Tywin had been rather surprised to be summoned to the Tower of the Hand later that day and more than a little annoyed. It had been his domain for nearly twenty years, the place from which he made a thousand decisions for the realm while Aerys busied himself with dreaming up ludicrous ideas and failing to produce more than two children. As he made his way up to his old solar, dozens of memories flittered through his mind, most of which he still took pride in. The kingdoms had prospered under him, and they would have again, had Robert seen sense and named him his Hand. Jon Arryn was a competent lord, but he was too indulgent, Tywin knew, and Eddard Stark had likely been little different.

"If some good is going to come of this nightmarish week, Robert will be dead soon and Myrcella, as queen, will be able to lean on my experience," he thought to himself. *"From what I've seen, she might well possess the wisdom to do as well."*

He stared coldly at the guards standing outside the door to the solar, and they let him in without a word. Entering quietly, he turned and saw Eddard Stark behind his old desk, looking older and wearier than he should have, while Myrcella frantically looked through numerous documents, the tension in her almost palpable; it was so clear.

"Nearly two million to the Iron Bank, a million to the Faith, tens of thousands to the Tyrells, and tens of thousands more to...Tyroshi lenders, not to mention three million to my grandfather...what the fuck were any of them thinking?!" Myrcella asked, sounding completely overwhelmed.

"Oh dear," Tywin sighed, realizing at once why his granddaughter had sent for him.

"That's about the long and short of it," Ned sighed, and Tywin narrowed his eyes at the younger man, unsure if that was meant to be a stag joke or not.

"I'll have to cut the crown's expenses down to nothing," Myrcella declared, not even hearing him.

"Myrcella," Tywin said softly.

"I can't make the first thing I do as queen raising taxes," Myrcella fretted.

"Myrcella," Tywin tried again.

"I don't even have any neighboring powers I could go to war with and sack," Myrcella hissed.

"Myrcella!" Tywin shouted, and she whipped around, staring up at him in shock. "Breathe."

"Grandfather, I…" Myrcella went to say.

"Take a breath," Tywin repeated, speaking more softly than he probably had since Joanna died. "You are not going to fix nearly two decades of misrule in an afternoon. Calm down."

Ned looked decidedly uncomfortable at that but said nothing as Myrcella took her grandfather's advice.

“It’s so much,” the young blonde breathed. “How in the world did everyone just let it get this bad?”

“Robert was never an easy man to tell no,” Ned replied, “but I must admit that I was shocked by the fact that Jon let the state of things get like this.”

“He couldn’t reign him in,” Tywin said coldly, “and Baelish did everything in his power to indulge him. I knew of his debt to me, of course, and figured it was a worthwhile investment, given everything, but…”

“That’s only half of it,” Myrcella muttered. “I’d just skip the coronation if I could, but instead, I’m just going to have to see how little I can get away with spending on…”

“No, you’re not,” Tywin said.

“Grandfather…” Myrcella went to say.

“Your grandfather’s right,” Ned piped up. “You don’t want the lords to learn just how indebted the crown is, and, loath as I am to admit it, most of them will expect a degree of southern pageantry here.”

“Never show weakness if you can avoid it,” Tywin reiterated. “I will cover the costs of your coronation.”

“I already owe you so much,” Myrcella muttered.

“This will be a gift,” Tywin said.

“I swear I will repay everything that I owe,” Myrcella sighed. “I might be a Baratheon, but I’m a Lannister too.”

Tywin noticed Ned stiffen at that just a little and filed away the odd reaction for later.

“In the meantime, I am going to have a very frank conversation with Lord Bae…” Myrcella went to say, her eyes darkening, only to freeze and look at them both contemplatively. “Baelish.”

“What about him?” Tywin asked.

“I am not exactly fond of the man, your Grace, but I must admit that he has actually done adequate work in his role as Master of Coin,” Ned murmured, earning an incredulous look from Tywin. “The crown’s revenues have increased dramatically during his tenure from what I’ve seen. Your most prudent course of action would be to reduce your expenses after the coronation and work out a plan to repay everything from there.”

“I’ll have to,” Myrcella nodded, looking down at the document in her hands again. “I’ve always thought that Petyr Baelish was about the least trustworthy-looking man in the world. I know I can’t condemn him for that, but it’s always been my opinion of him. For the better part of two decades my father has spent coin like a drunken sailor convinced he was the Lord of Casterly Rock, and Baelish has facilitated that the entire time he’s been here.

What do you think the chances are, given these ridiculous expenses, that he could have let the odd thousand gold dragons go missing?"

"You think he might have been stealing from Robert?" Ned asked. "That's a significant accusation."

"Which is why I'm not making it," Myrcella said. "I'm simply saying that, looking over just how much has been spent over the past decade in particular, that it would have been incredibly easy for the man responsible for recording those expenses to inflate them slightly for his own benefit. If he hasn't been, then I'll decide on whether or not to keep him in his position based on everything he did and not just my anger over the debt that was accrued at my father's insistence, but if he has been stealing from the crown, then I could hang him, seize his assets, and use them to pay down some of this."

"Indeed," Tywin murmured, giving her a slight, approving smile.

"I want you two to work together on this," Myrcella said, standing up. "I won't hang an innocent man, but if I can make a guilty one help me in death, I'm more than happy to."

"If he has done anything warranting such a punishment, then yes, that would be more than appropriate," Ned replied, looking at her in surprise.

"In the meantime, I'm going to go through all of this and learn what I can of the state of the realm," Myrcella said, gathering together the numerous documents Ned had given her.

"Myrcella, there are a number of other things we should discuss," Tywin murmured. "Who you take as your husband, for example, will…"

"We'll discuss that come the morrow," Myrcella said, cutting him off. "I want to read through everything here and get some basic understanding of the realm I'm to rule before I start going over anything in depth. Thank you...for calming me down."

"You're already taking your responsibilities seriously, which is a very good sign," Tywin replied approvingly. "Perhaps if we broke our fast tomorrow we could have that discussion then."

