Disclaimer: This is a work of fiction based on the ASOIAF universe. All recognisable characters, plots, and settings are the exclusive property of GRRM; I make no claim to ownership.

Author's Note: So, here we are again. Over 900k words and two finished fics later, I'm starting yet another new project. And like the two, I fully intend to finish this one. However, it won't be nearly as big or grand as the Dragonwolf (I've still not given up on the rewrite; 3/4ths done, but I am merely short on time) or Shrouded Destiny.

This one will also be far more focused plot-wise. And yes, time-travel and Jon Snow again (blame the P polls!), only in the Dance era (mainly based on Fire and Blood, but I might borrow some minor things from HOTD). And this time, it will be almost completely focused on him and two or three plotlines surrounding him, so don't expect a PoV galore like in SD.

And last but not least, this is a crack-taken seriously fic. I prefer to write things as seriously as possible, but I might see myself hugging one fantastical or unbelievable element or playing around with different concepts. Maybe even make it unashamedly Gary Stue. I haven't decided on some of the more 'fantastical' specifics, but one thing is for sure - don't take this fic *too* seriously.

What can the readers expect from No Joy:

1) Following the Fire&Blood and ASOIAF lore over HOTD/GOT in 99,9% of cases. (Leaving myself that 0,1% leeway)
2) Nothing too serious. It's a crack-taken seriously fic. If it's not your cup of tea, don't read.
3) No harems or anything ludicrous that doesn't fit the setting's era.

Edited by: Bub3loka

Year 306 After Aegon's Conquest

Jon Snow

The Bay of Ice

Fools oft used to say the world would end in fire. But now, they feared it would end in ice.

Jon was no different. Warmth, let alone fire, was merely a distant dream. But it was a dream that came to him every time he closed his eyes, the crackling of burning wood, the soft smell of oak, the rush of heat. It was an odd thing to dream of fire instead of the sun's kiss in the darkness, for the North did not lack wood; it never had. But no man was a master of their dreams, Jon knew that much.

Ice and snow covered the world in every direction. For once, the starry sky above was cloudless, and the pale, sinister moon gave him a clear view of the surroundings, as if it were a dark, cloudy day. To the north, the white peaks of the Frostfangs looked like thick, snowy spears poking at the heavens with disgruntlement, shining under the moonlight. To the south and west was the endless field of snow and ice—it had been a year since the Bay of Ice froze. And to the east, the top of the Wall glimmered like a greyish spectre, peeking over the outskirts of the Northern hills.

Two years. Two long years had passed since the sun had set, never to rise again. Though there were rumours that Dorne and the southernmost Reach still saw the light of day, if only for a handful of hours at a time. Every fool now knew of the legend of the Long Night, of the time when a whole generation was born and perished in the darkness, struggling against the cold and the old horrors that crept within. They knew it, for it had returned.

It was a dreary fate, hopeless. Some might argue that it was merely myths, legends, and old wives' tales. *But nobody had any idea how to defeat the Others*. There were no grand battles like the legendary Battle of the Dawn. It would be easier if there were one—perhaps they would have won. Or if they had lost, it would have happened quickly. King Stannis Baratheon had ensured the Watch was at full strength and had mustered a mighty army of twelve thousand, only to lose a third of it to the cold in the Haunted Forest. The Others and their undead thralls merely avoided him, and three moons later, the king was forced to disperse the rest amongst the Castles of the Wall, Bear Isle, and Skagos or lose more to the cold.

Perhaps if Daenerys Targaryen hadn't disappeared in the Dothraki Sea all those years ago and her dragons were here, things would be different. But what-ifs and might-have-beens served no one.

No, the Long Night was a battle of attrition. Ambushes and skirmishes, where wights prodded for weakness, while the living merely endured, not willing to risk further rangings after Stannis' failed expedition. It was a game of waiting and positioning. Only the Cold Ones had all the time in the world; they needed no food, no warmth, or shelter and thrived in the cold in the dark, unlike humans. The Seven Kingdoms and the Watch had no choice but to resist desperately, no matter how spent the land, the food, and the people were from the War of the Five Kings, which lasted exactly five years. The world of men was doomed to a slow struggle of death, and Jon suspected the only reason they didn't die faster was that the Others grew cautious as the Watch became more organised and strengthened in number.

