After

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Summary

A year after the events of the series finale, Jon and Sansa see each other again at Castle Black and begin to say the things they always meant to say to each other.

Notes

Although I’ve written for several other fandoms, this is my first Game of Thrones fic and my first Jonsa fic. This is mostly based on the show, but I have read the first two books of ASOIAF. Like many others, I found myself interested in the "beginning" that the ending of the show represented for the Starks, Jon and Sansa in particular. Mostly, there were so many conversations we should have gotten between these two in the final season, and they kept getting into my head that I decided to start writing to see where it would go. In spite of all the issues with the last few episodes, I did like the idea of Jon going north of the wall to hide away for a while and heal and then coming back, so something post-series rather than missing scenes made the most sense to me. I’ve got at least two more chapters planned, but possibly more depending on how those go.

See the end of the work for more notes
A raven had come to announce her coronation, but he had left Castle Black with Tormund and the other Free Folk who were still there well before it arrived. He’d also missed the one sent with an invitation for the feast that would mark her nameday, dated a few moons after that. He’d lost track of the passage of time after a while. It was one of the things that he loved about being so far north of the Wall. Time seemed to stand still and yet passed so quickly it was easy not to notice that an entire year had gone by. He hadn’t been gone quite that long, but almost, when he finally returned Castle Black.

Despite the words Tyrion had spoken to him, Jon Snow’s exile to the Night’s Watch was not the punishment that had been described to him, not exactly. The Watch was no longer what it had been when he’d first joined years earlier. The Free Folk were allies now. The Night King had been vanquished. The few watchmen who’d made it through the Battle for Winterfell had dispersed for a while, only to return to the castle, not because duty called them back but because nothing else did. The brotherhood had become a crutch, but then little else was left so it was a comfort too.

When Jon arrived from King’s Landing, there was no lord commander, no maester, just a collection of men and boys who, like Jon, had nowhere else to go. They didn’t know whether the new king expected to retain their allegiance to Westeros since the North had its own ruler now, but neither Tyrion nor Bran seemed eager to stake a claim and gave Jon no instruction upon his departure. Jon accepted their lack of further concern with him as the gift it was. So with no one to tell him otherwise, Jon took Tormund’s invitation to go with his people with no thought of when or whether he would return.

These people, so long considered his enemies, the ones against whom he had fought when he’d first taken his vows, they embraced him. It was a complicated affection—he was a crow, after all—but it was fierce and true. He had saved their lives, an act of heroism, perhaps his only one, that remained uncontaminated by all the things that followed it: his death and resurrection, his kingship in the North. Most of all, it was uncontaminated by Daenerys of House Targaryen. They knew him and trusted him—rather, they knew and trusted a version of himself that seemed a stranger to him now, one that Jon Snow hoped he could be again.

Jon Snow.

That’s who he was, that’s how they knew him, and perhaps for the first time in his life, it’s who he wanted to be. He wasn’t Ned Stark’s son, but he was a son of the North, the son of a Northern woman. He understood now, more than ever, the strength such women carried with them, the strength Lyanna had passed on to him. Hadn’t he been told before he had the Stark look? He owed it to her, the mother who had saved his life by asking that he be raised a bastard. That’s what Snow meant and it was a meaning Jon clung to.

He still wore black, wrapped in a cloak Sansa had sewn for him as she journeyed to his rescue in King’s Landing, and on the straps of which she had embossed the Stark sigil. He loved her for this (he loved her for so many things), but also acknowledged that her continued affirmations that he was a Stark had grown complicated. Still, he wore it like he wore Longclaw at his side, never considering changing the wolf-head pommel to anything else, certainly not to a dragon. He was done with those creatures so far as he could help it. The signs of the wolf, the wolf he now knew was his mother, those signs tethered him to his family, such as it was, dispersed.

Jon, Tormund and others had ranged deep into the land of always winter, and might have stayed there but for the reports of the settlements. The queen in the north had allowed them near the Wall,
after much negotiation with the Northern lords, and she encouraged trade among them and the villages just to the south of it. These wildlings had to see it for themselves so they turned south again.

They came upon the first of the settlements even before what remained of the wall and Castle Black came into view.

Tormund, who had ridden at the front of their caravan, ahead of Jon, cantered back to him with a grin. “A thousand years of fighting kings and all we needed to make peace in the end was a cunt sitting on the throne in Winterfell.”

“Hey!” Jon said with a sharp look.

Tormund laughed. “Sorry, a lady.”

Jon dug his heels into his mount and said, as he moved past his friend, still frowning, “Not any lady, Sansa.”

“A queen kissed by fire,” Tormund said, turning his horse to follow. “I might give her a kiss myself in thanks if—”

Tormund stopped short at another sharp look from Jon and laughed again. “If I didn’t know it would earn me a beating from you.”

Jon rolled his eyes but his face remained in a deep scowl for a some time as they rode on. He hadn’t said much to Tormund about what had happened when Jon had ridden south to King’s Landing after the Night King’s defeat, but he’d said enough about his parentage. Enough, at least, for Tormund to give new meaning to the protectiveness that Jon exhibited when Sansa’s name came up. And despite Jon’s desire to keep what he felt for her close to his chest, her name came up rather often.

Jon had expected to see a ramshackle camp like the ones he’d seen the Free Folk set up before. This was not that. These were houses, solidly built, and here to stay. The queen had ordered it—that’s what they were told.

When they finally made it back to Castle Black, the place was wholly changed.

It was a trading post of sorts now. A new maester had finally been sent from the Citadel, but he served a mandate from the queen that the watchmen continue keeping the peace there and arbitrate conflict in a way that fostered amity rather than fear. There was less conflict than one might have imagined given how much there had been once, but the Free Folk who had stayed close did so because she’d welcomed them into Winterfell and fed them as the Night King neared. She had seen to their injuries and even allowed the oldest and most infirm to remain there long after the battle had finished. She had earned their trust, not by the sword like Jon had, but with her heart.

And her head. Jon chuckled now at the fact he’d ever doubted Sansa’s smarts.

He and Tormund dismounted, then walked into the yard. The wind was steady and sharp, seemingly coming from all directions.

The wind was the reason he saw her hair before he saw her face.

It was down, floating gently all around her, as if suspended in water.

Jon thought about the last time he had reunited with her in this very place. She had been cold and scared, looking for safety for the first time in years after escaping a monster.
Now, she stood where he had stood when he first saw her during that reunion. High above him as she was, self-assured and radiant, she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

She smiled softly, as if his appearance was something she had expected.

Jon watched her as she made her way down the stairs into the yard. She didn’t look all that different from when he’d left King’s Landing almost a year before, and yet everything about her seemed different. It was more than her hair. She wore a light blueish gray dress, simple in design, but with the intricate embroidery that he knew she loved to do herself. Not the black that she’d donned for so long as Lady of Winterfell to his King in the North. She looked calm but purposeful. Her eyes were bright. He realized as she got closer that they were made so by a sheen of tears.

“You’re back,” Sansa said quietly. “The men here said you left almost as soon as you arrived last year.”

