The White Wolf's Prey

by GypsyMoon88

Summary

He had been watching her. For the past three moons now he had been silently watching her, a shadow and whisper within the vast gods wood trees of the immense castle. Silent, tucked and hidden beneath the trunk of the mighty heart tree. Ever vigilant. Ever observant. Always watching with his intense grey eyes...

Notes
In this alternative universe, Jon Snow and Sansa Stark are not related. Jon Snow is the son of Mance Rayder and is a Wildling prince. Although he is a relatively genuine character, he displays his darker and obsessive nature throughout the narrative, especially when involving Sansa.

See the end of the work for more notes.
He had been watching her. For the past three moons now he had been silently watching her, a shadow and whisper within the vast godswood trees of the immense castle. Silent, tucked, and hidden beneath the trunk of the mighty heart tree. Ever vigilant. Ever observant. Always watching with his intense grey eyes... The vibrant redness of the leaves giving him both sanctuary and respite. Red like her hair... He had always fancied the color red. In a world full of grays, blacks, and lifelessness, red was salvation, a promise of new beginnings—of rejuvenation. She was promise itself with her vibrant cascade of fire and curls, eyes of crystalline sky, and a smile honey-sweet.

His people had always revered the scarlet hue, say that it is the color of the lucky ones. Even more, its wearer to have been personally touched by the gods, to have been "kissed by fire." Although he had never been particularly religious, he believed and adhered to the signs and superstitions. As a wildling and son of the wily King-Beyond-the-Wall, Mance Rayder, Jon Snow could not help but listen with an attentive ear. Savage, yes, but he was no fool.

At ten and two, Jon Snow's name was already legend. At ten and nine, the stories traveled far and wide throughout the realm. From the cannibalistic Thenns of the lush Frostfang Valley, who retell and divulge the stories over roasting fires of human meat, to the hedonistic Dornes of the southern summer kingdoms, lost within the throes of passion and orgasmic bliss on immense beds of silk and color. Always spoken in whispers and hushed tones. Out of fear or reverence, who knew? Perhaps it was one in the same. The results never changed.

Jon Snow, Mance Rayder's heir. The White Wolf of the North. The Ghost in the Darkness. The Devil's Son. It was all warranted, one supposed. The legends and the myths. Was it not oft said that one mystifies what is unknown and feared? As a wildling prince, he was both on all accounts. The wildlings were renown for their fierceness, that much was true. Stories of their ferocity was both a point of contention and yielded begrudging respect.

A ghost of a smile briefly flashed across his face and then, just as suddenly, it was gone. As descendants of The First Men, the wildlings would never be passive kneelers, weak and ineffectual. Not if Jon had the final say. No, the wildlings fought back. Already, at ten and nine, Jon knew war and warfare. Ninety-eight times he and fellow clansmen raided fellow wildling tribes and northern lords' keeps, he at the head of these raiding parties at the behest of his father. Everyone a success and victory, further cementing his invincibility and notoriety.

It was so simple, the pillaging and raiding. He scouted the villages and keeps, routing out all weaknesses; acclimating and familiarizing himself to all the hidden passageways and unused corridors. Always keeping to the shadows, always silent. Jon was grateful to Tormund Giantsbane, his second-in-command. While Jon was sullen and severe, with his long northern face and piercing grey eyes (the eyes of a wolf, they would say) Tormund was loud, boisterous and pugnacious. Always ready for a fight, never mind the reason or offense. They had been like brothers since time immemorial—the Wolf and the Wild Man. Their friendship forever cemented by blood, sweat, and tears. Two halves of a whole...

A twig snapped nearby, faint but telling. Tormund. A moment later, the large wildling was by Jon's side—always by his side. One of the few constants in an ever-changing world. Jon smiled fully then, a treasure to behold. It seemed like every woman in the village—young and old—would hold their breaths in anticipation for one of his smiles, especially if directed towards them. A loud, collective sigh escaping their lips, girlish giggles quickly ensuing. He was a pretty man, that Jon Snow.

Almost too damned pretty. With his midnight curls, full lips, and teeth of gleaming ivory, his face
was a contradiction: both classic and cold. Many a time, Tormund would jape about his comeliness, snickering over fermented goat's milk (a drink of choice Jon loathed, the pungent odor nauseating his stomach) that had he been born a girl, he would have been stolen many times over. Jon would not reply, he hardly ever did one Tormund got into his moods. He would only stare off into the distance, grey searching, but focusing on nothing. The flickering of the flames turning his eyes an unnatural light. The wolf's gaze..

As prince of the wildlings and a man fully grown, it was expectant that he take a woman soon. By the tie he reached a full score in age, to be exact. Only six moon's turns from now. That was hardly a conundrum, taking a woman. The village was in no demand of them. And they all made no secret that they wanted him. When they offered, Jon readily supped, taking only what they provided and being ever considerate with their emotions. His intentions were never mistaken or lost in translation. Although his body and bed were both warm and willing--ever ready to be sated and satisfied--his heart was his own.

It was not that Jon was an overly proud man, believing that no woman was worthy of being his wife, it was only that there was no woman he felt a connection to. No woman that shared his equally wild heart and spirited nature. Until now...

"Everyone in the castle is asleep," Tormund whispered quietly. His glacial blue eyes watching his prince and friend like a sentinel. Jon nodded in response, his grey eyes once again focusing on nothing, his thoughts churning. A plan slowly manifesting out of obscurity. It had been completely accidental. He had not meant for any of this to happen. Had not meant to fall in love...

He had taken a small group of men from his village on a hunting party. Although game was plentiful north of the Wall, something had driven Jon away from his mother's ancestral lands and into the land of the Wolves--the Starks. After three days of successful hunting, Jon and his party were to return to the village when he had gotten separated from the rest of the men. Knowing how to survive on his own since youth, Jon was not worried. He had an abundance of meat to keep him fed and it was still the summer months. Winter had not yet come.

He was both confident and prepared, for Mance had taught him well on the usefulness of survival and stealth. As a wildling, darkness was your one true companion. You rested during the day and moved in the cover of darkness. Never stay still. Jon lived by this teaching. It had served him well, taught him how to survive. He knew what to do. And he was ready.

Until he saw her...until his equilibrium had been knocked completely off kilter.

He had heard the voices first. They were close, perhaps no more than a few feet away. Knowing the odds were not in his favor, Jon hid behind a cove of trees, crouching and waiting. An unsheathed blade by his side, should the occasion arise. As they slowly emerged from the forest, Jon counted four of them. Four kneelers on horseback. Jon silently cursed to himself and sheathed the blade. A wildling could successfully fend against four soldiers (it has been done before), but no wildling was ever successful against those mounted beasts. In earlier wildling history, complete villages had been decimated by soldiers on horseback. No wildling stood a chance. So Jon waited, silently hidden away behind the dense underbrush and tree limbs. He had been wrong, though. They weren't soldiers at all, only passing lordlings on an afternoon stroll. Also, they were not all men, Jon was quick to observe. There was a woman among their midst.

She had been singing quietly to herself, periodically her traveling companions would join in, their voices a harmonious unit. Yet, it was her voice that gave Jon pause and held in rapt attention. His breath hitched slightly, his body unknowingly straining towards the dulcet sounds. Seven hells...

Soft and honey-sweet, Jon had never heard the like. Sure, there had been songs. The men (and
some women) would often congregate around various campfires and exchange bawdy tales of wife-stealing and bead sport. Jon never joined in, though. He would just observe in that quiet, attentive way he was prone to.

However, there was something otherworldly beautiful about her voice. Almost familiar...and Jon wanted to be completely consumed by it. Whatever it was that captured and enthralled him. At that precise moment, he felt like he was drowning, slowly suffocating by the wind and tide, and yet he wanted no resuscitation or salvation. At that moment, all he knew was her.

As the quartet slowly passed by Jon's hidden alcove, the young woman (a girl, Jon immediately corrected himself. She was a girl of middle teenage years) slowly raised her head and Jon was a man lost. He had seen beautiful women before back in the wildling village. There had been Rowena that time two years past, with her wheat-gold hair and emerald eyes, and then Ygritte, who although was no beauty, more than compensated for her plainness with her devotion and ferocity. There had been countless others throughout the years, each one bestowing a fond memory. Yet here, now, after viewing the material beauty before him, they were all left wanting.

"The hour wanes, Sansa." Her companion gently reprimanded. "We need to return to the keep." He was tall with dark auburn locks and light azure eyes. He was handsome, Jon begrudgingly conceded, his lip curled slightly. Who was this whelp? Jon wondered, as the party disappeared into the gods wood. Was he her husband? Her intended? A lover, perhaps? An uncomfortable clenching settled in his gut. That would make matters more complicated...

A small laugh erupted from the beauty beside him and Jon's heart constricted. Gods.

"And here I thought my brother was my champion, willing to protect me from the oncoming night and its terrors." They rode the remainder of the way in relative silence, past the gate and into the keep. All unassuming and none the wiser. As Jon slowly raised to his feet, he continued to stare after them. He could not breathe. Could not think. "Sansa..." Had he really said her name aloud? It was like warm honey on his tongue. Sansa.

Later that night, Jon met up with his hunting party. Yet, only Tormund knew something was amiss. Of course he would. Nothing ever escaped his notice. There were bound to be questions.

So from across a kindling fire, while the rest of his companions slept on, Jon retold everything—of Sansa, of this unexpected and deep yearning to seized and overwhelmed him, of his desire to steal the she-wolf from her lair and claim her as his own. Once finished, Tormund remained silent, watchful and contemplating. Finally, a loud bark of laughter erupted from him, slicing through the silent tranquility of the warm summer night.

"I'll be damned," he chuckled, shaking his head in complete disbelief and wonder. "The White Wolf is in love. With a kneeler, to boot." Jon took a moment, absorbing his friend's words. Loyal Tormund, whose insight and wisdom was oft frightening with its validity.

"Are you with me?" Jon asked quietly, stark grey eyes meeting twinkling blue. This was it, the moment of truth. Jon knew what Tormund would be risking. And if they were caught...

"You know I am," came the quiet reply, all mirth and humor gone, quickly fading with the night. Jon released a tense, tired breath of air that he did not know he had been holding. No more words were spoken, for there was nothing left to say. That had been three moons ago. Three moons of watching, waiting and hoping. Three moons of wanting and burning...

"That's good. Make sure everyone is prepared. We move at twilight." Tormund nodded and returned to the forest, leaving Jon once again alone with his thoughts.
"Sansa," he whispered into the waning night air. His thoughts once again returning to the flame-haired siren that haunted his dreams and consumed his thoughts. How was it possible to fall in love so completely, so irrevocably at just a single glance? A passing moment? Was this what that early wildling king of long ago felt when he gazed upon his lady bride before he stole her?

Once more facing the window of her solar, Jon waited. His heart swelling with hope and love. A ghost of a smile once again grazing his lips.
Contemplation and Fateful Meetings

Chapter Summary

Her Lady Mother had oft said that a lady's duty was to her house. "Duty and honor," Mother would recite the Tully words over roaring fires, while gentle hands oiled and braided her hair. "A lady must always remain loyal, first to her lord husband, then to her children, and finally to her house. Always." The brush stilled and a gentle hand turned her chin to face her, sapphire blue meeting turquoise. "Do you understand, sweetling?"

Chapter Notes

Here, we will explore the backstory of Sansa Stark and her family, as well as her inner turmoils and conflicts. Also, it is here that our favorite White Wolf meets his lady love. Strap in, ladies and gents! It. Gets. Real.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Two: Contemplation and Fateful Meetings

She hated him. Oh gods, how she loathed and despised him. Each step of her mare causing her stomach to clench uncomfortably, the bile slowly rising in her throat. She bit back a sob. Stop it, Sansa. She scolded, clenching her jaw in ire, trying to maintain some semblance of control. If only outwardly, at least. Wolves do not cry.

Yet, here in the quiet tranquility of the gods wood, she felt all composure and dignity slip and ebb away. She was no fool. A beauty, yes, but never the fool. She had heard the whispers, the stories. Always spoken in hushed tones and behind the security of closed doors. She had seen the fear that the Bolton name invoked. No one would dare call himself a Northerner without hearing of the Flayed Man...and trembling with abject horror.

Lord Father wanted an alliance and a union between the two ancient houses. After thousands of years of death and warfare, Father wanted an end to the feuding and a lasting peace. Of course, what better way to ensure the North's stability than through marriage? Being both beautiful and the eldest daughter of Ned Stark, Warden of the North, she was the ideal bargaining chip.

She should be content, she supposed. Their political union was sure to bring about a lasting truce throughout the realm. Should war ever erupt and the Northern lords were called upon, with their joined houses and banner men, victory would all but be ensured. If nothing else, Sansa would take pride in that small bit of comfort. Her sacrifice for the greater good..

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"Do you understand, sweetling?"

Yes, Sansa understood. All too well. She understood what marriage to Roose Bolton's newly legitimised son would mean for her house and the North. She understood perfectly. When her father summoned her to his solar and informed her of his intentions, Sansa remained impassive, giving nothing away. It was only in the solitude of her rooms that the mask of indifference gave way and the tears came—quickly and freely.

She wanted to die. Gods, how she wanted to die. To walk into the gods wood pond and never resurface, only letting the peace lull of the water take her whole. Was Father's loyalty to the North so unwavering and steadfast that he merely saw her as an expendable pawn in an ever changing game? He was a good man, Lord Father. An honorable man, one of the many reasons Catelyn had fallen for him.

Surely—surely—he was mistaken. He was not so stupid as to have turned a deaf ear to the stories of that monstrosity in human flesh that was Ramsay Bolton. Sansa was not without allies, though. He staunchest supporters being in the form of her elder brother, Robb, and her younger sister, Arya. Robb, with his pretty auburn locks so like her own, and ever gentle spirit. As soon as he heard the news, an unwavering anger consumed him and he vowed to speak to Father and beg him to change his mind, to reconsider. Her brother's devotion to his sister so unwavering that he had even offered to relinquish his title as heir and future lord of Winterfell if it meant his sister's happiness and safety.

Sansa smiled at that, albeit briefly. Arya, her fierce and wild wolf, had threatened to gut Ramsay at the first opportunity. Whispering, in the quiet darkness of the night in their shared rooms, that all Sansa had to do is "speak a word," and the problem would be dealt with. A sharp, deadly gleam in her eye, Needle, sharpened and glinting at her hip. Once the engagement had been announced, the news had spread far and wide, reaching even her aunt Lysa Arryn in the Vale and her great-uncle, the nefarious Blackfish, in the Riverlands.

Aunt Lysa had been outraged, cursing her good brother for his stupidity and offering Sansa sanctuary in the Vale. "How dare you do this to your daughter, Catelyn?" Lysa seethed and raged, shaking in righteous indignation and heartbreak. "May the gods damn you for eternity for condemning your daughter—your flesh and blood—to this death!"

The Blackfish, Ser Brynden Tully, only shook his head in disbelief, unwilling to believe that his beloved niece (his favorite as he had oft boasted) would so willingly acquiesce to this absurdity and madness. Surely Catelyn had more sense than this? Sansa was a beauty, a rebirth of Tully, with her deep autumn hair and sapphire eyes. The Rose of Winterfell, travelling bards called her, praising her incomparable beauty and spirited nature. Old he was, yes, but Brynden was not deaf as to not have heard the songs. His great-niece was in no short supply of suitors and admirers alike. Even the Baratheon king had sent ravens, voicing his interest in the Stark girl for his son, the young golden stag...No, this could not be. The Blackfish understood none of this.

Ned remained quiet. Shamed. He never wanted any of this for his beloved daughter. He remembered the day she was born, that glorious spring morning sixteen years ago. The bells had tolled from sunrise until dusk for a week, sharing in his exultation. He loved Robb, Arya, Bran, and Rickon, yes, without question, but it was Sansa who held his heart.

The moment the engagement had been announced and the ink dried, Ned fell ill and would often retreat to the gods wood to devote himself to prayer, seeking both absolution and clarity.

_I am sorry, sweet girl, for my broken promises. I am sorry that I am unable to keep you safe. I am sorry that I failed you. Forgive me. Forgive me. Oh gods! forgive me, please. If there was another_
The wedding was in a moon's time from now, on a midsummer's day. Soon, Sansa Stark would be Lady Bolton, and would forever be the reluctant and unwilling wife of that madman. He was handsome, Sansa decided, upon their first encounter. Not long ago, when she had been a stupid girl with stupid dreams, she would have thought herself in love with such a man. Handsome with his curly brown hair and warrior's body.

Yet, it was his eyes that had given her pause. Of pale ice and equally cold, they were the eyes of a monster and bespoke of unimaginable cruelty. And when he had kissed her hand upon their initial meeting, her demons screamed with revulsion and horror. This was wrong, this incongruous pairing. This was so damned wrong...

A twig snapped in silence, jarring Sansa from her thoughts. A respite she greatly welcomed and accepted. Her mare snickered a warning, but it was too late an all in vain. Quickly looking up, she was met with the sight of two large men--wildlings, she deduced, from their strange garb and unshorn hair. A nobleman would have known better.

The largest, a giant of a man with flaming red hair, stood in front of her, blocking her path. His companion, slightly shorter with dark ebony curls and piercing grey eyes, flanked her rear, effectively caging her. "Are you lost, milady?" The grey-eyed wildling asked, his voice a low rumble. Had it been under different circumstances, Sansa would have thought his voice pleasant.

Yet, before she could utter a reply, Sansa felt a strange sensation overtake her person and soon, she was quickly succumbing into oblivion. The wildling's steel-grey eyes the last image she saw before the darkness overtook her...

Chapter End Notes

When writing this chapter, I combined George R. Martin's characterization of Ramsay Bolton with the show's version. Although the book's characterization of Ramsay is rather ugly in both physical appearance and behavior, Iwan Rheon is rather pleasing to the eye!

Thank you SO very much for the feedback! You have no idea how happy it makes my heart. Please continue with the comments, both good or bad. I want to hear from you!

Also, anyone here want to slap some sense into Ned and Catelyn Stark? Anyone? Kinda funny that "Batshit Crazy" Lysa Arryn is the one showing sense.
An Unspoken Prayer, An Unknown Revelation

Chapter Summary

Jon never believed in the stories or the old crone's prophecy, and had reduced both to mere superstitious phantasms and the incoherent rantings of a diseased and unwell mind. And yet...And yet...Taking her all in, inhaling her sweetness, memorizing her softness--a stark contrast to his callousness and scars--Jon wondered. Perhaps this woman, this goddess who was the living embodiment and incarnation of The Maiden herself, was his salvation, his answer to a long-ago unspoken prayer whispered in the purple darkness of midnight.

Chapter Notes

I am truly blown away by everyone’s responses! You have gladdened my heart, truly. A thousand times, thank you! In this chapter, we get a brief glimpse of Jon's point of view after the abduction. Also, we (briefly) discover as to why his obsession with Sansa is so strong.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Three

She was soft and pliant in his arms and smelled of lavender and peony. Looking at her now--the soft luminescence of her skin, the flaming cascade of fire and curls that was her hair--Jon felt something within him shatter and break. Suddenly, he felt terrified, lost. Gods...

She was a witch, an enchantress, she had to be. Sent by the gods to drive him mad for some unforgivable or blasphemous transgression, one of the countless many he had committed in his short lifetime. No woman confused, beguiled, and left him trembling simultaneously.

Once, long ago, it seemed, when Jon was a young lad of five, he chased dragonflies through the surrounding woods. The Free-Folk revered them, called them magical. Messengers from the Old Gods, the elders would say. Father had told him once that if was ever lucky to capture one of these elusive creatures, the gods would answer an unspoken prayer.

A few years later, when Jon was eleven, he ventured to the hut of the Wise Woman, Old Magda, located on the outskirts of the wildling village. An ancient crone with matted hair and wrinkled skin that reminded Jon of curdled milk, she was renown throughout the village for her gift of divination and fortune telling. Father had forbade Jon from seeing her, claiming that she was mad and an ill-omen, but Jon was curious. Besides, he had been sent on a dare and he was never one to refuse a challenge...

Her hut was a curiosity: turtle shells of various sizes lined the walls, rainbow-colored glass decorated the windows and door-frame. Near the back of the hut, sat a large chest laden with herbs and dried plants. A fire blazed and roared in the hearth, a curious aroma emitted through the flames, smelling both sickly-sweet and heady. He heard her before she saw her, chanting in an
ancient tongue that had been lost to his people thousands of years before. Her eyes were closed, blinded by old age, and yet seeing so much.

"I oft wondered when you would come to see me, White Wolf." The witch crooned, not once moving from her designated spot by the fire. Jon blinked. She had not been there a moment ago, he was sure of it.

"You know who I am?" He queried, slowly inching closer to the sorceress. He could run, flee through the opened door and never look back. If asked by the others what happened, he could simply say that she had not been present. No one would be the wiser...

"Aye. And what you seek. I have seen you in the flames, Wolf. I know your story. Yet your destiny is not what you think. No doubt, you will be a fierce leader and your name will be feared and whispered throughout the realm. The Northern lords will sing songs around the hearths over your many victories."

Jon drew nearer, excited. He wanted more, wanted to know more. His breath hitched in anticipation. Yes.

"Yet, it will be your love for a woman--a kneeler--that you will be remembered for. She is your past, your present and your future. For every lifetime you have lived, she has walked by your side, always. She is your destiny, and if you are not careful, your destruction as well."

That had been long ago, eons ago, really. Jon never believed the stories or the old crone's prophecy, and had reduced both to mere superstitious phantasms and the incoherent rantings of a diseased and unwell mind. And yet...

And yet...

Taking her all in, inhaling her sweetness, memorizing her softness--a stark contrast to his callousness and scars--Jon wondered. Perhaps this woman, this goddess who was the living embodiment and incarnation of The Maiden herself, was his salvation, his answer to a long-ago unspoken prayer whispered in the purple darkness of midnight. And oh! How Jon's heart constricted and pulsed, filled to the brim and near bursting in exultation. Mother, Maiden, Crone and Stranger...

"Gods be good, but she is a pretty one, Snow!" Tormund quipped from his mount, an appreciative grin spreading across his face as he glanced at Sansa's prone form. Jon tightened his grip on Sansa and fought back a flash of anger and jealousy. A growling wolf with sharpened fangs...

Tormund is a friend, Jon reminded himself, hating the guilt that spread, like poison, through his body. Tormund is loyal. He is not a rival. He would not dare...

"Aye," Jon whispered, more to himself than anything. Unwilling to believe that this was real--that she--was real. He lifted a trembling hand to her cheek, admiring her softness and beauty. "And she is mine."

Just as I am her's...

Chapter End Notes
In this story, as promised, we are going to see a different aspect of Jon Snow's personality. At times, he will be very intense and obsessive. He is, overall, the same, upstanding Jon Snow from both the books and show that we love (and drool over), but as the story progresses, he is going to be battling his infatuation with Sansa Stark, and his fervent need to possess her. The struggle is real, y'all!

Please, please, please continue with the comments and feedback! I want to hear from you!
Too Little, Too Late

Chapter Summary

Roose Bolton eyed his son carefully, critically. His breath held in anticipation as he searched for some sign, some hidden clue, that all appearances of calm equanimity and control that was before him now would suddenly transform into a paroxysm of ranting, raving and chaos. Careful now...Careful...One always had to tread carefully--cautiously--when speaking with Ramsay. One false move is all it took.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: This chapter gives a brief, yet poignant interlude into the complex, dynamic relationship between Roose and Ramsay Bolton. Everyone who has either read George R. Martin's books or have watched the HBO series is aware of Ramsay's conception and birth. In this chapter, there are depictions of rape and sexual assault. May the reader be advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Four: Too Little, Too Late

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There was a tic in his jaw, faint but evident. Oh Gods...his bastard was angry. Roose glanced down at his hands-scarred and calloused, so unlike a true lord's hands-and visibly flinched. To the outside observer, they were innocuous. A testament of the bastard's hardship in a cold, unforgiving world. Yet, Roose knew better. Those hands, with their spider fingers and paled skin untouched and unacquainted with the summer sun, were the hands of a monster. A demon wrapped tightly in meat, sinew and bone.

Roose was not stupid, for he knew what fellow lords and servants alike were saying about his bastard. His flesh and blood. A mad dog, a wild animal. They would whisper surreptitiously among themselves. Never to his face, of course not, no. But always in hushed, terrified tones, always out of reach and into the air of nothingness and obscurity.

Roose had just returned from Winterfell after receiving a raven from Ned earlier that morn. Not wanting to believe the news, he procured his fastest horse posthaste. Gone...Sansa Stark had gone. Vanished into oblivion three days prior while riding her mare near the Wolfswood Forest. And with her, all of their carefully constructed plans.
In some strange show of solidarity, Roose was secretly glad Sansa had gone, fled her sham of an engagement and untethered herself from a madman's grasps. Yet, standing here now, taking his son in—the tic in his jaw, the clenching and unfurling of his fist, the shallow breathing, the quietness—all Roose could do at that moment was damn Sansa Stark to the deepest pit of the seven hells for her stupidity. When he had first heard the news, he had initially dismissed it all as gossip, idle and nonsensical chatter of bored and lack-witted servants. However, when he had received the raven while breaking his fast, glimpsing at the yellow parchment and the seal of the ferocious direwolf, the official seal of the North, he knew something was wrong. And here he was now, trying desperately to appease the seething, savage beast that was his son.

Son...Gods, the word felt like nettles on his tongue. He never wanted him, the bastard. When the boy's mother arrived at the Dreadfort with the young boy in tow, Roose had been ever quick to send them off, supplying the woman—the miller's wife—with a large sow, a hundred gold dragons, and a foul-smelling servant, all in the attempt to shut her up and conceal his crime.

He had returned from a hunting trip when he had first spotted her. Millicent. After so many years of denial suppression, Roose was finally able to concede what he had done. To admit his transgression which had long come back to haunt...

She was a pretty little thing, with her burnt chestnut hair and womanly curves. Alone on her lands—a small squat of ground consisting of a river and a few sparse trees and the wheat mill. She had been alone, washing laundry near the small stream behind the stone cottage. Her husband away in the village...Roose's britches tightened at the thought. Such beauty left alone, just ripe for the plucking...

She tried to fight him, further spurring his excitement and ire, his body a panting heap of exertion and lust. She had then fainted, due to an accumulation of shock and pain, enabling Roose to finish quickly. He thrust into her once, twice, three times before he spilled into her, his hot seed seeping and pulsing. He felt boneless then, weak, as he shuddered and convulsed.

Looking down at her now, her split lip, her bloodied and bruised form, her shredded peasant garb, she was hardly worth the rape, Roose decided. After cleaning himself up, concealing the deed as best as he could, Roose left, leaving Millicent's broken and bruised body where she had fallen without so much as a backward's glance. It was calloused, Roose acknowledged, and cruel. No woman—peasant or highborn—deserved that type of mistreatment.

Yet, she was a peasant, a lowly miller's wife, and he was a lord of an ancient and powerful house, second only to the Starks. Who in the seven hells was she to deny him? She was fortunate that he did not kill her for her insolence!

Roose was angry now, indignant, yet justified.

All she had to do was stay hidden. Stay away. And then the bitch had to fall pregnant...When she had first come to him, her condition revealed and slightly straining against her threadbare homespun, Roose had been hysterical and ordered her to be beaten so severely that he was certain it would induce a miscarriage. He had hoped so, anyway. Night after night, he was a mad man, fervently praying to the gods (both old and new) that she had lost the babe. That he would be forever untethered by an unwanted bastard.

However, his prayer had fallen on deaf ears and remained unanswered. When his son, Domeric, had learned that he had a brother (half, always half) and had wished to seek him out, Roose had been incensed and forbade the relationship. Domeric was his heir, his one joy in an otherwise bleak existence laden with shit and mire. He was an erudite man, Domeric, a lover of books and horses, unmarred by the curse of the Bolton name and its horrors. Roose wanted to protect him, to keep him
unblemished from the one blight that threatened to level and shatter his house's foundations to the very ground.

And then Domeric had fallen ill and died under mysterious circumstances early one morning. Maester Wolkan asserted that it was an illness that claimed him, one of the enumerable passing maladies that had plagued the North that winter. But Roose knew better, evil hands were at work. Ever since Millicent brought the bastard back to the Dreadfort, an ill-omen settled over the castle, saturating it with both unease and trepidation.

The boy, the bastard, was a demon. A living reminder of Roose's misdeeds and failed atonement. Although small and sickly, his gauntness made all the more evident by his ill-fitting clothing and pallid skin, every alarm bell rung riot in Roose's head as he gazed at the boy, more specifically, his eyes.

They were not the eyes of a human, no, not in the least. Unblinking, colder than Northern ice and devoid of all emotion and warmth, they were the eyes of a madman, a rabid and feral dog. Roose involuntarily shuddered, a reaction he was in the habit of doing whenever the bastard drew near. Steady. Steady now...

Roose tried to love him. Gods only knew how he tried to love Ramsay-to show him some form of kindness and compassion that had been deprived from him since childhood. Perhaps if Roose loved him hard enough, encouraged him more, spoken more softly to him, then maybe the gods would forgive him for his transgression and penance could be made. It had been said that if one showed kindness to a feral animal, then it could be tamed. He had already lost Domeric, surely he had paid enough. The gods were not that cruel, were they?

Standing here now, looking at his son and gauging his reaction, Roose had been wrong. Very wrong. There it was again, that tic in Ramsay's jaw. A tightening of his fist. He knew the signs well. The Mad Dog was becoming unhinged.

"Ramsay-"Roose began, slowly raising his hands in appeasement.

"Where. Had she. Gone?" Came the reply, colder than any Northern wind. Roose shuddered again, suddenly terrified. No. No. No...

"They do not know. She went out for an evening stroll on her mare and did not return. They say that she had been abducted. Some hunters had found wildling tracks in the woods. They suspect that they took her." Roose gulped as Ramsay turned to face him fully then. "'Bride-stealing,' they call it."

A moment passed. Then two. The silence between them seemed interminable. Roose waited, tensed. Oh...!

Then, just as suddenly, the bastard left the room, not once looking back. Roose let out a tired breath, his eyes slowly closing and opening. Dread sinking, like a stone, in his belly and settling there. This was just the calm before the storm. He knew his bastard, he knew his moods--as unpredictable and capricious as the Summer Sea. He was not done.

The next morning, as Roose was preparing for a morning stroll, one of the few luxuries afforded to him that truly calmed his nerves, he was greeted with the ghastly sight of the decapitated and flayed remains of the stable lad, Wilsun.

Damn you, Sansa Sark, Roose Bolton swore vehemently, fighting off both shock and nausea at the grizzly sight before him now. May the gods damn you for unleashing this hell on us all. And may they damn me, too, for allowing it to endure.
*Breathes in. Breathes out.* For any of you who were offended or upset, I am truly sorry. I struggled with writing this chapter for both obvious and personal reasons. Anything exploring Roose and Ramsay in this narrative is bound to be dark and uncomfortable. Thoughts? Comments? I want to hear from you!
Even Roses Have Thorns

Chapter Summary

Once, when Sansa turned four, her father gifted her with a small wood thrush for her nameday. It was a beautiful bird, small and delicate, that would sing so sweetly every morn as the sun ascended over the trees of the gods wood. Sansa adored her present and would oft spend hours on end alone in her solar trying to imitate its dulcet tunes. It was a beautiful gift, her family concurred. A perfect gift for a perfect little lady.

Chapter Notes

The long-awaited chapter in where Sleeping Beauty wakes up and comes face-to-face with our favorite abductor. Remember in the tags where I said that Sansa was a fighter and no doormat? The she-wolf's fangs come out and Jon doesn't quite know what to do with himself! Round 1 let's go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Five: Even Roses Have Thorns

Once, when Sansa turned four, her father gifted her with a small wood thrush for her nameday. It was a beautiful bird, small and exquisite, that would sing so sweetly every morn as the sun ascended over the trees of the gods wood. Sansa adored her present and would oft spend hours on end alone in her solar trying to imitate its dulcet and sweet tunes. It was a beautiful gift, her family concurred. "A perfect gift for a perfect little lady."

Sansa beamed at that, reveling in their adulation and praise. When she had been the young, naive girl full of summer dreams and fairy tales, that was all she wanted. At night, tucked beneath the warmth and safety of wolf pelts and vair, Sansa dreamed of gallant knights and white horses, while beautiful ladies wore pretty dresses of silk and color. To be a true noble lady in a faraway kingdom somewhere...

Theon, her Lord Father's ward, had once japed that Sansa would make the perfect bride her lord husband, whomever he may be. That she was good at sitting still and singing pretty songs on command. "Little Bird," Theon would call her, mockingly bowing and prostrating himself whenever she was in view. "Will you sing me a song, Little Bird? I so love hearing your sweet songs."

Robb rewarded him with a broken nose after that, for making his sweet sister cry. That night, as the rest of her family slept on, Sansa tip-toed over to the thrush, perched silently within its ornate and gilded cage and opened the door, releasing it into the night sky.

Now you are free, Sansa thought, watching the thrush disappear among the stars. Now you are free to sing your songs or keep them to yourself. Whatever you choose.
The following morn, when her Lady Mother came into her solar to wake her, Sansa told her of the deed. Catelyn scolded her then, calling her daughter thoughtless, however there was a small note of pride hidden within the admonishment. At times, Sansa deeply missed her small wood thrush. Sitting atop its perch, beautiful and exquisite, singing so sweetly to the coming dawn...

Sansa raised her head, slowly and carefully, willing the throbbing ache to cease. A dull, steady staccato. She blinked once, twice, willing her body into compliance. Seven hells. Had...Had she been drugged? And with what exactly?

"The red she-wolf awakens." Sansa frowned in confusion. The voice was too deep to be Robb's or Theon's, theirs just recently breaking and no longer on the cusp of adolescence. Nor did it belong to any of her father's men. Growing up in Winterfell, supping with them, memorizing their facing, knowing their moods, they were like family. She knew and loved each one dearly.

This one, however, this stranger's voice, was both alien and familiar. Unlike Ramsay's, with his harsh tones and cruel laugh, causing Sansa to tremble with dread and unease, this voice was dark and deep, invoking an involuntary shudder to run through her. Suddenly, she felt warm and feverish, heady. Gods be damned, they had drugged her again. She was sure of it. Any moment now, Sansa would wake up and be back at Winterfell, sparring with Robb, Theon and Arya. Catelyn looking on in disapproval and distaste, her lips pursed and tight, arguing that gentle, true-born ladies did not act so recklessly.

"Even roses have thorns," Robb argued, his breath ragged with both exertion and fatigue, his face beaming with pride. Sansa had been practicing and soon, she would eclipse even him in both precision and technique. He could not wait for the day.

"Aye," Sansa concurred, never once losing her focus. The first rule of sword play: study your opponent and anticipate his next move like a chess game. Robb taught her well. "And she-wolves have fangs."

And soon, her captives would know just how deadly and razor sharp they were once bared...

Lifting her head up fully then, both embarrassed and enraged, Sansa prepared herself for confrontation. Although a lady, she had the temper of a harpy. Theon had not been able to walk properly for a whole sen-night after he peeked at her changing in her solar that one time two years past. However, all words died on her lips as she came face to face with the storm-grey eyes of her abductor.

"Wildling," Sansa whispered to herself, as if saying it aloud would somehow make it less possible. Less real. She was dreaming again, she had to be.

On nights she lay abed sick with fever, Old Nan would tell her stories of wildlings. They had been both her's and Arya's favorite, then. Wide-eyed and enranced, Sansa would sit for hours on end listening with rapt fascination and curiosity to the tales. The Starks were descendants of the First Men, a fact that instilled a sense of unwavering pride within her. To be kin--however distant--to the strong and resilient people of beyond the Wall.

She had heard of Mance Rayder, the elusive and cunning King-Beyond-The-Wall, a man who had given the Northern lords pause. He had been theirs, once. A volunteer and commander of the Night's Watch before he had gone rogue. He knew the North's ways, its lands. However, it was his son, Jon Snow, the White Wolf of the North, that caused the realm to shudder and quake.

The wildling she had been riding with clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes. He was angry. For what she had said? Sansa was not certain. Good...She wanted him angry. Perhaps if she made him
angry enough—*just enough*—he would become careless and make a mistake, therefore allowing her to escape. Taking him in now, his narrowed eyes and clenched jaw, he reminded Sansa of an animal. A *wolf. A savage, growling beast...*

But she was not afraid of him. Gods help her, but she was not afraid of him and would be damned if she allowed him to intimidate her now. Storm-grey eyes or not.

"I believe the correct term is Free-Folk. There is nothing 'wild' or 'primitive' about us. You southroners envious of us because we are a free people and are able to do what you Kneelers wish you could."

Seven. Fucking. Hells. The wildling savage was trying to educate her on ethics and propriety. Sansa wanted to laugh at the absurdity of it all. Under any other circumstance, she would have laughed. Loudly. *Well then...* If he wanted to engage in a battle of wits with her, then Sansa was ready. Never let it be said that she was not a quick study. And Gods only knew she needed a release right about now.

"Look around you, Wildling. This is all Northern lands. There is no Southrone kingdom here."
Sansa knew she was pushing her luck with her provocation, but she did not care. He opened this floodgate, he now must close it. *Please be angry,* Sansa silently prayed. *Please, Gods, let him become angry and make a mistake.* If he made a mistake, if he became stupid, she could try to escape. The wildlings were oft known for their stupidity.

To Sansa's surprise and shock, he did neither. Instead, he only smirked at her, his top lip quirking in...what was it? Admiration? Humor? Sansa did not know, nor did she like it. She wanted no part of this savage--this *barbarian's*--admiration. She would rather drink from the chamber pots first.

