**A Widow's Walk**

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by pristineungift

Summary

It happens in a flash of blue. One moment Natasha is standing amid the wreckage of Manhattan, and the next she… isn’t.

In Which the Black Widow makes her mark on Westeros.

Notes

I am crossover trash.

I took some liberties with the timing of certain events and existence of certain nobles so just go with it.
It happens in a flash of blue. One moment Natasha is holding Loki's scepter, arms straining as she forces it through the shield around the portal generator, and the next she is sent tumbling. To those watching, it looks like she is vaporized in a backwash of energy.

To Natasha, it is as simple as falling backwards.

Except she doesn't land on concrete. She isn't sprayed by chunks of glass and gravel. She is lying in the middle of a forest, on a bed of leaves, looking up at a clear night sky filled with strange stars. There is a circular pattern that she recognizes from her briefings on the Bifrost scorched around her,
and the smell of ozone in the air.

It doesn't take her long to come to the correct conclusion.

"Heimdall?" she tries, though she doesn't expect it to work. It's still worth trying. The Asgardians might return her home simply because they don't want a lowly Midgardian wandering around the other realms.

Silence.

"Thor?" She tries next, knowing it is even more of a long-shot. Then, "Odin?"

Desperate now, though nothing in her manner shows it, "Loki?"

Nothing.

She sighs.

Clint, she allows herself to think. Earth.

Her home, as much as she had one, is gone. But she is Natasha Alienovna Romanova, the Black Widow, and her world has burned before.

She gets up.

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She spends her first few years traveling in search of a way back. It doesn't take her long to learn that she's not on any of what the Asgardians call 'The Nine Realms.' But then her interrogation with Loki hinted that there are many more than nine, the Chitauri's home planet being one of them.

The place she landed is called Westeros as a whole, and their language isn't too hard to learn, being very close to her native Russian. She slips among them like a ghost, a shadow studying their customs and politics. Their society is medieval, a thing of nobles and brutality. She wishes she still had her guns, but she discarded them during the battle with the Chitauri after she ran out of bullets. No matter, she replaces them with throwing knives and a crossbow, such as they are.

She dismisses technology as a means to get home very quickly, turning to magic instead. She spends some time in King’s Landing, because the royal family is supposed to be made up of sorcerers. But that den of dragons seems to have lost their power a few generations ago, and their magic is that of fire and destruction besides.

Next she ventures North, to the land held by the Stark family and the Wall beyond. She dresses as a man, because it is safer, and on her way she saves many an unwary traveler from bandits or wolves or worse. Those she rescues barely see her, because while these people are martial and hard, she is a spy from a land with security cameras and listening devices and satellite imaging, and they are children next to her. She only speaks to one of them, a little girl named Lyanna whose caravan is set upon on the way to Winterfell.

"What is the name of my rescuer, Ser Knight?" the (probably) noble child asks.

Feeling a spark of mischief, Natasha answers, "I am no ser, merely a Winter Soldier."

Leaving the wide eyed girl behind, she wonders if she's started a new legend.
The godswoods of the North don't do anything but bleed, so Natasha crosses the sea next, stowing away on a ship called *The Laughing Lion* that is bound for Old Valyria, the supposed magic capital of the world. She's found after two weeks (medieval ships only have so many hiding places after all) and pays for her passage by becoming Gerion Lannister's whore. He's handsome and jovial and it's actually some of the better sex she's had, so she doesn't really mind. She was trained from a young age to use every weapon at her disposal, and her sexuality is one of the most potent. It helps that 'belonging' to the noble on board keeps the other men from getting ideas.

She doesn't doubt she could deal with any who tried to press the issue, but it would force her to reveal skills that a whore shouldn't have.

During the months at sea, Gerion tells her about his family. About his brothers Tywin and Kevan and his daughter Joy Hill, who is a bastard and therefore not a Lannister, except for in his heart. Family secrets are whispered to her in the hush before dawn, her fingers curled in Gerion's golden hair as he extols the virtues of Casterly Rock, never noticing that he is being subtly guided into divulging the locations of secret passages, how to open the treasury, ways to manipulate Tywin, where to strike and make it hurt.

Natasha has no particular plans regarding the Lannisters, is in fact collecting information on them more out of habit than anything, but she memorizes it all anyway. It can't hurt.

Sometimes Gerion reminds her of Clint, with his stupid jokes and the way the skin around his eyes crinkles when he laughs. Sometimes he reminds her of Yasha, with the way he handles a sword and the intensity in his gaze when he fucks her. She thinks he may be in love with her, his beautiful red haired mistress who is tougher than she looks. He gives her a string of pearls to wear that he'd originally intended for his daughter, and Natasha carefully does not examine her true feelings for him. Natalia Rivers the whore is besotted with her noble lover, and maybe that is enough.

Valyria is overgrown, plants lush and green in the volcanic soil. It's said that Valyria burned, and Natasha wonders if it was dragon fire or a natural disaster that really collapsed the empire. She goes with the crew to explore, despite Gerion trying to order her to stay on the ship. He's worried that she'll come to harm in the untamed ruins, but she giggles at him and promises to stay behind him and let him protect her, and he relents. Natasha thinks it likely that he's gotten used to her company in the evenings and doesn't want to go without it.

"Sometimes I don't want this journey to end," he confides to her one night, lying on the bed of pillows in their tent. "I think this is the happiest I've ever been, a good woman at my side and the world at our feet."

"I love you, Gerion," Natalia Rivers says, snuggling into the tall man's side.

"Would that I could make you my wife," Gerion sighs into her hair.

But all good things end, especially when they involve Natasha, and eventually they find the sword that was the purpose of the whole expedition - *Brightroar*, the ancestral blade of House Lannister, the thing Tywin covets above almost all else - and it is time to return to the ship.

It is only after they have sailed away that the men begin falling sick.
Natasha thinks it is something akin to scurvy or malaria or the flu - something she can recognize - at first. Her training as a field medic makes her more experienced than any maester of Westeros, so she does her best to treat them. She boils water, laces it with the juice of whatever fruit she can get her hands on, makes Gerion tea and forces him to inhale the steam. Natalia Rivers loves these men, her lover and her friends, and maybe Natasha is fond of them too, but nothing helps.

Like a slow motion video, grey starts to creep over them, leaving statues where flesh and blood people once stood.

"Greyscale," Gerion tells her, surprised she's never heard of it. Half of his face is already stiff, making his smiles into crooked things. "I didn't want it to end this way. But I'm glad I'm with you, darling girl."

Natalia Rivers weeps over him, begging him to stay with her. He doesn't.

First they are a plague ship, others veering away as soon as the greyscale on the crew is spotted by any passing vessels. Then they become a ghost ship, manned only by statues in odd poses, like the gorgon Medusa took a stroll along the deck.

Natasha is the only one who doesn't get sick. She can't decide if she's immune because she's from a different world and her physiology is different on some level, or if it's because of what they did to her in the Red Room. She isn't a supersoldier, not like Rogers, but she's something. Whatever version of the serum Russia could cobble together was given to the Red Room girls. Natasha was one of the few who survived. She's stronger, faster, hardier than she should be, though the main difference is that she doesn't age like a normal person.

She's not sure how old she is, just that she's older than she looks.

*The Laughing Lion* eventually runs aground off the shores of Yi Ti with no one to steer it, and Natasha fills a rowboat with everything of use and value. Then she leaves a trail of lamp oil from one end of the ship to the other and sets a candle on the edge of Gerion's desk where the motion of the waves will eventually knock it onto the floor.

Gerion is still lying in the bed of his stateroom, a smile frozen on his grey face. Natalia Rivers caresses his cold cheek one last time. His last words to her were, "Promise me you'll love again, darling girl," though he had no reason to believe that she would survive when the rest of the crew was dying.

"Love is for children," she tells him, the first time it is Natasha Romanova that speaks. "But I was happy with you. I might even have stayed." She smiles, the curve of her lips perfect and beautiful, nothing to give away that she doesn't mean it. Gerion still deserves her best work. "I guess we'll never know."

*A Lannister always pays their debts.* That is something that Gerion said often. Natasha has many debts, all of them written in dark red ink, and she can't help but feel that Gerion has paid one of them in her stead. It is a whimsical thought with no basis in logic, but still she indulges it. It helps guide her in a post-Gerion world. It would be so easy for someone of her skill to become an assassin, to rob and cheat, to do a million and one things that no one would see coming and leave her wealthy. In this world there is nothing to keep her from it. No international most wanted lists, no Hydra dying to get their hands on her, no Shield waiting to take her down if she falls into old patterns for even a moment. Why shouldn't she conquer herself a castle and retire in luxury?

But then she remembers Gerion's green eyes and the roar of the inferno that burned *The Laughing Lion* on the water and the the sting of debts unpaid. She never really was Natalia Rivers, and Natalia
Rivers was never Lady Lannister, but sometimes she wishes she could have been.

Natasha continues her search for a way home in Yi Ti, and then the Free Cities, and in Lannisport Joy Hill receives a crate that contains *Brightroar* and a note written in Gerion's hand that says, *Do with it as you will, joy of my heart.*

But Natasha keeps the pearls.

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In another year, Natasha is back in Westeros. She didn't find anything across the sea, and she looks Westerosi. In a world where traveling so far is rare she stands out too much in the other countries, so to the Seven Kingdoms she goes.

Aerys Targaryen has gone mad while she was gone. Well, more mad. He was always a sadist but now he doesn't seem capable of coherent thought beyond liking it when things are on fire. Natasha steers clear of King's Landing, and tries to decide what to do next. She has never, not once in her life, not been hunted or hunting, never had a time when there wasn't some clear goal like *stay alive, find the mole, find the way home, protect the target, kill the target, gather intelligence.*

She honestly isn't sure what normal people do with their time. Especially here where there isn't much in the way of personal entertainment. She knows she wants to keep balancing her ledger, but she's not sure how to go about it. She's more of a spy than a soldier, not to mention she's a woman, so simply joining the guards of some city or keep is out of the question.

She could go to the capital once Aerys is dead and become the spymaster. The one they have now dares to call himself the Spider. Black Widow would eat him alive. But Natasha knows better than to become beholden to any one regime...

She could kill Aerys. That would certainly be a righteous use of her skills, considering the stories coming out of the Red Keep lately.

The game is all she knows, so she decides to keep playing it. Her first step is to find a way into noble circles. It's easy enough for a noble to disguise themselves as one of the so-called 'small folk,' but going the other way is a shade more difficult. Natasha watches and waits, spinning her web and gathering secrets until the perfect opportunity falls into her lap.
Sansa Tully

Sansa Tully is the youngest daughter of Hoster Tully, sister of Lysa, Catelyn, and Edmure. She is being sent to foster at Casterly Rock in the hopes of matching her with Jaime Lannister. (Natasha does not feel a pang, her lips do not twitch, her eyes do not water. She does not wonder what Joy did with Brightroar).

Sansa Tully is also dead, her party set upon by a group of bandits somewhere between the Riverlands and the Westlands. Natasha wishes she could have saved the girl, but it doesn't stop her from taking advantage of the young lady's death. Tullys are known for being red haired and blue eyed, and the women are thought to be especially beautiful. As old as she is (and some days she feels so, so old) she can still pass for fifteen or sixteen if she dresses in a young maid's gowns and acts the part.

It's so perfect that Natasha almost thinks it a trap. No one at Casterly Rock knows what Sansa Tully looks like, and no one from Riverrun will see her for at least a few years. Any differences in appearance can be blamed on the time apart, especially as they don't have accurate photographs to remember her by. Red haired and blue eyed will be close enough.

Natasha buys a suitably girlish dress in Tully blue, and then she walks to Lannisport from several villages over, letting her skirts get torn and dirty and shredding her delicate slippers. Upon arrival she swoons dramatically on the path to the Lion's Mouth, tears streaming down her cheeks.

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Tywin Lannister questions her once she's been seen to by a maester, trying to catch her in a lie.

He doesn't.

He leaves for King's Landing two weeks after sending a raven to Riverrun to let them know that Sansa Tully is alive, Brightroar on his hip.

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Jaime and Cersei Lannister are fourteen year old twins. Cersei hopes to marry Prince Rhaegar and become queen, and Jaime intends to scorn his inheritance and join the Kingsguard so that he can stay with Cersei. Natasha discovers why easily enough, all of Gerion's pillow talk about the hidden passages in the Rock aiding her in that endeavor. The incest doesn't surprise her so much as the fact that they haven't been caught yet. It's far from the most depraved thing she's seen, and it's not unheard of in Westeros, what with the Targaryens traditionally marrying their siblings. She thinks Cersei and Jaime are shortsighted for indulging in it, but Jaime is hopelessly devoted to his sister, and Cersei, well…

Cersei is just the kind of girl who would do well in the Red Room.

It makes it easy to dismiss Jaime and focus her attention on Tyrion. Natasha doesn't doubt that she could steal Jaime from Cersei if she tried, but it would make an enemy where she doesn't need one. (And if it is a relief because Jaime is altogether too much like Gerion in every way, she is the only one who knows).

Tyrion is clever and sweet and painfully earnest, responding to her small kindnesses as if she's offered him the moon. He's used to scorn and viciousness, because he is a dwarf and both Tywin and
Cersei despise him for his deformity, and for the crime of living when his mother died after birthing him. He is young enough that she is vaguely ill at the thought of marrying him, but she won't wed him until he's at least fifteen, which while still horrifying is considered old enough here. She consoles herself with the thought that their age difference is not uncommon in Westeros, and is not the biggest gap between partners in the noble class.

Seducing someone underage is not the worst thing she's ever done, but it's enough that Natasha adds another debt to her mental tally. She decides that Sansa Tully will always be head over heels in love with Tyrion Lannister, because he (like Gerion) deserves her best work.

Perhaps it is guilt, or some lingering memory (darling girl), but for some reason Natasha finds herself allowing Tyrion to see a bit more of the truth of her than anyone else. She teaches him to speak English so that they can talk without fear of being overheard (she's never heard a language even close to English in this world), and shows him that his small stature doesn't make him any less dangerous than any other man. (In fact, in some ways he is more so, for he will be forever underestimated.) She does genuinely enjoy his company. He may be young, but he functions on a much higher mental plane, and if Westeros had a way of measuring such things she has no doubt he'd be declared a genius. He reminds her of Tony Stark without the self destructive tendencies.

For his part, Tyrion idolizes Jaime and regards Sansa Tully as his very best friend.

A year into her stay at the Rock and Tywin Lannister returns just long enough to be disappointed in all of them. On his last evening there, he mentions sending a raven to Lord Tully to arrange for Sansa's betrothal to Jaime.

"Tyrion," Natasha interrupts him.

"What?" Tywin snarls, even as Tyrion chokes on his dinner and Cersei and Jaime gape.

"I would prefer to wed Tyrion. We're a much better match." Natasha smiles Sansa Tully's demure little smile and peers at Tywin from beneath her lashes. "After all, I can never compete with Jaime's first love."

Cersei goes white. Jaime goes green. Tyrion's still choking, so Natasha rubs his back.

"Jaime's first love?" Tywin bites the words out, the tone demanding an explanation.

"The sword, of course." Natasha sips her wine. It's very good. She meets Cersei's eyes and lets the girl see that she knows.

"I wouldn't want to stand in the way of their happiness, Father," Jaime says suddenly. Natasha suspects that Cersei kicked him under the table. "There will be other girls for me. But if Sansa loves Tyrion, I say let them be together."

Tywin hums, no doubt his hatred for making Tyrion happy warring with the coup it would be to have a Tully willingly marry his dwarf son.

Tyrion is looking at her like she is something rare and wonderful, disbelief and awe in his mismatched eyes. Sansa Tully beams back at him, placing her hand in his.

"Cersei, what do you think?"

Cersei spares one glance for Natasha, swallows heavily, and says, "I don't see why it should matter. She will be my good-sister either way."
Cersei creeps into Natasha's room that night, Jaime a looming shadow at her back. Natasha has been waiting for them, knowing that Cersei will want her silenced as quickly as possible. Jaime is Cersei's sword as always, no matter how clumsily the blonde girl wields him.

"Good evening, Cersei, Jaime," Natasha says before they can do something stupid like try to smother her or toss her out the window.

Cersei's eyes widen and Jaime's hand goes to the sword he's wearing over his night clothes.

"There's no need to kill me. I have no intention of telling anyone."

"What?" Cersei's voice is a harsh whisper.

Natasha sits up slowly and makes a show of lounging against the pillows piled at the headboard of her bed, though in reality she is coiled and ready to spring at the slightest provocation. "As you pointed out at dinner, I am to be your good-sister once I marry Tyrion. Do you know the words of House Tully?"

It's Jaime who answers. "Family, Duty, Honor."

"Exactly. And I take the words of my House very seriously. You two are part of my family, so I will protect you. On that note, Jaime, I would highly suggest that you not join the Kingsguard until after Aerys is dead. I understand wanting to be near Cersei, but I heard your father saying that the king has gone completely mad and started having people executed for no reason. I'd hate to see you hurt simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

They both blink owlishly at her.

"You can't honestly expect me to believe that you prefer Tyrion to Jaime and you just want to help us. I'm not a fool," Cersei spits.

"Ah," Natasha says, and lets some of the Black Widow come forward in her expression, her eyes going flat and lips turning down. "Consider this the price of my silence then: you will always be kind to Tyrion from this point forward. After all, as my husband he'll be part of my family too."

