The Lady and the Squire

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Summary

Sansa had never been one to make a bold move.

And, Sansa had never been truly kissed.

So, why in the Seven Kingdoms did she breathe out, “Can I kiss you, Podrick?”
Chapter 1

Sansa had never been one to be bold.

She had been sly in her movements with Littlefinger and hid her emotions in King’s Landing. On the rare occasions that she said something bold, she had been struck or manipulated again. In her years away from home, she had changed so much, morphed into something that was unrecognizable from the little girl who had left all those years ago, dreaming of a blonde haired prince and having his blonde-haired princes and princesses. And, now, the thought of being with another and having their children was the furthest thing from her mind.

Now was the time of winter and war. If she wasn’t playing the game, those who would come to harm her family would come and hurt them. The Night King would come and kill them all. Cersei likely wanted Sansa’s head on a stick because she still believed that the red-haired Stark had wanted her killed. And… well, Sansa did not know what the Dragon Queen would’ve wanted with them. Jon had left Winterfell not that long ago to try and make allies with the Queen and Sansa was left with preparations for winter in the North.

“I heard your brother arrived, Lady Sansa.”

The comforting voice that echoed off the walls of the crypt drew her away from the statue of her mother and towards Podrick Payne, who was dressed for winter like she was. Despite the heavy winter robes, he still had a tint of red on his clothes, accented further by the torches that he passed. There was a smile on his face as he walked up to her place at the crypts.

“Lady Brienne asked me to check on you,” he replied to her unasked question.

Even before Brienne as her sworn guard, she and Podrick had a long history together. He had been the squire to her first husband, Tyrion Lannister, and had been around her as long as they had been together. She had been wary of him at first, but he might’ve been one of the few people in King’s Landing who might’ve been genuine in his actions. Plus, she had figured out that he was scared of her as she was of his cousin. Once he and Brienne had rescued her and Theon, they spent more time together and he protected her as much as Brienne had done.

“She said you looked rather upset when you left the Godswood earlier,” he continued, stepping beside her.

“Yes,” she responded to him, looking back towards her lady mother’s statue. Her mother stood in front of her, tall and unyielding. Her eyes wandered towards the casing that held her bones a little behind her. If what Jon said was true, would they need to burn the bodies of their family to prevent the Night King from turning them? “Bran just wasn’t what I was expecting is all.” Sansa wrung her hands in front of her, Bran’s words ringing through her head. Bran had spoken of her wedding night, brought back forth the memories of him and the horrific memories that haunted her.

“Well, you’ve changed a lot, milady,” Podrick replied, simply. “Both of you and you’ve both been through a lot of different things. You just need to get used to one another again.”

“Thank you for that, Podrick,” she replied to him. He beamed at her, sheepishly looking towards her lady mother. There’s a small gentle smile on his face as he looked at the statue. He looked at the statue for a long time, studying her features, before looking back towards Sansa. Once he did, Sansa realized that she had been staring, her cheeks flushed.
Sansa had never been one to make a bold move.

So, the thought of kissing Podrick Payne, right here in the crypts, was enough to make her cheeks flush brighter than what they had been. Sansa was no longer the girl who dreamed of a knight in shining armor that would come rescue her. She knew now that she could save herself by planning ahead and manipulating the events around her. But, she also knew that people like Brienne and Podrick were there to protect her if she ever needed it. So, the thought had surprised her, brought out a part of her that she thought had long since been buried in the depths of her soul, and sent her in a tailspin especially since the thought seemed to take root at the back of her head.

The oddity of her thought grew at the fact that Sansa had only ever experienced one true kiss before this very moment. And, it had simply been a trick to gain her trust back (a trick that worked). The only other few times that she had been kissed were by Petyr Baelish, who was another man with another agenda to pave the way to the Iron Throne with her by his side. And, then there was Ramsey Bolton, who kissed her without regard to what she wanted and tortured her crueler than Joffrey had ever done.

Yes, Sansa had never been one to make a bold move.

And, Sansa had never been truly kissed.

So, why in the Seven Kingdoms did she breathe out, “Can I kiss you, Podrick?”

For a moment, Sansa believed that Podrick had not heard her, that he seemed to be too enthralled in what he was thinking about to have heard her or that she was too quiet for him to have heard her. But, then, he turned towards her, his eyes wide and his cheeks flushed as he stared at her. The silence is heavy between them as they stared at one another. Podrick opened his mouth to respond to her, but the words seemed to die on his lips because he closed his mouth, biting down at his lip.

Then, he simply nodded his head.

Sansa simply stared at Podrick, with his brown eyes wide and betraying ever emotion that he might’ve felt in this moment of time. She tried to take his expression, the feelings in his eyes to find the angle that he could’ve had for his response. But, she couldn’t. Because, it was Podrick Payne, the boy who stumbled over his words in King’s Landing, but had grown in his time as Brienne of Tarth’s squire. Podrick had never had any sort of agenda or alternative motive. He had saved Tyrion because he was Tyrion’s squire and he cared for him no other reason. He saved Sansa because he was Brienne’s squire and he didn’t think she was safe with Baelish and knew she wasn’t safe from Ramsey Bolton.

His eyes were watching her, looking for a reaction, a movement. She breathed in a heavy, shaky breath before she stepped forward, felt the brush of her nose against his own. She looked up at him and they were so close that she couldn’t help to see every single flicker of emotion that danced in his brown eyes. He looked at her quizzingly, turning his head so his nose pressed against hers, and she was thrown by the intimacy of such a simple gesture as she leans in and presses her lips against his own.

She could feel the pressure of his lips against hers, the force behind the flesh of his lips. But, the simple flesh of their lips was the only way that they were connected. Curious, she reached out to place her hands on Podrick’s shoulders, leaning against him briefly. As soon as the pads of her fingers were against the furs of his coat, one of his arms wrapped securely around her waist and the other reached up to cup her face, holding her cheek in the palm of his hand. His lips have more weight against her own, leading her through the kiss with gentle movements.
Then, he was pulling away from her, not far as he still hovers in front of her, “Lady Sansa,” he spoke, his voice thicker than it had been before. “I think we need to get back to the hall.”

“Why?” she questioned, confused. The question that she wanted to ask dies on her lips before she has the chance to think of asking it, drying up somewhere in the base of her throat. Did he not want to kiss her? Was she not as good as reading people as she thought?

“It’s just…” he trailed off. Then, he swallowed. “If we stay down here in the crypts any longer, I am afraid that someone will think that I have dishonored you, Lady Sansa.”

*There it is*, she thought, a smile forming on her lips.

His tone screamed that he didn’t want to leave the crypts and his eyes, which were half-lidded and filled with a look of adoration, were gazing at her in a way that the Sansa who originally left Winterfell had dreamed about abashedly. But, even with all that, he was more than willing to not continue as to not damage what the other lords and ladies had thought of her as the leader until Jon’s return. In another time, she would’ve agreed with him and walked away, back to her duties. Presently, she only agreed with him.

“You’re right,” she spoke, reaching up to cup his face in her hands and leaning forward to kiss him. Their lips connected faster than she expected and she presumed that he had leaned forward to meet her. His lips pressed harder against her own as she wrapped an arm around his waist. His arm wrapped tightly around her waist, bringing her closer to him, and she prayed that someone wouldn’t come looking for either of them soon so she didn’t have to worry about any other than their kiss for the time being.
Sansa had not been alone with Podrick since their encounter in the crypts. And, with what little interaction they had since that had always been in the company of others and most times, Petyr Baelish had been glued to her side for most of it. It was for the best, Sansa knew as she tried to ignore the looks of confusion and hurt that he would send her way from across the Hall in meetings with the Lords or up at her while Brienne and Arya were sparring.

But, almost every time, Baelish was with her.

To make matters worse, Baelish had been the one to come hunting for them in the crypts. By the time that Baelish had rounded the corner, their lips were detached and they were standing several feet apart. But, their cheeks were flushed and their lips were swollen and Sansa was partially certain that her hair might’ve been messed up. She had heard the sound of his footsteps before Podrick had. She had pulled away and Podrick had given her a confused, hurt look moments before Baelish had stepped around the corner.

Before Podrick had left, she had seen the look of understanding in his eyes.

She hoped that he understood the real reason why she had pulled away, to protect him from Baelish’s targeting eye. But, at the same time, she was also worried that he didn’t, that he believed that she did not enjoy the kiss, or believed in something else that she couldn’t have imagined. Despite her numerous attempts to try to explain, it never ended up happening because she could never find a believable time for them to be alone together with no chance of someone else overhearing.

And, it just so happens that Podrick was the one to finally make it work.

Sansa was pouring over the raven scrolls in her room.

It had been weeks since Arya had returned to Winterfell and Baelish had already attempted to divide the two sisters after years apart. She would be lying if she said that she hadn’t anticipated it. Before Jon had left, she could sense that he was going to attempt to drive a wedge between her and her brother. Arya would be here any minute, she thought. Sansa had a plan and Arya needed to help her with it. They needed to be on the same page. But, they needed to be discreet which meant Arya using her newfound talents with the Faceless Men to sneak into her room late at night for them to discuss the plan.

There was a knock on the door. “Come in!” she called, picking up one of the scrolls from Dragonstone from Tyrion. He was keeping her updated on Jon’s progress mining. They should be expecting some dragonglass within a fortnight if the winds were right. The door creaked open and she expected to hear a girl’s voice (Arya said she would “wear” the face of a girl).
Except, it wasn’t a girl.

“Is this a good time to talk, Lady Sansa?”

Sansa glanced up towards Podrick, who stood in the doorway. While his furs were still partially draped over his shoulders, he was standing half-in, half-out of the door into the hallway. He looked like he had just gotten in from the cold with the way his cheeks were flushed red and the snow in his hair. But, he wore his red outfit beneath his furs. Though her hair was almost dry, she was still dressed in her thick night clothes. But, that didn’t make her less vulnerable.

Somehow, Ghost must’ve sensed it because he was lifting his head to look in her direction.

“Podrick,” she spoke, surprised to see him at such a late hour. “Yes, it is. Is everything okay?”

“I, uh, I don’t know,” he responded, fumbling for his words. “Are you…” He paused, avoiding her gaze and looking towards Ghost, who turned his head the longer he stared at the white wolf. “Are… are you mad at me?”

Sansa blinked up at him, trying to figure out what he meant. “No, Podrick, I’m not mad at you,” she responded, moving to stand up from the bed after pushing the furs on her bed back. Podrick watched her and she felt unusually nervous under his gaze. “Why would you think that I’m mad at you?”