“I did,” Jon replied. “I needed a bit more distance than even this place could afford me. I honestly wasn’t sure I’d return. I wasn’t sure I’d see you again.”

“That’s silly. You know that eventually I’d have come looking for you if you didn’t come back.”

“You would have?” Jon asked, the side of his lips twitching into a hopeful, if sad, smile.

“Do you think I’d let you be gone from me forever?”

Jon breathed out a deep sigh of what seemed to Sansa like relief but didn’t say anything.

She bit her lip and looked down. “Did you want to be gone from me forever? Because if you do I—“

“Of course not!” He closed the already short distance between them and looked into her eyes, eyes he’d thought and dreamed about for so many moons. “I can’t think of anything I’d want less.”

“I thought maybe you were still angry with me.”

“What would I be angry with you about?”

Sansa let out a sigh that turned into a bit of a laugh. “I can think of a number of things.”

“I can’t think of any. Honestly. Maybe a year ago I was angry, but it wasn’t at you. It was everything. There was too much in my head for me to make sense of any of it. That’s why I had to go away. I don’t know that I deserve to return here . . . return home to Winterfell even now, but I know that I want to.”

Sansa gave a watery smile, full tears finally forming at the edge of her eyes and rolling down her cheeks. She took a step toward him just as Jon took a step back. She realized he did so intending to kneel just before he actually did so. She stopped him, stepping into him and pulling him into a hug instead. Jon melted into her arms and breathed her in.

“There is no deserving, Jon,” she whispered into his neck. “Home will always be there waiting for you and so will I.”

He didn’t know how long they held each other—it might have been all eternity—before he stepped back without letting her go to look into her eyes again.

“I should kneel. You are queen, after all.”

“Not to you.”
“What are you to me, then?”

“Not a sister,” she said with something that looked like hope in her eyes.

He smiled slightly. “A cousin?”

Sansa laughed. “That’ll do for now.”

Seeing Tormund coming up behind Jon, Sansa finally stepped out of the circle of Jon’s arms.

“You don’t expect me to kneel, do you?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Sansa said, not missing a beat. “But I expect you to follow the law, if you stay. No more taking what’s there because the people you are taking it from can’t stop you. No more raiding villages. If you want land south of the Wall or proper shelter north of it, it will be granted to you so long as you trade fairly with us and help support the watch and the small folk.”

“Support the watch?”

“Yes,” Sansa said plainly. “They’re not your enemies. They’ll do the building, keep the peace and ensure trade is fair. If you have nothing to trade, you can provide labor or food. What do you say?”

Tormund looked at Jon. “Do you think she’ll marry me?”

“You couldn’t handle me, Tormund,” Sansa deadpanned and turned on her heel to go back up the stairs.

Tormund let out a loud laugh, but Jon could only look on in awe. She had done so much already, so much more than her predecessors, himself included, to make peace among those who’d been warring for more time than anyone could possibly remember.

Halfway up the stairs, she turned and looked at him with a smile. “You’ve arrived just in time. We’re drawing up the last of the treaties with the last of the clan leaders north of the Wall, and the Watch is choosing a new lord commander.”

Tormund went up the stairs and past Sansa, who waited for Jon, who came up behind him, more slowly.

“Bran has allowed all this?” Jon asked.

“The North is not his. Why should he have an opinion?”

Jon couldn’t help but raise his brow in surprise, as he stopped two steps below her.

Sansa rolled her eyes. “He can warg into my mind if he’s bothered about whatever he may hear down south or he may send a raven like a normal person.” Sansa looked away for a moment then stepped down to where Jon was to look at him at eye level. Quietly, she added, “He’ll have his hands full rebuilding King’s Landing for quite some time. I can’t imagine he’s all that concerned with us here.”

Jon looked down and felt shame. Sensing it, Sansa put her hand on his shoulder.

“I don’t mean to upset you. It’s just the truth.”

“I’ll never forgive myself for the part I played in it,” Jon said, looking away.
“If it weren’t for you, it might have been worse. If it weren’t for you we might have done the damage ourselves, as part of the army of the dead. I know that I dismissed what it meant for you to have brought... *her* to Winterfell, but you were right. We needed her might. I didn’t want to admit it, but it was true.” Sansa let out a long sigh. “I keep looking back and wondering what might have been different, and it’s a million things and nothing all at once. Maybe it was all inevitable.”

They looked at one another again.

“Tyrion had no right to ask you to do something and then punish you for doing it. He sent you here to live out your sentence, but like I said, this is the North. *We* determine what happens here, and serving the Watch is not meant to be punishment anymore. Not for anyone and certainly not for you.”

Sansa turned away to walk up the rest of the stairs. Jon followed her quickly up.

“Then how are you filling its ranks?” Jon asked falling into step with her. “Recruiting men to join was hard enough before.”

“The vows made recruiting difficult. We got rid of them.”

“What!??”

Sansa stopped short, having reached the door to the main hall. Inside, Jon could hear loud voices, not arguing exactly, but engaged in lively conversation. “I understand, given who the enemy was, that it made sense to give men no choice but to face it, but I’ve come to find that men are bravest when they have something to fight for.”

“Who taught you that?” Jon asked quietly.

Sansa smiled. “Who else but you?”

“Sansa—“

“Everything you do from here on is your choice, Jon. You can stay and help us or you can ride north again. I want you here, but I won’t hold what you do against you. You may think you deserve greater punishment than you have been given, but I know you. There’s justice in merely asking you to forgive yourself. I know it’ll take the rest of your life for you to actually do it.”

Sansa stepped toward him again and kissed him gently on the cheek. Then, she opened the door, walked in and turned to see what he would do.

He followed her in.
This is basically just one long heart-to-heart between Jon and Sansa, continuing on their path to whatever is next between them. Addressing a few things (including why Brienne stayed in KL) that the show did not.

It was another three days before the final treaties were agreed upon.

When it was all over, the men of the Night's Watch gathered in the hall to take care of their own business.

A man named Jacob Dunbar, who had been a bannerman and advisor to Lyanna Mormont and served House Mormont for two decades before its demise with the death of Lyanna, was elected lord commander of the Watch. One of the men who had served in the brief time Jon had been in the post suggested Jon take it up again, but at the time of the voting, Jon stood and said that any man who’d had the confidence of a person as brave and intelligent and devoted to the North as Lyanna had his vote. After he spoke, the matter became unanimous.

After, Jacob approached Jon to thank him for his support, to which Jon answered, “It was the least I could do given the support she showed me.”

They agreed that Jon would remain the primary liaison with the Free Folk, given their trust in him, and train the younger men in combat and swordplay. Even if the watch’s charge had changed, the new lord commander saw no reason that they not be ready for anything.

When the meeting broke up, Jon went outside to walk around and found himself walking toward what had come to be known as “The Breach.”

When Viserion—the one that The Night King had improbably managed to pull out of the water and revive—unleashed his fire breath on the Wall, the break that he had made in that massive monument was not all that wide, comparatively speaking. It only took 30 or so long paces to get from one side of the rubble to the other. The width of one man would have been enough for the Army of the Dead to come through, however slowly. Even so, it surprised Jon to see how small the breach was, standing in the middle of it.
There was talk of creating another gate at the spot, but for the time being it remained open, and beyond it, Jon could see the start of woods that, once terrifying to him, were now a comforting, peaceful place, a refuge.

