In the Shadow of the Flames

by Phxreign

Summary

In the early months of World War II Sansa and Arya are sent to live with their Aunt Lysa in the Channel Islands to help her keep the Tully family farm. In the face of Nazi occupation they work to protect each other, their home and family, and eventually a downed pilot by the name of Jon Snow from forces (German commander Ramsay Bolton and collaborator Petyr Baelish) that are determined to possess and destroy them.
Chapter 1

Fall 1995 – The coast of Oregon

“Why can’t I at least ask her?” Catelyn whined.

“Because like I told you last night, Gran doesn’t talk about her life during the war. Did you ask your Uncle Rickon like I recommended?” Jon answered.

“Uncle Rickon was practically a baby then, he’s not going to have anything important to tell me. Seriously, just let me ask her, if she says no I’ll drop it, but an interview with Gran would guarantee me an A. No one else in school has access to a European civilian,” Catelyn countered.

“Catelyn I understand the desire, but I don’t want you upsetting her. I told you, she never discusses her time in the war, she won’t even talk with me about it.”

“It’s not fair! It’s for school! I don’t…..” Catelyn fell silent as her grandmother appeared in the doorway.

“Good morning Gran,” Catelyn said sheepishly.

“Good morning dear,” Sansa Stark responded and kissed the girl on the cheek. Catelyn could always make Sansa smile, looking at her was like looking at a younger version of herself, though her eyes were a shade darker blue and her hair a slightly darker auburn, closer to her dear older brother Robb’s shade.

“So what’s all the fuss about here? I heard raised voices on my way down,” Sansa asked as she made her way to the coffee maker.

“It was nothing,” Jon answered pulling down a cup and handing it to her. He gave Catelyn a look that told her not to argue.

“Actually Gran we were discussing my senior history project, I was hoping maybe you could help me?” Catelyn answered ignoring Jon’s warning.

“Perhaps, what’s it about?” Sansa asked her before Jon could stop her.

“It’s called “Life on the Home Front.” It’s about living history and first person accounts. I need to interview someone that lived during World War Two, tell their story. I was hoping I could interview you. I know you were a nurse towards the end of the war from the pictures in the attic, I thought you’d have a great perspective.”

Sansa turned deathly white and dropped the coffee cup she had been holding, it shattered on the floor. Jon shot Catelyn an angry look. Catelyn felt her face flush in shame, she never wanted to upset her grandmother like this.

“Gran!” Catelyn cried and reached for her grandmother, she helped her sit down in a chair by the table. Jon busied himself cleaning up the broken cup.

“I’m sorry Gran, I didn’t mean to upset you,” Catelyn said, softly brushing her hand over Sansa’s
grey and cooper hair.

“What were you doing in the attic? I didn’t give you permission to go up there and go through anything,” Sansa asked her, her tone accusatory, she never spoke to Catelyn in that tone.

“Research. I mean I knew you lived in England during the war, I thought there might be photos to go with my paper.”

“You shouldn’t have done that. Some things are just best left in the past,” Sansa said in a cold tone.

Catelyn stood back and swallowed, she had not expected a reaction like this. It made her all the more curious as to what her grandmother had been through, to ask about the other pictures she had seen up there, of an aunt and uncles she had never seen before and barely knew their names. She had so many questions. Had the war been that terrible on her grandmother?

Jon’s voice cut through her thoughts, “Catelyn you’re gonna be late for school.”

“What? Oh,” she responded and looked at the clock. Sansa’s back was now to her, she was staring out the window towards the coast. “Gran….”

“Have a good day at school dear,” Sansa responded in a cool clipped tone.

Catelyn looked at Jon who just pursed his lips and shook his head at her. “Thanks Gran,” she whispered and headed out of the kitchen.

A week later Sansa sat out on the back deck overlooking the beach as the sun set. A chill had settled over the house since Catelyn had asked her about the history project. Sansa was not truly mad at the girl, it was more so that she had let herself be sucked into the past. Her memories of those years had wormed their way back into her dreams and daily thoughts. A couple days after the exchange in the kitchen she had made her way up into the attic and had looked at the same pictures Catelyn had, she had cried most of that day and into the night, skipping dinner much to Jon’s alarm. She had waved him off telling him she was fine but she needed some time to sort through her emotions.

As she sat on the porch, she now felt the weight of the past settle around her neck, pulling her down, drowning her in regret and shame. When the war had ended she had sworn to herself that she would never speak of those years again, they were far too painful, but now looking at her hands and seeing how gnarled and wrinkled they had become over the years, she wondered if she had done the right thing. She realized now by keeping everything to herself she had been selfish and disrespectful to those that had died. She knew the reason that she had survived was because she was supposed to bear witness, but she had failed.

She looked at the photo she held in her hand. It was of her family, taken in the fall of 1939, right before Robb had enlisted in the RAF and before she and her sister, Arya, had been sent off to their Aunt Lysa in the Channel Islands the following spring. Robb and Arya had been so brave, she started to cry now thinking of how ashamed they would be of her for her weakness, for rarely speaking their names, for failing to keep their memories alive.

“Gran?” she heard Catelyn call as she stepped out onto the deck. She walked over and stood next to her and took in her tears. “Oh Gran what’s wrong?”

Catelyn noticed the photo Sansa was holding, the one she had seen in the attic. She knew a few faces in the photo, Sansa, Rickon, Robb, who Rickon had told her before had been been a pilot and had been shot down and killed during D Day, her great grandfather and the great grandmother she’d
been named after. She assumed the other two people in the photo were their brother and sister that had died long before she was born. Sansa never spoke of them and Uncle Rickon rarely did; he was so young then that he barely remembered anything about them.

“I’ve been thinking a lot about them, ever since you brought the war up,” Sansa told her as she continued to watch the sunset.

“Gran I hope you know how sorry I am about all that. I wish I had never asked,” Catelyn whispered.

“I’m not, maybe it’s time the story was told. It is our family history after all, you have a right to know. And honestly they deserve to have people know, their story should live on even after I’m gone. It wasn’t fair of me to keep it all to myself all these years. It isn’t just my story.”

“Gran, you don’t have too.”

“I’ve made up my mind sweetling, the story must be told. I think you should get Jon and your tape recorder. And have Jon make some coffee, it could be a long night.”

Catelyn nodded and went back inside calling for Jon. She really hoped she would not regret getting what she had asked for.

Chapter End Notes

OK so there are several things to note as you continue:

Going forward this story is set mainly during World War Two. I did some light research (IE I have a history degree, have read alot of WW2 setting novels over the years and can google) so while I tried to keep things within the realm of historical possibility I am by no means claiming any type of complete historical accuracy. There are certain events, regulations and information that I did draw on but there are things I may have fudged timelines on in order for it to fit to my story (IE something that was not available until 1942 might show up in 1940). With that said if there is anything that is just so wildly off that it destroys the story for you please let me know so I can make an attempt to correct it. Also while I am writing British characters I am not British, so I'll just apologize now for anything that is wrong with regards to that.

I have set most of the story on Oakenshield Island. This is a real island in the GOT world, however besides the name I did not really use anything else about the island. For this story the island is located in the English Channel and would be similar to Jersey or Guernsey. I choose to use an imaginary island though in order to not be tied completely to historical facts and events.

I choose not to use archive warnings in order to avoid spoilers but I did rate it E because there is going to be some rough stuff later on so if you are triggered by things normally found in the warnings please proceed with caution.

Lastly, while this is a Jonsa story, their part of the story picks up much later in the story, and while I love that part and think its worth the wait, this story is much more than just them. I tried to craft a story that is about all of the characters relationships to each other and what they go through. So the initial act of the story belongs mainly to Sansa and Arya, and really overall this is just as much their story as Sansa and Jon's.
So with all that said I hope you enjoy and thanks for reading!
Chapter 2

Winter 1939 - London

“Mother, please stop, you should be proud,” Robb sighed with exasperation.

“Proud? Darling I admire that you want to do your part, we all need to do our part now, but as your mother I cannot be thrilled you are headed off to war and in an airplane no less? Why the air force, why not a naval officer like your father?” Catelyn Stark responded ringing her hands.

“Oh Cat, don’t begrudge the boy his sense of adventure,” Ned Stark said in an attempt to soothe his wife.

“Hush Ned, I don’t care what either of you say, he is my first born son, I will never be able to celebrate anything that will be putting him in harm’s way.”

“Mother, it’s a war, I don’t think one branch of service is safer than the other, and honestly I am 21 years old, almost 22, father had already been to war by my age and he did just fine.”

“Spare me your arguments Robb, I told you, I know we all have to do our part now, but I will never jump for joy that you choose the RAF.”

“Just agree to disagree son,” Ned cautioned him as he opened his mouth to respond to his mother.

The other Stark children had remained quiet during their exchange, eating their dinners. The nightly discussions of Robb’s eventual military service had become a hot topic ever since war had been declared. Catelyn had long argued the war would be over quickly so there was no reason for Robb to run out and enlist, but it had become clear within the first month of the war that Robb had no intent to listen to his mother. She had been able to hold him back for a few months but now he had signed up with the Royal Air Force, explaining he thought he could make the biggest difference there. He had also argued that it was better to volunteer and choose your fate, as opposed to waiting for the eventual draft that would decide it for you, should the war drag on. Catelyn had been distraught, she had hoped if Robb had signed up he would go to officer’s school, he came from a well-off family after all; at least his entrance into combat would have met a lengthy delay. But Robb had not been interested, he wanted to be close to the action. He reminded his mother that if the war would in fact be over as quickly as she maintained then there was nothing to worry about, as he would barely be trained in time to actually run missions.

Bran looked at to his older brother and smiled, he worshipped him. Bran had told his parents the other night that he planned to follow Robb’s example, but at only ten he would have to wait quite a while. Sansa felt proud of her brother as well, when she turned eighteen in a couple of years she planned to volunteer for the war effort too, should, god forbid, the war still be going on then, though she hoped it won’t.

They finished dinner in relative silence after that. The knowledge that Robb was leaving in just a couple of weeks for training had cast a heavy pallor over the family. Arya had tried to tell Sansa it would be no different than when he had gone off to university, but they both knew deep down it was nothing like that.

The holidays were not as festive this year. New Year’s Eve especially was not the grand event it normal was around the Stark household, though whether it was exclusively because Robb was to depart for basic training only two days later or this would be their new temperament under the war,
The time had come, and the family had gone to the train station to see him off. As they walked in Sansa and Robb found themselves walking slightly ahead of the others and they had a moment to speak alone. “Well it’s up to you now sister, you are officially the eldest Stark child in the household, it’s your responsibility to hold everyone together if things should start to go sideways, to be the protector. The survival of the family is now on your shoulders,” Robb teased as they walked.

“Don’t talk like that, you are not passing the baton to me just yet. You’ll be back before we even have time to miss you, only then you’ll think you’ve seen the world and will order us all about,” she responded looking at him from the corner of her eye. Robb had been all bravado and confidence up until this moment.

“It’s not just a jest Sansa, I don’t know when I’ll be back,” Robb said, the words ‘if I’m even coming back’ went unspoken but Sansa could hear them in her head. He went on, “If anything were to happen, well someone has to handle the task of keeping it together for mother and father, for the others.”

“Stop that right now. Everything will be fine. You’ll always be our protector Robb, always.”

“Sansa….” he said as they came to a stop to allow the others to catch up before he made his way to the track.

“Always,” she said a final time, her eyes allowing for no further argument.

“Right then,” Robb finally agreed with a hint of a smile and hugged her one final time.

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It was early March, Robb had been away for over two months now, his letters conveyed that he was in high spirits and was enjoying his training. He would be home for a brief furlough in a few days before heading off to flight training. The family took comfort in that, it would be a blessing to see him again, for they all knew that as more time passed he was getting closer to seeing actual combat. In his absence family dinners had become a special dance of keeping everyone positive while still addressing the new realities of life in a country at war.

“I’ve heard from Lysa today, she said the war effort is going to make it hard to hold the farm together, so many young men stepping up for the cause. Says she could really use some help since it’s looking like it might just be just her and Robin soon enough,” Catelyn stated casually.

Arya and Sansa exchanged glances, it wasn’t like their mother to bring up something like this in front of the whole family unless there was a reason. Catelyn rarely spoke of Lysa or her childhood home anymore, not since their grandfather had passed away a few years ago. In fact, they had not been to visit Lysa or Oakenshield since his funeral.

“Is that so? I’m sorry to hear that,” Ned replied. “Has she considered shuttering the farm this season? Maybe she could come here, stay with us or Edmure if needed, till the war ends?”

Catelyn seemed to bristle at the suggestion. “You know she won’t leave there, that bloody farm’s all she has.”

Catelyn seemed to suddenly remember the children were there, she glanced at Sansa and Arya and suddenly seeming nervous. “She’s asked for our help.”

“Help how?” Ned asked setting down his utensils and looking at his wife.
“I was thinking we could send Arya and Sansa to her, it gets them out of the city and helps Lysa.”

Arya and Sansa stopped eating and looked at their parents. “You’re joking right?” Sansa cried.

“Sansa!” their mother said sharply.

“You want us to go be farm hands for Aunt Lysa? You cannot be serious, she’s nearly a stranger to
us!” Sansa stated.

“Lysa is still family and during these times we have to help family. It won’t be forever, just for a bit,
till the war’s over and the help returns to the island.”

“We don’t know anything about farm work, I don’t see how we’d be any help,” Sansa stated.

“You’ll learn quickly, I grew up doing farm work on that farm, it’s in your blood,” Catelyn countered.

“Father,” Sansa said looking at Ned, “What about school?”

He seemed to be quietly weighing his options. “Well there has been talk that they might evacuate
children out of the city……”

“I’m barely still a child you realize?!”

“All the more reason you would be a help to your aunt,” Catelyn added.

“You understand that you’d be sending us closer to the Nazis!” Sansa protested.

Ned laughed at that. “You’d be on a little island in the channel, I doubt the Nazi even make it that far
west, and even then, what do they care about a farm on Oakenshield? Come on girls, where is your
sense of adventure and helping the cause?”

“Can I go?” Bran asked.

“No dear boy, you’re still a bit too young, besides I’ll need you here with me,” Catelyn responded.

Bran crossed his arms and pouted, “I’m always too young for anything fun.”

“So, are we in agreement Ned?” Sansa looked at their father, eyes pleading with him to say no. She
then looked at Arya who had yet to say anything. Sansa poked her, Arya shrugged but her eyes were
full of excitement.

“Aye, we are in agreement, Lysa can take the girls,” Ned consented.

“This is so unfair!” Sansa shouted and fled from the table.

She ran upstairs and slammed the door to her bedroom. She did not want to leave the city and go
work on some farm on Oakenshield. She couldn’t believe her parents were agreeing on this. She
looked up as she heard a knock at the door. “Go away!” she yelled.

The door opened and Arya let herself in. “Traitor! Why didn’t you say anything?” Sansa cried.

“I don’t know, I thought it might be fun actually,” Arya answered.

“Fun?! Don’t you recall the last time we visited there? It’s dirty and -, and I don’t want to do farm
work!”
“It might not be that bad, and we’d be helping the family. Helping the cause.”

Sansa threw her hands up. God, country, family, was her sister really buying into the patriotic propaganda?

“Come on Sansa, we’re girls, we don’t get to go off to war like Robb, this can be our adventure. You said it yourself, they are sending us closer to the Nazis.”

Sansa rolled her eyes and tossed up her hands. She should have known that her twelve year old tomboy sister would whole heartedly embrace what she could only consider to be exile.

“Well pout all you want Sansa, but we’re being booked on a boat next week, so I suggest making peace with it and start packing,” Arya informed her as she left the room.
Chapter 3

Sansa could not wait to get off the ferry that was taking them to Oakenshield. It was in the high 40’s and raining, the boat pitched to and fro on the waves. Sansa estimated they had about another hour till they would be at the harbor. They had been told that their Great Uncle Brynden would be picking them up and would take them to Lysa’s farm. Brynden lived near the harbor, Lysa was a few miles outside of town.

“Are you going to make a face like that forever?” Arya asked.

“It’s possible,” she responded dryly.

Arya rolled her eyes. Sansa had been sulking and pouting sense they learned they would be coming here, even Robb’s visit had barely lifted her mood, her sister simply refused to embrace it for the adventure that she knew it could be. In Arya’s estimation going to their aunt’s or being evacuated north really made no difference, at least here they could be with family and have a purpose.

They rode the rest of the way in silence, the rain let up as they neared the harbor. They could see Uncle Brynden standing on the dock once they got closer. The boat tied up and let them off. Their mother had reminded them their uncle was a hard man, he would be helpful, but they should not expect to be greeted with hugs and kisses. He helped them gather their things and load them in his old pick-up truck and drove them out to the farm. He asked after their parents and Robb but other than that made little attempt at small talk.

Since it was not yet fully spring, the land they passed on the drive out was still gray and muddy, the sight made Sansa shutter. The thought of digging up potatoes, planting a vegetable garden and tending apple trees did not hold the same excitement for her as it seem to for Arya. Their mother had also advised them Lysa kept a few heads of cattle and a few milk cows that they may need to help with as well. Sansa had feared coming here but now seeing it now in person she felt horrified on a whole new level. She longed for London.

They began to slow as they passed a long stone fence that was lined with thick trees. They turned off the main lane unto a gravel driveway at the break in the fence. The driveway was also lined with trees. The trees finally parted and the truck bumped to a stop in the yard, directly in front of large white stone farm house. The house itself was lovely, with a large wrap around front porch with a swing and chairs. There were rows of windows on each floor and three dormer windows across the attic. Sansa knew her mother had loved growing up here and tried to find some comfort in that. There was a large tall barn with a hay loft that sat back to the left of the house. There was a fair-sized apple orchard to the right of the house, a large garden between the house and the orchard. If the branches weren’t bare and gray it would almost be beautiful.

“Isn’t it amazing?” Arya said in awe.

“The house is prettier than I remember,” Sansa conceded. They hadn’t been here since she was 12 and Arya was 8.

Lysa was standing on the porch, she was paler and thinner than Sansa remembered, though it seemed likely that was a result of her husband and father both passing away within the same year, Lysa had now been running the farm on her own for the last three years. Their cousin, Robin, stood beside his mother, he matched her in complexion and build, he barely looked his age of ten, but then he had always been on the sickly side.
“Girls!” Lysa cried and swept down the stairs to pull them into an embrace. “I’m so pleased to have you here! I hope the trip over wasn’t too bad.”

“It was uneventful,” Sansa replied.

“Did you see any U boats?” Robin asked coming up behind his mother.

“No such luck,” Arya answered, she actually sounded disappointed. Sansa rolled her eyes at her.

“Uncle, will you be joining us for dinner, I’ve cooked something special to welcome the girls,” Lysa asked Brynden.

“Aye, that would be nice, thank you,” he replied.

“Robin, grab one of the bags and show the girls to their room. I’m giving you run of the attic girls. Cat and I so loved it when we were your ages.”

Sansa tried not to blanch, she and Arya had their own rooms in London, it had never occurred to her they might have to share one here. Just another thing to try and get use to Sansa sighed to herself. She made a note though to investigate the second floor in order to see if there might be a separate room she could talk her aunt into letting her use at some point.

They followed Robin up to the attic. The narrow stairway gave way to a large room that ran the length of the house, there were windows on each end and across the front and one small one to the back that let in plenty of light when the blackout curtains were not drawn. There was a writing desk under the west window, immediately to the right as you entered the room. There were two full sized beds, a nightstand with a lamp between them on the back wall. There were trunks at the foot of each bed. Across from the bed between two of the front windows was a worn overstuffed chair next to a small table with a reading lamp. A hanging bar spanned the far end of the room, from the back wall to the window, that they could use for clothes and there was a screen set up in front corner for changing. Though it would be a shared space Sansa had to admit it wasn’t all that terrible.

As they stepped further into the room Sansa could see that the windows offered a pleasant view of the farm. You could see the road out front over the trees and to the side they were almost level with the hayloft of the barn, though due to the offset you couldn’t actually see into the hayloft. Out the back window you could see the backyard, the back edge lined with tall hedges. On the other side of the hedges the land seemed to slope down into a large field that stretched to an expanse of woods. Along the edge of the field was a path leading to a small copse of trees and there appeared to be a small cottage there. The main thing Sansa noticed was that you couldn’t see any other houses around.

“Mother said to tell you the washroom is on the second floor and there is an extra water closet off the kitchen,” Robin told them setting the suitcase he had been carrying down on nearest bed.

“Thanks Robin. Do you know when your mother normally serves dinner?” Sansa asked.

“We usually eat at 6,” he responded.

Sansa glanced at her watch, it was 4pm now. She wondered if it would be rude to ask Lysa if they could have a nap before dinner. Their attention was turned outside where they heard a car coming up the driveway. They moved to one of the front windows to see a dark sedan coming into the yard.

“Uncle Petyr!” Robin announced excitedly and tore down the stairs.

“I don’t think we have….. wait, I think there was that boy mother and Lysa grew up with, from the next farm over, I think mother mentioned him now and then, but I don’t recall if he was around when we were last here,” Sansa answered her.

“Well I suppose we should be polite and go see,” Arya said.

“I suppose,” Sansa agreed giving the bed a longing look as they left the room.

“Uncle” Petyr was in fact the boy from their mother’s childhood. He had moved back to the island a few years ago, when his parents had passed away in a fire and left him their farm. He owned the land and barns next to Lysa’s but since there was no longer a house there he lived in town; it was just as well since he served in a top position on the town council and that would’ve kept him in town a good deal of the time anyways. He admitted he didn’t do much farming on the land anyways, mostly he leased out the land to other farmers for planting or grazing their cattle. If you stood in the eastern window of the attic you could see some of the barns over the trees roughly a mile away.

He had told them all of this over dinner. He seemed pleasant enough, but Lysa seemed to worship him; she hung on every word he said, which Sansa found strange since everything he told them had to be common knowledge to her. She did take note of one off putting behavior he showed, though Sansa wasn’t sure if maybe she was imagining it, but he seemed to watch her, his eyes linger just a bit too long for her comfort. For now though she dismissed it as a trick of her tired mind.

“You know, you look so like your mother at your age. She was my closest confident then, before she left us all for the glamor of London,” Petyr finally observed as they all sat on the porch sipping coffee. Suddenly it made sense why he might be staring, he had been comparing her to Catelyn.

“It’s true,” Lysa added, she sounded almost annoyed, “Petyr trailed Cat everywhere and then I trailed Petyr. Cat was always the one in charge, always leading the way, always full of grand ideas. However, given the current state of things I think we were the smart ones to not follow her off the island.” Lysa smiled at Petyr with a hint of conspiracy in her eyes, as if they had planned to be here together all along. Sansa and Arya glanced at each other out of the corner of their eyes. Their aunt was trying a bit too hard to draw a smile from Petyr.

“Do you remember all the summers in the woods? Swimming in the creek, Cat was fearless jumping from the rope into the swimming hole. The sun catching her hair, she was like Joan of Arc reborn,” Petyr seemed to be caught in a fond memory.

“Your mother? In the woods? Jumping from a rope?” Arya asked with disbelief.

“Your mother was quite the free spirit before she met your father and became a proper society lady, quite a waste if you ask me,” Petyr said, disappointment colored his voice.

“Enough of the past!” Lysa cried out sharply. Sansa and Arya looked at each other again. “I only mean that it’s getting late and I have much to tell the girls before we turn in, we can save some stories for another night,” she added, her tone softening.

Petyr and Uncle Brynden left shortly after that. A quietness settled over the house. It made Sansa realize how alone there were out here, even if it was only a few short miles to town. She almost wished she could have talked them into letting her stay with Uncle Brynden, she was sure he needed
help with cooking and cleaning, and while that was not her idea of fun at least she would be in town.
She tucked the idea away in her mind for the future.

Lysa called them into front parlor once she had finished cleaning up after dinner. They took their seats on the sofa and looked at her expectantly. Robin played on the rug by their feet, making the buzzing sound of an airplane and crashing his trucks together.

“I just want to go over my expectations and our routine for our time together. I want you to know I’m just thrilled that you girls are here. It’s been so lonely since all the boys started to leave for the war,” Lysa began. “Arya, you and Robin will be attending school from nine till one during the weekdays, so you’ll have to get up early enough to milk the cows before going to school. The school is on the north edge of town, it’s only a three mile walk but poor Robin gets so tired, so I’ll be driving you most days. When you come home in the afternoon you can help Sansa finish whatever chores are left. Sansa you’ll be helping me around the place with the chickens and the garden, I’ll show you the routine. Next month we’ll have to start the potato harvest. I don’t raise beef cattle so much anymore, just too much work, but the few head I still have graze over at Petyr’s, one of the other farmers handles those for me. Once a week I go in to town and help Uncle Brynden, some cleaning and cooking; Sansa, you and I can split that duty as well.”

Arya cast Sansa a glowering look, clearly the idea of going to school here had not even crossed her mind.

“Aunt Lysa, are you sure it won’t be better for me to stay here and help around the farm? Mother didn’t mention anything about school,” Arya suggested testing the waters.

“Oh I promised your mother you would at least finish this year, it’s only a couple more months, then we’ll have all summer together,” Lysa answered her dismissing Arya’s request.

“Summer is the best here!” Robin added.

Arya let out a grunt and sat back on the couch folding her arms. “Don’t pout dear, it’s very unlady like,” Lysa warned her. Arya groaned softly but she sat up and uncrossed her arms. Sansa laughed to herself.

“Well it’s nearly 8:30 so I think we should all turn in, the morning will come sooner than you think,” Lysa suggested. She called to Robin to put away his toys and sent him upstairs. She wished the girls goodnight and told them if they needed anything to just let her know. Her final words were to remind them to keep the lights low and to keep the blackout shades in place till morning.

Arya and Sansa climbed the stairs to the attic and prepared for bed. “8:30?” Arya whispered to Sansa once they had closed the door, “Bran doesn’t even go to bed this early.”

“Welcome to farm life I guess,” Sansa shrugged. Normally she might agree with Arya but she felt tired from the trip over and since she was unsure what tomorrow might bring she was more than happy for tonight to turn in.

“I can’t believe I have to go to school! I was in one of the best schools in London, you know that I am going to be way ahead of anything they are teaching on this island, what a waste,” Arya moaned.

“What, this isn’t the adventure you had planned?” Sansa remarked snidely. She felt a sense of satisfaction that things weren’t working out quite in Arya’s favor. Arya had been way too pleased to come here when Sansa had wanted to protest, it served her right.

Sansa’s sense of victory was short lived when Arya responded, “Don’t be nasty Sansa, and anyways
you realize with me in school that means more work for you.”

“Dammit,” Sansa muttered realizing she was right. Arya smirked in triumph.

The girls crawled into bed, wished each other goodnight and turned out the light. A silence settled over the house. It reminded Sansa again how remote they were. She missed the sounds of the city.

“Sansa,” Arya whispered after a few minutes.

“Yeah,” Sansa whispered back.

“I miss Robb, and Rickon and mother and father, I even miss Bran,” Arya whispered, there was a sad longing in her voice.

“I do too, but it’ll be ok, we’ll see them soon enough.”

“I’m glad you’re here with me, even though you think I’m a brat.”

“You can be a brat sometimes,” Sansa laughed softly. “But you are my sister. I’m glad we’re here together too,” she finished in a serious tone. “Goodnight Arya.”

“Goodnight Sansa.”

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Lysa woke them at 5:30 am. Sansa now understood why an 8:30 pm bedtime might be a necessity. The day began with milking the cows. Then it was time to get Robin and Arya ready for school. Lysa was driving them today and told Sansa they would go into town after so she could show her around. She wanted Sansa to be able to run errands on her own eventually.

They all piled into the car and drove to town. They dropped Robin and Arya at the school and continued on into town. Lysa showed Sansa the bakery, the grocer and the butcher. She explained that in late summer and fall there was a farmer’s market near the harbor and that when her husband and father had been alive they had mainly sold their potatoes and apples there, more recently though she had scaled back the farms operation some so she had started to sell them directly to the grocer instead, along with any other items she ran a surplus on. She then showed her the post office and they sent off a telegram to her parents letting them know the girls had arrived safely. They then drove along the road that ran next to the harbor and stopped for tea.

It wasn’t raining today and Sansa realized that it was not quite as awful as she thought yesterday. She enjoyed the tea with Lysa as they sat out on the terrace overlooking the harbor. They said hello to a few people that happened by that Lysa seemed to know.

“So do you have a fellow back in London dear?” Lysa asked her.

“No, this summer was supposed to be my coming out, but that’s all on hold due to the war. It’s just as well I suppose, all the boys are off fighting anyways,” Sansa responded.

“Such a waste,” Lysa mused, “you are only so young and beautiful once. You know Petyr was right, you do look just like Cat at your age; your figure might even be a little trimmer, yes what a waste indeed.”

Sansa regarded her aunt with an odd expression, was Lysa trying to make her feel bad? Her aunt had to know that she was painfully aware of the things she was missing out on in London, why remind her?
“Oh look at the time, we need to collect the children,” Lysa announced before finishing her tea.

Sansa helped clear the table and they made their way back to the car and headed off to pick up Robin and Arya.

They made their way home and unpacked the car. Since it was just barely spring there was not much else to do other than tend to the chickens. Lysa explained that soon they would begin work on planting a large vegetable garden and harvesting the potato patch, this would take up most of their days.

They had a simple dinner that evening and turned in for the night again at 8:30. Sansa started to realize that farm life meant routine.

She and Arya lay awake for a bit while Arya told her about school. It was run by the nuns and Arya had no patience for it. She warned Sansa that she likely would be in trouble soon enough. Sansa cautioned her not to make trouble for Lysa. Arya agreed to try but made no promises. Sansa could only sigh and wish her sister goodnight.
Chapter 4

Their days on the island fell into an easy routine and despite Sansa’s original concerns she found farm life wasn’t as terrible as she feared. She and Lysa alternated who took the children to school and who ran errands in town, her chores actually made her feel a sense of accomplishment. She enjoyed her visits to Uncle Brynden, curmudgeon that he could be, she didn’t even mind doing the light cleaning and cooking for him. She found it a nice change from digging in the dirt at the farm.

She still missed the refinery of London but there was a simplicity to life here on the island that had a certain charm. It had only taken a few short weeks, but Sansa found that she was becoming enmeshed in the goings on of the town, trading fashion tips and gossip with the grocer’s daughter, Jeyne, with whom she had become fast friends. Having a friend here helped her understand her mother’s love of the island and why she remembered it so fondly.

It was now the last week of school, Sansa was looking forward to having Arya and Robin help finish up the potato harvest and tend the garden. Arya for her part was thrilled to be away from the nuns, but was sad she would see less of her new friend, the butcher’s son, Mycah. They had become the best of friends, always up to something, always making Sansa wait on them to finish up some thing or another on the days when she picked them up.

Sansa knew the war was marching forward, she overheard Petyr and Lysa discuss it often, after dinner when they sat together on the porch, but when she would ask Lysa about it later she would always put her off, tell her there was nothing to worry about; that the war was far away from them, up in the north in Scandinavia. They got occasional letters from their parents and Robb. Robb was nearly finished with flying school. He would get a week furlough before reporting to combat flight school for the summer. He was excited that by fall he would likely have his wings.

Sansa wished they could go back to London for Robb’s furlough, she missed him so. She missed all her family, even though island life was better than she had hoped, it didn’t erase the memory of her prior life. She had mentioned the possibility to Lysa, but she had said they could discuss it when it got closer, however now it was only 2 weeks away, so she held out little hope that the trip would become reality.

The following week she was at the grocer’s, discussing with Jeyne the latest fashions they had seen in the newest edition of Vogue. They were interrupted when they heard a commotion in the street. They made their way to the door and saw people racing down the street towards the post office.

Jeyne ran back inside, grabbed the keys to the store so she could lock up, and then she and Sansa followed the crowd towards the post office. They heard murmurs in the crowd about the war and an invasion in the Low Countries, someone even mentioned France.

When they reached the post office it seems everyone was in a frenzy. Petyr saw her and pushed through the crowd to reach her. “Sansa, is Lysa with you?” he asked.
“No, she’s back on the farm. What’s going on?” she asked in response.

“The Nazis have invaded France, the war is headed west,” he answered.

Sansa and Jeyne gasped. “What does that mean for us?” Sansa asked in a small voice.

“Maybe nothing, the French have a strong army and they have the Maginot Line, I’m sure they will be able to turn them back. The kruts likely have over played their hand,” Petyr responded.

Sansa’s thoughts turned to Robb. It seemed unlikely he would be allowed to go home on furlough now. They thought of the front coming closer to them all was terrifying.

“I need to get back to the farm,” she said to both Petyr and Jeyne.

“Yes I think that would be best, but Sansa I won’t mention this to Lysa,” Petyr cautioned her.

“What?! Why ever not? She’s going to hear it soon enough,” Sansa responded bewildered.

“I know, but your aunt, she doesn’t handle stress well. She can be prone to…… well she has fits when things get too trying. I think it might be best if I tell her, I’m coming to dinner tonight anyways.”

Sansa wasn’t sure what he meant about Lysa’s “fits,” she had found her aunt could be odd or snappish and she did indulge Robin a bit much, but he was all she had had for so long, so one could forgive it. Petyr seemed to read the skepticism in her expression.

“She’s been good these last months with you girls here, but I promise you I know what I’m talking about. Please just trust me and wait, you won’t want to handle it on your own.”

Sansa glanced at Jeyne who shrugged slightly, almost as if she was agreeing with Petyr in some ways. Sansa sighed and nodded, agreeing with his request.

He placed his hand on Sansa’s shoulder and looked directly into her eyes. “I promise, I’ll be there tonight.”

“Come on, I’ll help you with your packages at the store so you can get home,” Jeyne offered.

Petyr finally removed his hand from her shoulder, sliding it down Sansa’s arm in an odd almost caress and turned back into the crowd. She walked with Jeyne back towards the store. “Do you know what he meant about Lysa’s fits?” she asked Jeyne quietly.
“Not directly, but I’ve heard others whisper about it. I think she got in a bad way after her husband died. But who won’t?” she responded.

“I suppose that would be true. I guess Petyr would know better than me.”

They loaded Sansa’s purchases into the car and she returned to the farm. Normally she and Lysa would take tea on the porch and discuss the happenings in town, but today she feigned a headache when she returned, requesting to lay down until dinner. She knew she was a bad liar so she figured it was best to avoid Lysa for the afternoon.

That evening Petyr arrived for dinner as promised. Sansa and Petyr kept exchanging glances, Sansa felt nervous for Lysa’s reaction to the news. Lysa seemed to notice a couple of the glances; it seemed to annoy her but she said nothing. Arya mostly carried the conversation, telling them about chasing a fox out into the woods that she had seen near the hen house earlier this morning. She had grand plans on how she was going to trap it. She had even spent time target shooting with Lysa’s small caliber rifle.

Sansa offered to clear the table and told Arya to help her. She returned from the kitchen with two tumblers of scotch for Lysa and Petyr to take out on to the porch for their after dinner discussion. When Sansa heard them go outside she dragged Arya into the kitchen.

“Good lord, Sansa, what’s wrong?” Arya asked as Sansa released her arm.

“France has been invaded,” Sansa hissed, “Do you realize how close we are to France?”

“When did you hear that?” Arya demanded.

“This afternoon in town.”

“Is that why you were sick, why you stayed upstairs all day? Why haven’t you said anything?”

“Petyr asked me not to.”

“Why would he want you to keep a secret like that?”

“I don’t know, he said Lysa might take it better if it was coming from him.”

“There’s something off about him, I don’t know what, but I don’t trust him Sansa.”

“He seems harmless Arya, maybe a bit too familiar, but then he grew up with mother and Lysa, he
probably thinks of us as family.”

“I don’t know, perhaps,” Arya agreed reluctantly.

“I think we need to talk to Lysa about going back to London, I don’t think we should stay here,” Sansa said.

They heard a cry from the front of the house and the sound of glass shattering. They ran to the front of the house. One of the scotch glasses lay broken on the porch, Lysa was sitting in her chair crying into her hands. Arya went to comfort her aunt, Sansa and Petyr looked at each other, if she didn’t know better she would almost say he was smirking with validation.

“Oh girls!” Lysa sobbed.

Robin appeared in the doorway and seeing the state of his mother also began to wail. Sansa turned to comfort the boy, taking his hand and leading him inside. She took him to his room and read him a story until he was calm and drifted off to sleep.

She went back downstairs and found everyone was now back inside, the lights turned low and the blackout shades in place.

“So, what do we do now?” Sansa asked.

“You already know? Have you known all day?” Lysa cried in an accusatory tone.

Petyr looked at her from behind Lysa with exasperation and a shrug.

“Yes, I heard a rumor in town, but I didn’t believe it until I saw your reaction,” she lied. “I’m sorry I didn’t say anything, I really didn’t think it true.”

Lysa looked at her carefully, weighing her response. “Well it is terrible, who would want to believe such things,” she finally said.

Sansa let out a breath and glanced at Arya who just shook her head slightly.

“Does this mean we should plan to return to London?” Sansa asked.

“Heaven’s no child! If anything we are in the safest place, no one will care about these islands. If France were to fall they’ll be turning their attention to London next, no it’s better to stay here. I’ll telegram your mother tomorrow to confirm.”
Arya and Sansa looked at each other again. Lysa’s tone seemed to imply there was no room for argument tonight, but Sansa knew she and Arya would have much to discuss in their room later. They discussed a few other matters of little importance in order to keep the mood light. After a while they bid their aunt and Petyr goodnight and retreated to the attic.

“Do you agree with Lysa, do you think it’s best to stay here?” Arya asked once they were alone.

“I honestly don’t know. She makes a good point that London will not be safe, but I think I’d prefer to be with mother and father.”

“She was saying some crazy things while you were upstairs with Robin.” Arya’s tone made Sansa pause in her night time routine. She turned to look at her now, encouraging her to continue.

“She said if the Nazis do come they’ll likely rape us or worse. She swore she won’t let them take us alive,” Arya whispered. “She said she’ll give us all poison or we’ll jump from the barn.”

Sansa gasped but then she realized she needed to remain calm for her sister’s sake. “I doubt she means it. I’m sure it’s just the shock,” Sansa said turning back to finish changing for bed.

“Sansa?” Arya’s voice was barely audible.

Sansa pulled her nightgown down and turned back to her with a questioning look.

“Is it ok… just for tonight….. can we sleep in the same bed, like when we were little and I had a bad dream?”

Sansa nodded and held her arms out to her sister. Arya stepped into her arms and they held each other for a moment before crawling into Sansa’s bed.
The final weeks of May dragged on, tension was high and it seemed the news was rarely good, the Germans were advancing quickly across France. Petyr began coming to the house more under the assertion of keeping them updating on the war and keeping Lysa calm. An uneasiness had settled over the island, some were preparing to evacuate, but most were not; despite the bad news from the front there was still a belief that France would not fall. Lysa had made it clear to them she had no intention of evacuating; thankfully she seemed to have forgotten her cryptic promises from that first night of the invasion.

They had finally received letters from Robb and their parents. As expected Robb’s furlough has been cancelled and he had reported directly to combat flight training. He seemed excited to be getting closer to seeing real action.

Their parents’ letter by contrast did not contain the hubris of youth. They were in agreement with Lysa, that girls should remain on the island for now. They said that they had sent Rickon to stay in the countryside with their Uncle Edmure. It made Sansa sad to think of her chubby cheeked curly haired little brother parted from her parents, she wondered if he understood what was going on. Bran was staying with their parents, they had worried both boys would be too much for Edmure, and Catelyn refused to send him to stay with strangers. Arya tried to lighten the mood by commenting that Bran was finally getting his wish to be an only child.

The calendar turned to June, the island was abuzz from the news about the defeat at Dunkirk and the army’s retreat off the continent. Moods had shifted and now everyone seemed in agreement that it was only a matter of time until France fell. Arya and Sansa were the only ones to go into town now, Lysa continuously deferred, preferring to stay on the farm, preparing them for “the hard times ahead” as she called them. This was the same reason they now spent most of their time home breaking ground for new gardens to plant late season vegetables.

A few more weeks had passed, Petyr was expected for dinner that night, so when they saw his car coming up the drive that afternoon as they worked the garden they knew something terrible had to have happened.

They left the garden and greeted him as he exited his car. “It’s happened, Paris has fallen, France will surrender, it’s just a formality now,” he announced. "There's more, the remaining British forces have been ordered to leave the island. We are being ordered to demilitarize."

"So we are just going to be here without protection?” Lysa asked, her eyes wide with fear.

Petyr tried to calm their fears, insisting that it was actually a good thing for them, that demilitarization made the island less of a threat and therefore less of a target. Lysa responded with a strangled cry. At the sound Robin ran down from the porch where he’d been playing and clung to his mother as she cried.

“This changes everything. I think we should get a telegram off to our parents today. Our last letter from them was almost two weeks ago,” Sansa said. "I can't imagine it'll continue to be safe for us to
Lysa suddenly turned on her. “You ungrateful wretched child! After all I’ve done for you two, why are you so determined to just abandon me here!?”

“Aunt Lysa, no, no, not at all. I just think we should…..,” Sansa started to defend herself.

“Ungrateful!” Lysa screamed slapping her across the face.

“Lysa!” Petyr cried stepping in between them. He grabbed her and made her look him in the eyes. “You need to calm down!”

Arya had backed Sansa up and now stood in front of her staring down their aunt. “Don’t you ever strike my sister again,” she hissed.

Sansa set a hand on Arya’s shoulder and squeezed a gentle thanks. “Girls, please take Robin in the house while I talk to your Aunt,” Petyr prompted.

Arya stepped forward and wrestled Robin away from his mother. She promised him sweets if he calmed down and came with her. He instantly fell silent and followed Arya towards the house. Sansa followed behind them with a glance over her shoulder at Petyr, he smiled back at her and nodded slightly. Sansa felt uneasy, as if they had somehow just entered into an unspoken agreement, the terms unknown to her, against her aunt. She gave him one final glance and then followed the other two into the house.

Panic now gripped the island and many scrambled to follow through on their evacuation plans. The night France had fallen Petyr had promised he would telegraph their mother to see if they should return to London, so far there had been no response. Sansa had told Arya last night they shouldn’t be too worried yet, it’d only been a few days and likely there would be a delay with the chaos the war was causing. Arya had agreed reluctantly, but even Sansa questioned her own reassurances.

The news of the war’s progression seemed to have shaken Lysa deeply. She seemed fragile and moody, becoming angry or crying without provocation. Somehow she managed to keep up the routine of the farm but she insisted that Robin always be within her sight. Robin, ever in tune to his mother’s feelings, had also become more sullen and irritable, often picking fights with Arya or Sansa for little to no reason. This change had brought on a new sense of exhaustion for the girls. Sansa and Arya had discussed on more than one occasion just leaving a note and joining the line of evacuees at the harbor. But even if they could ignore the guilt they’d feel for abandoning their family, with with no word from their parents and likely not enough money to purchase train tickets once they reached Poole, they had to accept they were stuck.
It was now almost the end of June, Sansa’s seventeenth birthday was the next day. Lysa had managed to pull herself together in recent days and planned to cook a special dinner tonight that Uncle Brnyden and Petyr would be attending. Tomorrow she was letting the girls go in to town for evening tea. Sansa was looking forward to doing something so normal and had invited Jeyne to join them as well.

Lysa made a wonderful meal, and now they all sat out on the porch enjoying the late evening sun with cake and coffee. “Time for gifts,” Lysa announced cheerfully.

“Oh Aunt Lysa the meal and the cake was gift enough,” Sansa told her.

“Don’t be silly dear. There might be a war on but one only gets one special day a year. Happy birthday,” she said and handed Sansa a small wrapped box.

Sansa smiled and opened it. It contained a beautiful green silk scarf. “I helped pick it out,” Robin said proudly.

“Well it is beautiful! Thank you Robin, thank you Aunt Lysa,” Sansa said as she felt the cool fabric. It was a very beautiful scarf, the green would look wonderful against her red hair.

Arya handed her a folded piece of paper. “I didn’t really have any money, but I think you’ll like it,” Arya told her, a hopefully look on her face. Sansa opened the paper, on it Arya had written, “Good for one day of milking.” Sansa laughed, “You’re right I do love it!”

“What is it?” Robin asked.

“Arya is going to take one of my milking shifts so I can sleep in,” Sansa told him with a smile. Arya looked pleased with herself.

“Happy birthday Sansa,” Petyr said and handed her a small square box. Sansa furrowed her brow, she had not expected a gift from Petyr; it made her uneasy, just as his long glances had over the last few weeks when he had come to visit Lysa.

“Oh that is so nice of you, but you really didn’t need to do that. I couldn’t possible accept it,” she demurred.

“You don’t even know what it is,” Robin cried, “Don’t you want to know?”

“Yes dear, open it, let’s see what Petyr got you,” Lysa said. Sansa sensed a cold edge in her aunt’s voice.
Sansa hesitated and then opened the box. Inside was a silver charm bracelet with three charms, a wolf, a fish and a mockingbird. It was delicate and beautiful but it made Sansa uncomfortable. She looked up and saw Lysa staring at it and then looking back and forth between her and Petyr.

“How lovely,” Lysa said, her tone was neutral but Sansa again sensed the cold edge, “It looks like the one you gave Cat for her eighteenth birthday, well minus the wolf.”

“It is lovely, thank you Mr. Baelish,” she said quietly.

“Petyr, I’ve told you before to call me Petyr,” he replied, “Go ahead and put it on.” Sansa shifted awkwardly under his gaze but fulfilled his request.

“I want presents!” Robin cried out drawing everyone’s attention. For once Sansa felt grateful for one of Robin’s tantrums.

“Oh my sweet boy, it’s not your special day, how about an extra slice of cake?” Lysa said to him. Robin pouted but nodded.

“Well I think I’ll call it a night, best to get back before the blackout,” Brynden announced standing up.

“Ah yes. I should be going as well,” Petyr agreed, his eyes resting on Sansa’s wrist.

“Well thank you again everyone for coming tonight. It was all amazing, thank you for making it so special,” Sansa agreed and began to clear away the plates to avoid having to hug Petyr goodbye. Arya joined her and they escaped to the kitchen.

“So….” Arya whispered fingering the bracelet on Sansa’s wrist.


They heard the cars pull out of the yard. They finished the dishes and then skirted through the front room and called goodnight to Lysa and Robin and retreated to the attic.

They readied for bed in silence, waiting to hear the second floor go quiet. When they were sure Lysa and Robin would be asleep they turned on their sides in their beds.

“He’s somehow gotten creepier,” Arya whispered pointing at the bracelet on the table between them. “I don’t like the way he looks at you either.”

“Do you think he had a thing for mother once? He constantly makes comments about me looking
like her. And what about what Lysa said about him giving her this same gift once?” Sansa responded.

“I don’t know, but he is a serious wanker. So what if he had a crush on mum, you’re not her and you’re seventeen. If he’s trying to make you into mum he is seriously disturbed.” Sansa couldn’t argue with her on any of those points, but Lysa seemed so reliant on him she was at a loss on anything she could do to address it. “I think we should try to telegraph mother and father again tomorrow. I think it’s odd we haven’t heard from them at all, war or not,” Arya added.

“Ok, we’ll go in to town a bit early for tea and send it then,” Sansa agreed.

“I hope they respond this time, I think I might be ready for this adventure to be over,” Arya sighed.

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The morning of Sansa’s birthday dawned warm and clear. Lysa seemed in a good mood, the awkwardness from last night erased.

They set about their daily chores before getting ready to head to town. If Lysa noticed they were rushing so they could leave before the post office closed she didn’t mention it.

They made their way in to town and headed straight to the post office. They caught Mr. Aemon, the post master, at the front door just as he was getting ready to close.

“Master Aemon! Can you please send a telegram for us? I know it’s late but it’s Sansa’s birthday, please,” Arya cried.

“Well since it’s her birthday I suppose,” he said warmly letting them all back inside.

“Well since it’s her birthday I suppose,” he said warmly letting them all back inside.

“Thank you,” the girls responded together.

“So are you sending a response to your parents’ last message?” he asked them as he headed behind the counter.

“Last message? Did they send something recently?” Sansa asked confused. The last message she could recall was prior to the fall of France, could he really be remembering a message from that far back?

“Why just last week I think,” he said.

“No, I think Mr. Baelish has been picking up your aunt’s mail most days,” he replied.

“Do you remember what it said?” Sansa asked.

“No, too long ago and as you can imagine we are swimming in incoming and outgoing messages right now. So what is it you want to send, I hate to rush but I do want to get home to the Mrs.”

Sansa took the paper and wrote out the message, she told her parents they were safe but they would like to come home, she asked they send a quick response. Mr. Aemon sent the message and told the girls he would let them know when he heard back. Sansa requested that he set any messages for them aside and that she would pick them up personally from now on. He had agreed but gave them a perplexed look as he did.

They left the post office and headed towards the harbor and the tea shop.

“Sansa?”

“I know Arya, I know.”

“What do you think happened?”

“Maybe he forgot to give the post to Aunt Lysa, or maybe he did and she forgot to open it. You know how she gets some days,” Sansa answered her.

“Do you actually believe that?”

“I don’t know. I guess we can check when we get home. Let just try and enjoy the tea service,” Sansa answered half-heartedly.

They saw Jeyne coming towards them from the other end of the street. They waved at each other. “Let’s keep this between us ok?” Sansa said to Arya as they neared the tea shop. Arya nodded.

“Happy birthday!” Jeyne greeted her as they stood on the street outside the entrance of the tea shop.

“Thank you.”

They turned to walk into the shop but stopped when they heard the sound of engines off on the horizon. Everyone on the street turned and stared at the planes. Flights over the island were common place but these planes seemed lower and closer than the ones they normally would see.

“Sansa?” Arya called, her voice full of fear.

“It’s probably just a training mission for the RA……” Sansa’s voice died in her throat as she saw the crosses on the wings. The planes were not RAF. The doors beneath the planes were opened.

“Dear god!” they heard someone cry.
Cries went up around them. “Bombers!” “Germans!” “Flee!” “Get off the street!”

The girls turned and burst through the door of the tea shop and ran to the back counter shouting.

“My heavens! Ladies!” the woman behind the counter cried out. "What on Ea-,

“Germans!” Jeyne screamed. "Get -," Those were the only words anyone got out before the first bomb exploded. The building shook and windows exploded. They dove under the nearest table. The room filled with smoke, they could hear the docks burning as bombs continued to fall. They held each other crying and shaking. They heard guns going off and more explosions. Sansa swore if they survived they would likely be deaf.

They had no idea how long they had stayed under the tables but eventually the bombing ceased and they crawled out. There was still smoke everywhere and they had to step carefully to avoid the glass and debris that now littered the shop. They walked to the door and took in the chaos in the street. There were fires burning and people running all over, either trying to help the wounded or trying to stop the fire. Even though their hearing was muffled from the explosions they could still hear crying and screaming. Across the street Sansa saw a body lying crumpled and bloody.

“I have to go to my parents!” Jeyne yelled over the noise. Sansa nodded and hugged her and then watched her run down the street.

“We have to get back to the farm, Lysa will be hysterical,” Sansa yelled to Arya. Arya took her hand and they picked their way up the street and a few blocks back towards the post office where they had parked the car.

Sansa said a silent prayer of thanks when they found the car unharmed. They piled in and sped back to the farm. As they pulled into the driveway Lysa came running out of the house, her face drawn and white. She grabbed them and pulled them too her.

“Oh thank god! What’s happened? I heard the explosions from here, I can see the smoke!” she cried out.

“Germans, Germans bombed the harbor!” Arya choked out.

“No, no you must be mistaken!”

“She’s not, we saw the planes, the markings, it was the Germans,” Sansa told her.

Lysa let out a loud wail and would’ve collapsed if they had not been holding her, they lowered her to the ground as she continued to cry out. The commotion caused Robin to come out on to the porch. He took in scene, Arya and Sansa covered in soot and ash, bleeding from shallow cuts, his mother wailing on the ground. He opened his mouth and began to wail as well. “Mummy!” he screamed running to Lysa and throwing himself on her. Arya and Sansa stood there looking at them, unsure what to do with their wailing kin.

“What do we do now?” Arya asked.

“I haven’t a clue,” Sansa answered.
Chapter 6

The next morning Lysa seemed unusually cheery. She hummed as she went about her tasks and cooked them all a large breakfast. Sansa found it unnerving but said nothing, better she be like this then sobbing in the yard. Afterwards they sat on the porch discussing if they should go to town to get an update, check on their uncle and possibly gather additional rations.

Their discussion ceased as they saw Petyr’s car come to a stop in the yard. He made his way to them and greeted them warmly. It seemed to Sansa everyone on this island was either in denial or had simply lost their minds.

“Have you seen Uncle Brynden?” Sansa inquired.

“Aye, the old buzzard is fine, though he’s telling anyone who will listen that he’ll fight the Nazis in the streets when they arrive.”

“Are the Nazis here?” Arya asked in response.

“Not yet, but rumors are swirling it’ll be any day now. The docks are destroyed, sadly there were some casualties. There’ll be no further evacuations,” he informed them.

”How awful. Anyone I would know?” Lysa asked as she rang her hands.

Petyr glanced at the open window to where Robin sat inside on the parlor floor and lowered his voice. “Aye, Gyles Grafton and his father.”

Lysa sucked her breath, “But he’s Robin’s age.”

”I know dear. Try not to think about it,” Petyr soothed taking her hands. Arya felt sad too, she’d seen Gyles playing with Robin at school last spring. She hadn’t really known him but he had seemed like a nice boy and he got along with Robin.

”There were a total of fifteen that died, the undertaker is quite overwhelmed.”

“That’s so sad,” Sansa said.

“Mayor Royce and Councilman Hunter were among them as well. That means everything falls to me. I’m going to be very busy in town making preparations for the Germans’ arrival.”

“Do you think it’s safe to be in town, I was going to send Sansa to get whatever rations she can
“Don’t worry Lysa, she’ll be safe enough, I can take her if you prefer.”

“No, that’s quite alright, I want to check on Jeyne and Uncle Brynden. I don’t want to take time away from your preparations. You have a duty to the town,” Sansa interjected.

“So, what do you mean by preparations exactly?” Arya suddenly asked, “Are you planning to roll out a welcome wagon to the Nazis?”

A look of annoyance passed over Petyr’s face. “And what would you have us do Miss Stark? The army has left us and taken practically every able bodied young man, do you recommend we start a defense with old men, children and pitch forks? We are all going to have to start being more practical in the months ahead if we all wish to survive.”

Heavy silence hung in the air now. “I’ll never stop resisting,” Arya said quietly.

“That’s the type of mindset that gets people killed. I recommend you keep your head down and listen to your elders. They dropped leaflets this morning, if we put up no resistance and follow orders the Germans have promised to be fair and treat us with respect. I guess we’ll know soon enough,” Petyr countered and gave Arya a hard look.

“Enough of this talk. We just need to focus on today. Sansa dear, best get going before everything is gone,” Lysa interrupted them. Sansa nodded and stood.

“Are you sure you want to go alone?” Petyr asked looking at her.

Lysa spoke before she could answer. “Petyr can you stay for some tea please? It would really help soothe my nerves. I promise not to keep you long.”

He tore his gaze from Sansa and smiled at Lysa and nodded.

Sansa promised she would try to be as quick as possible and ran inside to fetch the keys and headed for town before anyone could say anything further.

Upon arrival she found the town was bustling, it seemed everyone had the same idea to stock up provisions. She made her way to the grocery and waved to Jeyne who was busy behind the counter. She found many items were already in limited supply so she gathered what she could and made her way to the register line. When it was her turn she greeted Jeyne.

“It’s insane in here,” she said as Jeyne rung up her purchases.
“Been like that all morning. How’s your hearing? I think my left ear is still half deaf.”

“Seems to be ok. Petyr says they are preparing for the invasion.” Jeyne paused briefly and gave her a worried look.

“Preparing? What does that even mean? Fighting?”

“No, no fighting. Petyr says we should make ever attempt to get along, that the Germans will be merciful if we obey. All I know is that I’m very thankful for the farm right now, I know we’ll at least be able to eat,” Sansa responded gesturing to the emptying shelves.

“Well be careful out there alone, people are getting insane around here. If food were to run low who knows how long it will be till they decide to look elsewhere,” Jeyne whispered as she handed Sansa her change back.

Sansa nodded and left the store, she had not considered that, for now all she could hope was that the distance from town would keep them safe. Maybe she should see if Uncle Brynden might want to join them out there, but then she reminded herself that she should probably consult Lysa before she started making decisions for the household.

She stopped by the post office but Master Aemon told her nothing had come in yet. She made her way to her Uncle’s next. She found him moving about his house in a flurry, hiding his shotguns and other weapons under the floorboards.

He thrust a revolver at her, “You should take this out to the farm, hide it somewhere. Make sure to keep it loaded.”

“I won’t even begin to know what to do with it.”

“What’s to know, point it at a Nazi and pull the damn trigger.”

Sansa blanched, she didn’t like the idea of the pistol, she knew Lysa kept a small rifle for scaring the foxes or other nuisance animals but she had never bothered with it. Arya had used it a few times to target practice when she had taken up a war with the fox a couple months back, but that was all. Brynden handed her a cigar box containing bullets, it was large enough to hold the gun as well.

“Take it girl, hide it, you’ll need it soon enough, mark my words.”

Sansa decided it was best not to argue and agitate him further, so she took the box and loaded it into the car. She told him to come by the house if he wanted dinner or to get out of town, but he waved her off; it appeared he had his own ideas about preparations.
She made her way back to the farm. Arya and Robin were on the porch. Arya came down and helped her unload the car noticing the box from their uncle in the truck.

“Provisions?” she asked, her eyebrow raised in a question.

“Is there a place we can hide it?”

“I’ll take it to the barn, bury it in the root cellar,” Arya told her. “Later,” she added looking up. Sansa followed her gaze and saw Lysa had come out on the porch.

“Agreed, I don’t want her to have another reason to panic.”

The Germans arrived the next day and Oakenshield officially surrendered the day after that. They now found themselves ruled over by foreign invaders. Uncle Brynden came out stay in the cottage despite the fact it lacked running water and electricity, he said he had no plans to make it permanent but he couldn’t stand the saluting and the marching near his home as the Nazis attempted to make a show of force for the islanders. Lysa seemed calmed by his presence which Sansa was thankful for.

At dinner that night Petyr assured them that since they had surrendered peacefully the Germans were letting them keep what remained of the town council, with him now as the lead. He again reminded everyone that it was best to work to get along for now. His comments only worked to lower Arya’s opinion of him even further.

The Germans moved quickly, within a week they handed down several decrees and regulations. A curfew was instated from 11pm to 5am. They were to turn in any and all weapons, radios were only to be turned to German broadcasts, the use of any boat, even for fishing, now required registration and a special permit. All communication with England or non-Axis held countries was cut off and forbidden.

Brynden, Sansa and Arya had been dismayed. Petyr’s response was to encourage them to focus on their cows, gardening and fruit trees. He warned them it was likely that new rationing restrictions would be put in place. He also offered to turn in their contraband items. Uncle Brynden started to call him Herr Von Petyr behind his back much to Arya’s delight.

Sansa now took Arya to town when she went. Lysa insisted they travel together, warning them that soldiers at war were prone to rape and all manners of horrible things against women they found alone. Sansa had agreed, not so much due to fear of the Germans but to keep peace in the house. Lysa’s mood swings had returned and became increasingly erratic and Arya’s reaction to the occupation was to lose all sense of propriety and speak whatever came into her mind.
They had not received a response from their parents and did not expect to since communication to England had been cut off the day the Germans landed. They never had been able to locate the telegram Master Aemon mentioned the day of the bombing. They had searched the house and found nothing and given Petyr’s new position of power they hadn’t wanted to risk angering him with accusations, but they often wondered if they had missed their chance to go home and if he had kept them from it.

They were now nearly a month into the occupation. On their trip to town today Ayra had run off to play with Mycah while Sansa queued the ration lines. She knew it would be more efficient if they both queued but Arya would be thirteen in a few weeks, and Sansa felt some sense of duty to let her enjoy the last fleeting moments of childhood.

As she joined the line outside the bakery she noticed people seemed more agitated than normal. She tried to listen to the conversations going on around her but there was too many and the sound of the German trucks rumbling up and down the street was not helping.

She collected her bread and headed to the grocer, when in doubt Jeyne usually knew what was going on. Sansa waited outside for the soldiers inside to clear out, they were smiling and laughing with Jeyne. Sansa watched through the window unsure of how she felt about this. They finally wrapped up their conversation and left the store. They greeted Sansa warmly but she merely gave them a nod and did not smile back.

She stepped into the shop and greeted Jeyne. “Mum, I’m going to take a quick break,” she called to the back and then came around the counter and followed Sansa outside.

“How are the rations today?” she asked looking at Sansa basket.

“Worse than last week but not as bad as Monday,” Sansa shrugged in response. “Everyone seems upset today, do you know why?”

“There’s a rumor they are going to start seizing people’s vehicles, furniture, livestock, whatever they deem fit to help their war effort,” Jeyne responded looking around them nervously.

“That’s terrible, what are we supposed to do without the car? We’re over four miles out of town. And winter is coming, we are going to need all the animals since they are cutting rations.”

“Don’t know, could just be a rumor, but then fuel’s going to be rationed more tightly as well from what I hear, so maybe having a vehicle won’t do you any good soon enough. As far as the food, I’d start thinking about a winter garden, have you planted one before?”

“We didn’t plant vegetables much in London. I imagine I could ask Lysa. She’s is going to pitch a fit about the car.”
“I haven’t seen Lysa in town in months, I doubt she cares.”

“She’s too nervous to leave the farm, but she doesn’t like me to be gone long either, if I have to walk eight miles anytime I come to town she won’t like it.”

“Maybe Petyr can help, he’s the main liaison to the Germans; if anyone can pull some strings for you it would be him.”

“I don’t want to owe any debts to Mr. Baelish.” Jeyne gave her an odd look due to the formality of her words.

“Do you think he’s terrible for working with the Germans?” Jeyne asked her quietly.

“I’m not sure how I feel about it, Arya and Brynden are furious though. I can’t help but think about the fact that my brother is fighting them and they won’t hesitate to kill him. They are not our friends,” she answered with warning.

“Sansa Stark are you judging me because I was talking politely to those soldiers?”

“I just, well, they are the enemy. Don’t you resent their presence?”

“They are just following orders, they aren’t all bad. And in case you haven’t noticed we are all going to be here together for god knows how long. I would think it’s better to just get on with them at this point, it’s not like we are going to be able to fight them off. I’d prefer to not spend all my time tense and angry.”

Sansa just looked at her. It couldn’t just be that easy, there was a reason they were on opposite sides of the war wasn’t there?

“I don’t want to fight with you. I just -, just be careful Jeyne. They are still our enemy, no matter how handsome they might seem.”

Jeyne rolled her eyes. “I think you need to get off that farm more, I think Arya and Brynden are rubbing off on you a touch too much. If you talked to them you would see they aren’t all bad. In fact one of them invited me to a dance out at the Umber’s estate next weekend.”

“I thought the Umbers had evacuated?”

“They did, but the Germans are using the house for many of their officers.”

“And you’re ok with that?”
“You sound like you are judging me again. We’re young, we should be allowed some fun. Just think about it, ask Lysa if you can go. Hey, I gotta get back, but let me know next time you are in town. Seriously Sansa, it’s ok to have some fun.”

Sansa watched her go back inside and then headed to the butcher’s to collect Arya. Her patience had worn thin and she snapped at Arya that they needed to go now. They drove back to the farm in silence, Arya knew better than to press Sansa’s mood.

Petyr came to dinner that night, despite what she had heard in town he seemed unconcerned or worried. Sansa normally tried to steer clear of topics that would upset Lysa but tonight she had little choice.

“So I heard something upsetting in town today,” she began.

“Oh?” he responded.

“Someone said they are stealing vehicles, animals, furniture. That the Germans are commandeering whatever they want from people.”

Lysa gasped and looked at Petyr expectantly. “Well stealing might be a bit strong. They are offering a fair price for the vehicles and paying the owners for them. The other things, well they are requisitioning what they need to carry on their occupation, yes.”

“Can we refuse to sell?” Lysa inquired. “I need the car, Sansa needs the car. How will I get Robin to school? He can’t walk that far Petyr, my sweet boy, he’ll be too tired. And the animals, well I’d prefer to keep them as well.”

“Well….” Petyr began.

“It seems like calling it stealing still sounds appropriate to me,” Arya countered, “Or would you prefer ‘forced relinquishment’?”

Petyr seemed exasperated with her. “No Arya, it’s neither. Maybe you can take Robin to play while the adults talk.”

Arya shot Sansa a look. Sansa tipped her head indicating Arya should go. With a huff she got up and directed Robin from the table.

“What I was going to say is I’ll see what I can do about the animals, maybe keep it to the cows over on my land, but you should prepare to lose some, everyone has to contribute. As far as the car, well they are going to start restricting fuel more, so the vehicle will soon be worthless, better to just get a
good price for them now. Do you still have our old bicycles in the barn?”

“Actually I do, they might need a bit of work but I’m sure Brynden could help with those,” Lysa answered.

“Splendid. See, problem solved. I’ll get you a couple of nice baskets for them and if you ever need a ride to town you need just ask,” he finished, his gaze falling on Sansa.

She looked away from him and took Lysa’s hand. “Petyr’s right, we’ll be ok without the car.”

Lysa smiled at them weakly. “I should get Robin to bed. Can you clean up dear?”

“Of course,” Sansa replied and began to clear the dishes. Petyr followed her to the kitchen.

“Thanks for your support with Lysa, it’s important we all work together to keep her calm.”

“Agreed.”

“But I meant what I said, if you need a ride anywhere you just need to ask me.” He was moving closer to her as they spoke. It made Sansa’s skin crawl, she wanted him to back off.

“I’m sure the bicycle will be fine but thank you.”

“Well if you ever need anything just ask me,” he repeated.

“Thank you Petyr, but really we can manage. You don’t need to do us special favors. We can handle ourselves; getting to town, shopping, pick up our own mail, things like that.” For a moment she saw something flicker in his eyes, but it disappeared just as quickly as it came. She continued, “You should probably head out, curfew and all.”

He glanced at the clock, it was only 8:45 but he said nothing other than to wish her goodnight and left her standing in the kitchen.
They spent a good deal of the remainder of the summer cleaning out the barn, preparing it to store food come the fall. In previous years Lysa had sold off her overage and had had no need for storage, but this year with the new ration restrictions they planned to store most of it in order to sustain them through the winter.

School was going to be starting soon, but the edict that German would now be mandatory made Lysa baulk, so she had declared Arya and Robin did not have to attend, that she would teach them herself. Much to everyone’s surprise Arya insisted that she wanted to attend school anyways. Sansa suspected that it might have had more to do with her desire to see Mycah than anything else.

Brynden had moved back to town a few weeks into the occupation; he said he refused to abandon his home to the Germans, plus he still had his guns hidden there. He reminded Sansa of this as he left. She prayed he won’t do anything stupid. Sansa agreed to come see him once a week like before.

Due to Lysa’s erratic moods and headaches, Sansa had taken over many of the day to day details of the farm, currently her main concerns were the pending apple harvest and planning the winter garden. She consulted Brynden as well as the aptly named, Mrs. Appleton for guidance and tips. At times she found herself laughing at her current life, her daily thoughts consumed with the farm and food, it was far from the fashion and the parties that had consumed her thoughts just over a year ago.

Due to her preoccupation with the farm operations Sansa found she was going into town less than before. When she did go she found the rations were not as plentiful, the lines were longer and the German soldiers had become friendlier, more familiar. They would try to invite her to parties or to the cinema but she always pretended to be confused by their words until they gave up. Furthermore a distance had grown between her and Jeyne. It had started when Sansa declined her invitation to the party over the summer and was enhanced by the fact Sansa was in town less. Sansa couldn’t understand how Jeyne saw no harm in attending the parties or the dinners, and when they did see each other Jeyne had continued to argue with Sansa that there were barely any boys their age now anyways and it was ridiculous to expect them to miss out on life due to the nonsense of war. Sansa tried not to be too harsh on Jeyne, she thought much in the way that “London Sansa” had and she didn’t have a brother in harm’s way, a sister to protect or a farm to run.

Late summer eventually gave way to autumn and some sense of normalcy, if it could be called that, had settled over the island. The new normal was fraught with tension and worry. Anxiety was now just as much a part of the day as afternoon tea. They saw the bombers and other plans flying overhead daily, German planes on their way to bomb London and other British cities. They heard rumors that the bombings were terrible, whole neighborhoods leveled. It was said that thousands had
died, many more thousands were homeless and displaced, that the country faced collapse and could be invaded any day. They knew nothing of their family, nothing of Robb. Some nights they lay awake and wondered if they might be orphans now. It seemed the pain of not knowing might almost be as painful as the truth.

In many ways shock had helped ensure calm in the early months of the occupation and though they had grumbled and complained to each other initially, the islanders had gone along peaceful with most of the early German edicts and requisitions but trouble began to brew mid-autumn when a new set of restricts had been unveiled. The sale of all alcohol was prohibited, though Petyr still managed to show up with bottles of scotch for him and Lysa to enjoy after dinner. It was ordered that islanders were no longer allowed to go on the beaches and all previous fishing permits were revoked. The Germans ordered that they surrender all radios, rumors flew that there had been accusations on the other islands of espionage so they were taking preventative measured here. They also announced that all Jewish persons were to register with the administration and that any gathering of more than three islanders required special permission and permits.

The new restrictions only served to kick up a resistance movement that had not been previously seen. Anti-German symbols began to show up in town, painted on buildings or over posters in the night, leaflets started to be disturbed calling for disobedience and further resistance. This lead to a stricter enforcement of the curfew and more patrols in the streets. Everyone was now on edge. The Germans encouraged people to turn in anyone they suspected of subversive behavior, even offering rewards like money or additional rations, though for now they found few takers.

Most of the town worked to find ways around the restrictions. A black market for goods sprang up. People started forming clubs that were allowable by the Germans, book clubs for German literature and sewing circles, for example. Sansa had joined the sewing circle with Jeyne, she hoped it would help repair their friendship, and it seemed to have worked a bit, though it may have also been aided by the fact that Jeyne’s mother had now forbade her to fraternize with the soldiers. She had tried to persuade Arya into joining as well but, Arya hated the fact that they were repairing uniforms and darning socks for German soldiers, Sansa didn’t love it either but Arya did not understand that the meetings were so much more than just sewing.

The weekly meetings were a godsend for most of the women involved, Sansa included. It allowed them a needed respite from their day to day struggles and a chance to bond. It was a warm open group of women of all ages and from all social standings in the community. Sansa initially had been surprised to find that when they were together sewing, judgments were checked at the door. Everyone worked to focus on the positive, the small joys of each day, recipe successes based on the rations and home remedies. They talked of life before the war and she learned more about her mother’s life as a girl. Some of the older women, either those that had seen her grow or had been her peers had wonderful stories to share. It made Sansa homesick and yet comforted all at the same time. For the hour or two they met each week it was almost as if there was no war going on.

Eventually, the islanders begrudgingly accepted the new rules and as the cold autumn winds whipped over the island things settled back down.
Sadly, the uneasy peace of late fall would not last long; and as the year drew to a close it shattered.

It was the week before Christmas, the last day of school for the year and Arya had gone in to town with Mycah at the end of the day. Sansa had told her she would be at Brynden’s that evening for dinner so they had agreed they would ride their bikes back together since darkness came so early.

The rain had stopped for the day but things were still damp and cold. Despite that Arya and Mycah were hanging out in the alley way behind the butcher’s shop playing jacks and flipping through old comic books. The Germans didn’t see any value in comic books so even though they could get new German movies at the cinema, they couldn’t get new comic books.

“Do you want to see something I got last night?” Mycah asked Arya in a hushed whisper.