The Cold Gods had the bodies to flood them in rotten flesh. The Bay of Ice and the Bay of Seals were frozen, allowing them to cross uncontested, circumventing the defences of the Watch, and strike into the North, flanking and encircling the Night's Watch and choking them out for good. They made those attempts, too, but they were cautious. Slow. Probing. An attack at the Grey Cliffs near Karhold here, a skirmish at Bear Island, Sea Dragon Point or the Northern Mountains there.

The only thing preventing them from piercing deep into the North was the thick snowfall, over twenty feet at places. While the Others could glide atop it like weightless shades, the horde of corpses had to claw and dig its way through. Or perhaps they had already crept into the North proper, and Jon merely did not know of it. The thought chilled him more than the cold ever could.

A slow death awaited them all, whether in a few weeks, some moons, or years. There was no hope. Many gave in to despair and hopelessness, but most perished from the relentless creeping of the cold. The world was slowly freezing. Everyone knew that, from the lowest pauper who struggled to survive in some cold, damp cave all the way to King Stannis Baratheon, who had retreated to King's Landing with his helpless Red Priestess. Or gone to 'rule his realm', as he had claimed and deal with petty revolts down the Northmarch.

The stars were different from what Jon remembered in his childhood, different from what Luwin had once taught him. It was a herald of change. Many constellations had slowly disappeared. Jon could no

longer see the Swan, the Shadowcat, the Crow's Lantern, the King's Crown, or the Sword of the Morning. Another dark omen. For where the Sword of the Morning had disappeared, the Ice Dragon was shining brighter than ever, now in the middle of the sky instead of at the edge of the northern horizon. The new stars made for new constellations, like the Winter's Kiss, the Endless Sorrow, and the Stranger's Hand—or the Great Other's Fist, as Melisandre of Asshai liked to call it.

Jon Snow wasn't one to give up, though. He knew a grim future awaited them, but he was a man of duty. Vows had to be honoured; orders had to be followed. So what if they were going to die? All men died, whether in old age, in their bed surrounded by family or young while struggling to make their own way in the world. If Jon could choose a death, he would choose one where he fought his best with a sword in hand.

But he knew one rarely got what they wished for—merely what they managed to grasp in their fists. It was not to mean Jon Snow would rush into his death in battle. He liked winning, and he liked living, even if some days were a struggle. Even if the concept of 'days' had lost meaning with no sun to mark their proper passing, even if the maesters and septons still counted the passage of time religiously.

Today, he turned three and twenty if they had counted correctly.

So he decided to treat himself to some fresh fish. With the end of Rangings, life at the Wall consisted of patrolling and a heap of miscellaneous duties that kept the rebuilt Westwatch-by-the-Bridge running. And the occasional skirmish with the wights, giant blue spiders, and their icy masters reminded them of the Other's looming presence, waiting like a shadowcat in the dark. Of course, those were tasks for the men-at-arms, outriders, stewards, and builders, not royal commanders like him.

All he had to do was plan, report to Stannis, fight the occasional skirmish, and delegate duties to others, which gave him time to swing his sword. Practice, spar, fight, and plan. Not that there was much to plan; all the ideas to deal with the Others were horses that had long been talked over until their tongues grew numb and throats turned sore. Jon saw himself going fishing more and more of late.

A dull monotony in the dark. The fish rarely bit anymore, and the oak stump under his arse felt colder and less comfortable even through the thick leather hide that Jon used for cover. It didn't stop him from fishing. It was his way to unwind when sleep failed to ease his nerves and tension. With the hole cut out from the ice, Jon could simply shut down his mind, throw his string, and wait for something to tug. The feeling of emptiness was cathartic in a way.

Cold wind stabbed in the revealed parts of his face like icy daggers, but the cold had long stopped bothering Jon.

The rhythmic crunch of boots in the snow heralded the arrival of a man. Jon didn't need to turn around to greet him. Each man walked a bit differently, and experience had let him memorise the sound of their stride. There was no animosity or caution in the steps either.

"Daven Lannister," Jon murmured out a greeting, his eyes still. "Here to report again?"

