drifting in ginger rye

by csreads

Summary

The black cover of darkness makes way for a small stretch of bright light, and her mind reaches her hand out to find the empty space seemingly full of something that wasn't there before.

Are you really there?
Jon.

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Every now and then Jon Snow and Sansa Stark see each other in their dreams.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
weight as the days wore on. Not even the constant heat emitted from the springs, warming the walls of her home, were enough for some.

Whenever she was paraded as an object around the grounds, with two Bolton guards ever present at her sides (and sometimes, worse, Ramsay himself), Sansa felt no pain from the varying force of the winds and snow. She felt no bite at the tips of her ears. Her hands felt no sting underneath the boiled leather of her gloves. Sansa was born in winter. Sansa was of wolf's blood and in this one regard (for she'd had few underneath unwanted hands made of hate) she would not cower. She would not let herself. Besides, the smell of the frosted air had been soft relief to the coating of her lungs and sweet respite from the smell of blood, sweat, seed, and misery that clung to every corner of her rooms.

No, Sansa's pain hadn't lived in the cold, then. It lived in the welts and cuts underneath her own furs, over her back, her arms, the span of her legs, making the walks through the courtyard hurt with or without the state of the weather.

Her pain lives in the cold, now, though. She was far from stoned walls, far from the hot springs Winterfell was built upon. The often soft falling snow in the Keep was nothing compared to the wind that whips the night, as she lays next to the weak fire. She has a too thin blanket tightly wrapped around her, chilling through the snow crunched down underneath her. Winter has yet to truly arrive, and yet her ears burn, her hands ache. There were fresh gashes in her skin (that hadn't had time to heal any before she fell to the snow banked up against the outer walls -- a hard clash into frozen piles that shocked her already burning joints and broke back open any thin layers of skin that had managed to form), that sting as it melts against her form, tonight.

But, Ramsay wasn't there to leer at her pain, as he was back in the direction they'd come from. So, Sansa didn't have to pretend, as she often tried whenever he'd come to her door. She often failed, his dealings much worse than anything Joffrey or his guards had once inflicted upon her. Her perfectly practiced serene expression (when she wasn't being beaten, at least) of submission to her pain and place as a traitor's daughter and prisoner of the Crown, that she'd often have in the in front of the Lords and Lady's at court (the King and the Queen Regent), crushed away into one of anguish and defeat in the presence of the Bolton bastard.

Podrick presses another log into their fire as, a sudden harsh gust blew into them all. He looks up and over to her when a whine of agony brushes passed her lips, then on passed to the blurred blonde of Brienne's head that could be seen some distance away, through the downpour of white, where she was scanning the perimeter, once more, for any potential sign that they were being found and followed by Ramsay's hounds and men.

"We're close to the Wall, now, Lady Sansa," he speaks with as much encouragement as he can muster, through chattering teeth. But, with a squint upwards to where he sat, Sansa sees the red of his nose and the exhaustion in his eyes -- a reminder of how long he and Brienne had been camped
out in the woods waiting for a candled sign from her, and longer still how they'd been searching, initially, for a sign that she was alive, at all. "Should be no more th -- than a week. Maybe less than that, even, if -- if the horses don't give."

If she was cold, she who was of the North -- despite how much she'd tried not to be when she was younger and more fanciful of all of the life potentials that she didn't have, she cannot even begin to imagine what her newest traveling companions have been dealing with over the span of time they had been ducking and diving through the brush of the woods. While Podrick was showing all of the signs of the cold stabbing deeply into his skin, Brienne's face has been fierce and focused since they had initially left Theon behind -- since Sansa clutched their hands into one and chocked out a sob at his gently untangling their fingers from one another and backing away from her side to turn and start the trek that would reach him his own destination.

Sansa knows in the base of her bones that she will never see him again.

She knows in the base of her bones that the three of them will never make it to the Wall.

Her luck, if she can even call it that -- and she couldn't, really, she couldn't -- has run out.

They are going to die out here.

She will never get to see Jon again.

She has gotten her hopes up for nothing.

She is so stupid.

Always so stupid.

She will never learn.

Never.
"I...I can't feel my toes anymore," she pulls her blanket tighter around the scope of her head to block her ears, the quiver in her voice apparent to the man before her. "I can't...I can't feel my legs." Brienne was walking back towards them, she can hear the crunch of the snow under her boots, the clink of her armor causing the horses to stir. *They can't fall,* Sansa thinks to herself at the brief whine of the horse she herself had been riding for the past three weeks, *They can't.* Without the horses none of them stand a chance, especially not her.