“You’ve been avoiding me,” he responded.

“I’m not angry at you, Podrick,” she replied, unable to refute his claim about her avoidance. It was true. She had been avoiding him, but not for the reason he might’ve believed. Baelish had been keeping close to her side and Sansa knew better than anyone the lengths that he would go to get what he wanted. She had witnessed Baelish boldly declaring that he only loved one woman to his wife only to shove her through the moon door of the Eyrie. And, he wanted her. Sansa knew that he wouldn’t hesitate in killing Podrick.

And that’s why she kept her distance.

“But, you’ve been avoiding me,” he responded. “Is this about what happened? In the crypts?” Sansa isn’t quite certain if she’s ever seen Podrick so bold. There was hardly a stutter in his voice and her bedroom door was still partially opened. Uncertain if Petyr Baelish was wondering the halls so late at night, Sansa moved around Podrick, reaching out to close the door. And, she locked it for good measure. Despite his apparent boldness, he seemed flustered by the time that she had turned back around. “Lady Sansa, I don’t think you should do that. What if someone thinks…”

He trailed off, blush rushing to his cheeks.

“What if someone thinks what?” she questioned, innocently.

His cheeks only flushed even more as he tried to conjure up the words.

“I doubt anyone will think anything about me having a conversation with the trusted squire of Lady Brienne at late hours,” Sansa replied, a small smile growing on her face. “But, the castle has ears and you must be careful about what you say even so late.” Podrick nodded his head in response. “I am sorry that I have been avoiding you, Podrick. But, it’s not because of what happened in the crypts.”

“Then, why have you been avoiding me?” he questioned, his voice oddly quieter than she had anticipated.

“It’s not because of what happened in the crypts, I promise,” Sansa replied, crossing her arms over
her chest as she stepped back towards her bed. “But, Baelish is a complicated man. And, he wants me and he’ll do anything to get his way. He is a master manipulator. He will do anything to get what he wants. Even kill. And, I don’t want him to have a reason to kill you, Podrick.”

For a moment, Podrick simply stares at her. Then, he nodded his head. “I understand, Lady Sansa.”

“Sansa,” she corrected.

“Sansa,” he echoed. For a moment, he’s silent. Then, he’s moving closer to her until his legs are brushing against her knees, which are folded over one another at her ankles. His hands hung on either side of his body and she looked up at him curiously. “If you don’t mind me asking, Sansa,” he whispered. “Why did you ask to kiss me in the Crypts?”

“It’s simple, Podrick,” she replied, placing her hand on her knee. “I wanted to kiss you.”

Podrick nodded his head. He reached out to grab her hand. She twisted her palm around to lace their fingers together and their palms brushing together. There’s a look in Podrick’s eyes as he looked down at her again. “Is it alright if I kiss you again, Sansa?”

Sansa tries to ignore the fact that her heart was lighting up frantically in her chest. She couldn’t be feeling like this right now. Not with so much to do, she thought. Winter is here and she was the Lady of Winterfell, in charge of ruling while Jon is away, outmaneuvering a master manipulator that wanted her, and having to fight at least two wars: one with the army of the dead and other with the Queen of the South. But, her heart was thumping in her chest as she nodded her head.

As soon as she nodded her head, Podrick was leaning down, pressing their foreheads together. Her heart fluttered when she realized that he was giving her that look again, the one of abashed affection before she tilted her head back and their lips slotted together. While his hand gripped tightly on her own, his other hand reached up, bracing the back of her head and his fingers lacing in the bright red strands of her hair. Sansa’s hand found the way to the back of his head, her fingers slipping into the hairline of his curls.

Podrick pulled away from her. Not a lot, just enough for them to regain their air and come to the shocking realization (at least for Sansa) that she wanted to kiss him more. Sansa untangled their hands from each other to reach up and cup the side of his face, her fingers scratching across the stubble. Podrick’s eyelashes are long and dark, compared to Sansa’s light ones, and he looked at her like he was waiting for her to make the first move. And so she pulled him back against her.

The force of her pulling him towards her was almost enough to knock Podrick off of his balance. While Sansa knew that it was because he hadn’t been expecting her to do such a thing, she felt a bit of pride in being able to knock him off balance. His hand is temporarily gone from the back of her head, but it quickly returns and is followed by a clang. Sansa doesn’t even realize until her back is flush against her furs that she was leaning back at all (and as a result pulling Podrick with her). As Podrick leaned over her body (his knees digging into the bed by her hips and one of his arms bracing him by her head), Sansa felt comfortable for the first time in her life having a boy hover over her.

“Is this alright, Lady Sansa?” he whispered, his lips sliding against hers as he talked. Her name gets filters out to a muffled sound against her lips once he pressed another kiss against her own. She doesn’t bother to correct him on the name. She doesn’t find it in herself to care at the moment. Once again, their lips are pressed together and his mouth gently opened to slide his tongue along the edge of her bottom lip. Sansa let out a light gasp but pushed her mouth open against her own.

Podrick let out a noise, sinking down lightly against her as his tongue slid into her mouth. It wasn’t enough to make her extremely anxious, but it was enough to make her feel a little nervous. And,
Podrick must’ve known because his other arm is wrapping around her waist and pulling her to the side. Podrick rolled to the side so his back was flush against the bed and she was half propped up against him. And, from the fact that she isn’t being stabbed by the handle of the sword that he had walked in with, she glanced over to find it leaning against her nightstand.

“Is this better, Sansa?” Podrick questioned, pushing a strand of her bright red hair behind her ear.

She doesn’t bother to answer his teasing question before pressing her lips back against his. And, Podrick practically giggled against her lips and it was about the cutest thing that she had ever heard. His hand was in her hair at the back of her neck and the other was wrapped securely around her waist. Sansa moved so her face was directly hovering over his, lightly holding herself up with her elbow. Her hands are in his hair, combing through each strand slowly, and Podrick let out a noise as his mouth opens up to hers again.

Sansa had only been physical with one other person and it hadn’t been her decision. She had been sold off to a monster who murdered her family after being rescued by other monsters who murdered their family. Her time with Ramsay had been against her will and left her with many hairline scars beneath her clothes that she hid on a daily basis. Her mind had even more mental scars from her time in King’s Landing with Joffrey. Since as far back as her time in King’s Landing, Sansa hadn’t thought of being with another person in any capacity. So, the warm feeling in her stomach was new and uncertain and she wasn’t entirely sure how she felt about the foreign feeling in her stomach.

But, she knew that she liked kissing Podrick, and somehow that seemed to be enough for now.

The door rattled, pulling the two of them apart.

“Lady Stark?” a girl’s voice questioned. “Is everything alright?”

“Yes,” Sansa called, knowing that it must’ve been Arya. “Do you mind coming back in five minutes?” There was a noise of affirmation from the girl before the Lady of Winterfell heard the girl’s feet shuffling away from the door. The footsteps continued down the hallway until she couldn’t hear them anymore.

Podrick moved to sit up. It was a difficult task with her still laying half on top of him. Sansa quickly moved off of him, resting awkwardly on his right side and feeling the need to run a hand through her hair. Beside her, Podrick looked at her with a playful, affectionate glint in his eyes. “I’m sorry, Sansa,” he whispered. “That got out of hand, really quick.”

Sansa nodded, admitting, “For both of us.”

Podrick nodded his head. He reached up, his warm hand slipping beside her hair to cup the back of her neck and leaning forward to press a warm, gentle kiss to her lips. Sansa leaned into his touch, placing a hand on his chest. This kiss was gentler, less heated than their last handful of kisses, and shorter. Podrick pulled away from her and whispered, “Goodnight, Lady Sansa.” He stood up, grabbing his sword by her bedside and giving her a warm flushed grin before he slipped out into the hallway and towards his room.

Almost as soon as the door is shut behind Podrick, the door is opening again. And, Sansa doesn’t have a chance to gain her own composure and straighten herself out. And, by the time she had turned around, it was Arya standing on the other side of the doorway, a mischievous smirk on her face.

“Was that Podrick?” Arya questioned, a teasing tone evident in her mouth. “What was he doing here so late?”

Sansa gave her a look. Though Arya kept her mouth shut, Sansa saw the look forming on her sister’s
face as the Lady of Winterfell failed to keep the blushing smile off of her face.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

SPOILERS FOR 8x03 IN 3... 2... 1...

HE IS ALIVE GUYS.

MY BABY BOY PODRICK IS ALIVE AND HE CAN SING. You guys, I literally thought that he was going to die so I was just too nervous to write this chapter and it's not nearly as long as I wanted to (and Podrick isn't technically in the chapter), but next chapter is the chapter I've been building towards lol. So, I hope you guys like this chapter. I was literally so nervous at the thought of him dying that I could not focus on writing this, but now that 8x03 is out, I managed to finish this.

In other news, I started writing a story about Robb Stark and Margaery which eventually include couples like Jon/Daenerys, Podrick/Sansa, Gendry/Arya (BECAUSE IT'S OFFICIALLY CANON, wait, this is my Podrick x Sansa story, I can't be fangirling about my original GOT OTP), etc. So, if you want to, there's that as well!

And thank you so much for all the love and support you guys! It means so much to me and I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Once she had gotten the letter from Cersei, the Lady of Winterfell knew what she needed to do.

By nothing short of good planning and a minor miracle, Petyr Baelish was following the trail that they had left for them. Arya was pretending to be in a position where she might want to take the Lady of Winterfell position. But, anyone who knew Arya knew that she didn’t want to be the Lady of Winterfell. She didn’t even want to be a Lady. And, yet, everyone around them was falling for the act of the chill between the two sisters who were always fighting as kids. Petyr Baelish was falling for the bait.

And, unfortunately, so was Brienne.

The warrior had sworn to both of the sisters. While Arya did not need the protection that Brienne would provide, the warrior woman would still intervene if things came to a head. And, Sansa knew from the details of their plan that it definitely would have. Sansa was worried that Brienne would step in front of them if she thought something bad was going down between the sisters. And, no matter what direction this situation went, Brienne would dishonor herself by protecting one from the other.

The letter gave Sansa the perfect way to get Brienne out of harm’s way from the events of the plan that she and Arya had managed to come up with all those weeks.

“My lady,” Brienne spoke. “You are the Lady of Winterfell.”

