

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Axel is settling into his new role as King~

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A few days have passed since his coronation, but it all still feels so surreal to Axel. Every day he wakes up not just as a Baratheon instead of a Stone, but also as the King of the Seven fucking Kingdoms and the Protector of the goddamn Realm!

Not everything was perfect though, unfortunately. His uncle Renly was still at large and none of the ravens that his Hand has sent to the Stormlands about bringing their Lord Paramount to justice had received an answer yet. Might just be a matter of time, but it felt a little ominous to Axel despite Lord Arryn's assurances that the Stormlands would not all side with Renly against him.

Or rather, not Lord Arryn but Jon. That's what he'd been told to call his Hand with increasing frequency over the past few days. Now that Axel was King, apparently the old rules didn't apply to him anymore.

Instead of 'Lord Arryn' denoting respect like it would coming from anyone else, it denoted a distance and gap between the new King and his Hand that shouldn't exist. Basically, Axel wasn't just allowed to call him Jon, he was pretty much required to for the good of the Realm.

On top of Renly's bullshit, Axel also had issues that were closer to home. Like his Kingsguard for example. The Kingsguard were a long and storied cohort, an elite group of seven knights who were supposed to be the

greatest and strongest warriors in all of Westeros. Their duty was simple... protect the Royal Family, but most importantly the King, from all harm.

Given that three out of five members of the Royal Family had been down there in the catacombs when the wildfire had gone off, four out of seven of the Kingsguard had been with them as well. Ser Mandon Moore, Ser Boros Blount, Ser Preston Greenfield, and last but certainly not least, Ser Barristan Selmy, the Kingsguard's Lord Commander.

All four knights had perished in the same wildfire that ultimately took the lives of the King and Princes. Afterwards, though nobody could quite give Axel an explanation of why, the infamous Kingslayer Ser Jaime Lannister had also thrown himself off of the highest point of the Red Keep.

This left the Kingsguard down to just two men, Ser Arys Oakheart and Ser Meryn Trant. Axel had sparred with both knights after being crowned King and while he hadn't said it out loud... he found Ser Trant's skills quite lacking. Ser Oakheart wasn't half bad, but he also couldn't really do anything to overcome Axel's inherent advantages.

Axel could tell that neither man had been too happy to be bested by their King. However, they hadn't tried to argue with him when he assigned them to look after Queen Dowager and Princess instead of himself. Meryn for Cersei Lannister and Arys for Myrcella Baratheon.

They were better placed there anyways, because obviously Axel didn't actually need their protection.

Though it still wouldn't do to have the Kingsguard depleted for too long, at least according to Jon. That was why Axel had spent the mornings since his coronation sparring with other knights who were staying in either the

Red Keep or King's Landing at large, basically 'interviewing' to fill the five empty slots.

He didn't quite know how he was going to decide yet. But between that, making sure he prayed at the Great Sept of Baelor each day, and holding court for a couple of hours here and there with Jon at his side, Axel certainly had a far more structured schedule than he'd had back in the Eyrie.

It's as he's coming off of one such sparring session, barely having broken a sweat and frankly not even winded, that Axel finds himself approached by one of the Red Keep's staff.

"Your Majesty, a moment if it pleases you."

Raising an eyebrow, Axel stops and nods.

"Speak."

"... The Lord Hand has requested your presence in the Small Council Chambers, my King. He is with the other members of the Small Council as well."

Huh. Alright then. Jon had told Axel that his father didn't attend many meetings of the Small Council during his reign and at first he'd thought that seemed rather silly. That is, until he'd attended the first himself. Maybe it was because they were missing the Master of Laws and Master of Ships at the moment, but Axel just did not have the patience for Pycelle's stuttering and stammering, Baelish' slick wordplay, or Varys' needless obfuscations.

He didn't even think it was their fault necessarily... it was just how the three men were. Jon assured him they were the best men for their roles too, so in

the end all Axel could really do was tell Jon to handle the Small Council in his stead but call for him any time it was really important.

Like now, apparently.

“Of course, lead the way.”

The young King follows the servant through the Red Keep’s halls, girding himself for more not-so-subtle bootlicking from Lord Baelish, probing from Lord Varys, and the ramblings of a doddering old fool from Grandmaester Pycelle.

However, what he doesn’t prepare himself for... is Jon Arryn the angriest that Axel has ever seen him. Indeed, the moment Axel steps into the chamber, his Hand looks up at him with an expression of pure wrath on his face, snarling.