“Of course,” she answered.

He pulled out a copy of Captain America from his knapsack and held it up proudly to her.

“Where did you get that!?” she cried.

“Shhh, not so loud,” he whispered, “It’s contraband after all. Papa got it from one of the supply ship captains, smuggled it in in one of the deliveries. Papa says it’s my Christmas gift, but he let me have it early. Isn’t it grand? He’s fighting Hitler.”

Arya nodded in agreement and they sat on the crates behind the shop and began to read it. They were so engrossed in it that they did not hear the group of drunken German soldiers coming down the alley until it was too late.

“What do we have here?” Arya and Mycah quickly stood and Mycah shoved the book behind his back.

“Little love birds it seems.”
“We are not!” Arya protested.

“What are you doing out here in the cold then?”

“Nothing.” Mycah answered nervously, he was starting to sweat despite the December chill in the air. “We were just leaving.”

“Why such a hurry, aren’t we all friends here?”

“Why do you seem so nervous? What do you have in your hand?”

“Nothing.” Mycah made a move to leave but one of the soldiers grabbed him and tore the book from his hand.

“What is this?!” he demanded and handed it off to another soldier while he held Mycah in place. Arya began to tremble. The situation seemed to be escalating quickly. The three soldiers that were not holding Mycah were paging through the comic and speaking in German, their tones were growing angrier the longer they talked. The semester she had just spent learning basic German was no help, they were talking much too quickly.

“So you like this? This trash? Do you think it funny to disrespect the Furher?”

Mycah stared at the ground and shook his head. The soldier in front of him snapped his fingers in his face and demanded he look up.

“Say something chubby boy, do you think this is fun?” He held the comic in front of Mycah now, waving the picture of Captain America punching Hitler around.

“You like propaganda huh? Do you also paint the buildings at night? Hand out the papers that call for treason? Do you know others that do? I want names!”

Mycah had started to cry, that seemed to enrage the soldiers even more. Arya stood frozen, she wanted to speak up, to defend Mycah, but she was terrified. Just the other night she had overheard Lysa warning Sansa about what bored or conquering soldiers do to pretty girls in times of war. Arya
didn’t consider herself beautiful but she was a girl and she knew the soldiers here had become increasingly listless. She hated herself in that moment for thinking only of self-preservation. She also said a silent prayer that her sister would not choose to fetch her now, there was no telling what might happen if she did.

“Stop crying fat boy! You will tell us about the others.”

“I don’t know anything about that.”

“It is not good to lie.”

“I’m not lying.”

The lead soldier seemed to consider this and stood up and looked at the others. They exchanged words again in German before he turned back to Mycah.

“I believe you.” Mycah let out a breath and looked relieved. “Ah but you see,” the soldier continued, “you still must pay the price for this.” He pointed to the comic in his hand, it was now rolled up in a tight rod.

Fear washed over Mycah’s face as the soldier struck him with the comic and then knocked him to the ground. Arya turned to run and get help, but one of them grabbed her as the other two joined in the beating.

“Ah, Ah, you must watch my lady, someone must tell the others, there is a lesson to be learned here,” he hissed as he held her in place. She tried to struggle but his grip was too strong. She closed her eyes but that didn’t block out of the sounds of their fists and boots striking Mycah’s flesh, the cracking of his bones. She could do nothing but weep as they swore and laughed and beat Mycah until his cries and whimpers fell silent. When he finally lay stilled and bloodied the released her, shoving her to the ground and they all went on their way laughing as if they had just heard the funniest joke in the world.

Arya fled in the back door of the shop screaming for Mycah’s parents who came tearing down the stairs at the commotion, his father grabbing his cleaver as they followed her out back. They rushed to their son who lay bleeding and broken in the alley. Arya stood aside and wept loudly, apologies pouring from her lips.
Mycah’s father dropped the cleaver and picked up his son as if he weighed nothing and carried him inside shouting for his wife to fetch the doctor. Arya trailed them back inside and as she turned to follow him up the stairs she caught sight of Sansa who had just entered the shop as Mycah’s mother had run passed her.

“What on earth….” She began before she saw Arya’s look of devastation. Arya ran to her and flung herself in Sansa’s arms, burying her face in her chest and began to cry. Sansa held her and tried to calm her. After a few minutes the doctor entered with Mycah’s mother. Sansa grabbed her arm to ask what was going on but when she saw the wild look in her eyes she let go. They both disappeared upstairs.

“Arya, Arya stop! Tell me what has happened,” Sansa demanded.

Try as she might it took Arya another five minutes to calm down enough to tell Sansa what had happened. Sansa soothed her the best she could, she tried not to let Arya see how terrified she felt by her sister’s words.

“Can we stay here? At least till we know he’s ok?” She whispered, pleading. Sansa glanced at her watch, it was already dark and getting late, Lysa was probably already starting to worry; they couldn’t keep her waiting all night for word.

“Arya, Lysa will lose her mind if we don’t come home.”

“Please Sansa, please, I have to know before we go.”

They looked up when they heard the doctor clear his throat. “You girls should go now while you can. Nothing more can be done tonight.”

“What does that mean?” Arya demanded.

“It means go home.”

Arya began to protest and Sansa stopped her. “Go wait by the bikes, I’ll see what I can do,” she whispered. Arya nodded with renewed tears and went outside.
“Doctor?”

“I’ll just be honest dear, if the boy survives the night it’d be a miracle.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the beginning of the chapter was a bit dry but there was a lot of information needed in order to provide some context and to set up where things are headed as well as explain people’s motivations down the line. As always thanks for reading!
Chapter 8

Arya and Sansa rode their bikes home that night in silence save for the occasional sob that escaped Arya’s throat. Lysa was beside herself when they got home. She demanded to know where they had been, why they were so unthoughtful to stay out until the last minute. Sansa had snapped at Lysa to calm down and wait for her to explain, then immediately sent Arya to their room. She then explained to Lysa what had happened. The story had upset Lysa deeply. She had cried and woken Robin and forced him to come sleep in her room.

Sansa felt exhausted and drained as she entered the attic and found Arya laying on her bed crying into her pillow. Sansa sat at the edge of the bed and rubbed Arya’s back and shushed her, much like their mother had done when they were younger.

“I hate it here, I just want to go home,” Arya whispered through her tears.

“I know.”

“I hate the Nazis. I hope Robb kills them all!”

“You should try to get some sleep.”

“What did the doctor say? Tell me the truth Sansa.” She looked up at Sansa with a glimmer of hope in her eyes, it broke Sansa’s heart but she knew she couldn’t lie to her.

“It doesn’t look good Arya, he doesn’t expect him to make it through. I’m so very sorry.”

Arya buried her face back in the pillow, her small frame shaking. She pushed Sansa away. Sansa moved to the other bed to give her space. Arya did not want to speak any further and Sansa didn’t want to push her, so they lay in the dark, in silence, until they both fell asleep.

Everyone slept late, not waking until almost 7 am. They awoke to find there was no miracle in the night, Mycah died before morning and with him so did the last remaining wisps of Arya’s childhood. Petyr was the one that came to deliver the news. He arrived around 8 am, his expression as he exited his car was all they needed to know it had happened. Arya fled into the back field before he could even say a word.

Lysa invited him in for coffee and they sat at the table while Petyr conformed the details of Mycah’s passing. Lysa became upset and moved to the floor so she could take Robin in her lap. “So what now? Should we take Arya in to give her statement? When will there be arrests?” Sansa asked once he finished.

“Well that’s what we need to discuss,” Petyr said, his eyes darting around the room.

“What’s to discuss? They beat her friend to death in front of her, he was a child,” Sansa cried.

“A child with contraband, serious contraband according to the Germans,” Petyr countered.

“A comic book, he died for reading a comic book. That easily could have been Arya.”

“Does Arya know where he got it?”

“I think she said his father got it fr…… wait, why is that even important right now?”

“I’ve spoken to the German commander, he says he is very sorry for what happened but the rules
must be followed. We came to an agreement.”

“Agreement?” Lysa said as she tore her gaze from Robin.

“If I can keep the peace, if no one pushes for arrest of the soldiers involved, no protests or unrest, then they won’t look for additional contraband, the won’t arrest Mycah’s father or Arya.”

“Why would you agree to that?! How is that justice?!” Sansa demanded.

“I’m weighing the many against one. What would you have me do? Demand the Germans arrest their own soldiers, what do you think they would tell me? Should I let the people riot in the streets for justice, just so the Germans could crush them under their boots, increase restrictions, carry out reprisals? Please, tell me what you think we should do,” Petyr countered back.

Sansa did not have a response, she just stared at him weighing his words. She hated to admit he had a point, it was completely unfair and unjust.

“Mycah’s parents have already agreed anyways,” he added, his expression containing a hint of superiority.

“Then I suppose you’re really here to make sure I will bring Arya to heel on the matter?” she bit back at him.

“Sansa, don’t speak like that to Petyr, he is trying to help. Do you wish to see Arya arrested? Do you think they would stop with her, you should think about the rest of us,” Lysa spoke coming to Petyr’s defense.

Sansa sighed and then nodded at Petyr. “I’ll talk to her.”

“Good, see that you make her understand. I need to get back to town. I’ll come back for dinner.”

“Please don’t,” Sansa replied.

“Sansa!” Lysa cried.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean it to be rude but we all know Arya is not going to take this well, she is going to need a bit of space, I think it would be best to let her process it before she sees Petyr again is all.”

“I agree,” he said smoothly and knelt down to take Lysa’s hand. “Don’t worry, I’ll be back in a couple of days, but Sansa’s right, it’s important Arya remain calm for all our sakes.”

Lysa nodded slightly in agreement but looked upset none the less.

“Sansa, walk me out please,” Petyr requested. Sansa swore she saw Lysa’s jaw tighten at his request.

Sansa rose and followed Petyr out of the house and off the porch. When they were near his car he finally spoke. “How are things here? Are you managing alright?”

“We are getting on just fine.”

“Are you sure? Between Lysa’s delicate state and now this ugliness with Arya….. well, I could understand if you were in need, if you wanted, help.”

“They are my family Petyr, and I am a Stark, I’m strong enough to handle it.”
Petyr’s face expression darkened at her words. “Very well then, but should you need anything you should just ask.”

“Thank you, now I must go find Arya,” she said and turned to leave. He reached out and grabbed her upper arm and then slid his hand down so that he was holding her wrist. She looked at where he was touching her and then up at his face. He seemed to read her expression and released her.

“Good luck,” he said, “I hope you understand how important it is that she accept this. You may well seal all our fates with your words, choose wisely.” With that he got in his car and drove off.

Sansa hiked down into the field behind the house towards the woods to search for Arya. She went over her words in her mind as she walked, searching for the right ones to make Arya understand that there would be no justice for her friend.

She had seen no trace of her sister as she neared the edge of the field and prepared to head into the woods when she heard movement above her. She looked up and saw Arya perched in one of the trees. “Is he gone?” she called down.

“He is. Come down here please, I need to talk to you.”

Arya sighed and made her way to the ground. If Sansa had held hopes of finding a compliant child the look on Arya’s face had killed that hope. Her eyes were like chips of flint, set and stony. Arya was no longer a free spirited or weeping child, sometime completely different now stood in front of Sansa, something fierce and hard and almost frightening. It gave her pause, the words she had planned to say dying in her throat.

“I know he’s dead, you don’t have to be gentle with me,” Arya said breaking the silence.

“He is, but that’s not what I need to discuss with you.” Arya’s eyes were cutting into her. “Let’s walk,” Sansa suggested, she did not want to look into those eyes as she told Arya the ugly truth of where they now found themselves.

They began to walk along the edge of the field near the tree line. “Out with it Sansa, you’re a horrid liar, I can tell whatever it is you need to say is something I won’t like.”

“I’m going to need you to try and remain calm.”

“Just say it.”

“Nothing is going to happen to the Germans that hurt Mycah.”

“That murdered Mycah, say it, say they murdered him,” Arya’s voice was cold, colder than Sansa had ever heard her.

“They murdered him, and they are going to get away with it and you have to accept it and not make trouble about it, not speak to anyone about it.”

“This is Petyr’s idea.” It wasn’t a question.

“Not entirely, the German Commander suggested it, Mycah’s parents have already agreed. It’s the only way to protect everyone, you, Mycah’s father, everyone.”

“So you agree with Petyr? With the Germans?” Sansa flinched, her sister’s words cutting her to the quick. She didn’t agree but she saw little choice in the matter and it made her sick.
“No, I -,”

“What if it was Bran? What if you had watched Bran be beaten to death? Would you just accept it? You’d be ok with his murders being free, seeing them in the streets, laughing, living?”

Sansa stopped walking and grabbed Arya by the arm and turned her towards her, she choose her words carefully. “I would want justice for Bran, I would. But you need to consider this: if Bran died and the only way for you to get a chance at justice for him was for father and Rickon to die, would you take it? And what if you knew that there really was no real chance that justice would be delivered? Would you pursue it anyways? Would you be so blinded at pursuing what you thought was right that you would allow others to die to get it? Would you allow yourself to die?”

Arya stared at her, weighing Sansa’s word. Sansa said nothing more, she waited for Arya to decide their fates. Arya set her jaw and pressed her lips in a firm line before finally rendering her verdict.

“I’ll do as you ask, but I will never forgive Petyr for this, for being a collaborator, for denying justice to a dead boy, to my friend. I will never forget.”
Chapter 9

Five days after Mycah was quietly buried, Christmas came, but there was little joy to be found in their home. Arya had agreed to Petyr’s plan but it had left her angry and bitter. Petyr had brought extra rations and presents to them, Sansa assumed as a gesture of goodwill, but Arya had spent Christmas dinner glaring at him and would not speak a word to him regardless of his efforts.

Over the next week, despite the cold, Arya spent more and more time out in the woods or the barn. They tried to give her space, to allow her to grieve in her own way but it was still hard to accept the distance that was growing. Sansa realized she was grieving too, for the optimistic adventurous child that had once been her sister. They no longer lay awake in the dark sharing their days and thoughts in the attic as they drifted to sleep. Now she just prayed daily that Lysa’s patience with Arya’s dark mood would continue to hold.

The start of 1941 rang in with little optimism. Robin had developed a fever, Lysa was beside herself and so the care of the farm fell solely to Sansa and Arya. Petyr had offered to come stay with them, to help out, but Sansa had told him there was no need, that they could handle it, and besides his work in town was more important. He had tried to appeal to Lysa but she had been too distracted by Robin’s health and had waived him off, deferring him to Sansa who held fast to her polite refusal.

When Robin failed to improve Petyr called in some favors to get the medicine he needed to recover, and he made sure Lysa and Sansa were aware of the extra efforts he had made for their family. Robin’s illness broke a week and a half later, but he now seemed weaker than he had before. Sansa wondered if it might be related to the diminished quality of their food. While they still had a sufficient amount to eat, thanks in part to Petyr providing Lysa with additional rations, the winter garden had not turned out quite as she had planned and hoped. She kept counting the days till spring when they could plant and have fresh vegetables and fruit again.

Mid-January brought the return of school and they were surprised when Arya said she still wanted to attend. Sansa had tried to talk her out of it, but she was determined to attend, telling Sansa that Mycah would want her to keep going; that had silenced any protest Sansa could think of. In addition, Arya purposed a change to their living situation. She had spoken with Brynden and he had agreed to allow her to stay with him during the week so she could be close to school, as well as help Mycah’s parents around their shop. She argued they could use the help and they could use the money. Her plan was to come home to the farm Friday nights and leave on Monday morning for school. Lysa and Sansa had initially protested until Arya talked to Sansa about it as they lay in the attic the night before the first day of school.

“I need you to talk to Lysa, to make her say yes to me staying with Brynden,” Arya told her.

“We’re not convinced that it’s safe for you to be in town that much, the distance out here gives us
some protection. Do you really want to see the Germans every day?”

“They don’t matter, I’m not doing this to be easy on myself. I’m being ruined by guilt; do you know
that?”

Sansa turned and looked at her sister, there was something in her voice that made Sansa see her as
more than the angry creature she had been recently.

“You know his death was not your fault? Arya, it was not your fault.”

“Maybe not directly, but I did nothing. I barely fought the soldier that held me, I didn’t scream. I
knew I didn’t want to die; I froze, and he was beaten and he died. It’s eating me up inside, changing
me, twisting me. I have to do something to make it stop, and the only thing I can think of right now is
to help Mycah’s parents. I need to do this Sansa, before I become something I hate.”

Sansa stared at her sister. She had known her sister was no longer a child, not after all that had
happened, but her words made her weep now anyways. She left her bed and crawled in with Arya
and wrapped her arms around her.

“Ok, I’ll talk to Lysa, I’ll get her to agree.”

“Thank you. Is it ok if you stay in bed with me? Just for tonight?” Sansa nodded and smoothed back
her hair and they settled in for the night.

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Arya headed to school the next morning and Sansa sat Lysa down to discuss Arya’s wishes. Lysa
was resistant at first but Sansa worked on her and they came to a compromise. Arya would leave for
school on Monday morning and would stay with Brynden but she and Brynden had to come to
dinner on Wednesday nights when Petyr came. Lysa reasoned that he could give them a ride back
and forth to town. This way they would all be together once a week. Lysa admitted that she missed
Brynden since she no longer went to town.

Sansa told Arya the terms when she returned from school that afternoon, much to her surprise she did
not protest. She did request though that she be allowed to go into town tomorrow to see Mycah’s
parents and settle in with their uncle. Lysa agreed.
As they lay in bed that night Sansa realized she would miss sleeping next to her sister every night. She rolled over and faced Arya’s bed. “You awake?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you really ok with coming to dinner with Petyr once a week. You’ve made no secret of your dislike of him. I thought you’d protest more.”

“Means to an end.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Just that I willing to accept some unpleasantness for the greater good, to get what I need.”

Sansa almost asked Arya when she became so mature and reasonable but stopped herself; she knew the answer already. “Well that was very mature of you. Just be careful in town, there’s more eyes there,” she said instead. “I’ll miss you though,” she added quietly.

“I’ll miss you too, but we’ll still see each other plenty, I’ll be here every weekend.”

“I know but I’ve gotten so use to you always being in my space,” she teased.

“I love you too Sansa. Goodnight,” she responded with a smile in her voice.

“Goodnight Arya.”

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By February the island seemed to have fallen into a sort of hibernation. Petyr again made an offer to stay with them, this time citing that they were isolated out here, the rain making the roads nearly impassable slicks of mud, and they would need help now that Arya was staying in town most of the
week. Again Sansa refused him, working through Lysa, citing it wasn’t worth the risk of him being caught out with them should he be needed in town, plus they needed him there to keep an eye on Arya. It made Sansa uneasy that he seemed to be coming more and more determined to stay with them, though she had yet to figure out the reason. Lysa for her part seemed to enjoy the additional attention from Petyr, it seemed it was the only thing that ever lifted her mood. Sansa feared that eventually Petyr was going to get his way.

A few more weeks passed, and the new routine seemed to be working. Arya was there on weekends to help with chores and her spirits did seem to be somewhat improved. She even spoke to Petyr a bit now and no longer stared daggers into him just for being in the same room as her. She and Brynden seemed to have formed a tight bond as well. She told Sansa they had much more in common than she would have thought, that she enjoyed hearing his stories about his time in the Foreign Legion and learning the things he was teaching her. When Sansa had inquired what he was teaching her exactly, Arya had changed the subject by telling her about her work with the butcher. She said their mother would be appalled by the facts she now knew so much about butchering meat, it was very unlady like after all. They had laughed about that, though they now knew that their mother had not always been a lady herself, based on the stories Sansa had heard in the sewing circle.

By mid-March the hibernation had ended, the town was abuzz with news. Construction was to start on the island, camps for detainees that would be brought in to start building fortifications on the island. The occupation was forcing hard choices, as times became harder, resentment and judgments grew, the once unified front was cracking, and therefore the construction was the source of a vast controversy and the issue seemed to further divide the town. The island farmers, large landowners and shop keepers were in better positions than many of the poorer residents. With commercial fishing all but suspended, most other trade cut off and supplies limited, work was hard to find for many, so the construction was a boon, however the idea of working for the Germans, of helping them build what many were calling prison camps, was not desirable either. But most people found they had few options if they wanted to survive, so they made the hard decision to go to work building the camps.

It was around that same time that Sansa found herself at sewing circle without Jeyne, the latter was helping her parents with inventory. It was also the first week that Mycah’s mother, Molly, had returned to the group. There had been minimal sewing as they had welcomed her back with hugs and tears.

When the meeting ended and the women were packing up to leave Molly approached her. “Sansa?”

Sansa turned and smiled at her. “I know I told you before, but I’m glad you are back with us.”

“Me too,” Molly responded and then seemed to look around and shift uncomfortably. “Do you have a little time? I’d like to discuss something with you, something I hope you’ll keep between us. Maybe we could get some tea?”
“That would be lovely,” Sansa answered. Her reply did not seem to ease Molly’s nerves. Sansa’s heart went out to her. She knew it must be hard to try and fit yourself back into your normal life after a tragedy, especially one everyone knew about, and especially when everyone saw you as a symbol of what not to do, a cautionary tale. Everyone had been sweet to Molly today, but Sansa had heard the whispers around town and from others in the group previously, everyone had an opinion on what had led to Mycah’s death and how his parents should’ve responded.

They walked through town making small talk about the weather and the quilt Molly was planning to sew as they headed towards the harbor. The tea shop had been repaired after the bombing though Sansa had not been there since that day. They ordered a pot and sat at a table close to the front window. Sansa wondered if there might be an issue with Arya. She poured the tea and waited for Molly to speak, but she seemed to be hesitating, as if she had changed her mind. She wondered if she regretted asking her here.

“Is everything alright with Arya?” Sansa asked when she could no longer bear the silence. “Is she creating problems for you?”

“Oh, no! No, she has been a godsend, thank you for letting her work with us.” Molly took in her curious expression. “But she is the reason I wanted to talk to you. She’s like family now, which makes you family too, and I feel like I owe you some insight, a warning I suppose.” Sansa gave her a questioning look. “Like I said before, I’m hoping this conversation can stay between us. I don’t want Arya to think I’ve betrayed her trust and I promise I’m not trying to stir up trouble.”

“I promise.”

“Well then, I’m sure Arya has been clear about her feelings regarding Mr. Baelish?” Sansa nodded unsure of where this was headed. “Arya’s confided in me that he seems to have taken a keen interest in you, she doesn’t like it. Furthermore, she has voiced some concerns that you may be… I don’t know how to say it really, I guess, well, she thinks you might be on his side?”

Sansa blanched. “Yes, well Arya and I have discussed some of that, well about his interest in me, but really he hasn’t done anything truly inappropriate towards me. As far as the other issue, I know Arya’s angry about his handling of….” Molly looked at her and nodded in understanding of what Sansa was getting at. “I’m not on his side, in fact I argued against it initially, but once he explained it I understood his position. I’m the one that talked to Arya about it, I guess I understand why she might think that. But part of the reason I went along was because he said you had agreed as well,” Sansa concluded.

“We went along because we faced little choice. He basically threatened us. He said if we made a fuss
they would arrest my husband, we’d lose the shop. We have our other children to think about, and so I agreed to let my son’s murders go free.” Molly looked out the window towards the harbor fighting back her tears.

Sansa reached across the table and took her hand. “Don’t be upset with yourself. As you said, you had little choice. We are all just trying to do our best to survive this, and sometimes that means making the hard choices and sacrificing ourselves and ideals.”

“How much has your aunt told you about the Baelish family history here on the island?”

“Nothing, Lysa adores Petyr, she would never say a bad word about him.”

Molly let out a brittle laugh. “Of course, she won’t.”

“What?” Sansa asked. “You are going to need to tell me what is going on.”

Molly gave a sigh and took a drink of tea. “Did you know I once courted with your Uncle Edmure? It was forever ago, when we were very young, a year or two before your mother left the island. Cat was always sweet to me, but I don’t think Lysa ever cared for me. I’m not from a landed family.”

“I don’t understand what you’re getting at?” Sansa questioned her.

“Sorry, that’s another story entirely. Anyways, the Baelishes were one of the original families on the island. They used to own practically the entire place. Over time they sold off large plots to other families as they moved here. It made them very wealthy. But somewhere along the way they started to mismanage things. Petyr’s grandfather was a mess. He drank and gambled, losing everything but the few acres that they hold today. In fact, your great grandfather Robbryt got the Tully family farm off Petyr’s grandfather in a card game.

When Petyr’s father took over the farm it became clear that he thought many of the families on the island has taken advantaged and swindled his father. He feuded with everyone. He was a hard man, it was a known secret that he treated Petyr terribly, was always filling his head with stories about how everyone had wronged and abused their family. That’s why Holster, your grandfather, took pity on him, started looking after him, tried to save him from that man’s influence.

I think Petyr hoped to marry your mother one day and inherit Holster’s farm, truly be his son, but
your mother never saw him like that and she had her own plans. She lit out of here as soon as she could for the glamour of London, but I think he always thought she would find city life overwhelming and return to him and the island. When she brought your father back it crushed Petyr. He left here shortly thereafter and then it was Lysa’s turn to be crushed. “

“Why are you telling me all this?” Sansa asked.

“Because when Petyr returned a few years ago he seemed to be on a mission to make himself the most powerful man on the island. And now with the Nazis here he seems to have accomplished it. You are out on that farm and your aunt worships him so maybe you don’t know, or you can’t see it, but he is dangerous. He’s already been using his position to punish people, to even old scores.”

“I’m sorry but this all seems a bit….. Well, why have I never heard anything like that before? My mother never had much bad to say about Petyr.”

“He was her childhood friend, I doubt she knows much of the man he’s become. Also, why would anyone here tell you? He makes no secret about the advantages that he provides to those who are his allies, and he has made it clear to everyone he considers your aunt, and therefore you by proxy, his allies.”

Sansa felt her stomach turning. Was that what everyone thought of them? Was that what Arya thought of her? That they were collaborators and traitors? She felt shaken.

“Sansa, I love Arya and I like you as well. I just want you to have your eyes wide open here and to be careful. Your great grandfather and your grandfather, even your mother, were all well respected and well thought of on this island, the Tully name still means something here. Brynden’s efforts aside, Petyr is trying to leverage that name for his own purposes. I just think you should know.”

Sansa took a long drink of her tepid tea and let Molly’s words soak in. She was unsure of what she should do with this information.

“Why has Brynden never mentioned any of this?”

“I don’t know, maybe he thinks it’s better to leave you out of it? But also, Brynden left the island for many years, before Petyr was born even and he returned during the years Petyr was gone. Plus, I think you know your uncle tends to steer clear of gossip…… well and people in general.”
Sansa realized that was true, Brynden had few friends she was aware of and had spent his entire adult life in military pursuits, and he definitely would not entertain idol gossip. And then she remembered Arya telling her something Brynden had said recently, that one needs to keep their enemies close, maybe Brynden had a plan.

“Thank you for telling me."

“I’m sorry if it’s a burden, but as I said I think you should know, but please don’t tell Arya I told you she’s upset with you about Petyr. I don’t want her to know I broke her confidence.”

“I promise."

They sat quietly after that and finished the tea. If Sansa had had reservations about Petyr before it was nothing compared to how she felt now.

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Sansa kept her word to Molly and said nothing to Arya or anyone else about what she had learned about Petyr. However, at the end of March Petyr tried once more to make his way unto the farm. At dinner that week he announced that he had been ordered to take on soldiers in his own house, so he was asking Lysa if he might use the cottage. Sansa could tell Lysa was wavering, that she might allow it.

Lysa had seemed more depressed as the winter had worn on and as Robin had failed to regain all his strength; Petyr was the one thing that seemed to lift her moods. Sansa knew her aunt liked the idea of Petyr being close to her, and Molly had all but confirmed that Lysa had long been in love with him, though she doubted he returned the feeling. Sansa was quick to point out the cottage lacked the basic utilities of water and power, but in the end it was Arya and Brynden who shut him down.

“Don’t you think it would be better to stay in town, maybe you could gather information from those soldiers. Unless are you completely loyal to the Germans now?” Arya spoke in a clear innocent voice, her tone not betraying the harsh accusation her words held.

“I am most defiantly not blindly loyal to the Germans, I am loyal to the crown, to the people of this island. Everything I do it to ensure all of our survivals, but I am far from a resistance fighter. But tell me, who exactly would I be turning over this information to if I did?” His tone was had a hint of amusement. He was clearly baiting her.
“So the extra rations and special treatment are just an unfortunate side effect then?” Arya countered ignoring his question.

“Has this family not benefited from my position? Do I not drive you out here every week? You’ve never turned down the additional food I provide, the medicine I was able to procure,” his gaze fell on Robin and then back to Arya. “You wish to take some moral high ground but only when it suits you, when there is nothing you need. But you should keep this in mind, chaos and despair are always waiting around the corner, just ask the people out on the western end of the island.”

His words hung heavy in the air, Arya looked away, Sansa shifted uncomfortably, he had a point, they didn’t refuse his help, they didn’t question where he got the things he gave him. They had asked him to give Arya and Brynden a ride each week. They still enjoyed tea and coffee when she knew others went without.

He continued, “I know what people in town say; that I am collaborating, hell Brynden says it to my face some days.” Brynden chuckled a bit at that and Petyr gave him a pointed look before continuing, “But they are wrong, I am doing all I can to serve my people, their interests.”

“Do you think the people’s whose land you’ve stolen think you serve their interest? Seems to me you are serving your self-interests the most,” Brynden interjected. Petyr blinked and looked taken a back for the briefest of moments. Brynden almost smiled, clearly pleased to have rattled Petyr.

“I’ve stolen nothing. I have secured those lands through the proper channels, they were abandoned. My ownership gives me more leverage with the Germans, which is good for everyone. Don’t you think it’s better to have a local voice of reason in their ears?” Petyr countered regaining his composure.

“Interesting that you consider yourself the voice of reason,” Brynden said dismissively.

Before Petyr could answer Arya jumped in, “Well I don’t think you can be in their ear all the way out here. I would think it’s far better for you to be in town, and I think the islanders would feel better too. That way they would see you are one of them, that you suffer under the same rules as them.”

Her words hung in the air, Petyr’s jaw ticked with tension.

“Arya’s right Petyr, it would be selfish of me to keep you here, away from everyone else that would
need you. You are very important after all,” Lysa said sadly breaking the silence, she was clearly disappointed. Sansa said a silent prayer of thanks.

Petyr opened his mouth but Lysa cut him off, “Don’t argue dear, I’m doing what’s best for you and your position.” Arya just smiled sweetly but her eyes remained cold. Brynden crossed his arms and waited for Petyr to respond further, but Petyr just smiled back at Lysa and bowed his head in assent; Sansa saw no sincerity in his eyes.

After dinner Arya and Sansa were washing the dishes in the kitchen while the adults drank scotch in the parlor. “I need you tell Brynden something when you get back to town and are alone,” Sansa whispered.

“Why are you whispering?” Arya whispered back giving her a concerned look.

“Because it’s about Petyr,” Sansa said, her voice barely audible.

“Let’s take the trash out,” Arya said in a normal volume voice.

They grabbed the waste bin and went out back. Once they were near the trash barrel they stopped and Arya waited for Sansa to tell her what was going on.

“At dinner Brynden said the Petyr is taking up land around the island, the land that the people that evacuated once held, but that’s not entirely true. I’ve overheard him trying to convince Lysa to sign the farm over to him. He said it’s for her protection but I don’t believe him, not after what Brynden just said. I think you should let him know. I worry Lysa will eventually be swayed to Petyr’s point.”

“But why would he want this place? He doesn’t even farm his own.”

Sansa couldn’t tell her what she knew, that she had a theory. So instead she answered, “I don’t know, but clearly he has some purpose for trying to buy as much land as possible, maybe he just likes the control. But please tell Brynden, if anyone can get Petyr to back off it would be him. It scares me to think what could happen if we were totally dependent on Petyr.”

“I will. I hope the ride home is quick tonight, because you know it’s gonna be awkward,” Arya sighed as they headed back inside.
Chapter 10

By early April the weather had slowly started to break, growing warmer day by day. They would soon be able to start planting the garden for the spring as well as starting on the potato harvest.

At family dinner the following week there was a tang of uneasiness in the spring air as they discussed the latest news in town. The Lynderlys, one of the few Jewish families on the island, had managed to escape. The rumors had been swirling for weeks that they were to be relocated off the island soon, but it appeared they decided to leave under their own terms, and with the help of the resistance, had fled by boat in the middle of the night. The Germans were furious, in fact the current commander was being recalled to Berlin and a new commander was to be sent in. Petyr lamented the change and all the time he’d lost and wasted building a good relationship with the outgoing one. He warned them he’d have to start over, that things might get harder; he didn’t expect the Germans were going to send someone kinder or gentler. He grumbled that anyone who’d been involved in this whole plan was being ridiculously short sighted.

The look that passed between Arya and Brynden was not lost on Sansa, they seemed pleased. But then Sansa suspected anything that distressed Petyr likely pleased them. She hoped Petyr missed it though, for all her distaste for him he still held a lot of power, and to ignore that fact would be dangerous.

Along with the new commander, another wave of soldiers was expected next week, as well as the first detainees that would be staying in camps that had been built on the island. They were to begin building fortifications along the edges of the island, the Atlantic Wall, the Germans were calling it.

“I have something to ask Lysa,” Brynden began and Lysa nodded for him to go on, “I was wondering if I can move into the cottage. I was informed today that I must take in soldiers next week, I think it’s best if Arya and I came back to the farm.”

“I thought you said you would never let the ‘Kruts’ drive you from your home,” Petyr responded dryly.

“Well times have changed and I think it would do the women good to have a man around here.”

“It would indeed,” Lysa agreed, “It would be lovely to have us all in one place. Plus there are so many things in need of repair, and I do think it would make me and the girls feel safer with you here.”

Petyr’s mouth opened slightly in disbelief and anger but he said nothing. Sansa had realized after talking to Molly that Petyr could make things very bad for them if he wanted. Recently some of the women in the sewing circle had made their opinions on him rather clear, and while they did not blame Sansa they made it clear they looked down on Lysa for accepting so much help from him. Petyr for his part continued to flaunt that currying his favor had its benefits, while crossing him had its consequences. So the way he was looking at Brynden and Lysa right now, like he had been betrayed, made her worried. She hoped his focus on creating a relationship with the incoming commander would keep him too busy to dwell on his anger about this.

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Arya returned the next day; Brynden wanted to wrap up some things in town but saw no reason for Arya to remain with him in the meantime. Arya advised Sansa that it was true that they were to take on soldiers in their home but the real deciding factor was the information that Sansa had provided
previously, Brynden thought it might be best to circle the Tully wagons in one place to hold off the hostiles, so to speak. Brynden had told Arya he would die before he saw his family home signed over to Herr Von Petyr. Sansa was happy to have Arya back home full time, it had just not been the same here with her gone most of the week. Sansa hoped it also would allow them to fix the cracks she’d become aware of in their relationship.

That night Sansa voiced a concern that had been building in her head since she had seen Petyr’s expression at dinner the prior day, “Do you think Petyr would turn against us?”

“Well, hasn’t he already?” Sansa knew she was thinking about Mycah but she needed her to look beyond that.

“What I mean is what if he really turned on us? Made us take in soldiers or give up more of our food, he could if he wanted.”

“What are you getting at?”

“I think we need to be more careful with him. He was very put off that Lysa was so quick to allow Brynden to come out here when she has refused him several times, and there is the whole matter of him attempting to get ownership of this place. I’m worried he might turn on us.”

“I’m not going to call him uncle and sit on his knee Sansa, I don’t give a shit how he feels, let him do his worse.”

This conversation was not going how Sansa had hoped at all. “I wasn’t asking you too. That’s not what I meant at all.”

“Goodnight Sansa,” Arya’s tone conveyed that for tonight the discussion was over.

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Sansa went in to town a couple days later to help Brynden pack up for his move. As she rode into town and turned down his street she saw a group of people gathered near his home, a German truck parked out front. Her heart began to beat faster as she came to a stop on the edge of the crowd. “What's going on?” she asked the man nearest to her.

The man looked at her and then looked around nervously. “Appears he’s been informed on,” the man whispered and then quickly moved away from her.

Sansa gasped and felt a hand on her arm. “You shouldn’t be here,” Petyr whispered to her harshly and began to pull her back from the crowd. She shook him off but followed him back down the street.

“What happened?” she asked as soon as they turned off the street.

“I’m told someone informed on him. He’s been accused of working with the resistance. They searched the home and found weapon and pamphlets, as well as evidence of other activities. It doesn’t look good.”

“Who would do that? Why would anyone turn him in?”

“Who knows, probably for extra rations or favors. People are becoming increasingly unpredictable and desperate, it makes them selfish.”

“But who would know? I doubt he would have told anyone he had kept the guns or the other items,
at least not anyone that would turn him in.”

“It doesn’t matter now. He’s in serious trouble, they are saying he’ll be deported, likely to Guernsey, to one of the camps to help with fortifications there, that’s still better than going to the continent.” He looked at her expectantly. Sansa felt cold all over, he wanted her to ask him to help, to save her great uncle, but what would his price be?

“I need to get back and tell Lysa what’s happened. Should I tell her you’ll be by later?” Sansa asked not meeting his gaze.

“I’ll try,” he answered. It was clear he was disappointed by her response. He seemed distant now.

“Thank you,” Sansa said. She turned and mounted her bike and road out of town. When she reached the farm she hurried inside and called out to Lysa and Arya. They came from the kitchen to meet Sansa in the front room.

“Uncle Brynden’s been arrested, they found the shotguns he was hiding under the floor boards, other things tying him the resistance. Petyr says he’s likely to be deported,” she informed them sadly.

Lysa began to cry and sat on the sofa. “Can’t Petyr do anything?” she asked between her sobs.

“I don’t know,” she answered, “but he said he’d try to come by tonight to discuss it with you.” Lysa began to cry again, rocking herself back and forth. Sansa told Arya to watch her and she would make them all tea. When she returned Arya looked upset, it took Sansa a few moments to understand the source of her distress was Lysa’s quiet muttering. It was like she was talking to them and yet she wasn’t.

“This place is cursed. Everyone I love leaves or they die. My mother, my father, my husband, now my uncle. Will the island take Robin next? Me? Lucky Cat escaped, she knew, but she sent you back, maybe you’re the price of her freedom. This island feeds on Tully blood,” she murmured, “Tully blood, it wants it, demands it.”

Arya looked at her wide eyed and confused. Lysa’s ranting words sent chills down Sansa’s spine. She held up a finger and went back to the kitchen. She grabbed the powder the doctor had given them when Robin was sick to keep Lysa calm. She took some now and mixed it into the tea and took it back to Lysa. She coaxed her to drink it and then helped her up the stairs and tucked her into bed even though it was the middle of the afternoon. Thankfully, Robin had already been taking a nap when all this had started.

She made her way back down to Arya and they went out to the barn together. “Why was she saying such terrible things? She’s completely mad!” Arya asked. “Did you hear her? The island demands Tully blood?! Mother sacrificed us!? How am I supposed to sleep again after that?”

“You know Lysa’s doesn’t handle things well, I won’t worry about her ramblings. We have bigger problems.”

“I know, Uncle Brynden.”

“Did you know what he was doing?”

“Not a clue.”

Sansa studied Arya carefully looking for hints she was lying. Arya matched her gaze, holding her chin high, challenging Sansa to call her a liar. “You have been there for months and you didn’t see anything that would have tipped you off that he was in the resistance?”
“Isn’t that the point of the resistance; that no one knows you are in it? That’s how they protect themselves,” Arya responded, attitude tinging her voice.

“His involvement in that is only part of the problem; I think Petyr might have had something to do with his arrest. I don’t have proof, just a feeling. I’m sure he wanted him gone, but I also think he did it so we will ask him to intervene, so that we’ll owe him.”

“Why? What do we have that he wants?” Arya asked.

“Besides the farm I don’t know……”

“What are we going to do about this? We can’t just let Brynden be deported.”

“I don’t know what can be done, I’m not sure Petyr could help even if we did ask, not with the Germans having proof of his ties to the resistance. This is all just so fucked up.”

They stood looking at each other, the reality of the situation soaking in.

“Maybe Lysa was right, maybe this place is cursed,” Arya concluded.

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Petyr did not come that night, nor the next, Lysa refused to allow Sansa or Arya to leave the farm. The following morning he pulled into the yard followed by a large truck. Lysa, like a child, had run from the breakfast table to greet him. She stopped short on the porch when she saw the truck and the German soldiers exiting it, her eyes growing wide and wild.

“Lysa, you need to remain calm, but they need to search the house, the barn. Brynden is your family, they need to make sure you aren’t all involved,” Petyr explained.

“What’s the truck for?” Sansa asked him.

“In case they find evidence, but they are also probably going to require some items from you anyways.”

“Bribes,” Arya whispered to Sansa. Sansa looked at her sister, her eyes searching Arya’s face for concern. Arya might have denied knowing about Brynden’s activities but Sansa didn’t fully believe her, but she found Arya’s expression and eyes void of any concern or worry, her face a mask of calm. Sansa wasn’t sure if found it encouraging or concerning.

“Ladies you will please wait down here, you can sit in the truck if you want,” one of the soldiers told them. Lysa stated that no one from this family would be getting in that truck and told the girls to grab the chairs on the porch. They made their way down and sat next to the truck as the soldiers entered the house and the barn. They sat there as they heard things break and shatter. Lysa had begun to weep, which in turn made Robin weep. Petyr tried to comfort her.

“Is there nothing you can do? Why are you allowing this?” Lysa sobbed to him holding unto the hem of his coat.

“Regrettably no, maybe if you had asked for my help sooner or if I held the land.” He stared at Sansa as he answered her. It made her shiver. “But now it’s too late, they have too much on Brynden, so now they need to verify you are uninvolved. I told them to search the place, I knew it would clear you. But you will also need to let them have the rest of the cattle that is on my land and well as a portion of the potatoes you just harvested. Probably another half of the remaining hens as well.”
Lysa continued to sob. Sansa wasn’t sure how much more of her weakness should could tolerate. She could feel the anger and tension rolling off Arya as well. She hoped this would end soon for everyone’s sake.

They searched for another hour or so and then came back with the food and chickens they planned to take. They told them they were cleared and lucky that Petyr was willing to vouch for them, but they needed to make sure to steer clear of anything that could be considered subversive. They left after that, Petyr with them, he said he had paperwork to handle in town. So they stood in the yard and watched them go, not moving until they saw the truck turn out of sight.

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After a week of interrogation that proved fruitless Brynden was deported as promised; they weren’t allowed to see him before he went. Petyr said it was best they stayed as far from him as possible to keep suspicion off them. He said it was already bad enough that he was their family, no reason to make it worse. Arya fell back into her old habit of not speaking to Petyr and watching him with distain whenever he came around.

Arya still insisted she go to town to help Mycah’s parents at least 2 days a week, she argued that they needed the money, especially now that they had less potatoes to sell and no cattle as back up. Sansa didn’t like it but she decided there was no point in trying to fight her on it. Lysa had become despondent since the search, staying in bed most days and only coming out of her room to eat or sit on the porch. Sansa started to grow worried about how she would be able to keep everything going.

Sansa decided to head in to town, she had sewing circle tonight and as much as she hated doing anything to benefit the Germans, especially now, the need to get off the farm and away from Lysa’s pitifulness, out weighted her resentment. The town had changed in the two weeks since Brynden’s arrest, there were many more soldiers now. There were also prisoners coming in through the rebuilt harbor. Sansa found them sad and pitiful, her heart broke at how thin and sickly they looked. She knew they were being marched out to camps. She also knew they were bringing sickness with them, it was clear to see many were unwell.

She stopped into the grocer’s and saw Jeyne. “Hi,” she greeted her.

“Hey,” she said back and looked around. “Sorry about your uncle,” she added when she confirmed there was no one that would overhear them.

“Thanks. Sorry I haven’t been around, Lysa insisted we all stay together out on the farm since his arrest. How have you been?”

“As well as one can expect. There are lots of new faces around town, German faces mostly. The a new commander arrived. They are supposed to have a reception for him tomorrow night. You might consider going, might be good for your family to show some loyalty,” Jeyne said.

Sansa inhaled sharply and looked at Jeyne. “Loyalty to who exactly?”

“Jeyne shook her head and sighed, “You have been out on that farm too long Sansa, maybe you don’t know, but a Germans have been just terrible. After your uncle was arrested they tore through town, anyone that was accused of being an associate of Brynden’s was searched, some interrogated. They kept Master Aemon for three days, broke his leg. So don’t look at me like I am some traitor for suggesting you at least attempt to show some loyalty. Your sister was living with your uncle, people still wonder how she has avoided an arrest.”

“She’s a child, she didn’t know anything.”
“Do you believe that? And even if it is true it’s not stopping speculation. You should be careful. I’m telling you this as your friend, I hope you know that.”

Sansa regarded her carefully. “Is there something you’re not telling me?”

“No, I’m just telling you to be careful and that sometimes war means you have to sacrifice the moral high ground to survive.”

Sansa planned to respond but before she could a group of soldiers walked in the door and Jeyne turned to greet them brightly. Sansa stood for a moment longer and then headed outside turning Jeyne’s words over in her head.

She nearly collided with someone. “Sorry I wasn’t watching where I was going!” she cried and then realized with dismay it was Petyr.

“Sansa! What a wonderful surprise, you haven’t been in town in ages.”

Sansa just looked at him and then realized there was another man standing with him. He had a strong jaw, dark hair and the palest blue eyes she had ever seen, they unnerved her as he looked her over.

“Sansa Stark, I’d like you to meet the new German commander on the island, Major Ramsay Bolton,” Petyr introduced her.

“Lovely to meet you,” Ramsay said, his greeting held no warmth despite his words. He continued to study her, waiting on her response.

She remembered Jeyne’s words. “Welcome to Oakenshield,” she finally forced herself to answer.

“Will you be attending my reception tomorrow night?” he asked her. “It would please me if you would attend.”

“I… I…. well you see my aunt is very……” Sansa sputtered.

“Sansa’s aunt is not well, however I’m sure for one night Arya can handle things. You won’t want to turn down a personal invitation from the major after all and I’m sure Lysa would agree,” Petyr answered for her, a smirk playing in the corner of his mustache.

She felt trapped, there was no way to refuse now. “I suppose you are right. Yes, I will be there, thank you,” she answered.

“We must be going, important business,” Petyr said, “but we’ll see you tomorrow, 7pm at the Umber estate. Bring your friend, Jeyne.”

“Ms. Stark, it was a pleasure, I look forward to seeing you more,” the major said. Sansa could only nod and then stepped out of their way so they could pass. Once they were gone and her hands had stopped shaking, she turned and went back inside the store to talk to Jeyne.
Chapter 11

“I don’t understand why you would agree to go!” Ayra yelled pacing about the barn.

“Would you calm down? What would you have me do? I tried to make an excuse, Petyr won’t let me!”

“So now you get to put on a pretty dress and attend a pretty party, I’m sure you’re devastated.”

Sansa was stung by her words. She and Arya had not fought like this in over a year, not since they had come to the island.

“Believe whatever you want Arya, but everything I do I do for this family and for our survival.”

Arya stared at her for a long hard moment before she spoke. Her words were cold and cut Sansa to her core. “That sounds just like the things Petyr says.” With that she turned and left Sansa standing alone in the barn.

Sansa had borrowed a dress from Lysa. It was green with thick straps, a fitted bodice to the waist and then it flared out, the skirt falling to mid-calf. It was simple but beautiful and she paired it with a cream colored shawl. Arya had glared at her as she had fixed her hair.

Lysa told her she looked beautiful and she kissed Lysa on the cheek before she left the house. Petyr was driving her and they stopped to pick up Jeyne on the way. Jenye was dressed in sapphire blue and seemed thrilled to be going to the party. Petyr called them a pair of precious gems. Jeyne giggled and Sansa forced herself to smile.

They arrived to the Umber estate and Petyr escorted them in and presented them to the command council. Jeyne curtsied promptly. Sansa felt frozen as Major Bolton stared at her. There was something about him that consistently unnerved her. She heard Jeyne hiss her name under her breath, breaking the trace and she also curtsied. Petyr turned them loose after that, staying behind to chat with the Germans.

The girls made their way inside and found their way to the refreshments. “How does this compare to a London party?” Jeyne asked as they sipped champagne.

Sansa looked around. She supposed it was just as nice and told Jeyne as such. She didn’t add that the biggest difference was her desire to actually be there.

“See I told you it wouldn’t be so bad. Isn’t it nice to be out? Dressed up, sipping cocktails and having boys look at you?” Jeyne smiled and waved at a group of soldiers across the dance floor.

“Sure,” Sansa agreed with little enthusiasm.

A slow waltz began to play and a soldier walked over and asked Jeyne to dance. She agreed and followed him out on the dance floor, casting a beaming smile at Sansa as she went. Sansa closed her eyes shook her head to clear it. When she opened them she found Major Bolton beside her, studying her again, she felt his were eyes stripping away her dress and anything else that might shield her. “Do you know the waltz?” he asked.

She nodded, unable to find her voice under his gaze. “Then you will dance with me.” It was not a
request. He took her hand and led her out on the dance floor. She notice Petyr watching them, a look of satisfaction playing across his face.

“I’m told your family is still in London.”

Sansa blinked at him, she didn’t like that he had been discussing her and her family. He looked at her, his eyes growing colder as she failed to respond.

“Last I knew, but that was nearly a year ago,” she responded finally finding her voice.

“Ah yes, you are a bit isolated here.”

She didn’t respond, his words felt like a trap.

“You know London has been heavily bombed, many died, continue to die,” he continued. She knew he was trying to rattle her, to what end she was not sure, but it seemed he clearly wanted to upset her. She bit the inside of her cheek and watched Jeyne over his shoulder. Jeyne gave her a head tilt and a bright smile.

“Do you think they are dead or just forgot about you?”

Her attention snapped back to him. “They would never forget about me,” she said quickly.

“No, I suppose not, you are far too pretty to be forgotten, to go unnoticed.” There was a warning in his words and it caused her to misstep.

“It’s been awhile since I’ve danced,” she offered in a way of explanation. She noticed a look of satisfaction in his eyes and looked away. He knew he was getting to her.

The dance ended and she curtsied in thanks. “I’ll expect another dance soon,” he informed her and then walked away. She looked up to see Petyr nearby, he beckoned to her. She sighed and approached him.

“The major seems interested in you.”

“It was just a dance.”

“He’s asked quite a bit about you.”

“And it appears you were happy to supply him with information. What have you told him?”

Petyr’s mouth set in a tight line, he seemed annoyed with her but worked to hide it. “Only good things. If you gain his favor it could be good for all of us.”

“All of us?”

“Yes, everyone. If he is pleased with the island, with his time here, it’s better for everyone.”

A dark look passed over Sansa’s face and Petyr took notice. “What is it?”

“I refuse to be whored out to improve your social standing with the Nazis. There is nothing we need that bad, no I won’t play along.”

“We may need something in the future, it’s better to plan ahead, to be prepared. I would think about this carefully.”
“I won’t do anything to offend him but I have no intention to charm him, and it’s unfair of you to ask me to. My brother…”

They ceased their argument as Jeyne joined them. “Are you having fun?” Petyr asked her.

“Yes sir, thank you. It’s wonderful to dance and laugh so much.”

“I’m glad you are enjoying it so. I wish everyone was so open to opportunity,” Petyr said eyeing Sansa.

Another waltz began to play and Jeyne excused herself back to the dance floor. Petyr gave Sansa a warning look, “I would keep talk of your brother as quiet as possible if I were you.” He finished just as Major Bolton stepped to them.

“Ms Stark, I promised you I would return.” He held out his hand to her. Sansa gave Petyr a pointed look before taking Ramsay’s hand and joining him on the dance floor.

They started the danced in silence but she could feel a certain dark energy pulsing through the major. “So tell me about your family here on the island.”

She was surprised her had asked her this, she figured Petyr would have filled him in on anything he wanted to know, especially about their family here. “Well my younger sister and I are staying with my Aunt Lysa and her son Robin. She has a small farm north of town. It’s been in my mother’s family for generations.”

“And?” he asked expectantly.

She pulled back a bit so she could see his face. He had a glimmer in his eyes, the faintest ghost of a smirk playing over his lips.

“And it’s very pleasant. We have only a few chickens and a couple cows now, but I like the work.”

“Do you know longer claim your uncle then?”

Sansa froze a bit causing them to misstep. Ramsay’s eyes seem to brighten with her discomfort. He waited for her to respond.

“You asked about my family on the island, Brynden is no longer on the island. But you knew that already.” She tried to keep her tone calm and even.

“I did. It is my duty to know things after all. Just like I know your sister was living with him until right before he was arrested.”

“That’s not completely accurate, but she did stay with him some days yes, on the days she had school or if she was working for the butcher. His son was murdered by your soldiers last Christmas, but I’m sure you knew that as well.”

His eyes darkened. Sansa took a deep breath, she realized she may have been too bold. She did not truly know his temperament, she cursed at herself silently.

“Does being a traitor run in your family? Should I be concerned about you, your sister?”

Sansa scoffed, “My sister is just a child. She’s no threat to anyone. Neither am I.” She led herself into a twirl so he would not be able to see how bad she was shaking.
"If you love your sister you should warn her to be careful of the company she keeps," he warned. She took in his expression, his jaw was set, his eyes harsh.

"Of course I love my sister. She’s my closest family," she said quietly. "But I swear no one knew what my uncle was doing, we try to keep to ourselves out on the farm as much as possible."

"Family, love, loyalty, those can all be dangerous things during war," he mused, "I’d hate to see anything happen to such a pretty girl or her family due to a misunderstanding or bad information. It would be such a waste."

The dance ended then and he bowed to her and left her standing on the dance floor. She watched after him and tried to still her shaking knees.

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Petyr dropped her off to the farm after the party. They had rode in silence for most of the drive, Sansa feigned being exhausted as the reason. She wished him goodnight and entered the house and made her way to the attic.

Ayra was still awake, sitting in the reading corner paging through a magazine. "Did you enjoy yourself?" she asked snidely, she didn’t even bother to look up.

"Not for a moment."

Arya looked up then and took in Sansa’s expression. "Are you alright? Did something happen?"

"Nothing happened per say…….. Petyr says the new commander has an interest in me…… He’s terrible Arya. There’s something menacing about him."

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, not exactly. But he seemed like he was playing a game, testing me. He basically told me that our family was likely dead in London and then hinted that we are being watched because of Uncle Brynden. He asked about you."

Arya seemed frozen, her expression unsettled Sansa even more.

"Arya?"

"What an arse, him and Petyr both," she stated, her expression now cleared.

"I think we just need to be careful. I think we knew uncle’s arrest put attention on us, but this just confirms it. How was Lysa?"

"Fine, weepy as always. I wish she would pull it together."

"I know."

They stood in silence each regarding the other. Sansa waited to see if Arya would confess anything further, she could see something churning behind her eyes, but then she seemed to think better of it and stood from the chair, "I’m going to turn in."

"Ok, goodnight then," Sansa said in return and then thought better of it. "Arya?"

"Hmm?"
“Do we have any reason to worry?”

“About me? No sweet sister, don’t worry about me. I’m sure he was just playing at you, testing you. We’ll be just fine.”

Sansa regarded her for a moment longer, she didn’t truly believe her. With a heavy sigh she turned to get ready for bed.

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It was now late May, the days were getting longer and warmer. Lysa’s mood finally seemed to break. She was up and around now, helping with the farm again and not clinging to Robin at every moment. Their cousin seemed thrilled to be able to play outside again and not be tied to his mother’s side.

Small acts of resistance had begun to plague the town again, vehicle sabotage, leaflets, defacing of Nazi posters. Petyr had told them over dinner last week that it was pointless vandalism, the major was ignoring it and it was doing little to deter their efforts to fortify the island; he wished the resisters realized that they were essentially just an annoying fly. Though he added that flies eventually get themselves crushed when they refuse to fly away. Sansa had watched Arya for a reaction to his words but she had remained blasé towards his words.

Sansa found herself in town on a quiet weekday. She stopped in to see Jeyne. Last week Sansa had been upset when Jeyne had confided in her that she had secretly begun seeing the soldier who she danced with at the party. Sansa could barely remember his name. He seemed nice enough, but he was still a Nazi, and despite their friendship she would never be able to understand how Jeyne could overlook such a thing, but she was doing her best not to let it ruin their friendship.

There was a new influx of prisoners today and the streets near the wharf were crowded as they were herded around by the German soldiers. Many of the towns’ people lined the streets as well, watching in curiosity and horror. Sansa felt sad seeing them in such a state. Many of them looked skinny and sick. People talked about trying to help them with food but rations on the island seemed to be cut every time there was a new influx, so most weren’t in a position to help. It was truly a cruel tragedy.

“Do you see any you like?” she heard Major Bolton behind her.

“I beg your pardon.”

“Petyr suggested we start lending some of them out to the farms, maybe they could help with planting and harvesting.”

“It’s too late in the year for much planting I’m afraid.”

“Is that so? For a refined London lady you seem to know a lot about farm life.”

“My mother says it’s in our blood.”

“Ah, well that we can agree on. What is in one’s blood it the most important thing, you can’t fight nature.”

Despite the warmth of the day Sansa felt cold standing near him having this conversation. “I should be getting home,” she told him.

“So soon? I’ve hardly seen you since my reception.”

“The farm keeps me rather busy this time of year.”
“Yes, the safety of the farm. It’s interesting to me that your sister does not wish to stay there as much as you. I still see her around town quite a bit, even with school being out. What could she possibly be up to?”

Sansa hated his interest in Arya, it completely alarmed her. “She’s a child, what child wants to stay home and do chores? Also her work with Mycah’s parents keeps her busy here in town.”

“Yes, the dead boy, the one you like to remind me of.”

“I didn’t……..”

“Perhaps you have been avoiding me?” he interrupted. “Baelish tells me I might have upset you a bit at the dance. As such I have a gift for you.” He said it with no sincerity, he either didn’t believe a word of it or didn’t actually care if he’d upset her.

“Did he? He shouldn’t have bothered you with such ridiculous nonsense. Everything was lovely.”

“So he lied to me?” There was an undertone in his voice that made Sansa’s breath catch, this conversation was becoming extremely dangerous.

“No, it wasn’t a lie, I just meant that he should not have troubled you with the simple emotions of a silly girl. You are far too important for that.”

“So then I did upset you?”

Sansa stilled her mind, she had to play along or risk a vengeance on Petyr that would only trickle down to her or her family. She prayed they would forgive her for her next words.

“I only mentioned that I did not like discussing my traitor of an uncle; that I didn’t like to be reminded of the failings of my family.”

“Ah, well you have my apologies of course. I’d also like you to have this.” He snapped his fingers and barked an order in German. One of his officers fetched something from the trunk of the Major’s car and came forward handing her a large basket; it was filled with assorted foods and beverages, some of which she hadn’t seen in months. She could feel the eyes of everyone on her. He was making quite a show of this, for whose benefit she was not sure.

“I couldn’t possibly take this. Nothing you said offended me so that you need be so kind.”

“Well you cannot refuse it, but it’s yours to do with as you please. Again I’m sorry if I upset you.”

She suddenly had an idea. She prayed it would not offend him but he had said she could do as she pleased with it, and the last thing she wanted was people in town to think she had curried his favor. It was already bad enough the way people whispered about her family’s ties to either treason or Petyr, depending which side they were on, she refused to add to their ill feelings now.

“Well think nothing of it, all is forgotten. Thank you for your kindness.”

He waved her off. “I have business to attend to, these prisoners need to be processed by the end of the day. Lovely to see you as always Ms Stark.” With that he stalked off, shouting at a couple of soldiers closer to the dock. Sansa turned and approached some of the people on the sidewalks and offered them some of the supplies in the basket. Some of them refused but some took them regardless of their suspicions. Ramsay turned and watched her and shook his head with the most incredulous look on his face but he did nothing to stop her.
By the time she made it to the end of the block she had emptied the basket of everything but the bottle of champagne. She placed it in her bike basket and even though she could feel his eyes on her, she rode off without looking back.

She found Arya in the barn cleaning out the root cellar. “What are you doing?” Sansa asked standing on the edge of the ladder and looking down at her sister.

“Preparing for the fall harvest. I thought it might be a good idea to have a better storage system then last winter when so much stuff went bad.”

Sansa looked around, she could see Lysa over in the garden on the opposite side of the house and Robin in the yard playing near her.

“I’m coming down, I need to ask you something and I need you not to lie to me Arya.” Sansa climbed down the ladder and stood in the cellar with Arya. Arya looked at her and waited. “Are you working with the resistance in town?”

Arya met Sansa’s gaze and held it. “No,” she finally answered.

“Do you know who is in it?”

“No, Brynden left me out of it. I knew there was something going on, there were too many people coming and going from the house, a room he won’t let me in, but that’s it. He refused to let me in.”

Sansa watched her for a few more moments and then finally let her eyes break from Arya. “Well you need to be careful. Every time I see Major Bolton he seems to imply that you are involved with things that you shouldn’t be. I think maybe you should stay out of town for a bit. Can you do that?”

Arya’s face became angry. “This is complete rubbish.”

“I agreed, but that doesn’t negate the danger of the situation.”

“Oh, I’ll stay out of town, but just for a bit. After tomorrow though, I need to at least go tell Mycah’s parents I won’t be able to come around for a while.”

“Ok, that’s fair, but be careful. It’s clearly not safe for you there.”

“I’m always careful Sansa, trust me.”
Robin's birthday was the following week. They had tried to come up with something special for him, since his eleventh birthday had been largely overlooked last year due to the fall of France. It was Petyr who actually came up with the winning suggestion. He offered to take Robin into town with him for the week. He said it would be good for him to spend some time in the company of men, since at twelve he was constantly surrounded by women. The girls had expected Lysa to resist but she seemed to relish the idea of Petyr playing papa to her son. Robin himself loved the idea, he loved the idea of escaping a house full of girls for a bit. So the week of his birthday Petyr fetched him and took him to town. Sansa made a mid-week run and found him in good spirits, he said that Petyr had taken him to several very important meetings, that he had seen numerous soldiers and prisoners. Sansa blanched at the idea that Petyr was exposing him to the Germans but Robin seemed so pleased, so she said nothing.

Petyr returned him the following Monday, but the boy he brought back that evening was much more subdued. Sansa thought perhaps he was just tired from all the excitement, but he spoke little of his adventures over dinner and asked if he could be excused to go to bed. Lysa had agreed but she seemed disappointed he had not wanted to stay up with her and tell her all about his week. She had asked him if he wanted mummy to lay with him till he fell asleep. He had just shrugged but Lysa had said that she would. She asked the girls to clean the table and the kitchen and apologized to Petyr for not being free to chat tonight. He told her he understood but said he would probably relax here a bit longer before heading back to town; that had pleased her.

Once Lysa had been upstairs for a bit and the dishes cleared he came into the kitchen to fetch Sansa. "Sansa, can I borrow you for a bit. There is something I need to discuss with you."

The girls exchanged a curious look. Sansa set down the dish she was drying and nodded. She followed Petyr out on to the porch. She looked at him and he indicated they should walk further into the yard. They headed down the porch and out into the orchard.

"What's going on? You seem very serious," Sansa asked, she hoped her voice didn't betray the fear she felt.

"Something happened in town a couple of days ago, to Robin."

"Why are you telling me? Don't you think it's best to tell his mother?"

"I want to tell you first because after I tell Lysa I might not be back for a while, she is going to be that furious."

"What could possibly be that bad? Is he ok? He seemed quiet tonight but….."

"A few prisoners managed to escape a couple nights ago. The rumor in town is that the resistance helped them, but no one knows and they have yet to be found. Ramsay naturally was furious." Sansa felt a chill creeping up her spine at the mention of his name. She had seen the cruelty in his eyes, she feared what Petyr would say next. "He ordered a search of the town but nothing turned up. So to punish everyone he rounded up all the children in town, including your cousin."

"What? Why weren't you able to stop him? I thought you had some sway with him."

"I try to influence and persuade for the good of the islanders but Major Bolton, well, I'm not sure that can be controlled and he doesn't listen, not when he is in a blind rage. I've never seen anything like it.
He rounded up the children and marched them out to the camp. He ordered anyone that attempted to intervene be beaten. As you can imagine most of us trailed behind to see what he was going to do. Once we reached the camp he ordered the children inside, set them to work for a bit. After a couple of hours he called everyone to the main yard. He then hung five prisoners while we all watched. He said the next time it would be the children of anyone caught helping the prisoners. I have never seen such cruelty. I think he enjoyed it, the look of terror on everyone's face, it brought him joy."

Sansa felt her blood run cold in her veins and she shuddered. "You have to tell Lysa before Robin does. She is going to be distraught but I think she'll forgive you. I mean what were you to do? Fight Ramsay in the street?"

"Your aunt is not well, there's no telling how she will react."

"Poor Robin. I can't imagine how scared he must have been. Ramsay is something else. So I can assume you do not think it necessary for me to continue to humor his advances?"

Petyr stopped and turned to her and held her by her arms. "Foolish girl, if anything you need to be more careful in refusing him, clearly he is unpredictable and cruel, I'd hate to see anything happen to you."

Sansa looked at him horrified, tears began to escape her eyes. Petyr reached up and brushed her tears away and he let his hand linger on her cheek. "I'm sorry, but do you know how beautiful you are? Ramsay sees it just as well as I. He still asks after you. I'll do my best to keep him at bay, but you should know he is going to keep coming for you. You may be faced with difficult decisions sooner than I would hope for you."

Sansa stared at him, lips trembling, he moved to draw her to him but she pushed back from him instead. "You need to go talk to Lysa as soon as possible. She needs to know, before Robin wakes from a nightmare or she finds out another way." She began to walk in the orchard again leaving him staring after her. Neither one of them noticed Lysa watching them from the window.

Lysa had been furious with Petyr and requested that he not come around the farm for a while. She said his presence would just remind Robin of the terrible experience. Sansa understood her anger but she also seemed to be increasingly cold to her, which she did not understand, unless she was angry Sansa had been the first to support the idea of Robin going with Petyr.

Today Sansa and Lysa were in the barn cleaning out the dairy cow stalls. They had been working in near silence, Lysa seemed to be in one of her moods. Sansa told her aunt she would go into the hayloft to throw down a bale and proceeded the climb the ladder into the loft. She walked to the edge of the loft and looked out the window towards the orchard and the backyard. She breathed in the summer air and closed her eyes. If she tried really hard she could pretend for just the briefest moment there was no war, no danger.

"Your mother use to stand in that same spot, she was standing there when she told me she planned to move to London," Lysa said from behind her.

Sansa turned and looked at her aunt. Her face was calm and smooth, she seemed to have shed 20 years somehow.

"You are almost the same age as she was then. I see now why Petyr looks at you the way he does."

"I don't think he looks at me any special way."
"Let's not lie to each other my dear girl," Lysa said stepping towards her. "You must on some level know the effect you have on men. You are your mother's daughter after all. Such a pretty face." Lysa reached up and cupped her hand to Sansa's chin.

Now in the direct sunlight of the window Lysa no longer looked young, if anything she looked harsh and haggard. Her hand tightened on Sansa's face.

"Aunt Lysa," she said trying to pull back. Lysa's grip tightened and she seemed to be studying her reaction. "You're hurting me," she added.

Lysa released her then and turned and walked back towards the ladder. "Yes, definitely your mother's daughter," she heard her say as she descended.

The following week Petyr returned to seemingly test the waters. Lysa had not refused him but she had not been warm to him either. They had eaten dinner in awkward silence. Lysa had asked him if they could walk after dinner and he had agreed. She told the girls that they would be back soon and left them in charge of cleaning up and watching Robin.

Robin for his part had still not recovered from his time in town. He had nightmares still and continued to be withdrawn. They often heard Lysa cursing both the Germans and Petyr late at night when his screams woke him. There only silver lining to this whole thing was that she and Arya seemed to have made peace, at least for the moment.

They set about clearing the table and washing the dishes. "Can you believe you'll be eighteen next week?" Arya asked as she dried a plate.

"Not really. I can't believe we will have been here long enough for me to have had two birthdays."

"I wonder what kind of grand party we would've had back in London. I bet mother would've had the biggest lemon cake ever made for you. I asked around in town to see if anyone might have lemons, I knew it was a longshot, but I tried."

Sansa sniffed back a few tears, one because they rarely spoke of home anymore, it had become too painful, and two because her sister, who seemed lately to oscillate between love and hate with her, had tried to do something so sweet for her. "Thanks Arya, that means a lot."

As they set to putting the dishes away Sansa thought she heard raised voices carrying through the opened window. She asked Arya to stop for a moment. They stood still. They couldn't make out the words but they could feel the anger carrying from the tone. "Is that Lysa and Petyr?" Arya asked.

"It has to be, who else could it be?"

"Should we do something? It sounds pretty heated. Do you think they are arguing about Robin again?"

"Probably, Lysa is still fuming about it. You hear her at night." The voices seemed to be getting louder, they were shouting over each other now but still their words were not clear.

"I'm going to go out back, see if I can see them, make sure it's all ok. Keep an eye on Robin," Sansa told here and took the garbage can with her to the back door.

She stepped out the back door and into the yard. The sun was behind the woods to the west now but there was still plenty of daylight among the long shadows. She followed the sounds of their voices to
the barn and began to head towards them. She stopped at the garbage drum to dispose of the scraps into the compost when she heard a scream pierce her ear. She quickly turned and to her horror saw Lysa falling from the hay loft window to the ground. She made a sickening thud, her scream dying in her throat. Sansa couldn't draw air into her lungs, she felt eyes on her and she looked up to see Petyr, framed in shadows, standing in the hayloft opening looking back at her.

Petyr had come down from the hay loft and told Sansa to go to town and fetch the doctor. Sansa had agreed but did not know why they were bothering, she had seen Lysa's broken body, the blood seeping from her mouth. She knew she was gone. She brought the doctor back anyways. When they returned Petyr had moved Lysa inside to the sofa and had wrapped her in a blanket. Arya had taken Robin upstairs and was sitting with him. The doctor declared Lysa dead and asked if they wanted her to be taken in to town. Petyr refused saying she would be buried here at the farm so there was no point.

Petyr walked the doctor out, handed him something and shook his hand. Sansa had watched it all silently, her mind still unable to process what she had seen. Petyr moved Lysa's body to the cottage out back for the night and then told Sansa he planned to stay the night, he would start on arrangements in the morning. Sansa had merely nodded and then gone to bed. Arya came up later and tried to talk to her but she pretended to be in a deep sleep and refused to acknowledge her sister.

Petyr left the next morning and returned by afternoon with a couple of prisoners. They kept Robin inside afraid that the sight of them would trigger more nightmares. Sansa and Arya then watched from the porch in confused terror, none of it seemed real and it was all moving so fast.

"Aren't we going to have a funeral?" Sansa finally managed to ask him when he had come up to the house to get some water for himself and the men digging the grave back behind the cottage.

"We'll say some words. It's best to not draw attention to ourselves right now," he answered.

"What does that mean?" Arya asked.

"It means that there are more pressing issues, and now that you are going to be alone out here, well it's just best that the fewer people that know that the better. I've paid the doctor off to keep it quiet that Lysa has passed on. It's best for everyone if we keep up the pretense that she is out here still."

Sansa and Arya exchanged worried looks before nodding in agreement.

They laid Lysa to rest as soon as Petyr returned from taking the prisoners that dug the grave back to town. Sansa read a scripture and Petyr gave a brief eulogy. Robin stood nearby looking confused the entire time and asking about his mother more than once. Arya took him back up to the house right after, leaving Sansa and Petyr standing alone in the field.

"What happened last night?" she finally asked. "Why were you in the barn?"