"That would work," Myrcella nodded. "Good day, both of you."

With that, she left, and Ned quickly buried his face in his hands.

"Robert's named me Lord Regent," he said, and Tywin's eyes narrowed.

"I see," he replied.

"She's already said she wants to keep me on as Hand, at least for a while, but she will want you here as well," Ned continued. "My lord, we might end up working together for some time."

"Then best we get started on Baelish now," Tywin replied. "What's your basic opinion of him? I know that he and your wife knew each other when they were children."

“To be perfectly honest, I wouldn’t trust the man as far as my youngest could throw him, but he does seem competent,” Ned said.

“I’ll start our inquiry by finding out who owes him,” Tywin murmured. “It would be unwise to proceed at all without knowing that.”

“I could also have some of my men take a subtle look around his brothels,” Ned said, and Tywin shook his head.

“Your men are all Northerners and will be caught the moment they open their mouths,” he replied. “I’ll have a couple of my least remarkable servants take care of that once we determine who they should avoid. In the meantime, you’re still the Lord Hand, and the best thing you could do would be to call a small council meeting and assure those who show up that little is to change in the coming weeks.”

“And see who doesn’t,” Ned nodded.

“I know that Stannis left for Dragonstone moons ago, but Renly was still around the city the last I checked, and I’d like to see if he still is,” Tywin murmured.

“What do you suspect of him?” Ned asked.

“Little more than I suspect of most,” Tywin replied, “but given that the only examples we have throughout history of female heirs to the throne are a woman who never sat it and one who did for six moons, I plan to keep as close an eye as I can on my granddaughter’s uncles.”

“They’d not turn on Robert’s blood,” Ned declared. *“And so long as neither of them knows that Myrcella isn’t, that should be fine.”*

He knew that Stannis had been investigating that matter with Jon Arryn and that he suspected what Ned had become all but certain of, but without proof or allies, he doubted that the taciturn man would do anything. At the very least, he certainly hoped that he wouldn’t.

*****

“She wants me to be her husband,” Jon thought to himself as he walked through the hall of the Red Keep. *“I keep waiting to wake up.”*

It was ludicrous, he knew, something so utterly impossible that it had to be a lie, and yet, it seemed it wasn’t. Myrcella Baratheon, princess and heir to the throne, wanted him by her side for all her days, and he couldn’t even begin to wrap his mind around it. He knew that she desired him, and he’d taken her together with Sansa countless times, but that had always seemed like a bit of forbidden fun, something that he’d either remember fondly at the Wall or else be killed for if they were caught. The idea of actually being allowed to have her openly never occurred to him for a moment, but as he considered it then, he knew that he wanted it more than anything. By chance, he happened to, as he turned around a corner, spot Ser Mandon Moore and he realized that he’d stumbled over to her chambers.

“Is the princess in, Ser?” he asked.

“Not to visitors,” Ser Mandon replied, his voice flat.

“Could you tell her that I’d like to offer my condolences?” Jon asked. “If she doesn’t want to see me, I’ll go, of course.”

Ser Mandon gritted his teeth but simply nodded and turned to open the door a crack.

“Jon Snow is here, Princess,” he said, and a moment later, she opened the door further, having rushed over.

“Jon,” Myrcella smiled, and he winced when he saw how exhausted she looked.

“Princess, I...I know I did earlier, but I just wanted to say again how sorry I am,” Jon said weakly, and she nodded.

“Come in,” Myrcella murmured, earning a look of concern from Ser Mandon. “Leave the door open a bit, Ser Mandon. If anyone questions Jon’s presence, you can say honestly that you kept an eye on us.”

“Understood, Princess,” the knight replied, watching Jon enter her chambers.

“I guess we’ll have to speak vaguely,” he whispered as they sat down and she shook her head.

“Ser Mandon won’t repeat anything he might hear here,” Myrcella replied. “Now, what is this really about?”

“Sansa...kind of lost her temper earlier and…” Jon went to say, sighing when her green eyes hardened.

“I’d hoped to have that particular conversation with you first,” Myrcella muttered peevishly.

“Please don’t be too angry with her,” Jon said. “I was preparing for my...well, to leave, and…”

“I have a dozen things to be angrier at than Sansa failing to keep her mouth shut,” Myrcella sighed. When Jon cocked an eyebrow, she added, “Let’s just say I’m already feeling the weight of my crown and I’m not even wearing the damn thing yet.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “If I came at a bad time, I could…”

“My brothers are dead, and my father’s...dying and I’m inheriting a mess you can’t fathom,” Myrcella whispered, her eyes growing wet. “I don’t think there could have been a good time.”

“I’m so sorry,” Jon whispered, pulling her in for a hug, and she sniffled as she buried her face in the crook of his neck. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Promise me that I’ve heard the last of you taking the black,” Myrcella muttered, pulling back and glaring at him.

“If...if you truly want me to stay, then...I’d be a fool not to,” Jon replied, giving her the slightest smile as he looked at her hopefully. “Will I not just make things more difficult for you, though?’

“No, you won’t,” Myrcella sighed. “For reasons we’ll go over on the morrow, you will, if anything, make things easier for me.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said, furrowing his brow.

“For one thing, just coming here and giving me a break from my reading has made me feel better,” Myrcella replied, smiling slightly. When he still looked at her questioningly, she added, “We will speak again tomorrow, Jon, but for the moment, I need to focus on learning everything I need to of the realm. I...I was never meant to be queen, and I was taught virtually nothing of what ruling the kingdoms entails. Neither was Joffrey, that I know of, but that’s another matter entirely. At the moment, I’m stuck reading through everything that the lords of the Small Council felt important enough to write down over the past few years and hoping that it all just sort of sinks in before my eyes cross. Ugh, my head is already sore.”

“That much I could help with,” Jon murmured, gesturing for her to turn around.

