His New Girl

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Summary

Stannis runs into Sansa Stark at a birthday party he had no intention of enjoying himself at. One thing leads to another...

This fic is a companion piece for darkstark's wonderful fic The New Girl which shows Shireen's POV of what it's like when Stannis and Sansa start dating. This is Stannis' very - ahem - adult POV.

Notes

I hope you all enjoy this companion piece to darkstark's story, The New Girl!

Disclaimer: I do not own these characters. I'm just playing with GRRM's toys.

- Inspired by The New Girl by darkstark
Stannis did not understand why his unbearable older brother had insisted that he and Shireen attend Bran Stark’s twelfth birthday party. As he drove to the Stark residence, enjoying the companionable silence he and his daughter shared while he still could, he thought about how this birthday party would be a waste of time at best and a torturous ordeal at worst.

He’d most likely be expected to chat.

When Catelyn greeted him and Shireen at the door looking like some sort of domestic goddess, Stannis had to sigh internally. Torturous ordeal.

To Stannis it had always seemed that the Starks had everything. Ned Stark, especially. Ned Stark gained Robert’s trust and friendship. Ned Stark was treated like a brother by the man who really should remember that he already had two brothers. Ned Stark had a perfect, beautiful wife who loved and adored him, and gave him five perfect, beautiful children. Ned bloody Stark.

Stannis couldn’t even hate Ned properly because Ned was an incredibly decent man. He was the kind of man who would always leave a note if the door of his car hit yours, and take full responsibility if one of his kids kicked a ball through your window. Responsible, decent, wonderful Ned.

Catelyn sent Shireen upstairs to play with the other kids, and Stannis felt a pang of guilt as his daughter shot him an accusing look. Should he have attempted to keep her with him?

Robert clapped him on the shoulder in greeting and Stannis stopped feeling guilty. Instead he felt vaguely jealous that his daughter would not have to put up with the torture he was undoubtedly about to endure.

“How’s it hanging?” his brother boomed, “how’s it hanging?”

How was what hanging?

Stannis didn’t dignify the unclear question with a response, but then it never seemed to make much of a difference to Robert whether Stannis answered him or not.

“You know, I was just talking to Ned about how you really need to get back on that horse. It’s been what, nearly a decade since the divorce?”

Stannis clenched his jaw and started counting to ten. Don’t let him rile you up. That’s what he wants. Just don’t say anything.

“Robert,” Ned said in a tone of voice that sounded both a little amused and admonishing.

“I’m just saying,” Robert kept on, “if he doesn’t start using the equipment again it might fall off.”

Stannis felt himself redden at the insinuation, and when he noticed that a very very beautiful girl had apparently been observing the whole humiliating exchange he reddened even more.

The girl smiled at him when their eyes met and walked over to him.

Stannis almost wanted to groan in despair. Could this get any worse? He did not want such a pretty girl to wonder if his ‘equipment’ had fallen off.
“Hi,” she said, still smiling brightly, “do you want to come and get something to drink? I can show you where everything is.”

“Er,” he said, feeling confused. Who was she? She looked very familiar, and she had Catelyn’s looks…

Robert opened his mouth, but before he managed to say anything Ned interrupted him.

“Thank you, Sansa,” Ned said, nodding at the girl. He then proceeded to physically drag Robert over to Catelyn.

Sansa? Not Sansa Stark? Stannis swallowed and felt himself break into a sweat. The last time he had taken any notice of Sansa Stark she had looked a lot less grown up.

"Come on," Sansa said, already walking towards the kitchen.

Stannis followed her in a bit of a daze, doing his best not to stare at her arse. It was very hard. Difficult. She was wearing very tight jeans.

"Coffee?" Sansa asked when he caught up to her.

"Just water, thanks," he said, feeling incredibly awkward now that they were alone in the kitchen together.

Sansa gave him water and did not seem affronted when he hurriedly prevented her from adding ice.

"I feel like we've never really talked," Sansa said, her expression and posture inviting and friendly.

"Er, yes." Stannis took a sip of his water and hoped it wasn't too obvious that he was sweating.

"You work at Baratheon Enterprises, don't you?"

Stannis cleared his throat and began to haltingly explain what he did for a living. Sansa seemed genuinely interested in what he had to say, and Stannis found himself speaking with more confidence after a little while.

Sansa was always ready with a comment or question when he faltered and didn't know what to say next, and he soon found himself involved in one of the most enjoyable conversations he could recall having with anyone other than Davos.

After he had somehow told her more about his life than he had ever told anyone in one sitting, Sansa began to tell him what she was doing with her life. Stannis listened, entranced and captivated by both her words and the way she looked as she spoke.

She never avoided making eye contact with him and smiled near-constantly. She was also playing with her hair rather a lot, twirling a lock around a finger or pushing stray strands behind one of her dainty ears...

Time flew by and soon Catelyn was interrupting them to find the cake and light the candles.

"Come out to the living room," Catelyn said, her voice cheerful, "Robert won't bother you while Bran's blowing out the candles."

Stannis followed Sansa closely, wanting to stay near her and continue their conversation.

"You know, you're so different from what I expected," Sansa whispered, leaning in close and filling
his nose with a delicious, alluring scent.

“Oh?” he choked out.

“I know this may come as a shock to you, but Robert doesn’t really paint the most flattering picture when he talks about you.”

Stannis had long since accepted that his older brother had a loud mouth, and that it was his lot in life to be the butt of his jokes. It had been a long time since it had rankled quite as much as it did now, however.

“Robert is a buffoon,” Stannis muttered, glaring across the room at his brother.

“Don’t let it bother you. I’ve only been talking to you for a little while and I can already tell you’re pretty great, actually.” Sansa delivered this bombshell with the kind of smile that might have been enough to arouse him if they weren’t in a public place. But as they were in a public place, she simply left him with a racing heart, an utterly blank mind, and sweaty panic. He had absolutely no idea what to say to her. At that exact moment everyone started singing the birthday song for Bran, however, so he was saved from having to awkwardly stutter his way through some sort of response. Sansa sang like an angel.

Sansa offered to bring him some cake, but he declined the offer, citing his dislike for things that contained too much sugar. “Your loss,” she said with a smile, sticking a forkful of the sugary treat into her mouth with another maddeningly attractive smile. It was a new experience for him: to be jealous of a fork.

“Dad, can we leave soon?”

Stannis blinked, trying to bring his thoughts back to earth. His daughter was looking at him with a sullen expression on her face, obviously not enjoying herself. He glanced at Sansa - she had gone back for more cake and was not paying any attention to him - and then back at his daughter.

“It wouldn’t be right to leave quite yet,” he told her, speaking quietly.

He glanced at Sansa again, hoping she would return soon, and when he looked back at Shireen she was staring at him as if he had burnt all her favourite books. She ran off before he could attempt to say anything else. Wonderful.

Sansa returned just as Shireen disappeared from the room.

“How old is Shireen?” she asked, giving him an encouraging smile. She must have seen him talking to his daughter.

“Eleven,” he sighed.

“It’s a difficult age,” Sansa said, her voice soft, “especially for girls.”

Stannis just grunted as he was not sure what to say to that.

“You live in King’s Landing, don’t you?” she asked, changing the subject.

He nodded, his thoughts still with Shireen.

“Does Shireen live with you?”

“She only stays with me on weekends,” he explained, glancing at her eyes to gauge her reaction to
his words, “she stays with her mother the rest of the time.”

“I live in King’s Landing, too,” Sansa told him, and there was something about the way she looked at him when she said it that he could not quite put his finger on.

Expectant?

Hopeful?

He didn’t say anything, and the silence stretched on for longer than it had since Sansa had started talking to him.

“Maybe we’ll run into each other one of these days,” Sansa finally said, breaking the silence. She was biting her bottom lip and her teeth looked very white against the dark shade of her lipstick. He briefly wondered what the colour was called and what it looked like to her.

“Yes,” he said, probably a little too quickly. He would like seeing her again.

His quick response made her stop chewing on her lip and start to smile again. Her hand came up to play with a lock of her long hair.

He never wanted this day to end.

For the first time in his life he ended up being one of the last guests to leave a party, and still he was not ready to part ways with Sansa. When it turned out that her car was in the shop and that she had taken the bus to Winterfell he almost fell all over himself in his haste to offer her a ride back to King’s Landing. He was desperate to spend more time with her.

Maybe her scent would linger in his car if she stayed in it for long enough?

The drive back to the city felt much shorter than the drive to Winterfell. Stannis listened as Sansa went on about her studies, the weather, her car and all sorts of topics, and found himself telling her more about his work and various other subjects. It was easy to talk to her, and her genuine interest in what he had to say was very gratifying. She wasn’t quite hanging on to his every word, but it was a near thing.

Arriving at the address she had given him was awkward. Stannis wanted to follow her inside and keep talking, but he couldn’t exactly do that as Shireen was with him. He wondered if he should ask for Sansa’s number. That was the done thing, wasn’t it? When one was… interested. Would she laugh in his face?

“Would you like to come upstairs for some hot chocolate or something? My roommate, you might know her - Margaery Tyrell? - anyway, she’s away visiting her family in Highgarden, so I have the place to myself. It would be no trouble,” Sansa babbled, sounding a little nervous unless he was mistaken.

Stannis wasn’t sure how to interpret Sansa’s invitation. If Shireen hadn’t been with them he might have been tempted to think that she was trying to indicated that she was interested in him, but he didn’t really know if her offer should be interpreted that way since his daughter was with him.

Gods, he wanted to say yes.

“Thank you, but I think we had better get going,” he said, trying much harder to be polite than he usually did.
Sansa’s eyes locked with his and he got utterly lost in those sparkling depths, wondering if he was the only one feeling entranced or if it was mutual. Eventually Sansa blushed and looked away.

“Thanks for the ride, Stannis,” she whispered, looking up at him through slightly lowered lashes, “good-bye.”

With a pang he realised that he absolutely did not want this to be good-bye.

He wanted to see her again soon.

Would she say yes if he offered to take her out to dinner?

She smiled and waved cheerfully as he backed the car out of the drive, and he attempted to smile at her in return.

Was he being absurd to hope that her kindness and her conversation today might have meant something? He was pants at reading facial expressions and body language, but she had almost seemed like she might have been flirting with him a little... or was that just wishful thinking?

Seven hells, was he turning into Robert? Was this some sort of midlife crisis?

*Am I a dirty old man?*

His thoughts swirled around in his brain as he drove back to his apartment on auto-pilot, and by the time he made it to bed he still had no idea what he should do about this sudden *attraction*.

With a tired sigh he decided to sleep on it.
Stannis went to the office even though it was the holidays. It was a cold and dreary Tuesday, and it would probably have been nice not to have to go outside, but he didn’t mind going to work. There was no one waiting for him in his empty apartment, and he’d rather allow employees who had functional families to stay at home.

He was in the middle of answering the last urgent email in his inbox when his mobile went off. He almost hung up without looking at the caller ID, but glanced at the screen in case it was Shireen. The fact that it was an unknown number made him curious, and he decided to answer.

“Stannis speaking.”

“Stannis? Hi, it’s Sansa!”

He almost jumped out of his chair in surprise, but settled for standing up very quickly.

“Sansa? Er, I mean, hi. How did you get this number?” Stupid. Why did he ask her that?

“Oh, I just asked Dad,” she said, sounding a little uncertain, “was that not okay?”

“No, it’s fine,” he hurried to say, “what can I do for you?” He paced around his office, feeling excessively energetic.

“I was just wondering… and don’t feel like you have to say yes… um,” Sansa faltered for a moment, sounding almost flustered. Stannis remained silent. He would have liked to put her at ease, but he had absolutely no idea what he should say to accomplish that.

“Would you like to meet me for coffee?” she asked, speaking quickly.

“Yes.” The word was out of Stannis’ mouth before his brain decided to say it.

“Really? I mean, great!” Sansa sounded relieved, happy and surprised all at once.

“There’s a café near my apartment that serves excellent tea as well as coffee,” Stannis said, hesitating a little when he realised how she might interpret the fact that he was suggesting a place near his home.

Sansa did not seem to read anything into it, however, or if she did she was not put off. She asked for the details of the location and they agreed on a time that was convenient for them both.

“It’s a date, then,” Sansa said, and Stannis was fairly certain she was using a flirtatious tone of voice, “I’m really looking forward to seeing you again, Stannis.”

Yes. Definitely flirtatious. A woman would never say his name like *that* for no reason. He was not dense enough to miss such a signal.
Stannis wanted to say something similar in return, but the words got stuck to the roof of his mouth and he ended up having to hold the phone at an arm’s length while he cleared his throat. He managed to say good-bye after that, and was pleased when Sansa did not seem perturbed by his spontaneous coughing fit.

They had decided to meet the following afternoon, and thought Stannis could easily have worked a full day and gone straight from work to the café, he decided to leave work a little early and go home to change his clothes first. He wanted to look a little more… approachable than he usually liked to look at work. It was a good thing that Davos was on holiday or Stannis would never have been able to leave work early without being interrogated.

It took him five times longer than it usually did to decide what to wear. It was highly embarrassing to spend so much time on his appearance, but at least he was pleased with what he ended up putting on. Grey slacks, a dark shirt with the top buttons undone, no tie, no jacket. At the last minute he decided to roll the sleeves of the shirt up, vaguely recalling Renly going on about how a man’s forearms were an important ‘feature’.

It had taken him longer to get dressed than he had expected, and he ended up being five minutes late to the café. Sansa had already arrived and looked as if she had been sitting there for a while. She had a laptop set up on a secluded table in a corner, and there was an empty cup next to her computer. She was staring very intently at the screen, and judging from the way her eyes were moving, she was reading something. She was dressed casually, and not wearing a lot of makeup, but she looked gorgeous nonetheless. Effortlessly beautiful.

He ordered himself a cup of tea and asked the barista for another one of whatever Sansa had been drinking, too. Sansa hadn’t noticed him yet, but when he asked for a slice of lemon she looked up and smiled at him. It felt a little like being the mythical Chosen One to be on the receiving end of a smile like that. The gangly college kid who was serving him tea raised both eyebrows as he slid two cups across the counter towards Stannis. Sansa’s drink came with a veritable mountain of whipped cream.

“You’re the date she’s been waiting for?” he asked, his tone a mixture of curiosity and incredulity.

Stannis scowled at the boy. How did he know Sansa had been waiting for a date? “Yes,” he said flatly, daring the boy to say something ‘clever’.

“Man, you must be loaded.”

Stannis clenched his jaw and glowered in the boy’s general direction, but didn’t say anything. Instead he simply picked up his order and headed for Sansa’s table.

Sansa had busied herself with putting her computer away as he walked over to her, and by the time he sat down, she was giving him her undivided attention. It was unnerving.

“Er, here,” he put her drink down in front of her, trying not to spill.

“Oh, thank you,” she took a sip, looking at him the whole time. She was smiling, and Stannis felt transfixed by the way the light in her eyes seemed to be dancing.

“Were you waiting long?” he asked, glancing at the empty cup she had pushed to the edge of the table.

“I needed to do some reading for school and I thought I might as well come early and do it here. I never seem to concentrate quite as well at my place,” Sansa explained easily, her hand going to her
hair. Stannis watched with avid interest as she started to twist a lock around a finger.

“What were you reading?” He just wanted her to talk so that he could listen to her lovely voice and drink her in along with his tea.

Sansa obliged him, launching into a description of the course material for one of her classes, getting side-tracked with some amusing anecdotes about the teacher and the other students in her class, finding her way back to her original point, and then veering off to explain why she hadn’t had the time to read the material until today.

Soon she was encouraging him to talk, however, and Stannis didn’t know why he was surprised. She had done the same thing at Bran’s birthday party, after all.

He found himself telling her what his school years had been like, how he had met Davos, almost landed him in jail, and somehow ended up making a lifelong friend instead.

Sansa listened very actively, nodding, shaking her head, giggling and asking questions in all the right places. In short, she genuinely acted like what he was saying was interesting, funny, and worth listening to. Like he was worth listening to.

Stannis was no stranger to being listened to at the office. Whenever he opened his mouth everyone else tended to shut theirs. (Unless Robert was around. Nothing could shut him up.) But it was quite different to be listened to by his employees - who were being paid to listen - and being listened to by an incredibly attractive, bright young woman who seemed to like him.

Before Stannis knew what had happened two hours had gone by and he was smiling.

“I should really catch the next bus,” Sansa said reluctantly, giving him another one of those looks he wasn’t sure if to call expectant, hopeful or something else entirely.

“I could drive you,” Stannis offered, wondering if that was what she was hoping for, and thanking his lucky stars that her car was still being repaired.

“Are you sure? I wouldn’t want to put you out,” Sansa bit her lip and gave him an uncertain look.

“It’s no trouble. I’d just have to get the car keys,” he explained, not really concentrating on what he was saying. He was busy noticing how graceful Sansa’s neck was and wondering what it would be like to place his lips right at the juncture of her jaw and her neck, just beneath her ear.

“Where are they?”

Stannis blinked at Sansa. What was she talking about?

“Your car keys?” she explained, a small smile of amusement playing at her lips. Did she know why he had been distracted?

“Uh, at my apartment. It’s just a three minute walk,” he answered, feeling himself redden as he realised that he sounded as if he were trying to lure her to his apartment after one coffee date. “You could wait here and I could just get the car and pick you up outside?” he hurried to suggest, trying to make up for his gaffe.

“Or I could just come with you?” Sansa suggested, still looking amused.

Stannis found himself nodding, a smile tugging the corners of his mouth upwards. “Or that,” he agreed, wondering if she perhaps wanted to be lured to his apartment.
While Sansa fiddled with her computer bag and found her coat Stannis paid their tab. The annoying barista shot him a jealous look when he realised Sansa was leaving with him. Stannis raised an eyebrow, daring him to say something ‘clever’ again.

“Have a nice day,” the boy said sullenly, handing Stannis back his credit card.

Stannis didn’t respond.

Sansa chatted away for the short walk to his apartment while Stannis tried to figure out whether she wanted him to ‘make a move’ or not. He hadn’t been on a date in a very long time and he really wasn’t sure what modern dating culture was like. He resolved to watch Sansa carefully for any signs she might give him, but not to take any action unless overtly encouraged to do so.

Sansa breezed into his apartment as if she visited him all the time.

“Wow, this place is amazing!” she exclaimed, walking around and examining his furniture. Stannis tried to look at the familiar surrounding through her eyes. He supposed the interior designer Renly had forced him to hire had done a decent job. The man had actually listened to Stannis’ requests to make things functional while also managing to find pieces that were tasteful and a lot more masculine than Stannis would have expected.

“Do you mind if I test the sofa?” Sansa asked with a grin, eyeing the leather centrepiece of his living room.

“Go ahead,” he said, unable to keep from smiling bemusedly at her enthusiasm for his furniture. He had already found his car keys as they were conveniently located near the front door, but he decided not to bring too much attention to the fact.

“Ah, this is the life,” Sansa sighed, sinking into the seat he usually sat in and closing her eyes.

Stannis shifted from foot to foot, wondering whether he should sit down or whether he should perhaps offer her a refreshment. He was saved from his uncertainty when Sansa opened her eyes, gave him a dazzling smile and patted the seat next to her.

He sat like a well trained dog, narrowly avoiding tripping over the coffee table in his haste.

“I’m having a really nice time,” Sansa said, turning to point her body towards his and blushing faintly. She was looking up at him in a way that no one would have been able to interpret as anything but flirtatious, her eyelashes slightly lowered whenever she wasn’t fluttering them coquettishly.

She was close enough for him to smell that alluring scent he had first caught a whiff of at Bran’s birthday party, and he wished he could put a name to the elements of it. It was sweet, light and relentlessly pleasant, but he had never been very good at identifying scents.

“Me too,” he managed to say, though he was utterly distracted by the way his heart was racing and his palms sweating.

“We should definitely do this again,” Sansa whispered, meeting his eyes and quickly licking her lips.

That was a signal, wasn’t it? She wanted him to kiss her, right?

“Yes,” he said, feeling out of breath and unable to think what to do. He didn’t want to muck things up by misreading the situation, but at the same time he really couldn’t see how else he was
supposed to interpret her behaviour.

He decided to take a small risk that would be sure to tell him whether he was on the right track. Slowly, he brought his hand up to push a stray lock of hair behind one of her ears, imitating a movement he already felt like he had watched her perform countless times.

Sansa leant into his touch and closed her eyes. When she parted her lips Stannis finally felt sure that she definitely wanted him to kiss her.

Without considering the matter further, Stannis cupped her cheek, closed the distance between their lips, and kissed her as gently as he could. A very large part of him wanted to take advantage of her parted lips and really taste her, but he thought he ought to see how she reacted to something more restrained, first.

She moaned.

The sound traveled like warm honey down to his groin, and his slacks suddenly felt a lot less comfortable than they had a moment ago.

If the sound she had made hadn’t been enough to convince him that she wanted more, the hand that found its way to the back of his head and began to stroke his hair would have.

His hand was still resting against her cheek, and he used it to tilt her head to the side so that he could comfortably start to explore her willing mouth with his tongue. Sansa met him stroke for stroke, and Stannis was glad that he had not forgotten how to do this. His heart was pounding away in his chest, doing its best to send all of his blood to his erection, and soon he had to pull back, knowing that if he kept going he might start fondling her breasts, and he was not certain she was open to that sort of thing.

Sansa’s eyes remained closed for a while after the kiss broke, and Stannis used the opportunity to observe her blushing cheeks and the way the colour of her lips had deepened.

When she opened her eyes Stannis could not help but feel rather proud of how glazed they looked.

“Mm, okay,” Sansa said in a voice that was rather breathless, “please do that again.”

Stannis very much wanted to, but he knew that he would have a difficult time restraining himself to kissing if they kept going, and he didn’t know if she wanted to do more than kiss.

“I would like that,” he said, surprised at how deep his voice sounded, “but isn’t this a bit… fast?”

Sansa smiled at him, a teasing look in her eyes. “Do you want to take me to dinner first?” She glanced at his lap, and Stannis felt himself redden. It was very apparent that he was aroused.

“I’ll be honest with you,” Sansa said, rescuing him from having to respond to her question, “I’ve been wanting to kiss you since we were talking in the kitchen at Bran’s party.”

Stannis swallowed and stared at her, hoping she would say more.

“I haven’t had the best luck with guys in the past, so I kind of promised myself that if I ever found myself becoming attracted to someone actually decent I wouldn’t hesitate.”

She was blushing quite deeply now, and Stannis thought it looked very flattering on her. He tried to focus on what she was saying, however, and did his best to listen as she went on.
“I - I really like you, Stannis.”

“You barely know me,” he protested, not really knowing why. A voice in the back of his mind that sounded suspiciously like Robert was telling him to shut up.

“I know I’m attracted to you,” she said, glancing at his lap again, “and I think you’re attracted to me, too.”

Stannis cleared his throat and cursed himself for insisting that there would be absolutely no pointless throw pillows on his sofa. He would have liked to place one on his lap.

Sansa was looking at him with a shy, hopeful expression on her face, and Stannis wished he knew what she wanted. She had asked him to kiss her again, but was she offering more than a kiss? He had to know exactly what she was ready for before he started kissing her again, because he knew it would be very difficult to stop once he started.

*Gods, how many years has it been?*

“What exactly do you want to do right now?” he asked, hoping he was not ruining the mood by asking so bluntly.

Sansa searched his face for a moment and he thought he could see understanding in her eyes. “I’m open to suggestions,” she whispered, licking her lips.

As sexy as her response was, it wasn’t entirely helpful. He needed to know what her limits were.

Before he could figure out a way to ask, Sansa got up and sat back down. On top of him. He hissed at the intimate contact, but Sansa kissed him before he managed to make any further embarrassing noises. When had he last been straddled by a woman like this? Would she be offended if he grabbed her arse and pulled her even closer to his groin? *Yes, probably.* He decided to wrap his arms around her middle in a more polite embrace.

Sansa had started the kiss, but it was quickly becoming apparent that he would be the one to finish it. He had taken over the role of the aggressor, burying a hand in her hair and devouring her with the hunger of a starving man. Sansa yielded to him, moaning into the kiss and rocking suggestively against him.

He could not remember feeling this horny since he was a teenager.

All he wanted to do was pick her up and carry her to his bedroom, strip her completely naked, lick some very strategic locations, and then fill her with his cock. His imagination was helpfully supplying him with a very vivid fantasy of what exactly that would feel like, causing him to groan against Sansa’s lips.

Sansa moved her head back a little and brought up a hand to shift her hair away from her neck on one side. She extended her neck pointedly, exposing it to him as if offering herself to some sort of vampire. It could not have been more obvious that she wanted him to kiss her neck. He happily obliged her.

He was experienced enough to know how to lick, suck and kiss at a woman’s neck without leaving a mark, but he found himself ignoring his experience in favour of leaving blemish after blemish on her previously flawless pale skin. She ground herself against him every time he sucked on a new spot, so it wasn’t as if he had any incentive to stop.

Feeling emboldened by her eager acceptance of everything he had done so far, he decided to take
another risk. He moved one of his hands slowly - making sure she knew what he was doing and that she had time to protest if she didn’t want it - and wormed his way underneath the soft sweater she had on, bringing his fingers into contact with the skin at the small of her back. Sansa’s only reaction was to make a delighted noise and press her chest closer to his, so Stannis assumed he had been granted under-the-shirt privileges.

He found himself kissing her lips again as he slowly inched his hand up her back, enjoying the feel of her decadently soft skin and trying to ignore the way his heart seemed to be attempting to beat its way out of his chest. When his fingers found the clasp of her bra Stannis was faced with a choice. Should he, or should he not?

“Hold on,” Sansa said, breaking their kiss and moving back from him.

Stannis snatched his hand from underneath her sweater and tried to breathe normally. He searched her face, looking for signs of distress, doubt or fear. He had not meant to pressure her or scare her.

It was a relief to see that she was smiling at him. It was a very flirtatious smile, but there was something about her expression that hinted at shyness, too.

“I just thought maybe I should take this off,” she explained, pulling her sweater up and off in a smooth, graceful movement.

Stannis made a strangled sound, overwhelmed at the amount of bare skin that was now exposed to him. She was wearing the sort of bra that Stannis had always been half convinced women didn’t really actually ever wear. The sort of bra that he had only seen girls in certain kinds of catalogues from certain kinds of lingerie shops wear. It was black and there was a lot of lace. Sansa’s young perky breasts probably didn’t need the help, but the bra was holding her breasts up high and creating the sort of cleavage that Stannis rarely allowed himself to stare at.

He dragged his eyes back up to Sansa’s face, wondering what she was thinking. She appeared to be pleased at first glance, but Stannis started to doubt that assessment when he noticed how she was biting her lip a little nervously.

“You’re beautiful,” he said hoarsely, wanting to reassure her and make sure she knew he appreciated the view.

Sansa ducked her head a little bashfully, but soon she was kissing him again, her breasts pressed against his chest, and his hands roaming all over her nearly naked back.

“Do you want to…?” she asked a little breathlessly, after his fingers had lingered suspiciously at the clasp of her bra for the fourth time.

“Uh,” he said intelligently, feeling his face heat up. Did she want him to say yes? Or was she expecting him to be a gentleman?

“I’ll show you mine if you show me yours,” she whispered, moving back from his chest so that she could play with the first button of his shirt that wasn’t casually undone.

She wanted him to take his shirt off? And then she’d let him unclasp her bra?

He hurriedly started unbuttoning, feeling like he was getting the better deal.

Stannis watched Sansa’s face out of the corner of his eye as he opened and discarded his shirt, wondering what she would think of him. He was pale as it was the middle of winter and he hadn’t been sailing since the summer, and he never bothered with getting rid of the hair that grew on his
chest and his abdomen, but he was in good shape, at least. Judging by the way her eyebrows rose up and her eyes widened she was not displeased.

She had schooled her expression when he looked at her properly, a flirtatious smile playing on her lips again.

“Well have you ever heard the term: ‘dad bod’?” she asked, a teasing glint in her eyes.

“No,” Stannis said, frowning at her, “what does that mean?” It didn’t really sound very flattering.

“Oh, you can look it up. I just wanted to say that you definitely don’t have one.”

“What do I have, then?” he asked, curious and amused despite himself.

She giggled, and it really ought to have sounded irritating and gratingly girlish, but instead it sounded very sexy. “I’m not sure there’s a term for what you have,” she said, tilting her head to the side and pretending to think very hard on it. After a second she pressed herself against him and brought her lips to one of his ears. “Hot,” she whispered.

It was embarrassing how much he enjoyed hearing her say that.

His fingers had somehow found their way to the clasp of her bra yet again. He had held up his end of the deal…

Sansa was kissing the shell of the ear she had just been whispering into, so he heard her slightly louder intake of breath when he tentatively unclasped her bra.

“Okay?” he asked, wanting to make sure. Her bra was still covering everything, though it was loose, and it would be easy to simply put everything back the way he had found it if she had changed her mind. He hoped she hadn’t, however, as he very much wanted to see her breasts uncovered.

Instead of answering, Sansa moved back so that she was no longer pressed up to him, creating space for herself to maneuver. The lacy bra fell to the floor and Sansa did nothing to hide herself from his eyes. Her breasts were beautifully round and rested high on her chest. They did not seem to miss the support of the bra much, though they were no longer pushed up to create quite as much cleavage. Her nipples were a little darker than the ivory skin that surrounded them, and they were temptingly puckered. It was almost as if they were begging him to tease them with his fingers, his lips, or his tongue.

As he stared at her newly exposed breasts the discomfort of wearing trousers became utterly unbearable. He had to use all of his willpower to stop himself from sticking his hands down his pants to adjust himself.

Sansa was blushing, but there was nothing shy about how she found both his hands and brought them up to touch. Her breasts felt even better than they looked, and Stannis let out a shuddering breath at the delicious contact. Sansa sounded as if she liked the way his hands felt and when he glanced at her face he could see that she had tilted her head back and closed her eyes.

The last of his self control vanished and he started to do everything and anything he could think of, hoping that she would stop him if he went too far.

He licked and sucked at her nipples in turn, pinching and stroking the free one as he worked or simply kneading the soft flesh, enjoying the pleasant feel of her curves in his palm. Sansa’s highly arousing moans egged him on, and soon he was forced to give her breasts up in order to pull her
flush against his body so that he might rub up against her most intimate places, several layers of fabric making it a highly frustrating venture. All thoughts of politeness had left him, and he was gripping her arse firmly, encouraging her to grind herself against him.

He wanted their lower halves to be as naked as their top halves, but he had no idea how to ask.

*I know we’ve only recently started to get to know each other as I only just realised you’re an adult, but would you mind if I fucked you?*

The thought caused a bizarre flare of arousal and embarrassment within him, making him groan.

“Will you still respect me in the morning if I ask where the bedroom is?” Sansa whispered breathlessly in his ear, “because if you would rather take me to dinner first, we should probably stop now.”

A slightly pathetic sort of noise escaped him at the idea of stopping, and he gave Sansa a look that was probably a little desperate.

“If you want to stop I’ll still give you a handjob,” she added with a teasing smile.

Stannis blinked, thinking about his options. Should he charge straight ahead to sex without getting to know her properly, or take the handjob and invite her to dinner?

Stannis cleared his throat and ignored the voice inside his head that reminded him of Robert. “Er, perhaps it would be wise to get to know each other a little better before I show you the bedroom?” he said, sounding decidedly out of breath.

Sansa kissed him. “Take me somewhere that serves really decadent desserts,” she whispered, moving to sit beside him and undoing his fly a little awkwardly. (The fabric was straining, and the buttons were fiddly.)

He tensed up when she pushed his underwear out of the way and released his erection. He wanted to moan with relief at finally being free and finally being touched, but he couldn’t relax quite yet. He was too nervous about what she would think of the equipment that had most certainly not fallen off.

Sansa’s face didn’t betray any reaction at first, but then he noticed her blush deepen, and she bit her lip when she met his eyes. He wanted to keep looking at her and try to figure out what she was thinking, but she started to move her hand, gripping him firmly and stroking him in just exactly the way he needed her to. The sensations she produced were just too good and he couldn’t help closing his eyes and finally letting that moan escape.

She brought her face to his neck as she worked him over, kissing him warmly with her soft lips and breathing hot air on the sensitive skin just under his jaw.

He managed to keep from coming embarrassingly soon, but it was a near thing. Sansa was gorgeous, and he could see her breasts whenever he opened his eyes, and the feel of her lips on his neck and her hand on his cock was wonderful.

Cleaning up and getting dressed was a lot less awkward than Stannis had feared, and driving Sansa to the apartment she shared with Margaery Tyrell was just as enjoyable as driving her home from Winterfell had been. When she spoke she simply put him at ease somehow, and everything she said seemed interesting and amusing.

“Is tomorrow night convenient for you?” he asked when the time came for Sansa to leave his car.
“For dinner?” Sansa asked, giving him a hopeful smile.

He nodded, feeling rather light and hopeful, himself.

“Tomorrow night is perfect.”

“I’ll pick you up at eight,” he promised, knowing he’d easily be able to get the reservations he wanted.

“I can’t wait,” Sansa said, leaning over to kiss him.

Stannis caught the back of her head with one of his hands and held her in place so that he might kiss her properly. She made a pleased mewling sound as he did his best leave a lasting impression on her, trying to promise without words that he would make sure to see to her pleasure next time.

She looked dazed and her chest was heaving when he let her go, her lips slightly swollen.

Stannis felt a smile tug at the corners of his mouth. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then,” he said, watching her as she nodded happily and left the car.

He waited until she had disappeared through the front door before heading back home.

“Tomorrow,” he repeated to himself, still smiling faintly.
Dinner

Stannis had spent a long time getting ready for his date with Sansa at the café, but he somehow managed to spend an even longer while on his appearance before picking her up for dinner.

There was not much he could do about his lined face and his receding hairline, except shower and make sure he was clean-shaven and neatly combed. He never usually wore any scented products aside from his regular aftershave, but he did own a bottle of cologne that Renly had once presented him with, insisting that it was ‘so him’. He sprayed some on, feeling a little ridiculous. Once he was clean and smelling surprisingly pleasant, he chose his finest bespoke suit, a crisp shirt, and a silk tie that the lady in the shop had said matched his eyes. He always wore the same kind of dark cotton underwear, but if he had owned anything slightly nicer he might have considered donning it.

He felt nervous and awkward when he knocked on Sansa’s door, but very relieved that there was no risk of her roommate answering. He didn’t know Margaery very well, but if she was anything like Loras he would happily avoid meeting her as much as he could. He did not really enjoy being teased about his life choices. He got enough of that from Robert.

The greeting he had prepared to say when Sansa opened the door became a garbled mess halfway through.

“Good eve- ngh.”

Usually this would have thoroughly embarrassed him, but he didn’t even hear how dim-witted he sounded. He was much too busy staring.

Sansa looked utterly and devastatingly stunning. He had never seen a woman - other than maybe Cersei when she had been young - look like that in real life, and Cersei’s looks had always been spoiled by her charming personality. He did not know Sansa very well, but he already knew that she was as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside, and that made her infinitely more attractive than his brother’s wife.

She had done something to make her hair cascade down her back in soft, glossy waves, her skin seemed to shine like polished, flawless ivory, and her eyelids had been decorated with dark, shimmering colours that emphasised their shape and drew attention to how big and gorgeous they were. Her dark dress clung to her rather indecently, reminding him of certain things he had already seen and wished very much to see again, and her lips looked full, shiny and tempting.

“Shall we go?” she asked, raising an eyebrow. There was a knowing look in her eyes and a slight smirk playing on her lips. She could clearly tell that she had knocked him off balance.

“Ye - yes,” he stammered, trying to regain his cognitive skills.

“Do you mind?” she asked sweetly, tucking her hand into the crook of his arm, “these heels are new and I’m a bit wobbly,” she explained, pressing herself close.

Heat moved through him, pooling down low in his groin and creating just a hint of a very familiar pressure.

_Gods_, the way she smelled…

Stannis somehow made it to the car and did not embarrass himself too badly as he helped her get in.
The drive to the restaurant was a blur. Sansa chatted easily, but all Stannis could do was try to focus on the road and not on the way the skirt of her dress was exposing a very tempting amount of thigh. He wished he knew if he were allowed to place his hand there. It would be so easy to just rest his hand on that smooth expanse of skin when he was not shifting gears...

“You got us reservations here? Only a day in advance?” Sansa asked when she was on his arm again, walking carefully towards the elegant entrance to The Braavosi, her eyebrows climbing higher and higher.

Stannis tried to shrug casually, like it was nothing.

“I’ve been dying to try this place for ages,” Sansa said, smiling brightly as he held the door open for her.

They were shown to their seats - at the best table, of course - almost as soon as Stannis finished giving his name to the maître d’, and Sansa shot him an incredulous impressed sort of look. He couldn’t help feeling rather smug.

Once they had menus to peruse, they were silent for a little while as they looked at the selection. Soon Sansa was chatting away, however, excitedly pointing out dishes she wanted to try and eventually wondering out loud whether she could just have a bit of everything.

Stannis hesitantly recommended the venison, and that led Sansa to interrogate him about everything he had ever tried on the menu.

Once they had ordered they fell silent for a moment, and Stannis could not help staring at her. She stared right back.

“You look very handsome tonight,” she said with a smile, “I like your tie.”

Stannis panicked. Would he need to think of something coherent to say about the way she looked? It was bizarre that he felt more intimidated by her beauty now than he had when she had been topless in his lap, but there was just something almost untouchable about her looks now. What would one say to the creator of a priceless work of art? There were no words.

“You look…” he trailed off, opening and closing his mouth uselessly. ... Much too good for the likes of me.

“Like I tried way too hard?” she finished for him with a laugh, “I don’t get too many chances to get really dressed up. I’m sorry if this is a bit much.”

“Don’t be sorry,” he hurried to say, “you’re stunning.”

Sansa blushed and ducked her head, and Stannis straightened up in his chair. He had managed to pay her a compliment and he had managed to sound like a sane adult and everything as he did it.

“Thank you,” she said, looking up at him with a blush still staining her cheeks.

They looked at each other in silence for several moments, and Stannis wondered what on earth Sansa was doing with him. He knew he was not a hopelessly lost cause. He was not altogether unfortunate when it came to his appearance - receding hairline notwithstanding - and he liked to think he was a good, honest man. He was well off, too, though he hardly expected that to be what Sansa was after. She did not exactly come from poverty. But all his good qualities combined did not come close to bringing him to Sansa’s level. She was out of his league.
And yet she wanted him.

“So, what do you want to know?” Sansa asked, breaking the silence and sipping her water. She had ordered a glass of wine, too, but asked for it to arrive when the food did. Stannis would obviously not be drinking as he was driving.

“Er, what do you mean?”

“You said you wanted us to get to know each other a little better? Remember? When I was throwing myself at you?” Sansa laughed, and the sound was clear and beautiful.

Stannis felt himself redder, and the touch of arousal that he had been struggling with ever since Sansa had taken his arm outside her door started to cause him a little discomfort.

He searched desperately for a question to ask her. “I - er - you said you haven’t had the best of luck with men in the past?” As soon as the words left his mouth he closed his eyes and grimaced. Really? He was going to ask her about her ex-boyfriends? What was wrong with him?

Sansa’s smile faded a little and she sighed. “I wish I already had my wine, now,” she said in a feeble attempt at humour.

Stannis grimaced again. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” Sansa reassured him, “it’s probably better to get it out of the way.” She took a deep breath and pushed a lock of hair behind one of her ears. “I have had three relationships and they’ve all been disasters in one way or another.”

Stannis gave her his full attention and wondered what sort of morons she had been spending her time with.

“My first boyfriend - you might know him - was Joffrey Baratheon,” Sansa said, giving him a wry smile.

“Joffrey?” Stannis said, appalled at Sansa’s poor taste. The boy might be handsome, but if there ever was a child that had needed to be beaten…

“I was twelve, okay?” Sansa said, shooting him an exaggerated wounded look, “no need to sound so disgusted. I didn’t know any better!”

“Sorry, please continue,” Stannis said, trying to look repentant and interested.

“Well, Joffrey killed my puppy. So that was the end of that,” Sansa said succinctly. They both knew what Joffrey was like, so there really was no reason for her to elaborate. Still, the boy had killed her puppy?

“Really?”

“He always denied it, but I know he did it,” Sansa said with a bitter twist to her lips, “he’s a sadistic little shithead.”

“True,” Stannis said, nodding in agreement.

“After Joffrey I met Willas Tyrell online. We flirted and exchanged pictures and did all that stuff you do when you like someone online,” Sansa said with a blush, draining the rest of her water from her small glass in a few gulps, “you know how it is.”
Stannis didn’t.

“We decided to do the long distance thing, even though I was fourteen and he was twenty-four.”

She had been fourteen?

“But eventually he found out how young I was and broke things off really abruptly,” Sansa explained with a sad smile, “he was actually pretty decent aside from the way he broke up with me, and Margaery and I met because he gave me her number when I moved to King’s Landing for school, so all in all, not my worst relationship.”

Stannis nodded, and wondered if Sansa had ever had a real, adult relationship. It made him very uncomfortable to think that she hadn’t.

Sansa took another deep breath. “And then there was Harry.”

It sounded as if she had more history with Harry than the other two, and Stannis did his best to look attentive to encourage her to go on.

“Harry was my boyfriend all through my final year of secondary school,” Sansa explained, “I was eighteen, and he was twenty-two. We met at Aunt Lysa’s wedding and it was all very romantic.”

Stannis quietly wondered why Sansa looked so bitter if it had been as romantic as all that.

“He was my first,” - Sansa gave him a significant look - "and I thought we’d get married.” There was a self-deprecating twist to her lips now, and she looked down at her lap. "But he cheated on me with half the girls in Westeros.”

His face must have betrayed his shocked dismay because Sansa hurried to continue as soon as she looked up and saw.

“He didn’t manage to - you know - give me anything, thank gods, but I couldn’t break up with him fast enough after I found out.”

It was difficult, but Stannis managed to keep his eyebrows from shooting up at her words. He was relieved to know that she had already been in a sexual relationship, but he hadn’t really wanted to think about venereal disease over dinner.

“I see,” he said, clearing his throat, “you have indeed been rather unfortunate.”

“Yep,” she said, popping the ‘p’, “which is why I’m pretty thrilled that I finally like someone like you.” She shot him a shy smile, and met his eyes for a brief heated moment.

He felt himself redden. “You like me?” he said, trying to sound light and amused. He probably came off hopelessly stiff, instead.

“Yeah, I thought I made that very obvious yesterday,” Sansa said, laughing beautifully again.

His cheeks were burning now and it was his turn to gulp down the rest of his water.

“How about you?” she asked when she stopped laughing.

“I like you, too,” he said, wanting to make that clear. He certainly hoped he would not have allowed things to progress as far as they had yesterday afternoon if he didn’t like her. He was not some cad.
“I’m glad to hear that,” Sansa shot him another heated look, “but I was actually wondering if you had any bad relationship stories.”

“Ah,” Stannis said, feeling sheepish, “well, there is my failed marriage to consider.”

Sansa looked at him with kindness in her eyes and nodded. “Was the divorce very hard?” she asked, biting her lip and looking sympathetic.

“The divorce itself was just a relief,” Stannis admitted with a sigh, “it was hard trying to make a hopeless situation work.”

It had been a terribly difficult time in all their lives. At first, when Selyse had been exhausted and… sad, he had been the one responsible for taking care of Shireen. But when Shireen got ill later on it had been Selyse who had been saddled with most of the work. No matter how much hired help they got, his wife had been left with a heavy load. He had wanted to do as much as he could, but his work had been important, and the money he brought in for doing his job even more so. Shireen’s medical treatments had been astronomically costly, and Selyse had not been able to care for their daughter and work, too.

By the time Shireen was out of the woods Stannis’ marriage to Selyse had been effectively over.

“I’m sorry,” Sansa said, reaching across the table to place her hand over his.

“I’m not,” Stannis responded dryly, “we would have been miserable if we had stayed together.”

“Yes, I - I just meant…” Sansa squeezed his hand and withdrew, “I’m sorry things didn’t work out the way you hoped.”

Stannis tried to smile. “Thank you,” he said, feeling awkward. He missed her touch.

“Do you still talk?” Sansa asked hesitantly, “I mean, I suppose you must because of Shireen.”

“Since Shireen got older Selyse and I have got away with very little contact,” Stannis admitted.

Sansa nodded in understanding. “Will Shireen be staying with you this weekend?”

“No, actually,” he said, glancing at Sansa’s eyes to gauge her reaction, “she’s going skiing in the Vale with her mother.”

Sansa’s eyes widened a tiny bit and she hummed noncommittally.

Stannis was certain they were both thinking the same thing, but before either one of them could comment, the first course arrived.

For the remainder of dinner they discussed less serious topics, though Sansa certainly touched on sensitive subjects like politics and religion. She did it very gracefully, however, and in a way that would not have incited any arguments even had they been on completely separate pages. As it turned out, they were very compatible politically, but when it came to religion they were not quite in agreement. Sansa was not deeply religious, though she considered spiritual matters to be important, while Stannis was an utter atheist and saw no value in either spirituality or religion.

“Don’t worry, I won’t try to change your mind,” Sansa said with a smile, “and I never really go to the sept anymore. I like my dad’s way of praying more and more as I grow older.”

“How does he pray?” Stannis asked, curious despite himself. Ned Stark had never seemed very
religious to him.

“He takes long walks in the woods and thinks deep thoughts,” Sansa explained, her eyes sparkling. Stannis looked at the ceiling and shook his head. “Yes, that sounds like him.”

“It’s a nice thing to do whether you’re religious or not,” Sansa said with a shrug, “it’s peaceful.” He nodded, agreeing with her. He could imagine it would be nice to have a long walk in the woods in pleasant weather. *Especially with Sansa there to keep him company…*

Stannis made sure that Sansa was given the most decadent dessert on the menu at the end of the meal, and he was forced to order a pot of tea for the table after watching her eat it, closing her eyes and moaning with pleasure at every bite.

For the second time in his life he had been very jealous of a fork.

The very deliberate show she had put on had caused a very *obvious* reaction below his belt, and he would have embarrassed himself horribly had he stood up from the table right away. He’d needed the tea as an excuse to linger and calm down.

“So…” Sansa said at length, “what do you want to do now?” She leant forwards and brought a hand up to stroke her neck idly. Stannis had to work very hard to keep his eyes on her face.

“Er, what would you like to do?” he asked, not wanting to presume. He was fairly certain she wanted him to invite her back to his apartment, but he wanted her to be the one to suggest it.

“You know, you quite neglected to give me a proper tour of your apartment yesterday,” Sansa said, giving him the look of a co-conspirator.

Stannis swallowed. *Was he really going to go through with this?* “My apologies. I was distracted for some reason,” he said, hoping to sound witty. Sansa gave him a dazzling, amused smile. Emboldened by her response, he continued, “I would be honoured if you would consider giving me another chance to show you around the place.”

“Of course,” Sansa said, still smiling brightly.

Stannis paid the bill, taking no notice of the total amount, and thoroughly enjoyed the way Sansa clung to his arm on the way back to the car. Her shoes were ridiculously impractical, and she’d probably break an ankle if she needed to run for any reason, but they made her legs look even longer than they already were, and they did something really quite interesting to her posture. Best of all was the way they made her hold onto him for balance, allowing him to touch her more than he would otherwise have conscientiously been able to do in public.

Stannis spent most of the drive to his apartment wondering if he should attempt to suavely stroke her thigh at some point in between switching gears, but ended up being much too nervous to attempt it. He just didn’t really think he was the sort of man who could get away with moves like that. She’d probably laugh at him if he attempted to do anything *suavely.*

No… she’d not laugh. She’d be too kind to laugh.

Once they made it through his front door, Sansa clinging to him and stroking his arm surreptitiously, Stannis felt his heart start to beat as if he had just run up the stairs while being pursued by a bear.
“Is it very unsexy if I take these off?” Sansa asked, collapsing on the leather sofa where he had been feeling her up the previous afternoon. She stuck one of her legs out as she asked her question, indicating her shoe. “They’re killing me,” she added with a laugh.

“You can take anything you want off,” he said before he managed to think his words through.

Sansa raised her eyebrows.

Stannis felt his face grow hot. Why had he said that?

Thankfully, she seemed more amused than offended.

“Come sit with me,” Sansa said, her eyebrows back in their normal place and her tone light and friendly. She had toed her shoes off and curled her bare legs underneath her.

He sat, feeling gratified when Sansa cuddled up to him like it was a completely natural thing for her to do.

“Thank you for dinner,” she murmured, “everything was so delicious.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, tentatively moving his arm to accommodate her better, wrapping it around her shoulders.

“Er, would you like anything to drink?” he asked, once he felt certain his touch was welcome.

“No thanks, the tea at the restaurant was perfect,” Sansa said with a contented sigh.

They stayed like that for a while, and Stannis worked up the courage to stroke her arm where his fingers had landed. She was very soft and touching her was causing very vivid recollections of what it had been like to fondle her naked breasts to stir in his mind. The familiar pressure against the fly of his trousers was back, and Stannis tried to furtively shift around to make himself more comfortable even though he knew it was hopeless. He couldn’t become comfortable while he was in this state. It either became pleasurable - if it was dealt with - or it became unbearable.

There was a third option, but Stannis thought it was probably impossible for his erection to simply go away on its own while Sansa was cuddled up to him.

“This feels really nice,” Sansa said at length, her voice dreamy and relaxed.

Stannis agreed with her, but as embarrassing as it was, all he could presently think about was how good her hand had felt when it had been wrapped around his cock.

“But I think you should give me that tour we talked about before I end up having a nap on you,” Sansa added, untangling herself from his embrace and looking at him with a faint blush.

Stannis grimaced. He did not really want to walk around his apartment and talk about designer furniture in his current state.

“Why don’t you start by showing me your bedroom?” Sansa suggested, her blush deepening.

“So you can have a nap in there instead?” he asked, hoping she wouldn’t think he was being serious. He wasn’t very good at making jokes.

“Maybe,” Sansa said coyly, shooting him a teasing look. She stood up and looked around expectantly, obviously wondering which way to go.
Stannis got to his feet and walked hurriedly towards the master bedroom, hoping his trouser situation wasn’t too obvious. Sansa followed him, staying close and treading lightly now that her shoes were off.

“Oh,” Sansa said as soon as Stannis turned on the light in his bedroom, “this is definitely a nice place to have a nap,” she added. She sounded a little nervous to Stannis’ ears, so he turned to face her, wanting to search her face and see if she was okay with being in his bedroom. Alone. With him.

She smiled when their eyes met, and though she was blushing very deeply, she did not look as if she wanted to leave. Stannis swallowed and felt himself break out into a sweat. He had not brought a woman to his bedroom in years.

He cleared his throat. “Um, the headboard is solid weirwood, designed by - “

Sansa kissed him before he could finish trying to remember who had designed the headboard.

They ended up lying on the impeccably made bed a heartbeat later, their tongues tangling together and Sansa most of the way on top of him. His hands were on her arse, somehow having wormed their way up under her skirt, and he was kneading the supple flesh greedily, enjoying the way it made Sansa moan into his mouth.

She was oddly bare to his touch under the dress, and he hardened to an extent he had not thought possible at the wild thought that she might not be wearing any underwear. Utterly distracted by the notion, he forgot to be polite and allowed his fingers to explore between her thighs, finding that there was fabric covering her after all. She had to be wearing some sort of G-string.

He realised with a jolt that he was essentially poking at her most intimate of places when Sansa moaned even more loudly and broke their kiss.

“Please - yes,” she gasped out, spreading her thighs invitingly.

He started to tentatively stroke her through the silken fabric of her tiny panties, his cock twitching where it was pressed against her abdomen. Sansa squirmed and seemed to want a firmer more decisive touch, so he obliged her, growing more confident when she started to whisper encouraging words into his ear.

“Yes, just like that, oh, please, that’s so good…”

Before he knew what had happened, he had pushed the scrap of fabric aside with an impatient gesture and started to touch her directly, delighting in how deliciously soft and slick her folds were. She mewled and squirmed and kept encouraging him - pleading with him - to keep going, to do more. Soon he was pumping two fingers into her searing hot, damp passage, listening to her squeals of pleasure and the enjoyable wet sounds the activity was producing. It was slightly awkward to finger her from behind, but it felt illicit and highly erotic to have her on top of him like this, her thighs spread, the skirt of her dress pushed up and her underwear shoved to the side.

He noticed that her neck was within his reach, and he licked it, wanting to taste her skin again.

It tasted terrible.

“What do you have on your neck?” he asked before he could stop himself.

“Mm - makeup,” Sansa gasped. He was still fingering her.
“Why?” he asked, feeling bewildered. He thought makeup usually went on a woman’s face.

“You left like - ah - a million hickeys yesterd- ah -ay,” she explained breathlessly.

He decided to add another finger, somehow feeling as if that would indicate that he wasn’t terribly embarrassed that he had forgotten about his eagerness to mark her neck.

“Oh! Stannis!”

The pressure of his erection was becoming utter torture. He pumped his fingers in and out of Sansa a few more times, liking the way she was getting louder and louder, but the he pulled away, pushing her gently to get her to roll off and lie on her back beside him.

His hands went to his belt, fumbling with the buckle clumsily before managing to get himself free of the thing. He was halfway through undoing his fly when his brain caught up. “Are you… uh,” he faltered when he looked at Sansa, forgetting what he had been about to say. She was on her back in his bed.

“Yes?” she asked, looking at him with heavy-lidded eyes.

“Uh…” He could not remember anything. She looked like some sort of goddess, and all he could think about was finishing what he had started and getting his cock free.

Then it clicked. Protection! He had been about to ask her about protection.

“Do we need condoms?” he asked, feeling his face heat up yet again.

“Not unless you have something you don’t want to share. I’m definitely clean and I won’t get pregnant. I’m on the pill.”

“I’m clean,” he hurried to say, excited by the thought of pushing into her with nothing coming between them. He got up on one elbow and leant over her so that he could kiss her, fumbling at his fly with his free hand and feeling completely overwhelmed with desire.

“Wait,” she said, breaking the kiss and sounding quite breathless, “can we do this properly? I want our clothes off, and I want to turn the bed down.”

Stannis drew in a shuddering breath, but nodded. He got off the bed and started to shed his clothes as quickly as he could, golden cufflinks flying off and skidding into a separate corners of the room, his belt dropping to the floor with a loud clink. Sansa was sitting on the bed, watching him with avid interest and not making a move to undress herself.

Did she want him to do it?

He left his underwear on as he was feeling a little exposed, and approached her slowly.

She stood up in a single fluid movement, turned her back to him and pushed her hair out of the way. It was a clear signal for him to help with her zipper. With his heart hammering in his chest he reached forward to open her dress. The zipper was stubborn, but he remembered a few tricks from back when he was responsible for helping Selyse with such things, and he got it to cooperate soon enough.

He resisted the urge to yank his hand down to strip her quickly in favour of moving slowly and deliberately. He wanted Sansa to have plenty of time to stop him if she changed her mind. She did nothing to stop him, however, as he revealed more and more of her back. He let the fingers of his
free hand explore each inch of new territory as he exposed it, and revelled in the way Sansa shivered and the way her breath hitched.

Once he had zipped the dress completely open, he placed his hands on her shoulders. He rested them there for a moment, gripping her gently and thinking about how much he'd like to massage her. Saving that thought for later, he pushed the straps of her dress until they were no longer doing the work they were designed to do. After that her dress only needed a bit of coaxing - it clung tightly to her hips - before it dropped to the floor and pooled around Sansa's bare feet.

She was breathing very loudly, but they were the deep, slow breaths of an aroused woman. She was not afraid.

Though the view of her back was very attractive, he decided that he wished for her to turn around. He could stare at her nearly naked arse later.

She was wearing a matching set of lingerie. The bra was similar to the one she had worn the previous afternoon, but a different - though also dark - colour. There were girlish little bows that hinted at innocence even as the lace and the darkness of the fabric oozed with sex. Was it wrong of him to like the contrast?

He definitely liked the cleavage on offer, and with a quick look at her face to seek permission, he bent to kiss and lick at the pillow-soft mounds.

"Mm, yes..." she moaned, arching her back slightly to thrust her chest out and bringing a hand up to stroke his hair. His cock jumped in response to the raw sexuality of her voice, and he let out his own low moan of need.

"Please," she implored, pushing the bra straps over her shoulders and turning around to show him the clasp. He found the little hooks quickly and did as she wanted. The pretty bra fell away and Sansa moved to the bed and turned it down messily, pillows flying everywhere. Soon she was lying down, wearing only her tiny, indecent panties. She held her hand out to him. "Please," she said again, her lips parted and her eyes dark.

Stannis didn't hesitate. He shoved his boxer-briefs down and off, causing his erection to spring free and bob up and down a few times before it stilled, the head almost touching his abdomen.

Sansa stared at him - at it - looking flushed and excited. Watching her watch him like that was intensely arousing, and he had to ball his hands into fists to keep from tugging on himself just to show off.

He climbed into bed with her and she immediately pressed the full length of her body against his, rubbing herself suggestively against his desperate cock and kissing his neck eagerly.

It felt good, but he wanted much more. With a push he had her on her back, and his hands found her lacy little panties. He pulled at them a little roughly, yanking them down as she lifted her hips to help him, and soon he had her naked before him. Her hair was disheveled, though her makeup still looked annoyingly flawless, and her chest was heaving with each deep, drawn out breath she took.

He was kneeling on the bed and looking down at her, overwhelmed by the sight of her fully nude body and wondering what to do first. The possibilities seemed endless, and she was just looking up at him, expectant and aroused,

"Okay?" he asked, reaching for her cheek and stroking her with a thumb.
"Yes," she whispered, nodding for good measure.

"Is there anything you would like me to do?" he asked, hoping for some guidance. He wanted to make this good for her.

"I liked what you were doing before," she said, seeming almost a little shy.

"Spread your legs," he ordered hoarsely, glad to have her permission to start exploring between her thighs again.

Sansa eagerly parted her legs, moaning as soon as his fingers found her folds. She was bare for the most part, though there was a neat triangle of close-cropped hair on her mound, small and perfectly symmetrical. He enjoyed the way his fingertips slid easily in the moisture she had produced, and judging by Sansa's throaty moans she was enjoying it quite a lot, too.

Now that she was on her back, and he on his side next to her, it was easier to stimulate her than it had been when he had been finger ing her from behind. This new angle allowed him to slip two fingers inside and use the pad of his thumb to rub the small bundle of nerves that was already swollen and needy.

She was coming before he even really got started -- amazingly responsive to his touch.

"Gods! Stannis!" she gasped out, her voice a keening, sexually charged marvel. He'd heard actresses of questionable repute imitate that sort of cry in films he would deny ever having watched to his very last breath, but the real thing was infinitely more arousing.

He climbed on top of her and touched her lips with the fingers he had just removed from her sex. He wanted her to taste herself on his hands, and hoped she wouldn't mind. She seemed to understand his wish, and licked delicately at his sticky fingers, maintaining heated eye contact with him the whole time. He had managed to fit his cock between her legs while she did this, and was coating his length in her moisture by rubbing himself deliberately against her, groaning at the delicious sensation and the sight of her tongue licking at his fingers.

"I need you," she whimpered after a while of this, opening herself to him as much as she could.

"What do you need?" he asked, his intense desire for her temporarily derailed by curiosity. Could he get her to ask for his cock? Hearing that would be… very nice. He rubbed himself a little more fervently against her, needing the friction.

"You know," Sansa whined, her hands trailing down his back and tentatively grabbing his arse to pull him closer. Her hands felt really good.

"Tell me," he whispered hoarsely into her ear and forced himself to stop rubbing up against her despite her encouraging hold on him.

Sansa squirmed and blushed so hotly that he felt warmth coming off her in waves.

"Please, I need you inside," she whispered, sounding equal parts embarrassed and aroused.

Stannis did not have the willpower to keep teasing her after that.

He reached down to guide his cock to her wet, inviting entrance, and let out a drawn out groan as the head slipped inside. She felt wonderfully tight, and the friction of pushing forwards, burying himself deeper and deeper, was enough to cause his eyes to roll into the back of his head with pleasure.
When he was all the way inside he couldn’t help but gasp out a strangled, *fuck,* and he heard Sansa make a very delighted mewling sound in response.

He took several quick breaths, trying to convince his body not to embarrass him, and started to move.

“You feel so good,” she whispered heatedly, clenching her inner muscles around him and making him swear again.

He had not been inside a woman for a very very long time. It would not be easy to keep his dignity.

With yet another muttered curse, he stopped moving and closed his eye tightly. He needed to concentrate.

“Why did you stop?” Sansa asked with a pout in her tone.

“Fuck,” he said in explanation, because apparently it was the only word left in his vocabulary.

“Yes, please,” she purred.

“I’m sorry,” he choked out, feeling terrible about how disappointing he was about to be.

With a quick decisive movement of his hands he pushed her thighs up so that he would have unlimited access and a decent amount of leverage. Then he let out a strangled moan and started to thrust *hard.*

He lasted maybe a minute.

It was a minute of pure bliss, but it was followed by pure humiliation. Sansa would probably never let him near her again. Fucking *hells.*

He kept his eyes closed and tried to avoid having to face the consequences. He was still inside her, but he’d have to move and let her put her legs down soon. He’d have to look at her undoubtedly disappointed face. *Fuck.*

“Hey,” Sansa said, touching his cheek. She sounded… nice?

He opened one eye and peered down at her. She was smiling at him. It was a kind smile. Definitely not like she was laughing at him - or worse - pitying him.

He opened his other eye.

“I can’t wait to do that again,” she said with a very sexy look in her eyes. She kissed him, and he forgot to be embarrassed while their tongues danced.

Stannis rolled off and to the side when she gave him a tiny push, and she got on her side, fitting herself to his body in a way that was incredibly comfortable. He liked how she swung one of her legs across his body rather possessively.

“I’m sorry,” he said again, feeling like he should explain himself, “I - I haven’t…” he took a deep breath and steeled himself. “It’s been a while.”

Sansa pressed herself even closer. “Don’t worry about it,” she said, “it felt good.”

“It was pathetic,” he muttered, feeling himself redden.
“It was _not_,” Sansa protested, “it was good, and it will always feel good because your… “ Sansa trailed off in embarrassment, took a breath and continued in a whisper, “… cock,” she started speaking at her normal volume again, “is perfect.”

Stannis didn’t know what to take in first. The fact that Sansa thought his cock was perfect, the fact that Sansa seemed so deliciously embarrassed at saying a ‘dirty word’, or the fact that she had said that it would _always_ feel good. Phrasing it like that made it sound like she wanted to have sex with him a _lot_ more often.

“I didn’t quite catch that,” he said, wanting to see if he could get her to say the word ‘cock’ again, and just generally wanting her to say more nice things to make him feel a little less mortified.

“You heard me,” Sansa grumbled, swatting his arm.

“Perfect, huh?” He cleared his throat and wondered if it was possible to feel smug and embarrassed both at once.

He thought he heard her mutter something that sounded like, “_men_,” under her breath, but then she was talking about his cock again, so he didn’t dwell on it.

“Yes, it is such a nice size,” she purred, “and the _girth_...” She made an incoherent noise of pleasure to indicate what she thought of his girth.

Considering the fact that his ego had just been smashed to a million pieces a few minutes ago, it was feeling remarkably whole, shiny and polished.

“The only problem,” Sansa began, clearly teasing him, “is that I really don’t think it will fit very well in my mouth.”

A wave of heat moved through him at her words, pooling in his groin and causing his limp cock to twitch with interest. “Oh?” he said, his voice weak, grabbing at the bedclothes for something to hold.

“Mmhm.”

“Any particular reason why you would bring that up?” he asked, squeezing the fistful of fabric in his hands.

“Maybe,” she said, a coy look in her eyes, “do you want there to be a particular reason?” She propped herself up on one elbow and looked down at him with a flirtatious smile.

“Yes,” he answered emphatically

“Do you want me to check how well it fits?” she asked, widening her eyes and giving a look of feigned innocence.

He nodded frantically. He would _definitely_ get hard enough to fuck her again - properly this time - if she put her mouth on him. The fact that she had suggested it made him want to keep her forever. She was a goddess.

Sansa gave him another flirtatious smile and started to kiss him. She didn’t linger at his mouth for very long, however. She made her way down his body, kissing and licking his neck, his collarbones, his pectorals, his flat nipples, and his abdomen. The lower she got, the longer it took her to move from one spot to the next. He was _panting_ by the time she got to the area below his navel.
When her lips finally found their way to his cock he was already halfway erect, and he gasped at the pleasurable sensation of her warm mouth toying with his most sensitive places. And she really was toying with him. Lapping at the head for just a second, moving to kiss the shaft, then licking daintily at his balls only to surprise him by sucking half his cock into her mouth all at once.

He was rock-hard before he knew it.

She stopped soon after she had him at attention and sat up to look at him suggestively.

“Do you want to try again?” she asked, tilting her head to the side. He was amazed to note that her lipstick did not appear to have become smudged at all.

He nodded, wondering whether they should switch places so that he could go on top again. Before he could ask her, she had straddled his thighs and started to rub herself against his cock. It was rather messy since he had already spent himself inside of her once and she hadn’t cleaned up after, but Stannis didn’t care.

When she looked like she wanted to start, he reached down to hold his cock steady for her, and she shot him a pleased look.

She sank down on him slowly, moaning with pleasure and letting her head fall back to expose her throat, making herself look rather delicious. He was able to enjoy the whole process much better now that he had already had one orgasm and felt a little less overwhelmed. The view of her gorgeous breasts didn’t hurt, either.

Sansa rode him slowly at first, and Stannis watched in hypnotised fascination at the way she rolled her hips. It was difficult to stay still, but he wanted to watch her and see what she would do without him trying to take control. Soon he couldn’t resist the temptation to at least touch her, however, and his hands went to her breasts to tease her nipples.

“Mm, yes,” she moaned, quickening her pace, grinding herself against him eagerly.

He waited for as long as he could stand it, but eventually he grabbed her waist and started to guide her movements and thrust.

“Oh, gods, yes, please, yes,” Sansa breathed, squeezing him with her inner muscles and letting him take control. He pulled, pushed and bucked up, forcing her to bounce around in a way that did very entertaining things to her breasts, and listened to her voice get higher and higher, until she was squealing and quivering.

She was crying out - almost sobbing - when he started to come again, feeling dazed and awash with pleasure, and confident that he had not embarrassed himself this time.

Afterwards, once Sansa had excused herself to clean up and returned, they rested on their backs, side by side, just breathing. He noticed that she had taken her makeup off, and wondered how she had managed it. It had still looked perfect after two rounds of sex and half a blowjob. She must have had to use some industrial strength cleaning products.

“Is it okay if I sleep here?” she asked after a while.

“Of course,” he said, pleased that she wanted to stay.

“I’ll have to wake you up at least twice,” she warned.

“Why?”
Sansa laughed, and it made him feel a bit insecure. Why would she have to wake him up? Was he missing something?

“To have more sex,” she explained, her voice warm and rather sinful.

Oh.

“Yes - er - I think that would be, um… acceptable,” he stammered awkwardly, cursing himself for not sounding more intelligent.

Sansa laughed again and pressed herself against him, making him feel like it didn’t matter one bit how he sounded as long as she kept doing that.

“Try to get some rest, then,” she whispered into his ear, amusement and the promise of good things to come in her tone.

Stannis drifted off with a smile on his face for the first time in years.
Sansa hadn’t left his apartment since their dinner, and that had been two days ago. They had spent their time having more sex than Stannis could ever recall having in his life, talking, eating takeout, and watching old films.

It was the best little holiday he had ever had, and he was not just thinking that because Sansa was in the middle of giving him blowjob number three, insisting that he deserved it after the way he had gone down on her that last time.

He hadn’t been able to argue with that logic.

Stannis was sitting on the edge of his bed with his thighs spread wide, and Sansa was kneeling between them, a pillow on the floor beneath her.

He looked down at her and brushed her hair out of the way, holding it back from her face for her, and she looked up at him as she sucked on the tip of his cock, her cheeks slightly hollowed and her lips… gods, her lips…

The mood was suddenly broken by the highly unwelcome sound of his mobile ringing.

He could see the screen from where he was sitting as his phone was currently charging on his nightstand, and he glanced at it in irritation.

Shireen.

“I’m sorry, it’s my daughter,” he said, reaching for the phone.

Sansa let go of his cock and sat back on her heels.

“Shireen?” Stannis said as soon as he accepted the call, trying to figure out why on earth Shireen could be calling him. She was meant to be going to the Vale tomorrow, wasn’t she?

“Hi, I forgot my isothermal clothes at your place,” Shireen explained, “are you at home?”

“Isothermal… oh, I see,” Stannis’ mind wasn’t quite as sharp as it normally would be and it took him longer than it ought to understand that Shireen would definitely need her isothermal clothing for her ski trip. “Yes, I’m at home.”

“Can I come and pick them up?”

Stannis stared down at Sansa. She was naked and looking up at him with a puzzled expression, her lips swollen and her cheeks flushed.

“Dad?”

Stannis realised he had been silent for a bit too long. “Yes, of course, you can’t go skiing without your isothermal things,” he hurried to say.

“I’ll see you in a bit, then,” Shireen said.

They said their good-byes, and Stannis put his phone back where he’d found it.

He looked down at Sansa. “Er, Shireen is coming over to pick up some clothes.”
“Oh,” Sansa said, biting her lip, “how long do we have until she gets here?”

He didn’t really know, but hazarded a guess. “Twenty minutes?”

Sansa gave his prominent erection a significant look. “So…” she licked her lips, “do you want me to finish?”

The sensible thing to do was to say no.

“Please,” he heard himself say.

Sansa smiled at him and started licking the head of his cock, gripping the base firmly. He groaned, closed his eyes and let his head fall back as far as it would go.

Since Sansa didn’t have anything to wear except her little dress, he gave her one of his shirts to cover herself with once they were ready to leave his bedroom. She looked so gorgeous in it that he probably would have tried to fuck her on the dining room table if they hadn’t been expecting company. He made do with sipping hot water and wondering if his daughter would notice all the hickeys on Sansa’s neck.

Was Shireen old enough to know about hickeys?

Would she tell Selyse?

Stannis started when the front door flew open and Shireen breezed in, shouting good morning and heading straight for her room. He recovered quickly, however.

“Good morning, Shireen,” he said, sounding astoundingly normal. He kept his face carefully blank as he watched his daughter turn to face him. She looked surprised, but there was no real understanding on her face.

“Oh,” Shireen said at length, “hi.”

There is an awkward silence. Stannis glanced at Sansa out of the corner of his eye and noted that she was smiling faintly and blushing.

“I have to get my clothes,” Shireen announced, turning to head for her room once more.

“This is weird,” Sansa whispered, giving him a slightly helpless look.

Stannis just blew out a loud breath, unable to think of anything to say to that.

After a while Shireen returned with a bag and Stannis presumed it was full of isothermal clothes.

“I’ve got to go,” his daughter mumbled, hardly looking at him. He glanced at Sansa again and felt bolstered when she gave him an encouraging look.

Shireen was already walking towards the front door, but Stannis caught up with her easily.

“I - er, this is, I mean,” he said, wincing at his inability to articulate anything.

Shireen didn’t help him out. She just stared up at him blankly.

“Have a good time on your trip,” he eventually managed, hugging her loosely to his chest. He was hoping against hope that he wouldn’t be getting a phone call from Selyse interrogating him about Sansa in the next couple of hours.
He stood by the door for a full minute after Shireen left, staring at the smooth, shiny surface and trying to figure out what he should have said to his daughter. He really didn’t know. This… relationship with Sansa was in its infancy. He didn’t know if it would go anywhere. He didn’t know if it was the sort of relationship Shireen really needed to know anything about.

“Hey,” Sansa said, wrapping her arms around him from behind, “you okay?”

“Yes,” he said, trying to sound present and not hopelessly distracted.

“Do you want me to leave?” There was a very vulnerable note in her voice, and it prompted Stannis to return his full attention to the situation at hand. He turned around to face her, placing his hands on her shoulders.

“Absolutely not,” he said firmly.

Sansa brightened and smiled at him.

They sat back down at the table and Stannis finished his water. As soon as he took the last sip Sansa cocked her head to the side and looked at the table with a small crease between her eyebrows, as if measuring its size.

“So,” she said, shifting her gaze from the table to his face, “want to do it on the table?”

He was already getting hard.

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Stannis knew it time to face the facts. He and Sansa were a couple. They had been seeing each other regularly for a little over a month, and it wasn’t just sex anymore. He knew that he wanted her to be real part of his life, and that meant inviting her to spend time with him while Shireen was at home. He was incredibly nervous when he brought it up with Sansa, but she immediately put him at ease and made him feel like it was the best idea in the world, and that it would work out really well.

Bringing it up with Shireen didn’t garner quite such an enthusiastic response, but she agreed that it would be all right if Sansa came over to spend their Sunday with them.

It was strange to watch the two most important people in his life interact. Sansa was trying a little too hard, but he supposed that was to make up for his daughter utter lack of trying. He winced when his daughter revealed that he was colour blind and used the opportunity to snap at Sansa that she shouldn’t start pointing at things and asking him what colour they were.

Still, it could have been worse.

They all had tea together and Stannis and Sansa awkwardly discussed the weather. Shireen seemed to be sulking.

Sansa decided not to stay over that night and it made Stannis start sulking, too. He had built up the expectation that she would stay in his mind, and finding out that she was leaving was a big irritating disappointment. He liked having her in his bed. He liked kissing her before he fell asleep, and then again when he woke up. If he weren’t quite aware that it might scare Sansa off and that it was unwise because of Shireen, he would have asked her to move in with him weeks ago.

Stannis frowned at the floor when he stood by the front door, saying good-bye to Sansa. Shireen had already said a halfhearted “bye,” and then excused herself to go to her room.
“You will not consider staying?” he asked one last time, hoping the answer might have changed.

“No, not tonight. I think this was a big shock for Shireen. You need to spend the evening with her,” Sansa said as she put her coat on.

“I don’t see why this should come as a shock to her,” Stannis grumbled.

Sansa smiled at him, giving him an affectionate look he was already completely addicted to. “Well, you’re not an eleven year old girl, are you?” she pointed out, “how would you know what they find shocking?”

Stannis grunted and shrugged.

“Next time we all spend time together we should go out. It was nice to spend the afternoon here, but you have to admit it was a little awkward. Having something specific to do ought to help.”

“Did you learn that in school?” Stannis asked, genuinely curious. Sansa was studying to be an educator, so she ought to be learning how to reach children.

“Sort of,” Sansa said, still smiling affectionately at him.

“That’s what we’ll do, then,” he said, nodding once for emphasis.

Sansa had finished donning her coat, her shoes, her gloves and her scarf, but she didn’t open the door. Instead she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth, using a liberal amount of tongue and getting him rather inconveniently turned on.

“I’ll drop by tomorrow after school,” she promised with a wink.

Stannis thought about how he was likely to find her wearing next to nothing on his bed when he came home from work the next day, and the idea did nothing to lessen his arousal.

“I gave you a key to the apartment for emergencies, not to give me heart attacks,” he murmured, his lips quirking and hinting at a smile.

“Should I not wear the new lingerie, then?” she asked, fluttering her eyelashes.

Stannis bit back a groan. “There’s - there’s new lingerie?” he choked out.

Sansa stood on the tips of her toes so that she could whisper straight into his ear. “There’s even a garter belt.” She sounded sinful.

“You have to go now,” he told her heatedly, glaring at her for making him want her so badly just as she was leaving.

“I know,” she chirped, “see you tomorrow,” she added in a more suggestive tone of voice.

The door swung open and shut. He stared at it blankly, not seeing the wood. All he could see were the visions of Sansa in sexy lingerie that his mind had conjured up.

“What’s for dinner?”

It sounded as if Shireen was no longer hiding in her room.

Stannis looked down at the prominent bulge at the front of his trousers that would probably not go away in the next five seconds.
Sansa had been right. It had been much easier to spend time with both her and Shireen when they went somewhere and did something together. Going to interesting places seemed to improve Shireen’s mood slightly, and having activities to occupy them, and things to look at, removed a lot of the awkwardness that had made the first afternoon they all spent together so uncomfortable.

There were still awkward moments, but they were easier to shrug off. Stannis disliked it when strangers added unnecessarily to the awkwardness. It was hard enough to figure the dynamics of his relationship with Sansa and Shireen out without people like that stupid photographer who took novelty photos at the Blackwater Bay Aquarium assuming Sansa was his daughter. He had complained about it at length when he and Sansa were alone later that day, but Sansa had been uncharacteristically unhelpful.

“Well, I am young enough to be your daughter,” she had pointed out with an amused smile.

He had shot her an indignant look, wondering which side she was on, anyway.

“It doesn’t matter if strangers make assumptions about us,” Sansa had said at the end of their conversation, hugging him close and kissing his cheek. “We know the truth.”

That had made him feel a little better.

Of course, Sansa had gone on to tease him horribly when the hugging and chaste pecking had turned into fondling and deeper, more intense kissing. She had giggled and asked him if she should call him ‘Daddy’, causing his face to catch fire and stammer at her to please never do that. He was quite relieved when she listened to his request, but disappointed when the fondling had to stop because she still didn’t want to stay overnight on weekends.

Thankfully, after a few more outings to museums and parks, Sansa had relented and started to stay over even though Shireen was in the apartment. The first couple of times Stannis hadn’t dared to have sex with Sansa - even though he very much wanted to - because Shireen was sleeping a few doors down, and he had no idea how the sounds might carry through the walls. His resolve hadn’t lasted when Sansa had tested it, however, and as Shireen had yet to shoot him any horrified looks or comment on any noises, Stannis was hoping that the apartment was soundproof enough to protect his privacy.

Last night had been rather wonderful. A lot of kissing and touching and massaging, slow, leisurely sex, and then the sort of cuddling that was so comfortable that having to get up to pee turned into a tragic event.

He had only just woken up, and he rolled over to search for Sansa, wanting to wrap his arms around her and press the length of his body against hers. She was lovely, warm, and fast asleep. She always slept for longer than he did, but that was true of most people as he tended to wake up quite early.

A glance at the alarm clock told him that he had slept longer than he usually did, however. It was a little after eight, and as he happened to know for a fact that Shireen never got up until nine when she stayed with him, he immediately started to wonder if he might be able to convince Sansa to wake up and let him have her.

His hands found her breasts with the ease of familiarity, and he started to tease her nipples through
the fabric of her pretty satin nightgown.

“Sleepy,” she mumbled, sounding pouty.

“I’m up,” he rasped, his voice not quite awake yet.

Sansa wriggled her arse against his groin. “mmm, yes you are,” she said with a hint of a moan.

“Do you want to… ?” he asked, his voice an octave deeper than it normally was.

“Sleepy,” she repeated with a yawn.

“I’ll go down on you first,” he promised, wanting her to say yes.

She giggled and turned around to press her front to his chest, kissing him lightly on the chin. “You
know just how to tempt me,” she whispered.

Going down on Sansa wasn’t a huge chore. She was never very hairy, she tasted tolerable, and she
never tried to crush his head with her thighs. The best thing about going down on her was how
incredibly wet it made her, however. Fucking her afterwards was bliss.

Sansa was whimpering with pleasure almost before he really started licking her, and keening into a
pillow by the time he was through. He didn’t wait for her to come down from her high and he
didn’t lick her through her aftershocks. As soon as he heard that she was coming he stopped what
he was doing and climbed on top of her. His cock sank into her with delicious ease, and Sansa was
utterly pliant and moaning beneath him, allowing him to do whatever he wanted. He had her hook
her legs over his shoulders and started to plough into her relentlessly, grunting with every thrust.
Sansa’s inner muscles were clenching and fluttering around his cock the way they only did when
she was coming, and it felt gloriously satisfying. He held on for as long as he could, but he was
burying his face in the crook of her neck and gasping her name before he really wanted to to.

Afterwards, once they had cuddled and cleaned up, he managed to drag Sansa out to the kitchen by
promising her some tea. It was nine o’clock, and Stannis wanted to be there when Shireen woke
up.

Shireen didn’t show up when she usually did, however.

Sansa sent him a mock-glare for dragging her out of bed for no reason, but laughed when he asked
her if the wake-up had been very awful to suffer through.

They ended up having a very pleasant morning together, though Stannis kept thinking about why
Shireen was sleeping so unusually late. Was she sick?

“Don’t worry about it,” Sansa said reassuringly, “I started to want to sleep in at around that age. It’s
a normal part of becoming a teenager.”

“She’s eleven!” Stannis was appalled at the idea that Shireen might be becoming a teenager
already. According all sense and reason it should not happen for at least another two years.

“She’s going to grow up whether you like it or not,” Sansa sing-songed.

“Not yet,” he grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest and glancing at the time. It was nearly
noon. “I’m going to check on her. She’s never slept this late.”

“Maybe she’s feeling blue about something?” Sansa suggested, biting her lip.
“Maybe. She’s been acting a bit off for a while.”

“Tell her I’m making pancakes. Pancakes always cheer me up.” Sansa started to find ingredients for pancakes even as she spoke. Stannis thought about protesting - pancakes were not healthy - but decided not to. Maybe pancakes would help Shireen feel better…

He knocked on Shireen’s door, hoping his daughter was not coming down with something. “Shireen?”

There was no answer. He knocked again with similarly lackluster results. After he had knocked three times he decided Shireen was probably dying and that he had been a horribly negligent father not to check on her sooner, so he went inside.

He walked over to her bed and looked down on her. She looked… fine.

“Shireen, are you all right? It’s quite late,” he asked, wondering what could have possessed her to miss the entire morning.

“I’m fine. I just didn’t feel like getting up, okay?” Shireen mumbled, the corners of her mouth dragging downwards.

“Well, if you want to get up now, Sansa is making pancakes for you,” he said, feeling more than a little awkward. Should he say something about how the pancakes were meant to cheer her up? Shireen stared at him like he had just told her he would be abandoning his career to become a tap dancer.

“Just… come to the kitchen when you’re ready,” he said, retreating hastily from his daughter’s room.

“So?” Sansa asked, giving him a curious look. She was wearing an apron. Where had she found an apron? Why was she wearing anything else? She would look amazing in nothing but an apron… Or maybe a French maid uniform...

He was startled when Shireen suddenly appeared, sitting down at the table without announcing her presence.

“Hi,” she said sullenly.

“Say good morning,” he corrected sharply, still discomfited at having her sneak up on him. What if he had been kissing Sansa? It was bad enough that he had probably been looking at her rather lasciviously and been on the cusp of imagining her in a very inappropriate costume.

“Good morning,” Shireen mumbled, glaring at Sansa for some reason. Sansa just smiled and continued her work at the stove.

“If you’re going to sleep until noon you should at least be polite when you finally get out of bed,” he said, giving Shireen a stern look.

“Oh, leave her alone,” Sansa said in a cheerful tone of voice, “I always had trouble waking up at weekends when I was your age,” she added, addressing Shireen and laughing lightly.

The pancakes Sansa gave his daughter actually looked really good. He usually didn’t go for that kind of thing, but maybe with sour cream instead of syrup…
“I can tell that you want to try one,” Sansa said with a wink, placing a plate in front of him, too.

“No, I’m fine,” he insisted, though he couldn’t take his eyes off the delicious-looking pancake.

“It’s really good,” she promised, using her really tempting tone of voice. In front of his daughter. He gave her an indignant look.

“Come on, just one bite?”

“I - er - I’m not much for sweets,” he insisted, clearing his throat.

Sansa bit her bottom lip, widened her eyes at him, and fluttered her eyelashes in a way that she knew perfectly well made him want to do anything she damn wanted.

He shot her a dirty look. She wasn’t playing fair.

“I’d like some sour cream, please,” he said with a sigh. Sansa gave him a dazzling smile and got the sour cream for him.

The pancake tasted like heaven.

“This is really quite good,” Stannis said once he had devoured the whole thing in four greedy bites.

“It’s my mother’s secret recipe,” Sansa told him with another bright smile. She was eating her own stack of pancakes with liberal amounts of maple syrup, and Stannis knew that if Shireen weren’t at the table that he’d grab the hand Sansa was using to hold her fork and guide the fork to his own mouth to steal some of her food. Sugary stickiness be damned.

He glanced at his daughter, wondering why she hadn’t joined the conversation. Shireen was quietly eating her pancakes, looking faintly murderous.

Perhaps it would be best not to say anything to her.

Stannis prompted Sansa to tell him more about the recipe and she happily chatted away as Shireen finished eating. He noticed right away when she was done because she stood up from the table and rushed from the kitchen as if she had been raised by wild animals. He had rarely seen her act so rude.

Sansa blinked and stared after Shireen for a moment before turned her big eyes on him and giving him a wounded look.

He felt terrible.

“Come here,” he murmured, pushing his chair away from the table so that Sansa would be able to sit on his lap.

As she perched herself on top of him he spoke. “I’m sorry about my daughter, I don’t know what’s got into her,” he sighed, enjoying the way Sansa made herself comfortable, “she’s usually not this rude.”

“It’s no big deal,” Sansa said, but she was pouting and looking rather disappointed. “It’s just… I thought she’d really like the pancakes,” she whispered sadly.

“She wouldn’t have finished every last bite if she hadn’t,” he pointed out, trying to cheer her up with logic.
Sansa glanced at Shireen’s plate and a small smile tugged at her lips. “You really think she liked them?”

“Yes,” he said, kissing Sansa chastely.
Stannis had never seen Sansa treat his daughter with anything but perfect kindness, and yet Shireen’s behaviour towards Sansa still resembled the behaviour of some sort of abuse victim. He was starting to depend on Sansa, and care for her quite deeply, but he knew that he had to talk to his daughter very seriously before he allowed himself to fall completely head over heels. He did not want to inadvertently saddle his daughter with an ‘evil stepmother’ because he hadn’t been able to face the possibility that there was more to Sansa than he could see. He was not too stupid to know that his judgment was rather impaired when it came to his girlfriend; it was quite possible that there were aspects of her character or her behaviour that he wasn’t seeing clearly.

Gods, he hoped Sansa was not doing anything to make his daughter upset. The idea that he would have to break things off with Sansa in order to protect his daughter was excruciating. He knew he would do it without hesitation if it turned out that Sansa was not who she seemed, but it would be painful to discover such a thing and be forced to end a relationship that was making him so happy. He would not be happy at the expense of Shireen’s happiness and well-being, however.

It took him two weeks to work up the courage to speak to his daughter. He was so afraid of what she might tell him, and so worried about the possible consequences, that it just never seemed to be quite the right time.

Finally, on a Friday night when he and Shireen were alone in the apartment, he managed to ask her all hard questions he had been avoiding. (Had Sansa… said something to Shireen? Done something to her? Something to make her sad?)

It was enormously difficult, and he had to think carefully about every word he said, but he did it. It was a relief when Shireen said that Sansa had not been saying or doing anything to make her upset, but it left Stannis feeling very confused. If it was not Sansa’s doing, then why had Shireen been acting so glum?

Shireen’s response to that question was not what he had expected or prepared himself for.

“I don’t like it that she’s always around,” she said, and his heart broke a little when he saw that there were tears streaming down her face.

He had thought Shireen had been enjoying their outings together with Sansa. He had thought she could see how Sansa improved his mood, his stress levels… his life. And she had just admitted that Sansa never said or did anything to upset her. If Sansa was nothing but sweet and kind to Shireen, why did she not like having Sansa around?

The answers he managed to get out of his daughter were not entirely satisfying and did not do much to banish the painful twisting, writhing sensation in his stomach.

“I just… I want things to be like before.”

“Before?”

“When it was just you and me.”

Shireen wanted to spend more time with just him? Missed their time together enough to cry about it?
While he was deeply touched to know that his daughter cherished the time they spent together just the two of them, he couldn’t help but be surprised. Sansa was so much brighter and more fun than he was. It was strange to think that his daughter would prefer his own less sparkling personality to such an… emotional extent.

“It’s still you and me,” he told her, going on to promise to attempt to spend more time with just Shireen, hoping that it would help her feel better.

He was then forced to explain to his crying little girl that he would not give Sansa up because Shireen did not wish to share him.

It was one of the harder conversations he had ever had to have.

Hopefully she would understand that he just... needed someone to take care of him and his needs. That he needed Sansa to take care of him and need him in return. Want him in return. He hadn’t realised how incomplete and lonely he had been before Sansa came into his life. He hadn’t realised how much he had been missing.

He couldn’t explain all of this to his daughter, but he tried to explain the parts he thought she might understand.

Shireen nodded, and he hugged her, feeling relieved and sad at the same time.

The whole conversation left him feeling very drained.

It was very tempting to call Sansa and hope that her voice would help him regain his energy, but it would feel wrong to tell Sansa all the details of his talk with Shireen, and he did not know what else he would say. He abhorred random phone calls about nothing in particular.

He’d talk to Sansa tomorrow and tell her the relevant aspects of the conversation once he’d had a chance to process it. He also wanted to discuss how they would go about going public with their relationship. So far the only people who knew about them were Shireen and Sansa’s parents.

Stannis still felt vaguely uncomfortable when he recalled the afternoon he had spent in Winterfell being interrogated by Ned and Catelyn. It had all been very friendly and civilised on the surface, and Sansa still didn’t understand why Stannis had wanted to leave as soon as they had politely been able to do so, but she hadn’t been on the receiving end of the looks her father had kept shooting him.

Ned Stark had clearly wanted someone more… age appropriate for his daughter.

Catelyn had been nice, however, and he had even overheard her say something about what a sensible choice Sansa had made when the two women had retreated to the kitchen for a more private chat. It had pleased him when Sansa had calmly responded that she liked him, and that she was not simply with him because it was sensible.

Stannis never tired of Sansa telling him that she liked him and that she was attracted to him. He was even starting to truly believe her; his self-doubt having been run off by her affection and sincerity.

It had been rather like having the rug pulled out from underneath him when Catelyn had responded to Sansa with a comment that indicated that she expected her daughter’s interest in Stannis to vanish after a few months.

He knew he should probably prepare himself for just that eventuality, but somehow a mad hope for
a future with Sansa had taken root within him, and he couldn’t bring himself to think about what he would do if Sansa decided to find someone more appropriate. “Someone with no… luggage,” as Catelyn had so delicately put it.

The hope for more had inadvisedly made itself a nest in his breast, and Stannis knew that it meant he was most likely headed for the kind of heartbreak that could ruin a man.

He pushed those thoughts away, trying to focus on the fact that Sansa was attracted to him and wanted to stay with him for the foreseeable future.

It was enough. It had to be.

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Stannis invited Sansa to come as his date to the next social function at Baratheon Enterprises. He knew that Robert would make some sort of embarrassing scene if Stannis didn’t warn him beforehand, so the day before the party he went to his brother’s office and knocked.

It was always better to knock before entering Robert’s office. Stannis had once caught Robert with one of the interns on his lap and it was not an experience he wanted to repeat.

“Come in!” Robert sounded quite happy to have company, so Stannis guessed that he was not currently entertaining any interns.

“Do you have a minute?” Stannis asked when he had carefully closed the door behind him.

“Sure, sure,” Robert waved at a chair in front of his desk, “anything to drink?”

“No, thank you.”

There was an awkward silence while Stannis tried to figure out a way to break the news and Robert tried to surreptitiously put the sports magazine he had been perusing into a desk drawer.

“Er, I just wanted to let you know that I’m bringing a date to the event tomorrow,” Stannis finally said. It was blunt and to the point, but Stannis did not think he could stand to draw this conversation out.

“A date?” Robert’s eyebrows started to climb upwards.

“Yes,” Stannis confirmed with a nod, “I thought I should let you know as you are familiar with her, and I wish for you to act your age when you see us.”

Robert’s eyebrows were still attempting to reach his annoyingly non-receding hairline, but he was smiling, too. “I know her?” He sounded very interested. “Who is it, then?”

Stannis took a deep breath and braced himself. “Sansa Stark.”

The explosion that he had been expecting didn’t come. Robert was eerily and uncharacteristically silent. His mouth dropped open as if this muscles in his face had suddenly stopped working, and he was blinking very rapidly.

“You are dating Sansa Stark?” Robert asked after an eternity of staring in - frankly insulting - disbelief.

“Yes.”
“Does Ned know about this?”

“Yes.”

“Does Selyse know about this?”

“... No.”

Robert was shaking his head and reaching for a tumbler of amber liquid that was giving off a very strong smell of alcohol. He took a swig and gave Stannis an incredulous look. “How did this happen?”

Stannis didn’t really want to go into detail. “How does it usually happen?” he snapped, irritably.

“You got drunk and woke up with her lips around your cock?”

“No!”

After his indignant outburst Stannis sighed and rubbed his face in frustration. “She asked me to meet her for coffee and then I took her to dinner. Seven hells, Robert.”

“Oh.”

Stannis glared at his brother and crossed his arms over his chest.

“So - um - how long have you two been seeing each other?”

Stannis relaxed a tiny bit. His brother was clearly making an effort at being civil. “Since the winter holidays,” he said.

“What?” Robert exclaimed, “you’ve been banging her for months and you never said anything before now?”

Stannis bristled and sprang up from his chair. “Don’t talk about my relationship with her like that,” he bit out through clenched teeth, narrowing his eyes at Robert.

“Oh, come off your high horse. Sit down,” Robert said with an exaggerated roll of his eyes.

Stannis didn’t sit.

“Sit. Down,” Robert ordered in his ‘I’m older, bigger and stronger than you. Don’t make me come over there’ voice.

Stannis shot him a filthy look and sat down.

“Don’t pretend you haven’t been fucking her at every opportunity until you’re blue in the face,” Robert said with a derisive snort, “not even you could date a girl that pretty without enjoying the perks.”

Stannis felt his face grow very warm, but continued to glare belligerently at his brother.

“Does Renly know?” Robert asked, sighing.

“Not yet,” Stannis said.

“I’ll invite you both to the house this weekend. We can have a barbecue. Let the kids entertain
themselves by the pool while the grownups talk.”

Stannis wondered if there was any way he would be able to get out of going. The look on Robert’s face was very determined. “Fine,” he bit out, “but I’m not bringing Sansa unless you behave at the party tomorrow.”

“I always behave!” Robert boomed, taking another swig from his tumbler and smacking his lips. “Although if you do bring Sansa to the barbecue we’ll have to figure out whether to stick her in the pool or let her talk with us.”

“Fuck off.”

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Robert was surprisingly well-behaved at the event at Baratheon Enterprises, but Stannis didn’t really unclench until he had managed to escape with Sansa to his car.

Sansa had been amazing. Stannis usually hated these stupid events, and avoided going whenever he could, but with Sansa there everything just seemed easier. She was able to help him out with the small talk he had never really been able to get the hang of, and her cheerful presence almost made it seem like he was in a good mood, too. Of course the harpies that some of the board members were married to threw some very catty looks at him, not even bothering to lower their voices when they started to discuss how depressingly common it was for men to go through midlife-crises these days. Thankfully this had only seemed to amuse Sansa.

“You know what you should do,” Sansa had whispered in his ear, pressing herself ostentatiously close, “get a flashy convertible and watch their faces melt off.”

He had actually laughed. In public. Robert had given him a concerned look and everything.

Presently he was not laughing. He, Sansa and Shireen were walking up to Robert’s front door in the pleasant early summer weather. The barbecue at Robert’s house would be uncomfortable if he knew his brother and his witch of a wife correctly, but at least Shireen wouldn’t have to sit through the interrogation that was likely to take place while ‘the grownups talked’. She seemed relatively pleased to be going to her uncle’s house, and had gathered her swimming things without so much as a sullen look or a put-upon sigh. Sansa looked a little nervous, but she was hiding it well.

Stannis sighed heavily before he knocked. Here we go.

Myrcella answered the door. She looked like a photocopy of her mother when Cersei had been younger: all long blond hair and graceful limbs.

“Hello Uncle Stannis,” Myrcella said sugary sweetness in her tone, “hi Shireen,” she added, smiling at his daughter. Myrcella smiled at Sansa, too, and offered to take her light jacket.