“Before anything else, know that this is a pack of lies, Axel. Lies and slander.”

Axel just blinks, a little confused as he moves further into the room. Baelish is the one to provide an answer to the burning question that Jon’s words provoke.

“Your uncle Renly has sent a message by Raven, your Majesty. And from the looks of it, he’s sent it to everyone in the Seven Kingdoms.”

That... well, that didn’t sound good. Axel snorts derisively as he moves and takes his chair at the head of the table.

“I suppose it’s too much to hope he confessed his crimes and begged for forgiveness and clemency in this letter?”

Varys gives him a condescending smile at that, though honestly Axel thinks the Spider's default facial expression is just like that really.

"I'm afraid not, Your Majesty. The Lord of Storm's End has... well, he has made some rather damaging accusations. About Lord Arryn... and your claim to the throne."

Axel furrows his brow and looks to Jon. Letting out a sigh, his Hand runs a hand down his face before finally explaining properly.

"Renly is claiming that he has three maids from the Red Keep who saw Robert on his deathbed after he was retrieved from the rubble. He doesn't dispute that your father survived the explosion thanks to Ser Selmy's sacrifice, but these maids of his... he claims that all of them tended to Robert and are willing to testify before the Seven Who Are One that the King was incapable of speech or writing in his final hours."

Before Axel can fully process this, Pycelle decides to speak up, unfortunately, stroking his long beard all the while.

"W-Which means... I'm afraid... t-that he claims the late King did not in fact legitimize you and name you heir. And that Lord Arryn lied in order to put you on the throne ahead of your two uncles."

Throwing the Grandmaester a glance, Axel looks back to Jon... and frowns harder. Actually, he thinks he feels something igniting in his chest at those words. Anger. Rage. Fury.

"... How dare he."

The members of the Small Council all tense up as Axel rises from his chair, hands curling into fists at his side.

“It... it would be one thing for him to come after me. But to disparage Lord Arryn’s honor like that?! After decades of leal service to the Realm? The Lord of the Vale is above reproach! He would never lie about something like this! This... this slander cannot stand!”

Funnily enough, in the face of Axel’s indignation... some of Jon’s own fury seems to fade away. Instead, the older man just looks tired as he offers a wan smile.

“Thank you, my King. Your words mean quite a lot. But this does not surprise me. He had to do something after his rather blatant attempt to have us killed on the Kingsroad failed so spectacularly. Still, this unfortunately explains why there has been no response from the Stormlands to our missives regarding their Lord’s crimes.”

Varys nods at that.

“Mm, yes. My little birds have been hunting for answers, but I’m ashamed to admit that there wasn’t enough time to find out what was going on before this letter arrived. Still, it explains quite a bit. Lord Renly, for all his treachery, is well-liked by the Lords of the Stormlands. With this lie, he has given them a reason to rally behind him and work to put him on the Iron Throne. I imagine what few dissenters there might have been have already been dealt with accordingly and more loyal men have been put in their place.”

Hmph. Just more for his uncle to answer for. Axel honestly wants to march out there right now, run down to the Stormlands, and find Renly Baratheon. Then, he’d beat the older man black and blue with his fists before taking

him into custody. He wouldn't want to stoop to kinslaying, but by the Seven it would feel good to be able to put his hands on Renly right now and demand to know why his uncle was such a traitorous bastard.

Unfortunately, he can't do that. Not without inviting more questions than he or Jon wants to answer at this point in time.

Clearing his throat, Lord Baelish speaks up.

"There's a matter of how the rest of the Seven Kingdoms will respond to this, of course. The coronation was a bit... rushed, so we haven't even received many vows of fealty by raven just yet, save for those of the Crownlands. Renly is clearly hoping to preempt the news of our young King's coronation with this letter, trying to sew discord and rebellion against the Crown by giving everyone a reason to put him on the throne instead."

Frowning, Axel grabs the back of his chair, voicing his own opinion.

"He'll be disappointed, won't he? The Storm Lords might rally behind him, but who else would come to his side?"

When the members of his Small Council, including even his Hand, all share looks at that... Axel's stomach drops. Jon had told him people wanted him as King, for fuck's sake! Why was he here if everyone, even his own family, were going to be so fucking disloyal?!

After a moment of silence, Varys speaks up first.

"Well... at the very least, I do not believe Stannis Baratheon will accept Renly's bid for the throne. Even if Renly's lies were to be believed, Stannis would be next in line for the throne. Not him. The only question will be whether Lord Stannis supports you or decides to... stay out of it."

