Summary

In the days before Joffrey’s wedding to Margaery, Sansa and Tyrion's marriage grows more complicated.

Notes

This has been a work in progress for many months (grad school has prevented me from spending as much time with it as I'd like to!), and I now have so many thousands of words that I can't help but share some of them!

Warning: updates will in all likelihood be not entirely frequent. But I swear I'll try!
One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

But it doesn’t work that way

Wanting not to want you won’t make it so

It doesn’t work that way

Don’t leave me here alone

(The National, “You Were A Kindness”)

Look around you. We’re all liars here, and every one of us is better than you.

(2.10)

Jaime drinks deep from his goblet, then sets it down on the table with a thud. He’s still ungainly with his remaining hand. Tyrion tries not to find it unsettling. “The Stark girl looks miserable.”

“My lady wife looks miserable, you mean.”

“Very courteous, though.”

“Ah yes.” Tyrion grimaces. “I don’t know if a more courteous lady has ever lived.”

“Cersei told me you’re staying out of her bed.”

“Her family was slaughtered by ours. It’s not exactly conducive to romance.”

Jaime smiles, mischievous. He’s lost his hand but not his ability to annoy. “Would you like to romance her?”

“Go away,” Tyrion grumbles.

“Oh, you would!”

Tyrion says nothing. Jaime laughs to himself. The laughter does not last for long, though, and when it stops, he looks startlingly gaunt.

Solemn now, Jaime says, “I swore to return your wife to her mother. Her and her sister.”

“Swore to Catelyn Stark?” Tyrion asks, surprised.

“No, no. To Brienne.”
“Brienne, your statuesque new traveling companion?”

“The very one. I can’t wait to introduce the pair of you, by the way. Seeing you stand next to each other – at this point I can hope for nothing better out of life.”

Tyrion ignores the jape. “Why is Brienne so devoted to Sansa?”

“She swore Catelyn Stark a vow. When she thought she would be unable to fulfill it, she passed it on to me.”

“And you agreed to it?” Tyrion can’t quite imagine that.

Jaime doesn’t reply, aside from looking suddenly very disgruntled.

“Your giantess must be very persuasive.”

“She’s all duty and honor.”

“Aren’t we all?” Tyrion says dryly.

“But she means it, is the thing. She’s ...”

Tyrion waits.

“Odd,” Jaime concludes. “And very annoying.”

“Ah, I see. The two of you have that in common. So you swore her a vow.”

“I did. Alas, there will be no keeping it. Catelyn Stark is dead, the little girl’s who knows where, and Sansa ... well. Sansa won’t be going anywhere, will she? She’s part of the family now.”

Tyrion doesn’t say anything. Instead, he stares at the wine in his goblet. Turns the cup in small circles and watches the liquid swirl.

“Tyrion, it’s good of you to leave her be. But it can’t go on. You know that. There must be a Lannister heir in the north. You know what our father—”

“Oh, fuck our father.” He’s tired of talking about Sansa. There’s no one he can speak to about her in the way he would like to. He wishes he could talk about her cleverness, her bravery, her strength. But of course, no one can know about any of those things. They’re her only weapons, and ought to be kept secret. So instead it’s all pity and despair. And speaking of pity and despair: “How have you found our darling sister since you returned?”

It’s Jaime’s turn to stare into his drink.

“Did she miss me?” he asks. He means to sound sarcastic.

“Desperately,” Tyrion says. “It made her even more charming than usual.”

Jaime does not look so heartened by that.
In the morning, Sansa embroiders pink roses onto a handkerchief – a small wedding gift for Margaery, who no doubt has a hundred handkerchiefs with pink roses on them already. Still, none of those are from Sansa. It’s a small, silly gift, but she likes thinking that Margaery will have something of Sansa close to her even after she’s married.

Tyrion sets a book down on the table, catching her attention. “What do you think?” he asks.

Sansa sets aside her needlework for a moment to consider the book. It’s old and very grand looking, the sides of its pages pressed together like a brick of gold. She puts two fingers to the leather cover, tracing the letters of the title. *Lives of Four Kings*.

“It’s beautiful,” she says truthfully, looking back up at Tyrion.

He smiles, pleased by her interest. “I’m glad you think so. I predict its recipient will be staggeringly ungrateful.”

“It’s for Joffrey and Margaery?”

“Indeed it is. Perhaps a bit of history will lend our great king a bit of wisdom.”

“Our great king wants to be wise almost as much as he wants to be kind.”

He chuckles as he takes a seat beside her. “My lady wife, I couldn’t have said it better myself.”

Sansa smiles to herself and returns her attention to embroidery.

“You’re very good at that,” Tyrion remarks, leaning closer to peer down at the tiny roses.

Sansa can’t help but feel pleased at the compliment. “I love doing it. When I was younger, Septa Mordane always told me I had the tidiest stitches of any girl she’d ever known. Arya hated anything to do with a needle and thread. She always said it was a stupid thing to be good at, but that’s because she couldn’t do it. We used to get so angry at each other. Our mother would—”

She can see her mother’s face, her mouth pinched in that disapproving way that Sansa found so irritating back then and would give anything to see now.

“It’s for Margaery,” she forces herself to say.

“It’s very beautiful,” Tyrion says softly.

She looks up at him. His eyes are warm with sympathy. “Thank you, my lord.”

He puts his hand on her shoulder, the touch light and almost timid. It’s a funny thought: Tyrion Lannister, with his smooth words and jokes and cleverness, being timid about anything. About Sansa.

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Sansa wants very badly to visit Margaery on her own – to have a few last moments that are just theirs – but like most things she wants, she doesn’t get it. She’s nearly to Margaery’s quarters; she turns a corner and there’s Joffrey coming toward her, trailed by a pair of guards.
She feels a powerful combination of sickness and anger at the sight of him. She’s getting used to that feeling.

“Your Grace,” she says demurely.