"I'm not sure honestly. We were just walking around. She asked me to go up to the hayloft with her. We use to sit up there in the window as children, but we haven't done that in years. But last night she insisted. So we were up there and we were talking about Robin, about the town. I told her Ramsay has started to talk about a plan to lease farmlands next year for planting to be done by the prisoners. I don't know if it was the mention of Ramsay or the thought of prisoners coming near Robin, but she just lost it. I haven't seen her like this since Jon Arryn died. Lysa has always been prone to fits, to mood swings and sadness, but she seemed like a wild animal last night. She started to rant about how hopeless it all was, how we are all doomed and cursed. I tried to calm her down but then suddenly
she flung herself from the loft."

"Did my mother know?" Sansa asked. Petyr looked momentarily confused. "I mean did she know Lysa was so…. unstable."

"Doubtful, their relationship has been considerably strained since your grandfather died and left everything to Lysa. Last minute will change you see. Once her husband died Hoster rewrote his will, wanted to make sure Lysa was cared for, now that she was alone in the world, he just never got a chance to tell Cat and Edmure before his untimely death, caused a bit of ugliness in the family."

Sansa had heard none of this before, but then she had still been a child when that all occurred, though it might explain some of the tension she had remembered sensing the last time they had been here for her grandfather's funeral.

"So what now?"

"For now we just try to keep a low profile, if people in town know that it's three children out here, well you could face squatters or worse. Do you think you'll be able to manage with Arya? I could come stay if you think it would help."

"We'll be ok. We're Starks, we can handle anything."

"It's the Tully in you that will help you survive out here, not being a Stark."

Sansa ignored his comment. "I think its best you continue to stay in town. You said we need to keep a low profile, if you are out here it might make people come look for you. We don't want that, especially the Germans, or Ramsay."

Petyr turned to her and took her hand, he seemed to consider her words before finally agreeing. "Alright, but if you need anything you should let me know. I'll do my best to take care of you from now on."

She felt uncomfortable at the way he was looking at her and slowly removed her hand from his grip. "Thank you, I'll keep that in mind," she said before turning and heading back up to the house.
Sansa found that here was no time to mourn for Lysa. The farm would not wait, Arya and Robin would not wait; she knew she was right to refuse Petyr’s help, but she found herself overwhelmed. She told herself she would make it through this, that she would be strong for the remaining members of the family, she vowed she they would not suffer, that she would not lose anyone else. Arya had taken note of Sansa’s determination and did her best to mirror it.

Sadly though, they were unable to catch their breaths before the next blow came. The week following Lysa’s death they found it harder and harder to rouse Robin each morning. It seemed he was constantly tired and listless. They initially blamed it on him missing his mother, but on the third morning Sansa found him feverish and covered in sweat.

By that afternoon he was covered in a rash. He was in and out of consciousness, when he was awake he whimpered for his mother. Sansa left Arya with him and went to town to find the doctor. He told her he would do his best to get out to them today but that it sounded like typhus. He said there was currently an outbreak, likely a result of Major Bolton’s ‘field trip’ a couple of weeks ago. He cautioned her that the medicine to treat it was in short supply and high demand. He apologized profusely but told her there was a very good chance he would not be able to procure it. When she had asked him what that would mean for Robin she had just continued to say he was sorry. Sansa knew what that meant.

She left the doctor and went to find Petyr. She hated to ask him for special treatment, to owe him anything, but Robin’s life was at stake and she saw no other option. She found him at home and he invited her in. She realized as she crossed the threshold that this was the first time she’d been in his house as he had always come to them. She felt un-nerved by this, like he already had the upper hand. She told herself again that she had to do this for her cousin’s life.

“You look upset. Is everything alright?” He asked as he showed her to a chair and they sat in his parlor.

“No, I’m sorry to come to you like this but things are awful. Robin’s very ill, the doctor thinks its likely typhus,” she told him fighting back tears. “I – I – I think I need your help.”

“Ahh,” he looked beyond pleased by her words. “Well it seems our dear friend Ramsay has given the town quite a gift. Many people from that trip have fallen ill in the last week, it’s causing a lot of issues.”

“You’ve known for a week this might happen? Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“I didn’t want to worry you, not with everything else.”

“He stared showing signs three days ago, if I’d known what I was looking for I’d have been able to help him sooner! You should’ve told me! Now the doctor says the medicine is in short supply!” Sansa was so angry with him. She glared at him as he stood and walked to the window and looked out.

“Calm down. I can still help you. I might be able to access the medicine he needs,” he told her as he turned back towards her.

“Might?”

“Well I can, but there is a price you see. Nothing comes free. You’re eighteen now and Lysa is no
longer here, I think it’s time you begin to understand how things in this world work.”

She looked at him confusion, could this really be happening, was he really planning to twist this situation like this? She decided she would play dumb and hope he’d be merciful. “I don’t understand.”

“No I imagine not, you have seemed rather naïve sometimes. You are aware I have always had a fondness for your mother and her family but you see fondness only gets one so far,” he watched her reaction as he spoke. She just nodded dumbly. “You should know Lysa agreed to sell the farm to me, she signed the papers after Brynden’s arrest, after the search, she understood I could protect her better if I held the land. I had agreed she could buy it back after the war and that in the meantime I would deed it to Robin in my will.” This news was something she had not anticipated and it frightened her. He took in her scared and shocked expression. “Oh, I have every intention of letting all of you continue to live there in the meantime. I’m not a monster after all.”

“Why would she do that? Why are you telling me this?” Her heart was pounding in her chest. Her palms were sweating, her back ridged with tension.

“I just want you to understand that your aunt understood what it took to protect her family, you should try to honor her example. Furthermore, I want you to understand where we stand. You should further know despite our prior interactions I’m not one to just do things out of the kindness of my heart. No one in this current world can afford to do things out of kindness. As I said I can help you, but there’s a price and you have precious little to bargain with currently.” He had moved towards her and now stood behind her chair, his hands coming to rest on her shoulders. He began to play with her hair.

“Then what is it that you want?” Her voice shook as she said the words, her skin pricked with the chills.

“I think you already know, the same thing I’ve wanted for so very long, since the first time I saw you,” he was rubbing her shoulders now, his hands slowly descended towards her breasts.

Sansa bolted from the chair and turned to face him when she was safely across the room. “No, no. I’m sorry but I can’t give you that. I can’t believe you would even ask that.”

“Is that so?”

“You shouldn’t even ask for…. She couldn’t make the words come out. “There has to be something else you want.” He laughed softly at that and shook his head.

“As I said you have nothing else of value.”

“If I refuse you, what happens?”

“Then I’m afraid I can’t help you with the medicine. You see I would have to pay a fortune for it, either in assets or favors, and well frankly my benevolence for the Tullys is quite used up. I’m happy to help but it was time I was paid in kind.”

“Are you going to throw us off the farm?” Her voice came out small and frightened.

Petyr reeled back a bit like she had struck him. “I have to say I’m hurt you see me as such a monster Sansa, I just want fair payment for my efforts.” He took in her accusatory expression. “You have my word, I’ll never run you off the land, its Cat’s home after all and well, you’re lucky you remind me so much of her……. Yes, you and Arya can stay there for as long as the Germans will allow it but I can’t keep giving you special favors either, not unless you do your part.”
Sansa felt a wave of nausea pass over her. Somehow Petyr seemed to see this as a business transaction, as if what he was doing was practical and not ghastly, she had no idea how he was reconciling all of this in his mind. “You’d let Robin die then? There has to be something else you want, some other deal we can work out.”

“I told you, you have nothing else of value, nothing else I desire. And I’m not the one letting him die, you are making this choice my dear girl.”

Sansa wanted to rush at him and claw his eyes out. She had always found him to be off putting, she had never trusted him, but she never imagined he might be cruel. How dare he twist this and lay the blame at her feet when he was asking for something so foul. She searched herself, she loved Robin but she couldn’t do it, she couldn’t give herself to Petyr. Her mind whispered to her it would be a waste anyways, that he was likely too far gone at this point to be saved, maybe a couple of days ago she’d have felt differently, but she has seen the way he looked when she had left the house this afternoon, the chance that he might survive had already been slim. She hated herself for being so selfish, she hated Petyr for putting her in this position, but she knew there was no way she could offer herself in trade.

“Good day then Mr Baelish.” She held her head high as she went to walk by him to leave. He grabbed her arm as she passed, his fingers searing into her. His eyes cut in to her, she resisted the urge to slap him.

“How dare you? He is your cousin after all. Do you really want to see yet another of your family members -,”

“And he is like a nephew to you,” she spat cutting him off, “but it seems we are all making our choices.” With that she pulled her arm from his grasp and marched out the front door.

The doctor made it out the following day and confirmed their worst fears; it was typhus. He told them he had no further medication for them but that likely it won’t matter at this point anyways, he was too far gone and too weak to make it back. He gave them some pills to give him to make him comfortable while they waited for the end. He had told them he was sorry there wasn’t more that he could do. He seemed truly sincere.

And so they waited for the end to come. Robin passed two days later. The girls told themselves that at least his suffering was over and he was with Lysa now; that she would be pleased to have her beloved boy with her once again.

She hadn’t told Arya what had happened with Petyr. She had told her she had gone to him but that he had been unable to help. She knew it was better if Arya didn’t know, she already had a strong hatred for Petyr because of what had happened with Mycah and Brynden; she refused to throw gasoline into that fire.

They dug the grave themselves behind the cottage. They figured it was best to do it themselves rather than go to town begging for help and drawing attention. Once they finished they went back to the house and they wrapped Robin in a sheet and carried him out of the house. As they carried him down to the field Sansa’s mind wandered back to the night her mother told them they would be coming here, her biggest concern then had been about getting dirty from cows, now she was digging graves. She had to suppress a burst of laughter that was welling inside her, she wondered if she was losing her mind.

They reached the hole and placed him in the grave. They said little as the filled in the grave but when
they finished Sansa felt overwhelmed with shame and guilt and began sobbing and sank to her knees. She cursed at herself in her mind and wept for not being able to make the deal with Petyr. The doctor had said nothing would have saved him but who could know for sure. Sansa knew she would question if she had made the right choice until the day she died.

Arya held her as they sat in the field. Arya felt scared, Sansa was the strong one, if she fell apart all would be lost. Arya told her they would be ok and begged her to stop crying. Arya’s desperation pulled her back into herself. Sansa finally managed to pull herself together shortly after. When she did they stood and said a few words and then went back up to the house. They sat on the porch without speaking and stared out at the farm, taking in the fields, the orchard, the garden, the barn. On the surface it was beautiful, idyllic and bucolic, a place anyone would love to be, but to them it had become a place of horror and death and in that moment neither of them knew what to say.
Petyr kept to his word, he did not toss them off the farm. He was amenable when they encountered in town but he made his position clear by the fact that he no longer gave them additional rations and he did not come by the farm. Arya was pleased by this and didn’t question it, she assumed that his true loyalty had been to Lysa and with her gone it made sense why he would come around less. Sansa too was relieved by his current lack of interest in them and hoped it would continue as long as possible, but she did not fool herself in to thinking it would be permanent.

Sansa had returned to the sewing group. She figured it might be helpful to have more than just Arya to talk to. Arya decided she wanted to go back to helping Mycah’s parents a couple times a week, Sansa didn’t love the idea but she also understood the desire to be away from the farm, the place was starting to feel saturated in death.

They decided they would continue to use the ration cards of four people and give extra portions to the doctor in order to make sure he continued to keep their secret. He had not asked for additional payment but he had not refused them when Sansa had made the offer. She figured it was better to cultivate a sense of loyalty from him directly as opposed to relying solely on what Petyr had built with him.

Ramsay Bolton continued to watch Sansa from a distance, sometimes engaging her in conversation when she was in town and sometimes not. Sometimes he would just watch her from across the street, she wasn’t sure why but she found that almost more unnerving than when he just spoke to her. Thankfully though he was so pressed with the demands of fortifying the island that he had no time for social engagements and did not invite her anywhere.

They continued to sleep in the attic but at night they no longer pulled the blackout shades once they turned the lights out. They figured it was safer to be able to see if anyone approached the house.

They still had the pistol their uncle had given Sansa before the invasion. They barely knew how to use it but they didn’t dare shot it to learn less there be an accident or someone hear it. They had built a secret compartment for it in one of the dairy stalls in the barn so it would be easier to reach than when it had been in the root cellar. Sansa had to admit despite not knowing how to properly use it, there was still a peace of mind that having it provided.

It was late August when Petyr finally made a return to the farm. They felt genuinely surprised to see him and Sansa knew that meant no good news would be with him. As much as she hated him, and the sight of him made her skin crawl, she knew it was prudent to hear him out and find out why he had come.

They met him on the porch. “Ms Stark, Ms Stark,” he said greeting each of them.

“Hello,” Sansa said at the same time Arya asked, “Why are you here?”

“I see some things never change,” he said with a small quirk of a smile.

“Do you want to sit?” Sansa offered.

“Certainly.”
“Arya can you go fetch some tea?” Sansa asked.

Arya rolled her eyes and muttered something about perfect Miss Manners and stomped into the house. Petyr looked at Sansa with a question in his eyes.

“I never told her.”

“I suppose I could have guessed that since she didn’t charge me and attempt to slit my throat.”

“So what brings you out here?”

“I wanted to let you know I am being sent to Guersney.”


“Hardly, though I’m sure you’re disappointed,” Petyr said to Arya pointedly. Arya looked away and pursed her lips. “Ramsay is sending me;” he continued. “He wants me to work with the government there, see how they are running things. Apparently things are much smoother there, the citizens better behaved.”

Arya opened her mouth to say something but Sansa cut her off. “For how long?” She then shot Arya a look that told her to shut her mouth. Arya glowered back in response.

“I leave in two days. I could be gone a month or maybe longer. It depends on how things go and how difficult travel is. Hopefully I am back before winter though. I just wanted to let you know. You’ll be completely alone once I go.”

“We’ve been alone and we have been just fine,” Arya stated before Sansa could stop her. Petyr gave Sansa a sharp look.

“Arya, can you start on dinner?”

“Arya, you….”

“Arya, now please.” Her tone offered no room for argument. Arya huffed and went in the house slamming the door behind her.

“Being a mother and a sister must be trying.”

“We’re managing. So what have you really come to warn me about? I can tell there is something more.”

“I meant what I said, you are going to be completely alone now. You should know you are still on Major Bolton’s mind. Be careful around him.”

“He speaks to me occasionally when I’m in town but honestly that’s about all. Maybe he’s lost interest.”

“Don’t be fooled, there are rumors around town of his cruelty. He’s done things out at the camp, unspeakable things if the rumors are true. And there are stories we’ve overheard from the soldiers, about things he did before he got here, things he did in Poland….. anyways, once I knew what he was I’ve worked to keep him at a distance from you, and it’s worked so far because he knows I’m fond of you and he respects me, but once I’m gone…….”

“Are you trying to frighten me?”
“That’s not my intention, but if even half the rumors are true you should be. I want you to be careful. Despite your rejection of me I have not stopped caring about you. So let me give you some advice,” he reached for her hand, she let him take it. She told herself not to pull away, that for now it was better to keep him on her side. He continued, “He likes his games, I’ve seen them first hand. He’s very smart so I recommend you be smarter. He’ll want things from you, things you may not want to give him, and that’s fine, but you’ll have to learn a very fine balancing act with him. Don’t trust him but you need to try and keep him calm and happy. You can try to hide out here, but he will eventually come for you if you are not careful.”

Sansa shuttered at his words. This all seemed so sudden, what could Ramsay Bolton possibly want so badly from her, clearly there were things Petyr was failing to tell her, but then again she knew it was unwise to trust him as well. “We’ll be careful, you have my word,” she answered him.

He stared at her a moment longer and then nodded and withdrew his hand and stood. “I should be going. I have final arrangements to make. Take care Sansa.”

He turned and started back towards his car. “Petyr!” she called out. He turned to her and smiled. “If possible, when you are on Guernsey, can you try to find out if Brynden’s alive?” A look of disappointment passed over his face, his smile faded and he simply nodded before turning back and getting in his car.

Sansa woke with a start. It was early autumn and Petyr had been gone for nearly two weeks. She had stayed out of town since his departure. She felt a sense of cabin fever but given Petyr’s warning she thought it best for now to stay out of sight of Ramsay while she figured out what to do.

She had been awakened by a light coming through the side window, she could see a light and movement in the hayloft. She sat up and whispered for Arya in the dark but there was no response. She turned and saw Arya’s bed was empty. Fear gripped her and she felt sick. She tried to tell herself that it was just Arya in the barn, though why she was in the barn in the middle of the night was another concern all together.

She got dressed and made her way quietly downstairs and out to the barn. As she got closer she could hear hushed voices, her heart started to beat faster, if Arya was in the barn she was not alone. She entered the barn and looked around. Everything seemed normal other than the muted light coming from the hayloft. She could hear the whispering better now, she swore one of the voices was male. She thought her heart might burst from her chest, what was her fourteen year old sister doing with a man in the barn?

“Arya?” she called out softly. The voices ceased and there was the sound of rustling, movement in the hay. She swore she heard Arya say “hide.” Sansa walked closer to the ladder as Arya’s head popped over the edge and looked down at her.

“I’ll be down in just a moment Sansa, sorry if I woke you.” There was more rustling behind her and Arya turned her head and looked towards the back of the loft. It was too dark for Sansa to read her expression.

“Arya what’s going on?”

“Nothing, just wait right there, I’ll be down in a minute,” she said and pulled back into the loft.

Despite her fear Sansa began to climb the ladder, but then Arya appeared over the edge and began to come down with the lantern. She went back down and waiting for her sister. Arya hopped to the
Sansa was not about to just ignore it, she could only imagine what trouble Arya might have gotten them into now.

“Arya what in god’s name is going on up there?”

“Nothing, I couldn’t sleep, I just came out here to think.”

“Don’t lie to me, I heard someone else up there with you. A male someone I’m pretty sure, and don’t tell me I imagine it.”

“It was just me, I was talking to myself. Sometimes I pretend I’m Bran and answer myself.” Arya looked embarrassed as she said it.

Sansa studied her carefully. “You swear it?”

“Sure. Listen I’m sorry if I worried you. It’s late, let’s just go back to bed.” Arya grabbed her sleeve and started to tug her towards the door. Sansa looked up at the hayloft and then back at her sister.

“Ok,” she sighed, “But you need to be more careful about the light.”

Arya let out a deep breath and nodded. As they stepped out of the barn Sansa glanced back over her shoulder one last time and swore she saw dust drift down from the floor boards of the loft.

Sansa woke just before dawn, the sky was the faintest shade of silver purple. She rolled over and saw Arya was still asleep. She tip toed out of bedroom and down the stairs. She changed in Lysa’s room and then headed out to the barn. She hadn’t believed Arya for one moment, that there was nothing going on out here, but in the middle of the night she had decided it would be easier to play along and investigate later.

She quietly entered the barn and stood listening. She could hear their two remaining dairy cows in their stall and there were birds rustling in the rafters but not much else. She went to the ladder and began to climb into the loft. She topped the ladder and stepped quietly into the hay and looked around. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but in the faint light it was hard to see into the corners where the stacks of hay and boxes blocked her view. She heard rustling to her left and turned to head towards it, she said a prayer that it wasn’t rats.

As she neared the edge of the stack of bales something rushed out at her and tackled her to the ground, she went to scream but found her mouth was covered by a hand. Whoever it was felt heavy and was pressing her down, the hay digging into her back. She saw the flash of something metal near her face and let out a strangled sob.

“Who are you?” a male voice demanded. The voice was British, there was no trace of a foreign accent; that gave her a small comfort despite the weight that was pressed against her.

She was unable to answer but in the ever growing light of dawn she could see a pair of grey eyes staring at her with wild desperation. She stared back at him, steady and strong, willing him not to hurt her, to be calm. He seemed to register the look on her face and softened a bit.

“I’m going to move my hand, please don’t scream,” he said. She managed to give him a tiny nod. He drew his hand away and they were both breathing raggedly. He continued to hold her down and stare at her.

“I’m Sansa Stark, this is my home, my barn. Who are you?”
“Stark?” he seemed confused by her response.

“Yes, Sansa Stark,” she repeated. He seemed to relax a bit and put down the knife he had been holding. They stared at each other for a few more breaths and Sansa was shocked to realize she thought him handsome, dirty but handsome. He had dark unruly curly hair, a slight beard and those grey eyes.

“Maybe you could get off me?” she suggested. He seemed to suddenly realize he was still holding her down and scrambled to get off her.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized helping her to her feet. She got up and regarded him. He was wearing a RAF jacket, it was dirty and ripped, the patches missing, but she could still clearly tell he was RAF.

“You still haven’t told me who you are,” she stated.

“Oh, sorry. I’m Wing Commander Snow, but you can call me Jon.”

“And why are you in my barn Jon?”

Before he could answer they heard a noise beneath them. They both froze until they heard Arya call out in a loud whisper. “Jon?”

Sansa walked to the edge of the loft and looked over, Arya’s face froze in panic.

“Good morning little sister, I think we have some things to discuss.”

Chapter End Notes

So it took a little longer to get here then I thought, so I want to say thanks for sticking with me so far.

Time of a brief happy dance since:

1. No one died in this chapter

2. We’re going to be getting a break from Petyr’s creeping

3. We finally have Jon!

Thanks again for reading!
Against her better judgment Sansa agreed to allow Jon in the house to take a bath and clean up. She could hear him running water in the bathroom upstairs as she sat in the kitchen with Arya.

“Explain, now,” Sansa demanded.

“He needed a place to hide. He’s RAF, the Germans will kill him if he is found.”

“That explains nothing, I doubt you just happened across him in the lane out front. Tell me the truth Arya, all of it.” Sansa had long suspected her sister might be involved in things she shouldn’t be, but she had hoped that after Ramsay’s warnings and Brynden’s arrest Arya would have come to her senses.

“I think it might be safer if I tell you nothing. No One found him, No One is helping him.”

“Arya I swear to God if you do not tell me everything right this moment I am going to smack you. And don’t pretend you are concerned about my safety suddenly, you brought that man here, to our home, what if a German found him hiding here or someone that might inform on us? You don’t get to hide the truth from me now, so get on with it.”

Arya took a deep breath and looked out the window for a long moment before looking back at Sansa and answering, “I’ve been helping the resistance.”

“Clearly. Go on.”

“It started when I was staying with Brynden. I was so angry about Mycah, I needed to do something; I tried to seek them out on my own. I guess Brynden got word of it. He talked to me about it, made the introduction. Initially I only had him and one other contact, it’s safer the less we know about each other. I did small things, running information, helping Brynden print pamphlets, things like that. I wanted to do more but he won’t let me, said I needed to learn more, be patient,” Arya sounded frustrated as she told that part of the story. “After Brynden was arrested I lay low, stayed to the fringes of the group, after all you had warned me that Major Bolton was watching me and I didn’t want to hurt the group. Well, last week my contact-”

“Who? Who is getting a child involved in this mess?”

“No One Sansa, it’s No One and that is all I am going to tell you. And I am far from a child now,” Arya shot back. “Anyways,” she continued, “No One asked if I might be able to hide a “package” out here. They knew that people rarely came out here and now with Petyr gone it seemed a pretty safe place. I said I would be happy to help. So last night they brought Jon here. I’m told they are working on a plan to get him off the island and back to Britain, but it takes time. So here we are.”

“He can’t stay. You need to go to town and tell whoever it is that they need to figure something else out, this is far too dangerous.”

“No it’s not Sansa, it’s perfect. It’s just you and me out here, we never get visitors. Plus, he can help us with the harvest while we wait for them to help him escape.”

“Oh, perfect, so we’ll just all play house then. Are you insane? My answer is no.”
“Sansa come on. There is plenty of places for him to hide, we can hear people coming up the drive, but nobody ever comes. We can do this. Don’t be a chicken shit.”

“Arya!” Sansa got up from the table and went to the sink and stared out into the orchard from the window. She wanted to throttle her sister. She couldn’t believe after all that had happened, all their terrible luck, that Arya would invite more into their lives.

“Have you already forgotten what happened to the Karstarks?” Sansa asked quietly and turned to face her sister. She saw the fear flicker across Arya’s face for the briefest of moments.

Sansa knew it was unlikely anyone had forgotten the Karstarks, not when the Germans had made a point to use their story as a warning to anyone that might consider breaking the rules or helping “enemies of the state.” It had happened only a couple of weeks after Ramsay had taken the children to one of the camps to threaten everyone. The Karstarks lived on a farm that bordered one of the camps and their youngest son had been observed giving some of the prisoners food through the fence. The story was that Ramsay ordered a small detachment of his men to the home to detain the son for questioning, but the situation had escalated and Rickard and his older sons had tried to intervene. According to the German version he threatened them, going so far as to pull out a gun he’d kept hidden. Whether that was true or not was the subject of much speculation, but whatever had happened, a fight ensued; one of the sons was shot and killed, but so was one of the Germans. The soldier in charge of the operation had become enraged and after subduing the remaining males, several of the soldiers raped his daughter, Alys, right in front of them. They then beat Rickard nearly to death and arrested his remaining two sons. But that wasn’t the end of it, nearly six weeks later Alys, overcome by the trauma and shame caused by the rape, drowned herself in the pond on the family farm. There were rumors she may have found herself pregnant, but no one knew for sure.

“How could anyone forget that?” Arya responded. “But this is different, we aren’t doing anything in plain sight and we are smart enough to not get caught.”

“The answer is still no,” Sansa said firmly turning away from Arya so she didn’t shout at her.

“Sansa please! Try to understand,” Arya begged, her voiced hitching over the last word.

Surprised to hear the break in her voice Sansa turned back to her. “Understand what?” she asked her.

“What if it was Robb?” Arya asked her softly.

“Arya he’s not Robb. We don’t even know him.”

“But he’s RAF like Robb. What if Robb crashed somewhere and there were people that could help him? Wouldn’t you want them to help him? Keep him alive?”

“Of course I would. It’s just – It’s just we are all alone now. If something were to happen, well it’s just us and I imagine it does not end well for any of us. We are putting ourselves in a lot of danger here.”

“We won’t be alone if we let Jon stay. He can help us and I feel like we have a duty, a duty to honor Robb. He would want us to take the risk, to be brave like him. Sansa we can do this, it’ll be ok, I know it.”

They stood staring at each other for the longest moment. Arya’s eyes pleading and Sansa’a weighing her words and the risks. They heard Jon on the stairs.

“Sansa, please, for Robb,” Arya pleaded one last time.
Jon appeared in the doorway and looked between the two girls, his expression serious and concerned. He locked eyes with Sansa, and gave her a slight nod, like he understood her position, her hesitation. She felt her resolve to throw him out crumbling. She turned her attention back to Arya and gave her head a slight shake. “Ok, for Robb,” she muttered finally agreeing.

Arya squealed with joy and jumped at her sister pulling her into an embrace, “Thank you Sansa, thank you. I promise, it’s all going to be ok! You’ll see.” She turned and ran towards Jon and took his hand. “Come on Jon, we have to go work on your hiding places!”

Jon let Arya lead him away, but as he did he turned and looked at Sansa over his shoulder, he gave her a faint smile and a slight nod of thanks, Sansa closed her eyes in response and prayed she had not just made a decision that would doom them all.

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They had discussed that afternoon that it was best if Jon stayed down at the cottage at night. The purpose was twofold. For one thing it would be easy for him to escape into the woods if someone did come on the property from the road, and for another it allowed the girls a measure of deniability. They had agreed if Jon was caught they would deny knowing he was there and he would state he had snuck in from the woods and they had not known him. They knew it was unlikely the Germans would believe them but it was the best chance they had. Sansa hated the fact they were putting so much faith in a stranger, there was no way to know if he was in fact caught that he won’t sell out every person he had been in contact with here in order to save himself, but she did not say this in front of Arya.

They also decided Arya and Sansa would take turns sleeping downstairs, the plan was that if someone came to the house in the night they would turn on the back porch light; that would then signal Jon that he should make for the woods. This time Sansa couldn’t stop herself from asking if they would ever actually sleep again, which had done nothing but earn her an embarrassed apology from Jon and a glare from Arya.

They ate dinner that night together. Arya was rattling off the places they planned to make into hiding places. The idea was Jon would be able to move about the farm and help them but should someone come by then he would be able to quickly hide and avoid detection. Sansa was skeptical of this plan but she had agreed he could stay so she had little choice but to go along with it. She distracted herself with silent prayers that whoever was involved in this would be able to arrange for his evacuation quickly.

“Sansa!” Arya’s voice cut through her thoughts.

“Huh? What?”

“I asked if you would be ok here alone with Jon while I go into town tomorrow. I need to get an update on this situation and let No One know we are ok for now.”

Sansa rolled her eyes and answered exasperatedly, “Yes, I’ll – we’ll be fine. Just be careful.”

“Well I might be gone most of the day,” she added. Sansa gave her a look. “It can take time to make
contact, there’s a certain – “she continued, “Well, never mind, just don’t worry if I’m gone for a while is all I’m saying. Jon can help with my chores.”

“Do you know a lot about farm chores?” Sansa asked turning her attention to Jon. Jon was staring down into his food, his expression was not angry, but it was not pleased, brooding might be the best word for it. He looked up then and realized both girls were looking at him waiting on a response.

“I’m sure I know enough. I’ll be able to manage, and if I’m not I’m sure I can ask. I take direction well.”

“See, everything is going to work out splendid,” Arya said with triumph.

They finished dinner and cleaned up. Arya disappeared upstairs and returned with a box of men’s clothes, Sansa guessed that must have belonged to either her late uncle or grandfather. “You can look through these tonight, see if anything fits. You should probably get rid of that jacket as soon as possible.”

“Thank you Arya, I will.” Sansa noticed the broody expression was back.

“Well I suppose I’ll head out to the cottage, get situated,” Jon stated.

“I’ll walk you,” Arya offered.

“Actually Arya I’ll show Jon out,” Sansa stated.

“You will?” Jon and Arya asked at the same time.

Sansa sighed and nodded her head at both of them, “Yes, me.”

“Well goodnight Jon,” Arya said giving Sansa a sideways glance.

“Goodnight Arya, thanks again for the clothes and the place to stay.” He nodded to Sansa and they made their way out the backdoor and out into the yard towards the cottage.

They walked in silence until they were far enough from the house that she thought Arya was unlikely to hear them. “Have we done something wrong? You seemed very displeased during dinner,” she began.

“Sorry, am I that obvious?”
“I hate to tell you but your face is rather easy to read.”

“Aye, you’re not the first person to tell me that. I don’t want you to think I’m not grateful for what you are both doing. I know I’m putting you in grave danger. But honestly I feel a bit useless, it’s bad enough my plane was shot down, but now I’m just expected to sit and wait.”

“And take orders from a fourteen year old girl,” she added in a teasing tone, attempting to lighten the mood.

“If you only knew. I’m used to being the one in charge, so to be relying on anyone, but especially your younger sister, well it’s a hard adjustment.”

“You’ll find you get used to it,” she laughed. “Arya tends to be quite the ferocious wolf when she sets her mind to something, you’ll find most of the time it’s just easiest to go along with it.”

“And what about you? Are you a fierce wolf as well? Is that a Stark family trait?”

“No.” She said nothing more, he had no way of knowing but he had hit a nerve. Sweet compliant Sansa was never fierce, she liked things peaceful and pretty and nice, she minded her manners and wanted everyone to get along always, at least that was what her family had always said about her before the war. She wondered what they would say about her now. She suddenly felt an ache in her chest thinking about them all. She realized they had stopped walking and Jon was staring at her. Those damn grey eyes of his, Sansa thought.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said.

“It’s nothing,” she responded waving him off and beginning to walk again. He caught up with her and they continued in silence until they reached the cottage.

“I think you should have everything you need, at least for tonight. If there is something more you need we’ll figure it out tomorrow,” she said.

“Thank you Sansa,” he said. “For letting me stay, for risking everything.”

“You’re welcomed. Goodnight,” she gave him a soft smile and turned and headed back to the house.

The following morning Arya left right after breakfast. She said she would get their rations, do her notifications and try to be back as soon as she could. Sansa told Jon they needed to work in the barn today to prepare for the apple and garden harvest.
He was wearing some of the clothes Arya had given him. He now looked like he belonged doing farm work. Maybe in his former life he did, she realized she really knew nothing about him.

They had set about clearing out the old bins from last year and organizing the far corner of the barn so they could stack the bins there once they were filled.

“Arya says you are from London, I assume you weren’t doing much farm work there.”

“No, definitely not. What else has she told you about us?”

“Just the basics. You’re from London, you’ve been here for almost a year and half, she mentioned the farm is actually your aunt’s but she’s tending to a sick son on the other side of the island, so you’re not sure when she’ll return. Your family is large, three brothers and you two. That your eldest brother is RAF, and no I don’t know him sadly. I wish I did though, if he’s half as brave as his sisters he’s probably a hell of an airman.”

Jon took in the odd expression on Sansa’s face. “What?” he asked.

“I imagine if we are all going to be here together a while you might as well know the truth.”

Jon turned to her, his expression wavered between curious and worried. “Most of that is true. We are from a large family in London and Robb is RAF. The farm did belong to our aunt, it’s been in the family on my mother’s side for generations, until……” She stopped and looked at him carefully, she was weighing if she should tell him the truth; she wondered why Arya had not.

He took a deep breath, “Go on.”

“When we came here, before the occupation, our aunt and her son lived here. Our great uncle lived in town as well. They are all gone now,” she told him. She started to taste tears in the back of her throat. She wasn’t sure why she was so near tears now, other than she had worked to remain strong for Arya. She realized other than Robin, she had never actually cried for any of them.

“What happened?”

“Our uncle was arrested and deported, I don’t know if he’s still alive. He’s the one that got Arya involved with the resistance, which I’m still not sure if I’m proud or pissed about. Lysa, well Lysa flung herself out of the hayloft earlier this summer. I’m still not sure why other than she was unstable and depressed and life here can be difficult.” Jon sucked in a shocked breath and looked disturbed. “And your cousin?” he asked.

“And Robin, oh god, poor Robin,” Sansa began to cry as she said his name, all the guilt over not
being unable to get him the medicine flooded back into her. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed. She suddenly felt Jon’s arm around here and reared her head up.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you.”

She wasn’t sure why but she leaned into him. There was something comforting about him and in a way it was a relief to finally cry, to finally mourn and for that moment she didn’t care if he was judging her. Jon wrapped her in a hug and she cried into his shoulder and his neck.

After a few minutes she pulled back and he released her. She rubbed her face and eyes and knew she must be a blotchy mess, she could only imagine what he thought of her.

“Typhus,” she said.

“What?” a look of pure confusion on his face.

“Robin, he died of typhus. A lot of people here did due to the cruelty of the island commander, he took a bunch of them out to the camp to punish them for something and people were exposed.”

“Oh. That’s terrible.”

“I’m sorry by the way.”

“For?”

“You barely know me and I just cried all over you. I’m actually quite embarrassed.”

“Don’t be. I imagine its hard being out here alone, having people die, not knowing about your family back home, watching over your head strong sister who brings strange men into your home.”

His comment pulled a soft smile from her and he gave her a half smile back. She turned back to clearing out one of the bins and took a couple of deep breaths before turning back to him.

“So what about you then? What’s your family like?”

A dark look passed over his features and Sansa worried she might have hit a nerve for him but then he answered her. “I’m afraid it’s all a bit tragic. My father was in the Great War, fought for Britain, he suffered from shell shock; he died shortly before I was born. My mother died when I was about nine, I grew up in the north, in an orphanage. My father was actually a naturalized German, last name was Targaryen, so you can see why I now go by my mother’s name, Snow. Does it make you think less of me?”
“Because a father you never met was German?”

“Aye.”

“Do you think less of me for crying all over you when I’ve known you barely one day?”

“No.”

“Then there is your answer.”

They looked at each other and smiled. “Though maybe don’t tell Arya that ok?” Sansa said.

That drew a laugh from him and Sansa felt satisfied she had been the one to draw it from him. “Which part? The German heritage or the crying?” he responded.

It was Sansa’s turn to laugh now. “Either.”

“Alright then,” he agreed continuing to smile at her.

They went back to cleaning the barn until lunchtime. Sansa smiled to herself as they walked to the house. She had to admit that even though his presence put them in such danger, it was nice having someone to talk to that she didn’t need to remain strong for or protect their feelings. If she wasn’t careful she might actually let herself enjoy having Jon Snow here.

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“So what’s the status report?” Jon asked Arya over dinner that night.

“They are working to get you off the island but they said it’s going to be a while. There was an escape attempt by boat from Jersey recently so the patrols have been increased on the beaches. We have to lay low till things cool down a bit.”

“How long do they think that will be?” Sansa asked.

“Hard to say, they said it depends on a lot of things, I’m to check back next week.” Arya waited to see if Sansa would be angry but much to her surprise Sansa just shrugged.

“We’ll just have to make due and wait,” Sansa agreed. Arya said nothing but caught Jon’s eye and she suppressed a smile. And with that they went back to eating dinner.

Chapter End Notes
A decent sized chapter since the next chapter might not be up for a couple days. I have an idea that wasn’t in the original rough draft so it might take a little longer to work out since I need to write it and not just edit and post.
Chapter 16

Arya went back into town the following week and had promised she would get an update. She had come back from town just in time for dinner. She had said little of her trip and had looked nervous since her return. Sansa tried to wait her out, but as they sat eating dinner and she watched Arya push food around her plate, her patience gave way.

“So what were you able to find out?” Sansa finally asked her.

Arya started to fidget and won’t meet her sister’s eye.

“Arya?”

“You’re going to be so furious with me,” Arya whispered.

Sansa froze and dropped her utensils with a clatter. Jon froze as well and they stared at Arya.

Jon spoke first, “It’s alright Arya, just tell us what’s going on.”

Arya took a deep breath and finally looked up, tears had started to form in her eyes. “There’s been an arrest.”


“I don’t know his name.” Sansa felt confused, it wasn’t like Arya to be this despondent over a stranger. Arya swallowed hard, she feared her sister’s reaction. “A fisherman, they arrested a fisherman and he admitted to pulling an airman from the water. They are going to search the island.”

Sansa flew up from the table, she had to get back from her sister less she strike her. “When? When are they searching?! When were you going to tell us?! Arya what have we done?!”

“It could just be a rumor. There are always rumors,” Arya said quietly.

“So what are we going to do?! Who’s coming here to get him?” Sansa demanded pointing at Jon.

“Nobody’s coming, I was told we have to do our best to hide him here.”

“Tell me you are lying! Tell me you are playing a cruel joke!”

“Ok, I think we all need to take a breath,” Jon interjected. Sansa stared daggers into him, he looked away from her and back to Arya. “Did they say how long ago the arrest was?”

Arya seemed to focus on only Jon now, he couldn’t blame her, Sansa was pacing back and forth; she looked like a rabid wolf ready to attack.

“I was told he was arrested a couple of days ago but he broke under interrogation this morning. Rumor has it they were starting at the west end of the island.”

“This morning?! This morning! The island isn’t that big, that means they could be here any time. I knew this was a mistake, I never should’ve agreed!”

Arya had initially felt terrible about this news but Sansa reaction had triggered something in her. “Stop being over dramatic and irrational,” she snapped at Sansa.
Sansa halted and her mouth dropped open. Arya pressed on. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about the searches as soon as I got home, but Jon and I worked out several hiding spots when he first arrive. We’re going to be ok.”

Sansa closed her mouth and took a deep breath. Arya was right, she needed to be rational and they needed to be prepared.

“So what is our plan then?” Sansa said, her voice calmer.

“The way I see it we have two choices,” Jon began. “I can go out to the woods and stay there for a while or I stay down in the root cellar in the barn. You tell me what you want me to do.”

Sansa considered this. She and Arya would be safer if he went into the woods but he would more exposed, possibly more likely to be caught. He’d be safer in the root cellar but it was more of a danger to her and Arya if he was caught. She looked at Arya, it was clear from her expression what option Arya had picked.

“Best guess, if they search through the night, how long till they are done with the island?”

“If they started this morning I give it two, maybe three days depending on how thorough they are being,” Arya surmised.

“Then I guess we better get started moving stuff in the barn,” Sansa said with a sigh.

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They spent a couple hours in the barn, filling the root cellar with supplies for at least a week to be safe. When they had finished they had sealed Jon in and covered the entrance with a combination of hay and crates. They called good night and good luck to each other and then Sansa and Arya went in the house for the night and waited for the Germans to come.

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They didn’t have to wait long. The trucks rumbled up the drive before noon the following day and the sisters stood out on the porch to greet them. Major Bolton exited the first truck and strolled up to the porch to meet them.

“Ladies,” he greeted them with a stony smile.

“Major,” Sansa responded. She wiped her hands on her apron, she hoped he didn’t notice how much they were sweating and shaking.

“Ms. Stark, it’s been a while,” he said, his words directed at Sansa.

“Has it?” she replied.

He squinted at her a bit, his smile fading. “It has. Have you been avoiding me? Are you upset I sent Baelish away?”

“I could care less what you do or need with Mr Baelish. I’m sorry if I troubled you.”

“Well you did. I’ve so missed your pretty face.” There was a menacing tone in his voice. Sansa prayed he could not hear her heart slamming against her rib cage. Arya was looking between the two of them, she was as tense as a bow string.

“Well here we are. I am so sorry to have concerned you, to make you come all the way out here and
with so many men. I’ll work to be more considerate in the future.”

He laughed coldly at her words. “That’s sweet, but I’m not here on a social call. Do you know why we’re here?”

“I can’t say that we do. Have you come to take more supplies? I fear you might not find much,” Sansa said cautiously.

“Is your aunt in?”

“She’s away,” Arya answered.

“Away? Where exactly does one go to be away on this island?”

“She wasn’t feeling well so she headed to the hot springs over on the east side this morning. I’m sure if she had known you were coming by she would have waited,” Sansa answered.

Ramsay regarded her and smiled a cold wicked smile. “She’s ill, but she’s going to walk to the east end of the island? Is that what you would have me believe?”

“She borrowed a horse and a cart from the Hersys,” Arya offered.

Ramsay turned his gaze on Arya. She looked back at him, her face a calm mask of innocence.

Alright then, if that is what you say,” he agreed and then let out a long whistle. Several soldiers exited from the trucks and began to fan out.

“Well the reason I’m here is because we are conducting a search of all properties on the island. You will sit here on the porch with me while we search.”

“What exactly are you looking for? Maybe we could save you some time,” Sansa said in her sweetest voice.

Ramsay smiled at this, it was as close to a genuine smile she had ever seen him have. “It seems Baelish was right about you, you just want to be so accommodating. While I appreciate your offer I regret to inform you it doesn’t work like that. So please, take a seat.”

Sansa avoided looking at Arya, less he see something in their exchange; so she turned and sat in the chair closest to her. Arya did the same. They watched the soldiers in the yard. A couple were headed towards the barn. Sansa wondered if her heart would stop. It was taking all her energy to keep her breathing steady.

Ramsay kept looking back and forth between them and the soldiers, clearly he was monitoring them for a reaction. Sansa pasted a smile on her face. “Are you hungry Major? I was just about to make lunch when you came. I could make you something now if you’d like.”

“You are far too sweet Ms. Stark. I do appreciate your concern for my well-being, but I’d prefer you stay where you are.”

They looked up as another car pulled into the yard. An officer exited and walked up to Ramsay and whispered in his ear. His voice was barely above a whisper and he was speaking in German, Sansa dared to look at Arya who was straining to listen to the exchange. She saw a confused look pass over Arya’s face. The officer finished and then saluted and marched back to his car.

Ramsay whistled and barked out some orders. The soldiers fell back towards the trucks. Sansa saw the two that had entered the barn among them.
Ramsay turned to them and smiled again, his eyes were bright with excitement. “Ladies, I’m sorry to have troubled you. It appears what I was seeking has been found elsewhere. With that said, I will need you both in town tomorrow.”

“Can I ask what for?” Sansa inquired.

Ramsay just laughed. “Just report to the town square by noon. Good day ladies. I’ll see you then.” And with that he left.

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They let Jon out of the root cellar once night fell. They figured if the Germans had not returned by then it was unlikely they would. Furthermore, based on what Arya had understood of what the officer had said to Ramsay, they had found the airman on another farm.

Sansa had questioned Arya about this but Arya denied knowing anything about it. She said she was unsure if it was true but explained the resistance worked like that, the less information people knew the safer everyone was. Jon had wanted to know if they had a name, if it might be one of his men. Arya had apologized but reiterated she knew nothing.

Tonight was Sansa’s turn to sleep downstairs. She lay on the sofa staring at the ceiling. She was unable to sleep, the conversation with Ramsay and the day’s events still heavy on her mind. She got up and went into the kitchen to get a glass of water. She stood staring out into the darkness of the orchard when she heard a light series of taps on the back door. She tensed for a moment and then let out a sigh of relief when she recognized the pattern was the one they had agreed to with Jon. She opened the door and let him in.

“Is something wrong?” she whispered. “It’s the middle of the night. You shouldn’t be in the house.”

“I can’t sleep and well I just wanted- well… I want you to know I’m truly sorry if you’ve been upset.”

Sansa wasn’t sure what it was about his presence in that moment that angered her so, maybe she was just exhausted, maybe it was the terror that was sitting like lead in her stomach due to Ramsay’s demand that they be in town tomorrow, but whatever the cause she lost control of her tongue. “Really? IF I’ve been upset? Are you serious? Nazis came to our home today! I thought my sister and I might be murdered in our yard. IF I’m upset? Of course I’m upset!”

Jon seemed taken aback by her sharp tone. “I didn’t mean – I -”

“Your presence here upsets me.” The words felt bitter on her tongue as they spilled from her lips, she was stunned at her own harshness. Jon looked uncomfortable and apologetic. “I know this is not ideal, I know I’m putting you and your sister in danger. You should know I’m sorry for that, I am, but what would you have me do? Turn myself into the Germans?”

“I know, I’m sorry. I just – I want, I need, to protect my sister. She’s still a child in so many ways, I sometimes wonder if she understands how serious this all is.”

“With all due respect I think you underestimate her. She’s told me about Mycah, about why she joined with the resistance. I think she has a very good grasp on the seriousness of all of this.”

“Then maybe I want to protect myself. Some nights I lay awake and wonder if Arya and I are the last Starks alive in the world. It’s lonely and I feel a great responsibility to ensure our survival, to make sure our family carries on. Do you understand what that’s like, carrying the weight of someone else’s
life? You being here puts my family at risk. Can you understand that?”

“You think I don’t understand that? I’ll have you know I’ve commanded many men, I’ve had to give orders that sometimes lead to their deaths. I think I know far better than some pretty girl on a farm the weight of people’s lives.”

His words angered her and frayed her last nerve. Her response was out of her mouth before she could stop it. “It’s different when it’s family. If you’d have had one you’d know that.”

She gasped at her own cruel words and took in the wounded look on his face and instantly felt ashamed of how she had made him feel.

“Jon, I didn’t mean – “

“I should get back to the cottage. You’re right, it’s not a good idea for me to be in the house at night. Goodnight Sansa.” He was out the door before she could say another word. She rubbed her eyes trying to wipe away the tears that were forming due to exhaustion and frustration. She let out a heavy sigh before making her way back to the sofa, she knew she was not likely to get any sleep tonight.
Arya found Jon in the barn the following morning cleaning out the cow stalls. He seemed tired and in a foul mood. She had found Sansa in a similar mood in the kitchen earlier, which was why she had come out here. She decided to tread carefully.

“Do you want to come in for breakfast?” she asked him in her most pleasant tone.

“No, I’d like to get this finished. I’ll eat once I clean up, you’ll probably be off to town by then.”

“Are you sure? Sansa is making breakfast right now.”

“I’m sure.” Jon wanted to tell her even if he was hungry he doubted he was welcomed, but he didn’t want to start a quarrel between the sisters.

“Probably just as well, Sansa seems in a terrible mood anyways.”

Jon stopped and looked up at Arya, he wondered if Sansa had mentioned their fight. He decided she hadn’t, but if she did, Arya’s expression gave no indication.

“I’m sure she’s just stressed and worried, I think we all are. When are you heading to town?”

“After breakfast. Sansa says we should go early, see if we can find out what is going on before it actually starts going on.”

“You’re sister’s right on that.”

“I don’t think we should go at all. What if it’s a trap?”

“I think it unlikely anyone would lure someone into town for a trap.”

“Sansa says the same thing, but I think it’s stupid for us to trust a Nazi, especially that one.”

“I would agree but I also think it’s unwise to anger him by disregarding a direct request from him.”

Arya scrunched her face up in anger, she hated that he and Sansa seemed to have the same opinion on the matter. She had been hoping Jon would help her argue her side.

“No I suppose not. I better get back in and get ready before Sansa yells at me,” Arya sighed.

“That’d probably be wise.”

Arya was almost out of the barn when he called out to her. She turned and waiting for him to speak.

“If you can find out anything on this other airman, if it’s even true, please try. I would like to know if he’s one of mine.”
Arya gave him a sad nod and then left the barn.

They had arrived in town around 10am. They passed the post office and saw the large sign that demanded everyone report to the town square at noon. They could hear the sound of construction, sawing and hammering echoing in the streets.

“I was thinking it might be better if I go alone to see… Him,” Arya said awkwardly.

Sansa bit her lower lip. She didn’t like it, she thought she and Arya should stick together, but then she worried they might draw attention.

“Make it quick. I’m going to go see Jeyne. Meet me there in twenty minutes whether you have information or not.”

Arya nodded and they headed in different directions. Sansa decided instead of going directly to Jeyne she would first stop and see Molly. It seemed likely that she would know more of what was going on than Jeyne, who viewed their occupation through rose colored glasses.

There was no one in the butcher’s when she arrived. Thinking about it she realized on the walk over that there hadn’t really been many people on the street in general. Molly emerged from the back when she had heard the bell on the door ring. Her eyes widened when she saw Sansa.

“Why are you in town? I would’ve stayed out on the farm if I was you. Do you know what’s going on?”

“We were told to report here at noon. They were there yesterday. The Major ordered us here himself.”

“Oh. Well, that would change things.”

“Do you know what’s going on?” Sansa asked.

“Heard they arrested the Torrents, rumor has it they were hiding an airman.”

“I don’t think I know them.”

“They are older, they are out towards the western side of the island. Their daughter and her husband left before the occupation, and they refused to go. They have three grandsons in the navy. I really hope it’s just a bad rumor.”

“How do you know all that?”

“People tell me things while they shop,” she answered with a shrug.

“So you’ll be there at noon then?”

“Everyone living in town will be there. The major issued a decree.”

She and Sansa exchanged a long worried look. “I have to get over the grocer. I told Arya I would meet her there. I guess I’ll see later,” Sansa said.

Molly gave her a grave nod and with that Sansa departed.
She waited outside next to the grocer’s for Arya, for some reason she didn’t want to go in and talk to Jeyne. She felt sick to her stomach and she didn’t want to have to pretend everything was ok. Arya showed up five minutes late but Sansa was too distracted to chide her.

“So?” Sansa asked her quietly.

“I was told it was best if nothing was discussed in detail. But it doesn’t look good for the people that were arrested,” Arya murmured. “This meeting it likely an execution.”

Sansa sucked in her breath, her face a mask of frozen horror. “He won’t.”

“Have you already forgotten what he did to Robin? He’s executed people before and made others watch, why won’t he do it again?”

“Those were…. I don’t know, those were criminals, prisoners. These are subjects of the crown. It’s different, he can’t – no,” Sansa sputtered.

“You are trying to apply logic to a madman.”

They heard the door open behind them. “I thought that was you!” Jeyne called. “Why are you standing out here?”

“I was just waiting on Arya,” Sansa said.

“Well come on. We should all eat something before we go to the meeting.”

Sansa and Arya exchanged looks. Arya raised an eyebrow, she clearly had decided Jeyne was a naïve idiot. “Actually we have to run another couple errands,” Sansa said quickly. If there were going to an execution she sure as hell was not going with a full stomach. She prayed Arya was wrong.

“Ok,” Jeyne said giving her a questioning look. “I guess I’ll see you at noon.”

The sisters left and walked off towards the harbor. Sansa wasn’t sure what to do, she regretted coming early; maybe it would’ve been better to be clueless like Jeyne instead feeling worry eat her from the inside out. They stood for some time silently looking over the harbor. It was quiet today. It seemed the normal guard patrols were reduced to nearly nothing, likely they had been pulled for other duties and whatever the banging and sawing was.

“Sansa?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m scared.”

“Me too, but we’ll be ok. We just have to go to this meeting and do our duty and then we can go home. I think it might be best if we just stay out of town for a while maybe.”

“Do you think he’ll let you?”

Sansa shuttered, she thought of Ramsay’s words from yesterday, his reprimand of her for staying out of town and away from him.

“I don’t know. I can only pray something comes up that draws his attention elsewhere.”

“We should’ve left when we had the chance, runaway, stowed away, whatever we needed to do to
leave here. What do you think ever happened to the last telegram from mum?” They never discussed
that anymore, not once it had become evident that they were at Petyr’s mercy and there was no way
off the island.

“I don’t know, but I like to think she had told us to stay, to help Lysa and Robin and to be brave and
safe. I think she told us she loved us and we were doing the right thing for the family and to take care
of each other.”

“Do you really think that?”

“It’s what I have to believe.” Sansa wiped away her tears as did Arya.

The bells from the church tower chimed, signaling there was only fifteen minutes till noon. They
headed back up the streets into town and followed the trickle of people to the town square. When
they rounded the corner they stopped dead in their tracks. They now knew what all the noise had
been for, at the end of the square in front of the town hall stood a freshly built scaffold and gallows.

Arya slipped her hand into Sansa’s and the moved forward with the rest of the crowd until they
found themselves somewhere near the middle of the crowd. There was hushed whispers here and
there, but for the most part everyone was silent. Sansa didn’t look around for Jeyne or Molly, her
eyes were glued on the scaffold where Ramsay stood surveying the crowd. He seemed pleased by
the turn out.

He waited until the surrounding streets appeared empty, the square nearly filled with people. The
bells rang signaling noon had come. Soldiers now appeared and flanked the crowd, murmurs of
dismay rippled through the crowd. “Thank you all for coming so promptly. It pleases me that so
many of you can in fact follow orders,” he began. “I’m sure many of you are wondering why you
are here. Well, it seems that not all of you listen and so I have brought you all here to make sure the
message it very clear.”

He shouted something in German and two soldiers exited the hall, between them they half supported,
half dragged a slight dark haired man. His hands were bound, he was bloody, beaten; one eye nearly
swollen shut. More murmurs went through the crowd, no one seemed to recognize him.

“This here is one of your majesty’s royal airmen,” Ramsay announced with scorn. “He was plucked
from the sea by one of your fishermen, though neither saw it appropriate to report his presence. No,
instead they conspired and have been hiding him, I’m sure with the intention to cause trouble and
discord here in our peaceful hamlet.”

The crowd was silent, everyone watching in frozen horror. Sansa and Arya were holding each
other’s hands so tightly Sansa was afraid they were going to break each other’s fingers.

“I told him he could save his life by telling me everything he knew, anything to help the Fatherland’s
war efforts, but he has refused. So here we are.”

They stood the airman on a bench and put him in the noose, a cry went up from the crowd. “You
can’t, he’s a prison of war, he has to be given quarter,” someone in the crowd cried out.

“He is an enemy combatant who has refused to surrender to me properly. That is unless you have
changed your mind?” Ramsay said turning to the man. “Do you have anything to say? The people
would like to see you find mercy it seems.”

The man looked at the crowd and then at Ramsay with his one good eye and gave a slight nod.
Ramsay smiled brightly.
“Wonderful! Tell me you surrender and apologize for serving against me.”

“I am Lieutenant Edd Tollett of his majesty’s Royal Air Force. You sir are a spineless coward. Fuck Hitler! Fuck Germany! God save the king!” the man yelled.

Ramsay screamed an order in German and the soldiers shove the airman from the bench. The rope snapped taunt, the man’s body convulsed and spasmed. The choking noise was unbearable. People in the crowd screamed but anyone that attempted to flee was pushed back by the soldiers on the fringes. People were crying now, somewhere they heard someone vomit.

Ramsay waited for silence to descend back over the crowd. The airman’s body had stopped convulsing and was now just swaying slightly back and forth, his face was white purple, his eye fixed and bulging.

“Well, he made a poor choice. Let’s see if the next ones are any wiser.” He called out and an elderly couple was brought forth. They held their heads high, they seemed proud and defiant. Sansa could feel bile rising in her throat, she could already tell this was not going to end well.

“Mr and Mrs Torrent, you stand accused of treason, of harboring and aiding the enemy –“

“HE wasn’t my enemy,” Mr Torrent interrupted pointing at the airman.

Ramsay laughed and waved his finger at the old man. “So it seems it may be a waste of everyone’s time to ask you how you plead.”

“I’m guilty of serving my king and his forces, I won’t deny it, but my wife had nothing to do with it, she knew nothing. It was my choice and mine alone so I do beg that you release her.”

“I’m not one to honor the request of traitors but in this case I may be willing to bargain.”

The crowd stood silent watching their exchange. Petyr’s voice suddenly filled her head, “He likes his games. You have to be better.” She doubted the Torrents would be able to beat Ramsay at this game.

“I will release your wife if you will point out right here and now who else was involved, who is in the resistance.”

The crowd sucked in a collective breath. The tension was now visible in the air, in the eyes and posture of everyone in the crowd. Arya was squeezing Sansa’s hand so tight she swore she heard her bones pop.

Mr Torrent was looking at his wife and she was looking back. She had almost a slight smile and was shaking her head. In that look Sansa saw years of shared history pass, communicating in a language that only lifelong lovers could share, and yet for the moment Sansa felt she could speak it with them. Mrs Torrent was telling her husband that it was ok, to not be scared but to not say a word, she was telling him goodbye. Sansa was silently weeping.

“There were no others,” he finally answered.

“Are you completely sure?”

He looked at his wife one more time but her face was unchanged.

“Yes sir, I’m sure.”

Ramsay turned to the crowd. “I tried, but this man has chosen poorly as well.”
Ramsay tilted his head slightly to the right. “Now,” he barked, and with his order time stopped.

The soldier behind Mrs Torrent drew his knife and ran it across her throat. Blood sprayed forth, a river of vibrant red arching across the scaffold. The tang of iron and salt filled the air. The soldier who had cut her throat released her and her body crumpled to the ground. Mr Torrent roared and rushed forward towards the major. Ramsay turned, drew his revolver and fired at his head. Arya watched a portion of his skull disappear, brain, bone and blood splattering into the air. Mr Torrent fell back and went silent.

Time started again. Panic broke out in the crowd, there was screaming and crying and cursing. Everyone was shoving, trying to flee the square. It was pandemonium. Sansa pulled Arya to her and tried to brace against the crush of bodies. The soldiers tried to contain the crowd. Fights were breaking out. Suddenly Ramsay fired his revolver in the air. “Enough!” he screamed and the crowd lulled for a moment in stunned silence. “Let them go! I’ve made my point.”

The soldiers fell back and the crowd dispersed. The girls waited until there was space to move and then quickly left the square. They fled back towards the post office and retrieved their bikes and fled town without looking back.

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They made it home in record time. Their legs and lungs burning from their efforts. They took the bicycles into the barn. Arya looked around to see if Jon was there but he wasn’t. They went in the house but he wasn’t there either. Sansa felt a pang of guilt but she hoped maybe he had left them.

Without a word Arya ran out the back door, Sansa knew she was headed to the cottage. She let her go. Suddenly the image of Mrs Torrent’s blood spraying from her neck popped in Sansa’s mind and she found herself retching in the toilet off the kitchen. When she finished she sat on the floor, her back against the wall and her head on her knees.

She heard the door open and waited for someone to call to her. She waited for a few moments and heard nothing so she looked up and found Arya standing in the door frame looking at her. “He wasn’t out there.”

“I’m sure he’s fine. If the Germans had him we’d know,” she said with a shudder. “He’d leave a note if he’d left for good. He’ll be back.”

“You’re probably right. Do we still have that stuff Lysa took to sleep?” Arya asked fidgeting.

“We do. Are you sure you want it?”

“I need to not think for a bit, not see….. I just want to sleep.”

“It’s in the tin next to the tea tin.”

“Do you want some?” Arya asked.

“Not right now. I doubt I can keep it down anyways.”

Arya made tea and retreated upstairs. Sansa finally got off the floor and sat at the table. She stared out the window, her mind replaying the looks that had passed between the Torrents before they died. She wondered how it was possible to love someone that much and know they were about to die and just be able to accept it. Tears ran down her cheeks in rapid succession.

Her thoughts were interrupted as the back door opened. Jon looked startled to see her. He was
holding a chain with several fish attached to it. “You’re back.” She just looked at him, he shifted uncomfortably. “I brought dinner.”

“I doubt anyone will be hungry,” she said softly and it was then he noticed that she was trying to brush away the tears that wouldn’t stop. Jon set the fish in the sink and wiped his hands and took the chair next to her. He looked at her, his face deathly serious. “Where’s Arya?”

She realized he thought her sister’s absence might be the cause of her distress. “She’s alright. She’s asleep upstairs.” He let out a sigh of relief.

“Are you alright?”

Sansa couldn’t believe he still could care after the way she’d treated him last night. It made her cry harder.

“Sansa?” he said gently.

“No, no I’m not alright.” And then between sobs and ragged breaths she proceeded to tell him what happened in town, of the horrors they had witnessed. He had shifted closer to her as she talked, eventually he had taken her hand and squeezed it when she’d been sobbing too hard to speak.

Finally she finished her tale, she looked exhausted and wrecked. He was still holding her hand and she had finally stopped sobbing. He let her sit silently for a bit but he had one question and he knew he couldn’t wait till tomorrow to ask it.

“I’m sorry to do this, but did you get the name of the airman?”

She looked at him, really looked at him, and the realization that he had a stake in this finally seemed to dawn on her.

“Oh Jon, I’m so sorry, of course you’d want to know that. He was a lieutenant, his last name was so close to Torrent though, I can’t recall, I just keeping think about them….. Sorry, umm, he was thin, dark hair. Edd, I think.”

Jon went white and still; his grip tightened on her hand. “Was it Tollett?” he whispered.

“I think that might be it. He was someone you knew?”

“He was. I knew him very well. He was on my crew. We flew numerous missions together. I can’t believe…” He took his hand from hers and covered his face, leaning forward to prop his elbows on the table.

“If it matters, he died bravely.”

Jon shoved up from the table and stalked to the window and stared out. He felt devastated and angry. It was one thing to have lost his friend in a crash, it was another to know he’d been tortured and executed. He fought back angry tears.

“It doesn’t matter, he still died.”

Sansa stood beside him now and placed a hand on his upper arm. “I’m sorry Jon. I’m sorry for everything.”

Something in her voice broke his resolve. He whirled around and wrapped her in his arms and let the tears fall. She encircled him as well and began to cry again.
They stood there holding each other until they were both cried out. He realized as he went to pull back that Sansa now seemed dead on her feet and was leaning heavily into him. She seemed to have surrendered to her exhaustion and despair.

He picked her up and cradled her, carrying her through the house to take her upstairs to sleep. When they reached the second floor he realized he’d never be able to navigate the narrow steps to the attic, so he instead took her to her aunt’s room and laid her on the bed and tucked her in. Her red hair fanned out beneath her. It looked like a halo of flames. It reminded him of the fires he’d flown over last fall, when London had been bombed and burned, something sad and terrifying, and yet beautiful.

He turned to leave and then he heard her voice, thick with sleep, ask him not to go. He turned back, her eyes were closed, she seemed to be dreaming but her expression was one of distress, her hand was reaching out for him.

He sat on the edge of the bed and took it. She said nothing more but after a couple minutes her expression seemed to relax. He waited until she was clearly asleep, her breath steady and even, and then he released her hand and went downstairs to mourn alone.

Chapter End Notes

So not Robb, I’m not quite to that level of cruelty yet. I am sorry if the story is getting too dark, but then this was a dark period in history. The next couple chapters I’ll try to lighten it up a little, admittedly there’s always going to be a dark tension but they won’t be nearly this brutal.
Chapter 18

Since the day of the executions everyone at the farm had been on edge or subdued. Arya felt guilt for putting them all into this situation, Jon was mourning the loss of his friend and Sansa constantly fretted about what would happen if they were found out.

Jon had made more of an effort to stay in the cottage and away from the girls. Arya had other ideas though and would seek him out, telling him stories about her brothers and her family, about her life before the war. He mostly just listened, he actually appreciated the distraction from his grief. Eventually to appease Arya he had started to come back to the house for meals.

Sansa for her part wanted to keep him at a distance. Sometimes over meals their eyes would meet, there was such a sadness in him now, it made her want to reach out and comfort him, but something held her back. She told herself there was no point getting close to him anyways. At best he would be leaving soon, at worst he would be arrested and they would all be dead. After seeing what she had seen, the idea of getting close to anyone only to lose them held little appeal.

A week after the execution Arya had told Sansa she was going into town. They had argued over it. Sansa had argued that they had plenty of work here to keep them busy, that the apples needed to be harvested, that town could wait. Arya argued she needed to keep up her contacts and she wanted to see if Mycah’s parents needed help. Eventually Jon had weighed in and sided with Arya. He reminded Sansa that it was important that they keep up with their normal routines, especially now. He assured her he would help her with the apples and that between them it would be fine. Sansa had ultimately conceded to them but her annoyance with Jon was clear.

They were in orchard together, barely speaking. Sansa was on the ladder picking the highest apples, the ones that were just barely out of her reach. If Arya was there she would’ve had her hold the ladder so she could get to the very top rungs, but she didn’t want to ask Jon for help. She was straining and stretching, it was imperative that they get every last apple; they would need them to make it through the winter. There was one last section of the tree to clear and she decided to move up one more rung to get the final ones, the ladder shook and creaked.

“Do you want some help?” Jon called from the tree next to her.

“No, I’m nearly finished.” The ladder twisting a bit more as she was straining up on her toes.

“Are you sure, because that thing looks ready to dump you,” Jon chuckled at her stubbornness. It was the first time she had heard him laugh in at least a week.

“Are you laughing at the idea I might fall?” she asked incredulously. “I’ll have you know I have exceptional balance.”

“I don’t doubt you, and well I’m laughing because you are just as stubborn as Arya.”

She turned to glare at him and then turned back. She climbed one rung higher and reached for the final apple, a bird flew from the tree then and startled her; she screamed as she fell from the ladder. The ladder would’ve hit her had Jon not rushed forth and pushed it away as it fell.

She lay on the ground, nothing felt broken but there would be bruises, both to her pride and her body. She stared up at the tree catching her breath. “Sansa are you ok?” he asked kneeling beside her, “Are you hurt?”

“I’ll live,” she answered but didn’t move. He kept looking at her but she refused to meet his eyes.
She realized in that moment he was always very kind to her and Arya, even when she had been terrible to him. She suddenly felt very guilty for how she had treated him these last few weeks.

“T’ll’m sorry for the things I said last week when I was angry. T’ll’m sorry I said you didn’t understand the responsibility of family. I shouldn’t have waited till now to say it.”

He nodded. “You were under tremendous stress then.” He sat down beside her and helped her sit up. He was staring off towards the woods, not meeting her eyes. “I’ve haven’t told anyone about my family, my father, in a long time.”

“T’ll’so why did you tell me?”

“I’ll’m not sure, maybe because you were being so open that day when you cried, for some reason I just wanted to tell you.”

They sat there for a while listening to the trees, the sounds of the farm. At least she no longer felt annoyed with him. A memory suddenly flashed in her mind. One from when she and Robb had spent the day together in Hyde Park right before he left for university. It seemed like a lifetime ago. The thought of her brother out there fighting somewhere made her heart clench.

“Can I ask you something?” Sansa asked breaking the silence.

“Sure.”

“You seem very young to already be a commander.”

“I’ll’m not sure that’s a question exactly.”

“How did you advance so quickly?”

“Are you thinking of your brother?” She inhaled sharply and looked at him. He met her gaze, his grey eyes were gentle but then there was also something tentative behind them. She wasn’t sure if it scared her or thrilled her that he seemed to have read her mind.

“Partially, yes,” she finally answered looking away.

“Then you won’t like my answer.”

She turned and looked at him again and he was looking back at her. His eyes had changed, now they were mournful, full of apology. “Just tell me,” she prompted.

“I’ve been in since the day after the war started. The fatality rate is so high that promotions happen quickly for those with any skill and the ability to stay alive. On every mission there is a 50% chance you don’t come back.”

“Well aren’t those always the odds? You live or you die?”

Jon shook his head at her. “No, what I’m saying is if four planes go out only two are coming back. It’s essentially guaranteed.”

She let his words sink in. Until now she had refused on some level to even consider the actual possibility that Robb might be dead. She thought of him often, she knew he was in danger, the idea played in the back of her mind but still on nearly every level she had rejected the idea that her brave older brother might be gone, but after Jon’s words she now understood that it was more than just a remote possibility. She felt her eyes mist over, she looked away, not wanting to cry in front of him.
“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you, yet again.”

“It’s not you. I think I’ve been fooling myself into thinking he would always be ok.”

“You should continue to think that. Hell my plane crashed and I’m still here.” She looked back at him and he gave her a sad smile.

“What was it like? Being shot down I mean.”

“Terrifying. We were on the way back from a recon mission and we started taking fire. It was chaos, the left engine took a direct hit; then the right failed. We went down in the channel. I honestly have no idea how or why I survived. I know we hit the water and the plane broke up a bit. I remember breaking through the surface of the water and waiting, but I never saw anyone else come up……” He stopped for a moment to regain his composure. She knew he was thinking of Edd, probably wondering how things would’ve turned out if he had seen him that night. After a few moments he continued, “It turns out we weren’t too far off the west side of here and by some miracle a fisherman was out fishing in the middle of the night. He pulled me from the water and brought me to the island. The resistance smuggled me around for a few days and now I’m here.”

I’m not sure why I’m so lucky. I lost a lot of good men, and well Edd….. I feel like I failed, I was their commander and they are all dead and I’m still alive….. It seems wrong.”

He looked up as a flock of birds flew across the field and seemed lost in thought. Sansa’s heart broke for him. She knew some of his pain, his guilt, all too well. To be the one alive when others died for seemingly no reason. She started to think of Robin and felt the tears forming again. A couple slid down her cheeks before she could stop them. She moved to wipe them away before Jon saw but it was too late.

“It seems I’m good for little else than making you cry,” he said as he wiped away the tears on the cheek closest to him. His palm lingered for a moment, his skin warm against hers. She suddenly became aware he was looking at her, maybe through her, with an expression she could only describe as longing, it made her pulse quicken. They stayed like that for a few moments and then something over her shoulder seemed to draw his attention and he slowly withdrew his hand. She was surprised when she felt disappointment wash over her.

She turned her head and looked over her shoulder and saw Arya dismounting her bicycle in the yard. She looked back and found Jon now standing over her, he offered a hand and helped her stand as Arya called out for them. They answered her as the started out of the orchard to meet her and find out the latest news.

Arya advised there was no progress on getting Jon off the island. Not surprising the patrols were still too heavy for anyone to risk an escape attempt, so they would have to continue to wait. Sansa said it was just as well, if he could stay a couple more weeks they could use his help to finish the apples and the garden.

They finished the apple harvest a few days later. The night they finished the apple harvest it was Sansa’s turn to sleep downstairs. She knew she should go to town tomorrow for the sewing group, but the thought of possibly seeing Major Bolton held no appeal. She wondered if she really would be able to make herself go. Since that day in the orchard when she fell, and she and Jon cleared the air, things had been much more peaceful, in fact she’d almost could call it enjoyable. She didn’t want
that feeling to end, so now she lay tossing and turning dreading the morning.

She sat up as she heard the soft coded tap on the door. She rose and padded across the floor, drawing the blackout shade in the kitchen and let Jon in. “I’d hoped you’d be awake,” he said quietly.

“Everything alright?”

“Yes, I just can’t sleep. I wanted to see if I could get a glass of warm milk.”