“Yes,” Sansa responded, glancing over at the woman who stood in the room. Her furs were draped over her shoulders and covered the armor that she wore underneath. She must’ve just been sparring
with Podrick or Arya when Sansa had called her to the meeting. “And you will be there to represent my interests as you see fit.”

“They invited you. They want you to be there,” Brienne replied.

“I will not set foot in King’s Landing while Cersei Lannister is queen,” Sansa remarked, turning and walking to the fire. The letter was in her hand and she had the itching to throw it into the fire and let it burn in the embers. “Besides, if they want another Stark prisoner, they can come up and take me themselves. Until then, my duty is here in Winterfell and preparing for the upcoming winter.”

Sansa reached the fireplace and discarded the letter into the fire. The fire twitched, welcoming another food source for the continuing of their destruction of the wood. The words on the page disappeared in an instant and she watched the fire poke holes in the parchment until the letter was just more ash. Even though Sansa had grown up in the cold, the heat of the flame was comforting in the harsh winter.

“It’s not safe,” Brienne replied.

Sansa turned from the fire towards Brienne, who had stepped closer to the other side of the desk. Sansa knew that the woman was talking about Littlefinger and Sansa was well-aware of the danger that the master manipulator had on those around her. Especially Arya. Everyone who wasn’t Sansa but stood in the way of his goals would be swiftly eliminated. And, even with Sansa, he was willing to toy around with her like a puppet in an attempt to get her the way he wants.

“Ser Jaime will be there,” Sansa responded, turning towards the sworn sword. “You said he treated you honorably before.”

Brienne gave her a look and Sansa could practically tell that the blonde warrior was not fooled by Sansa’s way of changing the subject. “I’m not worried about me in King’s Landing. It’s not safe leaving you with Littlefinger,” Brienne replied.

“I have many guards who would happily imprison him or behead him whether you are here or not,” Sansa responded, hoping she would see reason.

“And you trust their loyalty?” Brienne spoke up. Sansa had to admit that Brienne had a good point. She did not know who she could trust in this castle as Littlefinger always seemed to find an opportunity to get whatever it is that she desired. But, from Arya’s fights with Brienne and Podrick, Sansa could see that the girl could take down a room full of the Knights of the Vale if she so desired. “You trust that he hasn’t been speaking to all of them behind your back? Let me at least leave Podrick behind to watch over you.”

Sansa closed her eyes, trying to think of what would happen if Podrick would stay.

While Baelish had not spoken directly about Sansa’s secret involvement with her sworn sword’s squire, she had seen the increase gaze of masked hatred sent in Podrick’s direction. On most nights, Podrick would come to check on Sansa in person after a day of being separated. On some nights, it was just mild chatter with Podrick talking about his training (he’s started sparring with Arya on some mornings and he had grown even more) or listening to Sansa talk about the resources for winter. Other times, it ended in heated kisses that made Sansa feel things that she had never felt before. Despite all this, Sansa knew that his best option would be to go to King’s Landing with Brienne.

“He has become a competent swordsman--”

Sansa was well-aware of how much a swordsman Podrick had become. She had witnessed his
training, both on the road to Castle Black and in the walls of Winterfell. He fought for how much he has grown and she had witnessed it first hand. But, it was not safe for Podrick in Winterfell. And, in some cases, it was not safe for Brienne either. And, Sansa wondered briefly if Brienne knew the truth about her and Podrick, of their stolen moments in the confounds of the quarters.

Either way, Sansa knew that neither one of them would be safe if they stayed.

“I do not need to watched over or minded or cared for,” Sansa interrupted, with a bit more bite to her tone that she had originally planned to have. But, Sansa was half-annoyed. She was the Lady of Winterfell. While she didn’t have the same pull as Jon, she was the person who was overrunning the entire castle. Brienne was supposed to be listening and she wasn’t. But, Sansa also understood where Brienne was coming from and she respected the woman for that. “I am not a child. I am the Lady of Winterfell and I am home. This is the safest place for me.”

It was the safest place for her for a lot of reasons. Heading south to King’s Landing had a lot of consequences for the North. For starters, neither Bran nor Arya seemed to be wanting to have the position of the Lady or Lord of Winterfell. Bran was the Three-Eyed-Raven now (whatever that means) and Arya was heart-set on protecting her family (even if her perceived actions at the time pointed towards the opposite). Secondly, she needed to prepare for not just winter but also two winter wars. And, thirdly, she knew that if she had gone south that she might not come back. Cersei was a vengeful woman and Sansa was dragged away in the aftermath.

It doesn’t take much to figure out that it was all on purpose and that Sansa was most likely blamed for Joffrey’s death alongside her husband at the time.

“My lady,” Brienne spoke, trying one final attempt. “I swore an oath to protect you and your sister if I abandon that…”

Sansa cut her off again, officially running out of patience and excuses for her behavior. “The trip to King’s Landing is long, Lady Brienne, and you won’t be traveling on summer roads. The sooner you leave, the better chances you have of making it on time.”

“Yes, my lady,” Brienne spoke, before nodding her head and strolling out of the room. Once the door was closed behind her, Sansa let out a sigh, leaning further into her chair. Sansa did not want to be so cold to Brienne. She didn’t like being mean to her after all that Brienne had done to make sure that Sansa returned back to Winterfell safely. But, Brienne needed to go, or else she would just be another pawn in Littlefinger’s grand scheme of trying to tear the sisters apart.

Suddenly, even with a fire at her back and a thick winter dress on her shoulders, her skin suddenly felt as cold as the winter storm outside.

Resigned, Sansa stood to her feet, grabbing the remaining letters on her desk and leaving the cold, dark room that she was in. She needed peace and quiet and to be alone for the evening. In addition, she thought as a chill ran down her spine, she really needed a bath. As she marched through the corridors towards her room, she thought about Podrick, who would be out in the storm soon, and hoped that he would keep warm in the long travel south. No doubt he would be cold and freezing but with Brienne at his side, he will make it to and from King’s Landing as safe as they could.

“Lady Sansa,” her handmaiden spoke, surprised to see her as she pushed the door open. She was cleaning the room, Sansa realized like she had told her to this morning. Ghost’s fur tended to get everywhere whenever he decided to sleep in her room. “What are you doing back so early? I’m only halfway done.”

“That’s alright,” Sansa spoke, as a way of replying. “I’m doing my work from here for the night. Do
you mind fetching me some fresh water for a bath?”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

SO, I did not like this episode. I did not like last week’s episode. But, up until the point where the Battle of Winterfell happens, that will be considered "canon". However, some of the events that transpired in the opening of Episode 4 will remain the same. But, some things will be different. I loved the first three episodes of the series, but I have not really liked the direction that they’ve gone with Dany and it's disappointing to me. Plus, that's the beauty of fanfiction right? But, this WILL continue to be a primarily Podrick and Sansa fic.

Anyways, with that announcement out of the way, I hope you enjoy this lovely chapter!

The bath of the Lord’s chambers was different from the other bathrooms in Winterfell. The tub was much larger than the one that Sansa had grown up with, capable of fitting two people in the waters even if the water was filled all the way up. And, it was a large stone structure with a seat. It reminded Sansa of the bath in her room in King’s Landing, which was the only place that she could escape the cruel terrors that Joffrey inflicted on her.

Ironically, this fact remained the same upon her first return to Winterfell with Ramsey as she furiously tried to scrub off what he had done with her. However, now, as the Lady of Winterfell, this spot was the only spot she could truly relax. While she argued back and forth with Jon about who would get the Lord’s Chambers, she eventually let Jon win after seeing the bath. Jon simply returned to his old room, not wanting the Lord’s chambers.

The warm water rushed over her body as she stepped inside, sweeping over her body and releasing the tension in her shoulders. She had just taken a bath this morning. So, she knew that she was clean. Her handmaiden had expressed this fact. However, Sansa needed to relax and she had become increasingly aware of how she relaxed in the bath. With tensions high with Arya (supposedly), she was getting tense as the day went trying to play into the facade that Petyr Baelish had wanted from her.

It’s almost over, she promised herself, dipping down into the surface of the water. Her hair floated around her in waves. After feeling the brief sense of weightlessness, she quickly propped herself up on the seat, running a hand through the dark red strands of her hair. She had to chant it like a mantra, over and over again. It’s almost over. She can return to trying to protect her family, protect Arya, protect Jon, and protect Bran. They were the last of the Starks. The only ones left.

Petyr Baelish was the one who was trying to drive her family apart and she wasn’t going to let that happen again.

The door to her solar opened, but Sansa paid no heed to it. It might’ve been her handmaiden, Amelia, who might’ve taken her cloak from the day to wash tomorrow or coming back to finish cleaning up Ghost’s fur after Sansa had sent her away after gathering the clean water. It might’ve been Arya to come over some final details of the plan, wearing the face of a girl that she had no idea had originally possessed it. But, Sansa didn’t turn around, simply because she did not expect the actual person who entered her bathroom and skidded to a halt at the sight of her in her large bathtub.
“I’m so sorry, Sansa,” Podrick let out, practically shouting. By the time that Sansa had turned around to see him standing in the doorway, he was facing away from her towards her bedroom with his hands over his mouth and his back to her. And, for a moment, Sansa blinked in surprise. She had not expected him to come to her chambers. She had expected him to return to his chambers for the night, get some sleep, before heading to King’s Landing in the morning.

She hadn’t expected to see him in her room, in her bathroom while she was completely naked.

“Podrick?” she questioned.

“I’m so sorry,” he repeated. “I should’ve knocked or said something. I’ll be leaving now.”

“Podrick,” she replied. “It’s fine.”

“No, it’s not,” he rebuffed, pointing a finger in her general direction. Sansa watched his back almost in amusement.

Even as an innocent girl in King’s Landing, Sansa had heard of Podrick’s infamous adventures in a brothel paid for by her own husband. One day, in the gardens, Margaery had practically told her the details of Podrick’s infamous time in the brothels after Podrick had brought Sansa a note from her soon-to-be husband about the wedding. At the sight of Margaery eyeing him, Podrick had practically fled from the gardens with his cheeks blushing like a maiden’s. While Sansa had seen the change in Podrick, seen his confidence grow, his flirtatious comments growing bolder when they were alone or in a crowd, and (before their kiss) had even been with several of the girls of King’s Landing, the fact that he was standing in her bathroom, acting more nervous than she was about seeing him like this, almost made him more endearing to her.

