Obligatory disclaimer: I don’t own ASOIAF; that honour goes to GRRM.

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I also want to thank everyone for their support and encouragement.

Eddard Stark

"Lord Stark," his friend greeted him with a smile, and Ned finally felt some relief.

Howland Reed was still a head shorter than him and slim like all the other crannogmen. A slight brown stubble sported on his chin, and his signature bronze scaleshirt peeked beneath his dark green cloak.

“It’s Ned for you, Howland. Did you come alone?”

"Five of my men are in Wintertown," Howland supplied before looking around the bustling with training guardsmen yard. He carefully leaned in and lowered his voice to a whisper. "I received your summons, Ned. Did something happen? Winterfell looks like it's preparing for war."

"We'll speak in my solar," Ned urged, turning towards the Great Keep. As usual, his muscles felt pleasantly tired after a good training session. Since he started sparring regularly again, he felt more energetic, and his mind was clearer.

Before they passed the ironwood gate, the Crannoglord handed over his black trident and three bronze knives to Donnis, one of the four sentries at the entrance of the Great Keep.

A few minutes later, they were finally in front of the oaken door of the solar, guarded by one of his men.

“Stand watch at the stairway and let none pass, Varly,” he ordered, and the man dutifully moved towards the end of the hallway.

Ned opened the door and entered the room, only for his boots to be attacked by the enthusiastic Winter.

"Down, boy," he ordered, and the grey direwolf sat, looking expectantly at him with yellow eyes while his shaggy silvery tail was sweeping along the floor in excitement. It had scarcely been a moon, yet Winter reached his knees already.

“Gods, Ned, is that a direwolf?”

Howland stood in shock as Ned tossed a piece of jerky from the stash to Winter, who happily devoured it in one bite. A second and third piece followed, and it seemed that the young direwolf had enough as he returned to his favourite spot on the myrish rug near the hearth.

“Aye.”

“I thought the direwolves were gone south of the Wall for nearly two hundred years.”

"Now there are six," Ned said with a sigh, remembering the day of the execution, and chills ran down his spine. He grabbed a jug of dark ale, filled two tankards on the desk, and handed one to Howland. "I am in dire need of advice, my friend."

“Ask away, Ned,” the crannogman urged after taking a sip. “House Reed have always been leal servants of the Starks.”

The Lord of Winterfell took a generous gulp of his own.

"Have you told Jon anything?" He slowly asked, and his friend's face scrunched up in confusion momentarily.

"I haven't seen the lad since he was a swaddling babe, and I have not left the Neck since the Rebellion ended," Howland replied, face puzzled. "Why?"

A heavy sigh tore out from Ned’s lips. If his friend did not tell Jon, it only meant one thing. He walked over to his chair and slumped down as the Lord of the Greywater Watch sat across the desk.

“It all started with a Night’s Watch deserter-“ the tale began to slowly tumble out from his mouth. The old deserter’s fevered rambling, the dead direwolf gored by a stag, the pups, Bran’s death and Jon’s collapse at the heart tree. The impossible illness and eventual seemingly nonsensical rambling, before his son disappeared from Winterfell and, finally, the letter written in blood, heralding all sorts of dark omens.

When Ned finished his tale, he let out a sigh of relief. It was as if he had a mountain pressing on his shoulders, and it was now gone. For a moon, he had nobody to confide in, and he felt as if the world was going crazy, and he descended into madness along with it. Robb was far from ready, and he felt unsure about entrusting his woes to his wife after reading the letter, especially since she was still grieving. And while he had faith in Rodrik and Luwin, neither could be trusted with the knowledge of Jon's parentage.

He glanced at Howland, who looked incredibly troubled.

“Ned, do you still have the letter?”

The Lord of Winterfell grabbed a small bronze key from his belt, unlocked the lower drawer, withdrew an ironwood box and placed it on the desk. With another key from his belt, it opened with a rusty click, and he handed over the roll of parchment to the Crannoglord.

