### Only when I have to

**Rating:** Not Rated  
**Archive Warning:** Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings  
**Category:** F/M  
**Fandom:** Game of Thrones (TV), A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin  
**Relationship:** Jon Snow/Sansa Stark, Jaime Lannister & Sansa Stark  
**Character:** Jon Snow, Jaime Lannister, Sansa Stark  
**Additional Tags:** Post-season 7, Post-Winterfell Reunion, Jaime is Sansa's sworn shield, Angst, Hope, Pre-Battle for the Dawn, Pre-Jon Snow's reveal  
**Series:** Part 2 of Honor made you leave, and honor brought you back.  
**Stats:** Published: 2017-09-07 Words: 7748

---

**Only when I have to**

by LadyMD

**Summary**

In the following morning, Jon will ride for the wall together with Daenerys' army. But before that, he needs to settle another war. So many things have changed and are changing still ever since he came back. The only thing that remained constant was the unreachable drift between him and Sansa and now he was going to try once more what he failed to do that night he witnessed something he shouldn't have seen between Sansa and her new sworn shield, Jaime Lannister.

**Notes**

Sort of sequel to "The things we do for love". This ficlet focuses on Jon and Sansa's inevitable talk before he rides out for war. Bran hasn't revealed Jon's parentage yet, and the Wall hasn't fallen. Those are two things that would happen right after this discussion.

Okay, and the song on my background while I wrote this is Snow Patrol's Open your eyes. I still cry whenever I hear that. This is so them right now. *Sigh* You guys might wanna listen to that too.
Tyrion Lannister: Do you drink wine?
Sansa Stark: Only when I have to

- GoT S03E08

Jon sighed.

Spying blonde hair emphasized by the deep brown leathers as was the standard issue of Northern armor, Jon saw Ser Jaime Lannister standing guard in front of the library entrance and this was where he knew he'd find Sansa at last because, as it proved these days since he came back, that if one was to seek out Sansa, you either follow Ghost or as the men and the servants pointed out, "Your gra-my lord, perhaps you should ask Ser Jaime?". Since Ghost was out hunting, this only left one choice. Jon stubbornly held out but in the end relented after going up the battlements, the Godswood, her chamber, his, the crypts, everywhere, even getting no help from Arya or even Brienne who were sparring outside and said the same thing "She's with Jaime."

So begrudgingly, that's what he did.

Look for the Kingslayer.

Nowadays, he was the only one who called him that but only in his mind. Ever since the disgraced knight rode to Winterfell before him and swore fealty to Catelyn Stark's daughter and getting accepted into Sansa's service, he has slowly endeared himself to the men or at the very least, was tolerated.

It was all because of Sansa, of course. These days also proved that everyone of his men were trying to get into her good graces no matter if it was just to slight him or because they've come to see how capable and honorable Sansa was...is. A lady at three, her mother boasted, and now a Queen in all but name, everyone can see that. And if their lady trusted Jaime Lannister, they would not question it. Not when all she's done ever since he granted her regency, was for the North.

And as the North remembered, they also questioned a lot. Every little thing...just not with the Lady of Winterfell. The only question they had for her was when would she finally take the crown to the North.

So here they were, waiting for his downfall. Probably wishing he'd die in battle so she'd be forced to take the crown at last. Wishing that he and his queen would perish - he knew that and the North would be independent in its wake. He also knew very well what the men thought of him, thought of his queen. But he was tired of explaining himself to them. Death was knocking at their doors and they simply had no time for it.

Still.

Still.
He swallowed.

To him there was only one person he wanted to explain it all. One.

Only one that he wanted - no - needed to understand him. Yet that same person was the only one who never even dared to ask him or showed signs of wanting to know. Even Arya no matter how they were both overjoyed with their reunion, didn't fail to tell him what a shite he was, telling him that though she loved him best, she was siding with Sansa this time. Bran was...he didn't even know what Bran was about anymore but he was going to talk to him this evening and find out. But before anything else today, he had to seek out Sansa.

Sansa.

How many times did he gaze at her, willing her to meet his eyes to see him pleading her to ask him? Ask him anything and everything and he'd tell her all that she wanted to know?

But she never did.

She was the only one who without demanding an explanation nor an apology, simply went along with his decisions. And it was only through this that the North still followed him. He should be grateful. He is grateful.

Then why does it make me feel so ill?

He should be proud and happy that she finally trusted him. He was. He is. She gave him everything he needed from the North right now to win the great war.

Then why does it feel like I've lost everything then?

Because in truth, he didn't get everything he needed yet.