"Anyone living south of the Wall is a southroner, Kneeler." He answered quietly, slowly. His grey eyes glinted in wry humor. It was as if he were speaking with a dull-witted child. The other wildling, a giant of a man with vibrant red hair, let out a loud bark of laughter.

Sansa felt angry then. Humiliated that a wildling had caused her to lose all equanimity and control. She was actually shaking in her fury and indignation. At that precise moment, Sansa wished for Needle, her sister's sword that had been gifted to her by Robb for her tenth nameday. She could have easily run the wildling through to the hilt and then calmly watch him bleed out. Smiling all while doing it.

"What are you thinking, She-Wolf?" The grey-eyed wildling whispered. His nose was in her hair, his warm breath on her neck. Too close. He was too close and Sansa did not like it. At all. She wanted him to hate her, to erect a wall so large and insuperable that he would be unable to breach it.

Sansa turned to fully face him then, indigo sky meeting storm-grey. Two snarling wolves facing off. He still wore that smirk, that damned insufferable smirk that she wanted to slap off his face. "Of killing you."

Strangely, the wildling did not respond, only continued to stare at her with those unnerving wolf-eyes. Gone was his smirk, however, but in its place, a full-fledged smile. "What's stopping you then, She-Wolf?"

*She-Wolf.* He was taunting her, knowing that it was only a matter of time before she snapped. When she had been younger, Lord Father would call her that, while gently stroking her hair, his eyes full of the love and tenderness that was set aside for only Catelyn, Arya, and her.

"My fierce little she-wolf..."
Now, the endearment only rained down Sansa's disgust and spurned her anger. She stared at him then, full of righteous indignation and fury. "Someday, one day very soon, I'm going to put a sword through your eye and clear out the back of your skull. That's a promise, Wildling."

The wildling let out a quiet chuckle in response. His grey eyes glinting in merriment and challenge.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing says, "I love you," than threatening to stab the love of your life through the eye, right? Before anyone says anything, yes, I incorporated both The Hound's lines in Season 2 (?) and Arya's threat in Season 3 of the show here in the narrative. I was hoping it would help develop the plot and also highlight Sansa's no-holds-barred, bad-assness. Please read and review. Your comments give me SO much life!
Chapter Summary

Ned sat alone in his solar, feeling like a requiem. His tongue lay heavy in his mouth, as though thickened and numbed with Dornish wine. Gone. The finality of the word hit him like a tempest, nearly bowing him over with its weight and magnitude.

Chapter Notes

In celebration of the Season 7 premier, here is chapter 6! I struggled with this chapter, trying to further encapsulate Ed's internal conflicts...as well as more of Ramsay's depravity!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 6: Requiems and Absolutions

Ned Stark sat alone in his solar, feeling like a requiem. His tongue lay heavy in his mouth, as though thickened and numbed with Dornish wine. Gone. The finality of the word hit him like a tempest, nearly bowing him over with its weight and magnitude.

Oh gods. Sansa Stark had…gone. The bile began to rise within his throat—hot and acidic—and he quickly willed it down. He could not break, not now. Yet, it was all he could do to not buckle and collapse. He hurt. Gods, how he hurt, a sharp, resounding throb that threatened to tear his heart asunder.

A wail shattered through the hall, animalistic almost, in its pain. High and keening, cutting through the thickened silence. Ned shut his eyes tightly to the sound of it, his heart breaking anew. Catelyn. Since the abduction, she had been confined to their bed, a torrent of tears and convulsions.

She had refused all food and drink, as untouched trays littered the outside of the closed chamber door, and Maester Luwin feared for her health, administering small doses of Night Shade from the apothecary to induce sleep. Ned furled his hand over the armrest as if to keep himself buoyant and tethered to reality.

Four days…It had been four days since the abduction and he still felt as though he were asleep, ensnared within a dark, never-ending incubus. Wake. He needed to wake now. If he could only wake, then everything would be as it was. Sansa would be in her solar, sewing in her embroidery circle, japing with Arya and Robb, smiling as sweetly as the dawn…

Locke, a Bolton bannerman and Roose’s best tracker, said it was the work of wildlings, that no kidnapping had been so complete or well-executed.

“Just like a ghost,” the small ferreted man announced, his black, beady eyes glistening in sordid glee.
and anticipation. His hand slowly caressing his hunter’s knife, his strokes both slow and deliberate. Ned immediately disliked the look of him.

*Like some salivating dog tempted with a leg of mutton.*

Roose had assured him that he was the finest hunter in all the North and did exceptional work, but that did little to pacify and ease his comfort. Ned was loathed to think of the past work that he had done in the Boltons' employ. Monsters, monsters all of them...

*They had been in the Wolfswood two days prior. All of them—the two most powerful houses in the North—and already dissention arose. Roose had been incensed, his blood lust near insatiable, wanting to execute the forester and his family (a young wife and a nursing babe) for their incompetence.*

“I fear you have gone soft, Lord Stark.” Roose’s eyes were cold, flat chips of ice, simmering with an undercurrent of rage. Controlled, but bubbling just beneath the surface. “This man was your forester, clearly benefitting from your mercy and elevated position. Your daughter is missing because he was careless and an example needs to be made.”

The forester, Merric, was knelt on forest floor, a trembling, blubbering fit of apologies and excuses. “Mercy, m’lords! Mercy! I did not see ’em! M-m-mercy! I did not see ’em, I swear. M-m-m-must’ve hid in the dark...”

His wife was standing just beyond, at the entrance of the cottage, clutching the babe at her breast as though it were a shield, her bottom lip quivering. Ned turned away then, barely hearing the pleas, his thoughts suddenly in a quagmire. How did it all come to this? This—whatever it was—was sheer madness.

“Leave him,” he said finally, returning to his horse. He suddenly felt tired, defeated. The search party had returned with very few leads and only more unanswered questions. “The man knows nothing and will be of no help to us.”

All that his men gathered was that a group of wildlings had traversed the Wall and briefly settled in the forest. There had been a small band of them—five, at the most—and they were all able to go undetected so far south. No other clue had been left. No clothing, no weapons. Nothing. Only a few dispersed tracks.

“This is Mance Rayder’s work,” Robb stated from his mount, a hard gleam in his eye. Ever since Sansa’s kidnapping, he had become angry. Harder. No longer a carefree lord of seven and ten, but now a man full grown and fashioned from the tragedy that has befallen him. On all of them.

“No,” Ned interjected, turning around to face them all. Roose’s lips were tightly pursed, a look of righteous anger upon his mien at being undermined. His bastard silently fuming upon his black destrier. All throughout the interrogation, he remained quiet, eerily so, lost in contemplation and thought. One hand held tightly onto the reigns of his charger, the other to the scabbard of his sword.

As Ned silently watched him then, appraising the Bolton heir, a tightening seized his gut, sudden and constricting. He was Sansa’s betrothed, an agreement borne out of dire necessity and preservation, and yet he could summon no sympathy for the man. He turned his head, feeling shamed.

*He was angry, angry at feeling such animosity and resentment towards a man who had not chosen his bastard status, or to be the unwanted son of a cold, unfeeling man like Roose. Yet, angry*
that it had all come down to this. He had heard the stories of the Bastard of Bolton, as had all of the
North. A monster and a madman who relished in the peeling of human flesh.

...And Ned had given his beloved daughter to him as though with little thought or consequence...

When Catelyn had heard of the engagement, she ranted and raved at him, a storm of tears and
accusations. Her eyes wide and transfixed.

“How in the seven hells could you give our daughter away to that animal, Ned? How?”

In retrospect, Ned had believed that he had taken the right course of action, striving to repair
a splintered and fractured North, badly weakened by its self-imposed civil war. Yet standing there,
now, he had realized he had greatly errored. A mistake he would willingly rectify once Sansa
returned.

If, that sly and treacherous voice would whisper. If she returns, you mean.

Ramsay was like a broken bone, one that had not fully mended correctly and continued to
hinder and impair the body. There was no salvaging or healing it; it just continued to grow crooked,
distorted, and wrong. He did not deserve Sansa to take to wife. He would never be deserving of her.

“It was not Mance Rayder. He’s too cunning and cautious to venture south of the Wall on a whim.
Everything he has done has been deliberate and planned. This was the work of his son, Jon
Snow.”

Everyone turned to look at him then, Ramsay included, his grip on his sword hilt tightening.
It seemed almost instinctual, this visceral reaction, one based off loathing and fear. Even the Mad
Dog trembled and kowtowed to the White Wolf...

Ned ordered his bannermen to disperse and reconvene on the morrow, at first light. As his
men began their journey to their keeps, a loud squall reverberated throughout the air, a woman’s
howl quickly ensuing. Ned turned to look back, and his blood nearly congealed at the sight awaiting
him...

The forester lay writhing on the floor, a large pool of blood coalescing near the stump that
was once his hand. Ramsay standing over the man, panting, sword drawn, a feral smile of pure
exultation fully displayed upon his lips...

Chapter End Notes

Please read and review. Your comments give me so much life.
Revelations and Claimings

Chapter Summary

Despite the seclusion of her chambers, Lysa looked around discreetly, ensuring there were no hidden ears. Privacy was a luxury that eluded even the most privileged of noble women. "Has your Lady Mother told you of the power that lies between your legs? Tears aren't our only weapon. What we possess is sweeter and more potent than the finest Dornish wine. Let your Lord Husband--or any man--have just a taste--and he will become yours."

Chapter Notes

We have more Jon/Sansa interaction! Yay! After watching Episode 1 and reading the spoilers, I think it is greatly needed. Please read and review! Your opinions--good, bad, or indifferent--determine whether or not I continue.

Also, I borrowed/paraphrased the scene where Sansa is interacting with Cersei after becoming a woman and when Stannis sacks the capital. Instead of Cersei giving Sansa advice, I replaced it with Lysa. In this narrative, Lysa is not jealous or envious of Sansa, but is a confidante, and ally to her. Oh, and I also borrowed a line from Arya's speech in the opening scene in this narrative because it was so badass and fit into Sansa's more assertive personality.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Seven: Revelations and Claimings

The ropes were loose. A realization that caused her both pause and elation. They were at the edge of the Umber lands, bordering the lesser-known Mountain clan, the Knotts. Just fifteen leagues south of the Wall and ten leagues from Castle Black. Sansa knew the territory well—the Umbers and Knotts were Stark bannermen and liege lords who had sworn fealty to her Lord Father.

Just last year, she and her younger brother, Bran, had travelled with Ned to celebrate the Greatjon's nameday. When permitted to leave from his duties, her Uncle Benjen would regale her family with stories of the northern mountain clans and his chose life of austerity.

"It is the end of the world, truly." Benjen would commence, looking so much like Father with his severe, blue-grey eyes and long, Northern face. His hands, although strong and heavily scarred, were always gentle when they encircled her waist when he danced with her and Arya at feasts. "There is nothing but snow for days on end. A man can easily disappear and never be found."

Everyone reveled in his visits, as few and far between they were. Even Mother had oft questioned Father as to why Benjen took vows of self-imposed celibacy than take some noble lady to wife.

"But he is so handsome!" Catelyn would gush, her face matching the scarlet of her hair, the result of Ned's latest teasing. "Surely, he would have made a fine husband for some noble lady somewhere..."
Sansa felt a tear slip, and she angrily shook her head, willing the rest at bay. 'Twas another lifetime ago. Another girl. Crying never did anyone any good, and besides, only little girls cried and she was no longer a little girl.

Three years ago, when Sansa had turned three and ten, she visited her Aunt Lysa in the Vale when her flower came into bloom and she bled for the first time. Horrified, she tried to extricate the stain from the sheet with a knife lying nearby. Unsuccessful in her attempts, she resolved to flipping the mattress over and was nearly successful in her subterfuge when her aunt's maidservant entered her guest chambers.

Sansa, disgusted and ashamed of her sinful body, had pleaded with the young girl, Elyse, to not divulge her secret to her aunt, but all entreaties fell on deaf ears and she was summoned to her solar within the hour.

"You are flowered now, my lovely," Lysa began, offering Sansa a lemon cake from a nearby tray. It was only on special occasions her Lady Mother permitted the saccharine dessert, so Sansa ate with relish, slowly savoring the lemon's tang upon her tongue. "Do you know what that means?"

Sansa knew. All too well. She knew what the crimson blemish, stark against the snow-white sheets, entailed and she shuddered. She was marked now, permanently tethered to an unknown, faceless entity that would be her Lord Husband.

"That I am now fit to bear children," she began quietly, the lemon cake suddenly feeling heavy, leaden like gruel within her mouth. She swallowed slowly.

"Yes, my lovely," Lysa replied, smiling gently. "Truly an exciting time to be a woman. To carry a child within your body that is yours alone to love and protect." Despite the seclusion of her chambers, Lysa looked around discreetly, ensuring there were no hidden ears about. Privacy was a luxury that eluded the most privileged of ladies.

"Has your Lady Mother told you of the power that lies between a woman's legs? Tears aren't our only weapon. What we possess is far sweeter and more potent than the finest Dornish wine. Let your Lord Husband—or any man—have but single taste, and he will become yours."

Sansa blanched at that, her cheeks suddenly aflame at the gauche conversation. Of course Mother never told her this! Mother was a proper lady, delicate and chaste, she would never behave so…so wantonly, like a common slattern.

After her father had informed her of her impending marriage to Ramsay, Sansa began to loathe her body; loathe the curves and twin peaks that suddenly sprung up upon her person. She could still feel Ramsay's heated gaze linger after their initial meeting. His pale eyes freely and unashamedly rove and appraise her form, as if she were some glorious prize that only he could claim. As soon as she returned home to Winterfell, she scrubbed her body raw, desperate to extricate the revulsion and loathing that seeped into her soul and clung to her skin like mud. Never! she vowed. Never! Never! Never! And now, here she was: liberated from one monster, yet prisoner to another. Oh, how the gods loved to play their little ironies! However, Lysa was wrong. Tears and seduction weren't a woman's only weapon. They also had their wits and were able to solve any dilemma presented to them.

Leave one wolf alive and the sheep are never safe...

They had stopped to rest in a small, wooded area. It was dark now, the Hour of the Wolf, if Tormund, the giant wildling, was to be believed. There were also no stars in the sky. Sansa paused at
that. Only a fool would try to escape within the abysmal darkness of night, but when would another
opportunity present itself?

She could hide—the woods offered endless sanctuary—she could hide during the day and rest and
travel at dusk, where there was just enough light. It was not a perfect plan, Sansa conceded, but it
was the best she had. There were streams that provided fresh water and bushes that stored berries that
provided substantial nourishment. (Arya had taught her which ones were edible and which ones
brought death.) Besides, these were Umber lands, a House forever loyal to her father. The Greatjon
would help her if asked, give her quarter.

The wildlings forgot to bind her legs, a small mercy she was not going to analyze or question.
Perhaps, when there were multiple leagues distancing herself from them, she could think on it. But
now…Now she had to escape.

They were all asleep, Sansa could make out their prone forms around the dying fire. After a meagre
dinner of rabbit (the grey-eyed wildling had offered her part of his, but Sansa refused, only glaring
angrily at him and offering her backside), they talked quietly amongst themselves before sleep
claimed them. Throughout the meal, Sansa could feel the grey-eyed wildling’s gaze on her, heated
and dark. Although she had obstinately refused to look at him, once, when adjusting herself at the
foot of the tree, her eyes met his and a battle of wills quickly ensued.

He looked away first, annoyed, and Sansa reveled in the small victory. It was childish, she supposed,
but at the moment, she did not care. Soon, she would be away from here and would never have to
look at him again, no matter how unsettling and captivating his gaze may be. Focus, now. She had to
focus.

Closing her eyes, Sansa took a deep breath and channeled her thoughts. She could not afford to error
—not now—not when escape was nigh. After a few more twists and deep tugs, the ropes gave way,
and Sansa’s heart lurched.

Quickly looking up, she glanced around at her surroundings. They were all asleep, still. Tormund,
sprawled on his back, snoring loudly into the night sky, the other two laying on their sides, facing the
dying fire. The grey-eyed wildling was propped against a large boulder, opposite Tormund. All
unsuspecting. All unassuming.

Sansa got to her feet then, her heart throbbing within the vicinity of her ears. She felt heavy, wooden,
but willed herself to move. Go! Go now, you stupid girl! Go before you have nothing left!

She was surprised that stealth came so easily to her; Arya had always complained during games, that
she made too much noise when hiding, easily giving away her position. One step…Then two…
Soon, she found herself within a small cluster of woods.

A breath of relief escaped her then, faint and shallow. This was good. She only needed to keep
moving and she would be just fine. She just. Needed to. Keep moving.

Sansa had barely turned around when she suddenly found herself on the forest floor, all breath
leaving her. No. No. No…!

The grey-eyed wildling was standing over her, his face all but obscured from the consuming
darkness, his winter-grey eyes glittering with barely concealed rage. "Where are you going, She-
Wolf?" His voice was soft, quiet, and yet nonetheless deadly. It spread like a winter gale through her
body, settling in her core, and she trembled.

"You think me so stupid that I would not know how to secure your binds? I knew you were trying to
escape. I watched you, waiting. There is no place you can hide that I will not find you."

Sansa felt angry then, livid. Before she was aware of herself, aware of her actions and the weight of the consequence it would bring, she launched herself at him, a barrage of slaps, punches, and curses. *A growling and angry she-wolf at last…*

She did not care that he was stronger, that her two hands fit into his one. She did not care that he could very easily kill her and leave her corpse for the crows to feast. She just wanted to hurt him! To humiliate him! To maim him! To make him feel *some* small measurement akin to the loss and helplessness she felt currently.

He deftly caught her punches, pivoting her around and securing her arms behind her back. His face was in her hair again, and suddenly, she felt overwhelmed by him—his scent, his presence, his essence, his strength. Gods, why was he affecting her so? Why was she so conscious of him?

Angry, defeated and *so* damned tired, Sansa could only cry. And cry, she did. Painful, gut-wrenching sobs. She cried for her mother, for her father, for Robb, for Arya, for Bran, and for baby Rickon, as well.

She cried for her lost dreams, her shattered hopes, and for her unspoken prayers. She mourned for it all. Finally, after a moment, her tears abated. She was a wolf once more.

The wildling continued to hold her, though not as tightly as before. His lips remained in her hair, murmuring quiet words of comfort and mollification. He walked her back to the campsite, steering her back to the foot of the tree. And Sansa acquiesced, too tired—to exhausted—to fight back.

After securing the binds to her wrists (and feet), the grey-eyed wildling continued to linger over her, his storm colored eyes silently perusing her. Gone was the anger and disgust, and in its place was something else entirely. Something foreign and unrecognizable.

*Gods, he pities me now.*

"I had a home!" Sansa bit out, angry and ashamed she had shown her enemy weakness. She was no Stark. Wolves never cried. "I had a family that loved me. I did not ask for you to take me away. I never asked for any of this!"

They grey-eyed wildling blinked in surprise and then quickly stood up, giving Sansa his back. He stopped suddenly, yet refused to face her, only looking at the night sky that continued to engulf and surround them.

"You did ask, Sansa. I *heard* you ask. I heard your prayers." A moment passed. And then…

"I know because I prayed for you, too."

Chapter End Notes

*Sigh* What wouldn't a lady do to hear the love of her life say that to her? Question is, what does Sansa do with this piece of information? Where do Jon and Sansa go from now? Is there even a *place* to go to?
Stalemates and Impasses

Chapter Summary

He had told her the truth last night. Exposed those small fissures and cracks of vulnerability until there was nothing left but an unbound river of desperation and anxiety. Last night, beneath the cosmos and heavens, where only the gods were present and listening, Sansa Stark saw him. The real Jon Snow. Nothing else was left of him, nothing so sacrosanct or primal.

Chapter Notes

Remember when I said that there was a little bit of Dark Jon Snow in this narrative? Well, he briefly makes an appearance here. I am absolutely blown away by your responses. A million times, thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8: Stalemates and Impasses

She had tried to escape. The thought made Jon’s stomach clench uncomfortably and jaw tic in ire. Last night, the red-haired, she-wolf tried to escape—to leave him—and return home. Under different circumstances, Jon assumed, he would have been quite amused at the failed attempt. No hostage had ever escaped the White Wolf’s clutches once he set his sights on you. It was akin to a hare absconding an eagle’s talons. A fate his captives long resigned themselves to.

Yet, Sansa’s escape made something within him snap, shatter and splinter into hot embers. He burned. Gods, how he burned and raged like an inferno.

He had made sure the ropes were deliberately loosened and her feet remained untethered, a request that made Tormund curse and shake his head incredulously. Perhaps Jon was foolish in his decision. Perhaps it was cruel to bait her thus, to offer a minute glimmer of hope and security only to snatch it away from her just as quickly. There was no sport in hunting, Father would reprimand. And it was no secret she was unhappy with her predicament and wanted liberation.

Yet, he wanted to test her, test her strength of will. She was beautiful, yes, but was she really as fierce and unyielding as the beast on her father’s sigil? The answer was unequivocal and resounding. Yes. Jon’s britches tightened involuntarily, a small smile gracing his lips. Something akin to admiration settling in his belly.

Gods, but she was magnificent in her rage. Her eyes, a tranquil sky, turned into an indigo storm whenever she looked at him. With such hate and derision. And scorn.

The smile left Jon’s face and the admiration that once took root and swell began to deflate and sink like a stone into the bottom of the North Sea. As a wildling, Jon was well-acquainted with Southrone contempt. The looks of disdain etched on the faces of the sanctimonious Southrone Kneelers and lords whenever their keeps and villages were razed and their property seized.
The way delicate noble women’s lips would curl and eyes turn cold as they gazed upon him in silent inventory. Jon was not stupid—he knew what they saw whenever they looked at him. It was the same even amongst his own people.

They judged him. Deemed him a monster—an animal. Unfit to breathe the very same air as they. A beast unworthy to live among the good and righteous civilized population south of the Wall. They condemned him, he and his people. Sansa Stark, the Warden of the North’s daughter, the living embodiment of privilege and pedigree, judged him with her frigid hauteur and glacial stares.

A savage, that’s what she called him last night after he caught her. After he bared his heart and soul to her. After his revelation.

“You are nothing but a savage…”

He was angry now. A wild, crackling tempest. His grey eyes narrowed and blackened, his fists clenched and palpitating. Tormund noticed the drastic transition within his prince, perceived his dangerous mood, and gave him wide berth. It was never wise to provoke and bait a seething wolf, especially within its own lair.

The woods were his domain, his home. It was best that the red-haired Kneeler remembered that. Surely, she was not so stupid as to not know what he could do to her should she continue to anger and provoke him further.

She was a woman, a Kneeler, at that. Here, in the woods, away from villages, keeps, and fat, titled lords, she was nothing—a possession to be stolen and reclaimed over and over. Albeit, a very beautiful possession, but a possession nonetheless.

He could take her if he wanted. The thought had crossed his mind repeatedly since the abduction. Tormund had asked repeatedly why he had not pursued the notion. Here, under the morning sun and among prying eyes, he could claim her body—so ripe and firm—and sate the unquenchable desire that festered and burned unabated for so long. And no one would deign to stop him or question him.

He was the son of Mance Rayder, the King-Beyond-the-Wall, the White Wolf of the North. He took what he wanted. And what he wanted was her. Gods, but he was starving for her.

She was asleep, propped against the foot of the tree, her breathing shallow and steady. Her hair, a scarlet curtain, shielding part of her face. She was pale, the mark of fatigue forming beneath her eyes. Yet, despite the paleness, she was still beautiful. Undeniably so.

Jon’s heart constricted at that, soothing the raging beast that had run riot within him. Last night, she had splintered. Crying, convulsing, and shattering within the encircle of his arms. While sorrow and tears had never previously affected him, seeing her so broken, even momentarily, had torn him asunder, leaving a chasm so wide and gaping that he wondered if he would ever again be complete.

When had he changed? Become this calloused, unfeeling monster that reveled in suffering? Before Sansa, Jon would have placed blame on the Southroners. It was their fault his people were reduced to starvation, living on the fringes of the realm. It was their fault he was reduced to pillaging and plundering, like scavengers, to survive. It was their fault he was forced to this existence, a damnation and curse he would never subject anyone to, nemeses included.

Yet now…

Now…

Jon was not so sure and the uncertainty bowed him over, shattering him anew. Gods. How did she
do it? How was this flame-haired warrior able to reawaken and resurrect something that was once thought long-dead and buried?

He had told her the truth last night. Exposed those small fissures and cracks of vulnerability until there was nothing left but an unbound river of desperation and anxiety. Last night, beneath the cosmos and heavens, where only the gods were present and listening, Sansa Stark saw him. The real Jon Snow. Nothing else was left of him, nothing so sacrosanct or primal.

He had prayed for her, small, feverish prayers spoken in the purple twilight of nights beneath the glittering stars. He had prayed for salvation and sanctuary, for completion. And he found it in her. She was the sun to his moon; his other half. A realization that caused both euphoria and great sorrow.

He wanted her, aye. He would always want her, until the sun rises in the west and sets in the east. Until the roaring seas became dry and the mountains blew in the wind like leaves. Jon’s desire for the red she-wolf would remain unquenchable.

Yet, he would not dishonor her or take what was never his to give. He may be a savage, but he was no monster. He would earn her, protect her. From others and himself, if need be. It was the very least he could do. And perhaps make her see him in a new light.

She held all the cards in her hand and was his to command. And should she reciprocate his sentiments—if she reciprocated any of them—it would be on her terms. He would never force her. And Jon would wait, silently and quietly. He would wait forever.

Chapter End Notes

So...Sansa, what's your move? You hold all the cards in your hands. And thank the gods, that Jon did not go through with his previous thoughts. He is no Ramsay, so rest assured.
Chapter Nine

The screams penetrated the darkened chamber, and Ramsay closed his eyes in ecstasy, relishing the sound. The bellows began to quieten in volume, its inhabitant slowly losing consciousness. Only an occasional whimper breaking the silence.

That would be remedied, he vowed, his pale, lifeless eyes glinting avidly. Soon, the oubliette would be a cacophony of terror, agony and hysteria. Soon, the smell of blood, gore, and decomposition would permeate every orifice, and Ramsay relished at the promise.

It was like sex, the taking of a life. It gave him a euphoria and bliss that left everything else wanting. Here, beneath the Dreadfort, within the shadows and quiet stillness of obscurity, he was The Stranger. The God of Death.

He smirked at that, the corner of his lips lifting ever so slightly. His joy was fleeting, though. His eyes soon returned to their resting stoicism. He was becoming bored, now. There was no sport in an unconscious victim. The hunt was no longer exciting.

The forester’s (Merric, that was his name. Ramsay remembered all of his victims’ names.) head lulled to the side, revealing a missing eye and lacerated face, a bloody labyrinth of red, puckered skin and tissue. He was tied to the crucifix, a crudely fashioned “X,” the binds tearing into his flesh. The stump that was once his left hand unbound, exposed, and raw.

Perfect...the fun was about to commence.

The thin flaying knife twitched within his hand and he gripped the serrated blade tightly to control its tremor. A sharp pain lit through his body, jarring his consciousness. Ramsay glanced down briefly, acknowledging the crimson liquid that wet his palm. It was no consequence or matter, really. All men were made of meat, sinew and bone.

Merric had sworn that he had not been aware of the wildlings hiding within the Wolfswood, and the damned fool of a Warden and his cunt son believed him. Ramsay’s lips curled at that, mercy was reserved only for the weak and gullible. And Ramsay was neither.

“Now, let’s start again. The sooner you tell the truth, the sooner I will let you go. I swear it, by the Old Gods and New.” This was his favorite part, the interrogation. Here, he could pretend, bestow a false mien of friendship and congeniality, along with the sweet promise of freedom, only to then rip it all away. Crushing all hope in its wake and watching the condemned crumble into pieces of nothingness and ash.

Oh! how he loved that part.

To be able to give life and then take it away—he was truly a god. The only answer the forrester was
able to give were small whimpers and incoherent blubbering.

“P-p-please, milord! I know nothing, I s-s-swear.” Another dead end. Another false lead.

Walking over to an open barrel of salt, Ramsay took a handful of it and began grinding it into the bloodied stump of Merric’s hand. The howls that followed soon after were deafening. Ragged, torn, and broken. Soon...it would all be over soon.

Once, when Ramsay was five, he flayed a small kitten that had belonged to the chamberlain’s daughter, Madylin. Small, midnight black in color with jade eyes, the kitten was a beauty, a gift from Dомерic for her eighth nameday. The only gift she received ever. Bolton servants were inconsequential, a rule Roose had made certain and frequently executed.

Although the kitten was innocent, so trusting and gentle in nature and air, it was the fact that Madylin loved it that spurred Ramsay’s ire. The look of pure joy and infinite elation that made his jaw tic and his finger thrum in anticipation. No one was allowed such bliss, especially not in a world laden knee-deep in shit and mire. Someone had to teach her, show her that such a luxury was fleeting and a phantasm. And Ramsay was ever-willing to be her tutor and jumped at the prospect.

The howls were high and keening, every time a layer of fur and skin was lifted and peeled, they would intensify; become sharper in its pleas for mercy and respite. It was such a sweet, delicious melody to his ears. Soon (all too soon for Ramsay’s liking), the kitten’s wails quieted, and in its place was a formless, shapeless, quivering mass of tissue. Ramsay stared at the spectacle--now a grotesque lump of tendons, veins, and thew--in queer fascination and intrigue. The trembling then ceased and the lump soon cooled and stiffened.

Father was right, Ramsay mused, all the while staring transfixed and awed. A naked man has few secret; a flayed man has none.

“You disappoint me, Merric,” Ramsay whispered, bending low to his ear. “I thought you wanted to go home. Return to that beautiful wife of yours who warms your bed and that son you are so proud of. Perhaps, I could bring them here. Bring them to the Dreadfort as a favor to you. Would you like that?”

Merric let out a sound then, not quite human in tone and sound and leaning towards that of an animal. A wounded and dying animal whose time was quickly coming to an end…

“Please. Please, milord. Mercy, I beg of you. M-my family, they are innocent. Please.”

Ramsay backhanded him, then. The force of it causing the forester’s head to snap back and ricochet off the wooden cross. He was losing patience now. The Mad Dog was becoming untethered.

“WHERE IS SHE, MERRIC?! WHERE IS SANSA?!” There it was now. The frothing, rabid beast that was Ramsay Bolton. He had Merric’s face in a vise, his hands on opposite sides of his neck, effectively stifling any further sounds of protest.

It did not matter, anyway. Merric was served his death warrant the moment he set foot in the Dreadfort chambers. There was no way Ramsay could let him go now. Not that he would ever concede to do so, anyway. Promises be damned.

Sansa was his. He had chosen her the moment the engagement had been announced and the introduction given. He had bed warmers aplenty; whores that he fucked and fucked constantly, yet with very little gratification or pleasure. It was unfulfilling and menial.

There had been Violet, with her beautiful blonde hair and lovely complexion. Those had been fun
times, Ramsay acknowledged, but then she had to ruin it and become pregnant. She was killed soon after. It would not do, sullying the Bolton name with another fatherless bastard.

Then, there was Tansy, or “Tansy Fly,” she was called, with her dimpled smiles and saccharin laughter. She had been a good girl—willing and dutiful—but too damned sweet. Too good. Such unassuming kindness was more liability than virtue. Better he the one to put her down than someone else. Ramsay had done her a kindness, truly.

Finally, there was Myranda. His favorite bitch. He enjoyed her, enjoyed her enthusiasm, her vigor and willingness to watch and partake. Once, there had been a time where Ramsay had weighed the prospect of taking her to wife. Of course, she had been riding his cock to oblivion when the promise had been struck, her hands wrapped tightly around his neck, her screams of ecstasy and pleasure piercing the sky. She was a good fuck, that Myranda.

For awhile, marriage to Myranda had had its possibilities. Yet, all of that faded into obscurity and nothingness the moment the engagement had been announced and Ramsay caught a glimpse of his betrothed. Gods…

She had been a vision, all polite smiles and demure pleasantries. She had hair of fire; a stark contrast to the creamy cast of her skin. Her eyes were caerulean and Ramsay felt as though he had been doused with ice water. Everything before her ceased to exist, and nothing after her was of any consequence or mattered.

Myranda had been incensed. A jealous, raving fit of curses and paroxysms. “You said you would marry me!” she accused, her cold, green eyes etched in betrayal and humiliation.

She had quickly gotten over her jealousy, though. She had no other recourse. Besides, the hard backhand to the face and grab at her throat had effectively put an end to the matter. She was lucky that night; Ramsay had allowed her to walk away relatively unscathed. He was feeling generous. Any other time, she would have been fed to his hounds.

Sansa was his, now and forever more. And nothing was to take that from him. Not the gods. Not the Starks. And most certainly not the wildling savages or their damned White Wolf.

Ramsay’s jaw clenched again. A tic starting to form. A foaming and salivating Mad Dog was again emerging from the shadows.

They were all obstacles—to be knocked down and demolished. Ramsay looked back at Merric, now a half-dead, whimpering heap. Another obstacle to be immediately dealt with.

One quick slash and the man was dead, his throat an opened, bubbling gash. Ramsay smiled at that, his pale, lifeless eyes feral and animated. So much blood…

His britches actually tightened at the sight. Once, his lord father deemed him a lunatic, a demon spawned from the deepest pit of the seven hells. And Ramsay wholeheartedly agreed. Only a fool would try to restrain and tether a Mad Dog, as the White Wolf would soon learn.

He could not wait.

Picking up the thin flaying knife once more, Ramsay inserted the tip of the blade into Merric’s smallest finger and lifted. The skin neatly giving way. Just like peeling an apple, he thought jovially.

Now, the fun really began...
As a HUGE animal lover, the flaying of the kitten was the most difficult to write. Also, it looks like our favorite White Wolf has some SERIOUS competition. The White Wolf vs The Mad Dog. Placing bets now!
On a serious note, thank you everyone for your responses. To say that I'm overwhelmed by your love of this narrative is an understatement. You guys truly give me life.
Chapter Summary

“Strange people, Wildlings,” Old Nan would commence. She had been her father’s nurse when he was but a suckling babe at Winterfell. Although four score in age, her mind was sharp; just as keen as her eyes. A curious mix--not quite hazel, but more of a warm amber--they were able to pierce through bone and marrow and penetrate the very soul.

“Not like you or I--civilized people--but free. Freer than the birds in the air. There’s is a land without restriction where they adhere to no one save themselves.”

Chapter Notes

It is with my shame and regret that I have spoiled you. Two chapters within a week--a true record. This chapter transpires two days after Sansa's failed escape. Here, they have successfully made it over the Wall undetected and are now officially in Wildling territory. I have written a separate, "lost chapter" that explores their trek over the Wall and other details. That will be a short narrative that should come about in the near future. Stay tuned! Also, Bethany Canton is an imaginary character I conjured up in my mind. Here, she replaces Jeyne Poole as Sansa's close, childhood friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 10: Unwanted Concessions, Unexpected Enemies

The wildling camp was nothing Sansa expected. Of course, she had naught to base said expectations on save the stories Old Nan told at bedtime, and fantasies culminated from feverish, untethered dreams and youthful imaginations. Fanciful mechanisms laden with naivete and ignorance.

“Strange people, Wildlings,” Old Nan would commence. She had been her father’s nurse when he was but a suckling babe at Winterfell. Although four score in age, her mind was sharp; just as keen as her eyes. A curious mix--not quite hazel, but more of a warm amber--they were able to pierce through bone and marrow and penetrate the very soul.

They were captivating, those eyes. Always focused and set to determined purpose. Eyes of an arbiter, Robb asserted once. If the gods were real, Sansa supposed, they would be in possession of such a steady and unwavering gaze.

“Not like you or I--civilized people--but free. Freer than the birds in the air. There’s is a land without restriction where they adhere to no one save themselves.”
Sansa could remember nights where she would sit in rapt attention, envious that such liberation was not only possible, but that some people were in possession of it.

“It’s not fair,” she would whisper into the cool sanctuary of her pillow in the still darkness of the night. “I wish it were me, too.”

Now, all Sansa could do was chuckle, mirthlessly and shake her head at the irony. Yes, she was liberated, but at what cost? At what expense? Such questions were bereft of answers.

The camp was large, spacious, and vast. Men, old and young alike were outside, completing menial tasks. Some, from what Sansa could see, were forging weapons out of rusted steel, hoping that such attention would somehow restore the discarded metal to its former glory. Others were roasting meat—their day’s largess—on an open spit. The heady smell of deer and other game wafted through the air, causing Sansa’s stomach to clench in hunger.

The women were all congregated together, an aggregation of laughter and affability, sewing and repairing torn clothing. It reminded Sansa of home, of Winterfell. Automatically, Sansa was transported to her sewing circle with her Lady Mother, of hours spent gossiping with Bethany Canton, of the lesser Canton House, on fashions of the South, and potential suitors and eligible husbands.

Not at all pretty with her prominent teeth (“Bethany Rabbit-Teeth,” Arya would snicker behind cupped hands. Sansa would often pinch her and tell her to shut up.) and elephantine nose, she had her sights set on the young Lord Cerwyn. The same lordling who would haunt Sansa’s steps, like a second shadow, and beg for her favor. Sansa would always decline.

A lump began to form at the base of her throat and Sansa swallowed it down. Such a long time ago, she thought ruefully. When things were simple.

As the horses slowly approached, the laughter began to dissipate and quieten. Soon, within a span of seconds, they were surrounded. A sea of curious, unblinking faces and hostile stares. Sansa stared back, a defiant lift to her chin. All transparency and intrigue melted away then, and the cold mask of indifference and frigid hauteur returned.