His friend's green eyes darted along the parchment, and a minute later, he placed it back into the ironwood box with a heavy sigh. Ned hesitated for a short moment. The words penned down with blood were both too damning and dangerous. But the urge to toss it into the fire lost out, and the message returned under lock and key.

"I thought magic had waned from the land, merely a thing of the past, alive only in the tales of old," Ned sighed, still troubled. "Yet Luwin, with his Valyrian Steel link, says that sorcery was at play, and even the

old records couldn't help him make heads or tails out of the odd malady. Do you think Jon has truly lived the future, or it's just the addled rambling of a fevered madman?"

“Magic might have waned, but it never truly left, Ned. It might be little more than a memory now, but it’s not to be underestimated,” Howland slowly began, as his brow was scrunched up with thought. “Which day did Jon fall ill?”

Ned paused for a few moments, trying to remember.

“Second day of the third moon.”

“It is as I feared,” his friend replied, looking even more troubled, “That’s the day my son lost his sight.”

“Did young Jojen go blind?!”

"Nay, he lost his Greensight," Eddard opened his mouth, but his friend quickly continued. "Ever since he caught a greywater fever as a youngling, he was bestowed prophetic dreams or visions by the three-eyed crow that our old records classify as the Greensight. At first, I was sceptical, but then he foresaw his wet nurse dying to a lizard lion. The next morning, she was wandering in the swamp looking for mushrooms for her frog stew when a lizard lion pulled her into the turbid waters. Jojen's sight was weak, and he scarcely saw anything beyond the mundane things. On the first day of the third moon, he dreamed of blood, ice, darkness, and death, and nothing ever since. His body, which was weak ever since the greywater fever, has finally begun to strengthen, and his dreams are no more."

Eddard Stark's first instinct was to claim his friend's words were a load of horseshit, but Howland Reed was not one for lying, and after the last moon, Ned himself had seen things just as crazy, if not even more. The memory of his gloved hand burned from the unnatural coldness seeping from his son's skin was still fresh in his mind.

“Three-eyed crow? Glimpsing into the future? I thought that was just an old children’s tale.”

He vaguely remembered the tale of Daenys the Dreamer and how the Eyrie’s maester had simply dismissed it as the Targaryens covering for their shameful exile from the Freehold.

"Most tales have a grain of truth in them," the Crannoglord explained with a pained smile before sipping from his tankard. "The three-eyed crow is one of the last great Greenseer lineages, clinging to life in alcoves hidden by magic. Yet it's not only the Greenseers who can glimpse into the future. The Dragonlords also had a similar ability, albeit lesser. When the mightiest of sorcerers gather, few things are impossible. The wonders and horrors of the Freehold were equal in their grandeur, and the Children of the Forest did manage to shatter the Arm of Dorne and flood the Neck with the Hammer of the Waters, after all."

“Gods...” The Lord of Winterfell tiredly ran a hand through his hair. All of this was supposed to be just a children’s tale.

"Aye. Jon could be having glimpses of the future from either side of the family. It's not impossible that he truly has travelled through time either." Howland's words were very close to his own suspicions, but Ned needed to hear them from someone else's mouth to feel less mad. "According to an old legend, eighty-one Greenseers willingly sacrificed themselves to shatter the Arm of Dorne, so you'd never know with magic. You said it yourself - Jon escaped Winterfell and took whatever he wanted, leaving nary a trace like a skilled thief or a catspaw. Is this something a sixteen-year-old boy could plan, let alone pull off after half a moon of being bound to the sick bed?"

"Fuck," Ned groaned before emptying his tankard in one breath, welcoming the bittersweet feeling burning through his throat. There was no point in dwelling on this any longer. "How does one prepare for the Long Night?!"

"Jon left you the answer," Howland supplied. "The Northern Mountains have significant deposits of obsidian, along with Skaagos. I'm sure some can be found in other areas around the North, even near Winterfell, considering the hot springs you are so proud of. Lya's boy refuses to divulge his plan but seems to know what he's doing."

And Ned couldn't help but worry. But there was nothing he could do anymore. Even if he found Jon and made him return to Winterfell, his son had proven far too slippery and could probably escape again anyway. He could only hope Jon would succeed and return home.

