Factor Sansa

by Maracuya

Summary

A little, but extreme what-if game/experiment. So... what if the situation had developed differently after the Battle of the Blackwater? Veering off to crack! material again, can't help myself...

Notes

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Rating somewhere between "M" and "E", probably. Tags may be added as we go along.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything, nor would I ever try to make any profit from this.
Everything belongs to GRRM.
Sansa watched the scene unfold in the Throne Room: how Tywin Lannister rode in on his horse, how he was thanked for his role in the Battle of the Blackwater and declared Hand of the King, how the so-called “Fat Flower” from Highgarden asked Joffrey to marry his allegedly starry-eyed daughter... and how the king obliged and ended his betrothal with Sansa.

Oh, the sudden relief! It washed over Sansa and was so powerful that she had a hard time not to show her happiness. However, she knew better than not to play her part. Thus, she shed a tear or two and willed her shoulders to droop.

When the festivities were over, she hastened to the Godswood to pray and to thank the gods for sparing her a marriage to Joffrey. However, it was there that her initial joy dimmed the more she thought about the whole affair.

True enough, it was a good thing she didn't have to wed her former fiancé, but her position was even weaker now than it had already been.

“Now that I've been cast aside, someone might think he could get away with forcing himself on me,” she thought and pressed her lips into a tight line. “Even Joffrey himself might still do it. And even if it doesn't happen – they'll likely try to use me as a pawn again and to barter me away to someone else. Someone who won't – or can't do anything against the king’s sadism. Or worse than that: he might enjoy it and take part in these cruel games.”

Sansa started to feel nauseous.

“I need to do something about it. Need to try to find a solution. Something that might offer me a measure of safety.”

Briefly, she considered becoming a silent sister, but discarded it at once. Joffrey wouldn't allow her to turn into a woman of the Faith. Her claims to the North were too strong.

Sansa felt sick, but she had to admit she couldn't avoid marriage. She could only try to see to it that she wasn't handed over to a monster like the Mountain that Rides.

Sansa shuddered and was close to throwing up. Her mind rattled through the names of all possible bachelors. One option caused her to wince more intensely than the other. Lancel Lannister? Tyrion? Or even worse? Tears started to stream down her face.

In the end, she reached a decision. It was the most difficult one to make she could imagine. Sansa
balled her dainty hands until they trembled. And she hoped she wouldn't vomit in one of the many
difficult situations she'd have to face in the future. Notwithstanding, she steeled herself and returned
to the Red Keep.

The next morning, Sansa still didn't have a better idea. So she had her hair done in an intricate
Southron style, donned the best one of her too tight dresses and walked to the solar of the Hand. The
sentry admitted her after half an hour.

Lord Lannister sat behind the desk – just where Sansa's father had sat in the past. The lord was
immersed in a scroll he was holding, but he looked up after a moment.

“Lady Sansa.”

She dropped a little curtsy, and her heart tried to hammer its way through the ribcage. Her knees
trembled when she noticed the man's steely, green-golden gaze.

“Lord Hand,” she began and asked the Seven to grant her strength.

“Speak up – why are you here?” the elderly man snapped.

Sansa realised he wouldn't condone any blabbering.

“‘The king has ended our betrothal, so I have thought about my future, Lord Hand.’”

Tywin Lannister tipped his index fingers together.

“You will marry someone else in due time, of course. I'll choose one for you at some point.”

Sansa's throat felt papery when she said: “I'd like to propose.”

The man behind the desk furrowed his brow.

“And what to you want to propose?”

Sansa swallowed hard.

“Myself to you.”
Tywin Lannister's posture had not been a relaxed one to begin with, but now, he stiffened even more. His eyes widened, and deep creases appeared between his golden-grey eyebrows.

“I'm married,” he snarled.

Sansa blinked in confusion.

“Widowed,” she answered in a meek voice.

The Lord Hand glared at her as if he wanted to burn a hole through her midsection. After a moment, he rose and smoothed down his elegant waistcoat. He came around the desk, hands clasped on his back.

“Tell me: why should I marry someone like you – someone who is barely a woman and my grandson's discarded fiancée besides?”

Bile rose in Sansa's throat, but this was something she had rehearsed in her head all night.

“I'm from a very noble and very old family. One of Westeros's most elevated families. The Stark roots are even older than the ones of the Lannister family. And you do have two sons, but one of them cannot inherit Casterly Rock anymore, and you deem the other one unworthy.”

Tywin Lannister snorted.

Sansa went on: “I have flowered. I can give you an heir. And a marriage between the two of us could also bring you an advantage in your fight against Robb.”

Lord Lannister approached her until he was right before her. Sansa didn't dare to look him in the eyes, being so close to him. Instead, she stared ahead, at his chest where the chain of the Hand dangled. She could smell the sandalwood soap he had used for his shaving in the morning. A bead of
sweat trickled down her spine.

Lord Tywin's voice sounded mild when he spoke, but his words were sharper and stung more than most of the things Joffrey or Cersei had ever said: "I'm no good when it comes to feelings – but don't you feel like a traitor with regard to your brother?"

It was exactly what had tormented Sansa all night, and she had tried to calm herself down by assuming she'd try to influence her future husband so that Robb might survive this madness of a war. Granted, Robb had been victorious several times, but now that she stood in front of Tywin Lannister, she knew that the man's ruthlessness would outdo her brother's fighting prowess. Sansa had already lost half her family; she wouldn't be able to stand any more losses.

At the same time, Sansa's court reflexes cut in, and she said aloud: "Robb is the traitor here. A traitor, just like father."

Next, Lord Lannister placed a hand under her chin and forced up her face. The gesture reminded her of the Hound, and she wished she had fled the Red Keep together with the scarred warrior.

When her eyes met Lord Tywin's, she froze, and it was as if her soul was laid bare before him. She hadn't felt so naked and so vulnerable when she had been stripped at court.

“Hmmmm,” the elderly man uttered. “Another question. You've tried to point out why I should marry you. So... which of my non-existent charms caused you to want to marry me?”

Sansa gulped and had a hard time not to make water on herself.

“Your age, my lord.”

The lion of Lannister cocked his head.

“I wouldn't have taken you for someone who'd fancy old men.”

“I... I...,” Sansa stuttered, “could never murder an inconvenient husband. I'm not vile enough for it. Your age is a... natural solution. And you've got a position.”

She hoped that greed was something the man in front of her would understand. As a matter of fact, he did. Of course he did.
He pondered things in silence for a moment, and Sansa didn't dare to interrupt him.

Finally, he said in an offhand voice that still didn't fool her into feeling safe: "I've just become the king's Hand. Many things have to be organised and decided. This realm has lain fallow for years. Give me a moon to settle these most pressing matters. Don't talk about our conversation in the meantime. No word to anyone. Go to the sept on Smith's Day in a moon from hence. At noon. If I agree with your proposal you'll meet me there and marry me at once. No big ceremony. If I don't agree, I won't be there and you'll get notice about another match soon."

"I see, Lord Hand," Sansa breathed.

Lord Tywin's eyes were green flint.

"Are you sure you want to go through with this? You've barely reached the cusp of womanhood. I should say I have no taste for someone your age in the marriage bed. I am a grown man with a grown man's needs and desires. And I am a lion. A predator. You're a clueless maid – at least I hope you're still a maid. If you're not, I'll have your head. But if you are one, I doubt you'll be able to cater to my passions."

Sansa flushed bright red. She told herself that Lord Tywin still couldn't be as bad as Joffrey.

"I have been raised to be a pure and good wife for my future husband. And if you find me lacking, I'll do my best to improve."

Tywin Lannister's gaze swept over her body, and he clucked his tongue in disapproval.

"Is that so? From now on, wear something more decent. I don't accept a woman whose breasts are close to spilling free from her bodice as if she were my crippled Tyrion's harlot."

Sansa wanted to sink into the ground.

"I'd gladly do so, but I've been given no new dresses in ages, although I've been growing a lot lately."

The Lord Hand didn't say anything for moment. His jaws worked. He raised a hand and allowed his index finger to follow the seam of Sansa's bodice. He brushed the skin of her heaving cleavage. A little spark shot down her spine.
Lord Lannister tore his gaze away from her and spun around.

“The problem about your clothes will be mended. Now leave. I have to work. And as I've said it before: await my decision in a moon from now.”

Sansa cleared her throat.

“Thank you for taking the time to converse with me, Lord Hand.”

The old lion nodded gravely, and Sansa knew it was time to leave.

Once she was out of the solar, she made for the next privy and retched. How, in the name of the Seven, should she be able to wait through a whole moon?
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

All I can say is: let the show begin.

The first consequences of her advance were noticeable at once. One hour after she had arrived back at her room, there was a knock at the door. A servant stood in front of it and handed Sansa a package without any information about its origin. When Sansa opened it in her chamber, her heart missed a beat: there was a dress inside of it! It was of a fine making suitable for court; at the same time, it didn't attract much attention, because it was a dull brown.

Sansa tried it on at once and started to weep when she could breathe freely. The bodice was actually even too big and the sleeves too long; but that was nothing she couldn't deal with. She could pad the bodice and remove the pads once she'd have grown into it, and shortening the sleeves was an easy task for someone as skilled with the needle as her.

In the evening, two maids came to her door without Sansa having to call for them like usual. She realised at once that they weren't the spies Queen Cersei had set on her, but new servants. Lord Lannister's choice? Sansa resolved to remain as cautious around the women as she had always been.

The women were quick and effective and not overly keen to get to know something about her. Quite the contrary: they knew each other and one of them, Deirdre, had just fallen in love, so the two preferred to chatter in subdued voices about the man in question.

Sansa pretended not to notice and wished she could be in Deirdre's situation. She remembered when she and Jeyne Poole had gossiped about handsome men behind upheld hands. Oh, the time that had passed since those happier moments back in Winterfell...

The next morning, Sansa went to court, wearing her new dress. She kept herself at the back of the throne room.

Nobody paid her any attention. Not Joffrey, who was busy boasting about his new Tyrell connection, not Cersei, who looked bored and not quite sober... and not Tywin Lannister. The Lord Hand was concentrated and finished off one petitioner after the next in a cold, but effective way.

Joffrey slouched on the throne, or at least as much as one could do it without cutting oneself, and let his grandfather do the tedious work.

Later, Sansa went to the Godswood and spent a long time praying. When she returned in the
evening, there was another bundle with a second dress on the bed. This one was beige, framed with a dark plum colour. If she squinted, she could tell herself it was rather Stark silver and Lannister crimson, but then again, she didn't want to read too much into this.

Over the next few days, this new routine repeated itself. Sansa was ignored, being the discarded, dependent, unimportant ward everyone took her for. She prayed for guidance and ate with a surprising appetite. Her moon blood came, but this time, she wasn't as frightened as she had been the time before.

Of course, Sansa didn't manage to escape everyone's attention. Sooner or later, someone would notice her. And it happened sooner than she liked.

One morning after court, a soft, fleshy hand landed on her arm.

“Lady Sansa,” a voice said.

Sansa turned around and found herself face to face with Varys.

“My Lord,” she answered and inclined her head.

“It is always such a pleasure to see you – and to see you so well after the king's choice not to marry you. One could come to the conclusion that you're not too sad about this sudden change in your life.”

Sansa's heartbeat accelerated.

She chirped: “I wish the king well – and if it means I must give him up so he can form an alliance to bring down my treacherous brother... so be it.”

“Ah, yes, this new match.” Varyas nodded and viewed her up and down. “Now, I have to say that part of your lovely appearance must be due to the dresses you're wearing. It's not as if you're not a beauty yourself, but I think your refined tastes in your clothing only help bring out your appeal even more. Pray tell – is this a new robe?”

Sansa blanched but chimed merrily: “Your keen eye is most astonishing, Lord Varys. Yes, the dress is new. And I agree in that it looks particularly good.”

“Mmmhm,” the Master of the Whispers uttered. “Now... you see, I'm a curious man and as it happens, I've learned that you have received not one, but two new dresses. The strange thing is that I don't know who sent you these presents – and I usually know everything that goes on the Red Keep. It is my duty to know everything so as to be able to keep the king safe. There are few people who can conceal something from me. Care to enlighten me who gifted you with something so wonderful and becoming?”
Sansa cleared her throat to win a moment to think about an answer. Her mind rattled. She tipped her finger against her lips.

“‘Aaah, to be honest – if only I knew! The origin of these dresses is as much of a mystery for me as it is for you. I wonder whether I’ve got a secret admirer.’”

Lord Varys arched an eyebrow.

“So soon after the end of your betrothal? But then again... men can be greedy beasts when their blood is up. Those are the rare moments when I'm happy not to have to cope with passions of the flesh.”

Sansa blushed and didn't know what to say to that.

Meanwhile, Lord Varys looked behind her and mumbled: “‘Speaking of 'secret admirer'. Though a secret one he is not, I should say.’”

Sansa creased her brow, turned and watched Lord Baelish approach the two of them with a smile.

“*Out from the frying pan into the fire,*” she couldn't help but think, though actually, she had no reason to dislike the Master of the Coin.

“Lord Varys. And Lady Sansa!” the short, elegantly-clad man called out. “What a pleasure to meet you. And as I can see, Lady Sansa, you're honouring me by wearing my gift. Why, I am utterly delighted!”

Sansa's smile didn't falter, because court life had trained her too well; yet, she felt as if someone had just walked over her grave.
It was so difficult for Sansa not to gape. She felt the impulse to shrug off her gown then and there. Instead, she plastered a smile on her face and said: “So the mystery is solved who to thank for this.” She pointed at the dress.

Baelish's eyes twinkled. He took her hand and placed a kiss on it, but not on the back of it. Instead, he turned around her hand and placed it on her palm. Varys arched an eyebrow.

Sansa pulled back her hand as if he had bitten her.

“Lord Baelish!” she called out.

“Ah, Lady Sansa, did I do anything ontoward?” the man called 'Littlefinger' asked. “In that case, I do apologise and blame my behaviour on the enthusiasm caused by your incredible beauty. I wonder if you might be willing to meet –”

“LADY SANSA.”

Sansa winced on hearing Lord Lannister's razor sharp voice. She turned and saw the man approach her, Queen Cersei on his heels. King Robert's widow looked like a cat who fallen into a bowl of cream.

“Lord Hand?” Sansa asked in a small voice.

Lord Lannister turned to Varys and Baelish.

“Allow me.”

The two men bowed, excused themselves and left, though the smile of the Master of the Coin turned stale, and he hesitated for a moment before he was willing to go.

Sansa paid the short man no further attention. With a feeling as if she had ants in her belly, she faced Lord Lannister. There were thunderclouds in his eyes, and they frightened her like the Hound's had done in the past.

“Lord Tywin has seen Baelish's kiss,” she thought, and a cold sweat broke on her brow.

Despite the old lion's obvious fury, the man didn't explode. It wasn't necessary for him to yell in order to punish her.
Lord Tywin said: “Lady Sansa. I've decided to allocate you a new room. You're not the king's betrothed anymore, so a humbler domicile is sufficient for you.”

Cersei added in a saccharine voice: “You will certainly understand, won't you?”

“And here I thought I couldn't be humiliated any worse than I've already been,” Sansa thought. “How stupid I've been. There won't be a wedding with this man. He'll just sell me off to one of his bannermen and be done with it.”

She somehow managed to utter: “As it pleases you, Lord Hand. Queen Cersei.”

Lord Lannister gave her a curt nod and strutted on with his daughter at his side.

Sansa returned to her old room and found her new chambermaids and two male servants in Lannister colours in it. They were already packing her things.

“Where is my new room?” Sansa peeped.

“Let me show you, my lady,” Deirdre answered in her most polite voice.

Sansa's new chamber turned out to be one of the better servants' rooms in the Tower of the Hand. Close enough to be under the Hand's surveillance. It was neat, but small, with a real bed – no cot – and even a little window high above in the wall. There were no decorations. And the door hinges wailed when she entered.

All Sansa could do was to sigh and to accept the inevitable.

“My lady... it's not luxurious, but it's a good room,” Deirdre said.

Sansa smiled.

“Thanks for your kind words,” Sansa replied. “I didn't want to appear ungrateful.”

When Sansa was alone, she took off her clothes, crept under the furs in her bed, and cried into her cushion. Why had she been so stupid as to take action? Would she ever learn her lesson?

At some point, Sansa fell asleep, having spent all her energy on her tears.

A rough hand shook her awake some time later.

Sansa's eyes flew open.

She looked directly into Tywin Lannister's stony face.
Sansa squeaked.

She also thought: “Why didn't I hear the door hinges?”


Sansa sat bolt upright, then remembered her state of undress and covered herself while blushing a deep crimson.

Lord Lannister pivoted around.

With his back to her, he asked: “Care to explain why you allegedly have no fitting dresses, so I send you one at once... and today, I see you with another fitting dress, and the Master of the Coin is slobbering all over you?”

Sansa wanted to die on the spot.
Ok. This chapter contains more unsaid words than actually uttered words, I guess. It's difficult to write a scene that's supposed to contain layers of hidden meanings while having only one POV and while communication doesn't function between the two. So... here we are.

She averted her eyes and whispered: “I didn't want him to kiss my hand. And I didn't know it was his dress. I thought it was from you, like the first one. There was no note attached when I received it.”

Tywin Lannister breathed in and out. He didn't respond. Sansa didn't know what to say either.

The silence dragged on. At least, it didn't look like it would ensue in an explosion.

Finally, the old lion said in an informative tone: “This room is convenient. Until now, I've always lodged my personal servant in it. I'm sure in the past other hands used it for their illegitimate affairs.”

“You've known this passage for a long time?”

“Of course. It's a good Hand's task to know things. And to know when to make one's knowledge public... and when to remain silent.”

Sansa felt a sting in her heart, and for more than one reason.

She asked: “And... am I an illegitimate affair in your eyes now?”

Lord Lannister snorted.

“Have I been between your legs? Have we declared eternal love? No? No.”

The rhetorical questions caused Sansa to blush.

After another moment, Lord Tywin said: “However, our... situation is a bit of a secret, as you well know. And you're aware of how nosy the Master of the Whispers is. So I arranged your relocation. Today's developments have proven me right.”

Once more, Sansa didn't know what to say to that. So she wrecked her brain in search of a new topic.
The next moment, her mouth produced a question that had somehow bypassed her brain: “Do you think I'll be able to see Casterly Rock at some point in the future?”

Tywin Lannister turned towards her and blinked.

“You want to see the Rock? The Westerlands?”

Sansa couldn't believe what she had asked. Worse than that... had she meant it?

“Well, it would mean I'd leave King's Landing. I'd leave Joffrey behind.”

“Yes, my lord. I've heard that it's an impressive castle. And Lannisport a nice town.”

The old lion arched a grey-golden eyebrow, and Sansa's cheeks heated up even more.

“It's a place with lots of memories. Grave ones, too. For me, that is.”

And Sansa whispered: “I feel the same about this place here.”

At once, she winced, and her hand flew to her mouth.

“Of course, I'll be wherever I'm expected to be, Lord Hand.”

Lord Lannister stooped over her and brought his face right in front of her; she couldn't help but stare into his green eyes – and he stared into hers. Stared into her soul.

After an unknown timespan that felt like eternity, Lord Tywin retreated, stood straighter and said: “Good night, Lady Sansa. I expect you not to wear the second dress again. You'll get another one.”

“Thank you, Lord Hand,” was all Sansa managed to say.

The Lord of Lannister gave her a curt nod, turned, and left through the secret corridor. The passage closed behind him.

And Sansa was left in a completely puzzled state.

“What did all of this mean? What did he truly want? What DOES he want?”

It took Sansa a long time to fall asleep again.
The next day, it turned out that the Lord of Lannister was true to his word: in the morning, she received an anthracite dress with rich emerald laces and embroidery, plus white baby pearls at the neckline.

“The green colour looks like Lord Tywin's eyes,” Sansa thought.

On her way to court, she ran into Lancel Lannister. The young man, who was on Cersei's side, had never been friendly towards her, granted. Yet, Sansa, of all people, had made sure he'd see a doctor and would survive after he had been injured during the Battle of the Blackwater.

Now, Lancel Lannister was still wearing bandages, and he looked pale. Even so, he attempted a little bow when he saw her.

“Lady Sansa,” he said. “I haven't had a chance to thank you for saving my life.”

Sansa blushed.

“I did what was the decent thing to do. It's a surprise to see you back at court so soon after your your serious injury.”

“It's the first court session I can attend again. To be honest, it may have been too early, but I want to see how things are developing.”

Lancel Lannister fidgeted with the collar of his tunic and didn't look Sansa in the eye.

“Would it be too much to ask you to accompany me inside? To lend me your arm if necessary?”

Sansa's eyebrows rose in surprise. This sounded utterly different from the arrogant young man she'd got to know. For once, he didn't sound like Cersei's minion.

“If he's at my side – as if he were my companion – Petyr Baelish is less likely to approach me again.”

So Sansa assented. She took Lancel Lannister's arm and found the young man really needed to lean
on her – and by his scowl one could see it went against his pride to do that.

The court session itself was rather uneventful. Joffrey was mainly busy basking in his new betrothal and chummed up with Mace Tyrell. How glad Sansa was that Sansa Joffrey had released her from his side!

Lord Lannister simply dealt with one petitioner after the next in his cold, effective way. Joffrey let his grandfather do his work without disturbing him often, simply because the young man wasn't interested in the individual cases.

The more problematic point was that Cersei spotted Sansa and Lancel stand side by side.

After the court session, the former queen grabbed Sansa's arm as soon as Lord Kevan's son had left and hissed: “Stupid little harlot! You think you can dig your claws into my nephew? Pah, I've seen through your vile schemes, and don't you think you could fool me! I've already warned my father not to allow you to marry Lancel. There mustn't come any filthy, traitorous blood into the family. Joffrey did right by disposing you.”

Had Sansa been more like Arya, she would have screwed her eyes heavenwards. As if she'd ever want to become Lancel's wife! Worse than that, Lord Lannister would likely get more false ideas about her now, thanks to Cersei's paranoia.

As it was, Sansa schooled her features and simply answered in a demure tone: “I'm sure the Lord Hand will do what he considers to be right.”

“And you can bet on it that I'll guide him on this way,” Cersei frothed, turned, and left.

Back in her room, she sat down and looked at the dress Petyr Baelish had given her. It was beautiful, no doubt about that, and of a fine quality besides.

“Entirely too precious to be simply thrown away in these times of privation.”

At that moment, Deirdre and the second servant, Melly, entered the room. Sansa remembered from the women's gossiping that Melly, a bony woman with front teeth like a rabbit, had a daughter of about eight years.

“Melly, I won't wear this dress again. Do you want to have some of my old dresses for your daughter? And I could also change this one here for her. Shorten the sleeves and such.”
The chambermaid stared at Sansa, mouth agape. After a moment, the woman hastened to Sansa and prattled on and on about how thankful she’d be for such a generous gift and how she couldn’t really accept the dresses.

Sansa, however, appeased her and set to work right away. Her heart was lighter now, knowing that the dress would be good for something after all.

Before it darkened, Sansa took a stroll to the Godswood. She noticed a guard was following her in the distance, and she was grateful for it. After all, that man had nothing to do with the King’s Guard. She went to her favourite place for praying.

Suddenly, a nearby bush rustled. Sansa started, but relaxed again when Ser Dontos appeared from behind said bush.

“Lady Shansha,” he slurred. “It’sh nishe to shee you. You know I’m preparing your eshcape, don’t you? One day, I’ll help you to get back to the Norsh.”

“Like you’ll give up drinking one day?” Sansa couldn't help but think.

Not wanting to be rude, she said: “You're a kind-hearted man, Ser Dontos. But let me tell you: don't take any risks on my behalf. Just don't. I'll pick my way myself, wherever it may lead me.”

Ser Dontos shook his head avidly.

“You're a shweet girl. But you've got no friendsh, and you're weak. I'm your friend, you know shat, Lady Shansha, don't you? I shwear I'm your friend. You need help.”

The bloated knight tried to give Sansa a kiss, but she avoided his attempt easily. Besides, his comment irked her. Everyone had always seen her as a girl, as a stupid, weak creature, not able to look after herself, and in time, it had become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even her parents had seen her that way and had kept important knowledge from her. Of course, they had meant well, in contrast to her enemies, but still.

“Lord Lannister is different,” it suddenly occurred to her. “He and his first wife – they were a team. Equal partners. Maybe, I can get him to respect me one day. And I hope I've had a good start down this road.”

Her focus returned to Ser Dontos.
In a kind, but firm voice she said: “I appreciate your wish to help me. But you're not responsible for me. You're not my father, nor my relative, nor am I your ward. You can't decide for me, and I don't want you to decide for me. Good evening, Ser Dontos.”

The knight's eyes bulged, that much Sansa could see before she turned away from him.

“Lady Shansha!” Ser Dontos called after her, but his stagger was so bad he was unable to follow her swift pace. For once, it was possible to actually outrun a man, despite the skirts and the bodice.

On her way back to the Red Keep, she thought once again that she'd chosen to pick a way herself. Perhaps, she'd fail. But men kept failing all the time. Well, apart from Lord Lannister, apparently. Anyway, the mere fact that Sansa had taken action was rewarding in itself. Of course, she'd never be a bold player in the Game of Thrones, but neither would she be reduced to being a mere object anymore, ready to be passed on; that much she vowed to herself. And she hoped she was right in hoping Lord Tywin would ensure her not being a pawn any longer.

Chapter End Notes

I wished Lancel and Sansa to sort of come to terms - not to become friends, but to make peace. And tempting as burning the dress would have been I wanted Sansa to be above such things, because I feel it would suit her kind heart better. Finally, I thought that because of Sansa's plan to marry Tywin she'd be less susceptible to Ser Dontos' offer.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I know, this is entirely too short, but I've got so little time today...

Back in her room, Sansa prepared for bed. At the same time, she was nervous. Would Lord Lannister visit her again in her room? She thought of how he had entered her chamber via the secret passage while she had already been abed.

“Then again – why should only he use the corridor?” she couldn't help but think.

Where she would have simply waited passively before she was suddenly curious to find out things herself. Once her maids had left, she walked over to where she knew the hidden opening was.

At first sight, one couldn't see that the wall wasn't as solid here as it should. She knocked onto the stones. The ones where the corridor was sounded slightly different if you knew what you were searching for.

“So where is the mechanism to open the secret door? It must be somewhere here. I can't imagine that you can access it only from one side,” Sansa thought.

So her fingers traced the edges of the stones. For a while she found nothing, and she furrowed her brow in frustration. She pondered the whole thing. Unlike Arya, she wasn't one to freak out and storm away to find a completely different way.

Instead, she thought: “What would I do if I wanted to hide a passage and the mechanism to open it?”

After some moments, she clicked her fingers. Next, she walked to the other side of the room. There was an unobtrusive ledge in the wall, just above a tall man's eye height.

Sansa’s eyes started to sparkle, and she felt excited like a wolf who knew he was closing in on its prey. She stepped closer to the ledge, lifted her arms and traced the edge. At first, there was nothing noteworthy to be found, just dust. But then, she reached the far corner of the room. It was comparatively dark. And there, she discovered a lever.

“Ha!” she murmured, grinned, and pulled on the lever. After a few moment, the false wall glided to the side, and Sansa could enter the secret corridor. To be on the safe side, she took a candle with her. On the inside, the mechanism was visible, and she inspected it. It would be counterproductive if her flame went out before she knew how to open and to close the door from the inside.

Once she felt prepared for the endeavour, Sansa followed the course of the hidden passage. Fortunately, her task was an easy one. The corridor was in a good state and had obviously been used
regularly over the last years. There were a few steps and a few turns, but no forks and no other entries. It was a direct connection to the rooms of the Hand, no doubt about that.

Finally, the corridor came to an end, and the same opening mechanism she had seen at her own door became visible. Sansa didn't know whether she should open the passage or not, so she listened intently as to whether she could hear anything on the other side of the opening.

Things became interesting when she spotted a crack in the wall that allowed her a glimpse into the room. Her heart stuttered when she found out that she could see a part of Lord Lannister's bed, and of a slender desk next to the bedstead. And... Lord Tywin was sitting at this desk!

The old lion was shirt-sleeved, and Sansa could see the skin and sinews and hair of his arms. Sansa gaped.

Lord Lannister was turning his back towards her, because he was either reading or writing something. So Sansa stood utterly silent and barely dared to breathe.

“This was a stupid idea,” she thought. “I shouldn't spy on him. It's not ladylike.”

Just when she was about to retreat, however, Lord Tywin turned a little. And what was more: Sansa heard him sigh. It was such an uncharacteristic sound coming from the man that Sansa didn't know what to make of it.

Then, she saw Lord Lannister was holding an open golden locket with emerald inlays in his hands and was staring at it. It only took her a heartbeat to guess what he was looking at. Of whom he was thinking.

Sansa's heart became heavy.

“This was a mistake. I shouldn't have come here,” she thought.

On tiptoes, she fled back to her room.
After this interlude, four days passed by without any news. True, Sansa received a third new dress, but otherwise there was no sign of Tywin Lannister doing anything different than focusing on his tasks as the Hand. That was unnerving for Sansa, to say the least.

Was he still considering her proposal? And if so – how seriously was he taking it?

“I know he can't communicate with me in public, but he could visit me through the secret passage. Why doesn't he do that?” Sansa mused.

And back in her room, her maids weren't making things any easier. Oh, they were reliable and efficient, and Melly and Deirdre were even polite towards her – far more than Cersei's maids in the past.

No, the problem was that the two women were... candid. With regard to... intimacies. Sansa never knew how to react to what they talked about amongst each other. As a lady, she should stop them at once. Yet, more often than not she simply opened her ears and eavesdropped on the two women. Sad as it was to admit, her parents had never told her any details about passions between men and women. Since she had arrived in King's Landing, she had heard various things, but none were trustworthy. Joffrey and Cersei, for example had frightened her.

So Melly and Deirdre were a source of information she had never had.

This day was no different.

“Tell me, Deirdre, how well-hung is your Gerry? I mean – if he's such a good lover.”

The maid who had just fallen love giggled.

“Ah, the length isn't much to speak of, but it's a fine fat rod that he's got, I swear. And the size isn't always the important point. He's good with his fingers and his mouth.”

Sansa pretended to be immersed in her needlework. On the inside, she was more confused than she had ever been. How could it be possible that the same act could be both horrible and something that could bring you great pleasure? Apart from that, she had always thought she was simply expected to lie on her back and under her husband while he was doing what he had to do. According to her maids, however, there were many ways to... be together.
Her septa had always told her Sansa wasn't allowed to touch herself 'down there', because it was supposed to be a 'dirty' place. But now, she learned from Melly and Deirdre that such things could cause a woman great enjoyment.

In the end, Sansa had to remonstrate the maids for their scandalous chats, but she knew she was being a hypocrite. The problematic point was that Sansa started to try to imagine what intimacies with Lord Tywin could be like. That, in its turn, caused her cheeks to flush crimson every so often. Perhaps it was good they didn't come face to face.

“No, but it's not good! Not at all! But... gods, what shall I do?” Sansa thought.

After much pondering, she reached a conclusion: “If the Lord Hand doesn't come to me, I have to go seek him out a second time. And now, I know a good way.”

She resolved to knock on the secret door so Lord Tywin would know she was there. No spying, no nothing.

Sansa nodded to herself. Yes, that was what she'd do. The Lord Hand couldn't be cross with her for such a way of proceeding, could he?

So in the evening, Sansa waited for her maids to leave and then darted off to open the hidden corridor. Again, she took her candle, and again, she traipsed to Lord Tywin's quarters. She cast a quick glance through the crack in the door, simply, because she wanted to make sure that Lord Lanister was there - without a servant who might gossip about their meeting afterwards.

And then, Sansa's mouth hung open, and her eyes widened. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. Her heart skipped a beat. She pressed a hand on her mouth so as not to utter a squeak. Her feet couldn't decide whether to stand still or to flee, quick like an arrow.

“Sweet mother have mercy!” was all she could think.
The Lion of Lannister was sitting on his bed, his back resting against the headboard. He was panting. His tunic was open, thus revealing a smattering of curly grey-golden chest hair. And a fine sheen of sweat. His nipples were visible, too. And the feet were naked. How could a man's feet look so...

"Gods, what am I seeing!"

And that was only the beginning.

Lord Tywin's breeches were open, too.

Where his codpiece should have been... his erect shaft protruded from the clothes. From what Sansa knew by now she could tell it meant the man was aroused. She swallowed hard.

Lord Tywin had closed his eyes, and his hand circled his member. He moved his fingers up and down in casual, deliberate strokes. A growl sounded deep in his throat.

Sansa bit her lip.

She saw the shaft twitch and become even bigger and darker than it had already been, and the veins stood out more and more clearly. A whitish droplet appeared at the tip. Lord Tywin rubbed it into the skin in little circles with his thumb.

Sansa's breathing deepened and became more rapid. She felt a pulsating sensation in her core, like a faint echo to what Lord Tywin had to be feeling. Worse than that, her fingers itched, and she didn't know whether she wanted to touch the man in bed or herself. So enthralled was she by the spectaculum that her mind didn't even come up with the notion that her behaviour could be unladylike.

“Mnmnnnnmh,” Lord Tywin uttered, and it was something between a groan and a purring sound.

Sansa licked her lips.

She saw another bit of whitish liquid appear, and Lord Tywin spread it with his thumb once more. His head fell backwards, and one could tell he was in his own world.

“As if he were weeping down there – only from... happiness.”
To Sansa's confusion, his hand paused for a while. Then, he resumed his slow strokes.

Sansa felt feverish, and she could feel her nipples rub against the fabric of the simple dress with front laces she wore before going to bed. She pressed her thighs together.

Lord Tywin's hand stilled a second time, and it was like torture for Sansa to watch him do that, though she couldn't tell what she was waiting for. Then, she noticed how his midsection started to buck into his hand with each stroke – and still he seemed to be drawing out the experience.

Then, it happened: Lord Lannister threw back his head even more, and his jaws worked. The muscles of his body became taut, especially at the neck. One last movement with the hand, and a fountain of the whitish liquid spurted from his member.

And he moaned: “Joanna.”

It was as if a bucket with icy water had been emptied over Sansa's head. A wild, cold wave of shame washed over her. She pressed one hand onto her mouth and another one onto her chest. Next, she spun around and fled back to her room. She didn't even make it to the door of the secret passage before tears were pooling in her eyes and starting to stream down her cheeks.

“Stupid, stupid Sansa. Wanton Sansa. Serves you right. How could you ever think of making an impression on that man? He'll never let anyone else into his life again. Least of all into his heart.”

Sansa threw herself onto her bed and buried her face in her cushion. Then, she sobbed and sobbed. Worst of all, there was still so much bottled-up passion inside of her, despite the disappointment. Not really realising what she was doing, she pressed a second cushion between her legs. The corner of it rubbed against her skin, where a slit was in her smallclothes, and her instincts responded. Desperately, she writhed to get some tension from the fabric – and it touched a sensitive spot she had never discovered before.

A spark shot up her spine, and her movements became even more frantic. On and on she went, she simply couldn't help herself. Her body knew it was heading for a sensation it craved though it had never experienced the feeling before. The pulse in her core throbbed and throbbed and became worse with every moment.

At long last, the tension exploded in Sansa's womanhood, and she squealed. Her nether muscles clenched. Warmth flooded her and calmed her. Sansa went slack, her mind stopped working. After a short while, she was sound asleep.
She woke from something that sounded like purring, but within moments, she had to realise it was coming from a human throat.
“I should be furious,” Sansa heard Lord Tywin say in a low voice right next to her bed. Only he didn’t sound angry, but smug.

Sansa shot up in bed and stared at the king’s Hand with huge eyes. Lord Tywin had never looked more like a predator on the hunt – on a hunt where he could already tell the game would be abundant.

“My lord,” Sansa squeaked and blushed.

In a conversational tone, Lord Tywin went on: “Imagine my surprise, Lady Sansa. I enter the secret passage and notice a female scent linger in the corridor. Have I been spied upon? Have I been betrayed? Is the Lady Sansa the vile little wolf bitch my daughter claims she is? So I hurry to your room to call you on the carpet... but then, I hear you call out my name. Your voice having a particular pitch. And when I open the secret door, I see you asleep in bed. Still closed in your dress and with a flush on your face.”

“I... I...,” Sansa stuttered.

Lord Lannister grabbed the lower cushion, held it in front of his face and inhaled. He purred again. As if he were smelling the sweetest delicacy.

Sansa squealed; she wanted the ground to split open and to swallow her. Her cheeks were burning as if she had a fever.

“Gods! He knows! The shame! And... and what did I do!? I called out his... !? Oh nonononono!”

Sansa threw herself onto the bed and buried her face against the linen. It was impossible to look Lord Lannister in the eyes.

She heard him speak up again: “Either you're the best actress in the world... or you're ripening to get picked soon.”

Sansa tensed even more. Oh, the shame! And now, he was like a big cat who was playing with a mouse, knowing full well he had cornered her. To make her distress complete, she could feel his warm breath against the nape of her neck, which told her he was leaning over her now. A whiff of
his own male scent reached her nostrils, and her private parts reawakened at once. How on earth was that possible?

And Lord Lannister continued to be merciless.

“Perhaps I should want to get used to you calling out my name, what do you think? After all, it was you who sort of came up with the concept. Come to think of it, I should want to hear you more than once per night, I presume. You know... I'm not a clueless youngster anymore, and I can keep myself in check to prolong the experience. I wonder how much you could take.”

Unbidden, visions from Lord Tywin controlling his passion sprang up in Sansa's mind. Her inner muscles quivered in response.

“Please, my lord...!” she begged.

Next, she felt a featherlight touch of his nose at the nape of her neck, right between her ear and her hair. Hot shivers rippled through her body.

“By the way, the reason to come here... I want to warn you,” Lord Tywin murmured. His lips brushed her ear while he was talking.

“Why?” was all Sansa managed to say in between hard breaths.

Lord Lannister answered: “I'll be even more of an ass tomorrow than I usually am. Tactical reasons. But I promise that my behaviour will be very different from what will be going on inside my mind. I'll be envisioning what I didn't see tonight. And I'll be remembering the sound of your voice. And your fragrance.”

By then, Sansa's firm belief was that Lord Lannister was just as bad at torturing and humiliating her as Joffrey had ever been. Or worse.

“And what will he be doing to me on the morrow? He won't make this public, will he?”

“I... I see,” she whimpered, but understood nothing.

Suddenly, she felt something wet and hot on her skin for a split second. A moment later, she realised that Lord Tywin had flicked the tip of his tongue against her pulse point. Her heart ran rampant.
“Good night, Lady Sansa,” he purred. “I daresay you may want to repeat your... previous actions. In that case: think of me again.”

It occurred to Sansa that she’d choose a public beating at court over this on any given day.

The next instant, she heard the secret door close, and it dawned on her that Lord Tywin was leaving her. Sansa uttered a little sob.

Her womanhood throbbed, but she fought the urge to rub herself against the cushion again. Instead, her mind ran rampant with outrageous thoughts. As a consequence, she didn't fall asleep before the hour of the wolf.
Chapter 11

The next morning, Sansa was bleary-eyed when the maids woke her. So the servant women paid even more attention to give her an impeccable look and applied all the little beauty tricks one could think of.

Sansa put on her brown dress and thought once again how elegant and becoming it was without attracting unnecessary attention. It would also be easy to hide her hands in the folds to keep other people from noticing her shaking hands. Since she didn't know whether it was a good idea to wear the scanty jewellery Joffrey had given her when they had been betrothed Sansa rather decided to wear a thin lace shawl.

When Sansa finally arrived at court, she stayed at the back of the throne room, like she preferred it to do these days. Cersei was nowhere to be seen, thank the heavens; perhaps she was suffering from her 'female affliction' or from a hangover.

However, all the other important people where present, so whatever would happen now would still be all too public.

Sansa's heart dropped into her slippers when she heard whispers about Robb having won yet another skirmish against the royal faction.

“Gods no! They'll beat me again! And Tywin... will he let it happen? Was that what he wanted to warn me of?”

She was close to making water on herself, even more so when she saw the Lord Hand's stony face.

As soon as Joffrey arrived shortly after Lord Baelish, the king's face told everyone at once that he was in a bad mood. However, he didn't address the skirmish or punish Sansa right away.

She overheard from two courtiers in front of her that the king had been present in the Small Council for once and had already thrown a tantrum there. Sansa could only pray the king had burned out his anger in that unholy congregation.

The court session began without anyone bringing up the skirmish. Rather, one petitioner came after
the next as usual. And the Lord Hand dealt with them while the king's mind was elsewhere most of the time.

Suddenly, Lord Baelish advanced the Iron Throne with a request.

“He came in right before Joffrey. They must have talked about this before,” Sansa thought and felt sick, though she didn't know why.

“You Grace,” the short man spoke up in what Sansa found an oily voice. “The last war reports have shown how right you did by ending your first betrothal. Recent news have shown that nothing good would have come from it. However, Lady Sansa is still your ward and has flowered. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to find her another groom. I'd offer myself, now that I'm the liege lord of Harrenhal and the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands.”

Joffrey's eyes lit up for the first time that day, a vicious sparkle entered his eyes, and Sansa was close to throwing up then and there.

Just as the king wanted to speak, Lord Lannister cut in: “Only an oaf would agree to such a request, Lord Baelish. You've prided yourself of being Lady Catelyn Stark's friend in the past, even her lover – and you want to wed her daughter? Now that her treacherous son and Lady Sansa's brother has had a temporary success? I must ask myself what to make of your idea. Is your old friendship for the Starks stronger than I thought? Do you want to get Lady Sansa out of King's Landing? To hand her back to her family? Both you and her have got intimate knowledge of this court and of the realm. No, no, no. While I do agree that the Lady Sansa should be bound to someone in marriage I also know it must be someone on whose loyalty His Grace can count – and also someone who can rein Lady Sansa in and keep her under surveillance. A strong man. With a strong hand. You, Lord Baelish, may have risen in status, politically speaking, but you are not the right man.”

Lord Baelish did not cringe, Sansa had to give him that. Instead, he tried to weasel himself out of the situation he had brought himself into, using honeyed words like he always did.

In the end, the short man managed to lull the king's fickle temper, but the chance to talk Joffrey into wedding Sansa off to the Mockingbird was lost.

Sansa was close to relaxing a fraction... when Tyrion suddenly spoke up and addressed his father in that sarcastic tone of him: “Well, father – if you want a strong and loyal man for the Stark girl who's also good at controlling and bossing around others... why not marry her yourself? The only other one you trust is uncle Kevan, and he was married to auntie Dorna the last time I looked.”

On hearing this jape, Lord Lannister sat up even straighter than he had already done. Ire flared up in
his green eyes – Sansa could even see it from a distance. She paled and saw Lord Tywin's hands turn into fists.

“This is NOT funny, Tyrion.”

At that point, Joffrey interrupted him with a malicious grin that would have gone round his head, if his ears hadn't stopped it: “I didn't take it as a joke, grandfather. Actually, it is a perfect idea. You'd be the most capable man when it comes to showing Sansa where her place is. And it would even be a great honour for her to wed the Lord of Lannister.”

Joffrey pronounced the word 'honour' the same way he had done when he had mentioned the term 'mercy' in front of her father on the day of Lord Stark's execution.

Lord Tywin growled: “Your Grace, we're at war with her brother.”

Joffrey smirked: “Splendid! You can give her Robb Stark's head as a belated present. And who else could keep her under control so well? – Septon Folrey, where are you? Step ahead! I order you to wed these two at once. – And Lady Sansa, where are you? Come here!”

A mousy septon, who worked in the sept of the Red Keep, appeared in front of the Iron Throne. He was wringing his hands. Sansa left the mass of the crowd as well and couldn't sense her feet as she walked up to the king.

Lord Tywin positively looked as if he wanted to tear his grandson apart mid-air.

He spat: “Do you think this mummery is a fine prank?”

Joffrey's eyes widened in sardonic glee.

“Well, make sure it's no prank, grandfather, and leave this room right after the ceremony to bed her. If you're still capable of such a thing, that is.”

That was the very moment when Sansa realised Joffrey had just made himself an enemy. The deadliest enemy one could think of.

“Lord Tywin isn't protesting half as fiercely as he could,” she suddenly realised. “But to what end?”
Some more perceptive courtiers were shifting uncomfortably. Tyrion was amongst them. But as one could expect, the king was oblivious to these details.

Lord Lannister spoke up: “I know my duty, Your Grace. But as you've just pointed out, I'm not the young man I used to be and will have to employ my powers wisely. If you order me to marry this air-headed girl, I won't be able to serve as your Hand anymore.”

The court waited with baited breath.

Sansa realised: “Everyone is thinking Lord Tywin is blackmailing Joffrey so as to make him discard the idea of the marriage. Only... this isn't true. He knows his grandson too well.”

And sure enough, Joffrey looked to jubilant.

His sparkling eyes said: “I'm getting rid of my stupid tyrannical regent of a grandfather. I'll be free! I'll have more power!”

Aloud, he said in a haughty voice: “Why, I can understand that, grandfather. I'll grant you your wish and relieve you of the burden of being my Hand. And now – marry the Stark girl!”

Lord Tywin took off the chain that had indicated his position as the king's Hand and placed it onto the table with the scrolls in front of him. His eyes were cold, and never had a man looked less defeated.

Cloaks in Lannister colours were brought, and then, Sansa and Lord Tywin stood in front of the Iron Throne, and in front of the fidgeting septon as well. Sansa had a feeling as if she were watching herself from outside her body. Her voice was lifeless when she spoke her vows, whereas Lord Tywin's trembled with badly-retained fury. In the end, Sansa felt how one cloak was removed and replaced with another, and there was the quickest, driest peck on her lips one could possibly conceive.

Now, the septon only had to announce what Sansa already knew: she had become Lady Lannister. Once this was done, her knees buckled under her, and she sank to the ground. Her vision faded for a moment, but she could still hear Joffrey's evil cackle.

Next, there was an iron grip around her arm.

“My lady! Will you pull yourself together!” she heard Lord Tywin hiss, and Sansa tried her best to
“Grandfather, you're excused to bed your bride now,” Joffrey crowed. “You may leave the throne room at once.”

Sansa was shaking like a leaf when her groom led her out of the hall. From the corners of her eyes she could make out the whispering, gossiping, gloating courtiers. She would have liked to throw up on one of them, but she told herself she wouldn't start her life as Lady Lannister like that.

No sooner had the big folding doors closed behind their backs than Lord Tywin hissed: “This didn't go as expected. AT ALL.”
Chapter 12

He dragged a breathless Sansa down the corridors, towards the Tower of the Hand. Before they arrived near that tract, however, Lord Tywin pulled her into a narrow side corridor all of a sudden. And there, he found a door Sansa had never known, wrenched it open and pushed her into the room behind. He followed suit and closed the door. It had all happened so fast that nobody had seen his move.

Sansa looked around, her brow furrowed. They were in an abandoned chamber not unlike her own one. There was a narrow bed, a chest and a row of shelves. Those were covered with dust, thus proving that nobody had been here for a long time.

“What is it, my lord?” Sansa panted and pressed a hand onto her chest to catch her breath.

Lord Lannister snarled: “I don't trust anyone further than I can throw him or her, and I don't want anyone to lurk around and to try to eavesdrop.”

Sansa swallowed.

She asked: “You said things didn't go as planned. What went wrong?”

Tywin answered in a voice that trembled with rage: “I had a feeling Baelish was up to something, but didn't know for sure, otherwise I’d have dealt with him accordingly before the court session. Besides, in the late afternoon, I had received a message from the Riverlands with the news that some of your brother's men had been spotted and that a fight was imminent. So I expected I'd have to be rough towards you at court, and I had also planned to keep Baelish at bay. It would all have worked out and I'd still be the Hand – if not for my blasted gnome of a son.”

Wham!

Lord Tywin's fist crashed against the wall, so heavily that dust and plaster came off of it in big flakes.

Sansa squealed.

Next, she took her groom's hand and called: “My lord! Please! Don't! Look at your knuckles! They're bleeding.”

The elderly man stared at her and the way she held his hand. His eyebrows moved up.

A moment later, he stiffened and tore his hand away.

“I'm not a delicate icing on a cake. Come to think of 'delicate' and 'blood' – lift your skirts. People will want to see red stains on a piece of cloth. And there will be no linen to present. Buggers.”
Lord Tywin unceremoniously pushed up the layers of fabric and exposed Sansa's smallclothes. Sansa squealed a second time and watched her groom rub the blood from his hands on the cloth.

Meanwhile, he growled: “This inbred bastard of a grandson. I've given him more chances than I would have ever granted anyone else. I saved his sorry arse during the Battle of the Blackwater, and before as well, back in the Riverlands. Everything to preserve the Lannister heritage. And what does he do?”

“My lord –,” Sansa tried to appease him, but Lord Tywin was having none of it.

“Joffrey is too stupid. Undeserving. The only knack he's got is for pissing against the wind. To make things worse, Tommen is no alternative, because he's a retarded sissy. One of them a younger version of Aerys and the other one a younger version of my soft father. Fuck! I've striven to bring the Lannister family back to glory for decades, and what does my family do? Shit on it! And shit on me. I say! My own grandson asked me – ME, of all people! – if I was still virile. And in front of the whole court. Nobody has ever dared to humiliate me and been successful. Nobody! And he won't be either.”

“Perhaps things can be sorted out in the future?” Sansa ventured forth.

Lord Tywin scoffed.

“Oh yes, they can. After the way Joffrey has disqualified himself, the 'Rains of Castamere' will need a new stanza. If the Lannisters shall have a chance to thrive in the future, it will have to be without a certain faction. That much I've learned today.”

