

Dungeons & Discourse

a *Game of Thrones* fanfic

by Rodo

If one thought about it, it was no wonder that the dungeons of the Red Keep had survived the fire of a dragon. Well, parts of them had. The Black Cells were no more, and Jon Snow, who had nothing but time to ponder the state of the Keep, didn't have to do so in total darkness. His cell – one formerly reserved for highborn hostages – had windows, but there was little to see outside, so he was merely grateful about the ebb and flow of light that meant he didn't lose all sense of time as he awaited his fate. He was under no illusions – he knew it would be death. He had known before he... he still avoided to think of it. He'd been sure it would be Drogon, had been glad, even, but for some reason, the dragon had turned away. Jon sighed. Now it would be Grey Worm, he reckoned, or one of the other Unsullied. If only there wasn't this blasted wait. He had been staring at the pool of light on the floor for weeks, if not months already...

The opening of the heavy cell door startled him. He quickly glanced at the light on the floor – it wasn't time for dinner yet. Something was up. He expected an executioner to fetch him, or maybe even someone who had come to break him out in a foolish attempt at heroism that would only result in more bloodshed. But it was only Sam who shuffled in, looking as embarrassed and out of place as he so often did when he wasn't comfortable. Jon relaxed as the guard drew the door closed behind Jon's guest.

“Jon,” Sam said with a shaky smile on his face.

Jon wished he could return the gesture, but his own face felt frozen. “Sam.”

“How are you?” Sam asked, looking him all over with nervous eyes. Jon reckoned he looked terrible, after ages in his cell without the opportunity or the motivation to wash, beard unkempt and longer than he usually kept it.

“Do you have to ask?”

Sam tilted his head and sighed.

“Why have you come?”

Sam cast his eyes about until he found an old chair. Jon rarely bothered with it, preferring to sit on the bed. He'd almost forgotten it was there. He watched as Sam sat down and looked out the window for a moment.

"There'll be a trial soon," he admitted.

"I figured as much."

"Your sisters aren't going to let you die." Sam said it with so much conviction in his voice that Jon was taken aback. He hoped they didn't do anything stupid. He wasn't worth it. His life wasn't. He wanted them to live. That was half the reason why...

"You did the right thing," Sam continued.

"Sam..."

"I know you did. Even the Unsullied would if they stopped to think for a second. They're so lost without a purpose now; they're taking it out on you, and they loved her, despite everything."

"As did I," Jon murmured. The words felt as heavy as his shoulders and he couldn't lift his gaze above the tiled floor.

"You did," Sam answered with a soft voice. "But she was who she was, and there was no other way. Nothing could have stopped her. Not words, not even armies. That's what it means to have a dragon – nobody can stop you, for better and for worse. Just look at history."

Jon knew all the stories – he'd been taught by a maester too, got a young lord's education. Nothing could be as great or as terrible as a Targaryen on a dragon. Dany had been both. And maybe, just maybe, love could have stopped her eventually, even if all the armies in the world couldn't. Whatever else, Jon had killed his queen, the woman he loved.

"I'm guilty," he insisted. When Sam scoffed, he added, "whether it was right or not, I killed the queen I was sworn to. The Kingslayer shouldn't have been allowed to get away with it, and neither should I be, if there is any justice in the world."

For a good while, neither of them said anything. They merely stewed in their own silences and thoughts. Jon hadn't wanted to even think about it, and for good reason. Her eyes haunted him in his sleep, and now even in his waking hours. She hadn't said anything in the end, but her eyes had spoken clearer than words. And Jon had been the one to do that to her.

"There is nothing wrong with forgiveness," Sam finally said. "That's the only way grudges end. I'm sick of grudges. I don't want my child to live in a world like this."

Jon wondered if Gilly was due soon. Not yet, he guessed, but the babe had likely kicked already. He'd never know what that felt like – to feel your child move in its mother's womb. He'd given up on it when he joined the Night's Watch. He'd never wanted it,

because he had nothing to give to a child of his own. Sam, on the other hand, had all the love in the world to share. Jon looked up and saw a faraway stare in his eyes.

“Dany called it the wheel,” he told Sam. “She wanted to end it too.”

“And she’d have killed half the world in the process.”

“Do you have a better idea?” Jon shot back, with maybe a little more bitterness than was necessary. He didn’t. The constant struggle for power between the great houses had to end, but the only way it ever would was if they were all dead. And even then, there would only be new great houses. It was the nature of man, Jon thought. He was so tired of it all. In his weakest moments, he remembered his time among the free folk and yearned for the biting cold, the snow and the loneliness of the far north. He’d been happy there, he thought. As happy as he could be.

“I have.” Sam’s voice was quiet and timid, as it had been when they’d only just met. When he had been unsure of his worth. Jon had forgotten that side of him, so much had he grown in the intervening years.

When Sam looked straight at him, Jon raised his eyebrows in question.

“We need leaders,” Sam explained. “All civilized nations do. But kings... I think it would be better if we had an election. Not like the ones in Braavos or the Great Council, though. I think everyone deserves a vote, not just the lords and ladies or the richest merchants. Because in the end, the smallfolk end up suffering the most. Their voices should be heard. And there should be a way to remove a ruler if they’re no longer fit. No more princes, no more lords. Just people who get a say in who rules them. Don’t you think that would destroy the wheel?”

He looked at Jon with a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Jon didn’t quite know what to say. Of course it sounded good, but it was never going to happen. The lords and ladies and rich merchants would never let it. They would never consent to having as much power as a farmer, septa or beggar.

“I don’t think the world is ready for something like that,” he answered in the end.

Sam sighed. “But we should try, don’t you think?”

Jon stayed silent for a couple of breaths. “Trying is all we can do. Even if we’re destined to fail.”

When he heard that, Sam beamed at him. He would try, Jon was certain, just as he was certain that Sam would fail. But he wouldn’t fail as a father. He wanted to make the world a better place for his child, and that was all any boy or girl could hope for, these days.

“Don’t worry,” he told Jon when it was time to leave and the guard knocked at the door impatiently. “You’re not alone. We’ll get you out of this.”

Jon smiled wanly when Sam left, then wondered yet again if he even wanted to live. Maybe he should die, and his cursed bloodline with him. It would be for the best. For him and the world.

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