If there was one thing her Uncle Benjen had imparted to all of them, apart from his love, it was the great sight of the Wall, and she's seen none near a glimpse yet. Perhaps they would be able to finish the distance on foot, if she were in her best condition. But, she wasn't. And even if she was, she struggles to think on how she ever could of managed. Arya is the one with a strong back, ready for adventure -- Sansa has never possessed nearly quite as much physical prowess. Besides, she has never felt this broken. Every second on the horse, alone, has been agony in and of itself and all she has to do is sit there and push through the pain to stay upright.

"Neither can I," Podrick says with a shaking smile. "But, Castle Black has -- has walls and beds. Fires that won't go out with the wind."

She doesn't remember much of Podrick from her time in Kings Landing, if she has to be honest. He was there, often, both before her marriage to Lord Tyrion and afterwards. In the before, he was just a figure trailing around behind his Lord and the cutthroat, who watched her as all men seemed to, with a 'Lady Sansa' on his lips whenever deemed appropriate. She had all of the time in the world to think on him, but she never did -- her mind too full of her own torments to pay much mind to the Lannister's squire, apart from the general pleasantries she was learned to give, from birth. In the after, his hovering of Tyrion and tending to his needs was much closer to her than before -- his Lord was her husband, however forced, and his proximity increased. A kind smile always offered, sympathy in his eyes.

Sansa can see that ever present sympathy, now. For her, freezing to the ground in front of him, and himself and Lady Brienne all suffering in the howling night, every night, for weeks, Sympathy would not save them, "...if we ever make it."

Ramsay had told her, while she was still trapped, that Jon had risen up to Lord Commander to mock her, she's sure. To prop himself up as more than just a bastard -- as someone worthy of the position he had stolen from the man who stole his position, first and foremost. But, to tease her of something she could never have, second. *Family so close, yet so far. Don't dare to dream, sweet wife. You belong to me, now.* Castle Black has walls and beds and fires that won't go out with the wind, but Sansa can't even remember the last time she spoke to Jon. She can't remember if she was dismissive in that moment. If she was awful. She didn't say goodbye to him, before they left home, she knows that for fact. If Sansa and her company make it to the hold, at all, she wonders if he will see her and remember and wish her away.
"We will make it, my lady," Brienne's voice is sure, as she sits on flat ground some feet away -- careful as Podrick had been to not touch Sansa, where she lay on her own slice of earth. "I swore to find you, and we have. I've now sworn to protect you, and I shall." Her eyes remain vigilant, the constant threat of a potential Bolton search party never far from her mind. Sansa doesn't know Brienne as well as she knows Podrick (whom she really doesn't know at all), but determination bleeds from her very being. She makes note (as she has done this entire trip north) to make sure it never leaves her thoughts that her mother trusted this woman with Sansa's life, with Arya's, wherever she may be. And so, even though she lays whimpering in pain, Sansa will as well. If by some miracle they can last the last leg of the journey, she is sure that the expression will not vanish from her sword's face -- that being in the walls of Castle Black will not lessen her careful and protective stance. "If we push tomorrow, as much as allowed, we might make it by the next four moons. If not, the fifth morning afterwards."

"I've never traveled to the Wall," Sansa's eyes drift closed. They had settled down for the night hours prior and Maester Wolkan had told her while she was still in Winterfell that stealing as much rest as possible would help ease the throbbing in her body. "My...my f -- father always said it was a month's journey, at a standard pace...it's been longer than that.

"Yes, poor weather and travel off road," Brienne shifts to find some comfort. "I'm confident we're making fine time, under our circumstances."

Sansa isn't so sure, although she supposes she would have the least knowledge of the three. King Robert's party had taken a month to Kings Landing from Winterfell, for a time (before the painful fall of the loss of her wolf) it had been a ride of joy, the days flying by far too fast. Traveling to Winterfell from the Vale, with Lord Baelish, had felt like a painfully leisurely stroll -- Littlefinger suctioning as much time with her as he could take, before selling her like a hog for slaughter. This voyage was nothing like either of those. Her body is inflamed, her mind has been soaked in a numbing fog for longer than she could remember, and despite the pointedly positive spirit of Podrick, she cannot help but have an ache in her chest that something was wrong -- that their saving her wasn't going to work.

Somehow, someway, her small taste of freedom would not last.