"Obsidian is far too fragile for anything other than arrowheads, daggers, and speartips," he darkly recounted. "I can order it being gathered and worked, but none would use it over normal steel. But any outright talk about dead men walking and Long Night would simply be madness."

"There's not much that could be done about this without proof. Still, some preparations can be done, and you can start with your brother," his friend proposed thoughtfully. "The First Ranger would be far better positioned to prepare the Watch from within or procure proof, especially if he knows what is coming. But I'm not too worried about the Others. Jon claims he has a plan of his own to deal with them."

“He’s just a-“

"-A Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, a Lord of Winterfell, a King of the North, and an experienced warrior and a veteran of many a battle," Howland Reed interrupted. "He might be a sixteen-year-old boy now, but if what half of the letter is true, he not only survived but thrived against all odds with foes in every direction. Have faith in your nephew! Even so, I'm more worried about the troubles in the South. Bolton rebelling is just a matter of course when the direwolf is weak, but everything else seems like someone was trying to push House Stark into a perilous conflict. The dead direwolf omen does not bode well either, as I find it difficult to believe that Robert would ever harm you in any way. Alas, I am unfamiliar with the games of the South and can be of little help with this. But it seems that young Jon put this well enough - nobody from the South can be trusted."

Ned tiredly rubbed his brow. His questions were answered, yet now he had even more than before. It felt as if the world was going mad. Magic, prophetic dreams, the Others and dragons walking the land once

again while enemies gathered against his House in the shadows, making him feel like a helpless child once more.

Could he afford to ignore Jon’s warning?

No. Even if Eddard still felt somewhat sceptical, it painted a dire future; something couldn't be allowed to pass. But at least now he had an inkling of what to do. If nothing else, he could plan and prepare. House Stark was ancient, and its roots ran deep. It would not be so easily toppled, especially if he had anything to say about it.

"I shall pen a letter and send riders to the clansmen and the Skagosi, ordering them to start looking and mining for obsidian and crafting it into daggers and arrowheads," he finally decided. Ned could already feel the headache of dealing with the quarrelsome Skagosi and the inconvenience of them lacking ravens or maesters. "But what do I tell the Lords and the Watch should they ask why?"

"Oh Ned, you've always been too honest for your own good," Howland bemoaned. "I have no idea how you fooled people that Jon's yours for so long. The solution is pretty simple - you will say that you received a dire warning about a great peril from a Greenseer, which is quite close to the truth. Your pristine reputation would play in your favour, and your bannermen will believe your word. We of the North still remember, and a Stark's word is worth thrice its weight in gold. Besides, it's not like he's wrong - the signs are there for those who wish to see them. This summer has been unnaturally long, and more veterans are deserting their Watch. You even mentioned the last one speaking of the Cold Ones."

By the gods, Ned hated lying, but despite his mislike for the idea, Howland was giving good advice. If lying could aid his family, he would grit his teeth and lie! None of his remaining children would perish anytime soon if he could do something about it!

"That still leaves the problem with the South," a heavy sigh escaped his mouth again. "House Stark has far too many alliances on the other side of the Neck to stay out of Southron affairs, even if I decline the Handship."

"That might be so, but you've still isolated yourself from the rest of the Seven Kingdoms, Ned," his friend chastised softly. "You still have no idea who the main players are or what they want, despite being the most connected Highlord in the realm. Is it truly any wonder that almost all of those connections were turned against House Stark? Someone clearly used you to start a war and drag the Starks right into the middle of it all. I think you should summon Lord Wyman or his heir for advice. House Manderly still keeps some connections to the South for trade, if nothing else. The merman lord and his heir are far more cunning and shrewd than they appear and are still one of your most leal bannermen."

Ned briefly mulled on the idea before realising it had no downsides. His friend had a point; he was not alone in all of this. House Stark had plenty of trusty bannermen who could serve as his advisors. Not to discount Rodrik or Luwin, but while wise and experienced, they simply lacked the lordly perspective. Two heads were better than one, and three were better than two. Seven hells, it had taken him nearly a sennight to suspect someone actively moving against House Stark, but Howland had seen through it almost immediately.