“I think Mum and Dad are in the kitchen. Renly and Loras aren’t here yet,” Myrcella told them, “I was just heading out to the pool. Want to come?” Myrcella pointed her question at Shireen, and his daughter nodded. Their group split up when they rounded a corner, the girls heading for the pool, Stannis and Sansa following the sound of Robert’s booming laughter.

When they arrived in the glamorous, sparkling clean kitchen, Robert barely looked up from the TV screen he seemed entranced by. It was showing a man in chef’s clothing yelling at someone. Robert looked as if he was in the middle of preparing some meat for the barbecue. Cersei was standing as far away from Robert as she could, leaning against the counter and taking sips from a glass of white wine. There was a chopping board on the counter in front of her, the makings of a
salad strewn across it. Cersei was still holding the knife.

Stannis wondered if their cook was on holiday.

He steeled himself and went over to Cersei, handing over a bottle of wine. He would not be drinking from it, but Sansa had insisted it was good manners to bring something for the hosts. Cersei put the glass she had been holding down and accepted the bottle with a sardonic little smile.

“Thank you, Stannis,” she said, slipping lazily into the role of the gracious hostess. Stannis grimaced and retreated from her and her sharp-looking knife as fast as he could. It felt safer to stand next to Sansa.

The angry chef stopped yelling and Robert muted the TV.

“I was just getting the meat ready,” he stated unnecessarily, his face splitting into a wide grin. “Want to help me man the grill while the girls prepare the salad?”

Stannis noticed Cersei roll her eyes at that and take a large sip of wine.

“Renly’s better at that stuff,” Stannis muttered. He, himself, always managed to burn everything he tried to grill. Renly was the one who took all the expensive cooking classes.

“Suit yourself, I’m going to go out and see if there’s enough gas.”

“So,” Cersei said as soon as Robert was out of hearing distance, “how did Selyse take it?”

Stannis winced. He still hadn’t told Selyse, and judging from the way he had yet to receive an annoyed phone call from his ex-wife, Shireen hadn’t told her, either.

A slow smile spread across Cersei’s lips like motor oil over the surface of water. “You haven’t told her, have you?”

Stannis just glared at her. Sansa fidgeted uncomfortably next to him, and placed his hand at the small of her back in an attempt to be supportive and reassuring.

“Ashamed of your little dove?” Cersei purred, tilting her head to the side.

He started to grind his teeth. He hated Cersei.

“Or perhaps you don’t expect this… dalliance to last?” she wondered, her smile sweet but her words dripping in venom. She sipped her wine with apparent pleasure, but Stannis knew that she was not taking pleasure in the taste of the wine. Her pleasure came from spewing her poison at him. He hoped she couldn’t tell that her last comment had hit a nerve.

“You’re right,” Sansa suddenly said, surprising Stannis, “we didn’t want to talk about our relationship until we were confident that it was going somewhere,” she added.

Stannis cleared his throat. “Yes,” he managed, feeling wrong-footed, but not wanting to contradict Sansa. She wasn’t lying, but they had never said this to each other in so many words. It was quite gratifying to hear that Sansa believed their relationship was going somewhere. His heart rate quickened, and he pressed his hand a little more firmly against Sansa’s back.

“Oh?” Cersei seemed less pleased.

“Yes, Stannis is planning to tell Selyse the next time they meet in person,” Sansa said decisively.
That was news to him. He supposed it made sense, though. He really should. He nodded decisively to back Sansa up.

Cersei smiled in a way that might be construed as polite.

“What can I do to help?” Sansa asked, changing the subject with a smile that was definitely and genuinely polite.

Cersei rolled her eyes, dropped the knife on the chopping board and made an impatient gesture at the half-made salad. Sansa walked to the board and picked the knife up. Soon she was engrossed in her task, leaving Stannis at loose ends. Cersei and her glass of wine had made themselves scarce.

“Well, that was nice an awkward,” Sansa said in a low whisper once Cersei had disappeared.

“I’m sorry,” Stannis sighed, “I should have known Cersei would harp on about Selyse.”

“You will tell Selyse, won’t you?” Sansa stopped chopping and gave him a vulnerable look.

“Yes, yes, of course.” Stannis felt his face heat up. Why hadn’t he spoken to Selyse sooner?

Sansa smiled at him and finished slicing up a tomato. Somehow she got perfect uniform little pieces and the tomato pips didn’t escape and go everywhere.

“Er, shall I help?” Stannis offered halfheartedly. He was mostly rubbish in the kitchen.

“Hmm, maybe you could toss the salad?” Sansa suggested, her eyes sparkling with mirth.

Stannis’ face felt positively aflame now. He was not so ill informed that he did not catch the double entendre. Not wishing to let her get away with teasing him like that he walked right up to her, pressing his chest against her back to whisper in her ear. “Would you like that?” he asked, trying to make his voice sound deep and husky. He had noticed that Sansa tended to practically melt into a puddle at his feet when he did that.

It was Sansa’s turn to blush and Stannis smirked to himself, satisfied that he had managed to turn the tables on her.

“Stannis!” she squeaked, a high-pitched giggle bubbling up from her as she half turned to swat at his arm with the hand that was not holding a very sharp knife.

Stannis caught her hand and brought it to his lips, kissing her palm and gazing into her eyes.

“Well, _hello_,” someone said, prompting Stannis to take a step back from Sansa and clear his throat. It was Renly. And Loras. Stannis grimaced, feeling incredibly awkward at having been caught by his brother in such an intimate pose with Sansa. He would have preferred to break the news in some other way.

“Renly, Loras,” Stannis said, nodding at the men in turn.

“Robert wasn’t joking, then,” Renly said with an infuriating smirk.

“I wouldn’t know. What did he tell you?”

“That you had a new lady friend to introduce to us,” Renly said, shrugging.

Sansa had washed her hands and wiped them dry on a dish towel. She stood beside him now and Stannis unconsciously found himself touching the small of her back again, rubbing circles with his
“Yes, well,” Stannis said, clearing his throat again, “I’m sure you both know Sansa.”

Loras waved at her cheerfully and Renly grinned.

“Hi,” Sansa said, sounding a little sheepish. He glanced at her and saw that she was still blushing.

“Cersei stick you with salad duty?” Renly asked, walking over to the chopping board to examine the progress Cersei and Sansa had made, “is Ramón on holiday?”

Ramón, Stannis suddenly remembered, was the name of Robert’s cook. He shrugged as he had no idea where the man might be hiding.

“Robert outside?” Renly asked, looking around at the distinctly Robert-free kitchen.

Stannis explained that Robert had gone to check if there was enough gas for the grill, and Renly decided to go and offer his assistance.

It surprised Stannis that Renly had not wanted to stay and interrogate him about his relationship with Sansa, but perhaps Renly thought it would be easier to get the details from Robert.

“Want help?” Loras asked, directing his question at Sansa. Loras did not seem surprised at all by Sansa or Stannis’ relationship with her.

“Thanks,” Sansa said with a smile. She found Loras another knife and made room for him beside her. Stannis ended up standing awkwardly to the side and feeling even more useless than he usually felt in kitchens.

“So, who blabbed?” she asked conversationally as she started carefully slicing up another tomato.

“What do you mean?” Loras responded, picking up a cucumber and giving the vegetable a bemused look before starting to chop it into little cubes.

“Was it Margaery? Because if she told you, I’m giving her a piece of my mind. She swore she wouldn’t tell anyone until I told her it was okay.”

Loras sighed. “It was Willas, actually.”

Sansa shot Stannis a nervous look that he didn’t know how to interpret. “Oh.”

“You know he’s still hung up on you,” Loras said, shooting Stannis a nervous look of his own, “you’re probably not doing him any favours by staying in touch with him.”

Stannis frowned. Sansa was still in touch with Willas?

“We exchange the occasional email,” Sansa said with a frustrated sigh, “I’m hardly keeping him dangling. And he was the one who broke up with me!”

“Easy,” Loras said, taking a step back to avoid the knife Sansa had brandished to emphasise her words, “I know you’re not leading him on. He’s just lonely.”

“I’m not stopping him from finding a girlfriend,” Sansa muttered, viciously chopping a head of lettuce.

“Do you know how often I’ve had to listen to him moan about how the girl of his dreams turned
out to be underage, and that he had to break up with her so he wouldn’t have to go to dirty old man jail?” Loras asked, his tone exasperated, “do you think any other girl is going to want him while he’s like that? Honestly, what did you do to him? It’s been years.”

Stannis was irritated by this whole conversation, but he felt a certain amount of sympathy for Willas Tyrell. Sansa was amazing. He was sure it would take him several years to get over her if she left him. It would probably be even worse if he were forced to break things off because of circumstances beyond his control.

“I didn’t do anything to him! We never even met in person!” Sansa exclaimed, now dicing carrots with gusto.

“So, you’re doomed,” Loras said, turning to address Stannis.

“What?” Stannis furrowed his brow in confusion.

“My brother’s heart has been irrevocably stolen by this little she-devil without her even meeting him in person,” Loras explained, “you’ve definitely met her in person so you’ve likely already lost your soul to her.” Loras clapped him on the shoulder. “My condolences,” Loras added, barely able to keep his face straight.

Renly returned before Stannis was able to say anything in response to Loras’ words, looking for tongs and beer for Robert.

They dropped the subject of Willas after that, and spoke of more innocuous things.

When everyone had gathered to eat the subject of Stannis’ relationship with Sansa was brought up again when Renly made some stupid comment about how Baratheon men were all smitten with Starks. This caused Cersei to shoot him a death glare, and Loras to roll his eyes and smack him with an oven mitt when Renly went on to wonder whether he should ask Robb out.

“Ah, Stark women are hard to resist,” Robert said, winking at Stannis and leering at Sansa. (Cersei poured wine into her glass for the fifth time.) “When Lyanna and I were your age we never left the bedroom!” he continued, laughing uproariously.

“Robert,” Stannis hissed, giving him a look and then glancing pointedly at Shireen. This was not the sort of talk he wanted his daughter to hear.

“I was surprised you were able to keep your hands off Sansa at the party. With the dress she was wearing I thought for sure you’d be sneaking off for a - “

“Robert!” Stannis repeated more firmly.

“What?” Robert asked, feigning innocence and taking a large gulp of his beer.

“Act your age,” Stannis said, trying to rein his anger in for Shireen’s sake.

“Honestly, Stannis, I thought having a girl in your bed would loosen you up a little. Especially one as pretty as Sansa,” Robert gave Sansa a grin that he probably thought was winning. Sansa was somehow maintaining a polite expression on her face, but her posture was very stiff.

Stannis opened his mouth, feeling enraged and wanting to shout some very choice words at his older brother.

“So, how about ‘em Rangers?” Renly said before Stannis managed to start yelling, changing the
subject to something less volatile. Robert seized the opportunity to start talking about sports, and Stannis felt the vein on the side of his neck stop throbbing quite as dangerously.

Sansa reached for his knee under the table, squeezing it lightly. Stannis covered her hand with his and they stayed that way for the rest of the meal.

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“Sansa?” Stannis said quietly, wondering if she was still awake. They were lying next to each other in bed and it had been several minutes since they had both put out their lights.

“Mm?”

“You don’t have to answer this,” he began, his words stilted, “but why are you still in contact with Willas Tyrell?”

“We’re just friends,” she said, moving to cuddle up to him. She started to pet his chest soothingly.

“I believe you,” he said, minding his tone, “but it seems that he isn’t - er - ‘over’ you?”

“Loras was exaggerating,” Sansa said, and he could practically hear her rolling her eyes, “Willas has dated a few girls since we broke up.”

Stannis was embarrassed by how relieved he was to hear that.

“Trust me, that ship has sailed.” Sansa’s voice was muffled as her mouth was pressed close to his neck, and she was kissing him affectionately as soon as she finished speaking.

Stannis supposed it must have. If Willas still cared for Sansa as much as Loras had indicated, he would have attempted to renew the old spark when Sansa came of age. The fact that he hadn’t done so had to mean that Willas had lost interest, or that he had tried and Sansa had rejected him.

A jealous part of him wanted to ask her whether Willas had tried to get her to go out with him again, but he decided to hold his peace. Nothing could be gained from knowing. If Sansa said Willas was not in the running for her affections, he would not act as if the man was competition. It would be very childish to do so.

Sansa was with him now, and she did not appear to be dissatisfied with the arrangement.

“Are you jealous?” Sansa whispered, her lips close to his ear now.

“No.” He didn’t manage to sound entirely convincing.

“You have nothing to be jealous of, but I don’t mind if you are a little.”

Stannis furrowed his brow. What on earth was she on about?

“I mean, it’s okay if you’re a little jealous,” she added, kissing his earlobe, “as long as it’s not out of control caveman jealousy.”

He couldn’t help but huff out an amused breath at that.

“Too much jealousy is not attractive.” Sansa’s hand was making its way down his body, and the sensation of her kisses, her touch and the idea of what she was perhaps about to do made him harden in anticipation. “But a little jealousy is kind of sexy.” Her hand found his cock and she started to stroke him. He groaned in appreciation, wondering if he should try to think of a coherent
response to what she had just said.

“Er, perhaps I was a bit jealous, then,” he managed, hoping it was the right thing to say.

“Mm, and what can I do to convince you that I’m all yours?” she said, affecting a playful, over-the-top, breathless voice. It was not the first time she had used that particular tone of voice to tease him, and she seemed to know that he liked it despite himself. Just like she liked it when he deepened his voice and spoke huskily into her ear the way he had in Robert’s kitchen.

He attempted to do it again now. “I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

Sansa giggled and kept fondling him very pleasantly.

Her enjoyable touches became more focused after a little while, and soon she was kissing him all over his face and neck as she moved her hand in a steady rhythm. He tried to touch her in return, but she swatted his hands away and insisted that he should just relax and enjoy.

It was strange to just *lie there*, but Sansa knew what he liked, and soon she was sitting astride him and taking him inside. He knew that he would be allowed to touch her after that, and sure enough, Sansa was happy to let him play with her nipples as she rode him, her every movement measured and deliberate.

“Gods, *Sansa,*” he heard himself moan, the pleasure of having her almost too intense to bear.

She bent forwards until their chests were flush against one another and her lips sought his. She kissed him leisurely in time with her body’s slow rocking movements, and when she came up for air it was to tell him something - in a completely sincere tone of voice - that made him start to come as soon as she finished speaking.

“I’m yours, Stannis. I don’t want anyone else. Only you.”

It took him a while to be able to respond with anything more coherent than embarrassing grunts, but eventually he managed a whispered, “likewise.”

They fell asleep in a tangled heap of naked limbs, and Stannis’ last thought was that perhaps he should be a bit jealous again sometime.
The Next Step

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Stannis had thought that he knew what absolute horror felt like. He had witnessed the car crash his parents had died in, after all. But what he was presently faced with was a new and entirely unexplored level of horror.

“I think I – I think I got my first period.”

His daughter’s words echoed strangely inside his head as he desperately searched for the appropriate response. Nothing came to him.

“What?” he said, feeling at an utter and complete loss.

Shireen seemed to shrink into herself as she repeated the dreaded words in a tiny voice. Why couldn’t this have happened on a weekday? This was something Selyse ought to deal with, wasn’t it? How on earth could he be expected to know anything useful about this?

He opened his mouth but had no idea what he was about to say. Thankfully Sansa chose that moment to arrive on the scene, breathless and apologising for being late.

“My saviour!” he could not help but think. Sansa would know what to say to Shireen. Sansa was a woman.

“Shireen thinks she got her first period,” he blurted out, giving Sansa an imploring look. Help me!

He was only vaguely aware of Shireen’s protests, too busy throwing desperate looks at Sansa. She looked surprised at first, breathing a small, “oh,” and blinking at him, but she was very quick to collect herself. She nodded at him and asked him to give her and Shireen some privacy. He practically ran from the room, thanking all his lucky stars that Sansa had arrived when she did.

The rest of the day was awkward. Every time Stannis looked at Shireen he couldn’t help but think that his child was no longer a child. Puberty. She was going through puberty. How on earth could it be time for that already? She was only eleven!

He still hadn’t wrapped his mind around the idea when he was getting ready for bed. He kept having to stop in the middle of brushing his teeth to stare at his reflection in the mirror. Father of a teenager.

“Stannis, are you okay?” Sansa asked, reaching for her own toothbrush.

“Mhng?” His mouth was full of toothpaste.

“You keep staring at your reflection like you’re expecting the Night’s King to pop out at you.”

Stannis spat the foam into the sink and rinsed his toothbrush. He took his time about this as he was trying to think of a response and not having much luck.

“Shireen is growing up,” he finally said. His reflection in the mirror looked very pale.

“Of course she is,” Sansa said, squeezing toothpaste onto her brush, “girls often get their periods around this age.”
Stannis winced. He never wanted to hear the word period in connection with his daughter again.

“Go to bed,” Sansa told him, rolling her eyes and giving him a little shove. “I’ll come and comfort you when I finish up in here.”

Stannis went to bed.

When Sansa had finished her bedtime routine she joined him, cuddling up to him in her customary way.

“You’re not ready for Shireen to grow up?” she asked, petting his chest soothingly.

“No.” He was absolutely not ready in any way shape or form for his daughter to become a young woman.

“But you knew this would happen eventually, didn’t you?” Sansa said, her voice calm.

“Yes, but this is too soon,” he moaned unhappily.

“She has a long way to go, but the next five years are going to be a roller-coaster. You should really prepare yourself.”

“How?” he asked, a note of desperation sneaking into his voice.

“The most important thing is to be patient. Make sure she knows you’re there for her and try to be supportive. Don’t smother her, though.”

Stannis blinked and tried to make sense of Sansa’s advice. It sounded completely contradictory.

“Uh,” he mumbled, “okay…”

“You have a good relationship with Shireen. I don’t think you should really worry,” Sansa said reassuringly. She was still petting his chest and it felt very nice.

Sansa thought he had a good relationship with Shireen? “You think so?”

“Yes. Just keep up the good work and try to be patient when any issues arise.” Sansa support felt like a warm blanket, and Stannis finally felt his muscles relaxing after an entire day of being tense and on edge.

“Okay, I think - I think I can do that,” he said, hugging Sansa closer to him.

“It’ll be fine,” Sansa whispered in his ear, kissing his earlobe and then his neck.

The last of his concern and anxiety seemed to drain away to make room for his much more pressing feelings of arousal and affection.

… and love?

There was something very warm inside his chest where his heart usually resided, warm and full of positive feelings that he couldn’t really organise properly. All he knew was that Sansa had been amazing today, and he could not imagine how he would have gone through it without her.

“Sansa,” he said, his mouth suddenly very dry.

“Yes?”
“I think I love you,” he choked out, feeling more than a little overwhelmed.

Sansa rose up and looked down at him, tendrils of her hair framing her face and tickling his neck. “You only just worked that out?” she asked, obviously trying to sound light and playful but failing completely. She sounded suspiciously tearful, instead.

“Um. Yes?” He did not know what he would do if she cried.

“I love you, too,” she said in a rush, her lips descending on his in a passionate kiss. They made out like teenagers for a while, rolling around and giving each other hickeys for the first time since the beginning of their relationship.

Eventually they had to come up for air, but Stannis had rarely felt more aroused. It was more than just physical arousal, however. He wanted to make love to Sansa.

“Do you want to - ?” he asked, lowering his voice and trying to sound tempting.

“Mm, yes,” Sansa said, “please,” she added, writhing pleasantly against him.

He took it very slowly that night, worshiping every inch of Sansa’s body and refusing to stop until she was practically insensible and utterly worn out. It was satisfying in every possible way, and Stannis didn’t care that he had to get up early the following morning.

This was more important.

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Stannis was at the office when the screen of his mobile lit up with a name he very rarely saw.

Selyse.

He swallowed thickly before picking up, feeling guilty about that fact that he still hadn’t worked up the nerve to tell his ex-wife about Sansa. After the barbecue last weekend he had been foolish to keep putting it off. Cersei must have found a way to let Selyse know. It was exactly the sort of thing his sister-in-law would do.

“Stannis speaking,” he said, trying to sound normal as he answered the phone.

“I cannot believe you!” Selyse shouted the moment he finished his generic greeting.

Stannis grimaced and held the phone a little way away from his ear.

“How dare you drag Shireen into your tawdry little midlife crisis without so much as a phone call?” Selyse asked, sounding very upset, “is it too much to ask to be notified when you feel the need to parade your teenage mistress in front of my child?”

Stannis’ mouth dropped open in disbelief. He felt a little as if the wind had been knocked out of him, but he was quickly recovering from Selyse’s attack and becoming very angry.

“That’s uncalled for,” he snapped, “Sansa and I are in a serious relationship. I have never been rude about any of your boyfriends. I’ll thank you to afford me the same respect.”

“Uncalled for?” Selyse repeated, sounding outraged, “I have always made you aware when my relationships reach a stage where Shireen is affected by them,” she said with a sniff, “always!”

Stannis knew she had a bit of a point there, but Sansa was not an unknown entity or a stranger. She
had been on the periphery of Shireen’s life since she was born. Stannis reminded Selyse of this and added, “I expected Shireen to inform you of the new situation.”

“Well, she didn’t.” There was a very bitter tone in his ex-wife’s voice.

“Anyway,” Stannis said, feeling annoyed when there had been silence between them for a few beats, “now you know.” Not that it’s any of your business, really, he added in his mind.

“I had to find out from Cersei,” Selyse complained, “do you have any idea how humiliating that was?”

Stannis had some idea. “You know better than to let her get to you,” he said with a sigh, rubbing his face with his free hand.

“Of course I know that,” Selyse snapped, “the woman’s a heinous bitch.”

Stannis raised an eyebrow and hummed noncommittally.

“I just hope you’re being considerate of Shireen when she’s with you.”

Stannis bristled. Of course he was considerate. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“I just mean that she doesn’t need to witness her father drooling after some ditzy teenager like a desperate old horndog.” There was something in the practised way Selyse said this that made Stannis think she’d been sitting on that sentence, waiting to fire it at him like a shot.

“Selyse,” he said, a clear warning in his tone. He would not tolerate her speaking to him like this. If she weren’t the mother of his child...

“Stannis,” Selyse retorted mockingly with more vitriol than Stannis felt was really needed, “you’re pathetic.”

The call disconnected and Stannis was left feeling supremely irritated. What was worse was the fact that he had no one to take it out on except perhaps his employees. But that wouldn’t be very fair of him.

Maybe talking to Davos would help?

Stannis got to his feet and was just about to open the door to his office so that he could look for Davos, when it burst open on its own. Stannis blinked at it in confusion for a moment, but then he realised that Robert, who was now standing in front of him, had opened it.

“Did I catch you at a bad time?” Robert asked cheerfully, clapping him so hard on the back that Stannis accidentally bit down on his tongue. Robert didn’t wait for a reply before steering Stannis back towards his desk and starting to talk again.

“Good, good, I’ll just take a moment, have a seat!”

Stannis sat down, albeit reluctantly. It was usually easier to just go along with Robert when he was in one of these moods. Robert sat in one of the visitor chairs and wriggled around to make himself comfortable.

It was strange that Robert didn’t immediately start talking after that. It was even stranger that Robert seemed to be staring at him, searching for something in particular -- as if it were hidden in the lines of his face.
Finally, when Stannis was just about to crack and demand to know what Robert wanted, his brother spoke up.

“You know, I just can’t picture it.”

“Picture what?” Stannis snapped, already in a bad mood due to the call with Selyse and not nearly patient enough to deal with Robert’s idiocy.

“Your fucking face,” Robert said, turning his head this way and that as he continued to stare at Stannis, “you know, the expression on your face while you fuck? I can’t visualise you with anything but that scowl, but not even you could scowl while balls deep in a dish like Sansa…”

Stannis blinked at his brother while what felt like all the blood in his body rushed to his face. It was a hot, uncomfortable feeling of fury and embarrassment, and he honestly didn’t know what to say to express his outrage.

“She. Is. Your. Goddaughter,” he eventually managed to choke out, the vein on the side of his neck throbbing fit to burst.

“Yeah, I know,” Robert said emphatically, “that’s why it’s so weird to think about you fucking her. Much less with a scowl on your face.”

Stannis stood up from his chair, trembling with rage. “Then I would suggest not thinking about it. Get out.”

Robert didn’t stand up. “That’s what Ned said, too, but I can’t help thinking about it. It’s like driving past a train wreck. You can’t help but look!”

Stannis felt himself blanch and he dropped back into his chair, feeling faint.

“You talked to Ned about this?” he asked, his voice weak.

“Yeah, I asked him if it was as weird for him that my uptight little brother was probably sticking it to his daughter on every available flat surface as it is for me,” Robert explained with a shrug, “but he didn’t want to talk about it.”

Stannis hid his face in his hands and wondered if any jury in the world would convict him if he were to strangle his brother right now.

“Please get out,” Stannis moaned into his hands, unable to cope with Robert’s continued presence in his office.

“Are you okay?” Robert asked, sounding mildly concerned.

Stannis looked up, feeling completely incredulous. “No.”

“Well, what’s the matter?”

Stannis briefly considered knocking himself out on his desk rather than continue this conversation, but with a sigh he decided it might be better to attempt to get his brother to understand why it was not appropriate to discuss Stannis’ sex life with Sansa with either himself or Ned. For Sansa’s sake.

Maybe he’d even listen?

“I’m upset because you have apparently felt the need to discuss my private life with the last person on earth who would want to think about my… private life.”
“I don’t follow,” Robert said, looking confused.

Stannis sighed and looked longingly at his desk. Was it too late to knock himself out?

“It is ‘weird’ for Ned to think about me and Sansa having sex, and it is incredibly inappropriate of you to ask him about it. Just as it is tactless of you to discuss what my face looks like during sex with me. Or anyone, for that matter,” Stannis said, trying to sound patient, but ending up biting most of his words out through clenched teeth.

“You think so?” Robert said, furrowing his brow.

“Yes.”

Robert seemed to think Stannis’ words over for a few moments. “I’m pretty sure you’re just being an uptight prude,” he eventually said, raising an eyebrow.

This would be the point when Stannis would usually lose his will to live, start shouting at Robert to leave him alone for the rest of eternity, and maybe throwing something at him. Stannis took a deep breath and thought of Sansa. What would she say?

“How would you feel if Benjen started to date Myrcella in a few years?” he asked, trying to keep his molars from grinding together too loudly.

“Myrcella is never going to date anyone,” Robert said, his face flushing, “she’s going to be a virgin forever.”

Stannis stared at Robert for a few beats, his mouth hanging open. “You can’t honestly think that,” he finally said, shaking his head.

Robert scowled at him, but didn’t say anything.

“Well, imagine if Ned came to you and started asking you about how you felt about Benjen ‘sticking it to’ Myrcella, anyway,” Stannis said, trying to drive his point home.

Robert stood up from his chair, looking outraged. “Don’t say things like that! She’s a child.”

Stannis gazed steadily at Robert, willing him to make the connection in his alcohol soaked excuse for a brain.

Robert’s rage faded, as it always did, after a few seconds. He blinked at Stannis and it was a bit like watching a light bulb flicking on behind Robert’s eyes.

“Er, I see your point,” he said, clearing his throat.

There was an awkward silence while Robert seemed to be struggling with some words that he wanted to say. Stannis suppressed an irritated sigh.

“You’re still an uptight prude,” Robert eventually said, turning on his heel and marching out of Stannis’ office.

Stannis gave into the impulse to rest his forehead against the smooth wooden surface of his desk. He had needed to talk to Davos before Robert arrived, but now he really needed to.

Talking to Davos helped. Stannis mostly complained about Selyse, feeling unequal to the task of repeating anything that Robert had said, but he was still able to get in a few vague complaints about Robert that Davos didn’t question.
Davos invited him to dinner once he finished explaining how unfair Selyse had been, and how unhelpful Robert was.

“Bring Sansa and Shireen,” Davos said as he was leaving Stannis’ office, “I’m sure Marya would love to meet Sansa. I’m looking forward to meeting her, too.”

It was a balm to finally have someone in his life react so positively to his relationship with Sansa, and if Stannis were the type to indulge in emotional displays, he would probably have hugged Davos for it.

Dinner with the Seaworths was a much more enjoyable experience than the barbecue with his own brothers. Davos and Marya treated Sansa with kindness and respect, and were both very excited and happy about the fact that she and Stannis were in a relationship. No one mentioned sex and the words ‘midlife crisis’ went unspoken. It was thoroughly pleasant and easy.

The only awkward moment of the evening came when Davos took him aside to speak in private and told him in no uncertain terms that he would not listen to one more word of complaint from Stannis about his relationship.

“When you have somehow managed to snag a woman like that you don’t get to complain,” Davos had laughed, “especially not about your ex getting upset about it.”

The visit to Winterfell the following weekend was a lot more awkward.

Stannis overheard Ned talking to Sansa soon after they arrived. They were putting Shireen’s and Sansa’s light summer jackets away while Catelyn asked him if he wanted tea. He nodded yes, and she left for the kitchen. Shireen had already disappeared into the house, leaving him alone in the silent foyer. Silent but for the quiet voices that were drifting over to him from where Ned and Sansa were standing. Stannis immediately broke into a cold sweat, thinking about what sorts of ideas Robert must have put in Ned’s head, and he couldn’t help but listen in.

“You’re still determined to throw yourself away like this?” Ned asked.

“Dad, I’m not throwing myself away. Don’t be dramatic.”

“He’s my age.”

“And you’re quite young, aren’t you?”

“Sansa…”

“I love Stannis, Dad.”

Ned sighed. “I just want you to be happy, sweetheart.”

“I am happy.”

Stannis felt heat creep into his cheeks and a large jagged rock settle uncomfortably in the pit of his stomach. He was pleased to hear that Sansa did not seem to have any doubts about their relationship, but it was very uncomfortable to know in no uncertain terms that Ned disapproved.

Sansa walked over to him and he decided not to put his arm around her or touch the small of her back like he sometimes did. Ned was watching.

“Did you hear that?” Sansa whispered, looking a little upset.
Stannis nodded.

“I’m sorry,” she sighed, “but don’t take it personally. He’s convinced himself that no one is good enough for me.” Sansa rolled her eyes and they walked into the house and followed the sound of voices coming from the kitchen, leaving Ned to sulk in the foyer.

Stannis felt even more awkward and out of place when the Sansa and her siblings decided to play UNO before dinner. Shireen joined in, which was nice, but Stannis couldn’t really play due to his colour blindness; he could never really tell green and blue apart fast enough to be of any use in the game. He definitely did not wish to intrude in the kitchen where Catelyn and Ned were noisily finishing the dinner preparations, so he ended up watching from the sidelines as Sansa won game after game by somehow always managing to have a wild card as her last card.

Things were much less awkward for Stannis once it was time to eat. He knew what to do with himself at a dinner table. But as it turned out, it was possible to make something as simple as eating dinner awkward, too. It was Arya who managed it by making a few choice comments. Stannis bristled when she said something about how Sansa was annoying him instead of her for a change. He wanted to tell her that Sansa was most certainly not annoying him, but Sansa placed a hand on his knee under the table and gave him a quelling look.

“This is just how Arya is,” she whispered, “let it go.”

Stannis tried to let it go, but he couldn’t help but shoot Arya some nasty glares for the rest of the meal. Sansa was not annoying.

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Sansa was being rather annoying. Stannis was trying to sleep as he had a very important meeting early the following morning, but Sansa was squirming around in bed, sighing and making herself a nuisance.

“Sansa,” he said, a hint of a growl in his voice, “I’m trying to sleep.”

Sansa made a sound that was a cross between a moan and a whimper. It would have turned him on if he weren’t grumpy and exhausted.

“Hush,” he told her, feeling a bit guilty about pushing her away when she was clearly feeling… needy.

“I’ll try to be quiet,” she whispered breathlessly, still writhing about.

Stannis grunted and turned to lie on his side, facing away from her. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to focus on getting to sleep.

It wasn’t working.

All he could focus on was the fact that Sansa had just dropped some fabric on the ground on her side of the bed. The soft whisper of her satin nightgown meeting the floor had his heart beating a little faster. It sounded as if Sansa was naked now.

The next thing he heard was the unmistakable sound of skin on skin. Sansa was most likely running her hands over her body, stroking herself the way he usually did for her. He heard as her breathing hitched and wondered if she was teasing her nipples until they were stiff little peaks. He almost turned around to look, but he could see his alarm clock when he opened his eyes and the red numbers warned him that he would be next to useless at the meeting tomorrow if he didn’t go to
sleep right now.

He closed his eyes and took a deep calming breath. It was a mistake. The scent of Sansa’s arousal filled his nose just as the wet noise of fingers entering certain places reached his ears. Sansa wasn’t moaning, but her breathing was loud and irregular.

 Fucking hells. His cock was standing to attention despite the fact that every sensible cell in his body was screaming at him to go to sleep.

“Turn around,” he ordered, knowing that his erection would not be going away on its own and that he might as well just fuck her, “get on your hands and knees.”

Sansa made a delighted sound and obeyed him immediately.

Stannis didn’t even bother with taking his T-shirt and his pyjama bottoms off. He just pushed the soft cotton out of the way, freed his cock and plunged himself into Sansa’s wonderful, inviting heat as soon as he got himself lined up with her entrance. He was a little rough in his impatience and Sansa let out a keening whimper. She was pushing her arse out, however, clearly begging for more.

He didn’t start moving right away, choosing to first lean over her and place his lips right next to her ear. “I’m going to fuck you very hard and very fast,” he said in a low, deep voice, “and then you are going to let me sleep.”

Sansa just moaned in response and he felt her inner muscles clenching around him deliciously. He gave her no further warning.

She cried out in shock when he pulled nearly all the way out of her in one swift movement, thrusting his way back in rudely, using his hands to splay her buttocks apart. He usually did not let himself fuck her at the pace he was currently setting until he reached the frenzy of his approaching orgasm, but right now he just wanted to come as quickly as he could.

The wet smacks of skin against skin filled the room, and Sansa’s muffled cries kept getting louder. They were usually careful to make a lot less noise when Shireen was in the apartment, but it was the middle of the night and she was probably fast asleep. He hoped.

He groaned and let go of Sansa’s arse in order to grab her hips and hold her still as he did his best impression of a jackhammer. It felt glorious to take her like this, to hear her sobbing with pleasure and feel her inner muscles fluttering around his cock, squeezing and squeezing.

Bizarrely enough, he was lasting much longer than he would have expected. He was actually getting physically tired. But then Sansa got down on her elbows and changed the angle slightly, and he caught his second wind.

He was so close, and he was somehow managing to go even faster than before. Sansa was practically screaming into her pillow, and the sound of her voice was doing things to him.

His orgasm hit him with unforeseen force, and he became utterly insensible to his surroundings for what might have been seconds, minutes or even hours for all he knew. He was still inside Sansa when he came back to himself, so for her sake, and for the sake of her trembling thighs, he hoped it had only been seconds.

With a grunt he pulled out, but he kept a hold on Sansa so that she wouldn’t be able to lie down. He watched in fascination as their mingled fluids started to seep out of her.
She squirmed and caused more liquid to leak out. “Stannis,” she whined, “this is embarrassing.”

He released her and watched as she stumbled unsteadily to the en suite to clean herself up. It was always rather satisfying when she could barely walk right after, but he made sure she didn’t catch him smirking.

When they were both tidy and ready to go to sleep Stannis glanced at his alarm clock and groaned. It was almost three in the morning.

“Stannis?” Sansa sounded hesitant.

“What?” he answered grumpily.

“Did you hear a door slam earlier?”

Stannis tried to remember, but he could only recall the noise of a very different kind of slamming. “No,” he said, not even trying to disguise his irritation, “now go to sleep.”

“Okay…” Sansa said, not sounding entirely reassured, “good night.”

Stannis managed to sleep quite well for a few hours and was remarkably well rested when he woke up. It was strange how it was sometimes quite easy to wake up after getting much less sleep than one was used to.

The memories of the impromptu sex in the middle of the night had him feeling relaxed and mellow despite the looming meeting, and he noticed that Sansa was in a good mood at breakfast, too. Maybe she liked it a little rough sometimes?

The only person who did not seem to be in a good mood was his daughter, but Shireen never seemed to be in an entirely good mood these days so he didn’t think anything of it.

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Stannis felt a little guilty when he noticed Shireen’s good mood now that it was just the two of them. They were in Oldtown for a long weekend to celebrate her twelfth birthday, and Sansa had absolutely refused to come along.

“Shireen needs to spend time with just you,” Sansa had said, kissing his neck and smiling with her eyes.

“It will be strange,” Stannis had replied, his words halting, “not to have you there.”

“You made do without me for years,” Sansa had pointed out with a laugh, “you’ll be fine.”

It was quiet without Sansa, but there weren’t really any uncomfortable silences. It was easy to simply fall back into his old routines with Shireen, even though he was constantly turning to his left with some comment Sansa might appreciate on the tip of his tongue. When he was inevitably faced with empty air instead of Sansa’s cheerful presence, he was forced to swallow his words without speaking them and attempt to hide his irrational disappointment.

When the time came to give Shireen her presents he couldn’t help but feel nervous. Sansa had been very determined that the books they had bought were just the thing, but what if Shireen hated the gifts? What if she hated them just because they had been Sansa’s idea? Shireen had yet to warm to Sansa, and the knowledge weighed on him.
Would Shireen ever accept his girlfriend?

Stannis was incredibly relieved when it seemed his daughter was thrilled with her gifts. He had not seen her look quite as happy in a long time, and the fact that she was not showing the gifts Sansa chose any scorn gave him hope.

Maybe Shireen was finally coming around.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to Tommyginger for inspiring me to write that scene with Robert and for her suggestions regarding the phone call with Selyse. ♥
When Sansa graduated Stannis took her to a very nice restaurant and told her to order all the desserts she wanted at the end of the meal. Sansa scolded him and said she would stop being able to fit into her dresses. Stannis said that he would be willing to bear it if she decided to go about without any dresses on, and she giggled so much that she could barely stop for long enough to eat her sweets.

When Sansa got a job about a minute after she graduated, Stannis put his pride aside and asked Renly to give him idiot-proof step-by-step instructions for how to make pasta alla Genovese. He wanted to cook her something nice to celebrate her accomplishment, and the only things he trusted himself to make without outside help were very simple dishes.

“Oh, Stannis,” she said when she came to the balcony where he had set the table for three, “you didn’t have to do all this!” She threw her hands around his neck and squeezed him tightly. As always, she felt divine in his arms.

Stannis tried to shrug it off as nothing, but he was very pleased with her reaction.

He encouraged Sansa to talk some more about her teaching position over dinner, never tiring of hearing her sound so thrilled -- even though she was always very modest, too, and never failed to mention how she had help from her father to get her foot in the door. Shireen did not seem to have any patience for hearing Sansa speak of the matter, however. More than once he spotted her rolling her eyes, but she ignored him when he glared at her in an attempt to get her to stop being so rude. Ordinarily he might have said something to her, but he did not wish to spoil Sansa’s happy mood by reprimanding his daughter.

He couldn’t believe it when Shireen finally stopped rolling her eyes in order to declare that she would never want to be a teacher and implied that Sansa’s students would say mean things about her behind her back. His first instinct was to get angry and send her away from the table, but the wounded look on Sansa’s face distracted him. He squeezed her hand and tried to reassure her that it wouldn’t happen to her. Shireen made matters worse by insisting that it would, and Stannis shot her an angry look that she missed because she was looking at Sansa.

He knew he ought to talk to Shireen about her attitude problem, but he felt Sansa's need for reassurance was greater at the moment.

Stannis therefore focused his attention on Sansa, stroked her hand with his thumb and tried to will her to go back to being cheerful and happy again. It didn’t work. The celebratory dinner he had worked so hard on felt ruined and Stannis had no idea how to fix it.

Shireen disappeared to her room as soon as she finished eating, perhaps sensing that he was a hair's breadth from ordering her to go there, anyway. Stannis was frankly happy that she didn’t linger. He wanted a moment alone with Sansa.

“I’m so sorry,” he said, speaking quietly and trying to infuse his tone with all the sincerity he felt.

Sansa shrugged and gave him a weak smile as she started to clear the table. “It’s fine.”

Stannis placed a hand on her wrist, gently preventing her from cleaning up. “It’s not fine,” he said firmly, “come sit in the living room. I’ll deal with the dishes.”

“No, you cooked,” Sansa protested, “let me help, please.”
He practically had to carry her to the sofa and tie her down, but he managed to get her to sit and relax with a cup of tea in the end. It took no time at all to load the dishwasher and put the leftovers away, so Sansa’s cup was still steaming when he joined her.

He encouraged her to sit sideways on the couch, stretch her long legs out and place her feet in his lap so that he might rub them for her. She had the most delicate little toes he had ever seen, and her nails were often painted. He wondered what today’s shade looked like to her. It seemed to have a metallic sheen, but was it blue or green? He wasn't certain.

Soon she looked very relaxed; a soft smile playing on her lips.

“You’re going to be a wonderful teacher,” he said eventually, “and the children will all love you.” Sansa opened her huge eyes and gave him a slightly tearful look. “How can you know that?” “You got me to love you, didn’t you?” he said with a wry smile, raising an eyebrow at her.

Sansa sniffed and let out a bit of a giggle. “Are you comparing yourself to a child?” “No,” he said, huffing out his own short laugh, “I’m saying that no child could possibly be as grumpy and prickly as I am.”

*With the possible exception of Shireen*, he thought, still feeling very annoyed with his daughter’s attitude at dinner.

“You’re not grumpy,” Sansa said, removing her feet from his hands and placing her empty cup of tea on the coffee table so that she could cuddle up to him like she so often did when they sat together on the sofa. He encircled her shoulders with an arm and kissed the crown of her head.

“Ssh, I have a reputation to uphold,” he mumbled into her hair.

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Stannis felt like the world has come to a crashing halt when Sansa called him, crying too hard for him to understand her at first, and then managing to calm down enough to explain that Bran had been in an accident.

*Another damn car crash?* Stannis’ stomach clenched uncomfortably as the memories of his parents’ crash suddenly flooded his brain, vivid flashes of colour and the deafening BANG of the cars colliding.

He convinced Sansa to stay where she was and somehow got Shireen to the car. He felt like he was moving around in a dense fog, or underwater even, and every sound he heard seemed muffled and distorted. The world didn’t come into focus again until Sansa was safely strapped in beside him. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she was trembling with emotion. He had to put his feelings aside, now. It was time to be strong for her.

 Everything became easier after that. He had a clear goal and the means to accomplish it. He was in charge of making sure he got the two most important people in his life to Winterfell in one piece. The seven knew that it would not help matters if he managed to get into an accident, too.

He wished he could do more than place his hand on Sansa’s shoulder in an attempt to be supportive. He wished he could call the doctors and demand answers, or call the police and demand that they find whoever was responsible for the crash. But there was nothing for him to do except get Sansa to the hospital where Bran was fighting for his life and try to be there for her
when she had need of him.

The wait was excruciating. He was forced to watch the Starks wilt before his eyes, every hour that went by without news making them fear that the worst had come to pass.

Perhaps it had been a blessing that his parents had died instantly in their crash? He and Robert had been spared this agony of not knowing. Renly had thankfully not witnessed the event, and he had been too young to really comprehend it, anyway.

He felt horrible and guilty about it, but he could not help but be grateful that out of all the Starks it had been Bran and not Sansa who got in the accident. He had seen what it had done to Robert when Lyanna had left him for Rhaegar, only to die in a car crash similar to the one that had taken Steffon and Cassana. Stannis was not certain he would handle it any better if Sansa were to be taken from him in such a violent and brutal way.

Finally the doctors arrived with good news, breaking the spell of despair that had settled over the Starks and the Baratheons in the waiting room. After that it was all a blur of hugs and tears and overwhelming emotion, and Stannis knew he had to get Shireen somewhere where she would be able to get some proper rest.

Davos came and picked Shireen up, promising to take good care of her. “Just focus on Sansa,” Davos advised, clapping Stannis on the shoulder, “Marya said that you ought to make sure she eats something and that she sleeps.”

Stannis nodded. “Thank you. I’ll be by for Shireen at some point tomorrow.”

Sansa was all out of tears by the time Stannis sat down next to her and pulled her into another hug. She clung to him tightly, however, and her breathing was irregular. Everything about her spoke of the harrowing day she had just had, and her upset feelings. Stannis wished he could fix it all for her, but he knew from experience that such shocks had to be worked through slowly, and that there was nothing an outsider could really do to help.

All he could do was try to follow Marya’s advice and attempt to keep Sansa fed and rested. Easier said than done on both counts, but he did manage to get half a sandwich into her stomach, and by asking her to let him stroke her hair he was able to get her to stay still and somewhat relaxed enough for her to nod off a few times during the night.

Ned caught his eye at one point when Sansa was using him for a pillow during a nap. There was utter exhaustion in the older man’s gaze along with something else that Stannis didn’t recognise. But when Ned nodded slowly, Stannis realised that it was acceptance. Stannis had passed some sort of test. He nodded in return, feeling lighter despite the circumstances.

Having Ned’s approval would make his plans for the future much easier to implement.

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After a sleepless uncomfortable night, Stannis called Shireen to let her know when he would be picking her up from the Seaworths’ place. It was a strange conversation. He could not help but feel overwhelmingly grateful that Shireen was safe and that he was not in Ned’s shoes, facing weeks of hospital visits and constant worries about whether the doctors would be able to restore his child’s ability to walk. He knew what it was like to constantly fear for a child, and he had no wish to go through it again. He wouldn’t wish the experience on his worst enemy.

He wanted to tell Shireen how much he loved her, but the words seemed to stick in the back of his
“Be good for Davos and Marya,” he managed, his voice a little raw, “I’ll come get you in a few hours.”

“Okay - I... okay,” Shireen said in response, sounding as if she was having trouble speaking, too.

It was comforting in a strange way, to think that she was like him and had difficulties expressing herself.

“See you soon, sweetheart,” he said, using an endearment he hadn’t used since she was very little, hoping that she wouldn’t roll her eyes and groan at him.

“Yeah, see you, Dad.” It did not sound as if she were exasperated with him.

Stannis stared at his phone for a while after the call ended, wondering if he should try harder to make sure Shireen knew how much she meant to him.

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Stannis was constantly worried about Sansa. He was actually having trouble focusing on work during the day because his mind kept drifting to Sansa and the dark circles around her eyes. He wanted to do more to help her, but there was only so much he could do, and only so much she would accept.

She refused to listen to Ned, Catelyn or him when they told her there was no need for her to stay with Bran as much as she was, and that the nurse her parents had hired to stay with him when Ned and Catelyn had to be in Winterfell was perfectly competent.

"I know Bran is probably going to be fine," Sansa said when Stannis asked her why she couldn't just rest for a few days, "but I need to stay with him. I know I'd want a friendly face around if I were him and I know he's scared. Anyway, I'd go crazy just sitting around. Being there for him makes me feel like I'm actually doing something worthwhile to help him."

Stannis could understand the sentiment, and eventually he gave up on trying to convince her to leave Bran in professional hands. Instead he made sure there was always food in her apartment and harassed Margaery into making sure Sansa always had clean clothes to wear.

"I don’t know why I should bother since he insists on wearing the same jeans and hoodie, like, every single day," Margaery had said with an exaggerated eyeroll, but she agreed to make sure the laundry got done, nonetheless.

Being at home with Shireen during weekends was hard. He was torn between his desire to stay by Sansa’s side, comforting and supporting her as much as he could during this difficult time, but he also wanted to spend time with his daughter and make certain she did not feel neglected. This caused him to feel tense and anxious when he was with Shireen and guilty when he spent time with Sansa.

For the sake of his mental health he therefore ended up dragging Shireen along to the hospital in King’s Landing whenever he reasonably could.

On one such occasion he was pleased to see Shireen actually making an effort to be nice to Sansa. Shireen was usually not exactly mean to her, although she had certainly been very rude a handful of times, but mostly she was sullen and never really made much of an effort to connect with Sansa. For that reason it was very pleasing to see Shireen offer to share a bar of chocolate with his
exhausted and no doubt hungry girlfriend. Hope swelled inside him at the sight, and he wondered if he might actually stand a chance at creating bit of a family unit out of the three of them.

He could not remember wanting anything as much as he wanted to be successful in doing just that.

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“I’d like to take you somewhere nice for the winter solstice,” Stannis whispered to Sansa one evening. He had managed to lure her to his apartment by promising that he had stocked up on lemon cakes from her favourite bakery, and then he had tempted her to bed by offering to give her a back massage. Having his hands all over her had turned him on to a nearly painful extent, but he could tell that she was not in the mood for sex and did not press her for any such activity. It wouldn’t feel right to have sex with her when she was this tired. He’d just have a nice long shower once he managed to convince her to fall asleep.

Presently he was holding her in his arms and trying to make sure his raging erection was not bothering her. His mind was at complete odds with his body. He wanted to be sweet and romantic to Sansa at the moment, but his lower half was raring to go and complaining that he had not had her in weeks.

“That’s Bran’s birthday,” Sansa said, her voice tired, “we’re all going to visit him at the hospital and bring him gifts.”

“We can still do that,” Stannis said, rubbing soothing circles up and down her back. She was lying face down half on top of him, so it was easy for him to reach. Her skin was still shiny and smooth due to the massage oil, and her bare breasts weren’t doing anything to douse his desire for her. They were so soft against his chest.

“We can go visit him and then disappear for a couple of hours,” he added.

There was a quiet moment while Sansa considered this. “What do you have in mind?” She sounded very curious.

“Depending on the time of day we could go for lunch, coffee or dinner, and then I was thinking about getting a hotel room with a jacuzzi? I did my best just now, but I think your shoulders could do with being submerged in hot water for a good long while. We could turn the jets on and see if that might help, too?”

It would be nice to spend some time with her while wearing as little as possible, anyway. He didn’t want to press her for sex, but he did miss being intimate with her. Getting to look at her in a bikini would be the next best thing.

“Mm, that sounds wonderful,” Sansa said, sighing dreamily, “could we get room service? Champagne and strawberries? Like in the films?”

“Anything you want,” he said, a smile tugging at his lips.

“Bran is pretty much out of the worst danger…” Sansa said, obviously trying to convince herself that it would be okay to leave his hospital birthday party for a few hours.

“It will be our anniversary,” Stannis reminded her, kissing her cheek carefully.

“Oh,” Sansa said, her tone surprised, “of course.” She rose up so that she could look at him properly. “I’m sorry… I wasn’t thinking.”
He tried to smooth the lines from his face - or make them less deep, at least - and kissed her lips. “You’ve had more important things on your mind.”

“Still,” she let out a frustrated breath, “I should have remembered.”

“Don’t worry about it,” he told her, encouraging her to rest her head against him again.

“I’d love to escape for a few hours,” Sansa said once she had made herself comfortable, “let’s do it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. It will give me a reason to put on some makeup and go see my waxer,” she said with a tiny giggle.

“You wear makeup for your waxer?” he asked, pretending to be confused. (Pretending also that the idea of her going to see her waxer wasn’t making his cock twitch with interest.)

“Don’t be stupid.” Sansa giggled some more, and Stannis felt thrilled at the sound. He hadn’t heard Sansa sound so happy in weeks.

He pulled her face up for a kiss, losing himself in the pleasure of her lips and imagining how lovely it would be to feed her strawberries and taste the tart flavour on her tongue afterwards.

“I can’t wait,” she whispered when their kiss broke.

She was asleep before he was able to muster a response.

Stannis waited until he felt sure that his movements wouldn’t disturb her before stealing away to his shower, hoping the sound of the running water would mask the noise of what he planned to do with himself. It would be a little embarrassing if she woke up and heard him.

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Stannis felt a bit bad about his plan to leave Shireen at the hospital while he went off for a romantic afternoon with Sansa, but it seemed as if his daughter was getting along with Bran as she did not look very sullen.

It was difficult to focus on feeling guilty over Shireen when it was finally as if his Sansa had been returned to him. Sansa was looking healthy and happy again, and it felt as if a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders when he saw her smile reach her eyes. Witnessing the way she had been existing as a shadow of her former self all through Bran’s stay at the hospital had been awful, and it made him so proud to see that she was rising from the ashes with her shoulders back and her chin up.

They were still standing in the corridor outside Bran’s hospital room, and as much as he wanted to sweep her away and get her far from the smell of antiseptic cream and rubbing alcohol, the urge to kiss her was more pressing.

He touched her elbow and leant down, liking the way she was looking up at him in turn.

“I love you,” he said, meeting her eyes and enjoying the way they were sparkling again, “happy anniversary.”

The kiss felt like Stannis was already sinking into a warm jacuzzi and Sansa smiled into it, making
“Let’s go,” Sansa said once their kiss broke, looking happy and a little dazed.

It had been weeks since they had spent any real time on their relationship, and Stannis was determined to show Sansa a nice time and help her relax. They had a late lunch at one of her favourite restaurants and then went straight to the hotel room he had booked. He didn’t tell her it was the bridal suite, but she probably figured it out. Neither one of them said anything about it, however.

Sansa wanted to put bubbles in the giant bathtub, and Stannis let her have her way, enjoying her gleeful giggles when he turned on the jets and a mountain of foam was instantly created. Since it was a bathtub rather than an outside jacuzzi, Sansa went without her bikini and made Stannis’ mouth go very dry.

“You’re so beautiful,” he told her, feeling a little unworthy of her company.

“Thank you,” Sansa said, giving him one of her dazzling smiles, “but I’m freezing, so I’m going to get in now.”

Stannis nodded helplessly, following her with his eyes as she sank into the mass of bubbles with a contented sigh.

Before Stannis could decide whether to follow her in right away or wait for a while there was a quick knock at the door, followed by someone calling, “room service!”

The strawberries and the Champagne had arrived. Stannis didn’t really like Champagne, but he popped the cork and filled a flute for Sansa, bringing the gently bubbling liquid and the bowl of strawberries to her.

“Join me,” Sansa ordered with a grin, looking flushed from the heat of the water and alive with happiness.

He did not need to be asked twice.

It was the most enjoyable afternoon in Stannis’ recent memory. After Sansa had feasted on strawberries and Champagne they ended up kissing and touching each other the way they had done at the start of their relationship -- half mad with need for each other. Stannis’ fingers had found their way between Sansa’s thighs, stroking her gently and slowly until she was flushed with an entirely different kind of heat, quivering in the water and gasping his name. She straddled him and did her best to get rid of all the bubbles with her enthusiastic movements, and half the water ended up on the floor.

Sex in water was a new experience for Stannis, and he felt that he had been terribly deprived. It was slippery and a little awkward, but the sensation of holding Sansa in his arms, dripping wet from head to toe, while they were both surrounded by warm water, was really quite marvellous.

Once they were dry Stannis led Sansa to bed and made himself even more intimately familiar with exactly which parts Sansa had decided to get waxed, licking at her until she was absolutely boneless with pleasure, and then making love to her slowly and gently, filling her with his cock again and again until they were both unable to do anything but moan.

They held each other after they had spent what felt like all their energy, and Stannis lazily ran a hand through Sansa’s still-damp hair, feeling rather like the luckiest man alive.
“We should get back,” Sansa said at length, sounding reluctant.

Stannis made a sound of protest and squeezed her to him. He did not want this afternoon to end.

“I know,” Sansa sighed, “and I agree with you, but you need to get back to Shireen and I promised I’d be back in time to eat with my family. I’m sure you and Shireen could join us if you’d like?”

“I’ll ask her,” Stannis said, resigning himself to the fate of having to get dressed and go back to real life. He started to untangle himself from Sansa, but she stopped him with a gentle touch.

“Thank you for today,” she said, her voice sincere and her eyes full of love.

“You’re welcome,” he said hoarsely in return.

“I think it was just what we needed.”

They kissed, and Stannis wished he could freeze the moment and exist in it forever.
Stannis was sitting at his desk at work, staring at his computer screen and letting his mind wander. There was hardly a soul at work with him as most people were enjoying their Christmas holiday. He had only really gone to the office because he would have felt wretched sitting alone at home. Sansa was in Winterfell with her parents for the day, and Shireen was with Selyse.

It would have been perfect to spend the day holed up with Sansa. She had been smiling more and more since their anniversary, and he could imagine that a day with her would have been incredibly pleasurable for them both. Maybe he could have given her the gifts he had found for her a little early, and maybe she could have been convinced to try the necklace on while wearing nothing else. He didn’t have any artistic talent, so he wouldn’t have wasted any time drawing her, but he would have enjoyed looking at the sparkling stone nestled between her bare breasts. Her nipples would probably put the necklace to shame, though...

A sharp knock at his door interrupted his reverie.

“It’s open,” Stannis said, wondering which of his employees would be bothering him now. Perhaps he should just tell whoever it was to go home?

He was very surprised when the door swung open and revealed none other than Ned Stark standing on the other side.

Ned did not look like he had planned this visit. He was wearing a very garish Christmas jumper in bright colours. There was even a cartoon figure of a snowman. It was not the sort of thing a man like Ned would ever wear outside the comfort of his home under ordinary circumstances.

They blinked at each other for a moment before Stannis remembered his manners and stood up to invite Ned inside, shake his hand and offer him a seat.

“I know you are a direct sort of man, so I won’t beat around the bush,” Ned said as soon as the barest of the necessary pleasantries had been covered. “I’ve driven down here to tell you that I’ve just had an upsetting conversation with Sansa.”

Stannis felt himself blanch. “Oh?”

“Yes. She was just telling me and Cat about how your daughter saw fit to share a bar of chocolate with her the other day. Sansa seemed to think this was progress.” Ned’s expression was stony.

Stannis nodded slowly. It had definitely been a sign of progress.

“Sansa has been running herself into the ground trying to take care of Bran, and I know you have tried to talk her into resting just like Cat and I have, so I’m not blaming you, but she is a bit… fragile because of it.”

Stannis was confused. Where was Ned taking the conversation?
"I know," Stannis said, "but I thought she had been relaxing a bit more since - er - since Bran had his birthday," he added, thinking about his and Sansa’s very recent anniversary and trying not to redden again.

"She has," Ned said, "but she still burst into tears when Cat started asking her about Shireen’s past behaviour and trying to understand why a simple bar of chocolate meant so much to her."

Stannis’ stomach tied itself into knots and he wished he had something to hold onto other than the armrests of his desk chair. Sansa had cried?

He stared at Ned, feeling awful and unable to think what to say.

“I think you’re a good man, Stannis, and I think you’ve been doing everything possible to help Sansa through this difficult time, but I also think you need to have a serious talk with your daughter if she does not change her attitude.”

Stannis wondered for a moment if it were possible to Ned to sound or look any graver. He doubted it.

“I know," he said, his voice hoarse and subdued. Ned was absolutely right.

“I seriously hope you do know. Sansa is a very kind and giving person. I don’t like seeing people take advantage of that. I realise that Shireen is only a child, but she still needs to be made aware that her words can be hurtful, and that Sansa does have feelings. It is your job to make sure your daughter learns this.”

The fact that perfect Ned Stark was giving him parenting advice stung his ego, but Stannis knew Ned had a point. He had been remiss in his duties as a father and Sansa had been stuck dealing with the consequences.

“Understood,” Stannis said, not trusting himself to say much more about the matter.

They stared at each other in awkward silence for a little while, and Stannis suddenly wondered whether Sansa knew Ned was talking to Stannis about the issue. Had she asked her father to do this? The idea was a little mortifying; he would have preferred it if she had talked to him directly.

“Does Sansa know you’re here?” he asked, needing to know.

“No.” For the first time since Ned had arrived he looked uncomfortable. “I - er - I told her and Cat that I was going for a walk in the godswood.”

So perfect Ned Stark sometimes told lies. For some reason this cheered Stannis up considerably.

“I won’t mention this conversation to them, then,” Stannis said, raising an eyebrow.

Ned cleared his throat. “I would appreciate that.”

A look that spoke volumes passed between them.

Stannis understood that Ned had accepted his relationship with Sansa, but he also understood that Ned would not stand idly by if he believed Stannis was not doing everything he could to make Sansa happy.

Ned didn’t really linger after that, and soon Stannis was alone in his office again.

Stannis furrowed his brow and thought about the few times that Sansa and Shireen had both been
in his presence since Shireen had shared her chocolate with Sansa. He was sure that things had been going much more smoothly and he was fairly confident that his daughter’s improved attitude hadn’t just been a one-off.

It had been strange for him, these past few months, to feel at his wit’s end regarding his daughter. She had never given him any trouble since she had been sick as a baby, and he had never really had to discipline her. Selyse had occasionally been forced to take a favoured toy away for a while, or send her to bed without dinner, but from what he had gathered that had not happened frequently at all. Shireen had always been a quiet and well-behaved child. When she was with him she always did as she was told, and rarely caused him any trouble.

It had been a nasty shock when she had started to act out regarding Sansa, and Stannis had hardly known how to react to it. He still got a bit angry whenever he thought about the celebratory dinner Shireen had ruined with her insensitive comments, and he often wondered if he shouldn’t have taken her aside and told her that her rudeness needed to stop.

But whenever Stannis had become angry enough to think about reading Shireen the riot act he inevitably got sidetracked by a heavy dose of guilt before he could ask Shireen to come talk to him in private.

His guilt insisted that Shireen wouldn’t be acting so moody and rude if it weren’t for the fact that he had decided to start a new relationship. She’d probably be just as sweet and quiet as she had always been if Stannis hadn’t brought Sansa into her life. This was a difficult change for her, and she had told him as much when he had asked whether Sansa was doing or saying anything to upset her.

Had he not been doing enough to make this easier on Shireen? Had he not been spending enough time with her, just the two of them? Like he had promised? He didn’t want to think that he had been failing in such a way, but maybe he had been.

Could it be that he was failing in his role as a father? Was he too distracted by his girlfriend to give his daughter the attention she needed?

And what of his role as Sansa’s boyfriend? Had he been failing her, too?

Ned seemed to think so.

It could not have been easy for Sansa to deal with Shireen’s moods with a smile for all these months, and though he had been doing his best to apologise for Shireen’s behaviour on her behalf, he was worried that Sansa was disappointed in him for not demanding that Shireen be more respectful.

The fact that she had cried about this when her parents had questioned her left his blood cold and his heart so heavy that it seemed as if it were struggling through every beat.

Stannis sighed and looked out the window. The weather was dismal.

Should he attempt to talk this over with Sansa? Or should he wait and see if she brought it up with him? He wasn’t supposed to know any of the things Ned had told him.

Perhaps it would be best to wait and see. Shireen did seem to be improving, after all.

Stannis continued to stare out the window for a while, and in the end he promised himself that he would have a very serious discussion with Shireen if her behaviour did not continue to improve.
Things were almost back to normal when Renly and Loras invited Stannis, Robert and their families to dinner after the holidays. Bran was firmly out of the woods and slated to make a near-miraculous recovery, and Sansa was acting much more like her usual self. Stannis was very irritated by Renly's invitation as he had just spent rather a lot of time with his brothers and their families because of the holiday celebrations and he was quite ready to have a quiet weekend with just Sansa and Shireen. He wanted a chance to observe Shireen's behaviour towards Sansa on a normal weekend and find out whether he needed to have a talk with her.

There was also another reason he wanted a quiet weekend, but it was a lot less noble. Sansa had been hinting that she had used the gift card he had given her as a part of her Christmas present to buy some new lingerie, and he had been hoping to spend the later part of his Saturday evening convincing her to model her purchases for him.

She ended up wearing the other part of his present - the part that was more acceptable to wear in public - to dinner, and Stannis was pleased when he saw how Sansa preened when Margaery Tyrell started cooing over the sparkling necklace. It looked like he had made a good choice.

When Renly stood up and announced that he and Loras would be getting married in a few months Stannis immediately wondered if he should have bought Sansa a ring instead of a necklace.

Too soon, he told himself sternly. They hadn't even moved in together yet, and the situation with Shireen was still a bit shaky.

Still, he couldn't help but observe Sansa closely for the rest of dinner, trying to figure out what her reaction would be if he asked her to become his wife. She blushed when she caught his eye, looking genuinely happy.

How would she look at him if he proposed? What sort of ring would she like? Something glamorous and eye-catching, or something understated and classic? A diamond? A sapphire to match the necklace he'd given her? Or perhaps an emerald?

Thinking about marrying Sansa led him to remember their recent stint in the bridal suite of King's Landing's best hotel, and he couldn't help but picture Sansa in that suite, lying on a bed of rose petals, wearing lacy bridal lingerie and maybe a little veil?

Stannis shifted around in his chair, his trousers suddenly much more uncomfortable than they had been a minute ago. He took a deep breath and forced himself to focus on something other than sex. Like the way it would feel to wake up every morning with Sansa by his side, his ring on her finger, and maybe... one day... a baby...

The rest of dinner went by without Stannis contributing much to the conversation. He tried to make sure Robert wasn't being too obnoxious, but otherwise he was deep in thought and distracted by frequent visions of what his future might be like if Sansa were to stay with him and let him marry her.

He deliberately ignored the pleading looks Shireen sent him when Sansa started to talk to her about getting a new dress for the wedding, feeling like dress shopping might actually be a good opportunity for Sansa and Shireen to be alone together. If they managed to get along for such an outing he would know whether Shireen had truly changed her behaviour towards Sansa.

He almost regretted the way he failed to come to Shireen's rescue when it later turned out that Sansa expected him to go shopping, too, but in the end he decided it was a worthwhile sacrifice on
“It was amazing,” Sansa said, practically glowing as she got ready for bed, “I feel like I really bonded with Shireen today.”

Stannis thought about how genuinely pleased Shireen had been when she had modeled the pretty dress she and Sansa had found, and how gratified she had looked when he had complimented her. It was almost too good to be true, but it really seemed that both Sansa and Shireen had been happy with the shopping trip.

Sansa was standing in the doorway that led to his en suite. She was brushing her hair, already wearing one of her pretty satin nightgowns. He couldn’t take his eyes off her from where he was half-sitting, half-lying in bed.

“I’m glad to hear that,” he murmured, putting the book he had been pretending to read on his nightstand and stowing his reading glasses away in their case. “She seemed very pleased with her dress.”

“Didn’t she?” Sansa said, smiling happily at him. Her happy smile soon turned shrewd, however, and she added, “I’m sure you’ll be just a thrilled with your navy suit.”

Stannis groaned. He had been hoping she would forget about the whole ridiculous matter. He had a closet full of perfectly good suits.

“You know, I’ve already bought the dress I’m going to wear,” she said, ignoring his groan.

“Oh?” She hadn’t showed it to him yet. That was unusual. She usually loved showing him new dresses, shoes, and lingerie.

“I’ll show it to you when you show me your navy suit,” she said.

Ah.

“I think you’ll really like it. I found the most adorable bustier to go with it, too.”

Now that was just not playing fair.

“I’ll go see my tailor tomorrow,” he grumbled.

“Great!” she chirped, “once you see my dress you’ll understand why I want you in navy.”

Stannis blew out an exasperated breath. He really didn’t get why it mattered so much, but he supposed it would not hurt him to humour her.

He watched as Sansa finished brushing her hair in silence.

“I really think Shireen is coming around to me,” Sansa said, putting her brush away and turning the lights off. His bedside lamp remained lit, however.

“She’s been coming around for a while,” he said, thinking not only of the bar of chocolate at the hospital, but of many other much smaller signs he had observed. He helped Sansa get comfortable with her head resting on his chest and added, “she’s just been too stubborn to let you see it.”
“How did you get so insightful all of a sudden?” she asked suspiciously, though there was a smile playing on her lips. He could just see a glimpse of it as most of her face was hidden against his body.

“I do know my own daughter,” he said, stroking her newly brushed hair with a great deal of pleasure. It was so thick and soft and smooth and perfect.

“Do you think she’ll ever be able to - I don’t know... really be friends with me?” Sansa sounded both vulnerable and hopeful, and it made Stannis want to squeeze her and never let her go.

“Yes, I think so,” Stannis said, pausing for a moment and trying to find the right words for what he wanted to say. “I know her behaviour has sometimes upset you, but I believe she has genuinely changed her attitude.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

The tension in Sansa’s body faded away. “I hope so,” she sighed, “I know it makes me sound utterly spoiled, but it’s just rare for people - other than my sister - to dislike me for this long. I - I usually don’t have to try this hard.”

Stannis knew this was a serious conversation, but I couldn’t help huffing out a bit of a laugh at the pout on Sansa’s face. Sansa was the sort of person who could charm anyone. Of course it would have been very disconcerting for her when someone stubbornly tried to dislike her for as long as Shireen had.

“Don’t laugh,” Sansa said, her pout becoming even more pronounced.

“I’m sorry,” he said, reminding himself that even though Sansa was not acting very upset at the moment she had cried about this. He regained control of himself and when he spoke again the amusement was gone from his voice. “I understand that this has been difficult,” he said and pulled her towards him for a kiss before he continued, “and you can’t imagine how much I appreciate how hard you’ve worked to build a relationship with Shireen. You’ve been extraordinarily kind and patient.”

Sansa had looked mollified as soon as he told her that he understood her difficulties, but when he finished speaking she looked quite touched, and her eyes were glassy. “Thank you,” she said softly, returning the kiss he had given her with interest.

Soon they were doing much more than just kissing. Stannis might not be the best with words, but he could show Sansa how much he appreciated her hard work with Shireen with the touch of his hands, he could apologise for how long it had taken for Shireen to change her attitude with every kiss he placed on Sansa’s skin, and he could thank her for her patience and forbearance by making love to her with every ounce of passion he had in him.

They rolled around and around, both taking their turn on top, and Sansa’s hair ended up hopelessly tangled by the time they were through. He might have offered to brush it back out for her, but he was already falling asleep, exhausted due to the physical exertion and emotional outpour.

“Good night, Stannis,” Sansa whispered, and it was the last thing he heard before he drifted off, feeling sated and at peace.

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Stannis felt very happy for his brother and Loras on the day of their wedding. Their joy was infectious, and having Sansa on his arm made the occasion so much better than it would have been if he had been alone. He kept picturing how their wedding would be similar or different to the one his brother and his new husband had planned.

Sansa would look beautiful in a wedding dress.

No, she looked beautiful in the ice blue dress she was currently wearing. In a wedding dress she would probably look like a goddess. He’d most likely embarrass himself completely by gaping at her like an imbecile if he ever saw her in one, but it would be fine as no one would be looking at him.

When she caught the wedding bouquet and threw him a pleased, shy little look he felt himself flushing with embarrassed pleasure. He wished they could just be alone so that he could hold her close and tell her he’d marry her in an instant. Unfortunately he had to try to control the amount of tender emotion welling up inside him or Robert would notice and become even more intolerable than he already was.

Fortunately for him, Cersei decided to cause a scene before Robert was able to start making embarrassing insinuations, and everyone got distracted. He felt a little guilty about being relieved at Cersei’s indecorous behaviour, but it really had saved him a lot of embarrassment.

At the end of the night, as they danced to the eclectic music Renly and Loras had lovingly selected, Stannis knew that he had to ask Sansa to take the next step with him. It was probably too soon to ask her to be his wife - she was so young - but he could ask her to move to his apartment. He wanted to live with her.

He wanted a life with her.

***

Stannis had to keep reminding himself that he wanted to talk to Sansa by the time they got home from the wedding and a fast asleep Shireen had been placed in her bed.

It had been a very long time since Stannis had carried Shireen to bed. She wasn’t a baby after all, and he usually tried to wake her up so that she could walk. Waking her up proved impossible this time, however, as she had quite exhausted herself at the wedding by running around with the other kids. He had been surprised at her exuberance and her childlike behaviour, but he supposed she had just been swept up in some game. It had been nice to see her look so happy, and it had been wonderful when she had happily posed for pictures with him and Sansa as if she fully accepted the fact that they were a family.

In any case, Stannis had ended up carrying her just to speed things along, but perhaps his decision to pick her up and hold her close was driven by nostalgia, too. When he turned the lights in her room off he couldn’t help but think it was likely the last time he would ever carry her.

“Sansa,” he gasped out, telling his body to calm down, “I want to -”

Sansa was kissing his neck and pushing his navy jacket down his shoulders, trapping his arms.

“Wait, wait,” he said, even though a very large part of him wanted her to ignore him and keep going.

She listened to him, however, and took a step back. Her eyes were dark when they met his, glittering with desire and playfulness.
“Yes?” she said, raising an eyebrow.

“Er, I wanted to talk to you about something,” he explained, his face warming up. Maybe he was being stupid. Maybe this conversation could wait until tomorrow?

Sansa tilted her head to the right and sat down on the sofa, arranging her face to show an attentive expression.

Stannis awkwardly moved his jacket up until he was wearing it properly again and sat down beside Sansa.

“You look serious,” she said, biting her lip.

He cleared his throat. “I wanted - I mean, I wondered…” he paused and rubbed his face. His words were failing him. Thankfully Sansa just waited patiently for him to organise his thoughts.

With a deep breath he dropped his hands from his face and sought Sansa’s. She was happy to let him hold her hands, and was looking at him with wide curious eyes.

“I would be very… pleased if you would consider moving in with me,” he finally managed. He hesitated before saying that he would be pleased, wondering if he should say something more expressive, but he hadn’t really been able to think of a good word.

He watched Sansa anxiously for her reaction, his heart beating painfully hard in his chest.

He needn’t have worried. Sansa broke into a wide, dazzling smile, making it seem as if his gloomy living room was suddenly playing host to the sun. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him squarely on the mouth, passionately showing him how happy he had made her.

“Yes!” she exclaimed when they came up for air, “of course I want to move in with you!”

He felt the corners of his mouth lifting in response to her enthusiasm, and couldn’t help but feel quite satisfied with himself for finally working up the nerve to ask her.

“I can’t wait,” Sansa added, excitement shining from her every pore. Then she was kissing him again, her hands frantic and impatient: tugging at his tie, unbuttoning a few shirt buttons, pushing at his jacket and cupping his erection through the fabric of his navy suit trousers.

Her eagerness was making Stannis’ heart beat hard for a very different reason than before, and he was quite glad that he wasn’t old nor out of shape enough to worry about heart attacks yet or he might have felt concerned.

Before he had a chance to suggest that it would be wise to move to the bedroom, Sansa had slid to the floor and her nimble fingers had unbuckled his belt and undone his fly. He briefly wondered if it wasn’t painful to kneel on the hardwood floor like that, but he stopped being able to have coherent thoughts as soon as her mouth was on him. His fingers got tangled up in her hair, and he moaned when she looked up at him, her desire and playfulness back in full force.

They had been together for more than a year, and Sansa knew exactly what he liked. It didn’t take her long to get him to a point where he was unable to keep his eyes open, and his neck refused to support his head so that it lolled back uselessly.

He wanted to say things to encourage her, tell her how much he appreciated what she was doing, somehow explain how unbelievably good it felt for him, but the only sounds that he managed were garbled and embarrassing.
She had done this more often at the beginning of their relationship, but he really didn’t expect her to go down on him once a day. That would be… excessive. Still, it had been a few weeks since the last time she’d really gone to town on him like this and the pleasure was all the more intense for it. She was toying with him: bringing him to the edge only to slow down and take her lips away from the head of his cock, licking teasingly at the surrounding area and then starting to slowly bring him back to ‘almost’.

“Sansa, please,” he choked out the fourth time she did it, tightening his hold on her hair slightly and making pathetic whimpering sounds. This was torture. The best kind of torture, but still. He needed to come.

He thought she would relent after he begged her, but the minx kept tormenting him.

Stannis ran out of patience.

“Right,” he said, a hint of a growl in his voice, “up you get.”

Sansa stopped what she was doing, and looked up at him: flushed and clearly excited.

“Now,” he ordered, not bothering to hide the tension he was feeling.

Sansa scrambled to her feet, standing in front of him.

He tugged on her dress. “Off with this.”

She stripped quickly, clearly aware that he did not have the patience for a slow, teasing production. The bustier she had been telling him about, but not letting him see, was even more gorgeous on her than he had dared to imagine. It appeared to be a… pale blue? With lace details and ribbons that criss-crossed across the front. It was cut to emphasise her tiny waist and push her breasts up to offer him the most tempting sort of cleavage. And there was a garter belt that held up some very sensual lace-topped stockings. His cock jumped and he sucked in a breath that caused his nostrils to flare.

“Lie down,” he told her, knowing that he would not be able to make it the short distance to the bedroom.

Sansa blinked at him. “On the floor?” she asked, her tone nervous. Her deep, slow breathing told him she was aroused, however, so he wasn’t worried about the way she was hesitating.

He gave her a look. She was on the floor within the next three seconds and he did not waste time taking his clothes off. His cock was out, and that was all he needed.

Sansa did not need to be told to spread her legs when he joined her on the floor, and when he used his fingers to shove her lacy little panties to the side, he was very pleased to find her quite wet. She gasped when he pushed his cock inside of her, thrusting forwards without so much as a warning. It was a gasp of pleasure, however, and she was wet enough to make his abrupt entrance relatively smooth. He groaned at the sensation of her squeezing him so tightly, and stayed still for a moment to catch his breath. It was hard on his knees to do this on the floor, but he imagined Sansa was in considerably more discomfort. She did not seem to care, however.

“Oh, you feel amazing,” she moaned, wrapping her legs around his middle, her arms around his neck, and wriggling underneath him in a very distracting way.

“Behave yourself,” he scolded, wanting her to keep still so that he could concentrate. She had brought him to the edge too many times, and he’d come within seconds if she didn’t let him focus.
Sansa giggled but went still. “Yes, sir,” she said teasingly.

He groaned and started to thrust, suddenly not caring about how long he would last. He was forceful and frenzied, pulling out most of the way so that he might feel the glorious friction of entering her along his entire shaft, and so that the smacks his body created when he slammed into her would be as loud as possible. He liked hearing those smacks almost as much as he liked hearing the involuntary gasps a hard fucking wrenched from Sansa’s lips. There were mostly incoherent ‘ah’s and ‘oh’s, but sometimes she would whimper his name and it would make him fuck her even harder. When her voice became a continuous near-scream he was forced to place a hand over her mouth so that she wouldn’t wake Shireen, and bite his own tongue when the force of her orgasm pushed him over the edge he felt like he had been teetering on for hours.

He collapsed on top of her rather impolitely, breathing hard and feeling utterly limp. The release he had just had… there were no words.

Sansa mewled in complaint after less than a minute, reminding him that she was not really built to withstand his dead weight. He rolled off and hurt the back of his head when it made contact with the hard floor. “Ow,” he grumbled, annoyed that the high of his mind-blowing climax was being intruded upon so rudely.

Sansa made a concerned noise and he told her he was fine.

She blew out a loud breath. “Now that I’m going to be moving in, I’m getting some throw pillows for this sofa,” she said decisively, her tone daring him to object and see what would happen.

Stannis and his aching head no longer felt as if throw pillows would be without a purpose, however, so he just made a vague sound of assent.

“That being said,” Sansa went on, “this was fun. I don’t think I’ve ever had sex on the floor before.” She giggled and moved to rest her head on his chest.

Stannis cleared his throat pointedly. He could vividly remember taking her on the floor of the shower in his en suite once. It had started as up against the wall, but they had somehow ended up on the floor before they were through.

“In the shower doesn’t count,” Sansa said, giggling some more.

He would have liked to lie there and listen to Sansa giggle for a while longer, but his back was starting to complain, and his head wasn’t happy with the lack of pillow, either.

“Come on,” he said, giving her a gentle push off him, “we should go to bed.”

They’d scar Shireen for life if she woke up to go to the bathroom.

“I can’t wait to live with you,” Sansa said as she got to her feet. When they were both standing she wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. “I love you.”

Sansa said those words a lot more freely than he did. He preferred to show his love with his actions, but he sensed that this was a moment where it would be appropriate for him to give her a verbal response.

He kissed her and murmured the words against her lips, attempting to use the deep, husky tone of voice she liked. Judging by the way she pressed herself against him he had been successful.

“Mm, you’re making me want round two,” she whispered, moving her hips suggestively.
“Seven hells, woman,” he grumbled, looking up at the ceiling, “am I expected to work miracles?”

“Maybe,” she said, her tone coy.

He sighed and - ignoring his complaining back - picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. She squealed loudly enough to wake the dead, and Stannis swatted her arse to remind her to be quiet, walking quickly to their bedroom so that he could throw her on their bed.

They barely got any sleep that night.

Chapter End Notes

Big thanks to Tommyginger for her suggestions and help with the first scene in this chapter. ♥
Stannis could not recall having felt more consistently happy and at peace in his entire life. Waking up with Sansa close at hand every morning and always being able to kiss her good night before he went to sleep was a privilege he never wanted to do without. Not for any long stretches of time, at least.

He liked how she had added some personal touches to his home, brightening the place up and making it feel more like their home. It had been odd when he had returned from work one day to find pictures in frames everywhere, and Sansa had been very nervous when she had asked him whether he liked them, but he found himself growing used to them very quickly and he had been able to be honest when he had told Sansa that he did not mind them.

… Even if all the did was gather dust.

The pictures of the three of them - him, Sansa and Shireen - were his particular favourites. The one from Renly’s wedding was perhaps the better photograph, but the picture that had been taken in the Blackwater Bay Aquarium by that rude photographer, back when Sansa and Shireen had just been getting to know each other, held more sentimental value for him. It was the first photograph of the three of them as a family, and he didn’t care that he looked stiff and awkward and that Shireen looked every bit as sullen as she had usually looked the year the photo had been taken.

He hadn’t dared to voice his thoughts on the matter as he was not certain Sansa or Shireen were ready to consider the three of them to be a family unit, but he hoped they felt the same way. Or that they would feel the same way soon.

Stannis didn’t figure it out right away, but when Sansa came to him and told him that she thought Shireen ought to be taken to see a dermatologist and that Selyse had been resorting to homeopathy of all things, it meant that Sansa must have discussed the matter with Shireen. She would hardly have talked to Selyse about the matter, after all. When he realised that Sansa and Shireen were comfortable enough with one another to talk of such matters, and that Sansa was showing his daughter the sort of proper care Selyse really ought to have been showing her, a powerful wave of happiness and contentment flowed through him.

Whether his girls admitted or not, they were a family.

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Stannis started to mentally prepare himself for the coming argument the minute Shireen decided that she wanted to try the treatment Dr. Pylos had recommended. Talking to Selyse was never all that pleasant, and he had been avoiding it with even more fervour than ever before since their disastrous phone call about Sansa.

*Just stick to the facts,* he thought to himself, *Selyse will want what’s best for Shireen.*
Sansa had noticed that he had been more quiet than usual ever since the doctor’s appointment, but she had accepted it when he had explained that he was trying to think of what he should say to Selyse without asking him for details. Sansa always avoided the topic of his ex-wife. She did not seem to feel ill at ease about discussing Selyse with him, but she probably sensed how ill at ease he was about it.

The truth was that Stannis was embarrassed about his past with Selyse. He was embarrassed that he had entered into a serious commitment like marriage without being in love. He would never regret having Shireen, but it was embarrassing that he had let it all happen - marriage and a child - with a woman he had barely liked. He had gone in with both eyes wide open and an iron-clad prenuptial agreement, knowing that the relationship wasn’t what he truly wanted.

After the divorce he had sworn to himself that he would not make such a mistake again, and had therefore mostly avoided women. With Sansa things were different, however. He wanted her. He wanted it all with her.

“Drive safe,” Sansa said, walking over to him to peck him on the cheek before he left to take Shireen to her mother. “See you next weekend,” she said to Shireen, smiling brightly.

Shireen gave Sansa a small smile in return. “Yeah, see you.”

Stannis patted his pockets, looking for his phone. When he didn’t find it he told Shireen to go out to the car and that he’d meet her there. He must have left his phone in the study. Shireen took the car keys and left and Stannis started to walk towards his study. Sansa stopped him, however.

“Here,” she handed him his phone, “good luck with Selyse,” she said, planting a soft, lingering kiss on his lips. “Don’t back down,” she added once she pulled away, “this is important to Shireen.”

Stannis nodded, feeling a little as if she were sending him off to do battle.

He spent the entire drive rehearsing his speech in his head, making sure every word of his argument sounded reasonable and logical. When he parked the car he didn’t really feel ready, but he supposed he was as ready as he’d ever be.

He followed Shireen inside and was relieved that Shireen made sure Selyse was aware that he was in the house. It saved him the bother of having to announce himself. They found Selyse sitting in the kitchen and she blinked at him as if he was some bizarre apparition for a few moments.

He cleared his throat. “Hello, Selyse.”

Shireen made herself scarce, and Stannis thought it was probably for the best.

“Good evening,” Selyse said, raising an eyebrow at him as if to ask what on earth he was doing, intruding in her kitchen.

Stannis knew better than to attempt to have a seat, so he simply took a deep breath where he stood and launched into his speech.

“I took Shireen to a dermatologist to evaluate the condition of her skin. I’m sure you’ve noticed her acne has been getting worse. The doctor diagnosed her with cystic acne.” He paused for emphasis. “I do not know if you’re aware, but it is a serious medical condition which can lead to permanent scarring if left untreated.” Stannis took another deep breath and listed the details of the treatment Dr. Pylos had suggested as well as the possible side-effects and other relevant concerns. “As you can hear the treatment is not easy, but as Shireen wishes to try it, I think we should make it possible for her to do so.”
Selyse got up from her chair, looking furious.

“How dare you?” she asked, her voice ice cold.

“Excuse me?”

The argument Stannis had been preparing himself for happened almost exactly the way he had imagined it. Selyse was angry that he had taken Shireen to a doctor behind her back but insisted that the fact that she had exposed their daughter to some quack was not relevant. She believed homeopathy was the answer, and he couldn’t resist insulting the entire ‘profession’ with all the derision he could muster.

Selyse kept insisting that the treatment Dr. Pylos had suggested was too intense for a young girl like Shireen to withstand, calling the medicine ‘poison’ and insisting that a more natural method would be better.

“Sansa has friends who have undergone the same treatment and they’ve all been fine,” he eventually bit out, trying to get Selyse to see that even if the treatment was harsh it would not be nearly as damaging as leaving the acne untreated.

“Oh, well, if perfect little Sansa says it will be fine, I’m sure it will all be just PERFECT!” Selyse shrieked, throwing a pile of receipts from the kitchen table at him.

Stannis raised both eyebrows in shocked disbelief. Mentioning Sansa had apparently been a mistake.

Perhaps Davos was right. He kept insisting that Selyse was threatened by Sansa, and resentful of her place in Shireen’s life.

“*How long has it been since Selyse has had someone special in her life? She’s reached a certain age, and she never had the sort of looks Sansa has. Selyse would probably feel resentful of her even if she weren’t well on her way to becoming Shireen’s stepmother.*”

Stannis pushed the memory of his friend’s words from his mind and tried to listen to what Selyse was saying.

“How can you take the ideas that the little tart puts in your head seriously?” she asked, coming right up to him to poke him in the chest accusingly, “she’s been an adult for five whole minutes and she thinks she knows what’s best for our daughter?”

“Calm down,” Stannis said, taking a step back from Selyse.

“I will not calm down!” she screamed, following him so that she could continue to jab him in the chest.

“Your whore may have you wrapped around her little finger and willing to let Shireen take all sorts of risks, but I will not have her trying to poison Shireen with drugs that are much too powerful for someone her age!”

Stannis bristled. He would not stand back and allow Selyse to say such things about Sansa. It was beyond rude.

“I don’t expect you to like Sansa, but I am in a serious, committed, long-term relationship with her. I will *not* tolerate any more of your disrespect. That means I expect you to keep your petty and resentful barbs about Sansa to *yourself*.”
They glared at each other for a moment, but when it seemed that Selyse was taking a breath and preparing to speak, Stannis cut her off.

“You need to think about what’s best for Shireen and less about your own insecurities. Sansa is not a threat to Shireen’s well-being. She has never been anything but perfectly kind to our daughter.”

“Of course perfect Sansa has never been anything but perfect,” Selyse spat, her face twisted up into a mask of bitterness and fury. “I suppose you’d think it was a great kindness if she told Shireen to start shooting heroin, too!”

“You’re being unreasonable,” he said, crossing his arms in front of his chest and scowling at her.

“Oh, am I?” Selyse said heatedly, stepping back to cross her arms over her chest, “or is it unreasonable to take Shireen to a doctor without telling me, without gaining my approval, at the word of your little playboy bunny, and then to just expect me to agree without a fight when you want to pump my precious little girl full of chemicals?”

Stannis gave Selyse a warning look. If she called Sansa a whore or a playboy bunny one more time…

“The doctor’s appointment was just to get a diagnosis and a suggestion for treatment. I am bringing this to you now so that we can both agree whether to allow Shireen to get the treatment that she wants to get.”

“Of course she wants to get it! You and your girlfriend have been filling her head with ideas about how this treatment will cure all her skin problems! Telling her how it was all fine for Sansa’s little friends, so of course it will be just fine and dandy for Shireen, too.”

*It will cure all her skin problems. That’s the point,* Stannis thought to himself, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from yelling those exact words at his ex-wife.

“Selyse, you’re not seeing the big picture,” he said instead, his patience wearing thin.

“I won’t agree to the treatment!” Selyse insisted. Loudly.

Sansa’s words repeated themselves inside his head. "*Don’t back down.*” He wouldn’t have backed down in any case, but it felt nice to think of Sansa’s support.

“If you are going to jeopardise Shireen’s health by denying her access to medical treatments she wants and needs, I will not hesitate to take you to court.”

Selyse’s eyes widened and she pressed her lips together tightly. *You wouldn’t,* she seemed to say, her eyes flashing with uncertainty and fear.

He narrowed his eyes at her and made sure his entire body conveyed a clear message: *I would.*

Selyse had been left with nothing more than what she had brought to the marriage after the divorce. The prenuptial agreement had seen to that. She was Shireen’s main custodian, so Stannis had always been generous when it came to child support and expenses that had anything to do with his daughter’s upbringing, but it would be difficult for Selyse to pay a lawyer to fight Stannis and his legal team in court. If Stannis decided to sue for custody, Selyse would be hard-pressed to stand up to him.

When Selyse simply stared at him, Stannis decided to go on.
“This is not something you can afford to dismiss out of hand,” he said, glaring at the angry woman in front of him, “Shireen’s health is too important. Do you really want our daughter to carry permanent scars because you were too proud to think about letting her try a medical treatment that has repeatedly been proven to be effective in cases just like Shireen’s?”

Selyse deflated a little and Stannis hoped it meant that she might eventually be convinced to allow Shireen to try the treatment.

“I don’t care,” she said petulantly.

“Nonetheless. I’ll send you the information the doctor gave me. You can look at it at your leisure and then we can talk about this like adults.” He took a deep breath and drew himself up to his full height. “I’m warning you, Selyse. If you do not change your mind within a month I will call my lawyers.”

Sometimes it was quite useful to be a tall, imposing man with a deep commanding voice. To Selyse’s credit she did not shrink away from him; her lips merely thinned until they were nothing but a straight line under her nose.

“Just get out,” she said, sinking into the chair she had been sitting in when he arrived and casting the receipts that littered the floor a disgusted and tired look.

Stannis raised an eyebrow and turned on his heel, leaving Selyse to deal with the mess she’d made by herself. He really couldn’t care less if she wanted to make a mess of her own life, but he’d damn well not stand by and allow her to make a mess of Shireen’s.

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Two weeks after his fight with Selyse he was starting to wonder if he actually would have to drag Selyse to court. He had asked doctor Pylos to call Selyse when it seemed that his own daily calls were not causing her to change her stance, and he had tried every argument that he could think of.

“I don’t know what to do,” he told Sansa, appreciating the way she listened to him without rolling her eyes even though he was complaining about the same thing for the third night in a row. “I don’t understand why she’s being so damn obstinate.”

They were both lying in bed, but they had their respective lights on and were both supposed to be reading before turning in for the night. Stannis’ book and reading glasses lay ignored on top of the covers and he didn’t even care that the spine was getting cracked.

Sansa carefully marked her place in her own book, putting it away on the nightstand on her side of the bed.

“Come here,” she said, inviting him to cuddle up to her. It was nice and comforting, and he liked the way she stroked the back of his head and scratched the back of his neck and the top of his back lightly.

“You just have to keep trying,” she said, using the same encouraging tone of voice she had been using for two weeks when she told him not to give up. For Shireen’s sake.

“I know, Selyse is just being impossible.”

“She’s probably just trying to protect Shireen,” Sansa said, nothing but the patience of a saint in her tone.
“I know, I know,” he sighed, “but she’s going about it all wrong.”

“You have to think about this from her perspective,” Sansa said, giving him the same advice she had given him before, “you won’t be able to bully her.”

“I’m not trying to bully her,” he protested.

“You’ve been calling her every day and essentially telling her that she’s a bad mother and that you’ll take Shireen away if she doesn’t agree to do what you want to do.” Sansa spoke gently, but there was a hint of admonition in her tone.

“You’re the one who keeps telling me not to give up.”

“I know. But your tactics aren’t working. I think you need to place yourself in her shoes and try to think of an argument that would convince you if you were her.” Sansa kissed him and smiled when she pulled away. “I’m sure you’ll think of just the right thing to say.”

He couldn’t help but smile at her in return, his worries melting away. “All right,” he said, looking at her and wondering what this whole situation would be like without her support, “that’s a fair idea.”

Sansa beamed and kissed him again, more deeply this time.

“You know, you’re much too nice about Selyse,” he told her when they broke apart.

“Oh?” Sansa looked curious and amused.

“She called you my playboy bunny.”

Sansa burst into laughter.

“That’s not so bad,” she said once she stopped giggling.

“She called you worse things, too,” he told her darkly, not wanting to spoil the mood by saying the word ‘whore’.

The smile faded from Sansa’s lips. “I’m not really surprised,” she said, sounding suddenly very vulnerable.

“I told her off,” Stannis said, shifting his position a little so that he could hug Sansa to his chest and stroke her hair.

“Thank you.”

They were quiet for a little while.

Sansa took a deep breath and rose up to look at Stannis with a look on her face that was serious on the surface, but her eyes betrayed her by showing a teasing glint.

“So, when are you taking me to the mansion?”

What mansion? He blinked at her in confusion. Sansa was no longer looking anything approaching serious.

“And will I have to supply my own bunny ears, or is that something you’re going to take care of?” She could barely get the words out as she was giggling so madly.
Ah. Playboy bunny. Right.

“Hush,” he said, shooting her a mock irritated look.

“I think you’d look really good in a red silk robe,” she said, still giggling and ignoring his faked irritation.

He was forced to be very creative about how to get her to stop poking fun at him. Not that he minded.

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After thinking about the advice Sansa had given him, Stannis attempted to convince Selyse to let Shireen try the treatment with the condition that it would stop the moment it seemed as if Shireen’s health would be adversely affected due to the medication. It didn’t persuade her instantly, but she became a lot more reasonable after he brought it up.

Three weeks after the initial fight with Selyse, Shireen was finally starting her treatment. No lawyers needed.

Stannis watched Sansa in bemusement as she read the fine print of the pamphlet that came with the medicine she had just snatched from his hands. It was hard to tell which one of his girls was more excited by the pills. Shireen didn’t wear her excitement on her sleeves like Sansa did, but he could tell she was thrilled.

His heart skipped a beat when Shireen offered to make Sansa some of that fancy tea with the rose petals Sansa had insisted on buying. He knew his daughter well enough to tell that she was trying to show Sansa some affection. The look of mingled disbelief and joy on Sansa’s face told him that she understood it, too.

Once Shireen had disappeared into the kitchen he walked over to Sansa and pulled her into a hug.

“She’s being so nice,” Sansa said, her voice muffled against his chest and filled with emotion.

He didn’t know what to say, so he just patted her head a little awkwardly and used the thumb of his other hand to rub soothing circles at the small of her back.

It was wonderful to see his girls getting along and it was wonderful to know how much it meant to Sansa. He almost snorted when he recalled that he had once been worried that Sansa might become some sort of evil stepmother to Shireen. If anything, Sansa was more of a fairy godmother.

Or perhaps a fairy princess?

A princess he longed to crown as his queen.

Stannis shook his head when Sansa left his arms to join his daughter in the kitchen. He was thinking like a ridiculous, lovesick fool.

