Snowed Under by your Love

by Everythingjonsa

Summary

Jon Snow is no more the bastard he once was. He's powerful and successful, a prince in everything but name and has everything money can buy. Except what he truly wants.

A chance encounter with Sansa Stark with whom his past is entangled, yields a bombshell discovery: Jon is a father!

Jon is Livid. It's a rocky reunion and old, intense feelings return with a vengeance.

Jon is determined. And what Jon Snow wants, Jon Snow gets....

Notes

Hello ALL.. This is my first attempt at Fanfiction. Please be kind.
I am everythingjonsa on Tumblr.
Chapter 1

JON SNOW got out of his black and white Maserati, parked at a safe distance from the Book store he planned to pay a visit to. It was late August and the sun shone brightly in his eyes causing him to squint a little. He undid the button of his black silk shirt that he wore under his Grey Suit as he tried to read the name of the book store from a distance. Damn, he’d forgotten his glasses. After a lot of squinting he finally read the words painted in silver…

THE LITTLE CITADEL

Jon smiled slowly thinking how much Sam would’ve appreciated the name. He then braced himself for doing something he partially hated doing, but he knew it had to be done. One of the Hospitality companies he owned had bought all the three blocks adjacent to this shop for his new Hotel project and he needed to buy this store because it was facing the main road and was built on a prime location. The book store owner had turned away three of his employees politely and Dolorous EDD, his friend and the vice-president of his company informed him that apparently they all came back telling how it was such a bad decision to buy out her store. This lady had never lost her cool even once while talking to his employees and had them wrapped around her little finger in a matter of an hour; three of his BEST employees. Jon then suddenly remembered that he knew nothing about the lady who owned the store and had requested EDD to send him her file. He took out his phone, irritation creeping into him at this lacuna in knowledge. He always liked to do his homework before meeting his nemesis. And if this woman was half as good as Edd had heard she is, he was going to have to use all the tricks in his playbook to get her to agree to sell.

“EDD, you’ve not yet sent me this bookstore lady’s name and details…” Jon barked into his mobile phone irritably as soon as EDD came online “How am I supposed to convince the lady to sell her store to me, if I don’t even know her name?”

EDD mumbled something about messaging him the details in just a while and Jon cut the phone with a huff as he entered the store. The store was bigger than he’d expected it to be. The walls were painted grey but everything else, especially the book shelves were all as white as snow. At the back end of the bookstore a beautiful weirwood tree with its fiery red leaves was painted artistically on the wall and suddenly Jon had to literally hold himself back from rushing to the tree and tracing its branches with his fingers. This Lady was definitely a northerner, Jon made a mental note. Could he exploit that connection? There was no one in Kings Landing who could know or appreciate the beauty of the weirwood tree like he could. Surely the lady and he had one thing in common, at least. As Jon slowly looked around, he realized that the book shop was so tastefully decorated that he almost felt bad that he was going to have to arm twist the owner into selling the shop to him. But he knew it had to be done. He was going to have to offer this woman a deal she couldn’t refuse.

Jon straightened the jacket of his steel gray suit and ran his hand over his curls which were tightly secured in a man bun of sorts. Jon decided to pretend to look through the collection of books. He had to buy some time till his office sent him all the details. He passed rows and rows of books stacked neatly in the snow white shelves. The children’s books section was the only one which had rainbow coloured shelves and a small play area where children could read and play. He imagined that a lot of book readings and story-telling sessions must happen in this very area. He paused when he saw the Harry Potter series and a sense of nostalgia washed over him. He picked up the first book in the series, Harry Potter and the philosopher’s stone and many memories that were kept hidden on purpose, threatened to come back to him. What a positive impact this series had had on him when he was growing up! He felt so connected to the characters especially because there were so many similarities between his life and Harry’s.
His mother Lyanna Snow had been a single parent and Jon had never known who his father was. When he was 11, he was called a bastard by someone in his class and somehow the name stuck. No one befriended him. He had been alone and an outcast until the Starks had moved back to Winter-fell from Castle Black. Robb Stark strode into school like a rock star and with his good nature and drop dead gorgeous looks had become the most popular boy in school overnight. When Ramsey Bolton had called Jon a bastard in front of Robb, he got punched so hard in the face by Robb, that no one had ever dared to call Jon a bastard for the rest of his schooling days. For Robb stark had become his Ron and the Starks had become his Weasleys. Jon used to practically live in Robb’s room. Ned Stark and his mother had been classmates and had gone to Winterfell high together. So Robb’s dad and his mom doted on Jon. Arya had idolised him. She had mimicked everything Jon did which would amuse him greatly. Bran was too mature for his age, but Jon had loved him dearly and Rickon was everyone’s baby. Only Sansa had remained elusive and withdrawn from him. Jon squeezed his eyes shut to will these memories away.

“Why do you like Harry Potter?”

Jon was so taken aback by the sudden delicate voice that seemed to come out of nowhere that he almost dropped the book he was holding. A little girl of probably four or five was staring up at him with icy blue eyes from a little pink chair that she was sitting on. Jon cleared his throat and looked around to see if the parent of the child was around but it looked like the girl was sitting there all by herself. He was already slightly impatient with the amount of time EDD was taking to get back with the information. It was so unlike EDD. In the meanwhile he thought talking to this sweet child may just be what he needed. So Jon grabbed a bean bag that was lying nearby and dragged it near her chair to sit down next to her.

“I like Harry Potter, because it’s the story of an ordinary boy doing extraordinary things!” Jon replied almost extremely tempted to ruffle the girl’s curly mop of black hair which looked so much like his when he was a child.

“What is extraordinary?” The girl asked him with a slight pout that reminded him so much of a girl he once knew. Sansa Stark.....

“Well the dictionary meaning of ....” Jon started to say but caught himself when he realised to whom he was trying to explain this to. He smiled slightly at his own folly as he saw the little angel’s pout change into a brood, which looked pretty much like his own childhood broody pictures. He remembered Catelyn Stark’s words. “You brood too much, Jon Snow” So he crossed his arms and leaned forward slightly. “Well, extraordinary means when you do something that no one thinks you could’ve ever done.”

The little girl’s brain seemed to process this information that had come out of his mouth. She imitated Jon’s stance folding her hands in front of her chest and leaning towards him. “Have you done anything extraordinary?”

Her question stumped him momentarily. Jon wondered how he was going to answer. Where should he even begin? Jon had lost his mother when he was just fifteen. Ned and Catelyn Stark had insisted that Jon come and live with them. Robb and Arya had had his things packed and brought over to the stark mansion before he could even say a yes. When he was 21, he had started from scratch with the Angel investment Ned Stark had made in his company eight years back. He owned more than thirty companies in the Hospitality sector today. He had managed to create, build and grow all his businesses into a massive empire worth $340 million. Jon had been lucky enough to appear in Forbes Magazine’s 30 under 30. But how does one explain all this to a child without sounding like someone who brags? He cleared his throat. “I’ve built a few hotels.. ummm… buildings… I mean errr.. Skyscrapers so I guess, I’ve done a few extraordinary things” He replied to the girl who was
watching him with great concentration, not knowing if he was making any sense.

“My uncle can turn me into an airplane and make me fly!” The girl stated with obvious pride in her uncle’s skills and Jon instantly broke into a grin. “I think that’s very extraordinary.” continued the little girl, he blue eyes sparkling.

Thank you for the lesson in humility, love, he told her in his head. “And what about your Dad?” Jon asked without giving a second thought but the second the words came out of his mouth, Jon knew he had made a mistake. The child’s face fell like her favourite toy had been taken away from her, forcibly.

“I don’t have a Daddy.” the girl looked like she was close to tears and Jon felt like he was the worst kind of monster. This was not a good state of mind to be in before negotiating a difficult deal. Jon was at an utter loss for words.

“Mummy says she’ll tell me about him when I’m older” The little girl’s face lifted a bit slowly “But I have four uncles, an Aunt and Grandma and Grandpa and six cousins. We’re a big family.” Her face fell a little again “But sometimes I wish I could call Uncle Robb “Daddy” just like Sarah, Ben, George and Lilly do.”

The mention of an ‘Uncle Robb’ did various things to Jon’s heart at once, none of which he was willing to explore at the moment. He’d lost touch with the only family that was truly ever his because of one single mistake that he had unknowingly committed. But he’d always sent them Christmas cards but never got a single one in return. Five years had gone by and he missed them every single day. He never had a father, just like this little girl and his heart went out to her. His palm automatically went to cup her cheek.

“What’s your name, darling?” He asked her wondering if it was strange that he thought he could see so much resemblance between her and his childhood photos. It had to be the hair, he told himself. All kids with a dark mop of curly hair look similar.

“Lyanna” said the girl and Jon suddenly had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. ‘Uncle Robb’ first and then ‘Lyanna’ … this was getting ridiculous. The girl cheerfully continued “But you can call me Lya. That’s what Mummy and everyone in my family call me. I’m named after my grandmother.”

Jon heaved a sigh of relief. The girl’s grandmother was called Lyanna. It had nothing to do with his mother’s name. The girl said she had a grandpa and a grandma. His mother was long dead. Jon smiled at the girl. “So what does your Grandpa call your Grandma, if both of you have the same names.”

“He calls her Cat!” Lyanna looked at Jon incredulously as though he was thick-headed or something and Jon felt like all air had been sucked right out of his lungs. He could not be hearing this right. It was impossible. He stared at Lyanna like she was probably not real, like he had conjured her out of thin air.

Lyanna who was oblivious to the emotions that were going through Jon, continued talking while kicking her legs back and forth playfully. “My Grandma is called Catelyn, my ‘grandmother’ is called Lyanna and no one gets confused because Grandma Lyanna is in heaven. She doesn’t come to visit us, ever.” Jon saw it then, as clear as day. Lyanna was his spitting replica only with the exception of her blue eyes which she had no doubt inherited from her mother. The very thought of her mother, now made his blood boil and set his pulse racing.

For the sake of your good health Sansa Stark, he sent out a prayer into the universe, I really really
hope this is not what I think it is.

Jon was now gritting his teeth to keep the anger that was exploding inside him under check. There was still a good possibility that he was over thinking this. “So, you have an Uncle Robb, an Aunt Arya, an Uncle Bran, an Uncle Rickon, a Grandpa Ned and a grandma Cat, who is the fourth uncle?” He asked her as gently as he could.

“It’s Uncle Gendry!” Lyanna exclaimed and then looked at him suspiciously, “How do you know all their names?” She asked him frowning at him with narrowed eyes looking very similar to her mother, he suspected. So Arya had finally come around and married Gendry. But he hadn’t received an invitation for the wedding. Why would Arya exclude him from her wedding? Why would Robb not tell him that he was now a father of four?? He glanced back at Lya who was still frowning at him and realisation dawned upon him.

Of course he got no invitation for the wedding or news of the births of Robb’s children. No wonder the Starks had shut him out. They were all hiding a secret. A secret, that had everything to do with him. Jon was so livid he felt his ears becoming hot. Just then his phone beeped. EDD had sent him a message.

“Her name is Sansa Stark. She’s 24, unmarried and a single parent.”

Jon kept staring at his phone unable to move a muscle aware that the little girl next to him probably thought he was mad and it was not going to earn him a first good impression if he was what he thought he was to her. So he smiled and sweetly asked her the last question that he thought was necessary. “How old are you, Love?”

“I’m four.” She asked inching her chair away from him and he instantly regretted the coolness of his voice. The math unfortunately fit perfectly in his calculations and once again Jon felt like he was being hurled down a cliff, rescued then hurled down again.

His phone beeped again and brought him out of his trance. EDD had sent him another message.

“Ummm… Is this ‘your’ Sansa Stark?”

Jon shut his eyes in an attempt to get a reign over the various emotions that were raging within him. EDD sent him another message and this time he practically growled but he read it anyway.

“Well, She is your Sansa. I double checked twice, so that makes is four times. Hence I took so much time. Jon……. You’re so fucked buddy!!!”
SANSA STARK tried her best to look interested in Shelly Finn’s woes. It was the same old story again! How the publishers rejected her work again and again, and how they didn’t appreciate real talent, and good writing anymore! Sansa’s mind couldn’t but help wander to her raison d’être; her beloved daughter, Lyanna! Where was she? She should’ve come running to Sansa by now. Had she finished eating her snack? If only Shelly would stop talking, she’d really like to go and check on Lya. It’s not like she did not sympathise with Shelly, but it got a bit frustrating when the woman just wanted to whine and not accept sound advice or suggestions for improvement. Shelly Finn, though a talented writer, was unfortunately stuck in a time capsule. She refused to understand that the average reader base always changed with time. Different things appealed to them then now, as compared to what did ten years ago, but Shelly stubbornly refused to acknowledge this fact. Sansa let out a small sigh that went unnoticed by Shelly, who was oblivious to the world around her, but not by Brienne, who gave Sansa a sorry smile from behind Shelly’s back.

So Sansa did what she always did, when Shelly’s ramblings went on and on. She let her mind drift into her own thoughts, because Shelly wouldn’t notice it anyway. As long as Sansa said “Right.” and “I understand” enough number of times, and at the right intervals, she was good. Brienne had a sheepish grin plastered on her face, as she very well knew that Sansa was far far away. What a dear Brienne was, thought Sansa. She had helped Sansa run The Little Citadel (TLC), ever since Sansa moved to King’s Landing from Winterfell. Sansa was six months pregnant when she bought this store, with the money Grandpa Tully had left her, when he died. Brienne Tarth was the younger sister of Catelyn Stark’s friend from college, and was on the lookout for a job. Sansa had needed someone to manage the store for her, so that she could concentrate on curating, sourcing, promotions and events.

But in a very short span of time, Brienne became more than just Sansa’s store manager. She had become her best friend and confidant. It was Brienne who drove Sansa to the hospital when her water broke. It was she who had first held Lyanna in her arms, before any of the Starks could even reach the hospital, and had looked at Lya, like she was the most precious gift that god could bestow upon mankind. It was she who had toiled in the store, so Sansa could get enough time to recover from her pregnancy and delivery. It was no wonder that Sansa had named Arya and Brienne Lyanna’s godmothers. Arya was slightly jealous of the intimacy that Lyanna and Brienne shared with each other. Brienne was always Brie, but Arya was Auntie Arya. Sansa almost laughed out loud, when she remembered how Arya would always say goodbye to Lya with a, “Don’t ever forget, that ‘I’ am your cool Aunt” and then roll her eyes at Brienne.

For Lya’s third birthday Brienne had accompanied Sansa to Winterfell for the first time. She’d never been to the north before. Everything about Winterfell had taken her breath away. The scenic landscapes, the snow-capped mountains, the air smelling like a mixture of pine and herbs… Brienne had wondered aloud why Sansa had felt the need to leave this beautiful place, and choose the over populated and concrete jungle that was King’s Landing. But Sansa had remained silent, and Brienne had understood the reason behind her silence. Robb and Talisa had organised the biggest party ever for her little princess, in spite of the fact that Talisa has just delivered their twins, Lilly and George. Sansa often wondered how Robb could love Lya so selflessly when he had four kids of his own. Did he see too much of a man, he once loved, in Lya? Was that the reason for his special affection for her? She mentally scolded herself. It was such an unfair question to ask. Did she not love all her nieces and nephews as much as Lya? Arya and Gendry’s baby girl Nymeria had just turned one and she had already started following Lya like her mother had once followed Lya’s dad. Sansa almost shut her eyes when her thoughts drifted to…… Jon Snow.
How could she ever stop thinking about Jon? He was constantly in her thoughts. Not that she never tried to not think of Jon, but Lya made it impossible for her to forget him. Other than Lya’s Tully blue eyes, that she had inherited from Catelyn’s family, she was Jon Snow through and through, in looks, in personality and in behaviour. Sansa knew everyone in her family thought the same thing about her daughter, but no one except Bran, had ever told it to her face. Bran had simply said, “Let’s hope Jon never runs into Lya, if you wish to keep her a secret. Cause the day he sees her, trust me, HE’LL KNOW.”

Sansa gulped down the feeling of fear that rose up the back of her neck. Jon had never been quick tempered like Robb. It took a lot of time, and very serious stuff to get him angry, but if he did ever get angry, God save the person who would be the unfortunate victim of his wrath! CALM DOWN, Sansa told herself… You had a good reason to not tell Jon about Lya. And besides, their paths were never going to cross… EVER.

Brienne cleared her throat loudly, and Sansa was suddenly jolted out of her thoughts as she stared into the blank face of Shelly, who was gaping at Sansa, “Are you alright, darling? You’ve gone deathly pale…..”

“I… er… A headache has been bothering me since morning” Sansa stated the first thing that came to her head, while adjusting the blush pink blouse that was neatly tucked in her black pencil skirt.

Brienne stood up from behind the counter of the store towering above both the women who were leaning against it. “Maybe you should eat something Sansa, you’ve missed your lunchtime!” Brienne suggested, very purposefully, hoping Shelly would get the point. Thankfully, she did. “Oh look!” she said glancing at her watch. “I’ve wasted so much of my time here.” Brienne almost snarled, but Sansa gave her a shushing look. “I’ll come back later dearies. You take care of your health, Sansa.”

After Shelly had exited the store, Brienne turned to Sansa “Why do you even entertain that woman?” she questioned, with an irritated look on her face. “She’s so full of herself.”

“She also gave us exclusive release rights to two of her best-selling novels.” Sansa said smiling at Brienne, letting her fiery red hair down from the French knot she had secured it in. She had finished her work for the day and was planning to take Lya home in a while. “A great man once said, be anything you want in life, but don’t ever be ungrateful.”

Brienne laughed out loud. “I can guess who this great man is, love. It’s definitely…”

“EDDARD STARK….from Winterfell” said a low husky deep voice from behind and SANSA FROZE, her actions froze, her thoughts froze, her speech froze. She felt like time had frozen too, and the all air had been sucked out of the earth, making it impossible for life to exist. This could not be happening. This voice could not belong to the person she thought it belonged to. Not NOW, not with LYA so close by. Suddenly two little hands went around her legs, and Sansa instantly whirled around to pick up her daughter. She drew her into her arms and hugged her so tightly, that she was afraid Lya could feel her heart pounding against her ribcage. She didn’t dare look at the looming silhouette of the person, standing only a few feet away from her.

“Mummy…” Lya cooed. “This is Mr Snow and he says he’s Uncle Robb’s friend. He thinks I am ..” she paused to look at Mr Snow for encouragement, but Sansa didn’t dare follow her line of sight. “Extraordinary” She said enunciating every vowel, proud that she had learnt a new word.

Sansa made an attempt to look surprised, in spite of the fact that she was nearly going to faint, and smiled down proudly at her daughter. “You are, my love. You are extraordinary…” She then turned to look at Brienne, who knew exactly who this Mr Snow was. “Brienne… ummm… why don’t you take Lya to the play place…. I er… I’ll be there, in just a few minutes.”

Lya frowned, not at all happy at being dismissed, when she obviously had befriended someone new, and wanted to be involved in whatever conversation her mother was going to have with her new
friend. But Brienne scooped her up and threw her high up in the air, stifling Lya’s protest which had definitely begun forming in her mind.

It was only when Lya was out of sight, did Sansa allow herself to look at the man who was standing in front of her, and she instantly wished she hadn’t. Five years had changed Jon Snow, and yet not changed him at all. He still wore Grey and Black, although his suit looked tailored to perfection, and very expensive. He still wore his hair long, though instead of loosely falling around his head like it had once, his jet black curls were slick and pushed back into a man bun, which strangely made him look more menacing, especially with the medium stubble he was now sporting. Jon was more powerfully built now, muscles rippling under that steel grey suit he wore, as he slowly prowled towards her. But the thing that remained absolutely unchanged about Jon Snow, was the intensity in his dark grey eyes, when they were locked with hers. However in the next instant, his eyes looked so dark and stormy that for the first time in her entire lifetime of knowing him, Sansa felt truly scared of him.

Jon suddenly stopped walking, and stood about three feet away from her. “I believe you’ve turned down three of my employees about selling your book store, Miss Stark. So I’ve come down myself, hoping that I could make you an offer, you may find difficult to refuse. Do you have someplace private, where we can talk?”

Sansa let out an audible sigh, relief spreading through every pore in her body. This was not about Lya. But wait a minute, those three men who came asking her to sell TLC, offering her obscene amounts of money, were working for him?? “You own ‘The White Wolf Inc.’??”

Jon just raised an eyebrow, and Sansa shut her eyes wondering how she had overlooked this small detail. Who else but Jon Snow, could’ve named his company “The White Wolf” “I should’ve guessed.” Sansa said, trying to sound as composed as she could manage to. She pointed towards her small office, at the back end of her store, near the painted weirwood tree. Jon automatically pulled the door open for her, when they reached her office, and Sansa almost rolled her eyes. Jon couldn’t ever stop being the gentleman. So, one more trait of his had remained unchanged.

Sansa asked Jon to take a seat. She herself sat behind the desk because, one, she wanted to put some physical distance between her and Jon and two, she didn’t want him to see, that she was visibly quaking. She put her game face on, and looked him in the eye, as he sat down opposite her, his eyes boring into hers. He’d called her Miss Stark. Alright, thought Sansa, two could play at this game. “Mr Snow..” She said, offering him, her best smile. “I don’t think anything you offer me will make me sell my book store. But I am willing to listen to it anyway.”

Jon remained stone silent for a few seconds. Then, the corner of his mouth turned. “Oh but you’ve got me wrong Ms. Stark…” said Jon, watching Sansa, like a predator. “I have absolutely NO INTENTION of buying your place.”

She creased her brows in confusion. What was happening here? If Sansa got any more surprises today, she thought, she’d definitely have to head to the hospital. She cleared her throat. “But I was led to believe by all the three men representing your company that buying my store was absolutely your intention.”

“Oh believe me, it was…” Jon interlocked his palms, and placed it on his lips, drawing Sansa’s attention to his full mouth. “But I saw something here…” Jon said, staring at the weirwood tree, like he was captivated by it. “And I’ve changed my mind.” He brought his attention back to Sansa, and suddenly sprang up from his seat. “I’ve decided that I like your book store, and it’s become special to me. The very thought of tearing this place down, sends shudders through my body. So I am going to make you a new offer.” Jon suddenly had a very professional look enter his expression. “Since your store is only on the ground floor, let me construct my hotel above your store. I won’t charge a penny
from you for the construction. I’ll pay you rent for every floor that I construct above your store. And I’ll also provide you extra storage space more than your current one can accommodate. You’re store will do better, because you can retain your current business, plus have more potential customers in the form of those who visit and stay at my hotel.”

Sansa stared at Jon, unable to believe what he was offering her. The rent from three floors alone, which she apparently did not need to shed a single penny for, would be enough and more for her and Lya, to lead a luxurious life, without her having to work at all. And she knew for a fact he was planning to build a minimum of seven floors. His men who’d come to visit her, had spilt the beans about the plans. Plus, she got to keep her store too! This was a golden offer. She would be gloriously foolish to refuse it. But, there had to be a catch somewhere. Where was the CATCH? Sansa cleared her throat, in an attempt to steady her voice. “I’ll have to agree that you’ve made me an excellent offer and it is a win-win situation for me. But it can’t be a profitable deal for you.”

“Oh Believe me Miss Stark” said Jon, crossing his arms, to look at Sansa. “It’s a tremendously profitable deal for me. In fact I think it will be the most profitable one I’ve ever made since I’ve started doing business.”

Warning bells started ringing in her mind. Jon was being sarcastic. Jon was seldom sarcastic. So she tried a different route. “The construction and the noise will drive away some of my customers.” She knew her excuses were beginning to sound flimsy, but she did have a valid point.

Jon looked at her incredulously. “I’m sure you’ve done the math Miss Stark. The rent alone that I’ll pay you after the construction will be at least ten times the profits you make in a month.” He exhaled audibly. “Still, if you feel there’s a drop in your sales as compared to the same month in the previous year, I’ll compensate you for the difference amount.”

Sansa could feel her mask slipping. She felt like she was out of her element here. Jon looked determined to win this round with her, she could see that. What could he possibly gain from this deal? “What assurance do I have, that you won’t make me vacate this store, once you have constructed your hotel over my head?”

It Happened then. If she’d not known him she would’ve missed it. But she did know him more intimately than most people, at least she had, once upon a time, and she saw his lips and his nose twitch ever so lightly. Jon Snow was angry, she knew it. She had crossed a line. That he would throw ‘her’, Ned Stark’s daughter, out of her own property for the purpose of his business, was insinuating that he had no honour.

His voice was huskier and guttural when he replied, “I will sign an agreement stating that I have no interest whatsoever in buying this property from you, if that’s what’ll make you believe, that I don’t have any devious plans about your store, unbeknownst to you.”

What?? Was this guy for real?? This was getting a bit too much. Sansa rose up from her chair with a huff. “I can’t understand why you would be so generous to me?”

“You CAN’T??” Jon said placing both his palms on Sansa’s desk and leaning on them, his biceps straining against the sleeves of his suit jacket. “Well, that’s a pity. Why would I not be generous to Ned Stark’s daughter?” He smiled sweetly at her. It was very fake too. “After all that your family has done for me, can’t I give you a little bit in return, especially when you will be going through such a rough patch emotionally?”

Sansa pulse began racing. She felt like someone had just pushed her underwater, and was holding her head below it. Surely, she’d forgotten how to breathe. “W-why will I be g-going through a rough patch? Everything’s fine.”
Jon’s face suddenly turned deathly serious, his dark grey eyes burning into her icy blue. “That’s where you are mistaken. Nothing, will ever be ‘fine’ for you.” growled Jon menacingly inching closer to Sansa, looking every bit like Hades – the god of death. “Cause you can keep your goddamn store and every penny that comes with it, but very soon, I AM TAKING MY DAUGHTER HOME. I’ll see you in court, Sansa Stark.”
Chapter 3

JON saw Sansa’s eyes widening with horror as he said the words. Good, he thought to himself. Let her think that he had every intention, of going through with his threat. Serves her right, for what she’d done to him. Sansa opened her mouth a couple of times, but no words came out. Her fingers were trembling, and a bead of sweat trickled down her temple. She looked vulnerable, scared and defenceless.

But, Jon had in his whole life, never been THIS LIVID with anyone before. Sansa had hidden from him, the very existence of his daughter, HIS FLESH, and BLOOD. Of course, he couldn’t be a hundred per cent sure of it, unless a paternity test confirmed it. But he knew. Jon knew Lyanna was HIS, unless she was the daughter of his secret doppelganger. He had definitely entertained the idea of dragging Sansa’s ass to court during his conversation with Lyanna, but all that had changed the instant he’d seen Lyanna run to her mother like she’d found the axis she revolved around.

And SANSA STARK had, regardless of his fury, managed to rob him of his breath, his anger, his purpose, his intent, his thoughts, and left his brains in a muddled mess, just by her mere presence. Five years had changed everything, yet nothing.

The woman was still a still a witch… a nymph… a siren… a goddess… Jon couldn’t decide, but by god, she was beguilingly beautiful! Jon had desperately tried to tell himself, in vain, to not look at her shapely body, her rapture blue eyes and her soft full mouth. Her long molten hair that fell around her in waves, had nearly undone him. But above all else, he’d absolutely detested, what seeing Lyanna in Sansa’s arms had done to his heart. Mother and daughter had clung to each other like an invisible umbilical cord still connected them and Jon suddenly felt like an outsider, which he was, in his own daughter’s life. And that made him angry.

HOW DARE SHE? Jon thought as he looked at Sansa, who looked drained of all colour now. He really had to resist the temptation of holding her by her arms and shaking the truth out of her. Regardless of whatever had happened in the past, Sansa had absolutely NO RIGHT to keep the identity of a child he had fathered, from him. IT WAS WRONG, on every single count. And what about the Starks? His heart clenched when he even thought about them. Had Sansa told them that Lyanna was his? If they knew, had they actively helped her keep this fact, hidden from him? There was only one way to find out.

Jon knew what he had to do now. He clenched his fists into tight balls. For what she had done to him, Sansa had better agree to every single one of his terms.

Sansa still remained seated exactly where she was, looking as pale as a ghost. A slight panic clutched at Jon. Was Sansa going into shock? Jon moved away from her desk and just when he was beginning to get really worried about Sansa’s lack of reaction, she got up from her chair in one fluid motion. “You would do that??” She half questioned him, half yelled at him “To YOUR OWN DAUGHTER??”

Jon and Sansa just stared at each other, their eyes locked, their breathing, laboured. The room was so silent, that the only sound that could be heard, was the tick-tock, tick-tock of the wall clock. Jon was the first one to blink. “So, she is mine.” he said softly. Finally, here was the confirmation, he’d hoped for, directly out from the horse’s mouth. He saw the realisation dawn on Sansa’s face, that she had been trapped, into admitting the truth. Sansa’s lips quivered and she bit her lower lip in an attempt to suppress it. She sank down into her chair and covered her face with her palms, her fiery red hair falling all over her shoulders in the process, and despite the tension in the room, Jon Snow felt a terrible itch in his hands. When Sansa slowly looked up at Jon, her eyes were red-rimmed. Jon
ignored the prick in his conscience. “Yes, it’s true.” She said, gently. “You are her father.”

“And you robbed four years of her life from me?” The rage that coursed through Jon’s body flared his nostrils. “HOW DARE YOU, SANSA? My child thinks she has no father when here I am ALIVE AND KICKING.” He punched his fist on her desk. “You very well knew how I felt about the absence of my father in my life. How then, could you do this to me? I mean, forget about me. HOW THE BLOODY HELL COULD YOU DO THIS TO OUR DAUGHTER?”

“Our daughter”

The words hung in the air, thickening the tension around Jon and Sansa. Jon took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself down and looked at Sansa. She had the decency to look guilty, but her tone was icy when she replied. “I did what I thought was best for everyone, including Lya. Besides, you had made it very clear that you wanted nothing to do with me.”

Jon had to bite his tongue to keep himself from saying what was on the tip of his tongue. If only she knew….. “So you decided to punish me, by keeping me in the dark about the existence of my daughter?” He paused, his heart thudding as he asked her the dreaded question “Does your family know she’s mine?”

Sansa looked up at him, and for the first time he saw pity in her eyes, and just like that he knew the answer. They knew. Each and every one of them! Yet Ned had not searched him to the ends of the earth and pulled out his intestines for knocking up his daughter. And Robb had not gutted him for being that guileless friend who got your little sister pregnant. And Arya had not run him with a sword or blown a hole in his head with a shotgun. And Sansa, who had turned to him, every time the night was darkest, had never come to him when it mattered the most? Jon shook his head in disbelief. “You really thought I would’ve turned you away if you’d told me you were pregnant? Because of how things ended with us before I left Winterfell?”

Sansa looked down without answering and disappointment surged through Jon. He decided that he didn’t want to hear her reply. At least not now! “On second thoughts, don’t answer that. It might make me angrier, and it won’t help this situation we are in.” There was going to be enough and more time for Jon to think about why Sansa did what she did. Enough time to ponder about why her family did what they did. Right now, the solution was more important and not the problem.

Jon sat down on the edge of Sansa’s desk, “Sit down, Sansa” he motioned towards her chair. “I’m not going to drag you to court. You love Lyanna, even if that’s the only genuine thing about you.” Sansa looked a little relieved and surprised as she sat down and Jon continued “She’s my daughter too. She loves you and needs you; even a blind fool can see that. What kind of a monster would I be, if I tore a child away from her mother? BUT..” Jon paused as Sansa looked up at him warily “I want her in my life, and I want to be in her life.”


A muscle twitched in his jaw. He had tread carefully now. “What part of ‘I want her in my life’ did you not understand Sansa? I don’t want to be a visiting parent. Neither do I want our daughter to be torn between us. You may argue that many children grow up well, all the time, even in such situations, and I respect the parents who try to give their children the best, even in difficult circumstances. But I can’t do it to my daughter. It’s a personal choice.” Sansa frowned in confusion and Jon decided that it was best to drop this subject, for just a while. There were other issues that he had to draw her attention to.

“What are you going to tell Lyanna about me?” Jon glanced at the door briefly before looking back
Sansa rubbed her temple with her fingers. “Could you not give me some time to think about how we’re going to break this news to her? She’s just met you today. It’s not a good time to tell her that you are her father right away.” Sansa let out a sigh and wet her lips and Jon all of a sudden felt extremely uncomfortable and hot. “I suggest, you spend some time with her. Let her get comfortable with you, and then we’ll slowly break it to her, that you are her father. I’ll think of something to explain your absence in her life.” she held her hand up when Jon began to protest “...Without making you sound like a reformed villain.” She looked up at Jon hesitantly “And thank you, for not suggesting the “Your mummy never told me about you” option. Cause … umm.. she’d really hate me then…” Her voice was barely a whisper and Jon noticed that her eyes had welled up.

Before Jon could say anything further, someone knocked on Sansa’s door and the tall, blonde lady who had taken Lyanna away earlier, poked her head inside. She glared at Jon and he realised it was meant to be one, a hot glare, because her eyes turned soft when she looked at Sansa. “Sorry to interrupt love, but Jessica’s mom called to ask if you could do the carpool tomorrow instead of her?” Sansa gave her a soft smile. “Tell her I’ll do it Brienne. Where’s Lya?”

Again, this Brienne gave him a tough look before answering Sansa. “Neil and Polly are keeping her busy. She wanted me to remind you, that you promised to take her to the park today.” Sansa looked at her wristwatch and then back at Brienne. “Could you please change her clothes, Brie? And don’t let her wear those purple pants even if she insists. It’s got so many pockets and you know how Lya loves to fill sand into her pockets.” She got up and went towards a small refrigerator and took out two boxes. “Yogurt and berries for the way. Just put it inside her backpack. I’ll take her to the park, directly from here.”

Brienne gave a short laugh. “Refuse her the purple pants and she’s going to brood all the way to the park. But I’ll give it a try anyway.” She gave Jon another tentative look before smiling down at Sansa “If you need anything at all, I’m right here.”

Jon knew very well that Brienne was eyeing him with a lot of suspicion, like he was a criminal. But that didn’t bother him as much as the realisation that he didn’t know ‘anything’ about his daughter. Her likes, dislikes, her habits and whatever else children did. A sinking feeling began to form in the pit of his stomach. It was not just that he didn’t know anything about his daughter; he also didn’t know the first thing about caring for a child. He needed to spend more time with his daughter, which actually fit in perfectly with his plans. He looked at Sansa who had placed her palm on Brienne’s arm. “Thanks for everything, Brienne.” She said, with genuine affection for the blonde lady who gave a slight nod and left the two of them alone again. Sansa turned around to face him.

“Jon”

“Sansa”

Both began speaking at the same time. Sansa ran her slender fingers through her hair. “You go first.”

Jon cleared his throat. “I need to spend more time with Lyanna. And you must forgive my impatience for wanting to do so, from the very next second if possible. But I understand, that too much, too soon may just scare her away. So this is what I suggest we could do.” Jon looked at Sansa who was listening to him with rapt attention. “If you can manage a break from work and if Lyanna can bunk her pre-school for just a while, the three of us could take a short trip together. Hear me out fully before you protest.” Jon said when he saw that Sansa had already begun saying a no. “I don’t know anything about my daughter, Sansa. I want to get to know her better and fortunately or unfortunately you are the only one who can help me do that. If I don’t take a break from work and
you don’t do the same too, Lyanna and I will take such a long time to get to know each other. She needs to learn to trust me and it will never happen unless you guide us both. You owe me that much at least.”

Jon suspected the ‘you owe me’ bit was making her consider his suggestion. Yet, she looked sceptical. “I don’t know if it’s a great idea, Jon. Lyanna will definitely wonder why she is going on a vacation to a strange place with a strange man. If you want her to trust you, if we have to tell her that you are her father, would you rather not if it happened in a place she’s comfortable and familiar with, around people whom she loves.” Sansa shook her head dismissing the idea. “It won’t work. She may become wary of you.”

Jon smiled inwardly. Sansa had just made his job a bit easier by stating the obvious flaws in his suggestion. “Oddly, I happen to agree with you. It is a silly idea to take Lyanna, to a strange place with a strange man and introduce him as her father. You are absolutely right. She may get frightened, confused and neither of us wants that to happen to her, obviously.” Jon thought very hard about how he should frame his next words. He was going to have to let the cat out of the bag at some point. “Unless she doesn’t go to a strange place with a strange man…”

Sansa looked frustrated now. “I just said those exact words a couple of minutes ago. The trip is not a good idea. You just said that we agree.”

Jon ran his tongue over his lower lip. “I said going to a strange place with a strange man is not a good idea. I never said that the trip is not a good idea.”

She was irritated. Jon could tell by the way she placed both her hands on her hips. “Are you enjoying speaking in circles? Just what are you implying, exactly?”

Jon stood up to his full height. “What if we could take Lyanna to a place she’s familiar with, with a man who is not so strange to her? I mean think about it. I’ve told her I’m Uncle Robb’s friend. I’m not really a stranger in her eyes.”

Sansa rolled her eyes. “Yes, and why are Mummy and Lya going on a vacation with Uncle Robb’s friend? And which is this place that she’s familiar with that I don’t know of?”

It was time. Jon closed the gap between them and looked deeply into Sansa’s eyes. “Why it’s same place her mother, father, uncles and aunts grew up in. Where she was conceived, where she is surrounded by people who love her enough, to keep her a secret from her own father.” Sansa’s eyes were widened with shock and she gasped audibly. Jon’s voice sounded like a low growl when he said the next sentence.

“Call your folks. Tell them that I know. And Pack your bags Sansa, we’re going to WINTERFELL.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the comments. I am jittery and a nervous writer and this is my first ever venture into fanfiction. So a heart felt thanks to all the love that I've received.

Thank you Melissa for being my pillar of strength. I don't know what I'd do without all your help and encouragement.

Hope you enjoy this new chapter!!

Sansa let the warm water run down her hair, in the shower. Today had been the toughest day of her life and, she was physically, mentally and emotionally drained out of every single ounce of energy. Can one really outrun destiny? I guess not, she thought. Karma was a bitch and it did come to bite you in the ass. She’d known when she had made the decision of raising Lyanna alone that if the day ever came that Jon Snow found out about his daughter, both their lives would be irreversibly changed. She had panicked when Jon told her about dragging her to the court about Lyanna. Her mind had painted before her, a thousand scenarios of Lyanna standing in a witness box, Lyanna being interviewed by strangers and so many other scary situations for her little baby that she’d forgotten that Jon COULDN’T BE SURE that Lyanna was his. And she had slipped. She had given him the conformation, he was looking for. She’d told him Lyanna was his daughter, after almost five years of keeping the fact hidden from him. And Jon had reacted exactly like she had expected him to react. In fact, knowing Jon Snow, it could’ve been far worse.

He’d wanted his daughter, from the very minute he’d realised she was his. Why do you want her now, she’d ached to ask him, but knew as soon as the question arose in her mind that, it was rather unfair of her to do so. Hadn’t she herself wanted her baby? From the very moment, she’d known she was pregnant, from the very first flutter she’d felt in her womb?

Sansa had also known there was no point in deterring Jon or arguing with him about Lyanna. Nothing she said or did was going to change his mind about having his daughter in his life. She’d seen the determination in his eyes and she’s known that it was more sensible for her to just resign to the fact that this is how it was going to be from now on. Jon wanted in, and there was no way on earth, she was going to be able to stop him. Not that she wanted to. Unbeknownst to Jon, a great burden had been lifted from Sansa’s heart. She’d never liked keeping Lyanna a secret from Jon and now, she didn’t have to.

But suggesting that they go to Winterfell?? THAT WAS UNEXPECTED. Sansa squeezed her eyes shut when she remembered their argument over his suggestion.

“Pack your bags??” Sansa had been outraged at his audacity. “I hope you do realise that you can’t be ordering me around, Jon Snow. I do have a choice whether or not I want to go.”

Jon had literally snarled at her. “Exactly like I had a choice, five years ago, whether or not I wanted my daughter?” He had inched closer to her and she thought all her cognitive abilities had come to an abrupt halt. Damn the man, for having such an effect on her even after five long years. His
breathing was very irregular and she could see the fury flash in his eyes. “You should be thanking me that it’s not much worse for you, Sansa Stark. But if you keep your ego aside for a moment, you’ll see that it’s actually a good thing to happen for Lya.”

