

Last Words

a *Game of Thrones* ficlet collection

by **Rodo**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Drogon – Valyriā	3
II.	Daario - Meanwhile in Meereen	5
III.	Sansa I - Justice	7
IV.	Yara - The Driftwood Crown	9
V.	Brienne I - Those Left Behind	10
VI.	Bran I - In Faraway Places	12
VII.	Arya I - Thirst	15
VIII.	Grey Worm - The Island of Butterflies	16
IX.	Samwell I - The Citadel	18
X.	Jon I - A Life in the True North	20
XI.	Tyrion I - Sewers	21
XII.	Ghost - Children	23
XIII.	Samwell II - Family	24
XIV.	Arya II - A Visit to White Harbor	26
XV.	Gendry I - Visiting the City	28
XVI.	Jon II - King-Against-His-Will	30
XVII.	Bronn - The Troubles of Lordship	32
XVIII.	Sansa II - The Crypts	34
XIX.	Brienne II - Duty and Honor	36
XX.	Gendry II - The Lady of Storm's End	38
XXI.	Bran II - Audience	39
XXII.	Tyrion II - An Unlikely Friendship of Hand	41
XXIII.	Sansa III - A Meeting	43
XIV.	Arya III - West of Westeros	45

I. Drogon – Valyriā

THERE WAS PEACE. Drogon had yearned for the simplicity of it for years – no humans and their cramped little stone huts, just him and the sky. Below him, the vast ocean stretched out until almost the horizon, where the cliffs and rolling hills of Essos rose from the waters. The only things moving this far out were the clouds and his own shadow on the dark blue seas. And yet, his heart felt heavy.

In his claws rested the body of his mother. Drogon had loved to take her flying, would have taken her anywhere – to the far south, which few dragons had seen, or even the Shadow Mountains. Up here, they were free of the constraints placed upon the earth. And yet his mother hadn't wanted that. Her weak human blood had chained her to the earth and led her to her doom. Drogon had followed her, of course, waiting patiently for a day when she would be free. The day had come, yet not in the way he had hoped. His clutchmates were dead, both dying in the waters of Westeros, and so was she, victim that she was to the weakness of men.

The sun set, and Drogon kept flying. In the darkness, he watched the stars in the sky and the moonlight, glittering in the waves. Peace made manifest. He didn't need their help to find his way. He had been there before, in the place he wished to call home. The place where he would have stayed had it not been for the love he bore this woman with her blood almost as fiery as a dragon's.

The sun rose when he arrived, bathing the fourteen craggy peaks in warm light that was distorted by the smoke and hot air that lazily drifted upwards from the ruins of a once-great city. Now only rubble remained of the burned-out husks of palaces and luxurious residences. His kind had once built them, Drogon knew. He could smell the fire of those that came before him still clinging to the stones. A home made by dragons.

And a home for dragons again. Drogon landed on one of the biggest towers, its walls mostly caved in and warped by hot lava and ashes. On a large boulder with a flat surface, he finally put down his burden. His mother seemed to be at

rest, at least.

Ēdrūs, muñūs, he thought. She had earned it.

And so had he. Later, there would be porpoises to hunt, and maybe the odd kraken. The seas were rich around the island, a contrast to the barren lands. It suited Drogon just fine that way. He could always venture out further if he longed for goat. He had everything he needed, and the sulfurous air tasted like home to a creature that was fire made flesh.

II. Daario – Meanwhile in Meereen

THERE WAS A KNOCK on the door of his solar, and Daario Naharis welcomed the distraction with a relieved sigh. Any reason to put down pen and paper was a good reason in his book. He was a warrior, not a scribe.

“Yes?” he asked. The door opened to reveal one of the many servants that worked in the great pyramid – all former slaves.

“News from the west, Lord Naharis.”

These words alone made his heart beat faster, as did the fading memories of his queen. Had she finally succeeded? Would he see her again? Or had she found another man to warm her bed?

“Yes, what is it?”

Instead of an answer or another blasted scroll, the servant opened the door wider to reveal a grubby sailor whose hands nervously gripped his cap. Neither servant nor sailor said a word, and so Daario leaned back in his chair and looked at them expectantly. Finally, the sailor broke.

“I work on the *Harpy’s Tail*, Lord, and the captain sent me to tell you the news we heard in Volantis.” He kept fingering his cap. Not good news, then. That much was obvious.

“The queen is dead,” he finally blurted out. Daario closed his eyes for a moment. Fiery, tempestuous Daenerys. No longer would she inspire madness and loyalty in those around her. He’d never meet another woman would come close to her. He should have been at her side.

“How?”

“Murdered by one of the westerners,” the sailor spat, before literally spitting on the floor in distaste. “Filthy barbarians!”

“Her dragons?”

The sailor shrugged. Further interrogation didn’t provide Daario with much clearer information. Half of the rumors heard in Volantis had been nonsense about a battle against an unspeakable evil in the north and the queen massacring

the people she wished to rule. Still, one fact was clear as day. When the servant had shown the sailor out and rewarded him for his service, Daario called him back.

“Fetch me the commanders and the council!” he ordered. “This will be all over Slaver’s Bay in days, if it isn’t already. We have a war to prepare for!”

And as much as he wanted to mourn his love, Daario was looking forward to it.

III. Sansa I – Justice

SANSA STARK SAT up straighter in her throne when the two guards led the man in. She stuck out her chin in a way that she knew drew attention to her crown, then took a good look at the man opposite her. Lord Glover had aged. There was more gray in his hair than she remembered. He wore simpler clothes as well, less fine furs, and wore no sword. Sansa had been clear in her instructions to the guards to confiscate it.

“Lord Glover,” she said in lieu of a greeting, beckoning him to come closer. He obeyed, and from the corners of her eyes Sansa saw the guards tense.

“Your Grace,” Glover replied, and knelt before her throne. Now that he was closer, Sansa realized that he didn’t so much look older, as diminished. His pride was gone. He could have put up a fight when she summoned him to Winterfell, he could have run, but instead, he had come. He knew he had lost, so he had given up.

“I trust you know why you are here,” Sansa told him, letting her fingers drum on the weirwood of her throne.

Lord Glover nodded.

“When my brother took the throne, you swore fealty to him, to House Stark, to us. Yet in our hour of need, you abandoned us. How can I trust you to keep your oaths ever again?”

To his credit, Glover didn’t reply. He simply lowered his head and stared at the floor. For a moment, Sansa looked at the faces of her court: men and women who watched her every step like hawks.