The old lion looked at her and didn't so much as blink.

“You will have to play a crucial part, my lady. You'll have to bear me an heir who deserves to become the Lord of Lannister.”

Sansa's skin tingled.

She said: “I've vowed to do my duty. And I take my vows seriously. But tell me – surely you don't want to kill Joffrey now, and to combine kingslaying and kinslaying?”

Lord Tywin glared at her.

“Do you doubt or do you fear I could top Jaime in that respect? Ah, but actually, I don't have to go to these ends to reach the desired effect. There are just two things I'll do, and both of them are perfectly legal. First, we'll travel to Casterly Rock, you and me. And second, I'll demand all the money back the Crown owes me.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Be prepared for the same feelings one might have at a gynaecologist...

Sansa felt a wave of dizziness wash over her.

“Is that wise, my lord?” she asked with downcast eyes.

“Pfft! If I were a wise man, I'd be a maester in Oldtown.”

“Then... how long do you plan to stay here in this room? What do you want to do next? I fear your daughter might try to have our wedding annulled. Maybe, the king will order an... an examination.”

Lord Tywin glared daggers at her.

“Are you so eager to get laid?”

Sansa gulped. Then gave a tiny shake with her head.

Her groom snorted once more.

“Fine. That makes two then. I will not fuck you on my grandson's order.”

Sansa's cheeks were hot, and she didn't know what to say to that.

Lord Lannister, however, continued after a moment of contemplation: “The problem is that you're right. We have to ensure that this marriage cannot be annulled. You have to lose your maidenhood. Now.”

The world started to spin around Sansa.

Yet, Lord Tywin's next statement brought her attention back: “We'll do it differently.”

“What do you mean?” Sansa peeped.

Her husband walked into a corner of the room where he had detected something that had caught his interest. It was a broom. He unsheathed his sword, took the broom and hacked off the stick.

Sansa's eyebrows went up. She didn't understand.

Lord Lannister sheathed his sword again and came back to her with the broomstick.
“This will have to serve now. See the rounded, polished end? It has to be inserted into your lower opening. It'll deflower you. It's basically what I'd do with my cock under different circumstances. Only you'll do it yourself. It hurts the first time. You've heard of that part, haven't you? Maybe, it's better for you this way, because you can feel what causes you pain and avoid most of it.”

Sansa's eyes bulged.

“Sweet Mother have mercy,” she whispered. “But this stick... it's so long and thick.”

Lord Tywin rolled his eyes heavenwards in response.

“Not everything has to go in. You don't want to catch a splinter from the lower end, do you? The first third will do. And you can prepare yourself with your fingers first. You will not panic, understood? Millions and millions of women have been through this, and they've pressed whole babies out of that opening. Your body will be able to handle this.”

Sansa was so unsettled she actually snapped: “And this piece of advice is coming from a first-hand expert, isn't it?”

Lord Tywin shot back: “I've been through this with Joanna. What was good enough for her should be good enough for you.”

After that, they both looked sideways in an awkward silence.

A moment later, Sansa turned around with wooden movements and stalked over to the bed. She half lay down across the mattress. Her groom sat down next to her.

Sansa asked: “The... the smallclothes?”

And her husband answered: “You can do it through the slit in them, or you can pull them down. Whatever. But you need to spread your legs.”

Sansa flushed crimson. She didn't want to put off her smallclothes if she could avoid it in this situation. But she did part her thighs and pulled up her skirts.

“What next?”

“Stick a finger in. Then two. Move them to widen the opening. Finally the stick. Think of it like a maester's examination to cure you of an ailment. It can hurt for a moment, but it's not carried out to do you harm.”

Lord Tywin cleared his throat and stared at the wall across from the bed.

“He's embarrassed, too,” Sansa realised and felt thunderstruck.

This detail actually helped her to cope with the situation.
Tentatively, she slipped her hand under her skirts and into her smallclothes. She was sure she had to be scarlet in the face. The fact that her groom simply leaned back and looked at the ceiling and not at her helped Sansa to relax. She thought she couldn't have dealt with his scrutinising green eyes.

Sansa pressed her lips together when her index finger started to explore her folds.

“Where on earth is that stupid opening?” she thought, close to panic. “Lord Tywin will become furious if I fail. I mustn't disappoint him.”

It took her a few more moments, but then she discovered the entrance to her womanhood. Her heartbeat, which was already fast, accelerated even more. Ever so slowly, she slipped a finger into herself.

“Oh,” she breathed.

To her endless surprise, there was no pain. She only felt a little tight; it wasn't comfortable, granted – but it was harmless in contrast to the blows she had received from the King's Guard men at court.

Remembering her groom's words, she dipped a second finger into her opening. Sansa pulled her brows together, because she didn't like the feeling, but still, it wasn't anything she couldn't handle. Lord Tywin was silent at her side and let her do what he had told her to do.

“Joffrey would have never let me keep control in this matter. He'd have inflicted as much pain and shame on me as possible,” Sansa thought.

At once, she forbade herself to think of the boy king and concentrated on the task at hand. She tried to widen herself as best she could and hoped she was doing it right. For a moment, she wondered whether she'd already be considered deflowered at this point or not. Probably not, because there was one last step she had to perform.

Hesitating, she removed her fingers and took hold of the broomstick. She gulped.

Lord Tywin said at her side: “Try to will your lower muscles to relax. Again and again, if necessary.”

Sansa gave a quick nod, though she wasn't sure whether she could carry out his advice. She used her second hand to guide the polished wood to her opening. Her lower muscles tensed, there was no helping it. So she breathed in and out. It helped. Carefully, she applied a bit of pressure.

The wood was colder than her body, but warmed after a few moments. Sansa's body gave way ever so slowly. Sansa pressed a little, and only when she thought she was ready to take some more, she repeated the process. She didn't like the feeling of the stick and wondered if it could ever be any better with a man's member.
“I wonder how much it would depend on the man attached to that body part...”

After some minutes, Sansa whispered: “Enough?”

Lord Tywin turned his face and cast a look at her.

“Should be all right. Change the angle a bit. Just to be sure.”

Sansa closed her eyes for a moment, then obeyed her groom. It hurt, but not much.

And her husband concluded after a short while: “You can stop and remove the stick. Welcome into the grown women's world. Though I'll have to show you yet what it actually means at another point.”

Sansa pulled out the stick. When she saw it, she winced in embarrassment.

“No blood,” Lord Tywin commented. “I told you it would likely be easier for you this way.”

“But... you do believe I was a maid, don't you?”

Lord Tywin glanced at her.

“I don't believe you'd have been able to put up a mummery on such an advanced level. Now rest for a few minutes, and then, we'll have to return to the Tower of the Hand.”

Sansa sighed and lay back at his side. She felt her groom's warmth next to her.

“May I?” she whispered.

“Suit yourself.”

Sansa hesitated after that less then inviting answer, but then, she pulled herself together and placed her head on Lord Tywin's shoulder.

Oh.

Good.

Sansa couldn't help herself and huddled closer. After a minute or two, she felt Lord Tywin comb through her hair with a hand. She realised she hadn't been caressed since her father's imprisonment, and a dam broke. She clutched her husband, held onto him for dear life, and started to sob into his doublet.

She thought she heard a: “What in the name of...?”

Only she was in no position to pay attention to it, and thankfully, her groom didn't shove her away.
It had to be ages later when the stream of her tears subsided, and she started to feel heavier and heavier. It was as if there were lead ingots attached to her eyelids. Finally, she simply drifted off into the embrace of a peaceful slumber.
Chapter 14

When Sansa awoke again, she felt warm and heavy. Safe. On instinct, she pressed herself against the source of heat at her side. A finger rubbed her behind the ear.

“Hmmmm,” Sansa uttered in contentment.

“Already turning into a feline, giving me headbutts and purring like you do?” she heard a voice in her ear.

Sansa’s eyes snapped open, and she sat up.

“My lord!” she said. “How long have I slept?”

Lord Tywin shrugged.

“Half an hour, perhaps.”

“Oh,” Sansa peeped. “I'm sorry.”

Her groom wrinkled her brows.

“What for? Falling asleep? Pfft. I'd have done something against it if I had considered it a slight. Falling asleep after intimacies is normal.”

“Oh,” Sansa made and blushed.

She gazed down at the Lion of Lannister, who was still lying on the bed and was at peace with himself, by the look of it. Sansa had never seen him in a mood that close to... to serenity, there was no other word for it. True, he didn't smile, but there was an air of smugness about him. Maybe, there was even a glimmer of delight in his eyes. Whatever.

“And this after his abject fury earlier on,” Sansa wondered.

When she noticed a slight soreness between her legs her thoughts turned to her defloration. The memories caused her to blush, but at the same time, she felt relief. Even thankfulness.

“I'm not a maid anymore. I'm a woman wedded and bedded and can behave accordingly from now on. I'll have more freedom. And a good position. Not as queen, but I wouldn't want to be one anyway. That's a stale dream of the past. And Lord Tywin – he gave me control over my body when no-one else would have done that. Back in Winterfell, even my parents only told me tie lie back and to let my husband do what he'd see fit. But that would have been worse. More painful.”

Sansa looked at the elderly man at her side and found she didn’t care much about his age. Joffrey would have been young – but he'd also have been a monster between the sheets, of that she was convinced.
Aloud, Sansa said the first thing that crossed her mind: “What do you think, my lord: can there ever be love between us? Or at least friendship?”

Her groom became very serious then.

“Love and friendship both require trust. How would that be possible between us?”

Sansa's heart sank.

“What then?” she asked.

It spoke volumes that Lord Tywin considered her question. Another man in an arranged marriage might have just ignored her. Or worse, laughed at her.

After a moment, her husband spoke: “There could be a measure of attraction. Some passion. And if everything goes particularly well perhaps some mutual respect. On a professional level.”

Sansa inclined her head and cast a sideways look at Lord Tywin.

“It would be more than Queen Cersei and King Robert had.”

“Indeed. My lady.”

Sansa's heart skipped a beat when he addressed her in such a way.

“I understand,” she said. “Hmmm, with regard to attraction... Forgive me, I don't know about such things, but shouldn't we try to kiss, now that we're married?”

Lord Tywin swallowed his own spit, sat up, and coughed.

When he had recovered, he said: “You're a peculiar one, do you know that?”

“He doesn't sound angry,” Sansa thought.

For a moment, they looked into each other's eyes. Then, Sansa leaned over and placed a shy, but not too quick kiss on her husband's lips.

“He smells good and tastes good, too,” she found and immediately considered repeating the touch.

Her groom eyed her up and down, causing her skin to tingle.

Under these circumstances, his next words were a disappointment: “We better return to the Tower of the Hand now. There have too many things to be done. Once we've left Joffrey's sphere I can still fuck you into oblivion.”
At once, Sansa's ears started to burn, and she cast down her eyes.

Suddenly, she heard a sound she'd have never expected from the Lord of Lannister: it was a chuckle. Sansa looked up and saw a spark of true merriment reflected on his face. He was smirking and suddenly looked more like an older copy of his flamboyant eldest son than he had ever done before. Sansa's heart started to pound like mad.

“Still more than half a maid, my lady, even if a maester couldn't prove it in an examination. Perhaps it's good that way. Come now, wife. Let's face the chaos outside that must have ensued today's court session.”

Lord Tywin rose from the bed, took Sansa's hand and pulled her up. He also turned serious again, and all Sansa wanted was another smile from this man. For the moment, however, that particular chance was gone, so she rather steeled herself for the inevitable that lay ahead: the conflict with the Lannister family.

Together, the two left the dusty room and returned to the Tower of the Hand. What they met outside the chamber door was no less than a full-scale pandemonium.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes


Servants were dashing in different directions, and courtiers were pointing at them. The latter ones only turned away to hide their gossiping when the Lord of Lannister glared daggers at them. Ah, at least Sansa was used to such vile court behaviour by now, but the fact that those people were surely chatting about what might or might not have transpired between the two yet had her casting down her eyes and blushing. The soreness between her legs did nothing to feel any more comfortable.

When the two arrived at the Tower of the Hand it turned out Tyrion and Cersei were already waiting for them. Lord Tywin's daughter looked like an old cheese gone bad, and the Imp was wearing the official Chain of the Hand.

“No surprise there that Tyrion has been given this post,” Sansa thought. “Cersei and Joffrey will both think they've found a weak man they can play like a fiddle because of his physical shortcomings. Or because it'll irk their father and grandfather.”

Now, if Cersei had meant to get back into her father's good graces, she bungled these plans once she laid her eyes on Sansa.

“You! Where have you been? Busy hooking your claws into my father?” Cersei yelled and pointed at her. “You whore! You stupid northern kerb slut!”

Lord Tywin reached her with three long strides.

Ffffatsch! And the mark of five fingers could be seen on Cersei's cheek.

“Don't you blame her for something that isn't her doing, and you know all too well she's had no hand in this. Don't you dare shame her in such a way,” the old lion snarled. “We've done nothing else but carry out the king's explicit orders. Now, she's my property, under my protection, my lady, and your new stepmother, no matter how weird it sounds. And while you've always had a vulgar streak, daughter, such wording is even below your non-existent dignity.”

Cersei's eyes widened, and Sansa thought the former queen was close to foaming at the mouth.

At that moment, Tyrion asked: “So you've bedded her indeed?”

Lord Tywin rumbled: “This marriage that you've triggered off – you did that on purpose, didn't you? As some sort of vengeance for that lowly woman in the past? You wanted to make me swallow some of my own medicine, am I right?”
Tyrion's face turned stony.

“Don't remind me of Tysha. Just don't. Maybe I had a thought of vengeance in my mind when I made that comment at court, but I didn't want Lady Sansa to meet such a fate.”

Before Sansa could ask herself what it all meant, Lord Tywin snarled: “Pah! You didn't think at all – you only followed your malicious impulses, like you've done from the very moment when you were born and killed your mother.”

On hearing these harsh words, Sansa became nauseous. She watched Tyrion stiffen.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door and Maester Pycelle entered without even waiting to be let in.

“Looks like I'm arriving at the right moment,” he said.

“Out!” Lord Tywin spat.

Tyrion, however, waved the old man closer. The Imp's face was pale now.

In a guttural voice, he spoke: “Lady Sansa, as you can see I've been declared the king's Hand, and Joffrey has tasked me... ah...”

He looked at Maester Pycelle, and it dawned on Sansa that her previous fears were becoming harsh reality.

She cast a quick glance at her groom, grabbed his hand and pressed it, just in the very moment when he was inhaling to yell at his son, or perhaps even to do something stupid. Sansa looked him in the eyes without flinching, and told him thus that she was prepared. Lord Tywin was radiating white-hot anger, so she pressed his hand a second time and shook her head.

Suddenly, they noticed how three pairs of dilated eyes stared at them touching in such a way, and Lord Tywin snatched back his hand as if he had been burned. Next, he retreated a step and looked aside, his jaw working and a vein throbbing on his forehead.

Sansa stepped towards Maester Pycelle.

She felt sick when she said: “Let's get it over with.”

The man led her into the next room. Sansa's face was hot when she sat down and lifted her skirts to allow his fumbling fingers access. She went as taut as a bowstring and winced, because she was still sore. That the man smelled like a dead cat only served to make things worse.

Fortunately, the examination only lasted a moment.
Then, Maester Pycelle nodded and declared: “There is no doubt the Lady Lannister has just lost her maidenhood.”

At once, Lord Tywin stormed into the room with balled fists. After he had allowed the maester to do his disgusting duty the old lion was ready to make his stance clear with regard to what he thought of such a humiliation.

As it was, he didn't get a chance to bash the maester to a pulp: Sansa's stomach finally got the better of her, and with a violent spasm she drenched the old man in the half-digested remains of her breakfast.

It caused Maester Pycelle to screech and to swear.

Lord Lannister stood there, frozen, and after a heartbeat he growled: “I bow to your perfection, my lady. That technique of yours was flawless.”

Sansa hid her face in a handkerchief.

Meanwhile, Tyrion called for some servants, and Cersei left with billowing skirts and the smashing sounds of closing doors.

When Maester Pycelle had cleaned himself scantily and had left, the Imp addressed Sansa: “I apologise for the... inconvenience.”

“Pah!” Lord Lannister cut in. “Just go and piss off the Wall.”

Tyrion sighed and turned to his sire: “By the way – you'll have noticed that I am the Hand now. So you'll have to move out of this tower and into another suite. But I'll grant you two days to do so. Because of the Lady Sansa.”

With those words, Tyrion turned around and waddled off. Lord Tywin sent a torrent of scathing curses after his son. Sansa didn't dare to look up from her handkerchief.

Once they were alone, the old lion prowled the room, up and down, up and down. Sansa remained quiet and let him think. No need to pour oil into the fire.

Suddenly, her groom stopped and at gazed her.

“Has your stomach calmed down?”

“Yes, my lord,” Sansa peeped.

Lord Tywin nodded.

“You need food. Me, too, as a matter of fact. We'll need our powers for the next steps.”
He ordered two platters, which were brought in soon enough.

Next, he called for the current Captain of his Goldcloaks. The man arrived within minutes and clicked his heels together in a formal salute.

“Ser Arystide,” Lord Tywin said, “my young wife and me will be leaving the capital for Lannisport tonight. By ship. Prepare a suitable vessel. And keep a low profile. One day and a half after we've gone, all the Goldcloaks will follow. But before you do so you'll send ravens to all the important places in the realm.”

Ser Arystide was too well-trained to glance at Sansa and only focused on the Warden of the West.

“Will I have to write the messages, or will you have them prepared, Lord Lannister?”

Sansa's groom shook his head.

“I'll write the letters myself. And now... look at this.”

Lord Tywin produced a big iron key and went on: “This is the key to the royal gold vaults. They don't contain much – and what little is in there belongs to me, because I've lent it to the king. You'll make sure the gold is on our ship tonight. If you come across any other valuables – fine. Retrieve them. I'm calling in all the king's debts to the Rock.”

Ser Arystide blanched, but nodded.

“I'll see to it. I take it you can give me a written order bearing the king's seal so that I can get past the guards?”

“Sure.”

While the two men were conferring, her blood was whooshing in Sansa's ears. She had known what her husband was up to, but she hadn't expected he'd allow her to witness him organising their departure. Her father would have never let her in on any details.

“I'm a woman now. With all rights and all duties. He's putting me to the test. I have to see to it that I don't disappoint him.”

Next, Sansa prayed to the Seven and to the Old Gods alike, hoping that all would go well until they'd make it safely out of King's Landing.
Chapter 16

Sansa was jittery all afternoon.

“It's normal for a bride to be nervous before the bedding – not after,” she thought. “I'll never be able to forget this wedding day for the rest of my life, no matter what.”

To soothe her nerves, she begged her groom for a task.

He answered: “You can help me copy these letters if you have a good handwriting.”

“Oh yes! That's something I can do!” Sansa called out, enthusiastic at once.

She sat down at the desk in the Hand’s solar, right next to her husband, took a model message and copied it within three or four minutes.

She felt uncomfortable about the content: the declaration that Lord Lannister was demanding the money back he had lent the Crown. Even though she was politically inexperienced, she knew that bankruptcy would bring Joffrey down within a short time... and lead the Seven Realms into another phase of upheaval. Many people would die.

“But many people would die under Joffrey anyway,” Sansa tried to tell herself.

And with those words, she grabbed the next empty parchment, dunked the quill into the ink and wrote.

When she strewed some sand onto the finished message, she noticed Lord Tywin watch her.

“What is it?” she asked, afraid she could have made a mistake.

Her groom inclined his head.

He answered: “I'm just wondering if we'll have a female Hand one day.”

Sansa's heart beat faster.

“Who knows,” she mumbled.

With her help, the messages were ready in no time, and the Lord of Lannister handed them to Captain Arystide.

Next, Sansa's maids packed a few of hers and her husband's belongings. She didn't own much, but Lord Tywin did.

He said to her: “We'll only travel with a small bundle. The rest can come later, together with the remaining Goldcloaks.”
“Will Melly and Deirdre come along?”

Lord Tywin arched an eyebrow.

“Oh, maids? One of them has got a daughter if I remember correctly. She'll want to stay. The other one is Captain Arystide's lover. She'll come to the Rock, no doubt about that. She may accompany you.”

Sansa blushed. She had known Deirdre to be in love, but she had only known the lover's name was “Gerry”. As she had to find out now, it was Ser Arystide's second name. To know the man who did the most outrageous things with Sansa’s chambermaid was embarrassing. But the unbidden imagery that bubbled up in Sansa's mind diverted her, if nothing else. The captain was a comparatively handsome man after all – though nobody could compare to Lord Lannister's overwhelming and intimidating presence.

At long last, it was dark outside.

“Let's go,” Lord Tywin growled in a low voice. “There's an underground way we can use to leave the Red Keep and to reach the harbour directly. Used that particular one more than once during Arys's days.”

Sansa swallowed, but allowed her husband to don a cloak around her neck and a second around his own one, to take her hand next, and to lead the way through a maze of tunnels.

Some of their servants were with them, all carrying torches and bags. They fluttered red-eyed rats, who scurried away with angry piping sounds.

Sansa felt queasy, but also happy they weren't alone in this network of underground passages. She also looked at the tall, slender man, who was now her husband and who was self-confident and sure-footed, by all appearances. His dark cloak billowed behind him.

“He's an elegant man, even here in the castle's underworld,” she couldn't help thinking.

After a timespan that felt long for Sansa, but probably wasn't, they left the last corridor and entered King's Landing through a massive entry that was hidden behind a big bush and that opened to one of Lord Tywin's keys. At once, Sansa could smell the salty, but also fishy air of the harbour. In the inky night she could still make out the solid walls of many houses, and down a road there were some reflexes on what had to be the water of the harbour. Seagulls were screeching above them.

“We're lucky,” Lord Tywin murmured into Sansa’s ear. “It's a cloudy night. No moon or stars to give us away. Just an occasional lamp in front of a tavern. Mind your steps. We've got no need for a sprained ankle.”
Sansa nodded and hid her fiery locks under a dark hood. With cautious movements, they made their way to the docks.

Ser Arystide was already waiting for them.

“My Lord,” he said in a low voice. “I fear your departure has turned out to be too unexpected. Or too expected. Who knows. The point is: I've found a ship that's suitable for the voyage... but I fear it's not suitable for your standards.”

“Where's my galley?” Lord Tywin hissed.

“Now that's a good question. If I had to put my wagers on a theory I'd say your younger son has had a hand in this. Your galley is in the dockyard for ‘urgent repairs'. Under normal circumstances, I could have found you another adequate vessel, but considering the necessity to keep a low profile...”

Lord Tywin cursed under his breath and Sansa pressed a hand onto her mouth.

After a moment, her groom said: “We've got to leave. I don't give a damn about the standards, as long as that nutshell is able to float.”

Captain Arystide nodded.

“I've thought as much and have loaded the ship accordingly with all the necessary provisions... and with the other objects you've ordered. By the way: the ship may not be luxurious, but it's fast.”

“Hmmmyes, that's at least some comfort,” Lord Lannister murmured and nodded. “No help to cry over spilled milk, as long as it all works out. Off we go.”

When their little group arrived at the wharf, Sansa's groom still uttered a sound of frustration once he set eyes on the ship that would take them to Lannisport. Sansa could only agree. One could see at once that there would be next to no space for the passengers, and even less privacy. Otherwise, however, the ship was relatively new and in a good state.

“We'll make do, my lord,” Sansa whispered.

Lord Tywin uttered a sound of reluctant agreement.

Suddenly, Captain Arystide cursed. Sansa turned towards the tall, impressive man, then followed his gaze... and felt her heart drop into her shoes.

On the quay stood a corpulent, bald man with a torch. He was smiling knowingly. It was the king's Master of the Whispers. Lord Varys.
Chapter 17

Lord Tywin drew his sword. So did Captain Arystide and those few armed men who had accompanied them.

Lord Varys kept smiling and said: “Now that's what I call a 'warm welcome'.

The old lion shot back: “I take it we'd be surrounded by City Guards if you wanted to stop us now.”

“Uuuh,” the eunuch made. “What an ugly situation that would be, wouldn't it?”

“What do you want?” Lord Tywin spat.

Varys inclined his head and hid his hands in the bell sleeves of his robe.

“You wouldn't take me with you, given how particularly interesting circumstances will become in the capital once you've left?”

“I wouldn't take you as far as a cock's length,” Lord Tywin snapped.

On hearing this, Sansa's ears turned red, and she tried to hold onto her groom's elbow, but he fended her off to hold his sword properly and to have a good footing.

Varys tskd.

“I've expected as much, but I wanted to ask you nevertheless.”

“Maybe, you want to instruct the High Septon about the fact that he'll have to optimise his leading competences in the near future. And with regard to yourself…”

“Yes?” the eunuch asked.

“I imagine you'll want to contact Daenaerys Targaryen, over in Essos.”

Sansa's head snapped up, and she stared at her husband in utter confusion.

Varys inquired: “And why would I want to do that?”

Lord Tywin snorted.

“You've always struck me as someone who could have a drop of Targaryen or Blackfyre blood in his veins.”

Sansa squeaked at the notion.

Lord Varys simply arched his eyebrows.
“Interesting concept, but not a relevant one. I'm only interested in the well-being of the Seven Realms. But pray tell me: if I assume I actually did want to contact the Targaryen girl – what should I tell her?”

Lord Lannister glared at the eunuch in a way that would have brought most men to their knees.

“Oh, that would depend on your personal interests, I'm sure. Could it be you'd be willing to tell her that the Iron Throne is ripe for the picking? Would there even be a chance you'd inform her of the fact that King Aerys's former Hand – a very competent and successful Hand – has exerted all his influence to make a take-over as easy as possible?”

Varys smiled.

“How fascinating. It's always so refreshing to be around you and to witness your sharp mind, Lord Lannister. What a pity I'll have to part company with you. But I can see you'll be in good company anyway from now on. I haven't had a chance to congratulate you yet. Please let me make up leeway now.”

Lord Tywin's jaw twitched; Sansa could see it clearly in the torchlight. She knew better than to interfere at this point and simply watched on with bated breath.

“Don't change the subject,” her groom rumbled at the corpulent man with the bell sleeves.

Varys sighed.

“But is there anything more to say about a completely hypothetical meeting with a young woman over in Essos? To my mind, this topic is getting somewhat jaded now.”

Still, Lord Tywin wasn't quite done.

“Tell Daenaerys Targaryen I'll acknowledge her claim to the throne and help her seize it if she's merciful towards my wife and my brother and his family.”

Varys's eyes glittered in the torchlight.

“You didn't mention yourself.”

Lord Lannister looked to the side, and Sansa felt sick from one moment to the next.

The old lion at her side uttered: “Given the chance I'd ask for a Queen Targaryen's mercy, too, but then again... How can I ask for something I wouldn't grant if I were in her place?”

“Mylord!” Sansa peeped in shock and grabbed her husband's arm.
Varys focused on her and smiled some more.

“Lady Sansa, please don't fret. This is just an exchange of ideas that lacks any tangible basis, fascinating as it may be. I must admit I don't know what a sort of woman Daenaerys Targaryen is, but one thing is sure: she cannot be any more enchanting than you. And now, I should bid you farewell, I guess.”

Sansa wasn't pacified in the least, but her groom gave her no further chance to think about it all then and there. He nodded at the Master of the Whispers, grabbed Sansa and dragged her to the ship.

“We've said everything there was to say, my lady,” Lord Tywin growled. “No more wasting time on land.”

Their group embarked swiftly, and the captain of the ship lifted the anchor as soon as Ser Arystide was back on the quay to carry out Lord Tywin's last orders for the Goldcloaks. Lord Varys had already disappeared in the dark.

Sansa couldn't believe she was finally leaving King's Landing behind after all those long months since she had arrived as a naïve girl. She took hold of her groom's hand. Lord Tywin blinked and glanced at her with knitted brows.

“Thank you,” Sansa breathed.

“What for?” Lord Lannister asked.

“A glimpse at freedom, fleeting as it may turn out to be.”

“Freedom is just a theoretical concept. Like peace,” Lord Tywin said.

“And like safety,” Sansa added with a serious smile and leaned herself against his side.
Chapter 18

This is the last update before Easter. To those who celebrate it: merry holidays! :-) And to everyone: have a good time.

All too soon, their musings were overridden by practical necessities considering their present situation. Since the ship was so small it had no cabins below deck, just one big storage room. That caused Tywin to snarl, but there was no helping it.

A big sheet was hung up in a corner to form a slightly more seclusive niche for the bride and groom, but it was nowhere near the privacy a recently wedded couple required. They'd even have to sleep in their clothes, because there was barely any possibility to change them. A second sheet at the opposite end of the storage room served to mark the privy of the passengers. Gold chests and other valuables were piled up at the walls, and the remaining people had to sleep in the centre. There wasn't even the faintest chance for a romantic mood, Sansa thought.

“Can't we make land when we reach Dorne and find a bigger ship?” Sansa asked, because she wanted to provide an idea to calm down her husband.

It didn't have the desired effect.

“Pfft! As if that was an option. Have you never heard of the cordial enmity between the Lannister family and the Martells? If they noticed I was aboard this ship, Sunspear would try to catch me and to pickle me in their hot spices.”

Sansa's eyes widened in shock.

“No! Seven help! I mean, yes, Robb is your enemy... but the Dornish, too? Are you surrounded by enemies? It didn't look like that from King's Landing. Your were the all-outshining lion general there.”

Lord Tywin actually screwed up his eyes, and didn't feel the need to answer her. Sansa blushed. Oh my, she was still far too naïve!

The problem was that she had more pressing questions she needed an answer for.

“Is it likely the Dornish will catch us?”

Lord Tywin proved again he wasn't one who'd cushion her fears, unlike her father had done in the past.
“There's a noticeable risk. That's why I omitted Lord Doran Martell on the list of receivers of my message about reclaiming the debts. I wanted to buy us some time before they'll notice we're on the run, so to speak. And if we're lucky, they won't expect us to take this route, but will rather believe us to travel on land. The captain and the crew are instructed to heave out the Tyroshi flag, and to pretend we're traders from Oldtown on their voyage home.”

“I see,” Sansa peeped, but her guts kept churning in fear.

How could her husband remain so confident in the face of such danger?

Around midnight, Lord Tywin spoke to her again: “You should retire. There's nothing you can do here, and sleep won't come easily under these circumstances, so you should try to get as much as you can.”

“I won't be able to close a single eye,” Sansa thought.

“You're not coming along?” she asked.

Her husband rubbed the bridge of his nose and sighed.

“I won't be able to close a single eye,” he said.

Sansa winced.

Then, she asked: “Can't we lie down and remain awake together then?”

Only when Lord Tywin stared at her did she realise how these words could be understood, and she squealed and pressed a hand onto her mouth.

Her groom scratched his forehead. Next, he shrugged.

“As you wish. Let's go.”

A few moments later, they slipped under a big blanket in their niche. Sansa had removed her bulky overskirts, but that was about it.

“Is it the lack of space, or am I not accustomed to sleeping next to a woman anymore?” Lord Lannister complained. “This bedstead is cramped.”

Sansa pulled in her head and apologised.

“Roll onto your side,” her groom told her, and she obliged at once.

Lord Tywin aligned with her, and she could sense his breath against the nape of her neck.

“At least it won't be cold,” she murmured.

There was a snore from the other side of the sheet.

In her back, her husband growled: “And it won't be quiet either.”
Now it was Sansa's turn to sigh.

To her eternal surprise, she did fall asleep without any problems. At first, her husband's presence was pretty overwhelming – but soon, she relaxed, tiredness claimed her, and she dozed off.

At some point, she awoke again and felt cosy, no less. She realised Lord Tywin was slumbering at her side. Suddenly, she noticed her underskirts had slid up, and that something hard was touching her upper thighs.

Sansa was puzzled at first – until she figured out what she was feeling. Her eyes widened.

“How is it possible?” she asked herself. “He's fast asleep. How can that body part be awake?”

She didn't know how to react and tried to wriggle away from her husband – only there wasn't enough space to put any distance between her and his... private parts.

Suddenly, she thought she felt him twitch down there.

“Oi! What's that? Is he all right?” Sansa thought.

At that moment, an arm moved around her middle, her groom pressed himself against her, and he growled contentedly in his sleep. Sansa could feel him even more clearly. That she could still feel his hot breath on her skin and that she could smell his scent didn't help her one whit. She became restless. Her female core started to pulsate, and she blushed.

“Oh my! What shall I do?” she thought.

After a moment, she decided to turn around. She hoped Lord Tywin would move around, too, ideally without waking up.

The problem was that her groom did not do her such a favour. Instead, his member was now pressing against her pubic bone. It only served to increase the throbbing sensation down there.

And then, Lord Tywin's breathing changed. He was awake. Sansa swallowed.

He didn't say a word in the darkness – but he rubbed himself against her.

Sansa gasped.

“How?” he breathed into her ear... and rubbed himself against her some more.

Sansa's breathing became laborious as he continued to tease her in such an outrageous way. She had
to bite her lips so as not to moan. On instinct, she parted her thighs slightly to grant her husband better access.

Lord Tywin was panting a little, too. He seized the opportunity and pressed his codpiece against the slit in her smallclothes. A knot rubbed against her most sensitive point.

“Oh! Oh GODS!” Sansa thought and didn't know how not to keep still.

The tension within her became worse and worse, and she remembered what had happened when she had rubbed herself against the cushion, back in the Red Keep. She dreaded a possible outcry.

Lord Tywin noticed her state, cradled the back of her head and buried her face against his chest. It happened just in time.

A radiant feeling seized Sansa, exploded and left her whole body trembling. Whatever sound she would have uttered otherwise was stifled by her husband's body.

When she recovered, she realised that her groom had opened his codpiece and was stroking himself – until he stiffened and uttered the faintest hiss. Sansa thought there was a wetness down there where their bodies touched, and she understood. Her cheeks and ears were hot.

“These are things that happen in the marriage bed,” she told herself.

And the confusing thing was that she should be frightened, shouldn't she, but she only felt a mix of embarrassment... and joy. But how could she feel joy around a man like the Lord of Lannister? Then again... why should she feel sorry for a moment's happiness after what she'd been through in the past?

Sansa was starting to feel warm and relaxed and drowsy again.

Her last thoughts were: “I've had something like a wedding night after all. And since I've got to lie in the bed I've made I'll try to turn it into something good.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

To those who are celebrating: HAPPY EASTER!! In Germany, we've got the tradition to put coloured eggs into a nest as a present. Here's my coloured egg for you. Coloured it right until midnight for you. ;-)
A little less external action and more inter-spouse dynamics/conversation. Plus the usual cliffy...

Lord Tywin was already up in the morning when Sansa awoke. How he had managed to rise without waking her was a mystery to her. Or why she had slept so long and so deeply with so many people in one room.

Bleary-eyed she got up, shook out her underskirts, blushed when she remembered the outrageous incident with her husband during the night, put on a simple day skirt and was grateful she didn't have to wear an elaborate dress for court.

Below deck there was only little light. Sansa heard a retching sound from the makeshift privy.

“Has anyone been drinking at night? Or has anyone fallen ill?” Sansa thought. “I better go upstairs to catch a fresh breeze and leave that person in peace. I can use the pail later.”

On her way, she passed a tiny kitchen. At once, her stomach growled, and she poked her head in to grab a morsel or two. A minute later, she stormed on deck, munching merrily on a roll and some strips of dried meat. Seagulls greeted them from above in their harsh voices. At once, Sansa saw Lord Tywin stand next to the man at the steering wheel, very erect, hands clasped on his back, and looking at a distant shoreline.

“Dorne,” Sansa realised, and a little shiver crept up her spine. She moved towards the poopdeck. Her husband turned his intense gaze towards her.

“Good morning,” Sansa called and smiled.

Of course, Lord Tywin didn't smile back, but his voice lacked its frequent sharpness when he asked: “Enjoying your breakfast?”

Sansa looked at the food in her hand, then back towards her husband and nodded avidly.

“Oh yes! I think the sea air is most invigorating and makes me hungry.”

Lord Tywin asked: “Have you been aboard a ship like this one before?”
Sansa creased her brow and shook her head.

“Is anything wrong with it?”

At that, Lord Tywin coughed into his hand.

When he had recovered, he said: “It's just that the servants are all seasick. Without exception.”

Sansa's eyes widened.

“Oh my! The poor ones. They should take a break and recover. I can manage without their help for the time being. But... you're all right, my lord, aren't you?”

“I'm from Lannisport,” Lord Tywin pointed out, and Sansa understood the underlying message easily enough.

“I see. So you've had your breakfast?”

“Trying to control me?”

Sansa blushed.

“Oh, I didn't mean it like that!” she peeped. “I just wanted to ask if you wanted some.”

She broke off a piece of the roll and held it in front of him, together with a strip of dried meat.

Lord Tywin stared at her. The man at the steering wheel turned his face away, pretending not to see the gesture. And then, Sansa noticed incredulous eyes in the rigging and elsewhere on the ship; they were all cast at the young woman attempting to feed the most dangerous lion in Westeros by hand.

Sansa's ears turned crimson, and she slowly pulled back her hand.

To overact her slip she asked: “Any signs of the Dornish?”

Lord Tywin picked up the change of the subject at once.

“Nothing unusual. Not yet. But we'll be crossing their waters for a while, so we'll have to wait and see whether we're lucky or not.”

“Ah,” Sansa said. “Will we have to stop at some point?”

Lord Tywin addressed the man at the steering wheel, an elderly man with a nose like a cob: “Doyle?”

The man sputtered: “Once in a smaller Dornish harbour for fresh water. The ship isn't so big and has
got less draught, so that's possible and we're not restricted to the big ports. Next Oldtown, just a brief stop for some fresh water and food. Final stop: Lannisport, according to Captain Collys.”

Sansa thanked the man for his report.

Next, she asked: “Can I stay on deck or do I have to go back?”

Lord Tywin shrugged.

“Don't get into the way of the sailors. Stay out of the sun as best you can. We've got no use for a sunstroke. And if the captain is against your presence you'll have to follow his orders.”

Sansa nodded once more. These were sensible orders. So she sat down in a corner, next to some barrels which shielded her from the sun to some extent. To increase the protection, she draped an empty sack across the barrels.

From below there, she enjoyed the fresh air and the rests of her breakfast. She felt great. The weather was so fine and the open view breathtaking.

“So far, this is the nicest day I've had for ages. Since before we reached King's Landing, I'd say. And this in spite of being married to Lord Lannister. Or rather because of it?”

A bit later, she went to the privy, but returned to her hideout once she had refreshed and cleaned herself a bit. Her mind started to wander. She thought of the danger the Dornish posed, of her future home at Casterly Rock, and of what the recent changes would mean for Westeros.

After some two or three hours, a pair of legs in elegant breeches appeared in front of her. She craned her neck to blink up at her husband.

“Having a good time down there, my lady?”

Sansa rose.

“Oh, it's simply wonderful!” she pattered and smoothed down her skirts. “I was thinking whether Casterly Rock and the West are similar to the coastline here.”

“It's greener, of course. And not so hot.”

Sansa smiled.

“Oh, I'll like that. For someone from the North like me moderate temperatures will be nicer in the long run.”

Lord Tywin uttered a non-committal sound.
Next, Sansa plucked up her courage and asked: “My lord?”

She didn't get an answer; it was her husband’s simple attention that told her she was allowed to speak.

“My lord, I’ve been thinking about many things. Now that you've left the capital... how will you proceed with regard to my brother?”

The Lord of Lannister tensed.

“Why, he's my enemy. I won't accept his claim to the Throne of the North – if that's what you've wanted to hear. Neither does he have my respect. He's not someone who risks something to save his family, given how he left you to your own devices.”

Sansa’s eyebrows rose.

“How could he have saved me? He had to fight in a war, and I was... erm... stuck in the capital.”

Her husband harrumphed.

“War has been all he's been focused on. Glory. Heroism. Braveness. Honour. All those things young men crave, because their balls are bigger than their brains. Your Robb can win skirmishes and battles, but he's not wise enough to actually govern the North. Your people are running into the winter unprepared, even I as a Westerner can see it. And you know what? Had anyone tried to keep Cersei as a ward against my will when she was your age, I'd have introduced spies and would have saved her by applying some tricks. Dirty tricks as well. Only it's not dirty to try to free your kin.”

Sansa balled her fists, even if her voice remained soft.

“Before I left Winterfell, Robb was always good to me.”

Lord Lannister snorted.

“My father was a good man, too, or so people used to say, and it nearly meant the downfall of our family. Now, I tell you something: I'll refrain from realising a plan I had hatched to ensure your brother's death. But it's not a weakness, best believe that. Consider it my wedding gift for you. But should your brother seek another battle with me I can only guarantee you I'll turn him into wolf hash.”

These words caused Sansa to believe the day wasn't as warm anymore.

Before she could ponder Lord Tywin's words, however, there was a call from the crow's nest: “Dornish ship abaft!”
Chapter 20

Uuuh, I'm sorry. No updates in April and May. Real life is coming. Occasionally, you may come across me on Livejournal or Tumblr, but not much more. However, I've had some recent ideas I want to integrate into this story. So I'm not giving up on this story. Big promise.

On hearing the call, Sansa felt as if the cold hand of doom was reaching for her.

“No!” she whispered.

Lord Tywin was nowhere near close to panic, in contrast to her.

“Below deck!” he ordered, and he followed her into the storage room.

There, he informed the seasick servants of the situation.

“If the Dornish come down here, you may puke onto their shoes. Anything to send them up on deck again.”

Lord Tywin looked at Sansa.

“Into our corner behind the sheets! It's good it's pretty dark in here. Let's hope the Dornish don't look around in great detail.”

Together, they huddled down in their secluded spot. Sansa was trembling in fear and pressed herself against her husband. She even wrapped an arm around his middle.

“Who are you?” Lord Tywin growled in answer to her behaviour. “Lady Kitten? Wouldn't be surprised, given how you're clinging to me.”

At least he didn't shove her away, so Sansa didn't care about his comment. She was far too frightened for their immediate future.

She breathed in his Sandalwood scent and all but buried her nose in the opening of his tunic. She even dared to place a tiny peck onto the patch of skin she found there. Somehow, it helped her not to panic, though her impulsive way of touching her fearsome husband should have shocked her in its own right.
Above deck, there were the calls of several sailors. She also heard the captain of the ship bark his false story about who they where and where they were heading. Obviously, the men were communicating between the two ships. What the Dornish said, however, wasn't audible.

“Please, Father, Mother, Crone, Maiden, Smith and Stranger – please don't let it end here and now. Not after all these changes. Please don't punish me for having taken a risk,” Sansa prayed.

She had not wanted to marry Lord Lannister, or to make a match with any Lannister man, but she had been willing to pay the price.

“Did father know what he was risking when he spoke up against Joffrey's succession to the Iron Throne? Had he decided it was worth the risk? Was he willing to pay the price? But no – I saw him in front of the Sept of Baelor, just before his death. No. He wasn't ready to risk everything. He even called himself a traitor, hoping to save his life. He, the honourable man, lied in the crucial moment. Why wasn't he the hero he would have others expected to be? Or did he want to save us? But no, that's impossible – calling himself a traitor made things only so much worse even when he was dead.”

After another moment, it dawned on Sansa: “Father wanted to live. Just like I do. People have always likened me to mother, but on the inside, I'm probably more like him.”

To her surprise, at this point Sansa felt her husband comb through her tresses with his fingers.

Oh.

Oh, how good it felt!

“Lord Tywin wouldn't lie on a scaffold, or would he? He'd deny such a statement, not because it's the honourable thing to do, but because he'd be too proud to give in. Then again... isn't pride stupid in it's own right?”

A hand moved under her chin and caused Sansa's face to move upwards. And then, the incredible thing happened: her husband gave her a short, but firm kiss on her mouth. For a split second, Sansa even felt the tip of his tongue flick against her lips. Had a bolt of lightening licked up her backbone, it couldn't have been any different.

The next moment, a sailor appeared from the upper deck and announced: “Everything all right. It was just a trading ship that wanted to warn us of recent pirate activities in the area. They're on their way again.”

“Fantastic,” Lord Tywin answered in a sarcastic tone. “So we're safe now – until another Dornish OR a pirate ship seeks us out. Now we have even two options to be stopped on our journey, not counting natural disasters and the like. And apart from that: couldn't you have waited another two minutes before you disturb me and my wife? Ah, anyway, I need to confer with the captain.”
Sansa's lips were still tingling from the kiss, and she flushed bright red. It was good that her complexion wasn't visible so well in the semi-dark. Meanwhile, her husband left her side with swift steps and moved up onto deck again.

Sansa had to stifle a sigh. And she had to stop the impulse to run after her husband to drag him back into their corner.

“\textit{Gods, what's going on with me?}” she thought and was downright confused.

Since she didn't want to think about it, because it might have become unsettling, she returned to her earlier thoughts. And suddenly, it occurred to her that Lord Lannister might not lie for honour in the face of death, because he was proud... but he would probably lie to save his family. If it was a worthy family part, that was. Sansa wished she'd never have to put her musings to the test.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Surprise, surprise!
I'm still in the midst of total stress and have got an average amount of sleep of only few hours, but somehow, sentence by sentence, I've managed to write a chapter. Won't be able to update regularly anytime close, but I didn't want to keep this hidden until later. And... FAIR WARNING FOR SMUT. Lots and lots of smut.

After this interlude, Lord Tywin was on deck for the remainder of the day. Sansa understood it all too well. Not to be surrounded by the castle walls – especially not the walls of the Red Keep – caused such a liberating feeling. So Sansa returned to her previous spot as well and listened to the waves and the cries of the seagulls. Slowly, her relaxed mood from earlier that day returned.

Some hours later, her husband's long legs obscured her vision once again.

"You should go below deck. Given your light complexion you'll have the colour of a lobster tomorrow anyway, but there's no need to turn you into a completely burned lobster."

Sansa got onto her feet.

"You're better off, my lord, as you've got a light tan."

"As a military leader I've been on the road for quite a while, not just in my solar."

Sansa nodded in understanding.

"All right, I'll go below deck. And it's also about time to catch a bite."

Lord Tywin arched an eyebrow.

"For someone so slender you're quite a hungry person. I wonder who might have passed that gluttonous streak on to you. Didn't take your father or your mother for someone who might eat a lot. And late Lord Hoster from Riverrun or your other relatives neither."

Sansa blushed.

"It must be the sea air. It's inspiring for the appetite."

"I hope it's also inspiring for another type of appetite."

Sansa's blush deepened.
“I... I'll see you later, my Lord,” she mumbled, eyes directed at the planks under her feet, and walked off to the staircase that led below deck.

In the evening, she was tired much sooner than she usually was. Again, she ascribed the effect to the fresh sea air. She washed as best she could in these cramped surroundings and put off her overskirts; then, she sneaked under the furs in her secluded corner of the room.

No sign of her husband.

“He's used to staying up late from his time as the king's Hand,” she thought, but her thoughts were already becoming fuzzy, and she drifted off into sleep.

At some point, she noticed Lord Tywin slid under the furs at her side. At first, it was more subconsciously, but slowly her mind came awake.

Her husband was turning his back towards her and appeared to be in the process of dozing off.

Sansa could smell his scent in the dark, and somewhere deep inside her there was a tug at her female core. She turned towards him, aligned with his body, and rubbed her nose against the nape of his neck, thus eliciting something akin to a sleepy purr from him. It triggered off Sansa's curiosity.

“If he's a gift for my life, he's a dangerous one and needs to be handled with utmost care,” she thought.

Yet, the point was still that a gift was meant to be unwrapped.

Sansa couldn't help herself: her hand sneaked under his tunic and found warm skin there. Her heart started to pound like mad, and she sensed this tell-tale pulsation between her legs she had come to know recently. Her hand moved upwards and discovered some curly chest hair.

Lord Tywin purred again.

Encouraged, Sansa let her hand roam his shoulders... and further when he still didn't protest. Then, her fingers found a nipple, which hardened under her inquisitive touch. Now, Lord Tywin's purring turned into a low growl.

Sansa pulled her hand back, but Lord Tywin's fingers caught hers. Next, he guided her lower... and placed her hand onto the bulge in his breeches.

Sansa gasped and didn't know what to do. This was so not ladylike.

“Gods! Septa Mordane will revolve in her grave!”

Sansa's ears burned. Yet, at the same time, she couldn't help herself. She wanted to know. And her
husband was obviously allowing the touch, even demanding it. So she gathered all her strength, opened the laces at his codpiece, and reached into his smallclothes.

As a consequence, they both uttered little gasps.

“Sweet Mother have mercy!” Sansa thought as she wrapped her fingers around his erect member, shyly, as if it were a raw egg.

Lord Tywin gnashed his teeth and pressed himself into her hand.

“Oh my, he likes it,” she realised in utter amazement.

Slowly, she traced his length, found curly hair, veins and some sort of ridge towards the end. The skin at the tip was so soft she couldn't believe it. She found the opening she had seen once and also noticed one of these whitish droplets ooze from it. She spread it with her finger in little circles, like she had watched him do it.

Lord Tywin hissed and pressed against her hand some more. They were both panting. Sansa returned her attention to his base and cupped his balls.

At that moment, her husband freed his private parts completely, grabbed her hand, wrapped it around his member in a firm grip and caused it to rub up and down, up and down.

“What in the name of –” Sansa wondered.

Then, Lord Tywin tensed, from his jaws to his toes; at least that was Sansa's impression in the darkness. There was a stifled growl.

Next, Sansa felt a sticky wetness on her hands.

“That's his... my... his...!”

Sansa wanted to sink into a hole in shame. Yet, at the same time she was thrilled that she could exercise such an effect on her fearsome husband.

The next moment, Lord Tywin wiped her with a handkerchief – and next his private parts. His member was flaccid again.