Sansa hadn’t, for the life of her, been able to understand how this could work in Lyanna’s favour. She’d dreaded thinking about how Robb was going to react if she EVER told him. A shudder ran down her back and Jon had moved away, pulling a chair to sit down. He’d pulled one for her to sit on too, but she had stubbornly refused, like a petulant child. Jon had simply shrugged and continued talking. “All the stories that I’ve heard from Lyanna, in whatever little time that I spent with her, has been about her Uncles and Aunties and Granny and Grandpa and her cousins which can only mean that your family is very much a part of her life and she obviously loves them a lot. It’s rather evident, therefore, to me at least that if I am going to be an active part of her life and so are they; we’re going to have to meet eventually.” Jon interlinked his palms and placed his elbows on his knees as he leaned forward, his face filled with disquiet. “So why wait for it to happen? Besides, I’ve been running away from facing your father for years now. I don’t want to anymore.” Sansa had remembered that fateful day all too well and she could see in Jon’s eyes that he did too. “You can tell Lyanna, that we’re going to Winterfell with her Uncle Robb’s friend. We’ll sail to White Harbour and drive down to Winterfell from there. It will give us a lot of time together. Once we’re in Winterfell we’ll…. ummmm…. talk to your family, and then slowly break it to her. She’ll have the people she trusts, around her. It’s the best place for her to be, really.”

Sansa wondered how the ‘talk to your family’ bit was going to work out. She knew that her mother and father would be civilised about the whole thing, at the very least. Bran was going to be himself, probably wearing the ‘I warned you this would happen’ look on his face. Arya was undoubtedly the right person to talk to if Sansa was even going to entertain this mad idea. Rickon was perhaps going to be the first one to hug Jon but Robb? Once again, Sansa dreaded thinking about how Robb was going to react. Jon didn’t have a clue how fiercely protective Robb was about Lyanna and how much he’d hated Jon for everything that happened. But he’d never admitted any of this, not even to himself. But Jon did have a point. Lyanna felt most at home, at Winterfell. She was the eldest Stark grandchild. Robb and Talisa’s Ben was just two months younger than Lya but they got along with each other like house on fire, just like their fathers had once. It was also where Lya had come to realise that she didn’t have a father like her cousins. She invented stories and told them to Ben about her imaginary father who was fighting monsters in castles so that he could come back to her. Ben, who adored Lya, believed every word she said. It was their ‘not-very-secret’ secret. She loved playing big sister to Anna, Lilly, George and Nymeria. She’d often begged Sansa to move closer to her family and her cousins. If she were to discover that she had a father too, like she’d always wanted and imagined, it was really in her interest that it happened at Winterfell.

Jon had probably seen the resignation in her eyes. He’d risen up from where he was sitting. “I’ll call you tomorrow morning, Sansa, and I’m hoping you’re going to have an answer by then.” The firm look had come back on his face when he slowly prowled towards her. “If you and Lyanna don’t come with me, I’ll go to Winterfell by myself and bring them all down here, even if I have to wage a war to do it, and then tell Lyanna myself that I’m her father.” He brushed past her and opened the door to leave but not before he told her, “And don’t think, even for a second, that I won’t do it.”

Sansa turned off the shower with a start. The worst thing that could ever happen, was Jon going to Winterfell all by himself. It was a risk she couldn’t take. Who knows what might come tumbling out of her family members mouths in her absence. Jon Snow must never know, why she did, what she did.

Sansa wrapped herself in a towel and got out of the bathroom. She towel dried her long red hair and changed into her PJs. Sansa then slowly tip-toed into Lya’s room and watched the serene expression on her daughter’s face while she slept. In spite of the emotional roller coaster that Sansa had
experienced today, she couldn’t stop herself from smiling. When Lya was awake, Sansa often wondered when she would go to sleep so she could get some work done and maybe have some time for herself. But when Lya finally did go off to sleep, Sansa got bored of the silence and the absence of the melodious voice that said ‘Mummy’ every single minute. Were mothers always so conflicted? She knelt down beside her daughter’s bed, carefully ran her hand over her forehead and kissed it, resisting the temptation to do it a hundred times more. How was Lya going to deal with Jon’s presence in her life? What kind of a father would Jon be?

She already knew the answer to that, she thought as she quietly went back to her room. Jon would probably take some time, but he would be the best ever father Lyanna could hope for. Just as he had been the best ever friend to Robb and Theon, the best ever brother to Arya, Rickon and Bran, the best ever son to Ned and Catelyn Stark. Jon had always kept his distance from her and she hated it. Sansa knew she was partly to blame for this distance. She had always behaved cold and indifferent around him. Her siblings, especially Arya, had hated her for this coldness she had shown towards Jon. But neither her siblings nor Jon, had ever known the REAL reason behind her indifference. Sansa had had the hugest crush on him, from the very first moment that she had set her eyes on him. Her heart would start pounding, her pulse racing and her palms would become sweaty when Jon was around. She had been scared her siblings would figure out her true feelings. So had she feigned indifference and dislike to cover up the crush that was festering inside her heart like a wound that wouldn’t ever heal. She had tried her best to get him to notice her in a not so obvious manner, wearing the best of clothes, trying to look as pretty as she could. Unfortunately for her, Jon had always seen her as Robb’s kid sister and nothing else.

It had gotten worse when Jon had started dating girls. Sansa had been heartbroken. She vividly remembered the first time Jon had shyly introduced his first girlfriend, Val, to the Starks. Jon was living with them, then. Val was a stunning blonde beauty at 16, and Sansa, who was only twelve, felt gangly and ugly in front of her. She’s thrown a terrible temper tantrum about a spinach pie and had been grounded for a day by her mother, who was appalled by the fact that her otherwise lady-like girl, had behaved like a hussy. Robb and Arya had tried to speak to her but she had shut them away. She’d always struggled with her feelings for Jon, as she was too fearful to talk to her siblings about it, worried that they would judge her for having these feelings for someone who was like a brother to the rest of them. She had never had an outlet to vent her frustration and that had made things worse for her. When Jon and Robb had turned 18, they had both wanted to move out of the Stark mansion, especially Jon but her father had put his foot down. Finally, a truce had been drawn. Robb and Jon would move to the outhouse which was very much in the premises of the mansion. This had made things worse for Sansa, for now when she went to meet Robb, many times she encountered Jon alone and she didn’t know how to behave around him. Like Robb, Jon had been extremely protective of her and Sansa wondered if any boy would ever have the guts to ask her out, with the reputation that preceded her.

Sansa got into her bed and stacked the pillows for her to rest her head. She sighed and thought about how she’d gone on a dating spree when she’d turned 16, to retaliate against Robb’s machinations to protect her and to convince herself that she didn’t really need Jon Snow. But every boy she’d ever dated proved to be disappointing, if not disgusting and she pined more and more for the one boy, she couldn’t have. Finally, things had come to a turn when she had started dating Joffrey Baratheon, a boy who was equal parts disappointing and equal parts disgusting. Robb had thrown a fit, when he came to know that Sansa was dating Joffrey, which had encouraged Sansa to mute the voice of her conscience, and continue dating Joffrey, in rebellion. She still remembered that fated night, so clearly.

_Sansa straightened her knee-length black skirt and green blouse. She was very happy with how her outfit had turned out. Today was her special date with Joffrey. He’d promised to surprise her by taking her someplace special. He’d promised her father, that he’d bring her home on time. Sansa_
came down the stairs and the first person she encountered was her brother Robb, who was
glowing at Joffrey like a big grey wolf. Next to him sat Jon Snow, who looked broodier than his
usual self. He must’ve sensed her presence for he looked up at that precise moment and their eyes
locked. In all the four months that she’d dated Joffrey, Sansa had never felt so charged and light-
weighted at the same time as she felt now, with just one look from Jon. He took in her appearance,
slowly giving her a once over and when his eyes returned back to hers, they looked darker and
stormier, if that was even possible. Sansa stood rooted to the spot, unable to look away from him.

“Sansa, you look ….” Started Joffrey, getting up from the couch to offer her, his arm, but Robb
growled and Joffrey recoiled a little bit, then rolled his eyes. “Ummm… This is a pretty dress. Shall
we go?”

She could still feel Jon’s eyes on her. Of course, he disapproved of Joffrey. Why would he not? Robb
didn’t like Joffrey, so it was obvious that Jon would follow suit. He had never vocally expressed his
dislike and so Sansa was taken aback when she heard him say, “WAIT …..” She turned back to see
him get up from his place and walk towards them. Jon was twenty now, piling on muscles by the day
and looked menacing in his favourite black T-shirt and Black jeans that he usually wore, matching
the black of his mood. He gave her a tentative look before glaring into Joffrey’s eyes with absolute
purpose. “If you try anything funny with her, golden boy” he paused, a muscle working in his jaw,
“Anything at all..” He repeated looking at Sansa again, and she felt dizzy with the intensity in his
grey eyes. “You will wish, you were never born….” And with another terse look at the two of them,
he stormed back into the house leaving Sansa totally and utterly shocked. It was all she could think
about, on her way to some party that Joffrey was taking her to. Apparently, ‘a party at one of his
friend’s house’ was Joffrey’s idea of a special date and Sansa was thoroughly disappointed with
him. Her thoughts, however, kept drifting back to Jon. It was so out of character for Jon, to have
threatened Joffrey, the way he had. She had been too stunned to even react like she would’ve if it
were Robb who had issued the same threat. Robb and Theon were the most aggressive of the three.
Well, if truth be told, Theon was just plain stupid, Robb was the aggressive one and Jon was the
more level-headed of the three, who usually bailed them out of fights, or stopped them from getting
into one.

Sansa continued to be lost in her thoughts about Jon, when she suddenly realised that something
was terribly wrong with her. She was feeling awfully dizzy and she’d not even consumed alcohol.
Had her drink been spiked with something? Joffrey was now giving her a sly look and all warning
bells started going off in Sansa’s brains. In spite of the numbness that was dulling her brains, she
thought fast and hard for an escape route. If Sansa was anything, she was a survivor. She smiled
sweetly at Joffrey and told him she wanted to use the Loo, and he had obviously not suspected a
single thing. Sansa summoned every single ounce of her willpower to pretend that she could walk
steadily but the minute she reached the bathroom, she bolted herself inside. She reached into her
purse and took out her phone to dial Robb’s number. It was unreachable. She couldn’t even see the
numbers on her phone correctly. Frustrated and extremely petrified at whatever Joffrey had planned
for her, she pressed the phone assist and yelled ‘JON’ into it. Sansa went to the bathtub and lay
down in it, hoping against hope that Jon picked up the phone. He did, on the first ring. “Sansa??”

“JON!” Sansa yelled into the phone “I think Joffrey has spiked my drink. My vision’s blurred, my
head is spinning, I can’t even stand on my feet.”

Jon swore so harshly that Sansa was surprised he knew to swear at all. “Don’t move from there. I’ll
be there in exactly five minutes.” He cut the call. Even in her daze, Sansa remembered that she
never told Jon where to come and get her. She tried to get up from the tub and staggered to the
basin when she heard some commotion below. It sounded like furniture was being dragged around
the house and someone was hammering the wood a lot. Sansa splashed water on her face and drank
at least a few litres in an attempt to flush whatever was in her system. After what felt like a few
centuries later, a knock sounded on the bathroom door.

“Sansa…” Jon’s voice came through from the other side. Relief flooded her entire being and Sansa ran unsteadily to the door, unlocked it and flew into Jon’s arms without waiting for him to offer that comfort. Whatever Jon was about to say, had frozen in his mouth, just as he had, when she hugged him. This was the first time that she’d ever gotten this physically close to him. In the next instant, she felt his strong arms go around her, gathering her more securely against him, almost lifting her off her feet. She felt him press his lips against her temple and she was lost, lost in the sensation that was Jon Snow. She nuzzled against his cheek and inhaled his familiar scent. She felt like, this is where she belonged; this is where she was always meant to be; that she had found her haven. But the moment was lost as quickly as it had come, for Jon pushed her away from him with a slight jerk.

“Sansa, are you alright?” he said, his breath coming out in huffs.

Sansa took a while to focus on him. He had thrown a black leather jacket over his previous attire but what really caught her attention was his bloody fist. She immediately reached for it, but he drew his hand away. She looked at him furiously. “What did you do to him?”

Sansa saw that violent look come into his eyes. “The less you know, the better. Come now, let’s get you home.”

But Sansa refused to budge. Suddenly a thought nagged at her brain. “How did you know where to find me?”

Jon rubbed his eyes with his fingers. Thankfully, his other fist looked intact. He looked extremely uncomfortable when he answered her. “Robb, Theon and I followed you here. It was Robb’s idea.” He added, when he saw Sansa’s shocked expression. “And you should be thankful we did. He was planning to put on a show for his friends with you, the bloody motherfucker.” Jon spat the words looking angrier than Sansa had ever seen him look. Sansa felt a sudden wave of nausea overcome her and her anger at Robb for having followed her on her date instantly disappeared. She should thank her stars for having a protective, interfering and loving brother like Robb in her life. What would’ve happened if he had decided to leave her alone, just like she had told him to, a million times?

“Before you ask me” Jon’s heated voice broke through her thoughts and she looked at him. “Yes, Robb and Theon were right here. They’ve taken those assholes to the police. Robb asked me to take you home.” Then suddenly, he turned his anger on her. “What the hell is wrong with you, Sansa? Why are all your boyfriends, miserable twisted fucks?”

Jon’s face was now inches away from Sansa’s and maybe it was the drug still acting up in her system but all her anger at Jon was coming back to her. She rolled her eyes. “Because obviously, I’m not dating the person, I desperately want to date.”

Jon’s expression changed and he creased his brows in confusion. “There’s someone else you want to date?” He took a firm step towards her. “Why don’t you then?” His words sounded harsh. Jon clearly did not trust her choice.

Sansa gulped at the disdain she heard in his voice. HE, was responsible for this. She was bursting from within. “Because, he doesn’t want me.” The truth hurt her, but she said it anyway.

Jon looked at her for ten long seconds and then scoffed, shaking his head. “What kind of an imbecile, wouldn’t want you, Sansa Stark?”

Sansa’s heart was pounding against her rib-cage. By some stroke of luck, an opportunity had been presented to her, to finally say what was in her heart. Did she have the courage to go through with
Sansa took a step forward. She would’ve fallen had Jon not held both her arms and steadied her.

Blue eyes were locked with dark grey ones “Would you call yourself an imbecile, Jon Snow?”

Jon looked like he’d been punched in the face. He narrowed his eyes, then looked shocked and then looked confused. “Sansa…” He said after what seemed like an eternity. “You can’t possibly mean what you said.”

Sansa felt stung, rejected. What had she expected anyway? She tried to wriggle out of his grasp but he didn’t let her escape. It was a futile attempt anyway. He was far stronger than her. Fury and frustration bubbled inside her. If she’d come down this far, she might as well go all the way. So she looked directly into his eyes and said “I like you, Jon Snow. Deal with it.” And she kissed him.

She threaded her fingers through his dark silken curls like she’d always imagined in her dreams, and pressed her lips to his. His lips felt soft and warm and she wanted more. Jon still stood like a rigid cold statue and Sansa suddenly realised the folly of her actions. This was definitely going to be the most embarrassing day of her teenage life. How was she going to face Jon, after today?

Her grip on his hair slowly slackened. She was about to move away from him, when he suddenly held her face in his palms and devoured her mouth in a ferocious kiss that sent tremors through her entire body. It had to be SHOCK, thought Sansa desperately. Jon was kissing her. THIS WAS HAPPENING FOR REAL. Sansa was soaring above the skies as Jon’s kiss made her feel dizzier than the drug she had accidentally consumed. There was an entire orchestra playing inside her body as Jon’s mouth worked expertly over hers. Sansa’s hands travelled from his hair to his neck to his corded shoulders where she held on to him for dear life. She felt hot and cold at the same time.

Never had she, in her entire dating history, been kissed so passionately by a boy like Jon was kissing her now. Jon’s fingers were now tangled in her hair and he angled her head slightly to deepen the kiss and she arched into him. His tongue was now doing the exploring and Sansa moaned loudly as she kissed him back with the same intensity.

The next instant Jon had withdrawn himself from her muttering “Shit… Shit …Fuck… Shit…”

Sansa shut her eyes to stop the tears from flowing, because she knew all too well that the moment, however beautiful it was while it lasted, was over.

“I am a bloody lout…” Jon was cursing himself and in general. He looked utterly disgusted with himself. Then he turned to look at her. “I am sorry Sansa….b-but this … we… This can never happen. Ever… You are Ned’s little girl. You’re Robb’s sister.” Jon cringed at the very mention of Robb.

“Jon, there’s nothing wrong with what happened.” Sansa said, hoping against hope that he could stop seeing her as Sansa STARK. “Just because I’m Robb’s sister….”

“Sansa…just stop, please” Jon moved away from her, running his palm through his curly locks. “This was .... an…an aberration… Please don’t talk about this again.”

An aberration? He’d called the best kiss of her life an aberration? “You are a bloody imbecile, Jon Snow!” Sansa had yelled at him “I hate you more than anyone else in this world.”

And hatred she had felt, for herself, thought Sansa, as she drew the covers up to her chin, wiping the lone tear that had fallen out of her eye when she was lost in her memories of her past. For her utter inability to hate him. He’d brought home Ygritte, his new girlfriend the very next day and Sansa’s skin had turned to porcelain, and no one except Bran had noticed. He had been just fourteen, but was extremely intuitive. He had looked at her and Jon several times during that cursed dinner, which was
nothing but a blur in her memory. She hadn’t displayed any emotion outwardly, but something inside her had shattered that day. A realisation had dawned upon her; one she would never be rid of.

A realisation that she would remain utterly and irrevocably in love with Jon Snow, to this day, until her last day!
Chapter 5

JON glanced at his wristwatch, rather impatiently. Sansa and Lyanna were late. Jon once again regretted his decision of agreeing to meet her below the apartment in which she lived, when she’d refused his help for bringing down her luggage. Of, course he knew why he’d done that, he thought as he fidgeted with the collar of his white shirt which he’d worn underneath his navy blue blazer. He didn’t want to push her too much. He’d been secretly relieved when she’d called to tell him that she and Lyanna would go with him to Winterfell. She didn’t mention the Starks or telling them about their impending visit and though he was dying to ask her about them, he held himself back. He had to allow Sansa to open up to him, on her own terms.

Jon spotted some movement in the Lobby and immediately started walking towards it. He stopped when he saw his daughter come out of the lobby wearing a navy blue and white polka dotted frock, holding a teddy in her arms and a backpack slung over her shoulders. Jon felt a desperate urge, from the very core of his being, to rush towards her and pick her up in his arms. But he couldn’t allow himself that pleasure. Not yet. So, he did the next best thing. He took off his sunglasses and offered her the best smile he could manage to conjure. She gave him a small wave in return and Jon already felt like his day was made. As he was enjoying this new feeling, Sansa appeared from behind Lyanna and Jon felt like someone had suddenly gutted him with great force. She was wearing a simple navy blue and white striped T-shirt and white linen pants, her fiery hair pulled back into a long pony. She looked radiant and he detested his body’s reaction to how the outfit clung to her curves. Jon cursed inwardly; this was going to be a long journey! Lya started walking in his direction but Sansa was struggling with something behind her and when Jon squinted to get a better look, he froze. Both father and daughter were now staring at something behind each other’s backs and both exclaimed at the same time.

“Mummy, look, THE BATMOBILE” said Lyanna, eyeing Jon’s black Ferrari LaFerrai

“Errr… How many people are travelling with us?” said Jon, eyeing the number of bags Sansa was dragging behind her.

Sansa let out a huff and Jon hurried to help her with the bags. There were two humungous suitcases, a car seat, a stroller, a picnic basket of sorts, an airbag and a huge tote that Sansa was herself carrying. How could one and a half people, require so much? Jon looked at Sansa in utter shock, whom he could see, was trying her best to calm down.

She pointed at the two suitcases. “Clothes, books, toys, puzzles, favourite quilt and pretend friends that she can’t live without and medicines for her in case she falls sick, especially since this is going to be her first journey by sea.” She gestured at the picnic basket. “Snacks and food for the journey.” She patted the huge tote she was carrying. “And that’s a few things she will immediately require and also stuff to keep her busy.”
Jon took in all this information and tried to not appear stunned. Toys.. medicines.. sickness.. food .. snacks… all these words were floating in his brain without an anchor. A child of four needed so many things? Fatherhood was new to him but he had better start learning quickly. When Sansa cleared her throat, Jon looked back at her. Sansa now gestured towards his favourite black sports car. “And yes, about the BATMOBILE, it won’t do.”

“What do you mean?” Jon couldn’t believe Sansa said ‘It won’t do’ to his Ferrari LaFerrari.

Sansa took a step towards him with a patient look on her face while running her tongue over her lower lip. Jon instantly put his sunglasses back on, because he didn’t want to reveal how his eyes were now stuck to her soft pink mouth. “Jon, how many people can your car accommodate?” she asked him softly and Jon looked up at her distractedly. Focus Jon, he told himself and instantly realised his error. Only two people could sit in his car. He looked at the car seat, the stroller, the luggage and at his daughter. How could he have been so foolish? Jon reprimanded himself for his thoughtlessness as drew his phone out from his pocket. “Podrick…” He spoke to his personal bodyguard who was trailing him in a Range Rover. “Ummm… I need you to hand me the keys to your car and…. Jon paused looking possessively at his Ferrari. Then took a deep breath, “Err… you can take mine.”

Podrick appeared before him in his usual black suit and white shirt grinning at him from ear to ear. Jon threw him a dirty look before reluctantly stretching his hand out with the keys to his car. Sansa was watching this whole exchange with a very amused expression on her face. Even Lya came to stand beside her mother and giggled hard when Podrick had to literally pull the keys out of Jon’s grasp. “Sansa…” Jon turned his attention to her. “This is my friend Podrick, who also takes care of my security.” He turned to Podrick who was smiling charmingly at Sansa. Jon cleared his throat loudly. “And this beautiful little angel is Lyanna.” She’s my daughter, he wanted to add but knew he couldn’t. Not now, at least.

Podrick blew her a kiss. “You can call me Pod, my lovely.” He said and Lyanna blushed brightly. “Are you going to drive Mr. Snow’s BATMOBILE, Pod?” she asked in her soft, small voice and Jon wanted her to talk more, hear that beautiful little voice of hers over and over again. When Podrick nodded, Lya looked at Jon to check out his expression. Jon instinctively bent down and touched her cheek. “He can have my BATMOBILE, I have something even more ‘extraordinary’ with me.” He winked at her. Lyanna gave him a glowing smile.

She tugged at her mother’s pants. “He means me, Mummy.”

Sansa ran her hand affectionately over her daughter’s silky curls and beamed at her. Jon looked at her from beside his daughter. She looked at the Range Rover and gave him a nod of approval. Jon and Podrick loaded the bags into the vehicle while Sansa fixed the toddler car seat at the back seat of the car. When she slid into the passenger seat beside Jon he looked at her warily. “Will she be alright, all by herself at the back?”

Sansa let out a soft laugh, and for a moment Jon was mesmerised by the sound of her laughter, which he had heard after a very long time. “She sits in the back all the time when I drive, Jon. Trust me, she will be alright.”

During the course of the next half an hour, which was the time it took for them to get to the docks, Jon came to the conclusion that Sansa was definitely a witch and that tote she carried was her witch’s cauldron. Lyanna must’ve asked her for a thousand things during the short span of time that they travelled and Sansa was able to procure every single one of those items from her bag. Mummy, I want some yogurt melts, Lya had asked and Sansa had given it to her without even looking into her bag. Next, she wanted a book, a wipe, a unicorn, her hat, her pretend camera and Sansa whipped
each and every one of those items from her bottomless tote while continuously answering every single one of Lya’s ‘why’s’ patiently. Why is Pod not coming along with us? Why is it not raining? Why is it sunny? Why does the boat float? What will happen to Mr. Snow’s car? Will he ever get it back? Why is the sun a circle and not a square? Why can’t boats fly? Why isn’t there an aquarium in the sea? Will we see a rainbow? And the questions never stopped.

Jon looked at Sansa with awe. She had a convincing answer for each and every one of Lya’s questions and he thanked his luck that the questions were not directed at him. This was definitely tougher than a board meeting and he was sure he would have stuttered and stumbled and been at an utter loss. But not Sansa, she breezed through Lya’s questions like a pro. Finally, when they reached his private yacht, Lya had been too awed by the ‘house-that-floats-on-water’ to speak. Jon smiled to himself. He knew they only had moments before she would start grilling Sansa about his yacht. When he turned his attention to the mother of his child, he realised that Sansa suddenly wore a very grim expression on her face. She inspected his yacht, without exploring it too much like his daughter did, but followed her closely making sure she stayed away from the railings. Lya ran back to him. “Mr. Snow, this yacht boat is better than an airplane. There’s a kitchen and a bedroom and TV here! Does this boat have a name?”

Jon went down on his knees to talk to Lya, something he found himself doing often in her presence. “It does have a name. I call it…” Jon paused to look at Sansa for a long second before looking back at his daughter. “GHOST”

Lya scrunched her chubby face in confusion. “Because it’s white like Casper, the friendly ghost?” she asked him earnestly.

“Well no,” Jon replied unsure of how to answer her. “I er… well, there was a dog, I umm…. He was my best friend…” Jon looked at Sansa beseechingly for help and she promptly stepped in. “Darling, do you remember the story of the six dogs that Gramps gave each one of us?”

Lya nodded enthusiastically. “Grey-wind, Nymeria, Summer, Shaggy-dog, Lady and Ghost. Auntie Arya calls them wolves.”

Sansa smiled sweetly and Jon and his daughter both stared at her enraptured. “They were direwolves, a special breed of dogs. So when Jon became friends with Uncle Robb, Ghost who would never respond to anyone, well except me, befriended Jon like he’d been waiting for him to come. So Jon’s named his yacht “GHOST”, so he can always remember the fun times he had running around and playing with his best friend, isn’t that correct Jon?”

“Absolutely..” Jon said lost in his own thoughts as Sansa tucked Lya in her arms. He missed Ghost, so terribly at this very moment. Look, Old boy, he told the Ghost in his head, this is my daughter, mine and Sansa’s.

Sansa informed him that it was time for Lya’s nap and she went down with Lyanna to the lower deck where the bedrooms were located. Jon watched her go, as the yacht set sail. Did she know, that only Ghost knew how he’d felt for her? For Ghost was the only one he’d ever dared to talk to about Sansa. Jon squeezed his eyes shut.

He was only 11 when he’d first seen Ghost. Robb had insisted that he stay over at the Stark mansion as his mother was travelling for work. Catelyn Stark had spoken to his mother and it had been settled that Jon would spend the weekend with the Starks, in their mansion. The Stark mansion had always been the talk of the town. Every kid in school had envied the Starks, for their mansion was no mansion at all; it was a castle fit for princes and princesses. Jon, however, had never given it too much of a thought. For him, Robb’s friendship, Ned’s and Catelyn’s affection mattered more than their shiny house. The first thing he’d asked Robb was to show him the six dogs that people in
Winterfell referred to as Wolves. Robb had taken him straight to the huge kennels, when the groundkeeper informed him that the white one was missing.

Robb and Jon had run in different directions in search of the dog and just when Jon had been about to give up he’d heard a low growl and melodious laughter come from behind a strange tree. Jon had felt like he’d reached some other land altogether, for never in his whole life had he seen a tree with leaves as red as blood and a trunk as white as snow. Jon heard another low growl and a peal of laughter. He’d slowly moved forward to inspect the source of the two sounds. And what he’d seen that day had taken his breath away.

A little girl of about seven, with hair as red as the leaves of the tree and eyes as blue as the sky, was dancing, and a white monster, whose eyed looked as blood red as her hair, twirled around on two legs trying to imitate the actions of the girl. Jon had watched the scene before him, hypnotized, for what a pretty picture the angel with the red hair, the wolf with the red and the tree with the red leaves had made! Jon had walked towards them in a daze, unaware of his own actions. The WHITE WOLF or so Jon thought had sensed his presence, and gnarled at Jon before slowly prowling towards him. The girl had followed the dog, looking warily at Jon, who by then had been sure that he was going to be eaten up by the great white wolf-dog. He’d shut his eyes expecting the worst but instead felt a wet slurp on his face. Sansa Star, had stood beside him, looking at him with her pretty blue eyes. “That’s strange.” She’d declared. “Ghost likes you.” Then a bit of jealousy had crept in her small voice, “He usually doesn’t like anyone but me. But if he likes you, you must be a nice boy.” She’d outstretched her small palm towards him. “I am Sansa Stark. And you are?”

“JON SNOW” Sansa’s voice came from behind him and Jon jerked open his eyes, coming out of his thoughts. Strands of her fiery red hair had escaped her ponytail and her blue eyes were blazing. She still managed to take his breath away like she had when she was just a little girl. Jon saw her pursed mouth and realised he was in trouble. “What were you thinking?” she asked him.

That momentarily stumped Jon. Did she really want to know what he was thinking? She might not like where his thoughts were going at this point of time. When she rolled her eyes, he grasped, that her question was just a manner of speaking.

“The railings are so low, Jon.” Sansa adopted a slight scolding tone. “And there’s so much gap between them. A child of four can easily slip out of this.” Sansa pointed towards the wide gap between the low railing and Jon gulped. Sansa was right. But there was very little they could do about this right now.

“Sansa, I obviously didn’t think this through.” He took a step towards her and she instantly backed towards the railing, so he stopped. “I am so used to living on my own and I’ve never been around a kid since Rickon and Bran, and that was ages ago, so I don’t know what to expect.” Sansa was gripping onto the railing and Jon saw that her knuckles had turned white. “For now, I’ll do everything in my power to keep her safe” Jon moved closer to Sansa, “I Promise” he added, his voice barely a whisper.

It was probably the heat from the sun, thought Jon, as he looked at Sansa’s flushed face and laboured breathing. His own breath was coming out in huffs. What would Sansa do, if he reached out to tuck that errant strand of red hair behind her ear? She’d probably throw him overboard decided Jon, shaking himself slightly and Sansa took this moment to step away from him and put some distance between them.

She cleared her throat slightly. “Well… ummm.. okay, we’ve to be careful.” She turned her back to him. “I err.. am going to sit with Lya. I’m quite exhausted. I’ll see you in a while.” Sansa scurried away to the lower deck.
Jon silently watched her go, without saying a word. Her running away from him was so oddly familiar, that it made the corners of his mouth turn. When they were children, Jon had often wondered, why she had been so cold towards him. After all, they’d gotten off to a great start at the Weirwood tree, with ghost. But as the years passed, Sansa had become more and more distant from him, to his chagrin. Arya who was just a year younger than Sansa, adored him and idolised him, but not Sansa. Sansa turned her back on him the minute she saw him. Unknown to the world, Jon had secretly welcomed Sansa’s brusque behaviour, for it kept the undercurrent of his rogue feelings for her under check.

Sansa had been, even at the tender age of fourteen alluringly beautiful, and Jon knew he’d have murdered anyone who so much as looked at Sansa perversely if Robb had not already done so. But what always drew him to her was her compassionate heart, her optimism and her silent strength in the face of adversity. Yes, Sansa Stark had been strong, and not many people had been able to recognise this in her. Robb always saw her as his baby sister and hence couldn’t see her inner strength. Arya was always fighting with Sansa and had always hated her for being the perfect daughter to Ned and Catelyn Stark. But Jon had observed, from a distance, the tact she used to get out of an argument, the manipulation she used with Robb to calm him down. Sansa had always possessed the ability to recognise a situation for what it really was. She’d hardly fret over it. She’d accept it, improve it if possible, avoid it if necessary or very diplomatically diffuse it if needed. He had known that Sansa was very capable of taking care of herself but all reason and objectivity had been lost to him, the second Sansa had started dating.

Jon had never seen himself as a violent man, but when Jon had seen Harry’s hand slip around Sansa’s waist, it had taken every bit of his willpower to sit back in his car and not rush out and pull Sansa out of the boy’s grasp. That he could snarl and growl and such sounds were involuntary, was news to him about himself and it usually happened when Sansa Stark and a boy who wanted Sansa Stark was around. Jon had known from the very first instant he had spotted Joffrey Baratheon looking at Sansa, that he was going to be trouble, with a capital T. Jon had been sure, Sansa would not date a prick like him but he was proved wrong. He still vividly remembered his conversation with Robb.

“What the fuck do you mean by she’s dating him?” An angry Jon had glared down at Robb who looked like he was ready to murder someone and something about his expression gave Jon new understanding “Please don’t tell me, you EXPLICITLY told her not to date him.” Robb had looked guilty and Jon had known that the damage was done. “ROBB, when the bloody hell are you going to realise that she’s sixteen dammit? You can’t threaten her to not date someone. She’s going to retaliate by doing exactly what you don’t want her to do. Really Robb, you just drove her into that vicious fool’s arms. Great Job, mate.”

Robb had looked up at him with a crazed expression. “She’s going out with him tonight, on some special date.” Robb had looked like he was going to vomit. “I have a very bad feeling about this, Jon.”

Jon had counted until ten before he answered Robb. “Why don’t you just talk to your father? She will fight you, but you know that she won’t fight him.”

Robb had nodded his head in denial. “Robert Baratheon is my dad’s best friend. Unless I have proof about Joffrey, I can’t go around incriminating him.” He had stood up from his seat and turned to Theon who had been silently witnessing this exchange between Jon and Robb. “Get up. We’re going to follow them.”

“You are batshit crazy, man!” Theon had yelled at Robb. “If Sansa ever finds out, she’ll kill us. You know Sansa can stare a man to death, don’t you?” He’d looked at Jon for support. “You are the
Jon had looked away from Theon, his heart thudding against his chest. Theon was right. If Sansa was ever going to find out about them following her on her date, she was going to hate them all. But then again, if it was a choice between Sansa’s hatred and Sansa’s safety he’d choose her hatred any day, to keep her safe. “Let’s go.” He’d told Robb and an extremely shell-shocked Theon.

Jon clenched his fists when he thought about the way Joffrey had looked at Sansa before they’d left for that cursed date. When he’d warned Joffrey that he’d better not touch Sansa, he’d surprised himself and Robb and Theon. Protectiveness, possessiveness and jealously made a lethal combination and he had been unable to think straight anymore. Jon was aware of Theon’s eyes on him, throughout the drive when they were following Sansa.

“Jon…” Theon had asked him when they were parked a distance away from the house where Joffrey had taken Sansa. Robb had gotten out, to stretch out his legs. “I know you’re worried about Sansa…”

“I’m not worried about her…” Jon had lied, through his nose. He had been DAMN worried about her. “She’s Robb’s sister, Ned’s daughter.”

“And she means nothing to you?” Theon’s voice had been soft. It was a rare occurrence. Jon looked at him and he’d seen the thoughtful look in Theon’s eyes. He’d cleared his throat. “This is not about Sansa, this is about helping Robb.” He’d lied to himself and to his friend.

Theon hadn’t questioned him further but the silence in the car had been beginning to get to him till his phone buzzed. The second he’d seen Sansa’s name flashing on his phone, he’s already begun sprinting towards the house. He knew Theon and Robb were close behind him.

“JON” her voice had sounded shaky and scared. “I think Joffrey has spiked my drink. My vision’s blurred, my head is spinning, I can’t even stand on my feet.”

Jon hadn’t even realised when his sprint had become a crazed run towards the house, as the curses tumbled out of his mouth. Jon had felt like his body was on fire, his blood was surely boiling. Jon had NEVER experienced such white rage in his whole life.

Jon unclenched his fists, and let out a sigh. He’d tamed the beast within him. What was it about Sansa that made him lose control of his senses? He shook his head as he remembered how swiftly he had crumbled when she had flown into his arms.

Jon hadn’t been able to believe that she was in his arms. He’d crushed her to him, relief flooding through his entire body that she was SAFE and UNHARMED. He stroked her back and closed his eyes and thanked every angel and god who was listening to him, for keeping her from harm. He buried his face in her neck and inhaled her scent and suddenly his relief changed into something deeper, darker.

Jon let go of her instantly. She was unsteady on her legs and she was questioning him about his bloody fist. He couldn’t tell her what he’d done. What he’d nearly done. She was annoyed when he told her that they’d followed her here. How dare she? Jon had thought. Did she know what an elaborate date her miserable boyfriend had planned for her? He was going to drug her, rape her and make his friends watch. So he turned that anger on her. “What the hell is wrong with you, Sansa? Why are all your boyfriends, miserable twisted fucks?”

She’d rolled her eyes. “Because obviously, I’m not dating the person, I desperately want to date.”
Again that monster inside his stomach started clawing at his insides. There was some other miserable idiot she wanted to date? Great, The Chronicles of Sansa Stark and her Psycho Boyfriends was just getting better and better. Jon hadn’t realised that he had asked her out loud about the person she wanted to date. But he had been shocked when she had replied in a hurt voice. “Because he doesn’t want me.”

Jon had looked at her incredulously. There was a man, on the face of this planet, who didn’t want Sansa Stark? He envied that man and wished he could trade places. “What kind of an imbecile, wouldn’t want you, Sansa Stark?”

“Would you call yourself an imbecile, Jon Snow?”

Jon had felt like he was hearing this from a great distance. There was no way on earth, Sansa had said what he thought she had said. He looked at her unable to stop the emotions from flowing out of his body. He’d said something unintelligent, something, anything to curb the fever that had gripped his body and soul. Sansa had always been his forbidden fruit. And it had been easier for him to not long for a taste of this fruit, as long as he lived under the impression that Sansa didn’t want him. Please, Sansa, he’d begged her with his eyes. Don’t bridge this gap between us.

But she did. “I like you, Jon Snow. Deal with it.” And she had kissed him.

Days, months, years of imagination couldn’t compare to what he’d actually felt when she had her mouth on his. Soft, pliant, full mouth urging him to open his. His insides were churning, he was waging a war against himself and he was losing, miserably. She’d probably mistaken his lack of reaction for a lack of desire and her disappointed sigh was the straw that had finally broken the camel’s back. A dam broke inside him and he didn’t just kiss her back, he consumed her. He’d finally tasted his forbidden fruit and never in his entire life had he felt so complete, so thoroughly whole, like he did now, with Sansa in his arms. And boy was she delicious. He was ravenous for her. With every taste, his hunger for her, just kept on increasing. He was angling her towards the wall, his palms were already bunching up her skirt and Sansa moaned when his tongue danced with hers and Jon had suddenly realised what he was about to do. It was like someone had poured a cold bucket of ice-water on him and he backed away from her.

Jon held on to the railing of his yacht to will the memories away. He remembered the disappointed look on Sansa’s face when he’d called their first kiss an aberration. She’d of course not known that it had been the most soul-consuming kiss of his life. She was a drug and he was addicted. But nothing had broken his heart more when he’d seen the crushed expression on her face the next day when he’d brought Ygritte home. Ygritte had been vying for his attention for so many days and he’d been putting her off with some excuse or the other. But the morning after that soul-consuming kiss with Sansa, he’d agreed to go out with Ygritte, throwing himself in the deepest pits of hell.

He’d never hated himself more in his life. Sansa had looked like she’d zoned out into another plane. She hadn’t looked at him even once throughout that entire dinner. She’d politely excused herself in a short while and walked back to her room with her head held high and Jon would’ve preferred that she run him through with a knife. He was sure that the pain would’ve been lesser. He’d desperately wanted to reach out to Sansa, comfort her. But he couldn’t, even if every pore in his body was demanding that he go down on his knees and beg for her forgiveness. No! She had to forget her infatuation for him and there was no better way to do that than to get her to hate him. Sansa Stark could never be his, and he was a fool to hope in the secret recess of his heart for such a possibility.
Jon sighed and ran his hand through his curls. But that had changed, hadn’t it? Who was it that once told him that it was always a fool’s hope that brought about his downfall? Cersei Lannister. And how right she’d been! If only, he’d listened to Ned….

Jon’s phone rang all of a sudden and he fetched it out. He squinted at the unknown number that was flashing on his phone. “Hello…” he said uncertainly.

“JON?” said a voice from a million years ago and Jon felt that his throat was suddenly clogged with emotion. He still couldn’t be sure.

“Who’s this?” he asked trying to keep his voice as steady as possible, but dear god it was difficult.

“It’s… I’m… It’s Ar-Arya, Jon” said the girl who had once been his little sister. “Arya Stark”
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to a dear friend of mine, who's going through hell, yet is the epitome of strength.

Yes, life can be hell, but the important point is to remember is; This too shall pass, that too shall pass. The ups and downs in life, that are so similar to the waves in the ocean, sometimes pulling us down, sometimes pushing us up.

I strongly believe that every dark cloud has a silver lining and each one of us have that power in us to be the first ray of sunlight that shines through the sky, after a terrible storm!!

I love you all and thank you from the very bottom of my heart for all the comments, feedback and love that you’ve showered me with. I mean it, every single word. Hope you enjoy the rest of this story!

“Arya Stark”

The name resounded in Jon’s ears a couple of times from far far away. He was not imagining this. Arya had really called him. Arya, who had been his biggest fan. Arya, who had shared a relationship with him like Robb had with Sansa. Arya, who would’ve fought against the world to defend him. Arya, who would’ve chosen him over Sansa at any point, Arya, who had finally helped keep the identity of his daughter a secret from him.

Blood was surely thicker than water, deduced Jon, his heart clenching with desolation at the thought.

“How did you get my number?” His words sounded harsher than he’d meant for it to sound.