She gave him a querying look before shrugging and doing so, and as he reached forward and started rubbing her temples, she gasped.

“Prin…” Ser Mandon went to ask, looking in and glaring at Jon, who froze.

“Not a word, Ser Mandon,” Myrcella commanded, sighing happily as he started massaging her head again. “Oh, that feels marvelous.”

“I thought it might help,” Jon smiled, and she nodded.

“It is,” Myrcella replied. “Perhaps you could stay and help me as I read.”

“If you’d like,” Jon smiled.

“If you’re sure, Princess,” Ser Mandon said.

“I would and I am,” Myrcella replied. “Ser Mandon, fetch me the scrolls on the table there. I’ll read them as Jon does his best to distract me.”

The knight sighed and entered her chambers, figuring that, so long as he was there, no one could really claim that anything improper had happened, though as he did so, he knew that this was something he’d not be sharing with Ser Jaime or the queen. As it stood, of course, he was sure that they were in no position to find out about it.

*****

“I keep waiting to wake up,” Cersei said morosely, staring down at her cup of wine. “Tell me it’s all a terrible dream, Jaime.”

“Cersei,” Jaime breathed, his heart breaking again as he saw how broken his sister looked, sitting on the edge of her bed, her eyes bloodshot from crying.

“Tell me the boys...tell me our boys aren’t really…” Cersei tried to say, only for her throat to tighten as she started to sob again.

He was there in an instant, hugging her woman he loved most in all the world. She buried her face in his shoulder, her whole body shaking as she poured out her anguish and he held her, trying to keep himself as composed as he could as her heart twisted. He’d not felt loss quite like this since their mother had died when they were children, nor had he felt such guilt since he learned what happened to Princess Elia and her children. He should have gone with them, he knew; he should have kept his sons safe while Robert got himself killed with his drunken stupidity.

“You shouldn’t have stopped me!” Cersei hissed, rage filling her eyes as she pulled back. “I could strangle that idiot with my bare hands.”

“He’ll die more slowly like this,” Jaime assured her, just as angry with Robert. “Gut wounds are among the worst; I’ve heard seasoned warriors beg for their mothers as they died slowly from things like that.”

Cersei couldn’t even bring herself to enjoy that, knowing the part she’d played in what had happened. She’d never admit it, and even in the safety of her own mind, she’d shifted blame to Robert, but deep down, she knew that she’d been the one who had Lancel get him drunk in the hopes he’d get himself killed on the hunt. She’d not known that anything like this would happen and hadn’t even known that he’d taken her sons along until she returned, but she’d still used that hunting trip as a means of getting rid of her husband, and both her sons had died because of it.

“Myrcella is going to need us,” Jaime whispered, and she froze.

“Oh, gods,” Cersei breathed. “That poor girl, I…”

She closed her eyes and took a gulp of wine, trying to chase away the guilt she felt at having all but abandoned her daughter in what had to be the worst moment of her life.

“She’s not alone,” Jaime said soothingly, rubbing her back. “She has Father and Tyrion and…”

“Stop talking; you’re making it worse,” Cersei muttered, standing up. “Myrcella will be queen the moment that fat pig dies. She is going to need us, all of us. Once Robert’s gone, we’ll remove Ned Stark as Hand and go from there. You should be Hand of the King, Jaime.”

“Father should probably take that on if he’s willing,” Jaime murmured.

“You are more than capable, my love,” Cersei whispered.

“I am, but he’s experienced,” Jaime replied. “Would you like me to check on her?”

“Why?” Cersei asked, her eyes narrowing, and he sighed.

“She’s mourning Robert too, Cersei, and you hate him more intensely at the moment than you’ve hated anyone in all your life,” Jaime replied. “I wouldn’t want you two to get into an argument at a time when you’re both in so much pain.”

Cersei wanted to argue that she could keep silent if the subject came up, but even she knew that was a lie. The simple fact was that she wanted to claw Robert’s eyes out just then, and while she hated to admit it, her brother was right that she’d probably get into an argument with Myrcella just then if she mentioned him. It didn’t help that the cup of wine in her hand was far from her first of the day and would not be her last.

“I can’t just stay away from her,” she sighed.

“No, but I could say that you fell asleep,” Jaime replied.

“No, I should see her,” Cersei sighed. “If the subject of...that man comes up, just help steer us both away from it.”

“If you insist,” Jaime nodded, following her out.

They made their way to Myrcella’s chambers, and both of them furrowed their brows when they saw that Ser Mandon wasn’t standing outside. They could hear voices coming from within, though, and so Jaime knocked, stepping back when he heard everyone inside go silent.

“Ser Jaime,” the other knight nodded as he opened the door a crack. “My queen.”

“Mother?” Myrcella asked, and as the door was pulled open more, they both spotted Jon Snow sitting within.

“What is Ned Stark’s bastard doing here?” Cersei asked tersely, earning a glare from her daughter.

“Jon came to offer his condolences, and we got to speaking,” Myrcella replied. “Jon, I’ll send for you on the morrow.”

“Alright,” Jon nodded, sounding confused. He took that dismissal for what it was, though, and quickly left as Myrcella gestured for her mother and uncle to enter.

“Ser Mandon, guard the door,” she commanded, and the knight nodded as he left.

“It is inappropriate for you to be…” Cersei went to say.

“Alone in the company of a young man, I know,” Myrcella sighed. “That’s why I had Ser Mandon join us. I’m so sorry, Mother.”

Cersei hugged her, clenching her eyes shut as she breathed in the scent of her last living child.

“You’re going over old council reports?” Jaime asked.

“I will be queen soon enough,” Myrcella replied. “It behooves me to learn all that I can.”

“There will be time for that, my dove,” Cersei whispered. “You’ve lost your brothers, and you should take time to grieve.”

“The realm won’t sit still as I do,” Myrcella replied, choosing not to mention her father. “It’s also helping to have something else to focus on. The coming days are going to be...difficult.”