He had never really considered himself a romantic, but it was easy to clean out the dust and cobwebs from the romantic recesses of his brain when Sansa was around to bring it out in him and appreciate his gestures.

She loved his efforts and returned them with interest, and he was past caring that Robert would laugh at him if he ever found out. It was none of Robert’s business, anyway.
No one except Sansa had to know.

Chapter End Notes

Tommyginger gets a ton of credit for the scene where Stannis fights with Selyse. She really helped me out with it. Thank you so much, Tommy! ♥
Stannis tried to be as quiet as he could so he wouldn’t disturb his girls. They were curled up on the couch, watching a period drama and looking utterly transfixed. Seeing them getting along always made him smile, which meant that he was near constantly smiling when Sansa and Shireen were both at the apartment. Sansa had started to tease him about how he would get crow’s feet from all his smiling, and jokingly asking him whether his scowl lines would get jealous.

Sansa would probably only have smile lines when she grew old.

Stannis hoped very much that he would be around to see them, and that he would play a large part in putting them there.

He walked up behind the couch, watching the drama that was unfolding on the screen and trying to figure out what was on. “Oh, it’s Pride and Prejudice,” he said once he realised that Mr. Darcy was currently in the middle of his first disastrous proposal.

He hadn’t really meant to say it out loud, but now Sansa and Shireen were looking at him, and Shireen was expressing her bewilderment at his knowledge of English literature. Sansa looked rather intrigued as well.

It was a little strange to talk to his daughter about how he had read the novel for school, that he had enjoyed it, and that he thought it was an eloquent portrayal of how important it was to stay true to oneself and one’s ideals when searching for a partner. He could not really remember ever having discussed romance or relationships with Shireen in this way before, and it looked as if his daughter found it just as strange as he did. He felt his face warming slightly, but Sansa was casting him encouraging looks, so he decided to stay where he was instead of going away to hide in his study right away.

He tried to change the subject by bringing up those awful vampire books that Myrcella had been going on about, and Shireen’s expression of mild confusion turned to one of baffled incredulity. She did not seem to think he was supposed to be aware of pop culture. He usually wasn’t, but some things were hard to avoid. Sansa’s encouraging looks disappeared to make way for impatience; she clearly wanted to keep watching the film.

“I’ll be in my study if you need me,” he said, doubting that they would hear him. They were watching Elizabeth Bennet reject Mr. Darcy and they were captivated. It really was an incredibly well-crafted piece of writing. The way Elizabeth had misread Mr. Darcy’s behaviour and interpreted his character in the worst possible light, and the way Mr. Darcy clumsily insulted those dearest to Elizabeth in his effort to win her hand…

Stannis had always seen a lot of himself in Mr. Darcy, though he would never admit it to anyone. Women tended to romanticise the man to a ridiculous extent, so comparing oneself to the character was likely to be misconstrued as a pathetic bid for female attention. But he still remembered how eye-opening it had been to read a romance where the male lead was socially awkward, stiff in his manners and often insulting without really meaning to; while also good at heart, honest, decent, and willing to go to great lengths to protect those in his care.

He was still standing by the sofa, watching the film and glancing frequently at Sansa and Shireen to gauge their reactions to the events on the screen. He had rarely seen Shireen look so entranced. Perhaps he had better unearth his Austen collection for her? No… it would be less embarrassing to buy her new copies. He didn’t really want Shireen to know that he had done rather more than read
Pride and Prejudice for school.

There was a smile playing on Sansa’s lips, and sometimes she mouthed the words along with the characters. Especially if Elizabeth was speaking. He wondered whether she saw herself in Lizzie Bennet the way he saw himself in Mr. Darcy. That would be something. He could definitely see a certain resemblance between Sansa and Elizabeth’s characters. Sansa seemed a lot kinder to Stannis, but they were both vivacious and fond of laughing, witty, clever and known to tease those they liked.

It had been a while since he had read the book, and he had never seen this particular adaption, so he found himself becoming absorbed. He postponed his vague plan of going to his study in favour of perching himself on the arm of the sofa and watching as Mr. Darcy delivered The Letter, and then as Elizabeth returned to Longbourn and spoke to her sister Jane. He was surprised at how much sympathy he felt for Jane. The strangely powerful feeling seemed just as fresh as the first time he had read the book. The actress did a very fine job of portraying a woman putting a brave face on her heartbreak, and he could not help but think how he would behave if he were in her shoes.

He doubted he would be able to put on such a brave face if Sansa left him.

By the time Elizabeth had gone on the trip with the Gardiners and was standing on a cliff as the music swelled, he had given up entirely on his plans for his study. He wanted to see what Elizabeth made of Pemberley.

Sansa smiled at him when he loosened his tie and pressed himself against her, and she gave him a surreptitious kiss so Shireen wouldn’t notice.

Stannis hoped this would be something the three of them would do again. It was decidedly pleasant to watch a film with his girls as a family, and he was sure they thought so, too.

He could tell.

***

“I didn’t know you read Jane Austen in school,” Sansa said when they were alone in the living room.

After they had watched Pride and Prejudice with Shireen they had made dinner. More accurately, he and Shireen had both attempted to help Sansa make dinner, but had been ousted from the kitchen when Stannis had somehow managed to set the potatoes he was supposed to boil on fire. (That had never happened before. He had just been distracted because Sansa had bought a new white apron with a lace trim, and it really just wasn’t decent.)

It was late and Shireen had gone to bed. Sansa had made some of her fancy rose petal tea, and he was drinking some of it despite his bemusement with the beverage.

Stannis made a noncommittal noise as he was not certain what to say in response to Sansa’s remark.

“I can’t believe we’ve been together all this time and I never knew,” she said, shaking her head incredulously.

“Does it matter?” He raised an eyebrow and took a sip of his silly tea.

“I probably would have swooned in the kitchen at Bran’s birthday party if you’d told me,” Sansa
said with a little giggle, “you would have been required to catch me before I hit the floor and carry me to the nearest bed.”

“Surely a sofa would have sufficed.” Stannis cocked his head to the side and pursed his lips slightly.

“No, I would have needed you to do me right then and there,” Sansa said, nodding solemnly.

Stannis did not choke on his tea. He just needed to clear his throat while he was swallowing some of it.

“You know,” he said, casting about for something to say to distract Sansa from the fact that he had just not choked on his tea, “I’ve read Sense and Sensibility, too.”

Sansa’s eyes widened and her lips parted into a small ‘o’ of surprise.

“And Persuasion,” he added, liking the feeling of surprising her.

Sansa closed her mouth, took a deep breath and set her cup of tea down on the coffee table. Then she calmly stood up and held her hand out.

He looked at her in confusion. What was she doing?

“Come on,” she said, her voice a little breathless.

“What - ”

Sansa grabbed his hand and tugged. Hard.

“Come on,” she repeated more firmly, biting her lip and looking at him with her eyelids a little lowered.

Oh.

He abandoned his tea and got up from the sofa, letting Sansa practically drag him to their bedroom.

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“Can I… can I stay here instead?”

Stannis stared at his daughter. She wanted to move in with him? Weekdays, too? She wouldn’t rather go to Brightwater with Selyse to help take care of her strange grandmother?

A warm feeling spread from the centre of his chest to the rest of his body. His daughter was choosing him.

“Yes, of course,” he hurried to say, his voice hoarse and a little thick with emotion. Shireen would be with him full time. For the first time since she was a baby. The idea was simultaneously terrifying and thrilling.

As he was telling Shireen that his apartment was her home, and that she was always welcome to stay, he realised that he should really have asked Sansa before agreeing, so he hurried to add that he would need to talk it over with Sansa.

Now. He should do it now. This was exciting!
He squeezed Shireen’s arm in a way that he hoped came across as affectionate, and went to look for Sansa. She couldn’t have gone far. She had been grading papers in the living room just a moment ago…

“What’s going on?” Sansa asked as soon as she saw him, “you look all flushed.”

Did he?

“Nevermind that, Shireen’s just asked me - I mean - I’ve just agreed - if you agree, er…” He was too flustered to get the words out in the proper order.

Sansa raised both eyebrows and laughed. “Calm down,” she said, smiling at him and shaking her head.

“Shireen wants to move in with us rather than go to Brightwater with Selyse,” he blurted, “and I sort of already said yes for the most part,” he added, bringing a hand up to scratch the back of his head.

“Oh!” Sansa’s smile became even wider. “That’s great!” She looked around, obviously trying to find Shireen.

“She’s still in my study,” Stannis said, feeling relieved that Sansa did not seem to be put out with him for agreeing to let Shireen move in full time, and pleased when Sansa immediately went to find her.

He heard as Sansa excitedly told Shireen that of course she could live with them, and how she went on to reassure Shireen with motherly affection in her voice that everything would be fine.

This merited a celebration, he thought, reaching for his phone and dialling the number of Shireen’s favourite restaurant.

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“We need to talk,” Sansa said, sounding very serious and speaking the four most dreaded words in existence.

Stannis didn’t know what to think. They had just had a wonderful evening. Dinner at Shireen’s favourite restaurant had been a great success, and nothing had seemed wrong. Everything had been perfect. Had he missed something? Had Sansa been unhappy about something and he hadn’t noticed?

Was she breaking up with him?

Sansa had just finished brushing her hair and joined him on the bed where he was currently lying in a state of paralysed panic.

She cuddled up to him and kissed his cheek. “Don’t look so worried,” she whispered, squeezing his hand reassuringly, “I’m not about to tell you that I’m dying.”

Stannis only felt the tiniest bit reassured by her words and her comforting presence.

“I just wanted to say that I genuinely did not mind that you agreed to let Shireen stay before asking me, she’s your daughter and this was her home before I moved in here. I love her, and I’m thrilled that she’s moving in on a more permanent basis for a while.”
Stannis sensed a ‘but’ and braced himself.

“... But I hope that in the future you will involve me in big decisions that will affect us both. Even when they’re really great, easy decisions to make and you feel like you already know what I’d say.”

Stannis swallowed thickly. Her gentle reminder had set off a burning guilty sensation in the pit of his stomach. She was not asking for anything unreasonable. He had been in the wrong.

He swore to himself that he would be more careful next time a similar situation arose. He wanted to be respectful of Sansa, and he wanted to be respectful towards the relationship they were building together. She would never agree to a marriage with him if he acted so clumsily.

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” he said, shifting around so that he could look her in the eyes, “I should have handled that better.”

“You were excited,” Sansa said, her eyes kind and a smile in her voice, “I’m just making sure we’re on the same page when it comes to the future.”

Stannis immediately felt infinitely better. Sansa wanted a future with him.

“Understood,” he said, hugging her to him in an effort to comfort himself.

“You know I love you, don’t you?” Sansa said, her voice affectionate.

A strange lump appeared in his throat, making it impossible for him to reply with words. He squeezed her more tightly instead.

“And you know I’m not going anywhere, right?” she added, easing his fears and forcing him to squeeze his eyes shut so that I wouldn’t do something very unmanly.

“Yes,” he croaked out.

Sansa was kind enough to bury her face in the crook of his neck, keep silent and give him time to compose himself. He stroked her hair and focused on breathing, his heart rate gradually slowing. Eventually he felt like he’d be able to speak normally.

“I love you, too, Sansa,” he said, clutching at her and wondering if he would be able to get away with never letting her go. “Very much.”

Sansa made a pleased sound in the back of her throat and wriggled in his arms.

“I’m really looking forward to having Shireen around during the week,” Sansa said, changing the subject.

“Yeah?” He was a bit distracted by the way she was wriggling.

“Mmhm. It will be nice to have some female company around here.”

It was rapidly becoming increasingly apparent that there was nothing female about her current company. She was still wriggling.

“Although,” Sansa said, a teasing lilt in her tone, “we’ll have to contain the urge to have sex on the living room floor from now on.”

His cock twitched at the memory Sansa had just jogged.
“If I remember correctly, Shireen was at home on that particular occasion,” he said archly.

Sansa laughed. “Oh, well, I suppose that’s true. Maybe the floor is still an option, then. But you should probably not make me sit on the dining room table so that you can go down on me while she’s at home,” she said, pretending to sound pensive.

Stannis huffed out a short laugh. “No, I think not.” But his amusement faded quickly. For the first time he was considering quite a glaring downside to having Shireen around all the time. He had always been used to having weeknights to himself, and after Sansa moved in he had grown used to being able to kiss and touch her as much as he wanted during the week without worrying about Shireen grimacing over it.

With a frown he resolved to figure out a way to encourage his daughter to have sleepovers with Myrcella without coming off as too desperate for some alone time with Sansa.

Sansa blew out an exaggerated put-upon sigh. “Maybe we should just learn to make do with the bedroom.”

“And the en suite,” he reminded her, unable to resist the urge to rub his erection against her. He had some very fond memories of taking Sansa in the shower.

Sansa giggled and moved her hips in time with his, creating some rather lovely friction with him.

“I know there’s no dining room table in here,” he whispered in her ear, “but I think you should spread your legs nonetheless.” He was still feeling a little guilty, and going down on her would be a nice sort of apology, wouldn’t it?

Sansa moaned and immediately did as he asked.

Stannis moved the covers out of the way so he wouldn’t suffocate and pushed the skirt of her satin nightgown up. Sansa never wore any panties to bed unless she was on her period. He started to kiss her inner thighs, but the scent of her arousal made him eager to taste her, and he decided not to tease her too much before finding his goal. She was moaning continuously almost as soon as he started to lick at her, though he could tell that she was trying to be a little more quiet than she would have been if Shireen hadn’t been at home.

When he started to focus his attention where he knew she wanted it most, she was forced to muffle her cries with a pillow. He smiled and took his mouth away to kiss the surrounding area gently.

The pillow moved to the side. “Stannis,” Sansa whimpered, “don’t stop.”

He descended on her again, with even more intensity before, causing her to scream rather satisfyingly loudly into her pillow. Unsure whether she was in the mood to let him inside her, he patiently licked her through her aftershocks, hoping she would say something to indicate whether she wanted his cock or not.

She touched his shoulder after a little while, indicating without words that he should come up and lie beside her. She kissed him full on the mouth when he did as she wanted; it never seemed as if she minded the taste of herself on his tongue. When the kiss broke she whispered a few words he was very pleased to hear.

“I need you.”

He didn’t hesitate to climb on top of her, sinking into her soaking passage with a satisfied groan. She always felt so good after he licked her.
After a few frantic thrusts he managed to calm down and slow his movements. He wanted this to last, and he wanted to make love, not fuck. At least for a little while.

Sansa sounded like she was close to coming again already, and he knew that if he dragged his cock in and out of her slowly, he would be able to keep her on the precipice of her orgasm until she started to sob.

He licked and sucked at her neck as he worked, sweat beading on his skin due to the effort of restraining himself. He really just wanted to plough ahead and chase his pleasure the way his most primitive drives were screaming at him to do, but even though her inner muscles were already fluttering around him, tempting him to listen to those screams, he resisted the powerful impulse.

“Please!” Sansa sobbed after what seemed an eternity, “harder, please.”

It was what he had been waiting for. He let go of the reins, grabbed Sansa by the ankles to spread her legs wide in front of him, and did exactly what his body wanted and what Sansa had just begged him to do.

There was no pillow to muffle her cries this time, and Stannis would have worried that Shireen might hear her if he hadn’t been utterly focused on the glorious pleasure that his impending climax was drowning him in.

With a series of grunts that were barely audible due to Sansa’s gasps and flattering moans, he started to come. He was pounding himself into her with all the force he could muster, revelling in the way she was clenching powerfully around him and milking him for all he was worth.

He hissed out a swear word when his energy ran out and he had to surrender to gravity, but Sansa just let out a dazed little giggle when he collapsed on top of her.

They lay there in a heap for a little while before Stannis managed to roll off with all the grace of a burlap sack.

They were quiet as their breathing returned to normal.

“Yes,” Sansa eventually said with a happy sigh, “you’re definitely stuck with me.”

Stannis huffed out a laugh, but he hoped she meant it. He wanted to be ‘stuck’ with her. His heart was swelling in his chest at the thought, and he felt warm in a way that had nothing to do with his recent physical exertion.

He’d go to a jewellery store soon, he decided. Waiting for some vague ‘right time’ was too hard.

He wanted Sansa to wear his ring.
Stannis did his best to stifle a yawn as he made his way to the kitchen. It was a cold winter morning and he was not really looking forward to going outside for work. He bumped into a bleary-eyed Shireen on her way to the bathroom, and would have smiled at her obvious sleepiness if he hadn’t been half asleep himself.

He put the kettle on and found the loaf of bread Sansa had picked up at the baker’s yesterday. He had never usually gone to bakeries to get bread before Sansa’s moved in, but he found he preferred the quality and the freshness of baker’s bread over the cardboard taste of store-bought variants. He cut a few slices, found the butter and the organic honey that Sansa insisted was much better than all other brands, and brewed the tea.

Soon his girls found their way to the kitchen, Shireen looking a little more awake than before but her hair still a bit mussed, and Sansa looking bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Stannis never ceased to be amazed by the transformation Sansa underwent inside the en suite in the mornings. She tended to wake up looking just as bleary, mussed and covered in pillow marks as the next person, but when she came out of the en suite it was always as if she had worked some sort of magic in there. He suspected makeup had something to do with it.

“Good morning.” Sansa trilled when she saw Shireen, “do you want me to drive you to school today?”

“Yes, thanks,” Shireen said, spreading a generous amount of honey onto her slice of bread.

Stannis was already halfway through his breakfast, but a glance at the clock told him he should hurry up. He was usually always among the first to arrive at the office, but he had been taking extra care to arrive on time for the past few weeks as he had been taking longer lunch hours than he really should. He had been using the time to visit what felt like every jewellery store in King’s Landing in an attempt to find the right ring for Sansa. No luck thus far. He just couldn’t seem to find anything that would suit her. At first he had wanted to give her a diamond because it was classic, but the more diamond rings he had looked at, the more he had become convinced that a diamond would be all wrong for Sansa. She was more than classic; she was vibrant and special, and he wanted a ring that would reflect that.

“Can I sleep at Myrcella’s tonight? Since it’s Friday?” Shireen asked just as Stannis was about to get up to rinse his cup and plate in the sink.

Stannis looked at Sansa. There was a playful gleam in her eyes when she gave him a small nod. Suddenly the idea of the cold morning weather did not seem as daunting.

Stannis knew that Shireen had a standing invitation at Robert’s house, so he did not really have to think it over before giving his answer. “Of course,” he said, “we can watch The Birds of the Vale tomorrow,” he added, remembering that they had made plans to watch it that evening. It had been his turn to pick a film, and he had been wanting to watch that particular documentary for a while.

“Great!” Shireen said happily, sipping her tea and looking quite pleased.

Another glance at the clock prompted Stannis to hurry to the sink and start splashing water into his
“I’ll take care of it,” Sansa said from her seat at the table, giving him an affectionate look, “you should get going.”

He shut the water off and wiped his hands on a dishtowel. “Thank you,” he said, going over to Sansa to give her a quick kiss. Just something chaste and innocent that he did not mind his daughter seeing. The eye contact they made right after was less innocent. He felt his face heat up as Sansa told him with her eyes that she was planning something decidedly sinful for the evening.

He straightened up and cleared his throat, hoping Shireen wouldn’t notice how flustered he suddenly was. With one last lingering look at Sansa he turned to head for the door, stopping only to stroke Shireen’s cheek and wish her a good day at school.

“Thanks, Dad,” Shireen said, happy to accept his slightly clumsy new way of showing his affection, “have a good day at work.”

Stannis doubted it would be all that great, but the thought didn’t bother him. Not when a weekend with his girls was only a day away, and he had a Friday night alone with Sansa to look forward to.

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Davos was very amused when Stannis started to compulsively look at his watch when the meeting they were in, which had been meant to end at five o’clock, ran late.

“Shireen’s staying at Robert’s place tonight, I take it?” he whispered as an associate from Essos droned on about the market value of oil.

Stannis glared at Davos. The man was too observant for his own good.

“Hey, I don’t blame you. I remember what my first year of living with Marya was like,” Davos continued to whisper.

Stannis shushed him, feeling uncomfortable with discussing these things.

“Enjoy it while it lasts. When the first baby comes along you’ll be lucky to, well, get lucky once a month,” Davos said with a low chuckle as he moved away from Stannis’ ear and leaned back in his chair.

Stannis didn’t hear another word of what the man from Essos said about oil price fluctuations. He was too busy imagining what it would be like if he and Sansa were to have a baby and feeling powerfully nostalgic for those first few months after Shireen was born.

He really needed to get a move on and find the right ring. He wanted to marry Sansa before getting her pregnant, and if she agreed to have children with him he wanted it to be sooner rather than later. He was not getting any younger, and he did not want to be changing nappies when he was fifty.

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When Stannis opened the door to his apartment he was in the middle of a pleasant recollection of an evening he had spent driving all over King’s Landing with Shireen securely strapped into her baby seat, playing her an audio book about the Andal invasion and trying to get her to fall asleep. He had been rather sleep deprived at the time, but there had been something oddly soothing about driving in random circles with his quiet - but wide awake - baby girl in the back seat.
He was pulled from his thoughts when he saw that Sansa appeared to be in his study. The door was ajar and the lights were on inside the book-filled room. He furrowed his brow and wondered what on earth she might be doing in there. His study was a room both Sansa and Shireen tended to leave completely alone if he wasn’t there, and though he loved them both dearly, he wished to keep it that way.

Stannis made quick work of his coat and his wet shoes and crossed the living room in a few long strides, his curiosity hastening his movements.

He started to ask a question as soon as he reached the door. “What are you doing in - ”

Stannis’ words died in his mouth when he saw his desk. Or more accurately, when he saw who was sitting at his desk.

It was Sansa.

In a very scandalous negligé.

Stannis realised he had neglected to close his mouth when he had stopped speaking. It took more of a mental effort than it probably should have to snap it shut.

Sansa stood up from his chair and perched herself on the mysteriously empty surface of his desk, giving him an even better view of what she was wearing. It was tiny, mostly see-through, and made of a dark, lacy fabric that clung to her every curve in the most tempting way. There was a white lace trim on it that made him think that the only thing missing was a little white apron, and Stannis started to wonder if Sansa was some sort of mind-reader.

“You’re home, then?” Sansa said, her tone flirtatious. She was twisting a lock of hair around a finger, biting her lip, and fluttering her eyelashes. The whole picture she presented was one of coy, exaggerated innocence, and it was making his blood rush south so fast that he was worried he might lose consciousness.

“Sansa,” he groaned, taking an unsteady step towards her. He needed to take his trousers off. They had become hideously uncomfortable.

“You know,” she said, her voice playful, “I only came in here to dust the bookshelves a bit.” She produced an actual feather duster - though it was the kind one would find at a sex shop rather than at a store that sold cleaning supplies - and started running it from her neck and down to her cleavage. “But then I thought I should wait and ask your permission,” she added, tilting her head and causing her long hair to cascade attractively to the side.

Seven fucking hells.

Stannis did not know what he had done to deserve the fact that Sansa occasionally seemed to enjoy playing these games with him, but he was very grateful that she did.

He swallowed a few times, trying to unstick his dry tongue from the roof of his mouth, and parted his lips to speak.

The words he had decided to say came out all wrong (“Er - wha - um - “) and Sansa gave him a wicked smile for his trouble.

She stood up and sauntered towards him, using the feather duster to tickle his nose.

“I hope you’re not mad that I waited for you in here?” she whispered, standing close, but not
pressing herself against him.

Mad? When she was wearing *that*? Of course not.

His expression must have betrayed his thoughts as she winked at him, indicating that she knew perfectly well that he would never get mad at her for something like this.

_Ah_. He understood now.

“Er,” he started, but stopped to clear his throat and straighten his spine a little, “I suppose I could be persuaded to forgive the transgression,” he said, raising an eyebrow and trying to hide his intrigued amusement.

Sansa’s smile widened and her eyes were glittering.

“Mm, and how might I persuade you?” she asked, stroking his neck with the feather duster. She glanced at the desk, and Stannis followed her eyes.

Where had all his things gone? He kept his desk pretty neat, usually, but not *completely* devoid of clutter…

Stannis closed his eyes and told himself off for being so slow on the uptake.

“I think you’ll have to bend over the desk,” he said, deepening his voice in an attempt to sound stern, and hoping he was guessing correctly at her wishes.

Sansa blushed, but her expression told him she was quite happy with his suggestion.

“I think I had better,” she agreed, widening her eyes theatrically.

Stannis couldn’t bear it. His hands went to work, beating his belt into submission and struggling to open his fly and push his boxers down to free his cock. He sighed with relief when he was no longer uncomfortably confined.

Sansa was smiling at him, clearly amused by his haste.

He narrowed his eyes at her, refusing to feel embarrassed. “Well?” he said imperiously, “I don’t have all day.”

She blushed more deeply and smothered a giggle with her hand before turning to bend over the desk. The sheer negligé hadn’t exactly been hiding the fact that she wasn’t wearing any panties, but it was so short that her current position removed all doubt. His cock jumped when she spread her legs invitingly without being asked.

Unable to resist the tempting, round cheeks of her arse, he swatted one lightly as he moved himself into position between her legs, letting the head of his cock tease her wet entrance. Sansa’s breath hitched right after his hand landed with a bit of a smack and he could have sworn that she arched her back a little to push her arse out even more invitingly. He accepted the invitation and rubbed his cock more firmly against her, spreading her moisture along his shaft. It appeared as if she did not need much in the way of foreplay today.

“What do impertinent young women get for sneaking into people’s studies uninvited?” he asked, feeling a little ridiculous about saying something like that, but too turned on to let it stop him.

He knew he was unlikely to get a very graphic response as Sansa tended to become flustered and
embarrassed if she had to say anything ‘dirty’, but he was curious about her reaction to the little smack he had given her, and despite knowing that she was unlikely to, he was hoping she might say something about it. He had occasionally smacked her arse when she was being an intolerable tease, but she had never indicated an interest in being spanked. He wasn’t entirely sure if he was comfortable with that sort of thing, but if it was something she wanted to try, and if the aim wouldn’t be to actually hurt her...

“They get bent over desks and taught a lesson,” Sansa said breathlessly, leaving him none the wiser about whether she wanted to be fucked or spanked or both.

He decided to play it safe and started to push into her, groaning at the wonderful sensation of sinking into her little by little. She was really quite amazingly wet, and it made him wonder what she had been doing before he had arrived. The thought of her touching herself as she sat at his desk and waited for him to make his hips jerk forward involuntarily, causing him to sheathe his cock to the hilt much more quickly than he had intended.

“Oh, gods!” Sansa gasped out, clenching around him like a vice.

He squeezed his eyes shut, gritted his teeth, and grabbed onto her hips, trying not to use too much force, but probably holding on too tightly, anyway. This was a little too good.

He forced himself to let go and started to knead the cheeks of her arse instead, keeping himself still and fighting the urge to thrust. Sansa mewled and squirmed around, attempting to fuck herself on his cock since he wasn’t doing it for her. She wasn’t having much luck as he had her pinned to the desk and there was no room for her to maneuver.

“Stannis,” she whimpered, “please,”

“I thought I was teaching you lesson?” he said, managing to sound less overwhelmed than he was.

Sansa whimpered again, this time without making any coherent words.

He decided to have a bit of mercy. He brought his hands to her hips once more and started to move: creating the friction they were both desperate for. He listened to Sansa’s reactions to the different angles he tried, his hips thrusting forward at a very measured pace. Stannis knew exactly what it sounded like when he hit the right spot and he waited until he heard that particular moan. Once he found it he stopped moving.

“Stannis!” Sansa cried out, sounding frustrated and full of need.

He was pretty sure he could get her to say a few ‘dirty’ words now.

“Yes?” he said, his muscles tense with effort of keeping still.

“Please don’t stop,” she moaned, squirming and wriggling as much as she could.

“I won’t,” he promised, not even having to consciously try to make his voice deep and husky, “but first you have to ask for what you want.”

“Stannis,” Sansa whined, a distinct pout in her voice.

“I’m waiting,” he told her, trying not to sound too amused at her expense. He would spare her the embarrassment if he didn’t know that it made her come twice as hard when he did this. Wondering if it might be a little too much, but feeling too curious to resist, he gave her arse another light smack where his own body wasn’t getting in the way. He felt her inner muscles flutter around him and
raised an eyebrow.

*Good to know.*

Sansa drew in a deep, shuddering breath. “I want you to - “ her voice dropped to a mortified whisper and he felt her inner muscles clenching around him almost as hard as when she was having an orgasm, “ - *fuck* me with your perfect cock.”

He groaned and lost all control.

Stannis would have felt terribly guilty about holding her down and fucking her this way if it hadn’t been her idea in the first place, and if she weren’t practically sobbing with pleasure already. At the moment he was too far gone to think about how guilty he should or should not be feeling, however. All he could think about was how good she felt around him, and how *close* he was.

His mind went utterly blank as his primal instincts took over, a haze of lust settling deep into his bones. He started to thrust with such force that the feet of his very heavy, very solid redwood desk started to scrape against the floor, moving a little every time he filled Sansa and drew another delicious cry of pleasure from her throat.

He didn’t stop even after he came, liking the noises she was making too much to give up. He knew he would remain hard for a little longer, and though his thighs were trembling with the effort, he kept fucking her until - as Robert would likely put it - he was blue in the face.

He ended up sitting in his desk chair when he simply couldn’t stand anymore, leaving Sansa still slumped over the desk, making pleased little humming noises.

It was a while before they recovered themselves, but eventually Stannis felt up to talking.

“Are you okay?” he asked, pleased to feel that his heartbeat was finally returning to normal.

“Mmhm,” Sansa moaned, not making a move to get up from her slumped position.

Her tone of deep satisfaction made him feel a little smug.

Eventually they ended up in bed where Sansa cuddled up to him, occasionally giving his neck little kisses.

> *Enjoy it while it lasts. When the first baby comes along you’ll be lucky to, well, get lucky once a month.*

The memory of Davos’ words disrupted Stannis’ pleasant afterglow and caused an uncomfortable writhing sensation to spread from his stomach to his chest.

“If we ever have a baby,” he blurted, “do you think we will still do things like we just did?”

Sansa lifted her head up so that she could meet his eyes. “What brought this on?” she asked, smiling at him, but looking curious.

He felt himself flush with embarrassment. Why had he just blurted that out?

“Just something Davos said,” he muttered, avoiding her eyes.

“If we ever have a baby together,” Sansa said slowly, shooting him hesitant looks, “and I get all fat and covered in stretch marks,” she added with a nervous giggle, “will you stop wanting me as much?”
Stannis considered the question. He hadn’t really thought about it, but it didn’t take him very long to come to the conclusion that he would still desire her as long as she was Sansa. Her beauty shone from within as much as it did from without.

“I will always want you,” he said, his voice hoarse, but sincere.

Sansa’s breath hitched in a way that it sometimes did when they watched her period dramas and she was trying not to cry at the ending -- whether it was happy or not.

“I will always want you, too,” she whispered.

Stannis cursed himself for not having the ring yet. He was fairly certain this would have been a good moment to propose.

Ah, well, he thought, blowing out a deep breath, hopefully there will be other moments.

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Stannis had been spared dishwashing duty as he had a horrible report to read, and it had to be done before an early meeting the next day. He never would have left it this late, but Robert had forgotten to send him the bloody file.

“What is it?” he snapped, when someone knocked on his door.

Sansa opened the door a bit hesitantly, giving him a worried look.

He took a deep breath and reminded himself to be civil. It was not Sansa’s fault that Robert was a forgetful idiot.

“What can I help you with?” he said in a more patient tone of voice.

“I was just talking to Shireen,” Sansa said, biting her lip and blinking much faster than she usually did, “and she’s been invited to spend Bran’s birthday with him and his friends in Winterfell.”

“That’s fine,” Stannis said, assuming Sansa wanted to know if he approved of the plan.

“I’m glad you think so,” Sansa said with a smile, “Shireen was concerned that we wouldn’t have time to drive her up north because it’s our anniversary,” she added.

Stannis didn’t know how to react to that, so he just kept still and silent.

“I suggested that we could celebrate our anniversary in Winterfell this year,” Sansa continued, biting her lip and giving him a hopeful look, “there are a few things that we could do up there...”

Stannis nodded. “That would be the logical solution,” he said, hoping they’d be able to iron out the details later as he really had a lot of reading to do.

“Okay, great,” Sansa said, her smile even wider, “I’ll let you get back to your reading now.”

Stannis just grunted and forced himself to look away from Sansa and back at the screen.

He really would much rather have continued to look at her.

***

After dropping Shireen off at the mall where Bran and his friends were waiting for her, making
sure that she was in good hands before driving towards Ned and Catelyn’s house, Stannis asked Sansa what she had planned for them. She had been refusing to tell him for the past week, insisting that it was to be a surprise.

“Just be patient,” Sansa said with an enigmatic smile.

Stannis scowled, but didn’t pester her for answers. All she had told him so far was that they should start by going to Ned and Catelyn’s house.

“This is a pleasant surprise,” Ned said when he opened the door to find Stannis and Sansa waiting on the other side.

“We’re not really here for a visit, though” Sansa said after hugging her father and kissing him on the cheek. “Sorry,” she added, clearly noticing that her father looked a little crestfallen at the news.

“We’re celebrating our anniversary today,” she explained, smiling brightly at Stannis for a moment before looking back at her father.

“Two years, isn’t it?” Ned said in a pleasant tone, already adjusting to the fact that he was not going to have a nice visit with his daughter.

“Yes, exactly,” Sansa said, pushing a lock of hair behind one ear a little nervously.

They were all silent for a beat.

“I was just wondering,” Sansa said, breaking the silence, “if I could have the keys to the hunting cabin?”

Hunting cabin? That sounded like a nice secluded spot to have a romantic afternoon...

Ned grimaced. He had probably come to the same conclusion Stannis just had. “Are you sure you want to go there?” he asked, looking uncomfortable, “there’s nothing much to do up there in the snow.” He was giving Sansa a pleading look that Stannis understood quite well. Ned clearly did not want to think about his daughter having romantic ‘alone time’ with Stannis in his hunting cabin.

Stannis made sure that he did not meet Ned’s eyes as he tried to forget the fact that Robert had probably filled Ned’s head with all sorts of ridiculous ideas about what Stannis liked to do with Sansa, and wondered whether he had ever lived through a more uncomfortable moment.

“Don’t be silly,” Sansa said, “remember when I had that sleepover with my friends there? When I was eleven? It was so much fun! We built snowmen for hours and then Mum helped us light a fire and we all overdosed on marshmallows.”

Ned sighed and disappeared for a moment, returning almost at once with a key on keychain emblazoned with the Rangers logo.

“Remember to lock up when you leave,” he said, barely sticking around to say good-bye in his hurry to escape into the house again.

“That was weird,” Sansa said, shooting Stannis a bemused look as they made their way back to the car.

“Of course it was,” Stannis muttered, his face heating up.

“Why do you say that?”
“Your father isn’t stupid,” he said, raising an eyebrow as he opened the car door on the passenger side for Sansa.

They continued their conversation once they were both buckled in. Stannis wasn’t sure which way to go, so he didn’t start the car.

“What do you mean?” Sansa asked.

Stannis sighed and felt his face heat up even more. “Your father knows exactly what people often like to do in secluded spots when they are celebrating a relationship anniversary.”

Sansa’s eyes widened and she looked at the house with a panicked expression.

“I should have told him that we’re not going to spend all day at the cabin!” she exclaimed, sounding a little woebegone.

“We’re not?”

“No!” Sansa shot him an irritated look. “I know we could probably entertain ourselves for hours at the cabin if we wanted to, but I rather fancy being able to walk tomorrow.”

Stannis huffed out a laugh and shook his head in amusement. “Well, where should I drive us, then?” he asked, deciding to attempt to shake his discomfort off.

“Into the centre of town,” Sansa instructed, pursing her lips.

Stannis did as she bid, and soon they were walking in ‘the winter town’ that was apparently staged every winter for the holiday season. Sansa explained that she had grown up enjoying its marvels every year, and that she wanted to share the experience with him now.

“Maybe next year we could bring Shireen? If you think she’d like to see it?” Sansa suggested as they walked towards the main display, passing various stalls selling decorative baubles, roasted almonds, eggnog and mulled wine.

Stannis bought Sansa a crystal ornament shaped like an evergreen tree, and she kissed him right on the mouth in front of everyone in a rare display of public affection. He got a bit flustered, but he doubted that anyone noticed as everyone was a bit red in the face due to the cold, anyway.

Stannis was very impressed when they reached the centre of ‘the winter town’.

“They have an ice sculpting contest every year,” Sansa explained as they wandered among the glittering works of art, admiring the details and the craftsmanship. “We can put in a vote for the one we think should win if you like?”

Stannis immediately started looking at the sculptures more critically, trying to pick the best one. Sansa laughed at how seriously he was taking it, but while he was able to confidently vote for a superbly detailed sculpture of a stag, she ended up not being able to choose any of the sculptures because she liked them all so well.

They wandered over to Sansa’s favourite café after that, where she ordered a hot chocolate and he went with his usual tea. They lingered over their drinks, and Sansa managed to get him talking about what the winter holidays had been like when he had been young, and his parents had been alive. He was surprised by the amount of pleasant memories he was able to scrounge up, but then again, Robert had always been under very strict orders to behave during the holidays, and with both his parents present, they were able to enforce the rules.
“Let’s go to the cabin,” Sansa said at length, looking at Stannis from behind lowered lashes.

“Yes,” he managed, his heart starting to beat quite fast.

Sansa knew exactly where the cabin was located, and was able to give him very specific instructions while he drove. He was glad of it as he doubted he would have been able to find the place on his own -- even using GPS.

Stannis had expected Sansa to want him to go inside the little log cabin, light a fire, take all their clothes off and ravish her on the conveniently located bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. He was a little disappointed when she insisted on building a snow castle instead.

“Seeing all those ice sculptures inspired me!” Sansa said with a wide smile, “I want to see if I can recreate the old Winterfell castle. I saw a model of what it was supposed to look like on a field trip with the kids last week.”

Her enthusiasm was rather endearing, so Stannis put his ideas about fires and bearskins on hold, and went outside to… play in the snow.

Sansa managed to construct a pretty convincing castle, though Stannis had no idea if it looked anything like Winterfell. She took several pictures on her phone of it, and asked him to take pictures of her with her marvellous creation, too. After that she insisted on taking selfies with them both in the frame and the castle in the background. He was obliged to snap the pictures as his arm was longer, and he felt utterly ridiculous the whole time.

Well, perhaps not the whole time.

Sansa started kissing him at the end of their impromptu photo shoot. Warm, lingering kisses that lit a fire inside him and inspired him to pick her up and carry her into the cabin, giggling and protesting halfheartedly that they hadn’t finished taking pictures.

He told her quite firmly that they had finished, and that it was time to do something to warm them up after all that time outside in the snow.

“Mm, okay,” Sansa agreed, her giggles fading away to leave only a dreamy smile playing on her lips.

It took an unfortunate amount of time to get the fire started, and Sansa did not help the process go any faster. She decided it would be a good idea for her to strip off all her clothes as he tried to concentrate on building the right sort of pile of logs, dry twigs and old newspapers, causing him to get sidetracked several times.

Thankfully he had a convincing fire going by the time she was down to her underwear, or she might have frozen to death.

She knelt on the bearskin next to him, reaching for his clothes. He let her undress him, helping her whenever she got herself into trouble, and kissing her as much as he could. She tasted like hot chocolate and snow, and she smelled like snow, too. Her cheeks were still flushed from the time she had spent outside, but there was also a new sort of flush appearing, colouring her chest and her neck.

“I love our anniversaries,” Sansa sighed as he sucked lightly on her neck, “I’m already looking forward to the next one,” she added with a giggle.

He smiled faintly against her neck, and moved up to nip at her earlobe. “Lie down,” he whispered,
wanting to do some of that ravishing he had been thinking about for a while.

Sansa obligingly took her - very pretty - bra off before doing as he asked, and he was speechless for a while as he took in the sight before him. Her skin was glowing in the firelight, but her hair... Her hair looked alive.

“Gods, you’re beautiful,” he choked out when he remembered how to talk.

Sansa smiled at him. “Touch me.”

He did not have to be told twice. He finished getting rid of her panties and his boxers, and started to kiss her breasts with the eagerness of a boy seeing a pair for the first time. One of his hands found its way to Sansa’s thighs as he licked at her nipples in turn, and he stroked the soft skin with the very tips of his fingers, encouraging her without words to spread herself open for him.

He spent a long time just touching her, ignoring the demands of his cock in favour of pushing his fingers inside of her and stroking her in just the right way to get her to keen and tremble.

In the end she begged him to take her, and he couldn’t say no.

Her legs and arms wrapped around him, holding him to her so tightly that he was hardly able to muster proper thrusts, but it was all right. He rocked his hips as much as she would let him, kissing her deeply and whispering her name when he came up for air.

By the time they were spent, it was hard to remember what it had felt like to be cold.

“‘I meant it, you know,’” Sansa whispered as they lay in a pile of disorganised limbs on the bearskin, both of them transfixed by the way the flames licked the logs in the fireplace.

“What?”

“I’m looking forward to our next anniversary. And the one after that.” There was something vulnerable and hopeful in her tone, and Stannis realised he was about to miss another perfect opportunity to propose.

Next time he would not let the chance slip away. He had given up on searching for the perfect ring and had decided to commission one to be made to his specifications instead. It would be ready soon.

“Me, too,” he said, bringing his lips to hers and gently licking at them, asking to be admitted. She yielded immediately, parting her lips and inviting his tongue to curl around hers and taste the hints of hot chocolate that still lingered here and there.

Stannis pulled back and gazed steadily into her eyes, trying to tell her without words that the kiss had been a promise.

He would ask her soon.

Sansa blinked at him for a moment, but then she bit her lip and gave him a tiny nod.

They were only able to stay in front of the fire for a little while longer after that. It was getting late, and they needed to pick Shireen up. Stannis stole a few more lingering kisses, but before he knew what had happened they were wearing clothes and locking the cabin up behind them.

Stannis opted to wait in the car while Sansa ran into the house to return the keys to her father. He
hoped she would be able to explain that they had not spent the entire afternoon sequestered in the cabin, and that he would eventually be able to look Ned in the eyes again.

Sansa occupied herself with looking at the pictures they had taken of Sansa’s snow castle on the way to the mall, and Stannis did his best to concentrate on driving rather than getting lost in the memories of the very pleasant afternoon they had just shared.

His daughter looked very happy when she joined them, smiling brightly and reporting that she had enjoyed her time with Bran and his friends.

“What about you, though? Did you have a good time?” Shireen asked, curious and polite.

Stannis looked at Sansa and exchanged a meaningful look with her. Their afternoon had been so much more than good. Despite the awkwardness with Ned.

He made sure his voice sounded calm when he told his daughter that he and Sansa had also enjoyed themselves that day, but his heart was beating up a storm, and his couldn’t fight the smile that was threatening to take over his entire face.

Chapter End Notes

This is what I had in mind when I was describing Sansa's "French maid" negligé.
Stannis returned home from a conference in Volantis feeling exhausted, grumpy and very, very hungry. It was very late on a Sunday evening, and an endless work week stretched ahead, threatening to smother him with a tedious procession of meetings, frustrating correspondences with Robert, and a parade of employees who would all be planning the coming year and wanting to bother him about when they’d be allowed to take their summer holidays. Honestly, it was still winter.

“You’re back,” Sansa said, looking up from a book she had been reading where she was curled up on the couch. He watched as she put the book away with a listless lack of care and hugged her knees to her chest, giving him a subdued smile.

This was not the sort of greeting he usually got when he had been away for a couple of days. Something was clearly wrong.

He dropped his luggage and strode over to the sofa, sitting down next to Sansa and encouraging her to lean against his chest so that he might put his arms around her.

“What’s the matter?” he whispered, rubbing circles on her back and trying to do his best to be comforting.

“I thought she had changed her mind,” Sansa said in a small voice.

“Shireen?” Stannis asked, his stomach filling with ice.

“No, no, Shireen is lovely,” Sansa hurried to say, “I’m talking about my mother.”

“I see,” Stannis said, relief flooding his system. Things had been going so well with his family. He did not want there to be any tension between his girls.

“What did you think your mother had changed her mind about?” he asked, trying to sound calm and patient.


Stannis furrowed his brow. He remembered Catelyn saying some things early on in his relationship with Sansa; things about how she expected Sansa’s interest in Stannis to fade, and that it might be better to find someone younger. He hadn’t heard any such comments in a long time, however, and Catelyn had always treated him quite well. He had thought she and Ned had both accepted his relationship with Sansa.

“She - she disapproves, then?” he asked, trying not to let his disappointment bleed into his tone.

“Not exactly,” Sansa mumbled, pressing her face into the crook of his neck for a moment. He waited for her to collect her thoughts and continue.

“She thinks you’re mature and responsible, and she knows you won’t hurt me, but she basically said it was time for me to take the training wheels off and find myself a younger version of you.” Sansa’s voice sounded distinctly tearful now, and Stannis tightened his hold on her.
He wasn’t really surprised that Catelyn was thinking along those lines, but he was surprised to hear that she had actually said those things out loud. To Sansa. He realised she was probably trying to protect her daughter, but he couldn’t help but feel unjustly attacked.

Maybe he wasn’t as young as Sansa, but he was hardly decrepit.

“And she acted like I was ridiculous for expecting her to think of Shireen as a grandchild. For loving her like a daughter…” Sansa had started to cry, and Stannis felt a little overwhelmed at her words and her emotional outpour. A hard lump appeared in his throat as he tried to make soothing sounds, and he found himself blinking rather more rapidly than he usually did.

He had known that Sansa loved Shireen, and that she considered both himself and Shireen to be her family, but he had never heard Sansa state her feelings quite so plainly. He thought about the little satin-lined box he had hidden in his study, and wondered if this was the right time.

No. She was crying. He wanted her to be smiling when he proposed.

“Ssh, it’s all right,” he murmured, stroking her hair and holding her close.

“No it’s not,” Sansa sniffled, “we somehow ended up having a huge fight about Jon, and I think I really hurt her feelings.”

“Jon?” Stannis asked, feeling incredibly confused. What did Jon have to do with anything?

“Dad took him in when he was a baby, remember?” Sansa said, her tone a little reproving “he wanted to raise him as his own son even though Mum wasn’t exactly thrilled at having to take care of two babies when Robb was already a handful all on his own.”

Stannis knew Jon was Lyanna’s son and that the boy had lost his parents in the car crash that had killed her and Rhaegar. He also knew that Ned had taken the boy in, but he had never really thought about how Catelyn would have felt about raising her husband’s nephew.

Stannis made a vague noise to indicate that he was listening, still not entirely sure what Jon had to do with Catelyn’s refusal to accept Sansa’s choices.

“Mum never let Jon forget that he was not her son, even though the rest of us were happy enough to accept him as a part of the family. I mean, I was sometimes kind of rude to him when I was a child because of the way Mum always acted towards him, but I grew out of it. She never did.”

Sansa wasn’t crying as much anymore, but she sounded horribly sad.

“I can’t imagine you being rude to anyone,” Stannis said, kissing her temple. He really didn’t know what to say to make her feel better.

“Oh, I was a brat,” Sansa said with a snort, “but Jon was always kind to me, and eventually I realised that he was just as much of a brother to me as Robb, Bran and Rickon.”

Stannis wondered if Sansa’s experience with Jon had helped her be patient with Shireen when it had been Sansa’s turn to be treated like an outsider by a member of a family she was trying to join.

“Perhaps it was good for Catelyn to hear what you had to say on the matter,” Stannis suggested, his words halting.

“I don’t know,” Sansa sighed, burying her face in the crook of his neck again, “what if she never forgives me for saying that she should have treated Jon better?”
Stannis had to listen quite hard to make out her mumbled words, but he managed it.

“She’s your mother,” he said, keeping his voice as gentle as he could make it, “she will always forgive you.”

Sansa shook in his arms, obviously crying again. He didn’t try to get her to speak, knowing that it would be better to let her cry herself out.

“Besides, I don’t think you require her forgiveness for telling her the truth,” he said when Sansa seemed to have calmed down.

Sansa made a sound that was a strange, wet sort of burble. It might have been a laugh or a sob.

“I love you,” she said, giving him a wet kiss. She tasted a little like seawater.

“I love you, too,” he murmured, running his thumbs under her eyes to wipe her tears away, “no more tears, all right?”

Sansa nodded, giving him a tremulous smile.

Stannis’ stomach chose that moment to emit a growl that was so noisy a bear would have been proud of it, causing Sansa to burst into laughter. It was the sort of tension-diffusing laughter that she had clearly needed, so Stannis tried not to feel too embarrassed about being the object of her amusement.

“I’m guessing you didn’t eat on the plane?” she said once she had caught her breath.

He shook his head, feeling a little sheepish.

“Come on, Shireen helped me make cottage pie yesterday. I can heat some up for you.”

“Is she asleep?” Stannis asked, feeling relatively certain that she was.

“Yeah, she asked me to tell you welcome home for her,” Sansa said, throwing a soft smile over her shoulder as she led the way to the kitchen.

The cottage pie was about the best thing Stannis had ever put in his mouth, but he realised that the fact that he was starving probably made the food taste even better than it usually would have.

Sansa stayed with him as he ate, telling him of the things she and Shireen had got up to while he had been away. He watched her as she spoke and couldn’t help but feel angry with Catelyn Stark. How dare she suggest that Sansa should be anything less than fully committed to him and Shireen when she was obviously so happy with them? How dare she suggest Sansa ought to find someone else?

Perhaps it was time he sat down with Ned and Catelyn and had real talk about his intentions with their daughter.

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Stannis went to his study to take a few deep breaths and review his itemised list of things to do before the next weekend. He could now cross the first item off.

1. Tell Shireen I’m going to propose to Sansa and ask her to stay at Robert’s for the weekend.

The conversation had gone well, he thought. He had almost panicked when Shireen had pointed
out that Myrcella would be in Lannisport with her mother, and that she would therefore have no reason to stay at Robert’s place. Thankfully she had been amenable to staying with Davos and Marya instead, and thankfully he knew Davos would not mind taking on a lodger for the weekend. He should probably call to make sure, though. Stannis added that to the list.

He smiled to himself and recalled that his daughter had actually told him that she loved Sansa. She had never said it in so many words before today, and it had made him very happy and relieved to hear it.

Shireen was glad that he was going to propose.

He shook his head, feeling a bit amazed at how far Shireen had come since he had first started dating Sansa. With the benefit of hindsight he realised he hadn’t really gone about introducing Sansa into Shireen’s life in the most tactful manner, that he hadn’t talked properly about the whole matter with his daughter, and that he should have tried to approach the whole situation more proactively. He couldn’t pretend that he hadn’t had a share in the blame for how rocky those first few months had been.

But it had been smooth sailing for a while now, and he could not see any choppy waters on the horizon. He was going to marry Sansa, and the three of them would officially be a family.

The next item on the list might be tricky.

2. Go to Winterfell without Sansa noticing and talk to Ned and Catelyn.

He would not be going to Winterfell to ask permission. He was going to propose no matter what Sansa’s parents said. But he wanted to have words with them, and especially with Catelyn. He needed to make sure that Catelyn would not be making Sansa cry again because of her relationship with him. He would not stand for it.

Perhaps the best thing to do would be to tell Sansa that he had an unavoidable work meeting. Maybe he could convince Robert to cover for him?

No. Robert was more likely to blow his cover than help maintain it.

Stannis sighed and opened his desk drawer. The little jewellery box was sitting there, looking very innocent and not at all like a life-changing object. He picked it up and opened it, admiring the treasure it contained for a moment before closing it and putting it back. He could not wait to see how it would look on Sansa’s finger.

He ran his eyes over the rest of the items on the list, and tapped his finger against his lips for a moment, thinking about the last one.

10. Ask Sansa to marry me.

It looked very straightforward written down like that, but the truth was that he had absolutely no idea how he would actually go about it. How on earth was he supposed to know what to say?

With a sigh he put the list away, thinking that he would work on finding the right words for his proposal later.

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“Stannis?” Bran was blinking up at him, leaning on that cane of his and looking like he had only just rolled out of bed. It wasn’t unlikely. It was half past ten on a Saturday morning, after all.
“Good morning,” Stannis said with a nod, “are your parents home?”

“Yeah, they’re in the kitchen,” Bran said, scratching the back of his head, looking nonplussed. “Are Sansa and Shireen not with you?” he asked, moving aside to let Stannis step into the house.

“Not today,” Stannis said, not offering any explanation.

“Oh.”

They stood in the foyer for an awkward moment before Bran suddenly came to life and led the way to the kitchen.

“Mum, Dad, Stannis is here to see you,” Bran said when they arrived.

Catelyn and Ned had been sitting at the kitchen table, reading different sections of the Winter Herald, sipping tea and picking at slices of toast. Stannis noted with approval that the bread they were eating looked as if it had been bought from a bakery. Or perhaps even homemade?

Ned folded his section of the newspaper up and gave Stannis a slightly guarded smile. “Hello, what brings you out here?” he asked, his tone genial but a little cautious, too. “You’re not here to borrow the keys to my hunting cabin again, are you?”

Stannis closed his eyes for a second and tried to keep his face from heating up. “Er, no, not this time.”

“Stannis borrowed the keys to your hunting cabin?” Catelyn asked, sounding surprised.

“Not really,” Ned said, shifting uncomfortably in his chair, “Sansa did. Remember, I told you?”

“Oh, for Bran’s birthday, wasn’t it?” Catelyn said, nodding.

“No, it was on Bran’s birthday, but I don’t think it was for Bran,” Ned said, clearing his throat.

Stannis watched as the Bran in question got a cola drink from the fridge and disappeared from the kitchen.

As soon as he was certain that Bran was out of earshot he interrupted Catelyn who was in the middle of asking why Sansa had wanted Ned’s hunting cabin on Bran’s birthday.

“I’m going to propose to Sansa today,” he said, effectively silencing her.

Catelyn’s lips became very thin, but she nodded a little jerkily. Ned, on the other hand, jumped up from his seat and strode over to where Stannis was standing to clap him on the back. It was nothing like being patted on the back by Robert. It was much gentler, and more of a show of camaraderie than of strength.


Stannis was staring at Catelyn, however, and couldn’t answer Ned. He only nodded to acknowledge that Ned had spoken.

Catelyn stood up with a lot more grace than Ned; her every movement measured and unhurried. She walked up to Stannis and met his eyes. Stannis returned her gaze fearlessly, determined to argue her into submission if she objected in any way to his plans.

“If she says yes,” Catelyn said, her voice steady, “I expect you to make it your life’s work to make
absolutely certain that she is happy with that choice.”

Stannis clenched his jaw and reminded himself that Catelyn was Sansa’s mother, and that she was protective of her daughter. While it was a relief that it did not appear as if she was going to make things difficult for him, it was annoying to be spoken to like that. But getting annoyed with her for demanding that he do something that he was obviously going to do his best to accomplish no matter what, would not get him anywhere, so he held his tongue.

“Of course she’ll say yes,” Ned said, breaking the tension, “and of course Stannis is going to work very hard to make Sansa happy, aren’t you?” Ned raised an eyebrow and locked eyes with Stannis.

“Of course,” Stannis repeated, nodding once without breaking eye contact with Ned.

There was a tense, silent moment.

“So, have you picked out a ring?” Catelyn asked, sounding suddenly much warmer.

Stannis was confused by the change in her mood and blinked at her a bit stupidly for a few beats before recovering his wits.

“Yes, certainly.”

“How are you going to ask her?” asked Ned, walking back to the table and sitting down. He waved at one of the chairs, inviting Stannis to have a seat, too.

“I’m taking her to dinner at the restaurant we went to on our first date,” Stannis explained, feeling his face warm up a little as he recalled what had happened after that date. He sat down in the chair Ned had pointed to, and gratefully accepted a cup of tea from Catelyn.

“That sounds lovely. What’s the ring like?” Catelyn would not be distracted from her chosen topic of conversation, apparently. She sat down across from him and gave him an expectant, excited look.

What was it with women and engagement rings?

“I’m sure Sansa will show it to you if all goes to plan,” Stannis said, taking his little revenge for Sansa’s tears by depriving Catelyn of a proper description of the ring. It was probably petty, but he didn’t really care. Catelyn had made Sansa cry.

Catelyn looked disappointed, but recovered relatively quickly. “You’ll have to come by next weekend for dinner,” she said with a sweet smile, “I insist.”

“Thank you,” Stannis said, trying to sound gracious, “I’m sure Sansa would like that.”

“Of course she would,” Catelyn said, a slightly frightening gleam appearing in her eyes, “we’ll have to start talking about the wedding preparations, after all!”

Stannis and Ned looked at each other, and he was sure Ned’s expression of weary exasperation probably matched his own down to the very last detail.

“So soon?” Stannis said, his voice a bit faint.

“Oh, yes. If you’re going to have a wedding next summer you’re going to have to hop to it. There’s so much to be done!”

Stannis swallowed and nodded. Catelyn was probably right.
His stomach did a small flip at the thought that he might be married again soon. It was an exciting prospect.

First he needed to go and propose to the bride, however.

Chapter End Notes

Most of you are probably aware, but I posted a one-shot set in this verse of Ned POV scenes on Friday. Here it is!
Sansa was not poor by any stretch of the word, and she would probably be able to buy all the couture dresses she wanted using the money that had been put in a trust for her when she had been born. She rarely used that money for frivolous expenses, however, and preferred to make do with her teacher’s salary for the most part. Which was probably why she acted quite pleased when Stannis said he wanted to take her shopping after lunch.

It was not really an activity he enjoyed, but he wanted Sansa to have a new dress for the evening because he knew she would like that.

“Any particular reason you’re spoiling me today?” Sansa asked as they parked in the high end shopping district. Her smile was almost blinding.

“Yes,” he said, leaving it at that.

“Ooh, so mysterious,” Sansa giggled, “I like it.”

The benefit of shopping in stores that sold dresses that cost an arm and a leg was the way there were always comfortable seats for him. Usually refreshments, too. It was a bit tedious to wait as the shop assistants fell all over themselves to show Sansa all the latest designs, linger as Sansa chose which ones to try on, and stay put as Sansa disappeared into the lavish changing rooms, but he tried not to appear very bored.

The only really good part was when Sansa emerged to show him how the dresses looked.

She had a good eye, and rarely elected to try on a dress that did not end up suiting her well. Choosing just one dress to buy proved impossible, and as Stannis was in a generous mood he told Sansa she didn’t have to. They ended up walking back to the car with three dresses from two different shops, and two pairs of shoes from Sansa’s favourite designer. Or at least he walked. He was pretty sure Sansa floated.

“You should take Shireen shopping like this,” Sansa said once they were on the road. She was glowing.

Stannis gave Sansa a quick sceptical look. “She’d probably like it better if you took her,” he said, feeling confident that what he was saying was true. “You could just take my credit card,” he added, raising an eyebrow.

“Don’t you dare say something like that if you don’t mean it,” Sansa said, her tone too playful and happy to come off in any way as threatening.

“I mean it,” he said, feeling his lips quirking into a smile.

Sansa placed her hand on his thigh and kept it there while they drove in silence for a little while.

“Where are we going?” Sansa eventually said, sounding confused. She had noticed that Stannis was not heading back to their apartment.

“We have a few appointments to get to,” Stannis said, keeping his words deliberately vague.
“Appointments?” Sansa sounded surprised, but a little excited, too.

“Yes.”

Sansa seemed to realise that he meant for the appointments to be a surprise and didn’t ask any further questions.

When they reached their destination he heard Sansa draw in a sharp breath.


“You mentioned you wanted to come here last summer,” Stannis reminded her, hoping her reaction to the spa meant that she was pleased, “I’ve booked you in for a massage, a manicure and a pedicure.”

“Are you serious?” Sansa squealed, gaping at him in amazement.

“Yes,” he said, unable to keep from smiling at her reaction.

“But… what are you going to do while I’m in there?” she asked, flushed and blinking at him in disbelief.

“There are hot tubs and saunas and things,” he explained. He fully intended to take advantage of the amenities while Sansa got her treatments. His muscles were tense, and he was anxious about the question he was planning to pop that evening. He was fairly certain Sansa would say yes, but it was still stressful.

“Oh, but I don’t have my bikini,” Sansa said, sounding a little disheartened.

“I packed it for you,” Stannis reassured her, “there’s a bag in the trunk with your bikini and all your toiletries and things, too.” (Making sure of this had been item number five on his list.)

Sansa leant over the gear stick and kissed him. It was a surprisingly deep kiss, and Stannis felt very flustered by the time she pulled away.

“I love you,” she whispered.

He became even more flustered at that, but managed to respond without sounding too witless.

“I love you, too.”

They enjoyed a most luxurious, relaxing afternoon at the spa after that, having their every need seen to in an environment that had to be seen to be believed. There were fountains everywhere, and hot tubs had been worked to fit seamlessly with the Dornish decor. They had a section of the spa to themselves, and Sansa joined him in the hot tubs and the lemon- and peppermint-scented saunas whenever she was in between treatments.

When she came back from her massage Stannis almost became jealous at the expression of carnal satisfaction on her face. She tended to look exactly like that after good sex.

“I’m sorry Stannis,” she said, sinking into the hot tub he had been lounging in with a sigh, “I’m going to have to run away with that masseuse. I don’t care that she’s a woman and that I’m straight.”

Her words were undermined by the way she cuddled up to him in the water, her hand coming up to stroke his chest idly.
“That good?” he asked, trying to make sure his jealousy did not bleed into his tone.

“You have no idea,” Sansa moaned.

Her voice and the sensation of her mostly naked skin against his in the water caused certain parts of his anatomy to start showing an interest.

“Perhaps I should make an appointment?” he suggested, wondering how she’d react. Would she want such a talented masseuse to have her hands all over him?

“Definitely,” Sansa said, sounding pleased, “you could pay attention to what she does and then do it for me at home!”

Stannis huffed out an amused breath.

“But you had better say no if she were to offer you a happy ending,” Sansa added, whispering her words into his ear and then nipping at his earlobe a little wickedly.

Sansa fell asleep in the car on the way back to their apartment, and Stannis couldn’t blame her. He was feeling rather boneless and relaxed, himself.

“We’re home,” Stannis said, making sure his voice was gentle as he reached over the gear stick to shake Sansa awake.

“Mm,” Sansa mumbled, “five more minutes.”

“We have dinner reservations,” he tried, feeling amused.

“We’re going to dinner, too?” Sansa opened her eyes wide and sounded rather overwhelmed.

“Yes,” he said with a nod, “and we should probably try to be there in about an hour.”

Sansa made a slightly panicked sound. “But I have to do my hair and makeup!”

Stannis smiled, thinking of item number seven on the list. “I have asked a certain Jeyne Poole to help you with that.”

“Jeyne?” Sansa’s voice was hushed and even more overwhelmed than before.

“She’s your friend, isn’t she?” Stannis asked, wanting to make sure his information was correct. Margaery Tyrell had been quite helpful, but he always had a difficult time telling whether she was being serious or not.

“We were friends growing up,” Sansa whispered, “but we lost touch.”

“Well, she’s apparently made a name for herself as a makeup artist, and when I spoke to her she said she was quite happy to help you with your hair, too.”

“Stannis…” she trailed off, shaking her head and looking at him with wide eyes.

“Let’s go upstairs. She’s due to arrive at any moment.”

Stannis retreated to the main bathroom of his apartment to shave and get dressed, leaving the bedroom and the en suite to the two women who were happily catching up with each other as Jeyne
helped Sansa get ready. They were constantly breaking out into peals of laughter, which Stannis hoped was a good sign.

When it was time to go, he made sure - for the tenth time - that he had the ring firmly tucked away in the inside pocket of his suit jacket, and tried not to pace around the living room like a caged beast.

“Are you almost ready?” he asked, raising his voice so it would carry through the bedroom door.

“One minute,” Sansa’s voice promised.

Stannis knew her well enough to know that one minute probably meant five, so he sat down on the sofa, and told himself to relax. They could probably be an hour late and their table would still be waiting.

Jeyne emerged three minutes later, looking smug and superior.

“Have a good evening, Mr. Baratheon,” she said as he helped her with her coat, “you’re going to die when you see her,” she added with a wink. Stannis swallowed, remembering how he had turned into a stuttering imbecile when he had picked Sansa up for their first dinner date.

With Jeyne gone, Stannis was left with nothing to do except stand around and wait for Sansa to show herself.

He did die a little when she finally stepped out of their bedroom. Or at least it felt as if his heart stopped beating for a moment as he took her in.

She was a vision.

He had seen the dress when she had tried it on at the shop, but it looked completely different on her now that she was in heels, and her hair and makeup was done. The cut of the dress reminded him of a chiton with a plunging neckline, but the midnight blue silk, and the the shimmering golden details at the waist and the shoulders of the gown, put him in mind of something out of One Thousand and One Nights. Her skin looked luminescent, her hair was sleek and glossy in its elegant updo, and her face looked almost otherworldly.

She was a goddess, and he was not going to be able to speak to her for the rest of the night.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t find my favourite clutch,” Sansa said, sounding a little breathless.

Stannis just nodded, still staring at her in awestruck amazement.

“Ready to go?” she asked, coming right up to him to fix his tie. His tie was fine, he had checked it in the mirror in the foyer when Jeyne had left. Sansa clearly just wanted an excuse to touch him. This reminded him of the fact that she was not some ethereal being. She was his girlfriend. Soon to be his fiancée if everything went well.

His powers of speech returned.

“Yes,” he managed, “you look beautiful, Sansa.”

She ducked her head and blushed. “Thank you.” She looked up at him and met his eyes for a moment. “You look quite handsome, yourself.”

They smiled at each other, and Stannis wondered whether she, too, was thinking of the way they
had exchanged similar compliments when they had first gone to dinner together. The way she looked at him when he was obliged to support her as they walked to the car - because she was wearing a new pair of sky-high heels - made him think that she was thinking about their first proper date just as he was.

Sansa exclaimed in delight when she realised they were headed for The Braavosi, and started trying to remember everything she had tasted last time and wondering whether they still had any of it on the menu or whether she ought to try something completely different this time.

Stannis made sure the maître d’ knew that they were celebrating a special night, and they had only been sitting at the very same table they had been given the first time for five minutes when a waiter arrived with a bottle of Champagne. Stannis accepted a glass so that he would be able to toast with Sansa, but he only had one sip.

The conversation with Sansa was decidedly different tonight than it had been two years before. They knew so much more about each other, and they were so much more at ease in each other’s presence. Sansa told him stories about the kids she was teaching, and he gave an account of a dramatic exchange that had taken place between two of his employees because they both wanted to take the same two weeks off during the summer season. It was the same sort of conversation they would most likely be having if they were at home, and the familiarity of it was wonderfully soothing on his nerves.

When it was time for dessert, Sansa winked at him before putting on an elaborate show with her fork, and Stannis couldn’t help but huff out a laugh as he recalled his embarrassing reaction to Sansa’s flirting two years before.

Instead of lingering over tea, Stannis suggested they go out into the restaurant’s garden. It was winter, so there would not be much in the way of roses to admire, and it had rained for most of the day before so the snow was gone, but there was an old-fashioned gazebo out there that they might explore, and the stars might be bright enough to be seen despite the city lights.

Anyway, Stannis did not want any of the other guests at the restaurants to overhear or witness what he considered to be a very private moment.

They had made it halfway across the garden towards the gazebo, walking slowly due to Sansa’s impractical footwear, when a few drops of rain landed on them. They were a little closer to the gazebo than the glass doors that would lead them back inside, so they picked up the pace and were almost at the steps to the quaint wooden structure when the drizzle turned into a downpour.

Sansa giggled as they stumbled up the steps, seeking shelter under the gazebo roof.

“Oh, no. We will trapped out here while it rains! Whatever shall we do with ourselves?”

Stannis didn’t answer her. He leant down and kissed her, feeling utterly enchanted by her joyful, flirtatious reaction to the rain.

When he pulled back, the words he had been searching for without much success for several days came to him as if he had been planning to say them all along.

He took a deep breath, reached for her hands and kissed each one before meeting her eyes and holding her gaze.

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you,” he murmured, reaching to push a lock of hair that
had escaped her updo behind one of her ears. The speech might be stolen, but Jane Austen’s words were timeless and classic, and they fit his feelings perfectly.

Sansa’s eyes widened to an almost comical extent and her lips parted into a small ‘o’ of surprise.

Stannis pulled the box out of his pocket and got down on one knee. Sansa’s hands came up to cover her mouth and she started to blink quite fast, her eyes becoming glassy with unshed tears.

He opened the box to reveal the oval sapphire he had chosen, mounted on a band of white gold and surrounded by little diamonds.

“Sansa Stark, will you marry me?” he asked, gazing up at her and hoping very much that the tears that were running down her cheeks were happy ones.

Sansa’s hands went from her mouth towards him and then back to her mouth a few times as she struggled to speak. His knee hurt a little, but he hardly noticed it as he was focusing all of his attention on her eyes.

“Yes! Please get up, oh, you crazy... yes!” she eventually babbled, her voice tearful and full of laughter at the same time. She was tugging at his hand, so he did as she asked and got back on his feet. She immediately threw her arms around his neck, kissed him full on the lips and pressed herself flush against the length of his body. He closed the box so that the ring wouldn’t get lost, and hugged her close as he returned her kiss with all the passion he had. She tasted like very dark, very expensive chocolate, and he tried to find every last trace of the flavour as he kissed her, loving the contrast of her innate sweetness and the chocolate’s slight bitterness.

They were both breathing hard when they broke apart, and Stannis was glad when he saw that Sansa was smiling. Her eyes were still a little glassy, but no more tears were escaping.

“Shall we see if it fits?” Stannis asked, giving her a small smile.

Sansa nodded and started blinking furiously again.

He re-opened the box and carefully pulled the ring out of its satin surroundings. Sansa’s hand was trembling a little as he took it in his, so he kissed her palm and her knuckles to still her. He heard her breath hitch as he did it, and somehow it helped calm his raging heartbeat.

The ring fit perfectly as he knew it would, and it looked just right on Sansa’s finger. As if it had always belonged there.

“It’s so gorgeous,” Sansa breathed, gazing at it in admiration.

“You are gorgeous.” Stannis hoped his sincerity made up for the slight cliché.

Sansa kissed him again, seemingly perfectly content with his words, clichéd or otherwise.

It was a perfect moment, and Stannis knew he would remember it for the rest of his life.

The rain let up for long enough to allow them to escape back inside the restaurant and then to the car. Stannis asked whether Sansa wanted to go anywhere, and told her that it was absolutely up to her.

“Just take me home.”

“As you wish.”
The heated look in her eyes convinced him to drive faster than he usually would have.

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Stannis and Sansa kissed frantically in the elevator - despite the camera - and Sansa’s elegant updo was quickly becoming a thing of the past. Stannis was burying a hand in her hair, ignoring the way it was a little sticky with styling products, and causing the carefully arranged locks to fall down into a wonderful disarray. His other hand was resting at the small of her back, pressing her close. In her turn, Sansa was running her hands all over his back and down his sides, never keeping them in one place for very long and always leaving him wanting more.

They stumbled from the elevator to their front door, somehow getting it open without coming up for air, already taking each other’s clothes off before they managed to get it shut behind them.

A careless trail of expensive fabrics later, they were mostly naked in bed, lying on their sides, facing each other, after having rolled around for quite a while. Stannis was trying to get Sansa’s bra off and cursing the inventor of the bra clasp for coming up with such a cruel and unusual punishment for hopelessly aroused men.

“Here,” Sansa said, reaching back to undo the evil thing deftly. “Sorry, there’s a bit of a trick to this one,” she said with a smile in her voice, “it looks good, though.”

He couldn’t disagree with her there. It looked even better on the floor, however, and her breasts looked their absolute best when they were totally uncovered and right in front of him. He moaned at the sight of her gorgeous nipples, already puckered and waiting for his attention, and fell on them with his lips and his fingers, needing to hear the needy little sounds she made whenever he teased her like this.

The sounds she made did not disappoint, and neither did her eager hands. She was on her back now, and he was hovering over her, trying not to crush her with his weight. One of her hands had snaked its way between their bodies and was already stroking his cock through his boxers, while the other was scratching lightly at the back of his head.

Eventually he couldn’t take the teasing touches anymore.

He hurriedly got to his feet, leaving Sansa on the bed wearing nothing but her lacy panties, and pushed his boxers down and over his jutting erection, getting back on the bed while he was still kicking the soft material off one ankle.

His fingers found their way between Sansa legs and pushed the scrap of fabric that was covering her to the side. She was already quite damp, but he would prefer her to be much wetter. He started to stroke her, his movements certain and confident, and soon he had two fingers inside of her as he coaxed her into creating more moisture for him.

“Do you remember what happened the first time I got inside of you?” he asked, his embarrassment over the incident long gone.

“Mm - oh - mmm,” Sansa moaned, nodding to clarify her unintelligible reply.

“That’s not going to happen now,” he whispered, certain that what he was saying was true. He knew how to control himself with her after two years of having her in every conceivable way, and he intended to fuck her until she begged him to let her rest, and then he was going to let her rest because of course he would respect her wishes, but after that he was definitely just going to keep fucking her.
His thoughts had his hand moving at a frantic pace, and soon Sansa was bucking up and gasping his name, already coming for him like a good girl.

He only gave her the time it took for him to slide her panties down her thighs, over her knees and down to her slim ankles, to recover. As soon as the lacy scrap of fabric was gone, tossed clear across the room, he was on top of her, spreading her thighs with his hands and encouraging her to pull them towards her body to cradle him.

Stannis guided the head of his cock to her entrance, taking a few moments to simply rub up against her and tease them both with the delicious sensation of it, and then pushing inside with a very deliberate, slow movement of his hips. He wanted to enjoy the stretch.

“Stannis, please, I need more,” Sansa whimpered, her hands on his arse and trying to push him in faster.

He kissed her and gave her a stern look. “Patience.”

Sansa did not seem to want to be patient. She kept pleading with him, her voice sounding very needy and imploring, and she kept groping his arse and trying to pull him deeper inside herself. He decided to back out a little instead.

“Stannis!” she cried out, and he felt her inner muscles contracting around the only part of his cock that remained inside: the head.

He started to move his hips, fucking her very lightly with just the head of his cock.

Sansa went a little mad underneath him, doing everything she could in an attempt to physically draw him in. Squirming, moving her legs around in an attempt to wrap them around him and pull him down on top of her, using her hands to grab at his arse, his back, his head, and his arms…

He tensed his muscles and resisted her with ease. He was considerably stronger than her, after all. Even with gravity on her side.

“Stop that,” he said after a while, using the deep voice she liked, “and be patient.”

Sansa gave up for the most part, but continued to squirm rather enjoyably. He liked how it felt, so he didn’t tell her off for it.

Once she stopped trying to make him move, he started to move on his own.

It took a lot of effort and willpower, but he managed to sink into her at a veritable snail’s pace, enjoying the little noises she made as he did it.

Finally, when he was in to the hilt, he let himself take a very deep breath. She was clenching around him, tightening up in an utterly maddening way, and he needed to breathe in order to think.

“Let me know if you need a break,” he whispered before he started to move, wanting her to know that he was definitely going to take a while.

Sansa’s hands had been resting on his shoulder blades when he spoke, and he felt her nails dig into his skin briefly.

He began to pull out, not quite as slowly as he had been moving before, but not fast in any sense of the word. Sansa moaned and scratched at his back rather pleasantly as he worked, moving in and out of her lovely wet passage at a very sedate pace.
His orgasm was building very slowly, just as he had planned, and he rested quite comfortably on his knees and his elbows as he continued to fuck her steadily, working towards a faster pace at a glacial speed. He peppered the skin of her face and neck with kisses, wanting to show his affection, and Sansa kissed him in return, her tongue a little desperate for his.

Eventually he was moving at a pace that was clearly more along the lines of what she wanted, and soon she was almost coming, her voice shaky and high-pitched as she begged for release. He didn’t speed up like he usually would to help her over the precipice. Instead he chose to maintain exactly the pace that had her nearly there.

It was incredible to feel the low-level fluttering of her inner walls around his cock and hear her becoming increasingly desperate. He almost wished he could keep her like this forever.

But eventually she started to come, and he could tell that her orgasm was all the more powerful for having been coaxed from her in such a patient, steady way. Not only were her inner muscles clamping down on him like they were trying to choke the life out of him, but her entire body was shaking and convulsing with pleasure. Her voice was raw from crying out for him, and she couldn’t seem to stop gasping his name.

He kept going, moving his hips steadily through the violence of her orgasm, sweating profusely as he denied himself his own release.

Eventually Sansa became nearly limp beneath him, moaning a little pathetically and whimpering that she couldn’t take much more.

He pulled out, still hard as anything, and started to surreptitiously stroke himself as he allowed her a bit of time to recover.

He waited until it seemed like she was becoming comfortable and sleepy.

“I’ve got more for you,” he whispered, rubbing his cock against her thigh.

“Stannis,” Sansa whined, “you’ve made your point, you have god-like stamina.” There was something very flirtatious and intrigued in her voice beneath her exaggerated whine, however, so Stannis was not really worried that she was fed up with him.

He pushed her, making her roll over so that she was lying on her stomach. Remembering that she liked it, he gave her arse a light smack. “Up,” he said, unable to keep his amusement at the squeak she had made out of his voice.

Sansa got shakily to her elbows and knees, her face resting on her forearms.

He sank into her quickly this time, and he worked his way up to a punishing pace almost before she had a chance to suck in enough air to make a loud, scandalised sound that sounded a little like his name, though she said it rather like she was uttering an unladylike swear word.

She was coming again within a minute, already so sensitive from last time, and wet enough to allow him create a very satisfying smacking noise each time he filled her.

With her clenching and fluttering around him the way she was, he didn’t stand a chance -- no matter how much he would have liked to impress her even more.

He started to grunt with each powerful thrust, the effort of keeping himself at bay making him lose control of his voice. His balls felt so tight that he knew he should be coming already, and he moaned as he imagined how good it was going to be.
The pleasure, when it came, was a blinding sort of release, and Stannis blacked out for a fraction of a second as it raced up and down his spine like a series of electric shocks. His hips were out of control, his ears full of wet smacks, and his heart was beating so hard that he thought it might escape his ribcage at any second.

Eventually he had to pull away and lie down, sweaty, exhausted and utterly spent.

Sansa rolled over to cuddle up to him, throwing a leg across his thigh and mumbling an embarrassed apology when something warm and wet trickled out of her. He didn’t mind. A little mess on his thigh wouldn’t exactly ruin his day.

Nothing short of a nuclear holocaust could ruin his day.

They were silent for a little while, but eventually Sansa spoke.

“That was very impressive, Mr. Fiancé,” she said with flirtatious amusement in her tone.

His insides wobbled at hearing her call him that, and he sucked in a loud breath in lieu of an answer.

“Do you think we’ll have time for more tomorrow?” she asked, drawing lazy circles with a finger on his chest.

“Definitely,” he murmured, “Shireen is staying with the Seaworths until tomorrow evening.”

“Mm, you thought of everything.” Sansa sounded almost exactly like he imagined a cat in a perfect patch of sunlight would sound like. “Does Shireen know? That you were planning to propose?”

“Yes, I told her,” Stannis said, hoping that Sansa would not mind. He decided he might as well come completely clean while he was at it. “I told your parents, too. They’ve invited us to dinner next weekend. I think your mother is excited to see the ring. And she wants to start planning the wedding.”

Sansa giggled and buried her face in the crook of his neck.

“I’m glad Shireen knows,” she said, moving her face so that her voice wouldn’t be muffled by his neck.

“But not that your parents know?” he asked, feeling a little worried.

“No, I don’t mind. I’m surprised how well my mother took the news, though.”

“Something you said to her when you talked must have helped her accept that Shireen and I are not just practice for your real life,” Stannis said, reaching to stroke her hair.

“I hope so,” Sansa sighed, leaning into his touch. “How did Shireen take it?” she asked, her tone a little nervous.

“She was pleased,” Stannis reported with a smile, “she said it was great that I was proposing, and she told me that she - that she cares about you a great deal.”

Stannis stopped short of telling Sansa that Shireen had said that she loved her because he wasn’t certain if Shireen would want him to tell Sansa about it. He couldn’t see why not, but he thought it best to be safe rather than sorry.

“That’s wonderful,” Sansa said, sounding a little tearful.
“Yes,” Stannis said, his own voice hoarse with emotion, too.

“I can’t believe I’m going to be her stepmother,” Sansa said after a little while, sounding both choked up and amused.

“You already are,” Stannis said, kissing her temple. “The wedding will only make it official.”

Sansa made a pleased noise and hugged him more tightly. “You really think that?”

He kissed her again. “Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

I based the dress Sansa wore to dinner on this one. You can thank Tommyginger for showing that picture to me on Tumblr. Thanks Tommy! :)

In case you haven’t read Pride and Prejudice, I ought to mention that Stannis’ little speech when he proposes to Sansa is what Mr. Darcy said to Elizabeth Bennet when he first confesses his love to her. ♥
The Sunday after Stannis proposed felt a little unreal. There was a hazy, dreamlike quality to everything that happened, and not just because Stannis and Sansa ended up spending the entire morning and the early afternoon in bed. They hadn’t really been having sex as much as they had been tangled up in each other, trying to get as close as they possibly could and enjoying the way their scents mingled as their legs and fingers intertwined. But of course he had attempted to be inside of her as much as he possibly could.

Eventually they stumbled to the kitchen to eat something, their stomachs rumbling and their heads a little vague from lack of nourishment.

“I can’t believe you got Jeyne to come and do my makeup,” Sansa said, drinking a glass of freshly pressed orange juice, “it was so amazing to catch up! We’re going to try to stay in touch now that we’re both working in King’s Landing.”

Stannis smiled at her, feeling pleased that Sansa was so happy to have been reunited with an old friend.

“But how did you even find out about her?” she added, sounding a little incredulous.

“Margaery,” Stannis said simply, cutting up a lemon so that he could add a slice to some hot water.

“Of course.” Sansa shook her head and smiled. “Did you tell Margaery you were about to propose?”

“No,” Stannis said, frowning at his lemon, “only that I wanted you to have help getting ready for a special occasion.”

“Hah, she has most likely guessed, then. I should probably call her and put her out of her misery. She’ll be dying to know what happened.”

“Later.” Stannis reached out a hand so that he could run his thumb over Sansa’s bottom lip. “I want you to myself today.”

“Mm, what do you have in mind?” Sansa asked, kissing his finger and smiling.

“I thought we might pretend to watch a film,” Stannis suggested, moving to catch a lock of her hair and twist it around a finger slowly.

“Pretend?”

“Yes.”

Sansa laughed and used the honey stick to put a glob of honey on his nose. He opened his mouth to scold her, but she was already licking it off his face and then sticking her tongue in his mouth, letting him taste the honey, too.

“Okay,” she said when they broke apart, “let’s go pretend to watch a film.”

They were quite well behaved for the first ten minutes of the film Sansa selected, but soon Sansa was stroking his thigh and sneaking teasing little glances at him, raising her eyebrow challengingly. He raised an eyebrow in return, curious about where she was going with this.
Her hand moved closer and closer to his groin, and Stannis decided he quite liked where Sansa was taking them. He kissed her when her hand reached his rapidly hardening cock, fondling him through his pyjama bottoms and making him want to take the damn things off. At least it wouldn’t be difficult to get them both undressed; they hadn’t bothered to put on any proper clothes.

Sansa moved to kiss his neck where there was no stubble to scratch her skin, and her hand found its way underneath his waistband, touching him directly and making him groan at the pleasant sensation. He touched and stroked her at random in return, petting her hair, her back and her arms aimlessly. She made happy noises against his neck when he started to scratch the small of her back through the satin of her nightgown, so he kept doing that for a while, unable to really pay any attention to what he was doing since her hand was where it was. It was strangely thrilling that she was using the hand where she wore the engagement ring to pleasure him. He couldn’t really feel the metal band most of the time, but the idea that it was there was deeply arousing.

He didn’t really know how it happened, but after a while he ended up sitting naked on the sofa with Sansa’s head in his lap, licking lazily at his cock as his fingers tangled in her hair and massaged her scalp. He hadn’t seen anything that happened on the screen since half an hour ago, and he was completely fine with it.

“Sansa, please,” he eventually moaned, needing her to do something a bit more focused to get him off. Her little licks and soft touches weren’t really doing anything except keep him hard and titillated.

“Ssh, this is a good scene,” Sansa said, her attentions not becoming any more satisfying.

“You’re watching the film?” he asked, looking down at her a little incredulously.

“Just for a bit,” Sansa said with an embarrassed smile, kissing the head of his cock in a way that made it jump.

“You’re a minx,” he complained, moving his hands from her scalp and down to her shoulders, kneading the muscles there lightly.

“You made me be patient last night,” Sansa retorted, a smile in her voice.

Stannis grunted, but didn’t say anything. He supposed turnabout was fair play. Still, it was a relief when the scene Sansa was so interested in watching finally came to an end and she started to suck him properly.

“Fuck, Sansa…”

He couldn’t open his eyes anymore. The pleasure was too intense, and her mouth felt so good.

There was a wet popping noise and Sansa’s warm mouth was suddenly gone.

“Hey -” he started to say, feeling very ill used, but then Sansa was straddling him and taking him inside with a low moan, pressing her naked breasts to his face and stroking the nape of his neck. He swallowed his protests and groaned instead, loving the way she felt around him.

“You were saying?” Sansa said, clenching up around him and sounding decidedly cheeky.

“It was nothing,” he choked out, “carry on.”

Sansa started to rock against him, her body pressed hotly to his. It was quite good, but not exactly what he needed after all that foreplay. He waited for a little while, wondering if she would start
moving more decisively on her own.

She didn’t.

She kept rocking against him, rolling her hips and making attractive mewling noises, and she ignored his hands when he tried to encourage her to get a little rougher with him.

He placed her arms around his neck when he couldn’t stand it anymore. “Hold on.”

“Wha -“ Sansa began, sounding confused. She cut herself off when he suddenly stood up, holding onto her thighs to keep them connected. “Stannis!”

He walked them over to the nearest bare stretch of wall, pinned her against it with his weight and made sure she was still holding onto his shoulders and neck.

“Let me know if it’s uncomfortable,” he managed, breathing a little heavily due to his arousal and the slight exertion of carrying her.

But Sansa just gasped, clearly liking the way he started to thrust his hips.

Stannis was in good shape, but he knew his legs would start protesting if he were to draw this out, so he didn’t hold back. He held onto her thighs tightly as he fucked her, panting into the crook of her neck, and listening to the illicit sounds of their bodies meeting. He was enjoying the way she was crying out, the sound of his name echoing more loudly around the apartment with each second that went by, and soon he was coming, his grunts mingling with her cries as he slammed himself into her a few more times.

They were still for a few heartbeats, but eventually they sank to the floor.

“I liked that,” Sansa mumbled after a while, kissing his cheek.

“Of course you did,” he said, pretending to grumble, “you want me to throw my back out, don’t you?”

Sansa giggled and kissed him again. This time on the mouth.

It was quite late by the time Stannis got dressed in real clothes and retreated to his study to check whether he had received any urgent emails over the weekend. He and Sansa had spent most of the afternoon absolutely glued to each other. After their stint up against the wall they had a long shower, groping each other so much that they almost forgot to wash, and once they were finally clean Sansa had decided to get him all dirtied up again because “that’s what whipped cream was invented for, honestly.”

He really hadn’t minded.

Stannis was pleased when it seemed there were no serious fires for him to put out at work. He was just forwarding an email to Robert for him to deal with when he heard the front door opening, and then a moment later, Shireen’s voice.

He smiled as he heard Sansa greet his daughter. They sounded quite happy to see each other, and judging by the snippets of conversation that carried through his door Sansa was already showing Shireen the engagement ring.

Stannis got up from his desk and went to join them, wanting to spend the rest of the day with both his fiancée and his daughter, doing something together as a family.
When he saw Sansa, disheveled and wearing hastily donned sweatpants - because she had probably 
been naked a minute ago - but still looking gorgeous and glowing with happiness as she showed 
Shireen her ring, he couldn’t help but smile. She was going to marry him. He would get to keep her 
around forever and be her husband.

Even though he’d had his hands all over her nearly without pause the whole day, he still went over 
to Sansa and put his arm around her, wanting to show his affection, but mostly just wanting to keep 
touching her.

“I’m so happy for you,” Shireen said, sounding sincere and smiling at both him and his soon-to-be 
wife.

He smiled back silently, wishing he had the words to explain how he felt, because ‘happy’ just 
wasn’t covering the full spectrum of positive feelings he was experiencing.

Hopefully his girls could tell how he felt, anyway.

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“You’re throwing a dinner party?” Robert repeated, a look of supreme scepticism on his face.

“Yes, that’s what I just said.” Stannis resisted the urge to cross his arms in front of his chest and 
scowl at his brother. Renly and Loras had not been this difficult about this. They had just cheerfully 
accepted the invitation without a fuss.

“Who’s going to cook?” Robert asked, looking baffled.

“Sansa is, and Shireen and I will help her.” Stannis knew that this was an exaggeration. He would 
be setting the table and cleaning up after dinner, but Sansa was highly unlikely to let him near the 
food. It was unfair because he did know how to cook some things. He had managed to feed Shireen 
on the weekends without burning the building down for several years, after all.

“Well, all right…” Robert said, still sounding a little sceptical, but cheerfully so.

“See you on Saturday, then,” Stannis said, giving Robert a curt nod and turning to leave his 
brother’s office.

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It was strange to have his brothers and their families in his apartment. They usually tended to 
gather at Robert’s house because it was much bigger, but Stannis had wanted to be in his own 
home when he broke the news of his and Sansa’s engagement to his brothers.

He and Sansa had agreed to make the announcement during the main course, and that Sansa 
wouldn’t wear her ring until after they delivered the news. As dense as his brothers could 
sometimes be, he was fairly certain at least one of them would notice the ring and ask about it if 
Sansa wore it from the get go.

When Sansa picked up her glass and gave him a significant look during a lull in the conversation, 
Stannis knew it was time. He put his cutlery down and cleared his throat.

“Sansa and I have an announcement to make.”

All eyes focused on him, but he saw Shireen exchanging a conspiring look with Sansa before they 
turned their heads in his direction.
“I have asked, and Sansa has agreed -” Stannis paused to meet Sansa’s eyes for a moment and she gave him a small smile and a nod, “- to marry me,” he finished.

“Really?” Renly crowed, sounding thrilled. Loras was smiling brightly, and the two men were soon looking at each other with the same frightening gleam that he had seen in Catelyn’s eyes. Stannis was starting to worry that the people around him might be a little too enthusiastic about wedding planning, and he was hoping Sansa would not start looking at him with that same frightening gleam at any point.

Robert was uncharacteristically quiet for all of two seconds, but then he was filling the room with his window-rattling laughter and getting up from his chair so that he could pull Stannis and Sansa into bear hugs. Cersei made do with raising an eyebrow and then her glass, giving them a halfhearted toast as her husband attempted to collapse Stannis’ lung.

“I’ll start working on my speech right away,” Robert declared with a wide grin, “I know just how I’ll start it! I’ll tell that joke about the septon, the shadow-binder and the knight, and then I’ll explain how it was all thanks to me that you two lovebirds hit it off at Bran’s birthday party.”

“Hold on,” Renly said, crossing his arms over his chest, “why are you assuming you’ll be best man? I’m his brother, too, you know.”

Stannis felt a headache coming on.

“Uncle Robert, Uncle Renly?” Shireen had spoken up, looking at her uncles in mild amusement. Everyone turned to look at her, but she did not seem bothered by the attention. She had looked down at her plate and was focusing on piling salmon onto her fork. “You know Davos will be Dad’s best man, don’t you?”

Robert and Renly turned to look at Stannis at that, and Stannis had to quickly hide his bemused expression.

“Er, that’s true,” Stannis said, clearing his throat, “we agreed to stand up for each other a long time ago.”

“Was he your best man when you married Selyse, then?” Sansa asked, giving him a curious look.

“I didn’t have a best man back then. Selyse and I just went to a judge,” Stannis explained with a shrug.

Robert returned to his seat and sat down with a pout. “I can still give a speech if I want,” he said mutinously.

“Me too,” Renly immediately added.

“Of course you can both give speeches,” Sansa said, her tone kind, “thank you.”

Stannis exchanged a knowing look with Shireen. They were probably the only two people at the table who knew Sansa well enough to realise how amused she was at Robert and Renly’s expense.

“How about you, Sansa?” Loras spoke up, “are you going to have a maid of honour?”

“I’m still thinking about it, but I might ask Arya,” Sansa said, unable to hide her amusement, “naming her my maid of honour would probably be the only way to get her to wear something appropriate for the occasion.”
“Margaery will be heartbroken,” Loras said, raising an eyebrow.

“It’s too early for heartbreak, I haven’t made any final decisions,” Sansa said with a wink.

“Well, can Renly and I be groomsmen?” Loras said with a wide, hopeful smile.

Sansa looked at Stannis, clearly hoping for answers. Stannis just shrugged. He hadn’t really thought about having groomsmen.

“We really haven’t ironed out the details of the wedding party yet,” Sansa said diplomatically, “but now that we know that you’re interested we’ll keep that in mind.” Sansa looked around the table and smiled brightly. “You should all feel free to let us know if there’s any particular role you would be interested in playing. We would love to be made aware so that we can see what we can do.”

Stannis noticed Cersei filling her glass of wine nearly to the brim and rolling her eyes.

“Could I be a bridesmaid?” Myrcella asked, blushing faintly.

“If we decide to have bridesmaids and groomsmen I will definitely consider it.”

“Cool!” Myrcella said, looking pleased.

No one else asked to be a bridesmaid or a groomsman, and they all ate in silence for a little while.

Myrcella spoke up again before long, however. “Did Uncle Stannis give you a ring?” she asked Sansa, her eyes lighting up with excitement.

“Of course he did,” Shireen said, drawing herself up in her chair importantly, “it’s gorgeous.”

“Oh, can I see it?” Myrcella asked, shooting Sansa a pleading look.

“I’ll go and fetch it after dinner,” Sansa promised, blushing faintly at the attention.

Renly and Loras started reminiscing about their wedding after that, and the topic carried them through the rest of dinner as most of the dinner guests had their own stories about the wedding to add. Everyone carefully skirted around the matter of Cersei’s embarrassing outburst on the day in question, but Stannis could tell that Cersei was thinking about it nonetheless. She was shooting daggers at anyone who dared look at her, and he was fairly certain she had already finished an entire bottle of wine on her own. The fact that it barely seemed to make her tipsy concerned Stannis. Her tolerance really shouldn’t be that high.

Stannis and Shireen cleared the table after dinner while Sansa went to find her ring, and Stannis hid in the kitchen while Myrcella, Renly and Loras all oohed and aahed over it. He really didn’t know how to act when people exclaimed over the ring, and it had been difficult enough to sit through it the weekend before, when Stannis, Sansa and Shireen had gone to dinner with the Starks.

Once he had finished loading the dishwasher - feeling relieved that Sansa was not in the kitchen to insist on doing the dishes by hand like she sometimes did - and putting away the leftovers, he had no reason not to join his guests, however.

“You picked such a pretty ring, Uncle Stannis!” Myrcella said as soon as she spotted him, “where did you find it?”

Stannis tried to keep his face blank as he explained that he had asked a jeweller to make the ring to
his specifications.

“Did you do that, Dad?” Myrcella asked Robert.

“Don’t be absurd,” Cersei snapped, “my ring is a Lannister heirloom.”

“Oh,” Myrcella said, looking down at her hands, “I forgot.”

“It will be yours, one day,” Cersei said, her tone much gentler.

Stannis watched the mother and daughter exchange soft looks, and thought to himself that for all Cersei’s faults, she was at least kind and loving to her children. Perhaps a little too kind when it came to Joffrey, but Stannis didn’t really know what Robert and Cersei could have done to fix that little sociopath.