Ever since she came to him in Castle Black, she had been the one voice that could reassure him and make him feel worthy even though deep inside, everything that he was now was because of her efforts. He didn't want to fight battles, yet he went for her. He didn't want to be King, but he accepted because with a nod and a smile, she gave her blessing.

And she named him... Stark.

Not officially, but it felt all the same.

He sighed again and closed his eyes, ready to turn back.

A home.

A title.

A family.

She gave him all three, paid with tears, blood, humility, innocence, and love.

And what did he do to repay her?

He clenched his fists and steeled himself to do it - do it now.

Go to her.
Talk to her.

You owe her this much.

He walked over to her sworn shield who regarded him with his signature smirk and those judging green eyes - and by the gods did he want to punch him. Every time he saw him, the Kingslayer would give him a look that was part smug and part angry and he hated himself that he knew why.

The gods were cruel to let him witness Sansa seeking comfort from this man. But when he remembered Sansa looking lighter and better in the morning...after -even smiling more genuinely, he thought that, no, the gods were just for punishing him with this. He knew eventually that Sansa might one day choose someone for her.

He even prayed for it - for her to find some happiness. He swore to himself after learning of her horrors that he'd find a way to make her believe in songs again.

He just...didn't think it would be from the Kingslayer.

"Your grace - oh sorry, Lord Snow," he drawled.

Jon gritted his teeth at the obvious pass, but decided to let it go. "Ser Jaime." He acknowledged with a gruff.

"Was there something you need, Lord Snow?"

"I'm looking for my sister."

He smirked deeper but made no move to step away from the door. "Ah."

Feeling his patience wear thin, Jon blurted out. "Is she inside?"

"She is," he answered smoothly, his smirk deepening.

Jon pushed his irritation away and simply nodded. He made for the door but was halted when the Kingslayer blocked his path, good hand on his pommel.

Jon's eyes widened as he scowled up at him, daring him in silent question.

Jaime raised a brow for a moment before relaxing his stance and stepping aside with a grin. "Oh. You meant to speak with Lady Stark?"

Jon bristled at the way he said her title, remembering how he used it as an endearment for Sansa. Slowly, he unclenched his teeth. "What does it look like?"

Jaime chuckled and shook his head. "Apologies, Lord Snow. I thought you were merely inquiring where she was."

Jon let out a breath. "I've no time for your games, ser. I mean to speak with Sansa now."

Jaime let go of his pommel and crossed his arms over his chest instead. "Urgent matters, I presume?"

He kept his brow raised.

"It's none of your business," he muttered impatiently, his hand pressed to the wooden door but before he could push it open, the Kingslayer stepped in front of him again, making him step back, and looking condescendingly down at him, all trace of humor gone.

He stood firm, eyes holding tightness in them while his mouth curled into a frown. Jon could tell he obviously wanted to say something but held it, both of them opting to just staring each other down, Jaime cracked first with a sigh before looking at him almost apologetically. "Forgive me. It's just... you should let her sleep a little longer." He glanced softly at the door before looking back at him grimly.

All the anger and the fight faded away, replaced with guilt. "She's-she's asleep?" He glanced at the door himself.

Jaime looked to the side and nodded. "Lady Stark just came back from talking to Lord Royce about the provisions the Vale would be providing. And this was after she visited the only functional glass house with Lord Tarly and Maester Wolkan on what grain or crop they could still try to grow...I only was able to convince her to take her work on reviewing ledgers here. At least here, no one would bother her and she'd be sitting down," he huffed.

The guilt grew but he took out his anger on the Kingslayer anyway. "Then why didn't you suggest she take to her chambers instead if you're so concerned with her exhaustion?"

He could tell Jaime bristled with the twitch of his mouth but he instead regarded him with a raised golden brow. "You think I didn't try? Lord Snow, as you've said, time is of the essence and with the additional people you've brought in Winterfell that along with the refugees seeking shelter here upon her invitation, as well as the women and children of the Freefolk that remained... my lady has worked nonstop in making sure everyone is provided. She'll not be stopped. Certainly, of all people, you'd be the one to know how stubborn Sansa is."

Jon almost lost it. How dare he? How dare he make it - how dare he say her name so - Jon shook his head and kept his emotions in check.

"She just fell asleep not that long ago. Let her rest. Lady Sansa has, after all, not been sleeping that mu-

Jaime was cut off with Jon's grip on his doublet, just below his throat. The former king in the north's eyes were mad with rage and was practically frothing at the mouth as he heaved.

Jaime held his ground, dropped his hands to the side, and smirked at him amused and waiting. Jon just knew that everything that left the Kingslayer's mouth was a hit on him.