She nodded and set to making them each a glass while he took a seat at the table. She could feel him watching her as she stood over the stove stirring. She hummed quietly to herself as she did in an attempt to calm her nerves. Once she wasn’t so angry with him it was as if her brain fully recognized how handsome he was and being alone in the kitchen in the middle of the night now made her nervous.

“What are you singing?” he asked as she set a glass in front of him, “I feel like I know it.”

“It’s Newcastle Lullaby. My father used to hum it all the time, his mother used to sing it to him as a boy. He grew up in the north, near there, like you,” she answered him as she took the seat across from him.

“It sounds like something my mother used to hum.” He looked forlorn and far away.

“Do you remember her?”

“Aye, very much. She was sweet, kind but so fierce in her love. She made me the center of her whole world.”

“It must’ve been hard when she died.”

“It was. For a long time I wished I had died with her. She was all I had in the world. The orphanage was a shock and I was terribly lonely at first. You learn quickly that no one wants to adopt an older child, especially one with a German last name. I think I would’ve run away and become a Dickens’ street urchin if not for Sam.”

She noticed the way his features softened as he spoke of his friend. Sansa took a sip of milk and waited for him to continue. “He was my salvation in a lot of ways. He came a few months after me and his story was sadder than mine. His parents couldn’t afford to raise him and his siblings and so his father decided to just drop him at the orphanage one night. He was very timid and scared but it seemed to wake something in me and I became his protector. It gave me a purpose, stopped me focusing on how much I missed my mother. We stayed there until we aged out and then moved to Leeds together, lived in a dingy apartment, working this job or that. It was some of the best times though. Then the war came.”

“Where is he now?” she asked.

“Back in England I suppose. I enlisted with the RAF, Sam, well he was never going to be much of a fighter but he was smart, so smart. He joined the intelligence service. I hated we were split up but we both wanted to do our duty and we both knew we had different talents to use.”

“When was the last time you heard from him?”

“A couple months before I was shot down. He came down to Middle Wallop where I was stationed. I wonder if he thinks I’m dead now. I just realized everyone probably thinks I’m dead.” He fell silent then and looked sadly down at his hands wrapped around his glass, the joy he had shown in
speaking of Sam now seemed a faded memory.

Sansa reached out and took his hand nearest to her. He looked up at her almost surprised. “I’m sure he hasn’t given up on you and you will see him again,” she said with a gentle smile. He looked at her, his eyes dark and serious; he finally nodding in agreement. They sat like that for a while in silence until he seemed to almost unconsciously start to stroke his thumb over her knuckles, drawing her gaze to where their hands were joined. He seemed to notice where her attention had been drawn and he stopped and slowly withdrew his hand.

“I should let you get some sleep,” he said softly.

“I suppose, it is quite late after all,” she agreed. They both stood and he walked to the door and opened it.

“Goodnight,” he said turning back to her.

“Goodnight Jon,” she responded. Their eyes lingered on each other for another beat or so and then he turned back and exited, closing the door behind him. Sansa smiled and looked down at her hand before heading back to the sofa.
Chapter 19

Sansa had talked herself into going to town the next morning. She had attended the circle meeting and was walking back to the grocer’s with Jeyne catching up with her friend.

By some blessed miracle Ramsay was not in town, he had been called to the north end of the island to oversee some of the fortifications, or at least that was the information Jeyne told her. Jeyne was still seeing the soldier from the spring, who apparently was a clerk for one of the ranking member of the command staff here on the island, and it seemed he like to talk.

Sansa honestly couldn’t understand how Jeyne was continuing on with him, especially after what had happened in the town square. Jeyne had defended him, saying he had been just as sick about it as they were, that he hated Ramsay just as much as they did, maybe more since he saw even more of his cruelty first hand. He had begged her forgiveness and swore he knew nothing of the executions beforehand and she said she believed him. Sansa wasn’t so sure but then she really didn’t know him either. She wanted to believe her friend had sound judgment but the whole thing still did not sit well with her. However, she had decided she would stay silent on the matter.

It seemed in an attempt to prove Matthias was on their side Jeyne told her of the information he had recently shared with her; there had been deportation orders that had come down to remove hundreds of people from the island, a reprisal for something in Persia or Prussia, she couldn’t recall, but Ramsay was ignoring them, his main concern was the island fortifications, hence his trip to the north side of the island. Sansa wondered if it was true, and if it was, why would he be ignoring them. The major didn’t seem the type to disobey an order unless he had some darker motivation.

“It’s actually been a relief to not have that bastard in town. Everyone is breathing a bit easier with him gone. I hear he is supposed to be back in a couple of weeks though,” Jeyne concluded as they went up the steps to the porch of the store.

Sansa still couldn’t wrap her head around the fact Ramsay would be ignoring a deportation order, not when he lived to see them all suffer. “So really you aren’t at all concerned they could change their minds and start deporting us?”

“I mean maybe, but I don’t think it’s a real concern, Matthias doesn’t think so either. It seems like a lot of effort and work for little gain. He says these orders get issues all the time, some commander or another throws a tantrum, but cooler heads always prevail. And Ramsay seems far from inclined to send anyone away, I imagine he enjoys torturing us all far too much.”

Sansa felt a sense of dread but she hoped and prayed Jeyne was right. The thought of being swallowed up into the whole of Europe was terrifying. She wished Jeyne a good day shortly after and headed back to the farm.

She arrived home and did not see Arya or Jon outside but she heard noises from the barn. She took the supplies from town and put them away before going out to the barn. She entered to find only Jon.

“Where’s my sister?” she asked. Jon looked up at her, his shirt sleeves were rolled up showing his strong forearms. He was covered in just the slightest sheen of sweat. There was something about the way the light caught his eyes and his curls fell across his face that made her suck in her breath.

“I hope that’s alright?” she realized he had been talking to her and she had been staring at him dumbly.
"I’m sorry, what?" she responded feeling heat rise in her cheeks.

A look of amusement passed over his face but he said nothing to embarrass her further. "I said Arya saw the fox again so she is down in the woods."

"Her and that fox," she answered giving a slight laugh.

"It actually gave me an idea, would you be alright with me setting some snares out in the woods? See if I can catch anything? I was thinking I could teach Arya as well."

"I don’t see why not, knowing her she will love the idea."

"Wonderful. So how was town?" he asked cautiously.

"Not as terrible as I feared, the major is out of town for a couple of weeks….. but……." she trailed off.

"But?"

"I heard there are rumors that they might consider deporting some people, punishment by the Germans for some military action in god knows where, but I was told not to worry about it." Jon looked concerned but said nothing. After a moment he went back to working on the crate he had been when she walked in.

"What is it?" she asked him moving closer to him.

"If you say not to worry then no reason for me to contradict that."

She was close enough now to reach out and put her hand over one of his to stop him from working. He looked up at her and halted his work. "Tell me," she ordered softly.

"It’s just that there are rumors, well maybe not so much rumors as intelligence….. just……. you don’t want to get deported to Germany or to the east. There are said to be camps….. they aren’t a good place to be." He didn’t want to scare her, not if what she said was true and the deportations were unlikely.

"There are camps here for the detainees," she countered, "They aren’t great but….."

"The ones in the east are far worse if things are to be believe." He looked at her and realized he was frightening her more than he intended. He didn’t want that, he only wanted to see her happy. "Like I said, rumors, but I would do everything possible to avoid leaving the island unless it's to go back to England."

They held each other’s gaze, her hand still resting on his when they heard Arya calling out to him from the back field. Sansa withdrew her hand from him and backed away as Arya entered the barn.

"Sansa, you’re back! Did Jon tell you? I saw the fox again. I think I might know where he is hiding! I will outsmart him yet," she declared.

Sansa gave Jon one more look that sealed the contract between them to speak no more of the deportations and then turned to Arya with a smile. "Have you now? How about you tell us all about it over lunch."

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They finished bringing in the garden the following week. Sansa made a trip to town. She wanted to go again before Ramsay was due back. She hoped now that Jon was teaching Arya to set traps and hunt she would not be as eager to go into town and seek out the resistance. Her concern for her sister was growing though, she saw the way Arya looked at Jon, it was the same way she had looked at Robb, a mixture of love, respect and admiration. She knew when it was time for Jon to go Arya would be crushed, it would be like losing her brother all over again. Sansa hated to admit she would be crushed as well, but her reasons were entirely different than Arya’s.

Jon had started to come into the house the nights she was the one to sleep downstairs and they would stay up for several hours discussing their pasts, their lives before the war and during. They had started to hug goodnight when he would finally leave, she liked the way his arms felt around her. The more time she spent with him the more she realized she was developing feelings for him. She knew it was a bad idea, a dangerous idea, but she couldn’t stop herself, she wasn’t sure but she thought the feeling might be mutual.

She was lost in her thoughts of their conversation from last night, he had told her a story about when he and Sam had convinced some of the younger children there was a dragon that lived in the woods near the orphanage. One little boy had such bad nightmares that the nuns had given them kitchen duty for a month. Sansa laughed softly to herself recalling how Jon had told the story and tried to imitate the dragon voice.

She had been headed towards the butcher’s shop. She was almost there when she heard her name being called. She turned and found Major Bolton marching towards her. He stopped once he was a few inches from her.

“Oh, Major, hello.”

He looked irritated. “Were you ignoring me, I’ve been calling your name for half a block Sansa.” He rarely said her first name, he normally called her Ms. Stark, it sent a chill down her spine and she hated the way it sounded in his mouth.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you. Actually I didn’t expect you in town at all.”

“Yes, well I’m back from the north side sooner than expected. It does please me to know you concern yourself with my whereabouts though.”

Sansa didn’t know how to respond to that. She didn’t want to anger him but she had no desire to encourage him.

“I’m glad I’ve run into you. Now that I am back we are going to move forward with the island’s Oktoberfest celebration. There is a dance next Saturday, I would like you to attend, bring your aunt and your sister.”

Sansa froze, he was setting a trap again, she could feel it. She could feel him watching her carefully and forced a sweet smile. “Isn’t it late for Oktoberfest, it’s nearly November,” she demurred.

He frowned and looked annoyed, “Then think of it as a harvest festival if you want, but you are missing the point. It doesn’t change the fact I request your presence.”

“I’ll have to see. Arya hates dances or anything requiring her to wear a dress or act like a lady, and Lysa and Robin have not been feeling well.”

“Shall I have the doctor sent out? I could send my medical officer, he might be better than your local doctor, better supplied at least.”
“That is too kind but unnecessary, they’ll be ok. I think it’s likely just due to the weather change, those brisk autumn winds and all.”

“Well if she feels up to coming please let me know. Of course you and your sister will still be expected to attend.”

“And of course. I should be getting along though.”

“Yes, won’t want to keep anyone waiting.”

She bowed her head and turned to head into the butcher. “Oh Sansa,” he called. She stopped and turned back to him. “I’ve requested Baelish stay on Guernsey to spring, I thought it was best for everyone.”

Sansa said nothing but swallowed hard. “Good day, Sansa,” he finished and then turned and walked off. She watched him go and then hurried into the alley next to the butcher’s so she could catch her breath. She didn’t want him to turn back and see the terror radiating from her body.

She had come back home to find Jon and Arya skinning rabbits in the yard behind the house. She called to them from the backdoor to let them know she was home. They waved and Arya called back that they would make dinner tonight. Sansa thanked them and then advised she was going to lay down for a bit and assured them she was fine.

She climb the stairs to the attic and sat in the reading chair for a while staring out the window in to the fields. It was the end of October, the last of the fall leaves had turned to brown; the vibrant colors fading into memory. She knew it won’t be long till winter would set in. They’d need to till the garden to prepare for winter planting. She was trying to think of anything she could to not think of Ramsay’s invitation.

She looked up as Arya entered the attic. “Is everything alright?” She asked.

“I suppose,” she answered.

“The only other time you came home from town and laid down right away, France had been invaded. So what’s happened now?”

Sansa turned and looked at Arya. There was no point lying, they’d need to figure something out sooner rather than later anyways. “It’s Major Bolton.”

Arya was deathly still and looked at Sansa intently. “Has he hurt you?” Arya asked.

“No, nothing like that.”

Arya walked to the bed nearest Sansa and sat down on the end facing her. “Do you think Petyr might actually have been protecting us from Ramsay?” Sansa asked looking away from Arya. “By us I also mean the town.”

Sansa turned back from the window and Arya could see how pale she’d become. “What’s going on? You’re scaring me.”

“He wants us to attend a harvest festival dance next week Saturday, he wants you and Lysa there. I keep thinking he knows Lysa’s dead, that he’s toying with me. He said he’s leaving Petyr on Guernsey till spring.”
“We shouldn’t go. We should stay far away from him. We’ve seen what he’s capable of. They talk about him in the resistance, about the things he does. He tortures people out at the camp, not just orders it, does it. Cuts, burns, lets dogs loose on them, he’s completely deranged. It’s not safe to be near him.”

“I’m well aware of how awful he is but I’m not sure he’ll be so easily refused Arya. He insisted.”

Ramsay’s words to Sansa that day on the porch hissed in Arya’s ear, ‘Baelish was right, you do love to please.’ Arya couldn’t help but ask, “Do you want to go?”

“Of course not! But I don’t want to anger him. I don’t want to give him any reason to come here.”

They sat quietly after that, the only sound the wind in the trees outside in the yard.

“We’ll figure some way out of it. I’m going to go help Jon with dinner,” Arya said finally breaking their silence.

“Ok, I’ll be down in a bit. Maybe keep this between us for now, ok?” Arya gave her an odd look but then shrugged as if in agreement and went downstairs.

Sansa had laid down after Arya had left and now found herself disoriented as she woke; she heard Arya calling her for dinner. She called down she’d be right there and proceed to straighten her hair and clothes up before heading to the kitchen.

She entered the kitchen and met Jon’s eyes. They were darker than normal and the broody expression she hadn’t seen in several weeks was back. She turned to Arya who won’t meet her eyes. “You told him about Ramsay’s request,” she said flatly.

“She did, and I’m glad she did,” he answered for Arya.

Sansa sighed and sat at the table. “I suppose you have an opinion on it.”

“Arya and I disagree,” he said. Arya glared at him. Sansa’s eyes snapped up and she looked between them. “Go on,” she said.

“I told her you both need to go to the festival. I hate it, I do, but I see no other option, not unless you want to draw more attention. Arya just really doesn’t want to wear a dress.”

“That is not the only reason,” she snapped.

Jon served dinner as they discussed the matter further but in the end it was decided that there was no other option but for them to attend. Arya had finally agreed only after Sansa promises she could skip the dress.

When Arya went to complete the evening chores Sansa helped him clear the kitchen and thanked Jon for helping her in getting Arya to agree to go.

“I hate it honestly, I’d actually prefer you didn’t go,” he said quietly.

“Then why’d-“

“Because I also know we have little other choice. But given what we know about the major, well the thought of him touching you, dancing with you, it makes me want to march into town and shot him in the street. Hell maybe that’d be the best for everyone. Maybe that’s why I’m here.” There was
something ferocious in his voice as he spoke. It thrilled her and terrified her all at once.

“It’d be a pointless waste of your life, they’d just send someone to replace him, probably someone worse.”

“I can’t stand the thought of him touching you,” he said again.

She set down the dish she was drying and looked at him. “You know I hate him. Why does the thought bother you so? Just because he’s a Nazi? Or is there something else?”

He flushed and looked away, biting the inside of his lower lip softly.

“Is there an answer you’d prefer?” He asked softly as he stepped closer to her but he still won’t meet her gaze.

She reached up and placed her hand on his cheek and made him look at her. “I’d prefer the truth,” she whispered.

He sighed and bit his lip again and reached up to touch her hand. Before he could answer the back door flew open and Arya bounded in as they pulled apart. If she noticed anything off between them she didn’t say a word before asking them to move so she could get a glass of water.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

It’s a cold cloudy day out so what else can I do but write?

The day of the dance arrived clear and brisk. When late afternoon arrived they started to get ready despite Arya’s objects they shouldn’t bother to look nice. Jon told them he wanted to check the snares in the woods and disappeared around the same time.

They had raided Lysa’s closest during the week and Sansa had altered some of the clothes to fit them. Sansa choose a silver grey sleeveless dress with a high neckline and a skirt that ended in the middle of her calf. Arya would be dressed simply in high waisted trousers and a checkered blouse. Sansa thought she looked lovely and it was an outfit even she would wear, which is likely why Arya had groaned and grumbled as they got ready, which caused Sansa to snap at her, so they had finished in silence. Jon had returned as they were preparing to leave. He stood on the porch staring at Sansa to the point Arya had asked him what he was gawking at. He and Sansa had then laughed uncomfortably. He told them they both looked beautiful and he would wait up for their return.

They thanked him, finished pulling on their coats and headed off to their bicycles. Sansa gave him a backwards glance and he gave her a sad smile and halfhearted wave in return.

They met Jeyne and Matthias in town and then headed to the Umber estate in Matthias’ car. Sansa could feel the disapproval radiating off Arya but was thankful she said nothing.

They arrived at the party and made their way inside. It was very German, the food, the music. She knew Arya must be cringing inside. Arya shot her a seething look.

“I promise we’ll leave as soon as we can,” Sansa assured her. Arya responses with a curt nod.

They checked their coats and then made their way through the receiving line and waited for their turn to greet Ramsay.

“Major Bolton,” Sansa said when it was their turn and gave a curtsy. “Major,” Arya echoed and gave the smallest of bows.

“Lovely to see you Ms. Stark, I’m pleased to see you as well Arya, it is Arya right?” he responded.

Arya looked annoyed but gave a slight nod; they all knew he knew her name perfectly well. “Pity you couldn’t be bothered to wear a dress, but I suppose you’re presentable enough.”

Sansa shook her head ever so slightly at Arya, her eyes warning her to not respond. “My sister means no offense, dresses for a growing girl are just hard to come by during war,” Sansa demurred.

“Yeah, food and survival tend to be a priority,” Arya added unable to control her tongue.

There was an uncomfortable silence before he continued. “And what of your aunt?”

“Our cousin is ill, she couldn’t bear to leave him, she sends her apologies,” Sansa answered.
“Pity. I guess that’s what you meant by surviving being a priority,” he said turning his gaze back on Arya. Arya just gave him a steely gaze back.

“You are a defiant one aren’t you? I can see it in your eyes,” Ramsay observed.

“Forgive us for monopolizing your time, we should let you go,” Sansa interjected. Arya and Ramsay stared at each other a beat longer before he looked at Sansa and smiled. “Of course. Enjoy the evening. Save me a waltz,” he said before dismissing them.

They walked away. As soon as they were no longer in his sight line Sansa pulled Arya into a corner. “You must be more careful.” She chastised her, “Don’t provoke him.”

“How can you be so polite to him? He’s a murder. He killed our cousin.”

Sansa took a deep breath. “I know. But we can’t act like foolish children, not with him. He won’t tolerate your mouth like Petyr. Please, for all our sakes, just keep quiet.”

“Why is it always so easy for you to just get along with everyone? Doesn’t he make your skin scrawl? Didn’t Petyr?”

“Arya, please. This is not the place for this discussion. I’m begging you, do your best to be pleasant, or at least just be silent.”

Arya huffed but nodded. They made their way to the food table and tried to go unnoticed. They were successful for a while but then Ramsay spotted them and came towards them.

“Come for your dance?” Arya asked unable to hide the disgust in her voice.

“I have,” he confirmed, his eyes alight with a gleefully menacing gleam. Sansa stepped towards him but he held up his hand and waved his finger and made a tsking noise. “Not yet. Arya, shall we?” He extended his hand to Arya.

“Me?” she squeaked.

“I advise you don’t make me wait.”

Arya looked at Sansa, her eyes looked like those of a caged wild animal. Sansa was sure she had the same look. She nodded at her sister flicked her eyes in Ramsay’s direction, a silent plea for her to consent. Arya gave her the most withering look and then took Ramsay’s hand and let him lead her to the floor, she kept looking back at Sansa who was doing her best to look calm and reassure her it would be ok.

Sansa watched them, she could see them talking, it was making her heart race. She wondered if this had been his plan all along, to corner Arya, to question her about the resistance. She knew he had his suspicions. It would be something he would do, force her to watch as he destroyed her sister. The song finally ended, Ramsay bowed to Arya and then turned and walked towards Sansa. He caught her eye and smirked with a look of satisfaction as he continued pass her.

She felt unable to breath and looked back to where Arya had been standing but no longer saw her. Her eyes moved around the room desperately searching for her. She caught a glimpse of the back of her as she exited out unto the terrace. Sansa fought her way through the crowd to reach her. She caught up with her outside, at the edge of the terrace. It was easy to see she was quite upset.

“What happened? What did he say?” she asked.
“I want to leave,” Arya responded. Her tone was cold but Sansa detected a slight tremble.

“Arya, please tell me.”

“We should go. Unless you’d prefer to stay at this lovely party?” There was a measure of distain in her voice now.

“Are you going to tell me how he upset you so?”

“I’m headed back to town, are you with me?”

Sansa felt exasperated, why couldn’t she just answer her damn question. “Yes we can go. Let me just find Jeyne and let her know.” She turned and headed back in without waiting for a response. She saw Jeyne across the room and headed towards her. She had made it halfway when Ramsay caught her.

“You still owe me a dance,” he purred.

“Regrettably not tonight, Arya doesn’t feel well so we are just about to leave.”

“She’ll wait,” he snapped and pulled Sansa to the dance floor. He began to twirl her and whorl her about the dance floor. She stayed silent, her heart pounding out of her chest. She wished she could pull the knife from his belt and stab him right here and now.

The song was half way over before he finally spoke, “So you don’t want to ask me?”

“Ask you what?”

“Why I danced with Arya, what we discussed. Why she might suddenly want to leave?”

“I figure your reasons are your own. And I told you she feels ill. I think it’s all the rich food.”

“Do you think you are clever?”

“No. I’ve been told my whole life I am a horrible liar.”

“Why is your sister always scurrying about town?”

“She makes deliveries for the butcher. A lot of the elderly people, or people with small children can’t always make it out to get their rations.”

“Is that so? The way I see it your sister is a very clever girl, but you and your aunt are failing to make her a proper lady, one that would make a good German wife. Don’t you want her to have a future?”

“Of course but she’s rather young to be thinking about that right now. Did you say all this to her?”

He ignored her question. “And what about you? What kind of future are you planning?”

“Me?” Sansa felt confused and alarmed, she didn’t like where he was taking their conversation.

“Yes, you. Do you plan to be a good submissive wife? Baelish told me your mother is quite the proper lady, do you plan to be like your mother? A lady that breeds many fine children?”

“I— I haven’t really thought that far ahead. There’s a war on,” she finally managed response.

“So Baelish never discussed my request with you?”
Sansa pulled back, she could not hide the panic and revulsion from her face.

“I -, he -,” she couldn’t get the words pass the bubble of horror clogging her throat. Had he really tried to have Petyr arrange for her to marry him? Had this once been Petyr’s suggestion or was this just another of Ramsay’s games?

“Hmmm,” he hummed thoughtfully as the song ended. She couldn’t tell if he was angry or insulted. His total lack of readable response was possibly one of the most terrifying things she’d ever experienced. It left her unable to plan her next step with him. He released her and said nothing more, just simply turned and stalked off the dance floor.

Despite feeling like she might faint, she finally made her way to Jeyne. She told her Arya was sick and they planned to leave. She told her they would walk back but Jeyne insisted they were drop them off in town. She gathered Arya and they rode back, the Starks sitting silently as Jeyne went on about the party. They gathered their bicycles and rode the rest of the way home in silence as well.

When they were finally at home and behind a closed door the dam finally broke. “Did you enjoy yourself!? Why did you force me to go??” Arya cried out whirling on Sansa.

“Arya what happened? Please tell me why you are so angry,” she pleaded in return.

“Are you ok?” They heard Jon ask as he entered from the kitchen and saw the two sisters facing each other, their backs rigid and tense.

“I’m not sure,” Sansa answered as Arya glared at her.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Arya said. “Not with her!”

“I’m going to get ready for bed. Arya if you change your mind and want to talk to me I’ll be upstairs. Goodnight Jon,” Sansa said. She gave Jon a hopefully look. She hoped if Arya won’t talk to her then maybe she would to Jon. She hadn’t even reached the second floor when she started to hear them whispering. She sighed and hoped he might be able to talk Arya down.

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Sansa woke after a fitful night of sleep. She made her way downstairs to find Jon in the kitchen, Arya was nowhere to be found. “Where is she?”

“She asked to check the snares herself this morning,” he answered as he brewed tea.

“Did she tell you what happened last night?”

“She did.”

“And?”

Jon gave her an uncomfortable look. “I think it would be better -,”

“Don’t tell me to ask her, she clearly doesn’t want to tell me,” she cautioned him.

“She’s upset we made her go. Ramsay said some cruel things to her, about her, about your family, about you.”

“It’s what he does, he tries to upset people, it’s like a game to him. He’s very cruel, it’s clear. Did she say what he said?”
“He asked about what she does in town. Then he brought up your brother, told Arya he’s probably
dead, made some terrible joke about if he’s not he should come by the island so he can show him the
same hospitality he showed the last RAF man to step foot on this island.”

Sansa pulled in a deep breath, it was cruel but she couldn’t imagine that alone could shake Arya so,
she was stronger than that.

“And then he wanted to know why I’m not more of a proper lady like my pretty sister or her pretty
friend,” Arya said from behind them. They hadn’t heard her enter. They turned to look at her now.

“Ar-“ Sansa began.

Arya held up her hand. “He said I could stand to learn from you both about how to get along, how to
make people feel welcomed. He said he’s certain I’m involved with things I shouldn’t be but he just
can’t prove it. He wanted to know if I thought a hard German cock in my cunt would straighten me
out, make me a proper lady just like Jeyne, just like you.”

Sansa gasp and pulled her hand back to strike her but Jon caught her wrist.

“That’s a lie! Why would you believe that! I have never- Arya! That’s a disgusting lie!” She
wretched her hand from Jon’s grip.

“Is it? Because based on my observations you have no issue being polite and sweet towards him, you
were always accommodating to Petyr. I see the way they look at you, how men always look at you!
It makes sense you wouldn’t refuse them if asked, Sansa always wants to please everyone. Do you
enjoy it? Does it make you feel powerful? Desired?” There was such disdain in Arya’s voice it made
Sansa feel sick.

“Arya, why would you believe him over me? I’m telling you, I have never, would never, willingly
let either of them touch me. Don’t you see what he’s doing? He wants to divide us. He wants us
angry, to make a mistake.”

“And how do you know what he wants? Jeyne loves that Nazi she’s with and she’s your best friend,
why would it be a stretch to think you might like the attention as well? And you would never settle
for some low level clerk.”

“I don’t know what to do to make you believe me, but none of it is true. Tell me what I have to do to
make you believe me.”

Arya regarded her, looking her over. Sansa felt weighted, Arya was sure to judge her wanting. “Cut
your hair off,” she finally answered.

“What?” Jon interrupted them for the first time. They’d nearly forgotten he was there. “That seems a
bit extreme.”

“Sansa’s always been vain and beautiful, if she’s telling me the truth; that she’s never been with
Petyr or Ramsay, that she doesn’t like them looking at her; she should cut off her hair.”

Sansa locked eyes with Arya and grabbed a knife from the counter, she took a thick coil of hair and
sheared it off at the collarbone.

Arya shrieked as Jon wrestled the knife from Sansa. “Stop this! Both of you!” he shouted. They
were so startled that Sansa dropped the knife and Arya jumped. Arya started to cry and ran to Sansa
sobbing.
“I’m sorry, I—” she sobbed and buried her face in Sansa’s chest.

“It’s fine, calm down,” Sansa soothed. Jon stood behind them utterly bewildered. Sansa caught his eye and mouthed that he should go, give them some time. He nodded and left out the back door. As he headed towards the cottage he actually thanked god for the first time that he didn’t have sisters.

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They retreated to the attic and lay on their beds talking late into the afternoon. Sansa had realized as they lay there that since Jon’s arrival they had lost their nightly talks. She also realized Arya had been holding in a lot of pain, Sansa felt ashamed that she had failed to notice until now.

Arya had explained that guilt had been building in her relentlessly since Mycah’s death. She had long held it was her fault, if he hadn’t been trying to impress her with the comic, if she had fought or cried out, maybe he wouldn’t have died. But it went deeper, things had snowballed from there. She also felt guilt for Brynden, she wondered if her encouragement and involvement with the resistance had lead him to a mistake. And if the resistance had helped those prisoners escape last summer had she somehow indirectly played a part in Robin’s death as well? She now wondered if bringing Jon here would be their final damnation.

“Arya those things just happened, you had no control over them. Don’t you remember what Lysa use to say? This place, this island, is cursed but that’s hardly your fault,” Sansa assured her.

“You told me to ignore that.”

“Well maybe I’ve changed my mind. Maybe she was right.”

“But that’s just it Sansa, that’s the whole problem,” she countered. Sansa sat up and looked at her as she continued, “It’s my fault we’re even here.”

Sansa said nothing and waited for Arya to explain. “You never wanted to come here. The night mother and father decided we would, you got upset and stormed out of the room. After you left they said maybe they should discuss it further but I stopped them. I told them I wanted to go and you would too if you just gave it a chance. I told them I would talk to you, but I begged them to send us and they agreed. I wanted to come here. I thought it might make us equals.”

“I don’t understand, what do you mean equal?”

“In London you were always the good one, the pretty and poised one, a proper lady. But not me, I’ve never had the social grace you do, I never will, but I thought if we came here, well we’d be more on equal footing. I knew I would like the farm, being dirty and working with my hands. I knew you won’t. I just thought for once, for the time we were here, well I thought I’d be the good one.

But then everything went to shit, and I’ve felt so guilty. I guess when Ramsay said those things I wanted to believe them because for a moment I didn’t feel guilty. I could blame you for something finally and it was something so terrible. For a moment I felt like it didn’t matter if it was my fault we were here because you’d done something worse. It was just easier I guess. It felt good to be released from my guilt for a bit,” Arya told her as she avoided looking her in the eye.

“Shove over,” Sansa commanded as she lay down next to Arya. “In the future just talk to me, don’t let things build up. Don’t ever think you can’t tell me something. The only way we survive all this is by sticking together. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I’m sorry I believed him, and I’m sorry about your hair,” Arya said snuggling into her.
Sansa gave a barking laugh. “I’d nearly forgotten! I’ll need you to finish cutting it, though please try your best not to butcher me further.”

“I swear I’ll do my best.”

They lay in the attic side by side watching the sun chase across the floor. “I have one more question, but I don’t want you to take it the wrong way,” Sansa said breaking the silence.

“Ok,” Arya responded with trepidation as she sat up.

“Everything you just told me, well it’s just all so actualized….. how did – I mean,” Sansa struggled to find the right words. She didn’t want to insult her sister but Arya wasn’t exactly known for her self-reflections.

Arya laughed, “Its ok. I spent a lot of time talking to Jon last night. He made me realize a lot of things. He’s nearly as good as Robb.”

“Wait, so if you thought all this last night –“

“Jon thought, he seems like he wants to see the best in people and I just figured he might be another boy under your spell. I wasn’t ready to believe you, but then you cut your hair, then I knew. Again, I’m sorry.”

Sansa fingered the section of cut hair, “Well I suppose it’s a small sacrifice at this point. Come on, let’s go downstairs, I’m starving.”
Arya wanted to go to town the next morning, she felt it'd been too long since she'd gotten her last update. Sansa had not objected. After the high emotions of the last couple days she welcomed the room to breathe.

Jon had gone down to the woods to check the snares and she found herself alone for the first time in a while. She had finished her chores in the barn and decided to climb into the hayloft. She sat in the window staring out unto the house and the orchard.

She reflected back on yesterday's conversation with Arya. She thought about Arya's confession, that she wondered if she might be responsible in some way for Robin's death, she wondered why she hadn't confessed her own guilt over Robin. She realized it would do little good, but still she felt a pang of guilt over holding back when she'd told Arya they needed to be honest with each other.

She caught sight of Jon coming up through the field and waved to him. He waved back and then made his way towards the barn. He called he was coming up and climbed in the loft and sat beside her.

"What are you doing up here? Aren't you cold?" He asked rubbing his hands together.

"It's not so bad. Wait here." She stood and fetched a pair of blankets from a trunk in the corner. She came back and offered him the end of one. He took it and they sat wrapped together, shoulders just brushing. Sansa spread the other one over their legs.

"Better?" she asked.

Jon felt warm but it had little to do with the blankets and more from his proximity to her. He snuck a look at her from the corner of his eye and smiled. "Yes. Now if only we had some hot cocoa or cider."

"That would be grand."

They stared out unto to farm. The weather had turned cold, windy and dull in the last week. The sky was a dull gray, the land now brown and grey as well, the wind having swept the last of the leaves away. The back of their hands brushed each other but neither of them seemed brave enough at the moment to take the others hand.

"There's something beautiful about it isn't there?" Jon said.

"Beautiful? It looks dreadful if you ask me. So dirty and blah."

"I think there is something almost magical about the world falling asleep in winter only to be reborn in the spring. You can't have life without death."

"I didn't realize you were such a poet," she teased. He flushed a bit and she swore at herself for ruining the moment.

He turned and met her gaze. "Well I suppose a splash of color, say red, can add some beauty to any view." He smoothed a strand of her newly shortened hair behind her ear. Now it was her turn to
blush a bit, she suddenly felt self-conscious, her hair had never been this short, it now just brushed her shoulders and it still felt strange to her. "It suits you," he added sensing her discomfort.

"Do you think so? I'm still getting use to it."

"I do, it's lovely."

"Thank you. Also, thank you for talking to Arya the other night, she said you helped her a lot."

"I just wish she'd listened to me a touch more before it all blew up, when you grabbed that knife, well it was a bit frightening."

"I'll admit now it might've been a bit dramatic," she smiled and flicked the end of her hair behind her shoulder.

"I'm glad I could help, I told her you two felt a lot more the same than she realized. I assume everything is good now? You were up there for a long time. Sorry I didn't come back for dinner last night, I just figured you might want the space."

"It was very kind of you, sorry you were stuck in the middle a bit there."

"I didn't mind."

They sat quietly again, Sansa turning over his words. He watched her from the corner of his eye for a while and finally decided he couldn't take one more brow furrow from her. "What is it?" he asked.

"What did you mean when you said we feel the same?"

"Well you both seem to carry a lot of guilt about things that have happened here."

"Why do you think that?" Sansa felt uncomfortable with where the conversation was heading.

"Well Arya said she does. And well, I don't know, you cried so hard over your cousin that day and you were the one in charge when he died. I just…. I'm sorry if I assumed."

She was quiet for a long moment, she weighed if she should unburden herself to him. "You're right, I am guilty, but its not just a feeling. It's my fault he's dead."

Jon turned to her, he looked perplexed and confused. "How is that possible?"

"I had a chance to save him and I chose not to," she answered quietly, choking back tears.

"That doesn't sound like you. I don't understand. You said he died from typhus. Arya said he got it from the camp Ramsay took him to," Jon said. He moved to comfort her but she shook him off.

"When we found out he was sick I had gone to Petyr to ask him to get him medicine. It was in short supply, so many others were sick, but I asked him to do me this favor, but he wanted something in return. And I decided against paying him what he requested."

Jon just looked at her, he wanted to ask what his price was but he suspected he knew. Arya had told him repeatedly about Petyr's unhealthy obsession with their mother and with Sansa. The thought made him furious.

"It's disgusting he'd even ask that of you. I think I understand now why Arya despises him so."

"She doesn't know any of this. I'd like to keep it that way for now."
"You can trust me."

"I know. The thing is, well I can't stop wondering, was my virtue really worth a child's life?"

"So you're saying you wish you'd given him what he asked?" He couldn't hide the disgust from his voice. Sansa registered it as well and pulled back from him.

"I didn't say that," she countered. "But if I had, I take it you would think a lot less of me." She moved to stand but he grabbed her shoulders and pulled her back down in place next to him.

"No, that's not what I meant. I'm sorry the question came out harsh, it wasn't meant at you. I swear it." Sansa regarded him with a measure of distrust. He pressed on, he wanted to change the expression on her face. "It disgusts me to think someone could turn a life and death situation, a plea for help, into such…. I'm just saying its not right he would put you in a situation like that."

Her expression softened a bit but she still seemed bothered by his words. "One of the things I admire about you is how practical you are. If you had done something like that I would not think less of you. I know if you made a choice like that you were faced with no other options and you did what you had to. It's clear you would do anything to protect the people you love. There is no shame in that."

"But I didn't, I didn't make that choice. That time I chose to be selfish." She was looking out the window towards the horizon.

He placed a hand on her cheek and turned her head to look at him. "From all that Arya tells me it would've made little difference. She says your cousin was rather weak and ill prior to the typhus, she thinks if it hadn't been the typhus it would've been something else soon enough."

"She talked to you about him?"

"She talks to me about quite a bit actually. She has accidentally called me Robb a couple of times even," Jon said with a laugh. Sansa reached up and took his hand and lowered it from her cheek but she kept holding it.

"You are easy to talk to, just like he was… is." She closed her eyes to push back the tears that were trying to form. She knew she shouldn't think of her brother in the past tense, it was probably bad luck.

"Is that how you think of me? Am I another brother to you?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him. His hand was holding hers more tightly, he looked somewhere between tense and hopeful waiting for her answer. She brought his hand up to her lips and kissed the back of his hand and then lowered it back into her lap. She had the lightest ghost of a smile on her lips. Jon felt like he might get sick waiting on her to answer.

"I didn't think much of you at first to be honest. I didn't want to get close to you, know you at all really."

"Why?" He felt caught off guard by this, he knew there had been a coldness between them initially but he didn't like hearing her admitting it now.

"You said earlier I am very practical." Jon nodded. "Well, it didn't seem practical to let myself feel something for you. I figured you'd be gone soon enough, I didn't imagine you'd be here this long; that you'd be so kind and gentle…." She seemed lost in his gaze for a moment. She drew his hand closer to her heart. "Anyways, I honestly didn't want to add another person to the list of people my heart breaks over every day. My parents, my brothers. I hate being here and not knowing who's alive
and who's dead. I didn't want you to become the thing that finally broke my heart for good."

"So you do think of me as one of your brothers then?" He said it a little more roughly and forceful than he had intended and saw it took her a bit by surprise.

"Is that how you want me to see you?" she asked looking disappointed. Had she read all the signs wrong? Did he just think of her the same way he thought of Arya? A sister?

He never got a chance to answer her because at that moment Arya rode into the yard and called out to them, "I think you should come in the house, I have news."

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They sat down in the front room together. Jon felt frustrated with the way his conversation with Sansa had ended in the hayloft and he had sense she was somewhat upset with him as well, she won't meet his eye and was looking expectantly at Arya.

"So there's an update. It appears Major Bolton is due back on the north side of the island again starting tomorrow and for the rest of the week. He's taking some of the harbor patrols with him, so it looks like this week is going to be our best bet of getting Jon off the island," Arya informed them. No one in the room seemed particularly happy about the news, but no one said anything.

"I was starting to think maybe I was going to have to ride out the war here," Jon said. His tone was neutral, they couldn't tell if he was happy or sad to finally be leaving them.

"We all have our duty to do," Sansa added. Her tone was neutral as well.

"I know it's for the best, but I will miss you," Arya stated. She was the only one that seemed ready to show her emotions. "You're like family now."

"I'll miss you as well Arya, but Sansa's right, I have a duty. So do you have the details?" Jon asked. He avoided looking at Sansa.

"Not yet, they are working it all out still. I'm to go back to town in two days and they are supposed to know more then. They said ideally they can have you on a boat by the end of the week."

"It seems so soon," Sansa said softly. She did not seem to be speaking to anyone specifically.

"Sansa, can you go to town once I get the details? Try to get some supplies? I think it'll be odd if I go in three days close together this week," Arya asked her.

"Of course."

"Great," Arya answered but her voice held no joy.

"Alright, well I'll get started on lunch then," Sansa rose and left the room. She just wanted to be away from Jon for a moment. After the exchange in the hayloft it was a lot to process, this was the exact thing she had feared from the start, that she would let him in and then he would be gone. The thought of him leaving now was like a blow to the chest, it felt like it was hard to breath. She realized she had started to believe as well he might be here with them for a long time. She had started to rely on him and she cursed herself silently for it now.

She stood in the kitchen now staring out the window into the orchard where Arya was now walking and swatting at the trees with a stick. This was how he found her when he came into the room.
"Sansa, about earlier – " he began.

"Let's just forget about that. You're leaving now anyways so it makes the whole thing irrelevant anyways," she said not looking at him.

"How we feel about each other is not irrelevant. Please don't push me away like this," he implored her.

"It doesn't matter now, we just need to focus on your rescue. I need to finish making lunch." She turned away from him to go into the pantry. He reached for her and grabbed her forearm and spun her to face him. She looked down to where his hand rested on her and looked almost offended he was touching her. He saw her expression, it stung and so he released her.

"Don't be like this. We both knew I would have to leave eventually. My place is not here, I'm supposed to be with my men, fighting," he told her.

"I know, I'm not a stupid child," she spat back at him. "I said as much in the barn."

"I didn't mean that you were…." He sighed heavily and ran his hand over his face. "I hate this war, I hate that I have a duty, I hate that I have to leave you and Arya, but I have no choice now."

"I told you, I'm not a stupid child thinking this is some fairy tale," she answered him.

"Would you stop saying that!" he cried in exasperation.

She fell quiet, she wasn't sure now what she was more upset about, the exchange in the hayloft or the fact that he was leaving. They stood staring at each other, waiting on the other to speak first.

"I'm sorry," he finally whispered.

"What are you sorry for Jon?" she asked, her voice was soft but her tone was hard.

"For earlier, for making you think I was judging you about the thing with Petyr. I can't imagine what you go through in order to survive here. And for…." He trailed off. How to tell her was sorry for not telling her how he felt, that now it might be too late.

"And?"

"And I'm sorry I'm leaving now," he added and stepped closer to her and cupped her cheek. "And that I haven't told you how I feel and I'm sorry that I am about to kiss you and that I've waited this long to do it."

Her eyes widened in surprise and she sucked in her breath as he leaned in and pulled her to him, his arms twining around her waist and he kissed her. It was gentle and sweet and everything she could've hoped for in a kiss. His lips were softer than she imagined they would be. He tasted of apples and Indian summer. She felt her hand wind into his curls. She never wanted the kiss to end.

"I'm sorry," he finally whispered.

They stood in silence, Sansa flushed, her lips felt swollen even though the kiss had been gentle. The tiniest smile tugged at the corner of Jon's mouth. And then they became very aware of the ticking clock on the wall behind his shoulder. Sansa felt it was surrounding her, only to realize it was the sound of Arya whacking the apple trees outside.

Jon followed her gaze. "I should go talk to her," he said, a hint of regret playing in his voice.
"I think that is for the best, we need those trees for next year," Sansa agreed.

"We'll talk more later," he said pressing a kiss to the back of her hand and then headed out the back door to talk to Arya.

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It had been Arya's turn to sleep downstairs that night. Sansa had wanted to ask her to switch but then she hadn't want to explain why. She knew Arya saw Jon as a brother, but she wasn't sure how she would feel if she knew they had feelings for each other. She didn't want to do anything to risk the fragile peace they had just reached and with Jon leaving so soon she doubted it would be worth finding out.

The news of Jon's departure had cast a gloom over them that matched the cloudy sky. Sansa wanted to be happy, he had finally kissed her, but instead she just found it made her sadder. He would be returning to the war, it would be another person she cared about that she would have to wait for and wonder about. She wondered if it would eventually become more than she could bear.

Arya went into town the following day and returned with the details of his departure. It was to occur Friday after curfew. She would only tell Jon the rest of the details, she told Sansa the less she knew the better. They thought it best she knew nothing, that way should something go wrong and they were caught, she would be able to maintain deniable knowledge. It infuriated Sansa to no end but she had finally agreed to be left in the dark.

Later that evening in a moment alone with Jon she told him she resented it but he implored her to be practical and try to not think of it as being excluded. She had huffed at him but he refused to change his stance. He had told her she was beautiful when she was cross and had kissed her again which has softened her anger towards him despite her best efforts to the contrary.

She awoke the next morning and got ready to go to town. It was the day to get whatever supplies she could to help him in his journey home. Since she was alone she allowed herself a few tears as she pedaled along the lane.

She stopped in to see Jeyne and caught up on the gossip from the rest of the dance, she did her best to fake a sense of interest in it all but her heart was not in it. Jeyne asked after Arya but also made mention she had seen her in town a couple of times this week so she had already assumed she was doing better. Sansa demurred saying it must've been something she ate that night.

She stopped by the butcher's as well and he slipped her a package with extra sausage and gave her a knowing nod. Sansa just smiled back, she realized she should've known they would be aware of the situation given what had happened to Mycah but it still given her a shock to be in the vicinity of someone that knew their secret.

She gathered all of her items and placed them in her basket and headed back to the farm. She was thinking about what to make for dinner since tonight would be the last night they would all have together, tomorrow would be too busy making the last arrangements for his departure. She wanted it to be special but she knew she would be limited by what was actually available to her.

She turned off the lane into their drive and was thinking about if she could make apple pie without sugar. As the trees parted for the yard she nearly fell from her bicycle, her blood turned to ice in her veins and she forgot how to breathe. She blinked to make sure she was not just imagining it. She felt bile rising in her throat, there in the yard sat a hulking black mass, a harbinger of death and disaster, the black Rolls Royce that had once belonged to the Umbers, the one everyone in town now knew as Major Bolton's car.
Gonna leave it here for today - yes I'm a jerk and yeah shits about to go down in the next couple chapters.......
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

This chapter was admittedly hard to write, so I’m sure it’s going to be just as painful to read. So trigger warning for this chapter.....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It felt like time had stopped, Sansa managed to fight off the urge to vomit but she couldn’t move, she just stared at the car. It seemed like it was sucking all the light from the world. Why was he here? She tried to think back, to remember if anything had seemed off in town. She didn’t think so, but then she had only gone to the grocery and the butcher and had tried to be quick about it. If anything had been amiss she likely would’ve missed it.

She wasn’t sure how long she had stood there before noises from the barn pulled her back to reality. She recognized Arya’s shouts and threw her bicycle down and broke into a mad sprint to the barn.

She breached the doorway and began to scream Arya’s name, but the sight inside caused the name to die in her throat. She stopped short as Ramsay and Arya both turned their faces to look at her. They were both filthy, Ramsay had scratches on his face and looked to be a bleeding from a long slash on his arm, the area around the tear in his uniform dark with blood. Arya had a split lip and the beginnings of a black eye. But their wounds were hardly the most terrifying thing about this tableau. The most horrifying thing was that Ramsay had Arya pinned to the ground, her arms lashed together with his belt and pinned above her head. Her shirt was ripped opened down the middle exposing her bra and stomach and Ramsay’s shirt was untucked, his pants undone.

“Sansa,” Arya cried, her voice choked by tears, snot and blood.

“Hello Sansa,” Ramsay hissed. He was smiling at her, she had never seen him look so pleased. “Did you just get back from town?”

“What’s going on here?” she forced herself to speak. She kept her eyes locked with Arya, pleading with her to stay calm, to soothe her, to trust her.

“I’m teaching your sister a lesson. She’s quite the rude little beast. In addition to failing to teach her how to be a proper lady, you and your aunt have also failed miserably at teaching her respect for authority,” he said, “So I have decided I will help you.”

“You’re trespassing! You don’t have any right to be here! Get off of me!” Arya yelled defiantly.

“Do you see what I mean? No manners,” Ramsay said, his voice full of scorn. “Do you even want to know what she’s done?”

“First can you please tell me why are you here?” Sansa asked gently. She had to know if he knew about Jon. She wanted to know if she should expect a truck of soldiers at any moment, if this was the beginning of their end.

“Purely a social call,” he said dismissively. “I’ll ask you again, do you want to know what she’s
Sansa nodded slightly but said nothing and kept her eyes on Arya, willing her to be quiet and still, to not anger him further. “I came here to check on her since you had to leave the party so suddenly, what with being sick and all. I knocked on the door but no one answered. I was about to leave when I heard something in the barn. I thought I should check it out. I am rather concerned about everyone’s safety after all. I worried you might have unwanteds hiding in your barn, unknown to you of course.” He was laughing at her with his eyes. They both knew he was lying about why he’d come to the barn. He was far from concerned for their safety. “When I came in here she ambushed me, slashed at me with a knife, cut me even. Do you see my arm?” he demanded she look at him. She looked at his arm and nodded.

“I’m sure she was just scared, Lysa is away and she was all alone. I think you should let her up now. She understands she made a mistake, don’t you Arya?” Sansa said looking at her sister in desperation.

Arya clamped her mouth shut and nodded but her expression remained defiant. Ramsay looked between them and let out a mocking laughed and shook his head.

“Look at her. She’s understands nothing. I won’t be leaving here until someone learns a lesson,” Ramsay said turning his attention back to Arya. “I’m going to enjoy teaching you,” he added in a hoarse whisper, “and you will learn or the consequences will be dire.” He placed his hand on Arya’s breast. Arya squirmed and spat at him. He removed his hand from her breast and back handed her. Sansa knew in that moment he would kill her without a second thought and Arya was unlikely to act in a way to assure her survival.

“Stop! Stop!” Sansa screamed dropping to her knees. “You’re right! You’re right!”

Ramsay and Arya both went still and Ramsay rocked back towards his heels and stared at her. Tears were streaming down Sansa’s face but she had made up her mind, she thought of Robin. She would not allow this to happen to Arya, not if she could save her. She knew what he really wanted, she knew he would accept her offer if made.

“What do you mean? Explain,” he commanded.

“You’re right, someone has to learn a lesson and it should be me. She’s a child, you were right when you said Lysa and I have failed her, that we haven’t taught her right. This is my failing, not hers, so it’s my price to pay,” Sansa said. Her voice trembled a bit but she did everything in her power to appear brave.

“Sansa no!” Arya screamed.

Ramsay smacked her again and order her to be silent. “I am nothing if not a man of mercy. I accept your assessment Ms. Stark.”

He pushed up off Arya and marched to Sansa, he grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her to her feet keeping his hand firmly clasped around her and began to pull her towards the house. Arya got to her feet and Sansa could tell she planned to intervene.

“Arya no! Just stop,” Sansa said firmly.

“Yes Arya, for once please listen to your sister. We are going to go in the house. I recommend no matter what you hear you do not enter, don’t make your sister’s sacrifice worth nothing,” he hissed at Arya.
“Sansa,” Arya was sobbing now.

“It’s gonna be ok Arya, listen to him, please,” Sansa told her, her voice was choked with fear.

“Enough of this,” Ramsay snarled and quickened his pace, dragging Sansa towards the house. Arya chased after them from a distance, her eyes locked with Sansa’s. They were both crying but Sansa kept shaking her head at Arya. Their eyes stayed locked until Ramsay pulled Sansa into the house and the door slammed shut behind them cutting off Arya’s view.

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Arya had gone up on to the porch initially, but when she heard Sansa’s first scream she had run into the back field all the way to the cottage. She had prayed she would find Jon. She wanted him to go with her to the barn and get Brynden’s gun and storm the house and shot Ramsay in the head. She knew she’d be unable to do it herself, she was unsure how to use the pistol and she was scared if she tried to use it he would either wrestle the gun from her before she could fire or worse she might hit Sansa. But Jon could help, Jon had to be a better shot than her.

Her heart shattered when she entered the cottage. All trace of him, save the ash in the fireplace, was gone. She knew it was a long shot he would be here, she had turned on the back porch light when she had seen Ramsay pull up, but now that Sansa was in danger she had hoped he had forgotten the plan. Hopelessly Arya sat in the door frame of the cottage and cried into her hands.

She wasn’t sure how long she had sat there but after a while she heard the sound of the car start and the faint sound of the wheels on the gravel. She waited for a few minutes after the sound had disappeared and then made her way back to the house, going around the front to confirm he was in fact gone. She entered the house and found it quiet except for the sound of running water in the pipes.

She walked quietly up the stairs to the second floor, she didn’t call out as she didn’t want to startle Sansa further. She proceeded down the hall, the doors to both rooms were wide open. Robin’s room look undisturbed but the scene in Lysa’s nearly caused Arya to be sick. The room was empty but Sansa’s torn dress was on the floor, the bed covers were pulled back and there was blood staining the white sheets. The smell of the room, a mixture of blood, shame, tears and sweat, made her gag.

The sound of running water turned Arya’s attention back towards the bathroom and she moved closer. The door was partially opened, from her position in the hall she could see Sansa in the mirror. She was wearing her slip, one of the straps was ripped and hung limply in front of her. Her hair was ratted, her lip split, a dark bruise forming on her cheek. The rest of her face was swollen and puffy, her eyes red from crying. Arya cried silent tears in the hall watching her. Sansa turned and shut off the bath tub tap and then reached down and took off her slip. Arya sucked in a breath when she saw the bite mark on Sansa’s left breast. The sound caused Sansa to turn and notice her for the first time.

The look on her face was one Arya would never be able to forget for the rest of her life; Arya immediately cast her eyes down but froze when she noticed the blood that covered Sansa’s pale thighs.

“Sansa,” Arya sobbed moving towards the door.

“Not now Arya, I can’t” she whispered in response and closed the door with an echoing click.

“Sansa, I’m so sorry,” Arya sobbed in a voice barely above a whisper. She leaned her back against the wall and slid down it. She rested her head on her knees and began to sob hopelessly.
The water stung and burned as she lowered herself in the tub. It made her eyes water. She could hear Arya sobbing in the hall, it broke her already fractured heart into tiny shards, but she was too spent and hollow to comfort her sister now. She submerged herself under the water for a moment to block out the sound. She wondered as she lay there if it might be easier to never come up. She stayed there until her lungs burned and then she burst through the surface of the water gasping for air. She picked up the wash cloth and soap and began to scour her skin.

She wasn’t sure how she’d convinced herself he might not be too rough with her, but clearly she had overestimated his humanity. She had told herself in the barn right before she made the offer that as long as she didn’t resist he’d have no reason to hurt her but she had been wrong. She had told him this, that she won’t resist, as they had gone up the stairs; he had just given a cold laugh and said he’d be disappointed if that was true. When they had entered Lysa’s room he had shoved her, she had tripped and struck her face on the dresser, bruising her cheek and splitting her lip. She had known right then she had made a grave error in her calculations but she kept telling herself it was better her than Arya, that she would survive this for her sister’s sake. He had pulled her up then and had torn her dress off, ripped her slip, and scoffed at her when she tried to cover herself. As he pushed her unto the bed she had admitted to him she was a virgin, she had hoped it might soften him; it had backfired, it actually seemed only to excite him more.

He hadn’t even tried to be gentle when he took her, in fact it had hurt so bad she had screamed, the sound so primal that she terrified herself, but again that only seemed to drive him on. He’d reveled in her blood, pulling out to gather some on his hand, forcing her look at it, taunting her. After that she refused to give him the satisfaction of her screams. She bite her bleeding lip and focused on the tang of iron on her tongue. He took her in several different ways, when he had her on her back he had bitten her breast breaking the skin, but when she had refused to scream, to cry out in pain, he had smacked her across the face in anger. He continued with his assault until he was finally spent, she had no idea how long it had lasted.

He had dressed afterwards as she lay curled on the bed, wrapped in Lysa’s sheets and comforter, anything to shield herself from his gaze. He had made a joke that he hoped she had learned her lesson well and hoped she would do better to teach Arya in the future. With that he had kissed her on the cheek and left. She waited until she heard the sound of his car start and then let out scream after scream, pounding her hands into the bed. She finally stopped when she could no longer breathe and her throat felt raw. She had then pulled on her slip and gone into the bathroom to clean herself off.

She lay in the tub until she no longer heard Arya’s sobs and the water had gone tepid. She gingerly stepped from the tub and dried off. She wrapped herself in Lysa’s dressing gown and opened the door. Arya lay in the hallway asleep. Her face puffed and red from Ramsay’s blows and from crying. She slid past her and reached into Lysa’s room and pulled the door shut without looking. She then proceeded to Robin’s room and pulled a blanket from the bed and placed it over Arya. She watched her sleep for a few moments, she looked so young lying there, it gave Sansa a small bit of solace; she knew in that moment that she had done the right thing.

She turned then and walked down the hall. She made her way up to the attic. She shut the door and leaned against it. She wanted to cry and yet found she couldn’t. She was hollowed out, utterly spent. She walked to the bed closest to the window and laid down. She stared out the window watching the trees sway in the wind, stripped bare they looked ugly and exposed. How appropriate that the weather outside would match her soul. She wanted to sleep but every time she closed her eyes she would picture his hideous smiling face moving over her. She rolled on her back and stared at the ceiling. She needed to fill her mind with something else. She thought of her parents and her brothers. She tried to imagined them all together somewhere, happy and safe. In her daydream she imagined
them all together in London on a warm summer night in the garden, everyone at the dinner table, her and Arya telling them all about their first months here, before the Germans, before all the misery. They would all laugh and joke about Sansa milking cows, of Arya matching wits with a fox. They wouldn’t discuss the war, it would be like none of the last year had happened.

She stayed lost in her day dreams until the sky darkened. She realized then that the back light was on, the one that alerted Jon he was to hide. She wondered where he was now but she was too exhausted to get up and go turn it off. She realized they would be in violation of the blackout and found she didn’t care. In fact, she began praying that some bombing crew would see the light and drop a bomb on them. The thought of being swallowed by dark oblivion was the first thing to make her smile since she had come home from town.

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Arya woke in the darkened hallway confused and sore. She sat up and realized she was under a blanket. She looked to see the bathroom door was open and the room empty, Sansa’s torn slip shoved into the corner. She noticed the door to Lysa’s room was closed but she couldn’t imagine Sansa would be in there. She got up and walked to the end of the hall. She went downstairs and found it dark as well, except for the light coming in from the back porch. She went through the kitchen and shut off the light. She wondered if Jon would come back tonight or not.

She went back up the stairs and towards the attic. She saw the door was closed and heard no sounds from the other side. She wanted to go to Sansa but she had no idea what to say. She told herself that she was probably sleeping anyways and really that was the best thing for her.

Arya padded back downstairs and into Robin’s room. She wrapped herself back up in his blanket and laid on his bed, hugging his stuffed bird to her chest, and waited for sleep to consume her once again.

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Jon had been out in the cottage packing his things in small knap sack. He was thinking about how he would tell Sansa goodbye, that he hoped one day they could explore a future, that he would wait for her and find her after the war. He thought of how her lips tasted like apples and honey and the summer sky; how when he kissed her he felt like he belonged, like he was finally home. It was the feeling he had searched for all his life. It tore at his heart that tomorrow might be the last time he would ever feel that.

He had finished packing and planned to head back up to the main house. He had started into the field when a flash caught his eye. He looked harder and realized the back light had come on. He stopped in his tracks, fear gripping his heart. Why now? He almost couldn’t believe it. It had to be a mistake. But he knew it wasn’t when he saw Arya bolt from the back door and run around the edge of the yard so the row of hedges would hide her as she made her way to the barn. Jon wanted to run to her, but he knew that would only make it worse for them. He turned instead and sprinted to the cottage. He gathered his things and sprinted around the back and then made his way to the woods, keeping low so he was hidden in the tall grass.

Once in the woods he thought he heard shouts on the wind, but he was too far away to make out anything for sure. Everything in him told him to go back and check on Arya, but then she was a young girl, surely no one would harm her unless they had a reason and he couldn’t allow himself to be that reason. He forced himself further into the woods until he came to a large fallen tree. He wedged himself into it for cover and waited. He could only pray that it was either a false alarm or that they would find nothing. He cursed himself for bring this danger upon the Starks.
He sat for what felt like hours listening to the woods, for the sounds of boots or shouts, any indication that they had figured out he was here, but he heard nothing other than the wind in the branches and an occasional bird cry. He emerged from his hiding place, he decided he would cover the space with additional branches to try to keep himself warm. He figured it would be safest if he waited until morning to return to the house, if at all. If the Germans had found something they might be watching and waiting, so he climbed back into the cover of the fallen tree to wait for morning.

Chapter End Notes

So a quick note on things in this chapter:

1. Rape is sadly all too common during war. So even though it’s a commonly used trope in these stories it honestly fits in this world.

2. Jon was not being a coward by not going up to the house. He stuck to the plan that would keep everyone safest. He had no way to know what was going to happen or that it was Ramsay alone. He had to operate under worse case scenario which would be a squad of soldiers searching for and finding him. If that had been the case, there would be no chance he could fight them basically unarmed and win, going to the house and being caught would’ve guaranteed all their deaths 100%. So really this was his way to try to protect them.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

So settle in, this is a rather long chapter, but there just didn’t seem to be a good place to break it up so I just went with it.

Arya awoke early to another gray morning. She slid off Robin’s bed and went in the bathroom. She saw herself in the mirror, her split lip looked better but her black eye had darkened and set. She almost wished she had more scars to bear, she felt she deserved them for being so stupid and short sighted, for letting her sister go off with Ramsay. She looked at herself one more time with disgust before heading to the attic.

She stopped at the door again and listened. She heard no sound, so she slowly pushed the door opened and peered inside. She saw Sansa’s laying on the bed closest to the eastern window, her back to Arya. She wasn’t moving much, and her breathing seemed to be rhythmic, so Arya decided to let her sleep and slowly closed the door and headed downstairs. Unsure what she should do she decided to follow her daily routine and went out to the barn.

She milked the cows and fed the hens. She froze when she heard a noise from the hayloft. She moved deliberately in the direction of where the gun was hidden. She would not be surprised this time. But before she could make it to the stall she heard her name being called in a loud whisper and looked up towards the loft. She saw Jon’s curly head peeking out over the ledge.

“Jon!” she cried.

“Is it safe?” he asked her.

“For now, come down here,” she answered.

He had awoken before dawn and made his way back to the edge of the woods. He could tell the light was off and took it as a good sign. Everything had seemed quiet as he neared the house but he hadn’t wanted to wake the girls. He also entertained the notion it might not be safe and so he had decided hiding in the hayloft until one of them came out was his best course of action. Upon finding the barn empty he had climbed into the loft to wait but apparently he had drifted back sleep until he had heard Arya below.

Now he climbed down the ladder and Arya ran to him and hugged him, burying her face in his chest. He hugged her back and tried to ask her what happened. She won’t answer and just held unto him. He indulged her a couple more moments and then finally pulled her back from him to ask her again what had happened. When he noticed her bruised faced he was taken a back.

“Arya! What happened? Who did this?” he demanded.

“I’ll be fine, it’s looks much worse than it feels,” she told him.

“Arya tell me what’s going on,” he ordered.

“Major Bolton came yesterday. I tried to fight him, I managed to cut him, and he got angry. Jon, something bad happened,” Arya told him, her voice becoming heavy with grief.
Jon realized for the first time Sansa was not here. “Where’s Sansa?” he asked. At that Arya started to cry and she covered her face.

“Arya?” he whispered, he could barely speak, fear was strangling his throat.

“She’s in the attic,” she finally managed to answer.

“Is she ok?”

“I don’t know.”

“How do you not know?! Arya what is going on?” He was becoming frustrated and angry, but most of all he was frightened.

“I haven’t talked to her, I haven’t really seen her since…….” Arya couldn’t finish her sentence, she was sobbing much too hard to speak.

Jon could no longer take it and turned and ran towards the house. He heard Arya chasing behind him begging him to wait. But he couldn’t, he had to know what had happened to Sansa. He sprinted up the stairs two at a time and came to the attic door. He stopped himself from opening the door, based on Arya’s reaction he didn’t want to frighten Sansa and so he called out to her. There was no response, but he heard movement inside the room and waited. After another moment he heard a click, he initially thought she was opening the door and then his brain registered that it had been the lock. She was barring him from entry.

“Sansa?” he called again.

“Please go away Jon. You’re leaving tonight, and I would prefer we don’t see each other before you go. I want you to remember me as the girl you kissed in the kitchen, nothing more, not like this,” she said.

“Sansa please, I don’t understand what has happened. Arya can’t tell me, please just let me in. Talk to me, please,” he pleaded.

“Goodbye Jon. I wish you good fortune in the war,” she responded. With that he could hear her walking away from the door. He wanted to beat it down and rush to her but clearly something terrible had occurred and he didn’t want to scare her further.

“Did he hit you? Sansa, I saw Arya’s face. I can handle some bruises, nothing could make you anything less than beautiful, please don’t hide from me,” he called out.

He heard a noise behind him and whirled around to see Arya on the stairs. “I don’t think she can talk about it yet,” she whispered.

Jon pointed down the stairs and he and Arya descended to the second floor. “Someone needs to tell me what happened here,” he told her.

“I can’t. It’s not my story to tell. I don’t know if she wants anyone to know.”

“Then how about you tell me what happened to you.”

Arya regarded him carefully and sighed. “I saw Ramsay pull up. I flipped on the light and ran to the barn, I wanted to get the gun in there, but I wasn’t quick enough. He found me there in the barn. I was so angry to see him here, especially after the harvest dance, so I lunged at him. I cut his arm and he got really angry. He hit me and we fought but he was faster and stronger.” She had started to cry.
again, her words began to mix with her sobs, “He had me pinned…….. he tore my shirt…….. he threatened…….. he was holding me down……..then Sansa came…….. She said she’d take my punishment….... she saved me from him…….. I don’t know what to do, how to help her now.”

“What did he do Arya?” Jon’s voice was ice cold. He knew in his heart what had happened, but he wanted her to say it, to confirm his worse fears.

“I can’t,” she sobbed. “I can’t tell you.”

“You have to. I can’t help if I don’t know.”

Arya looked at him and shook her head but then pushed passed him down the hall. She stopped outside the room with the closed door. She stepped forward and opened the door and pushed it inward. She turned then and went into the bathroom and closed the door. He could hear her crying behind the door.

He moved down the hall. He felt waves of nausea passing over him. He stepped into the room and stopped dead, all the oxygen left his lungs. He picked up the torn dress and flung it on the bed and angrily stripped off the sheets.

He carried everything downstairs and outside. He lit a fire in the trash barrel and tossed everything in it. He watched the flames burn away the fabric, but it did nothing to release the pressure in his chest.

Arya came down sometime later and stood beside him. They stood outside together silently watching until the fire burned itself out.

As the last of the embers winked out Arya finally spoke, “Are you still going to leave tonight?”

Jon looked at her, he had nearly forgotten. He wanted to say no but then what if there was no other chance for him the leave? And wasn’t it better if he did, it would put them out of danger won’t it? But then they hadn’t been arrested, so had what happened yesterday have anything to do with his presence? He felt unsure and sick.

He realized Arya was watching him, waiting on a response. “I imagine so, it’s probably for the best Arya, you and Sansa will be safer once I am gone.”

“If you say so,” Arya responded unable to hide her skepticism. “We should make breakfast and take Sansa something,” she added. Jon nodded and they turned to head back into the house.

They busied themselves in the kitchen, cooking eggs and making toast. Jon was too furious to speak and Arya moved around him like a mouse. He realized he was scaring her and she didn’t deserve that, she had suffered as well. “You know this is not your fault, that I’m not angry with you,” Jon said trying to keep his tone gentle.

Arya said nothing and continued to stir the eggs. “Arya?” he said.

“You’re wrong,” she said bluntly. “I did this. This is entirely my fault. I should’ve shot him. The knife cut just made him angry. I will never make that mistake again.”

“This is Ramsay’s fault, these are his actions, nothing you did can justify what he did to you or Sansa. This is not on you,” Jon repeated.

Arya wiped away a couple of tears and just shook her head at him. She took the eggs off the stove and plated them. “I’m going to take a plate up to Sansa and eat with her, so don’t wait on me,” she told him. She walked out of the kitchen before he could answer.
She made her way up the stairs and knocked on the attic door and called out to her sister. “It’s just me Sansa, I have food.”

She heard the lock click and the door opened. Arya inhaled sharply. Sansa’s normally perfect face was cut and bruised, her hair hung limply and she was still wrapped in Lysa’s dressing gown. Sansa held out here hand and waited for Arya to hand her the plate. Arya lowered her gaze, fought back her tears and gave her the plate.

“Arya, look at me. Are you ok?” Sansa asked.

Arya barely glanced up, she swallowed and gave her a slight nod, “I can’t believe you even still care about me. I’m so sorry Sansa.” Arya again swallowed back her tears, she felt like a selfish ass, the last thing her sister needed was to be the one comforting her.

Sansa moved back from the door and told Arya to come in the room. Arya sat on her bed and Sansa sat in the reading chair. They each picked at their food, neither of them had much of an appetite.

“Jon’s still leaving tonight,” Arya said softly.

“That’s always been the plan Arya, you know that.”

Arya gave her with a pained look.

“What have you told him?” Sansa asked.

“I told him what happened to me, but he saw Lysa’s room, he burned the sheets. We haven’t discussed it further but I know he’s worried about you.”

“I don’t want to see him. I don’t want this to be how he remembers me and I don’t want to remember him by how I know he’ll look at me,” Sansa said quickly. “I don’t want to be the reason that he stays, that he doesn’t do his duty.”

“Damn his duty,” Arya cried out.

“Arya,” Sansa said firmly.

“Ok, if that’s what you want then I’ll tell him he needs to stay away. I owe you that much.”

“You don’t owe me anything.”

“Why would you say that? I owe you everything, you saved me. I’m so sorry Sansa, I’m so so sorry,” Arya whispered, her tears could no longer be held back.

“Arya please, don’t cry. You don’t owe me an apology. This was my decision and mine alone. I’m telling you, you don’t owe me anything.”

“Stop it! How can you say I don’t owe you anything? If I hadn’t gone after him none of this would’ve happened.”

Sansa shook her head, “This isn’t your fault. This is war and I think this was always an enviable possibility. He’s always been after me.”

"Petyr made sure of that,” Sansa added bitterly.

Arya felt angry and frustrated and it got the better of her, like so many times in the past she spoke without thinking. “Why did you do it? Why did you let him do that to you?”
That made Sansa’s flinch and she met Arya’s eye. “Let him?”

The look on Sansa’s face told her she had said entirely the wrong thing. “I didn’t mean…… I’m sorry, that’s not what I meant. I just – how did this happen? He was supposed to be away.”

Sansa was staring out the window now, it seems like she was deciding something; Arya watched her and waited, afraid to say anything further.

“I did it because I failed Robin, and I refuse to fail you. You are my sister and it’s my job to protect you.”

“Robin died because of typhus, because of Ram- him.”

“That’s true but I played a part as well. I failed to save him because I refused to make a bargain and it’s been slowly destroying me. This was my chance to rectify it. So I did it for him and did it for you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I should have told you a long time ago.”

Sansa proceeded to tell Arya about what had happened with Petyr, about his condition to help Robin and her refusal to accept his terms. It was cathartic to finally tell her, to no longer bear the guilt alone. Arya was furious of course. She swore she would kill Petyr the next time she laid eyes on him.

Arya could see that Sansa was spent from telling her the story about Robin. She told her she would let her get some rest. Sansa nodded but she seemed far away, lost in her thoughts. Arya gathered up their plates and left the room nearly unnoticed and went back downstairs.

She found Jon still in the kitchen, he was busying himself with cleaning the breakfast dishes. He turned to her as she came in the room.

“How is she?” he asked.

“She opened the door for me at least, but she still doesn’t want to see you.”

Jon looked hurt, though she wasn’t completely sure why, she had her guesses. She also wondered if he thought, like so many men that he could fix everything if only given the chance, but he hadn’t seen her, to Arya the last thing her sister needed was a man near her.

“Can you finish up here? I need some time to think,” Arya said.

“Yeah I’ll be fine. You let me know if you need me. Please tell Sansa the same,” he answered.

“Don’t go up there Jon, I know you think you can help but you need to leave her be for now,” Arya warned before she banged out the back door.

Jon stared after her, it took everything in him to not smash every dish in the sink.

