

My Lord Connington

Today I passed by a tree in Starfall whose budding blossoms reminded me of the ones I saw in the gardens of Whitegrove. I thought to write as I do not wish for distance to stand in the way of what I hope can be a sincere friendship.

Since our parting, I have wondered how you fare. There is a rare comfort in finding someone willing to speak freely. Your words deserve care, and I hope you know they have found a safe place with me.

I wish that our conversations may continue, though miles intervene. Letters have a way of carrying both thought and comfort across distance. Though I warn you, I expect honesty tempered with wit, or I may scold you in reply.

Yours with friendship,

Ashara Dayne
Lady of Starfall

Lady Ashara Dayne,

I will admit, I did not expect your letter. I had assumed our conversation at Harrenhal was the end of it, and while your words are not unwelcome, they are just that - unexpected. You are a woman of many unexpected things, and I suppose I am a man of the same, judging by your reaction when I spoke to the truth I had been hiding. Forgive me my indiscretions, and my weakness. Men should not act as I did when confronted with the weight of their failings. They should not weep. It is another one of my wrongs for the Seven, I imagine, and not one for you to have handled. And so for that, I am regretful, truly.

It is not easy for a man like me to find comfort in somebody else sharing a weight I have carried since I was a squire in King's Landing, and you will forgive my forthrightness, but it is not yet something I am ill at ease with. I do not think I will ever find ease with it. I am not a man to find safety or trust easily. My father always called me too harsh on the world, too lacking in trust. I am trying to see good in the world - and you have helped me do so. I see the good in the world in you.

I imagine there are some things I am still too scared to put to paper. The Warrior makes me courageous enough to face a man fully armoured and ready to kill me, but he does not stand at my side when it comes to matters of the heart. Rhaegar laughs at me sometimes, reminding me of this fact. If he only knew what it was I hid from him. I can only imagine he would see exactly why I fear it. I always have. You will have to scold me for it, I am afraid. The Mother grant me mercy when the famed Ashara Dayne seeks to tell me off, but there will be no yielding from me in that regard. It is too dangerous to put those words to paper, and if I put them to paper, then I have to admit that they are real. It is far easier to deny something like this if it is only in my mind, and in my voice. There is no further evidence. It cannot be held against me.

I think you are the only person who knows.

King's Landing is cruel. The court here grows difficult under Aerys' control, each day harsher and bloodier than the next. We travel to Dragonstone often, and it is quieter there. When you stare out across the Narrow Sea, to the sunset far across the horizon, it turns the sea almost wine-dark. It fills Rhaegar with such a strange melancholy. I find him standing on the walls, just staring out at the sea in silence sometimes. I stand with him, but it is as if he barely even registers me there. I think his father's actions weigh far more heavily on him than any of us. I can only imagine they would - if my father had done the same, I hate to think of the person I would be, or the forsaken actions I would have taken. But Aerys is our king, Rhaegar our prince. They are gods amongst men, and who am I really to say what I would do if I was them? One day, it will be better. Rhaegar will rule, and he will be true, and just. All I can do is keep him safe until then. ~~Even from himself.~~

I trust that you are well at Starfall. Your brother speaks of you kindly and often, though I am uncertain he likes that we are friends. I mention you and he shoots me a look that would curdle cream. What a strange pair we are - a Dornishwoman, and a Marcher lord.

May the Seven keep you safe, Ashara Dayne.

Lord Jon Connington, Lord of Griffin's Roost

My Lord Connington

Your letter arrived safely, and I read it more than once before setting pen to paper. I wanted to be sure I gave what words you do choose to share the care they deserve.

You owe me no confessions set down in ink. I would not ask you give a thing permanence if it carries risk to do so. There is wisdom in guarding oneself from a world that is quick to punish what it does not understand. And yet, I cannot pass over in silence how you speak of denial, as though it were a shield. Perhaps it can be when turned outward. To protect yourself from others is prudence, but to deny a truth to oneself is asking one to wound themselves, a cost I do not easily accept.

As I have said, I will not ask you to put dangerous words to ink, a truth need not be spoken aloud to be held with care, but I would hope it is not treated as something shameful simply for existing.