“In the end,” she continued, “I don’t think I can.”

Glover sighed in defeat.

“I should take your head, but I have decided to show mercy, since you came when I called for you – this time. You are hereby sentenced to a life in exile, and stripped of your titles. You will be escorted to White Harbor, where a ship will take you to Braavos. If you ever set foot in the North again, you will die.”

At this, Glover's head shot up and he looked straight into her eyes. Sansa hoped he didn't see any trace of weakness in her, or else she might live to regret her mercy.

IV. Yara – The Driftwood Crown

YARA GREYJOY SAT at the foot of the Seastone Chair and cursed. In her lap lay various bits of driftwood and a spool of silver wire. All that fuss just to satisfy the priests and their love of tradition. She'd been ruling the Iron Islands for months now, and none had dared to challenge her claim. That was enough for the people, but not for the priests and their fucking tradition.

And so she sat in her empty home and tried to weave a crown out of wire and wood as the iron kings of old had done since time immemorial, even though she hadn't done so much as knitted a scarf since her mother gave up trying to force her.

At least it didn't need to be pretty to be a driftwood crown. Yara still remembered her father's crowns – ugly and badly made, both of them. A metaphor for his rule, she supposed. She'd never seen Euron's, if he'd ever made one, but she doubted he'd managed to come up with something better. He'd been as shitty a king as his brother, too. She wanted to be different, and yet she still twisted the same plain wire around ugly bits of wood.

“Fuck this,” she muttered, discarding the mess.

“Lannis!” she called to her servant. “Get me some golden wire too, will you?”

The girl peeked into the throne room and nodded curiously, then left. And for the first time that day, Yara felt better about her task. It wouldn't be the crown that the priest expected, but it would be a crown for a new age, and if they didn't like it, Yara knew how to silence their protests.

V. Brienne I – Those Left Behind

IT WAS A sad turn-out for a funeral, Brienne thought, but she wasn't surprised. It had been a strange couple of days – weeks, really – traveling along the Gold Road with two coffins and a morose dwarf. And then there was Casterly Rock, a castle emptied by years of war and a successful siege. The red stone corridors were haunted by ghosts. Brienne had spent the last two days visiting different parts of the palace, only to see Jaime everywhere – joking with his brother in the main hall as a younger man, playing with his sister in the garden as a young boy, training with his master-at-arms in the training yard. She was tired of it and just wanted it to be over. By tomorrow, it would be.

“Sad, isn't it?” Tyrion Lannister moved to her side once the septon had made his excuses and the graves were sealed. “A queen of the Seven Kingdoms and a Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, and the only people who mourn their passing are a dwarf and a swordswoman.”

Brienne sighed. “I don't mourn her,” she pointed out. And she didn't. That he'd chosen Cersei over her still hurt, even if she understood, in a way. Would Jaime have been the man she had fallen in love with if he had abandoned his sister and queen in her hour of need?

“Well, I do. I hated her, but she was my sister. I could never fully resign myself to her hatred, and now I have to bury all the impossible, foolish hopes I had with her. A feeling you're quite familiar with, I presume.”

Except it had been more than hope. For a few glorious days, it had been her life. “Jaime made his choice,” she said levelly. “And I respect that.”

“Doesn't make me miss the idiot any less.”

“No, I suppose not. But we still have our duties.”

“Not all of us love our duties as much as you, Ser Brienne.”

“You don't need to love them. They just need to fill our days while time does its work.”

Lord Tyrion didn't answer, and Brienne tore her eyes from the twin

sarcophagi – as entwined in death as they had been in life. She found him peering up at her curiously.

“You have lost much over the years,” he said.

Brienne nodded, remembering her mother and brother. She remembered Renly and Lady Catelyn. “It hurts, and it never really stops. But those left behind will keep on living, and it gets easier.”

Tyrion snorted. “It’s never been like that for me.”

Because he didn’t let go of grudges, Brienne supposed, and because he wore his pain like a badge of honor. A Lannister always paid his debts, and in order to do so, he needed to keep a tally.

“Maybe you can change that, now that they’re all dead.”

Tyrion frowned and stared at the coffins while Brienne looked down on him. He’d lost more than she had, she remembered. Brienne still had her father, Queen Sansa and Pod. Tyrion only had his sellsword friend. For a moment, she pitied him.

Finally, the tension drained from his body and he awkwardly patted her arm. “You know, I bet there’s still some good wine left in the cellars. Let us drink to lost friends today, and tomorrow, the Hand of the King and the Lady Commander will ride out to start a new life.”

VI. Bran I – In Faraway Places

THE PYRAMIDS WERE bathed in the golden light of the late afternoon sun as the crow flew over them. At other times, Bran had seen the streets busy with life. Sometimes, it was brown-skinned men and women wearing heavy collars, running errands for their masters. Sometimes, it was the Unsullied who patrolled the streets looking for shadows wearing masks. Once, he saw a great parade in honor of the harpy goddess of Old Ghis, when the city was young yet. But none of that mattered now. There were still men in the streets, and they hurried back and forth. They didn't wear collars, nor did they wear the uniform armor favored by organized armies everywhere. Some carried arakhs, others spears, and they all ran towards the Grand Market. The crow followed, curiously.

In the market, on a raised dais made of wood, stood a couple of men as disparate as the group assembled around them. Bran listened as they spoke of war, but soon lost interest. Wars this far east were of no consequence to the three-eyed raven until they were over, until they could affect the fate of Westeros.

The dark, cavernous room further west was a different matter. The four men and women did not concern themselves with war, either, but they were far more dangerous to the world than any war. And they might see him, so the mouse that was Bran stayed as far back in the shadows as it could, hoping their gazes would glide over him.

They were arranged around a brazier whose light did little more than underline the darkness of the black stone the walls were made of. The men faced each other, as did the women, but the raven couldn't discern their identities, for they wore masks and red, shapeless robes without adornments.

"Is it certain?" one of the men asked.

The woman to his left nodded. "We have three independent reports. The dragon is in Valyria."

"And without a master," the other woman added.

“It is dangerous, what you propose,” the second man, the self-appointed voice of reason, pointed out. “Many may die in the attempt.”

“It is a sign from our Lord, is it not?” the first woman said. “A creature of fire, near our lands, and without a master. The Targaryen woman clearly was not favored by him, but we are.”

“And with a dragon, they will hear our words,” the second woman added.

“But how?” the voice of reason asked.