"It's *Ser* Daven Lannister," a sour, hoary voice corrected as if titles of knighthood mattered anymore. "And aye, I'm here to report that one big load of fuck-all is happening along the Milkwater's mouth."

Jon chuckled. The crude Lannister knight never failed to amuse him. “What a surprise.”

“You crazy bastard. Even now, you don’t turn. I could have been a wight or one of the Cold Shadows. Even if I wasn’t, I could draw my blade and take your head right now.”

“Even a shambling wight is not nearly as clumsy as you are,” Jon quipped back, earning himself an amused snort. “And I wouldn’t hear an Other from afar.”

“Lies. I’ve seen you sense the cold fucks before everyone else sees them.”

“Sense? Yes. Hear? No.”

The Lannister knight finally stopped beside him. He was tightly wrapped in a heavy cloak of grey wool that had once been black. Jon was scarcely any different, even if his cloak was lined with grey fur, hiding the armour underneath. Dye was hard to come by for years, and the Order of the Black Brothers was greyer by the year; the snow, frost, and each wash made any signs of black slowly but surely fade. There was a second stump there, waiting in the snow before the round hole cut into the ice.

“I hope you don’t mind.” Jon gave him a slight nod, and Ser Devan Lannister tied the unlit torch every black brother carried to his back. His dragon-glass-tipped spear was abandoned on the snow-covered ice as he sat his arse on the second stump by his side, grabbed the fishing rod, and tossed the hook into the water. “Waste of corn, if you ask me.”

The once thickset man had grown thin, his face gaunt as a ghost, but his dark green eyes had yet to lose their spark. Many others had grown thin, for food was hard to come by in the snow. And the harder you toiled, the hungrier you grew. There were no supplies from the South: the frozen seas and snow higher than a man made long travel impossible. The chickens, the dogs, the pigs, and the horses had long been eaten. Underground tunnels filled with mushrooms growing in the dark, digging roots, boiling bark and leather, and catching the occasional fish sustained the army stationed along the length of the Wall. It was a poor sustenance, in truth, a part of the slow death.

Jon couldn’t complain. Commanders like him ate better than most.

“You’re a madman, Commander Snow,” the Lannister knight murmured stubbornly, the yellow, frost-covered tangle he called beard twitching unhappily. “I could have taken your head.”

For all his talk, there had not been even an ounce of hostility in the man earlier. Jon would have sensed and acted upon it. Living on the edge of death for years sharpened your senses like nothing else. Or perhaps it was the skinchanging?

Instead, he mused, “How many have tried?”

Daven scoffed. “Hundreds of men, I reckon. And they did a piss-poor job at it, even if I count those who filled your chest with holes the very first time. A proper man would have the grace to die when mortally wounded.”

The great pride of Casterly Rock had grown dangerously thin in the last few years. Out of a powerful House boasting more than two scores of members, only three survived. Daven Lannister, here at the

Wall, a babe that was the lord of Casterly Rock and one of Daven's sisters, wedded to one of the king's men. The winter had been cruel, war even more so.

"I nearly died," Jon admitted. "Believe me, I was as surprised to wake up after that as everyone else. The Red Witch should have left me to die."

Mention of Melisandre only brought a scowl to Daven Lannister's face as he cursed under his nose. "Damn sorcerers and her unnatural shadow magicks. Stannis would have never even gazed at the Iron Throne, let alone seat his arse on it without her foul tricks or if we weren't busy fighting that Blackfyre and the treacherous Dornish!"

"I believe I provided ample assistance, too," Jon drawled lazily. "Didn't I defeat you and your men on the field?"

It was amusing to remind Daven of the day he had chosen to take the Black rather than being beheaded for treason. But the Lannister knight had long stopped bristling like an angry boar at such prods.

"Aye, you've got a mind for battle like your brother does, so what?" His voice thickened with genuine confusion. "What good are sharp wits when you could have fucking sailed for the Summer Isles instead of rushing into the cold hell? What sort of madman gets rid of the black, only to willingly come to the cold hell for a second time?"

The brush with death, the mutiny, and the Pink Letter had seen Jon accept Stannis' offer all those years ago. Only the offer of a wife could hardly be accepted when Val had perished in the mutiny, and Jon could hardly take Winterfell from his brother. And kings had long memories and held grudges for even longer. Stannis had not forgotten Jon's rejection, and while he begrudgingly granted a royal decree to release Jon from his vows after the mutiny, the former Lord Commander was acknowledged as a trueborn… but kept the name Snow, not a Stark.