Sansa laid down on the bed and stared out the window. She could see Arya moving about the orchard. She was glad she had finally told Arya about Robin, it made her feel closer to her now that the secret was gone. She just hoped Arya would not blame herself for what happened yesterday, she’d hate for this to destroy them more than it already had.
Despite the hurt and disgust she felt she knew she had done the right thing. She told herself she was strong enough to bear it, that she had done it for Arya, for the survival of their family. In her mind Ramsay would not have just raped Arya, he likely would’ve killed her, Sansa felt sure of it. Her mind began to turn to the rest of her family. She told herself to be brave and strong like Robb. She thought back to when he had left for basic training, how she would have to be the one to hold it together for everyone if things started to go sideways. Would he have ever imagined that things would go this sideways or that the family might one day only be her and Arya? She thought of her younger brothers, their hopefully faces. She wondered what kind of world they stood to inherit, if they were still alive, because to her the world currently felt evil and void of hope. She wished she could talk to her mother, or maybe more so she wished she could hand the responsibility of being strong to her mother. She wondered if she would ever see her again. She closed her eyes and imagined Catelyn there, stroking her hair and her back, drying her tears. It was a thought that was devastating and comforting all at the same time.

Arya brought her lunch in the early afternoon. Sansa thanked her but told her she would like to be alone again. She may have made her choice but for today she was going to be selfish and allow herself to grieve. She told Arya she just needed the rest of the day, tomorrow they would start to figure where they went from here. She had given her a weak smile and Arya had nodded and returned it. She took Sansa’s hand and told her she loved her and she could take all the time she needed and left her alone once more.

Sansa felt exhausted. She had barely been able to sleep the night before, but every time she attempted to sleep she found herself back in Lysa’s room, Ramsay moving over her. The images made her sick. At some point she did drift off to sleep only to be awaken when she heard knocking at the door and Arya calling her name. She realized that she had been crying, she wondered if Arya had heard her.

“I’m ok, it was only a dream,” she called out.

“Do you want me to come in?”

“No, I just want to be alone. I’m sorry Arya.”

“It’s ok, but if you need me please let me know,” Arya called her voice full of hesitation. It would be a couple more minutes before she actually heard Arya descend the stairs.

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Jon had everything packed and ready to go before the sun set. He had asked Arya repeatedly to let him see Sansa but Arya continued to refuse. He told himself he must respect her wishes, especially now, but the thought of leaving without saying goodbye to her seemed unbearable.

They were in the kitchen making dinner. They weren’t speaking. Jon was incensed with the situation, he knew it wasn’t Arya’s fault but he feared he might snap at her if he opened his mouth. A knock on the front door shattered the silence. Both of them snapped to attention. Neither of them moved, their eyes locking on each other in panic. The knock came again followed by someone calling Arya’s name. The sound relaxed her and she gave Jon a quick nod. “It’s ok,” she said before leaving the room. “But stay here.”

Arya made her way to the front door and let in the doctor. “Thank god,” he said as he came inside.

“What are you doing here?” She asked.

“Is the commander still here?”
“What’s going on? What’s happened?” Arya asked alarmed.

“The evacuation is off. Has the commander’s presence been compromised?”

“No, I don’t know. He’s still here, but can’t you tell me what is going on?”

“You know that’s not our way, especially now.”

“I think I’ve proven my loyalty. Please just tell me what is going on.”

The doctor hesitated, weighing his choices. “We suspect there may be a mole among us, how much they know and what they’ve discussed is still unclear. The information that the major would be gone with the patrols seems to have been a ruse. We had set so many plans and now they have gone to shit. Mr Donniger was arrested, he was trying to help the Eleshams off the island Wednesday night, they were all caught on the beach. I don’t know what the Eleshams might’ve told the Germans, not that I think they know much. Thankfully Donniger was their only contact. And he’s dead now, took the capsule in the truck before the interrogation. When were you last there?”

“It’s been weeks. He thought the house was being watched, he told me not to come anymore. He left messages with Michael when he needed something. I didn’t know there was a plan to get the Eleshams off the island.”

“Originally we weren’t going to risk it, but then their deportation order was moved up,” he explained. “This arrest is the exact reason we don’t share information unless absolutely necessary.”

“So what does all this mean?” Arya asked.

“We’re not sure yet. When the major was here yesterday, did he look around? Did he say anything to make you think he knows what’s going on here?”

“And how did you know he was here?” she asked nervously. She suddenly wondered if the house was being watched.

“Does your sister need a doctor?” he answered softly.

“Why would you ask that?” Arya demanded defensively.

“Because I heard the major in the café this morning,” the doctor answered. He looked uncomfortable and was looking around the room, unable to meet her eye.

“And what was he saying exactly?” Arya’s voice was harsh.

“That he had been out here yesterday. That he….. well, it was quite crass…. Basically he mentioned that he showed Sansa a thing or two,” he answered. “It’s terrible, I know, but we took that as good news, if he had left you all alive…….”

“Good news?” Arya said bitterly. “He’s telling people what he did to her?” Arya was horrified. Were people ok with this? Did the doctor really just say it was good news? Arya felt sick.

“He was telling his version yes, but regardless, is Sansa alright?”

“Is she alright?!” Arya barked, “What kind of question is that? She’s alive if that’s what you meant but she is far from alright!”

Jon appeared in the doorway then, he could no longer hide in the kitchen while they discussed Sansa. “So he’s bragging about it then?” he asked.
The doctor looked up at him. “Yes, in terms I’d rather not repeat, it’s rather distasteful.”

“Can you get me into town?” Jon asked.

“What?! Why!?” Arya cried.

“I’m going to end this. I want you to get me into town, I’m going to kill him.”

“That’s impossible,” the doctor said.

“It’s not. There’s a gun here. I’m telling you, get me into town and I can end this.”

“You have one gun. Do you plan to kill just him or the entire occupying force with it?” The doctor looked at him sympathetically. He understood the desire but the boy wasn’t thinking clearly.

“I’ll start with him,” Jon answered.

“And get the rest of us and yourself killed. Even if you managed to kill him, and that seems unlikely, you couldn’t take out the whole of their forces. The reprisals would be severe and harsh. Everyone would bear the cost,” the doctor told him.

“He needs to die for what he’s done, not just to Sansa, but to everyone.”

“I’m not disagreeing, but now is not the time. No one else needs to be harmed right now, and you don’t need to get yourself killed.”

“If you won’t help me I’ll find a way to do it on my own.”

“I know you’re angry but you’re not listening. You’re going to get a lot more people killed if you try to do this.”

“I -,” Jon began.

“And what shall I tell Sansa when you’re dead? How do you think she’s going to feel knowing you died because of her? Do you want to hurt her like that? Do want her to stand in the square again and watch more people die because of what you tried to do for her? You might as well go upstairs and kill her yourself!” Arya screamed at him.

Jon stared at Arya, his jaw clenched and he swallowed hard. He blinked away tears, clasped his hands together and then looked away. She was right, he was righteous angry but he was being rash. He could feel their eyes on him, waiting on him to respond. “I don’t want that, no,” he answered with a shake of his head.

“I think we all just need to take a breath,” the doctor said quietly.

“I’m going to go ask Sansa if she wants to see you,” Arya said to the doctor, refusing to look at Jon, “wait here.” She headed up the stairs to the attic, she needed out of that room for a moment. She knocked on the door and called out. “Sansa, the doctor’s here. Do you want to see him? Is there anything he can do for you?”

There was a long pause and then she heard her moving towards the door. The door opened. Sansa stood before her fully dressed, no longer in Lysa’s dressing gown, but her hair was still a mess. “He knows!?” she hissed. “How? Who else knows? Is that why you are all shouting?”

“I’m sorry, yes he knows.” Arya thought it best for now not to tell her how just yet. “Do you want him to examine you? Has…… Are you……… is there still bleeding?” Arya felt uncomfortable
asking but after what she had seen in the bathroom yesterday she felt she should ask.

“I don’t need anyone touching me!” she said sharply and slammed her hand against the door frame. Arya waited for her to say something further, after another long pause she finally added, “Anyways, the bleeding stopped, I’m just – it’s tender.”

“Ok, I’ll tell him you are ok. Jon and I made dinner, we’ll bring you some up in a bit.”

“I told you, I don’t want to see Jon.”

“That might be an issue. You should know he’s not leaving today.”

“Is he staying because of me?” she asked. “Because of what happened?”

“They’ve cancelled the mission because the patrols in the harbor are back, apparently they never left.”

“Is he to continue staying here? Or will they move him?” Sansa inquired. “Wait, what do you mean they never left?”

“Don’t worry about that now. We haven’t really discussed Jon’s status yet. Do you want him to stay?”

“Do you think it’s safe if he does?”

“I don’t think Ramsay actually came here because he thinks we are hiding an airman….. If he had, I think we’d all be dead by now. But you tell me what you want. If you’d feel safer with him gone I’ll make it happen, you’re my sister. You should feel safe, well safe as possible, in your own home, I owe you that at least.”

Sansa opened her mouth but Jon’s voice called out before she could answer. “Arya, is everything ok?”

“Fine, go away Jon,” she answered, her response harsher than she meant it to be.

“I’m sorry, I am, but the doctor says he has to go soon and there are still matters to settle.”

“I’m going to go handle this and then come back with food.” She turned and went downstairs.

Arya informed the doctor that Sansa did not wish to be examined but maybe he could leave something to help her sleep. The doctor was happy to accommodate, he also gave Arya a packet of tea leaves and instructed her to have Sansa drink it for the next week. They discussed if Jon should stay or they should attempt to relocate him. Mr. Donniger knew about Jon but it seemed he’d died before revealing anything. The Eleshams knew nothing of him as far as they knew. Ramsay’s presence yesterday lead them to believe at least for now he knew nothing of Jon. The doctor argued they should move him but Arya felt confident that the fact they were still alive meant the major truly didn’t know. Arya advised for now Jon should stay, and really a move would be too dangerous anyways if the resistance was being watched. She’d need to discuss the long term plans further with Sansa. The doctor agreed and advised he would be in touch and left to go back to town.

“I’m going to take something up to Sansa and talk to her about if you should stay,” Arya told him heading into the kitchen.

“Listen, I’m sorry about earlier. I let my anger get the best of me. I’m not going to do anything stupid to get myself or anyone else killed. Are you sure I can’t talk to her?” he asked.
“I appreciate that, but she’s been rather clear about not wanting to see you. Let me see what I can do, you need to be patient with her.”

“I know, I am, I will be. Please just tell her I’m here, that I’ll do anything to help her. I want to help if she’ll let me.”

“I’ll let her know. But I want to ask, why are you so willing to die for…..” Arya stopped talking when Jon suddenly won’t meet her eye, he seemed suddenly flustered and nervous. And then something clicked in Arya’s mind, all the times she had walked in a room and they had pulled apart, the way they watched each other that she had dismissed, the times she thought she heard their voices late in the night but thought it was a dream. “Do you love my sister?” she asked suddenly. His eyes widened and he looked at her with a shocked expression.

“Why would –“

“I could hear you two some nights when you came to the house, how you’d sit up and talk till late in the morning. I see the way you watch her. You look at her like my father use to look at my mother.” There was a touch of sadness and longing that had worked its way into her voice.

“I think you might be scared and homesick Arya. I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility and duty towards you and Sansa. I owe you both so much for taking me in, sheltering me,” he tried to explain. He felt himself burning under Arya’s skeptical gaze. “I mean I care about her, of course I do, but calling it love, that might –“

“Does this thing that happened to her – did that change how you think of her?”

“Absolutely not!” He answered quickly and clearly. This pleased her, though she’d be more pleased if he would just admit what she could clearly see.

“I’ll make sure she knows you are here and you want to help.”

With that Arya left the room with the powder from the doctor, water, tea and the soup they’d made for dinner. She climbed to the attic. She knocked at the door and waited for Sansa to say it was ok to enter. Arya went in and set the food on the reading table and then took a seat on the trunk at the foot of the bed nearest to her. “You should try to eat. The doctor also said to drink the tea. And there’s stuff to help you sleep.”

Sansa sat in the chair and nibbled at the food and drank the tea. She seemed a bit steadier than earlier but it still rattled Arya to see her sister so fragile. Sansa noticed the pained look on Arya’s face. “I’m going to be ok Arya, we will be ok.”

“I thought he was going to kill you. I stood on the porch and heard you screaming and I ran away. And you know what I kept thinking? What if that was my last memory of you? What if I had left you to die?”

“But he didn’t kill me. We need to stop thinking about it, we can’t change it. And you should know I would die for you if needed. I told you, you’re my sister and it’s my job to protect you.”

Arya jumped from the bed and rushed to Sansa; dropping to her knees they embraced and sobbed into each other’s shoulders. “I don’t want you to end up like Alys Karstark,” Arya sobbed. Her words left Sansa rattled. It broke her heart that Arya would think that. Sansa vowed to herself right then that this would not break her, that she would not allow herself to be pulled so low that she would end it as Alys had. Sansa felt like a layer of steel was starting to form within her.

When they were calm and the tears had stopped they pulled apart and Sansa took Arya’s face in her
hands. “No more guilt, no more tears, ok? We are going to be fine. We are Starks, we are stronger than this.”

Arya nodded. She needed a bit more time to process but she resolved she would not cry to Sansa again. She stood up and took a few steps back, Sansa looked exhausted, Arya felt ashamed she needed to ask her for yet one more thing.

“I suppose you want to talk about Jon?” Sansa asked reading Arya’s expression.

“I don’t want to push but yes. If he needs to be moved I have to get the wheels in motion.”

“Do we have any reason to think they know about him?” Sansa asked.

“I don’t think so, I’m sure we’d have been arrested already.”

“Then I suppose we carry on as we have been.”

Arya smiled slightly, she couldn’t help it, she had wanted him to stay. “He wants to see you, desperately.”

Sansa ran her hand over her split lip. “Not today ok? Tell him tomorrow, I just need a little more time.”

“I’ll tell him, but you shouldn’t worry what he’s going to think. I asked him, he says this changes nothing about how he feels.”

Sansa stared at Arya, instead of being pleased at the news like Arya expected she looked angry. “Don’t discuss his feelings about me with him any further.”

“I thought that would make you happy,” Arya said confused.

“I’d like to lay down, can you go?”

“Did I do something?”

“No, no, I’m just tired. I promise,” Sansa answered, her tone softening.

Arya nodded and left her. She went back downstairs and then went to find Jon in the barn. He was sitting in the hayloft window wrapped in a blanket.

“It’s a good thinking spot huh?” She asked as she crested the ladder.

“How is she?”

“She says you can stay, but she’s still not ready to see you. I think she might be worried about her face.”

Jon looked at her with exasperation. “I don’t care about that.”

“I know, but take it as a good sigh. It makes me think she’s acting like her prior self,” Arya offered grimaced smile.

“What else did she say? Or what did you say?”

“I told her you said this doesn’t change your feelings about her.” She broke off eye contact his him then.
“Arya I wish you hadn’t said that.”

“Why? You told me that yourself.”

“I know but, well Sansa and I haven’t really discussed….. I mean, we’ve kissed, but well.” He was struggling with his words, he was flustered and running his hands through his hair. He didn’t know what this thing with Sansa was, he knew they cared for one another, that there was clearly an attraction, maybe he loved her, but then maybe it was too soon for that. Trying to put any of that into words with her younger sister had left him flummoxed.

“It’s ok, it sounds like I’m not the one you should be talking to about this anyways,” Arya said. They sat in silence after that; looking out at the brown yard and the naked trees, Jon wondered if maybe Sansa had a point about this place not being beautiful.

“I’m going to go to town tomorrow morning, let the doctor know we’re set for now. I think I’ll stay at Mycah’s tomorrow night and give his folks a hand in the morning. Can you keep an eye on Sansa?” Arya said ending the silence between them.

“Are you sure that’s wise? She doesn’t want to talk to me and I think you’re absence might trouble her. Plus what if you see……. him?”

“I’ll be fine, I have no intention of prowling the street for him. It’s a risk but I need to do this. I can’t breathe here right now, Sansa isn’t the only one that needs some space, even if it’s just a night.” Arya took in his expression. “I don’t mean from you, I mean from this place. There’s been so much death and despair here this year….. I just need to breathe and get refocused. Sansa won’t even know I’m gone.”

Jon simply nodded but he was skeptical. But then who was he to say no? He wasn’t her father. He knew everyone processed trauma in their own way, he knew he needed to allow her her’s.

“I’ll be back Sunday afternoon.”

“Be safe.”

“I will.” Jon nodded and said a quick prayer that he won’t regret letting her go.
Sansa decided she would no longer fight her exhaustion, dusk had settled in, the blueish purple light was calming and soothing. She lay down on the bed but sleep won’t come. She tossed and turned for hours before she finally managed to drift off. She wasn’t sure how long she had been asleep when she woke up sobbing. With the blackout shades drawn the room was dark, she wasn’t even sure what time it was. She heard a noise behind her and whirled around, someone stood in the doorway. She let out a scream and pushed off of the bed and cowered under the window.

“Sansa, Sansa it’s only me!” Jon cried moving into the room and switching on the reading lamp. Sansa managed to stop screaming but she was breathing raggedly. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I only came because I heard you crying. I didn’t mean to scare you,” he apologized, his tone desperate. He didn’t want to tell her he’d been sitting in the stairwell on and off for most of the night when he’d heard her cry out.

“Where’s Arya?” She demanded.

He hesitated. “Where is she?” she demanded again, but this time her voice was full of fear.

“She’s alright, she went in to town. She just left a little while ago.”

“In the dark? What time is it?”

“Just after 7, the sun will be up in a bit.” She seemed to consider this and then once she decided her sister was not in immediate danger she rose from the floor and she turned a cold gaze towards him. She seemed to be hardening herself against him.

“I told her I didn’t want to see you.”
“Why?”

“I have my reasons,” she answered as she ran her fingers over her lip. He could see she was fighting back tears.

“I don’t care about cuts and bruises, you’re still beautiful.”

“I’m not so vain. That’s not why,” she said quietly looking away from him.

“Then what? Tell me why, please.”

She still won’t look at him and she was wiping away any tear that managed to escape her eyes. She seemed frustrated that the tears would not stop. He suddenly had a terrible thought. She blamed him. When it happened he hadn’t been so far away after all and yet he hadn’t come for her. She must hate him, the sight of him likely reminded her how terribly he’d failed her. He wondered if he dropped to his knees now and begged her to forgive him if she would.

“This!” She suddenly cried breaking him from his thoughts. “I don’t want you to see me like this! A pathetic sobbing mess. I have to be stronger than this. I know I can force myself for Arya’s sake, but…. I don’t think I can pretend for you too.”

Sansa sat down on the bed then but she kept her back to him. She continued to sob quietly, batting away her tears angrily.

He didn’t know what to do. He selfishly felt relieved that the reason for her distress was not him, but it hurt him just as much that she was still so upset. He slowly moved closer until he reached the window closest to her; he turned and waited for her to either throw him out or say something else. Her crying quieted after a bit and she finally looked up at him. Her face swollen and blotchy. “Do you want me to go?” he asked.

“No,” she whispered, “I don’t know what I want anymore. I know I made this decision, I know it was my choice, but right now I’m not even sure I want to live.” She seemed shocked she had said the words aloud. “Please don’t tell Arya I said that,” she added quickly.

Her words were like a knife to his chest. He wanted to take her in his arms and draw all the pain and hurt from her, but he knew better than to even approach her right now, let alone touch her. Instead he
stood rooted to the floor.

“Please don’t say that,” he pleaded. “You didn’t have a choice.”

She looked up at him shaking her head furiously, her mood seemed to have suddenly shifted. “What is it?” he asked.

“You won’t understand.”

“If you want… you don’t have to, but I’m willing to listen, to try and understand if that’s what you want.” She looked at him hesitantly. “Or you can tell me to piss off,” he added suddenly worried he was pushing her too hard. She owed him nothing after all.

She seemed to consider this. He noticed she had stopped crying, it gave him the tiniest glimmer of hope.

“I need this to have been my decision. I need to think that I have some control, because if I don’t, well I don’t really want to be somewhere if everything is beyond my control, beyond hope.”

He looked at her, he did understand, probably more than she even realized. He had felt that hopeless feeling, of lacking control, in the early days at the orphanage. The feeling that things were happening to you and nothing you did mattered, it had nearly broken him. And while not as severe, he had felt something similar in the days immediately after his plane had crashed, when he had been shuffled around the island with no idea where or when he was going or with whom. He could understand why she would want to desperately believe she had some control in her life.

“I don’t expect you to understand.”

“But I do. I do understand. I didn’t mean to try and take that from you.”

“Do you remember the other day in the hayloft? When I told you about Petyr, how I refused his offer?” She asked.

“I do.”
“You were so disgusted by it.” She was looking away from him now. “Do you think what I did was wrong? Do you look at me and feel ashamed that I let that Nazi bastard…..” She seemed desperate for answers and he wanted to relieve her pain.

“You have nothing to be ashamed of,” He interjected. “You made a choice to spare your sister. I wish to god you hadn’t been forced into that position, I wish I hadn’t left….. I’ll never forgive myself for that. But what happened to you, it’s appalling and disgusting, but that does not mean you are. Please don’t feel that way, I don’t feel that way. If anything when I look at you I see nothing but bravery and courage. I can’t imagine making that choice.”

She said nothing but he could see she was wiping away tears again. They sat in silence for what felt like an hours, Jon had at one point slid to the floor, his back against the wall; he sat facing her waiting on her to decide the next move. Finally she sighed and laid down on the bed staring up at the ceiling. It was clear she was exhausted.

“Should I let you rest?” he asked as he rose to his feet and took a couple steps towards the door.

“Can you stay with me?” she asked in a small voice. She didn’t turn to face him.

“Are you sure?” he asked, her words halting him.

“I can’t sleep. I keep having nightmares and I’m just so tired. Can you just lay with me, just for a bit?”

“If that’s what you want I can do that,” he said gently. He crossed to the bed and lay beside her, she turned on her side and he fit himself on his side along her back. He adjusted his arm under her head, the top of her head tucked under his chin. “Are you comfortable?”

“Yes. Thank you,” she murmured. Jon was almost certain she had barely finished the words before she had fallen asleep.

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Arya hadn’t slept well. Between her restless mind and Jon’s constant movement on the stairway she
wondered if she’d even gotten in 3 hours total. At one point she had wanted to scream at him but she knew why he was doing it, and honestly if he hadn’t been she thought she might have. Sansa said she would be fine but Arya had heard her moving about the attic, the occasional sobbing; she knew Sansa would need more time to recover than she wanted to admit.

She finally had given up her quest for sleep and risen and dressed. She moved quietly into the hall and observed Jon dozing on the stairs, his chin propped on his arm, his elbow on his knees. It was rather endearing, and despite everything she found she had to stifle a laugh. She went downstairs and did her chores quickly before making her way back inside. She made a simple breakfast and ate it quickly. She wanted to get town early, she figured she was less likely to encounter Ramsay if she could be off the streets early enough. She was just about to walk out the front door when Jon came down the stairs.

“It’s not even light out,” he said clearly trying to suppress a yawn.

“I know but I couldn’t sleep.” She refrained from adding “because you’ve been pacing the stairs nearly all damn night.”

“Me either.”

They stood quietly for a moment. She knew he wanted to command her not to go and she was grateful he was restraining himself, she really had no desire to quarrel with him today.

“You’ll be careful?”

She nodded. “I’ll come home if it gets too much, I won’t do anything stupid.”

“Alright then.”

Arya turned to go but then thought better of it and ran back and gave Jon a hug. He hugged her back and when he released her she turned quickly and went out the door before she could change her mind.

xxxxx
They town was quiet when she arrived. The sun was just starting to rise. For once there were few clouds, the pink and gold light actually made the place look cheery.

She parked her bike in the alley behind the butcher’s and went in the back entrance, calling out for Molly and Michael. Molly came to her first, she appeared shocked to see her. She gave her a quick hug and then called to Michael that they were going upstairs for a bit.

“Arya dear, what are you doing here?” Molly asked once they were behind closed doors.

“I have some matters to attend to. Also can I stay with you tonight?”

“You are always welcomed, but…. Well don’t you think you should be home with Sansa right now?” Arya knew by the look on Molly’s face she knew. She cursed the major under her breath.

“Does everyone in this whole damn town know? It’s barely been two days.”

“I’m not sure if it’s everyone but there are quite a few. It’s a small town and there’s not much to do anymore but gossip. I’m not saying it’s right but it’s the truth.” Arya looked angry. “And even if people did mind their business, well, the major…”

“Won’t shut up about it,” Arya finished for her.

“You’re family was well respected in this town once. Brynden did a lot for the resistance. I think he’s decided it’s almost propaganda worthy. If the niece of a key resistance figure, the granddaughter of Holster Tully can accept and accommodate his rule, well why can’t the rest of us?”

Arya shuttered. He was absolutely mad, did he really think people would actually just go along with him if he could convince them Sansa Stark had accepted Nazi rule? He was more delusional then she had dared imagine, which also meant he was more dangerous as well.

“That’s preposterous.”

“On the surface yes, but I imagine he is laying the groundwork for something else.”
“Do people believe him?” Arya’s voice wavered.

Molly looked at her with pity but she knew she couldn’t lie to her. “Some people do yes.”

Arya bit back her tears. “They can go to hell then.”

She thought back to her own trauma and how some people had judged her and Michael after Mycah’s death. “Aye, that they can,” she agreed.

“He attacked me first you know, he wanted to kill me; I saw it in his eyes. Sansa stopped him, but he only let me go because she said he could….”

Molly hugged her and let her cry. “Then you’re truly blessed to have such a brave sister.”

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Eventually Arya had calmed down, and once she composed herself she made her way to the doctor’s. She let him know they had agreed to let Jon stay. He told her that was fine for now, especially since it was unlikely they could find him a new safe house at the moment anyways. They talked at length about who the mole might be. They came up empty. The only thing that was certain was that someone had either been compromised or had become desperate enough for something that they were willing to sell them out. Either way everyone was in agreement that for now operations were to go to ground.

He told her the Eleshams had essential vanished. It was anyone’s guess but their best estimate was they were dead. Mrs Donniger and her two small children were currently under house arrest. They were considering this a victory, but there was still much concern about what their final sentence would be.

It was late morning when she finally departed his office. The sun was still shining but a cold wind had sprung up. Arya pulled her coat closed and started back to the butcher’s. When she reached the door she said a quick prayer of thanks that for today she had managed to avoid Ramsay Bolton.
Fun fact - I did look up sunrise and sunset times for this time of the year in this area, sunrise was legitimately after 8am. Another "fun" fact - when the Nazi's took over the Channel Islands they forced them to switch their clocks ahead in order to match the time in Germany.

Lastly I inadvertently named the butcher and his wife "Mike & Molly" - I had named them independently, in separate chapters, and it wasn't until this one that I realized what I had done, oops.
Several days had passed and outwardly Sansa seemed to be recovering, the bruises had faded, the split lip knitted. Arya and Jon had been concerned about her mental state initially, they tried to treat her gently, do her share of the chores, only discuss light topics. Sansa had allowed this to go on for exactly three days before she sat them down and demanded they stop. She assured them she was going to be ok, that she was stronger than they were giving her credit for and while she appreciated their concerns it was unnecessary. She told them she wasn’t in denial, that she wouldn’t pretend it never happened but she did not wish to let it live on and continue to breathe life into it. Given her wishes they all entered into an agreement to not discuss what had happened any further and try to go back to the way things were before. Arya did her best to follow her sister’s lead, she would’ve given anything for things to go back.

In many respects they did go back, they had to keep living after all, they shared chores, they ate meals together and tried to discuss happier times. But things had changed, Sansa had begun taking long walks alone along the edge of the woods almost daily. She never wanted Arya to join her, though she did on rare occasions allow Jon to. She also made excuses on why she couldn’t go to town, she stopped going to the sewing circle. She claimed there was just too much work on the farm needing her attention. Everyone knew that wasn’t the reason, it was winter after all, but they didn’t anything, they figure it was best to let Sansa cope in her own way.

The biggest change though was that she could no longer sleep unless Jon was in the room. They had all discussed him staying in the main house. He had objections but decided not to voice them. He had decided it should be left it up to the girls since they were taking the biggest risk. For her part Sansa said if they were caught then so be it, she no longer feared the consequences. Arya had agreed and added that if they were caught she would just pray their deaths were swift. Jon had been shocked by her words but Sansa seemed unaffected. It had broken Jon’s heart a little that the sisters had seemingly lost whatever optimism they once possessed.

Given the new arrangement Sansa and Jon now slept in attic and Arya moved to Robin’s room. While they might no longer fear capture they weren’t about to be careless either. They had decided to build a false wall in the attic in order to create a small room for Jon to hide in should the need arise. They were repurposing boards from the barn. In some ways it had actually been a blessing, the perfect indoor project for the winter. They had also managed to get the winter garden in, Sansa hoped it would be more successful than last year.

A couple of weeks later Arya came across Sansa behind the house up to her elbows in the wash basin where they did their laundry. Sansa was smiling and humming and it took Arya by surprise. This was the happiest she had seen her since that day. She came alongside her but as she prepared to greet her she saw that Sansa was scrubbing her panties and they were stained with blood.
“Sansa,” Arya whispered horrified. Sansa glanced at her and realized where her attention was. She realized then what Arya thought.

“It’s ok, I’m ok. It’s not from that. It’s actually good blood this time,” Sansa told her.

“I don’t understand,” Arya replied.

Sansa flushed a bit. “It’s…. It means I’m not carrying his child,” Sansa said firmly.

Arya’s eyes went wide. She’d never even considered it until now that that would’ve been a concern. No wonder Sansa had seemed so tense and worried these last few weeks, to be waiting and counting the days, it must’ve been unbearable.

“Things will get better now, you’ll see,” Sansa said with a smile and then went back to the laundry.

Arya was amazed at the strength Sansa had shown. She vowed right then she would work to be more like her sister.

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Initially, Arya had been more cautious. The Saturday after the attack was essentially the last time she had been in contact with the resistance, and she knew it was for the best. They had become too exposed, too comprised. And anyways the doctor promised he would let her know if anything changed but with the last escape attempt ending so terribly no one seemed incline to try another anytime soon. This had also allowed her to scale back her time in town. She had apologized to Molly but told her she had no desire to see Ramsay and other than a quick weekly trip for rations, specially planned for when she knew he had a weekly meeting, she wanted to be home with Sansa, Molly had understood.

But now the anniversary of Mycah’s death was nearing and so Arya decided it was time to be brave and to return to helping the butcher at least a couple times a week. Sansa had wanted to protest, but she knew they needed the money and since Arya had promised she was steering clear of the resistance, Sansa had agreed.
The first time she saw Ramsay it had been roughly a month since he had come to their home, the week after Sansa knew she hadn’t become pregnant. They had passed each other on opposite sides of the street. He had stopped and stared at her intently, a smirk clearly on his face. It had taken Arya everything in her not to launch herself across the street and attack him but she had controlled herself, given him the slightest nod and kept on her way. She had not mentioned any of it to Sansa.

The following week she saw him again, this time he was on the same side of the street as her and called out to her. “Arya!” the sound of her name on his lips made her hands ball into fists. She slowed and turned to face him and unfurled her hands.

“How can I help you?” she said trying to keep the rage out of her voice. She would not look directly at him less he know the hundreds of ways she had dreamed of killing him.

“I just wanted to see how you were. I see your face has healed nicely.”

Arya nodded but said nothing.

“And how is your sister? I haven’t seen her in town in over a month. She hasn’t cast herself from the hayloft in shame I hope,” his voice held a hint of amusement. She knew he was trying to get a rise from her, provoke her into doing something stupid.

“She would never do that!” she shot back and then quickly softened her voice, “She’s doing fine. She’s focused on the farm currently.”

“I’m sure her friend over at the grocer’s misses her, the other women in the sewing group, it would be nice to see her in town again. Do let her know I would appreciate seeing her back here, doing her part.”

Arya grimaced, she had no intention of going home and telling her sister she needed to come to town to be further terrorized by this bastard.

“I’ll pass along your concerns, however I must be going,” she responded and turned to leave.

“Please make sure you do, I’d hate to have to come all the way back out there to check on her myself,” he said. His voice was light but it was clearly a threat.
Arya stopped and turned back to him. She looked at him this time and saw the amusement playing across his face. She wanted to tell him to go to hell, or better yet come by the house so she could murder him and bury his body in the woods, then again why desecrate the land? No, when she killed him she would burn his body she decided. Her thoughts made her smile but then she heard Sansa’s voice telling her not to provoke him. She dug her nails into her palm before nodding and then started back up the street.

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Arya had seemed sullen and angry since she had come home from town. She had gone to check the traps with Jon that afternoon. They had both come back in dark moods. It upset Sansa that the dark mood was spreading. She could easily guess that it had something to do with her.

Sansa had made soup for dinner, it was mostly vegetables with a bit of rabbit meat. They had been eating quietly when Sansa decided she could no longer bear Arya’s dark mood.

“What the news in town?” Sansa asked. “Are they decorating for Christmas yet?”

Arya looked up at her curiously. “Sparsely. Do you actually care about that?”

“I don’t actually, but I do care about why you are in such a dark mood. Has something happened?”

Jon had stopped eating and was watching Arya intently. He seemed to be shaking his head at her. Sansa caught it from the corner of her eye and grew angry. “Out with it! You two clearly are cross about something. I will not have your treating me like I’m a fragile child.”

“Sansa, maybe –“ Jon tried to interject.

“No, out with it. Arya?”

“I saw him today. He asked about you,” Arya told her.
Sansa went very still. Jon reached out and took her hand but she slowly pulled her hand from his. “Go on. I can tell there is more.”

“You are to return to the sewing group, you are to be seen in town.”

A single tear ran down Sansa’s face, she swatted it away. Jon stood up to move towards her. “I take it this was not a suggestion,” Sansa said quietly.

“He said if I didn’t tell you he would come out here and tell you himself,” Arya said. She felt sick to her stomach telling Sansa that. Sansa for her part seemed oddly calm, detached.

“Let him try. If he comes out here again I will murder him with my bare hands,” Jon said gruffly.

“You’ll do no such thing because he will have no need to come out here. I’ll return to town tomorrow,” Sansa said matter of factly.

“Are your sure that’s wise?” Jon asked.

“It’s the best thing for all of us, it’s the thing that will keep us safe,” Sansa answered.

“You’ve done enough to protect us,” Arya said, “I agree with Jon, let him come here and meet his fate.”

“I will not continue to live in fear of Ramsay Bolton,” Sansa stated. It was the first time his name had been spoken in the house since he had been there. “We are going to survive this war, we are going to survive him and I will continue to protect us. There is no other way and there is to be no argument.”

Arya and Jon were silent, Jon sat back down. “Now eat your dinner, we can’t just be wasting food,” Sansa ordered.

They ate the rest of dinner in silence. Sansa stood to start clearing the dishes when Arya finally spoke. “If you are going back to town tomorrow I think there are some things you should know.”
Sansa set her dishes in the sink and turned back to her. The tone in Arya’s voice made her weary. “What exactly do I need to know?”

Arya glanced at Jon nervously. Jon picked up her cues and told them he would go do the evening rounds on the animals. He went to fetch his coat and they heard him go out the front door.

“You remember the doctor came out here because he had heard in town what Ramsay had done to you, because Ramsay was talking about it,” Arya began. Sansa let out a long sigh, she could already tell she had no desire to hear where this was going.

“Do you know what he told people? I don’t imagine he says he forced me.”

Arya wouldn’t meet her eye and she was growing flushed and fidgeting. “Arya, what is it?”

Sansa sense of dreaded started to grow to an almost unbearable weight, whatever it was Arya was not telling her must be truly awful or it won’t be giving her such pause.

“He’s been trying to send stuff here,” she finally said.

“What do you mean?”

“He has the merchants set aside things for you, they give it to me when I pick up the rations. He wants people to know… to think….”

“To think I’m a Jerry-bag, that’s what you’re saying? That I wanted to be with him, that I traded myself for favors,” Sansa finished for her. “Does everyone think that?”

“That I don’t know, but there are rumors. I’ve given all the stuff away and I think most think he – well that he forced you, but some…… well they look at our family’s ties to Petyr and they just assume that now that he’s gone that you –” Arya was shifting uncomfortably.

Sansa took a few deep breaths. What had she ever done to Ramsay Bolton that could to have made him so hell bent on humiliating and destroying her? She saw Arya watching her and waiting. Sansa steeled herself again, she could not allow him to succeed. As much as it hurt and she was scared, she
vowed he would not win.

“Well if they do think that then they can say it to my face, but it doesn’t matter, I still have to go to town tomorrow.”

“Sansa –”

“I think I’m going to go to bed Arya, can you tell Jon I went up?”

Arya nodded, she looked like she wanted to say more but Sansa turned and left the room before she could.

She went upstairs and sat reading for a while until Jon knocked and she called for him to enter. With the exception of that very first morning they had been sleeping in separate beds, but tonight she asked him if they could sleep in the same bed. He had agreed. She changed behind the screen and he in the room. They each called out when ready. She came out in her nightgown and crawled into his bed. He turned off the lights and lay on his back and she on her side, her head resting on his shoulder, her arm over his chest.

Even though they now slept in the same room, and tonight the same bed, things had changed between her and Jon since the rape. Gone were days of lingered touches, longing glances and the occasional sweet kiss. He now treated her like fragile glass. The first couple weeks when she had let him join her for her walks they had barely spoken, neither of them seemed sure of the right words and, if Sansa was being honest, she had been so consumed by fear and thoughts about what she would do if she was carrying his child, a thought she refused to admit out loud, that she hadn’t trusted herself to speak. Jon respected her need for quiet and spent his time watching her from the corner of his eye for signs of trouble. She knew Arya had told him about Alys Karstark, she had been coming down the stairs and heard her imploring him to make sure Sansa didn’t suffer the same fate. For some reason after that she had felt annoyed by his hovering she had barred him from walking with her for a few days. Eventually she relented but decided the silence was only being detrimental. So she had started to talk to him as they walked, it was never about the rape, she focused instead on telling him more about her life before the war and encouraging him to do the same. It had worked and they had built a deeper bond. She had slowly started to allow herself to feel something for him again, to hope. For his part he seemed to become more comfortable and when he felt assured she wouldn’t harm herself, he had relaxed as well. It made her hope one day they could return to the kissing and touching that she had enjoyed before.

They lay in silence for a while. Jon felt like he was going to burst, he could no longer bite his tongue. “You don’t have to go. You don’t have to give him what he wants,” Jon told her.
“You know as well as I do that is not true. He’s the commander of this island, we do have to do what he wants. I meant what I said, I will protect us and we are going to survive this.”

Jon pulled her tighter, he felt helpless and useless, that he could do nothing to protect her. “I always knew you were strong and brave. I knew it the first time I saw you, when you came in the barn unarmed and discovered me.”

“You mean when you tackled me and held a knife to me?” she teased him.

“Aye, but you didn’t scream out, instead you stared me down and told me your name.”

“I think I knew from the start you won’t hurt me, it’s easy to be brave when you know there is no risk.”

They were quiet again, the sweetness of that first shared memory fading away into the cold winter darkness.

“I’m scared to go to sleep,” she whispered.

“I know, but I’ll be right here. I’ll do what I can to protect you.”

She said nothing but he felt his shirt grow wet. “Sansa, shh, don’t cry,” He soothed her as her tears fell, his undershirt becoming soaked in the vicinity of her cheek.

“Don’t tell Arya how upset I am. I don’t want her upset any further,” she begged him.

“You’re secrets are safe with me; you’re safe with me. I promise,” he whispered stroking her back as he held her. That seemed to mollify her for a while. Her tears stopped and her breathing because more even, Jon hoped she had found some peace and fallen asleep.

“Do you think I’ll ever be normal again? That I can be that girl laying on the hay staring up at you again?” Her voice was barely audible.
Jon shifted so he was sitting up slightly and could look down at her. “You are still that same girl. Actually you’re an even braver version of her. You stared down a true monster and lived. What’s more you are willing to do it again because you love your sister and you want to protect me. You are already so much stronger than that girl in the hayloft.”

She looked up at him, he could tell she was crying again despite her attempts to not. He placed his hands on her cheeks and wiped them with his thumbs. “In fact you should know you won’t ever be normal, because you never were. You’ve always been far superior to normal,” he whispered. She stretched up and kissed him softly. He froze and barely responded.

She pulled away and sat up, hugging her knees to her chest. “If that’s true why don’t you ever kiss me anymore?” she asked, her voice raw with pain.

“I didn’t think you’d…. I wasn’t sure if it was ok, if you’d want that.”

“I told you I want to go back to normal, I don’t want you to be scared of me.”

“I’m not scared of you,” he sighed. “But I am scared to hurt you.”

“I trust you, you’d never hurt me.”

“I won’t pretend I know what’s best for you, but I don’t want to rush anything. So for tonight can you please just lay back down, please.”

She said nothing but she did lay back down and curled into him. She let out a sigh. He held her and stroked her back until they both fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

A little more Jonsa feels :)

Jerry bag - (slang) A woman who consorted with the Germans during the Second World War.
The next morning seemed to come too quickly. Sansa awoke to find Jon already awake, watching her sleep and twisting strands of her hair around his fingers.

“Did you sleep ok?” he asked once he noticed she was awake.

“Well enough, thank you,” she yawned.

“It snowed in the night. What if we just pretend it was a blizzard and stay here today?”

“You know we can’t,” she responded sadly.

“I know,” he breathed, the words heavy with disappointment.

They lay intertwined for as long as they dared before then finally rose and began to prepare for the day. Sansa went downstairs to make breakfast for everyone as well as gather her sewing supplies. They had eaten in silence, the weight of day’s events dragging them all down. Normally Sansa might have tried to brighten everyone’s mood but she was conserving her energy, she knew she would need it to face him.

She cleaned up the kitchen and then changed into her heaviest pants and sweater. Arya had excused herself to the barn. She knew Sansa had to go but she hated it and she did not want Sansa to think the hate that she felt was in any way meant for her, so she figured it was best not to be there when she left. Jon had stayed inside with her. He sat in the parlor watching her pull her coat on. “Are you sure?” he asked as she finished the last button.

“No, not at all. But I must do this, so therefore I will,” she answered.

“You should take this, hide it in your boot,” he said standing and holding out his knife to her. It was the knife he had pulled on her on the day they met. It was an odd gift to smile about, but she smiled nonetheless. She stepped forward and took the knife from him and he drew her to him.

“I meant what I’ve said. I’ll go into town and shot him in the street. I don’t care if I die if it means you’d be spare one more moment of pain.”

Sansa drew back and looked at him, she placed her hand on his cheek. “Don’t be foolish Jon. Don’t you think your death would cause me just as much pain? Maybe more. I told you, I can bear this, I will bear this.”

Jon took her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm and held her hand to his heart. “Be that as it may if you have not returned to me by dark I will seek a terrible vengeance on him.”

She leaned in and they held each other for a brief moment, to linger any longer would strip her of her resolve. “Watch over my sister please. Tell her I’m not scared and that everything is going to be fine.” As Sansa said the words she knew they were just as much for her as they were for Arya.
Jon gave her a slight nod and with that she grabbed her sewing bag and headed out the door.

Sansa pulled her bike up in front of the grocer’s and got off. She made her way inside and saw Jeyne behind the counter, she gave her a wave.

“Sansa!” she shrieked and rushed around the counter to pull her into a hug.

“I’m so glad to see you! It’s been so, so long!” Jeyne said as she released her. “I had started to get worried.”

“I know, I’m sorry. I’ve -,” Sansa was lost for words.

“You don’t have to, Arya told me. She kept promising you were fine but, well it’s just been so long.” Jeyne looked at her tentatively as she spoke.

“I know, but I just wasn’t ready to risk seeing him,” Sansa replied softly.

Jeyne looked away embarrassed. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have brought it up. Arya only told me because he’d left several packages here..... and well...... he’s not exactly well liked as you know. So I just..... Well and my parents didn’t like it... but I knew it couldn’t be what it looked like....”

Sansa insides were twisted and roiling, if her best friend on the island had questioned her what chance did she stand with everyone else. She refused to cry. “Let’s not talk about it. I think we can all just agree he’s evil, I want nothing from him.”

Jeyne nodded and again pulled Sansa into a long hug. “I’m sorry I even brought it up.” Sansa took a deep breath and forced herself to slam the door in her mind that was attempting to burst open and let in so many thoughts that would reduce her to a sobbing mess. She forced a smile on her face and pulled from Jeyne’s embrace.

“So tell me what you have been up to. What have I missed?”

Jeyne caught her up on a bit of town gossip as well as her own situation. She and Matthias were still seeing each other on the sly, thought she feared her mother might be catching on, Ramsay’s weekly trips in and subtle hints had not helped, but now there was a possibility he might be reassigned back to the continent. Sansa tried to feel sympathy for her, and in some ways she did, but she could not feel bad there would be one less German on the island. Jeyne told her that Major Bolton had cancelled the Christmas play this year, something about not wanting to spare personnel to monitor the rehearsals. It was yet another item on the list of reasons why the town despised him.

They chatted until it was time to go to the sewing circle. Mrs. Poole took over the counter and the girls left the store. Sansa turned to head towards the Glovers where the group normally met. “Oh sorry, I forgot to tell you, we’ve been moved to Town Hall now.”

Sansa froze, “Why? We’ve always been at the Glovers and there was never any issue.”

“One of the major’s edicts. He made us change about a month ago, after the latest arrests. He said he can’t even trust the women anymore. He seems to have decided we are all a resistance risk, can you imagine?”

Sansa just looked at her, Jeyne really was naïve sometimes. She thought of Arya, she wondered if it would anger her or amuse her that Jeyne thought it crazy woman would be in the resistance.
“Are you coming or are you putting down roots?” Jeyne teased her.

“Oh, sorry,” Sansa said, “I mean, I’m coming.” They made their way towards town hall. Sansa steeled herself, if she was to encounter Major Bolton this would be the place. Her only hope was that he was out of the office or in a meeting, anything that might somehow aid her in avoiding him.

They made their way inside and to the room on the second floor that they were allowed to use. She found the other women there working quietly. No one seemed to be enjoying themselves. “This is how it is now,” Jeyne whispered glumly, “Everyone’s a bit scared to talk; the walls have ears here.”

Sansa nodded to her with understanding. Sansa missed the old meetings, when they had traded gossip and joked and laughed. It had always been such a respite from all of the stresses of the war, even if they had been forced to stitch and fix German clothing.

She took a seat next to Jeyne and found some of the women looking at her with a mixture of expressions. Some were sympathetic, others cold or suspicious. She realized then that this is what Arya had been warning her about. She wondered if some of them now thought she was the enemy, that she had gone willingly, that she had whored herself out for favor.

Molly entered the room then and saw Sansa and smiled at her. She came and took the open seat next to her and took her hand. “It’s good to see you,” she said softly. “Arya’s told me all that had happened. Don’t let any of these bitches make you feel bad.”

She had the realization then that in her absence they had likely discussed her, that most of them had already formed their opinions about her situation. The door in her mind was straining again. Sansa fought back tears and gave her a grateful smile. They all sat stitching quietly for a bit. Finally someone started to hum Christmas carols and one by one everyone joined in until there was a soft rendition of “Winter Wonderland” filling the room. They had all started to make eye contact again and were even smiling at each other. It was beautiful and peaceful. It felt like a balm on Sansa’s heart, an omen that things could return to what they once were.

The song drew to a close and they heard clapping from the doorway. Everyone’s head snapped up and there stood Major Bolton in his uniform, boots gleaming, smiling his terrible cold smile at them all.

“Simply beautiful, almost makes me regret cancelling the Christmas play,” he told them.

Everyone except Sansa had lowered their eyes and had gone back to their sewing, but she couldn’t, she stared at him, frozen and yet something was sparking in her chest.

“Ms. Stark, it’s good to see you’ve rejoined the ladies at last. I take it your sister passed on my concerns.”

“She did as she was commanded,” Sansa said continued to look at him. Her attention on him seemed to be effecting him, though she couldn’t tell if he was growing angry or amused. She refused to allow him another opportunity to further lower people’s opinions of her.

“I’m pleased to hear she has finally learned to follow instructions.”

“We’ve all learned something Major.” She had no idea why she said that or what she even meant in that moment but she refused to concede to him. She had no idea what was happening inside her but it seemed that seeing him had flipped a switch in her, instead of feeling frightened she felt defiant. Jon had been right, she had tangled with a monster and survived. She would not let him think he had broken her, not now.
Ramsay’s eyes started to glow, his jaw set. He had not expected this response. He had been prepared to humiliate her and then drink her tears, to use her as a warning to the other women if possible. And yet here she sat defiant and unbroken, he was almost at a loss for words. Slowly the realization came to him that this version of her might be even more useful than a broken one. He suddenly felt very pleased and let himself smile.

Before he could say anything further though one of his corporals came and whispered in his ear. For now it appeared he might have more pressing matters than toying with these women. The corporal saluted him and left.

“Well keep up the good work ladies. I would so enjoy to hear a rousing rendition ‘Oh Tannenbaum’, maybe next time perhaps. Have a nice day,” he said and turned to leave. “Oh,” he said suddenly turning back. “We will be having another town meeting this Friday at noon. I expect everyone to attend.” And with that he was gone.

The room collectively exhaled as he left, they knew his invitation for Friday was not good news but at least for the moment he had removed his presence. Sansa looked around the room, a couple of the women caught her eye and looked at her wearily. The major’s interest in her had done nothing to endear her to the ones that had already thought the worse. She could take it no longer.

“He planned to rape my sister, my fourteen year old sister. You should all know that before you pass your judgments on me.”

Everyone stopped sewing and looked at her. “You all know he’s a monster, I don’t know why you would think that I would willingly be with him. But I ask you, if it was your sister, or your child, would you have let it happen or would you have done the same as I?”

Her words hung in the air, she could tell some believed her and felt ashamed, others still did not seemed moved by her plea.

“There is a war on. We are all just doing our best to survive it,” Molly said. “I for one will not sit in judgment of you. I can tell you sitting here now that given the opportunity I would’ve let the whole German army have at me if it meant I could have Mycah back.” Molly started to cry softly then. “It’s been a whole year and it still hurts the same. I believe what Arya told me, that the major would’ve killed her. I will never judge you for saving her. I won’t wish this hole in my heart on anyone.”

Molly was sobbing now. Most of the other women in the room had started to cry as well. Sansa pulled her chair next to Molly’s and embraced her. “Thank you,” she whispered as she stroked her hair.

There was no more sewing that day, but Sansa felt a major piece of her soul had been mended nonetheless.

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Sansa arrived back home around dinner time. She entered the parlor to be greeted by Jon and Arya. They had playing cards to pass the time. It was such a sweet and normal scene. Sansa smiled at them. Some of the distress on Jon’s face seemed to clear.

“How - how was town?” Arya asked. Sansa could tell she was trying to pick her words carefully.

“As well as could be expected. I saw him,” she stated. “He came by the circle, no he didn’t touch me,” she added for Jon’s benefit. He seemed to let out a breath he’d been holding.

“Are you alright?” Jon asked getting to his feet.
“Better than I expected, I suppose.” There was a note of hesitation in her voice that Arya picked up on.

“There’s something else isn’t there,” she said gently. Sansa met her eyes and then looked away.

“He’s called a town meeting for Friday.”

“For what?”

“No one thought to ask, we just wanted him gone. Well, I am going to start on dinner,” Sansa announced and headed into the kitchen.

Arya and Jon looked at each other. They both knew this was not good and Sansa’s seemingly under-reaction concerned them as well.

They ate dinner quietly and Sansa told them she wanted to join them in their card game after. If there hadn’t been such a heaviness in the air it would have almost been enjoyable, it would’ve been the most normal night they had experienced in weeks. Eventually they grew tired and wished each other goodnight and made their way to bed.

Jon and Sansa made their way to the attic. Once inside, when the door shut Jon pulled her to him and held her tightly to his chest. His hug was so fierce she thought he might crush her but she also relished how close she was to him, how the heat of his body was familiar and comforting. “Are you truly alright?” he whispered.

She pushed back slightly and he released her, she gazed up at him. “I am. It was the strangest thing, I was so scared to see him, and yet when I did, I don’t know, I no longer felt scared. He’s only a man, what he did was terrible but I can’t let him have power over me anymore. I don’t know…… I can’t really explain it.”

“You don’t have to, I’m just relived you are ok. I was going mad all day, imagining the worse, terrified that I might not see you again, that I had failed yet again to protect you.”

“Well it’s done now.”

Jon looked at her curiously, his eyes darkening in concern. “What?” she asked.

“It seems far from done. You said yourself he’s called a meeting for Friday.”

Sansa turned away from him and went further into the room. “Can we not tonight? I’m exhausted. Can we please just save this for tomorrow?”

“Oh course, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” she said as she headed behind the screen to change. Jon changed as well and crawled into his bed turning on his side to face the door. Sansa came out from behind the screen and looked at him, she felt a wave of disappointment move over her.

He could feel her eyes on him. “What is it?” he asked turning his head to look at her.

“I – well, nothing,” she said moving towards her bed.

“No tell me, you seem upset now. Have I done something? Do you want to talk about something?”

“I just thought maybe…..” She seemed flustered and it finally dawned on Jon what she wanted.
“Do you want to sleep in my bed?” She flushed and gave him a small nod.

He gave her a small half smile and held up the edge of the blankets and she crawled in. “Why were you scared to ask? We slept like this last night,” he asked once she had settled in, her back to him now.

“Because last night I was scared, tonight I’m not scared, but I still want to,” she answered him, her cheeks flushing. “If that even makes sense.”

He turned on his side and propped himself up on one arm so he could look down on her. “You can sleep next to me anytime you want or need. You don’t even need to ask, I would never deny you anyways.”

She turned her head towards him and smiled and then nodded. He smiled down at her. He wanted to kiss her then but he felt it was inappropriate at the moment. She’d been through too much today and while she might think she was over it he was not so sure. So instead he kissed her forehead quickly and laid down and wrapped his arm around her.

She reached out and turned off the table lamp and then she snuggled into him with a sigh and settled in to sleep.
They arrived in town shortly before the appointed meeting time to find the streets filling with soldiers and weary townspeople. It seemed everyone was being herded east of town. They followed the flow until they reached the butcher shop and ducked inside.

“We’re closed,” they heard Michael call over the ringing bell on the door.

“It’s just us,” Arya answered.

“Ah, just in time then,” he advised. He was wearing his coat. Molly came down the stairs then with their little girls in tow.

“Well, at least we can all go together,” she said.

“Do you know where we are going?” Sansa asked. “It seems the meeting might not be in the square?” She felt hopefully at this, it meant they weren’t going to the gallows.

“To the Donnigers,” Michael answered resignedly. The adults all exchanged a charged look.

Just then a soldier banged into the shop. “Loslegen! Snell!” He barked at them. Michael picked up his youngest daughter as she began to cry. The soldier looked annoyed and shouted again and herded them out into the street with the others.

Everyone trudged along and made the half mile journey to the Donniger homestead. The crowd was subdued but there were whispers that they were about to see another execution. Everyone was herded into the yard. A large hay wagon had been positioned to function as a stage. Mrs. Donniger stood to the left side flanked by two soldiers. She would not meet the eyes of anyone in the crowd but she held her head high. She balanced her toddler son on her hip and held the hand of her daughter who look to be roughly eight years old. Major Bolton stood on the right side of the wagon. The crowd started to murmur now. Surely he was not going to murder a widow while she held her children, even he couldn’t be that cruel. Arya and Sansa exchanged a charged look, they knew first hand that he was that cruel, that there was no evil he was not capable of. Arya slid her hand into Sansa’s.

They tried to blend in, but it did no good. He picked them out and a terrifying grin spread across his face, his eyes blazing in satisfaction.

“My good people of Oakenshield, here we find ourselves again. We stand on the property of a treasonous traitor, an enemy of the fatherland and his most sacred rules,” he began silencing the crowd. “And what’s worse is he isn’t even here to face his punishment. Only a true coward would leave his wife and children to pay for his crimes.”

The crowd was murmuring again, children started to cry as their parents squeezed them tighter. Arya felt like she was turning to stone, rooted to this spot and unable to look away from the terrible events unfolding before her. She knew it would do little good but she prayed someone would speak up. On every level she knew he was a deranged madman, he would never listen to reason or do the moral thing, and yet it still tore at her heart that they should all witness and accept this in silence.

“I had thought after the last time you would’ve all learned, but it seems sadly you did not.” He seemed to pause for effect, to let his words settle in. “We cannot continue like this. We need order,” he chastised them. “So I find myself here, ready to teach this lesson again.” He looked angry and annoyed. “Before we begin I think you should all know there is one
thing I hate above all other things, and that is repeating myself.” He surveyed the crowd. “And yet here we are.” His voice dripped of disgust.

He looked at the Donnigers now and suddenly the terrible smile returned. “Purity of blood, perhaps that is the issue here. Perhaps you are all just ruined from the start, maybe there is no teaching you.” He marched to Mrs. Donniger and tore her son from her arms. She wailed and lunged for him, the soldiers held her back, but for once even they looked horrified at their commander. Her daughter began to cry as well. The boy began to wail, wiggling in Ramsay’s arms, trying to reach for his mother. Ramsay unsheathed his knife. In that moment it felt like all the air had been sucked from the Earth. Many in the crowd were holding their breath. Some were breathing raggedly. A couple were muttering hurried prayers. Arya couldn’t breathe, she glanced towards Sansa, there was fire snapping in her sister’s eyes. Arya was taken aback, she had never seen such anger or hate from Sansa before.

Ramsay’s eyes search the crowd. He seemed to be waiting on something, but what was anyone’s guess. He seemed clearly to have made up his mind. Arya couldn’t help but wonder why God had not struck him down. She looked to the clouded sky and prayed for just that. After several long moments he sighed loudly. Arya’s eyes snapped back to him, he seemed disappointed, resigned almost. He looked at Mrs. Donniger who was sobbing and begging him to return her child to her. He did not smile but he shook his head at her and raised the knife in the direction of the boy’s throat.

“MAJOR! STOP! YOU WILL NOT DO THIS!” Arya heard Sansa’s voice roar, it cut sharply and loudly through the crowd. People stepped back from them clearing the smallest of spaces around the sisters. Everyone was looking at them with a mixture of shock and absolute horror. Even the Donnigers had stopped crying. Sansa was a sight to behold. She was standing straight and tall, her face was set, hard and demanding, her red hair whirling around her in the wind. She looked like an avenging angel of holy fire.

Ramsay was staring at her sister now, dark and intent, weighing her and her demands, and then suddenly a broad smile appeared on his face and he dipped his head ever so slightly to Sansa. It seemed this is what he had been waiting on, what he had wanted all along. He sheathed his knife and thrust the now whimpering boy back at his mother.

“Burn the house and the barns, but the family lives, after all, I am nothing if not a man of mercy,” he announced smirking at Arya.

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Once the fires had nearly been burned out they were released to go back to town. Within their little group no one spoke. A few people had offered quiet thanks to Sansa as they passed but most people seemed almost frightened of her. Arya wasn’t sure if she was in awe or terrified of the power everyone now seemed to think her sister possessed. Sansa for her part held her head high but unless it was a trick of the light, Arya swore she could see the slightest glimmer of panic peeking through.

They parted ways at the butcher shop. Again no one spoke of what had just occurred, they simply exchanged goodbyes and parted ways.

The sisters rode home in silence. They went inside and Sansa excused herself upstairs. Jon came in from outside and looked at Arya. “She’s fine, she just went upstairs.”

“Are you sure she’s alright?”

“You should have seen her Jon, she commanded the major to do something and he did it. In front of the whole town, she told him to stop and he did,” Arya said with reverence. Jon felt a cold wave of dread wash over him. Ramsay Bolton was not the type of man to do such a thing, not unless it served
a much darker plan. No, no good was going to come from this.

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Sansa lay her head against the cool porcelain of the toilet. She had reached the point of dry heaving. She wasn’t sure how she had managed to hold it together until they reached home. She still had no idea how she had managed to raise her voice and yell out to the major either. It was almost as if she had been possessed, some other force working through her. But that was not the cause of her distress. No, the thing that terrified her most, the thing that was making her sick, was he had actually listened, and not only had he listened but he seemed happy to do so. She didn’t know what that meant but she did know it likely meant they were headed towards catastrophe.

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The next week when Sansa went to town she found people were looking at her differently yet again. She no longer saw the disdain and suspicion that had been there just a week ago. It seemed that those seven shouted words had turned her into a something of a hero. She was the woman who had stood up to the major, had made him see reason. She had their respect now it seemed, but it came with a price. Given the choice between harlot or deliverer she was not sure which she preferred.

A number of people approached her. Some offered her a simple thanks, but others inquired if she might be able to make requests on their behalf, to somehow help them or ease their suffering. She apologized profusely and did her best to gently explain she had no real power or pull, that it had been a onetime blessed incident. She could tell most of them did not believe her, but thankfully no one became angry and no one called her a liar.

Ramsay did not come around their meeting this time. She wondered if he was intentionally allowing her space, if he wanted to see how people reacted to her and how she would respond. When she made her way home she had come to the conclusion that this was what he had intended. He wanted people to think she had influence. He was setting her up for something, but for what or to what end she still was not sure.
Sansa had decided she was exhausted. The last weeks and months had been a relentless onslaught and she was unsure how much more she could take before she completely broke. She declared they would have a normal Christmas, well as normal of a one as possible under occupation anyways, but she intended to push the town and Ramsay to the edges of her mind, even if was just for one day. At night in bed she had begged God to give her this one thing, this one day.

And it seemed God had heard her pleas. Something had happened at the camp near the western end of the island, with the resistance network down no one knew what exactly had happened, but it didn’t matter. All that mattered was that Ramsay had gone west and would be there at least through Christmas. She and Arya considered it a Christmas miracle and it was the only present they wanted or needed.

In her excitement she had planned an exceptionally large meal by occupation standards. One of the hens had stopped laying recently and so decided that poor old Penny would serve as Christmas dinner. Sansa had been thankful Jon and Arya had handled the butchering, she doubted she could have actually killed Penny herself, even for Christmas dinner. The house had smelled amazing as she had roasted the chicken with root vegetables and herbs from their garden. For Sansa her favorite moment of the day had been when she and Arya had sat in the kitchen together, closed their eyes, and for a few minutes pretended they were back in London awaiting their family Christmas dinner. It was the happiest she had felt in months.

A couple days after Christmas Sansa was at sewing circle. Thankfully after her initial awkward return and her confrontation with everyone, the last couple of meetings had slipped back into their old comfortable pattern. Nearly all the suspect and distained looks had stopped and Sansa hoped it would hold.

“So sorry to intrude ladies,” Ramsay announced as he entered the room. Sansa saw Mrs Glover and Mrs Hornwood look at each other with an expression that showed they clearly didn’t believe his false pleasantries. He continued on, “I’ve come with terrible news. I’ve only just returned and yet I’ve been called away to Jersey on urgent business.” He waited for a response. Sansa almost had to suppress a laugh, this was far from terrible news, if he was looking for sympathy he had made a mistake in coming here. “As such I’ll be unable to attend the New Year’s Eve party that was being planned. Therefore, the party will be canceled.”

He again waited for them to react. A couple of the looked to Sansa, given recent events it had clearly become her job to be their spokesperson at least with matters concerning Ramsay.

“That’s a shame, but when duty calls…” she offered. All the women nodded in agreement and quietly echoed her sentiment. She did her best to quash the joy that was welling inside her. She had been dreading having to attend that party knowing he would demand she dance with him or god knows what else. She hoped he would depart soon, before the smile she was fighting broke across her face.

“Yes, well I have a gift for you all nonetheless,” he announced. There were numerous sharp inhales in that moment and a strong sense of discomfort settled in the room. Ramsay’s interpretation of a gift was rarely a good thing. He called out in German and a couple of men entered the room carrying a couple of crates with French lettering on it.
He surveyed them waiting on a respond, his eyes falling on Molly. “Of course all the food from the party will be used to feed my men, but I can’t have them drinking all this wine and champagne. I’ve been reminded more than once that when my soldiers are drunk they have a tendency to overreact to even the most trivial things, comic books for example…….”

Sansa felt Molly tense and hitch a breath behind her, so she reached back and took her hand and squeezed it. She kept her eyes on Ramsay, even now his cruelness still managed to shock and anger her. She set her jaw and he met her eyes for a brief moment before his lips twisted into a cruel sneer. He was clearly pleased his words had caused pain.

“I was going to smash it all, but then I thought Sansa’s closest friends deserved to celebrate.” No one breathed, everyone’s eyes fell on Sansa. Her entire body began to prick with fire from their gazes.

“To celebrate what exactly?” she asked softly, she could feel cold sweat pricking at her hairline and down her back.

“Why you making me see reason, for helping me show mercy,” he said smirking at her and then turned his attention back to the room. “So for one evening I will allow each of you to take home one bottle so you can ring in the New Year. I only have one condition, you all must make sure to toast to my health and the health of the Fatherland and the furher. Can you agree to that ladies?”

They all knew to refuse him would be foolish and punishment swift, so they all nodded in agreement, many of them keeping their eyes downcast. A couple women muttered thank you.

“Oh please ladies, you can do better than that. After all, I am breaking so many rules here.”

More thank yous were said, this time a bit louder but he still did not seemed pleased. He was playing games again, drinking in their discomfort. They had not asked for this and most wanted nothing from him, his continued presence and demands for gratuity had become arduous.

“Ms. Stark, can you remind me and everyone here who you’ll be offering your best wishes to tomorrow night.”

She had had enough of him and his attempts to use her. Maybe she had spent too much time with Arya or he had broken something in her that day in Lysa’s room but her sense of caution and reserve had been eroding since then. Though perhaps today had been the final straw for she had overheard some of his soldiers just before this meeting discussing her, pointing her out as the one that the major said moaned like a whore when he had taken her.

“We’ll all be drinking to the health of the king,” she said her eyes blazing.

“You’ll what?!?” he roared and marched towards her and roughly pulled her from her chair by her right arm. His fingers dug into her, her skin searing where he had contacted her but she found she did not fear him the way she should. For a moment she almost hoped that he’d strike her in front of all these women so that they could go home and tell their husbands, neighbors. For a moment she wanted to be the catalyst for something, for anything that might stop him. She wanted to be, what had Petyr called her mother once, yes, to be Joan of Arc.

But his iron grip and hot ragged breath on her neck and face suddenly snapped her back, she had pushed too hard, too far, this was not the way she would win this. A need for self-preservation flooded her senses. “Forgive me major, I meant no offense, I’m but a silly girl; my understanding of Germany and its politics are still not what they should be. Is Hitler not your king?” She lowered her eyes as if she were apologizing, but also to hide the small sense of satisfaction she felt in not giving him exactly what he wanted. If he wanted to give her influence then he should be prepared to have
her use it. She just prayed she had not overplayed her hand.

He took in the looks on the faces of the other women in the room and Sansa’s downturned face. He realized it would do little good for his plan to make her a martyr in this moment. He had to give it to her, she was getting smarter; he wondered if this was what respect might feel like. He released her and pulled himself back. He regained his composure and shook a finger at her instead. “I’m so disappointed Ms. Stark. No, he is not our king in the sense of the English king.”

“Well I’ll make more of an effort to learn then.” She knew better than to meet his eyes now.

Ramsay stared at her a moment longer and then turned to go. “Sewing’s over, make sure they each get a bottle on the way out,” he announced as he marched out.

Some of the tension followed him from the room. They silently gathered their things and took their bottles and left. Once out on the street she, Jeyne and Molly fell into step.

“I can’t believe he backed down from you like that,” Jeyne said in awe. Sansa said nothing, she knew she had gotten lucky.

Molly turned to her, her expression very concerned. “Sansa dear, I think you might be overestimating how much leeway he’s willing to give you. Why would you bait him so?”

Sansa swallowed and would not look at Molly, she knew she was right, she had been reckless. The other woman however seemed to take her silence as another act of defiance.

Molly grabbed her arm and turned her to stop her. Sansa forced herself to look at her. “You are playing a dangerous game with him, you should stop. I know he hurt you but…..” She seemed to take in Sansa’s look. “Well, I don’t want to see him do something worse,” she added.

Sansa nodded softly. They walked back to the grocery in silence. She chastised herself and reminded herself she needed to be more careful, Molly was right, if he got truly angry there would be no telling what he might do. And what if he came to her home again, what about Jon? She had far too much to lose to keep up this behavior. They reached the shops and bid each other goodbye and a happy New Year and Sansa rode back to the farm.

She used the ride home to reflect. She realized that she was challenging Ramsay because she had an overwhelming need to prove to him that he had not destroyed her, that he could not use her. She knew that what he ultimately wanted was to break her down so he could possess and control her. Since the day he had laid eyes on her she had felt his need and that was the knowledge she had used that day in the barn to save Arya. But now she wondered if she had not broken enough for him yet because it seemed his initial desire had twists into something new. It had become clear he wanted her for something else, and when he got that she wondered if he would then seek her decimation. For now the thing she had going for her was that he liked his games, he enjoyed the chase; she could tell it pleased him to toy with her. She just needed to make sure going forward to not overplay her hand or cause him to grow too angry or bored. Petyr’s words from the last time she had seen him now played in her mind. It made her shiver that she finally fully understood them and that she might understand Ramsay’s mind. And then she realized that she wanted nothing more than to push that knowledge from her mind in any way possible.
So the idea behind this chapter is that Sansa might have a bit of PTSD she needs to work through still
“Are you sure this is wise?” Jon asked again as Sansa pulled the cork from the bottle of wine.

“He’s gone and its New Year’s Eve Jon, for one night we are going to pretend there is no war, no Germans. We are going to relax, and I for one plan to toast the hell out of the end of this shit year,” Sansa countered.

She had made a decision the other night when she was almost home that for the last night of 1941 she was going to be free. It might just be for one night but she was taking it, it would belong to her. The war, Ramsay, responsibility, it would all still be there in 1942, so for the last night of 1941 it would wait.

Arya suppressed a laugh and her eyes were all alight. Sansa had not told them where the wine had come from, nor where the bottle of champagne she had been holding on to since last summer. But at dinner a couple of nights ago she declared New Year’s Eve was the night they would drink it all. Jon had brooded about it until this morning when it was confirmed that Ramsay had in fact left, Arya had made sure of it when she was in town earlier today. On a high note this terrible year was coming to an end, if that wasn’t a reason to celebrate she couldn’t think what else would be.

They had finished a late dinner and Sansa had insisted she would clean up. Jon and Arya had sat in the parlor playing cards while she finished up and then had fetched the alcohol and walked in the room and presented it. Arya had just laughed; Jon had been leery, but Sansa refused to be deterred.

She poured three glasses and told them they would save the champagne for midnight. Arya wound up the old victrola she and Jon had found last week in one of the trunks in the barn. The big band and swing music records they found with it were actually quite pleasing.

Sansa and Arya explained to Jon that New Year’s Eve was a Stark family tradition. In fact their annual party back in London was one of the social events of the season and a must for anyone with any social standing.

Arya drank her wine slowly, she didn’t love the taste but it felt special to be included in the drinking for once. She thought back to the last party in London, the start to 1939, when she had still been too young and Sansa and Myrcella had made sure to exclude her. Sansa and Myrcella for their part had decided they would flirt hopelessly with all of Robb’s mates from university and had convinced them to sneak them drinks. The boys had been more than happy to oblige them. That was also the year she had turned Sansa in to their parents for being drunk, a fact she was pretty sure Sansa still didn’t know that. Arya smirked now at the memory as she watched her sister dancing about the room. For everything horrible that the war had taken from them it had at least given her her sister.

“Why is no one else dancing?” Sansa demanded now pouring herself another glass of wine. She had been dancing around the parlor where they had pushed some of the furniture back to give her space to dance.

“Probably because none of us are any good,” Jon offered. He had finally surrendered and had drank half of the cup of wine.