“What a weird body part it is,” Sansa mused and noticed him lace up his codpiece once more.

Before she could dwell on the thought any further, however, Lord Tywin mumbled into her ear: “All right. The spectacle is over on my part. Now let me return the favour.”

Sansa's breath hitched in her throat. What did he mean? Surely he wouldn't... or would he?

The next moment, his fingers were on her neckline and found the upper laces of her shift. With quick
movements in the dark that astonished her he made short work of the knots and exposed her breasts. Sansa gasped when she felt the cool air on her body – and the sound turned into a squeak when Lord Tywin’s lips found one of her nipples.

“Shhh,” he whispered against her skin.

Next, started to suckle and to nibble and to lick at her flesh.

Sansa pressed a hand onto her mouth to stifle a moan and arched her back. Lord Tywin let go of the first nipple. At once, dedicated himself to the second one. Oh, and he was as thorough about it as he was about everything in his life. He didn’t do things by halves.

At that point, Sansa couldn’t think coherently anymore. For a fleeting moment, she wondered how her allegedly oh so cold husband was capable of such heated attentions, but she didn’t want to ponder that idea. Nor was she able to.

Next, Lord Tywin pressed his mouth onto hers. At the same time, his hand found its way into her smallclothes. One of his fingers entered her... and his lips drank in the noises she couldn’t suppress anymore. At the same time, his tongue invaded her and mimicked the movements further down.

As if this wasn’t enough, the pad of his thumb found that sensitive spot of hers and circled it until tears welled up in Sansa’s eyes and streamed down her cheeks.

It was getting difficult to breathe, and she bucked desperately into his hand. Her husband seemed to know when she was close to the sweet relief she craved and changed his movements to prolong the sweet torture. Not knowing what to do with her hands, Sansa grabbed his torso and even dug her nails into the fabric of his tunic.

And then, she burst apart.

It was as if lightning would shoot into her body, or as if waves from a burning sea washed over her and tore her apart. The world exploded into shards of heat, and left her unconscious for a while.

When she came back to her senses, her husband had removed his hand and was wiping the salty droplets on her cheeks away. Sansa couldn’t help herself and cried some more.

What confused her was that Lord Tywin didn’t turn angry because of her emotional reaction. Everyone knew the Lord of Lannister couldn’t abide displays of intense emotions.

Finally, he purred into her ear, and she could feel his sideburns against her skin. His voice was rife with contentment.

“Well. Now even the man in the crow’s nest knows my first name, that’s for sure. He’ll have realised that my wife uses said name when she comes undone. And that she’s just enjoyed herself in the most
explicit way. Oh, and if he's not a complete oaf than man in the crow's nest will know a lion is capable of many things. Especially of pleasing a wife.”
Sansa's shame was endless. She couldn't sleep after their intimacies and kept pondering what the others on board the ship had now to be thinking of her. Surely, they were considering her to be a loose woman. Oh my!

The fact that her husband curled up around her and fell asleep at once didn't help to make things any better. Sansa found the Dornish heat below deck – combined with her husband's body temperature – quite stifling. She was sweating and felt sticky. To make things worse, Tywin snored. Not in a bone-rattling way, but loud enough to prevent her from finding peace in this situation.

Slumber only claimed her after hours, and when she finally awoke, her husband was already up and on deck. To make her misery complete, her moon blood had started overnight.

Deirdre helped her at once. The maidservant didn't show the faintest sign of derision or of contempt after Sansa's lustful experience. Was it because of the woman's own experiences with Ser Arystide? Who knew. It mattered little.

Once Sansa was presentable, she found out the other people on the ship pretended not to have noticed anything at night either. Sansa felt horrible nevertheless. First, her tummy hurt. Second, she had to tell her husband she wouldn't be able to stand a consummation of their marriage until her moon blood was over.

“Oh my, he'll be so angry!” she thought. “Or worse: he may still claim his rights, no matter what.”

Sansa felt nauseous when she arrived on deck. Her husband was standing further ahead and was looking out to the sea, hands clasped on his back.

“Such an impressive man...,” Sansa thought and wrung her hands, not knowing what to do.

After a while, Lord Tywin turned around and looked her right in the eyes. So she stepped up to him. He didn't say a word, just waited for her to speak up.

Sansa cleared her throat. And again.

Then, she whispered: “I need a private word with you, my lord.”
Lord Tywin answered in a low voice: “The way you're speaking to me now is likely the utmost privacy we can get on this floating nutshell.”

Sansa played with the hem of her sleeves.

“I... I've got my moon blood,” she murmured.

Her husband looked at her.

“And...?”

She shrugged and flushed bright red.

“Erm. I think we can't do what we did last night. Or... more. Until the moon blood is over.”

Lord Tywin inclined his head.

“And that upsets you?”

“It doesn't upset you, my lord?”

Her husband blinked.

“Why should it? It's a normal thing to happen to a woman, and I take it you'll be willing to do your duty in a few days' time.”

At that moment, Sansa understood that Lord Tywin was truly different from the men she had got to know in King's Landing.

On impulse, she replied: “More than willing.”

Moreover, she threw her arms around his middle and pressed herself against him.

Within a heartbeat, Lord Tywin stiffened.

Sansa looked up at her husband.
He growled: “Does the Lady Kitten have an emotional fit?”

“How can he be embarrassed of a simple embrace, but not of what we did last night?” Sansa thought.

Aloud she said: “It's because you’re so good to me, my lord.”

Her husband snorted.

“If that's your opinion, it only shows you haven't spent much time with me yet.”

Sansa’s eyes widened for a moment.

Then, she simply said: “You're right. We haven't spent much time together yet. Nowhere near enough.”

With those words, she let got of her husband, turned around without looking back, and went to the kitchen to break her fast. She decided she wouldn't allow her aloof husband to spoil either her day or her appetite.

“He's still treating me better than the other Lannister family members,” she concluded.

After a simple meal, she returned below deck and to her makeshift bedstead. She wanted to relax and hoped the pain in her womanhood would abate soon. Sansa nestled between the sheets and allowed her thoughts to wander.

“Perhaps it's not so bad after all that we can't consummate our marriage right away. It has all happened so quickly. We haven't been able to stop and think about things.”

Now, Sansa took the time to consider what it could all mean for herself. For her family. Even for the realm. She also thought of the way she had lost her maidenhood and came to the assumption that with her husband the process would surely feel nicer in the future. To her own surprise, Sansa realised she wasn't afraid of what was supposed to happen in the marriage bed. Not anymore.

She also liked that Lord Tywin had called her moon blood something normal. It was such a relief!
“This is so much better than my first moon blood,” Sansa thought.

Back then she had been so afraid of a marriage with Joffrey she had tried to burn her bedding with the red blotches.

“Things have improved since then,” she reasoned.

In the afternoon, her husband came below deck.

“How are things going?” Sansa asked him.

“We're leaving Dorne,” Lord Tywin said. “The dry Dornish heat is becoming more humid. I've talked to the captain. He thinks it's not a good idea to stop in Oldtown to get fresh water. The ship is small enough to dock in a small harbour. We're supposed to keep a low profile.”

Sansa nodded.

“I see. Ah, as long as we reach Casterly Rock safely I don't mind.”

By then, Lord Tywin was down to his tunic and his smallclothes, and he slipped under the thin blanket.

Sansa asked: “What do you think, my lord? What is happening in the capital at the moment?”

Lord Tywin uttered a low rumble.

Then, he said without the faintest trace of emotions in his voice: “By now, Joffrey will have been overthrown. Without money, he can't save his crown. Tyrion will surely have dragged him aboard a ship, likely to the Free Cities. He can smell problems through a wall. And Cersei will be with them, clamouring and drinking wine.”

Sansa was silent for a moment.

Next, she asked: “Will you allow me to write my mother a letter?”

After a short pause, her husband answered: “If you want to. But I'll read it. And you shouldn't put your hopes on this letter.”
Sansa furrowed her brow.

“Why not?”

“Your family will likely condemn you for having become my wife.”

Sansa sat up.

“Robb and my mother love me. They'll never be so harsh.”

Her husband blew up his cheeks.

“Your brother claims to be King of the North now. That makes him a very young king. And besides, he's a young man. Young men want two things: to prove themselves and to gain glory. War is what your brother wants, let me tell you. Our marriage is counterproductive in that respect, and he hasn't been able to sell you off to one of his vassals. No, he'll detest our marriage. And your mother... we know each other personally. She has always despised me and my family – and now that Joffrey is responsible for her husband's death she'll never forgive you for marrying me. She's a Tully. She's judgemental.”

“No!” Sansa exclaimed. “I can't believe that. I've grown up with both of them, and I'll try my best to help arrange peace negotiations.”

Lord Tywin clicked his tongue.

“The Lady Kitten has got big plans. That's good. But you should nurture plans that can be realised. Ah, but do what you must and write that letter. You'll see I'm right.”

Sansa found her husband's condescending attitude unnerving.

“What if I manage to secure Se... Jaime's release?”

Her husband stiffened at her side.

“You'd gain nothing from such a step. He's harmed your family. And biologically, he's still my heir. You wouldn't want his freedom, because he could threaten the claims of our future children.”
Sansa couldn't believe her ears. She cupped her husband's cheek, and Lord Tywin became downright stony.

“This has to end – on both sides. The need for revenge. The need for compensations. As it is now, your eldest son has forsaken his claim voluntarily. And even if things changed: it is true that I'll never love him for what he's done to my family. But I'll try to forgive him. Otherwise, the circle of hatred can never be broken. I'm your wife now, for good or for bad – and I'd rather want us to be a team.”

Lord Tywin sighed.

“He thinks I'm a naïve girl,” Sansa thought and felt hurt.

That, in its turn, triggered off an unprecedented wave of defiance: she pressed herself against her husband and kissed him on his mouth. Hard.

“I'll show him I mean every single word of it.”

Lord Tywin responded after a moment and kissed her back greedily. The kiss got out of hand all too quickly. When they broke apart, they were both panting.

“I must say,” her husband conceded, “that I may have next to no hope in your vision – but it does have its charms.”
Chapter 23

Their ship reached a little harbour south of Oldtown to load fresh water and food. Some people - the most trustworthy ones - were allowed to pass the time on land, because it would raise less suspicion. Of course, no drinking, fighting, gambling and whoring were allowed, because such behaviour could easily uncover their mummery.

Sansa and Lord Tywin stayed on board anyway.

"You're too easy to recognise," the captain pointed out to them, and the old lion agreed.

Thus, the spouses found themselves below deck and in their private niche once more while the others were at least milling around on deck. Sansa placed her head on her husband's shoulder, and Lord Tywin trailed with a finger through her tresses absently.

"So far, things have been far too easy with my husband. He's such a difficult character, but we've got along well enough since our wedding," Sansa thought. "And what's more... what am I feeling for him? I don't understand. I feared and despised him when I proposed to him, but this has changed. Am I in love? But no, that's not possible. I don't adore Lord Lannister like I adored Joffrey at the beginning. Or even Ser Loras. I still know my husband to be a cruel, ruthless man who has done many bad things. I'm not blind because of my feelings, unlike in the past."

"A silver stag for your thoughts," Lord Tywin interrupted her musings.

Sansa looked at him.

"I don't understand myself, my lord."

"That's nothing to worry about, because people usually don't understand themselves. You're wiser than most, however, to have noticed. And what is it you're pondering?"

Sansa swallowed hard and didn't know what to answer. Joffrey would have never asked her about her true thoughts... so this here was more dangerous.

"I... don't hate you. More than that, I... appreciate your touches. How can that be? You're so... I mean - look at the age gap. Look at our family histories."

Lord Tywin turned around and hovered over her. Fortunately, he didn't look furious.

"It's natural for a woman to feel a certain fondness for her first lover. Your body has awoken and is discovering a woman's needs. And those needs are new and thus exciting. Besides, you've been on your own for a while, and your instincts are looking for male guidance. That's all there is to it. Though I do appreciate you appreciate my touches. "
Sansa didn't know whether she should disagree. She thought of the Hound and of how he had tried to guide her. Granted, his attempts had been crude, and the man's character had been deeply troubled, so perhaps her husband was right. She craved to know what her husband thought about her, but Sansa feared the answer.

Thus, she opted for a kiss and placed her mouth onto her husband's lips. They tasted good, and Sansa stole another kiss.

Lord Tywin indulged her and simply murmured: "Female curiosity or not - you're a weird one. But for now, I won't complain."

Again, Sansa had a dark premonition about their interactions being too carefree. Perhaps it was because they were on this ship, in their own little world.

So Sansa said: "It's true. I am curious. I'd want to kiss every inch of you to get to know you better."

"Even the most private inches?"

Sansa squeaked.

"I... don't know. Perhaps I'd prefer to start with the other ones. But would you like me to kiss you... there?"

"Is the Lion of Lannister a demanding man?"

Sansa gulped in response and didn't know what to say to that.

Meanwhile, her husband went on: "Ah, the day we'll have a proper bed... you'll learn a lot, that much I can tell you, my lady."

Sansa blushed and felt antsy at the mere thought. So she changed the subject.

"Do you think the people will accept me as Lady Lannister at Casterly Rock?"

Lord Tywin dropped down at her side again.

"Why should they not?" he asked in an offhand voice. "I have married you, and at some point you'll be with child. A Lannister child. There's nothing to discuss about your status. And if anyone doesn't agree and dares to oppose us openly he'll have to face my wrath. And worse. I'd annihilate any enemy."

Sansa swallowed and knew all too well her husband wasn't exaggerating.

For that reason, she crept with her hand under the tunic. Her fingers found curly chest hair.

"Maybe, we should focus on the child aspect then? To be sure?" she asked.

Lord Tywin snorted.
"I welcome your enthusiasm for the marriage bed, but I've had..."

He faltered for a moment.

"I've had one wife who went through a delivery that was too much for her. This mustn't happen to you. I need children from your side to secure the future of House Lannister. So your body needs to be a bit more mature to reduce the risk of a miscarriage. Or an untimely death."

Sansa nibbled on her lip and intended to draw back her hand, but her husband stopped her.

He added: "Having that said, you'll find I'm no monk, and there are many possibilities. You needn't feel discouraged."

Sansa found she didn't quite understand the full scope of Lord Tywin's statement, but she did figure out that it was fine for him if she caused him lust with her hands. So she let her hands wander, mapped his body with her fingers and found once again, that yes, Lord Tywin wasn't a young man anymore, but he was impressive nevertheless. Apart from his member, length and girth notwithstanding.

"Really, this male organ is such a ridiculous thing," she couldn't help but think. "It can twitch like a bunny's nose!"

Of course, she was intelligent enough not to voice her thoughts on that matter and bit back a giggle. Besides, when her husband started to moan and to writhe under her touch, Sansa realised it was quite an experience to behold - even though she knew how fleeting the influence of her hands on her husband was.
When the people returned to the ship they carried rumours of a catastrophe having occurred in King's Landing, but there were no details to be had yet. That was the disadvantage about not stopping at a great port where the ravens would fly first with their news. Tywin simply shrugged and said his assumptions about what would happen had seemingly turned into reality.

If only Sansa were able to live with the lack of information as easily! Her slumber after nightfall was troubled.

Hours after they had set sail again, they passed Oldtown unseen around the hour of the wolf. In the morning, Sansa was torn between nervousness, grogginess and the enjoyment of a bright new day. The shoreline of the Reach looked picturesque with all its vegetation, and it was a wonderful feeling to be coming closer to their destination.

Sansa stood at the railing, because the sea with smooth; she breathed in deeply and felt the fresh air on her skin. Oh, she couldn't wait to reach Casterly Rock!

Approaching steps caused Sansa to turn around. Her husband was right behind her, hands clasped on his back, and was looking out to the land they were passing by.

Without casting a direct glance at her, he asked: "That song - is it from the North?"

Sansa's eyebrows moved upwards, and her eyelids fluttered.

"Song?"

Only then did she realise she must have been singing without noticing it.

"Oh. I was elsewhere with my mind. I don't know which melody you've been listening to."

To her surprise, her husband started to hum a tune she could recognise.

Her eyes widened.

"That's 'The Bard under the Heart Tree'. And yes, you're right: it's a song from the North. Did you like it?"

"I'm not a music person," Lord Tywin said.

"So you don't like to sing," Sansa stated.

In a matter-of-fact tone, Lord Tywin replied: "I sometimes pretend to move my lips during mass."

"Don't you have a favourite song?" Sansa wanted to know.
Her husband shrugged.

"'The Rains of Castamere' have been useful from a political point of view. I once had it played by an envoy when I had to deal with refractory Lord Farman. After that, no bloodshed was necessary to convince him of my stance."

Sansa didn't like that notion one bit. Nor did she like the song, as it highlighted her husband's cruelty. Yet, she didn't want to be confrontational.

"Would you sing the song for me, my lord?"

Lord Tywin stiffened.

"I'm not a bard. I'm the Warden of the West."

"Neither am I a bard, my lord. One doesn't have to be. And nobody would think less of you because of a song. Especially not that song."

There was a momentary silence.

Then, the Lord of Lannister began to sing.

Sansa was surprised; while it was true that her husband was no trained bard he had a clear - though somewhat sharp, metallic - tenor voice. What was more, he was capable of hitting the right notes. Ah, one couldn't deny he was a man of many abilities - especially unexpected ones.

The way he sang the song caused Sansa's skin to crawl, and she believed that the people around them reacted the same way. Granted, Lord Tywin wasn't an outstanding musician... but he knew what he was singing about. Knew it better than anyone else. It lent a credibility to his performance Sansa had never known from a bard.

When her husband ended, there was a pause.

"Not quite the romantic material you are used to, right?"

Sansa gave a tiny shake with her head.

"But you've shown me a few things with your song... though I still have to really understand what they mean."

"There are a few things you can only fathom with more experiences and growing age."

Sansa inclined her head.

"I believe you. I can already see a difference between myself when I left Winterfell and myself today."
Lord Tywin nodded.

"And since you're the musical person of the two of us I'm convinced you'll find many new songs in the West."

Sansa sighed.

"Forgive me if I hope that none of them will be like the Rains of Castamere."

Lord Tywin placed a hand under her chin.

"You've got a gentle soul. But look at my father to see where that will lead you. His softness was the reason that ultimately led to the way House Reyne ended. Life is for predators, not for game."

Sansa looked into her husband's eyes.

In a low, but firm voice she said: "My lord, you're so much older than me, and you must have seen so much more in your life. How is it you've never learned that gentleness doesn't necessarily exclude steadfastness?"

And with those words, Sansa turned around and went below deck.
Chapter 25

At once, she felt panic rise in her guts. Oh, sweet Mother have mercy! What had she done!? Would Tywin be angry with her now? Surely he would.

By the look of it, he wasn't coming after her to punish her right away, so Sansa suspected she had spoken quietly enough, and others hadn't overheard their verbal exchange. It was a small consolation. There was no denying that Lord Tywin would have wreaked havoc, had he felt slighted in front of others.

For hours, Sansa didn't notice a single sign of her husband, which was probably Lord Tywin's intention, and her nervousness reached a new level she couldn't deal with anymore. In the early afternoon, when she reached the breaking point, she grasped her skirts and walked upstairs to find out how the land lay.

Her husband was standing on deck and glowering at the people and the scenery around him with clenched jaws.

"So he IS in a bad mood after what I've said to him. He's just unlike Joffrey and doesn't explode at once. Oh no!"

Quivering on the inside, Sansa approached Lord Tywin while pretending to be all innocence.

"My lord, have we made good progress over the last hours?"

"Acceptable," her husband grumbled, but didn't look at her.

Sansa felt disheartened, but refused to give up.

"How much longer will we need until we reach the Westerlands?"

"Depends on the weather. As long as it takes. Not so very long. Don't you know Westerosi maps well enough to understand the status of our voyage?"

On hearing the clipped answer, Sansa's heart sank.

She stepped right up at her husband and whispered into his ear. "I apologise if I have insulted you in
any way."

For a moment, Lord Tywin looked at her, then averted his gaze again.

"You've got no idea what I'm like when I feel insulted," he stated in a cool voice.

"May I kiss you tonight then?" Sansa asked meekly.

Lord Tywin breathed in and out and looked still out to the sea, not at her.

After a long moment, he opened his mouth.

At the same moment, there was a wild call from the crow's nest: "Pirates!"

Tywin pivoted around, his spine becoming even straighter than usual, and his eyes widening.

"Below deck!" he hissed at Sansa, grabbed her arm and dragged her to the staircase.

Then, it happened.

There was a rope on the ground that had not been there minutes before, and Lord Tywin stumbled over it in his haste to get Sansa off deck. First, he careened against the hindrail, tried to grab it, but wasn't successful, and then, he fell down the staircase with a short yell.

Sansa screamed. Unbidden, a vision of Tywin Lannister with a broken neck popped up in her mind. Somehow, time stretched and trickled by like oozing honey. And then, she heard the dark thud of a body crashing onto the floor below. The sound was almost as ugly as the one of her father's falling head.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Warning for canon-typical violence.

When she heard Lord Tywin's moan, she sobbed in relief. Within one or two heartbeats, however, that lighter sentiment was replaced with sorrow again. How badly was her husband hurt? And what about the pirates? Had her husband just survived to be slaughtered by those people?

It took only a few moment until the staircase was swarming with people, mostly from below deck, since the sailors were busy with the threat from the sea. Tywin's personal servant was at his lord's side even before Sansa.

It became clear at once that the Lion of Lannister was in the process of regaining his consciousness after having blacked out for an instant; and it was obvious that he was injured. Sansa knelt at his other side and cupped a cheek while wiping her own one with her second hand.

"My lord! My lord! How are you? Where does it hurt?"

"Sansa...," Lord Tywin managed to utter and groaned, and Sansa took his hand and kissed his brow.

"My lady, please let me through," a man said from behind her.

It was Lord Tywin's personal healer, Roland Stone. So far, the man – a bastard of better descent – had stayed in the background and had only been busy treating the servants' seasickness. Tywin had simply told her he had hired the man recently – as soon as he had set eyes on Maester Pycelle in King's Landing. Now, Sansa was grateful to know the man on board and retreated from her husband's side at once.

A few minutes later, it was clear that Lord Tywin had a broken rib.

"My lord, my lady, this is a blessing in disguise," the healer pointed out. "Your rib hasn't pierced the lung. It could have all gone much worse. I take it you've known pain before, my lord?"

The old lion snorted in an offhand way, then hissed with a contorted face.

"I've survived my share of battles," he managed to say with difficulty.

Roland Stone nodded and explained: "This injury will be painful for the next couple of weeks, my lord. Bandages and bed rest. No riding, I fear. The broken bone has to heal properly."

Lord Tywin cursed.
"Having to stay in bed is a great punishment for an active man like him," Sansa realised. "It'll be my task to entertain him so it won't be quite as bad."

"What about the pirates?" Lord Tywin asked between clenched teeth.

His personal servant spoke up: "I've talked to the captain. Those people seem to be Ironborn. At least they've got a flag with a kraken. The captain says they've got a fast ship. Very fast, actually – but that we can be faster. It'll take us a while to outrun them, but outrun them we will."

Sansa had a hard time not to hug the man for the good news.

Ever so carefully, Lord Tywin was transported to his bedstead. He was pallid from pain, but was too proud to cry out loudly. Sansa took it upon herself to mop his sweaty brow with a cool, wet cloth.

"You've tried to save me," she murmured. "You're my hero."

"Pah, a very effective one as you can see. And if I wanted to save you, it was for selfish, greedy reasons," Lord Lannister growled.

He accepted a melting kiss nevertheless.

In the end, it took the Ironborn four hours to see they couldn't win and to give up the chase. Everyone cheered when the danger was over.

After that, however, matters became far more serious again. The sailor who had left the rope on the ground that had caused Lord Tywin to stumble had been found. The man was tied to the main mast with a bare back and was whipped until he lost his consciousness.

Sansa remained with her husband below deck. She flinched with every audible smack and every cry, but her husband showed an expression of grim satisfaction. Sansa knew an intervention from her side to be useless. These were the harsh laws of the sea, combined with her husband's thirst for revenge. Yet, she knew she'd never be able to witness this sort of violence easily.
It turned out that Lord Tywin was far from an easy patient, just like Sansa had expected. Tywin growled at his servants and at herself. The food was too hot, had no taste and was of bad quality in general, though he had never mentioned the quality of the food before his accident. It was too smelly and too warm below deck, and why were they not near Lannisport already?

Sansa did what she could to distract her husband.

“My lord, what can you tell me about Lannisport and Casterly Rock? I've heard people say they're beautiful places.”

“Far better places than King’s Landing and the Red Keep. Neither of them smells like a mix of rotten fish and whores.”

Sansa blushed.

“And what else should I know about my new home?”

Thankfully, her husband was willing to get his mind off his injury and was willing to inform her. Sansa found he was actually far more talkative than usually. Lord Tywin talked about the harbour of Lannisport, of how Lann the Clever was the forefather of the Lannisters, of how the entrance gate of Casterly Rock looked like an open maw, of the gallery with the Lannister paintings, of the stone gardens...

Sansa listened with real interest.

“Will you take me to the beach at some point? The scenery must be lovely.”

Lord Tywin bethought himself.

“I'll be busy ruling the Westerlands, but at some point, there must be an opportunity. But you'll have to get to know Lannisport first. The city is important. Crucial for the Lannister wealth. And sooner or later, you'll also get into contact with House Marbrand.”

Sansa beamed at her husband then and nodded.
“I'm so curious to get to know this part of Westeros. Surely, you are happy to return?”

“Mmmh,” Lord Tywin grumbled, “the Rock is my home. But there are also many ghosts from the past I sense in the castle. And there will be lots of decisions waiting for me. In short: no chance for nostalgia.”

Sansa ran a finger through her husband's sideburns.

“Winter is coming, as my family would say. Do you think there will be a welcome feast for us?”

Lord Tywin wrinkled his nose.

“I guess so. But I'll try to keep it limited. Some good food – better than this muck – and some talking, but not much dancing if I can avoid it.”

Sansa smiled.

“I remember. You're not a music person.”

“Indeed.”

“But at some point, I'll want to dance with you. We didn't do that on our wedding day.”

Lord Tywin screwed up his eyes.

“The seven help me. Why did they see it fit to grant me a second wife who is into all this romantic nonsense?”

“Because it needs a romantic attitude to develop feelings for you.”

“It needs lunacy to develop feelings for me.”

For a moment, Sansa's mouth hung open.

“Why are you so harsh with yourself, my lord?”

“Call it lifelong first-hand experience. And countless confirmations from other people. But rest
assured: there's no need for pity. I can sleep well enough in the bed I've made for myself.”

Sansa gazed at her husband.

“Back in Winterfell, I once asked my maester why he liked my little sister so much although she had such a difficult character. Master Luwin said that the most difficult people need our love most – and even more so if they can't love themselves. I'm slowly starting to see some wisdom in his words.”

Lord Tywin waved her words away like he'd wave away an annoying fly.

“Educational prattling for a soon-to-be wed girl.”

Sansa didn't agree with her husband's attitude, but she kept her mouth shut.

After a long moment, she asked: “I know you'd never accept names like Eddard or Rob or Rickard for any son we might have. Would you accept Luwin? It sounds Western enough, doesn't it?”

Lord Tywin wrapped one of her locks around his finger.

“We'll cross those bridges when we get to them.”

A short while later, they got notice that the ship had reached the Southern border of the Westerlands. Sansa breathed in, and her heartbeat accelerated. Finally, their voyage was drawing to a close.
Chapter 28

Once they had passed Crakehall, Tywin dictated Sansa a letter, because he couldn't write himself. Back in King's Landing, Ser Arystide had been intelligent enough to put a cage with two ravens on the ship, which would fly to Casterly Rock. Now, it was time to announce that the Lord of Lannister was on his way back home and that he would arrive soon.

"Kevan will be down at the harbour with the castle guard to welcome us," Lord Tywin said to her. "Of course, it won't be an easy meeting. He'll want to know why I behaved the way I did. And he won't like it if his Lancel has been forced to flee to the free cities with the other family members. I'm sure Kevan will be sceptical of you as well, my lady. Like me, he's seen what my ageing father did with that younger whore who claimed to be his lover, but who feasted on his wealth like a tick would suck an animal's blood."

Though they made her uncomfortable, Sansa was grateful for these pieces of information. She also counted on her husband to explain their situation and to bring other people to come to respect her.

Once the letters had been sealed and attached to the ravens, Sansa watched the birds take off into the grey morning air. The salty air smelled of rain that was bound to fall soon. Sansa's heart went out to the two animals flapping their dark wings; she could barely await to reach her new home. Besides, she thought of the ravens she'd send to her family. Winter was coming, so surely they'd have an open ear for any news that could help them prepare for the cold, cold years to come - such as peace negotiations. Sansa longed to see Robb and her mother again, and she couldn't share her husband's darker expectations considering her family.

After a while Sansa went below deck again. She went to their niche and stooped over her husband.

"The news of our arrival are on their way."

She smiled at her husband.

He simply nodded and looked at her with his green-golden eyes. Then, he raised a hand and opened the buttons at Sansa's cleavage. Her heartbeat accelerated at once.

"It is a pity, my lady, that I cannot show you all those things I had meant to until our arrival," Lord Tywin murmured.

"It's all right, my lord, you'll show me later then," Sansa said and gasped when his index finger started to caress the sensitive skin of her breast.

Lord Tywin's touch was gentle - involuntarily gentle because of his injury, Sansa suspected... but it was all the sweeter. She blushed in embarrassment, but her body jubilated. After all the time of harsh treatment in King's Landing, she couldn't get enough of any softer touches.

Her husband looked at her, assessing her reactions. The pad of his thumb started to circle her hardening nipple, and Sansa bit her lip so as not to yelp. Lord Tywin was very careful, because any movement hurt him, even his breathing.
"You don't have to do this," Sansa whispered. "You're in pain."

"I want to see you in pain, too - though of a more agreeable sort," her husband replied in a low voice, thus causing her womanhood to pulsate. "Come. Lean over me, so I can taste you."

Sansa's heart pounded like a hammer on an anvil when Lord Tywin's hand guided her body until his lips could reach her breasts.

"Is this normal? Is this what men -"

"Ooooohhh...," she breathed when he started to suckle on a nipple.

A hot wave licked up her spine, and her toes curled inwards. What followed was so incredible, yet so delicious that Sansa would have never anticipated it, not in a lifetime. Lord Tywin feasted on her skin, though she could tell he had to hold back to still be able to breathe properly. It only served to prolong her own experience.

He licked and nibbled and suckled on her flesh, and at some point his fingers found her sensitive spot further down. Tears of joy streamed down Sansa's face, and she nearly bit her lip bloody in an effort not to moan. Her thighs started to tremble, because she didn't want to buck against her husband and to cause him any more pain, but oh, it was so difficult!

At long last, she burst apart and sobbed in sheer relief. When she came back to herself, she could see pain in her husband's eyes, but this was extenuated by the definite air of smugness about him she had also noticed after their last intimacies.

Lord Tywin murmured: "The Lady Kitten looks as if she has fallen into a bowl of cream."

Sansa was already feeling flushed, but that comment made things even worse.

"Will we do that at Casterly Rock, too?"

"Would you want me to do it?"

"Yes."

Sansa felt incredibly embarrassed for being so wanton. And so candid about it. At the same time, she resolved not to be ashamed of any moments of happiness she was offered.

Lord Tywin looked at her, his pupils dilated. He uttered a low growl.

"When I'm back to my old self we'll do it all night, and in every possible position my ageing body is still capable of. Until we're so exhausted we don't know our names anymore."

Sansa squaled and pressed her face into a cushion. The mere idea was more than she could process. Yet. But she had faith in her husband he'd teach her how to deal with all of this.

Then, she stilled.

"Oh. I'm trusting him about the matters of the marriage bed. Maybe, I don't have confidence when it
comes to other things, but THIS...

She started to wonder how close she was coming to falling in love with the Lion of Lannister.

Sansa still had not found an answer when they were finally approaching Casterly Rock. Lord Tywin was placed on a makeshift stretcher and transported up on deck. He watched Sansa spot Casterly Rock perched atop its mountain and Lannisport nestled below for the first time.

"What a beautiful view!" Sansa exclaimed and looked at her husband. "What a beautiful castle."

Lord Tywin's eyes were shrouded with pain again, but there was a little half smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"This is my home. Our home now."

Sansa felt all bubbly on the inside when she saw her husband in such a good mood despite his injury.

After some minutes, the captain at their side suddenly said: "I don't like this. Something is wrong here."

Lord Tywin's focus was on the man at once.

"What is it?"

The captain gestured towards their destination.

"There's no activity in the harbour. Lannisport is usually brimming with life, but from what I can see, the city looks like a ghost town. Wait... I can see five men in Lannister colours arrive at the pier. Hmmm... none of them fits the description of your brother, my lord. I take it that's not a normal reception for the Warden of the West?"

Lord Tywin's jaws started to work.

"You're right. There is something foul afoot. Sansa, you'll go below deck. I'll leave the ship with my men first. Captain, if someone attacks the ship you must take my wife to safety."

"And where would that be?" the captain asked.

Sansa cut in: "No, my lord, I'm not leaving your side."

Tywin pretended not to hear hear and spoke to the captain: "Good question. If Lannisport has fallen we don't have many allies that can be reached via ship anymore, I guess. Now... Sansa, the Night's Watch is still neutral when it comes to matters of the realm, and I hope things haven't changed. You've got a bastard half brother there, Sansa, haven't you?"

"Jon?" Sansa exclaimed.

But Tywin was already addressing the captain again: "If it comes to the worst, ship my wife to Shadow Tower. Now take her below deck."
Sansa’s thoughts were spinning.

"I could see Jon? - No, no don't touch me! I'm not leaving my husband's side!"

Lord Tywin stared at her in a way that the Wall would appear warm in comparison.

"Go below deck, my lady. This is a direct order, and you will obey."

"No!" Sansa exclaimed, tears, pooling in her eyes. "Nonononono, I can't... I won't..."

But Lord Tywin's personal servant was already pulling her downstairs, and the captain sent a bulky sailor after them to watch over her once the servant returned to his lord's side.

Sansa started to cry. She had known it all the time! Those wonderful, romantic moments with her husband weren't meant to last. Her father had been promised life, yet he had been decapitated. She had been promised a golden prince, yet she had met a monster. The King's Guard, the allegedly best knights in the realm, was a group of dishonourable men. Nothing was the way it should be at first sight. Everything turned foul. Now what was going to happen once they docked in Lannisport? Would there even be enough time for her to escape in case of need?

Sansa hugged herself and rocked back and forth, back and forth. She could hear when the ship came to a halt and when the gangway was lowered. Sansa was close to vomiting.

What was happening outside?
For a moment, there was nothing to hear.

Then, Sansa could discern Lord Tywin's yell: "Liar!"

Sansa clapped her hand over her mouth.

"How can he yell like that with his broken rib? Oh my gods, what must have happened?"

Sansa expected shouts and the sounds of fighting at any moment. That everything stayed quiet was just as bad, or worse even. Sansa waited and waited, but nothing happened.

She addressed the sailor at her side: "What do you think could have happened?"

The sailor inclined his head, deep in thought.

"He must have received bad news, m'lady. Didn't the lord say he was expecting his brother to receive him? Perhaps he's dead."

If that was possible, Sansa's eyes widened even more.

"I need to see the captain!" she exclaimed.

"You stay here m'lady. Don't want your husband to tear me apart for letting you storm on deck."

Sansa wrung her hands.

"Please, good man, can't you go up then an contact the captain? I promise to stay here until I get further notice."

The sailor's eyes flitted to the staircaise and back to Sansa. He shifted from one foot to the other and rubbed his greying beard.
"I... hm... all right. I'll be back in a moment. You promise, m'lady? I don't want the lord to whip the skin off my back."

Sansa understood all too well and nodded.

Only two or three minutes later, the sailor came back with the captain in tow.

The latter spoke up: "Lady Lannister, please forgive me the delay, but I'm not quite sure what to do. The lord didn't stop to give me any further orders with regard to your person."

Sansa squared her shoulders.

"What is going on? And what about my husband?"

The captain rubbed the nape oh his neck.

"Your husband is being transported to Casterly Rock as fast as he can travel. I fear he has received catastrophic news."

"Has his brother died?"

The captain shook his head. He breathed in and out and didn't look Sansa in the eyes.

"The tragedy is much more encompassing. There has been a rebellion in King's Landing, just like his lordship suspected. The rabble invaded the Red Keep. But the outcome was far worse, from what I could overhear aboard the ship. The Lannisters and Baratheons of Lannister descent didn't escape. They are dead."

Sansa gaped and needed a moment to grasp the full extent of what she had just learned.

"Joffrey? Cersei? Tyrion? Lancel? Tommen? Oh... oh no!"

Even if she had despised Joffrey and Cersei and had distrusted the others, this came to her as a shock. So what kind of blow was this for her husband? This was not what he had intended to befall to his family. He had counted on Tyrion's survival instinct. What had gone wrong?

Sansa felt numb on the inside.

Still, she said: "It's quite obvious that I'm not in danger here. And if my husband wasn't in a position to give you any orders, I as Lady Lannister have to decide for myself. I need to get to Casterly Rock. You and your crew - would you be so kind as to be my safety guard until I'm there?"

For a fleeting moment, an inner voice told her she should set sail for the Wall. That she should go see Jon. But she decided against it at once.

"No, this is my place. This is my responsibility now. I am a wife. I won't turn craven and take the easy way out."
And as an afterthought: "Tywin needs me."

The captain was willing to escort Sansa to the Rock. Sadly, they could only find a donkey for Sansa, because all the livery stables near the harbour were closed. The owners didn't even answer their doors and had barred the entrance gates.

Sansa didn't say much and simply mounted the donkey. Together with the crew on foot at her side, she rode down the big road that seemed to lead towards the market place and further uphill to the castle. She looked left and right to take in as much as she could although she still felt dizzy from the bad news.

The houses were clean an in good shape, the street was not just trampled dirt, but cobbled with good stones; there was also much less refuse to be seen than in the capital. Lord Tywin had been right: the town smelled better, too.

But the group were nearly alone. The shops and taverns were closed, the market place bereft of all stalls. There were no playing children to be seen. And those few people who were walking by didn't look up and hurried away from the travellers. Many windows had little figures of the Stranger on their sills. In short: the town was in mourning.

Up, up the mountain they trotted. When they reached the gate, the sentries didn't want to let them enter.

That was the moment when Sansa pulled herself together, remembered how her Lady Mother was able to intimidate other people and declared: "I am Lady Sansa Lannister Stark, wife of Lord Tywin Lannister, and this is my place unless His Lordship decides otherwise. You will let me enter. Announce me to His Lordship, or to the castellan, but it is NOT your position to deny me entering the castle."

By the look of it, Sansa had picked up a thing or two from her mother, for they were all in the main yard a few moments afterwards. But there was nobody there to receive them. Only a pockmarked stable-boy was there to take care of the donkey.

"Go, announce me to His Lordship. You know this castle," Sansa said.

The stable-boy pulled in his head, he started to tremble, fell to his knees, and his eyeballs nearly rolled up.

"M... M'lady, I can't... why... I'm just a stable-boy!"

Sansa sighed.

"Then seek out another servant who can announce me to His Lordship."

The young man rose and stumbled indoors. After that, nothing happened for a while - if you didn't count a light drizzle that started to set in from the heavens.

"This doesn't look good, my lady," the captain said. "Your Lord Husband must have been too upset to even inform the household of your impending arrival."
"Yes, that's obvious," Sansa stated. "Maybe, we should go find the Great Hall ourselves and wait there. I don't want to get drenched."

The captain swallowed - but just then, Lord Tywin's personal servant appeared. The man had red-rimmed eyes.

He announced: "I fear the Lord of Lannister and the Lord Castellan aren't in the position to receive anyone. The men from the ship are supposed to get some guest rooms. They can stay until tomorrow. I take it that Her Ladyship's maidservant will arrive with the ship's cargo? And... Lady Lannister... I apologise, but your Lord Husband doesn't want to see anyone. You are supposed to inhabit late Lord Tyrion's room for the time being. Your belongings may be brought there."

The man swallowed several times.

On hearing this, Sansa felt sick.

"Tywin is mourning the only way he knows. By fleeing and shutting everyone out. Just when his walls were coming down. It may take a while for him to recover. Let's hope it won't take a quarter of a century like it did after the death of his first wife."

With leaden feet, Sansa followed her husband's servant.

Tyrion's room was everything a nobleman might ask for: fine, massive wooden furniture with carvings and gold inlays, beautiful tapestries, a window one could look out, a nice view to the entrance gate, and there were lots of richly decorated books on the shelves. The disadvantage about the room was that it was obviously situated far away from the lord's wing.

Sansa had a hard time not to cry as long as she wasn't alone, but once she had been left, she did let her tears allow to fall. For those Lannisters who had not been quite so bad, and for herself. She thought of Jon and resolved to write him a letter. She also recollected a fragment of the oath of the Black Brothers: "And so my watch begins..."
Chapter 30

Sansa learned a lot more about her situation within a few days. First of all, people knew about hers and Lord Tywin's marriage... and they didn't take kindly to it. There was no public uproar against her, but she saw no fondness for the new Lady Lannister in the people's eyes. That her husband buried himself in his private wing and rejected any meeting with her (and others) didn't make things easier.

Once, she came across her brother-in-law, but the man looked like an empty shell. She recognised him at once although he was a bit overweight, in contrast to lean Tywin.

She offered her condolences, because it was the ladylike thing to do, but he cut into her statement: "Keep those words for yourself. You - a Stark - hate the Lannisters, which is no surprise after what has happened. So you wanted to take revenge, and succeeded by turning my brother into a second, toothless Tytos. You even caused him to betray the one thing he's always held dear: the legacy of his family."

Sansa's mouth dropped open in shock, but Lord Kevan had already turned and was leaving her.

After a short moment, she called after him: "I forgive you your insolence because grief must have made you blind."

Lord Kevan denied her a reaction and kept walking away.

After that, it turned out that Lord Kevan was still running the castle as its castellan, and he refused to hand over any of the tasks a wife of a lord was suspected to do. Sansa wrote her husband a letter about it, but he wasn't even willing to receive it. At the same time, Lord Tywin didn't restrict her in any way, as long as the servants obeyed.

So Sansa walked around and got to know the castle. She didn't eat in the Great Hall, because it would have shown her isolation without her husband's presence. Besides, she didn't have much of an appetite. But she went to the sept, and she inspected the kitchens. She even went to see the imprisoned lions below the castle. Sansa also chose a reception room next to the Great Hall where she had people put up a high harp, and she would always come over after lunch and play and sing there, doors wide open. Of course, she only chose serious songs, nothing frivolous.

At first, people were sceptical and hesitant, but after a while, some of them started to listen and to linger. Since the lord and his castellan were not available, after little more then a sennight, the first handful of people asked Sansa for advice. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing, she found. It also helped her to learn a first few names in the castle.
On good days, Sansa also went down to the beach in the company of some guards and took Tyrion's books with her. In that respect, the room Tywin had allocated her was perfect. Of course, Tyrion's interests had been different, but Sansa found the volumes surprisingly interesting: the history of the Seven Kingdoms and the Free Cities as well as books about dragons had been the Imp's favourites.

There were even several outrageous books with explicit visual content that caused Sansa to blush and to put the volumes away... until she was alone and back in her room. When it came to Tywin Lannister it was likely best to be as well-prepared as possible. Sansa also started to understand in detail what her husband had meant with regard to "different positions". She thought she should have been scandalised, and part of her was. The bigger part, however, was strangely intrigued. She even started to have dreams of this particular quality. Often, she would wake up in the morning and feel wet between her legs, which caused her to be - if possible - even cleaner than usual.

One day, Sansa came across a particularly old tome; she read it indoors so as not to cause the pages to crumble. While perusing page 411, she suddenly sat up straighter, because she read: "On how to produc dragan glasse and to fyghte də undæde wyghtes from də Norðe." It took her quite a while to decipher the old writing style, but the text thrilled her nevertheless. Did the people at Castle Black know undead creatures could be killed with dragon glass?

Sansa didn't quite understand the description of the production process, but she set to work nevertheless and copied every single letter. Next, she prepared a more private message for Jon. Sansa gave him a short account of where she was now, and in which position. No emotions, no assessment. Lord Tywin would never allow her to send anything potentially provocative.

When she was done, she rolled up the missive and called a servant.

"This is a letter I want to send. Take it to my Lord Husband, and wait for his approval before sending it via raven to the Wall. Inform me if Lord Tywin doesn't want the letter to be sent."

Sansa bit her nails after that, but she actually got a swift reaction: her husband wasn't against her lines. Or he didn't care about them, but she doubted it. One way or another: she could send a raven northwards.

"If only Lord Tywin would show himself. Or send me a message," she thought.

But nothing more happened in connection with her husband. It made her sad.

To her great relief, Lord Tywin's armed men finally arrived safe and sound. They had dressed up as mercenaries guarding a long-distance merchant. The merchant was no other than Ser Arystide.

Deirdre, who had been beside herself, fearing her lover lost forever, shrieked in sheer happiness and cried wild tears of joy while clinging to her man. Sansa couldn't help but feel an envious stab in her guts, though she didn't begrudge her maidservant her happiness. She only wanted to be in a happier position again as well.

Ah, but Ser Arystide remembered his duties soon enough. And the news he told Sansa, after he had actually been received by Lord Lannister, were anything but joyous.
They had retreated to the music room near the Great Hall.

“Lady Lannister, my men and myself have been incredibly lucky to make it out of King’s Landing. All hell must have broken loose hours after our departure. We've got our information from people who had already heard rumors via birds from the capital. There were also some riders who were faster than us because of our disguise. And luckily, nobody was clever enough to find out who we actually were.”

Sansa put her hand on the man's arm.

“I'm so, so relieved to find you safe and sound. Please, do tell me what you've learned.”

Ser Arystide inclined his head.

“Yes, my lady. Now. The first thing we heard was that the king had had the Master of the Coin executed. The easiest victim who could be blamed for having failed to prevent Lord Lannister from taking all the money with him.”

“Lord Baelish is dead?”

“The very same.”

“What happened, good ser?”

The tall captain of the Goldcloaks shrugged.

“From what we've heard, Lord Baelish was gagged and buried up to his neck in the main yard. In the end, the man suffocated, because his skin couldn't breathe anymore. And when he was dead, the king mounted his horse and trampled the skull.”

Sansa breathed in an out. Lord Baelish had not been her friend, but she still didn't like the account of his execution.

“At least it was over for father in an instant,” she thought and felt a bit nauseous.
“What happened next, Ser Arystide?”

“Mhh, as far as we know, Lord Tyrion suggested an escape. He must have seen very clearly what would happen next. The king, however, would have none of it and pointed out he was the king, and his subjects had to obey, or he'd kill them. When Lord Tyrion objected, saying that it needed at least some subjects who'd have to carry out the killing orders, and that these people – the city and the castle guard – couldn't be paid anymore, King Joffrey answered that he'd kill any traitorous people himself... and shot his own uncle the same instant with a crossbow to make a point.”

The capital had trained Sansa well, so she didn't squeal. But she did swallow hard.

“I see,” she managed to say with a hollow voice. “What else?”

“King Joffrey declared your husband a traitor and demanded the same fate for Lord Lannister like late Lord Stark. And he wanted your head as well.”

Again, Sansa kept herself under control, like a true lady, but on the inside, she wanted to scream.

Aloud, she said: “I've heard that King Joffrey is dead now, which means that his thirst for revenge cannot pose a danger anymore if I'm not mistaken.”

Ser Arystide inclined his head once more.

“It's true, King Joffrey is dead. Once he couldn't pay the guards and servants anymore, they deserted like hares on a field. In no time, there was utter pandemonium in King's Landing. The mob approached the Red Keep with words like – please forgive me my frankness – 'inbred goldfuckers', 'shithead of an impostor', 'worse than Mad Aerys' and 'hang the false stag'. Since almost nobody from the rabble had ever seen the king from close up they didn't know exactly what Joffrey looked like. As a result, they hunted down anyone with fair hair, even the few remaining better-dressed elderly servants.”

Sansa's eyes widened; she couldn't help it. After all, she was finally getting a good picture of the developments in the capital.

She asked: “How did my Lord Husband react to your account? Is he well? He's been very secluded ever since he heard of the demise of his family.”

Ser Arystide scratched his nose.
“Lord Lannister is pallid and can't have eaten much over the last days, but he didn't so much as bat an eyelash at what I told him. Instead, he wants me to send these messages via raven. Which I'll do as soon as you release me.”

The captain of the goldcloaks produced some papers.

Sansa arched her eyebrows.

“Did my Lord Husband say what this is about?”

“As a matter of fact, he did. He intends to take sides with Stannis Baratheon, and to accept him as new king. Lord Lannister pointed out that sacrificing his own family so that Lord Stannis could sit on the Iron Throne should be a good argument even for – forgive me – 'a narrow-minded fanatic of a second-class stag'. And if you ask me... Lord Lannister has helped beat Lord Stannis at the Battle of the Blackwater – it's clear who's proven to be in the stronger military position; and now, Lord Lannister is trying to play his pieces in the Game of Thrones well to keep an influence in the Seven Kingdoms.”

Sansa shook her head in disbelief.

“Why Stannis? Why not Robb?”

Ser Arystide asked back: “Would Robb Stark ever respect him in an influential position? I think not. And if I'm not mistaken, Lord Lannister is now playing the Eddard Stark trump. Your father supported Lord Stannis in the first place, and made it public that there was some incest afoot in King's Landing. The Northern Lords will remember Lord Stark's attitude. Sure, many will only look for their own advantage, but if only two or three lords favor Lord Eddard's over King Robb's stance, it means a decisive weakening of your brother's influence.”