“Sansa gave it to me.” Arya’s voice sounded shaky. “She … asked me to call on your phone, in case I couldn’t reach her.”

Disappointment coursed through his veins upon hearing Arya’s reason. So, she’d not called to talk to him. She’d called to talk to Sansa. He let the wave of dejection pass before answering her. “Sansa’s taking a nap. Should I wake her up?”

“No!” Arya sounded alarmed. “Please don’t wake her up. She really needs all the rest she can get….” Her voice trailed away and Jon almost scoffed. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Arya was concerned about Sansa? Five years, definitely seemed to have changed a lot in their relationship. Jon didn’t know what else to say. He remained silent feeling alienated from the girl whom he could’ve once talked to for hours together.

“How’re you Jon?” Arya asked him very cautiously, after a prolonged silence and something in her tentative tone caused him to explode. “Well, you are FIVE YEARS too late to ask that question, Arya Stark.” He yelled into the phone, momentarily forgetting that he’d promised to keep his temper under check while dealing with the Starks.
“And you went out of your fucking way to know if I was alive or dead, didn’t you?” The fire was back in Arya’s voice and Jon found that strangely comforting. “Don’t you dare blame me, Jon Snow. You never bothered looking back, once you left.”

Jon’s felt the ire rise in him. “Aye, I didn’t look back.” He yelled back at her. “Your father made it clear that I couldn’t. So, all of you punished me, by keeping my daughter, my own child a secret from me?”

Jon thought he heard Arya snarl. “Oh Right!” she said her voice dripping with sarcasm. “We’re talking about morals now, aren’t we?” Arya spat back at him. “Pretty rich coming from a man who fucked his best friend’s sister, the daughter of a man who was like a father to him, right before running away from Winterfell.”

“WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE, ARYA STARK!”

“YOU HAVE SOME LOFTY EXPECTATIONS, JON SNOW!”

Both were panting into the phone, after the yelling match. Jon could hear Arya’s uneven breathing, much like his own. This was impossible! He couldn’t go on like this, if he really wanted to be a part of Lya’s life. Jon took a deep breath hoping it would calm him down. There was some truth in what Arya said. He’d betrayed the Starks in the worst possible manner by giving in to temptation, but he hated the way Arya phrased that sentence. The night before he’d left Winterfell for good, was the night that had created his daughter, and he’d be damned before he let anyone insult the memory of that.

“Do you really want to do this, Jon?” Arya’s voice sounded softer now, more relaxed. “Sansa’s already been through hell. Do you want to drag her through more?”

“What do you want me to do, Arya?” Jon couldn’t believe how protective Arya sounded about Sansa. “Stay away from my daughter?” The pitch in Jon’s voice was up by several notches. “You have a daughter, don’t you? Could you do the same? Stay away from her, after having known her.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. Jon wondered if Arya was still on the line. She was, and he heard her release a soft sigh. “No, I can’t ever stay away from Nymeria, not now, not ever.”

Both of them were silent for a while. Jon broke the ice first. “You named her Nymeria?” The direwolves had been such an integral part of the Stark kids’ lives when they were growing up in Winterfell. Grey wind was Robb’s, Lady was Sansa’s, Nymeria was Arya’s, Summer was Bran’s, Shaggy-dog was Rickon’s and Ghost was Jon’s. Often, Jon had thought, if the direwolves did indeed reflect the personalities of each of the Stark kid they were attached to. He would know, because in spite of not being a Stark, Ghost was so much like him. Theon used to call the pair of them Broody and Moody. Nymeria had been wild, just like Arya.

Arya gave a short laugh. “Yes, she’s my little she-wolf now. I’m.. I married Gendry.”

Jon chuckled to himself. He remembered how explosive Arya and Gendry’s relationship had been. “I know and I am glad that he finally got his head out of his arse and asked you to marry him.”

“Well…” There was hesitation in Arya’s voice and Jon frowned. “He didn’t. I did. I got fed up of all the ‘I want to marry you but don’t have the courage to ask you’ looks he kept giving me.”

Jon laughed out loud and said without thinking, “Who would’ve thought, Arya Stark would be the first Stark sister to get married?” And just like that the tension that had been slightly diffused was
back in their conversation and this time it was thick and cold and hot at the same time.

“Right” Arya’s tone was flat but sharp. “And who would’ve thought that the perfect Sansa Stark, had a child out of wedlock with some random guy and went away from Winterfell to save her family from the shame of it all? Destiny sucks.”

Jon’s heart was thudding against his chest, more like hammering and banging against his rib-cage. He could feel the blood rush to his ears, the heat penetrate his head. He hated every sarcastic word that slipped out of Arya’s mouth. But not even the child out of wedlock bit or the random guy taunt affected him as much as what she’d said about Sansa’s departure from Winterfell. “What do you mean she went away from Winterfell to save her family from the shame of it all? Ned could’ve never sent Sansa away even if she’d confessed to murder.” It was impossible. Sansa Stark was Ned Stark’s princess. She was his pride, his strength, his weakness.

Arya was stoically silent. Jon was getting frustrated now. He’d been under the impression that Sansa had come to King’s landing after she’d had Lyanna. He was shocked to discover that Lyanna was not even born in Winterfell. Did Sansa not have her near and dear ones around when she was pregnant? With your child, his brain added, driving guilt’s sharp dagger deep into his gut.

“Jon, it’s not really my place to tell you what happened and how it happened.” Arya said from the other end. “This is between you and Sansa. Besides, I don’t know many things myself.” Arya was clearly hesitating to add something else. “I’ve .. er… I’ve spoken to Mum and Dad.”

Jon’s heart stopped beating altogether. The hesitation in Arya’s tone spoke volumes. Jon cleared his throat bracing himself for what was to follow. “What kind of welcome should I expect? Ned standing on the Ramparts with his favourite shotgun in his hand?” Jon tried a weak attempt at humour though he fathomed that it could very well be the case.

“Dad said..” Arya cleared her throat. “He said he’s looking forward to seeing you.”

Jon almost dropped the phone from his hand. He was so stunned by Arya’s reply that he couldn’t seem to form words in his mouth for an immediate reply. “What kind of welcome should I expect? Ned standing on the Ramparts with his favourite shotgun in his hand?” Jon tried a weak attempt at humour though he fathomed that it could very well be the case.

“You don’t know what it feels like to be orphaned by the man you loved like your own father, Jon screamed at Arya in his head. And didn’t you just say moments ago that I’m a random guy who knocked up your sister, betrayed your family? And now she wanted him to shack up with them? But Jon’s inner voice told him that Arya was talking sense. This was not about him or the Starks
anymore. This was about his little baby girl who had not just deepened but had forged a permanent connection between him and the Starks. He’d left for Winterfell with the determination that he’d swallow his pride, crush his ego and do everything in his power to intertwine himself in his daughter’s life. Yes, he’d made mistakes. Yes, he’d paid for them dearly. Yes, going back to Winterfell was going to drain every ounce of his energy. But he was going to hold his head high and endure everything thrown at him, for the sake of his child. Hell, he’d been prepared to undertake this journey with or without Sansa and Lya.

“Since when did yours become the voice of reason” Jon told Arya with a resigned sigh, unable to stop the affection he felt for her from creeping into his voice. When Arya chuckled, Jon added. “I guess the words that I was actually looking for is, Thank you for having me over. Tell Ned and Cat, I said that.”

“You tell them, when you come here!” Arya retorted instantly and Jon shook his head, running his fingers through his hair. What about Robb? He wanted to ask her, but he did not dare. Not yet. “Are Bran and Rickon home too?”

“Umm yes..” said Arya and it’s only because he knew her so well, in spite of the five years that had elapsed, did he notice the slight tremor in her voice, which told him that she had noticed how he’d avoided speaking about Robb. But she didn’t bring it to his notice. “Rickon’s doing his last year of schooling at Winterfell high. Bran.. well he’s staying in the old hunting lodge alone, near the Godswood. He .. he likes to be alone.”

Bran had always been a loner, right from the time he was little. He spoke very less, stayed away from crowds and parties, and was lost in his own thoughts. People thought he was weird. They never saw his all-knowing look, his perceptive eyes and his utterly sharp sense of intuition. In a way, Bran didn’t get along with most people his age, because they bored him to death with their trivial problems and childish behaviour. Bran couldn’t be too bothered with mere mortals. He belonged more to the creation. He would lie on his back in the godswood for hours together and stare at the vast sky, with millions of twinkling stars. Jon had lay down beside him, on countless occasions, just enjoying the silence that came with hanging out with Bran. At times, Bran would never even say a word. At times he would talk to him for hours telling him vague things like “We’re all playing a game in this creation. We’re all like the characters in a video game, who have forgotten our true nature. I can feel life, not just coursing through my veins, but all around me, within me, beside me. We’re all one, really. We just have to recognise, that we are. Truth, is only one but it has many forms. Love is the only thing that makes this creation beautiful.” And at other times, he’d suddenly morph into a kid. “I can’t believe Rickon ate my chocolate cake, Mum! This sucks!” But Jon had loved him like he was his own brother. He’d probably understood him better than Robb, Arya or even Ned. Jon remembered the unshed tears that had shone in his eyes when Jon had said his goodbye. Jon felt a lump form in his throat.

“Yes.. uh well.. I guess I’ll get to see them all.” His voice was unnaturally husky. He waited for Arya to say something but she did not. Still no mention of Robb! “Arya, we’ll reach Winterfell in a couple of days.”

“Yes I know.” Arya said hurriedly. He heard a baby crying in the background. “Jon. I have to go now. I think Rya’s nappy needs changing.” But Jon couldn’t for the life of him, imagine Arya Stark changing a baby’s nappy. “And umm…Jon Snow, listen to me very carefully. If you give Sansa third degree again, I will forget who you are before I deal with you.” The line went dead.

Jon smiled. He really did. If anyone else had heard Arya threaten him and seen him smile, they would’ve wondered what was wrong with him. But Jon knew exactly why Arya had said, what she had said, which meant, Arya Stark remembered everything they’d shared as kids, just as well as he
did. And it did mean something to her. Jon stared into the horizon, taking his glasses off. He still remembered that day so vividly.

Arya had just turned sixteen. Robb and Jon were walking into the grounds of the Stark Mansion when they saw the feral expression with which Arya was staring at Sansa. Jon had anticipated that Arya would lunge at Sansa at any point of time and had broken into a run when he’d seen her flared nostrils. He’d reached just in time to restrain her from doing exactly what he’d feared she’d do, by putting an arm around her waist and dragging her, a little distance away from Sansa. Out of the corner of his eye, he’d seen Robb walk up to Sansa and draw her into his arms, asking her what was going on. Sansa had been close to tears but she didn’t look at Jon. It had been almost a year since they’d shared that kiss in the bathroom, a kiss Jon had been doomed to remember despite all his efforts towards wiping out that memory. Sansa had barely spoken to him after that unless absolutely necessary. He’d hated it, with every fibre in his body but had continued to encourage the distance between them. Arya had been writhing in his arms and though Jon had bulked up quite a bit, he was finding it a trying task to keep Arya from charging towards Sansa.

“I hate her” Arya had declared, glaring at Sansa. “She’s weak, selfish and dumb.”

“Watch it Arya!” Robb had growled standing to his full height and just for a second Arya had looked scared. “I don’t want to hear you talk about Sansa like that, ever again.”

The ferocious expression had returned to Arya’s eyes but this time it was accompanied by some hurt. “So typical of you Robb.” She’d spat out. “You come to her defence without knowing what she’s done. Perfect Sansa can never do anything imperfect. Barf!”

Jon’s body had tightened and Arya had looked up at him. Jon didn’t know if she’d been able to see that he was really trying to control his temper. Whatever had been the case, she’d felt the need to explain to him. “She insulted my friend Woody. She asked him to get out of our premises. She accused him irrationally. HOW DARE SHE?”

Jon had drawn in a breath to steady his breathing and thrown a look at Sansa which she’d returned keeping her head held high. “Yes. I did that. I asked Woody to leave. And if I see him with you again, I’ll let Lady have him for lunch.”

Jon had been shocked, to say the least, hearing the aggressiveness in Sansa’s voice. But Arya tried lunging at Sansa again and he wrapped both his arms around her to keep her from harming Sansa.

“Crazy Bitch!” Arya had yelled and Jon’s grip on her had tightened so much that Arya had cried out in pain. “What’s wrong with you Jon?” she’d looked at him with despair.

Robb who’d had enough of this, had looked at Sansa. “What happened Sansa?”

Sansa had appeared distressed. “Robb, Woody is a depraved idiot. She thinks he’s her best friend but I’ve seen the way he looks at her. He’s always….” Sansa had hesitated giving Arya a sceptical look. “He’s always making her climb trees, especially when Mum forces her to wear skirts, so that he can look at her…” Her voice had trailed off and Robb had looked away embarrassed with his fists tightly clenched at his sides.

“You’re just jealous of my freedom.” Arya was hysterical “You hate the fact that you have to follow all the rules and I can do whatever the fuck I want to, and no one expects me to be a paragon of virtue like you. Which you are not… considering the amount of men you’ve let into your pants…”

“AARYAAA….” A roar had erupted and Jon had realised a little late that it’d come from his throat. Arya had stopped moving and just looked at him with a shocked expression. Jon had never
raised his voice with Arya before that moment. Ever. She stopped fighting him and slackened in his arms.

Sansa had taken that opportunity to step forward. “You may think I am your worst enemy Arya, but I am not. I am your elder sister and it’s my prerogative to look out for you. You may hate everything feminine, but I hope you do realise that you are a woman, and…” Sansa had hesitantly lowered her eyes before adding “and a beautiful one at that. Just because you slap them hard on their backs, swear like them and call them mate, doesn’t mean they don’t notice that you are a girl. If you don’t believe me about Woody, ask Gendry. You trust him, don’t you?”

She’d cast a tentative glance at Jon before glaring down at Arya. “I like to date. There’s nothing wrong in that” Jon had wanted to disagree. He had wanted to shout at her on the top of his lungs that ‘There was everything wrong with that’ but he obviously couldn’t. So Sansa had continued to speak. “But if you dare insinuate once again that I’m a floozy, I won’t be responsible for what I do next.” With that she stormed away from the grounds towards the mansion.

Robb had cast Jon a look before looking at a deflated Arya. “I don’t think I have to tell you that I’ll kill that Woody if I ever see him again.” Robb had turned and run after Sansa and Arya had scoffed turning to look at Jon. “She’s a liar, is what she is”

Jon bit his tongue to keep his anger in check. “Sansa is very perceptive, Arya. She has no reason to lie to you about this boy.”

Arya had looked up at him with accusing eyes. “Why are you defending her? She’s horrible to you. She has always disliked you.”

‘I like you Jon Snow, deal with it’

Soft words, from a soft mouth that had tugged at the strings of his heart, had come flooding back to him and he’d felt hot and frustrated all of a sudden. “Not everything is as it seems.” He’d said, his words coming out harsher than he’d intended it to and Arya had frowned at him in confusion.

“I don’t know why you can’t see that she loves you and is looking out for you. No one’s comparing you to Sansa, Arya. You’re great just as you are and she is …. ” Beautiful, compassionate, kind, charming.. “great just as she is. You’ve been nasty to her for no fault of hers.”

He held his hand up when she’d begun to protest. “I am fed up of you being on the constant look-out for reasons to pick a fight with her. And the things you say about her… it’s disgusting!” Arya had had the grace to look embarrassed. she’d even mumbled something that had sounded suspiciously like, ”Of course anyone who still uses the word floozy, cant be one.” Jon had known that the sisterly love was there. Sure, they were as different from each other as the North Pole and South Pole, but love was still the magnetic force that kept them bound together. Jon knew Sansa had stood up for Arya on many occasions when her sister had been called a freak by some kids in school. That Robb had later on secretly threatened each one of those kids with a horrible fate if they so much as raised their voice against Arya, was information, neither of the Stark sisters were privy too. Arya had once broken Lancel Lannister’s arm when he’d asked her for the speed dial to Sansa’s bed. Little did Arya or Sansa know that Lancel’s extended stay in the hospital had been because Jon had felt the desperate urge to stick his leg out when Lancel was running looking distractedly and lecherously at Sansa. So, basically, the love had always been there. They were a pack, they stuck together, but couldn’t ever express it to one another.

But Arya had been getting nastier and nastier to Sansa and Jon knew he was the only one who could put a stop to it, even if that meant that he had to hurt her a little. So he’d turned to her with absolute intent in his eyes. “Arya Stark, listen to me very carefully. If you give Sansa third degree again, I will
Jon still had a grin pasted on his face when he remembered his words to Arya. He couldn’t deny that he felt glad, that Arya and Sansa had each other’s backs now. It was very telling that Sansa had chosen to talk to Arya first about him and their situation with Lya. It was also significant that Arya had called him to ensure that Sansa was Ok. But one thing he was sure of now. Arya Stark had itched to call him and speak to him the minute Sansa had given her his number. Jon smiled as he made his way down to the lower deck. She’d not called to speak to Sansa. She could’ve have texted her if Sansa hadn’t picked up her call. Jon knew Sansa had a cruise plan in her phone and her phone was very well working on sea.

No. Arya Stark had called to speak to him, he thought, a happy feeling spreading through his chest. Because she’d damn well wanted to.

Meanwhile … at Dragonstone…

Daenerys Targaryen sat at her oval desk rubbing her temple with her fingers. She could hear the rumbling of the enraged sea and the pounding of its waves into the cliffs that surrounded the coast of Dragonstone. She glanced at the man sitting across her, looking at her with rapt attention, a scar on his face, improving his otherwise unpleasant features. But she liked his eyes. She really did! Though they would have scared most others. He had eyes, of the rarest kind. Rarer than her purple ones. One was green, and the other was black.

But she was not most others. She was Daenerys of House Targaryen. A Myth about her powerful family was that her ancestors were dragon-riders. Whether true or not, Dany knew that fire ran in her veins. She did not fear him. For, she could recognise the wisdom, shrewdness and intelligence hidden behind the dwarf’s eyes.

She shut her own purple eyes, which had frightened people throughout her life, yet enchanted more men than she could count. She stood up and walked quietly over to the window overlooking the sea. The wind had died down, but she could see a storm brewing in the horizon. There couldn’t have been a better set up for the conversation that was about to take place in her office. She cleared her throat slightly.

“You do understand, what you are insinuating, don’t you Tyrion Lannister?” she asked in that commanding voice of hers that had come so easily to her because of her Targaryen Blood. “Drogo and I have great respect for you. It’s the only reason you are still standing before me. You are very… unlike your siblings.”

“Aren’t we all?” said Tyrion, in his deep sage voice, staring at her with what she suddenly realised was a mixture of understanding and pity.

Daenerys had to look away. He couldn’t know. No one could know. She tried to bring her mind back to the subject of discussion. “Do you have any proof to back your claim?”

Tyrion smiled and leaned back in his chair. “You’ve still not understood me clearly, Ms. Targargen. I am not claiming anything. I don’t think you realise it yet. But I don’t care if you believe me or not.” He crossed his arms across his chest as Daenerys turned to look at him with a confused expression. “You may know that I’m only famous for two things. Whoring and Drinking. At least that’s what my father thinks I’m capable of. And the world…” Tyrion scoffed “The world sees what it wants to see. It surrounds itself with what looks perfectly beautiful and casts the imperfections aside.”
He gestured to himself when he used the word ‘imperfections’ and Daenerys cringed a little, at the casual indifferent tone of his voice when he made the statement. “BUT, beauty is vain and fleeting, charm is deceitful and it’s ultimately only a cactus that survives the harsh cold and heat, the ice and fire of a dessert, not a rose.” He leaned forward suddenly looking dangerous, his green eye glinting in the rays of the sun that streamed from within the window. “I am that cactus Daenerys Targaryen and I survive, no matter the odds. Your brother unfortunately, was not a cactus. He was a rose. A rose, that was beautiful and vain and oddly disinterested in the world. He was too sure of his power and position in the world and he didn’t watch his back. He was more interested in his songs of love and happiness and couldn’t see the snakes that were growing in his own backyard.”

Daenerys remembered her brother all too well. His handsome face, his cheerful smile, his melodious voice, his music, his guitar, she had been so very happy then, until it had all come crashing down. She looked at Tyrion who was eyeing her curiously, or was it just his eyes, she couldn’t decide. “I was drunk that day and I was far away but there is nothing in the world potent enough to dull my brain. This, I swear to you. I saw what I saw, Daenerys.” He said addressing her by her given name for the first time.

“And why come to me now, after all these years.” Daenerys couldn’t stop her words from sounding ragged, tight, as the tension that coiled in her stomach made her breath hitch.

Tyrion Lannister gave her a slow smile. “Two reasons. One, I didn’t know if I could trust you. Two, I didn’t know if the truth would keep you safe.” The corners of his mouth lifted a little. “I had no intention of signing my death warrant if you were untrustworthy. And I couldn’t risk you dying, in case you were trustworthy. I may be a man of ill-repute but cruelty is not one of my vices.” Tyrion’s eyes now had a certain degree of softness in them. “Your marriage to the Great Khal Drogo has put you in a powerful position. No man, powerful or otherwise would dare to hurt you now and risk Drogo’s ire. You know that better than anyone else.”

Daenerys recoiled once again with the perceptive look that lit the dwarf’s eyes. “SO let me get this straight.” She said clearing her throat to get a grip on her voice. “You’re telling me, that the fall that killed my brother was no accident at all?”

“No Daenerys” Tyrion got down from his chair and walked over to where Daenerys was standing near the window. Though she was looking down at him and he was looking up at her, the intensity in his eyes, more than made up for his short stature.

“I am telling you that your brother Rhaegar Targaryen was murdered. By someone who knew him very very well.”
Chapter 7

Sansa woke up with a start. For a moment, she felt disoriented in the strange, unfamiliar bedroom and the constant rocking feeling that had probably put her to sleep in the first place, contributed to the strangeness, for Sansa was definitely not used to napping in the afternoons. She clutched the chaise she’d been sitting on and realised that someone had covered her with a thin duvet. Suddenly, she bolted upright glancing at the empty bed where Lyanna had been sleeping. Fear was the first emotion that gripped her senses and Sansa almost tumbled as she bolted out of the bedroom door, with the speed of a mommy cheetah! All the unsafe features in ‘The Ghost’ flashed before Sansa’s eyes and she felt her vision blur. Stay calm, she scolded herself. Jon did have a large crew on the yacht. Someone would’ve noticed her whereabouts. There was no one in the Galley which was the first place Sansa checked. As she made her way to the upper deck, Sansa nearly tripped on the stairs as she heard a cheerful squeal of laughter. A wave of relief passed through her entire being as she recognised her daughter’s laughter and the husky rumble that could only belong to Lya’s father’s.

Strange, thought Sansa, as she slowly emerged from the stairway, she’d already begun referring to Jon as Lyanna’s father. Maybe she always had, in the secret recess of her heart but had never let the part of her that remained logical, admit it. Now, with Jon so close to her, it was impossible to shut out that voice from her brain. The sun was still shining brightly in the sky, and Sansa had to momentarily shield her eyes from the sun as she walked towards the sky lounge. When her eyes adjusted better to the light, she was treated to a sight that did ridiculously wonderful things to her heart.
Jon and Lya were in the outdoor dining area of the lounge and Jon was struggling to get her into something. When Sansa got closer she realised that it was a radium green life jacket that Jon was wrestling with. “Why won’t this thing stay on you, love?” he was asking probably more to himself than to his daughter. Of course, what Jon couldn’t see was that every time he turned his attention to get her other hand into the jacket, Lya was wriggling out of the one he’d managed to get her into. Children hated life vests and Lya obviously didn’t want to wear one because it was uncomfortable and restrictive.

“I’m sorry Jon,” Sansa said, drawing both their attention to her. Lya flew into her arms with a big ‘Muuummy’ and Jon looked at her with obvious relief. Sansa cleared her throat, adjusting Lya better on her hip. “I usually never nap during the day. When did she wake up?”

Jon waved off her apology as though that was the least important thing that mattered right now. “You don’t have to apologise Sansa. I was on the main deck, in the dining room when I heard Lya wake up. She walked out of the bedroom with her teddy.”

“Jon asked me not to wake you up, Mummy,” said Lya who was still in her mother’s arms. “You were sleeping with your mouth open, like this.” She opened her mouth wide open with her tongue stuck out and Sansa turned beet red. Dammit! Sansa desperately hoped she’d not looked as bad as Lya’s description. Sansa slowly looked up at Jon who’d gone red in the face too. But then Sansa realised that it was because he was trying his extreme best to not laugh. So you find that funny, don’t you Jon? Thought Sansa, her hands going to her hips, after she set Lyanna down. Well, It’s my turn now.

“So, why are you wrestling with this vest, Jon?” Sansa questioned in her sweetest voice and Jon stopped smiling. He shifted on his feet uncomfortably, a frown marring his handsome features. “Ummm… I’ve been trying to get her into this life-vest, but somehow it just won’t fit her.” He shook his head staring at Lyanna like she was a complicated mathematical equation. “And I’m pretty sure, it’s exactly her size.”

Sansa put Lyanna down and outstretched her hand and Jon immediately handed her the jacket. Sansa looked at the jacket first, like she was inspecting it. Then she looked back at Jon. “I must say, Jon, this is such an amazing colour. It’s exactly the same vest Peppa* wore when she went with her Grandpa on his boat.” She looked at Jon who was blinking furiously, obviously, utterly confused. “Do you have one like this for me?” Now Jon looked even more confused but he nodded and shouted out to someone to get one adult life jacket. “Make that two,” said Sansa looking purposefully at Jon. “You did tell me how much you love wearing your life vest when you are on the upper deck, didn’t you Jon?” Jon was now looking at her like she’d grown two horns.

“You serious?” he asked in that deep voice of his. “You want me to wear a life vest too……” he paused when Sansa rolled her eyes and Jon’s eyes darted to Lya before coming back to Sansa. “…the one that I told you I loved so much. Of course I’m going to wear it.” Jon was finally playing along, a little reluctantly and Sansa nodded in agreement. He muttered something under his breath as he put on his life vest and Sansa put on hers. Sansa pretended to check out her life vest with enthusiasm. “I think I need to click a picture of me wearing it and send it to Brienne. She’ll be so happy to see me in Peppa’s life vest.”

Lya slowly came forward and tugged at Sansa’s pants. “I want to wear Peppa’s life jacket too” she said, pointing towards the small life jacket that Sansa was deliberately holding away from her.

Sansa looked at her like she was unsure. “Are you sure you want to wear it darling?” she twisted her lips. “You could always go inside and watch the sea from your cabin if you don’t want to wear it.”

Lya grabbed the jacket from Sansa and very independently hooked both her arms into the vest
causing a very shocked Jon to stare at her with his mouth open. “I want you to take a picture of me and send it to Brie too!” she cooed as Sansa tightened the straps on her life vest. After Sansa had clicked her picture Lya pointed towards a small box that she’d placed on a table. “Can I please play with my play-dough now, Mummy? I told Ben that the next time I met him, I could make a pot all by myself.”

Sansa smiled and nodded as Lya rushed excitedly to her little play-dough kit. Jon took a step towards Sansa and she slowly turned to look at him. “You got cheated by a four-year-old, Jon Snow. Shame on you…” Sansa teased and Jon shook his head with a smile. Unfortunately, in the very next moment, though his smile remained, his eyes got that intense look that deeply unsettled Sansa. “What can I say?” Jon’s voice sounded huskier than usual. “She has managed to hoodwink me.”

Sansa took a step back to still her tangled nerves more than anything and cast a wary glance at Lya. Then Jon took a deep breath and added. “But you are wonderful with her.” Sansa looked at him, shocked, when she realised that he’d actually paid her a compliment. He ran his fingers through his hair and looked down at his shoe before looking back at Sansa. “Umm… Arya called”

Sansa’s eyes shot up quickly to meet Jon’s. “She called you?” When she registered just how surprised she sounded, she immediately changed her question. “Um…did she leave a message for me?” Sansa realised how idiotic this sounded. If Arya had wanted to leave her a message, she would’ve just sent her a text. No, Arya Stark had not been able to hold herself from speaking to Jon Snow.

Sansa heard Jon let out a heavy breath. “She asked you to call her once you were awake.” He took a step towards Sansa reducing the distance between them. “She told me, you need all the rest you can get.” Sansa’s heart started to pound at the searching look that had now entered Jon’s eyes. “She told me that your father is looking forward to seeing me.” Sansa’s heart hammered against her chest because with every sentence that came out of his mouth, Jon was getting closer and closer. “She also told me that if I gave you Third degree, she’ll forget who I am before she deals with me.” Jon stopped walking and Sansa looked up at him in confusion. Arya had threatened Jon? Why was he looking so pleased then?

“And since I do take every threat made by Arya Stark very seriously…” Jon smirked, or whatever closely resembled a smirk in Jon’s collection of facial expressions, “I had better watch my back.” Jon inched still closer and thrust his hands into his pockets. He cast a sideward glance at Lya who now seemed to be enjoying the company of a few crew members, showing off the cup she’d made. When Jon looked back at Sansa, his eyes looked strange, almost vulnerable. “Sansa, did you father know, as soon as you conceived that… er…” His voice dropped to almost a whisper. “That I am the father?”

Sansa felt like the whole world was spinning around her. Very soon, Jon was going to be in Winterfell. Her past, present, and future were all going to collide with a bang. How could she tell Jon the whole truth without sacrificing herself in the process? There was only one person, other than herself, who knew the whole truth and thankfully, right now, he was far far away. Besides, he had promised her that he would never tell Jon or anyone else, the truth or rather the whole truth. But Jon was going to have a lot of questions. And it was better he questioned her and not anyone else in the family. She cleared her throat avoiding to look into his eyes. “Not as soon as I found out that I was pregnant… I told him a month later.” Well, thought Sansa as she looked into the blue waters, at least she was not lying to him.

“And he sent you away from Winterfell?” The pure shock in Jon’s troubled voice brought Sansa’s attention back to him. Her blood ran cold. How in god’s name had Jon found out about that? Sansa’s throat went really dry. It had to be Arya. Sansa tried to compose herself, as she traced the neckline of her t-shirt. One conversation with Jon, and her sister had already turned into a blubbering fool.
Winterfell was going to be a catastrophe. She could feel it in her bones.

“It was not like that.” Sansa shot back when she realised, she’d taken too long to reply and Jon was eyeing her suspiciously. She twisted the ends of her ponytail in her fingers. “Dad didn’t send me away. He just thought it was better for me to not have the baby in Winterfell, in a place where everyone knows me. He was just trying to save me a great deal of trouble.”

Jon shook his head vigorously as though he was unable to comprehend what Sansa was trying to say. “That is so unlike your father. I find it very hard to believe that he would send you away from his care and protection after knowing about your condition.” Jon’s eyes were now searching hers and Sansa gulped. How could she admit to Jon that she’d herself been astounded when her father had suggested that she leave Winterfell? This was the same man who had refused to allow Robb and Jon leave the Stark mansion, when they’d turned 18. Besides, Ned Stark had always taught her and all his children to never run away from their mistakes, their fears or problems. He’d advised them to face all the trials that life brought them, head on, without batting an eyelid, without giving a damn about what the world thought or spoke behind their backs.

And yet, it had been her father’s suggestion that she must leave Winterfell as soon as possible and Sansa had explicitly trusted her dad, even though a part of her had felt let down by his decision. “You don’t understand Jon,” said a daughter, defending her father. “The Stark name has been around for centuries. People associate the Starks with honour. Besides, Dad is the mayor of Winterfell. How do you think the conservative Northern people would have reacted if they’d found out about my pregnancy?” Sansa took a deep breath. “It’s not like he abandoned me. He came down to King’s Landing with me, helped in setting up my bookstore. Robb, Arya and Gendry, Mum, Dad took turns to stay with me while I was in King’s Landing. Even Bran and Rickon would visit me sometimes. Besides, Brienne was like my shadow. She never ever left me alone.”

When she looked up at Jon, his grey eyes now wore a smouldering look and she felt like her eyes were somehow glued to his. “That still doesn’t explain why he didn’t come after me and blow my head off with his favourite shotgun.” Jon took a step towards her and their faces almost touched. She could feel his breath on her face and as she tried to step away from him Jon placed his palm on the small of her back effectively cutting out the supply of oxygen to her lungs. “Sansa …” Jon’s voice rumbled low in his throat. “I need to know why you didn’t…..”

“JON…” shrieked Lya and both Jon and Sansa jumped apart. Sansa was still reeling from the feelings that were coursing through her body. Jon, however, went down on his knees as Lya reached him. “What is it, love?” he asked her with so much affection that Sansa instantly felt a tightening in her chest. Lya practically glowed with the attention that he showered her with. A small part of her even felt sad or was it jealously? She had tried her level best to be Lya’s mother and father; right from the very moment, she’d known that she was probably going to raise her baby all by herself. But once Lya had turned three, she had always subconsciously searched for a father figure. At times, it had been her Grandpa Ned but more often than not, it had been her Uncle Robb. Now, she could see the same adoration in her daughter’s eyes for Jon.

Sansa looked at Lyanna chatting away excitedly with Jon, parading the cup her tiny hands had managed to shape, and Jon was looking at the cup with an expression which was nothing short of absolute wonderment. A soft smile, almost melancholic, played on Sansa’s lips. Lya was so excited about impressing Jon, that she’d forgotten about her mother completely. Sansa walked slightly away from the scene, allowing Jon and Lya to share their moment. Sansa would’ve felt insanely jealous of Jon, she almost did but the luminous smile that lit her little baby’s face drove away every such feeling from her heart. Watching the exchange between father and daughter from a distance, a realisation dawned upon Sansa.
Jon was definitely inexperienced with kids, leave alone his own child. Sansa was also aware that he was conscious of this fact; worried even. But in reality, he had no reason to be worried. Jon looked at Lyanna, like she was the most precious thing in the whole world. It was love, she saw in his eyes, every time he looked at his daughter. His every conversation, action and thought was laced with that paternal love that so closely resembled the emotion that she so often saw in her own father’s eyes. And if that was any standard to go by, Jon was on his way to becoming the best father in the world.

As the cool evening breeze gently kissed her cheek, Sansa looked at the horizon which now had a pinkish hue as the setting sun cast it’s orange-gold rays upon the clouds making them look red, almost as red as the leaves of the weirwood tree - the mystical tree of Winterfell. There were legends and myths about the magical powers of the tree and somehow many events in her life seemed to be connected to that tree. She swallowed a lump in her throat as she recalled a memory that never failed to bring emptiness in her heart, when time had stopped still for her, when she’d felt like someone had ripped her heart right out of her chest. It had been the day she had lost something very very precious.

A storm had been raging through Winterfell. Thick, icy sheets of rain obscured Sansa’s vision and pierced her pale and wet skin. Still, she ran on the slippery path that led to the Godswood, not bothered by the weight of her soaked clothes. A brilliant flash of bright white lit the darkened sky and moments later came the ominous sound of rumbling thunder but it was not this that made Sansa’s heart constrict with fear. It was the sound of a gloomy howl that sounded far away and yet almost felt like it was coming from of the depths of her own heart.

“Lady…” Sansa yelled, her voice muted by an oppressive boom. The wind howled, trying to blow away the clothes that stuck to her body like a second skin and the raindrops, which felt like darts in her eyes, washed away her tears even before they had begun forming in her eyes. Sansa ran on, paying no heed to the branches of the trees that were swaying so dangerously close to her, not deterred by the wet leaves that the wind and rain plastered on her face at regular intervals. She called out again, shrill but loud… “Lady…”

Why her feet had brought her to the Godswod when she was first informed that Lady was missing, she would never know. It was instinct, or maybe a connection that led her to where she was now, hoping against hope that the white mass that she could see lying down at the foot of the tree was just a bundle of bed sheets that someone had mistakenly forgotten below the tree, or perhaps a bale of cotton that the wind had managed to blow from some unknown location. Please, God, she had pleaded, Let this not be Lady. But today, the Gods were not so kind.

Sansa sat down next to her best friend in the whole world. They were both pups when they first met – one human and one canine. And now, eighteen years later, one of them was ready to say goodbye. Lady was blinking very slowly. Sansa cradled her furry head and softly placed it on her lap. “I’ve found you, my love. You’re going to be okay now. We’ll take you to the hospital and they’ll make you better.” Sansa’s tears now fell faster than the rain that was pelting on her face.

Lady attempted to lift her feeble paw towards Sansa but she was unable to. Sansa immediately caught her paw and kissed her a hundred times, maybe a thousand. She felt something akin to anger emerge from her grief. “Why did you run away from the kennels, girl?” Sansa stroked lady’s head lovingly in spite of the condescending tone of her voice. “You are sick. You aren’t supposed to be out during a thunderstorm searching for your favourite spot.” Was it a weak whine that she heard? Sansa was not sure. Lady’s body was getting cold. Sansa immediately whipped her jacket out and covered lady with it. “You must be cold, my love. How silly of me!” Sansa wrapped the jacket around lady tighter, trying her best to engulf her beloved direwolf in her arms. “There, are you feeling better now?” She kissed her forehead, stroked her ears, gently resting her own head on Lady’s. “Robb will be here any moment. You’ll be safe.” Sansa heard herself say, but she knew
better. She knew why Lady had come to the heart tree. She was trying to find solace in her final moments. She had suffered enough. “I love you, girl,” Sansa whispered into Lady’s ears. “And I shall love you till the last breath leaves my body. Someday, we shall meet again under the Weirwood tree. Rest now.”

And Lady did rest. She nuzzled into Sansa’s lap and closed her eyes. She never opened them again.

“Sansa…” a voice sounded from afar, as she felt a wet lick on her cheek. She looked into red eyes, which were perhaps looking redder than usual. Ghost then sniffed Lady’s cold body and let out a howl that was followed by many answering howls from afar. That’s when the dam in her broke. She hugged Ghost and howled and wailed just like him, her tears drenching his snow-white fur, more than the rain ever could.

“Sansa….” said a voice again and this time she knew who it belonged to. “You need to move away from here,” Jon said, and Sansa turned to look at him startled by the panic that laced his voice. He slowly pointed towards a branch that was dangling dangerously close to her. “You are already soaked, and have been like this, for god knows how long. But right now, you need to move out of the way.”

“I’m not leaving Lady,” Sansa said stubbornly, not fighting back her tears. “If this branch falls on her, her body will be mangled. And I cannot let that happen to her.”

“Sansa, please. I’m begging you damn it!” Jon’s voice boomed in her ears. “Lady’s … she’s gone. I don’t think she’ll be very happy if you follow suit.”

“I don’t care!” bellowed Sansa, and two things happened at once. She heard a huge CRACK and SPLIT above her and at the same time, Jon hooked his arm around her chest and she was flying backwards, away from Lady and her back crashed into the hard wall of his chest. A branch of the weirwood tree fell over Lady, covering her with its red leaves, like a coffin that was made just for her. It didn’t hurt her body, instead, from where Sansa could see, it felt like the tree was paying its last homage to a very dear friend. Ghost slowly walked towards Lady and sat beside the branch unfazed by the heavy downpour.

Jon still had his arm wrapped around Sansa’s shoulder and she held on to it shamelessly. She rested her head against the crook of his neck and felt his Adam’s apple bob. “We’ve got to get you inside, love.” He kissed her temple and then her hair. He then took off his rain jacket and covered her with it, though it didn’t do her any good. Sansa clung to Jon and buried her face in his chest as he easily picked her up in his arms.

“She has truly gone,” Sansa told him, her voice muffled against his chest. Jon drew her closer in the circle of his arms. “How did you know where to find us, Jon?”

“Ghost” Jon whispered against her ear and Sansa suddenly felt shivers run down her spine. She was cold and drenched and she suddenly realised that so was Jon. She looked up at him and he regarded her with kind eyes. “Robb called to tell me that Lady was missing and so were you.”

“But why didn’t he come after me himself?” Sansa heard herself say and Jon bounced her in his arms which brought her head closer to his.

“Because they’re all still searching for you, Sansa.” Jon’s husky voice reached her ears. “And
they’re still searching for Lady.”

It took a while for Sansa to understand what Jon was trying to say. But she finally did. Of all the direwolves only Lady and Ghost were particularly attracted to the weirwood tree. The rest of them didn’t go near the tree. Just like Sansa had known that Lady would’ve run to the Godswood, so had Jon and Ghost. While Robb, Arya and the others would’ve gone to other places first to search for her and Lady, only Jon would’ve known to come to the Godswood first. Abruptly, the continuous downpour of rain stopped and Sansa realised all of a sudden that she was now inside the Old hunting lodge which was where Jon, Robb and Theon lived. Jon set her down, but held on to her forearms. He wrapped one arm around her waist and with his free hand; he dug into the pocket of his rain jacket to fetch his phone.

“Robb, I’ve found her. She’s with me now at the hunting lodge.” Jon absently started running his hand up and down her arm, drawing her closer to him. “You need to get to Lady first. She’s gone, Robb.” There was an eerie silence that surrounded the room. Sansa didn’t realise when Jon had made her sit on a chair. He was now kneeling in front of her, looking at her with absolute concern. “You should change out of these wet clothes, Sansa. I’ll get you something of Robb’s to wear.”

