

things change and get strange (it's happening right now to you)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/747970) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/747970>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	Gen , F/M , M/M
Fandom:	A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin
Relationships:	Jaime Lannister/Brienne of Tarth , Renly Baratheon/Loras Tyrell
Characters:	Brienne of Tarth , Jaime Lannister , Loras Tyrell , Renly Baratheon , Cersei Lannister , Catelyn Stark , Sansa Stark , Arya Stark
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - High School
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of West Eros High
Stats:	Published: 2013-04-04 Words: 3,282 Chapters: 1/1

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by [openmouthwideeye](#)

Summary

And it goes like this . . .

Brienne deals with friendly ribbing, plotting cheerleaders, and meddling mothers. Jaime sings Rihanna.

Who says the universe is out to get her?

Notes

The title is taken from a song by The Avett Brothers, who have many mundane and unexpected turns of phrase that are really quite lovely and refuse to let me be

This series was intended to be a smattering of loosely connected one shots that would let me play around in an AU without fear of repercussion. So much for that.

Plot is coming . . .

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Head down, eyes on her books. That was the strategy that Brienne had clung to for more years than she could remember. It had gotten her through grade school, through junior high, and through a year and a half at West Eros High.

Today it was failing her.

“Great hair, Brienne,” Tae cackled at her, breezing by as Brienne tried to slink into Health. “The dead straw look is in this year.”

WEH’s elite had been insulting her with compliments all week. Tae was less subtle about it than the others, and Brienne wished she could be grateful for the transparency, but the attack had caught her off guard and she was busy not stumbling over a carelessly abandoned backpack.

Jaime had warned her about Cersei.

The knowledge was a small consolation.

Brienne slid into her seat, 3rd from the back, and dutifully pulled out her text and notebook. If there was one thing she’d learned, it was that mindless note taking did wonders for blocking out snickers. No matter how bad she was at the subject at hand.

Loras frowned at her.

“What did you do to piss off Queen Cersei?”

He shared her third period, and they were far enough past the tense ‘you spent a year crushing on my boyfriend’ phase to count each other as friends. Brienne figured it had something to do with the fact that, despite her distinct lack of curves, her chances with Renly were roughly equal to her chances of winning prom queen.

Brienne winced at him.

She and Loras were cool now, sort of, but *‘have a crush on her stepbrother’* was not an answer she was comfortable sharing.

“There was this sleepover . . .” she hedged.

Loras raised an eyebrow and checked his mental social calendar.

“That you planned the same night as the cheerleader soiree?”

Unwritten rule #4: mess with a cheer event and your social life was forfeit. Loras may as well have tacked, “are you an idiot?” onto the end of his question.

She should probably shut up, shrug, and let him make of that what he may. But Brienne was caught up in an overwhelming (and somewhat depressing) surge of gratitude that Loras thought she *could* plan a sleepover.

“Um, it was the cheerleader soiree,” she admitted, feeling like she owed him for thinking so highly of her.

Loras snorted, and then, when it became clear Brienne had not become magically funny overnight, gaped at her.

“How the hell did you manage to crash that?” And then, just so she didn’t have to imagine it, “Are you insane? No wonder Cersei’s glaring daggers at you.”

“Sansa’s mom tricked me,” Brienne defended weakly.

She felt a little guilty blaming Mrs. Stark when the woman had been nothing but nice to the large, awkward girl from her daughter’s hockey team. But it wasn’t like Brienne had wanted to be there.

Loras snickered, which irritated her. He was gorgeous *and* athletic, and dating Renly besides. What did he know about being unattractive and socially inept?

“Shut up,” she muttered, flipping open her Health book and pretending to read yesterday’s lesson. Pycelle always seemed to get off on Sex Ed discussions when he was lecturing. “Those girls are more vicious than The Bloody Marys.”

The Bloody Marys were from Saint Mary’s, the Catholic school on the other side of town. A decades-long reputation for wicked fouls and constant bloodshed made the team’s nickname more recognizable than the school they played for.

“Those guys don’t scare me,” Loras postured. Brienne snorted, and he amended, “But they’re a hell of a lot scarier than *cheerleaders*.”

Let’s bring Cersei to the game next week, Brienne didn’t say. Ten bucks says she sends the captain home crying.

“Did they make-up you to death?” he teased, smiling lightly.

“Gossip me to death, it’s more like.”

Nervous energy was making her tap her pencil against the desk. She forced herself to quit, and the room felt oddly tense in the absence of the dull rhythm.

“I’m sure you heard more than any normal person could stomach about Bob and Queen Cersei.” He disappeared behind his eyes, and when he returned he shivered.

“Renly’s brother overshares when he’s drunk. Which is all the time.”