Sansa pressed her lips together. She didn't like all of this. Not one tiny little bit.

Ser Arystide spoke up again: “Lady Lannister...”

“Yes?”

“Your husband wouldn't have told me anything about the missives if he didn't want you to know.”

Sansa heartbeat accelerated.
However, she didn't smile and only said: “Thank you for your report, Ser Arystide, and for your clear political assessment, too. I'll see if I can't exercise a positive influence on my brother by corresponding with him. And now, you may go and send Lord Lannister's messages.”

Ser Arystide clicked his heels together and left.

Sansa watched his retreating form and thought: “I won't only write my brother a letter. I need to talk to my husband as well – and at the moment, I can only do it in writing.”

She sent a prayer to the seven heavens Lord Tywin would respond. One way or another.
Sansa wrote her message to her brother and her mother. Like before with regard to Jon, she kept her report short and avoided too much emotion when it came to the description of her marriage. She did emphasize, however, how happy she was to be able to communicate with them.

"As the new Lady Lannister, I wish to bring peace to the Seven Kingdoms. 'Winter is Coming', I have not forgotten the words of our family, and you'll have to prepare for the upcoming winter. I know it well.

A continuation of this war would help nobody. We must overcome our enmities and become supportive to be able to survive the next winter.

I promise I'll do whatever I can for a reconciliation of the noble families, especially the Starks and the Lannisters."

Sansa wrote some more, sighed, and wrapped up the parchment.

Next, she took a small piece of paper for another message. She only wrote three words on it before she folded and sealed the sheet: "I miss you." Once everything was done, Sansa called for a servant and said: "Take these two missives to the Lord of Lannister."

To her eternal disappointment, there was no direct reaction from her husband.

"If he were against my letter to Robb and mother, I'd have known it," she told herself, but it was only cold comfort. She had meant what she had written Lord Tywin.

Sansa's nose remembered all too well what her husband smelled like, and her skin itched to touch him again. Her need was so bad that she started to touch herself at night. At first, Sansa tried not to do it, but couldn't hold back after a while. That her body was becoming more feminine by the day added to the development of her desire even more. She dreamed of her husband all the while, and it helped to satisfy her body to some extent, but the effect was always short-lived. Apart from that, she kept feeling some embarrassment, and it did nothing to alleviate the yearning in her heart. Quite the contrary.

"I've known him for such a short while, and our marriage was borne of necessity. How can I miss him so much? But does he miss me, too? Have his ribs healed well by now? Oh, if only I knew!"

There was a moment when Sansa wanted to go to her husband's wing and to scream and to yell until he had to come out and to meet her. As soon as she mulled the idea over, however, she discarded it again. It wouldn't do to throw a tantrum as if she were late Cersei Lannister. She was the lady of this castle, and it was her duty to behave accordingly. Besides, unworthy behaviour would not work around her husband at all. So Sansa restrained herself and forced herself to be patient, difficult as it was.
During this time, the best point was the presence of Ser Arystide and his men. They told the other people of the Rock how King Joffrey had humiliated Lord Tywin and how the Lord of Lannister had only done what was his right. Given how the people started to respect Sansa some more it was obvious the captain of the Goldcloaks was spreading positive words about her. Though she couldn't prove it and didn't ask, Sansa also suspected that Deirdre added to it all with accounts of how well the spouses had gotten along on the ship.

Whatever rumors were circling in the castle - more listeners appeared during the music sessions, and more residents from the Rock wished to converse with her, wanted to get to know and to probe her. Sansa understood them well. She also remained very careful whenever things turned to political questions.

"What do you think about Lord Lannister's idea to take sides with Lord Stannis all of a sudden?" a hedge knight named Philys Braont asked her one day.

Sansa batted her eyelashes.

"My husband is very experienced a player in the Game of Thrones. He'll know what is necessary to do under all these... altered conditions."

"What about the Stark family then? Don't you feel sad for your brother?" Ser Phylis wanted to know.

Sansa knew now that she was on difficult terrain.

"You see... Lord Eddard Stark, my father, was the first one to take sides with Lord Stannis after King's Robert's untimely demise. So I don't think that Lord Lannister's approach is an anti-Stark policy. And I've offered my brother to confer with him and to reach a mutually beneficent solution in this feud."

"You are wise beyond your age, Lady Lannister, and we're all grateful you are the new lady at Casterly Rock. Even if Lord Tywin is absent and mourning, we can feel his acceptance of your attitude," Ser Arystide emphasised at that moment, thus cutting everyone short who might have dared to object her stance.

Sadly, Lord Kevan wasn't becoming any more open towards her. She only saw him and his wife during mass, but the couple avoided her. Or rather Lord Kevan was busy supporting Lady Dorna, who was so broken after what had befallen the family that she collapsed in the sept twice. Otherwise, Lord Kevan still carried out the practical day-to-day duties, like he had always done as a castellan: he ordered necessary repairs, ordered the purchase of horses and such. At least he didn't try to foil her attempts at being a compass for the castle inhabitants.

Sansa would have liked to get to know Lannisport better, too, but Ser Arystide advised her not to visit the city yet.

"The people here at the castle are starting to accept you, my lady, but the commoners in town don't
know you yet... and they don't like you. They'll need more time to find out about your good character."

Sansa sighed at that.

"What a pity. But what about a little excursion to the beach then? I could take some people along. Those who want to come. Nothing overly merry, of course, but something... relaxing, if you get my meaning. The first ones may need a distraction from all the mourning. They'd be ready to slowly start to look into the future again."

Ser Arystide clicked his heels together.

"I'll see what I can do about it. And I'll ask his Lordship when my next report is due."

Sansa placed her hand on the captain's arm and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Please do tell me - how's my husband faring? I'm so worried. I think he should be among those who make for the beach with me."

Ser Arystide averted his gaze and answered: "He's working in his solar from before dawn till long after dusk, from what I've heard. The ravens are flying back and forth between him and Lord Stannis. It looks as if some radical sticklers of the Faith are trying to seize the power in the capital, and King's Landing is in utter chaos. It's something neither of the Lords appreciate. But Lord Stannis intends to spread the cult of the Red God R'hllor. If you ask me that's like replacing fleas with lice, and Lord Lannister shares my opinion."

Sansa smiled, but her eyes remained serious.

"This is all very interesting and important, captain, and I'm grateful for the information - but you're trying to distract me as well. Don't deny it. Lord Tywin isn't sleeping and eating enough, that's what you're trying to keep from me, isn't it?"

Ser Arystide blushed, and it was all the answer Sansa needed.

"I need to see him, captain."

"Lady Lannister, he is the lord. And he has given explicit orders. Only his personal servant may see him. And I may report to him once a sennight."

"Does he want to know how I am?"

The tall captain rubbed the nape of his neck and looked towards the door.

"He expects an encompassing report of everything that is going on at the Rock."

Sansa tipped her index finger against her lips.

"The next time you meet my husband, you mustn't say anything about me until he asks. Then tell him I've told you he should come and see me if he wants to know how I am."
Her words caused Ser Arystide to pull in his head.

"Please, my lady, don't ask me to do that! I'd lose my position, and besides, your Lord Husband would fry me alive. He's in such a somber mood these days. And... forgive me... but I need this job. Deirdre... we both aren't sure yet, but I we think she's with child."

Sansa's eyes widened.

"Oh! That's the most wonderful news I've heard since I learned of your safe arrival at the Rock." She sighed and cursed Lord Tywin's difficult character inwardly. "I understand. Then go ahead with your question about the trip to the beach as you see fit."

One week and a half later, Sansa was allowed to go on her little excursion. It was a beautiful day, if you didn't count that Lord Lannister remained absent.

"It's half a year now that he's buried himself alive in his solar. I've been patient long enough. Tomorrow, I'll confront Lord Tywin, one way or another. Things can't go on like this. How can an intelligent man like him be so stupid?" Sansa thought.

She watched two children frolicking in the waves and saw Ser Phylis smile for the very first time while he was flirting with a chambermaid named Elssa.

"This activity has been long overdue. And what a success it is becoming!"

Sansa nodded to herself, and though she became a bit nervous when she thought of forcing a confrontation with her husband, she enjoyed her time at the seaside and was convinced she was planning to do the right thing.

"My lord, I need to see you. And you need to see me, whether you'll acknowledge it or not. We're a team after all."
As soon as Sansa returned after her enjoyable stay at the beach, she ordered a bath scented with herbs and flowers. For once, she didn't go to the reception room with the high harp, where she made her music. After all, she and the people from the castle had passed the afternoon together, and Sansa felt a bit tired.

Deirdre swarmed around her, humming to herself.

“She's glowing with happiness,” Sansa thought and smiled.

She said: “Ser Arystide is a good man.”

Deirdre blushed.

“Oh yes, he is! There couldn't be a better one.”

“When are you going to marry?”

At that, Deirdre's smile vanished, and she looked to the floor.

“Oh, I'm just a maidservant and too far below his station, my lady. His family would never accept me, even if he were free.”

Sansa blinked and couldn't believe what she was hearing.

“He's married?”

Deirdre pressed her lips together.

Then, she said: “It's a bit of a private and painful thing for him, so he doesn't talk about it much. Yes, he was eighteen when he married, and it was a true love match. But his wife lost three unborn children in less than three years. That made her ill – her body, but also in her head. Gerry – Ser Arystide, I mean – is still taking care of her. He has contacted the best maesters, and he's spent so much money for her to heal her and for people to take care of her. Nothing has helped, and his wife is living in her own dream world now. He's still fond of her in a way, but they can't be together like spouses anymore.”

Sansa gently took her maidservant by the arm.

“I'm so sorry. For all of you. I shouldn't have intruded upon your private affairs in the first place. And I promise I'll always give you a safe place in my service, without judging you or Ser Arystide.”

Deirdre showed a little smile again, although her eyes were still averted and sad.

“You've got a good soul, Lady Lannister.”
After her bath, Sansa donned her shift for the night and braided her still wet hair with Deirdre's help so it wouldn't be in the way at night. And all the time, she kept thinking about love and marriages and romances and how nothing was ever like the bards sang about it in their songs.

When she was ready, she picked up one of Tyrion's books; it was a biography of Vinsenya Targaryen. Of late, Sansa had found some interest in written material she would have ignored before.

“I've got everything I need, Deirdre. And I'm not hungry. These delicious lemon buns during the picknick on the beach have been quite filling, and I've eaten too many. You may retire now.”

Her maidservant bowed and wished Sansa a good night.

Smiling, Sansa sat down in the well-padded niche of her window, right next to the desk with a chandelier on it.

“Tyrion could sit here with outstretched legs,” she thought while propping up the book on her bent knees, and she felt melancholic.

Her eyes detected some movement outside in the dark. Several torches were dancing merrily in the yard at night.

“Perhaps a late merchant arriving at the Rock,” it crossed her mind. “If that's the case I'll go and meet him in the morning. People here need to know I'm taking care of the visitors. That I'm taking care of them all. This trip to the beach has been a good thing. I'll do something like that again at some point. But what about the inhabitants of Lannisport? What can I do to win their trust, perhaps even their hearts?” Sansa's memories returned to the children playing in the water, and to Deirdre's unborn, illegitimate baby. “I'll help those who are less fortunate. Orphans, for example. Only... I don't have any money myself. Maybe, I could teach them. Yes, that would be something I'd like.”

Sansa smiled to herself and started reading about Visenya, hoping for some further inspiration. But somewhere along the way, sleep claimed her while she was still sitting in her window niche...

WHAM!

The door flew open and crashed against the wall. Sansa jumped and awoke with a squeal. Her book crashed to the floor with a loud thud. As soon as Sansa realised what was going on, her eyes became as wide as saucers.

“Tywin!” she breathed.

And it was true: her husband was standing in the door frame. He was thinner than in the past, and pallid, but it was still unmistakably him, the Lion of Lannister with the gold-flecked eyes, tall, erect and every inch a ruler. The pride of the pack. His jaws were working.

Now, Sansa could have reacted in different ways. Cersei would have burst into an impromptu tantrum, other women might have flinched from him, but Sansa felt only one impulse and acted on it without any further thought: she ran towards her husband, jumped up, threw her arms around him,
held onto him for dear life, and kissed him with a desperate wildness she had never dreamed of before, not even in her most outrageous dreams.
Chapter 34

Her husband stiffened under her onslaught, and that caused Sansa to let him go. She looked up at him, but he didn't meet her gaze.

Instead, he said in a pressed voice: "It is my duty to sire an heir. Make yourself ready."

Sansa had it on the tip of her tongue to exclaim: "What?" But her education to obey was too deeply ingrained.

She also thought: "I haven't seen him for months. And something is wrong with him. I'll have my answers later."

Her body was already reacting to his presence. There was a wetness building between her legs she had also felt during their intimacies on the ship. She swallowed.

So Sansa walked over to the bed and divested her thin shift. The crackling flames in the fireplace illuminated her nakedness, and she blushed, because Lord Tywin had never seen her like this below deck. And he did see her now. Sansa saw her husband stare at her and noticed how his eyes widened and became darker.

He was at her side, so fast that she uttered a surprised squeak... and another one when she landed with her back on the mattress. Lord Tywin's hands were so quick Sansa didn't even manage to see everything and even less to prepare herself. Her husband didn't do any more with regard to opening his clothes than was absolutely necessary to establish body contact.

When he entered her, Sansa's mouth opened, but she found no sound in her throat that could have expressed what she was feeling. Lord Tywin plowed onto her with perhaps a dozen wild thrusts, and he groaned her name like a mantra with each movement. Sansa was so confused and overwhelmed that she didn't know what to make of it all - nor did she have the time to process what was happening. Her husband's muscles were already becoming taut, he threw back his head, and roared like a true lion. Then, there was a second type of wetness between Sansa's thighs and in her core.

Lord Tywin slackened; he collapsed on top of her. Next, he held her in an iron clasp and crushed her
to his chest as if he wanted to break her bones. Sansa had a hard time to breathe. At the same time, she noticed her husband was trembling, and she thought that where the crown of her head met his chin her hair was not only damp from the bath anymore.

It took some minutes for both of them to calm down. Sansa still didn't know what to say to their wild encounter. She was a tad sore. At the same time, she was overwhelmed by her husband’s presence and underwhelmed by what had happened. After the lust on the ship she had thought it would be comparable in bed, but nothing could have been further from it. There was some embarrassment in the mix, too. Her lack of understanding for the state Lord Tywin was in didn't help either. And she felt such relief he was finally with her. He was still there, further down, inside her... and soft. Somehow that was nice.

"What a mess," Sansa thought and wrapped her arms and legs around her husband to make sure he wouldn't flee from her bedroom the next moment.

She could breathe more freely now and asked: "Where have you been, my lord?"

"Busy being dead."

Her husband's voice was brittle.

Sansa said: "You don't feel dead now."

"You keep bringing me back, Sansa."

His words caused her heart to palpitate.

"If only you had let me bring you back sooner."

"You're more of a woman now."

"And you more of a skeleton."
Sansa squaked as soon as the words had left her mouth.

"I'm sorry."

Finally, Lord Tywin looked at her. His green-golden eyes were glassy, but quickly turning serious and more composed.

"Always so honest. Any more frank words for this old man?"

Sansa bit her lip.

"What, my lady?"

"Could you be gentler in bed with me the text time? Perhaps... take longer?"

Lord Tywin took her chin with his hand and gazed at her.

"If I were a humorous man I'd be laughing now. So you want me to do things like this?"

His hand moved down to one of her breasts, and the pad of his thumb circled her nipple. Sansa gasped.

"Yes."

"And you want me to move more like this?"

He ground himself a little against her, and his flaccid member rubbed against the walls of her opening where they were still joined. Sansa mewled. All of a sudden, her body was truly coming awake.
Lord Tywin uttered a growl of contentment.

"Good?"

"Gods, yes! And... can you kiss me? Please?"

"A Lannister always pays his debts. And I owe you more of an interest than I and the Bank of Bravos could ever pay if we combined our fortunes."

Sansa wanted to say it all had nothing to do with money, but she never got the chance to comment on her husband's words: Lord Tywin put his lips onto hers, his tongue slid between them and teased her own one, and at the same time, he started to ground himself against her again and again. At the same time, his fingers found her sensitive spot, down where they were joined. Sansa forgot everything around them. Her world turned into bright, sparkling colours.

There were some guttural sounds deep in her throat, but she couldn't even think of any coherent words.

After a while, bliss turned into agony: Lord Tywin had alleviated his own needs, and he was in no hurry to bring this round to an end. He was obviously very capable of enjoying their intimacies without an aroused member, and Sansa's desperate need for sweet relief seemed to be the crucial point about it. Whenever she was coming close to bursting apart, he paused or changed the angle a little so that the friction was elsewhere. Enough to drive her mad, but not enough for what Sansa was craving. She cried, she begged for an end, but mercy wasn't Lord Tywin's forte.

"Shhht," he murmured and licked the edge of her ear. "It will be even better if you can last a little longer."

When the wild waves of her peak finally crashed through her body and washed Sansa away, she screamed and sobbed. Her husband was still rubbing against her to keep her in that wild torrent for as long as possible. In the end, Sansa saw white and passed out.

When she awoke again, she was nestled against Lord Tywin's body and snug in his arms. His tunic was open, and she could feel his curly chest hair against her skin. The sheer cosiness of the moment
made her dizzy.

"Sweet Mother have mercy, how long have I slept?" she asked.

"Look at the fire. It has burned down," her husband answered in a drowsy voice.

"Oh my," Sansa breathed. And after a moment: "Why did you come to me tonight of all nights after such a long time?"

Lord Tywin tensed.

"You don't know?"

"Know what?" Sansa asked, alarmed.

"And here I thought you were ignoring things," Lord Tywin answered and rubbed his sideburns.

"Ignoring what things? Tywin, don't speak in riddles!"

"You didn't see them arrive?"

Sansa blinked.

"I thought we might have visitors, because I saw some torches in the yard, but didn't notice any details."

Tywin nodded.
"Ah, yes, you wouldn't recognise the black hair in the darkness. I should have thought of that."

"Who has arrived, my lord?"

"Ser Govin of Pine Keep and his page. Also better known as Ser Lancel and Tommen Baratheon."
Let's have some pillow talk Tywin style.

Sansa sat bolt upright, her eyes very wide.
"Lancel and Tommen are alive? Oh!"
She beamed at her husband.

Lord Tywin blinked.
"They're from the lot in King's Landing. The people who mistreated you. And don't deny it - I've had reports from informants, and I know about some scars on your back. Honestly - why would you be happy to see them?"

Sansa turned serious and blushed at the same time.
"Yes, they were in King's Landing. But they were not the ones who ordered my father's beheading. They were not the ones who had me... stripped in court. Or who had me beaten. Yes, they are Lannisters who were there, but they were not the worst ones. After what I've been through I don't know if I can ever fully trust them, but what shall I do? Want them dead? Hunger for revenge? I don't think it would do any good. It wouldn't make any harm undone, and revenge only ever brings about new misery. But that's a point many people tend to forget so they end up glorifying revenge. Which is stupid."

Lord Tywin's hand trailed across her naked skin. Sansa fought down the momentary maidenly urge to cover herself and rather leaned in for a kiss. That earned her a deep purr.
"What a soft heart. What a mystery."

Lord Tywin looked her in the eyes.
"And the weirdest thing is that you don't look weak, despite your soft heart. Not for one single moment. It's a riddle I don't understand."

Sansa blushed even more.
"Back in King's Landing... If Joffrey hadn't forced us to marry, would you have accepted my proposal?"

Her husband's hand was warm on her hip.
"Back then, I was tempted - but no, I would have decided against a wedding."

Sansa pressed her lips together and looked down, suddenly ashamed.

Lord Tywin went on: "It would have been a mistake, of course. Yet another one of my many mistakes."

Sansa's eyes rose again, her eyebrows went up, and her heart started to pound. Her husband stared up at the ceiling, one arm above his head, jaws set.

"I should dig deeper, but I guess he wouldn't answer," she thought.

So she asked: "Lancel and Tommen - have you met them already? Can I see them?"

Lord Tywin established eye contact again and answered readily: "Yes, I've seen them. They've lost more weight than me. Must have been a rough time for both. They arrived on a farmer's cart, with holes in their shoes. What they needed was food, a bath, and a bed. In that very order. Kevan and Dorna have provided everything."

Sansa smiled.

"They must be overjoyed."

"That they are."

Sansa trailed through her husband's chest hair. It was a sensation she was coming to like.

"Are you happy, too, my lord?"

"I've just fucked my wife senseless - of course I am an acceptable mood."

Sansa flushed crimson, but she said nevertheless: "You're digressing. On purpose."

Lord Tywin growled back: "Come to think of it - my acceptable mood is dissipating."

Sansa heaved a sigh and lay back on her bed.

"What will happen tomorrow, my lord?"

"We'll break our fast in the Great Hall and meet Tommen and Lancel. We'll also talk to them in more detail in my solar."

Sansa blinked.

"I'm allowed to see your solar?"

Lord Tywin behaved as if he had not heard her.
"There are many letters to write. Boring copying. You're a fast writer. I expect your help. Meanwhile, the servants will transport your belongings to our private quarters."

Sansa's heart skipped a beat.

"Oh," Lord Tywin went on as if he were talking about an everyday activity, "and after lunch I'll place you on my desk and eat you out for dessert."

Sansa squealed and stared at her husband.

"My lord, you're most improper!"

Lord Tywin appeared to mull over her criticism.

"Indeed." He nodded. "I'll add a proper fuck to the previous plans."

Sansa gulped.

"Isn't this something that should happen in the marriage bed?"

"Sure. We'll certainly do it there, too. Later."

"I knew him to be a greedy man from the beginning," Sansa thought and hid her heated face in a cushion. "But only now am I slowly starting to grasp the extent of his greed."

"Is... is this need for lust normal?" she asked.

"As normal as it could possibly be for a man who has been denied a warm, willing wife for more than a quarter of a century."

Sansa uttered a whimper. She could only hope she'd be up to the task ahead.

Her husband said: "Sleep now. We'll have to get up early."

"Sleep? After the pictures he's just put into my head?"

Sansa couldn't believe it.

Then, Lord Tywin curled around her and started to purr against the nape of her neck. In no time at all, Sansa yawned, dozed off, and was soon sound asleep.
Chapter 36

The next morning, Sansa woke up with a warm feeling deep down in her guts. Rather than to open her eyes, she enjoyed the sensation of her cheek against warm skin. And curly hair. After a moment, she realised she was pressing her face against her husband's upper chest. Sansa inhaled and became almost dizzy from her husband's delicious male scent. Considering how relaxed he was and how deep and slow his breathing, it was clear he was still asleep.

“Mmmmh,” Sansa mumbled in sheer contentment.

Within a heartbeat, her husband stiffened. As a soldier, it was normal for him to be awake in an instant.

“What on earth...!?" he exclaimed. “It's already sunrise? I'm late!”

A moment later, Lord Tywin was out of bed. Sansa sat up, eyes wide and feeling bereft of her husband's physical presence. With a side look at the window, she breathed: “The sun is just above the horizon. It's still early enough.”

“Pah!” Lord Tywin made, and Sansa watched him quickly put on his smallclothes, his tunic, and his breeches. “I'm the Warden of the West, the Lord of Casterly Rock. I'm usually up an hour before sunrise. There's work to do. My subjects expect me to be effective.”

Sansa blinked.

“Your sense of duty is laudable, but surely people will understand that we've had our first –”

“People give a fuck about our activities in the marriage bed. And this has little to do with a sense of duty, as you choose to put it, wife. Time is money. THAT is the important point. I'll meet you in about half an hour in front of the Great Hall for breakfast. Until then, I have to read the first missives that may have come in via raven since yesterday evening.”

While he was speaking, Lord Tywin went to the bedroom door and wrenched it open.

He snarled at his personal servant, who was waiting outside: “Why haven't you knocked on the door although you knew it was getting late? Fetch me my razor, my official clothes, a bowl of warm water and a cloth, and take it to the solar. One more tiny little slip from your side, and you'll apply for
another job. As caretaker of the privies. Have I made myself clear?"

The servant blanched, pulled in his neck like a frightened turtle, and bowed deep.

“‘Yes, my lord. I apologise, my lord.’”

“Just do what I’ve told you. At. Once.’”

With those words, Lord Tywin strutted out of the bedroom, and the servant scuttled off to carry out the orders.

Sansa remained behind; her mouth only remained shut for one reason: King’s Landing had taught her too well not to show her feelings. Even so, she couldn't believe how quickly her husband had turned from a fiery lover to a sensible man to a cold tyrant.

After a minute or two, she got a grasp on herself and clapped her hands. Deirdre entered with a huge smile on her face.

Her handmaiden said: “Good morning, my lady! And what a good morning it is indeed.”

Sansa blinked.

“What do you mean?”

Deirdre grinned.

“Oh, it's not my place to comment on this... but you're having such a good influence on the Lord of Lannister.”

Sansa's eyebrows rose.

“Do I?”

“Oh yes, my lady! Before your wedding His Lordship would have fired his servant at once for making a mistake – and he would have had him flogged in public.”

Sansa swallowed hard. Her heart beat faster.
“Oh.”

Deirdre, however, was all aflurry and hustled and bustled around Sansa to make her presentable within a short time. When Sansa finally headed downstairs to break her fast she still didn't know what to think of it all.
Her heart was in her throat when she reached the Great Hall, and she felt as if ants were crawling in her stomach. This would be her first public appearance with her husband. From the excited chitter-chatter inside she guessed people were already anticipating something to happen. Words always flew from mouth to mouth, no matter whether they were in the capital or at Casterly Rock. By now, surely everyone knew the Lord of Lannister had passed the night with his wife in his late son's bedroom.

As soon as Sansa approached the door, she heard steps from another corridor, and her husband appeared, meticulously clad and shaven. Every inch the Lion of Lannister. With a curt nod, he offered her his arm. Together, they entered the Great Hall.

Everyone inside rose to his or her feet. The people bowed as the lord and lady of the Rock passed them on their way to the dais. Lord Kevan and Lady Dorna were there, same as Ser Lancel and Tommen. They dutifully inclined their heads, too, according to their station. Sansa noticed at once that Lord Tywin had been right: Ser Lancel and Tommen were hollow-cheeked, and their golden hair was dull.

“Tommen has never looked more like his grandfather,” Sansa thought.

And it wasn't only because of the lean appearance. Tommen cast his grandfather a serious, even judgmental glance. Sansa had often seen it in her husband – but also in her little sister before she had disappeared from Sansa's life.

“Oh my. What could that possibly mean? Where's the friendly, innocent boy I knew in the capital?” she asked herself. “He must have been through so much. He must have had to grow up really fast... like myself. No wonder. He's lost the greater part of his family. I wonder what he has been forced to witness. Let's hope he hasn't started to turn into an evil Lannister.”

“Lords, ladies, sers, people from Casterly Rock and elsewhere,” Lord Tywin began. “As you can see, two family members who we believed dead have found their way back home. So this is no day for mourning. Quite the contrary. First of all, let us enjoy our breakfast.”

The men raised their tankards and called: “Lannister! Lannister!”

Lord Tywin gave a curt nod of approval and sat down, thus indicating the other people could take their seats again as well and continue their meal.

A freckled, very short servant approached the Lord of Lannister with a platter and an assortment of food.
Lord Tywin said to him: “Put it down between my wife and me.” As soon as the servant had obeyed and had poured them a goblet, Sansa's husband turned towards her and said: “Mylady, you may have your pick now.”

Sansa's heartbeat accelerated once more.

“Oh! One shared platter. And he's offering me the best pieces. In public. Sweet Mother, this is nothing short of gallant. Calculated gallantry, sure, but nevertheless...”

She smiled, thanked her husband and chose some semolina rolls, honey, and a cheese wedge. Moreover, she was positively surprised when she found out that there was no alcohol in her goblet.

“Mint water,” she stated after a sip. “Very refreshing. I like that.”

Lord Tywin inclined his head in agreement.

“We'll need our wits about ourselves in the solar later on.”

Clonk!
On Lord Tywin's other side, Lord Kevan had accidentally dropped his knife, but he quickly got hold of it again. Sansa had to bite back a grin and a giggle.

“Looks like someone is a tad surprised about myself being granted access to the lord's solar. And about myself being considered worthy of cooperation.”

On Sansa's other side, Ser Lancel and Tommen were immersed in wolfing down their meal as if they’d have to be afraid of starving any time soon. It was hardly a surprise, given their previous shortage of food.

Sansa addressed the elder of the two: “My husband has indicated he met you yesterday evening.”

Ser Lancel swallowed a bite and spoke: “Yes, that's true. Though we couldn't say much, exhausted as we were.”

Sansa nodded in understanding.

“I'm curious to get to know more later. I take it that your way here was a very difficult one.”
Tommen wanted to say something at this point, and defiance was written all over his features, but he stopped before he could utter a single word. Sansa realised Ser Lancel must have kicked him under the table, or something of the sort.

Instead, the knight answered: “Sadly, 'difficult' doesn't nearly cover it. After we had lost our horses, we had to walk most of the time. And we had to adopt false identities. But now, we're happy to be back home.”

Well, Tommen didn't look the part. Not one tiny little bit. But he kept his mouth shut and was content to sport a sullen face. He really looked a lot like Arya had done when something had not happened according to her liking.

“What have you already been able to celebrate your reunion with your parents, Ser Lancel?” Sansa asked.

“Apart from a first happy and tearful meeting – not yet. Neither have I had a chance to tell everyone of how you saved my life during the Battle of the Blackwater.”

Lancel had spoken loudly enough, and there were gasps everywhere around. Lord Kevan was positively looking like a carp on land. Sansa flushed crimson.

“I did little and less,” she said.

Ser Lancel smiled at her.

“No need to put your light under a bushel, my lady. To ensure a maester's treatment during a time of utter chaos was decisive for my survival.”

At that moment, Ser Arystide, who was off duty, called: “A toast for Lady Lannister!”

The Great Hall resounded with hurrays and the stomping of feet. Sansa stared at her food and was sure her facial skin was on fire.

After that, breakfast proceeded quickly enough. Sansa noticed Lord Tywin and Lord Kevan had a private conversation. Their faces were serious, their demeanor stiff, but at least they talked, and the rift that had obviously appeared between them in the wake of Lord Tywin's return from King's Landing didn't look insurmountable.
Once they had had their fill, Lord Tywin rose. So did everyone else in the hall.

“Now. Ser Lancel, Tommen. It is time to converse about your trip here in detail. Let's retire to the solar. – My lady. Brother. Please accompany me.”

Sansa's guts somersaulted.

“He really wants to have me around! He really intends to confide in me!”

She thought of how her father had never spoken to her about politics, had always conveyed the idea that she needn't care about it, and that men would decide for her what was best.

“Perhaps Lord Tywin is a harsh leader. From what I know about him he's not been a good father so far either. But it looks as if he's a more decent husband than most men.”

Sansa thought of how she had only cared about good looks and romantic behaviour in a man when she had still lived in Winterfell. She wanted to laugh and to cry, and to berate her former self at the same time then.

She cast her husband a side glance and was more convinced than ever that it had been the right thing to do to marry him. For so many reasons. Sansa thought of the previous night, flushed bright red again and was grateful the others couldn't read her mind.
Chapter 38

Things got even more miraculous when the small party entered Lord Tywin's solar. Sansa took it all in with swift glances: there was a small, round table with some chairs it in the corner to their right. Moreover, there were golden-red tapestries on the walls and red-golden soft carpets on the floor. Stained-glass windows showed lions hunting their prey. And at the far end of the room there was a huge, L-shaped desk made of reddish, massive wood.

Sansa looked a bit closer when she saw Lord Kevan furrow his brow. She then noticed that the desk actually consisted of two tables: a bigger, heavier one at the end, and a shorter, more slender one on the side. There were also two different chairs behind the desks to match. The smaller chair had a white and gray upholstery. That caused Sansa's heart to beat faster.

For the time being, however, Lord Tywin pointed at the meeting table in the corner. A servant brought in glasses and decanters with different juices.

They all sat down, and Lord Tywin started to speak: “Now. On to the details of what happened in the capital and of your way here.”

Ser Lancel nodded and had a servant pour him some apple juice.

“Of course, uncle. We should start hours after you and San... Lady Lannister had left the capital.”

Ser Lancel scratched his eyebrow.

“Now. First of all, it became known you had taken what little gold reserves the crown had still possessed, and that you were demanding the debts back.”

“I AM demanding these debts back, no matter who ascends the Iron Throne next,” Lord Tywin corrected.

Sansa winced a little at this statement, thinking of all the possible implications.

Meanwhile, Ser Lancel made a dismissive gesture.

“Be that as it may. On finding out about these developments, Joffrey blamed Petyr Baelish and Tyrion for it. He had both executed so swiftly – on a whim, really – that they had no chance to flee the city.”

“I've heard about the types of their death,” Lord Tywin said. “No details necessary here.”

The fair-haired knight nodded.

“All right. So... in Joffrey's absence I kept telling your daughter the family had to flee the city. And that if the king didn't want to realise his servants were turning tail and running, just like the City Guards, Joffrey should suit himself and go die on his own. I said Cersei should at least ensure
Tommen’s and our lives. That it was her responsibility, her duty. That it didn’t all end with Joffrey.”

“How did Cersei react?” Lord Kevan asked.

Sansa already had an inkling, but still wasn't prepared for what came next.

“I should have been more diplomatic, sure, but to make things worse... Cersei was drunk, like so often in her last months. She yelled at me that the Lannisters and the Baratheons and basically everyone else were traitorous scum. That she had given her happiness and her future to serve your greedy dreams of power, uncle.”

Lord Tywin stiffened at that.

Ser Lancel went on: “Cersei said that she'd make you traitors pay and that nobody but Joffrey counted. That Joffrey was the only one who counted.”

Sansa looked at Tommen and breathed: “Gods!”

Ser Lancel shrugged.

“I said to her that she could hate everyone, including myself, if she wanted to, but that she still had a daughter in Dorne. Her brother was still alive and in captivity. And that she had to take care of her second son Tommen, who was in immediate danger. Tommen was even accidentally present at the scene. And Cersei yelled that the Dornish were surely successful of turning Myrcella into – forgive me – a Dornish slut; that Jaime was a traitor, because he had left her alone; and that Tommen was a –”

“Worthless, retarded sissy whose father sadly might have been King Robert after all, given how soft and disgusting I am,” Tommen growled.

Sansa's hand flew to her mouth. Her husband uttered a curse.

And Ser Lancel went on: “It was then that I knew all I could do was to save my own sorry life and Tommen’s. I could already sense the rabble gather to start the ultimate riot and to cry for the king’s head. So Tommen and me quickly died our hair, put on the clothes of lower noblemen, and took to the undergrounds of the castle. I had found a map of the dungeons in Tyrion's solar. That way, we managed to leave King’s Landing unharmed. The City Guard had already left the gates and the barracks. We found some provisions and even two old horses there. The mares helped us to put some distance between ourselves and the city... until they died from the strain.”

At that point, Tommen averted his face, his eyes full of anger. Once again, Sansa saw similarities between him and his grandfather that had not been there before.

She asked the boy: “And you had to walk all the way from there?”

“We don’t need any kind of pity,” Tommen growled.
“Good,” Lord Tywin cut in. “Compassion isn't my forte. Go on, Lancel.”

The knight rubbed the tip of his nose and looked at Sansa.

“You're right, my lady. We were walking a lot from then on. Sometimes, we could sit on a farmer's cart, but people aren't exactly helpful in a war-ridden country these days. We came across several places where bad things had happened before. And we had little provisions and less money. So we posed as a disinherited hedge knight and his page. Got a job or two along the way, helping to protect some merchants. Affiliations changed from place to place, depending on who we were talking to.”

Lord Tywin nodded.

“I see. Well. You didn't end up in the hands of cut-throats. You've survived. You're free. You've had your wits about you, and you've been lucky, too. That's more than I can say about quite a few other family members. For now, you should rest and regain your strength. In a week or two, we'll speak about your future.”

Tommen balled his fists.

Ser Lancel spoke up: “Forgive me, uncle, but there's something I'd like to bring up now.”

In answer to that, the Lord of Lannister made a gesture that allowed his nephew to go on. So the young man cleared his throat.

“You see, uncle, I'm nearly a man grown now, and I've spent much time with Tommen on the road. After my injury in the Battle of the Blackwater I had meant to join the Faith – but over the last weeks and months I've come to understand that the Father above has got other plans for me.”

He looked at Tommen.

“He has lost both his parents. I'd like to adopt him. To give him a new place within the Lannister family.”

Lord Tywin inclined his head.

“I see. It's a relevant wish you're uttering. I'll take it into consideration in the weeks to come. And your father and I, we have to discuss these things in depth as well.”

On hearing this, Lancel looked contented. Tommen, however, pushed his eyebrows together and glowered at his grandfather. Lord Tywin ignored these glances and rose. So did everyone else.

“Right. Thank you for your report. I may come back to one detail or another in the near future. For now, I've got other things to do.”

Lord Kevan and his son bowed their heads. So did Tommen after another kick under the table. They all made for the door – until Lord Tywin's voice called after them: “Wife. I need you for another task.”
Sansa turned around and faced her husband again. Her heart hobbled in a most unruly way. From the corner of her eyes, she noticed Lord Kevan blink several times before leaving after a moment's hesitation.

“Yes, sure,” she said as if it was nothing.

She approached Lord Tywin. Then, she heard the door close behind her. They were alone now.

“What do I have to do?” Sansa asked.

“Hold still for a moment,” her husband said.

She obliged and wondered what he was up to.

The next moment, Lord Tywin bent down and gave her a kiss. Now, it was Sansa's turn to blink. Tywin stood straight again and looked up as if he were critically assessing a particular sort of wine. Then, he nodded.

“Right, wife. Now let's get down to serious matters. Look at your desk. There's a pile of papers there. All from Lannisport. Likely invitations of some sort. Sift through them, report to me in general, and tell me about anything relevant in more detail. Moreover, there is a short note about Lancel's and Tommen's arrival back at the Rock. Copy it so we can send it to the noble houses in the West.”

“I see,” Sansa answered. Her lips were still tingling. “But before I start: you have to take good care of Tommen. There’s an anger bottled up inside of him that worries me.”

Her husband made a dismissive gesture.

“I've already made a mental note, but there are more urgent matters. Now let's get started.”

Sansa inclined her head, knowing her husband was cutting the topic short, and moved over to her desk.

It was beautiful, with copious white iridescent mother-of-pearl inlays in the shape of lions and silver handles. They matched the cushions perfectly.

“Lannister emblems, but Stark colours,” she thought.

“Is the Lady Kitten contented?” Sansa heard her husband ask.

She smiled.

“You know, husband,” she said, “I've heard a different pet name spread among the people of the Rock.”

“Is that so?”
“They call me the 'Winter Lioness'."

Lord Tywin nodded.

“I've heard the same, and I can't help myself but think that Captain Arystide has had a hand in this. You've turned him into a devoted subject, by the look of it. – All right. No more dawdling. I'm an old man, and I don't know how much time I've actually got to groom the Winter Lioness for the Game of Thrones. And we have to nearly start from scratch, because your father failed to prepare you according to your mental assets. Off to work.”

For a moment, Sansa wanted to say something to this; but then, she decided against it. She sat down on her chair and turned to the many papers her husband had already stacked there for her.
Sansa set to work at once. Lord Tywin was right: most of the letters were invitations. For a jubilee of the orphanage in Lannisport, the introduction of a new deputy mayor in Lannisport, a wedding of a certain Cresydus Lann, a feast of the brewery guild, and other events of the same sort. Some lowly noblemen had written the Warden of the West notes about the birth of a son or daughter, clearly hoping for a present of some sort. Sansa doubted her husband would be so generous, but she'd ask him all the same.

Speaking of her husband. Lord Tywin was sitting at his desk, his fingertips forming a tent. He looked as if he wanted to stare a hole into the door ahead of him. No movements, even less activities with regard to his own stack of scrolls and missives.

“He's still pondering the events in the capital,” Sansa thought. “He may be more accessible than he was before Lancel's and Tommen's return, but he hasn't fully recovered from his losses. That'll take a while.”

Thus, Sansa didn't comment on Lord Tywin's frozen posture and rather busied herself with her correspondence. It took her a while, and at some point, she noticed her husband shake himself like a wet dog and pick up the first one of his own messages.

Much later, Sansa called out with a smile on her lips: “Done!”

Lord Tywin looked up from a long piece of writing.

“Already?”

Sansa blinked.

“Why – yes. I've read all the letters, and I've written the messages you've assigned me.”

The Lion of Lannister took up a listening position.
“Mhm. Anything important to tell me?”

Sansa gave him a report. Her husband listened without interrupting her once, eyes closed.

In the end, Sansa asked: “What about the babies? Do you usually send any presents?”

Lord Tywin rubbed his elbow.

“I gift them with little blankets in Lannister colours, embroidered with a lion. They only cost a trifle, but they make a huge impression on the parents. Come to think of it – you're good with the needle, so you might want to dedicate yourself to the embroidery of some of these little blankets in your free time. For the important noble houses. That would be a particular sign of esteem for them.”

Sansa let this sink in for a moment.

After a short silence, she asked: “What about your letters? Anything from Lord Stannis? I've heard you're supporting him.”

Lord Tywin moved the paper in his hands and pointed with his chin.

“That's from him. And I'm not supporting him. I'm supporting myself. With the loss of my family I've also lost a lot of political power. Cersei was queen, and Joffrey was king after all. So I'm trying to work together with a man who's in a weak position, too, but who could still try to harm me further if I didn't appear to be actively supporting his rule.”

Sansa cocked her head.

“Stannis is weak?”

Lord Tywin nodded.

“Absolutely. The houses Baratheon and Lannister beat him in the Battle of the Blackwater. It was an immense loss of men, material and military reputation for him.”

Sansa nibbled on her lip.
“I can see that... but isn't he influential now? He's the new king, isn't he?”

Her husband shook his head.

“Not really, at least not yet. He's facing lots of problems. There's a new High Septon in King's Landing, a despicable religious fanatic. This man, who calls himself 'High Sparrow', wants to get the capital under the control of the Faith. Stannis, however, is a vehement follower of the Red God R'hllor. So there are many quarrels in the capital, and these two powers are neutralising each other. Besides, Stannis still has got many issues with your brother. Should Robb Stark not bend the knee and return to the mere post of the Warden of the North – instead of being a king in his own right – war will go on. And last, but not least, the Crown still owes me and the Iron Bank from Braavos incredible sums, no matter who sits the Iron Throne.”

“Oh,” Sansa peeped.

Lord Tywin inclined himself towards her.

“I've offered Stannis a partial remission of his debts. But that comes at a price for him.”

Of course, Sansa had to ask: “Which one?”

Her husband's eyes twinkled.

“A prerequisite for a peace treaty between Stannis and your brother would be Jaime's freedom. And there would be a further remission of debts if Stannis released Jaime from the King's Guard after that.”

Sansa gawked. Mementarily, she had not thought of the fact that Lord Tywin's eldest son was still alive and in Robb's hands.

“Do you think such a peace treaty is likely?”

Her husband uttered a little sigh and stared at the door again.

“Your brother won't want to give up being the King of the North – and he'd not want to set Jaime free. I can't see that. But one never knows. Either my claim will bring back my son, or at least it'll help to bind Stannis' forces, and to keep him malleable.”
Sansa could only marvel at her husband's cunning. But there was something that disturbed her, apart from the obvious fact that she was sad about her husband's and Robb's ongoing enmity.

“If Jaime were released from the King's Guard... he'd be your heir, right?”

Lord Tywin arched an eyebrow.

“Fearing your future son won't be the Lord of Lannister?”

Sansa didn't know what to say and shrugged.

Her husband continued: “I'll tell you something. First of all, we don't know if you're fertile. Second, we don't know if we'll have any sons together – or any sons fit for ruling. And third: if Jaime ends up as the Lord of Lannister, and if we've got a promising son, he might end up Lord of Winterfell instead. I don't believe your brother will live to see old age, and you'd be the next in line. And finally, things often take a completely unexpected turn anyway. A bitter experience learned thoroughly.”

Sansa swallowed hard. She thought of how nobody had foreseen her father's untimely end. She also thought of some castle gossip she had heard.

“What happens if this Targaryen woman comes over the Narrow Sea and ascends the Iron Throne?”

Lord Tywin sighed.

“I've already pondered this, but I for now, I won't give you any details.”

“He's not trusting me fully,” Sansa thought. “With a man like him I shouldn't be surprised.”

Even so, the insight helped nothing to alleviate the sting in her chest.

Meanwhile, Lord Tywin rubbed the nape of his neck and looked towards the window and the height of the sun.

“What time is it? So late already? We should go eat a bite for lunch.”

Sansa's stomach answered with a supportive growl. She blushed.
“Good idea!” she exclaimed and rose from her seat.

When her husband stood up as well, he said: “By the way – I've heard your maidservant is pregnant. I'll have to fire her.”

Sansa stiffened.

“WHAT!?” Then, she answered: “No, my lord. You will do no such thing. She's MY maidservant, the best one I could have.”

Lord Tywin stood straighter.

“And I am your husband. Don't forget your station, woman. I must think of your reputation. It won't do to have a personal maidservant who's pregnant, but not married. She's got Ser Arystide, he'll take care of her, but he cannot marry her.”

Sansa put her hands on her hips. Blood whooshed in her ears.

“I'm not forgetting my station, but you can't decide over my head when it comes to such a private matter and think it won't affect our relationship negatively. Ser Arystide has got a dangerous job. He can become a cripple or die any day while keeping us safe. Deirdre needs her own income – and the income she's got now can ensure she'll be able to look after her child.”

Lord Tywin's jaws worked, and Sansa became frightened. Would he strike her? Her husband had never been cruel towards her, but she didn't fool herself into thinking she had tamed him.

They stared at each other for a while.

Then, the Lord of Lannister spat: “Your maidservant will get a job elsewhere in the castle. Payment will be decent. But she'll leave your immediate surroundings. End of discussion.”

Sansa hung her head.

“Yes, my lord.”

At least, Deirdre wouldn't be jobless. And she could see why her husband had decided in such a
way. Still. It didn't feel like victory.
Life wasn't fair. Sansa remembered the Hound's harsh laughter, and his statement that life wasn't a song.

After this episode, lunch turned out to be a rather bleak affair. And Sansa didn't feel up to any sort of intimacies, no matter what Lord Tywin had had in mind for her earlier on.

Chapter End Notes

In the past it was pretty standard behaviour to fire a pregnant maidservant who wasn't married. Often enough, the employers - or another man in the family - even forced themselves on the women and still send them away when this had said consequences. So Tywin is actually not much worse than others here, sadly.
Chapter Notes

Just a short one today, because I’m ill.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

To top it all, Sansa got her moon blood later in the afternoon. As a consequence, the next days were very calm. Her husband and herself were not in a flamboyant mood (not that Lord Tywin ever was), and they simply slept next to each other in bed. At daytime, they worked together in the solar the way they had done before, and it was a reassuring experience for Sansa. Her husband gave her clear instructions and candid comments on her reports. The absence of criticism was his sort praise, Sansa learned.

They also talked to Lancel again. As it turned out, the Kingsguard members who had harassed Sansa most, back in King’s Landing, had died. While Sansa wasn’t overjoyed to hear of it she wasn’t depressed either. It was just that she’d have preferred a verdict after a just trial, but things were the way they were.

When it came to Tommen, Lord Tywin made sure the boy was given excessive hours in the training yard.

"The boy needs to do some catching up when it comes to fighting techniques," the Lord of Lannister said. "Besides, it’s a perfect way for any man to work off his frustrations by doing some extra sparring."

Sansa hoped her husband was right.

Otherwise, there was little going on. They were waiting for Stannis’ next raven... and Sansa was still waiting for a letter from her brother. Against her own will, she was coming to think that her husband had been all too right with his predictions about Robb.

On the fifth day of her moon blood, Sansa set forth for a stroll in the Stone Gardens. It was a place she enjoyed. She contemplated her situation and was looking forward to resuming her intimacies with her husband very soon.

Then, a lackey approached her, a young man who was panting and sweating from a run.

"My lady!" he called.

Sansa’s eyebrows rose.
"Yes? What is it?"

"The Lord of Lannister requires your presence in the Great Hall, and he asks you to make great haste."

At once, Sansa set her feet into motion.

"Do you know what's happened?" she asked the lackey, who was staying at her side.

The young man nodded avidly, so that his brown curls flew into his eyes.

"Yes, my lady! I guess there's no way to prepare you for this - your mother, Lady Catelyn Stark, has arrived."

Sansa nearly toppled over.

"WHAT did you say?"

The lad blushed.

"You've heard me correctly, Lady Lannister."

Sansa's heart turned into a tambourine. As quickly as she could, she darted towards the Great Hall, and she even cursed her satin slippers and her billowing skirts, which hampered her progress.

The big double doors of the hall flew open in front of her, and Sansa stormed towards the dais. She had anticipated correctly: Lord Tywin was sitting there, with a golden chalice in his slender fingers - and across from him sat Lady Catelyn Stark. She turned towards Sansa, her Tully blue eyes became very big, she stood up and held out her arms.

"SANSA!"

"Mother!" Sansa cried out, tears already spilling down her cheeks.

And finally, finally, she threw herself against Lady Catelyn with all her might, and the two of them wept tears of joy.

After a while, Lord Tywin cleared his throat. Next, he uttered a low lion rumble in the background.

"When the two of you two have finished that hug we may come back to the most pressing matter at hand: why are you here, Lady Catelyn? And where's Jaime?"