“Let me tell you about a horn,” the first man began, but the raven already knew that story, and so he moved away and crossed the Narrow Sea.

In Dorne, the prince stood in his solar, his back to the door as he gazed out the window towards the harbor near Sunspear. The many-colored sails unfurled in the wind as the ships left their berths with the tide. Then the door to the prince’s solar opened, and a girl who looked more like a boy, with skin as dark as a Summer Islander’s, was led inside, followed by a guard who loomed over her shoulder like a hawk. She peered at the prince with inscrutable eyes.

“It took us quite a while to find you, my lady,” the prince said to the girl. After a courteous bow, he turned back to view the ships.

“I am not a lady,” the girl said.

“But you are Prince Oberyn’s oldest surviving daughter, are you not?”

The girl remained silent for a moment. “And you think I want your position, is that it? Will you kill me for it?”

The prince hummed and pursed his lips. “If you do, the Citadel is a terrible place to gather support. Besides, we are kin, however distantly. After what your sisters did, I would prefer to avoid that sort of thing. It only breeds dissent.”

“Then why am I here?”

Finally, the prince turned around to look at the girl properly. “I have a proposition for you. You did not follow in your sisters’ folly. You are not Ellaria’s daughter. You are more your uncle’s kin than any of your sisters, as far as I can tell. I think an alliance would benefit us both, and a sense of continuity would benefit Dorne.”

“You are suggesting a marriage.”

The prince shrugged. “I might consider your younger sisters, should you decline.”

The girl cocked her head. “I will think about it.”

We will see, the raven thought. He would need to look into her, to figure out

whether this development was good or bad. Whether something would need to be done. But for now, he drifted further north, until he reached the Wall. At Castle Black, the new Lord Commander was talking with what little he had in the way of officers.

“And they’re staying quiet?” he asked, looking at his men.

The men exchanged glances and shrugged. “Asked to buy some things to help with rebuilding their homes, but that’s it.”

The Lord Commander looked to the ceiling and sighed. “I guess we’re merchants now,” he grumbled. “At least we’ll get the coin to—”

“Your Grace,” Bran heard Ser Podrick say. There was a mailed hand on his shoulder, gently shaking him out of his vision. “It’s time for supper.”

“Thank you,” Bran said trying to get used to the feeling of his own body again.

“Did you see anything important? Should I get the council?”

Bran shook his head and cast a glance at the kitchens. Pork pie. “Nothing that can’t wait until tomorrow.”

VII. Arya I – Thirst

THE SUN WAS scorching the deck of the *Sea Wolf*. From the shade of the quarterdeck, Arya took stock of the situation: no breeze; the sails hung limply from the masts; the men were hiding in the shade too, conserving energy and water; her tongue felt like sandpaper; they were low on food. Her first mate had told her last night that the only option was to turn back. She hated the thought of giving up. If it had been just her ...

“When the wind picks up, we turn back east,” she ordered.

The men sighed in relief.

VIII. Grey Worm – The Island of Butterflies

THEIR SHIPS ARRIVED around noon, with the sun high in the sky. Grey Worm watched the island through the spyglass. When they were close enough to see the trees and the beaches, he turned around and opened his mouth to speak, but there was nobody there to talk to. It frustrated him that he still did this without a thought, when her ashes were resting in his cabin, to be scattered on the island that she came from.

Once they'd made anchor, Grey Worm organized his men. A quarter would start work on their camp. Another group would scout the island. Another would stand guard, and the last would rest.

Grey Worm himself remained on the beach, coordinating their efforts and wallowing in his grief when he had the time. Naath was a queer island. There were no people and few birds that he could see. But there were butterflies. Thousands and thousands of butterflies. A beautiful place for a child to grow up in, he thought. No wonder she had been so kind.

*

The first slavers arrived two weeks after their arrival. They were beaten back quickly and had little chance. The Unsullied had fortified their camps, had established a guard in all the likely landing spots. On Grey Worm's table at their main camp, a map took shape. The far coast wasn't surveyed completely yet, and they had avoided the interior so far, but their plans were taking shape. Grey Worm felt satisfied with his work for the first time in years.

That evening, he took her ashes to a little clearing and emptied the urn onto a field of flowers.

*

It took another month until Grey Worm got his first glance at one of the Naathi. He and his men were on a trip further inland, looking fruit to supplement their diet of fish and provisions brought from Westeros. Two of the men he had with him had been born on the island knew their way around the trees better than the rest of them. They were arguing about whether the round, yellow fruit they held was ripe enough to eat yet, when Grey Worm cast his eyes about and spotted the little face hiding behind some huge, green leaves.

“Hello,” he said in Naatheen, one of the few words his men had taught him. “What is your name?”

The child didn’t answer. Its eyes were wide and focused on the spear in his hands. Of course they had brought their weapons; they were Unsullied. Even if the Naathi were no threat to anyone, their spears were like parts of their bodies. Carefully, Grey Worm laid it on the ground. Seeing him, his men had stopped arguing, and did the same.

“My name is Torgo Nudho,” he said, using the Bastard Valyrian version of his name, since he didn’t know the words in Naathi. “We do not wish to harm you.”

But that was the extent of the phrases he had memorized, and his men had to take over. Finally, they coaxed the child out of the bushes. She was about nine years of age and skinny, but beautiful in the way of her people, with large golden eyes and dusky skin.

“What is your name?” Grey Worm asked again.

“Missandei.”

IX. Samwell I – The Citadel

To KING BRANDON, First of his Name,

the Citadel does not approve of the decision to appoint an acolyte to the position of Grand Maester. We will send an emissary to inform you of our own choice in the matter.

That scroll had arrived by raven four weeks ago. Now, Samwell Tarly, temporary Grand Maester by the appointment of the king, nervously paced in the king's solar while they awaited the arrival of the emissary. King Bran had declined to hold any public meetings today, and now Sam knew why. He wanted to resolve this privately. Why he wanted Sam to be present for it was more of a mystery.

Ser Brienne led the emissary inside, and Sam wanted to hide behind a shelf. Unfortunately there weren't any shelves in the solar large enough to hide his bulk, and so he had no choice but to gulp, and greet the man.

"Maester Ebrose," he said. "Welcome to King's Landing."

Ebrose gave him a withering glare, then turned to Bran, sitting in his chair behind the desk. "Your Grace, the Conclave have appointed me to the position of Grand Maester."

Bran just stared at him serenely. "I'm aware."

"Are you? Have they sent another raven confirming my appointment?"