"My lady is right, it's just the snow. The wind, too," Podrick's voice is far away in her head, unreachable underneath the troubled haze that has become the foundation of rest. "It's messing with us, is all, The horses, too --"

"-- You should get some sleep, Lady Sansa," Brienne's voice much the same, as it drifts through the darkness of Sansa's closed eyes -- orange and yellow flickers of the fire igniting flashes of light. "We'll set back out at first light."
There is nothing -- nothing, at all. Sansa feels her body weighed down in a vast empty space. A thick black cover of darkness wrapping it's cloth around the span of her chest -- sliding, like the pretty and expensive silks that Margaery used to wear, in ropes around the width of her throat -- squeezing tighter and tighter, until she cannot breathe, at all. When she reaches out with a trembling hand, she feels the dead space of air. The nothingness in front of her lost and alone without the chance to suck breath into it's own lungs. She is swarmed by both a frantic sense of dread, distant and plentiful, as if it isn't her own or that of the empty space in front of her -- as if it was born in the air itself. There is heat in that space -- that space away from her and the empty place before her. Heat drenching her skin in sweat, the black cover pulling tighter.

Vanished.

Gone.

She is there, she is fine. Somewhere in the back of her head she knows that Podrick sleeps on the other side of the dim fire -- somewhere inside her she knows that Brienne does so, as well, although much lighter -- far easier to wake in case trouble comes. But, still, the fear drifts out from the empty space. Her fingers glide through it. There is acceptance there. In that space. The emptiness resigned to it's fate. Acceptance, but betrayal. Loss.

The black cloth wraps lower, pulling further snug around the span of her stomach. Her most recent stab wound, a rare injury Maester Wolkan had been allowed to properly tend to, sears in pain and yet she knows the space before her feels none -- it's non-existent body does not alight in the flame of injury as hers' does, now. It is not there, as hers' is. It is gone. Something should be there, she knows it should. But, there isn't. There isn't anything.

Distantly she hears the pull of a low whine. It is built in pain, soaked and stewing in deep grief. Suffering. An ache sounds in her chest, as her lungs try further to expand, of the thought of Lady -- long dead, long gone. Not Lady. Not anymore. Cersei killed her. Joffrey did. King Robert and his general detachment from the responsibilities of kingdom, casually flicking his wrist to let it be done. What does a southern king know of a direwolf? Nothing. She's dead. Sansa hears the heavy thumping of something in the distance, where the heat has been coming from. There are voices, calling out, anger on both sides of structures that do not exist. The low whine of before slowly turns into an open menacing growl, but the space in front of her stays unmoving. Stays vacant of anything that matters, at all. The things that make us up as something resembling human. Uninhabited until the end.

There is a slow drifting of time, an agonizing pace, crawling forward. Simple seconds lasting years -- hundreds of years. A faint sound of the sharp of a knife slicing something through and through.
The slick slide of cold water slides down the span of her skin, both soothing and ripping her cuts and welts apart -- Ramsay's hold ever present. Fire burns at the bottom of Sansa's feet, as her legs are pulled into the cloth, next, and her fingers clutch against the black fog. The darkness swells around her and, for only a moment, she thinks she sees the shape of a...man. Familiar and unfamiliar, all at the same time, and painfully still, where the empty space is. She feels the tips of her fingers glide against cold skin, long cold, long departed. She can't hold the gasp in her throat through the feeling boiling in her gut that all hope is lost. It is everywhere, in the space around her and the deserted place.

They will never make it to the Wall.

They are going to die out here.

She has gotten her hopes up for nothing.

Ramsay and his men are going to hunt her down.

She is so stupid.

Always so stupid.

She will never get to see Jon again.

Never.

Morning hits her with a punch to the gut, her eyes flying open startled and afraid -- a silent scream scratches out from the bowels of her being. The hazy memory of the nightmare of Ramsay's hands forcing her arms above her head into the old mattress as he barreled on, fades from her mind, as it does every morning, since she had first been married to Roose Bolton's son. Every night before she goes to sleep, Sansa wills herself to dream of something good. Long ago memories of her mother's warm smile and her father doing his best to fumble along to her differing interests. Bran and Rickon running through hills, with Hodor, alive and safe. Arya storming through the world fierce as ever, being pushed around by no one.
And every morning she wakes up from the disappearing glint of Ramsay's deceptively blue eyes.

Podrick doesn't look over towards her, as she creaks her bones to stand, though she sees him tilt his head, from the side of her eye. At the very start of their journey he and Brienne both would rush to her side, imploring her if she was alright. Eventually, they had learned to let her collect herself, alone. To be there for her, without invading further into the air around her that Rasmay held, even with him miles and miles away.