Remember who you are, Sansa affirmed. You are a Stark of Winterfell and a wolf. Wolves show no fear in the face of their enemies. Try as they might, they cannot break you.

They grey-eyed wildling was the first to dismount, followed by Tormund and the others; leaving Sansa last. Since her failed escape two nights previous, she had been securely bound and under constant supervision, the exceptions being when she had to relieve herself and bathe. She had promised not to flee again, and for some inexplicable reason, the grey-eyed wildling believed her and granted her this respite. Sansa was thankful for the victory and spared humiliation. They had already taken her freedom, she would be damned if they stripped her dignity from her, too. She would fight. And let the consequences fall where they may.

Tormund (she finally learned his name) had argued against it, but was immediately silenced with one sharp look. Sansa shivered at the recollection of it: piecing and feral, they were the eyes of an animal, an agitated and deadly beast about to pounce. The wolf’s gaze once more…

Tormund automatically retreated, hands raised in quick surrender. It was then Sansa’s earlier suspicions were confirmed—he was their leader and they all followed him. It was no wonder, that. Just by looking at him—the proud gait, the unwavering, determined gaze, the brooding intensity—it was easy to see why the men respected him, it was almost reverent.
Such a pity, Sansa conceded, albeit reluctantly. He was handsome, and wielded such command with great ease and fluidity. He would have made a formidable soldier. Seven hells, had he been born into a respected House and with the proper education and conditioning, he would have made a strong nobleman. A fine Warden.

He would-- no!

Sansa shook her head quickly, effectively quelling all previous thoughts. The mind truly was a treacherous thing. Stop this. Stop this madness now!

The man was a monster, Sansa reminded herself. He stalked her, kidnapped her, and had her bound like an animal. He did not deserve her admiration. The only thing he deserved from her was a sword through the eye!

Bastard.

Somewhat mollified then, Sansa began to dismount, blatantly ignoring the grey-eyed wildling’s proffered hand. She was not helpless. She did not need assistance--especially from him. She did not want him touching her. Ever.

The wildling lifted one eyebrow at her, his lip again quirking in wry humor and amusement. Sansa glared at him, her bound hands twitching. She could not wait for the day she slapped that smirk right off his face. Soon, she silently vowed. Very soon.

Then, too soon, too fast, before Sansa could even blink or react, a hand shot out from the crowd, the calloused palm connecting with her cheek. The sting of the impact causing her head to jolt to the side. She blinked in surprise. The hell…?

“You fucking, Kneeling whore!”

Chapter End Notes

So...Sansa has come face-to-face (or should I say, face-to-palm?) with Ygritte. Did you REALLY think that she would just arrive at the camp and there would be no drama? Gotta love a good catfight now and then. Keeps things lively!
Scorned, Forsaken, and Damned

Chapter Summary

She had told him she loved him, already exposed and vulnerable, she dared to open herself up further, delicate and fragile, like a newly formed butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. Jon smiled at her then, and Ygritte’s heart fluttered, the wings of hope beating and slowly ascending from the abyss.

Please, it would whisper fervently. Please...

Chapter Notes

In this chapter, we will explore Ygritte's thoughts, her anguish, her inner conflicts when seeing Sansa with Jon for the first time, and her willingness to do whatever must to keep him by her side, no matter the extremes.

Also, thank you so much for your responses. I am truly overwhelmed. Alas, as the new school year approaches, I will be unable to update as frequently as I had during the summer months. This will probably be my last chapter until I can get into a routine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Eleven: Scorned, Forsaken, and Damned

She had missed him. Oh gods, but she had missed him fiercely. She had missed his intensity, his broodiness, his severity. She missed his smiles, rare as they were, when bestowed upon her. It was not often he smiled, but whenever he did, it felt as though the world fell away and ceased to exist.

For me, Ygritte thought wistfully. All for me.

Most importantly, Ygritte missed his hands. Although only nine and ten, Jon had the hands of a man full grown. Large, strong, and calloused, on those long-ago nights he frequented her hut, those hands had proven gentle and attentive, steady. He was the White Wolf of the North, as vicious and unforgiving as the beast he was named after. Yet, with the encroaching of night, he was generous and careful.

His touches were light and honey-sweet when he loved her. And loved her, he did. Frequently and thoroughly, bringing her to sobbing completion over and over again. Once, when she was five and ten and he, just a year older, they made love in an isolated cave, located on some unknown plain.

The name had been inconsequential, long lost within the dark recesses of her mind, but the memories—a sweet, and all-consuming poison—continued to linger, a balm to soothe the festering, burning agony that continued to plague her at nights. She had told him she loved him, already exposed and vulnerable, she dared to open herself up further, delicate and fragile, like a newly formed butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. Jon smiled at her then, and Ygritte's heart fluttered, the wings of hope beating and slowly ascending from the abyss.
Please, it would whisper fervently. Please.

He did not repeat the words or respond to her declaration, only cupped her cheek in those warm hands of his, and bought her face down to his, kissing her into sweet oblivion. His taste quieting the roaring dissent and unease within her. It was almost enough to make her forget. There, within the encircle of his arms, away from Mance Rayder's disapproving stares and the cruel taunts from other Wildling women, who at one time shared his bed, she could luxuriate in Jon Snow. Yes, given enough time, Ygritte could almost find herself content.

Almost.

Her heart dropped at the realization, the once fluttering bird of hope now heavy and lying dormant like lead. He never said the words back to her, only leaving them suspended in the air of nothingness and oblivion. It hurt. It hurt deeply.

It had been almost three years since their tryst in the cave, since he had last loved her. She had tried to pretend that the slight had not affected her, had not torn her heart asunder into nothing but blood and ash, but it was a lie. Nothing but a damned, fucking lie.

She blamed his father, Ygritte did. Mance had always seen her as unworthy, undeserving of his son. Less than. She was loathed to be in his presence, loathed how his eyes, so sharp and unforgiving, reduced her to that of an insect. Naught but a nuisance that could only be tolerated, if not squashed.

"That girl will lead you to ruin if you do not have care!"

Gods, but Ygritte hated him! Hated him with a passion of a thousand burning suns. And she made sure Mance was aware of her sentiments. At every opportunity.

At nights, sated and exhausted from Jon's latest visits, she would laugh quietly to herself, relishing in the thought that she had defied the King-Beyond-the-Wall and laid with his son, his great pride. Whenever Mance was in earshot, Ygritte made sure to speak loudly of their clandestine encounters. The more lewd and vulgar, the better. In those rare and few times that Jon would acknowledge her, show her a small measurement of devotion, she made sure to be as effusive with her affections as possible.

With every stolen kiss, every forbidden caress, every wet thrust of his hips that lit her body aflame, Jon slowly became part of her. He had marked her, claimed her. She was his woman. Only his.

"You are mine and I am yours," she whispered one night, arms and legs intertwined, a foggy haze of dreams and expectations. "If we die, we die. But first, we will live."

Ygritte held onto that promise, buried it deep within her veins. Even when he discarded their vows so cavalierly, she held onto the whispered words, for it served as her resurrection. Those many nights he failed to come to her, failed to breathe life once more within body, she died in agony and despair. Their words, their memories, the only tether and preservation keeping her afloat.

Ygritte was not stupid; she knew that she was no beauty. Not even the most accomplished and fanciful of imaginations could deem her thus. Slight, petite, and lightly freckled with copper tresses, her features leaned more towards plain than anything. Passable, as the elders would oft say.

It was due to her plainness that she was often overlooked and left wanting in comparison to the statuesque Rowena, with her honey-gold hair and emerald eyes, and ample Bridget, whose dark beauty and lush curves had rendered many a man mute. They were beautiful, both of them, the most
desired in all the village. For a while, Jon had courted them, but it was always innocent and fleeting.

"Just sewing his wild oats," they would all laugh, shrugging.

Yet for Ygritte, seeing Jon--her Jon--with one of them was like nettles on her tongue. She oft wondered if running herself through with a dulled knife would bring more relief. She hated them--those pretty girls. Oh gods, how she hated them.

She could never win against a pretty face, they were her competition, her rivals. So she mocked them, belittled them. Masking her jealousy behind a façade of indifference and contempt. At every opportunity presented, Ygritte would berate Rowena and Bridget, berate their beauty and grace, to the point of unrelenting ruthlessness.

When at last the insults had ceased its comfort, ceased its mollification, Ygritte took the game one step further: she eliminated them. The eradication of a rival a euphoric and welcomed catharsis.

Bridget had been the first to meet such an unfortunate demise, poor thing. A pity, really. She had left her stew unattended--an assortment of wild turnips, cabbage, leeks, and carrots--when she took sick and fell ill. Black Iris and mandrake root grew in abundance in the forest and was overlooked to the untrained eye. Once completely dissolved into the clear broth, it became tasteless and odorless; and if consumed in high dosage, death would be imminent and agonizing. Excruciatingly so.

Bridget had been all but recognizable once the poison set in and The Stranger finally seized her. Her once prized beauty reduced to naught save decomposition and waste. Such a pity, indeed.

Then Rowena, the rival Ygritte despised the most. Despite her cherubic looks and statuesque height, Rowena was a formidable huntress, a source of pride among many in the village. There were very few who equaled her skill with a bow...

Yet for all of Rowena's dexterity and talent, she could not match Ygritte's stealth and alacrity. All it took was a well-placed arrow in the back of the neck and the yellow-haired bitch was vanquished. All in one felled swoop. The tears had come freely, thanks to the crushed wild onion and salt rubbed into her eyes; the lies dripped smooth like honey from her venomous lips.

("It had all been but a terrible mistake, a hunting accident gone awry! Oh gods! If only she had not moved so quickly!")

Such duplicity was easy, for no one dared to question her--not even Mance, whose seeming omniscience was often unnerving when proven right. Both Rowena's and Bridget's deaths had been reduced to a horrible mistake, one of the many unfortunate events that had plagued the village that year. This was the North, where life and death ran hand in hand with the other. For a wildling, theirs was an arduous existence.

Besides, Ygritte was loyal to her people, steadfast. She would never think to do something so inconceivable knowing the ramifications. No, surely not.

Yet, when gazing at her new rival--with her luminescent skin, crystalline eyes, and autumn hair, more vivid and crimson than weirwood leaves--that uncomfortable and familiar sensation began to once again ascend and choke her with its intensity. Yet this time, it was stronger, more potent, and dangerous. It crackled and surged, frightening even her with its fury. Something was different, Ygritte could sense it within the depths of her bones.

Not only was the girl beautiful--eclipsing even Rowena and Bridget--but she was not like the rest of them, a cut diamond amongst blackened coal. A Kneeler. Even worse, the look of unconcealed,
naked reverence displayed on Jon's face when he gazed upon her. He was gawking on her as though he had never seen the like, as though he dared not to blink should she disappear into shards of light and color.

Ygritte tightly swallowed the acidic bile that began to rise within her throat. Not once, she quickly realized, during their affair had Jon ever gazed on her like that. So openly and unashamedly.

Besotted fool, you have damned us both!

Before she was fully cognizant of her actions, Ygritte began to move forward, pushing and clawing her way to the front. This could not be, not again. Jon could not do this to her again. And yet he had, only this time it was worse. The pain excruciating and searing.

A white-hot rage began to blind her, permeate her consciousness until nothing was left save primal, animalistic instinct and reaction. Ygritte could not remember lifting her hand, nor could she remember striking out. All she could remember in her disorientation and hysteria was the sound--like a whip cracking through the charged air--and the sudden stinging of her palm.

And Jon Snow’s deadly and incensed gaze as it leveled on her...

Chapter End Notes

If it's not Ramsay, than it's Ygritte. What can I say? I have a propensity for writing batshit crazy characters! Lol...
Chapter Summary

He knew battles, he knew warfare. Eighty-five times he has led charges against Southrone Kneelers pretending to play soldier, and each one a resounding victory. Throughout each charge, each raid, never once had he felt one ounce--one figment--of rage or unbridled wrath. Through it all, he had prided himself in maintaining his equanimity, for it was all just a duty; an obligation that needed to be fulfilled. A mission to be executed.

Chapter Notes

Happy Weekend, Lovelies! Since this will quite literally be my LAST *tear* weekend of freedom, I wanted to celebrate with a new chapter. As Petyr Baelish so famously said in Season 4, "We're all liars here." Lol...
Unlike previous chapters, where it only focused on a single entity's POV, here, it will focus on *BOTH* Jon and Sansa's point of views and feelings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twelve: Lies, Truth and Duplicity

In the nine and ten years of his existence, Jon Snow had only felt angry twice. The first, when he was a young lad of seven and witnessed his mother breathe her last. A victim of the winter coughing sickness, one of its several casualties that year, it had been particularly devastating for the Wildling villages north of the Wall. The contagion was sudden, swift in its claiming. One moment, Lyanna had been there--with him--beautiful, smiling and exultant; the next, her body was lying on a funeral pyre, pale, exanimate, and stiff. A candle snuffed of its flame.

The second, was a few years later, when Jon was ten, and Father struck him for the first time. The backhand was hard and severe, the force of it felled him instantly. Immediately, Mance felt contrite, shamed. His black eyes repentant and pleading. He was profuse with his apologies, vowing to never raise a hand to him again, but Jon was hearing none of it.

Although but a young child, Jon already possessed the temper of a man, his fists curling at the sides, his eyes narrowed and staring. A wolf-pup already baring his fangs. He fled Mance's hut then, before he disgraced himself further. Fleeing to the woods where he stayed for a fortnight, until he was forcefully brought back from his self-imposed exile. Mance, haggard and disheveled, was immediately jubilant at the return of his son, and Jon felt a stab of remorse and apologized for his selfishness. Immediately, the tension was lifted and the incident forgotten.

Yes, it was rare that Jon Snow felt anger--that raw, blistering, white-hot intensity that pervaded one's mind and clouded his judgement. Anger made people stupid, changed grown men into untried boys--
weak and careless. And Jon was none of these.

He knew battles, he knew warfare. Eighty-five times he has led charges against Southrone Kneelers pretending to play soldier, and each one a resounding victory. Throughout each charge, each raid, never once had he felt one ounce--one fragment--of rage or unbridled wrath. Through it all, he had prided himself in maintaining his equanimity, for it was all just a duty; an obligation that needed to be fulfilled. A mission to be executed.

But now...

Nothing prepared him for the searing, white-hot acerbity that charged him now. It was electric, surging and pulsing with its intensity as it traversed his extremities. At that second, Jon felt dangerous, murderous. Ygritte was playing a deadly game that she could never afford to lose.

He was unprepared for the first slap, the sound permeating the air, causing a tense, sickly silence to saturate the atmosphere. Sansa cried out, partly in shock, partly in outrage. Her blue eyes narrowed, her fist clenching. Even bound with rope, the red she-wolf was impressive, silently fuming. The fangs were coming out.

Unperturbed, Ygritte reared her hand back again, ready to strike...

...only to be caught in mid-air...

Jon Snow had to be careful, for this was Ygritte. The same Ygritte he had once thought he loved, and to some degree, did love still. But she touched Sansa--dared to touch what was his--and he could never let that stand. Careful. Careful now.

Ygritte tried to retract her hand, suddenly terrified. She had seen anger, she had seen rage, but never this. Jon looked crazed, wild. His tranquil grey eyes were a tempest. In that instant, he could very well have killed her and would not have had a second thought.

"You are never to raise your hand to my wife again. Am I understood?" His voice was succinct, tight. Already a deep baritone, it dropped an octave lower, causing the crowd to take a step back in caution. Ygritte tried again to jerk her arm back, but Jon held on, his grip tightening, the pressure starting to hurt.

"You...you took a Kneeler to wife?" Ygritte gasped, her eyes widening in disbelief and horror. The crowd let out a collective murmur of incredulity. One Wildling woman spat the ground.

Jon remained resolute. Unbowed and unapologetic. A veritable stonewall. Never would he be sorry for choosing Sansa, even if she would not have him. Never would he be ashamed for loving her--he would do it a million times over if it meant just a second in her presence. She was worth it all and much more.

It did not matter if she never chose him. If she never reciprocated the longing and lust he held for her. Right now, at this moment, she was here--with him--and nothing could take it all away. Absolutely nothing.

Jon's eyes turned black, his gaze burning with barely restrained wrath, as he continued to hold Ygritte's wrist, still suspended in mid-air. How simple, he thought darkly, it would be to end this. To snap her throat and put an end to all of this foolishness. It would only take but a moment.

Steady, that quiet voice countered. Do not dishonor yourself here.

"Aye. She is mine, and you would do well to remember that. There will not be a next time."
The threat was unmistakable as it lingered through the air. Although directed at Ygritte, it was all-inclusive. No one was safe. Jon Snow was not a liar, and all knew the hell that would be paid if they dared to touch the red-haired Kneeler...their White Wolf’s chosen mate.

With one final, deliberate squeeze, Jon Snow released Ygritte's wrist and stepped forward, gently pulling Sansa along. Tormund and the two other wildlings followed close by, making up the rear. The silence now engulfed them, following in their wake.

Sansa's thoughts were in a quagmire. She could not determine where one began and another ended. It all seemed to be one long, continuous blur. Did he just say what she thought he had?

'Wife... She is mine.' Sansa shook her head in incredulity. No! If she did not want to marry Ramsay, then what would make the wildling think she would willingly consent to him?

Anger began to set in then. Hot and uncontrollable. How dare he reduce her to naught but chattel? In that moment, Sansa felt like a piece of mutton; fit to only to tease and tantalize. Was this all men saw in her? First her Lord Father, then her betrothed, and now him?

Seven fucking hells.

Too consumed with her tumultuous thoughts, Sansa failed to realize that the grey-eyed wildling had led her to a large hut in the center of the village. Pulling back the animal skins, the wildling set her down on a nearby stool and began to unbind her ropes. Not once had he looked at her, his storm-grey eyes instead focused on the task at hand.

With the knots finally unbound, he abruptly stood and made his way towards the entrance once more.

"You called me your wife!" Sansa blurted out, incredulous. Immediately, she wanted to yank out her tongue from the confines of her mouth. Until she could gather a better understanding of this man, it was best to conserve her inquiries.

Always play your hand well...

Jon inclined his head in her direction, just only but a mere fraction. His heart constricting within the confines of his chest. Oh, but if only she would forget, forget he made such false claims! Only then, he could better preserve his splintering heart.

"Aye, I did." He was content to walk away, to leave it at that, but Sansa was insistent. His she-wolf wanted more. If only she were his.

"Why? Why did you lie?"

Jon closed his eyes tightly and sighed, his heart fracturing anew. *Please. Please cease to go any further. I cannot bear anymore.*

"To protect you, Sansa. If the men knew you were unclaimed, they would have tried to have stolen you. By telling them you're my wife, they will leave you in peace."

It was only a half-truth, but a truth all the same. It would have to suffice. Jon could not bear to tell her the real reason for the deception. He could not bear more of her scorn and ridicule.

If he told her it was only for her protection, then she would be more inclined to stay. Therefore allowing Jon more time to pretend—pretend that she was his, and that she was here of her own accord and free will. Pretend that she loved and wanted him, too. Just as he desperately loved and wanted
her.

And with that, Jon closed the hut's flap and made his way to Mance.

Chapter End Notes

So Jon is going to tell Daddy Mance of his new "possession." How do you think it will go? Also, do you *HONESTLY* think Ygritte is going to take the not so subtle hint?
Kill the Boy

Chapter Summary

He had never believed in love. He had prided himself on being too smart, too wizened. Too jaded. After living among his former brothers in the Night Watch, and witnessing the horrors beyond The Wall that would have rendered any normal man to the brink of insanity, Mance Rayder would have readily dismissed love and its notion to that of a phantasm. A product equated to that of mermaids and dragons.

Chapter Notes

Oh, how I missed you! Since it's the weekend, and I have just a little bit of a breather, I wanted to post this chapter. Also, this is my form of therapy from the train wreck that is Jonaerys. In this chapter, Mance reminisces on his lost love, Lyanna, and makes a startling discovery about his son, Jon. Also, in this universe, Lyanna is a common Northern name that is given to both common and noble-born girls alike. The Lyanna in this narrative is NOT related to the Lyanna Stark of the book and show cannon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen: Kill the Boy

Mance Rayder eyed his son critically, carefully. Perusing his form and trying to find...what, exactly? Some sort of malady or malaise that suddenly struck and seized him into succumbing to this lunacy and madness. Looking at him now, there was nothing of note that marked a drastic change.

Except, mayhap this...

Gaging his now, assessing him further, the man standing before him was still Jon Snow. His son. The pride of the Free-Folk and the White Wolf of the North. Mance Rayder knew his son and was well pleased.

Although sharing his midnight hair (Jon's more luxuriant and tending to curl, possessing a natural luster), and long Northern face laden with travail and severity, the White Wolf before him was Lyanna's son completely. He had her look--large, winter-grey eyes, full lip, and quiet introspection.

So much like Lyanna...

The realization caused Mance's heart to lurch and throat to constrict. It had been two and ten years since her untimely passing and the wound never ceased in its hurt. Some days, there was naught but
a dull, dry throb, yet other times, the wound would reopen, raw and festering. This pain was cyclical, never seeming to end.

Mance was the King of the Wildlings, the sovereign King-Beyond-the-Wall, revered by the Southrone nobles and Free-Folk alike. For years, he had worn the distinguished mantle with pride, for it became akin to a second skin. He was King (the Southrone lords sneered at the self-imposed title. *King of what?* they would oft inquire. *Of shit and snow?*) and his duty was foremost to his people and the uniting of the dissenting clans. Yet, all of that ceased to exist once Mance met Lyanna's eyes.

He had never believed in love. He had prided himself on being too smart, too wizened. Too jaded. After living among his former brothers in the Night Watch, and witnessing the horrors beyond The Wall that would have rendered any normal man to the brink of insanity, Mance Rayder would have readily dismissed love and its notion to that of a phantasm. A product equated to that of mermaids and dragons.

Fanciful stories reserved for old nursemaids and the superstitious. And yet...All of his previous skepticism melted away into nothingness once he met Lyanna. Beautiful Lyanna. *His* Lyanna.

Although only six and ten, Lyanna possessed more grace, more spirit, and more courage than the fiercest of his warriors. She was both sweet, yet unyielding. Gentle, yet unbreakable. Innocent, yet sage. So hauntingly beautiful, but sweetly unaware.

She was everything that he had not realized he had wanted and more, even still. A winter rose blooming among death and decay. She was his fire and oh, how Mance burned and incinerated!

...And then one winter's morning, the coldest in memory, that all-consuming fire had forever extinguished.

Mance railed at the gods. Cursing them, damning them into the deepest pit of the Seven Hells for taking his Lyanna away from him. She had been his reason—his purpose—for living. When succumbing to the deepest, darkest parts of himself had been *so* easy, *so* simple, she had been his tether and salvation. She had breathed life into him again and again, saving him so many times over.

And yet he had been unable to save her in the truest hour of need; unable to tether her back to Earth. To him.

Mance shook his head, the grief pulling him under yet again. Oh, how the gods loved to play their little ironies. He had wanted to join her, to wherever her soul ascended. To never be parted from her again. He had prayed for it fervently. Yet, the gods in their unrelenting cruelty ceased to honor his entreaty.

He did not understand it then, the unfairness and cruelty. Yet now, looking at his son, his and Lyanna's creation, Mance was grateful for this second chance at redemption and atonement. Lyanna had once more breathed life back into him and had given him purpose. Jon Snow was his purpose. Lyanna's boy.

And Mance could see the phantom of Lyanna in his son now. The once extinguished flame now but a spark and flicker. Faint and dim but there, present. Aye, he was truly grateful.

Yet, looking at Jon now, he could see Lyanna's stubbornness shining clear through. The firm tightness of his lip, his unwavering gaze. His wolf-son was unapologetic. He was always irrational, that Jon Snow. Lyanna oft japed that he had inherited that trait from him. Always quick to act, yet slow to speak.
Mance had oft feared that his son’s temerity would come at a price. Now, he was almost all but certain. Gods, but what had he done?

"I am not sorry for taking her. I will never be sorry for that."

Mance knew when Jon was lying. For nine and ten years, he had ample practice in deciphering lies and deception. There was no duplicity in him now. Only raw, blistering truth.

A moment passed. Then two. The silence interminable.

"The girl is beautiful, I will give you that. Far more beautiful than any I have seen. But she is a Kneeler. Worse, a Stark. How long do you think it will be before her people come for her? You know they will."

Jon Snow swallowed tightly then. He was angry now. An all too familiar trait. It seemed as though he stayed angry. His growling, snarling wolf-son. A man full grown, but still very much a boy in many ways.

"No Southrone Kneeler has breached the Wall in over a thousand years. She is mi--ours. She is ours."

The slip was slight, unnoticeable almost, but Mance caught it instantly. She is mine... Gods be damned but his son was in love. Not the innocent flirtation and dalliances that he had experienced with Rowena and Bridget all those summers past, or that silly, near-obsession he had shared with Ygritte. No, this was different, substantial. If pressed further, Jon would deny it, argue that he wanted her only for her pretty face and warm body and naught else.

But Mance knew better. This possessiveness...this claiming...was the act of a man in love. It was the same fire and consumption that he held (and still possessed) for his Lyanna.

He realized then that he was fighting a losing battle, Mance was. He knew that it was pointless and all for naught. There was no retreat for them now. Only acquiescence and yielding.

Mance turned his back to his son then, effectively dismissing him. His mind was in a quandary. In one hand, he was proud of Jon, for his unwavering stance. In that moment, he was truly his son.

Yet, he also wanted to rant and rail at him and for his stupidity, for visiting this danger to his people. Gods, what fools these mortals be for all in the name of love! This was his son in truth, and therein lied the problem, the danger. The gods were a cruel and fickle lot. What if Jon was not meant to keep her? Then what?

How would he survive it?

Jon lingered for a moment, wanting to say more, but unable to. As he turned to leave the hut, he was once again stopped by Mance's words.

"A thousand years ago, a wildling king stole a Kneeler away from her home to take to wife. Thousands of men died on both sides to reclaim her. Is she worth it, this she-wolf?"

Jon weighed the answer carefully, meticulously. His answer was both steady and unwavering, his winter-grey eyes resolute.

"Yes."

Mance nodded, smiling briefly. "Good."
Jon left the tent, stunned. It was rare that Mance complemented him. Although both father and son loved and respected each other tremendously, theirs was not a relationship based on flowery sentiments and poetic words. It was not the wildling way.

Mance watched his son walk away, a prowling wolf then. The transformation was immediate and mesmerizing, for in his wake was no longer Lyanna's boy--temperamental and pugnacious. No, there was no boy before him now. The boy was dead, and in its place was a man full grown. A White Wolf.

Chapter End Notes

Glad to see that "Daddy Mance" has given his stamp of approval. Now, what's next? Please read and review! I want to hear from you all!
Truth or Dare

Chapter Summary

“You must be brave, sweet girl. Not only are you a Stark but you are a wolf-maiden. Wolves are brave. The tiger and lion may be more powerful, but the wolf will never be contained.”
Robb was right, he always was. Brave, sweet Robb, her protector and savior, who knew no fear or intimidation.
For you, Robb. Sansa averred. I will be brave for you. Always.

Chapter Notes

"Let's play Truth or Dare, or maybe dare, because nobody knows how to tell the truth anymore.” Here, Sansa finally realizes who the grey-eyed wildling is and a battle of wills ensue and neither Jon or Sansa know how to stop it or give in. Question is, do they even want to?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Fourteen: Truth or Dare

The grey-eyed wildling was Jon Snow. Mance Rayder's Wolf. The realization caused Sansa to quake, a sharp current running through her extremities. She felt as though she had been run through to the hilt, all breath escaping her. No...it could not be. Could not be possible. And yet, it was. The stark reality screaming right back at her, as if daring her to refute it. Taunting her, even.

She was incensed, worse yet, humiliated. She loathed this feeling-of being deceived. Of having the wool pulled over her eyes. Wolves were supposed to be perceptive, keen. Yet, at that very moment, Sansa felt no more wolf than a balding sheep.

Stupid...you stupid, stupid girl!

The reprimand stung, bitter and astringent like wormwood. She had always been discerning, possessing an unnatural ability to see what was around her, even what was hidden. To accumulate and fit the pieces together akin to a puzzle. It was both a gift and an affliction. Hers alone to bear.

Sometimes, she wished she could be that clear-eyed, unassuming girl in the songs she had favored so much as a young girl. When magic was real and the world was sparks of color and its people were good, decent, and virtuous. Her Lady Mother once told her that husbands wanted wives who were sweet and innocuous.

"A good and dutiful wife is to never question her Lord Husband. She is under his protection, his guidance. Wherever he leads, she follows unfailingly..."

She and Arya scoffed at that notion, for they knew better. Had seen too much. Such blatant transparency would get you killed in this world full of ugliness and apathy. They were daughters of
the North, both of them, and even they were not afforded the luxury of pretense.

She should have known better, paid more attention to who he was; how others responded to him. They revered him, it was worshipful, almost. She had known that the grey-eyed wildling (Jon. His name was Jon. Jon Snow.) was some sort of leader for the wildling clans had many within their own faction. Yet, she had not realized that the man she had interacted with was the Prince of the Wildlings.

Another jolt of trepidation and fear ran through her anew, and Sansa could not quell the unwanted tremor. She had heard of him, of the cunning and elusive White Wolf. Old Nan refused to speak of him, but the servants' tongues ran free. She had heard the stories, of his indomitable spirit and incomparable prowess that haunted the North.

Worse still, was the worry and vexation he caused her Lord Father. Ned Stark was a renowned military man and soldier. Songs had travelled far and wide across the realms celebrating his enumerable victories. He hated it, fervently asserted that the acclaim was for another man—for another time.

Despite the protests, Sansa knew her father's reputation. He was a killer, her gentle and noble father. They all were—Father, Uncle Benjen, and Robb. Soon, sweet Bran and little Rickon would become inaugurated into the fold.

And yet, despite it all, they all came up short and were left wanting compared to Jon Snow. Unable to finally muzzle and tether the raging and snarling wild Wolf of the North. Multiple times they had tried, Lord Father and his banner men. And each time, they had fallen short. He had slipped through even their best laid snares. Like a phantom, a mist.

Oh gods...

He had a warrior's hut, an assortment of swords, knives, and arrows. It was both beautiful and primitive. Just like him.

She as a lamb to his wolf—his prey. Sitting here, in his large, strange hut that smelled of musk and pine, she was as good as dead. And that was exactly what would happen if she did not fight, if she simply succumbed and acquiesced to the wind and tide. She could see herself being pulled under. Perhaps, mayhap her death would not be so literal, so absolute.

But even she knew that there were other ways to die, none any less agonizing. She knew of the wildling practice of wife stealing. To take a woman that met a Wildling man's fancy and simply...vanish into obscurity beyond the Wall. A thousand years ago, the Wildling king, Bael the Bard, stole a noblewoman from her home to take to wife. Legend said it was Brandon Stark's virgin daughter, Allyria. Another stolen wolf-maiden.

Allyria the Fair, they called her, with her crimson hair and twilight eyes. A distant relative and kin to her blood. Sansa's breath stilled and her blood ran cold and congealed. The parallels were unmistakable, only a fool would dismiss what was so glaringly evident.

Whenever Lady Catelyn became annoyed with her daughter's perception and intrinsic inquisitiveness, Sansa would find an ally in her Aunt Lyssa, who would oft encourage her niece's natural intuition.

"*Pay attention to everything, Sweetling. Everything you are now seeing has already happened before.*"
He had meant to keep her, to continue a practice as barbaric as it was savage. To condemn her to a fate worse than death. A fate he assumed she would readily accept.

"No."
The answer tore through the silence like a loosed arrow. A No. She would not accept this. She would not become another Allyria or countless others, tragic victims who merely accepted their fate and subsequently warranted the deaths of thousands of innocents.

She was neither helpless or passive. She was a wolf and wolves fought back. When news of hers and Ramsay's engagement was first announced, Robb had been one of the first to comfort her, to offer some small, minute glimmer of hope.

"You must be brave, sweet girl. Not only are you a Stark but you are a wolf-maiden. Wolves are brave. The tiger and lion may be more powerful, but the wolf will never be contained."

Robb was right, he always was. Brave, sweet Robb, her protector and savior, who knew no fear or intimidation.

For you, Robb. Sansa averred. I will be brave for you. Always.

Set to new purpose, Sansa began to look around the hut with renewed interest. She was in search of...what, exactly? What did this Wolf have that would be of use to her?

Almost immediately, her eyes landed on a sword. It was a fine piece, too immaculate for a wildling: an ornate, white wolf-head pommel with garnet encrusted eyes. It was beautiful...and... Valyrian. It was rare to see Valyrian steel so far North; such luxury had thought to have gone extinct as with the demise of that ancient and accursed city. She could quite literally count on one hand how many Valyrian steel blades she had seen in her lifetime, excluding her Lord Father's.

Sansa extended her hand to touch it, surprised at its weightlessness. She had seen swords before, naturally. Ice, the ancient sword of Lord Father and the emblem of her House, with its long and heavy blade and polished shoulder; to Needle, Arya's gift, with its thin blade and crude carvings. Sansa knew swords like she knew the back of her hand-she had practiced with them, knew the way they fit, their shape; their make.

Yet despite her acclimation and expertise, she had never seen a sword such as this. It was...perfect.

Yet, when facing him, the White Wolf of the North, she saw no malice or anger. No hostility or cruelty. Nothing save reserved curiosity.
He stood aloft, near the closed entrance of the hut. His arms were folded and his storm-grey eyes watched her with calm fascination. She felt no fear from him, despite his nearness and watchful vigilance. If he wanted to have harmed her, he would have done so. Gods knew he had ample opportunity.

Sansa raised the sword then, pointing it at him. Testing both him and his resolve.

*Stupid...you stupid, stupid girl!* 

"You won't harm me," she whispered, dismayed and inwardly cursing the ineffectiveness of her voice.

*I will be brave...*

Jon took a step towards her. Then two. Stopping until he was standing directly in front of her, the sword the only barrier between them. He lifted a hand, slow and deliberate, as if not to startle her; as if to not break whatever this was that was happening between them now.

*I will be brave...*

The hand lowered and softly cupped her cheek. The contrast was startling—his hard callouses against the velvety smoothness. Sansa continued to stare at him, caerulean to storm-grey.

*What is it that you do?*

"No, Little Wolf, I won't."

Chapter End Notes

Fast Fact: I am typing this literally as a hurricane (tropical storm, whatever you want to call it) pummels my window and dumps ten inches of rain on my street!
Chapter Summary

His people often bespoke of the legend of the phantom Red Wolf. Whispered in hushed, excited tones, they told of how it haunted the moors and forests beyond the Wall. A guardian and protector for the wandering and lost. To see it, would be lucky; to capture it, would be unheard of. Its owner elevated to that of a god.

Chapter Notes

Hurricane Harvey hit and it looks like my school district will be out until after the Labor Day holiday. So, instead of ruminating on the madness and chaos that is happening in my hometown, I choose to write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Fifteen: The Red Wolf

It was not often that Jon dreamed. At night, alone in the quiet solitude of his hut, his sleep was dreamless and fitful, often disrupted in torn intervals. His father, bereft and mourning the passing of his beloved Lyanna, warned against the perils of dreaming, claimed that it was pointless and wasteful. That dreams—even the most ludicrous and fanciful—led to naught save disillusion and disappointment.

"It is not ours to dream, to escape. All dreams lead to pain. The one constant this fucking world will never exhaust of."

When Jon was younger, his was full of warrior dreams—of death and glory. A wildling was not a wildling lest he saturated his blade with the blood of his enemies. And Jon's sword ran wet with the crimson liquid, a testament to his training and apathy. At night, on the eve of raids or significant battles, while the rest of the village would drink, often to excess, or pair off somewhere for one last dalliance, Jon would abstain.

While the rest of the wildlings fucked and drank, apathetic to the oncoming dawn and the uncertainty it would bring, Jon remained a sentinel; watchful, clear-eyed and sober. If he were to fall, to meet the Stranger on some unknown field, he wanted to be lucid. When he reached his sixth and tenth nameday, the day he finally became a man, Jon met the Thenn leader, Styr, at open combat.

More giant than man—comprised of muscle, sinew, and meat—the colossus looked upon Jon as if she were a nuisance, a fly to be squashed beneath his booted feet. The fight had been fast and intense. Tormund, restless and pacing by the sidelines, gripped the handle of his battle axe tightly, a swarm of curses falling from his lips. Mance had been there, too. Thin-lipped, pale and solicitous, watching with his solemn, coal-black eyes as his Wolf faced the Giant.

This was not just any battle—for territory, acclaim, and weapons. No, it was more than that, transcended far beyond man's pride and vanity. This was for survival and existence. Everything
before that was secondary and inconsequential.

This battle was between the most skilled fighters, the victor would decide all—whether the defeated clan would continue to exist or become extinguished, a literal feast for the crows. They were nearly evenly matched, despite the vast size difference, the Thenn and the Wolf. Jon was swift, using his alacrity to his advantage. Yet, all it took to enervate him was a handful of dirt to the face, coupled with a hard blow to the jaw. And just like that, he was down, disconcerted and bewildered.

His jaw throbbed and smartened, making him see stars. Tormund had been crazed, a paroxysm of curses and shouts, willing his friend out of entropy. Mance closed his eyes tightly, unwilling to witness his son's imminent decapitation. All the while, Jon heard none of it.

Lying there, prone and immobile, Jon slowly watched the Thenn's large axe lower. Much to his dismay, part of him wished for the release, to be far removed from his current existence. All he had to do was lie still for another moment and it would all be over. Soon, now. But just another moment...