He had taken several steps toward them when he saw Sansa. Her hair was again flying every which way, though the wind was not so cutting today. At first it looked like she was knee deep in a drift of snow, but as Jon got closer he realized it was Ghost curled up at her feet.

The sight warmed Jon, and he smiled.

He stopped well short of them and whispered, “Ghost, to me.”

The direwolf lifted his head and looked in Jon’s direction, which stirred Sansa. As she turned, Ghost got up on his feet and padded over to Jon. Jon’s smile grew wider as Ghost circled around him before walking back to Sansa’s side and settling exactly where he had been. She crouched down and scratched his neck, a soft smile on her face.

“He obviously missed you,” Jon said, closing the remaining distance between them.

“You must not give him the proper attention,” she said.

“I give him plenty of attention,” Jon said, looking down to Ghost. “But I’m not you.”

“I missed him too,” Sansa said quietly. “When you left Winterfell . . . the first time, when you went to Drongonstone, he used to come to me whenever I went to the Godswood. We’d sit there together for what felt like hours. He’d even let me brush his fur sometimes, like I used to brush Lady’s. It made me feel less afraid, less alone. I . . .”

“You what?”

Sansa stood to look at him. “I used to think it was like you were there with me. Silly, isn’t it?”
Jon opened his mouth to respond, but before he could form a word, Sansa spoke again. “I love these woods. Is that strange?”

“No,” Jon replied quietly. “But I do wonder whether it’s a good idea that you walk here alone.”

“But I wasn’t alone,” Sansa said, smiling again, as they fell into step together. “I’ve just said Ghost is the best company.”

They were quiet for a moment before Jon asked a question that finding her alone here brought to mind, but that he had been thinking about for a long time.

“Why did you let your sworn sword stay in King’s Landing?”

“Brienne had done her duty to me.”

“She would have continued doing it.”

“I know,” Sansa said with a sigh. “But the King’s Guard was a duty that predated me.”

Jon’s brow furrowed in question.

“Renly Baratheon.”

“What?”

“Brienne served him first, and I don’t think she ever forgave herself for failing him. She wouldn’t have ever articulated it, but she wanted another chance to serve a king.”

“Serving a queen would have been no different. She’d never have left you unless you insisted.”

“And I’d never have someone I could trust on Bran’s small council unless I insisted.”
Jon stopped short, and when Sansa turned to him, he was shaking his head and smiling.

“What?” she asked.

“You really are the smartest person in the world.”

Sansa looked away, but Jon could see that she had pursed her lips to hide a smile, a something like a blush had come over her cheeks. His compliment had pleased her, in spite of herself. Rather, it was his acknowledgement, after all this time, that she knew what she was doing.

After a charged moment between them, they carried on walking, Ghost still ambling behind them.

“We’re at peace, and I intend to keep it that way,” Sansa said. “Given that, who do I need protecting from? The smallfolk? More often is the case that they need protecting from their rulers.”

“You’re right, but even so, I’d sleep better if I knew you had your own guard,” Jon said. “Why don’t you?”

“The same reason you don’t want to lead the Night’s Watch.”

“Your afraid the power will go to your head?”

Sansa nodded.

“But . . . you don’t have a reason to be afraid, not like I do.”

“What reason is that? Your Targaryan blood?”

“King’s Landing has borne witness to what happens when a Targaryan wields too much power more than just this last time. Why would I be immune to it?”
“I suppose you’re not, but neither am I, neither is anyone. When I called what was left of our bannermen and bid them march to King’s Landing with me to remove you from the custody of the Unsullied, they did so with little hesitation. To call men to arms like that, and be heard . . . it was unlike anything I’d felt. They would have walked to their certain death in the city just because I asked.”

“Did you feel that way when we asked them to fight Ramsey Bolton?”

“That was about liberating the North from the monster Ramsey was. Everyone who agreed to fight saw the right in it. Going to King’s Landing was about me wanting to save you. I would do it again, but I can acknowledge now that it was about me, not about the North. The North didn’t want to lose its king, but more than that I didn’t want to lose you.”

They turned to look at each other, and Jon stepped tentatively toward her, brushing a hair out of her face.

“So you see, even I can’t be trusted not to serve my own interests if I know men are willing to kill for me. Power is intoxicating . . . even if we’re not the ones wielding it.”

“I wish I could say that my experience, my actions, contradict that statement,” Jon said, looking down.

“I don’t mean it as a reprimand, certainly not one directed at you.”

Sansa took a deep breath and looked around. Jon looked up and watched as she sat on a fallen log a few steps away from where they were.

“I used to envy how easily Joffrey and Cersei wielded their power. There was no thought wasted on whether their actions were right. They had might; therefore, their actions were right. That’s how they saw things—I dare say that’s how Daenerys saw them too. It takes those who know better longer to decide to act because we weigh the possible consequences. Perhaps you think you waited too long, or perhaps you think you should have waited longer than you did, to act against her, to be really sure it was what was right. The fact that you waited at all is what separates you from them. So too does the fact that you question yourself about it even now. You may not believe you’d have made a good king, but you would have. I know it because I saw it. The North chose you because they loved you. And I now speak from experience when I say that making them love you is no easier than making them fear you. It’s much, much harder, actually.”
Jon finally sat next to her and Sansa laid her head down on his shoulder. “But you’ll keep doing it, won’t you? You’re confident you can”

He felt her nod. “I have to. It’s the only way. Though I wouldn’t say I feel confident about anything.”

Closing his eyes, Jon sighed and pressed his cheek into the top of her head, which still lay on his shoulder. “You should be. I have confidence in you.” He felt her take his hand and start to pull on his glove. He opened his eyes as Sansa pulled her own glove off to slide her hand into his. “I just wish I could trust everyone else as much as I trust you,” he added.

“You’d not have turned yourself in if you didn’t also ultimately trust in people, in the goodness they can be capable of. You’d have just run away.”

“I’ve always wanted to just run away,” Jon said. “I’m fighting the urge even now.”

Sansa lifted her head to look into his eyes and quirked her eyebrow playfully, in a way that reminded Jon a bit of Arya. He laughed thinking of how similar they could sometimes be, despite how different they were. He thought too of how very differently he felt about them, even though he loved them both, how differently love could be articulated in his own heart.

“What?” Sansa asked, a confused smile on her face.

“I really missed you.”

Sansa smiled, too overwhelmed by too many feelings to speak. Jon tilted his head slightly to let himself watch as a becoming blush came over her cheeks. His eyes landed momentarily on her lips. Sansa held her breath, as he leaned in ever so slightly. She was about to do the same when Ghost jumped up, putting his paws on Jon’s lap with such force that Jon was knocked back and off the log in one unceremonious tumble.