There was the fleeting promise that if he earned enough contributions and proved himself worthy, Jon would earn what was previously easily offered. Contributions Jon had made aplenty: victories, taking castles, killing enemy lords and much more. Jon was still a Snow, for while the war for the Iron Throne was won, the war against the Others had yet to end.

Jon had not taken the Black this time; he was merely… in command of the westernmost flank of the Wall. Westwatch by the Bridge. The Bay of Ice. Bear Island. Three thousand men spread out in camps, fortifications, and underground tunnels. Not that it mattered; it was hard to say where the Watch ended, and the king's army began as of late anyway—Jon himself was garbed with grey from head to toe.

It had been tempting to say those vows again, but the freedom to act and move had stayed his hand.

"The sort that follows orders and values duty." Something tugged on his line, and Jon hastily yanked his pole out and threw the twitching cod into the bucket beside him. It was smaller than usual, barely the size of his fist. "I'm no craven like you to try and shirk from adversity when things grow hard. If the Watch were run by overproud Southron fops like your lion lot and the kingdoms by a child king like Tommen, the Wall would have long fallen. Someone had to do it. Someone who has the ability, the desire and the mind to put into things. As His Grace loves to say, big and small, we all must do our part, so why not me?"

“A fucking madman,” Daven swore dismissively. “They say bastards are creatures of lust and sin, not of blind daring and cold duty.”

“And that’s the difference between you and I.” Jon grabbed a single grain of wheat from his pocket and skewered it on the hook. The thick leather gloves made the task particularly challenging, but he had plenty of experience to succeed in one go without dropping the grain. “Many of you trueborns are soft. Harping about privilege, rights, and all that, but when the call of duty comes knocking on your gate, you all try to weasel your way out. There’s no king better than Stannis to deal with your lot, even if he had to use magic for it.”

The Lannister knight spat. “Aye, how grand. We fight against some cold fiends from an icy hell for a man who has sold his soul to some foreign devil god of fire and shadow.”

“Be that as it may, the man is your king. I can have you flogged for treason and insubordination,” Jon idly pointed out, his lips twitching. “Or perhaps you seek to provoke me so you can get yourself killed because you’re too cowardly to walk off into the cold? Too proud to take your own life?”

“Tsk.” Devan Lannister then stared at the hole cut out in the ice, but didn’t deny it. The edges showed the ice sheet that had taken hold of the Bay was as thick as a grown man’s arm was long. “You are the only one using a Valyrian Steel Sword for fishing like this. It’s unbecoming. I should have tried to lop your head off for true.”

His tone, however, was half-hearted.

“Only a fool would not use a tool that never dulls, rusts, or bends,” Jon said back. “I cut this hole in a handful of minutes. For how many hours do the fishermen have to cut and saw and hammer through the ice to reach the water underneath?”

An angry vein popped on Devan’s temple, but he remained silent. Even if it wounded his warrior’s pride to see a named dragonsteel sword be used like a common tool, he could reluctantly recognise the utility after struggling for years in the cold and the snow.

Ghost’s presence slithered into the edge of his consciousness. But his companion was far, far away from here, behind the sturdy, tall walls of Winterfell with Rickon, allowing Jon to keep an eye on his brother lest Manderly or the other Stark bannermen did anything funny—more Manderly than anyone else. Jon no longer needed to rely on his direwolf for years now, and knowing his last brother was safe gave him peace of mind.

The silence stretched until the cold gale from the frozen shore started whistling again, followed by the chattering of teeth from the Lannister Knight.

“Going b-back to the t-tunnels,” he excused himself. “I don’t k-know how you haven’t frozen into an i-icicle j-just yet.”

“This is nothing,” Jon chortled. “Haven’t you heard? Ice runs in the blood of the Northmen.”

The unsteady crunching of footsteps and the muttering about madmen slowly dwindled in the distance. Time tickled as Jon once again emptied his mind. There was time and place to think of the hopeless future, but this was not it. Two hours later, two more cods were in his bucket, and one mackerel and all

three were frozen as hard as a stone inside the bucket. He would scrape them out with Longclaw and roast them over the fire later. Or just slice them up and eat them as they were—fish frozen stiff were a delicacy, and men would not get sick eating them.