*The nerve of him dangling his - his - Jon couldn't even bring himself to complete that thought without feeling like retching or wanting to kill this man.*

Ever calm, the prick spoke in a hushed but firm voice. "*Might I suggest, Lord Snow. That whatever this is, we take it somewhere else? I'd rather not wake my lady this way.*"

Jon gripped him tighter then, his blood boiling over his veins, bleeding on to his skin.

Jaime sighed exasperatedly and in one fluid movement, he stepped forward once making Jon step back while he stared Jon down. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

With one disgruntled breath, Jon released him, his hands clenching at his sides while Jaime stood there straight and calmly straightening his clothes while he looked at Jon passively, waiting for him to make the next move.

Jon stepped forward once more and met his eyes angrily. "If you ever *hurt* her-
Jaime couldn't help but erupt into a chuckle as he stared Jon down incredulously.

"You think this is funny?" Jon said through gritted teeth as his nose flared as did his temper.

"I think," he paused, "you're being too loud," Jaime crossed his arms again as he whispered his answer back. "Lord Snow."

He then nodded towards the door and stepped aside. "Go on then. But wait for her to wake up if you can. We've all asked her to do so much already. She deserves a moment of peace. I'll make sure no one disturbs you. Or if you want I'll have someone send for you once she wakes. It's up to you, Lord Snow."

Jon wanted to have it out with this arrogant pompous prick but he didn't want to miss out an opportunity to be alone with Sansa so with haste but care, he ignored the Kingslayer though he brushed past him earning another irritating chuckle before he pushed the door as quietly as he could and stepped inside.

"It's about time," he heard Jaime mutter but he chose to ignore him still.

He walked quietly and found her on the back corner and the sight that greeted him made his heart melt.

There with her head resting on top of her arms over some ledgers, was Sansa.

He slid into the chair opposite her as stealthily as he could and took a moment to just look at her.

Her fiery hair was pulled in one long braid today and roped over her shoulder with a few wisps framing her face which, for the first time since he's been back, was peaceful and the sight of it drew all his breath in at how beautiful this look on her was, almost too innocent or childlike as if she was back to being that little girl with only songs and stories in her eyes that he knew years ago. Using her words, the sight of her peacefully sleeping felt like an enchantment to him. Something he wanted to preserve and keep forever like this.

Her long lashes fell on her sharp cheeks while her mouth, slightly parted drew out endearingly quiet snoring that was almost too ladylike that he almost chuckled at how Sansa it was.

But then the more he looked, the more he saw how much of the innocence was lost and signs of exhaustion etched on her skin. For one she looked slighter. It could also be from the way the large black furs of a coat that clearly did not belong to her - his insides twisted once more knowing just who it belonged to, dwarfed her but no. Her cheeks were sharper and her beautiful dainty hands were bonier than when he'd left her. How did this happen?

Before he left, he made sure she was cared for enough to regain what she lost to her monstrous husband who starved her as part of his games. Then he saw the shadow under her eyes and the scratches and new callouses on her hands and once more he felt guilty. This was because of him.

While he was running a fool's errand in the South, she was busy keeping their home and their men intact.

He was incredibly proud of her and now he just threw all of her effort away. He rarely prayed now but if there was one thing he prayed for the most, it was for his gamble to win out in the end.

He promised to protect her and he'd do anything. Anything at all to protect her so help him.
Damn the rest of them for what they think of him when the only thing that mattered was that she would be alive in the end. Not even what she thought of him would matter to him in the end because he thinks that this is the only way. He'd rather live with her hating him than live without her at all.

Still, if she understood, if this war between them could be settled even the slightest, he'd go to battle and die a happier man.

Finally pushing through his restraint, he gingerly reached out and brushed a few strands of her hair off her face, tracing the side of her face carefully. He withdrew at once when her forehead twitched and held his breath.

She didn't wake.

But a tiny smile crept up her face that made Jon choke up.

*Are you dreaming, sweet girl?*

*What are you dreaming about, I wonder, that would make you smile so?*

Then his heart tightened and he swallowed.

*Is it... is it Ser Jaime you dream about now? A knight that stepped out of the stories you've always dreamed about?*

*Or is it...*

"Is it me...?" he didn't mean to say out loud.

"Jon."

He sat still and stopped breathing, his eyes locked on to her.

*Was that my name or did I just imagine it?*

"Jon?"

Jon sucked in a breath sharply and everything seemed to happen all at once while he remained unmoving heavily in his seat.

Her eyes fluttered open briefly then closed once more as he watched her unfurl like a flower blooming, sitting straight while rubbing at her eye with one hand while her other hand was covering her mouth as she yawned.