Sansa served homemade lemon sorbet after they had all recovered from dinner, and even though he was usually not very fond of dessert, he had to admit that it was good. Not too sweet, and very refreshing.

When all the guests had left and Shireen had gone to bed, Stannis and Sansa ended up sprawled on the sofa, done in by all the work that went into throwing a big dinner.

“Should we have bridesmaids and groomsmen?” Sansa asked, her voice a little muffled since she was cuddled up to him.

“I don’t know,” Stannis said, kissing the top of her head, “whatever you want.”

“Do you think Shireen wants to be a bridesmaid? I don’t think I’ll really fancy having bridesmaids unless it’s something she’s interested in.”

“Er, I don’t think so?” Stannis had absolutely no idea, but judging by his daughter’s reluctance to wear dresses and general lack of interest in traditionally ‘girly’ things, he didn’t think being a bridesmaid was near the top of Shireen’s bucket list.

“I so wanted to be a bridesmaid when I was little,” Sansa said with a wistful sigh, “Jeyne got to be a flower girl when we were six and I was so jealous of the pretty dress she got to wear.”

“I’m sure you would have been an admirable addition to any wedding party,” Stannis said, feeling relieved that he didn’t really have any clear memories of Sansa as a child and could not really picture her at six, pouting about not getting to wear a flower girl dress. He had seen her now and again when she had been growing up, but he had never paid most of the Stark children much mind, and could only summon vague flashes of a well-behaved redheaded girl, with a button nose and oddly clean clothes for a child.

“I can’t wait to marry you,” Sansa said, her voice tired, but happy.

The words traveled through him like hot tea on a winter morning, and he wrapped his arms more tightly around her, wanting to feel her pressed as close as he could get her.

“But I was wondering…” she added, sounding a little nervous, “I know we decided to get married on the summer solstice, but I was wondering if we should perhaps wait until next year’s solstice?”

Stannis furrowed his brow. He had been hoping to have the wedding this summer, and he had started to have idle little fantasies at the very back of his mind about celebrating next Christmas with a very pregnant Sansa. He really didn’t want to wait too long to start having children.
“Why?” he asked, trying to sound neutral.

“Well,” she started, sounding a little hesitant, “I think we both want to have a baby after we’re married -”

“Yes, definitely,” he hurried to say, not waiting for her to finish.

Sansa kissed him and smiled when she pulled back. “I know you don’t want to wait too long.” she said, blushing faintly, “but there are a few things I’d like to do before my life becomes all about changing diapers and breastfeeding.”

Stannis supposed that was understandable. “Such as?” he asked, wondering what sorts of things she had in mind.

“Travel, mostly,” Sansa said, sounding relieved, “I really hope you don’t think I’m selfish, but I’ve barely seen the world, and I’d really like the chance to travel without worrying about a baby.”

“That’s not selfish at all,” he said, feeling that it was a very reasonable thing to want.

Sansa looked at him with love and delight, clearly pleased with his words. Stannis basked in the lovely way she was gazing at him, and thought to himself that one more year wouldn’t make that much of a difference. It was more important to give her this.

“Let’s aim for next year’s summer solstice, then,” he said, reaching to stroke the side of her face with a thumb, liking the way she leaned into his touch.

“Thank you.”

They didn’t do very much talking after that.

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Stannis, Sansa and Shireen ate the cheesecake the girls had made in total silence. Sansa kept throwing him anxious looks, and he knew she wanted him to try to break the tension somehow, but he had no idea what to say. The news of Shireen’s grandmother’s death hadn’t exactly come as an unexpected blow, and none of them had really known or cared for the woman, so it was hard to know how to handle the situation. Ought they mourn? Stannis had never been very good at this sort of thing.

“This cake is quite good,” Stannis said at length. He had a feeling there was probably more butter in it than Sansa had admitted, but decided not to comment on it.

“Shireen will be baking things all on her own before long,” Sansa said with a tentative smile, “she’s learning so quickly.”

Shireen didn’t really look up from her plate.

There was an awkward silence.

“Did your mother say when the funeral is to be held?” Stannis asked, grasping for something concrete to discuss. He always did better with facts than emotions.

“Next weekend,” Shireen mumbled.

“How are you going to get to Brightwater? I could arrange the flight for you if that’s what you need,” Stannis offered, feeling pleased when Sansa shot him an approving look.
“Mum said she’d call again tomorrow and we’d work out the details,” Shireen said, pushing her cake around her plate listlessly.

“It will be strange when Selyse moves back to King’s Landing,” Sansa said, her voice gentle and her words careful. “Your father and I will miss having you around during the week.”

Shireen looked up, but she wasn’t looking at Sansa. She was looking straight at him with a hopeful expression.

He blinked at her, but realised that she was looking for him to confirm Sansa’s words. He hastened to nod. “Indeed, we will.”

This seemed to bring Shireen’s appetite back. She finished her slice of cake and asked for another one.

“I suppose that’s all right,” Stannis said, “you said you used a healthier recipe?” he added, looking at Sansa with a raised eyebrow. He wasn’t entirely sure he believed it.

“Oh, yes,” Sansa said, nodding decisively.

“Yes, Dad.” Shireen was also nodding.

He pretended not to notice when Sansa winked at Shireen.

***

“Dad?”

Stannis pushed the screen of his laptop down so the email he had been working on wouldn’t distract him from the phone call with his daughter.

“Speaking,” he said, not really knowing whether he should ask Shireen how she was doing or how the funeral that had been held a couple of days ago had gone.

“Um, how are you?” Shireen said, her tone awkward and a little nervous.

“I’m fine, thank you. How are you?”

“And Sansa?” Shireen asked, avoiding his question.

“Sansa is good. She says hello,”

“Oh, okay.”

They were both silent for a couple of beats.

“Mum wants to stay in Brightwater. She’s been offered a job.”

Stannis inhaled sharply, but tried to do it silently. What did that mean? Would he be seeing even less of Shireen than he always had in the past? Would it become every other weekend? Or just once a month? The thought made him feel a little as if someone had reached into his chest and started squeezing his heart.

“She’s - she’s not coming back to King’s Landing?” he eventually asked, unable to disguise his surprise and unease.
“No.”

“I see.”

They were silent again, and Stannis wondered if he should offer to talk to Selyse about this. Try to convince her to change her mind or something...

“Only, I don’t want to move to Brightwater.”

“Oh,” Stannis breathed, probably sounding more relieved than he should.

“And I just wondered… could I keep living with you and Sansa?” There was vulnerability and hope in his daughter’s voice and all he wanted to do was tell her yes right away, but he stopped himself. It was a big decision, and he should talk to Sansa about the matter. They had travel plans for the summer, and this might throw them into chaos. He was fairly certain that Sansa would be happy to continue to keep Shireen with them full time, but it wasn’t a decision he could make without first figuring out solutions if she had any concerns.

“I’ll need to talk to Sansa about it,” Stannis said, trying to use his tone to reassure Shireen that he was certain Sansa wouldn’t mind.

“Of course,” Shireen said, “I understand.”

“I’ll call you as soon as I’ve had a chance to discuss it with her, all right?” Stannis promised, “tomorrow, probably.”

“Okay. Thanks, Dad.”

“No problem, sweetheart.”

They said their good-byes and the call ended. Stannis spent a few minutes staring at the screen of his phone, wondering if he should call Sansa right away. She had gone out to dinner with Jeyne Poole, and she had told him they were thinking about going to a karaoke bar afterwards. He wanted to talk to her about Shireen right away, but perhaps it would be smarter to wait for a better time. He couldn’t expect her to make those sorts of decisions with him over the phone while she was distracted by some drunkard’s awful rendition of Brave Danny Flint.

He attempted to stay up and wait for her to come home as she had said she would be returning at a decent hour, but he was so exhausted that he ended up falling asleep on the sofa before the late evening news came on.

Sansa woke him up when she got back, but he was too groggy and confused to ask her about Shireen. He just let Sansa drag him to bed, enjoying the way she undressed him and tucked him into bed completely in the nude. He usually never slept naked, but it was sort of nice, and he was too tired to ask for pyjamas.

As he was naked when he woke up the following morning, and Sansa was also naked, he ended up getting very - er - distracted and was almost late for work. In his rush he didn’t manage to ask Sansa about what she would think of letting Shireen stay with them on a more permanent basis, but he promised himself he would talk to her as soon as he go back from work.

“Sansa?” he called out as soon as he made it through the front door, pleased that he had been able to get home at a decent hour for once.

“In here,” Sansa called from the kitchen.
He kissed her cheek when he found her stirring what looked like soup at the stove.

“That smells good,” he said, giving her a grateful smile.

“I’m trying a recipe Marya gave me,” she explained, sounding happy.

Stannis sat down at the kitchen table and wondered how he should put his thoughts into words.

“Have you heard from Shireen?” Sansa asked, giving him the opening he needed.

“Yes, she called yesterday.”

“Is she doing all right?”

“Yes, I think so. But there’s been a… development.”

“Development?”

“Yes. Selyse is moving to Brightwater. Permanently.”

Sansa dropped the wooden spoon she had been using to stir the soup into the pot and looked at him with two very wide, very blue eyes.

“But… what does that mean?” she asked, looking anxious, “will Shireen still be staying with us on weekends?”

“That’s the thing,” Stannis said, taking a deep breath, “she’s asked to continue living with us full time.”

Stannis was very pleased when he saw Sansa’s anxiety melt away to be replaced with relief.

“I’m so glad to hear that,” she said with a smile, “it would have been hard for her to switch schools and start a whole new life. She’s at such a vulnerable age.”

Stannis blinked at her. Was she saying that she was okay with it? “You don’t think it will interfere with our travel plans this summer?”

“I’m sure we will still be able to go on the trip we’ve planned. We’ll just figure it out,” Sansa said, fishing the wooden spoon out of the pot with some salad tongs.

Stannis stood up and embraced her from behind, wrapping his arms around her waist and kissing her neck.

“You’re certain?” he whispered into her ear.

“Yes,” Sansa said, her voice filled with happiness, “it’s been lovely to have her with us full time.”

The tongs and the wooden spoon ended up abandoned on the kitchen counter for a while as Sansa turned to face him and kiss him deeply. Stannis nearly got distracted again, but the thought of calling Shireen to tell her the good news kept him tethered to the here and the now.

“I want to go call her and give her the news,” he murmured into Sansa’s ear, “but perhaps we can pick this up again…”

Sansa swatted his shoulder playfully. “Was this morning not enough for you?”
“That was a long time ago,” Stannis said, kissing her earlobe lightly.

“Mm, go call Shireen.”

***

It was late when Stannis and Sansa stopped acting like horny teenagers for long enough to have a real conversation.

“Did Shireen tell you how Selyse took the news of our engagement?” Sansa asked, wincing as she tried to get a stubborn knot out of her hair with her hairbrush.

“Er…” Stannis wrinkled his forehead and tried to recall whether Shireen had mentioned anything about it. He was pretty sure she hadn’t.

“You didn’t ask, did you?” Sansa sounded amused.

“I’ll ask when I see Shireen,” Stannis promised, “but I doubt Selyse had anything very nice to say about the matter.”

“As long as she didn’t call me a playboy bunny so Shireen could hear, I don’t really mind.”

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If Stannis had to describe the feelings that settled over him when he and Shireen returned home from the airport, he would say that they were a little like the feelings of sitting by a warm fire, after digging into a delicious meal, with a favoured book open on page one.

His little family had been reunited, and if Shireen was to be believed, Selyse uncharacteristically wished to congratulate him and Sansa on their engagement. If it was true, Stannis thought it was good to hear that she was becoming less bitter about Sansa as it would make future interactions with her so much easier.

When Sansa looked up from her bridal magazines and smiled at him and his daughter, he felt quite as if the last puzzle of a very challenging thousand piece picture had just fallen into place.

His fiancée smiled. “Welcome home.”
The last months of winter and the spring that followed were some of the best months of Stannis’ life. He was engaged to the woman he loved, his daughter was with him, and work was pretty tolerable for the most part. Robert was actually pulling his own weight for some reason, spending more and more time at the office, and though this should probably be worrying Stannis, he decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth. Maybe his brother was finally growing up?

He enjoyed having his daughter around, so it was a little difficult when the schools let out for the summer and Shireen went to Brightwater to stay with Selyse for the holidays.

Stannis could still vividly recall the phone call he’d had with Selyse about the change in their arrangement regarding Shireen.

“Hello, Selyse here.”

"Hello Selyse.”

"Oh, it’s you. What do you want?”

"We need to talk about Shireen. She wishes to stay with me on a more permanent basis. There are details to consider. Custody, child support…”

"Do we need our lawyers for this?” Selyse had sounded tired and resigned.

"It might be best.”

There had been an awkward pause.

"Thank you for the congratulations,” he had then said, trying not to sound too stiff and uncomfortable.

"What?” Selyse had seemed confused.

"Er, the engagement…”

Selyse had made a strange sort of noise. A cross between a snort and a sigh. "Yes. I suppose congratulations are in order.” There had been something tight and strained in her voice.

Stannis hadn’t known what to say to that.

"I’d like Shireen to stay with me for the better part of the summer if she’s to be with you during the school year.” Selyse had spoken firmly, and Stannis had been able to tell that she would not budge on the matter. It was not an unreasonable request, so Stannis had decided not to challenge it.

They had discussed the child support payments for a bit, and Selyse had not objected when Stannis had proposed that they be reduced. They agreed to let the lawyers work out the details.

Selyse had not said one word about Sansa, which Stannis thought was a vast improvement. It was better that she should say nothing rather than spew venom about Sansa’s youth or her looks.
Stannis sighed and tried to focus on driving. He really had not realised how difficult it would be to part with Shireen for nearly the whole summer.

“She’ll be back in August,” Sansa reminded him as they made their way back from the airport, having just said good-bye to Shireen.

“Mm.” August seemed a long way away.

“We’ll be able to Skype,” she added, touching his arm reassuringly.

“Mm,” he repeated. It wouldn’t be the same.

“It will be easier this way. We won’t have to worry about Shireen when we go on our trip,” Sansa pointed out.

“Yes,” he sighed. He knew it would be easier, but they wouldn’t be travelling the whole summer, and the apartment would feel so empty without Shireen.

“So… am I to assume that your mood means that you’re not interested in enjoying the fact that we’ll have the apartment to ourselves?”

Stannis glanced at her quickly. She was giving him a very suggestive look.

He hadn’t really thought about the perks of an empty apartment. He had grown so used to the daily routine of the past months that he had quite forgotten that now he would have more than an occasional Friday or Saturday night alone with Sansa. They’d be able to do a lot more… exploring. All over the apartment. Maybe on the dining room table again? A jolt of electricity made its way down his spine, and a familiar pressure below his belt caused his trousers to feel a little tight.

“I’m interested,” he hurried to say, wanting to make sure Sansa knew that he had arrived on the same page.

“That’s good,” Sansa said with considerable relish, “because I’ve got some things that I’ve been wanting to show you.”

Stannis’ heart started racing. Lingerie? More things like that feather duster? His foot - er - slipped and suddenly he was driving over the speed limit.

He managed to restrain himself until they made it through the front door, but as soon as it clicked shut behind them he was on her, kissing and touching as if it were weeks and not a few days since they had last had sex.

Sansa giggled and twisted out of his grip. “Let me take my coat off, you silly man.”

He watched impatiently as she stripped off her coat and fussily put it away in the foyer closet, arranging it on the hanger just so.

When she had finished she turned to smile at him. “Give me five minutes. Make yourself comfortable.”

Stannis wanted to argue. He wanted to tear her pretty dress off and have her right there in the foyer. But he was curious about what she would do with the five minutes she was asking for, and he supposed he could just use the time to take his own clothes off instead.

He felt a bit strange about sitting on the sofa in his underwear, just waiting for Sansa to join him.
and trying not to touch himself. Thankfully, he didn’t have to feel strange about it for a very long
time.

Sansa walked towards him wearing perilously high heels, her legs encased in pale silk stockings
with a lace trim at the top, her nakedness only barely covered by a matching set of panties and a
bra. He knew they were a colour she called ‘peach’, but more than that, he knew it was a colour
that made her skin look even more beautiful than it usually did.

When she reached him, she took her hands from behind her back and revealed two pieces of silk.

“One is a blindfold,” she told him in a low whisper.

An image of her, blindfolded and totally dependent on him to make sure she didn’t get into trouble
- or make sure she got into the right kind of trouble - appeared in his mind, making his cock twitch
with interest.

“And the other?” he asked, his voice hoarse and his mouth completely dry.

“You could use it to tie my hands, maybe?” she suggested, trailing the soft silk over the skin of his
shoulder lightly.

Stannis swallowed as he tried to process that idea. She’d be utterly at his mercy.

“You - you want to try that?” he asked, trying to control his breathing and sound marginally
normal. It was difficult because Sansa was sitting down on top of him, perching herself across his
thighs and wrapping her arms around his neck.

“I’m curious what you’d do with me,” Sansa whispered into his ear, kissing his neck right after.

“But what if I came up with something you didn’t like?” he asked, almost too aroused to speak
coherently, but doing his best to make sure Sansa had thought this through.

“Then I’d tell you,” Sansa said with a smile.

“Um, all right,” he said, his heartbeat quickening dramatically at the thought of what they were
about to do.

Sansa kissed him, but only for a brief moment before she got up from his lap. She handed him both
the blindfold and the tie and turned around to stand with her back to him, her hands deliberately
held wrist to wrist behind her back. She obviously wanted him to tie her up first.

He couldn’t resist the impulse to fondle her arse before he tied her up. The panties she was wearing
didn’t really cover her round, tempting cheeks, and they were just there, right in front of him.
Sansa giggled and stumbled a little on her high heels in response to his groping.

“Mm, I love your hands,” she said with a happy sigh.

“I’m quite fond of yours, too,” he said as he tied her up, wondering if it wasn’t a mistake. He really
liked it when she touched him.

She turned around and knelt in front of him - he made sure to give her a throw pillow so she
wouldn’t hurt her knees - making it easy for him blindfold her. “I suppose I’ll just have to use my
mouth to make up for the loss of my hands,” she said, a wicked look in the eyes he was about to
hide from view.
His cock jumped as he imagined asking her to go down on him without the aid of her hands or the benefit of her vision. He tried to suppress a groan at the thought, but wasn’t quite successful.

Sansa was in the middle of raising an eyebrow at him when he placed the blindfold over her eyes and tied it securely at the back of her head. It was strange to look at her now, knowing that she wouldn’t be able to see the expression on his face. At the same time it felt liberating to know that no matter how embarrassed he got, she wouldn’t be able to see him turn red.

When he finished making sure the blindfold wouldn’t just fall off, he dropped his hands and took a deep breath.

“What shall I do with you?” he asked, talking to himself almost as much as to her.

Sansa bent forwards and kissed his thigh. “What would you like?”

He’d like to not be wearing his boxer briefs anymore. But he couldn’t ask her to - could he?

Maybe he could try it? She had said that she would tell him if he asked for something she didn’t want. The worst thing that could happen was that she would say no.

“I’d like you to take my boxers off,” he said, reaching to pull her head towards his groin. She’d need to use her mouth to do it, but he’d help her if it was too difficult.

Sansa didn’t utter a word of complaint. She just started to look for the waistband, nosing his erection in the process and making him grab a nearby throw pillow for something to hold onto.

Eventually, after a suspicious amount of time spent burying her face in his crotch and breathing hot air on some very sensitive places, she found the waistband of his boxers and bit it, carefully tugging the material downwards. He lifted his hips and helped her by pushing the waistband down at the back, but she did most of the work on her own.

Once the boxers had been pulled clear of his ankles, Sansa returned to kneeling in front of him, seemingly waiting to hear what he wanted her to do next.

His face felt very warm as he made his decision, and he was glad that she couldn’t see him.

“I want you to suck me off,” he told her, trying to keep his voice steady. He didn’t want her to know how uncertain he felt about asking this of her. He wanted it intensely, but he realised that it would be difficult for her without the use of her hands.

“Do you want me to suck your cock until you come?” Sansa asked, sounding for all the world as if she talked like this to him all the time without blushing and whispering all the ‘dirty’ words. Maybe the blindfold was making her braver, too?

“Fuck,” he hissed out, aroused by her boldness, “yes,” he added, answering her question.

“Do you want to come in my mouth?” she asked, tilting her head to the side.

He was assaulted by a vivid fantasy of himself coming all over her face, getting that blindfold dirty with messy globs of semen, followed by another fantasy of coming on her lacy peach bra and cleavage.

“I haven’t decided yet,” he groaned, “no more questions. Get to work.”

Sansa immediately complied, unerringly finding the head of his cock with her mouth. She started
by licking it, and then moving to lick the shaft, even though it was twitching, bumping against her nose, and making her give chase.

It was tempting to grab and hold his cock steady for her, but it was also intensely arousing and a little entertaining to watch her struggle.

She made a frustrated little sound when he twitched and bumped into her for the third time, and he couldn’t help the answering noise of amusement that escaped him.

“Be nice,” she said with a pout, moving down to lick at his balls instead of trying to chase his unruly cock around.

He loved it when she played with his balls, and he had started to keep the hair that grew in that entire area well tamed shortly after they started having sex because he had noticed that she was more keen to put her mouth on him that way.

“Seven hells,” he moaned as she sucked very gently on arguably the most vulnerable part of his body. It was incredibly good, but it wouldn’t bring him anywhere near his orgasm, and therefore it was also incredibly frustrating.

She tortured him like that for a little while, but eventually she moved to suck the head of his cock into her mouth, starting to bob her head up and down steadily.

Stannis had to squeeze his throw pillow very hard in order to prevent himself from grabbing Sansa’s head and pushing her down further, and he had tensed what felt like every muscle in his body to keep himself from thrusting up.

She was trusting him, and he needed to be worthy of that trust.

“Yes-yes-yes,” he hissed out, wanting to encourage her and inspire her to do more if she possibly could, “just like that, suck it just like that…”

Without her hands in play he could tell this would take longer than it usually would, but it was so hot to watch her do this - to know that she was blindfolded, tied up and at his mercy - that it almost made up for the lack of stimulation from her hands.

She took small breaks every now and again, licking him instead of sucking and catching her breath, but he really didn’t mind. It was quite nice to watch that, too.

Eventually he felt himself getting close, and he started to seriously consider whether he could ask her to let him come somewhere other than in her mouth. He felt slightly ashamed of the urge to come on her face as he knew it was not something he should want, but the idea of seeing his come on her skin wouldn’t let him alone. He always liked seeing it on her thighs or running out and over her folds, and he was convinced it would be even more satisfying to see it on her face or her breasts.

He wondered if this was some weird biological urge from his evolutionary forefathers, compelling him to mark his territory, and the thought just made him feel even worse about the stupid desire. He hated the idea of being a slave to some idiotic primeval drive.

“I’m close,” he told her, hoping she would say something to help him make up his mind.

She stopped sucking for long enough to ask him how he wanted to come, and went right back to what she had been doing.
Her question did not help him at all.

“Er, is anything off limits?” he choked out, needing to know if there were lines she would not cross.

“Not the hair,” she said quickly, only letting him out of her mouth for a second or two.

Before he managed to explain that he wanted to come on her face, his orgasm overtook him. He used a hand to still Sansa’s face and pulled out of her mouth, his other hand going to work, pumping away and causing two spurts of semen to land on her lips and nose before he was spent. Sansa flinched slightly when it happened, and opened her mouth more widely in shock.

She didn’t say anything, however, and Stannis couldn’t speak either. He just panted and stared at Sansa’s come-stained face, feeling an intense mixture of satisfaction, arousal and shame.

He was just about to apologise when Sansa started to try to lick his come where it was slowly running down towards her chin, clearly attempting to clean herself up without the use of her hands. It wasn’t particularly dignified, but it was still the most erotic thing he had ever witnessed.

Stannis allowed himself another moment to watch and fix the image in his memory before hurriedly getting up to fetch a tissue, returning as quickly as he could to help her get the stuff off her face before it started to get all crusty and horrible.

“Thank you,” she said when he finished cleaning her off, and he could see that she was blushing rather deeply.

“I think you should follow me now,” he told her, walking over to the dining room table and watching as she got very unsteadily to her feet and carefully made her way over to him, step by tentative step. It looked like it was difficult for her to keep her balance on those ridiculous heels now that her hands were tied and she couldn’t see where she was putting her feet down, but she made it over to him after asking him once or twice to say something so she could follow his voice.

Once she had made it over to him, he immediately pulled her panties down and told her to sit on the table. She was still in those pale silk stockings that seemed to be the kind that stayed up on their own, and her heels were still on. Her panties were caught on one ankle, and Stannis decided to leave them there.

He pulled up a chair and told Sansa to spread her legs wide. She smiled brightly and complied with his wishes. It had been a long time since he had made her spread herself open on the dining room table so that he could sit in front of her and eat her out, but she had clearly figured out that he was in the mood to do it again now. He would need a little time to recuperate from his last orgasm, and he thought she deserved a treat for letting him do what he had just done.

The scent of her arousal was powerful now that she had opened her thighs right in front of him, and he took a moment to just admire her, pink and wet and perfect as she was.

“Stannis, please,” she said after a little while, her need clear in her voice.

He didn’t say anything in return. He just brought his mouth to her entrance and stuck his tongue rather unceremoniously inside her.

“Oh!”

He would have smirked if his mouth weren’t busy.
She continued to gasp and moan continuously after that, clearly loving every stroke of his tongue. It didn’t matter what he did, she seemed to like it all. But he knew what would get her off, and after a while he started to use the flat of his tongue to lap at her hungrily, pausing now and again to suck on the swollen bundle of nerves that made her sob his name and tremble.

Feeling adventurous, he encouraged her to place her thighs on his shoulders and lean back on her tied up hands so that he could really press his face against her and focus on sucking until she screamed.

The sound of her cries was doing rather a lot to get him ready to fuck her, and he kept going a little longer than he usually might have since she was unable to use her hands to steer him away like she generally did when she was overwhelmed.

“Stannis-it’s-oh-gods-it’s-too-much!” she said in a rush, her voice almost a wail.

He relented after that, pulling back and taking her thighs off his shoulders.

It was quite nice to watch her panting, her skin all flushed and sweaty, knowing that she was unable to tell that he was observing her so closely.

“Stand up,” he said after it seemed as if she had come down from her high.

It took her a little while, but she managed it, standing before him on shaky legs. He was still sitting in one of the dining room chairs, naked and halfway erect.

“Is there anything in particular you would like me to do now?” he asked, running his hands over her abdomen and then down over her thighs.

“I - I don’t know,” she said, biting her lip. There was something in her tone that made him think she did know, however.

“Have you had enough? Would you like me to untie you?”

She blushed, though it was hard to tell with her skin still flushed from the orgasms he had just given her. “No,” she said, shaking her head from side to side.

“Tell me what you want,” he said, trying to insert as much authority into his tone as he could.

Her blush had traveled from her face to her chest now, and he noticed her squirm a little and press her thighs together. “I can’t.”

“Tell me now,” he insisted, raising his voice just a fraction.

She inhaled and blew the air out in a rush. “I want you to spank me,” she admitted, her face glowing red.

Stannis wasn’t surprised. Ever since that night in his study he had been thinking about the reaction his little smacks to her arse had garnered, and though it had seemed rather deviant at first, he had been coming around to the idea. He refused to hurt her, but more of those harmless little smacks might be… fun. Especially since Sansa seemed to derive so much pleasure from his small experiments so far.

“Come here,” he said, trying not to sound as nervous as he felt.

He helped Sansa lie down across his lap, lower abdomen pressed over his groin and her gorgeous
arse bare and exposed to his gaze. Her hands were still tied up behind her back, but she had bent her elbows slightly so they weren’t in the way.

His heart was beating so very hard, but at least his every breath was not hitching the way Sansa’s breaths were. She almost sounded distressed, but he knew she was just very excited.

Stannis brought his hand up, swallowed, hoping he wouldn’t disappoint her, and then let it fall down, causing it to land with a satisfying smack right at the centre of her left buttock.

She moaned and wriggled, helping his cock return to life. He was not quite fully hard yet, but he’d get there soon if they continued like this.

“Okay?” he asked, wanting to make absolutely sure.

“Mm, yes, more please,” Sansa said, sounding rather sinful.

He tentatively smacked her a few more times, rapidly becoming fully erect due to the sounds Sansa was making.

She wriggled her arse pointedly. “A little harder,” she begged, “please.”

*I’m not sure I can get any harder,* he thought to himself, but didn’t say anything out loud. She could most likely tell that he was quite... *excited.*

He used a bit more force the next time he smacked her arse, liking the noise and the way her flesh rippled a little.

“Yes, like that! Please!”

Emboldened by her encouragement and just plain *horny,* he went on to spank her until her cheeks were slightly pink all over, loving the way she wriggled and rubbed up against him as he did it.

Even with her arse all aglow, she did not seem to be in any mood for him to stop what he was doing, but he decided that she’d had enough. He wanted to fuck her now.

The only position that was likely to allow him to fuck her the way he wanted to, and wouldn’t be uncomfortable for her with her hands tied behind her back, was called: ‘bent rudely over a table’. He hoped she wouldn’t mind, because he was past the point of asking permission.

He manhandled her until she was bent over the way he wanted, listening for any signs of distress and feeling relieved when all she did was moan out more encouragements.

“Tell me how much you want this,” he ordered when he had the head of his cock in place, just tickling her entrance.

“Please! I want it, I want it!” she whimpered, spreading her legs a little more and trying to push herself back to get more contact. He held her in place, however, and didn’t budge.

“How much?” he asked through gritted teeth, the effort of keeping from plunging into her almost keeping him from being able to talk.

“More than anything in the world, just *please!*”

He pushed forwards, sliding in easily as she was absolutely *soaked,* and buried himself to the hilt in no time at all. They both moaned in identical relief, but he didn’t give her time to adjust to the invasion. He started to move, fucking her with everything he had left, one hand on her shoulder,
holding her in place, and the other braced on the table beside her.

She was coming almost at once, and he started to grunt with the effort of keeping his movements steady through her orgasm. It would be easy to give into the delicious sensation of her inner muscles clamping down around him, but he refused to start thrusting like a frenzied animal quite yet. He wanted to enjoy this for a little longer.

If Stannis hadn’t known any better he might have thought Sansa sounded as if she were having severe breathing difficulties. But he knew she tended to sound like this when she was in the middle of coming her brains out, and that her ‘breathing difficulties’ were nothing to worry about. He could tell that she was trying to choke out his name when she wasn’t making incoherent ‘ah’s, and it really did wonders for his ego.

He kept going at a steady pace until she seemed to have recovered, and that was when he sped up to a nearly impossible extent.

This time when she came she screamed even more loudly than when he’d had his mouth on her.

He followed her over the edge soon after, collapsing into the chair that was still behind him almost as soon as he was done, feeling like a rag that had been wrung out completely.

Sansa giggled when their breathing had slowed. “Again, again,” she said, and Stannis wasn’t entirely sure whether she was joking or not.

He gave her a smack on her still-pink arse just in case. “Behave.”

That just made her giggle some more, but at least she didn’t keep demanding an encore.

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It took them a month, but they went to each of the Free Cities in Essos and on a hike in the vast Dothraki sea. Sansa insisted on going to a Dothraki horse breeder Willas Tyrell had told her about, too, and they were allowed to go for a short ride on a pair of true-bred Dothraki steeds. It was something Stannis had never tried, and the experience was incredibly memorable.

Out of the Free Cities, Sansa liked Myr the most, though she had been quite impressed with Titan of Braavos, too. Stannis ended having to send several bolts of lace and silk from Myr to King’s Landing as Sansa had been absolutely enthralled by the quality and the wide selection of fabrics available at the markets of Myr.

"The lace will be perfect for my wedding gown," she had said, turning her doe eyes on him and making him helpless to resist. If she wanted Myrish lace, she would get Myrish lace.

They spent many of the evenings of their travels trying to make up their minds about what sort of wedding to have, but they didn't make much progress as they inevitably got distracted unless they were in public.

They were in a beautiful park in Lys, originally devoted to a love goddess that had been worshipped by the Lysene throughout the ages, sitting on a bench and enjoying the fountains, the flowers, and the lovely weather, when Sansa wondered whether they might have an outdoor reception.

“Wouldn’t it be lovely? Just a relaxed party where the guests could enjoy the beautiful nature and the lovely weather...”
“You’re certain we will have good weather on the day, are you?” Stannis asked, feeling equal parts fond and amused.

“We’re getting married on the summer solstice, aren’t we?” Sansa said, resting her head on his shoulder and pressing her body in close.

“Sometimes it rains. Even when it’s summer,” Stannis said, reaching for a lock of her hair and idly twisting it around a finger.

“It won’t rain on us,” Sansa said, sounding as if she had already settled the matter with the forces of nature.

“Perhaps it won’t,” he said, a smile tugging at his lips, “but if we are to have an outdoor reception it will be a small matter to arrange for a party tent to be on hand. Just in case.”

A group of Lysene women walked past at that moment, tall, fair and beautiful and Stannis watched as Sansa gazed after them and bit her lip.

“You’re much prettier,” he whispered in her ear, telling her the complete truth.

“Don’t be silly,” Sansa said, shaking her head. But she kissed him nonetheless, and the smile she gave him when they broke apart told him that she had appreciated his words.

He gazed at her smiling face and admired her openly, not trying to hide his adoration at all.

“So, you’re not interested in touring the pleasure district tonight?” Sansa asked, her smile widening into a cheeky grin, “you don’t want to find yourself a Lysene love slave?”

“Why would I?” he asked, deepening his voice a little and tightening his hold on her, “I already have you, don’t I?”

Sansa giggled and halfheartedly tried to get him to loosen his grip. “You don’t think the more the merrier?”

Stannis inhaled sharply as his mind was immediately flooded with very illicit images. But as erotic as the thought of rolling around with Sansa and some beautiful, nameless blonde might be, it wasn’t something that he needed in his life. He knew exactly what sort of effect it could have on a marriage when a man did not keep faith with his wife, and Stannis had no wish to end up like Robert.

“No,” he said, once his heart started beating properly again, “I only want you.”

Sansa’s giggles faded away, and she kissed him deeply.

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Stannis and Sansa were back in King’s Landing by the time they made up their mind about what sort of wedding they wanted, and it was only Sansa’s idea about an outdoor wedding reception that survived the trip from Essos.

They agreed to have an old-fashioned northern wedding ceremony before a heart tree rather than in a traditional one in a sept, and as there weren’t really any proper godswoods in King’s Landing, it seemed logical to throw the wedding in Winterfell. Stannis thought it was rather fitting, too, as he and Sansa had met in Winterfell.
They decided not to go with any groomsmen or bridesmaids, though Davos would be Stannis’ best man, and Margaery would be Sansa’s maid of honour. (“Don’t worry, my mother has promised to make sure Arya will dress appropriately at the wedding, and Arya wouldn’t have enjoyed being maid of honour. Not as much as Margaery will, anyway.”)

Myrcella was a little disappointed that she wouldn’t be a bridesmaid, but she recovered well enough. Or so Stannis had thought.

He watched with concern as his niece stormed from Robert’s garden where everyone had just been having a relatively peaceful barbecue, chatting about the wedding as they sat around the table. She had looked rather upset.

“Shireen, do you want to go check on her?” Sansa asked, her tone reflecting the concern that he was feeling, too.

He was pleased when Shireen went after Myrcella without an argument. It seemed that the time his daughter had spent with Selyse in Brightwater had not had any undesirable effects on her personality.

“Robert?” Renly asked, the first to break the silence, “do you know what that was about?”

Robert removed the last piece of meat from the grill and came over to sit down at the table, his grip on his beer tighter than it needed to be. He took a long pull from the bottle and stared at the house with slightly unfocused eyes.

“Cersei and I - we’re getting a divorce,” he said, looking a little deflated.

“Is that all?” Renly said, rolling his eyes. “It’s about time - hey!” Loras had smacked the back of Renly’s head and hissed that he was being insensitive.

“No, it’s okay, he’s right,” Robert said with a sigh, “we probably should have split up a long time ago.”

Renly snorted. “You should never have married her in the first place.”

Stannis shot Renly a glare. He had gone through a divorce, and comments like that were decidedly unhelpful.

“I’m so sorry, Robert,” Sansa said, her voice soft, “is there anything we can do to help?” She was casting worried glances at Tommen, obviously wondering if it was appropriate for him to be there for this discussion. But Tommen was eating and looking unconcerned, making Stannis think that it was unlikely he was paying the conversation any attention.

“I don’t know,” Robert said with a shrug.

“You’ll be better off in the end,” Stannis said, thinking that it might be useful for Robert to keep that in mind.

Robert made a strange noise that might have been derisive or amused or neither. He ruffled Tommen’s hair affectionately and looked off towards the house.

Stannis knew Robert was wondering what sort of relationship he would end up having with his children. Robert had never been the most attentive of fathers, but Stannis could tell that Robert disliked the idea of losing them. (Well, Joffrey was no great loss, but Robert had been living without Joffrey for a long time. He had moved to Lannisport to stay with his grandfather when he
was fourteen, and had yet to return.)

They changed the subject after that, sensing that Robert was in no mood to discuss the matter, and not wishing to make things too awkward with Tommen at the table.

Sansa volunteered to take the dirty dishes to the kitchen once they finished eating, and Stannis decided to help her. He had a feeling Sansa would want a word with him in private.

“I can’t believe it,” Sansa said, shaking her head as she rinsed the plates.

“Oh?” Stannis said, keeping his tone mild. He was about as surprised about the matter as Renly had been. That is to say, not surprised at all.

“I know Robert and Cersei have never had the best relationship, but I just thought - I mean - they stuck it out for this long…”

Stannis accepted the last plate and put it inside the dishwasher with the others. “People get fed up,” Stannis sighed.

“I know.” Sansa put the cutlery in the sink to soak and turned the water off. “Poor Myrcella and Tommen…”

“They’ll be fine,” Stannis said, wrapping his arms around Sansa and kissing her temple. “I’m willing to bet they’ll be better off in the long run.”

“Myrcella seems to be taking it hard, though.”

“Yes,” Stannis agreed, sighing again.

“I’m sure Shireen will be a good friend for her to have as she goes through this,” Sansa said, relaxing into his arms, “she’ll be able to understand what Myrcella is experiencing.”

“You think so?” Stannis wasn’t certain. Shireen had only been a baby when he and Selyse had separated.

“She’s lived with the results of your divorce her whole life,” Sansa said quietly, “of course she’ll understand.”

Stannis took a step back from Sansa, feeling a little stung. Did she mean to say that he and Selyse had made the wrong choice?

“Don’t misunderstand me,” she said, reaching to stroke his cheek, “I’m not criticising. It’s just a fact that Shireen has grown up as the child of divorced parents. I think you and Selyse made sure Shireen had a good childhood.”

Stannis nodded, feeling a little awkward about his reaction. Of course Sansa hadn’t been criticising; he should have known that. He took a step towards her and kissed her lips, wanting to show her how much he appreciated her support.

“I love you,” Sansa said when they broke apart.

“I love you, too,” he murmured, stealing another shorter kiss.

The gathering broke up soon after Stannis and Sansa returned to the garden, the pleasant mood of the party having turned a bit sour.
Shireen was very quiet and thoughtful for the first few minutes in the car, and Stannis wondered whether Myrcella had told her about the looming divorce. He was just about to ask when his daughter broke the silence.

“Myrcella said that Uncle Robert and Aunt Cersei are getting a divorce.”

Well, that answered his question. “Yes,” he said, watching the road and wondering what else Myrcella had told Shireen.

Shireen seemed upset at the idea that Stannis might have known about the divorce and hadn’t told her. He explained that Robert had told them about it when Shireen had been with Myrcella, but admitted that he hadn’t exactly been surprised to hear the news. Robert and Cersei’s marriage had been on the rocks for a long time.

Shireen went on to call Robert and Cersei sick for shouting at each other in front of Myrcella and Tommen, and didn’t really calm down when Sansa explained that sometimes people got very emotional in the sorts of situations Cersei and Robert were in.

“It’s still not right.”

Stannis felt a little defensive when he heard his daughter say that. Did she mean to indicate that he and Selyse had been wrong to get a divorce, too? He asked her what she meant and was relieved when she explained that it was the fighting that wasn’t right.

Sansa touched his arm and he realised he had been gripping the steering wheel much too tightly.

Shireen asked why Cersei and Robert had married in the first place and Stannis was forced to make something up about how they had been fond of each other once. He really didn’t think Shireen was ready to hear that Robert and Cersei had practically had an arranged marriage.

His daughter seemed all set to discuss the matter further, wanting to know why someone hadn’t stopped Robert and Cersei marrying since they hadn’t been in love, but Sansa managed to explain that sometimes people simply had to be allowed to lead their own lives. He doubted he would have been able to explain this to Shireen without coming off as hopelessly condescending, so he was relieved Sansa was there to do it.

“Can you please promise you will stay together until the end of the world? I really don’t fancy any more separations,” Shireen said after she had sat in silence for a little while.

Stannis couldn’t help but huff out a laugh, and he heard Sansa laughing beside him, too. He looked at her, meeting her sparkling eyes for a moment before going back to watching the road, and wondered whether they would make it to the ‘end of the world’ together. It was perhaps a little naive and outrageously romantic, but he hoped that they would.

He took a steadying breath and looked at Sansa again for a brief moment. “We can promise that, right?” They had agreed to get married, and that was basically the same promise.

Sansa’s enthusiastic nodding was something he had to observe out of the corner of his eye, but it was very satisfying nonetheless.

“I think we just exchanged our vows,” Sansa said, laughing in that beautiful way of hers and making him feel warm all over.

All thoughts of divorces and heartbreak melted from his mind and he actually heard himself crack a joke, even though it was just a reference to something Renly had said at the barbecue. Sansa and
Shireen laughed, and the atmosphere in the car was light and happy for the rest of the drive.

Chapter End Notes

By the way, Stannis is not a biologist. His thoughts about certain things being biologically driven aren't super accurate.
Stannis knew Shireen was about to go to the cinema with Devan and could hardly wait for her to leave the apartment. It had been several days since he’d last had the time, the energy or the opportunity to do anything entertaining with Sansa, and he was already half hard just thinking about what he was hoping to do with her while Shireen was away.

Not wanting to be too obvious, he waited until five minutes had passed since Shireen’s departure, and then sat down on the sofa beside Sansa. She was looking at brochures they had picked up when they had last been in Winterfell, showing the different godswoods that were available for wedding ceremonies.

He put his arm around her and started to tentatively pepper her cheek, her jaw, her neck and her ear with kisses. His confidence grew when he saw her lips curl into a smile, and he felt almost certain that she was open to a bit of fun when she tilted her head to give him better access to her neck and breathed out a rather arousing sigh of pleasure.

“Do you want to go to bed?” he whispered, deepening his voice and getting ready to stand up from the sofa. He was sure she would say yes.

“I’d love to, but I’m on my period,” Sansa said, giving him a slightly apologetic look.

Stannis’ shoulder slumped and he wished he could deflate his arousal as easily as Sansa had just punctured a hole in his plans for the evening.

But perhaps his plans might still be salvaged? There were things they could do even though Sansa was on her period. She had often offered to do… those things for him when she was indisposed in the past, and he could offer to give her a massage, perhaps? She usually liked massages.

Somehow his ideas came out of his mouth all wrong.

“Maybe we could still do some things? You could go down on me…”

He knew he’d made a mistake even before he finished speaking.

“Stannis, I’m really not in the mood,” Sansa said, her body stiffening up and her voice a little frosty.

“I’m sorry,” he hastened to say, “I wasn’t thinking. Would you like me to get anything for you?” he offered, trying to think what she might want, “that tea you like?”

He was relieved when the tension in her muscles drained away, but her wintry expression told him he was not quite forgiven.

“No, I’m okay.” She was clearly not okay.

“I didn’t mean to demand - I mean, I thought I’d give you a massage and then maybe - “

“I love you, and I know you didn’t mean to come off chauvinistic, but I’m having really bad cramps and I’m not feeling entirely reasonable. Could you maybe leave me alone for a while?” Sansa’s was clearly attempting to use her usual kind and loving tone of voice, but there was something a little strained about it that made Stannis think it might be a good idea to just retreat to his study for a while.
“Of course, I’ll just go work in my study,” he said, feeling a little disappointed and frustrated, but understanding that physical pain was not likely to put anyone in an amorous mood. He doubted he would be very keen to go down on her if he were in the middle of bleeding from his genitals and experiencing a severe stomach ache. The thought made him grimace. Perhaps he ought to check one last time if there was anything he could do for her?

“I think there’s chocolate in the kitchen somewhere. I could find it for you if you want?”

The ice in Sansa’s eyes melted and she gave him a relieved smile and a nod. “That would be nice, thank you.”

Once the chocolate had been found and delivered, he risked a kiss and was glad when she kissed him back just like she usually would.

“I’ll leave the door open,” he said, standing just outside his study, “let me know if there’s anything else you need.”

Sansa said yes, but she was already burying her nose in the brochures again and looking distracted.

Stannis sat down at his desk with a quiet sigh.

There would be no sex for a while, but that was no big deal. He’d gone years. He could handle a couple of days. It would be fine.

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Stannis was careful to treat Sansa like spun glass for several days after his failed attempt to get her into bed. He ended up taking longer showers than he usually did, but hopefully Sansa didn’t notice. For some reason he had never quite become comfortable with the idea of Sansa knowing when and if he chose to get himself off. He knew it was stupid, since Sansa occasionally touched herself when he was too tired to do anything for her, and didn’t try to hide the fact that she had a vibrator. His cock still twitched whenever he remembered a certain day when he had come home early from the office and found her using it on herself. It had led to some rather mind-blowing sex.

Presently it was an ordinary Wednesday night, and Stannis was waiting for Sansa to finish in the en suite and come to bed. If his calculations were correct she was probably not on her period anymore, and he was hoping he would be able to tempt her into celebrating the fact.

Once Sansa was tucked in beside him, lying on her side and facing away from him, he made his way over to her and started to stroke the outside of her thigh. Slowly he inched his way closer until he was flush against her, his erection poking her in a way she would be sure to notice. He kissed her neck and moved his hand to one of her breasts, touching the nipple lightly.

“This is really nice,” Sansa said, her tone a little regretful, “but I’m tired and I have to go to sleep. I need to be at school really early tomorrow. There’s going to be a staff meeting before class starts.”

Stannis briefly debated whether he should beg her to reconsider, but she always respected his wishes whenever he said he was tired. She sometimes started touching herself if she was very hot and bothered, which occasionally made him change his mind about needing sleep, but she never tried to wheedle him into having sex with her.

He rolled to lie on his back with a sigh. “I understand.”

His erection was bound to go away eventually. He’d just think about… Robert.
Sansa stayed up so late on Thursday night that Stannis was fast asleep by the time she came to bed, so by the time Friday rolled around he was feeling both desperate and determined to have her. He tried to give Shireen hints about how she should go see another film with Devan or something, but she was completely oblivious.

Stannis ended up sitting on the sofa with both Sansa and Shireen for most of the evening, watching a period drama, munching on salted popcorn - “Not too much butter, Shireen,” - and constantly trying to figure out how much time there could possibly be left of the film. He kept getting hard because Sansa was cuddled up to him, all soft and warm and smelling delicious. Each time it happened he ended up having to concentrate to make his erection go away because it was not time for that yet, and his daughter was right there. Why could his body not understand when this sort of thing was inappropriate?

When the film was finally over he had to restrain himself from ordering Shireen to bed. They had agreed that she was allowed to stay up until midnight on Friday and Saturday nights if she wanted to, and he was not about to upset the routine by telling her to go to sleep at eleven. Instead he went to his study, thinking that he might as well try to get some reading done while he waited for Shireen to go to bed.

As soon as Shireen said good night and he heard her door click shut he turned his computer off and ventured forth in search of Sansa. He found her curled up on the sofa with her laptop.

“I’m thinking of turning in,” he told her, giving her a significant look and hoping that she would pick up on his meaning.

Sansa didn’t even look up. “Mhm, be there in a little while,” she said, not taking her eyes off the screen.

He hesitated, wondering if he should make his meaning more plain. If Shireen hadn’t been home he would have taken the laptop, closed it, and proceeded to fuck Sansa right there on the sofa if she proved amenable. But Shireen was close at hand, and he didn’t want to bulldoze over Sansa after the way he’d put his foot in his mouth a week ago.

Feeling frustrated, but hopeful that he and Sansa would be on the same page when she came to bed, he turned around and walked to the bedroom without another word.

Of course he fell asleep minutes after he got under the covers, even though he had been determined to stay up and wait for Sansa, and even though every cell in his body had felt charged with need.

He dreamed.

Stannis was somewhere very warm, and everything was moving. A boat? A ship? He wasn’t certain. The sun was bright, but he wasn’t worried about burning. That wouldn’t happen.

Sansa walked towards him, wearing a bikini for a moment, but then Stannis blinked and she was naked. This did not seem odd at all. In fact, Stannis was convinced that everything was as it should be.

"Why are you wearing all these clothes?” Sansa whispered when she reached him, stroking his chest which was suddenly bare. Or had it been bare the whole time?
"I’m not wearing clothes," Stannis said, and when he looked down at his fully erect cock he saw that it was true. Sansa was already stroking him and it felt perfect.

"Let’s have sex in the ocean," Sansa suggested, her hand speeding up and her breasts pressing softly against him.

"We’ll drown," Stannis pointed out.

Suddenly Sansa’s legs were spread wide and he was inside her, pumping away and grunting with pleasure as her inner muscles squeezed him.

Stannis felt like he might come, but then Sansa started to pour water on his face.

"Stop that," he said, feeling irritated. His mouth was getting all wet and he really didn’t like it...

“Stop that,” Stannis mumbled, his hand coming up to wipe at his mouth. It was no longer bright and sunny, and he was lying in bed. He had managed to drool all over his pillow. With a grimace, he sat up and fumbled about until he found the switch for his bedside lamp. Soft light filled the room.

It was well after midnight according to his alarm clock and Sansa was asleep beside him. He was painfully aroused due to his dream, though he could no longer recall any of the details of what had been going on. All he knew was that he had been having sex with Sansa and that he really wanted to make his dream come true.

“Sansa?” he whispered, hoping to wake her up.

She didn’t respond.

“Sansa, wake up,” he said a little more loudly, shaking her gently.

Nothing.

Stannis blew out a breath and tried to think. It was difficult as all the blood that usually brought oxygen to his brain was busy elsewhere. In an attempt to get slightly more comfortable, Stannis stuck his hand down under the waistband of his pyjama bottoms and adjusted himself.

Unfortunately, now that his hands was down there, it proved impossible to let go. He just needed a little relief. Just a tiny little bit of touching. And then he’d stop. Because this was not something he ever did while Sansa was right next to him. He wasn’t like her when it came to this sort of thing. He couldn’t stop thinking of it as private.

The tiny little bit of touching soon turned into a lot more, however, and soon he was almost holding his breath as he moved his hand, frantically chasing his pleasure and hoping the noise wouldn’t wake Sansa. He didn’t dare close his eyes in case she opened hers, and he felt like the worst sort of pervert, lying next to Sansa, staring at her face, and pumping his hand like his life depended on it.

Looking at her was sort of nice, actually. He usually didn’t use any films or images for… inspiration - though it had happened occasionally - and it was exciting to have someone as beautiful and special to him as Sansa was to admire up close. It was also rather thrilling to do this with her completely unaware that he was gazing at her features and thinking about her lips and getting closer and closer to his release because she was gorgeous and lying in his bed with his ring on her finger.
Feeling suddenly reckless, he reached for the covers and pulled them down, exposing Sansa satin-clad chest.

He let out an undignified strangled noise and sped his hand up when her nipples stiffened under her flimsy nightgown.

“Stannis?”

Fuck. He shouldn’t have done that. This was too embarrassing for words.

“Oh, just go back to sleep,” he choked out, feeling his face heat up as he tore his eyes away from her chest and faced her.

“Are you…?” Sansa trailed off, the question clear in her tone. She sounded sleepy and a little amused.

He wasn’t moving his hand any more, but he was pretty certain that she had guessed what he had been doing.

“I tried to stay awake,” he hurried to explain, feeling flustered and completely off-balance, “but I couldn’t, and then I had a dream where we were - um - and I couldn’t wake you to - er -”

“Have sex?” she finished for him, her voice a little raspy. Gods, but it made him want to start moving his hand again.

He nodded, and instead of moving his hand, he brought his body into contact with hers, trying to show her without words how much he needed her. “I can go down on you first for a bit if you want?” he offered, hoping that it would tempt her to say yes. It usually worked.

“Okay,” she said, still sleepy and amused, “I love you.”

He was too busy peeling the bed covers and her satin nightgown off her body to answer her, but he was fairly sure she knew the sentiment was returned.

Stannis was almost too distracted by his own arousal to remember what he was supposed to do, but his tongue knew its way around Sansa’s folds even when his brain was out of commission due to sleepiness and lust, and soon he had Sansa moaning incoherently for him.

He got her to come as quickly as he could and climbed on top of her - discarding his pyjama bottoms with a few ungraceful movements - as soon as he was sure that she was peaking. He was desperate to get inside of her.

He let out a strained groan as he sank into her warmth, loving how wet she was and the way she was spasming around him, obviously still in the middle of an orgasm. She moaned more loudly and whispered words of encouragement, telling him to go hard. He really didn’t need her to tell him. In the state he was in he couldn’t have gone nice and slow unless she had begged for it. And maybe not even then.

“Fuck, Sansa,” he groaned, his hips snapping forwards and his hands grabbing at her legs, bringing them up to point straight into the air and resting them against his chest. He was on his knees in moments, holding onto her tightly and just letting himself go. The wet smacking noises created a familiar sort of beat in the background, erotic and almost as much a part of the experience of fucking her silly as the sensation of friction along the shaft of his cock.

“How does it feel?” he gasped out, wanting to hear her say something a little dirty.
“It’s - oh - it’s so good,” Sansa moaned, her flushed face becoming redder.

“What’s good?” he asked, thrusting relentlessly and putting more and more of his weight into it.

“Your - mm - your cock,” Sansa moaned, crimson-faced and clenching around him the way she always did when he made her say things like that.

Stannis shuddered with pleasure and sped up, grabbing her ankles, spreading her legs further apart and fucking her like he was eighteen and didn’t have to worry more about his heart possibly exploding in the middle of doing things like this with every month that went by.

He really needed to add more cardio to his workouts. Better to be paranoid than dead of a heart attack.

He stopped trying to hold himself back from coming as soon as Sansa’s voice became high-pitched and sharp, and let her squeeze every drop he had to give out of him.

“Fuck,” he hissed as the relief of his orgasm made his spine melt. Soon it was as if all his bones and muscles had been replaced with Sansa’s favourite brand of organic honey, or possibly the softest part of a fresh loaf of bread.

He collapsed, unable to control his honey-bread limbs, just barely avoiding Sansa’s body and falling flat on his face next to her.

“I think you were starting to miss me,” Sansa said after a while, sounding extremely satisfied and rather smug.

“Mnf.” His mouth and nose were buried in his pillow. It wasn’t very nice as it was still a bit drooled on.

“I missed you, too.” Sansa was kissing the back of his neck in between words. “I’m sorry I wasn’t in much of a sexy mood this last week. I promise I’ll make it up to you.”

Stannis made a muffled intrigued sound. Make it up to him how?

“Next time you ask me to go down on you I’ll definitely say yes,” she whispered, using her breathless intentionally sexy voice. It really was ridiculous how well it worked.

He moaned, wishing he weren’t too tired for it right now, but also liking the idea of saving that favour for later. With a superhuman effort he managed to turn to his side. “That’s not necessary,” he rasped.

“I know.” Sansa kissed him. “But I think you deserve a treat.” Her tone, which had been upbeat and cheerful, became softer and more serious. “I love you so much,” she whispered, stroking his neck.

Stannis kissed her very deeply, feeling his heart swell with love for her and wishing to show her how he felt. He didn’t know if it was possible to convey the feeling of being safe, secure and warm with a kiss, but he tried.

They ended up making out for a little while before Sansa insisted that they should both clean up and get some sleep.

Right before Stannis drifted off he wondered if he could somehow go back to that dream he had been having. It had been lovely, and bright, and the ocean had been there…
The following morning, when Sansa was playing a piece from an opera they both enjoyed and Stannis was scanning the newspaper, wondering if he should perhaps get tickets to a live performance of Carmen, Shireen innocently asked if they’d slept well.

The question made him turn his head and glance at Sansa. She was giving him a very wicked look, and he felt his face warming in response to it. He had slept very well after finally getting the release he had been craving for nearly a fortnight, but he hadn’t really got a lot of sleep.

“We slept really well, thank you,” Sansa answered breezily, going back to the wedding magazine that she had been perusing.

Stannis only trusted himself to nod.

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Sansa seemed unusually subdued the evening after they had spent a very successful day in Winterfell, touring different godswoods and actually finding the perfect venue for their wedding. They had even finished booking it, so Stannis couldn’t understand why she wasn’t in a better mood.

“Sansa? Is anything bothering you?” Had she changed her mind about the venue? Was she having second thoughts about the whole thing?

“I’m thinking about what Shireen said today,” Sansa said with a sigh, “about wanting a pet.”

“Oh.” Stannis couldn’t help but be relieved for a moment. He had been starting to worry that Sansa wanted to look at more godswoods, or even that she wanted to get married in a sept after all.

“I’m wondering if we weren’t a bit too quick to say no,” she said, biting her lip and putting her latest bridal magazine away. Those magazines were taking over the apartment, but Stannis couldn’t find it in himself to get annoyed about it. Every time he came home to find Sansa looking through one of the glossy things it reminded him that they were engaged.

“It’s a big responsibility,” Stannis murmured, putting his book away, too. He left his reading glasses on. Sansa seemed to like them.

Sansa came over to his side of the bed and cuddled up to him. “I know, but wouldn’t it be good for her? To learn how to take care of an animal? To be responsible for it?”

“Perhaps,” he said, absently threading his fingers through her hair.

“I mean, part of me thinks it would be good for her, but part of me is still twelve and in deep mourning for Lady,” Sansa said, giving a halfhearted self-deprecating laugh.

Stannis wrapped both his arms tightly around her. Sansa rarely mentioned the puppy that Joffrey had killed, but she had told him that her name had been Lady and that she had been the most well-behaved, gorgeous animal there ever had been. He’d be tempted to think that she was exaggerating, but something about the conviction in her tone of voice when she spoke of Lady made him believe that the puppy had been something quite special. At the very least he was certain that the puppy had been very special to Sansa, and that was all he really needed to know.

“I know losing a pet is supposed to be a healthy way to learn how to deal with loss and death, but I really don’t want Shireen to ever feel the way I did when I lost Lady,” she added.

“There was nothing normal about the way Lady died,” Stannis said, his voice serious, “it makes
sense that it would be more difficult for you to work through the loss than it might have been under ordinary circumstances.”

Sansa sniffed a little suspiciously and took a deep breath. “Thank you,” she said in a very small voice.

Stannis didn’t know what to say to that, so he just kissed her briefly and resumed the stroking of her hair.

“Let’s wait and see if Shireen asks about pets again,” he eventually said, when he’d had a bit of time to think. “If she’s really set on having a pet I’m sure she’ll bring it up. We can reconsider the matter if that happens.”

“Okay,” Sansa agreed, burying her face in the crook of his neck and pressing herself close.

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“What is wrong with you?” Stannis asked, knowing full well that his odds of a straight answer were slim to none.

“What have I done to offend your delicate sensibilities now?” Robert scoffed, pausing in the corridor that led to his office.

“I do not have delicate sensibilities!” Stannis argued, pinching the bridge of his nose when he realised he had allowed Robert to derail the conversation.

“Sure you do.” Robert clapped him on the shoulder. “Good talk.”

“No, wait,” Stannis growled at Robert’s retreating form, “why have you left a turtle on my desk?”

“Shireen wanted a pet, didn’t she?”

Stannis furrowed his brow. Had Shireen gone behind his back and asked Robert to get a pet for her? “Well, yes,” he said, confused and irritated by the entire situation.

“The turtle is for her,” Robert said with a shrug.

Stannis clenched his jaw and tried to figure out what he should do. If Shireen had asked Robert to get her a turtle he didn’t want to make too much of a scene. But if Robert had just decided to do this on a lark…

“This conversation is not over,” Stannis said, glaring at Robert for a moment before turning on his heel and stalking off.

The next day, when Stannis had found out that Shireen had not specifically asked Robert to give her a turtle, he stormed into his brother’s office, determined to give him a piece of his mind.

“Why on earth did you decide to take it upon yourself to give Shireen a turtle?” he asked, feeling relieved that he hadn’t walked in on anything awkward as he hadn’t knocked.

“Did she like it?” Robert asked, looking up from his computer with a cheerful expression on his face. Stannis tried not to wonder whether his good mood was due to the glass of amber liquid that was already within easy reach on his desk. It wasn’t even ten o’clock.

“She said a turtle would not be her first choice, but she’s already growing very attached to it,” Stannis said, running his hand through his hair and wondering whether his brother was trying to
make sure he’d be completely grey in his wedding pictures.

“Oh, well. The lovely young lady at the shop said a turtle would be just the thing.”

Young lady? Had Robert been flirting with some shop assistant and ended up buying a pet in an attempt to get in her pants? Typical.

“No more pets,” Stannis said, “do you understand?”

“Don’t get your panties in a twist.” Robert took a sip of his drink. “I just thought it would be nice. Myrcella told me that Shireen wanted to have something to take care of.”

Stannis’ anger faded a little. Had his brother actually been trying to be nice? “You should have talked to me about it first,” he grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I’m a man of action, Stannis! You know that,” Robert boomed, laughing so loudly that Stannis winced at the assault on his senses.

Once the laughter stopped Stannis sighed and wondered if he shouldn’t just leave Robert to his day drinking. A voice at the back of his mind that sounded a lot like Sansa was telling him to stay, however, so he pulled up a chair.

“How are you coping with the divorce proceedings?” he asked, deciding that he’d rather just ask straight out than dance around the subject.

The amusement disappeared from Robert’s face and he took another, much larger, pull from his glass. “I’m fine,” he muttered.

“Ned told me you’ve been having trouble convincing Cersei to let Myrcella stay with you,” Stannis said, trying to keep his tone gentle. It felt very strange to speak to his brother like this.

“The bitch has Joffrey and Tommen holed up with her in Lannisport, and she’s insisting that Myrcella should come stay with her, too. Says I’m an unfit parent.”

Stannis was very careful not to glance judgmentally at Robert’s drink. Cersei was no better when it came to alcohol. “What does Myrcella want?”

“She wants to stay in King’s Landing. Her school is here, and all her friends.”

Stannis nodded, thinking that it made sense. Shireen hadn’t wanted to move away, either. “Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help,” he offered, not knowing what else to say.

“Thanks,” Robert grunted, “but I’m not sure what you could do that my overpaid lawyers can’t manage.”

He shrugged. “I’ve been through a divorce. I understand what it’s like.”

“You want me to start using you as my own personal agony aunt?” Robert snorted and looked marginally more cheerful for a moment.

“If that would help,” Stannis said stiffly, reminding himself that for all his faults, Robert was still his brother.

Robert sighed. “I don’t know, Stannis. Maybe some other time.”

He stood up and gave Robert a curt nod. “No more pets,” he reiterated.
“Aye, aye,” Robert said, rolling his eyes and giving Stannis a lazy salute.

Back in his own office, Stannis sat down at his desk and stared out his window for a little while. There was a small, vindictive corner of his mind that was trying to convince the rest of him that Robert was reaping what he had sowed, but a much bigger part of him was already convinced that no one deserved to go through the hell Robert was currently going through.

His eyes travelled from his window and to his desk, seeking out a picture in a frame that Sansa had given him recently. It depicted the two of them in their hiking gear, somewhere in the middle of the Dothraki sea. Sansa had taken the photo, turning the camera to face them, and she had somehow managed to catch him looking rather young and carefree.

Would he be in Robert’s shoes ten years from now? Going through another painful divorce?

He swallowed thickly and examined Sansa’s face in the picture very closely. She looked genuinely happy; her eyes were practically shining with joy.

Stannis hadn’t expected Sansa to want to go on a hike or on horseback; she was much more the type to want to stay at nice hotels and explore urban environments. But she had insisted that she wanted to try a hike because it was something he enjoyed, and because it was apparently ‘the only proper way to explore the Dothraki sea’. Stannis had been pleased to accede to her wishes, but he had made sure they never had to go without a real bed or a shower for too long, suspecting that her tolerance for ‘roughing it’ would not be terribly high.

No. They wouldn’t have a painful divorce. They had promised Shireen that they would stay together forever, and he was fairly sure he could keep that promise.

Maybe if they had moved their relationship along faster he wouldn’t be as certain, but they had taken things step by careful step, and Stannis felt like he knew Sansa well enough to be sure that she would keep her promise, too.

She loved him.
“Dad’s offered to come and pick Shireen up and take her to Winterfell for Bran’s birthday,” Sansa informed Stannis when she finally got off the phone. She joined him on the sofa where he was sitting and watching a mildly interesting news program. It was was much less interesting than Sansa, however, so he muted it in order to focus on her.

“She’ll be pleased to hear that. Do you want to call her and let her know?”

“No, there’s no rush. It’s not until next week. I’ll just tell her when she gets back from Renly’s.”

Stannis nodded. “Was there anything else you two had to discuss, or did it take him half an hour to tell you that?” he asked, raising an eyebrow. He was convinced that no phone call should ever take more than five minutes. This had occasionally frustrated Sansa at the beginning of their relationship when they hadn’t lived together. She had liked the idea of chatting with him over the phone before turning in for the night, and Stannis had never quite got the hang of it.

“No, we were just talking. I think he misses me, Robb, Jon and Arya now that we’ve all moved away.”

Stannis couldn’t imagine what it must be like for Ned to have had a house full of kids for so many years and then suddenly being left with only two boys.

“Did you like growing up with so many siblings?” he asked, wondering whether she’d want to have so many children herself. He really wasn’t sure he was up for five more children. One or two would be perfect.

“I know it makes me sound like a horrible, ungrateful person, but no. I didn’t really like it.”

“Oh?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I love them all dearly and I’m not unhappy that I did have them around, but they were all so loud and messy and all over the place, you know?”

“I think I know what you mean,” Stannis said, nodding at her. Having Robert as an older brother had been like having three older brothers. Three loud, overbearing, irritating older brothers.

“I was just always the odd one out,” Sansa said with a sigh.

She cuddled up to him and he put his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close and inhaling deeply to fill his nose with the scent of her hair.

“How so?” he asked, curious to know more about Sansa’s childhood.

“I was the only one who wanted to stay neat and clean and play inside with my dolls. I was the only one interested in learning an instrument and reading books about princes, princesses and happily ever afters. I wanted to keep everything around me organised and beautiful, and my siblings just didn’t.”

Stannis nodded. That fit with what he knew of Sansa and what little he remembered of her as a little
“I was so disappointed when all Arya ever wanted to do was play with our brothers and get scrapes and bruises chasing them around and rough-housing,” she said, her voice a little wistful, “I thought that she would be more like me since she was a girl.”

“You and Arya are about as similar as Robert and I,” Stannis said, shaking his head.

“I know!” Sansa laughed, “thank the gods for Jeyne. I would have gone mad without her.”

They were silent for a little while, and Stannis stroked her arm absently, wondering whether he should ask Sansa the question that was on his mind. After a lengthy internal debate he decided it was probably the sort of thing they ought to discuss before they got married, and now seemed to be as good a time as any.

“How many children do you want to have?”

Sansa shifted around and pulled back so she could look at him. She was biting her lip and looking at him searchingly.

“I think - well, we already have Shireen, so I just thought…” Sansa trailed off and took a deep breath. She was still looking at him as if she were trying to read his mind. “Maybe we could just have one or two and then see what we feel like after that?”

He kissed her quickly, wanting to reassure her. “That sounds sensible,” he said, stroking her cheek with his thumb.

“How soon do you want to start trying?” Sansa asked, biting her lip and blushing faintly.

“I was rather hoping that we might start attempting to get you in the family way on our honeymoon,” Stannis admitted, speaking a little hesitantly. Was it very old fashioned of him to talk about getting her in the family way? Should he have said ‘knocked up’ or something?

“I think that’s probably a good idea,” Sansa said, nodding slowly. “It might take us a while to conceive.”

Stannis felt a thrill of excitement. It was excellent to know that they were on the same page and that Sansa was willing to start trying for a baby so soon after the wedding.

“Do you think we should go see a doctor? Get some advice?” he asked, trying to keep his voice steady and dignified.

“Yes,” Sansa said, nodding and shooting him a smile, “I’m not sure when it would be best to stop taking the pill, and I’m sure there are all sorts of vitamins, supplements, and things I need to start taking at some point. It would be good to get some guidance. I think it would also be good if we both got a general check-up, too.”

Talking about the details of actually trying to make a baby made his stomach do flips, and his heart felt like it was expanding to some ridiculous size inside his chest.

Sansa relaxed against his chest. “We’re going to have to move,” she said, her voice a little far away, “there aren’t enough bedrooms here.”

“I’ve been keeping an eye on the real estate market for months,” Stannis admitted, hoping it came off as responsible and not over-eager. It was a part of his morning routine at work to check the new
listings. He wanted to be able to pounce as soon as the sort of property he had in mind became available.

“Shouldn’t that be something we should do together?” Sansa asked, sounding a little put out.

“Of course,” Stannis said, unable to disguise the surprise in his tone, “I’d let you know immediately if I saw something suitable. I would never buy a house without consulting you first.”

“No, I mean… do you even know what sort of house I would like?” Sansa was pulling away again and giving him an anxious look.

“A well-made, spacious one in a good neighbourhood?” Stannis said, blinking at her and not really understanding why she was looking at him the way she was.

“Yes, obviously.” She didn’t quite roll her eyes, but it was a close call. “I meant what sort of architecture and design and colour scheme and, and, and… “ She was gesturing helplessly and looking at him as if he should be understanding her.

Stannis furrowed his brow. He doubted he would be able to get a sense of what sort of architecture Sansa would approve of from a single conversation.

“How about I send you an email with a link to the listing whenever I see something that I think might suit us, and you can tell me whether it’s acceptable?” he suggested, hoping that would solve the problem.

Sansa smiled. “Yes, that would be perfect,” she said, cuddling up to him once again, “I just want to be included in the process.”

That made sense. Stannis started to stroke her arm again, and watched the muted figures on the television screen for a little while. Someone on the screen was signing a legal document and Stannis thought he recalled it having something to do with some corporation or other in Essos changing hands.

Sansa shifted in his arms and he heard her take a deep breath. “Since we’re talking about babies and houses and the future… there’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you,” she said, and he felt her stiffen a little.

“Yes?” He wondered what it might be. She seemed to be worried about what his reaction would be, so it was probably something serious.

“I - I know the wedding is still a few months away, but I just... “ Sansa took another deep breath. “I just wanted to let you know that I’m going to keep my name.”

Stannis felt confused for a moment, thinking that she was talking about her first name and that it was ridiculous that she was even bringing that up. A split second later he realised she was talking about her surname. Because traditionally women changed their surname when they got married. Of course.

“Er, all right?” he said, not knowing what she was expecting him to say and hoping she would explain herself a bit more.

“You - you’re fine with it?” Sansa sounded surprised. Relieved, but surprised.

“Well, it’s your choice,” he said, still a bit confused about why she was talking as if she expected him to start shouting at her.
“I thought you’d want me to take your name,” she mumbled.

“Do you want me to want you to take my name?” This was the most confusing conversation of his life.

“Well, no,” Sansa said, sounding a little confused herself. “I just thought… don’t you want to know why I don’t want to change my name?”

“If you want to tell me,” Stannis said, kissing her somewhere near her temple.

“When I was younger I was determined to become Mrs. Baratheon,” Sansa said, untangling herself from his embrace and standing up so that she could pace around the living room as she talked. “I grew up thinking that I would marry Joffrey and make beautiful golden-haired babies.”

Stannis couldn’t help the way his lip curled, but he contained the urge to make a disgusted sound.

“But then I actually became his girlfriend, and it was everything I had ever dreamed it would be… for about five minutes.” Sansa snorted with derision in a rather unladylike way. “Finding out what Joffrey was really like changed my outlook on so many things. It - it opened my eyes.”

He wanted to say something to comfort her, but sensed that he needed to stay silent and listen.

“I started to question everything I had made assumptions about before. I tried to look at more than just appearances, and I tried to think for myself instead of just blindly going along with whatever I was ‘supposed’ to do according to… I don’t know. Society? The patriarchy? Arya would know the right word.”

Sansa stopped pacing and stood still by the living room window, looking outside.

“Of course, I was only twelve at the time, so I didn’t really think about all of this in the terms I am using now.”

Stannis stood up and planted himself behind her. At first he didn’t touch her, but then he decided to move her hair to the side and kiss her neck. Just a gentle press of his lips to her skin to encourage her to keep talking.

“Anyway, it really opened my mind,” Sansa said, glancing over her shoulder at him and smiling.

He gave her a small smile in return.

“By the time I was dating Harry I still hadn’t really considered that it would be possible to keep my name if we got married. I used to write ‘Sansa Hardyng’ in the margins of my notebooks at school.” Another derisive snort. “After I dumped him for being human garbage I remember looking through those notebooks and just feeling furious every time I saw his name connected with mine, and I started thinking about how unfair it was, and how it didn’t make any sense.”

Stannis nodded and ran his hands down her back in an attempt to be supportive and soothing.

She sighed and turned around, placing her arms around his neck and looking up at him with a curious expression on her face. He continued to stroke her back with one hand and lightly touched the place where her waist dipped with the other.

“Did you know that in some countries women don’t as a rule take their husband’s surname, and the children don’t either?”
Stannis recalled meeting people on business trips that had surnames that followed vastly different rules than surnames in Westeros did, so he nodded.

“I don’t think the marriages in those countries are any unhappier for it,” she said, her voice soft.

They stared into each other’s eyes, and Stannis tried to tell her without words that he thought she was amazing and that he would love her no matter what name she chose to go by.

“Anyway, I think Sansa Stark just has a ring to it!” she said, ending the tender moment with a mischievous grin.

Stannis huffed out a laugh and kissed her lips, liking the taste of her smile.

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“Stannis, do you want my yacht?” Robert asked conversationally, as if phoning people up and offering them yachts was a perfectly normal thing to do.

“Want it how?” Stannis asked, trying to mask his befuddlement.

“To keep! To own! To name it after Sansa and take it out to sea where you can fuck in total privacy. Except the crew might hear you if you’re very loud. Are you very loud in bed? I bet Sansa’s a screamer. Unless you’re absolutely pants at fucking. Which obviously you are not since she hasn’t left you. She’s not with your for your looks and she has her own money!”

Stannis took the phone away from his ear while Robert laughed uproariously and wondered how much of a hassle it would be if he had to get a new phone after breaking this one by throwing it at the nearest wall.

Too much of a hassle.

“Why do you want to give me your yacht?” Stannis asked through clenched teeth.

“Cersei wants it in the divorce. She can’t have it if I give it to you for Christmas!”

“It’s not Christmas yet.”

“I thought you might want to take it out for a spin on your anniversary with Sansa. It’s in a few days, isn’t it?”

Stannis was struck dumb. Robert had remembered his and Sansa’s anniversary?

“Stannis? Hello? Are you still there?”

“Yes… I’m here.” He wasn’t quite sure whether ‘here’ was some strange alternate reality or not, however.

“Do you want the yacht or not? I’m sure Renly will want it if you don’t.”

“No need to call Renly,” Stannis said tersely, “I’ll take it off your hands if you want.”

“What? No thank you?”

“Thank you,” Stannis said, trying not to sound too grudging.

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“Are you sure we can’t take it out to sea?” Sansa asked, walking along the deck of Stannis’ recently acquired yacht and looking full of wonder and excitement.

“Have you sailed before?” Stannis asked, raising an eyebrow. He hadn’t wanted to risk taking the yacht out in case Sansa got seasick.

“Not really,” Sansa admitted, “but I’ve always wanted to!”

“Perhaps we could take it out when the weather improves in a few months,” Stannis said, knowing that though the waters of Blackwater Bay were relatively still, the Narrow Sea would likely be a bit too choppy for a pleasure craft.

“Not now?” Sansa pouted, but it was a playful sort of pout.

“You might get seasick,” he said, reaching for her jutting bottom lip and stroking it with the pad of his thumb.

“Oh.” Her face fell, and it was clear to Stannis that she hadn’t considered that. She was quick to collect herself, however, and was soon looking puzzled rather than crestfallen. “What are we going to do if we’re not taking it to sea?”

“I thought we’d have lunch and have a bit of a look around.” Stannis had been aboard the yacht a few times as Robert’s guest, but he’d never really explored the vessel extensively.

“Lunch?”

A member of the small crew arrived just in time to lead them to a small table that had been set up with a selection of cold cuts of meat along with several different types of fresh bread, cheeses and patés. There were also strawberries and cream for dessert, and Champagne for Sansa. The table was in the salon, where large windows provided them with an ocean view. It was too cold outside, though it was a cloudless and beautiful winter day, to eat out on deck.

“I could get used to this,” Sansa said in a hushed voice when the member of the crew who had poured her Champagne turned away to put the bottle away in its bucket of ice.

They toasted their three years together and spent an enjoyable hour talking of nothing very serious at all as they tasted the delicious food and enjoyed the view.

After they had eaten they started to explore the yacht. Stannis began the tour by showing Sansa the places he was familiar with, but somehow they ended up on the bed in the biggest cabin without any of their clothes on, trying to be relatively quiet because Stannis had no idea if Robert might talk to the crew and try to find out whether Sansa was a ‘screamer’.

It was late in the afternoon when they finally found their clothes and did their best to straighten out their hair and attempt to look as if they hadn’t just been having sex all day.

“If traffic isn’t too bad we should be able to make it back to the apartment with enough time to spare to take a shower before Ned brings Shireen back,” Stannis said, looking at his watch.

Unfortunately Stannis was incorrect about that.

Sansa was still in the shower when Ned arrived with Shireen, and Stannis’ hair was still wet from having been in there with her just a few minutes before they walked into the apartment. He wasn’t really dressed in proper clothes, just comfortable ‘at home’ clothes, and as the bedroom door was ajar, the sound of Sansa singing in the shower was fairly audible.
Shireen didn’t seem to think this was anything out of the ordinary. She said hello, asked if he’d had a nice day with Sansa and disappeared to her room to feed her turtle as soon as he had nodded.

There was an incredibly awkward silence after she left.

Stannis was fairly sure Ned was highly aware of why Stannis and Sansa had wanted a shower, and for some reason Robert’s voice kept echoing in his head. The memories of his brother’s speeches about ‘fucking faces’, ‘screamers’ and fucking on ‘every available surface’ made Stannis’ face get uncomfortably warm.

“Er, would you like some tea?” Stannis offered, unable to stand the silent tension in the room.

“Thank you, that would be nice,” Ned accepted, looking around and clearly wondering where he should sit down. Stannis stopped himself before offering Ned a seat at the dining room table. Even though he and Sansa were always meticulous about cleaning up after themselves whenever they had their little adventures outside the bedroom, he did not want to ever see Ned sitting in any place where Stannis had on more than one occasion gone down on Sansa.

Stannis cleared his throat. “Let’s go to the kitchen. Sansa should be out in a minute.”

It had always made him shake his head in the past, but Sansa always refused to have sex in the kitchen. She insisted that it was not hygienic. He was rather grateful for it now, however, as he could offer Ned a seat at a table that he knew for a fact had never supported the weight of a very naked Sansa.

He busied himself with the kettle, relieved to have something to do with his hands.

“I don’t think I’ve ever really had a chance to speak with Shireen without other people around,” Ned said, breaking the silence. “I quite enjoyed talking to her in the car. She has matured a lot,” he added, looking out the kitchen window and obviously trying to appear relaxed even though his shoulders were utterly tense.

“Yes,” Stannis said, seizing on the subject of his daughter like a lifeline, “she’s growing up quite fast.”

They were quiet while Stannis finished brewing the tea, and the silence stretched on until Stannis had taken a seat at the table, steaming cups in front of both him and Ned.

“She seems like a good kid,” Ned said, sipping carefully at the hot beverage.

Stannis felt inordinately pleased to hear those words coming from Ned. He did not need Ned’s validation; Stannis knew Shireen was a good kid, and the fact that Ned agreed shouldn’t matter. Except it did matter to Stannis because Ned had once stormed into his office in a Christmas jumper and told Stannis that he was doing a shoddy job as a parent. It seemed to him that Ned was eating his words. Or at least admitting that Stannis had managed to salvage the situation.

“She is,” Stannis agreed with a nod. He hadn’t touched his tea, though he had moved the cup around on the table a bit.

“She and Bran get along quite well,” Ned said, moving his own cup around, too.

“Well, they’re friends, aren’t they?” Stannis said, feeling that it was a little odd of Ned to bring it up. They’d hardly want to spend time together if they didn’t get along.

“Hm, yes. Friends,” Ned said with a nod, sounding a little amused.
“Dad?”

Sansa had arrived in the kitchen. She was wearing a fluffy bathrobe and she was toweling her hair very carefully, sort of squeezing the damp locks. She looked confused but pleased to see her father and Stannis drinking tea together. Stannis hoped Ned wouldn’t notice that she was walking a little gingerly.

“Sweetheart!” Ned stood up and hugged his daughter, “it’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, too! Do you want anything to eat with the tea? We have some biscuits... no chocolate ones, though.”

“No, no, I’m not going to stay long,” Ned said, sitting back down, “and I’m rather full, anyway. Cat made some very interesting snacks today for the kids. They were watching those films with the elves, the wizards and those ugly trolls.”

“They’re orcs, Dad. Not trolls.” Sansa created a towel turban and sat down at the table, too.

“Yes, well, you know what I mean.”

Sansa and her father bickered good-naturedly about his lack of understanding for the fantasy genre for a little while, and Stannis sipped his tea, observing them interact. One would have to be blind and deaf to fail to understand that Ned adored his daughter.

Ned had finished saying good-bye and was just about to walk out the door when he turned around and said a few words that soured Stannis’ mood significantly.

“Oh, I almost forgot, Cat said to remind you that you’re invited to dinner on Christmas Eve, and warn you that Robert will be there, too.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Sansa said, hugging him again, “see you in a few days.”

Once Ned was definitely gone, Stannis felt it was safe to sit down on the couch and groan. “Robert will be at dinner on Christmas Eve?” he asked, half hoping that he had misheard Ned.

“I’m sure it will be fine,” Sansa said, already heading for their bedroom, presumably to get dressed.

Stannis was not as sure as Sansa claimed to be; Robert always managed to say the most awkward things, and there would be no escaping him on Christmas Eve.

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“I told you it would all be fine,” Sansa said as they got ready for bed after the long drive back from Winterfell. It was a little past midnight and Shireen had barely been awake for the last twenty minutes of the drive. All that delicious food and the excitement of the games she had joined after dinner had her walking to her room like some sort of zombie, nearly forgetting to say good night to him and Sansa.

“I suppose it could have been worse,” Stannis admitted. At least Robert hadn’t started to talk about sex.

“He was only a little drunk and sentimental,” Sansa said, raising her voice so that he would be able to hear her though she was in the en suite. The door was ajar and he could hear the swish of fabric. He wondered why she was changing her clothes out of view, but the thought didn’t linger.
“A little drunk?” Stannis said, making himself comfortable on his side of the bed and kneading his pillow until it was just right.

Sansa’s silvery laugh floated over to him. “You know what I mean,” she said, “anyway, he did us a favour. We needed to tell them at some point.”

Stannis sighed. “I suppose.”

“And it gave Shireen a chance to make those brilliant points of hers,” Sansa pointed out, her tone pleased, “she really endeared herself to Arya.”

“So did you, from the sound of things,” he said, recalling how impressed Arya had been with Sansa for not wanting to change her surname.

“Oh, that won’t last. She’ll be rolling her eyes at me the next time we meet,” Sansa said, sounding amused.

Stannis huffed out a laugh and turned to lie on his side.

“What did you think of the Christmas jumpers?” Sansa asked, and something about the extra nonchalant tone of her voice made him feel a little suspicious.

“They were a horrible blight on this world,” he said, not pretending to have changed his mind on the matter. Sansa had tried to get him to wear one of those brightly coloured monstrosities, only to collapse into a fit of giggles at the disdainful look he had given her for her trouble.

“So you still think all Christmas themed clothing is an ‘abomination’?” Sansa asked from the other side of the door, sounding as if she were quite close to the small opening that was allowing them to converse without shouting.

Before he had a chance to answer her, she had pushed the door open and stepped into the bedroom. Her appearance caused him to completely forget what he had been about to say.

Sansa walked over to his side of the bed and stopped in front of him, giving him a chance to look at her up close. She was wearing a sheer red negligé with a white fluffy trim and a pair of lacy red panties, and she looked like the most gorgeous holiday treat imaginable.

He cleared his throat and licked the very dry roof of his mouth. “May-maybe not,” he stammered hoarsely, having trouble looking away from her rather spectacular cleavage.

Sansa pulled the covers away from his body and straddled him, leaning down to kiss him almost in the same movement. He eagerly wrapped his arms around her and accepted the kiss, loving the way she felt in his arms. The white fluffy trim of her negligé tickled a little, but it was not unpleasant.

“Happy Christmas,” Sansa whispered when their kiss broke, her red lipstick miraculously unsmudged.

“Yes,” he said, nodding his head and agreeing that it was a very happy Christmas, indeed.

She bit his earlobe lightly before kissing it better. “How would you like your present?” she asked coyly, sticking her hands under his T-shirt and running them over his abdomen.

Stannis felt his face warm up a little. They’d had a lot of sex on their anniversary, and Sansa had
licked his cock a little in between bouts, but she hadn’t taken the time to really suck him, and it had been ages since she had. He knew it was a little selfish, but it was what he wanted.

“Go down on me?” he asked, hoping she was in the mood to humour him.

Sansa smiled and kissed him again. “I promised I’d say yes the next time you asked, didn’t I?”

He blinked at her in confusion for a beat, but then he remembered.

“You did,” he agreed, his heart beating faster and his cock twitching.

“I think you should be naked,” Sansa said, arranging her face into an exaggerated ‘thoughtful’ expression.

He hurriedly discarded his sleepwear.

“Much better,” she said with a wicked grin.

The aggressive part of his nature that sometimes woke up when she teased it out of him wanted to order her to get to work, but he kept silent and let her do as she wished.

She started to kiss her way down from his face to his chest, sucking very pleasurably on his neck and probably leaving a hickey or two. He didn’t care as he knew he’d be able to hide them under a shirt. She licked his nipples and his abdomen, looking up at him frequently and meeting his eyes. There was so much heat in them, so much desire.

He knew she quite liked his abdomen, so he didn’t try to get her to hurry up. She had started to fondle him with one of her hands, stroking his balls at first and then the shaft of his cock, making it easy for him to be patient for a little longer. The anticipation would make the eventual touch of her lips feel so much better, anyway.

Despite his thoughts about patience and anticipation, he growled a little in the back of his throat when Sansa gave his cock a miss when she was done with his abdomen and started licking and kissing his inner thighs instead. It felt incredibly good, but he had thought the waiting had been at an end. He got up on his elbows so that he could see what she was doing.

Sansa looked up at him, meeting his for a moment and smiling wickedly.

“Minx,” he muttered, half frustrated and half affectionate.

“You like it,” she said, suddenly licking the length of his shaft and making him inhale sharply and collapse back onto his pillow.

She licked him a few more times before moving to suck gently on his balls, drawing a moan of pleasure out of him. She was using her hand to stroke his cock while she played with his more vulnerable parts, and it was so fucking good.

When she moved to start licking at and sucking on the head of his cock, he got on his elbows again, wanting to watch his cock disappear between her red lips. She met his eyes boldly, but there was a blush staining her cheeks that betrayed her embarrassment. She could act like quite the temptress and the tease, she could be bold and she could do everything he liked without hesitating, but she always blushed when their eyes met while she sucked his cock.

He loved it.
When she started to bob her head up and down, holding his shaft steady with one hand and fondling his balls with the other, he couldn’t support himself anymore. As much as he enjoyed watching her, he ended up lying back down and closing his eyes, just focusing on all the deeply pleasurable sensations and trying not to moan too loudly.

After a while he tangled his hands in her hair and gave her subtle hints about the speed he wanted. He didn’t use any force, and he never minded when she chose to ignore the signals, but Sansa had said in the past that it was useful to know when he was ready for more intensity. She often did the same thing when he went down on her, and he found it rather useful, too.

Soon he was focusing a lot of mental energy on preventing himself from bucking up as his orgasm was so close, and trying to make his mouth form the necessary words to warn Sansa that he was nearly there.

He came with a drawn out groan, unable to keep from thrusting his hips just a little. Sansa was quick enough to pull back and compensate for the way he was thrashing around, but when he opened his eyes he saw that he had still managed to make a bit of a mess.

“Any good?” Sansa asked him a little teasingly as she wiped her chin with the back of her hand. Stannis could only manage an incoherent noise in response.

It was in moments like these that he sometimes wondered whether the past three years had been a very long, very detailed, dream. If it weren’t for the fact that his older brother was as obnoxious as ever he might have worried that he would wake up one day, and find himself leading the same grey and drab life he always had in the past.

“You’re not going to sleep, are you?” Sansa asked, poking him in the stomach.

“M’tired,” he mumbled. He’d make it up to her some other time.

“Would you still be tired if I said I wanted to do it again?” she asked, tilting her head to the side and fluttering her eyelashes at him coquettishly.

Seven hells. That was a trick question. It had to be.

“I don’t know?” he answered, feeling genuinely uncertain.

She kissed him lightly and pulled back with a smile. “Go to sleep,” she said with laughter in her tone, “if you don’t know whether you want another blowjob you must be tired.”

He furrowed his brow and felt even more confused. Had he fallen for the trick? Avoided it? What had happened?

“Don’t look so worried,” Sansa giggled, “we can pick this up again tomorrow.”

He relaxed. It did not seem as if Sansa was upset. Still, his brain felt as if it had been left outside in the sun for too long, and he had no idea what to say.

“You’re very beautiful,” he murmured, figuring that even with his brains slightly addled he couldn’t go wrong with a compliment.

With Sansa, he was starting to understand more and more, he couldn’t really go wrong at all. She loved him even though he put his foot in it sometimes. She knew that he always meant well.
“Thank you,” she said, her amused expression softening to a fond one, “now go to sleep.”

He was drifting off to a peaceful slumber almost before he could finish mumbling, “good night.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: In Iceland you can have a family of four people (mother, father, son and daughter) and they'll all have different surnames!

If I were to have a child with a guy called "Jón" (which is a very common name in Iceland) and the child turned out to be a boy, his surname would be: "Jónsson" which translates to "Jón's son" in English. If I had a daughter her surname would be: "Jónsdóttir" which - you guessed it - translates to "Jón's daughter" in English.

My surname is my father's first name with the "dóttir" suffix, and my boyfriend's surname is his father's surname with the "son" suffix. If we ever got married it would not by expected of us to change our surnames in any way.
Stags and Bunnies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“No,” Stannis said flatly, tired of repeating himself.

“Why not?” Robert asked, sounding thoroughly stubborn.

“Davos is my best man. He’s the one who will organise the stag party.” Stannis didn’t really want a stag party, but as Sansa was having a hen party it seemed churlish to deprive Davos of the joy of throwing one.

“Well, can’t I help him?”

“You’ll have to take that up with him, not me,” Stannis sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose and hoping Robert would get out of his office and let him work.

“I will,” Robert said, cheerful as anything. “I have some really brilliant ideas!”

Stannis gave Robert a halfhearted glare and told him to get out if there was nothing else he wanted to discuss. He wasn’t too worried about Robert’s brilliant ideas. Davos wouldn’t allow the stag party to evolve into some sort of... night of debauchery.

Davos had promised.

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It was two weeks before the wedding and Stannis couldn’t sleep. His stag party would be held tomorrow evening, and Robert had been acting suspiciously pleased for the past week at work. Stannis had repeatedly asked Davos whether the stag party wouldn’t be a dignified affair, and whether he hadn’t made sure to ignore every single suggestion that Robert had made. Davos hadn’t been uncomfortably vague with his answers.

Usually Sansa would have helped him work off the stress in some highly enjoyable way, but she had instigated a ‘no sex until the wedding night’ rule which had gone into effect an eternity ago. Two weeks had never seemed to crawl by so slowly, and he was starting to doubt that he would make it through the month. Sleeping next to Sansa was torture now that he couldn’t have her, and he had ended up out on the balcony several times in the past few days, letting Sansa fall asleep in peace.

It was ridiculous of him to be so hungry for her. They had occasionally gone a week or two without sex since they had started dating. A month was just a little bit longer than that. He should be able to handle this without going out of his mind. After all, he had her. It wasn’t as if he was being deprived of her company, her kisses, her laughter and her smiles. He still had his best friend. He just... wasn’t allowed to make love to her. Or suggest that she use her vibrator on herself while he watched. Or ask her to wear anything exciting.

The last time she had worn anything especially titillating had been for Valentine’s Day, and that had been months ago.

He was also not allowed to sleep without a shirt on. Apparently it was distracting.
Stannis stared out over the city, not really registering the beautiful view of the lights twinkling in the dark, wondering if he’d be able to do anything impressive on his wedding night after being starved of Sansa’s body for so long. Quick wanks in the shower weren’t really conducive to helping him maintain his stamina, and he had no doubt that she would be wearing some sort of gorgeous lingerie when the time finally arrived, which would make it even harder for him to keep from coming the second he got inside her.

He had stolen peeks at the lingerie in some of her bridal magazines, and for the past few days those glimpses had served as highly potent inspiration when he got himself off under the spray. Just thinking of Sansa in those lacy confections was enough to get him rock-hard, so he was careful not to think about it now.

Instead he started to think about the fact that Sansa had already gone off the pill and they had both started to follow the doctor’s advice to make sure they were both in good shape to start trying for a baby. Sansa had told him that it was quite likely that she would be ovulating around the time of the wedding, which meant that the sex Stannis certainly hoped they would have on their wedding night might very well turn out to be much more than purely recreational.

Unfortunately, this was a highly arousing thought, too.

He should really try to think about something that didn’t make him want to have a shower in the middle of the night. Now was not the time.

“Dad?”

Now was definitely not the time.

What was Shireen doing up? It was really late. Had she been staying up and reading? Or playing those awful brain-damaging computer games? He asked her, hoping his questions would distract her from the fact that her appearance on the balcony had made him jump.

Apparently she was just having trouble sleeping.

They ended up sharing a comfortable silence for a while, both looking out across the city, both thinking their own thoughts. Having her nearby helped him think about something other than sex, and he found it was a welcome relief to be able to focus on something else. It was also just nice to share the quiet with someone, and Stannis was glad that they could still do this. Just sit together without saying anything; it had always been easy with his daughter.

He was about to encourage her to go back to bed, feeling like a responsible parent wouldn’t enable a child’s insomnia, when Shireen broke the silence.

She asked him a question he had not been expecting. The question didn’t really surprise him, but he had not been expecting it.

“Why did you and Mum marry?”

The thought of having to discuss his past with Selyse made him grimace, but Shireen deserved to know why he and Selyse had married and why they had decided to make Shireen in the first place. She was directly involved. Still, he wondered why she wanted to know. And why now?

“Why do you ask?”

“Because I understand why you are marrying Sansa… but I can’t understand why you married Mum – or why she married you. You don’t like each other at all.”
Shireen’s answer was simple, and it made sense. He was glad that it was obvious to her that he loved Sansa and that he was marrying her for love, but there was something inside him that felt a little sad when he realised that Shireen had never seen him treat Selyse with anything like love.

It could not have been easy for Shireen, growing up with parents that barely even liked each other. Stannis had lost his parents when he had been Shireen’s age, but he knew that they had loved one another and that they had loved him and his brothers. It had always been a comfort to him.

He took a breath and tried to organise his thoughts. Shireen deserved an honest answer.