The feeling of utter loss, unrequited love and the angst that arose from both was a dangerous mixture. It was probably that which emboldened Sansa more than anything else. She held his hand as he was about to get up. “I want to wear yours.” She said looking directly into his eyes and for a moment Jon simply stared at her opening and closing his mouth alternatively. He then gave a slight nod and pulled her to her feet as he guided her into his bedroom. Sansa looked around at the clean grey walls and the neatness that surrounded his room, which was such a contrast to Robb’s unkempt room and Theon’s, which was nothing short of a pig sty. This was the first time she’d stepped into Jon’s bedroom. Jon opened his wardrobe and took out a dry towel tossing it towards her, which she caught. “Pick whatever you want to wear.” He said stepping away from the open wardrobe, walking towards the door. “I’ll make you some hot chocolate.” He shut the door behind him and Sansa walked towards his wardrobe. She picked a soft maroon T-shirt and a white track pants, wondering if Lady and the weirwood tree were subconsciously behind her choice of clothes, or was it because red was the only colour in Jon’s wardrobe other than black, grey and white. Sansa discarded her soaked clothes dried her wet hair and body and put on the dry clothes. Jon’s smell engulfed her senses and she hugged herself as she stepped out of the room.

Jon gave her a withering look as she appeared in the living room. He had changed into a black T-shirt and his grey PJ’s clung to his powerful legs. Sansa felt choked with emotion as the realisation hit her, that she was not going to be able to tell Lady, how she felt when she looked at Jon. Sansa turned away from Jon and sat on the couch but he was immediately beside her, handing her a mug of something that felt warm and smelt delicious. “Drink some of this.” His deep voice rumbled low. “You’ll feel better.”

“I’ll never feel better, Jon” Sansa said staring into space, twirling the mug in her hand without taking a sip. “It’s the truth and I should just accept it for what it is.” Her tear ducts had probably dried up and she felt no more tears flowing down her eyes, yet the pain was still there. Sansa expelled a heavy breath. “She was suffering Jon. It was good she found peace in her last moments. I am actually relieved for her sake.”

“Yes…” Jon said intertwining his palms, sitting beside her. “I know how that feels.”

Sansa, glanced at him suddenly understanding that Jon was speaking about his mother, Lyanna. She placed her palm on his. “I miss her too. She was terribly fond of me, you know, unlike her son.”

Sansa realised the folly of her words a little too late. Jon had now gripped her by her arms. “What’s
that supposed to mean?” His eyes were narrowed; his breath was coming out unevenly.

Sansa brushed his arms away and stared at the empty wall ahead of her. “Arya is your little sister. Robb, Bran and Rickon are your brothers but me..” She crossed her arms trying to stop the tirade that was coming out of her. “I have always been Ned and Cat’s daughter or Robb’s little sister to you. Any kindness that you’ve ever shown towards me is because of what you feel for my family and not me.”

She realised the situation she was in and her words sounded ungrateful even to her own ears. Jon had in all probability, saved her life, just a few moments ago, risking his own for the same. She let out a sigh. “I don’t mean it in a bad way so don’t get me wrong.” She turned back to face him and saw that he was holding his head between his palms, his elbows resting on his knees. “At first, I was terribly disappointed, heartbroken even when you ....” Sansa hesitated for a moment before continuing. “When you brought Ygritte home right after you kissed me.”

“Sansa...” Jon’s voice was a groan as he raised himself to a sitting position but looked away from her.

Sansa turned around and placed her palm on his thigh softly to get his attention and she saw him shut his eyes. “No, I get it, Jon. I really do. We were in a tense situation, I forced myself on you, you probably just slipped...”

With a guttural growl, Jon pulled her by the nape of her neck towards him and she could feel his warm breath on her face and his erratic heart beat beneath her palm. “Please ...” his stormy grey eyes beseeched hers “Please stop this, Sansa. There is only so much, I can take.”

Sansa felt a sudden rage overtake her body. She held the collar of his T-shirt in a tight grip. “Why do you do this to me, Jon?” She could feel tears welling up in her eyes. “When I try to come close to you, you push me away. When I try to distance myself from you, you draw me in. When a boy so much as glances at me, you are ready to break his skull.” She felt his hold on her tightening. “But you still maintain that it’s because I’m Robb’s sister. Theon is Robb’s friend too. He doesn’t act like you when I’m around another man.” She loosened her grip on his T-shirt and rested her palms on his shoulder. She could feel Jon’s thumb tracing circles on the nape of her neck. “I know you broke up with Ygritte ages ago. I know you feel like there’s some code between you and Robb that you should not break. But I..” Sansa wondered if she could swallow her self-esteem once more and say what she really wanted to say. “I want you, Jon. I’m...”

With a primal sound that seemed to emerge from his soul, Jon had crushed his mouth to hers. Some part of her was aware that everything that happened after Lady passed in her arms, was leading to this – her finding solace, comfort, and completion in the arms of the one man who could give her all the three. Jon angled her head to deepen the kiss which went from searing to scorching in seconds. He broke away from her mouth to kiss her jaw, her eye-lids, her earlobe, and Sansa couldn’t stop moaning in ecstasy. “Jon please....” She knew she was asking for something without really knowing what it is that she wanted.

But Jon seemed to understand because he grabbed her by the hips and pulled her onto his lap. He pressed her to him as she straddled him and Sansa felt her whole world explode. Jon’s hands slipped inside his t-shirt that Sansa was wearing and he let out a low growl that vibrated from his chest to hers, when his rough palms came in contact with her soft skin.

“When Robb told you to comfort her, I am pretty sure this is not what he had in mind.” Sansa heard a voice from behind them and they jerked apart when they saw Theon standing in the front door.

“Theon..” Jon barked immediately coming to stand in front of Sansa. “Just please, get out of here.”
Sansa had turned a shade of fiery red. She couldn’t dare to look at Theon. What if it had been Robb who had walked in on them? A shudder ran down her spine just thinking about the consequences of that. She had to be careful if she wanted anything with Jon. Too many people she cared about would get hurt if she went about this the wrong way.

Theon was still standing in front of them, scrunching his face, pretending to think. Then, all of a sudden, his face cleared and he gave them a dazzling smile. “I think not. I live here too.” He then looked at Sansa, and his eyes shone with compassion, which was a very uncommon emotion that one saw in his eyes. “I’m sorry about Lady.” He told her genuinely. “She was the only one, amongst your wolves, who liked me."

Sansa accepted his condolences with a slight nod. As he walked towards them, he gave Jon a slight pat on the back. “You made a move, Snow. I was wondering when you would.” Jon snarled and just for a moment Sansa was scared for Theon. But somehow Theon seemed unperturbed by the rage that was now showing on Jon’s face. Then again he paused as though he was trying to think hard about something, as he made himself comfortable on the couch. “In fact, I thought it was going to be never.”

“Shut the fuck up!” Jon turned away from Theon and cast Sansa a sideward glance. “There’s nothing going on between me and Sansa.”

Jon’s words seemed to shock Theon as much as it shocked Sansa. What was Jon playing at? She could see it in his eyes. He was regretting what just happened. “Of course not.” She said sarcastically, placing her hands on her hips. “Except you were devouring me just seconds ago.”

Jon looked astounded that these words had come out from her mouth and not Theon’s and Theon just sat there looking like he’d gotten his Christmas present earlier than expected. “Good one, Stark” He cheered Sansa. “But I must say that you stole the words right out of my mouth.” He winked at Sansa. “I mean you almost. Mine would’ve surely been grosser.”

“Sansa..” Jon came to stand beside her, his eyes looking traumatised now. “Why can’t you understand that there can never be anything between us? I’m trying to do the right thing here. So please, help me.”

Rage bubbled inside Sansa. “How can us not being together, be the right thing Jon? You obviously feel something for me. Why are you fighting it?”

Jon just stared at her, a muscle twitching in his jaw.

“If I may,” said Theon raising his hand, whose presence Sansa had forgotten during her heated discussion with Jon. “Ehem..” Theon cleared his throat. “Sansa sweetie, Snow here is terribly like your own father, so you’ll understand better.” He then put on a brooding face, imitating Jon’s expression. “Darling, we can’t be together, because everything I am, I owe it to your father, I owe it to Robb. And look what your father has gone and done now. He has made an angel investment in my venture for turning my mother’s home into that very successful boutique hotel that I’m running. How can I then ask for more from him?” Theon ducked as Jon threw an empty beer bottle on his face. “That’s what Snow meant when he said ‘We can’t be together’. " Theon rolled his eyes. “Don’t mind him, Sansa. He’s horrible at communication. All this is the internal dialogue which never really comes out.”

Sansa stared at Jon who looked flushed with embarrassment. “Is this true Jon?” She questioned him, but he refused to look at her. So she went towards him and caught his elbow in her palm to get his attention. “Is the money that Dad’s given you, the only reason why we can’t be together?” Jon still didn’t answer her, just ran his fingers through his hair and cast a very angry look at Theon who
simply smiled back at him saying, “You’re welcome.”

Sansa shook his hand to bring his attention back to her. “Give his money back, if it bothers you so much. I don’t care about any of this, but if you do…” as she looked at him with absolute intent in her eyes, she heard Robb’s voice on the porch. “Then do something about it, so we can break this wall between us.”

“Mummmy!” cried Lya and Sansa suddenly jerked out of her thoughts. She saw Jon watching her intently from behind her daughter’s back and she wondered if he’d been able to decipher that she had been lost in the past.

“Look what Jon made for me.” Lya stretched out her tiny palm with an object that resembled a lizard or maybe a little dragon. “Umm…It’s a beautiful…a beautiful…” Sansa looked at Jon sending him a distress help signal. He rolled his eyes and mouthed ‘Butterfly’ “Butterfly!!” Sansa clapped her hands, wondering how much Lya already venerated Jon for passing off this horrible creation for a butterfly. Jon, however, had a very smug and satisfied look on his face which seemed to be telling her ‘You may not think I am an artist. But it doesn’t matter because my daughter thinks I am a great one.’

Sansa looked lovingly at her daughter. “It’s lovely, my darling.”

“Mummy?” Lya suddenly looked serious and Sansa’s creased her brows. “Can my Daddy make butterflies like Jon?”

Jon and Sansa exchanged a look from above her head. Sansa had known, from the very first time she had seen Jon interacting with Lyanna that this moment would arise. Lya was beginning to get attached to Jon. Sansa knelt down near her daughter and took her in her arms. “Yes, he can, actually. And if you want to know why he can make butterflies just as good as Jon can, remind me to tell you a little secret, once we are home at Winterfell!”

Lya obviously loved the whole mystery surrounding the butterfly and Jon. She made a shushing sound with her forefinger and her pink pouty mouth and dashed off to where Jon was standing; reeling to him exactly what Sansa had told her. Jon and Sansa looked at each other and realised at the same time, that in the near future, they were going to have to tell their daughter, the truth about her father. And that was going to be a different ball game, altogether.

Meanwhile at Winterfell.

A solitary scarlet leaf that had fallen off the heart tree, danced in the cool evening breeze, as the wind blew it from one place to another, not happy with any location that it landed on. Tired of the constant attack by the wind, the leaf fixed itself on the window, where a man stood staring out at the grounds that surrounded the regal Stark mansion. Unknown to the leaf, it had probably achieved a small victory, for it had chosen the perfect spot for refuge against the currents that brought it here. The tall man looked at the trapped leaf with a single sweep of his shrewd brown eyes. He reached out for the leaf, careful not to crumple his well-tailored dark brown suit. His face was stern, yet peaceful as he observed the little red leaf in his hand. The dusting of white in his once dark brown hair was proof that he had aged, yet somehow, it seemed to accentuate his imposing presence. But our leaf had nothing to worry about. For it was now under the patronage of the great Ned Stark, of Winterfell. He placed the leaf in a wooden box, as he had, many others before this one, who came to him, seeking his protection.

The only sounds that came from his stately office, located on the topmost floor of the Stark Mansion, was the howling of the wind, outside the now-closed window of his study and the ticking of the big grandfather clock in the corner of the room, which seemed to inform him of the passage of time.
And so when the telephone rang, it disturbed the peace that prevailed in the study. Ned moved a little too quickly to receive the call and if it hadn’t been for that swift reaction of his, one could’ve never guessed that he had been waiting for the phone to ring.

Someone said something from the other end of the line and Ned Stark simply nodded without uttering a single word. He then cleared his throat. “Thank you for the update. I just wanted to know if Jon was personally accompanying both of them …. Yes yes…. I know that he has an elaborate security detail now…. Uh –huh.. uh huh… .. Right, Thanks once again. Yes, I’ll let you know when you must come to Winterfell.”

Ned Stark hesitated a little before adding, “I hope Sansa has no idea about who you really are.” He definitely looked reassured with whatever the person on the other end said. A small smile turned the corner of his lips.

“That will be all for now. Thank you….. Brienne.”

Chapter End Notes

*Peppa Pig: Peppa Pig is a British preschool animated television series directed and produced by Astley Baker Davies in association with Entertainment One, which originally aired on 31 May 2004. It went on a hiatus for just over two years before re-premiering on 14 February 2015. To date, four seasons have been completely aired, with a fifth currently airing. It is shown in 180 territories.

But really, Peppa needs no introductions or explanations!!
I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times,
In life after life, in age after age forever.
My spell-bound heart has made and re-made the necklace of songs
That you take as a gift, wear round your neck in your many forms
In life after life, in age after age forever.

- Rabindranath Tagore

Jon leaned back in a booth at the Wolf’s den café to look out of the window from where he could see the White Knife River, wending its way between the banks, which were now bustling with people going to work - traders, teenagers, dancers, artists and musicians. He cast a sideward glance at Sansa who was now ordering some food for them at the self-pick-up counter. Podrick had flown in to White Harbour just this morning and was now watching Lya while she was asleep in her room. Jon smiled thinking about how reluctant Sansa had been to leave Lya under Podrick’s care. She didn’t have to say it in so many words but Jon understood her cause for concern. Gone were the days when parents felt comfortable leaving their kids with their neighbours or relatively unknown people. With all the cases of abuse even by sitters and nannies and just the increase in the amount of weirdoes in the world, parents were nowadays extra cautious and careful about whom they left their children with, taking as much precaution as possible. It was only when Jon assured Sansa that he trusted Pod with his life that Sansa had relaxed a bit and come down with him to get lunch. Now, the way her ivory pencil skirt and blush pink blouse hugged her womanly curves as she leaned on the counter to look at something made Jon want to stand behind her, shielding the wondrous view she was so freely providing from the lascivious stares she was earning.

Jon inhaled deeply in order to quash this feeling that was beginning to gnaw at his primal instincts and so he once again looked out of the window to divert his attention from his current area of focus. The river was flowing swift and strong, its snow white water, sparkling at noon, catching glints of the sun in its little sprays, which looked like shimmering diamonds.

White Harbour was the main seaport of the north and also its biggest city. Jon remembered a story Ned had once told them about how the White Knife River had once been infested with pirates, until the Stark kings of winter had driven them away. The Starks had then granted the rich lands around the mouth of the river to House Manderly, under whose rule, White Harbour prospered and grew into the North’s main port and a well-known business hub. Of course, the days of the yore were now gone and democracy had replaced monarchy centuries ago but somehow the old houses still found their way back into power and wealth. Wyman Manderly was still the Mayor of White Harbour and his family owned a major chunk of the prosperous businesses in the city. Besides, reflected Jon fighting the temptation to roll his eyes, Wyman Manderly, would still happily jump into the White Knife River and drown himself, without asking a single question, if it was Ned Stark who ordered it.

Which was exactly why Jon had chosen this remote bed and breakfast, away from the prying eyes of
the city instead of a luxurious five-star hotel. Yet, in spite of the precaution he had taken, the second
the lady at the lobby had asked for Sansa’s ID and glimpsed the name Stark, she gave all the three of
them a once over, several times, before allocating them their rooms. Jon really hoped, word didn’t
travel as fast as he expected it would but he knew he was just bidding his time. They were in the
North, for crying out loud, and in spite of the generations that had gone by, everyone, still seemed to
drop everything they did, with just a mention of the Stark name.

As if on cue, a tall young man with wavy brown hair, wearing a crisp navy blue business suit entered
the café searching for someone purposefully. Jon knew the man’s search had ended when his eyes
fell on the loose cascading molten copper Tully hair that was still partially damp, another thing that
the mother of his child has put on display for men to lose their minds, because the man definitely
looked at her like he was lost in a trance.

Snap out of it, you bastard, commanded Jon in the secret
corners of his mind, or I’ll fucking make you.

Maybe it was because of the suppressed groan that seemed to involuntarily escape from his throat but
the man seemed to regain his senses and he marched towards Sansa. Since there were not many
people in the café, Jon could easily hear the conversation between the man and Sansa.

“Are you Sansa Stark?” The man asked with obvious interest in his eyes, extending his hand. Sansa
gave Jon a look before taking the man’s hand and nodding in agreement. “I’m Wendel Manderly.
My father got word of your arrival in White Harbour and he extends our invitation for you to stay
with us at the Manderly House.” said the man grasping Sansa’s hand and Jon’s stomach churned.
Great, he thought miserably, Wyman Manderly had already sent reinforcements.

“Thank you Mr. Manderly” said Sansa to which the man grumbled, placing his palm over his heart
and said “I don’t think you remember me. It’s been a long time. But please, call me Wendel.”

How bout ‘Wendy’, thought Jon, hostile sarcasm radiating from him, it suits you, arsehole.

Sansa gave Wendy a soft smile, poised gracefully like the Lady she was. “Thank you for your kind
invitation and do convey my thanks and regards to your family. But this was just a quick stop. I’m
sort of in a hurry to get to Winterfell.”

“I could drive you…” said Wendy and Jon had heard enough. He got up from the booth, literally
pushing himself out of it, in one swift motion, striding towards Sansa and Wendy with purposeful
steps. For a second he saw a hint of fear in Sansa’s eyes as she looked at him approaching her,
before she widened her eyes a bit in a warning. But before Jon could reach her, his daughter beat
him to it.

Lya squealed a big ‘Mummy’ as she catapulted into Sansa’s arms. Wendy’s mouth was now hanging
slightly open. “S-So, you do have a daughter..” He muttered unintelligently, more to himself rather
than Sansa. Jon gulped. Wendel Manderly looked utterly shocked. He’d probably heard the rumours,
but here was conformation, right before his eyes. What was the story that the Starks had come up
with about Lya? Jon’s blood boiled at the very thought. For their sake, he sincerely hoped it was a
good one.

Sansa ignored Wendel, her eyes focussed only on her daughter, and suddenly Jon’s momentary rage
morphed into a warm and fuzzy feeling that took hold of him. He also realised that he had stopped
walking when Lya had come in. When He started to walk towards them again, Podrick appeared and
handed Sansa Lyanna’s backpack. He smiled down at Sansa affably, “She can’t go anywhere
without this backpack can she?” and Sansa gave a slight laugh.

Wendy was now looking at Sansa and Lya, then at Podrick and then back at the mother daughter
duo. If he looked shocked before, he looked confounded, right now. Jon knew exactly what was
going through his mind. Well, Jon thought, smiling to himself, his anger substantially cooled at Wendel Manderly's predicament; here I come to add to the confusion and blow your brains out.

“Had a good nap, darling?” He asked stretching his hands out in front of Lya and felt victorious when his daughter easily slid into his arms.. “Are you ready for the ride home?” He asked her in a gentle voice.

“Yes.. I am” Lyanna answered him enthusiastically. “Once I am in Winterfell, I’ll get more butterflies and more …Daddy.” She exclaimed and Jon’s heart gave a ridiculous lurch when she looked at him and said the word Daddy, putting her tiny arms around his neck. He realised of course that Lya was referring to that secret, Sansa had promised to tell her and she actually meant ‘more about’ Daddy and had just forgotten to add the word ‘about’. Yet, he couldn’t but help place a tiny kiss on her dark silky curls which were so very much like his own. Yes baby, he swore an oath. When we get to Winterfell, you’ll know everything about your Daddy.

When he opened his eyes, he was directly confronted with Wendy’s utterly spooked expression. “You’re Jon Snow.” He said, recognition sinking in his eyes. Then, acknowledgement was swiftly replaced with apprehension. Jon saw how Wendel took a couple of steps away from Sansa as he spoke again. “I don’t know if you remember me, but I was a couple of years junior to you and I was Sansa’s senior in grad school.”

Sansa smiled acknowledging Wendel’s explanation but for the life of him, Jon couldn’t remember Wendel Manderly or even place his face. Wendel had by now put a respectable distance between him and Sansa, maybe confusing Jon’s inability to remember him with cold indifference.

“I was a bit plump back then…” Wendel tried again and Jon squinted and then faked recognition. “Oh, yes. I remember now. Nice to meet you, Wendel.” Jon was still drawing a blank.

Wendel gave a short laugh. “You would…” he said with a slight roll of his eyes.. “I was one of the seven people who were struggling to restrain you, when you attacked Ramsay Bolton back in Winterfell.”

And just like that, the air in the café turned so brittle, filled with thick tension, that the only sounds they could hear were the low murmurs around them and the sound of gushing water. Sansa’s blue eyes found his and he saw a shudder pass through her body at the very mention of Ramsay’s name. Blood pounded through Jon’s veins as he turned to look at Wendel, who looked embarrassed at his choice of words. “I ..er.. that ..is..” he stuttered, trying to make some sort of a come-back to diffuse the pressure of the situation, but whatever he saw in Jon’s eyes, shut him up.

“Seven men were still not enough to stop me from what I did to him…” the words were out of Jon’s mouth before he could stop them. In fact, he was surprised to discover that he didn’t want to. He looked at Sansa before he looked back at Wendel, who was visibly uncomfortable by this point. “And a hundred will still be less, if anyone tries anything like he did, again.” Even though Jon had not meant it as a threat to Wendel personally, the man had gone white in the face. Jon gave him an awkward smile and turned to look at Sansa. “Shall we get going?” She looked at him, her lips pursed in a tight line. But she didn’t argue with him in front of Wendel, whom she politely thanked, once again, for offering his hospitality. She didn’t look at Jon even once as she plucked Lya out of his arms and walked out of the café.

Jon knew an argument of epic proportions was going to break out at any moment. He gave Wendel a slight nod and followed Podrick out of the café. Just before they got inside the Phantom, with all the safety features required to travel with a child, Podrick who had been watching this whole exchange at the café with amusement placed a palm on his shoulder. “In all the five years that I’ve known you, I could have challenged any person to court, if they’d accused you of violence of any kind.”
He looked at Jon very curiously, and Jon squirmed slightly under the open question in his eyes. “What did you do back then, to make that man in there cower like he was talking to a mobster?” Podrick shook his head as though in denial. “I’ve never seen that feral look that came upon your face when that man mentioned this Ramsay bloke. Do you even need the security I provide you, Jon Snow or am I just an armed squire?”

Jon chose not to answer. How could he? Podrick, for his part, didn’t prod him any further. He slipped into the driver’s seat and Jon slid in beside him. He didn’t dare look back at Sansa but he could feel her icy blue eyes burning holes at the back of his head. Jon shut his eyes, as trees, buildings, people, animals all turned into a big blur as the Rolls Royce Phantom sped out of White harbour. Jon tried his best to push the memory back but it tumbled down on him like a hurricane.

He was sitting at Craster’s Keep, with Gendry and unfortunately Theon because Robb was not in Winterfell. Jon had moved out of the hunting lodge of the Stark Mansion, a year ago, choosing to stay at the bed and breakfast – The White Wolf, which he now successfully ran, for better management of the business. They were a few drinks down and Theon was already in very high spirits. Jon looked at his friend who was now engaged in a flirtatious conversation with a waitress. Unknown to most people, who considered Theon, a bloody fool, which he deserved by the way, he was also capable of bouts of kindness and compassion which though a rare occurrence, was definitely a part of his secret personality. It could be alluded to the Stark influence over his otherwise Greyjoy upbringing.

Theon’s family had once lived in Pyke, which was a collection of harsh and bleak islands, off the western coast of Westeros, known as the iron islands. Theon’s mother was a Karstark, a northern woman, a distant relative of the Starks. Hence upon the death of Balon Greyjoy who was Theon and Yara’s father, his mother had brought the kids to Winterfell after a fall out with their uncle Euron Greyjoy over Theon and Yara’s inheritance. Theon had always been a scared little boy when they were younger, constantly being bullied in class. But then Robb, who in classic Stark style, had inherited his father’s streak for adopting lost causes, had befriended Theon and that had put an end to his misery. Theon always hung out at the Stark mansion, very much like him and though Theon and Jon were polar opposites of each other and didn’t see eye to eye on many things, Robb Stark had been the bond that tied them together.

Now he was blubbering all over Gendry who was as usual ignoring Theon and heatedly complaining about his favourite person in the whole universe. “I just don’t understand her. She beats me in every single video game we play. But then, smacks me in the head, telling me that I’m purposely letting her win.” Jon rolled his eyes but Gendry missed that. “I mean, I do it sometimes to make her happy... she’s my .. she’s my..” He got stuck at that point, obviously confused as to what he should refer to Arya as. Girlfriend would be nice. However, the axis, around which my world revolves, would be appropriate, thought Jon, smiling to himself. Gendry who obviously got frustrated with racking his brains for a word cursed loudly. “Damn the Starks and their intuitive feisty women...” Then he shuddered visibly before adding “And their scary older brothers.”

“Hey..” protested Jon but he laughed looking at his friend’s frustrated expression. Gendry Baratheon was smitten, but Robb Stark still scared him. Though he was Joffrey’s half-brother, Robert Baratheon’s child from his first marriage, Gendry was safe from the Lannister influence on the Baratheons. He went to live with his maternal uncle in Dorne after Robert married Cersei and didn’t come back to Winterfell until he was sixteen. Robert had asked Ned to help out with Gendry and Ned being Ned, had taken him under his wing. He now assisted Robb in The Stark industries. Jon knew that offer was always open for him, but he also knew he’d never take it. Being a Baratheon, was very different than being a Snow.

“The Bastard of Winterfell” said a sneaky voice and Jon didn’t have to turn around to know who it
belonged to. The word had bothered him as a kid. It didn’t any more. Ramsay Bolton was the creepiest loser he’d ever met and Jon knew that even arguing with him was a waste of his time and energy. So, he simply took another swig of his bourbon, as Ramsay plonked himself on a chair next to him, without preamble. When Ramsay saw Theon and Gendry glaring at him with barely contained anger, he smiled. “Waaaaaat? The Bastard of Winterfell, is a poem my girlfriend’s written.” He brought an unconvincing confused look on his face. “You blokes thought I was talking about Snow?” His strange blue eyes gleamed eerily as he put on a scolding look on his face. “You hurt me, boys. I wouldn’t dare.”

“I’d like to see you say this in front of Robb.” said Gendry, through gritted teeth. “Or have you forgotten how he broke your jaw?” Jon still pretended like Ramsay was invisible.

“Ah! The famous Robb Stark with his quick temper,” Ramsay rubbed his jaw, his voice and tone definitely sounding like that of a psychopath. “Tell me,” he said leaning forward, his forehead puckered. “What do the three of you call yourselves? Robb Stark’s buccaneers? The Three Stark-crumbs-eat-eers? Ned Stark’s charity-eers?” He rolled his eyes. “I could go on and on. Your life must be so interesting.” He let out a pretend sigh, and Jon’s grip on his glass tightened. “I am so jealous of you, you lucky bastards. Oops…” He said covering his mouth with his hand, faking a shocked expression. “We do not use, that cursed word in here, do we?”

“You are not welcome here, Ramsay.” Theon said, flinching a bit as he spoke. Jon looked at Theon, whose jaw was set in a hard line. He’d heard rumours that Ramsay had tortured Theon in school. Theon never spoke about it, but Jon could see the hatred for Ramsay in Theon’s eyes. “Just go do whatever it is that you do.”

“Let’s play a game.” Ramsay stood up but his eyes were fixed on Jon, he could feel it. Jon still refused to acknowledge his presence. “It’s called what moves Jon Snow?” He looked around excitedly, as though he was trying to rope in more enthusiasm for his so called game. But he obviously didn’t get the response he’d expected. “No? Oh bother!” He hit his fist on the table. “I thought it would be fun! You boys are such spoil sports! Hmmmhm… What have I not done, to break the ice in this cold person? His voice again had that maniacal quality. “But he won’t budge.” He laugh sounded like a hiss. “Anyway, I’ve enjoyed our little chat. I had best be on my way. Lots to be accomplished!” He clapped his hands and was gone.

Jon could sense the sombre mood around him. Gendry was shifting uncomfortably in his chair. “I’ve lost my happy high!” He exclaimed, pushing away his Beer mug. “That guy never fails to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. If Winterfell ever has a serial killer, we’ll all know right away, who it is.”

“Forget him and don’t let him get to you.” Jon spoke for the first time, after Ramsay’s disturbing personality had happened upon them. “He’s not worth it. Let’s talk about something else.”

“Sansa…” exclaimed Theon and Jon’s fists clenched thinking that Theon was going to say something about him and Sansa to Gendry but then he realised that Theon was actually looking at the entrance of the night club waving out to someone. Jon followed Theon’s line of vision and sure enough, there she was, the woman that haunted his every waking dream, looking like a nymph who’d walked through the gates of heaven, only to send him straight to hell. She wore a bottle green gown that stopped short of her knees exposing her long creamy legs. Her fiery red hair was pulled back in a mermaid like braid. It was however the bright light shining from behind her that made her look like she was bathed in a soft glowing golden aura. She looked radiant, ethereal, other-worldly, and more beautiful than she had the right to be. When he looked into her blue eyes, he knew he was being sucked into a black hole, from which he was never coming back.
Sansa deliberately avoided him and waved back at Theon and Gendry. Jon’s heart sank to the bottom of his stomach. Almost a year had gone by since lady’s death and he knew Sansa was still searching his eyes for an answer - one he didn’t have. How could he tell her the truth? How could he tell her, that he’d pined for her, far too longer than he could even remember? How could he tell her, that the minute she walked into a room, she instantly consumed his mind and body? Sansa was the only woman he wanted, from the very core of his being, but she was also the only woman he couldn’t ever have.

Ned was the only father-figure, he’d known in his life. In spite of him not being an actual part of the family, Ned and Cat had always gone out of their way to ensure that he felt at home with them. Ned was instrumental in helping Jon starting his new business venture. In spite of the fact that they were said in bad taste, there was a ring of truth in Ramsay’s cruel taunts. Everything Jon was today, was because of the Starks. How could he then think, that anything was possible between him and Sansa, when he knew only too well that they were ill-suited for each other?

Jon’s grip tightened on his glass, his knuckles turning white. Sansa was as good as a princess. And not just a princess, she was a Stark princess. He had nothing to offer her, not riches, not the comforts she was used to, not the elite social circles she moved in, not a big mansion like the one she lived in. He was a Snow and she was a Stark. He was a bastard and she was a princess. Theirs could not be a story, which could ever be woven together. Jon knew Cat was constantly worried about the boys Sansa dated, worrying if they were from a good family, above all else. How could he then ever think of dating her?

And could he ‘just’ date Sansa? Could he ask her out on a normal date, like he did with other women? There was so much more responsibility where Sansa was concerned. The consequences of this going wrong scared Jon far more than the idea of them being together. He couldn’t break the trust of the people he loved most in the world!

But in spite of knowing all this, he’d slipped, not once but twice. He’d kissed her like she was the elixir of life, after that incident with Joffrey and he’d almost made love to her, on a couch no less, had Theon not walked in on them, after Lady’s death. NO! Sansa was a forbidden fruit, however tempted he was to get just one more taste of her and she must remain so, he decided.

But could his feelings for Sansa, ever end? He hoped to god that this was possible, but he knew that he was fighting a losing battle against himself every day. His feelings for Sansa were embedded into his very soul. Every time he feared he’d fall, it was the thought of her that steadied the ground under him. She was his weakness, his strength and the very source of his inspiration and motivation.

Jon finished the rest of his bourbon in one gulp, burning his throat in the process. It, however, did absolutely nothing to calm his nerves or his raging emotions.

From the corner of his eye, Jon spied Sansa walking with her friend Jeyne towards the dance floor, swaying to the music the DJ was spinning. Even in his drunkenness, Jon was astutely aware of every eye that turned in her direction, and he suddenly felt a burning desire to drag her out of the club.

“Glowering is not going to get them to stop staring” Theon whispered obviously forgetting all about their previous conversation with Ramsay, but Jon looked away. “You could, however, go dance with her if you like, broody.”

Theon was not helping his mood get any better. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He said defensively, glaring at Theon, who was giving him a goofy grin.

Theon cast a look at Gendry, who was rapidly typing back a text to someone and was oblivious to this entire conversation. “What a bloody waste you are! And if I may add, a pathetic liar too!” He
placed his palm on Jon’s shoulder which Jon promptly shrugged off. “Look here, Snow, you’ve
gone all red in the face which usually happens because of a combination of anger and desire and in
your case tons and tons of angst. It’s a heady mixture, I know.” Theon blinked drunkenly “Boy, am I
eloquent when I’m drunk or what?” He said, giving himself a slight pat on the back. “But the point is…
what the holy fuck?”

Jon frowned at Theon, thinking that he’d, in all probability, lost his mind in mid-sentence but when
Gendry exclaimed, “Hey, what’s that creep doing with Sansa?” Jon had already flown off his seat
knocking their glasses off the table in a loud crash. As he turned around, he was faced with the sight
of Ramsay Bolton grabbing Sansa’s ass and pulling her towards him as she banged her fists against
his chest.

A burning wildfire had erupted from within Jon; spreading over his limbs with such searing heat
that he could almost feel the hot roaring flames ready to incinerate anything, everything he came in
contact with. The next thing Jon felt, was his knuckles crack, as his fist crashed into Ramsay’s jaw.
From the red of his eyes, he saw blood spouting out of Ramsay’s mouth, as he fell on the dance floor
in slow motion. But the fiery monster that had possessed Jon’s body right now was not satisfied, far
from it. He found himself sitting on top of Ramsay’s body, thrashing his head like it was not a
human’s head but a sack of meat and blood. His brain said the words, which only came out only as
wild grunts, every time he smashed Ramsay’s face.

How dare you touch Sansa? PUNCH! My Sansa…. PUNCH! You had the bloody guts to violate
her? PUNCH! I am going to kill you, you bastard! PUNCH.. PUNCH.. Then I’ll resurrect you
and kill you again and again and again. PUNCH.. PUNCH .PUNCH!

When he closed his fingers around Ramsay's neck , Jon could feel that he was being physically
pulled back by many pairs of hands, yet his grip on Ramsay’s throat did not loosen, not even for a
fraction of a second. Ramsay’s blue eyes, bulged out of his blood smeared face, as he tried in
desperation to get his neck out of Jon’s grasp.

“JON...” came Sansa’s voice and Jon’s head turned on its own accord in her direction. He saw the
horror etched on her face and instantly released his hold on his victim, pushing away the various
pairs of hands that had tried, unsuccessfully, to get him off Ramsay. They were now trying to get him
out of the club but he was not ready to go. He looked at the one person, who mattered the most to
him - Sansa. Myranda, Ramsay’s girlfriend was now arguing with Sansa, her face contorted with
rage. “The Mayor had better find a way of getting your bastard friend out of this mess. Roose
Bolton, is definitely going to press charges of attempted murder.”

Jon was ready to come to Sansa’s defense but when she took a threatening step towards Myranda,
who instinctively stepped back, Jon looked at her, awestruck. “I’d like to see your creep get out of
the sexual assault charges that I’m going to press against him.” Sansa’s controlled voice and icy
stare was making the other girl very uncomfortable. “But.....” Sansa paused, giving Jon a sweeping
look before focusing the power of her cold stare back at the girl “Call Jon Snow a bastard once
more and I’ll make sure Ramsay is rotting in a cell for a very long time under charges of attempted
rape.” She threw a frozen look at Ramsay who was only semi-conscious now. “Next time you try
anything like this, on any other girl” The warning in her voice rang out loud and clear. “I’ll happily
let Jon finish you…… for good.”

She then strode stylishly towards Jon linking their arms and she walked out with him, her head held
high. As she collapsed into his car beside him, hugging herself in an attempt to calm down the
adrenaline pumping through her body. Jon couldn’t help but stare at her. She was shaking and Jon
instantly gathered her in his arms. “Shhh..” he whispered in her ears.. “It’s over now, love.” Jon
kissed the top of her head, smoothing his hands over her silken hair. She looked up at him, wiping
the tears from her eyes and Jon resisted the urge to place a soft kiss on her quivering lips. “I wanted you to kill him, Jon.” She admitted, wrapping her arms around his neck. “The only reason I asked you to stop was because I was scared for you, not for him.” She didn’t move out of his arms even as Theon and Gendry walked towards them. Jon didn’t want to release her either. “I don’t want to lose you, ever” she’d said softly and Jon shut his eyes as the inferno that burnt in him calmed down to glowing embers that warmed the nether regions of his heart. He wound his arms around her in an attempt to fuse her to him, if that was possible. He didn’t want to lose her ever, either.

It was the moment Jon had decided – Fuck the world, Fuck the people, Fuck the consequences; Sansa Stark was going to be his, and he’d be damned if he didn’t do everything in his goddamn power to make her his.

“There was no need for you to scare Wendel!” hissed Sansa in a low voice, and Jon was brought out of his thoughts which were consumed by the very woman, currently spitting venom at him. He saw that Lyanna was now fast asleep in her car seat, her favourite teddy tucked under her arm and he couldn’t help the smile that curved his mouth. Sansa didn’t appreciate his smile one bit, but her voice softened when she spoke again. “You know how quickly gossip spreads around the north..” she exclaimed, her eyes flashing her displeasure.

“How does it matter, Sansa?” said Jon, in a slight whisper, careful not to wake his daughter. “I don’t care if the whole of Westeros comes to know that she’s mine.” Jon’s tone was clipped and Sansa looked sideways at Podrick who suddenly seemed to be concentrating a little too much on the road. “Once, Lya knows the truth about me, I am going to introduce her, as my daughter, to everyone I know or come across. I won’t have it any other way.”

“Jon, you know nothing about….” Started Sansa but Jon cut her off.

“Yes, I may know nothing..” he glared back at her, his initial anger at her re-surfacing. He was tired of playing cat and mouse with Lya. He wanted to tell her that he was her father. He wanted to tell her that he loved her. He wanted to make it up to her for the four years he’d been absent from her life. He was frustrated now. “It’s not as if you are going out of your way to enlighten me about everything.” Jon sighed, cursing himself for his lack of control. But right now, he couldn’t help himself. “You can keep your secrets, for now, Sansa Stark.” He said turning away from her, looking at the road ahead saying the rest of the words only in his mind. ‘But I promise you, I’ll find out about each and every one of them.’

Meanwhile @ Dragonstone...

Daenerys Targaryen stared at the life sized framed photograph in front of her. She gazed upon the handsome face of her eldest brother, surprised that she still vividly remembered, every plane, every angle of his charming face. His green eyes were filled with happiness, as he gazed into her purple eyes from the other side. His silvery blonde hair, so similar to her own, ran down his shoulders, half of which he had pulled back into a ponytail. His smile was so infectious that Dany couldn’t help smiling back at his picture. He was obviously exultant about something when this picture was being clicked, she reminisced, as she ran her fingers tracing the lines of his laughter. What were you so happy about, dear brother, she asked him in her head, willing him to answer. Just a few days before you died?

All of a sudden, Dany felt the grief, coming in waves, threatening to consume her whole being. She felt this heavy feeling like the weight of the entire world was now resting on her shoulders and she
could do nothing to get out from under it. She heard footsteps behind her and she didn’t have to turn around, to know, who had come to stand behind her.

“I see you got Rhaegar’s room cleaned” said her older brother, Viserys Targaryen from behind her. Dany didn’t turn around. She didn’t reply. She continued to stare at the brother that she’d lost. “He was such a beautiful man..” said Viserys coming to stand beside her. “Our brother, long gone…”

“But not forgotten…” Dany promptly added, turning to look at her other brother, for the first time since he had walked in. The waves of the sea, crashed against the cliffs at a distance, its menacing sound echoing in her ears.

He nodded with a smile. “I know you loved him more like a father, than a brother.” He said, his purple eyes observing their clones on his sister’s face. “Father was gone, even before he knew that mother had conceived you.”

Dany smiled sadly. “And mother left me as soon as she gave birth to me.” She said, and she saw that Viserys’s jaw tightened for a second, before he relaxed again. “I thought Rhaegar was my father,” she continued, searching his face for a reaction. “Until I was brutally informed of his death…” She cast her accusing eyes at Viserys and he looked away. She didn’t see remorse in his eyes. “When I lost Rhaegar, I lost the only parent I’d ever had. There was no one in this world who ever loved me like he did.”