“Lady Sansa.” He beams at her. “I’m on my way to visit my sweet lady Margaery. Won’t you walk with me?” He offers his arm, practically bouncing with delight. Once she would have been so thrilled to imagine a young king could ever be so happy to see her.

Ignore him. He’s nothing. She takes his arm.

“You and my uncle look very cozy lately,” Joffrey remarks pleasantly as they walk along.

“He is my husband, Your Grace.”

“Is he? I know he hasn’t fucked you yet. Why is that? You see, I think it’s that he can’t.” Behind them, the guards chuckle. Joffrey lowers his voice. These words are just for her. “It’s not that you won’t let him. You’d let anyone, wouldn’t you? Even a gnarled little monster like him.”

Sansa holds her head high and pretends not to hear him.

“You’ll let me.” Joffrey curls his fingers around her arm. Sansa imagines breaking every one of them.

“You’ll be married to Margaery.”

“Oh, I’ll fuck her too.” Sansa feels a lurch of sickness. Someone as kind and bright as Margaery shouldn’t have to waste her radiance on a husband so unworthy of her.

Annoyed at her silence, Joffrey orders, “Don’t be rude. Answer me when I speak to you.”

“Yes, Your Grace.”

“Mm, that’s better. Is that what you’ll say when I take your maidenhead?”

The words are so coarse – Sansa doesn’t mean to protest, but she can’t help it. “You can’t.”

“What?” Joffrey snarls.

You idiot, she curses herself.

“Lord Tyrion is my husband,” she says again. “He’s already ...” But she cannot bring herself to say the rest of it. It’s too vulgar. And besides, it’s treason to lie to a king.

Even though she doesn’t say it, Joffrey follows along well enough.

“So he has fucked you.” He looks Sansa up and down. “Poor lady. And here I thought you were so depressed because your family’s been slaughtered. But it isn’t that at all, is it? It’s that you’ve had that gargoyle inside you.”

Sansa wants to follow her husband’s example and slap Joffrey right across his smug evil face.

Instead, she stares blankly forward and resists the eager tingling in her fingers.

“Don’t worry,” Joffrey sneers. “I’ll have my lady wife to please first, of course, but I won’t neglect you too long. You’ll see what it’s like with a real man soon enough.”
He squeezes Sansa’s arm, tight enough to bruise, and then lifts his hand to rap his knuckles against the door.

Margaery opens the door, already smiling. She looks as though there’s no one in the world she’d rather see. Sansa resolves to keep the handkerchief for now. She won’t let Joffrey ruin the gift.

Chapter End Notes

Note, as of 4/14/14: Hello dear readers! I will return to this story once 1) I've finished up grad school (which will be over in the next few weeks!), and 2) I've gotten enough of Game of Thrones season four to be inspired to change, oh, EVERYTHING IN CANON.

Thank you so much for your readership! I promise this series will return soon!
You know he betrays you
As much as he saves you
(Phildel, "The Disappearance of the Girl")

As soon as she gets back to her room, Sansa bursts into angry sobs. The effort of keeping a sweet smile on her face while conversing with Joffrey and Margaery, even for the few moments she stayed, was unbearable. Her whole body shakes. She knows she’s just a weak girl, but she thinks she could kill Joffrey if he stood before her right now.

“I hate him, I hate him, I hate him,” she fumes, gasping for breath.

“Sansa,” Shae orders, alarmed. “Quiet!”

“He’s going to make me—he keeps talking about—”

“What?” Shae says firmly, taking both of Sansa’s hands.

“Joffrey keeps saying he’ll make me—He wants to be the one who takes my maidenhead. I lied to him, I told him that I’ve already been with Tyrion; I thought maybe he wouldn’t want to as much that way. But he still said he’d do it.”

Shae’s face turns hard, so suddenly that it makes Sansa afraid of her.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” Sansa begs, her voice thick with sobs. “Shae, please.”

The door swings open.

“Hello,” Tyrion says rather awkwardly, taking in the sight of Sansa all blotchy from sobbing, clutching Shae’s hands.

Shae storms over to Tyrion. “You fucking fool. What are you thinking, ever letting her alone with him?”

Sansa’s heart all but stops. “Shae! You can’t speak to him like—”

“She is yours; you protect her. If that little shit of a king comes anywhere near her—”

“Shae! My lord, I’m sorry—”

“What’s going on?” Tyrion demands.

“The king is making threats to rape her. Talk to your father, have him make the boy stop, take her away somewhere else. Do whatever it takes to keep her safe.”

“You can’t just tell him what to do,” Sansa says, her head spinning. “My lord, I’m so sorry for her insolence, please don’t dismiss her, she means well—”
Sansa falls silent as she looks at them. Shae is standing very close to Tyrion, her arms folded as she glares down at him. Tyrion doesn’t look very shocked as he stares up at her. It’s not the way you would stand with a stranger.

“Do you know each other?” Sansa asks slowly.

Her husband and Shae look at her in unison, alarmed. It would be funny under other circumstances.

“Um,” Tyrion says.

Shae gets that look on her face, hard and determined.

Then she says, “I was his whore.”

“What?” It’s all Sansa can think to say.

“Not anymore,” Shae adds sharply. “He’s a married man now.”

“You weren’t just my—” Tyrion sighs, exasperated, then says to Sansa, “We were lovers.”

“Lovers!” Shae laughs darkly.

“You’re in love?” Sansa says stupidly.

Tyrion mutters, “That’s up for debate recently.”

“Why would you fall in love with my handmaiden?” Sansa struggles through the words. “Why would my handmaiden be a—a—?”

“Shae wanted to remain close to me,” Tyrion says, his voice all strained patience. “The easiest way was to give her a position within the castle. Sansa, I—”

“You lied to me,” she realizes aloud. “Both of you.”

“Sansa—” Shae begins.