And then, one by one, Jon met with her blue eyes, and once again, he didn't feel the need to breathe or blink, fearing that if he moved he'd only imagine the warmth and the softness that lingered in her gaze as they looked back at him.

Sansa blinked once then tilted her head as she regarded Jon for a few beats before finally she gave a tiny smile. "Hello Jon."

Jon sucked in another breath and just continued to gawk at her. *Not your grace. Not my lord. Jon. Just...Jon.*

He'd expected to see cold or steel or that polite and unreadable mask he loathed so much, but not *this.*
Sensing his confusion, comprehension dawned on her and with a sigh she smiled a little wider before leaning back and clasping her hands on top of the table. "Are you alright?"

His brow twitched as he focused on her mouth. He knew she was saying something. He heard it but he was still filled with anxiety. He was prepared for indifference and rage but this was... this was...

He jumped when he felt a hand on top of his clenched one on the table. Surprised, Sansa started withdrawing her hand right away and that was when he came back to himself, grabbing her hand at once and holding on to it with both hands tightly and pulling it closer as he leaned forward.

She was looking concernedly at their hands before slowly lifting her gaze to meet his, her brows drawn while her mouth was slightly parted before closing as she searched his expression before starting again.

"It's o-

"No."

He hoped she could see the pleading in his eyes. Do not tell me it's okay. It's not. Do not placate me.

Sansa must've understood so she kept her mouth shut and relaxed her hand in his grip.

Jon closed his eyes then and pressed his forehead on top of his hands that were clutching one of hers.

Just a little longer.

He knew Sansa was looking at him. He could feel it. Trying to understand what he was doing or what he was trying to do. He thought he could do it. But with just one sliver of affection from her after so long, he was undone. He didn't realize how much he craved this. How much he came to rely on her reassurances.

How he just missed her.

He let out a breath as some relief washed over him that she wasn't pulling away. At least, not yet.

When he realized that the silence stretched out for too long, reluctantly, he lifted his head, and met her eyes.

Her eyes were the same beautiful blue pair that haunted him day and night especially all those days he was apart from her. Her gaze was soft like that time she told him he was nothing like the royal prick that was Joffrey but her posture was still slightly guarded.

He settled for a smile. "I missed you." He kissed the back of her hand. "Sansa." What was I saying? This wasn't what I sought her for.

Sansa's eyes wavered before she gave another small smile. "I miss you too," she said sadly and the guilt started backing up again.

Ever since that conversation he witnessed, he couldn't shake off the knowledge that Sansa felt the same way. That knowledge should've made him feel some joy but instead, it fed him even more guilt and shame.

And now he said he missed her and never one to miss a beat, she said she misses him.

And now she was looking at their hands at how tightly he was holding on to hers and he dared
search her face and saw that she was thinking about something...something close to pain. *What do you know?* He wanted to ask. *Just tell me and let's be done with it.*

He looked at her small hand in between his and the image of this same hand being held and kissed by another made his chest hurt and his blood boil once more before the thought that if indeed if it was as he suspect that she knew what he did... then maybe she was feeling the same as he was from this touch.

He looked up at her again and saw that she had more control of her expression once more in the silence but her eyes still held a sadness that she couldn't quite keep and it killed him that if what he heard was right, it was his fault. He wanted to tell her it wasn't what she thought.

It wasn't.

It *was* but not quite the whole of it.

Everything he did, was for her.

"Sansa-" he started but she held her hand and shook her head.

"You don't need to explain," she said quickly.

Jon stood up then and knelt in front of her, grabbing both her hands in his as he looked up at her. "Let me."

She looked down at him startled and shifted her gaze sideways. "Get up. Jon, *get up*- you can't be seen like-

He gritted his teeth and shook his head firmly. "Your sworn shield is outside. This may be my last chance."

She blinked confused. "Jaime is-

Jon bristled and snorted but did his best to reign the jealousy in. "Yes. He promised we won't be disturbed."

She softened then and looked softly at the direction of the door. "Oh." Jon felt another stab in his chest at the fond look in Sansa's eyes.

Jon squeezed her hands once, redirecting her attention back to him. "Sansa."

She was starting to slip her mask on as she looked at him but he saw the brief twinge of pain in her eyes making him flinch a bit.

"What is it...Jon?"

With the way she struggled to say his name now he almost shattered into pieces but he held on. "Sansa...just ask," he pleaded in a voice barely above a whisper.

Sansa considered him then, a war of emotions in his favorite blue while her mouth was set in a frown.

"Please," he urged, squeezing her hands again.