You speak kindly of me, this good that you see. Contrary to the belief of many, I would rather be thought of plainly than idealized. I am a woman who chooses her actions carefully. I know I am capable of error as much as kindness, and as such, I permit myself little indulgence in either. If you see light where you expected not, perhaps it is because you have not lost the ability to look for it, even where it is easiest to overlook.

Our dear queen Elia writes to me as well of the hardships her and Prince Rhaegar face at court. It pains me that I have been called away from Elia's side by the duty and demands of House Dayne's legacy during these increasingly trying times.

You are right, we are a strange pairing to the eyes of the world. A Dornishwoman and Marcher lord were never meant to be at ease with one another, at least according to those who prefer their borders neat and their affections predictable.

I fear Arthur's disapproval is already beyond remedy. I am sure he has decided our friendship is either deeply suspicious or mildly treasonous. I have not yet determined which. My brother is loyal to a fault, and cautious where I am concerned.

If it helps, know that his disapproval has survived Dornish princes, Reachmen knights and at least one Braavosi merchant whose only crime was excessive charm.

I do hope you continue to write, and with the knowledge this remains a place of confidence, not expectation. I value your trust far more than I would ever value proof.

Yours in sincerity,

Ashara Dayne
Lady of Starfall

Lady Ashara Dayne, the light of Starfall,

Forgive me if I do not have the time to contemplate what I write - things change here like the tide, and what Princess Elia writes is true. His Grace, King Aerys, long may he reign - makes choices that are cruel, and I see the people I care for struck by them each morning. Rhaegar barely sings while he is here. Occasionally I will catch harp music drifting through the castle, and then missives will come and it will stop as if someone has killed him. The melancholy of the whole situation is the worst part.

All of us are bound to the service of a king who seeks to torment his own son. My own father was no king, just a red bearded lesser lord who always tried to do right by me, by gods and by men. King Aerys is not the same father he was. It is not my place to question the divine right of the Targaryen family. It is my place to protect those I am loyal to. And I am loyal to Rhaegar, body and mind and soul. That is the bond of brotherhood that comes with knighthood. Perhaps one day, he will name me to his Kingsguard, and I can be happy there, I think.

~~I do not owe you those words and you will not receive them, nor will anybody else while I breathe. My sins are for the Seven, and they will find me in the Hells and judge me for them there.~~

I have spent half my life turning blows inward, letting the arrows of whatever this is strike me full-pelt before they touch another. It will not stop now, romantic as the thought may be, and it will not stop until the Seven take me home and judge me on how well I resisted this. I know you are different about these things, in Dorne, but I am of the Stormlands. I know what this is. It is a deficiency that the Seven above gave me, and I will spend my entire life atoning. Something in me went wrong, somewhere along the way to this, and it is ... the subject of this that is wronged by it. It is better I am the shield that guards. I will turn it inward, or away, or whatever it is that keeps that thing safe. It is all that I can do.

I will try to think more plainly of you, if that is what would please you most. Understand that this is not something ladies of the realm usually request, to be considered plain by noble lords, but know that I am trying to do so and will endeavour to think. As I am one to talk about permitting oneself indulgence, I will hold any comment there. Rhaegar tells me I am too dour, too much concerned with what will happen next, but I worry. Something is

building and much as we look to the storm clouds to try and reckon their fury, I find myself staring back across the Narrow Sea toward King's Landing to try and predict what it is that will come.

Perhaps you are right, and I try to look for that light amongst the darkness there too. It comes in small doses, but it is there. Young Princess Rhaenys, chasing butterflies in the godswood. Elia's laugh when it comes, bright and clear. Rhaegar singing for the smallfolk. I suppose I have him to thank for that, really. I fear the brute I could have been without him, another thick-skulled Stormlander with no sense of joy. If nothing else, I am a thick-skulled Stormlander with no sense of joy but an appreciation of music.