Sansa laughed harder and truer than she had in ages, and Jon, covered in snow up to his hair, harrumphed forcefully at his pet but ultimately couldn’t stop himself doing the same.
They walked back to Castle Black arm in arm, not in any hurry.
Chapter 3

The night before Sansa was to return to Winterfell, nearly a fortnight after Jon’s return to Castle Black, a feast was held in her honor and to mark the end of all the good work done to broker peace between the Northern Houses, the Watch and the clans from beyond the Wall. The Night’s Watch of old might have scoffed at such an event, but walking around Castle Black’s main hall and seeing all the bright faces, deep into their cups and deeper still into their celebration of a new era for the North, Jon thought it felt right. Alisser Thorn no doubt would have had plenty to say about it if he’d been present, but those who were had lived through too much not to allow themselves a moment’s merriment. New threats, new enemies would likely arise in some hopefully distant future—didn’t they always?—so why not make the most of good times and good company while it lasted.

Sansa is right, he thought. These memories, their friends, their families will move men to fight much more than any disavowal of what they hold dear could possibly do.

He’d sat at a table at the end of the room, among the Free Folk, and allowed himself to watch Sansa from afar without thought to hiding how much he liked doing so. She was at the center of the head table, wearing an intricately stitched frock unlike any he’d seen on her before and her crown of two wolves. She was flanked by Lord Commander Dunbar on her right and the Watch’s maester on her left. A few times over the course of the evening, their eyes had met across the room and she would give him a small smile, but it was never long before her attention was pulled elsewhere. She offered each person who approached her, and there were many who did, her focus and grace in a way that marveled Jon. It was these niceties that had most exhausted him when he’d been in her position.

There may have been more weighing on his mind at the time, but Jon truly believed that he was not built to be a king, regardless of his lineage or of the rightness of the duty others sought to thrust on him. His rejection of the thrones that had piled up at his feet—considered noble by some—was but an act of self-preservation. Jon had not been without ambition as a young man, and he’d certainly not been raised to shirk responsibility, but life had wrecked him too much for him to ever want to seek more than what he wanted now.

To serve the North and the Watch well.

To help those above him do what was right.

To be free to love Sansa.

And all that he wanted was finally more or less his to have. It was oddly confounding for Jon to be in such circumstances after life had so long thrown obstacle after unrelenting obstacle to block him from
anything that felt remotely like happiness.

He and Sansa had continued going on walks together while she was at Castle Black, and he’d often join her and the lord commander in meetings. Their physical interaction had not progressed in any meaningful way from what it had been when they’d last been at the Wall together, but the shift in their feelings—primarily owed to not having to hide or suppress them anymore—was considerable. Among others, Sansa’s expressions were warm and engaged, but Jon could see that there was a formality to her demeanor that she did not bother with when the two of them were alone. He smiled at the thought that there was an openness between them now that hadn’t existed before and that she reserved only for him.

Even when they argued. Especially when they argued.

(They had just yesterday over whether Jon would join the Watchmen who would escort Sansa and her small contingent back home to Winterfell.)

Now, the frustration that inevitably blossomed between them when they disagreed didn’t feel oppressive or tormenting like it did before. It felt . . . exciting. It felt like possibility.

Amid the festivities, Jon was shaken from his reveries by the loud voice of Dunbar, who had stood as those at the head table finished their meals and raised his cup to speak. “We’re a year removed from the Great War, we’ve lifted ourselves up like Northerners do, and now we begin a new age. May it bring prosperity and peace, and a long life for our queen.”

A loud chorus of cheers followed and Jon, like those around him, pounded the table to add to the cacophony of joyful noise. Sansa’s face remained serene in response, but she nodded in acknowledgement. Dunbar motioned for her to rise and speak. Taking his offered hand, Sansa stood and to make herself heard better in the packed room stepped up on her chair, then on the table in front of her.

Towerimg over the rapt crowd, she took a deep breath and began: “My lords, Watchmen, friends. Thank you for your faith in me and your loyalty to House Stark. I pledge to you here and now to continue to earn both at every step.”

She stopped for the cheers that followed.

“I raise my cup to Lord Commander Dunbar, and the newly formed Night’s Watch.”
More cheers.

“I raise my cup to Lady Lyanna Mormont, a girl braver than all of us combined, who taught me we must face our enemies head on no matter their size and no matter ours.”

More cheers still, louder and longer.

Sansa stopped to take another deep breath and to catch Jon’s eyes before continuing, “I raise my cup to her namesake, my aunt, Lady Lyanna Stark, whom I never met, but who nevertheless taught me that we must protect our own no matter the cost, with our lives, with our hearts and, sometimes, with our lies.”

Listening to her, Jon felt an overwhelming ache in his chest and tears forming in his eyes.

“And I raise my cup to her son, Jon Snow.”

The boisterous crowd quieted then, and all eyes in the room turned in his direction. For all Jon knew, though, he was alone with her. She was all he could hear, feel, see.

“A prince made into a bastard, a bastard made into a king, a king who gave up his northern crown to save us from the ice and his southern one to save us from the fire.”

The cheers swelled again and Jon felt himself being lifted up off the ground and carried toward the middle of the room. He was turned around so he couldn’t see her anymore, but despite the increasingly loud din in the room, he heard the last of her words: “What is he now but a man, my cousin, and a poor sap who can’t hold his drink.”

Amid the eruption of laughter and “Hear! Hear!” Jon managed to get those who were holding him up—Tormund, among them, of course—to finally set him down. Everyone had stood and the room felt even more full than it had been just minutes before, so it took some pushing and shoving to make it to the front, where she was still standing on the table.

Sansa watched him as he made his way to her, a goofy smile on his face. She’d rehearsed the speech on her own several times that day, so she’d not falter when the time came.
Though Sansa knew that establishing a new order for the Watch and the Free Folk was an important step toward stabilizing the North after so much conflict, she’d also resolved to make things as easy for Jon as possible if and when he came back from beyond the Wall. And the first order was to ensure he’d be embraced here as the beloved Northern leader he was, rather than be treated as a pariah who’d been sent to serve out a sentence.

If Bran could not stop Tyrion from appeasing Grey Worm by punishing Jon for killing Daenerys, an act he well knew was just and necessary, then Sansa would do all she could to soften the landing. Let Westeros think him a traitor, if they must. The North would hail him as their hero, Sansa would spend the rest of her life making sure of it. And although what other people thought mattered a great deal less to her now than it had once, she’d spend at least as much time reminding everyone that he was not and had never been her brother.

Could he be her king, her consort, her husband, her companion? To her it mattered only that he was hers.

As Jon approached her amid the ongoing celebration, Sansa thought about when she’d last seen him this carefree. She thought about the night they marked the defeat of the Army of the Dead. After the feast had been served, he’d perched himself on the table facing her, and laughed and drank with her and his friends until their speech slurred.

But then the conquering queen had to assert her presence. And every time she did, it deflated him.

Of all the sins that Sansa would ascribe to the mother of dragons—and her list was long—the one that hurt Sansa the most was that Daenerys robbed Jon of his light. Everything had to come second Daenerys, including his dignity. They were lovers, that much Sansa could tell from early on, and there was little she could say about it given what, at the time, she believe couldn’t happen between herself and Jon. But she didn’t believe she flattered herself in thinking that for Jon there was no joy in it. It was a task he’d assigned himself to keep Daenerys happy for complicated reasons he preferred not to confide in Sansa about. Only later would it be crystal clear to Sansa that when Daenerys wasn’t happy people burned.