Somehow he managed to speak much more steadily than he thought he would be able to.

“Your mother and I married because we didn’t know any better. We married because we thought it was what we ought to do. Because we didn’t know what a good relationship was supposed to look like…”

It was strange to explain that he and Selyse had simply been thrown together as young people, and that they had clung to each other when it had been as if everyone around them was getting married and starting a family.

It had seemed like the logical thing to do, to get married and try for a baby. Neither of them had really expected that they would ever be able to find a better partner. Stannis had thought their temperaments had been well suited, and they both placed equally little stock in appearances. He had thought he had been making the sensible, logical choice.

But his reasons had been bad, and the choices he had made with Selyse had only led to one good thing: Shireen.

“... and because we wanted to have a family and it seemed logical to start it with our present partner. Those are all very bad reasons to marry someone. But we didn’t have any good ones.”

He hoped he had said enough to make Shireen understand.

“At least you have good reasons this time around,” Shireen said after appearing to think his words over.

Stannis thought about the past few years with Sansa and how it had all started between them. It still amazed him that she had hidden away with him in Ned and Catelyn’s kitchen for nearly the entirety of Bran’s twelfth birthday party. He could well remember staring at her arse, but it hadn’t just been her looks that made him want to stay sequestered away from the other guests with her. It had been her conversation, her smile and her laughter that had pulled him in and made him want to stay in that kitchen with her forever. She was so blindingly bright, so kind and so smart, and he still couldn’t quite understand how she had seen him and decided that she had to get to know that stiff and dour man.

It had been the luckiest day of his life.

He smiled and agreed with Shireen. He did have good reasons to get married this time around. This time he was certain he was not making a mistake.

A part of him wished that he had waited until he had found what he had with Sansa before making the decision to get married that first time around, but he couldn’t bring himself to regret the mistake of marrying Selyse. Not only because of Shireen, but also because every single decision he had made in his life, and every single mistake, had eventually brought him to the present moment.
Shireen had almost left the balcony when he decided to stop her.

He opened his mouth and words poured out, words that seemed to stream forth as if he had been sitting out on the balcony and contemplating them for hours.

He explained that in theory it was easier to avoid mistakes than to fix them, but that in practise it was impossible to go through life without making any mistakes. Instead of avoiding them, Shireen needed to know that it was important to admit it to herself when she made them. He told her that it would be hard, but that it was only possible for her to fix a mistake by admitting that she had made one in the first place.

Their gazes locked and Stannis was pleased when he saw understanding in Shireen’s eyes. She nodded.

He sent her to bed shortly after that.

Stannis knew he ought to go to sleep, too. Perhaps now that his conversation with his daughter had managed to fish his mind out of the gutter he would actually be able to get some rest?

He sat outside for a little while longer, staring at the city lights without seeing them, and reflecting on the twists and turns his life had taken.

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Robert acted as if he had won some sort of victory because he had apparently managed to persuade Davos to use Robert’s gentleman’s club as a venue for the stag party. Stannis pretended that it didn’t bother him, but as soon as he could have a private conversation with Davos he was hissing questions in his friend’s ear.

“What are you playing at?”

“What do you mean?”

Stannis sighed. “Why are we at a club where my brother probably has some sort of platinum membership card?”

“It’s a good location,” Davos said with a shrug, “and Robert got it for us for free.”

Stannis almost groaned. Sometimes Davos was a little too pragmatic.

Renly walked up to the pair of them and interrupted the private chat. There was a mischievous expression on his face that Stannis didn’t quite trust.

“Stannis, we’re ordering drinks and you have to pick something alcoholic, and you have to drink the whole thing. This is your stag night. Time to live a little.”

“Fine,” Stannis said, crossing his arms over his chest and clenching his jaw, “a gin and tonic. With a slice of lemon.”

Renly left and Davos clapped Stannis on the shoulder. “Don’t worry, I’ve got everything under control.”

Stannis didn’t really feel comforted by those words, and as it turned out, he had been right to be sceptical.

The staff kept switching his glass of gin and tonic for a fresh one, making it impossible to keep
accurate track of how much he imbibed, and Massey, Horpe and Storm insisted that they should play some idiotic drinking game. Robert was all for it, and Renly and Loras were easy enough to persuade.

Stannis was counting on Davos to be on his side. The side of reason, logic and human decency.

“Sounds like fun,” Davos said with a grin, “we should do it.”

Stannis suddenly identified quite well with that Obi Wan fellow in those Star Wars Episode films.

A few drinks later, the drinking game was well under way, and Stannis had been press-ganged into playing.

“Never have I ever… “ Robert paused as he always did, straining himself to think of something that he hadn’t done. “Never have I ever fucked a gorgeous woman on my yacht,” he finished, taking a drink himself as he had obviously done what he had just claimed he never ever had.

Stannis scowled at his brother but took a drink. It was the honest thing to do.

“I knew it!” Robert crowed, “I knew it!”

Massey grinned at Stannis and lifted his glass in a salute.

This felt wrong. Stannis was not the sort of man who liked to kiss and tell, and all the others were using this stupid game as an opportunity to make him admit to all sorts of sordid things. He really ought to put a stop to it.

It was Rolland Storm’s turn, and he seemed to be looking at something that was behind Stannis as he choked out his next few words. “Never have I ever fucked a playboy bunny…!”

Stannis was so relieved that he wouldn’t have to drink that he didn’t notice that the others had started to look at whatever it was that Storm was looking at. Eventually Davos said something that made Stannis look around.

“I didn’t order a stripper, I swear.”

She was on the other end of the room, and too far away for Stannis to make out the details of her face. She was blonde, her legs were about as long as Sansa’s, and her body might have looked like Sansa’s, too. He wasn’t certain as it had been squeezed into a black corset. The girl was wearing the classic white wrist cuffs with the black button detail, a bowtie collar, and, of course, bunny ears. Stannis felt his face heating up uncomfortably and he hurriedly looked away. He didn’t want to ogle some strange girl.

“Pay her and send her away.” Stannis whispered the order to Davos and hoped that his friend would be able to convince the girl to leave.

“Robert? Did you do this?” Stannis hissed, trying not to let the girl hear. It was not her fault that she was not wanted at this party.

“No, I swear!” Robert looked completely nonplussed. “I tried to convince Davos to let me hire a burlesque dancer, someone classy like Dita Von Teese, but he was ridiculously adamant that there should be no female entertainment.”

Stannis turned to look at Renly and Loras but they both shrugged and looked equally baffled. The other three men weren’t paying any attention to Stannis. They were busy craning their heads and
trying to hear what was going on on the other side of the room where Davos was talking to the blonde.

“I’m afraid she insists on staying to congratulate the groom,” Davos said apologetically when he returned. “She won’t leave until she’s had her say,” he added, an amused twinkle in his eyes.

Stannis glared at Davos, but was surprised and bewildered when his friend winked at him.

Something strange was going on.

“Why, hello there, handsome.” The bunny spoke in an over-the-top breathless voice that Stannis recognised immediately. He almost broke his neck by snapping his head around to look at her now that she was up close.

Sansa? He felt like his eyes were bugging out of his head, and he could feel his mouth dropping open.

Why was her hair all different? And how had she made her skin so brown? A fake tan? And how did she expect to be recognised with all that makeup on? Her eyes were hidden under several layers of black stuff and false eyelashes, and her lipstick was a bright colour that Sansa would never wear if she were in her right mind. He knew enough about her tastes to know that.

She winked at him, much like Davos had, and slipped onto his lap the way she had done hundreds of times before, perching herself on one of his thighs.

Seven hells. He needed to make sure Selyse never heard about this. Or Ned, for that matter.

“I heard there was a man in here about to get married, and I just had to come and say hello,” she flirted, “are you looking forward to your big day?”

“Yes,” he choked out, surprised that he was able to speak.

“Isn’t he the sweetest?” Sansa cooed. She was mussing his hair and looking around at the others as if she expected them to answer her question.

“That’s Stannis in a nutshell,” Robert said, always quick to open his mouth, “ever the sweetest.” His words prompted a round of good-natured chuckling, and even Stannis didn’t have the heart to glare at his brother for the quip. He had not really tried to cultivate a reputation of sweetness over the years.

Sansa laughed, but it wasn’t her usual laugh; it was a breathy little giggle that Stannis should hate because it wasn’t her real laugh. There was something undeniably sexy about it, so he couldn’t really make himself hate it.

“No one except you and Davos knows it’s me. Let’s tease them a bit,” Sansa whispered in his ear, winking at him when she pulled back.

Stannis wondered what she meant, but hoped that he was about to get a little of his own back for that stupid drinking game.

“So, Mr. Groom, do you want to have a little fun before you tie the knot?” Sansa purred, her voice loud enough to be heard by the other men.

“Of course he does,” Robert boomed, “say yes, Stannis.”
Stannis glared at his brother and glanced at Sansa. She gave him a signal that he doubted any of the others would have been able to pick up on. They didn’t know her like he did.

She wanted him to play along.

“Actually, I think I would like to have some fun, please,” he said, minding his manners and ignoring the looks of shock that were now appearing on everybody’s faces. Davos was trying to pretend to look shocked, but mostly he appeared to be trying not to burst out laughing.

Sansa stood up and indicated that Stannis should push his chair away from the table to give her more room. He did as she wished and was rewarded immediately. Sansa straddled him, writhed about, and started to pepper his neck and face with kisses, doing her best to thoroughly muss up his already mussed hair.

Stannis watched Robert and Renly out of the corner of his eye, wondering what they would make of this. He had to work hard not to smirk when he saw that they were looking a little uncertain and going rather pale.

He also noticed that Massey, Horpe and Storm all seemed to have frozen in place, staring at Sansa with their lips parted and eyes wide.

It felt incredibly awkward to have Sansa basically do her best to give him a raging hard-on in front of his brothers and his friends. To his embarrassment she succeeded rather easily. But then it had been a good long while since she’d given him so much as a proper kiss, so perhaps it was hardly surprising. Somehow the fact that she was in ‘disguise’ and that it was all for a prank made him feel a little less mortified, however.

Possibly the alcohol was relaxing him a little, too.

“Do you want to get out of here?” she asked after a little while, winking at him.

Stannis could tell that she didn’t actually mean for them to leave, but that he should pretend to be up for it.

“Why not?” he said, making his tone as carefree as he could. (It was not easy. He rarely spoke in a carefree manner.)

Sansa stood up and Stannis did his best to get to his feet without revealing too much of the effect Sansa’s little lap dance had wrought.

“Stannis,” Renly hissed, looking at him with wide-eyed panic, “what are you doing?”

Robert, meanwhile, was turning a frightening shade of… puce?

“Stannis you are not leaving this party with her even if she is playmate of the year,” he blustered, “I forbid it! You are getting married to my goddaughter and I will not stand by and watch you disrespect her in such a way. A lap dance is all in good fun, but you’re taking it too far.”

Stannis raised an eyebrow and wondered if Robert realised how hypocritical he sounded. He very much doubted that Robert had ever in his life said no to a willing woman.

Suddenly Sansa was laughing her real laugh.

“Robert, it’s okay,” she said when she caught her breath. “It’s me,” she added, beaming at him, “don’t you recognise me?”
Robert blinked at Sansa as if she had just gone mad.

Sansa laughed some more and pulled her bunny ears and her wig off. Her beautiful natural hair had been pinned up carefully, and she started to remove the pins, letting lock after lock tumble down her back. In the end it was a little more flat than it usually was due to being squashed under the wig, but the effect was still quite a good one.

Robert, Renly and Loras were all gaping at her. The others were exchanging sly smiles and elbow nudges.

“Seven hells, Sansa!” Robert eventually managed, “put something on, will you?”

Sansa rolled her eyes and shot Stannis an amused look. He couldn’t help but smile back.

“Did you two plan this?” Renly asked, quickly regaining his composure and his sense of humour. His eyes were crinkling with mirth.

He looked at Sansa and she gave a tiny shrug, leaving it up to him to decide what to tell everyone.

“Er, no,” Stannis said, running his hand through his hair. “I was as surprised as any of you,” he admitted.

“But you recognised her?” Robert immediately asked, “you knew you weren’t letting some stranger - er - do what she did.”

Stannis snorted. “Of course I recognised her.”

There was an awkward silence.

“So, Sansa, join us for a drink?” Robert finally said, obviously trying to regain his cheerful mood, “after you put something on,” he added hastily.

“Thank you for the lovely offer, but I need to get going,” Sansa said with a smile, “just promise you’ll return my fiancé home in one piece, please.” She swept her eyes over every man in the room, and they all shifted from one foot to the other, murmuring in agreement and nodding.

“See you at home,” Sansa said, kissing him soundly and then turning on her heel and leaving.

Stannis couldn’t tear his eyes away from her little cotton bunny tail as she sashayed from the room, and he was relatively sure the others were staring, too.

Once she was gone it was Davos who broke the stunned silence.

“More drinks?”

Everyone agreed that more drinks were definitely in order, and soon Massey, Storm and Horpe were falling all over themselves to clap Stannis on the back and tell him what a lucky man he was.

“She’s hot, smart and she has a sense of humour,” Massey said with a wide smile. “Well done, mate!”

Robert was sulking, and Renly was looking at him as if he were seeing him in an entirely new light.

It was the best time he’d ever had at a party where both his brothers were present.
Stannis crawled into bed with Sansa, who was thankfully back to being her usual pale self, at five in the morning. He was fairly sure he reeked of the cigars that Robert and a few of the others had been smoking, and his breath was probably not going to fool anyone into thinking he was sober. He wasn’t anywhere close to being drunk, of course, but he did not think he’d had as much to drink in one evening since his eighteenth birthday.

“Hey,” Sansa murmured, her voice hoarse with sleep, “did you have a good time?”

Stannis had torn all his clothes off and was in the process of trying to get Sansa to spoon with him. She kept resisting his attempts in favour of facing him, however.

“I suppose,” he said, thinking a little guiltily about how much he had enjoyed the poker game Davos had organised. Instead of betting money they had all scribbled down some minor secrets or embarrassing memories. They didn’t sign their names, so in the end the winner had read out everyone’s notes and they’d all amused themselves trying to guess which secrets belonged to which man.

Apparently this was based on a game Davos had observed Devan and his classmates playing on a school trip he had chaperoned.

Stannis might have objected to the game if he hadn’t felt fairly confident that he would win. He was the only one who had even been attempting to pace himself when it came to drinks, after all. Davos had nonetheless ended up beating him by a narrow margin. For some mysterious reason his friend had managed not to read any of his notes, however. Stannis would have to remember to give him an extra week off work or something.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Sansa whispered, giving him a chaste kiss.

“Why were you a bunny?”

Okay, perhaps he was a little bit drunk.

“I just thought it would be funny,” Sansa said with a smile in her voice, “I almost brought a red silk robe for you to put on, but I was worried you might throw me out if I tried it.”

Stannis made a noise that was a cross between a huff of laughter and a grunt. “I think you broke Robert.”

Sansa muffled her giggles with a pillow. “He’ll get over it.”

“Hm.”

Stannis decided to see if Sansa would make an exception to the ‘no sex before the wedding night’ rule, and started to rub himself against Sansa’s satin-clad body and kissing her much the same way she had kissed him at the party earlier, peppering her face and neck with feather-light touches of his lips.

“I’m sleeping, Stannis,” she scolded him, her tone both fond and irritated.

“No you’re not,” he argued petulantly, but he pulled away to lie on his back nonetheless. She was obviously not going to make an exception.

“I can’t wait for our wedding night,” Sansa sighed, settling herself against his chest.
He doubted she was as impatient as he was.

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Stannis was very busy with the wedding preparations, but he made time for the end of year parent teacher night as he always did. It was good to hear about the progress Shireen had made during the year, and he refused to give Selyse the satisfaction of being able to say that he was neglecting his duties as a parent due to the wedding. (Only one more week, now…)

He got to the school before Selyse did, and gravitated towards Robert despite himself. He was probably there for Myrcella, which was unusual. Cersei was always the one who came to these things. Stannis supposed she hadn’t been able to get away from Lannisport.

When he reached Robert it turned out that his bulk had been hiding Selyse, however, and she gave him a smug look that told him she was very pleased with herself for having arrived before he had.

“Stannis!” Robert’s greeting was a lot more enthusiastic than it really needed to be, but perhaps he was just glad that he wouldn’t be stuck with Selyse by himself any longer. “Where’s your bunny?” he asked with a chortle, looking around expectantly. Robert had decided, after a few days of sulking, that what Sansa had done at his stag party had been hilarious, and kept bringing it up whenever he could.

“Bunny?” Selyse repeated, her face scrunching up into an expression of distaste.

Stannis felt himself blanch, and his body had frozen up completely. Why couldn’t Robert keep his big fat mouth shut?

Robert, uncharacteristically observant for once, patted Stannis on the back and gave him a concerned look. “Are you all right? Did something happen to Sansa?”

“No,” Stannis choked out. “She’s fine.”

This seemed to alleviate all of Robert’s worries. “Good, I’d hate to think that she got her little tail in trouble!”

Stannis shot Robert the most murderous, threatening glare in his repertoire.

"What on earth are you talking about?" Selyse asked, her tone snippy.

Robert grinned at her and started to laughingly explain the prank Sansa had played at the stag party. He conveniently left out the fact that he had sulked over the trick for days.

Stannis felt as if he were observing the Hindenburg disaster.

Selyse’s lips became thinner and thinner, her eyes narrowed until they were tiny slits, and her body became more tense and rigid with every word Robert spoke.

“... and then she just left!” Robert finished, blissfully unaware of the highly uncomfortable atmosphere he had just created.

“How amusing.” Selyse crossed her arms in front of her chest and glared at Stannis.

He crossed his arms and glared right back. He would have preferred it if Selyse had never found out about Sansa’s prank, but now that the cat was out of the bag he would just have to straighten his spine and own it. It had been his stag night. A certain level of… tomfoolery was expected. And
it hadn’t been as if he’d had strippers and hookers for entertainment.

“Yeah, it was really funny,” Robert said, “much better than having a burlesque dancer show up like I wanted.”

Stannis could have sworn he saw lightning flash behind Selyse’s eyes. She opened her mouth and -

“Is anyone here on behalf of Shireen Baratheon?” Shireen’s teacher called, distracting Selyse from whatever she had been about to say.

He and Selyse approached the teacher in glacial silence, tension thick in the air between them.

The conference with Shireen’s teacher did not take very long. The woman had nothing but praise for Shireen’s work and said that Shireen had also been improving socially.

“She’s really been coming out of her shell this year, and she seems kinder and more cheerful than ever,” the woman said in the end, smiling at his and Selyse’s stony faces. Stannis wanted to smile and thank the teacher, but the tension in the air was pressing down on his chest, making any facial expression except perhaps a grimace impossible.

“Thank you,” Selyse said tersely, standing up from her seat. Stannis hurriedly followed suit, nodding at the teacher.

Selyse turned to face him once they had left the schoolroom.

“There are no words,” she hissed.

“This is not your concern, Selyse,” Stannis reminded her, a warning in his voice.

“That... woman is about to become my daughter’s stepmother. I have a right to know what sort of role model you are exposing Shireen to.”

“Sansa is a wonderful role model for Shireen. You heard the teacher. Our daughter is doing very well both academically and socially.”

Selyse’s lips thinned again, and she gave him an angry look. It was as if she were mad at him for being right.

“I can’t look at you right now.” Selyse turned on her heel and strode off towards the exit, tension radiating from her in waves.

Stannis blew out a frustrated breath and went to find Robert.

He could not let this go like he often let Robert’s various follies go without comment.

“Why did you tell Selyse about what happened at my stag party? Are you completely insane, or just too drunk to pay any attention to the way your words can actually have consequences?” he asked, trying to keep his voice pitched low so that they other parents in the lounge wouldn’t hear. His hands were balled into fists and he was almost trembling with barely suppressed rage.

Robert blinked at Stannis and actually looked a little taken aback. “What’s the matter? It was just a laugh...”

“It was not something my ex-wife appreciated. And you should have had the sense to keep your mouth shut about it.”
Honestly, this would probably set the progress Selyse had made regarding Sansa back an entire year.

Robert was starting to look angry, his face reddening and his bloodshot eyes narrowing. “If you’re upset that Sansa pulled that prank you should yell at her and not me!”

Stannis looked around at the curious parents in the room, feeling irritated that his brother wasn’t bothering to keep his voice down.

“I’m not upset with Sansa. I’m upset with you for being an irresponsible drunk,” he bit out, not caring when Robert’s eyes widened with rage. Stannis could tell that he had wounded his brother, however, as here was hurt beneath the anger. It was the hurt that would linger after the fury inevitably burned itself out, and it was the hurt that Stannis would eventually have to deal with.

But not now. He was going to leave now.

“We’ll finish this conversation later,” he said, gathering up the remnants of his dignity and storming from the school.

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“I’m so sorry,” Sansa said, bringing a hand up to cover her mouth. She was shaking her head and looking at him with her eyes wide. Her hand fell away and she took a deep breath. “I never meant for Selyse to find out about that stupid joke,” she said, her tone a little horrified.

“She never would have if Robert could keep his mouth shut,” Stannis said with a sigh.

“You really shouldn’t have called him a drunk, though.” Sansa was looking at him sadly, and it made him feel guilty about what he’d said to his brother even though it had been the truth and Robert had deserved it.

“Someone needed to say it,” he muttered.

“He’s been getting better recently,” Sansa said, “and he needs our support - not our judgment - if we want him to continue to get better.”

Stannis rubbed his face and sighed again. “I know.”

***

The wedding was just around the corner, and Stannis couldn’t afford to put this conversation off. He did not want there to be tension between him and Robert on his wedding day.

“We need to talk,” he said, sinking into one of the visitor's chairs in Robert’s office.

Robert grunted and didn’t look away from his computer screen. There were no sports magazines or glasses of amber liquid on his brother’s desk.

“I’m sorry about what I said,” Stannis began, ignoring the way it stung his pride to apologise, “I was out of line.”

There was a brief silence. Robert still wasn’t meeting his eyes, and Stannis couldn’t tell what sort of mood his brother was in.

“No you weren’t.” Robert slowly pulled his eyes away from the screen he had been focusing on and met Stannis’ eyes at last. “I was drunk. I shouldn’t have told Selyse what happened at your
party. It was… unkind.”

Stannis blinked at Robert and wondered whether he had been replaced by an alien lifeform that looked like him.

“I’ve been - I’ve been seeing a therapist,” Robert said with a small chuckle, apparently amused by Stannis’ bewilderment, “she’s been helping me.”

“Oh,” Stannis said, unable to think of anything better.

“You gave me the idea, actually,” Robert admitted, “back when you offered to be my agony aunt.”

Stannis shifted in his chair, feeling uncomfortable but also… pleased?

“She thinks I should stop drinking, and I’ve been cutting back, but it’s hard…”

“Is there - ah - is there anything I could do to help?” Stannis offered, shooting his brother a questioning look.

“Keep being happy with Sansa and Shireen,” Robert said with a sentimental smile, “it does me good to see families like yours and Ned’s. Reminds me that family life doesn’t have to be utter shite.”

It felt bizarre to have his family compared with Ned Stark’s perfect one. Stannis had always been a little jealous of Ned’s home life, and it was strange to think Robert might feel that way about him.

“I’m - I’m really looking forward to the wedding,” Robert added, his voice full of emotion.

To Stannis’ horror there seemed to be tears in Robert’s eyes. Time to leave.

“Er, me too. I have to go now.”

Robert sniffed very loudly. “Of course, of course. I’ll see you around.”

It took Stannis half an hour of staring out the window in his office to collect his thoughts.

Robert actually admitted that he had done something wrong? Robert was in therapy and trying to cut down on his drinking?

It was almost too good to be true, but it actually seemed that Robert was trying to get a grip on his life.

A warm feeling settled in Stannis’ stomach and he smiled to himself.

*Good for Robert.*

Chapter End Notes

Stannis was of course thinking of this scene in the Star Wars series.
“So, what have you got planned for the wedding night?” Robert asked, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“I have to go call Cat,” Ned immediately said, jumping up to go to another part of Robb’s house so he wouldn’t have to hear Stannis’ reply to Robert’s question. Stannis wished he could just run away from his brother, too, but Renly was in the middle of tying his cravat for him, and had already told him off for fidgeting twice.

“That’s none of your business,” Stannis said, willing his face to keep to a respectable temperature. Robert would not let up if he noticed Stannis getting flustered. (Robert might be trying to get a grip on his life, but apparently that did not mean he was going to keep from torturing Stannis on his wedding day.)

“There, done,” Renly took a step back and tilted his head from side to side to inspect his work. “Loras and I had such a special night,” he then sighed, a wistful note in his tone of voice.

“We did, didn’t we?” Loras piped up, sounding equally wistful.

“Special night?” Robert scoffed, “gay.”


“What? Who calls their wedding night special?” Robert sounded genuinely affronted.

“My wedding night was special,” Robb said, looking amused.

“He’s telling the truth,” Theon agreed, “it really was.”

Everyone in the room turned to stare at Theon.

“I wasn’t there,” Theon hurriedly explained, “Robb just told me about it.”

They continued to stare at him for a few beats before collectively shaking their heads.

“My wedding night was quite special, too,” Davos said, fiddling with the piece of paper he had written his speech on. He had been reading it obsessively for the past half an hour, mouthing the words and looking nervous. Stannis had told him that he didn’t have to make a long speech - or any speech at all - knowing that Davos was uncomfortable with public speaking, but Davos insisted that he wanted to get this best man job done right.

“Oh,” Robert said, realising that he was outnumbered. “Well, what was so special about them?”

Renly and Loras shared a look that could only be described as exceedingly sappy. “It’s hard to describe it,” Renly said, a smile playing on his lips.

“It was just so…” Robb added, making a hand gesture that indicated that he couldn’t find the right words.

“Magical,” Theon finished for him.

“Gay,” Robert said again, this time under his breath.
Stannis bit back a groan. When would Robert learn?

“Seriously, though,” Robert said, raising his voice, “are you going to go where no man has gone before?” More eyebrow wagging.

This time it was Renly who hissed out a scandalised, “Robert!”

“That’s my sister you’re talking about,” Robb grumbled, giving Robert an offended look.

“Sansa is not a virgin,” Stannis blurted, feeling horribly confused.

Everyone gave him looks of mingled disbelief and amusement. Even Davos shook his head a little.

“Robert was asking whether you were going to take her up the arse,” Theon helpfully supplied.

“Seriously, man,” Robb said, addressing Theon, “she’s my sister.”

Stannis wasn’t sure his face had ever got this hot this quickly before.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” Robert said, beaming at Renly and Loras and causing both men to hide their faces in their hands and start to shake with laughter.

Stannis stared at Robert and tried to figure out how his brother’s brain worked. How could he look at Sansa in a playboy bunny costume and want nothing more than to cover her up, and then turn around and ask Stannis whether he was planning to fuck her up the arse on their wedding night?

It didn’t make any sense.

“It’s easy, too,” Robert continued, “just make sure to scrub everything really well first, and then use a condom and a lot of lube -”

Davos walked over to Robert and whispered something in his ear. Robert went quiet.

Stannis shot his friend a grateful look and wondered if Davos could teach him that trick.

“I’d prefer it if we didn’t discuss my wedding night,” Stannis stated, trying to sound dignified.

“Yeah, and you should probably ease up on the porn,” Renly suggested, giving Robert a wry look.

Robert just shrugged.

Stannis took a deep breath and tried to decide whether he was annoyed with his brother for torturing him with horribly inappropriate questions or grateful for how the inappropriate questions were distracting him from his nerves.

He hadn’t expected to be this nervous. He hadn’t been nervous at all when he and Selyse had gone to see the judge back in the day. But that had been a simple matter of signing some documents. Today he would be participating in a ceremony he had only practised for a handful of times, and everyone would be watching. What if he tripped? What if he did something wrong?

Was he supposed to say you are mine and I am yours or was it the other way around?
How many times was he supposed to walk around the tree?

“Where is your pocket square?” Loras suddenly asked, his eyes sweeping from Stannis’ breast pocket and around the room, clearly searching for the piece of white linen.

“I’ve got it,” Renly said, lifting his hand and showing the cloth to his husband, “it wasn’t folded right.”

Stannis allowed his younger brother to fussily arrange the pocket square in his breast pocket, and felt relief course through him when he suddenly recalled it was three. They were supposed to walk three times around the heart tree.

“Cat says hello,” Ned announced when he returned, “and she says Sansa is nearly ready. Apparently she looks more beautiful than ever.” The words caught slightly in Ned’s throat, and Stannis was certain that the man would be shedding tears soon.

“It’s unfair, you know,” Robert said to the room at large, “how women transform when they wear all that bridal hoo-ha.”

Renly and Loras shrugged, but all the others nodded.

“Have you worked out a strategy for how you’re going to handle it?” Robert continued, directing his words at Stannis. “You don’t want to start sobbing like a little girl when you see her, do you?”

Stannis blinked at his brother and raised an eyebrow. “I think I’ll be able to control myself.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Robert said, “I didn’t care all that much for Cersei, but seeing her in that sept, in that beautiful dress and her hair like a golden halo... “

“I don’t recall you crying,” Stannis said, furrowing his brow and dredging up the memories of his brother’s wedding day.

“That’s because I had a strategy!”

Stannis glanced at Ned, Davos and Robb and saw that they looked intrigued.

Feeling a little bit like he was opening a door that ought to be chained shut and letting some sort of monster out, he carefully asked Robert what his strategy had been.

“I imagined that she was naked!” Robert revealed with the pomp of a stage magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

“I have to call Cat again,” Ned said, jumping up from the seat he had only just taken and hurrying out of the room.

Stannis closed his eyes for a moment and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Why did that help?” Robb asked, sounding curious.

“The sex drive trumps sentimental wishy-washy parts of the brain,” Robert explained, nodding wisely.

“I doubt it would have worked if you had actually been in love with Cersei,” Renly pointed out, rolling his eyes.

“I cried when I saw Jeyne in her wedding dress,” Robb admitted, “it was the happiest moment of
my life. Until Ned was born, of course.”

“I know what you mean,” Davos said gruffly, “when I saw Marya I thought I was seeing the Maiden come to earth…”

Stannis started to feel rather worried. Would he start crying in front of everyone? He caught Robert’s eye and Robert mouthed the word ‘naked’ exaggeratedly.

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Stannis was unable to think of anything coherent when he caught his first glimpse of Sansa in her wedding gown. Even if Robert’s advice had been anything useful or sensible it would not have done him any good. Everything except Sansa was wiped from his mind as soon as he saw her, and he had his hands full just trying to keep his knees from buckling.

The smile that lit up her entire being had his heart skipping several beats, his lungs forgetting to function, and made it very difficult for him to take in all the details of her appearance. It was the whole picture that he saw, and it was a picture of perfect, ethereal beauty. She radiated happiness as if she had her own secret source of sunlight that she kept within her, and Stannis felt so fortunate to be allowed to stand near her and bask in the rays.

He was glad that he had a good long while to admire her while the godswood’s officiator talked of love, forgiveness, and the sanctity of marriage, because he really wanted to take in every detail and file the memory away in the safest part of his mind.

Her lovely face, so familiar to him after all their time together, was flawlessly made up to emphasise her eyes, her lips, and her smooth, youthful complexion. Tendrils of curled hair tickled her cheeks and neck, but the rest of her thick mane had been coaxed into a glossy updo, decorated with a little lace-trimmed veil and a few sparkling combs. She was sheathed in yards and yards of Myrish lace, and the gown was cut to showcase her lithe figure, her small waist and the flare of her hips. The gown did not hug her quite as tightly below the knee, and Stannis remembered Sansa saying something about mermaid skirts.

Stannis understood what it meant now. He could easily believe that she was a siren on dry land, come to seduce him to her side where she would keep him as her captive for all eternity.

He could not imagine a more desirable fate.

It did not seem odd to him that anyone feeling the emotions that were coursing through him would shed a tear, but for some reason his feelings broke out as wide smiles that made the muscles of his face ache in the best of ways.

He came close to crying when he and Sansa exchanged their vows. Sansa went first, and her words were so moving that he had to swallow several times as she spoke to get rid of the lump in his throat.

“They may say the love of your life is the person you end up spending your life with; but with all of life stretching ahead of us, I know that the love of my life is going to be you, because with every passing hour, I will only love you more, and never less.”

Seeing her slip the gold band onto his finger with hope and love in her tearful eyes was almost too much.

He had to take a few very deep breaths before he felt ready to say his piece.
“I have only one wish in this life: that one day, people will say I have loved you long and I have loved you well.”

Thankfully he managed to get his words out without getting too choked up, but he was very glad Davos had advised him to keep the vows short and to the point. He would have broken down if he had needed to say much more.

His hands only shook a little as he slid her wedding band home, and he smiled when he saw how perfect it looked with her sparkling engagement ring.

The rest of the ceremony was a blur. He followed along with the officiator and repeated the words he was supposed to say, but his mind was floating somewhere among the clouds, and his heart was burning with happiness, passion, and more love than he knew what to do with.

He knew the ceremony was at an end when he was finally, finally allowed to kiss his bride.

His wife.

They broke apart for a moment so that they could see each other in a whole new light, but Sansa didn’t look any different, and Stannis couldn’t bear to be parted from her. He kissed her again immediately, feeling only vaguely aware of the clapping and the cheers in the background.

Flower petals and rice grains rained from the sky, but Stannis couldn’t take his eyes off Sansa, and she wasn’t looking around either. They stared at each other, smiled, and communicated their love just as clearly as if they had been speaking plainly.

Would it be terribly inappropriate if he skipped the reception, carried her off, and spent the next few days making love to her in every possible way? It was very important to ascertain whether anything would feel different now that they were married.

Sansa’s smile widened as if she had just read his mind, and she shook her head slightly, a delighted and slightly wicked gleam appearing in her eyes.

“I love you,” she said, her voice pitched low so only he would hear, “I can’t wait to spend my life with you.”

“I can’t wait either,” he said in return, pulling her into his arms, embracing her tenderly and reaching to pick a flower petal from her hair. Telling her that he loved her didn’t seem enough. He wanted to show her, and he had to restrain himself as there were quite a lot of people watching.

Thankfully it was soon time to start receiving congratulations from everyone, and being forced to communicate with other people helped him return from the clouds and get both his feet on the ground. He was surprised to see how many people appeared to have cried, and was almost moved to tears himself when he saw Ned envelop Sansa in a tight hug, crying in a completely undignified but utterly sincere way, unable to speak due to his outpour of emotion.

Would he act like that when Shireen got married?

The question made him feel very peculiar, so he shook his head and reminded himself that Shireen would not be getting married anytime soon.

Ned was now shaking hands with him and clapping him on the back and then throwing all masculine pretense up in the air and pulling him in for a tight hug. Stannis tried not to tense up at the sudden contact, and even attempted to pat Ned on the back a bit. He looked over Ned’s shoulder and saw Sansa and Catelyn embracing each other, both women shaking and crying and
smiling.

Would his mother have embraced Sansa like that, too? He was sure Cassana would have loved Sansa. Both his parents would have.

“I’m so happy for you,” Ned managed to say when he finally let him go, “for you both.”

“Thank you,” Stannis said, feeling genuinely gratified to hear those words from Ned.

Stannis and Sansa were obliged to receive congratulations and wishes for everlasting happiness from a lot of people before they finally found Shireen. She had obviously been crying, just like many of the others, and she happily allowed them to embrace her. Her voice was full of emotion when she told them that she loved them, and he shared a delighted, surprised look with Sansa at the touching declaration. They both told Shireen that they loved her too at the same time, and Stannis knew that he would accept it without so much as a raised eyebrow if Robert were to compare his family to Ned’s perfect one at that moment.

Stannis’ family was perfect.

***

Stannis was convinced that he never wanted to be photographed again in his life. It had been all right at first when they had been with the others and they had taken all sorts of different family portraits, but now it was just him and Sansa and the flowers and the trees. He had thought it would be nice to be allowed to hold Sansa and kiss her in relative private, but the clicking of the wedding photographer’s camera constantly pulled Stannis out of his romantic mood and made him feel self-conscious and awkward. He never photographed well, and he was probably ruining all the pictures. Maybe the photographer should take a few pictures of Sansa by herself?

“Don’t worry,” Sansa whispered, stroking his cheek and giving him an encouraging smile, “I love you, and I will love these pictures because you’re in them.”

It was as if she had read his mind.

“Just look at me and think about our future,” she told him, kissing his cheek.

He almost forgot about the photographer after that.

***

Sansa had explained the tradition of kicking over a brass bowl filled with water and different coloured flowers to him at some point in the past weeks, and though Stannis had scoffed and rolled his eyes at the superstitious nonsense at first, he now felt rather excited. He and Sansa were going to try for a baby soon - possibly even tonight - and it would be interesting to see whether the flowers predicted a son, a daughter, or twins.

Sansa had told him that she had been made to practise kicking bowls full of water at her hen party, and it was obvious that the practise had paid off. She managed to get every single flower out with one smooth kick.

A boy and a girl? Twins?

Stannis almost dropped his empty flute of Champagne.

Sansa was suddenly kissing him, startling him out of his slight shock and reminding him that this
was all superstitious nonsense and that he should focus on kissing his wife, not on how many flowers just came out of a bowl.

It was strange to sit down to eat the delicious food, knowing that he was sitting in the place of honour, next to the belle of the ball, and that he and Sansa were the centre of attention. He doubted he’d be able to so much as sneak a kiss of her lips or a touch of her thigh without someone observing him. It therefore came as a relief when the speeches started. Stannis thought he would be able to steal a few kisses while everyone focused on the speaker, but Sansa wouldn’t stand for it and scolded him that he should listen.

“I can listen and kiss you at the same time,” he protested, whispering the words into her ear.

“Mum worked hard on her speech,” Sansa whispered in return, “behave.”

He sat still and listened after that, feeling rather touched when Catelyn said that though she hadn’t exactly expected Sansa’s relationship with Stannis to end up where it had, she was so glad of it, because she had seen Sansa’s joy, and she had seen Stannis’ joy, and that it was only right for such a joyful love to be allowed to thrive and flourish in the world.

Ned got up next, looking rather emotional still, and delivered a speech that Stannis would not forget in a hurry.

“I am a very fortunate man. I have known the love of many women in my life. The love of a mother, the love of a sister, and the love of a wife. But as any father lucky enough to have a little girl will tell you, the love of a daughter is something quite different and special.” Ned had to stop for a little while at that, dry his eyes and take a few breaths. “When our daughters are little, they look to their fathers to be there for them, to be the most important men in their life, to protect them and teach them what a man’s role is within a family. I was glad to fill this role, and I hope I did my job well.” Another pause. “Nobody warned me about how hard it would be when the time came to step aside, however, and allow someone else to take my place as the most important man in my daughter’s life.”

There was a round of chuckles and a few sniffles.

“What made it bearable was the fact that my daughter chose a singularly good man to start a new family with, and I know that he will cherish her just as she will cherish him.” Ned dried his eyes again and raised his glass. “To love and to family!” he toasted, his voice remarkably strong despite the tears that were escaping him.

Everyone toasted, and Stannis saw several tears rolling down Sansa’s cheeks as she drank from her flute and smiled at her father.

He glanced at Shireen, and wondered again if he would feel as overcome as Ned on her wedding day. She was smiling and chatting with her friends, looking happy and confident, and Stannis had to swallow the lump that was suddenly in his throat.

The lump did not really go away. If anything, it only grew larger when Davos delivered his short, but very sincere speech. It was impossible to tell that Davos was a nervous public speaker, and everyone applauded when he finished his speech by saying it had brought him true happiness to finally see Stannis find love with his other half after so many years of solitude.

It was a relief when Margaery started her speech with a joke, and Stannis and Sansa shared a tension-diffusing laugh. The lump disappeared from Stannis’ throat, and he was able to smile and enjoy the rest of the speeches without worrying that he would embarrass himself.
Margaery made a few cheeky references to her heartbroken older brother, but mostly she talked about how Sansa had acted at the start of her relationship with Stannis, and how Margaery had enjoyed having the apartment mostly to herself since her roommate hardly ever bothered with coming home.

Stannis tried not to grimace when his brothers raced each other to the microphone, snatching it from Margaery’s hand and launching into several highly embarrassing stories of his youth.

“Stannis was always bringing stray animals home and trying to nurse them back to health,” Robert declared, “such a kind and sensitive boy!”

“One time,” Stannis grumbled under his breath, “one time I did that.”

Sansa giggled and kissed his cheek. “That’s so sweet,” she said, giving him an adoring look that caused him to ignore the rest of what his brothers said in favour of having a fantasy or two about receiving that look while he made love to her later tonight.

When the time came to start the dancing, Stannis was still somewhat wrapped up in his fantasies, but he wasn’t too distracted to notice how perfect his surroundings were, and how perfectly they complemented Sansa’s beauty. Everything was warm, alive and blossoming just like Sansa; the perfume of honeysuckle and jasmine flowers mingling alluringly with Sansa’s scent. It made him want to breathe more deeply than his lungs allowed as he held her carefully in his arms. She had been right to insist on having the reception out of doors, and he shouldn’t have worried about how it might rain.

They swayed to the music they had chosen, the grass soft beneath their feet, the party lights glittering and golden above them, and Stannis thought about the conversation they’d had about the lyrics when they had been trying to find the perfect wedding song.

"I'm hardly a beginner,” Stannis had said when Sansa had first suggested Bowie’s Absolute Beginners.

"It’s our beginning, and we’re both getting it right for the first time,” she had said with a bright smile.

He hadn’t been able to argue with that. Besides, he liked Bowie’s music.

Now, as he gazed into Sansa’s eyes, he couldn’t be happier to hear the words: ‘I absolutely love you’ floating on the breeze, because that was how he absolutely felt.

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Perhaps it was Ned’s speech, or perhaps it was seeing Ned dance with Sansa and hold onto his daughter so tightly, but when Stannis saw Davos twirl Shireen around the patch of grass they were using as a dance floor he suddenly felt an overwhelming need to dance with her. His daughter was looking so grown up in her beautiful dress - and so happy - that it was almost surreal to think that she had ever spent months at a time looking sullen and despondent.

He had never danced with her before, so it was a little awkward, and he didn’t know what to say, so he just kept quiet, but somehow it was wonderful, anyway. They had never needed to talk very much in order to understand one another, and Stannis was sure that Shireen was understanding him now. Understanding that he loved her, and that he was proud of what a bright young woman she was becoming.

At the end of the dance he hugged her tightly, trying with all his might to fix the moment in his
memory and wishing that he could stop the clock. Shireen was perfect as she was now and he wished she didn’t have to grow up any more than this. The idea of being in Ned’s shoes someday was terrifying and exciting all at once, and he wasn’t sure he’d ever be quite ready to face the challenge of ‘stepping aside’ as Ned had put it.

***

Stannis tried not to think about all the people that were watching or the cameras that were flashing as he and Sansa carefully cut the wedding cake. He had stayed completely out of choosing what sort of cake to serve, citing his dislike for sweets, but he wasn’t surprised at all when the piece that Sansa fed him turned out to taste of lemon. She eagerly accepted the piece he fed her, licking his finger playfully to get all of the frosting and obviously enjoying the flavour quite a bit. Feeling her tongue swirling around his finger was enough to set his heart to racing, and he started to seriously wonder when he’d be allowed to steal her away and ravish her.

While everyone was busy lining up to receive a piece of cake he managed to pull Sansa aside and ask her that question.

“Stannis!” she giggled, “don’t be impatient.”

“Don’t be so tempting,” he retorted with a bit of a growl, giving her a heated look.

“I still haven’t thrown the bouquet, and I want to do a lot more dancing,” Sansa said, running her hands down his chest and then fixing his cravat with a great deal of care. “We only get this one wedding reception and I want to enjoy it for as long as I can.”

Stannis nodded, feeling a bizarre mixture of fond love and intense sexual frustration. It had been a month.

“If it’s any consolation,” Sansa whispered, returning his heated look with a sizzling one of her own, “there is a big part of me that wouldn’t mind if you carried me off right now.”

He groaned and kissed her full on the lips, invading her mouth as soon as she let him, and eagerly licking up the sweet taste of lemon cake on her tongue.

“There you are!” Margaery’s voice was like a bucket of ice water, and Stannis took a quick step away from Sansa, thought he didn’t go far.

“You can’t just run away and make out,” the maid of honour scolded them, “you haven’t thrown the bouquet yet!” Her last words were directed at Sansa.

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Jeyne Poole was glowing, happily holding Sansa’s bouquet of freesias, and Stannis was giving Sansa a pointed look, trying to convince her to let him carry her off already.

She had thrown the bouquet, and she had danced with all her brothers - even Rickon - at least twice and probably four times with her father. It was time to go. He was in the sort of state where she barely had to touch him to get his cock to take notice, and it was getting awkward to be around people.

“Now, I’m gonna be dancing this with my hubby, but this one is actually dedicated to my brother, Stannis, who did learn what love means. I think,” Renly’s voice rang out, a little slurred due to all the Champagne, and magnified by the sound system.
Stannis didn’t realise right away which song was starting, but Sansa was giggling almost as soon as the first notes of the song played.

He furrowed his brow and listened to the lyrics, trying to hear what the singer was saying despite Robert’s awful, out of tune accompaniment.

_In my life there’s been heartache and pain / I don’t know if I can face it again..._

Stannis scowled and glared at Renly who was happily dancing with Loras and ignoring him completely. _Foreigner, Renly? Really?_

“Let’s dance,” Sansa said, taking a break from her amused giggles in order to pull on his arm and attempt to drag him towards the other dancing couples.

“No,” he complained, “this is embarrassing.”

“I actually really like this song,” Sansa cajoled, “please?”

“You like Foreigner?” he asked, still frowning, but feeling a little less embarrassed.

“It’s over the top and cheesy, and it’s amazing,” she said decisively, tugging on his arm and smiling.

“They’re making fun of me,” he protested, glaring at his brothers and wondering if it had been too much to expect that they would leave him in peace for one night of his life.

“It’s good-natured,” Sansa pointed out, “the song is about a man who’s been through a lot and just wants to find love and not be lonely anymore. I think it’s romantic.”

Stannis sighed and stopped resisting. He supposed it was no hardship to dance with his wife to a cheesy love song. Even if he could have done without his brothers providing tuneless backing vocals.

Maybe he should even thank his idiot brothers? After all, he was feeling more in control of his body now. A minute ago he would not have been able to hold Sansa in his arms without getting an unfortunate erection.

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Stannis was still feeling fairly in control of himself when Davos and Marya came over to talk with him and Sansa, and he was glad of it as Davos would have noticed if he were having that sort of trouble.

He couldn’t help but smile when Sansa asked the other couple what the secret of their success was. They had been married for twenty years, and they were obviously still very much in love.

“Never go to bed angry, trust and respect each other, and don’t be afraid to have independent lives and separate interests and hobbies. You’re only strong together if you’re also strong individually,” Marya said promptly, sounding as if she had thought the matter over carefully.

Sansa was nodding thoughtfully, and it seemed to Stannis that she hadn’t heard anything quite like that last piece of advice before.

“And don’t forget to make time for each other when the babies come along,” Davos added, winking at Stannis.
Sansa blushed, but her smile widened when Davos mentioned babies and she gave Stannis an excited look. He returned the smile, feeling rather excited himself at the thought of making a baby or two with her. At the moment he was rather more excited about the conception than the end result, but he was also looking forward to raising more children. With Sansa.

“Davos, look,” Marya suddenly whispered, nodding at the dance floor. They all turned to look at what she had spotted, and Stannis felt his stomach do an odd little flip when he saw that Shireen was swaying to a slow love song with Bran Stark.

“Oh, it’s so sweet,” Sansa squealed, grabbing Stannis’ arm and squeezing it. “Aren’t they cute?”

Stannis exchanged a significant look with Davos and grunted in response to Sansa’s question. It was more alarming than cute, in his opinion. He hadn’t expected her to start dancing with boys quite yet.

“Isn’t Bran technically Shireen’s step-uncle?” Marya asked, sounding bemused.

Sansa laughed and shook her head. “I really don’t think we should point that out to them.”

Sansa’s laughter faded, and the four adults stood in silence for a little while, listening to the gentle music and watching the two teenagers avoid each other’s eyes as they mouthed the lyrics and slow-danced.

Stannis suddenly felt like someone was watching him, and after checking that it wasn’t Sansa, Davos or Marya, he carefully looked around at the other people scattered around the glittering flower garden.

Ned was staring right at him, a small amused smile playing on his lips. Something about his father-in-law’s expression reminded him of the way he had sounded when they had discussed Shireen’s friendship with Bran over tea. There had been amusement in his tone then, too.

Feeling uncomfortable, Stannis tore his eyes away from Ned’s gaze, and looked at Sansa instead.

“Can we leave soon?” he asked, suddenly feeling very tired of being among so many people. He wanted to be alone with Sansa, and he wanted many hugs. “It’s nearly morning.”

“Soon,” Sansa nodded, “we should start saying good-bye to everyone.”

Saying good-bye took a good half an hour, but eventually they had spoken to everyone except Shireen. They had left her for last so they could spend a little extra time saying good-bye to her before driving to the harbour where the yacht Robert had given him awaited.

Shireen was laughing as he and Sansa hugged her, and she told them to take care, sounding much too grown up. Stannis really couldn’t believe how grown up she was. She had been behaving like quite the lady in her pretty dress for most of the night, and now she had even started to dance with boys…

He kissed her cheek, feeling like he ought to do more than just hug her, and told her to behave for Davos and Marya while he and Sansa were on their honeymoon. It would only be for a few days, but they wouldn’t be in much touch while they were out on the ocean.

As he walked away, hand in hand with his gorgeous bride, he thought about what his wedding day had meant to him.

The day had been about making his relationship with Sansa official and publicly declaring his
commitment to her, but it had also been about solidifying Sansa’s relationship with Shireen and their whole relationship as a family. He was surprised by how little the events of the day had changed the way he looked at Sansa, and how much they had changed how he saw Shireen. Sansa was still the woman he loved more than anything. The person he wanted to grow old with. And Shireen was still his daughter, but she was a more grown up version. A version that laughed with her friends and danced with boys. He hadn’t expected this change to happen so quickly, and he wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about it. All Stannis knew was that he would fight tooth and nail to keep both his girls happy. No matter the changes that might be in store.
The sun had risen and the sky was blue by the time Stannis and Sansa boarded the yacht Robert had given Stannis for Christmas. They had not got around to renaming it, so it was still called The Winter Rose. They had discussed a few options when they had taken it out to sea in the spring, and so far Stannis liked the idea of naming it Lady after Sansa’s puppy the best.

Stannis was not really thinking of any of this when he boarded the vessel, however. Nor was he noticing that the day that was beginning would be cloudless, beautiful and warm. All he could focus on was getting Sansa to the main cabin and finally getting to see what she had on underneath all that Myrish lace.

He hoped casting off and sailing out to sea would keep the crew suitably busy for the next hour or two, and hopefully they would not get bored enough to wander by his and Sansa’s cabin door, because Stannis did not intend to even attempt to keep it down. He hadn’t heard Sansa’s moans, her sighs or her high-pitched screams of pleasure for much too long, and he desperately wanted to remedy the situation.

Sansa took her high heels off almost as soon as they were aboard the yacht, holding them loosely in one hand, and holding onto the edge of her skirt with the other in an attempt to keep the train from getting dirty. He would have offered to carry her, but they were on a boat, and it would be safer if they walked properly to the cabin. Before going below deck Stannis nodded to the captain, signalling that it was time to cast off. They did not interact with any other members of the crew, and Stannis hoped they would not have to do so anytime soon. Their luggage should already be in their cabin if his instructions had been followed, and some light snacks.

When they reached the door to their cabin, Stannis stopped Sansa before she walked inside.

He reached for her face and stroked her cheek with a thumb before tucking a tendril of hair behind one of her ears. “I believe there is some sort of tradition that has to do with brides and thresholds,” he murmured.

Sansa smiled, her eyes sparkling, and she immediately arranged herself so it would be easy for him to pick her up. Stannis made sure the door was open so that he wouldn’t run into trouble, and lifted her into his arms in one smooth motion. Nothing but the bridal carry would do, and he was careful to enter the cabin sideways so that he wouldn’t bump her head on the door jamb.

“Shall I put you on the bed?” he asked, unable and unwilling to disguise the desire in his voice.

“No, I want to look,” Sansa said, craning her neck and obviously trying to see how the cabin had been decorated for the occasion. Stannis placed her on her feet and eventually managed to tear his eyes away from her to take in their surroundings.

Red rose petals had been strewn over the snow-white comforter on the bed, and the veil she had worn for the ceremony - but removed for the reception - had somehow ended up there as well. The port holes - more like windows, really - had been shuttered to prevent any sunlight from streaming in, and the cabin was gently lit by several strings of fairy lights instead. A bottle of Champagne had been left in a bucket of ice, and two crystal flutes stood waiting to be filled. Next to the glasses there was a large bowl of fresh strawberries, still glistening with drops of water, a box of custom-made chocolates - heart shaped and engraved with a double ‘S’ design - and a plate of miniature lemon cakes. There was also a picnic basket nearby, covered with a checkered cloth, but as there was a baguette sticking out Stannis assumed there were some savoury treats in there.
“Did you do this?” Sansa asked, turning to give him a wide-eyed look. She was still holding her high heels loosely in one hand.

Stannis shook his head. “I only asked for some snacks…”

“The crew did this?” Sansa sounded incredulous, but happy.

“They must have.” It was the only explanation he could think of. “Or Margaery, perhaps…” he added when the thought occurred to him. Someone must have arranged for the veil to be transported from the godswoods to this cabin.

“Well, if it was the crew then they’re all getting a bonus,” Sansa said, nodding decisively. “But I’ll ask Margaery about it later.”

Stannis decided not to tell Sansa that he was already paying every member of the crew much more than the standard rate in order to ensure that they would be blind and deaf for the duration of the cruise, or failing that, at least discreet about anything they might see or hear.

“Of course, anything my wife wishes,” he said instead, feeling a little thrill at saying the words.

“Mm, is that so, husband?”

He felt another, more powerful thrill at that, and closed the distance between them so that he could kiss her and share his excitement with her. He heard two thunks as she dropped her shoes in favour of wrapping her arms around his neck.

Sansa pushed him away after a criminally short while, telling him to wait.

“Are you sure you want to do this right now? Aren’t you tired? We’ve been up all night…”

Stannis could not believe his ears. Was she being serious? He did not believe in any gods, but if he did, he’d be praying to them and asking them to make it so that she was not being serious.

He took a step back from her and searched her face, trying to read her mood. His shoulders sagged with relief when he saw the wicked, teasing glint in her eyes. The minx was torturing him on purpose.

“If you want me to be romantic I would reconsider your current tactics,” he growled into her ear.

“What will happen if I don’t reconsider?” Sansa giggled.

“Your lovely wedding gown will end up torn and possibly used as a restraint,” he warned, his hands starting to wander down towards her arse.

“No!” Sansa sounded genuinely distressed at that, and took a step away from him. “I’ll be good, I promise. Just let me take the gown off, please?”

“Of course,” he said, feeling a little amused at her reaction. As if he would seriously do anything to damage a woman’s wedding dress. He was desperate to have her, but he wasn’t suicidal.

Sansa immediately relaxed and smiled at him. “Just make yourself comfortable. I’ll join you in a minute,” she promised.

He nodded, but then he looked at the form-fitting gown on Sansa’s body and had a thought. “You don’t need help getting out of that?”
Sansa blinked a few times and bit her lip. “Actually, I probably do. Could you undo the buttons at the back?”

Stannis didn’t linger too much over his task. Every pearl button he undid revealed more and more of the bridal lingerie she was wearing, and by the time the back of the dress was gaping open he was so aroused that it was becoming difficult to breathe normally.

Sansa turned around, holding the dress to her front and smiling. “I won’t take long,” she said, “I just want to make sure everything looks right.” She pecked his lips, bent to pick her shoes up off the floor and started towards the door to the en suite. She stopped when she was halfway there, however, and went over to the bed. Stannis had a brief moment of hope, but then he realised she was only fetching the veil. After she had picked it up and winked at him, she disappeared into the en suite, the fine fabric of her gown swishing as she walked.

Stannis decided not to imagine what Sansa might look like in bridal lingerie, heels and a veil. He wanted to be conscious when she returned to him, and such thoughts were likely to knock him out cold.

Instead of getting lost in daydreams, he decided to use the time to strip. He wanted to feel Sansa’s naked skin against his, and it was always quicker to undress himself than have Sansa giggle over every button that gave her trouble. As enjoyable as her giggles were, his patience was long gone. Even his emergency supply of patience was gone. The only thing stopping him from dragging Sansa to bed and ravishing her, was the knowledge that this was their wedding night, and that he was actually a decent human being and not a wild animal.

Technically it wasn’t night, though.

Stannis shook his head and took a deep breath. He wanted to make love to the woman he loved. His wife. He did not want to attack her and fuck her like some sort of horny beast.

… There would be time for that later.

Their first time as husband and wife should be special.

He hesitated when he was down to his silk boxers - especially bought for the wedding - and wondered if he should take them off and get on the bed or if he should leave them on and let Sansa help him with them. He was still trying to make up his mind when the door to the en suite opened.

All thoughts of his own underwear flew from his mind when he was finally faced with Sansa in her bridal lingerie. His painfully erect cock jumped and twitched, and he could have sworn it hardened just a little bit more.

There was a cream-coloured bustier holding her breasts up and making her waist appear narrower than ever. It was decorated with silk bows and lace panels and criss-crossing ribbons that he very much wanted to touch and possibly pull on with his teeth. There was a matching cream-coloured garter belt and some scandalously small lacy panties that he definitely wanted to pull on with his teeth. The stockings she wore were topped with cream-coloured lace, and there was a delicate garter encircling one thigh. It was either light blue or green - probably blue - and it was decorated with a little bow and a heart-shaped design with a small glittering stone at the centre. She had combed her hair out of her updo and it was flowing down her back in soft waves, and her face still seemed flawlessly made up to him, even after all the eating and the dancing and everything. The veil and the high heels were the crowning finishing touches.

She put the models in the bridal magazines to shame, and was quite possibly the most arousing,
gorgeous vision he had ever been faced with in his life.

Would it be horribly gauche to beg for a picture as a keepsake? He had never asked for sexy photographs of her as he hadn’t thought he would ever need or want any. He had her, after all. Why would he need a picture if he had the genuine article?

But this… he doubted he would ever get to see this again.

He had to swallow several times before his dry mouth could be convinced to cooperate and perform the necessary functions required for speech.

“I can’t… I don’t - I don’t have the words,” he stammered, staring at her greedily and almost groaning when she responded to his words with a faint blush. A perfect blushing bride. Was this real? Was this actually happening to him?

“You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” he choked out, taking an unsteady step towards her and reaching for her lips.

“Thank you,” she whispered, kissing the tips of his fingers and fluttering her eyelashes at him.

“Could - could I take a picture?” he blurted, feeling his face heat up. “You can say no,” he hurried to add, half regretting his outburst already.

Sansa looked surprised for one moment, but rather pleased with herself the next.

“What would you do with the picture?” she purred, reaching to stroke his chest and - oh, yes-yes-yes - his cock through the black silk of his boxers. Unfortunately she let go after just a few wonderful touches.

She sat down on the bed and he sat down next to her, drawn to her side as if there was a magnetic pull between them.

“I’d just - just keep it,” he said, feeling uncertain about what sort of answer she was fishing for.

“When would you look at it?” she asked, tilting her head to the side and smiling a little wickedly.

“Er… I suppose I would look at it when I wanted to remember this night.” He would also probably be tempted to use the picture for inspiration, but Stannis still didn’t really like to talk with Sansa about the fact that he got himself off on his own.

“What if you looked at it and it made you want to, you know, do things?” Sansa asked, her wicked smile still in place.

Stannis swallowed and tried to collect his wits. “I’d seek you out and try to talk you into taking your clothes off,” he said, deepening his voice and staring straight into her eyes. He was getting tired of talking.

Sansa made a pleased humming sound, but did not appear completely satisfied with his answer nonetheless.

“What if I wasn’t around just then?” she asked, giving him a coy look.

What did she want him to say? That he’d probably stick his hands down his pants, have some sort of lewd fantasy, and come all over himself?

His face felt very warm, and he couldn’t think of anything to say.
“Would you touch yourself?” she whispered, her hand choosing that moment to start stroking his cock again.

“Gnghno.” That was supposed to sound like ‘no’. *Great work, Stannis.*

“You wouldn’t?” Sansa was pouting and pulling her hand away.

“I mean yes,” he gasped out, needing her hand to come back. To his relief his words had exactly the intended effect.

“Did I ever tell you how hot I thought it was when I woke up and your were… entertaining yourself?” Sansa asked, using her attractive breathless tone of voice and sneaking her hand under the waistband of his boxers.

He was too distracted by the sensation of her hand on his bare cock to reply right away, but when she didn’t start to stroke him he realised that she was waiting for an answer.

“No, you never told me,” he hurried to say, hissing out a breath when she started to move her hand up and down, squeezing him lightly.

“I - I really like the idea of you looking at a picture of me and touching yourself,” she confessed, sounding a bit shy all of a sudden.

“Oh, *fuck,*” he groaned, wishing that she would speed up, or use her mouth, or let him get his cock between her thighs where it *belonged.*

She let go.

“Why did you stop?” he moaned, a slightly embarrassing whine in his tone.

“I thought you wanted to take a picture?” Sansa asked, giving him a sweet smile.

*She was really going to let him… ?*

“Do you want me to stand, or would you like me to lie on the bed?” she asked, fiddling with a lock of her hair a little nervously.

Stannis had to close his eyes for a moment and focus on not hyperventilating.

He cleared his throat and tried to say something sensible. “On the - on the bed, I think.”

Without a sound, Sansa made herself comfortable on the bed. Soon she was lying among the rose petals, looking like something out of a perfect, romantic dream.

Stannis hurriedly found his phone and turned the camera on.

“Careful that you don’t upload them to the Cloud or Instagram or something,” Sansa said, sounding amused.

Feeling flustered, Stannis just nodded. Usually he might have told her that he knew exactly what he was doing, thank you very much, and that he wasn’t as technologically impaired as her father, but now did not seem to be the right time for their usual banter.

His hands shook a little as he raised his phone up to frame the shot, and he had to take a few deep breaths and tell himself to calm down.
The air in the cabin seemed unnaturally still and quiet as he snapped a few pictures. They communicated with their eyes, and Sansa moved to give him a few different poses: coquettish, sexy and devastatingly beautiful.

A part of him would have liked to keep photographing her for longer, but a much larger part of him was hard and ready and full of need.

“Let me see,” Sansa said, when he lowered the phone.

He humoured her, and didn’t protest when she deleted two of the pictures because of some perceived imperfection.

A little while later the phone lay forgotten on the nightstand, and he and Sansa were tangled up in each other on the bed, kissing and touching with a passionate fever. He was just sucking on her neck when he heard her take the sort of breath that signified that she was about to speak.

“What do you think about? When you… you know.” Her question was asked with a genuine and excited sort of curiosity, and Stannis almost forgot to be embarrassed about the topic.

Almost.

“I’d rather not say,” he said, feeling relieved that she wouldn’t be able to see his face now that he was busy licking a trail from her neck and to her cleavage. She smelled divine.

“I’ll tell you one of my fantasies if you tell me one of yours,” Sansa offered.

He had always wanted to know what she thought about when she played with that vibrator of hers. Stannis was fairly sure the next words out of his mouth had originated from his groin and not from anywhere higher up.

“All right, you go first,” he said, pulling on some of the ribbons that decorated her bustier with his teeth. The ribbons of a bow came undone, but not much else happened. He moved back to her cleavage and buried his nose in it, enjoying the plump softness of her breasts.

“Okay, um, I’ve often had this fantasy where we’re both, you know, in sort of like a period drama,” she began, sounding a little embarrassed.

Stannis moved down towards her thighs and started to kiss the exposed skin of her inner thigh, avoiding the lace of her stockings.

“In the fantasy I’m a little like Mary in Sense and Sensibility - overly romantic and a little gullible - and you’re just like a mixture of Mr. Darcy and Colonel Brandon - very stern and sensible.”

He started to lick his way from her inner thigh and upwards, aiming for the scrap of lace and silk that covered her sex. He was very interested to hear more of her fantasy, and hoped that his actions were encouraging her.

“What usually happens is that I end up in a bad situation with some scoundrel who attempts to ruin my reputation, but you come along and challenge him to a duel to protect my honour.”

“I should like to hope I’d be very concerned with your honour,” Stannis said, and started to pull at her panties with his teeth just like he had wanted to do since he first saw them.

Sansa giggled. “Of course I end up marrying you in the fantasy, but on our wedding night it turns
out that there’s more to you than meets the eye.”

“Oh?” He still had panties between his teeth, so he didn’t say much more than that.

“Yes. It turns out you feel I deserve a lot of discipline for having been such a silly, gullible girl, and getting myself in trouble,” Sansa whispered, sounding really quite embarrassed now.

He hadn’t really managed to move her panties out of the way, but they had shifted enough to give him access to her folds. He started to lick her; his tongue was probably too fast and too eager, but he couldn’t slow himself down. His balls were starting to ache.

“So you… oh, you spank me, and make me go down on you, and - and all sorts of things that a lady of that period would be horrified by.” Sansa moaned her words more than she spoke them, but he understood her well enough.

Stannis gave her a firm lick and pulled away so he could look up at her. “But are you horrified by them?” he asked, feeling curious about what fantasy-Sansa really thought of fantasy-Stannis’ treatment of her.

“No,” Sansa squeaked out. “I love every minute.”

Stannis huffed out a laugh and got to his knees. “Switch with me.” If he was going to attempt to reveal one of his fantasies to her, he wanted her to be licking his cock while he did it.

It was difficult to remember how to talk once he was faced with the view of Sansa, still bedecked in her wedding lingerie, kneeling between his thighs and licking up the clear droplets of precome that were leaking out as fast as she could clean them away. His boxers lay forgotten on the floor of the cabin, and it had rarely felt quite as good to be naked.

“So?” Sansa prompted after a while, raising an eyebrow at him and then going back to tormenting him in the best of ways with her little licks.

Right. He was supposed to share a fantasy. His fantasies were usually not very elaborate, nor fit for a lady’s ears. He closed his eyes and tried to think of one that would not embarrass him completely.

“Last time I had to go on a business trip,” he began, speaking a little hesitantly, “I - er - I missed you quite a bit.”

Sansa made a humming sound, encouraging him to keep going.

“I thought about what it would be like if I could call the hotel’s room service and have you delivered to my room…” he trailed off into a groan when Sansa started to suck on the head of his cock.

“... wearing a French maid’s uniform,” he added, feeling incredibly embarrassed but weirdly aroused by the memory of the fantasy at the same time.

There was a wet sounding pop. “You’re really into the whole French maid thing, aren’t you?” Sansa giggled, “I’m starting to think that’s what I should have gone with for your stag party.”

Stannis groaned and tangled his hand in her hair, begging her without words to keep sucking.

She obliged him.

“I imagined making you put your hands on the window - with the curtains thrown open - and
bending over for me,” he said, his voice strained.

Sansa sucked harder and used her hand to great effect, squeezing the base of his cock in just the right way.

“And then I thought about fucking you from behind in full view of anyone who might pass by the hotel and think to look up.”

Sansa stopped what she was doing and sat up. “I didn’t know you were an exhibitionist,” she said with a delighted smile.

“I’m not,” he said, shooting her an offended little glare, “it was just a fantasy.”

“Of course,” Sansa said, turning to show him her back and indicating with a gesture that he should undo the fastenings that held her bustier in place. “You know I like to tease you.”

“I’m not sure I’ll be tolerating much more teasing,” he murmured into her ear, moving on to kiss her neck as he unhooked the cream-coloured lingerie.

She giggled at that and helped him unclasp her garter belt. The suspenders came away from her stockings fairly easily, and soon she was left in nothing but the panties - he had not managed to get them all the way off with his teeth - the stockings and the blue garter. She had long since kicked her heels off, but the veil was still hanging on.

As much as he loved how the fancy lingerie looked, he was starting to wish it was a lot less complicated to get it off.

“I can’t wait to feel you inside,” she confessed as she helped him pull her panties down her thighs. He decided to leave the stockings and the garter.

He couldn’t answer her. He just groaned and climbed on top of her, rubbing his cock against her lovely wet folds and enjoying the sensual feel of naked skin against naked skin.

“I haven’t put anything bigger than a finger up there since we last had sex,” she whispered. “You have no idea how much I’ve missed the way you feel.” She was blushing quite a bit, but there was heat and love in her eyes, and he couldn’t hold himself back any longer. He found the right place and thrust his hips the way he had been increasingly desperate to do over the course of their wedding day, the night, and now this morning.

“Oh, gods! Stannis!”

The ecstasy in her voice made the long wait worth it, but the glorious sensation of her squeezing him so fucking tightly was rather worthwhile, too.

“I love you,” he gasped out, wanting to say it while he still could. Soon he would be too incoherent and too out of breath.

“I love you, too,” Sansa moaned, scratching lightly at his back and wrapping her legs around him to pull him closer.

He started to move, rocking against her and looking down into her eyes. She looked back at him and Stannis felt more connected to her than ever before. It was special. Magical.

“You have never felt this good,” she moaned, “you’re so amazing...”
He felt his sack tighten up at her words, and he hissed out a breath. *Not yet,* he thought at his overeager body. He wanted this to last forever.

It was a challenge, but he managed to hold on by a thread by keeping his every movement tightly controlled. Being so close was almost better than actually coming, and after a while of teetering on the edge he started to pant. He tried to do it as quietly as he could because he wanted to hear the sounds Sansa was making. He had missed those sighs and whimpers, and he wanted to drown in them now.

“I hope…” Sansa said, her voice breathless and a little throaty, “I hope this is the right time…"

He slowed down and kissed her neck. Fuck, but he was close.

“Right time?” he choked out, hardly able to get his vocal cords to cooperate.

“For me to conceive,” she whispered.

Her words caused white-hot pleasure to course through him, warming him from the centre of his chest and outwards to the tips of his toes and his fingers. He lost all control, shifted his body for more leverage and started pounding himself into her with total desperation and abandon. *A baby… he might be putting a baby in her…*.

Sansa’s voice climbed to a higher pitch with every powerful thrust of his hips, and soon she was practically screaming in time with his broken moans and grunts of effort.

Stannis had been vaguely aware of the fact that the yacht had started to move for a while. It was a piece of information that had seemed wholly unimportant in comparison with everything that was going on between him and Sansa, but right now he was glad that the noise of the boat’s engine and the ocean waves was probably helping to keep this moment private.

His orgasm was so forceful that he was surprised that he was managing to live through it, and he moaned Sansa’s name as he collapsed on top of her, sticking their sweaty skin together.

It took him a moment to collect what remained of his strength and shakily roll off, but he did it before Sansa started to have trouble breathing.

The fact that he had been awake for nearly twenty-four hours suddenly caught up with him. He couldn’t open his eyes. His brain was shutting down, and his limbs - heavy with fatigue and sexual satisfaction - were refusing to budge and inch.

He mumbled something that he hoped Sansa would understand to mean that he loved her, and that he was just going to have a little nap… just for a little while…

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“Stannis?”

He groaned and threw an arm over his eyes. Why was it so bright?

“Time is it?” he muttered, turning to lie on his front so he could bury his face in his soft pillow and block out the light.

“It’s a little after noon,” Sansa said, sounding amused. “I thought you might want to have brunch with me. You must be hungry.”
His stomach growled at the mere thought of food, and he decided to attempt to open his eyes. He sat up and squinted, rubbing his face and wincing at the taste of his own tongue. He needed a shave. He needed to brush his teeth. He really needed to pee.

After finally adjusting to the light, he managed to look at Sansa.

She looked unfairly beautiful. Her hair looked freshly washed and dried, her face was clean and clear of makeup, and she was wearing a pretty white negligé under a matching silk robe.

He probably looked like a wreck next to her. Perhaps he ought to shower.

“The crew left all sorts of things for us in this picnic basket,” Sansa said with a wide smile. “Bread, cheese, honey... It all looks delicious!”

His stomach growled again.

A quick trip to the en suite later he was sitting at the small table of their cabin, breaking his fast like a king.

Everything was indeed delicious, and even though most of the ice had melted, the Champagne was still cold. He only drank a few sips to humour Sansa, but he had to admit that it brought out the flavour of the strawberries.

He suspected that everything tasted better because he was sitting across from Sansa -- his lovely queen who was mostly eating the lemon cakes and shooting him playful glances that made him want to laugh. She was acting like a little kid, full of glee at the fact that she was getting away with sneaking sweets instead of eating proper food.

“I was thinking of going up on deck to soak up a bit of sun after we eat,” Sansa said, sipping her Champagne and picking up a strawberry, “I expect you want a shower, but I hope you’ll join me when you’re done?”

He would rather have her wait for him in bed, but he knew there would be plenty of time for that later. If she wanted to enjoy the sun for a while she would get to do precisely that.

“Anything you want,” he said.

“And if I want you to make love to me up on deck in a lounge chair?” Sansa asked, sucking on a strawberry and giving him a look that could only be described as naughty.

“Then I will do that,” he said, his voice husky. He rather liked the idea of fucking her under the sun. He did not think they’d ever done it outside.

“What about the crew?” she giggled.

“They’ll make themselves scarce if they know what’s good for them,” he said heatedly.

“Oh, but what if someone sees us by accident?” Sansa asked, not really sounding worried as much as she sounded flirtatious.

He raised an eyebrow. “Then they might learn a thing or two.” He wasn’t concerned that it might actually happen, so it was easy to pretend that he didn’t feel uncomfortable with the idea of someone catching them in flagrante delicto.

“You are an exhibitionist,” Sansa laughed, her tone teasing.
He gave her a mock-glare. “Are you going to make me regret sharing that fantasy with you?” he asked, trying to keep his voice stern and an octave deeper than usual, “shall I have to discipline you, my little wife?”

Sansa blushed and her pupils blew out with obvious arousal. “Maybe… maybe that would be best,” she said breathlessly, biting her lip.

It was a good long while before Sansa managed to escape the cabin, and Stannis didn’t end up showering until well after three in the afternoon, his cock feeling a little tender from overuse. He smirked to himself as he washed up, thinking about how he was certainly not at risk of having his ‘equipment’ fall off due to a lacking sex life anymore. If anything, he was starting to wonder how he’d make it through several days of such enthusiastic…exercise without the equipment going off on strike.

Perhaps Sansa would be willing to apply a soothing lotion, or kiss it better?

Stannis made the water a little cooler just in case his tender flesh got any ideas due to his spontaneous Nurse Sansa fantasy. He couldn’t handle another erection quite yet.

Despite the minor discomfort of his current situation, the memories of the past few hours had him wondering whether it would be considered terribly odd if he decided to take Sansa for a bit of a honeymoon every year.
Returning to normal life after his honeymoon was more difficult than Stannis had expected. He usually thrived on routines, order and structure, but it had been incredibly nice to exist in a sunlit little bubble out on the ocean, where time didn't mean anything, and the day was spent doing one of two things. (Either he was making love to Sansa or he wasn’t.) He’d had no responsibilities and no stress. The only thing he had needed to worry about was whether he’d be able to get it up enough times to satisfy his insatiable wife.

That had not really been a problem.

Sansa had been a bit sad to return from their honeymoon, too, but she had smiled when faced with the task of opening all the weddings gifts. Stannis hadn’t been all that interested, but he had enjoyed watching her squeal with joy over the beautiful silverware and china they had been given.

The gift from Shireen had most certainly interested him, however, and Sansa had squealed more loudly about the framed puzzle than any other present.

“It’s my favourite!” she had exclaimed, her voice so high-pitched that Stannis half expected a few dogs to come running.

"It’s very beautiful,” he had added, smiling at Shireen who had been watching Sansa open the presents with avid interest. "Thank you, Shireen.

"Yes! Thank you, thank you, thank you! Let’s hang it up right now!”

Sansa’s enthusiasm had been infectious, and Stannis had found himself removing an abstract painting from a prominent place in the living room to make a place for the puzzle.

His wife hadn’t seemed the least bit sad after that.

At the present moment he was sitting at his desk at work, staring blankly at his calendar and wishing time would go faster. Sansa had said that tomorrow would be the day that she would start her period if they hadn’t managed to get her pregnant. He had wanted to make an appointment with their doctor and get a blood test done a week ago, but Sansa had wanted to wait.

“If my period comes we’ll have our answer,” she had said with an infuriatingly calm smile, “if it doesn’t come we can think about making an appointment.”

Stannis started when the door of his office flew open and Robert strode inside.

“I forgot to ask you what you wanted to eat tonight,” his brother said without so much as a ‘hello’. “Chicken, beef, pork, or some kind of fish, maybe?”

It took him a few seconds to remember that Robert was throwing a barbecue at his house that evening to say good-bye to Shireen. She was leaving for Brightwater tomorrow, where she would spend the rest of her summer.

“Just - just whatever everyone else is having,” Stannis said with a shrug, his heart rate slowing back down to a normal rhythm as he recovered from his brother’s startling entrance.

“I’ll put you down for chicken, then,” Robert said, “Renly gave me a recipe for a marinade that I’ve been wanting to try,” he added, going on to talk about how much fun he was having now that
Ramón the chef was on holiday. It turned out that Robert quite liked to cook, just like Renly.

“Anyway, how’s married life treating you?”

“Fine,” Stannis said warily, hoping Robert wasn’t about to start asking him whether he and Sansa had done it up the arse on their honeymoon or something inappropriate like that.

“Looking forward to having the apartment to yourselves?” Robert waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Stannis clenched his jaw and tried to keep from going red. “None of your business.”

“Relax,” Robert sighed, rolling his eyes, “I wanted to talk to you about the apartment, actually.”

“What about it?”

“You’re planning on moving at some point, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I thought you might want to talk to the realtor that sold me my house. She’s really great, and she often catches wind of great places that are about to come on the market before they’re even listed.”

Stannis stared at his brother, feeling confused and a little suspicious. “Why are you being helpful?”

“My therapist thinks I should work towards creating ‘stronger familial bonds’.” Robert scrunched up his face as he quoted his therapist, obviously straining his memory to come up with the right words. He looked very pleased with himself when he managed it.

“Oh,” Stannis said, not quite sure how to respond.

“Yep. So do you want the realtor’s contact information, or what?”

“Er, yes. Why not.”

Robert found his phone and poked at the screen for a little while. Stannis felt his own phone vibrate in his pocket.

“You’re going to need a very big house, aren’t you?” his brother chortled, “if Sansa is anything like Cat!”

“Go away,” Stannis sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose in annoyance.

“Don’t be like that,” Robert said, looking crestfallen, “I’m really looking forward to meeting all my new nieces and nephews!”

“I’m not having this conversation with you right now.”

“You’re definitely doing your best to knock Sansa up, though?” Robert asked, ignoring Stannis’ death glares. “You know you can actually find out when a woman is ovulating by monitoring her basal body temperature,” his brother happily informed him, “and I think there’s something about cervical mucus -”

Stannis closed his eyes and fought the urge to put his fingers in his ears and hum loudly. “Please stop talking,” he said instead, cutting his brother off right as he started to describe the texture of
fertile cervical mucus.


He took a deep breath. “I do not wish to discuss my wife’s cervical mucus with you,” he explained, keeping his voice low even though he felt he would be entirely justified if he started shouting.

“You’re right. It’s not as important to pay attention to that stuff if you’re managing to to get her on her back at least once a day. Twice is better, though. You know I can cover for you if you want to use your lunch hour for this –”

“Robert!”

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Stannis and Sansa sat in tense silence in the car. They had just dropped Shireen off at the airport, and Stannis couldn’t help but think about how different the mood between him and Sansa was now compared with how it had been last year. Last year he had been a little sad to part with his daughter, but Sansa had cheered him up rather creatively. This year he was also a little sad to part with his daughter, but his anxious anticipation was overshadowing the feeling completely.

“Still nothing?” he asked, feeling a little absurd for asking. He had never been quite this interested in Sansa’s periods.

“I would tell you,” Sansa said, sounding amused.

“Should we stop and pick up a pregnancy test?” he asked, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel to get rid of some of his nervous energy.

“Well…” Sansa trailed off, looking out the passenger side window, “I usually start during the night or in the morning. The fact that I’m still not even feeling any cramps is a pretty good sign. Maybe getting a test wouldn’t be a bad idea.”

Instead of making him wait five minutes before appearing before him in pretty lingerie, holding a blindfold and a silk tie, Sansa made him wait five minutes while she did what she had to do with the white stick in the en suite. Hopefully she would emerge with the result soon.

He paced around their bedroom, feeling a mixture of hope and fear, and wondered what it would be like to become a parent to a new child. Would it be the same as it had been with Shireen?

Stannis hoped any children he ended up having with Sansa would not get sick as Shireen had. He knew he would be able to struggle through it as he had done before, but he did not wish to see Sansa suffer the pain and the uncertainty.

He practically ran towards the door when she opened it, opening his mouth to ask a question but changing his mind halfway through and closing his mouth again.

“It took a little while to read the instructions and get everything, you know, done, but now we just need to wait for three minutes and then we should see the result. If we get two lines it means that the test is positive, one line means that it’s negative.” Sansa was obviously attempting to sound calm and in control of herself, but Stannis could see that her hands were trembling with excitement.

“Where is it?” he asked, noticing that her trembling hands were empty.

“On the counter. I don’t think we should look at it until the time is up.”
“Was that in the instructions?” he asked, feeling strangely amused all of a sudden.

“No, of course not.” She swatted his arm lightly, but gave him a grateful smile. She looked a little more relaxed.

He smiled back at her and pulled her into a hug. Would she be able to feel how hard his heart was pounding?

They stood in silence for a while, clinging to each other and waiting.

“If I’m pregnant I’d be due in March,” Sansa said at length, her voice muffled due to the hug.

Stannis did some quick mental arithmetic. “Around the spring equinox,” he murmured, stroking her hair.

“Wouldn’t that be perfect?” Sansa’s voice was vulnerable and hopeful, and Stannis squeezed her a little tighter.

“It will be perfect no matter when it happens.”

Sansa’s phone started to chirp.

They sprang apart and looked at each other, eyes wide open.

“You have to look first,” she blurted, “I can’t.”

He felt a swooping sensation in his stomach, but he nodded nonetheless. “All right.”

He found the white stick sitting on the counter in the en suite just where Sansa had left it. She had placed it neatly on top of a few tissues, and the little window that was supposed to display the result of the test was facing up.

There were two lines.

That meant...

“We have to make an appointment with Dr. Cressen,” Stannis said, his voice strangled and full of emotion, “there are two lines!”

Sansa had been chewing on her lower lip and wringing her hands as he had investigated the white stick, but at his words she dropped her hands and opened her mouth until it formed a surprised little ‘o’.

“Really?” she squealed, “let me see!”

Stannis stood aside and allowed Sansa to look at the pair of lines that indicated their lives were about to change rather drastically.

“Gods,” she breathed, shaking her head, “I didn’t think it would happen so soon… I mean, I hoped it would, but you always hear that it takes time for these things to - to - “ She broke off on account of having burst into tears.

He hurriedly embraced her again, rubbing her back and stroking her hair and doing whatever he could think of to soothe her.

“Ssh, it’s okay, it’s good,” he murmured, “we’re having a baby.”
Now she was laughing and crying at the same time, and Stannis wondered if it was time for the pregnancy hormones to be messing with her sanity quite yet.

“I’m so happy,” she sobbed.

He reached for a nearby box of tissues and pulled back a little so that she would be able to wipe her face.

Seeing her raw, unfettered emotions was making his own eyes feel a little watery in their turn, and he had to swallow a few times before he was able to speak.

“I’m very happy, too,” he croaked. It was an understatement, but he couldn’t find better words.

“Can we call Dr. Cressen right away?” Sansa asked, wiping her nose and sniffing a little.

“Of course,” Stannis said, already looking for his phone.

Sansa used the time while he was on the phone to compose herself, and by the time he had made the appointment she was looking almost serene.

“I kind of want to keep this,” Sansa said, nodding at the white stick and giving him a sheepish look.

“Take a picture of it before throwing it away,” Stannis suggested.

They ended up sitting on the sofa, cuddled up even more closely than usually, and somehow his hand ended up resting low on Sansa’s abdomen.

“A baby,” Sansa whispered, “our baby.”

“I know,” he murmured in return, kissing her temple.

“Are we ready for this?” She sounded nervous.

“Of course we are,” he told her, sensing that she needed him to be confident, “all we have to do is find a house and we’ll be all set.”

“You make it sound so easy,” she said with a bit of a giggle.

“I’m afraid you’re going to be saddled with the hardest parts.” He had seen first-hand how hard a pregnancy could be on a woman, physically and emotionally, and it was frightening to be stuck on the outside, unable to really do anything to help.

“But you’ll be there, won’t you?” Sansa asked with a small smile.

“Every step of the way,” he promised, locking eyes with her and making sure she knew he was completely serious.

“Even when I get huge and fat?”

Stannis hesitated. Not because he thought he wouldn’t be there for her, but because he wasn’t certain he ought to agree that she might get huge and fat. It sounded like a trap.

“You should see the look on your face,” Sansa giggled.

He shot her a mock-glare and kissed her. “I’ll be there for you no matter what happens.”
“I know.” Sansa’s amusement had faded to make way for a very tender expression

One of her hands joined the hand he was resting on her abdomen. Their fingers intertwined. Somewhere beneath their hands new life had been created: the product of the love he and Sansa shared.

For the first time in his life he understood Jane Bennet when she had said that it was too much when Mr. Bingley finally proposed to her, that she could not bear such happiness, and that she wished everyone could be as happy as she was. He had always thought it was strange. Of course it wasn’t too much, and of course she could bear it, and what did everyone else have to do with it?

But he understood her now.

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“I thought being pregnant would mean I’d be glowing and stuff like that,” Sansa moaned from within the en suite. It was very early and Stannis was barely awake. It was hard to sleep through the retching noises coming from Sansa’s direction, however.

He rubbed his face and got out of bed. Sansa had left the door to the en suite ajar, so he went in and sat down on the floor next to the toilet with her.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, his voice full of sleep.

“I just want the nausea to stop,” she whimpered, retching again. Stannis did his best to hold her hair back.

“Do you want me to make an appointment with Dr. Cressen? Or the midwife?”

“There’s nothing they can do about this,” Sansa managed to say when she wasn’t… busy.

Stannis had known that, but he hadn’t been able to stop himself from making the suggestion anyway.

When it seemed the worst of Sansa’s nausea had passed he helped her off the floor and found her toothbrush for her. She had closed the toilet and was sitting on it, looking pale and tired.

“Do you want me to make breakfast?” he asked, wanting to make himself useful.

Sansa was brushing her teeth so she shook her head and grimaced instead of saying anything. Once she had found the strength to get up to finish brushing and rinsing, she explained that she couldn’t bear the thought of eating anything.

“But you’ve lost weight,” Stannis said, feeling worried.

“I’ll gain it back when the smell of food stops making me want to vomit,” she promised.

“Do you want me to stay at home today?” Stannis felt increasingly guilty about going to work while Sansa was alone at home and feeling wretched. As she was a teacher, she had a longer summer holiday than most, and thankfully did not need to worry about going to work in her current condition.

“I’ll be fine,” she said, moving slowly from the en suite and back to bed. “I’m usually a bit better in the afternoon.”

“Should I call Catelyn and ask her to visit you?”
“No, she’ll figure out that I’m pregnant in about a second. I want us to wait a bit longer before we tell my parents.”

“Margaery or Jeyne, then?”

“They’re busy with their own lives. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine.”

In the end Sansa almost had to shove him out the door, and he couldn’t get his face to stop frowning worriedly as he drove to work.

“What’s the matter?” Davos asked almost as soon as he spotted Stannis at the office.

“Er -” Stannis didn’t know what to say. He and Sansa were not telling anyone about the pregnancy yet. It had only been three weeks since they found out about it, and although Stannis was in complete denial about the possibility of a miscarriage, it was not yet certain that Sansa would keep the baby.

“Wishing you could stay home with Sansa?” Davos suggested with an amused grin.

“What do you think?” Stannis grumbled.

Davos laughed and dropped the subject.

Stannis took a deep breath, feeling relieved that his friend was not going to pursue the matter, and tried to look less miserable.

Maybe he’d actually be able to leave work early for once.

***

“Can you stay home today?” Sansa purred into his ear, rubbing herself against him suggestively.

It was the eighth week of Sansa’s pregnancy, and though she was still firmly in her first trimester her morning sickness had abated dramatically to be replaced with considerable morning friskiness.

Stannis was still trying to catch his breath. Going from being fast asleep to pounding himself into Sansa as hard as he could because she kept begging for more had been confusing for his body. His head felt incredibly fuzzy and his eyes were refusing to open properly.

“Stay… ?” he mumbled groggily.

“Yes, I really need you,” Sansa said breathlessly, still rubbing herself against him and getting his thigh all wet with his own mess.

“But we just - “

“I want you again,” she moaned.

“Now?” Even when they had been on their honeymoon she had usually given him more than five minutes to recover.

Sansa didn’t answer him. Instead she was kissing her way down his chest and towards his mostly limp cock. She did not seem to care that he hadn’t cleaned up yet and started to lick and suck at the head and then the shaft, bringing her hand into fray to fondle his balls. He knew she’d coax some hardness back into it soon and bravely resigned himself to his fate.
With a moan of pleasure he nonetheless furrowed his brow in an attempt to figure out how he would explain to Davos why he was late to work for the third day in a row.

***

“How’s it going?”

Robert had walked into his office again without knocking. It was rather unfortunate as Stannis had been - er - resting his eyes. And his head. On his desk.

He had snapped up into a sitting position as soon as he had heard the door, but he was fairly sure Robert had seen. His face became uncomfortably warm.

“Fine,” he muttered. “Did you want something?”

“Can’t I just look in on you from time to time?” Robert asked innocently.

Stannis raised a sceptical eyebrow.

“Did you ever talk to the realtor?” Robert asked, dropping the innocent act with a roll of his eyes.

“Yes, she’s been very helpful. We’ve looked at several houses at her behest and one or two are real contenders.”

Robert clapped his hands loudly and rubbed them together. “Excellent!”

“Was there something else?”

“In hurry to get back to your nap?” Robert sounded very amused.

“I wasn’t -”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell. I suppose Sansa is wearing you out? I know baby-making is hard work!”

For a mad second Stannis wondered what Robert would do if he told him that yes, he was worn out because he could barely keep up with his wife’s pregnancy-induced sexual appetite, and yes, he had been having a bit of a nap as a consequence. What of it?

“Shut up,” he said instead, glaring belligerently at his brother.

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch,” Robert said genially, “I’ll get out of what little remains of your hair in a second.”

Stannis just glared.

“I just wanted to remind you that I’m throwing a dinner party in a couple of weeks. I ought to be a free man by then!”

“I remember. I’ll save my congratulations for when the divorce papers have been signed, shall I?”

“That’s probably best. Don’t want to jinx it!” Robert laughed and shook his head. “Anyway, Shireen’s coming back tomorrow, isn’t she? Myrcella was wondering if she would want to sleep over at my house this weekend.”

“I’m sure the girls have talked about it amongst themselves,” Stannis said with a shrug. “She can sleep over if she wants.”
“Well, we can’t have her getting in the way of you putting a brother or sister for her in Sansa’s belly!”

“Get out before I throw my stapler at you,” Stannis threatened.

Robert barked out a laugh and held up his hands. “Fine, fine, I’ll go.”

Stannis was too embarrassed to try to go back to his nap, and managed to spend the rest of the afternoon doing some actual work.

***

Shireen had been at home for a week and Stannis was going insane because of that godforsaken turtle. He knew it was important to keep that thing away from Sansa and the baby she was carrying, but he couldn’t say anything about it before he and Sansa had announced the pregnancy to Shireen. Sansa was on her tenth week, which meant it was still early, but Stannis was pushing for them to tell Shireen as soon as possible. He was itching to make sure Shireen stopped bringing the damned thing to breakfast. Sterilising everything the turtle touched as soon as Shireen wasn’t looking was exhausting.

It was Sunday and Stannis had been woken up absurdly early by his demanding wife. He obliged her, and even managed to satisfy her thoroughly enough to keep her from begging for another round right away. His energy levels were up since she had agreed to have mercy on him on weekday mornings. (He had explained that Robert had caught him napping on his desk at work, and that as much as he wanted to satisfy her every need, he simply couldn’t keep up with her and do his job.)

Presently he was lying next to her and wondering whether he’d be able to convince her to tell Shireen the news today.

“Do you want the shower first?” Sansa asked, her voice content.

“No, you can have it,” he murmured, “but I wanted to ask you something before you go.”

“What is it?”

“Do you think we could tell Shireen about the baby today?”

Sansa shifted around so that she was facing him. She was biting her lip uncertainly. “You don’t think it’s too soon?”

“Dr. Cressen said the odds of a miscarriage were vanishingly small after the tenth week,” he reminded her.

Sansa glanced at the pile of pregnancy books next to her nightstand. “Some of the books say it’s better to wait until week twelve…”

“But the turtle -”

“You worry too much about the turtle.”

“I do not! There have been cases of infant death that have been traced to turtles and -”

“I’m careful!”

“Shireen needs to keep that thing away from you.”
“It’s not a thing, it’s her pet.”

“When we move we should set it free in the garden and get her something more appropriate.”

“Oh, I really liked the garden in the last place we looked at. It was so big and gorgeous…”

Stannis could tell that Sansa was trying to distract him by getting him talking about the perfect house Robert’s realtor had helped them find. He was very excited about the prospect of buying it, but he would not be derailed from his chosen topic of conversation.

“Let’s just tell her,” he said, “please? I promise I won’t say anything about the turtle until later.”

Sansa smiled widely. “I do really want to share the news with her. Do you think she’ll be excited about finally having a brother or sister?”

Stannis honestly had no idea. Shireen had never expressed an interest in having a sibling. He shrugged and told Sansa that he didn’t know.

“I remember when Mum and Dad told me that Rickon would be coming along. I was close to Shireen’s age.”

“How did you feel about it?” Stannis had never really thought about the age difference between Sansa and Rickon.

“I was thrilled!” Sansa was still smiling widely and looking more excited by the minute. “I was old enough to be over the worst of the phase where I felt like an outsider among my siblings, and it’s different when you’re so much older, anyway. I’ve always been more of an extra mother to Rickon rather than a sister.”

“I’m not sure I want Shireen to be a mother at fifteen,” Stannis said wryly.

“It wasn’t like that,” Sansa said, rolling her eyes at him. “You must know what I mean. Renly is much younger than you, isn’t he?”

Stannis heaved a deep sigh. He really didn’t want to remember what it had been like to become a makeshift parent to Renly after their parents died. Thankfully Sansa seemed to understand. She kissed him, stroked his cheek, and gave him a sympathetic look that told him he didn’t have to say anything.

“Let’s tell her,” Sansa said. “I’ll make a fruit salad, and maybe we can make pancakes after we tell her? With chocolate chips since we’re celebrating!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I love chocolate chips.”

“No, about telling Shireen.”

“Yes, I’m sure!”

“Let’s go and wait for her to wake up, then,” he said, already getting up from bed.

“She won’t be up any time soon. We have time to shower,” Sansa said, sounding amused.

“Right,” he agreed, feeling a little embarrassed at his eagerness.
Somehow they ended up having sex again in the shower.

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“I didn’t realise she’d be so taken aback by the idea of moving,” Sansa said quietly as she mixed the pancake batter.

Stannis had just entered the kitchen after having stayed behind with Shireen to explain that Voldetort the turtle needed to be kept as far away from Sansa as his namesake needed to be kept away from Harry Potter.

“She’s never been very fond of change,” Stannis said, thinking back. “She hated it when I had the apartment redecorated six years ago.”

“You decided to redecorate?” Sansa stopped mixing the batter for a moment while she gave him a bemused look.