But Sansa doesn’t stay to listen. Suddenly, she can barely breathe.

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When Tyrion finds her, Sansa is kneeling in the godswood.

“Sorry to interrupt,” he says. She turns to look at him briefly, but doesn’t favor him with her gaze for long.

“I needed to be alone.”

“Shae informs me that you’re not allowed to go anywhere alone.”

Sansa ignores him.
“Sansa, please—”

Briskly, she interrupts, “Shit.”

It’s unexpected, to say the least. “What?”

“The word is ‘shit,’ not ‘shift.’”

“Ah yes.” Tyrion winces. “One of Shae’s favorites, in fact.”

“Why didn’t you tell me I had it wrong?”

“Your naïveté can be very charming. We don’t have a lot of that around here.”

As soon as he says it, he knows he’s made a mistake.

Sansa’s face goes cold and angry. “You told me I was smart.”

“What?”

“You did. You said I wasn’t just some stupid girl, and yet you were lying to me the whole time. I don’t know what I should have expected. You’re a Lannister. I am stupid. I shouldn’t have let myself forget. I should have never started to trust you, but you were kind and no one is ever kind and everyone I’ve ever loved is dead, and that should have been a lesson but I was such an idiot—”

“Sansa.” He tries to reach for her hand.

She shakes him off, rough. “Don’t touch me.”

“Lady Stark.”

“Don’t!” She nearly shouts it. He’s never heard her voice so sharp. It sends a chill through him. She quickly recovers herself, and the next words are a slight whisper. “Don’t just—say things like that and think it’s enough.”

“Put yourself in my shoes,” he says, frustrated despite himself. “They are a little small for you, I admit, but try. How would you have told your sweet young wife about your mistress?”

“At our wedding feast, you told me about vomiting on one of your mistresses while you bedded her. You’re very good at honesty. It wouldn’t have been hard.”

“I know it’s not romantic, but married men often keep whores. I am unique in that I have abstained from mine since we wed.”

“Don’t talk about her like that!”

“Like what?”

“Like she’s a thing. She’s not a thing. She’s Shae. She’s a person. She was my friend – I thought,” she corrects herself sharply, “she was my friend. And she was a Lannister spy all along.”
“Not just any Lannister.” The look on her face is unbearable. “I swear it, my lady, she has only ever wanted to keep you safe.”

Sansa says nothing.

“And,” Tyrion says after a moment, “That’s all I want, too.” It must be a lie – he has always wanted so much, and she’s just a young lady he still barely knows. And yet looking at her now, it feels true. “I will not let Joffrey near you.”

“And you’ll never hurt me,” Sansa recites, scathing.

Tyrion looks at her sadly.

“I lied to Joffrey and said that you’d bedded me,” she tells him after a moment. “I thought it might put him off. He couldn’t make quite such a joke of you if you’d been there first.”

Tyrion cannot quite find the words to answer that; what words are there in the world that could make a thing like that better? It feels impossible that it was only yesterday when they’d strolled through the sunset together, speaking of old loves and the dirtier nuances of *The Bear and the Maiden Fair*. He wishes the gods had seen fit to give her joy in love, instead of the cruel trick that was Joffrey.

Instead of the trick of this marriage, which seems almost as cruel.

All he can offer her is a weak, “Thank you.”

“But it didn’t put him off.” Dully, she recites, “He says he’ll show me what it’s like with a real man.”

Suddenly, he wants nothing more than to find Joffrey and kill him on the spot. But Sansa deserves more than useless rage from her husband. Tyrion strives to sound calm and wise, tries to sound like he knows everything. Not usually a challenge, that. “Well, he won’t touch you.”

She isn’t so easily convinced. “How do you know that?”

“The wedding is foremost on everyone’s minds right now. I’m sure Margaery will keep him properly distracted for a week at least. That will give us time to…”

“To what?” She is mostly wary, but her eyes brighten with something that might be hope.

Shae’s words echo in his head. *Talk to your father, have him make the boy stop, take her away somewhere else. Do whatever it takes to keep her safe.*

But it isn’t—it can never be—that easy.

“Sansa, Joffrey says awful things,” Tyrion says, trying to sound consoling and loathing himself thoroughly for it. “But often, they are to mask the fact that he’s just a boy with no idea what he’s doing. Maybe this is just talk.”

“What he did to that woman. The one who worked with Lord Baelish—Ros. That wasn’t talk.”

“How do you know about that?” Tyrion asks sharply.

“Shae told me.”
“Why would she ...” He swears under his breath. Then, louder: “You shouldn’t have had to hear about that.”

“Yes, I should have,” Sansa says. She seems suddenly to catch fire. Urgent, she turns to face him; still on her knees, she matches his height. There are mere inches between them. He feels oddly dazed by the fierce blue of her eyes. She clutches his hands in hers. Her grip is stronger than expected. “You and Shae aren’t the only ones trying to survive, and I’m the one Joffrey likes to hurt best. And there are no knights, or – or heroes. No one else is going to take care of me. I have to learn how to do this alone.”

“But you aren’t alone,” Tyrion protests.

Sansa looks at him, a look of such deep betrayal and disgust that he can’t stand to hold the gaze. She lets go of his hands as quickly as she’d taken them.

“Sansa,” he says to his feet like the coward he is, flustered by her closeness and her goodness. “I swear I won’t let Joffrey near you.”

Her face frosts over. She stands, towering above him with a queen’s dignity. He looks up at her, and she does not avoid his eyes. I don’t believe you, she doesn’t say. She doesn’t need to.

“His Grace is my king,” she says instead, her voice steady and cool. “I’m glad to serve him however he wishes.”

When she walks away, Tyrion doesn’t attempt to stop her. Instead, he follows on behind her—not a knight or a hero, but her husband all the same. She doesn’t slow her pace or look back.