In this way, Daenerys had made herself Jon’s burden to carry in life and again in death. Sansa knew he would not forget the fact that duty had called him to murder someone with whom he’d lain, so Sansa was committed to showing him that the sacrifice was worth it. She had her own reasons for doing so, a desire that when his true parents were revealed finally made a measure of sense. Despite how long they’d been apart, that desire remained. It had grown stronger, in fact, on the knowledge that it was not as sinful as she’d once thought.
But watching him now, it occurred to her that it wouldn’t matter to her if they never acted on it. It would be enough to know that he was happy. As a child, she’s thought the greatest joy would be to be loved like the songs. But grown, she knew that loving was the reward itself.

When he finally made it to the table, she crouched down, grabbed a handful of his hair and kissed him on the top of the head. Jon took the opportunity to take her hand and wrap his other arm around her legs to lift her up off the table. She laughed as he wobbled holding her up, but eventually he found his footing and she slid down against him until her feet were on the ground again. They looked into each other’s eyes for a long moment, their cheeks pink with drink and want that the drink made harder to hide.

“Will you walk me to the lord commander’s chambers?” she asked.

Jon couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows in surprise.

Sansa bit her lip. “No, not . . . uh, when . . . um, I . . . I want to remember everything, and right now I feel as if I’ll not remember my own name tomorrow.”

Jon laughed and leaned her forehead against hers. “So you just want my company?”

“For as long as I can have it before I go.”

“All right, then.”

They separated and looked around. The revelry continued around them.

“I will let my handmaiden know I intend to retire,” she said.

“I’ll wait outside,” he said, as she stepped away with a nod.

Jon made his way through the room again. Tormund caught his arm as he neared the door, and before he could say anything Jon warned, “If you’re going to say something crude, I’ll use that drinking horn of yours to beat you bloody.”
Tormund threw his head back in laughter. “You may not drink like a man, but you fight like one. Get on with you.”

Jon shook his head, smiling, and kept going. The cold served to wake him up a bit when he finally stepped out. He rubbed his face with both hands. He did feel a bit drunk, but it wasn’t just from the ale. His heart was light and the feeling was entirely foreign to him. The things about which he felt hope now outweighed what worried him, a state that he never quite remembered being in.

Hearing the door behind him, he turned again and smiled when he saw her step through. He offered her arm, and she took it, leaning her head against his shoulder. The gallery and the yard were quiet. The night crisp under a bright moon.

“Why did you say those things?” Jon asked.

“About you? Didn’t you like it?”

“You know I did, but you didn’t need to say all that.”

“Yes, I did. The lords here didn’t respond positively when the Unsullied made a criminal of their king. It’s important to them that we affirm we did not abide the judgment. If we agreed to let them exile you, it’s because we knew we’d adjust the terms once you were here and enough time had passed.”

“So you said it for them?”

Sansa stopped and pulled on his arm to turn him toward her. “Of course not. I said it for you, but all the rest happens to be also true. As queen I have to take everything into consideration.”

“Have I said that you’re very good at this?”

She laughed. “Not today.”
They continued along the gallery to the lord commander’s quarters. Once there, Jon opened the door for her but stayed in the doorway after she walked in.

She turned, halfway into the anteroom when she realized he wasn’t following. “Aren’t you coming in?”

“Are you sure?”

Sansa smiled. “I meant it when I said we’d just talk.”

Jon looked down embarrassed. “We can’t go back from this,” he said quietly.

Sansa looked squarely into his eyes. “Do you want to do.”

He pushed off the doorjamb, closing the door behind him. Sansa bit her lip on a smile and held her hand out. He took it and followed her into the bedroom. Letting go, she sat down on the edge of the bed and turned to face him. She lifted her feet playfully.

“Help me?”

“You brought me in here to take your boots off?” Jon said with a laugh.

“No, I brought you in here so we could dance. I just want to take them off and I need help.”

Jon narrowed his eyes playfully, and kneeled in front of her. Without taking his eyes of hers, he swept his hand under the skirt of her dress and put it behind her knee while he pulled her boot off with the other. “You want to dance?”

Sansa nodded.

“I’m not much of a dancer, particularly when there is no music.”
“I know, which is why you have to take your boots off too.”

Once Jon had taken her shoes and playfully squeezed the underside of her calves, causing her to giggle, he went over to one of the chairs in the corner of the room to remove his own.

They met in the middle of the room. It felt strangely quiet, given the loud, boisterous crowd among which they’d been only minutes before, but it was not an uncomfortable quiet. If nothing else, even after so much time apart, after everything that had happened, they were still able to enjoy long, comfortable silences together.

Sansa put her hand on his shoulder as he slid his around her waist. Their other hands joined, and once standing face to face, Jon grinned realizing something.

“Why did you want to be on bare feet, so that you’d stand at your natural height and not tower over like normal?”

Sansa laughed, as they began swaying slowly. “I don’t tower over you.”

“You do. I rather like it, but I imagine the heroes in your songs are all taller than I am.”

“I do have complaints about you, but your height is not one of them, believe it or not.”

“You have complaints?”

“Observations.”

“Dare one ask what they are or if the list is long?”

Sansa shook her head. “Only three things.”

“The first?”
Sansa let go of his hand and put her hand on his cheek. “Your face likes to look sad. It’s not that I mind that, exactly. Only that it makes it hard to know what you’re feeling when you always look like you’re frowning.”

“I’m happy right now,” he said, schooling his face into a serious expression that he couldn’t quite hold.

She looked up to meet his eyes again. “Me too.”

“What’s the next thing?”

“You are entirely too brave for your own good.”

“I’ve done most of acts you’d call brave for you.”

“I know. Doesn’t make it any easier to endure.”

“And the last?”

Sansa stopped them moving and cradled his cheek again, tracing his bottom lip with her thumb.

“You’re brave about the wrong things.”

Then, she pressed her lips softly into his.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

This keeps getting longer and longer because I keep just wanting to write these individual moments rather than any sort of plot :) Hope you readers don't mind. I have the rest of this more or less mapped out, so one more chapter and then an epilogue.

Thank you so much for reading and to those who have left kudos and comments. I really appreciate it.

It was surprisingly easy for Sansa to get back into her routine in Winterfell after almost a moon at Castle Black. She had not intended to stay as long as she did, but, of course, when Jon had come back she had to make the most of their time together lest he decide to go off beyond the Wall again. She knew now that he wouldn’t, and that knowledge was like the relieved freshness in the air after a long, pounding rain.

When she’d received word that he’d gone north with Tormund and some of the Free Folk shortly after arriving from King’s Landing, Sansa genuinely worried that he’d not come back, choosing to lose himself in the wilds of country utterly foreign to her and where she’d be unable to find him. She managed not to lose faith and got on with all the things that needed doing. She held fast to the belief that, eventually, he’d come back, and that if he didn’t she could learn enough about the people and land north of the Wall to know to how to go about looking for him.