Cersei looks like she wants to protest for a second, but quickly changes her mind. Natasha will still need to keep an eye on her, but she thinks the girl is processing the fact that Natasha really isn't asking for much.

"Agreed," Jaime answers for his twin, grabbing Cersei by one arm and towing her toward the door. He pauses at the threshold. "You really do love him, don't you?"

"He loves me," Sansa Tully says, her hands going to her cheeks as if to hide a blush and her red curls falling over her face.

Jaime Lannister smiles and it's like the sun coming up, like the sound of waves on board The Laughing Lion, like Clint's bowstring singing. "Good."

Say what you want about Jaime, but when he loves he does it with his whole heart. Natasha wonders what that's like. Sansa Tully vows to love Tyrion as much as his brother does.

Then the twins are gone and Natasha says, "Clear."
There's the sound of grinding stone as Tyrion exits the secret chamber in her room where he's been eavesdropping.

"I can't believe they were really going to try to kill you," he tells her, speaking in English since she used it to call him into the room. "You're to be my wife!"

Natasha helps him up into her bed and cards her fingers through his golden hair once he's comfortable. "They're scared and reckless. Or rather, Cersei is reckless, and Jaime will do whatever she asks him because he loves her. We'll keep an eye on them and keep them from being too stupid."

Tyrion snorts. "We can try."

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In the end, Natasha trains Cersei just enough to make her less dangerous. The girl has enough natural talent for the game to bring them all to ruin if she isn't given proper guidance. Natasha does her best to direct Cersei's lust for power into the least destructive channels and get her to think through the consequences of her actions more than one or two steps ahead. Cersei is smart enough, but being female in this society has left her ignored by her father and missing her mother and thus woefully unprepared for politics of any stripe. If she ever does become queen, she'll be a puppet or dead within five years.

But that turns out not to be an immediate concern, as the betrothal of Prince Rhaegar to Elia Martell is announced shortly.

Cersei is furious. She trashes her bedroom and beats her fists against Jaime's chest until he bruises. Jaime doesn't bother to hide his relief that he won't have to be separated from the woman he loves. Tyrion and Natasha quietly place bets on how long Cersei will refuse to speak to him.

But Natasha can take only so many tantrums, so eventually she kidnaps Cersei from her bed in the middle of the night and takes her to the dungeon to learn to throw knives. And it only takes being knocked to the floor three times for the girl to get with the program.

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The next night Jaime is there waiting with Cersei for Natasha to arrive.

"Are you two actually connected at the mind?" Natasha asks dryly as she walks past them to set up the targets. "Or are you unaware what the word 'secret' means?"

Cersei draws herself up haughtily. "Jaime and I belong together. What you teach me, you will teach him as well."

Natasha raises an eyebrow. "I will, will I?"

"I doubt there's much you can teach me that I don't already know, but Cersei insisted," Jaime says with a smug, arrogant look. Natasha looks forward to wiping it off his face.

"This should be good," comes Tyrion's voice in the gloom. Both Jaime and Cersei whirl, not having realized he was there.

"Nice of you to join us." Natasha smirks.

"What language is that?" Jaime asks. "And how long have you been there? How did you sneak by us?"
Tyrion steps into the light of the torches, moving to stand next to Natasha with well honed grace and a spring in his step. As a child he learned tumbling at an uncle’s behest and Natasha has helped him build that skill into a fighting style few will be able to combat, no matter how much larger they may be.

"That language is a secret between my beloved and I, and as for the rest…” His smirk rivals Natasha’s own. "I have been a student of the Lionfish for several years now."

"Lionfish?” Natasha snorts. Jaime and Cersei look back and forth between her and her betrothed as if watching a tennis match.

"You have an uncle called Blackfish, do you not? And you are to be a lion once we marry. I thought it appropriate."

"You're ridiculous, milord."

"Ah, but you love me."

"There must be something wrong with me. A touch of brain fever, perhaps."

"I'm told that feeling’s natural when one is utterly besotted."

"I'm going to have to come up with a name for you now, you realize?"

"So long as it isn't 'Imp' nor 'Halfman' I don't care what you call me."

"Oh, you're all man, my darling."

"That's disgusting!” Cersei interrupts. Natasha smiles at her sweetly. "At least he's not my brother."

Cersei makes an incoherent sound of rage that rather reminds Natasha of a moose. Jaime laughs. "She's got us there!"

By the end of the night’s session, Natasha has disarmed Jaime three times and put him on his back twice. She could have done more, but there is no need to reveal how fast or strong she really is. For the same reason, Tyrion simply watches, not revealing that he is capable of fighting at all.

Jaime returns to his room with a newfound look of respect in his eyes, and Cersei one of wary watchfulness.

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Time passes in relative peacefulness. Natasha still keeps an eye on the rest of the realm, especially King’s Landing, but she focuses most of her energy on Lannisport and Casterly Rock, passing on interesting tidbits to Tywin through various intermediaries. Black Widow has become a name to be feared, an almost legend that most people think is a retainer of House Lannister, more infamous even than The Mountain That Rides. Of course, Lord Tywin would never admit that he has no more idea of who Black Widow is than anyone else.

It helps that this world apparently doesn't have any spiders called "Black Widows” and the populace can be very credulous, leading them all to believe that the elusive spy is a dark skinned woman with a dead husband. It certainly can't be little Sansa Tully, who is so sweet and innocent and to be married to Tyrion Lannister once he reaches his eighteenth year. Heart of gold that one, a dear little
lamb, so gentle and loving.

And then Tywin resigns as Hand of the King and all but flees the Red Keep, barricading himself within Casterly Rock and doing his best to subtly reinforce the borders of the Westlands. Natasha takes this to mean that Aerys has gotten too dangerous for even the Old Lion to face, and goes about expanding her network. (Half of the Spider's web is already hers, not that they know it. It won't take long to claim the other half.)
Sansa Lannister

A grand tournament is to be held at Harrenhal. Since so many nobles will be in attendance, it is decided that Tyrion and Natasha will have their wedding as part of the festivities. Natasha's 'Uncle' Blackfish will serve as the Tully family's representative and give Natasha away, as Hoster Tully can't be bothered to leave Riverrun. Natasha counts it as a lucky stroke, for the Blackfish is the least likely to realize that the Sansa Tully he walks down the aisle isn't the same one who left the Riverlands a few years ago, having rarely spent time with her.

The ceremony goes off without a hitch, Cersei knowing better than to say anything to spoil the day and Natasha curtseying low so that Tyrion can reach to drape the Lannister cloak around her shoulders. They kiss and Sansa Tully swears to the Seven that she will love her husband unto death. Even Tywin manages to smile, though Natasha suspects it is more to do with keeping up appearances than any true happiness for his son.

They consummate their union that night, and what Tyrion lacks in experience he makes up in enthusiasm. His flexibility and stamina, refined over years of training with Natasha, serve him in good stead. Sansa Lannister has no complaints about her marriage bed, and Natasha has a new set of lessons to teach.

Still, the two of them do not let their nuptials distract them. The tournament starts in earnest upon the morrow, and Jaime means to compete. Natasha is adamant that they can't let him. She has been listening to the whispers coming from her web, with Tyrion at her side as he always is these days. Black Widow and her husband are more than aware of how far into madness Aerys Targaryen has descended, as well as the paranoia that has overtaken the capital.

No doubt if the Mad King sees their brother compete (and he is their brother now) he would use the Young Lion's prowess as an excuse to claim Jaime for the Kingsguard. And Jaime, for all that he is fucking his twin sister, still has ideas about honor and glory and what it means to be a knight that would lead him to accept. It wouldn't even cross his mind that he would not be a bodyguard, but a hostage used to keep the Lannisters in line.

And that Natasha will not allow. Somehow (darling girl) some way (Lionfish) the Lannisters have become hers. Tyrion is her handler (husband) now, her compass, because while he understands dirty hands and acceptable loss he is at the core of him a good man. Good in a way the rest of them will never be. And Tyrion loves Jaime, so Natasha will burn the world for him. (And if sparring with Jaime feels like she's back with Clint, if the color of his eyes makes Natalia Rivers quiver where she's been put away in favor of Sansa Lannister, then she is the only one who knows.)

Tyrion is the one to sneak out, being smaller and slighter and thus more easily going unseen than she, and he returns with an empty vial. In the morning, the newlyweds will express their dismay that Jaime has fallen ill and is unable to leave the privy long enough to joust.
They will attend the various contests anyway, in support of Natasha's 'Uncle' Blackfish and because Cersei wants to see Rhaegar, even if she will never wed him. It is an enjoyable time, especially when a hedge knight called the Winter Soldier makes an appearance, only to disappear afterwards like a ghost.

*Some things are the same, no matter what world,* Natasha smiles to herself, and notes that Lyanna Stark is never in the stands with her brothers while the Winter Soldier is on the field.

But then it is time for the tournament's winner, Prince Rhaegar, to crown the Queen of Love and Beauty, and all joy is sucked from the air when he bestows the wreath of flowers not on his wife, but on Lyanna. The crowd falls silent in their shock. Natasha's smile fades from her eyes, though her lips twitch not an inch, and all the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. A feeling twists in her gut that she hasn't experienced since that hellish time in Budapest. Tyrion meets her eyes with his own mismatched ones (and she loves that there is one green and one blue, because there is no way to mistake him for anyone else) and says, "Fuck."

Natasha couldn't put it better herself.

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Things happen quickly after that, at least as far as Westeros goes. The pace is still nothing to some of the ops Natasha was involved in on her old world, but without instantaneous communication she is constantly working with outdated intel. It starts with Lyanna Stark's abduction and is followed by the Mad King burning two Starks alive. Natasha can't get clear reports, so she has to speculate. Once it comes out that it was Rhaegar who supposedly took Lyanna and Robert Baratheon is rebelling against the Iron Throne, she starts to get a clearer picture.

The Starks and the Arryns are with the Baratheons, both having close ties to Robert. Hoster Tully aligns with them as well after getting marriages for Catelyn and Lysa out of the deal. Tywin is pleased that they will be related to the Starks and Arryns through Tyrion's wife once heirs are born, and holes the entire Lannister clan up in the Westlands to wait and see which way the wind blows.

Natasha doesn't mind that approach. She liked the Blackfish well enough when she met him, but she has no real loyalty to the family. She is Sansa Lannister more than she was ever Sansa Tully. (Some days more than she is Natasha Romanova.)

A year of hard fighting passes. Natasha does her best to keep abreast of what is happening beyond the Rock, and eventually receives word that Robert's armies will be making their move on the Red Keep. Rhaegar is dead and Aerys is next.

Black Widow passes the information onto Tywin through the usual channels, and Tywin decides it is time the Lannisters choose a side. Taking Jaime and their bannerman with them, he heads for King's Landing in order to secure it - and hopefully a royal marriage for Cersei once there is a new king.

But there is something that he does not know. Something that not even Natasha knows, no matter how far reaching her web. Only the Mad King and his pyromancers are aware of the caches of wildfire the king has ordered made and hidden at strategic points around King's Landing.

And so it is that when Tywin breaches the doors of the Red Keep, a great explosion louder than any dragon's roar balloons up in a red cloud of death. And the city burns.

Tywin is ash before he has a chance to register he's dying. Half of the Lannister bannermen and most of the population of King's Landing share his fate. Jaime, left at the back of the Lannister host to secure the city gates, is blown backwards in a rush of super-heated air, his right arm thrown up to
protect his face. His right gauntlet and mail sleeve glow bright orange and Jaime screams as the metal sears and melts into his flesh.

Natasha learns of all this from a series of ravens and even a few runners, whisperers in her web who flee to her for safety. Making a decision, she brings her agents directly to Tyron, no wasting time with proxies. He gives her a long look with that bright spark in his eye that says he's making connections, but ultimately says nothing, his attention turned to ordering his brother brought back home to the Rock.

Natasha issues strict instructions on how to treat burns in the field and then goes to do everything she can think of to prepare for Jaime's convalescence, Cersei fast on her heels.

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Tywin's ashes arrive at Casterly Rock in an urn alongside *Brightroar*, the Valyrian steel the only part of him that wasn't incinerated in the fire.

Jaime is brought in a wagon, lying flat on his back. By the time they clear the Lion's Mouth his burnt arm is infected and he howls when anyone attempts to touch it. In addition, his ribs and legs are heavily bruised from the force of the explosion knocking him back several feet and he's delirious with fever.

Natasha makes their men put him on a table to carry him inside, since Westeros has no concept of what a gurney is. She can't tell if Jaime has any bone fractures or spinal damage, but she'd rather not take chances with him being jostled. The sight and smell of his right arm - raw and with metal still stuck to it in places - would make her retch if she was anyone other than who she is. Tyrion does retch, his face grey with worry and shared pain.

Even if Jaime lives through this, he'll never wield a sword with that hand again. The burn scars will limit the flexibility of his wrist and the heat of his melted gauntlet has shrunken his ligaments, permanently twisting his fingers into claws.

But that is not what breaks him, what sends the Young Lion spiraling into depression. No, he is strong in the face of his injuries, smiling through grit teeth, refusing milk of the poppy because he's afraid they'll amputate if he's not awake to protest… until Cersei goes to see him and recoils in disgust. She calls him a cripple, calls him worthless, her eyes wide in horror. Sansa Lannister wants to take a carving knife to her face. If Natasha could transpose Jaime's injuries onto Cersei, she would do it.

But she does neither thing. No, instead she presents Tyrion with a Last Will and Testament written in Tywin's own hand and bearing his seal, as well as the signature of the Mad King as witness, that Tyrion is to inherit Casterly Rock and rule it as lord in the event of Tywin's demise, as Jaime has expressed his desire to serve in the Kingsguard on several occasions.

"However did you manage this?" Tyrion asks, his lips twitching at the corners.

Sansa Lannister winds one of her red curls around her finger and says, "I've no idea what you mean, husband."

Then she presents him with a letter - also in Tywin's hand - suggesting that Cersei wed Jon Arryn and Lysa Tully be given to Robert Baratheon, as that way Eddard Stark and Robert will be good-brothers and won't the king like that?

They deprive Cersei of being queen and pack her off to the Vale where Jaime won't have to see her
in one fell swoop. And they even manage to convince Cersei that it was her idea, as she doesn't really want to help rebuild King's Landing and rule over a heap of ashes, does she? But with an aging husband serving as the king's Hand, she will be able to run The Eyrie as she sees fit, the Warden of the East in all but name.

Natasha's final piece of advice before Cersei climbs into the wheelhouse they had built as part of her dowry is, "When you take lovers, ensure that they at least have the same coloring as your husband. We don't want any doubt over the paternity of your children."

She makes sure that any and all Lannisters that accompany Cersei to The Eyrie are at least second cousins, just in case. There's no need to risk more incest induced insanity. The Mad King was quite enough.

-1-

Tyrion and Natasha both work tirelessly to see to it that Jaime recovers as much as possible. Tyrion calls in experts and acquires rare tomes of healing. Natasha writes out reports on as many treatments for burns and muscle rehabilitation as she can reliably remember, and sees to it they find their way into Lannister hands. They take turns sitting vigil at his bedside, and have all of their meals in Jaime's room so that he isn't allowed to feel lonely.

And when his skin is healed, his fever broken, his bruises gone, his bones mended, and Jaime still insists on moping in bed, Natasha dumps him out of it.

"Get dressed," she tells him. "We're meeting Tyrion in the dungeons to spar in twenty minutes."

Pulling himself to his feet with his good arm, his gold hair sticking every which way and sheets tangled around his body, Jaime resembles nothing so much as a disgruntled cat. "If you haven't noticed, dear sister, I can't grip anything with my right hand. I can't even uncurl my fingers. I'll never be able to fight as I once did."

"If you haven't noticed," Natasha retorts, "you have two arms."

-1-

"She left me," Jaime says to the dungeon ceiling, once the three of them are lying on the floor covered in sweat. It took Tyrion demonstrating his own fighting style to convince Jaime that being less a hand does not make him less a man. "I thought she loved me. But as soon as I stopped being her perfect mirror, her perfect knight, her unblemished male self…"

Natasha opens her mouth to tell him that love is for children, that he is lucky this lesson has broken only his heart. But when she looks at him, lying next to her on the ground like Gerion used to after a good fuck, Natalia Rivers takes control of her tongue.

"You'll love again."
Lady of the Rock

Natasha teaches Jaime to move like Yasha and fight like Steve. His right hand is no longer capable of holding a weapon firmly enough, but there's nothing to stop them from strapping a shield to his forearm; and after Natasha makes a seemingly offhanded comment about once seeing a man with an arm of enchanted armor Tyrion designs a fully articulated metal sleeve for Jaime to wear, with special clasps that will lock his shield in place and a matching bladed gauntlet that will support his ruined fingers and turn them into actual claws. It is both protection and weapon, and Jaime christens it the Lion's Paw.

Practice makes Jaime strong again, and his new weapons breathe life back into him. He devotes himself to his training with a single minded focus, smiling like a sword cut.

Being with him is like being Agent Romanoff again. He is her protege and her partner and her friend and Tyrion is their handler, their Director, their Lord Lannister. And he is also my husband, Natasha reminds herself fiercely when sparring with Jaime brings their faces close, body pressed to body. A lock of gold hair falls across Jaime's face and he has Gerion's eyes and Clint's cocky grin.