Sam tried to suppress a chuckle. Ser Brienne, who stood behind Ebrose's back, didn't bother to hide her smile.

"No."

"Then how—"

"The fact of the matter is this, Maester Ebrose. I do not accept their decision. Maester Samwell is more qualified for the position than you are. You are welcome to stay in the Keep, but you will not have a seat on my council."

"That is absurd!" Ebrose cried. "The Grand Maester is chosen by the Conclave. This man is a mere acolyte. He hasn't finished any of his links! He stole from the Citadel!"

The last accusation made Sam flinch, but Ebrose didn't notice. "I had a good reason for that," muttered Sam.

"You stole from the Citadel," Ebrose repeated, staring at Sam.

Sam straightened his spine and stared back. He had faced wights and White Walkers, he reminded himself. Ebrose was just an old man.

"He did so for a cause greater than your order, Maester," Bran said calmly. When Sam turned towards him, his eyes had a faraway look to them. "This kingdom needs men who can look past their own shadows and preconceived notions to do what is best. You are not that man, and neither is anyone else your order might send. You proved that. Sam may finish his studies, if he wishes, but even if he does not, the seat is his, not yours."

"But—"

"This is a new age. It is time for change, not just in this city, but also in your Citadel," Bran told him, and suddenly his eyes became sharp as they bored into Ebrose's. "I suggest you get started, before time catches up with you and leaves you behind."

X. Jon I – A Life in the True North

“COME DOWN HERE, King Crow! It’s time for lunch!” Tormund Giantsbane called up from the ground. “Mella made seal stew!”

Jon Snow sighed and wiped the sweat off his brow. Then he put the hammer back into his belt and stretched his fingers. Despite years of training with the sword, his hands were unused to handling a hammer and he regularly got blisters from working. At least he had some idea of how to shingle a roof. Most of the other surviving wildlings had never lived in a village like Hardhome, instead living in tents further north, or under roofs covered in a thick layer of grass, half-sunken into the ground. It was trial and error, rebuilding the lands beyond the Wall. The bright side was that they could all hunt. Even if Jon was getting sick of seal.

“I’m not a king anymore, Tormund!” Jon called back when he scrambled down the ladder.

“It’s a nickname,” Tormund countered, grinning, then clapped Jon on the shoulder with one of his paws. “It’s coming along?”

Jon shrugged. “We’ll see. I think I’m getting better at it.”

“Maybe after you do a few more, you’ll make one where the roof doesn’t leak.”

Jon snorted. “Whatever I’m doing is better than what we’re living with right now. The Night King’s army did quite a number on this place when they marched through.”

They shared a look, because they both still remembered. Of course they did. All the fighting and the fear and the dying. But they’d won, he reminded himself. And Johnna and Willa were sitting with an old fisherman from the Frozen Shore who was teaching them how to make and repair nets. Karsi would be glad to see that, he thought.

“Look on the bright side,” Tormund argued. “At least they cleaned up the dead bodies.”

At Jon’s appalled face, Tormund started laughing. “Come on, you don’t want to let the seal stew grow cold. It’s even worse when it doesn’t warm you up properly.”

XI. Tyrion I - Sewers

“YOU ASKED TO see me, Lord Hand?”

Tyrion looked up from the letter on his desk, then looked at the stack of letters he still had to go through. With a sigh, he cracked his neck once, twice, and then looked towards the man at the door. He looked to be in his forties, had already lost half of the light brown hair on his head and carried a couple of scrolls under one arm.

“That is entirely possible. If you wouldn’t mind telling me who you are, exactly?”

The man blushed and wiped his free hand on his tunic. “Helbard Torpe, of the Guild of Masons.”

At that, Tyrion perked up. “Ah! The master builder, I take it?”

Torpe nodded.

“And you brought the plans?”

“What we have in the way of plans, my lord.”

“Yes, that might be a problem. I’ve got some we salvaged from the ruins of the Red Keep’s archives around here somewhere ...” With a grunt, Tyrion got up from his too-high chair and waddled over to one of his cabinets. It took him three tries to find the right drawer; then he produced the slightly singed plans and spread them on the side table. The light was shit there, so he fetched a candle, inviting Torpe to look over the plans.

“Do you know why I asked for you?” Tyrion asked him.

Torpe shook his head. “I assumed it was about a more organized approach to rebuilding the city and the Keep.”

“You’re not wrong there,” Tyrion told the man. “But it’s not the whole truth either. You see, I have permission from His Grace to rebuild King’s Landing *from the bottom up*, so to speak. And what lies at the bottom of King’s Landing?”

“Its foundations?” Torpe asked, uncertain. Tyrion saw that he was beginning to sweat. Hopefully he’d get over that soon.

“Its sewers. A city runs on its sewers. Or not, as the case may be. King’s Landing certainly never had much of a sewer system, or it wouldn’t have stunk like a whore’s armpit on a sunny day.”

The master builder nodded slowly, clearly already making some calculations.

“And you may not know this, but sewers are something of a specialty of mine. Let me tell you what I learned managing the best-run sewer system in the Seven Kingdoms, and then we can get down to planning.”

XII. Ghost - Children

HE WAS RUNNING, hunting in the night as he followed a stag through the dark woods his human cut down in the daytime. Ghost didn't understand, but that was humans for you, always doing strange stuff. The stag was old already, and weakened, but after weeks of hares and squirrels, he felt his mouth water at the thought of fresh deer meat. In the back of his mind, he felt his human agree.

But then, suddenly, there was a different smell. It was old, musty and green, like decaying leaves on the forest floor further south, where he had been born.

I want to know what that is, the voice in the back of his head whispered.

He whined at the idea of missing out on the stag, at missing out on the thrill of the hunt and the taste of the meat, but he too was curious. Was it a danger, like the moving dead and the frozen men? Or was it a different kind of prey? And so he followed his nose, up a slope, then down another, weaving his way past trees and bushes until he reached the mouth of a cave and the little stream flowing past it. The smell was strong here, and fresh.

A splash, and he turned his head to look at the small creature filling a ceramic pot with water. It looked and smelled like a human, but also, not like a human. The skin looked like bark and the hair like leaves. Its eyes seemed golden in the moonlight. It smelled of earth and decay. He could feel his human recognize what he saw, but couldn't make sense of it himself.

The creature too had noticed him and its huge eyes bore into him.