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“You did always tell me not to trust you,” Sansa tells Shae that night when Shae comes back to help her undress. Sansa has already put on her nightgown and taken down her hair. All it takes is one look to know what she is telling Shae: I don’t need you. Shae wishes Tyrion could be half as efficient at breaking her heart. You were honest, at least.”

“Would you like me to go?” Shae asks dutifully.

Sansa looks almost frightening in the candlelight, tall and queenly and cold. “Yes. You’re dismissed.”

“I’ll come back in the morning.” Shae promises.

Sansa shows no sign that she heard.

Once she is outside, Shae rests against the door for a moment. She feels old and heavy, sick of everything. She misses her old self, who knew that love was not worth the cost and swore never to be so stupid and weak.

Inside, she hears Sansa begin to cry.
Shae closes her eyes.
Tyrion has been trying to abstain from wine (well, too much wine, anyway), but considering the day’s events, he can’t quite fault himself for the relapse.

He banishes himself out to the terrace, leaving Sansa her privacy, or at least some semblance of it. He is not sure how long he sits there, kept company only by his wine cup and a hearty sense of abject failure. The daylight eventually fades, passing into night. The wine helps to dull his senses, at least, if not his guilt.

Eventually Shae comes, carrying a tray of food. “You’re drunk,” she says briskly. “You should eat something.”

“Neither of us deserve her.”

“Speak for yourself,” Shae scowls. She sets the tray down in front of him with an unnecessary clang. He winces. “You should take her away from him.”

“So you really think my father would allow it?”

“Do you really think your father is a god? I promise you, he is not. If someone shoved a knife in his guts, he would bleed and die same as anyone.”

“Don’t get any ideas,” Tyrion says dryly.

Shae rests her hands on the table and leans down, meeting his eyes. She lowers her voice. “Joffrey is a rotten king.”

“Not the first rotten king.”

“What difference does that make? I thought you stayed here to make things better. That’s why you wouldn’t run away with me when I asked you. Why a life with me was not enough.”

“Shae—” he says miserably.

She glares at him. “Don’t look at me with your sad puppy eyes. I don’t want your pity. But you know it and I know it: keeping that little shit on the throne will help no one.”

“What other option is there?”

Shae says nothing.

“There’s a good chance Margaery will soften him,” Tyrion says. “The girl knows what she’s doing.”

“Maybe. But not soon enough.”

Tyrion groans. “What would you have me do?”

“Help her. Protect her. She is your wife.”

“Not really—”

“Yes, really!” Shae cries. She goes quieter, gathering control of herself, but the words don’t lose any
bite. “So you are not in love. What good is love in this place? Who does it help? The point is, you are bound to each other now. You protect each other.” She pauses for just a moment, then finishes, her voice steady, “She is yours and you are hers.”

Tyrion feels a sharp pang of misery. “If I could have married you—”

“Don’t.”

“I wanted you to be my wife.” The words come out choked and pathetic—and yet somehow, not saying them would be worse. She deserves at least this much. “I do love you.”

He doesn’t know for certain in the dark, but he thinks Shae’s eyes might be gleaming. “And what good is that, hmm?”

“It’s brought us some happiness.”

“It did for a time,” she agrees, almost gently. “And now it’s over.”

He sighs heavily. “I know.” For a long time they’re quiet. “Are you going to leave?”

“Only once I know she is safe.” Shae leans in close and presses her lips to his forehead. “You help her. Be brave, my lion.”

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Lying in bed, Sansa listens to Shae and Tyrion talking outside. She can’t make the words out; she hears just the sound, the way their voices twine familiarly. It makes her heart ache.

What would it be like, to have someone like that? One person to be true to while you lie to the rest of the world.

Of course, there’s no point in wondering. It can never happen—not for her. She squeezes her eyes closed, angry at how much it makes her want to cry, and pretends not to hear them talking.

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When she wakes in the morning, she discovers that Tyrion is still out on the terrace, asleep in his chair.

For a moment, she feels guilty—this is his home just as much as it is hers (more, really), and she knows that he is already an outcast in his own family. Now he has been banished by his wife, too. Maybe she is a true Lannister after all.

But that isn’t true and it isn’t fair. He’s the one who hurt her. Lied to her. She shouldn’t be the one feeling guilty.

She leans against the doorframe, watching him sleep. His mouth is slightly open, his hair mussed. He looks foolish, really, and not at all like the handsome dream husband Sansa had always imagined and
expected.

Still, there is a part of her—a stupid part—that feels so fond of him.

As if he feels her watching him, Tyrion stirs, groaning. Then he wakes properly and looks up at her. She meets his eyes for a moment, and that stupid part of her wants him to speak. To say something that will magically turn everything better, and make them friends again.

“Sansa,” he says, his voice a croak, and she realizes that he has been drinking. Is still a little drunk.

Disappointment pulses through her. Disappointment in him, for breaking another of his promises. In herself, for caring in the first place.

She holds his gaze a little longer – long enough that she thinks he must see how he’s hurt her, because his eyes go weary and sad and he looks away. Sansa turns and disappears inside, and he stays out on the terrace, banished like a bad dog.

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Sansa has better luck visiting Margaery a second time: Joffrey is nowhere to be seen. Margaery dismisses her handmaidens, insisting that she needs some time alone with her dear friend. The words make Sansa blush, and yet doubt lurks underneath her happiness. She knows better than to trust kind words like that, words that insist she is special.

When Sansa gives her the embroidered handkerchief, Margaery’s face lights up in a smile. “Oh Sansa, you shouldn’t have. It’s beautiful.”

“It’s nothing. I just thought—”

Margaery smiles and tucks the handkerchief into her bodice. “For luck.”

Sansa knows better than to really trust Margaery. She is too beautiful and kind and warm and good; Sansa has believed in people before and been wrong, and she has never wanted to believe in anyone more than Margaery. That’s why she knows she mustn’t.

“Sansa, what is it?” Margaery asks, brushing a finger against Sansa’s cheek.