“I’ll teach you then, stand up,” Sansa ordered.
“No, no way. There is not enough wine on this whole island for that.”

Arya changed out the record to something a bit slower. “Maybe try that,” she said and gave Sansa a slight smile. “I’m going to go check on something in the barn,” she added and slid from the room. Sansa shook her head, subtly was not something Arya did well.

“This is slower, I can easily teach you this. Come on,” she needled him.

Jon took a large swallow of his wine and saw the determined look on Sansa’s face. “Alright,” he relented and stood up. Sansa clapped and took his hands and positioned them on her waist and shoulder. She explained the steps to him and how to move his feet. She counted it out and urged him to move. She was smiling and so carefree it took Jon’s breath away, he realized that in his arms was the Sansa that had lived before the war. For the briefest of moments he visualized what their lives might have been if they had met another way, if there had been no war. He imagined himself dancing with her in London, meeting the other Starks, of building happy memories, being part of a family, of feeling loved and whole.

“Jon?” her soft voice cut into his vision.

He blinked and realized they were no longer dancing and she was looking at him with a questioning apprehension. “Are you alright?” she asked when he failed to answer her.

He smiled ever so softly to allay her concerns and she returned the gesture. He felt swept up in the moment, heat building slowly inside him, so he pulled her to him and leaned forward and kissed her. He hadn’t kissed her like this, passionate and hungry, since Ramsay had come to the farm. He wasn’t sure if it was the wine or the vision he had just had, but he felt so much in that moment and it seemed the only thing to do was to consume her a kiss. But given the way she was responding and kissing him back he wondered if the heat he had felt might just burst into a full scale fire.

He finally released her and drew back. Her face and neck were flushed and her lips swollen. Her eyes were still half closed and she had the most pleasant expression on her face. This was what she had wanted for some time now, for things to truly go back to how’d they’d been before Ramsay had ruined it all. She wanted to be with Jon, she wanted him to feel the same, to see her as a woman, not a girl he needed to protect and soothe.

“What was that about?” she whispered.

“You just looked like you needed a proper kiss I suppose.” She giggled and turned away and took a drink of her wine. He wanted to grab her again and kiss her but Arya came banging back in the house then, she seemed extra loud. Jon laughed knowing exactly why.

“Well everything is set in the barn,” she announced.

“What?” Sansa laughed twirling about.

He had nearly forgotten and now suddenly felt nervous. His idea no longer seemed like a good one. When he had discussed it with Arya he hadn’t realized Sansa would be in such an upbeat mood. “I have my own New Year’s tradition, I had wanted to share with you, but it seems like it might be a bit of a mood killer now……” Jon said weakly. “Maybe we should skip it this year, its cold out after all.”

“Actually once I had the fire going in there it wasn’t so bad,” Arya said trying to be helpful.

“You lite a fire in the barn?! Arya!” Sansa cried.
“It’s in a barrel, everything’s been cleared from around it. I’m not going to burn the barn down Sansa,” Arya replied rolling her eyes.

“Oh,” Sansa said and finished her wine. She was clearly tipsy now, but she seemed so carefree neither Jon nor Arya wanted to point it out. She filled everyone’s glass again and gave a pout when she found the bottle empty. She tramped into the kitchen and came back wearing her coat and holding the bottle of champagne. “Don’t look at me like that. We only have like thirty minutes till midnight,” she told them when they looked at her holding the bottle and her glass. “To the barn!” she shouted pointing with the bottle and then she and Arya ran out the door in a fit of giggles.

Jon shook his head and laughed. Why fight it, he thought. He fetched his coat, picked up his wine and followed the girls to the barn. He found them standing near the barrel he and Arya had rolled in earlier. A fire burned in the barrel and gave off a pleasant ring of heat.

“So what are we doing exactly?” Arya asked. Even though she had helped him set it up he hadn’t explained to her why they were doing this.

“Well, as I said I have my own tradition. I thought maybe I’d share it with you.” He suddenly felt self-conscious and took a long drink of wine. The girls sipped theirs as well and waited. “Well….. so in the orphanage one of the nuns had a tradition where you wrote down something you wanted to leave in the prior year and right before midnight you tossed them in a fire so they burn away before the new year.”

He felt like an idiot. When he had asked Arya to help him set it up this afternoon he had thought they might have liked it and he had been pleased to have something to share, but now he felt like he had brought the party to a screeching halt. The girls looked at him quietly. “It’s stupid, let’s forget it and go back inside.”

“Do we only get one thing? Because I have several,” Arya offered up. Sansa suddenly hiccupped and then laughed.

“Me too, starting with potato peel soup.” She made a face and Jon let out a sigh. He drank some more wine and moved closer. He pulled some sheets of paper and pencils from his pocket and passed them around. They joked about what they would write, reminiscing about some of the better points of the year. They each finished their wine and when Sansa announced they only had a couple more minutes they began to toss their papers in the fire. No one said it but they all knew there would be several slips bearing Ramsay’s name, and Petyr’s. They watched the slips burn and counted down to midnight.

They yelled happy New Year and hugged and Jon popped the champagne and poured them each a glass.

“To 1942,” Jon toasted.

“To the year the war ends,” Sansa added as they clinked their glasses. Arya laughed as the bubbles tickled her nose. They sat in silence for a while after that and watched the fire burn. Finally Arya yawned, the alcohol suddenly had made her feel tired.

“I think I’m off to bed,” she announced.

“Really?” Sansa said sounding disappointed. “I thought we’d stay up for London New Year, though we might be out of champagne by then…..”

“Have the rest of mine,” she poured the remainder of her glass into Sansa’s and smiled. “Happy New
Year Sansa.” Arya hugged her and smiled over her shoulder at Jon. She hugged him next and whispered in his ear, “I know you’ll take care of her.” Arya had always been their biggest champion; ever since the day she’d asked Jon if he loved Sansa she had wanted nothing more than to see them together. She knew he could give Sansa a reason to live and she secretly hoped he one day could be her brother by law. So with that thought she left them together in the barn, smiling as she went back in the house.

Jon and Sansa we now alone in the barn. They each sipped their champagne and then Sansa smiled brightly at him. “So here we are, where it all began,” Sansa said sweeping her hand through the air. Jon drank more champagne and watched her with amusement.

“Let’s go in the hayloft,” she said suddenly and chugged her champagne. “And bring the bottle.”

As he watched Sansa climb the ladder he realized the alcohol was clouding his judgment. Sober Jon would never let Drunk Sansa climb a ladder into a hayloft, Sober Jon won’t follow her up clutching a half full bottle of champagne.

They made it safely to the top, when he topped the ladder he found Sansa standing near the doorway looking out on the farm.

“Come look,” she whispered holding a hand out to him. “It’s so beautiful.” He crossed the loft and took her hand. They stood side by side and stared. It was breathtaking. There was a full moon tonight and everything was gilded in a shimmering blueish silver light. The air felt like it was charged with magic. Jon wondered if you squinted just right if you would see fairies. He said as much to Sansa and drew a melodic laugh from her.

“What do you believe in magic?” she asked him.

“Magic? That I don’t know, fate or luck maybe,” he answered suddenly serious.

“And which are we?” She had turned her body completely towards him.

Jon felt swept up in the moment, his blood hot from the wine; his head clouded by champagne. He was overwhelmed by the lemony scent of Sansa, of apples and hay. Standing there in the edge of the moonlight, it was all too perfect, like something you’d see in the cinema. He suddenly felt at war with himself. He told himself to resist, to be gentle with her, but then he saw the way she was looking at him, expectant, hungry.

He swept all common sense from his mind as she bit her lower lip and waited on him to answer. “Fate,” he whispered and pulled her to him and kissed her hard. He slid his tongue along her lips and she parted them to accept. He felt his blood turn to molten lava. Her hand wound into his hair. He spun them slowly so he could pin her between the wall and himself. He couldn’t believe he would ever want anything more than he wanted this, for a moment he felt frightened at how much he wanted this, and then he wondered if she wanted the same, but then he became aware of her mewing and sighing and it seemed to answer his question.

She started to pull at his coat, undoing the buttons and pushing at it. He released her just enough so she could push it off him. The cold air hit him but it only drove him to pull her tighter, to use her warmth to save himself. He reached down and lifted her legs up to encircle his waist. She wrapped her arms tighter around him and pushed her upper back into the wall. The angle of her body against him made him moan and he tipped her head back to lay kisses down her neck. She giggled as his beard tickled her.

He moved to adjust them and lost his footing, slipping he fell back and she landed on top of him in
the hay. Sansa started to laugh uncontrollably and she found herself hovering over him. “I seem to remember this differently,” she teased.

Jon tucked her to him and rolled them so he was now on top, his weight on his arms and his knees, their bodies not quite pressed together anymore. “Is that better?” he asked looking down at her.

“Only slightly,” she sighed and wrapped her arms around his neck. She seemed to be trying to pull him closer to her, she wanted to feel his weight, his heat. He stared down at her and let out a breath, she was so beautiful. Her eyes a bright blue, reflecting just a touch of the silver moonlight, her flame colored hair spread beneath her and tangled with the golden hay. She arched her back trying to draw him closer and let out a sound that was all too close to the whimpers she let out when she was having a nightmare, and those still came at least once a week. It suddenly made his heart hurt to look at her and he was instantly terrified. They were both drunk and after what had happened to her he had no right to put her in this position or take advantage of her state. And while she might outwardly appear strong he was not sure she had completely healed from her ordeal. She might think she wanted this now but would she want to go this far if she had a clear head? He suddenly felt ashamed of himself.

“What is it?” she asked cupping a hand to his cheek. He realized he might have been staring at her far too long.

He sat back on his heels, disappointment flashed across her face. He helped her sit up and then reached for his coat and tugged it back on.

“I think I am properly pissed,” he mumbled as the situated themselves shoulder to shoulder looking out the window again.

She turned her head towards him and regarded him, Jon met her gaze and saw something close off in her in that moment. She looked at her watch. “It’s officially new year’s in London. Happy 1942 Jon,” she told him softly, she sounded sad and disappointed. The boisterous dancing girl was gone.

“Happy New Year Sansa,” he replied and wrapped his arm around her. She leaned her head on to his shoulder and said nothing more.

They remained like that until the decided they were sober enough to safely climb down the ladder and went into the house. They went to the attic together and got changed for bed without a word. Jon climbed into bed and left the covers back to wait for her, but when she came out from behind the screen she merely mumbled a halfhearted goodnight and then slid into her own bed alone.

Chapter End Notes

Bittersweet chapter. I thought this might be a good place for it to hang for a few days though.

In editing the original draft I realized I needed a couple additional chapters to handle the updates I’ve been making as I publish, so now I need to weave those back in and update the scenes before and after before I get much further in posting.

Just posting this as a psa since I was rolling out a chapter or more a day and didn’t want to worry anyone! Resolution is coming, might be several chapters from now, but it’s coming.
They had yet to speak about what had happened in the hayloft that night. Days had passed and their silence on the matter had only seemed to feed the distance that had started to grow between them that night. They stuck to their routine, sleeping in the attic but in different beds again, circling each other in their daily task; the heat and excitement that had been there before had waned. They seemed to regard each other with regret but neither of them seemed to be able to put in to words why and as the days had passed it had just gotten harder and harder to bring it up.

Arya had asked him once or twice what had happened, why Sansa didn’t seem as happy as she was around the holidays, but he feigned ignorance. He was sure he knew but he figured they would discuss it when she brought it up, he had vowed he would let her lead things from here on out. He had felt ashamed at the way he had grabbed at her and pawed at her, even if she had seemed to enjoy it.

Sansa didn’t want to discuss it because she was not sure exactly how to put it into words. She felt frustrated and disappointed. It was as if she was failing to meet everyone’s expectations on how she was to act. Was she supposed to cower in fear and despair forever? Was she supposed to be over it? She had fancied herself a pragmatist, what had happened to her was terrible and traumatic, but this was war and she had made a choice, was she to mourn that forever? She hated the way Jon had looked at her in the loft that night, like he needed to protect her from her choices, from herself. It had been one of her greatest fears in the immediate aftermath and it seemed like it was now coming true.

Arya came back from town one evening excited and full of news. “They are saying the Allies attempted to raid Jersey. That’s why Major Bolton was summoned there. The rumor is there were even some German casualties. They are saying it might be severe enough that he’ll be transferred to take over there,” she shared.

“God help anyone on Jersey if that’s true,” Sansa said but she couldn’t hide the hope that was filling her eyes.

“You said it’s a rumor and you said attempted, so other than a few possible casualties it wasn’t much successful was it? Jersey’s not liberated. And it might not even be true. I doubt we are rid of him,” Jon asked. He was brooding again.

“Well, no, nothing’s been confirmed but the possibility……” Arya mumbled, the wind had been taken out of her sails.

“I don’t think you should be getting your or other people’s hopes up then. You shouldn’t be adding to the rumors,” Jon cautioned her.

For whatever reason Sansa had felt extra irritable with him today. “Must you do that? Always be the voice of reason?” she snapped. “Is there no reason to hope? To want something that brings you happiness?”

Jon looked at her and she flushed, clearly she was not talking about Arya’s news. “I’m going to go upstairs,” Arya announced.

“You don’t – “ Jon began.

“Oh yes I do. I don’t know what you did to each other but for all our sakes just have it out. I’d far prefer you go back to mooning over each than this,” Arya said and then walked from the room.
Jon and Sansa stared at each other for a long moment before he finally broke off his gaze. “For the record I never mooned over you,” Sansa huffed. Jon couldn’t help but give a small chuckle which only seemed to anger Sansa further.

“I owe you an apology,” he offered up before things could escalate further. His statement seemed to give her pause, she regarded him with interest waiting for him to go on. “I shouldn’t have grabbed you the way I did in the barn that night, I got caught up, the wine, the moon…..”

Sansa’s face fell and he realized he had said the wrong thing. “Did you ever consider for one moment that I wanted you to? That I was ok with it?” she asked him. He stood slightly stunned, blinking at her. “I’m not so fragile Jon, I know myself and I can make my own decisions. It’s sweet you want to protect me after everything, but you have to let me make my own choices.”

“I thought I might’ve pushed too hard, I didn’t want you to think I was trying to take something that I don’t have a right to.”

“As I said I’m not so fragile….. You know one of the hardest things about all this has been dealing with everyone else’s expectations and feelings. Yo –” she began.

“That why I stopped, I didn’t want you to think I expected,” he interrupted.

“That’s not what I mean.” He looked confused so she continued on. “At first everyone expected me to be shattered, or traumatized or…… I don’t know it just felt like everyone thought I might do what the Karstark girl did, but I refused to be like that and yet I’ve seen the looks, the ones that make me feel like that was wrong, like I’m in some sort of denial. But what if I were to act sad and destroyed? Won’t everyone just be telling me to move passed it, that I need to be strong? It’s like there’s no right way to act. I get it, it’s ugly and uncomfortable, and honestly I feel all those things. Some days I am sad, I feel broken and used, and some days I steel myself and refuse to let him win, and both are ok, everyone needs to learn to be ok with that. This happened to me, it didn’t happen to everyone else and yet everyone else seems to have an opinion about how I should process it, you included.”

“I’m sorry but that’s not entirely true.” Her eyes shot up to meet his, her surprise was clear. “Yes, the act did not happen to us, and you’re right you should get to process it however you see fit, but just because the physical harm didn’t come to us doesn’t mean nothing happened to Arya or I. We have our own guilt. We still get to have feelings about it, we still have to process it just like you.”

They stood silently after that absorbing each other’s words. They both knew the other had a valid point, but the question now was where did they go from here?

“So what now?” he asked finally.

“I’m not totally sure, but I think we figure it out together. It hasn’t been much fun to be cross with you these last several days and heaven knows Arya isn’t enjoying it.”

“I haven’t either. I’m sorry I hurt you; that I didn’t…” he was suddenly uncomfortable, how did one apologize for not continuing on with a drunken grope?

Sansa smiled at him and laughed bit, amused by his awkwardness. “No need, just maybe next time it’s ok to take my cues….. to follow my lead.”

Jon quirked an eyebrow and a smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. “So there’s still a chance of there being a next time? That is pleasant news.”

She laughed again and then crossed the room and let him fold her into his arms. She rested her head on his shoulder and looked up at him.
“You would be so lucky,” she sighed.

With Major Bolton gone the ladies decided to rebel the following week and held the sewing circle back at the Glovers. It had been amazing, finally free to talk as they pleased they had laughed and joked and celebrated. Some of them shared stories from New Year’s, of being tipsy on wine and dancing with their husbands. Sansa naturally didn’t share her story but she smiled and laughed and enjoyed everyone else’s. Sansa’s heart felt full of joy, for a while it felt as if things were finally going back to how they were before he had ruined it all. It gave her hope that one day it could always feel this way.

Eventually though, there was a brief discussion about if there truly had been a raid on Jersey. The consensus seemed to be that it had occurred, otherwise why would the Major have been there for weeks? But the fact that it had been unsuccessful was cause for some concern. If there were in fact dead Germans then there was a good chance the people there likely faced reprisals, and no one was better at reprisals than Major Bolton. When the talk had lingered on the subject too long Mrs. Glover had demanded that they stop the speculation and enjoy their time together.

Sansa arrived home to find Arya and Jon working the potato patch. They were nearing the end of their planting and Sansa had been concerned over how few plants they were going to be putting in this year. As rations on the island had continued to dwindle they had used more of the potatoes which left them with fewer to seed this year. If the war was to drag on yet another year she feared they might have nothing to plant, but she shook the thought from her head and tried to tell herself that would not be the case, didn’t the raid prove something? If their government was willing to spend resources on their tiny islands then maybe the war at large was turning.

Her thoughts turned to Robb suddenly. She wondered if he was still alive, he’d been in two full years now. She suddenly felt desperate for news from home and found herself wiping away tears, she went into the house then so that Jon and Arya would not see her distress.

She went about making dinner and was back in control of her emotions by the time Jon and Arya came in. She told them what she had heard in town.

“If Ramsay is in fact gone for good I wonder if they will try to arrange Jon’s evacuation again,” Arya wondered out loud. “I should probably inquire.”

Sansa suddenly lost her appetite. She and Jon exchanged a look and then he looked away. He felt ashamed. Since Sansa’s attack he had rarely thought of his men, his duty, he had been consumed by her, by his life as it now was. He had failed to honor his fallen brothers and he was failing even now. He should be focusing on returning to the cause and yet he felt like his heart was turning to lead at the thought of leaving this island, leaving Arya, that he thought of as a sister, of leaving Sansa who he knew he had fallen in love with. His months on the island had changed him, he had something to live for now and the thought of going off and putting himself in harm’s way again did not fulfill him, in fact it tore at him.

“Maybe you can ask what they know of the war first,” Sansa began, “I can’t help but wonder if this raid might be a sign things are turning, that maybe the end could be in sight?” She had a hopefully look on her face as she asked Arya. “And anyways there was no mention that the harbor patrol has been changed or moved, just Ramsay.”

Arya’s heart went out to her, ever since she had forced them to talk last week they were both so
much happier, their smiles and sweet glances returning. She knew when Jon left it would crush
Sansa, she just hoped it won’t destroy her completely. She decided she would change the topic to
something happier, to the plan she and Jon had discussed earlier.

“How would you feel about me staying in town Saturday night with Molly?”

“For what, the butcher’s closed on Sunday.”

“There is a birthday party for Hot Pie,” she started. Sansa raised an eyebrow in question. “He’s the
baker’s son. Anyways, it’s Saturday night and I’d like to go and it’d be nice not to have to leave
early to get home by curfew.” She kept her face neutral, while it was partially the truth, she didn’t
want to give away that she and Jon had planned this, she prayed Sansa would agree.

“I suppose as long as Molly is ok with it, then yes. So you have a friend named Hot Pie?”

“It’s just a nickname, and I’ll confirm with Molly tomorrow, thank you.” Arya broke out in a
genuine smile then but kept her eyes off Jon, less Sansa figure out their conspiracy. She hoped her
sister would enjoy the surprise.
Jon tried not to consider it a stroke of luck, but in a way it was for him. One of women in Sansa’s sewing circle, Mrs. Upcliff, had fallen ill; it appeared not to be too serious but Sansa wanted to help, so on Saturday she had made a large pot of soup to take over for her and her children. That had allowed Jon and Arya time to set up the house to surprise Sansa. Late in the afternoon when they had finished Arya had left for town.

Jon had worked on looking his best, he had searched around in the remaining men’s clothes in the back of Lysa’s closet and had picked out the nicest pants and button down shirt available. He had trimmed his beard and smoothed his curls back into a high knot. He really needed a haircut but both Sansa and Arya had been too nervous to make any attempt on his curly locks, so he had just let them continue to grow.

He went downstairs and checked on the stew he was making, he had been happy to have caught a rabbit in the snares last night since the traps seemed to be becoming less and less effective in recent weeks. He felt quite accomplished by the pleasant smell that was wafting through the house. Arya had helped him get Lysa’s wedding china from a trunk in the barn and set the table in the refined London manner he knew Sansa would like. He turned on the victrola and let soft music play through the house and with nothing else to do he just paced nervously waiting on her to return.

She finally returned as twilight began to creep across the sky. He was in the kitchen but he heard her on the porch and hurried out to meet her.

“Jon, I’m home,” she called as he entered the parlor the same time she did. She turned to take off her coat and then turned back to him. Her cheeks were pink from the cold outside, a few wisps of her fiery hair slipping from her braid, she looked radiant. She looked at him and saw the way he was dressed and smiled at him. “What’s going on?” she asked. “Did you make dinner? It smells delightful in here.”

“Aye, please take a seat in here, I’m almost finished. I’m sorry I don’t have anything to offer you to drink other than water……”

“Water would be lovely, thank you. But really what is all this about?”

“Well, I thought it might be nice if we had a proper date, well at least as proper as can be since I can’t leave the property.” He looked a bit nervous and it made her smile.

“Well you should probably ask me then.” Jon looked confused. “On the date,” she added.

“Oh, yes! Sansa, would you do me the honor of your company and allow me to take, well make, you dinner?”

“I accept.”

He gave her a wide smile, it was her favorite one because brightened his face and showed his teeth, and then he fetched her a glass of water and brought it back to her. She had taken a seat in one of the high back chairs and was listening to the music, faintly humming along. He wished he could’ve just joined her but he needed to finish dinner.
He went back into the kitchen and prepared the simple salad from the vegetables he and Arya had plucked from the garden earlier. He brought the salads out to the table and then made up two bowls of stew in the kitchen so they could cool a bit before they were served. It wasn’t elegant but there were three courses, Arya having managed to procure him a small cinnamon cake from the baker, and honestly it was the best he could do.

He went back into the parlor to fetch Sansa, coming alongside her chair and offering his arm. “Dinner is served my lady,” he said. Sansa giggled and took his arm and let him lead her into the dining room. He had turned the lights off and had lit candles in several places in the room. It was lovely. Sansa let out a small gasp of delight and turned to him with a bright smile.

“It’s beautiful. It’s very sweet you went through all this trouble.”

“It was no trouble, not for you.”

He pulled out her chair and she sat down and admired the way he has set a proper table. They sat on opposite ends and ate their salads and she told him of her trip over to the Upcliffs. He cleared the salad plates and brought out the stew. It was very flavorful and perfect for a winter night. Sansa showered him with praise. He smiled and told her about how he and Sam had barely known how to cook when they had set out on their own and they had learned by trial and error, though he spared her the details of how one of the first meals Sam had cook had almost lead to their deaths by food poisoning and how they had to fight over the lou for nearly two days after.

Sansa shared that they had employed a cook in London and she hadn’t really learned to cook until she had come here and her aunt had taught her. For all of Lysa’s failings she had been an exceptional cook.

“I have one more surprise,” he told her as they finished and he moved to clear their bowls.

“This has already been so wonderful,” she sighed. He disappeared into the kitchen and returned with the cinnamon cake on a delicate plate.

“Arya told me lemon is your favorite, but well, they are in short supply these days,” he apologized.

“No, this is perfect, thank you,” she beamed at him. He drew his chair near and they shared the cake off the same plate.

“Everything was wonderful, thank you. It was a perfect date,” she sighed sitting back as they finished.

“Well it doesn’t have to be over just yet,” he told her. “Are you up for a bit of dancing?”

She gave a small smile, her eyes lighting up and nodded. They went into the parlor and he put on the song they had danced to on New Year’s Eve and took her in his arms and they danced the dance she had taught him. She was pleased to find he actually recalled most of the steps. They repeated it one more time and when the song again finished he kissed her, soft and sweet, holding her close.

“I think this might be the best date I’ve ever been on,” she sighed. For a moment Jon wondered if she had been on many other dates or if she was just being kind, but he knew better than to ask.

“Mine too,” he answered.

“Though I suppose it might be a bit anti-climactic.”

Jon pulled back and looked at her questioningly.
“I just meant you already know you are going to end up in bed with me,” she teased and then turned bright red. Jon’s eyes grew wide and he bit his lips. He knew she likely just meant to sleep, since recently they had gone back to sleeping in the same bed, but for the briefest moment his mind wondered what it would feel like to have her in that bed with nothing on, to feel her warm soft skin against his. He felt his blood rush lower. He shifted his hips back slightly and prayed she won’t notice.

He tucked a bit of hair behind her ear and kissed her forehead. “I won’t want to presume,” he whispered.

“Go blow out the candles and come to bed Jon,” she whispered back. She was looking intently into his eyes. He saw want there and she seemed sure and determined. It made his breath hitch. He nodded and released her so he could go into the dining room and extinguish the flames. He heard Sansa going up the stairs and he had to control his breathing. She seemed decided and he did want her so, he reminded himself he should be ok with this if this is what she wanted. He blew out the last candle and headed up to the attic.

He found Sansa standing at the far end of the room near the window looking to the east. There was barely any light outside, the sky was an inky deep blue. She had drawn all the other curtains and turned on the nightstand light. She had let her hair out of its braid and it spilled around her, he realized how much it had grown since she had cut it that day in the kitchen. She was more beautiful than he deserved.

He entered the room all the way and closed the door and she glanced at him with a shy smile and looked flushed. She closed the final curtain and turned to him. “This isn’t as easy without all the wine,” she joked.

“Hush Jon, I do want this.” She crossed the room to him and wrapped herself in his arms and inhaled the scent of him. She placed the softest kiss on his lips and he could sense her smiling. And with that the dam in him broke and he pulled her to him hard and increased the intensity of their kiss. She inhaled sharply and wound her hands into his hair, pulling it loose. He did the same and tugged her hair gently so her neck was exposed to him and he kissed down the column of her neck.

He captured her lips again and she reached for the buttons on his shirt and began to undo them. She placed slow kisses on his chest as she went. When she reached the plain of his stomach it had made Jon shiver. He pulled her back up so he could kiss her again and she pushed his shirt off. He was magnificent, his shoulders, his arms, his chest, save for some small scars from the shrapnel of the plane crash, were smooth and perfectly sculpted.

Now it was his turn. He untucked her blouse and undid the buttons, kissing his way down between the valley of her breasts. Her blouse hit the floor and then she reached back and undid her skirt, letting it fall away as well. She stood before him exposed and vulnerable; he’d never seen anything more exquisite. Her hands moved to his pants and then they stood facing each other only in their under clothes.

Any shyness she had initially felt had disappeared with his kisses, so Sansa took his hand and lead him to the bed. She sat down and looked up at him. He leaned forward and kissed her and the crawled forward until they were laying down. He kept his weight on his arms but the feel of this much contact between their bodies was delicious.

His hardness was rubbing against her and was driving her wild, she ached to feel him inside her. He could feel the heat coming off her and it spurred him on. He rolled her on top of him and reached
around to remove her bra. He moved his hands to cover her breasts and Sansa let out a soft moan, it was music to his ears.

She basked in the waves of pleasure that Jon’s touch was giving her, it made her crave his hands in other places. The thought made her blush. They rolled over again and Jon pulled back from her. He ran his hands down her sides till they rested on her hips. He looked up at her and she bit her lip and nodded and he slid her panties off. He kissed her right ankle, then her left and smiled at her. His eyes were dark, want flooding out the gray. She flicked her gaze down on him and the last piece of clothing that separated them. He took her hint and dropped his shorts. She suddenly felt exposed now that there was no barrier between them but then she noticed again how Jon was devouring her with his eyes and the thought melted away.

Jon could take no more so he crawled towards her, placing himself between her parted thighs and pinning her back to the bed and caught her in a long kiss. She could feel him rubbing against her, begging entry. He pushed back slightly, placed a hand on her cheek and took a deep breath and waited. She nodded and pushed her hips into him letting him know it was ok, that she was ready. He lowered himself down and guided himself inside her slowly and gently. She bit softly into his shoulder until he filled her. It was like he was giving her a piece of herself back. Being joined with him like this, it made her feel whole and safe for the first time in months, it was better than anything she’d ever hoped for.

She began to roll her hips, signaling him to move within her. He began to move, slowly at first, to let them both adjust to the sensation. Sansa had her head tossed back, her red hair splayed over the pillows, a river of molten lava to match the fire Jon felt in his blood as he surged against her. Jon initially had feared he might hurt her but she was letting out the loveliest little moans and it spurred him on, making him quickening his pace. He reached down and threaded his arm under her left knee, pulling her leg up, pulling her tighter against him to enhance the angle. She was gripping his back, nails delightfully digging into his shoulders. It made Jon moan her name into her mouth.

He could feel her growing tighter, hotter and wetter in her core. He picked up the pace again, the increased friction driving Sansa to the brink. Her hand had found its way into his hair and was gripping tightly. She was coiling tighter and tighter, fire pooling in her abdomen begging to be released. He moved her leg slightly higher and thrust upward and suddenly she came apart beneath him. His name spilled from her lips in fervent prayer as he felt her flutter around him. He released her leg then and nearly collapsed on to her.

“Fuck,” he breathed into her neck slowing for a moment as the sensation overwhelmed him.

She bucked into him, calling him back to the moment and he picked up the pace once more. He was so close, he knew he should withdraw, but then she wrapped her legs around his waist binding him to her; he cupped her chin and made her look at him.

“Sansa,” he breathed. He wanted to tell her she should release him but he couldn’t get the words out and he couldn’t stop himself from moving within her, from barreling towards his release.

“I love you Jon,” she breathed, and that was his undoing. He meant to say it her loved her as well but as soon as the words had left her mouth they stole his breath; he collapsed on her again and felt himself spilling inside her. He lingered for a moment and she relished the feel of his weight pressing her into the bed. He kissed her a final time as he withdrew. He rolled to her side breathing heavily and pulled her to him, thankful she did not cringe at the sheen of sweat that now covered him.

“I love you too,” he finally sighed kissing the crown of her head. “Sorry I couldn’t get the words out till now,” he added with the softest chuckle.
She laid her head on his chest as he stroked her back mindlessly. She let out a satisfied sigh, “Yes well, to confirm, this was by far my best date ever.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew, ok so anxiety in publishing this one, its actually harder than the violence imo. I hope it was worth the wait!

I struggled with this because I wanted it to envoke the feels but I didn’t want to get too smutty since that did not fit with the tone of the story. Hopefully I found the right balance.

Anyhow three chapters of relative calm, which of course means..... well prepare for darkness to descend soon, sorry :-/
It seemed that God had decided to briefly smile on the Tully farm, but it appeared he was doing so at the expense of everyone else on the island. A week later the island began seeing a large influx of detainees. The rumor was they were not sending any to Jersey at the moment, instead diverting them to the camps on Oaksheild and Guernsey. But this wave seemed more sickly and malnourished than the last and it made everyone extremely nervous.

It didn’t take long for the wave of diphtheria to begin. The acting island commander banned all public gatherings in an attempt to stop the spread. Sansa and Arya decided it was best to steer clear of town. Everyone knew that the disease was spreading and the antitoxin needed to fight it was in dangerously low supply. If something wasn’t done soon the death toll would begin to climb.

After nearly two weeks Arya had developed cabin fever. She hated being cut off from town and though it had initially made her happy, Jon and Sansa’s puppy dog eyes and hand holding had started to grate on her nerves. So when she entered the barn one morning and found the fox cornering one of the hens she never thought she could be so happy. She had not seen him since autumn and had assumed he had been killed or captured by someone else.

The fox for his part seemed just as startled to see her and after a moment decided the hen was not worth his life and bounded from the barn. Arya gave chase to the edge of the woods but since she did not have on her boots she decided it was best to let him go for today.

She trekked back up to the barn and was surprised to find a horse tied into one of the stalls. She vaguely recognized the horse and so it did not cause her alarm. Confused she headed into the house. “Sansa! There’s a horse in the barn,” she called as she came in through the back door.

“We are in the parlor,” Sansa called out.

Arya entered the room and was greeted by the sight of the doctor, she now knew why she recognized the horse. He looked exhausted and desperate. Arya wondered if he was possibly here for Jon or if someone they cared about might have died.

“What’s going on?” Arya asked. “What have I missed?”

“Doctor Seaworth was just about to tell us why he came all the way out here,” Jon said with apprehension.

“There are several reasons I have come,” the doctor began. His hesitation was evident. Arya took the seat next to Sansa. Jon was pacing near the front windows.

“Has someone died?” Arya asked unable to wait.

The doctor shook his head slightly, “Not yet, I’m trying to prevent that.”

“Ramsay’s returned,” Sansa ventured. “He’s not being reassigned.”

“Aye, that’s part of it,” the doctor confirmed. “He returned three days ago….. but that’s not all, he’s not the true reason I came.”

“Can you please just get on with it,” Jon requested, he had become agitated.

“Right,” the doctor sighed. He looked apologetic now in addition to exhausted. “I know you are
aware of the diphtheria outbreak and that we were dangerously low on medication.” Everyone nodded. “Well before the major returned I was able to get a request through to the Red Cross. They arranged an air drop of medicine and supplies. The drop was two days ago. The Germans intercepted it. The major is holding it out at the Umber estate.”

“Not that he cares but that’s a direct violation of the Hague Convention,” Jon mumbled to no one in particular.

“That’s terrible but I’m not sure what brought you here then,” Sansa said.

“Well…. The doctor began.

“You want me to lead a raid to get the medicine,” Jon interjected.

Tension filled the room and the offer was considered. “It was discussed actually, but we decided against it,” the doctor finally answered.

“You need to reconsider. I can do it. I just need to know what our capabilities are. How many men, weapons. Some intelligence on the location.”

“That’s exactly why we decided against it. We have no weapons and outside of yourself no one with any recent military training. And even if we did have the weapons and the men, well the major has decided it’s his prize possession, he won’t surrender it easily. It would be a suicide mission, and not just for the men involved.”

“Then I can do it alone, get what you need and get out. You said yourself I have the training.” He could feel Sansa’s eyes on him, he could tell she was growing angry with his insistence on the matter.

“I appreciate the spirit, but it’d be a fool’s errand. One man won’t be able to get everything we needed and it would be noticed. Anyways the reason I have come here is because the major has offered a…. an alternate solution.”

Jon knew what he was about to ask. If the doctor was not here for him then he was here for the Starks, likely Sansa. Jon would rather die than see them hurt.

“No,” he declared before the doctor could even state what it was Ramsay wanted. He knew it would likely be grotesque, he had no desire to hear it.

“Commander, I think you should let her at least hear it and decide.”

“What does he want from me?” Sansa asked before Jon could interject again.

“He told me, well he’s told most of the town actually, that if you, you and no one else, will come appeal to him personally he will consider releasing the supplies.”

“Absolutely not,” Jon said at the same time Arya cried, “He can’t ask that.”

Sansa blocked both of them from her view and focused solely on the doctor. “How serious is the spread? How many people?”

“Don’t answer that,” Jon ordered moving towards the doctor.

“Jon! Let him answer!” Sansa commanded. Jon fell back and looked to Arya for help. Arya shook her head, she knew her sister and when Sansa decided something there would be no deterring her.
“I have 30 confirmed cases, half of them are children. Many of them will likely die within the next week if we do nothing.”

“How long do I have to decide?”

“He would like you to come by dinner tonight. You should know it brings me only pain to ask this of you and I understand if you wish to refuse. But we have no other options at this point. People are dying and will continue to die. I don’t know if you meant to but you have become….. people look to you to help. If there is anything you can do I am begging you to. The town is begging you.”

“She’ll have to think about it,” Arya said. She felt angry, everyone knew what Sansa had been through, how could they ask this of her.

Sansa took Arya’s hand and looked at her. Arya knew Sansa had already made her choice, her eyes had the same set that she had seen that day in the barn. Arya closed her eyes and swallowed and looked away.

“He said I just need to come and appeal, that’s it?”

“You know that is not all he is asking for!” Jon cried. “You can’t do this!”

“People are dying. People I care about, people that have been good and kind to me and Arya, to our family. You know I can’t just ignore their suffering, their dying. If you love me as much as you say then you won’t ask me to. You have to let me make this choice.”

Jon looked at her, his eyes full of sorrow and pain. He knew he couldn’t command her to do anything, he couldn’t lock her in the attic, but he couldn’t just let her go through that again. Not this time, not when he would know it was happening.

Arya stood up and left the house. It was all become too much for her. “Should I go talk to her?” Jon asked as they watched her walk across the yard towards the barn.

“Let her be for now,” Sansa answered and then they all sat in a heavy silence. The tension in the room was palpable. Jon wasn’t sure how much longer he could remain there, especially since he knew she had made up her mind and there was no changing it. She was too sweet, too kind, too selfless for her own good. He was going to have to do something drastic if he wanted to protect her.

“I need some air,” he said finally and banged out the front door. He headed to the barn and went into the stalls searching.

“Save your time, I hid it,” Arya called down to him from the hayloft.

“Tell me where it is.”

“Why? So you can charge off in in the middle of the day, in broad daylight to the Umber estate with a single pistol? Do you think you’ll actually make it there?”

“I can blend in.”

Arya laughed but it held no joy. “It’s a small town Jon, the Nazis know the name and face of nearly every person in it. They’ve been here studying us for almost two years. And even if they somehow miss you, well the collaborators won’t, they’ll turn you in for an extra loaf of bread before you even make it down Main Street.”

“What would you have me do then?”
“Well you can’t do what he would want you to do.”

“He doesn’t even know about me.”

“I think he knows a lot more than we think he knows.”

Jon was knocked off kilter by that. “Why – what makes you think that?”

“He said something when he was here……. Nothing directly, I don’t know, it’s just a feeling. Anyways, it would be like him to know and wait, to toy with us.”

“I can’t just let her go to him.”

“She’s the best hope for everyone to survive this.”

“How can you be alright with this?”

“I’m not alright with it, far from it. But I trust Sansa, and if she says she can do this then she can. Every other option leaves a trail of dead bodies. He won’t kill her, I’ve seen the way he looks at her. He won’t kill her; that would end all his fun. I think Sansa knows that too.”

Jon was at a loss for words. Arya’s assessment was cold and detached. What had happened to the girl that had hidden him in the hayloft all those months ago? The girl that early days had trailed him and had been embarrassed when she had accidentally called him Robb.

“Even if that is true, some thing’s are worse than dying.” He shook his head and left the barn.

“And she already survived them,” Arya called after him. “We need to trust her!”

The doctor was still sitting in the parlor when he returned but Sansa was gone. The doctor saw his alarm. “She went upstairs for a bit,” he told Jon.

Jon wanted to shout at him to leave, to never return, but he held back and marched up the stairs. He banged into their room and slammed the door. Sansa had been sitting in front of the mirror fixing her hair and she jumped.

“What if I tell you I won’t allow it?”

“Please don’t.”

Jon stared at her hard. He wanted her to crumble under his gaze, to relent, to promise she won’t do this.

“This is what it’s all been building to. I see that now,” she said calmly.

“I think you have lost your mind. I love you but you are being naïve.”

“Perhaps, but I think he’ll listen to me. He did once before and for some reason he wants the people here to think I can influence him. That will keep me safe, he didn’t put all this time into me just to murder me at the Umber’s over dinner with no witnesses. It’d do him no good.”

Jon just stared at her, mouth open shaking his head. She was mad, there clearly would be no reasoning with her. He collapsed into the chair and buried his face in his hands. He wished he’d never come here, he wished he drown in the ocean. At least that would’ve been swift and far preferable to letting her go off like this and shattering his soul into a million pieces.
Sansa knelt in front of him and removed his hands from his face and held them tight. “I love you and I will come back to you.” Jon eyed her wearily, he felt worthless, what kind of man was he to allow this? Sansa however took something different from his expression. “That is if you’ll still want me.”

Her words snapped him from his daze. “I’ll always want you. It’s killing me I can’t protect you from this. I wonder why you would want me, I’m fucking useless.”

“That’s not true. If I thought it would work I would let you charge in there, guns blazing. It means so much to me that you want to, that you would try to, but it’s just not going to work. This at least gives us a chance. You said it yourself once, I stared down a monster and survived, I can do it again. I can survive this as long as I have you and Arya.”

“God save me,” Jon whispered and fell on his knees before her, burying his face into her shoulder. He refused to cry even though he could feel the tears threatening to form. He was going to have to let her do this. She was convinced she could survived it, but could he?
She had left with Doctor Seaworth late in the afternoon. He would deliver her to Ramsay. He had apologized to her profusely as they set out. She had let him say his piece and then told him it was not his apology to make. After that they had rode in silence.

She missed the feel of Jon’s knife in her boot. She knew she was safer not having it this time, Ramsay would undoubtedly be displeased if he discovered it, and anyways she doubted she would’ve been able to use it on him if faced with the choice. She was not inclined to delude herself into thinking she’d be able to successfully slit the major’s throat in his stronghold and make it out alive, despite Arya’s encouragement. Additionally, she had sworn to them both she would return, and so she had left the knife sitting on the nightstand and hoped she’d chosen wisely.

They arrived at the Umber Estate just before dinner time, the threat of rain loomed large and dark in the sky; the clouds had been building in on their trip over. The doctor let her off at the bottom of the wide stone staircase and apologized once more, then he thanked her and watched her go inside.

She wasn’t sure if it spoke more to her predictability or his arrogance, but it quickly became apparent that she was expected. The sentry took her from the front door through the house to the dining room. Ramsay sat at the head of a long banquet table, a place was set to his right. It appeared it would be just the two of them for dinner.

“Saint Sansa,” he greeted her almost warmly and rose from the table. She felt a look of confusion pass over her face. “You weren’t aware they call you that?”

“I’m not a saint.”

“Perhaps not yet, but I am slowly getting you there.”

“Who exactly calls me that?” She was genuinely curious.

“The townspeople of course. You are their savior from me after all.” He smiled at that. “Please come in, take a seat. Dinner is just about ready.”

“I don’t think I’m very hungry. I rather just ask you for the –,”

“I don’t want to discuss that now. I want you to have dinner with me, then we will discuss our business.” His tone offered no negotiation. She swallowed, she knew she had to be extra careful tonight, she was in his home after all, far away from anyone that might help her.

“As you wish. Is there a place I can wash up then?”

“Down the hall to the left.”
She left the room and found the washroom. She splashed a bit of cold water on her face and pressed the towel to her cheeks. She set it aside and placed her hands on the sink and looked at herself in the mirror.

“You can do this. It’s going to be alright.”

Her mind flashed to one of her last memories of Robb. He had been home on furlough after basic training and they were walking around the garden. He had been telling her about hell week, it had sounded terrible and she had asked him how he had managed it. He had responded that he had to keep telling himself, ‘If I can take it, I can make it.’ She repeated those words to herself now.

She took one more deep breath and went back into the hall.

“Sansa?” She turned to see Mrs Terrick standing in the hall. She had nearly forgotten that she worked as one of the cooks here. She knew she was ashamed of it and so it was rarely spoken about at group, but she had taken the job in order to feed her children and Sansa saw no shame in that. “I knew you would come. Bless you sweet girl,” she said as took Sansa’s hand.

“How are the boys?” Sansa asked.

“Georgie’s taken ill,” she answered her voice hitching.

“That’s terrible.”

“He’ll be ok now that you are here. You’ll be able to save him,” the woman said fighting back tears. “Thank you Sansa. Everyone thanks you.” The gratitude made her feel uncomfortable, she hadn’t done anything yet and there was no guarantee she would succeed.

“I should get back,” Sansa said quietly.

“Of course,” Mrs. Terrick said releasing her hand. “Please tell the major I’ll be in with the first course in just a moment.”

Sansa went back to the dining room and Ramsay rose again as she entered. He gestured for her to take the chair adjacent to him. She crossed the room and he pulled out the chair and pushed it under her as she sat and then took his own seat.

“I happened on Mrs Terrick on my way back, she said she would be in with the first course in moments.”

“Good.” He was studying her, pinning her with his gaze. She looked away from him and took in the artwork on the walls. It seemed the Umbers liked to dine under pictures of their forefathers long deceased. Their stares almost made her as uncomfortable as Ramsay’s.

Mrs. Terrick entered and placed a steaming bowl of soup in front of each of them and left the room without a word. Even though it smelled delicious Sansa couldn’t imagine trying to force the whole thing down.

“I’d really like to discuss the Red Cross supplies.”

“I told you, business is for after. What else would you like to discuss?”

She had no answer, she didn’t want to discuss anything with him other than why she was here but it appeared that would not be an option. She had to think of something quickly because she could see his annoyance growing with her silence.
“Tell me about Germany. I’ve never been but I’ve heard it’s very beautiful.”

His eyes lit up, it appeared her request has pleased him. He began to regale her with stories of the superiority of Germany. Its people, food, culture, everything there was better he assured her. She forced herself to swallow a few spoonfuls of soup as he spoke. She felt no satisfaction from it, it felt as if she was swallowing acid.

“I think you will like it there. Once the war is over and we leave this putrid shithole you’ll see what I speak of.”

She nearly choked over his words, she swallowed quickly and her eyes watered a bit as she forced herself not to cough. The soup became a lead weight in her stomach. He was watching her very closely, the corner of his eyes crinkling and his lips twitching slightly as he suppressed a wicked grin. She said nothing and took a long drink of water.

Thankfully Mrs Terrick entered then with the main course. It was a hearty portion of steak and potatoes topped with a béarnaise sauce. Under different circumstances Sansa would have relished such a rich meal. Tonight however it simply tasted like ash in her mouth as she choked it down.

Ramsay continued to carry on the conversation. Enthusiastically spouting Nazi ideology to her, why it was better for everyone for Germany to rule the world. She ate quietly willing his words to slide from her mind.

Finally dessert arrived, sticky toffee pudding. She hated sticky toffee pudding, but she choked this down as well while answering his questions about her life in London. She didn’t want to share that with him and so she kept her answers as superficial and vague as he would allow.

Mrs Terrick came and cleared the dishes and he stood and offered her arm. “Shall we retire to my study to discuss our business?”

Sansa steeled herself and closed her eyes for the briefest moment. ‘If you can take it, you can make it,’ she heard Robb in her mind. She nodded and took his arm and let him lead her to the study.

It was a large dark paneled room with numerous exotic animal heads and more portraits of long ago Umbers on the walls. A fire was burning in the fire place and he released her to go stoke it. She stood looking out beyond the large desk that was centered along the wall of windows that faced east and could see it was raining now. Recalling something her old nanny use to say to say about the rain she thought, ‘How appropriate that even the angels were crying for me tonight.’

“Is he out there?” Ramsay asked from behind her. She had not heard him come back to her and she flinched.

“Who?”

“Why your true knight of course. The handsome gallant man that would rescue you from the beast.”

She thanked god he was behind her in that moment and that he could not see the expression she was sure was on her face. Her heart all but stopped beating. Was he playing at her or did he know about Jon? She forced herself to keep herself steady, her voice calm.

“I was just looking at the rain. I don’t much believe in fairy tales anymore.”

“I would imagine not after all you have seen in your time here.” He waited a few more moments before speaking again. “Come sit by the fire. Would you like some brandy? Sherry?”
“No, thank you.”

He poured her a glass of sherry anyways and a brandy for himself and they sat in the pair of chairs that faced the fire. He watched her over the top of his glass as he took a drink and waited for her to speak.

“I am here on behalf of the town, I came as you requested,” she said without pretense, “I would like you to release the Red Cross supplies to the doctor.”

“Is that so?”

He was studying her, she could see him weighing something in his mind as this went on. She remained quiet and held his gaze, she did not want to give him the satisfaction of knowing how afraid she was in this moment.

“I’ve long thought that Baelish greatly underestimated you and your value.”

This caught her off guard and a look of genuine surprise crossed her face. Ramsay smiled at her reaction, clearly amused he was throwing her off balance.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean by that,” she ventured. This was clearly something he wanted to discuss, she thought it best to indulge him. If nothing else it might at least delay the inevitable.

“When I first arrived here you were one of the first things he offered me.” Sansa shuttered, of course he would have. She had long held Petyr in the lowest regard but this actually made her hate him. Ramsay took in her reaction and continued, “In his defense I had asked about the availability of whores on the island. He told me he had no whores, but he did advise he had a pretty “niece” from London that I might find worth my attention.” Sansa felt sickened by his words. Ramsay read her expression. “He wasn’t offering you as a whore exactly,” he corrected, “he made it clear you were quite refined in fact, a prize possession. To Baelish it was as if I had asked simply for meat but he advised I should request something more appropriate to my position, so he was offering me prime rib.” Did he honestly think comparing her to a cut of meat would somehow make this better? But then clearly he did not seem to be concerned if she was offended.

“I knew what he was doing, he wanted me to be pleased with him, to see him as an ally, perhaps even owe him a favor. Honestly I thought you’d be fat and ugly, but then I saw you in town. Imagine my surprise that you are actually as beautiful as he claimed, he did get some credit for that. Imagine my surprise that you are actually as beautiful as he claimed, he did get some credit for that.

After the dance I thought you might be an amusing distraction, something to play with, I am a man after all. I thought it could be fun, at least until you bored me. But then that day at the harbor, when you refused my gift, I saw the way the people regarded you, watched you. You were concerned with their thoughts of you but you didn’t seem to fear me. I was intrigued, I almost admired you. I knew then there was much more to you then just beauty, something that might be very useful to me and my rule here.”

“Why are you telling me all this?”

“I want you to understand how I feel, and that there are things I’m willing to offer you as a result.” His words hung in the air, his eyes and jaw had softened; if she didn’t know what a monster he could be she would almost think he was trying to be vulnerable. This was a side of him she had never seen and it was unsettling. Sansa took a drink of the sherry hoping it might calm her nerves.

“I think you have a good heart, you don’t like to see people suffer, not if you can help it. The people here see that, they respect you for it,” he continued on, “They look to you to save them. Isn’t that
why you’re here now?” She knew not to delude herself into thinking his words were a compliment, there was a warning buried in there somewhere. She said nothing and took another sip of the sherry.

“I’m here because you demanded it.”

“Did I?”

He was starting to make her doubt herself, she couldn’t allow him that privilege. “I’m not so special,” she said at last. “As you said, I don’t like to see other people suffer. I think it’s a terrible to see someone suffer and realize you have no power to help them.”

“You don’t think you have any power?”

“I don’t have any.”

“Did you not save that Donniger boy? I think the people in your sweet little hamlet here would say you have quite a bit of power.”

“It’s an illusion. We both know I only have the power that you have allowed me to have, that you want everyone to think I have.”

He smiled at that. “See I knew you were smart. What would you think if I could offer you the power to help everyone?”

“Honestly I don’t see how that would be possible. It’s clear you have all the power here, why would you want to share that with me?”

“I do have all the power, yes. You’d do well to remember that,” he warned gently.

“But it’s not enough, you want something else,” she said trying to divert him. She was hoping she might even be able to unsettle him.

“And what is it you think I want?” His eyes were glowing in the firelight, menace and malice moving like eels below the water. She knew then she had likely made an error but she had few other options so she doubled down.

She also knew he wanted her but she knew better than to give voice to it. “It concerns you to rule only by fear, you want their acceptance. After all, it must be exhausting to govern by fear, fire and blood,” she offered hoping her words might catch him off guard.

They did not have the desired effect. He scoffed and laughed. “Yes, their acceptance would be helpful, it would allow me to focus on more important matters. But let me be clear, the only thing I might be concerned about is that there will be no one to govern if I’m forced to murder everyone.”

They stared at each other, the room filling with the sounds of the rain, the crackling of the fire and their breathing. She was not going to win this, he was better at this than her and he had less to lose; she knew she should accept that.

“So how exactly would I make everyone suddenly accept Nazi rule? People here have not exactly embraced the rule of foreign conquerors.”

“History tells us that familial relationships, marriage alliances and the like, seem to go far with calming the protest of simple backwater people.”

Sansa gasped at this, was he offering her marriage? She grabbed the arm of her chair to keep from
fainting. This was so much worse than she could’ve imagined. She had resigned herself to allowing him to use her body but a marriage? No, that would mean so many terrible things. She’d belong to him, he’d have regular access to her, expectations of children, no, no this she could not bear.

“So I ask again, what if I could give you the power you need to help these people?”

She would not consent, she would rather die than belong to him like that. Better to have him end her here and now then to let him slowly destroy her soul piece by piece. She prayed everyone would understand, she had tried her best, but even some things she could not do. “I would think it comes with a very steep price, one I doubt I could pay,” she finally answered and waited for his wrath.

He stared at her intently, mulling over her words. She was prepared for him to fly into a rage but instead he remained calm, but his eyes were hard and cold, the amusement she saw earlier was gone.

“If you are unwilling to bargain with me then tell me again why you are here.”

“As I said before I’m here to request that you release the Red Cross supplies so we can treat the sick,” she repeated her earlier request.

“And what do I get in return?” He was genuinely curious, he wondered how far she was willing to go since she had taken so much off the table already.

“The gratitude of the people, the satisfaction of saving lives and not letting people suffer.”

He laughed at her, it was cold and brittle. “I’ve made it clear that means little to me. And anyway, gratitude and satisfaction will not warm my bed on these cold winter nights,” he scoffed and then waited for her response.

Sansa felt her throat closing off, everything in her stomach was threatening to push its way out of her. ‘This is what you came here expecting. You can handle this,’ she told herself quickly. But the way he was looking at her now, rage simmering beneath his eyes, it scared her. He likely would want to punish her for her earlier rejection of him. ‘You have to be very careful now,’ her mind whispered as she felt a cold chill pass over her causing her flesh to prickle.

“If that’s your price….” she said quietly looking away from him into the fire.

“Say it, say what you’re offering.” It was clear he was enjoying her humiliation.

She couldn’t say she would give him herself, for she would never truly allow him to have her, not all of her anyways. “I’ll give you tonight,” she finally managed to say.

He let out a sound, something between a light low laugh and a sigh that indicated he was pleased with her response. He got up and went to the door. He called into the hallway and then went to the desk. He wrote out something and then one of his staff entered. He spoke to him and handed him the paperwork. They saluted each other and the man left.

“It’s done. I am releasing the supplies now as you have requested. Everyone in town will know what you have done for them. That you have secured their lives for now.”

“You swear it?”

“I do. Now come with me.” He offered her his arm again and after a moment of hesitation she took it. He led her from his study down the hall to his bedroom. He pushed opened the door and let her inside. This room was dark as well. There was a fire in the fireplace and a large dark four poster bed stood on a platform jutting out from the left wall.
He closed the door and then stood close behind her. She could feel his hot breath on her neck, the heat emanating from the rest of his body.

“Take off your blouse,” he commanded. She suddenly realized that this was far worse than the last time when he had just torn her clothes from her. She knew then that this is how he would take his revenge on her. He would force her to be complicit this time. He was going to make her hate herself, to be an active player in his humiliation of her.

She swallowed and began to undo the buttons with shaking fingers. She shrugged her blouse off and he took it and hung it on the door. He turned back to her and trailed his fingers over the exposed skin of her neck and her shoulders. She felt a tear slide down her left cheek but she didn’t dare brush it away and she hoped he won’t notice. She could feel her heart sluggishly constricting in her chest. She closed her eyes as another tear escaped.

After a moment he moved in front of her and took her hands and then gave her a kiss. She did not respond, she stood like a statue and felt his lips move over hers for what felt like an eternity. He drew back, his eyes bright and threatening in the fire light. He took a step towards her and she instinctively stepped back. They repeated the dance until he had her pressed between him and the wall. She was fairly certain her heart had turned to stone, that it was no longer beating. Another tear trailed down her cheek and he leaned forward and kissed her cheek, lingering while he used the tip of his tongue to sweep away the tears that were now falling freely. His breath fanned across her face and neck. She closed her eyes and choked on her vomit.

And then she suddenly felt a sense of cold replace his radiating heat as he pushed back from her. “You can go,” he said coldly. Her eyes flew open, she was sure she had not heard him right but she didn’t want to ask him to repeat himself less he change his mind.

“She whispered as he stared at her.

“I told you I would release it if you came and asked, and I will be true to my word,” he said turning away to stare into the fire.

Sansa was unsure why he was letting her go. Her heart had started to beat again but she still felt cold all over. She reached for her shirt and put it back on, hurriedly fumbling with the buttons.

“Thank you,” she murmured stepping away from the door and then turning to open it so she could flee from him. Part of her feared this was just part of his game; that he planned to let her in the hall only to chase her down.

“Consider this my gift to you. Proof I am not so evil,” he said turning back to her, his words making her stop and look back at him. His eyes were hard and cold, suppressed anger sparking under the surface.

She stared at him for a single breath and then she turned back, opened the door and stepped into the hall. He moved to stand in the doorway. “Sansa,” he purred giving her pause. She shivered as she turned to look at him over her shoulder.

Any relief she had felt was ripped from her as he spoke. “Despite what you think I’m a reasonable man, so I am going to give you some time to reflect on tonight, but I can guarantee you are going to need what I can offer you sooner or later. So next time I make you the offer, I do hope you’ll find yourself much more inclined to pay the price,” he said. And with that he closed the door with an echoing thud.
The quote I attribute to Robb “If I can take it, I can make it,” is actually from the book “Unbroken” which is an amazing biography of a WW2 veteran. If you like biographies or this era I highly recommend it, what that guy survives will blow your mind. (The movie is alright but in this case book over movie for sure.)
Jon and Arya had stood on the porch and watched her go. She hadn’t looked back, Arya knew it had been for their protection as much as her own.

Once the wagon had disappeared from sight Jon began to pace relentlessly around the porch. He said nothing. Arya had never seen him look so angry, even the day he had learned of Sansa’s rape paled to this. He kept throwing her seething looks, she didn’t take it personally though; she knew he was angrier with himself than with her. She understood how he felt though, she wanted to be angry at someone as well, but she decided rather than herself that person would be Ramsay Bolton.

They stayed out there until the sky started to darken from the clouds that were moving in from the west. Jon seemed to have paced out some of his fury finally.

“Looks like a storm is rolling in. I should go check the traps before it does. It’d be a waste if we have something in there.”

“Maybe we should go together.” Arya eyed him carefully waiting on a reaction.

“If it’s all the same I’d like to do it on my own. I just need some time.” He looked earnest as he said this, much of his anger seemed to have dissipated. He just seemed sad. Arya felt relieved by this, sad was better than angry; in her experience people did stupid stuff out of anger far more often than sadness.

“Ok, I’ll start on dinner then. But don’t make a fool of me, if you aren’t back in 30 minutes I am going to come looking for you.”

“Agreed. Thank you for understanding Arya.” He turned to go down the porch steps.

“Jon?” He turned back to her and she went on, “Seriously, please don’t do anything stupid.”

He looked at her and took a long breath and then nodded and headed around the side of the house.

Arya went inside to the kitchen to see what they had on hand for dinner. She doubted either of them were very hungry but she supposed they should force a little something down.

Meanwhile Jon had doubled back into the barn and climbed into the hayloft. Arya had not been in the barn earlier that day much longer than him. He knew she won’t have been able to hide what he sought very well in that amount of time. He dug around in the hay, opening boxes and moving blankets. After several minutes he located what he needed and threaded it through his waistband.

He climbed down from the hayloft and glanced at his watch. He’d have a twenty minute head start and he knew he’d need it since he wasn’t entirely sure where he was going other than east. It was dark enough now that if he stuck to the shadows he’d likely be able to make it to the road unseen and so he left the barn and said a prayer of apology for lying to Arya. He knew what he was about to do she would likely consider very stupid.

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Arya glanced at the clock in the kitchen. She realized that he’d been gone forty minutes and it had
started to rain. She couldn’t imagine he’d still be in the woods. She knew then she’d been misguided to trust him. She ran out to the barn and into the hayloft. It took her only moments to confirm her worst fears.

She descended the ladder and grabbed her bike cursing him and herself. She headed out into the rain. She knew he’d be smarter than to simply be following the road into town but she hoped she’d find him anyways.

As expected she had made it to town without spotting him. She headed to the butcher’s and found Michael. She explained to him what had happened, what she feared and begged his help. He had agreed and they had headed back out into the rain together to find Jon. Arya prayed over and over than they would find him before it was too late.

Sansa walked back through the house unescorted, her head held high. She passed several other officers and members of Ramsay’s staff. The looked at her questioningly. Though it had felt like forever at the time, the amount of actual time that had passed from when they had left his study and when he had released her had been minimal. Some of them smirked and seemed to be forming their own opinions about why she was now leaving. Several of them whispered to each other in words she could not hear or understand; there were stifled laughs, and for once she wasn’t completely convinced they were directed at her. She could only surmise on what they might think of her time with the major.

Somehow the sentry at the front door was expecting her and insisted he give her a ride back to town. Sansa tried to refuse but the young private begged her to not make him disobey a direct order from the major. The terror in his eyes had made her relent.

They rode back to town in silence, the rain beating against the truck. From the corner of her eye she could see the young private sparing her a cautious glance every so often. They were nearly to town when she finally turned and looked at him, making him aware she knew he was looking at her, her expression demanding he tell her why.

“You’re very brave,” he murmured looking away. He did not look at her again for the rest of the ride.

The private dropped her off in front of the butcher’s as she requested. She banged on the door until Molly came down and let her in. “Sansa?” she said confused and registered her wild look. “You poor thing, come in here.”

Molly swept her into the shop and closed the door and pulled the curtain and looked at her carefully, she’d never expected to find Sansa on her doorstep tonight; not when Arya had told her where Sansa had gone and why. She wanted to tell her about Arya’s earlier appearance but she wanted to make sure she’d be strong enough to hear it, and so she watched Sansa closely for a moment.

For Sansa it had been getting harder and harder to breathe since she had left Ramsay’s room and so it took her a moment to find her voice. “Do you know if the Red Cross supplies reached town?” she finally managed to ask.

“I’m not sure.” Molly took in Sansa’s pale pained expression. “Maybe you should come with me upstairs. You look like you need to sit down.”

“No! No, I have to know,” Sansa cried and suddenly fled back out into the rain. She could hear Molly calling to her as she ran down the street. Normally she’d have felt guilty frightened the woman
so, but she had to know if he’d tricked her, if he’d lied, but most importantly if she’d have to go back and plead with him.

She rounded the corner and saw a small crowd was in front of the doctor’s office. She slowed as she came upon the group and realized they were helping the Germans unload their truck. She could see the boxes had large red crosses. She nearly collapsed from the relief the sight gave her. It didn’t take long for people to notice her and the murmurs to start. Someone thanked her, someone blessed her. She was fairly certain someone even called her a saint.

“I told you I’d make you a saint,” she heard him hiss with satisfaction. And then his parting words started hiss in her mind as well. Confusion and fear were turning her heart and mind to ice.

She wasn’t sure who it was but someone eventually ushered her inside and she was placed in front of the doctor. She seemed stunned, borderline catatonic.

“You did it girl,” she heard him say. “You made him see reason.” But when she failed to respond he grew concerned. “Sansa?” He snapped his fingers near her face and she finally focused on him. “Did he hurt you? Are you alright?”

After a moment she blinked and came back to herself. “Yes, no. I mean I’m fine, I’m not hurt, not really.”

The doctor was clearly concerned, she seemed extremely traumatized. “Let me take you upstairs to lay down. I’ll take you home in the morning,” he said gently. He placed his hands on her shoulders to guide her from the room.

She suddenly felt overwhelming panic, thoughts started to flood her mind, the ice thawing and pieces clicking into place. He had said she would need to have power. He had asked about her true knight; he knew about Jon, there was no other option. He’d given her the medicine and he’d let her go. What if that was the game? What if he was going to the farm tonight? What if he’d already been there? If she stayed here he might kill both Jon and Arya.

She suddenly let out a scream. “NO! I have to go home! Tonight! I have to go tonight!” She pushed away from the doctor and ran for the open back door. She was wild and crazed now.

“Sansa! Wait!” the doctor yelled.

She didn’t heed his words, she tore down the alley until she reached the town stables. She forced herself to slow so she wouldn’t startle the horses. She found the doctor’s horse, quickly saddled it and rode from the barn into the rain forcing the horse to the fastest speed she dared.

By the time she arrived home she was half drown from the rain and her own tears. The yard was empty, the house dark. She wasn’t sure if she should be relieved or panicked. She quickly tied the horse in the barn and broke into a frantic run towards the house. She flew through the yard, sliding on the mud and falling down. She wanted to scream for Jon and Arya but she didn’t have enough air in her lungs.

She finally scrambling up the porch and burst through the front door and ran through the first floor of the house. There was no one here. She finally forced herself to call out and there was no answer. She ran to the attic to be sure but found it empty as well.

She ran back downstairs trying to think of where they could be. Maybe they had gone to the cottage. Why she had no idea, but they weren’t in the barn, there was nowhere else unless he had already taken them. She could feel despair threatening to overwhelm and paralyze her.
The front door was still open and suddenly headlights flooded the room. She knew in her heart this was it. She had been right, this was the game; he had come for them, and only God knew what would happened when he found only her.

Ramsay hadn’t wanted to let her go, but Sansa Stark did not seem to be ruled by fear of personal harm, or really any kind of fear. He knew she did care about what the people in town thought of her and she also seemed to do things out of love and loyalty, concepts so foreign to him that he had started to wonder if his normal methods for getting what he wanted were going to work. He had realized this tonight when he had tasted her tears, he had decided in that moment he would try a different way with her.

He had long surmised that she was hiding something, likely something her sister or uncle had gotten her into. He had spoken to Baelish and any other person that was willing to trade information for extra rations, but he had yet to figure out what the secret was. He knew he needed to figure out what it was soon in order to leverage it against her, to make her bend to his will. He was use to taking whatever he wanted by force and violence, but she did not respond to that, not the way he wanted, and for some reason there was a small part of him that wanted her to acquiesce to him on her own volition, even if he did have to help it along.

So he had let her go, but now he was furious. He had left his room a short while ago and had overheard some of his men discussing her departure. Someone commented she definitely had not looked satisfied when she had left this house. They were joking that he had been unable to perform, that she was too much for him, far too beautiful and intimidating. Someone said perhaps he had even made up the other time he had taken her.

He had been wrong, attempting to be merciful was a waste. It had made him a joke. Well he would correct this momentary lapse in judgment swiftly and harshly. He knew he couldn’t start executing his own men but he could see to their transfer to the eastern front, which ultimately was as good as a death sentence. But until the orders could be processed he would show them that he was to be respected and feared.

He marched through the house then and shouted for his advisors to meet him in his study. Once assembled he ordered them to gather twenty men, they were going on a raid to the Tully farm.

Sansa had sunk to her knees in parlor staring out the open front door. She knew it was him before he had even marched into the house and ripped her from the floor and forced her out unto the porch. He was shouting orders. The yard seemed full of soldiers. Several flooded into the house and more in to the barn.

“You’re keeping secrets from me and I intend to find out what they are.”

Sansa had no idea what had happened since she had left the estate. No idea what would have made him so angry. She wanted to ask him what had made him decide she no longer would have time to reflect on tonight as he had promised when she had left him. Perhaps he had decided he was angry at himself for letting her go, maybe he thought he had been weak and now he was here to prove to himself he was not. But then she had long known he was completely unstable. And so did it really matter what had happened to turn him so violent? Whatever the cause, the result was he was here and ready to punish her.

She glanced up him quickly, he was watching her. He looked as if he despised her in this moment, as
if he wanted nothing more than to strangle her with his bare hands. She wondered again what had changed in the recent hours, but then his soul was so twisted maybe this had been his plan from the start. It seemed like something he would do.

So she crouched on the porch under his glare and she didn’t respond. In the silence her mind began to race. If he was here searching then he did not have Jon and Arya, but then where in God’s name were they?

“Where’s the rest of your family?”

She didn’t answer him and so he struck her across the face and then he stared at her in disgust as she half sprawled on her knees in from of him on the porch. She was soaked in rain and mud. Not so dignified now, he thought with a sense of victory. He knew then he was getting his power back from her.

“I don’t know. I arrived just before you. I don’t know I swear.”

One of the soldiers came out of the house and told him they had found nothing, he ordered them to search again. When the soldier asked what it was they were looking for Ramsay had struck him as well. He had asked no more questions and fled back into the house ordering the others to keep looking.

“I think you have been playing a game with me and it ends tonight.”

Another soldier came unto the porch and told him they had found nothing in the barn. Ramsay seemed furious. He hauled her up from the porch and into the rain and shoved her into the mud.

“What are you hiding here?! Why did you agree to come to me tonight? And don’t say for the town or because I asked. No one does what you do, no one is so selfless. I think you are covering up a bigger secret and you hoped by coming to me I would not come to you.”

“You’re wrong. I’m not hiding anything here, I didn’t want anyone else to die. You said it yourself, I hate to see people suffer. You were right. That’s it, that’s all it is.”

“I don’t believe you.” And then he just stared at her waiting on her to crack.

She suddenly saw movement beyond him in the rain on the edge of where the headlights lit up the yard. He seemed to notice the flicker in her eyes and whirled around.

“Who’s there?!” he demanded. He was reaching for his gun.

“What are you doing to my sister?” she heard Arya’s voice call as she stepped into the light and held her empty hands high.

“Arya Stark. There you are,” he purred. “Come here. Slowly.”

Arya kept her hands up and walked through the rain towards them. Sansa could see the other soldiers start to shift uncomfortably. Most of the ones that had been searching the house were now on the porch watching the scene unfold. Sansa knew whether they agreed with their major or not they would not find any allies among them, they all feared him too much.

“You don’t seem surprised to find us here,” he said to Arya once she was close enough. Arya and Sansa were eyeing each other. Sansa was searching her sister’s face for any indication of what she might be planning but Arya was stoic.
“Actually I am. I thought you had summoned my sister to you, so how is it you ended up back here?”

“I think you are both hiding something out here and I came to see for myself. However your sister refuses to tell me what I want to know.”

“We aren’t hiding anything. We are just trying to survive out here.”

Ramsay just looked between the girls. They thought themselves smarter than him, he saw that now. He would not let them win this, this was his command, he was in charge here and they needed to accept that. He pulled his gun now and pointed first at Sansa and then Arya and back again. “I don’t care which one of you tells me what I want to know, but one of you better talk or there will only be one of you to talk.”

“We don’t –“ Sansa began.

“We need to stop lying Sansa,” Arya cut her off.

Ramsay smiled triumphantly and waited on Arya to continue. Sansa had stopped breathing waiting on Arya to speak. She felt terrified but she was going to put her trust in her sister.

“We’ve been lying to everyone,” Arya began. “We didn’t want anyone to know because we thought they might try to take the farm from us. Lysa’s dead, she died last summer and we never told anyone.”

Sansa started to breathe again.

“Is that true?” Ramsay asked turning to Sansa.

“It is. We didn’t tell anyone and we kept using the ration cards for her. We’ve been terrified we would get caught and then we’d lose the farm. But we are always hungry and well…… yes, we have been lying.”

Ramsay was pleased and vindicated with their admission, he knew they had been hiding something. He realized he had completely taken back power over them now.

“Do you think the townspeople would still hold you in such high esteem if they knew you’ve been taking extra rations?”

“I suppose not,” Sansa answered lowering her eyes to the ground.