“Podrick,” she ordered, lightly. However, even she could detect the tone of teasing in her voice. She scooted over the side of the tub, making sure that she would be blocked from his view. She folded her arms on the edge of the tub and placed her chin on her arms. “Turn around,” she responded. Podrick shook his head practically waving his arms as he did so. “Podrick, I promise that you won’t see anything.”

And so, Podrick let out a heavy sigh and did as told.

At first, his hand lowered to his side and his fist clenched at his side. Then, he turned around, almost stiffly to turn towards her. Seeing her pressed against the tub and trying to keep herself covered to the best of her ability, he seemed to let out a breath of relief and lowered his head. “I am sorry for barging in Lady Sansa.”

“Sansa,” she corrected at the same time that he did.

“I was sent by Brienne because she wanted me to let you know that we are going to be leaving for King’s Landing in the morning,” Podrick informed her. She spotted the confused look on his face as he started speaking once again, “And, she also wanted me to see if you had changed your mind about me staying to protect you from Baelish.”

Sansa resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “No, I have not changed my mind.”

“Have I done something, Sansa?” Podrick questioned.

Sansa let out a sigh. “Podrick,” she replied. “You haven’t done anything wrong by barging into my bathroom unannounced.”

“It’s not about that,” he whispered.
“You haven’t done anything wrong, Podrick,” she responded.

Podrick opened his mouth to respond but seemed to think better of it. His mouth closed hastily afterward and he seemed to be thinking about something as he gazed intensely at her. Then, to her surprise, he took several steps in her direction and crouched down on the other side of the tub to stare at her. He was looking at her intensely, his brown eyes meeting with her blue ones, and one of his hands was fitted over his own. His thumb drifted over the back of Sansa’s hand.

“Then, why are you sending me away?” he whispered. Sansa looked down at him, trying hard to find the words before he was speaking again. “I would not mind staying here to protect you. I know that you are more than capable of protecting yourself and outmaneuvering Littlefinger. And, I’m sure that you already have a plan in place because you are not the same girl from King’s Landing. But, needing to protect you and wanting to protect you are two completely different things.”

Sansa sucked in a breath, suddenly feeling like she was unable to breathe.

“I want to protect you, Sansa.”

If Sansa had been the same naive girl from King’s Landing, Podrick would not be in her bathroom, crouched down on the other side of her tub. She would have shrieked at the sight of a boy in her bathroom and someone would’ve already come to drag him out. She wouldn’t have asked to kiss Podrick in the crypts. She wouldn’t have let him kiss her in her bedroom all those weeks ago or the numbers of times since then. Their relationship whatever that is would’ve been non-existent.

But, if Sansa was just the naive, little girl she had been when she had arrived in King’s Landing, she wouldn’t have been capable of hearing Podrick say “I want to protect you” or hear the underlying tone that sown within it.

I love you.

Sansa sucked in another breathe. Podrick watched her, his breathing uneven as though he was waiting for a response like Sansa was trying incredibly hard not to break under his gaze. Petyr Baelish’s love was different from the love that Jon gave her. Baelish loved her image and what he would desire to become with her by his side. Jon loved her like a sister, she was his family and he was hers, willing to protect her from the monsters and horrors that hid on her path.

But Podrick was neither of these things.

And, Sansa still wasn’t one hundred percent for sure if she was guarded enough for the potential hurt that Podrick might bring. He may not have the hidden agenda like Baelish, but that did not mean that Podrick could accidentally hurt her one day. It was things like that which constantly spun in her mind if she thought about Podrick visiting her at night and kissing her with so much love and adoration. But, no matter how hard she tried to guard her heart against Podrick of House Payne, he always managed to make the walls crumble with a simple smile.

“I’m just trying to protect you,” she whispered, hoping her voice portrayed what she felt inside. From the look in Podrick’s eyes, she hoped that she managed to get it across. “If you stay here, he’s going to be looking to drive a wedge between the two of us.”

“Just like he has between you and Arya?” he questioned. There must’ve been a look in her eye because he began to smile, the kind of smile that almost made it look like his face would’ve split in half. “Just like he thinks he’s driven between you and Arya,” he whispered like he’s managed to figure out her darkest secret. “I feel better about leaving you here in Winterfell.”
“You do?” she questioned.

He nodded his head. “Arya will be able to protect you better than I ever could.” His thumb brushed across the back of her hand, sending chills up her skin. “But,” he whispered, “That doesn’t mean I’m still not going to be worried about you.”

“I know,” she whispered. “But, I can protect myself.”

“I know,” he parroted back. “But, I still want to protect you.” Podrick let go of her hand, reaching up to cup the side of her face. He leaned forward to press a kiss against her lips. For the brief moment of contact, Sansa pressed her lips against his, leaning towards his kiss. Something ignited in her stomach but Podrick pulled away, quickly. “I should really get back to my quarters, Sansa,” he whispered, his voice husky.

“Why?” she questioned.

He gulped, looking away from her. “I’m afraid that if I kiss you any longer, that I’m going to…” he cut himself off, biting his bottom lip as he tried to figure out what to say. “I’m going to want to go farther than what we should be doing.”

“Is that a bad thing?” she questioned.

His eyes flickered to her. “I just don’t want to hurt you,” he whispered to her. “And, I don’t know what all he did to you and I don’t want to know.” he added quickly before she could open her mouth. “But, I don’t want to do something and bring up old memories, painful memories,” he whispered, “Because the last thing that I want to do is to accidentally hurt y-mmph” Sansa cut him off with a kiss, pressing her lips against his before Podrick could even get a chance to finish the sentence. Podrick’s lips were working against hers, pushing her lips back and his tongue slipping in her mouth without much of a thought. Sansa’s hands were on his cheeks and pulling him closer. One of his arms wrapped around her shoulders, attempting to bring her closer against him and succeeding in only flattening her against the edge of the bath.

Suddenly, Podrick broke away, slipping from her grasp and heading swiftly into her bedroom. Sansa expected to hear the door to the castle open and then close, for then he would be gone and she would be alone for the evening. Except, it never happened. She heard the swift click of the lock of her door and her eyebrows rose in confusion. She had just come to the decision to follow after him when Podrick returned to the bathroom, a heavy look in his eye.

He crouched down in front of her.

“Promise me something,” he whispered.

She nodded her head before his forehead was pressed against hers.

“Tell me if I’m hurting you,” he breathed.

“She nodded her head before his forehead was pressed against hers.

“Tell me if I’m hurting you,” he breathed.

“I promise,” she replied before taking his lips in her own. Podrick let out a breath, his hand on the back of her head and his tongue sliding against her bottom lip. Sansa reached out, finding the zippers of his tunic and undoing it. His hands were there with her, their fingers brushing together as the red tunic slipped off of Podrick’s shoulders. She slid her hands down his chest, mapping out his chest as Podrick’s kisses shifted from her lips to her jawline and then down to her neck.

By the time that her fingers brushed against the waistband of his pants, his own hands were there to push them off and down. “Podrick,” she whispered. He paused, pulling back to look at her with a
perplexed and worried expression on his face. He looked so cute that she let out a giggle as she continued and pushed herself from the edge to give him room to get in, “Join me in the tub so I can kiss you again.”

He grinned, stepping inside and sitting on the bench beside her. “As you wish, Lady Sansa,” he whispered before kissing her again. His lips pressed harder, more tender than their previous kisses, and the water shifted as he reached out to wrap his arms around her waist. The feeling of his hands against her bare skin, against the scars given to her by Ramsey, sent a jolt of fire down her spine with each gentle brush of his thumb against the scarred skin.

His eyes flickered up at her as he shifted her until she sat in his lap, feeling his chest against her side. In his eyes, Sansa could spot the silent question in his eyes. *Is that okay?* Something warm formed in the pit of her stomach as she nodded her head, dipping down to press another kiss to Podrick’s lips. He kissed her back tenderly, but his lips quickly turned feverous and heated as his hands traveled over her scars and into her hair. His hands moved constantly around her body before barely brushing over her hips.

Then, Podrick hesitated.

“Is this alright, Sansa?” he questioned.

“Yes, Podrick,” she replied. “This… this with you… it’s more than alright.”

Podrick nodded his head frantically before his lips are pressed against hers, his kisses had become searing and Sansa found herself melting into his kiss. Whatever had been holding him back before had seemingly melted away.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Tried writing this before the show. Failed. Tried writing it afterward and that didn't work either. But, it's three in the morning and I'm upset with how the finale ended. I couldn't sleep without finishing this chapter (and the fact that it's like 80 degrees in my room does not help either). But, on the bright side, I feel a bit better. However, I'm still really upset with the writing this season especially after episode 3. Honestly, the best things about the finale (to me) are SER Podrick Payne and Queen in the North Sansa Stark (but, the latter raises questions as to why SHE is the only one to gain independence instead of Yara but I loved it nonetheless) but not so much that he's in KL and she's in the North.

But, despite your opinions on the show itself, I hope you guys enjoy the chapter. If you guys want more eventual Podrick x Sansa stuff, they will eventually be a couple on my other story "Robb Stark is Dead", shameless plug there. I hope you guys enjoy and mourn with me all the character arcs that were destroyed in Season 8.

Sansa woke up in an empty bed.

She might’ve turned over and gone back to sleep if she hadn’t suddenly been brought back to the realization that she was alone and naked in her empty bed. It took her several minutes to remember how exactly she managed to get into this position. But, eventually, her tired mind allowed her to remember to searing kisses of Podrick Payne against her lips and her neck, his strong arms lifting her from her bathtub to her bed, his strong arms wrapped around her, and his individual kisses to her scars.

And, as soon as it all hit her mind, she was sitting up in bed, pulling the furs to her body.

Podrick’s sword was gone from the place he normally leaves it against the wall by her door. His clothes were most likely gone from the bathroom as well. But, her sheets seemed to smell of him as well. There was a small cavern from where he had slept in the bed beside her. Sansa laid down against the cool sheets and spotted a small scroll on the side of the bed. She reached out, snagging it with her fingers and unraveling it in front of her.

Needed to go to my room and pack things. Sorry for being unable to say goodbye. Hope I didn’t wake you. Podrick.

Sansa let out a heavy sigh, collapsing against her sheets. She wondered briefly if Brienne and Podrick had left yet, wondered if there was a chance that she could go and convince Brienne that she had changed her mind and ask to have Podrick stay. She knew that Podrick would see right through it. And, if Podrick could see right through it, then so would Littlefinger. And, he would definitely set his sights on Podrick if it meant getting her alone and alienated and at his disposal to be murdered.