“Nothing. I ... I just hope you’ll be all right.”

She regrets it as soon as she’s said it. It’s too honest. No one must ever say what Joffrey is really like; Margaery certainly hasn’t. And now here Sansa is, as good as saying that marrying Joffrey is dangerous.

But Margaery doesn’t protest. She does not say some sweet pretty thing about what a joy it is to be Joffrey’s bride.

Her face almost grim, she says, “Thank you.”

Sansa knows that look on Margaery’s face so well—knows exactly how it feels to wear it, and how hard it is to cover it with a smile.

On a whim, Sansa wraps her arms around Margaery. Margaery is still for a moment, and Sansa is
almost embarrassed, but then Margaery’s arms circle around her, holding her close. Sansa closes her eyes, and lets herself pretend—just for a moment—that she has a family again. A sister who understands. Someone she can trust as simply as breathing.

Shae is called to Lady Margaery’s room—something about a message for Lady Sansa and her dress for the wedding. Frivolity. Shae feels a stab of something, almost like jealousy, at the fact that a girl like Lady Margaery retains Sansa’s trust when Shae has lost it, maybe for good. Perhaps it all comes down to blood and rank, like always. Margaery is a fine lady too. People trust those of their own kind, and Shae can never be what Sansa is.

When Shae enters the room, Lady Margaery is standing at the window. She turns, her arms folded in front of her chest. This is not the pretty girl who is all charm and laughter in the garden. There is stone in her look, and Shae knows right away that something is wrong.

“Leave us, please,” Lady Margaery instructs her servant, who does not need telling twice.

The door shuts, leaving Shae alone with her.

Lady Margaery comes forward slowly, her steps measured. “You’re Lady Sansa’s handmaiden.”

“Yes,” Shae says. She will say only as much as she needs to.

“I’ve heard her speak fondly of you.”

Shae says nothing, waiting.

“I know you must have her best interests in mind, as I do,” Lady Margaery continues.

“She can rely on me.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Some time ago, Petyr Baelish was often in Lady Sansa’s company.”

“Yes.”

“What do you think his intentions were?”

“Nothing good. Why?”

Of course, Margaery does not explain. Her face is thoughtful, eyes sharp. Abruptly, she changes her tune. “I’ve heard the most awful stories about Lord Tywin and his son.” Shae feels it like a blow; it pulls the air from her lungs. “Did you know, there is a rumor that he made it very clear that if Lord Tyrion brought a whore to the Red Keep, his father would have the woman killed?”

Here she is at last. Caught.

Shae keeps her voice steady, uninterested. “Why would I know that? Besides, Lord Tyrion is a husband now.”

Margaery laughs shortly. “And what could husbands want with whores?”
“I suppose some of them prefer pretty blonde boys.”

Lady Margaery’s mouth twists in what might be a smile. If it is, it is not a pretty one. “I know who you are, Shae.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Shae answers evenly.

“Very well. If you’d like to play it like that, then by all means, do. The point is, I think you should feel a bit uneasy. A mysterious handmaiden, appearing quite suddenly when Lord Tyrion returned here, with no discernible ties to anyone and something—well, unusual in her manner. Coarse, some might say. Most servant girls don’t threaten other servant girls at knifepoint, as a rule. Not to mention that you were spotted—never mind by who—speaking alone with Lord Tyrion yesterday night in quite an intimate way. Put all of this together, and, well. You certainly wouldn’t be able to blame Lord Tywin for being suspicious, if he were to find out about you.”

Shae curls her hands into fists, trying to stifle her rage. Calmly, she asks, “What do you want?”

“I want you to be quite aware that I could ruin you,” Lady Margaery answers simply. She is standing close now. “Not that I want to. I’m not Joffrey, or his mother; I take no joy in such things. But I could. I hope I’ve just illustrated that.”

Shae glares at her.

“Lord Baelish will be returning very soon,” Lady Margaery continues, “but only for a little while. He intends to take Sansa away with him, and it’s as you said: I doubt his intentions are good. I don’t think it would make her happy, to go with him.”

“So what do you want me to do?”

“I want you to take her away first.”

“Where?”

“Far. You’ll be provided with money and safe passage. It won’t be a luxurious journey, but I have faith in your capabilities.”

“What makes you think I will be able to just steal away Lord Tyrion’s wife?”

“Timing will be rather crucial.”

New suspicion pricks. Shae asks, “When would we go?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Your wedding is tomorrow.”

“And I trust the celebration will provide a suitable distraction.”

“Why?”

“It’s a wedding. There are always a thousand things happening at once at a wedding.” Margaery gives her one of those charming fine lady smiles.

Shae scowls at her. “And what about him?”

“Lord Tyrion?”
“I doubt he will take kindly to losing her.”

Margaery says nothing, her face unreadable. After a moment, she says, “I’m not the only one who has people listening out there. There’s a good chance you’ve been found out by those less kind than I.” She places a hand on Shae’s bare shoulder. Her fingers don’t stay still; instead, she traces small circles against Shae’s skin. “This is the best thing for you, and for Sansa. Please tell me you’ll do it.”

Shae meets her eyes. “Do I have a choice?”

“Do any of us?” Margaery says, and Shae cannot argue with that.

+

Sansa goes again to the godswood. She knows Shae forbid her from walking around alone, but Shae is the servant, not the mistress. Besides, what difference is there between sitting in her room, caged, and roaming out in the open air? Either way, Joffrey will find her if he wants to, and either way there is no one to protect her but herself.

But as she nears the godswood, she realizes that someone else is there already: a man, kneeling. Her heart flutters nervously, and she turns to go.

Then the kneeling figure turns and looks up at her, catching her interest. He is a sad-faced man, chubby and unwashed, his face vaguely familiar.

“Lady Sansa!” the man says, and scrambles to his feet.