“I have told you how sorry I am, about how I treated you after, Rhaegar’s death.” Viserys said through gritted teeth. “I was just eighteen when he died; I was having anger management issues.” She saw the hint of malice cross his eyes when he turned towards her. “And I blamed you for mother’s death, probably even father’s. When Rhaegar died, I blamed you still more. I thought you were a curse, upon our family that will be the cause of our downfall.” He inhaled deeply and then sighed. “I know it was stupid of me and I wish I could take back what I did to you. You were just a child.” He held both her arms in his palms. “I love you, sister. You and I are the last Targaryens left in all of Westeros.”

Daenerys bit down on her tongue to keep herself from retorting back. She politely moved away from him, away from the cold, unfeeling touch of his palms. “Why didn’t you ever get married, Viserys?” she asked him, changing the topic, she didn’t want to talk about, lest her true feelings came out. “I often wonder if it had anything to do with Rhaegar’s Will?”

Viserys laughed as though she’d cracked a joke. “Rhaegar’s Will is really a joke.” He said waving his hand like he was swatting a fly. “The man was a poet in his life and in his death.”

“Still..” said Dany, twirling the ends of her long silvery hair in her fingertips, moving to sit on the large chair that once belonged to Rhaegar, the heir of the Targaryen dynasty. “His will named you custodian, not owner of the Targaryen empire, until such time either his heir or yours came of age. If neither happened till the time you turned 45, you would be the sole owner of the Targaryen empire. You are 42. And. you. still. don’t. have. an. heir.”

Viserys looked at her with creased brows first and then crossed his arms. “You are forgetting the part where his Will names you the sole owner of Dragonstone..” His purple eyes challenged hers. “What are you getting at Dany?”

Daenerys shook her head, a far-away expression coming to her eyes. She smoothed the creases on her long black skirt before speaking. “I just find it very odd, that Rhaegar should have drawn up this Will, just a few weeks before he died. Why mention an heir at all, when both of us were alive and kicking. He was not even married.”
Daenerys could see that her brother’s patience was wearing thin. “Look, like I told you, Rhaegar was whimsical, always playing that stupid harp of his and singing his love songs. I know you sort of hero worshipped him, but he was slightly loony.” Viserys said with a shrug of his shoulders. “You do know that madness runs in our family, don’t you? He must’ve thought the Will looked more dramatic like this, or something.” He slowly walked towards Dany. “It doesn’t really matter. I’ve drawn up all the papers for you to sign. Take a look at it, will you? And you can have that husband of yours verify it for you!”

Viserys turned to walk out of the room when Daenerys called out. “What’s the hurry, brother?” she said, moving on the chair from side to side, and Viserys turned to fix her a look. “There’s a lot of time for all that. I’ve decided that since I’ll soon be going back to Essos, I might as well use the time and take a short vacation here.”

Viserys stopped walking and turned to look at her like she’d gone crazy or something. “You are on a vacation, even now. Where do you want to go?”

Daenerys got up in one swift motion from the chair, her white frilly blouse bouncing as she moved with quick strides towards Rhaegar’s picture. Viserys followed her closely. “What can you see in this picture?” She asked him, pointing at Rhaegar’s picture. Viserys squinted, trying very hard to see what Dany was trying to show him. “I can see nothing..” he said, frowning at the picture. “Except Rhaegar…”

An excited look involuntarily crept into Daenerys’ eyes. “What is Rhaegar wearing?”

Viserys looked bored now. “What is this, fifty questions? Just get to the damn point.”

“A shell jacket, Parka, snow pants, a balaclava in his hand which he obviously removed to pose for the photograph, gaiters and snow boots.” Daenerys finished in one breath. “Rhaegar was trekking when this photograph was clicked.” She pointed towards the background. “You can’t see anything in the white background, because it’s a big wall of ice.”

Viserys looked at her with a blank expression. “So?”

A very determined expression crept into Daenerys’ Targaryens’s purple eyes. “It’s the great wall at Castle Black. That’s where Rhaegar was, before he died.”

The room crackled with tension, the air around them felt thick and heavy. Viserys cleared his throat. “That can’t be true. He was in Riverrun. That’s where we were informed that his body was found.” Viserys suddenly looked at Dany with a fierce expression. “Are you telling me, that you want to go to that cursed place, now?” He shook his head, like this was a really bad idea. “Dany, you can’t go to that wretched place, unless you have appropriate permissions. You do know that Castle Black also houses a prison, for the ‘brutally’ brutal criminals in the world. Those uptight Starks are the only ones, who can grant you the required permission at such short notice.”

“I know…” said Daenerys, her shrewd eyes suddenly glinting with new found purpose. “Which is why, I’m going to …. Winterfell.”
Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for all the comments and support, but most importantly for your patience! Hope you all have enjoyed this chapter!!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Sorry for this late update but I was travelling and things just got a big hectic. Thank you all for tolerating my erratic updates with patience and understanding. Love you all. I hope this chapter is worth the wait.

I have learnt that adventure will teach you to fly.
But the moment your feet will touch the earth, you'll sigh,
for the greatest journey, every true traveler knows,
is always the one that brings you back HOME.
IS always the one that ends at LOVE's door.

- Karuna Ezara Parikh

Jon drummed his fingers on the seat impatiently, as they zoomed towards their destination. And even though he sat inside a fully air-conditioned car, he could feel the temperature dipping outside. He could see the trees swaying, the cold winds coiling around its bark. The fallen leaves danced as the car sped over them, taking small flights into the air, when they came in contact with the tyres. And just like that, in spite of what was to come, Jon felt his mind relax and a very familiar sense of calm spreading all over him.

Jon turned around to check on Sansa and Lyanna. Both mother and daughter were fast asleep. What a pretty picture they made! His daughter was going to be a beauty when she grew up and Jon swore he’d not let a single guy come within a hundred yards of her. His eyes then lingered on Sansa’s beautiful face for a bit longer. Strands of her fiery red hair were falling across her forehead and Jon almost reached out to tuck them behind her ear.

God, she drove him crazy!

Jon turned away before he could give in to the temptation. He turned off the AC and rolled down his window slightly and inhaled deeply, shutting his eyes. The waft of cool air brought in the sharp intense smell of pine mixed with roses and herbs and pervaded his senses and suddenly Jon knew.

He was home – for the winds of Winterfell carried with them, the fragrance of the north and the essence of his childhood.

Home – A strange word considering the fact that he’d not come back in five years. Yet, even the dry leaves that were scattered around wastefully felt more familiar to him than the sea at King’s Landing or the sand in Essos had ever felt. Winterfell – the only place that had ever felt like home and The Starks – the only family he’d ever had.

For a second, the emotions that churned within him caught him off guard and his eyes reddened. But as they flew open, he immediately sat upright and cleared his throat to dislodge the hurt that seemed to take the shape of a lump, he couldn’t swallow down. A bead of sweat trickled down his temple in spite of the cold breeze blowing on his face. He was finally going to see them all, after five long years.

Ned Stark had given him everything he’d ever needed in life, from the second he’d walked into it.
The love of a father, the security of a home, a place where he could belong, the means to succeed, lessons of duty and honour. Jon sighed, trying desperately to shake away the hurt that was still lodged deep within him. Because there was one more thing he had to add to the list of things Ned had given him – The hurt of a lifetime. The twenty-four year old Jon who’d walked out of Ned’s office with a broken heart had never healed – not then, not now.

He remembered - that cursed day - he’d lost everything he held dear.

Jon hesitated outside the thick looming wooden door covering Ned Stark’s study. He glanced at the cheque in his hand and swallowed twice. Ned was not going to like this. Jon paced outside the study, alternating between shoving the cheque leaf into his jeans pocket and then taking it back out again. How was he going to go about this? Jon realised that he’d have to just come out in the open and state the truth. In his mind he practised what he was going to tell Ned. ‘Ned, I know you told me to stay away from Peytr Baelish but I checked him up and he’s got a clean record. Besides, I do need a business partner to expand The White Wolf Inc in Essos. I have made up my mind to take him up on his offer. I’ll go to Essos for just a year, not more and then I’ll be back. And…’ Jon hesitated staring at the cheque in his hands. This was going to be the tricky part. He was going to return Ned’s money. But that was not the thing he was dreading. It was what he was going to ask for next that he really needed all the courage for.

Jon rushed inside the room adjacent to Ned Stark’s study. It was where visitors waited to meet Ned. There was a huge oval shaped golden framed mirror and Jon looked at his reflection. He looked like a muddled mess. He desperately tried to tame his dark curls, in vain. He gave up finally and mustered the most confident expression on his face. “Ned…” he told his reflection. “Sansa, I would like your permission to date her.” Jon shut his eyes. “Imbecile…” he cursed his reflection. He started again “Ned, your daughter, she means the world to me. I mean - Sansa. Not Arya. Not because I don’t love Arya. I mean… Arya means the world to me too. But like a little sister… It’s your other daughter that I want …. because I’m a fucking perv …SHIT …SHIT!” Jon hit his fists on the wall in sheer frustration. As if on cue the door opened and Sandor Clegane stepped in, fixing Jon a hard stare with his un-burnt eye. The burnt half of his face was covered with his long brown hair and he stood as tall as a mountain covering the entrance to the room with the bulk of his physique.

“If you’re done destroying expensive antique furniture, Lord Stark will see you now, broody.” He gave him a slight smirk and Jon cringed. He desperately hoped Sandor who was nicknamed Ned’s Hound or just The Hound, had not heard his utterly embarrassing conversation with himself. He squared his shoulders and walked towards him. “Do not call me Broody!” Jon said rallying his most commanding voice. “I know you’ve been talking to Theon but that doesn’t mean..”

“I call you Broody to your face.” Sandor’s expression didn’t even change. “You call me ‘The Hound’ behind my back!” Jon was momentarily stunned and Sandor placed a palm on his shoulder. “Go in, Snow. Do your best.” The next minute Jon was shoved inside Ned’s study and the doors behind him shut with a soft thud effectively cutting off any escape routes in case he dared to have second thoughts. Jon swallowed as he looked at Ned who was busy writing something. Jon wondered how Ned had the effect of making people tremble in their shoes without even having to make eye contact. His very presence seemed to achieve that. But Jon stood his ground and he cleared his throat. “Ned, there’s something I wanted to talk to you about.”

Ned didn’t bother looking up from his writing. But his deep solemn voice reached Jon’s ears. “It’s why you’re here, isn’t it? Go on, son.”

There was no point in beating around the bush. The longer he evaded the issue, the more his courage was going to seep out of his body. “I have decided to take up Peytr on his offer of partnership in Essos.” The words were out of Jon’s mouth and Ned Stark’s golden pen stopped...
writing whatever it was urgently trying to write. He still didn’t look up. Jon saw a vein move in his
 temple and his mouth set in a tight line. Jon took a deep breath and continued. “I know you
 expressed your concerns about him and so I did a thorough background check and nothing turned
 up against him. He’s clean. Besides Ned, I won’t really grow at the pace at which I want to grow if I
don’t take big risks.”

“You’ve known Peytr Baelish for the space of a single conversation..” Ned said, and finally turned
to look at Jon. The raw fury in his eyes was unmistakable and Jon couldn’t help the guilt that
threatened to surface from within. “And yet you and your so called trusted friends whom you’ve
hired to do your background check sit around and make plans with a man you don’t know.” Ned
stood up to his full height. “I know him. I know how his mind works. Did it once occur to you that
my insight about him is worth more than your background checks? Do you think he didn’t know that
you’d have his background checked?”

“Okay, so tell me” Jon now countered, feeling a bit of anger himself. “What has he done, to make
you distrust him so much?” He took a step forward, his new found anger giving him the courage to
say what he wanted to say. “Because the only thing I’ve ever heard from you is ‘Don’t trust him,
Jon’ or ‘Don’t do business with him’ or ‘He’ll ruin you’..” Jon inhaled trying to calm down his
raging heart. “Am I not trust worthy enough to let me know why you feel this way?”

For the first time in all the years that Jon had known Ned, he saw a flash of hurt cross his eyes. “I
thought my word, was more than enough.”

Jon bit his tongue “I have lived by your word my whole life. You know the value I attach to it.” Jon
looked down and then back up at Ned with determination. “But today... It isn’t enough. Tell me he
has hurt you and I’ll gut him like a fish. Tell me he has insulted you and I’ll see to it that he suffers
worse humiliation. But for the love of god tell me.... something.” Jon placed his fists on Ned’s study
table and continued to look at Ned who still looked at Jon with an incomprehensible expression.

“I didn’t ever think that you’d need ... something more ... from me to keep faith” Ned stuffed his
palms inside his pockets as he slowly walked towards Jon. “I have very strong reasons to distrust
Petyr, dislike him even. But I am afraid that’s the only ‘something’ I can tell you right now.”

Jon took a deep breath and straightened himself, squaring his shoulders. “Well then, you’ll just have
to trust my judgement this time.” Ned and Jon locked eyes with each other for what seemed like an
eternity. Jon reached into his pocket and placed the cheque leaf on Ned’s study table. He saw it
happening then - Ned’s eyes widening with a mix of shock, hurt and anger.

Jon knew very well, that he had hurt his pride. So he chose his next words very very carefully.
“Ned, this is not meant to hurt you in anyway. But... I need to do this on my own. Without your help.
This is more about me trying to make a place for myself in the world.” And to give your daughter
everything she deserves and I need to know that I can do it myself – words he didn’t add. Words, he
couldn’t add. Not anymore.

Ned turned his back to Jon, trying to conceal whatever emotion he was overcome with and Jon
sincerely hoped that his decision was worth this strain in his relationship with the only man he’d
ever thought of as a father. Of course, Ned was angry with him. But once Jon succeeded, his idea
succeeded, his business plans succeeded, all would be forgiven and forgotten. Or so he desperately
hoped. He stared at Ned’s back which was adamantly turned away from him. Jon let out a sigh. He
knew the conversation was over.

As Jon turned to walk out of the door, he heard Ned’s tense voice. “Jon, if you walk out of that door,
you can’t come back in again.”
Jon turned so fast that his head almost snapped. “What do you mean?” He heard himself say, unsure of what he’d heard, unsure of his own voice, losing all sense of time and space. Surely, Ned could’ve not meant what he thought he meant.

Ned slowly turned around to look at him, his face devoid of any expression. And it was the lack of emotion on Ned’s face that wounded Jon more than anything else. That he could’ve uttered such a curse with a straight face, that his tongue did not slur when the words escaped his mouth, that his voice did not tremor even the slightest when the very earth on which Jon stood was trembling, shaking, threatening to collapse.

Ned cleared his throat. Just as he was about to say something the door burst open without a warning and Robb Stark strode in like a warrior. “Dad, what the hell is going on here?” He went and stood next to Jon.

Sandor stepped into the room running after him. He looked at Ned, apologetically and then cast a chastising glance at Robb. “Master Robb still hasn’t gotten over his silly habit of eavesdropping at your door and he can still manage to slip from between my legs. Of course, he still doesn’t know that I can restrain him with one hand…” He growled and Robb rolled his eyes. “But I choose not to do it.”

“It’s okay, Sandor. Robb might as well be here.” Said Ned with a wave of his hand and The Hound left the room, after giving his employer a slight nod.

“Dad…” Robb stood to his full height. “Please tell me that you did not mean what you said.” He looked at Jon and Jon swallowed trying to wash down the emotion that was threatening to choke him. Robb looked back at his father. “This is Jon we’re talking about, remember? Jon Snow, who you love more than your own sons? Hell, I am jealous of him most of the time because he’s more like the son you wanted, more than I could ever be.”

“That is not true Robb” Ned said more vehemently than either of them expected and Jon saw Robb flinch at the ferocity in his father’s voice. “Don’t ever say that..” He said with emotion and the wound that threatened to tear apart Jon’s heart deepened, drawing blood.

Ned took a breath to calm himself down. “I know what I am doing and you both have got to learn to trust me.” He then ignored Robb and locked eyes with Jon. “I am giving you a choice Jon and I know that it doesn’t seem fair. But right now, it is what it is. You walk out that door and choose Peytr, you can’t have anything to do with House Stark. I am the Mayor and I am not going to let the likes of Peytr do any business in Winterfell.” He paused, his eyes shining with absolute intent. “You will find that your licences will be revoked, your permits invalid and just lots and lots of other shooting troubles that will come your way. If you ever decide to do business in Winterfell with Peytr, you will find me standing in front of you, as your biggest hurdle.”

Suddenly, Jon felt rage that was fuelled by his injured heart and he prowled towards Ned. “Then I shall leave Winterfell for good. I was going to Essos anyway.” His vision blurred as he looked at the man who had once loved him like a son. Not anymore. Suddenly Jon felt like an orphan and his mother’s beautiful face flashed before his eyes. He looked into Ned’s eyes with new found purpose. “And I swear on my mother’s grave…” he said, taking a deep breath “No man shall be powerful enough to threaten me about impeding my success, ever again. I Promise.”

From the corner of his eye, Jon saw Robb panic. “Jon, what the hell is wrong with you?” he heard him say but his eyes were only locked with Ned’s. “Just drop this stupid deal. Is this more important to you than all of us?”

Jon turned towards Robb, adrenalin still coursing through his body. “You cannot imagine what it
feels like to be a bastard. To have no family... then have a huge big one ... a place where you think you belong... only to realise some day that 'you' were always the most 'disposable' piece in that family.” Jon looked at Ned with accusing eyes. “You were never really a part of the family. Always the outsider, looking inside. One mistake and you're out, like you were just a piece of trash.”

Robb looked at Jon, his eyes bulging out of his sockets, like he couldn’t believe that these words had come out of Jon’s mouth. “Jon....” He said, his voice laced with raw feeling. “This is not you. This Peytr whoever, is not good influence. Just forget about him and we can pretend none of this ever happened.”

But the volcano that had erupted from within Jon was not going to calm down anytime soon. Jon looked at Robb, taking in his handsome face, reading the affection he held in his eyes for him. This was probably going to be the last time he saw him. “I... er.. Robb... you ... I have to do this Robb.”

He cast a sideward glance at Ned who was staring at the opposite wall. “I’m sorry but I refuse to be compelled to make a choice with a tip of a dagger pointed at my throat. My mother’s home which I turned into a Bed and Breakfast will continue to do business in Winterfell under my name. Pyp will manage it for me and Peytr will have nothing to do with it. I give you my word.” Ned gave a slight nod and Jon continued. “Do I have your permission to say my goodbyes at least?”

Ned shut his eyes and then opened it again. “Yes” His voice was very husky when he replied.

Robb was running his fingers through his auburn hair. “This is madness, is what it is!” He looked at Jon with a pained expression. “I refuse to abide by this decision.” He simply stated.

Jon regarded Ned, who appeared to him, like he was nothing but a statue, made of stone. “Thank you, for treating my mother like a sister and me like a son, for as long as you could.”

Without another word, Jon turned on his heel and walked out of Ned’s study, knowing very well that Robb was following him closely. Jon blinked hard as he tried his best to keep his emotions at bay. But they almost burst out as Robb turned him around by his arm to get him to face him. “Look here old boy, to hell with Dad’s ego and to hell with your pride. You both are being stubborn asses about this whole thing and honestly I could care less.” He shook Jon a bit trying to get his attention. Jon could see the determination in his best friend's eyes. “Remember...” Jon heard the eldest Stark child tell him, “There’s nothing you could do that would ever make me stop loving you as my brother. Do you understand? NOTHING”

Jon’s eyes flew open and he was surprised to find that there was some dampness around its edges. Jon quickly cast a glance at Podrik, rubbing his eyes lightly with his fingers. He suddenly felt a soft palm on his shoulder and he turned around to look into concerned blue eyes. A bolt of current passed through his body and he spied Sansa’s face, now just inches away from his. She bit her plump lower lip in an act of nervousness and Jon clenched his hands so tightly that his nails dug into his palms painfully. He couldn’t help himself. It was the only way, to stop him from pulling her face to his and devouring her lush lips, for which he had now become starved.

When he looked back into her eyes, he could see that her pupils were dilated too and she moved back a bit, definitely sensing Jon’s desire. To hell with it, thought Jon. He didn’t care about propriety anymore. He was this close - this close - to insanity. He’d be damned if he didn’t at least admit to himself that it was the first thing he wanted to do when he first set his eyes on her, after five long years. Kiss her senseless and maybe then wring her neck. And God knows he almost did!

“Jon... ummm” Sansa spoke in a whisper and Jon looked at her from under hooded eyes. He could see her struggling for words. “Listen, I don’t know what kind of a reception you are going to get at Winterfell but I just want you to know that I’ll... I’ll help you through it.”
No you won’t, sweet girl, thought Jon achingly. Not after what I plan to do. But he nodded politely. “Thanks for the gesture, Sansa. But I’ll manage on my own.”

She still hesitated. “Robb .. well.. he’s not going to be.. very happy to see you.”

Jon turned back around and stared outside the window. He almost smiled. Trust Sansa Stark to tone down the intensity of the most negative emotions. “You mean he’s going to rip out my throat the moment he lays his eyes on me, don’t you?”

He heard Sansa sigh. “Yes..” she said softly “To put it mildly.”

Jon gulped. Robb’s words from the past came back to him. ‘There’s nothing you could do that would ever make me want to stop loving you as my brother. Do you understand? NOTHING’ He cleared his throat and looked back at Sansa who was looking very worried. “We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“Unfortunately…” said Sansa, leaning a bit forward, “That Bridge is going to come soon, look” She pointed towards something and Jon looked in that direction. They were approaching the first gate of Winterfell, with ancient statues of the two Stark Kings of winter sitting majestically, with their swords in their hands, on its either side. The gate itself was a huge iron gate, now perennially open, to allow the modern world to wind and blend into Winterfell’s historic past. Finally, they were here. Winterfell – which had once been the seat of the ruler of the north and the ancestral home of the Starks for over 8000 years; and though centuries had gone by and the very definition of power had changed, one thing remained unchanged. The Starks were still in power and Jon had a strong feeling that they would continue to be, for as long as this earth rotated around its axis.

He knew very well that the woman sitting right behind him was royalty. They didn’t use their titles anymore but Sansa was a princess – a stark Princess. All of a sudden, in spite of all the wealth he had amassed, and all the success he had achieved, Jon felt a familiar sense of inequality plaguing him. He smirked as the sensation crossed him. He was wealthier, more powerful and had as much a social standing as the Starks did, if not more than them, yet old habits and feelings die hard. Jon put on his sunglasses, more to shield his eyes from the emotions that passed through them rather than to shield them from the orange rays of the setting sun.

Jon looked out at the streets now filled with all sorts of people – families, shoppers, office goers returning from work – and Jon had this weird feeling that he recognised almost every one of them. Winterfell had developed drastically in the past few years. Of course he saw the word Stark every now and then. Stark Hospitals, Stark Malls, Stark Daily-Needs Stores, Stark Granaries, Stark Mills and the list went on. Team Robb was apparently doing very well.

Podrick took a sharp turn and suddenly the hustle bustle of the town disappeared as they were surrounded with lush greenery on both sides. Jon’s heart started beating with a steady humdrum – for he knew very well that they had now entered the Stark Lands.

Jon saw the gates to the property from a distance. He knew this place like the back of his hand. Two armed guards wearing full uniform with the Stark Sigil prominently visible as their cap device, opened the gates for them, giving them a full salute. They apparently knew about Sansa’s arrival and which car she was going to arrive by – for there was a common saying in Winterfell that not even a fly could enter the Stark Mansion without thorough checking and permission. Sansa rolled down her window and signalled for the older guard to come towards her. She then handed him a big parcel. “Hello Roger. This is for Rosie, your grand-daughter. I hope she enjoys reading these books.”

So Sansa Stark knew the names of the guards and the names of their grandchildren? Jon shook his head slightly, feeling a bit ashamed that he could not claim to have similar knowledge, as he
observed Roger sputtering thanks and giving Sansa a million bows. She smiled radiantly at them as the car went through the gates. Now the rhythm of Jon’s heartbeat went from a humdrum to a rapid thudding. This was it - two more miles to go. The long driveway was lined with pine trees, now gently swaying to the music played by the chilly autumn wind. Then came the gardens, with its manicured lawns, flower beds and shrubs and it’s crown jewel – the Blue winter rose gardens that came to full bloom when the mansion and the gardens were fully covered in white.

Jon, by force of habit, had kept a watch on the tall stone towers looming in the distance, to judge how soon they were going to arrive at the colossal structure that was the Stark Mansion itself. It was something he had been doing from when he was a child.

“Have we reached, Mummy?” said a groggily sweet voice and Jon automatically turned to the sound of his daughter waking up. She stretched her hands towards her mother and Sansa enveloped her in a bear hug placing a loud kiss on her cheek. “Yesh my shweet…” Coed Sansa kissing Lya’s forehead continuously, “And did you know you have perfect timing?” She asked Lya affectionately. Jon tried to, but he couldn’t look away. He wanted to do everything Sansa just did, but he couldn’t. So for now, he satisfied himself by just observing the exchange.

Suddenly Lya was a bundle of energy. “Hurray!!” she exclaimed. “Is Grandpa going to give me new presents? Please can Aunt Lisa set up the bouncy castle for Ben and I? Could I take Ria with me too? I promise I’ll be very careful and take very good care of her. And could Sandy come with us too?”

“Hold on, Lya!” Laughed Sansa and so did Jon. If anything it just re-instated how much his daughter loved the Starks. “Remember, you have to first finish your dinner.”

Lyanna pouted a bit. “Alright” she conceded but then held up her index finger. “But only with Grandma. You can take rest, Mummy.”

What? Jon was shocked. You can take rest, Mummy. What was that all about?

Sansa gave Lya a warning look. “You can have dinner with Grandma, only if both of you promise me that you won’t make her feed you cakes.” Lya realised that her clever plan just got discovered and looked at Sansa with ridiculously huge puppy eyes and if this was the expression she used on Catelyn to extract the dessert she wanted, it was no wonder that it worked like a charm. Hell, he’d have all the cakes and more in the world brought at her feet, if she looked at him with that face. But Sansa looked unmoved, her eyebrow still raised in a warning of sorts. God! thought Jon, Cruel woman. A great mother, said another voice in his head. No, he argued with himself. She’s evil, beautiful, sexy, bewitching… O for the love of god…Damn his adjectives when it came to Sansa!

“Ok Mummy!” said Lya with some reluctance and Sansa relaxed a bit. “I’ll tell you what my love. I’ll bake a chocolate cake tomorrow for all you little tykes and you can have as much as you want, as long as it is before five. How does that sound?”

“Super!” said his daughter and Jon’s mouth watered. He wondered if he could be spared a bite of Sansa’s famous chocolate cake but he was getting ahead of himself. He still had to go to war before that and come out of it alive. And there was a very good chance that Sansa was going to roast him in her oven, very soon.

Jon cleared his throat as they reached the white marble pillars that lead to the entrance, after having crossed the main gate. They reached the old Mansion’s threshold and here stood the marble fountain of the heart tree with its painted red leaves and a wolf carved into its white bark, the water flowing melodiously, with a gurgling sound, from the red leaves, resonating in the silence around them. Only when Podrick shut the engine of the car, did Jon realise that it was time to disembark. Sansa had
already gotten out and he cursed himself for his momentary lapse.

As Jon opened the car door, the twenty feet tall wooden door to the mansion began opening with a creak, as the silver knockers rasped on the door by themselves due to the force of the movement. For a single long second Jon remained frozen in his act of getting out of the car but he gathered himself and stood to his full height, expecting Ned Stark to step out at any moment or maybe Robb. But instead it was the matriarch of the Stark family that stepped out and Jon was disarmed by the thousand watt smile that she bestowed upon him.

When all you expect is hate, love shown in any form, becomes an emotion that is very difficult to comprehend.

So instead of returning her smile, Jon gawked at her foolishly, his mouth opening and closing, without any words coming out of them.

“You got her daughter pregnant, you imbecile,” a voice in his head scolded him, “but here she is smiling at you. At least return the courtesy!”

The corners of his mouth turned slightly as Catelyn Stark strode towards them with confident steps. She seemed almost unaffected by the tension that came with his arrival at Winterfell. But Catelyn always had that aura. She could magically diffuse a tense situation with a witty comment or a swift change of topic and the worst of enemies would find themselves saying cheers with a glass of champagne in their hands wondering how they reached here when they were just about to draw blood. Five years had changed nothing in her graceful appearance. Her fiery red hair, which Sansa and Robb had inherited from her, had a slight sprinkling of grey in them. Her Tully blue eyes held intelligence and serenity and Jon was captivated by the maternal glow that always seemed to exude from her. She wore a classic white blouse and black trousers and looked overjoyed when her grand-daughter - his daughter - jumped into her arms.

In the next few seconds, she’d given the staff instructions to carry the bags to their respective rooms, while simultaneously chatting with Podrick, who was now blushing and gushing at whatever Cat was telling him. Jon smiled more naturally now, remembering how good Cat was at making things easy, helping those around her to relax and making them feel happy about themselves. Perhaps, it was why her skin still shone, despite her age, for it was her inner beauty that lit her blue eyes and softened her features. Without preamble, she walked towards Jon and hugged him and Jon remembered the word again for a second time during the day – home.

“Oh Jon!” Cat whispered as she released him, her eyes filling with unshed tears and Jon’s throat felt constricted. “There’s so much I wish to say but for now I am just going to settle with, I am SOOO glad you’re home.”

Yes, thought Jon, as she enveloped him in another hug. This is exactly what it felt like to be in your mother’s arms. He hugged her back, trying to speak the words with his actions – I missed you, Cat. More than I missed my own mother.

“You silly me,” Cat said, laughing and crying at the same time, desperately dabbing her eyes with her fingers as she looked into Jon’s eyes. “You poor kids must be hungry and I am here getting unnecessarily emotional.” She picked Lyanna up and placed her on her hip, ignoring Sansa’s protests. “Come on in then.” She said turning towards Sansa and then cast her affectionate glance at Jon. “You know the way, Jon.”

You couldn’t help but smile, every time she smiled at you, thought Jon, overwhelmed by the unexpected welcome he’d received at Winterfell. Even if it didn’t show on your features. Even if you just smiled from within. To be in Cat’s presence was to feel that you mattered too, that you were
loved too, that you had been warmed in the summer sun’s rays despite the cold winds that blew around you.

Just as Cat disappeared into the great hall, another figure stepped out and Jon stopped in his tracks. She looked exactly like he remembered her for remember her he did – every single day of his life. Arya Stark the only sister he’d ever known stood before him staring at him like she was seeing a ghost. She wore her hair very similar to his, half her hair tied away from her face. She rubbed her hands on her red T-shirt which she wore over a pair of denims, classic Arya style, as she took a step towards him. The next instant both of them sprinted towards each other and he lifted her off her feet as he swung her around in circles.

“Oh? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?..” she chanted. Jon couldn’t answer. He didn’t know what the ‘whys’ were for. He could guess but he felt too happy to think about the wrongs of the past. He put Arya down and she stared up at him, her eyes shamelessly wet with tears. She looked up at him and then at Sansa who was looking seriously into her mobile, desperately trying to not look emotional. Arya then looked back at him and he saw the emotion in her eyes changing. “I’ve waited so long for this moment..” she said wiping her tears away. “I’ve imagined so many different ways in which this would go… so many different versions of how I’d finally get to see you.. so many things I would say.. so many things I would do…”

“Arya… I am so…” started Jon but he couldn’t say a word further as Arya’s small yet power packed fist collided with his jaw and he stumbled on his foot, momentarily losing balance. For a moment Jon felt completely disoriented. He could see Stars and ducks and all sorts of shapes floating in front of his eyes. He vaguely registered Sansa shouting Arya’s name. But then he heard Arya’s voice.

“But first things first…” she said, massaging her knuckles and Jon looked at her rubbing his jaw where she’d hit him. “This…. is for knocking up my sister, Jon Snow.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Oh my god!! I struggled so much with writing this chapter. It was almost an impossible task. I wrote, re-wrote. Thanks Melissa for guiding me through this. Thanks for telling me to re-think certain portions. Hope it was worth all the trouble we went through together. It would’ve been impossible for me to write this, otherwise.

Becky, wonderful Becky. You're eye for detail and all the silly mistakes I make while writing is amazing. I am so glad you have my back. Thank you so very much!!!

Neha, my very own personal scanner!! LOL. How could I not see what you see?? Thank you so much for "all" the screenshots, (you know what i am talking about, LOL) that you sent me pointing out what I need to change.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa stared at her sister in complete bewilderment. Arya – had just punched Jon in the face – without batting an eyelid. In the first few minutes of his stepping foot inside the ancestral home of the Starks, Jon had been hit squarely in his jaw, by the girl who’d loved him the most. This was not a good beginning.

“ARYA!” Sansa screamed, rushing to where Jon staggered, but surprisingly, he regained his balance quicker than it would’ve taken to recover from such a power packed punch. She then heard Arya say, “This – is for knocking up my sister.” It was needless to say that Sansa coloured visibly.

Jon cast a wary glance at her and then back at Arya. Her sister, who’d seemed to have completely lost her temper, lunged for Jon’s collar and pulled him close to her, in spite of the fact that he towered above her. She had a wild spark in her eyes when she spoke to Jon.

“And this - is the only time - a Stark will punch you. Do you understand me?” She searched his eyes for something. Understanding, perhaps? “Only I have the right to do that.” She reinstated, her previous promise, and suddenly Sansa understood what Arya was trying to convey. She would stand between him and Robb if the need ever arose. Sansa shivered as she thought about her older brother – they would all need to!

Jon pulled Arya into another hug and kissed the crown of her head. “I know that. And thank you. But I think I can manage on my own.”

Arya scoffed as she disentangled herself from Jon’s embrace. “Yes, of course.” She linked palm through Jon’s and the other through Sansa’s dragging them both inside the house. “Like you managed brilliantly by yourself, the last time around”

Sansa didn’t miss the sarcasm that was dripping from Arya’s tone. But despite the tension that surrounded her, Sansa couldn’t help the joy that bubbled within her as she walked through the familiar welcoming grey walls that flanked the great hall. She was home, and she rejoiced in the feel of it. She also registered the fact that her sister was still engaged in an argument with Jon, who was
looking very close to exasperation.

“The last time you “managed” by yourself,” said Arya, using air quotes to emphasise the word. “We didn’t see you for five years. So please” She waved her palm in front of his face. “Do me a favour, and please play these pride and prejudice games with my father. I don’t give a damn about your ego or your pride.”

Jon stopped walking, turned around and stared at Arya as they were halfway through the great hall. Sansa could see that he was looking very uncomfortable with this conversation or was it just the mention of her father, who seemed surprisingly absent from the scene. Where was her father? Jon exhaled audibly and then glared at Arya with sombre grey eyes. “Look here Arya, you don’t know what happened between Ned and I ….”

Arya who seemed to be determined to interrupt Jon before he finished a sentence, rolled her eyes and cut him short. Again! “Look here Lizzy, I am not Darcy. Your Darcy – he’s waiting for you upstairs in his study and most definitely, the two of you are going to have a lovely conversation – filled with sarcastic comments, huffs and puffs, a few accusations thrown here and there and lots and lots of drama.” She linked her arm through Sansa’s and then looked at Jon who looked horrified at her comments. She gave him a sardonic smile. “I mean if it were up to me, I would’ve definitely said - Let’s settle this the old way. You and Dad … going at it hammer and tongs. Would’ve been so much more fun than those broody stares and deep looks that you people keep giving each other… UGH!”

Sansa resisted the urge to smile. Even though this conversation was not going well, at least it was entertaining. Her sister gave her an affectionate glance. “Poor Sansa,” she said and Sansa’s heart clenched. “Caught in the crossfire..” Sansa immediately looked away, unable to look into either of their eyes.

“Wow!” Jon’s voice seemed to come after a long time. “She’s poor Sansa now? What happened to wicked Sansa? Cruel Sansa? Your adjectives seemed to have changed quite a bit in the past few years.”

Arya prowled towards Jon like a stealthy cat and looked into his eyes with unmistakable seriousness glowing in her eyes. “Someday I am going to put a sword through your eyes and out the back of your skull, Jon Snow.”

Sansa stood stock still, looking at the scene in front of her, observing the tension coiled around both Jon and Arya’s bodies. Then all of a sudden, the both of them simply burst out laughing and Sansa released a breath. A breath she didn’t know she was holding. And Arya’s the one to talk about being dramatic! Thought Sansa and smiled as she saw Jon pull Arya’s ear.

“I heard you’re no more a Stark but a Baratheon now,” Jon asked her playfully as the three of them entered the kitchen.

Arya poured out two glasses of water and handed them to Jon and Sansa, and Jon raised an eyebrow at the gesture, clearly not expecting it from Arya. Well, a lot more was in store for him in that case, thought Sansa. She smelled the aroma of food that wafted through the kitchen and her stomach gave a hungry growl. Her mother had cooked today, she could tell.

“What? NO!” exclaimed Arya, shuddering as though the thought of being a Baratheon was scary. “I’m a Stark and will always be one. I can’t share a surname with that hideous woman. No offense, darling” She said to someone standing in the doorway and Sansa realised that it was Gendry.

“None taken” came the reply from the man who had been brave enough to marry her sister. He looked as dashing as ever, in his work clothes – navy blue trousers and a crisp white shirt which
moulded his lean and muscular but athletic frame. He had a friendly smile on his face. Sansa automatically moved to hug him and he returned her hug with affection. He smiled at her, his kind blue eyes twinkling. “How have you been?”

Sansa simply nodded with a smile as she suddenly registered the fact that the atmosphere in the room had gone cold once again as Gendry and Jon looked at one another, so many emotions, reflecting in their eyes.

“Snow”

“Baratheon”

Gendry shifted from one foot to the other. Jon rubbed his jaw, where he’d been recently hit. Jon was going to make the first move, Sansa realised as she saw Jon take a step towards Gendry.

“So you managed to get down on one knee in front of this she-wolf and still survived? I’m impressed.” Jon said. Sansa cast a glance at Arya who looked like a lot of tension has just been released from her body. Jon’s words slowly cracked a smile on Gendry’s face and soon, he broke into a laugh.

“As if!” exclaimed Arya, putting her arm around Gendry’s waist, as her husband pulled her in for a kiss.

Jon groaned loudly as they kissed. Sansa looked at Jon. This was really difficult for him - to watch Arya like this – like a loving wife. All Jon’s ever seen her do, is stir trouble, get into squabbles and fights and see her adventurous spirit shine through her. Sansa didn’t think Jon had ever thought that a picture like this, with Arya in it, would ever play out before his eyes. A sudden thought caused her to smile to herself. Surely, if Jon were to see Arya with Nymeria he was going to pass out.

Gendry crossed the distance and stretched his hand out, which Jon shook with a nod. “Happy to have you back, Jon.” Then he leaned a little closer and whispered just so Jon could hear but it didn’t escape Sansa. “I wish you good fortune in your wars to come, my friend.”

And just like that, Sansa’s heart started beating really fast. Arya had said that her father was waiting for Jon in his study. Sansa looked at Jon’s face. He was trying his very best to put up a brave face, but Sansa knew him and she knew that beneath the façade of the confident business tycoon, was the boy who lost a lot on that fateful night that her father had banished him from the Stark mansion. Jon was definitely a bundle of nerves, just like she was. Sansa poured herself another glass of water and gulped it down quickly. She felt a light tap on her shoulder. She turned around to look into Jon’s concerned face. “Are you alright, Sansa?”

Sansa nodded vigorously. “Yes, and No.” she told him truthfully and he gave her a soft smile. “Silly me!” she said, tapping her forehead slightly. “I should be the one asking you if you’re ok.”

Jon took a step back and thrust his hands into his trouser pockets. “I’m fine.” He said without making eye-contact with Sansa. “I’m just going to go and meet your father now.”

“I am coming with you” Sansa was determined. There was no way she was going to let Jon talk to any single member of her family without her presence. There were still many secrets her heart had to guard. Jon couldn’t know certain things and she hoped it would remain like that for as long as possible.

Jon blinked once. Then again, at her suggestion. He looked away, almost guiltily. “You.. err… I don’t think that’s a good idea.”
“I insist,” Sansa said, stepping towards Jon and their eyes locked—dark grey boring into bright blue ones. Jon seemed to be torn between the two choices he was presented with— to go with her or without her. Then she saw the emotion take shape on his visage before he said the words.

Resignation.

“Alright. What the hell! You may as well be there.” Without preamble, Jon reached for Sansa’s hand and literally dragged her behind him as he stormed towards Ned Stark’s study.

“Slow down, Jon,” Sansa said, trying to tug her hand free from his grasp, but his grip just tightened a little more.

“I can’t slow down.” He told her, without looking at her. “If anything, I need to hasten things up. We’ve been beating around the damn bush for far too long, Sansa.” He stopped just before they reached the floor which housed her father’s famous study. “I want my daughter to know who I am. I am tired of the pretence and I think I’ve made that amply clear from the very beginning.”