Go, a new, foreign voice murmured in his head. *We have no quarrel with you. Leave us in peace, and it will stay that way.*

For a moment, he hesitated. The creature was small. But it was old, and he had lived long enough to learn that things that small and fearless didn't grow this old by being prey. He left, upwind, until he couldn't smell the creature anymore. Then he tried to catch the scent of something else to hunt.

XIII. Samwell II - Family

THERE WAS NOTHING quite as terrifying as being a father, Sam thought as he saw Little Jon crawl over to where his brother was playing with wooden knights and dragons. Every little step, he worried. Would he hurt himself on an edge? Would he fall? Would Little Sam refuse to share his toys and they'd have to keep the boys apart until they calmed down? Gilly, of course, only glanced up from her book every so often. The story of Florian and Jonquil, not quite her thing, she had told him, but she'd heard some of the ladies mention it and thought she should know about it.

In the end, Little Jon didn't hurt himself, fall or upset his brother. He just took a wooden horse and began sucking on it while Little Sam tried to engage him in a story about – something, Sam couldn't really tell.

"You worry too much," Gilly told him with a hint of amusement in her voice. She'd grown up around little sisters, Sam supposed. Dickon and Talla hadn't been that much younger than him.

Sam shrugged. "I can't help it." And he couldn't. It hadn't been this bad when it had been only Little Sam, when he had survival to worry about, wildlings, the Watch, the White Walkers. Maybe this was what peace meant: constant worrying about little things.

Gilly just smiled at him fondly and was about to turn back to her epic love story when Sam remembered something. "Oh, I got a letter today."

Gilly looked at him expectantly as Little Jon gurgled and Little Sam babbled.

"My mother and sister are coming to the city," Sam said, and he still didn't know how to feel about that. They were family. Sam loved them. But he'd also not done anything to avenge his father and brother. Not really. He'd just cowered when he was faced with dragons. Dickon, at least, had deserved more.

"They're going to love Little Jon," Gilly assured him. "They're both nice." *Unlike your father* was left unspoken.

“I know,” Sam protested. “It’s just ...”

“You worry too much,” Gilly said sagely.

“Yes, I worry too much.”

They both laughed, and their sons joined in, even if they didn’t know what they were laughing about. The wooden horse tumbled to the floor, forgotten, and the fire from the hearth flickered merrily.

XIV. Arya II – A Visit to White Harbor

THE WHITE WALLS of the city were gleaming in the sun as the *Sea Wolf* approached the mouth of the White Knife. It felt like a defeat, but after two tries, resupplying first at Lannisport and then at Pyke, Arya had run out of funds and her men out of patience. The storms had left their toll on the ship. And so they had limped along the coast of Westeros back towards their home port, where the *Sea Wolf* had been built and where they still knew every bolt and plank in her body. It was time to return home, for the men to visit their families and for Arya to reconsider her approach.

When they pulled into port, the harbormaster bowed before her and called her “Your Grace,” which only served to remind Arya of why she had left. She was no princess, no matter how many of her siblings wore crowns.

“Welcome back,” Lord Manderly said when she arrived at the New Castle. “Your sister will be pleased to hear you’re alive and well. Do you plan to go visit her?”

Arya shook her head. “I came to restock, to get the ship repaired in a proper shipyard, and to look at the maps you have here. I’d also like to talk with some of the captains. Going to Winterfell wouldn’t be of any use.”

Manderly nodded understandingly. “Still, you should consider writing to her.”

Arya did consider it. And reconsidered it. In the end, she even wrote, but it was a short message. She loved her sister, but she just didn’t have much to tell her.

Dear Sister, she wrote. I tried to cross the Sunset Sea twice, but had to return due to bad weather. I’m currently resupplying at White Harbor and the ship is undergoing repairs. I expect to ship out again soon (and to succeed this time). Give Jon my best when you can.

Arya

P.S. You need a proper deep water harbor in the west, Sister.

But while the repairs went well and the men enjoyed their time off, Arya had a harder time of it. She studied sea maps, weather charts, ship's logs and captain's journals to get a better understanding of why she had failed. She noted down where and when to expect doldrums and storms, and piece by painful piece, she assembled her plans, charted courses and chose one.

When the ship was ready, so was she. She wouldn't fail again.

XV. Gendry I – Visiting the City

“WELCOME, LORD BARATHEON!” Ser Davos said with a proud smile when Gendry rode into the main courtyard of the Red Keep. Gendry had almost gotten used to the horses and the name, but the city would take a while. He’d grown up here, knew some parts of Fleabottom and the Street of Steel like the back of his hand, and now they were gone. Replaced by busy construction work and new streets.

Ser Davos spread his arms when Gendry dismounted and he hugged the man gladly. Then they looked at each other, and Gendry figured Davos was contemplating just how odd it was that they, who had both been born in this city, had both ended up here as well.

“We’ve come quite far for two boys from Fleabottom, aye?” Davos asked.

Gendry nodded.

“How are the Stormlands?”

“Recovering,” Gendry said. “Not quite used to a bastard for a lord yet, but for the most part, they seem to think it’s better than the alternative. Thank you for recommending the councilors. I wouldn’t know what to do without them.”

Davos smiled. “You’re welcome. And I think that’s enough politics for now. You’re a guest. We can negotiate lumber shipments later. It’s time for supper soon, and you’ll sup with our other guests.”

Gendry silently groaned and wished there was a way to say no. He hated meeting other nobles. They either wanted something from him or wanted to watch him embarrass himself.

“Don’t worry, you’ll like these,” Davos assured him, but Gendry was skeptical.

He shouldn’t have been, Gendry realized later, when they were all sitting around the table, eating venison. The other guests, it turned out, were Lady Tarly and her mother Lady Melessa, Samwell Tarly’s family. And while Lady Melessa had eyes only for her newest grandchild, Gendry was seated between Lady Tarly and Gilly, who mostly helped her other son eat.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Lady Tarly told him, while her brother kept an eye on them that felt more threatening than it should. “I’ve heard good things about you.”

“You have?” Gendry asked, trying not to focus on the fact that she was a young lady saying genuinely nice things to him. A pretty young lady.

“Oh, yes, the usual stuff, you’re a hero who fought at Winterfell and went beyond the Wall with King Jon, of course,” she said between bites. “But my mother is a Florent, you know, and after everything, my family still has ties to the Stormlands. My mother’s cousin says you’re doing a good job of it so far. More of a Stannis than a Robert.”

“I’m not sure that’s a compliment,” Gendry replied with a frown.