No, she hissed at herself. I’m not going to put him in that position even if I want him to stay.

So, instead, Sansa got up, slipped on her small clothes, and into a clean dress that her handmaiden had set out for her last night. She managed to lace it up all on her own as well, which is only
something of a minor miracle. But, it’s only as she’s putting her fur cloak around her shoulders, her final layer of protection for the harsh winter weather, that she caught sight of her neck in the reflection of a plate on her desk. Curious, she stepped closer.

Was that a bruise?

For a moment, Sansa was briefly confused. Throughout her memories of the night, she was certain that Podrick had not held her hard enough to give her a bruise. Finding bruises on her hips might’ve not been as much of a surprise as it was finding one on her neck. Luckily for her, she wouldn’t have to deal with the questionable glances from Littlefinger because her furs managed to cover up the small bruise. She would, however, need to be careful of how she moved around the master manipulator.

After Sansa left her room, she didn’t have a real destination.

However, her feet took her to the stables, where Podrick was brushing the mane of the horse and putting on the saddle of the horse. He was alone and oblivious to her standing there. Brienne must not have been there yet or had gone down to the kitchens to make sure that they had enough rations. He seemed lost in his own thoughts as she stepped into the stables and shut the door. As she walked up towards him, he did not move from his spot, only continued to brush his horse.

Then, he spoke without turning away from the horse, “You should still be in bed, Sansa.”

There’s a teasing tone to his voice that makes her crack a small smile as she walked up towards him. He glanced over at her as she stood beside him. “How can I? I woke up in an empty bed because my company left me all alone.”

Podrick smiled sweetly at her and placed the brush on its hook on the wall. “I’m sorry, my lady,” he replied in a soft whisper. He turned towards her and gave her a look of uncontested affection. His gaze flickered down to her lips before dragging up to her eyes. “Is there any way that I can make it up to you?”

Sansa thought about it, letting out a hum. “Maybe, there is one way.”

Podrick laughed and kissed her. His lips were gentle against hers, pressing lightly and less scorching than his kisses from the previous night that left invisible marks even hours later. His arm snaked under her cloak and brought her closer against him. She clung to his cloak, feeling the fabric of it and drowning herself in his kiss for several more moments before she’s pulling away, her breath and his breath equally as heavy.

“Promise me that you’ll be safe on the King’s Road,” she whispered, her voice light as though she was saying a prayer.

“I will,” Podrick replied. “Lady Brienne won’t let me freeze.”

“Then, be careful in King’s Landing,” Sansa supplied. Podrick gave her a brief but concerned glance and she continued, “I fear that I’m getting you out from the mockingbird’s claws only to send you straight into the lion’s den. If Cersei were to find out how much I care for you, that is if she doesn’t already know, I imagine that she will try to harm you to get to me.”

His grip on her waist tightened. Sansa wondered what he would say. Maybe, he would get upset at the fact that she wasn’t confident in his abilities to keep himself safe. Maybe, it was something that she couldn’t see. Maybe, he would get angry and cold right before he was set to leave. But, this was Podrick Payne, who was different from his cousin and any of the boys she had been with before.
Instead, he just looked at her with an intense look in his eyes and whispered, with confidence, “I’ll stay safe. I promise.”

Sansa let out a breath of relief.

“What?” he questioned.

“I don’t know,” she whispered, gripping onto his arms. Even though the heavy fabric, she could feel the outline muscle of his arms. “I thought you might be angry at me for thinking that you were unable to protect yourself.”

“You’re just trying to look out for me,” Podrick remarked, his voice quiet and assured. For a moment, he’s completely quiet and biting down on his lip before he continued, “And, it means a lot to me that you care about my safety, Sansa. I’ve never had anyone beside Lord Tyrion and Lady Brienne, who cared about me enough to worry about me.” He’s quiet again. Then, he adds, “But, sometimes, I think I annoy Lady Brienne.”

“Sometimes, Arya annoys me,” she remarked. “But, that doesn’t mean that I care for her any less.”

Podrick laughed.

Then, his lips were on hers once again. This kiss was gentle and slow, his lips lightly moving against her own but not enough to stir up any feelings. His hands were on the small of her back. He pulled away.

“Thank you,” he replied.

“For what?” she questioned.

“For caring about me,” he spoke like it was obvious.

Sansa was certain that her cheeks were flushed and that he was grinning in such a cute way because of it. She feels the need to bring him in for another kiss but refrains herself. “Thank you for wanting stay so you could protect me,” she replied.

“Always,” he breathed.

Sansa was certain that if she was going to kiss him that they would go too far and be discovered by Lady Brienne or the stable boy. But, Sansa had reached the point that she could not talk herself out of it. He would be gone soon and it would be many moons before she would be able to see him again. She wanted to savor his kiss, the touch of his hands in her hair, and Podrick Payne before he slipped from her fingertips, heading South on her own orders.

But, as she leaned in and Podrick leaned in to meet her, they both heard the crunch of the snow outside the stable doors. Despite neither of them having the desire to step away, both of them stepped away from each other that by the time that Lady Brienne opened the door, Podrick was making sure the saddle was secure on his horse.

“Lady Sansa,” Brienne spoke. “I did not realize you were awake.”

“I went to sleep late last night,” Sansa supplied, quickly and without it actually being a lie. “I woke up earlier than I expected and thought I would see you two off. Are you prepared for your long journey to King’s Landing? Do you have enough rations for the journey back as well?”

As Podrick brushed past her to get Brienne’s saddle ready, his hand brushed against her. It was so
quick that she almost thought that she had imagined the entire encounter. But, Podrick’s gloved fingers darted out to lightly grasp her own and squeeze them lightly. Despite the layers of fabric on their hands, she could still feel the warmth of him. Then, the warmth of his hand is gone and he’s walking away, leaving Sansa nearly giddy with the secret exchange between them.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sorry for not having a chapter last week, I needed a sort of mental detox from Game of Thrones.

I feel really bad for Kit Harrington and only wish him the best of luck.

Now, story-wise, if anyone hasn't realized, Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen are still a couple (and still will be a couple when all is said and done). I will officially be adding that into the relationship tags of this story, but Podrick and Sansa are still the main focus of the story (even though there is a bit more plot happening in this chapter).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bronn had practically dragged Podrick away as soon as they were all seated in the Dragonpit. Brienne had given him the ok so Bronn had been all the more merrily to drag him away to a pub to get drunk. Podrick only had a glass of wine and had to fend off Bronn, who kept telling him to drink more. The knight of the Blackwater attempted to get him to drink more before settling on his own conquests, talking of brothels, and questioning if Podrick could convince the girls to not have him pay.

When Podrick later dropped off Bronn at the brothel, one of the girls attempted to get him to come back into the room to “show her a good time free of charge”. However, Sansa was the only one on his mind so he declined (Bronn gave him a look of pure confusion) and left back to the Dragon Pit. Once he had arrived, Cersei’s men were gone and Brienne was talking (almost angrily) with Ser Jaime as he walked in. Both of the blondes looked up at him as he approached.

“Podrick,” Jaime spoke, noting that he was alone. “Where is Bronn? He wasn't at the meeting.”

“We went to get a drink while the others talked. He's at the brothel now,” Podrick supplied. “I dropped him off.”

Jaime let out a heavy sigh, placing his head against his golden hand.

“Podrick,” Brienne spoke. “Do you mind giving me and Ser Jaime a moment alone?”

Podrick nodded his head to the Lady. He moved away from them. Almost immediately, they started resorting to talking in hushed whispers. As the squire moved away from them, he glanced back towards them, eyeing their position and body stature. Hmm, he thought. Bronn might've had a point that time in Winterfell. Podrick heard the shout of his name and turned to find Tyrion ushering him over, in the midst of the group around him. He quickly moved in their direction. As he got closer, he noticed Jon Snow among them. Despite the smile on his face towards the squire, Podrick suddenly grew incredibly nervous of the brother of the woman who was currently consuming his thoughts.

“Podrick,” he greeted.

The King in the North (or former rather, he presumed) was standing beside the Dragon Queen, Daenerys Targaryen. Looking at the pair of them, Podrick had to admit that there was a regal air of
the sight of them together like this. They were standing closer to one another than any of the other members of the group. He was dressed in Stark furs with his black hair pulled back in a tie and she was dressed in Targaryen colors with her silver-blonde hair intricately braided. The Dragon Queen glanced from Tyrion to Podrick quizzically, quickly looking him up and down, but it did not make Podrick uneasy. She seemed like a kind soul who was curious about the new person.

“Podrick?” she questioned, a teasing glint in her eyes as she stared up at him. There was a peculiar smile on her face, one that might’ve been able to split her face apart if it grew any bigger. “As in Tyrion’s former squire, Podrick?”

“The one and the same!” Tyrion bellowed, beaming towards him with a cup of wine in his hand. Podrick smiled down at his former lord. It may have been a while since he had served the youngest (and shortest) Lannister, but even Podrick knew that he must’ve somehow been given a glass of wine (or two). “Never has there ever been a more loyal squire!”

“Yes, I am aware. You have told me many times,” the Dragon Queen spoke, smiling towards her Hand. She glanced back towards Podrick, who returned her gaze. “Tyrion has told me a lot about you and your bravery. He’s even told me about some of your … uh, exploits a time or two. It’s quite impressive.”

Podrick opened his mouth to question what the Queen had meant before he spotted the bemused expression on Tyrion’s face and the gentle quirk of her eyebrow. The Dragon Queen let out a laugh as Podrick buried his face into his hands, hoping to hide the blush on his cheeks. It might’ve been the first and only time that Podrick had stepped into a brothel as a customer, but it seemed to have haunted Podrick from the moment that those girls had given him Tyrion’s pouch back. The story continued to follow him like a ghost that refused to keep haunting him. It had even managed to get to Sansa, somehow, as she had teased him before she fell asleep against his chest.

However, men who go to brothels don’t want to hear that the key to not having to pay was to focus on the girls’ needs instead of focusing on their own.

Jon Snow let out a cough, a confused expression on his face as he glanced around the group, specifically at Daenerys who gave him an amused expression. The only other person who was similarly confused was Theon Greyjoy, who stood behind Tyrion. “So, Podrick,” the former King spoke up. Podrick glanced towards him, eager to have something else to talk about other than Podrick’s brief sexual exploits with the women in a brothel. “How is Sansa doing at Winterfell?”

And, somehow, that was so much worse than the previous conversation.