...Yet, in that final second, Jon felt his sword raise up—either out of its own volition or fear, he did not know—and pierce the goliath through the throat; his sword, wet and crimson, glinting through the other side. It was in that glorious instant that Jon Snow became legend. The White Wolf immortalized.

Later that night, after downing a cup of spiced ale, Jon did dream, the first time in years. Yet this time, his dreams were not frantic, fraught with death, uncertainty, and battle. It was instead of a forest, silent and tranquil. He had been walking an isolated path alone, for Ghost had run ahead, abandoning him.

Entering a small clearing, Jon abruptly stopped. There, just ahead, standing in front of a vivid weirwood tree, was a wolf. It was beautiful, almost ethereal in its appearance. Silver, yet with a russet undercoat and tail. A red wolf. Although larger than any other wolf seen, it was smaller than Ghost, and a female judging by its form and litheness.

As Jon approached, carefully with one arm extended, the wolf raised its head, slowly assessing him as if determining whether he was friend or foe. Jon stopped then, unable to breathe for all air had been constricted from him. His people often bespoke of the legend of the phantom Red Wolf. Whispered in hushed, excited tones, they told of how it haunted the moors and forests beyond the Wall. A guardian and protector for the wandering and lost. To see it, would be lucky; to capture it, would be unheard of. Its owner elevated to that of a god.

Jon was but a mere foot from it now, almost touching. Then, before he could blink, the specter wolf disappeared, vanishing among the scarlet weirwood leaves. Jon raged, angry and hysterical that he would never see it again. That all magic had been forever vanquished from the world.

Until now. Until Sansa.

He wanted to kiss her. It was all he had wanted to do since the abduction. Since he had first glimpsed upon her all those moons past. He tried to quell it, to quiet this raging inferno that erupted and consumed him to the brink of insanity.

Aye, he tried in earnest to stave off this desire and wanting. He would lie, pretend that she was ugly; that she was a glacial ice princess, too cold, too frigid, and too distant to be reached. And yet, despite his fervent attempts, Jon felt like a man drowned insane. He had promised himself—promised her—that he would not dishonor her. That if she were to have him, the choice would lay solely with her.
But seeing her like this now, a growling, entrapped wolf, it was all he could do not to damn them both to the deepest pit of the seven hells. *We are all liars here...*

"Killing is a hard thing to do well. Are you sure you're up to the task?"

She still had the sword pointed at him, just at his heart. Gods help him, but he would willingly run himself through to the hilt if it meant he could have but a taste of her. To drink endlessly from her mouth as if she were honeyed mead. Only but a taste to sate the yearning that ran riot through his extremities.

Yet, he dared not; dared not heed the siren's song. Jon wanted her, aye, he burned for her. But he was not a stupid man. She was angry, and at that moment, she could very well kill him. Gods knew she had every right to.

*Do it. Put me out of my misery. Save us both from this feverish madness. Save me.*

Sansa remained resolute, impassive. Her eyes turned glacial and apathetic. An ice princess once more.

"What makes you think that I couldn't? I could kill you where you stand and not shed a single tear."

Jon did not doubt it. She looked positively feral. But he still wanted her, despite it all. He wanted all of her—now and forever. Gods, but what was *wrong* with him?

Ignoring every bell that ran riot in his head, Jon took another step forward, goading her. Testing her now. He was playing a dangerous game here, as they both were. It was a deadly dance of wills that none seemed able to yield to. There could be no victor, and yet neither wanted to raise that white flag of surrender.

*What will you do now, Little Wolf?*

Against his better judgement, Jon stepped nearer still. Until his lips were but a breath away from hers. He knew he should not, that he was risking his honor, but at that moment, he could not allow himself to care. Gods, but she was beautiful.

So

*Very*

Beautiful.

Lowering his head but just a fraction of the way, he kissed her, drinking deeply from her mouth like a man starved. He could apologize, promise that it would never happen again, that he would stay far away, but it would be a lie. He would not be able to stay away even if he wanted to. He was in too deep.

He moaned, deepening the kiss, his hands frantic and searching. She tasted like candied plums and honeyed dreams. Of purple twilight and golden dawn. Of magic and the spectacular. And Jon was drowning, finally acquiescing to the wind and tide, and yet, he wanted no salvation or respite. She was here. He was here. And the world was theirs for the claiming.

Jon was hysterical, lost in a foggy haze of bliss. All but forgetting reality...

...Until a sharp, searing pain caused him to free fall back to Earth.
Gasping, Jon looked down at his tunic, his eyes widening at the sight of blood quickly coalescing just at his shoulder blade.

Chapter End Notes

Seriously? Did you *REALLY* think that Sansa was just going to fall into his arms and forget everything? And yes, Jon...you are a stupid man! Lol...
Please read and review. I promise I will step my game back up with this fic. Right now, I feel a little off-kilter.
"I should not have done that," he rasped, hands raised in appeasement, extended. It was an honorable gesture, Sansa assumed, but a false one. His grey eyes were placid, soft and convinced, a contrast between desire and restraint. "Forgive me." Forgive me. Forgive me. How often, Sansa wondered, fleetingly, had men begged for absolution? To be forgiven of transgressions that they alone were culpable? The entreaty sounded akin to a curse, loud and cacophonous, suspended into the air of nothingness.

Chapter Summary

A game of cat and mouse ensues. Here, we get the pov's of BOTH Jon and Sansa...also a little bit of Ygritte! Happy Labor Day, everyone, for those who participate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Sixteen: Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken

The wound was shallow, a flesh wound, truly. Not hard enough to hurt, but deep enough to penetrate the skin, the blood running scarlet. Sansa stared, transfixed. She had stabbed him. Oh gods, she had stabbed him, causing him injury.

Good. The thought came suddenly, unbidden and dangerous. Good. Let him bleed! Let him bleed! Let rivers of blood seep and percolate until he hemorrhaged, until there was nothing left save meat and bone.

And even then, that dark and sinister voice whispered, it would not be enough, not even a tenth of the suffering he had visited on her. This man stalked her, kidnapped her, tore her home asunder and sent her off-kilter, oscillating. And yet none of the aforementioned horrors equated to the tumult of emotions he was now forcing her to feel. It did not matter what he did to her now, if he killed her and left her corpse to rot, suspended over the Wall, she could never forgive him turning her emotions against her, for manipulating her feelings until they were twisted, malformed and corrupted...wrong.

She had wanted him, wanted him with every fiber of her being until there was nothing left. She had been fighting this, this dark temptation. Since that night he had bared his soul to her, raw, cracked, and splintered, she felt something within her snap. May the gods damn him to the deepest pit of the seven hells for this, this coming undone and unraveling.

There it was again, this unbridled rage. Sansa felt it crackle and surge within her, blistering and white-hot. She felt drugged, lethargic. Damn you damn you damn you!

Jon looked up at her, wild-eyed and staring, as if at any moment, she would grow fangs and a tail, like some sort of demon. It would not be at all unfathomable, he supposed. Here, within the tight enclosure of the hut, she looked the every essence of a spear wife. She had the look: wide, feral eyes, untethered rage, the rising and falling of her chest.
She was a merging of beautiful and terrifying. And Jon had not wanted anything more. He took in a shuddering breath, the wound now a dull ache, a wolf bite. The She Wolf's warning.

"I should not have done that," he rasped, hands raised in appeasement, extended. It was an honorable gesture, Sansa assumed, but a false one. His grey eyes were placid, soft and convinced, a contrast between desire and restraint. "Forgive me."

_Forgive me. Forgive me._ How often, Sansa wondered, fleetingly, had men begged for absolution? To be forgiven of transgressions that they alone were culpable? The entreaty sounded akin to a curse, loud and cacophonous, suspended into the air of nothingness.

Forgive me...Forgive me...'

Never! she wanted to rail out, to scream for the top of her lungs until it echoed, reverberating throughout the realm. _Never! Never! Never!

Never will I forgive you for ripping me from my home. Never will I forgive you for tearing my family apart. Worse yet, never will I forgive you for this chaos and madness that you alone have inflicted upon me. For making me want you as I have not wanted any man.

"You will never do that again, do you understand?" The words were succinct, final and cold. Had she not have spoken them, fallen from someone else's mouth, Sansa would have shivered. They were like poison falling from her lips, lips still warmed and heated from his taste.

She had needed this, this self-preservation and assiduity. If not, then she cold easily see herself careening, free-falling into him with nothing to tether her or pull her back. He had drugged her again, she was sure of it.

Bastard.

Jon swallowed tightly then. His once placid grey eyes an emerging tempest. Had it been anyone else, he would have laughed, relishing the prospect of a challenge. Alas, it was not anyone else. It was the wolf maid, the embodiment of glimmering hope and bright-eyed wanting. All that he both loved and feared facing him now. What's more, he had promised.

_What is honor compared to a woman's love?

"I do not know much of honor, She Wolf, but I will not kiss you again until you have asked me to."

Jon meant it, too, for he was tired. Exhausted from this constant yielding to her, this succumbing. She was a masterful tactician, he mused. Her only misfortune being of the wrong sex. She had a warrior's resolve, and had she been born a man, she would have been invincible.

She had already stolen the one thing he had sworn he would never part with, and had done it effortlessly. Gods, but how had she done it, burrowed so deeply within him that she became like an extension? _There must be some witch in you, She Wolf. You have bewitched me completely._

Sansa lowered the sword then, her eyes glacial and snooty. "And that, I never will."

Jon eyed her silently, for there was nothing left to say. At nine and ten, Jon was already a warrior, his skills matching that of the Lion of Lannister, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. He knew strategy, he knew battles, he knew warfare. More importantly, he knew how to read people, how to decipher between truth and lies, as did Mance.

Yet, watching Sansa now, taking her in, he was in a quagmire. Careening down a high slope and unable to gain traction. He could not read her, could not tether understanding to her, and it left him
both frustrated and intrigued, simultaneously.

Jon felt angry then, helpless. He wanted to shake her, dismayed that already he never tired of touching her. He knew it was wrong, but he wanted Sansa to react, to convey some emotion to his kiss. To want him as much as he wanted her.

_Oh, but gods you are a hateful woman!_

Sansa dropped the sword and took a step back, chin lifted, giving nothing away. Only her eyes seemed to speak, a strange yet fascinating mix of sapphire blue and indigo dusk. They were bluer than paradise, those eyes. And they were focused on Jon-his lips-searching.

Jon's heart jumped from his chest, exalted. She had wanted him back, he was sure of it! He made a hasty retreat, before he allowed himself another mistake. Perhaps it would do well if she stayed somewhere else, in Muirgayn's hut, maybe. That way, she would be protected and the temptation quelled. Out of sight, out of mind. For now, at least.

Besides, Muirgayn was Tormund's woman, she was tough and stalwart. More than that, she was loyal, never asking or questioning. She would be a much needed friend ally to Sansa, all things considering.

As Jon left, he was unaware of a set of eyes following him, resting on the large hut where the She Wolf remained. They were the eyes of the betrayed and damned, hostile and angry, calculating. A plan suddenly taking form. _It mattered not if the White Wolf was in love with Kneeler Bitch_, Ygritte decided. Let him have his sport.

She would be gone by way of Rowena and Bridget. She would be exterminated, her pretty face smashed into shreds of pulp and nothingness. Yes, Ygritte mused. She would have great fun in skinning the Red Wolf. And only then, would Jon return to her, repentant and contrite.

And Ygritte will be ready, arms extended, heart opened, welcoming him. She would finally bait and trap her rogue wolf.

Chapter End Notes

_So...Sansa's is conflicted, trapped between the two powerful emotions that are love and hate. Jon is fearful of the enormity of his feelings. And Crazy Ygritte is on a mission to reclaim her lost love. You guys didn't believe me, but I told you! Nobody writes crazy better than I!_
Sansa was not so helpless as to only rely on the temporary. Beauty was good, yes, but intelligence was better. She knew how to disassemble, to scheme. Lysa taught her well. She knew how to play the game almost better than any man. Yet this...this was different. Jon Snow was different. Could she do it? Could she seduce this untamed Wolf and make him hers, manipulate him just enough, bestow just enough affection that he would be hers to command? It is cruel to play games, that temperate, quiet voice asserted. It was her mother's voice, reminding her of a lady's courtesies and what was proper and expectant.

Sansa noticed the scarlet weirwood immediately upon her arrival to the Wildling camp. It was not a difficult task, truly. The rufescent leaves a glaring contrast against the brilliant cyan sky. It was summer, had been for the past five years, and yet a hint-a small, minute trace-of winter surrounded them all with its iridescent leaves and solemn face of an unknown, omniscient winter god. It was a blessing, that proud and beautiful tree. In the near-month she has lived among the Wildlings, it provided temporary comfort and respite from all the unravelling and undoing that had so suddenly been visited upon her. It reminded Sansa of home, of Winterfell. More than that, much more than that, it reminded her of Father.

When Sansa had been but a young girl during those rare and far-between days the summer sun visited the North, its golden rays magic against the cold winter snow, she would hide within the godswood, secretly watching her Lord Father. Seated and tucked behind an alcove of scarlet leaves, Ned Stark would be at repose, sharpening his great sword. It was here, Sansa observed, secreted and hidden away behind the sanctuary of the crimson foliage, that Lord Father found reprieve, a guest among the pantheon of the ancient forest gods.

Gone was his furrowed brow, laden with travail and grim severity-the Northman's ipseities-and in its place, a man of middle years, handsome still, despite no longer in his first youth. Here, alone within the secret company of the Old Gods of the forests, Father was free, a mortal man comprised of meat, sinew and bone. Untethered and unburdened by nonsensical politics and the endless pressures of the realm. Unconcerned by the Bolton's and the ongoing civil war that threatened to splinter and tear The North asunder.

Here, he was but a man, a lone wolf at rest. And Sansa loved him best like this. A living, tangible
deity among ugliness and sin. The taste of salt met her lips, tangy yet sweet, simultaneously. The tears began to fall faster, and this time, Sansa did not will them away, only allowing the mask to fall and the fissures and cracks to show, opened and raw. There was nothing left of her now, only a festering, gaping hole that once held her heart. She had not cried since her foiled escape a sennight past. She had been angry at herself then, for showing weakness to the enemy.

But now...

Now...

Alone within this strange hut, with its weapons and with her treacherous and tumultuous thoughts, Sansa allowed her heart to break. 'Oh Father...will I ever see you again? Do you think me a ghost now, haunting the crypts and silent tombs of Winterfell?'

She heard footsteps outside the hut. Her heart stopped. He had come back, she was sure of it. Soon, he would enter through those animal skinned flaps and seek his vengeance—whatever that may be. Sansa knew he wanted her, only a fool would be so blind to see what was so glaringly obvious. The rising and falling of his chest, as though he were a man parched and she, the last bag of water skins. The darkening of his eyes, feral and predatory; the fusing of his mouth as he claimed hers aching, hot and searching.

Aye, he wanted her. The deadly and formidable White Wolf wanted her. And for that, Sansa did not know what to do with that bit of information or how to feel.

Perhaps, that deep and sinister voice answered, you could exploit this. Tame this rabid wolf and make him yours. The difficult part is half done, the boy is already half mad with lust.

Sans knew she was beautiful, a fact that caused her Lord Father and elder brother much grief and concern. Although she tried not to dwell on it, she was not blind to the many passing glances gifted to her by the male servants of Winterfell, old and young alike. Twice now her brother Robb had to break Theon's nose for his bold, staring eyes and roving hands, too intimate and far too friendly at dances.

Sansa knew lust, judging by the hot glances and lingering stares Ramsay had given her upon their initial meeting after their engagement had been precogitated. She had been four and ten and he, five years older, and even then, she wanted to die, to vault herself from the highest ramparts and careen to the cobbled streets below. Mayhap then, she would be free.

'You will be a great beauty, Sweetling.' Closing her eyes now, Sansa could hear her Lady Mother's endearments. 'All flowers bloom when they are planted, but yours will be the most beautiful of all.'

Sansa was not so helpless as to only rely on the temporary. Beauty was good, yes, but intelligence was better. She knew how to disassemble, to scheme. Lysa taught her well. She knew how to play the game almost better than any man. Yet this...this was different. Jon Snow was different.

Could she do it? Could she seduce this untamed Wolf and make him hers, manipulate him just enough, bestow just enough affection that he would be hers to command? It is cruel to play games, that temperate, quiet voice asserted. It was her mother's voice, reminding her of a lady's courtesies and what was proper and expectant.

Well Mother, you have not been kidnapped by a Wildling savage and spirited thousands of leagues from home, Sansa countered. She was angry now, indignant. Women were always expected to remain courteous and kind, while men could readily bend the rules to befit their desires and needs.
'All men are the same, Sweetling.' Aunt Lysa affirmed. It had been the night Sansa had received her moon's blood for the first time. Scared and embarrassed, Lysa attempted to mollify her niece by braiding her hair. The scarlet curtain a cascade of fire and curls. She was a sweet sight, Lysa's niece. Sitting here, Lysa wished that she were her daughter instead of Catelyn's. Such a pity.

'They all want to be touched, to be loved. It does not matter if he's a lowly stable boy or Aegon the Conqueror.'

Embarrassment subsiding, Sansa sat in rapt attention to her aunt's teachings. She had heard the whispers her Lady Mother spewed about her youngest sister. A whore, that's what she had called her when she thought she was alone within the solitude of her chambers with only her lord husband for company. A Black Widow. A wild, unrestrained entity with too much liberty and power left alone to rule The Vale. She was a thing to be pitied, to be reviled, and yet all Sansa felt was admiration.

'How do I get a man to fall in love with me?" Sansa heard herself asking, suddenly emboldened. At three and ten, before Ramsay Bolton and other monsters of his ilk, she had dreams of golden, fair-haired knights and chivalrous lords. Of beautiful Jonquil and her Florian. True love was oft a phantasm among arranged marriages. The best a lord and lady could hope for was that a friendship and camaraderie would be established. What her Lord Father and Lady Mother shared was a rare thing, a diamond amongst endless fields of charcoal and anthracite. Sansa was not so foolish and naïve to expect the same good fortune, but here, within Aunt Lysa's halls, she could dream.

Lysa stopped her braid, an intricate and beautiful design, and smiled knowingly. Her cornflower blue eyes glistening mischievously. 'Seduction is in itself an art. To make a man love you, you must make him believe that despite all you have given him, there is still more to conquer. All men thrill at the chase, the mystery. Offer him but just a taste, and he will want more, never sated.'

Enoldened now, Sansa began to plan, to assimilate. She would do it. She would get this Wolf Prince to love her, endear herself to his people and when the time was right, she would escape.

So you will become a whore, then? His whore? There it was again, that voice. Her mother's voice, condemning her, damning her.

Mayhap it was wrong, this subterfuge and deception. Mayhap it was ill work to manipulate and exploit one's affections, but yet what choice did she have? Once the Wildling took her from her home, he left her with no other alternatives. She owed him nothing. She would give him nothing.

"I am sorry, Mother." Sansa whispered into the still night air. "I am sorry that I am no longer the daughter you raised. I am sorry, Father. I am sorry that I have failed you. Forgive me, please, for what I must do."

Wolves cannot survive on their own, her Lord Father once told her, many moon's turns ago. They need the pack to survive.

The lone wolf dies, but the pack survives.

"I will survive, Father," Sansa affirmed. "I will do whatever I must to survive."

And she would. She must.
Let the games begin!
Chapter Summary

He wanted to forget, Jon wanted to forget all of it—Magda, her damnable prophesy, the history—and yet no matter how hard he tried to repress it, there it was again: bright, iridescent, and gleaming. Aye, he was going mad, she was causing it, this unravelling and lunacy. Sansa Stark was to blame. For all of it.

Chapter Notes

Brooding Jon...I apologize if this chapter is all over the place. In this chapter, Jon is all over the place—between blaming Sansa for his lust, ruminating over his fate, his jealousies, and harboring secret dreams of a family.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Eighteen: Between Dreams and Clarity

He was trembling. Of rage or lust, he was not certain. What did it matter, truly? Were they not one in the same emotion? Positioned and situated on the same side of the spectrum?
He took the coward's way, turning and fleeing. A Wildling faced his enemy, never retreated or disengaged. Yet, here he was, the fearsome and odious Jon Snow, shrinking back, hiding and regrouping. And all for what? A woman. A Kneeler.

She's not just any woman, is she? That malevolent and pernicious voice would whisper. Jon sighed, closing his eyes tightly, trying to stymie the unwanted intrusion. He hated that voice, that dark and attritive whisper. It haunted him, like a second shadow. One that he could never shake off.
He wanted to laugh at the absurdity. Had it been any other, Jon would have laughed. Yet, it was not another. It was him—the jape was on him, and it roared in its hilarity, taunting him ruthlessly with its merriment.
Jon pressed his lips tightly together; her taste still lingering. She was so sweet, so very sweet. Jon doubted that even the finest Arbor Gold wine, the few flagons pilfered so far North, would taste as fine as she.
What is it you are doing to me, Little Wolf? What in the Seven Hells are you doing to me?
Perhaps he was going mad, finally succumbing to this lunacy that overtook Old Magda. Jon chuckled darkly. He knew he was going to die, had long ago accepted his fate. In an existence as harsh and unforgiving as his, death was the only inevitable outcome. He often thought on it, ruminating on the various possible outcomes and circumstances. It was only fair, he supposed.
As a harbinger for death who had silenced so many—the guilty and innocent alike—it was only right for the scales to be balanced and measured. With death comes life. Jon had always envisioned that he would die on the battlefield, like his grandsire, Isaar The Terrible. He was a legend among the Free-Folk, a war-god nearly invincible in battle, a queer and strange catalepsy overtaking him each and every time.
The Southrone lords feared him—rightfully so—for he was a man of unspeakable barbarity and
terror, his pathological cruelty even shocking his own people into quiet submission and subservience. Of all the Wildling raids on The North and the Seven Kingdoms, his was the closest to victory. Yet, it was a bolt to the eye, gifted by Lord Rickard Stark, to forever silence Isaar's ambitions. Reduced to nothing save another page and footnote in someone else's history book. "She is your past, your present, and your future..."

Jon could still hear her, Old Magda's voice, and the prophecy she had spoken so very long ago. "She is your destiny, and if you are not careful, your destruction as well..."

Jon shook his head, swearing silently to the heavens. The witch was right, even now, eons later, after countless raids, battles, and skirmishes, the witch was right. Sansa Stark was part of him, their lives ensnared and forever entangled and intertwined. Bael the Bard, a long -ago great wildling king, had kidnapped Brandon Stark's daughter, Alhystia The Fair, another fire-haired beauty, according to travelling minstrels, and distant kin to the red-haired Wolf Maid. Their child unknowingly killing his sire in open combat. Jon's grandsire being felled by Sansa's...

He wanted to forget, Jon wanted to forget all of it—Magda, her damnable prophesy, the history—and yet no matter how hard he tried to repress it, there it was again: bright, iridescent, and gleaming. Aye, he was going mad, she was causing it, this unravelling and lunacy. Sansa Stark was to blame. For all of it.

Jon absently reached for his shoulder, gingerly fingerling the wound—the wolf bite—she had gifted him. The bleeding had ceased, thanks in part to the poultice Muirgayne had made. The noxious smelling concoction staving off all possible infection as well, only leaving a dry ache in its place.

"Lucky, you are," Muirgayne's hazel eyes glinted merrily with barely concealed humor as Jon recounted how he came about the wound. "An inch lower and she would have pierced your heart."

Tormund howled with laughter, his face matching the crimson of his hair. "Never would I have thought a Kneeler would have bested you, Snow! Looks like your Lady-Wolf has fangs!"

Jon glared at both of them, unamused. As much as he loved and admired Tormund and was grateful to whichever gods or force that brought them to each other, he was envious. Of him and Muirgayne. Of what they both shared with one another.

They had been together for years, five to be exact. Already, they were the parents of two small daughters and another on the way, judging by the slight roundness of Muirgayne's belly. The news came as a surprise for Tormund. After multiple miscarriages and false pregnancies, he had been afraid to hope. Unprepared for yet another heartache.

"It will be a boy, this time," Muirgayne decreed. She had claimed that the gods had visited her in a dream in the form of a bear cub, Tormund's totem. Only men were allowed to pass on their father's tokens. Tormund sat in the background, rolling his eyes good-naturedly. He oft learned to ignore her portents, their two daughters a testament to her errors. He never voiced his skepticisms, though. Gods alone knew the hell that would be paid if he ever dared such disrespect outwardly. Muirgayne would have his balls for breakfast. Although small in stature, she was a fearsome sight when angered, a truly awesome sight at that.

Jon was grateful to Muirgayne, she kept Tormund honest. Before, Tormund was shiftless—directionless—like a ship without oars, tossed to and fro by every tempest and gale. While Jon enjoyed his women, he was always careful, judicious in his choosing of them. Tormund had no reservations. Any woman would do, anywhere.

Aye, Jon was grateful to the diminutive, yet fierce spear-wife for salvaging his friend, preventing his imminent self-destruction. But he was also jealous, his face burning with shame at the realization. It was easy for them to jape, to laugh. Theirs was a relationship forged in camaraderie and trust. Looking at them now, they looked like a single entity; where one ended, the other began.

Jon turned away, angry. It was not right, this jealousy, raging with its ferocity, but Jon felt its sharpness keenly. Felt the sting of its bite. Would it be so terrible to dream? To want? To hope so fervently and ardently that he physically ached?

The night just before the abduction, Jon had a dream.
He was in a strange room, a fire blazing in the nearby hearth. He was dressed not as a wildling, but instead as a lord. Gone were the strange, heavy furs and in its place, a finely woven tunic, embellished in a sumptuous brocade, and jerkin. Although it was all strange, it was what Jon held in his arms that caused his breath to leave him…

It was a babe, rosy cheeked and cherubic. His hair was of ebony, his eyes closed, framed by dark, sooted eyelashes. He was asleep in Jon's arms, a peaceful repose. His breath milk-sweet and even. At that moment, Jon felt something alien overtake him. His heart both breaking and full simultaneously. It was foreign, this feeling, this unexpected fullness. So very alien. And yet, Jon did not want to lose it.

A woman entered the room then. Her face obscured, but yet somehow—someway—Jon knew her. She was speaking, her voice low and muted, causing Jon to smile and gently kiss her forehead tenderly. The dream faded with the family smiling down on the babe, slumbering on in his father's arms.

It was such a sweet dream, a beautiful and welcomed one. When Jon awoke, he was surprised to discover his eyes were wet with unshed tears. For the first time in his life, Jon felt a sense of calm tranquility wash over him anew. It was the same strange peacefulness that he felt whenever Sansa was near. He never wanted to wake from her.

The wound gave another throb, and Jon touched it gently, Muirgayne's words coming back to him. "An inch lower and she would have pierced your heart..."

Too late, Muirgayne. Jon chuckled darkly, the sound reverberating through the stillness. She already has.

Chapter End Notes

FAST FACT: Isaar The Terrible is a fictional character of my own creation. He is loosely based off the historical Viking, Ivar The Boneless, who, according to history, would actually go into cataleptic "trances" whenever he stepped foot on the battlefield. He was a man of unspeakable cruelty and employed psychological terror on his enemies. According to GGR Martin, the Wildlings are based on an amalgam of both the Scandinavian Vikings of the European Dark Ages and the indigenous people of North America and Canada. I hope I have done his character justice.
Chapter Summary

Muirgayne started, eyes widened slightly in shock. “I think you have it the other way around, She-Wolf. The past is already written and the ink is dried. Your stories are aligned with one another’s. Jon chose you, aye, but the gods willed it. Jon only listened.”

Chapter Notes

As Sansa schemes, she meets a new face and seeks answers...Can't get anymore vague than that! Also, I have taken some license and liberties with the original plot in order to suit the alternative universe of this narrative. In this world, I have replaced Lyanna Stark with a character of my own creation, Elaynna. In this story, Elaynna was betrothed to Robert Baratheon, a true love match, but on the eve of her wedding, she was kidnapped, raped and murdered by Rheagar Targaryen who had been spurned by Elaynna’s rejecting of him. The Lyanna of the original series and show cannon, in this narrative, was instead a Wildling woman and lover of Mance Rayder.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Nineteen: The Past is Written, the Ink is Dried

“So you’re the Kneeler who tamed the White Wolf.”

It was not Jon Snow at the entrance of the tent. The realization gave Sansa brief pause, a sigh of relief escaping her. She felt...what, exactly? Euphoric? Elated? Disappointed?

No, she would not allow herself to dwell on the latter. She could not allow her already treacherous and duplicitous mind to take her to that dark and abysmal dwelling. If she lingered there for too long, she would then be forced to confront and face some hard truths. Truths Sansa was neither brave enough or willing to confront just yet, possibly never if she had her say.

In a world where truth and lies were often blurred and hardly discerned, what the fuck was truth anyway? For the longest time, Sansa had been made to believe that one should always tell the truth, that transparency was always a sign of good faith. The Starks were renown for their honor and probity. Ned had claimed that integrity was worth more than a chest of gold, land and titles combined.
Yet, it was that same fucking honor that had gotten both her Uncle Brandon and her grandsire Rickard Stark killed in King’s Landing once upon a time, all those many years ago. It was that same fucking honor that caused thousands of Stark bannermen to rally South to the aid of their liege lord and die at the hands of the Mad King and his wild fyre. It was honor (or lack thereof) that caused her aunt, Elaynna, to be kidnapped and murdered on the eve of her wedding day to Robert Baratheon, the unwilling and unwanted victim of a silver-haired Dragon Prince’s lust and objectification.

Honor. Sansa sneered at the word. Honor was what got you raped. Or immolated at the amusement of a crazed and un tethered monarch. Or strangled to death within the darkened, forgotten oubliettes of The Red Keep. It was such a seemingly innocuous word, truly, but an ill-omen to all who strived to live by it.

And Sansa had done being defined by it. She had done being dutiful, being sweet and unassuming. She had done being Lord and Lady Stark’s prized daughter. She had done with all of it. None of it would ever serve her here, in this forgotten wasteland of tundra and ice.

Squaring her shoulders, Sansa turned around to face the stranger fully. She was angry now, and it would be good to hit somebody. And let the consequences fall where they may; she was already damned. Yet, the stranger facing her was neither Jon Snow or that russet-haired Wildling who had slapped her earlier.

Sansa’s cheek throbbed at the memory. She was unconcerned, however. She would pay the bitch back tenfold. She just had to bide her time and wait. Waiting was all a part of the game and Sansa had an infinite amount of patience.

Instead, it was a petite, Wildling woman a few years older than she, with waist-length, ebony hair. If Sansa’s memory served correctly, this was Muirgayne, Tormund’s woman. She was attractive, Sansa conceded, her almond eyes striking against the heart-shaped contours of her face. Although her skin was of pale milk, it held but a slight touch of warm honey, a curiosity considering the infrequency of the summer sun. However, it was not her features that set Sansa aback, no, for she was no stranger to beautiful women. It was instead the smile upon her countenance that caused her to stare.

It was warm and friendly, this stranger’s smile. Welcoming, almost, if not for the slight hesitancy in her body language, as if she were waiting for Sansa to grow fangs and attack. The only looks Sansa had received upon her arrival to the Wildling camp were open, hostile stares and cold derision. Wildling or no, such friendliness and reciprocity was a much-needed welcome in this viper’s nest.

Sansa had always prided herself on being a good actress, at pretending. Such pretense and conviction served her well since her betrothal and suffering Ramsay’s presence. Yet, it was tedious work, this continuous charade. Sansa had grown weary of wearing so many masks: the glacial and frigid ice queen, the apathetic hostage, the scared and victimized daughter. Despite all of this, these games she was forced to play, the subterfuge and deception, Sansa needed an ally, a pawn at the very least. Someone to help her alleviate the weight of this nightmare and help her navigate through this world until she could do so on her own.

Upon seeing the open gesture of reciprocity and welcome upon this stranger’s--this Wildling woman’s--countenance, something within Sansa began to soften, ebb and erode away, at least towards her. She was sanctuary, an oasis within a vast and arid desert, and Sansa was grateful. So damned grateful.

A moment passed, the Wildling woman waited, expectant. Her smile--warm and welcoming--started to slowly cool and falter. Sansa could not risk alienation, not now. She was loath to admit her need of her.
“P-Pardon?”

The smile immediately returned, as did the warmth, spreading like the Southron e sun across the Narrow Sea. **Good...Good...Make them like you. Become passive and unassuming.**

The Dragon had its fire; the Kraken had its oceans. The Lion had its pride. Yet, it was the Wolf who had its cunning. And Sansa had cunning, beneath all assumed artifice and passivity, it lurked. Waiting. Ready.

When Sansa was two and ten, her brothers Robb and Bran, along with Theon, went out riding through the godsdow. It had been Bran’s fifth nameday and he had been gifted a destrier—a present from Lady Barbrey Dustin. It was a beautiful horse, blue roan and high spirited. Lady Catelyn had had her reservations, of course. Not only was the gifted stallion too extravagant and exorbitant for a young lordling of five, but there was most certainly an ulterior motive in the faux courtesy.

Lady Barbrey was a capricious woman, the elapse of years had made her harder, embittered. She had resented Catelyn for her betrothal to Brandon Stark, a marriage that Cat never truly desired or pushed. While Brandon was handsome, roguish with his brunette hair and slate-colored eyes, he was pugnacious and temperamental. Many attested his bellicosity to his “wolf’s blood” that ran wild within him.

He was a pretty man, Cat conceded, reluctantly. A pretty man with all the pretty words and courtesies that caused half of the realm’s women to swoon. Yet, despite his multiple and incessant promises (pretty, yet empty promises), Cat knew he could never be faithful to just her alone. Catelyn was a Tully, aye, she knew the words--etched and engraved upon her heart like chiseled stone--but she wanted fidelity above all else. The one thing Brandon Stark, with all his capricious moods and dark beauty, could never afford to give her.

She had heard the rumor of her betrothed and Lady Barbrey Dustin, of how they had been lovers driven apart by an unwanted, impending marriage and forced alliance. While her father assured her the rumors were false, the manifestations of a covetous and spurned paramour, Lady Catelyn was no fool. No, it was best to keep Lady Barbrey at bay, preferably as far away as possible. A snake was still a snake no matter how less potent the venom.

As Bran and Robb returned from their excursion, they were set upon by a trio of Wildlings hidden within the thicket. Robb and Theon had make quick work of the two men, one of which held a rough, obsidian blade to young Bran’s throat. A woman had been captured among the fray, Osha. Sansa had been afraid of her then. Terrified of this strange, wild entity with her small, suspicious eyes and unrestrained tongue.

She was no lady, that wall all but certain, but yet despite Osha’s unconventionalism and candor, she became one of Sansa’s most trusted friends. Sansa loved Osha and missed her terribly.

This woman--Muirgayne--reminded her of her friend, possessed the same warmth and vibrancy and Sansa could not help but be drawn to it. She almost felt bad for what she had to do, for the duplicity was forced to assume. It could not be helped, now.

“You are the one the speak of. The red She-Wolf. You are the one who the elders speak of, who tamed the wild Wolf of the North.”

Sansa sat there, immobile, for she was bereft of words. Was this how they saw her? As some sort of tamer, conquering savage beasts with naught save apathy and cool disdain? Is it truly that easy?
“I did not know such a man like that could be tamed.” Sansa could not help but be intrigued now. Initially, she had planned to give this woman a wide berth, guilty of becoming too attached. Now, she realized the folly in her plan. She could use her in further cementing and ingratiating herself within the wildling camp. This woman could help her, be her eyes and ears and help her curry favor among those who mattered.

It should not be so difficult. Already, Muirgayne looked upon her with something akin to reverence and worshipful awe. Sansa could use this.

“You are a Stark, are you not? Little wonder Jon is so taken with you. Wolves draw to their own. So many women have tried to win his heart and he has refused them all.”

Sansa thought back to the red-haired Wildling woman who had assaulted her, remembering the hatred and loathing that radiated off her. Sansa knew jealousy, she knew envy. Yet this transcended far beyond any petty emotion she could think of. What this woman felt for her at that instant was dangerous and unbridled. Had Sansa been any other woman--a lesser woman--she would have been afraid.

Fortunately for her, she was not a lesser woman. She had seen the worst and had survived. There was nothing anyone else could do to her now.

“Why did he take me, Muirgayne? Why did Jon choose me?” Sansa had not meant the desperation, had not meant to allow anyone to let on, but yet she was curious.

Muirgayne started, eyes widened slightly in shock. She hand never told this Kneeler her name, she was certain of it. “I think you have it the other way around, She-Wolf. The past is already written and the ink is dried. Your stories are aligned with one another’s. Jon chose you, aye, but the gods willed it. Jon only listened.”

Chapter End Notes

So Muirgayne seems to be quite the perceptive one, huh?
Chapter Summary

"You have left me." The accusation hung in the air, suspended and lingering. Jon closed his eyes, suddenly tired. He swallowed tightly, his throat heavy. He had not wanted a confrontation, only a clean break and understanding. He should have known that Ygritte would seek the most difficult route. So be it, then.

"Stay away from Sansa, Ygritte. This will be your final warning. There will not be another." Ygritte reeled as though Jon had struck her, his words near felling her. This was not her Jon. This was something different. Alien and unknown.

"Do you love her?" She asked finally, hysterical and frantic. She would not lose him. She would not. Not to this fucking wolf-bitch. This Kneeling cunt. She would never be worthy of him. Never would she love him like she could. Like only Ygritte could. Never!

Jon was silent, resolute. His hesitancy giving Ygritte a faint moment of hope. Surely he was mistaken. Surely he-

And then there was a nod, imperceptible at first, and then steady, certain.