“I don’t mean it like that!” she cried, then laughed. “You don’t look like I heard he did. Quite the contrary. You’re a much more exciting prospect for a young girl than my fiancé was, for example. He’s old and barely has any teeth left! I suppose I’m lucky I don’t have to marry him now.”

Gendry didn’t quite know what to make of that, and going by the blush on her cheeks, she hadn’t meant to say it quite like that either. But she seemed nicer and more real than the other noble girls he’d been introduced to so far, and so Gendry smiled at her.

And when she smiled back, his breath caught in his throat.

XVI. Jon II – King-Against-His-Will

“WE NEED YOU in the longhouse, King Crow!” Tormund called when Jon returned with the others from the forest, dragging a large felled tree behind them.

“For the last time, Tormund!” Jon called back, tugging at the rope that was fastened around the tree trunk.

“Are you coming or not?”

Jon did. Even though he was covered in pine needles, small cuts and sweaty furs. In the longhouse – the largest and best they had so far rebuilt– a number of people were already waiting. They all looked at him expectantly as he took a seat – pointedly *not* at the head of the table.

“What is it?”

“Well, King Snow,” one of the women said. “Danna here has been hunting rabbits in the new forest, down by the creek. But that’s my hunting grounds, and I want her to stop.”

Jon sighed, looking at the two women. They were both stooped and aged and it was a miracle they had managed to survive so far. The new forest was close, and neither could walk much further.

“You’ll have to share. Tell Arryk to move farther out instead, so you can share his grounds as well, and he can try hunting for deer again like he wants to.”

The two women looked at each other, then nodded at Jon and left. He’d miss Arryk’s help with the trees, but they’d get by without him now that fewer and fewer of the houses were unlivable.

“There’s also Kell,” Tormund told him. “He’s from Southpoint.” Tormund indicated the tiny man with the withered face. What was he doing here, Jon wondered. Southpoint was far from here, but only a day’s walk from Eastwatch.

“King Crow,” the man began. “The village sent me to tell you that we’re having a bit of trouble with ’em crows. Nothing bad, only when we go trade fur or ivory with them, they insist on twice the amount they demanded a year ago in exchange for grain. They’re saying it’s not their fault, but I heard the folks near

Castle Black don't have that problem.”

That was worrying, Jon thought, but— “Why are you coming to me with this?”

The man's face got even more wrinkled when he frowned. “I don't understand. You're King Crow.”

Jon sighed and resisted the urge to bury his head in his hands. He'd given up a crown and killed a queen. “I'm nobody's king,” Jon said.

“Give up, my friend,” Tormund cut in. “You're our leader, whether you want to be or not. You saved us, believed in us when nobody else did, and you're helping us even now. Ain't nobody as respected as you among the free folk, and that's how we choose our kings. Get used to it and stop whining.”

With his eyes closed, Jon counted to ten. He didn't want to be king. Never had, but it seemed destiny left him no choice.

“I'll see what I can do,” he promised Kell, then wondered what in the seven hells he'd gotten himself into.

XVII. Bronn – The Troubles of Lordship

FUCK THIS, BRONN thought. Fuck this with a rusty sword.

Highgarden was huge. He'd wanted a nice castle. He'd had a nice castle, and been happily betrothed to a stupid woman who wouldn't have noticed that he preferred the company of whores. It had been perfect. But then came the fucking Lannister brothers and his own greed and now he had a huge fucking castle and *an entire fucking kingdom* to deal with. He had ledgers to study, lords to wrangle and above all, audiences to hold.

"Melvin the Bald and Alyn the Wheeler, my lord," the herald announced. The two men walked in, and Maester Gyldain began to summarize their complaint. They were neighbors whose fields bordered one another's. Alyn had been married to Melvin's sister, but the woman had died without having children, and now her dowry was being disputed. A couple of fields, Bronn thought. I have to worry about a couple of fields.

When the maester was done, Melvin presented his side, then so did Alyn. It was terribly predictable. After they were done, they all stared at Bronn as he sat slumped in the high seat.

"Do you have any documents to back up your claims?" he asked the men. They shook their heads.

"But it was shook on," Alyn insisted.

Bronn rolled his eyes, then cracked his neck. "Alyn keeps the land until his death, then it reverts to Melvin or his heirs. And Gyldain – put that in writing. In triplicate."

Both men looked like they wanted to argue, but a glare shut them up. They shuffled out and for a blessed moment, Bronn thought it was over. Then the herald lifted his scroll again.

"How many more?" Bro

nn asked the maester.

"Today? Fifteen."

Fuck this, Bronn thought again. He wanted a whore. He wanted to kill someone. Preferable a golden-haired twit named Lannister.

XVIII. Sansa II – The Crypts

“SHALL I COME with you, Your Grace?” the guard asked when Sansa took the lit torch from him.

“No, thank you, Tom,” she told him. “This is something I have to do on my own. Besides, I’ll be fine. There’s nobody down there, aside from the dead.”

And the dead posed no danger to anybody. Not anymore.

The crypts of Winterfell were dark as she descended down the narrow steps, but they were changed, as was the world. The old plaster had been replaced by a new coat that was lighter in color when they reburied the kings of the North and the lords of Winterfell. Some were likely in the wrong tombs, but nobody could expect differently after all the chaos. Only with the new tombs were they sure they contained the right occupants. Her grandfather and Uncle Brandon had never risen and lay undisturbed. One had been burned to cinders, the other’s bones had been cleaned of all flesh before coming north, as had Sansa’s father’s and aunt’s.

At Aunt Lyanna’s grave Sansa paused, taking the wilted winter rose from the statue’s hands and replacing it with a fresh one.

“Jon asked me to pay his respects to you,” Sansa told her, remembering the sparse letter. “I hope you watch over him.” That was all she had to say to a woman she never knew.

The next three tombs were the difficult ones. Father looked at her, stern as always, with Robb standing next to him over his empty tomb. The fresh plaster on Rickon’s tomb she tried to ignore, as it was a stark reminder of the one member of her immediate family whose eyes had turned blue.

“Father,” she said, nodding at the statue. “Robb. These days, I wish I had your counsel. Both of you ruled the North, and I try to do my best, but there is much I never learned. Did I do the right thing with Glover, I wonder? Or would you advise forgiveness? Or should I have taken his head? What will the lords respect more? I wish you had taught me, Father, and not just Robb and Jon.”

In the flickering light, she could imagine her father's kind smile, though the statue looked little like him. If she tried hard enough, she could hear him tell her it was all right, as he had done when she was an upset little girl.