“Luckily Father is already here,” Cersei said. “You’ll be able to learn from him.”

“I’ve already begun speaking with him about the kingdoms,” Myrcella nodded.

“Does that mean that you intend to put him on your council?” Jaime asked. “He served as Hand of the King for many years and…”

“I’ll be keeping Lord Eddard as my Hand for the time being,” Myrcella replied. “Father has named him Lord Regent and…”

“He what?!” Cersei growled. “That is ridiculous; Eddard Stark is not…”

“He’s perfectly competent, and he will serve me well,” Myrcella replied.

“You don’t need to keep him,” Cersei glared. “Whatever Robert has said, it will be worthless once he’s…”

“Mother, I don’t want to fight with you, but I’d ask you to remember that I’m losing my father as well as my brothers,” Myrcella said, her jaw quivering as she did.

“That’s...probably best avoided,” Jaime piped up, giving Cersei a warning look.

“Lord Eddard is the least of my troubles at the moment,” Myrcella muttered. “He won’t be the first one on the council I replace, that’s for certain.”

“Selmy should probably go,” Cersei hissed.

“What?” Myrcella asked, blinking at her in confusion.

“He’s old,” Cersei said as Jaime went to speak. “He was there on that hunt and failed to save...failed to save…”

“Ser Barristan is one of the most capable knights in the kingdoms, Mother,” Myrcella replied. “He cannot be blamed for failing to talk Father out of trying to spear that boar. No one ever talked him out of anything, as it turned out.”

“Your uncle would serve well as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard,” Cersei argued.

“I’m not getting rid of Ser Barristan,” Myrcella sighed, shaking her head. “I will demand a full inquiry as to what happened on that hunting trip and how everything went so wrong. You, Uncle Jaime, will lead that. I would also like to know, in your opinion, who the least capable man among the Kingsguard is.”

Jaime blinked at her for a moment before saying, “He is a capable warrior, but out of all of us, it would likely be Ser Boros.”

“I see,” Myrcella nodded. “I would ask that neither of you interrupt Lord Eddard or Grandfather just now, as I have them working on something of great importance.”

“You tasked Father and Ned Stark with working together?” Jaime asked.

“I am queen in all but name,” Myrcella replied simply. “I want a full report on that hunting trip as soon as you can manage it. For now, though, I would like to get back to all of this.”

“Of course,” Cersei said, staring down at her daughter in numb surprise. As they left her chambers, the queen waited until they were out of earshot before turning to Jaime and hissing, “Why did you tell her that?”

“She asked, and I answered,” Jaime replied. “She seems...to be coping well.”

“She’s thrown herself into ruling,” Cersei muttered. “Why is she insisting on keeping that man around?”

“She’s friends with his daughter,” Jaime whispered. “Perhaps she’s just looking for some sort of stability at the moment.”

“She has us,” Cersei scowled.

“Cersei, Robert’s not even gone yet,” Jaime whispered in her ear. “Let’s wait a little while to try to push for anything.”

Cersei sighed and walked back to her chambers, hoping that, with enough wine, she could forget everything, at least for a while.

*****

Word came early the next day that Robert had died in the night, and so his body was brought to the Great Sept of Baelor to lie next to those of his sons. As Tywin entered Myrcella’s chambers near to noon, he found his granddaughter seated, her eyes puffy and bloodshot as she looked out the window toward the Sept of Baelor.

“The bells will sound all day,” she murmured.

“A fitting tribute for three members of the royal family,” Tywin said. “Lord Eddard is handling the funeral arrangements.”

“Good,” Myrcella sighed. “I...I can’t...”

“We could speak another time,” Tywin offered, and she shook her head.

“No,” Myrcella replied. “As I told Mother and Uncle Jaime last night, the world won’t stop because I’m grieving, and besides, it actually helps to focus on other things.”

“That was what I found when your grandmother died,” Tywin murmured, and she looked at him in surprise.

“I don’t think you’ve ever mentioned her before,” Myrcella said softly, and his green eyes grew colder.

“I seldom do,” Tywin replied. “Renly appears to have left the city.”

“What?” Myrcella asked. “That doesn’t make sense. I could hardly blame him for what happened.”

“It bodes ill,” Tywin said. “Your uncle is charismatic and well-liked, and if he tried to rebel against you…”

“I am King Robert’s daughter,” Myrcella said, her eyes narrowing. “What justification could he possibly have to move against me?”

“No woman has sat on the Iron Throne since Rhaenyra Targaryen,” Tywin replied, “and even before her, when Rhaenys Targaryen stood as the heir to the throne, she was replaced with her uncle. Mace Tyrell’s third son has served as his squire for years now, and those ties could make him dangerous.”

“He has a daughter,” Myrcella murmured, tapping her fingers on the armrest of her chair.

“Summon him formally, him and Stannis,” Tywin advised. “All the lords of the realm will swear fealty to you soon, but you should start with your uncles. You are queen, Myrcella, but you are the second monarch of your line, and with the dynasty being so young and you being a woman, your position is weaker than any of us would like. The easiest way to strengthen that position would be by wedding a man from a family that could help you.”

“Yes,” Myrcella smiled as a sudden thought occurred to her. “Yes, that will help.”

Tywin regarded her curiously, saying, “You have someone in mind.”

“I do,” Myrcella replied. “I’m going to legitimize Jon Snow and…”

“What?” Tywin hissed. “Myrcella…”

“Grandfather…” Myrcella went to say.

“You already have Ned Stark’s loyalty, and all the lords of the North combined couldn’t field as many men as some of the more powerful lords,” Tywin lectured. “Even beyond that, though, to take a bastard as your consort would…”

“He’s Rhaegar and Lyanna’s son,” Myrcella said, and he froze, blinking in confusion.

“What?” Tywin asked.

“Lord Eddard found her bleeding out in her birthing bed,” Myrcella explained. “He claimed the boy as his own to save his life and…”

“That is treason of the highest order,” Tywin said.