Chapter End Notes

You didn't expect that twist, right? ;-)
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Another shorty. Can't help it.

Lady Catelyn lifted her head and looked at Lord Tywin, and her face turned grim.

"You can't stand a moment of unrestrained happiness, can you? Well, I can give you good news and bad news. The good news for you is: your son is free. The bad news: he doesn't want to have anything to do with you anymore. Not after what happened in the capital. We set out together, but Ser Jaime quickly headed for the East."

"East?" Lord Tywin arched his eyebrows. "I cannot imagine why he should seek out your sister's company in the Vale."

Sansa couldn't understand either, but her mother shook her head at once.

"No, not the Vale. The Stormlands. Tarth, to be precise."

Lord Tywin cocked his head, and Sansa blinked.

The Lord of Lannister asked: "That boring assembly of rocks in the sea? Why should Jaime want to go there?"

Lady Catelyn shrugged.

"He'll have his reasons."

At once, Sansa was under the impression that her mother knew more, but wasn't inclined to say any more about it.

And if Sansa knew this as a fact... her husband would have noticed it as well. Lord Tywin thrummed his fingers on the table in front of him.

"I'll write the Evenstar a letter and ask him in my very own way to send Jaime back."

But Lady Catelyn didn't care one whit about this statement and rather focused on Sansa. There was sorrow in her eyes.

"How beautiful you've become! And how tall! A real woman. And... I fear... a woman in... every respect?"

Sansa flushed scarlet.
"There's nothing to exactly fear about me having become a woman. The king forced me and Lord Tywin to marry in King's Landing, but since then we've managed to -"

Lady Catelyn cut her off and commented in the lord's direction: "I've always believed you to be ready to do all sorts of things, but to lust after an innocent girl!"

Lord Tywin's face turned stony, his green eyes flashed with anger, and his voice turned razor sharp.

"Innocence is a good word, Lady Catelyn. You and your husband sent Sansa to the capital, knowing full well that she wasn't prepared for this place, innocent as she was. Now, it's my duty to open her eyes. Honestly, how -"

"Don't argue like that!" Sansa called. "I'm fond of you both, after all."

Two heads snapped around, and four eyes stared at her that could have also belonged to two shocked owls, instead of two humans.

Tywin's head moved back first.

"Lady Catelyn," he said, "by the look of it, we have to discuss many difficult things, and the Great Hall isn't the right place. We should retire to my solar. But first, you must tell your daughter what you've already told me about her brother."

A shiver ran down Sansa's spine.

"What about Robb?"

Lady Catelyn lowered her eyes and looked suddenly very old. Her hands clenched.

Finally, she croaked: "Robb has been murdered. That's also why I've fled here."

Outside in the yard, there was a long, sad howl.
Sansa's eyes widened. She stared at her mother, then turned and gazed at the windows where the howl had come from. After a moment, she started to shake her head and retreated from her mother.

"No!" she blubbered. "Nonononono. That's a direwolf. Grey Wind? That's Grey Wind outside. Robb... There must be a mistake."

Her mother knitted her brows, pressed her eyes shut and shook her head.

"On the road. Three arrows. Poisoned arrows. Robb. His wife. Grey Wind took an arrow, too. Robb was dead at once. His wife had been dying for 30 hours when I escaped with uncle Brynden's help. Grey Wind survived the poison. Too big and too bulky, in comparison to a human. But he's got a lame leg now. He still ran after the assassins and killed them before anyone could stop him. Highway cutthroats, allegedly. But I know they were assassins. I simply do."

Again, Sansa couldn't believe what she was hearing, flung around, and ran out of the Great Hall.

"Sansa!" she heard her husband call after her, but she couldn't stop.

In no time, her feet took her to the main yard.

There he was. Grey Wind. Pony-sized, but unmistakable. Someone had bound him to a big metal ring.

At once, Sansa thought of Lady. Of how Lady had always been on a lash. Had always been bound. Had not been able to run away to save her life.

Sansa stormed towards the direwolf. One of his rear legs was half in the air. On seeing her, Grey Wind started to whine like mad, and he even peed into the yard.

"Grey Wind!" she grated out.
And then, she made impact. She buried her face in the dense fur and started to sob.


Grey Wind couldn't stop whimpering and licked her face. With shaking hands, Sansa loosened the leash that tied the big animal to the metal ring.

She had lost Lady, and Grey Wind had lost Robb. They had both lost a sibling, too. No wonder Sansa could feel the beginning of a strong bond forged by mutual understanding.

After a while, there was her Lord husband's voice at a distance behind her.

"Don't even think of it. That huge beast will NOT sleep in our bed. Besides, he's killed my men."

Grey Wind growled and bared his fangs. Sansa's head snapped around. At the same time, she grabbed the direwolf's fur to keep him under control. Her eyes were puffy and red-rimmed, and her cheeks were wet.
"My lord, I've been thinking no such thing. I haven't been thinking at all. Apart from that, I'm convinced Grey Wind wouldn't want to sleep in your bed. You've killed HIS men. And besides, I've let you mourn your family and didn't interfere. Now let me mourn mine."

Lord Tywin advanced a few steps but still kept his distance.

"You may mourn your family, but the problem remains that the Rock is not the right place for a direwolf; for practical reasons, if nothing else. And keep in mind that despite everything, I've always kept an eye on what's going on in the Seven Kingdoms. You must do the same. Not only for your own sake or for mine, but also for your mother's."

Sansa gazed at her husband, sniffled, wiped her cheeks, and said: "You're responsible for Robb's death, aren't you? You've always wanted him dead. You've sent those cutthroats."

Lord Tywin shook his head.

"I've wanted him dead, I admit it freely. You know he was my enemy. And now, you've got a strong claim to the North - to my eyes, things couldn't be better. You're also right to assume that I'd resort to methods your oh so honourable father would have rejected. I'd resort to them to cut a needless war short. But you're my family now, and I promised you I'd let your brother stay alive for the time being. I would have killed him in combat, and make no mistake. But this time, someone has been quicker than me."
Sansa swallowed hard and didn't know whether to believe these words. Grey Wind sat down at her side and whimpered when his bad leg touched the ground. Sansa petted him instinctively, but her mind was still a mess.

Green-golden eyes bore into her all the while. Lord Tywin clasped his hands on his back with stiff movements.

Her husband said: "I've told you before, remember? It's all coming down to trust between us. Either you know I'm telling the truth or you don't. And I can tell it's the latter, because I'm neither blind nor stupid."

Sansa replied: "My lord -"

But the Lord of Lannister turned away from her and addressed Lady Catelyn, who was now appearing in the yard: "As I was saying. We need to talk in the solar. Please follow me."

Sansa's mother asked: "What about my daughter?"

Lord Tywin shrugged.

"She may stay here or follow us as she sees fit."

By that point, Sansa's heart bled from far too many wounds.

She murmured into Grey Wind's ear: "I've got to go inside. You'll behave, won't you? You're a good one, I know that."

Grey Wind whined, but there was a note of acceptance to his voice. So Sansa kissed his furry nose, turned around and followed her mother and her husband.

It was when Lord Tywin ushered her mother into the solar that it happened. Sansa didn't know how it came to pass, but she looked at her husband, at his aloof, formal politeness for her mother, and from one moment to the next, she was sure of it: he had told her the truth. He wasn't responsible for Robb's death.
Sansa took her husband's hand and whispered: "Tywin."

He gazed at her. A curt nod indicated he understood... and his posture became a fraction less tense. Someone who didn't know him well wouldn't have noticed, but to Sansa, it meant all the world.
Chapter 43

Once they had all entered the solar, the Lord of Lannister didn't lose any time. He wanted to know who the leader in the North was now. It turned out it was Roose Bolton who had claimed to inherit the position of the Warden of the North. Sansa didn't know many details about the lord in question, but remembered from Maester Luwin's lessons that his sigil was a flayed man. That caused Sansa to shiver.

Lord Tywin pressed his fingertips together so that they formed a tent.

"I'm not surprised here. Not at all. Please proceed with the news about the Riverlands."

Sansa's mother nodded and went on in a matter-of-fact tone. The Freys were no less than blackmailing her brother Edmure by demanding a match between the Tully leader and one of the Frey daughters. Sansa couldn't believe that someone would treat his liege lord like that.

Her husband, however, said: "Looks like the Lord Paramount of the Riverlands has to find his own tune for the 'Rains of Castamere'. I only wonder whether he's got any idea of how to play a fiddle to make his subjects dance."

Bristling, Lady Catelyn pressed her lips together and didn't reply.

So Sansa said to her: "Under these circumstances, it's even better you've come here."

Lord Tywin commented on her statement: "Of course, your mother knows the price she'll have to play for an optimal Lannister support."

Sansa blinked.

Her mother balled her fists.
"Not now. Not yet."

Sansa knitted her brows and looked back and forth between her husband and her mother.

"What do you mean?"

Lord Tywin said: "I fear there's no other way to ensure yours and Sansa's claim to the North. Besides, I'm convinced the Boltons and perhaps also the Freys would try to snatch you away and to offer you an undoubtedly worse option."

Sansa still didn't understand and asked: "What are you talking about?"

Lady Catelyn's jaws worked, and her blue eyes were ice cold.

"Whom? Not the Mountain That Rides. In that case, I'll rather throw myself off the next cliff."

Slowly, it started to dawn on Sansa what the other two people in the room were talking about, but she refused to believe it was this topic they were referring to.

She breathed: "My lord, surely you can't -"

But her husband interrupted her: "I've got a far more eligible bachelor in mind. Back in the past, you got to know him at Robert's coronation. It's Lord Addam Marbrand."

Sansa gaped. She couldn't believe Lord Tywin was forcing her mother to remarry.

Lady Catelyn breathed in and out. In and out.
"Lord Marbrand? He's been in the Riverlands of late."

The Lion of Lannister nodded.

"Quite so. Which means you've got some joint knowledge, just from different perspectives. And I take it you've got an inclination for honourable men."

Lady Catelyn blew out the air through the nose.

"He's about Ser Jaime's age. Do tell me - is there a reason why he isn't married and hasn't fathered a half a dozen of children yet?"

Lord Tywin lifted his brow and cocked his head.

"As a matter of fact, there is a reason. But it's nothing you have to be worried about. Perhaps you'll find out one day. The relevant point is he'll try to keep you safe and to ensure the claim to the North. Matches have been made on a flimsier basis."

Lady Catelyn pressed her eyes shut.

"Family, Honour, Duty."

That was the moment when Sansa found her voice again.

"My lord, this isn't right! You cannot force my mother to remarry! She was in love with my father!"

Lord Tywin's head snapped around, and his green eyes narrowed.

"You will not tell me what is politically correct and necessary. And if you remember, you will keep
in mind that our match wasn't made in the seven heavens either."

Sansa knew she'd come up with a suitable answer two hours later, but for the time being, her mind was blank. Robb's death was still weighing her down, and her emotions were a wild mix roiling within her.

Her mother took her hand.

"Sansa. Don't make this any more difficult. Please."

Sansa swallowed hard and cast down her eyes. When their conference came to an end, she was ready to bury her face in Grey Wind's fur again.

"Mother seems to be so unhappy about the upcoming wedding," she thought. "Yet, she seems to agree with Tywin considering its necessity, loath as she may be. I only hope Lord Marbrand turns out to be the good man he's said to be..."
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

There's not really a lot of action in this chapter. It's mostly about psychology and family dynamics, in a broader sense.

After their meeting, Lady Catelyn retired to a room she had been allocated. Sansa could see now how thin her mother had become, and how new wrinkles were etched into the corners of her mouth and around the eyes.

"Time hasn't only been difficult for me, but for her as well," Sansa thought. "She needs some rest after her long and difficult trip here."

Of course, there would be a great dinner later on to celebrate Lady Stark's arrival. One hour prior, Sansa knocked on her mother's door, because she hoped for some private moments.

Luckily, her mother was ready to receive her. At first, they talked of Robb's development before his untimely demise, and they both cried together about his death. It helped a lot to do that.

When the maids were gone for a moment, Lady Catelyn took Sansa's hand and asked with a sigh: "Now. Let's talk about you. Why, oh why was it possible you ended up with this cold, old bastard from the West?"

Sansa stiffened.

"Don't talk about him like that. He's my husband now. It may be true that he's ruthless, and that he's unrelenting about what he thinks to be the best for the family legacy. But at the same time, he's treated me better than other men. Younger men. Allegedly more honourable men. He deserves some respect."

Lady Catelyn patted her hand.

"You've always had such a gentle soul. I'm not surprised you're willing to see something good in even a man like him. I'd only have wished a better lot for you. I wish King Robert had never got it into his wine-shrouded head to travel North and to order a match between you and Joffrey. Or to make your father his Hand. Gods, the sorrow it all has brought over the Seven Kingdoms!"

Lady Catelyn pinched the bridge of her nose.

Then, she went on: "Anyway. The mere thought of you and Lord Lannister together... in private... it makes me so sick. I wish you wouldn't have to endure this, even though it's a woman's duty."
Sansa blushed, but she also knitted her brows.

"There's no need to pity me, mother. My Lord Husband and me are trying our best to make our marriage work, and I'm far happier here than I was in King's Landing."

Her mother shuddered, but she forced a smile onto her face.

"I'm proud of you for trying to be strong and to make the best of this situation. I wish Robb could have seen you, all grown up and so beautiful."

When Sansa left her mother's room before the evening banquet, she wasn't quite sure what to feel and what to think. Something had changed in the way she saw her mother. It took Sansa a moment to realise she didn't believe her mother's words to be an ultimate truth anymore.

"She sees I'm a grown woman now, but she doesn't realise I've not only grown on the outside. She still thinks I'm a clueless little bird."

Sansa stopped dead in her tracks when she noticed she had used the Hound's moniker.

"What would HE think if he saw me these days?"

She sighed and shook herself like a wet dog. Or rather direwolf.

"It's no use to think of the past - or of things that won't happen any time soon, or that will probably never come to pass. I've got to concentrate on the things ahead. Hmmm... Tywin was right. We need to think of how to deal with Grey Wind's presence. He's far too big for the kennels. At the same time, the stables are out of the question, because he'd drive the horses mad. So what can we do?"

To her surprise, her husband had already dealt with the question when she asked him mere minutes later.

"In the past, we had lions here, Sansa. People still think we do, but I've never had a taste for caged lions. Imagine caged Lannisters. Nah, bad symbolism, if you ask me. But we could design a domicile for your direwolf there. And if he behaves, he may leave the caged area... at times."

Sansa hoped that this would turn out to be a good solution. She spent the last thirty minutes before the banquet in Grey Wind's presence, and the big animal pressed itself against her. Sansa had mourned Robb with her mother - now, she did the same with Grey Wind.

On her way to the Great Hall, she thought: "I've never had a chance to mourn a family member so thoroughly. It's good I can do that now."

On entering the hall and seeing her husband near the dais, Sansa's sad smile turned into a more brilliant one.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Ready for some fierce smut?

During their dinner, Sansa pressed her leg against Tywin's.

His reaction was to cast her a side look and to murmur into her ear: "Are you putting on weight these days? Do you need more space?"

Sansa had a hard time not to roll up her eyes then. And she had believed him to be the experienced one of the two of them!

Thankfully, there was no dancing after the food courses. Sansa was too sad about Robb's death. Besides, she suspected that her husband and her mother didn't want to have to dance with one another. Ah, Sansa would shake a leg with Lord Tywin another day, of that she was convinced.

Later, she retreated to their bedroom first. When she had put off her gown and had combed out her hair, her husband entered. Sansa blushed when he saw her in her state of undress. After all, intimacies were still a relatively new part of her life.

Lord Tywin barely looked at her and spoke in a matter-of-fact tone.

"So you think you're fond of me? That notion is utter rubbish. 'Fond' is a weak word like 'nice'. Nobody is 'fond' of Tywin Lannister."

Sansa's heart beat faster, and her eyes widened.

She breathed: "Then you think it's more, too! Ooooh, I knew the term 'fond' didn't nearly cover my feelings for you, but I didn't expect... - oh, I'm so happy!"

With those words, Sansa jumped up, threw her arms around her husband's neck, clung to him as if it were for dear life, and pressed her lips onto his.

Lord Tywin stiffened under her passionate assault.

"Why does he always have to be so formal? So... so NOT relaxed?" Sansa asked herself.

Growing insecure, she thought of ending the kiss.
The same instant, she all but flew backwards and landed on the mattress of their bed, spreadeagled. And then, Tywin was on top of her, pressing her into the cushions, eating her up with wild kisses, and tearing her smallclothes to shreds.

Sansa didn't know what to think. Nor how to react. Nothing had prepared her for THIS.

Lord Tywin opened the laces of his breeches and revealed his hard member, that much she could feel. Then, he stopped abruptly.

Panting, he growled: "You find me too wild, don't you?"

His eyes were a darker green than usual.

Sansa licked her lips and answered: "It's just... I'm mourning Robb. We shouldn't do this while I'm still so sad. It's improper."

Lord Tywin snorted.

"I bet you're in need of a good tumble. People need to celebrate life in the face of death. I've witnessed too many men after battle to know this for a fact. And guess how your brother ended up with the wrong wife: he needed to fuck out his sorrow when he heard of your brothers' death in Winterfell. I swear this is the truth. I got a spy's report on the way your brother behaved. Come, Sansa. Spread your legs for me. I'll show you. I can already feel you're wet for me."

Sansa was still insecure, but she obeyed her husband. Lord Tywin slid into her with one smooth motion. Sansa bit her lip and whimpered.

Her husband moved inside of her, ground himself against her without pulling out. It caused her to whimper again and again. She wrapped both her arms and her legs around him.

"Please," she begged him. "Please."

"Shhhh," her husband made. He sounded hoarse. "This is supposed to last long."

He altered the rhythm and switched back and forth between quick little thrusts and slow, deep movements.


She so wanted to reach this kind of blissful relief she had come to know. But her husband was an old hand when it came to lustful encounters and knew how to draw out the experience. Sansa started to cry from all the penned-up tension, and her fingers scratched across his back. Lord Tywin grunted, and his movements became more erratic.

Finally, Sansa fell over the edge and into the maelstrom of incredible relief. For a moment, she saw white.
Her husband, however, wasn't quite there yet, his veins were visible at his neck, and his jaws worked while he plowed into into her like mad.

A second climax seized Sansa, though she had had no time to recover from the first one. It hurt, and yet, Sansa couldn't let go of her husband, so desperate was she.

At long last, Tywin was able to follow in her tracks. He tensed, pressed his green eyes shut, and roared like a true lion.

Afterwards, they both lay together, silent and motionless. So exhausted were they that they couldn't part. Sansa sobbed against the crook of her husband's shoulder.


Her husband coombed with his fingers through her sweaty auburn tresses.

He mumbled: "How can one single person harbour so much lust and tenderness? You're a mystery."

Then, he gave her a short kiss.

Sansa smiled. Her hands explored his back. Next, she dared to touch his buttocks. Sansa noticed once more she didn't care she was touching an elderly man.

Back in Winterfell, she would have found the Lord of Lannister physically disgusting, and not only because Sansa had still been a child. Sansa knew it well enough - back then, she had looked out for handsomeness, not for character. She was happy things were different now.

Moments later, Sansa drifted off into sleep, though their bodies were still joined. She thought she still heard her husband whisper something along the lines of "my love", but that could have also been the beginning of a particularly sweet dream.
Something was different. That was the first thought Sansa had when she woke up. She opened her eyes and realised her husband was still at her side. Her head was resting on his shoulder, and she was pressed flush against him. Early rays of morning light illuminated the golden-grey curls of Lord Tywin's chest hair.

"Oh," Sansa thought. "He's still here?"

Her husband was always such an early riser!

"Good morning, my lady," she heard a purr against the crown of her head.

Sansa looked up at Lord Tywin. He returned her gaze.

So she gave him a peck on the lips and asked: "Good morning. How come you're still here with me - and in such a serene mood?"

Her husband arched an eyebrow.

"Serene isn't the right word - though yes, maybe I'm more relaxed than usually. It's difficult to remain tense with a sleeping kitten on your chest."

Sansa blushed.

Nevertheless, she felt the courage to ask: "I'm happy to have you here, don't get me wrong - but aren't you working at this time on other days?"

Under the furs, Lord Tywin's hand traced her hip and caused Sansa's heartbeat to accelerate.

"Ah, he knows what he's doing and the effect his touches have got on me - and he likes it," she thought.

Her husband said: "But I AM working. I'm pondering many things. Though you're a bit of a distraction."

He cupped a breast, and Sansa gasped.

"What have you been thinking about?" she asked, and her voice was throaty.
Lord Tywin stared at the furs, pulled them down a little, and revealed her nipples.

"Right now, I'm considering breaking my fast on you, my lady."

Sansa gasped again when a finger brushed her lower curls.

Meanwhile, her husband went on: "Before you woke up, I was thinking about the North and about King Stannis. Oh, and Jaime, too."

Sansa pressed her face against Lord Tywin's collarbone.

She murmured against the warm skin: "And are you willing to share your considerations with me?"

Lord Tywin arched an eyebrow and lifted one of her legs over his hips, so Sansa felt his half hard member against her private place.

She hastened to say: "I'm a little sore from last night."

The statement caused her to blush even more.

"Me, too," her husband admitted in an offhand voice. "I thought I wouldn't have one of these morning reactions at all-," he pointed at his crotch, "and since I'm an old man, I don't have the energy to take you as passionately as I did last night."

"Oh. Hmhm."

That was all Sansa could say to this; she lacked all ideas for a more eloquent response.

But she thought: "Sweet mother have mercy! If he's like this these days, I don't want to know what he was like in the prime of his youth. I bet other men at the age of twenty don't have his... his... appetite."

"Coming back to your questions, my lady...," Lord Tywin said and rubbed himself against Sansa, thus eliciting another gasp. "I won't wage war in the North before the winter. It can't be long now, and time will be on our side. After the winter, House Bolton will be weakened and ripe for a harsh punishment. Harsh even according to my own standards. Moreover, I'll keep in contact with your bastard half-brother at the Wall. I know the Black Crows are supposed to be neutral, but I'd prefer a... benevolent neutrality."

After those words, Lord Tywin slid into Sansa with one smooth moment. She whimpered and pressed her face against the crook of his neck. Her husband's breathing deepened. He cupped her buttocks to keep her in place.

"What do you think of these ideas?" he asked.

Sansa licked her lips and was sure that most other men would never ask her for her opinion.

"I can understand your line of thinking. I... I'd like to see a Stark leader back in the North sooner, but..."
yours is the wiser variant, I guess."

Lord Tywin rocked her slowly, and Sansa uttered a mewl. She looked up at him and noticed his green eyes had darkened.

"How can something so simple feel so good?" she breathed.

"That's easy to explain," her husband growled and rocked her again. "Nature has arranged it like that so animals and humans will keep making babies."

He moved a bit under her.

"Mmmh," Sansa made.

"Considering the realm - I still intend to play King Stannis against the Boltons - and against his other enemies, too. While siding with him. I only wish your great-uncle were here."

"Uncle Brynden?" Sansa asked. The next moment, another lustful noise escaped her throat, in response to yet another rocking movement.

By then, Lord Tywin was panting - but still in full control of himself.

"Sure. The very same. The Blackfish. A seasoned man, like myself, and clever, too. Would have been inspiring. A pity we're enemies and he rather chose to go into hiding, from what I've heard. I can fuck you, but that's not an option I could apply to him. Wonder if he'd like it, though. After all, there must be a reason why he's never married."

Sansa gasped, this time in shock. The mere thought of it!

Yet, the gears in her head didn't stop turning.

"Is that why Lord Marbrand has never...?"

"No," Lord Tywin answered, and that was that. No further explanations.

The next moment, he rolled around until Sansa was on her back. That way, he entered her even more deeply. Sansa moaned.

"What a little minx you are," her husband murmured. "Who would have ever thought? Is that your Tully heritage? You're as slippery as a wet fish."

Sansa squeezed her eyes shut in embarrassment - but also wrapped her legs around her husband's grinding middle. Lord Tywin's movements were still steady and rather slow, especially in comparison to what she'd experienced before.

"Has he ever been so gentle?" Sansa thought - and pushed the concept of her husband with another woman away at once.
"I still haven't decided what I will do with Jaime when he returns. What he needs is a good spanking for being such a blockhead, but he's too old for that," Lord Tywin continued. "Apart from that, our falling-out is too complex."

Sansa didn't want to think of the Kingslayer, especially not under these circumstances.

"If you're still undecided, my lord, perhaps you could focus more on - ah! Yes! This!"

Her husband's eyes were slowly turning glassy.

He mumbled: "There's a lot to be said about starting a day like this."

"Can you kiss me?" Sansa begged.

There was a deep growl in Lord Tywin's throat. He bent down and pressed his mouth on hers. His tongue slid between her lips and explored her. Sansa's heart sang. The flicks of Lord Tywin's tongue started to mimic the movements further down, and Sansa thought she had never tasted anything better than her husband's outrageous kisses.

On and on they went with their slow, but all the more intense intimacies. It only ended when Lord Tywin's fingers moved down to where they were joined. After that, it didn't take long until Sansa pressed her head into the cushion and bucked against her husband, legs trembling. And her spasms caused Lord Tywin to come as well. Afterwards, they still didn't stop their deep kisses, or their touches. Sansa wondered whether a younger man could be so patient in order to increase their lust.

In the end, it took them a long time until they were presentable. Sansa knew they couldn't start every morning like this, but oh, she knew she'd be happy all day. She also realised she needed to talk to her husband about his plans in more detail. She sighed and all but floated down the stairs as if she were treading on little clouds.

Only when she came across Greywind near the Great Hall and the animal sniffed at her, snorted, and turned away did she find back into reality. It left her with bright red cheeks.
Breakfast was a slightly tense affair. Catelyn was still in the Great Hall and kept glowering at Lord Tywin. And at Sansa, too.

Sansa pretended not to see it and remained polite.

"Tywin and I are married. I'm not going to feel guilty about being happy," she thought. "I can understand mother must feel uncomfortable about her - and our - recent situation. Having to remarry and all that... I don't like the idea of her being together with anyone but father. And yes, the West isn't the North. But I won't apologise for being in love with my husband."

Tywin at her side didn't acknowledge Lady Catelyn glaring daggers at him either. Instead, he talked to Lord Kevan, who was sitting across from him. The two brothers were still behaving as if they were walking on raw eggs when they spoke together - but at least, there was some conversation between them again.

Lancel, Lady Dorna and Tommen had already left the breakfast table with Tywin's permit. Lord Kevan's wife was off to the sept, and the male youngsters had left for yet another training session.

Suddenly, there was quite a major commotion with barking voices outside the great hall. There was heavy footfall to be heard, too. The guards inside stood at the ready and grabbed their weapons. Sadly, Ser Arystide was off duty and not present, which was a tactical disadvantage.

Then, Sansa's heartbeat quickened. There was a voice she thought she recognised.

"What in the... but that's imp-

WHAM!

And the big doors flew open from an enormous kick with a heavily-booted foot.

Lord Tywin rose, unsheathing the short sword at his hip with one smooth motion. Lord Kevan was only a second after him and mirrored his brother's reaction.

"Good morning, Lord Lannister. My lady. Forgive me for interrupting your breakfast, but I thought I
should make haste to deliver this parcel. Has been a bloody burden of late," a dark voice rasped.

Thud!

And a carpet landed in front of the dais. A dark-haired head that uttered a flood of filthy words stuck out of it.

Sansa stood up, like the men. Her heart was in her throat, ready to hop out.

Her jaws dropped, and she stared at the man in the middle of the great hall. She didn't know what to think. Her brain was empty.

Then, her husband spoke: "Clegane. A deserter like you at the Rock? Guards!"

"Arya!" Lady Catelyn called out and rushed towards the carpet with billowing skirts, tears already staining her cheeks.

"Mother!" the head that stuck out from the carpet exclaimed.

At the same time, Greywind showed he was worthy of his name as he made his speedy appearance in the hall.

Sansa's hand flew to her mouth. She stifled a sob.

"Why, my lord - I've saved your WIFE'S sister and brought her here. And doesn't a Lannister always pay his debts? How about a deal? Isn't the little wolf bitch worthy of a pardon?" the Hound grated out.

Lord Tywin cocked his head and narrowed his feline eyes.

He spoke: "Lady wife, I've heard a lot about your stay in King's Landing. He was there, too. What do you say?"

That caused Sansa to shake off the initial shock.

"He's not only saved Arya, but also my life. And more than once. Unbidden. Though he's no ser he behaved more honourably than the rest of the King's Guard."

Lord Tywin furrowed his brow. His jaws worked for a long moment.

"Clemency isn't my forte, Clegane. But I think I'll rather punish those who were too slow to announce you although you were carrying a heavy carpet with a girl inside. A pardon for you it is then."

The Hound rubbed the nape of his neck, then clicked his heels together.

Sansa couldn't control herself anymore. One moment later, she was at Arya's side, together with her mother and Greywind. Arya was finally coming free from the carpet. They were all crying.
After a while, Sansa rose and moved over to the tall, scarred warrior.

She threw her arms around his middle, armour and all, and cried: "Thank you for bringing Arya back! Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"My lady!" she heard her husband's sharp voice behind her. "Countenance!"

Sansa winced, let go of Sandor Clegane and looked around. The Hound had gone completely rigid, and his eyes were as big as saucers. Everyone else gaped at her open-mouthed. Apart from her husband. There was a muscle twitching in his cheek.

"Oh sweet Mother, what a mess!" Sansa thought.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Tywin isn't amused. At all.
Sansa can be happy she's got two strengthening sigil animals in her soul now.

If she had learned one thing during her marriage with Lord Tywin, it was that her husband didn't appreciate weakness.

So she made no more than one step back, held her head high and spoke: “A momentary emotional outburst. I apologise for my behaviour. But I will not apologise for being grateful. Clegane deserves our thanks, though he's not good at accepting them. Thanks for the reunion of my family. Thanks for saving my honour and my life during the bread riots in King's Landing when some commoners were about to end both. If not for Clegane, we would have never met, even less married.”

It wasn't easy to say this in front of others, but she wouldn't allow Sandor to bear the brunt of her husband's ire.

Arya and Lady Catelyn gaped at her open-mouthed, and the other people didn't look any less surprised.

The Lord of Lannister ground his teeth so hard Sansa feared they might break.

“Out!” he finally spat. “Everyone out! Everyone but you, wife. And Clegane – to the barracks!”

Lady Catelyn started to protest, but Lord Tywin seared her with his green-golden eyes, no less. Sandor Clegane made no fuss, grabbed Arya – who was starting to swear again – by the sleeve to drag her out, and left with long strides after a curt bow.

As soon as they were alone in the hall, Sansa pressed her hands onto her hips and tapped her foot in a way her mother had used to set servants running. As it turned out, her husband was immune to the gesture.

“Woman!” he frothed. “How dare you shame me with your behaviour?”

Sansa was taken aback.
“Shame? I admit my behaviour was a tad inappropriate, but –”

“Inappropriate!? You were nearly slobbering all over that scarred, filthy cur! And in public!”

Sansa flinched as if she had been beaten. At the same time, her blood coursed white-hot through her veins. Her cheeks were burning.

“Perhaps the maester should check your eyesight then, because I did no such thing like 'slobbering'. It was a short hug, simple as that. Back in King’s Landing, Clegane was the only one who behaved decently towards me, in his rough way. He wasn't a friend, but he was the one who came closest to it. Don't behave now as if he'd been my lover. You know I was a maid when we married. And besides, you know that I love you, and I stand by my word.”

Lord Tywin bared his teeth.

“Words are wind. And even if you speak truly – do you think the Hound's needs are innocent ones? In that case, you're stupid. One only needs to flick a single look at the man to see he's lusting after you. I'm old, but I'm neither daft nor blind. So even if I believed you – I have no faith in that traitor.”

Sansa's heart knotted.

“The word 'traitor' has been used too often in my presence over the past years. Besides, you should be very careful with your reproaches, my lord. Clegane didn't do anything you didn't do either: leaving a king behind who was unfit to rule.”

Lord Tywin bristled, but Sansa simply went on: “And just so you know: Clegane came to my room, right after leaving the battlefield. During the battle of the Blackwater, I mean. You've said it yourself that a man needs to celebrate life after such a fight. Clegane was still in complete emotional disarray from all the slaughter, and from the wildfire, too. For a burned man like him, the fire was the worst. He could have raped me easily. But he didn't do it. He didn't even force me to come with him, though I could have done nothing against it. If Clegane didn't take advantage of me then, he'll never do it. If you can trust him about anything, it's this.”

Lord Tywin stared at her with narrowed eyes and flaring nostrils.

It took a long moment until he answered: “Ah, but I'm not a trusting man. You were half a child back then. Now you're a woman wedded and bedded. It makes a difference.”

Sansa felt a sting deep in her guts.
“You want to send him away. On an errand that will cost him his life. Although you’ve promised to spare him.”

It wasn't even a question.

Lord Tywin snorted.

“I've spared him for now. The Hound has always carried out tasks that could turn out to be lethal. It's what vassals do for their liege lords.”

Sansa's fists balled.

In a calm voice, she stated: “Our love will die if you kill the only person who I'd count as my friend. Especially now after he's brought Arya back. Do you want to risk our love? The feelings we've just established? Tywin, I don't want to go down that road. I want to be happy with you. With you and nobody else.”

Lord Tywin's eyes burned a hole into her middle, and for a moment, Sansa feared he'd forget himself. Then, he looked aside, clearly seeing images that were invisible to anyone else but him. He reminded Sansa of the day when she had watched him look at a golden pendant, back in King's Landing.

He growled: “No other man will desire my wife. No-one. No-one. I'll make sure...”

Then, his mind snapped back to the present, and he shook himself.

“My lady. The Hound will resume his old work. He'll take care of Tommen. The boy needs a teacher for swordfighting anyway. And the Hound better be more successful than he was with Joffrey. The two and Lancel will not stay at the Rock, however. I've got plans for them. Plans with regard to the West. So they won't be abroad either, and things won't be any more dangerous for them than life is in Westeros anyway. They'll carry out a task I probably should have taken care of years ago.”

The Lord of Lannister leaned towards Sansa, still not quite done.

“Don't you say anything against this decision, wife. And I don't want to see any more familiarising between you and the Hound.”

Sansa swallowed.
“I see,” she said. Though she didn't understand at all. “I'll obey, my lord.”

What else could she have said after all?
Chapter 49

After this interlude, Lord Tywin declared he needed some training.

"Haven't sparred enough of late. And the Hound is the only one who won't let me win just because I'm the Warden of the West."

Of course, Sansa felt the need to follow her husband to the barracks.

"Better not leave these two men alone," she thought.

On her way, Sansa came across Arya and her mother.

"Daughter, you must go and get a wash and put on a dress. You must finally become a lady," Catelyn Stark chided her younger child.

Arya rolled up her eyes and bit into an apple she had picked up somewhere.

Munching, the girl asked Sansa: "So you've come out of that hall with your head still on your shoulders? And with a Lord of Lannister still looking as if he'd want to slay the Warrior himself? I say! You're a survivor. And what do I hear? The old lion and the Hound want to settle the matter in the training yard? Must be something right after your romantic heart: two men fighting over their lady. Pffff!"

Their mother interrupted them and grabbed her younger daughter by the wrist.

"Arya, I'm talking to you! You'll go upstairs and do what I'm telling you!"

"Oh mother, please! When will you understand I'm not a lady and will never be one. I'm not even a maid."

That statement caused Sansa and her mother to goggle, mouths agape.

After a moment, Lady Catelyn frothed: "What did that scarred brute do to you!? I'll go flay him as if I were a Bolton!"

Arya started to caugh and to laughat the same time.

"The Hound? Nah, wasn't him. Though it would be fun to watch you skin him."

Sansa arched an eyebrow.

"Arya is lying," she thought. She couldn't say why, but Sansa was convinced of it. "Or perhaps what she's saying is only true in a metaphorical sense. Arya must have lost her innocence in many ways. I don't think she's lain with-"
And then, it dawned on her.

"She must have killed. Wasn’t the Hound about her age when he killed his first man? Gods!"

On impulse, Sansa embraced her sister, which caused Arya to bristle like a stray cat, so Sansa said:
"You wanted to watch my lord husband and Clegane fight? Come then. And mother: surely, Arya can change her clothes a bit later. I don’t see how it would cause any more damage to proceed like this."

Lady Catelyn threw up her arms into the air.

"And here I thought you’d want to spend some time with your mother after all these months and months apart. But no, no... I’m off to the sept. Pray for your father. In case you’ve forgotten him."

Sansa pressed her mother's arm.

"Mother - I had to watch father die. It's something I won't forget for the rest of my days. But please don’t be so bitter. It won't bring father back. And I'm a married woman now. My place is at my husband's side. I'd also like to have a private word or two with Arya. Let's meet for lunch or for supper later, and then, we'll all have calmed down after this dramatic morning. What do you say?"

Lady Catelyn sighed and rubbed her brow.

"You're right, Sansa. My nerves are not what they used to be. The recent past... all these horrible experiences. Forgive me."

Sansa kissed her mother's cheek.

"We've all been through a lot."

Their mother smiled sadly and patted Sansa's hand and shot Arya a pained side glance.

"See you two later then. I'm off to the sept."

Once they were alone, Arya murmured: "When they beheaded father, I was there, too. In the crowd. But there was someone who shielded my view from watching when Ice... when..." She faltered.

Sansa's hand flew to her mouth.

"No! You don't say! Gods!"

And then, the two sisters hugged each other close and both shared a tear or two.

After some time, Sansa wiped her eyes and said: "Come now. Let's watch the men carry out their fooleries in the training yard."
Arya sniffled, grinned, and clapped Sansa on the back.  
"Now that's a word after my taste! Looks like you've come to your senses, big sister."

As it turned out, Lord Lannister and Sandor Clegane had already put on their armour. Some knights and other witnesses were milling around, waiting. Ser Lancel and Tommen were among them, too. The two young women sat down on a bench at the side.

"Tywin looks splendid, even if he's not as tall as the Hound," Sansa couldn't help but think.

When the two men started to fight, Arya murmured into Sansa's ear: "Good fighter for his age, your lion. Wouldn't have expected any less, though. But tell me - how you can live together with someone so disgusting? I don't understand. Even less since he's not the type of man you'd find attractive."

Sansa sighed.  
"Difficult as he is, he's been better to me than other men. He got me out of King's Landing."
Arya knitted her brows and shook her head lightly.

"It's still beyond me." She pointed with her chin at the fighters and asked: "And what about the Hound?"

"What do you mean?" Sansa asked.

Arya rolled up her eyes again.

"Oh please! Don't take me for a clueless child. The Hound turns into a salivating puppy whenever your name comes up, you know?"

Sansa blushed.

"How is it possible nobody saw a connection between Clegane and me in the capital - and now, two people come to the opposite conclusion within an hour. Although I'm in love with Tywin."

Sansa remembered the night of the Battle of the Blackwater... a massive body pinning her down on a bed and a knife at her throat.

Sansa played with the hem of her sleeve.

"We've never been romantic together, you know?" she offered. "But we've shared some... relevant moments."

"Mhmmm," Arya murmured, still clearly skeptical.

The next second, Sansa's full focus was on the fighters in the yard. So far, Sandor Clegane had attacked his liege lord and had driven Lord Lannister back, no matter how competent and experienced the latter one was. But then, Lord Tywin muttered something between clenched teeth,
and the Hound lost his footing. One heartbeat later, Sandor Clegane was flat on his back, the edge of a sword at his neck.

Sansa squeaked and pressed her hands onto her mouth.

Next, Lord Tywin said some more to the scarred warrior and stepped back, still panting and a smug air about him. Clegane looked as if he had seen a ghost. Sansa jumped up and ran towards her husband.

"My lord! Is everything all right?" she asked and put her hand on his arm.

"Just for your - hhh - personal information: I've won -hhh," Lord Tywin answered in his most aloof voice.

"You distracted Sandor Clegane. Couldn't you have won in a fairer way?" Sansa asked. "I mean - you're so good with your sword."

"Pah!" Lord Tywin exclaimed and growled: "Do you think battles are fair? We're training for real fights here."

"And what did you tell the Hound? Look at him! He's still quite beside himself."

The Lord of Lannister chuckled, which caused many eyes to stare at him in utter shock.

"I told him you consider him a friend. That was something he couldn't deal with. And after the fight I informed him of his future task."

A shiver crept up Sansa's spine.

"What's he supposed to do?"

"I've told you so, wife: to accompany Tommen and Lancel."

Sansa wanted to screw up her eyes like her sister, but she told herself she was a lady and couldn't do that.

"And what have you planned for Tommen and Lancel, dearest husband?" she asked.

Lord Tywin looked at her with his feline eyes.

"They'll rebuild Castamere."
Lord Tywin didn't give her any further explanations and rather pointed out he needed a bath, because he was sweaty and dirty after the training. Sadly, he wanted to be left in peace during his wash. Sansa could have imagined many other activities in their private wing, from inquiring her husband some more about his plans to helping him clean himself while carrying out some intimacies. She sighed when Lord Tywin stalked off and she could only look after his retreating form.

"Doesn't look overly interested in you, now that he's won his fight," Arya commented.

Sansa scratched her wrist. Of course, she wouldn't tell her sister that her husband was still sated after a very enjoyable night and simply a bit exhausted after the training.

Instead, she said: "Don't ever interpret his momentary disappearance as a lack of interest. Now, Arya, what do you think? Shall I give you a quick tour of the castle?"

Curiosity sparked up in the younger one's eyes. She smiled.

"Of course! Show me the famous Rock. Are there really any lions below the ground?"

So the two set off together. Sansa also asked her sister about her experiences since the day their father had been taken captive in the capital.

It was an impressive account she got from Arya. Of how her little sister had survived in Flea Bottom, of how she had started to travel up the Kingsroad, of how she had come across the renegades called "Brotherhood Without Banners", and of how Sandor Clegane and her had met there.

"And you say this priest was able to revive Ser Beric Dondarrion? Why, that's creepy!" Sansa exclaimed.

Arya nodded.

"Yes, I know. But they set the Hound free after the fight - and the Hound stole me away to take me westwards."

For a moment, they walked in silence.

Then, Grey Wind turned up, still limping a bit, but already better than when he had arrived. The direwolf whined at Arya, let his tongue loll out - and Arya erupted with laughter.

"You want me to catch you? Ha! Just you wait! I've caught stray cats in the Red Keep. You won't escape."

"Arya -," Sansa began, but didn't get any further. Grey Wind and her tomboyish sister darted off. Before she could have said "direwolf" Sansa was alone.
She smiled to herself and shrugged.

"Chasing cats in the Red Keep? Now that's something I didn't know - but it's so Arya to do such a foolish thing."

Sansa looked around.

"Now... what do I do? Mother gone, Tywin gone, Arya and Grey Wind gone... - ah yes!"

She clicked her finger.

"Sandor. He must still be around. I should have a word with him before he leaves for Castamere. No 'familiarising', as Tywin would put it, of course. Just a short talk in public."

Humming to herself, Sansa walked back to the training yard - but the Hound was gone.

"Excuse me," she asked a hedge knight who was sharpening his sword, "where's Clegane?"

"Jus' round the corner of the barracks, my lady," the man answered readily. "But you shouldn't -"

Sansa didn't wait for the man to finish, thanked him, pivoted around, and hurried off to the building in question.

She turned a corner, looked around... and nearly tripped over her feet at the sight unfolding in front of her.

There was a well near the entrance door of the barracks. As far as Sansa knew, it was often used for the water buckets the stable boys carried to the horses. But now, the well was being used in a different way. Several men who had finished their training were in varying states of undress to clean themselves. And in the middle, the biggest warrior of them all was naked from head to toe. Sansa saw the muscles of his backside flex when he poured a bucket of water over his body. Glistening rivulets streamed down his torso and his firm buttocks.

Sansa couldn't help it: she gaped like a carp.

"Sweet Mother have mercy!" she thought.

She knew exactly she should leave at once, but was rooted to the spot like a rabbit that was being paralysed by the stare of a snake.

The first men spotted her and froze.

"Hey Burle, you look like a bloody ghost that has shat itself and is surprised it can shit!" the Hound rasped and laughed.
Then, he turned around to look what was going on.

If it was possible, Sansa's eyes widened even more and threatened to pop out of their sockets.

"How's that one supposed to fit into -"

She flushed scarlet. But she also knew she had to maintain what shreds of dignity she possessed as the Lady of Casterly Rock.

So she spoke up.

"Had I known of this public display of male assets I wouldn't have disturbed you, gentlemen. I'm awfully sorry for your inconvenience. Please proceed as if nothing of the sort had happened."

With those words, she turned around and left with stiff strides, head held high, and burning cheeks. She feared Sandor Clegane would run after her. In the Red Keep he'd have surely done so.

But nothing happened.

"I'm Lady Lannister now," she thought.

And then: "I need my husband."

She darted up the stairs without even sensing her feet. When a guard tried to stop her in front of her private quarters she shot the man a side look, and the man retreated, pulling his head in like a turtle.

With shaking hands, Sansa wrenched open the door and entered.

Her naked husband was in front of the bath tub and in the middle of drying himself with a towel. He looked up and knitted his brows.

Sansa looked at her husband.

"Yes! That's better," she thought.

"What on earth - wife! I've told you to leave me alone!" Lord Tywin growled.

Sansa threw herself at him.

"I'm sorry!" she chirped. "I need your help!"

Lord Tywin was taken aback.

"My help?" In a sharper voice, he asked: "Sansa, what's happened?"

But Sansa was in no mood to communicate. She sank onto her knees.
Her husband's eyes widened.

"Sansa, what -"

She kissed his tip, something she had never done, but for now, she didn't really care. Instead, she started to kiss up and down his length. Inspected his warm, velvety skin down there. Felt his veins against her lips. Tasted him. Inhaled his scent. Why had nobody ever told her that this activity could be so delicious?

Lord Tywin gasped.

"It's not as if I didn't appreciate your eagerness, wife, but why - FUCK!"

That was the very moment her tongue licked into the little opening. Sansa couldn't stop herself. Her shaking hands cupped her husband's buttocks and squeezed them.

Slowly, his member started to react, though it was still hesitant after their tumble at night.

Lord Tywin panted: "Careful with your teeth, woman!"

Next, he moaned. Sansa continued with even more enthusiasm and started to suckle.

Her husband uttered noises like a wounded animal and started to thrust into her mouth. A wave of happiness washed over Sansa.

Then, her husband pushed her away and came into the cooling water of the bath tub.

"If you ever want to kill me by bliss you should consider this method," he panted. "What a good thing I've still got a strong heart. And now tell me what's happened."

Sansa couldn't look her husband in the eye. She knew people would talk in the castle. They always did.

"Outside the barracks... I... I accidentally chanced upon naked Clegane who was washing himself after the fight, too."

"WHAT!?" Lord Tywin roared.

Sansa winced and continued: "It was an accident. And I knew at once I wanted you. You! Please, I need you so."

There were tears on her cheeks. She inched closer and pressed herself against her husband's side.

Lord Tywin didn't move. When Sansa finally dared to look up, she saw his steely green eyes, and her heart dropped into her slippers.
The epitome of 'ooops', right?
Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

I thought I'd have lots of stress today and couldn't write... and it WAS stressful at the beginning, but later, I found a break, so... ;-)  

Sansa was crying a lot over the next few days. Tywin had relocated her in Tyrion's room. And had locked her in there, too.

Her only connection to the outside world were her short talks to Ser Arystide when he was on duty and had to control whether she was all right and behaving adequately. However, the knight wasn't in good shape - his wife's health was deteriorating rapidly.

"How's my family?" Sansa would ask Ser Arystide each time she saw him.

The man's answers used to be short and to the point.

"The direwolf is getting better by the day." - "I've started to take Grey Wind out on my tours - the animal needs some exercise." - "Lady Arya is very agitated about your imprisonment." - "Lady Arya has berated the Lord of Lannister during dinner in the Great Hall." - "Lord Tywin has locked up Lady Arya, too." - "Lord Marbrand has arrived to meet your Lady Mother." - "Your Lady Mother is praying a lot these days." - "Your Lady Mother's wedding has been set for a sennight from now." - "Ser Lancel and his entourage have left Casterly Rock for Castamere."

Sansa's heart was heavy. Everything that could have gone wrong had gone wrong! And now, Sandor Clegane (and even Ser Lancel and Tommen) were getting punished for her own stupidity.

"Hopefully, they don't hate me now," Sansa thought. "And I couldn't even really talk to Sandor..."

She was happy, though, that at least Grey Wind was doing fine. The direwolf and Ser Arystide were in the process of becoming friends.

"He's a decent and also very active man - like Robb used to be one. No wonder Grey Wind likes to be around Ser Arystide," Sansa thought.

Her husband was a completely different matter. Sansa missed him and their joint time a lot. She wrecked her head over how everything had been able to go downhill so quickly.

"I guess he wouldn't be so jealous if he didn't feel so much for me," Sansa pondered, trying to see the good in this sad situation. "If only I could make him believe he means everything to me! I'd do anything to prove my love and my being faithful."

She sighed when she thought of the scene in front of the barracks.
"People are gossiping. And they've seen me hug Sandor prior to this episode. No wonder rumours must be flying now. And no wonder Tywin felt the need to lock me in. He has to live up to a certain standard of cruelty. It's what people are expecting of him to do and to be like. Otherwise, he'd look weak."

Sansa smacked her cushion.

"It's so, so unfair!"

Then, she thought of the Hound's words: "Life isn't a song."

"I'll compensate you one day," Sansa murmured. "But now, I have to win back my husband. Only how can I do that if I'm forbidden to communicate with others, even in written form?"