“It seems you are not so perfect and selfless after all.” He seemed so pleased by this, as if she was now more on his level. He suddenly seemed completely relaxed, his early rage suddenly washed away by the rain.

“Well I think it’s best for now we keep this to ourselves. I have put far too much time in to elevating your profile with these people, no reason to just toss that all away.” He reached down and helped her to her feet. He felt calmer now that he had regained the upper hand.

“So what is going to happen?” Sansa asked fearing the answer.

“For now? Nothing, we shall go back to how things have been. The epidemic shall pass, everyone will be grateful to you, your legend will grow and then one day in the near future I will need you to help me with something and you will agree. Simple as that.”
He whistled loudly and twirled his finger in the air indicating that the soldiers should load up. They all hustled to the trucks and loaded up to leave.

“Good night ladies,” Ramsay said with a small bow and then marched back to the trucks. Sansa had never seen him look so satisfied.

The girls stood in the rain and watched the trucks leave. Arya took Sansa’s hand and led her into the house and they stood in the parlor dripping rain on to the floor. Arya didn’t fully know what Sansa had been through tonight but she could tell she was on the brink of collapse.

“Jon?” Sansa managed to whisper.

“He’s ok. I think you should sit.”

“Where is he?” Sansa breathed.

Arya had no time to answer because just then Sansa’s eyes rolled back and Arya only had the time and strength to dive forward and save Sansa’s head from smacking the floor.

Chapter End Notes

So you got the briefest peek inside Ramsay’s snake pit of a mind. Excuse me while I go shower *shutter*.
Sansa awoke slowly and it took her a few moments to comprehend and believe she was in her own room. She had honestly expected to find herself in his bed at the Umber estate, her escape from there and the events in the yard a trick of her tortured mind.

She sat up slowly and saw Jon reading a book in the chair. A quick glance out the window told her it was either late morning or early afternoon. She pulled her knees to her chest and looked at him. Jon noticed her and set the book down.

“You’re awake,” he stated getting to his feet and crossing to her. He stood by the edge of the bed and waited for her to decide what was appropriate. He did not yet know what she had suffered before she had come home, before Arya had come home and found her in the yard with Ramsay.

“Where’s Arya?”

“Downstairs, she’s been checking on you regularly but she’s rather angry with me so she hasn’t stayed long. Do you want me to get her?”

“Maybe in a while,” she answered as she reached out and took his hand in hers. He sighed a bit and sat sideways on the edge of the bed so that their legs ran parallel to each other. He reached up and cupped her cheek and smoothed back her hair and let his hand fall away. They looked at each other with resignation, they both had so many questions about last night but they weren’t sure who should start.

Sansa decided she would start since Jon normally seemed to prefer she take the lead on painful matters. But instead of asking her questions she chose to tell him what he would want to know.

“I think I’m ok,” she began, “He didn’t… I…. we didn’t do….”

“It’s not important. And even if you had it won’t matter to me,” he interrupted in an attempt to save her from the pain.

“I know but it’s important to me that you know it didn’t happen,” she said taking his hand again. They locked eyes and he gave her a small nod.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asked.

“Eventually, just not right now. Right now I want to know why Arya is angry with you.”

Jon sighed and lowered his eyes. Sansa squeezed his hand and he looked back up at her and gave him an encouraging nod.

“Because I lied to her.”
Jon knew now the doctor had been right to call this a fool’s errand, he was never going to make it to the Umber Estate at this rate. He stood in a copse of trees that ran along the edge of the road and closed his eyes and tipped his head back and let the rain wash over him.

He knew he’d been walking far over an hour and still the town was nowhere in sight. It was dark and rainy and the town observed black out procedures, and even with the extra time it had added to cling to the hedges, walls and trees as he had travelled, he should still be nearing the edge of the town, and yet there was nothing, just more fields. He realized then he had must have made the wrong choice back at the fork.

He tried to remember everything he’d ever been told about the town. If he had to guess he must be on the road that circled north of town, he thought it was possible that if he kept on the road that it looped back up with the road that ran through town and then that road would take him pass the estate. He deliberated if he should press on or turn back. If he was being honest there likely was little point now. Enough time had passed since Sansa had left, plenty of time for the Major to have already harmed her, and really at this point the old gun tucked in his waistband was so water logged it seemed unlikely it would still fire.

He sank down in the trees, his back against one of the trunks and rested his head on his knees. He felt like a complete idiot. Now had he not only failed Sansa, but he had lied to Arya and had nothing to show for it. He shook his head wondering how he would face either one of them. After a bit he lifted his head and gently tapped the back of it against the tree several times and then rose to his feet and continued on east and this was only because he feared that the wide creek bed he had passed on the way in might now be impassable, at least that was the lie he told himself. In reality he decided he’d rather not retreat, not yet. He told himself he could at least scout the Umber Estate, maybe the information would be helpful at some point in the future, he’d come this far after all.

He had been lucky so far, aided by the rain and the darkness, he had not encountered anyone, but as he neared another fork he heard what sounded like a horse and a wagon. He crouched behind the old limestone wall and waited. Eventually he heard voices as well carrying over the rain.

“I think we might need to accept that he could’ve made it there. Should we head back and start checking closer to the estate?” he heard a man ask.

Jon realized the wagon had come to a stop and was not that far from where he was hiding. He was thankful the rain was covering up the sound of his breathing and his pounding heart.

“I guess that’s the last option. At this point I almost hope the Germans do catch him.” His breath caught, it was Arya. It was Arya and she was looking for him. He felt his guilt explode in his chest. He wasn’t entirely sure who she was with though and so he felt torn about revealing himself. He waited another breath and then whistled the bird call that he and Arya had sometimes practiced on their trips to the snares.

“Did you hear that?” he heard her ask. He did it again and this time she answered back. He knew then it was ok to reveal himself and he rose and slid over the wall into the road way.

“Arya.”

“Jon?!”

“Aye.”
“Oh thank god.” Arya dismounted the wagon and ran to him and threw her arms around him. He went to hug her back but she quickly pushed him back.

“How could you?! You liar! You agreed not to be stupid! Give it to me! You stupid, stupid idiot!” A litany of curses berating him as Arya rained blows upon his chest and arms. He let her carry on for a few moments, he knew he deserved it after all, but once her voice cracked and the tears became apparent he pulled her in his arms and restrained her to him. He knew she was crying about more than his lie at this point.

After the sobbing lessened he finally spoke, “I’m sorry. I am, it was stupid of me. I just…. I thought I could do something.”

“She’s my sister, I love her too, but we can’t win this and getting ourselves killed will hurt her far more than most things he can do to her,” she said pulling back from him.

“Arya, I think we should get him in the back of the wagon, I don’t like just sitting out here in the open,” Michael called.

“Yes, you’re right,” she called back and she and Jon walked back to the wagon. Jon climbed into the back and Arya covered him with canvas and positioning several crates to hide him further. When she was finished she climbed back on the bench next to Michael.

“We are going to have to cut back through town, this road washes out west of here when it rains like this,” Michael sighed.


“Yes. So commander that means I’m going to need you to stay under those tarps and to not come out for anything. The Germans seems to be staying in due to the rain so maybe we get lucky, but if not, well for the love of all that is holy don’t try to be a hero.”

“Understood,” Jon called from under the tarp.

Michael turned the wagon and they headed back east and then south to cut back through town. Arya sat quietly and shivered from the rain, she was fairly certain she had never been so soaked in all her life but she was grateful they had located Jon before he’d been able to reach his intended destination. She shook her head, he was brave, but god he seemed more impulsive than she was. ‘You were just as bad once,’ she suddenly heard her Uncle Brynden point out. She shook her head at that, brave men always seem to get themselves killed she thought sadly. And then Robb’s face also flashed into her mind. She suddenly felt exhausted.

They entered town and found it was quiet, though she wondered if they stood out more because they were out in the rain when everyone was inside. As they passed through she had looked down one of the streets as they had passed by and caught sight of a throng of people outside the doctor’s office. She wasn’t sure what they were doing and there was no way they would be stopping to find out.

They were passing down the main road, having passed the butcher’s and nearing the end where they would turn out of town when they heard someone calling out to them. Michael stopped the wagon and Molly ran up to them breathless.

“Sansa,” she huffed out.

Jon had to command himself to not call out, he needed to trust Arya to handle this.

Arya waited a few moments to allow Molly to regain her breath. “What about Sansa?” Arya asked
“She was here. She was very distressed, she wanted to know about the Red Cross supplies. She ran off. I just confirmed with Seaworth she went there but he said she took off as well, screaming she needed to go home. No one got a chance to tell her you are not there.”

Arya groaned and shot an angry look into the back of the wagon. She could only imagine her sister’s hysterics when she arrived home to find no one there. She wondered then how she had gotten away from the major. Had she escaped? Had she hurt him? Arya’s mind flooded with fear, she had been encouraging Sansa to do something to him, what if she had snapped and followed through?

“We need to get home, now,” Arya commanded.

Lights flooded the road then and there was the blasting of horns. Michael quickly moved the wagon to the edge of the road just as the trucks blew pass them. The three of them exchanged a charged look, that was the Germans and they all knew instinctively where they were headed.

“Sansa, what have you done?” Arya whispered.

“If the Germans are going to your home what are you going to do with…” Michael asked inclining his head towards the bed of the wagon.

Arya thought for a moment, he was right, she couldn’t roll up there with Jon and she couldn’t ask them to hide him here. A thought formed in her head.

“I’ll take him to Baelish’s, to the barns.”

“Alright then,” Michael said picking up the reigns. Molly looked at him and was clearly frightened.

“I’ll take him. You should stay here, you’ve done enough, and if something were to happen…..”

“Arya….”

“No, for tonight this is a Stark matter, I appreciate it but I won’t ask any more of your family. I’ll bring the wagon back as soon as it permittable.”

Michael gave her a quick squeeze and handed her the reigns and hopped down from the bench. Molly hugged him and then they raised a hand to Arya as she clicked at the horses to take them west.

They reached the Baelish property and she pulled the wagon into the barn and told Jon he could get up now. She had said nothing to him on the ride back and she is sure he had questions but he had managed to remain silent till now.

“What is going on with Sansa? I couldn’t hear everything but I caught she was in town, that she was heading home. Why are we not there?”

“Because I am fairly certain the Germans are there as well. I don’t know what she’s done or why but I’m going to go find out and you are going to stay here.” Her tone was stern and even in the darkness Jon could see her eyes were steeled against him.

He nodded.

“I mean it Jon, no tricks, no lies. No matter what you hear, even if it’s gunfire, do not leave this barn until I come for you.”

“And what if you don’t come?” He wished he had not asked that as soon as the words had left his
“If neither Sansa nor I come for you before dawn then you should assume that we have been arrested or worse and you should leave this place and never look back.”

“Arya….”

“I have to go. Please Jon, please stay put.” And with that Arya marched from the barn back into the rain.

Jon waited for what felt like an eternity in the darkness. He paced, he lay in the wagon; he listened to the rain and waited as he had been commanded. It was excruciating but he vowed he won’t disobey or betray Arya again.

At one point he dozed in the wagon and dreamed of his mother. He must have been seven or eight. He had gotten into a fight at school and had been severely trounced by a boy that was older and much stronger than he was. His mother had had to fetch him from the nurse because he had been knocked unconscious, but despite his injury his mother was still angry and had punished him. He had been sent to his room without supper.

His mother came in the room and sat next to where he lay on his bed. “You cannot be so foolish dear. That boy could’ve seriously hurt you.”

“But what he was doing was wrong, someone had to stop him,” Jon argued in a small voice. He had been trying to stick up for one of his classmates that the bully had been threatening and harassing for weeks. Jon had hated seeing the other boy cry or show up with black eyes. He hated that no one ever did anything and so today he had decided he would be brave and stop the bully, but he had failed miserably.

“I understand, but there were other ways to stop him that won’t have resulted in you coming to harm. You have such a beautiful heart my son, but you need to think with your head sometimes,” his mother chastised him softly.

Before he could respond back he awoke to the barn door opening. Arya came inside looking scared and soaked.

“Wh-,” he began.

“The Germans are gone, Sansa’s at the house but she collapsed and I need you to help me move her,” Arya informed him.

“What happened with the Germans?”

“I’m not fully sure and we can figure it out later. Can you get moving please, my sister is laying on the floor of the parlor and if she wakes up I don’t want her to be alone,” Arya snapped at him.

Jon knew then Arya was still angry with him for earlier. He’d have to make amends later, for now she was right, they needed to get to Sansa.

He followed her out into the rain and through the hedges and trees until they reached their house. Arya had explained briefly what she had witnessed when she arrived home, that she had told Bolton that Lysa was dead. Jon remained quiet and listened. He wasn’t sure what that might mean in the future but it seemed unlikely it would be good.

When they arrived Sansa was still lying on the floor just as Arya had left her, a pillow under her
head. Jon bent and lifted her carefully and carried her up to the attic. Arya followed and together they
changed her for bed and tucked her in. Jon had been concerned that she seemed so deeply
unconscious but Arya told him if the rest of her night had been as terrible as what had happened out
in their yard she won’t want to be awake right now either.

Jon offered to stay with Sansa and Arya had consented and told him she was going to get some sleep
as well, she was exhausted after all from spending most of the night in the rain looking for him and
she had given him a rather angry look before she left the room. Jon sunk in the chair and realized he
now was majorly in debt to both Stark girls.

“I agree with Arya, you were being stupid,” Sansa said as he finished his story.

“I know. I just – I just acted without really thinking it through. I didn’t want him to hurt you, to hurt
anyone. I thought – hell I’m not sure what I thought, it was stupid,” Jon finally conceded.

“Arya hates liars, hates them. You are going to have to work your way back into her good graces, be
prepared for days, if not weeks of penance.”

“It’s that bad?”

“You’ve never really been on the receiving end of her anger before, it’s not a good place to be. I’ll
wish you luck,” Sansa said, a soft hint of tease in her voice.

Jon looked stricken. Sansa took in his expression and touched his arm. “She loves you dearly, she’ll
forgive you, trust me, but honestly be prepared for a few days of anger,” she added to comfort him.

“I suppose I deserve it,” he finally admitted. “And what about you? Are you angry as well?”

“A little perhaps, but honestly Arya’s wrath will be punishment enough. And really I suppose in
some way it all worked out. If you hadn’t gone out on your mission you would’ve been here when
Ramsay came, and that would’ve been the end of it all. So I suppose in this instance I’ll just forgive
you.” She looked away from him and out the window and took a few deep breaths. “And anyways, I
have far too many other emotions to deal with to waste space on anger towards you.”

Jon moved and took her in his arms and they laid down on the bed wrapping around each other.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asked again.

“I will, but I’d rather just tell you and Arya together. It’s not something I want to share over and over
again.”

“I understand.” He pressed his lips to her forehead and ran his hands through her hair and down her
back. Repeating the act over and over to soothe them both.

“I love you,” he breathed.

“I love you too,” she murmured and then pushed up a little so she could see his face. “I told you I
would come back to you,” she began and then a smirk played on her lips and lit up her eyes, she
couldn’t resist the urge to tease him, “and unlike someone else I can keep my word.”
Arya had heard their voices from the bottom of the attic stairs earlier and had decided to give them a little while to themselves. When the voices had eventually died down she had made her way to the attic and found Sansa and Jon sitting on the edge of the bed holding hands, Sansa’s head on his shoulder. Jon was murmuring to her but Arya could not hear his words even when she was this close. She was relieved to see Sansa finally awake and calm, and even though she was still mad at Jon, it did bring her a bit of solace that he could make her sister feel so safe.

Sansa caught sight of Arya and lifted her head and smiled sadly at her and motioned for her to come in. Arya entered the room and gave Sansa a hug and caught Jon’s eye for the briefest moment before looking away from him. Sansa then told them she wished to take a bath and wash the remaining mud from her hair before they sat down and discussed what had occurred last night.

“Of course,” Jon had agreed before kissing her forehead and following Arya from the room.

Jon and Arya had gone downstairs to prepare a late lunch and wait. Arya was still giving him the cold shoulder but he had seen a crack in her icy façade when she had found him and Sansa together, so he knew there was hope.

Arya was making lunch and Jon had set the table and then sat down. Arya kept her back to him as she worked. “I’m very sorry I lied yesterday. I have no excuse, I shouldn’t have tricked you,” he ventured.

“No you shouldn’t have.” She still kept her back to him, but Jon appreciated she’d at least answered him.

“I don’t want you to stay angry with me.”

Arya sighed, turned towards him and eyed him wearily. “We need to be able to trust each other. We aren’t going to survive this otherwise.”

“I know. It’s not an excuse but I was out of my mind; I swear I will never do anything like that again.”

“The lying or the run off with no plan and trying to do something stupid?”

Her words stung a bit but he knew he deserved them. “Either,” he answered.

She seemed to consider this and studied him hard. Finally she seemed satisfied. “Good. Then rest assured I will forgive you…. Eventually.”

“Eventually?”

“Don’t push your luck,” she said as she turned back around.

Jon shook his head, who’d have ever thought he’d be so concerned about a fourteen year old girl’s opinion of him. He did honestly feel bad he’d upset her and put her in danger by forcing her to look for him. He would openly admit love and rage had blinded him; that he needed to work harder at letting his mind take the lead, at least while they were in the middle of a war.

Sansa came down soon after looking a bit more like herself, her hair clean and braided back. They ate lunch quietly, saving the unpleasantness for after. When they finished they moved to the parlor so
that Sansa could tell her story.

She relayed her experience from the night before, but she choose to omit a few details. There were things she just wasn’t ready to share, their implications would be too far reaching. She had felt terrible guilt over this, but she had thought it over as she had bathed and as she measured Jon’s reaction to the things she was sharing she knew she was making the right choice.

She stood in a long white dress between the rows of apple trees in the orchard. The leaves were a kaleidoscope of green that nearly formed a canopy over head, bits of sunlight drifting in as the leaves shifted in the breeze. The breeze was like a warm embrace, it swept her hair back from her shoulders and kissed her cheeks. She realized happily that it was summer.

She looked up to the bit of cerulean sky she could see through the leaves and a crow caught her eye. She watched it fly off towards the woods. As the bird disappeared from sight her gaze fell to the end of the row of trees, a man with dark hair stood with his back to her. It made her smile. She began to walk towards him, realizing then that she held a bouquet of wildflowers in her right hand.

Her initial happiness though started to recede. As she moved further down the row of trees the sky began to darken, the bright promising blue giving way to iron gray and burnt orange that indicates a gathering storm. The gentle breeze shifted, becoming stronger, harsher, colder. The leaves on the trees were turning brown and blowing away, revealing more and more of the unforgiving darkening sky. The flowers in her hand began to wilt and die. She dropped them in alarm.

She was almost next to the man now but he did not seem to notice her, so she halted and prepared to turn and run back into the orchard, but as she did she felt his firm grip on her arm. When she tried to wrench away she found she could not. She attempted to protest but found she couldn’t speak, it was as if her mouth had been sealed. But she did find it was possible to cry and so silent tears began to slide from her eyes.

“Come and see,” Ramsay hissed in her ear pulling her forward.

She shook her head furiously but she could do little else as he pulled her from the orchard. They were stepping into the town, the farm fading behind her.

“Come and see,” he hissed again.

They were at the edge of the square headed towards the gallows. There was a body hanging there, swaying in the bitter wind. She tried to pull away again or sink to the ground to stop their progress, but it did not work, the gallows continued to come closer.

“It’s your wedding gift. Do you like it?” he asked once they were in front of the platform and he had tilted her head up and forced her to look at the gallows.

Even though she was crying her tears did not blur her vision. She could see his vacant eyes staring back into hers. It was as if his blank expression had peeled away the barrier over her mouth and she finally found her voice. Her lips formed his name, she screamed it as she stared up at as his corpse. To her horror her screams seemed to breathe life back into the corpse and it answered back, calling her name.

“Sansa!”

She jolted awake as he shook her, Jon’s concerned voice pulling her from the nightmare. Jon rolled her from her back unto her side so they were facing each other. She began to sob and he pulled her
close. Now fully awake she clawed for him, winding her hands into his shirt to try and pull him
tighter against her. “It’s ok, you’re ok. I’m right here. I’m right here.”

She felt like she could barely breathe, barely believe he was real. The terrible image was lingering in
her mind. She buried her face in his neck half expecting to feel a rope against her nose. She needed
confirmation he was alive; she wanted every possible inch of her that could be to be in contact with
him. “Shh, it’s alright,” he soothed stroking her hair and her back. He could feel her hot tears against
his neck, he’d give anything to make her stop, to take her pain away. She hadn’t had a nightmare like
this in months but he should’ve expected it after last night.

She pulled back suddenly and kissed him, it was urgent and desperate and full of need. It took his
breath away. Her hands were working down his chest and pushing at his shorts, reaching for him
and stroking him.

“Sansa, wait,” he breathed raggedly as she pulled back for air.

“Please Jon, please,” she begged. “I need…. I need you, please.” She seemed so shaken, so
desperate, and it didn’t feel right, but he also feared what would happen if he said no; she looked as
if she would fracture into a million pieces if he denied her now.

“Sansa, shh, just breath,” he murmured gently cupping her cheek and carding her hair with his other
hand. She seemed to relax the tiniest bit, her grip on him below easing just slightly but the tears still
fell. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

She buried her face back into his neck nipping at his flesh and his ear. “Please….. I just…..I’ll tell
you after, I swear it. I just… I need to know you’re real. I need to feel you….. Please Jon, please.”
She started to work at him again.

Despite the hesitation in his mind his body was responding to her touch. She pulled back from him
enough to remove her nightgown and then press her body against him. He groaned as she started to
overcome his objections. He responded to her kisses and let her work his shorts off him. She pulled
at him and rolled them so he was now above her, shifting so he was positioned between her legs.

She wanted him inside her, she wanted to know he was real, that he was safe; that he was here with
her. She wanted to feel like she had the first time they had been together, when he had made her
whole and healed. She wasn’t sure she would get that exact same feeling now but she was desperate
to feel anything other than how she felt when she awoke from her nightmare.

Jon broke from their kiss and looked down at her. “Are you certain?” His voice was a mixture of
want and hesitation. “I don’t wa-,”

“You won’t. I trust you. I need you, please,” her assurances turning to a plea. He gave the slightest
nod and then kissed her again and slowly filled her.

Sansa let out a whimper and clung to him. Jon was afraid she was going to break his ribs with her
grip. He managed to wind his arm around and took one of her arms and loosen it from him and he
gripped her hand, holding it down on the bed as he started to move. He went as slowly and gently as
she would permit. He wasn’t sure when but at some point they had stopped kissing and were looking
at each other in the dark. Their eyes were locked and the intensity of her stare was crushing his ribs
in an entirely different way now. It was as if she could see into his soul. He’d never felt something so
intense.

Soon after he spent himself and rolled to her side. Sansa immediately flipped on her side and turned
her back to him and pulled his arm over her, threading it up between her breasts so his hand rested on
her forearm. Her head rested on his other arm, not that he hated it but he was essentially trapped against her.

“Sansa?” She didn’t respond. Her body gave the slightest shutter as if she might be on the verge of crying again. “Are you alright?” He feared she might be full of regret or angry with him now.

“It was just a terrible nightmare,” she finally answered as a way of explanation.

“Tell me about.”

“I can’t recall the details,” she lied, “just the terrible feeling it gave me. You were gone, you had been taken from me. I- I- it was terrifying.”

Jon didn’t know what to say to that. He wrestled his top arm from her and turned her face towards him. “No one will ever take me from you.”

“You can’t promise that,” she whispered. “Everything is so dangerous now, every day things grow more dangerous. I shouldn’t love you so much, this was a mistake.” She started to cry then and pulled her face away.

He pushed himself up and rolled her on her back so she could not hide from him. “Don’t say that, don’t ever say that. This is not a mistake.”

“It gives us too much to lose. You’d die for me, I’d do anything to protect you. Love is a weapon, the same as a bomber or a gun. Love can be used to destroy people much the same.”

“No, no, that’s the work of hate, not love.” She looked at him and it was clear she did not believe him. He pressed on, “If something took me from you like in your dream, well it could only be due to hate. Just now, when I was inside you, when you were looking at me. I know you felt the difference. That was love.”

She was breathing raggedly. She wanted to believe him, to believe love won’t destroy them, but she couldn’t. It was a weapon, her love for Arya, for everyone in town had been used against her; it was only a matter of time before her love for him would be as well. She knew she was deciding something in this moment, she would never stop loving him so there was only one other option.

Jon studied her expression. “Tell me.”

She knew she couldn’t tell him, not yet, not until there was a plan and it was too late for him to not go along with it. He was honorable enough that if enough people were putting themselves in danger he would not dare refuse.

“You’re right. It was just a nightmare.”

Jon knew she wasn’t telling him everything. There was something below the surface, something she wasn’t ready to share with him yet. He decided not to push, he knew she’d need time to process what ever it was. Honestly he was amazed every day at how she continued to carry on despite all she had suffered. He wished she would understand that it was love that was carrying them on, saving them, love would not destroy them.

“Yes, only a nightmare,” he agreed and kissed her forehead and laid back beside her and drew her against him, his forehead resting on her temple. “You know you can always tell me anything.”

She nodded, she didn’t dare speak. She knew it wasn’t true though. She couldn’t tell him about Ramsay’s ultimate plans for her, he’d never agree to go; he’d never leave her here to that fate. She
hated to keep anything from him but it didn’t matter if he would be angry, if it might pull them apart, because in the end they’d have to be separated all the same.
A couple days later when Jon had gone to the woods, Sansa and Arya had gone to the barn. They were cleaning the stalls, they were still in possession of the horses they had borrowed and they wanted to make sure they returned them in perfect condition.

“We need to discuss some things, things I wasn’t ready to discuss the other day,” Sansa began.

“What things?”

“Things about Jon.”

Arya turned to her sister and rolled her eyes. “You don’t need to worry, I already told him I would forgive him.”

“That’s good to hear but that’s not what I meant. I… well I think he needs to leave, soon.”


Sansa took several deep breaths before she could answer. Arya had eyed her suspiciously in the meantime, gripping the pitchfork she’d jammed in the hay tightly.

“It’s because I love him. Ramsay is not going to stop, he’s going to continue to look for leverage over me, there’s things he wants Arya, things I would only agree to under extreme duress.”

Arya considered this but felt unsure what she meant, hadn’t she already allowed him to do terrible things? What could be worse than having that man touch you, be inside you? She couldn’t stop herself from voicing this.

Sansa winced before answering. “You need to promise me this will all stay between us, at least for now.”

“I swear.”

“He has designs on marrying me.”

“What?! Where would he get an idea like that?!” Arya’s stomach began to turn.

“I think Petyr put the idea in his head once, an attempt at a power play in the early days, but he underestimated Ramsay.”

“But you would never agree to that!”

“That’s not entirely true, if he were to make me choose between your life and being his wife you know what I would choose, and that would extend to Jon. Your lives are the only thing that would make me agree. I would do anything to protect the two of you.”

“So then do you plan to send me away with him? Would you stay here and die or worse?!”

Sansa met her sister’s eyes and held them. Arya suck in her breath. “No, no I will not allow it. You and I will stay together always.”

“Arya.”
“No, I get a say in this and the answer is no, I will never leave here without you.” Sansa sighed, she should have known her sister would be stubborn and dig in her heels on the matter. One matter at a time she told herself. “Since the details of it are far too difficult at the moment we can table your escape for now.”

“But you still want Jon to go?”

“I don’t want him to go, but look at what happened the other day. How do you think he would react if I were to………”

“He promised he won’t do anything stupid again.”

“I don’t think he intends to, but what if I had to leave with Ramsay at some point? Do you honestly think he’d ever allow that?”

“Is that possible?” Arya asked alarmed, “Would he take you from here?”

“If I was his wife it’d be possible yes.”

“I still don’t understand. Why does he want to marry you anyways?” Her voice was full of disgust. If they had been discussion any other person Sansa might have been offended.

“Control mostly. He thinks the people here would be more cooperative with the regime if they saw me married to him, that I was accepting their rules.”

“There are plenty of other girls letting officers have their way with them and that’s not helping anyone embrace them,” Arya said bitterly.

“No one said anything that he thinks is grounded in logic or truth.”

“Did he actually say all of this?”

“Yes and no, but if nothing else he implied it.”

“So you think sending Jon away is going to somehow decrease the chance of him forcing you?”

“I think it gives him half the leverage.” Arya studied her sister’s face, there was something else there below the surface.

“There’s something you aren’t saying,” she finally said trying to keep her voice from venturing into an accusatory tone.

Despite the seriousness of their discussion, Sansa’s mouth threatening to quirk into a smile. “You’ve become far too good at reading people,” Sansa said. “But I’m afraid he’s going to figure out Jon is here and that he’ll kill him.” Arya looked at her questioningly, this was always the fear; so why was it more of a concern now she wondered. Sansa took in her expression. “He said something that night, something that makes me wonder if he doesn’t already know, or at least suspect.”

“How could he possibly know? Do you think someone could have told him?”

“You tell me, it was your group that brought him here. I’ve never told anyone.” Sansa tried to keep her tone soft as she said this so Arya would not take it as an indictment.

“As far as who I know that knows, well it’s me, Doctor Seaworth, Michael, probably Molly now, and Mr Donniger. None of us would’ve told and Mr Donniger died before he could talk. But there were people Jon was with before he came here. I have no idea who that was, but one of them
could’ve turned I suppose. But we don’t know for sure he knows.”

“Even if he doesn’t know now I fear it’s only a matter of time until he does. It was a miracle he
didn’t find him the other night, either on his own or because of Jon. We can’t just keep taking this
risk.”

They stood in distressed silence. “So what do we do?” Arya finally asked.

“You’ll need to talk to the resistance, I know they are somewhat disbanded but you need to see what
can be done. They need to get him off this island. Even if they move him Ramsay will find him, you
know he will,” Sansa said shuttering again at the memory of Ramsay’s words to her from that night.

“Do I need to do it immediately?” Arya hoped that maybe given some additional time Sansa might
reconsider her position.

Sansa thought for a moment and Arya thought she saw uncertainty flicker in her eyes. Arya looked
away in order to suppress the hope that was sure to be on her face. “Maybe not immediately, Ramsay
has the information about Lysa and that should tide him over for a bit. He’s arrogant enough to think
he’s won some important victory, he’ll want to enjoy it. And anyways, he is making such a show
about this medicine. I don’t think he would put all this energy into elevating my status in the town to
then do something that would force him to arrest me and execute me,” Sansa finally said. After a
couple moments she added, “At least for a couple of weeks.”

“Alright.”

“Anyways, we should wait until the epidemic subsides, so next week, yes next week you’ll need to
go ask. That gives me time to tell Jon as well.”

Arya could see her sister’s pain etched on her face, she wasn’t making this decision lightly, and
moved to hug her. “I’m sorry you have to do this; that you have to make this choice.”

Sansa let her sister hold her for a few moments and then saw Jon coming up through the yard. He
stopped in the doorway and looked at the girls standing together, their heads bent together
whispering comforts to each other. Sansa made eye contact with Jon. Arya looked between them and
felt she should leave. She hugged her sister again and went across the barn to exit near Jon.

“She alright?” Jon asked softly as Arya passed him.

“She will be,” Arya answered sadly looking away from him and leaving before he could question
her further.

Jon waited for Arya to disappear into the house and then he crossed the space to Sansa and gathered
her in his arms and held her to him tightly. He could sense how sad she was and it made his chest
ache. She hadn’t had any further nightmares last night, at least none that he had noticed, but he knew
her well enough to know she was still quite distressed.

He drew her back and held her face in his hands. “Do you know how much I love you?” he
whispered. She nodded. “I wish I could’ve stopped all this. I’d do anything to see you safe, to not
see you in pain.”

“I’m sorry I went. I know it saved the town, but it… I hate that I went, that I heard his words… That
I let him near me.” She wasn’t sure how to explain to him that by going she had learned things that
were about to change the course of their lives, things that were going to force them apart.

“It’s all going to be ok. As long as we are together we can face anything.”
Sansa started to sob at that and he pulled her to him and held her and stroked her back. “Shh, it’s alright,” he murmured.

She melted into him and knew she couldn’t tell him anymore right now. She had at least a week till Arya went to town to see about his escape, so for today the truth of what was about to happen could wait.

Sansa still had not told him about her plans by the time Arya headed to town the following week. They had bickered about it a bit. Arya hated keeping the information from Jon but Sansa argued for now there was no reason to burden him with it. Plus he’d want to know her reasons and she knew he was unlikely to agree to leave if he thought for one moment that he would be leaving her to a marriage to Ramsay.

He had gone to check the snares. Arya left for town and Sansa had gone to the barn to think. She sat in the hayloft trying to work up her nerve, to find the right words. She knew it was going to be nearly impossible to do this because in her heart this was the last thing she wanted.

She had been so deep in thought she had missed him coming through the field and only became aware of him as he stepped into the loft.

“Anything in the traps?” she asked over her shoulder.

“No. It worries me how little we’ve been catching, summer can’t get here soon enough,” he replied. Sansa realized it was unlikely he would be here when summer came. The thought made her eyes well up.

She looked away as he came and sat beside her. After a few moments Sansa turned and looked at him in the afternoon sun. It was all so unfair, they had barely begun their love story and had suffered so much. Weren’t they owed? Why couldn’t they have this? The idea that they would be parted soon seemed unbearable. She didn’t want to tell him, not yet, so instead she leaned in and kissed him. He kissed her back and placed a hand on her cheek. She kissed him harder and swung herself into his lap, straddling him and running her hands into his hair. He sighed and wrapped his arms around her. He knew she was still holding something back from him, but the sensation of her mouth on his and the rolling of her hips against him made him push the concern from his mind for the moment.

He felt himself growing hard and she continued to grind against him. It was going to be difficult to resist if he let her keep going, and she seemed to have no intention of stopping. She seemed needy, but not as desperate as the last time when she’d had the nightmare, and he liked that he had the power to make her feel safe and happy, even if the feeling was fleeting.

“I want to feel you inside of me,” she breathed drawing back. He pushed her hair back from her face and smiled, she was beautiful, blue eyes sparking, cheeks flushed, lips swollen and pink. He knew he had no desire to deny her or himself. A smile pulled at the corner of his mouth and he nodded pulling her mouth to his again.

They clawed and wiggled their way out of the clothes that were keeping them apart and Sansa playful pushed him down and then hiked her skirt up and sunk down on him. Jon groaned as her warmth enveloped his length. She rode him, sometimes leaning in to kiss him and sometimes sitting back so her weight would drive him further and further into her. She threw her head back and let out a long moan, his name jumbled within as she released. He held her waist, his hips snapping as he let her ride it out. He sat up then and pulled her against him and continued to move with her until he found his own release.
Her head lolled on his shoulder and the held each other until their ragged breathing returned to normal. Sansa blushed as they released each other and put their clothes back in place.

They sat side by side again and she rested her head on his shoulder and he wrapped his arm around her. “Well that was unexpected,” he mused.

“Is that a complaint commander?” she used his rank and title, she did it to remind herself that she needed to let him go. That he belonged to a greater cause and not just to her, that this was the way it was supposed to have always been.

“Not at all. I love unexpected surprises, especially from you.”

“Remember that, when I tell you this.”

He turned and took in her expression. He took her hand and stroked the knuckles thoughtfully. “I’ve been waiting, I knew there was something. You can tell me.”

“Well, I’ve asked Arya to inquire about your evacuation and to push to make it happen. It’s become clear that it is much too dangerous for you to stay. Ramsay….”

“I will not leave you here with that man, absolutely not. You and Arya are my family now, I will take care of you. I won’t do it. I will not leave while he is still here.”

“I don’t think you have a choice, it’s the safest thing for all of us, and you have a duty to king and country. We seem to have forgotten that over the last few months. And being family doesn’t change that. We watched our brother go off to war…….”

“Fuck duty.” He got to his feet and stepped away, closer to the window so he could see the orchard. This was his home now, they were his family; how could she be dismissing that?

“You don’t mean that. If you did I probably won’t love you the way I do.”

Jon turned and looked at her, grinding his teeth in frustration. She was right, this wasn’t him, he had never been one to just ignore his duty. But he was different now, he was not the same man that had crashed into the ocean. How could she think he would consider leaving them here with people that cared nothing for them at best or wanted to hurt them at worse? He turned back to the orchard.

She rose and stepped to him and laid her hand on his arm and begged him to look at her. “I wish there was another way. I truly don’t want you to go, but it’s just no longer safe for any of us and it is only going to get worse.”

“It’s always been unsafe. I don’t understand what has changed, what would make you make me want to go now when things seem to be getting worse.”

“You just said it yourself, it’s getting worse.”

Jon looked at her and his expression held a challenge and she relented. She owed him at least some of the truth. “I haven’t told you everything that happened the other night.”

He took her hand and looked at her, “So tell me now.”

She explained Ramsay’s cryptic question and veiled threat, again omitting any mention of his proposal.

“Asking about your true knight doesn’t mean anything. It’s a turn of phrase, he was just playing with
“Your mind,” Jon tried to argue. “We can’t be certain he knows.”

“Yes we can. He doesn’t do anything unless it’s calculated. He may not know Jon Snow is here, but he accused me out right of hiding things from him and he won’t rest until he proves himself right.”

“But you said Arya told him about Lysa. You were hiding that, maybe he’ll back off now.”

“Do you honestly believe that?”

Sansa started to cry softly and pushed away her tears with the back of her hand. She wished she could believe him, but even if Ramsay did believe Lysa’s death was her secret that wasn’t all he was concerned with. She had seen it in Ramsay’s eyes, he’d never be satisfied until he possessed her or destroyed her. She wished she could tell Jon this, the whole horrific truth of their situation, but she held back, she knew it would only bring more pain.

Jon looked at her for a long moment and at last he finally seemed to accept her words and gave her the tiniest of nods. “So there is no other way?”

“Not that I can think of. The safest thing for all of us it to get you far away from here.”

Jon said nothing but instead took her hand and interlaced their fingers and he kissed her forehead. He knew it would serve no point to argue and he had no alternative solution to offer anyways. She seemed to relax now that he was no longer protesting and she set her head on his shoulder, sadness washing over both of them. They stayed like that in silence until they heard Arya come home.
Arya had returned from town advising she had made initial inquiries and explained to the doctor they now had a pressing need to smuggle Jon from the island. She said he explained the resistance was still mostly inactive but he would start working on it to see what could be done.

With epidemic now passed Sansa headed to town a couple days later for sewing circle. The weight of waiting and fear was wearing her down. She realized she was losing weight and had dark circles constantly under her eyes. And even though he always told her she was beautiful, she hated that this likely would be Jon’s parting image of her.

Most of the people in town greeted her with grateful reverence. Ramsay had made it known she had been the one to save them, that she alone had made him see reason and show mercy by convincing him to release the medication. The people offered her love and gratitude. Those that could even tried to offer her money or rations. She respectfully declined those offers and tried to graciously accept their praise even though it was completely undesired. Ramsay had succeeded, as he said he would, he had made her into a saint.

The circle meeting was nearing at its end when town hall seemed to explode into a flurry of activity. They could hear boots pounding the halls as the soldiers and officers ran. There was shouting. The women had all stopped and exchanged looks as they absorbed the sounds of panic and chaos. The Germans were always orderly and strict, this was completely out of character for them.

Jeyne bravely dismissed herself and on her way out whispered to Sansa that she was going to find Matthias in hopes he could provide answers. She returned several minutes later. Her cheeks flushed, her expression almost feverish. She shut the doors to the room as she entered.

Everyone leaned in to hear her news. “The north end of the island was attacked, shelled I’m told. The fortifications were broken in one place. The Germans were able to hold off a land raid but it’s chaos in the offices. Berlin is furious.”

“What does that mean?” someone asked.

“I don’t know but it’s not good for the Major. Don’t you recall the rumors; they ousted the commander on Jersey for allowing a raid there,” someone else answered.

“Major Bolton is reported to be incensed, that was Matthias’ word,” Jeyne advised.

Sansa wondered for a moment if anyone would tell Mrs. Poole that Jeyne was consorting with a German. She hoped for her friend’s sake they would focus only on the news and not the source.

Everyone started to exchange looks. Emotions ran the gamut from joy to terror. “I think we should all head for home,” Mrs. Glover announced.

They quietly slipped from town hall using the back entrance. The Germans had been too distracted to take notice of them.

Sansa hurried back home and shared the news with Jon and Arya. “Does that mean Jon can stay then?” Arya asked when Sansa concluded.

“I don’t think we know anything yet really,” Jon answered. “It sounds like Ramsay might be in trouble but there is nothing to prevent him from doing damage in the meantime.”
“And now it appears he might have nothing to lose,” Sansa said voicing her worse fears. “If he loses this command there is no telling how he might react or do on his way out.”

“So what do we do?” Arya asked. Sansa’s statement had frightened her.

“We wait I guess, wait and pray that this whole thing allows him no time to come after us,” Sansa said. She could feel ice spreading in her veins. She and Jon exchanged a charged look. She knew they were both agreeing to do their best to not frighten Arya further. “I think we’ll have time though based on the chaos I saw. He has other priorities for now.”

“So we will just wait and see, after all, it’s what we’ve gotten good at,” Jon added.

Ramsay had been furious but to Sansa’s relief he had gone to the northern end of the island almost immediately. Rumors spread though that he had gone out to the camp closest to the attack site that night and had murdered at least three prisoners in the most gruesome manner with his bare hands in order to release his rage. Sansa had prayed for the poor men that had perished but was eternally grateful that she had not been on the receiving end of his wrath.

Unfortunately he was no longer the only threat. The Germans left in town had become harder, meaner, their anger over the raid clear. They were generally irritable and quick to anger, anything could set them off. There had been an increase in assaults and arrests for the purpose of interrogations. And while they didn’t tend to hold anyone too long it was still a miracle they hadn’t killed anyone. Arya assured them though that despite this, the resistance was still trying to work on a plan to evacuate Jon but it was extremely slow going now that there was increased scrutiny on everyone’s actions.

The only solace they found was that as the days passed and no one came for them, Sansa was able to surmise that if Ramsay did know about Jon he had kept it to himself. She could not imagine that if the other Germans knew about Jon they would be able to resist coming there to capture him and drag his beaten and bloodied body through the streets, not given their current moods and thirst for reprisal. And when she finally accepted this she knew it made sense, she was his play thing after all, he’d never want anyone else to harm her; he would want to keep that power completely for himself.

Just over a week later word came that Ramsay had returned to their side of the island. Sansa braved town anyways but had tried to hold out hope that it might truly be a rumor. She knew if he was back it was best to measure his mood, and it was far better to chance an encounter with him in town then to wait in fear at the farm.

She stopped by the grocery to meet Jeyne but found the doors locked. She couldn’t imagine why the store might be closed in the early afternoon. She banged on the door but to no avail.

She gave up and headed to the butcher’s, arriving just as Molly was coming out the front door. Molly looked at her and gave her a sad shake of the head. “Poor Jeyne,” she murmured.

Sansa’s breath caught. “What? What happened to Jeyne?”

Molly looked alarm and then sad. “You don’t know. Of course you won’t, she was arrested last night.” Sansa noticed she was keeping her voice low. Sansa shook her head, her mind was swimming. Jeyne? Arrested? Those two words made no sense together.

“We need to head over to the hall,” Molly said and looped her arm with hers and pulling her along gently. Sansa felt her stomach drop. If they were back at the hall then Ramsay was certainly back.
When they had walked to an area that allowed them a measure of privacy Molly began to explain. “They came last night after midnight. They dragged her out of the house. Her father tried to stop them so they took him as well. Her mother fled to her sister’s on the east end.”

“But why? Jeyne is no threat. She’s involved with a German even. What could she have done that warrant an arrest?” Sansa felt even sicker. If Jeyne was not even safe was anyone?

“No one is entirely sure at this point. We wonder if it might be a clerical error. It makes very little sense to anyone.”

They fell silent as they neared the hall and entered. They found most of the group in their normal room on the second floor, but there was a melancholy tension in the air.

Jeyne’s aunt was there. She rarely came to these meeting. “Sansa?” she said, her voice trembling.

Everyone in the room was looking at her. She knew they were hoping she had answers, she felt a jolt of guilt that she did not. She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I only just found out it happened.”

“But you can find out right?” Her aunt looked desperate. Sansa crossed the room and took her hand. She knew the Pooles would want her to appeal to the major, but it was the last thing she wanted to do. She wondered if she could just find Matthias and ask him; that would be a far safer option for her.

“She’s a good girl, we can’t understand what has happened. It’s got to be a mistake.”

“I’m sure it is. I’ll do my best to get you some answers.”

An officer stuck his head in then and noticed no one was sewing. He began to berate them and demanded they start sewing. Everyone fell silent and picked up their work and began to sew. The officer watched them for a while. Once he was satisfied he left.

“Rumor has it the major has managed to retain his position here but only because he blamed all the failures on his subordinates. Berlin is demanding someone pay for the failure. I heard much of the staff will be shipped out by the end of the month, probably to the eastern front,” Mrs. Glover said softly.

“I guess that means they’ll be replacing them soon enough….” Molly sighed.

“Well that’s just it, with the Americans now in the war some wonder if they will bother with replacing all of them,” Mrs. Glover whispered and gave a cautious smile.

“Won’t that be something? We can only hope that means the war might be ending,” someone added.

All of this news was overwhelming. Ramsay was staying but with less support. Jeyne was locked up somewhere; this was not what she had expected when she had made her way to town today. Sansa excused herself to go to the restroom and made her way down the hall. Her nerves were on edge as she tried to think how best to help Jeyne without putting herself more at risk. She knew she would do what she could to help her but she had to be so careful, she had herself and her own family to be concerned about after all. Alone in the bathroom she took a few minutes to compose herself.

As she washed her hands she thought of Mrs. Glover’s words, that many of the staff were leaving and might not be replaced. If it was true there would be less Germans, she couldn’t help but smile at that. Maybe her toast from New Year’s, that this would be the final year of the war, hadn’t just been wishful thinking after all.
She was lost in her thoughts when she exited the room. “There you are,” she heard his voice. She looked up and he was leaning against the wall across from her, regarding her coolly.

“Major,” she greeted him and shifted her gaze down towards his feet, she did not want to look him in the eye.

“I imagine you’ve already heard the news?”

There was so much news today and though she was not entirely sure, she assumed he meant Jeyne’s arrest. “I have,” she answered carefully.

“I have to say I’m surprise you hadn’t sought me out sooner. Aren’t you concern?” He stayed back, arms folded and waited. He wanted her to ask him. She knew she needed to ask for the Poole’s sake but her tongue felt dry and swollen in her mouth and in so many ways she did not want to give him the satisfaction. He let out a heavy sigh and she flicked her gaze quickly to his face, she could see he was growing impatient.

After a couple more breaths she finally found her voice and courage. “Of course I’m concerned, but I’ve told myself not to worry, I hardly think she could be guilty of anything.” The look of annoyance on his face increased, she knew she’d have to ask him something or risk his anger. “If I could ask though, why was she arrested?”

Her question seemed to please him and he visibly relaxed. His arms uncrossed and turned his palms up to her with a shrug. “That’s official business I’m afraid. It’s not something I can just openly discuss with a civilian. Perhaps if -,”

“So it’s not a mistake?” she asked cutting him off.

He smiled coldly at that. “I assure you I don’t make mistakes. Now my staff, well they are a bunch of imbeciles, so it’s possible. Thank god they are being reassigned.”

“If there has been a mistake I would think you’d want to fix it.” She was choosing her words carefully, the last thing she needed was to owe him any type of debt.

He gave her another cold smile and pushed off the wall and came closer to her, circling her. He smelled of iron, sweat and something sour. It made her stomach turn. “Perhaps, but these things take time.” He continued to buzz around her as he mused, “Since you won’t ask me an important question I’ll ask one of you. I wonder, are you disappointed I’m staying on? And before you say you were unaware, know I am well aware that you and your little group all know far more than you should.”

She couldn’t stop the flush that began to creep up her neck as he finally stopped in front of her and stared her down. She was starting to piece things together. She ducked his question about her thoughts on him staying because there was no safe answer and she had no desire to either please him or anger him. “How would we know anything?” she asked instead.

He smirked, he knew what she was doing. She had made him work for it a bit today but she was so good at this verbal sparring, if she only knew how it excited him and made his blood run warm. It was one of the things he admired and desired most about her.

“Let’s not do this. Be honest, all women know things. You all want to play simple, but we all know you are far from it. It’s all calculated and the thing between your legs makes weaker men fools, makes them say things, share information they shouldn’t.”

“Weaker men?”
“Corporal Wagner for example.”

She decided to no longer indulge in this game with him and to cut to the point. “You arrested her as a spy, because she told a bunch of frightened old women a scrap of information.”

“See this is what I like about you, beautiful and oh so quick and clever, but we both know that was not her information to share.”

“It hardly makes her a spy.”

“Who’s to say?”

“You, you’re the one that would get to say.”

Perhaps. I suppose I could be willing to listen to arguments on her behalf.” His eyes were dancing with so much satisfaction it was making her dizzy. “Maybe we should have dinner again.”

“That would be unnecessary,” she said quickly and then pressed on before he had a chance to be offended. “I don’t require that much of your time to make my point. We both know she is not a spy. She’s a girl in love and I think that the corporal loves her back. He told her what she wanted to know to soothe her. She shared the information to soothe others. She made a judgment error but she is hardly someone worth arresting.”

He tilted his head as he listened to her, as if he might actually be considering her words. For a moment it made her feel slightly bold and so she continued on. “Anyways, with your staff due to depart don’t you have bigger concerns? I imagine it is going to be quite demanding on you to govern practically alone, even for a time. Do you want to be bothered with retaining a girl and her father? Finding someone to run the grocery? All this things seem beneath your rank.”

He smiled brightly at her words, it was painful to see. “It pleases me you concern yourself with my happiness and difficulties. That will give us something to build on. All marriages need a strong foundation.”

Sansa shivered, he was speaking again of their future together, a future she had no intention of fulfilling. She choked down her fear and said a silent prayer. He could turn anything against her it seemed.

“How grateful would you be if I release your friend?”

“I know her mother and aunt would be very thankful for her release. The town as well, I’m sure they would like the grocery reopened as soon as possible.” She was trying to be very careful with her words and demeanor. She had not directly asked for Jeyne’s release or tied it to herself in anyway, and he had not asked her for something in exchange, and she needed it to stay that way.

“Hmm, well I will think about your words.”

“That is the best I can hope for. Well I should be going, socks don’t darn themselves,” she said and turned to leave.

“Sansa, wait,” he said grabbing her arm. “Don’t you want to know why I was here waiting for you?”

She shook her head slightly and made sure not to meet his gaze. “I assumed it was to discuss Jeyne.”

He gave a soft low laugh and leaned forward so he could whisper in her ear. “As you said, that’s beneath my rank, but I’m glad we were able to discuss that for your sake. But you’re right,
governing only own would be rather taxing…… So the reason I had sought you out was that I thought you’d like to know I’m recalling Baelish soon. I thought it important he be back here. There are things I would like him to attend to and oversee. After all I have my own desires to attend to and I’ve always fancied a summer wedding.” He pulled back, releasing her and smiled with a menacing satisfaction.

Sansa swallowed hard and without a word turned and fled back into the bathroom. Try as she might she couldn’t stop herself from retching into the toilet. By the time she composed herself and exited he had gone, but the sour smell of him lingered.

Sansa made her way home, her head swimming. Petyr was coming back, that would put them all in even more danger as he certainly would come to see her and Arya, and he would use anything he could to curry favor with the Nazis, turning Jon over would be a boon for him. She also tried to block out Ramsay’s parting words, if he thought she’d actually consent to his proposal then he was far more deranged and delusional than she could ever have imagined, but his sinister voice hissed in her mind, there were ways he could make her accept and they both knew it. It was clear he thought her time to consider was coming to an end.

She parked her bike alongside the house and then crossed to the barn, she almost wished she had kept pedaling further down the road. She needed to think and wasn’t ready to face Jon and Arya just yet. She climbed into the hayloft and sat near the window, staring out into the orchard. The realization came to her slowly but it was harsh nonetheless, they must get Jon off the island, now, there could be no more delays. Between Ramsay’s increased interest, his ever present threat to act, and the return of Petyr their borrowed time was up.

She heard a noise behind her and turned to see Jon cresting the top of the ladder and stepping into the loft. He gave her a hint of the smile but his eyes were thoughtful, as if he was trying to figure out why she was out here alone instead of coming in the house. “Are you alright? I saw you out the window but then you didn’t come in,” he told her.

“Where’s Arya?”

“Gone over to the Beesbury’s, said she wants to see if she can barter with them for some honey, she mentioned something about wanting you to bake an apple honey cake for Easter.”

Sansa gave out a sharp laugh as Jon drew near and sat with her. “You didn’t answer my question,” he said stroking her cheek. She leaned into it and nuzzled towards the warmth. She closed her eyes for a moment and took a breath. She opened her eyes and was greeted by the slightest sad smile from Jon.

“Ramsay’s back and he tells me Petyr is to be recalled. We have to push the resistance to get you away from here. We’ve run out of time.” She began to sob after that. Jon held her and let her cry. He had nothing to say, he knew she was right. The clock was striking midnight and there would be no avoiding it. He would appeal to Arya himself to have her push her contacts. He would do whatever it took to make sure they were safe.
Jon had taken Arya with him to the woods the following day to discuss where the evacuation stood. He knew Arya wanted him to stay, hell he wanted to stay, but the news that Petyr was returning had made their wants irrelevant and he wanted to impress that upon her.

The days had started getting warming and some of the trees were attempting to bud. Small patches of green poked between the dead leaves, life was returning to the island. Arya seemed lost in her own thoughts, scanning the horizon as they walked.

“Arya,” Jon began.

“Hmm,” she said swatting at a downed tree with a large stick.

“What’s Doctor Seaworth saying about the evacuation plan?”

“They are still working on it but nothing’s set yet,” she answered, but it was too late, Jon had seen it. When he had asked the question she had tense for just a fraction of a moment before she had swung her stick again and answered him.

“Arya -,” he began.

“Shh! The fox,” she said quietly and pointed.

Jon turned his head slightly and saw it sitting on a log only 20 feet away. It looked at Arya like it was waiting on something. She took a step forward, then another. She was within 10 feet of it when it bounded off and she grunted and gave chase.

“Arya!” Jon cried and followed her deeper into the woods.

After several minutes they lost the fox in the deep under brush and gave up. They stood in a small clearing breathing heavily from the chase.

“Dammit,” Arya huffed while she swung her stick at the brambles. Jon noticed she was wiping away a couple of tears and not meeting his eye. He knew she wasn’t crying about losing the fox.

“You’ve never asked them to evacuate me did you?”

Arya stopped swinging and turned to him and took in the look on his face and drop the stick. “I didn’t want you to go. I know you don’t want to go. I thought if I gave her time she’d change her mind and then I thought they would make Ramsay leave. I thought it would be ok.” She started to cry openly then. Jon stepped forward and pulled her into a hug. “I’m sorry. I just thought it would get better.”

“I know. Its alright,” Jon murmured. He had often hoped for the same thing, but it seemed nothing ever got better here. They needed to start accepting that.

After a while Arya finally calmed down and stepped away from him and wiped her face with her mitten. “I suppose you’ll be pleased now.”

Jon looked at her and raised an eyebrow in confusion.

“You aren’t the only liar anymore.”
Jon let out a bark of laughter. “Well then I suppose its good you forgave me so quickly and set such a fine example.” His comment was rewarded with the ghost of a smile from Arya.

“Are you going to tell Sansa?”

Jon hated the idea of adding another burden to her. Jeyne’s arrest and the fact that she had not openly asked for her release had gutted her. He had spent half the night trying to get her to sleep after she had spent nearly two hours being inconsolable. “Can you go to town today? Appeal to Seaworth for real this time?”

Arya took a deep breath and gave him a look that sat on the line between pained and petulant.

“If you can do that today and swear to me that you will truly do it then I see no reason to tell Sansa. But you have to do this today Arya. You heard your sister last night, Petyr’s returning. I have to go.”

Arya muttered something but nodded.

“What did you just say?”

“I said I hate Petyr and this is all bullshit. None of us want you to go.”

“You’re right, but this is war and it doesn’t give a shit about what we want. We have to stop being selfish. I can’t do any good here, I’m just a liability. I need to get back to my command so I can make a difference.”

“But you are making a difference here. You make Sansa happy, you make me happy. We make a family…….”

“And we will always be a family, nothing will ever change that but I can’t keep hiding here Arya. Every time something happens to you or Sansa there’s nothing I can do and it makes me nearly insane. I can’t just keep doing nothing while everyone else suffers. I need to get back to where I can do something that matters, something that might help end this war.”

“Have you told Sansa this?”

“No, but I’m fairly certain she knows,” he answered thinking back to every time he had tried to tell her he no longer cared about the world at large or his sworn duty and she had reminded him that he did. “So today?”

“Yes, today,” she relented.

“Ok then. Come on, let’s get back,” Jon said turning to lead them back out of the woods.

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Arya went to see the doctor. She wasn’t sure if she was angry or relieved to find out the resistance had been working on a plan already. The departure of Ramsay’s understaff was proving the opportunity because it meant that many of the boats used for the harbor patrol would be utilized to ferry them to the continent, therefore leaving a large gap in security for a couple of nights.

Arya thanked him for the information and made her way back home feeling heavy with the news. This meant that in less than two weeks Jon would be gone.

She found him in the barn and told him what she had found out. He had seemed shocked by the news that it would be so quick, but thanked her all the same. He advised he would prefer to be the
That night when they went to bed Jon had been the one to initiate their love making. When she had changed for bed he had not allowed her to pull her nightgown on. He had come up behind her and wrapped her in his arms. He pushed her hair to the side and trailed kisses across her neck and shoulders. She sighed and melted against him and allowed him to trace and worship her curves with his hands and his mouth.

When every inch of her skin felt on fire from his attentions she had turned and helped him undress and then let him lead her to the bed. He had been fervent as he had moved within her, making her come apart beneath him more than once, and afterwards they lay intertwined covered in a fine sheen of perspiration.

He had meant what he had told Arya in the woods, that he needed to go so he could be useful, so that he could do some good, and he knew leaving meant a greater safety for the Starks, but it was still breaking his heart. He had needed her tonight, needed to feel her, so that she might bind his heart together and make it whole again.

Neither of their breathing had returned to normal yet but he spoke anyways, bursting the protective bubble of the afterglow of their coupling. “I’m going soon.”

Sansa pushed up and looked down at him. “How soon?” Her voice trembled just a touch. She knew this had to happen, that she had asked for this, but now that it truly was happening she wondered if she could bear it.

“By the end of the month. The harbor patrol will be gone with the Germans departing, there’ll be a window in which I can go.”

Sansa counted the days in her head and blinked back her tears. She won’t do this to him, to them, she would remain strong. There was no other way and she shouldn’t make it harder. Jon reached up and pushed her hair behind her ear and ran his hand slowly down her cheek, her neck, and let it rest just above her heart. “I know,” he whispered, “I know.”

They lingered in that position for several more breaths before Sansa folded back down into his arms and they fell asleep without another word.

The days moved forward and they prepared for his departure. The weather had turned cold and rainy again. The promise of spring seemed to have retreated. As always Sansa wondered how the island’s weather always seemed to mirror her moods. Lysa’s words about curses and ties to Tully blood tried to seep into her consciousness but she made an effort to push them aside.

Early the following week she learned that Jeyne and her father had been released. They were shaken but had not been severally harmed. When she went to see her she found her clearly distressed from the incident as well as crushed to find out that Matthias had received 10 lashes from Major Bolton and was to be sent back to the continent.

Sansa had thought about telling her it would be for the best but then she knew first-hand what it was like to have the person you loved being sent away and counting the days, dreading each passing hour and sunrise that brought it nearer, and so she had saved her hollow words.

Since they had found out he was going Sansa and Jon had continued almost nightly to make love; trying to pack in a lifetime of kisses, touches and sensations to sustain them until they met again, and
they had promised to meet again. Jon vowed to her he would survive the war and he would find her and Arya when it all ended. Sansa wanted desperately to believe he could keep such a vow.

“You should come with me, we should tell them that you and Arya will come with me. There’s nothing here but pain for you anyways,” Jon thought aloud as they lay in bed while he stroked her back. They only had a couple of days until he was to go.

“That’s true, there is barely anything good left here, but if we go it’ll be noticed, and then what happens to the people left here? Ramsay would be furious, he’d make sure to punish someone, maybe everyone, and that won’t be right.”

“I don’t care about anyone else.”

“That’s not true…… and even if it were, Arya and I couldn’t live with that. Many of these people have been good to us, good to our family, we can’t leave them to suffer just to save ourselves.”

Jon said nothing but she could feel the tension in him. She wanted to go with him so badly, to be with him longer, to go home to England, to finally be able to see their family or at least know their fate, but she also knew it would destroy her to think of Molly’s daughters punished or Jeyne tortured because she had chosen to leave. She only prayed that her sacrifice for the greater good would somehow keep her safe and reward her with protection.

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Arya had gone to town the following day to confirm that everything was still a go. She returned looking drawn and tortured. She came into the kitchen where Sansa was preparing dinner. Jon was down in the woods attempting to set as many snares as possible to help them for when he was gone.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Sansa asked clearly reading her sister’s misery.

“Petyr’s back, I saw him,” Arya told her.

Sansa went completely still. “Did he see you?” she asked when she had caught her breath.

“He did, he gave me a nod but we did not speak. I asked around, he made it back yesterday.”

“So it won’t be too much longer and he’ll likely turn up here.”

“Maybe not, maybe he moved on while he was away,” Arya said hopefully. Sansa gave her a dubious look, they both knew that was highly unlikely.

“Well we just need to make sure to be prepared, with any luck he won’t come by until Jon is gone, we just need our luck to hold for another twenty four hours,” Sansa said and then made a silent plea to god.

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It had come. Their last night together. They made love that night as slowly as possible. Every touch and kiss lingering so they could memorize it. They both openly wept as they continued. They kissed each other’s tears away as best they could. When they finished and drew apart Sansa burst into tears, her body convulsing with her sobs. Jon held her and did his best to soothe her but he couldn’t stop his own tears from flowing. Though they hadn’t given voice to it they were both fearfully this was to be their last night together ever and with the dangers they would both face going forward there was a very good chance it might be.
When she was finally cried out they lay together in the dark listening to each other breathe. “No matter what happens I will be with you always, just as you’ll be with me,” he said breaking the silence. He felt her nod her head against his chest in agreement. “When you make it off the island find Sam, he’ll be able to get us in touch or…… well Sam will know if anything were to happen.”

“I have no one to send you to, no one that will know.”

“That’s not true, I’ll find you, or your family. If I have to I’ll come back here, someone here will know, you will not be forgotten. But I have faith that when I return you’ll be there waiting for me in England.”

She nodded again, she knew if she tried to speak she would likely just find herself back in tears. So instead they lay in silence and waited until sleep consumed them.
“I still think you should stay here with Sansa,” Jon told Arya. They were out in the barn sorting through the last of the seeds from last year’s harvest so that she and Sansa could start planting the garden next week. Sansa had reluctantly gone to town, her hope was that she would see Petyr there in order to prevent him from seeking them out here. No one had been thrilled by the idea but they thought it was the safest thing to do.

“No way, the smuggler was told to expect a girl escorting you. Plus if we are found, well I can be a quick talker or create a distraction, you by yourself is far too dangerous. Plus I am the one that is supposed to answer the smuggler when he asks who we are meeting there.”

“Ah, yes, the magical ‘No One’,” Jon said in a mocking tone.

“Laugh all you want but No One has helped keep us safe and made this all possible.”

They looked up and saw Sansa coming into the barn, she did not appear happy but she was trying to to force a smile for them.

“So, no luck with Petyr I take it,” Arya stated.

“No, appears he’s been in meetings with Ramsay almost non-stop since returning. I guess with his support staff leaving he has to get him up to speed. I hope it’s exhausting him enough to keep him clear of here.

I saw the boats in the harbor being loaded though, everything seems to be on track for their departures later today,” Sansa answered. Her fear and distress was clear to Jon.

“How’s Jeyne?” he asked in a sad attempt to change the subject.

“Distraught. I felt a lot more sympathy for her this time, nothing destroys you like someone you love leaving.” Sansa looked away from him and blinked back tears. Arya took in the scene and shook her head, she had never imagined that they would fall so deeply in love. She had been thrilled for them at first, she long thought that their love was one of the things that had prevented Sansa from following after Alys Karstark after Ramsay had attack her, but now it seemed like it might be a curse as well.

“What time are you planning to leave?” Sansa asked after she regained her composure.

“I was thinking maybe 9, it’s only a couple miles to the beach, if we take the old cattle trail south through the woods. The actual pick up time is 11 so that should give us plenty of time,” Arya answered. They were not keeping as many of the details from Sansa this time.

“I think you should go earlier,” Sansa suggested and Jon could see how disappointed she was to say the words.


“Because of Petyr,” Jon offered flatly, his eyes locked with Sansa’s. She gave a slight nod.

“It’s my fault really. I shouldn’t have gone looking for him. I’m sure word will get back to him that I
was in town and asked about him. You know he’ll think it an invitation.” Sansa looked distraught and angry and had wrapped her arms around herself.

“You did what you thought was best. How were you to know Ramsay was going to keep him all day? We’ll go after dinner then,” Arya said trying to ease her sister’s burden. Jon nodded in agreement.

“Well I’m going to go whip up dinner, you need a good meal before you travel,” Sansa said far too brightly, almost as if Jon was headed on holiday and not back to war. Sansa turned and left the barn then. Arya realized she likely wanted to cry alone for a bit.

“I’ll take care of her. We’ll take care of each other,” Arya told him when she saw the pained look on Jon’s face. Jon gave her a tight smile and a nod. “Jon?”

”Yeah?” He was still staring off into the direction that Sansa had gone.

”We’ll be alright, I promise. When you see my parents I want you to tell them that.”

Arya’s sad but determined tone brought his attention back. “Of course, and I know you’ll take care of each other, you are Starks after all,” Jon said with a sad smile.

“And now you are too, don’t ever forget that.”

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Dusk had started to creep in, the shadows growing long and purple. Arya waited down in the yard to give Jon and Sansa a moment to say their final goodbye. She couldn’t hear their words, just the hint of whispered promises and vows of love. She turned back as they ended their final kiss and watched as Jon descended the porch stairs and Sansa quickly wiped away her tears.

“Ready?” she asked Jon as he came near.

“Aye,” he answered and then looked back one last time, lifting his hand in a final farewell; Sansa returned the gesture. She stood on the porch and watched them head down the lane, she watched until they disappeared from sight.

Jon and Arya crossed the lane and headed south into the woods. While there was still a touch of receding twilight to be found, they were thankful for the lack of clouds and the full moon tonight. They walked mostly in silence, neither knowing the right words for such a gloomy trek.

They weren’t walking particularly fast since they had more than enough time to make it to their destination, but Arya figured they had to be at least a half mile in by now. Jon suddenly stopped and held up a hand for her to do the same. She stood still and listened. There was nothing she could hear.

She opened her mouth to ask him what was going on when she did hear the rustling off to her left. Both their heads snapped in that direction and they caught sight of the tip of his white tail. Jon visibly relaxed and shook his head.

“He’s as obsessed with you as you are with him,” he chuckled.

Arya let out a huff. She wondered if maybe this was his true home, maybe this is where he had hidden all those months ago when she thought him dead. She swore to herself right then that she was going to find his hiding place before she left this island, even if it was the last thing she did.

The fox caught her eye and gave a toss of his head, almost as if he was telling her to follow him. She
shot Jon a look to see if he had seen the same thing she had.

“For a few minutes, we have the time but be careful,” he whispered suppressing a laugh. Arya smiled and when the fox bounded away a few minutes later she gave chase, following it back north. “I’ll wait here,” she heard Jon call out.

Arya chased the tip of white that kept catching the emerging moonlight. She started to laugh, it was the freest she had felt in weeks. She had no other cares in this moment other than following that white tail. She felt a couple tears of joy squeeze out. For a moment she was a child again, six, maybe seven, memories of the stray puppy she and Robb had found at the park flooded her mind. She had begged and pleaded with him to let her keep it. He had been an easy sell and he had helped her smuggle it into the house. They had managed to keep the pup a secret for nearly a month until it had escaped her room during one of her parents’ dinner parties and she had chased the dog down the hall, crashing into the dining room after it, knocking down one of the butlers and creating quite the scene. Robb had taken the blame for her and had gotten in big trouble. They had been forced to give the dog to one of Robb’s school friends who did not live in the city. Arya’s heart clenched at the memory, now she was being forced to give up something, someone, else that she loved. It just wasn’t fair.

“Dammit!” she cried realizing that her trip down memory lane had caused her to lose sight of the animal. She stopped and looked around and then saw it peek out from behind a tree. It shot off again and she fell into pursuit once more.

She was nearly out of breath when she saw the fox dart into the side of a small berm. “I knew it!” she cried feeling beyond victorious that she had discovered his home. She bent forward and put her hands on her knees to catch her breath before heading back to meet Jon.

She was just about to go when she thought she heard the faint sound of a motor over her breathing. She realized she had gotten much further north than she would have thought, and if there was a car this close it likely meant someone was going to see Sansa and it would not be someone welcomed.

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Sansa had watched them disappear into the lane and then went back in the house to finish cleaning up from dinner. She told herself she was not allowed to cry anymore, that just like her decision to allow Ramsay to take her over Arya, that this was something that had to be done, to cry over it anymore was wasteful.

She turned on the victrola to choke off the silence in the house and went about her tasks. When she finished up she decided she would go to the barn, to the place everything had begun. She recognized the barn had become the touchstone of so many things that had happened to her here. She shook her head and almost laughed, could anyone have ever guessed a barn would be such an important location in the life of Sansa Stark?

She took a lantern and headed to the barn to check on their remaining two milk cows and made sure their feed was full. They would have to make a decision soon on what to do, one was producing less and they likely could not feed two come winter, but there was no way to store all the meat if they did slaughter one. She’d have to talk to Arya about working out something with the butcher. She petted the old cow as she thought and it nuzzled her for a moment, catching hay in her hair.

“I question if I am still in 1942.”

Her head snapped up and she saw Petyr standing in the barn. She pulled the hay from her hair and tried to calm herself, to smooth a mask over her expression.
“If I didn’t know better I would swear I am watching Cat. She was wonderful with the animals, always a calm touch,” he went on.

She moved from the stalls into the main portion of the barn to greet him, but she did not draw near him. “Welcome back Mr. Baelish.”

“Was I gone so long that we are strangers again? I hoped if anything my absence had made the heart grow fonder, softened you towards me some.”

“I guess we don’t always get what we want,” she answered and saw his expression darken. “So how was Guernsey?” she asked quickly, she realized it was not a good to antagonize him right from the get go.

“It was fine, I learned quite a bit from their leadership, though they benefit from having a much more rationale German in charge.”

She said nothing but she won’t disagree, there was no way there was anyone that existed that was worse than Ramsay Bolton.

“I’ve spent a lot of time with him since my return, he had a lot of interesting things to share with me, in fact, I think he was even gloating.”

“Oh?” She knew it was unlikely Ramsay knew that she had once rejected Petyr but she knew exactly what he meant, she hadn’t fooled herself into thinking that Ramsay would not rub his conquest of her in Petyr’s face.

“Don’t be coy, you know he told me, my question is why?”

“Why what?”

“Why would you agree to such a thing when you had rejected me? I can’t imagine he treated you with the reverence I would have, that you deserved.” His reaction was making her skin crawl.

“I’m sure he told you some version of what he thinks happened and I can assure you it’s all a lie.”

“So you didn’t plead with him, offer yourself in place of Arya? Beg him to take you?” She was almost taken back with the fact that there was more of the truth in that than she would’ve expected Ramsay to admit.