Robb's statue remained silent. She was older now than he had been when he died, and it was still strange to think about. He'd always been the older one, the brother she looked up to, even if his honor had ended up getting him killed while she had been trapped in King's Landing.

With a sigh, Sansa closed her eyes. It was no use. Even down here, surrounded by Starks, she was alone. Arya, Bran and Jon were gone. Starks weren't made for loneliness, she thought. They were made for a pack, and hers was gone.

XIX. Brienne II – Duty and Honor

BRIENNE OF TARTH hit the training dummy with her sword. Hard. She pictured Bronn's face and hit it again. Then she pictured Lord Tyrion's. Again. She thought of Samwell Tarly, and the dummy wobbled on its stand. With Ser Davos, it finally fell to the ground. She was sweating and she supposed it was a mercy there were no Master of Laws or Master of Whispers appointed yet. She would have run out of dummies if that had been the case. These stupid, idiotic ... *men* had been arguing about brothels. Again. For over an hour. As if there was nothing else for the small council of the Six Kingdoms to worry about. She blamed Bronn and Lord Tyrion, mostly, but the other two were just as annoying once they got started: Sam with his earnest information about how brothels related to public health, and Davos with his tendency to be contrary.

"Lady Commander," she heard Pod say from the entrance. He still wore his golden armor, even if it still looked like it was too big for him and he needed to grow into it properly. Still, she knew he was the best choice she could have made for her first appointment to the kingsguard.

"You look like sparring would do you good," he told her.

Would it ever, Brienne thought. "Then take up your sword, Ser Podrick, or did you forget how to?"

"No, Ser!" Pod answered with an eager smile. They walked over to the sparring yard and Brienne let Oathkeeper twirl lazily through the air, waiting for Pod to draw his own sword. Once they were set, Brienne made the first move and Pod parried confidently, counterattacking with one fluent motion. Brienne had expected that, of course, and evaded, using her long stride to get into position for her next move. For once, she let tactics and techniques fall by the wayside and simply used her greater strength to pummel Pod into submission. He suffered three blows before the force was too much and he lost the grip on his sword.

“I yield,” he said with an air of disappointment, as he looked down the length of her sword.

With a sigh, Brienne sheathed Oathkeeper. “You’re not as bad as you think,” she assured him. “I wasn’t going easy on you in the least.”

“Still,” Pod pouted. “I thought I was better than this.”

“Pod – Ser Podrick – you’re a fine knight, and there is nobody I’d rather serve my king with. You are loyal, true and a good fighter. The Six Kingdoms could not ask for more.”

At this, Pod brightened a little. “Did it help, at least? With whatever was bothering you?”

It had, she found, and she nodded.

XX. Gendry II – The Lady of Storm’s End

HE WAS NERVOUS as he stood in front of the septon in the sept of Storm’s End. Gendry hadn’t really thought this was going to happen. The guests watched as Talla walk towards him, some with smiles on their faces, and Talla’s mother with tears in her eyes. And Talla – Talla was all he could wish for. She was nice, sometimes a little mischievous, but without a mean bone in her body. For a brief moment, he imagined another woman walking up to him – then he put this thought aside. What was past was past and they had both made their choices. It had been for the best, both for him and for Arya.

Talla smiled brightly when she finally reached him, and Gendry just hoped he wouldn’t bungle this up. He was certain he’d memorized everything, but now he couldn’t remember a thing.

Somehow, they got through the ceremony anyway, and it felt like a dream when Sam removed his sister’s cloak and Gendry replaced it with a Baratheon one. Then, the septon pronounced them “one flesh, one heart, one soul, now and forever,” and Gendry leaned forward to kiss his bride. Talla’s lips were warm and passionate and a little clumsy. When they pulled apart, she was blushing and he could feel his own cheeks warm up as well.

The crowd cheered when they walked outside to greet their people. “Lord Gendry!” he heard, but also “Lady Talla!” and “Long live Lord and Lady Baratheon!”

Gendry took his wife’s hand. He certainly hoped they would.

XXI. Bran II - Audience

THE ROOM HELD its breath. People usually did when King Bran held an audience himself instead of letting his Hand do the talking. If Bran still felt amused by these things, he would probably come more often. As it was, many things occupied his mind, and few were as mundane as dealing with accusations against a corrupt harbormaster. But a king needed to be seen every once in a while, and so he let his chair be lifted up onto the dais so that he could listen to complaints.

The audience tittered as the harbormaster was led away, removed from his post and sentenced to repay the city the sum he had stolen from it. The man started to cry once he was outside, Bran saw, through the eyes of a crow.

In the throne room without a throne, the next petitioner was led inside. He was a portly man wearing rich silks. His ample cheeks were the most prominent feature on his otherwise unremarkable face. He put on an air of righteousness as he bowed deeply.

“Your Grace,” the man began. “My name is Weston Holdwater. I purchased the land where the Alchemist’s Guild used to stand with the intention of rebuilding what is left of the buildings and tearing down what can’t be salvaged. My plans to establish a trading company have been approved by the city. Everything is in order, yet for some reason, construction is delayed again and again on orders of the city watch. The commander refuses to tell me why. So I ask you, please allow me to begin my work. I don’t know how much longer I can afford to be idle. A humble merchant such as myself only has so much money.”

Bran hummed and pretended to mull this over for a while, closing his eyes and letting his mind travel elsewhere. Finally, he cleared his throat. “You may start construction in exchange for the contents of the back room of the cellar in your second residence,” Bran told him. “If that price is acceptable to you.”

Holdwater blanched and gasped for air. He stared at Bran as if he was looking straight into the maw of a dragon, come back to the city just to roast him. He began to sweat. Finally he managed to force a strained smile onto his face. “No,

thank you, Your Grace,” he said. “I think I’ll wait for the official permission.”

Then he left the room in what was clearly a hurry, and the tittering started up again.

When the audience was done, Tyrion Lannister followed him on the way to the godswood.

“What’s in the cellar?” he asked.

Bran smiled enigmatically. “Everything Holdwater could find out about the Alchemists’ wildfire.”

Lord Tyrion raised his eyebrows. “So he didn’t want to start a trading company. We should arrest him before he runs off.”

“There is no need. He already has, but he has left everything behind. Send some men to confiscate his research.”

Lord Tyrion bowed. “Of course, Your Grace.”

