

A Promise Is A Promise

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Summary

Ser Alliser Thorne decides to do something nice for someone he hates.

Ser Alliser was seething. *That bloody dwarf, if he had seen me when I first arrived, that bloody hand was still moving when I reached this thrice damned city. But the Bloody Hand thought it funny to make me wait, and the longer he had waited the less the hand moved, until eventually it began to smell and stoped moving entirely, and the flesh sloughed away as it rotted.*

Only then, when Ser Alliser had nothing more than a pile of bones did the Lord Imp see fit to hear his plea. *I came here to warn the king!* He thought, sullenly as he loaded his saddle bag. *I was to tell the boy Joffrey of what waited beyond the wall, to ask for his help, his men. Instead I was made mock of by a dwarf in front of half the court and given the pick of the dungeons. And him, I suppose he counts for something, and at least the Gold Cloaks the dwarf sent with him will be less inept than the fool boys I teach at Castle Black.*

Since Janos Slynt joined their company the night before he had done nothing but sulk and make threats on the dwarf. “He will rue the day he thought to make a fool of Janos Slynt, oh yes,” the jowly man said. “I am the Lord of Harrenhal, I am no fool. I commanded the city watch of Kingslanding, that dwarf shan’t be rid of me this easy, no, no no. I will not forget this.”

Slynt was a dolt of a man, in truth. But he did have experience in both fighting and commanding, and Alliser had a feeling he would make a useful ally.

“Ser Alliser Thorne?” Called a sweet, high voice from behind him.

The knight turned around, and at first glance he missed the girl entirely. But when he looked down he saw pretty, red- haired girl standing before him. A few paces behind her stood a knight in armour as white as the Wall, *a kingsguard*. Though the black brother could not say which of the white swords it was.

“Yes,” Ser Alliser said, eyes returning to the girl before him. She wasn’t especially small, in fact she looked rather tall for her age, he wondered how he had not seen her sooner. Her garb, and escort, told him that she must be highborn. “I am he.”

The girl smiled, politely, if a bit nervously. “It is an honour Ser. My uncle oft told us tales of the courage and... and nobility of his Nights Watch brothers. He was the First Ranger, Benjen Stark,” the girl curtsied slightly. “I am Sansa Stark, eldest daughter of Lord Eddard and Lady Catelyn.”

“Then the honour is mine, my lady,” he bowed, somewhat begrudgingly. *Another of the traitors whelps. She’s prettier than the bastard, and her manners are infinitely better, but that can not change her blood.* “Is there anything you need of me? I am in rather a hurry I’m afraid, my ship sails with the evening tide.”

“Of course, Ser,” she nodded, “I promise I shan’t keep you long. You are escorting new recruits to the Wall?”

“Aye, my lady,” *obviously.* The girl’s eye caught Lord Slynt and she visibly tensed. “Is aught amiss?”

“Not at all,” she forced a smile and dragged her eyes away from Slynt. “I just wanted to pay you my respects. The Wall is of the North and so am I, and I’m not sure if you will know, but I am to wed King Joffrey when we both come of age,” now *that* peaked Thorne’s interest, but though the girl was smiling, there was an emptiness behind her eyes. *Emptiness or dread.* “I await the day eagerly, when I will become the Queen.”

“I have no doubt you shall be a great and gracious queen,” The knight had little love for the girl’s family, but he was gaining something akin to respect for her. *The Lannister’s executed her father and killed all his men, she is alone here, and trapped. But she hides her fear, and her hate better than most men could, and she must not be any older than twelve.*

“I read once that the Good Queen Alysanne flew her dragon to the Wall, and was so amazed by the brave work of the Nights watch that she gifted them more land, giving them half again as much as whichever Brandon gave them the gift. She also gave them her jewels to buy food and supply’s. I have no dragon, I’m afraid, and I cannot give you any land at the moment,” she reached up and unclasped her necklace. “But I can give you these, and a promise to send the Watch as many men, resources and food as they require when I am the Queen.”

In Lady Sansa’s hands now, was a necklace with a gold lion pendant, a silver bracelet, three rings set with matching emeralds, sapphires and amethysts, and a pair of pearl earrings set in

silver. She tried to give them to him, but he drew his hands away, “my lady is kind but I cannot accept these,” he scowled, “why would you want me to have them anyway?”

“I- I,” she swallowed nervously, “I want to help the Watch, I have family there, you know. I have rings and necklaces a plenty. If you promise me these few things can be used to help you and your brothers, use them to refill your food stores for Winter, or buy warmer garb or more weapons and armour. If it can just help, even the littlest bit, I will appreciate that far more than I will the jewels themselves.”

With that she took his hands, though not quite before one of her own pulled something out of her sleeve. It was a swift motion, he doubted anyone else would have seen it. As she held his hands he realised she was trembling. *I am the sword in the darkness, shield that guards the realms of men*, he thought. *I wonder if it's my sword she fears, or her own sworn shield.*

She pressed the jewellery into the black brothers hands, and he felt something else, *parchment*, he guessed. “Use then well Ser,” she smiled at him then, and something in that smile triggered a memory in him. *Marsei*, he thought, wistfully, *Marsei used to smile like that*. He had not thought of her in many a year, but the memory of his sister was with him now clear as day. Lady Sansa stood on her toes and kissed his cheek. “Thank you, Ser. And please, will you tell Jon that I miss him. Jon Snow, that is, my half- brother.” Her smile was the same but her eyes looked at him imploringly.