What can be done to help the demands of House Dayne, Ashara? If there is anything I can do to support you from here at court, then I will do my best to fulfill it. Is it marriage? Is it less treacherous planning in front of your brother? ~~I can plan any and all betrayal far more obviously if he would prefer, definitely as Ser Dayne keeps insisting on reading what I am writing over my sh~~

I do mean it. If there is anything I can do, tell me and I will do my best. Let it be a toast to messy borders and unpredictable affections. ~~To trust without proof.~~

In the light of the Seven,
Lord Jon Connington,
Lord of Griffin's Roost.

My Lord Jon Connington

I was unsure if I should address this letter to you alone, or you and my brother, as it sounds as if Arthur has appointed himself your secretary. I would ask you inform him I intend to write something truly treasonous in my next letter, so that he may prepare himself. Regardless of my brothers opinions, I am glad we may confide in one another.

A stormlander's stubbornness is well renowned, so I will not waste ink continuing to push a matter you seem resolved on. I will say only this; the words 'deficiency' and 'wrong' belongs to a different conversation than the one we are having, and I would ask you to retire it.

I think of Rhaenys often. That child has her mothers eyes and I suspect her willfullness too, which means she will either be a great comfort or a great trial to everyone around her, probably both. I miss Elia dearly, being apart from her and her sweet children has been one of my heavier burdens since inheriting Starfall. Elia does write when she can, yet I worry anyway, as you worry for our Prince. I am glad there are eyes at court I trust.

You are kind to ask after how the burdens of my duty may be lightened, and I do not say that lightly. I have learned the difference between courtesy and intention, and yours is the latter. But I think you imagine the question of marriage simpler than it is from where I stand. It is not that there are no candidates, it is that I have requirements that are... let us say, particular. My responsibility is to Starfall first, and legacy second. While a husband is necessary to secure the legacy of my house, he cannot come before Starfall. I do not wish to spend my marriage negotiating whose house matters more. I have no patience for that. I need someone who would come to Starfall and mean it, not as a concession, but as a

choice. A second son, a knight of good standing, someone without a Lordship of their own to complicate matters.

There was a man whom I met at Harrenhall. I did not think of him this way until just now, writing that, which tells me something I am not entirely at ease knowing. He asked me to dance, then seemed uncertain what to do once I said yes. I found it unexpectedly disarming. I notice I am being vague, which is unlike me, and I shall stop. Eddard Stark is who I speak of.

He is not a man who performs, and there is something almost alarming about a person who simply looks at you. I am accustomed to being looked at, I am less accustomed to feeling seen. The world already finds a Marcher lord and a Dornishwoman improbable. I suspect it would have very little patience for whatever this is. And yet I find, somewhat against my will, that the world's patience is not what concerns me. He is a second son, without a lordship of his own to complicate matters, and I feel something close to irritation at the realization, as I had not planned to think of him seriously and it seems I am going to anyway.

I appear to have written myself into a confession I did not sit down to make, and I am blaming you for this entirely.

Do give my regards to my brother, assuming he has finished reading this. If he has opinions, he may keep them to himself.

Ashara Dayne
Lady of Starfall

Lady Ashara Dayne, light and lady of Starfall,

Arthur is away at his duties now, so I have little need for my secretary and more need for a friend. I will retire those thoughts for you, if you demand it. I suppose they are more between me and the Seven, after all, and for other conversations.

You will be glad to know that Rhaenys does indeed possess her mother's temperament. She spent thirty minutes yesterday arguing that maybe she does not need to eat her vegetables, or her main meal, as there are honey cakes at every table. She is bold and bright and a source of light here, one I think is long overdue. You are right to worry for Elia as well. The treatment she suffers at the hand of our King is...well. It is the King's prerogative, but many of us try to act to keep her safer than she could be. Things have taken a darker turn here. King Aerys sees fit often to deride and humiliate members of the court, members of his family.

Queen Rhaella seems a shadow at his side, barely the strong and comforting mother she was when I first arrived in King's Landing. But I was a boy then, a squire at the side of her oldest son. Now I am a lord and a knight, and while Aerys does not target me for the sake of my father's loyalty, I see him lash out often. My father is now a year or more dead, and that loyalty can only defend me so long. I do not fear him. I simply fear his actions one day stepping beyond the pale and into some cruelty even the worst of us could not conjure. Some call him the Mad King. Some would call that treason. Others might say it is a simple descriptor of a clear fact, more and more by the day. I say very little, and maybe that is my own cowardice.