Then, Jon had all of his senses scream in danger in a way they never did before, even when he faced the Others or while fighting a battle against overwhelming odds. Cold sweat trickled down his back, making Jon Snow feel as small as an ant. It was a primal sort of fear, far direr than anything else he had felt before. His hand found Longclaw's hilt, but it brought him no comfort as Jon wildly looked around and saw nothing but an endless expanse of frost and some stone in the distance. Where was it? Where was the threat coming from?

As if to answer his query, the world suddenly brightened as if the sun had returned. Jon froze in his tracks, a smidgen of hope blooming in his heart before confusion replaced it. No, it was even brighter.

A gigantic ball of fire and brimstone blotted out a third of the sky, leaving an enormous bloody trail behind it. No, not blood, but fire. A comet. A falling comet that was ten times the size of the Frostfangs. It was as majestic as it was terrifying, and Jon Snow couldn't help but ignore the stabbing pain in his eyes as he watched with morbid fascination as small pieces splintered away from the fiery giant, forming their own comets, drawing lesser streaks of fire tearing across the sky, as if a painter had dipped his brush into fire and slashed it across the heavens.

A hoarse bark of laughter slipped from his lips. The air itself began to simmer with heat as the ball only grew larger and larger, falling southwest, just where Bear Island was. Some of the smaller balls struck the ground first, creating fiery flowers that had to be enormous in size for Jon to see them in the distance. How? How did such a massive comet appear out of nowhere?! The Bleeding Star of a few years ago could be seen for weeks!

The most jarring thing was the silence. Jon had yet to hear anything. Then, the giant ball of fire smashed into the horizon, and the world itself shook under his feet so violently that it brought Jon to his knees. He instinctively stabbed Longclaw in the ice below to anchor himself. The flash of light forced him to close his eyes, and when they were cracked open, a wave of fire blotted out the horizon, threatening to engulf the world.

And it was headed his way, growing bigger and taller by the second. There was nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. What could a man do against such sheer destruction?

It was over, Jon Snow knew. The world was ending. And by the whim of the gods, it was ending not in ice but in fire. A deep, whistling sound awoke him from his stupor.

The world might be ending, but his pride compelled him to try to fight back. Do something, no matter how futile. He yanked Longclaw out of the ice underneath and lashed out at the fishing hole. It wasn't wide enough yet. Two heavy blows saw it expand a little, but Jon could wait no more.

He took a deep breath and squeezed into the fishing hole, praying the thick ice above was enough to help him weather the destruction. It was a death to swim with all the steel on his body, enough to have him sink to the bottom and drown. A slow and painful death. But it was a death of his choosing.

The shock of the cold water had his whole body shaking madly, and he had to struggle not to let go of his breath. But his mind stretched and slipped as Jon Snow succumbed to the cold darkness of the Bay of Ice, and his body sank into the cold waters.

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Jon Snow really, really didn't expect to wake up again. A surprise, but a welcome one for sure, doubly more so considering he felt great—ignoring the stab of pain in his knees, which was definitely a trophy of him slamming them on the ice.

The first thing he noticed was the warmth; it was hot, almost suffocatingly so. The second matter made his heart sink. Ghost. There was only an inky void, a bleak silence in his mind where the connection had stood strong.

The third thing he noticed was the air. It was hot, almost scalding on his throat, tingling with salt, sulfur, and brimstone. And something else was there, too. Something subtle, almost spicy in a way that made his spine tingle, but the more he tried to focus on it, the more it slipped his senses. The rhythmic crashing of the waves in the distance was like a war drum in his ears… Something in the recesses of his mind gnawed at what he heard. When was the last time he had heard waves?

It was too different. Everything together painted a picture that made his mind churn. Everything felt too different, too… *wrong*. Or perhaps it felt right in a twisted way instead? Jon struggled to say, for the line between right and wrong was oft impossibly thin.