“I would forgive it even if I agreed,” Myrcella replied, her eyes narrowing, “and in this case, that *treason* is going to serve us well. Uncle Renly might find allies in the Reach, where he is well liked, but none of them would move against a Targaryen for him, and as for Uncle Stannis, his greatest allies are all in the Crownlands. By legitimizing and wedding him, I will bring the two sides of that old conflict together, and I’ll also deprive my uncles of their most likely allies in any treason they might plot. I would be left with the Westerlands, the North; through the North, the Riverlands and potentially the Vale, and Jon, by his blood, would help secure the loyalty of the Crownlands and the Reach. My uncles would be left with, perhaps, the Stormlands, and while Dorne will remain unhappy with us, I doubt they’d side with another Baratheon against me.”

Tywin just stared at her for a moment, and she forced herself to remain still, projecting greater confidence than she felt in that moment. She was the queen, and there was nothing her grandfather could want to do to Jon or the Starks that she could not overrule him on, but he was also one of the most powerful men in Westeros and someone who had been wielding power to one degree or another for decades, and as much as she felt certain in the benefits of what she wanted to do, part of her worried that he was about to point out some flaw that she hadn’t thought of.

“How many people know about this?” Tywin asked.

“Just Lord Eddard and myself, as far as I know,” Myrcella replied. “Even Jon doesn’t know yet.”

“The entire realm has believed close to two decades that Rhaegar Targaryen abducted and raped Lyanna Stark, sparking the rebellion that brought the house of the dragon low,” Tywin said.

“That part isn’t actually true,” Myrcella murmured. When he cocked an eyebrow, she added, “When Lord Eddard found her, she said that he didn’t rape her. Those two ran off in a fit of stupidity, and by the time they realized that there had been horrific consequences from that, it was too late to stop anything.”

“Gods be good,” Tywin muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Why did he tell you?”

“I asked who Jon’s mother was, saying that I wanted to...wanted to wed him, and from what I said, he came to believe I was with child,” Myrcella went to say, shrinking as her

grandfather's eyes narrowed more with her every word. "I'm not, and he and I haven't...there is no scandal to be had here...but...I like him, I really do…"

"So everything you told me just now was a justification you came up with after the fact," Tywin said flatly.

"When I first went to Lord Eddard, I thought I was inheriting seven stable, prosperous kingdoms," Myrcella scowled. "I thought I could afford to make one selfish decision for myself. Instead, I'm up to my eyes in debt, you think my uncles are plotting against me, my mother's already plotting to use my position for her benefit, and I...it's not important. Do you think my justifications are good at least?"

Tywin took a deep breath and let it go as he sat down. "There are several lords in Westeros who will be deeply pleased by the idea of you wedding a Targaryen, and those who would object the loudest are Northerners and you uncles, and the former group would be alright with this particular one. Lord Tarly is the most capable military commander in the Reach, and he also, I imagine, remains a fervent loyalist."

"He's the one who dealt Father his only defeat," Myrcella nodded.

"If he refuses to move against you, Mace Tyrell would likely see that doing so would be madness," Tywin continued.

"And if he didn't, I could always replace them with the Tarlys," Myrcella shrugged. "I could also offer Ser Loras a position in the Kingsguard. Someone is going to have to be blamed for that calamity in the woods, and according to Uncle Jaime, Ser Boros, who was with them, is the least capable of my guards. If I could relieve him of his duty, I could replace him with Lord Mace's son. That would keep him in line, and so far, we have no actual reason to think that the Tyrells are plotting against us."

"He's a capable knight, by most accounts, if a bit young," Tywin mused. "What did Cersei ask of you?"

"She wants me to dismiss Ser Barristan so Uncle Jaime can take his place as Lord Commander," Myrcella replied, and Tywin rolled his eyes. "I said no."

"Good," he muttered. "If anyone should have their white cloak removed…"

"Let's not go there at the moment," Myrcella sighed. "Did you find anything about the matter we discussed yesterday?"

"I spoke with Pycelle," Tywin replied quietly. "Janos Slynt is Baelish's man through and through. Corrupt as can be, he's been selling positions and promotions within the City Watch for years. Jon Arryn learned of it and brought it to your father, but Baelish convinced him that his successor could be even worse, and he listened."

"So the City Watch is held by a man in debt to him," Myrcella murmured. "That's more than a little disconcerting. I can't imagine what state it's in if the man commanding it has been promoting people for coin rather than ability."

“It will need to be reformed, very likely,” Tywin said. “We’ll need to remove Slynt and replace him with someone we can trust.”

“Someone who could purge it with impunity and who has an eye for capable warriors to replace the corrupt and useless with,” Myrcella mused. “I’ll give it some thought. You’ve found nothing yet to suggest that Baelish has been stealing from us?”

“No, but the man went out of his way to elevate someone as corrupt as we suspect he is into an important position in the city,” Tywin murmured. “I would be surprised if we didn’t find something we could use against him.”

“With luck, we’ll find out that he’s squirreled a million gold dragons under one of his brothels,” Myrcella grumbled, and Tywin gave her a slight, mildly amused smile.

“We won’t be that lucky, I’m sure, but anything would help,” he replied.

“I hope you won’t mind if I prioritize the other debts first,” Myrcella said.

“The Iron Bank should be your first priority,” Tywin murmured. “I’d pay that off myself if I had that much coin just sitting around.”

“You’re covering my coronation; that will be more than enough,” Myrcella sighed. “I’ll take care of the debts as I can. I was just...a little taken aback by it all yesterday.”

“That’s understandable,” Tywin said. “I’ve been quite impressed with you since I arrived.”

“Gods, to think I called you here because of what I feared Joffrey had done,” Myrcella sighed. “That feels like it was years ago, and it was just days.”

“He did,” Tywin murmured.

“What?” Myrcella asked.

“Sandor saw him meet with Gregor before the tourney,” Tywin explained. “He didn’t hear what they said, but after what happened, he figured it out.”