I act only if Rhaegar asks me to, and he does that very often. His melancholy worsens, and when that happens, we often ride to Summerhall and camp amongst the ruins. He finds it peaceful there. I cannot say why. I find he makes it a peaceful place by his presence. There is some morbid beauty to a ruined building, the summer light, the sound of his song. It is the only place in the Stormlands besides Griffin's Roost that feels like home to me anymore. Those few Stormlands lords who come to court often rally to the Queen, but not to anyone else. It is a strange loyalty, but one that is noted.

I understand that ties to home are made more complex when it is a woman that stands to inherit. Second sons and knights, men without lordships of their own....there are few at court who fit that position, and well – Eddard Stark?

I cannot say I know the man well, beyond the courtesies shared at Harrenhall and what one hears of the Northerners at court. His brother, Brandon, holds a fearsome reputation as a future Lord Paramount and warrior. But Eddard? A quiet man. There is little wrong with quiet men, being one of them myself sometimes, but I cannot say I know him. He is regrettably close with my liege lord, Robert. He seems to pale in comparison to the force that is the oldest Baratheon brother, but then many do, for better or worse.

This is not to put you off, but to let you know what I know of the man. And do not let that stop you. I would be a hypocrite to pass judgement on any sense of realisation of affections, infatuations or considerations. I try my best not to consider things, really. The world is full of improbable affections and people who feel remarkably unseen, wherever they go. If I hear more of young Lord Eddard Stark here at court, I will let you know, Ashara.

May the Seven watch and keep you,
Lord Jon Connington, lord of Griffin's Roost

My Lord Connington

I expect you know more of this than I do, and I find I am writing to you anyway. My seclusion in Starfall has not prevented word of the Prince and Lady Lyanna Stark's disappearance. While I may have found one disappearance surprising, I confess I do not find them surprising together. I tried to put the spectacle at Harrenhall to simple foolishness, but I cannot any longer. You and I and all of court saw it. He crowned her. I watched Elia's face and I have not stopped thinking about it since. A man does not do what he did at Harrenhall without having already decided something. I think we both know that, perhaps we knew it then and said nothing, and now here we are on either side of the consequence of that silence.

I do not know what he has done. I do not know what this is yet. But I know what it is not. Elia bore the insult of that crown with more grace than he deserved. I watched her do it and held my tongue. I regret that more now than I can say. I am holding it less carefully now.

I know our King bears no fonder feelings for Rhaegar than he does for Elia, which gives me little comfort. I fear what this disappearance will mean for her regardless. What I would do to protect her cannot be put to ink. I find I cannot quench the anger I feel for the position she has been placed in, both at Harrenhall, and now.

I write to Elia, and to Lady Jeyne. I do not know what good it does. Words sent into silence feel less like comfort and more like evidence of how far away I am. Starfall has never felt further from King's Landing than it does at present, and I have spent two years learning exactly how far that is. I would give a great deal to be closer. I have nothing purposeful to do from here, and I am finding that harder to bear than I anticipated.

Arthur has not written. I find I am not surprised, and I find that I mind it anyway.
There is no one closer to this than he is, and no one further from me for it.

So I am asking you instead.

You are closer to her than I can be. Watch over her. Please.

I am aware this letter is not my most composed, and I imagine this is not the easiest letter to receive. I find I am less concerned with these things than I usually would be. Forgive the letter. Do not forgive what caused it.

Ashara Dayne

Lady Ashara Dayne, light of Starfall,

I do not know. I do not know what has happened, nor did he tell me anything before doing so. Ser Arthur has gone with him, as has Ser Oswell. The court is ablaze with rumours and I am expected by everybody to know everything that has occurred, and I know *nothing*, and it does not feel that anybody believes that. A day does not pass where some well meaning lord or inquisitive woman asks me for what the truth of the matter is, and I have to bite my tongue and offer courtesy and disguise the sheer panic in order to explain I do not know. What are the whims and actions of Targaryen lords to us mortal men?