“In some ways I suppose that is true, but he would’ve raped and murdered Arya while I watched, I know that in my heart, so yes I begged him to stop and made a deal with him. I did what had to be done to save my sister.”

“So you’re sister means that much to you, but not your cousin? Or was it me? Do you fancy the major over me? Do I disgust you so?” His voice was full of menace. She sensed his anger growing. She told herself she needed to be careful now, to not increase his ire.

“Not at all, it was just that Robin was more than likely gone, whereas Arya could be saved. It was a simple as that.”

“So if given the option again?”

“I can’t answer that, I don’t want to entertain things that cannot happen. What’s done is done.”

He had slowly been moving towards her as they had been speaking. She had tried to hold her ground
but now she began backing away. Unfortunately she found her back against the side wall of the stalls.

“What if I told you that you now face another choice?”

She swallowed hard, for the briefest moment she wished Jon was here to protect her from him. “And what would that be?”

“You know he wishes to marry you. Once I was in support of that, when I thought he was controllable. I thought I would marry you off to him and we could control him, you and I, and in that way we would control the island. But I see now he is far from controllable, so I think the best option now is for you to consider marrying me.”

“You?” she squeaked.

“To save yourself from him.”

She couldn’t stop herself from laughing then. “You think you can save me from him? No one can save me from him. You have been gone too long, I’ve learned a lot about the major in that time. And even if, and he doesn’t, respect decency and vows it would be an unwise move for you. As your wife I would be your heir. All those lands you now hold are quite attractive. Just another reason for him to murder you and take me anyways.”

“Perhaps then you should marry him after all and see to his demise? As his wife you could poison him or something to the like. Once he is gone then you and I could control the island together. But if we agree to that I would need certain assurances.”

“I have no desire to be pulled into any such plots. I just want to run my family’s farm and protect Arya until this is all over. I don’t want to marry anyone,” she declared.

“You are a stupid girl to think that is possible. You are already involved in such plots whether you want to be or not.” He was too close now. She could almost feel his breath on her face. He could reach out and touch her if he wanted. She was too alone with him and Arya would not be back for hours. She needed to get out of this space.

It seemed as though he could read her mind and leaned forward placing his arms on either side of her, locking her in to place. She felt her heart rate quicken, she did not like the way he looked at her.

“Maybe my mistake all this time was being too weak, too kind. I treated your mother much the same, gentle, respectful, and look what that got me, a place as her second brother. Maybe you Tully women only enjoy the attentions of a brute, of someone that takes what they want by force. He told me you screamed his name, that you cried out in pleasure as he took you like a dog in heat. Do you know how much it made my blood boil to hear him tell me how you begged him, how you proudly told him you were a virgin but made the offer nonetheless?”

“None of that is true,” she protested but her voice was barely above a whisper.

“Why would I believe you? You and your mother both seem to enjoy toying with me, dismissing me as a man. But I am a man you know.”

Sansa shook her head and swallowed her tears.

“You seem doubtful, well my dear, I’m going to show you. You will understand soon enough how much of a man I am.” He grabbed her chin in his hand and kissed her hard, pinning her body between him and the wall. Sansa struggled to get away from him but his anger seemed to have made
him strong. With no other option she bit his lip and tasted his blood. He shrieked and pulled back and struck her across the face.

“You are going to regret that,” he declared. He reached forward and shoved his hand up her shirt, Sansa closed her eyes; she didn’t want to see the satisfied look on his face as he fondled her. She felt his hand on her breast, and then in the next instant she heard a strangled gurgle and felt a sticky warmth spray across her face and chest. Her eyes popped opened as his hands left her. He clutched at his neck, blood pouring from it, his eyes wild with panic and fright. She understood then she was covered in his blood.

He fell to his knees to reveal Arya standing behind him holding a pitchfork, the tines dripping his blood. He gave another gurgle and then fell forward, his blood seeping into the hay at Sansa’s feet. Sansa looked up from his body and met Arya’s eyes. They both looked relieved for a moment and then terror passed between them. Arya dropped the pitchfork and they moved to embrace, but before they could close their arms around each other light flooded into the barn and they heard a voice from the doorway.

“What have you two done now?”

Chapter End Notes

Petyr had to die, but at least in this version he didn’t go out like a total begging bitch....
Arya and Sansa turned and there silhouetted against the headlights of his car stood Major Bolton, he had drawn his pistol and held it casually. He made a tsking noise at them and walked forward taking in the scene. Sansa stood covered in Petyr’s blood, Petyr laid dead, his blood continuing to pool and seep into the floorboards and hay, the bloody pitchfork lay to the side of Arya.

Ramsay continued to study them as he neared Petyr’s body. He toed at him for a couple of moments, and then kicked him all the way over unto his back. Once he confirm he was dead he smiled wickedly at both of the girls.

“This is not good, not good at all,” he informed them even though he looked pleased. They stood frozen staring at him, watching his movements. “I can’t say I’m disappointed exactly, I mean I detested him. He was smug, thought he was so clever, that he was going to outwit me, control me. I’ll be honest, I long thought one of us was going to end up this way one day, but the fact that he would find his end by the two of you, well that is an interesting turn.”

Sansa wanted to close the distance and pull Arya to her but she worried any sudden movement might set him off, so she forced herself to stay still. Ramsay moved towards Arya purposely and stood in front of her. He stared down at her, taking her measure.

“It is unfortunate though,” he said beginning to circle her like a shark. “As much as I hated him I can’t let the death of the highest ranking civilian on the island, my most trusted advisor, go unpunished, even if we are almost family.” Sansa blanched and Arya looked disgusted.

“Was this your doing?” he purred, addressing Arya specifically. Arya glanced towards Sansa. Ramsay’s hand shot out and gripped her face tightly and wrenched it back to him. “Don’t look at her! Answer me!” he snarled.

“It was me!” Sansa shouted before Arya could respond. Ramsay’s head snapped towards her but he still held Arya’s face tightly.

“I think you’re lying. If you are, there will be consequences,” he said turning his gaze back to Arya.

“Let her go and I’ll explain,” Sansa said softly. She stepped forward and touched his arm. He glanced at her hand and then her face. He looked confused, like he was shocked she’d initiated contact. “Please,” she added. He released Arya from his grip and she staggered back, red finger impressions clear on her cheek.

Sansa was staring into his eyes, her eyes were set and hard. He hadn’t seen this expression from her before. And admittedly that had him intrigued. He had his doubts that sweet self-sacrificing Sansa had been the one to kill Petyr, but this look she currently had made him wonder if he might be wrong. And if she had done it then he had so many questions. He wanted to hear the details, if there had been pain or shame he wanted to revel in it. But she did not seem distraught or even disturbed at the moment. If she had killed and could remain this detached then perhaps she was more like him than he’d ever dared hope. He wanted to know if she’d enjoyed it, if it was something she might be able to do again. What if this was something they might be able to share? He smiled and his blood sang in his veins, internally he snapped at himself to calm down, to not get ahead of things, after all he might be wrong; she could be lying.
Sansa felt taken aback by the look of, well she could only call it happiness, which had spread across his face. She set her jaw and slowly drew her hand away. Ramsay was looking at her expectantly waiting on her explanation. She wanted to get him away from Arya. God why was she even here? Where was Jon? Sansa quickly pushed those thoughts from her mind, she needed to focus on Ramsay now.

“Maybe we can go outside and talk. I’d like to be away from his body.”

Ramsay laughed, a dark energy was pulsing from him. He seemed amused. “If that’s what you’d prefer. But tell me, what does his blood taste like?” He reached out and ran his thumb over her lower lip, then her chin, and finally down her neck. He held it up to her to show her Petyr’s blood, dark and thick and sticky on his thumb. She shuttered and they locked eyes. To her shock she realized he was actually wanting a response. She had no idea what to say and after another moment he simply smiled and placed his thumb in his mouth. Sansa felt her stomach drop. She recognized in that moment that this was going to end horribly; that they had just signed a contract in literal blood.

He pulled his thumb from his mouth with a dramatic flourish and laughed again. He grabbed her arm and ushered her towards the door. “Go on, tell me. Tell me what you’ve done,” he commanded excitedly.

Sansa glanced back at Arya who was staring at them dumbfounded. Sansa tried to use her head to motion for Arya to go out the back. Ramsay took notice though, his smile falling a bit and he squeezed her arm tighter. “You stay,” he commanded Arya and the turned back to Sansa, “Tell me. Now.”

“The how is not important. He’s dead because of me.” He looked disappointed in her words, his smile now completely gone. She decided to change tactics. “I did you a favor really, he was disloyal and jealous. He was going to cause problems.” He loosened his grip and studied her, looking for the lie he was now sure she was telling.

“A man is dead, so I’m afraid you’re going to have to be much more specific.” His tone had grown cold.

“Petyr came here angry. I’m not sure if you know but he loved my mother, he tried to put those feelings on me.”

They had stopped near the door and he was regarding her. He flicked his gaze to Petyr’s body and then back to her. “Hardly a reason to kill him.”

“Well he was angry about us. I know he offered me to you once but he didn’t like that we’d been…… together. He was saying terrible things about you, plotting against you even…. He got aggressive, he tried…. It doesn’t matter. All that matters is I killed him.”

Ramsay kept watching her. His expression tense, his jaw tight. His eyes were burning her with their intensity and she wondered if she might crumble under it. Arya still hadn’t moved, she needed to get him further away.

She placed her hand on his arm again and hoped to guide him into the yard. She hoped if he could no longer could see Arya then she would take the opportunity to run and hide.

His expression grew tighter. “I said be specific. Tell me, what did he try to do?”

“He tried to take something that belongs to you.”

His eyes flashed and sparked and something broken loose. His face transformed into a gruesome
sneer. She knew then, much to her horror, that she had said the wrong thing. She had hoped to appeal to his ego, his sense of ownership over her, but she’d overplayed her hand and he had seen it for the lie it was. He looked furious and shoved her back hard. She fell, her head striking the doorframe. Everything flashed black and then blurry. She thought she heard Arya yell her name.

“Belongs to me?! I told you not to lie,” he hissed and stalked back into the barn, towards Arya who had been watching the whole scene in a sort of suspended animation. Ramsay’s approach startled her, but it was too late. She made a move to dart away but he grabbed her by her hair and hauled her back, spinning her to face Petyr’s body.

“This was you. You did this.”

Sansa tried to stand but she was struggling and her mind was not processing things as it should.

“I did. I’m not sorry either,” Arya spat out.

Ramsay laughed and let her go. So perhaps Sansa wasn’t like him, that was fine, he hadn’t really even expected her to be, and even if she had not done it, her sister had and really this couldn’t have worked out any better. Baelish had been a stupid arrogant prick in thinking that he had not cataloged away every look and mention of Sansa since they had met and he had made his offer. He knew telling Petyr about his conquest of her would make him furious. He knew that fury and jealousy would drive Petyr here in an attempt to somehow assert his control back over Sansa. He had expected to show up here tonight and save her himself from Baelish, but this, this was even better. He was dead here on the Tully farm and not by his hand. He now had all the leverage he needed over her. She would do whatever he wanted now, she would have no other choice. The sense of victory washing over him was intoxicating.

Sansa had managed to stand and was leaning on the doorframe, her senses nearly normalized. Arya looked at her sister as she staggered forward and then halted to compose herself. She looked up at Ramsay then and took in his pleased expression, a disgusting look of triumph, and she wanted nothing more than to wipe it from his face. And so she reacted before she or Sansa could stop her.

She spit at the ground next to his boots. “I killed him because I hated him, and you should know I hate you even more,” she declared as she shoved him hard. He stumbled back but he did not fall. He steadied himself and he frowned and let out a heavy sigh. Arya’s eyes went wide with confusion and panic. “That’s unfortunate, I had so hoped we would soon make a happy family,” he said resignedly.

And then time stopped. Sansa tried to surge forward but she could not move fast enough. She felt as if she was outside of herself watching a movie or trapped in some sort of terrible dream. She watched in horror as Ramsay pulled his gun on Arya and fired. The gun flashed, the sound was deafening. Arya fell back, a red flower blooming from her chest.

Sansa screamed, shoving passed Ramsay, she scrambled to Arya’s side and fell to the ground. She pulled her sister to her and cradled Arya’s head in her lap calling her name over and over. Arya’s eyes were rolling back in her head and she could barely focus on Sansa’s face. Not that it mattered anyways as the light from the headlights were obscuring it anyways. But the light did catch her red hair, illuminating it to create rivers of molten lava that were cascading towards Arya to claim her soul. To Arya’s dying mind it appeared she was looking into the face of fire, the image of an avenging angel come to take her away, and even though she had begun to feel cold the fire gave her a measure of comfort.

“Be brave,” she breathed. Sansa wasn’t sure if the words were for her or if it was something Arya
was telling herself.

“Arya, please, please stay with me. I need you to stay with me,” Sansa sobbed as she tried to stem the flow of blood from Arya’s chest. She almost couldn’t see Arya’s face now, her eyes too flooded with tears.

Arya’s hand came up and dropped on top of Sansa’s. “Be brave,” Arya whispered again and then Sansa saw the light leave her eyes. Sansa let out the longest most terrible scream, primal and heart shattering, and she began to shake her sister’s body.

“Enough!” Ramsay roared after several moments and grabbed her by the arm and dragged her away from Arya. All sense of self-preservation was gone, her only thought now was to destroy Ramsay. She turned on him, screaming, clawing, biting; she had transformed into a wild wounded animal. She felt his skin tear in her fingers, his blood filled her mouth when she bit his hand. He roared and struck her to the ground and set himself upon her. Her body was pinned, she could see his face was bleeding from her efforts but it did little to satisfy the need she had to end him.

“You goddamn cunt! I am going to fuck you right here in your sister’s blood! And if you don’t die by the end you’ll be begging me to fucking kill you soon enough!” He was tearing at her clothes now. He no longer cared about possessing her, all he wanted now was her destruction. But she no longer cared, she would welcome it in fact, she would rather be with Arya now anyways.

But then she suddenly thought of Jon, she hoped he had made it to the coast and off this godforsaken cursed island. She thought then of her promise to him to survive here without him. To be reunited with him after the war. And that thought made her try one more time to free herself from Ramsay. And so she screamed and bucked and twisted in an attempt to free herself, but it failed; he was too strong, his rage seemed to have given him ungodly strength.

He called her a cunt once more and struck her across the face, fresh blood filled her mouth and she once again was dazed. She stilled then, his forearm now digging into her windpipe and cutting off her air, and with it cutting off any hope she still held of surviving this. She cursed herself for being so naïve, to have ever thought there would be any other outcome then her destruction at his hands. And so she relaxed and accepted her fate. She closed her eyes, she didn’t want to see her fear reflecting in his eyes as he did this to her. She did not want the last thing she saw in this life to be his eyes full of triumph as he finally destroyed her.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know. I’m sorry. If it’s any consolation I cried when I read this back before I posted it.

So I’m planning to finish this in three or four more chapters, however because of the way it ends I’m wrestling with posting it one chapter at a time or just dropping them all at once. I’m leaning towards the mass drop because I think it’ll make a better reading experience for all of you, but obviously if I go that route it’ll be a little bit till the next and therefore last update. I guess we’ll see how the editing goes......

As always thank you for reading and all the love in the comments. They honestly help grow this story from a 175 page first draft to about a 260 page final story, but alas the ending we are nearing was always going to be the ending. *sigh* Now to perfect it.... the pressure!!!
Alright, so here is the finale of the story. I have a million things I want to say but I am going to save most of them for notes after the final chapter.....

Thanks to everyone for their patience while I finished up. I decided to publish the final four chapters in one shot (but still in separate chapters so it makes sense) because I think it reads better this way. If I was a reader I would just want this all in one shot so I would get my questions answered and be able to process it all. Honestly some of you may need to sit with this a while before you decide how you feel about it and that's ok, I did too.

So here it goes, buckle in. (Honestly my heart is about to explode and I feel kinda queasy as I post this, so there's that.....)

If you need music to go along with this, I recommend for this chapter "Hot Gates" by Mumford and Sons. That song speaks to this chapter in numerous ways, or maybe it's just that it's what I listened to a lot while I wrote it.

Darkness was consuming her. Her throat was raw and her lungs burned from the lack of air. If he didn’t let up soon she was going to pass into unconsciousness, but then perhaps that was preferable to feeling what he was about to do to her. She heard her shirt rip over the litany of foul curses he was hissing at her. She felt the cold air hit her flesh. Tears forced their way out of the eyes that she had screwed tightly shut. And then suddenly his weight shifted back, his arm moved from her neck, pinning her instead by her shoulders. He seemed to still. She gasped for air, the sound filling her ears, and her mind pulled back from the darkness.

“Who’s there?” he called out. He actually sounded alarmed and it made her open her eyes. She found the barn had plunged into near darkness. The headlights had been shut off and the lantern in the cows’ stall cast minimal light.

They waited but there was no answer. She dared to turn her head to look towards the front door, the one that opened into the yard. They both now stared into the darkness. For a moment she considered calling out for help, but it seemed as if he read her thoughts. He tightened his grip on her shoulders, fingers digging into her flesh. A painful reminder that she was beyond salvation.

After several long moments he seemed satisfied they were alone and he shifted his focus back to her. Leering at her, he leaned back over her to resume his assault. And then she heard it, coming from the back of the barn, the sound of someone running into the barn.

Ramsay let out an angry cry as he flew off her. She hadn’t clearly seen him, but she knew it in her
heart, it was Jon; he had come back. He had tackled Ramsay off her and they were now rolling in the hay, swinging and striking at each other, a whirl of fists and limbs. Sansa couldn’t control herself before she sobbed out Jon’s name one despondent time.

Ramsay had been on top but Jon had managed to throw him off. The men, now broken apart, quickly scrambled to their feet. They faced each other and began circling, regarding each other, looking for weaknesses.

Ramsay spoke first, his comment directed at Sansa but his focus on Jon. “Sansa darling, I must say, you are certainly full of revelations.” Jon grunted in displeasure at his words, drawing Ramsay’s full attention back to him.

Ramsay studied him hard for several long moments before he finally spoke. “Jon is it? I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure previously,” he stated wiping blood from his mouth. “Which begs the question then, just exactly who the fuck are you? Why are you on my goddamn island?” Sansa noticed then that his hand was fumbling around his side. She understood then that Ramsay no longer had his gun, she glanced around but in the darkness she couldn’t see it anywhere near her.

“I’m the man that has been waiting to kill you. I’m the man that is going to kill you.”

“Then I’m afraid you are a man that is going to be so disappointed,” Ramsay laughed. Jon said nothing, but he narrowed his eyes and pulled his knife. He held it low and by his side. Ramsay scoffed and then pulled his as well. They continued to circle each other slowly and deliberately.

“I hadn’t imagine you’d be so bold. I long wondered why you wanted to stay out here, I often suspected you were up to something, you and that cunt of a sister. There were rumors of course, but I clearly underestimated you. I frequently wondered if I should have forced you off this forsaken shit stain.” He was speaking to Sansa again but he never took his eyes off Jon. “This is a valuable lesson for me, both on your capabilities and the foolishness of mercy.”

Sansa felt mired to the floor, her head was pounding again, her vision momentarily blurring. She tried to draw as much air into her lungs as she could, to clear her head, so she might be able to help Jon. She knew she would need to do something, but for the moment she was unable. Jon for his part was trying to focus on Ramsay but he did manage to spare her the briefest of glances. Ramsay took note and he smirked, amused with what he saw before him.

“This is all rather interesting don’t you think?” Ramsay asked.
Jon only gave a displeased grunt in response. He did not want to engage in conversation with this man, or say anything that might give him more ammunition to harm him or Sansa.

“I’ll take that as you disagree, but you see Jon, we aren’t so different.”

Jon’s eyes went wide and he scoffed in disbelief and was unable to hold his tongue. “We are nothing alike.”

“But we are. You love her, I can tell. Its why you wish me dead,” he said his cold smile growing larger. “But you see, I love her too.” Sansa choked at his proclamation, but he seemed to not hear her. “I wonder, how long have you been here exactly? How long have you been cowering and hiding? Were you here when she was still a virgin? Were you here when I fucked her? Could you hear it? Did you wish it was you?”

“Stop talking!” Jon shouted and stepped towards Ramsay. He slashed at him with his knife but missed. Ramsay smiled wider at that.

“What kind of man hides when another takes his woman?”

“Stop it! Shut up Ramsay!” Sansa screamed, “Shut up!”

It seemed he had been so distracted by taunting Jon he had nearly forgotten she was there. Her shouts caused him to look towards her for just a moment and Jon saw his opening and charged him. Ramsay let out a howl. They rolled to the ground, a tangle of limbs again. There was screaming and shouting, sometimes Sansa couldn’t even tell who was making what sounds.

They flipped over and over. The sounds of ribs breaking, fists cracking bone and bruising flesh, screams of pain and wild growls filled the air. Who was making what sound became indistinguishable as the violence increased. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Jon emerged on top. His knife was gone but he was striking Ramsay, blows raining down and turning his face to a bloodied pulp. To Sansa’s shock she almost swore Ramsay was smiling.

She forced herself to her feet and managed to retrieve Brynden’s gun from the hiding place in the stall. The feel of it in her hand seemed to give her a renewed strength and finally cleared her head. She walked over to them holding the gun in front of her. Jon slowed his punches and looked at her. She stood right next to them and Jon stopped hitting him, he pushed back and stood next to her. Jon could see her hand was shaking as she stared down at Ramsay’s bloodied and battered face.
“You don’t have to,” Jon said reaching for the gun. He didn’t want her to carry the burden of taking a life, even if it was justified.

“Yes, I do,” she responded, her eyes still trained on Ramsay. She seemed determined. Her hand had stopped shaking and so Jon let his hand fall away. Ramsay burbled on his blood and seemed to smile at her with broken teeth and blood stained lips. She aimed the gun at his face and he opened his mouth to speak, but before he could form a single word she pulled the trigger.

Blood, brain matter and bone sprayed everywhere as his face collapsed in. Sansa dropped the gun immediately, staggered back and fell to her knees, vomiting into the hay until her stomach was empty. Jon knelt beside her, holding her hair back and gently rubbing her back.

When she was finally able she look up. She found herself staring into Jon’s grey eyes. They were a storm of pain and concern that threatened to swallow her. She forced her focus outward and took in his entire appearance. He was covered in hay, dirt and blood; he was sweating and in the dim light seemed extremely pale. She then looked beyond him for a moment, three bodies lay in the barn now, blood soaking into everything. How would they clean this up? Explain it? How would they escape this unharmed? Her mind reeled with a thousand questions. If she hadn’t already emptied her stomach she surely would have now.

Jon helped her to her feet and held her by her shoulders, his face deeply serious. “You need to go. You need to get to the beach, find the smuggler and have him take you to England,” Jon told her.

She focused back on him again. His words were not making sense. “I need to go?” she responded, her tone confirming her confusion. “You mean we, right?”

“Sansa…..” he groaned and sank to his knees clutching his side. She grabbed at him and pulled his hands away, the palms were covered in fresh blood.

“You, it’s only going to be you,” he breathed and then collapsed to the ground.

She fell to her knees and pulled his shirt up, there were several stab wounds in his flank, she rolled him and saw two in his back right above his kidney; they were bleeding the hardest of all the wounds. She let out a sob.

He rolled back and clutched her hands and demanded she look at him. “Listen, there is no other way. 
They will come looking for Ramsay, for Petyr, and when they find them you’ll be dead anyways. This is the only way. No one will know what happened, but if there are four bodies you can protect everyone.”

She pulled her hands away. “What? What do you mean four bodies?”

“The island commander is dead, if they think anyone on the island is responsible they’ll be reprisals, but if they think you all died in a fire, by accident, they might be spared.”

“I don’t -, what are you saying?” She was starting to feel hysteria rising in her chest.

“I’m saying you are going to light the barn on fire, the hay will burn the bodies before anyone can make it out here and identify them. They’ll find four skeletons, Arya, Petyr, Ramsay and you, but it’ll be me, I make the fourth body. Ramsay and Petyr are hated, they won’t investigate too hard; everyone will be safe. But you have to go, you have to go to the beach and get on the boat.” He was growing paler, his breathing more labored.

“No! No! I’m not going! You can’t make me go!”

“There’s nothing left here Sansa!” he shouted with such force that she was certain there was no way he could be dying. As if he could read her thoughts he reached up and took her face between his hands, mixing his blood with Petyr’s. He forced her to look into his eyes. “Listen to me, I’m going to die here. You need to leave. When you get to the beach they’ll ask you who you are meeting, you must answer No One.”

“No!”

He released her face and reached in his pocket and pulled out a sealed envelope, his fingertips transferring blood to its white surface. “If you must, show them this, tell them its important intelligence that you need to get to Samwell Tarly. Only let Sam open this.”

“What is it?”

“It doesn’t matter, but you must insist that they take you so this can get to Sam. You need to hurry or you might not make it.” His hands shook as he held the envelope.
She took the envelope and she held it and sobbed. He reached up and pushed her hair back, more of his blood transferring on to her face. “I have loved you more than I ever thought it was possible to love anyone. You made me belong, you gave me a family. Please. Please, do this for me.”

Sansa continued to sob and shake her head. “We are still a family. I want to stay with you and Arya. I have to take care of you both.”

“I’ll take care of Arya, but you can’t stay. That isn’t what we want for you. You don’t belong here with us, not now. We need you to go. Can you do that?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know. I’m not strong enough.”

“You can, you will. You are strong enough, you are the strongest woman I’ve ever known.”

“I’m not leaving. I can’t! I won’t!”

“You have to.” He started coughing, blood filling his mouth, he spat it out. “Listen to me, there is no time, you have to do this. Are you listening? You have to answer ‘no one’.”

“I can’t do it alone, come with me, please. You’ll be ok, just come with me.”

“No Sansa, no I’m not, I wish you were right, but this is it. You have to do this, light the fire and go. You have to survive this, I can’t die thinking it was all for nothing.”

She sobbed, she screamed, and then finally she nodded in agreement. “I love you,” she sobbed.

“I love you too,” he breathed. Despite his attempt to protest she lay down beside him. She held him until his breathing became slow and shallow and he finally slipped in unconsciousness. She place a kiss on his temple and released him. She tear off her clothes and cleaned off the remaining blood. She pulled on new clothes, shoved the envelope in her satchel, and gathered up all the clothes and towels with blood on them.

She raced back to the barn and tossed the clothes into the hay near Petyr. She grabbed the lantern from the cows’ stall, leaving the gate open so they could escape.

She carefully knelt by Arya so that no further blood would get on her and took her hand. “Please forgive me little sister… I’ll do my best to be brave, just like you said,” she whispered and then kissed her forehead gently.

She made her way back to Jon. He was no longer breathing and she knew by the searing pain in her heart he was gone. She knelt beside him and pushed back his curls and kissed him one final time on the lips, her tears raining down on his face. She finally stood and gripped the lantern. Once she was clear of the hay she flung it to the ground and watched it shatter, fire instantly exploding into the hay. She watched for a few moments as the flames raced towards the bodies. But before the fire reached
them she turned and ran. She knew she couldn’t bear to watch the flames consume her family, her future; everything she loved. And even if she could have, she didn’t have the time. It was two miles to the beach and it was getting late. She found the old cattle trail and plunged into the woods. She glanced over her shoulder once and could see the fire had engulfed the barn, tall flames shooting into the night sky.

She had been running for nearly twenty minutes and could hear the ocean now. Her legs and lungs burned but she had not slowed. She burst from the tree line on to the beach, tripping in the sand. She looked at her watch, 10:56. She searched for any sign of the boat that would be her salvation. Her eyes swept over the horizon and then she saw something a little ways down the beach to her right, to an area where the trees nearly met the water. She rose and approached with caution.

She was almost near the boat when a bright light blinded her and a voice called out. “Stop right there! Who are you looking for girl?”

She thought of Arya’s words again, to be brave. She took a deep breath and called back loudly and clearly, “No One!”
Sansa sat in a small office waiting on Samwell Tarly to appear. She fidgeted with the envelope that had become her life line, her salvation, and she would hand it to no one but Sam Tarly. She had argued this point with the smuggler that had taken her from Oakenshield, and with every person she had encountered since being let off at Weymouth, that had tried to take it from her.

Using that envelope she had managed to hitchhike her way from the coast to the air base that Jon had mentioned was his last station. The envelope, combined with the skills she had honed after years of dealing with Petyr and Ramsay, had allowed her to fast talk and charm her way on to the base. She had talked her way around and finally found someone that had remembered Jon. They had agreed to contact Sam for her. Thankfully, Sam was stationed at Harpenden and so she had only had to wait a couple of days for him to come to her.

The door opened and a portly dark haired man in a uniform came in. “Sansa Stark?” he asked her.

She nodded. “Are you Sam? Samwell Tarly?”

“I am. They tell me you have news from Commander Snow.” She nodded again and tapped down the tears that were trying to form. Sam seemed nervous and was fidgeting worse than her. Sansa struggled to find the words, but it seemed Sam could read her expression. “He’s dead isn’t he?”

She swallowed and then answered, “Yes, a few days ago.”

He took a seat in a chair on the side of the table adjacent to her. “They told me he was presumed KIA months ago, but I guess I had hoped….. Well, it’s no easier to hear it now. Were you there?”

She nodded. “Can I ask how?”

“Saving me,” she whispered and suddenly felt overwhelming guilt, everyone had died because of her, everyone. A couple of tears managed to escape and trail down her cheeks.

“I’m sorry,” he sighed and handed her a handkerchief. “That sounds like Jon though, he would die a hero.” She wiped her eyes and then realized he was looking at the envelope in her hands now.

She stared at the envelope, at the bloody fingerprints, and blinked away more tears. It was the only thing she had of him still and the thought of handing it over was causing her physical pain, but she had to honor his wishes. “He said I was to give this only to you.” She waited one more mournful moment and then she handed the letter to Sam even though it felt like she was giving him the last piece of her soul.

“Thank you Sansa,” he said taking it and focusing his gaze on the blood stains. He sighed and then looked at her again. “Is there anything I can get for you? Assist you with?”

She dabbed at her eyes again and steeled her mind. It was time to be practical once more. “I need to get to my family, to London…..”

“I’m sure I can help arrange that.”

They sat quietly for a moment and Sam turned the envelope over in his hands nervously. He finally rose which caused Sansa to shoot her hand out and grab his arm. He jumped a bit, looking startled.
and then embarrassed.

“Sorry, but actually can you open that now? If it’s top secret you don’t have to tell me details, but – I just…..” She wasn’t sure what she hoped was in there but she hoped it was important, that somehow she had helped by bringing it here.

“Of course.” Sam tore open the envelope and took out the folded letter. He flipped it open and began to read the first lines. His face grew red and he folded it down and placed it on the table in front of Sansa. “It appears it is actually for you.”

“Me? But he insisted I bring it to you.”

Sam smiled sadly, knowingly. “I think he wanted to make sure that you would get here, that they would listen to you and take you. I’ll give you some time to read it. In the meantime I’ll see about getting you home.” Sam gave her hand a pat and then left the room.

She stared at the paper like it was a poisonous snake, like it was a living thing that could do nothing but wound her. She took a deep breath, she wasn’t sure she was prepared to read Jon’s final words to her, but she couldn’t not read them either. She picked it up and flipped the letter open and began to read:

“Dearest Sansa,

Tonight we said our last goodbye, and rather than lay in tears in bed all night I’m writing this letter as I watch you sleep, so please indulge me if I ramble. You’ll probably never know how beautiful you look right now, laying there naked, wrapped in the blankets with this soft sleepy smile on your face. It’s a sight I hope to see every day of my life once the war has ended. Honestly though, all I can think of is that after tomorrow I’ll spend every day wanting nothing more than to see your face once more.

I actually hope you never have to read this, but if you are, know I’m sorry.

I’m sorry because if you are reading this it means that I failed to keep my word and I will not be able to find you after the war. I can only hope that my death was heroic, that I took out a bunch of those Nazi bastards when I went, that I died for a noble purpose.

I’m sorry I couldn’t stay, I never wanted to go. But you were right, I had a duty and there was nothing else I could do that could keep you safe. I owed it to you to do something. I want you to know that you brought out the best of me, a part of me I’d never seen. It was as if you took my soul and wiped it clean. I think my real life began on that island. It hadn’t matter then that I came from nothing, with you I became something. Because of that as I write this I can promise you that you and your happiness were the last things I thought of when I slipped from this life.

Despite the war the time I spent with you and Arya was the most amazing and important months of my life. I hope after I left that the two of you continued to be safe and not drive each other too crazy. Please give Arya my love and tell her I hope she was able to outwit that fox before the end of the war.”

Sansa set the letter down. His wishes to Arya had set her crying so hard she could no longer read the words, and she feared they might even smear the ink. It took her several minutes to regain her composure and continue on.

“I told you more than once that you and Arya gave me a family and made me belong. I know you dream of rebuilding your family, of carrying on the Starks. I’m so sorry that I won’t get to be a part
of that. But I want you to know that I want that for you still. I know you may not want to hear that now, but if you're reading this there's going to come a day when you might be ready to move on, you might find someone else, and that's OK. You have so much love to give, please don’t let that die with me. And more than that, I want you to be loved, I want you to feel as whole and happy as you made me.

Please Sansa, you’ve survived so much, please don’t let my death be the thing that actually destroys you. Please carry on and try to fill your life with love and joy. It’s all I have ever wanted for you.

I will love you always.

Yours truly,

Jon.”

She read the letter again and then set her forehead on the table and sobbed.

Xxxxxx

She must’ve drifted off to sleep because the next thing she knew Sam was standing next to her gently tapping her shoulder. She sat up startled and Sam jumped back a bit.

“I’m sorry! I hate to wake you, but then I can’t imagine sleeping hunched at a table is comfortable,” he apologized.

“It’s ok,” she said and felt herself flush a bit with embarrassment.

“I’m headed back to Harpenden tomorrow, so I figured I can escort you to London.” An expression passed over Sansa’s face. Sam read it as an apology, so he added, “It would be what Jon would want after all.”

“Thank you Sam,” she answered and seemed to relax a little. She then gave him a timid look. “Can I ask you for something else as well?”

“Of course, Jon’ll haunt me if I refuse,” he said with a sad rueful smile.

She attempted to return his smile, but it looked more like a controlled grimace. Sam flushed and cursed himself for being so awkward. If Jon was alive he would’ve laughed good naturedly at him to soothe his nerves. Jon had always been encouraging and kind to him. Jon had saved him so many times in the orphanage. Images of their youth began to play in Sam’s mind.

Sam was so caught up in his memories he realized he had not heard Sansa’s request. “I’m sorry, can you say that again?” Sam flushed further and shook his head at himself.

Sansa flushed too and wondered if she was asking too much, but she repeated her request. “Can you inquire about my brother, Robb Stark? He’s in the RAF.” Sam looked perplexed but nodded. “I have no idea of his current rank or station…… or if he is even alive……” She began to choke up again.

Sam patted her hand. “I’ll have an answer for you before we go tomorrow, I promise.”

xxxxxxxxxx

It had taken some digging, but Sam had been able to locate Robb. He was somehow still alive and Sansa had broken down and wept in Sam’s arms when he told her. He was part of the Desert Air Force now, a member of a squadron of the RAF that was stationed and fighting in Africa. She was
heavy hearted to learn he was so far from her and yet elated that he was still alive. Sam told her she could write him, the letter might take a bit to get to him, but eventually it would find him.

They rode in the back of a transport to London. Sam kept her busy with stories about Jon from their childhood and their life in Leeds. Sansa told him a couple stories about Jon and Arya and their time on the island. It felt good to indulge in happy memories of them, even if only for a couple of hours.

When they reached the outer edges of London they had fallen silent. Sansa could not believe how the city had changed. There were piles of rubble and burned out buildings on nearly every street. It made Sansa sick to her stomach. As they made their way further into the interior the damage increased, she started to fear what she would find when she reached her home. And then a wave of panic swept over her. If she did find her parents what would she even say? How could she possibly explain what had happened to Arya? That she was returning home without her little sister? She swallowed the bile that threatened to rise in her throat.

The truck bumped to a stop and Sam’s voice cut into her thoughts. “- as far as they can go.”

“What?” she said looking at him confused.

“I said you’ll need to walk or get a bus from here, this is as far as they can go.”

“Oh.”

“I’m sorry but we have to get back to base and I have to explain I didn’t get any actual intelligence,” he apologized and turned bright red.

“It’s ok, Sam. I understand. Thank you for everything.”

Sam helped her from the truck and gave her a hug. He then handed her all the money he had. “Please stay in touch. And if you ever need anything, please get word to me.”

“I will. Be safe. Thank you again for everything.”

Sam climbed back in the truck and gave her another wave as they pulled away. Sam felt terrible to
leave her like this, but he had had to call in favors and talk up the fact he might be able to get some good intelligence just to be able to see her in the first place. And now that he nothing to show for it, so he knew he needed to follow his orders and return to his station as soon as possible. He mumbled a prayer asking for Jon’s forgiveness.

Sansa made her way to the bus station and eventually found her way to the edge of her neighborhood. The area had been leveled by the bombing, so the bus didn’t actually run into the neighborhood anymore.

She made the rest of the way on foot. She already knew what she would find, but when she turned on her street she felt her heart turn to lead nonetheless. There was nothing standing, save for a few chimneys or exposed brick walls. It was a terrifying moonscape of despair. There was nothing here for her. The question now was what had happened to her parents, to Bran?

Xxxxxx

Sansa stepped off the train at the Nottingham station and looked around. After a few moments she saw Edmure. He waved at her from near the end of the platform. She went to him, their eyes meeting and mirroring each other’s sadness. After a pause they hugged.

“Rickon’s back at the house with Roslin,” he said as they drew apart. “He wanted to come but he was tired.”

Sansa nodded in understanding but she wondered if that was the truth. Rickon would be six now, she hadn’t seen him in two years, she wondered if he even remembered who she was.

“The car’s this way,” Edmure said picking up her satchel. They walked in silence. She knew he had much to tell her, but she could see the tension in his shoulders; he was not ready just yet to tell her the story of her parents and Bran.

After she had found the ruins of their home she had reported to a refugee center. They had given her some food, clothes and a place to sleep. She had sent a telegram to Edmure telling him she was alive and in London. She didn’t mention Arya or Lysa’s fate, she knew he would assume quite a bit from their lack of inclusion in her message. He had quickly responded that he, Roslin, their son, EJ, and Rickon were alive and well and she should come to them. He added that he was sad to inform her they were the only ones remaining, but offered no further information. He did however wire her money to purchase the train ticket to Nottingham.
They rode in silence back to his home and went inside. Roslin greeted them with Rickon en tow. He held his aunt’s hand and looked shyly at Sansa. When she tried to greet him her had buried his face in Roslin’s skirt. As she feared, he did not seem to remember her. Roslin gave her a reassuring smile as she patted Rickon’s shoulder, “He’ll come around.”

“Do you want to rest?” Edmure asked her. “I can show you to your room.”

“If it’s all the same can we talk now? I’d like to know what happened to…..” she answered, her voice trailed off as she looked at Rickon.

“Of course. Ros, can you bring us some tea? We’ll be in the library.”

Roslin nodded and headed off taking Rickon with her. Sansa turned and followed Edmure to the library. They took a seat in the chairs before the fire.

“I’m sorry. I don’t even know where to start,” he said gazing into the fire.

Sansa watched the fire for a moment shaking off the memory of sitting before the fire at the Umber Estate with Ramsay not so long ago. When her mind was clear she prompting him to begin. “When did it happen?”

He took a breath and let out a sad sigh. “For your parents; December 1940. It was the worst night of bombing London had seen. They died in the house. Somehow Bran had survived, he was found in the rubble the following day, but he was paralyzed. He was taken to the hospital but eventually he got an infection, he died in February. I regret that we didn’t take him when we took Rickon, but we were just about to have the baby then and –. “ He choked up then and covered his face with his hands.

“It’s ok. How could you have known? Anyways, mum would’ve never agreed, I’m sure it would have been too hard on her to have us all away from her……” She sat for a moment watching the fire again and thought back to her mother’s comment to Bran the night it had been decided that she and Arya would go to the island, how Cat had told her she wanted to keep him with her. She wondered if her mother had thought of those words at the end. If she had mourned sealing her son’s fate that night. The thought made her heart ache for her.

They sat quietly while Edmure composed himself. When he finally was ready he turned to her. “Sansa. I hate to, but I must ask, what happened on Oakenshield, to Brynden? Lysa and Robin?
“Arya?” He grimaced as he said each of their names.

“I don’t know Brynden’s fate. He was arrested for helping run the resistance on the island, he was deported in ’41.”

“That old coot might still be alive then, probably trying to lead a rebellion wherever he is,” Edmure mused and it made Sansa smile. She hoped it might be true. Edmure’s smile faded though and he looked at her with resigned sadness once more.

She continued on. “Lysa and Robin both went last year as well, typhus. It was impossible to get the proper medicine under the Nazis.” She had decided it would be easier for everyone to tell the story this way, there was no reason to sully Lysa’s name by saying she killed herself, and honestly Sansa wasn’t even sure if that was the truth. She’d long suspected that Petyr had played a much larger part in her aunt’s death than he’d ever admitted.

“And Arya……. Arya was killed by a Nazi the night I fled the island,” she added quietly as tears began to slip down her cheeks.

Edmure handed her a handkerchief and she dabbed her face. “It must’ve been quite awful living under their rule.”

“It was, you have no idea……. but we did our best.” An image of her, Arya and Jon standing in the barn on New Year’s Eve appeared in her mind. “Sometimes I think we even managed to be happy.”

Edmure gave her a soft smile. “Well it’s not all terrible news, Robb is still alive.”

“Yes, in Africa.”

Edmure then gave her a surprised look. “How do -,”

“Arya and I were hiding a downed RAF man. When I made it back here I was able to have one of his friends look into it for me. It’s the only good thing I’ve heard in months.”

She could see the gears turning in his mind. “I’m surprised you’d take such a risk,” he said. “That
was very brave of you,” he added quickly when he noticed the distressed look on her face. She could tell he wanted to say something more but was holding back.

“You can just say it,” she said, she was too exhausted for speculation.

“The pilot, is that why Arya is dead?”

She thought she’d been prepared, but his words cut her deeply nonetheless. She tried to answer, “No, no not directly. Arya’s dead because…..” Sansa started to sob and was unable to finish her statement. Her mind screamed at her, ‘Arya’s dead because of me, because Petyr and Ramsay were obsessed and I loss control the situation. I failed.’

Edmure rose to give her a hug. He seemed uncomfortable with her uncontrollable tears. “Maybe you’d like to go rest now?” She managed to nod. Roslin had just entered with tea, but upon seeing Sansa crying she set it down and shooed Edmure off. She led Sansa away upstairs to what was to now be her room.

Once inside she steered her to the bed and sat beside her, stroking her hair and her back. The tenderness only made Sansa miss her mother more and she began to cry even harder.

“Do you want me to stay with you?” Roslin asked gently.

Sansa shook her head, batting away her tears, trying to compose herself.

“Are you sure? I don’t mind.”

“No, I’ll be ok. Some of it is just relief. At least I know now……. I just miss them…… but at least I know,” she sobbed. Roslin stayed anyways. She held her until Sansa got herself under control and assured her it was ok to leave.

“Take all the time you need. Call if you need anything,” Roslin said and gave her a final hug.

Sansa watched her leave and close the door and then she lay down on the bed, buried her face in the pillows and cried herself empty.
She had been with Edmure and Roslin for a few weeks now and things had been rough. She refused to speak any further about anything that had happened on Oakenshield, and whenever it was brought up she became angry or would dissolve in tears. Edmure started to keep his distance.

She felt exhausted all the time, as well as sick. Most days half of what she ate came right back up. She frequently had nightmares and would awake in tears, or worse, screaming. This meant that Rickon continued to be frightened of her, which was just another source of frustration. It seemed the relative safety of Nottingham was allowing her to fall apart, and so she grew extremely frustrated and irritable.

Roslin was the only one that continued to try with her, and she had decided it might help her if she got involved in something. She reasoned that perhaps if she was distracted she’d have less time to be miserable. The first time she had mentioned to Sansa that she should come with her to the local knitting circle Sansa had suffered a panic attack. It reminded her far too much of the sewing circle on Oakenshield. Roslin’s innocent suggestion had filled her mind with thoughts of Molly, Jeyne, Mrs. Glover and all the others. Had the Germans accepted the fire had been an accident? Had there been reprisals? Were they all still alive? Did they believe she was dead? Had they mourned her?

She had shut herself in her room for a couple days after that. Roslin tried to talk to her but she refused. The sense of guilt she felt was threatening to consume her. For the first time she started to understand why Alys Karstark had gone into that pond.

And then a letter arrived from Robb, slid under her door by Edmure. It was a letter filled with relief and joy that she was alive. It focused on the future, on the survival of the family, on their reunion once the war ended or he could get leave. And while he acknowledged what they had lost, he did not dwell on it and reminded her to do the same. The letter did not offer her absolution but it was a lifeline.

So she pulled herself together and finally left her room. She told Roslin she would go to the knitting circle if they were willing to teach her how to knit. Robb was right, they were still alive, as was Rickon, and it was their responsibility to carry on.

A week later she went with Roslin to the knitting circle at the local church. She had felt nervous and
apprehensive to meet new people, but Roslin assured her everyone was kind and would welcome her. And she was relieved to find it to be true. She was also relieved to find that everyone likewise suffered from their own grief and did not wish to invite more, therefore their questions were minimal.

Everything had been alright until midway through the meeting when someone had brought out a plate of deviled eggs. The smell had turned Sansa’s stomach and sent her to the bathroom where she proceeded to be sick. She eventually composed herself and made her way back to the group. No one said anything but she noticed Roslin regarding her carefully. Her eyes clearly filled with concern as well as questions, though she said nothing other than to ask her if she was alright.

Sansa said she was and Roslin had just nodded, but Sansa could tell they would be discussing it later.

Xxxxxxx

That night Sansa sat in the window seat in her room reading with the window open. It was early June and though it was not yet fully summer she found she often felt warm. She looked up when she heard a knock at her door and called for whoever it was to enter.

It was Roslin and she looked nervous, she was wringing her hands and sat on the edge of the bed across from Sansa.

“I want to talk to you,” she began.

Sansa felt her heart rate jump. Roslin seemed so nervous and in Sansa’s experience there were very few things that would make her aunt seem this tense. She refused to entertain the notation something was wrong with either of her brothers, which left only a couple options, her uncle had grown tired of her and wanted her gone or she wanted to talk about Oakenshield. For a brief moment Sansa thought it would be easier to be tossed out.

Sansa looked at her tentatively and waited, digging her nails into her palm.

“I know you have been very clear that you don’t want to discuss what happened on the island….”

“I have, and nothing has changed.”
“Sansa, I understand, I do, and I don’t want to upset you, but there are things I have noticed and well, I, we can’t keep ignoring them.”

“What things?”

“Your exhaustion, how you get sick.”

“I have nightmares, I don’t sleep. My nerves are shot, it makes me sick. I’m sorry you are worried, I’ll try to be better.”

“I don’t think it’s only grief that is making you feel like this.”

“What are you saying? Do you think I’m sick? That I have cancer or something terrible?” Her voice was raising, she felt the beginnings of a panic attack starting to form around the edges of her consciousness.

“No, not cancer.”

“Then what?! You think I’ve gone mad then? Is that it?” She started to cry then and Roslin moved to the window seat and took her in her arms.

“No, no I don’t think you’re mad. I think you are overwhelmed, and you have lost so much, but sweet girl I think you might be…..“ Roslin sighed losing her nerve.

“That I might be what?” Sansa said drawing back, her tears ceasing, fear clawing at her heart.

“Is there any chance you might be with child?” she asked softly.

Sansa pulled from Roslin as if she was made of fire and shot off the window seat. Her eyes grew wide with panic and she sputtered. “I…. I…..”

Roslin sat quietly as Sansa paced and considered her words. She finally stilled and looked at her aunt. “I thought it was all due to the grief….. It still might be.”
“But it’s a possibility, yes?”

Sansa nodded, tears streaming down her cheeks. Roslin crossed the room and hugged her. “It’s not what you think,” she sobbed.

Roslin pulled back and held her face gently. “You don’t have to tell me the details, but Edmure and I do have a few questions.”

“He’s going to be so ashamed. Are you going to throw me out?” Sansa wept. She regretted now that she’d been a miserable houseguest, and now this. She had nowhere else to go, and if Roslin was right, well who would take her in such a condition? She suddenly felt heavy with despair.

“Oh Sansa, of course not!” Roslin cried and folded her to her. “You are family! We would never do such a thing. Why would you think that?”

“I’m unmarried and – well people will judge and -,”

“Sansa, if you are worried what people will think, don’t. Honestly most people will just assume the father if away at war or ….. Well, just never you mind what people might think. None of that matters. As I said you are family.”

Sansa nodded, she forced herself to stop crying, she feared the questions her aunt had but she knew she owed her something for her kindness. “What are your questions?”

“Do you know who the father is?”

“Yes.”

“Did he force you?”

“No, never. Never.”
“Was he German?”

“No. He was brave and gentle and strong, and I loved him and he loved me.” She thought of Jon and the tears started again and Roslin held her once more.

“That’s wonderful dear. Just try to relax, everything is going to be alright.”

xxxxx

They went to the doctor the following week and he confirmed Roslin’s suspicions. She was in fact pregnant, the baby due in January.

Sansa was shocked at how accepting her aunt and uncle were being of all this. She had expected for Edmure, at least, to be furious, to accuse her of dishonoring the family by being unwed and pregnant, but he said nothing unkind.

She wrote to Robb and told him the news. And even though she felt overwhelmed and a bit terrified, her letter expressed nothing but joy. She didn’t want to worry her brother and she knew he would support her if he thought this would make her happy.

The idea of Jon’s child growing in her did bring her some measure of joy, but it also made her ache for him all the more. And that made her feel guilty because their child had already experienced weeks of grief inside her. So she tried to push the sadness from her mind; she was determined these next few months should be full of as much peace and calm as she could muster.

The awareness of her child seemed to have made the nightmares stop. And by the time she started to feel the baby move Rickon had started to bond with her more. He and EJ were fascinated by her growing belly, and by the time fall arrived they both loved to curl up with her near the fire and watch the baby move and have her read them stories.

She also found that Roslin had been right about people’s reactions. It was quite common for women now to find themselves in similar positions, carrying children of men away at war, of men lost to the cause. People just assumed she was a young widow and she never corrected them.

Robb had eventually responded to her news and as expected was supportive. His letter though had moved her to tears with mentions of their parents and how they would’ve been so pleased to be
grandparents and to see the Stark family grow. He again spoke of their reunion and how he couldn’t wait to be introduced to his niece or nephew.

The baby in true Stark fashion decided that New Year’s Eve was the day to begin its appearance in the world. Sansa’s water broke shortly before midnight, during the first major snow storm of winter. And suddenly all her happiness evaporated, fear and longing replacing it. She wanted her mother, she wanted Jon; she wanted Arya.

It took them forever to get to the hospital. Edmure had been in a panic she might end up having the baby in his car, but once they were at the hospital the baby no longer seemed in any hurry.

And so her labor dragged on and her distress and despair grew. Roslin stayed with her and tried to comfort her but Sansa became distraught in her exhaustion, wailing for her mother, her sister, for Jon. Roslin still knew little of the baby’s father, Sansa still rarely spoke of him or the island, but Roslin knew the wall that Sansa had constructed against the past was crumbling under the pain of childbirth.

And when the little boy was finally pulled from her after thirty six hours of labor it had only gotten worse. She had heard him crying but had not been able to hold him as she fell towards unconsciousness. She had started to hemorrhage. They were able to control it and save her life but then the fever had set in.

Sansa had never even seen her son and now she seemed to be hovering between life and death. The doctors told Roslin and Edmure they had done all they could but it would be up to Sansa now to decide if she would pull through.

The fever broke a couple days later but in that time she had suffered from terrible fever dreams and nightmares. Ramsay and Petyr had both come to her, taunting and torturing her, filling her with even more fear and self-loathing. Arya came to her as well, it had not been a happy reunion either, but rather a nightmare of accusations of fault and abandonment. Jon never came, it was as if he knew coming to her would make her follow him towards the darkness.

The day her fever broke they brought her son to her. The nurses had looked so happy as they brought him in. “Here he is. Perfect little Mr. Jon,” one nurse announced joyously.

“Who named him Jon!?” she snapped, fear gripping her heart. This had to be a cruel joke.

The nurses exchanged a look before one of them answered. “Well you did. You have been calling
Sansa said nothing and just gaped at them. The nurse looked uncomfortable but she placed the sleeping infant in her arms anyways. Sansa looked down and stared at him. He had plump cheeks, a mass of dark curly hair and long eyelashes. He was a beautiful baby. She knew she should be filled with love and awe, and yet as she looked at the boy she felt nothing but despair.

“I’ll fail you too,” she whispered to him. The boy stirred at the sound of her voice and attempted to nuzzle into her. She moved him away from her slightly and this caused him to wake. His lip trembled and then he opened his eyes and gazed at her and Sansa found herself staying into Jon’s grey eyes. And with that her already fractured heart shattered into a million pieces.

“Take him,” she cried out to the nurses as tears started to stream down her face.

“We thought you’d want to feed -,”

“I said take him!” She was becoming hysterical now. She needed them to take him. He was too perfect and his proximity to her was going to doom him, why could they not understand that? Everyone she loved died, if her son was to have a chance they had to get him away from her.

The nurses stared at her in shock. The baby had begun to wail as well and Sansa was holding him up as an offering, pleading with them through her tears to take him. Roslin rushed in the room then, pushed passed the nurses and took the boy from Sansa and began to soothe him. Sansa collapsed back against the pillows and sobbed.

“Please take the baby back to the nursery,” Roslin said to the nurses once she had soothed him. She handed a now quieted Jon to one of them. They exchanged another alarmed look but left as requested. Roslin shut the door after them and then came to Sansa’s bed and sat on the edge and stroked her hair in an attempt to calm her.

“It can be overwhelming, I know. But I’ll help you.”

“It’s not that. I’m no good for him, I can’t love him.”

For the first time Roslin seemed shocked. She stopped stroking her hair and looked at her carefully. “Sansa, you said…. The father, you said he didn’t make you, but if that’s –“
“No, no, that’s not it. I told you, I loved him and he loved me, but he’s dead Ros. He’s dead, Arya’s
dead, they both died because I loved them and they loved me. Don’t you see, that boy is doomed if I
love him. I can’t allow that, I just can’t. He doesn’t deserve to die because of me…. Everyone dies
because of me.” Sansa dissolved into hysterical sobs again.

“Oh Sansa. That’s just not true.”

She couldn’t respond to that but she knew her aunt was wrong. She hadn’t been there, she hadn’t
seen the trail of bodies that she had left on Oakenshield. Sansa vowed then that her son would not be
added to that trail, even if it meant she could never love him.

Chapter End Notes

Jon’s letter is heavily inspired by and quotes a couple of lines from Kodaline’s "All I
Want." Great song and I recommend listening to it.
Chapter 44

“Nurse, can I trouble you for some water?”

“Of course,” Sansa answered. She took the pitcher from the nearby table and filled the American’s water cup.

“Thank you.”

“Is there anything else I can help you with -,” she glanced at his chart, “Lieutenant Tyrell?”

“Willas, please. And do you think you could sit with me? Maybe play a game of cards? Can’t really sleep and I would like the company.”

Sansa looked around the ward, it was late and all the other men seemed settled or asleep. That was one of the things she preferred about the night shift, she didn’t have to interact with too many people.

“I suppose for a bit,” she agreed and pulled a stool up to the side of the tray table near Willas’ bed. He smiled gratefully and picked up the deck of cards and began to shuffle.

He had been here for nearly a month now but this is the first time she’d actually held a conversation with him. He had spent some of his initial time here under sedation due to the horrible leg injury that had brought him here.

“How’s the leg feeling?”

“A little better each day, the pain meds help,” he answered with a small smile. “Gin rummy?”

Sansa nodded but kept her eyes down cast. The smile had made her uncomfortable and she didn’t want to encourage him. Plenty of the other nurses flirted with the patients but she had no desire to. She really was only here in some attempt to make a difference, to maybe help save lives and pay off the debt she felt she owed to Jon and Arya. “Actually I don’t quite know how to play.”
Willas chuckled. “I’ll teach you then.” He began to deal the cards. “So what’s your story Nurse Stark?”

Sansa’s head snapped back up and she looked at him and he was giving her a serious curious look. “How do you know my name?”

“Well I’ve always made a point of learning the name of the prettiest girl in the room. My sister says girls like it when you pay attention to details.”

Sansa felt uncomfortable again but she didn’t want to be rude, he wasn’t being pushy and he didn’t seem to mean any harm. She reminded herself this man had sacrificed his leg for the cause and she had a duty to be kind to him.

“My story is far too sad to burden an injured man with. All you need to know is that I’m a nurse, just a girl trying to do her part.”

He regarded her carefully and seemed to register her discomfort, her sadness. The hint of a smile that had been tugging at the corner of his lips faded. She sensed a sadness in him as well then, and the cause seemed far deeper than her simple rejection of his passive flirting.

“That’s very noble of you. I hope you find it fulfilling. But I do hope one day you’ll tell me your story,” he said, “Then maybe I can tell you mine.” And then he began to explain the game to her.

xxxxxxxxxxx

She had been in London for three months now. It had been easy to get a job in the hospital, they were desperate for help. She lived in a boarding house with several of the other nurses from the hospital. She hardly slept through the nights anymore anyways so she had happily taken the night shifts.

She had managed to make it about one month in Nottingham after Jon was born and she had been released from the hospital. She had tried for Roslin’s sake to care for him, but she just couldn’t. Nearly every time he looked at her with those grey eyes she would dissolve in tears or panic. She was no good for him.

She had made a difficult decision and explained it all to Roslin and Edmure in the letter she had
written before she had fled in the middle of the night. She told them she would send them money; that she was sorry, but in the end it was better for everyone and critical for their survival that she not be there.

She made her way back to London and had taken the hospital job. And though she should’ve expected it, it had still shocked her when Roslin showed up soon after she had sent them the first payment. To Sansa’s frustration she informed her she had no plans to leave until Sansa told her everything that had happened on the island. By her second day there Sansa relented and poured out the whole sad tale. She wasn’t sure why she did it, other than she felt she owed Roslin the truth if she expected her aunt to take care of her son.

She had expected Roslin to be angry, to demand she return north, to the family, to her son, and yet she did not. Instead she told her she understood why she felt she needed to do what she was doing. She promised that they would keep Jon for her and she was welcomed to come visit or stay whenever she was ready. Her aunt’s love and kindness had left her in tears.

Soon after that she had reached out to Sam, who was now stationed in London, and they tried to have dinner with each other a couple times a month. She found him kind and funny. The stores he told her about Jon brought her a bit of solace. Sam for his part was too timid to tell her to go back to their son, but she often saw it in his face or heard it in certain stories he told about their time in the orphanage.

She found the work at the hospital tiring but satisfying, and slowly she did find that it was healing her. She started to hope one day, years from now, when the debt was paid, that she might get a chance to be a part of her son’s life.

She was encouraged and took it as a good omen when the news came that the Allies had won the African front. Robb was coming back to England. He was being reassigned to a base in the south but had been able to secure a three day pass to come see her in London.

He had surprised her by coming a week early. She came home one July morning and found him sitting on the stairs of the boarding house. She thought her heart would burst and they collapsed into each other’s arms and cried for the longest time, ignoring all the looks of the people that passed by them on the street.

Luckily he had come just as she was beginning her days off and they were able to spend a significant amount of time together. She told him everything she could bear to about their time apart. Though there were some things she could not bear to speak of again, and some things she did not want to burden Robb with, not when he was headed back to the war.
He in turn had shared with her much of his own experiences. And despite the sadness, Sansa actually had felt some things in her start to heal.

They were walking in the park on the evening of his final day. He was leaving in the morning to report to his base. They had been reminiscing about times past, memories of their parents and siblings, of life before the war, but the conversation had lulled. She could see Robb watching her from the corner of his eye, he was clearly wrestling with something.

“What is it you want to say?” she asked resignedly.

“How do you know I want to say something?”

“Because I know you and I know that look. Just say it, we both clearly know there are not always opportunities later on.”

“I’m not sure you’ll like what I have to say and I don’t want to leave on a sour note.”

Sansa stopped and turned and looked at her brother and he smiled thoughtfully at her. “I’ll do my best not to get angry.” Robb looked skeptical and so she crossed her heart like she did when they were children when she had begged him to tell her a secret. That made him chuckle softly.

“I want you to consider going home to your son, truly consider it. I understand what you are trying to do here, I do, but you don’t owe a debt to anyone. And even if you did, well I think your Jon, and I know Arya would, they’d want you to be with your son rather than tending to wounded strangers. You need to raise him to be a proper Stark, to teach him where he came from. He’s the future, he’s what’s important.”

“Robb. I told you. I’m staying away ,”

“Sansa,” he took her hand then, “I want you to do this for me, for the family. I want you to go home and raise your son. Maybe you can’t tomorrow and that’s fine, but promise me you’ll try to go sooner rather than later. Don’t lose this time with him, you are going to regret it.”

She looked at her brother and his pleading expression. He would never understand that she was doing the best thing for all of them by staying away, but she had no desire to quarrel with him and she knew his heart was in the right place, and so she promised even though she intended for it to be
She did go home to visit for Christmas and New Year’s. Robb was right, she was missing so much. Her boy was growing and crawling. He looked like Jon and had a touch of Arya’s temperament it seemed. A part of her had hoped he’d forgotten her, but somehow he hadn’t. He had lit up when he had heard her voice and wanted her to hold him. This time when she held him her heart had shattered in a different way. She realized her brother was right, she was starting to regret that she had lost this first year.

But the dreams returned to her in Nottingham. Dreams of fire and blood, death and despair, painful reminders of why it was best to stay away from her child. And so she returned to London. Robb had been disappointed she hadn’t stayed north and reminded her in his letters that she had made him a promise and he was not releasing her from it.

The months passed by and then two weeks into June 1944 Samwell Tarly showed up. She hadn’t seen him in some time, the business of war keeping him constantly busy. He stood before her now in the hospital lobby, flushed and fidgeting, as nervous as the day they first met.

“Sam?”

“Sansa.” He sounded sad as he spoke her name and she felt confused, her anxiety level rising.

“What brings you here?”

Sam fidgeted again and Sansa’s eyes fell on his hand, to the telegram envelope he held in his hand and she instantly backed away.

“No, you should go. No,” she breathed. She wanted to run from him, but she felt so heavy, despair turning her to stone.

“Sansa, I’m sorry. I thought it was better if you heard it from me than anyone else.”
“You shouldn’t be here, I’m working. You should go.”

“Sansa, please,” Sam pleaded. He was clearly uncomfortable.

“Maybe there’s been a mistake,” she said flatly, shaking her head.

Sam gave her a concerned look and stepped forward. “I’m certain there isn’t.”

“Please don’t Sam, please don’t.” Sansa let him hug her as she began to cry. After several minutes she pulled away and took the envelope from his hand and tore it open. She already knew what it said but now she needed to read the words anyways.

“We regret to inform you, your brother…….”
1995

Jon had started a fire in the fire pit once the sun set and Catelyn had brought out blankets to keep them warm. They still hadn’t moved from the deck. They had spent the entire night enthralled in Sansa’s story. Now the sun was starting to come up.

They sat wrapped in blankets, Catelyn tucked in with her grandmother. Jon stood by the railing looking out towards the ocean. Sansa was exhausted and almost seemed to be asleep. Catelyn didn’t dare move but she felt torn, it seemed like her grandmother and her father both needed her.

When her grandmother had revealed that Willas was not in fact his father, Jon had become angry and had stormed off. Sansa had continued to tell Catelyn the rest of the story.

She told her granddaughter how Robb’s death had sent her back to Nottingham. She hadn’t wanted to go but she knew she needed to honor her promise to her brother. She had often wondered if Robb had paid a price for her lie, for her hollow promise to him.

She had stayed in Nottingham until the war ended and then that summer Willas Tyrell tracked her down there. It had touched her heart that he had remembered her and had come looking for her. They had gotten to know each other during his time in the hospital. He knew she had a son, that much of her family had died. He also knew she had sworn to never love anyone else, and despite all that had still come looking.

He worked to get to know her remaining family, especially Jon and Rickon. Over the next several months they built a very deep friendship as she tried to move forward. She focused on building a life for the son that she had finally allowed herself to love, but she had continued to be very clear to Willas that she could never love him, or anyone, the way she loved Jon Snow.

Willas for his part had accepted that but he hoped that she might one day want to let him in and maybe learn to love him in a different way. He revealed that he had thought about suicide in the hospital when they had first met. She hadn’t known then but he had lost both of his brothers in the fighting and had awoken only to be told that he might never walk again. He had fallen into despair, but then he had started to watch the sad pretty nurse night after night, and when he had finally spoken to her she had sparked something in him. She had somehow unknowingly given him
purpose, saved him, and now he wanted to do the same.

Sansa had told him he owed her nothing, but he persisted and had told her he would wait as long as was necessary because he knew that they were meant to heal each other. Sansa had laughed him off, she had started to convince herself that she was healed. She had no more nightmares and Jon was her joy. It was the most optimistic she had been since she had been a child, since before the war.

Then in the early winter of 1945 a letter arrived from Oakenshield for Edmure. It was from the local government and they were trying to sort out the farm. They had been able to confirm that Brynden had died in the camp on Guernsey, apparently trying to organize an escape, which meant Edmure was considered the surviving heir. That letter brought everything back, the nightmares started again. She became consumed with thoughts about everyone that she had left there and how they thought she was dead. She started to have panic attacks and wanted nothing more than to get as far away from England and the reminders of the war.

She had gone to Willas and told him this. He offered to marry her and take her to The States with him. She refused at first, she told him he deserved someone to love him better than she ever would, but he told her again his only desire was to make her happy, to save her from all the pain and sadness. And so in her desperation she had finally agreed.

They married shortly after and she moved with him the States. It had pained her to leave Roslin and Edmure. They had been so good to her and they were going to keep Rickon and raise him. That had broken her heart a bit, but they were the only parents he had known and she had forfeited that right when she had fled to London in 1943. They did however agree that he could come visit them often and in fact he had spent most of his summers in their home.

Catelyn had noticed that her father had heard most of this because even after he had stormed off he had lurked on the edges of the deck, just outside the light of the fire, listening. Eventually he had come back on the deck and had stood near the railing as Sansa neared the end of her confession.

He looked back at her mother and his daughter snuggled together on the sofa and sighed. He walked over to them and sat on the edge of the table facing them. Catelyn gave him a sad smile. She could only imagine what he must be feeling, he had just learned his whole life was somewhat of a lie. She cursed herself for the hundredth time in the last several hours for pulling her family into this project.

“Mom,” Jon said softly trying to rouse her. He didn’t seem so angry anymore which surprised Catelyn. “Maybe it’s time we all went back inside and got some sleep.”

Sansa’s eyes open and she reached out and took one hand from each of them. “I’m so sorry.” She
was looking at Jon, her face begging forgiveness, tears forming in her tired eyes.

A look of understanding passed between mother and son. Catelyn turned and hugged her grandmother. “Thank you for sharing your story Gran, for being brave. I’m sorry it hurt you. I love you.”

“I love you too sweet girl,” Sansa sighed.

“I’m going to go in,” Catelyn said wanting to give her father and grandmother some time alone. They watched her go and when the patio door closed they turned back to each other.

“Willas was a good man, he loved you and treated you like you were his. I told myself that was one of the reason I didn’t have to tell you,” Sansa began. “But I was just trying to make it easier on myself and that was wrong. I should’ve told you sooner. It’s just that I knew if I told you you’d have questions, questions I never felt ready until now to answer.

If it matters Willas always said we should tell you, I’m the one that refused. I had decided once I left England I was closing the door on that part of my life and I never wanted to open it again. It was just too painful and he respected my wishes to the grave.”

They sat quietly then studying each other.

“I can imagine that it wasn’t something you decided lightly. What changed your mind? I mean it’s been nearly fifty years.”

“The same thing that changed my mind about marrying Willas. The letter from Jon. I read it again in the attic after Catelyn asked about the war. I just…. Somehow I just knew it was time. I should’ve never kept the truth to myself. Honestly I have wondered over the years how much Jon and Arya have come to resent me, maybe even hate me for pretending that none of it ever happened.”

“I think they would be both be proud that you managed to survive and build a life. I think that is what they wanted for you, why they sacrificed for you. You were a family and that’s what family means.”

“Thank you for saying that,” Sansa said as she wiped away her tears and they exchanged a long embrace. She pulled back and regarded her son, he reminded her in that moment so much of his
father who she still so fiercely loved.

“To be clear though, I’m not saying I’m over it. I’m still in shock and I am going to have a lot of questions once I process this, but you are my mother and I love you.”

“I know, and I love you too.”

After a few more moments of silence Jon stood to go in the house and asked her if she was coming, she told him she would be along in a moment.

She sat looking at the coast, feeling lighter now that the truth was out there. She said a silent prayer thanking God for giving her both Willas and Jon, for while she had never stopped loving Jon she had over the years built a life with and had grown to love Willas in her own way. She hoped her son’s words were true, that Jon had understood why she had stayed silent all these years. The sun was starting to come up. She hoped despite the secret she kept that he was proud of how she had raised his son into an honorable man just like him. She prayed he would be at peace now knowing she had finally told their son the truth; that she had not taken that to her grave.

And then she closed her eyes and she said one final prayer, this one to Arya. She thanked her for bringing Jon into their lives, for protecting her and saving her all those years ago. Lastly, she apologized for taking so many years to finally be as brave and honest as she had been. With that Sansa opened her eyes and stood to go inside, but as she did something made her pause. Her eyes scanned the beach and there just on the edge of the woods sat a fox. It regarded her for a long moment and then turned and bounded off, and if Sansa didn’t know better she would’ve swore it had given her a nod before it went.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so I'm going to ramble here because I am super emotional and nervous having finished this and posted it......

If you are still reading I want to say thank you. If you threw your laptop or tablet and cursed me but still made it here, well I still say thank you.

If you figured out the ending before you got here, and there were a few of you based on comments in earlier chapters, I want to say bravo as well because I tried to be very careful about giving anything away in the first chapter of the story.

I tagged this as a tragedy from the start because this story started with the ending originally. There were three scenes that I had in mind when I started this story and I built it out from there. Those scenes were Sansa’s sacrifice for Arya (Ramsay’s rape of Sansa), Arya and Jon's death in the barn, and the ending, that the story would reveal to
Jon's son that he was Jon's son.

Using those scenes I built backwards and crafted the rest of the story. The original draft was far shorter, but as the story progressed it grew and grew. In fact, when I first started I got 50 pages in and had terrible writer's block because I didn't know how to get from the start to the end. I had tried to start the story right at the time Jon arrived on the farm. It made no sense and no one's motivations seemed authentic. I realized I was trying to hard to make this a Jonsa-centric story. Once I accepted that it was bigger than that, well the writing became much easier. So I appreciate everyone that went along with it and embraced it and all the relationships that I built in it. (And if you commented to that affect thank you as well, because I honestly thought there might not be an audience for this at a couple points.)

Honestly, I almost wanted to just keep this story going forever. I loved the characters and I loved the world they lived in terrible as it was, (though I'm sure some of you think I'm lying since I killed so many of them.....) and maybe I could have. I did wrestle with it, but then I think I would've lost something by not staying true to the original inspiration.

Anyways, feel free to comment, in fact I encourage you to. I do read them all and have appreciated all the feedback and interaction that this story has created. If you have questions I'll do my best to answer them. It's ok if you are not exactly pleased with where I took this, I can handle honest feelings. (Not that I think anyone would but just try not to attack me personally is all I'm asking.)

Ok now I'm gonna go hide for a couple of days before I start on a new story.

Thanks again for reading!

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