The Jon Snow, she’d encountered on that day in her bookstore was back again. He looked livid. He looked ferocious. Sansa swallowed. She could understand why he was losing patience. But since they’d already come this far, why complicate matters by rushing things. Besides, this was not a good frame of mind for him to be before he met her father.

Dread filled her body and Sansa felt slightly dizzy. She must’ve taken a shaky step for that could be the only reason why a strong arm encircled her waist and steadied her. She looked into Jon’s face which was now just inches away from her own. His eyes looked stormy, dark just like the sky had looked on that night—that had changed Sansa’s whole life. With a strength which came not from her body, but from her emotions, she pushed herself away from his embrace.

“Could you just give me a few minutes, to collect my thoughts?” She said avoiding his eyes. “I’ll meet you outside dad’s study in just ten minutes.”

Jon, ever the gentleman, in spite of his sudden sporadic outbursts, stepped away from Sansa and she literally ran to the bathroom and shut herself inside. The last time Jon had been on this floor Sansa had been far away, with her friend Jeyne when she’d got that fated call.

“Hello?” Sansa couldn’t hear Robb’s voice very clearly, so she went outside the shop, to see if she could hear any better. “Robb I’m not sure if I heard right but I thought you said something about dawn?”

“No, silly girl” said her brother with absolute panic in his voice. “It’s Jon. And he’s leaving Winterfell for good.”

Sansa couldn’t hear the rest of whatever her brother was trying to tell her. What did it matter how it happened? Who was responsible? Who was or wasn’t at fault? If the earth was revolving around the moon or the moon was revolving around the earth? Or they were all just orbiting around the sun. It didn’t matter. Nothing did. Jon was leaving Winterfell—he was leaving Winterfell for good and Sansa felt like the very life had been sucked out of her body. She sank onto the floor outside the shop, her bags scattered around her, unaware of the stares a few passers-by cast towards her, some even stopping to check if she was ok. But Sansa had been far, far away. Time stood still in that moment for her.

In her daze, she realised that to this day, every action of hers had somehow always been connected or centred around Jon. When she bought a new dress, she’d wondered if Jon would like to see her in it. When she’d cooked, she’d always wanted his appreciation. When she’d dressed up she’d wondered if he’d look at her and think she’s beautiful. When she’s walked into a room, she’d wished
that he looked at her. When she’d dated another guy, she’d hoped to get him jealous. When she’d
done well in studies, she’d loved the secret admiration in his eyes. He was the first boy she’d fallen
in love with, was still in love with and would always be, for as long as she lived.

How could she then go on without him? It was a life, she couldn’t quite fathom. Someone was
shaking her and she looked into the eyes of the person who was doing that. “SANSA…SANSA…
Please love, say something.” Her friend Jeyne Poole was on the verge of tears and Sansa suddenly
realised where she was and what she was doing. Slowly with Jeyne’s help, she stood up. Her
friend’s face hovered near hers. “You’ve gone deathly pale. Is everything alright babe? I could drop
you home right now if you want.”

“No!” Sansa’s mouth had already conveyed the decision that was beginning to form in her brain.
She looked at her friend, hastily. “Look Jeyne, something’s come up and I’ve got to go.” She thrust
all her bags at Jeyne and the bewildered girl just stared at Sansa trying to get a semblance of the
situation at hand. “If anyone calls you, just tell them I’m with you. Ok?”

Jeyne frowned, not liking Sansa’s suggestion one bit. “Do I at least get to know where you’re going
to be?” she said sarcastically. “In case I need to point the Police in the direction of your dead
body?”

Sansa looked at her friend, annoyance stamped on her features. “I won’t do anything stupid Jeyne. I
know I am asking you for a big favour, but I need you to trust me right now.”

Jeyne rolled her eyes and put her hands up in defeat. “Fine! Go. But promise me that you’ll be
safe.”

Sansa promised and dashed down the escalator of the mall towards her destination - The White Wolf
– which was just across the street. As soon as she escaped the sanctuary of the mall, cold rain
splattered on her body, soaking her in a matter of seconds, plastering her red cotton shift frock to
her bones like it was a second skin. But Sansa could neither feel the cold, nor the rain that seeped
into her every pore, for the agony exploding from within her, had made her numb. She rushed into
the Lobby of Jon’s luxurious bed and breakfast and just spluttered the first two words that came out
of her mouth to the receptionist. “Jon… Snow”

“Mam, I’m sorry,” said the woman behind the desk eyeing her and the water dripping from her with
wary eyes. Good, thought Sansa. She’d not recognised her. “But Mr. Snow’s asked me explicitly, to
not let any visitors meet him.”

“Please..” Sansa begged her, with her eyes, body and heart. “I need to see him... now.”

“Thank you, Joyce. But I’ll take it from here.” said a kind voice from behind and both Sansa and
Joyce turned around to look at the source of that voice. A tall man with chestnut brown hair,
wearing a suit strode towards her and very gently took her by the arm and led her around the
corner. “Sansa.. you’re Sansa Stark.”

Sansa just nodded unable to form a single coherent word in her mouth. The dark-haired man just let
out a loud sigh. “He’s on the roof top. Soaking himself to death. Please save him, if you can.”

He escorted her into an elevator and pushed the button for the seventh floor. Sansa wondered if the
journey up seven floors could really feel like seven decades, but to her, at that very moment, it really
did. As soon as the doors of the elevator opened with a ping, Sansa stepped out into the pouring rain
once again, her eyes screwed in concentration, searching for the only person she wanted to see right
now.
“Get out, whoever you are” growled a voice from the far corner and Sansa whirled towards it.

There stood Jon in nothing but a white vest and his dark grey joggers which clung to his chiselled muscular frame and the contours of his strong legs. Water was dripping from his silky curls and Sansa smiled in spite of her anguish. Even the god of rain couldn’t tame Jon’s wild curls. “Jon…” she called out to him and hoped her soft voice carried through, for he was some distance away. But the next instant, Jon turned around so fast that Sansa was worried he’d hurt his neck. That’s when - their eyes met.

It was like a moment in eternity. Sansa could see every raindrop that fell between her and Jon and yet the only thing that she could see was the storm in his eyes and not the one that was raging around them, threatening to shatter into pieces, the world as they knew it. They walked towards each other, as though an invisible force drew them closer, but Jon stopped short of covering the whole distance.

He stopped walking, so she stopped too, like dancers who were about to strike a pose for a waltz. He looked at her from that distance, watched her, like a man who had gone without water for too long – like he was drinking in her features, memorising her every detail. She felt his eyes everywhere - on her face, her mouth, her breasts, the curve of her hips, her exposed thighs - before she heard his strained gruff voice.

“What the devil are you doing here, Sansa? Go home…Now.”

Sansa wondered if he could see the tears streaming down her cheeks, mixed with the rain assaulting her face. She guessed he couldn’t and it was better that way. She tried to dislodge her voice from the lump that it had got stuck in, at the base of her throat. “Is it true? Are you really leaving?”

Sansa knew the answer to that already. Even in her daze, she’d picked up enough from her conversation with Robb to know what was going to happen. But she still asked him. She wanted him to look into her eyes and inform her of his decision. She wanted to hear with her own ears, to feel the pain in her body, in order to dull the ache in her heart.

However, Jon regarded her with the same pain in his eyes or was it just that she hurt everywhere and she projected that to him too? “Yes…”

His monosyllable drove the dagger deep into her heart and from its nether chambers, arose a fury like one she’d never known before.

Sansa clenched her fists so tightly that her nails dug into her palms. “You were going to leave without even saying goodbye to me, weren’t you?” she asked him, her voice barely a hoarse whisper. She took a step towards him, when he looked away, not meeting her eyes. “Look at me dammit and tell it to my face,” she demanded, her body shaking with the wrath.

“YES dammit!” Jon growled, his grey eyes looking almost purple as an unnamed fire lit his eyes. “Yes I am leaving. And Yes..” he said, taking a step towards her. “I was going to leave without saying goodbye to you.”

Despite the distance between them, Sansa could see Jon’s ragged breathing, like he was desperately trying to reign in something. The rain had made his white vest translucent and she could see the water running down from his broad shoulders to his six-pack abs making her momentarily forget why she was here. But his words made her see red and she nodded her head in understanding of them through gritted teeth. “You met everyone else. You said goodbye to everyone else but me. It’s because I’m the least important Stark to you, isn’t it?” The words slipped out of her mouth and Jon moved towards her involuntarily, his features etched in shock.
“What. Did. You. Say?” he asked her, slowly stressing on every word that came out of his mouth, his brow furrowed.

But Sansa had had enough. She was tired of shrugging off his rejections, tired of giving excuses for his actions, tired of hoping for something and then seeing that hope getting crushed under his feet, tired of endlessly waiting for him to come to her, tired of the wounded feelings that caused her heart to explode each and every time – all because of him.

“I said exactly what you heard. It’s always been like that. Every time I’ve smiled in your direction, you’ve turned the other way. Every time I’ve touched you, you’ve shied away like you couldn’t bear it. Every time I’ve tried to bridge the gap between us, you put another thousand miles between us.” Sansa scoffed in spite of the rage coursing through her veins. “And now you’ve literally done that, haven’t you? I told you I want us to be together and you’re leaving Winterfell for good. Do you hate me so much, Jon Snow?”

“Sansa, I beg you…” Jon’s voice sounded like the whelp of a wounded puppy, his eyes beseeching her for mercy. “Please stop. Stop this or else…”

“Oh else what?” Sansa challenged him with her eyes, stepping closer to him, unsuccessfully wiping away the water droplets from her face. “How dare you, Jon? How dare you think of leaving? How dare you think of leaving your family?”

Jon once again tried to turn his back to her. “I am not a Stark”

“You are to me.” Sansa replied reaching out, to stop him from moving away.

Her palm connected with his wrist and Jon turned to look at her like he’d been electrocuted. Their breaths came out in laboured, unsteady huffs as they looked into each other’s eyes. “You’ve always been a part of my family … and my life.” The words came out of her mouth before she could stop them.

Jon took an unsteady step towards her, shrugging his wrist from her grasp. “What’s done can’t be undone. You need to leave Sansa. Your father’s not going to be very happy if he found out …”

“Oh to hell with all that!” Sansa screamed and Jon looked at her, taken aback by the ferocity in her voice. “You and dad and Robb, you’re all the same. You think you know what’s best for me?” She pushed his chest with her palm. He caught her wrist and gritted his teeth, but he didn’t move. Sansa mimicked Jon as best as she could. “Sansa go home. Sansa, this is not good for you. Sansa, you have to be careful. Sansa, you shouldn’t be out so late. I DON’T GIVE A FUCK ANYMORE.” She pushed him again, with her other palm and this time he caught her other wrist too and simply hauled her to him with a mighty tug.

For a second, the motion knocked her breath right out of her lungs. The thin wet layer of clothes that separated them, proved to be no barrier to the heat and warmth that poured from Jon’s body to hers. This is where she wanted to be, she thought as heat pooled in the pit of her stomach. In the circle of his arms, for the rest of her life but he was going to take that away from her. She remembered her fury and realised that she was not done.

“Does anyone of you give a shit about what I want? What I feel?”

Jon looked away, a muscle moving in his jaw. “Sansa… Please” It was there again, a begging quality to his voice. “This has to stop. Now.”

Sansa caught Jon by his neckline of his vest and pulled him closer to get him to look at her. “I can
She loved this man! She knew it as surely as she knew the breath that gave her life. She tried to push him away, disgusted with the situation, that he had brought upon them but Jon threaded his palm through her hair and made her look at him. His touch instantly set her on fire but when she looked into his eyes, the burning intensity she saw in them, caused desire like she’d never known before to shoot through her,forking into her every limb, electrifying her senses. The tempest was not outside,of that she was sure now. It was in his wild grey eyes.

“Don’t you dare talk about dying, Sansa Stark, or I’ll kill you myself” He growled into her ears and Sansa shivered with sensation. “But when I walked out of your house, I agreed I’d have nothing to do with you or any of your siblings. And my promise to your father is ironclad. When enough people make false promises, words stop meaning anything. Then there are no more answers, only better and better lies. So please, go home. Or I’ll just have made an empty promise to your father.” Jon pushed himself away from her and Sansa promptly shivered with the cold that the heat from his body had been shielding her from. “Besides, I have to go to Essos to make something out of my life.
There’s nothing here for me now. At least that is abundantly clear.”

Sansa tried her best to ignore his words – there’s nothing here for me now, he’d said. She hoped she was correctly reading what he was trying to do. He’d laid it all out before her. All the reasons he needed to leave Winterfell. All the reasons he needed to stay far away from her. But he was doing it on purpose. Jon was a bad liar and Sansa Stark new when she was being lied to. And so in response, she said the bravest thing she could ever say, for her love for him made her say those words...

“Would you take me with you?”

Jon stared at her for a long never-ending moment like she’d completely lost her mind. “Take you with me?” he echoed “To Essos?”

Sansa nodded, since to her, it seemed like the most reasonable thing to do. Surely, she couldn’t go on living without him. Why was that so difficult for him to understand?

“Are you out of your mind?” The anger was back in Jon’s voice as his palm left her hair to grab her arms. He shook her slightly as if trying to get her out of her daze. “If you leave with me, it’d amount to eloping, do you understand me? Your father can hate me all he wants but I’d never do something like that to him. And neither should you.”

“What other options do we have?” Sansa looked at him in exasperation, drawing on her last vestige of hope. Truth be told, she knew Jon wouldn’t change his mind just like her father wouldn’t change his. She had known during her one-sided conversation with Robb. She had known this even before she decided to come to find him here. Why must she be torn between the two men she loved the most? And why were they the two most stubborn men the earth had chosen to spawn?

“You can’t run away from me, Jon. The universe will only throw us back together. We’re meant to be with each other.”

Jon laughed – a sad laugh then and released her harshly, like touching her had burnt him. “We’re meant to be no such thing. You still believe in your silly little songs of princesses and knights, don’t you? You are Ned Stark’s daughter – A Stark princess and I am nothing but a lowborn bastard. There’s nothing we have in common. There can never be anything between us. If anyone of us thought differently, we were nothing but the biggest idiots on the face of this earth.”

He cast a sideward look at her, his shoulders slouched in defeat as he walked towards the elevator,
Sansa knew these things plagued Jon. In her heart of hearts, she’d always known. But she’d thought that if he loved her it would be enough. But did he love her? All that separated them before was an imaginary line, one that he had drawn between them. Now a truckload of complications were added to that. But someone had to cross that line first and Sansa realised that it would have to be her. She didn’t know if Jon would ever be hers. But she’d be damned if she didn’t at least try.

Sansa swallowed as she stepped closer to him and traced the muscles on his shoulders. Jon’s eyes widened in shock and his body went rigid. Sansa could feel the tension coiled in his every muscle but she was in no mood to stop. “This is just about you and me Jon. I know you have feelings for me.”

Jon stood stock still. “I feel nothing. Do you understand me? What happened between us... it was just... just desire and lack of judgement on my part.”

“Desire?” Sansa now traced his collarbone and looked into his eyes. A great war - was brewing within those turbulent grey eyes. “Was it just desire then... that made you rescue me from Joffrey? Just desire... that made you feel so protective of me. You saved me, Jon, not just once, but so many times. You put yourself in harm’s way to save me from a falling tree. For God’s sake! You almost killed a man because he touched me.”

“I did that for Ned, for Robb.”

“My father couldn’t stop you from kissing me.” Sansa stroked his cheek, trying to soften the tense lines on his face and Jon squeezed his eyes shut as though praying for some divine intervention to help him “My brother couldn’t stop you from touching me.” Sansa knew she was fighting a losing battle, but she was going to give it her everything, even if there was hope for just a fragment of his affection. “I know you care for me. And I know that you want me.”

Jon didn’t bother denying that part, as his eyes flew open at her words. Sansa knew it was useless. She could see the searing hot desire in his eyes; feel the heat that radiated from his skin despite being utterly drenched. Sansa searched his eyes and she could see the intense battle he was waging with himself. She traced his jawline with her finger. He flinched and his Adam’s apple bobbed in his throat.

“Stop this. For your own good, if not for mine.”

“Make me”

Yes, she couldn’t have him for all of eternity. But surely, she could have this one night. “You keep your promise to my father.” She said her hands sliding from his neck to his hair. “And I’ll keep the one I made to myself.” Of loving you forever, she said to herself, as she brushed her lips against his and felt his entire body go stiff. He was going to push her away, she could sense it.

“I won’t change my mind about leaving tomorrow.”

So Sansa continued her assault on him, determined to win this war. She kissed his cheek, the bridge of his nose, his jawline, his Adam’s apple and nibbled on his earlobe. “All I am asking you for is tonight Jon. Give me this one memory to live by.” She felt the shudder that shook his strong body as she brought her lips back to his. “Make me whole, Jon Snow.” She whispered against his mouth.

The next instant she was pulled back by her hair and she almost winced in pain if it hadn’t been for
the distressed look in Jon’s eyes. For what seemed like years, he just stared into her eyes amidst the sound of the pouring rain, an array of emotions, anger, frustration, anguish, grief, passed through his eyes before desire won over all else – his raw, red, fiery desire for her which heated her up more than burning fire. And then with what seemed like a herculean effort Jon let go of her and pressed the elevator’s button which opened with a ping.

He stepped inside it and looked at her. “I know you’ll hate me for this, but I am doing the right thing here.” He said and Sansa almost wailed in agony as the doors shut.

How could the gods be so cruel? She cursed Jon, his honour, his sense of duty, her feelings for him. A sob rocked through her body, a second followed and then another. Why had she to fall in love with a man who was hell-bent on completely destroying her?

Perhaps, she was not suitable for him, after all. Perhaps he was right in walking away from her. Perhaps she was wrong about the fact that he cared for her or desired her. He was right. She was still a naïve little girl who believed in knights and happy endings.

Sansa hugged herself and let the emotions wash over her. So lost she was in the torment that rocked through her body that she didn’t notice anything around her. Not the boom of the thunder, not the crackling sound of the electric blue lightning and definitely not the sound of the elevator doors falling open once again from which stormed back in a man who strode towards her with absolute intent in his every step and a savage need for her in his dark grey eyes.

“You can’t always be right, you know?” Jon’s voice startled her as he came to stand behind her. She whirled to look at him and saw it before she felt it.

Open, naked hunger. And eyes that looked tormented by it.

It scared her, yet excited her. “Jon...” Before she could start speaking, Jon took her by the waist and crushed her to him. She gasped at the suddenness and strength of his action.

“You’re wrong about one thing Sansa.” He tightened his hold on her waist and the way he was looking at her – she felt beautiful, desired, precious, needed. Perhaps, he’d always looked at her like this. With an intensity that heated her very core. “You are not the least important Stark” his deep voice came to her, breaking into her thoughts. “You are, in fact, the most important one.”

With that he picked her up in one swift motion, winding her legs around his waist and shoved her against the elevator door with a loud clang before his mouth came crashing down on hers.
Hope you liked this chapter. Please let me know what you felt. It'll help me write and communicate the story better!! Thanks.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Smut Finally! I have never ever ever ever written Smut before and I am not even sure if this qualifies for Smut, LOL! But here it is and the poem at the beginning is my composition in case you're wondering why I haven't mentioned a source.

Needless to say I struggled with writing this but I hope you like the outcome. Happy reading!!

A big shout out to Melissa, Becky and Neha for making my fic readable, bearable!!
LOL

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I want to love you,

Wildly, savagely, fiercely

My heart pounds, my pulse races, I am drenched in sweat completely

As an insatiable need to feel you, burns through me.

In your deep blue eyes, I want to drown

With my touch, I want to erase, every worry, every frown

Every second I resist you, is killing me

As an insatiable need to sink into you, burns through me.

My emotions have gone into overload,

As raw passions threaten to explode,

Senses burning, soul-stirring - blinding me thoroughly

As an insatiable need to shatter in you, burns through me

I wish we had the chance and the time
A love-filled forever – to make you mine
But if this one night is all that there can ever be
Then I shall snatch this moment from destiny
To forge you in my heart, my soul and to etch you in my memory
And time will testify, whole-heartedly
That my insatiable need to love you - is what will finally burn me.

The first thing Sansa tasted was bourbon when Jon’s mouth devoured hers in a fierce, soul-shattering kiss. Judging by the fumes that filled her breath, now intimately entwined with his, Jon had consumed copious amounts of it, too. That, he was still standing like a solid rock, was a wonder, thought Sansa, as she opened her mouth to freely welcome the onslaught of his tongue. Sansa vaguely registered the elevator opening because precisely at that second, Jon pulled her flush against him, one hand gripped around her waist and the other cupping the sensitive flesh of her bottom, eliciting a deep moan from the base of her throat. Sansa thought she was going to combust from within at that very moment. She didn’t know if the droplets that trickled down from her temple were the remainder of the cold raindrops that became hot when they came in contact with her heated skin or if they were beads of her sweat – a chemical reaction of potent desire and long-suppressed need.

Without his mouth leaving hers for even a single heartbeat, Jon placed her against the long mirror at the back of the elevator. It was only then that he set her down on her feet, his palms diving immediately into her wet red hair that looked like molten lava flowing from his hands. Sansa’s swollen lips burnt and a powerful bolt of current shook her entire body.

“I burn for you, Sansa.”

Jon whispered against her mouth, looking deep into her eyes and Sansa’s legs turned to jelly as an insatiable fire was ignited at her very core when she saw the raw hunger in his eyes. Jon’s touch was not gentle like it had been when he’d first kissed her or when they had made out on the couch after lady’s death. It was urgent, fierce - desperate almost, just like her own burning need for him. She’d wanted this for so very long now. To be in his arms, to be touched by him, to see him give in to his desire for her – she felt victorious, glorious, in spite of the impending doom.

Jon withdrew his mouth from hers as his palms travelled from her hair, tracing her slender neck to the contours of her collarbone, his eyes following the movement of his palms, his stare scorching her skin. When he reached the ruffled sleeves of her maroon dress on her shoulders, he looked back into her eyes and Sansa realised that she’d been holding her breath. Her heart was now, surely rattling the entire elevator with its incessant uneven thudding. And then - it stopped altogether.

With an unexpected, daring move, Jon roughly shoved the sleeves of her dress and the thin red straps beneath it, off her shoulders, exposing more of her creamy, satiny skin to his view. Jon was on fire – Sansa could see it, feel it and sense it like she could her own throbbing desire. His nostrils flared as he entwined his fingers with hers in a strong grip and pulled her arms above her head as he swooped in for a taste of her.

“Stop me, Sansa” he growled into her throat, but his fingers tightened around her palms, entrapping her even more than before, sending Sansa into a breathless frenzy.
“Push me away; I’m begging you,” Jon’s raspy breath on her earlobe had her writhing in his grasp, frantic to feel him under her palms but he was too strong for her.

“Curse me…” Jon said as he nipped at the column of her throat. “Hit me…” he said, wedging his knee between her legs. “Kill me…” he said, as he traced her jawline with his tongue and Sansa whimpered like she was undergoing some torture of the worst sort.

All of a sudden Jon released her hands and fisted her hair with one palm and cupped her cheek with the other, placing his forehead on hers, trying to find his breath like he was desperately searching for some sanity. He kicked a button on the elevator with his foot, and it was only then that Sansa realised that he’d hit the stop button on it, the second they’d entered it. She looked at him amazed. In spite of his drunkenness, in spite of his carnal craving, he’d remembered to preserve her honour. How could she not love this man?

When the elevator started moving again, he spoke with his eyes closed. “I’m giving you one last chance to save yourself” He opened his eyes and looked into hers and Sansa was stricken with the amount of pain she saw in them. She reached out to touch his jaw, but he moved away. “I am going to walk out of the elevator alone and go to my apartment but my door will be open.” He kissed her soundly on her mouth. “Run, Sansa, if you can. There is NO possible scenario, in which, this is going to end well BUT…” he paused, and she looked into his dilated pupils - a stormy grey sky, thundering and booming. “If you decide to follow me, there will be no looking back. If only for tonight, I can make you mine…” he said, dragging her head closer to his and Sansa was taken aback by the ferocity of his touch. “Then I shall. Over and over again, till this long night ends, until the first rays of dawn. Do you understand me?”

With that, he walked out of the open doors and Sansa instantly hit the stop button. For some reason, the doors of the elevator opened and closed continuously, giving her glimpses of Jon’s strong muscular retreating back. Sansa hesitated only for a second – before running towards him, wrapping her arms around his wet torso as she hugged him from behind. In the very next moment, with an almost inhuman quickness, Jon had her inside his apartment, pinned to the shut front door.

Sansa looked at him with determination, as she fisted the hem of his soaked vest in both her palms. “If you thought even for a moment, that I was going to walk away from this, you don’t know me at all, Jon Snow.”

“Obstinate, Stubborn, Stark girl!” he grated but fused their mouths together, and Sansa was lost – lost to the sensation that reeled through her body. There was no one else in that moment – only her and Jon. Sansa peeled off his vest from his torso, and Jon’s groan echoed around the room when she ran her palms over his chest. He gave her no time to breathe, to think. He swept her again into a raging kiss like her mouth was the source of his succour. Sansa could see the stars around her eyes. She was alternating between flashes of heat and drowning in happiness. Sansa suddenly realised that Jon was tugging frantically at the knots at her back that held her dress together.

“I’ll help you, Jon…” she said, trying to reach for the back ties but Jon shook his head.

“Keep your hands – ON ME” he commanded, his tone gruff with the frustration and the urgency of his need, sounding very much like he’d reached a decision. “Besides, I can’t wait any longer.”

RRRRRRIIIIPPPPPP

Sansa heard the sound before she realised that he had shredded her dress into two pieces with his bare hands and it fell into a puddle around her long legs. She looked at him shocked, but he was looking at her with ragged breaths as his eyes took in her every curve, every detail and suddenly she felt self-conscious.
“Not a single dream of mine, not a single fragment of my imagination did you justice, Sansa.” Jon’s hand gripped her exposed waist, and his thumbs drew circles on her hips, honesty dripping from his eyes. “There is no woman, no nymph, no dryad, and no goddess who could ever be as beautiful as you.”

It was almost more than she could bear. If he’d not been holding her, she would’ve swooned in the whirlwind of sensations that attacked her at his words. His mouth didn’t ease her condition as his kiss turned wicked – his tongue claiming her, filling her with his taste. Without preamble, he slid his hands up from her waist to her breasts, cupping them, squeezing them and Sansa cried out in pleasure as she arched into his touch. He turned her around then and started guiding her backwards and then lost his patience once again midway. His hands on her bottom, he lifted her up fully, and she wrapped her legs around his hips as he raced with her towards the bed. Every action of Jon’s screamed ‘Right here, right now.’

When her back hit his soft firm bed, Sansa instinctively inched back on her elbows as she watched him prowl towards her on fours, watched him climb over her and her heart started beating harder and faster. Jon reached behind her back and unhooked her bra and sent it flying in the darkness. For a second he did nothing, she did nothing. They just looked at each other, their faces partially lit in the darkness by the flashes of lightning outside that lit the stormy sky.

Fearing that he would put an end to the most beautiful night of her life even if he were allowed even a moment of sanity, Sansa threw her arms around him and brought him to her. She moved her hands from his neck into his damp silken curls as he kissed the hollow of her throat, the base of her collarbone and then inched lower.

Jon trailed his mouth over her smooth silken curves and took one rosy tip into his mouth. Sansa vibrated inside, outside as the shock of his touch caused heat to pool between her legs and Sansa instinctively tried to clamp them together. Jon didn’t give her the opportunity as he chose that precise moment to wedge himself between her legs and Sansa gasped out loud, as she felt the full impact of his desire pressing down on hers.

“Darling,” Jon ran his palm across her cheek, his thumb brushing against her temple, a shudder rocking through his entire body. “I have wanted this for way too long… I don’t think I can hold out any longer. I need to be inside you, now.”

Sansa had barely nodded in approval and Jon had already rid her of the last flimsy barrier of cloth that still covered her. He kicked off his joggers and briefs in the next heartbeat. Sansa looked at him in awe. He looked like a Greek god, sculpted to perfection. She saw his skin turning red at her scrutiny. But that lasted only for a fraction of a second as Jon moved to blanket his body over hers. If she felt bereft and cold when he left her to undress himself, the feverish heat that radiated from his aroused skin when he covered her body with his, made her feel whole, warm and secure.

At once Jon kissed her everywhere. He kissed her eyes, her mouth, her chin, her breasts, and the smooth pane of her stomach. He went past her hips, kissing her, moving her legs apart and then he was kissing her ... down there...

“Seven fucking hells...” cursed Sansa, as shock waves after shock waves flooded through her and the world as she knew it shattered before her eyes. But before she could recover from her state, Jon was already kissing her mouth, positioning himself to enter her. Sansa wondered if this would be a good time to tell him that she was a virgin. She didn’t get the chance. He pushed into her and a searing pain tore through her.

“Fuck...Fuck...What the fuck!?” Jon’s eyes had widened in shock as he stared into Sansa’s face, open-mouthed, like his brain could formulate no thought other than to register the shock of his
discovery. “You’re… you are a... Gods, this is your first time??” he looked at her incredulously, hurt even that she’d kept it from him. A shudder broke through his body, and he berated himself, shaking his head vigorously “I should’ve known that in spite of you dating all those morons that you’d never… You are Sansa Stark. Seven hells…What a bloody cad I have been!”

Sansa instantly wrapped her legs around his hips to keep him trapped, fearing that he was going to end this. The break that his discovery had caused, had given Sansa time to adjust to his intrusion and she was in no way willing to let go of this precious moment that had somehow fallen into her lap.

Jon shut his eyes, as she drew him inside, inhaling sharply. When he opened his eyes, Sansa hoped he couldn’t see the tears shimmering in the corner of her eyes. He bent down to kiss her forehead. “Did I hurt you, love?” he asked her, with a pained expression in his eyes but then he smiled – a sad smile. “Don’t worry about me ending this, Sansa. I am too far gone in the sensation of you, to stop myself. It’s probably the bastardy of my blood.”

Sansa reached out to kiss his mouth, apologising to him with her actions and he was kissing her again deeply, passionately. He was caressing her now, his hands were gentle and rousing at the same time as he played music with her body and pleasure surged through her once again, the pain becoming a distant memory as the blood pounded through her veins. She was acutely aware of him inside her but he didn’t move and she felt restless, her hips grinding against his.

“Sansa...” Jon groaned into her mouth but now, he moved inside her and Sansa felt all her blood rush to her warm the place where they were so primitively joined. As she was thus engaged in the age-old dance between man and woman, her man now plunging into her with abandon, she moved with him unrestrained, learning from him along the way – this act of love - as she’d learnt from him, everything else. The lessons of duty, of honour, of kindness, of compassion, of friendship, of passion... she’d learnt it all from him and she would keep it as an essential part of her soul; of who she would always be.

As her feelings grew stronger and deeper, and wave after wave of happiness hit her, carrying her out of her body and then slamming her right back into it with brute force and then sending her straight to heaven, she bit down on her lips to cry out what her heart wanted her to scream as she heard Jon still inside her with a roar that seemed to reverberate from the very core of his being.

‘I love you, Jon. I always have and I always will.’

But she didn’t say it.

For she knew her love was not reciprocated. If it were, it wouldn’t have taken him away from her. As she floated back down to earth on soft, fluffy clouds, Jon gathered her in the circle of his arms and pressed fevered kisses to her shoulders, her hair, and her neck. Sansa closed her eyes and revelled in the sensation, memorising the feel of Jon around her, for she knew there would never be anyone else for her. As her eyes drifted into oblivion, contentment sweeping through her, Sansa consoled herself that at least for this one night, she’d felt whole, complete and like she’d finally arrived home.

-*-

“SANSA!” Jon’s booming voice outside the bathroom door brought her back to her senses. “Are you alright?” The urgent concern in his voice made her swing open the door without thinking and the moment Jon’s eyes fell on her rather flushed face, considering where her thoughts had just taken her, she saw his jaw tightening and his lips pursed in a straight line. “Were you talking to someone in there?” He took a step forward as she stepped out and suddenly held her wrist. Sansa looked at
where he held her and then back up at him. He looked positively uncomfortable. He avoided looking at her as he tried formulating his next words. “Sansa, as far as I know… I mean… is there another man in your life, right now?” He looked up at her now, with brooding grey eyes.

Sansa wanted to laugh at the choice of his words – another man. What did he mean by that? But she didn’t ponder too much. She levelled him a look. “I don’t have the time for any man in my life. Also, I’d like to remind you, that I’ve never once asked you about your love life. Of course, the tabloids leave little to speculation.” Sansa burned from within. Her mind conjured pictures of Jon and Ygritte walking out of a bar hand in hand that she’d avoided to look at but hadn’t been able to help herself. The last she’d read about them was the article which stated that they were on a break.

“Not everything you read in tabloids is true.” Jon’s grip on her wrist became stronger. “Have you ever considered that?” He cleared his throat and let her go as he stepped backwards. “I asked you only because it’s imperative that I know. I just assumed earlier… ehem.. anyway…Now, let’s go meet your father and get this over with.”

Sansa looked at Jon, confused at his nervous disposition. It was so unlike him. Granted, that the situation was tense and their upcoming meeting with her father was probably not going to be a pleasant one at all. Yet, the way Jon was fidgeting with the collar of his shirt, beads of perspiration forming at the top of his forehead suggested that Jon’s discomfort went beyond his face-off with her father.

Sansa’s heart started thudding faster and faster as they walked towards Ned Stark’s famously infamous study. Sandor gave her a lopsided smile as they neared the door and threw a glare in Jon’s direction which was returned with fervour. “Broody, you’re back.” He grunted, still glaring at Jon.

Jon narrowed his eyes sarcastically. “Good to see you too, Sandy.”

Sansa bit her lip to refrain from giggling as Sandor’s expression which resembled that of a man who just got gutted. Jon had registered Lya’s nickname for the big burly man and used it at him when he’d least expected it.

“What?!” Jon’s asked as Sandor’s mouth was having trouble finding words to form his usual one-line taunts that he impishly hurled at Jon. “You really thought I wouldn’t notice that my daughter’s met that soft, fluffy side of you hidden behind this bored-i-don’t-care-a-damn face? Besides, Sandy suits you better than The Hound.”

Sandor lunged for Jon, but the latter’s quick reflexes and agile body moved faster, ducking under Sandor’s large arms. Not that Sandor was really trying. Both of them were now glaring at each other. But Jon had a laugh etched on his face and Sandor looked like he could almost smile. But then again, Jon and Sandor were always like this with each other. They liked to pretend they hated each other when in fact it was all just a convenient pretence. Sansa could bet all her money on the possibility that Sandor actually liked Jon and vice-versa. Somehow his verbal match with Sandor, seemed to have calmed him down. Sansa wondered if he’d realised that for the first time, Jon had almost subconsciously, casually addressed to Lya as his daughter.

Sandor’s voice brought her attention back to him. “You sure you want to go in there, little bird.” He threw Jon another dirty stare. Jon refused to be affected by this, as always. “Broody’s got a rare talent for mucking things up in that room.”

Sansa smiled kindly at the big man. “Well that remains to be seen, doesn’t it?”

She walked to her father’s door but Jon beat her to it.
He looked at Sandor once, who nodded slightly. Jon turned the doorknob and walked in first before holding the door open for Sansa. As they both made the journey to the big oval desk with almost, matched steps, Sansa felt her father’s sage brown eyes upon them. The great Eddard Stark was seated in his large chair, behind the oval desk, his fingers intertwined in front of him, as he observed Jon and Sansa. For a fleeting moment she felt time slowed down and she could almost hear that soulful, stirring Stark music that always played when they were commemorating their ancestors. She looked sideways at Jon who now had his eyes locked with her father, both men now staring at each other. Jon opened his mouth to probably greet Ned, but no words came out. A cold, heavy silence settled over them, thicker than the uneasy tension in the atmosphere. Five years passed between them in those five long seconds of silence. Sansa cast wary glances at both Jon and her father praying at least one of them would break the ice.

Her prayers were answered. It was Ned Stark – who broke the ICE.

“Ah! Finally, I get to meet the famous Jon Snow.” Ned smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Five years back you left this room promising no man would ever be powerful enough to keep you from getting what you want. Five years later, you have lived up to your promise.”

Jon instantly narrowed his eyes and Sansa had a bad feeling about this already. “I haven’t,” he said with ferocious vehemence, and a shudder ran down Sansa’s spine. Jon took a step towards her father as the older man slowly folded his arms across his chest. “All the wealth I have, all the power I exude still didn’t stop Ned Stark from keeping my daughter a secret - from me. In my opinion, I’ve miserably failed.”

“And what about what you did to my daughter?” Ned looked fierce too, in that moment. “You’ve known your daughter for what, five days now? Yet I can see how protective you are about her. Do you know how I felt when my little girl came and told me she’s pregnant? I’ve never been angrier in my life before. Tell me, Jon, what would you have done if you were in my place?”

Jon gulped and Sansa saw the guilty look on his face, then anger replaced that. “I would’ve sucked the life out of me.” Jon looked at her father, his grey eyes shining with purple fire. “Why didn’t you? You should’ve come after me and killed me. It would’ve been a far better situation than it is now.”

Ned looked at Sansa and she pleaded with her eyes, hoping her father wouldn’t spill out all the details. Her father released a frustrated sigh and when he looked at Jon now, he looked far more composed. “Because I understood that Sansa getting pregnant was not your fault alone. It was a decision made by the both of you. She is as much to blame as you are, Jon. You both acted recklessly. But that is all in the past now.” He looked at Sansa and smiled at her lovingly. “Lya is the best thing that’s ever happened to this family. So I wouldn’t dare call what happened between the two of you a mistake.”

Sansa sank down on one of the chairs facing her father and Jon took the other, some tension already escaping his body at her father’s words. He cleared his throat.

“You… er… were right about Petyr Baelish all along, Ned. I was wrong to have turned a deaf ear to your advice.” Jon lowered his eyes looking very much like a young child confessing his guilt to his father, yet the very mention of Petyr Baelish sent a chill down Sansa’s spine.

Jon looked at her father from under hooded lashes “Samwell Tarly, my chief accountant, found out a couple of years later that Peytr was embezzling funds from our legitimate hotel business and transferring it to many illegitimate businesses he owned – primarily brothels.”

This elicited a gasp from Sansa and Jon turned to look at her but her father’s expression remained stoic, unreadable. Jon probably expected him to say ‘I told you so’ or something like that, but her
father just blinked - like the news that he had been right all along, meant absolutely nothing to him. The silence stretched uncomfortably between them and Jon cleared his throat. “I ... er... we... Sam that is made a rock solid case against Peytr along with Jamie Lannister who was with the Westerosi Bureau of Investigation then, in charge of the case and ... well, Peytr…. he’s now behind bars.”

Relief spread through Sansa’s body when she heard this news. She looked at her father, wanting to share her relief.

There was still no reaction on Ned Stark’s face.

Sansa frowned. Was it possible that her father had not heard Jon correctly? But Ned Stark was the single most alert human being in the history of creation. It was impossible that he had not heard Jon. She looked at Jon who was squirming in his seat. Obviously, Ned’s blank stare was making him very uncomfortable too.

Jon made a third attempt at conversation. “Ned, I was wrong all those years ago - wrong when I didn’t listen to you, wrong about Peytr and …” he cast Sansa a guilty look and Sansa knew what he was going to say before he was going to say it. “Wrong about what I did to Sansa. In spite of what you said just now, which is very magnanimous of you to say, considering the fact that she’s your daughter, I should’ve known better.”

Finally, her father blinked. Then he slowly nodded. “Yes, she’s my daughter. But you forget Jon that you’re like my own son too.”

Jon flinched next to Sansa and she could now feel the heavy tension radiating from Jon’s body. He leaned forward, his voice hoarse and raspy as he tried to reign in his temper. “That’s a lie, I’ll never believe again. You kept me – your so-called ‘like a son’ from his own daughter Ned! Do you hate me so much?”

The raw pain in Jon’s voice tore at Sansa’s heart. She knew he was not just talking about keeping Lya away from him. It was everything. What her father had inflicted upon Jon was not just a wound that wouldn’t heal but also one that Jon didn’t want to heal.

Her father smiled, for the first time since they’d stepped into his office. But it was a sad smile and suddenly in that moment, Sansa felt her father had aged. The tired lines around his eyes, the wrinkles on his forehead, the worried glance he cast upon them from the other side – he looked like a man who had restrained himself, contained himself for far too long. He now looked at Jon with a forlorn look on his face. “Hate is such a strong word, Jon. It’s an easy emotion to cultivate too. Love, on the other hand, is more difficult. It’s a weakness and strength. You find that you could become a version of yourself that you don’t even recognise - for the sake of that love. Is it not true?”

Jon looked away when her father said those words. So did Sansa. She wanted to disagree. She wanted to tell her father he was wrong. But she knew he wasn’t. Everyone did unthinkable things for the people they loved. She had too.