I cannot even escape it in the training yard, where I often find quiet. I came here when I first realised, when he married, when my father died. Violence is a language I am better trained in than matters of the heart, than the politics of court or the whims of silver haired poets. I understand it more, and yet those who train with me ask and ask and ask, and I cannot answer.

I suppose I did not want to see what happened at Harrenhall for my own reasons. I did not want to watch as someone else was chosen, or he wrote his own fate into being. As you say – both of us stayed silent that day, the whole realm did. And now the Seven have seen fit that we reap the reward of our inaction.

Me and Elia are....not close. There is the politeness of court, and the respect one pays to their princess, their future queen. The children are dear to me as they would be to any close friend. I – I do not doubt that there is some petty envy deep in me for what she can be, and that as always, my wrongs keep the good at bay. It all feels wretched, Ashara. I suppose our lack of vision condemned us thus. I will speak with Elia, when I can. I will not let harm come to her. I swore that oath when I was eighteen – by the Mother, I protect the innocent. And despite my envy, my petty jealousy, she has done nothing wrong, and has been wronged at every turn.

I hate that he has. I suppose loving someone makes you blind to their wrongs. Or maybe the denial of it. I suppose I do not want to think about the feelings that I have for him long enough to feel the discomfort of his failings. I suppose it is treason to speak of a Crown Prince's failings, or his father's. Maybe your brother is right, and all we have been writing is sedition disguised as concern. King Aerys has barely reacted to the news. He simply continues as he does. It is a strange thing to see him as a pillar of calm and collectedness amongst the rife gossip and panic of the rest of the courtiers. It is not something I have seen, in all of my years in King's Landing.

There is talk of a Stark party riding south. I do not know what will follow, but there is a feeling deep in my gut that bids me not to sleep, nor to rest without the fear of what is to come. The gods have found their point of doom, and the world has changed for it. When I have word of what has happened, I will send it. I doubt I will ever know the truth of it. For one described as a close friend, as more a brother than many, I am told the truth less and less so these days. And yet I remain a loyal dog at his side. This fealty is a rot in me, I told you. And yet as always, nobody listened.

Maybe it is time for me to travel home, for a while. I tried to, long ago, and yet he needed me here. I do not think he needs me anymore.

Lord Jon Connington, Lord of Griffin's Roost

Lord Jon Connington

I was brought the news this morning. Aerys is dead. Lord Richard Stark and his heir Brandon are dead. Rhaegar, Lyanna, and my brother remain absent based upon this morning's missive. I find I do not know how to begin a letter in a world that looks like this one. I have been trying to find the shape of what comes next, and I cannot. This is not something I am accustomed to.

I admit, at times I wished for an end to the miseries Aerys inflicted upon Elia, yet I find I am not as comforted by his death as I may have expected to be. I did not consider what a wish costs, or what shape it may take when it arrives, or who else might be required to pay for it. I do not know what to do with these thoughts, as they feel dangerous and perhaps treasonous to speak of. Yet, what's done is done, and I do not want to entertain the notion that my inner desires carry any great weight on the designs of fate.

Aegon is not yet a year old. Even setting aside what Rhaegar has done to Elia, I find myself wishing he would return, if only for that. The realm will not survive a long regency. Aerys has seen to that. Whatever he has done, his absence leaves Elia and her children more exposed than his presence would. I wonder if Arthur advises him as such, wherever he has gone. I do not know what can be done from here. I am not certain anything can.

Robert Baratheon will not take this quietly. I do not think anyone expected him to. With Lyanna still gone, and now the deaths of the Starks, I fear he would be willing to sacrifice the whole realm to satisfy his pride. I do think of Eddard Stark, the quiet man I danced with at Harrenhall, who seemed to see the world more plainly than most. He has lost his father, his brother, his sister remains absent, and he is now Lord of the North without a

moment to prepare for it. I know something of stepping into a house grief has emptied, yet I had years to brace for it. He has had none, and I find I am wary of what Robert will want him to do with that grief.

Your last letter suggested you may return home. I find I am writing to Kings Landing regardless. I hope you have remained, to watch over Elia and her children as I had asked of you. I hope you stayed.