Brienne didn’t respond, just went back to tapping her pencil.

“Did Mar stop playing coy about her love life?” he switched tacts.

Brienne didn’t pride herself on social aptitude, but even she could see he was fishing for information.

The Tyrells were close, a nuclear family with none of the tensions of families like the Lannisters. But Loras and Margaery were forever locked in friendly competition, and lately Margaery had the upper hand.

“Margaery was nice,” Brienne answered noncommittally.

“And, what? Now you’re in and Cersei’s feeling threatened?” Loras sounded half skeptical, half amused. “Her eyelashes are insured as a source of income and you mentor Pee Wee Hockey dropouts for fun.”

“Pod’s getting good,” she told him.

“Missing the point,” Loras pointed out.

“The point is she was miserable,” Renly’s voice drifted across the room.

Brienne started. She looked up in time to see him slide onto Loras’ desk, slinging an arm around the back of his chair to prop himself up.

Loras looked instantly brighter.

Brienne felt a pang somewhere near her heart.

She was over the Renly thing, really. Ten minutes of listening to Loras talk about his “sun in a world of candles” and Brienne knew it wasn’t Renly she loved, just a moment of kindness.

Still, it must be nice.

“What’s up?” Loras wondered.

Brienne was curious, too. Renly had Art Theory 3rd period, clear across the quad. Health Sciences was about as far from his corner of the morning as you could get.

“Pycelle’s out sick,” he shrugged around his boyfriend. “And I had a work period.”

Loras sniggered.

The last time Renly let slip that art classes allowed work periods, his dad had pulled him out of school for a weeklong hunting expedition with his brothers. Renly had quoted phrases like, “not teaching you shit” and “manning up” for days.

Apparently his family was still pissed that he dropped football.

“So you’re stealing us away?”

Renly’s eyes skated over Brienne and back to Loras. His expression flickered for half a second.

“Car’s by the quad.”

“Cool.”

Loras turned to her, but Brienne was already shaking her head.

“I’ve got Shakespeare,” she fibbed. “You two go ahead.”

Loras shrugged and stood, sliding his books into his open messenger bag and swinging it over his head.

“See you at practice.”

Brienne wished she were still oblivious enough that she didn’t have to overlook Renly’s relieved smile.

“Bye, guys,” she said, but they were already gone.

Well, *Twelfth Night* was forever relevant as far as Brienne was concerned. She may as well lose herself in the version that ended in eternal bliss.

She had career guidance 4th period, so she ended up reading straight through lunch. By the time 5th rolled around, Maria was deep into her scheme against Malvolio, and Brienne was pining for hockey practice. She tanked a pop quiz in Pre-Calc and spent most of World Civ watching snow flurries drift across the parking lot.

Looks like I’m failing that quiz, too, Brienne thought, stuffing her untouched notebook back in her locker after the final bell.

She promised herself she’d study an extra hour tomorrow night. She wasn’t in danger of flunking off the team, but she couldn’t stand disappointing her dad by tanking a test. He tried his best to support her extracurriculars, and if she couldn’t be the well-rounded daughter he deserved, she could at least keep her grades up.

“Well look at you,” the voice was like wind chimes above the cacophony of the hallway.

Brienne felt a stab of horror, and all but buried herself in her locker.

Cersei would have none of it, though. She pulled the door flush against the locker beside it and looked Brienne down and up, up, up.

Behind her, a handful of pretty girls watched the spectacle unfold.

“Don’t you look special.” Cersei’s smile might as well have been painted on. “That is such an *inventive* wash on your jeans.”

Resigned, Brienne looked down, categorizing her appearance: jeans half worn through, graying Keds, a plain blue sweater that was nicer than normal. She had pulled her hair into a quick ponytail before curling up with her Shakespeare anthology, and she prayed Tae hadn’t noticed.

“Cute shoes,” said a short girl Brienne didn’t know. “I didn’t know they stressed sneakers.”

“Nice sweater.”

Brienne hadn't seen Sansa between the girls flanking Cersei. The redhead hung back, casting around for some insight into her friends' game, but seemed to come up empty.

"Blue suits you," she offered, sounding hesitant.

Brienne wanted to sink into the floor.

Cersei gave the freshman an appreciative nod, eyes gleeful.

"I think we can all agree that Brienne is a *rare* sort of beauty."

She glanced away, intent on something Brienne couldn't see, and when she refocused she was smiling wickedly.

"Doesn't Brienne look nice today, Jaime?"

Brienne felt hot all over. She staunchly refused to turn and give him the opportunity to add to her humiliation.

He came up beside them, barely glancing at Brienne before telling Cersei, "She wears casual better than you do."