“I require your services by my side for the near future, Lord Reed,” Ned declared after a minute of contemplation.

His friend gave him a wide smile.

“It would be an honour, Lord Stark.”

9th day of the 4th Moon

White Harbour

Princess Myrcella Baratheon

She shivered and pulled her golden velvet cloak tighter. It did little to ward off the Northern cold. Even the gentle rays of the sun couldn't warm her up yet. She vaguely remembered cold and snow from early childhood, but it felt so long ago. And it was supposed to be a damned summer right now!

The Lord of White Harbour was old and so fat she wondered how he could even move. It was a small miracle he managed to kneel and a mystery how he would get up. Wyman Manderly reminded her of an oversized barrel about to burst. His fat spilt from his blue-green velvet doublet, and it looked like he had not one, not two, but four chins. His sons seemed to take after their father in every way but slightly less round, with walrus-like moustaches and bald heads that shone in the midday sun. The merman granddaughters, however, looked nothing like their father or grandfather. They were both slim and demure and very pleasing to the eye, even with the younger one having her hair dyed in a garish green colour.

“Rise,” her father’s voice was not as booming as usual. The journey at sea seemed to hit every single member of their family but her and Uncle Jaime. She threw a look at her younger brother Joffrey, who was uncharacteristically silent, most probably because he looked ready to heave over and spill his breakfast.

She turned her attention to the centre of the square just in time to see how the Lord of White Harbour needed the help of two burly guardsmen to get up from his kneeling position. Myrcella couldn't help but wonder if her father would soon require aid to get up himself. While he was not as fat as the merman lord, he wasn't far off…

Finally, the cold wind began to die out, and the sun's soft caress managed to seep some warmth into her flushed skin. From the side, her mother, wrapped tightly in her crimson velvet cloak, fussed over Tommen's runny nose with a silken handkerchief, and Joffrey was trying to suppress his shivers and look manly but failing miserably.

He looked like a sickly cat instead.

It unnerved her how much the cold affected their party, and this was supposed to be the height of summer. Myrcella shuddered to imagine how the North was during winter.

A serving man dressed in a sea-green tunic quickly walked over with a platter of bread and salt. Her kingly father tore a generous piece, dipped it in the salt, and devoured it in one bite.

“Your Grace, I have a feast prepared for you at New Castle!”

The mention of a generous serving of food and wine seemed to invigorate her royal father.

“Lead the way, Wyman!”

"I must apologise in advance, Your Grace," Lord Manderly began as he wiped a few beads of sweat from his head with his meaty hand. "The Castle Stair leading up to New Castle is lined with steps and unsuitable for a wheelhouse. But I have the finest horses to take you there if you wish."

"Bah, it's good to feel solid ground under my feet after so long," her father eagerly waved it away. "It would do us good to stretch our legs before the feast!"

On the side, her mother looked like she had just swallowed a lemon whole. A pity, as the unqueenly grimace made the otherwise beautiful face of Cersei Lannister look rather grotesque.

The whole procession slowly headed up the white street, and Myrcella had ample time to look around. The chill of the northern air seemed to abate even further as she started moving.

The Northern city was… not bad. From the inner harbour, the wide cobbled streets were straight and orderly, and the smell of pigsty that was ever present in King's Landing was replaced with clean but salty air. While White Harbour was bustling, it thankfully lacked the noisy commotion of the royal city. All the houses were built from whitewashed stone, creating a clean appearance. Even Lannisport was not as tidy and orderly as this.

The city guard had cordoned off the streets, men wearing simple arming doublets and woollen cloaks dyed in sea green with a silver trident emblazoned on their surcoats. Each watchman had a bludgeon, a dagger, and a spanghelm.

"It's lovely," Rosamund said in awe from her left.

Alas, her handmaid was nearly half her age and barely reached her elbow. Sometimes, it felt that Myrcella had to care for the younger girl, not the reverse. Not that she minded; Rosamund was a sweet little girl, and her cousin besides.