An answer presented itself soon enough: Lord Tywin released her from custody for her mother's wedding. Sadly, he did it in such a way that there was no time for Sansa to talk to her husband before the ceremony in the sept. All she could do was to present herself in her best attire. Tywin had allowed her chambermaids to tend to her, so that was an improvement. It spoke volumes for Arya's situation that she wasn't allowed to attend. For an instant, Sansa thought of Deirdre, too, and she missed her former maid - but then, the Lord of Lannister entered in all his golden splendour, and Sansa forgot everything else. She nearly even forgot decorum and would have wanted to throw herself at her husband then and there.

His stony face, though, brought her back into focus. Without even looking at her, he positioned himself next to her.

Right afterwards, the doors of the sept swung open and Lady Catelyn and Lord Marbrand entered. Sansa didn't know the handsome man with the rusty-coloured hair, who was probably about her mother's age, or perhaps a few years younger.

"Lord Marbrand was Ser Jaime's childhood friend, if I remember correctly, so yes, he must be a little younger than mother."

Sansa felt awkward to see her mother with another man, so she forced herself to look closer in order to get used to this new sight. What she then noticed knocked her nearly out of her shoes. Sure enough, Lady Catelyn's expression was a sour one at best... but things were completely different with regard to Lord Marbrand. The man didn't even turn his eyes from his bride for as long as a heartbeat, and there was such yearning in them it bordered on pain.

Sansa's heart beat faster.

"He's known her since the end of Robert's Rebellion. And he's never married. Why... sweet Mother! All these years? Gods! Does mother know? But how could she not?"

Sansa blinked and realised Lord Tywin was gazing at her. When she looked up at him, he inclined his head a tad, then stared at the end of the aisle where bride and groom were meeting the septon.
The formalities were carried out quickly enough. Lady Catelyn's voice sounded hollow when she spoke her vows, and she looked right through her husband when he leaned in to give her a peck on the lips.

There was some polite applause, and next, they all moved on to the Great Hall for the big feast.

And a big feast it was indeed! The Lord of Lannister didn't like carefree amusement, but he took any chance to show off his wealth and how distinguished he was. The gigantic assortment of the finest delicacies highlighted this streak in a most compelling way: quails in a honeyed sauce, pheasants in a plum sauce, green asparagus - though it was autumn, not spring -, pea souffles and much, much more. After the custody in Tyrion's room, which hadn't been much of a culinary experience either, Sansa couldn't help herself and shoveled food onto her plate and into her mouth in a way that would have made late King Robert smile.

There was an orchestra, too, and people danced and were merry. At least most of them.

Lady Catelyn and Lord Marbrand opened the dancing like it was proper, but after only one piece of music, the bride sat down at the table again and refused to participate in any more frolicking. It was heart-wrenching to watch Lord Marbrand's face then.

After all the good food, Sansa felt the need to dance like so many others. She decided her husband's sullen brooding about the episode with the Hound had to come to an end. Without further ado, she grabbed his hand and stood up.

Lord Tywin looked at her as if she wasn't right in her mind. Sansa pulled some more and pointed with her chin to the dancers.

The Lord of Lannister knitted his brows and pressed his lips together... but he did stand up and avoided a major hubbub. Sansa rejoiced.

What was even better was that her husband was a stiff but otherwise apt dancer. She relished their renewed proximity, felt his warmth, inhaled his scent, and vowed to herself she'd lure Lord Tywin back into a happy marriage... and a warm marriage bed.

At some point, their course of complicated dancing steps brought them to a corner of the room. Sansa, who was beaming up at her husband as if she were the bride, not her mother, suddenly somehow noticed a movement that caused her instincts to sound an alarm.

She looked closer... and saw a foreigner with a little crossbow tied to his wrist. He was aiming at Lord Tywin!

Sansa squealed, tore at her husband's arm and jumped in front of him to shield him from the impending shot.

Fssss!
Sansa looked down at herself and furrowed her brow in confusion. There was a feathered gib protruding from her upper left arm.

In the suddenly distant crowd, there were some shrieks, but Sansa didn't pay them any attention.

She blinked, looked at her white-faced husband, shook her head and said in an offhand voice: "Pfft! Now look at this stupidity! Tywin, go and get the assassin who wanted to murder you. It was good luck that he didn't hit you, love. And I should better go see Maester Cressen."

Then, she fell, saw black and knew no more.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Here comes a punch right into the feels...

There was a tiny golden light at Sansa's side. She loved it at once with all her might and felt loved in return.

Then, she felt another presence. A happy presence. There were neither body nor voice, but it felt as if the presence would whine and wag it's tail if it had one.

"Lady!" Sansa thought, and the happiness around her increased. Without hesitating, she delved into the feeling and imagined herself and her direwolf rolling on the ground in a moment of sheer joy.

"Sansa!"

The thought was crystal clear, so clear she could sense it easily - and she knew the soul connected to it all too well.

"Robb!" her heart cried in sheer delight.

She felt embraced.

"Oh sister, you're here with us! So soon? What happened?"

Sansa didn't know. She saw the tiny golden light, pulsated with love for it, but had no clue what to answer.

Lady continued to weasel around her.

"Never mind," Robb calmed her down. "What's over is over. No bitterness is necessary. Come. Your grandfathers and your uncle are here, and your grandmothers, too. Your aunt. And my wife. You can finally get to know them all. They're lovely."

"Indeed," yet another presence uttered warmly, and Sansa would have started to weep tears of joy, had she had any eyes.

"Father! Father! You're here!"

"Yes, little lemon cake."

Sansa mingled with her father's soul since there was no body to throw herself at, but oh, how beautiful it all was! This way, their contact was even purer. Sansa's essence felt soothed in a way it had never done since the day her father had been taken captive in the Red Keep.
"Father, I'm so sorry for what I did in the past," she said though she didn't really recollect in what way she had wronged him, because her thoughts were a blur.

"Never mind," her father thought out to her and sent her another wave of love. "You could do nothing, you would only have come here sooner. Robert, don't you agree?"

"Yes," a dark royal voice answered, or rather the soundless echo of a voice. "You couldn't undo anything my stupidity had caused and others had hatched."

Oh! So His Grace was here, too? For a fleeting moment, it occurred to Sansa that she should ask herself where "here" actually was, but her bliss was so overwhelming that she forgot it again at once.

"Don't worry, it's all a bit foggy at the beginning, but your mind will be clearer soon."

Robb enshrouded her in tenderness. It was surprising how very much at peace he was, despite...

"What has happened?" Sansa asked herself.

"It doesn't matter, sister," Robb answered. "Valar morghulis."

"Gods, Lady Sansa, have you already gathered all your family around you?"

Sansa... ah, she didn't prick up her ears, because she didn't have any, but her essence reacted with surprise.

"Lord Tyrion!" she thought out to the man who wasn't short anymore.

"So you do remember me," the former Imp answered. "Faring better than I did at the beginning of my afterlife."

Sansa was confused.

"Afterlife?"

"Yes, my dear. You're dead. And your little spark of life, too. But don't fret. For someone like you, it'll surely be lovely here. On a different note... must be an interesting time for my sire - to be bereft of yet another chance to have a proper heir."

Sansa didn't understand. What was Tyrion talking about?

"Don't upset her," Eddard Stark's soul growled. "She's just arrived. And she deserves all the goodness one can get. We should show her around."

"Nonsense. We must send her back to Tywin," another mind emphasised. It was female, and Sansa had never met this person before, of that she was convinced.
"Oh mother," Tyrion said. "Surely you don't want to reunite Sansa with my sire. Sansa deserves better."

"The living deserve better. And I can only tell you again: give up your old bitterness, Tyrion. If Robert and Lyanna and Cersei have been able to sort out their problems in the afterlife, you can do the same."

"I'm coming after my sire - I'm not good at forgiving," Tyrion retorted, but sounded gentler than before.

Sansa couldn't believe it.

"You're Joanna Lannister?"

The other woman had no solid form, like all the other gathered souls, and yet, Sansa sensed a smile and a unique beauty.

"The very same. And I wonder if my dear, old Ty is still the same: brilliant, but destructive as well as self-destructive without the guidance of a good woman."

Sansa didn't know what to answer to that.

Joanna repeated: "We must send you back. And I'm convinced you'll be doing great, Sansa. You'll be good for Tywin. He needs you - and thus the world needs you, too."

"I... I cannot leave," Sansa replied. "I've just found my family."

A little wave of sadness hit her.

"Honour, family, duty. I've always liked these family words. Sansa, I feel Lady Joanna is right," Eddard Stark uttered.

Tyrion cut in: "What about the little one? It's too late for her."

"We'll take care of her until Sansa comes back," Robb said. "She'll be with her family until Sansa comes back."

"Yes, she'll be with her family," Lady Joanna agreed. "Our family as well. She's from both origins. Just tell us, Sansa: What would you call her?"

Sansa still didn't get it. Or rather, she refused to understand.

Lady's soul nudged her. The golden spark glittered.

"Paxwyna."

A ripple of amusement came from Tyrion. The others appeared to be deeply moved.
"Now come," Lord Eddard said. "It's time."

"I don't want to leave!" Sansa cried. "How can I leave you all?"

"You'll come back. It's not forever, and we'll all be here to await you when the time comes," Lady Joanna tried to soothe her. "And in the meantime - give Ty the love I can't give him until we'll be reunited."

"No!" Sansa called.

She felt at home. At ease. She needed to taste more of the bliss she had encountered. She needed to be with the golden spark of light!

"Sssshhh! You'll be fine," Eddard Stark murmured, and Lady nudged Sansa's soul again.

Then, her family - her loved ones - retreated. Sansa fought against it, tried to get back to them, but she felt leaden. As if she were swimming in syrup. Her recent memories dimmed. Everything turned dark for a while.

"... implore you, Lord of Light, bring Lady Sansa back. Lord of Light, Lord of Light, I implore you, bring Lady Sansa back."

The murmured human litany sounded like an angry buzz. More like an obstacle than a snare. On instinct, Sansa didn't like it at all. And she still couldn't move. Worse than that, she felt as if she had just lost something too lovely and too big to grasp. Her very essence buckled with pain and yearning.

In the background, there was dark, uncontrolled wailing to be heard. Was an animal dying? Sansa wanted to furrow her brow, but couldn't.

At long last - and only after an immense effort - did Sansa manage to open her eyes. She looked right into a bearded face with closed eyes that was rocking back and forth and still continuing its mantra.

"I know this man. I've seen him... in King's Landing. But he looks different now," Sansa realised after a heartbeat or two and strove to remember the man's name.

She licked her lips.

And croaked: "Thoros of Myr?"
Chapter 53

The red priest's eyes popped open. The man smiled.

Further back in the room, the wailing broke off. There were some hasty movements. Then, Tywin appeared on Sansa's horizon.

"Sweet Mother!" she thought. "What's happened to him?"

The Lord of Lannister had bloodshot, puffy eyes, his cheeks were grey, unshaven, and cavernous. His sideburns looked ruffled.

"Sansa!" Lord Tywin exclaimed. "But... but... that's impossible!"

Then, he was at her side and crushed her to his chest. He was sobbing into her hair. Sansa couldn't believe what was going on.

"Sansa, oh Sansa! How is this possible? I thought I had lost you! I thought... not another wife. Not again. Not you. Not after..."

Lord Tywin nearly choked on his words.

Sansa didn't know what to say or to think. How could her cold, harsh husband behave like this?

Lacking another idea, she simply lifted her arm and embraced him. Somehow, her left side didn't move along, but her right hand combed through his sideburns. She realised it had been her husband who had uttered the horrible sounds when she had woken up.

"He was dying on the inside," she came to understand. "And he was close to ending his life. For whatever reason. Oh no! But that would mean war for the West. The succession... Maybe, it would mean war for Westeros. What on earth has been going on here?"

"Lord Lannister. I've brought her back. Or rather the God of Light in all His glory has brought her back. Will you acknowledge His powers now?" Thoros of Myr asked.

"That smile!" Sansa thought. "Gentle, but something is wrong about it. Some half-hidden vitiosity. Reminds me of late Petyr Baelish somehow."

And she remembered Thoros of Myr had not sported such an unsettling grin back in King's Landing.

Lord Tywin finally realised he wasn't alone with his wife and spat: "We'll talk later, priest. Out! Leave us alone!"

The other man bowed and left, still looking as if he had won a big fight. Or even a tournament.
"Tywin," Sansa breathed. "What's going on?"

Her husband turned towards her again, took her hand, and kissed it. Now, Sansa was terrified.

"Sansa, love," Lord Tywin croaked, "this priest has revived you. You'd died. You took a poisoned arrow to save my life. There was no antidote. You've fought for two days. Maester Cressen has just declared you dead. When he left, the red priest came in - the gods know where from - and said he could revive you, and that he had had a vision. That he had come here to save you. I let him pray. I didn't care anymore. And here you are!"

Lord Tywin beamed at her, and Sansa felt a shudder on witnessing such an uncharacteristic reaction on his part. She also began to remember the crossbow attack, which caused her to feel even worse. And there was an empty hole within her and a great sadness about and yearning for something she couldn't name. There was only one thing she was sure of.

"This priest hasn't brought me back. I don't know what has happened to me. But whatever it was, the priest had no part in it. Whatever has been going on... it has happened despite his presence, not because of it. I don't feel any connection to that man."

Tywin looked at her. He shrugged.

"You're back. It's all that matters."

And he kissed her, again and again and again.

Sansa was overwhelmed in a good way, but also shocked that her husband behaved as if he wanted to inspire a bard to sing a romantic song. Finally, the fact that she had been dead really sunk in. That she had come back to life. That she was resurrected.

She tried to push Tywin away with one hand and started to retch into the kiss.

"Sansa! What's wrong?" her husband asked at once.

Tears pooled in Sansa's eyes.

"Don't you see? I'm a monster! I'm unnatural!" Sansa cried.

Just at that moment, the door to their room flew open and a sobbing Arya stormed in.

The Lord of Lannister growled: "My guards have become utterly incompetent bastards! Anyone is walking in anywhere unbidden these days."

Arya, on her part, stopped dead in her tracks and stared at Sansa.

Next, she turned to Lord Tywin and yelled: "You old, gnarled, golden shitload of a monster! You have her declared lethally injured first, then dead! But she's alive! Sansa! Oh Sansa!"
Without further ado, Arya flew to Sansa’s bedside and hugged her sister close.

Sansa squeaked in sudden pain. Arya let go at once.

Tywin, who had been in the middle of heating up for a deadly explosion, forgot his anger at once.

"What's hurting, Sansa?" he asked.

"My left side," Sansa answered. "And my waist."

"That's where you got shot," her husband answered. "And the poison caused your inner organs to bleed. No wonder you're in pain."

"I'm sorry," Arya said to her sister.

Lord Tywin looked at the younger Stark daughter, finding back to at least some grumpiness.

"I didn't lie. Sansa was dead. But a red priest came here just in time to revive her. And you will keep your tongue in check from now on. If you ever call me such names again, I'll marry you off to the older Clegane brother."

Arya winced and bristled.

Sansa took her husband's hand.

"No such threats. She was beside herself with grief, just like you."

Lord Tywin closed his eyes, breathed in and out deeply, but said nothing.

Arya was already back to business.

"That red priest - who was it?"

"Thoros of Myr," Sansa answered. "And he didn't revive me. At least I don't think so."

Arya blinked.

"Thoros of Myr? From the Brotherhood Without Banners?"

Lord Tywin pricked up his ears.

"You know him, don't you? When I saw him, I was too... distracted to think of this."

Arya scratched her chin.

"I've seen him weave his magic. I've met revived Beric Dondarrion. I don't know, but... he wasn't like you, Sansa. He didn't suffer from the former wounds that had killed him."
"Well, my wounds certainly hurt. A lot. I can't move my left arm. And my middle... it even feels wet," Sansa said.

Her husband tore the blanket away. There was a red puddle between Sansa's legs.

"Your moon blood," he said. "Bad timing."

Sansa blushed.

"It's early," she replied, then stopped, and her eyes widened. "Oh Tywin! I think... Gods! Maybe I'm... losing..."

"Don't say such things," Tywin cut her short. "I'm sure it's got something to do with your poisoned wound. The important thing is you're alive. You can have children in the future."

"I think a corpse that's been reanimated by Thoros of Myr couldn't have a baby. Or sire one if it were a man. And I think such a corpse couldn't heal. Lord Lannister, I think that way we'll find out whether the red priest is responsible for Sansa's life or not."

Lord Tywin narrowed his eyes.

"Clever girl," he said. "Maybe no Mountain for you after all."

Arya screwed up her eyes, and Sansa wanted to do the same.

Lord Lannister rose.

"Brotherhood Without Banners, you say?"

Arya nodded.

Lord Tywin walked to the door, wrenched it open and called out to a servant: "Make it public that a miracle has happened: Lady Lannister is alive, against all odds. And have the red priest Thoros of Myr detained."
Chapter 54

As it turned out, Thoros of Myr had obviously sensed somehow that after his leave something wasn't developing according to his wishes, because no matter how the castle guards searched for the red priest - he had disappeared. The Lord of Lannister was so angry about this that he thrashed his fist against the next wall and hurt himself in the process. Which caused his mood to become even worse.

In other ways, however, Sansa's husband behaved in ways Sansa would have never imagined. He brought her lemon cakes and treated her like a raw egg. Every so often, he'd kiss her brow, or whatever part of her body he could access.

"As if he wanted to make sure I'm still with him and alive," Sansa thought.

Even though she didn't know whether the term "alive" still applied for her. The maester, however, proclaimed her very much alive, though he couldn't believe that - and how - this had come to pass.

Sansa only started to believe she hadn't turned into a monster when she found out she had a ravish appetite and a digestion to match. She didn't believe an undead person needed a privy.

Her health was still fragile at best. Her inner organs were still suffering from the poison. Whatever had brought Sansa back to life had not been able to erase all of those problems. Worse, the crossbow gib had hurt her left arm considerably, so she could barely use it.

"Will I be able to sew again one day?" she asked herself and wept.

Sansa cried a lot these days. She felt a hole, deep down in her core, even when her female bleeding stopped. As if a part of her was missing.

A consequence of this was that she needed more touches. Lord Tywin did his very best to cater to her needs. The Lord of Lannister was gentler than he had ever been, Lord Kevan told her once when he visited his goodsister. They could only marvel at this change.

Lady Catelyn and her bridegroom were still in the castle, too, Sansa found out soon enough. They both visited Sansa and expressed their relief about Sansa's survival. Her mother hugged her close and shed some tears of joy. Lord Marbrand had not wanted to lead his wife away to his own castle after the catastrophic assassination attempt had occurred during their wedding feast. According to Arya's words, he had also refrained from bedding his bride until it had been sure Sansa would live.

To Sansa's enormous relief, the couple looked far less frosty around one another now than it had done prior and during the wedding.

"I daresay your mother's marriage bed is much warmer now than it's ever been before. Your father was maybe honourable, Sansa, but he wasn't a... vibrant man. I'd bet any sum your mother is learning many new things these days," Lord Tywin said on one occasion.

Sansa blushed and covered her ears.

"I don't want to know anything about my parents' intimacies!" she called out, and her husband let the matter rest.
Their conversation about the assassination attempt was far more interesting. One evening, Sansa was nestled up in her husband's arms and felt strong enough to talk about this affair.

"That arrow - it was you who was supposed to die," she whispered.

Lord Tywin nodded at her side, and his hand combed through her hair.

"I'm not surprised," he said. "Others have tried to get rid of me before."

"Who do you think is behind this treachery? And what about Thoros of Myr and the renegades behind him?"

"I've been pondering this a lot," her husband said. "Thoros of Myr is still a bit of a riddle, and I don't know how he fits into the tangled framework of all of this. But I've got a feeling I know who's responsible for the assassination attempt. You see - you've got a strong claim to Winterfell, now that your brother is dead. Anyone who wants to rule the North himself would want to marry you to legalise his rule. And I'm in the way."

Sansa gasped.

"You mean... a Northerner could be behind all this? I can't believe it!"

Lord Tywin sighed.

"You see... when your brother was still alive, I strove to kill him, as you well know. At the time, I also led some secret negotiations with Lord Bolton and the Freys, because they weren't loyal anymore."

Sansa froze and felt sick.

"You've never told me!"

"What good would it have done, wife? We married, I promised you to spare your brother, and then, he was dead nevertheless. Seemingly, his enemies acted of their own account. What do you think why I was so keen on wedding your mother off to Lord Marbrand?"

Sansa's mind was feverish.

"Arya! What about her? She's in danger, too!"

Lord Tywin nodded again.

"True enough. I've been thinking about this point as well. The problem is that she's not only young, but also extremely unruly. I do have a feeling she'd be the winner in a lifelong sparring contest with the wrong husband."
Against her will, Sansa had to chuckle. But only a moment later, she turned serious again.

"You've got someone in mind, don't you?"

Lord Tywin sighed.

"I haven't quite decided yet. You see... we've got a team of eligible bachelors at Castamere now. Different ages, but all of them affiliated with House Lannister. What do you think? Would your sister like the adventure of digging up old skeletons and of rebuilding the castle? And if we're lucky, she'll find an answer to the wedding question herself."

Sansa didn't know if she should laugh or cry or berate her husband. In the end, she shrugged.

"Offer her an adventure, and you might end up her hero. No adult has supported her tomboyish nature like that before."

Lord Tywin's eyebrows rose.

"Me? A hero? The Wall would crash before such a thing could happen."

Interestingly enough, there was a raven from the Wall the next morning. The gigantic frontier had not crashed, sure, but Sansa was all too happy to receive some news from Jon. Her husband and her half-brother had exchanged various letters in the recent past. While Lord Tywin hadn't commented on it, Sansa knew he appreciated Jon's matter-of-factness.

"Would you like to get to know him one day?" Sansa asked her husband.

"He's a bastard. It's good he is where he is. But. He's a Stark bastard," the Lord of Lannister answered, and Sansa understood she'd be allowed to invite Jon to Winterfell if they ever went there together.

Lord Tywin handed her the letter. They were sitting in his solar.

"Your brother is writing some very disturbing things about the North. In the past, I wouldn't have paid these news much attention, or I would have called them lies and exaggerations. But now, I'm worried."

Sansa read the letter and learned some details of the horrors beyond the Wall. She pressed her lips together.

"What do you think?" she finally asked.

Lord Tywin pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Without being an expert in the affairs of the North..."

"You're an expert in the Game of Thrones."
Sansa’s husband pressed his fingertips together and continued: "The true enemies aren't the wildlings. It's the wights your brother has to fear. It's the wights the wildlings have to fear. And my enemy's enemy is my friend. So... the wildlings and the black brothers should join their forces."

Sansa gulped at the sheer extremity of the idea. Wildlings and men from the Night's Watch together!? Incredible!

On second thought, however, she had to admit that, logically speaking, her husband wasn't wrong. Still...

"But that wouldn't be enough, would it?" she asked.

"During a long, harsh winter? No, Sansa, you're right. The big problem is - Westeros has suffered a lot after King Robert's death. It'll be extremely difficult to support the Wall and to hold it against the undead monsters."

Sansa looked at her husband.

"Don't you like a challenge, husband?"

Lord Tywin gazed back at her and simply arched an eyebrow.

The next moment, there was a knock on the door.

"Enter!" Lord Tywin called.

A servant with bushy eyebrows came into the room.

"Another raven for you, my lord. From Tarth."
Chapter 55

The letter was a very polite message from Lord Tarth, the Evenstar. Sansa watched her husband read the parchment. In the process, Lord Tywin's facial colour changed from pale to a reddish hue, and a muscle started to twitch at his jaw.

"Bad news?" Sansa dared to ask.

In answer to this, her husband tore the paper into tiny shreds and hauled them into the fire. After that, the Lord of Lannister stood in front of the fireplace, with his back to Sansa, his hands clasped tightly behind him, and watched the flames.

"Your son Jaime - he's alive?" Sansa wanted to know.

Lord Tywin snorted.

"Very much alive," he ground out. "Proliferating even."

"What do you mean?" Sansa asked.

Finally, her husband turned around, and his eyes were like green flint.

"He's put a baby into Lady Brienne of Tarth's belly. The woman is the heiress of Tarth. And now, the two have arrived on the island and have married."

Sansa stood up from behind her desk and clapped her hands together.

"Why, these are good news! Haven't you always wished for your son to settle down and to have some children?"

Lord Tywin snorted again and turned back towards the flames.

"This is not the problematic part of it all. Stannis had already given up on him anyway. But. My son blames me for Cersei's and Joffrey's and Tyrion's death. And his new goodfather wrote the letter to wrap a heap of dung into silk, metaphorically speaking. What it all comes down to is that Jaime shits on Casterly Rock and the West. He shits on me... and you, even. Ah,... when he entered the King's Guard, I was incredibly wroth with him. Still, I tried to bid my time. Tried to tell myself Jaime was a rash, shortsighted youngster. That he'd mature with age. That somehow he'd become my heir after all."

Lord Tywin sighed.

"Now, I can only say he's dead like my other children, as far as I'm concerned. He wants Tarth? All right. He shall have it. But if we should have no children, Sansa, it'll be Lancel who will inherit the Rock, and Tommen after him. Just don't tell the young men about it - we don't need any future kinslayers in this family. I'd still prefer to beget an heir with you."
Sansa walked up to her husband and wrapped her arms around his middle. She remained silent. No words were necessary between them in that moment.

Later that day, Sansa talked to her little sister about her upcoming stay at Castamere. Arya was... partly thrilled.

"This old underground castle full of skeletons? And we're supposed to build another one on top of the old one?"

Arya's eyes glittered.

"Count me in on this mission!"

But then, she turned serious.

"Only... you say I'm supposed to marry one of these stupid chaps there?"

She wrinkled her nose.

Sansa tried to reason with her.

"It's for safety reasons. If I die, you'll be the heir of Winterfell, and countless men would try to snatch you away and to force you into the marriage bed."

Arya shook herself with laughter.

"Hahahaha! They should try to do that! I'd cut them open from navel to chin with my Needle."

Sansa pressed her lips together.

Then, she said: "I don't doubt your skills - but neither do I doubt our enemies' determination. You might kill one or two of them, but they or their families would make you suffer. A lot."

That caused Arya to turn serious. Her shoulders tensed, she paced up and down in front of Sansa.

Then, she said in a forced voice: "I can't believe this will ever happen to me. And I still hope to avoid this sort of match... but if it comes to the worst... I'd opt for that Lancel sod."

Sansa blinked.

"Lancel Lannister?"

"Oh, please!" Arya called out and rolled her eyes. "Everyone knows you've seen the Hound naked. Do tell me - could you imagine us together? From what I've heard tell, that dangling thing between his legs is like a club. And besides, he's killed Mycah. I may have taken the Hound off my revenge list, but I could never be his wife. Ever."
Sansa’s cheeks turned crimson.

In the meantime, Arya prattled on: "And Tommen? He's younger than me and even more of a child than Rickon was when I last saw him! Really, Tommen is stupid. Granted, I like that he bears a grudge against his grandfather of late, but no, he's really so very much behind with everything. He'd bore me into an early grave. That leaves only Lancel. Bleh. I don't want to marry a Lannister."

Sansa’s mind rattled.

"Lancel was so disgusting in King's Landing. It gives me goosebumps to imagine - But Arya wasn't there for long, until they put father into jail. So she hasn't seen too much of his nasty side. And... it's true, Lancel is more adult now. I can't really believe it, but such a match might probably not end in a catastrophe."

Still, the whole concept caused Sansa to feel nauseous. But she had give it to Arya that her little sister was surely feeling the same whenever she saw Sansa and the Lord of Lannister together in the Great Hall.

In the end, Arya was prepared for her trip to Castamere within two days, and she got a nice escort for the way.

Sansa, Lady Catelyn and Arya cried when they parted, but Arya also whispered into Sansa's ear: "I'm sad now, but give me another month here at the Rock, and I'd be willing to murder you, because we're so different."

That caused Sansa to giggle and to sniffle at the same time, and she knew her sister was right. It took the edge off Arya's departure.

Grey Wind was present, too. He was quickly turning into an everyday member of Lord Tywin's court, so to speak. His leg had healed, which gave Sansa good hope her arm might heal one day as well, though she was still handicapped and saw little progress with regard to her own wound. Sansa had discussed sending Grey Wind along with Arya to Castamere, and her little sister had been enthusiastic about the possibility... but the direwolf rather chose to stay at Ser Arystide's side. The knight's wife had died days before Arya's leave, and Grey Wind obviously sensed the man's need for some comfort.

"Ser Arystide is theoretically free for Deirdre now, but my husband would never condone such a misalliance," Sansa thought and knew the rest of the Westerosi nobility would take the same stance on that matter.

In many other ways, the nobility of the Seven Kingdoms continued to be difficult as well. Relations with Highgarden were on a frosty level... and with basically any other region, too. It fell to Sansa to contact her uncle Edmure while her husband honed his diplomatic contacts with Stannis. Sansa didn't like this sort of double game - but she did want to get along with her mother's family. At least, her mother supported the correspondence.

"Winter is coming," Lady Catelyn said. "We need to find peace before it comes to the worst. To
Sansa found it interesting to see how far more practical and far less bitter Lady Catelyn had become. Then, she watched her mother place a hand onto her belly.

"I'm with child, Sansa. I didn't think I'd have another one, but here we are. So soon after the wedding."

Lady Catelyn smiled a little, and Sansa didn't know how to react. On the one hand, she felt great joy, but on the other hand, there was also great pain, deep in her heart.

"I need to lie down with Tywin again," Sansa thought.
There were also many other things that went through Sansa's head in the course of the day. Her husband's politicking caused her to pay more attention to the developments of the realm than in the past.

In the evening, when Lord Tywin put his head onto her good shoulder and purred against her skin, she played with the hair of his sideburns and murmured: "I've been thinking about Dorne."

Her husband tensed and sat up a little.

"What do you mean?"

Sansa sighed.

"Relations between the Dornish and the Lannisters have been so bad for so long. Shouldn't we try to improve them?"

"I don't see how that could be possible after Elia of Dorne's death. The Martells won't forget."

Sansa placed her good arm above her head and looked at the ceiling.

"It's not something that can be changed within a day, that's true. But we have to start somewhere. And we've got a beginning point, you know?"

Lord Tywin leaned over Sansa and gazed at her.

"Myrcella?"

Sansa smiled about her husband's intelligence.

"Yes."

Lord Tywin rubbed his brow.

"But how do you want to proceed? Myrcella won't be interested in a contact with me. Surely, she'll think the same like Tommen: that I'm basically guilty of kinslaying. That it's my fault that most of her close relatives are dead."

"Can you fault her for such a line of thinking?" Sansa asked back, then patted her husband's arm appeasingly. "But this is beside the point. The important aspect is that I could help establish a contact with her brother. She knows me from our time in King's Landing. Myrcella could react more positively towards me and, in its turn, influence the young Dornish generation in a favourable way."

Lord Tywin arched an eyebrow.

"You're certainly the better one of us when it comes to 'gentle diplomacy', wife. Do what you must then. Given how many enemies we've got I approve of your plan to reduce the number."
Sansa looked up at the ceiling again.

"There's something else I've been thinking about with regard to the Dornish. You know... the Mountain is still up and about. I don't like it."

Her husband's face hardened.

"He's my vassal. It's my duty to keep him safe from harm. If you don't like him, I can't help you. I don't like him either. But any overlord needs a brute for the ugly tasks in his region."

"My father didn't employ a man like him!" Sansa retorted in a heated voice.

Lord Tywin snorted.

"Then, you're still clueless. Think of Lord Bolton. The flayed man in his sigil isn't just a metaphor, let me tell you that."

There was little Sansa could say against that. Still, she refused to see her father in a negative light.

"Maybe it's true that father had to accept Lord Bolton as his vassal, but he didn't 'employ him for nasty tasks', as you would put it."

"Oh please, Sansa!" Lord Lannister answered. "What did you notice about such things back in Winterfell? You were an ignorant child, from what I know. And besides - it's well possible your father didn't need Lord Roose so very often, because times were peaceful before you left your home. I didn't have much need of the Mountain for years prior to the last war either."

Sansa was at a loss. Only her heart told her that her father surely had never used Lord Bolton readily like her husband had done it with the Mountain.

Instead, she said: "Even if you're right - the Dornish would be far more lenient towards you - towards US - if you gave them a chance at punishing the Mountain for the murder of Elia of Dorne. How about a trial?"

"Pah! As if a trial of any sort was fair!" Lord Tywin exclaimed.

Sansa asked back: "A trial by combat neither?"

Lord Tywin blinked.

"Since when do you condone violence? Do you want to help the Hound become Lord Clegane?"

Sansa shook her head.

"I don't condone violence. It's just that you're excluding all other possibilities, and I do think the Mountain has committed too many horrible crimes. And Clegane? He doesn't care about the title and about the keep where he suffered during his childhood."
Lord Tywin narrowed his feline eyes.

"You know a lot about that scarred man."

Sansa screwed up her eyes so violently that Arya would have applauded her.

"Really, Tywin, do we have to get back to this stupidity? There's no need to be jealous! Remember that arrow I took for you?"

The Lord of Lannister remained silent. Only his jaws worked.

"I need to distract him," Sansa thought.

Aloud, she said: "By the way, there's something else on my mind. I talked to Arya about your plan to wed her off to Clegane, Tommen, or Lancel. I was surprised she didn't oppose the idea more passionately. I mean... sure, she doesn't want to marry any of them, but she mentioned she'd take Lancel if need be."

At that, Lord Tywin actually showed her a short, lopsided half-grin.

"And you're surprised? According to Ser Arystide's reports, she's circled Lancel for weeks and has needled him with the nastiest comments. Her vulgar language was as colourful as are the clothes of a jester, from what I've heard."

Sansa was taken aback.

"She doesn't like Lancel at all then."

Lord Tywin rolled his eyes at her.

"No, it means she likes him, but her feelings are against her world view of Lannisters being monsters. And what's more: she's got no clue of how to show her feelings, and attracting negative attention is the only way she knows."

"Says someone who's not exactly an expert himself when it comes to love. When did you pick up on such things?" Sansa wanted to know.

Lord Tywin knitted his brows, and there was a spark of anger in his eyes.

"The fact that I'm not amiable in general doesn't mean I'm inexperienced. I'm decades your senior. I know enough about love, and you know it."

Sansa grinned.

"You do? Maybe, you can prove it?"
The quality of the spark in her husband's eyes changed in an instant.
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

Lots of smut... and a serious turn at the end.

Sansa squeaked when Lord Tywin snarled and attacked... and threw himself at her. Within a heartbeat, he was devouring her with wild, hungry kisses. Had Sansa's core not started to quiver in anticipation, she would have been afraid of this primal side of his.

She squeaked again when she heard the screeching sound of tearing fabric. The next instant, her torso was exposed to the cool air of the room - the fire in the fireplace wasn't exactly a furnace, in contrast to what was going on on the bed. The body of her feverish husband warmed Sansa instead. Still, she had gooseflesh on her arms and legs, but that was only partly due to the temperature.

Her nipples tautened... and it became even worse when her Lion started to feast on her breasts. Sansa moaned.

"Tywin!" she breathed. "Tywin, what -"

Rzzzz.

And her smallclothes were a matter of the past.

"Sweet Mother!" she thought. "What in the name of -"

That was the very moment when her husband's mouth made impact between her legs.

"Aaaah!" Sansa exclaimed and winced.

Before she could decide what to think of it all, Lord Tywin draped her legs over his shoulders. His hands kept her in an iron grip. And his lips and tongue worked remorselessly between her folds.

Sansa arched into the mattress, pressed her head into the cushion and moaned so loudly that surely everyone in the fortress knew now that the lord and lady of the Rock were busy with some most intimate activities.

"Gods!" Sansa exclaimed and writhed under her husband's body. "Gooooods!"

To make things worse, Lord Tywin found her most sensitive spot quickly... and teased it until she was almost there. Almost.

"Please!" Sansa begged again and again.
But her husband was merciless and changed his attentions every so often, licked here and nibbled there and returned to suckling her throbbing nub only when he could be sure she wouldn't reach her climax right away. Sansa started to sob. It was too much! She couldn't take it anymore!

And then, finally, finally, she was ripped apart by sweet relief, or at least it felt that way. She screamed. Convulsed. Wept.

For a moment, she saw white.

When she came back to her senses, Sansa noticed her husband was nuzzling her nether parts with his hardened member.

She wanted to say something, wanted to tell him she couldn't take him in right away, but her voice failed her.

With a slow thrust, Lord Tywin glided into her.

"Don't you worry," her murmured into her ear and nibbled on it. "I'm not a patient man, but right now, I'm not in a hurry."

Then, he kissed her deeply. And only moved a little here and ground himself against her a little there.

Sansa couldn't say anything, couldn't even think coherently. After a few minutes, she couldn't help it and came again.

Her own spasms sent Lord Tywin over the edge, too, though his movements hadn't been erratic before. He moaned, tensed and still.

After a few moments, he growled: "Your cunt is delicious, do you know that?"

Sansa was still flushed from their lovemaking, but this revelation did nothing to lessen the intensity of her complexion.

She whispered: "I... I didn't know... it could be like that."

"Of course you didn't," Lord Tywin murmured in a smug voice. "That made the surprise all the more interesting."

Sansa combed through her husband's sideburns and was confused Lord Tywin showed no signs of leaving her body, though he had softened.

"Isn't it over?" she asked.

"Younger, more inexperienced men would say 'yes', because they think that a hard cock is all that counts. But I'm too greedy to give you up right now, wife."
Sansa was confused. But she also liked what followed. And Lord Tywin enjoyed himself, too, there was no doubt about it, given how he continued to caress her, to press himself against her, and how he made sure not to slip out of her.

In the end, Sansa couldn't help it and simply dozed off.

The next day, she was sure the sentries' and servants' eyes followed her with knowing eyes, and her cheeks remained rosy all day.

Lord Tywin, however, didn't dwell on such thoughts and went through with some plans of a different nature: he called Ser Arystide into the solar and spoke of the lacking competence the guards had revealed of late.

"Develop a new and intense training system, captain. Have the men exercise twice as much over the next two moons. Anyone who shows the slightest sign of unwillingness will be flogged until he's unconscious. I'll hold you responsible, ser."

Although Ser Arystide clicked his heels together, and his shoulders were as hard as iron, the knight looked stooped. Sansa pitied the man, but she also knew her husband was right: a few unwanted things had occurred of late, and such problems had to be mended.

So from that day on, more barked commands and more clanking sounds of metal on metal were audible in the training yard than ever before.
In the following days, Sansa wrote a letter to her uncle Edmure - or rather she dictated her husband the letter, because she didn't want to try to scribble something with her left hand while her right hand was still pretty much useless.

"Diplomacy needs a decent handwriting," she pointed out.

"And waxy phrases," her husband added.

Sansa smiled. She hoped for a peaceful winter.

Things became more difficult with regard to her letter for Myrcella. She wanted to keep Tywin out of this contact - for obvious reasons. So she had no other options but to write with her left hand. The outcome looked like chicken scratches, so all Sansa could do was to apologise and to explain that she was hurt.

Otherwise, she spoke of Lancel's and Tommen's new project of rebuilding Castamere Castle.

"This enterprise will entail a good and safe future position for your brother, your cousin, and the smallfolk in the area - something I wholeheartedly approve of. Having been separated from my own family for so long, I can also understand if you want to strive for a regular contact with your brother. Please write back to me, and I'll support your wish."

Sansa added some more details about the situation at Casterly Rock, but kept information about its Lord short. In the end, it took her two days to come up with a version that satisfied her with regard to both content and looks.

In the meantime, her mother and Lord Marbrand were readying themselves to leave the Rock. Of course, they wanted to travel home to Lord Addam's own castle. Sansa's mother had not seen it yet, so it was high time to finally go through with these plans.

Often, Lady Catelyn would hum in her chambers or down in the yard in between giving out orders on how to pack certain objects.

"I've never seen her so happy," Sansa couldn't help but think and was sad, because as a child she had always deemed her mother to be very content with her life at Lord Eddard Stark's side.

At the same time, she had to smile whenever she saw Lord Marbrand. The copper-haired man was radiant and fusses about his pregnant wife in the cutest possible way.

Even Lord Tywin had to admit: "The sun is shining from his bowels. To see him and her together is like eating a treat that is so sweet it pulls your jaws together and causes your teeth to itch."

These words caused Sansa to laugh into the hollow of her good hand.

Things took a dramatic turn on the morning when Lady Catelyn and Lord Addam wanted to leave. Like so often, drama ensued after the arrival of a message bird.
It was Lord Tywin who read the news in his and Sansa's bedroom at sunrise, and his eyes bulged. Sansa had still been drowsy at that point, but on seeing her husband's reaction, her mind snapped into focus at once.

"What is it?" she asked.

Tywin looked at her with his hard, green eyes.

"Your mother won't be leaving today," he said.

Sansa blinked and furrowed her brow.

"And why not?"

Lord Lannister looked away and into the cooling ashes of the fireplace.

"I've been so wrong, Sansa."

Sansa grabbed her husband's hand.

"Don't speak in riddles!"

Tywin snorted.

"I thought your sister was secretly in love with Lancel. In fact, your little wolf bitch of a sister was fooling me. I should have become wary when she didn't fight the concept of a betrothal."

Sansa cocked her head.

"What do you mean?"

Her husband's jaws worked until he ground out: "Arya has disappeared. To be more precise: she's fled. And she's left a message behind that says she'd rather shit on my head than ever try to shit Lannister gold."
Chapter 59

Tywin was right. Lady Catelyn and Lord Marbrand did not leave Casterly Rock. Sansa's mother rather ran around, wringing her hands.

"The gods know I've done my best to educate Arya," she prattled during one meeting in the Lannister solar.

Lord Tywin answered by simply arching an eye, and Sansa could hear his unspoken comment.

Lady Catelyn turned towards the lord.

"I beseech you - try to find my girl! The Seven Kingdoms are such a dangerous place."

Sansa thought of King's Landing.

"Westeros is a dangerous place, no matter where you are."

Her husband thrummed his fingers on his desk.

"You can bet on it that I'm eager to find your daughter, Lady Catelyn. Nobody insults me the way she did and can get away without punishment."

Sansa's mother blanched.

"Oh no, please! Arya is young and rash, but she's not evil -"

"If she were evil, my lady, I'd leave her to the Boltons so she could get flayed alive."

Lady Catelyn gaped and balled her fists.

Sansa was getting tired of her husband's and her mother's quarrels. She closed her eyes so as not to screw them heavenwards.

"He'll want some sort of public punishment for Arya. Something that shows nobody can undermine his power. Why, oh why did Arya have to be so stupid?"

Later, when Sansa and her husband were alone, she asked: "What sort of punishment do you have in mind for Arya? I hope it's not wedding her off to the Mountain."

Lord Tywin snorted.

"After what she's done, that's pretty much a wet dream of mine. As it is, I cannot let her marry Lancel anymore. She's too unreliable, hates the Lannisters too much, and could turn into a veritable danger in the future. No, I'll marry her down to a loyal knight and keep her under close surveillance. Ser Arystide is a widower - it would be an exceptional gift for him to marry such a noble lady far
above his station."

Sansa bit her lip.

"It would be an exceptional gift for him to marry Deirdre, commoner or not," she thought.

At the same time, she knew the Lord of Lannister wouldn't discuss his decision any further. It was rather a surprise his reaction wasn't any harsher, given how cruel he could be.

A day later, a report arrived from the ruins of Castamere. It was from Lancel. Sansa read the lines as soon as her husband handed her the message.

"To the Lord of Lannister

Dear uncle,

you will be satisfied to learn that we have opened and aired the underground section of the former Castle of Castamere, and that we have cleared the area of all the skeletons. There was only little damage to be found below the earth - broken furniture that had been knocked over and old blood stains. Otherwise, we have found an acceptable - though not exactly cosy - basis here.

Tommen is training a lot with Clegane. The two are getting along much better than in the past, now that Tommen is older. The overall development is decent, even your critical eye would come to this conclusion.

The smallfolk in the area is scanty and lives in abject poverty. The people are unprepared for a long winter, and they are not used to having a lord close by anymore. I can see upcoming trouble here, so I am postponing the beginning of the rebuilding of the castle to the next spring. It is more important to re-establish a direct rule here and to improve the situation of the subjects. It would be of little use to have a castle in an area where all the people have starved to death.

On a more positive note, I can tell you that the architect you have sent along with us in our entourage is a diligent man and has come up with a first rough draft. We will discuss more aspects in the near future. What we will be able to realise will also depend on your financial support, uncle.

And here we are coming to a relevant point. Luckily, there will be no immediate monetary problems ahead since we have found many valuable goods in the underground section of the Castamere ruins. Next spring, however, we will be in need of both your expertise as a man who knows how to make money as well as some coin to get the project on the way. Thus, I politely ask for your thoughts on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Lancel"

When Sansa had finished reading, she asked: "What do you think, Tywin?"

For a moment, her husband's front teeth nibbled on his lower lip.
"If you're the Winter Lioness, Sansa, Lancel should be named Guilded Tongue. I wasn't aware of the fact that my nephew deemed me prone to flattery."

Sansa cocked her head and took Lord Tywin's hand.

"The way I see it he's not doing too badly, given his difficult situation. And it makes sense not to begin the construction process in winter."

Tywin shrugged.

"At least he doesn't seem to be as useless as he used to do as a lad. Maybe, he's getting older and wiser after all. Let us hope he's able to reduce Tommen's grudge against me. If there's anything I don't need, it's a vindictive inbred bastard of a grandson."

"Tywin! Don't speak of him like that!" Sansa chided her husband. "Such a kind of wording does nothing to reduce a grudge against you."

Lord Tywin's jaws hardened.

"It's the truth, and he'll always have to live with it, so he better not forget it. If I don't mention it - others will, and make no mistake."

Sansa sighed.

"Really Tywin, I've got no idea why you're not the greatest heartthrob in the Seven Kingdoms."

"And I've got no idea when you mastered sarcasm, Sansa. Doesn't become a lady like you at all."

They might have continued to bicker, but a knock on the solar door interrupted them. It was a servant with another message.

Lord Tywin grabbed the parchment, sent the man on his way, and commented while starting to read: "There are those days when it would have been a decidedly better alternative to stay in bed and to fuck you into oblivion."

Sansa was just about to give him an according reply when she noticed her husband furrow his brow.

"Bad news?"

Lord Tywin finished reading and rubbed his face.

"As I've just said - staying in bed with you would have been preferable. This letter is from the capital. And you're right. Bad news. I wonder what it'll all mean in the future."
I haven't watched the last seasons of the show, so I'm not up to date with the religious developments in the series. Just wanted to let you know in case there's something you consider weird.

Sansa looked at Tywin and exclaimed: "Don't make me tear each sentence from your lips individually! What has happened in the capital?"

Her husband pinched the bridge of his nose and breathed in and out.

"Stannis and the new High Septon had a decisive clash when Stannis started the construction of a big temple for the Red God. To make things worse, the king burned a priest of the Faith - a sacrifice that should show that the Seven lacked real power in comparison to R'hllor."

Sansa's eyes widened, and she clasped a hand over her mouth.

Tywin nodded at her reaction.

"And things aren't getting better," he continued. "The High Septon - or High Sparrow, as he calls himself - has retaliated. He ordered all followers of the Faith to not accept a king who defied their way of living. Stannis sent the City Guard against the protesters. In the process, a toddler died. That was the symbolic point of no return for the people. To cut a long story short: Stannis is dead, all signs of the Red God are in the process of being wiped out - and R'hllor's supporters along with them. To top it all, the High Septon has declared himself ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. He claims the country needs to be cleansed."

Sansa couldn't believe her ears.

"Sweet Mother! The madness of it all!"

"And now?" she asked.

"Now we've got a problem," Tywin answered. "The High Septon will demand my loyalty. Of course, he's not a suitable political leader for the Seven Kingdoms by any means. He's the religious head of our main religion, but nothing more. He's probably not even of noble birth."

"What about the Old Gods in the North?" Sansa breathed.

Tywin nodded.

"The rift between the North and the other kingdoms is bad enough as it is. And there's the undead menace from beyond the Wall, and winter is ahead. We've got no need of a religious stickler in King's Landing."
Sansa stood behind her sitting husband and wrapped her arms around Tywin's neck.

"What will happen if you deny the High Sparrow your loyalty?"

Tywin leaned his head against her chest, closed his eyes for a short moment and uttered a purr.

Next, he said: "The Faith will throw me out, and the High Septon will try to fight me, and to weaken my position. To destabilise the West. To kill me even. He knows me for a harsh and a strong man. He knows that my stance still has got much weight in the realm."

Sansa let her fingers trail through Tywin's sideburns, and her husband purred again. She bent down and kissed him.

"I'll be at your side, love. Always."

Tywin looked up at her, and while his mouth was serious, his eyes smiled.

Sadly, the gentle expression vanished again all too soon and was replaced by stony resolution.

"Joffrey's only folly I'm glad about is that he brought us together, Sansa. Now. We need to confer with the others. I need to speak to Kevan. It's also good Lord Marbrand is still here. And while your mother and I a certainly no friends, it might be interesting to hear her opinion on the matter, too. We need to pool our thoughts and to develop a strategy on how to deal with the problems in the capital. In this situation, I'm interested to hear different ideas on the matter."

Sansa rubbed her nose against Tywin's scalp and inhaled his scent. She gave him a kiss and nodded against his skin.

"Why do things always have to be so complicated?" she thought.

Tywin's hand reached up, and his fingers dug into her hair. Now, it was her who purred.

"Tywin may be cold in general," Sansa mused. "But not when it counts."