Brienne bit her tongue to keep herself in check. Cersei Lannister would be a goddess in a sack. It was cruel of him to point it out.

"I'd *love* to see her in a dress," Cersei said.

The other girls giggled, and Brienne felt like a freak on parade.

"What do you want?" Brienne muttered at Jaime. He was the only one she felt safe enough addressing.

"Yes, Jaime." Cersei looked from her stepbrother to Brienne, arched a brow suggestively, and refocused on Jaime. "What do you want?"

"A ride," he answered, leaning against the lockers between Brienne and her tormenters.

"You've got my keys."

"We're shopping," Cersei informed him. "But if you ask nicely, I'd consider--"

He cut her off.

"I was talking to Brienne."

The look on Cersei's face was almost enough to ease the sting of the joke. She looked like she'd swallowed a mouthful of sour grapes.

"I don't have time for you," she announced, and Brienne didn't know which of them she was talking to.

Cersei glowered as she swept away, the other girls trailing after like they had strings around them.

Jaime rolled his eyes after her.

“I must’ve been high,” she thought she heard him mutter.

Brienne shuffled her feet for half a second before deciding a quick exit was her best strategy. She closed her locker with a resounding *clang*, and Jaime glanced at her as though he’d forgotten she was there.

She was used to it.

“Ego still intact?”

His voice was flippant, but the restlessness in his green eyes made him look almost uncomfortable. Brienne wondered how much of his time was spent apologizing for his stepsister’s behavior. Then she wondered how much of his time was spent apologizing for *his own* behavior.

“Ego?” she joked weakly, and he smiled away whatever discomfort was between them.

Brienne slung her backpack onto one shoulder, and Jaime pushed himself off the lockers.

“So are you going to surrender the keys, or will I have to fight for them? You drive like an old lady, and I don’t particularly want to skate suicides today.”

He started walking toward the lower lot, where her Camry was parked in its usual spot.

Brienne hastened to match his stride.

“You were serious?” she asked, choosing to ignore the snide comment about her healthy respect for traffic laws.

Jaime smirked at her.

“What, can’t stand my presence for ten minutes? Afraid my dashing good looks will enchant you into spilling all your secrets?”

Brienne felt herself go red to her roots. Partly because she was worried about spending ten minutes alone with him, and partly because said secrets were about him. Jaime laughed.

“I told Cersei I was hitching with you. You wouldn’t make me a liar, would you?”

He turned his eyes on her, big and green and sparkling with feigned innocence.

“Would that make the first one today?” Brienne muttered, “Or just the first after the bell?”

Jaime smiled at her and bumped her shoulder. Her stomach lurched, and breathing suddenly took a great deal of concentration. She bit her lip, ordering herself to stop overreacting. She was about to make an idiot of herself, and she'd already done that twice today. Besides, Jaime was - gone.

She cast about for several long seconds before her eyes found Jaime. He was striding ahead of her, twirling her keys around one finger.

Brienne glanced down at the backpack hanging from her shoulder. The side zipper she diligently checked and rechecked was gaping, only half done.

"That's pick pocketing!" she objected, chasing after him.

But Jaime was remarkably obstinate, and Brienne was less difficult when she felt embarrassed, and so she ended up sitting passenger in her own car, wincing as

Jaime paid half a mind to cars and stoplights alike.

There was an awkward moment when he reached for the radio and, terrified by the prospect of him recognizing the sap in her cd player, she grabbed his hand without thinking.

"Music breaks my concentration," she stammered, dropping his fingers before he could realize how sweaty her palms had become. "Y'know, before practice."

Which, of course, led to 7 minutes of Jaime serenading her with everything from Rihanna to Frank Sinatra, while Brienne hunched down in her seat, grinding her teeth to keep from smacking him.

"Next time you'll be singing along," Jaime threatened as he pulled into a space and tossed back her keys.

Brienne climbed out of the car and slammed the door, which only seemed to amuse him more.

"Next time we're listening to Gospel choir," Brienne told him, completely serious. The words to S&M were still burning in her ears. Jaime Lannister singing lyrics like "make my body say *ah*" should be a sin.

She heard her name echo off the parked cars and turned to see Loras jogging up. The look on his face promised retribution if she didn't explain 5 seconds ago.

"What's up with you and Lannisters today?" he asked, more bluntly than seemed fair.

Brienne chewed her lip, at a loss.

"Cersei's in a mood and I needed a ride," Jaime piped up.

Loras crossed his arms, unconvinced.

“Some of us actually care about showing up for practice,” Jaime continued, voice dropping dangerously.

Loras flared up before Brienne could blink.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he demanded, edging forward.

“If you want someone at your beck and call, jump back in Renly’s Beamer. Otherwise, I expect you to be here.”