But he did come back, and the two weeks they spent at Castle Black reacquainting themselves with one another were all she had hoped for. Looking back now, she’d have kissed him sooner, so that they’d done more of that before she returned to Winterfell, but she had hope now in a way she hadn’t since she was a child when she didn’t know what it was like to lose everything.

Sansa had wanted Jon to come back to Winterfell with her, naturally, but despite the lengths to which she had been willing to go to make clear she did not believe he deserved the judgment that had been cast upon him, Jon felt strongly that he should serve out his sentence in some measure. He’d barely spent any time in Castle Black before leaving the first time, so he believed that he needed to make a point of staying longer now that he had returned, especially now that he knew the place was not going to be a prison to him.

So she left, knowing she couldn’t stay longer but also knowing this was just the beginning. He would be in Winterfell soon enough, with a handful of other Watchmen, traveling on orders from his lord commander.
Sansa could barely contain herself.

Almost three moons later, thought of the kiss—kisses—still made her blush.

The kiss lasted only a handful of seconds before Sansa pulled back. Short and sweet, it felt like everything all at once.

They looked into each other’s eyes for a long moment. Jon stepped back and gently removed the crown she wore. He walked across the room to set it on the table. Stepping back into her, he took Sansa’s face into his hands gently and whispered, “Have you ever been kissed, Sansa? Really properly kissed by someone who loves you?”

Sansa let out the breath she’d been holding and shook her head.

Jon swiped his thumbs over her cheeks, reveling in the sensation of touching her skin so intimately. “Right then.”

If their first kiss had been a testing of the waters, the second was a deep and satisfying plunge. Jon’s lips were warm and sweet and tasted of the tangy ale he’d been drinking. As they opened to deepen the kiss, Sansa heard herself moan with a pleasure she had never experienced. She felt him smile against her, but she quickly pushed her hands from where they’d been resting on his chest up and around his neck to keep him from pulling away. Jon’s hands held her tightly to him around her waist and did so even after, finally, they came up for air.

Jon smiled as he saw that Sansa’s eyes were still closed.

“I’ve changed my mind,” she whispered into his lips. “I don’t want to talk.”

Jon laughed for a second before her lips caught his in another kiss.
They did not lay together that night. They did tumble onto her bed and kissed and held one another for a good long while, but they never removed anything more than their shoes. Eventually, before the fire in the room had gone out completely, Jon took his leave, wanting to respect the boundary she had set for them when she’d invited him in and not wanting to jump heedlessly into something with her when he knew they’d have the time to let it unfurl slowly.

As he’d walked back to his own bed, Jon had thought about Sansa’s lack of experience and his own, which boiled down merely to a pair of liaisons colored by the complicated circumstances from which they had sprung.

He’d loved Ygritte. His affirmations to her of this truth even as he rode away from her were true and sincerely felt, but it was a love that was unintentional, not something he ever meant to see through. How could he? His position as a man of the Night’s Watch, first and foremost in his mind when he’d been with her, made it impossible.

Nevertheless, she’d taught him something about himself and his ability to separate his feelings from his duty. He didn’t believe himself capable of ever doing that very thing again until he met Daenerys. Walking into her room on that boat had felt like knowingly walking into a trap, knowing a trap was exactly what it was and foolishly believing that extracting himself from it would be easy. He hadn’t anticipated how hard that would be, ultimately, or the cost. Looking back, every step taken felt like a mistake and yet what, exactly, could he have done differently?

Sansa, Arya and Bran were safe. So was Winterfell. It sometimes still felt like a hollow victory given how many people were killed before it was all over, but Jon couldn’t bring himself to imagine an alternative in which he hadn’t been able to protect his family, particularly Sansa, who Dany had singled out to him in warning more than once.

They were why he had to kill her.

All previous posturing by Tyrion and others about love and duty meant nothing on that wretched day in King’s Landing. Had Jon not had a duty to Daenerys? Might he have managed to love her if circumstances had been different? Impossible and useless questions in the face of the truth of that moment: He owed both greater love and greater duty to the Starks. One wasn’t the death of the other. Both love and duty had compelled him to act.

Now, more than a year removed, it was easier to see that whatever had existed between Jon and Dany wasn’t love at all.

He’d told Sansa when they kissed that first time that she’d not been loved as she deserved. That was
also more or less true for him. And like Sansa, Jon hadn’t ever really loved someone properly either. Despite their positions and long history, Jon and Sansa were still just two young people with so much life in front of them and now in possession of the rarest of gifts: the possibility of getting to live it out together. She might love him as much as she ever would already, but Jon wanted to enjoy the fall, savor it, revel in the sweet simplicity of anticipation.

And what anticipation it was as he rode with his Night’s Watch brothers into Winterfell.

The new Watch now deployed rangers not just north of the Wall, but south of it as well. Their mission was not to keep wildlings out anymore, but to ensure peace among all the villages, keep the roads passable and safe, report on their needs back to the queen and the lord commander, and recruit. It meant that Jon could travel home at regular intervals without feeling like he was abandoning his post.

Sansa had been told they were approaching when the group was spotted in the distance and walked to the ramparts to watch them make the last of their journey into the castle. Though she was high above them as they rode in on their horses, Jon saw her there. He smiled at first when their eyes met but his expression changed, overwhelmed as he felt by love, the pride he always felt coming back to his childhood home, and a keen desire to be alone with Sansa again.

She turned quickly from where she stood and practically ran down to meet them. That she didn’t jump into Jon’s arms was perhaps owing to the fact that he was the last to dismount when she arrived in the yard, and never one to forget her manners, Sansa greeted the group appropriately all at once.

In anticipation of their arrival, rooms had been prepared—Jon would stay in his room in the family’s quarters, which remained exactly as he’d left it. (The same was true of Arya’s room and Bran’s.)

After a long, hearty dinner, the Watchmen retired early, given the long journey they’d endured, so Sansa was alone in her solar when she heard his familiar knock. Such was the sense of familiarity that overcame her at the sound, she was barely audible when she said, ”Come in.” Jon entered like he always did, like the space was as much his as hers, like he had never left. Sansa has been pacing the room as she waited in an effort to expend her nervous energy. He closed the door gently behind him and no sooner had he done that, the two met in the middle of the room in a passionate kiss.

Sansa ran her fingers through his hair as they melted into each other. A part of Sansa had wondered if Jon’s kisses were as magical as she remembered, if somehow their separation had allowed her to
build them up in her mind. But no, it was better than she remembered. The softness of his lips and tongue, the roughness of his beard, his hair between her fingers, the gentle pressure of his hands on her waist and the small of her back. Sansa couldn’t believe it possible to feel so much all at once.

“This is such a conundrum,” she whispered breathlessly as Jon pulled away from her lips only to place a string of light pecks along her jaw.

“What?” he replied, with a chuckle, not stopping his ministrations.

“I want to talk,” she said. “There’s so much I want to tell you.”

“You want to stop so we can talk?”

“Not at all.”

Jon laughed again and continued to kiss her neck, following the line of her dress to the corner of the V the dress made at the top of her chest. Her hands still tangled in his hair, Sansa gently pulled on his head to bring his attention back to her eyes.

“Wait, wait.”