"Aye, I do."

Chapter Notes

Jon makes a long-overdue realization, and tries to seek finality and close the door to one longstanding chapter within his life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty: Poison

A deep hunger settled within his gut as he watched her. It seized him, the force of it constricting the air from him. She had been staying with Muirgayne and Tormund in their hut, sharing an alcove with their two young daughters. Both of them swore to watch over Sansa, to be his eyes whenever he was not present.

Jon chuckled darkly. It was hilarious, this irony. He had sent her away from his tent-from him-so that he could protect her, to quell this lust that had run rampant within his extremities, and yet, he could never be fully rid of her. She haunted his thoughts, an ever present shadow. Since the encounter with the shadowcat, his obsession of her grew. He looked down at the hunting knife, the blade, though dull, glinting in the firelight.

As Mance Rayder's heir and prince, Jon presided over the hunting, he and twelve of the best huntsmen were commissioned with bringing meat to the village. It was menial work, monotonous and dull, but Jon had not minded it. His duty was foremost to his people, now and always. Mance had always expounded on a leader's duties, expatiating on the heavy burden of caring for another.

When Jon had been younger, selfish and wild, he could not comprehend this. His wants and desires
had been paramount, immediate, and instantly gratified; as a Wildling, refusals and withholdings were unknown and foreign to him. If he desired it, he would take it. Such was the Wildling way. Mance would oft shake his head, bewildered and dismayed, at his son's short-sightedness and apathy, praying to the deities above that one day Jon would comprehend the salience of service and charity.

Surveying the camp, taking in the laughter and camaraderie, Jon now understood. One could never be a leader, have the unwavering fealty of his people, if he could not first serve. It was a difficult lesson, aye, but an important one. And Jon had learned.

Out of the periphery of his vision, Jon sensed movement. He tensed, turning his head quickly, bracing himself. It was rare that he was truly at ease, even now within the enclosure of his camp and among his own people. The night was dark and full of terrors and safety was both an illusion and phantasm.

Turning his head fully, Jon's breath was all but lost as he took her in. Sansa. She was following Muirgayne, her head held high, gaze unwavering. She had changed clothes since their last encounter, shedding her noblewoman's finery for the hadowcat pelt. Yet, in spite of the simplicity of her new garments, Sansa had managed to wear them with such pride, akin to a chest laden with treasure.

Her deep auburn hair was unbound and wild, resting at her waist. The campfire highlighting its undertones, contrasting the silver and black furs with an array of molten copper and rich chestnut. A living flame. She was a living flame.

And Jon was set ablaze and singeing.

He quickly diverted his eyes, his britches tightening. He was not alone in his admiration of her, Jon noticed. It seemed as though every man within the camp turned their heads to look their fill of her, their collective gazes hot and appraising. Even Mance appeared momentarily awed.

Already, songs were sung of her in worship and praise, for she was the she-wolf who slaughtered the feral shadowcat. Never before had such been done.

This feast was in her honor.

A black cloud began to enshroud around Jon then. He felt murderous, dangerous and primitive. He clenched the hunting knife tightly, briefly envisioning plucking the eyes from each man who dared to gawk on her with such liberties, his father included. Immediately, Jon felt contrite, rueful almost.

It was wrong, this jealousy, for he had no right. No right in this claiming of her, and yet, he could not help quell this desire and fervent yearning. He was going mad, his sanity tethered but by only a single loose thread. Remember your vow, Snow.

His father's voice penetrated his reverie, lauding Sansa's bravery. His voice a slight beam of clarity contrast to the inky blackness of instability. That's right. He had vowed not to touch her until she asked, until she initiated the contact. He had every intention of honoring his promise and preserve what little honor remained of him, but gods! Why did she have to make it so fucking difficult?

Jon shifted in his seat, trying to alleviate the ache between his legs. He could not count the times he had taken himself in hand, envisioning her above him. The tent redolent with lavender and peony. His She-Wolf's scent. Mayhap he could visit the lake after dinner...Aye, the coolness would help bring back some of his lost rationality and control. If only for a moment, at least.

Jon looked up again, dismayed by his need to see her, to glimpse upon her once more. She was
sitting in front of the campfire, sandwiched between Muirgayne and Tormund. She had smiled at one of their daughters, her smile honey-sweet and beautiful. Jon’s breath hitched upon the splendidness of the sight, instantly wishing he were the recipient of her sweet smiles and laughter.

She was beautiful, Jon amended. Even now, a captive among vipers, she was still so damned beautiful. Looking at her now, Sansa looked the epitome of a queen—a Wolf Queen—both resplendent and terrifying simultaneously. Jon looked up, glancing just beyond.

Ygritte was staring at him, her gaze hostile and cold. Jon sighed in resignation. It was inevitable, his dealing with her, and yet it was a task he was loathe to do. Once upon a time, Jon had loved Ygritte, and did still. She had been good to him and he would cherish their memories fondly. Yet, she was his past, now reduced to that of a distant recollection.

She was not for him, her jealousy and possessiveness of him a loud, resounding cacophony. She did not love him, not really. Rather, she loved the illusion of what he could offer her. Mace was right, as he oft was. He knew what Ygritte was and had warned Jon at length of her poison, and Jon had not listened. At first.

It had all changed when Jon had happened upon Ygritte and Muirgayne in the midst of a heated exchange. Ygritte had been incensed, within the throes of wild accusations and jealous paroxysms, her blue eye transfixed and glacial. She had accused Muirgayne of being unfaithful to Tormund, that their eldest daughter was some other wildling man's bastard.

"You fucking whore! You are nothing save a filthy, dirty whore!" Muirgayne, already temperamental, lunged at her, eyes flashing. Had it been any other time, Jon would not have cared, for he knew Muirgayne and knew that no woman was a match for her, Ygritte included. Yet Muirgayne was pregnant, almost five moons gone. As formidable as Muirgayne's anger, Ygritte could be cruel, vicious, and Jon knew she would have no compunction injuring an unborn babe. He had to stop this.

Jon began to separate the women, keeping both at arm's length of the other. Muirgayne, trembling in her fury and tearful; Ygritte exultant and superior. Later that night, Ygritte divulged that she had known all along that Muirgayne had been faithful and devout to Tormund, but had wanted to cause dissention within their union, covetous and resentful of their marriage and bond.

Although a Wildling woman was autonomous in her choosing of a husband, fidelity was paramount. Should she be suspected of infidelity from her people, she would be killed—the restoration of her husband's shredded honor. All it took was but a word, a whisper. Jon was numb, disbelieving. Surely Ygritte could see the folly and danger of her duplicity.

"Do you not realize that your lies could have killed her? Killed her babe?" Ygritte shrugged, apathetic and triumphant. It was then at that moment that Jon realized the extent of her depravity and callousness. He had to break with her, there was no other alternative.

It had been a year since their final encounter, Jon had been forceful and insistent, Ygritte, disbelieving and adamant.

"I am your woman, Jon Snow. You cannot ever betray me. You are of me, and I, of you."

She had been a nuisance, at best. Bothersome and worrying. Mance had wanted her exiled, to be sent far away, emphatic that she was an ill-omen to all within his camp. Jon had refused the sentence, believing it too stringent, too severe. Yet, after seeing her strike out at Sansa, seeing that unbridled rage and madness, Jon knew that something had to be done. This could not stand.
Sighing once more, Jon stood up, his appetite lost. He was stone now. Immoveable and resolute. The sooner he placed distance between them, the better he would feel. He loved Ygritte, aye, but he would kill her should she threaten Sansa again. That was a promise.

“You have left me.” The accusation hung in the air, suspended and lingering. Jon closed his eyes, suddenly tired. He swallowed tightly, his throat heavy. He had not wanted a confrontation, only a clean break and understanding. He should have known that Ygritte would seek the most difficult route. So be it, then.

"Stay away from Sansa, Ygritte. This will be your final warning. There will not be another.” Ygritte reeled as though Jon had struck her, his words near felling her. This was not her Jon. This was something different. Alien and unknown.

"Do you love her?” She asked finally, hysterical. She would not lose him. She would not. Not to this fucking wolf-bitch. This Kneeling cunt. She would never be worthy of him. Shadowcat or no, she would never be worthy of him. Never would she love him like she could. Like only Ygritte could. Never!

Jon was silent, resolute. His hesitancy giving Ygritte a faint moment of hope. Surely he was mistaken. Surely he-

And then there was a nod, imperceptible at first, and then steady, certain.

"Aye, I do."

At that moment, Ygritte died. Surely, a million swords to the belly would never equal to the searing pain of her heart. "And what of me, then?"

Jon startled, his eyes softening, apologetic and contrite.

"Goodbye, Ygritte." And with that, Jon turned, retreating to the Wildling camp. To her. Ygritte remained back, her thoughts a sudden quagmire, the finality of it all bowling her over with its intensity and magnitude.

"Goodbye, Ygritte."

No. No! There were no goodbyes between them, not yet. Jon was hers. And she was his. The She-Wolf had to die, had to be vanquished. It was the only way. Ygritte was more than certain of this now.

In her fury and hysteria, Ygritte had not noticed how tightly she had gripped the arrow tip, the blood wetting her palm. Yet she was numb, she could feel nothing anymore.

Chapter End Notes

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." --William Congreve
From Porcelain, to Ivory, to Steel

Chapter Summary

Sansa waited, yet beneath her calm equanimity was something sinister, dark. In another life, she supposed, she would have cowered and yielded, begged. Back when her skin was of the finest porcelain. Now, all that remained of her was steel. She was steel. It was Sansa's turn to step forward, causing the other woman to retreat a few steps, blinking in surprise. Something had changed. Ygritte was suddenly fearful.
"You think your idle threats can scare me? Make me tremble? I am Sansa Stark of Winterfell. I am the Wolf's daughter, and you cannot frighten me."

Chapter Notes

Sansa continues to scheme and plot...and comes face-to-face with an unwanted visitor.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-One: From Porcelain, to Ivory, to Steel

He had been gone for a long time, almost an hour. He and the red-haired Wildling woman. Sansa continued to incline her head towards the forest, attune and listening. She had not wanted to do it; she had told herself that she had not cared one dry fuck where he had gone, if he had fallen off a ravine somewhere (she didn't, truly), but even she knew such denial could not be upheld for so long. Try as she might, she could not quell this curiosity.

She had worn her hair loose and unbound, remembering how Jon's eyes darkened and ignited whenever he allowed his eyes to feast on her. Even in her unconscious state after the abduction, Sansa remembered the sensation of his hands upon her hair. It was a strange thing...She had never imagined one with such large and calloused hands capable of gentleness.

The proffered furs were not such a tedious or difficult task, as she had worn men's clothing before as she sparred with Rob and Arya back home. Although the epitome of a lady, Sansa was not so far removed that she would forgo convenience for luxury. Besides, it was for a purpose, all of it.

"He had been watching you, She-Wolf." Muirgayne observed quietly, all the while watching the campfire flames flicker and dance. Sansa blinked, startled. When had she returned? The last time Muirgayne had spoken with her, it was to inform her that she was to tuck her youngest in for the night. Little Kiva barely keeping her eyes open during the festivities, her dark curls resting and tucked upon Tormund's shoulder.

Sansa turned, facing Muirgayne fully. Throughout the feast, Sansa noticed something different. Jon looked tortured, conflicted. Tormund had always japed on Jon's moroseness and intensity. Yet this night...He seemed persecuted. Was it because of her? Sansa dared to hope.

"Truly? It seemed the hunting knife held more interest than I." Sansa stopped then, refusing to divulge more. Muirgayne was sharp, keen. In the day that Sansa had met her, she had already proven
to not suffer fools. Sansa could not risk letting her in on her plans of seduction and escape. No, better
to play the distressed lady, helpless and passive, than allow her or anyone else to let on. Besides, this
was Sansa's game to play and these were her chess pieces to manipulate and move; she was far from
helpless.

"You did not see what I saw, Lady Wolf. He was looking on you how a dog eyes a bone. Tis
strange, he's never looked on a woman the way he looks at you, with such longing. Not even with
Ygritte."

Sansa trembled, the involuntary jolt surging down her spine. Although she was aware of the
Wildling's lusts, it was a curious thing to hear its confirmation from someone else's lips-someone who
knew Jon and was something akin to a friend. Good. A small, secret smile threatened to break
through and Sansa fought to carefully school her features. Not now, she could not break now.

"Your Wolf Prince is not in love with me. I am but a novelty to him. He's just upset because I refuse
his attentions." That so much was true. Sansa believed that had she not been withholding her
affections from him and had given herself freely-like he wanted and desired-she would have already
been discarded, like scraps to the furnace.

She refused. In order to get what she wanted, Sansa had to play her hand carefully. So far, she held
the winning cards. Let him look, that secretive voice whispered deliciously. Let him like what he
sees.

"Tell me about Ygritte, Muirgayne." Although Sansa did not recall Jon's heated, furtive gaze, she did
remember Ygritte's eyes-cold, calculating, and burning. While Ramsay's eyes were maniacal and
apathetic, Ygritte's were cruel and empty, like frozen, glacial lakes. Throughout the duration of the
feast, they had narrowed and pinned Sansa down, as though she were some loathsome, abhorrent
pestilence she wanted to rid the world of. Sansa stared back, unintimidated.

Since when were wolves afraid of balding sheep?

Muirgayne spat the ground, a hard gleam in her eye. "Rabid cunt. You best keep away from that
one. She traverses the evil road. She is a jealous, frothing mad bitch. Any woman that comes within
a league of Jon Snow is made her enemy."

Sansa stilled, listening in rapt fascination. Aunt Lysa had once told her to pay close attention, that
everything that is seen has already been visited once before. She had been here before-this was
Ramsay Bolton all over again.

Last year, when Sansa had been five and ten, and the wedding preparations had been underway, she
and her elder brother, Rob, had visited the Dreadfort, accompanied by their Lord Father, to visit
Roose and his newly legitimized son. "Bastard." Rob sneered the word underneath his breath, out of
their father's hearing. The word was vile, base. An unwanted demarcation and blight against a
person's nature.

Sansa loathed the word, believed the castigation unfair and permanent. Yet upon her initial meeting
with the Bolton lordling, no adjective could better describe the monster hidden behind his innocent
smiles and saccharine courtesies. It was a stable boy that revealed the depravity lurking beneath.
The young man's sole transgression was to let his eyes linger a tad too long on Sansa's form as she
dismounted from her mare. Sansa had dismissed the slight, bestowing the stable lad-Luc-with a
small smile of gratitude as he helped her off her beast.

Yet, Ramsay singled in on Luc, like a seizing, virulent dog, and backhanded the defenseless servant
so severely it had broken his nose, the crimson river freely flowing from the orifice. Sansa had been
horrified, outraged; Ned angry yet silent. Roose, apathetic and indifferent. Father had inquired on
the lad soon after, the very least he could do. He had been dismayed to learn that Luc had
disappeared into the night soon after the unfortunate incident, his putrefied and disarticulated
remains spread about the forested floor.

Roose had asserted it had been an accident, the unfortunate result of a hunting accident gone awry;
that he had been drunk and fallen off his horse and the beasts of the forest had ravished him. Yet
Sansa knew the truth. He had died because of jealousy. Because of misconstrued actions. Envy truly
was the death of allâ€

"You forget that I had been kidnapped from my home and taken against my will to the ends of the
earth. I have no family, no soldiers to fight for me, and yet here I stand. I am not one to scare easily."

Muirgayne chuckled at Sansa's side. "You have spirit, She-Wolf. I will give you that. More courage
than most. A wolf's courage. All the same, take heed and stay out of her way."

Sansa inclined her head in faint acknowledgement, barely listening. It was obvious that the woman-
Ygritte-fancied Jon, and he had loved her at one time. Perhaps the sentiments lingered still. Sansa
frowned. What did that mean for her? For her plans? She could readily play the whore if it meant
yielding the desired results. Yet, her plans held no room for a jilted and spurned lover. Oh well...just
another adjustment and recalculation. The game was wrought with them, a true tactician knew how
to manipulate and navigate through them.

Besides, Sansa relished at the challenge. She looked on at the flames silently, Muirgayne's warning
now a distant, fading memory.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

"You're the Wolf-Bitch they have been harping about, aren't you?" Sansa tensed, her shoulders
stiffening. She had been praying in front of the weirwood tree, seeking solace and clarity. Though
gods only knew why she prayed anymore, it was not as though they had inclined their ears to her
entreaties before. Still, she had wanted a reprieve and Jon had given her leave.

Sansa stood, facing the woman, Ygritte. Muirgayne had warned her to take heed of this stranger, that
she was no friend of hers and wished her ill. Yet, looking on her now, sizing up her person, Sansa
felt no fear, no intimidation. Nothing.

"My name is Sansa." It was such a simple declaration, a mere stating of her name, and yet, looking
on Ygritte now, it seemed to unlock a hidden fissure of control and equanimity. She was growing
steadily untethered.

"You think he will ever love a Kneeling cunt like you? I know your kind, you Southrone bitches are
all the same-taking what is not yours." Sansa stared, patient. It would not do to interrupt.

Let it out, Wildling. Go ahead and place your frustrations on me.

"You forget that I did not have a choice. I did not ask for your precious Wolf to kidnap me from my
home. He did that all on his own." Sansa tried not to let her anger consume her, but she could not
help it. How long was she to be blamed and made culpable for a crime she had not committed? For
each passing second, the anger within her surged and crackled, bubbling at the surface.

Ygritte stepped closer, then. Her cold eyes raking over Sansa in derision. If one could die by a mere
glance, Sansa would have perished a thousand times over from the intensity and weight of her stare.
Still, she refused to fold. She raised her chin in defiance.
"He may have kidnapped you, aye, but you want him. You dream about it-him inside you, spilling inside your tight, wet hole. Aye, you want him, but he's not yours to have. He is mine, now and forever. I have killed cunts like you who thought they could have him, stronger and braver than you could ever be. What makes you think I could not kill you now and bury your body somewhere where only the crows could find you?"

Sansa waited, yet beneath her calm equanimity was something sinister, dark. In another life, she supposed, she would have cowered and yielded, begged. Back when her skin was of the finest porcelain. Now, all that remained of her was steel. She was steel.

It was Sansa's turn to step forward, causing the other woman to retreat a few steps, blinking in surprise. Something had changed. Ygritte was suddenly fearful. When had the Wolf-Bitch grew fangs?

Sansa was upon her, now. Already tall, made all the more formidable by the cold glint in her eyes. If she had dared step closer, Ygritte could have sworn to have heard growling.

"You think your idle threats can scare me? Make me tremble? I am Sansa Stark of Winterfell. I am the Wolf's daughter, and you cannot frighten me."

Chapter End Notes

*Mic Drop!* You all wanted it, so I delivered. Rest assured, it won't be the end between these two!
A Thawing

Chapter Summary

She was sitting at the foot of the weirwood tree, her head bent in deference, the summer sun’s rays streaming through the forest canopy, the scarlet of both the leaves and her hair forming a ring of fire around her. She looked ethereal and otherworldly, the Maiden incarnate.

Jon took a step forward, but abruptly stopped. He was like the tide being pulled by the moon. He could not understand this, this yielding and acquiescing to her. She was like a drug, and he was losing all inhibitions....

...In that instantaneous moment, Jon felt something shift. Although the burning lust and unrestrained yearning remained (it would always remain as far as he was concerned), there was, more importantly, a thawing that began to softly trickle and percolate. Like ice in a Dornish summer. There now was respect and reverence.

As if sensing his presence, Sansa turned around to face him, a defiant lilt to her chin. Jon stared back, silent and watchful, the transformation before him stupefying. My queen...My Wolf Queen....

Chapter Notes

Jon overhears an important exchange and a thawing begins to form from both sides. Also, in this chapter, we see Dark!Jon emerge.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Two : A Thawing

Achilles: You’re still my enemy in the morning.

King Priam: And you’re still my enemy tonight. But even enemies can show respect.

( Troy , 2004)

“There have been whispers, I fear.” Jon inclined his head towards Mance, attentive and listening. Of course there would be whispers. Despite the vast reclusiveness of the North, even the King-Beyond-The-Wall was not without his sparrows, the eyes and ears of his frozen kingdom.

“Orell has told me that First Ranger Benjen Stark is leading the search along with fifty of Bolton’s best men, a hundred total. No doubt trying to reclaim the lost wolf.” Mance’s coal black eyes
watched his son, patient and waiting, gaging his reaction. He was like a sentinel, always holding vigilance, waiting for the first sign of dissent.

As expected, Jon remained stoic and impassive, disclosing nothing. The only sign of cognizance was the shifting of his wolf-grey eyes as he watched the flames flicker and dance before him. Mance was not fooled, however. His son was thinking, a plan starting to form within the recesses of his mind.

Even before the abduction of the Wolf Maid, there had been long standing enmity between the Free Folk and the men of the Night’s Watch. Benjen Stark had been a formidable enemy that was responsible for the execution and slaughter of many within village. Kin to the she-wolf or no, Jon would have satisfaction.

A moment passed between them, the silence interminable. Only the crackling and roaring of the flames could be heard. “Where had they been spotted?”

Even as Jon spoke, his eyes still lingered over the fire, casting an eerie glow. It was as if the fires contained a secret that only he felt privy to and could decipher. What was it he had seen within the smoke and embers? A vision? An oracle?

Nay, Mance doubted it. The gods did not impart their mysteries so liberally. No, Mance knew his son. His thoughts were preoccupied with his great prize, the red wolf. She was a sweet song, Mance conceded. Such a pretty, sweety dream. But Mance knew all too well the harsh and bitter sting of waking. His wolf son was living in a fantasy that he could not escape from.

And then what? What would be left of Jon after he plummeted back to earth? To reality? Mance shuddered at the terrible prospect.

“Orell said just south of Eagle Pass, near Midnight Canyon.” Jon shifted yet remained silent, his thoughts careening and dark. They were close--too close. Mayhap seven hundred leagues from the camp.

Benjen Stark was relentless, a trait that yielded begrudging respect from Jon and Mance alike. Set to determined purpose, he was a hound on the scent--nothing would deter him. The other man, Bolton…

Jon knew very little of the Flayed Man and his men, save that he had a bastard son who was prone to cruelty and bouts of mania. A mad dog, that was his epithet. Jon smirked. It mattered not. His father once told him big men fell just as quickly as little ones. Together, however, they presented a problem. They would arrive within a moon’s turn, the summer season speeding up the journey. He was running out of time.

Abruptly standing, Jon left his father’s hut and made his way to the center of the camp. He needed to speak with Orell. The warg and shapeshifter was his father’s favorite spy, able to enter the minds of animals and see through their eyes, his favorite, his golden eagle, Aeris. He was useful, Jon conceded, his gifts allowing him to see what others could not.

Shifty and suspicious, he was but a mere slip of a man, Orell, with dirtied yellowed hair and mismatched eyes of blue and green. Jon never liked the ferreted man and more than once prayed for the opportunity to run him through and rid the village of his presence. He had been a lover of Ygritte’s once, long before Jon.

Resentful, jealous and antagonistic, Orell made no secret of his antipathy and dislike of Jon. The contention amplified due to Jon being the son of Mance Rayder, Orell’s idol and hero. Even after Jon’s breaking with Ygritte, Orell continued his little games, sowing seeds of division wherever he
could.

Yes, Jon would relish in killing the weasel-faced man. There were so many possible ways...

But first, he needed answers.

Jon found Orell sitting atop a boulder near a small clearing, just on the outskirts of the village and right before the entrance of the forest. He had been speaking with Rattleshirt, another fellow wildling leader and war chief. Jon halted, his stomach clenching. He had not missed the way the bull-faced man’s eyes glistened and alighted on Sansa during last night’s feast, or the way they had followed after her as she made her way to to forest. Earlier that morn, she had asked Jon for leave to visit the weirwood tree and he had granted her supplication. Now, he could not quell the trepidation that ran riot inside of him. She had been gone for too long.

“Mance said that your eagle spotted both Night Watchmen and Bolton bannermen near Eagle Pass. Is that true?”

Orell smirked, sharing a passing glance to Rattleshirt who chuckled quietly at his side. The colossus glancing just past the thicket of trees, towards the weirwood. Suddenly, that old, familiar dark cloud began to form around Jon and he tried to will it down. Not now...not now. He could not lose his control now.

“Aye. They’re coming for that kneeler bitch, trying to play hero and rescue her. A fine woman, she is. What say you give her to me? By the time I get through with her, I’d have her spilling from every one of her tight little holes.”

It was meant as a jape, the Lord of Bones’ bulging eyes brilliant with mirth, his bellowing laugh a cacophonous echo through the morning stillness. Tormund stiffened by Jon’s side, his blue eyes blazing, all the while watching his prince, reading him. No one knew his friend’s moods better than he.

And right now, Jon was feeling dangerous, judging by the darkening of his eyes and the stiff set of his jaw. Don’t. Don’t.

It happened too quick-- all too quick. Like a wolf seizing its prey, Jon’s arm shot out, faster than a loosed arrow, and enclosed around Rattleshirt’s bulbous neck. The once riotous laughter now reduced to epileptic wheezing and sputtering.

“Jon--” Tormund began, yet knowing such dissuasion was futile. It was not often Jon entertained provocation, always maintaining rigid ataraxia and cool detachment, but Rattleshirt struck a nerve and continued to burrow deeper and further down. The wolf was quickly emerging and unable to become tethered. The look on Jon’s face was feral, his winter grey eyes now a tempestuous storm.

“My father values your prowess on the battlefield, Rattleshirt, but I am not him and you test me now. You touch what is mine and I will kill you myself.”

The threat lingered, saturating the air. All was quiet, save the continuous gasping and wheezing from Rattleshirt, his throat still enclosed within Jon’s grasp. Even Orell was dumbstruck and cowed. Rattleshirt’s face was slowly turning blue, his meaty hands clawing desperately at Jon’s hand. Yet Jon did not relinquish his grip, only tightened further.

“Gods, he means to kill him!’ Tormund thought wildly. Right here, right now, Jon was going to kill this man. The once thickened cord of self-possession quickly unraveling before his very eyes. No man was worth this dishonor.
“Jon, you need to release him. Release him now. JON!” A beat passed, then two. Tormund wondering if Jon had even heard his entreaty and plea.

Finally, after what seemed like eons...

A gasp of air, the Lord of Bones coughing and gagging, his hands clasping at his throat, the color starting to slowly return. Tormund sighed in relief, nearly collapsing and buckling at the weight and enormity of it all. At this moment, he had almost lost his friend. Not to a sword or arrow, no, but to anger and unbridled madness.

The red haze continued to linger and permeate Jon’s mind, his eyes near black and abysmal, but the control had been returned, if only in small increments. All it took was another misstep and foolish error and the black cloud would return, thunderous and terrifying. Rattleshirt was teetering on the edge and taking Jon with him.

“First and only warning, Rattleshirt. There will not be another. Now, get the fuck out of my sight.”

He did not need telling twice. Had Tormund not been so tense and bewildered, he would have shared a laugh at the larger man’s expense. Now, he only felt concern and slight fear. What the fuck had changed?

Orell forgotten, Jon left Tormund’s side and made his way directly to the forest. To Sansa. He needed to see her, to look upon her, if only at a distance. He would not rationalize the reasons why, mayhap when he was within the silent enclosure and quietude of his hut. But right now…

Right now, he needed to see her and quell this unbridled rage that was pulsing through him. If only but for a moment at least. She was sitting at the foot of the weirwood tree, her head bent in deference, the summer sun’s rays streaming through the forest canopy, the scarlet of both the leaves and her hair forming a ring of fire around her. She looked ethereal and otherworldly, the Maiden incarnate.

Jon took a step forward, but abruptly stopped. He was like the tide being pulled by the moon. He could not understand this, this yielding and acquiescing to her. She was like a drug, and he was losing all inhibitions.

“You’re the Wolf-Bitch they have been harping about, aren’t you?” The voice rang out, penetrating the quiet serenity. Ygritte. Jon stiffened, moving swiftly towards them. He had warned Ygritte to stay away, to stay far away from Sansa, knowing the consequences that would befall upon her should she contravene.

And yet, here she was—provoking and vexatious. Jon cursed silently, he should have known Ygritte would never settle for the path of least resistance. Yet, it was all too late now. The black cloud began to once again reemerge and manifest.

“I have killed cunts like you who thought they could have him, stronger and braver than you could ever be. What makes you think I could not kill you now and bury your body somewhere only the crows could find you?” There was a rushing that filled Jon’s ears at the admission. Oh, gods no...Rowena and Bridgette. No no no no no!

Jon moved forward, his hand on the blade of his hunting knife. If this bitch did anything to hurt Sansa, Jon did not know what he might do. Only that he would not be held responsible for his actions. The red haze began to encircle once more.

Her voice stopped him, hard and unwavering. In the rare and far between moments that Jon had
heard Sansa speak, Jon was entranced by the honeyed mellifluousness of her voice, wishing she would speak more, laugh more, instead of the angry silence she would oft give him whenever it were but the two of them. However, this time, instead of sweetness and operatic words, there was an anger and strength. Steel. She was now steel.

“You think your idle words can scare me? Make me tremble? I am Sansa Stark of Winterfell. I am the Wolf’s daughter, and you cannot frighten me.”

Ygritte, Jon noted, was nonplussed, cowed. Her lifeless and dull eyes flashing in momentary fear and recognition. She fled the woods then, hastily retreating to the wildling camp. She would not remain there. If Jon had his way, she would be dead--preferably by his hand.

There was a stiffening of her spine, her back rigid and proud. Even in her anger and wrath, Jon noted, Sansa was still beautiful. Coldly beautiful and proud. No longer this timid, scared little dove of fairy tales and songs.

In that instantaneous moment, Jon felt something shift. Although the burning lust and unrestrained yearning remained (it would always remain as far as he was concerned), there was, more importantly, a thawing that began to softly trickle and percolate. Like ice in a Dornish summer. There now was respect and reverence.

As if sensing his presence, Sansa turned around to face him, a defiant lilt to her chin. Jon stared back, silent and watchful, the transformation before him stupefying. My queen...My Wolf Queen....

Chapter End Notes

What is it that they say? Enemies make the best lovers? Now that Thanksgiving Break is upon us (hallelujah!), expect more frequent updates.
Chapter Summary

“I have to have her with me. I need to protect her, Tormund--at all costs. If she is under my protection, surely no one would be so foolish as to harm her.” It was a good lie, one Jon could easily believe if he allowed himself the luxury.

Instead of feeling insulted at the implication, Tormund only quirked an eyebrow and smirked knowingly. He sobered just as quickly, remembering the day’s events and their encounter with Rattleshirt. “Have care, Snow. Anyone with eyes can see she is your weakness. A jewel like her? How long d’you think it will be before another cunt tries to pluck her away from you?”

Jon stiffened, his jaw setting. His threat to the Lord of Bones was not an idle one; he had meant what he’d said. He would kill anyone who tried to take her away from him. Yet, it transcended far beyond mere objectification and possession. Jon remembered his dream--of the warmth--and trembled. And hoped. Hope was a foolish thing to have in this world full of ugliness and sin, and yet it proved difficult to kill.

Chapter Notes

After dancing around each other, Jon and Sansa spend some time together, and sexual tension ensues!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Siren

Ygritte had vanished. The revelation sending ripples of disbelief and slight trepidation throughout the wildling camp. Secreted away in the night, like a mist or specter haunting the moors. All that remained in her wake were a set of footprints and two dead guards who held vigil over the abandoned hut that once served as her asylum, their throats slit nigh to the bone, nearly decapitated.

Mance had been livid upon the revelation of Ygritte and her crimes and ordered for her immediate confinement, to which she would be tried in accordance to wildling law and praxis. If she were condemned (as of now, all they had were Sansa’s and Jon’s testimonies and no witnesses), she would pay with her life, as was the wildling way. Blood demanded blood and only a life could satisfy death--the balance weighed and measured.

Jon had volunteered to carry out the execution, believing himself solely responsible for the deaths of Rowena and Bridgette. Mance tried to object, asserting that one could never decipher an untethered and diseased mind, yet Jon had been resolute and immoveable. It was only fair, by Ygritte’s death, Jon could acquire absolution and atonement for his transgressions and stupidity. Mayhap if he had listened, then all of this could have been avoided, the deaths never happening.
The man who passes the sentence must swing the sword. Those had been her Lord Father’s words, Sansa thought achingly, the clenching within her belly intensifying. She had been gone almost a fortnight and the throes and anguish did not cease but only intensified. Those were her father’s words, yet Jon had been the embodiment and manifestation of it.

Looking at him now, taking him in, the parallels between the two men were unmistakeable: the same grim severity, the deep furrowed brow laden with travail. Sansa knew the look well. Resignation. Identical to what Ned often bore upon an execution.

While Mance had been pleased, mollified by his son’s fortitude and quick severing of all past memories, Jon’s silver eyes belied something else entirely. Contention. He was reluctant in his mission—take a life—but he knew he must.

Yet this was different, for Ygritte was not a deserter of the Nightswatch or a reprobate criminal, no. She had been his lover. It was difficult to discard lingering sentiments. Sansa understood this, but for some unknown reason, it still stung, nonetheless. Sansa did not dare explore the reasons why, but she could at least empathize.

Besides, she needed to be sweet now. If she were sweet and unassuming, Jon would trust her, expose more and more of his cracks to her until she could escape. It was all but a dance.

Yet, Ygritte had gone and nobody knew where. There would be no execution, not yet anyway.

“How long must I stay within your hut?” Sansa asked without preamble and immediately winced. She had been ensconced within Jon’s hut immediately following Ygritte’s absconding. Tormund had offered to escort her back to Muirgayne, but Jon had declined, remembering Rattleshirt’s lecherous gazes and Ygritte’s threats. He had argued that until the whole debacle was over, she would again remain with him.

“I have to have her with me. I need to protect her, Tormund—at all costs. If she is under my protection, surely no one would be so foolish as to harm her.” It was a good lie, one Jon could easily believe if he allowed himself the luxury.

Instead of feeling insulted at the implication, Tormund only quirked an eyebrow and smirked knowingly. He sobered just as quickly, remembering the day’s events and their encounter with Rattleshirt. “Have care, Snow. Anyone with eyes can see she is your weakness. A jewel like her? How long d’you think it will be before another cunt tries to pluck her away from you?”

Jon stiffened, his jaw setting. His threat to the Lord of Bones was not an idle one; he had meant what he’d said. He would kill anyone who tried to take her away from him. Yet, it transcended far beyond mere objectification and possession. Jon remembered his dream—of the warmth—and trembled. And hoped. Hope was a foolish thing to have in this world full of ugliness and sin, and yet it proved difficult to kill.

“Until I say so, She-Wolf. Are you bored of me, already?” He was smirking again, that insufferable grin that she loathed so much to look upon. Sansa clenched her jaw, a sharp and acidic reply immediately upon her lips, yet with Herculean effort, stamped it down. It would not due to lose control now, after all her carefully constructed planning. Gentle. Gentle now.

“I am your prisoner and with nowhere to go.” Sansa replied demurely, eyes lowered in false docility. Not too much, she scolded. Barbarian Jon Snow may be, but he was not stupid. This was a man renown throughout the realm for his ingenuity and agency, the ability to dissemble any snare. Too much false saccharinity and she was sure to arouse suspicion.
“Forgive me.” Sansa swallowed thickly. *Gods.* How far must she sink? “It’s only that I do not like being confined like an animal. At least with Tormund and Muirgayne, I was allowed a little bit of freedom.”

Jon remained silent, contemplating. It was easy to see how she could become restless. The wildlings were a free and independent people who valued their liberty. Theirs was not a life built on walls and confinement.

Jon rose abruptly and walked towards the hut’s entrance. *He’s leaving again!* Sansa thought dejectedly, hopes deflating. She was not so certain she could endure another moment of silence without going mad.

“Are you coming, She-Wolf?” Jon asked, inclining his head towards her. Sansa followed behind, hesitant. He could very well be leading her to her death, out of sight from the rest of the village, like a lamb to slaughter. Sansa did not have it in her to care any longer. Besides, if he had meant to kill her, gods knew he had ample opportunity to do so.

Instead, the sinfully-sweet smell of oleander and Mary rose wafted through the summer air. Sansa stopped, inhaling the fragrance, the air redolent with it. Jon waited, watching her with a peculiar expression upon her face.

They travelled a few more paces until they reached the lake. The summer sun had just dipped, meeting the earth, bathing the waters with a dusty rose glow. The water was cool and temperate, bringing instantaneous joy to Sansa’s feet. She was wearing a long tunic, overlarge and stretched, its hem reaching well past her knees. In another life, perhaps, Sansa would have been concerned with propriety and modesty, of what was proper and virtuous. But now, all that mattered was the coolness of the water and her newly given freedom. She lifted the hem and waded in, exhilarated.

She remembered summers like this with her brothers and Theon, carefree days swimming in the hot springs. Robb and Theon would make sport of diving off rocks, trying to see who made the biggest splash. Arya, ever the explorer, would dare Sansa to swim to the deepest ends, the loser having to relinquish their desserts for two moons (Sansa would always lose, save that one time. A fluke, Arya called it.). Sweet Bran, careful and solicitous, staying close to the water’s edge; Baby Rickon, much too young and too small, chortling and gurgling with glee as he looked on his siblings at play.

Oh, how she missed those sweet, long-ago days! There was a loud splash at her right and Sansa opened her eyes, laughing at the sight of Jon’s direwolf, Ghost, swimming towards her. The great beast more pup than formidable protector, his tongue lolling in his elation. Sansa laughed at the sight and playfully splashed some water in his direction. The albino wolf growled playfully and proceeded to shake the excess water from its mane, drenching Sansa further.