Stannis nodded jerkily. He didn’t want to share the fact that his younger brother had annoyed him into doing it.

“She seemed happy about the baby, though,” Stannis said, thinking about the way she had smiled and congratulated them.

“She seemed overwhelmed,” Sansa countered, adding chocolate chips to the batter.

“You think so?”

“Yes, I think she’s going to need a while to adjust.”

Stannis sighed. Maybe Sansa was right. He hoped it wouldn’t take Shireen as long to come around to the idea of a baby sister or brother as it had taken her to come around to Sansa, however.

He wouldn’t allow it.
The ultrasound technician was chatting with Sansa as she moved the probe over Sansa’s exposed abdomen. It had started to protrude now that she had entered her second trimester, but one could easily assume that she had just eaten rather a lot of bread. Anyone who knew Sansa would realise that she wasn’t just bloated or putting on weight, however. The teachers at her school had all figured the secret out on her first day back, despite her attempt to dress in a way that wouldn’t draw attention to the little baby bump.

“There we go,” the ultrasound technician said after she had finished telling Sansa which baby carriers were the best in her opinion. “Do you see that?” She pointed at the blurry black and white image on the screen of the ultrasound machine. “That’s your baby.”

Sansa was staring at the screen in awe, but Stannis couldn’t decide whether he wanted to look at her or the blurry image. He kept looking back and forth between them, feeling like his heart might just burst out of his chest with love and pride.

“Oh,” the technician said, moving the probe around. “I’m not completely sure… wait just a minute…”

Sansa took her eyes off the screen to give him a panicked look. He tried to look calm even though he was panicking just as much on the inside. Was something wrong with the baby?

“Yes, those are two heartbeats,” the technician said, nodding to herself.

“Two?” Sansa repeated, sounding a bit faint.

“Yes, I think it’s safe to say that you’ll be having twins.”

“Twins?” Stannis repeated, his voice hoarse and about as faint as Sansa’s.

“Congratulations,” the technician said, obviously a bit amused by their shock.

Stannis looked at Sansa and she looked back at him. She bit her lip and quirked an eyebrow, clearly waiting for him to react.

“That’s good news, thank you,” he said to the technician, feeling overwhelmed but increasingly joyful.

Sansa’s expression changed to one of unbridled happiness, her smile wider than ever, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears. “Stannis,” she whispered, “twins.”

“I’ll give you a moment,” the technician said, gracefully bowing out of the room.

Sansa moved to the side on the bench she was resting on, and Stannis was quick to take the hint and squeeze in next to her so that he could put his arms around her and hold her to his chest. He didn't care when he got some of the clear gel on Sansa's bump on him.

“I can’t believe it,” Sansa mumbled into his shirt, “two babies.”

“I wonder if they’re identical or fraternal,” Stannis said, feeling excited and curious.

“I’m sure the technician will take a closer look at the placenta when she comes back. I remember reading about this in my books. There might be just one placenta that both babies share, or there
might be two. And I think it’s also possible for two placentas to fuse into one… Oh, and there are these inner membranes and outer membranes that the babies might share or each baby might have their own. I can’t remember it very clearly because I didn’t read the bits about twins too carefully… Anyway, that stuff should be able to help us figure out whether the twins are fraternal or identical.”

Stannis listened in fascination, feeling impressed with Sansa for having retained so much of a subject matter she hadn’t read ‘too carefully’.

“What do you think everyone is going to say?” he asked, already trying to imagine Shireen’s reaction.

“I think we had better bring a box of tissues with us when we tell Mum and Dad about this,” Sansa said, giggling and shaking her head slightly.

“You’re probably right,” Stannis said and sighed. “I’m not sure I’ll want to hear what Robert will say.”

Sansa giggled even more and Stannis couldn’t quell the urge to kiss her. It was a deep, passionate kiss, and Stannis was tempted to lock the door and find out how far Sansa would let him take this. He had barely finished having the thought when the door opened and the technician came back.

“Hello,” she said, cheerful as anything.

Stannis got to his feet, trying not to stumble off the bench in an undignified manner.

"Ready to figure out some details?” she asked, beaming at them.

Stannis locked eyes with Sansa and they smiled at each other before nodding at the friendly woman.

“As ready as we’ll ever be.”

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“So, you don’t actually know whether they’re fraternal or identical?” Davos asked. He had made himself comfortable in the visitor’s chair of Stannis’ office with his morning cup of coffee.

“Apparently they’re dichorionic diamniotic twins,” Stannis explained, “which means they could either be identical or fraternal. If they’re not the same sex we’ll know for sure at around the twenty week mark, but if they’re the same sex we might have to wait until after they’re born to find out.”

Davos nodded and sipped his coffee. “How has everyone been taking the news? Was Shireen as overwhelmed as when you first told her about the baby?”

“Shireen seems to be really happy for us,” Stannis said, smiling faintly at the memory, “and I think everyone else is, too.”

“Marya is over the moon for you,” Davos said with a grin, “she’s knitting all these little baby booties and coming over all nostalgic.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, I’ve been having to remind her that we already have all the kids we need, and that it would not make sense for us to have just one more wee one.”
Stannis huffed out a laugh while giving Davos an apologetic look.

“Laugh it up,” Davos said, raising an eyebrow, “I’m not the one who is going to have to learn to change two diapers at once.”

Stannis frowned. “I think we should hire a nanny,” he said, “but I haven’t asked Sansa what she thinks about it.”

“I’m sure Shireen will be a big help.” Davos finished his coffee and sighed. “But a nanny might not be a bad idea. Babies are a lot of work.”

Stannis was intimately familiar with how much work a baby could be and he could well remember the special kind of exhaustion he had experienced when Shireen had been a newborn. It was unlike any other kind of exhaustion he had ever felt and he was not really looking forward to experiencing what it would be like without the benefit of his youth to help him pull through. He was not truly old, but he was certainly no twenty-something.

He became more aware of the fact that he was no twenty-something every time Sansa wanted him to have sex two or three times in a row because apparently being pregnant made her want him to live between her legs. He just couldn’t. Not every day for days and days on end. It was exhausting, and although things had improved after he explained to her that having sex with her two times before even going to work was not a sustainable lifestyle for him, and although a big part of him enjoyed her overwhelming desire for his touch, he was starting to wish she’d just go back to normal.

“Could I ask you a personal question?” Stannis asked, wondering if it might not be a bit too early for this sort of talk.

“Sure,” Davos said, putting his empty cup on Stannis’ desk and giving him an attentive look.

“When Marya was pregnant…” Stannis trailed off, uncertain about whether he should continue.

Davos didn’t say anything. He just continued to look attentive.

“Did she - er - I mean, did she want more…” Stannis blew out a loud breath and gave Davos a significant look.

“Oh,” Davos’ eyebrows rose all the way up. “Yes,” he then said, looking more amused than surprised. “She wanted much more.”

“How did you - er - cope?” Stannis asked, feeling incredibly awkward about asking, but needing any advice he could get. Selyse had not wanted anything more to do with him when she had been pregnant, so he had no experience when it came to these matters.

“Well, I just did what I could and said no when I couldn’t.” Davos shrugged, acting like it was the simplest thing in the world to say no to one’s gorgeous wife who is carrying one’s child and begging for sex.

Saying no had never been a problem in the past. He and Sansa had always tried to be respectful of each other when they weren’t in the mood or just tired. But Stannis felt like it was different now. He felt like he was obligated to do whatever he could to please her while she was nurturing his babies inside her own body.

“What if I feel like I can’t say no?” Stannis asked, realising a little too late how ridiculous that sounded. Sansa was not some tyrant. He was not some weak-willed slave. “No, that’s not what I
meant. I meant that I feel like I should do everything I can to make her happy now that she’s pregnant.”

“Would you expect her services whenever you wanted if your roles were reversed?” Davos asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No, of course not,” Stannis said, furrowing his brow. It wouldn’t feel good for him if he felt like he was coercing Sansa in any way.

“Just say no when you’re not up for it,” Davos repeated, standing up and walking to the door. “And - er - make sure the water pressure in your shower is good.” He reddened at that, and disappeared from Stannis’ office.

_Water pressure?_

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Sansa, as it turned out, was not entirely happy with Stannis when he started to follow Davos’ advice and say no when he wasn’t up for more sex. She wasn’t entirely happy, but she accepted his wishes and cheekily told him to make sure she wouldn’t run out of batteries, then.

It was honestly as if Sansa felt that a moment not spent in the throes of an orgasm was a moment wasted.

Today it was Friday and Shireen had informed him and Sansa over breakfast that she’d be going home with Myrcella after school and sleeping over. With Sansa the way she was, Stannis was fairly certain that meant he’d be having sex the minute he got home from work.

If he wanted.

Traffic was particularly bad on his way home and it was nearly six by the time he finally made it into the apartment.

Sansa was nowhere to be seen. Probably in the bedroom, then.

He loosened his tie and walked towards the closed door, listening for a moment before opening it.

He couldn’t hear anything.

When he entered the dimly lit room he could see that Sansa was naked and wrapped messily in the bed covers, moving slowly and deliberately against her own hand. Her eyes were closed and her skin was flushed.

She was beautiful.

He undressed as quickly as he could, and she turned her head fluttered her eyelashes for a moment so that she could observe him approvingly through half-lidded eyes.

By the time he had joined her on the bed, naked skin against naked skin, he realised something was terribly wrong.

He wasn’t hard.

It was probably nothing. He just needed Sansa to touch him a little and it would be fine. Except he had never joined Sansa in bed while she was _naked_ and obviously dying for his cock without getting hard just from the view and the _anticipation_.

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Sansa’s hand found the limp bit of flesh between his thighs and gave him a surprised look.

“Are you okay?” she asked, stroking him gently.

“I think so,” he said, feeling awkward and embarrassed. “Just - just give me a minute.”

His own hand took Sansa’s place and he started to stroke himself in a way that usually got him hard fairly quickly.

Nothing.

“Don’t worry about it,” Sansa said, “we don’t have to do anything right now.”

“I - I don’t know what’s wrong,” Stannis stammered, feeling confused and bewildered. This had never happened to him.

Was this another age thing?

Would he have to start buying those embarrassing little blue pills?

“It’s okay,” Sansa insisted, “we can just cuddle. Why don’t you tell me about your day?” She moved to press herself against him and rest her head on his chest, throwing a leg across him and letting him feel the heat that was coming from her wet centre in waves.

She wanted him to talk about his day? While he was in the middle of a complete crisis?

“I can’t,” he muttered, “I can’t focus.”

“Don’t be silly, I’m sure this has happened to you before at some point?”

“No!” He hadn’t meant to sound quite that forceful, but he was starting to panic.

“Stannis, you have to relax. This is completely normal. It happens to every guy occasionally.”

“This doesn’t happen to me,” he insisted, hating this entire conversation.

“Well, really,” Sansa huffed, sounding exasperated. “You’re probably just stressed out or putting too much pressure on yourself. You really just have to relax.”

“I can’t relax,” Stannis said, unable to disguise how upset he felt.

“Why not? What’s really worrying you?” Sansa sounded gentle and soothing and she felt lovely and soft in his arms. He wished he could enjoy it.

What was really bothering him?

He was silent for a long time. Not because he didn’t know the answer, but because it was difficult to work up the courage to admit it out loud.

“I think I’m getting too old to keep up with you,” he finally said, his heart beating fast and hard, and his chest feeling rather like Robert was sitting on it.

“Because of this?” She touched his persistently limp cock. “This happens to really young guys, too. It happened to Harry when we were together.”

Stannis would never admit what a relief it was to hear that. “No, not just because of this…” he
sighed. “Because I - I just get tired, and I can’t behave the way I did on our honeymoon every day.”

“I don’t expect you to be superhuman,” Sansa said, kissing him tenderly, “I really don’t. Parts of me might sort of wish you were, but I certainly don’t expect it.”

Stannis squeezed her to him for a moment before loosening his hold again. It was a lot more reassuring to hear Sansa say that than it had been to hear Davos say something similar.

He kissed her, trying to tell her how he felt without having to use words. He had no idea how to put his feelings into any sort of coherent order, anyway.

Sansa moaned into his mouth, welcoming his tongue and giving as good as she got. It was nice to just kiss her without rushing to do anything else. She tasted like herself, which was his favourite flavour, and she was eager to nibble and suck on his lower lip.

“Do you want me to check whether I can wake you up with my mouth?” she asked after a good long while of pleasurable kissing. Her tone was nothing but sinful indulgence.

Stannis felt torn. On one hand, he hadn’t received a proper blowjob in weeks. On the other hand, what if he couldn’t get hard even when Sansa was naked and sucking his cock? It would be a complete nightmare.

“What if it - what if it doesn’t work?” he whispered, taking a leap and trusting her with his fear.

Sansa bit her lip and gave him a thoughtful look. "If it doesn't work we can just do something else. It won't be the end of the world and I won't take it personally."

Stannis nodded and tried to believe her. "Okay," he said, feeling completely strange about this entire situation, "thank you."

Sansa smiled at him and kissed his lips, using her tongue to lick lazily at his before moving to his neck. She licked and kissed her way down his body the way she had so often done before, and the familiarity and the pleasure of it helped him start to unwind -- the tension in his muscles slowly draining away.

He piled a couple of pillows behind him so he could watch her more easily, and smiled back at her when she looked up at him and gave him a cheeky grin.

By the time she was licking his inner thighs and scratching them lightly with her nails, he was starting to feel the usual pressure in his groin. He wasn't fully hard yet, but at least something was happening. The relief he felt was immense, and when Sansa started to lick his steadily hardening shaft, the moan that escaped him was just as much a moan of relief as it was of pleasure.

"There you are," she purred in between languid licks.

He made an incoherent noise and tangled his hand in her hair, encouraging her to start sucking.

She shot him another cheeky grin and maintained eye contact with him as she started to suck the head of his cock and stroke him with one of her hands at the same time. Her blush got to him just like it always did.

"Sansa, yes, please," he moaned, wanting her to keep going forever.

She obliged him by giving him the most luxurious, drawn out, sensational blowjob of his life, appearing to be in absolutely no rush.
He shuddered and bucked up as he came, helpless and crying out brokenly, unable to keep from tightening his hold on the back of Sansa's head in a silent demand for her to take everything he was giving her.

Stannis gave her a grateful, slightly apologetic look once she had crawled up to cuddle with him, but she just smiled.

"Liked that, did you?" she asked a while later, drawing random patterns on his chest with a finger.

"Yes, very much," he said, wishing he had the vocabulary to express how much her actions had meant to him. "But I'm afraid I'm spent now."

"Do you think you'd like to do something for me that does not require you to not be spent?" she asked playfully, a hint of laughter in her voice.

"Would you like me to go down on you?" he asked, deepening his voice and kissing her neck.

"Well, I won't say no to that, but I was actually thinking about asking you to use the vibrator on me..."

He had done it a handful of times in the past, and it was always rather arousing to see Sansa unravel completely due to the toy's ability to wrench orgasm after orgasm from her in rapid succession.

"I can do that," Stannis rasped, kissing her deeply. He didn’t care that he was tasting himself on her tongue.

Sansa made a small delighted noise and went to find the toy as soon as their kiss broke. "It's so much better when you do it," she told him, "I always stop when it gets too intense..."

His ego recovered slightly from the hit it had so recently taken and he smirked at her. "Is that so?"

The toy buzzed to life in his hand and he pressed it against her where she had eagerly parted her thighs.

"Perhaps I should just tie you up and leave you here with this thing?" he murmured, "would you like that?"

Sansa was already breathing fast and whimpering. He pressed the vibrator more firmly against her, moving it back and forth steadily. She moaned and squirmed and gave him a heated look. Stannis knew very well that she came more often and much harder if he talked to her like this. It had taken him a while to get used to saying these things without getting embarrassed, but he thought he was rather getting the hang of it.

"Would you like lying here, with this vibrator pressed right here against you -" he pressed it directly to her most sensitive spot, knowing full well that it would cause her to convulse as if she had just received an electric shock "- unable to do anything but come and come until the batteries ran out?"

"Stannis!" she sounded almost choked with arousal, and it was obvious that she was already having her first orgasm by the way she was bucking up and chasing after the toy as he moved it around.

"You don't think you'd like it?" he asked. "Would you prefer if I stayed and watched, then?"

Sansa moaned and went very red. Her face, her neck and her chest -- all practically glowing.
"Maybe I would have you lie on your front so I could smack your lovely arse whenever you begged me to let you go," Stannis whispered, feeling relatively confident that this idea would have her panting.

Sansa thrashed around and sounded rather like she was already having her second orgasm. He pressed the toy tightly against her and held it still, making her convulse again.

"Please," she whimpered, "I can't -"

He started moving the vibrator around again. "I thought you liked it better when I don't stop?" he asked, feeling incredibly powerful and a little amused.

Sansa moaned and shot him a blistering look.

He focused on teasing her sensitive entrance for a while, knowing that he could easily make her come that way, too. It just required a bit more patience and more dirty talk.

"You want my cock right now, don't you?" he asked her, making his voice deep. "You want me to fuck you from behind until your thighs give out from underneath you and you get sore and tender."

Sansa was sweating and getting louder by the minute,

"You want me to fuck you like that again and again until you can't walk, don't you?"

She came for the third time, keening and shuddering and trying to press her thighs together to trap the vibrator in place.

He moved it up towards her mound instead, unerringly finding the swollen bundle that would make her scream.

"And then you want me to fuck you some more even after all that. Isn't that right, my wanton little wife?"

Sansa didn't answer him. She was busy screaming herself hoarse. Hopefully the neighbours wouldn't think he was murdering her.

He switched the vibrator off and buried his face between her legs, licking her gently until she stopped trembling. She tasted of concentrated arousal: musky, sharp and a little salty.

To his ego's very great pleasure, he found himself in the possession of a brand new, raging erection by the time he finished bringing Sansa down to earth, and she did not need to be asked twice whether he should put it to use.

"Yes, please gods, yes!"

He fucked her just like he'd talked about, punishingly hard from behind, listening to her sobs of pleasure and feeling rather like one of the gods she kept crying out for.

They were a sweaty, sticky mess by the time they were through, and Sansa kept moaning softly even after he pulled out.

"The fact that you can do something like that," Sansa said, her voice still a bit breathless and very hoarse, "means that you really don't have to worry about being too old for me."

Stannis held her tighter and kissed her soundly, appreciating her words more than she could ever imagine.
"I love you," he said, hoping that those words would tell her what she needed to know.

"I love you, too," Sansa said in return, sounding blissfully happy.

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After Stannis’ brush with possibly needing pharmaceutical help in the bedroom, Sansa started to ask for his attention in a slightly different way. She made it easier for him to say no without feeling like he was letting her down, and Stannis tried to meet her halfway and offer to do things with her that did not require him to sustain erection after erection. It was a bit of work, but they found a balance that left them both feeling satisfied, closer to each other and most importantly: not exhausted at work.

“How are things going with Sansa?” Davos asked one day, a couple of weeks after the Incident.

Stannis’ shoulders stiffened up. He knew it was his own fault for having started to talk about certain things with Davos in the first place, but he still felt very uncomfortable with discussing his sex life with his friend. It was supposed to be private. He supposed Davos deserved to be told that his advice had been useful, however.

Stannis looked around and made sure the corridor they were standing in was deserted. “Well, thank you,” he said, trying to force his posture to become more relaxed.

“Having an easier time coping?” Davos asked, an amused smile playing on his lips.

Stannis nodded once. “Yes. Thank you for your advice,” he said, hoping to put an end to the conversation.

“What advice?” Robert had somehow found Stannis and Davos in a corridor that had been perfectly abandoned a moment ago, and was now butting in.

Stannis stiffened up again. Did his brother have some sort of special sense that told him when awkward conversations were taking place in the vicinity?

“Oh, it was nothing,” Davos told Robert, “pregnancy stuff.”

“I still can’t believe you’re having twins!” Robert said, clapping Stannis on the back. Stannis clenched his teeth and tried not to glare at Robert. It was good that Robert was happy for him. It was just a bit painful when Robert clapped him on the back with the force of an anvil being dropped from on high.

Still, Stannis knew he ought to make more of an effort with his brother, so he tried to say something that Sansa would want him to say.

“I have trouble believing it myself,” he said. It was true. This early in the pregnancy it was still a bit unreal.

“You know what we should do?” Robert asked, his face coming alive with gleeful anticipation.

“... What?” Stannis wasn’t sure he liked where this was going.

“We should go fishing! You, me, Ned… Davos, do you want to come?” Robert shot Davos a questioning look. “Maybe Robb, too? We could all give you advice about ‘pregnancy stuff’.” Robert looked very excited, and he was practically bouncing back on his heels.
Stannis tried not to look as horrified as he felt. “I’ll have to talk to Sansa about it,” he said, hoping that she would help him figure out how to say no without hurting Robert’s feelings. “We’re probably going to be moving to the new house soon, so I’m not sure she’ll want me going off on trips.”

“Oh, moving won’t be any trouble. But I have to talk to Ned, anyway. I’ll call you up once I’ve found a time that works for him.”

Stannis didn’t get a chance to protest as Robert was walking off already. Instead of protesting Stannis gave Davos a helpless look.

“It sounds like it could be fun,” Davos said with a shrug. “I’m sure Ned’s presence will keep Robert from being too inappropriate.”

Stannis raised an eyebrow at his friend and shook his head. Had Davos forgotten all the things that Robert had said right before Stannis’ wedding?

“I’ll talk to Sansa about it,” Stannis repeated, closing the topic for now. Hopefully Sansa would refuse to let him leave for however long a fishing trip would take. She really did prefer having him around, after all.

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“A fishing trip sounds like a great idea!” Sansa exclaimed, “Dad already called me about it, and he’s so excited. I’m so glad you’re going with him and Robert and the others. You’ll all be able to bond and have such a wonderful time, and Shireen and I will be able to get a lot of packing done. Mum and Arya might come over and help, too.”

“Isn’t Arya studying in Harrenhal?”

“She’s visiting Winterfell this weekend.”

Stannis swallowed and nodded. He had really been hoping that Sansa’s pregnancy-induced cravings for his company would make her a lot less enthusiastic about the idea of him going away.

“But… who will go to the store to fetch lemons for you?” Sansa had recently started to crave fresh lemons. She cut them into pieces on sucked and nibbled on the wedges without sweetening them or diluting them at all.

“I’ll manage for a couple of days. If I need help with my shopping I’m sure Mum will pitch in.”

“Are you sure?” It made him anxious to think that she might need him and he’d be nowhere near.

“I’m sure. Remember what Davos and Marya said about being independent people? We need to be able to function without each other. At least for short spans of time.” Sansa smiled at him, and her words combined with the sweet smile eased his anxiety somewhat.

He took a deep breath. “I’ll - I’ll tell Robert I’ll be able to make it, then.” Stannis tried to give Sansa a pleading look, begging her to change her mind, but she just continued to smile brightly.

_Damn it._
Go Fish

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stannis did not like fishing.

He was fairly certain that the fish just didn’t like him. It was frustrating to watch Robert and Ned reel in salmon after salmon, while he didn’t even get a nibble. Even Davos and Robb had caught one each, and Davos had never gone salmon fishing in his life.

*It’s not fair*, Stannis thought and ground his teeth.

What was worse was the fact that he couldn’t keep his phone on him while he was half submerged in the river. If he fell in the phone might get ruined. He hated being out of touch since he had told Sansa to call if she needed him to come back home. He knew Shireen was with her, but Shireen probably wouldn’t think to make sure Sansa didn’t do anything silly like stand on a chair to reach something on the highest shelves in the kitchen or try to lift something too heavy. Perhaps Catelyn would think to make certain Sansa didn’t do anything like that, but he wasn’t sure for how much of the weekend Catelyn and Arya would be staying with Sansa. And Arya probably wouldn’t be of any help at all. She’d probably just do something to upset Sansa.

“It’s a wonder you landed a girl like Sansa with that sort of fishing ability,” Robert chuckled as he pulled salmon number four out of the water.

“I hardly think one uses comparable methods to charm women as one does to catch fish,” Davos said, probably noticing that the vein on Stannis’ neck was already pulsing dangerously.

“Oh, I don’t know, it’s all about using the right lures, isn’t it?” Robert grinned and waded to shore with his catch.

Stannis blew out an exasperated breath and counted to ten in his mind. Soon he would no longer have to stand in the freezing water of the Trident. He only needed to survive one night in the cabin Robert had rented and tomorrow he’d be back at home with Sansa and Shireen. Packing up his study really didn’t seem like a tedious task when compared with tolerating Robert’s attempts to ‘bond’.

“He really does like to give you a hard time, doesn’t he?” Davos said, wading closer to Stannis.

“You only just noticed?” Stannis scowled and glared at his line. It was tangled. *Again.*

Davos laughed and shook his head. “I’m just glad Ned and Robb are too far away to catch the way Robert just compared Sansa to a fish.”

Stannis rolled his eyes up at the sky to show his irritation, and noticed as he did that it was getting late. Hopefully they’d be calling it a day soon. He didn’t care that he hadn’t caught anything. Well, he cared a little, but he’d rather go to the cabin than keep torturing himself.

Too Stannis’ great relief, Ned and Robb were returning to shore and talking to Robert. It appeared that they were both ready to stop fishing, and Robert looked happy to do what Ned wanted to do. *Of course.*
The evening was much more pleasant once Stannis was no longer freezing, and once Robert managed to cook some of the salmon they had caught to perfection on the state of the art Weberman that came with the rented cabin. It was hard to be very grumpy when one was sitting in a comfortable chair with a belly full of good food after a full day of breathing fresh country air. He had recently texted Sansa for the third time since dinner, making sure she was definitely all right, and her reassuring reply about how she was cuddled up on the sofa with Shireen and watching TV was making him feel a little better about being away from her.

Stannis ought to have known that such a relatively pleasant mood couldn’t last with Robert around.

Stannis and Ned had been talking about the upcoming move, and Stannis had been describing to Ned which rooms he and Sansa were planning to give to the twins. Ned had been nodding along with interest and asking questions whenever Stannis wasn’t sure what to say next. It was a little like talking to a much less exuberant version of Sansa, though he was obviously not attracted to Ned.

“Yes, yes, we all know about the house. The house which the realtor I put you in contact with found for you, by the way, no need to thank me...” Robert gave Stannis an exaggerated look that was probably meant to be funny.

It wasn’t.

“What I want to know is what you’re going to name the twins!” Robert added with his usual flair.

Stannis groaned inwardly. He and Sansa had barely started to discuss it. And why on earth would he tell anyone before the babies were even born?

“I’m not going to talk about that right now,” Stannis bit out, glaring at his brother.

Instead of backing down like a normal human being, Robert came over to where Stannis was sitting and snatched his phone from his hand.

“Tell me or I’m hiding the phone and you won’t be able to text Sansa for the rest of the trip,” he said, grinning triumphantly.

Stannis looked around for help, but the others were just rolling their eyes. “Sansa and I haven’t decided,” he said, trying not to clench his teeth. “Give me my phone back.”

“Wonderful!” Robert exclaimed, happily handing the phone over, “that means we can help you decide!”

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“Robert,” Ned said, giving his friend a reproving look.

“What?” Robert widened his eyes in a fairly terrible attempt at looking innocent. “We can give Stannis ideas, can’t we?”

Ned sighed and shook his head, but there was amusement in his eyes. For some reason Ned seemed to have an endless reserve of patient humour when it came to Robert.

“If you have two boys you will of course be naming them after me and Ned, won’t you?” Robert asked, directing his words at Stannis.
“Won’t Renly feel left out if he does that?” Robb asked, looking more overtly amused than his father. “And don’t forget that Jeyne and I already named our son Ned.”

“Robert and Renly, then?” Robert suggested with a wide grin.

Stannis wondered if it would be considered very rude of him to go for a walk. To his car. And then a drive. Back to King’s Landing.

“I expect Sansa will want to have some say in the matter,” Davos said mildly. There was something deceptively quelling about his tone, however.

“Yeah, and what if they have two girls?” Robb added.

Ned sniffed suspiciously. Stannis glanced at his father-in-law and saw that Ned looked rather emotional at the idea of Sansa having twin girls.

“Lyanna and Cassana,” Robert said, snapping his fingers as if it was a done deal.

“Two granddaughters,” Ned whispered, looking positively overwhelmed.

“We don’t know anything about that yet,” Stannis hurried to say, wanting to keep Ned from going off.

“Two little Sansas…”

Robert seemed to sense that Ned was heading for another crying jag and for once in his life his penchant for derailing conversations came in useful.

“I have an activity that we should all do! It’s called a trust exercise!” Robert boomed, distracting everyone in the room.

Stannis was so relieved that they were moving away from the topic of names for his twins, and away from the risk of having Ned turn into a hose pipe, that he actually encouraged Robert.

“What sort of trust exercise?”

“My therapist suggested it,” Robert said with a happy smile, “it’s the one where one person deliberately falls backwards, and the other person catches them.”

“Oh, I’ve done that,” Robb said, looking intrigued, “we used to do it at summer camp all the time.”

Stannis was already regretting the fact that he had asked. Maybe it was not too late to escape to the car?

“My therapist thinks it’s good for forging stronger feelings of trust and - er - caring,” Robert said, looking proud of himself for remembering. “I told her it sounded a bit gay, but she said it wasn’t.”

“Oh, it’s fun,” Robb said, “I’ve done it with Theon loads of times. Not just at camp. He did drop me once, but that was an accident. His dad distracted him.”

Stannis caught Davos’ eye and they exchanged baffled looks. No one said anything for a few seconds.

“... Anyway, I think we should try it!” Robert said. “My therapist will be very pleased.”
“Well, I don’t mind doing it if it’s going to be helpful in your treatment,” Ned said, nodding supportively at Robert.

Davos and Robb were also up for it, so Stannis was forced to grudgingly go along. It wasn’t as bad as Stannis thought it might be. He watched everyone else, and it really didn’t look very complicated. It seemed to be a matter of crossing your arms over your chest, closing your eyes and letting yourself fall backwards into the waiting hands of your partner. Robb and Ned made it look easy as breathing.

Stannis tried it first with Davos and had no problem with it. He confidently caught his friend and didn’t mind letting himself be caught in return. It felt a bit stupid, but the other were all doing it, and Robert wasn’t making fun of anyone, so it wasn’t so bad. It was also quite easy to trust Ned to catch him, and Robb looked quite strong and capable, so Stannis was able to trust him, too.

When the time came to allow Robert to catch him, however, Stannis froze. He couldn’t do it. He just couldn’t.

“I’m… I’m just going to go call Sansa,” Stannis said, wanting to excuse himself before the others noticed that Stannis wasn’t able to trust his brother to catch him.

“Don’t be stupid, you have to let me catch you,” Robert said.

“I… I don’t want to,” Stannis said, edging away from Robert and the space they had cleared in the living room of the cabin.

“I’m going to go see if I can get the hot tub on the patio going,” Robb said, “Dad, Davos, can you help me? I’ve suddenly forgotten how hot tubs work.”

It was an obvious ploy to leave Stannis alone with Robert, and Stannis shot the younger man a glare as he retreated with Ned and Davos in tow. Davos gave Stannis an apologetic look, but somehow Davos also managed to convey that Stannis should make peace with his brother. It was a look that reminded Stannis of his father for a moment, and he felt a sharp pang of loss and pain at the memory.

“Why don’t you trust me?” Robert asked as soon as they were alone. His brow was furrowed, and he looked genuinely hurt.

Stannis managed not to gape at his brother in disbelief, but it was a close call. He was not able to prevent the feelings of resentment and anger that he usually always kept locked away under the surface of his mind from boiling over, however.

“Why don’t I trust you?” he said, his tone incredulous, “why would I trust you? You’ve done nothing my whole life except pull the rug from underneath my feet!”

Robert looked taken aback by the force with which Stannis had spoken. “What do you mean?”

Stannis opened and closed his mouth a few times and ran a hand over his face. Was Robert seriously asking him that question?

“You never do anything except torment me. You’ve never done anything else!”

Robert rolled his eyes. “You’re being dramatic. I just tease you the same as I tease everyone. it’s just my nature.”

Stannis took a deep breath and reminded himself that shouting absolutely never worked when it
came to Robert. “I am not being dramatic.”

“Well… I didn’t know you felt that way,” Robert said, deflating a bit and looking at Stannis as if he were seeing him for the first time.

Stannis just crossed his arms over his chest and scowled.

“I’m trying to get better at this family thing.” Robert said, gesturing randomly and sighing, “but I can’t get better if you don’t tell me things like that.”

Stannis continued to scowl, but realised that Robert had a point. He usually just tried to ignore or avoid Robert. Occasionally Stannis exploded and yelled at him, but most of the time he just… tolerated his brother.

“Now I’ve told you,” Stannis snapped.

“So will you do the exercise now?” Robert asked, giving Stannis a hopeful look.

“No!”

Robert’s face fell. “I want you to be able to trust me, Stannis,” he said, his expression imploring. “I want to be a part of your life and of the twins’ life. I don’t want them to grow up knowing that their father doesn’t trust drunk Uncle Robert. They won’t trust me if you don’t.”

“Don’t be drunk and that won’t happen,” Stannis bit out.

“Damn it, Stannis!” Robert roared, “I’m trying to quit!”

Stannis clenched his jaw and glared.

“Quitting is hard, damn you.” Robert started pacing around the living room and running his hands through his thick, bushy hair. “It would help me to stay on the straight and narrow if I could just be sure that you would let me spend time with the little ones. Let me be their strong Uncle Robert. Cheerful Uncle Robert who gives great gifts and makes them laugh and doesn’t… doesn’t make their father grind his teeth every time he visits.”

Stannis made himself stop grinding his teeth.

“I won’t pretend that I’ll become a different person entirely,” Robert said with a snort, “I’ll probably still give you a hard time. I give everyone a hard time. But I won’t be drunk around your family, and I will be trustworthy. You can believe that.”

“Where was all this when Shireen was born?” Stannis asked, unable to disguise the bitterness in his voice. “You realise I could have used help and support when she was sick? And when Selyse could barely function due to the postpartum?”

“I was wrapped up on my own miserable life with Cersei and dealing with Joffrey being a little shit all the time,” Robert said, sitting down heavily in one of the sofas. He leant forward, propping his elbows on his knees and hiding his face in his hands. “I’m not proud of myself. I know I wasn’t… I wasn’t there for you when you needed me. I’m sorry.”

Stannis pressed his lips together tightly. He didn’t know what to say. He had never in his life expected Robert to apologise like that. It didn’t feel as vindicating as Stannis had thought it might. It just felt sad.
“It doesn’t matter,” Stannis muttered, “it’s done.”

“It does matter,” Robert argued, looking up. “I want things to be better this time around. I want to make up for what a sorry excuse for an Uncle I was to Shireen when she was a baby.” A slightly frightening gleam of enthusiasm appeared in Robert’s eyes. “I want to be the best damn uncle in the world to those twins. I’ll be there for them and I’ll protect them. Always.”

Stannis really didn’t know what to do with Robert while he was in this sort of mood.

“I’ll believe you when I see actions that go along with those words,” he said at length, unable to easily accept what Robert was saying at face value. Robert might go on a bender a month from now and forget this conversation ever took place.

“I promise you’ll see them,” Robert swore, standing up and looking fervent. “I swear on our parents’ names and memories.”

Stannis flinched and his stomach clenched up. “You had better keep that promise,” he whispered hoarsely. “I won’t have you swearing on them and letting their memory down.”

Robert came right up to Stannis and placed his large hands on Stannis’ shoulders. Their eyes locked, and for a moment Stannis was a teenager again, clinging to his brother in the wake of the car crash that had taken their parents.

“I won’t let them down, Stanny,” Robert whispered, his voice choked, “I won’t let you down.”

Stannis stared into Robert’s eyes, and he couldn’t see any trace of inebriation or untruth. There was only sincerity.

He nodded, accepting Robert’s words.

Robert’s Adam’s apple bobbed up and down, and he sniffed loudly. Stannis wasn’t quick enough to escape the bear hug that came next, but for once in his life he didn’t really mind the way Robert was trying to crush his spine.

Perhaps he needed the hug just as much as Robert seemed to.

It was a little awkward to join the other men on the patio to let them know it was safe to come back inside, but Robb started talking about the water temperature in the hot tub, and somehow his ramblings helped the atmosphere enormously.

“I didn’t realise hot tubs weren’t supposed to be fifty degree hot,” Robb said, shrugging sheepishly.

“Celsius?” Stannis asked, looking at the steam that was rising from the water.

“Yeah, is that a lot?”

“It’s a lot,” Davos said.

“How did the three of you manage to cock this up?” Robert was shaking his head and chuckling.

Ned and Davos just shrugged and Robb continued to look sheepish.

“I suppose we should head back inside the cabin. Unless someone wants to attempt to fix the temperature of the water?” Ned looked around, his face expectant.
Stannis walked over to the control panel and saw that it ought to be fairly simple to fix the problem. “I’ll set it to thirty-nine degrees,” he said, raising his voice a little, “it might take a little while to cool down.”

"We can go back inside and have dessert while we wait," Robert suggested, "Ramón made his famous apple crumble. I have enough to feed an army!"

Stannis started to look at his phone once they had all settled in for a plate or three of Ramón's apple crumble, feeling like it had been a very long time since he'd last heard from Sansa. The crumble really was much too sweet, but Stannis had a few bites in order to make Robert happy.

“Why do you keep looking at your phone?” Ned asked, happily working on his second plate of the dessert treat. “Expecting a text?”

“I’m worried about Sansa,” Stannis muttered.

“I thought Cat and Arya were visiting? I’m sure she’s fine with them looking after her.”

The last Stannis had heard Sansa and Shireen had been watching TV, but that didn’t mean Catelyn and Arya hadn’t been there, too. What if Arya had done something or said something to make Sansa unhappy in the time since Stannis had received Sansa’s last text? Should he call her? She was always going on about how she liked just hearing his voice, and though he always thought it was strange to call for no purpose he was starting to think it might be worth it…

“Stannis?” Ned sounded a bit concerned.

Stannis snapped out of his worried reverie and blinked at Ned. “I don’t like the way Arya talks to Sansa,” he blurted.

The other men stopped eating their dessert and stared at Stannis and Ned.

“What?” Ned looked very confused.

It was as if something about the conversation with Robert had loosened Stannis’ control over his tongue. “Sansa never says anything, but Arya’s behaviour and her words regularly hurt her feelings.” Just the way Robert’s actions and words regularly upset and hurt Stannis.

“Oh, er,” Ned looked at Robb as if to confirm whether what Stannis was saying was true. Robb shrugged. “That’s… I know they never really got on as children, but I didn’t realise they were still not getting along.”

“Why didn’t you do something about it when they were younger?” Stannis asked, feeling incensed that Ned had seen that his girls had not acted as they should but that he hadn’t intervened.

Steffon hadn’t intervened very often when it came to Robert’s behaviour, either. Maybe if he had, things would have been different for Stannis.

“Yeah, Dad, why didn’t you?” Robb asked, looking curious and a little amused at the way Ned had been put on the spot.

“I - I did what I could,” Ned said, frowning down at his hands. “I tried to make sure Sansa got all the love and attention that she needed. That she knew that she was not loved any less because she didn’t like running around and getting into scrapes. It’s impossible to force siblings that have completely different personalities to get along all the time. You might find out about that, soon.” Ned looked up at Stannis and smiled faintly.
Stannis’ anger faded slightly and he felt a cold dread settle over him in its place. What if the twins hated each other?

“Ned’s right,” Davos said, “sometimes siblings just refuse to get along. But that doesn’t mean we can’t encourage them to treat each other with respect. I’m sure you won’t have any trouble with the twins.”

Stannis felt a little better at that, but it was hard to shake the cold feeling in his stomach.

“My therapist would be very happy with you,” Robert suddenly interjected, “she’s always saying that the key to healthy relationships is communication!”

Stannis wanted to communicate a lot of things to Robert that he was sure the therapist would not approve of. But more than anything he wanted to call Sansa.

“I’m going for a walk,” he said, taking his phone with him.

When Sansa asked why he was calling Stannis couldn’t explain everything that had just happened. He knew he would tell her eventually, once he’d had time to process it properly, but for now he just told her that he had missed her voice.

It was the first time in his life he was quite happy to have a phone call about nothing in particular.

Chapter End Notes

Big thanks to Tommyginger for inspiring this chapter! You are amazing, Tommy! ♥
The house was something out of a storybook.

It was situated on a bit of a hill that overlooked the waters of Blackwater Bay. It was probably the most spectacular view in the city, and it was what had closed the deal. The garden was wonderful, too, but the view was what made the relatively small size of the house - compared with Robert’s place - unimportant. There were only four bedrooms, but there was a study, too, and a sizable attic that could be converted into a bedroom suite if they ever needed more space.

Stannis had seen master bedrooms and en suites that were more lavish, but not very many. The previous owners had mostly left the original style of the house alone, but they had definitely renovated the bedroom and the en suite. They were full of every modern comfort imaginable.

There was even a sleek fireplace with a glass front in the en suite, and a freestanding bathtub that Sansa insisted was ‘beautiful’. There was a huge shower stall, too, and the realtor had assured him that the water pressure was very good. There were entirely too many shower heads in the stall in Stannis’ opinion, but he was happy when he saw that there was a steam function. Steam baths were a luxury he seldom allowed himself, but he liked having the option. He also liked the fact that the shower had glass walls. He enjoyed the idea of being able to occasionally watch Sansa in there.

Sansa went into raptures when she saw the walk-in closet, and she was thrilled that she would be able to set up a large vanity by one of the bedroom windows where she would be able to keep all her cosmetics, perfumes, and mysterious odds and ends.

In general, Sansa seemed to be thrilled with every aspect of the house, though he caught her standing in front of the main fireplace in the living room early one morning, sucking thoughtfully on a wedge of lemon and furrowing her brow at the huge marble centrepiece.

“When was the house built again?” she asked when she noticed him, taking the lemon out of her mouth. Stannis couldn’t understand how she could stand the concentrated sour taste. He liked lemons well enough, but not quite like that.

“Eighty-five,” Stannis told her, “why?”

“Oh, that explains the marble,” Sansa said with a bemused expression on her face.

“What’s wrong with marble?”

Sansa just shrugged and shook her head. “Nothing at all.” There was a smile playing on her lips. “I think I know just the way to make it work.”

When Sansa finished with the living room it looked beautiful. The art and the furniture all reminded Stannis of France for some reason, and everything looked like it just belonged.

The best part about being about to move to the new house was decorating the nursery, however. Stannis wasn’t all that interested in interior design, but when it came to the nursery he was fascinated. He got the feeling that Sansa was a bit surprised at his enthusiasm for picking out paint colours for the twins, examining furniture, curtains, floor rugs, cribs, changing tables, mobiles, soft toys, and everything and anything that might make the nursery a comfortable room for their babies.
“Where was all this interest when I was doing the dining room?” Sansa asked with an amused, slightly crooked smile. They were sitting on the living room sofa, looking through websites that sold handmade mobiles. Stannis wanted to find a mobile with a nautical motif, and he hadn’t wanted to give up even after an hour of searching for just the right one.

“I gave you my opinion regarding the table, didn’t I?” Stannis said, looking back at the screen.

“Telling me how high it should be does not count as giving an opinion,” Sansa said primly, poking him in the side.

Stannis didn’t respond. Sansa knew perfectly well that the height of a table was its most important feature. She certainly hadn’t complained when they had broken it in one evening when they had been alone in the half-decorated house. Stannis was already keeping a mental tally of how many of the rooms they had managed to have sex in, and wondering whether they would manage to do it in every room before they even officially moved in.

“I suppose I’m just more interested in the nursery,” Stannis said after thinking it over.

It had all come into sharper focus when Stannis had felt the babies kick for the first time. It had been an incredibly emotionally wrought moment, and Stannis was sure he would remember it for the rest of his life, just as he would always remember when he had felt Shireen kick for the first time.

When he had felt the movement under Sansa’s skin he had suddenly comprehended how very little he was contributing to the new lives he and Sansa had created together. He wasn’t the one carrying the babies. He wasn’t the one who would nurse them the way Sansa would. He would do everything he could to be a good father, but he would never be able to contribute his body the way Sansa was doing. He could contribute to making the twins’ nursery as welcoming and comfortable as possible, however.

He could make sure the house they would grow up in would be a home, and that they would be safe and cared for.

Loved.

He wanted the house where they took their first steps, learnt to talk, where they would play together, find all the best hiding places, work on school projects, and celebrate Christmas together, to be a sanctuary full of happy memories and love.

And though he knew he couldn’t make any promises, he would do his damn best to make sure that he and Sansa would live to a ripe old age so that neither Shireen nor the twins would have to grow to adulthood without them. He could not stand the idea of leaving his children to endure what he had endured in the wake of Steffon and Cassana’s deaths. He would also do his very best to make sure that the twins got along with each other and that they got along with Shireen. He wanted his children to always treat each other with kindness and respect.

It was hard for Stannis to put any of these feelings into words, but working on the nursery with Sansa was a way of doing something concrete that made him feel like he was working towards his goal of giving the twins the sort of life, and the sort of home, he believed they deserved.

Renly laughed when he and Loras came over to look at the progress he and Sansa had made with decorating the house. The actual move would happen soon, and both Renly and Loras were insisting that they should help when it finally happened, even though Stannis would be hiring professional movers to do all the heavy lifting.
“It’s obvious that Stannis is the one decorating the nursery,” he said once he caught his breath, “it’s like being underwater!”

Stannis scowled at his brother and opened his mouth to defend his choices. Sansa beat him to it, however.

“The nautical theme fits the location of the house, don’t you think?” she said with a sweet smile, “I mean, just look at the view.”

Renly had already exclaimed over the view many times, but as soon as he looked out the window he forgot all about criticising Stannis’ choices.

“It really is amazing,” he sighed, glancing over at Loras. “Let’s get a house with a view of the water next time.”

“Maybe we should stay where we are now for a bit longer before moving again.” Loras suggested with a fond smile.

“I suppose,” Renly grumbled.

“How’s Shireen coping with all the decorating and the impending move?” Loras asked in a transparent attempt at changing the subject. He directed his question at Stannis, but Stannis looked at Sansa for help.

Shireen had been acting very strange lately. If Lorast had asked his question a few weeks before Stannis would have had no problem with telling him that Shireen was over the moon about the new house. She had loved decorating her new room, and even though she had asked Stannis not to sell the old apartment, she had seemed to be adjusting remarkably quickly to the change.

Now, though…

“She’s very pleased with the house,” Sansa said, answering Loras’ question, “but I think she’s been having a hard time for some other reason. She’s been a bit blue for a while.”

Stannis thought ‘a bit blue’ was an understatement, but he didn’t contradict Sansa.

“Have you talked to her about it?” Renly looked uncharacteristically concerned.

“I’m planning to talk to her soon,” Sansa said with a smile, “I’m sure it’s nothing we need to worry about.”

Stannis knew exactly when the talk Sansa was planning on having with Shireen happened. Instead of coming home to find Sansa by herself and Shireen locked in her room, he found both of his girls watching a film together. Whatever Sansa had said to Shireen had clearly worked to get his daughter to stop sulking. He was relieved to see it, but a bit surprised when Sansa refused to stop watching the film in order to chat about their day the way they usually did when he got back from work.

“Sometimes I think you only married me for my daughter,” Stannis said, feeling lighthearted even though Sansa had basically told him to go away. He was too glad that Shireen was no longer in her strange mood to mind. He hadn’t liked the way Shireen had been cutting both him and Sansa out of her life, and he would have talked to her himself if Sansa hadn’t offered to do it first.

"I think it’s girl stuff,” she had said when he had first brought it up, "let me see if I can’t get her to tell me about it before you try.”
Stannis had to wait until Shireen went to bed to be able to tell Sansa about his day. The story about Massey’s presentation and the way it had mysteriously disappeared from his computer, only to be replaced with some horribly inappropriate slides with pictures of people in animal costumes, made her laugh as he knew it would, but Stannis could tell that she was anxious to talk about Shireen, so he didn’t try to tell her about the incident with the coffee maker.

He wanted to know what had been ailing his daughter.

“I can’t tell you,” Sansa said after he’d asked, making him frown.

“Why not?”

“It’s private, and not something you need to worry about. You just need to know that she’s a bit fragile right now, and that we need to be patient with her. But I’m sure she’ll be all right.”

_Private_? Private girl stuff? Did that mean it was something to do with periods?

Feeling proud of himself for not grimacing, Stannis decided he didn’t want to know the details. Sansa would tell him if it was anything he absolutely had to know, and if she said it wasn’t something he needed to worry about, he simply wouldn’t. He trusted her.

“All right, if you’re sure,” he said, kissing her cheek and reaching to stroke the baby bump that was starting to show more and more.

It never ceased to amaze him that their babies were growing in there.

“Do you think we should start thinking about names?” Sansa asked, placing her hand over his and squeezing it lightly.

“Robert wants me to name the babies after him, Renly and your father,” Stannis told her. This time he was unable to keep from grimacing.

“Oh,” Sansa bit her lip and searched his face a little nervously, “do you want to do that?”

“Not particularly,” Stannis said, pursing his lips.

“I - I was sort of wondering… if one of the babies is a boy…” Sansa trailed off and kept chewing her lip.

“Yes?” Stannis did his best not to sound impatient, but he was very curious.

“I’d like to name a baby after Dad,” she said with a blush. “I know Robb already named little Ned after Dad, but I just… I want to.”

Stannis understood her quite well. He had always really wanted to name a child after his father, after all.

“I think Eddard is a good name,” Stannis said with a nod, “but what do you think of Steffon?”

Sansa’s eyes widened and she wrapped her arms around his neck, hugging him tightly. “Steffon is a lovely name,” she whispered.

They held each other for a while, but eventually they broke apart. Stannis wasn’t quite sure, but it almost seemed to him that Sansa’s eyes were a bit teary.

Feeling like he ought distract her to keep her from doing a Ned, he hurried to ask the first question
that popped into his mind. “Er, what if we have girls?”

“Do you want to name a girl after your mother?” she asked, still looking rather teary.

Stannis was fond of his mother’s name, but after Robert had suggested Lyanna and Cassana there was an obstinate part of him that wanted to name any daughters he might have anything but what Robert had suggested. If Stannis named a girl Cassana - or Lyanna for that matter - Robert would never stop insisting that it had been his idea.

“I think you should choose,” Stannis said.

“Are you sure? Cassana is such a pretty name.”

“I’m sure.”

“Maybe we should both think about it for a while? We could both come up with one boy name and one girl name. That way, if we have two girls, I’ll name the older one and you’ll name the younger one. If we have two boys, you’ll name the older one and I’ll name the younger one. If we have a girl and a boy, I’ll name the girl and you’ll name the boy.” Sansa spoke slowly and carefully, searching his face the whole time. He tried to look encouraging as he thought her idea was quite good.

“That sounds like an excellent plan,” Stannis said, kissing her lips and letting his hands wander back to her baby bump.

Stannis felt like doing a lot more kissing, but Sansa moved her head to the side after a while. She was obviously not done talking.

“Have you finished packing up your study?” she asked him, raising an eyebrow. “The movers are coming on Saturday,” she reminded him.

Stannis groaned when he realised how many books he still had to put away into boxes. “No,” he said, “but I’ll get it done.”

“Good,” Sansa said with a smile, “Shireen and I were planning on doing the kitchen on Friday.”

Stannis could tell that Sansa would be talking about the move for the next half an hour if he didn’t do something.

“If you could be done with the study before then - “

“Are the kids at school still giving you a hard time?” Stannis interjected, hoping to distract Sansa. Sansa had been complaining about the ‘monsters’ she taught with increased frequency for the past few weeks, and Stannis was convinced that the strain of dealing with the ungrateful, entitled children of the snobs that were willing to pay the exorbitant school fees Sansa’s school charged was not good for the twins.

Sansa blinked and furrowed her brow, obviously a bit taken aback by the interruption. “They’re brats,” she said with a sigh. “Most of the time I can keep them under control, though.”

“You know you can go on maternity leave early, don’t you?” Stannis said, locking eyes with her and trying to show her with a look how much he loved her. “And you know that you can quit working for a few years - or even permanently - and I will support you.”

“I love teaching,” Sansa said, reaching up to stroke his cheek, “but yes, I do know that I don’t have
to work. I wouldn’t have to work even if we weren’t married.”

“I meant that I will support whatever decision you make,” Stannis explained. “I know you don’t need my financial support.”

Sansa kissed him. “Thank you,” she said, “I’ll think about it.”

This time when Stannis kissed her back, she did not try to keep talking.

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“Sansa and I found your Austen collection,” Shireen said early on an unusually sunny Sunday morning.

They had been living in the the new house for a week and a day and there were still boxes everywhere. Sansa was still in bed, but Stannis had decided to go to the kitchen to make tea. Shireen had been in there when he had arrived, carefully unpacking a box of fine china. Stannis recognised it vaguely as a wedding gift he and Sansa had received.

When Shireen’s words registered he felt his face get a bit warm.

“Oh, er, I had to get those. For school,” he said, spilling some water from the kettle he had been filling from the tap.

“Sure you did,” Shireen said, sounding amused.

Stannis managed to set the kettle to boiling without spilling more water. “Sansa and I are both very pleased with how much you’ve been able to help with the unpacking,” he said, changing the subject. It was one thing to admit his love for Jane Austen’s works to Sansa, but quite another to admit such things to his teenage daughter.

Shireen blushed and looked down at the box of china. “It’s nothing,” she said.

“It’s not nothing,” Stannis argued. Shireen had been making him quite proud ever since she got over whatever ‘girl problems’ she had been having recently. “Sansa gets tired more easily now that she’s pregnant. She tries to hide it, but she’s been exhausted due to the strain of the move and due to the difficulties she’s been having at work. She appreciates your help and I appreciate it, too.”

Stannis rested his hand on Shireen’s shoulder for a moment, trying to convey everything his words just couldn’t get across.

Shireen looked both very surprised, very flattered and strangely guilty. She didn’t say anything to explain why she might be feeling guilty, however, leaving Stannis to wonder what might be going through her mind.

“You might be able to help us unpack a bit more if you didn’t spend every spare minute baby-proofing the house. You do realise that the babies won’t be going to the attic anytime soon, don’t you?” Shireen said after a while, her expression turning amused.

Stannis frowned at her. It was better to be thorough now than to let the baby-proofing wait and risk forgetting something vital. He tried to explain this, but he wasn’t sure if Shireen took him very seriously.

He got distracted from his lecture on the importance of safety when Sansa joined them, looking rumpled and yawning hugely.
“Who wants pancakes?” she asked, gracing him and Shireen with a sleepy smile.

Stannis felt very proud of his daughter when she immediately offered to help with the batter.

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Stannis didn’t know how he had let Sansa convince him to do this.

“And this cocktail is my own little twist on a mint julep,” the mixologist said, handing Stannis a little glass with a sample. It was the fourth such little glass he had been required to consume in less than twenty minutes, and he was starting to feel a bit… warm.

“What do you think?” Sansa asked, ready to take notes. “Will it do for our party? It has to be classy and grown up and perfect.” She was taking this housewarming party much too seriously.

Stannis tasted the drink and found that it was a bit too sweet for his personal taste, but he knew that most people liked a little sweetness to offset the alcohol, so he shrugged. “It’s fine.” If he was forced to drink he’d prefer a simple gin and tonic. With a slice of lemon.

“No, you have to tell me more than that,” Sansa reminded him, “I can’t taste the drinks.” It was true, Sansa couldn’t imbibe while she was pregnant, so she had only been able to help taste the nonalcoholic beverages that the mixologist was prepared to make for those who, like Sansa, would not be drinking cocktails when the party rolled around.

Stannis still thought that they should just serve nothing but the nonalcoholic beverages at the party and not listen to Renly’s ideas about how having fancy cocktails was just the ‘done thing’. But Sansa wanted everything to be perfect, and he didn’t have the heart to deny her the joy of planning a big party for her friends and family to celebrate their move. No one under the legal drinking age would be present, and Shireen had originally been put out about that. Until Robert had given her and Myrcella permission to throw a slumber party at his house. Girls only, of course.

“It tastes like bourbon, sugar and mint,” Stannis rattled off with a sigh.

“And a splash of lime!” the mixologist added with a cheerful wink. “That’s my own addition. Don’t tell anyone -- it’s a trade secret!”

“Er, yes. I think I can taste it,” Stannis took another sip. If he kept this up he’d be as drunk as he’d been after his stag party soon.

Sansa wrote everything down diligently.

“Ready for the next drink?” the mixologist asked with a grin.

“I suppose.” Stannis tried very hard not to roll his eyes.

“How do you two feel about tequila?”

Stannis felt himself blanch. He had not gone anywhere near tequila since his eighteenth birthday. It had… it had not been good.

“Oh, do you think you could make margaritas?” Sansa sounded excited.

“Sure thing!” the mixologist said. “Do you want the classic version? I also do a great alterna-rita with blackberries.”

“Both?”
“Coming right up!”

Stannis tried not to look panicked. Tequila was the main reason he hadn’t touched a drop of alcohol for five years after his eighteenth birthday. It wasn’t just the hangover that had been bad… his behaviour while under the influence had been utterly unacceptable.

When the mixologist handed him a little glass with salt on the rim he took a deep breath before tasting the concoction. He was a grown man now. He was only drinking a little bit of tequila. It wouldn’t be like last time.

Stannis wasn’t completely wrong. It was definitely not as bad as last time. For one thing, he was at his own house, safe with his wife, and once the mixologist left there were no other witnesses. Shireen was staying at Robert’s house and his twins were in no condition to witness anything except the inside of Sansa’s womb.

“Stannis, are you sure you don’t want your pyjamas?” Sansa looked very amused. He liked it when she was amused. Her smile was so pretty.

“No, too warm,” he protested, feeling completely fine without any clothes on.

“Well, I certainly don’t mind,” Sansa said, shrugging and putting the pyjama bottoms that she had been holding away. She was still smiling and her eyes looked like stars.

“You’re so beau- be- … pretty.” It was hard to say long words.

“Thank you, darling,” Sansa said, and there was love and amusement in her tone. She hugged him and he wrapped his arms around her very tightly. She was soft and her breasts were getting bigger.

Their bed was very close by, so he decided to walk them over to it.

“Stannis,” she laughed, “you need to brush your teeth.”

“No, I need to kiss you,” he argued, searching for her lips. She let him kiss her for a moment before pushing him away. He ended up falling over and landing on the bed. Weird.

“Stay there. I’ll bring you your toothbrush. You taste terrible.”

Stannis frowned. He didn’t want to taste terrible.

Once his teeth were clean (Sansa brought him a glass to spit into) he tried to get Sansa to kiss him again. He wanted to make love to her. She was so pretty.

“Woah, woah,” Sansa said, pushing his hands away from the breasts he had been trying to fondle. “Let’s see if you can sustain a conversation before you try to sustain anything else, shall we?”

Stannis huffed out a laugh. He had understood that joke! But why would she want to talk before he sustained an erection?

“Tell me something nice and simple,” Sansa instructed. “Like how many fish did you catch on the fishing trip with Dad and the others? You never told me.”

“I didn’t catch any fish,” Stannis confessed, frowning at the thought. “I was very unhappy about it,” he added.

“Oh, that’s too bad,” Sansa said in a lovely sympathetic tone of voice that made him feel it was all right that he hadn’t caught any fish. She was stroking his chest and he really liked it. She resisted
when he tried to move her hand to his groin, though. Damn.

“Robert hugged me,” he told her, feeling like this was the perfect moment to discuss it.

“Because you didn’t catch any fish?” Sansa sounded confused. He realised he ought to explain things properly.

“No, because he’s trying to stop drinking and wants to be a good uncle to the twins and also because he’s sorry about how he didn’t help out with Shireen and because he wants me to trust him.” There. That had been a perfect explanation.

“I think we should talk about this when you’re sober,” Sansa said, still petting his chest. She resisted again when he tried to move her hand to his groin.

“It’s okay, I’m not drunk,” he told her. It was completely true.

For some reason Sansa laughed. She had such a pretty laugh.

“I yelled at Robert,” he confessed, “I also didn’t want him to catch me. I let the others catch me, but I didn’t want Robert to catch me. And then I fixed the hot tub.” There. Now she had the full story. Maybe she would want to pet his cock now?

He tried to move her hand again. No luck.

He decided that since Sansa did not want to touch his cock it was now a good time to talk to his babies. He moved until his head was near the swell of Sansa’s belly.

“You two should remember to always be nice to each other,” he said, feeling very strongly about his words. “No teasing. I mean it. You should always want to catch each other, because that’s what siblings should do.”

Sansa gently pulled him back up to lie on his pillow. “Stannis…” she said, sounding a bit like she was at a loss.

He tried to get her to touch his cock once again.

Sansa made an exasperated noise. “We really need to talk when you’re sober. I’ll get you some water to drink and then I think you should go to sleep.”

“No, don’t leave,” he asked, feeling horny and not wanting her warm, soft body to be anywhere except close to him. “May I have a blowjob, please?” he asked, very careful to remember his manners.

“Not tonight,” Sansa said, sounding a bit like she was trying not to laugh.

He frowned. Had he not asked nicely enough? Had he definitely said please? He couldn’t remember. “Please?” he tried, looking at her and trying to will her to change her mind.

“If you drink your water I might be willing to give you a handjob. How’s that?”

She would pet his cock? He sat up and looked at her expectantly. “Okay.”

“Wait here while I get your water.”

Where else would he go? The bed was definitely the most comfortable place in the house. And why would he leave if staying here meant that Sansa would touch his cock?
It really was such a comfortable bed. And his pillow was very nice, and he felt very warm…

“Stannis?”

For a moment Stannis wasn’t sure where he was. His head hurt and his tongue felt like sandpaper in his mouth. But his surroundings smelled familiar. Bed. He was in bed. He was naked in bed. Had he and Sansa had sex? Why else would he be naked?

“It’s nearly one in the afternoon. Shireen will be back soon.”

Stannis groaned and tried to sit up. How much did he drink last night? Sansa’s hands were on him, helping him reach a seated position. They were cool and soft and wonderful.

“Here, drink this.”

Stannis managed to open one eye a little bit and saw that Sansa was holding a tall glass of water in front of his face. He took it, but Sansa didn’t quite let go of it. She helped him drink. The water was the best water he had ever tasted in his life. His tongue felt a little less like sandpaper.

He managed to get both his eyes fully open. The room was thankfully dimly lit; Sansa hadn’t thrown the curtains back.

“How are you feeling?” Sansa’s words were spoken in a low, soothing tone of voice.

“Fine,” he muttered, feeling embarrassed. He vaguely recalled refusing to put on his pyjama bottoms and begging for a blowjob.

Tequila was the enemy.

Sansa ignored his claim. “I know you’re not feeling well right now, but you said some things last night that I really think you need to talk about.” She was biting her lip and giving him a very concerned look. “What happened with your brother on that fishing trip?”

Stannis groaned and slid back down to lie on his back once he had finished his water. He closed his eyes. He had really meant to tell Sansa all about it. There just hadn’t been time with the redecorating and the moving and everything.

Slowly, the whole story spilled from his lips. He even told her what he’d said to Ned about Arya.

Sansa had moved to lie down next to him as he spoke, and she hadn’t interrupted him once. She just stroked his forehead, his neck and his chest and made encouraging noises.

“I’m glad you and Robert are trying to work things out,” she said after he finished talking. “I was hoping you would use that trip to mend fences with him.” She hugged herself close and it felt more comforting than anything she could have said. “But you really shouldn’t worry about me and Arya. I’ve long since accepted that we’re just different personalities. And we’re getting along a bit better with every year that goes by.”

Stannis resisted the urge to snort. He had often seen the look on Sansa’s face when Arya called Sansa ‘annoying’ or rolled her eyes when Sansa tried to share something she was excited about because it was ‘too girly’ or some such rot. He hated seeing that initial flash of hurt in Sansa’s eyes and the way she scrambled to raise her defences and soldier on as if she hadn’t been hurt at all.

“I still think Ned should have done something about it when you were kids,” he said, leaving it at that. His head hurt too much for him to try to argue with Sansa.
“Do you remember what you said to the twins last night?” Sansa asked, changing the subject.

“I talked to the twins?” He couldn’t recall.

“You told them to be nice to each other, and not to tease. You also said a lot of things about catching each other that only make sense now that you told me what happened on that fishing trip.” There was a smile playing on Sansa’s lips that was strangely sad.

“Oh.” He didn’t know what to say.

“I’m sure the twins will love each other very much. And you mustn’t get too upset with them if they don’t always get along. It’s normal for siblings to have disagreements.”

This conversation was too difficult for his dehydrated brain to handle, but Stannis understood what Sansa meant.

“I know. But I don’t think we should let them get away with tormenting each other.” He was determined not to let it happen.

(Of course not,” Sansa said, stroking him gently and sounding sincere. “We’ll do the best we can.”

A knot of tension somewhere deep in his stomach came loose. Sansa would help him make sure that their babies did not grow up to experience the sort of sibling relationships he and Sansa had to deal with when they had been children.

“Yes, we’ll do our best,” he repeated, silently vowing to do even better than that.

“And you want some pain killers? I think they’ll have kicked in by the time Shireen gets home if you take them now. Although you’ll have to eat something with them.”

A fuzzy memory of something that Sansa had said last night resurfaced.

“I think I’d rather have that handjob,” he said in a hoarse, rather hungover voice. He was fairly sure an orgasm would do a lot more to fix his headache than a painkiller would.

(Of course you’d remember that,” Sansa said, rolling her eyes and sounding amused. But despite the eye rolling her hand was moving down towards his groin, and Stannis felt a thrill of excitement.

“I love you,” she said, kissing his lips right as her hand closed around his erection.

He kissed her back, and wondered if she would mind if he tried to turn the handjob into sex. “I love you, too.”

She didn’t mind.

Chapter End Notes

Many thanks to Tommy for suggesting that mixologist scene. ♥
“I’m huge.” Sansa was looking at herself in the mirror of their en suite, naked as the day she was born and her eyes brimming with tears.

She looked beautiful to Stannis, but he knew quite well that women got very sensitive about the stretch marks on their skin and the roundness of their bellies during pregnancy. He had gone through this all with Selyse, and even though she had never been a vain creature, she had still had the occasional crying fit about the matter. He had also read every pregnancy book and magazine article he had been able to get his hands on, and they often spoke of the way a woman’s self image and self esteem needed to be nurtured during this time of change.

With Sansa it was a lot easier and more natural to respond to these emotional outbursts.

“You look beautiful,” Stannis said as he dried himself off and wrapped the towel around his waist. He had just finished his morning shower.

“You’re just saying that because you have to,” Sansa shot back, dangerously close to crying.

“I never say anything I don’t mean,” he reminded her, walking up to stand behind his very pregnant wife and wrap his arms around her.

“What if I never shrink back? What if I have loose skin and scars and things?” She was chewing her bottom lip and running her hands over the stretch marks low on her belly.

“Remember what Dr. Cressen said,” Stannis murmured, stroking her arms from shoulder to elbow and back up. “You’re young and healthy enough to bounce back from this with ease. And your mother has never had any trouble recovering from her pregnancies.”

“She never had twins,” Sansa pointed out. She did not look tearful anymore, but there was a stubborn set to her jaw.

“I don’t know what to say,” Stannis admitted, feeling a bit helpless. “I will love you and the twins whether you end up with loose skin or not.”

“I know that,” Sansa said, turning around to face him. He was unable to stand very close to her due to her protruding belly. “I’m just not sure if I’ll be able to love myself if I end up looking like an alien burst out of me.”

“Please stop listening to Shireen talk about how creepy your pregnancy is,” Stannis said, feeling annoyed with his daughter. He knew that she didn’t mean any harm, and he knew that most of the time Sansa just laughed and agreed with her wholeheartedly - it was quite creepy when one could see the outline of a hand pressing against Sansa’s skin from the inside - but it still wasn’t helpful.

“This isn’t about Shireen,” Sansa sighed, “it’s about the fact that my waist will probably never be as tiny as it was before. It’s about the way my breasts will look after feeding two babies for months on end… I’ll never be quite as… unblemished after all this.”

“You would never have stayed tiny and unblemished forever, anyway,” Stannis said, furrowing his
brow. “We all get older and we all change. I look nothing like the way I looked when I was your age. There’s nothing we can do about it. But your mind and your heart will always remain beautiful, and I will always think that you’re the most stunning woman in my life.”

Sansa burst into tears and Stannis’ face fell. He really hadn’t meant to make her cry.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t - I mean - please don’t cry.” He moved a little to the side so that he’d be able to hug her without the baby bump getting in the way.

“You are so nice,” Sansa sobbed, clinging to him and shaking with emotion, “I - I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Stannis stroked her hair and her back and tried to say soothing things even though he always felt incredibly awkward when he was required to murmur comforting words in situations like these. He could never think of anything better than ‘there, there,’ to say.

Sansa calmed down after a little while, and Stannis moved back so that he could examine her face. She did not seem sad. Just a little red and swollen around the eyes.

“Are you going to be all right today? I could take a personal day if you need me to stay.” It was getting harder and harder to leave Sansa behind in the mornings as her pregnancy progressed. She had been on maternity leave for a while, but it was still more than a month until her due date.

“I’ll be fine. I have my knitting. And I think Margaery was going to come over and talk about what sort of food would work for the baby shower.”

“Are you sure?” Stannis asked, feeling decidedly uncomfortable about leaving Sansa alone feeling vulnerable and upset about her body.

“Yes, you’re already taking time off tomorrow for the ultrasound, remember?”

Stannis shrugged. “Robert and Davos can hold down the fort. I am at liberty to take off as much time as needed.”

It really was a relief that Robert was doing his job these days. It made Stannis a lot less nervous about all the time he would be taking off when the babies were born. Robert was a charming and capable leader when he wasn’t swimming around in a beer vat, and Davos was more than competent when it came to stepping in for Stannis.

“Robert’s been doing so well, hasn’t he?” Sansa said, stepping away from the mirror and giving Stannis access to it. He needed to shave.

“Tolerably,” Stannis muttered as he lathered his face up with shaving cream.

Sansa walked over to the peg where her robe was hanging and put it on. Stannis was still only wearing a towel. “But you’ve been trying to get along, haven’t you? You were both really good over Christmas.”

Stannis made an affirming sound and started to move the razor over his skin with practised, economical movements. Christmas had been unusually good. Robert hadn’t been drunk at all and he hadn’t tried to give anyone a yacht. He seemed to be quite serious about getting his act together, and Stannis had done his very best not to grind his teeth whenever his brother opened his mouth, and to stop treating him with quite as much tense suspicion.

“Maybe we should name one of the twins after him,” Sansa said, her tone teasing, “Or both if we have a boy and a girl. I’ve always thought Roberta is a beautiful name.”
“Don’t let him hear you say things like that,” Stannis grumbled, lifting his chin to shave his neck. “He’d hold you to it.”

Sansa laughed and shook her head. It was as if she hadn’t just been crying a few minutes ago. “I hope we’ll be able to find out about the sex of the babies tomorrow,” she sighed. “They’ve been so secretive!”

Stannis made another affirming sound and shot Sansa a concerned look when she sat down on the edge of the bathtub. What if she fell in?

He finished shaving and rinsed the razor one last time. He noticed Sansa close her eyes and inhale deeply as he applied his aftershave, her chest rising and falling in a way that was almost hypnotic. Their eyes met when she opened hers again and he could see that she was enjoying the scent of the product he had just applied. His concern got pushed to the side as a pulse of arousal ran through him.

Might she be interested in going back to bed for a little while?

Sansa was still quite eager for sex though she was nearly eight months pregnant, but she was not quite as out-of-control needy as she had been for a while, and rarely tried to get him to do things with her before he left for work anymore. Her size made it difficult to do anything sexual very quickly, mostly since her body just made her uncomfortable these days. She enjoyed being touched, however, and he usually tried to spend a good amount of their foreplay time massaging her feet, neck and shoulders before he tried anything else. He didn’t mind this new arrangement at all, but a part of him was starting to miss the morning quickies that had nearly driven him into an early grave a few months ago.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Sansa said with an amused smile, “but I’m afraid you’ll be very late for work if we go back to bed.” There was something very confident about her body language now, all traces of her previous vulnerability gone. “But we can pick this up tonight.” She winked at him and got up from the bathtub’s edge with as much grace as her belly allowed. “I’ll go downstairs and put the tea on.”

Stannis took a deep breath and willed the beginning of his erection to go down.

Hopefully the day would go by quickly.

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“Now, remember that this is not an exact science, but I’m ninety-nine percent sure that you two are having fraternal twins. A boy and a girl.” The ultrasound technician was beaming at them after having stared quite intently at the screen of the monitor for a very long time, moving the probe over Sansa’s belly, squinting her eyes and tilting her head this way and that.

Stannis and Sansa looked at each other and smiled until it hurt.

“I can’t wait to tell everyone!” Sansa squealed.

Stannis felt rather excited at the prospect of sharing the news, too. He nodded and squeezed Sansa’s hand.

“Should we wait until the baby shower, though?” Sansa asked with an excited gleam in her eyes. “Just imagine what an amazing surprise that will be!”

Stannis nodded again, his lips quirking into a smile. It would be interesting to be able to see
everyone’s reactions.

Later, in the car on the way back home, Sansa asked him a question he hadn’t been expecting.

“Are you disappointed that the twins aren’t identical?”

“Why on earth would I be disappointed about that?” He really couldn’t fathom it. There were so many things to be worried about when a woman carried twins: the increased risk of gestational diabetes, preeclampsia and premature labour to name a few, that it simply hadn’t occurred to Stannis to worry about whether the twins would be identical or fraternal. It was a question that had interested him for a long time, but he genuinely had no preference one way or another. As long as they were healthy and didn’t bring any harm to Sansa he would be thrilled.

“Well, it would have been very cute,” Sansa said, sounding a bit embarrassed.

“I probably would have ended up mixing them up,” Stannis grumbled.

Sansa burst out laughing. “No, you wouldn’t have!”

“How do you know?”

“Well, I read about what parents do when they have identical babies. There are usually birthmarks that can be used to tell them apart, or you can paint their toenails or have them wear anklets or bracelets.”

That didn’t sound entirely foolproof to Stannis.

“It probably wouldn’t take my brothers very long to start trying to sabotage any such markings,” Stannis said, feeling a lot less resentful about the idea than he would have felt a few months ago. “So it’s probably for the best that we’re having fraternal twins.”

“But you wouldn’t have wanted two boys?” Sansa asked, sounding curious. “I mean, you already have a girl…”

“I’m just glad the three of you are all healthy and doing well.” Stannis knew it was the sort of things parents always said, but he really meant it.

“I suppose it’s nice to get one of each on our first try,” Sansa said, stroking her bump affectionately.

“It’s perfect,” Stannis said, wishing that he weren’t driving so that he would be able to meet her eyes. But now that he was driving such precious cargo he was even more concerned with keeping his eyes on the road at all times than he usually was.

“Have you decided what you will name the boy?” Sansa asked after a short silence.

Stannis recalled the deal they had made and realised it would be up to him to choose the name of his first son. He wasn’t quite sure if he was ready to say it out loud yet so he stalled by turning the question back on Sansa.

“I’ve been thinking about it a lot,” Sansa said, “and I think I want to name our little girl after my grandmother. How does Minisa Cassana sound to you?”

Stannis gripped the steering wheel tightly and sucked in a deep breath. Sansa wanted to name their girl after his mother, too? His thoughts about not giving Robert the satisfaction of using one of his
It sounds very good,” he croaked.

Feeling moved to reciprocate Sansa’s gesture, he swallowed a few times and gathered the strength to tell her what he wanted to name their son.

“How does Steffon Eddard sound for our boy?”

“Perfect,” Sansa said at once, sounding deeply emotional, “it’s exactly what I was hoping for. Thank you.” He felt her hand clasp his shoulder, and risked taking one hand off the steering wheel so that he would be able to rest it on top of hers for a moment.

He heard her take a tremulous breath when she retracted her hand and sensed that she was trying to pull herself together. He was glad of it. If she cried while he was driving he wouldn’t be able to hug her. Unless he pulled over, and there wasn’t a safe place to do that for the next several minutes.

“Those are some big names for our little ones,” she said, clearly making an effort to sound cheerful and bright.

“They’ll grow into them.” People always did. Unless they got stuck with nicknames like Ned Stark. Stannis had never quite understood why the man put up with it. Eddard was a much more dignified name. Robert occasionally called Stannis ‘Stanny’ when they had been growing up, but Stannis had put a swift end to that in his teens. (He had allowed Renly to keep doing it for a little longer since he had only been a child.)

“I really can’t wait to see what Margaery, Renly and Loras are planning for the baby shower. Have they told you anything?” Sansa asked, changing the subject to something less emotionally charged.

“No, nothing,” Stannis admitted. Renly hadn’t even responded to any of Stannis’ subtle interrogation techniques. Admittedly, glaring at Renly until he caved and told him everything hadn’t worked since Renly was little, but it had been worth a try.

“I’m excited that it’s going to be a surprise,” Sansa said with a pleased sigh, “but I’m also really happy that we’ll be able to surprise them, and everyone, with our news.”

“Everyone except Shireen,” Stannis amended, “we should tell her before we tell the others, don’t you think?”

“Yes, of course. We can’t keep that from her. They’re her siblings! And I think she’ll like being in on the surprise.”

Stannis usually disliked surprises, but knowing that he and Sansa had their own surprise waiting made him feel a little better about being forced to tolerate Renly, Margaery and Loras taking over his own living room while they prepared for the baby shower. It also helped that Sansa was so excited about it all.

When the day of the shower arrived Stannis was amazed at the lengths Renly and the others had gone to in order to make the day special for Sansa. He didn’t recognise most of the children’s books characters that decorated his living room, but he recognised that they were important to Sansa, and that was all he needed to know.

Still, he had liked it when Sansa had explained the story about the wolves who built a house out of
flowers to avoid a pig. It was a completely illogical way to avoid a pig, but Sansa’s eyes softened when he pointed it out, and he felt like he had somehow said exactly the right thing.

When Shireen asked him about his favourite children’s books he was a bit surprised. He told her he couldn’t recall as there was absolutely no way that he would tell her about his love for The Giving Tree. He simply did not trust himself to talk about that book. It had been a book that his mother had always read to him, and no matter what he did he couldn’t quite keep from becoming emotional if he tried to discuss it. He hadn’t even told Sansa about it. Only Robert knew.

Thankfully he managed to remember a story about a lonely beaver that he had used to read for Shireen, and he felt very pleased when Shireen defended the book after Renly said it was depressing. His daughter was really growing into such a confident young woman.

Stannis spent the better part of the baby shower talking to Davos, though Robert and Ned sat nearby and occasionally joined the conversation.

“Raising boys is really not so very different from raising girls,” Davos said after Stannis had sidestepped yet another question about the ultrasound appointment he and Sansa had gone to the other day. “For the first couple of years it really makes no difference at all. It’s only after they start interacting with other children that you start to notice a change.”

“Boys tend to be more rambunctious, though?” Stannis asked, looking around at the other men. They all had sons, so they ought to know. Robert grimaced at the question and looked enviously over at Renly and Loras who were obviously spiking their drinks. Stannis wondered if Robert was thinking about Joffrey. ‘Rambunctious’ didn’t really cover it when it came to that little demon child.

“I’ve found that it’s the child’s personality more than their gender that matters the most,” Ned said, shooting Stannis an unreadable look. Stannis got the vague sense that Ned was thinking about Lyanna and Arya.

“If you have a high-spirited child – or two – it’s important to give them a chance to use the energy for something productive. Devan has always had a lot of energy, so Marya and I had him doing all sorts of sports from an early age,” Davos said with a proud look on his face.

Stannis nodded, that was useful advice. He knew exactly what to do with a quiet child as Shireen had always been very quiet, but he’d be at a bit of a loss if he ended up with a pair of hellions.

When the time came for the big reveal, Stannis had a very difficult time keeping a straight face. He and Sansa had agreed that she would make the actual announcement, mostly because Stannis wasn’t entirely sure he’d be able to get the words out without bursting from pride, and Stannis liked being able to watch as everyone reacted to her words.

Nearly all the people present reacted with the same thrilled, happy expression, and it was really quite strange and wonderful to see how excited everyone was.

Stannis was a bit confused when Catelyn started talking about flowers, but remembered the wedding a split second later, and the way Sansa had kicked those flowers out of a bowl of water for that silly tradition. He knew it was just a coincidence that the flowers had predicted correctly, but it was still a little interesting.

When Stannis noticed that everyone was losing focus and starting to talk about the boy and the girl Sansa was carrying he quickly spoke up, getting everyone to quiet down and listen to the rest of Sansa’s announcement.
Sansa told everyone the name they decided to give their little girl first, and Stannis locked eyes with Robert as Catelyn exclaimed and hugged Sansa. Robert did not look triumphant at the fact that Stannis and Sansa used one of the names he suggested. He looked serious and a little sad as he nodded in approval, and Stannis gave him a small nod in return. Renly came over to pat Stannis’ back, his eyes full of a sad sort of understanding. Sometimes Stannis forgot that Renly had lost even more than Stannis and Robert had when their parents had died. He had lost the opportunity to get to know Steffon and Cassana, to create real memories of them…

Stannis was relieved when Ned didn’t burst into tears when Sansa announced that their son was to be named Steffon Eddard, but he was still glad that everyone was watching Sansa and Ned when Robert decided to give him a short hug.

“Thank you,” Robert whispered before releasing him, clapping him on the back quite gently.

Stannis suddenly had a small epiphany regarding Robert’s eagerness to be involved in naming the twins. Robert was probably sad that he hadn’t been allowed any say when it came to naming his children with Cersei. In his own blundering way he had probably been trying to make up for it. The resentment that had been lingering at the back of Stannis’ mind over Robert’s meddling came undone and faded into oblivion.

Renly almost looked tearful for a moment, but then he blinked and it was gone.

Stannis didn’t have time to dwell on the moment with his brothers. His wife was crying in her father’s arms, and Ned did not seem to know that it was important to distract her before she really got going. He grabbed a cupcake and Sansa’s hot sauce (her latest craving) and went over to do what he could to calm his emotional wife down.

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“I know today was about giving presents to the babies, but I want to give you a present, too.” Sansa was standing with her hands behind her back in the doorway of their en suite. Stannis was already in bed, reading an article called ‘Life with twins: the first three months’. He looked up from a heading about ‘establishing daily routines’ and gave Sansa a curious look. A present? What sort of present?

She came over to the bed and sat down next to him, handing him a small wrapped parcel. It looked like it might be a book.

“I don’t have anything for you,” he said, feeling a bit awkward.

“Don’t worry about that,” Sansa said, waving her hand in the air as if to get rid of an irksome fly, “just open it!” She smiled and looked very excited.

Her excitement was contagious, and Stannis ended up tearing into the wrapping paper with nearly as much enthusiasm as she had shown when she had opened the gifts for the twins at the shower.

A plain white photo album with a golden edge design was revealed. It reminded him of the large album Sansa had made with all their wedding photographs, and wondered if this was a smaller version he would be able to keep at his office along with the framed wedding portrait on his desk.

“Have a look,” Sansa encouraged him, a blush colouring her cheeks.

Wondering why she was blushing, Stannis opened the album. As soon as he saw the first picture he understood why and felt his own face heat up.
He looked a few more pictures and saw that they were all similar. They were pictures of Sansa in her wedding lingerie, similar to the ones he had taken, but of much finer quality. They were obviously professional shots, and Stannis’ stomach clenched up at the idea that someone, a stranger, had been allowed to see her like that. To photograph her like that.

“You’re not pleased,” Sansa said, looking crestfallen.

“Who took these pictures?” he asked, unable to keep his jealousy completely under control.

“Her name is Sophie and she was very professional. Jeyne often works as a makeup artist on shoots with her, and she recommended her to me.”

Stannis calmed down a little at that. If it was someone Jeyne knew he was sure it was a trustworthy person who would not start spreading the pictures around online. And as much as he hated to admit it, he was relieved that the photographer in question was a woman. He did not like to think of himself as some sort of backwards caveman, but the idea of another man seeing his wife dressed like that was not easy to handle. Maybe if it had been any other kind of lingerie it would have been easier, but the wedding lingerie was something special.

Now that he was calmer he was able to look at the pictures more closely. They were beautiful, and Sansa had clearly posed for them either before or very shortly after the wedding. There was no hint of a baby bump.

“These are very nice,” he said, trying to apologise for his initial reaction. His throat was becoming a bit dry as his eyes traced the outlines of Sansa’s perfect figure, posed seductively on a beautiful bed with an old fashioned wooden headboard.

“I thought you might like to have proper pictures rather than those poor-quality phone shots,” Sansa said, still blushing faintly.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice hoarse.

“This way you’ll always be able to remember what I looked like when my waist was tiny and my breasts were perky,” Sansa said, obviously trying to sound cheerful and upbeat, but not quite managing to hide her lingering insecurity about her pregnant body.

Stannis looked at her for a moment, unable to think what to say. Suddenly it was as if a light bulb had been flicked on in his brain, however, and he got up and went to his study, leaving the photo album and Sansa in bed. He could hear her asking him where he was going, but all he said was that he would be back in a second. He remembered finding a box of old pictures when he had been cleaning his study out for the move, and he remembered exactly where he had put it in his new study. There was a photograph in that box that he had a feeling Sansa would be interested in seeing, even though he felt awkward about showing it to her.

When he returned, the picture in his hand, Sansa was sitting up against the headboard of their bed, pillows piled behind her and her legs underneath the bedcovers. He got into bed next to her, slipping his own legs under the covers.

“I don’t know if you saw this back when you went through my old photographs and framed some of them, but here you go,” he said, handing her the faded picture. One of the corners was bent, but otherwise it was mostly in good shape.

“Oh,” Sansa said, her eyes widening as she looked at the picture. “How old are you in this?”

“About twenty-three,” Stannis said, feeling his face get very warm. “I still had all my hair,” he
pointed out a bit stupidly.

“I can see that,” Sansa breathed out, her eyes glued to the picture.

It was a picture from a sailing trip he had gone on with Davos and Marya one summer weekend. It had been uncommonly hot and both Stannis and Davos had taken their shirts off just to be able to breathe. Marya had been wearing a bikini, and Stannis still remembered how awkward he had felt when Davos had helped her put some sunblock on.

“You’re thinner,” Sansa said, still staring at his younger self. “Good shape, though,” she added, finally looking up to meet his eyes. “You’re still in good shape.” She smiled shyly at him.

“I’ve changed,” he said with a shrug. Age.

“I like the changes,” Sansa said, still smiling, “your face has more character now. And I like the grey in your hair. It’s distinguished.”

“Well, I like you the way you are now, too,” Stannis said, using the opportunity to make a point. He held up the photo album she had just given him. “These pictures are lovely, but they’re not better than you.”

He couldn’t get the right words out. He wanted to explain that while he enjoyed her body quite a lot, he enjoyed it because it was the vessel that contained her. He wouldn’t like the body on its own without Sansa’s personality inside it -- without her smile, her laughter, her essence.

“I think you’ll be grateful for them for the first six weeks after the birth, though,” Sansa said with a cheeky grin.

Stannis swallowed. He had been doing his best to try to forget that he and Sansa would not be able to have sex for a long while after the birth. He knew he would probably be too busy with the twins to really notice, but it was still a long time, and he wasn’t looking forward to it. Sansa would be nursing, too, so he wouldn’t even have exclusive rights to her breasts anymore.

“Poor substitutes,” he muttered, leaning over to kiss her and fondle the breasts he would soon have to fight his babies for.

“You really prefer me like this?” Sansa asked, gazing at him with a vulnerable and incredulous look in her eyes.

“I prefer the present moment over dreaming of some unattainable past or unknown future,” he said, kissing her neck and running a thumb over one of her nipples through the material of her satin nightgown. She had been forced to buy a set of maternity nightgowns when her old ones had stopped fitting, and Stannis was glad that she had bought satin ones. It would have felt odd to see her wear nightgowns of any other material.

“How do you always know the right thing to say?” Sansa whispered, arching her back slightly and pressing her breast up towards his hand.

“That’s an exaggeration,” Stannis muttered against her neck. He often said the opposite of the right thing.

She laughed and tugged on his face until it was near enough to hers for a kiss. The kiss was passionate, hot and full of love, and it stirred his blood a lot more than the pictures had. Her lips were like a drug to him, and the feel of the breast he was still fondling, so full and lush under his palm, made him want to moan and never stop kissing and touching her.
They kissed for a long while, but eventually Stannis moved down to lick and worship her nipples. They had changed along with her breasts. They were a little bigger and a little darker, and Sansa often complained that they were always stiff. This was not a cause for complaint in Stannis’ mind, but he wisely kept that opinion to himself.

To his surprise he felt a bit of fluid leak from her nipples after a while, and he looked up at Sansa for instructions. Unfortunately she had her eyes closed and her head thrown back. He had got some of the sticky fluid on his tongue, and the flavour was surprisingly sweet. Was it milk? Was Sansa supposed to start producing milk so soon? He usually didn't pay too much attention to the details that had to do with breastfeeding in the books, figuring that it wasn’t terribly useful for him to know, but he cursed himself for it now. Feeling curious, and wanting to confirm his milk hypothesis, he licked at her nipples in turn, lapping more of the sticky secretions up. The taste really wasn’t bad, even though it was sweet, and Stannis started to feel guilty about enjoying it.

He should stop. What sort of sick man wanted to steal the milk from his unborn children?

“Mm, why are you stopping?” Sansa moaned, her hand going to the back of his head and encouraging him to go back to licking her nipples. “It feels so good.”

“You’re leaking,” he blurted out.

Sansa opened her eyes and looked down at herself in dismay. “I’m not bleeding, am I?” she asked in a panicked voice, her fingers going to her nipples as she examined herself.

“N-no,” he stammered, feeling a bit disturbed. Women sometimes bled from their nipples? “I think it’s milk.”

Sansa had found some of the sticky substance and was licking it off her finger. “Don’t be silly,” she said, “the milk doesn’t come until after the birth. This is just colostrum.” She sounded relieved.

Stannis strained his memory. He had read something about colostrum. It was the stuff that came before the milk, full of protein, antibodies and sugar.

“It’s - er - it’s not bad,” he said, wondering if she would call him a pervert for liking it. It was for their babies. Not him.

“I know, it’s kind of sweet,” Sansa said, smiling at him. “It’s been leaking out occasionally for a long time. I’m surprised you haven’t noticed before. Although… maybe it’s not so surprising. It has mostly happened while I’m in the bath.”

“You don’t mind that I’m… er, tasting it?” he asked, looking at her uncertainly.

“As long as you don’t mind, I don’t mind.”

“But it’s for the babies,” he argued, still feeling like he was doing something wrong.

“The babies aren’t born yet, darling.” Sansa was using the patient and amused tone of voice that meant she thought he was being particularly endearing.

“Right,” he said, feeling his face get very warm. He decided to stop talking and get back to business. Sansa was clearly in the mood for sex, and he really didn’t know why he was waffling about.

Sansa stroked his hair and encouraged him with soft touches and moans to keep licking up the little bit of sweetness that was coming from her nipples, and he complied, feeling less and less guilty the
more Sansa moaned and writhed beneath him. He wasn’t completely on top of her, of course, due to her belly, but he was curled around her side, one of his thighs in between hers, and his upper body partially covering hers.

Eventually they shifted and started to spoon, allowing Stannis to kiss the back and side of her neck, rub his erection against her rear and fondle her breasts all at once. Sometimes he let go of her breasts in favour of running a hand over her baby bump, marveling at the fact that his babies were in there, marveling at the fact that she was carrying them inside, nurturing and giving life even as she went about her day. It was miraculous, arousing and thrilling all at once, and Stannis wished he had a way with words so that he could express his feelings about it properly.

“Please, Stannis,” Sansa moaned after a while, wriggling her arse and clearly needing his cock quite badly. He was perfectly willing to oblige her, and pushed his pyjama bottoms down to free himself. He only needed to shift Sansa’s skirt in order to gain access, and she lifted her leg to help him have an easier time of slipping inside from their spooned position.

It was an incredibly intimate and comfortable position to be in, and Stannis rocked his hips slowly, breathing her scent in and enjoying himself. He continued to fondle her breasts and stroke her belly in turn, not in any hurry to speed up.

“Gods,” Sansa breathed, clenching around him and arching her back as much as she could, pressing her arse against him, wordlessly begging for more.

Stannis peppered her neck with kisses and murmured for her to be patient. He was in the mood to take it nice and easy tonight.

Suddenly he felt something move under his palm where he had been stroking Sansa’s baby bump, and couldn’t help breathing in a bit sharply.

“The kicker is awake,” Sansa giggled. She had been convinced for a while no that one of the twins was a much more active kicker than the other, though Stannis couldn’t understand how she was able to tell.

“Should I stop?” Stannis asked, feeling terribly awkward about having sex with her while at least one of their babies was kicking.

“Don’t you dare,” Sansa said, sounding miffed. “They kick all the time while we’re having sex. You’ve never minded before.”

Stannis usually had his mind on something else while they were in the middle of things.

“Do you think they can tell?” he whispered, starting to move tentatively again, rocking his hips and hoping that he wasn’t somehow traumatising his children.

“Of course not. They’re in the womb. You’re big, but you’re not reaching all the way in there.” Stannis could hear her rolling her eyes at him, even though he couldn’t see her face. “If they can sense anything at all it’s that their mother is enjoying herself.”

“Yeah?” He sped up a little. He had liked hearing her call him big. He never got tired of hearing her compliment his cock, and he never got tired of hearing about how much she enjoyed his attentions.

“Mm, yeah,” she sighed, doing everything in her power to encourage him to go even faster.

“You want it harder?” he asked, forgetting all about stealing milk from his children and
traumatising them by possibly disturbing their peace with his cock. He was no longer all that interested in taking it slow. He wanted her to get on all fours and let him fuck her like he meant it.

“Gods, yes, yes,” she mewled, her voice more high-pitched than before.

He pulled out of her and ignored her offended little huff in order to steer her into the position he wanted. She helped him as soon as she realised what he was doing, getting on her knees with more speed than he would have thought possible for a woman in her condition.

She whimpered with pleasure when he entered her again, making sure to rub himself nicely against the spot inside of her that always made her shiver.

“Still want it hard?” he asked, smacking her arse lightly and enjoying the way she clenched up in response.

“Yes, please, please,” she begged, breathing heavily.

“Hold on.” He didn’t give her any more warning and started to pump himself in and out of her, aiming for a steady rhythm he knew she liked. He was rewarded immediately with moans and cries of pleasure, and it did not take her very long at all to start fluttering around his cock, so eager and greedy for his vigorous thrusts.

The smell and the smacking sounds filled his senses, and he couldn’t help but look at his own cock disappearing and reappearing repeatedly, glistening with her arousal. It was always a very erotic sight, and he groaned and increased his speed as he felt his balls start to tighten up.

“Yes, like that, harder,” Sansa cried out, giving him permission to let himself go.

It would have been difficult to keep himself in check for much longer, anyway.

With a grunt he adjusted his hold on her hips and started to thrust fast and hard, his balls smacking against her and the muscles of his arse and his thighs burning with the effort. He barely even noticed. He was in that perfect place right before his release, his pleasure at its most intense.

“Oh, gods, yes! Don’t stop, don’t stop,” Sansa practically wailed, clenching around him and gripping him like a vice, obviously coming quite hard.

Feeling a drops of sweat run down his face and his back, he bit his tongue and forced himself to keep going without coming for just a… little… while… fuck.

“Sansa!” he gasped out, his release overpowering him and making him squeeze his eyes shut. He saw little pinpricks of light despite this, and wondered if they were stars. His hips kept thrusting on autopilot for a few more seconds, but soon he was too exhausted to continue. He pulled out, making a bit of a mess, and collapsed on the bed. Sansa had to move more slowly, but she was lying on her side and facing him soon enough.

Not for the first time, Stannis was very relieved that the house was fairly soundproof and that Shireen’s room was not the nearest one to the master suite. He and Sansa had checked when Shireen had first asked of Myrcella could stay over.