He cautiously cracked his eyes open and was greeted by worn-down wooden rafters. He was in a bed inside a small, cosy room, and his clothes and armour were nowhere to be seen. Longclaw's sheath was also missing. Judging by the rough chair, small wooden table in the corner, and weather-worn door, it seemed to be some sort of hut or old cottage that the smallfolk would live in.

On the upside, his limbs were in good order, and he was alive if stripped down to his smallclothes. No, these were not his smallclothes, made from roughspun smallfolk used, judging by the uncomfortable way the fabric made him itch.

On the downside, no matter how much it wished it was so, the giant ball of fire that had shattered the world was not a dream. Two purple bruises on his knees, one on his ribs where he had been forced to shove himself in the fishing hole, were a painful memento he couldn't ignore.

How had the world not ended? Jon had seen the impact of a small, man-sized falling star in the Wolfswood before, overturning the earth in one big crater and toppling down all trees within a hundred yards and burning them to cinders.

But a falling star ten times the size of the Frostfangs that stretched for hundreds of miles? That would break the world.

Evidently, it hadn't. Jon Snow was alive, and the world seemed fine. A streak of light too bright to be sunlight seeped through the cover that covered the window. Had the Long Night passed already? It only confused him more.

His confusion only grew as the door creaked open.

“I see you have awoken, m’lord,” a rough voice greeted him. A distant part of his mind identified the slight drawling accent as something he had heard from the knights and men-at-arms from the Crownlands.

Jon blinked. He then rubbed his eyes again at the queer sight before him. The craggy face worn by the elements was expected, as was the slight hunch in his back, roughspun brown tunic, or the old, patchwork boots that seemed to have been stitched so many times but still somehow held together. No, what surprised him was the pale skin, the mane of silver-gold hair, and the dull amethyst eyes.

A smallfolk man, a fisherman by the smell of him, that looked anywhere between forty and sixty and with the looks of Old Valyria to boot. And he had recognised him as a nobleman despite the lack of heraldry—probably because of his armour, arms, or clothes.

“Your name, my good man?” Jon spoke slowly, relishing the hoarse sound of his voice. It made him feel strangely alive.

“Aethan of Ashcove, m’lord, a fisherman.” He bowed deeply. “It was I who fished you out of the water.”

Aethan spoke the common tongue. This had to be Dragonstone or Driftmark or maybe Claw Isle, where the Dragonlords and their noble retainers had spread their seed over the centuries. How did Jon get all the way from the Bay of Ice to Blackwater Bay?

“I am very grateful, Aethan of Ashcove,” Jon offered, earning himself a beaming smile. “I take this Ashcove is on… Driftmark?”

“Dragonstone, m’lord, nestled on the eastern end of the Dragonmont,” Aethan helpfully explained.

“Ah, yes,” Jon murmured, but he inwardly rejoiced. Dragonstone was the seat of Stannis. He would be safe here if he played his cards right. A practical part of him regretted not wearing his surcoat today, which would make proving his identity much harder. “But if you fished me out of the water, I must inquire where my effects are.”

“I dried your armour and scrubbed it clean, so it won’t rust, m’lord.” The fisherman wrung his hands nervously. “I’ve hung your fur cloak to dry outside—but the saltwater has ruined it, I can say. A thousand apologies. I have your pouch here, and the rest of the garments are undamaged.”

Aethan hastily handed over Jon’s purse, still as heavy as he remembered. Jon untied it and counted the coins inside, anyway. To his surprise, the man had not taken even a penny. Jon fished out three silver stags with the face of Conciliator and tossed them as the fisherman deftly caught them.

“Thank you, m’lord.” He bowed deeply. “Thank you—your generosity knows no bounds—”

“For your troubles, my good man,” Jon interrupted with a frown. Was Stannis so heavy-handed at the smallfolk that they’d be scared even of offending a drifting ‘nobleman’ found in the sea? Or perhaps not Stannis, but whatever steward he had left behind. “Did you happen to see my sword?”

The purple eyes were suddenly filled with fear.

“It might be in the sea, m’lord,” Aethan bowed even deeper, shivering. “Thousand apologies. I swear. I swear it by the Father—I saw no sword. Please, m’lord, I’m no thief, don’t punish me—”

“It is of no trouble,” Jon reassured calmly, trying not to think of the possibility of Longclaw being lost in the Bay of Ice. The fisherman certainly wasn’t lying, or if he was, his skills in deception were far better than everyone else Jon had encountered. His trusty sword had last been in his grip when he lost consciousness, so he refused to give up hope just yet. “I will have you show me where you found me.”