To her right walked the rest of her family, bar Uncle Tyrion. The shortest lion had probably found his way into the nearest brothel. Uncle Jaime’s gaze lazily wandered around the streets, looking for danger. Next to him, her mother had donned her ever-present scowl. Tommen’s eyes sparkled as he drank in the surrounding view while Joffrey still looked pale and miserable.

"It certainly isn't as dreary as I dreaded," her mother hummed as she looked around. "While small, the city is passable. Hopefully, the rest of the North is similar. Perhaps a merman’s daughter for your handmaid, Myrcella."

“Bah, they make us walk like common peasants in this cold,” Joffrey grouched from the side, and colour finally seemed to return to his pale face.

Alas, he quickly got better enough to start his usual incessant grumbling as soon as he got away from the rocking of the ship.

“Our royal father commanded it,” Myrcella countered. “If you had to ride a horse while your world was still spinning and shaking from the boat, you could very well fall off. Besides, it’s not bad. Usually, all we see is Casterly Rock, King’s Landing, and the Gold Road in between. Now, you get to visit some more of the other bannermen. Maidenpool was great, and I’ve heard that Winterfell’s hotsprings easily rival Jonquil’s pool.”

“We are the royal family!” her younger brother continued whinging. “The rabble should come to us, not the reverse!”

Gods, would he ever grow up?! He was three and ten and as tall as her already!

“If everyone came to King’s Landing, it would be too full of people you don’t like,” Myrcella countered, and Joffrey’s face scrunched up. “Besides, good luck moving a hot spring all the way to King’s Landing. And it was the Northern swords that placed Father on the throne, and House Stark is very well-connected. Aside from the friendship between Lord Stark and our royal father, the future Lords Tully and Arryn are cousins of the Stark heir, and the Greyjoy heir is fostering in Winterfell. This is an opportunity to make your own connections and shows you care for your future bannermen, you know. Many a king did a royal progress for a reason, Joff!”

Her brother finally shut up, and his face became thoughtful. He even looked half as adorable as Tommen now, as long as he did not open his mouth. For some reason, Myrcella felt that her mother's eyes flashed with disapproval, but the Queen remained silent. The princess couldn't help but pity the woman who got to marry Joffrey; he was simply unbearable.

They finally ascended the hill and were at the opened gate of the proud and pale New Castle. The large keep and the surrounding ring of curtain walls were made of whitewashed stone. The ramparts looked more than forty feet tall and fifteen feet thick. As they entered the courtyard, Myrcella couldn't help but shiver as the sun was hidden behind one of the pale towers. Without the sun's warm kiss, the cold returned with a vengeance.

The Manderly heir and his Woolfield wife approached her mother and Joffrey, offering to show them the way to their quarters.

At that moment, though, all her attention was drawn by the dark-haired Wynafryd Manderly, who came to her and Rosamund with two fur-lined cloaks.

The Northern Mountains

Jon Snow

It seemed that he managed to successfully pull off Ramsay's assassination since nobody followed him. He wouldn't have minded culling a few Bolton men as he was sorely out of practice; his current body still felt sluggish and weak. Then again, the men-at-arms were usually innocent of their overlord's sins. He could get away with that too. Aside from Ghost, who could easily hide, Jon had nothing that would distinguish him as a Stark aside from his looks, but more than half the North shared the first men colouring, similar to him. It would also be good to avoid openly breaking the King's Peace.

Regardless, Ghost had grown too large to travel in his bosom. In fact, he was already above his knees, and in another half a moon, he'd be larger than the other dogs. Jon's travel speed slowed with the four hunting hounds for his companions. It took him nearly twelve days instead of the original estimate of eight to arrive at the Liddle lands while evading all the villages and settlements from afar. That was two days ago, and Jon had been searching for dragonglass since.

Alas, he only knew of one open vein of obsidian somewhere around here, but not the exact location. The last time he visited, everything had been covered by a thick white veil of snow, and the clansmen were the ones who mined the obsidian and provided it to his forces. Mayhaps he could easily acquire assistance in the Little Hall, the seat of the Liddles, but he didn't want to impose on their hospitality. Even as a bastard son of Eddard Stark, he would be warmly welcomed and aided. Bastardry meant little compared to blood and mettle in the harsh northern mountains.