“Wow,” Sansa said, her breathing nearly back to normal.

Stannis made an affirmative noise.

“I’m definitely going to miss this once the babies come,” she added, throwing an arm across his
“We’ll make time. As soon as it’s safe for you, and as soon as you’re ready,” he promised, hoping that she would still feel the same way after giving birth to two babies. Selyse hadn’t wanted him anywhere near her for a year. He hadn’t really minded that much, but he knew that with Sansa he would feel very differently.

“Somehow I get the feeling that we’ll be a bit busy,” Sansa said with a small laugh.

“We’ll make time,” Stannis repeated.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

It was the easiest promise he had ever made. Or so he thought.

Chapter End Notes

Again I thank Tommy for being generous with fun ideas for this story. ♥
“Stannis, we have to talk about this,” Sansa said, a serious expression on her face. She had been chasing him from room to room, getting more and more annoyed with him when he kept finding increasingly flimsy excuses to put the conversation she wanted to have off.

Now she had cornered him in the kitchen and he had nowhere to go. He sipped the water he had insisted on getting himself and nodded in defeat.

“In the event that something goes wrong at the hospital I need us to be on the same page,” Sansa said, an anxious expression replacing the serious one.

“I know,” Stannis sighed. He just didn’t want to face the idea that something might go wrong. Dr. Cressen said that everything looked about as wonderful as it could, and Stannis had been trying to convince himself that things would simply go very smoothly and nothing bad would happen. The end.

Sansa took a deep breath and squared her shoulders as if she were preparing for battle. “Okay, so if I’m unconscious and the doctors tell you that you have to make a decision to save either me or the babies, what do you do?”

Stannis dropped the glass he was holding and felt himself blanch. Thankfully he had been holding the glass over the counter, so it didn’t smash into a million pieces. It just spilled the water.

Sansa sighed and got a nearby roll of paper towels. “It’s extremely unlikely that it will come to that, but it’s better to discuss it now so that you’ll know what I want.”

“I’ll save you,” Stannis said, watching helplessly as Sansa started to mop up the water. He wanted to help her, but he felt paralysed. “Always you.”

“I’m relieved to hear that,” Sansa said, no longer mopping. “Because that’s what I want. Maybe I’m heartless, but if you save me we can always try to get pregnant again later. Or adopt if that becomes impossible.” There was a tremor in her voice as she spoke, and he had rarely seen her look as vulnerable as she looked now.

“You’re not heartless,” Stannis said, his body slowly recovering from the shock of having to even think about the idea of losing Sansa or the twins. “You’re being practical about a very cruel hypothetical situation.” Stannis was actually quite amazed at her ability to look at the situation as clearly as she was. According to what he had read it was natural for mothers to do anything and everything in their power to ensure that their babies lived, even at the cost of their own lives. Something to do with hormones. Sansa was most likely fighting herself quite hard in order to ask Stannis to save her rather than her babies if it came down to such a horrifying choice.

He managed to get his body to work and took the step he needed to take in order to be able to hug her. She was shaking.

“Tell me it’s going to be okay,” she whispered, “I need you to promise me.”

“You’ll be fine. All three of you. I swear it,” he said at once, ignoring the fact that it was not a promise he could make.

They clung to each other for a long time, and Stannis didn’t care that it was awkward to hold her now that she was about ready to pop. Dr. Cressen said she ought to go into labour any day now,
and Sansa had packed her hospital bag a week ago.

“I feel like I was being very dramatic just now,” Sansa said when they finally pulled apart. She wiped at a stray tear and gave him a faint smile.

“Childbirth is no easy thing,” Stannis said, stroking her cheek. “It is quite possibly the most dramatic event a person ever goes through. Being born and giving birth. Just because modern medicine has made it safer than it has ever been throughout history does not make it an inconsequential event.”

Sansa’s faint smile turned into a true smile, and it was a little like seeing the sun come out after a rainy day. His heart immediately felt less heavy.

“I know that,” Sansa said, shooting him a look that told him that he might have been - what was that term again? - ‘mansplaining’?

“Of course you know,” Stannis hurried to say, “it just sounded like you needed a reminder.”

Sansa kissed his cheek. “Thank you. It’s nice to know that you understand why I’m a bit dramatic about this sometimes.”

He nodded and decided that it might be a good time to finish mopping up the mess of water he had made.

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“I know they’re here somewhere,” he shouted to Sansa who was stoically standing in the kitchen with her hospital bag as he rushed around and picked up every throw pillow from the sofas in the living room, throwing them haphazardly back in place when no keys were revealed underneath, and bumped into Shireen as she presumably ran around looking for something she had misplaced as well. Unless she was helping him look for the keys?

After a while of running around and panicking more with each minute that went by and no keys were revealed, Sansa finally asked him if he had checked his trench coat.

Of course! He had worn it yesterday because it was the closest thing he had to raincoat and the weather had been miserable. The car keys were in the coat’s pocket and finally it was time to drive to the hospital.

Stannis had never felt as nervous about driving. His mind kept flashing back to the day his parents had their crash, and he gripped the steering wheel so tightly that he almost went numb. He hardly dared to blink. It was dark out, and it had been raining and freezing in turns for the past several days, so the roads were not in the best condition. His heart pounded in his chest as he tried to find a balance between getting Sansa to the hospital quickly, and not driving too fast and putting them in danger.

He almost fainted with relief when he finally made it to the hospital. No car crash. Everything was fine. Everything would continue to be fine. He had promised Sansa.

Stannis managed to calm down a bit once Sansa was in the hands of some competent, medically trained people. Apparently they needed to wait for her cervix to dilate, and so far Sansa said that her contractions were not too bad. Stannis could tell that she was being brave, however, and tried to
do what he could to comfort her. Mostly that meant holding her hand, and it made him feel completely useless.

He was relieved when Margaery arrived. She seemed able to chatter on and on in a way that distracted Sansa from the pain she was experiencing at regular intervals, and even when she made a ridiculous comment about how Sansa would probably leave the hospital wearing her favourite pair of skinny jeans it didn’t seem to upset Sansa. He was fairly sure he would not have been able to get away with such a comment and could not understand why Margaery would say such a thing. Didn’t she know this was a sore subject?

Stannis didn’t get to dwell on it for very long. Robert arrived, bringing with him noise and an even more cheerful attitude than Margaery had managed to bring. He also brought a newspaper, which Stannis recognised as a thoughtful gesture. It was meant to be kept for the twins, so that they would be able to see what had happened on the day they had been born, and Sansa was already looking like she was ready to frame the thing.

He couldn’t hear anything anyone was saying most of the time as he was too busy monitoring Sansa’s every facial expression and trying to read her mind. It was terrible to be forced to watch from the outside as her contractions made her grimace and break into a sweat. She was in pain and he couldn’t fix it. Worse, she was in pain because he’d put those babies inside her. This was all his fault.

Things were getting serious by the time Sansa’s family arrived, and Stannis was pleased when Margaery stood aside to let Catelyn fuss over her daughter. He could tell that Sansa was relieved that her mother was there and Stannis was relieved, too. Knowing that Catelyn would be present for the birth, with all her experience and ability to calm Sansa down, was a gift. He had only been present for one birth, and he had not been very good at it. It had all been much more gruesome and terrifying than the films led one to believe, and Stannis had partially blocked it from his memory.

He hoped it would be different this time around. He and Sansa were being supported by so many more people, and there was so much love between them that he had to believe that this birth would be easier in some ways.

Much, much too soon it was time for everyone except him, Catelyn and the medical personnel to leave the room. Sansa was gripping his hand tightly, and she had started to nearly crush it when she experienced contractions that were longer and sharper. Someone was telling her to breathe, and Stannis tried to breathe, too. He couldn’t stop looking at her face and feeling guilty and terrified.

“You’re doing so well,” Catelyn murmured, speaking to her daughter. “It will all be over soon.”

Catelyn was a lying liar.

It took hours. A single hour of pain and fear felt like a century, and after nearly four hours of torment Stannis was starting to think he’d walk out of the birthing suite with white hair. The stress of watching Sansa in so much pain was nothing to what she had to be feeling, however, and as the evening wore on she became a lot less shy about telling him about it.

“I hate you!” she moaned after a particularly bad contraction, glaring at him like he was the worst scum of the earth, but still holding onto his hand like it was the only thing keeping her afloat out on a stormy ocean.

“She doesn’t mean that,” Catelyn said soothingly, shooting him a consoling look.

“Yes I do!” Sansa cried out, “he’s never touching me again!”
Stannis swallowed thickly and felt as if all his internal organs were shrinking. Vague recollections of Selyse verbally abusing him in a similar way came back to him, but he could not recall it stinging quite so badly.

“Do you want me to go?” he asked, feeling like he might be doing more harm than good.

Sansa immediately burst into tears. “Don’t you dare leave me!”

The rapid about-face caught him by surprise and he looked at Catelyn for help. She was shaking her head, looking almost nostalgic.

“I was usually calling Ned a filthy bastard at this point,” she told him. “But that didn’t mean I wanted to do without his support.”

Sansa’s sobs turned into screams of pain as another contraction wracked her body.

“It’s almost time,” the midwife said from between Sansa’s feet. “The first one is crowning.”

Sansa squeezed Stannis’ hand even more tightly and shot him a look he would never forget as long as he lived.

“I’m scared,” she choked out, tears in her eyes.

Stannis’ vision was a little blurry, too, but he restrained himself mercilessly. He had to be strong for Sansa.

“It’s going to be all right,” he managed, “you’re so brave. You can do this.”

If he’d given himself time to look away from Sansa for a second he would have seen Catelyn looking at him with fierce approval and pride, but he couldn’t bear the thought of looking away from Sansa’s face.

“Okay,” Sansa said. She was breathing heavily, but her eyes were becoming less frightened and more determined.

After that Stannis had to use all his mental energy just to remain upright and able to talk. He copied Catelyn and kept up a running commentary of encouragement, reminding Sansa of how much he loved her, how much he would love their children, how much she meant to him and how humbled he was that she was putting herself through this ordeal for the sake of their family. Catelyn said similarly encouraging things, though she focused on how proud she was of Sansa, and how well she was doing, how strong she was, how she had already come so far and how little there remained.

When the midwife delivered the first twin, already crying and sounding strong and healthy, Stannis wanted so badly to go and take a proper look, but he couldn’t abandon Sansa, and he couldn’t let go of her hand. He was starting to think he would need a new hand after this night, however. She had been cutting off his circulation for a while.

It was a sacrifice he was willing to make.

“It’s a boy,” the midwife said, after having made sure there was not too much fluid in his mouth or his nose. Then, thankfully, she placed Steffon at Sansa’s breast, allowing for some necessary skin to skin contact. Steffon went quiet almost at once. The umbilical cord had not been cut yet, but Stannis could hear the midwife talking about getting it cut before the next contraction hit. He couldn’t focus on what she was saying, however, as he was busy staring at Sansa and his son.
Sansa was looking entranced. Sweaty, exhausted and entranced. He probably looked similar.

Their son was still covered in all sorts of gunk, and he was wrinkled and mottled pink and purple. Despite this he was the most miraculous thing Stannis had ever seen. Sansa and he had made that little person, created him out of love - possibly on their wedding night - and here he was: whole and complete, with ten fingers and ten toes, black hair and the tiniest ears, and the tiniest nose imaginable.

It was a perfect moment, and Stannis thought it was cruel when it had to end much too soon because Sansa had to do it all over again. The umbilical cord was cut, and Steffon was taken away so that his parents would be able to focus on getting his sister into the world.

“This one ought to be easier,” the midwife promised, her voice encouraging. “You can do this, Sansa.”

Stannis was quick to pick up the chant, telling Sansa it was just one more birth and then she would be able to rest. She would barely feel the afterbirths slip out, and she would be fine. Just fine.

Thankfully, Minisa came out without much of a struggle just as the midwife had said. Sansa still cried out loudly enough to make Steffon start complaining, but Catelyn managed to calm him down.

Stannis was starting to think his hand was broken. He hadn’t realised Sansa had that sort of strength in her, but he tried to ignore it. This night was not about any pain he might be feeling.

The same procedure as before was repeated, Minisa had barely cried after the midwife had delivered her, only making enough noise to make it clear that she was perfectly fine. Minisa was just as wrinkly as her brother, her skin red and purple, her features all scrunched up. But she was beautiful nonetheless, and Stannis’ heart could hardly take it. He had never felt richer or more fortunate.

Sansa now had both babies in her arms, resting against her bare skin and learning to recognise Sansa as their mother. They had been listening to her heartbeat for months from the inside, and they were calmed and soothed by the same heartbeat, even though they were hearing it from the outside now.

Both of Stannis’ hands shook as he rested one on Steffon’s back, and stroked Sansa’s hair - getting it unstuck from her sweaty forehead - with the other.

They were all healthy and alive. They were perfect.

Stannis did not think he would stop shaking from relief anytime soon.

“They’re so small,” Sansa whispered, her voice raw. She was gazing at their babies with a look of complete awe on her face.

“They’ll grow,” Stannis said, remembering how quickly Shireen had gained weight.

“They felt much bigger a moment ago.” Sansa was still whispering, but there was something like tearful amusement in her tone.

Stannis pressed his forehead against her sticky one, wanting to be close to her. The love of his life. His wife. The mother of his children.

“I love you,” he told her as he rose back up, wishing there was a more meaningful way to say it.
The words just didn’t seem big enough. “Thank you for… thank you for everything you just did.” He sounded much too formal, but he couldn’t think of a way to express his gratitude in any other way.

Sansa smiled at him, and a few tears rolled down her cheeks. “I love you, too.”

Stannis’ heart leapt at the words, and he wished he could just crawl into bed with her and hold her.

He could not recall feeling a fraction of all that he was feeling now when Selyse had given birth to Shireen, and for a moment he felt a very powerful wave of regret over it. He knew with utter certainty that this was how he ought to have felt towards Selyse when she had given him Shireen, but so many of his current feelings just hadn’t been present. He hadn’t felt what he felt for Sansa for Selyse.

It took a while to finish everything up. Minisa’s umbilical cord needed to be cut, and the afterbirths needed to be delivered. The twins needed to be cleaned up and clothed. Sansa and the babies needed to be thoroughly examined and seen to. It all took time, and Stannis was thrilled when he and Catelyn were allowed to help clean and clothe the twins. It felt like an enormous responsibility, and yet he felt on more familiar ground with a simple task in front of him.

Stannis felt at ease with the straightforward tasks of taking care of a baby. He knew how to do this. It had been about fifteen years since he’d held a newborn, but his hands - his hands that felt impossibly big when compared to such tiny bodies - remembered how to do this. It wasn’t so complicated, really.

By the time they let the people who had been waiting outside into the room Stannis felt calm and centered, able to interact with people and able to talk like he hadn’t just spent the past several hours listening to his beloved wife telling him that she hated his guts and that he would never be touching her again.

He really hoped she hadn’t meant that.

It felt good to watch everyone rush in and group around Sansa’s bed to congratulate her, and Stannis was again struck by how different this experience was compared with his last time. All this overwhelming love and support from so many people had been missing, and it was clearer to Stannis than ever that this was how it should be.

He wished he was less tired so that he would be able to stand up from his chair and show Steffon off. But he couldn’t face the challenge of getting up from his chair right away. Besides, he was busy bonding with his son. His perfect son with his perfect tufts of black hair, his tiny little fingers and tiny little toes…

“I’m sorry, Stannis,” Robert suddenly said, snapping a photograph and breaking through the dazed state Stannis had allowed himself to sink into, “I mean, my condolences.” Robert was trying to look serious, but he was obviously about to burst into laughter.

“What do you mean?” Stannis asked, trying not to snap his words impatiently. Sansa said he should try to speak more kindly to his brother.

“Well, it’s like your favourite pub has been burnt down, isn’t it?” Robert started to laugh, and Stannis realised that Robert was speaking in metaphors. The pub was supposed to be the place between Sansa’s legs that Stannis liked to visit, and the childbirth was the fire that ‘ruined’ it. Stannis shot Robert a furious, filthy glare, and opened his mouth to say something very scathing.
Unfortunately he was interrupted by Margaery. She started to exclaim about how the twins were
not only born on separate days due to being born on either side of midnight, but that they had
different astrological signs because of this. (“Steffon is a Pisces and Minisa is an Aries!”) Before
Stannis had a chance to roll his eyes at her words, Ned approached the chair Stannis was sitting in,
looking very interested in holding his namesake. Ned’s eyes were full of happy tears, and as soon
as Stannis had - carefully - transferred Steffon into the arms of his grandfather and introduced the
two - “Eddard, meet Eddard,” - he saw the tears start falling.

Stannis had trouble keeping his eyes from welling up as he watched Ned cradle his grandson in his
arms, his size making Steffon seem impossibly tiny and fragile. There was something very pure
about the way Ned was looking at Steffon, and Stannis couldn’t help but wonder how it would feel
to hold his own grandchildren one day. A hard lump appeared in his throat, and it just got harder to
swallow when Stannis became aware of the fact that Sansa and Catelyn had given Minisa to
Shireen to hold, and that she was now sitting with her baby sister in her arms, telling her that she
loved her and gazing at her with utter adoration.

Stannis was forced to take a very deep, very steadying breath when Ned handed Steffon to Shireen
as well, and he couldn’t help but get up and walk over to them, not caring about the way Robert
tried to stop him to take his picture, not caring about the fact that he might break down and cry at
any moment, not caring about anything except going over to be with his three perfect children.

He watched as Shireen continued to look down at her siblings with love in her eyes, feeling an
avalanche of fatherly devotion that he really didn’t know how to deal with. He decided to focus on
breathing, and though it was very difficult, he eventually started to think that he might actually be
gaining a bit of control over his overwhelming emotions. Of course, that was the moment Steffon
chose to reach out for something to hold with his little hand, and those tiny fingers were nearly
Stannis’ undoing. Swallowing thickly, he reached out in return with a single finger, hoping that his
son would try to catch hold of it.

Stannis stopped breathing for a moment when the contact was made. It was too much for one
person to handle. Too much perfect joy all at once.

As much as Stannis loved Sansa, the love he felt right now, the love for his children, was
something completely different and not subject to any kind of change. He knew that he would love
each and every child for as long as they lived, just as much as he loved them in this very moment.
It did not matter what they chose to do with their lives. Even if they became vagrants and criminals
- doubtful - he would love them just the same.

His love for them was unconditional. Eternal.

He believed his love for Sansa would last just as long, but he knew it would evolve and change as
time went by and they grew old together. He had seen the way Ned’s relationship with Catelyn had
evolved over time, and he had seen the same thing happen between Davos and Marya. He did not
think those couples loved each other any less than they had at the beginning, but he was sure that it
was not quite the same.

Stannis was not worried about the changes that would come, however. He knew that he and Sansa
would always be a team, and he knew that their love was the kind that would last.

Later, as he sat with Sansa on the hospital bed, the twins in her arms, he placed his arm around his
new little family and thanked his lucky stars that Robert had forced him to go to Bran Stark’s
twelfth birthday party.

Even if Robert never did Stannis another good turn he wouldn’t mind. Robert was the reason why
Stannis was the happiest he had ever been, and for that he was willing to forgive nearly anything.

Though he could really do without Robert’s comments about pubs and fires.

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Sansa didn’t quite walk out of the maternity ward wearing her favourite pair of skinny jeans but Stannis was astounded at the way her body shrank back to something very like her normal size almost before he could blink. Her breasts remained larger and full of milk for the babies who seemed to be training to nurse competitively at the Olympics, but her waistline had recovered remarkably well. He occasionally caught her frowning at her stretch marks, and he always tried to make sure she knew he found her attractive when that happened. He really didn’t think of her stretch marks as blemishes. They were marks she had earned bringing their children into the world, and he wished she would wear them like badges of honour on her skin.

He really didn’t have a lot of time or energy to dwell on the issue, however. One baby had been challenging enough when he had been a young man, but now he had two to deal with, and even with Sansa and Shireen doing so much of the work, he still felt a bit overwhelmed sometimes. Shireen had school, after all, and sometimes Sansa needed to sleep, leaving him alone with two helpless babies who didn’t do anything except fill their nappies, scream and spit up. They slept too, of course, but usually never both at the same time. Minisa usually refused to sleep unless he held her in his arms and walked around the house, complaining sorely if he ever tried to have a seat. She was light enough to not really be a noticeable burden, but when all Stannis wanted to do was rest it became a bit frustrating.

But it wasn’t as if there weren’t plenty of people willing to help out. If Stannis wanted help he knew he only had to give Robert or Ned a vaguely encouraging look and they’d be camped out in the nursery in seconds. He knew he would have to allow more people to help out eventually, but he had convinced Sansa that it would be better to keep the twins secluded for the first few weeks. He knew perfectly well that it wasn’t too risky to have friends and family come over and say hello, but he preferred to keep those visits short, and enforced strict personal hygiene rules for those who entertained ideas of touching his babies. He did not want to risk the babies getting sick like Shireen had.

He forgot all about the frustrating aspects of taking care of the twins when he received the occasional reward from them, however. When they were quiet and had their eyes open, when they gazed up at him and grabbed his fingers, made small content noises and scrunched up their little faces in ways that made Stannis feel sure that they were trying to smile at him…

With babies involved, emotions just became more extreme. The despair and hopelessness he felt when one - or both - of them just would not stop crying was like no other feeling, but the ecstatic bliss of seeing them content, happy and thriving was similarly indescribable.

Four weeks went by before Stannis thought it would be all right for Sansa and Shireen to take the twins to Winterfell to spend some time with Sansa’s family. Originally he had meant to go with them, but Sansa had practically ordered him to stay behind and get some sleep. He had been up half the night, walking all over the house with Minisa in his arms, and he had desperately needed the rest. Sansa needed the rest, too, as she had been nursing on and off throughout the night, but she went where the twins went. Hopefully she would be able to rest at her parent’s house.

When he woke up in the late afternoon to an empty house, feeling alert and recharged for the first time in a month, he hardly knew what to do with the free time. He had no work to take care of because he was on paternity leave, and Sansa had said that she and Shireen would be eating dinner in Winterfell so he didn’t need to start cooking or anything like that.
He decided to go to his study and check his email. Maybe he’d even go a bit wild and read the headlines on all the news websites. Check the weather report.

He did all this, feeling like it was an impossible luxury to browse the Internet in peace and quiet, and was pleased to see that the weather would continue to improve. May was just around the corner, and spring was in the air.

Stannis glanced out the window, observing the sunset and the still waters of the bay, and wondered if he and Sansa would be able to take the yacht out at all over the summer. He wasn’t sure if he felt safe about taking the twins aboard while they were so young, but finding babysitters ought not be a problem based on how eager everyone in their life had been to pitch in. Maybe Ned and Robert would fight each other for the privilege?

Probably not. There were two babies. They could share.

When Stannis looked back towards his desk his eyes were drawn to a small white album with a golden edge design rather than his computer. He had placed the album on one of the bookshelves closest to his desk, making sure that it was partially hidden from view unless one was sitting right where he was. As much as he trusted his family to leave his study and his things alone, he still didn’t like the idea of leaving such an album lying around in plain sight. Robert might find his way into this room at some point, and he did not want to run the risk of his brother picking that particular album up.

Stannis reached for the album and opened it, feeling his heart beat a little faster as he examined the picture on the first page. He felt a little like he was misbehaving, but it was a ridiculous notion. Sansa had given him the pictures. He was allowed to look at them when he wanted.

Flashes of his wedding night came back to him as his eyes focused on the creamy lingerie that covered Sansa’s even creamier skin, and he started breathing a little more heavily as he recalled how it had felt to take pictures of her on his phone, have her pose so seductively for him and know that he would be undressing her soon.

His cock twitched and Stannis hurriedly closed the album, feeling guilty.

Though Sansa’s waistline had recovered at the speed of light, she had not indicated that she was ready to resume any kind of sexual activity with him. He knew that it was appropriate to wait at least six weeks, and he knew that there had been a bit of tearing during the birth that needed time to heal, which meant that six weeks was actually a pretty optimistic estimate. Not to mention the psychological trauma that Sansa was working through with the help of a therapist the hospital had recommended. So far Sansa was not showing any hints of developing postpartum depression, but she had never in her life experienced as much physical pain all at once, and needed help to recover from the shock.

Even though they were not having sex, they still tried to make time to be close to each other when they weren’t too tired. Mostly they held each other and did a lot of kissing, so there was a lot of intimacy and love, but no sexual release.

Stannis had been abstaining from gratuitous masturbation out of a sense of solidarity with her, and had made do with quickly relieving some tension in the shower when his biological needs simply would not be denied. Right now he was starting to understand that it was not quite enough to satisfy his biological cravings the way he had been doing. After years of being with Sansa and being satisfied in a way that encompassed his entire being, his brain was protesting the idea of going back to treating his need for sexual release as something to be mechanically and thoughtlessly taken care of without his mind and emotions being engaged.
Ideally, he needed to convince Sansa to let him touch himself as they kissed each other, let him find release with her right there with him, but even though he had been getting a bit better at sharing the fact that he sometimes touched himself, he wasn’t sure if he was ready to ask that of her quite yet. He was worried that she would think he was being selfish.

The middle road was to allow himself to fantasise about her while he gave himself what he needed without rushing through it like it was a chore to be completed.

Stannis took the album with him to bed, trying very hard not to feel too guilty about what he was doing. If their positions were reversed he would want Sansa to be able to pleasure herself while he was indisposed, and he would not want her to feel any guilt over the matter. And he’d be flattered if she used pictures of him for inspiration.

He closed the door, turned off all the lights except for the lamp on his nightstand, stripped, and got into the unmade bed where he had been sleeping not so long ago. It was comfortable to lie naked in bed in the gloom, and for a moment he was tempted to simply have another nap, but the photo album beckoned and he couldn’t resist having a good long look.

At first he just stared at the pictures without touching himself, allowed himself to remember his wedding night and enjoy the heat of his arousal as it pumped through his veins. Soon his cock was fully erect, however, and the pressure of it always got intolerable if he didn’t succumb to the urge to touch. He started to stroke himself, flipping to his favourite picture and trying not to breathe too loudly. (He wasn’t worried that anyone might hear him, he just didn’t like the way his heavy breathing made him sound like a pervert.)

If Sansa were to ask him which picture was his favourite he wouldn't show her the one he was looking at now. The one he was looking at now was his guilty favourite. It showed her on all fours, facing towards the camera and exposing a lot of cleavage. Her hair had just been flipped over to one side, and it looked almost like it was still in motion. Her eyes were hooded and her lips slightly parted, and there was something… submissive about the entire look. He could easily imagine that she had just agreed to suck his cock and was just waiting for him to bring it to her lips.

He moved his hands faster as he did imagine it, remembering the way her voice sounded when she was aroused and willing to play with him. He then went on to think about how she looked as she sucked him, her lips stretched around his cock and her eyes full of excitement at the prospect of how well he would satisfy her afterwards, and how many times he would make her scream his name…

He flipped one-handed through the photo album when he got finished with the idea of her mouth on his cock, searching for a picture that showed Sansa looking over her shoulder and biting her lip. He wanted to look at the picture and imagine that Sansa was bent over in front of him and looking at him like that, waiting for him to fuck her from behind the way that she always enjoyed so much. The mental image lasted him for a good long while, and he was able to bring himself close to the edge by looking at the picture and remembering the way she always sounded while he took everything she offered him.

For his climax he wanted a different picture, however. He flipped frantically until he found it, sighing with relief when he saw the familiar photograph of Sansa lying on her back, her beautiful hair artfully arranged over the pillows behind her, her eyes looking shyly up at the camera, a faint blush on her cheeks.

He imagined working on top of her, her legs wrapped around him and pulling him towards her more and more insistently, her inner muscles squeezing him as she came and came with his name and words of love on her lips. He imagined looking into her eyes as she moaned for him, telling her
how much he adored her, and then just coming until he was bone-dry.

The last part he didn’t really need to imagine. He bucked up against his hand as his orgasm overtook him, one warm spurt of semen after another covering his hand and his abdomen. He groaned as he came, feeling sweaty, dirty and wonderful.

It was the closest he had felt to the sort of satisfaction he hadn’t experienced since the last time he and Sansa had actually had sex, and it was a little like he had just eaten a home-cooked meal after weeks of subsisting on dry rice crackers and water.

His afterglow didn’t leave much room for guilt, but eventually he started to think more complicated thoughts than: I’m happy now. This feels nice. He realised that he probably needed to shower and put the photo album away, and that he should probably eat something.

And then maybe he’d have a nap.

Somehow he ended up having the nap first.

Thankfully, he was spared the embarrassment of having Sansa find him in bed with the photo album near his hand and dry semen all over himself. Sansa called from Winterfell right before she and Shireen left the house, giving Stannis an hour to make himself presentable and quiet his growling stomach.

“Did you get some sleep?” Sansa asked after kissing him hello, looking well rested after her day in Winterfell.

“Yes,” he said, feeling his face warm slightly.

“Me too,” Sansa said with a smile. “Mum and Dad were great with the twins, and I practically slept the whole afternoon away!”

“Bran and I helped,” Shireen said, already picking Steffon up from his baby carrier as he had been fussing. “Mostly with Steffon, though. Ned wouldn’t let go of Minisa. And he kept calling her Minnie.” She executed a rather impressive eye roll as she maneuvered Steffon into a comfortable position in her arms, calming her brother down without too much trouble.

Stannis looked at Sansa. “Minnie?” he repeated, feeling his face settle into a grimace.

“Oh, don’t worry about it. It’s cute,” Sansa said, obviously not quite right in the head. She would never agree that the name Minnie was cute if she weren’t high or drugged or something.

It was bad enough that Robert was refusing to call Steffon anything other than ‘Little Stan’, ‘Stanny’ or sometimes ‘Stanny junior’ due to the fact that according to him, Steffon looked just like Stannis. If Ned started calling Minisa ‘Minnie’, too, Stannis would have to put his foot down.

He really didn’t like nicknames.

Stannis walked over to Minisa’s baby carrier and looked at his daughter. She was awake and alert, but looked content with staying in the carrier for the time being.

“Your name is Minisa Cassana,” he reminded her sternly, observing her beautiful blue eyes as they looked for the source of his familiar voice. “Don’t let anyone forget that.”

She drooled a bit and Stannis decided that it was a sign that she understood.
“Come on, we need to get those two changed,” Sansa said, sounding amused.

Shireen was quick to hand Steffon over at those words, disappearing to her room to ‘feed Voldetort’.

Stannis took a deep breath and wondered for a moment when he would next be able to have a day like today. It would probably not be any time soon, so he did his best to fix the memory of what it was like to feel rested and satisfied in his memory, squared his shoulders, and made himself ready to go back to being a full-time caretaker.

“You’re there,” he said, meeting Sansa’s eyes and exchanging a look that only they would ever be able to understand.

And then it was back once more into the fray.
Stannis did not know what to do. Both his babies had been rudely stolen from him and there seemed to be no way to get them back. Sansa was being supremely unhelpful, insisting that he should sit down, relax and try to eat something while he had his hands free, but he would much rather starve and have his hands full of his babies than continue to feel like he was about to have a heart attack each time Robert lifted Steffon up and made loud noises at him.

At least Ned was holding Minisa properly, and walking around with her the way that she liked. He wasn’t too worried about those two. But he’d really prefer to have Minisa in his own arms. Or for Sansa to hold her. Surely she would be done eating soon?

It was the first big dinner he and Sansa had thrown since the babies had arrived, and it was both to celebrate their upcoming wedding anniversary and to say good-bye to Shireen. She would be going to Brightwater tomorrow to stay with her mother for the summer, and though Stannis was sure he would miss her and the help she had been giving him and Sansa with Minisa and Steffon, he was already planning to use the opportunity her absence provided him with to build an outdoor pen for Voldetort. Sansa had convinced him that it was not tactful to tell Shireen that he wanted the turtle out of the house, but she had agreed that it might be best if Voldetort didn’t live too close to the babies. The outdoor pen had been her idea of a compromise.

“Who’s a big strong boy? Who’s a big strong boy? You’re going to grow up to be big and strong like your Uncle Robert, aren’t you, Stanny?”

“Don’t shout at him,” Stannis said, hovering near his brother and watching anxiously as Robert lifted Steffon towards the ceiling and blew a loud raspberry.

“I’m not shouting,” Robert said, starting to spin around like a bear at the circus, “and you’re having fun, aren’t you, Little Stan?”

Steffon did not look very certain about that at all. There was a pout on his face that Stannis recognised quite well. It meant that he was seconds from bursting into tears, and though Steffon usually never cried for very long at a time, it was still quite loud when it happened.

“He’s going to cry,” Stannis informed Robert, holding his hands out in an attempt to get his brother to return his son to him.

“No, of course he’s not!” Robert laughed, ignoring Stannis’ outstretched hands. “He’s a brave lad!”

Robert’s booming laugh was the last straw.

Everyone winced when Steffon started to shriek. Stannis had read somewhere that babies could cry loudly enough to compete with the decibel output of a car horn blaring, but he hadn’t really believed it until Steffon came along.

Robert handed Steffon over with a slightly sheepish expression and Stannis did his best not to glare too murderously at him. Robert wasn’t trying to be irritating. Robert just wanted to be a good uncle to the twins.
It was a little hard to remember this when Steffon was turning red from the effort of screaming the way he was.

“Shh,” Stannis said, holding Steffon the way he preferred to be held and walking to a less crowded part of the house. “There, there,” he murmured, stroking Steffon’s back soothingly and hoping that his son would calm down once he was away from Robert, the others, and the noise of their conversation.

“It’s all right,” he continued, ambling towards the nursery, “you’re all right…”

Once he reached the window in the nursery, Steffon had stopped screaming, though he still looked decidedly upset.

“I know your uncle sounds very loud and frightening, but he really means you no harm,” Stannis said, making sure to keep his voice quiet and reassuring. “I won’t ever let anyone harm you.”

Stannis knew quite well that his son could not understand his words, but hopefully the tone and the intent behind them was enough. It seemed to be working; Steffon was relaxing into a more contented state.

“You’re really good with him, Uncle Stannis.”

Stannis tried not to stiffen up in surprise. Steffon would sense it if he became tense. Instead he turned around to face his niece.

“Taking care of babies is not very complex,” he told Myrcella, giving her a look that would hopefully compel her to explain why she had followed him.

She nodded and walked a bit closer so that she would be able to peer at her cousin. “Still, you’re not making him cry harder. You’re doing a great job.”

“I can’t always get him to calm down. Sometimes it’s impossible for anyone except Sansa to get him to stop crying,” Stannis grumbled, thinking of an incident from the day before when he had been trying to feed Steffon from a bottle, only to receive determined screams until he gave up and had Sansa feed him from her breast. There had been breast milk in the bottle, but apparently it was much better straight from the source.

Minisa, despite being the more high maintenance baby when it came to nearly everything else, was not nearly as picky about whether her milk came straight from the breast or from the bottle. Stannis wondered whether it was because she was a girl and therefore less interested in breasts than Steffon, but he doubted that was the reason.

“Dad sent me to tell you he’s sorry he upset Stanny,” Myrcella said, taking a step back after having looked her fill at the baby.

“Steffon is a bit easily startled,” Stannis said, “if Robert tried to be a bit less loud…”

“That’s like asking a flamingo to be a bit less pink,” Myrcella interjected, raising an eyebrow.

Stannis sighed and nodded. It was true enough.

“I’m sure Stanny will get used to it. Minnie doesn’t seem to mind as much.”

“Minisa is just happy when someone is holding her and paying attention to her,” Stannis said, unable to keep his lips from quirking into a smile even though Myrcella was using the irritating
nicknames that everyone seemed to be picking up like the plague. Minisa’s tendency to flourish whenever she was the total focus of someone’s world was rather amusing.

“Well, of course,” Myrcella said, grinning up at him. He was surprised to note that Myrcella was almost as tall as Sansa. He could remember when she had been Steffon’s age, and it did not seem very long ago.

“What girl doesn’t like to be held and pampered?” Myrcella added.

Sansa certainly liked it, and from what Catelyn had been telling them, Minisa was very similar to what Sansa had been like as a baby.

He hadn’t been able to hold and pamper Sansa as much as he would have liked since the twins were born, but maybe Stannis would be able to convince Sansa to let him pay a lot more attention to her now that Shireen was leaving for Brightwater and the twins were settling into a reasonable routine? He and Sansa still hadn’t started to have sex again, and he was starting to feel increasingly worried that she would simply never be ready.

It had been nearly three months.

“Anyway, I’m going to go back downstairs. I heard Sansa say something about dessert on my way up here.” Myrcella smiled and vanished from the room in a flurry of long blond hair.

“I’ll be down soon,” Stannis said to no one in particular, wanting to stay in the nursery with Steffon for just a little longer.

He walked around the empty nursery a bit aimlessly, rocking Steffon in his arms and occasionally shifting his grip so he could nose the black hair that grew thickly on his son’s head. His son’s hair carried the best smell in the world, and Stannis inhaled slowly and deeply whenever he did this, enjoying it while it lasted. Too soon his son would be a toddler, and the smell wouldn’t be the same.

“Don’t grow up too fast,” Stannis murmured, knowing that there was nothing he or Steffon could do to slow time down. “There’s no hurry.”

Steffon was quiet in his arms, eyes open and alert, and even though Stannis knew it wasn’t possible, he felt like Steffon understood every word he was saying.

“You don’t want to go back downstairs, do you?” he asked, raising an eyebrow at his son.

Steffon blinked and yawned.

“No, I didn’t think so.” Stannis walked back over to the window and stared at the ocean, feeling almost as peaceful as Steffon looked, though there was a touch of the bittersweet to his mood. He realised that moments like these were precious, but he also realised that they were precious because there would only be a finite amount of them.

He stayed still like that for the next several minutes, enjoying the warm weight of his son against his chest and doing his best not to think about how soon he would no longer be able to hold either one of his babies like this.

“There you are,” Sansa said, joining him by the window. Her voice was very quiet -- just barely more than a whisper. “Is he asleep?”

Stannis looked down at Steffon and observed that his son seemed to have nodded off. “I think so.”
He noticed that Sansa was not carrying Minisa. “Where is -”

“Minisa is still with my father. She is soaking up all the adoration like a proper prima donna. Don’t worry about her.”

Stannis frowned and tried not to feel a twinge of jealousy. Minisa was always quite happy to let him hold her, but she adored her grandfather. He had never seen her cry in Ned’s arms. Not once. It was uncanny.

“Do you want to put him down?” Sansa was looking at Steffon’s cot questioningly.

“Not quite yet. He was awake a second ago.” Stannis wasn’t ready to relinquish his son. He was having such a nice moment with him.

“Come back down soon,” Sansa said, standing up on the tips of her toes and kissing his cheek. “I miss you.”

He nodded at her. It was nice to be missed, but he couldn’t help but wish that Sansa would have kissed his lips rather than his cheek.

Stannis lingered at the window a while longer, thinking about what he could do to rekindle the flame between himself and his wife. He knew the heat was still there, but the blazing inferno had burnt down to embers, and he needed to do something about it. He quite liked the warm glow, but he wanted more, and he was fairly sure that Sansa wanted more, too.

It had become easier to be patient ever since he had started to allow himself more than perfunctory wanks in the shower, and he had managed to turn two cuddling sessions with Sansa into a bit... more. But Sansa had been resisting his attempts to initiate anything more than a glorified handjob. She was even refusing to let him go down on her, and she never let him touch her for very long at a time. It was all very frustrating.

She had explained that she was not ready, that she was too tired, that she just didn’t feel sexy, that she wanted to wait until she wasn’t dealing with clogged breast ducts, intermittent bleeding - thankfully that had mostly stopped about six weeks after the birth - and the overwhelming emotions, fears and concerns of being a mother for the first time.

“Your mother really has nothing to be afraid of,” Stannis sighed, keeping his voice low so he wouldn’t wake his sleeping son. “She was born to be a mother.”

Steffon scrunched up his face for a brief moment before relaxing again.

It was true. Sansa had struggled for a while after the birth, afraid of doing something wrong or damaging the fragile babies in some way, but her confidence had increased day by day, and soon she had been handling the twins with as much ease as a seasoned mother of five.

Stannis liked to believe that he had helped her get there, but he was fairly certain she would have got there on her own eventually. He had probably just... sped the process up a bit.

Once he was sure Steffon was fast asleep, Stannis placed him carefully in his cot and set the baby monitor up so that he would be alerted if he woke up and needed to be seen to. His diaper had been changed fairly recently, but that didn’t mean much. There always seemed to be a new mess, so it was fairly likely that Steffon would start to complain within the hour.

With a deep breath and a last lingering look at his son, he left the nursery to rejoin the party.
Hopefully the guests would have the decency to leave soon.

***

A few days after Shireen left for Brightwater the twins were both asleep relatively early in the evening after having slept - both of them! - through most of the previous night. Stannis and Sansa were sitting on the most comfortable living room sofa, staring at the baby monitor on the coffee table, unable to believe that they were actually relatively well rested and not in the middle of dealing with screams or poopy diapers.

“Do you want to watch a film?” Sansa suggested after a while of staring at the silent monitor.

Stannis did not want to watch a film. He wanted to have sex. Their wedding anniversary was tomorrow, and Stannis wanted to have sex tonight, tomorrow morning, tomorrow afternoon and all through the next night. Ned and Cat had offered to babysit so he and Sansa could go out and have a romantic dinner to celebrate, but Stannis would much rather go somewhere with a big bed than to a restaurant.

“Or I could give you a massage?” he suggested, hoping that he’d finally be able to get her in the mood if she just gave him a chance to touch her properly. Naked.

“No, I don’t want a massage,” Sansa said, fiddling with her sleeve and avoiding his eyes.

“We could have a bath?” he tried, already fantasising about what it would feel like to have her naked, slippery body pressed to his in the warm water. His cock stirred, feeling very interested in this fantasy.

“You don’t just want to watch a film and eat ice cream?” Sansa sounded rather small.

He moved to embrace her, encouraging her to lean against him as he held her securely. After he felt her relax into it and sigh out a pleased sort of sound, he quietly asked her what was wrong.

“Nothing’s wrong,” she said, not sounding very convincing.

“Are you still feeling self-conscious about the way you look?” he guessed, furrowing his brow in concentration.

“No, I mean - yes, a little, but that’s not - I told you. Nothing’s wrong. I just want to watch a film.”

Stannis was silent for a moment, trying to understand whether this was a moment where he should push her until she told him what was bothering her or whether this was a moment to be patient with her.

He had been patient a very long time. They might not get a chance like this again for weeks. Perhaps it was time to push.

“You don’t think it’s time we started taking care of each other again?” he asked, attempting to sound as gentle and neutral as he could.

“What do you mean?” Sansa said sharply, rising up to sit away from him. She was giving him a hurt look that told him he had managed to phrase his question poorly.

“Er, well, we’ve been using most of our energy to take care of Steffon and Minisa since they joined us. I thought it might be - um - good if we focused on each other tonight.” He cleared his throat and met Sansa’s eyes, trying to convey that he really wasn’t trying to upset her.
“I’m - I’m not sure it’s the right time.” Sansa broke eye contact first, looking down at her hands and frowning.

“You’ve recovered from the birth, though?” he asked, unable to disguise his anxiety about the matter. Did she need to see Doctor Cressen about something? Had she been hiding the fact that she was in pain?

Sansa looked at him again, eyes wide. “Yes, of course, please don’t worry about that.”

“Well… why isn’t it the right time, then?” He wished she would explain it properly. It would make things so much easier for him. Right now he just didn’t understand what exactly it was that was bothering her and keeping her from wanting to have sex with him, and without that understanding he felt completely adrift.

“I don’t know!” Sansa said, sounding frustrated and oddly frightened. “I don’t know what it’s going to feel like. What if it’s totally different? What if I’ve been stretched all out of shape and it doesn’t even feel good for you? What if everything is so messed up inside me that I can’t have orgasms the same way I used to? What if it’s all different and terrible on top of the fact that I have hideous stretch marks everywhere?”

Stannis could tell that she was working herself into a state, but he had no idea what to say to fix it. He wasn’t sure she’d want to hear what it had been like for him and Selyse, but he had absolutely not other experiences to share. He doubted it would help her to hear what it had felt like when he and Selyse tried to pick up where they had left off. That situation had been completely different.

He decided to latch onto the last thing she had said.

“Your stretch marks are barely visible,” he told her, speaking the honest truth. He doubted he would notice them at all if Sansa didn’t keep pointing them out and asking him if they seemed to be getting better or worse. To him she looked pretty much exactly the way she had before the pregnancy, and he knew it was not just his opinion. He had overheard Margaery saying the same thing, and Renly and Loras never seemed to tire of exclaiming over how unbelievably well she had recovered her figure.

Stannis was fairly certain his wife was just a bit of a perfectionist.

“You’re stunning,” he added, wanting to make his opinion quite clear.

Sansa raised a sceptical eyebrow. “I’ve worn makeup three times in the last three months. I’m wearing a maternity bra. I’m pretty sure I smell like breast milk and baby poop, and I haven’t had anything waxed since I was still pregnant.”

He snorted. It wasn’t as if he looked like a film star these days. “I’ve barely made it to the gym since the twins were born. I haven’t been this flabby since I was prepubescent. I’m starting to get winded from walking up the stairs.”

They stared at each other for a few beats, not quite glaring, but not quite not glaring.

Suddenly Sansa started to laugh.

Stannis was so surprised that he just blinked at her, unable to move a muscle.

“That’s just… that’s not comparable,” she eventually managed to gasp out, still giggling uncontrollably.
Stannis grunted and crossed his arms over his chest. He wasn’t really sulking, but he had a feeling that she might keep laughing if he pretended to sulk, and he really wanted her to keep laughing.

She did laugh for a bit longer, but eventually she calmed down and started to look frightened and worried again.

Perhaps he should try to address some of her more serious concerns?

“I know you’ve read the same things I’ve read,” he began, speaking a bit hesitantly, “and I know you’re aware that things... sex might feel different for you. But being with you will always feel good for me, and even if it has changed for you, we will figure out a way to make it good. As for being stretched out of shape... I mean - you know as well as I do that it doesn’t happen like that.”

He was fairly sure he had rarely sounded quite as tongue-tied, but hopefully Sansa had got the message.

“Are you sure it will be good?” Sansa asked, biting her lip and seeking his eyes with hers.

“Yes.” Of course he was sure.

Sansa chewed on her lip for a while as she thought about his words, and Stannis was starting to think she would keep thinking for the rest of the night before she finally spoke.

“You really think I look stunning?” There was both vulnerability and amusement in her features, and Stannis knew that it was important for him to answer this correctly.

“Absolutely,” he said, letting his eyes drift down from her face and over her form.

Even with tangled hair, comfortable clothing and dark circles around her eyes she was beautiful. And her figure really was gorgeous: full, tempting breasts, an astoundingly small waist, and legs that went on for days.

“You’re not flabby,” she said in return, blushing faintly. Her hand came up to touch his chest, and she let her fingers trail down slowly, touching him in a way she hadn’t in much too long. He closed his eyes to focus on the sensation. “You’ve never been more attractive than you’ve been for the past three months.”

Stannis opened his eyes in order to give his wife a sceptical look.

“No, I mean it,” she insisted, “seeing you with the twins, seeing how much you care about them and what an amazing father you are... I’ve never wanted you more.”

His heart started to pump a little harder. Her words were both arousing and confusing. Why hadn’t she told him this before? How could she both want him more than ever and keep herself to herself the way she had been doing?

“I’m sorry it’s taking me a while to figure myself out,” Sansa said, still touching him very distractingly, “I do want to go to bed with you. I’m just... scared.”

“Don’t be sorry,” he hurried to say, taking her distracting hand in his and kissing it, “I would wait years if that’s what it took. I just want to make sure I’m doing everything I can to help you. You have nothing to be afraid of.”

Sansa closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them back up there was a tentative smile playing on her lips.
“Should we… should we go upstairs, then?”

Hope surged through him and he nearly jumped up from the sofa. He managed to restrain himself, however. “Yes,” he said instead, his voice hoarse with desire.

“What could you give me half an hour? I don’t really feel my sexiest…” Sansa looked down at her loose clothing and ran her hand through her tangled hair.

“Of course.” He’d be perfectly happy to make love to her right where they were sitting, but he understood that she was very fragile and needed to go through her grooming ritual in order to feel more confident.

He could use the time to check on the twins and put the baby monitor on his nightstand. And perhaps he could light some candles in the bedroom and put on some music or something…

Stannis ended up lighting every candle he could find and arranging them all around the bedroom, making sure not to create any fire hazards. He drew the window curtains shut and debated lighting a fire in the fireplace. He decided against it as it was summer and the candles were quite enough to be getting along with. He was also very indecisive about the music, but figured that he couldn’t go wrong with David Bowie. They both liked him, and they had danced to his music at their wedding.

He really needn’t have bothered. His surroundings became completely irrelevant the moment Sansa stepped out of the en suite.

She took his breath away.

Her hair looked silky and tangle-free, her skin smooth and freshly moisturised. There were very light touches of makeup on her face, and she was wearing one of her old satin nightgowns. It was indecently short, dark blue, and covered in pretty lace details. His eyes lingered on her cleavage for a very long time before he was able to drag his eyes down. (Gods, her breasts were works of art…)

Her feet were bare, and her legs were very shiny.

Stannis was only in his pyjama bottoms, and he didn’t care that his choice of attire made it quite clear that he was fully erect. He hurried towards her and searched her eyes for permission to touch and kiss her. Words failed him.

She smiled at him, and looked both shy and pleased with herself.

The next few minutes were a blur. Sansa hadn’t encouraged him to kiss and fondle her the way he was doing now in months, and he was experiencing acute sensory overload. It was made even more overwhelming due to the way she was eagerly touching and kissing him in return, her tongue doing things he had half forgotten about.

Somehow they ended up in bed, and Stannis was not quite sure where their clothes went. But they had gone away, and that was all he needed to know.

Sansa seemed a bit nervous when he started to fondle her breasts and her nipples, but soon she was moaning and holding his head to her chest as he licked at her sensitive flesh.

Finally he was getting a turn. He loved watching Sansa nurse their babies. It was beautiful, natural, and miraculous in a way, but he had missed having her breasts to himself.

He wasn’t surprised when he ended up getting a bit of milk in his mouth, and he was quite used to the taste as he had tasted it often enough in the course of feeding it to the twins from bottles. It really didn’t taste all that good, but there was something very satisfying about sampling it from the
source, and he suddenly sympathised quite a lot with Steffon. Of course it was nicer to get the milk this way.

“Stop drinking the milk,” Sansa scolded after a little while, sounding both amused and a little embarrassed.

He kissed the nipple he had been lavishing with attention and started to move down towards Sansa’s thighs. He was determined to taste every part of her.

When he reached his destination he couldn’t get Sansa to part her thighs, however. He looked up at her in confusion.

“Are you sure you want to?” she asked, biting her lip and blushing. “What if it tastes all different?”

“I’m sure it will taste just fine,” he said, trying to sound calm despite his excitement.

Sansa looked at him with her brow furrowed for a moment before closing her eyes and relaxing. It was easy to part her thighs now that she was no longer resisting, and Stannis didn’t hesitate before bringing his tongue to her tempting folds. Everything looked exactly as it always had, and despite her words about not having been waxed in a while he did not really think there was anything wrong with the way she was groomed.

She was just beautiful.

She was beautiful, she tasted the same as always, and she smelled deliciously aroused.

Stannis felt a rush of satisfaction when he heard her start to respond to his ministrations. Judging by the sounds she was making she really shouldn’t have worried about the possibility of things not feeling good for her. She was moaning just like she had always moaned for him in the past, and it was wonderful.

Even though he was dying to sink himself into her and show her exactly how much he had missed her, it really wasn’t very hard to have patience. He loved her so much, and he wanted her to feel every spark of pleasure he could give her. His own needs could wait a bit longer.

“Please, I need more, I want you inside, please, please...”

Apparently Sansa was less patient than he was.

“Do you want me on top?” he asked, sitting up and wiping his chin. The view from this vantage point had his cock jumping. She looked gorgeously disheveled with her thighs spread, her skin flushed and her eyes hooded.

“Yes, just please -”

He was on top of her before she could finish her sentence, pressing his cock to her entrance and feeling like the world had shrunk down to just the two of them.

He had expected to slip inside easily and was surprised when he needed to push. “Is it okay?” he asked, worried that he might be hurting her.

“Mm, good,” she moaned, shifting her hips and angling her thighs to cradle him more fully.

The change in her position seemed to be all that was needed.

He slid home.
“Fuck,” he hissed out, the hot bliss of being inside her causing an intense wave of pleasure to pass through him.

“Is it okay? Is it different? What’s it like?” Sansa asked, her voice anxious.

“It’s perfect,” he choked out, “is it different for you?”

She was quiet for a moment, and Stannis forced his hips to remain still.

“It’s… it’s mostly the same, I think.” She shifted around again, and Stannis used the opportunity to get in a small thrust. A groan of utter pleasure escaped him, but he made himself stay still again.

“It’s okay, you can keep moving.” She sounded amused, happy and relieved.

“Sure?” Every muscle in his body felt tense and ready.

“Yes, I’m sure.”

He wanted to unleash all his pent up desire all at once, but he somehow managed to pace himself. He moved slowly and steadily, letting Sansa get used to him. It felt completely unreal to be inside her after all this time apart, and he was unable to keep from moaning and grunting at every pleasurable thrust.

“You can go faster,” Sansa said after a little while, her voice a little breathless.

His control faltered after that.

It was its own kind of release to let go and allow his body to find the familiar rhythm it had found so often before. He felt as if he could finally breathe after being underwater for too long, and he couldn’t think about anything except how right he felt, how much he loved Sansa, and how viscerally satisfying it was on every single level to be connected to her in this way.

“Oh, oh, oh!” There was something almost startled about Sansa’s cries of pleasure, and Stannis looked down at her, his vision a little hazy, wondering whether she was all right.

“It’s a little different,” she gasped out. “I can’t - I can’t explain it.”

He grunted out a question that verged on being incomprehensible, asking her if she wanted him to stop.

“No, don’t stop! It’s good different!” She grabbed his arse, seemingly to emphasise her words, pulling him closer.

The encouragement and the touch of her hands spurred him on to thrust more powerfully and even faster than before, and soon he could feel his balls tightening up. He was close.

“Yes! Oh, gods! Harder, Stannis, harder, please!”

Her voice caused heat to race up and down his spine, and he quickly got more firmly on his knees for additional leverage. He started to pound himself into her, creating loud, satisfying smacking noises and causing her to cry out his name in a way that never failed to inflate his ego to an utterly ridiculous extent. He could feel her clenching up around him, and fuck…

His climax hit him hard. He knew he was making some sort of noise, but he couldn’t hear it. Sansa’s gorgeous voice was drowning him out, and he made himself keep thrusting as steadily as he could so that she’d be able to keep coming. Things did not seem to be winding down for her at
all, and he wanted to keep giving her pleasure for as long as possible.

Unfortunately his cock could not stay hard forever.

They ended up lying on their respective backs, side by side on the bed, breathing faster than they normally did: a pair of sweaty heaps.

It's a good thing I didn't light a fire, Stannis thought, wiping his forehead with a forearm.

They were quiet for a few minutes, and soon the only sound in the room was David Bowie’s voice - currently crooning Tonight - and the sound of their breathing as it evened out.

Sansa spoke first. “That was .”

A baby’s cry suddenly rent the air, interrupting Sansa before she was able to finish her sentence.

They looked at each other for a second before they both sat up.

“I’ll go,” he said, “you should stay here and relax.”

“Are you sure?” Sansa bit her lip. “What if she’s hungry?”

It was obvious that it was Minisa who was crying. She cried a lot more daintily than Steffon did.

“I’m sure she just wants to be held for a while. Same as last night.” He got to his feet and found his robe. It would feel very strange to go to the nursery without a stitch on.

Soon he had Minisa in his arms, no longer crying now that she had the attention that she wanted, but still pouting a bit unhappily. Stannis rocked her gently and walked around, hoping that she would fall asleep again soon. He wanted to go back to Sansa. When he passed by Steffon’s cot he saw that his son had somehow managed to sleep through the ruckus, but he had kicked his blanket off, so Stannis carefully tucked him back in.

Minisa started to fuss and complain.

“I’m sorry, your highness,” Stannis said, walking away from Steffon’s cot and over to his favourite spot by the window. “Was I not paying complete attention to you? That won’t do, will it?”

His daughter immediately settled back down when he started to talk to her.

“Yes, I don’t know what I was thinking,” he continued, “coming in here to take care of you, and then daring to pay a bit of attention to your brother. Very impolite.”

Minisa stared at him.

“I suppose I ought to thank you,” he murmured, stroking the red wisps of hair on her head affectionately. “You were decent enough to wait until your mother and I were no longer indisposed.”

More staring. His face seemed to fascinate her.

“You’re obviously not going to be tactless like your Uncle Robert,” he told her, kissing her forehead.

He went on like that for a little longer. Chatting with her about whatever occurred to him in a low voice and rocking her from side to side.
She fell asleep as he was asking her if she needed her nappy changed, and he decided to take that as a no.

He held her to his chest for a while, remembering the way he had felt when he had held Steffon much the same way at the dinner party a few days before. He felt similar now, though the weight of his worries about rekindling the flame between him and his wife had been lifted from his shoulders.

Without those concerns it was easier to just enjoy the peaceful feeling of holding his baby girl.

Stannis sighed and put Minisa down with the reluctance of a man being forced to part with a limb. As much as he wanted to get back to Sansa, he truly loved spending time with his babies. Especially when they were quiet and sweet like his daughter had just been.

“Good night, you two,” he said and left the nursery door ajar.

Sansa was asleep when he made it back to bed, her makeup gone and her nightgown back on.

It was a bit disappointing as he was curious about what she had been about to say before Minisa started crying. He had also been hoping for a bit of cuddling.

Oh, well.

Maybe she’d be up for round two tomorrow morning? It would be their wedding anniversary after all…

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Stannis did not get his wish for morning sex on the day of his and Sansa’s wedding anniversary. The twins woke up at six in the morning and took turns demanding attention the entire day, making it very difficult for their parents to get ready for their romantic date.

Thankfully, Ned and Cat showed up an hour early, making it possible for Stannis and Sansa to grab quick showers and make themselves presentable.

They made it to the new restaurant Renly and Loras had recommended in time, but they both kept glancing at their phones all through dinner, barely noticing the food and feeling nervous about spending so much time away from their babies.

By the time they had dessert Stannis had abandoned his idea of suggesting a trip to a hotel. He couldn’t bear the thought of staying away from home for much longer.

“Back so soon?” Ned asked, looking heartbroken when he opened the door. Minisa was sleeping in his arms, practically glowing with angelic contentment.

“We missed our little monsters,” Sansa explained, gazing lovingly at their daughter.

“Where is Steffon?” Stannis asked, doing his best to fight the urge to take Minisa from Ned.

“Cat’s got him upstairs. She’s trying to get him to go to sleep, but I think he’s hungry again. We finished all the milk in the fridge earlier.”

“All of it?” Sansa sounded shocked.

“I guess they were hungry,” Ned said with a shrug.
Stannis followed Sansa to the nursery and hovered about as Sansa switched places with Catelyn. She had been sitting in the rocking chair in the corner of the room and humming lullabies for a fussy Steffon, and she looked very relieved to hand him over to Sansa. Catelyn left the room soon after Sansa started nursing, leaving the three of them alone.

Stannis couldn’t help but smile at the eager way Steffon latched on and practically inhaled the milk, and he walked up to the pair of them so that he might stroke Steffon’s chubby little cheek.

“Slow down, there,” he murmured, “leave some for me.” He glanced at Sansa’s face, expecting to find a look of amusement on her face. Instead he found a frozen, discomfited expression.

Stannis furrowed his brow. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” Sansa said, blushing deeply. “Hi, Dad.”

Stannis realised that Ned was probably standing right behind him, and he felt his own face redden. Of all the times to make a joke about breast milk…

“Er, I was just going to put Minisa down for the night,” Ned said, clearing his throat and studiously avoiding Stannis’ eyes.

Usually Stannis would have offered to take Minisa and put her down himself, but he wanted to get away from Ned at the moment, so he told the ceiling that he was going to go say good-bye to Catelyn and left the room.

Sansa laughed so hard about the situation after her parents were gone that she cried and gave herself hiccoughs.

Stannis didn’t think it was funny, so he took her to bed, spanked her until she stopped laughing and started moaning, and then fucked her until she was crying with pleasure rather than amusement.

It didn’t cure her hiccoughs.

Chapter End Notes

I'd like to thank the wonderful Eilit for giving me the idea for the way Stannis makes that breast milk joke. I'd also like to thank Tommy for her help with this chapter. ♥
Stannis was in the middle of feeding Minisa from a bottle when his phone rang. He decided to risk answering since Minisa was very occupied with drinking her milk, and thus unlikely to pitch a fit.

He sighed when the screen of his phone informed him that it was Selyse calling.

“What does she want?” he muttered before answering the call. Minisa looked at him for a moment but did not seem to know the answer to his question.

“Stannis?” Selyse sounded unusually nervous.

“Yes, what’s wrong? Has something happened to Shireen?”

“No, no, nothing’s wrong. Shireen is fine.”

Silence.

Stannis furrowed his brow. Usually Selyse would have got to the point by now. “Er, all right then. Can I help you with something?”

“I wanted to let you know that I’ve - I’ve met someone. His name is Milton and he’s a dentist.”

Huh. Selyse hadn’t had a boyfriend in years. He had half thought that she had given up on men.

“That’s - that’s nice.” He really wasn’t sure what to say.

“I just wanted to let you know that I’m going to introduce him to Shireen.”

“Right,” Stannis said, feeling on more familiar ground. He had received similar phone calls in the past, though they had usually been a lot more clipped and to the point. “I hope it goes well.” He meant it. He understood how nerve-racking it was to introduce a new significant other to their daughter, and he hoped it was less awkward for Selyse and Milton than it had been for him and Sansa a few years ago.

“Thank you,” Selyse said, sounding surprised.

Another awkward silence.

“Shireen tells me that your twins are doing well. That they’re healthy.”

“Yes, they’re getting bigger and stronger every day.” Stannis was surprised that Selyse would mention the babies. She hadn’t said anything except a halfhearted ‘congratulations’ before this.

“And Sansa… she’s - she’s doing well, too?” There was something very tentative and melancholy in Selyse’s tone.

“The first few months were hard on her, but she’s doing really well, yes. Thank you for asking.”

Stannis could hardly believe that Selyse was genuinely acting as if Sansa were a human being and not some sort of inflatable sex doll that Stannis had picked up at the pervert store.

“Oh… good.” Selyse sounded hesitant, but sincere.
Stannis noticed that Minisa was about to finish her bottle and realised that he needed to hang up soon.

“Yes, well,” he said, stopping to clear his throat. “Er, I need to get off the phone soon. I’m feeding Minisa.”

“Of course,” Selyse said in rush, “don’t let me keep you. Good-bye.”

The line went dead before Stannis had a chance to say good-bye in return.

He stowed his phone away and put the bottle aside as soon as Minisa finished. She looked at him curiously.

“What do you think?” he asked, “has Selyse gone ‘round the bend, or is the dentist just having a good effect on her?”

Minisa blinked, but didn’t offer an opinion.

Stannis told Sansa about the phone call when she came inside with Steffon. The two of them had been enjoying the sun in the garden, but now it was time for Steffon to join Minisa for a bit of a nap. She was already sleeping.

“Good for her,” Sansa said, smiling widely. “Things must be getting serious with that Milton guy if she’s introducing him to Shireen.”

“I suppose,” Stannis said, feeling very uncomfortable with discussing his ex-wife’s love life. It didn’t really feel like any of his business.

“Do you think we should invite them to dinner the next time they’re in King’s Landing?” Sansa asked, tilting her head to the side and blinking innocently at him. Steffon looked at him with interest too, obviously feeling safe and secure in his mother’s arms.

Stannis felt the blood drain from his face at the very idea.

“No.” He was unable to keep from sounding horrified.

Sansa started to laugh, shaking and becoming flushed with effort of keeping herself from becoming too loud. Steffon usually did not mind when Sansa laughed as long as she didn’t make too much noise. Right now he was even smiling.

Traitor.

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Stannis was very grateful that of all the days Sansa could have chosen to get sick, it ended up being on the day Gilly came over for a trial day as their nanny. He wasn’t sure if he would have been able to handle both twins on his own while trying to take care of Sansa, too.

Gilly was from the north, and came with glowing recommendations from Jon Snow. Stannis would have to remember to thank the man. Gilly handled the crisis situation that met her when she entered the house very calmly.

“Here, let me take them,” Gilly said, reaching for the pair of crying babies Stannis was holding. He had been walking around in circles, trying to get them to quiet down while also trying to brew Sansa some tea.
Sansa had spent the morning in a very familiar position in front of the toilet, emptying her body of every bit of fluid it contained. Stannis had offered to make tea so that she wouldn’t dry up into a husk. Sansa had crawled to bed and accepted the offer.

Once Gilly had taken charge of the twins it got a lot easier to make Sansa something to eat and drink. He doubted she’d be able to stomach anything more than dry toast, but he took a bit of cheese and butter along when he went to their room just in case.

“I’m dying,” Sansa moaned when he found her. She was curled up in the foetal position in bed.

“You just have a stomach bug,” he said, trying to sound reassuring. “You’ll be fine by tomorrow.”

She moaned again. Not in the nice sexy way. “I haven’t felt this horrible since I was pregnant.”

“Well, you can’t be pregnant,” Stannis said, stroking her hair and still attempting to sound soothing and reassuring. “You’re on the pill, aren’t you?”

Sansa stiffened up. “No. Of course not. I’m breastfeeding. I can’t take most hormonal birth control while I’m breastfeeding.”

Stannis felt as if his heart had stopped beating. If Sansa wasn’t on the pill, and they hadn’t been using condoms since they started having sex in June…

“When did you last get your period?” he asked, trying not to sound as panicked as he was feeling. He loved the twins more than life itself, but the idea of going through another pregnancy so soon was terrifying.

“I don’t know. I haven’t had a period since before I got pregnant. But it’s normal not to get them for about six months after the birth.”

Stannis counted in his head. The twins were born at the end of March. It was now early August. That was less than six months, wasn’t it?

“Maybe we should call Doctor Cressen about this,” Stannis suggested, feeling his stomach drop to the level of his knees.

“I can’t deal with this right now. I need to be sick again.”

They didn’t discuss the matter again for the rest of the day, but it weighed heavily on Stannis’ mind. Hopefully Sansa just had a stomach bug, but what if she was actually pregnant? What would they do? Two babies at once were challenging enough without adding another little one to the mix. And Sansa had just started to accept her body the way it was after the pregnancy. He really didn’t know what it would do to her state of mind if she had to go through the whole ordeal again.

It was late, and Gilly had managed to get both twins down for the night by the time Stannis was able to talk to the nanny properly.

“You’re obviously hired,” Stannis said, seeing no point in beating around the bush. “The plan was to have you start when I go back to work at the beginning of September, but would you consider coming back tomorrow in case Sansa is still sick?”

“Would I be getting the same hourly rate we discussed for today?” Gilly asked, raising an eyebrow. “Because I think I’d deserve a bit more now that I’ve been hired.”

Good with children and a savvy businesswoman. Stannis approved.
They haggled over her salary for a minute before ending up at a number they were both relatively happy with.

“See you tomorrow!” Gilly said, waving cheerfully at him.

Stannis couldn’t face the idea of going back to the bedroom to discuss things with Sansa quite yet, so he ended up calling Davos instead.

“Sansa might be pregnant,” he blurted out as soon as he heard Davos’ voice.

“What?” Davos sounded completely stunned.

Stannis explained the situation as best he could, pacing around the living room as he talked.

“You’re telling me you didn’t even ask her if you needed to be using a condom?” There was a scandalised note to Davos’ tone that made Stannis’ face heat up.

“Sansa has always just… taken care of all that.”

“You have got to do your share. Being safe about these things is a job for both of you, not just her.”

“I know that.” Hypothetically. “But what should we do if she’s… you know.”

“Well, the first thing you have to do is talk to Sansa and decide whether you two want to have more children. If you do, now’s as good a time as any, but if you don’t… There is a solution.”

*Abortion.* The word echoed loudly inside Stannis’ head even though no one had spoken it.

“Trust me, it will do you good to get the conversation out of the way. And if you two figure out that you don’t want more children you can do what I did.”

Stannis frowned. “What did you do?”

“I got a vasectomy.”

Stannis almost dropped his phone. He felt like his brain had just been squeezed, and also like he needed to go stand behind a piece of furniture and protect his groin.

“Isn’t that… isn’t that a bit drastic?” Stannis finally managed to choke out.

“It’s a very simple procedure, and it meant that Marya didn’t have to keep pumping her body full of hormones after we stopped having kids. I had a bit of sperm frozen before I had to procedure done just in case, but it’s been wonderful. No condoms, no hormones, no worries.” Davos actually sounded disturbingly cheerful about the matter. “And best of all, I got to do my part. Take a bit of responsibility. You do realise that when a woman is on the pill she has to remember to take it every single day at approximately the same time, don’t you? Getting one little procedure done is easy compared to that.”

Stannis blinked. He hadn’t really thought about it that way.

“I think I’d rather stick to condoms while Sansa is still breastfeeding,” Stannis muttered, still feeling that a vasectomy was a very drastic option.

“When’s the last time you used one?” Davos asked, sounding amused.

Stannis tried to remember. It had been *years.* “Er…”
“That’s what I thought.” Davos still sounded very amused. “Once you start using them regularly, and missing the way sex feels without all that latex getting in the way, you’ll be changing your tune.”

Stannis doubted it. He couldn’t remember sex with a condom feeling that substantially different from sex without a condom. He knew it was a little better to not have anything in the way, but Davos was probably exaggerating.

“Anyway, you should definitely talk things out with Sansa before you take a pregnancy test. You need to know what you both want so that you can make a sensible decision once you know what’s going on.”

“Mm,” Stannis agreed.

They chatted a bit longer, speaking mainly about work, but eventually Stannis had to hang up. He needed to talk to his wife.

Sansa looked a little better when he returned to the bedroom. The toast and the tea he had been feeding her over the course of the day had put some colour back into her cheeks.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, starting to get undressed.

“Pretty rotten,” Sansa sighed, “but better than earlier.”

Stannis finished changing into his sleepwear and got into bed with Sansa. Usually he might be reluctant to come too close to a person with an upset stomach, not wishing to catch the bug, but he found himself in the odd position of wishing that he would catch ill. If what Sansa had was contagious, it meant she was probably not pregnant.

“We need to discuss what we’ll do if you’re pregnant,” he said, diving right in. They really couldn’t afford to put the conversation off. If they decided not to have more children and it turned out that Sansa was pregnant… well. Time was of the essence.

“I don’t want to think about it,” Sansa said with a woebegone moan.

“We have to think about it.”

“Can’t it wait until I feel a little more human?”

Stannis was tempted to give in, but because there was such a large part of him that needed to have the matter settled, he decided to press the issue.

“I think you just want to procrastinate,” he said, fixing her with a stern look.

Sansa arranged her face into an exaggerated pout. “That’s not true.”

He raised an eyebrow at her.

“... Okay, it’s a little true.”

“I’ll go first,” he said, feeling his heart speed up. It was very important for them to arrive on the same page when it came to the matter of whether they wanted more children, and it made him nervous to think that this might turn into a fight. “As you know, I’m not getting any younger. Taking care of Minisa and Steffon is challenging for me, though I do enjoy it. I would not be opposed to one more child if you are pregnant right now, but if you’re not pregnant, I think it
would perhaps be better to call it a day.”

Sansa was biting her lip and nodding, which Stannis hoped was a good sign.

“I…” she trailed off and looked down. When she looked back up her eyes were full of tears.

Fuck. Had he upset her?

“I can’t go through another pregnancy so soon. I can’t,” Sansa said, her voice shaky and a few tears escaping. “I’m - I’m not sure I ever want to get pregnant again.”

Stannis felt a very strange mixture of relief and gut-wrenching agony. He hated to see Sansa upset, but it was a relief to know that she did not seem to be upset about the fact that he wasn’t very keen to have more children. It seemed they were actually on the same page.

He loved Steffon and Minisa more than life itself, but he was in his mid-forties. He had three children. And though Sansa was young and capable of having a lot more, two really was plenty.

“If you are pregnant and you don’t want to continue the pregnancy I will support your decision,” he said, keeping his voice as steady and reassuring as he could.

Sansa began to cry in earnest, and Stannis hurriedly slipped his arms around her, gathering her to his chest and holding her as lovingly as he could. “There, there…” He stroked her hair and her back, doing his best to stay strong for her. There was a lump in his throat that was making it hard for him to breathe, but he ignored it as best he could.

“Am I a horrible person?” she sobbed after a while, her body shaking.

“No,” he said at once. “This is not a moral issue.”

“I know… I just - I feel like,” Sansa stopped to sniffle and wipe her eyes. Stannis reached for the box of tissues on his nightstand and handed it to her. She gave him a grateful look and proceeded to clean herself up a bit. She took a deep breath and continued. “I feel so stupid.”

Stannis frowned. “Why on earth?”

“I didn’t think about birth control. Doctor Cressen talked to me about it when the twins were about a month old. He asked me what sorts of methods I’d like to use and asked if I wanted a prescription for the special pill you can supposedly take even though you’re breastfeeding. I wasn’t ready to even think about having sex back then so I sort of brushed him off.” Sansa took a break to breathe and wipe more tears from her face. “By the time we actually got around to having sex again I just… I wasn’t thinking. I haven’t had a period in months so it just didn’t really occur to me to worry about it. It’s very unlikely for women to conceive while they’re breastfeeding a lot, but it’s not like I didn’t know it was a possibility…” She trailed off and started to cry again.

Stannis held her tightly and let her cry until she calmed down again.

“You are not stupid, and nor is it your exclusive responsibility to make sure we think about these things. I should have asked you whether you were on any kind of birth control instead of assuming. This is on me as much as it is on you.”

“But it makes sense that you would assume I was on top of it,” Sansa argued, “I have always taken care of this, so why should you have expected anything to be different?” She sounded determine to absolve him of any guilt.
Stannis wouldn’t have it. “Don’t be ridiculous. Of course I should have expected things to be different.”

Sansa’s lip trembled and she looked ready to start crying again.

“Please,” Stannis said, softening his tone, “we don’t even know that you are pregnant. Let’s not make a mountain out of a molehill quite yet.”

She closed her eyes, drew in a long, deep breath and released it slowly. With a nod she opened her eyes again, looking a little less upset.

“Oh,” she said, taking another deep breath. “Let’s just… wait and see. We can decide what to do once we know more.”

Stannis kissed her, not caring about possibly catching a stomach bug, not caring that her face was a mess of tears and… other things. He just needed to show her that he loved her, and that they would deal with this challenge together.

She kissed him back, tentatively at first, but with increased fervour as the kiss went on. Under normal circumstances Stannis might have become a little turned on by the passionate kiss, but Sansa was sick and she had just been crying rather a lot. He couldn’t really imagine that she’d be interested in sex any more than he was at the moment. Especially because of what they had been discussing. And anyway, they didn’t have any condoms.

He ended up helping her to the en suite so that she’d be able to get properly cleaned up and ready for bed, and once she was back under the covers, he held her close until she drifted off.

It really was a bit early to be going to sleep, but Stannis knew the twins would be up at the crack of dawn, and he’d probably need to take care of them both by himself until Gilly came back. He’d also had rather an exhausting day and an emotionally exhausting evening. Sleep sounded like a great idea.

Stannis woke up a couple of times to see to the twins, but they didn’t demand too much of him, so he was actually pretty well rested by the time he woke up to the dawn light streaming through the gaps in the window curtains, the birds singing outside in the trees, and his stomach doing its best to escape through his esophagus.

He made it to the toilet just in time to throw up what felt like his liver, his lungs, and the rest of his internal organs.

It was a very strange feeling, being so physically miserable (he never got sick) but also so mentally relieved and joyful.

Sansa probably wasn’t pregnant!

His stomach had never felt this terrible in his life, but Sansa probably wouldn’t have to make any sort of agonising choices!

He was in the middle of shuddering through another bout of vomiting when he heard the baby monitor go off in the bedroom. Minisa and Steffon were both crying for attention.

Despite his situation he tried to finish what he was doing and get up. His body was not having it. It was pretending that his muscles simply weren’t functional, and not letting him abandon the hug he was involved in with the toilet.
“I’ll take care of them,” Sansa’s voice told him from somewhere behind him. “I’m feeling a lot better today.”

He tried to tell her that he was glad to hear it, but he vomited instead.

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August went by much too fast. Soon Shireen was back from Brightwater and Stannis started going back to the office. Gilly helped Sansa with the twins while Shireen was at school and Stannis was at work, and made it possible for Sansa to have a little energy left in the evenings to enjoy spending time with him and Shireen.

Getting back into the routine of going to the office every morning had been very hard at first, and Stannis had spent a large part of his first week at work on the phone with Sansa, getting her to tell him what the babies were doing and asking her to let him talk to them. Sansa said they usually smiled when they were allowed to press their chubby cheeks to her phone and listen to him chat about whatever came to mind.

He still called home at least once a day.

It was now late September. Sansa was still breastfeeding, and she had decided not to risk going on the pill that Doctor Cressen said would not interfere with her body’s ability to produce milk. They had been relying on condoms since their pregnancy scare, and were paying close attention to all the important details, trying to be as safe as possible. It had been an odd sort of relief when Sansa had started getting periods again as it allowed them to keep better track of things, but Stannis had to admit that he hadn’t really missed Sansa’s monthly dose of irritability and chocolate cravings.

As for the condoms… Davos had been right. Stannis was already pretty sick of having to use them. It had been a bit of a novelty at first, but he missed being able to feel Sansa properly. There wasn’t a huge difference to the way it felt to have sex with a condom on, but there was definitely a difference, and though it actually felt pretty good to feel the tight rubber circle at the base, he really preferred the feeling of letting his naked cock slide against Sansa’s soft, wet folds…

He had started to secretly research vasectomies, wanting to know more about them. Stannis still thought it was a bit of drastic measure, but apparently it was very effective, quite safe, and incredibly convenient for men in his situation in life.

Still, Stannis couldn’t help but wonder whether he wouldn’t feel like less of a man if he knew he had lost the ability to father children. Wouldn’t it be a little like being impotent?

Davos didn’t seem to feel that way, so maybe Stannis ought to ask him about it. It couldn’t hurt to get another perspective. He might even consider asking his brothers if one of them wasn’t gay - and therefore unlikely to need to worry about birth control - and if the other wasn’t Robert. He knew exactly what someone like Robert would say about the matter. He’d say that getting a vasectomy was horribly emasculating. But then, Robert had a lot of absurd ideas about masculinity that didn’t make very much sense.

“What are you thinking about?” Sansa had closed her book and was looking at him curiously.

He took his reading glasses off and rubbed his face. He had been too deep in thought to even open his own book. “Nothing,” he said with a yawn. “Condoms among other things,” he added, changing his answer due to the sceptical look on Sansa’s face.

She smiled and shifted until she was lying on his side of the bed, her front pressed to his side.
“Mm, want me to find one?” Her hand was under the covers, trailing down over his abdomen towards the waistband of his pyjama bottoms.

He was pleasantly surprised. Sansa had been complaining of being tired since dinner. He hadn’t expected her to be in the mood tonight. His cock twitched with interest.

“Er, yes - all right,” he said, breathing in sharply when her hand cupped his balls through the cotton of his sleepwear. His blood was rushing south at an alarming rate.

She kissed his lips for a moment before letting go of him and reaching into his nightstand’s top drawer, fishing out a foil packet.

He made short work of pushing the covers off and his pyjama bottoms down. Sansa watched, her cheeks flushed and her eyes full of desire.

“Do you want me to put it on?” she asked, biting her lip.

He usually shoved the rubber annoyance on himself, rushing to get it over with, but sometimes she liked to roll the condom on, taking her sweet time about it. He nodded, wanting to watch her and feel her nimble fingers.

Watching her roll the latex down over his cock was probably the only part of using a condom he would miss. She always looked like she was concentrating quite hard as she did it, a small crease appearing between her eyebrows. And then she would look at him - like she was doing now - asking him with her eyes if she was doing a good job.

He nodded and bit back a groan.

She smiled the way she only ever smiled for him. *Fuck, she’s gorgeous.*

“Sansa...” he moaned, enjoying the feeling of her hands smoothing the condom down to make sure there were no air bubbles.

She got on top and rode him, stripping her satin nightgown off as she rolled her hips, giving him the kind of view some men would probably kill for. He kept his eyes open, determined to enjoy the show and do what he could to help her along.

At first he mostly played with her nipples, licking up the milk that inevitably leaked out. When she scolded him for doing it he switched to rubbing her right where they were joined, heightening her pleasure by letting his fingers create more pressure where she needed it.

In the end, when he was close and too desperate to come to really think about anything else, he gripped her hips and bucked wildly, pulling her up and down and making her full breasts bounce.

She threw her head back and cried his name, and he was forced to close his eyes as his release took him over, his voice raw, his words garbled.

It was good sex, but as he stood in the en suite, cleaning himself up after having disposed of the condom, he thought about how much better it would have felt without the stupid rubber.

When he and Sansa had turned their lamps off, and finished making themselves comfortable on their respective pillows, Stannis took a deep breath and decided to just ask Sansa for her opinion.

“I’ve been thinking about getting a vasectomy. Would that be okay with you?”
Sansa turned her lamp back on and sat up, staring at him with wide eyes.

“A vasectomy?” she said, blinking rapidly.

He sat up and felt his face warming. “Er, yes. You know, to make me - um…” Shoot blanks, said a voice in his head that sounded a lot like Robert, “… infertile.”

“I know what a vasectomy is,” Sansa said, sounding both amused and confused. “I just don’t know why you’d be willing to do that.”

“Well, we don’t want more children, do we?” He asked, his tone careful.

“No, I really think Minisa and Steffon are enough.”

“I agree. That’s why I think I should get the procedure done. It will make sure we don’t have any accidents down the line.”

“It’s very final,” Sansa said, sounding uncertain. “Are you sure you don’t just want to keep using condoms until I stop breastfeeding and go on the pill again?”

“When do you think you’ll stop breastfeeding?”

Sansa ran her hand through her hair and sighed. “Mum always breastfed until my siblings and I were two years old. With Rickon she was still breastfeeding him occasionally until he turned three. I’m going to see how it goes, but I’d like to keep going until they’re at least a year and a half old.”

Stannis grimaced at the idea of a whole more year of condoms. At least with a vasectomy he’d only have to use condoms for the first couple of months after the procedure. (Apparently the sperm count didn’t drop to zero immediately after the operation. He had read a few stories while he had been researching the matter about men who had got their wives pregnant right after their vasectomies.)

“I’d rather just get the vasectomy,” he said, trying to smooth the grimace from his features.

“But… what if we change our minds?” Sansa was looking at him very searchingly, her brow furrowed.

“I could have some - er - sperm frozen. Just in case.” Stannis felt a little awkward about talking about it, but it had to be done. “And the procedure is reversible to some extent.”

“Oh.” Sansa was quiet for a while, clearly mulling his words over. “I wouldn’t have to take the pill?” she finally asked, looking tentatively hopeful.

“No, you wouldn’t have to worry about birth control at all.”

The amazed, happy look that overtook Sansa’ features made Stannis feel like a vasectomy might be one of the best ideas Davos had ever given him.

When Sansa started kissing him, moving her lips down after they had exchanged several slow, lingering and highly pleasurable kisses, Stannis changed his mind.

A vasectomy was definitely the very best idea Davos had ever given him.

Stannis would just have to make sure Robert never found out about it.

Minisa made a very cute noise that was her attempt at laughter. Stannis’ lips quirked in response. It was impossible to be stern with her.

“You’re not even trying,” he complained, his tone affectionate and a smile still playing on his lips. “Let’s move on. Who’s this?” He pointed the the family portrait in one of Sansa’s big picture albums again.

“Aaah!” Minisa squealed.

“No, not ‘aah’. Shireen.”

“Eeeh!”

Stannis huffed out a laugh. ‘Eeeh’ was certainly closer to ‘Shireen’ than ‘Aaah’. “Yes. It’s your sister.”

He adjusted his grip on his daughter and flipped to the next page. A big picture of Ned and Sansa in their ridiculous Christmas jumpers appeared.

“Gaga! Gaga!” Minisa exclaimed, wriggling around in excitement, pudgy fingers slapping down on the plastic that covered the picture of Minisa’s favourite person in the whole world.

“Of course you’re excited to see Ned,” Stannis grumbled. He couldn’t bring himself to be very annoyed about it, however. Minisa just looked so cute as she smiled brightly, displaying a single baby tooth, and squealed with joy.

“But who’s that next to your grandfather?”

“Am!”

“No, it’s ‘Mama’, not ‘Am’.” Stannis was glad that he’d caught Minisa in such a chatty mood. She and Steffon had both started to make a lot of sounds recently. At seven months Stannis knew they weren’t really able to equate the noises they were making with anything, but they had started to respond to the sound of their names. To Stannis’ chagrin Minisa responded both to ‘Minisa’ and ‘Minnie’, but Steffon seemed to be attempting to make Stannis proud and would only turn his head when he heard the sound of his proper name.

It was definitely not because Stannis had been making a particular effort to say Steffon’s name to his son as much as he possibly could, even going so far as to promise Gilly a raise if she refrained from using any nicknames.

Gilly wasn’t working today as it was a Sunday, but Sansa had taken Steffon for a walk in his stroller, bundled up in a brand new hat that Sansa had somehow found the time to knit for him. The chilly October weather had inspired her to make both hats and scarves for the twins, and Stannis had to admit they looked quite good. Sansa had a way with patterns and colours. Stannis was perhaps not the best judge when it came to colours due to his colour blindness, but Gilly and Shireen both agreed that the colour combinations Sansa had chosen were lovely, and Catelyn had exclaimed over the hats for ten minutes straight.
Stannis stood up from his seat, leaving the photo album behind and holding Minisa so that she would be facing the same way he was. She liked to see what was going on around her. They went over to the nearest window that looked out on the street and Stannis tried to see whether Sansa was coming back. It didn’t seem like it.

It was strange to rattle around the house with just Minisa for company. Stannis was used to having more people around on the weekends. His brothers had taken to dropping by for coffee, and Shireen often had Myrcella or Devan over. But his brothers were busy today, and Shireen was in Winterfell.

Stannis walked upstairs to the nursery and put Minisa down on a soft blanket. She immediately turned to her stomach and started to crawl. It was amazing how proficient she was getting -- she had only started to move around the week before. Steffon was not progressing quite as quickly. He had started to get up on his hands and knees, sometimes rocking back and forth as if he were about to start crawling, but so far that was all he did.

Stannis watched Minisa like a hawk and distracted her with toys whenever she made herself likely to crawl towards the nursery door in a bid for freedom. It was a fairly mindless task, but entertaining enough. It was at least a lot more fun than reading the report that was waiting for him in his study.

“Dada!” Minisa suddenly said. She was sitting on her padded bottom and holding a wooden block in her little hand. She seemed to be trying to hand the block over.

It took him much longer than it usually did to accept the token of her majesty’s goodwill. There was something in his eye that was making everything blurry, and a warm feeling in his chest that made it difficult to concentrate on anything except the way his little girl had just called for him.

He could remember the first time Shireen had said ‘Dada’ as clearly as he could remember the day the twins had been born, but he could not recall having been quite this overwhelmed. He had been pleased, and proud, and very happy that his daughter had made it to an age where she was able to make sounds at all, but now…

Now his face was getting all wet.

He did not think his reaction now meant that he had loved Shireen any less when she had been little. He knew quite well that he loved her just as much. But he was a different man after falling in love with Sansa. He felt love in a more overwhelming, all-encompassing way. He felt more capable of both receiving and giving love.

He felt more whole.

“Dadadada!” Minisa insisted, determined to give him her block. He took it.

“Thank you, sweetheart,” he managed to say. “Dada loves you.”

The feelings swirling about his body and mind were dizzying and a little like the euphoria he had felt when he had been falling in love with Sansa -- though very different at the same time. His brain was probably soaking in some of the same chemicals, but he didn’t want to think about it logically. He wanted to enjoy the fact that Minisa had called for him, and look forward to the way she would call for him in the future. He would always be there to answer her call. He would not leave her or Steffon behind when they were still too young to cope with the loss. He would make sure.

Sansa did not seem to notice that anything was different when she and Steffon returned, and
Stannis blew out a relieved breath. He had washed his face and taken Minisa to his study so that he might read his boring report and calm himself down. (He had spent more time trying to keep Minisa from destroying the printed report than actually reading it.) Apparently this strategy had worked to make himself seem normal. And since Minisa was too young to be able to tell Sansa that her father has spent half an hour trying to compose himself after she had babbled ‘Dada’ at him, his secret ought to be safe.

He would tell Sansa about what had happened at some point, but for now he decided to keep Minisa’s little milestone to himself. He’d probably just get emotional again if he tried to talk about it so soon, anyway.

Stannis spent the rest of the day with his little family, enjoying the sort of peaceful and mundane Sunday that he doubted anyone would think to write home about.

Shireen came home from Winterfell a little later than she usually would have, but Stannis didn’t think much of it. He was amazed that Ned let Bran drive her home when she could easily have taken the bus - he had bought her a bus pass for a reason - and wondered whether it was because Ned wanted Bran to gain more experience as a driver. With petrol prices being what they were it seemed like a very expensive way to let Bran gain experience.

Stannis was dreading the day Shireen started to learn to drive. Maybe Sansa would be able to go on the road with her while she had her learner’s permit? Stannis was fairly sure he’d be too stressed out due to all the potential for accidents to be a very useful instructor for his daughter. Sansa would probably be able to keep a much cooler head.

Sansa had never witnessed her parents dying in a car crash.

“Did Shireen seem a bit different to you earlier?” Sansa asked once the twins were finally down for the night.

“No?” Stannis furrowed his brow and tried to remember how Shireen had been acting since she got home. She had helped get the twins out of the bath and into their little pyjamas, she had spent some time playing different songs for Steffon while Sansa had fed Minisa, and then she had disappeared to her room. All pretty par for the course.

“Hm.” Sansa looked thoughtful, but not worried.

“Why? Did she seem different to you?”

“A little. You both seemed a little far away tonight.”

Stannis thought about his little secret. Did Shireen have a secret, too? That seemed unlikely.

“I’m not far away,” he said, wrapping his arms around Sansa. “I’m right here.”

They spent the rest of the night cuddled up in front of the TV, watching an old black and white film with one eye, and sharing a lot of kisses. Shireen spotted them when she came out of her room for a late night snack and rolled her eyes at them. “You guys are ridiculous,” she muttered, clearly trying not to smile and failing.

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“Are you sure you don’t want more kids?” Stannis asked as he looked over his schedule for the next few weeks on his phone, trying to find a good time to schedule a visit to the hospital. He and Sansa were both sitting in bed, about to go to sleep.
“I’ve been thinking about it a lot,” Sansa said, clearly taking his question very seriously, “and I’ve talked to a few people about it.”

Stannis felt a moment of worry that Sansa might have mentioned that he might be getting a vasectomy to anyone, and was therefore relieved to hear the next thing Sansa said.

“I didn’t say anything about the procedure we’re thinking about, I just talked about the idea of more children. I actually made an appointment with my therapist, and she was a lot more helpful than my mother.”

“Oh?” Stannis wasn’t surprised. Catelyn would probably want Sansa to have a lot of kids like her.

“Yeah. Mum is a bit sad that I’m not excited to have more little ones. She thought I’d want to follow in her footsteps. But my therapist asked me to think back to what I wanted before I ever even got pregnant.”

Stannis nodded. That made a lot of sense.

“And I thought it over, and over, and over,” Sansa said, shooting him an amused smile, “and I can’t honestly remember myself ever wanting more than two or three kids at most. I genuinely always thought I’d try to get at least one girl and one boy, and that I’d leave it at that.”

Stannis thought about it for a minute, and Sansa turned to lie on her side, facing him.

“You still feel that way even when Minisa looks at you like you’re her whole world, or when Steffon does that thing with the ducks in that bath?” Sansa loved that thing with the ducks in the bath. “You don’t feel like you need to make more of them?”

It was a question he had been asking himself quite ruthlessly ever since Minisa had called him ‘Dada’. Was he really ready to give up on the idea of making another clever little girl like her? Or a sweet little boy like Steffon?

His heart always softened at the idea, but his brain wouldn’t let him forget all the work. And then there was the matter of his age. It was just an equation that didn’t add up for him. He wanted to be able to meet his grandchildren. Play with them. Have the energy to teach them things and take them to the Aquarium…

“Oh, you know I’d love to make an endless procession of them if I could be sure I’d get the really nicely behaved, cute babies each time.” Sansa looked at the ceiling for moment. “But I’m a teacher, Stannis. I interact with parents and children all the time. I know that children don’t always turn out the way parents hope, and I’ve seen what can happen when parents don’t give their children enough attention.” Sansa stopped talking and took a very deep breath. “I don’t want to give up on my career. I don’t want my children to feel like I don’t have time for them, and I don’t want my children to have to compete with each other for attention. I don’t want you to feel like I don’t have enough time for you.”

“The twins will get older, though,” Stannis pointed out. “They won’t need as much time and attention.”

“And at that point I want to be able to focus on my career and on you,” Sansa said, sounding absolutely sure of herself.

“I’ll always be here, Sansa,” he said, meeting her eyes steadily. He did not want her to give up on having more children because she thought he needed constant attention. He was not a child.
“I know that, and focusing on you doesn’t mean I want to throw myself at your feet every day,” she said with a grin. “Focusing on you means focusing on me, too. Focusing on romance -- on us. Having time to go to Volantis every now and then. Being able to go to the opera when we feel like it and being able to enjoy quiet moments in the house…”

Gods, that sounded wonderful.

Now for the really hard questions. He steeled himself.

“What if I was out of the picture for some reason?” He looked at her sadly. Life sometimes took odd turns. One could never take anything for granted. Death, disease… divorce. He didn’t think it was likely, but what if?

“If you randomly got beheaded or something?” she joked halfheartedly.

He nodded, a tight feeling in his throat.

“Well… I don’t know. I’d still have the twins, and I don’t think I’d want to have more without your support.”

“What if you met someone else? Do you still think you wouldn’t want more children?” His mouth felt completely dry. He hated the very idea of Sansa with someone else. Hated it.

“Does it really matter? I’m not getting my tubes tied.” Sansa looked confused and a little worried. “And that would be a really huge change. I’d no longer be living the life I’m expecting to live.”

She made a good point. Perhaps he should really be asking himself if he could fathom having more children if he lost Sansa. If he could fathom meeting someone new after her. Falling in love again. Wanting a new family...

He couldn’t. He was completely certain that Sansa was it for him. There would be no other woman after her. Even if he lost her tomorrow, he couldn’t imagine trying to replace her. Perhaps it was unrealistic of him, but it was how he felt.

The hardest question of all had yet to be asked. He didn’t really want to ask it. He didn’t want to consider it.

“What if we lose one of them? Or both?” He didn’t dare express the idea using the full strength of his voice, so he whispered the question as quietly as he could.

Sansa’s face went completely white, and she pressed a hand to her lips in distress. “That… I can’t think about that.”

He opened his arms and encouraged her to come over to his side of the bed and cuddle up to him. He held her in silence for a long time, feeling terrible for having caused the anxiety that he could feel pouring off her in waves.

Stannis was sure they were both thinking the same thing. That if they ever recovered from such a loss and somehow felt up to trying again, there was the possibility of reversing the vasectomy. And if the reversal didn’t work… Well. He supposed that was what the emergency cache of frozen sperm would be for. Or adoption. There was always adoption.

“So,” he said hoarsely, “we’re sure?”

He could feel Sansa take a deep breath. The warm air tickled his chest as she exhaled.
“We’re sure,” she said.