The relief on the fisherman’s face was visible. Jon really needed to talk to Stannis about the steward left in charge of Dragonstone. It did not bode well if whoever was in charge in the royal demesne was mistreating the smallfolk so brazenly…

“Thank you, m’lord.”

“I really need to return to King Stannis,” Jon murmured. Was the Wall still standing after that cataclysm? Had the Others even survived? So many questions, and a scared fisherman from Dragonstone could hardly give him any answers.

“King Stannis?” Aethan echoed, his brow creased in confusion. “But m’lord—His Grace Viserys sits on the Iron Throne and rules the Seven Kingdoms.”

The sheer honesty in his voice gave Jon pause. Jon Snow had heard too many lies, too many boasts, and he knew this was no lie. The man genuinely believed his words, for they were spoken with the same tone one would proclaim water was wet. Viserys. How long had he been knocked out? The only Viserys he knew was the long-dead son of the Mad King. Had a new one come around and displaced Stannis?

“I must have hit my head too hard,” Jon offered, but the shakiness in his voice betrayed his confusion.

“Happens to those who nearly drown,” the fisherman offered slightly less fearfully. “Their wits are slow and muddied for some time.”

“Of course, of course.” His mind, however, felt as sharp as a well-honed sword if still clouded with confusion. He needed to know more. Caution had served him well before, and it would serve him well now. He was suddenly glad he hadn’t taken his surcoat. If this King Viserys were an enemy of Stannis, he would be in quite a predicament. “Did you tell of my presence here to anyone?”

“Nay, m’lord.” It didn’t take long to figure out why. Fear. The fear that smallfolk felt from offending those of higher birth. Perhaps he was eager for a reward for saving him, too. A reward that he would never see if he reported to the local steward or castellan.

Jon shrugged off the rough cover and carefully stepped out of the bed.

Even the wooden planks on the floor felt warm under his bare feet. How much time had passed? Had winter finally come to an end?

The brightness outside made him squint. It took him half a minute to get used to the light, but the sun wasn’t nearly as bright as the falling star. He had left the house and was on a small hill overlooking a rocky shore. His clothes and armour were hung on a few wooden racks to the side. It was warm. The

wind was warm, like the caress of a long-lost lover. The air was hot. He eventually caught himself staring at the sky. It was such a pretty shade of azure that Jon couldn't tear his eyes off the sight.

Until a big winged shadow entered his vision, and Jon froze. It was at least ten times bigger than any bird had the right to be, elongated in a serpentine manner unbefitting of any flying beast he knew. It had scales instead of feathers, glinting like a ruby in the sunlight.

He could only blink numbly as an earth-shaking roar shook the world, and another, bigger figure, as black as sin, crashed into the smaller one and started spewing dark green fire as it tore at its flesh.

Dragons. These could only be dragons.

"Pah!" Aethan spat beside him, looking wholly unconcerned about the sight above as if he had seen it hundreds of times before. "The Cannibal is at it again. Thought Brightscale would've lasted longer."

King Viserys. Dragons. It shouldn't have been possible. A dream? No, Jon Snow knew dreams, and they were never that real. A part of Jon Snow was shaking with fear, but something deep inside him, a part that he never knew existed, stirred with excitement.

And then, he remembered the great ball of fire. It didn't matter, did it? The world would end.

"Aethan," Jon began. "My wits are a tad muddled still, so I must ask. What year is it?"

The fisherman blinked at Jon with confusion but eventually said, "Today is the first day of the Year 129 since the Dragon conquered the kingdoms, m'lord."

Author's Endnote: Boom. Here's me tossing Jon into the Dance Era. A loosely told backstory of what happened, giving hints about what sort of man Jon Snow has grown into. A second reminder that I'll stick as closely to Fire and Blood Canon as possible; the only thing I have considered changing is Baela/Rhaena's ages to +2 (merely can have Rhea Royce die two years earlier, etc., producing no other outstanding ripples on the timeline) after I realised that… Daemon's daughters are too damn young!

Also, our first OC - Aethan.