When none of them spoke anything again, her father leaned forward, drawing their attention back to him. “If I may ask, when and what do you plan to tell Lya?”

Finally, Sansa could speak. “We were waiting to get to Winterfell so we could tell her.” She looked at Jon who was pointedly avoiding her. This annoyed Sansa a bit. She could use some support here. With a slight shake of her head, she looked back at her father. “Now that we’re here, we can tell her anytime…”

Ned nodded thoughtfully, pursed his lips and then looked back at his daughter. “So how’s this going
Sansa was taken aback by her father’s question. She opened her mouth a couple of times, but nothing came out and she suddenly realised there was really nothing she could say. The past few days had been so hectic that she’d hadn’t really given a thought about the aftereffects of revealing to Lya, the identity of her father. Her mind blanked out totally.

“I … uh… we’ll come to some sort of an arrangement..” Sansa stuttered, unable to frame a single coherent sentence. “Depending on our… er… individual schedules, we could come up with a … a plan … I mean Lya could spend the weekends with Jon … because her school and friends are closer to where I stay…”

Her father cocked a sarcastic eyebrow at her. “Right! This is what you have planned, before telling a little girl of four - that she has a father.” She saw it in his eyes before she heard it in his words – Censure. “I expected more from the both of you. This half-baked plan is what you had in mind when you came here to reveal to Lya the identity of her father? I can’t believe it. You’re going to turn her life topsy-turvy and this is the explanation you have?”

Sansa couldn’t believe it herself. Until this point, she’d never even given this a thought, she realised with a shock. Jon came up with the idea of going to Winterfell and telling Lya who he was and at that time it had seemed like the best decision. Jon’s impending reunion with the Starks had pushed the very reason they were going to Winterfell to the backseat. Sansa couldn’t believe that she’d gone this unprepared, in front of her dad. But why hadn’t they ever spoken about what they were going to tell her? Wasn’t it the most rational thing for two parents to do? And Lya was Lya. She was going to have so many questions. How could she or Jon inspire any trust or confidence in Lyanna, if they were themselves unsure about what they were going to do?

“That is not true,” Jon spoke finally, in a low voice and Sansa looked at him, hoping he had something better to offer, unlike her. She couldn’t fathom how he was going to come up with an explanation better than her raw one but since Jon was the one who had come up with the idea of travelling to Winterfell with Lya to tell her the truth, which Sansa now acknowledged was an intelligent thing to do, she was willing to let him present his option.

Jon’s Adam’s apple bobbed before he spoke to Ned. “She’s my daughter Ned. She’s all I’ve thought about from the moment I suspected that she’s mine. You really think I would’ve dragged her all the way to Winterfell, a place where I was asked to leave from no less if I wasn’t thinking about her best interests.”

Her father narrowed his eyes to slits. “And pray tell me what is in her best interests, Jon? I hope it’s not some ill-conceived, impractical solution that my otherwise-rational daughter just offered.”

Suddenly Jon looked very calm and composed, thought Sansa; wanting the floor to swallow her alive after her father dismissed her earlier logic with a simple sarcastic remark. She deserved it even. But now, as the man who had given her Lya, stared into her father’s eyes confidently, as though finally after a long time, he could finally say what he’d been holding back, a new sense of panic gripped Sansa.

“There’s always been one and only one solution that ever occurred to me, since I saw Sansa in her bookstore with my daughter in her arms” Jon gaze was now unwavering, his hand steady, his posture erect and stance – powerful. “Of course, other than the fact that for a fleeting moment I wished to murder her by wringing her neck, I intended on marrying Sansa, from the very second I realised who Lya was,” He looked at Sansa who felt like someone had moved the earth from under her feet and she was trapped in a never-ending free fall.
His dark grey eyes bored into her bright blue ones, his deep husky voice reaching her from another dimension. “And I'd like you to know, that I won’t have it any other way.”

Chapter End Notes

Don't hate Jon!! LOL. Ok you can. Maybe a little.

But this is Jon Snow, people - the honourable Jon Snow !! What is the first thought that's going to come to his mind when she discovers that Sansa has had his child? But he is hot headed, like he is in the show. He wants to be a part of his daughter's life, ASAP. He also doesn't want to be a part time dad. And then of course there is the feeling of being cheated off four years from her life. The undercurrent of that anger is obviously going to be there.

Sansa would've never agreed to come to Winterfell with him if she'd known that this was his intention all along. So, desperate times called for desperate measures. And there's so much that has yet to come to light. So hate him now if you want. But I promise you'll love him in the end.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hi all, I know my updates are far slower now, but certain things are really keeping me busy at the moment. Anyway, I wrote this chapter initially in a 45 minute break that life was graceful enough to grant me. Needless to say, that Melissa was not very happy with the outcome - a fact I very well knew. So I ruminated over what I had written over the next two weeks and added bits and pieces here and there and here's the result of it. Thanks Mel, for forcing me to be the better version of myself.

I have to mention here that I when I imagine Sansa's rage, I always think about a controlled fury, tightly reigned in, waiting for the right opportunity to strike back. It's always that calm in her voice when Joffrey tells her about giving her his brother's head and she respond's back- "Or he'll give me yours." Sansa Stark never loses her shit even when she is seething and this is part of her charm - at least in my head.

Thanks Becky for being more worried about every single word I've written than me. I'm so careless when I write so I'm glad that nothing escapes your watchful eyes.

Neha - Never want to change who you are,
I swear by the sun, the moon and the stars.
Even though we squabble, argue and fight,
Know that in the darkness, you're my beacon of light!! - LOL, You know what this means...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And I'd like you to know, that I won't have it any other way.”

The words that he'd wanted to say right from the very first day he'd seen her at the bookstore, from the very first moment he'd known that he had had a daughter by her - words he was withholding from pouring out of his system - had come tumbling of his mouth before he could stop and think about them. The air in the room became so thick that Jon found breathing - a herculean task. His insides were quivering, heart pounding, and pulse racing as he slowly saw Sansa’s eyes turn into blue fire.

There was absolute, pin drop silence in the room. Jon didn’t dare look at Ned. His eyes were fixed on Sansa – her and only her. He waited… for the blow to come.

Very gracefully, Sansa turned to face her father. “Daddy,” she said; her voice so cold, it could have come from beyond the great wall of ice. “If I ever commit murder, will you get me off its charge?”

“Of course, darling,” said Ned, his voice perfectly calm, though Jon wondered if he’d imagined the slight quiver of amusement in his voice.

“Good,” said Sansa, with a nod. “Now, Could I borrow your favourite shotgun ICE for a moment please?” She turned towards Jon, her nostrils flaring. “Because I’d like you to know that I plan to
“BLOW YOUR BLOODY HEAD OFF!” She perfectly mimicked Jon’s tone and his earlier statement.

“Sansa…” Jon began, but Sansa flew off her seat, raising a warning finger at him. Her other hand curled tightly around the pen she had picked up from her father’s desk in her rage, holding it like a weapon she was about to use. She probably imagined using against him in her head too. But Jon knew that she would never actually do it. Nothing drove Sansa Stark over the edge. That was due to her never-failing inner strength, which was the source of her power. Yet, this was Sansa at her angriest; he understood that. Jon had expected nothing less from her.

“NO. DO NOT TALK!” she commanded, and when Sansa commanded - everyone listened. Jon was no exception.

Her face grew red with suppressed fury, animosity exuding from her like acid – burning, slicing, yet potent. It was a wonder that she was not shaking with it. As though sensing that she was about to snap, Sansa took a deep breath trying to calm down. “Listen to me Jon and listen to me carefully. I came here to support you, so you wouldn’t have to face the music by yourself. I can see the honesty of your intent with Lya. You took a magnanimous step for her sake to come down here and face your demons so that you could be a part of her life, and I appreciate that, Jon. BUT…”

Right! Here comes the BUT, thought Jon, as he looked towards Ned who simply cocked an eyebrow at him as if to say, ‘What did I used to say? Everything before the word but is horseshit…’

Thank you, Ned for the reminder, thought Jon miserably.

“If you think you can tell me even for one moment what I should do with my life…” Sansa now looked like a she-wolf ready to lunge at his throat. “You can jolly well go take a hike! How dare you ORDER me to marry you, HOW DARE YOU?” Her anger came unleashed, like the angry waves of the ocean during a thunderstorm, yet her voice didn’t quiver, not even a bit, nor did her voice turn into a screech. And in spite of this, he felt the full heat of the wildfire roaring in her eyes, ready to ignite anything it came in contact with. Sansa Stark didn’t have to scream to express her anger. All she had to do was look.

“You may have all the power and the wealth in the world, Jon Snow. You may be used to people falling in line with your wishes. You are probably used to getting your way all the time. But let me remind you…”

Sansa was a tall woman, and she stood to her full height, straightening her spine and holding her head high – the Stark in her completely overpowering the Tully.

“That no one… and I mean no one,” she cast a sideward glance at Ned, who looked away immediately and then her eyes were back on Jon, “… can make me do what I don’t want to. I have lived by my terms all my life, paid for the mistakes I’ve made, reaped the rewards for my hard work. I’ve never dated anyone for the simple reason that I didn’t want to have to answer to anyone but myself. If you think you’re any different, I would have you know, that you’re wrong. You may be a prince in your world, Jon Snow… but I am Sansa Stark of Winterfell. This is my home, and you can’t frighten me or order me around.”

Her words resounded in the silence that prevailed in the aftermath of her outburst. Against his better judgement, Jon smiled at Sansa, which obviously seemed to infuriate her even more, if that was even possible. In spite of her wrath, in spite of the situation they were in, Jon felt himself detach from his body and just stare at her.

Gods, but she looked as beautiful as a fire goddess, her red hair falling across her flaming face, doing
all sorts of things to his otherwise quick thinking.

“First of all… I didn’t order you to marry me. Hell, I didn’t even ask you to marry me.” Jon let go of
the breath he was holding. He had planned this poorly. There was no denying that. But it had always
been his intention to take her by surprise. If he had presented her with this option back in King’s
Landing, she would’ve never made this trip with him to Winterfell, of that, he was sure. He had a
strategy in place – cause shock, reason with her calmly and make her see the logic. But all of that had
come out in a jumbled manner.

Besides, he had planned to tell her after his talk with Ned, after he had asked Ned for her hand, the
proper way. But she’d insisted that she’d come with him, and he found himself increasingly
incapable of telling her a ‘No’. It had definitely not been a good decision.

Sansa frowned at him, as if he was speaking in Latin and she didn’t understand a word of it. “You
just said…”

“I know what I said” Jon didn’t let her finish. “I said I intended on marrying you the second I
realised Lya was mine and that I won’t have it any other way. Yes, it’s true.” Now Jon too stood up
to his full height facing Sansa’s heated expression and they almost breathed into each other’s faces.
“I told you and your father of my intentions, Sansa. I am coming clean. It’s the first thought that
came to my head, and I’m telling you that now. But I won’t force you to marry me. I am surprised
you didn’t expect this from me all along.”

When Jon saw Sansa’s eyes lower for a second, he knew she had entertained this idea. She had
thought that he was going to ask her to marry him. Did he have the courage to say what he really
wanted to say? Perhaps, now was not the right time. So he chose his next words as carefully as he
could, as honestly as he could. “I WANT Lya, full time. How can you not understand this, Sansa? I
will never be okay with any other arrangement where I just get to see a bit of her, once in a while.
And more importantly…”

Jon gulped. He looked away, thrusting his hands into his pockets, as deep-rooted pain from his
childhood resurfaced affecting him in the worst possible way. “I will not let my daughter go through
what I went through. She’s too young to realise it now. But…Her parents will be married. She will
never ever be called a …”

Bastard… the word stopped in his mouth, but it was so obvious that the cursed word echoed from
the grey walls of Ned Stark’s office. Boiling rage coursed through Jon’s veins as he thought about it.
It was the one thing, for which he could never forgive Sansa. She’d known how strongly he’d felt
about being a bastard. He’d sworn a solemn oath to himself that he’d never father a bastard. He’d
even left her a note on the last night they spent together…

Jon shook his head, disgusted. It was no use thinking about the past, he knew. Yet, as he looked
upon Sansa’s beautiful countenance and the fury written on her features, he couldn’t help but feel
anger at being punished, cheated in the most horrible manner – by letting his daughter be the one
thing he’d sworn no child of his would ever be. It’s not like he didn’t respect single parents all over
the world doing their best for the children they’ve borne. It was just something his personal
experience wouldn’t allow him to do.

Jon took a deep breath and looked away in order to keep his temper under control. There were many
questions he wanted to ask her but now was not the time. He first had to get her to agree to marry
him and then tell Lyanna that he was her father. These two items were the top priority on his agenda
and he’d do everything in his power to make it happen. He’d promised himself this much when he’d
set out on this journey back home.
“Oh my God, Jon,” Sansa’s hoarse whisper reached his ears, but he didn’t look at her. “Of all the things…”

He heard Sansa clear her throat and he braced himself to see the hurt in her eyes as he turned to look at her. He saw worse.

*Pity*

“Listen to me very carefully, Jon,” said Sansa, holding her chin very high, but he could see the red, around her blue eyes. She was holding back tears and it swiftly attacked the monster banging against his ribcage.

“I’m *not* marrying you. Get that into your thick skull and quickly at that, before my brother comes back and smashes it to smithereens.” Without another word, Sansa dashed out of the room, and Jon simply watched her go. He made no move to follow her. She needed time for the initial shock to wear off. If Sansa thought he was going to drop this or that Robb’s threat was going to make any difference, she didn’t know the first thing about him.

“Very well done, Jon,”

Jon turned around to look at Ned, momentarily snatched away from his thoughts of Sansa, who was shaking his head, his breath coming out in a huff. “Such a nice way to ask a woman to marry you. If I didn’t know you better, I would’ve either laughed or killed you myself. Why don’t you just tell her what you really want to tell her?”

Jon frowned at the man whom he’d once loved like a father. “You don’t know me better. You don’t know me at all!” *What do you know about the way I feel about her?* He wanted to scream.

“Right, it seems we are back to that then.” Ned crossed his arms and leaned behind in his chair, regarding Jon with his deep brown intelligent eyes. “You may think the worst about me, Jon, and perhaps you are right in doing so. I deserve your hatred. However…” Ned paused, a sad smile appearing on his face. “I never intentionally wanted to harm you, son. I did what I had to do. What I thought was right.”

“Yes, of course.” Jon resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “Throwing me out of Winterfell, distancing me from your children, the people I loved the most in my life, my only family, was the right thing to do?” Jon held his hand up before Ned could present a counter to this. “Look, Ned, this is not why I came here. Whatever happened is in the past and what I really want is *a future*- a future in which *Lya* is known as my daughter; a future in which Sansa is my wife.”

Ned considered Jon and his words for a long time. With a slight flick of his head, he leaned forward and placed his arms on the desk, looking intently at Jon. “*If* my daughter agrees to marry you, you have my blessing Jon. But there’s something about Sansa that I want you to know.”

Jon felt the air sucked out of his lungs at the intensity with which Ned was looking at him. This was going to be something important, he knew it.

Ned cleared his throat. “It’s not my place to discuss about what happened in the past. That’s between the two of you. But what I want you to know is something else altogether. For generations, House Stark has ruled the north. We were monarchs before - serving the people in that capacity; we are public servants now still serving the people of the north. My great grandfather William Stark was the last king in the north. After him, that title remained in name only after the Republic of Westeros was formed. Yet, my grand-father Edwyle Stark rose to power as the new Mayor of Winterfell, the capital city of the north, my father Rickard Stark after him and me after my father.”
Ned smiled in the midst of his monologue and Jon couldn’t help but wonder where Ned was going with all this. “All my life, I thought my son would follow my footsteps. He was after all the eldest Stark child and I devoted myself to grooming him to take up the mantle after me and as a result I was blind to a truth that had been staring at me all this while.”

Ned looked down and then back up at Jon. “Robb was never suited to this role. He is great with strategy and business and numbers and figures, and there’s absolutely no doubt that he’s filled my coffers with a lot of wealth. But… it was not Robb who campaigned relentlessly with me during elections? It was not Robb who never crossed a single line I had drawn?” Ned let out a sad chuckle and looked deeply into Jon’s eyes.

“Who did people turn to with their problems? Who is determined to always do the right thing? Who can use diplomacy and never lose her cool even in the face of adversity? Who charmed the house staff, the people of Winterfell – anyone who met her with a single smile or a single good deed?”

“Sansa…” the whisper escaped his mouth, just as the shock at what Ned had just said and the truth about what he said invaded his senses.

“Yes, Sansa,” said Ned, assertively. “She’s the one people turn to when they have problems. She’s the one who holds her cool in every single situation that is thrown at her. She’s like a phoenix that can rise back up from the ashes, and re-invent herself every time she’s been burnt. She can so easily put others before her, she can forgive easily, and she can meet every challenge - head on. She has the diplomacy of her mother and the Stark sense of duty and honour.”

There was something in the moment that took Jon’s breath away. Ned didn’t look like the egotistic man who’d once told him to leave Winterfell. He looked like a man who’s been bearing the burden of too many things for so very long in his life. He saw the only man he’d ever thought of as a father look at him, with a challenge in his eyes.

“If anyone deserves to sit on this chair, after me, it is my daughter, Sansa Stark…”

Jon gulped, understanding fully well, that Ned was absolutely right. There was no better person to take up the Stark mantle than Sansa.

“And you, Jon.”

For a moment, time stood still. Jon blinked, once and then again. His whole life flashed before his eyes in that one moment. All the love he has received from this man. All the precious time that had slipped away from his hands like worthless pennies because of this man. The only family he’s ever got – because of this man. The feeling of being friendless and haunted – because of this man. NOW, after all this time, he had the audacity to tell him THIS. Then perhaps, Jon thought Ned was definitely pulling a fast one on him. There was no way in hell, he’d said that. His ears were definitely betraying him.

“I beg your pardon.”

Ned simply looked at him, as though he’d planned to tell this to Jon all along. Like he was waiting for this moment for quite a long time just like Jon had to drop the bomb on Sansa. Was he extracting some sort of revenge for the sake of his daughter? Perhaps, that was it, thought Jon, unable to snatch his mind from the frenzy that his brain had launched into, upon hearing Ned’s words. He could scarcely breathe. Jon felt someone had sucker-punched him in the gut. Did Ned have the patent on how to do that to a man every time? The world around him was spinning, and he had to hold on to the desk to keep his focus and his mind steady. Had Ned Stark just told him that he deserved to be sitting in his place, as the bloody ruler of the bloody north? No. It was impossible. The last time he
was in this room, the world had been snatched from under his feet. Now, the weight of a hundred worlds was thrust upon him – too much for him to bear or even understand.

A rough smile erupted on Ned’s visage and Jon looked at him absolutely flummoxed, his mouth opening and closing like a fish. “Perhaps, I see more of myself in you than I see in any of my children. I may not have fathered you Jon, but I might as well have. You are my replica in thought, word and deed – except you are smarter, more giving and more willing to compromise for the greater good.” Ned rubbed his eyes with his fingers like he was keeping a headache at bay. “I know you may think I am senile, simply dropping these things on you without a care in this world. But there may very soon come a time, when you will need to know this, so you will know what to do then.”

Jon had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach which went from there to the crypts of Winterfell far below when Ned said this to him. A sense of foreboding like never before, attacked his very being. “Ned, you are speaking in riddles once again, and I don’t think I am suited to… er… to be in your place. I don’t even want to be. I am happy where I am as I am. Sansa on the other hand, I understand and agree with everything you’ve said.”

“Hmmmm…” Ned drummed his fingers on his desk. “At least the two of you agree on something. Sansa, though is most capable of being in this position, wants little to do with it. All she wants is… love. Her daughter’s, her friends’, her family’s…” Ned smiled looking away and once again Jon didn’t know how to react.

Not everybody's added Jon silently in his head. She doesn’t want mine.

“It’s probably why she’s so suited to the role too for if she’s ever put in this position by the people of the north, it will be because they love her and not ever because they fear her.” Ned met Jon’s eyes once again, and Jon could see the love a father had for a daughter and how much he believed in what he was saying. And Jon couldn’t disagree.

Ned cleared his throat, his eyes getting an almost beseeching quality. Like there was something he wanted to say, yet could not. “I wanted you to know this, before you pursue her, Jon. The future is unknown and unfathomable. Everything can change with a single stroke of time. But if you marry my daughter, I want you to promise me that you’ll always keep her safe, and you will do everything in your power to ensure that House Stark remains standing - no matter what.”

Ned gulped and Jon’s heart felt constricted as he looked into the misty eyes of the older man. The whole room around him suddenly felt potent with emotion, as Ned leaned forward with absolute intent in his eyes. “I know I am the same man who asked you to have nothing to do with House Stark and I am the same man telling you to protect House Stark at all costs, because I know you’re the only one who will be in a position to do it. Someday, you may find it in your heart to forgive me for what I’ve done. But for now, if you intend to marry my daughter, I want your word that you’ll do what I ask of you.”

The moment was so emotionally charged, Jon didn’t know how to react or respond. For a single second, Jon forgot the hurt and pain Ned had caused him and remembered the innumerable good the man had done for him, for the first time in five long years. He was also willingly giving him permission to marry his daughter. A feeling very close to elation but not quite spread through him, which probably had to do a lot with the validation … validation he’d never known he’d craved for from this man… and Ned had given him that at a time and place when he’d probably expected to be killed. What the hell was happening to his life?

Almost automatically, Jon leaned forward – the inner Jon breaking out of the new exterior he’d donned on for the last five years. The man, who was raised and tutored by Ned Stark, spoke now.
“I give you my word,” Jon repeated, slowly, making sure that every single word reached Ned’s ears and so did his absolute intent of meaning to live by his word.

“If Sansa agrees to marry me, I will do everything… everything in my power to protect her and Lya, now and always. Every hurt, every trouble, every calamity, every demon, every fiend, every stroke of bad luck will have to pass through me before it even touches them. And I promise you this Ned, House Stark will stand its ground for as long as I breathe.”

A red leaf of the heart tree that was placed on top of a box near the windowsill, flew by the force of the wind gushing in from the window and fell in the space between Ned and Jon. Both set of eyes went to the leaf now lying between them, almost serving as the witness to a sacred oath that had occurred between the two men or was it a blessing from the old gods for this new bond that was proposed to being forged – a union of two souls, a vow of honour and a promise of protection.

Jon picked up the leaf before Ned could. “I’d like to keep this.” He said, knowing very well that Ned had a box in which lay various leaves of the heart tree that had made their way into the office of the patriarch of the Stark clan.

“It’s yours from this moment.” Ned’s deep voice echoed all around Jon.

Right, now we move on to the difficult part, thought Jon as he got up pocketing the leaf of the heart tree.

“I better get going, Ned.” Jon was unable to conjure anything else, to diffuse this strange emotional tension surrounding them. There were so many questions he wanted to ask Ned, like for instance, why the bloody hell would house Stark need protection? And what the fuck could Jon do that Ned couldn’t? But he knew that in all probability that his questions would be met with the infamous stoic silence. If Ned had wanted him to know, he’d have told him. He’d already learnt it the hard way. Besides, there were more important things. “I have to talk to Sansa.”

“She could be anywhere,” Ned replied, frown lined appearing on his forehead. “If you want I could…”

“There’s no need for that.” Jon smiled at Ned waving goodbye, his heart leading the way, as his feet turned towards the exit. “I know exactly where she is.”

Meanwhile @White Harbour

The soft wind blew her silvery locks away from her face, as their ship reached the port of White Harbour. Daenerys looked at the dwarf standing beside her, looking at his surroundings – a frown marring his scarred face. There was a certain tension in the air, like static. The grey sky and the dull atmosphere put her at unease instantly. Did the sun never come out in the north?

“I did warn you that it’s a bit dull and dreary in the north.” Tyrion’s voice reached her ears, his eyes focussed on their ship being docked at the harbour.

She cast him a crisp look. “And since I am not here for a vacation, it doesn’t matter.” The dwarf simply nodded in understanding. “How long before we reach Winterfell?” She asked him, feeling restless already.
This caused Tyrion to turn around and look at her. “Why so restive, my lady? To get to the truth, you need to approach with caution. One wrong step and you will get further away from the truth than you are now.”

“Wisdom bountiful!” Dany scoffed, stepping down onto the harbour, detesting the cold that encompassed her. “Didn’t take you to be a philosopher. I hope you understand the amount of risk I am taking in believing your word which most others would’ve dismissed as tales of a drunk. If you must know, I am not restive, I am angry.”

Beside her, she heard Tyrion laugh. “That’s the fire in your blood doing the talking, Daenerys Targaryen. Your ancestors were dragon riders after all.” He paused, giving her a cautious look. “Known for their reign of fire and blood.”

Daenerys raised her chin and looked ahead, as she moved forward. “They did what they thought was necessary, in the times that they lived. They were dragon riders, magical people, different from the ordinary folk that inhabited Westeros. It’s not like the other Kings and Queens in Westeros didn’t bring havoc upon their people or didn’t cause enough bloodbaths, your ancestors included.”

“Touché!” acknowledged Tyrion, jogging slightly to catch up to her “Both our ancestors are guilty of a lot of things. Perhaps all houses, except… except for House Stark.”

“Right! You mean the deeply honourable, duty-bound, and honest to a fault Starks.” Daenerys stared back at a few passers-by who were giving her and Tyrion queer looks. “I’ve heard all about them and their uptight… sorry uprightness from Viserys. He doesn’t like them very much.”

Tyrion remained silent for a while as they got into a waiting car. Dany’s secretary Missandei and her security team headed by Sir Jorah Mormant got into the car behind them. “I don’t like them very much either,” said Tyrion in a voice so soft, Dany looked around at him to confirm if he’d spoken at all. He gave her a sad smile. “They remind me of what I could’ve been, instead of what I’ve become and a man doesn’t like such reminders now, does he? That is the truth about the Starks, at least, Ned Stark. This country doesn’t deserve a man like him. Sooner or later, he will pay the price, for being a beacon of hope and courage in a world filled with sharks. No man has withstood and fought the onslaught of corruption and treachery like he has. And as the forces of these evils increase, he is bound to fall. For as long as he stands in the north, there is no place for the seven deadly sins there except for seven horrible hells.”

Daenerys assimilated all the information from Tyrion and though he said just a minute ago that he didn’t like the Starks very much himself, it definitely appeared like he held Ned Stark in high regard. But she didn’t feel the same way. She’d never met the Starks and she would form her opinions about them, only by what she saw and felt and not by hearsay. “You know what his death record says, don’t you?” Dany lowered her voice, being very careful as to not take Rhaegar’s name. “That he drowned in a river in Riverrun. That he fell down into the river and bumped his head and drowned.”

“Of course, the record says that.” Tyrion rolled his eyes. Then suddenly he reached out to hold Dany’s hand and for a moment she flinched, taken aback by the streak of violence that reflected in his double coloured eyes. “I was there at the wall, that day. I trekked to the summit, it had been my life’s mission for a long time. I just wanted to stand on top of the wall and piss off the edge of the world. And I did. I kind of had to, considering the amount of alcohol I had consumed during my trek.” Tyrion let go of her hand and laughed as Dany made a disgusted face.

No wonder the man didn’t have friends. His best story was that about his mission to piss off the edge of the world. It was as crazy a story as the man himself. Dany wondered if Tyrion needed alcohol to be drunk. Somehow, he almost always seemed to be in that state.
Tyrion got a very thoughtful look in his eyes. “I sometimes wonder if the maker did grant me these … different set of eyes, so I could have better vision,” He tapped one of his eyes, the green one, with his index finger and then his temple, “Here and here, for isn’t it because of my eyes and what they saw that we’re here today?” He laughed again appearing slightly demented to Dany, but his eyes got a wise look and she watched the transformation in his face slowly – from that of a jester to that of a minister. He turned to look at her, his face dead serious now.

“I saw the man with the black hood push your brother from the edge of the world. I saw Rhaegar’s face as he fell into his death - his face still smiling yet his eyes widened in shock, a look of mingled fear and surprise on his handsome face, as I stood rooted to the spot, unable to move, unable to help the dying man. It was all over in a matter of seconds.”

Daenerys felt robbed of her breath as a dark cloud descended on Tyrion’s eyes.

“It’s a face that will haunt me for the rest of my life.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed reading this!!
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 13

There was only one place Sansa could go to, Jon descended the stairs of the Stark Mansion to head towards the destination his heart, as well as his mind, told him to go to. As Jon entered the sprawling gardens of Winterfell, the familiar sweet smell of roses mixed with the scent of the grass, filled his nostrils and Jon relaxed a little, the feeling of being at home calming him down, in spite of the tension that was coiled around his body. He stepped into the well-manicured lawns and for an instant looked towards the direction of the house, wondering if he should go and check on his daughter.

Jon sighed. Lya was in Catelyn’s good hands. There was nothing to worry about really, but if truth be told – he missed her. So very much! He missed looking upon her angelic visage, missed her naughty, bright smile, the excitement that shone in her brilliant blue eyes and even her thousand and one questions. Jon smiled just thinking about her, but he braced himself. Lya’s mother was more important at the moment.

“There is a right direction,” said a voice that startled Jon as he began turning around to make his way towards Sansa.

Jon almost did a double take as he took in the sight of the young man standing in front of him, at least a head taller than him. It was Bran Stark, and what surprised Jon the most was that he looked, normal.

Bran’s hair was not long like it used to be or his clothes careless like they used to be. This Bran had neatly cut hair, wore a pair of Khaki trousers, a navy blue collared T-shirt and a beige jacket. He also wore glasses and Jon rather stupidly kept gawking at him, lost for words.

Bran smiled at him. “My looks don’t match your expectations. I get it.” With that, he simply stepped forward, and pulled Jon into a hug, breaking him out of his trance.

“Sorry, Bran…” Jon said crushing Bran with his arms such that the younger man almost protested. Jon let go of him with a rough pat on his back. “It’s so good to see you, but I kind of expected you looking like a monk or a yogi or a seer, to be honest.”

Bran just shrugged his shoulders as they started walking together. “Well, nothing’s changed on the inside.” He winked at Jon. “I am what you call – ‘the modern day seer’”

Looking at Jon’s confused expression; he let out a short laugh. “A computer functions on binary codes, doesn’t it?”

Jon still didn’t understand where he was going with this, but he nodded with an affirmative.

Bran looked ahead of them, staring at the vast expanse of the gardens, “But for a user to make use of a computer, he would still need a user interface, won’t he? An interface which is easy to use, acceptable and user-friendly,” He looked at Jon with meaning, and suddenly Jon began to understand. “I am that user-friendly interface. If I spoke in binary no one would understand me or accept me. All the knowledge that I have acquired in the process of my self-discovery would be lost to the world. And in a world that is plagued with tyranny, discord, violence and hatred – it is essential that seers like me be available and accessible to simply nudge mankind in the right
direction.”

Ok, that was profound, thought Jon, but he didn’t say it. “So how are you accessible, if let’s say, a person wanted your help?”

Bran instantly held up his mobile and Jon squinted into it. He read the words www.thepathwaytobliss.com. “Just like every traveller, every cook, and every artist – I run a blog too, where you can interact with me. I also hold seminars and conferences around the world.”

“Wow, that’s great Bran!” said Jon, and he genuinely meant it. Bran had found his true calling, and he was extremely proud of what he had achieved. Jon smiled inwardly as he thought about Bran’s inclination to do good for the betterment of the world. He was not very different from the other Stark children after all.

“So, you asked Sansa to marry you?” Bran could’ve been discussing the weather, that’s how casual his tone sounded, but it made Jon stumble upon the cobbled stone path that they were walking on.

He turned around and looked at Bran incredulously, shocked beyond words that he could know such a thing. “You figured that out based on your cosmic knowledge?”

Bran started laughing. “No silly. I ran into Sansa, and she told me and I quote, ‘Tell that conceited, tyrannical, pig-head that I won’t marry him even if he were the last man on earth and do not come after me.’”

It shouldn’t have, but Sansa’s words did make Jon smile. “Yes, I kind of deserved that.”

“You did,” Bran cocked an eyebrow at Jon and then looked straight ahead, “But that doesn’t change the fact that you aren’t going to rest until you get her to agree. And that’s what makes all the difference.”

A very stoic silence now stretched between the two of them. That Bran had gauged so easily the extent of his determination to marry Sansa was not lost on him. He just didn’t know what to say.

Bran cleared his throat, pursing his lips as though he was debating the necessity of his next words. “You know Jon, not always do we get something in life when we want it. Most of the times, it’s for our own good, that things don’t happen like we want them to happen. It’s always better to get something – when we’re ready for it. Think of it like this, a tonne of gold will not make an ant rich, it will kill him. Still better, an ant may want to eat sugarcane, but the chances are that it will be crushed under the weight of that sugarcane if it tries to carry it. However, the same sugarcane after sometime, when transformed into a grain of sugar, is just right for the ant. It’s tasty, palatable and showers all its benefits on the ant.”

He gave a Jon a side-ward glance and continued to speak. “You and Sansa were always right for each other. It’s just that five years ago, the timing was never right. You were in denial of your feelings, proud, in search of your place in the world and your conscience was terribly burdened by my father’s generosity. Sansa, on the other hand, wanted too much too soon. She was young, idealistic, blinded by her feelings and perhaps frustrated by your constant rejection. Even if the two of you had gotten together in spite of the odds, at some point, these five years would’ve separated you.”

A barrage of emotions swarmed him as Jon heard Bran-the-wise-Stark effortlessly summarise all the problems that he and Sansa had faced in the past, and the thing about what he said was that there was a ring of truth to it. Even if they had gotten together five years back, their differences would have eventually torn them apart.
But then there was one thing that could’ve made all the difference. “Had I known about Lyanna when she was conceived, I would’ve married Sansa five years ago, without batting an eyelid, without giving any thought to either cause or consequence. Lya deserved to have the love of both her parents in her life, right from the beginning. Bran… I would’ve sold every last drop of my blood to keep them both happy, how could Sansa have not known that?”

“We always assume the worst about the people we care about the most, don’t we?” Bran crossed his hands behind his back. They had crossed from the gardens into the apple orchard which would bloom with the sweet fruit in the summer months, and Catelyn Stark would start her summer project of making all sorts of apple preserves, employing at least a hundred men and women in the process. Planning and organising ‘The festival of the wolves’ would occupy most of her time and schedule and for those five days – the entire of Winterfell would descend inside the Stark Lands to be awed, entertained and inspired by the munificence of House Stark. And Jon knew that for five years the festival had never taken place. Pyp had told him as much, though he had confessed that he never understood why. Jon knew why, now. The Starks had wanted to keep his daughter a secret, for the same people who enjoyed their generosity and loved them, would’ve immediately believed the worst about Sansa.

We always assume the worst about the people we care about, don’t we? Perhaps we did!

“What you choose to tell her, what she chooses to tell you,” Bran continued, his face had a faraway look, yet, in contrast, his eyes looked very much alive and in the moment. “…is between the two of you… Every story always has two versions; one must do well to remember that. So you may tell her a version of the truth, half-truth, untruth and she may do the same, yet the truth is only one, and it shall remain the same.” Now Jon was faced with the force of Bran’s full glare. It’s when he saw it, the power of understanding in this young man’s eyes. There was no point in lying, hiding, twisting anything with him. He’d simply just know.

“And what is the truth?” Jon dared to ask Bran. Did he want to know?

Bran smiled calmly, “The way you feel about her, Jon.” Jon instantly coloured, and Bran chuckled, “Don’t worry I’m not talking about the part where your intelligence is hijacked by your hormones. I’m talking about what you felt the first time you saw her, as a boy of eleven, when your heart was pure and innocent and untainted by worldly knowledge. Your soul recognised hers as its companion instantly, and that’s what you felt. I’m sure it’s a feeling you’ve never been able to forget.”

Never… He would always remember that moment...

Bran took a deep breath as they traversed the apple orchards and reached the edge of the Godswood. He stopped walking. So did Jon. “What I am trying to say is, eventually you and Sansa would’ve always found a way back to each other. The universe will always throw you back together because however clichéd it might sound – you both are just meant to be. That Lyanna was conceived on the day you decide to part ways for good, is just testimony to that truth. Only she can complete you Jon, and I’m sure by now you know this very well.”

Bran looked down at his feet and then back up at him. “You have to understand Jon, that you are not one person but three: The one you think you are; The one others think you are; The one you really are. The first two are illusions and hence temporary. Only the third one is the true version of you, and hence it is eternal. And your connection with Sansa is through that version of you. In a way, she’s your other half, and in a way, the two of you are no different from each other.”

The strangest thing about this conversation with Bran was that it felt very very real and Jon felt like perhaps, just perhaps he’d achieved momentary peace, and at that moment nothing affected him – not his inhibitions, not his insecurities, not his ego, not his emotions. He felt free of all things restrictive
like Bran was truly speaking, not to him but directly to his inner voice, his conscience – that part of him that probably always remained untainted, unbiased and unprejudiced. Like suddenly - He felt free.

“"I am not trying to tell you how to go about this, so don’t get me wrong.” Bran’s voice brought him back from his thoughts. “I love you, Jon, just as much as I love all my other siblings, probably more and it’s easy for me to tell you this because I know and understand that life is too short for hatred and there’s enough of that already. So all I can do is appeal to the person I know resides in you, that any decision that has its root in compassion and truth is the one that always triumphs, the one that always appeals to others, the one that will help you win her over.” He then gave a small chuckle and so did Jon, suppressing the urge to pull his wise, sage little brother into his arms. Bran gave him a very benevolent smile. “Be that person, Jon.”

“I’ll try, I promise,” said Jon, giving in to the urge of pulling Bran into a quick hug.

When Jon released him, Bran adjusted his spectacles. “I know it’s not going to be easy. In spite of hearing all this, it’s going to be very hard for you and Sansa to break the wall that still stands between the two of you.” He paused, once again giving Jon that very intense look of his. “But in the end, everything will be okay. You are Jon and Sansa …” Bran’s face changed, his intense look replaced with a mischievous almost naughty smile, “and I ship you.”

Both Jon and Bran broke into a laugh at Bran’s words. To hear a spiritual guru of kinds, use terminology and jargon of fandom was just hopelessly funny. Bran’s phone beeped and he pulled it out to check it. “That’s my cue,” He said, putting his phone back into his pocket. He then glanced into the godswood, the pathway that led to heart tree, where Jon knew he’d find what he was looking for – his Sansa.

“It’s your journey now,” said Bran taking a step backwards, his eyes still focussed on Jon. “Besides, I am your daughter’s favourite horsy, and the princess needs a ride. See you around.”

He started walking away, and Jon still kept staring at his retreating back. He remembered a younger Bran, lost in his own world of philosophy and self-discovery in one moment and then tearing at Rickon’s hair in the next. Apparently, all these years later, he was still the same. “Hey, Bran,”

Bran turned around and Jon quickly jogged up to him, “Say if someone wanted to be a part of this whole pathway to bliss thing that you’re doing, how do they go about it?”

There was a knowing look in Bran’s eyes as he gave Jon a lopsided smile, “Complicated answer is, if you needed my help, you could’ve called me five years back but you didn’t. You get only what you’re ready for, and that includes good counsel.” Then he simply shrugged. “Simple answer is, you register on my blog, attend one of my seminars or just send me a mail.”

As Bran was about to leave, Jon caught hold of his arm. “I know when I left five years ago, that I hurt you too. I’m sorry.”

“I never held you responsible for any of it, Jon.” Stated Bran as Jon let go of his arm. A cold breeze swivelled around them, and the sound of rustling leaves signalled that the sun was going down very soon. “And I also waited for this day to come. Go now, because you have quite a task ahead of you. Don’t ever forget that Sansa is as stubborn as my father and as determined as my mother.”

Jon let out a chuckle as he ran his fingers through his curly locks, securing them more firmly into his man bun. “Your words sound more like a warning than encouragement.”

“Perhaps, they are.”
With that Bran turned on his heel and took long steps in the opposite direction. And Jon turned towards his – the Godswood where the heart tree was; where he was sure Sansa would be. Jon walked towards the heart tree, admiring the round red sun that had now begun its descent. He could see the heart tree now, it’s many branches dancing in the wind, waving at him the blood-red leaves as though welcoming an old friend.

His heartbeats quickened. He felt a connection with the tree and the godswood – had always felt it and will probably always feel it. There was no denying that. The red setting sun now cast a pinkish hue in the clear blue sky – a perfectly matching backdrop for the red leaves of the heart tree, under which he spotted a girl hunched before a headstone – her fiery red hair matching or rather rivalling the red of the ball of fire in the sky. Jon stopped walking and just stared at the pretty picture Sansa made – against this tree of yore. He was pummelled back in time to the moment he had first set his eyes on her.