“If you think this team can survive The Bloody Marys without me-“

“I’ll *feed* you to The Bloody Marys.”

“You’d make a hell of an appetizer.”

Brienne realized she’d been inching away and forced her feet forward. She wasn’t sure if Jaime or Loras was more reasonable right now, but her chances of talking either down from a testosterone trip seemed pretty slim.

She tried anyway.

“Guys-“

“You’re lucky Brienne can swing a stick, or I’d have shoved mine up your ass and had you out for the season.”

Loras tensed, and suddenly Brienne felt very, very out of place.

“You and your sister stay the fuck away from her.”

Brienne almost dropped her bag.

“Loras!”

“Because clearly you have her best interests at heart.”

“Jaime-“ she protested, taken aback by the gravity in his words.

Whatever he was insinuating, Loras didn’t like it. This time, his step forward wasn’t threatening; it was full of intent.

“That’s enough,” Brienne decided firmly, muscling between them and pulling Loras back. “Whatever this is about, it’s your job,” she glared at Jaime, “to think about the team.”

Jaime pretended he hadn’t heard.

Loras seemed to be contemplating the effectiveness of a left hook.

“Hey meatheads!” Arya shouted at them.

Brienne was the only one to glance at her, and she could practically feel the younger girl roll her eyes.

“Are you gonna stand around the parking lot like morons, or are you gonna show me the drills I missed last week?”

Arya was forever getting grounded and missing practice. It drove the team half crazy, but she wasn't the only middle schooler playing up for nothing.

Loras and Jaime spent another moment glowering at each other, and then Loras shook Brienne's hand off his arm and headed toward the arena.

“Chop, chop,” Arya clapped her hands at her team captain, then shooed him after Loras' retreating figure.

Brienne expected Jaime to go off again, but he just frowned before following Arya to the rink, muttering about “upstart pretty boys with no respect for authority.”

Brienne hung back, letting them get a head start. She didn't want to end up in the middle of *that* again.

“Brienne, dear!”

Brienne jumped, half expecting a cheerleader to jump from the bushes. It was only Arya's mom, though, waving her over from her idling minivan.

She made her way to Mrs. Stark slowly, trying to ease her trembling fingers. That weirdness with the boys had kind of frazzled her. Whatever was up with them, it had felt strangely like watching the brother she never had scare off the boyfriend she never would.

“Hey, Mrs. Stark,” she tried to smile, but her mouth only twitched feebly.

“Brienne, how are you?”

The cool thing about Arya's mom was that when she asked questions like that, you could tell she actually wanted to know.

Weird, she almost said. On edge. Baffled by the male psyche.

“Fine. What's up?”

“Well, dear,” she began slowly, and Brienne knew just like that something terrible was about to happen. “Last night Cersei came to Joanna with an unlikely request.”

If Brienne were prone to strong language, or remotely capable of stringing words together under pressure, she was sure she'd be cursing eloquently right now. As it was, she was left staring dumbly at Catelyn Stark.

“It seems you've never been invited to join cotillion. Of course, Cersei was a deb years ago, and Sansa's still a year away, but your friend Margaery will be there, and she's convinced -

oh, that astrology girl - Mellie to come, too.” She paused to smile at Brienne, “And some of the girls thought you might like to be included.”

“C-cotillion?”

Brienne could hear Cersei jeering in her head.

“I would love to see her in a dress.”

“Jo and I think it’s a wonderful idea,” Mrs. Stark encouraged. But she must have read the total panic on Brienne’s face, because she added gently, “It’s completely up to you.”

“That’s – I mean - not really my thing,” Brienne managed.

Mrs. Stark nodded.

“It sounds daunting,” she agreed. “And goodness knows I’ll never get Arya to go. But you learn a lot about yourself, gain some life experience. And it looks good on college applications.”

“I’ve got hockey,” Brienne reminded her. “And football, in the fall.”

“It’ll be over by May,” Mrs. Stark prodded. “And there’s nothing that says you can’t do both.”

She hesitated, then looked at Brienne the way Brienne imagined a concerned mother would look at her daughter.

“I think it would be nice for you to make some new friends.”

She reached through the window and patted Brienne’s arm.

“I’ve left the information with your father. Just think about it, dear.”

Somewhere inside the rink, Coach Selmy’s whistle echoed across the ice. Brienne stood unmoving in the parking lot, watching the Stark’s silver minivan disappear into the distance.

Cotillion.

She felt like she’d been duped by the universe.

End Notes

Well, we've taken a sharp left turn from intention and are trucking along the highway of The Cliches Most Traveled. Let's see how this goes.

Feedback is much appreciated!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!