He looked down at the contents of his hands, careful to keep them sheltered from anyone who may be watching. It was parchment, a small piece folded over with a name on the back. He did not even need to read it to see who it was for. He was half tempted to throw it all back at her. *I did not ask for this, whatever that thing says can't be good. Gods be good, it could be treason for all I know*. But to his surprise he found himself instead saying, “have no worry, my lady. I shall be sure to tell your brother how you miss him.”

With that she curtsied again, and walked away. Her white shadow wasted no time in following her.

That night, as Ser Alliser lay abed aboard the ship, he looked at the paper. *Such a small thing, and unsealed*, he noticed, *no one could know if I read it, just to be sure*. But he did not read it, he stashed it away in his breast pocket.

When he finally fell asleep that night, he dreamed a dream he had not had in over thirty years. The moat around their keep always froze in the Winter, and when it did he and Marsei would skate around it, even racing sometimes. Alliser always won, he was older and faster, *and bigger. By rights it should have been me that cracked the ice.* But that wasn't how it happened. Marsei had skated over a rotten patch, she could not have been any older than the Stark girl was. The old knight remembered how cold she had been when he pulled her out, how the shivers had not abated, how she the chill had set in, and how slow her dying had been. He had watched on helpless, there was nothing he could do but sit by and hold her hand as she left their world. *The Stark girl is a hostage in Kingslanding, isolated and alone. Her brother won't give up, so there's little chance she'll ever leave that city. She's already dying, dying slowly.....*

Thorne hated the bastard as much as anyone. Jon Snow was arrogant, and green and the bastard son of a traitor. But his sister seemed to be none of that, and this note, whatever it said, this was her hand to hold. A last desperate attempt to have some contact with her family. *Who am I to deprive her of that, surely there will be no harm in keeping this one promise.* Then he tried his hardest to forget the girl for the rest of the trip.

At long last they reached the Wall, and were greeted by news that both delighted and disgusted Ser Alliser. "The bastard turned his cloak."

He wasn't sure whether to dance or rage. The boy was all excuses of course, when they asked him why he had abandoned his watch. His lies seemed good enough for the maester, but Aemon was blind, and near as old as the Wall itself, Thorne would need more solid proof.

Only after the bastard had been released from his Ice cell did the knight remember the girl, and the note and his promise. He still bore finger prints around his neck where the bastard had near throttled him not a fortnight past, but regardless, he called the boy over in the yard one morning.

"Lord Snow," he greeted, sarcastically.

"Ser Alliser," the boy replied, sullenly.

"When I was in Kingslanding I saw some friends of yours."

“Who?” The bastard looked confused.

“The dwarf first, he’s to thank for your new brothers,” he gestured at his new recruits. He had to swallow all his pride to say the next words. “I saw your sister too.”

“You saw Arya?” The boys face lit up, and he found great enjoyment in crushing that notion.

“No. The other one, the red haired one.”

“Sansa? What did she want?” His tone was making it increasing hard for Thorne to continue.

“To offer her thanks to the Watch, and give us a donation,” he grimaced and reached into his pocket. “And she wanted me to give you this. She said she misses you.”

Jon went to his cell to read the letter, half expecting it to be some trick. But when he opened it he saw his sisters neat handwriting on the paper.

“Jon, I don’t know when, or even if this will reach you. I wish I could have sent a raven, that would be faster, but I do not trust the grand maester and Cersei can’t see this. I want to go home, but I’m not allowed to leave Kingslanding, not unless Robb gives up his war and his crown. They say Stannis will attack soon, I think if wins he may let me go, or at least not make me marry Joffrey, so I hope he wins. I am all alone here, I don’t even have Arya. Everyone thinks the queen has us both, but Aryas not here, only me. I haven’t seen her since father was arrested, I think she might be dead, but I don’t know. Please, if you can, will you wrote to Robb, tell him that she’s not here, my mother will want to know. And if you do write him, tell him to hurry, I want to go home.”

When he'd finished reading, there were tears spilling f down his cheeks. Alliser had left Kingslanding months ago, of course the news in this was old, but he could not stop himself from crying. Stannis had not won the battle, there was no home for her to return to even if she could now Winterfell was gone, and Robb..... with that thought the tears came even faster. *I'm sorry*, he thought, *I'm so sorry Sansa. Robb is gone, so is Bran, so is Rickon. I cannot tell him anything anymore. He cannot help you. No more than I can.*

He had never felt more hopeless than at that moment, isolated and alone, his last know living relative hundreds of miles away, afraid, looking to him for help that he could not give. *I made my choice*, he told himself. *I chose wildlings and the Wall, Castle Black and my new brothers. I must live with that now.* Only one thing gave him any hope then, *they did not have Arya.* Wherever she was, the Lannister's did not have her. Unlike her sister, Arya was free.

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