Tyrion is Sansa Lannister's husband, not mine, whispers the part of herself that was born in the Red Room.

Jaime cups Natasha's face with his good hand, his calluses rough against the skin of her cheek. She inhales sharply through her nose, her eyes on Jaime's lips. Huskily, Jaime says, "Sansa."

And Natasha steps back. Because it is Sansa Lannister that Jaime sees when he looks at her, and Tyrion is Sansa Lannister's husband. Natasha does not exist. (Perhaps she never existed.)

Tyrion enters their dungeon training room through the secret passage, and Natasha turns to greet him with a smile, grateful that he did not appear a moment sooner. She bends and gives him the kiss that she almost shared with Jaime, and when she straightens she catches her brother-partner-friend's green eyes with her own.

"There is a letter for you, Jaime. Our sister writes from the Vale," Tyrion says, giving no indication that he notices anything amiss. Natasha doesn't quite trust that. Tyrion is a genius and she might have taught him too well. More than that, he is the Lion On the Rock, and a fiercer one could not be found.

"Burn it," Jaime says, never taking his eyes from Natasha's. "I have only one sister, and she is standing in this room."

Natasha closes her eyes and clenches her jaw, her famed composure shattering for a second that lasts eternity. It's good that Tyrion can't see her face, for though Jaime calls her sister, what Natasha hears is I love you, darling girl.

-1-

When Natasha starts getting nauseous to the point of vomiting at random intervals throughout the day, she thinks she is dying. No normal illness on her old world affected her after the Red Room, and in Westeros she is immune even to greyscale. She assumes that the physiology that saved her from that plague must now be working against her. It is likely that she has contracted some disease
that wouldn't harm a native of this world, but will see her to her grave.

The maester that Jaime and Tyrion force her to see says she's pregnant.

She draws one of the blades hidden in her bodice, incensed at the cruelty of the joke. Only Jaime's arm around her waist and Tyrion's smooth talking save Maester Creylen from having a red hourglass carved into his cheek.

"Lionfish!" Jaime protests, struggling to hold her. She is stronger than him, but not so angry as to forget herself completely and prove it before a witness. Tyrion is talking, a rapid patter of words that distract her long enough for her rage to fade.

"Talk to me, milady." Tyrion takes her hand, dotting kisses along her fingers. The maester sits, pale and shaking, in a chair on the other side of the bedroom, far from the door. Tyrion knows better than to dismiss him before finding out why Natasha pulled a knife. "Tell me what has upset you so."

Tears fill her eyes, and Natasha tells herself that it is Sansa Lannister who is crying. "I was told many years ago that I would never have children. I find this jest to be in poor taste."

Her knees give out and Jaime holds her up, helping her to sit on the end of the bed she shares with Tyrion.

"It is no jest, milady," Maester Creylen assures them, a little color coming back into his cheeks. "All the signs are there. You are with child."

"How can this be?" she hears herself say. The Red Room made sure motherhood was never a thing she could aspire to. She's always told herself that it was good, that she would be a poor mother, that she doesn't want children, but knows now that she was wrong. She wants this down to her bones. More than seeing Earth again.

What made this possible? Did the differences in Tyrion's Westerosi biology defeat whatever procedure the Red Room put in place? Did the magic that brought her to this world heal her, her body disassembled into atoms as she flew through space and reassembled whole again? Hell, maybe it was the greyscale that did it. She'll never know. What she does know is that it is coming to Westeros that has given her this chance, and Tyrion Lannister who has given her this child.

The men in the room are talking, and Natasha subconsciously locks away their words to pick apart later, but doesn't start actively listening until the maester says, "Most wondered why Hoster Tully would give his most beautiful daughter to a dwarf. If she was thought barren, that would explain it."

Natasha surges out of Jaime's lap before any of the men have time to notice that Sansa Lannister is over her bout of hysterics, and the maester gets his beard trimmed by the lady after all.

"Whatever my father's reasons," she hisses in the Lannisport accent she's cultivated over the years, "I love Tyrion and that is why I married him."

"No disrespect meant, Lady Lannister," the maester mumbles, his eyes on the steel at his throat.

Jaime laughs. "That's our Lionfish. She roars like a lion, but only for the family she is so protective of."
Tyrion grins. "She's beautiful with a blade in her hand. Don't you think so, brother?"

"My sister is always beautiful."

Tyrion inclines his head in agreement. "Nevertheless, all this excitement can't be good for the baby. Why don't you let the stupid man go, my love? I will have a cure for the mother's sickness brought and all of your favorites made for lunch."

Still reeling from the impossible reality of her pregnancy, Natasha falls back on her training and lets her lips twitch up at the corners, her mask back in place. "If that is what my lord commands."

The knife disappears back into her gown of Tully blue and Lannister gold, and she is the lovely, demure Lady of the Rock once more. Tyrion offers his hand and she takes it, the best way for him to escort her given their height difference.

"Oh and Maester Creylen?" Tyrion drawls as they leave the room. "Consider asking the Citadel for a replacement. I doubt you want to be anywhere near my lady wife when she gives birth."

Natasha's laughter rings like a clear bell through the hall.

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Later that night, Jaime comes to their bedroom door. Natasha pretends to sleep as Tyrion goes to speak with him.

"What is it, Jaime? Has something happened?" he asks in English. They taught the language to Jaime when he was still recovering from the Burning of King's Landing.

"No. No… I just wanted to say… I acted inappropriately with Sansa earlier, and I want to apologize to you for that. You are my brother and she is your wife, and I love you both."

Natasha holds her breath, ears straining for any noise, any indication of what is happening.

"There is nothing to forgive. I will never be tall enough to hold her on my lap as you did. I'm grateful that you offered her the comfort that I could not."

"Hold…? Oh. Yes. Well, she is my sister. There is nothing I will not do for her."

"I know."

The door creaks shut, and Natasha forces herself to breathe deeply and evenly. Tyrion clambers back into bed and cuddles up to her back, his arm draped over her to splay his hand against her stomach, where their baby grows.

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Natasha spends her pregnancy terrified something will go wrong. Tyrion and Jaime treat her like she's made of glass, and she lets them, grateful that there is always at least one of them with her. One of her handmaidens even jokes that it is like the Lady Lannister has two husbands, with the way Lord Lannister always makes sure she has cushions and her favorite food and the way Ser Jaime rubs her feet.

Natasha forces herself to giggle.

With her physical training curtailed (she knows exercise won't hurt her, but she is afraid, so afraid,
that this is all some fluke and the smallest thing will make her miscarry), she turns her attention to her
web and her duties as Lady Lannister, and writes several letters to her 'sisters.'

Catelyn, now Lady Stark, already has a strong son named Robb and expects to be with child again
soon. She loves Ned Stark, but also bitterly resents that he brought his bastard, Jon Snow, to be
raised at Winterfell.

Natasha has her own notions about the parentage of Jon Snow. She resolves to keep an eye on him,
as best she can from across the country.

Lysa is the queen, and all she does is complain. King's Landing is not the grand capital it once was,
so she must live with her husband at Dragonstone while it is rebuilt. She doesn't see why they can't
simply rule from Storm's End, but no one will hear of it and Robert has given the title to his brother
Renly. It is Stannis Baratheon who oversees the rebuilding of King's Landing while Robert keeps
her prisoner on Dragonstone, forced to watch his drinking and whoring. She hates him and all of
the bastards he fathers while her own womb remains empty. She has already miscarried twice, and
worries that the king will put her aside and no one else will have her.

Natasha knows from her whisperers that Lysa was pregnant once before her marriage, and was
forced by the child's father to terminate the pregnancy in order to protect them both. His name is
Petyr Baelish. Natasha puts the word out to her agents to watch him. If Lysa is set aside by Robert,
Natasha will extract a price from Petyr. Whether it's gold or blood matters little to her. What he took
from Lysa can't be replaced.

Motherhood is changing her. Jaime says she glows. Tyrion says she is bloodthirsty. They agree that
she has never been more beautiful.

Cersei, more her sister than the other two no matter how they parted ways, writes that she has given
birth, but the child was stillborn. She blames her husband's age, and seeks Natasha's permission to
take measures to ensure it doesn't happen again. (With Tywin's death, Cersei's hatred of Tyrion, and
Jaime's refusal to speak to her, it is the Lady Lannister that Cersei considers the head of their family.)
That part of the letter is written in broken English, whatever bits of the language Cersei could pick up
from listening to Natasha and Tyrion.

Natasha gives her blessing, and reminds Cersei to be sure that whatever man she chooses to father
her next child looks similar to Jon Arryn.

-N-

Natasha goes into labor in the middle of a sunny afternoon. Jaime carries her to her bedchamber
while Tyrion fetches the midwives and their new maester. Natasha is more worried about the child
than herself. She heals fast enough that the baby will have to split her completely in half to kill her,
but now that the time is upon her she is flooded by worries of stillbirth, umbilical cords wrapped
around necks, and fear that her alien biology will yield a child with deformities. She doesn't care
what they look like, but what if these primitive people see horns and a tail or blindness or some other
such thing and think the baby is a demon? A monster?

She'll kill them. She'll kill them all.

The midwives try to usher Jaime and Tyrion out of the room. Tyrion is about to comply, but Jaime
declares they will have to throw him out and he doubts they can. Then he climbs up behind Natasha
on the bed and pulls her back against his chest, one leg on either side of her. Seeing this, Tyrion
comes and stands at her side, giving her his hands to hold.
She smiles at them through the pain.

Natasha has a high healing factor and an even higher pain threshold. That and her training to withstand torture would let her get through this with only a few grunts. But Sansa Lannister never saw the Red Room, and everyone outside her immediate family thinks she is a beautiful, but silly woman.

She screams. She cries. She asks Jaime when it will be over. She tells Tyrion he is never touching her again, and then apologizes when he wipes her brow with a cool cloth. Jaime kisses her head over and over and mumbles an endless stream of encouragement into her hair.

At last a final ripping pain passes through her, immediately followed by a baby's loud squalling.

"It's a boy, my lords," the midwife says as she wraps the infant up. The maester moves in between Natasha's legs to take care of the afterbirth and stop her bleeding.

The little bundle is placed on Natasha's chest, and she finds she can't speak. He's perfect. An angel. A miracle. Nothing to give away that his mother is an alien, that his father is a dwarf.

Her son.

He looks like Jaime, if Jaime had blood red hair.

"Let's call him Gerion," Tyrion croaks out, utterly entranced by the tiny person on Natasha's chest. "He was my favorite uncle. He's the one who recovered Brightroar, you know. Shame he never made it back with the blade."

Natasha's face goes numb. It's Natalia Rivers who says, "Gerion is a fine name."
Lionfish

Chapter Notes

Special thanks to my bae queendanascully, who wrestled over several characterization questions that affect the rest of this story with me and checked over several passages in this and future chapters. You are a champ for putting up with my random brainstorming and flailing at odd hours of the night and will always be my Lannexpert.

Little Gerion looks more and more like his Uncle Jaime as he grows older, only the red hair and porcelain skin keeping him from being a clone of the older man. Nasty rumors that Ser Jaime is too close to Lady Lannister, that Lord Lannister has been cuckolded by his own brother start flying around the Rock. Natasha keeps a careful account of who dares to say such things when they think she won't hear.

A Lannister always pays her debts.

Jaime leaves Casterly Rock out of some noble desire to protect Natasha's reputation, and Natasha hates the rumormongers even more for that. She misses Jaime like a limb. He might have been born hanging onto Cersei's foot, but Natasha is the one who dragged him screaming from his bed when he was ready to give up on living. He is the one who carried her up and down the stairs of the castle when she was heavy with child.

He writes to her and Tyrion, saying he is heading for Dragonstone to participate in the tourneys King Robert is constantly holding. He will win gold, bring glory to the Lannister name, and show the Seven Kingdoms that he is still the deadliest blade in Westeros.

And, he writes, maybe I will find my own Queen of Love and Beauty. Though no one will ever be as lovely as my sister.

Natasha is honest enough with herself to recognize the churning in her gut as jealousy. But then she looks at Tyrion. Tyrion who is holding their son and reading to him. Tyrion who has never so much as commented on Little Gerion's resemblance to Jaime. Tyrion who made a mother of her.

She folds Jaime's letter.

-1-

Jaime becomes one of Natasha's whisperers, though he doesn't realize that she is the one he reports to. He was approached by agents of Black Widow after King Robert started inviting him out on hunts. As Black Widow has always looked after Lannister interests and Tyrion trusts the mysterious figure, Jaime doesn't hesitate to report on his conversations with the king.

He hates his wife and her family by extension, Jaime writes in the code used by all agents of the Widow, though he occasionally transposes a few letters thanks to his dyslexia. Natasha is still able to decipher the message. Actually hate may be too strong a word. It would imply that he holds her in high enough regard to bother with. It is more a lazy contempt. He complains about her being soft in the head and says that he doubts she was a maiden on their wedding night. This, while he has a whore in his lap and a flagon of wine in his hand. He drinks so much that he will start to get a belly
if he isn't careful. I cross swords with him twice a week, and I find it hard to believe that this man
defeated Rhaegar in single combat.

I think the real problem he has with his wife is that she isn't Lyanna Stark. He still pines for her, and
will go on and on about how different things would be if she were his queen. He says he would put
Queen Lysa aside, but he's afraid of dealing insult to the Tullys, as well as Lord Stark and Lord
Lannister. "Both of them are married to the other Tully bitches, the poor sods," he said to me,
apparently forgetting that he was speaking of my sister. I almost drew steel on him, but remembered
myself at the last moment.

Natasha's son is just over two years old when she gets a raven from Cersei announcing the birth of
Joffrey Arryn. The boy has Arryn coloring and officially was born early, though in reality he was a
bit late. Cersei had to fudge her conception date to make it line up with one of her husband's visits to
The Eyrie. King Robert uses the birth of his Hand's heir as an excuse to hold yet another tournament,
and Jaime wins it. He crowns Cersei with his triumphal garland, and Natasha thinks her heart will
stop when she finds out.

But Jaime writes to Tyrion that he meant the gesture as a peace offering, and felt it was expected
since Cersei was the mother of the child being celebrated. Despite this, Cersei still won't let him hold
little Joffrey, not trusting his bad arm, and orders him not to take off the Lion's Paw while in her
presence because she can't stand the sight of his deformity.

Black Widow's agents in the temporary capital add that Jaime Lannister was seen going with Cersei
into the apartments of the Hand and that they could be heard arguing before he left with Lady
Arryn's lip paint on his collar and a bruise on his cheek.

Natasha breathes out.

A few months after that Cat welcomes a daughter to the Stark family, and names her Sansa in
Natasha's honor.

Lysa avoids another miscarriage, but has a stillbirth.

Gerion turns three and Tyrion starts teaching him to tumble. Natasha commissions a low balance
beam and challenges her son to stay on it and juggle at the same time. They attach bells to his clothes
and tell him it is a game to see how long he can move without jingling. When they are in the hidden
rooms of the family wing, they speak only English so that Gerion will learn it alongside the Common
Tongue.

Natasha wants her boy to have a childhood, wants him to be more than the Black Widow's son or the
Heir to Casterly Rock, but she knows the world (any world) is not a kind place. So she trains him,
but does everything she can to make it fun.

It might be a mother's pride talking, but she thinks that Gerion is stronger, more coordinated, and
smarter than a child his age should be. It seems as if he has somehow inherited her enhancements,
though it should be impossible. But then again, his very birth should have been impossible for a
multitude of reasons.

*Love is for children*, she has said on more than one occasion. She believes it in a whole new way.
Natasha gets pregnant again, and this time there is no question that Tyrion is the father. Jaime hasn't been to the Rock in years, and Natasha hasn't left.

Jaime comes home as soon as he hears the news. He says it's because the king's court is preparing to move back to King's Landing, but Natasha knows it's so he can be there to carry her up and down the stairs and hold her through the birth. She throws herself into his arms as soon as he dismounts his horse, because that is what Sansa Lannister would do, and steps back only so Jaime can greet Tyrion.

"Still no wife?" Tyrion asks, one brow raised.

Jaime looks at Natasha. "I don't think I'm the marrying kind."

"He has my face!" Gerion exclaims, mouth and eyes wide as he stares up at his uncle.

They all laugh at that.

Gerion thinks Jaime is a god. He follows him around constantly, asking about his armor, his horse, what it's like in Dragonstone, what it's like to be a knight, if he's rescued any damsels. Natasha worries that Tyrion will be upset at Gerion's hero worship for the man many believe to be his real father, but Tyrion just tells their son that Uncle Jaime is his hero too.

Jaime is awkward with Gerion at first, unsure of what to do with the little boy always skipping after him. But one day Gerion says, "Mama can't train me for a while because of the baby in her belly, and Papa is busy being Lord Lannister. Will you show me how to fight like you, Uncle Jaime?"

Jaime has a little wooden sword and shield made for his nephew that very afternoon, and their positions reverse. Now it is Jaime who shadowed Gerion, asking him if he wants to practice, wants to spar, wants to come learn how to properly brush a pony. He even commissions a tiny version of the Lion's Paw, though it is made of hardened leather instead of metal and Gerion wears it on his left arm.

"I think they're both excited to have a playmate," Tyrion remarks at dinner, a smirk on his lips.