XXII. Tyrion II – An Unlikely Friendship of Hands

“AH, SER DAVOS, will you join me?” Tyrion asked. It was one of those rare evenings where he could retire to the gardens and enjoy a nice cup of wine or two while looking out over the bay. It was rather warm too, and the evening sun cast a long shadow of the Keep onto the sea.

“I wanted to talk to you about the fleet, actually,” Davos told him, but Tyrion cut him off before he could get any further.

“Not today. I want one evening off, can you understand that?”

“Fair enough,” Davos said. “I was busy enough when I was Hand in the Narrow Sea and Hand in the North. Running six kingdoms ... well, I’m glad it’s you and not me.”

Tyrion took the carafe of wine and poured Davos a cup as well. “That sounds like you don’t like me,” Tyrion joked when he handed him the cup.

“I wouldn’t put it quite like that,” Davos said.

“You would have every right to dislike me, though.” Tyrion nodded out at the bay that glowed red in the dusky light. When he looked at Davos, he saw the man’s eyes darken. Finally, Davos sighed and took a sip.

“I have. But it’s no use. It was war and you wanted to win it. I wanted to win it too, and we both did our best. In the end, I lost and you won. Holding a grudge won’t bring my son back. Killing you wouldn’t be justice. Putting you on trial for it would only mean putting myself on trial as well, for King’s Landing.”

“So you forgive me?”

Davos laughed. “No. But I choose to ignore it, for my own sake.”

“You are a wise man, Ser Davos. I can see why you became a Hand.”

“And you are a crafty one. I can see why you did, too.”

For a moment, Tyrion looked into his swirling cup, thinking how much sea and wine looked alike at this time of day. “What is better, you thing? Being wise or being crafty?”

Ser Davos sighed and Tyrion watched as he mulled over the question.

“Being wise didn’t help me choose a good king,” Davos said in the end. “At least the first time.”

“Being crafty didn’t help either,” Tyrion replied.

He didn’t know when he’d last thought of her, but it had been a while. She had been so *bright*, Tyrion thought. Maybe that had been the problem. One moment she had been as bright as the sun, the next as bright as dragon fire. Maybe monarchs shouldn’t be bright. Westeros was certainly better off with King Bran, eerie though he was.

“We served, what, five different kings and queens, between the two of us?” Davos asked.

Tyrion nodded. “Although I knew a couple more.”

The sun was almost beneath the horizon now and Davos raised his cup. “May this one be our last,” he toasted.

Tyrion heartily agreed.

XXIII. Sansa III – A Meeting

“YOUR GRACE,” JON said, and Sansa watched as he inclined his head in respect. When he looked up, she rolled her eyes, and finally, he grinned. He looked good, she decided. He’d picked up a bit of a tan, even, despite living north of the Wall. Life as an outcast clearly suited him more than a crown ever had.

“You don’t need to call me that,” she told him. “You’re my brother.”

Jon cocked his head in question and his smile became ironic.

“You are,” Sansa insisted. “The rest doesn’t matter. Now tell me, the Lord Commander told me you’re a king. *Again?*”

Jon sighed. “It’s a long story.”

They took a seat at the table in the solar in the King’s Tower and he told her the rest of it while Sansa rubbed her hands and tried to get used to the cold. She didn’t much like the Wall, least of all the weather, but she was glad to see Jon thrived in it. He deserved to be happy, more than anyone she knew.

In the end, took a cup of mulled wine to get her fingers moving normally again, and by then Jon had finished his tale.

“But enough about me,” he concluded. “How are you?”

“Well, as you can see.”

Jon raised an eyebrow in question.

“I am,” she insisted. “And so is the North.”

“I wasn’t worried about the North,” he said. “I’m sure you’re handling it better than I could. You were raised to be a queen. That was what your mother always wanted for you. I’m asking how *you* are. My sister. Sansa.”

For a good long while, she stared into the flames, wondering what to say.

“Alone,” she finally muttered, and she saw Jon stiffen out of the corner of her eye.

“Ah. You won’t be forever,” Jon promised. “These things take time.”

“I know,” she said, even if she didn’t. She didn’t know how to make friends anymore. Cersei and Petyr had seen to that. Trust no longer came easily to her.

“If it helps, we can make this a regular thing,” Jon suggested. “We meet here, once a year, and talk about the relationship between the North and the free folk. It’s not much, but I’m closer than Bran is. And Arya, wherever she has gone—”

“She sends her love, by the way,” Sansa told him, and they shared a fond but exasperated look that only their sister could conjure.

“I wish I could write more often, too, but we don’t have ravens or maesters to keep them at Hardhome. And not much paper, truth be told.”

Jon smiled and shrugged at his own predicament, but in Sansa’s head, the wheels began to turn.

“I’m sure that can be changed,” she told him. “With the right letters to the right people, we’ll find a maester for you yet.”

Jon looked skeptical, but Sansa was determined. If she could see her brother but once a year, at least she’d have his letters.

XXIV. Arya III – West of Westeros

THEY WERE ALL on half rations, and there was no way back. There hadn't been for a month now, and the sailors were tense. This was it, death or glory. Arya was sure that if it hadn't been she who had killed the Night King, she'd have had a mutiny on her hands by now. As it was, these men would follow her to the end of the earth – and in this case, it was quite literal.

But there was no end, only more ocean. At least the winds were fair and the ocean full of bounty. She had learned to fish from one of the men, and that was what she did most days now, like most of the men except the ones that were needed to handle the ship, and the lookout perched high above them all. Every so often, she'd look up to the crow's nest, hoping for word of a change. Here, out on the sea, it seemed like the earth stood still. The giant sea of dark blue never changed, even though the sun ran its course day after day. Even the stars seemed to move more than they did.

She had spent days like this. Weeks. She'd learned all the chanteys, started to understand the intricacies of handling the ship and even knew how to fix sails, ropes and nets, despite her lack of talent with a needle. How ironic that out here, she'd finally found a use for a needle that didn't bore her! Sailing was waiting, hoping and praying, until one day, the fifty-second day since they had upped anchor at Bear Island—

“Land Ahoy!” the lookout cried, pointing west. In seconds, all thoughts of fishing were forgotten as Arya hurried to the forecastle with the rest of the men. But even from the bows, there was nothing but sea to see yet.

“Fuck this,” Arya said, and quickly began to climb the mast. She'd become good at it over the months at sea, and she was small enough to climb into the crow's nest alongside the lookout. The young man pointed just to the right of the ship's bows excitedly and Arya turned. There, a dark, scraggly line rose above the sea.

Arya felt a grin spread across her face. Soon, the real adventure would begin.