But that was not all; Jon was wary of his uncle having ordered his bannermen to return him to Winterfell should they find him. While the need to prove himself to the world had dimmed long ago, the sliver of stubborn pride had remained.

He had already left Winterfell and helped himself plenty from the armoury; there was no need to go around begging for pittances from the leal Stark Bannermen. Even if Jon failed, if his uncle heeded his warning, the Others could be fought off if the Watch and the North were not caught unaware like last time.

Mayhaps he was foolish to rush headfirst beyond the Wall to confront the foes of old, but no matter what preparations were made, it would be far simpler to snuff out the danger before it could gain in on numbers. Something that would take the Night’s Watch and the North years. They were simply not prepared to even consider the existence of the Others, let alone confront them or fight beyond the Wall during the harshest of winters.

But Jon Snow was.

The Others weren't that terrifying foes once you knew how to deal with them. The real problem was the endless horde of wights under their thrall and the fact that if it got too cold for too long, the Bay of Seals might freeze, allowing them to easily bypass the Wall, turning the North into a terrifying battlefield.

Jon's failure or success would depend entirely on himself and his skill. Fighting, death, and ice have been his companions for a long time now. He had made peace with his death long ago, even before dying twice.

A sigh escaped his lips as he gazed at the sun. It was slowly crawling towards the western horizon; dusk looked little more than two hours away. The current clearing was too good to pass up, and it took at least half an hour to set camp properly. Mayhaps he would have better luck on the morrow after a good night's sleep. Jon tied Shadow's reigns to a nearby tree at the end of the small clearing and started pitching his tent. Ghost dashed into the nearby pinewood in hunt of some prey. After the tent was done, he also headed out to gather a few dry twigs for his campfire. Red Jeyne, Helicent, and Maude followed him while he left Willow to guard the uneasy Shadow.

Now, wasn't that a surprise? Not only could he slip into the minds of Ramsay's former hunting hounds almost effortlessly, but he could somehow tell their names. And, similar to Ghost, it felt as if they could tell his intentions or even thoughts the moment they passed through his head. He wasn't going to complain, though. They made hunting even easier, and having four more faithful companions would only aid him in the future.

"Now, I suppose you don't know where exactly that deposit of dragonglass was?"

Sadly, Red Jeyne didn’t respond and only huffed at him with amusement as she wagged her shaggy tail. Just as he finished gathering a bundle of dry branches for his campfire, he felt Ghost wildly tug at his mind.

He slipped into his companion’s mind, only to be greeted by a terrifying sight.

A young auburn-haired girl with grey eyes garbed in leather breeches and a fur-lined tunic had climbed high on a thick sentinel tree. She was holding onto a thick branch for dear life and looking in terror at an enormous snow bear that was effortlessly rocking the humungous tree below. He reckoned the monstrous beast was about twenty feet tall as it stood on its hind legs. By the gods, its enormous back was at least six feet wide. The tree was groaning with every push, and it looked as if it was going to fall any moment now. He could clearly feel Ghost's terror.

Jon snapped the connection, returning to his own body.

A wise man would pack up his things and move away from the monstrous bear as far as possible. A behemoth of enormous size straight from the tales of old, not something a lone man could hunt.

The Bastard of Winterfell, however, ran towards his horse, the gathered firewood left forgotten amongst the grass. He grabbed his hunting spears, yew longbow, and quiver and sprinted in Ghost's direction as he began stringing up his bow. Helicent, Red Jeyne, and Maude dutifully ran after him with angry barks. The girl reminded him of his sisters; she had Sansa's hair and Arya's eyes. Even if she did not, Jon knew he would regret it if he did not do anything. In his previous life, he had many regrets, but in this one, he would have none if he could help it.