"How's that rabbit coming, Pod?" Brienne questions as casually as she can, though her hand flexed on the hilt of her sword. She may physically stay away when Sansa awakened, every morning, but the gut of her can't help the way her hand flies to her sword. They are a day out from the Wall, now, as far as Brienne knows. If she wasn't so tired, Sansa would find it within herself to feel ashamed that she didn't think they would get her there. That she doubted the drive and determination of two people who would travel through the whole of Westeros searching for her and her sister, even when blatantly turned away. Two people who, in the span of time from the Bolton bloodied snow below their feet deep in the woods outside of Winterfell to where they sat now, have put their all into keeping her safe, no matter the potential cost.

The day's ride goes by in something of a blur. Everything about her feels dull, as if the horrors of Winterfell have sucked the life out from under her. Maybe they did, she wanes. Maybe she's a scooped out hollow shell of her former self, a shell of her newer one. Maybe she will never recover and maybe she'll never stop feeling the pain within her body that Ramsay Bolton has so joyfully inflicted upon her. But, as they push forward and the sight of it comes more clearly into view, no longer just a line blurring into the skyline, a small fire bubbles to life in the base of Sansa's stomach. The snow fall softens for the first time in days, into something pretty and serene, as they approach the gates of Castle Black, as a horn sounds out announcing the arrival of three hobbling travelers.

She is more exhausted than she has ever been in her life. Podrick is much of the same, more reserved than normal. Brienne, though, puffs herself up with a renewed energy upon their granted entrance, as they pass through into a hole of potential rapers and murderers who could do her new Lady harm. In her attempt to dismount, Sansa practically falls off of her horse -- a wince hisses through her lips. But, then the will to stand, as tall as she can possibly muster, flows over her, to allow her to look across the faces of the men looking her over. Some faces confused, some intrigued. Some hungry in a way she has come to despise. One tall man with red hair and thick furs is not looking in her direction, at all, but behind her where Brienne stands. They all blend together, these faces, clothed in black, solemn, and bearded.

And then one stands out, above them all on a balcony.
Sansa feels a black cloth slowly unfurl from where it wraps itself around her legs, as she watches him sharply inhale -- his hands pulling away from the railing they rest upon. The growing new fire in her stomach burns away the cloth from her middle and chest and air sucks gratefully into the whole span of her body. It soothes the crust that has shaped itself around her -- the dirt that has built a home in her lifeless hair and clung to every every available surface of her body. The hardened portions of blood from untreated wounds and the blood still fresh, from carefully crafted knife work that's broken open, once more, on the day's earlier ride, before the moment that has brought a hush upon them, now. Dozens of men, his brothers, his new family who have treated him so much kinder than she once had, she's sure, all hovering in silence, as if afraid to disrupt whatever they might be witnessing in the disbelief on their Lord's face. By the time he has made his way, slowly through the sudden molasses they find themselves in, down the stairway across the yard and forward in her direction, the cloth is tugging away from the curve of her neck.

Jon.

Really there.

In front of her.

Standing solid and true and swaying slightly underneath the mellow drift of snow, latching into their hair, with each shaking breath drawn into his lungs, as if it's all so new. The shock on his face, as evident and she supposes the shock on hers is -- not immediately disgusted and turning her away. Somewhere in the back of her head she hears a sharpened knife cutting something through. She hears the low whine and growl, of something that is not Lady, and fading angry shouts. She feels fire swarming in the air around her, burning the bottoms of her feet. She vaguely remembers something she has never seen, a distorted form of a familiarly unfamiliar man, so still, that suddenly twitches in a way she doesn't understand. The black cover of darkness makes way for a small stretch of bright light, and her mind reaches her hand out to find the empty space seemingly full of something that wasn't there before.

Are you really there?

Jon.

And then he was. He was there, by her own design, as she launches herself into his opening arms -- into the space where Ramsay lives. Driving, in a true moment for however short lived it might last, haunting eyes out and filling the darkened vacant space with something like home.
End Notes

I haven't published a fic since 2015 [shout out to Daryl and Beth, love ya, miss ya] and you can probably tell, because I clearly have no clue what I'm doing lolz. I try to write things all of the time and it never really works out, but for whatever reason Jon Snow and Sansa Stark finally have managed to drag some writing out of me. I'm quite nervous to try it out, but I'm doing it anyway and crossing my fingers.

I'd love to hear anything you have to say!

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