Jon slaps his hand down on the table.

“You can count on the Vale without question at the very least, Your Majesty. As well as the Riverlands and the North besides. There isn’t a doubt in my mind that Lord Tully and Lord Stark will recognize your claim and not only bend the knee but also answer the call when they find out what Renly is trying to do!”

Petyr Baelish clears his throat at that.

“Unfortunately, that becomes a matter of time and resources. The North is far away despite the men Lord Stark could call to arms. The Riverlands is a fair distance as well. And the Vale, for all that it is my home as much as its yours Lord Arryn, does not match the number of men that the Stormlands can call upon. Especially not if the Reach joins them.”

Axel jolts at that, even as a shadow falls over Jon’s face.

“The Reach? You think House Tyrell will side with my uncle against me?”

Offering an awkward smile, Baelish shrugs.

“Well... I’d say it’s a safe bet, Your Majesty. Everyone knows of the... deep and lasting friendship between Renly Baratheon and Loras Tyrell. If the Knight of Flowers has any pull over his family at all, then they are likely to let your uncle worm his way into their good graces. Especially with these... claims of his.

At his side, Varys nods along.

“Lord Baelish speaks true, I’m afraid. It’s safest to assume that the Stormlands and Reach will join together on this. And even if nobody else joins their cause, they are the closest to King’s Landing and will have something of a head start in gathering their levies.”

Well shit. Axel frowns, thinking for a long moment.

“... What about the Iron Islands and Dorne?”

The Small Council all share looks at that, until finally a tired sounding Jon answers the question.

“They’re likely to take a ‘wait and see’ approach, no matter how craven such a decision would be. The Ironborn have long detested us so-called mainlanders and Dorne is forever the thorn in the sole of the Seven Kingdoms. They won’t support Renly at least, but they also won’t be moved to try and stop him.”

Well damn. That... tracked with what Axel knew about those two ‘Kingdoms’ he supposed. But then wasn’t there also-

“A-Ahem... there is, of course, House Lannister to be considered. Lord Tywin will almost certainly voice his support, given that his daughter and granddaughter still reside within these walls.”

For once, Pycelle’s interjection isn’t a total waste of time. Axel nods thoughtfully.

“Yes... and the Westerlands are fairly close to King’s Landing as well, aren’t they? If anyone is going to be able to reinforce us in time, it will be them.”

Admittedly, he had yet to talk with the Queen Dowager since arriving in King's Landing and being crowned King. It had only been a few days though to be fair. But even still, Cersei Lannister had been conspicuously absent whenever she might have been present.

Hell, he'd even met the Princess once by this point. Myrcella Baratheon was an incredibly quiet, shy young woman who was clearly still grieving the deaths of her father and brothers. Axel had kept their conversation brief, deducing that she was a little afraid of him for some reason and not wanting to cause her any more pain than she was already in. He'd been avoiding paying her too much attention to give her time to breathe ever since.

But Cersei... Cersei could be the key to all of this. A letter from her was sure to sway Lord Tywin far more than a letter from any of them, right?

"... I will go speak with Cersei Lannister."

A ripple of shock runs through the Small Council, eyes widening even as Jon is the one to voice their apparent concern.

"I'm not sure if that's the best idea, Your Majesty. The Queen Dowager can be... prickly at the best of times. And she and Robert had something of a contentious relationship as well. She might not appreciate a personal touch from you."

Frowning, Axel shakes his head.

"I am the King, aren't I? I have to at least try. Even if it means getting down on my knees and begging, I'll do it."

Jon looks even more alarmed by that, but Axel's mind is already made up. Without another word, he turns on his heel and strides out of the chamber, heading straight for the Queen Dowager's quarters.

He's not really worried for himself or even his Kingship. But he'll be damned if he's going to let Renly get away with this shit unopposed. And maybe if he can get the Lannister Armies to King's Landing fast enough, they combined with the forces from the Crownlands can hold Renly at bay long enough for the Vale and Riverlands to reach the city as well.

From there, the numbers will start to fall in their favor and maybe they can even end this without too much bloodshed if Renly's lords see the writing on the wall and turn on him.

All Axel has to do to make that a reality is convince his father's widow to help him. How hard can that be?

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A/N: How hard indeed! Heh, in the interest of setting expectations now, Cersei will only be a major part of the second Arc of this story. She won't stick around forever for those who can't stand her, and sorry to those who would want her to!

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