Her stomach lurches, afraid. Joffrey isn’t the only man who can hurt her. (She will never, never forget those men in the alley.) Taking a few steps backward as gracefully as she can, she asks, “Are we acquainted?”

The man smiles wistfully. It is a gentle, good-hearted smile. Sansa relaxes slightly. “We were briefly, my lady. I don’t blame you for not remembering me. I have more reason to remember you – you see, you saved my life.”

She is able to place his face at once. “Ser Dontos. Of course.” The man Joffrey meant to kill for his own amusement. The man Sansa saved. “I’m glad to see you doing well.”

He snorts. “Well? Not quite.” He looks doubtfully down at his less-than-pristine clothes, and his staggering movements make Sansa realize he’s drunk. Why must all the men she sees today be drunk? But when he looks up again, his face is achingly sincere. “But alive. And for that I am forever grateful, my lady.”

“It was nothing,” Sansa says, feeling flustered—but happily so. “Truly, anyone would have done the same.”

“But they wouldn’t have. The way you changed the King’s mind—it was very clever and very brave.”

Sansa feels a surge of pride. Here, at least, is someone who thinks she is more than just a gullible little fool.
“I’m sorry to have interrupted you, Ser. I’ll leave you to your prayers.”

“Actually, I was hoping to see you.”

“You were? Why?”

He flushes, bashful. “I’ve wanted to repay you in some small way for what you did for me. Of course, nothing can ever truly pay such a debt—”

“Please,” Sansa says, “don’t worry—”

“—but it would ease my mind to give you at least a token of my appreciation.” He digs into his pocket and reveals a necklace. It is not as fine as most of the baubles Sansa owns, but the look on Ser Dontos’s face as he stares down at it makes it clear to Sansa at once that it is priceless. “I meant to give it as a wedding gift, but couldn’t seem to find the chance. It belonged to my mother, you see, and her mother before her, and it would honor me and House Hollard to gift it to you.”

“Oh, Ser Dontos, I couldn’t. It’s very kind of you, truly, but I couldn’t take such an heirloom—”

“Please,” he interrupts. “Please take it, and wear it. It would bring such comfort for me to know that some small part of my house still prospers, and—and keeps the company of beauty.”

Sansa cannot quite resist his gallantry. His words are so well-meaning; it makes her want to do something kind for him. And it’s only a necklace.

“It’s very beautiful.” Sansa acquiesces, allowing him to drop the necklace into her palm. She stares down at it. “In fact, it will go very well with my dress for the wedding tomorrow.”

“Will it?” Ser Dontos looks almost nervous with delight.

“I shall wear it there proudly,” Sansa assures him, and allows him to clasp her hand like a knight in a song would.
Sansa sits at her dressing table, absently stringing the necklace between her hands. She doesn’t want to put it down just yet; she’s still enjoying the comfort that came from the encounter. Ser Dontos may not be very dashing or handsome, but no one ever is in real life. At least he saw something worth admiring in her.

The door opens. Tyrion announces, “I’m only in here for a change of clothes. Then I’ll be out of your way.”

“It’s your room, my lord,” Sansa replies crisply, and does not turn to look at him.

“Our room.”

Sansa doesn’t reply.

“Sansa,” Tyrion says as he rifles through the wardrobe. His voice is so casual that Sansa knows it must be something important. “How would you feel about a bit of travel after the wedding?”

Leaving the Red Keep seems as unfathomable as flying. “To where?”

“I’m considering asking my father if you and I might go to Casterly Rock.”

She feels suddenly disoriented with hope. To leave this place—to really leave, even if it is only to go to another place overrun by Lannisters—to leave Joffrey behind—

“Isn’t it too dangerous to travel?” she asks, careful not to sound excited.

“It is dangerous, yes,” Tyrion admits. “But it’s dangerous here, too.”

She can’t help it: she turns and looks at him. He meets her gaze, and his eyes are warm.

He listened. He listened yesterday and he’s changing things.

“Will Lord Tywin let you go?” Sansa asks, trying not to let her gladness show too openly.

“He wants an heir in the North. If I tell him that Casterly Rock is more conducive to romance than a place where you’ve lived in constant agony as Joffrey’s prisoner, I think he might just see the light.”

Nervousness darts through her. Does he really mean—?

“It’s the excuse he will listen to,” Tyrion adds, reading her face. “That’s all. I have no intention of
breaking the promise I made on our wedding night.”

She calms. “All right.”

“Good.”

He gives her a kind little smile, and she can’t quite help but smile back.

He is doing what a husband should. Protecting her. Keeping her safe.

But as soon as she thinks the word ‘husband,’ she feels like a fool. He isn’t hers, not properly. He never has been. How could he ever even consider her his true wife for a moment, when Shae has held his heart for so long?

Not that Sansa wants to be a true wife to him. She doesn’t. But there’s something that burns indignantly inside her, knowing that she never even had the chance.

Lightly, she asks, “Will Shae come?”

“Do you want her to?”

“Do you?” Sansa asks, not looking at him.

He’s quiet for a moment too long. “I want your happiness.”

“Do you think she would want to come?”

“I know she likes to be by your side.”

“Or yours,” Sansa can’t resist muttering.

Tyrion chuckles darkly. “I think she’s quite sick of me. But you, Lady Sansa, have a certain inexhaustible charm.”

Sansa rolls her eyes, trying not to let his words sink in. “I suppose she’ll come if she wants to.”

“Yes,” Tyrion agrees. “Let’s leave the choice up to her, shall we?”

Sansa nods.

Tyrion gives her a slight smile, the corner of his mouth curving in a way that Sansa has come to find oddly handsome. Once she never would have imagined she could find anything handsome about him, but she supposes that must be part of getting to know someone. You begin to see all the little truths of them that are missed at first glance. She smiles back thoughtlessly, them remembers that she’s supposed to be angry with him.