“I’m sorry, I—“

Sansa smiled. “No, I’m not saying stop, just . . . “ Stepping away, Sansa untied the sash of her dress on the side of her waist, and the dress came apart in the middle so she could remove like a dressing gown. In mere seconds, before Jon could realize what was happening, Sansa was suddenly before him in a barely-there shift. Her face beautiful and shining with a becoming blush coming over her cheeks.

Her smile grew into a grin, seeing him barely able to move or speak. Stepping back into him, she took his face in her hands and kissed him deeply, doing all she could to convey the longing she’d felt since she’d left him at Castle Black. Jon responded immediately and again pulled her tightly into him, moaning softly as he ran his hands along her back. As the kiss grew heated again, both of their hands went to his jerkin to pull it off, then his shirt.
Sansa allowed herself a moment to admire him. Her eyes went, naturally, to the scars that she knew had once been deadly wounds. She placed her hand on the one over his heart, and Jon placed his hand over hers there. She could feel the beat of his heart beneath it, racing.

She snaked her arms around his neck again and pulled him into a hug, tucking her face into his neck.

“Jon?”

“Yes?”

She pulled back to look into his eyes. “I love you.”

Jon closed his eyes and leaned his forehead into hers. “I love you.”
Chapter 5

Thanks so much to everyone who has read and left kudos and comments. It means a lot. This is the final vignette in this story, which veers into "mature" content (nothing super explicit, but our heroes do the deed) so I've updated the rating accordingly. The final update will be a brief epilogue.

"Have you been with many women?"

Jon raised his head and shifted so he could look Sansa in the eyes. They were alone in her chambers, naked and spent. The candles in her chamber long burnt out. She had nestled herself into his side, her face buried in the crook of his neck so that her breath tickled his skin as she spoke. Feeling him move underneath her, she rolled slightly, and when they settled, they were on their sides facing each other, still close, their arms still around each other’s waists. But she could see the furrow of his brow.

It was his fifth night in Winterfell, and they’d settled into something of a routine—although “routine” was not a word either one of them would use to describe spending the night making love. Sansa hadn’t been sure before he arrived whether Jon would insist on keeping to his own chambers to sleep in or object to laying with her out of wedlock, but after their first night together the day of his arrival, when they were both overcome with desire after months apart, it was no longer a question.

They were discreet, though it seemed to Sansa that her handmaiden and others among the servants had caught on immediately to the fact they were sharing a bed. Those who had been around long enough to remember the time just after the Boltons but before the dragon queen had already gotten used to thinking of them as a unit. Such was their closeness, in fact, such their resemblance to the Ned and Catelyn of old, that some had wondered even back then what might be happening late at night behind closed doors. Now, everyone knew they were not brother and sister, so few were surprised that their relationship had shifted to this point.

In any case, the queen would need an heir eventually. Starks had been around thousands of years. They had to continue living.

It was in the back of Sansa’s mind too, but only as a vague notion. She was too happy, still enjoying getting to be with him like this too much to worry about what it all meant. The same was true for Jon.

Which was why her question took him by surprise.
“Have you been with many women?” she repeated.

“Why would you ask me that?”

She chuckled. “I don’t know. You’re . . . very good at this. I wonder whether that comes from practice is all. Were there girls other than Daenerys?”

Jon turned away and lay flat on his back, looking peeved. “What do you know about that?”

Sansa chuckled again. “It was rather easy to tell.”

Looking at her again, with a worried expression on his face, he asked, “Was it?”

“If you’re worried, it was she who made it so. I think she figured out my feelings and thought it important to stake her ground. Jealousy sharpened my own senses.”

“You really were jealous?”

The question stemmed from curiosity, but Sansa could tell that he also seemed almost . . . flattered.

Sansa bit her lip, afraid to admit too much of what she felt back when they still believed themselves to be siblings. Sensing this, Jon pushed himself up to his elbow and leaned over to give her a gentle kiss.

“If you feel as if you committed some great transgression before we knew who my parents really were, let me assure you that I committed it too. Perhaps that doesn’t make you feel any better, but it’s true. I wanted to tell you. I wanted to be able to act on it. But on top of being someone who . . . well, who—“

“Doesn’t say what he feels?”
Jon smiled bashfully. “Right. On top of *that*, there was the fact that you were my sister. I thought you’d be horrified. *I* was horrified with myself. I wanted to protect you—do what was expected of me—and these *feelings* keep growing. I thought if I was honest with you, it would just drive you away, and how could I protect you then.”

Sansa lifted her hand and pushed his unruly hair back. “I was facing the same fears. The same feelings. I kept telling myself there had to be a reason we weren’t close as children. I’ve often wondered if the reason I didn’t like thinking of you as my brother when I was young was because I wished to see you as something else.”

Jon grinned. “I doubt that. You liked your golden-haired boys too much.”

“I won’t deny that my younger self had questionable preferences, but I’ve always thought you handsome.” Sansa playfully pinched his chin. “I should have known you were a prince—it’s written all over this pretty face.”

Jon laid back down and stared at the ceiling. “I’m no prince,” he said quietly.

It was Sansa’s turn to sit up. Leaning over him, she pushed his hair back again, more gently this time, and ran her fingers down his jaw line. Smiling softly, she said, “I think you think the title means something to me.”

Looking into her eyes, with those gray eyes of his that said so much, he replied, “Doesn’t it?”

Sansa’s brow furrowed slightly, worried that perhaps he still thought of her as the silly, frivolous girl she was once, one for whom titles were important. That girl might have made everything about herself, but now she knew better. Now she understood the lingering insecurities he felt about who he was—knowing, as they did, that he’d not been a bastard wasn’t going to erase the effects of a lifetime of being treated like one. She also understood how she could ease his heart in that regard.

Eventually, she shook her head. “I am not complementing *you* when I call you a prince. I am complementing your lady mother.”

Jon’s expression softened into a smile.

“She’s who you look like, after all,” Sansa added.
“I still can’t quite believe it sometimes.”

“Why?”

Jon sat up, and leaned against the headboard of the bed. Sansa sat up too, pulling the sheet up to cover herself, so she could watch him as he spoke. “I’d given up ever knowing who my mother was,” he said. “Then, I find out she was everything I’d ever wanted my mother to be—high born, beautiful, noble, brave, good—only to realize in that very moment that knowledge of who she was put everyone I loved in danger. It was a long time before I could think about it and just be happy that I knew without also thinking about how it affected everyone else.”

“Does it bring you joy now, knowing Lyanna was your mother?”


“You can still call him father,” Sansa said, matter of factly.

Jon shook his head. “I don’t want to make her less real.”

Sansa smiled and squeezed his hand in response.

“He would tell me, ‘You have my blood,’ and even when he said so it was difficult for me to really believe him. Now that I know Lyanna was my mother, even though I never met her, I feel like a Stark in a way I never did before. I know it means I’m, um, something else too, but—”

Sansa cut in, grabbing his face in both her hands. “You are a Stark! And you were when you thought Ned Stark was your father. You’ve always been a Stark.”