I do not know what comes next. I have been trying to find something to do with that and I cannot. The only thing I am able to depend upon in these times is you it seems. Our correspondence and candor is a raft amidst the storm.

Ashara Dayne

Ashara,

It is worse than some simple death. It is worse than that. I can still see it, Ashara. I do not think there will be a day in my life that I will be unable to recollect what I witnessed happen to Lord Stark and his son, to Lord Commander Hightower. Wild fire burns such a particular green. It does not stop burning when a man dies, and the throne room is half-melted. Stone has turned to candlewax around the pillars of the Red Keep. I can only imagine this is what witnessing dragonfire felt like, and I pray for our ancestors, for what they faced. I pray for the Stark boys. I pray for all of us.

The Mad King laughed himself to death watching good men burn aflame, watching his court panic in horror. He found all of our suffering funny, to the last, and Rhaegar is not here to even witness it. I am incapable of hating him but at this moment, I am furious. I am terrified. I do not know what I am. Some coward too terrified of the truth and of what is going on, probably. There is no shape nor plan to what comes next. I look to the histories, to the stories from the Dance of the Dragons, when Targaryens went to war with each other. I try to glean something from the last time the realm splintered, when the Blackfyre bastard rose up. There is nothing that seems to bring solace. I was never much of a man for pondering tomes at the hour of the wolf, and yet the recent days have made me that man.

We try to keep the court calm. People are fleeing. I do not blame them. We await the king's return but do not know when that will come. I was thinking of home, and now my duty, my honour is tied here. To flee when the realm needs me most would break the oaths I made when I became Lord of the Roost. I am no Lord Paramount, just a step above landed knight, really. But I will stand where many have not, in the hope his Grace returns.

It is a strange thing to call him that. My silver prince, no longer. Now he steps into his destiny, or flees from it. Maybe that is why he fled. Maybe he wanted nothing more than to stay the Prince of Dragonstone. Maybe Rhaegar knew of what his father planned and it was all some elaborate scheme. I would want to think it was not - him and Aerys were never as close. I suppose I am putting my own worries to paper and putting thoughts and deeds upon him that were never his own. I will not know what our pr— what our king now plans. If he plans to return. I keep forcing thoughts into his head where he is not here to comfort me, to put my own insecurity upon him. It remains an awful habit of mine, even now.

If your brother sends you anything, any word - send it to me. I will not share it across the court, only with his family. They do not allow themselves to let the worry show in public. But it is there. Westeros may depend on that news, Ashara.

I pray for the Mother's mercy for us all, and for safety for you, friend.

Lord Jon Connington,
lord of Griffin's Roost

Lady Ashara,

His Grace has returned to us, alongside Lady Lyanna. Both are safe, well even. Glowing with joy. I do not need to speak of the news, as I assume the ravens are sent and the bells ring out for the happy day. I work day and night to support the King's will, as is my duty.

Elia struck me when I went to her the night they arrived back at court. I did not know where else to go, or who else to turn to, and I remembered your charge of me. I do not blame her, and she owes me no apology. I offered comfort that was not requested and spoke in my usual blunt tones and the Queen was righteous in her anger. She knows what I am now, and the both of us remain tied to Rhaegar, inextricably. I suppose I am an outlet for both of their frustrations also, and that is my role. That is what the Hand of the King must be. All actions and thoughts and deeds for the good of the King, the realm, the royal family.

The children do not even seem to place what has happened. Rhaenys remains her mother's daughter and young Aegon is bolder by the day, but both of them seem so sorrowful. To see children saddened is a suffering. I cannot even begin to place what the good Queen Mother is feeling. Rhaella is a force of nature, even when our allegiances cross, and she has been good to me. She has always been good to me.

Lady Lyanna remains as the North - cold, bold, certain. I cannot place her yet in my estimations but Rhaegar is in love. The melancholy lifts from him when he sees her, and she shares his every confidence. They do not seem to even see the rest of the court, and how they look at them both. She stands in the same halls her brother and father burned in, with her younger brother now Lord Paramount in the North. The whole world has changed around this woman, and all she sees is him.