She doesn’t know why she can’t just remain cold; it would make things so much easier. But he is trying, really trying to take care of her, and if there’s one thing her mother taught her, it’s that a husband and wife shouldn’t quarrel on the important things. They must stand together.

So maybe it isn’t weak and foolish of her to want to forgive him. Maybe it’s simply what’s best.
“Where did you get that necklace?” Tyrion asks, approaching her. He seems eager to keep talking, now that the ice has melted between them.

Sansa’s heart leaps. Smoothly, she lies, “I’ve always had it. My mother gave it to me when I was little.”

She doesn’t quite know why she holds back the truth. It’s a silly thing to lie about, but she doesn’t want the gift spoiled. She knows it was stupid of her to wander outside alone, to let a strange drunken man talk to her. It could have been so much worse than it turned out to be. It could have been Joffrey. If she tells, Tyrion will worry whether she can take care of herself, and Sansa doesn’t think she could bear being more caged than she already is.

She would like to keep this one small sweet thing to herself.

“I’ve never seen it before.” Tyrion reaches out with one fingertip to poke one of the necklace’s gemstones.

“I didn’t want to wear it here,” Sansa invents. “I didn’t ... I didn’t think it was fashionable enough. I thought the other fine ladies might laugh at me. But now that she’s dead ... I don’t care so much about fitting in anymore.”

She feels a pang of guilt, using her mother to lie. But she knows that Tyrion won’t question it. Sure enough—

“Vastly overrated stuff, fitting in,” he remarks wryly.

“You’re too wise to worry about things like that.”

“On the contrary. If I had the choice, Sansa, I believe I would jump at it in an instant. To be just like everyone else, to have someone look right through you without a second thought ... My gods, what a treat it would be, to be thought wholly unexceptional.”

“Oh, but it isn’t a treat,” Sansa protests without thinking. “It’s exhausting, to always have to seem like there’s nothing interesting about you. Not that I’m interesting, but—it’s difficult to keep all of your thoughts inside all the time. I know people have always been cruel to you, and that’s awful and unfair. But at least you get to say what you think.” Boldly, she says, “Sometimes I wish I could.”

“I wish you could, too. Though I admire your restraint. More restraint would do me good, no doubt. Once we’re away,” he adds, “there will be less restraint. Still some, of course—polite society demands it, and I’m not ready to turn wildling just yet—but less. We can begin anew. Say what we mean. Get to know each other for who we really are.”

Sansa smiles. “You mean you think I’m more than just a silly girl?”

“Depends. Do you think I’m more than a funny—and, alas, too-often-inebriated—dwarf?”

“Of course I do.”

“And of course I do, too.” He clasps her hand, quite gallant. “I look forward to getting to know you better, Lady Sansa, away from all this mayhem and misery.”
“And I you, Lord Tyrion,” Sansa says, inclining her head. For once, it’s fun to play at courtliness.

They stare at one another, faces lit with smiles. It’s the sort of moment where a proper married couple might share a kiss.

As soon as Sansa thinks it, she wishes she hadn’t. Her cheeks begin to burn.

Tyrion looks into her eyes a second longer, then drops his gaze to the floor.

“But first,” he says rather hastily, and lets go of her hand, “we have the wedding of the century to attend, and we shall have to keep our masks firmly in place.”

“To nod and smile at everything Joffrey does,” Sansa says wearily. Her fingertips tingle.

“To refrain from dumping our wine over his head,” Tyrion says woefully, “when it’s so plentiful, and his golden locks just asking for it.”

“Maybe it won’t be so bad,” Sansa suggests, “as long as we have each other’s company.”

“Lady wife,” Tyrion replies gladly, “it will be the saving grace of the day.”

+Sansa wonders if Shae will come to dress her for supper. She was here this morning, and Sansa allowed her to help with getting dressed; Sansa didn’t want to look like a mess visiting Lady Margaery. It was excruciating, the room heavy with awkward silence as Shae swept around, dealing with buttons and laces and then weaving Sansa’s hair into plaits. Sansa felt the stupidest urge to cry the whole time; once, she would have been happy and comfortable to have Shae fluttering around her, helping. She would have liked the chance to talk to her. And now it was all ruined. She couldn’t bear to meet Shae’s eyes in the mirror, even though she wanted desperately to know if Shae felt just as awful as she did.

So really, Sansa can’t blame her for disappearing.

Sansa would disappear too, if she had the choice.

She considers the gowns in her wardrobe, wondering how sloppy she’ll look if she tries to dress herself. She mustn’t look sloppy: she’s to eat with the Lannisters, a feast celebrating the wedding on the morrow, and Joffrey will take anything less than impeccable beauty as a personal slight.

It seems grotesque, to do so much celebrating over a poor girl getting bound to a monster for life. If she were Margaery, she would go mad from it.

Sansa sighs and goes to the looking glass instead. Her hair could use restyling. She makes a face at herself in the mirror, then reaches for Ser Dontos’ necklace and puts it on.

She is tilting her head, considering how the necklace looks, when the door opens and Shae comes in.

“There you are,” Sansa says, relieved in spite of everything. “I can’t be late, or Joffrey—”
“We’re leaving tomorrow,” Shae interrupts, her voice low and determined.

“What?” Sansa asks stupidly.

“I made the arrangements already.” Shae glances around the room. “Start planning now. Take what you must, but not too much.”

“Why?”

“Because you will become much less attached to your pretty things when they are slowing us down.”

“No. Not that,” Sansa says, frustrated. “Why would we leave?”

“What do you mean, why?” Shae says impatiently. “Joffrey. These people. You do not need to live like this anymore.”

“But I can’t just go.” The idea is so unfathomable that Sansa almost laughs.

And yet Shae carries on like it’s the most reasonable thing in the world. “You’ll be fine.”

“That isn’t what I meant.”

Shae puts her hands on her hips. “Well then, what did you mean?”