"As if you aren't as bad," Natasha says over the rim of her water goblet. "Who was it that kept him up all night talking about dragons?"

"Dragons are fascinating," is all Tyrion can say to defend himself.

Natasha goes into labor six weeks early. Jaime stays with her as he did the last time, while it falls to Tyrion to keep Gerion occupied on the other side of the castle where he can't hear his mother scream.

It becomes obvious why the labor was so early when Natasha gives birth to twins. A servant is dispatched to fetch Tyrion and Gerion as the babies are cleaned up, the midwife handing the boy to Natasha and the girl to Jaime.

They are as perfect as Gerion is. Their hair is Lannister gold with just a touch of red in it, and their eyes are mismatched like Tyrion's. Watching her besotted husband, Natasha thinks that even if he knows intellectually that the children are his, it must be nice to finally see his features in their faces.
Gerion really does look more like Jaime's son, even if he is not.

They call the girl Tasha and the boy Clynten, Natasha able to pass the names off as being in keeping
with the Lannister naming tradition.

-1-

A year and a half after the birth of the twins, the Ironborn sail into Lannisport and burn the Lannister
fleet while the ships are at anchor. Tyrion and Jaime ride out to fortify the town, and Natasha
remembers the groan of wood as *The Laughing Lion* was eaten by flame and what it feels like to be
hit with one of the Chitauri's energy weapons. When she closes her eyes she sees Clint's irises frosted
with blue sorcery and Loki forcing people to kneel. When she opens her eyes she sees her children
sitting together in a fearful huddle.

"Don't worry," Gerion tells his younger siblings. He has his wooden practice weapons with him, and
is wearing his tiny training armor. "Uncle Jaime is the greatest knight in the world, and Father is the
smartest lord. And nothing can hurt us while Mother is here."

Tasha and Clynt cling to their older brother, not sure why everyone is upset. Tasha's hair is tied in
pigtails with red ribbon and Clynt is chewing on his fist.

The Greyjoys do not appreciate the force they have woken. They do not understand what Natasha is
capable of.

She is going to show them.

-1-

"*Take Jaime with you,*" Tyrion says when she is packing, his English accent perfect after so many
years of using it for clandestine conversations.

"*I'm only going to Winterfell to visit Cat. I hardly need Jaime for that,*" Natasha answers, smiling
Sansa Lannister's sweet smile.

"*And I'm a dragon,*" Tyrion returns, not at all moved. "*If you were really heading for the safety of
Winterfell you would take the children with you. You're leaving them here, ergo, you are not really
going there.*"

Natasha blinks, cursing her unwillingness to put Gerion, Tasha, and Clynt in danger just to maintain
her cover. She was never this sloppy before motherhood. (But her babies are a miracle, an impossible
dream, and if their safety means that she has to break cover, has to kill kings, has to slaughter the
entire castle, the entire country, she will do it.)

"*I know you better than you think, my Lionfish, though perhaps not as well as I should know my own
wife.*" Tyrion tugs on her hands, and she responds to the signal by kneeling so he can kiss her. "*I
would slow you down on the road. Take Jaime. He loves you. He'll protect you.*"

Natasha is frozen, still as a statue. For a moment she isn't sure what Sansa would do. She isn't sure if
Sansa Lannister even exists, or if Tyrion has seen through the mask to the woman beneath.

Then she says, "*I didn't think you knew about Jaime.*"

Tyrion embraces her. "*Of course I know,*" her sweet, good, genius husband whispers in her ear.
"*Sometimes I think loving you is the only reason he still breathes.*" He gives a rusty laugh. "*He's
always been good at worshipping women with inconvenient relations to him.*"
"Gerion is yours," Natasha hears herself say. "All of our children are yours."

Tyrion’s arms tighten around her. "You didn't have to tell me that. But thank you for saying it anyway."

-I-

Jaime and Natasha tell the children goodbye and say they are going to visit Aunt Cersei in the Vale. Cersei will lie for them if Natasha tells her to. Tyrion stays, because the children need at least one of their parents and he is the Lion On the Rock.

Tasha and Clynt don’t really understand, but Gerion weeps like his heart is breaking.

"You won't stay away as long as Uncle Jaime did last time, will you?" he asks them plaintively. "He was gone so long before that I didn't remember him."

Sansa Lannister kisses her children and her husband but it is Natasha who cries inside when the Rock is no longer in sight.

-I-

They pose as smallfolk, traveling as husband and wife. The deception is almost too easy, and Natasha has to recite her old mantras from the Red Room when she lies in Jaime's arms at night. She isn’t sure if she's doing it to keep herself from rolling over and kissing him or to drown out the guilt at how good he feels against her.

Jaime is Natasha's partner, her match. When they fight they are like one person, one mind in two bodies, each knowing what the other will do before they do it. In her old world people always said Black Widow and Hawkeye in one breath. Now it is the Lame Lion and the Lionfish.

But Tyrion is the father of her children, and he is a good one. Natasha owes him a debt for that, and he deserves her best work. Though Jaime standing near is enough to make her heart pound, it is Tyrion who sees her. Jaime would believe her if she told him she was a dragon in human form, but Tyrion knows she is a liar and loves her anyway.

Tyrion knows she is a liar. And he told her to bring Jaime.

Natasha doesn’t know if it’s selfishness, if she's justifying her desires with thoughts of Tyrion's cleverness, his subtlety, but he told her he knows about Jaime, that he knows her well. That he knows. And then he insisted that Jaime travel with her.

It seems like permission. But still she hesitates, turning Tyrion's words over and over in her mind, circling around them, trying to understand his play. Is this a test? Is it genuine? Is it nothing but an illusion she’s spun for herself?

She cannot say.

So Jaime holds her close when they rest, and he kisses her cheeks and her forehead and her hands and her hair. But never her lips. And she rests her head on his shoulders and his chest and curves her body into his, but she does not lie on top of him, nor he on top of her. She can feel how aroused he is every night, every morning, his cock hard and pulsing against her, but he never does anything more than inhale the scent of her hair. Never says a suggestive word. Jaime loves her, but he loves Tyrion too.

She pretends not to notice when he masturbates. She hates knowing he’s so frustrated, but can see no
way around it. Jaime is self conscious about his scarred arm and twisted fingers, and is hopelessly faithful to whatever woman holds his heart. Between the two things, he won’t take a mistress, not even if Natasha were the one to introduce them.

It would be a twist of the knife.

In the beginning Natasha uses her web to find out where the Ironborn are likely to strike next, and then she and Jaime travel to whatever port town it is. If they get there in time, Natasha lets herself be captured and taken aboard one of the ships. After the ship is underway she sets a fire or poisons the drinking water or plants an explosive, depending on which approach will work best. Then she throws herself overboard to make the long swim to shore. It takes the Greyjoy forces a long time to catch on to the trick, since Natasha can swim faster and for longer than any normal person.

It is when she is emerging from the surf at the end of one such mission that she finally acts on what has been building between her and Jaime. She would say she snapped, or that she broke, but neither thing is true. She has broken only once in her life, and it was in the Red Room.

Jaime stands on the beach with a threadbare blanket in hand, ready to wrap it around her. Natasha meets his eyes, *Take Jaime with you*, echoing in her skull. *Take Jaime.*

She strips out of her wet things and waves the blanket away, standing naked before him, examining his face. His pupils are blown wide, his lips parted, his tongue darting out to moisten them. His eyes trail over her body, but jump back to her face every few seconds to gauge her expression.

She beckons and Jaime swallows, one hand going to the front of his breeches to adjust the bulge there. "Lionfish," he growls, dropping the blanket.

She goes to him and starts unbuckling the straps that hold the *Lion’s Paw* in place. Jaime moves as if to stop her, but she is determined. He’s been keeping the metal sleeve on more since his last altercation with Cersei, and Natasha won't have him think any part of himself is disgusting.

So she removes the bladed gauntlet and the many jointed plates of the sleeve, as well as the padding that keeps the metal from rubbing his skin raw. Jaime chokes back a sob when she presses her lips to his scars, when she guides his permanently curled fingers to her naked breast. And then in the next instant she is on her back in the sand, Jaime on top of her, his shirt flapping open and his breeches undone.

He sheathes himself inside her with much haste and little care, but she is more than ready so she just arches her back and moans out his name. His thrusts are frenzied and desperate, his hips smacking into hers so hard that she may bruise and she revels in it, raking her nails down his thighs. He bites at her breast and she pulls his hair, wrapping her legs around him to hold him closer and smiling when she thinks of just how many men have died exactly where Jaime is now.

They are both wound tight and so it is over in just a few minutes.

"I'll make it up to you," Jaime promises, then pauses. "I… Tyrion…"

Natasha raises her head from Jaime's chest to look him dead in the eye. "He's the one who told me to bring you. He said you love me."

Jaime closes his eyes, an expression somewhere between bliss and pain creasing his brow and tightening his jaw. "I do love you. I love you both."
They fuck every spare moment they have after that, and while it is sometimes loving and gentle it is more often frantic and rough, as if they are on a clock that both are aware is winding down. Part of Natasha thinks this affair cannot last, that one or both of them will not be able to continue when her husband is present and they can see in his face that he knows what they're doing. She wonders if she's passed Tyrion's test or failed it spectacularly, wonders if she will see betrayal in his mismatched eyes, or if he will simply smirk and make a joke about alternating nights. But then Jaime kisses her and she lets her thoughts go.

They call themselves husband and wife, use the names Yasha and Natalie, but they both know it isn't real and never can be.

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The Ironborn eventually stop taking captives, at least one of them making a connection between salt wives and their ships sinking. Jaime and Natasha change tactics. Natasha dons men's garb and they become a pair of sell swords who are looking for work and don't care who they work for. One of Black Widow's agents in play on the Iron Islands vouches for them, and they join a crew heading for Pyke and Balon Greyjoy.

It's a quick job. Almost insultingly easy. They spend a week learning the patrol schedule and plotting their route to Greyjoy's bedchamber. They go through an abandoned hall and out a window beyond the sight of the guards. Walking along a ledge, Natasha relying on her enhanced agility and Jaime anchoring himself to the wet stone with his clawed gauntlet, they move along until they can jump from one tower to the next. In through another window and they find themselves in an empty room of the family wing. All that's left is to wait for the guard to leave the hall and walk six steps to Greyjoy's door.

They don't even have to pick any locks.

Natasha does the deed, slitting Balon's throat with a dagger Black Widow's agents stole from his oldest son, simultaneously planting one she herself took from his brother's ship between his ribs. He's dead before he realizes there's someone in his room. Jaime keeping watch on the door, Natasha pushes Balon out of his bed to make it look like he woke up and struggled. Gripping the dead man's wrist, she dips his fingers in his own blood and uses his hand to scrawl the word *kinslayer* on the slick stone floor.

Lannisters always pay their debts, Sansa Lannister most of all. She will watch House Greyjoy tear itself apart.

"It doesn't seem very honorable," Jaime says once they're outside Pyke's walls, heading toward their rendezvous with another of Black Widow's contacts who will get them back to the mainland. He's wearing a black tactical suit of boiled leather with a hood to cover his bright hair and dark wrappings to hide the metallic gleam of the *Lion's Paw*. It matches the suit Natasha long ago made for herself.

"Saving lives is always honorable," she replies.

She has to believe that.
King's Landing seems to agree with the queen's constitution because Lysa manages to produce a living heir at last, though the child is sickly and fragile. It's for that reason that the queen keeps him close and quiet and few people ever see Prince Robin. Relieved that the succession is secure, King Robert washes his hands of them both and allows Lysa do as she likes.

What Lysa likes is not healthy or sane. Natasha witnesses this for herself when she visits King's Landing with her family.

The king is holding a feast and tournament to celebrate the reconstruction of the palace, and of course Jaime is competing - and so is Gerion. At thirteen he has been squire to Kevan Lannister for three years and is almost beside himself to ride in his first joust. Sansa Lannister is worried for her firstborn, but Natasha is sure that Gerion's natural advantages will see him through. All of her children have her strength and heal as fast as she does, thought thankfully neither Tyrion nor Jaime have ever seen a need to comment on it.

Eight year old Clynt begs to be allowed to squire for his big brother, which Gerion accepts with a smile. Natasha gives her son one of her handkerchiefs embroidered with her personal sigil, the Lionfish, to wear as her favor. Little Tasha makes a grand show of giving her own handkerchief, stained with jam in one corner, to her Uncle Jaime.

The horn blows to signal the start of the tournament and Natasha and her daughter make their way to the stands, Tyrion electing to stay on the ground with his sons. He is more nervous than Natasha is about Gerion getting hurt.

The two Lannister ladies are not in the stands long before they are joined by Joffrey Arryn, who is eager to meet his aunt and his cousin. Cersei's loyal Hound, Sandor Clegane, towers at the boy's shoulder.

Joffrey is almost the same age as Gerion and looks nothing like a Lannister, despite the similar coloring. His eyes are blue, his nose straight, and his hair curls at the ends. He's actually quite handsome. Cherubic, even. Natasha wonders who his father is.

"I'm sorry we've not been able to meet before," Joffrey tells them after introducing himself and kissing both their hands. "I rarely ever leave The Eyrie. Mother needs me there since Father is so often away."

"Yes, of course," Natasha murmurs. Little Tasha, who currently thinks boys who aren't her brothers are icky and plans to marry her Papa when she grows up, ignores them in favor of watching the joust. "How is Cersei?"

"Mother is well," Joffrey answers. "And yourself? Where are my uncles and other cousins?"

"On the field."

"You're letting Gerion compete?" Joffrey exclaims. "But he's the heir!"

Natasha raises an eyebrow, and politely claps as one of the knights before them is unhorsed. "And?"

"Mother says it's improper for the Heir of a Great House to learn the sword," Joffrey grumbles. "That's for second sons. She won't even let me near a blade, and Father won't do anything about it. He says it's because I'm their only child."
Joffrey, Natasha decides, is a bit of an idiot. But it's not entirely his fault. Natasha will need to write to Cersei. And perhaps dispatch one of Black Widow's agents to ascertain whether Cersei is deliberately keeping Joffrey weak so that she'll be able to continue ruling the Vale, or if she is merely overprotective.

Gerion wins his first four jousts before being unhorsed by his fifth opponent, the Knight of Flowers. He puts on a good enough showing, however, that King Robert calls him forward and has him remove his helm.

"I didn't know the Lame Lion had a son! I recognize the fighting style, not to mention the face!" the king roars. "Are you a bastard then?"

"No, Your Grace," Gerion says, his face as blank and polite as Natasha's ever is. "Jaime Lannister is my uncle, Your Grace. Tyrion Lannister is my father."

"Ah, the Halfman." Robert pauses to belch. "Good, good. Your uncle will have trained you then. Are you his squire?"

"No, Your Grace. Uncle Jaime felt that if he was the one to knight me people might question whether I'd earned it. We're very close. My knight master is Kevan Lannister."

Robert nods his great shaggy head, his beard obscuring a developing third chin. Jaime's prediction has come true - the king is fat. "No worry about that then. Take a knee."

Surprise flickering over his face, thirteen year old Gerion Lannister kneels on the trampled grass, makes his vows, and arises a knight. He is the very picture of nobility, his green eyes filled with triumph and his armor glinting in the sunlight, a gold lion rampant stitched onto his crimson surcoat, the red cloth matching the shade of his hair exactly.

Natasha and Tasha almost go hoarse with how loudly they cheer, Joffrey pouting sullenly beside them. Clynt can be seen turning cartwheels amongst the knights' tents while Tyrion jumps up and down. Jaime, already mounted for his run at the lists, prances his horse in a circle and raises Brightroar high.

Pride in his nephew's achievement urging him onwards, Jaime unhorses Loras Tyrell and crowns little Tasha the Queen of Love and Beauty. She blushes and waves when Jaime takes her for a ride around the field on his charger, blowing kisses that make the audience coo at her.

It is at the feast that evening that Natasha sees Lysa and Prince Robin. Lysa looks unwell. She is pale and her hair is frizzy, her gown not fitting quite right. Something about her eyes speaks to Natasha of mental illness, though she couldn't say which one.

Robin is four, but acts like a toddler, whining and crying and sucking his thumb. He barely knows any words apart from 'yes,' 'no,' 'Mama,' and 'mine.' At one point during the feast he reaches over and pulls Lysa's breast out of her dress so he can suckle. Natasha looks at Tyrion and raises both her brows. She remembers debates about the advantages of letting children breastfeed for longer back on Earth, but when it's accompanied by a clear stunting of the child's mental and emotional growth it can't be good.

Tyrion sighs. "I suppose you want to foster him?"

"Someone needs to if he is ever going to be a man, let alone a king. And I am his aunt."
"I will make an offer to Jon Arryn," Tyrion says, reverting to the Common Tongue. "It will be up to him to approach the king."

"Why are we using the secret language?" Clynt bounds up to the table. He's just escaped from a dance with his sister, who is now being spun around the floor by her Uncle Jaime. Gerion is off in a corner being flirted with by Margaery Tyrell, though he appears more interested in talking to her brother Ser Loras.

"For secrets, of course," Natasha tells Clynt, smirking.

"Mothheerrrr," he huffs.

Tyrion tosses his head back and laughs.

-1-

Natasha encounters Petyr Baelish for the first time in the gardens of the Red Keep. She spots him following her early on, but gives no sign, simply continuing to walk the garden paths, stopping now and then to sniff a flower, the picture of a naive noble lady.