She pressed herself closer against her husband, and they simply enjoyed each other's presence and gained strength from it. Sansa hoped it would be enough strength for what was lying ahead of them.
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Before the others arrived, Tywin turned arround and looked her up and down.
"Your arm is improving," he said.

Sansa's heartbeat accelerated. She had simply embraced her husband without even thinking about her lame extremity - but her husband was right!

At once, she tried to move her arm. And it did react! Granted, the movement was edgy and small, but oh! She was regaining control over herself!

Sansa beamed.
"Why - look at this, Tywin! Look at this! I'm healing!"

Her husband's green eyes became bright, and the corners of his mouth moved a tad upwards to display the tiniest smile. Tywin stood up and clasped Sansa in a tight embrace.

They kissed until there was a knock on the door. Hurriedly, they smoothed down their clothes before they allowed anyone to enter.

At the same time, Sansa noticed how her husband was restarting to ponder matters. Was he up to something?

But there was no time to ask any questions. When Lady Catelyn came in, her gaze flickered from Tywin to Sansa and back.
"Are you pregnant, daughter? You look so happy."

Sansa blushed and felt a sting in her heart.
"No, but my arm is improving. Look, I can move it again!"

Lady Catelyn smiled, but at the same time, she furrowed her brow.
"This is fantastic, but I take it that this is not the reason why you've summoned us all?"

She gestured at Lord Marbrand and Kevan Lannister, who were following her.

Tywin clasped his hands on his back and nodded.
"We have to discuss many things. I have received a report from the capital. As you can surely imagine, I've still got some informants in King's Landing. This one isn't at court, at least not since my departure. He's just in the capital, so he may lack some details. Still, he could at least give me a broad
account of what is going on. - Now, take a seat and let me tell you what has happened."

All the faces around them changed during the lord's report: eyes became huge, mouths opened, and Kevan gasped. When Tywin ended, there was a moment's silence.

Lord Marbrand spoke up first: "Who has ever heard of such madness? The entire realm is at stake. Now that war has finally come to an end more or less, we don't need a war of the faiths."

Lord Tywin nodded.

"I agree. Now. I've got a feeling that the High Septon will try to undermine the lords' authority so as to accumulate worldly power himself."

"This can't work, can it?" Kevan asked.

"Under normal circumstances - no," Sansa said. "But the Seven Kingdoms rather resemble Seven Shards at the moment, after everything that has happened."

"The Westerosi lords have to... not forget, but to process their grudges and to start to work together again," Lady Catelyn suggested with a side look at her new husband.

Lord Tywin cocked his head.

"This is easier said than done, my lady."

"I know. Still. I'll write to Edmure," Lady Catelyn offered. "It would be a beginning."

Sansa thought that this was a day chock full of surprises. The events in the capital, her arm, and now her mother's readiness for reconciliation. How much the former Lady Stark had changed!

"I'll write to the Wall," she heard herself say. "Jon needs to know of this, too."

"You will do more than that, Sansa," her husband said and rose from behind his desk.

Everyone looked at the Lord of Lannister as he stood there, very erect, every ounce a leader, unwavering, like a rock in the stormy sea.

In a calm, almost nonchalant voice, he said: "I'm getting old and ill and frail, as everyone can see. So it is time for me to step back into the second row and to leave the day-to-day business to my dear wife. I'll be her Lord Consort - and Sansa will be more than the Warden of the West. Or of the North, for that matter, once we have undone the Boltons next spring. No. She will be the Satrap of the Northwest and combine the best aspects of two kingdoms. In case you don't know what a satrap is - that's an ancient Ghiscari term for a regional ruler under a lawful king."

Sansa could do nothing but stare at her husband - and the world started to spin around her.
Lady Catelyn was patting Sansa's cheek when she regained her senses. As soon as her memory set in, Sansa stared at her husband.

"Tywin, what is the meaning of all of this?" she asked.

Her mother turned to look at the Lord of Lannister as well.

"You surely don't believe anyone in the Seven Kingdoms would buy the story of the almighty Lion at the Rock retiring because of old age."

It wasn't even a question.

Lord Tywin held up his index finger.

"Never underestimate the stupidity of a religious stickler. But yes, I agree. Few people will believe such a story - because few people can believe in a woman's capability. But Sansa is totally apt for the task ahead. I'm much older than her, and she'll have to take over these duties one day anyway."

Kevan looked at his brother as if he'd lost his mind.

"Ty, you mean you're being serious about this?"

The Lord of Lannister arched an eyebrow and had a smug air about him.

"Do you take me for a jester? After so many decades? And have you forgotten how I tried to give up my role as the Hand under King Aerys? I'm not clinging to a position any more than necessary, other than what people may think about me."

Rubbing their necks in confusion, Kevan and the others left, Lady Catelyn not without repeating that she'd write to Lord Edmure.

As soon as they were all gone, Sansa placed her hands on her hips.

"Honestly, Tywin, I want to know what's going on in that devious mind of yours!"

She thought she had never seen her husband so amused and knew he had some wretched sort of masterplan in his mind.

"Ah, the point is that I'm doing something the High Septon will never expect - and that's what you need to do: to surprise your enemies. You see - it doesn't really matter whether the Sparrow believes I'm giving up power or not. The point is that you'll be the official person to turn to. And while it's easy to condemn me for all sorts of things, everyone knows that you're a gentle soul and devout, not devious. Our subjects will stay loyal to House Lannister - far more than they'd do for me. And the
High Sparrow will have fewer chances to attack. Besides, you've got all many relevant connections: to House Lannister, to House Arryn, to the North, to the Wall. And you can't make things worse when it comes to the Stormlands, the Reach and Dorne.

Sansa glanced at her husband and still couldn't believe it all.

"Do you want to make me queen?" she asked. "You see... I'm beyond the point of wanting to become queen. Joffrey has cured me of that idea forever."

Lord Tywin snorted.

"Words are wind, and titles are words. Think of how powerful Robert Baratheon actually was. What counts is the actual power one wields. No, you becoming queen isn't on my agenda."

"Then who should be the ruler of the Seven Kingdoms?"

Tywin sighed.

"I'm not looking forward to it... but I do have a feeling we'll soon have a Targaryen monarch again. Some of my spies have reported certain rumours over the last days. Looks like there's a lot going on over in Essos with that dragon girl. And I intend to ride on top of the wave - not to be washed away by it."

Sansa didn't know what to say to that. Didn't dare to think of a Daenaerys Targaryen on the Iron Throne.

Instead, she asked timidly: "And your power? And mine?"

Her husband grasped her chin.

"We're husband and wife, aren't we?"

Sansa smiled.

"Yes, we are."

She kissed Tywin.

There was a sparkle in his eyes when he gazed at her.

"Happy first anniversary," he murmured.

Sansa stiffened. Only now did she remembere they had been married for a year!

"Tywin!" she whispered.

And her husband fished something out of the drawer in his dest.

"I wanted to give you this little sign of my adoration sooner, but a few things got in the way. Ah, but
here it is now."

Sansa had a little parcel in her hand. Adoration? This word from Tywin's mouth?

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "That wouldn't have been necessary! And I don't have anything for you!"

Lord Tywin shrugged.

"What about a decent fuck later on?" he asked.

Sansa blushed.

"Of course," she conceded avidly.

Next, she unwrapped the parcel. A moment later, she held a golden hairnet in her hands that was decorated with grey-white jewels as well as garnets. Lannister colours and Stark colours combined!

Tears welled up in her eyes.

"Tywin! Oh Tywin, thank you! I think I must be the happiest woman on earth!" she called out.

Her husband beamed at her.

"Does it mean I shall take you now?"

"By all means, Tywin. At once!" Sansa breathed.

She kissed her lord husband again, and her tongue invaded his mouth. The Lion of Lannister groaned, and she knew he'd be easy game for a northern firewolf today...

Chapter End Notes

"Firewolf" is a Freudian mistake, but I'll keep it, because it makes all the sense in the world. ;-}
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

In the last chapter, I accidentally wrote "grenades" instead of "garnets". Whoops. Sorry.

Otherwise... just smut and romance today.

They kissed, hungrily and greedily. Tywin pressed her against the desk, then heaved her onto it, and Sansa was all too willing. A few months earlier, she'd have blushed, but oh, after a year with the Lion of Lannister, she was beyond that. Especially since she had ample knowledge of the enjoyment that was lying ahead of her. Her hands as well as his tore on the clothes between them, undid buttons, opened laces. The procedure wasn't refined, but under these circumstances, Sansa didn't particularly care about being a lady.

Without further ado, Tywin probed her entrance, found her ready, and slid into her.

Sansa gasped, threw her arms around him, and kissed him as if she wanted to eat him alive. On this day, she was as much of predator as him. And when he started to move, she wrapped her long legs around his middle to keep her husband where she needed him.

The whole affair was out of control from the very beginning, but they became wilder with each thrust. Tywin pounded into her as if he wanted to split her apart. It hurt, and Sansa welcomed the pain. It was so much sweeter than the pain she had felt in her past. It helped her to feel alive, truly alive - recent short-term death notwithstanding. Oh, but now, she was here, in the arms of the man she desired. The man she loved.

Yes, now, after a year, she could be sure: she loved Tywin Lannister, of all men, despite everything that had happened in the past. She hadn't asked for this love, and yet, there it was, undeniably and as strong as it could possibly be. And her husband felt just as intensely for her, there was no mistaking it. Theirs was not a love that could be understood from the outside, weird and unexpected and utterly impossible as it was. No, their love could only be felt on the inside.

Speaking of 'inside' - Tywin was very much inside of her, and Sansa met all his movements with the greatest enthusiasm.

"Yes!" she gasped. "Oh yes, please... oh... Gods!"

She was beyond coherent sentences - and Tywin was even beyond coherent words. In the end, he only lasted for a few minutes. Shuddering and groaning, he came and pressed himself against her. And once he had recovered, he took care of Sansa and rubbed her to a wonderful peak. Then, it was her who leaned against Tywin.

Gasping, and laughing, she breathed: "I so didn't bargain for you - but I'd never want to exchange you for anyone else."
Tywin's noisetip rubbed the pulse point behind her ear.

"Next round in bed after dinner?" he asked.

Sansa laughed until she cried.

"Old and sick and frail, Tywin? Old and sick and frail?"

Her husband shrugged, the very image of innocence.

"Why - I did need a stick on our wedding night, for example, didn't I?"

Sansa made a face.

"Ugh. Don't remind me."

"We've come a long way since then, Sansa, haven't we?"

Sansa rubbed her nose against his.

"Yes. And I hope the way ahead of us is much, much longer."

"So do I," Tywin murmured. "Ah, I wouldn't wager on my impending demise. Thankfully, I'm as tough as weed. - Now... back to work. We've desecrated this desk long enough."

At that point, Tywin finally managed to cause Sansa to blush.
The next days brought no news of Arya's whereabouts. Tywin cursed about the ongoing absence of the Stark girl, whereas Lady Catelyn prayed for the survival of her youngest daughter... but not for a find.

A most welcome amusing rumour was that Grey Wind had allegedly put some pups into the belly of a dachshund lady. Ser Arystide wasn't absolutely sure since he hadn't seen the coupling, but he swore that Grey Wind and pregnant Doggie Dyane were utterly smitten with one another.

On hearing it, Tywin grumbled at dinner: “And how would he have done it, physically speaking? I've never seen spooning dogs. Direwolves. Whatever. And what should the outcome be? Floppy ears, short legs, and a pony-sized back? Pfft.”

The mere concept triggered off roars of laughter all around in the Great Hall. Naturally, Tywin remained unsmiling and furrowed his brow when he realised he was the source of the merriment. At least he didn't spoil the fun with another comment.

A positive development was that Sansa's bad arm continued to improve. The maester came over and organised a training programme for her – and Tywin made sure she carried it out though it wouldn't have been necessary to do that. Sansa was motivated enough herself, even if the training was hard work and painful.

Her husband turned out to be a tyrant in another context as well: since he didn't trust others when it came to the financial situation of House Lannister, even less the West, he decided to teach Sansa about bookkeeping himself. Before the rift with Kevan his brother would have been the natural choice, but the two were still a tad reserved around one another.

Sansa was mortified of the bookkeeping since she had always been bad at doing sums when she had been under Laester Luwin's tutelage back in Winterfell. To her surprise, she now understood things she'd never have expected to master. And while Tywin lacked patience he did have a way to speak in a clear, understandable way. He never lauded her, but Sansa still noticed she was improving.

Apart from that, she finally understood the full scope of the infamous, incredible Lannister wealth. She blew up her cheeks.

“*How is one single man capable of compiling so much within some thirty years?*” she couldn't help but ask herself.

She also compared Tywin's riches to her father's situation. She had always deemed him a decent financier, and they had certainly not been poor at Winterfell – but in comparison to *this*...

Interestingly enough, Tywin didn't cling to his coin when it came to wanting to make an impression.
– and making an impression was his exact aim with regard to the ceremony that would proclaim Sansa First Satrap of the Northwest.

The septons from the local sept at the Rock as well as from all the septs in Lannisport were present on that day. Sansa understood all too well why the Western branch of the Faith had to be involved in this matter so strongly.

After some prayers to the Seven, the Western Archsepton placed the finest golden tiara the goldsmiths had been able to produce on her head. It was embellished with rubies and diamonds and more beautiful than anything Sansa had ever seen – and she had seen a lot of beauty in King's Landing, false as it had been.

After the proclamation, there was a big feast with quails in a garlic sauce, buttered green beans, turnip cream soup, roasted Western scallops, pheasants, baked cod pieces, bread filled with goat cheese and many more delicacies. Of course, Sansa got her beloved lemon cakes – the heavens knew how Tywin had come buy the fruit in this season.

There was music and dancing, and Sansa couldn't keep her feet still. Thankfully, her husband was willing to play along and danced with her thrice. Other partners were Addam Marbrand, Ser Arystide, Kevan, and a handful of other noblemen.

Sansa thought that in a way, this day made up for the wedding feast she had not had. Almost.

Tywin was obviously able to read her thoughts; as soon as they retired to their private quarters he said: “When we get the North, we'll also have a Northern wedding ceremony if you don't mind. We need the loyalty of your folks, and Northerners can be difficult in that respect.”

Sansa smiled.

“He has to put logical reasons first, but I'd bet on him wanting to have a proper wedding. With me willing at his side,” she thought and kissed him senseless until he directed her to the bed and demanded a consummation of their marriage.

“Does your greediness know any limitations?” she asked.

“Have you forgotten the figures in the books?” he growled and claimed her with a groan.

As it showed all too soon, they had been wise to carry out the day in this manner. Only two days later, a raven arrived from the capital. It carried a message from the so-called High Sparrow. When Sansa saw the seal with the Seven-pointed Star, a shiver crept down her spine.
Finally, I'm back working on this story. Just a shorty today, though. I still need to get back into the plot. But at least there will be a cliffy. ;-) 

The letter turned out to be exactly what Sansa had anticipated: the verbose equivalent to aiming a crossbow at Tywin's chest. The High Sparrow tried to blackmail the Lord of Lannister by telling him he must bend the knee to the leader of the Faith. Otherwise, he'd be cast out and persecuted by the national authorities. Punishment would certainly turn out lethal in that case, given what a sinful, brutal life Tywin Lannister had lead up to this point.

On reading these words, Sansa blew up her cheeks.

"Ugh. And I thought you arrogant, my lord. But this tops it all."

Tywin made a somewhat nonchalant gesture.

"The difference is that I've got reason on my side. This man doesn't."

Sansa snorted in a Tywinish - and thus rather unladylike - way. The sound comprised a whole comment without using words. Then, she looked back at the paper in her hands.

"So what do we do with this thing?"

Tywin cocked his head.

"Apart from burning it, you mean?"

Sansa spread her fingers like a cat would her paws under a shower.

"Of. Course."

Tywin nodded smugly.

"All right. What we'll do is to buy time. I'll answer the message and tell the man that I'm awfully sorry, but that I'm not his contact person anymore. And then I'll bring up the whole satrap story, and what a good, religious person you are in contrast to me. And that he must contact you."

Sansa looked at her husband.

"And then?"

Tywin shrugged.
"A lot can happen in between two or three ravens."

"Husband, you're sounding entirely too innocent now."

In a rhetorical tone, Tywin asked, "Is that so?"

Now, Sansa did roll her eyes heavenwards. She knew that Tywin was capable of all sorts of evil deeds, and that he was ruthless enough to carry out any idea of his. And given how she herself had been a victim of an attack lately, she knew others were just as willing to apply dirty tricks.

Before her interim death, Sansa would have forbidden her husband to cook up some sort of nastiness, but on the one hand, she knew now that she wouldn't be able to stop her devious husband anyway, and on the other hand, she found that a dark alley solution might probably avoid yet another major military conflict when Westeros was already bleeding from too many wounds in the past - and when there was no time for any more war, what with the upcoming winter. She still didn't like the option Tywin was clearly thinking of, but she kept her mouth shut.

So her husband set to work, took a piece of parchment, a quill, and dipped it into the ink. With utmost concentration, he transferred his thoughts to the paper in his sharp, characteristic handwriting. Sansa couldn't help herself - when her husband was immersed into his favourite element like this (politicking), there was something entirely attractive about him.

"Must be his air of enthusiastic intelligence," she thought.

Tywin had just finished his message, when there was a wild knock on the solar door.

"Enter!" the Lord of Lannister spat.

A panting young servant darted into the room and skidded to a halt.

"My Lord! My Lady! - Hhhh. - There's a foreign nobleman in the yard, and he's got a girl with him he wants to leave here."

"ARYA!" Sansa breathed.

Tywin's face turned grim. But then, he paused.

"Boy, do you know what Lady Arya looks like?"

The servant nodded hastily.

"It's not her," he uttered. "No official sigils, but the man says you'd want to meet them... and I believe him."

Sansa felt a wild mix of disappointment and relief.

Tywin stood up from behind his desk and smoothed down his waistcoat.
"All right, wife. Let's see who the visitors are."

Sansa nodded and took her husband's offered arm. Together, they made for the yard.
When Sansa saw the girl in question in the yard, her eyes widened a fraction, and she thought, "It's not her, is it?"

Tywin seemed to share her thoughts, because he said, "Welcome to Casterly Rock. And what a surprise it is to meet you here. Lady Shireen Baratheon, I presume?"

The girl with the scaly face nodded.

"Greetings, Lord Lannister. Yes, I'm Sireen Baratheon, you're right, and this is my dear and loyal friend, Ser Davos. We're most glad to have reached Casterly Rock."

Sansa replied: "And we're glad to have you here, Lady Shireen. Ser Davos. I have to confess, though, that we never expected you to be on your way here."

"You thought me to be dead, like father and mother," the girl said in a stern voice that both highlighted her attempt to camouflage her grief and the strength she had needed to travel across a war-ridden country in disguise.

Sansa remembered what such a sort of trip had done to Tommen. How it had changed him. And she had to confess that she had known of the king's fate, but that she had not considered Lady Selyse's lot.

Aloud, she said, "I'm sorry to hear of your losses, and I hope that Casterly Rock will be a safe haven so you can mourn your family."

Tywin pointed out, "We'll have rooms prepared for you, of course, and I guess there will be much we have to confer about later."

There was a wet sheen around Lady Shireen's eyes, but she didn't cry.

Ser Davos spoke for her when he answered, "We're very grateful for your warm welcome, my lord. My lady."

When Sansa and Tywin had left the two visitors to their own devices - which included a hot bath and a platter of food - the two spouses exchanged a meaningful look.

"What do you think?" Sansa asked.

Tywin crossed his arms in front of his chest and tipped an index finger against his lips.

"This is a fascinating development. But also one that complicates matters."

Sansa understood well enough.

"She's got a claim to the throne."

"And she's a Baratheon. Which means she's bound to become dragon food once the Targaryen girl descides to come over from Essos."

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Sansa shivered.

"And we mustn't even start with how the High Sparrow will try to use her presence here against us."

Tywin exhaled.

"We must send her away again. And soon."

Sansa bristled.

"For the sake of the Seven, she's just lost her parents! And in a brutal way at that. You don't know what that feels like, but I do. We can't throw her out like this!"

She snipped her fingers.

Tywin snorted.

"I lost my first wife in a brutal way and my second one, too, only fortunately she was given a second chance. Still, I know what loss means. Don't be so condescending."

"Me? Condesc- oh really, I'll keep that in mind to fling it into your face when it's my turn. Knowing you, it won't be long."

Tywin started to fume at her, and Sansa knew basically everybody else would be checking the escape routes by now. Only she was feeling angry herself, so she wasn't willing to give in easily.

What followed next was what future generations at the Rock would only refer to as "THE ARGUMENT". Words flew back and forth, voices were raised, but also used for hissing and spitting and snarling. Never before had Sansa felt like this, meek as she had always been. However, Tywin was a man who needed someone to tell him he was wrong - and who else would have to fulfil this role but her?

She also used the chance to bring up the topic of political murder again. Where she had been silent before and had told herself she'd try to accept her husband's doings if it saved the West, she now dared to voice her own opinion. And killing off the High Sparrow, for example, might be useful at first sight - but Sansa started to think of the probably negative long-term repercussions she hadn't considered before.

In the end, they stared at each other with flushed faces, frothing at their mouths, and Sansa knew she'd overdone it. Tywin was about to punish her, and severly so. She could see it in his face. There was a cruel gleam in his eyes. Another heartbeat, and he came at her.

Suddenly, Sansa was back in King's Landing, and there were Joffrey and the King's Guard. On instinct, she ducked and lifted her arms to fend off the blow.

It didn't come.

When Sansa looked up again, the expression in Tywin's eyes had changed. He gazed at her, and Sansa knew he knew.
The next moment, his face changed again, he knitted is brows and shook his head like a wet, befuddled animal.

"I can argue with you," he said in a hollow, strangely distant voice. "I can argue with you like I could argue with Joanna. I can..."

Tywin muttered something unintelligible, his eyes far away, seeing things from the past. Sansa didn't know what to say. Still brooding, her husband scratched his sideburns, turned around on his heels and slowly tottered out of the room.

Sansa remained behind, gaping at the closed door. She and Tywin had just caused the earth to shake - and that was it? And what was more...

Blinking, Sansa breathed after her husband, "You and Lady Joanna had arguments!?!"
Chapter 67

Chapter Notes

Arsehole Tywin at his most arseholish.

Of course, they didn't have much time to ignore one another. Two hours later was the meeting with Lady Shireen and Lord Davos Seaworth in Tywin's and Sansa's solar.

When Sansa entered, her husband was already there, in front of a big, arched window, hands clasped on his back, and staring out. Neither of them spoke. Fortunately, the awkward silence didn't drag on as a servant led their guests into the solar a few moments later. Sansa smiled at once.

"Lady Shireen! Lord Davos. Please do take a seat."

At that point, Tywin turned around as well. His face was expressionless, unreadable.

They all sat down.

Lady Shireen spoke up, "Thank you for your support so far. Your bath and food have given us back some strength. Now, you surely want to know what has brought us to your door."

"Indeed," Lord Tywin said with a curt nod. "Do proceed."

Lady Shireen pointed to Lord Davos.

"Actually, I'm here thanks to him." She pressed the man's hand. "He got me out of King's Landing. - Davos, please tell Lord Lannister how it all came about."

The man who was also known as the "Onion Knight" coughed.

"It all began when King Stannis's conflict with the High Sparrow intensified. The king told me that the day might come when it would be my duty not to save him, but Princess Shireen. He made me swear to save her, not him, if I ever had to choose."

On hearing these words, Sansa felt a lump rise in her throat.

Meanwhile Lord Davos went on, "The day came when the situation exploded and the streets were full of fighting people. King Stannis - " He stopped short for a while, and his jaws worked, but no sound came out. Then, he continued, "King Stannis realised he was on the losing side. The High Sparrow had gathered too many supporters. The king had more men, technically, but they weren't as fierce as the religious folk. So when it became clear -" He stopped again and swallowed hard. Lady Shireen patted his hand once more and gave him courage to finish his report. "When it became clear it wouldn't end well for our side, the king told me to take the princess away."
Lord Tywin formed a tent with his fingertips.

"What did the king tell you where you should go?"

Lord Davos rubbed his face.

Then, he answered, "Here. You were coming closest to an alley, in comparison to the other big houses."

Sansa didn't show it, but she shuddered inwardly. Stannis had been in a really week position if he had seen no alternatives to sending his only child to Casterly Rock.

Lord Tywin lifted an eyebrow. Next, he stood up and placed his hands on his back. He addressed Lady Shireen.

"And now, you're here. And it looks as if you're bringing problems to our door. The High Sparrow is already blackmailing us and trying to find a way to subject und to humiliate and to fight us - even without him knowing you're here. Things won't improve once he realises his archenemy's daughter is here."

Eyes wide, the princess put a hand onto her mouth.

She said, "We've already feared our presence might entail some trouble, but we didn't know the situation to be so bad."

At that moment, Sansa spoke up, "Sadly, it looks as if this is only one half of the deplorable truth. I presume your father has received news from Essos, too, has he? Rumours?"

Shireen blinked, then looked questioningly at Lord Davos.

The elderly man nodded seriously.

"Yes, Lady Lannister. I take it you're referring to Daenaerys Targaryen and her dragons?"

"Exactly so," Sansa agreed.

The princess looked increasingly horrified, and Sansa's heart hurt. Tywin, however, didn't hesitate to come up with more harsh truths.

"She's preparing for coming over and for claiming the Iron Throne. I don't think she'll take kindly to many people - least of all to someone of the family name 'Baratheon'."

Shireen swallowed.

"I'm too much of a burden. You want me to leave."

At once, Sansa shook her head, and violently so.
"No, princess -"

At the same time, Tywin shot her a glare and said, "My wife and I have already debated this case. For us, it would be the easy way out if you took a break and left again in a few days."

The non-scaly part of the girl's complexion turned ashen.

Lord Davos asked, "What about the bumpy road then?"

Lord Tywin shrugged.

"You've got two problems. The term 'princess' indicates it. One could actually call you 'queen' at the moment, now that your father is dead. You've got a strong claim to the Iron Throne - but nowhere near enough supporters. These days, Westeros resembles a rag rug when it comes to political power. But back to your claim. As long as it's not completely clear that you're giving up those claims, the High Sparrow and the Targaryen girl will try to end your life. And other people probably as well."

Shireen started to tremble.

"And the second problem?" she peeped.

The Lord of Lannister waved his hand.

"History, in Daenerys Targaryen's case. She'll surely seek revenge with regard to the family who 'usurped' the Iron Throne and who caused her so much grief."

"Is the bumpy road ending my life then?" Shireen asked with tears in her eyes.

Sansa thought her heart would break.

Lord Davos, however, came up with another idea.

"I think the Lord of Lannister wants to indicate that you need a different family name. A... husband's family name. And that you'd have to marry down the social ladder so you wouldn't be fit to be queen anymore and that you wouldn't pose a threat anymore."

Sansa couldn't believe her husband was jumping to marriage policies. Yet again.

And Shireen was younger than herself!

"The princess is still too young," Sansa pointed out.

"Have you flowered?" Tywin asked bluntly.

Lord Davos bristled, but the Baratheon girl simply blushed and nodded.

Tywin looked at Sansa and said, "See?"

Never in her life had Sansa been so close to palming her face in despair.
"And I guess you've already got someone in mind, husband?"

"How about Clegane?"

"YOU'LL NOT SELL HER OFF TO THE MOUNTAIN AS IF SHE WERE CHATTLE!" Sansa exclaimed.

Lord Tywin snorted.

"I wasn't talking about him. A second son is further down the social ladder. And they might even get along, because they could understand each other, what with their faces."

The blood drained from Sansa's face. She realised that this was her husband's bill for her talking back to him.
Warning for melodrama. Thank you again, Tywin.

There was a little cough.

Tywin and Sansa looked towards Shireen again. The girl was very pale - and as stern as stern could be.

"Lord and Lady Lannister," she said. "I guess I must thank you for your candid - if painful - words. I've seen enough of Westeros to know that others would have simply snatched me away and would have thrown me into the next bed to force me into an unwanted marriage. And unwanted it would be. You see - I've just lost my family. I'm still mourning. Whether I'm too young or not doesn't bother me so much. It's not even that I'm overly afraid of this Sandor Clegane... though I've heard some negative stories about him. No. What I do mind is to throw away my position. Or no... it's not even my position as such. It's my identity. I'm Shireen Baratheon, niece and daughter of a king, and I still want to find out more about what is behind that name. I want to know who I am. Not a queen, that much I can already sense. But I want to know my own worth."

For a moment, Sansa couldn't believe that a person who was even younger than her was able to deliver such a wise speech. Then, however, she thought of how much her father's beheading had altered herself, how it had forced her to mature so much more quickly.

She said to Shireen, "I can understand your feelings, believe me, and I appreciate your conviction."

The Baratheon girl gave a quick nod, looked at Lord Tywin, and said, "I'd like to ponder my possible options since my choice means that I'll leave you soon enough. And I hope you're not considering a forced marriage - despite my explicit wish not to wed a man any time soon?"

Tywin positively looked as if he'd bitten into a lemon.

"Actually, I'm considering many things. I'm not an honourable man, as you will have found out by now at the latest. But I can say that your value is nowhere near as great as it would have been in the past. Which means I'm not as intent on you being bred on by the right man as I would normally be. Perhaps we can reach a mutually beneficent agreement."

Sansa winced.

Lord Davos actually had the guts to growl, "You're impolite, Lord Lannister."

"And you're one head shorter the moment you repeat your words," Tywin replied.
Sansa breathed deeply. She felt as if thunderclouds were gathering above her head a second time this day. If only she were not still exhausted from her previous argument with her husband.

Shireen pressed the Onion Knight's hand to keep him calm.

"There's no use for tit-fot-tat diplomacy," Sansa said. "Lady Shireen, of course you may take your time considering your options. There will also be a feast in honour to you tonight. And if I as the Northwestern Satrap can provide help for your next voyage, I shall be glad to do so."

A sad smile appeared on Lady Shireen's face.

"I guess my father was right: House Lannister comes closest to being an ally to House Baratheon."

After these words, the meeting came to an end.

As soon as Sansa and Tywin were alone, Tywin said, "The insolence of it! She pressed this smuggler's crippled hand THRICE during this meeting. Looks like they've got an affair."

Sansa gasped in shock.

"Tywin! How can you even imagine -"

"Why, he's a grown man, and they've traveled together. Wouldn't be surprised."

Sansa couldn't take it anymore. She palmed her face.

"Tywin, don't you see Lord Davos and Lady Shireen are like father and daughter? But then again, if I think of late Tyrion, I can tell you're not an expert when it comes to fatherly feelings."

Tywin's jaws worked.

He ground out, "Family relations don't exclude other relations - that's what I've had to learn. You may remember or ask Tommen about it. And when it comes to feelings for one's offspring I'm still more of an expert than you, so don't be so condescending."

Sansa gazed at her husband. He was breathing heavily. Sansa felt suddenly hollow on the inside.

After a moment's silence, she said in a soft, sad voice, "Oh Tywin. You're an expert at crushing one's love, you know?" Then, she turned on her heels and said, "I'll meet you at the feast tonight. I think I'll go to the sept now. And today, I haven't seen mother and Greywind yet. Perhaps I should pay them a visit."

When Sansa left the solar, it wasn't hard not to weep. She didn't feel much at all. But she knew it would become hard later. Too hard.
Short as this passage is, I wanted to improve the mood at least a tad after the drama of the last two chapters.

When Sansa appeared in the Great Hall in the evening, nobody could have told she was upset. Her mask of a perfect grande dame was firmly in place.

To her surprise, Lady Shireen was already there, together with Lady Catelyn. Sansa's mother and the Baratheon girl seemed to have taken to one another more quickly than you could say "Lannisport". The two were chatting animatedly and even laughing. Lord Seaworth and Lord Marband were at their sides and talking as well.

Had Sansa's own heart not been so heavy, she'd have rejoiced. Even under these circumstances, Sansa was relieved to see the princess was nowhere near as desperate as Sansa had feared she might be.

Lord Kevan and Lady Dorna were in the Great Hall, too. Tywin's Brother nodded in her direction and even sported a polite little smile. Sansa thought of how much her situation had improved since the day she had arrived at the Rock.

"Lady Sansa," Lord Kevan said. With his head, he pointed into Shireen's direction. "What a charming guest the princess is. And she seems to be taken with your Lady Mother and vice versa."

Sansa smiled.

"Indeed. How fortunate."

The next moment, Tywin appeared in his most elegant lion doublet, every inch one of the highest noblemen of Westeros. Under different circumstances, Sansa would have been proud, but after the previous conflicts, she was in no such mood.

It took her a moment to understand what depressed her so; it was the realization that her husband was too selfish to be capable of a major kind-hearted, selfless deed. Everything he did was tainted by his politicking, his wish to make a profit of some sort. The point was somehow that Sansa had foolishly hoped she'd be able to better the Lion of Lannister; yet, today's developments had shown her that her dreams were futile. And she feared that that, in its turn, would leave a permanent blemish on her feelings.

She sighed inwardly and squared her shoulders. She also reminded herself that all she had done was to bargain for a man who was better than Joffrey, and that it was probably unfair to be disappointed now. If only there wasn't a difference between what reason told her and what her heart felt...
"My lord," she said and curtsied

"My lady," Tywin answered and bowed his head.

They sat down.

Kevan looked at them and Sansa knew her goodbrother knew. Still, she pretended to be ignorant of the fact.

The feast started with a toast to the special guest, Lady Shireen. The Baratheon girl accepted the warm words in good graces. After this, ten courses were served.

Late King Stannis's daughter ate with a healthy appetite. It was hardly a surprise after her trip across the country and given how she was still growing.

Soon enough, Greywind sauntered into the hall as if he were Tywin in wolf-shape, and at once, the present dogs tucked their tails between their legs or showed their bellies. The direwolf paid them no attention and wandered up and down the dais. Lady Shireen was smitten with the animal at once, uttered happy cooing sounds and caressed the big animal between his ears. Greywind looked like Tywin would have done, had Sansa stroked his member under the table during the dinner: trying to appear scandalised, but actually being enthused. Only Sansa was in no mood for erotic frolicking. Not at all.

Instead, Sansa said, "It looks as if you're gathering admirers left, right, and centre, Lady Shireen. Even four-pawed admirers."

The Baratheon laughed.

"A, but I also admire your escucheon animal. Then at least the positive feelings are mutual."

Sansa smiled a little at that.

"By the way," she said to the dark haired, scaly-faced girl, "there is something I wanted to talk about a little detail."

"Yes?"

Sansa nodded.

"You see, I know there are many bad stories around, but Sandor Clegane isn't as bad as people say. He's a difficult man, granted, but there's also some decency in him. I'd call him a friend. More so than you'd call us an ally."

Shireen cocked her head.

"That's good to hear. But... do you also want me to marry him, all of a sudden?"
Sansa shook her head.
"That's your choice."

The princess sighed.
"I'll marry at some point in the future, or maybe never. Westeros is a dangerous country. But what I know is I'm not ready now. Perhaps, I'll get to know your friend the next time I'm here at the Rock."

Sansa nodded to indicate she was listening.

"By the way, Lady Lannister," Lady Shireen went on, "I've thought about where to go. At first, I considered to travel to the Wall."

"Jon," Sansa thought.

Aloud, she said, "But you've got different plans now?"

Lady Shireen nodded.

"I'd be infinitely grateful if you could provide a passage via ship."

"And where to?" Sansa asked.

The princess sighed.

"To meet my fate. You see - I'm a Baratheon. I'm not willing to run away from a possible threat like a headless chicken. No. I'm going to Essos. I'm going to Daenerys Targaryen to bend the knee. And since I'm neither my father nor my uncle, I hope for her mercy."
Squeeeeee!
100 subscribers to me as an author on AO3 and 1000 kudos for this story!! *gross sobbing*
To express my gratefulness, I give you a drawing rather than a chapter today: A Sansa-direwolf-reunion picture. Because we know this is the way it should be like.
For a short while, Shireen remained at the Rock, and her friendly ways had everyone charmed, without exceptions. Sansa was sad the young lady couldn't stay, because she was soon considering the Baratheon girl a friend - and the two of them had had so preciously few friends in the past. Together, they spent much time talking about things, also speculating about what might happen in Essos.

"I'll talk to Daenaerys Targaryen," Shireen promised. "I'll tell her that you're ready to accept her, and that it wouldn't be useful to punish your husband for whatever role he played in the past."

Sansa sighed.

"You're generous and good-hearted," she said. "If I were in your place, I wouldn't be sure I could speak on behalf of House Lannister."

Shireen smiled.

"Ah, I cannot hold your house's stance towards me against you. Your husband has got good reasons for his attitude. And now that I've made up my mind, he isn't trying to press me into an unwanted marriage anymore. I've seen enough of Westeros to know that other men would behave differently and would force me into someone's bed, because they'd enjoy my humiliation."

Sansa uttered a bitter laugh.

"I've got to know such people well enough. Still, you should get a fairer treatment."

"Lady Lannister, I'm content enough," Princess Shireen answered. "Your husband is even willing to provide the best ship for overseas voyages he's got. As long as you're offering him interesting prospects, he's willing to invest into your projects, and generously so. He's more willing to listen to reason than so many others."

Sansa looked into the distance.

"You're more willing to see something positive in him than I do these days. It's... he's incapable of being selfless. - Ah, forgive me my candid words. Forget what I've said."

Shireen placed a hand onto her arm.

"From what I've learned, he's let your brother's wolf live, even allows him to stay at the Rock, although the animal killed his men during the war. Is refraining from revenge a characteristic of your husband? Or isn't it a sign of selflessness to do such a thing, because he knows it to make you happy?"

Sansa's heart beat faster at these words. She had forgotten about how Tywin and Greywind had come to tolerate one another. Sure, there was no love lost between them and would never be, but it only served Shireen's words to ring true. These days, Greywind was often seen with his new-born
pups and Janei, Kevan's little daughter, who was so very fond of the baby animals. Greywind's beloved dachshund lady was even allowed to stay in Greywind's abode, and Greywind was surely the proudest direwolf father on this side of the Wall.

Sansa's sad smile became radiant at that.

"Why, I have to thank you so much for your kind words. I guess you're wiser than I am."

Shireen giggled.

"No, no, I'm not wiser. It's just easier for me to assess this particular situation, because I can look at it from a distance. I'm sure the day will come when I'll need your advice."

They parted, and Sansa's mood had improved greatly. She resolved to seek out her husband. They hadn't had much contact of late, and it was a shame. Sansa realised she missed Tywin; and though she was convinced he'd never admit it to anyone, not even to himself, she believed he missed her as well. So she headed towards the solar.

In one corridor, she came across Ser Arystide. He saluted and smiled at her.

"Good ser, you seem to be in a jovial mood today if I may say so," Sansa said.

"Oh, my lady, that's because I see YOU in a jovial mood, unlike during these past days," the knight answered.

At once, Sansa felt a pang of bad conscience. She had allowed her moodiness to taint the atmosphere at the Rock.

"Yes, I've been cheered up, and I hope things will stay this way. How's Deirdre?"

Ser Arystide winked.

"She's fine. She's of robust health. The pregnancy doesn't cause her too many problems. She's just a little slower and won't lift overly heavy things anymore. But she's all right and keeps bustling about."

On hearing the good news, Sansa's day became even sunnier. She still missed her former chambermaid, but she was relieved things were going well for Deirdre. And it was good to see that Ser Arystide had regained his posture after the loss of his wife.

With a nod and another greeting, Sansa moved on and to the solar. She furrowed her brow, however, when she found it empty.

The guard at the solar door told her, "The lord has gone sparring."

At once, Sansa brightened up again. She knew that while Tywin was incredibly busy with regard to paperwork, he kept a regular training programme, and it showed. He was still fitter than lesser men
When she arrived, the men there were grunting and sweating and hacking at one another. To her surprise, she didn't find her husband with a sword in his hand, but astride his war horse and circling a stray puppet with a bow in his hands. At first, she was surprised to see him thus, but then, she assumed that this sort of training had its own merits. She had just not seen him like this before, that was all.

Sansa looked at Tywin, his competent riding and the way he was directing his horse with his long, lean legs. Her heart started to palpitate. Further down in her core, there was suddenly a pounding sensation, too. They hadn't been on intimate terms of late, so it was no wonder that this display of apt virility caused her to react. Lust continued to be the easiest part in their relationship, and it was probably the right starting point to rearrange their wedded life.

Tywin was so focused on his bow and arrow that he didn't see her at once. But when he did, he rode up to her and gave a curt nod.

"My lady."

"May I have a word with you?"

Tywin glowered at her in silence for a moment, then inclined his head a fraction, and dismounted.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

Sansa looked up at her husband, and into his green eyes.

"I require your presence, my lord," she said under her breath.

Tywin furrowed his brow.

"Do you? An emergency? And where?"

Sansa felt a heat rise up her neck, and her cheeks started to glow.

"Yes. An emergency. Indeed. Between my legs."

Her knees became wobbly. She had never been so outspoken, and she was sure a lady shouldn't say such things, even less in a training yard and at daylight. Then again, she and her husband needed to figure out their own rules, and Tywin could surely handle candid words.

As it was, Tywin tensed, and his always burning gaze intensified even more.

"Is that so?" he asked.

Sansa's throat turned dry, all words eluded her, but she nodded.

Tywin's nostrils flared. Next, he threw the reins to a nearby stableboy, handed a squire bow and arrow, grasped Sansa's wrist, and growled into her ear, "That can be mended. But we won't make it to the bedroom."
Sansa gasped, but nodded again.

A minute later, the door of a storage room for horse supplies closed behind them. Sansa looked at her husband. Her hands were shaking - in anticipation, not in fear. What was to come wouldn't be a tempered, refined interlude. No, the Lion of Lannister was about to fall prey on her... and she didn't want to have it any other way.
Chapter 72

Chapter Notes

This chapter is mere pron without plot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tywin shoved Sansa against the wall right next to the shelves; an edge of the wood pressed into her side, but Sansa didn't care. She was far more focused on her husband's cold chainmail pressing against her front. Her blood whooshed in her ears. They had never had a tumble while he had been wearing full armour, and she didn't know what to think and what to expect.

"How can you even do it when you're covered like this?" she wondered for a fleeting moment and furrowed her brow. While she had seen so many knights in armour, and fighters like her father, too, she had never asked about this specific detail.

Thankfully, Tywin enlightened her moments later: without his metal gloves, he fumbled angrily on some ties that were attached to a protective cup that covered his private parts. Once those ties came lose, he had free access to his body. Still, Sansa couldn't help wondering how he might be able to do this on horseback in the case of other primary needs, especially in battle.

Yet, the sight of Tywin's erect member distracted her from this question quickly enough.

And her husband was far from considering such technical questions. He pushed up her skirts, tore down her smallclothes in a way that suggested Sansa wouldn't be able to wear them again, and positioned himself between her thighs. The chainmail was cold and sharp and far from titillating, but Sansa's need for Tywin was great enough to withstand this sensation.

With a mighty thrust, Tywin entered her, filled her completely, and Sansa moaned. Tywin hissed. Hungriy, he started to rut between her legs. Pressed against the wall on the one side and the hard metal on the other, Sansa could barely breathe. Moments later, her husband tensed, pulled out with a roar, and his seed dripped into the rushes. Sansa blinked at him with big eyes, suddenly bereft of the feeling of him inside her. It was also a most unusual behaviour as Tywin was wont to finish between her thighs.

Panting, he cursed, "Drat! That was too early. No wonder, though, after all this time. Wait."

The next moment, Tywin pushed her to the ground, and knelt - which wasn't quite so easy for him in his armour. Technical problems notwithstanding, he stooped over her private parts, leaned down and started to lick and to suckle and to nibble at her sensitive flesh. Now that he had quenched his own lust, he was far more intent on paying attentions to details again. And he was all the more interested in torturing her.

Sansa groaned and bucked, growing ever more desperate. It was exactly the way Tywin wanted to
have her: absolute loss of control, reduction to a sobbing mess pining for a relief he tried to withhold from her for as long as possible. Again and again, his tongue flicked against her nub, circled it, and Sansa would be close, oh so close... but then, he would retreat, nuzzle the inside of her thigh, kiss her here and there - anything that would keep her on the edge of bliss, but wouldn't bring it to the end.

The muscles of Sansa's legs were so taut she was trembling, her toes were curling, tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she was beyond coherent words.

One last, slow, careful, almost lazy circle of Tywin's tongue around her nub - and that was it. Sansa exploded with a wild whine. Almost the same instant, there was a sound of something crashing to the ground, but Sansa was beyond caring. She faded out for a moment.

When she finally regained her senses, her husband was wiping his face with a saddle cloth and said, "I need to remember not to store oil flasks for tack anywhere near a place where I mean you to peak, wife."

Sansa blushed bright red and fled into ladylike behaviour.

"I shall see to this problem my lord. For now, I thank you for taking such thorough need of this dramatic emergency."

Tywin lifted an eyebrow and sported a no less than victorious not-smile of his.

"You're welcome. And now, you may act squire and help me to get back to my feet again."

Chapter End Notes

Now you've got an idea how knights were able to pee while wearing armour... only in battle, they had no such chance and would have to hold it or to live with the mess until later and leave the dirtiest work to the squires.
"Smallclothes" in a pseudo-medieval context are GRRM's canon, not a historical fact, as far as I know.
Chapter 73

After this incident, Sansa's cheeks were glowing pink all day, she simply couldn't help it. And Tywin looked so smug she'd have hit him, had she had any violent inclinations.

As it was, her mother quickly turned up and said, "Arya hasn't been found yet. Addam and I will leave together with Shireen, on the same ship, and the captain will dump us near Addam's lands."

"I see, mother," Sansa replied, and she was partly sad and partly relieved. She also guessed her mother had heard of her... less than unladylike behaviour earlier on, and she knew that any details of intimacies were best kept private when parents or children were around. Especially if the son-in-law wasn't to the mother’s taste, as it was in this case.

And so it happened. On a sunny afternoon, Sansa embraced Lady Shireen and thanked her, though the princess just smiled and pretended to have to thank her in the first place. Sansa also grasped Lord Seaworth's crippled hand, and the elderly man was oddly touched and didn't know where to look.

Next, Sansa took Lord Marbrand by the elbow and murmured into his ear, "I know you'll be taking good care of her." She was referring to her mother, of course, and the copper-haired knight nodded and glowed with happiness and pride.

Finally, Sansa and her mother embraced, and Sansa's eyes started to burn from sudden rising tears.

"I can always come back quickly," Lady Catelyn pointed out. "But I need to get to know Addam's home now. I've already waited too long. Send me a raven as soon as you've got any news from Arya."

Once the ship left with the tide, Sansa had an acute feeling of the Rock being emptier. Cooler, in a way. She sighed.

At least Greywind and his doggy love and his pups were still there. The direwolf sensed he was needed and spent quite a bit of time with Sansa, and she was glad about his presence.

It was only a day after her mother had departed that a raven arrived... with a message from Arya. Sansa's heart pounded when she opened the tiny parchment that had been attached to the bird's leg. She started to read the untidy handwriting she clearly identified as her sister's.

"Sansa,

I won't and I can't come back as long as that filthy husband of yours is alive. I'm leaving Westeros. Stay well, you and mother - but not the Lannisters."

Sansa started to cry. On instinct, she knew the message wasn't a red herring, and that she wouldn't see her sister for a long time. Perhaps they'd never meet again. Surely, Arya had sent the raven from
some Westerosi port, and now, she was already leaving for the Free Cities. It was heartbreaking.

Why did all the people she loved vanish from her life so soon? Why couldn't she have a normal, stable family life?

She was depressed all day.

In the evening, Tywin did something surprising once they were alone: he embraced her and held her close. Since they were good at not talking to one another, he remained silent, and Sansa simply sobbed against his chest. His hands combed through her hair, and she had never expected he was capable of such a soothing gesture.

"I don't understand you, you know?" he murmured at some point. "All those emotions. But... I must admit that the young female generation of Westerosi noblewomen seems to be more noteworthy than the last one."

Sansa half giggled, half sobbed.

Then, she managed to utter, "Do you think Shireen will be able to charm Daenaerys Targaryen?"

Tywin snorted above the crown of her head.

"She half charmed me, as far as I can possibly ever be charmed. This dragon woman will be easy game for her."

That caused Sansa to snicker.

Tywin asked at this point, "Do you want me inside you tonight or not?"

Sansa looked into his green eyes and knew that his past self wouldn't have asked such a question. Few men she knew would have cared to ask her, actually.

"Can you hold me?" she asked. "And can we keep it slow? I need you close."

To her relief, Tywin had burned out his wild passion in that back room with the horse supplies. At least for the time being, he appeared to have all the time in the world. He slid into her, and the ensuing lovemaking took ages. Neither of them was heading for a quick peak; they rather enjoyed one another the full, caressed and tasted one another, and they wouldn't cease their touches under any circumstances. It was both relaxing and utterly delectable - just what Sansa needed. She sighed and moaned and showed her husband how welcome he was. Tywin reciprocated her lust and initiated the most outrageous movements. Aaaah, why couldn't it always be so easy between them?

Later, Sansa mumbled, half asleep, "I love you so, Tywin."

Her husband kissed her brow and murmured back, "You know the feeling is mutual."

Sansa smiled against his skin and dozed off.
If she had thought, however, that life at the Rock would become peaceful, or even boring, Sansa was thoroughly mistaken. The next morning, another raven arrived. This time, it was from the Twins.

Tywin was sitting at his desk, an unfinished apple on a platter, and he tensed while reading the message.

"What is it?" Sansa asked from her side of the desk.

"Uuuuh... bad news," her husband murmured, and there was an edge to his voice that alarmed and confused her.