She could not retaliate without lifting her tunic further, so she hitched it up, and began kicking water at him, her endless legs shimmering in the evening sky. Ghost retreated to the lake’s shore and Sansa bounded after him, her laughter a melodic cacophony. Jon moved to quiet her, afraid that the noise and laughter would invite a curious onlooker to investigate. It would not due to see their Wolf Prince all out of sorts and undone.

Sansa looked up just in time to see Jon approaching, and too ensnared in the spirit of the game, brought her foot out of the water and laughingly sent a shower of water droplets in his direction. Jon immediately stopped, her unconcealed joy immediately seizing him. She looked the very image of a mermaid, with her luminescent skin and autumn hair. A water siren rising from her aqueous lair, to entice some unsuspecting mainer with her silvered voice and honey-sweet smile. He was at a loss, suspended between wanting to partake of the game, and continuing to gawk on her. This was the first time she had ever looked upon him without any trace of fear or hatred. Here, beneath the endless
summer stars and the fullness of the moon, she looked pure and happy, like the young girl she was of middle teenage years than some hostage trussed and fearful of her life being forfeit. Radiant.

Soon, all too soon, it was time to return back to the camp. Jon exited the hut to allow Sansa to exchange her saturated tunic for a dry one made of wool. For as long as he lived, Jon would never forget this night, never forget the look of unconcealed glee upon the she-wolf’s face as she frolicked and splashed about the lake, relishing in her merriment and innocence. Nor, to his secret shame, would he forget the vision she had gifted him with the moonlight highlighting every dip and soft curve of her body, or how the sodden tunic clung so alluringly to her breasts, and the ample convex of her hips.

___________________________________________________________________

Sansa was euphoric as she returned to Jon’s hut, the warm summer’s breeze lifting her spirits. For the first time since her captivity, she felt free. For that one glorious hour, she was no longer a hostage, an ensnared fledgling dove among vultures and crows, but a sprite, a wood nymph, and any other spectacular and divine creature. A goddess, even.

Humming a long-forgotten tune, she began to change out of her wet tunic, reaching for the proffered one laying on a nearby chest. It was soft and warm, smelling distinctly of musk and pine and bergamot. Of Jon.

A strange excitement rose up within her and Sansa could not help but relish in it. Aye, it was but a mere tunic, yet it belonged to him—Jon. She was now inadvertently connected to him, a part of him. She heard a faint rustle of movement at the front of the hut and turned around to investigate, thinking it were Ghost, silent as the shadows, slipping inside.

All smiles left her lips as Sansa turned around fully, her blood nearly congealing at the sight awaiting her. There, at the entrance of the hut, effectively blocking her one means of escape, stood Rattleshirt, his eyes gleaming lecherously as they raked over her, a feral smile upon his lips.

Chapter End Notes

I know...I'm evil. My students tell me this all the time! Lol...Also, just because Ygritte has vanished, do not think for ONE second that she is gone for good. Just like a nightmare has a habit of revisiting its victims, so will Ygritte.
Once, Robb had told her about a land in Essos, where both the narrow and Shivering Sea meet, Braavos. In Braavos, she had heard that the people lived by a specific creed. "Valar Morghulis," Robb repeated, the words awkward and halting on his tongue. "All men must die."

It had been a long day, a particularly taxing lesson. Robb had not gone easy on her. Aye, all men must die, Sansa concurred, wiping the sweat from her brow, her face dirtied by grime. "But I am no man."

Chapter Notes

In lieu of the conclusion of Thanksgiving Break (*tear*) and my birthday, I wanted to drop this little nugget. With the exception of the initial chapter, this is perhaps, my longest chapter to date. For those who have complained that the chapters were too short, I hear ya! This is for you! In this chapter, we are given flashbacks of Sansa's training in Winterfell, past teachings, and the conclusion of her encounter with Rattleshirt. Also, it is here where both Jon and Sansa arrive at a very crucial turning point in their relationship where there is no return.

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

### Chapter Twenty-Four: Fangs

*She remembered the early morning she would sneak off from her embroidery lessons to watch Robb and her Lord Father spar in the courtyard. She remembered their dexterity, their grace; the sounds of metal clashing against one another as they battled for supremacy and dominance. While Robb was zealous and eager, his movement akin to a wolf on the chase of its prey, Ned was matchless and fluid, as if the sword were but an extension of his arm.*

"The steel must be part of you, sweetling. You are but one sword, that is all." That was a lesson. Her first lesson in swordplay.

*Sansa had been ten the first time she held a sword in her hand. Catelyn had been appalled, outraged that her eldest daughter and prize wanted to partake in something so barbaric and primitive. "A lady does not fight!" she would reprimand, her lips pursed and tight, blue eyes dilated in disbelief and horror. Sansa scoffed and rolled her eyes, Ned quirked a smile--a brief one--before Cat turned her annoyed gaze his direction. He was in for it now. Hw would have to speak with the merchants and have some fabrics ordered. He had heard that a new shipment of Myrish lace had come in from the Free Cities. Cat would look absolutely splendid in dark green....*

*Ned had initially been against his daughters learning, believing that such things were not done in...*
the North. He had been adamant in his refusals, immune to their pretty pleadings and tears. Yet, theirs was a difficult world, an arduous life where they hurt little girls with no hesitation or qualm. Soon--much too soon--they would have to leave the warmth and sanctuary of Winterfell and encounter bigger monsters than the grumpkins and snarks of childhood nightmares.

"The world is a dangerous place, Cat. The girls must learn." Catelyn was angry, sure, but eventually relented. And soon, the lessons ensued.

"Keep your eye on the angle of my shoulders. They will give clue to my next move." Her Lord Father would oft remind her during those early morn trainings with Robb, Arya, and Theon. Although his face was wet with exertion, he was proud of Sansa. She was like a cat--quick as a shadow and light as a feather. In this moment, she reminded him so much of Elaynna.

She remembered the first time Theon had challenged her to a duel, scoffing at her skill and questioning what she had learned. "Your brother and Lord Father might have gone easy on you, Little Flower, but I will not." Robb had been livid, threatening Theon with castration should harm befall his baby sister, yet Sansa had been ready, prepared. Theon had lunged at her, trying to make her lose focus, but Sansa blocked it easily.

"Watching is not seeing. Seeing, but true seeing...that is the heart of swordplay." Sansa remembered those words, ingrained them within her heart. It was all but a lesson.

Theon was a worthy opponent, reliable, but Sansa had been better. One quick thrust later and he had been disarmed, a dirtied heap in the muck. He had been embarrassed, disgusted that a lady--a girl--bested him. Robb was superior, lauding his sister's skill.

Yet, Sansa had heard none of it, her eyes solely on Theon's face and the crimson streak that ran from his brow to jaw. Oh gods...She had made him bleed!

The scar was thin, but a hairline in width; barely noticeable to the passing stranger. Yet, despite the superficiality of the wound, Theon had bled like a stuck pig. A small smile graced Sansa's lips as she remembered how much the ward ranted and raved, for he had always been a vain man. "It's an improvement," Robb asserted, his blue eyes gleaming at the hilarity.

For a brief moment, Sansa had been appalled at what she had done, for inflicting harm on another. Ladies are supposed to be docile and meek. Yet, Ned was hearing none of it. "All men are made of water. If you pierce them, the water leaks and he will die. That is the frailty of life and the imperfection of man."

Watching Theon bleed like that caused something within Sansa to shift. It was in that moment, Sansa realized that she could take a life, make a man bleed. Once, Robb had told her about a land in Essos, where both the narrow and Shivering Sea meet, Braavos. In Braavos, she had heard that the people lived by a specific creed. "Valar Morghulis," Robb repeated, the words awkward and halting on his tongue. "All men must die."

It had been a long day, a particularly taxing lesson. Robb had not gone easy on her. Aye, all men must die, Sansa concurred, wiping the sweat from her brow, her face dirtied by grime. "But I am no man."

________________________________________________________________________________________

Jon's sword was lying just at her right, resting upon a stool in the corner of the hut. Sansa eyed it,
calculating. She could make for it, the distance was not that great. Mayhap just five more steps...

Yet, what would be the risk? She was standing in the middle of Jon's hut in nothing save a tunic. Sansa was not stupid; men only wanted one thing from a pretty girl. While some men got it using pretty words and false promises, others, like Rattleshirt, just took it.

He was a large man, larger than even Tormund, but he was quick with the alacrity and swiftness of a hunter. He could easily overwhelm her, crush her within his fist like a butterfly. She could scream, he was likely anticipating it, wanting it, but then what? He would more than likely slit her throat before Jon arrived.

No, Sansa would not scream, nor would she beg. There would be only one person walking away tonight. And it would not be him.

"I watched you, waiting for you to come back alone. You were so beautiful tonight. Like a water goddess." Rattleshirt came closer, eyes never leaving her. He stumbled slightly, but quickly regained his footing. It was then Sansa realized that the gods had granted her a small bit of mercy--Rattleshirt was drunk. For as long as she had lived, Sansa never recalled her father deep in his cups, claiming that too much alcohol dulled the senses.

"Did you fuck him? Give him a taste of your ginger mint? He was always such a greedy bastard, never thought to share the spoils."

Sansa took a step to the right, to the blade; small steps, not too quick or sudden. All the while her eyes remained on the leviathan barring the door. "You will die this night, you know this."

It was not an idle threat, something tossed out of anger and frustration, but a promise. Sansa meant to kill this man. One way or another.

*Never hesitate...hesitation leads to mistakes...*

He advanced closer, she could smell the ale on his fetid breath, her stomach churned. "Come now. If Rattleshirt must die tonight, I will see the White Wolf's bitch to the afterlife with me." Sansa lunged towards the blade, mere inches away. Yet it was too late.

With a hiss and a cry, Rattleshirt had grabbed a handful of Sansa's hair, pivoting her around to the front, his face buried on her neck, inhaling her scent. "You will remember this night--my body pressed against yours. You trembling and helpless as I ram my cock into you. You spilling from everyone of your tight little holes. Most importantly, you will know that it is Rattleshirt who owns you, that you are mine."

*One morning, when Sansa was two and ten, her father had sent for a master fencer from Braavos up North to instruct both his daughters. Syrio Forel was the man's name and a former First Sword. Quick and lithe, his fighting was different from the swordplay up North, his movement fluid like water. Sansa and Arya had been entranced by him, by his matchless grace and precision. "We Braavosi don't fear death. We don't fear it because we understand."

Arya scrunched her face, confused. "Understand what?" her grey eyes both intrigued and annoyed. She was frustrated, just as Sansa had been; they had teamed up during practice to best him and he had beaten them both. Soundly.

"We understand that unlike you Northerners with your old gods and you Southroners with your Light of the Seven, there is only one god worth revering--the God of Death. And there is only one thing we say to Death: "Not today.""
Quick, much too quick, with a speed and deftness that surprised her, Sansa again lunged forward to Jon's blade, this time succeeding. Spinning around swiftly, before the wildling had a chance to react, she lodged the sword into the brute's neck, burying it to the hilt. Rattleshirt dropped to his knees, his eyes bulging in disbelief and faint hysteria. The look of the damned, Ser Forel called it. The last look of the dying before The Stranger seized him.

Kneeling before her now, Sansa looked at the languishing man and felt...nothing. No sadness, no fear. Only emptiness. Aye, it had been necessary, for this man tried to rape her and gods know what else. If it had not been him than someone else. She was a killer--like Father, like Uncle Benjen, like Robb. She supposed she was now condemned, along with the rest of them, to the deepest pit of the Seven Hells.

Extracting the knife from the giant's neck, Sansa leaned forward, maintaining eye contact. He was fading, the light slowly diminishing, and yet he still looked feral and angry. No doubt damning her to perdition. Yet it was all too late; she was already there.

"I am far from helpless and I belong to no man."

The wildling spat the ground, his blood thick and crimson, and died. The look of contempt and hatred still upon his mien. *The dragon may breathe fire, Sansa thought absently, and the lion may have brute strength, yet the wolf has fangs.* There was movement to her left. Jon.

"I killed him." It was not a question, but a statement. A rather stupid one. Sansa blinked, barely seeing. "I killed that man."

Sansa did not remember her arm being divested of the sword, or Jon holding her face in his hands. Nor did she remember the trembling of her hands, the blood coating the fingers; the rufescent liquid bright against the dying fire of the hut. Everything was a haze, a blur of confusion and disorientation. Someone must have changed her tunic, for it was different--smelled differently.

All that she remembered in that moment was leaning into Jon's touch, slow and deliberate, her lips meeting his. He moaned, deepening the kiss, leaning into her. Sansa pulled back, and Jon let out a growl of frustration, chasing down her lips. Gods, but he would never tire of her, never tire of this feeling of completion that she alone invoked.

The She-Wolf was speaking and Jon had to strain to his head to hear. "You promised you would not kiss me again lest I asked you." Jon blinked, his heart beginning to splinter in two. *No no no...* He had been so damned close.

"Sansa--"

She kissed him again briefly, silencing him. He watched her intently, silently. His heart a rapid staccato in his ears.

"I am asking you."

She breathed life into him as she leaned over him, a faint whisper against his lips, her own soft and pliant, sweet like nectar and summer dreams. Sansa's kiss was fleeting, a brief interlude, and Jon was bereft, craving more. She was a drug, more potent than the finest Arbor Gold, and Jon wanted more,
more of her. Always.

She pulled back slightly, and Jon reached for her, hysterical and fearful, suddenly incomplete and wanting. She was the embodiment of The Maiden above him, divine and beautiful, a contrast between bright, blinding hope and unfulfilled yearning. Jon was at a loss, afraid to look away from her, afraid that she would disappear, that all of this--this bright hope, this needful yearning--was but a dream that he would soon wake from. He would never wake from her again.

A curtain of fire pooled over her shoulders, mesmerizing him. She was divinity above him, a moon goddess, ethereal colors, crimson hair and eyes of sapphire seas. Jon's fingers threaded through her auburn locks, returning her back to him, kissing her deeply. Sansa smiled as she acquiesced to his voiceless command: a siren's smile, dulcet, honey-sweet and seductive.

Her head dipped down to his once more, tasting him. His breath lost at the feel of her. She was promise. The uncontained hope, the anticipated exaltation and fulfillment.

He stroked her, enjoying the contrast--the soft wetness of her core against the scarred callousness of his fingers. His hands were strong, a man's full grown and strong, fervent and frantic, craving more of what was offered. Sansa began to rock her hips, unbidden, wanting to feel him against her, feel more of his touch.

For the first time, she felt beautiful, wanton, uninhibited. She leaned forward, her hips continuing its undulating beneath his hands, filling him. She needed this, his touch, the gentle firmness of his hands against her.

At that moment, Jon felt drugged, as though he were on a euphoric high he could never come back from. He cupped her sex gently; gasping at her wetness, and felt a moan slowly build within his throat. Sansa lifted her head slowly and arched her back, the movement so fluid, so perfect, that Jon was at a loss. Her skin was of the purest pearl, and she was soft yet lithe, a merging of the divine and the spectacular.

She lowered herself over him, aching and hot, and stilled, waiting. It was strange, this joining and union. Her Lady Mother and Septa had bespoken of the pain, unbearable and searing, white-hot in its intensity. And yet...

Yet...

"Oh..."

Jon's hands skimmed lower, at the meeting of her thighs. He needed her--her touch, her essence. He needed to feel her, to touch her. It would never be enough.

Jon pulled Sansa to him, urgent and frantic, unable to wait any longer. A fervency and hysteria he had never experienced before spurring him on. Now...He needed her now.

Sansa kissed him again, silencing his unspoken request. Her taste providing temporary mollification and respite. No words were needed; they were one.

She pushed forward, sinking down deeply. And it was Jon who gasped, lost. She was so warm, so sweet. Never had he felt like this before, never had he felt such completion, such elation.

Sansa began to move, slowly posting up and down on his length, taking him in with shuddering need. She felt so full, so complete, and yet, she wanted more. What is it you are doing to me, Savage?
Jon surged forward, kissing her, tasting her deeply. He needed her--needed more of her skin in his hands, her hair on his fingertips, her taste on his tongue. More than that, more than this need--this craving--he wanted her heart, to capture the wild and untamable essence of her.

Sansa leaned down, kissing him again, gasping. She was close..so very close. At that moment, she felt as though she were standing at a great precipice, that at any moment, something both terrifying and spectacular was awaiting her. All she had to do was hold on...

Jon clenched his teeth, lost to the feeling. Lowering his hand, his fingers touched her nexus, gently stroking. Sansa arched her back, crying out. Her hips began to undulate, moving faster, harder.

Yes...

Then, just when the sun met the earth, burning and radiant, Sansa cried out, lost to a blinding haze of light and color. Jon followed immediately after, his roar of release splintering the calm tranquility of the morning sky.

Chapter End Notes

All the goodies! We got sex, we got violence, the only thing we're missing is Rock n Roll. However to be fair, though, I was listening to Bruce Springsteen's "Because the Night" while typing this. Also, fast fact: This was the very first time I had EVER written a sex scene.

PS: I know that many will be upset that Jon didn't play the conquering hero and rush in to save Sansa, but I wanted Sansa to have this victory and show both Jon and the rest of the wildling tribe that she doesn't need saving or someone to fight her battles. She is a wolf, and wolves can hold their own.
Clarity

Chapter Summary

"He rode through the streets of the city, 
down from his hill on high, 
O'er the wynds and the steps and cobbles, 
He rode to a woman's sigh 
For she was his secret treasure, 
She was his shame and bliss. 
And a chain and a keep are nothing, 
compared to a woman's kiss. 
For hands of gold are always cold, 
But a woman's hands are warm."

--"For Hands of Gold are Always Cold", GRRM, A Clash of Kings

Chapter Notes

Jon dreams in color, dreams of the future and possibilities; Sansa laments on her irrational decision and wars with her heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Five: Clarity

His world had been dark and grey, dismal and caliginous colors that were once a reflection of his equally bleak and desolate existence. Life was a cruel and fickle place, a world overrun with ugliness, insouciance, and dissolution. Just as in the North, with its coldness and unforgiving terrain, Jon Snow's heart had been as equally cold and severe.

It was safer this way, this apathy and detachment. Better. The more one loved, the weaker he became. The sharper the bite when the inevitable happened and they were ripped from loving embrace. The gods were a cruel and vicious lot, Mance had once warned him. That is why they were gods. One of Mance's enumerable lessons.

Jon remembered the night Lyanna had breathed her last. She had been pregnant, almost five moons gone, when The Stranger took her and his brother within his grasp. Mance had been bereft, inconsolable. A raving paroxysm of madness, grief and hysteria.

For two moons, he had been a recluse, shutting himself up in his and Lyanna's hut, torn between damning the gods to perdition and pleading with them to grant his reunion with her. He had been absent on the day of her funeral, the elders deeming it wise to bar him from the lighting of her funeral pyre, fearful he would do something irrational and stupid to join his beloved to the afterlife. Lyanna had been Mance's balance, his peace. She had soothed him, calmed the raging beast that had once
ran riot and untethered.

She had been his lover, his wife, his confidant, his counsel. Yet, more than that-much, much more than that-she had been his equal, the only one who secured his heart. When she had passed on, she took the flesh and superfluity with her to the grave, leaving Mance with naught save the discarded offals and remains.

While Mance had lost his wife, Jon had lost his mother. He had been but a young boy of seven when her life had been forfeit, but he could still remember her. Her smell of wild dianthus and cinnamon, her smile effervescent and warm like the Dronish sun. She had been his splash of color contrast to the monochromatic monotony of reality. When Lyanna had died, Jon became a shell, a hardened and hollowed out carapace of some once thriving, living thing. He did not dream any longer, fearful that his dreams would be of her, resplendent and waiting, arms outstretched and beckoning. His dreams had ended, forever dormant, once she had gone from the earth, taking all color and vibrancy along with her and leaving only greys and blacks.

Now, though:

Thanks to the She-Wolf, Jon dared once more to dream in color, of passionate, and fiery reds and serene and tranquil azures. She was both fire and ice; burning and all-encompassing, yet cool and temperate simultaneously. Gazing upon her now, in all her raw and splendid glory, Jon was a man resurrected.

"Gods, just look at you," he rasped, threading his fingers through Sansa's crimson mane, now damp with perspiration, stilling her. "You are so beautiful. My red wolf."

Jon reached for her again, half afraid she would disappear before him, dissipate within a plume of heat and sex before his very eyes, and half in need of desperate contact-wanting to feel her beneath his fingers needing to touch her lest he splinter and fall apart to ashes and cinders. He kissed her slowly, languidly, savoring her taste upon her tongue, sweeter than Arbor Gold and honeyed wine. Sweeter than life. She was ambrosia from gods, and Jon was drunk on her.

Sansa lifted her head, a fluid arc, and arched her back, memorizing him. She was close, rocking her hips faster, desperate to get closer to him. She looked glorious riding him, like Visneya Targaryen mounting her dragon, Vhagar. Jon had never seen anything so alluringly beautiful...

"Come for me, Sansa." Jon whispered, calloused hands cinching the smooth silkiness of her hips; not enough to hurt, but hard enough to leave an indentation, a stamp against the luminescence of her skin, evidence that she would never again be the same. His. She was his.

"Come for me, sweet girl."

Jon raised his hips and began to thrust upwards, meeting her. Sansa mewed, and lunged forward, meeting his lip, wanting to silence him lest the spell that existed between them broke, upended. Her eyes were closed and yet she could feel his gaze upon her, transfixed. Winter grey and dilated, nearly obsidian. Watching her with something akin to reverence and worshipful awe.

No doubt he would think her a goddess, a divine being not of this realm, something both magical and alien, beautiful yet foreign. For she was his secret treasure, his shame and his bliss. Sansa could not bring herself to look at him for if she did, she would free-fall and careen down that abysmal, never-ending pit of hatred, shame, and self-loathing. Whore. That is what she was now. A wanton whore.

She could hear her mother's voice in her head, both righteous and dissenting.
What are you worth now that you have given him your virtue? Who will want you? You are no better than a common slattern in the brothels of Wintertown.

As a tear trickled down her cheek, Sansa splintered and fell apart, lost to the feel of Jon's fingers upon her pearl, the golden haze quickly seizing and enshrouding her within its blinding glory. Jon followed immediately after, crying out as he reached the precipice. Sansa slumped forward, boneless, her hair, now saturated with sweat, tucked beneath his chin.

Jon was euphoric, for it was like all the puzzle pieces fit together now, she was that one missing piece that Jon had searched relentlessly for and yet had managed to evade him, just at his fingertips and forever beyond reach. He would never be without her again. She was now a part of him, an extension. Where he ended, she now began.

Sansa could feel him playing with her hair and she looked up, watching him admire the auburn locks, threading them through his fingers. "When I was a boy, a witch told me that I would fall in love with a kneeler. That she would be kissed by fire. She also told me that she would be my destiny and my destruction as well should I not take heed." He kissed her then; it was not a gentle lover's kiss, but one gripped by urgency and possessiveness.

"Yet, laying here in your arms, all I find is sanctuary and respite. You are my sanctuary."

Sansa remained quiet and aloof, only listening. She was positioned within a precarious situation, teetering on the edge. The words were sweet, vaunted declarations that she would have loved to have whispered to her all those many years ago when she was that stupid little girl rife with summer songs of golden knights upon white destriers. Yet, she was no longer that naïve child, but a woman full grown. She no longer sang any songs and only the silence lingered. Summer may be here, but all she felt was the cold bareness of winter.

The wildling's words were beautiful, yet Sansa could not allow herself the distraction. Everything was different now-she was now different. Only virtuous maids were allowed the possibility of love, to luxuriate in its vast warmth and phosphorescence. She was no longer that maid, only but a hollowed shell.

She had given herself to him, using her only card to barter with. She knew the risks and had calculated well. Rattleshirt had been but a pawn, an expendable pawn that she was well-rid of. Although Sansa had not wanted to kill him, she had no other alternative, she could at least find comfort in that he would no longer be allowed to impose his will on someone else.

She now found herself in a new sort of danger, one more terrifying than Rattleshirt could ever aspire to be. Soon, Jon would tire of her, discard her like an unwanted toy after all novelty wore off. Sure, Sansa could play the game and keep up with the charade, but for how long? How long would she be forced to play marionette and endure this pretense until the hollowed shell she so carefully and meticulously erected disintegrated and crumbled about her?

She was in love with him, in love with Jon Snow. How did this come about, Sansa was not certain, but there it was - irrefutable and damning. She was in love with this wildling savage, but yet it could never be.

If only...The words stung, acrid and sharp like wormwood. If only.

Jon wrapped his arm around her form, securing her to him, seeking both succor and warmth. Sansa leaned in, allowing his touch, allowing a few more lasting moments within the encircle of his arms, basking in his warmth. He was her summer knight, all that she had secretly yearned for. Yet, sadly, it was not her reality. Soon, she would leave him and all pretense behind. Dreams were a welcomed
escape, yet now it was time to wake. The sun would soon set and night would be upon her.

Chapter End Notes

It's been too long and I have gotten a wee bit rusty. My apologies. I promise it will get better. In regards to Jon and Sansa? It seems as though they are perpetually entangled in this ongoing dance of two steps forward, one step back.
"I am a proud man, Lady Stark. But even the proudest of men will become beggars at the behest of their children. Suppose you have some affection for Jon, somewhere within the depths of your heart. I beg you—hurt him to love him. Hurt him to save him. Only by breaking his heart can you offer salvation."

Mance and Sansa have an important conversation and decisions must be made...
Nothing like a lil' bit of angst to ring in the New Year!

Chapter Twenty-Six: Retrospection

"Do you love my son?" Mance's question was a simple one, honest and bereft of all duplicity and guile. Yet, in spite of the simplicity of the inquiry, there was a steady hollowing within the pit of Sansa's stomach. At that moment, she was not standing at the center of Mance Rayder's hut, facing the staid and pensive King-Beyond-the-Wall, but instead submerged within the frigid, glacial depths of the North Sea.

She felt frozen, pegged. Rooted to the spot, akin to a convict facing execution, or a hare staring down the jaws of a ravenous, solitary wolf. Sansa opened her mouth, the lie ready upon her lips. If she lied, she could gain further control of her heart and harden it fully, once more assume the guise of a that cold, stoic Ice Queen.

"Lie! Lie, damn you! You have already told so many lies, what's one more, surely? Yet, all mendacity Sansa had ready died as soon as she met Mance's steady gaze. While Jon's eyes were piercing, able to stop a man with a single, deliberate glance, Mance's eyes were terrifying. Darker than obsidian, they were bottomless; able to pierce both bone and marrow once they leveled and held. Yet despite their illimitability, they were not cruel or empty, not like Ramsay's icy depths or Ygritte's hollowed pools. No, instead they were the eyes of an arbitrator, wise and omniscient. Automatically, Sansa remembered Old Nan and her unflinching stare.

She tried again, this time ready. Sansa raised her chin, her own blue gaze both cool and leveled. She could do this. She could match wits with the Wildling king. She could match wits with any man.

"No." There, she had said it. The utterance was simple, a single-syllabled admission, and yet it felt as though her heart had shredded. Nothing. There was nothing, only a hollowed, tattered muscle that continued to bleed and bleed and bleed.

Mance had wanted to see her, the news of the wolf maid slaying the formidable Lord of Bones had spread throughout the camp. The whispers were hushed, yet laced with admiration and reverence. As a practical and pragmatic man, Mance was solicitous in believing such proclamations. Nay, it was
impossible that such a meek, timid slip of a girl could fell such a brute. More than likely, Rattleshirt
met his demise (greatly deserved and long overdue, if one were to ask Mance) through some sort of
folly or imbecility. Perhaps he had partaken in too much mead and had goaded Tormund into a row.
There had been no love lost between the red-haired wild man and the bellicose Lord of Bones. Many
a time, Giantsbane had vowed to gut him, mayhap he had finally delivered on his promise...

Yet, Mance had inspected the body and assessed the damage. Only one seized with unharnessed
rage could inflict so much debasement. Mayhap he had been wrong. Mayhap the docile and timid
she-wolf had some fight within her somewhere, lurking just beneath the pretty wrapping and
exterior.

Mance nodded, an imperceptible gesture of concession, yet his eyes remained measured and
remained impassive, conveying nothing. It was unnerving, for Sansa was almost certain he was
disassembling her piece by piece, like an old tunic slowly becoming unraveled at the seams. "'Tis a
pity, then. You have made him happy, the happiest he has been since..." He need not finish the
statement, for Sansa already knew.

Since his mother.

Jon had spoken of his mother only the once, after he had made love to her that fated night. There was
a pooling between her thighs as Sansa recalled the way he touched her as he loved her so tenderly,
so sweetly. Before, she had never thought it possible a wildling could be gentle, let alone considerate
in his reciprocity. Yet Jon had been attentive, careful. His touches light and but a whisper of
fingertips, reverent and worshipful as they ghosted over her skin. Sansa doubted Ramsay could ever
be so gentle or deliberate.

"I am certain I am just a novelty to him, your Grace." Sansa replied, succinctly, her cheeks aflame.
She need not be embarrassed, she was a woman grown after all. Yet, there was something
embedded within the wily King's obsidian gaze that unnerved her, coupled with the small smile that graced the
corner of his mouth.

He knows...

"Hmmmm. Yes, but my son is in love with you. What think you on that?" It was a loaded question and
Mance knew it. Had he lived south of The Wall, he would have made a formidable lord somewhere.
No doubt, he would have fared exceedingly well at the Southrone courts within the Red Keep.

Sansa chose not to respond. For what could she say to pacify him? I love him. I love him not. I love
him. I love him not. And so the game continues.

"I know my son. I have spent nine and ten years assessing his moods; more than enough time to
know what makes him happy. Suppose you love my son, just queer speculation. Are you prepared to
face the consequences for this affection and fancy? For this love? My son is a bit like you in a way-a
lover of songs. He told me that the day he first looked upon you, you were on horseback, singing of
Aemon the Dragon knight and his love for Queen Naerys."

Sansa stilled, her breath almost forfeit. She remembered that day vividly. All the best and finest
dressmakers had come to Winterfell to fit her for her wedding gown—a horrendous tent of silk, ivory
Myrish lace and gold embroidery. Sansa wanted something simpler, less ostentatious, reflecting her
love of the North and of her lineage. Yet Ramsay had insisted. He always insisted.

For two solid, agonizing hours, Sansa played the demure, subservient lady to perfection: tranquil,
meek and unassuming in her passivity and obeisance. Yet all the while, she was livid, her insides in
revolt. Her fingers itched, desiring to rent the monstrous confection into shreds. It was naught save a
leash, a restraint meant to tether her to him permanently. Did he not know that wolves ran free, belonged to no man?

The time seemed interminable, yet at last-blessedly-they had gone, Lord Bolton and his bastard. Sansa felt something shift, an oppressive, stifling weight. She was free if only for a moment. She did not have to endure Ramsay's lecherous stares and misplaced hands—she would have a lifetime of that.

As soon as they had left, Sansa quickly changed, not wanting to suffer another second under the mountainous fabric or ensnared within its deceptive beauty. She saddled her mare then and raced for the wolfswood, Robb, Jory, and two trusted guards in tow. Perhaps it was undignified and unladylike. Perhaps she was acting like a hellion racing through the forests, but at that moment, she had not cared; she just wanted away, as far away from this lunacy as her mare could take her.

It was Robb who had begged for a song, wanting to hear his sweet baby sister's mellifluous voice once more. She had been blessed with the gift of song, Sansa had. The gods had seen to it. Before Ramsay, before the betrothal, she was like a nightingale, a song ready upon her lips. Now...now the songs had been silenced and stifled. Another of Ramsay Bolton's doings.

And so Sansa sang. She sang of the famed dragon knight, of his unmatched valor. She sang of the pious and fair Queen Naerys and of her loveless marriage to Aegon the Unworthy. She sang of their ill-fated love that doomed them all, of what could never be. And her heart broke, shattered at the unfairness of it all.

It had been her favorite when she was but a girl, when true love was real, open, and raw. It made her hope, and yearn. And burn with an all-consuming inferno. Queen Naerys and Aemon. Jonquil and Florian. Life was not a song, Sansa knew that firsthand. Ramsay Bolton had all but ensured it. There were no Jonquils or Florians; no honorable Aemons or Naeryses. Yet there, within the seclusion and sanctuary of the wolfswood, Sansa sang. Clear, lilting and dulcet. Rising high into the heavens, for only the gods to hear.

Mance had been speaking to her then and Sansa blinked to regain focus. Her thoughts were riotous and dissonant, her heart a cacophony within the confines of her chest. Mance had to all but incline his head a mere fraction to hear it. She swallowed slowly and willed the rebellious tendon to still, her face both impassive and concealed.

As painful as this was, such self-preservation and assiduity were necessary. The Seven-Pointed Star denounced lying, stating that such duplicity and deception were one of the most egregious of sins. The ones found with its poison upon their lips were cast down, condemned to the deepest level of the Seven Hells. We all are liars here. All of us.

"You are aware that your kin, Benjen Stark, is on a mission to retrieve you, are you not? Along with your betrothed, a hundred men march North of The Wall."

The ice Sansa had so meticulously erected began to slowly percolate and thaw. Uncle Benjen. Benjen Stark was coming—accompanied by Ramsay. Oh gods. No doubt Ramsay would kill every single man, woman, and babe if he thought they were a barrier to her. And Jon...Jon was capable of anything; she had bore witness to his unbridled fury firsthand.

It was unfathomable to think he would allow her to walk away from him. Not now. Not after...

"My son will fight for you, you know this. He is in love with you and it will kill him, one way or another. I-" Mance blinked and looked away, suddenly upended. There it was, the unravelling, the coming undone. Here, right before her eyes, the King-Beyond-the-Wall was falling apart at the
seams. Sansa would not have thought it possible.

He swallowed thickly and exhaled. All vulnerability had now faded and the once insuperable wall of stoicism resumed. It had been but a moment—a mere second—yet the ripples were everlasting, casting its shadows.

"I am a proud man, Lady Stark. But even the proudest of men will become beggars at the behest of their children. Suppose you have some affection for Jon, somewhere within the depths of your heart. I beg you—hurt him to love him. Hurt him to save him. Only by breaking his heart can you offer salvation."

Sansa remained mute, her tongue suddenly numb and thickened. He made it sound so simple, as though it were the logical explanation in the world. Yet, how could he know?

"You say you know your son, your Grace, that you know him better than any man. Then you should know that he cannot be deterred or shaken. Perhaps you are right, perhaps he has developed an affection for me. Then what? You think he will just relinquish me and let me go?"

Sansa was desperate, nearly hysterical. It was perhaps the closest she had come to losing all equanimity and control. She was tired, so damned exhausted.

"You are a Stark of Winterfell. The blood of the Wolf-Maid, Allyria the Fair, and the First Men run through your veins. They were survivors, who did what needed to be done to survive and live. Had we lived in another world, another time where we had control of our lives, I would have welcomed you into my arms as a daughter, for not only does my son love you, but my people as well. Alas, that is not our reality. Save him, Sansa. Save him from himself."

Jon had been gentle and thorough as he made love to her that night. His kisses were ardent, yet sweet. Light, like snowflakes caressing her skin in a gentle lover's embrace. His thrusts were slow and deliberate, completing her. Sansa tried to detach herself from him, remove herself from the myriad of emotions that only he could invoke within her. However, she had been powerless to resist him as she had been the very first time he loved her.

She felt the familiar tightening low within the depths of her belly, a delicious clenching sensation. She was close, her walls enclosing around his length. Jon moaned and reached down between them, to where they were joined, his fingers searching. Suddenly, Sansa was engulfed within a haze of light and color, its intensity and vibrancy overcoming her. She convulsed, shattered and boneless, succumbing to tide and pull of him.

Later, as he slept on, Sansa quickly dressed and fled the hut. She had given him Essence of Nightshade, as it grew in abundance in the wild, mixing three drops of it into his mead. Although Muirgayne had assured her that the drug was fast-acting, taking effect quickly, Sansa had to flee. The longer she remained, the more precarious her predicament.

She reached her silvered mare, her one sole familiarity since the abduction, and untehetered the reins. The mare gave a soft nicker in greeting and nudged Sansa's hand gently. "Hush, my beauty. Soon, we will fly, like a bird taking wing."

The map had said that it would tale about three weeks to reach Castle Black, another of Muirgayne's gifts. She had enough provisions and there was a river that flowed from the camp. All she had to do was follow it.
"Go east, towards the rising sun. Do not stop riding until you reach home."

Sansa embraced Muirgayne, willing herself not to cry. She had been good to her, she and Tormund both, and she would miss them terribly, but she had to leave, had to get away. She would die if she remained, more importantly, she would be sentencing thousands of innocents to their demise should she stay.

As she galloped across the moors, Sansa heard the lone, solitary cry of a wolf, its mournful howl reaching its crescendo before tapering off in the night. A moment later, another wolf's cry carried over the plain, high and keening. This one however, was lighter, not as deep as its mate's, haunting.

Sansa wanted to turn around, to return to the camp. To return to Jon Snow's arms, yet she knew she could not. A tear slipped down her cheek. Then another. This time, she allowed the heartbreak. She could not look back, no matter how much she wished otherwise. She could only look forward-to home. To Winterfell.

"If I look back, I am lost."