Littlefinger, no doubt thinking he knows the gardens better than she (as if she would enter them without memorizing all points of egress), loops around her via another path, so that when she clears some hedges he appears to have been sitting on a bench with no notion that he would soon have company. But he doesn't look quite at ease, his muscles too tense for a man who has been sitting for some time.

Natasha holds back a snort of contempt as she thinks, Amateurs.

"Oh!" he says, standing as he makes a show of noticing her.

Natasha curtsies, but not an inch deeper than required for courtesy from a higher noble to a lower one. "Lord Baelish," she greets him, watching him from beneath lowered lashes.

"Come now, Sansa. Surely childhood friends need not be so formal." He smiles and Natasha can find some of herself reflected there. He does not have her polish, her training, so the monster is easier to see, but the coldness in their eyes is the same. The difference, she thinks, lies in the fact that Natasha is a monster made by men, one who might have never been if she was allowed to grow outside the Red Room, but Littlefinger has done this to himself.

Thinking over what she knows of the real Sansa Tully who died over a decade ago, Natasha chooses an approach. "Friends? I don't recall friendship so much as a boy who hated having me underfoot while he pined after my older sister." She smiles and hers is better, the knife blade expertly hidden, the monster down a well so deep that none of it shows in her irises.

"The follies of youth," Littlefinger counters without missing a beat. He offers her his arm, and she takes it, forcing her face into pleasant lines. Her skin doesn't crawl, but Sansa Lannister's would. They stroll the garden together and Baelish goes on, "It is easy to see now who is the true beauty of the Tully sisters. You are as lovely and sweet as a summer rose in bloom."

"You flatter me, milord. But as I am married, one wonders what you hope to accomplish."

"Can a man not simply want to bask in the presence of the loveliest lady in Westeros?"

Natasha raises an eyebrow. "Not when you are in love with one of her sisters and fucking the other."
Littlefinger stops dead, his grip on Natasha's arm turning painful, two spots of red high on his cheeks. His mustache twitches as his lips twist between a smile and a frown before settling on a grisly amalgamation of the two.

"Have a care how you speak, milady," he warns her. "The palace has ears everywhere and nasty rumors can lead to nasty consequences."

Perhaps trying to scare her, he points out a young boy down the path who is engaged in trimming one of the hedges. "That child reports to the Tyrells."

Next he turns to a maid who is wearing a palace uniform, ostensibly delivering messages, though she hasn't left the garden all morning. "That girl is one of the Black Widow's. You can tell by the way she moves. Quiet spiders, the lot of them."

Both are actually Natasha's agents, the little boy in place to report on the Tyrells. He is a bastard of the House, and hates how they barely acknowledge him. Natasha's smile never wavers. "I have nothing to fear from the Black Widow."

Littlefinger's grip on her grows tighter still. He will leave fingerprints at this rate. "Ah yes, how could I have forgotten, Lady Lannister. The Widow is your husband's creature. Perhaps she is also his mistress."

Natasha frowns. "If you are attempting to drive a wedge between my husband and myself, I must say that this is quite clumsy as far as such things go."

Littlefinger seems not to hear her. Instead he dares to pull a strand of her red hair from its complicated braid and wind it around his finger.

"How can a dwarf satisfy a woman like you, even if he is faithful?" he says almost to himself. Natasha blinks at him, mind going into overdrive as she tries to decide whether he's entranced enough with her appearance to be slipping this badly, or if he's merely playing the obsessed fool so that she will underestimate him. She tries to pull her arm away, using only a fraction of her strength. A test to see if he will let her go.

Littlefinger snarls. "But it's not the dwarf, is it? Everyone knows, no matter how your Black Widow tries to quash the rumors. It's written all over your bastard of a first son. You're fucking the Lame Lion. Your husband's own brother. Passed between a dwarf and a cripple," he laughs an ugly laugh. "Have you ever known the touch of a real man, I wonder?"

His face is close to hers now and when Natasha meets his eyes she doesn't see herself at all. The monster is there, but it is not her monster. No, this is madness and a greed that will devour the world. For an instant she thinks she is not the sole alien in Westeros, because she has seen this expression before.

He looks like Loki.

Natasha can't kill him here and now. Too many people have seen them, know they're in the gardens together. She'd never get away clean and then she'd be forced to either take her family on the run or fight a war to keep her freedom. Queen Lysa still loves Petyr, no matter the wrongs he's done her. Natasha's children deserve more than that life.

Sansa Lannister turns her face away from the man holding her and says, "I'll scream," her voice shaking.

Littlefinger doesn't allow her to retreat. Bending so that his lips press against her neck, in the place
Tyrion most likes to kiss, he whispers, "What would your husband do if he found out his heir is a bastard? If someone told him his brother is fucking his wife? If he's anything like Tywin he'll have all three of you killed, and the twins too for good measure, but only after watching his men rape you."

Natasha does not like being threatened. Especially when the threats are so poorly done.

Littlefinger's facial hair tickling over the sensitive skin of her neck like crawling insects, she scans the garden and notes that both of her agents are out of sight. It's only a matter of time then, for the first directive given to all of Black Widow's whisperers is *If you see a Lannister in trouble, help them.*

Dropping the quaver in her voice, as if she's suddenly found her spine, she says, "And what will the king do when he finds out that you're fucking the queen? That Prince Robin may not be a prince at all? I've always thought it was a blessing in disguise that Rhaegar's children burned to death before Robert got his hands on them."

Whether that will goad Littlefinger into outright attacking her so that she can call for the guards while righteously 'defending' herself or make him back off, Natasha never has a chance to find out. With a ring of steel her son appears, a naked sword in his hand. He lays it on Littlefinger's shoulder, and Natasha registers that her little boy is now taller than her and Littlefinger both.

"Unhand my mother," Gerion says, his green eyes glittering with suppressed violence. "Lest you want me to carve you a scar to match the one Brandon Stark gave you."

He is very like the three adults who raised him in that moment - Jaime's stance, Tyrion's cleverness, and Natasha's killing intent, all woven in with a sense of justice that could have come from all or none of them. Littlefinger takes one look at Gerion's face and blanches. With the point of the sword that was a knighthood gift from Jaime digging into flesh, Baelish seems far less inclined to cast aspersions on the young lord's parentage.

Littlefinger releases Natasha's arm. She moves to stand beside her son, putting her hair back to rights and smoothing her gown.

"Now now, no need for bloodshed over a misunderstanding," Littlefinger says, his voice going up a pitch when Gerion moves his swordpoint from Baelish's shoulder to his throat.

"Are you hurt, Mother?" Gerion doesn't take his eyes from Baelish.

Natasha regards Littlefinger for a long moment, letting him sweat as she considers their options. They still can't kill him openly, not like this, not with only her word that he earned it and his favor with the queen. And she isn't sure what safeguards he may have in place, what instructions he may have left, who his allies are. She expected him to be entirely different, based on what reports she's read of him, and now she can't figure his play. Arrogance, or complacency, perhaps, in a world where she's been a step ahead for so long.

She lets her lips turn up at the corners. "I'm fine, Gerion. It was just a misunderstanding, as Lord Baelish said." Cutting her eyes at the man, she takes a moment to enjoy how he cowes from her son's wrath. If ever one person truly embodied the words of House Lannister, *Hear Me Roar,* it is her boy. "Let him go now, if you please. We don't want any nasty rumors arising from this incident." She widens her smile. "After all, nasty rumors can have nasty consequences."

Gerion takes his sword from Littlefinger's neck, but he doesn't sheathe the blade until the man has scurried away. The two agents from earlier emerge when the weapon is back in its scabbard and Gerion tosses each of them a pouch of jingling coins, the standard reward for any whisperers who directly aid a Lannister.
"What was that?" Gerion asks in English, her arm in his as he insists on escorting Natasha back to her husband.

"A bird mocking a lion, heedless of the teeth," Natasha answers.

Gerion snorts. "Has Father been reading poetry to you again?"

"Your father is a very romantic soul."

"Yes," Gerion says, then sighs, face growing pensive. "But when you speak of my father, who is it you mean?"

Natasha abruptly goes deaf, save for a buzzing in her ears that she later realizes is her pulse. She's expected this day for some time, known that as intelligent as her children are, as well as they're trained, they would eventually pick up on the relationship she shares with their uncle. But somehow she never thought it would feel like this, like she is falling or drowning with no hope of saving herself.

She takes too long to answer in her turmoil.

"Whether Uncle Jaime sired me or not," Gerion bites out, a harsh series of staccato consonants, "I am Tyrion's son." He says it like a declaration. A dare. A line in the sand, a point on which he will not be contradicted, a mulish cast to his jaw that is just like Jaime, just like Clint, sharp cheekbones in a feline face topped with a red mane.

Natasha finds her voice. "You are Tyrion's son in all ways."

Gerion disappears for two days after that. Only the reports of Black Widow's whisperers that her son is staying in the apartments of Loras Tyrell keep her from turning the entirety of King's Landing upside down to look for him. When the rest of her family demands to know where he is, Natasha tells the truth. She also tells them why.

"Huh," Tyrion says, speechless for once. Jaime makes an odd face, likely trying to comprehend the nature of Gerion's relationship with the Knight of Flowers. (Natasha hasn't speculated. She doesn't care so long as her boy is happy and safe.)

It is the twins that Natasha worries about, watching them as the two communicate in that silent way of theirs. Little Tasha is elected the spokesperson. Turning away from Clynt to face the adults, she says, "We've known since we were seven." The you're all idiots is unspoken, but Natasha hears it anyway. "We don't mind." Then, slipping into English, "We get to have two fathers this way."

"Tyrion is your father," Jaime asserts, his eyes on his brother's carefully blank expression.

Tasha smiles sweetly, and Natasha honestly can't tell if she's playing them. (Her baby does good work.) "He's my favorite father."

Clynt shrugs his shoulders. "Gerion is my favorite."

It's a little hysterical, but they all laugh. Much like the man he's named for, Clynt has a knack for it.

Tyrion goes to fetch Gerion on the third evening of his disappearance. He is gone for far longer than
it takes to walk from the guest wing where the Lannisters are housed to Ser Tyrell's apartments, but when they return Tyrion looks happier than he has in years. Like he did when Sansa Tully said she wanted to marry him.

For a moment, Natasha mourns the choices she's made. She should have been a better wife to Tyrion. Or perhaps she should have let Tywin betroth her to Jaime, knowing she would win his heart in time (though she can't quite form her thoughts into that shape, can't fathom a world in which Tyrion is not her lord husband, the father of her children, her handler, her best friend).

But Gerion looks up and she catches the curve of a smirk on his face and she thinks that if this is where her choices led, she wouldn't change a thing.
The offer to foster Prince Robin at Casterly Rock is made, but Jon Arryn dismisses it after only a few nights consideration.

"I will take the boy in hand myself," he says to Tyrion as the family is about to set out for the Westlands. "As I did his father."

"And look how well that turned out," Jaime whispers, making Gerion snort.

"Behave," Natasha warns them both, though her eyes are dancing.

Once returned to the Rock, Natasha writes to Cersei about Joffrey and to Cat about Lysa. Cersei replies cordially enough. Cat doesn't.

Natasha sends five more ravens and still Cat doesn't reply. Fed up, she contacts her agent in Wintertown. Ros is a whore, and very good at getting all the castle gossip out of the men who pay to sleep in her bed. She is also one of the few who knows the Black Widow is Sansa Lannister, Natasha grooming her as a handler for part of the web.

*Queen Lysa knows about your husband's offer to foster the prince,* reads the coded report. *She got to Lady Stark first and filled her head with nonsense about the Lannisters wanting to foster Robin so they can force him to marry your daughter and use him to usurp the throne. I'm not sure how that would work since that seems to be how noble marriages are anyway, but that's what the word is. The North remembers that the Lannisters didn't make a move during Robert's Rebellion until victory was assured and everyone knows The Rains of Castamere, nevermind that there was a different Lord Lannister at the time. So Lady Stark finds it easy to believe Queen Lysa's lies about you fucking your husband and his brother at the same time; you not being a real Tully at all, but a fake the Lannisters found after the real Sansa died in order for their heirs to have a claim on Riverrun; and plots to kill Jon Arryn and Lysa herself and have Cersei installed as queen.*

*I borrowed a servant's dress off a friend who's a washwoman and used it to get into Winterfell castle. Took one of your latest ravens to Lady Stark myself, told her it was from her sister. She got a queer look on her face when she saw it was your handwriting and not the queen's and told me to burn it. "She's not my sister," she said. "She's a Lannister."*

Natasha thinks it very telling that Lysa's sudden bout of cleverness coincides with Petyr Baelish getting appointed to the King's Small Council. She resolves to keep an even closer eye on him, wondering if he has any evidence to back his first two claims or if they are simply lucky guesses.

Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

Four years pass. Joffrey improves after being sent to foster with House Waynwood (despite Cersei's protests). Robin, supposedly under an aging Jon Arryn's eye, remains much the same, Lysa countering any progress Jon makes with the prince. Natasha's agents among the capital's whores are under orders to drop subtle comments within King Robert's hearing until the man thinks fostering Robin at Casterly Rock is his own idea.
When the summons comes, it isn't for Tyrion, but for Jaime.

"There you are, Lame Lion!" the king says to Jaime when he presents himself at court. Robin is brought from his nursery and made to stand by the reforged Iron Throne, looking small and ill kept and nothing like a prince. "Look at this boy, if you can call him that," Robert growls. "Bah! I can barely believe he came from my cock. Nothing like your nephew. What was his name?"

"Gerion, Your Grace," Jaime answers.

"Gerion!" Robert bellows. "A knight at thirteen! Thirteen! And you, you were a warrior at that age too. And you're still a damned good fighter, cripple or no. So this is what I need from you. What your king commands: You will take this boy to be raised at Casterly Rock with his cousins. You will train him. You will be in charge of him. Not the Imp. Not the Tully bitch he married. You. You will make a man of him for me. You will make a **king** of him for me."

Here Jaime pauses in his recitation of events to pour more wine for himself and Tyrion, Natasha shaking her head and holding up her still full glass. They are sitting in Tyrion's study. "It was at that point," Jaime picks up his narrative, "that Queen Lysa burst into the room and started shrieking that they weren't taking her Sweet Robin away. She actually attacked Jon Arryn, slapping and clawing at him. She wouldn't stop until the king backhanded her and ordered the Kingsguard to take her to her rooms."

"She's not well," Natasha says.

"Clearly," Tyrion agrees.

"I'm sorry, Sansa." Jaime's eyes are full of concern. "I often forget that she's your sister."

Natasha shrugs. "It's the truth. And I hardly know her anymore. I've seen her once in twenty years. She didn't even recognize me until Tyrion introduced me as his wife."

"What happened after the queen was taken from the room?" Tyrion asks.

"Jon Arryn tried to talk the king into fostering the boy somewhere else or giving Jon more time to work with him. With all the gold the crown owes us, he fears Robin fostering at the Rock will lead to too much Lannister influence on the Iron Throne."

"A conclusion no doubt helped along by a certain Master of Coin," Natasha sniffs. "I tire of Littlefinger's games."

"We **could** just kill him." Jaime always switches to English when he speaks of assassination.

"All in good time," Natasha replies.

"Finish the story," Tyrion orders. "You didn't ride half the night and nearly kill your horse to tell us the king slapped the queen. What else happened?"

Jaime gulps his wine. "Jon Arryn is dead."

"What?!"

"He's been complaining of a persistent illness for some time now. It's thought that he finally succumbed after the stress of the evening."

Natasha scoffs. "And I'm a dragon."
"I agree." Tyrion is studying the dregs of his wine. "It's too convenient. It's more likely someone has been slowly poisoning him. Lysa is the obvious suspect. She hated the time he spent with the prince."

"But is she sane enough to pull it off?" Jaime muses. "And are we sure it wasn't Cersei?"

Tyrion waves a dismissive hand. "Cersei had no reason. So long as her husband was alive and spent most of his time in King's Landing, she could rule the Vale as she liked. With Jon Arryn dead, they'll be looking to confirm Joffrey as lord and Cersei may lose her power."

"Littlefinger," Natasha hisses. "His life just got shorter."

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They are on the road to King's Landing when the attack comes. It happens in the night, when Natasha is lying sandwiched between Tyrion and Jaime in their big red tent. Jaime has been their 'guard' for years now, to explain away how close they keep him. Of course, most guards don't sleep in the same bed as their charges... But as their servants know better than to barge into the tent of Lord Lannister, and the children are aware of Jaime's place in their parent's marriage, the risk is minimal.

Besides, when Jaime makes that pathetic begging face of his neither Tyrion nor Sansa Lannister can resist him, though it is always Tyrion they defer to in those moments. If Tyrion doesn't feel like sharing that evening, then he does not have to share. That is the primary rule of their arrangement, unspoken though it is.

Tyrion is feeling generous on this particular night, and so Natasha sleeps between the brothers, her face buried in the crook of Tyrion's neck and Jaime curled against her back, his legs tangled with hers. It is perhaps what saves them - the assassin's shock at finding three bodies in the sleeping furs where there should only be two.

Whatever reason, the figure that hovers over them hesitates, and in that moment Natasha comes completely and absolutely awake, the sixth sense that has kept her alive all these years sending a frisson of disquiet down her spine. She spots the cloaked person standing over them, a glint of metal in one hand, and prepares to take him down, her fingers seeking the dagger beneath her pillow.