He weaved between the trees and leapt over stones and gnarly roots as he ascended the hill. Jon felt his blood begin to sing as he pushed himself to the limit. He felt the hunting hounds lag behind, unable to

keep up with his mad dash, yet could not slow down as the chances that the girl still lived dwindled with every second. The upcoming clash of life and death only made his heart thunder with excitement.

A dozen heartbeats later, he finally arrived, only to see the sentinel tree groan under the monstrous bear's efforts. A large patch of earth near its roots began to rise ominously as the tree tilted dangerously while the girl above was crying and yelling for help.

Jon Snow took a deep breath and bellowed angrily to draw the bear's attention while he notched an arrow. He succeeded as the monster turned around to face him and ***roared*** back at him. The terrifying sound reverberated in the air, making even his bones shake. On four legs, it was still nearly eight feet tall, towering over Jon. Fuck, the beast was even larger than Borroq's gigantic boar. Why was something this size south of the Wall?!

He could only blink as the snow bear charged his way far faster than its size would suggest. He barely managed to loose two arrows that missed the behemoth's eyes and harmlessly bounced off its white-furred head, enraging his foe even further. He couldn't aim well as the bear was too fast, and it was already upon him before he could blink. Even with his lightning reflexes, he had yet to grab his spear and scarcely managed to roll to the side, barely avoiding the furious charge. He instantly got up and turned to face his foe, ignoring the flaring pain from the rocks he hit during his reckless roll. Unable to halt its momentum, the bear crashed into a younger pine, toppling it with ease, and it turned to glare at Jon with a pair of angry brown eyes.

Jon's hunting spear was finally in his arm; his heart beat like a war drum, and he could taste the danger in the air. Yet his blood froze as Ghost crept up behind the beast. For a short moment, he had forgotten about his companion.

Thankfully, the bear didn't notice him as the direwolf was silent as usual and easily blended with the surroundings. Ghost hid patiently, though Jon sent a strong desire through his link for his companion to stay away. He gripped his spear tightly as the furious beast rapidly approached. He took a deep breath, aimed at the eye, and *threw* his first spear with all his might. His aim was true, but the bear moved its head at the last instant, and the steel tip bounced off its forehead. The steel tip probably bent before leaving a small smidgen of blood that only infuriated the bear more than anything else.

He swore inwardly as he gripped his last spear; another throw would leave him bereft of weapons.

Jon’s blood sang with excitement as he gripped the ash shaft and prepared himself. He would have mayhaps half a second to pierce the enormous snow bear’s eye before it ran him through. But two heartbeats before it came in the range of his spear, it quickly began to slow down as the hunting hounds finally caught up and dashed his way, barking up a storm and providing a short moment of distraction.

He took a deep breath as his foe was only ten yards away; one strike of the titanic paw would effortlessly crush the thickest of bones. Now the enormous beast was looking around, hesitating whether to attack Jon, the newly discovered direwolf, or the incoming dogs. It didn’t help that if it stood up on its hind legs, its neck, eyes, and mouth would be too far away from him to reach with his spear. Even on four legs, he would struggle to stab into its eyes from below.

Every inch of his body was tensed to the limit, every muscle tightly coiled like a spring. If his foe went for his companions, there was nothing he could do with regular steel against the thick fur. Before the bear could choose whom to attack, Jon decided to act as the behemoth was warily eyeing Ghost. He took a large step forward, leapt recklessly with all his might, and cried out, grabbing the bear's attention again.

It instantly looked his way and began to rear back up with a growl as it swatted the enormous paw at him. It was lightning-fast, but Jon was half a heartbeat faster.

His heart soared with joy, and he smiled savagely as the steel tip of the hunting spear found the snow bear’s eye.

Author's Endnote:

Ned turns to an old friend for advice and help.

More AU changes appear. Since the Harrenhal Tourney and the Rebellion happened two years earlier, and now the birth order of Cersei’s kids is scrambled (because why not?!). Myrcella is the eldest, and Joffrey is already 13. The royal procession has finally arrived in the North, but the road from White Harbour to Winterfell is not short.

Jon’s a ~~brave~~ reckless fucker with no fear of death. The Jon PoV just didn’t come out as I imagined, but what can you do?