Chapter End Notes

*sighs* These two...
On a serious note, please, if you have any constructive criticism or ideas on how this narrative should go, I am more than open. I have hit a snag and I am unsure how I want to conclude this story, although I have a ways to go. I have a general idea in my head, but it is sometimes difficult to manifest that idea on paper. For those who have continued to stick with me--a HUGE thank you!<3 I will never find the adequate words or expression to convey my gratitude to you all.
Demon

Chapter Summary

"I love to hunt, you see. While many may think it cruel, it's all but a game to me. A fortnight ago, my hounds and I cornered a lone doe in the woods. After I loosed my arrow and felled her, I watched her in her final moments. Have you ever seen an animal as it lay dying-look deep into their eyes? It is the sweetest thing next to killing. It is in that moment, you are the closest thing to divinity, having the power of life and death. I oft wondered if that was how my father looked that night, knowing that he was to die and that at that moment, someone else was God."

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the wait! I was struggling with this chapter, and then we just returned to work from Christmas Break. Here, we find Benjen Stark and Ramsay Bolton having a little "get to know you" beyond The Wall...and a few other things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Demon

The man beside him cursed, the oath, although a low mutter, shattering the imposed silence enshrouding them. First Ranger Benjen Stark scowled, his cobalt eyes cutting the man to the quick. A warning. The soldier quickly averted his gaze, a hasty apology upon his lips.

He was a Bolton man, judging by the sigil upon his breast. A boy. Clean shaven, bright-eyed and eager. Too young, Benjen thought grimly. Too young, too green, too damned stupid to know better, to understand the perils that awaited them all beyond the sanctuary and confines of The Wall.

Benjen furrowed his brow, he was angry now. The boy was but a milksop, mayhap only five and ten years of age-too young to know the warmth of a woman, to father sons. He would be dead soon, the reality penetrated something deep within the grizzled ranger, a jolting ache. It was not right. None of it.

Soldiers had no business traversing beyond the realm, North men or no. They were too soft-callow and untried. Benjen had vehemently argued against this folly when the young Bolton voiced his demands, but had been so cavalierly dismissed. The Bolton heir had been emphatic, all warnings and discretion effectively ignored.

Benjen chanced a glance at the Bolton lordling, his lips curling. This was the man who was to take Sansa to wife in less than a moon's time. Benjen shook his head in bewilderment and disbelief. He had only met the lad but a week prior, and already the aversion was immediate in its fervor.

*How the fuck did it all come to this?*

The boy was a monster, no more a noble than the rapists, murderers and reprobates serving in the
Night's Watch. Wild, untamable and cruel. There was a madness and lunacy residing beneath the glacial, distant stare and tremoring hands. Yet, beyond the mania and instability, there was a deep despotism that lurked just at the surface.

"My condolences on the sudden passing of your father, Lord Ramsay." The words were regurgitated and forced, a false courtesy. Although life on The Wall distanced Benjen from the politics of the realm, he remembered the elder Bolton well. Mostly, Benjen remembered the paleness of his eyes—like two pale stones—and the coarse whisper of his voice, although spider-soft, would invoke an unwanted tremor to all who heard it. Benjen shuddered; and he found himself almost glad the man was dead.

He knew it was wrong, barbaric, to wish death on another, yet Benjen did not have it in him to care. Roose Bolton was a treasonous cur, his house alone was responsible for the chaos that splintered the North into two. Thousands of men had forfeited their lives for one man's envy and covetousness. Benjen looked askance at Ramsay, his rage bubbling.

What's worse, his beloved niece was to marry his spawn, all for the sake of securing a lasting armistice. Although tenuous at best, no doubt the marriage would still transpire despite the elder Bolton's recent demise. Sansa Stark was too valuable a prize to relinquish and Ramsay Bolton was not one to lose.

Benjen shuddered again, suddenly wishing his position did not call for such rigid equanimity and objectivity. The young Bolton nodded his thanks, it was an imperceptible gesture, barely a decline of his chin, yet he remained silent, impassive, his winter gaze unblinking as it looked out the horizon. Benjen was nonplussed, surely the passing of one's own father would yield more of a visceral reaction? However, gaging the lordling ahead of him— the devoid of emotion, the complete apathy—Benjen was reminded of that of stone. Even then, he thought, amazed, stone held more sentiment.

Against his better judgement, Benjen pressed on. "I am sure it must be difficult, what with Sansa's abduction and your lord father's sudden passing. Everything seems to be off-kilter."

The dark-haired man made a non-committal grunt of concession, yet remained stoic.

"My father will be greatly missed, yet he was a fool. It was no secret he had his share of enemies; it was only a pity he did not see how close they really were."

Benjen stilled, his breath caught. Was this an admission of guilt? He gripped the hilt of his sword as he eyed the Bolton heir. Bastard. The word came suddenly, unbidden. You are nothing but a bastard and there is no honor in you. A lowly, scurrilous dog. Kinslayer.

"We all have our enemies." Benjen conceded tightly. It would be too easy, Benjen thought darkly. Too easy to kill this man and be done with it. He would surely not be missed.

"Aye," Ramsay answered, loftily, a hint of a smirk gracing his lips. "But what is it that they say? Oh yes: One should always keep his enemies close at all times, lest he will have a dozen knife wounds at his back."

The ravens came roughly a sennight ago, heralding the news. Roose Bolton had been found dead on his banquet hall, his skin pallid and ashen, vomit and spittle congealing about his purpling lips. His eyes, once a pale blue, now lifeless and still, staring up something just beyond. A goblet of wine had later been discovered near the corpse, yet all remains of its contents gone.

Ramsay had conveniently vanished when the ghastly discovery had been made. None were so foolish as to interrogate the Mad Dog, no, for that was sheer madness. Yet the servants' tongues
wagged. A few who had been present during Roose Bolton's final moments witnessed the row the two men had earlier that morn. Roose had been incensed, lamenting on the death of Domeric, his true born heir and denouncing his bastard on his house's travails and ill-fortune.

Ramsay had been contrite, reduced once again to that of the dirtied, gaunt orphan boy unwanted by the world. He tried to apologize, yet all words of atonement were lost on his lips when the elder lord, drunk on anger and inconsolable grief, backhanded him, the blow ricocheting off the cold, stone walls and knocking Roose to the ground. Roose had then ordered the bastard out of his sight, but not before Ramsay, silent seething and glacial, the blow a scarlet blemish against his pale cheek, vowed retribution. The words were muted and indecipherable, none could hear the exchange, yet Roose blanched at them, his eyes widening and mouth agape. It had been the first time anyone could remember the Dreadfort lord trembling at his son, for it had always been the opposite; Roose was the one with the leash, able to control and tether his corybantic son.

Later that evening, Roose had been ensconced within his solar, reviewing various scrolls and maps when a servant entered, gifting him with a flagon of wine, confirming it was from the Dustin House. The Dustin's had at one time been kin to the Boltons by way of marriage, so there was no cause for concern. Roose had all but partaken in his first sip when the convulsions came, sudden and swift, and he was reduced to that of an animal cloying at his throat.

If only he had known, the servants would whisper. If only he had known Ramsay had been seen conferring with the apothecary, secreting small vials of The Strangler, then mayhaps Roose would have never accepted the accursed wine. If only he had known that rabid dogs could never be docile, but could only be restrained for so long before they succumbed to their inner demons and turned on their masters. They could never be loyal, not for long durations of time, anyway. Such conscientiousness was false, as foreign and unfamiliar as love. Mayhap if he had known, Roose would be alive still...

Benjen glanced at Ramsay, measuring him. The grip of the hilt tightening, his knuckles white and taut. He had made vows before the weirwood tree, swearing to safeguard the lives of those within the realm-noble and baseborn alike. Yet how it would be so easy...Gods, but if only. Benjen's fingers thrummed and itched in wanting.

The elder Bolton may have been a hard man, callous and unfeeling, yet Ramsay was a lunatic. A virulent, frothing beast. And Sansa was the sacrificial lamb. The bells rang riot in Benjen's head, a loud, dissentious cacophony of discord.

"You have questions for me, First Ranger. I see it in your eyes. Think you I killed my beloved father, eh? That I silenced the fearsome and odious Leech Lord."

A cruel smile graced Ramsay's lips, dark and twisted. A hint of mania slowly beginning to emerge from its murky depths.

"I love to hunt, you see. While many may think it cruel, it's all but a game to me. A fortnight ago, my hounds and I cornered a lone doe in the woods. After I loosed my arrow and felled her, I watched her in her final moments. Have you ever seen an animal as it lay dying-look deep into their eyes? It is the sweetest thing next to killing. It is in that moment, you are the closest thing to divinity, having the power of life and death. I oft wondered if that was how my father looked that night, knowing that he was to die and that at that moment, someone else was God."

There were only a handful of times in First Ranger Benjen Stark's recollection in where he felt terror-true, abject terror. The kind of terror and hysteria that both seeped into one's bones and held him within its clamping, talon grasp and refused to yield. He had felt fear before, yes. There had been that one time in his first year of being a ranger in where he and a small patrol of fellow upstarts-eager,
wide-eyed, and foolish, so damned foolish-encountered a clan of wildlings at the Fist of the First Man.

They had been out resourced, outwitted and outnumbered, five wildlings to their one patrolman. Only he and another lad, Rodger, survived the ambush, and only because their newly elected King and turn-cloak, Mance Rayder, had ordered his men to cease their butchery. Yet not before leaving Benjen with a parting gift—a bolt to the leg that rendered him nearly incapacitated and with a permanent limp.

Mance had almost destroyed Benjen's life that day and had nearly taken away the one thing that he had cared about. He had felt hatred that night—raw, blistering, pulsing hatred for Mance Rayder, the wildlings, and those of his ilk—but not fear. He did not fear death; rangers embraced such grim fatalism with stalwart defiance. Death was all but a means to an end. Besides, all men died sooner or later, yet very few ever truly lived.

There had been other times in where Benjen Stark encountered similar fear during escapades beyond The Wall, yet this...This was the first time in his two score years of life where he encountered terror in the embodiment of Ramsay Bolton. No doubt, he truly was The Stranger's Son. The man was a pestilence, a walking plague that spread hysteria and trepidation to all who were unfortunate enough to stand in his wake.

Benjen gripped the pommel of his sword, envisioning plunging the cold steel in the Bolton's back, burying it to the hilt. Aye, it was cravenly and odious to think on. No doubt such a deed would call for his immediate execution. Benjen could already feel the noose constricting about his throat, his neck snapping upon impact, his eyes, two bulging, slate-blue discs, staring out at a vast sea of nothingness. And yet, he had not it in him to care.

Such insouciance was dangerous, Benjen knew, and yet he felt nothing. It would all be worth it, that dark, homunculus would whisper. What's one more Bolton compared to the life of your niece? It would be a mercy.

Benjen's fingers itched, anxious and impatient. Soon. It would all be over soon…

The soft, almost imperceptible sound of leather meeting steel caused Ramsay to turn his head slightly. The Mad Dog's senses were heightened, Benjen mused. The two locked eyes and held-pale ice against slate. There was nothing, save the impregnable silence that saturated the ground, as if all the world was suspended, holding its breath in anticipation, waiting.

If the Bolton was aware that these moments were possibly his last, he gave nothing away to convey his unease. He only continue to stare, holding Benjen captive with his lifeless, blue gaze. Paler than ice and equally as cold, they reminded Benjen of those of a White Walker. And yet, therein lie the irony: the White Walkers were all gone, now reduced to that of a fanaticism and myth, the last documented sighting well over two millennia ago. Yet, despite being a walking corpse of ice and crystal, there was an intelligence and humanity within their frozen depths. Ramsay was real, tangible and present, and yet, when staring into his azure eyes, there was nothing—nothing save depravity and mania.

The seconds elapsed, melting away into minutes, and time seemed to pause. Then, Ramsay smiled, a cold, cruel and mirthless twist of his lips. "Do you want to be a god, Benjen Stark? To seize divinity within your hands? It would only take but a moment and fortune favors the bold."

As Benjen drew his sword, there was a loud disturbance just ahead, shattering the tension between the two men.
"Lord Bolton! First Ranger!" Benjen snapped his head at the calling of his name, sheathing his sword. Harrold and Edwyn were approaching, an urgency spurring their movements. Something was amiss.

Oh gods.

 Hastening his horse forward, Benjen raced towards the commotion, his heart in his throat. He had to be ready, prepared. Come what may. He had to be ready. Cat and Ned deserved some respite.

It was a woman, Benjen observed, taking in her gaunt frame and shredded garb. Her skin, though pale, was dirtied, caked in both grime and blood. Yet, it was the color of her hair that gave Benjen Stark pause. Red.

Sansa.

While Sansa's hair was more auburn, a rich, molten copper, this woman's hair was russet. It did not hold the luster and shine of his niece's hair nor its length. Instead, this stranger's hair was matted, dirtied and dull. A sigh of relief Benjen had not been aware he had been holding, escaped him. It was not Sansa. Thank the gods.

"Tis a woman, a wildling." Harrold's eyes perused the strange captive, watchful. He had seen wildlings aplenty, as had all of Benjen's men. Benjen noted his man's restlessness and knew it for what it was-unease. It was rare that a wildling would be alone about the moors, even rarer for a woman. No doubt, she was sent as a decoy. She was bait for the enemy, a trap sent to lure them all to their unsuspecting deaths.

If it had been another time, Benjen would have relished at the prospect of extirpating wildlings, picking them off one by one. Yet, there were more urgent matters to attend. Sansa was missing and answers were scarce. She-whoever she was-was their best hope.

Ramsay dismounted and circled the wildling slowly, almost curiously. Immediately, Benjen was reminded again of a wild dog-an ebullient, frothing mongrel high off bloodlust. And she was the prey.

The Bolton kneeled slowly before her, gripping handfuls of her dirtied hair in his fist, forcing her to meet his glacial stare.

"What is your name, wildling?" The girl-a woman, for she looked to be of late teenage years-remained silent, her eyes watchful and defiant. Ramsay smiled, tightening his grip about her hair, eliciting a sharp, pained hiss.

"Ygritte." The woman continued to watch the Bolton, silent and perusing. Yet, there was no fear, no hysteria. Only open curiosity, and daresay, queer fascination. It was akin to the long-awaited meeting of two shared souls parted only by distance and time.

"Tell me, Ygritte. Do you like to play games? If you tell me what I want to know, you will live another day. If you lie to me, I will skin you, piece by fucking piece."

Ygritte remained silent, continuing to watch Ramsay, assessing for any falsity or artifice. The minutes passed and Benjen was reminded of a pendulum swinging back and forth. Truth or dare. Truth or dare. Truth or dare.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the wildling-Ygritte-smiled. "What do you want to know?"
Dun-Dun-Duh! *cue in dramatic, cliffhanger music* I felt as though we needed to switch perspectives and become reintroduced to Benjen and Ramsay. Oh, btw--what do you think Ygritte is going to reveal? Please read and review!
Chapter Summary

"...Your love will kill me
Your love will kill me
And you will bear my curse
As long as my life will be

Your love will kill me
Your love will kill me
And I saw it would be
When I looked at you
When you look at me..."

Daniel Lavoie, "Your Love Will Kill Me"

Chapter Notes

Jon wakes up and remembers sweet memories of the she-wolf...and rages.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Wanting

The forest was still, tranquil and silent. The silver peale of the moon casting a luminescent and serene glow about the woods. The Old Gods were here this night, their magic strong--ubiquitous and potent. It was foolish to traverse through the moors at night alone, Jon knew, and yet he was not afraid.

Ghost had left his side and ran ahead of him. Although silent as the shadows, a veritable phantom through the trees, the beast was agitated, anxious. Jon knew the wolf's moods well, for he was but an extension of himself. He could sense every change and transition. The wolf's steps were urgent, swift in his immediacy and need.

Now. We must hurry now. Faster.

Jon hastened his steps, running now. Something was amiss. Ghost's movements were deft, quickly dipping and vanishing among the trees and brush, disquieted. Jon called out to the albino direwolf, once, twice, thrice. This was peculiar. Although one could never tame a wild thing, for as long as Jon had known the creature, he had never acted so out of turn.

A few moments later, Jon caught sight of the large direwolf as it entered into the forest thicket. Jon drew closer, his arm extended and stretched, his breath labored; suspended. Another moment passed and then, emerging out of the clearing, both terrifying and resplendent, was the phantom red
The wolf was beautiful, ethereal and divine in its appearance as it stood watching him, its golden eyes both patient and serene. Ghost reemerged then, standing at the specter-wolf’s side. Jon called out to him, fearful despite Ghost’s larger stature, yet the beast remained rooted to the red wolf’s side.

Ghost whined, a high and keening sound, frantic and insistent. What is it, boy? What are you trying to tell me, Jon wondered. And then, Jon knew.

But a moment later, a pup emerged from the thicket, small and frail, its fur a dark timber-grey. Jon stood transfixed as he watched the wolf pack before him. Suddenly, Ghost reared his massive head back and emitted a howl, powerful and lamenting as it reverberated throughout the forest. Soon, the red wolf joined in, joining her mate in their wolf song. It was both haunting and beautiful, tragic and yet hopeful simultaneously. It was a song of resilience, of new beginnings. Of hope.

The lone wolf dies, but the pack survives…

And there, in the midst of the forest woods, Jon listened, his heart both bursting and full.

Two days. It had been two days since she had vanished into the night. As if she had never been. Gone. She was gone. The words feeling akin to a thousand knife wounds to his chest, to his heart. The finality of it leaving a festering, gaping chasm so wide and insuperable that Jon felt as though he were percolating. He hurt. Ah gods! How he hurt, a deep, throbbing ache…

And then he raged. And raged. And raged.

He had heard the lone, solitary cry of the wolf that night and reached out to hold her, to take solace in her warmth…only to realize he was alone in his hut. Jon was unconcerned, however; the she-wolf was oft restless and valued her solitude. Besides, she could hold her own, as Rattleshirt ascertained first handedly. The beginnings of a wicked smile tickled at Jon’s lips as he began to dress.

This was all but a game, a sweet, tantalizing game of intrigue that she wanted to partake in. And Jon was willing and eager, wanting to luxuriate and indulge in Sansa’s sweetness. Ever since that night with Rattleshirt, he felt a deep, insatiable hunger that could not be abated, but only continued to exacerbate and deepen. He could not get enough of her, could not quench this unabated need of her.

Was this how Bael the Bard felt with his own she-wolf all those eons past? Was such a love possible, all-encompassing and raw with its potency?

Jon finished dressing and made his way to the lake. He closed his eyes, envisioning her. Auburn hair wet and slick against luminous pearl, eyes of indigo dusk managing both innocence and daring; a siren’s smile upon her lips. She looked so beautiful that night, a manifestation of all of Jon’s bright, glittering hopes and secret dreams. And Jon held on tightly, feverish; fearful that at any moment, she would vanquish and all his yearnings would disintegrate before him into millions of tiny shards of color and light.

And yet she had…

Jon’s heart throbbed anew, so piercing an ache he was rendered breathless. At that moment, Jon
felt like a butterfly bereft of his wings—torn, shredded and discarded. She was not at the lake. Nor at the weirwood tree. Jon frowned at that, feeling as though his insides had turned into ash. He ran back to the hut, frantic.

“Sansa!” Yet there was no reply, save only the desperate echo of his voice as it reverberated through the midnight sky. Jon felt numb, empty and hollow as he made his way woodenly to the hut. He did not need to go to where Sansa’s mare had been tied, for he knew it would not be there. Jon’s knees buckled as the finality and realization hit him anew.

Oh gods…

Jon eyed the discarded cup in the corner of the hut and sniffed. Although faint, there was no mistaking the sickly-sweet smell. Nightshade. Jon trembled in both horror and revulsion.

Nightshade was a sedative use to quiet the senses. Mance had been given doses of it in his ale after the death of Lyanna. One drop to calm the frayed nerves, three drops to lull into a deep, weightless sleep. Ten drops, even diluted into a cup of wine, summoning death.

It was the gentlest of toxins, Jon knew. As dangerous as it was efficacious. The perfect drug to use in an escape.

Jon trembled in anger. And realization. Only two women in the village held knowledge of the herbs and flora that grew about the camp. Ygritte had gone, absconding into the night. As irrational as she was, Jon knew that she would never risk recapture simply for retribution. That only left another--Murgayne.

Jon roared, hurling the cup against the far wall. He began to pace, the desire to destroy the hut coursing through him, burning in its fervor. He felt caged, restless. He felt the epitome of the Northern Fool. A damned, Northern Fool.

How in the seven hells had it come to this?

He had been the one to lay the traps, to look for all duplicity and subterfuge. At one time, he could have easily rooted out any signs of deception. Now, it felt as though he had been played at his own game. Gods, but the betrayal stung and singed. Had she planned this all along? Biding her time until she was able to rid herself of him?

Jon thought back to their last encounter—of her soft moans and chirps, her hungry kisses that she lavished upon him and would set his blood aflame. She had initiated their lovemaking that time, two nights ago. She had been forceful in her ministrations, much to Jon’s glee and elation. Since the death of Rattleshirt, it had been Jon to initiate their couplings thereafter and not the other way around. Though Sansa initiated the first contact, she had been hesitant, timid. However, the she-wolf was eager and willing, so sweetly willing in reciprocating and luxuriating in his caresses and touches.

Yet she would always hold back, always restrain herself from loving him fully and completely. She was still every bit the docile and proper lady, no doubt she had been thoroughly inculcated in the rules of propriety and chastity, not in the wild abandon that was the Free Folk way. Jon knew that he would have to remedy that.

His britches clenched at a memory, temporary stilling the inferno within him.

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She was trembling in his arms, a butterfly newly emerging from its chrysalis. Jon kissed her ardently, calming her nerves and providing succor simultaneously. Despite what they had just done,
what they had shared and discovered with one another, she would not look at him, intentionally shielding herself behind a curtain of molten flame. “Do not hide from me.”

Cupping her chin gently Jon forced her to meet his gaze. “My mother once told me of a woman from the faraway land of Lyse who could get any man to fall in love with her, over a thousand proposals from suitors all vying for her hand.” He traced her lips gently with his fingertips searching, the act eliciting an unbidden moan from her. Sansa blushed and ducked her head in his chest. Jon smiled gently, continuing his silent inventory and perusal of her.

“‘Twas said that she was so beautiful that she could finish a man simply by staring into his eyes.” He cupped a breast lightly, grazing the nipple with thumb. Sansa trembled. She was no lady, but wanton--she had to be. Only a slattern could enjoy the pleasures that such a man could visit upon her body. A proper lady would never allow herself to be so willing, or liberated.

Curious now, she looked up, intrigued. “Only but a single glance? Is that all it took to make a man love her?” Could she ever be that bold? That brave?

Sansa looked down at Jon’s naked chest and began to lightly trace a nonsensical pattern over him, taking him all in and memorizing him--every scar, every blemish, every freckle. He was a beautiful man, Jon Snow. Not a golden knight from her storybooks or Old Nan’s bedtime tales, but a dark knight. A dark prince from a dark, faraway land. Beautiful, dark, and mysterious. Formidable.

Jon cupped her face within his hands and raised her chin again, daring her to look at him. To understand. “Love comes in at the eyes, She-Wolf. Always.”

He kissed her again, slowly. And then, a new dance began. Their coupling was fierce, frantic almost in its urgency. Akin to two wolves mating, claiming and reclaiming each other. Yet this time, all timidity and diffidence left Sansa, for she had been the alpha--dominant, assertive and wild. She had been the one in control and Jon had freely relinquished it, acquiescing and succumbing to her freely.

It had been a good memory, a sweet one. One of the few many that they shared. In the two weeks she had been with him, Sansa Stark had managed to capture the one thing that he had sworn he would never part with. And then had left it shredded and tattered in the muck.

The rage began to reemerge, swift and sudden. Black and terrible in its ferocity and fervor.

He was a fool. A damned fool. The wolf-bitch had played her game and had played it well, using her one bargaining chip to barter with. And he had gladly partaken in it. Jon chuckled darkly, mirthlessly. Wolves had both cunning and patience to outwit any foe, all they needed to do was bide their time.

The red wolf had made sport of him and had waited patiently until she could out-maneuver him. And he fell for it. Every. Single. Time.

He felt another jolting ache, harder and more searing. Mayhap it was best if he were to just let her go, let her return to her people and completely eradicate her from his mind. Strive to mend the pieces of his fragmented and shredded heart. And yet, Jon knew he could not, for he was in too deep. She was part of him, and he was part of her. Two halves of the same whole.

“...It will be your love for a woman--a kneeler--that you will be remembered for. She is your past,
your present and your future. For every lifetime you have lived, she has walked by your side, always. She is your destiny, and if you are not careful, your destruction as well."

The pain was searing, excruciating, almost taking him under with its intensity. Jon began to set about the hut, gathering needed supplies. His heart was now stone, a dull and heavy thing. The transformation immediate and complete.

He would find her, yes. He would find her again--wherever it was she may be. He would never stop looking. He would find the lying she-wolf who had so callously ripped his heart out of his chest and demand the needed answers from her. And then what? that dark, black-breathed homonculous would whisper.

...And then, he would die. Perhaps finally ridding himself of the unending ache and searing pain that continued to tear his heart asunder...

Chapter End Notes

Dramatic, much? Between two psychopaths and an emo Jon, I don't know who's crazier...
There are no heroes...in life, the monsters win."--Sansa Stark, A Song of Ice and Fire, GRRM.

"Sometimes, mortals can be more horrible than monsters."--Rick Riordan

Chapter Notes

A little bit of Ramsay and Ygritte...the rest alone is self explanatory. Also, in this chapter, there is graphic depictions of sexual violence, bordering dubious consent. Discretion is strongly advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Monster

She was not Sansa. She did not feel like Sansa-supple and pliant-nor did she smell like her. Ramsay Bolton was known as the Mad Dog of the North after all. His senses were honed and sharpened, keen.

From the moment Sansa Stark visited the Dreadfort, Ramsay committed her scent to memory, imprinted her redolence like a stamp on his brain. She smelt of magic and the golden dawn, of winter blue roses touched by the first frost and the sweetest of peonies touched by twilight. Aye, he knew her scent well and inhaled deeply, both delirious and bereft simultaneously. Ramsay was acclimated to Sansa as he was to any other possession that was his.

The russet-haired wildling before him now was not his lost wolf (mayhap more fox than wolf, and even that was a poor substitution,), but she would have to suffice. Besides, Ramsay had been without a woman in well past a sennight; Myranda had been more trouble than she was worth, her envy and petulance irksome and tedious. He smirked coldly.

Such was the pity…

For a time, Ramsay had thoroughly enjoyed the pretty little kennel master's daughter. She reminded him of his bitches, loyal and stalwart beasts, partaking in everything he asked with equal depravity and fervor. And yet, therein lie the problem-she became too familiar, too comfortable. Too emulous. Quickly forgetting her designated place within the grand scheme of things. He and Myranda had an understanding; she was naught save a good fuck and nothing more.

Ramsay had thought she had understood their arrangement, accepted it for what it was. Aye, he had made that stupid promise to her all those years past that he would marry her-not that he ever intended to fulfill such an obligation. One would promise the moon if it meant getting fucked. However, all of
that began to quickly disintegrate and dissolve once the betrothal had been brokered between Lord Stark and his father.

Then, Myranda had become stupid and presumed to question him, to make demands of him! Initially, Ramsay had been patient (as patient as an ebullient dog could be), suffering her jealous outbursts and acquiescing to her tantrums. But then, Myranda had fallen pregnant, just as Violet, and began making demands of him, her latest ultimatum: either to marry her or watch as he forfeit everything as she threatened to expose him.

"You will marry me on the morrow, or I will ruin you! I swear it by all the gods-your House will crumple to the seas!"

That had been her mistake. Her last and final mistake.

Ramsay had given her ample warning of what would happen should she bore him, of what he was capable of. He was never one to suffer fools and did not make idle threats. Myranda knew this, and yet, stupidly, thought to restrain and tether him to her side permanently. As if she could…

It did not matter now, anyway.

His girls had feasted well that night, Myranda's shrieks and please piercing the hollow silence of the darkened kennels. The smell of gore and blood permeating the obscure chambers.

"She's good meat. Feed her to the hounds…"

Yet, Ramsay would be remiss if he did not miss her, however. Missed the way she would fuck him, white hands clutching at his throat as she rode him at a gallop, her inner walls gripping him like a vise. She was insatiable, wild. Ramsay lamented he would ever find another bed sport as vigorous-or as good-as she. Until now.

The wildling was on her hands and knees before him, her hips inclined, parallel to the ground, face to the mattress-away from him, as was his demand-as he bucked and raved inside her. She was still dirty and disheveled, as she had not bathed. Yet another of Ramsay's demands. For why should one waste precious resources on a fucking wildling?

Besides, the wildling bitch knew her place-dirtied, sullied, and on her hands and knees before her betters. 'Twas the way of things, the natural order. Never would she, or those of her, ilk be his equal.

Ramsay grunted and leaned forward, never ceasing in his vicious assault, and pulled Ygritte's hair, yanking roughly. She mewled loudly, whether in ecstasy or pain, he did not know. Nor care. He was incensed.

Ygritte had told him everything last night. Like a great deluge releasing and spilling forth its secrets, Ygritte had told the truth-of Sansa Stark, of Mance Rayder, of that fucking whoreson, Jon Snow. The damned White Wolf. Ramsay clenched his teeth and began fucking roughly into her. Harder. His hands gripping the matted, russet tresses so tightly, it caused Ygritte's head to snap back into an arc, a low hiss emanating from her lips, her arm extending before her, gripping. Her back was a myriad of cuts, scratches and bite marks, a gruesome canvas of shredded and tattered flesh, testament of his ire and envy.

Yet in spite of his savagery, Ygritte continued to wail and pant, rutting harder against him. Instead of horror and revulsion, surfeit at being reduced to that of a leg of mutton to be masticated and chewed on, Ygritte reveled in the depravity and viciousness. Ramsay's cruelty a catalyst to her odaxelagnia.
While Jon had been gentle and attentive in his lovemaking, almost hesitant in his reciprocity; Ramsay was selfish, never giving or kind, but rather luxuriated in his debasement. A monster. That was what he was. An evil, wicked thing suckled off the teat of some winged succubus.

Ygritte winced and bit her lip, clenching the sheet before her tightly as Ramsay's hands sought a nipple, his grip both tight and chafing. His hands were not the hands of a lover with its innocent touches and tentative strokes, no. Rather but the hands of a butcher, used to disarticulate and shred instead of worship and revere. The hands of a monster.

Ramsay thrust into Ygritte once, twice, three times before spilling, roughly pulling her areola to an uncomfortably taut peak. The friction and callousness of his touch inflaming her, the stark contrast and juxtaposition of dry skin against the softness of her breasts causing her to come. The tent redolent with the smells of sex, blood and submission.

She should feel shamed, abashed at the thought of betraying her home, her people-Jon. All that Ygritte once loved and swore to protect with her every fiber. Now, all that she felt was elation and excitement at the prospect of betrayal—of twisting the dagger in so deeply and watching with cold, distant apathy as those who doubted her, cursed her, spurned her, bled out and percolated on the ground below.

"What stands before you, Ygritte, is a monster. Rough-hewn by unfortunate events and given by necessity."

Aye, Ramsay was a monster. Cruel, vicious, and corybantic. Yet, for the time being, he was her monster. Just hers. She alone holding the leash.

It mattered not if he wanted another, if she only reminded him of the wolf-bitch whenever he looked on her. If she was just some unwanted vassal used to sate his lust and discarded as offals to the furnace.

Nay, none of that mattered to Ygritte. She closed her eyes and smiled as she felt Ramsay sink against her, his weight both bruising and comforting simultaneously.

If he is a monster, then I am one, too...

Chapter End Notes

Question: What's stopping two self-proclaimed monsters from unleashing hell and absolute destruction on all within their paths? Answer: Absolutely nothing. The shitstorm is coming...
Chapter Summary

Leave me out with the waste
This is not what I do.
It's the wrong kind of place to be thinking of you
It's the wrong time for somebody new
It's a small crime and I've got no excuse.
(Is that alright?)
To give my gun away when it's loaded?
(Is that alright?)
If you don't shoot it how am I supposed to hold it?
(Is that alright?)
Is that alright with you?

"Nine Crimes," by Damien Rice

Chapter Notes

I can't believe it's been a month since I last updated! Apologies, my friends! Thank you for staying with me, for I do not deserve you. Here, Jon and Mance come to a realization and decisions are made. Also, Jon faces some difficult truths.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Thirty: The Death of Duty

It was the right choice, he averred. The only choice. Aye, it had been a difficult decision, Mance conceded, as painful decisions oft were. Yet, it was necessary and needed to be done. The she-wolf was a danger to his people to his son.

“What is this you have you done, Father?”

A sweet poison, aye, but a poison all the same. A noxious, carcinogenic that took its time to slowly devour and consume until there was nothing left save decomposition and rot. And finally, death. It was all that love was, anyway. Naught but a harbinger for death. If Lyanna’s demise had taught Mance naught else, it was this.

“You betrayed me!”

The accusations were jagged and aciculated, filling Mance with simultaneous grief and shame. Aye, aye...Mance nodded his head in slow concession and finality, akin to an arbitrator giving his ultimate deliberation. Mayhap it was selfish and inadvertently cruel—to gift his son with but a touch of the sun’s golden warmth only to snatch it away—yet it had to be done.
The she-wolf had to be sent off, to return to her own pack, to her beloved Kneelers within the safety and confines of their castles and stone keeps. Gods knew they could provide better sanctuary than Mance ever could. Than Jon ever could.

Mance shifted in his stool by the fire as he thought on his son. Since the discovery, he had become more sullen and morose, taciturn. Although he fulfilled his duties and obligations to the camp and his people, it was mirthless and mechanical. Afterwards, Jon would go off in seclusion to his hut and remain. To do what? Gods above only knew.

“She was mine! Mine to cherish, mine to protect. You had no right!”

His son was angry, unforgiving, his wolf’s blood elevated and pulsing. Yet, it was not fear or timidity Mance felt when facing him, no. It was commiseration and sorrow. He was leaving camp, Tormund had informed him of that much.

No doubt trying to locate and recapture the Wolf Maiden.

Their relationship had soured as of late, tense like the string of an archer’s bow. Jon was no fool, and easily deduced that both Tormund and Muirgayne conspired against him in enabling Sansa’s escape. The betrayal akin to a thousand resounding blows upon his body.

Like Mance, Tormund tried to expiate himself, atone for his sins, yet Jon was deaf to all entreaties and hardened his heart to all supplications. Not that it mattered. Jon was an implacable sort, once he got into his moods. Capricious and mercurial, quick to shift like the changing tide.

If one were wise, he would stay clear of the wolf-son and give him a wide berth. Wolves did not fare well when caged. Yet, Mance knew his son, held him in his arms as a suckling babe, secure and warm; he held no fear of him now despite his rage.

“It is easy to hate, to feel that raw, consuming anger pulse and thrum and seep inside you, until it’s all you have to keep you going. It’s mother’s milk, warms a man’s belly better than meat ever could. It was the anger and rage I felt when your mother died, knowing that I had forfeit the most sacred and precious thing. You share the same look in your eyes now, the same rage and darkness.”

Jon shifted in his seat but remained silent, a shadow within the hut, angry and surging. Unforgiving.

“You knew what she was the moment you brought her here, my son. You knew you were not meant to keep her. It was a beautiful dream, yet sooner or later, we all must wake.”

Once, when Jon was two and ten, he fought a young lad in his village, Moren, he was called. A head taller than Jon with tousled, mousey hair that reached his shoulders, he was a cruel lad with cruel habits and proclivities. His parents had died in a Thenn raid, killed by its Magnar a year before, thus leaving him an orphan. Mance had taken the boy in, fostering him within his home; whether out of obligation or guilt, it was unclear.

The enmity between the two youths was instantaneous and palpable. Jon easily seeing through Moran’s artifice, his simpering and prostrating, a well-crafted and believable mask had one not been paying attention. He had nearly everyone fooled--everyone save Jon, for wolves remembered everything. And waited.

Along with maliciousness, Moren was a lusty fellow who enjoyed the company of the wildling girls within the village, the most recent of his passing fancy being Muirgayne. Moren had set his sights on the wildling girl many a time and had let it be known of his not-so-subtle desires of stealing
For a moment, Muirgayne had been successful in staying his hand, rebuffing his advances. Moren had not minded the dismissal, finding such repudiations amusing at best, for they never truly meant it. What maid would be stupid enough to deny him?

Soon, however, Moren’s patience began to wane and spread thin. What kind of game was the bitch playing at, anyway? Couldn’t he see that he had chosen her? That Muirgayne was his? She was taking too long, and Moren was no one’s fool.

The discovery was accidental and inadvertent. Jon did not pray or believe in any god or deity, long abandoning the practice after his mother’s demise, but he was thankful to whatever force that led him to Muirgayne. He shuddered tremulously at what could have been.

Muirgayne’s tunic had been shredded, the large tear renting the fabric into twain, exposing a breast. There was a gash upon her cheek, thin and rufescent against the pallidity of her skin. Worse—much, much worse—was the trembling and palpitating of her hands as they tried to hold the garment in place.

Even at two and ten, Jon was not a stupid child, willingly blind and naïve to the ways of the world. Theirs was a harsh existence within an equally cruel and pitiless world. A world that had no qualms in hurting young women and predating on the defenseless. Even more, Muirgayne was as obstinate as she was proud, never would she welcome another’s touch other than Tormund’s. What Muirgayne could not disclose with words, Jon could conclude with her shame. He knew, the damnable truth glaring and irrefutable.

Jon did not remember propelling himself at Moren, nor did he remember the barrage of his fists—ceaseless, deft, and heavy-handed—as he pummeled his foe into oblivion, like a baker kneading bread. He did not recall the blinding rage that overtook his person, white-hot and acerbic, as the blows continued to assail. Later, as he had a moment of retrospection, Jon knew he had acted akin to a beast, besieged within a blind haze of madness and viciousness. He had become a monster, a demon. Something both otherworldly and depraved.