But, tangled up with Jaime as she is, Tyrion is faster.

He rolls out of the blankets and keeps rolling, going between and through the assassin's legs, yanking at the man's - Natasha can see it is a man now - trailing cloak and choking him. The assassin kicks back with one booted foot, but Tyrion dodges, and in a series of quick stabs cuts the tendons in the back of the intruder's knees, sending the man crashing to the ground. In the muted firelight that filters through their tent walls, Natasha can make out the shape of a stiletto in Tyrion's hand. She's proud to say that not even she knows where he stashes all his weapons these days.

A choking sound draws her attention back to the assassin. Bloody foam is coming from his lips, his limbs jerking to and fro. Natasha recognizes the poison and knows if she checks the unnamed man's tongue, it will be purple.

"Are you well, Tyrion?" Jaime growls from behind her, giving her waist a squeeze and then standing to dress. Natasha doesn't need to light a lantern to know he is glowering. There are few things that incite Jaime's wrath so much as an attack on his family, physical or otherwise.

Tyrion is searching the corpse. "Perfectly fine, brother, though I fear our guards are not if this scum got so far."
Tyrion finds two things of note - a scrap of paper that has the Black Widow's hourglass drawn on it in charcoal, and the assassin's dagger. A dagger which has a direwolf etched into the pommel.

Natasha stands and helps Jaime with his buckles even as Tyrion cleans his stiletto and puts it back…. Wherever he keeps it.

"Surely the Black Widow would not betray us?" Jaime voices, though he doesn't sound completely certain.

"Of course she wouldn't," Tyrion says with unshakeable confidence. "And the Starks wouldn't arrange an assassination. Storming Casterly Rock and demanding satisfaction is much more their style, as obsessed as they are with honor. Someone thinks we're very stupid. Someone who wants the lions and the wolves at each other's throats."

Natasha fetches Tyrion's dressing gown and Jaime bends to slash at the dead assassin with the clawed gauntlet of the Lion's Paw, obliterating the marks of Tyrion's stiletto and bloodying the weapon he is known for never taking off.

"The Greyjoys?" Jaime muses. "It's similar to the trick we played on them."

"Are there even any Greyjoys left?" Tyrion asks as he takes the dressing gown from Natasha and shrugs into it. Natasha retreats to the bed and starts working up some tears.

"The youngest boy joined the Night's Watch," she says. "But I doubt he could arrange something like this, even if he knows what we did. I find Lysa or Littlefinger to be far likelier suspects. Maybe even Catelyn, without her husband's knowledge, if she still believes everything Lysa writes to her. Or perhaps the Targaryens across the sea. Viserys is said to be as mad as his father."

"Hmm."

"Did we miss anything?" Jaime surveys the tent.

The note and dagger are in Tyrion's robe pockets. The assassin appears to have been killed by the Lame Lion in defense of his brother and good-sister, Jaime's dressed, and his sleep tousled hair can be attributed to participating in a life or death struggle. Tyrion has cleaned the blood from his hands and the bloody handkerchief is tucked away somewhere.

Tyrion nods and comes to Natasha's side, taking her hand as she starts screaming like she's terrified and Jaime calls for the guards.

-1-

King Robert decides that he wants Ned Stark to be the new Hand of the King, and starts a royal procession towards Winterfell. Lord and Lady Lannister and their family join the procession on the road, having not yet reached the capital. They will travel with the king's train to Winterfell to visit their family there and Jaime will take custody of Prince Robin on the way back. King Robert agreed to give Lysa the length of the journey and their stay in the North to say goodbye to Robin, just to get her to shut up.

With the majority of the royal guard conveniently out of King's Landing and the assassination attempt on her and Tyrion weighing on her mind, Natasha sends her agents to kill Petyr Baelish and search his various businesses and properties. She has drawn out the game between them too long - never wanting him dead badly enough to risk the lives of her people. She feels differently about it now.
The deed is done by paying off the madams of several of Littlefinger's brothels. He is apparently a harsh master, and the whore he currently favors is only too happy to wear poison on her lips and give him a deadly kiss, even if it means that she'll die too. They arrange it so that Baelish appears to have succumbed to the same 'illness' as Jon Arryn, and discover that he has been embezzling from the royal treasury.

For their initiative in recruiting Littlefinger's whores, Natasha authorizes her agents to keep a generous percentage of Baelish's gold for themselves, and has the rest sent straight to the vaults in Casterly Rock. While Tyrion's business sense and keen fiscal management has seen the Lannisters flourish in spite of their secretly dried up gold mines, taking Littlefinger's misbegotten gains will ensure that people keep using the phrase rich as a Lannister.

The news of Littlefinger's death seems to steal what little sense Lysa has left. A day out from Winterfell she encloses herself and Robin in the royal carriage and refuses to come out.

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The Starks and their household all stand in the courtyard of Winterfell to meet them. Natasha notes that Jon Snow is made to stand in the very back, with the lowest of servants, then turns her attention to the rest of the Starks. They are all dressed in somber colors, dark blues and greys and blacks, furs draped around their shoulders. Most of the Stark children have at least a touch of red in their hair and Tully eyes, but the youngest girl is pure Stark, a younger, female Jon Snow.

In contrast, Natasha is dressed in a bright turquoise gown with lionfish embroidered on the bodice, matching jewels around her throat and in her elaborately braided hair. Jaime is golden from head to toe, the Lion's Paw shining in the weak Northern sun and Brightroar on his hip, and Tyrion and the children all wear rich fabrics in Lannister colors, Tyrion and Gerion both bearing the lion rampant on their chests. All of them carry more weapons than most of the Faceless, though all but Jaime and Gerion's swords are hidden. Against the white snow and grey stone of Winterfell, they look like nothing so much as tropical birds that lost their way.

Lord Stark and King Robert are greeting each other, Cat standing a step behind. It's clear Cat was a great beauty at one point, though her face is now lined and her hair greying. She is still stately, even while glaring hatefully at Natasha and her family.

Lady Stark doesn't let her personal feelings affect her courtesies however. At least not on the surface. But the hidden barbs are sharp enough. "Sansa. You're even more beautiful than when I last saw you. And you look so young. It's hard to believe you're the same girl who left Riverrun all those years ago," Cat comments. "And these must be your children."

"Aunt Catelyn," the children greet her, the two boys bowing and kissing her hand and Tasha performing a curtsey.

"Is that our imp uncle?" a youthful voice pipes up.

"Shut. Up," a red haired teen who ironically looks like a young Natasha hisses at the younger girl beside her.

"Ah. Children will be children," Catelyn says in a perfectly polite voice. "I must express my condolences, sister, on being passed over by the older brother and forced to marry the dwarf."

She says this as if Jaime and Tyrion aren't standing right in front of her. She says this in front of Natasha's children.
Sansa Lannister smiles sweetly. "Just as I must extend my own to you, sister, for your real betrothed being executed by the Mad King and you being forced to marry the surly younger brother who fathers bastards behind your back."

Cat's nostrils flare, and then she drops into an abrupt curtsy. "Excuse me, Lady Lannister," she spits the name as if it is the vilest of epithets, "I must go coax my poor sister out of her wheelhouse."

She marches off, leaving Natasha standing there across from the wide eyed Stark children.

"Well," Tyrion opines. "That was fun."

Tasha starts giggling, and is soon followed by the little Stark girl. They are soon all laughing except for the red haired maiden, who looks torn between following after her mother and swooning over Gerion. Gerion notices and takes action.

Bowing to her, he introduces himself. "Ser Gerion at your service, milady. Heir to Casterly Rock."

The girl blushes. "Sansa Stark."

"My mother's namesake! My mother is one of the most beautiful ladies in the entire Seven Kingdoms. I daresay you are well named, Lady Sansa." Gerion smiles and offers her his arm, and the girl is gone.

"That's my boy," Tyrion snickers as they all follow the young pair into the castle.

"What are you talking about?" Jaime complains. "I taught him that."

"Last I checked, brother, I'm the one married to the most beautiful woman in the Seven Kingdoms."

"Only because you saw her first."

"If I recall correctly, it is she who chose me first."

"You're already a knight?" Robb Stark asks Gerion ahead of them, Jon Snow his silent shadow. "Would you like to cross blades while you're here?" Gerion takes the time to answer them in the affirmative, but immediately switches his attention back to Sansa Stark.

Arya and Bran have their heads together with Clynt and Tasha, the twins telling the younger Stark children about their archery lessons. Both twins openly study the bow under the Rock's master at arms, but know better than to mention the secret lessons in other disciplines they get from their parents and uncle.

"We may end up arranging a marriage while we're here, if Gerion keeps that up," Tyrion observes.

Natasha merely hums, idly wondering what Ser Loras will think of it. He's been a frequent guest at the Rock over the years. As for the match, if Gerion and the Stark girl really were first cousins she would protest, but as it is she'll be happy so long as her son is.

The feast that night is excellent. Lysa and Robin are conspicuous by their absence, but the King's Landing contingent is used to it by now, so it goes unremarked by everyone but the younger Sansa. Gerion again steps in to distract her, monopolizing her attention. It soon appears that the girl who was so dazzled by the thought of royalty finds a young knight far more princely.

Jon Snow is also missing from the hall. Natasha sends her boys (minus Gerion, who is doing such
good work with Sansa) to go find him and make him an offer he can't refuse.

-1-

"You think he's actually Rhaegar's bastard, got on Lyanna Stark?" Tyrion says when she first reveals her theory to him during their journey to Winterfell. Perched on the back of a horse, he sits just as tall as she does.

"All the timing fits," Natasha confirms, patting her black palfrey on the neck. "But even if he isn't, Cat treats the poor boy like an unwanted dog."

"So if he is, we have a grateful dragon tied to our house," Jaime says, riding up on Tyrion's flank to join their conversation. His position as an outrider has him constantly moving up and down the column. Gerion also serves as one and can be seen further ahead, riding next to the royal wheelhouse.

"And if he isn't, we still have a loyal boy who is good with a sword and can be Tyrion's Sworn Shield. He will love us just for being kind to him." Natasha finishes.

"I guard you and Tyrion," Jaime pouts.

Natasha rolls her eyes. "Then he can protect Gerion, or the twins."

"I'd like that," Tasha pipes up from the back of her pony. Her English is spoken with a lilting Westland accent that she refuses to correct, liking the musicality of it. It makes her sound Russian. "Whenever Gerion escorts us to Lannisport we end up with a crowd of swooning girls following us around."

Jaime laughs. "If the Black Widow's reports are true, Little Lioness, then you will have the same problem with Jon Snow."

Tasha's expression turns thoughtful, a spark in her eyes that brings Tyrion to mind. "Then if he is a dragon I should marry him. Just in case the Targaryens return. Shut up, Clynt."

"I didn't say anything!" her twin protests.

Natasha narrows her eyes. She hates that her daughter is old enough to seriously consider her marriage prospects at the age of twelve, but it is the way of this world. "We'll see."

-1-

The night of the welcome feast, Jaime and Tyrion find Jon Snow by himself in the practice yard, halfheartedly running drills.

"What are you doing back there?" the boy asks when he notices them.

"We're here to talk to you," Tyrion says.

Snow gives them a suspicious frown, face scrunched like a confused pup. "Why?"

"My sister noticed you weren't at the feast," Jaime tells him. "She insisted we come check on you."

"Why?" Snow asks again.

"We're your uncles." Jaime gives his famed cocky grin and rests his good hand on the hilt of Brightroar. "Why shouldn't we?"
Snow shakes his head, sending his mop of dark curls every which way. "I've no Tully blood in my veins."

Tyrion makes a disgusted noise. "And judging by the way she treats you, there is none in Catelyn Stark's either. Clynt!" he calls, raising his voice only slightly. "What are your mother's words?"

Clynt drops down from a shadowed stairway, landing with knees bent. Jaime and Tyrion knew he was there, but to Jon Snow it is like he appears out of the very air. Jon jumps, his sword coming up instinctively.

"The Tully words are Family, Duty, Honor," Clynt recites. Then he looks at Jon, mischief in his mismatched eyes. "Hello, cousin."

Jon is flabbergasted. "Where did you come from? How did you do that?"

Clynt rocks back and forth on his heels. "Uncle Jaime taught me. If you come live with us, he can teach you too."

It is really Tyrion who handles most of the children's stealth training, but the standard line if anyone questions the children's abilities is to say that Jaime taught them. It's a lie that most people find easier to believe.

Jon smiles at Clynt, his manner that of someone humoring a child. "Thank you for the offer, but I can't come live with you."

"Yes you can!" Clynt plays on Jon's perception of his youth, making his eyes wide and earnest and stomping one foot. "Mama said! She said Aunt Cat is mean to you, so you're going to live with us and be mine and Tasha's Sworn Shield and Tasha might marry you when she's older. You'd probably have to become a knight first, though."

Jon Snow appears as if a feather could knock him over. "But I'm a bastard."

"Family, Duty, Honor," Clynt repeats, looking at Jon as if he is the single dumbest human in Westeros. "Don't you know anything?"

The next day Lord Stark approaches Tyrion and Natasha about a betrothal between his daughter Sansa and Gerion. Both the girl and King Robert are pushing for it, Robert looking at it as a reward for Jaime fostering Robin and a way to tie his allies closer together. The girl is just smitten with the Lordling Who Roars (a name Gerion insists he hates, but has been his since he unhorsed Gregor Clegane in a joust. Like his mother and siblings, Gerion is stronger than he looks).

Natasha suggests that instead of an outright betrothal, Sansa come foster at the Rock and a betrothal contract can be revisited in a few years.

"That is how I ended up with my lord husband," she tells Ned Stark, placing her hand in Tyrion's. "My father sent me there for Jaime, but I fell in love with his brother."

Catelyn is coldly furious and against the whole thing, but cannot defy her husband or her king. "Why doesn't Gerion foster here instead? I don't want my daughter sent halfway across the Seven Kingdoms."

"I understand the sentiment, sister," Natasha says, idly smoothing the sleeves of her rich purple gown. Her hair is pinned and braided in an elaborate style, and decorated with amethyst ornaments.
that double as throwing knives. They were an anniversary gift from Tyrion. "But if Sansa marries Gerion she will be Lady Lannister one day. It makes more sense for her to learn the ins and outs of the Rock, than for Gerion to stay in a land he'll never rule."

Catelyn opens her mouth. Natasha holds up a hand to forestall any arguments and throws Cat a bone. "I have noticed that my Tasha is quite taken with your Bran. They're clambering all over the towers and roofs together as we speak. And Arya and Clynt are thick as thieves. I propose that in a few years, say when they are fourteen or so, we send the twins here to foster and see what comes of it."

Cat looks like she might still object, but Lord Stark puts a hand on her arm and she closes her mouth.

"Of course," Tyrion drawls, "if either of my children are treated remotely in the same way that you treat Jon Snow, they will be coming straight back to the Rock. Just as he is."

Catelyn glares. Ned flinches as if struck. "What?"

Tyrion makes a show of inspecting his nails for dirt. He is wearing a doublet of Lannister red with gold embellishments. "Oh yes. My brother Jaime watched him practice with his sword while everyone else was at the feast last night. Offered to take him as a squire after seeing his skill. The lad said yes, of course. Not like there's anything keeping him here."

"Oh good." Natasha says. "It will be nice for young Sansa to have a familiar face when she's getting settled at the Rock."

A strident scream pierces the air. It isn't Catelyn, despite all expectations to the contrary.

Tyrion and Natasha are up and running in an instant, Ned Stark a half step behind them. Natasha easily outstrips the two men (one for lack of height, and the other for lack of breath) and can see Jaime coming from the opposite direction. Gerion, Robb, Jon, Clynt, and Arya are on his heels. They all converge on a single point: The base of a disused tower. The source of the scream. There, directly beneath the highest window, Lysa and Robin are lying dead, their bodies broken and bleeding, Lysa's neck twisted at an unnatural angle and Robin's head cracked open. Bran Stark is to the side of them, bones sticking out of his legs, but he's still breathing. Above, Tasha clings to the side of the tower, desperately hanging onto the ledge outside the window.

Without needing to speak, Natasha kneels to do what she can for Bran and Jaime diverts up the tower staircase to pull Tasha in through the window. The others arrive a few seconds later.

"Clynt, go get the med bag. It's in the room I'm sharing with your father," Natasha starts issuing orders. "Tyrion, we're going to need a table to move him, like when Jaime came back from the Burning. Gerion, help your father."

She is interrupted by a screaming Catelyn slapping her as hard as she can and trying to push her away from Bran. Natasha catches the woman's next strike and easily twists her arm behind her back. Looking at Ned she says, "Good-brother, please come take my sister before I am forced to render her unconscious."

"Get away from him! Bran! Bran!" Cat screams. It is at that moment that King Robert arrives on the scene and sees his wife and son are dead.

"What the fuck happened?!" he demands.

"Your wife went mad, Your Grace," Jaime's voice pierces the din. He comes to stand in the tower archway, a crying Tasha cradled in his arms.
Natasha shoves Catelyn in the direction of Lord Stark and bends back over Bran, glad for the distraction Jaime is providing and pleased to note Jon Snow falling into a guard position at her side.