She let out a breath then and looked away slightly before settling back to meet his gaze. "Are you alright, Jon?"
Jon's brow furrowed at her question before he realized what she was actually asking but he didn't want this to be about him. "Sansa...Are you alright?" he asked in answer.

She smiled slightly. "I'm...alive. That should be enough isn't it? Is what he knew she meant to say.

His chest constricted while his gut dropped still he pleaded once more for her to ask and because her being just alive and standing wasn't enough for him after all.

Sansa sighed then and looked away. "You leave tomorrow." What would be the point of this discussion? Would it change anything? He could practically fill in.

"Sansa, please look at me," he stoked her palms with his thumbs.

Slowly, she turned her head and looked at him, her eyes tight with control as she searched his until finally she spoke. "Do you have everything you need?"

Jon clutched at her hands tighter, leaning closer and holding her gaze. "Not everything."

Her lips parted slightly while her eyes widened a fraction as she continued to regard him, brows furrowing before smoothening in an instant, transitioning into a resigned look as she leant forward and gripped his hands. "You have my support. You know that," she said with an edge of exasperation only those who knew her could tell.

He choked. "Sansa," he shook his head unable to form the words.

She looked at him sternly not getting what he meant. "You do. You do."

"I know that," he said through gritted teeth making her withdraw slightly in shock.

"Then what else do you want from me?" she looked at him with frustration and was that finally irritation? That Jon almost wept with relief to see some of her control fraying at the same time he felt his heart shattering more and more at her question. What else? What more can I give that I haven't already given?

What else, Jon? He asked himself as well. He wanted so many things from her but none of them was his to ask. None of them he felt worthy of or was even allowed to have.

When he didn't answer, Sansa let out a huff of frustration and looked away, shutting her eyes tight, before calmly looking back at him. "Jon."

He looked up at her, making sure she had his full attention as he drank whatever she wanted to say.

She smiled sadly, extracting one hand tentatively reaching for the scar on his face, his eyes closing on instinct as she traced the line from his brow to his cheek and withdrawing and when Jon sensed that his eyes flew open and he grabbed at her hand, pressing it to his face and keeping it there.

"Sansa, please."

Her eyes were troubled and for a moment he thought they misted until they settled on resolve as she sat up straight and kept her face serious but not cold or hard. Just contemplative. This was as good as it was going to get.

"Alright."

Jon let out a breath then and nodded. Waiting for her to continue.
"Was it hard? This decision you made?" But he knew she meant, *Did it feel difficult? Did it weigh heavy on your mind?*

He nodded once. "Aye."

She blinked and nodded back. "Was it premeditated? Not something instinctual?"

He loved her even more for how she was phrasing her questions. How it lead with assumptions of what she thought to expect from him rather than outright accusations that his eyes softened as he looked at her. "Aye. I've thought it over more than once before speaking them."

She kept her calm, not giving herself away and once more he loved her even more because it was as if she expected no other answer - how she knew him more than he thought to credit her for.

But now a look crossed her features and her gaze drifted away slightly before coming back. "Were you thinking of the North when you decided?"

He wanted to yell of course he was but he knows she was leading to something. "Aye."

Without missing a beat, she followed up with, "Were you thinking about father?"

That set him back a moment, wondering where this was going but he nodded fervently. "Aye."

"Were you thinking about Robb?"

"Yes."

"Rickon? Arya? Bran?"

Jon looked up at her desperately. "Yes, of course I was-"

She looked away then cutting him off, shutting her eyes before slowly guiding them back to him and in a small voice, she asked,"...me?"

Jon reached up and cupped her face then forcing her to look at him. "Sansa, yes."

Sansa looked at him unwaveringly then even if her mouth was still set in a line until she shut her eyes and wrapped her hands around Jon's wrist as he cradled her face. *You're all I think about.* He wanted to say.

Jon rested his forehead against hers then and closed his own eyes, keeping them in this moment.

It was her who broke it. "Was there...no other way?"

Jon withdrew then reluctantly but kept his hands were they were even as she released her own.

"This is the surest way," he answered finally.

Sansa searched his eyes again before giving a resigned sigh. "Can this be undone? Your decision?"

Jon hated this game. Hated how he had to think this way. Hated how he can't just simply answer what he desired even with just Sansa. He may no longer be the king, but he would not discredit Sansa's loyalty to him by dishonoring the cause he chose that she had repeatedly told him she would support.

"Any decision can be undone but I mean to honor what I have already declared just so," he finally
answered carefully choosing his words.

Sansa leant away then and that was his cue to let her go and he did reluctantly but took hold of one of her hands anyway. She didn't pull back.