“That vicious, stupid cunt,” Myrcella muttered, shaking her head.

“So, when you wrote to me because of that, was it really because you feared he could be a danger to himself and the family, or was it because of Jon?” Tywin asked.

“Honestly, it was more the former than the latter,” Myrcella replied. “I had come to care for Jon already, but the thought that Joffrey would, on a whim, try to have the son of a lord paramount killed, even a bastard, it...I came to fear that he’d be our ruin. Now it all falls to me.”

“I’m going to meet with this boy,” Tywin said, and she looked up at him in alarm.

“Wait until after he’s been told who his parents were,” Myrcella all but commanded. “He truly doesn’t know yet.”

“Ned Stark lied to everyone,” Tywin murmured. “I’m actually impressed.”

“Really?” Myrcella asked.

“I would be less so if we didn’t stand to potentially benefit from it,” Tywin replied, “but I can respect his dedication to his family. His sister was a fool, of course, as was Rhaegar.”

“Were you surprised when the news came?” Myrcella asked.

“I was,” Tywin replied honestly. “With Aerys, there were signs long before Duskendale that he just didn’t have the strength to handle everything that life would throw at him, but Rhaegar...he seemed different. I questioned it, but after what his father did to Rickard and Brandon Stark, war was inevitable and after the Trident, that was that. You are aware, of course, that this means you intend to wed a man whose brother and sister were slain in this very castle.”

Myrcella closed her eyes at that, feeling suddenly very conflicted about asking her grandfather a question she’d wondered off and on for years.

“I didn’t order it, if that’s what you’re wondering,” Tywin said, and she opened her eyes, looking at him curiously. “I didn’t forbid it either, and I sent men into this keep, knowing what men do in war, but my focus was on getting to your uncle and seeing Aerys dead.”

“Right,” Myrcella nodded. “Who was the man who killed Rhaenys Targaryen?”

“Ser Amory Lorch,” Tywin replied. “He’s an odious little man, but he has his uses.”

“I see,” Myrcella nodded. “Do you really think that wedding Jon will help me?”

“It won’t bring you coin, but it will bring you the loyalty of the lords in the Crownlands, which will end any ambitions Stannis might have,” Tywin murmured. “If it helps secure the loyalty of the Reachmen, then that would limit the men Renly could field to the Stormlanders, and that didn’t exactly work out for Lyonel Baratheon.

“I hope they both just see sense,” Myrcella sighed. “I have enough problems as it is without them causing trouble.”

“You want Jon to learn the truth first,” Tywin said. “When is that likely to happen?”

“Lord Eddard is speaking with him today,” Myrcella replied, and he nodded.

“We’ll work to spread word of who he is afterward,” Tywin said. “As I said, there will be those, particularly those who lost kin in the rebellion, who will be less than pleased by the news. If I didn’t think it would improve things with the Tarlys and certain other powerful houses in the Reach, I’d almost say you were better off keeping quiet about it.”

“I need to deprive my uncle of any potential allies he might have among them, though,” Myrcella nodded. “We’ll deal with any issues that come of it as they do. In the meantime, I

will write to Uncle Stannis, calling him to court, and put out word that I want to see Uncle Renly as well."

"How they respond, if they respond, will tell us much," Tywin nodded. "About Cersei..."

"Mother's grieving like the rest of us," Myrcella said. "I don't need help with her, if that's what you're wondering."

"I was just going to warn you that that won't be the last request you get from her," Tywin said.

"I'm sure," Myrcella sighed. "I don't expect I'll get many of them until after the funeral feast, though."

"I know she's going to have quite the reaction to learning about Jon," she thought to herself. *"Our conversation about the absolute madness she wrought in Winterfell is long overdue; though that too will have to wait a while."*

She looked out the window at that, still hearing the bells ringing through the city, and sighed.

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"Father," Jon said as he stepped into Ned's solar. "You wanted to see me?"

"I...did," Ned replied, furrowing his brow as he spotted Sansa and Arya enter with him. "I only asked for you."

"I have a pretty good idea about what this is about, and I figured that they might as well find out too," Jon said, confusing him further.

"He's been annoyingly secretive," Arya grumbled, and Sansa just looked smug, as if she was convinced that she knew something her sister didn't.

"She thinks this is about the queen," Ned realized, having figured that Myrcella would have told Sansa about her intentions toward Jon. *"Well, I would expect Jon to see them out after this anyway, so perhaps it would be best if they were here to hear it too."*

There was a time when he'd have expected Jon to tell Arya alone, but he and Sansa had grown quite close since they left Winterfell. That was something that he'd chalked up to his eldest daughter spending time away from her mother, and while he wished he knew how she was going to react to what he knew would eventually become common knowledge, that wasn't something he could let himself think about just then.

"Sit down, all of you," Ned said. "I spoke with her Grace yesterday."

"Do you mean Myrcella?" Arya asked.

"She's the queen now, Arya," Ned chided, and she nodded.

“I was just checking,” Arya replied. “I’m sorry about the king.”

“We all are,” Sansa added.

“May Robert find rest,” Ned sighed. “When I spoke to the queen, she made it clear that she wants to legitimize and wed you, Jon.”

“The three of us all know that,” Jon assured him.

“Good,” Ned nodded. “She asked about your mother as well.”

That got all their attention, and Ned took a deep breath, knowing that this next part was going to be difficult.

“She...are you finally going to tell me?” Jon asked, his eyes practically radiating his desperate hope.

“I am,” Ned replied. “To tell you who she is, I need to start with the Rebellion.”

“You did meet her during it then?” Sansa asked.

“I met her many years before that,” Ned replied. “I didn’t see her again until after it had ended. Rhaegar was dead, Aerys was dead, and I had gone off to find my sister.”

“That’s when you fought Arthur Dayne,” Arya piped up, sounding excited, and Ned sighed.