Jon leaned into Sansa and kissed her slowly and deeply. She raked her fingers through his tangle of curls and felt his warm hands come around her to push her gently back down on the bed. Before he did so, she pulled away from the kiss. Keeping his face close to hers she added, “You are a son of the North. It’s in your hair, in your eyes, how you move, how you fight . . . how you love. If any other part of you mattered, the gods would have seen fit to make you some other way than how you are.”
Sansa pulled him into a kiss again, but as the kiss grew fevered, Jon suddenly felt the need to say words he’d been holding back, that needed to be said, that he’d been meaning to say since he saw her again at Castle Black months back.

Pulling back slightly, he held her face carefully to look into her eyes. “I’m sorry I wasn’t more honest with you. Not just about what was happening between us, but about Daenerys.”

Sansa sighed, remembering how heavily his silence back then weighed on both of them, how Daenerys’ presence in Winterfell had stretched their trust so thin. She remembered too, though, that the trust never broke. She wished she could go back and tell herself that it would all turn out all right. She’d go back and tell him so too. Now, all she could do was forgive. She pressed a soft kiss to his brow and offered a small smile.

Jon understood intrinsically what the gesture meant. He felt a weigh lift but also felt like there was more to say. Having bottled up so much so long, now that he’d opened the door, he couldn’t close it.

“What?” Sansa said, sensing his mood.

“At the time, I was just trying to keep us alive. Everything felt so hopeless. I thought, ‘If I give Dany this one thing, she’ll help us. I’ll likely die and it won’t matter.’ It took so much of me just to get her to agree and—once I knew what she was capable of—just to keep her from turning on the North.”

“I didn’t make it easy.”

“There was no easy. I tried to convince myself that I could make it so, that every time she asked more of me, I could give it to her and she’d finally be satisfied, but that . . . that was folly.”

Jon closed his eyes and let out a long breath. “Even setting fire to King’s Landing didn’t satisfy her,” he added quietly.

“You couldn’t have known that. Nobody could. You did what you could.”

“If I had just talked with you, though. If I had told you how I really felt about her—“
“Then she might have realized you were lying to her and set fire to Winterfell instead. I was frustrated at how set you were on defending her, I can’t deny that now. But I was jealous and naive. I wouldn’t have been able to stop her if she’d unleashed her dragons on us. You could. You did.”

Jon opened his eyes again. They were red from the tears that threatened to fall. “She loved me and I killed her.”

“Jon—“

“I been with one other woman, Sansa. Just one other. And she’s dead too. Killed by a boy I trained. I didn’t wield the weapon like I did with Daenerys, but I was responsible for her death. I laid with them, and I killed them both.”

Sansa felt her own eyes water and felt the fool for having asked such a question—a question from the mind of a silly, besotted girl. But then this was a release he clearly needed. She gently wiped the tears coming down the side of his face, kissed him again on his forehead, then his temples, then his cheeks, and finally his mouth. Jon responded then, bringing his hands to the back of her head, tangling in her hair. The kiss deepened and Sansa moved over him, feeling his hardness on her wet core.

With her hand, Sansa guided him inside her. Jon sat up to feel her close, and Sansa wrapped her legs around his torso. For a long time, they didn’t move, just held each other. Jon’s face was buried in her shoulder and Sansa felt the the tears that continued to fall.

“I love you,” she whispered. “I trust you. I know you will protect me.”

She felt his arms tighten around her and slowly, surely she began to move her hips. Jon pulled back slightly, then rolled them over so he was on top, her legs still holding him to her tightly. Their hands found each other, fingers intertwining, and as Jon pushed into her, he whispered her words back to her.

_I love you. I trust you. I know you will protect me._
They were both still asleep in each other’s arms when her maid came into her room. Only Jon heard her and disentangled himself from Sansa quietly, without waking her. Slightly red-faced but smiling and lighter of heart than he had been in some time, he joined the group of watchmen and a handful of others who worked in the castle as they broke their fast. The mood was happy, the talk of the coming harvest. It reminded Jon of the simpler days of his childhood.

He realized it was the feeling of being home.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

A glimpse into morning in Winterfell ten years later.

Chapter Notes

Here's a short, sweet epilogue to conclude this look into Jon and Sansa's lives after the show.

Big thanks to everyone who has read, given kudos and comments. The Jonsa fandom is so wonderful and welcoming. I've got a few ideas cooking, so even though this was my first Jonsa fic, it hopefully won't be the last.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's quiet. The early morning hours before the castle is fully awake is her favorite time of day. Before the demands of the day make themselves known. Alone in her room she is only herself, a woman, a wife, a mother. Not a queen.

She opens her eyes knowing she won’t see him there. Still, she smiles, runs her fingers lightly over the slight indentation on the pillow next to hers. She knows the pillow has likely been fluffed multiple times since he left. She has found herself hugging it in the middle of the night, chasing his scent. She likes imagining that he’s not gone, just somewhere else in the castle.

“Your grace?”

She turns and sees Dara, her trusted maid, who somehow always knows when she’s awake, knows the exact moment at which the day should begin.

She pushes herself up and out of bed, and Dara is there holding her dressing gown.

“Are the girls up?” she asks as she ties the sash, which now lands just under her swollen breasts. Her waist having finally yielded to the still small but growing swell of her belly about a week ago.
She steps into her solar, where Dara has already laid out her porridge and bread. The only thing she’s been able to stomach lately.

“They are,” Dara replies, moving behind her. “Septa is with them now. They’re excited about today.”

“Good,” she says, sitting down. “Tell them I’ll be in to see them shortly. Arya always brings commotion with her when she comes back, but they won’t be missing their lessons on account of it.”

“Of course, your grace.” Dara curtsies and turns to go before turning around, remembering something. “There’s scroll on your tray. I know you prefer to leave business to after your break your fast, but it’s from the Wall. The raven arrived overnight. I thought you’d want it right away.”

“I do. Thank you.”

The words are few, almost the same as the ones he sent last week.

_We love you. We miss you. We’ll be home soon._

There’s a line written in less tidy script at the bottom.

_Father said I can have Longclaw when I can hold it upright on my own. Nearly there! Robb_

She reads it again with a brightening smile on her face.

Chapter End Notes

I thought about writing more about what happens between the last chapter and this one, but it really boils down to continued healing and growth, with marriage and kids happening along the way. Jon remains untitled by his own choice, but their kids are recognized as Starks and heirs to the Northern throne. He remains close to the wildlings and a part of the Night's Watch, but begins to live primarily at Winterfell once their first child is born. He takes the kids to the Wall with him occasionally when they are old enough to make the journey. They have a boy and two girls at the time of this epilogue,
but eventually have another boy and girl to total six, which is what Sansa wanted—to have a family as big as the one they grew up in. Thanks again for reading!

End Notes

I decided to add the head canon that Sansa made the clothes Jon is wearing when he leaves King's Landing, even though we get no confirmation of that. I have no sense of whether Sansa resolving the conflict among northerners and wildlings is all the realistic, but I was working off the idea that she earned their trust while they were in Winterfell and after all that happened, everyone just wanted fighting to stop so it was easy for her to broker a peace. Realistic or not, this story is mostly going to be about Jon and Sansa so that's really minor in the scheme of things.

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