“She’s good,” he replied, trying his best to hold the King’s gaze. Avoiding his eye would just prove that he’s got something to hide. And Podrick really did not want to be gutted in the middle of the Dragon Pit by an over-protective brother of the Lady of Winterfell, who Podrick definitely had strong feelings for. “She’s gotten a bit of restlessness from the Northern lords which is what she expected.”

There was a light glower on his northern features, but Podrick hoped he had been imagining it (or at the very least, it was directed towards the Northern Lords and not to himself).

In an attempt to distract himself, he simply continued to talk, “While we were in Winterfell, Arya would join Brienne and me for training the other soldiers and Bran is … well …,” Podrick trailed off before eventually deciding on Sansa’s go-to response when asked about the mysterious brother, who always seemed to have been rolled into the Godswood, “Bran.”

For a moment, Jon simply glowered at him. Then, he smiled at the mention of his family, a soft smile
that he had only seen reserved for Sansa up until this point. “That’s good. I’m glad to hear that they are all doing okay.” His eyes flickered over Podrick’s shoulder. “Brienne, will you and Podrick be sailing with us back to Dragonstone then to Winterfell?”

“I’m afraid not,” Brienne spoke, matter-of-factly and to the point. Podrick felt as though there was something bothering her, but he didn’t speak up. “Podrick and I will begin riding back to Winterfell as soon as possible. I am afraid that I feel like we have been gone too long leaving Baelish with Sansa.”

Jon nodded his head as though he agreed.

Despite the fact that Podrick knew that Sansa was safe as long as Arya was around, he was more eager than the other’s believed to get back to Winterfell. He trusted Arya to keep her sister safe, as the assassin was trained in all things killing (and the fact she drew her sparring with Brienne to a draw despite the fact she was nearly half the warrior woman’s size and leaner let him know just how could she was), but he still wanted to be there by her side to help if he could.

“What’s it like?” Jon questioned, turning towards the Dragon Queen.

“Before the meeting, he said something about going to the Street of Steel,” Daenerys supplied to Jon. “About possibly bringing his master north with us? He’s a blacksmith from Volantis and could be useful in making enough dragonglass weapons in time. But, that’s only if Cersei’s army doesn’t show up.”

Jon nodded his head in agreement.

Some days after Baelish’s body had long since been turned to ash, Sansa had the guards dig out the only bodies of the former Stark lords and ladies. The Northern lords had protested, but Sansa had argued that it was the right call. An army of the Dead would eventually come to Winterfell. If the men and abled women were to fight, the safest place for those who can’t be in the crypt. If the leader can bring the dead to life, there would be little use of them being in the crypts as they would be killed within moments.

Sansa glanced up from the scroll, which bore the details of Brienne and Podrick being on their way back from King’s Landing.

“I mean, being with a guy,” Arya spoke up after Sansa didn’t say anything.

Sansa laughed. For them being on the brink of war from an army of undead as well as Cersei in the South, it seemed odd that the two sisters would talk about something as minuscule as lying with a man. Ghost, who was lying on the bed, glanced up at the sound. “I’m well aware of what you meant.”

“Well, you weren’t saying anything and I can’t sit here, watching you read scrolls all bloody day,” Arya replied, crossing her arms and a smug look on her face. “I’m just curious to know what it was like considering the fact that you were the one who used to think to do that sort of thing outside of
marriage was a sin.”

“Well, technically, I am still married to Tyrion,” Sansa replied. She spotted Arya’s perplexed look on her face and moved to explain, “The marriage was unconsummated so technically, not a legal marriage.”

“If you don’t want to talk about being with Podrick, you don’t have to,” Arya supplied, leaning further against the pillows. “I’m just curious, is all.”

Sansa placed the scroll on the table and leaned back in her chair. “I don’t know how to explain it, with Podrick.” Sansa whispered, leaning back in her chair, feeling the need to be quiet without the reason anymore. Arya watched her. “It felt good and… I don’t know… it felt right. If it had been anyone else, I would’ve felt nervous and scared and forced. But, he was really respectful and conscious of what I wanted. Even after he stopped trying to keep me at arm’s length, he didn’t do anything without making sure if it was okay with me.”

“He seems like a good guy,” Arya replied. “It seems like he really cares about you. Plus, he’s strong, willing to protect you if you needed him too. I like that about him.”

Sansa nodded her head. "Yeah, he’s a good guy.”

Arya messed with the dagger that had ended all of their troubles, of the man who only continued to stir up trouble with the Northern Lords against Jon. The silence grew between them as Sansa picked up the scroll from Jon, announcing that he had bent the knee to Daenerys Targaryen. The mention of the Queen had jogged something loose from her memory.

“I am afraid that Littlefinger might’ve had lasting effects on the Northern lords’ view of the Dragon Queen.”

“I agree,” Arya supplied, crossing her arms over her chest. “He’s definitely tried to get you elected as the Queen in the North. Lyanna Mormont told me that he was talking to the other Lords. She’s, of course, angry that Jon hasn’t been back since he was elected King, but I think she understands why he needs the allies.”

Sansa nodded her head.

“Do you believe him?” Arya questioned. “Is it true about the Army of the Dead?”

Sansa nodded her head. “I’ve never seen it,” Sansa informed her sister. “But, Jon has been terrified of the Army breaching the Wall, says it’s only a matter of time. And, I’ve talked with some of the wildlings and they are pretty scared of it too. He’s been pretty quiet about what happened before everything happened about the Wall.”

“Do you think we should trust the Dragon Queen?”

Sansa let out a sigh. “I don’t know,” she supplied. “I’m not the same little girl that I was when we left Winterfell, all too trusting in a Prince and a Queen who tried their best to break me.” Arya nodded her head as she agreed, but waited while Sansa sucked in a breath, standing on her feet to walk towards the fading fire. “But, I also know that if I act like the only people I can trust are Starks, then I would be Cersei, who thought that anyone that wasn’t a Lannister was an enemy.”

“And if the Northern Lords ask to be independent?” Arya questioned, raising an eyebrow. “Robb declared independence.”

“Robb was named King in the North after Father was killed,” Sansa supplied, crossing her arms as
she stared into the fire. “Robb was named King in the North without a real plan for a replacement King and no desire to have the position itself. In addition, he was in rebellion against the Lannisters, not the Targaryens. Father rebelled against Targaryens because the Mad King had taken her aunt. As far as I can tell, Daenerys Targaryen has done nothing of the sort other than being the daughter of the wrong man. Plus, Jon told me that I shouldn’t punish children for their fathers’ sins and he was right.”

Arya was quiet.

“You’re being too quiet,” Sansa remarked.

“Just thinking,” Arya questioned. “Littlefinger taught you a lot. Didn’t he?”

“Yes,” Sansa replied, turning towards her sister. “And, I’m determined not to be like him. I only want what’s best for the North and its survival, not the uncomfortable throne that sits in the Red Keep. If I never have to go south another day in my life, it would be a miracle. If this Dragon Queen is our best root of survival, then she is. But, that doesn’t mean that she doesn’t get my loyalty right away. She needs to earn it like everyone else.”

“Agreed,” Arya replied. “But, that doesn’t mean that she needs to come here to a shell of ice that the Northern lords are exhibiting. I might have been training to be a ruthless assassin in Braavos, but I heard about her time-to-time from the slaves she rescued. She conquered Meereen by showing the slaves that she was not their enemy and giving the slaves the weapons to take the city. And, she stayed to rule instead of coming to Westeros.”

“I know,” Sansa responded. “I don’t want the Lords to give her the cold shoulder either. By coming north instead of concurring, she has given us a fighting chance against the Army of the Dead when they reach Winterfell. And, Jon trusts her. And, I trust him.”

“I trust Jon too,” Arya replied.

The red-head nodded her head.

“So,” the assassin spoke. “Where do we start?”

Sansa grinned.

Chapter End Notes

We have officially reached the point where the story starts deviating from Season 8 (or pre-Season 8). And, for the purposes of this story, the story of the Long Night will not be affected (though I seriously wish it had been Jon to kill the Night King, but whatever I also liked the fact it was Arya with the Valriyan Steel dagger). After the events of Season 7, I had envisioned Sansa adopting the practices of Littlefinger in a different way, for support instead of pulling a Cersei or Littlefinger. So, this chapter will see her try to work the Northern Lords/Lady towards supporting Daenerys Targaryen.

And I also found it kind of odd that she would support Jaime--who shoved her brother out a window and attacked her father in the street--because Brienne saying she trusted him, but would think that Jon was being manipulated by Daenerys (but, I get it, she’s new and "crazy" but at the same time, kind of hypocritical if you ask me *shrugs*).
No Podsa, at least not directly, but next week is the reunion time in which Brienne and Podrick make it back to Winterfell!
I'm back!

I apologize for the long wait, but my anger about the Game of Thrones ending that happened had overwhelmed me to the point that I didn't want to write the story anymore and I apologize profusely. However, I am back now. In terms of my GoT stories, I am definitely finishing this one (as I do have all the chapters planned out) but my other one is on a semi-hiatus until I finish this story because it got way too overwhelming writing for two different stories in the same franchise.

I do hope that you guys enjoy this chapter and give me feedback!

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Sansa paused outside of the wooden door, her hand raised to knock.

On the other side of the wooden door, Podrick had been kept in his assigned room, only two rooms away from Brienne of Tarth. It was only four rooms away from Sansa in the Lord’s Chambers, yet it still felt like such a long distance in the previous weeks with the likes of Petyr Baelish. Now, the threat upon Podrick’s life was gone, the ever-manipulating Petyr Baelish was burned to ash, and the two of them were alone and free to do whatever they wanted. And, yet the wooden door in front of her still felt like such a large distance.

On the other side of the door, Podrick let out a wet cough that squeezed her heart in worry.

After arriving at Winterfell, Brienne had paused to get Podrick in his room, who had fallen ill on the last leg of the journey. The news had frightened Sansa (though she hid it well), worried that Podrick might’ve caught an illness on an errand that she had sent him on. However, the maester arrived in the midst of their meeting to inform them that Podrick simply had a cold and that he would be fine in a few days. Brienne and the maester seemed oblivious to her relief, but Arya gave her a glance and a nod, telling her that she had understood.

Sansa pushed open the wooden door to step inside of Podrick’s room. His room was bare of anything aside from his sword and a handful of books that sat on his desk. His room had a fire, which was blazing. There was a small bucket of freshwater by the chilled window. His bed was slightly smaller than her own, covered with furs and blankets that were wrapped around him. For a moment, she thought Podrick was asleep, but then he spoke, his voice hoarse from his cough, “You shouldn’t be here, Sansa.”