“It is,” he said. “After that fight ended, I rushed into the tower, where I found Lya alive but dying.”

“I thought you found her dead,” Jon murmured, wondering what this had to do with his mother.

“I found her close to death,” Ned said solemnly. “She explained then that we’d been wrong, that Rhaegar hadn’t abducted her or raped her…”

“What?” Jon and Sansa asked in unison.

“They’d run away together and didn’t learn about just how terrible the consequences of that had been until after my father and Brandon were murdered,” Ned replied.

“That sounds really stupid,” Arya said.

“It was unwise,” Ned nodded. “She didn’t want to wed Robert and found in Rhaegar what she was as an escape. She loved him, and she even said that they, wed before he went off to fight in the Rebellion. He was already wed, and how valid that would be, I cannot say. All I know is that she died mourning him as well as everyone else that died because of what happened. Before she did, though, she handed me a babe she’d named Aemon and begged me to keep him safe.”

“What?” Jon breathed.

“Wait, what?” Sansa asked, sounding stunned.

“So she had a son?” Arya asked. “Did he die on the road?”

“No, you idiot, he’s saying that Jon is…” Sansa went to say.

“Don’t call me an id...iot,” Arya snapped, looking over at Jon as she caught on.

“No, that...no,” he breathed.

“You’re saying that Jon’s a prince?” Arya asked.

“You’re my cousin,” Sansa breathed, smiling widely, much to Ned’s confusion.

“No, he’s our brother,” Arya snapped. “I don’t care what else he is.”

“This is true?” Jon asked, his eyes going misty. “I’m...I’m not…”

“You are my blood,” Ned said warmly, “and I have considered you my son ever since I found you in that tower. Robert would have been furious to learn about you, and after what he condoned here, I...I couldn’t trust that he wouldn’t demand your head, even with how close we were, so I named you after Jon Arryn and said you were mine, and I maintained that lie for every day of Robert’s reign, until last night when the queen unwittingly tricked me into telling her the truth.”

“She knows?” Jon asked. “Is that why she wants to wed me?”

“No, she wanted that already,” Ned replied. “She asked who your mother was, I think, as a sort of gift to you.”

“Wait, does that mean Jon’s the rightful king?” Arya asked.

“It would give him a claim, though Robert’s victory in the Rebellion made him king and thus his daughter the queen after him,” Ned replied.

“It will all be moot if they wed, though,” Sansa said, her mind reeling. “That explains the purple eyes.”

“My mother, she...what did she say about me?” Jon asked.

“She said she loved you and she wanted you kept safe,” Ned replied. “She said your name was Aemon Targaryen…”

“Like the dragonknight!” Arya exclaimed, and Jon barked out a laughing sob before pressing his fist against his mouth.

“You could have told me this,” he said. “Before we left, at least I’d have known that I needed to keep my mouth shut.”

“I wrestled with when to tell you for years,” Ned sighed. “Part of me wanted not to at all, thinking that, so long as I didn’t speak the words aloud and only myself and Howland knew, you’d be safer for it. With Robert...with Robert gone, though, and his heir not only aware of it but pleased, I am free to do so.”

“This doesn’t change anything for us,” Arya said, hugging Jon’s arm. “You’re still our brother, no matter what.”

Jon’s lips quivered as he tried to smile, and he decided to just kiss her forehead, not trusting his voice enough to speak. Sansa, meanwhile, sat there disagreeing entirely, though for very different reasons than her father or sister might have expected if they knew. Jon wasn’t her brother; he was her cousin, and that put everything they’d done together in a different light. It was still wrong, as they weren’t husband and wife, but they could have been.

“Myrcella marrying him makes more sense with who he is, but either of us actually could have if the rebellion hadn’t happened,” Sansa thought to herself. *“Could we both, though? It’s not as though no king has ever taken multiple wives before. He wouldn’t be...actually, what would his title be?”*

“I’m sorry for lying to you all these years, and any anger you might be feeling I would understand, but know that I did it to keep you and the rest of us safe,” Ned said.

“How are the others going to react to this?” Sansa asked.

“There will be decidedly mixed reactions, I’m sure,” Ned said. “None of you are to mention this to anyone else, save for the queen, until I say you can, am I clear?”

“Yes, Father,” Sansa and Arya said in unison.

“I understand,” Jon whispered, standing up. “I need to go.”

Ned nodded sadly at that, watching him rush out of the room.

“I’d suggest giving him some space,” he said as Sansa and Arya both stood up. “This was a greater shock for him than it was for you two.”

“Aye,” the redhead nodded. “Let’s not bother him until after the feast.”

“Fine,” Arya sighed, wondering why Jon seemed so upset. He was still one of them, after all. “I need to get my dancing lesson anyway.”

“I won’t keep you,” Ned said, watching her leave. “Sansa, I have to say, I’ve appreciated how much closer you and Jon have grown in the past few moons.”

“You wouldn’t if you knew why,” Sansa thought to herself. “He’s my blood; it was stupid of me to keep him at a distance as I did. Do you think Mother will be pleased or upset by this news?”

“I think your mother and I are going to have a few very long conversations in the coming weeks,” Ned said, already planning to write to her, asking her to go to the city so he could tell her in person. “I have a few things I need to take care of.”

“Right, of course,” Sansa nodded, getting up and leaving him alone.

She made her way down through the Tower of the Hand, hoping that Jon had returned to his chambers as she figured he had. She’d advised Arya to leave him alone specifically because she intended not to, and she really didn’t want what she had planned to be interrupted. Soon enough, she’d slipped into the hidden passageway that led to his bedchamber, and a couple minutes later, she’d made her way through the dark hallway and slipped inside to find him lying on his bed.

“Sansa, I really want to be alone right now,” Jon sighed, and she just shook her head.

“No, you don’t,” Sansa replied, crossing the room and earning a glare from him as he swung his legs over the bed and sat up.

“Sa…” he went to say, only to go still when she grabbed his right hand and brought it to one of her breasts.