"Bran and Tasha were climbing on the tower together," Jaime continues. "When they reached the top they heard voices, and peeked in through the window. There they saw the queen and the prince. Queen Lyssa was giving Prince Robin a bottle of poison to drink, telling him that it was medicine that would make sure he could stay with her. My niece recognized the poison for what it was and shouted a warning to the prince. When the queen saw Bran and Tasha in the window she picked the prince up and ran at them, throwing herself, Prince Robin, and Bran out of the tower. Tasha fell too, but managed to grab onto the ledge and hold onto it long enough for me to reach her."

Natasha listens to this monologue with half an ear, trusting Jaime to look after her daughter as she works to keep Bran alive, Clynt thankfully having returned with the medical kit she takes with her everywhere.

"Lies!" Catelyn protests. "It was the Lannisters! The Lannisters were plotting to murder Lyssa and her boy! She warned me about them! It was the girl! She did this!"

"Cat," Ned tries to hush the hysterical woman. "Think of what you're saying. A child assassin murdering her own aunt and cousins? One no older than Bran?"

"You will find the broken vial and the poison on the floor of the tower," Jaime says stiffly. "I believe my niece."

"No! They did this to my son! My son!"

King Robert turns around and leaves without saying a word. Tyrion and Gerion arrive with a table being carried by a few Lannister men, the Stark men having refused to obey their orders.

"Gerion, go take your sister from Uncle Jaime. Jaime, come help me move him," Natasha says quietly, ignoring Cat's sobs.

The rest of their time in Winterfell is somber. Lyssa and Robin's bodies are prepared and stowed in a cart. They will be taken to King's Landing for burial.

Bran will live, Natasha is sure of that, but he hasn't woken up in days and he may never walk again. Natasha is a field medic, not a surgeon, and can do no more for him. The maester can do even less.

Jon Snow tells Jaime that he'll be staying in Winterfell because he can't in good conscience leave while Bran is so injured. But then Cat screams at him when he tries to visit Bran's sick room, and Jon decides he's coming with them after all.

Natasha expects their understanding about young Sansa and Gerion to be called off, but Cat barely stirs from Bran's bedside and Ned believes Tasha's account of what happened in the tower after talking with King Robert about Lyssa's mental state. Not only does the agreement stand, but Ned asks them to foster Arya too.

"Arya is headstrong, and she needs a firm hand," Ned says to Tyrion. "With me going to King's Landing to serve Robert and Cat so focused on Bran, I worry about what she would get up to. Besides, she seems to get on well with your twins. And you are family."

"We will accept of course," Tyrion says. "Though I must admit to some surprise. It seems we lions aren't well loved in the North."
Ned has the grace to look ashamed. "Cat is grieving. She took Lysa's letters to heart. As for myself… I will admit that I have had my own reservations about your House and its dealings, but you are a very different lord than Tywin was. I see that now."

Tyrion takes that as a compliment.
The royal procession leaves Winterfell, Ned Stark riding at the head of the column next to King Robert. The Lannisters and their bannermen split off after a week to head for Casterly Rock, accompanied by Sansa Stark, Arya Stark, Jon Snow, and three direwolves. Natasha is already giddy with anticipation of what she can train the wolves and their human partners to do.

They don't use a wheelhouse, all of the family preferring to ride, so Sansa rides double with Gerion on his massive charger, and Clynt, Tasha, and Arya take turns switching off so that two of them are on the twins' ponies and one is in one of the supply carts. Jon has his own horse, a parting gift from Lord Stark, and takes Gerion's place as one of the outriders.

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They make good time to the Rock and are soon settled in. They are able to take Arya and Jon into the fold right away, Arya working herself to the bone to catch up with the twins both martially and mentally and doing such a good job of it that it soon seems like they are triplets instead. For Jon's part, he works so closely with Jaime and Gerion and is so amazed at being treated well, at being allowed to eat with them, to have a room in the family wing, to being told that they are serious about marrying him to Tasha if he continues to learn and improve, that he soon considers Jaime to be a father and Gerion a brother. He doesn't say as much, oh no. He is far too Stark for that, but he starts calling Jaime and Tyrion 'Uncle' and Natasha 'Aunt' and admits to Gerion that he feels more welcome and at home at the Rock than he ever did in the North.

To top it off, he treats Tasha in gallant fashion, obviously mimicking the way Gerion treats the younger Sansa to great effect, both boys bringing their ladies flowers, escorting them around the Rock, and carrying their packages when they go shopping in Lannisport. (Clynt tries to treat Arya similarly only once. She knees him in the groin. He brings her a bouquet of arrows instead of flowers the next time.)

Yes, Natasha is pleased with the progress of Arya and Jon Snow, as well as that of their direwolves Nymeria and Ghost, who are being trained in the way of special forces service dogs.

She is less pleased with young Sansa (and by extension, her direwolf Lady). The girl worships the very ground Gerion walks on and seems willing to do anything her aunt and future good-mother asks of her, even above the wishes of her own family.

Natasha doesn't trust it.

Ned Stark is unlikely to have taught the girl to prevaricate so well, even if it is a tad obvious, but Lady Stark… The teen could be a spy for Catelyn.

Natasha monitors Sansa's mail, having long ago mastered the art of opening letters without disturbing the sealing wax, and has her followed discretely. But after several weeks of consistent behavior, and bouts of upset whenever her delusions are threatened, Natasha is forced to conclude the girl is really that sheltered. Gerion and Natasha respond by tag teaming her, slowly leading her toward the idea that a real noble lady is one who serves and protects her people in whatever way she has to, and that she should at least learn some modicum of self defense.

Sansa doesn't give up her romantic notions of knights and maidens and likely won't any time soon, but since Gerion is the knight she builds those fantasies around they decide there is little harm in it.
Word comes from King's Landing. Queen Lysa and Prince Robin are buried in state, though King Robert doesn't bother to stand vigil for them. That task falls to Stannis Baratheon, who is now Lord of Dragonstone and seems to always be cleaning up Robert's messes, whether it is holding off a siege in Storm's End, rebuilding King's Landing, or standing vigil over the king's dead family.

The king needs an heir, so the customary mourning period is cut short and a lavish wedding is held in the Great Sept tying Robert to Margaery Tyrell. Ser Kevan represents the Lannisters at the ceremony, Natasha not wanting her family on the road again so soon after beginning to train their new wards. Ser Loras joins the Kingsguard and is given his white cloak at the wedding feast, neatly curtailing his visits to the Rock. (Though in his letters to Gerion he says the Roaring Knight is always welcome to stay in his apartments whenever the Lannisters are in King's Landing.)

The new queen is pregnant within just a few months, and seems to have the king enthralled enough that he takes far fewer whores to his bedchambers.

They are eating in the family's private dining room when a servant brings them a sealed envelope, urgency in the liveried man's step. All talk ceases as the missive is handed to Tyrion, Natasha and Jaime reading over his shoulders from their positions to his left and right, Gerion and Jon looking on with various degrees of wariness, while Tasha and Arya huff at being too far away to see. Sansa merely waits patiently, poised and dignified as a lady should be, trusting that the men will take care of whatever it is. Clynt looks as if he isn't paying attention, being engaged in feeding Nymeria table scraps, but is watching from the corner of his eye.

Tyrion breaks the seal on the letter and spies the Black Widow's hourglass inked into the top left corner of the page. Motioning for the candelabra on the table to be passed to him, he holds the letter up to the light, revealing the phrase *Even a hydra fears the Widow's bite* written in Natasha's own recipe for invisible ink.

She and Tyrion share a look. That phrase is used only when her agents need to send an emergency missive outside their regular report times and confirm that it comes from the Widow's web.

Tyrion quickly scans over the portions of the note written in regular ink, then lets out a snort. "It seems that there was an assassination attempt on the Starks who remain in Winterfell. Robb Stark was able to kill the assassin with the help of his direwolf, and all of your relatives are fine," he directs toward Arya, Jon, and Sansa. "But the assassin's blade had a pommel in the shape of a lion's head, and Lady Stark has taken that to mean that we," he gestures at himself, Jaime, and Natasha with the letter, "are behind the attack. She traveled to King's Landing to demand that your father do something to rescue the three of you from us, but he refused to act on such flimsy evidence. Lady Stark was unhappy with that response, and has taken our uncle, Kevan Lannister, hostage. One of Black Widow's agents is following the party and reports they are heading toward Riverrun and that Kevan is still alive. For now."

The response is dramatic. Gerion and Jaime leap to their feet, both ready to storm off and rescue Kevan, killing all who stand in their path. Young Sansa bursts into tears and wails that her mother is spoiling everything and of course the family of her princely knight didn't send an assassin into Winterfell. Jon looks constipated, no doubt torn between his old loyalties and his new, and Arya and Tasha merely watch Natasha, both with expectant looks on their faces.

"Silence!" Tyrion demands, punctuating the command with a thump of his fist on the table, rattling the cutlery. They all freeze.
Tyrion pauses, looking each of them in the eye until he is sure he has all of their attention. "This is not the first time someone has tried to spark war between the West and the North. A similar assassination attempt was made on myself and my lady wife on the way to Winterfell, though the dagger had a wolf etched on it in that case. We thought the man who arranged for that attempt was killed, but it seems that it wasn't him after all, or else he's not nearly as dead as we thought. So this is what we will do: Jon, Sansa, Arya, you will go with Gerion and send letters to Lord and Lady Stark and your brother Robb about what we suspect is happening here. Gerion can fill in any details that are unclear to you. Tasha, you will do the same for the other lords of the Great Houses, in case this plot extends further than us. Clynt you will go ready packs and horses for you, myself, Jaime, and Jon. We will be heading to King's Landing to discuss this with King Robert and Lord Stark in person."

"But Father-" Gerion begins to protest. Tyrion holds up a hand.

"You will be the Lion On the Rock while we're gone," he tells Gerion. "Consider it an opportunity to test yourself with your mother here to help you should anything go wrong."

At that Gerion subsides, though he frowns.

Tyrion turns to look up into Natasha's eyes, "Can I trust you to contact Cersei, my love? Have her send men to watch the Kingsroad. Then liaise with the Black Widow. If her agent can extract Kevan without any confrontation between our forces and whatever men serve Lady Stark, so much the better."

Watching Tyrion's quick mind at work, Natasha's mouth has gone dry, a zing of electricity traveling down her spine to form liquid heat in her groin. "Of course, Tyrion," she says fervently, breathily, no need to fake the reaction. "I'm yours."

Tyrion smirks at her, his eyes dipping to the cleavage showcased by her dress before he drags himself back on task. "Whoever did this wants a war between the the Starks and the Lannisters. I say we absolutely refuse to give them one."

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While she may be a lady well versed in running a castle like Winterfell, Catelyn is not a general. Nine days after being told that Kevan was taken, Natasha gets a raven from Cersei.

My bannermen caught Lady Stark and her men on the Kingsroad. They are in the Sky Cells now. Uncle Kevan wasn't with them. Lady Stark claims she was betrayed and that one of her men absconded with him. I assume that was the Widow's doing.

Natasha's agent, a noblewoman named Brienne who serves Black Widow in exchange for a promise that she will eventually be knighted, shows up with Kevan a month and a half later.

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Gerion is holding court in the main hall of the Rock, sitting in what he still refers to as his father's chair with Natasha in the lower chair to his right and young Sansa occupying the one to his left, her direwolf at her feet and some sort of frippery in her lap. Catelyn at least did one thing right: Sansa hates having idle hands, and is forever stitching away at something, whether sitting in her solar or next to Gerion while he performs his duties as lord.

Gerion gestures the next petitioner forward, and an incredibly dirty pair of men step into the center of the hall. One is tall and broad shouldered, with a barrel chest and trunk-like legs, a sword hanging
from his belt. The second is a good deal shorter, wiry and lean, the remains of a ragged cape hanging about his shoulders. They are both covered in mud and grime, turning their clothes, hair, and even their skin a uniform dull brown. But at a second glance, Natasha notes that the tall one is not barrel-chested, but has breasts, and the shorter one has Lannister green eyes.

"Is this anyway to welcome me back, squire?" Kevan says, smiling up at Gerion. Even his teeth are muddy.

"I haven't been your squire in a long time, Uncle Kevan," Gerion retorts, rising to hug his great uncle, disregarding the dirt on his clothes. Kevan laughs and asks for food and a bath, and Gerion sends him off with a pair of servants to see to his needs. Then he returns to the lord's seat and regards the woman who is even taller than himself.

"I assume you are one of the Widow's whisperers?"

"Yes, milord." The woman bows.

"Then you have my thanks, and the thanks of my family for seeing to my uncle's safe return. Am I permitted to know your name?"

The woman hesitates. Gerion slips into English and says, "Fury forms the Widow's shield."

The woman replies, "And her bite is made of lightning. I am Brienne of Tarth, milord."

Gerion smiles one of his devastating feline smiles, but Brienne seems unmoved. "Then, Brienne of Tarth, name your reward."

"I want only one thing. If you know the secret language, then you know what it is."

Gerion glances at Natasha out of the corners of his eyes. She nods, the motion barely perceptible. Gerion stands and draws his sword. "Take a knee."

Brienne does so and Gerion strides toward her with a prowling gait, regal even with streaks of mud from embracing Kevan on his fine clothes. He places the tip of his blade on Brienne's right shoulder, then on her left, alternating with every line he speaks.

"In the name of the Warrior I charge you to be brave.
In the name of the Father I charge you to be just.
In the name of the Mother I charge you to defend the young and innocent.
In the name of the Maid I charge you to protect all women.
Arise, Lady Knight Brienne, The Widow's Warrior."

Brienne stands and looks at Gerion like he's the sun, like she'll die for him, like she'll kill for him and all Natasha can think is, Yes.

They will have a feast later that night to celebrate Kevan's return and the Lady Knight who returned him, and Arya will march up to Brienne and inform her that she'll be staying in service of the Lannisters and taking Arya as her squire.

Brienne will toss back her head and laugh, and in that moment she will be beautiful.

-1-
Lady Lannister?

Natasha looks up from her desk, a quill in hand as she decodes messages. "Yes, Lady Knight?"

Brienne, wearing a tunic and cape of Lannister red with the sigil of the House Tarth on one shoulder and Gerion's newly chosen personal sigil (an addorsed lion rampant and wolf rampant) on the other, stands in the doorway of Natasha's personal study. "There is news from the capital. The Vale delivered Lady Stark and she was put on trial for kidnapping Kevan. Lord Kevan, I mean. Your lord husband, His Grace King Robert, and Lord Mace Tyrell served as the judges. Lady Stark admitted her guilt openly and demanded a trial by combat, naming Lord Stark as her champion. The King refused to allow it on the grounds that Lord Stark was the Hand of the King and if he would fight for anyone, it would be the crown. One of the Northmen who helped Lady Stark, a man by the name of Ser Roderick, was chosen to fight for her instead."

Here, Brienne pauses, a troubled look on her face. Natasha gives her what time she needs to gather her thoughts, translating another sentence of the report in front of her.

"Lord Stark was made to choose between love and duty. Honor and family. If he fought to the best of his ability and won, he would kill his own bannerman and cement his wife's guilt in the eyes of the gods and the king. If he purposefully lost, he would save his wife but would lose his honor and his life."

Natasha watches Brienne for a long moment. "Lord Stark is a man of honor above all else," she observes.

"Yes, milady," Brienne says, "he is."

"Ser Roderick is dead."

"Yes, milady. He is."

Natasha leans back in her chair and puts her quill down. "What is to be Catelyn's punishment?"

Brienne licks her lips and swallows, her hand on her sword. "Lord Lannister advocated for leniency, considering your relation and the fact that Ser Kevan was returned unharmed. He said he would be satisfied with a fine and Lord Stark's word to keep a tighter rein on his wife. But the king… it seems the king was reminded of Lyanna Stark's kidnapping. He wished to make an example. And while Catelyn Stark is your sister, she was also Queen Lysa's…"

Natasha sighs. "Does she live?"

"The king gave her the choice between execution and joining the Silent Sisters. She chose to become one of the sisters."

Natasha taps her fingers on her desk, rapidly altering, discarding, and forming new plans. "How are my nieces?"

Brienne frowns. "My squire is working out her anger in the training yard. But Lady Sansa… the younger Lady Sansa, she is…"

Natasha understands now why Brienne came to get her. Though sworn into Gerion's service, Brienne splits most of her time between training Arya and guarding Sansa, who still prefers the womanly arts to the daggers she is learning to defend herself with. Brienne is a good role model for both girls, but likely uncomfortable and unsure how to deal with a distraught Sansa when Gerion isn't there to sweep her off her feet.
"Say no more, Brienne. I will see to her."

Natasha finds Sansa weeping into a half sewn tunic, her tears dotting the fabric.

"Oh, little dove," Lady Lannister says and gathers the younger redhead into her arms.

"Auntie," Sansa sniffs, burying her face in Natasha's neck, the tunic falling to the carpet, needle and thread dangling from it.

Natasha lets her cry, stroking one hand over the girl's hair and humming soothing nonsense, straining her ears to make out the words between Sansa's muffled sobs. "It's all so horrible... I hate her. I hate the king. Arya says she's going to kill the king. Going to kill whoever tricked Mother. She has a list, of all the people she's going to kill. But I just... I just... How could Father? But what else could he do? It isn't fair. It isn't fair it isn't fair it isn't fair it'snotnotnot...."