*Your soul recognised hers as its companion instantly, and that’s what you felt.*

Jon sighed and walked towards where she knelt, for he knew without having to look at the headstone that Sansa was kneeling beside Lady’s grave. He was sure she heard the rustling of leaves as he slowly came to stand behind her, but she did not budge. Nor did she speak. So Jon simply plonked himself down beside her. She didn’t look at him.

“Hello Lady,” Jon spoke to their dead friend. “Your best friend is very angry with me and perhaps rightfully so.” Jon saw Sansa’s lips move a little from the corner of his eye, but she clamped her mouth shut. “If Ghost were here, he would probably be very angry with me too.” Jon’s throat felt constricted as he spoke about his old pal. “He should’ve been buried here, Lady. Here - besides you. I’m so sorry… I’m sure it’s where he wanted to be when he died. I denied him his last wish and…” Jon felt choked up. This is not what he’d come here to say, and yet this guilt that he had suppressed for far too long came gushing out as he spoke to Lady. “I encased him in a silver coffin, but I’m pretty sure it was the mud of Winterfell that he longed for the most. My pride probably cost him more than it cost me.” Jon’s voice shivered as he spoke and Sansa turned to look at him, her eyes as misty as his.

“You’re right,” she said, with a slight quiver in her voice. “But Ghost cared for you the most, Jon. I’m sure he knew that you loved him. He was the only one who you couldn’t bear to be parted with, even when you left Winterfell.” Jon looked at her visage, bathed in reddish rays of the setting sun, her fiery anger forgotten at that moment. “How did he die?”

Jon swallowed thinking about the day ghost simply lay down on his lap and breathed his last, “Old age, his heart had become weak.” *Perhaps, I broke his heart, when I took him away from Winterfell* – a voice in his head added.

For a long moment, neither of them spoke, just listening to the sounds of nature that surrounded them, probably wondering how less-complicated life was when they had been children.

“Why have you come here, Jon?” Sansa asked him, and Jon turned to look at her.

“Why do you think?”

“Jon if this is about the whole marriage things then….” Sansa stood up dusting the dry leaves off her jeans and Jon followed suit, but he didn’t let her finish.

“Sansa, hold on. Will you allow me to explain…”

“Jon please!” Sansa literally wailed as she began turning away from him. “I’ve already made myself
amply clear in my father’s study….”

“I need you, Sansa.”

Sansa blinked once. Then again, Jon’s words completely halting her tirade.

Jon stepped towards her, and she took a step back. “It’s true. You and Lyanna are doing great without me. I’m not sure I’ll be a great value addition to this family. I know nothing about being a father, and I respect the fact that you’ve done such a brilliant job in bringing up our daughter. She’s an affectionate, loving, beautiful child – all thanks to you.” Jon took another step towards Sansa. This time she did not step back. “I know you don’t need me, but I need you. I need your help to become a good father. I want to give her the best childhood possible – like the one you had. The one in which you knew you had a father and a mother as a team, and they always had your back. If we married, we could give Lyanna that. I want us to be a family, her family. You can help us be one, Sansa.”

Jon saw the indecision in her eyes. “We can be a family, without getting married, Jon. It’s possible.”

“I know that, Sansa.” Jon stifled the urge to reach out and hold her hand. He didn’t want to scare her away. “But will it be the same as you and I living under one roof? Honestly, I don’t know the answer. It’s just that all my life, I promised myself that if I ever had children then I would give them a life that Ned and Cat gave you guys. They were always stronger together and together they were the sun around which all of us orbited. Can’t we give Lyanna that? Or is it that you think that I won’t be a good parent?”

“NO!” Sansa exclaimed, once more taking a step back. “That’s not it. Jon, I hate to admit it, but you are a good father. I’ve seen you with Lya, and I know you’re a natural. You love her dearly; I don’t deny it.” She hesitated a little chewing on her lower lip and an instant bolt of current shot through Jon’s body. He tried his level best to ignore the thought.

“Also, it’s difficult for me to say this too, but I know… that she needs you too. She needs her father, and it’s a fact I’ve been running away from, for quite some time now. Robb does whatever he can for her and believe me he tries very hard that she should never feel the need for a father, but he can’t always be around and she does miss that blank space in her life.” When her tormented blue eyes looked into his, Jon had to physically fight the urge of drawing her into his arms by thrusting his hands into the pockets of his trousers.

“But the point I am trying to make is, is marriage necessary?” Sansa turned away from him as darkness begun to envelop them. “Is it not enough that she knows that she has a father and a mother who love her very much? Given our history, is it not better that we do not complicate things for Lya, by getting married and then discovering that it will not work out after all?”

Perhaps he should make Bran talk to Sansa; a fleeting thought appeared in Jon’s mind. Your bother is pretty sure that we’re meant to be, he wanted to say, but he knew Sansa would probably run in the opposite direction if he whipped up such statements. He had to appeal to her logical thinking and the love she held for her child. It was the only way, she’d agree.

“Is that why you didn’t come to Essos to tell me that you were expecting my child?” He had not wanted to bring this up, but he so desperately wanted to know. “Because you thought things wouldn’t work out between us and then our child would suffer?”

Sansa didn’t answer Jon. She kept her back turned, and Jon couldn’t hold himself back anymore. He went behind her, held her arm and gently turned her around. He could see the shadow of a full moon rising in the dark blue sky in the periphery of his vision, and the wind suddenly felt much colder than
“I left you a note after that night, Sansa. You knew where to find me if you ever needed anything. *I’d made sure of that.* So, why dint you?” His grip on her tightened, and he saw a deep flush spreading across her skin. “You were willing to come with me to Essos, weren’t you? You told me that yourself. So what changed your mind? Why didn’t you come?”

Sansa started wriggling her arm away from his grasp. “Let go of me, Jon.” She was avoiding his eyes.

But Jon just pulled her closer to him, snaking an arm around her waist. “I would’ve married you immediately, Sansa. I would’ve gone down on my knees and begged your father to take you with me if I had to. I would’ve sold my soul to keep you and our baby safe and happy. How could you have ever doubted this?”

The hardest thing was an opportunity had been presented for them to have gotten together, to bridge the ocean of differences that stood as a barrier between them – Sansa’s pregnancy. Many would’ve said that Jon got Sansa pregnant because that was the only way he could’ve married Ned Stark’s daughter. He would’ve endured it all. But Sansa who was so hell-bent upon them to have a future together until that point did the exact opposite.

*Every story always has two versions; one must do well to remember that.*

Hot tears rolled down her eyes, and Jon released Sansa like she’d burnt him. He ran his palm over his eyes, trying to control his raging emotions. He was not here to blame Sansa; that was never his intention. So he took a deep breath to calm down. “Look, Sansa, I am not judging you. You probably did what you thought was best for you and Lya; I don’t doubt that. I can’t deny that I am angry with you for it. But I want you to understand that my reaction to knowing that you had my child was going to be the same five years ago as it is now. I would’ve wanted to marry you then just as I want to marry you now. Just at least consider this for Lya’s sake. And I promise you, I’ll do right by her and by you.”

Sansa’s dilemma was visible through her eyes. She shivered slightly and rubbed her arms, as the temperature dipped. Jon instantly got rid of his jacket and slung it over her shoulders. Sansa protested this act of chivalry, but Jon wasn’t going to listen to her. He may lose the marriage battle but he’d be damned if he let her suffer in the cold because she was too proud to accept his help. Sansa licked her lower lip, and suddenly Jon was hyper aware of this lack of distance between them. “Even if I, say, for example, did agree to this marriage of convenience that you’re suggesting…”

“Wait, What?!” Jon’s neck almost snapped considering the speed at which he brought his head up to look at her. “A marriage of what?”

Sansa squinted, apparently confused by the lack of his knowledge of the term. “A marriage of convenience is when two people unite for reasons…” She paused when Jon whipped out his phone and started frantically typing something on it. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Since I don’t like doing things by halves, I’d have you know that I am googling for the term.” As ridiculous as it sounded, Jon was really intrigued by what Sansa thought he was suggesting. He also temporarily ignored his rising temper as he opened Wikipedia’s page.

“Ah, here it is, a **marriage of convenience**, into brackets, plural **marriages of convenience**…” Sansa rolled her eyes which Jon ignored as he continued reading. “… is a marriage contracted for reasons other than that of relationship, family, or love. Instead, such a marriage is orchestrated for personal gain or some other sort of strategic purposes, such as political marriage.”
Jon couldn’t help the sarcasm that laced his words and his features as his eyes found hers from above his phone. “I think I must’ve repeated the word ‘family’ at least a zillion times until now; so no, that’s not us sweetheart.” He looked into his phone again, “Anyway moving on, in the cases when it represents a fraud it is called - a sham marriage.”

Jon clicked his phone shut and looked into Sansa’s eyes, exposing her to the full intensity of his hot glare. She looked back at him unsure, as his expression turned firm and absolutely intense. She was working up an explanation, Jon could see that. He was going to let her speak her mind before he exploded.

“What I er.. meant is…” Sansa now stuttered, her slender fingers tucking her fiery locks behind her ear, “I mean in the books I’ve read…”

“Oh!” Jon interrupted her, folding his arms across the chest. “Let me take a wild guess.” He squinted at the sky, scrunching his mouth while pretending to think very hard. “In your... er… romance novels… A marriage of convenience is when two people get married for some diabolical reason very conveniently concocted by the hideously chauvinistic hero a.k.a me in this case…” Jon unfolded his arms and walked towards Sansa, and she instinctively took a step backwards.

“That’s not what I meant…”

Jon kept walking, no prowling towards her now and she kept walking backwards. “Of course not, darling. You meant the part where the thick-headed hero, in his arrogance, quite stupidly suggests that she will be his wife in name only and nothing else.” Sansa’s back hit the trunk of the heart tree with a thud, and Jon placed one hand next to her face, folding the other behind his back. “Only for appearance’s sake, but inside their bedroom, they would continue to live as strangers? Is it not what you thought I was suggesting?”

Jon saw Sansa gulp; her lips parted as she looked at him with a dazed expression, unable to form words. The moonlight cast its glow on her radiant face and Jon realised what was happening here.

*His intelligence was being hijacked by his hormones. Damnit, Bran Stark!*

But if he were to be honest to himself, he was enjoying being captive to the spell she was now casting on him. He brought his other hand placed it near Sansa’s shoulder effectively trapping her between his arms. “Since I’ve just spoken to Bran-the-wise, THE COMPLICATED ANSWER is I am not the hero of your romance novels so am I foolishly going to suggest something I have no intention of keeping up? I think not. It’s neither logical nor practical.” He leaned towards her, the sweet scent of her skin drawing him in and Sansa drew in a ragged breath. “The simple answer, however, is NO, Sansa. A marriage of convenience could never, ever work between us.”

He saw some amount of defiance in her eyes. She was fighting with herself. “Why not?” her voice, husky and low yet she tried to make it sound assertive, argumentative even.

And that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Jon lost the war he’d been waging with himself from the time he’s seen her at the bookstore – his last vestige of control completely shattering in that moment. His palm threading through the nape of her, he pulled her to him, as a loud gasp escaped from her full mouth, undoing him completely.

“*Because of this…”* Jon growled, sounding like a ghost-wolf before he crushed her mouth to his.
Hello lovely people!!

Don't hate me for the way I ended this chapter, lol. Because it is to be continued in the next.

Also, sorry if the first half of this chapter sounds like it's a page from the book - the monk who sold his Ferrari, lol, but everything Bran says is a lesson I've actually learnt in my own life - the biggest one being - Life is too short for hatred, so love all you can cause; it's the most beautiful feeling in the world. So, on that note...

I love you, Melissa. You are a great friend, mother, wife, sister, daughter and human being. The warmth and positive energy that radiates from you is infectious and inspiring. I am truly lucky to have a wonderful person like you in my life. You not just make my writing but also me, better.

I love you, Becky. Every time I send you a file, it seems like you are more invested in making my story look better, than me. Such a selfless gesture and commitment from you always has me overwhelmed and I am deeply grateful. Thank you, for being who you are.

I love you, Neha. Sometimes, more than blood-relations, it's the ones we make along the way that shine through. I see the pride you have for my writing so clearly in your eyes and it means so much to me. You add so much love and luster in my life and you don't have to say you love me. I just know!!

And to all of my readers, I love you too. Take some time out. Tell your friends, your parents, your siblings, your neighbors, your relatives, homeless people, your pets, your bae - That you love them, cause and I repeat life is too short for hatred.

One hug, one kiss, one phone call, one text, one email doesn't take even five minutes - but if it spreads some much-needed love in the world, then I would say, they are five minutes WELL SPENT!!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Hi all!!

I know my updates are very slow right now but I really can't help it. I'm also losing my motivation to write and it's sometimes a task to simply type out that which is already in my brain. But anyway here's an update. Since Snowed and Wolfish are the only two fanfics that I plan to write, at least I can promise you this that I'll finish both the stories.

Melissa - Thanks for sometimes holding the whip in order to get my ass moving. Also thank you so much for setting achievable goals for me and you know very well that this update is a result of that. Please please please continue to motivate me to write not just for the ffs but also my original fics.

Neha - Thanks for constantly reminding me that I need to write. I'm so glad you love all my stories so much.

Becky - I can't thank you enough for the time, patience and energy you invest in making my work look so much better and I am tickled to know that you edit your own editing again, just to be sure!!

Hope you enjoy this chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14

SHOCK. It was shock that was coursing through Sansa’s body, heating her blood as it pounded through her veins, melting away every trace of ice that had perhaps frozen her heart, the instant she felt his hot, hungry kiss. Sansa felt like time was passing like thousands of camera frames per second shown one at a time. In this slow-time loop, she felt herself respond to the fire he was igniting with a burning of her own. As their mouths waged a war against each other, Sansa felt his curly locks beneath her fingers, though how her hands had found their way to his dark hair, she had no damned clue.

Only Jon could ever make her feel this way – like she wasn’t in control of her feelings, her desire, her mind and her body. Jon pulled away for a heart-wrenching second and looked deeply into her eyes, his breathing so laboured that Sansa could feel his hot breath against her mouth. Sansa’s hands, now thoroughly entangled in his hair, almost protested this action. But she didn’t really have to because in the next instant, Jon’s gentle hands angled her head as his mouth dove back in to capture hers in another searing kiss, and Sansa wound her legs around his waist as he picked her up, pressing her more firmly against the weirwood tree and fully crushed to him.

“Sansa…” he let out a hoarse whisper as his mouth left hers to press hot kisses on her neck, her chin and her collarbone. “I lied to you, darling…” he said, as he kissed her temple, her hair. “This is what I’ve been craving to do the second I saw you.” Jon’s hands were now freely roaming over her body, and Sansa felt like she was on fire as she heard his words. No logic, no reasoning, no argument was going to deter her from stealing this one moment for herself. 

Sansa felt free yet bounded at the same
time. She was soaring in the skies, unafraid of the repercussions of her actions.

Jon took her mouth again as he cupped her ample backside and fused her to him. A gasp left Sansa’s mouth breaking the kiss as she felt the undeniable evidence of his desire pressed up against her. She looked into his eyes and saw how dark and stormy his irises had gotten — they almost appeared black. “I want you Sansa,” Jon said with finality, his gaze penetrating. “I want you in my life; I want you as my wife…” Jon’s hands were subconsciously bunching up the skirt she was wearing, exposing to his view her creamy, satiny thighs. “I want you in my home…” he said, as he kissed the column of her throat and Sansa whimpered, unable to hold herself back. “And I want you in my bed…” Jon’s husky whisper almost unheard, as it was Sansa who now pulled him to kiss her. Jon’s hands were now fully inside Sansa’s skirt, and Sansa felt dizzy as they inched towards her core. Jon’s tongue was causing waves of pleasure running up and down her body and his hips soon followed suit, as they pushed into hers again and again.

A moan, which sounded foreign to her, rumbled in her throat and in response she felt Jon’s guttural growl that reverberated in her chest. “J-Jon…” Sansa stuttered in her heightened desire, and Jon froze. He pulled back from his kiss, and his hands were now fully wedged in her hair as he pulled her face closer to his. He placed a soft, gentle kiss on her lips. “This could work, Sansa. Please, I’m begging you to consider this. Marry me and make me the happiest man alive. Marry me and give me the family I’ve never had.”

Sansa knew her stolen moment was over. The haze that was evident on Jon’s face just seconds before had cleared. Sansa’s legs slid down his and he withdrew his hands from beneath her skirt, but his grip on her waist tightened which instinctively made Sansa look up at him. “I am not going to dishonour your father any more than I already have, by taking his daughter against a tree his family has worshipped for generations…” Jon kissed her soundly on her mouth and whispered against her ear “Even though every fibre in my being is demanding that it wants you… right now.”

He meant it; she could see it in his eyes, as Sansa slowly tried to disentangle herself from him, but he steadfastly held her in place. Jon was looking at her like she meant the world to him. Could it be possible that he wanted her not just because she was the mother of his daughter? He had just told her that if she said yes, he’d be the happiest man alive. And a tear had almost threatened to slip out of her eye when he had told her to give him a family he’s never had. She’d known how he’d felt while growing up. Always like an outsider looking in.

Sansa closed her eyes for a brief second. No man would ever love Lyanna as much as Jon did, of that she was sure. That he would break the mountains for his daughter, climb the skies and swim across the mighty ocean was a given because when Jon loved, he loved fiercely and she’d already seen that kind of love for Lya in his eyes. He was already a great father even though he didn’t know it yet, and Jon was loyal to the core. Even if she were to consider for a second that she would agree to marry him, she knew that even if he didn’t love her, he’d always be faithful to her. So if the father of her child was a kind, loyal, brave, strong and gentle man, just like the one her father had always promised that he would find for her, was this really such a bad idea?

When she opened her eyes, Jon cupped her cheek. “I am not good with words, Sansa. I’ve never been, and I’m sorry if I hurt your sentiments earlier today. But I am not going to apologise for what happened between us just now.” He pulled her closer to him. “And I’m not going to stop pursuing you until you walk down the aisle and marry me under this very tree.”

Sansa’s eyes shot up to his as she heard his fiery declaration. He wanted to marry her in the godswood? She felt tears prickle her eyes. But she blinked them away. After all these years, he’d remembered her childhood dream of marrying under the white tree with blood-red leaves. How long were her defences going to last against his continuous onslaught? Was she fighting a losing battle?
Was her own heart going to betray her?

Jon moved away from her as she looked around the darkness that surrounded her. “Sansa, you’ve not said a word until now, and it’s beginning to freak me out.”

“I’m tired, Jon,” Sansa said with a sigh. “I want to go home, and I want to hold our baby in my arms.” Sansa was feeling exhausted and emotionally drained. Her daughter’s dazzling smile was the only thing that could rejuvenate her.

Sansa turned her head up to see a broad smile spread across Jon’s face, and she instantly creased her brows. “What are you smiling about?”

Jon took a step towards her, his thumb caressing her cheekbone, “You said ‘our’ baby. Mine and yours. Ours. Of course I am smiling, love.”

Sansa flushed deeply as she realised what she had said. Suddenly she felt angry at Jon for almost shattering her defences so swiftly. She glared at him. “Stop plying me with endearments.”

“Get used to it, darling…” Sansa heard Jon chuckle. “We’re going to be married very soon,” Jon said with finality, but his tone was light-hearted and very much in contrast with his presumptuous statement.

Sansa couldn’t believe it! Jon was, if she wasn’t mistaken, flirting with her. Never before, in the history of them knowing each other, had Jon ever flirted with her. Most of their interactions had always been intense, angst-ridden and their hidden feelings came out as a forced declaration when they were backed into a corner. Sansa couldn’t help but stare at Jon as he threaded his fingers through hers and started walking in the direction of the Stark mansion. She looked at their joint palms and then at him closely. Jon actually looked carefree, as though, a heavy burden had been lifted off his chest and that he could finally breathe.

The corners of his mouth turned slightly, and Sansa watched in wonder the transformation his features went through. How many times had Jon smiled in the past? She could count it on her fingertips. He looked so handsome, right now. Jon dipped his head towards her, “It’s good to know that you like looking at me.” Sansa coloured and looked away when she suddenly realised that he’d caught her staring. They had already reached the gardens, and Jon swung her in his arms before they stepped on the cobbled path. “You’ll have to see this face every day and every night, love. It’s a good thing that you approve of it.” With that, he quickly kissed her once on her mouth and helped her get onto the cobbled path.

“Jon…” Sansa said, slightly annoyed at his obnoxious self-confidence. “I haven’t said a yes.”

“Oh! But you will.” He winked at her; a laugh etched on his face when she stopped walking altogether. Then he let out a sigh. “Ok fine. I’ll hold off on the endearments for now, but I’m tired of fighting Sansa. It’s all I’ve done since I’ve left home. I’ve been so lonely and lost. I don’t want to feel like that anymore.” Jon took a step closer and suddenly looked fidgety. He fetched into his jacket pocket and took out a box, and Sansa’s heart stopped beating altogether because it was no ordinary box. It was a square Cartier jewellery box, and she was damn sure about its contents. But instead of feeling any happiness, Sansa’s mind took her back to a memory that was buried in the debris of her past and suddenly she couldn’t think or even see clearly.

Jon suddenly looked uncomfortable. “I’ve been roaming with this in my pocket for more than a week now and obviously I didn’t tell you about it because you’d probably have flushed it down the toilet…” He was rambling unable to look at her. “I, uh, got my mother’s ring redesigned to ..er… anyway.” He awkwardly put the ring back inside his pocket as Sansa’s face got paler and paler.
“What I am trying to say is … I’d intended on doing this properly, but my emotions got the better of me, Sansa?” Jon stopped in mid-sentence as he suddenly seemed to take in her deathly pale face. He instantly took her into his arms. “I am sorry, darling. I’m such an imbecile. I just fuck things up, don’t I?”

He was now running his hands up and down on her back obviously under the misassumption that he was putting pressure on her by his actions and words. It was soothing for Sansa; his touch always was. But she couldn’t correct him, right now. No, She couldn’t tell him the real reason why her body was shaking. She couldn’t ask him without revealing too much. Or…could she?

“Jon…” Sansa broke from his embrace, as the thought began to take root. Even if she couldn’t resolve her confusion, at least she could get some clarity about what exactly was he offering? It was now or never. Sansa took a deep breath.

“I… er… I have to ask you something.”

“Anything…”

His immediate reply made her gulp as she slowly looked at him from under hooded lashes. “I… er… I’ve read about you and Ygritte in the magazines. About you dating her, you umm getting engaged to her…”

Jon’s face turned red first and then purple. But then he burst out laughing, shocking Sansa beyond reason. “Me and Ygritte, engaged? What are you talking about, love? Sam keeps me up to date with all the gossip columns, and I concede that I know that it’s been written time and again that we’re having an affair, but I cannot recall a single one which spoke of us being engaged? Even the idea is ludicrous. Besides, every woman I’ve met at a party or even danced with has been pegged as my girlfriend. I’m reclusive and hence more interesting to the press. They can’t figure me out, and so they write whatever they want to write about me.”

Sansa was staring at Jon as if she had seen a ghost. Either Jon was a very good actor, or he was really telling her the truth. Her mind went back to a specific encounter in her past, and suddenly her whole world started spinning. Was it possible that they had been misinformed? There was only one person who could clear her confusion, and it was Jon. But she couldn’t ask him a question without revealing what she had done, and she didn’t want to feel vulnerable before him.

“Sansa, what is it?” Jon was looking down at her with concern. “Tell me, love.”

“No… it’s nothing.” Sansa shrugged her shoulders and tried to move past Jon.

But Jon easily slid his arm around his waist and pinned her to him. “Even all those years ago I dated Ygritte only because I wanted you to hate me. I went out with her for all of three weeks Sansa. I felt like a jerk and broke up with her because I was cheating her. She was mad at me first, but then somehow we ended up becoming good friends, nothing more.” Sansa was avoiding his eyes, unable to look at him, worried her eyes would show him a true picture of her heart.

Jon held her chin between his thumb and forefinger forcing her to look at him, “I am damn serious about marrying you, Sansa. I know you probably hate me right now, but I mean it when I say that if you do, by the grace of the old gods and new, agree to marry me, I will uphold and honour my vows to you - every single one of them. I want to come home to you and Lyanna and any other children we have…”

Sansa looked at him incredulously. “Any other children? God!! One moment you’re serious and the next… URGH!” Sansa started walking away from him as he once again surprised her by laughing.
Despite her state of mind, Sansa couldn’t but help herself from enjoying this new side to Jon.

“What?!” he asked catching up with her, still smiling mischievously. “Don’t you think we should have a brood that can rival Ned and Cat’s?” He put his arm around her and drew her in, and she turned her face away to hide her smile. “I want at least five more.”

“Five more?!” Sansa rolled her eyes and nudged him with her elbow. “Do you know how much it hurts when a baby comes out of you, Jon Snow? I will have only three more because I love kids, and I’ve always wanted four. You can find another wife for the remaining two.”

Sansa realised the folly of her words too late. Jon had already pulled her to a stop and was looking at her so softly that her heart began to melt like butter. “Then I’ll settle for the just the three, sweetheart. You’ll find that I’m a very accommodating husband.”

They just stared at each other. What about Jon’s presence made her forget herself? It was her cursed heart. “Er… I didn’t mean it like that… I was not thinking straight and ...”

“See how easy it can be between us, darling?” Jon crossed his arms and looked at her gently. “You just need to stop fighting with yourself and let this happen. What’s the worst that could happen? We’ve spent more than half of our lives in each other’s presence. Could the other half, with each other, be so difficult?”

Sansa opened her mouth to say something, but before she could utter another word….

“Will you stop badgering her and come inside?” said a voice, and both Jon and Sansa whirled around to see Arya with Nymeria tucked on her hips, standing near the fountains that adorned the entrance of the Stark mansion. The second Sansa’s niece looked at her, she started flapping her hands wildly with excitement, her attention diverted from the flowing water which she was previously enjoying.

Sansa instantly reached for Ria and scooped her up in her arms. “My little wolf! How I’ve missed you? Haven’t you grown bigger since the last time I saw you, sugar lump?” She immediately looked at Arya. “Are you feeding her the sweet potato puree I told you to give her?”

Arya rolled her eyes faking exasperation. “I’m her mother, you know. But yes, I screwed it up the first time, and she spat it on my face, and then you sent those frozen batches with Robb because Mummy dearest was not around, and obviously she gobbled it up like a goblin.”

Sansa heard Jon laugh as he walked towards Arya and effortlessly drew her into his arms as they started walking towards the entrance of the Stark mansion. “Arya Stark, your sister had to send you frozen baby food? You still can’t cook for nuts, can you?”

“Hey…” said Arya, only half protesting. “It’s not really my fault if my mother and sister take all the pleasure in spoiling me. I destroy, she cleans up my mess, and even though she gives me an irritating lecture afterwards for which I often forgive her graciously, it’s always going to be like that between us.” Nymeria cooed in Sansa’s arms and Arya scrunched her nose up at Jon. “So what’s the status? Is she your would-be wife or never-can-be wife?”

“ARYA STARK” came Sansa’s outraged cry. She couldn’t believe her sister was discussing this so casually with Jon.

Jon, however, didn’t seem to share her reservations with Arya’s line of questioning. He smiled down at her, “I would put it in the maybe-wife category as of now. Don’t tell me you are running a bet with Gendry?”
Arya positively beamed at Jon. “See, you get me. But no Jon the stakes are higher this time. You see Bran and Rickon have joined in. So we are equally divided between team Sansa and team Jon.”

Sansa couldn’t believe her ears. Just this morning her younger sister had punched Jon in the face. Now she was running a bet? She was hands down the craziest Stark alive, and she glared at Jon who seemed to be encouraging her.

“Pray tell me who is in Team Jon,” he said, and Sansa rolled her eyes.

Arya looked warily at Sansa for a second, and Sansa almost bared her teeth at her. “Go ahead; you can very well say you are Team Jon.” She said reading rather incorrectly the guilty look that crossed her features.

“No, silly. No one’s betting on whether you and Jon are going to marry,” said Arya, with a shrug of her shoulders. “The bet is just about how soon.”

Jon looked at Sansa from over Arya’s head, a fire burning in his eyes and Sansa’s breathing became raspy, and she held on tightly to the babe in her arms. She didn’t dare look back at him.

“Well if you want insider information Arya Stark,” said Jon, to her younger sister. “I think you should bet on sooner than later. If it were up to me, I’d say tomorrow because you see…” He glanced at Sansa who was finding it difficult to keep drawing in breaths and breathing out before looking back at Arya. “I can’t wait for your sister to be in my life.”

For a moment nobody spoke. Even Arya looked just as shocked as her sister. She shook her head and smiled at Jon, “Wow! Jon Snow, indulging in PDA! I never thought I’d live to see this day,” she said, and Jon playfully smacked her on the head.

As they entered the house, Rickon who seemed to have miraculously appeared on the scene now ran towards Jon and enveloped him in a bear hug. Sansa almost rolled her eyes. Her baby brother didn’t even seem to notice her presence in the room as he clung to Jon in a very rare display of emotion, given his rebellious teenage status.

“He’s taller than me!” Jon exclaimed as he crushed Rickon in his arms - The little boy whom he had once upon a time carried on his shoulders.

“I missed you, Jon!” Rickon was blinking rapidly and something tugged at Sansa’s heart as she saw the scene around the salon of the Stark Mansion. Her mother looked lovingly at Jon and her father, though not smiling as much, looked at ease as he gazed at Jon. After the initial awkwardness had worn off, Jon seemed to settle right in with everybody as though he had never left Winterfell. He looked happy and content and everyone around her reflected the same emotion. As she handed over Ria to Gendry she noted with a little surprise and a huge amount of envy at how Lya promptly plonked herself on Jon’s lap, and he absent-mindedly ran his hand over her curls, kissing her hair when she showed him her drawing. The look on Lya’s face when Jon appreciated her was priceless. It’s like she had won the highest acclaim. Tears stung at the back of her eyes. Could she deny Lya of this love that she deserved so much? A love that had been withheld from her because of a decision Sansa took five years ago?

Deep down in her heart, Sansa knew she’d made a huge mistake by keeping Lya’s identity a secret from Jon. She was responsible in some way, for keeping father and daughter away from each other. Five years was enough time for anyone to find a second chance at love and even though Sansa told herself that between taking care of Lya and running her bookstore, she couldn’t really manage to find the time to date, she knew that the truth was that she did not really want to date anyone because there was ever only one man who consumed her heart so completely. And now here he was demanding,
begging, requesting, pleading and announcing that she should marry him and she was saying no? Perhaps Lya was at the root of his decision but the man had been carrying a ring in his pocket for a week for crying out loud and was such a dork about it too. Didn’t that say something about the fact that he cared about her too?

Sansa watched as Mrs. Hudson, Nymeria’s nanny took both Lya and Ria to the playroom. Lya was reluctant to leave Jon, and he looked equally reluctant to release her. An unbidden image of Jon tucking Lya in bed and kissing her goodnight appeared in her head, and Sansa couldn’t help but think about how much happiness Lya could get if she had access to both her parents at all times. Jon had Lya’s best interests at heart when he suggested marriage; she couldn’t deny it anymore. If Jon was willing to put so much at stake for the sake of his daughter, couldn’t she do the same for her baby who was dearer to her than life itself?

“Sansa, why are you staring into open space?” Bran’s voice came from behind her and Sansa jerked around to see her brother leaning against a pillar smiling at her. “I thought that was my job!”

Sansa chuckled. “Yes of course. I.. er .. was just preoccupied with something…”

“Whether or not to marry Jon is your dilemma.” Bran simply stated and Sansa gaped at him. Bran shrugged. “I don’t have to use my yogic powers to figure it out, Sansa. We all know what’s going on in your head.”

When Sansa looked away, Bran very lovingly put his arms around her. “Just look at the man Sansa. He’s come all the way back home knowing fully well that in all probability he was never going to be welcome here. Think about this Sans, if he only wanted to marry you for the sake of his daughter wouldn’t he have done that in King’s landing? Why did he come all the way to Winterfell to brave all odds in order to ask you to marry him?”

Sansa rolled her eyes leaning into the comfort of her younger brother’s arms. “Perhaps because he wanted to do the honourable thing of asking father’s permission before he asked me.”

She felt Bran’s rumble of laughter. “He will say exactly the same thing if you ask him. I, for one, honestly doubt that ‘asking permission for your hand’ is the only reason, but even if you think that is true, doesn’t that speak leaps and bounds about the kind of man he is? A man who wants your father’s blessing before he can ask you to marry him? Do they make them like that anymore? Have you ever considered that perhaps Jon wanted our entire family to be happy with your union and bury the hatchet so you guys could move on? That he wanted to perhaps right every wrong of the past, so you guys had a fulfilling life in the future? Does that sound like a man who would want to marry you just because you gave birth to his daughter?”

Sansa turned to look into the sage eyes of her brother who was smiling at her with understanding. “Human beings are very complex, sister dearest. Unfortunately, it is human tendency to hide one’s best qualities because the fear of loss, of rejection, is so amplified that one is always striving to protect one’s heart from destruction. Hence we are unable to see that, which is staring us in the face. Listen to your heart, and you’ll know what to do.” He kissed her temple and led her to the settee where a heated discussion was going on about something, but as soon as they saw Sansa, everyone fell quiet.

Her dad cleared his throat. “Um, Sansa, I was just telling Jon that he can take your and Arya’s old room unless… er…” Ned Stark looked visibly uncomfortable and he looked at his wife for support.

He didn’t need to as Catelyn Stark already took over. “What your daddy means to say is that if you kids want to share a room, we’re fine with that.”
Sansa shut her eyes. So typical of Arya! She’d probably just told her parents that Jon and Sansa were coming back to Winterfell with Lyanna and her mother and father had simply assumed that they had gotten together. She turned to cast a nasty look at her sister but was surprised to find that Arya looked pretty outraged herself.

“Since when are you fine with that?” Arya looked infuriated. “You didn’t let me and Gendry alone in the salon even for a second together, and now you folks are acting all modern and forward about them sharing a room?”

Sansa simply wished the earth would devour her whole to save her from this embarrassing conversation. She stole a glance at Jon who surprisingly looked unperturbed. He leaned forwards looking her father in the eye. “Thank you for being so understanding, but Sansa and I are not in a relationship.” He glanced at Sansa and then back at her father. “At least not yet… So there’s no need for that. I’ll take whichever rooms are available for me.”

Sansa noticed that her father visibly relaxed, and Sansa smiled to herself. Her father would always be an old-fashioned man. She then looked at Jon who gave her a slight wink, and if she were to be honest, she was surprised to notice the ease with which he handled the situation. It was like something had changed in him after their encounter in the godswood. Nothing seemed to affect him, diffuse him, and he looked serene, calm and relaxed.

“Jon, did you know that we have newly renovated our lawns?” Catelyn Stark smiled down at her almost foster son, and he smiled back unaware of exactly why her mother had brought up this topic.

Of course, Arya couldn’t keep her mouth shut. “She means you could pick it as a wedding venue.”

Catelyn glared at Arya who seemed unaffected. “I meant no such thing!” she said stubbornly as a flash of guilt crossed her face.

Arya rolled her eyes even though Gendry nudged her ribs. “Right and the renovated lawns would interest Jon because of course, you knew that he is actually a secret botanist who likes chasing butterflies, aren’t you, Jon?”

Jon smiled but didn’t say anything. Sansa had had enough of this drama for a day. She got up from the settee after hugging Bran who was sitting next to her. “It’s way past Lya’s bedtime. I need to get her to bed. Goodnight everyone.” She said turning towards the playroom. But before she could escape, Jon had scrambled to his feet. “Sansa,” he called out, and she stopped turning around as he walked towards her. “May I please accompany you when you tuck her in? I promised her I would.”

Sansa simply nodded, and he followed her quietly. When they reached the playroom Lyanna ran towards Sansa, and she enveloped her daughter in her arms. “Will you let Jon tuck me in?” she asked her mother with beseeching eyes, and she squealed when Sansa nodded. “But only after you’ve brushed your teeth, and changed into your pyjamas.”

Lyanna hopped from Sansa to Jon who effortlessly threw her in the air and then gathered her in his arms. Jon read out Lya’s favourite book – *The Room on the Broom*, as Lya changed into her night clothes and brushed her teeth. Then Jon put the book down and carried Lya to her bed, and he tucked her in properly. He pressed a hundred kisses on her forehead before wishing her goodnight. Just as he was about to leave Lyanna called out to him in a small voice. “Jon, is my daddy just like you?”

Jon was shocked into silence as a flurry of emotions was visible on his face. He held on to the edge of his daughter’s bed, clenching it so hard that his knuckles turned white. He shut his eyes and bit his tongue, and Sansa could see the muscle moving in his jaw. Sansa didn’t need to be told that Jon was
literally holding himself back from telling Lya the truth. He probably wanted to scream, ‘Your daddy
is not like me… he is me!’ but he couldn’t.

Lya reached out for his hand and held it as Jon knelt down next to her once again. “I love you, Jon.”
said her tiny little girl, and at that moment, time stopped. Sansa, for the first time in her life, saw Jon’s
eyes shimmering with unshed tears. Everything in her broke in that one moment. Jon pressed a gentle
loving kiss on his daughter’s dark curls, his voice shaking as he spoke. “I love you too, my princess.”

Jon refused to leave her side until she fell asleep with a content smile on her face, her small hand safe
in his large one. Jon slowly got up, and without looking at Sansa, left the room. Sansa followed him
out, worried about what his reaction was going to be like because he looked emotionally distraught.
But before she could reach out to him, he turned midway and gathered her in her arms just as they
were descending the steps back into the main salon. Sansa knew that all her family members had
their eyes trained on them. Jon was holding on to her like he would never let her go. There was
nothing passionate about this embrace unlike what transpired a couple of hours ago. “Thank you,
Sansa” Jon whispered into her hair. “Thank you for the miracle that Lya is.” He pulled away from
her and looked at her with reddened eyes, and Sansa instinctively reached out to grip his shoulder.
The deep emotion etched in his eyes caused a sudden tightening in her chest. “At this point I am
willing to take anything you give me. You may choose not to marry me Sansa, and though I’ll keep
trying to change your mind, I will eventually respect your decision but swear to me by the old gods
and new that you’ll never ever keep Lyanna away from me. I’ll die if I have to be away from her
even for a single day. She’s my only wealth, my only treasure. Promise me!!” he added fiercely.

Sansa had tears in her eyes as she nodded her assent. Sansa disentangled herself from Jon before she
began bawling in front of him. Jon was still standing with his back to her in the middle of the
staircase. As Sansa reached the bottom step, she had already reached a decision. “Jon Snow,” she
called out loudly, and everyone in the Salon turned to look at her, and Jon who looked more
composed now as he prowled towards her, “You don’t have to try very hard to change my mind.”
Jon stopped just a few steps above Sansa, his expression blank, his mouth slightly open. In spite of
her current state, she bestowed him with a dazzling smile. “You just have to go down on your knees
and ask me nicely and then perhaps; I’ll consider marrying you.”

Time seemed to have stopped, until…. 

“OVER MY DEAD BODY” thundered a voice from the entrance of the Stark Stark mansion and
everyone, including the ones in the Salon who had been witnessing this exchange between Jon and
Sansa, turned towards the source of that voice, knowing fully well, who that person was.

His damp auburn curls told everyone about the tempest that was now raging outside, but it was not
that tempest which they feared. It was the one that was now stirring within the Stark Mansion. The
muscles that rippled beneath his leather biker’s jacket gave him the appearance of a seasoned warrior.
But it was his eyes that drained the blood from Sansa’s face and made her feel dizzy as her heart
hammered erratically.

ROBB STARK’s icy blue eyes were fixed on Jon Snow’s fiery dark grey ones, his unmoving gaze
filled with biting-cold rage.

Sansa suddenly felt invisible as did everyone else in the room. Both Robb and Jon seemed to have
eyes only for each other. Where once there was emotion, now there was emptiness. Jon took two
steps down and came to stand in front of Sansa almost shielding her from Robb’s line of vision, and
instantly Robb clenched his fists. *So did Jon.*

Thunder rumbled in the stormy sky and flashes of lightning appeared to touch the very ground. The weather outside seemed to perfectly match the weather brewing inside this ancient home of an ancient clan. The air was thick with tension as the two men stared at each other; the rage in their eyes, becoming an almost palpable thing. In spite of the cold winds blowing in from the entrance and bringing in with them showers of rain, Sansa felt the heat in the room drying up her skin as pure dread coursed through her entire being. Her house suddenly, irrefutably turned into a battlefield.

The frozen fury emanating from Robb’s eyes almost radiated into the blazing inferno in Jon’s. Robb strode into the house, with sure steps, purposefully towards Jon, and Sansa could simply watch as every muscle in Jon’s body visibly tightened.

This was never going to end well, *for anyone.* For this was not going to be just Stark vs. Snow or Ice vs. Fire…

*This was going to be a clash of the titans.*

Chapter End Notes

I was waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaiting to write Robb. I can't believe I've finally come to that point.

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