“The wedding is tomorrow,” Sansa says blankly.

“And you really want to stick around for Joffrey’s happy day? That means so much to you?”

“Margaery will want me there.”

Shae scoffs. “Margaery Tyrell can take care of herself. I promise, Sansa, she is not relying on you.”

Sansa feels a sick, flopping feeling in her stomach. Surely there’s something real in her friendship with Margaery – not everything, no, but at least some flicker of true caring. But Shae seems to think that there’s no way Margaery could ever really care about Sansa, or find comfort and strength in her friendship, and there is no denying that Shae’s clever. Much cleverer than Sansa. She knows just how to see right into the truth of things.

“I can’t just—they’ll find us,” Sansa protests weakly.

“No they won’t. I’m good at hiding.”

“I can’t just run away with you. Tyrion, he’s taking me to Casterly Rock after the wedding, he promised—”

“And you think you’ll be safe there in that pit of Lannisters? Tyrion is Master of Coin. You won’t be able to stay away forever.”

“But it will at least be a start.”

Shae comes forward and grips Sansa’s shoulders. Sansa flinches at the familiar touch of her hands,
but doesn’t move away. “It’s all right to be afraid,” Shae says, her dark eyes fixed on Sansa’s. “But I swear I will keep you safe. And we have money. We can be comfortable, if that is what you’re worried about.”

Sansa feels as if she’s been dropped into deep water and can’t fight her way to the surface; all the breath threatens to leave her lungs. “No,” she manages.

Annoyance darts across Shae’s face. “What do you mean, no?”

“I mean no. I can’t just run away with you!”

“Why not?”

Shae asks it so simply, as if she can’t fathom why Sansa wouldn’t trust her—even after always telling her not to.

Shae, who has tricked her from the moment they met.

“Because you lied to me!” Sansa cries. Shae glares at her—a glare that means Do not let them hear you, and Sansa lowers her voice. “All this time, you’ve lied to me, every single day! I’m not an idiot, I’m not going to just trust you—”

“What, you think I have some big plan to hurt you?” Shae demands, anger creeping onto her face. “You think I would ever let you get hurt?”

“I don’t know anymore!” Sansa wants to say more, but can’t. She wants to say that now she can’t stop thinking of Shae taking stories back to Tyrion about Sansa: Sansa at her most pathetic and stupid. Sansa crying herself to sleep, or not understanding why the poor would try to hurt her, or not knowing why the sheets should have been bloodied after her wedding night. Maybe Shae told Tyrion all of those things, and together they laughed at what a child Sansa was, what a small little idiot. And meanwhile Sansa has been here, blind, loving the both of them. Trusting the both of them, even though she knows she shouldn’t trust anyone at all.

“I don’t know,” she says again, and hates how weak she sounds.

Shae moves one hand from Sansa’s shoulder to touch her cheek. “I would not let you. I would kill anyone who tried to hurt you. I would rather die than cause you harm, you hear me?”

Sansa finds herself blinking back tears; it makes her furious, more than anything. She swallows the lump in her throat. “How can you even stand me, after I married him? I took him away from you—”

Shae’s expression turns solemn, sad, and she pulls her hand away from Sansa’s face. It tells Sansa all she needs to know. It’s true. Shae and Tyrion were in love, really in love, and Sansa’s the one who ruined it. Who destroyed their lives. Who destroyed Shae’s life.

“That was not your choice,” Shae says, the words careful and steady.

And of course it’s true—Sansa didn’t choose to marry Tyrion; she never would have.

But now she thinks of Tyrion holding her hand. That hint of a kiss in the air around them.

“And if I did choose him?” she asks, a little breathless.

“I don’t believe you.”

Shae grips her shoulders again, hard. “Sansa, you mean more to me than any man. Even him.”

It’s a beautiful promise. The kind that a mother would make. For a moment, Sansa wants so badly to listen and accept it as the truth.

But of course she can’t.

“I don’t—I can never believe you. Let go of me!” Sansa tries to shake her off.

Shae’s eyes fall on the necklace. She touches the chain. “Where did you get this?”

“It’s mine, it—it was my mother’s—”

“It is not. I know every piece of jewelry you have. This was not here before.”

“It was too—”

“Where did you get this, Sansa?” Shae demands. “Who gave it to you?”

“It’s none of your business! What answer do you want? Maybe Tyrion gave it to me, and he just didn’t want you to know. Did you ever think of that?”

“Did he give it to you?”

Sansa can’t quite bring herself to commit to that lie. She stays quiet, glaring at Shae.

“Fine,” Shae says bluntly. “Keep your secrets. But we are going tomorrow, whether you want to or not. We are getting away from this place.”

“You can’t tell me what to do!” Sansa cries, even though it makes her sound like a petulant child.

“Well, that is too bad, because I am telling you what to do.”

“You can’t!”

“Oh, can’t I? Why not?”

Something inside Sansa snaps.

“I am a highborn lady, a daughter of Winterfell! A Lannister’s wife. What are you?” Sansa stands taller, glaring down at Shae. Usually she thinks of her mother when she wants to be strong, but now her thoughts turn to Queen Cersei. Coldly, she says, “You’re a servant. A whore. You don’t get to talk back to me.”

In the wake of what she’s said, the very silence seems to catch fire.

Sansa watches the hurt break over Shae’s face, as raw and dreadful as the sickness Sansa suddenly
feels inside. Shae’s dark eyes are so vulnerable for a moment that Sansa thinks she might cry.

But then Shae lifts her chin higher, and turns and storms from the room. The door slams behind her, harsh and sudden as a slap.

It’s only once Shae has gone that Sansa realizes she’s shaking. She lets herself sink down onto the floor and breathes in and out, feeling sick and foul and cruel.

_They’ve made me a Lannister_, she thought once. She thinks it again, here and now, and the thought is like winter in her veins, turning her hard and cold.

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