"There, there," Natasha says, idly noting that the half finished tunic on the floor is in Tyrion's size. Perhaps Sansa intends it as a welcome home gift. With the conclusion of the trial, Tyrion, Jaime, and the boys should be on their way back to the Rock.

"She went mad, didn't she?" Sansa asks once she's a bit more coherent. "Like Aunt Lysa?"

"Yes, little dove. I think so," Natasha answers, not sure if she's lying. "But we can remember her as she was. Your mother, my sister. The good times we had with her. Take comfort in the fact that she still lives even if you'll never see her again and we've avoided a civil war."

"I still hate the king," Sansa confides. "As much as Arya does. I never knew I could hate someone so much. Does it make me a traitor?"

"No," Natasha promises even as she thinks, Regimes fall every day.

Tyrion, Jaime, Clynt, and Jon return and Natasha settles back into the rhythm of life in the Rock, spinning her web, training her children, and simply being in a way she never has before. Sometimes she calls herself Sansa Lannister even in her own thoughts.

Ned Stark, disgusted with the choice forced on him by the king, resigns his position and returns to Winterfell, where he holds a funeral for his wife and puts an empty coffin in the Stark crypts. Whenever anyone asks about Catelyn's fate, he will say only, "She was guilty. I did my duty." Natasha sends more agents to the North and the Riverlands, watching for a rebellion.

Horas Redwyne becomes the new Hand of the King, but all know that he is really a mouthpiece for his grandmother Olenna Tyrell, the Queen of Thornes.

Joffrey Arryn comes of age and returns to The Eyrie a much better man than when he left. He relieves his mother of being Lady Regent and is swiftly confirmed as Lord of the Vale.

Whispers come from across the Narrow Sea. Whispers of a Targaryen and dragons.

Natasha doesn't like the thought of a Targaryen with dragons. Or at least only the Targaryen having dragons. It's the equivalent to one person with three atom bombs. Black Widow wants the dragons...
either dead or under her control.

She consults with Tyrion because dragons are a hobby of his and he has more answers than she has questions. He tells her that only a Targaryen can control a dragon without some magical device called a dragon horn. Natasha works on a plan to steal a dragon for Jon Snow while they're small enough to be stolen, though she is hindered by how few agents she has in the Free Cities. She'll see if Jon can control the creature, and then they'll know if he's Rhaegar's son one way or the other. As a contingency she puts out a call for her agents to gather any and all information regarding the location of dragon horns and dragon eggs, no matter how old or unlikely.

For a worst case scenario, she has the historical defenses against dragon attack built and installed around the Rock, improving on them where she can. It's more for her peace of mind than anything else, as the historical defenses against dragon attack were also historically not very successful. But she won't be too worried so long as they have Jon Snow. (And they will have him. Tasha is doing a lovely job of making him fall in love with her, and she might even love him back.) Whether he's a true Targaryen or not, there's nothing to stop Natasha from saying he's one and that she knew and gave him safe harbor. The Martells in particular would love to get their hands on any Targaryen. They still want vengeance for Rhaegar disgracing Elia, and Aerys burning Elia, Rhaenys, and Aegon alive along with the rest of King's Landing.

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The agents Black Widow sends to steal a dragon don't come back. She loses three extraction teams before one of her people intercepts a letter from Jorah Mormont to King Robert's mediocre spymaster. From that letter she learns that the Dothraki who still consider Daenerys Targaryen their khaleesi despite the death of Khal Drogo are swift to defend the dragons, and adept at torture. The missing agents used the poison capsules they all carry to silence themselves before they could compromise the web.

Natasha will see to it that their families are looked after. It's the least she can do for them, especially as their efforts have ensured the Mother of Dragons doesn't know exactly who is after her scaly children. The Targaryen naturally blames King Robert.

Reluctantly, Natasha gives up on this course of action. Nine deaths, and she still has no dragon for Jon. She's not one to spend her people's lives needlessly. After consulting with Tyrion, she mounts an expedition to Old Valyria instead. If there are any other dragon eggs to be found, it is likely to be there.

Knowing the danger of the crew contracting greyscale, Natasha hires sailors from the defunct Iron Islands, and has Gregor Clegane lead them. She's never had more than hearsay to prove his crimes, which is not sufficient to put the Mountain down herself, but she won't shed any tears if he never returns.

So of course he does. But as he brings two dragon eggs back with him, Natasha has no complaints. And she even gets to punish him for lying to her, when he only tells her about one dragon egg and tries to keep the second one for himself.

She has him castrated.

- I -

Natasha presents the dragon eggs to Jon Snow. He's known her long enough now that he knows she has a reason for doing so. Furthermore, he trusts her.
"I don't understand," Jon says, even as he strokes the hardened shells, enthralled. Drawn to the creatures inside. As hard and dense as stone, one egg is dark blue and the other deep red. Fire and ice.

"What do you know about your mother?" Natasha asks.

That tears Jon's attention away from the eggs. "My mother?"

She gives him a moment, watching comprehension bloom in his eyes. In the three years he's been with them, Tyrion has trained the boy to think. "My mother was a Targaryen."

"Not exactly," Tasha says as she prowls into the room. At almost sixteen she is lithe and graceful, a promise of the woman she will become. The servants have taken to calling her the Quiet Lioness.

"Milady?" Jon asks, watching Tasha's hips sway.

"I told you to let me handle this," Natasha scolds her daughter.

Tasha rolls her eyes, moving to sit by Jon and examine his eggs. She is so close to him that her red skirts fall over Jon's shins. "He is mine. I should be here."

A blushing Jon says, "Hard, but I know speak. Talk Westron."

Natasha surrenders the floor to her daughter, pride and sorrow warring within her as she is forced to admit that her little lioness is growing up.

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The dragon eggs won't hatch, no matter what they try. No matter how long they are left in an open flame, how hot they grow, how they glow like a sword in the forge, how Jon insists he can feel the dragons inside stirring, the shells will not crack. But though they fail to wake the dragons, there is a silver lining: Jon proves himself a true Targaryen, as he's never burned when he handles the hot eggs, even on the occasions when he tricks himself into thinking they're hatching and catches his sleeves on fire trying to get to them.

"I know they're in there," he tells them, soot on his elbows after another attempt. "I can feel them the same way I feel Ghost." The white direwolf looks up from where it is sleeping before the fire.

"You'll get it," Tasha promises Jon, standing on tiptoes to bestow a sweet kiss on his scruffy cheek. "Even if Father pulls all of his hair out hunting our library for the answer."

"What?" Tyrion says, looking up from the thick tome he's buried his nose in. He's got a crazy look in his eyes brought on by lack of sleep, as obsessed as he is with dragons and the hatching thereof (an obsession he's had all his life). Natasha cannot keep a soft, fond affection for him from welling up within her, and doesn't bother to try.

"Nothing, my love," she tells him, using her fingers to comb his hair back into some semblance of order. Tyrion blinks at the endearment, but then grins brightly at her and turns back to his book.

At the other end of the family wing there is a shriek, followed by Sansa screaming, "Clynt!"

Clynt runs by the door, calling back over his shoulder, "Sorry, thought you were Gerion!"

Sansa storms after him, hands on hips, her soaking wet hair plastered to her head. "You know very well that my betrothed is out on a hunt!"
"The Laughing Lion strikes again!" Arya cackles.

Jon looks at her in askance. Arya shrugs. "He was pouting about Gerion and Tasha having nicknames when he doesn't. So I gave him one."

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_There's wildings gathering outside the Wall, Ros writes. The North isn't a good place to be. I'll be leaving with the next caravan, no matter where it's going. I'll make contact again once I'm settled._

The next report arrives only a week later, and it reads, _I was too late. The Wall has fallen. Lord Stark's called the banners. Winter is Coming._

Once he's seen the missives Tyrion raises a host to send to the North, offering ten gold dragons to each man who volunteers, and conscripting any who are arrested by the guard. They are all to join the Night's Watch upon their arrival at the Wall.

Jon wants to go with them, worried for the family that he thought was his for so long.

"They were awful to you! And now you want to throw your life away for them!" Tasha screams at him. Natasha can't tell if she's making a play, or truly upset. Tasha is too good. _"They treated you like an unwanted curr!"_

"Better dog than Targaryen," Jon answers in his broken English.

Tasha bursts into heart wrenching sobs. _"Don't leave me,"_ she entreats Jon, reaching for him. He kisses her with a passion that Natasha didn't think him capable of. She grabs hold of Tyrion's shoulder and Jaime's leg to keep them from interfering. A glance across the room confirms that Sansa has Gerion under control. Natasha nods to the young woman.

Arya doesn't bother to hold Clynt back, but it's not necessary. He knows Tasha will hurt him if he even thinks something wrong.

"If you must go," Tasha says when the the two break apart, her voice small and breathless, _"then let it be as my husband. Make me your wife so that I know you'll come back._"

Jon looks over to the settee where Natasha sits between Tyrion and Jaime. Natasha glances at her two men to gage their thoughts.

Tasha seems very young to her, but she's not much younger than 'Sansa Tully' was when she married Tyrion... And Lady Lannister wants her daughter to be happy, while this was Black Widow’s plan all along, a way to solidify ties to the Targaryens and spare her family being on the wrong side of flaming dragons. Tyrion and Jaime are both leaving it up to her, though it probably doesn't seem that much out of the ordinary to them.

Natasha will allow this.

The wedding is held that very night in accordance with the bride's wishes, a small family affair. Tasha appears to have been planning ahead, as she produces a wedding cloak that is sewn with winged white direwolves that breathe fire, the flames made up of a multitude of red stones and the wings studded with diamonds. Natasha can recognize young Sansa's fine needlework in the embroidery, as well as Arya's more uneven stitching at the hem.

Just before the ceremony is conducted, Jaime knights Jon and Tyrion grants him the last name 'Pendragon' along with a small parcel of land. None but Natasha know the significance of the name,
thinking it only a hint at Jon's true heritage. But as if the future is unfurling before her, Natasha knows that her daughter will give birth to queens and needs a royal name to match. That feeling only grows stronger when Jon looks at his bride and chooses the words of House Pendragon.

We Always Return

The new Ser and Lady Pendragon go to the wing of the Rock that is to be their household from now on, and Natasha stares after them. Black Widow hopes that a child will be conceived before Jon leaves for the North, so that they will still have a dragon in the family if he dies. Sansa Lannister wants to be a grandmother.

Natasha just feels old.

-1-

Jon leaves for the North, though he is less eager than he was before the wedding. He has something to lose now.

"Here," he says to Tasha, giving her the red dragon egg. "You keep this one with you, just in case there's a dragon in your belly." Being a married man hasn't cured him of his blushes. "I'll take the blue one with me. Maybe it will hatch if I need it enough."

Arya is angry that Jon is going North without her, but she is Brienne's squire and Brienne is sworn to Gerion. Jon placates her with the gift of a new sword. She makes him promise to kill some wildlings for her, and gives him letters to be delivered to the rest of the Starks.

Sansa weeps and hugs him. "I'm sorry," she says. "For how I treated you before. I make no excuses for it. But know that I am proud to call you good-brother, and look forward to raising my children alongside yours." Gerion offers his betrothed a handkerchief, smirking at Jon all the while.

The men (and how strange it is to think of Gerion and Clynt as men) merely clap Jon on the shoulder, offering battle wisdom and mild threats for what will happen if Jon fails to return, and thus breaks Tasha's heart.

For Natasha's part, she sends an agent to Daenerys Targaryen, who now rules the city of Meereen. But not to steal a dragon. Not this time. No, this time Natasha chooses a small, unassuming woman to deliver a message. A message the agent herself doesn't understand, for it is in Valyrian, a language the agent doesn't speak. Natasha drills her until she can repeat the sounds without flaw.

"Iā tresy hen Rhāegār iksis paghare. Ziry lairs lēda kēlia se vīlibagon lēda zokli. Uundegon zirŷla rŷ se dōros."

A son of Rhaegar lives. He lairs with lions and fights alongside wolves. Find him at the Wall.
They call it the Long Night. Natasha calls it a fucking zombie apocalypse. The zombies are led by creatures the Westerosi refer to as "The Others" or "White Walkers" which is good enough for a race of ice demons, she supposes. She wonders if they're from outer space or one of the Nine Realms or just a different continent, but in the end it doesn't really matter. Casterly Rock is still surrounded. Lannisterport is still dark and dead and buried under years of snow. The creatures and their minions want to kill every warm blooded thing that walks, swims, or flies. It is the end of an age. The end of a world.

But she is the Black Widow, and her world has burned before.

She gets up and calls her family to their hidden sitting room.

Gerion, Tasha, Arya, and Clynt line up in a little row on the sofa. Sansa and Jaime were in Lannisterport distributing food when the first attack came, and they haven't heard from Jon in months, not since the first hints of just why the wildlings were so desperate to pass the Wall. All are probably dead. (Except Natasha can't believe that. She won't. She refuses. Jaime is the most deadly blade in the West and he's trained Jon to that standard. Neither of them will give up without a fight, and Jaime has Brightroar. Valyrian steel is supposed to kill these creatures.)

Tyrion takes a seat by the fire. Natasha stands before him.


"Black Widow," Tyrion acknowledges her.

She finds it within her to smile, and it's not her best work. It's not work at all. "How long have you known?"

"I figured it out around the same time I realized that you aren't really a Tully."

"I suspected as much. The things you've taught us, the secret language, the skills and fighting
styles... You're a different race too, aren't you? Like the Children of the Forest, or the fabled Green Men. You've barely aged a day since I first laid eyes on you, though you hide it well."

Natasha kneels before Tyrion's seated form, taking his hands and kissing them, something inside her uncoiling when he lets her. When he doesn't shy away. "I'm faster and stronger too, and heal more quickly. The children inherited it from me."

"You mean to go out and fight the Others. You're going to look for Uncle Jaime, Sansa, and Jon. That's why you've called us in here." And that's Gerion, her clever, quick Gerion, whom she loves so much she could die.

"Yes."

Her children share a speaking look. It's Tasha who says, "We're coming with you."

"No," Natasha and Tyrion answer in tandem.

"Sansa is out there." Gerion has that stubborn cast to his face that tells Natasha nothing will turn him from this course. "Honor demands I go to her. She is mine to protect."

"And Jon is just mine," Tasha adds, and when their eyes meet Natasha remembers how she felt when she was told Barton is compromised.

"I'll stay here with Father and Arya," Clynt says, deferring to his older siblings. "There must always be a Lion On the Rock." It goes unspoken that he is the only one whose betrothed is still in the castle, and it will be left to them to carry on the Lannister name in the likely event that the rest of them are torn apart by zombies.

If Natasha doesn't agree to this mad plan, her children will simply do what they want anyway. They have the skill to get around any measures she could put into place to keep them here. She's seen to that.

She huffs. "Fine."

That's all there is to say.

"House Romanova," Tyrion asks later, when Natasha is pulling on her armor and checking her weapons. "What are its words?"

Natasha pauses in adjusting the fit of the black furred hood that will cover her hair. (She thinks of the old Russian dynasty of the same name. The Red Room. Yasha and his teachings. Clint and his bow. Coulson, Fury, Hill, all the blood she's spilled and the Battle of Manhattan, the flash of blue that was the end and the beginning of everything. She thinks of the legacy she left behind in her first world and her chance here, now, to finally balance the scales, wipe out the vermillion tide she's splashed on the pages of her life. She looks at her children, the Quiet Lioness, the Laughing Lion, and the Roaring Knight.)

Natasha pulls her hood up and says, "We Are the Avengers."

Tyrion smiles up at her, his eyes wet, and what Natasha sees in his face takes her breath away.

"Ask me to stay," she blurts, one of the rare occasions when her tongue moves faster than her mind. "I chose you once. Let me do it again."

Tyrion blinks and Natasha acts as if she doesn't see the tears that fall down his cheeks. "I'd never
forgive you for staying any more than you would forgive me for asking," he tells her. "The children will go with or without you, and Jaime is my big brother… There have been times that I hated him," he chuckles, and it sounds like breaking glass, "but in spite of everything, I always find that I love him more."

Her throat is tight, so she says nothing. Merely takes her husband by the hand and leads him from their hidden armory.

"Come back to me, Natasha." Tyrion demands once they reach the gate, her real name on his lips hitting her like a punch to the gut. She can't help but think how funny it is that Sansa Lannister is Jaime's love and Natasha is Tyrion's, when she always meant for it to be the other way around.

She does not smile like the Lady of the Rock. Instead she leans down to press a lingering kiss to Tyrion's lips (and if it tastes too much like salt, like goodbye, like an end, they are the only ones who know). Then, Gerion and Tasha at her side, she goes to kill the Night King.

"We may not save the world," Tony Stark said years ago in a different universe. "But we'll sure as hell avenge it."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has supported this story! I was taken aback by the response
to it, both positive and negative, and take pride in the fact that whether you loved it or hated it, it definitely made a lot of you feel something. Thanks to your enthusiasm, this final draft is nearly twice as long as the original was.

And before you ask - yes I am working on a sequel that will go into more detail on the war with the White Walkers. I have a plot outline and two and a bit chapters written. I want to get the first draft done before I start posting though, so we'll see how that goes.

**OC Casting:**

(Used in the graphic above)

Adult Clynt Lannister ........................................ Craig Horner (not pictured)

Adult Gerion Lannister ...................................... Alex Pettyfer

Adult Tasha Pendragon nee Lannister .................... Holland Roden

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