“You know what this means, don’t you?” Sansa asked, gasping as he squeezed her supple flesh gently.

“There are still many reasons why what we’ve been doing is wrong,” Jon murmured, feeling his cock twitch in his breeches despite his mood.

“It never felt wrong,” Sansa breathed. “From the first time I felt you inside me, it only ever felt amazing. Maybe that’s why; maybe our bodies knew what we didn’t.”

“And Arya insisted we were still brother and sister,” Jon muttered, feeling his throat tighten when she cupped his cheeks and lifted his head until he was staring into her bright blue eyes.

“I still love you, Jon,” Sansa breathed. “This doesn’t change that at all; if anything…”

She leaned in and captured her lips with her own, sighing happily when he snaked his arms around her. They kissed softly, slowly, neither one feeling the need to rush at all, and as she broke the kiss to stare down at him lovingly, he let out a shuddering breath.

“I just learned that my father isn’t actually my father, my parents are both dead, and I was born of a union that caused so many deaths and so much destruction,” Jon said. “I know that neither you nor Arya feel any differently about me, knowing everything, and that means more to me than I could say, but I’m just…”

“You feel like everything’s changed and you don’t know what you’re going to do,” Sansa whispered. “Myrcella’s felt the same since she learned what happened, and I’ve tried to help her as best I could. I’ll go if you want me to, or I can lie here in your arms in silence and prove in every quiet moment that I still adore you just as much as I did before, or…”

“Or?” Jon asked as he saw her trace a finger over one of her breasts, drawing his eyes to her rather substantial cleavage.

“Or, I can get out of this and spend the next hour or so distracting you until you can’t think about Aunt Lyanna or Rhaegar, or anything else,” Sansa offered with a slight smile. “The choice is yours, and I won’t be offended or upset by whatever you choose.”

“I love you,” Jon sighed, making her heat flutter in her chest.

Part of him wanted to send her away, indulging his old habit of skulking off alone when he was upset, but the rest of him desperately wanted to cling to some part of his life that still made sense. The fact that what he went with was the affair he’d been having with his sister did more to prove that he was a Targaryen than anything his uncle had told him. He gestured for Sansa to turn around, and she did so, shivering when she felt him start to undress her. His lips found her neck a moment later, and she gasped, reaching behind her and gently scratching his scalp.

“We could...ahh...have wed,” Sansa moaned, making him freeze.

“Sansa, you know that Myrcella…” Jon went to say, and she turned around, snaking her arms around his neck and smiling at him.

“I know,” Sansa murmured, figuring she was better off waiting until she broached the subject with her dear friend before suggesting that he could potentially wed them both. “We both know that she doesn’t mind us going to bed together, though.”

“No,” Jon rumbled, pulling her dress down until he’d exposed her supple breasts, “she doesn’t.”

He craned his neck down and captured one of her pebbled pink nipples with his lips, grinning when she whimpered. She started opening his doublet, desperate to rake her hands over his smooth skin and taut muscles, and they quickly lost themselves in their passion. Working together, they undressed each other as quickly as they could, kissing and caressing the other as they worked.

“Arya’s right that you are still our brother in every way that matters, but would you be too upset if I said I’m kind of glad you aren’t?” Sansa asked, resting on her knees and staring up at him as she tossed his breeches aside, having exposed his turgid cock. “This is still wrong, but it was so much more wrong before.”

“It wouldn’t make a difference to anyone we care about if they learned of it,” Jon replied, groaning when she reached out and wrapped a hand around the base of his shaft.

“No, but it matters a little to me,” Sansa purred. “I’ve not taken my brother’s cock deep into my wet little cunt, but my cousin’s.”

“Fucking hells, Sansa,” Jon groaned, and she grinned, feeling him throb in her hand.

“I didn’t let my brother fuck me in the arse,” Sansa continued. “Instead, it was my cousin who buggered me until I screamed and soaked the bed. It’s not my brother’s cock I’m going to suck until he spurts…”

Without another word, she leaned in and wrapped her lips around his bulbous head, staring up into his eyes. Jon groaned, the wet heat of her mouth incredible as always, and he quickly reached for her head, snaking his fingers into her long red locks. Her tongue worked the underside of his shaft in ways that made his legs shake, and soon enough, he was groaning almost constantly in pleasure. His troubles seemed to slip away as he luxuriated in the heaven of Sansa’s mouth, though when she took him deep enough to hit the back of her throat and gagged, he quickly grew concerned.

Be careful,” he muttered. “I don’t want you hurting yourself.”

Sansa let his cock slip from her lips with an audible pop and looked down at his cock in annoyance.

“I was enjoying myself too much,” she said sheepishly.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“I like seeing you feel good and knowing it’s because of me,” Sansa replied, blushing slightly. “I know you understand that, given how often you lick Cella and me.”

“I do,” Jon sighed. “Sansa, you know that this is going to change things, right?”

“It doesn’t have to,” Sansa replied. “The only people whose opinions we care about will either not care or even feel better about you when they learn the truth, and as for everyone else, we’ll deal with it.”

“You truly don’t care that I’m to wed Myrcella?” Jon asked.

“That doesn’t make you any more or less forbidden than you already are,” Sansa shrugged, “and we already know she doesn’t mind sharing you with me. There are some things we’ll need to figure out still, but the king hasn’t even been buried yet. We have time, and we’ll use it. As for right now, you are still thinking, and it’s annoying, so stop.”

“Yes, my la...gods,” Jon groaned as she took him back between her pouty lips and started bobbing her head up and down again.

“Not thinking sounds pretty great right about now,” he thought to himself, closing his eyes and letting the pleasure of her touch calm him completely.

Meanwhile, in the hidden tunnel, a servant girl who had just happened to notice Sansa entering it and followed her in watched the incestuous display in shock, knowing at once that she needed to tell Lord Baelish as quickly as possible. This was just the sort of thing he paid her for, after all.