"Then it must be so," she declared simply yet spoke volumes.

Jon took a deep breath and sat beside her then. "Aye."

"Then why-

He stood then and looked at her frustratingly, no longer able to keep his emotions in check. "Why are you being like this?"

She looked up at him confused. "Like what?"

He ran a hand through his hair. "This! Sansa, aren't you -

She began chuckling bitterly that Jon had to stop and watch her carefully.

"You want me to be mad? Is that it? You want me to lecture you? You want me to point out every little mistake? Is that it?"

"Yes!"

Sansa scowled at him for a score before leaning back after a disgruntled breath. "What would it matter, Jon? It's too late. What would be the sense in it? Nothing would change. We can spend all day looking at every angle, every option, every mistake and the result would be the same. And I'm tired, Jon. I don't want to fight you," she said the last part hushed.

Jon chastened then when he saw her melt in exhaustion against her chair, her shoulders heavy as if the world was pushing her down and she was barely pushing back.

"I'm so so-

Sansa looked up at him then cutting off his apology and beckoning him to sit down beside her again, offering her hand that he took at once. "I told you, Jon. It's done. You have my support. You don't need to explain. You are my king." She clutched his hand and unleashed the full force of her stare at him. "Do you understand?"

Jon couldn't help the strangled sob that escaped him then as he bowed his head over their clasped hands, shutting his eyes and gritting his teeth.

"Oh Jon," she stroked his hair but he didn't feel worthy of it so he pulled away and looked at her straight.

"What did I ever do," he swallowed, "to ever deserve this...loyalty?" he choked.

Sansa's brows were furrowed as she looked at him intently before she lifted a corner of her mouth. "Do you remember what you told me? When we were at the battlements? After I apologized for the Knights of the Vale?"

Jon looked at her confused. Why would she bring that up?

"Well, I do." She said not waiting for his reply. "You told me we need to trust each other. That we can't fight a war amongst ourselves."
He stopped sobbing then.

"And do you remember, on the bridge what I told you? Before we received Cersei's letter?"

Jon had to smile then. "You asked me if it would be so terrible to listen to you."

She smiled slightly then and sighed. "I did say that but I said something more before that."

Jon thought back. "You told me to be smarter than father - smarter than Robb."

She smiled wider. "Yes, what else did I say? What else did I tell you Jon?" she gripped his hand and a wave of affection came over him when he finally understood what she meant.

"Yes, Jon. I meant what I said then. I still do," she said reverently, squeezing his hand once more.

_You are good at this. Ruling. You are._

_You are._

"You should've been Queen in the first place," He squeezed back. "You're better than me at it."

She laughed once and shook her head. "It's more than just being _better_ at it."

She searched his eyes again. "Lord Tyrion told me you made a spectacle of yourself at King's Landing."

Jon cringed trying to get the memory of it away.

"I just want you to know that just as you said that people should start honoring their words or words would mean nothing, I mean for the North to honor their vows to _you_ when they forced the crown on _you_," she said firmly and carefully.

Jon could only stare at her as he took in her words.

"If I wanted the crown, I could take it. But why should I take the fealty of men who would so easily change their minds and usurp me at the next mistake? They didn't heed our initial call. And when we won, they chose _you_. When you decided to go South and hand me regency, you asked for their trust. They _gave_ their trust. The North must remember as we've always done before. The South can have their games, but the North must hold their word," she reached for his face again. "Just as their king does."

He couldn't help but bring her to him then, hold her, and bury his face in her neck and breathe her in. He held her tighter to him when he felt her wrap her arms around him as well.

"Only you would think this," he whispered in her ear.

"Sometimes...all you need is one person to believe," she whispered back. "Well, in this case, the _right_ person to believe," she said lightly.

Jon laughed then. "Aye, you're the only right person who needs to believe. They _adore_ you."

She laughed as well and it was music to his ears. "Well, it took feeding my husband to his own dogs and executing a mockingbird, to erase all doubts in me, mind you."

He shook his head, disagreeing. "It's not that. You know it's more than that."
She sighed. "It doesn't matter. The North is yours."

"I'm not a king anymore."

She sighed again but held him tighter. "When the war is over, we'll figure it out. We'll get it back. I trust you."

He pulled back then to look at her. "Why do you believe in me so much?"

Her eyes misted then as she looked at him sadly. "Do you have to ask?" she answered brokenly.

He knelt before her then and rested his head against her lap.

"Jon, stand up. You shouldn't-

He kept shaking his head and holding on despite her efforts at pushing him away.

"No, Sansa. You shouldn't."