"What bad news?" she demanded to know.

Tywin rubbed his face and uttered a hiss.

Then, he said, "She's coming."

"Who's coming?" Sansa asked at once.

Tywin positively looked like a doomed man.

"My sister. She's on her way to visit us - she and her ferret-faced brood."
Chapter 74

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year everyone!

After the note from his sister, Sansa quickly got the impression that yes, at first sight, Tywin behaved in a way that seemed to be as aloof as ever - but underneath, he was more like a skittish colt, not a seasoned man. Even Kevan once made a comment on his brother's composure. Sansa could only wonder at what a kind of woman Genna Frey had to be if she was able to leave such a deep impression on her closest relatives.

Then, however, her mind turned to more direct problems: one morning, she ate scrambled eggs with mushrooms when she broke her fast, and obviously, the mushrooms weren't good. An hour later, she was on the privy, digesting in the wrong direction, and violently so. At once, Tywin had the cook flogged in public and sent Sansa to the healer.

Maester Cressen examined her closely and wrinkled his brow.

"Veritable fungus poisoning, but by the look of it, it isn't deadly. You'll have to drink special teas now, my lady, and you have to stay in bed. Let's hope that nothing happens to the baby."
"The WHAT!?!" Sansa ejaculated, blinking.

"You're with child, my lady, congratulations," the maester said with a smile. "It's still a very early stadium, but I'm pretty sure of it. Just don't make use of a herald yet."

Sansa stared at Maester Cressen, mouth agape.

Then, she said, "I think I'm fainting..."

And that was exactly what she did.

When she came back to her senses, Tywin was at her side - and one look into his green eyes was enough to tell Sansa he had learned of the news. Only... Sansa had expected to see him triumphant, should she ever become pregnant. The reality was quite different: from now on, her husband snarled and growled at everyone and at any given moment. His self-control was fragmented at best. Sansa tried to calm him down, but he snapped at her, too. And he refused intimacies.

"He's close to panic," Sansa thought. "Oh my. Two impending events he can't quite control."
When it came to herself, Sansa didn't feel any different at first. If you didn't count the mushroom intoxication, she didn't even feel sick.

The first sign that actually told her the maester was right with his assumption was the development of the weirdest food cravings. Bacon with vanilla. Pickles with almonds. Apples with peppered roast. And so on and so forth.

The people watching her eat in the great hall were also the ones who started to make intelligent guesses about her state. It was only then that Sansa truly began to understand that she and Tywin would have a baby. That her death experience had not rendered her barren. She started to feel great happiness bud within her. However, Tywin's tension and worries wouldn't allow her to turn this emotion into unrestrained joy.

The next message from the High Septon didn't make things easier. The man was more than a little annoyed that Tywin had played the time card and hadn't simply referred the last letter to Sansa. Neither did the High Sparrow seem to be impressed of Sansa's piouness.

"Any man and woman can - and must - go to the sept to cleanse his soul. Yet, a person's deeds count as much as his or her prayers. So what will you do now, Lady Lannister? Accept me as the rightful Westerosi leader, or lead your region into sin and chaos?"

Sansa nibbled on her lip. This was blackmailing, no less. Tywin hissed when he read the letter, and they both discussed in detail what the best reaction to these lines could be.

So Sansa wrote back, telling the man that she fully accepted him as the religious leader of the Faith - but she also asked him how he could be a political leader in Westeros, given that there were different beliefs: in the Old Gods, the Drowned God, the Red God R'hllor and so on. Sansa tried to keep the tone of her letter friendly and naive, hoping that the man would rather engage in a discussion than start to fight her.

She rubbed the bridge of her nose when she had finished writing.

Her husband eyed her up and down.

"Take a break," he ordered. "Stress isn't good for you."

Sansa felt annoyed for a moment, but then, she relented and obeyed.

Two days later, the two of them were sitting atop their horses and were waiting in the entrance gate of Casterly Rock. They both watched the slow worm of a Frey entourage creep up its way to the castle. Colourful banners were fluttering in the wind, and an impressive closed carriage indicated the arrival of Lady Genna.

His eyes fixed on said vehicle, Tywin mouthed over at Sansa, "I've already suffered from morning sickness. Looks like I'm the pregnant one of the two of us."

Sansa didn't cast a side glance at her husband. She tried to remain serious as well, but couldn't prevent a smile from tugging at the corners of her mouth.
Chapter 75

When the carriage arrived at the entrance gate, Tywin and Sansa trotted along on their horses and guided it into the main yard. Kevan was waiting with Dorna on the castle steps.

Sansa also noticed Red Walder at their side. He was a page at the Rock and Genna’s youngest son. The lad could barely stand still, so excited was he to finally see his mother again. Sansa had never had much to do with the boy, because he had seemingly avoided too much contact with his uncle and aunt-in-law. Still, Sansa had always made sure to be friendly towards him when she had seen him in the castle.

Genna had been in the Riverlands during the war, but Sansa knew she had been a surrogate mother for the children from Tywin’s first marriage. And now, Sansa was finally able to lay her eyes on the infamous lady. As soon as the carriage had come to a halt and Tywin and Sansa had dismounted their horses, the carriage door opened - and a more than portly matron clad in red emerged from inside.

At that moment, Tywin took Sansa’s arm. It looked as if he wanted to make a show of them being a team, but Sansa wasn’t quite sure if he didn’t need some support, deep down.

Round Lady Genna waddled over to them. Meanwhile, another young man emerged from the carriage. From what she’d read in the letters, Sansa suspected this to be Lyonel, Genna’s second son. He was a thin chap with a flat chin and obviously didn’t come after his mother. An unobtrusive woman was on his arm, so she had to be... Melesa Crakehall if Sansa remembered correctly. When a third person clambered out of the carriage, Sansa knew at once that the younger man looked like his father, for she was sure to have Ser Emmon Frey in front of her. The only difference to his son was that he was bald, and his Adam’s apple was bigger and moved up and down, as soon as Ser Emmon looked at his elder brother-in-law.

By then, Genna had reached the waiting people in the yard. She looked Sansa up and down, and then glanced at Tywin.

"You look old, Ty, especially next to such a young woman."

Tywin tensed.

"You've aged, too, as much as you've gained weight," he shot back. "Losing two children to the war hasn't done you well."

Sansa had a hard time not to gape in shock at the exchange. She saw Genna press her jaws together for a moment.

The elderly lady retorted then, "At least I wasn't directly responsible for the death of my children." Genna looked at Sansa, "Still as amiable as ever, my big brother. Your influence on him can't be as intense as people would like to have it then."

Sansa didn't know how to react. Her instincts told her, however, that demure ladylike behaviour
wouldn't be helpful around this woman.

So she answered, "I don't define myself by the influence I wield over my husband. Can you say the same?"

There were gasps in the court, and Lady Genna blinked for a moment.

Then, she started to laugh.

"Hahaha, oh my, you're witty for someone with Tully looks. Splendid!"

Next, Lady Genna turned to Kevan.

"Aaah, his chubbiness in person! Come here!"

And without further ado, Lady Genna hugged her brother. To Sansa's eyes, it looked as if she meant to suffocate him with her enormous bosom, and Kevan positively looked as if he were choking. Genna's next victim was Red Walder, who she obviously wanted to crush to death as well.

Thankfully, the embrace didn't last long. Then, Lady Genna moved back, looked at Tywin again, and said, "I expect you to have prepared my old wing. No need to tell me the way, my memory still works. I hope your servants haven't been idle - I need a bath after this long journey. But don't you worry, I'll be ready for dinner."

Now that was a threat, if Sansa had ever heard one.

When Lady Genna turned her back on them and moved with her family inside, Sansa noticed Tywin close his eyes.

He growled into her ear, "Well. We did survive the first meeting, even if it was close. That must account for something."
76... Just a drawing, not a chapter

Chapter Notes

Today, no text update, I'm sorry (I'm having some content-related difficulties...).

Just leaving a Sanwin drawing I've just digitalised. Thought you might appreciate it. Sadly, there's a clear lack of Sanwin fanart... I know it's really just a hobby drawing, but perhaps someone feels inspired to create something as well. :-)

Chapter 77

When they entered the great hall for dinner, Lady Genna approached them. She thrust her index finger against Tywin's chest as if she wanted to impale him.

"So the rumours are true, Ty?" she wanted to know.

Tywin arched an eyebrow.

"There's usually a grain of truth in gossip, though I don't know what you're referring to in this particular context."

Genna rolled her eyes.

"Why - that you've put another roast on your spit, and that at your advanced age. And don't you dare give your wife the feeling that a pregnancy is something dramatic, like an illness, for example. It's a standard condition for a woman. Not for Melesa, granted, but you know what I mean. You might want to tell my Lyonel how to sire a child properly."

Tywin's jaws worked, and Sansa knew immediately that no, her husband was not in the mood to teach anyone anything.

"Lady Genna, let's sit down and start dinner," Sansa tried to relax the situation.

The elder Lannister woman threw back her head and laughed.

"Ty, you've educated your woman well with regard to distraction tactics. If there's anything I'll succumb to, it's the prospect of food."

Tywin looked his sister up and down.

"Now that's something I believe at once."

They all took their seats, and the servants brought in clam chowder, geese roasts, pearl barley in a white sauce and mushroom dumplings. As always, Tywin ate moderately, but Sansa noticed that he did drink a second tankard of wine - even unwatered wine at that. That way, she got yet another meaningful impression of how trying he found his sister's presence. Due to her pregnancy, Sansa ate with an appetite, present goodsister notwithstanding.

During the fifth course - plum tartelets with a cinnamon cream -, Lady Genna fired off another verbal volley.

"By the way, Lady Sansa, pregnancies are in no way like the bards sing about them - if they ever mention them at all, given how much more important stupid battles seem to be. No, what you've got to expect is to feel like a worn sack that's turned inside out. Oh, and forget about ankles, they'll be so swollen at some point you won't see them anymore. And even before the whole labour thing you'll already be dying with back pain. But be prepared that men won't give a fig about it all, so you better drag along, no matter what. That, or they treat you like a raw egg, which is even worse, because it'll
"Genna, if my wife wishes to know about your insights into pregnancies, she'll ask you," Lord Tywin spat, his voice like cold metal. "Otherwise, you'll keep your mouth shut, and you won't drive her mad with worries."

"You mean because you're already so good at inspiring worries about her state?" Genna shot back. "Apart from that: your wife DOES want to know about first-hand experiences, rest assured. Any woman about to have her first baby would. - By the way, Lady Sansa, there's also something nice about a pregnancy: you'll get randier than ever in your life. Just you make sure Ty doesn't get a heart attack."

Lord Lannister's green-golden eyes widened to a degree that Sansa feared they might pop out of their sockets. Deadly retaliation was imminent. On the other side of the table, Kevan Lannister positively looked as if he was about to duck from what was about to happen.

So Sansa tried her best to forestall her husband's reaction.

"Lady Genna," she said in her gravest voice. "I do prefer decorous topics if you don't mind."

Tywin's sister laughed.

"And here I forgot for a moment that you're your boring parents' progeny. But really, let me tell you that the juicy topics are the relevant ones. We all run on basic instincts, and civilisation is just a thin veneer. Find out about a person's passions, and you'll know how to deal with him or her."

Strangely enough, Sansa suddenly wondered what such an insight would mean for the High Sparrow in King's Landing.

At that moment, the door of the great hall opened and Grey Wind sauntered in.

"Speaking of basic instincts," Sansa pointed out.

Melesa Crakehall and Emmon Frey turned as white as chalk.

Sansa noticed Tywin and Grey Wind exchange a quick glance. Next, the direwolf approached the table... and lifted his leg behind Emmon Frey's chair. A sharp hiss indicated a warm spurt of animal urine. Lady Genna's husband squealed, and Sansa had a distinct feeling that yet another puddle of urine was in the making - this time of human origin.

Genna arched her eyebrow and for a moment, she looked very much like her brother.

"Is this instinct or intelligence, Ty?" she asked.

Her brother snorted.

"Your first smart question this evening."
The next moment, Grey Wind appeared at Tywin's side... and closed his jaws over a leftover goose leg on Tywin's plate. Greasy trophy in his muzzle and grinning like a loon, Grey Wind darted off again.

Tywin erupted with a string of threats against the direwolf's life.

Sansa pressed her face into the napkin so as to stifle bouts of laughter.

Lady Genna was guffawing.

"HAHAHAHAHA, now this beast IS really intelligent, Ty. I might come to like it. And you're prone to getting robbed by animals when it comes to food, right? Do you remember that old evil cat in the Red Keep that -?"

"Dinner. Is. Over."

Tywin Lannister's voice sounded as if it was coming from the grave. Uuuuuuh... Sansa knew that the evening wouldn't turn out entertaining with her husband after this incident. Not if she didn't do A LOT to distract him from this incredible slight against his persona.

"I'll have to talk him out of killing Grey Wind," Sansa realised. "Maybe this thing about 'being randy while being pregnant' will help?"
Chapter 78

As soon as they were in their private chambers, Tywin turned to her and growled, "Don't even think of it."

Sansa blinked.

"Er, what do you mean?"

"Whatever you've been thinking of to distract me from your giant wolf beast's outrageous misconduct."

Sansa blinked once again.

"You mean I shouldn't think of seducing you and of trying to have a wonderful, passionate night with you?"

Tywin stopped short and stared at Sansa.

"My sister and her accursed stories. As if our intimate life could be any wilder than it's been so far. Pffft."

Sansa inclined her head.

"Oh, I certainly wasn't complaining." She waved her hand. "All right, so if you don't want to -"

WHOMPS!

And Sansa landed with her back on the bed.

Tywin stared down at her, a furnace in his eyes... only to switch to worries the next moment.

"I shouldn't have done that. Are you all right? Is the baby all right?"

For once, Sansa couldn't help screwing up her eyes, but she did feel towards her core for a moment.

"I'm all right, Tywin. And the little one is all right, too. Can we proceed, please?"

Tywin's tense posture relaxed a little.

"Fine. Now where were we?"

"I think you were intending to wreak havoc on our clothes."

The Lord of Lannister gazed at her, assessed her.

"The Lady of the Rock has been attentive with respect to her master's needs."

"Then what are you waiting for?"
To Sansa's surprise, Tywin didn't rip her clothes apart, but rather turned her around on the bed so that her feet were pointing towards the headboard. Only then did he start to remove her clothes.

Sansa busied herself to do the same for him. She was glad that her belly was still quite flat so she could move about easily.

Moments later, her husband pushed her torso back onto the mattress, knelt above her, and spread her legs. Sansa was confused about the perspective, but she didn't complain as she got a fine view on his male assets. Another heartbeat, and she squealed out loud as Tywin had dipped his head and was now teasing her private parts with his mouth. He had done so before, but never in such a weird position. Yet, weird or not, her husband had internalised how to pleasure her, and Sansa's squeals quickly turned into moans.

When she opened her eyes at some point, she realised how her husband was stiffening right above her own face. In between desperate whimpers, she licked her lips, and felt the sudden need to do to her husband what he was doing to her. Oh, she knew the principle, just not this variant.

On impulse, Sansa lifted her head and took care of the member that was so conveniently on offer. Tywin uttered a hiss, but Sansa could tell the sound had nothing to do with frustration. Quite the contrary. And the hiss felt incredible against her own sensitive flesh. Sansa decided she liked this position.

On and on they continued, caressed each other, relished each other, the scent, the taste, causing each other to groan against the partner's increasingly wet and swollen parts. Sansa was slowly getting delirious, there was no helping it. And given how Tywin was panting and sweating, his own situation was not too different. Since they had learned a lot about one another by now, it was also possible for Tywin to make Sansa come first. When it happened, he quickly moved away from her so she wouldn't accidentally bite him.

While Sansa was still writhing from the incredible feelings that were flooding her, Tywin turned, positioned himself between her legs, and slid into her to finish what they had begun. Sansa moaned loudly as she was so sensitive from her peak, but her husband wouldn't and couldn't care anymore and pounded into her with abandon. He still needed some time to come himself, and in the process, he whipped her to a second, even painful climax. When Tywin threw back his head and roared in sudden relief, tears were streaming down Sansa's face.

After this memorable episode, they lay together for a while.

Finally, Sansa managed to murmur, "Your sister can't have been totally wrong about a woman's appetite during her pregnancy."

Tywin snorted. He just wanted to give a reply... when there was a frantic knock on the door.
Tywin hissed, "What in the name of -?"

Sansa creased her brow.

"Isn't Ser Arystide on duty?"

Her husband's expression darkened.

"Yes. And if I know one thing, it's that he wouldn't disturb us while we're together without a VERY good reason. Like... the Wall collapsing or something."

With utmost speed, they grabbed and donned their smallclothes. That was all the modesty they allowed themselves.

Next, Tywin called, "Come in."

Ser Arystide swept into the room, his face deadly pallid.

"What is it?" Tywin demanded to know.

As it turned out, it wasn't the Wall that had crumbled. But it was likely just as bad.

The captain of the guard only managed to breathe one word.

"Dragons."
Sansa and Tywin both blanched. Sansa's hand flew to her mouth. On instinct, she lifted her head as if she could see dragons through the ceiling.

Tywin spat, "Speak, man!"

In response, Ser Arystide lifted his fingers and handed over a message.

"Dark wings, dark words, my lord. This piece of paper wasn't sealed, nor is the text addressed to anyone in particular."

Tywin grabbed the message and read the few lines. Next, he passed it on to Sansa, who was already balancing her weight from one foot to another.

"Daenerys of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, The Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Queen of Meereen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Protector of the Realm, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Breaker of Chains and Mother of Dragons has arrived in King's Landing. She, her dragons, and her army have conquered the city. The Sept of Baelor has gone up in flames, and so have the High Sparrow and his minions."

"And so the fire has begun," Tywin answered in the gravest tone.

Sansa swallowed hard.

"These are the Spider's words, aren't they? Or could it be one of your spies? I don't recognise the handwriting, but Varys is a man of many styles."

"Let's say 'a person' of many styles," Tywin answered. "And yes, I think you're right, I'd wager this piece of paper is from him. I can feel it in my ageing bones. I'm just wondering why he'd be fair enough to warn us ahead of time. Probably because he deems us a lost cause."

Sansa shook her head.

"In that case, he wouldn't be writing, I think. No, he must have a reas- Shireen? Could she have met Daenaerys and have exercised a positive influence on her?"

Now, it was Tywin's turn to shake his head.
"Travelling takes its time, Westeros is big, and Shireen hasn't been gone long enough to achieve such a thing. No, there must be something else afoot."

Sansa sighed.

"What will we do?"

Tywin lifted an eyebrow and coughed in a meaningful way.

"As soon as we get the confirmation that this message isn't a trap of sorts, we must accept her as the new ruler and bend the knee. Of course, you'll be too ill to travel to the coronation because of your pregnancy. It'll buy us precious time."

Next, Tywin turned to Ser Arystide, who was still standing stiffly at his lord's side.

"Go, fetch Lord Kevan and Lady Genna. We'll meet in my solar in about twenty minutes."

Ser Arystide clicked his heels together and left. It was obvious he was glad about being given something to do.

"You know," Sansa mused. "I won't miss the place where my father was killed. And I'm relieved the High Sparrow is gone - if only this turn of events wasn't likely the worse alternative."

"Out of the frying pan into the fire. Dragon fire, to be precise," Tywin ground out. "What do you think, Sansa? Should I shave off my mutton chops before I go see the new queen? I don't want my last perception to be the one of burned hair."
Chapter 80

So here I am again after a long break. I'm doing first-hand-research about pregnancies, so I can't tell when or how often I can update in the months ahead.

They were gathering in the solar soon - the word "dragons" would have sped up anyone's getting together for a conference. Time and again, Kevan would run his hand along the lines of his short beard. Lady Genna stomped her massive foot.

"As if we have any use for sulphur-shitting lizards! Or their violet-eyed mistress!"

Tywin shrugged.

"There's little use in complaining what has already happened. It was to be expected after all the news in the more recent past. What I have to do now is to ensure the survival of the Lannister family."

Sansa realised at once that her husband wasn't referring to his personal survival.

Up to that point, she had maintained a facade of stoic calmness... but the next moment, she was sobbing and clinging to Tywin as if he'd vanish from her life within the next five minutes. Her husband went rigid under her emotional onslaught, and Kevan was probably gaping like a carp at this desperate display of affection.

"Sansa!" Tywin began.

"Ty," Genna cut in and demanded. "Leave us alone. You as well, Kev. AT ONCE."

"Sister, you won't tell .-"

"Tywin Lannister, your wife needs a talk from one woman to another. LEAVE US ALONE."

Sansa had never heard someone boss her husband around - and had even less witnessed him obey anyone. It came like a shock to her when Tywin disentangled from her and spat, "Then talk."

A moment later, she and Lady Genna were alone.

The elder woman gave her a handkerchief. Sansa took it readily and blew her nose.

"I apologise," she blubbered. "For losing control. I shouldn't do that in this situation."

"Pah! You're with child and your husband is an arrogant oaf. You've got every right to be emotional."
Sansa sniffled, giggled, and hiccuped.

Lady Genna went on, "Let me have an educated guess. You haven't had a decent talk about pregnancies yet, despite feeling the side effects, and my dearest sod of a brother is all male ignorance."

Sansa blushed and didn't know what to say.

Her goodsister ploughed on, "Have you been sick?"

Sansa shrugged.

"Occasionally. Not much."

Lady Genna nodded.


Sansa's eyes widened. She suddenly felt understood.

"How do you know?" she breathed.

Lady Genna snorted.

"We're all in the same shitty boat when it comes to multiplying. Now let me have another guess: you've been too shy to ask for relief for your ailments, because they're women's problems."

Sansa pressed her lips together and looked at her feet. Her goodsister sighed.

"Just the way I expected it to be. And Ty is too much of a blockhead to even realise it all. Now, then. Of course, you can't take a maester's medicine, as it could hurt your unborn child. Use dried and soaked plums against the constipation. The belly pain is mostly an indication that your womb and the rest of your body are readying themselves for a baby. That's also why you've got less energy and problems with your breathing. Make sure to get rest regularly. It's not a sign of weakness. Put some oil onto your belly and breasts every day. It'll help the skin to adapt to the upcoming changes. When it comes to heartburns, it's best to sleep on the left side and to chew some dry oats. And never feel ashamed of your bodily functions. Not ever. I know Tywin is constantly styling himself as some sort of demi-god, but even he will fart in his sleep. And don't tell me otherwise. We're all human, and even if men don't understand the ways of femininity it doesn't mean it's any less powerful. Men would die ten times over if they had to conceive and to breed and to give birth to another being."

Sansa started to cry again, only for different reasons now. She dabbed at her tears with the handkerchief.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Lady Genna nodded with grim satisfaction.

"All right. And now we must make sure that my stupid eldest brother doesn't make a heroic show of sacrificing himself to save the family. He certainly didn't have this streak in him in his earlier years. I
wonder if he's thinking that it's better to die a hero than from old age. Or perhaps he's finally got some moral issues after having killed off half his family. Oh, I keep wanting to bash in his face and to make him suffer for it. The point is he won't be able to suffer anymore once he dies. So our motivation may differ, but we have to see to it this man doesn't throw his life away for some warped notion of maintaining the Lannister legacy."

Sansa continued to sniffle and to smile.

"I couldn't agree more," she mumbled into the handkerchief.

Her goodsister nodded darkly.

"Right. Oh, and by the way. Call me Genna."
Finally, I'm trying to get hold of this plot again. My little one is 5 1/2 weeks now, and I'm trying to re-establish something like a rhythm in life. A new one, but still. *grins

Now. This chapter is rather short. Do forgive a mommy suffering from lack of sleep, please.

Finally, they were able to gather again and to confer about the new situation further. Genna poked her fleshy index finger against Tywin's chest.

"What we need is a strategy that ensures our survival. Yours as well. And the survival of the family, too. Just in case you've forgotten: we still don't know if your wife's baby is a boy or a girl. Personally, I'd be all in for a girl, but the rest of Westeros doesn't grant us women too many rights as you will remember. Take my sod of a husband who I had to marry against my wish, for example. So. Do make sure you don't end up as a dragon snack. Besides, it's far more entertaining to pester you than the Freys. You're intelligent enough to understand and to suffer from the full scale of sarcasm in my comments."

Tywin's eyelid twitched.

"If you want me to survive, sister, maybe we should focus on a strategy then - not on your sarcasm."

Kevan squeezed his eyes shut. Sansa considered it a good moment to clap her hands together with pointed enthusiasm.

"Indeed! Let's find a strategy then. How could we make the new queen more lenient towards us?"

Tywin shrugged.

"How about bribery? We could offer to help her secure her power. She'll need fiscal resources. And we're still the richest family in Westeros."

Kevan scratched his cheek.

"She could get our money the easy way, of course. What if she decides to expropriate us, to grab our riches, to deal them out to her cronies, and to feed us to the dragons?"

At this point, Sansa spoke up, "We have to offer the queen something she can only get if we remain alive."

Kevan cocked his head.

"Good idea, but what would that be?"

Tywin lifted an eyebrow at that.
"Our expertise. We know Westeros inside out, better than the Targaryen spawn, who has only ever been in Essos before. What's more... she might not only want to get existing riches, but someone who knows how to make it."

Genna nodded at her brother.

"Now that's the spirit, Ty. However, you're forgetting something important."

"And that is?" the Lord of Lannister wanted to know.

Genna shot him a sarcastic grin.

"Don't take it personally, but no matter how competent you are - you're lacking one important thing."

"And that is?" Tywin snapped and Sansa could barely imagine which relevant shortcoming her husband should have in the Game of Thrones.

Genna's grin intensified.

"You don't have a vagina. See, the queen is a woman. A young woman at that. If you ask me, she'll be in need of feminine support, just like your Sansa did with regard to her pregnancy. Daenaerys be more open in the presence of women. Whether you like it or not, Ty: Sansa and I, we'll accompany you to King's Landing. We'll offer her the rarest and most valuable thing a ruler can want. Friendship."

On hearing these words, Sansa suddenly felt as if she had some ice from the North in her stomach.

"Genna is right. Gods be good. I'm going back to King's Landing."
Chapter 82

Chapter Notes

The chapter is a little drab at the beginning, but I hope the ending makes up for it. :-) 

Sansa wasn't surprised her husband would speak up vehemently against Sansa traveling to King's Landing, and not only because of her pregnancy. It was interesting to see, however, how Genna was able to hold her argumentation against her elder brother. Finally, Sansa spoke up herself.

"Husband, you know my aversion against the capital. Yet, this is too important. Neither the shadows of the past nor dark premonitions about the future will keep me from doing what must be done. If you're worried about the baby, have a midwife and a maester ready for me at all times. And we can travel by ship, rather than take the road. Really, we must be rational. Which future would our child - and the Lannister family - have if we didn't do everything we could to secure our position? 'Everything' includes my presence, Tywin."

Of course, it wasn't the end of the discussion - not with a man like Tywin Lannister, who was used to people obeying his every word. Still, after this point Sansa knew she would do what Genna and she herself had decided to do. What was unavoidable.

Two days later, they boarded a ship bound for Lannisport. Kevan had to stay behind to go on managing Casterly Rock. Tywin's younger brother knew the task ahead of him, so nobody was worried about him.

Sansa's last act before leaving the West was to send a raven to the Wall, and to tell Jon what was going on. After all, she wanted to stay in contact with him, so it was useful to tell him where to direct the next ravens.

After their departure, it turned out Sansa wasn't seasick beyond the queasiness she already knew from her pregnancy. The voyage was uneventful. Sansa was just happy to have Genna around. Her sister-in-law taught her various card games to keep their minds from all the worries that lurked at the back of their minds.

Tywin wasn't inclined to play with them, but Sansa wasn't surprised. Her husband distracted her at night with different sorts of games, though.

Then came the day when their ship neared the Crownlands... and they saw a huge black shadow in the clouds to the East.

"Dragon," Tywin hissed.

Their hearts fluttered in fear, but thankfully, the huge beast turned into a different direction. Nothing disturbed their arrival at the capital.
King's Landing was abuzz with nervous activity. Whether it was the presence of the new queen, of foreigners like the wild Dothraki, or of the dragons that caused people to be so antsy was unclear. Sansa suspected it to be a mix of all these things.

"The atmosphere is contagious," she said to Tywin, who grunted.

Genna commented next to them, "I don't know what you want. The dragons haven't eaten or burned us yet, and so far, nobody has tried to incarcerate us. If you ask me, things could be worse."

Sansa thought one had to agree to these words, there was no denying them.

Of course, their party did attract many side glances, but while they weren't hailed at, no-one attempted to disturb their way to the Red Keep either. When they arrived at the fortress where the monarch resided, they were lead to the throne room at once. The dread in Sansa's stomach was an amalgam of memories and insecurity about their future fates, but she told herself to remain strong, no matter what.

The doors to the throne room swung open, and a herald first announced the queen's many titles to them, and then their titles to the queen. Tywin looked ahead of them and tensed.

In a subdued voice, he murmured into Sansa's direction, "Well. Looks like I'm done for."

What or rather who he was staring at wasn't the Iron Throne or the young, fair-haired woman sitting there. No, he was focusing on the short person standing at the foot of the throne.

Sansa's eyes widened. She opened her mouth. Then, she uttered a squeal and momentarily forgot she was in the presence of a queen. All she could do was exclaim, "Arya!"
Chapter 83

"So you do remember and recognise your sister well enough," a feminine voice cut through to Sansa, and she realised Queen Daenerys was addressing them.

The young woman wore elegant clothes that behoved her position, but they didn't spark off any warm feelings for her.

At the same time, Arya was standing there in front of the throne with an immoveable demeanour. She was in light armour, Sansa noticed with considerable confusion. Setting her surprise aside, however, she quickly dropped a curtsy in front of the Iron Throne.

"My Queen -," she began, but Daenerys interrupted her.

"Your little sister is on duty. She's an acolyte for my future Queensguard. Still training and not in full heavy chainmail, but loyal and effective in her own ways, which counts just as much. - Now. Arya. You may speak."

Sansa blinked.

Simultaneously, Arya said in a grave voice, "Do you remember my message, sister? I wrote I wouldn't come back as long as your husband was still alive. Sadly, I couldn't keep this vow. But maybe, we can set the circumstances to right soon."

Realising her little sister was speaking about Tywin's death, something within Sansa froze.

"Arya!" Next, she looked at the silver-haired young woman on the throne. "Your Grace, we've come here to pledge our loyalty to you. We don't intend to fight you. That's why we've come here. Surely, you don't want to begin your reign with a death penalty for a man who has served the Seven Kingdom for decades."

The queen inclined her head to inspect the visitors in front of the throne further. Sansa was surprised her husband was so silent at her side, his face without any expression that gave away what was going on inside of him.

"The Lannister family has brought much and more sorrow to the Seven Kingdoms over the last decades, and Lord Lannister is the head of the house and thus responsible. I don't think I need to go into the details as you're aware of them. Now. I'm not someone like the late usurper Joffrey Baratheon. I won't do to your husband what he did to your father, Lady Lannister. You say Lord Lannister is a loyal man. Well, it is my intention to take him by his word. You're calling yourself "North-Western Satrap". What I demand your husband to do is to prove himself in the North now. He will join the fight against the Others."

Sansa's heart turned to ice. So this was how the queen wanted to get rid of Tywin! Gracious gods!

"Which role has Arya played in this? Has she come up with the idea?"

It was futile to ponder this now. She had to react somehow. Just how?
At that moment, Tywin finally spoke up. His voice was cold and collected, the very image of a great man.

"I am always at your service, Your Grace. And I guess it will be most interesting to meet my wife's brother Jon Snow."

Sansa's eyes widened.

"Jon!" she thought.

Aloud, she said, "I'll accompany my husband, Your Grace."

Arya and Tywin spoke simultaneously.

"You can't do that in your state!"

The queen, however, smiled. And Sansa knew that yes, this was how she intended to undo the Lannister family. Daenerys Targaryen had made her move in the Game of Thrones. Sansa squared her shoulders.

"I'm of the North. It's my home. And Winter Is Coming. But even in the winter you'll Hear Me Roar."
Daenaerys had supported Sansa's wish to go to the North and had dismissed them quickly as there had been petitioners outside she wished to receive. All Sansa could think was that she was relieved Grey Wind was safe at the Rock with his pups. These surroundings here in King's Landing wouldn't have been good for him. She wondered briefly what had become of Shireen Baratheon, but guessed that the young lady had missed Daenaerys Targaryen on her way to Essos.

"Probably better for her not to come here," Sansa thought.

Then, her musings returned to their own situation. Tywin was still at her side, taciturn, and his face looking as if chiseled from a block of stone. They were on their way to a guest suite. Considering that the queen hadn't taken them into custody, it was their right to get suitable accommodation for the time being.

When the silence between the two of them grew too heavy, Sansa spoke.

"I'm sorry."

"What for?" Her husband cast her a side glance. "For your willingness to sacrifice our child's life by coming with me to the North?"

The words stung, but Sansa was becoming an old hand when it came to stinging comments from her husband's side.

"I didn't want it to come like this, Tywin. But I won't leave you alone. We belong together. In direwolf terms: we're a pack, and only as a pack we're strong."

Tywin snorted.

"I'm a lion. An old lion. I've danced with the Stranger for decades. But you! And our baby! You must live!"

Sansa took his hand then and pressed it warmly.

"We'll be in Winterfell. Winterfell is my home. Where I grew up. We'll be all right. And we'll meet my brother."

Her husband grimaced.

"We'll travel via Lannisport. The queen can't say anything against me leaving some personal orders and you seeing your mother before we travel on. Her baby must be due soon. I'll talk to Genna about it all later on."

Sansa nodded.

"Your sister will likely accompany us back to the West, considering that her plan to make friends with the queen won't work. And I want to pick up Grey Wind. He'll be happy to return to the North. His pups should be old enough by then to get along on their own."

Tywin grimaced again, obviously at the thought of the big beast at their side. What they both didn't
talk about was what had actually just occurred in the throne room. Not in a place that had a thousand and one ears. And they were right to do so when they heard that Varys had been reinstalled as Master of the Whispers. If the man knew one thing, it was how to weasel himself in and out of a complex situation. Sansa wasn't sure she'd want to know how the eunuch had managed to keep his post under the new rule.

A while after they had occupied their suite and taken a bath, there was a wild knock on their door. When they opened, Arya burst into the room.

"You!" Tywin hissed. "What are you doing here? After betraying your sister!"

Arya stomped her foot.

"This is not the way it should be! I didn't tell the queen she should do this to you. To Sansa, I mean. I don't care for you, lion, and you know it, and I wouldn't mind if you were dead. I only told her about my father's execution. What happened. How he was offered service at the Wall, and how Joffrey betrayed his hopes. How he wanted father dead. That was all! Do you think I'd want Lannisters in Winterfell? THIS Lannister in particular? BLEH! But be that as it may, they queen has come up with this on her own, based on the back story I told her."

Sansa shook her head, and her anger for her sister evaporated. They had both experienced their father's execution, and it had left scars on both their souls.

"Arya, I will believe you, but I must say this was exceptionally stupid on your part. You do know I love my husband and that I won't give him up. Not ever."

At this point, Tywin turned their back on them and clasped his hands on his back. Sansa was close to smiling, because she sensed his uneasiness about her admitting such positive feelings for him to her sister. Still, the situation was too tragic for amusement.

Arya had the decency to look at her feet.

"How you can love this horrible man is a mystery I'll never understand."

Sansa arched an eyebrow.

"I wonder if I'll ever think the same about you and a partner of yours."

Arya made a step backwards and made a defensive movement with her hand. Then, she changed the topic.

"I wish I could come North, too. I'd love to see Jon. But I'm preparing for the Queensguard now. I have already taken a vow of celibacy."

Sansa didn't need to see Tywin's face to know what he'd think of that vow. After all, his own son Jaime had betrayed that vow in more than one way. Sansa also knew what her husband would think of her next suggestion.

"Arya, it's not uncommon for a Queensguard member to leave the monarch's immediate surroundings for a special mission. You could come with us to control us in the queen's name. Check on whether we're loyal and dutiful. You could see mother when we make a stop in the West before traveling to Winterfell. You'd see Grey Wind - and later Jon. Wouldn't that be something?"
"You're inviting this headstrong, insolent hellion to come along with us? Right after the mess she's created?" Tywin burst out, spinning around. "I won't allow her in my presence anymore!"

Sansa sighed.

"Tywin, I've lost too many family members already. You know how that feels. And for a long time, I thought I had lost Arya, too. I won't allow myself to stew in hatred for my own sister."

Arya had the decency to blush.

"The gods know I wouldn't want to be in your presence anymore, DEAREST goodbrother. But if Sansa is willing to accept me around, I could at least help her stay alive in the North."

Tywin harrumphed.

"Wouldn't be surprised if that intention backfired, given how impulsive you are, acting before thinking."

Arya glowered at him.

"There are more than a few things I could say about your character that might lead to Sansa's untimely death."

At this point, Sansa had had enough of their hostilities.

She put her hands on her hips, tapped her foot... then turned cheesy.

"I'm fed up with your bickering. Excuse me, I'm on the privy for -"

She didn't get any further and started to retch. Really, why did she still have to throw up at times after the initial phase of her pregnancy? At least her situation brought momentary peace to her family as Tywin and Arya both rushed to her side to help her.

Chapter End Notes

Sansa's lenience may be OOC for show only fans, but it's not surprising for book!Sansa, I think.
Chapter 85

Chapter Notes

This is more of a contemplative chapter and not heavy on action.

When Sansa had recovered from feeling sick, Arya took her leave. This gave Sansa and Tywin room to discuss matters further.

"I guess my opinion doesn't count anymore," Tywin growled.

Sansa cupped his cheek.

"I value your opinion, and this doesn't go against you as a person, but I can't help myself. I want to be with you, so I'm coming North with you. And I don't want to lose my sister again. That's why I've offered her to accompany us. I've already lost too many people I hold dear."

Tywin remained stiff under her touch. Sansa could see how it wasn't easy for him to accept her stance, being the difficult man he was.

"Speaking of your sister, wife," he continued. "You're right. She's been really shortsighted and foolish. To enter the vow of celibacy and to enter the Queensguard - she reminds me of Jaime. He wanted to break free, to probably do something noble. Which is utter nonsense. You see what happened to Jaime. The whole Kingslayer development."

Sansa refrained from adding Jaime's incest with Cersei. She also refrained from saying something about what she assumed to be Tywin's part in driving Jaime into King Aerys' service. After all, she hadn't even been born at the time. What she did say was something with regard to her sister.

"Arya probably did it, because she wanted the feeling to have a choice, so as not to be married off to someone she doesn't know or doesn't like."

Tywin shook his head.

"Only this isn't the way things work. You'll always meet obligations you don't like, no matter which path you follow. It's something she'll have to learn one day, and I guess for her it'll be the hard way. Freedom is just a myth. There are always things you have to do, whether you like them or not. As a lord I may wield more power than others, but it's still even true for me. Arya could have helped our families, or maybe there could have been other intelligent solutions - but not this."

Sansa sighed.

"If you ask me - I don't like these institutions that depend on celibacy anymore. There was a time when becoming a Silent Sister sounded like an attractive option for me, but really - why do we need institutions where you make a decision for life to abstain from intercourse? Look at the Night's Watch, too. Look at my brother Jon. There are surely people who aren't made for the marriage bed, but if you ask me, too many people who aren't made for this sort of abstinence are driven into this direction one way or another."

Tywin cocked his head.
"As a military man, I have to say that there may be very specific professions that need a man's full focus and don't allow for a distraction. Being a member of the Kingsguard is such an example."

Sansa shook her head.

"Still, it shouldn't be for life. And besides... yes, family may distract you, but if you've got a family you're more motivated, and you know what you actually fight for."

That gave Tywin pause.

"In the North, I'll fight for you and the baby."

Sansa smiled then and gave her husband a kiss. Tywin rubbed the bridge of his nose with his fingers.

"I'm off to Genna then. There's a lot we need to confer about. Are you feeling better? Would you inform Captain Arystide of our future moves?"

"Of course I will, Tywin," Sansa answered, glad to have something to do.

Her husband left, and Sansa immediately set out for the captain. She found him easily enough, because he used to hold himself available as often as possible. Of late, ever since their departure from Lannisport, however, his drooping shoulders told Sansa the man wasn't happy.

"Do you miss Deirdre, good ser?" she ventured forth.

Ser Arystide looked to the side.

"Ah, Lady Lannister, I do. Only the point is she split up with my at the Rock before I left. I hope my personal situation hasn't affected my work."

Sansa's eyes widened and she blushed for having asked the question. She really hadn't known about this.

"Not at all, captain. And I'm sorry to hear this. What happened - if my question isn't too nosy?"

Ser Arystide shrugged his shoulders.

"Deirdre must have been cross with me for a while, only I didn't notice, didn't realise something was amiss. And then she decided she'd had enough."

"Do you want to fight for her when we come back to the Rock?"

The knight blew the air through the nose.

"Ah, my lady, she gave me the impression she wouldn't like such a move. But I've left some money at the Iron Bank. If something happens to me while I'm on duty, this will cover my remaining obligations."

Sansa sighed and pressed the man's arm gently.

"It's so sad when things don't work out. You're both good people, from all I know. I'm glad I've always been able to sort out things with my husband. Which leads us to why I've come to see you. The point is that it's well possible you'll meet more dangerous situations in the not too distant future. It's the queen's wish we relocate in the North and fight the Others."
Ser Arystide's stony face told Sansa gossip had already reached him. They were in the Red Keep after all, and their meeting with the queen hadn't been a secret.

"I'll always be at your service, my lady," Ser Arystide said darkly, and Sansa was grateful for the man's loyalty.
Chapter 86

Chapter Notes

I'm quite distracted today and don't feel very well, but I do feel like writing, so please bear with me.

Tywin's sister Genna chose a different way to show her loyalty. She decided to stay in King's Landing and to be their eyes and ears - and to soften up the queen in the course of time. Tywin doubted that softening someone up was Genna's forte, but he knew there was no arguing with his sister when she had hatched a plan.

Before they left King's Landing, they met Genna again. "My dear," she said to Sansa, "I would have liked to be around you when the time comes to give birth. As it is, you'll have to do it on your own. But just you find and rely on your feminine instincts, your feminine strength. That's what will help you. Imagine how each waft helps you to open up some more. Like a flower. Welcome those wafts, because they'll bring you closer to your baby! And say goodbye to each one of them when it's gone, because it won't return, and soon you'll be able to hold your baby. Let's just hope the little one doesn't have Ty's temperament. One person like him is quite enough."

Sansa uttered a chuckle then and embraced the woman. "Thank you," she simply said.

Genna snorted as if to downplay the exhibition of friendliness. She sounded quite like her brother in that moment. Next, they said their farewells.

The queen had given Arya permission to travel northwards - but not at once, and not together with Tywin and Sansa. Allegedly, she needed some more training for the Queensguard and her stay wasn't such a pressing matter and could wait for about half a year. So Sansa found herself saying goodbye to her sister, too. It was an awkward situation, and they were both guarded in their display of emotions.

Arya took Sansa's arm.

"I wish you all the best for the baby."

Sansa nodded and knew her sister was speaking truly.

Just before they boarded the ship to the West, a raven arrived and bore the news that their mother, Lady Catelyn, had just given birth to a boy named Alan. The baby had come some weeks early, but was strong and would likely survive. Sansa was still worried for her little half-sibling.

"I'll pray to the Mother everything will go well for him," she emphasised.
Tywin accepted her words with a shrug of his shoulders.

He himself had other things on his mind. Sansa's belly was growing, and the range of her movements as well as her breathing were increasingly limited. So he was increasingly hesitant about sleeping with Sansa. In fact it was her who demanded her rights in the marriage bed as he barely dared to touch her anymore. Sansa suggested different positions she could still accept. So she sat atop him and rode his cock as it pleased her, but Tywin felt uncomfortable. Next, she knelt on all fours and had Tywin take her from behind, but his knees protested. In the end, they resorted to sleeping like two spoons. Sansa found it strange to feel the baby's kicks and at the same time feel her husband inside of her. Did other women encounter the same problems?

She blushed and knew she couldn't ask anyone about it - not now that Lady Genna wasn't around anymore.

The passage back to Lannisport was uneventful. Tywin was often deep in thought, so one day Sansa asked him if he was afraid of risking his life in the North.

All Tywin did was look out at the sea and answer darkly, "Valar morgulis."

It wasn't a reaction Sansa liked, but she also knew her husband wouldn't say any more on the matter. She was just glad to have left the queen's immediate surroundings and to be back in the West for at least a short while. Daenaerys had permitted them to stay long enough to visit Lord and Lady Marbrand before travelling on to Winterfell.

As it turned out, baby Alan Marbrand was developing nicely, despite having been born too early. The message had been right: he was strong, and Sansa loved the red-haired baby at first sight. Lady Catelyn looked exhausted but happy when she embraced her eldest daughter.

"It's so good to see you again. Look at little Alan! Isn't he a darling? I just wish you didn't have to go North! Your own time for giving birth is nearing! Do promise me you'll take care of yourself!"

That Sansa did, and she also noticed how Lord Addam beamed at his wife. It was good and a relief to know that her mother would be thriving in the West.

Back at Casterly Rock, there were some things to organise with Kevan, considering that Sansa and Tywin would be gone for a longer period of time. Kevan wasn't happy about the development and worried about what would happen to his brother in the North.

At least Grey Wind was just thrilled to have them back and was thrilled to accompany them. His pups had grown old enough to leave them behind. So on a cold, sunny morning, they saddled their horses, alongside with a big entourage and lots of provisions. Sansa's heart beat faster. She was going home to Winterfell.
Chapter Notes

Thanks for the constructive criticism for the last chapter. It was very helpful and useful. I must confess I had forgotten to write something I had meant to include. I hope that it'll enrich this update.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Having lost one wife during childbirth, Tywin had taken measures to make the trip easier and a little safer for Sansa, even if he didn't talk about his motivation. First of all, he had a healer and a midwife in his entourage. Next, they traveled much slower than they'd have done during, say, a military campaign. They made many breaks and they had a broad cot with several soft furs in their tent at night so that it came close enough to a real bedstead. The final point was that Tywin didn't allow Sansa to ride. Instead, he had organised a wheelhouse that resembled the one Cersei had used during her trip to Winterfell. Inside the wheelhouse, there was a hammock Sansa had to lie in so the bumpy road only reached her in the form of gentle rocking.

As an consequence, Sansa slept a lot. Her breathing was becoming shallower because of her growing belly and she suffered from heartburns often, so this arrangement helped her to some more slumber than she would have usually had. However, the downside of the wheelhouse was that she felt bored soon enough. Oh, she did have a maid she could talk to, but there were no other women who had wanted to leave the Rock to settle down in Winterfell, and she couldn't see the landscape outside.

After the end of the third day, she mentioned it when she and Tywin retreated to their tent. To her endless surprise, her husband took it upon himself to actually spend some time in the wheelhouse with her after that.

"Captain Arystide is capable enough to lead the entourage once in a while," he said.

Now, while this was perfectly true, it was still something Sansa hadn't expected to hear from Tywin's mouth. So she smiled at him from her hammock, reached out for him, and pressed his arm. Tywin looked at her with his green-golden eyes, and though he didn't smile, there was a warm intensity in his gaze that lifted Sansa's heart. Then, the warmth faded from his eyes.

"I wasn't there when Joanna needed me most. This time, things will be different."

Another surprise: that Tywin was willing to mention the loss of his first wife.

Sansa emphasised, "Of course. Things will be different this time."

Her husband actually groped for the next words.

"Back then... we were young and agile. We knew that theoretically the Stranger was always around the corner - for me in battle, for example. But we didn't truly think of death. We thought we were
Lannisters. We were powerful. Had regained power and wealth because I had fought for it. But then, the Stranger took his due. This... it mustn't happen again. I couldn't live with it."

His voice faltered. Sansa took Tywin's hand and kissed his fingers. After all these years, he had finally spoken about this, had given her insight into his past. It was a precious gift. And Tywin still wasn't done.

"If you survive childbed and if you survive other dangers, the natural course would be that I'd leave this world first. I'm already old for Westerosi standards. I want you to know that I expect you to find some happiness in life. Joanna's loss caused me to become a shadow of myself for decades. Don't let that happen to you, should it come to that. Let the Lannister name continue to have a golden ring."

Sansa could only marvel at the development things were taking, the way her husband was finally opening up. She didn't like to talk about such serious things, but she knew Westeros was a dangerous place, and it was probably the sensible thing to cover these points at some point in their marriage.

In the evening, they lay down in their tent, and Sansa placed her husband's hand onto her belly so he could feel the baby's kicks. They didn't feel the wish for intercourse that night, but it wasn't bad. No, quite the contrary. There was a strange new peace between them, and it felt good. So good.

"Tomorrow, we'll stopp on the Castamere lands," Tywin pointed out.

Sansa nodded and placed her cheek onto his chest.

"I'm glad we've got a chance to see how Tommen, Sandor, and Lancel are making progress. Their last reports were encouraging."

Tywin wrapped an arm around her middle.

"You'll behave decently, my lady."

Sansa chuckled. Her husband being jealous was oddly satisfying. She placed a kiss onto the tip of his nose.

"I love you, too."

Even while Sansa was falling asleed she could only marvel at how things had developed between them.

"I'm a happy woman," she thought and allowed slumber to claim her. This was what marriage should be like. This was what love should be like.

Chapter End Notes

As you can see, I've been trying to explore emotional closeness in this chapter. I wonder what you think of it. I know this is making Tywin OOC, but then again, I've been doing that to him in other fics, too. This actually is the "Factor Sansa" if you ask me.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!