As she turned to close the door, she fought off a smile.

“I can do what I please,” she replied, stepping towards the bed where he lay wrapped up in furs. She reached out to grab the cloth from his forehead. She walked around to the bucket and dumped the cloth in the ice-cold water. She wrung out the access water from the fabric and returned to the side of the bed to place it back against his forehead. Podrick sighed, his hair messed up from sleep and his thrashing around. “How are you feeling?” she questioned.
“It’s just a cold,” Podrick supplied, his brown eyes glancing up at her. “A cough and the room is colder than normal but not as cold as outside.”

“That’s good to hear,” Sansa replied. “Are you simply saying that not to worry me?”

“Yes and no,” Podrick admitted, leaning back against the bed. Sansa moved the wet cloth from his forehead and placed her fingers against his forehead, feeling the warmth of his fever against her own fingers. “I’ve been through worse, Sansa. I’ll be fine. I promise.”

For a moment, the two of them are silent as Sansa placed the cloth back against his forehead. She slipped her fingers into the strands of his hair and his eyes fluttered shut for half a moment.

“I like her,” Podrick confessed.

Sansa blinked, perplexed and scared for a moment before she managed to form a response. “What?”

“Sorry,” he mumbled, reaching up to pinch his nose. His hand draped over his lap and she could lightly feel his hand at her side, drawing patterns against her dress. “Not like that, I’m sorry. The Targaryan Queen, the Dragon Queen. Her. From our brief conversation, she seems nice and funny.” He glanced over at her. “I know that you were worried about her.”

“I am,” she admitted. “I just want to make sure that Jon made the right choice, bending the knee to her.”

Podrick nodded his head. The cloth shifted from his forehead and Sansa hastily reached up to fix it. He mumbled out a “thank you” before he continued, “I think that Lady Brienne might have a more accurate view on the Dragon Queen. They interacted more than I did with her.”

“You weren’t at the meeting?”

Podrick shook his head, placing his hand over his eyes. “Bonn and I went to get a drink, then we went to a brothel.”

“Oh,” Sansa spoke.

In an instant, a thousand emotions swam through her mind. But, one seemed to stick: hurt. While he had been in King’s Landing, Podrick had gone to a brothel. And for a second, just a second, the image of a skimpily dressed girl with her hands all over Podrick sent burning white anger through her heart. It was a possessive nature that she didn’t think she was capable of. It frightened her enough to start fleeing, getting up to leave the room and make a hasty excuse to leave.

However, before she could fully get up and bury herself in the emotions that would certainly, Podrick’s strong arms were wrapped around her waist and he was pulling her back to the bed. It wasn’t a forced motion, she could’ve easily broken away if she wanted to, but the man guided her back into the bed and against his chest though she was stiff against him.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

Sansa closed her eyes, waiting for the apology or rejection that was headed her way come.

“I didn’t mean for it to come out like that…” Podrick trailed off, his breath hot against her ear before pressing a kiss against her cheek. His hand wrapped around, resting against Sansa’s stomach before moving to her other side, resting there. Again, he was giving her the option to break away, but Sansa found herself planted. “Bonn got a few drinks in him, exclaimed about wanting to go to a brothel, so I dropped him off and headed to Lady Brienne.”
Sansa let out a breath, of relief or something that filled her entire body. Podrick had gone to a brothel, but it hadn’t been to see a girl. Despite her inability to trust Littlefinger or the Dragon Queen, who she had not met yet, she found herself finding the truth and honesty in his tone. He was telling the truth. And, he knew that she would be able to tell that he was telling the truth.

“I’m sorry to have gotten you so worried,” he mumbled, his nose pressing against her temple. Sansa let out a breath, relaxing into his arms, relishing the feeling of his arms wrapped around her once again. As though sensing that her own uneasiness was gone, Podrick’s arms wrapped tighter around her body, gripping her like he never wanted to let her go, and she briefly wondered if he had always gripped her this tight or if he was trying to express how sorry he was for scaring her.

“You scared me,” she admitted.

“I’m sorry,” Podrick mumbled against her neck.

Sansa tilted her head back against his shoulder. In response, Podrick pressed a handful of kisses against the flesh of her neck.

“I’m surprised,” she spoke suddenly. Podrick hummed against her neck, his face settling into the flesh of her skin where her shoulder met her neck. “After your last experience at the brothel, I’m sure that the girls tried to get you to become a repeat customer.”

Podrick chuckled, his finger tracing up and down her arm. “They certainly tried.”

“So,” Sansa questioned, the need to question in her stomach. “Why didn’t you stay with them? I’m sure that they would’ve given you a great time.”

“I’m surprised you even need to ask.”

“Humor me,” she supplied, tickling his palm with her fingers. His hand opened up and her fingers slotted between his own like they were meant to be. Sansa tried to ignore the flipping in her stomach at the thought of someone meant for her. “I want to know why the legendary Podrick of House Payne decided not to have a free second run with the brothels frequented by Lord Tyrion.”

For a moment, Podrick was quiet, pressing a long kiss against her shoulder.

“There’s only one person I want to be with,” Podrick finally spoke, hesitation in his voice. But, he squeezed her hand with a frightening intensity. “And, she’s not in King’s Landing.” He placed a kiss against her cheek. “And, I think I might be a fool if I ever were to lose her or make her think any different.” Another kiss against her cheekbone. “And, that’s you, Lady Sansa.”

Sansa was certain her heart might plummet out of her chest.

“Sansa,” she corrected quickly before twisted in his arms and pressing her lips against his own.

Podrick’s arms pulled her tighter against him. Sansa kicked off her shoes and heard them tumble off the side of his bed. Hastily, she pulled up the skirt of her dress, but just enough so she had the freedom to settle on his waist with both of her legs on either side of his hips. At Sansa’s urging, Podrick opened his mouth against hers and she gripped onto the strands of his hair.

However, moments later, he hastily pulled backward. “We can’t,” he practically gasped out.

Sansa puffed out her bottom lip in a mock pout.

“You’re going to get sick,” Podrick explained.
“No, I won’t.”

“Yes, you will.”

Sansa kissed him again. Podrick melted against her, wrapping his arms back around her and kissing her just as feverously as before his protests. Her hands were in his hair and he fell back against the bed, forcing her to follow after him if she wanted to keep kissing him and she did.

“I missed you,” she mumbled into the kiss.

“I missed you too,” Podrick replied and her heart soared.

The cold that kept her restrained to her bed for several days and caused all of her meetings and planning to have to be held in her quarters was worth it. Even if after one meeting where Podrick had recovered and she was still on the mend, Podrick chuckled and whispered in her ear, “I told you.” She had to force herself not to kiss him or else they would do nothing but trade the cold back and forth until someone (aside from Arya) got suspicious.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Winterfell prepares for the arrival of the Targaryen Army.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone, I am back.

So, right off the bat, this chapter did not turn out how I originally intended it to be. Originally, it was supposed to see some distance between Podrick and Sansa to be sort of healed before the battle and completely healed after the battle was over (and because I REALLY wanted to manage to include the scene with Podrick and the girls, which was EASILY my favorite part of 6x04 - other than the hot kiss between Jon and Daenerys).

However, that shouldn't interfere with any of the future plot that I have set out so far. At least, I don't think it will. But, either way, I hope you all enjoy this chapter and I look forward to seeing you in the next one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You’re doing it again,” Podrick mumbled.

There was a scroll in her hands and all around her, more mail that she needed to do before going to bed for the night. And Podrick, thick with sweat from training the men of the North, was not helping matters. Ever since Brienne had asked Podrick to help train some of the other soldiers, he always seemed to be sweaty by the time that he stopped by her quarters to keep her updated on the training of the soldiers and the headcount for those going into the crypts with her and the rest of the women and children who couldn’t fight.

Of course, all those numbers would soon be squinched and shifted with the arrival of the remaining lords of the Winterfell. But, every once in a few days, it was nice to have an updated count.

“Doing what?” Sansa feigned innocence as she read over the letter from White Harbor. The scroll had been sent from the castle that stood in White Harbor, but the letter was written by Jon with his slanted, rushed letters.

_Daenerys, the ships, and I arrived safely at White Harbor safely. We will be headed to Winterfell in the morning. Get the blacksmiths ready. We have a ton of remaining dragonglass to bring for weapons along with two skilled blacksmiths who have been working with it. See you in a fortnight._ - Jon.

Podrick sat down on the edge of her bed, placing his sword against the nightstand on that side. He sent her a look that obviously meant _you know what before_ he leaned over to glance at the scroll. After reading the contents of it, he snatched it from her hand. “You aren’t getting away from this conversation.”

“I don’t even know what you’re talking about,” Sansa mumbled, refusing to look at him because she knew that he was right.

But, Sansa _did_ know what he was talking about and he knew it better than she could try to avoid the conversation at hand. Sansa was avoiding him _again_. But, it wasn’t for the reason that he thought. Whenever Sansa stepped away, Podrick was always worried that it was because of something that he
had done. But, in this case, and in every case, it had not been because of something that Podrick had
done. In fact, it had nothing to do with Podrick. It had everything to do with Sansa and her intense,
almost paralyzing fear of losing him.

She had finally gotten rid of Baelish (for a multitude of reasons), but now it seemed that she had only
replaced one enemy with two more.

The first one, the one that everyone was more concerned about, was the Night King. They had
received the hurried letter *The Wall Has Fallen* from Ed days ago. It was why training had enhanced
and Podrick had been getting to Sansa’s room later and later. It was why Sansa had sent a letter back
to White Harbor even with the likelihood that it would never reach Jon. It’s why she called all the
Lords of the North and their citizens to Winterfell because the castle was their best chance of defense
was. It was why her heart was in her chest at every waking moment at the thought of the upcoming
battle.

The upcoming battle.

That Podrick would be in.

And, then, there was the enemy to the South. Cersei Lannister. If by some minor miracle that the
gathering Northern men, Wildling (Free Folk, she corrected a heartbeat afterward), and the
Targaryen Army managed to come out on top, the group still would need to travel South to claim the
Iron Throne from Cersei. And, even while they recuperated and recovered from the long fight ahead,
Cersei would only grow stronger. Sansa and Arya knew it. Podrick knew it. The Dragon Queen
probably knew it. They all knew it.