"It's too late for that."

Jon looked at her then and he saw it clearly - as clear as day.

She loves him.

He stood up then and leveled with her. "Then you should also know why I'm doing all this."

Her eyes widened in surprise and Jon wanted to laugh bitterly.

Now you know as well.

Sansa turned to walk towards the window then and watched passively, her expression shifting in a war to collect herself.

Jon chose to follow her with only his eyes, knowing she needed the space.

The window rattled from the snow storm that was building outside, the only sound that interrupted the silence.

Jon watched her place a hand against the glass before sighing. "The things we do for love." She looked at him then with a small sad smile.

He wanted to cross the room and kiss her then but he remembered where Sansa heard this - from whom she heard this and was reminded why he couldn't.

Why they couldn't.

He shut his eyes briefly before nodding. "Aye."

He walked slowly over to her anyway, keeping his distance but still being close enough to study her profile.

Reluctantly when he knew she won't meet his eyes, he looked out the window and saw Daenerys with Missandei and Ser Jorah below.

"She's really quite beautiful..."
Jon whipped his face to look at her and saw the sadness back in her eyes.

"Sansa-"

She looked up at him then and smiled, shaking her head once, ending further discussion.

"I don't love her," he felt the need to blurt it out and be done with it. It was true. He learned to be fond of her, that's true. But it wasn't enough to fully love her.

Sansa was taken aback from the sudden declaration but still she looked away and back to watch outside the window and said nothing.

"I don't."

Still silent.

"I love-"

She looked at him then and shook her head, looking at him sternly. You can't. We can't.

"But you do care for her, don't you?" she asked him seriously.

He sighed long and heavy. "Aye."

She smiled slightly then, satisfied though he saw her eyes flash in pain. "Sometimes...sometimes care is enough..."

And there he felt the worst of the blows he could ever receive in both of his lifetimes.

She was letting him go.

And care, she mentioned care and all he could think about was how Jaime looked after her with care and how she accepted it.

She was also asking him to let her go.

They looked at each other then, their eyes searching each other, their hands clenched, hers in front of her, his at his sides.

It was clear what was between them. Jon knew that now and he knew she knew it then too.

Jon wanted to say it, but her eyes pleaded no.

Sometimes care is enough.

He knew what other thing she meant.

Sometimes knowing is enough.

She offered a smile then and though he wanted to weep, he had to muster enough to return it.

I love you. Her eyes said.

I love you too, he hoped he conveyed as well.

Maybe this should be enough.
Maybe the world might think that he loved another but he only needed Sansa to know the truth.

When he proclaimed her regency, he was actually declaring his love for her.

*The North is a part of me. It's my home. I left both in capable hands - yours.*

*And I'm going to fight for her to keep it no matter the odds.*

And now looking at her, at what she's done for him.

By refusing the crown, by giving him her support out before the lords, despite her speech on honor earlier... she declared her love for him.

He wanted nothing more but to close the gap and kiss her anyway. Show her what words fail to say. And he could tell she struggled too but there was more hesitation on her part.

And then he knew why. She spent so many years in the clutches of lions, she knew what union might bring. She bore its marks just as Bran was crippled, just as Arya hardened, just as all the rest of them were dead. Even Tyrion suffered. The Kingslayer lost his swordhand. Innocents like Myrcella and Tommen, good children he met died. Why only Daenerys is what's left of her line.

You can't choose who you love. It's true.

But you can choose duty over love.

He wanted to hold her one last time though. Surely they can have that much?

But before he could step closer, they were interrupted by the arrival of Ser Jaime.

"Jaime, what is it?" Sansa looked at him worriedly and Jon couldn't deny that it was jealousy he truly felt this time.

"Apologies, my lady. My brother is asking for an audience with you. I think he means to hand you your annulment," he said humorously.

Sansa smiled and shook her head chuckling. "Well, I'll receive him in my solar in a moment to tell him his watch has ended."

"Ah. An inside joke, I presume. Very well then," he grinned at her and waited.

Sansa glanced at Jon then before looking at Jaime apologetically. "Can you give us a bit more time? I'll meet you outside."

Jaime looked between the two of them, looking at both of them warningly that Sansa nodded at him chastened while Jon only felt irritation.

Sansa placed a hand on his arm then and he relaxed, fighting the urge to smirk at the Kingslayer who simply huffed and nodded, taking Sansa's hand and making sure he met Jon's eyes as he kissed the back of it before leaving. "Try not to take too long. People are also looking for you Lord Stark. I take it that with how long the two of you spent here, you wouldn't want people to speculate. I took the liberty of not telling them you were here with my lady," he said and walked out without waiting for a reply.