When it was all over, Moren was indistinguishable and altered, his face a tattered pulp of flesh, sinew and broken bone. Jon did not remember being forcibly lifted from Moren’s prone form, all he could recall were Muirgayne’s tears, glittering and iridescent in the night air. And the rage.

“You had no right!” he snarled, his grey eyes slitted and obsidian. “You had no right!”

Mance blinked, watching his son come apart. The outburst hurt, without question, but he supposed it was justified and deserved. Let it out, son. Let it out if you must, for I am sorry. So damned sorry for your pain.

“It was the right decision, my son. One of the many painful and difficult decisions we all must make. She was not part of our world, and you could not be part of hers, no matter how you would wish it otherwise.”

Until now, Jon did not look at Mance, instead looking elsewhere, anywhere. Fucking coward. The upbraiding stung, bitter and cloying like wormwood. Yet, there was no deception, only truth.

Mance was right, as he always was. He was right about everything. He had been stupid, foolish. He had no right in abducting the wolf-maid and stealing her away from her family and those whom she loved.
But I love her…

Mance frowned, a deep furrowed crease in his brow. Had his son really admitted such a transgression? Confessed such guilt? Before now, Jon would not admit the truth to himself, locking it away in some dark recess somewhere—out of sight and out of mind. Gods be damned, but the she-wolf had sunken her fangs in deep…

“I love her.”

There. It was out in the open now, no longer festering within the confines of his heart. Now, it was out in the open, raw and exposed, laying bare at Mance Rayder’s feet; his to do with it whatever he willed, for Jon cared not. He was past caring. “I love her.”

Mance sucked in his breath, feeling like a requiem and striving to tether himself back to Earth. Nay. Nay, this could not be. He knew his son held an attraction for the girl, aye, but love?

“I had hoped you would show more restraint, more reason, truly I did. Suppose your claim is true and you do love the Stark girl. Have you any thought as to what comes next? Her uncle and her betrothed have breached the Wall and are marching onto our lands like a ravenous plague. What think you their response once you declare your love for her?”

Again, Mance had the higher ground, but Jon refused to fold. Instead, he did what he had always done whenever he was angry and felt defeated—lashed out with anything that was sure to invoke pain, like a cornered, tethered wolf. The keener the bite, the sharper the sting.

“I am not afraid. I am not like you—too afraid and cowardly to love again! After Mother died, you gave up, like some beaten and kicked dog. I am not you. I will love and I will love hard and with everything within me. More than that, I will live.”

Jon got up to abruptly leave then, heading for the tent flap. It was a low deed, shaming his father with Lyanna’s memory, especially when the wound was still so raw and gaping. Immediately, Jon felt contrite and turned around to apologize, yet Mance was having none of it.

“You think me so calloused to not know love? That I am so dead inside that I cannot recall a woman’s tender embrace? Feel the warmth of her smile upon my face? I loved your mother, aye. I always will, but I have a duty to my people and to their safety. Go if you must, for I cannot stop you; only know that yours is a fool’s errand and you are condemning your people to death.”

The rebuke stung, but Jon remained silent and sullen. Too many words had been spoken out in anger this day. He would apologize, he vowed silently. Yes, once he returned with Sansa, he would make amends and set everything right as it once was. However, Sansa needed him and he would go to her—wherever she was. He would find her. “Goodbye, Father.” With that, Jon left, exiting the hut, not once looking back.

Mance sighed and closed his eyes tightly, suddenly feeling ragged and worn, older than his two score and ten years of age. His son was a fool. A damned and bloody fool. A damned and bloody fool who was in love.

...Just like he had loved Lyanna…

Mance’s throat constricted as he thought on his wife. Gods, even now, after an elapse of years, he could still see her right in front of him. Gleaming, vibrant and more real than Jon or anyone else. He could still see and remember the color of her eyes, the shape of her nose; the mellifluousness of her laughter, like tinkling silvered bells.
His son was wrong, for Mance had loved and loved deeply, just as Jon has. Yet love was the
death of duty and yielded naught save heartache. That was all.

Chapter End Notes

"Be you angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down on your wrath." Psalm 37:8
How ominous is this? Read and review, please!
Chapter Thirty-One: Omen

The rain was soft, light and gentle as it brushed Harrold’s face, as light as a lover’s gentle kisses and pooled on his cheeks. He had always loved the rain, Harrold did, despite many believing it an ill-omen. It reminded him of spring, of rebirth; of early mornings when the northern sun bathed the moors in its iridescence.

‘Twas magic, those golden dawns. When the gods of old left the heavens and walked the realm of men, touching the earth with their fingertips. Most importantly, the rain reminded Harrold of his wife, Una, dead now these past five years, gods rest her soul.

The soft bleating of the spotted pygmy goat at his left caused the grizzled man to smile briefly. Abigail would be ready to milk soon, her udders were swollen and enlarged. Harrold smiled again, this time it reached his eyes, the possibility and anticipation of having cream with his porridge elating him. Times were difficult now, arduous, despite the summer years.

What with the civil war looming south of the Wall between the great Northern houses, and the Wildlings becoming restless, their raids more coordinated and frequent. Times were uncertain, unpredictable and turbulent. One had to grasp such simple pleasure whenever he could. He had seen bountiful years and lean years, aye, but there had been stability. Now, there was naught save chaos and discord.

Harrold shook his head. For two score years, he had been a farmer, breeding and selling horses to the Night’s Watch in exchange for protection against any encroaching Wildling attacks. For nine and ten of those years, Benjen Stark had been faithful in his promise of protection as First Ranger, guarding the realms of men from those beastly and savaged wildmen. Yet, with the abduction of his niece, Sansa Stark, the first of the Night’s Watchmen had been remiss in his duties, now treating with the girl’s intended in her return.

A cold, tremulous jolt ran down Harrold’s back as he thought on the younger Bolton lord. Although leagues beyond the Wall and as true North as one could venture and still reside within its
realm of protection, Harrold knew of the depravities and horrors lurking within the fortified walls of
the Dreadfort, and it’s bastard’s proclivity for cruelty. It was wrong, to force Winterfell’s daughter to
pay for her father’s transgressions and folly. To force the prize of the North to that living, breathing
demon was akin to a crow being forced on to a dove. An egregious act, almost as blasphemous as
Tywin Lannister’s extirpation of House Reyne.

Harrold was angry now, a righteous, all-consuming indignation. The gods in their sovereignty had
not been so kind as to bless him with sons and daughters, for Una had been barren. Out of the
enumerable disillusions and disappointments life had dealt him, that perhaps had been the hardest
blow. For it had always been a secret dream--to become a father--to hold a babe warm in his arms.
Had he been blessed with children, Harrold would oft vehemently swear, he would do all he could to
protect them from the whims and schemes of men, to love them so fervently and deliriously. They
would be protected, never having to pay for another man’s error, or be a pawn to be maneuvered
within an ever-changing game.

‘Twas cruel--all of it. The gods were capricious, mercurial and shifting in their benevolence and
righteous judgement. Wherever the lost wolf had gone, Harrold hoped the lass was same and out of
harm’s way. Far away from Ramsay Bolton’s talon grasp, at least. Run, little wolf. Run away and
never look back…

A horse nickered in the distance, a warning. Harrold quickened his steps a sense of trepidation
overwhelming him. A shadow cat? A bear? Marauding Wildlings intent on an ambush?

A man alone and defenseless upon the exposed moors, half a league from the Wall and Castle
Black. He could not win, he knew this. His bones would be picked clean by the crows before
anyone thought to look in on him. There was a hunter’s blade sheathed to the leg of his pants, the
Wildlings were renown for their barbarity and proclivity for boiling their captives alive. He would be
dammed if he was taken alive, prey to be toyed and played with. Nay, this time, he would be given
choice, one of the few the gods had afforded him in his lifetime.

As Harrold neared the outpost, all fear and trepidation escaped him, for he was now at a loss. It
was not a raiding party or a feral beast that faced him, no, but a girl. A girl of middle teenage years,
pale and caked in mud, but nonetheless radiant of face despite looking to be on the threshold
between life and death. Oh gods! It was the lost wolf, he was certain of it. A babe alone in the
woods, away from her pack.

The rain began to abate, now a drizzling mist, the sun beginning to peak among the clouds. Many
thought the rains were a harbinger of doom, an omen of impending ill-fortune and black luck. Yet,
when looking on the sleeping she-wolf, resplendent and peaceful in repose, Harrold immediately
thought on his wife, Una, of the children that had never been. The gods had answered his prayers at
long last. He would finally become a father, for a time, at least. Until the she-wolf was nursed back
to full health.

Aye, Harrold had always loved the rain, for not only did it wash away the ugliness and shit of
yesterday, but yielded promise and new beginnings, of a hope that burned brighter than the morning
sun.

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The rains had become a deluge, the downpour so heavy and thick that it became a blanket,
making the moors in darkness and obscurity. The rain had always unnerved him, making Mance
uneasy, nervous. It was said that such heavy floods were ominous, yielding misfortune and horror.
Mance’s thoughts automatically reverted to Lyanna, remembering. She had died on a night just like this, the rains a torrential avalanche. A calamitous barrage.

Jon had been gone nigh a fortnight, their final words naught save angry exchanges, hurtful accusations, and denouncements. Mance was sorry for that now, contrite. He thought the releasing of the wolf maiden for the best, the only course of action to be made. The Kneeler forcing his hand. He liked the girl truly, and had fate been kinder, Mance would have gladly welcomed her as a daughter, for she was his son’s match in every way—the omega to his alpha—yet it could not be. Could never be.

As King-Beyond-the-Wall, Mance had his people to think on, their safety paramount. And yet, he could not stifle or quell the regret that surged through him, pulsing and keen in its acerbity. Gods, but what had he done? What had he done?

The dogs began to howl in the distance, their cries sharp and lamenting, sorrowful and mournful. It was a warning, something evil was fast approaching. The rain was relentless now, the lightning flashing across the sky, illuminating the moors.

There were four of them, four riders. All save one wearing a strange and gruesome sigil of an upside-down man strapped to a cross. Mance was not a stupid man, for he immediately knew who this was, what it meant. Tormund was automatically by his side, his axe gripped tightly in his hand. Mance waved him off, quelling all protests. He would not allow another to suffer his mistakes.

“Are you lost, friend?” The leader, dressed in a brown, leather doublet, slowly dismounted from his charger, his gait immediately reminding Mance of a prowling beast. No doubt this was the bastard of Bolton, the North’s Mad Dog. Although slight in stature with a mop of curly brown hair similar to Jon’s, the man was dangerous, formidable. His cold eyes transfixed and staring.

He was smiling, bestowing a guise of benevolence and good will, yet Mance was not fooled by the subterfuge. He knew a demon when he saw one.

“Aye, I saw your campfires from a distance and thought my men and I could stay on and warm up. You do not mind, do you?”

Yes, I do mind. You are not welcomed here.

The rebuke was sharp, just at the tip of his tongue, yet Mance remained silent. A ferreted man on the Bolton’s right unsheathed his knife, running his fingers languidly over the blade. Tormund stiffened, a muttered curse escaping his lips. Mance quieted him with a look.

Don’t, Tormund. Don’t!

“You are not dressed for this weather and are far from home. Surely, there’s more to this visit than simple fires.” The Bolton blinked in surprise, no doubt unused to being so cavalierly dismissed. A low chuckled left him, his smile now feral. Dangerous.

“Not one to mince words, I see. I like that.” The last rider dismounted from his horse, yet his features remained concealed by a dark cloak. It was rare that Mance felt fear, but he was unnerved all the same. Something was wrong—he could feel it in the depths of his soul. Something was amiss.

“I am looking for something that has been lost to me, friend. Something very important. I miss her terribly, you see, and a little bird of mine informed me that you may know of her whereabouts.”

Mance smirked, a brie flash upon his grizzled face and chanced a look at the hooded figure just beyond. “A heavy thing, truly. Losing something you love. Mayhap your lost treasure preferred to
remain lost. Mayhap, you weren’t meant to keep her, seeing as you cannot get a handle on your woman. Either way, I wish you good fortune in your search. But alas, my friend, I cannot help you.”

Had it been another time, Mance would have relished at the vanishing smirk from the young Bolton’s lips, laughed at the barely tethered rage glittering behind his icy depths. Yet, it was not another time. It was now, and all Mance wanted was to be rid of these interlopers and have some respite.

Yet Ramsay was unperturbed. The smile reemerged on the Bolton’s face, colder and uglier than before. “You have bigger balls than I give you credit for, Wildling, I’ll give you that. But I wonder if those big balls of yours will serve you where it really counts?”

The cloaked figure at Ramsay’s left removed its hood, and Mance stilled, his blood congealing at the sight. Tormund cursed, spitting the ground.

“Ygritte…”

All too focused upon the specter in front of him, Mance did not notice the arrow as it loosed from its bow. All he could remember was Tormund’s shouts, now fading in the distance, and the pain. White-hot, searing, and acerbic. He tried to speak, but found that he could not, for the bolt had lodged itself deep into his throat, the coppery tang of blood pooling upon his tongue and mouth.

I’m dying, Mance thought faintly. Gods, I am dying. And yet there was no fear, the shock and pain starting to subside and dissipate. At that moment, Mance felt weightless, liberated, suspended between that liminal space between the living and the dead. As his spirit began to float, float upward, he could see Ramsay and his men, there were more of them now, descend upon the camp, like a deadly pestilence. Tents had been overturned and desecrated, weapons burned and destroyed. The remaining wildlings rounded up and subdued, shepherded into wooden stockades.

So much destruction, Mance wanted to weep at it all. Then, as he looked up, he was met with another face he had thought he would never again see. Smiling, radiant and exultant. Lyanna. She had kept her promise and had waited for him, as she had said she would all those years ago. She was calling for him now, beckoning him to join her to that faraway land of nothingness. And Mance followed after her, this time. He would never be parted from her again.

Chapter End Notes

*Peeks from behind cupped hands* You’re still with me, right? No hard feelings? No, but seriously, this had been one of the most difficult chapters to narrate. I may have shed a few tears when constructing the death of Mance, but it was one of those unfortunate things that needed to be done to further along the plot. What can I say? Ramsay and Ygritte, man...
Bound and Imprinted

Chapter Summary

His dreams were dark and oppressive. Ominous. Although his visions were disjointed and muddled, the suffocating and cloying smell of fire and smoke percolated the air, stifling him. In the times Jon had warged into Ghost, his dreams, albeit brief, yielded liberation.

There was a freedom in skin changing, in his visions; a nirvana. For as long as he had known the beast, he had come to rely on the wolf’s red gaze, to see what no other could. And what Jon saw, grieved him thoroughly.

Chapter Notes

Has it really been that long?!?! My sincerest apologies. The conclusion of the school year is always the busiest. Now that summer is here, look forward to more frequent updates. In the interim, here is another chapter to tide you over.

Here, Jon wargs into Ghost, and what he sees while in the wolf’s skin, horrifies him.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirty-Two: Bound and Imprinted

His dreams were dark and oppressive. Ominous. Although his visions were disjointed and muddled, the suffocating and cloying smell of fire and smoke percolated the air, stifling him. In the times Jon had warged into Ghost, his dreams, albeit brief, yielded liberation.

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The village was gone, demolished-lost within the inferno of fire and ash. Jon willed Ghost closer, knowing yet it was futile. The air reeked of blood and gore, the ground saturated in it; the crimson liquid seeping into the great wolf’s paws. Just a little further...A little bit more.

Ghost stopped abruptly, emitting a high, keening wail. Mournful and tremulous. A eulogy. Give me your eyes, boy. Show me your world.

There, straight ahead, in the small clearing, Jon saw the flayed and disarticulated remains of his father, Mance. Another howl reverberated through the air, slicing through the thickened silence. Jon did not know if it came from him or from the large direwolf. Oh Gods!
Jon jolted from his reverie, a shaking, palpitating mass. Stumbling blindly through the woods, he made his way to the trunk of a tree. Dropping to his knees, akin to a supplicant prostate, seeking absolution, the wolf prince did not cry out to the gods, no. Instead, he retched violently, the acidic bile clinging at his throat and lodging itself there.

It was the hour of the owl, the darkness enshrouding him, covering him, masking his weakness and vulnerability. Hiding his shame. Oh Gods! Mance's eyes were gone. The savages had gouged out his eyes, leaving twin, hollowed pools. Not only was his soul gone, for the eyes alone held that sacred atman, releasing it into the empyrean once the body was rendered forfeit, but worse—much, much worse!—the Wildling king was forever damned to meander the spiritual realm blind and helpless.

Jon retched again at the realization, convulsing.

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! It was like a mantra. A prayer in the darkness, broken and forlorn.

I'm sorry, Father. Forgive me. Forgive me, please....

Yet, in spite of the fervency of his entreaties, Jon knew it was futile. The gods were pitiless, apathetic to the affliction of man. This was his transgression, his punishment, for which he would do due penance. When would it ever end, this ongoing ephialtes?

It was his fault—all of it. If only he had listened and heeded his father's admonition. If only he had not been so bullheaded and impetuous. If only-

If only he had been there.

The guilt assailed him anew, heavy, dull and leaded. His father's murder was on his hands, a permanent, rufescent stain. As was the capturing of his people—Tormund, Muirgayne, all of them. Gods alone knew what Ramsay and his dogs were doing to them. He alone was culpable.

What are you to do now, Wolf Prince? A small voice inquired, interrupting Jon's chaotic and riotous thoughts. Jon glanced up from the ground, and looked upon a face, its features cold, hard and staring. An old winter god, its visage etched upon the bark of the weirwood tree. Silent and arbitrary.

I want blood! I want satisfaction! Jon averred, both righteous and indignant, simultaneously.

Yet, to what end? It was that same small voice, temperate and irritating, that brought Jon back to sanity. To what end will you go to seek retribution?

The answer had been easy. As far as I must...

A gust of wind stirred the weirwood leaves, red like fire. A flash of crimson briefly filtered through Jon's thoughts. Eyes of indigo dusk, a hint of lavender and peony. Sansa.

Even her memory damned him.

Where did you go, little wolf?

Jon clenched his fist, his nails cutting into the flesh. His mouth had run arid, dryer than ash. He felt as though he has been torn asunder. Surely, there was no remedy that could ameliorate a dead man's heart.

Once, when he was six, Jon had heard Mance serenade Lyanna with an old Myrish psalm. It was a hymn of love, of the drifting seasons, and one's fleeting devotion. He had scoffed then, disgusted, for such songs were meant for girls. Yet Jon remembered the words, imprinted them upon his memory:
I loved a maid a fair as summer with sunlight in her hair
I loved a maid as red as autumn with sunset in her hair
I loved a maid as white as winter with moonglow in her hair
I loved a maid as spry as springtime with blossoms in her hair.

As the land changes masks, so follow maids and I
Whether balmy hot and soppy wet
   Or cutting sweet and dry
Ere my life the good lords fell
I'll prize the memory of
Each and every lass I've held for
A spell-the seasons of my love

Jon had been feckless in his youth, wild and roguish. For he had loved and loved frequently. For a time, at least. He had loved Rowena, statuesque and brazen, with her eyes of jade and sunlit hair. She had been his summer maid, passionate, splendid, and burning. Yet Rowena had been proud, haughty, too consuming and too mercurial in her nature. Demanding much, yet bestowing little. And Jon? Jon was still too much of a green boy-capricious and craven-to acquiesce and give more of himself that what was required or needed. And soon-too soon-their passion waned and thawed, waxing cold as the setting summer sun.

Then, there was Ygritte, his maid of autumn, her hair of burnished copper and rust. He supposed he had loved Ygritte, in his own way. For a time, at least. Like Rowena, she had been wild and fierce, however unlike golden Rowena with her capricious moods that burned both hot and cold, Ygritte felt safe, as though he had known her for ages.

Yet it had all been a lie, but a trick of the eye, or glamour. He had not known her truly, had not seen the deceit the artifice residing and lurking within. She assumed the guise of comfort, but beneath it all masked a serpent's heart with serpent's fangs. An autumn maid with winter's heart…

Then came spring. A flash of fire came again, unbidden, as Jon's thoughts again returned to Sansa. She was born of the springtime, of when life was vibrant, radiant and bursting. She had breathed life back into him, life Jon had once thought snuffed out. Before her, before his rebirth, he had been but a carapace, empty and hollow.

He had wanted her at the first. Aye, he had wanted her desperately. Fervently. With a white-hot passion that rivaled a thousand burning suns. Yet in spite of his desires, he had never anticipated the hold she had on his heart, had imprinted on his skin.

I am yours and you are mine. Then. Now. For always.

Had she known all along? Had this been her plan? To burrow so deeply down that nothing could extract her?

And then she had gone, like the flicker of a candle's flame. Extinguished. And with it, she had taken
his heart, leaving him in an eternal winter.

Jon clenched his fist again, turning away from the weirwood tree in anger. The winds had picked up again, stronger in their gusts. Once, his mother had told him that whenever the gods heard an entreaty, the winds would intensify, a testament to their omnipresence.

He had not prayed since Lyanna died, angry and resentful at their apathy. But now...He had nothing to lose, only broken and fractured supplication.

Dropping back onto his knees once more, Jon prayed for absolution, he prayed for atonement, he prayed for the souls of both his father and mother, and for needed strength. Lastly, he prayed for his missing she-wolf, alone and unprotected in the wilds. He would find her again, no matter the distance. She could not escape him; he had told her as much once, long ago beneath the glistening skies.

_You cannot escape me, she-wolf, for I am a man bound and imprinted to you. You may flee to the furthest corners of the world, it does not matter. I will run you until you drop._

Chapter End Notes

So...Jon's on a mission. First to find his lost love, and then to exact revenge on Ramsay and Ygritte. Sounds like a completely uncomplicated plan, right?
Found

Chapter Summary

Time seemed to elapse and escape her, as it always did whenever she was at prayer. Sansa did not know how long she had been outside. Minutes? Hours? She could not remember, for what did it matter? All Sansa could remember with distinct clarity was the stillness, all-encompassing and consuming. Once, eons ago, it seemed, the silence was a welcomed respite and yielded tranquility. Now, it was naught save a harbinger for death and ill-intent.

She was not alone in these woods.

Chapter Notes

Before I start my vacation, I just wanted to leave this here. Oh, by the way...Happy Summer!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Thirty-Three: Found

She had heard the wolf’s howl, had heard its sorrowful lament, its haunting lilt and mellifluousness as it crescendoed and dipped across the moors. It yielded comfort, it brought tranquility, and yet it damned her to the deepest pit of the Seven Hells simultaneously. Everything within the small, wooded hut seemed to oscillate and spin, sending her further into vertigo. Sansa closed her eyes, willing the nausea to abate. Harrold had brewed wild ginger root from his gardens into a tea, maintaining the herb’s properties would quell the malady, yet little seemed to help. She was deeply indebted to the kindly man, with his deep blushes and halting speech. Had it not been for him, no doubt the Gods would have hastened her to afterlife sooner. Along with the riot within her belly, there was a dull ache in her chest, a painful thrumming.

She had dreamt of him again, it was becoming a ritual. Dreamt of slate grey eyes so dark they were obsidian, of riotous curls the color of ebony, of full lips that kissed her breathless. She dreamt of his hands, they were the hands of a killer, aye, to be sure, yet when holding her within the encircle of his arms, they were an inferno. She missed him, Gods damn her, but she did, to her secret shame and guilt. She knew that she had made the right decision--the only decision--in absconding the Wildling village, yet it hurt all the same, as though she were being rent in two.

Sansa’s stomach jolted and then rolled violently. There was a wooden chamber pot at the far corner of the room and Sansa ran to it, nearly missing. Under different circumstances, she supposed, she would have been embarrassed. Ladies did not behave so, were more in control of their faculties. Her Lady Mother would have been appalled at the sight, her father concerned; Arya and Robb, no doubt, would have found their sister’s discomfiture amusing. So many, many eons and lifetimes ago, it seemed. She was starting to forget their faces.

There was a light rapping at the door. Harrold.
“Milady, do come ousside an’ get some fresh air. Issna good to stay cooped up for s’long.”

Since her rescue that one rainy morn, a little over a fortnight ago, Sansa had been confined to bed, per Harrold’s insistence, out of fear of contracting pneumonia. The horse farmer had been vigilant, praying at the foot of a sapling weirwood tree, entreating the Old Gods for assistance, tears streaming down his scarred visage. Once, in the midst of a fitful sleep, Sansa awoke to the elderly man fashioning a prayer wheel out of dried thistle and rush stems. A peculiar thing, it was, for it was a woman’s job and Harrold was a Northman who kept to the old faith. When questioned about his praxis, Harrold blushed profusely, suddenly bashful, telling the girl of his deceased wife, Una, and her multiple miscarriages.

She was a Southrone bride, having been brought up in the Light of the Seven, and upon discovering a recent pregnancy, she would weave a wreath for protection for herself and their babe growing within her belly. While the Gods had not been so kind as to bless them with a living child of their own, each pregnancy resulting in stillbirth, Harrold maintained that the Gods bestowed a small measure of clemency and kindness in sending Sansa to him.

“The Gods arna so cruel as to bring ye this far only to leave ye, now. You are strong, Little Wolf, much stronger than ye know. Ye must get better.”

In so, she had started to mend and heal, only starting to venture outside to take fresh air. Harrold would accompany her, insisting that one such as she should not venture out alone.

“It isna safe, milady, to go out alone. Not when there are true horrors lurkin’ about.” Sansa remained quiet, demure. She alone was well-versed in the horrors that resided on both sides of the Wall. Ramsay Bolton had taught her that much.

This time, though, Sansa subtly suggested a small respite alone, sweetly hinting of the plethora of chores the horse farmer had so selflessly shirked attending to her needs. “You do not need to concern yourself, Sweet Harrold. I promise I am well.” He meant well, Harrold did, but Sansa was restless. Tired. She had been hidden away for over a fortnight, akin to the winter roses in the glass houses at Winterfell after a frost. She needed sunlight. Besides, fresh air would help settle the biliousness within her belly, would calm her.

The weirwood was a paltry-looking thing, small and squat and not at all majestic as the ones back home and near the Wildling village. Despite its insignificance and underwhelming presence, it represented home and was the last tether Sansa had to keep her buoyant. She did not even know why she prayed anymore, for surely the Gods had turned a deaf ear to all her supplications the moment she had crossed that invisible, yet irrevocable threshold from girl to woman. She was marked now, sullied. A reprobate sinner too far cast down for any hope of atonement or salvation. No, the Old Gods did not lend ear to her, the ruined daughter of Winterfell.

But Sansa prayed anyway, her crimson mane bent in diffidence and humility. Mayhap the Gods would take pity, then. Forgive her folly and transgressions. She had given her heart and her maiden’s gift to a man that was not her betrothed, risking shame and ridicule; subjecting her pious Lord Father and Lady Mother to further castigation and cruel whispers. Surely, she has paid in full and the scales have been weighed and measured. What else was left?

Time seemed to elapse and escape her, as it always did whenever she was at prayer. Sansa did not know how long she had been outside. Minutes? Hours? She could not remember, for what did it matter? All Sansa could remember with distinct clarity was the stillness, all-encompassing and consuming. Once, eons ago, it seemed, the silence was a welcomed respite and yielded tranquility. Now, it was naught save a harbinger for death and ill-intent.
She was not alone in these woods.

There was a pulling, the sound of a bow string drawn taut that gave Sansa pause. Since her abduction, she had been well-acquainted with fear, that loathed friend coming back once more to haunt. Only this time, though, Sansa was able to quell it. If only outwardly...

Raising her head slowly, Sansa was met with the silent, glacial stare of the devil himself. Since her abduction, she had feared to behold those frigid, arctic depths once more, had prayed fervently to all the gods--both Old and New--that she would be spared such horror. Alas, another prayer fallen on deaf ears…

The arrow was obsidian-tipped, beautiful yet terrifying at the same time as it glinted and glittered in the evening sun, immediately reminding Sansa of its wielder. Ramsay.

“I have found you at last, Little Dove…”

Chapter End Notes

*Starts singing, "Every Breath You Take," by The Police.* I was actually listening to it on repeat while constructing this chapter. Before you start hurling fruit at me, need I remind you that this is Game of Thrones? As the reader and audience should surely know by now, just as soon as a character reaches a place of security and comfort, SOMETHING will transpire that will disrupt it. Seriously, though. Did you guys really expect Sansa to remain safe and secure? This IS Ramsay we are talking about!
The fear came upon her, sudden and immediate, washing over her like a wave. She was not alone within the crypts, yet unlike the previous comfort she felt while in the presence of her kin, Sansa now felt unprotected and imperiled. The presence--whatever it was--felt sinister, demonic.

She noticed the eyes before she saw the rest of it--glaring and crimson against the gloom of the catacombs. The homunculus hissed at her, its jagged teeth acerated and glinting. Although diminutive in stature, the creature--whatever it was--was monstrous, unnatural. A demon spawned from the deepest pit of the Seven Hells.

It took one step, then another. Although its movements were spasmodic and desultory, its eyes remained focused and unflinching It raised an arm, gesturing to her.

“‘You.’” It seemed to say, although silent and imposing.

“I want...You.”

Father once told her that fear was an illusion, a lie.

“Fear not, Sweetling. You are a Stark of Winterfell and a Wolf. You do not bow.”

Yet, here in the crypts, Sansa felt all courage and fortitude ebb and erode away as the beast drew nearer and nearer. Its arm outstretched and reaching, its eyes rufescent and staring.

“Sansa…”

What do you mean it's been six months since my last update?!? My apologies, everyone. Life's been so crazy this year. Hopefully, this chapter will compensate for the long hiatus as I try to get back into the swing of things and reclaim my momentum.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirty-Four: Captured

Once, when Sansa was nine, she had gotten lost within the crypts; a child’s game gone awry. Robb and Theon had been the bandits, and she, the princess who had outwitted her captives. It was supposed to be all in fun, the boys were supposed to be fun, the boys were supposed to have located her within the hour, and Arya and Bran were to pay her “ransom”, a moon’s worth of desserts pilfered from the pantries.
Yet, no one came. It had been hours and no one returned, abandoning her to the cold, abysmal darkness of the crypts, where the stone faces of the Winter Kings and their direwolves watched in silent vigil. Sansa could feel their stares—cold and arbitrary—and hear their whispers.

“Little Wolf,” they would murmur. “What are you here?”

Night came, swift as a shadow, warm against the winter’s gale, and Sansa trembled in spite of herself. Father would be furious, the crypts were forbidden, sacred. Almost sacred as the glass gardens and godswood. Sansa could all but feel his disappointed stare, weighted and cold. Although a stern man, seemingly to all outsiders who weren’t of his blood, Ned Stark was warm and vibrant, his rigidity and insouciance belying a gentle heart. Sansa knew he would never be too harsh when meting out his punishments, for she was his favorite. Yet, she dreaded it all the same.

How long had she been down here? Hours? Days? She could not remember. She only knew that she was hungry and cold, the sound of her stomach a wild beast against the quiet stillness of the crypts.

She was not afraid of her father’s kin, the Winter Kings of old who sat like sentinels in their eternal repose. Nay, Sansa could never be afraid of them, for they were her guardians and yielded comfort and succor. She was fearful of the ghosts, the specters who haunted and lurked within the abysmal gloom. Robb had told her the stories, late at night when the rest of the keep were abed. He told her of the ancient lore, of the phantoms residing beneath the castle, that, between the Hours of the Wolf and Owl, the ghosts were present and active.

Sansa did not remember falling asleep, only that her eyes were burning and that she had closed them momentarily to alleviate the ache. As her eyes opened, acclimating to the darkness, a prevailing stillness began to saturate the crypts. Sansa had been alone before, had relished the solitude and quiet of the godswood, had revelled in the isolation of the Broken Tower, yet this placidity was too consuming, too enveloping. Unnerving.

The fear came upon her, sudden and immediate, washing over her like a wave. She was not alone within the crypts, yet unlike the previous comfort she felt while in the presence of her kin, Sansa now felt unprotected and imperiled. The presence—whatever it was—felt sinister, demonic.

She noticed the eyes before she saw the rest of it—glaring and crimson against the gloom of the catacombs. The homunculus hissed at her, its jagged teeth acerated and glinting. Although diminutive in stature, the creature—whatever it was—was monstrous, unnatural. A demon spawned from the deepest pit of the Seven Hells.

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“You.” It seemed to say, although silent and imposing.

“I... Want...You.”

Father once told her that fear was an illusion, a lie.

“Fear not, Sweetling. You are a Stark of Winterfell and a Wolf. You do not bow.”

Yet, here in the crypts, Sansa felt all courage and fortitude ebb and erode away as the beast drew nearer and nearer. Its arm outstretched and reaching, its eyes rufescent and staring.

“Sansa...”
And Sansa screamed, high and keening, the sound ricocheting through the darkness.

It had been almost a decade ago since that fateful night in the crypts, since Sansa encountered the demon. Both Father and Robb had insisted that she had dreamt it all, ‘twas naught but the fanciful manifestations of an overactive imagination.

“It was just a dream, Sweet One. It was not real.”

Yet, Sansa knew better. It—whatever it was—was real, only this time, the monster did not vanish into a puff of smoke or dissolve into thin air. He was living and breathing and right in front of her, eyes both lifeless and cold, an obsidian-tipped arrow pointed right at her.

“I have found you at last, Little Dove.”

He had meant to be comforting, his smile friendly and unassuming, yet Sansa could not be fooled. Behind his facade of congeniality, resided a monster of the truest form and fashion. Like a ravenous dog scenting a hare, Ramsay Bolton had found his quarry.

Sansa blinked once, twice, uncomprehending. Nay, it could not be. The gods were not as callous as this. Surely, the were not so deaf and apathetic to her entreaties.

And yet…

And yet, here he was, alive and...here. Waiting for her.

“You found me.” It was a stupid thing to say, but it was all Sansa could muster at the time.

Stupid! You stupid, stupid girl!

Ramsay smiled, a chilling thing to behold, his glacial eyes roving and appraising. Sansa tightened her cloak, concealing her form from his lecherous gaze. He still wanted her. Still. Gods, she could be wearing naught but a sackcloth and Ramsay Bolton would still want her.

It it me or my claim? Sansa curled her lip, her throat tight. So this is how it ends.

Ramsay’s smile dropped, only to resurface again, tighter and colder, reminding Sansa of ice.

“My love,” he cooed, stepping closer, the arrow still raised and glinting.

Why don’t you just end it? Now. Here. While there’s still some part of me left?

“Are you not glad to see me? I have crosse endless plains to find you and bring you home.”

Sansa heard a thrumming in her ears, steady and low. At first, she thought it was the nearby stream, the ice beginning to thaw and percolate, only to realize that the thrumming was her heartbeat, a rapid staccato.

Ramsay must have heard it, for his smile grew, feral and predatory.

“Little Dove, are you so frightened of me? I have missed you so.”

She could run. She could run and run and run and never look back. Flee like a bird across the moors and hills and plains, until she was back at the wildling camp. Back with Jon.
How simple would it be…?

The arrow glinted and gleamed in the sunlight, a deadly warning, bringing Sansa back to clarity. Harrold. Ramsay would surely kill him if she attempted to flee, and Sansa could not bear an innocent’s blood on her hands.

“If I go with you, do you swear not to harm the old man? He’s an innocent and will do you no harm.” Sansa was hysterical, but she was able to conceal it. She would not tremble for him, or any man. Not anymore.

Ramsay smiled fully then, lowering his bow. “My Lady is merciful. If you come with me right now, I will spare your horse farmer. If not—”

There would be more blood, more death. More guilt.

Sansa nodded, the implication clear.

“I will go with you, Ser."

Harrold was crestfallen, heartbroken that his guest was to leave, leave him alone to the solitude and loneliness once more, yet Sansa was adamant.

Please, Sweet Harrold. Ask me no questions. I want you to live. Live and go on in peace, forget me.

Ramsay’s black charger was a capricious thing, mercurial and dangerous, shifting from side to side as its owner mounted, Sansa in front. She thought briefly of snatching the reins, of mowing the Bolton down as she raced across the moors to Castle Black. It was a brief thought, a small comfort, for at that moment, a small dagger had materialized at her side, hidden from Harrold’s hawk-eyed gaze, but an ever-present reminder to Sansa.

“In case you try to do something stupid and try to run.”

Where would I go? Sansa thought wildly, her eyes narrowing, staring ahead. She would not look at him, that was one concession she would not grant.

The horse began to move then, its movements jerky and harsh. Ramsay’s hand began to wonder, lowering until it rested upon her thigh, sending a jolt of revulsion through her body. Sansa clenched her teeth, but still continued to look ahead. So this is how it ends, then?

She imagined killing him, of wresting the blade from his hands and plunging it into his heart.

If only I could gut you, let you bleed like the treasonous cur you are. Oh gods! If only…

Somewhere in the distance, Sansa heard the faint howl of a wolf. A reminder.

You are Sansa Stark, the Blood of Winterfell and the Wolf’s Daughter. You must be brave.

Sansa stiffened, her head raising in defiance, looking towards the horizon. Aye, Sansa could be brave. All she had to do was hold on just a little bit longer.

Chapter End Notes
Any thoughts? Ideas? Should I just abandon this all together and just rewrite it? The ball is completely in your court. For those who have still remained with me, thank you! I write for you. <3

End Notes

Any thoughts or comments? I would most definitely love to hear from you. I am a die-hard Jon Snow/Sansa Stark shipper and am reliving this ship before all hell breaks loose in the upcoming Season 7, if certain spoilers *cough boat scenes* are to be believed involving a megalomaniac Dragon Queen.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!