Before Sansa could travel further into the large, sinking hole that she was falling into, Podrick
angling his face between her and the scroll that she had stopped reading over five minutes ago. In
King’s Landing, Podrick was the awkward squire of her forced husband and couldn’t look her in the
eye. Now, he had grown a certain confidence that almost continuously managed to surprise her. If
anything, Sansa realized, their relationship had only made him more confident. It brought a smile to
her face even if she didn’t want to admit that he was right about her avoiding the subject of the
upcoming battle that they all knew was coming.

“Avoiding the conversation won’t make the battle come any quicker,” Podrick informed her, his
breath ghosting across her cheek.

Sansa let out a loud sigh and Podrick took the scroll from her fingers, wrapping it up and putting it
on the desk. Ghost, who had been sitting with his head on Podrick’s lap, let out a low growl at
Podrick disturbing his slumber. However, Podrick simply patted his head and Ghost closed his eyes
again. Podrick opened his mouth to say something, but Sansa cut him off. “I’m not going in the
Crypts, Pod,” she whispered, giving him a pointed look. “If you’re going to be fighting and my men
are going to be fighting and Arya’s going to be fighting, then I should be up there, doing something,
not waiting in the crypt to wait patiently for the news on if you lived or…” she trailed off.

For a minute, the two of them were quiet before Sansa looked down at her hands.

Since arriving at Winterfell, Sansa had found herself becoming more and more like the lady that her
mother had been and feeling more and more like the girl that she had once been, before Joffrey and
Cersei and Ramsay. And, it all had started once Bran returned back to them. Then, it grew more and
more after Arya returned home to them as well. There was still one more member of her family that
was gone, and that was Jon who was nearly home, but losing all of them in the final battle was a
frightening thought that she didn’t think she could face.
But, the thought of losing Podrick was almost enough to make her heart clench in her chest and leave her frozen where she sat.

Sansa took a deep breath, closing her eyes and tilted her head down to the sheets. “I don’t think I can stand the thought of you dying in the battle, Podrick.”

For a moment, Podrick is quiet, placing his forehead against the side of her head. She leaned against his body and felt his arm wrap around her lower waist. “I don’t want to leave you alone,” he whispered. His voice was as quiet as the ghost in the castle. Sansa turned her head towards him, her nose brushing against his, and reached up to hold onto his arm. Podrick’s arms wrapped further around her, pulling her closer and closer to him until Sansa wasn’t sure there was any space left between them.

Ghost let out a slight noise, shuffling on the bed.

“Sorry Ghost,” Podrick mumbled

Ghost let out a huff.

Sansa laughed.

“If I can help it,” Podrick whispered. “I’m not going anywhere. I promise.”

“You’re not going to tell me to go to the crypts?” she questioned, her voice soft. Sansa opened her eyes to see that Podrick was looking at her with an intense look in his eyes. The worry in his face told her all that she needed to know. No, he wouldn’t. He wouldn’t tell her to go to the crypt and he wouldn’t try to force her. But, she knew that he would feel better if she was in the crypt, safely locked away if the confines of the crypts with the other women and children. It wouldn’t be the first time she was safely locked away in a conflict that could’ve ended with her life.

And, if they somehow made it through the Long Night, it wasn’t outside of the realm of possibility that there won’t be any more sieges on Winterfell’s grounds.

“You know I wouldn’t,” he replied.

Without really thinking of the motion, Sansa grabbed his face and kissed him. Podrick responded to her lips slowly, keeping it chaste and slow, which Sansa was fine with. She had finally come off the cold that he originally had. Now, the wall had fallen and the Dragon Queen was almost here and she was too frazzled to do much more.

But, when Podrick pulled away and started to talk about how he needed to return to his room before the other lords and ladies would become suspicious of their relations, Sansa couldn’t bear the thought of him leaving her side. “Stay,” she whispered.

“Huh?” he questioned.

“Stay,” she pleaded, looking up at him. “Just stay the night here. You and me. I told Amelia to not check on me until later so we won’t have to worry about her. Please.”

“Okay,” he whispered, wrapping his arms around her. He left his sword by her nightstand and moved his legs so they were on the side of Ghost, who had curled up by his feet. Sansa leaned against his shoulder, wrapping her arms around his chest and draping her legs over his beneath her furs. And, for a few moments, all Sansa could ever do was to just lean into his embrace and think I can get used to this.
Then, she remembered nothing after that.

The sun was barely poking over the horizon when Ghost perked up and bounded over both of them. The sudden jump from the extremely large direwolf had woken both Podrick and Sansa up with a start. As Sansa shook herself awake, Podrick climbed over her to get to the window where Ghost had managed to open the window and let out a loud howl that echoed through the walls of Winterfell.

Then, the door was being pushed open.

It was Arya, who wore an outfit that reminded Sansa of the clothes that their father liked to wear. Her hair was not tied up yet and it looked like she hadn’t even gotten the chance to go out to train. There was a telescope in her hand as she closed the door shut behind her and moved towards the window. Podrick took it from her to stare outside.

But, Sansa already knew before her sister even opened her mouth.

“They’re here? Aren’t they?” Sansa questioned.

Podrick nodded and Arya sent her a concerned glance, wondering how the two girls were going to maintain the gentle balance that they had maintained between Jon’s allegiance and the grievances of the Lords and Lady of the North. Sansa sucked in a breath, moving towards the dress Amelia had given to her before Sansa had sent her away. She needed to get dressed to get the castle ready. Without even thinking about who was in the room with her, Sansa hastily switched from her nightclothes to the warm winter furs that she wore in the castle.

“What do you want us to do?” Arya questioned.

It was when her sister spoke that Sansa remembered that she had not been alone in her room, just alone in her thoughts. The laces of her dress were still undone and she moved to shuffle in an attempt to get them tied up. It was only a couple of moments of her struggling to fit the laces together that the strong hands of Podrick Payne were pushing her fingers away and she stopped without a fight. With a motion that was surely intimate, he bundled up her long red strands and moved her hair over one shoulder.

It shouldn't have been any surprise to her that Podrick was as good as lacing her dresses as he was unloosening them from her body.

Sansa glanced towards Arya, who had a brief look of surprise in her eyes. Sansa had not told Podrick that her sister had known of their secret affair. But, he had wasted no time in helping her the moment that she had needed help especially with Arya in the room. But, she figured that he had either suspected her to have told her sister or it was simply natural for him to lace up her dress. Besides that brief, soft expression of surprise and something else that Sansa couldn't recognize, Arya didn't have much of a reaction to it.

“Do you want to be with me and Bran?” Sansa questioned her sister, who seemed jittery in her room.

“No, not really,” Arya replied, gripping lightly to Needle at her side. Sansa knew that she was anxious to reunite with Jon more than anything else. She hadn’t seen him since they had left for Winterfell and both of them are completely different. “I’d like to see them up close without the Dragon Queen’s company realizing that I’m there. See them behind whatever mask they’ve got up.”

Sansa nodded her head as Podrick tightened the laces.
“Do it. I’ll make an excuse for you with Jon until later.”

Arya nodded her head. Then, she was gone out of the door with her spyglass in her hand.

Sansa turned to see Podrick holding her normal fur cloak in his hands. As she turned towards him, he reached out to wrap it around her shoulders and his fingers quickly found the leather clips which held it on her shoulders. There was a look of concentration on his face as he silently adjusted the clips and Sansa stared at him, admiring the furrowing of his eyebrows and the look of concentration.

A vivid thought passed through her mind. It was girlish notion, one that she might’ve had back in Winterfell or in the Red Keep before she had witnessed the true brutality of the Lannisters. The thought had come so quickly and stayed so vividly that she was almost caught off by the vision. The vision of Podrick wrapping a marriage cloak around her shoulders remained fresh in her mind even once the clips were done and his hands dropped to her waist.

Realizing that his eyes were now focusing solely on her, but could probably also figure out quickly what had flashed through her mind, Sansa quietly remarked, “You know you aren’t my handmaiden right.”

“Yes, I am fully aware,” Podrick replied, a teasing lift to her voice. “But, other than Amelia, I’m probably the best one to help you lace them up. I was Tyrion’s squire and helped him prepare for the Battle of the Blackwater. And, I’ve helped Lady Brienne with her armor numerous times.”

“Speaking of him,” Sansa spoke up. Tyrion was one of the smartest men that she had ever met. In addition, the Lannister lord was also Sansa’s former husband and Podrick’s former lord, who he had served with at King's Landing before also fleeing the capital with Brienne for safety. If Baelish could figure out their involvement, Tyrion, who knew them so well, certainly would as well. "How are we going to deal with my former husband?"

"It's not Lord Tyrion I'm worried about," Podrick admitted under his breath. The squire's eyes flickered to hers and even though Sansa’s eyes had met Podrick's on many times before, she still found herself taking a breath. “If he finds out, he finds out. He won't care one way or the other. Honestly, I’m more worried about Jon killing me.”

“Arya will protect you,” Sansa replied.

Podrick had an odd look on his face, staring over her shoulder. “I’m pretty sure she might help him.”

Sansa laughed and smiled even more once he chuckled. “Thank you for staying with me,” she whispered before kissing him lightly as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Podrick's hands on her lower back tightened as his lips pressed harder against hers. Sansa dug her hands through his hair and kissed him, wondering when would be the next time that she would be able to kiss him this freely.

“You better get going,” Sansa whispered, pulling away from him and slightly grinning at the low whine he gave. “You're still wearing the same clothes as last night.”

Podrick smiled.

“Yes,” he whispered. “I suppose I should.”

But, he’s kissing her one last time before he slipped out the door and they stepped into their respective roles with their covers. And, at that moment as she clung to his arm with one hand and his black curls with the other, Sansa prayed for the first time, really for the first time since she was trapped in the walls of the Red Keep, praying to the Old Gods and the New and whoever would
listen to never lose the man in her arms.

Because she didn’t know what would happen to her if she lost him.

Chapter End Notes

This is a reminder that while Podrick and Sansa is the main couple of the story, there are going to be other couples that will be mentioned or seen at any point in time. And, one of those will be Jon/Daenerys.

I will never forgive D&D for screwing not only Daenerys over but Jon over as well. Of all the seasons, I have never seen him so useless. Like I've said in previous chapters, everything after 8x03 is completely different and will end differently for the show as well (which is probably good news for everyone since this is tagged a "Fix-It" fic)!

I look forward to seeing you next chapter.

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