Sansa tightened her grip on him then before releasing. "Well...duty calls."

Jon scoffed then angrily wanting to thrash the library in outburst. "Aye. Duty," he gritted his teeth.
"Jon."

He ran his hands over his hair and sighed. "He cares about you," he said so suddenly. Sansa looked away and Jon felt ill when he saw her cheeks color.

"He's only here to fulfill his oath to my mother," she muttered. Jon snorted. He knew about that oath as Brienne told him. It may have started that way but he knew with the way he was looking at her now that it was starting to be more than that.

She looked up at him then. "It's true. He thinks I'm his last chance for honor."

"Honor," he scoffed remembering what he offered her that night. "Do you trust him?"

"Jon-

"Sansa."

She sighed then and nodded. "I do."

Jon surrendered then, remembering how much better she looked in the morning after what he saw. And try as he did to ignore it, she was...happier and more at ease when the Kingslayer was with her. Sometimes care is enough.

"Jon, I don't-

"Sansa, don't-

She stopped then and suddenly Jon had the overwhelming need to know. "Is he...is he kind to you at least?"

She pursed her lips but nodded. "Jaime is very kind."

He sighed and nodded at her then before drawing her to him, stroking her hair before kissing her forehead, lingering just a little longer than necessary before pulling away and smiling down at her. "I'm leaving the North in your hands again."

She sighed as well and smiled a true smile finally. "Try harder not to lose it this time."

Jon chuckled. "Aye."

Sansa looked at him seriously then. "Jon. Come back okay?"

His gut dropped. "Sansa-

"Please. Promise me," she gripped his doublet then and her eyes shone with building tears.

"I'll do my best to come back to you," he cupped her face.

She closed her eyes tightly then and bit her lip, holding that expression for a moment, shattering him once more, before nodding. Jon stroked her cheeks. "Sansa, should anything happen to me-

She kept shaking her head then, closing her eyes once more making him want to weep for the
hundredth time but he had to be strong.

He held her face more firmly. "Listen to me. Sansa. Listen. Please."

She opened her eyes then and tears flowed out as she looked at him stricken.

He mustered a smile no matter how hard and brushed his thumbs over her tears. "Should anything happen to me, take the crown. Lead the North. But should we fail, you run. Take Arya, Bran, Brienne, Ghost, and... your Jaime. Run. I'll make arrangements for all of you to head East."

She tried to shake her head again. "Jon."

"Sansa, you said you trust me. I need you to trust me to keep you safe. Can you do this for me? Will you do this for me?"

She closed her eyes briefly again before holding back a sob. Then she was wrapping her arms around his neck and nestling her face on his shoulder. "Is this a command?"

Jon shut his eyes as he held her tighter to him. "Only if it comes down to it."

He felt her take a deep breath then before she nodded against his shoulder. "You'll do it then?" he wanted to hear her promise.

"Only when I have to," was her answer.

It wasn't the answer he wanted, but it was as good as he was going to get.

They held each other for a moment longer until they both knew their time was up.

When they pulled away slowly, Sansa leant close, held his face in one hand and kissed his cheek, lingering as he did that he shut his eyes and reveled in it until she had to pull away.

Sansa smiled softly at him then and pressed something in his hand.

He looked down and saw that it was a white handkerchief with an embroidering of two wolves. A grey one and Ghost.

"A favor. For whatever luck it may bring," she shrugged. "Will you accept it from your sister?"

Jon felt his chest catch once more as he looked at her though it hurt when she said sister but he managed a smile anyway. "With this favor, then how can I think to lose? Of course I'll accept it. Thank you my lady." He placed it over his heart.

With one final nod and grin, Jon watched her turn around and walk away.

It didn't take long for him to catch up to her, telling her that he'll just walk her to the door when she looked at him in warning. She sighed but snatched his hand anyway as they walked.

Once at the door, Jon watched as she took Jaime's offered arm, both of them exchanging smiles before walking away while he looked on.

Jaime looked at him and Jon had to nod and that would be enough as Jaime nodded back in understanding.

Jon was about to turn around when Sansa looked back at him.
And just as before, Jon smiled at him and gave her a wave knowing full well that he'd have to do this all over again tomorrow.

Sansa didn't wave back but smiled at him knowingly before turning around ready to continue her duty.

Jon stayed in the library and rested his head back at the wall.

Sansa would be safe with Arya, Bran, Brienne, Ghost... and Jaime.

This should be enough.

It must.

With one last sigh, he left the library to tend to his duties once more and seek out Bran later on.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!