I love him, and he has doomed us all. He just does not know it yet. It must be put right. I cannot stand and agree with this second marriage, Valyrian tradition or not. My duty now demands I support it, for he is the King and I am his Hand, and that is how the role works. I must stand in the Sept that day and watch it happen, and watch Elia's heart break and the realm shake and the fury of every lord in that room, and do nothing. My own inaction condemns the realm, but he is happy. Happier than I have seen him in months, now he is free from the shadow of his father.

Robert Baratheon's rage grows stronger by the day from what I can glean from the information I have. I do not fear the man, but what he can drive my countrymen to is another thing. He is a man younger than me, raging at a world he cannot comprehend from his sheltered Eyrie upbringing. And yet the realm starts to shatter, and I fear nobody else can see the cracks forming.

And the worst thing is that my heart would follow him into his doom willingly, against any of my noble instincts. Rhaegar Targaryen has always had that power over me, and I that rot in my chest I can never cut out. Someone will do it for me, some day, and I shall thank them for it. The Seven shall judge my wretched heart against the good I can do for the realm, and I can only pray that what I cannot stop myself feeling for him is outweighed by every other godly act I do, and each innocent I defend.

Here I am. A loyal dog to the last, with my leash pinned firmly to my chest.. I suppose it is what I have always been, even dressed as a griffin. This great honour I now possess, and I shall see the realm put right, or die trying, and let the Seven know I tried to atone for it all.

In the Light of the Seven, in the year 281 after the Conquest,

Lord Jon Connington,
Hand of the King to King Rhaegar Targaryen, first of his name.

Lord Jon Connington

I have returned to Starfall. I find it strange to be writing to you again so soon after having stood in the same room, and stranger still that there remained so much that could not be said in that room that must now be said in a letter. I find I am already looking toward the Hunt for that reason.

I watched the ceremony and I thought of Harrenhall. I thought of how little any of us could have predicted, standing in that hall, that the world would look like this so soon after. I saw Elia. I do not know what to say of that yet, although I am grateful that you looked out for her in these turbulent times, even if she was unwelcoming of such care.

I find myself thinking of Eddard Stark more than I would like to admit. Not as he is now. I do not yet know who he is after such horrible tragedies. I think of the man I danced with at Harrenhall. The quiet one, whom Brandon Stark had to speak for, and who seemed surprised when I said yes to a dance. I mourn Brandon as well. I knew none of the Starks well, yet both brothers left an impression on me. I find I mourn something else alongside them, that I do not entirely have a name for. Perhaps it is simply the loss of a version of things that was never certain to begin with, and yet felt, briefly, like it might be. Lyanna Stark stands in those same halls now, and I found I could not look at her without thinking of everything her presence has cost. I know that is not entirely fair, and I do not care.

I keep your letters. I have them in a box I return to more often than is perhaps wise, and shall bring them with me to the hunt as I do not wish to leave them behind in these times. Your last letter in particular I have read more than once. There are things in it I find I cannot put down, and things in it I find I cannot pen in ink. I hope this hunt gives us the

opportunity to speak to them in person privately, as we were able to at Harrenhall. Gods, that feels so long ago now.

I did not and have not heard from Arthur through all of this. He will of course be at the hunt, but I do not yet know what I shall do with that. The distance between us has grown so large and so strange that I am not certain how to cross it. And yet, I find I must try. We were so close as children, until he chose to leave Starfall to serve King Aerys, although we both knew his loyalty would always be to Rhaegar first and foremost. I have missed my brother, and found that distance there even during my year at court. I do have fears that if we could not bridge that distance during that time, then there is little hope we can over such a short time and in such turbulent waters. And yet, I must try, for I fear losing him more.

I will not pretend I am not wary of what this Hunt may bring. The realm is... not well, and a room full of people who know it and disagree about what to do about it is not a comfortable place to spend a weekend. I do think we have earned the right to be in the same room and say some of what these letters have carried.

I have found this correspondence to be one of the few constants of a year that has had very few of them. I am glad to call you a friend, Jon. I will see you at the hunt.

Ashara Dayne
Lady of Starfall