Stannis drifted off not very long after that, Sansa still in his arms. The last thought in his head before sleep claimed him was that he liked how he and Sansa were always ‘we’ together now.

We’re sure. We.

Us.

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Stannis got his vasectomy on a rainy Tuesday afternoon. It took him half an hour to get from the office, wait around at the hospital and then get into the room where the operation would be performed. It took less than half an hour for the actual procedure to take place, and though it was a little embarrassing to have a doctor fiddle around with his shaved scrotum, it was probably not the most humiliating experience of Stannis’ life.

Maybe that said a lot about his life.

After everything was over and done with Stannis was warned that there would probably be some bruising, that he would be tender down there for a little while, and that he would probably not be able to have sex for at least a week.

He was also reminded to continue using other methods of birth control for the next two months or so, and the doctor recommended that Stannis should submit a sample of semen for testing after two months to confirm azoospermia.

Another half an hour later he was back at the office, feeling a little uncomfortable, but otherwise fine.

Sitting down was a new and exciting challenge. It had to be done slowly and carefully.

“How did it go?” Davos asked when he popped into Stannis’ office shortly before Stannis usually left for the day, looking curious and sympathetic. “Hurts a bit, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, after the local anesthesia wore off.” Stannis cleared his throat and shuffled some papers that were lying around on his desk.

“Don’t worry, you’ll be back to normal in no time.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that. Stannis will probably never be normal.” Robert had let himself in without knocking.

Seven bloody hells. How much did he hear?

“What do you want, Robert?” Stannis hadn’t had to work this hard not to snarl at Robert since before the fateful fishing trip of the previous year.

“Woah, someone’s in a bad mood.” Robert raised both eyebrows and took an exaggerated step back.

“Tell me what you want and then get out.”

Robert looked a bit hurt. “Don’t be like that, I just came by to talk.”

Stannis took a deep breath. It did not appear as if Robert had heard too much. “What did you want
to talk about?” he asked, forcing himself to sound more patient.

“Well, I’m pretty interested in knowing what you needed local anesthesia for. Can we talk about that?”

Stannis gave Davos a panicked look.

“He was having a birthmark removed,” Davos said, calm and unfazed.

“You need local anesthesia for that?” Robert’s tone was surprised.

“In this case, yes.” Davos really had an amazing poker face.

“Huh.” Robert looked like he was thinking quite hard about something. Suddenly he started unbuckling his belt.

“Robert!” Stannis was scandalised. Why was Robert taking his trousers down in Stannis’ office?

“Oh, don’t be a prude,” Robert muttered, “I have a huge birthmark on my arse that I’ve been thinking about having removed. I want your opinion!” He turned around and mooned Stannis and Davos.

Stannis buried his face in his hands, but he heard Davos get up and examine the birthmark his brother was displaying.

“Looks fine to me, but I’m no dermatologist.”

“Maybe I’ll have Doctor Pylos look at it,” Robert said, “just to be safe.”

“Perhaps that would be wise,” Davos agreed.

“Please put your trousers back on,” Stannis moaned. “I need to get back to work.”

***

Stannis wished Gilly could have stayed for longer today. The twins were both screaming, his balls still hurt due to his very recent vasectomy, and it would be several days before he’d be able to have sex with his wife. His wife who happened to look particularly beautiful these days. Exceptionally ravishing.

“Quiet down,” Stannis said to Steffon, feeling exhausted. He could barely hear himself think.

Sansa was holding Minisa and trying to calm her down. “Try distracting him with Octavio,” she suggested, her voice almost drowned out by Steffon’s powerful screams. Minisa wasn’t quite as loud, but she could go for longer at a time. Like a police siren.

“Where is he?” he asked, glancing around the nursery without spotting the octopus plush toy.

“I don’t know,” Sansa moaned, shifting Minisa around in her arms, “just look for him.”

Stannis put Steffon on his cot and left the bedroom, ignoring Steffon’s enraged cries. He obviously did not appreciate being abandoned like that.

It took a while to search the house, but Stannis couldn’t find the toy anywhere. He glanced at Shireen’s bedroom door. It was not quite closed, but he knew Myrcella was visiting. Should he
bother them?

A particularly loud scream drifted over from the nursery.

He hurriedly went over to the door and stuck his head through the small opening. Shireen and Myrcella looked like they were busy talking and doing their nails.

“Have you seen Octavio? I think he’s our last chance to calm Steffon down,” he said, not caring that he had just referred to a stuffed toy as if it were a member of the household.

Shireen looked a bit startled (and flustered?) and Myrcella seemed confused. After a quick explanation about who Octavio was, Shireen suggested that he might be in the kitchen.

Oh. Stannis hadn’t thought to search the kitchen. What business did Octavio have in there, anyway? He nodded distractedly at his daughter and walked to the kitchen as fast as his aching private parts allowed.

Thankfully, Octavio was where Shireen had thought he would be, and soon Steffon was quiet, which meant that Minisa calmed down, too.

The silence was blissful, and Stannis met Sansa’s eyes for a tired, but triumphant moment.

After making sure the baby monitor was on, they both left the nursery and sat down in the kitchen.

“I thought they would never stop,” Sansa whispered. They had both been staring vacantly at the baby monitor on the kitchen table for several silent minutes.

Stannis reached for her hand and covered it with his own. Her skin was smooth and soft. “They’ll grow out of this soon,” he promised, trying to give her an encouraging smile.

“I know,” Sansa said returning his smile.

He shifted his weight, and his attempt at a smile turned into a pained grimace. Fuck.

“How are you feeling?” Sansa asked, concern in her tone.

Stannis grimaced. “I don’t really want to talk about it.”

“Is there anything I can do for you? To make you feel better?”

“Just tell me you’re still sure we made the right choice.”

Sansa stifled a laugh. “You think I’d say anything else after the last two hours?”

Stannis huffed out a tired, amused little breath. Screaming children didn’t really increase the desire for more noise machines. “Perhaps not.”

“Is Myrcella still with Shireen?” Sansa asked after a few beats of silence.

“Yes, they were painting their nails.” And discussing something that had made Shireen look surprised and flustered when he had interrupted. Stannis wondered why that might have been.

“And?” Sansa was giving him a shrewd look.

“Nothing… I’m - I’m sure it’s nothing.” It was probably some mysterious girl thing.
“Now you’ve made me curious.” Sansa was leaning forward, and her loose top was suddenly affording him rather an interesting view.

“Oh, um.” Why did his balls have to hurt?

“You know, I’ve been noticing that something is different with her lately,” Sansa said, moving her arms in a way that made the view he was having a hard time tearing his eyes away from even more interesting.

“Hm?” He was too tired to even attempt to stop his impolite staring.

“Yes, I think she’s been kidnapped by space aliens and replaced with a robot version of herself.”

Gods, her breasts were gorgeous. He could still play with them, couldn’t he? He could still do things for her in bed, even though he wasn’t allowed to use his cock for a few more days…

“Stannis?”

He finally managed to shift his eyes away from Sansa’s cleavage when he heard her tone change.

“You didn’t hear a word of what I just said, did you?” She looked amused.

Stannis tried to remember. *Space aliens? That couldn’t be right.* “Er, no.” He felt himself redden.

“I was saying that I think Shireen has been acting a bit strange.”

“You think?” It was very tempting to go back to looking down Sansa’s shirt, but he forced himself to keep looking at her face. They were discussing something important. He needed to focus.

“Yes, I have no idea what it is, though. She hasn’t approached me to talk about whatever it is, and she hasn’t been moody or difficult so I don’t really feel right about asking her about it. It might not be something that she’s willing to share with me.”

“Do you think I should talk to her?” *What if it’s girl things?* He tried not to panic at the thought. He was a grown man. If it was girl things he would be able to handle it.

“Maybe? But maybe not? She seems to be doing well socially and at school, so maybe it’s not fair to interrogate her?” Sansa sighed. “Teenagers are hard.”

“Babies are hard,” Stannis muttered.

They exchanged tired, amused looks.

“Do you want to have a bath after Myrcella leaves?” Sansa asked, blushing faintly in a way that told Stannis that she was actually asking him if he wanted to grope her while she was naked and slippery.

“Yes, please.” The warm water might make his bruised balls feel a bit better, too.

They leant towards each other to share a kiss, but right as their lips met the baby monitor went off.

“Dada!” It was Minisa.

Stannis pulled back from Sansa and looked at the monitor. Both Minisa and Steffon had been babbling ‘Mama’ and ‘Dada’ every now and again for a while now, but he had never heard Minisa say it like that when he wasn’t even near her.
“Do you think she’s really calling for you?” Sansa asked, tentatively hopeful.

“I don’t know,” he said, furrowing his brow, “I thought the books said that babies don’t really start equating words like ‘Mama’ or ‘Dada’ with us until they’re close to the one year mark?”

“March is only a few months away,” Sansa said, sounding excited now.

“Dada!” It was Minisa again.

“Do you think I should go and check on her?” Stannis asked, feeling a bit uncertain. They usually tried not to go into the nursery when the babies were supposed to be going to sleep.

“Let’s both go,” Sansa said in an even more excited tone of voice.

They stole into the nursery, trying to be as quiet as they could in case Steffon was sleeping. They left the door wide open, letting the light from the hallway shine into the dark room.

Minisa was standing in her cot, holding onto the bars and smiling happily at them both. “Dada,” she said when she spotted him.

“It’s time to go to sleep, sweetheart,” he whispered, placing his hand on her little head. “Aren’t you tired?”

“She looks wide awake,” Sansa said.

“Should I pick her up?” This was all very out of the ordinary routine.

“Maybe for a bit. Steffon seems to be asleep, so probably won’t start screaming with jealousy.”

Stannis lifted Minisa into his arms and she immediately hugged him with her chubby little arms, clearly thrilled to have got her way.

“I should get the camera,” Sansa whispered, looking at him with a very tender expression on her face.

“No, don’t,” Stannis whispered, “the flash will just annoy her.” He held his daughter close and walked over to the window, trying to make soothing, rocking movements.

Sansa followed them, still looking tender.

“I never told you about the first time I heard her say ‘Dada’, did I?” he murmured after a while, feeling like now was the right time to tell Sansa about it.

“Don’t be silly, I was right there when it happened.” Sansa touched his arm lightly, smiling up at him. She was referring to the second time it happened, when Sansa and Steffon had been present. Steffon had started to babble ‘Dada’ that day, too, and ‘Mama’ had happened - for both twins - very soon after that. Stannis had been at work when the first ‘Mama’ happened, but Sansa had called him and let him listen on the phone. He had been in the middle of a meeting, but he had put everything on hold to listen as Sansa got Steffon to burble out another ‘Mama’ for his benefit.

“No, she said it before then,” Stannis explained, going on to tell her the story of that special Sunday afternoon in the fall.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Sansa asked, shaking her head slightly.

Stannis shrugged. He wasn’t sure he could explain it.
“Well, I’m glad you told me now,” Sansa said, kissing his cheek. “It sounds like it was a beautiful moment.”

They were all quiet for a little while, and soon Stannis realised that Minisa was asleep. He put her down in her cot, and he and Sansa went back to the kitchen table.

“I’m glad they said ‘Dada’ first,” Sansa told him with an enigmatic smile. “I hoped they would.”

He gave her a puzzled look. “Why?”

“I thought it would make you happy,” she said, blushing prettily.

“Hearing them say ‘Mama’ would have made me just as happy,” he said, reaching to stroke Sansa’s pink cheek. “You’re a wonderful mother.”

Sansa leant over the table to give him a lingering kiss. “And you’re a wonderful father,” she said as they broke apart.

The kiss lit a fire low in his belly that made him curse the fact that he couldn’t take her to bed.

Next week.

“But I still think we made the right choice,” Sansa added.

It took Stannis a moment to understand that she was referring to the vasectomy. “That’s good,” he said once he caught on.

“We’ll have more time for Steffon and Minisa, and for each other,” she said with a dreamy smile.

Stannis was very interested in the ‘each other’ part of that equation at the moment.

“Do we have to wait for Myrcella to leave to have that bath?” Stannis asked in a low, heated voice, feeling like the bath might be a very acceptable way to deal with the hardships of having to wait for sex.

Sansa bit her lip and seemed to think it over. “No, let’s just go.” Her eyes sparkled.

Stannis barely noticed the pain below his belt as he hurried upstairs with Sansa. He had a steaming hot bath to get to.
“Stannis?”

“Mm?”

“Could you pass the salt?”

Stannis tore his eyes from Sansa and searched his surroundings for the salt. It was right in front of him. He handed it to Robb without comment and went back to observing his wife.

She was just eating, but she met his eyes every now and then, and he loved how pleased she always looked when she caught him looking. He was eating too, of course, but he had absolutely no idea what he was putting in his mouth. He was more focused on doing what he had been wholly unable to do for the first months after the twins were born: enjoying the ability to sit down and eat at the same time as Sansa when other people were available and willing to feed and entertain the babies.

It was always hard to let go and let someone else have a turn with the twins, but it got easier as they got older, and Ned and Catelyn were really very good with them. Perhaps they’d be willing to babysit overnight sometime soon? Stannis wouldn’t mind having Sansa all to himself now that his doctor had just confirmed that he was officially sterile. No more condoms. No worries about birth control. Just lots of carefree, blissfully satisfying sex.

“Darling,” Sansa whispered, touching his foot with hers under the table, “you have to stop.”

“Stop what?” he murmured, imagining how gratifying it would be to spend a whole evening with Sansa without the babies interrupting them. Perhaps he would forbid clothing for the duration of the night? Fuck her on the stairs? They still hadn’t managed to do that…

“Looking at me like that,” she whispered, blushing crimson. She was glancing around a bit nervously, obviously worried that someone might notice their conversation. Thankfully little Ned and Steffon were both doing something suitably adorable to draw most people’s attention. (Eating messily, from what Stannis could see out of the corner of his eye.)

“Looking at you like what?” he said, pitching his voice deep and low.

“Stannis.”

He knew she meant business when she said his name like that, so he forced himself to stop giving her heated looks at the dinner table. It really was rather improper.

“Are you going to throw Minnie and Stanny a birthday party?” Robb asked once he was no longer looking at their sons smear sauce all over their faces.

“Of course,” Sansa said before Stannis had a chance to scold Robb for using the nicknames. “It’ll be Sunday after next. We’ll be sending the invites out in a few days. I hope you’ll all be able to make it.”

Robb glanced over at his wife. “Sunday after next? Do we have anything planned?”

Jeyne shook her head and took a sip of her drink.

“Hm, will there be cake?” Robb asked Sansa, pretending to be indecisive.
“Yes,” Sansa said with a smile.

“Well, then I’ll definitely be there.”

“Me too!” Rickon added.

Stannis did his best to bury his intense desire for Sansa while the Starks were in the house, but he couldn’t seem to keep his eyes from being drawn to her if he went more than a few minutes without looking. It was as if she were a magnet for his gaze.

By the time they were finally alone in bed, the baby monitor the only thing that could possibly interrupt them, Stannis was almost mad with need.

“Finally,” he said with a bit of a growl, groping at her skin under the covers and licking and kissing her rather messily, letting his tongue leave a glistening trail from her neck to her mouth.

“Stannis, wait,” Sansa said, sounding like she really wanted him to wait.

He stopped trying to devour her neck and looked at her. He did not quite stop groping her.

“I wanted to ask you something before you make me forget my name,” she said, a hint of a giggle in her voice.

“Ask quickly,” he said, squeezing her arse. Wasn’t she as excited as he was to start having sex without condoms again?

“Well, I already asked Shireen, but I’m not sure she told me the truth.”

“Oh?” He buried his nose in Sansa’s fragrant hair and rubbed his erection against her thigh, letting her feel how much he wanted her.

“It’s just - it’s as if she and Bran have had a fight or something. They were barely looking at each other today. Has she said anything to you? She said everything was fine when I asked her, but I’m just not sure I believe her…”

“No, she hasn’t said anything. She looked fine to me.” Stannis hadn’t noticed anything unusual about Shireen and Bran today. He had noticed that Shireen seemed cheerful lately, both because she smiled more and because Sansa kept pointing it out, but he really hadn’t been paying attention this afternoon or at dinner.

He had been a bit preoccupied. No more condoms.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” He needed this conversation to be over. Thankfully, Sansa seemed to have finished talking, so he claimed her mouth, thrusting his tongue forward in time with his hips as he rubbed himself against her.

Sansa moaned and started to meet his tongue with hers, her fingers tickling the nape of his neck and her body melting under his touch. The satin of her nightgown was no barrier at all, and he had it pushed up over her breasts in no time. Next the covers went away so that he could see her as he lavished her body with open-mouthed kisses on his way down to her centre.

It was sweet to listen to Sansa come apart under his tongue, and sweeter still to let the anticipation within him build and build until he was convinced he would die if he did not get inside her soon.
He did die a little when he finally entered her -- the pleasure of being bare inside her after months and months of latex almost too much for him to handle. Sansa’s decadent sighs and moans of pleasure were all that tethered him to the present moment, her hands on his body the only anchors to this reality. When she dug her nails into his back he realised he needed to move.

“Fuck, Sansa…” he heard himself groan, the warm, wet slide of her causing him to shiver and shake with pleasure.

“How does it feel?” she asked in a breathless whisper.

“It’s so fucking good,” he said, speeding up and thrusting with more urgency. “I can’t believe how good you feel,” he added, his breathing becoming ragged.

“It’s good for me, too,” she told him, her hands stroking his back and his arse as he pinned her down and rutted into her. “Your cock is so amazing,” she whispered, the ‘dirty’ word still capable of making her blush.

He grunted and sped up, liking the compliment and wanting to reward her for it.

Sansa seemed to understand this as she continued to blush and moan out more lovely words to spur him on. (“So big - oh - I’m so full, oh, oh, oh!”)

In the end he had hooked her legs over his shoulders, bending her almost in two as he pounded himself into her with all the force he could muster, listening to her cries get louder and louder in that certain perfect way, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from coming before she broke apart.

Finally she was sobbing his name and clenching up around his completely naked cock, and the sensation had his balls tightening up and his climax hitting him almost instantaneously.

He wanted to let himself go and just rest on top of Sansa, but he knew it couldn’t be comfortable for her to bend the way she was, so he forced his spent muscles to cooperate and let him roll off. Sansa sounded put out at first when he pulled out of her, but she made a relieved noise when his movements allowed her to get her legs down.

“That was wonderful,” she purred, snuggling up to him. “I really don’t think I’ll miss the condoms.”

Stannis huffed out a short laugh. “No. Definitely not.”

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When Robert had started hollering for him and Ned, Stannis really hadn’t expected to leave the perfectly normal birthday party for his one year old twins and enter the Twilight Zone. The Twilight Zone where Robert had apparently caught his daughter doing… something with Brandon Stark in the hallway bathroom.

“I’m dating Bran.”

How was it possible that Shireen was ‘dating’ Bran? They were just friends. Just. Friends. And they were too young to ‘date’. This was all some kind of misunderstanding. A glance at Ned made his stomach clench up uncomfortably. Ned did not look like he thought this was a misunderstanding. He did not seem surprised at all.

“Did you know about this?” he hissed at his father-in-law, feeling like this was the sort of information Ned should have shared.
“Me? No!”

Stannis narrowed his eyes at Ned, not believing his claim of innocence at all. But he’d have to have things out with Ned later. First he needed to deal with his daughter.

How could she be ‘dating’ already?

His stomach kept clenching up and doing flips and all sorts of circus tricks, and he hardly knew what to say.

“How long has this been going on?” he managed to ask, hoping that the circus inside him would leave soon. Robert said something about being relieved that no one was keeping secrets from him. How could he be relieved? Shireen was the one who had been keeping secrets, and Stannis was certainly not relieved.

“Can we maybe get out of the bathroom? This is a little weird,” Bran said, interrupted Stannis’ staring match with Shireen and prompting him to glare at the young man who was ‘dating’ his daughter instead.

Stannis couldn’t stop himself. He shook his finger at the boy and told him to be quiet, acting like the worst sort of parody of an angry parent and not caring even a little bit.

“Now Stannis, there’s no need to—”

Stannis turned to glare at Ned now. How dare Ned interrupt? Ned’s son was ‘dating’ Shireen, and Stannis was pretty sure that Shireen was not ready to be ‘dated’. It was practically a crime. “No need for what?” he began, feeling full of righteous rage, “your son—”

“Darling, I really do think we should let the kids out of the bathroom before we talk about anything,” Sansa said, cutting him off. He didn’t like being cut off, but when he turned towards her, he felt some of the anger and the tension he was feeling fade. She was looking at him in a way that told him he needed to take a breath and think.

Minisa babbled out a nonsense word, clearly agreeing with her mother.

Right. Stannis took a breath, and once his mind was clear he understood that he needed to talk to Shireen alone. Still feeling a bit too angry to be polite, he ordered his daughter to his study.

Sansa sidled up to him as he started to push his way through the crowd of birthday guests with Shireen on his heels. “Don’t be too hard on her,” Sansa whispered, squeezing his hand lightly, “let her explain.”

Stannis clenched his jaw and didn’t answer. He wasn’t sure he could make any such promises.

It was easier to think once he and Shireen were in his study, but he still had trouble processing everything Shireen was telling him.

His daughter had been ‘dating’ Brandon Stark for nearly six months without telling him or Sansa about it? Going about her day as if nothing had changed -- as if she didn’t need advice or help now that she was embarking on something as complicated as a romantic entanglement?

He felt angry at the way she had been lying by omission, hurt to have been excluded in such an enormous way, and terrified that his little girl had grown up so much without him noticing.

Didn’t she need him anymore? Could she really be old enough to traipse off with some… boy?
“Look, I really meant to tell you. I really didn’t mean for everyone to find out like this. I wanted to tell you first. I just couldn’t find the right moment. You were always so busy with work and the babies… and I also wanted to make sure first.” Shireen’s face was earnest and full of emotion, and her tone was pleading.

Stannis felt a pang of guilt at Shireen’s words, but at the same time he really didn’t think she was being fair. She could have talked to him at any time. He was never so busy that he couldn’t make time for Shireen if she had asked to speak to him. She knew that. She had always known that.

“Make sure of what?” he asked, trying to ignore the guilt that nagged at him despite all reason and logic.

“That this was something worth mentioning.”

Stannis furrowed his brow. What on earth was she talking about? She couldn’t mean that she had waited six months to feel certain that her relationship with Bran was worth mentioning, could she?

A bit of prompting encouraged Shireen to explain that she and Bran liked each other a lot, but Stannis really couldn’t see how that made it all right to keep the relationship a secret for months on end. He pointed this out, keeping his tone sharp, but he could feel the initial burst of anger winding down. He was left with disappointment and frustration, along with a certain amount of annoyance with Shireen for causing a very inappropriate scene at the twins’ first birthday party.

But he supposed it could have been worse. The twins would probably not remember this birthday, after all.

Feeling very old, he asked whether Shireen and Bran were in a respectful relationship with each other and was relieved when Shireen said that they were. Hopefully they would be staying respectfully clothed at all times until Shireen turned at least twenty-two. He tried to communicate with a look that he did not want her to start having sex anytime soon, but when his piercing look was met with a blank expression, he sighed and gave up. Perhaps Sansa would be able to explain to Shireen that she should definitely not be in any hurry to start having sex...

He needed to stop thinking about Shireen possibly having sex.

“Why Bran, though?” he asked, trying to distract himself. It seemed perfectly absurd. Couldn’t she have started to date someone like Devan? Someone Stannis knew and trusted?

“You don’t like him,” Shireen said, her tone dejected.

Stannis tried to explain that he neither liked or disliked Bran -- that he simply didn’t know him.

“Well you would know him better if you ever paid attention to other humans and not just Sansa,” Shireen shot at him, her expression a bit sour.

Stannis felt his face heat up. He had been a bit preoccupied with Sansa lately, but he hadn’t realised it was so obvious to his daughter. Thankfully, Shireen changed the subject before he was required to figure out a way to respond to the accusation.

“Is the problem that Bran is Sansa’s brother?” she asked.

He suppressed a sigh. Stannis would have preferred it if Shireen had changed the subject to something a bit less difficult.

“It’s just… unusual. It complicates things a little.” More than a little.
They discussed what would happen at the numerous Stark-Baratheon family gatherings if Bran and Shireen were to break up, and Stannis was surprised that Shireen seemed to have thought about it. She said that if things didn’t work out between her and Bran, they would just have to be ‘mature’.

He thought teenagers were supposed to think that their first relationship would last forever?

And since when could teenagers be mature about anything?

This would all end in tears. Stannis just knew it. It would be an absolute nightmare, and it would ruin the comfortable family atmosphere that everyone had worked so hard to establish and nurture. Even Robert had been improving himself...

“Are you angry?” Shireen looked small and vulnerable as she asked her question, and Stannis wished for a moment that Shireen was little again. Little like Minisa. It would be so easy then to just take her into his arms and kiss the top of her head, call her sweetheart and let her know that he could never stay angry at her for very long.

But Shireen wasn’t little. She was far too grown, and that was the whole problem.

Why was Shireen in such a hurry to grow up, anyway? There really was no rush. There was no reason for her to start doing grown up things like ‘date’. Stannis had been forced to grow up the minute he had witnessed the car crash that had taken his parents, and it wasn’t something he would wish on his worst enemy. Didn’t Shireen understand how lucky she was to have all the time in the world to be a young teenager? Didn’t she know what a privilege it was not to be forced to enter the adult world before the time was right?

He pinched the bridge of his nose and tried to think of the right thing to say.

The truth would have to do.

“I’m not angry. I’ve just been brought face to face with the fact that you are growing up a lot faster than I expected. And it’s not an easy thing to accept.” It was surprisingly hard to get the words out, but he managed it.

Shireen looked like she was on the verge of tears, and Stannis hurried to continue.

“Look, I understand that you want to have your private life, but… I don’t want you to feel like you can’t share things with us. You don’t need to tell us everything. But don’t leave us completely in the dark.”

_Six months!

Surely it wasn’t too much to ask for her to keep him and Sansa in the loop?

He was relieved when Shireen nodded without arguing. This conversation was leaving him with a very uncharacteristic need to have a glass of something stronger than tea.

Feeling a bit awkward, he told Shireen that she was free to go.

She stood up and went to the door, but before she left she stopped and gave him an anxious look. “Er. Are we cool now?”

Stannis felt the sudden urge to smile, though he managed to keep his expression stern. Shireen had sounded a lot like Renly when he had been her age just then.
But Shireen wasn’t Renly, and Stannis wasn’t ‘cool’. He was still upset that Shireen had gone six months (!) without telling him or Sansa about her entanglement with Bran. That was a long time to be dishonest, and he hated the fact that he hadn’t noticed. He had only barely been able to see that Shireen had been more cheerful for a while now, and it was frustrating to know that he had been so oblivious.

He supposed he was annoyed with himself as much as he was annoyed with his daughter.

Shireen was looking at him, waiting for an answer. He searched for one that would ring true.

“We will be,” he said in the end, feeling like it was the best he could do.

It might take him a while to deal with his upset, disappointed feelings, but eventually they would fade. He really could not imagine a world where he could stay angry with any of his children for very long.

A world where he could stay angry with Ned was quite easy to imagine, however.

Stannis waited until he felt sure Shireen had made it downstairs before following her, ignoring Robert’s attempts to talk to him and walking straight up to Ned.

He put on his most menacing expression and used his darkest tone of voice. “We need to talk.”

Ned followed Stannis over to a slightly more secluded part of the living room willingly enough, but he had the nerve to look amused rather than intimidated.

“He didn’t know anything,” Ned said, his eyes twinkling, “I might have suspected a thing or two, but I didn’t know.”

Stannis ground his teeth in a way he usually only did when he was talking to Robert. “Tell me what you suspected, then.”

“I suspected the kids were headed towards a bit of a romance. They seemed to get along in that sort of way. They gave each other looks. Teased each other.” Ned shrugged and smiled a bit sentimentally. “Young love.”

“You saw all this and you didn’t say anything? You didn’t try to stop them?” Stannis felt appalled, and after a moment of thinking things through he realised something that made everything even worse. “You encouraged them!”

“You whatever do you mean?” Ned asked, tilting his head to the side.

“You kept letting your son borrow your car and drive Shireen halfway across the country to - to - to push them together!”

“Trust me, there was no need for me to push them together,” Ned chuckled.

“How can you be so calm about this?” Stannis asked, running a hand through his hair and feeling like Ned really wasn’t taking this seriously.

“Calm?”

“Yes, how can you act like your smug son isn’t trying to… despoil my daughter?”
“That’s a bit dramatic,” Ned said mildly.

“Well? How am I supposed to feel? I don’t know if I can trust Bran. I really don’t want my daughter to get pregnant before she even starts University. What if he’s all wrong for her? What if he’s not treating her the way she should be treated?”

Ned looked more and more amused with every new word that came out of Stannis’ mouth, and Stannis hated it.

“Well, you’ll just have to trust her judgement, like I had to trust Sansa’s,” Ned said, practically bursting with gleeful mirth.

Stannis felt like the wind had been knocked out of him. It had been such a long time since Ned had accepted him as Sansa’s significant other than he had forgotten that Ned must have gone through the anguish Stannis was currently suffering. Because of him.

He felt his face twist into a sour expression. “I suppose you think this is very funny,” he snapped, clenching his jaw shut when Ned gave him a cheerful nod.

“Well, if you’re not going to be helpful, I’m not going to talk to you.” Stannis knew he was being petulant and rather immature, but he stormed out of the living room and into the kitchen. He wanted to pace around and scowl, and he didn’t want Sansa to give him disapproving looks for it.

He had a few very satisfying minutes to do just that, and he was just settling into a proper sulk by the time someone came along to bother him.

“There you are.” Of course it was Robert. “Sansa and Shireen are looking for you. They want to start opening presents.”

“They can do it without me,” Stannis muttered.

“Upset about Bran and Shireen?” Robert asked, leaning against the kitchen counter and looking at Stannis with an open expression.

Stannis supposed he wouldn’t be able to avoid talking to Robert forever, so he decided to just get it over with. “Shireen has been hiding this for months,” he said, the words bursting out like pus from a boil, “And I didn’t notice anything was going on.”

“Months?”

“Six months!”

Robert’s eyes widened. “How did you manage to miss it?”

“I don’t know,” Stannis moaned, rubbing his eyes.

“Well, that’s just unsettling. You’re usually so observant,” Robert pointed out, furrowing his brow.

“Why is it unsettling?” Stannis asked, feeling like that was an odd word for Robert to choose.

“Myrcella hasn’t started dating...” Robert trailed off and frowned at the floor.

Stannis understood. Robert was worrying that he wouldn’t notice when Myrcella started dating. Robert shook his head like a dog shaking off water. “Ah, they’re all little rapscallions, aren’t they?” He was chuckling as if he hadn’t just been worrying.
“I really thought Selyse and I raised Shireen better than to sneak around like that,” Stannis said, not really feeling up to laughing the whole thing off like Robert seemed to be doing.

“Oh, you know what teenagers are like. They like to rebel. Test the boundaries.”

Stannis made a vague sound in response and nodded. He hadn’t felt the need to ‘rebel’, but all the books agreed with what Robert was saying.

“Not Myrcella, though. She’s an absolute angel.” There was something forceful and stubborn about the way Robert said it, and Stannis knew he was trying to convince himself as much as he was trying to convince Stannis.

It was probably safest to just nod.

Robert suddenly clapped Stannis on the back. “Buck up, it’s not the end of the world. Come watch the girls unwrap the presents. I got Steffon something really good. You’ll love it!”

Stannis allowed Robert to lead him back to the living room, a sense of dread settling in the pit of his stomach. He had the distinct feeling that Robert had decided to give Steffon something noisy.

Unfortunately, the feeling proved correct. (It was a plastic drum kit that played music. Each new song was more grating on the nerves than the last.)

It was hard to get back into the routine of putting the twins to bed after the party wound down and the guests all left, and Stannis ended up putting Steffon in a pair of Minisa’s pyjamas by mistake. This did not appear to bother Steffon very much, and Stannis was too tired to fix it. “Just don’t tell your Uncle Robert about this,” he muttered before kissing his son good night.

Stannis felt a little uncomfortable as he joined Sansa and Shireen in the living room. The two of them had been cleaning up after the party while he had been putting the twins to sleep, and by the looks of things they were just finishing up.

“Is it okay if I go to my room?” Shireen asked, her voice a little subdued.

“Yes, thanks for all the help.” Sansa gave Shireen a tired smile.

When Stannis heard Shireen’s bedroom door close behind her, he sat down on the nearest sofa and looked at Sansa.

“How did we miss this?” he asked, hoping that Sansa would have some magical answer that would absolve him of being such a clueless parent.

“I wouldn’t say that we missed it entirely,” Sansa said, sitting down next to him and leaving a trash bag full of shredded wrapping paper on the floor. “We did notice something was different.”

“Six months,” Stannis said. “Six!”

“I know, darling,” Sansa said, wrapping her arms around him in a comforting embrace. “But it’s not such a bad thing. They’re happy with each other.”

“I just… I can’t believe I didn’t see it.”

Sansa didn’t say anything. She just stroked him in a way that encouraged him to keep talking.
“Shireen accused me of being too wrapped up in you to notice ‘other humans’,” he said, feeling himself redden again at the memory.

Sansa sat up at that, and gave him an amused look. “Well, that’s a bit true.”

“I didn’t realise she’d noticed that,” he muttered, feeling even more embarrassed now than he had been earlier.

“Everyone notices that,” Sansa said with a kind smile.

Stannis frowned down at his hands. Everyone?

“Hey,” Sansa was touching his cheek, getting him to look back at her. “It’s not a bad thing.”

“Isn’t it?” It had prevented him from noticing that his daughter was ‘dating’.

“I like how focused you are,” Sansa said with a blush. “Part of what drew me to you in the first place was how intense you were when we were talking at Bran’s birthday party. I felt like I was the only person in the world as far as you were concerned. It was -”

“Unnerving?” he interjected, looking down at his hands again.

“Sexy,” Sansa corrected, leaning in to kiss him.

He deepened the kiss and allowed himself a few moments to enjoy his wife’s warm lips before pulling away.

“You really think so?” he murmured.

Sansa’s blush from before deepened. “Well, if you ask Arya she’ll tell you that I ‘waste away if no one is giving me attention’.”

Annoyance spiked within him at the very mention of Arya’s name. Why did she always have to needle Sansa about every aspect of her personality? It got on his very last nerve to see the way Arya treated Sansa, and it was not just because Stannis knew what it was like to have a difficult relationship with a sibling.

“I don’t like the way she talks to you,” Stannis said, unable to keep his thoughts to himself.

“I know,” Sansa sighed, “but you know I always gave as good as I got when we were kids. We’re fine now. We get along just fine.”

Stannis wasn’t convinced. To him it seemed that Arya had not stopped needling Sansa even though Sansa had stopped teasing in return. It was not fair, and he could tell that it upset Sansa even though she always tried to hide it.

“What I meant to say is that Arya wasn’t entirely wrong,” Sansa said with a self-deprecating smile. “I do like being the centre of attention. Especially yours.”

Stannis searched her face. “You don’t think it’s… too much?”

“No. I really don’t. I love the way you look at me. But we do need to be careful to pay attention to other people, too,” Sansa said and pursed her lips. “Maybe we could make a rule? Every time we’re at a family dinner we have to have one conversation with each person present before we’re allowed to stare at each other?”
Stannis could tell that Sansa wasn’t being entirely serious, but not entirely facetious, either.

He reached for her hair and ran his hand through the soft locks. “If you think it’s wise,” he said, pulling her towards him for another kiss.

“Can you believe it’s been a year?” Sansa sighed when they broke apart.

A year since Sansa went through the ordeal of giving birth. A year of watching their babies grow. How had the time gone by so quickly?

“You were so brave when the twins came,” he murmured, stroking Sansa’s hair and wishing he had thought to give Sansa a gift to mark the occasion.

Sansa pressed her face to his chest and hugged him tightly. “It was easy to be brave with you helping me.”

“I think your memory is faulty. I wasn’t much help at all,” Stannis said, remembering how he had panicked when he hadn’t been able to find the car keys.

“You were with me. That was all I needed.”

“I’ll always be here,” he said, feelings of love surging and expanding inside of him.

“I know.” Sansa’s voice was like a caress, and she was tilting her head in that certain inviting way. He kissed her, and she was quick to guide them towards deep, passionate kisses that were so good that it was tempting to forget to breathe.

Stannis was pleased when Sansa ended up straddling him on the sofa, giving him hope that this impromptu makeout session might turn into something more, but less pleased when the baby monitor went off just as he had started to try to unhook her bra.

“I’ll go,” Sansa said, kissing his cheek before she got off his lap. “We really shouldn’t get carried away in the living room when Shireen is at home, anyway.”

“I know.” He tried not to feel too grumpy. “Do you want me to come with you?”

“No, I’m sure it’s nothing. Steffon probably just dropped Octavio on the floor again.”

Stannis scrubbed his face and tried to get his brain to start working. He knew Sansa was right about doing things on the sofa when Shireen was at home. It would be awkward if she ever walked in on them.

Oh, gods. Did he have to start worrying about possibly walking in on Shireen and Bran? Robert had certainly walked in on them doing something today. Kissing.

Stannis would have to make sure that sort of thing didn’t happen again. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to keep from throttling Bran if he ever saw him do anything… inappropriate with Shireen, and Shireen would probably be upset with him if he hurt her boyfriend.

Boyfriend.

The word seemed to echo inside his brain as Stannis did his best to forget exactly how horny a teenage boy could get.

What if Bran was like Robert?
“Darling, what’s wrong?” Sansa had returned.

“You have to tell Shireen that she can’t have sex,” he blurted out. “She might listen to you.”

Sansa’s eyebrows flew to her hairline and she opened her mouth to gape at him. “What?”

“What if I walk in on it? I can’t see something like that. I can’t.” His heart was pounding and his palms had started to sweat.

Sansa sat down, took both his hands in hers, and looked him right in the eyes. “We can’t tell Shireen whether or not to have sex. She’s old enough to decide for herself. All we can do is make sure that she’s being safe, and respect her privacy.”

Stannis frowned at her. His heart was still pounding. “But -”

“I promise that you won’t walk in on anything you don’t want to see if you’re always careful to knock,” she added in a firm tone of voice, squeezing his hands lightly.

“She’s only sixteen,” he protested, feeling that Sansa was saying the opposite of what she should be saying.

“I was doing very racy things by the time I was fourteen, you know,” Sansa said, her eyes sparkling, “just be glad she isn’t younger.”

“What racy things?” Fourteen? Hadn’t that been when Sansa had been dating Willas Tyrell online?

“Oh, you know,” Sansa said, her cheeks pinkening.

“I don’t,” he said, feeling very left out.

Sansa got up from the sofa and picked the trash bag up from the floor. “Play your cards right and I might show you one day,” she said, winking at him and heading for the kitchen.

Show him what? What cards? What was he missing?

“Wait,” Stannis said, getting up and following Sansa. “What do you mean?”

Unfortunately, instead of finding answers, Stannis was given a kitchen to clean.

He didn’t realise until hours later that Sansa had managed to distract him completely from his thoughts about his daughter’s sex life.
Stannis stared at his computer screen, feeling a little like he might throw it out the window if Robert sent him one more email complaining about the board member from Volantis - the one who had a completely unpronounceable name - that was driving them both insane. He was trying to do some work in a spreadsheet, and it was very irritating to switch to his email program every two minutes. Maybe he should listen to Davos and get two computer monitors set up…

His computer gave a cheerful chime.

Another damn email, Robert? Stannis ground his teeth together and went to check. It was tempting to just ignore the new email, but it might not be from Robert this time. It might be important.

Stannis stopped grinding his teeth in favour of letting his mouth drop open in surprise.

The email was from Sansa.

Darling,

How has your day been going so far? I hope you’re not feeling too annoyed about that board member from Volantis. He sounded like a nightmare.

The twins are having their nap.

I’m in bed, too…

Sansa usually only emailed him for practical reasons, and she usually preferred to call him. She always said she liked hearing his voice. This was quite out of the ordinary.

Should he answer her? Or did she want him to call her? Why was she in bed?

Stannis got the vague feeling that she was flirting with him, but he wasn’t certain.

Feeling a little warmer than he had felt a few minutes before, he decided to answer the email. Perhaps his answer would prompt her to clarify her meaning.

Sansa,

The board member from Volantis was sent from one of the seven hells to torment me.

Why are you in bed?

-SB

Stannis tried to go back to his spreadsheet while he waited for Sansa’s answer, but mostly he stared at the corner of his screen where the little email notification usually appeared. He clicked on it as fast as he could when it popped up and the chime sounded.

I’m in bed because I’m thinking of you and wishing you were here with me…

Stannis definitely felt a little too warm, now. Sansa was flirting with him. She was flirting with him even though it was the middle of the day and he was at work.

Swallowing thickly, he went to write a quick response. He had to ask her to stop. This was
inappropriate.

I’ll be home at half past five.

Her next email came so quickly that he hadn’t even had time to switch over to his spreadsheet.

What would you do with me if you were here right now?

Stannis looked around his empty office and checked his calendar. The meeting with the dreaded board member wasn’t until three o’clock. He loosened his tie a little, feeling uncomfortably hot.

Suspecting that he might regret what he was about to do, but too curious to resist, he quickly typed a short message.

What would you like me to do?

He spent the next several minutes fretting that Sansa would write something terribly inappropriate and that his work computer might not be a safe place for such a message. What if the email ended up all over the company? All over the Internet?

When he had almost started to panic, he remembered that his work computer was actually quite well protected, and that he’d have to be especially careless with his passwords to run into any kind of trouble.

The chime of a new email sounded, and Stannis opened the message in a rush, his heart beating like a drum.

I want you to play with me. Blindfold me and tie me up so that you can enjoy every part of my naked body at your leisure. Tease me with little touches here and there until my nipples are stiff and I’m so wet that my inner thighs are glistening for you. I want you to make me squirm and beg for your cock, and then I want you to fuck me until I can’t walk.

The words on the screen caused an immediate and very inappropriate physical reaction to manifest in his trousers.

Why are you doing this to me? he thought, looking at the little icon next to Sansa’s name. It was a picture of her where she was smiling and not at all looking like someone who would torture her husband at work.

He decided to type out a quick reply in the hope that she would stop.

I’m at work, Sansa.

He looked down at the bulge below his belt in dismay, and tried to think of something that wasn’t arousing.

Baby poop. Baby poop was not at all arousing.

He deflated a little.

The computer chimed.

I can’t help it. I’m touching myself right now and imagining your hands on me. I’m aching for you… I’ve been using my vibrator but it’s just not enough. I need you to fill me with your perfect cock. I need you to fuck me hard and fast and deep.
Stannis groaned and shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He was even harder than before, now. The mental image of Sansa writhing around in their bed, trying to get herself off with a vibrator and only managing to make herself more desperate for his cock, was making him want to take the rest of the day off and go take care of her.

It surprised him that she was able to type these sorts of messages while she was in bed. It surprised him that she was able to spell this manner of thing out at all. She was usually so shy about saying all the ‘dirty words’. Perhaps she felt differently about writing them down? Or was she blushing as she wrote these emails? Hardly able to breathe due to her embarrassment?

Feeling wretched that he was forced to stay at the office until five o’clock at least, he typed out an apologetic email.

_I’d come home early if I could. I’m sorry I can’t. I have that meeting. I’d very much like to spend some time doing everything you’ve suggested._

The second he hit send he started to wonder whether he’d need to go to his en suite and make use of some cold water in order to be able to get some work done. It did not feel like his erection would be going away any time soon.

Before he had time to come to a decision, a reply from Sansa appeared in his inbox.

There was no text. Just an image.

She was flushed, her hair was wild against her pillow, and her eyes heavy-lidded. He could see her breasts. Her nipples were puckered and clearly visible, and her hand was resting between them, her fingers pointing up towards her neck.

He made an involuntary choked sound and fumbled with the mouse until he was able to make the image disappear from his screen. He looked anxiously over his shoulder, suddenly afraid that someone might be standing outside his window and looking into his office. Even though the person standing outside would have to be equipped with a jet pack.

There was no one.

Of course there was no one.

… Maybe he should close the blinds just in case?

Stannis took a few deep breaths and tugged on his tie to loosen it a bit more. He was horribly tempted to open the picture again. His fingers were itching to click on the attachment, and his left hand was dangerously close to his lap.

_I’m at work, he reminded himself. I can’t look at pictures of my topless wife at work. It’s unprofessional._

He decided not to answer the picture message, and forced himself to go to his little en suite. It was awkward to walk across his office with a raging hard-on, and he tried to do it quickly, in case someone decided to barge in at exactly the wrong moment. Thankfully, no one did.

It took him a while to calm himself down sufficiently, but with the aid of a lot of cold water, a few thoughts about dirty diapers, and what it was like to be forced to go fishing, he eventually managed to get himself under control.

When he sat back down at his desk he noticed that he only had half an hour to finish his work on
that damned spreadsheet before he had to be at that meeting with Robert and the board member from Volantis.

*Fuck.*

***

Stannis couldn’t interrogate Sansa about the meaning of her emails when he got home from the office. The twins were awake, and Sansa was in the middle of preparing dinner. He might not have let those things stop him from asking her questions about the emails if Shireen hadn’t been in the kitchen, too.

He almost forgot about the emails over dinner when Shireen mentioned that she was going to Winterfell the following weekend, and had to struggle with himself to keep from asking her some very pointed questions about what exactly she and Bran would be doing together.

It had only been about a week since he had found out about Bran, and though he had been trying his best to do as Sansa told him to do and be respectful of his daughter’s new relationship, it was getting harder and harder to keep from asking whether Bran was the sort of person who stuck his gum on the bottom of his desk at school, and whether he always made sure to avoid products with palm oil if he could. (Stannis had watched a documentary about how rainforests, palm oil and orangutans. The situation was quite dire.)

Stannis caught a moment alone with Sansa after dinner, but they were not completely out of earshot of Shireen and the twins; they were putting the leftovers away and doing the dishes by hand like Sansa sometimes insisted on doing, and Shireen was in the next room, playing with the twins and keeping them out of trouble.

“You’re doing so well,” Sansa said as she handed him a glass she had just finished washing.

He started to dry the glass. “What do you mean?”

“With Shireen,” Sansa explained, “I can tell you’re dying to interrogate her about Bran. You’ve been resisting the urge admirably.”

“I think I should be allowed to ask her some questions.” He put the glass away and accepted another freshly washed one.

“I suppose,” Sansa said with an amused smile. “Give it a little more time, and try not to do it too frequently. She’ll have a sense of humour about it if it’s not incessant.”

Stannis grunted and continued to dry the things he was handed. Her teasing tone of voice had reminded him of how she had teased him at work, and he was annoyed that he couldn’t talk to her about it. Shireen might hear. The twins might hear. The twins were probably too young to make much sense of such conversation, but one could never be too careful.

Stannis waited. He waited all through bath time with the twins, and then all through putting the two unruly babies to sleep.

While he read nursery rhymes from a colourfully illustrated book he was wondering how he would go about asking Sansa what on earth she had been thinking to send him an… erotic picture at work. (He was fairly sure he accidentally said ‘breasts’ instead of beasts at one point, but Steffon and Minisa didn’t seem to mind.)

Sansa got on the phone with Margaery soon after the twins were down, and Stannis knew it was
useless to hang around and wait for her to finish talking to her friend. Not when Sansa had curled up comfortably on the sofa with a cup of tea. She obviously intended to have a good long chat. He went to his study and tried to get some work done. The minutes from today’s meeting needed to be checked, and he should probably remind Robert to pick up a suitable gift for the board member before the reception tomorrow. Robert would probably have his secretary do it, but Stannis still thought it was worth sending him a note.

It was quite late by the time Sansa and Stannis were alone in their bedroom, getting ready to go to sleep.

“What was that today?” he was finally able to ask.

“Hm?” Sansa asked, looking up from her task of applying some sort of ointment or moisturiser to her bare legs. It was rather distracting, but Stannis needed answers.

“The emails?”

Sansa smiled and ducked her head. “Oh, that.” She put her tube of moisturiser away and rubbed her shiny legs together with apparent relish. “I thought you were curious about what sort of racy things one can get up to without ever touching a person. You certainly seemed very curious when I brought it up last week.”

Stannis was glad he was sitting down. Sansa did this sort of things when she was fourteen? With Willas Tyrell?

“Stannis?” Sansa sounded concerned. She came over and sat down next to him on the edge of their bed. “Are you okay?”

“But you don’t like saying all the words,” he finally managed to choke out.

Sansa looked relieved at first, but then her face turned a little red. “It’s more embarrassing to say the words than it is to write them down,” she said. She was playing with a lock of her hair, twisting it around and around one finger. “But I don’t dislike saying them. I just need the right sort of motivation.”

Stannis’ heart started to beat a bit faster as he imagined the different things he could do to motivate her. He really did enjoy it when she blushed and begged for his cock in that shy whisper of hers.

With a glance at the baby monitor to make sure it was where he had put it and that it was turned on, Stannis decided he really needed to take Sansa’s nightgown off.

Sansa giggled and squealed when he attacked her with his hands and his mouth, kissing her wherever he could reach as he worked to get her naked.

“I believe you wanted to be tied up?” he whispered into her ear, a bit of a growl in his voice.

Sansa bit her lip and nodded, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

He used the tie he had been wearing at the office, and secured her wrists to the headboard. She wriggled around and gave him a heated look, obviously wanting him to touch her.

He made her wait for a little while.

“Stannis,” she eventually moaned, pouting at him.
He relented. Keeping himself under firm control, he started to kiss and fondle her, focusing mainly on her breasts, but making sure to lick at her neck in that spot that made her shiver, too.

“Did you send Willas Tyrell those sorts of emails when you were fourteen?” he asked as he pinched one of her nipples lightly. He was glad he hadn’t blindfolded her when her eyes flew open and widened.

“Not quite the same,” she said, trying to chase his fingers when he pulled them away from her nipple. He could tell that she was very turned on by the way she was squeezing her thighs together, but he was keeping from touching her anywhere below her navel in an effort to get her really worked up.

He moved his hand away, not touching her the way she wanted while he waited for her to elaborate.

She gave him an irritated look when she realised what he was doing.

With a sigh and a roll of her eyes and started to speak. “I didn’t know what I was talking about most of the time. I thought I knew enough to talk dirty because I knew how to touch myself and I’d read books and seen a few adult films, but I’d probably die of embarrassment if I read those emails today.”

He nodded thoughtfully and started to fondle her breasts again, making her moan.

“Did you send him pictures?” he asked, feeling more than a little jealous.

“Yes,” Sansa said breathlessly, “but nothing as racy as what I sent you today. I always wore underwear at the very least.”

That made Stannis feel a bit better, though he grimaced at the thought of what it would have been like for Willas to possess those pictures and find out that the girl in them was fourteen.

“It was very naughty of you to send that picture to me while I was at work,” he rasped, squeezing both her breasts at once and then pinching her nipples a little harder than he usually did.

Sansa made a very attractive little squeaking noise, and her cheeks flushed bright red.

“I think I will have to punish you,” he added, giving her a stern look.

Her eyes sparkled with interest and arousal. “Oh, no,” she said, her voice theatrical, “please don’t!” She was fighting a smile, and Stannis knew that she was not really asking him to stop.

Feeling pleased that he had tied her up in a way that allowed him to flip her over to expose her arse, he did just that.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to spank you,” he said, feeling his cock twitch eagerly. It had been a while since he had played with her like this.

“Anything but that, please!” Sansa begged in the same theatrical tone of voice, her voice muffled by the pillow her face was now buried in.

“It’s no use,” he told her, hiding his amusement, “you were a naughty girl, and naughty girls get spanked.” He smacked one of her round, tempting arse cheeks lightly to make his point.

Sansa moaned, and the sound traveled through him like a wave of pleasure.
He started to spank her steadily, using just enough force to produce a satisfying smacking noise each time his hand landed on her curved cheeks. Sansa moaned and writhed around the whole time, spreading her thighs and trying to get him to touch her between her legs. Occasionally he gave her light pats where she was fast becoming soaking wet, making her gasp.

He kept going until he couldn’t stand the pressure of his cock anymore.

“Had enough?” he asked, stroking her pink arse gently.

Sansa made an incoherent sound that he decided to interpret as ‘yes’.

He flipped her around and made her put her legs in the air so that he would have all the access he wanted.

Sinking into her felt decadent.

“Yes-yes-yes,” she babbled, her eyes closed and her face flushed with pleasure. “Gods, you’re perfect.”

A rush of pure male pride warmed him through, and he made a small growling noise as he thrust the rest of the way inside.

“You like getting fucked like this?” he asked with his voice pitched low, starting to move his hips roughly.

She threw her head back and made a carnal sound of pure pleasure.

“Say it,” he commanded, fucking her harder and willing her to put what she was feeling into words.

“Stannis,” she moaned, tugging ineffectively at her bonds.

“Say it,” he repeated, his breaths coming out ragged as he snapped his hips harder, holding Sansa’s legs wide apart as he ploughed into her with complete abandon.

“I love getting fucked like this!” she gasped out, her eyes closed and her cheeks burning. “Don’t stop!”

He grunted out an amused sort of sound. “Oh, I won’t.” He had plenty of stamina left, and he was going to give her exactly what she had asked for in that email: a good hard fuck that would make it difficult for her to walk straight.

He kept pounding himself into her, finding a steady rhythm that had her clenching up tighter and tighter, her voice becoming more high-pitched and her words more incoherent.

Then, when he could see that she was starting to really come, he pulled out with a wet sucking noise.

“Stannis!” she yelped, her eyes flying open so that she could glare at him.

He just raised an eyebrow at her and turned her around, ignoring her indignant huff.

“Up,” he ordered, smacking her still-pink arse cheeks a bit harder than before.

She scrambled to get to her knees with her thighs spread, her arse in the air. He took his time in getting into position, and teased her entrance with the head of his cock for a while.
“Stannis, please!” she eventually begged, her voice muffled by her pillow again.

He didn’t give her any time to adjust. He plunged ahead and immediately started fucking her just as hard as he had been before he had pulled out, holding on to her hips tightly and creating much louder smacks than when he had been spanking her.

Her inner muscles were already fluttering around him, and soon she was screaming into her pillow as he grunted with effort. He felt sweaty all over, and his thighs were aching, but he barely noticed. All he could feel was the bliss of good sex, and his oncoming, spine-tingling orgasm. He could tell it would be a powerful climax.

Even though he had been bracing himself for it, the force of his orgasm still surprised him. He made a strangled noise and gripped Sansa’s hips too hard for a moment, hammering himself into her as the relief and pleasure of his climax surged through him.

She did not seem to mind, judging by the way she was sobbing with pleasure.

It took them a long time to come back down to planet earth after their exertions, but eventually Stannis managed to untie Sansa and stumble to the en suite to get them a damp washcloth so that they could clean up a little. Sansa refused to even try to get up, which made him feel rather smug.

He held her close once they were a bit less sticky, and sent the twins a grateful thought for sleeping quietly and not interrupting them.

“If you’re going to react like that I’m just going to keep sending you racy emails at work,” Sansa said at length, sounding sleepy and amused.

“Don’t,” he warned, “I was lucky today, but if you make this a habit Robert will eventually barge in on me trying to hide an erection under my desk.”

Sansa giggled. “I suppose that would be awkward.”

“It would.”

They were silent for a moment, and Stannis started to run his hands through Sansa’s hair a little absently.

“You really should be glad that Shireen didn’t do what I did when I started dating,” Sansa sighed, changing the subject rather drastically. “Bran is a good person. He’s not like Joffrey, and he certainly not as inappropriate for Shireen as Willas was when I was fourteen. Bran is kind and thoughtful. You only have to watch them for a little while to see how much they care about each other.”

Feeling that his brain was a little too soaked in orgasm chemicals to have this conversation, Stannis hummed in agreement. It was rather a relief that Shireen wasn’t dating someone like Joffrey. And dating at sixteen was certainly better than at fourteen.

“You and Selyse raised her well,” Sansa added. “She obviously knows her worth. She knows that she deserves to be in a relationship with someone good. I want that for Minisa and Steffon, too.”

Stannis really didn’t think he was in any condition to discuss this, and he really didn’t think this was the time to plan out the twins’ romantic future, but he made another noise of agreement nonetheless, and hugged Sansa closer. “We’ll make sure they know their worth,” he said.

“I just really want them to find people who will love them and appreciate them for who they are,”
Sansa said, her voice a little far away.

“There will be plenty of time to worry about that later,” Stannis said, kissing her gently.

“I think we always need to keep it in mind,” Sansa argued. “We need to make sure we raise them right.”

Sensing that Sansa would not be giving him any peace until he agreed, Stannis nodded and murmured a promise to keep this all in mind.

It couldn’t hurt, after all.

They were both almost asleep when his tired brain nudged him, concern spiking in his chest.

“Do you feel like you weren’t raised to know your own worth?” he asked, furrowing his brow.

Sansa sighed and buried her face in the crook of his neck as she gave her answer. “I don’t know. I think I was given all the tools, and shown the right path, but I got distracted and a little lost for a while. Maybe it wouldn’t have happened if my parents hadn’t been spread so thin at the time due to my brothers and sister, but maybe it still would have happened. I don’t know...”

“We won’t be spread thin,” Stannis promised, feeling a renewed sense of relief that they had made the choice to not have more children.

“I know,” Sansa whispered, sounding reassured.

They drifted off to sleep soon after that, and Stannis had very pleasant dreams about watching all his children grow up to be happy, loved, and well taken care of.
New Directions and Firsts

It was late, and Stannis found himself in the unusual position of wanting to write an email to the animal shelter that regularly received donations from Baratheon Enterprises. At dinner, Bran had indicated an interest in working for the shelter, and Stannis had promised to write and see whether they would be willing to accept Bran as a volunteer. Stannis wanted to write the email while his conversation with Bran was fresh in his mind, but to write the email, he needed his glasses.

His glasses were nowhere to be found, however.

He was able to get away with not using his glasses too much at work, but these days he always needed them if he had to do any computer work in the evenings when his eyes were tired. And he couldn’t read a book without them.

Getting old, he thought as he looked around his office for the damned things.

“Sansa!” he ended up shouting, frustrated by his fruitless search.

“She’s upstairs. I don’t think she can hear you,” Shireen said, sticking her head inside his office.

“Could you go and ask her if she’s seen my glasses anywhere?” Stannis said, rubbing his forehead. “I want to write that email I promised Bran I would.”

Shireen smiled at him. It was a small, shy smile, and it seemed a little out of place on his daughter’s face. She didn’t usually blush or seem shy.

“Thank you,” she said softly. “I’ll go ask Sansa.”

Stannis kept looking for a while, but his mind was not on his task.

Bran had surprised him. He had shown up smartly dressed with flowers for Sansa and Shireen, and he had been polite and respectful all through dinner. He had even refused to keep eating when Shireen had left the dining room for a spell, preferring to wait until she returned. Most impressive of all, Bran had stood up for himself when Stannis had questioned his decision to have a gap year. He had been able to explain is choice calmly and logically, and even though Stannis still rather thought Bran should be able to volunteer in his free time if that was what he wanted, he could respect Bran’s interest in volunteering full time for a while. After all, Bran was correct to point out that he could afford to give his work for free unlike many others, and Stannis agreed that people in that sort of position really had a duty to -

How long does it take to ask Sansa where my glasses are? Stannis wondered, interrupting his own train of thought.

Perhaps Shireen had forgotten.

With a sigh, Stannis trudged up the stairs.

He heard soft feminine voices spilling out of the nursery as he approached it, but he couldn’t make out what Sansa and Shireen were saying. It wasn’t until he was standing in the doorway, looking at his little family, that he could make any sense of their words.

“Well, you’ve already done it. You’ve raised me, too.”
Stannis blinked as his daughter’s words registered. *Shireen feels like Sansa raised her, too?*  

Suddenly he felt as if everything inside his chest was melting, and he let his usually rigid posture relax significantly as he met Shireen’s eyes when she turned to look at him.  

He considered asking them what they had been talking about, but speaking somehow did not feel like the right thing to do. This was a quiet, reflective moment, and Stannis knew in his bones that he should just keep still and enjoy it.  

*My girls. My family.*  

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Sansa’s hair smelled like the ocean, and Stannis didn’t want to let her get up and shower. They had returned from the beach an hour ago, and Shireen, Bran and Devan were watching the twins. He and Sansa were supposed to be getting the sand off their skin and the salt from their hair, but they had fallen into bed instead.  

“This is nice,” Sansa sighed, burrowing closer to him.  

“Mm,” he hummed in agreement, tightening his hold on her and inhaling deeply once again. *Her hair should always smell like the ocean…*  

“If I tell you something, will you promise not to get upset?”  

Stannis furrowed his brow, wondering where Sansa was coming from.  

“I will try,” he said, “but it’s an unreasonable request, Sansa. I don’t know what it is you’re going to tell me.”  

“I want to go back to work.”  

*Is that all?* Stannis didn’t find that upsetting. He had always assumed Sansa would want to go back to work when the twins were old enough for daycare. Sansa loved teaching.  

“That’s not upsetting,” he said, feeling pleased with himself.  

“I also want a bit of a change,” Sansa added in a small voice. “I’ve been offered a job at a public school.”  

Stannis frowned. Public schools weren’t as safe as private schools. Sometimes the children were… troubled.  

*Stop being prejudiced,* he scolded himself. *There are several very good public schools in the city.*  

“Which school?” he asked, trying not to betray a hint of scepticism.  

“Rydell Elementary, near Cobbler’s Square.”  

*Oh.*  

Stannis couldn’t think what to say. The school in question was located in a very challenging neighbourhood. Sansa’s classes would be full of the children of immigrants.  

“Well? What do you think?” Sansa asked, rising up to one elbow and looking down at him with an anxious expression.
Stannis took a deep breath. “I don’t think my opinion is what’s important right now,” he said, meeting Sansa’s eyes squarely. “How do you feel about it?”

Sansa bit her lip for a moment. “I’m really excited about it,” she whispered, her eyes shining.

“What excites you about it?” Stannis shifted, and they both ended up sitting on the bed, facing each other.

“The children at that school will actually really need a good teacher,” Sansa explained, her eyes lighting up even more. “I will be able to make a difference, Stannis. I won’t just be trying to keep spoiled children under control and then dealing with their equally spoiled and entitled parents.”

“You might find yourself dealing with more complicated problems,” Stannis pointed out, thinking about what Sansa would do when she couldn’t even communicate with the spoiled, entitled parents from across the Narrow Sea due to language barriers.

“I know,” Sansa said, “but I’m a big girl and I can handle big problems. I want to be challenged at work.”

Stannis nodded, feeling as if he understood. It was often exhausting to deal with complicated and challenging projects at work, but when they were completed, the feeling of satisfaction was that much more powerful.

Unable to help himself, he leant forward and kissed her. His reservations had disappeared. This was important to Sansa, and it would clearly make her happy. And she can always quit and find something else if it doesn’t.

“Rydell will be lucky to have you,” he said as their kiss broke.

Sansa’s face split into a wide, dazzling smile. “You think so? You’re not upset?”

“No,” Stannis said, shaking his head. “This is important to you. Therefore it is important to me, too.”

Sansa practically tackled him at that. They ended up lying down again, but this time Sansa was kissing every exposed bit of skin she could find.

Recalling that they were supposed to be cleaning their trip to the beach off, Stannis suggested they move to the shower.

As much as Stannis had enjoyed watching Sansa frolic on the beach in her tiny bikini, he hadn’t really been able to focus exclusively on her due to the twins and the teenagers under his care. He hadn’t minded, of course. It had been enjoyable to spend time together as a family.

Now that he had Sansa naked and slippery with soap and all to himself, he enjoyed focusing on every single aspect of her, however.

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“I can’t,” Sansa said, looking at the house and then at him, a slightly frantic look in her eyes.

“What if they need me?”

“They will always need you,” Stannis said, trying to calm her down.

“That’s not helping.”
"I mean," Stannis said, taking a calming breath, "they will need you whether or not you’re there, but they also need to learn to do without you."

Sansa closed her eyes and nodded. “I know. I know, I know. Let’s go.”

Stannis was already late for work, but he had told Davos to expect that today. He had known Sansa would find her first day at work difficult -- despite her excitement. After all, he could remember his first full day of work away from the twins. It had been exceedingly difficult to leave the house.

Shireen sounded impatient when he and Sansa got in the car, and seemed to think she would be late for school. Stannis wasn’t worried about it. There was plenty of time.

He listened as Sansa tried to explain her worries to Shireen, and felt his stomach drop at Sansa’s words.

“Yes. I’m – I’m just being silly. I was very excited about work, but now I feel like I’m a bad mother, abandoning my children.”

Sansa? A bad mother?

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed, gazing fiercely at Sansa and trying to tell her with his eyes that the very idea of her being a bad mother was insulting and absurd. “You’re a wonderful mother. Steffon and Minisa will be fine. And soon they’ll be going to daycare, and they will be with other children, learning to socialize more… This is good for them.”

Sansa looked at him with a soft expression that made him want to kiss her, but he restrained himself due to Shireen. Sansa came closer and placed her head on his shoulder in an awkward sort of hug, and Stannis did his best to accommodate her. Without thinking about it, his hand went to her hair.

He wished they could stay like this forever, his hand slipping through Sansa’s silken hair, and the heat of her body seeping through his jacket. It felt good to comfort her and lend her what strength he had to give.

After much too short a while, he asked whether she was feeling better, and she said that she was.

It was time to start the car.

“Seatbelts, please,” he reminded everyone out of habit as he began to back out of the driveway.

Shireen muttered something, clearly in an unusually cranky mood.

“What’s wrong with you today?” he asked, irritated with his daughter’s tactlessness. Hadn’t Sansa just explained that this was a difficult day for her?

Sansa managed to smooth things over, changing the subject from what might be bothering Shireen to the interesting question of how Shireen would handle separation anxiety when she had children of her own.

Stannis didn’t really think it would be a problem. If Shireen was anything like her mother, she wouldn’t have as much difficulty with placing her children in daycare at a young age. Stannis didn’t think any less of Selyse for handling the situation the way she had, and he certainly wouldn’t think less of Shireen if she turned out the same, but he couldn’t help but hope that one day Shireen would be able to understand how Sansa felt.
As Shireen joked about sending her children to boarding school until they came of age, Stannis briefly wondered whether Shireen would be likely to have any children at all. Some people didn’t.

Putting the thought aside, he attempted to join in on the joke, and muttered that he should have sent Shireen to boarding school.

“Joke’s on you, it’s too late now!” Shireen crowed.

Stannis sensed Sansa’s eyes on him, and when he met them it was almost as if he could read her mind.

She was glad that Shireen had not gone to a boarding school. Glad that their life was exactly the way it was. Her happiness was real and present and powerful. For a moment his own happiness almost overwhelmed him, but he was forced to look back at the road before he managed to get too swept away.

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“Stannis?”

“Mm?”

“What was your first time like?”

Stannis looked up from his book and took his glasses off. “What?”

“You know,” Sansa turned to lie on her side next to him, “what was it like when you lost your virginity?”

A cold feeling of dread settled in the pit of his stomach. “Why are you asking me this?” Had Shireen said something to Sansa? Had she and Bran…?

“I was reminded of my first time today,” Sansa said vaguely. “With Harry.”

Dread turned to anger so quickly that Stannis almost got whiplash. Harry the Cheater.

“Oh?” Stannis said, putting his book aside and laying his glasses down on top of it.

“It hurt,” Sansa said, her eyes far away.

Feeling powerless in the face of her memories, Stannis tried to do what he could. He pulled her snug against his chest and stroked her back.

“I wasn’t… I don’t think I was really ready. I thought I was, but…” Sansa sighed. “It doesn’t matter. I’m curious about you.”

Stannis felt his face become warm as he recalled his first attempt at sexual activity.

Her name had been Clara. They had both been fifteen, and it had been exceedingly ill-advised. She had been much more experienced than he had been, and much more confident. He had still been mourning his parents, and she had… comforted him. At first it had just been a warm embrace, but then there had been kissing and touching and before he had been able to make much sense of things, her hand had been holding his cock, and he had practically been choking on thin air.

He hadn’t lasted two thrusts inside her.
“It was embarrassing,” he muttered.

“How did you feel about it? After?” Sansa asked, thankfully not pressing him for details about the act itself.

“Relieved, in a way,” Stannis said, thinking back. “Robert was always talking about sex, and the whole world seemed obsessed with it. I was relieved to have done it. Got it out of the way.”

Sansa nodded, but bit her lip. “You didn’t feel like you had… lost… anything?”

“I suppose not.”

Sansa smiled and shook her head.

“Why? Did you?” he asked, his curiosity piqued.

“Yes,” Sansa said, her voice quiet. “I felt like I had lost something precious, and it was difficult to accept that I would never get it back.”

Not knowing what to say to that, Stannis started to stroke her hair.

“It didn’t help that it was -” Sansa sucked in a deep, tremulous breath, “- painful and bloody and a lot less romantic than I had always imagined.”

“I’m sorry,” Stannis said, feeling heartbroken for the girl Sansa had once been. She had deserved so much more than what she had got.

If I ever meet that Harry person, he’ll regret it.

“It’s okay,” Sansa said, taking another deep breath. “It got better.”

“Did it?” Stannis murmured, now running his hands over her figure in a way he hoped was comforting.

“Mm,” Sansa hummed, “especially after I met you.” Her tone was less vulnerable now. More playful.

Stannis let his hands linger on her arse. “Oh?” He squeezed affectionately.

Sansa giggled. “Yes, you were especially impressive that first time.”

This earned her a light swat to her delicious bottom. “Behave yourself.”

Sansa wiggled against him, causing certain parts of his anatomy to stir. “Or what?” she asked, using her sexy, breathless tone of voice.

“Or I will attempt to discover just how long I can make it last,” he threatened.

“But you’re getting so old and tired,” Sansa teased. “You were just complaining about it yesterday.”

“That’s it,” Stannis said, using his most stern tone of voice. “No oral sex for you.”

“Don’t say that!” Sansa exclaimed, sounding dismayed. “I was just teasing! I take it back!”

“I’m listening,” he said, still speaking sternly.
“You’re very young, really,” Sansa said, almost managing to keep her laughter out of her voice. “And handsome,” she added, much more convincingly.

She gave him a hopeful look. He just raised a brow.

“And amazing in bed,” she whispered, her voice a little husky.

His lips quirked at that, and he decided that she had stroked his ego enough to make up for her outrageous comment about his age.

Despite what he had said about no oral sex, he ended up settling between her thighs a little while after that, enjoying the sounds he could coax out of her. After hearing about her painful first experience, he wanted her to enjoy herself as much as possible.

He was grateful when she decided to ride him afterwards as he really wanted the sex, but was actually rather tired. Watching her move above him, fondling her nipples a little lazily, and bucking up when he couldn’t resist, was about all he felt capable of.

She felt incredible, she looked incredible, and the sounds she made sent pleasurable shivers all through his body. He felt like the luckiest man alive.

As his climax neared, he found himself filled with unexpected energy, and he managed to spend the last minute before he came guiding Sansa’s movements until she reached a pace that was frantic enough to scratch his itch, and thrusting up to meet her in his turn.

Sansa threw her head back and moaned. Due to the way she was bouncing up and down the sound came out in fits and bursts instead of smoothly, and some very male and egotistical part of him revelled in it.

He came with a groan, and let his hands roam over Sansa’s body as she continued to grind herself against him and clench up around his spent cock.

“I love you,” he said, feeling almost drugged.

She bent down to kiss him, and her lips were soft and perfect. “I love you, too.”

Stannis wrapped his arms around her as tightly as he could without hurting her.

They were still for a while, no sound but the sound of their breathing disturbing the peace in their bedroom.

Then, out of the blue, Stannis gave voice to a thought that had been marinating at the back of his mind. “If I ever meet that Harry person, I’m going to suspend him from the ceiling by his scrotum.”

Sansa burst into surprised laughter, and Stannis smiled.
Fatherly Pride

Stannis didn’t look up when he heard the door to his office swing open. He was in the middle of reading an important email.

“Stannis? How do you say ‘your son needs to be more punctual’ in Valyrian?”

For a moment Stannis stared blankly at the screen of his laptop, the email forgotten, and wondered whether Sansa was trying to hint that Steffon was becoming chronically tardy. But almost as soon as he thought it, he realised it was absurd. Steffon was a toddler. He barely knew what a clock was for.

Stannis looked up from his laptop and examined Sansa’s anxious expression. “Do you have a meeting with some parents coming up?” he guessed, taking his glasses off and rubbing his eyes.

“Yes,” Sansa said, stepping inside and sitting down in one of the visitor chairs. “And at the last meeting I had with this family I could barely get Mr. Portokalos to understand a word of what I was trying to say! He just kept trying to spray Windex on my arm. I think it was because I had that weird rash that day, but I honestly don’t know how Windex could have helped.”

Stannis furrowed his brow as he gave Sansa the High Valyrian translation she had asked for. “I doubt that it will be of much use to you, though,” he said as he observed Sansa jot the phrase down using a pen and a notepad that she had brought with her. “From what you’ve told me it sounds like most of the immigrants you deal with speak Low Valyrian.”

Sansa’s face crumpled. “Oh, of course. You’re right.”

They were silent for a moment, but Stannis continued to ignore his email in favour of giving his full attention to his wife. He could tell that Sansa was on the verge of saying something, and he wanted her to know that he was ready and willing to listen.

“It’s… it’s harder than I thought it would be,” Sansa admitted in a small voice. “The job. The work.”

Stannis ignored the tiny part of himself that wanted to say ‘I told you so’.

“You can always resign if it’s too much,” he said, unable to think of anything better.

The stubborn expression that appeared on Sansa’s face told him that she didn’t think much of his idea.

“I mean, I’m sure it will get easier once you get settled into a good routine,” he said, switching tacks.

“Yeah…” Sansa looked out the window, but her eyes did not seem focused.

There was another stretch of silence, longer than before.

“I’m going to go start dinner,” Sansa suddenly said, standing up without warning.

Stannis didn’t get a chance to say anything before she was gone.
Though Sansa did her best, the language barrier between her and some of her students’ parents remained a problem. Stannis hated the way it diminished the joy Sansa found in her work, and wished he could somehow make it illegal for people to neglect learning the language of the country they lived in. At least if the people in question had school-aged children.

It shouldn’t be Sansa’s responsibility to learn a whole new language on top of everything else she was dealing with, but as the weeks went by, it became increasingly apparent that learning some basic phrases was something Sansa really wanted to do.

The solution came to him when he walked past Shireen’s bedroom late one night and heard the laugh track of a TV show echoing from within. The joke that had preceded the roar of laughter had been in Low Valyrian.

*Shireen is very good at Valyrian*, he recalled. *Not just High Valyrian, like me. Low Valyrian, too.* Perhaps she might help Sansa?

He’d have to ask Sansa first, of course. Maybe she wouldn’t like being put in the position of being Shireen’s student? And even if Sansa agreed, there was no guarantee Shireen would. Shireen and Sansa had been getting on very well for a long time, but Stannis had not forgotten the rocky start to their relationship. He didn’t know if the friendship between his girls would stretch to something like this. What if it was a disaster?

But it wasn’t a disaster.

It was amazing.

Sansa loved the idea, Shireen agreed to tutor Sansa with a minimum amount of fuss, and soon Stannis started spotting them practising Low Valyrian phrases all over the house.

Stannis had never seen Shireen flourish like this. His daughter’s eyes shone as she quizzed Sansa and got the right answers, and Stannis could see pride and self-assurance when his daughter carefully reminded Sansa that the pronunciation of the Low Valyrian word for ‘grades’ was different than other similar words; it did not adhere to the general rule of which consonant the emphasis should be on.

Stannis was filled with pride whenever he observed them at it. He was proud of Sansa for trying so hard to learn even though she didn’t have much time, and he was bursting with pride over how well Shireen was doing at teaching. How patient and *clever* she was.

“She’s really a very good teacher,” Sansa said one night as she brushed her hair. “And I’m not just saying that to stroke your fatherly ego.”

Stannis was already in bed, trying to decide whether he felt like doing some light reading before going to sleep. “Fatherly ego?” he repeated, raising a brow. “You make it sound like I’m a clergyman.”

“You know what I mean,” Sansa said, rolling her eyes.

He wasn’t entirely sure that he did. His brain wasn’t cooperating. Instead of paying attention it was swimming around in some gutter, visualising Sansa’s hands stroking his ego in a manifestly physical way. In his imagination, he might or might not be dressed as a septon.

Sansa narrowed her eyes. “What are you thinking?”

“Nothing.” Stannis coughed. “You were saying about Shireen?”
“She’s done an amazing job,” Sansa said, smiling contentedly. “It depends on how well next parent-teacher night goes, but I think I’m ready to graduate.”

Stannis nodded, still a bit distracted, and his eyes lingered on Sansa’s legs as she got into bed.

“Seriously,” Sansa said, amusement and suspicion in her eyes, “what are you thinking?”

His face heating up, Stannis cleared his throat. “How beautiful you are,” he said, deepening his voice a little and hoping that it would distract her from her line of questioning.

Sansa smiled. “I don’t buy it. Try again.” She cuddled up to him and let her fingers trail down from his neck to his chest. And lower.

“I - er - I may have been thinking about the phrase you used,” Stannis admitted, his breath hitching a little as she started to play with the waistband of his pyjama bottoms. A familiar sensation of hot blood rushing down to his groin made him squeeze his eyes shut for a moment.

“What phrase?” Sansa’s voice was a little coy.

“I believe it was something about - ah - stroking my ego?”

Her hand traced the outline of his hardening cock through the cotton he was wearing, and Stannis let out a small appreciative noise.

“I see,” Sansa said, more self-satisfied than coy now. She kissed his neck and squeezed him in just the right way.

“Sansa,” he breathed, wanting to encourage her.

“Does my husband enjoy having his ego stroked?” she whispered in his ear, kissing his earlobe. Her hand was moving up and down over his shaft, though she still hadn’t reached underneath his waistband like he desperately wanted her to. His hips bucked a little.

“When it’s you,” he said, his voice husky with need.

He waited for a few more beats, hoping that Sansa would raise the stakes, but when she seemed happy to continue torturing him, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

After pushing his pyjama bottoms down and off, Stannis proceeded to claim Sansa’s lips and kiss her deeply. He never got tired of the taste of her, or of the sound that came from the back of her throat when he did something with his tongue that she particularly liked. His hands roamed over her body, delving beneath the satin of her nightgown and stroking every inch of bare skin he could reach. She wasn’t wearing any underwear.

Sansa gave as good as she got, and Stannis moaned into her mouth when one of her hands groped its way back to his cock, grasping it firmly and pumping up and down.

Impatient, Stannis hurriedly poked his fingers between her thighs, making sure she was becoming as aroused as he was. He found her wet, but she could stand to be wetter.

He broke the kiss in order to expose a nipple and flick his tongue over it, rubbing careful circles down below as he did, smiling against her breast when he felt her grow slicker under his fingers.

“Stannis,” Sansa moaned, her free hand going to the back of his head and scratching lightly at his scalp. “I thought I was supposed to be stroking your ego,” she added a little breathlessly.
The hand that was pleasuring him moved a little faster as she spoke, making it impossible for him to reply to her in a timely manner.

Eventually he managed to speak, though his voice was hardly very civilised. His words came out as a guttural sort of growl.

“Spread your legs.”

She obeyed without a word, and let go of him when he started to move himself into position over her. He missed the warmth of her hand on his cock, but he knew he would soon be going somewhere much warmer, so he didn’t mind too much.

An undignified grunt later, he was buried to the hilt and trying to keep still for long enough to savour the moment.

Sansa was moaning and squirming in that certain way of hers, trying to make him move.

“Please,” she begged, her hands tugging on his shoulders. “Please.”

Stannis let himself go. He could feel that Sansa was wet enough to tolerate the punishing pace he wanted, and judging by the sounds she was making, and the way her inner muscles started to flutter when he got the angle just right, she was enjoying it just as much as he was.

It was a relatively quick fuck, but the payoff was good for both of them. Stannis had needed to use his fingers to help Sansa get to her peak before he embarrassed himself by coming before her, but the smile on her lips told him that she wasn’t the least bit disappointed that he hadn’t been able to last longer this time around.

Anyway, they both had work tomorrow.

Stannis wasn’t prepared to fend off the question Sansa threw at him while he was vulnerable in his post-coital haze.

“Are you sure you were just thinking about me stroking your ‘ego’? There wasn’t anything… more?”

Stannis felt his face heat up again. She couldn’t know about the stupid thoughts about being dressed like a septon while she got him off, could she?

“W-what?” he stammered, as inelegant as it was possible to be. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Come on,” Sansa cajoled, rubbing herself against him like a cat. “You can tell me.”

His brain went blank for a moment. He couldn’t come up with a convincing lie or anything to say that might distract her. So of course he panicked and blurted it all out.

“Really?” Sansa practically squealed. “A septon?”

“Can we go to sleep now?” Stannis asked, rolling onto his stomach and burying his burning face in his pillow.

“I thought you only liked it when I dressed up,” Sansa said, giggling to herself. “And you’re not even religious!”

“It was just a random thought,” he said, his voice coming out very muffled due to the pillow.
“Or was I perhaps dressed up in your ‘random thought’, too?” Sansa asked, still sounding amused. “Was I in a schoolgirl outfit? Were you a teacher at one of those religious schools?”

Stannis honestly hadn’t got that far, but now that she mentioned it…

Fuck.

“No,” he said, turning to lie on his side so he could glare at her. “We’re going to sleep now.”

Sansa teased him for a little longer, but eventually she became too tired.

There had been silence in the bedroom for a while - no giggles for several minutes - and Stannis was on the verge of sleep when Sansa whispered something that ended up giving him very vivid, very distracting daydreams for the next few days.

“I wouldn’t mind role playing that scenario sometime if it’s something you want.”

Unable to come up with any sort of suitable response, Stannis choked out a simple, “good night,” and pretended to go to sleep, though he lay awake for at least half an hour, his mind buzzing.

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Life got in the way of any role playing Sansa might have been willing to do with Stannis for the next several weeks, and before Stannis knew what had happened, it was almost time to celebrate Shireen’s graduation.

“I wish she would let me throw her a party,” Sansa said for the tenth time, a wistful sigh in her voice.

Stannis put the Sunday paper down and peered at her through his glasses. He and Sansa were in the kitchen, having just finished lunch, and Shireen was watching the twins in the living room.

“Shireen doesn’t want a fuss,” he reminded Sansa. “She’s never enjoyed being the centre of attention.”

“But it’s her graduation,” Sansa said, stirring her tea morosely. “It’s a big deal.”

“Robert certainly seems to think so,” Stannis grumbled, “you wouldn’t believe what he’s spending on Myrcella’s party.”

“He can afford it,” Sansa said, her tone dismissive.

“Yes, I suppose.”

Stannis’ eyes strayed back towards the crossword puzzle he had been contemplating, but he had hardly read the clues through once before Sansa spoke again.

“I guess it’s for the best,” she said, frowning at her tea. “We would have had to throw Shireen’s party on another day because otherwise many of the guests would have to choose between Myrcella’s party and hers.”

“Selyse is throwing Shireen a party in Brightwater,” Stannis reminded Sansa. “Isn’t that enough?”

Sansa’s frown deepened. “It’s not just about Shireen,” she said in a low voice.

Was she blushing?
“What’s it about, then?” Stannis asked, folding the newspaper up and placing his reading glasses on top of the front page.

“We won’t be in Brightwater,” Sansa said, definitely blushing now. “It’s probably stupid, but I just - I just want us and the twins to celebrate with her. I want to celebrate with her. I want her to know how happy and proud of her we are.”

His heart suddenly felt very warm.

“She knows that,” Stannis said, reaching over the table to hold Sansa’s hand.

“I know she knows,” Sansa said, squeezing his hand and giving him a small, sad smile. “But it just feels more special when we all dress up and eat cake and make a day of it...”

Stannis thought it over for a moment, considering his options.

“I could talk to Robert,” he offered after a while, a vague idea taking form. “He’s inviting nearly everyone we would have invited. Perhaps Myrcella and Shireen could have a joint celebration?”

Sansa’s melancholy expression immediately became bright and hopeful.

“That would be perfect,” she said, leaning over the table to kiss him.

***

As it turned out, Robert was happy to include Shireen, and Myrcella did not object to sharing some of the limelight. Indeed, Myrcella was the one who ended up convincing Shireen it would be a good idea to share a party.

Sansa was thrilled.

All in all, Stannis felt quite pleased with himself for coming up with such a well received solution.

That was, he was pleased until it was time to get his entire family dressed up and ready to go to Robert’s house on time. Steffon was going through a phase where he didn’t like trousers, and practically had to bribed to wear his nicest ones. Minisa, on the other hand, had very strong opinions regarding her ensemble, and refused to wear the dress that matched Steffon’s outfit. Nothing but her Christmas dress would do.

But they all made it to Robert’s house in the end, and Steffon did not remain grumpy about his trousers for very long. Not with his Uncle Robert distracting him by throwing him in the air at every opportunity. Meanwhile, Minisa was in Ned’s arms before Stannis had a chance to blink.

“We should get them,” Stannis muttered, glancing between Sansa and his toddlers worriedly. “Robert is going to drop Steffon one of these days.”

“It’s fine,” Sansa said, her tone distracted. “Who is that boy Shireen is talking to?”

Stannis looked quickly in the direction Sansa indicated, wondering whether he should be worried. Whether Bran should be worried. He dismissed the thought almost at once. The boy was handsome, but Shireen’s expression was one of irritation, not infatuation.

“No idea,” he said, looking at Steffon again. “Must be a friend of Myrcella’s.”

Stannis could have sworn Robert almost dropped Steffon, and he decided that he couldn’t take it anymore. “We need to get them, now.”
Thankfully, Sansa went along with him. She even came up with a good excuse for them to collect both Steffon and Minisa. Something about needing to feed them.

Minisa pouted quite emphatically when she was separated from Ned.

Ned pouted a little, too.

“Oh, look,” Sansa said as she prepared a juice box for Steffon, “Shireen’s gone off with Loras and Renly. She looks upset.”

Stannis was busy with Minisa and barely had time to glance up, though he frowned at what Sansa had told him. He was so busy trying to convince Minisa that the world was not a darker place when Ned was not holding her, that he missed how Sansa suddenly ended up speaking to the boy that Shireen had been talking to.

“Yes, I’m a good friend of Myrcella’s,” the boy was saying when Stannis finally noticed him. “My name is Trystane. I was actually just talking to your stepdaughter.”

Stannis didn’t attempt to join the conversation, and simply glared at the boy. This seemed to unnerve him somewhat.

“It’s always nice to meet one of Myrcella’s many friends,” Sansa said, her voice overly sweet.

Trystane smiled. “Oh, Shireen was right about you. You are nice. I wasn’t quite sure if I should believe her. It’s not very common for people our age to get along well with stepparents. I mean, I thought you were Shireen’s sister at first,” he said with a laugh.

Sansa laughed with him. If Stannis didn’t know her as well as he did, he might have thought it was a genuine laugh.

“Well, I’m certainly not her sister,” Sansa said, removing the juice box from Steffon’s sticky hands before he managed to make more of a mess.

Not wanting to give Trystane a chance to spout more inane nonsense, Stannis put Minisa down and did his best to loom. “No. She is my wife,” he said, making his voice as dark as he could.

Trystane went a bit pale.

Good.

“Yeah - of course, yeah. I mean yes. Sir.”

There was a brief silence where Stannis could practically see Trystane trying to come up with a good reason to escape.

“I think Myrcella is looking for you,” Sansa said gently, taking pity on the boy.

“Right,” Trystane said with an enthusiastic nod. “Bye.”

The look Sansa gave him when Trystane was gone was half amused, half reproving.

“Did you have to terrify the poor boy?” she asked, taking Steffon’s hands and cleaning them with a wet wipe from her purse.

Stannis grabbed Minisa by the hand before she had a chance to wander too close to the pool. “I didn’t do anything to him.”
Sansa shook her head and fell into step with him and Minisa, holding Steffon’s newly clean hand.

“I thought you were past getting annoyed when random strangers assume I’m your daughter?” Sansa asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“I am,” Stannis said truthfully. “But you said Shireen looked upset after talking to that ingrate.”

“She did a little.” Sansa looked over to the place where Shireen, Loras and Renly were talking, squinting and tilting her head.

“Well, then,” Stannis said with a shrug, “he deserved it.”

Sansa turned to smile at him, her eyes softening. “You’re a good father.”

Stannis smiled back, feeling rather wonderfully content.

“But I think,” Sansa whispered, leaning close, “we should do something fun tonight. You know, celebrate the fact that I’m definitely not your daughter.” She winked at him. “Maybe some... role playing?”

Stannis’ heart started beating in his throat, and he felt his face redden. He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again when he couldn’t come up with anything to say.

Sansa just threw her head back and laughed. Her laugh was genuine this time, and she looked dazzlingly beautiful in the sunlight -- even though she was laughing at his expense.

For a moment Stannis wondered there was a way to love a person any more than he loved Sansa.

No, he decided. Impossible.
“I’m sorry, but it’s just… I’ve sinned. I’ve sinned, and I can’t keep it to myself anymore. The guilt… it’s too much.”

Sansa looked at him with her eyes wide open, a faint blush colouring her cheeks, and a hint of a teasing smile on her lips.

Stannis cleared his throat and tried to think of something appropriate to say. Mostly he just wanted to kiss her senseless, but he was a little curious. How far would they be able to take this without breaking character? He wasn’t sure he’d be able to deliver even one line convincingly.

“Well, Miss Stark…” he started, looking at Sansa and trying to see whether she liked what he had said so far. She nodded encouragingly. “…there is only one thing to do about that.”

They hadn’t dressed up. Not really. But Sansa was wearing a short pleated skirt and a white shirt, and he was all in black. Stannis wanted to undo his top shirt button when Sansa shot him a heated look. He resisted the urge.

“Please, tell me what it is, sir,” she begged, fluttering her eyelashes girlishly. “I’ll do anything.”

“You must… confess your sins and repent.” Stannis did not have to work very hard to keep his face severe, but he felt a little ridiculous about all of this. If his brothers ever found out that he was engaging in sexual role play he’d never hear the end of it.

“I’ve been having lustful thoughts,” Sansa confessed, biting her lip and looking at the bedroom floor. They were standing, but Stannis knew they’d be on the bed soon enough. He was half hard already.

“What sort of lustful thoughts?” he asked, making his tone sharp.

Sansa looked up at him and wrung her hands dramatically. “Lustful thoughts about you, sir.”

“Be specific, Miss Stark.”

“I’ve thought of sneaking into your rooms in the dead of night and stripping bare in front of you. I’ve thought of how you might react. Sometimes you punish me, and sometimes you… sin with me.” Sansa bowed her head in apparent shame.

His cock twitched, hardening further at her words.

“That is serious indeed,” Stannis said, not quite sure how to proceed.

“I know,” Sansa said, suddenly falling to her knees and looking up at him, her face scrunched into an exaggerated angst-filled expression of woe. “But that’s not the worst thing,” she said, her voice quavering theatrically.

Fully hard at the sight of her on her knees in front of him, Stannis struggled to remain in character.

“What’s the worst thing?”

“The worst thing is that I’m not sorry! I don’t repent at all!”

Still a bit wrong-footed, Stannis searched his imagination for something appropriate to say. It took a surprisingly short time. “You’re right,” he said, deepening his voice. “That is much worse. Your
sins can only be forgiven if you repent.”

“I want to be good, I want to repent. Please, sir. You must help me. Please.”

Stannis had to resist the urge to smile at Sansa’s flair for drama.

“I’m afraid there’s only one thing I can do to help you -- to help save your soul,” Stannis said, swallowing and pushing aside all thoughts of how ridiculous this whole situation was, and focusing on how much Sansa seemed to be enjoying herself. “I must punish you until you repent.”

“Oh,” Sansa said, pouting up at him, “how will you punish me, sir?” Her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

“Corporeally,” he announced curtly, turning to sit down on the edge of the bed.

Feigning a look of uncertain trepidation, Sansa stood up and planted herself in front of him. “What am I to do, sir?”

Stannis swallowed again, feeling his mouth become a little dry. “Lift up your skirt and lower your panties.”

Sansa squirmed where she stood and feigned dismay. “But sir!”

“Now, Miss Stark.”

Blushing fetchingly, Sansa did as he had ordered. She was wearing light-coloured panties with a lace trim. Pretty.

“Across my lap.”

Sansa didn’t protest this time. Soon she was where he wanted her; her skirt bunched up, panties wrapped around her knees, bare arse exposed.

He smacked her left cheek lightly, giving her no warning.

“I am going to spank you until you repent, Miss Stark,” he declared

“I - I deserve it,” Sansa said, her voice breathless. She rubbed herself against him, and it felt a little too good.

He smacked her arse again, a little harder. Her flesh rippled gently.

“Oh!”

A part of him wanted to ask her if she was ready, and make sure she would tell him when she wanted him to stop, but he knew Sansa didn’t want them to break character.

She’ll tell me if it’s too much.

He splayed the fingers of his left hand over the small of her back, pressing down with his palm and keeping her still and steady. (And also just to create a little more pressure over his groin.) Then he started to spank her properly.

He made sure not to use too much force. He didn’t want her getting hurt, after all. But he still hit hard enough to create satisfying smacks and make his point. They had done this in the past, and he knew how much she could take, and how much she liked.
After about a minute, the scent of her arousal hit his nose, and he had to bite back a groan.

“Say that you’re sorry,” he said after a while, exerting quite a lot of willpower to keep his voice steady.

“I can’t,” Sansa whimpered. It did not sound as if she was in pain, however. She was arching her back and practically chasing the palm that was delivering the swats.

“Why not?”

“I’m still having lustful thoughts, and I’m not sorry!”

Unable to resist, Stannis stopped spanking her for a moment and dipped his hand between her thighs, letting his fingers slip between her folds. She was slick with moisture: soft and warm.

Sansa spread her thighs wantonly, inviting him to touch her.

“Miss Stark,” he snapped, trying to make himself sound angry. “You must repent.” He smacked her arse as hard as he dared.

Sansa moaned and pressed herself deliberately against him, increasing the pressure on his cock.

“I think you are having lustful thoughts too, sir,” she breathed.

“Not at all,” he said, spanking her a few more times.

“I can feel your cock,” Sansa insisted, squirming on his lap. “It’s very hard,” she purred.

“Clearly this punishment is not severe enough to have its intended effect,” Stannis said, his voice hoarse with desire. “On your knees.”

He fumbled with his belt as soon as Sansa was off his lap, and breathed a sigh of relief when he managed to get his cock free. He needed to be touched.

“Use your mouth. If you do well you will be… er... cleansed of all sin.” That’s something a septon would say, isn’t it? Sounds about hypocritical and ridiculous enough...

Sansa suppressed a grin, and with her eyes still sparkling with good humour, she set to work.

Stannis closed his eyes and let his head fall back, enjoying the feel of Sansa’s tongue licking a trail from the base of his cock to the tip.

She knew exactly what he liked, and soon he felt rather like he was floating. There was nothing in his world but pleasure and the anticipation of a good orgasm.

It ended up being rather better than good. Sansa did something with her tongue right when he was on the edge, and her hand was moving just so, and -- oh, dear gods...

“Fuck, Sansa!”

They both ended up lying on the bed, their legs dangling off the edge. Stannis felt all tingly, but eventually he managed to rise up on his elbows and look blearily down at his wife. She was looking quite smug.

That won’t do.
He got on the floor and pushed her thighs apart. “I must be cleansed of sin, too,” he explained in response to the startled noise she made.

She tasted very aroused, and she was all puffy and swollen and dripping wet. Delicious.

He devoured her with gusto, enjoying every gasp, every moan, and every involuntary twitch and jerk he was able to elicit.

He made her come at least twice. He could never be sure when she started moaning and singing his name continuously whether she was in the midst of an orgasm or not. Putting a finger inside of her helped him figure it out sometimes. He really liked the way she clench ed up.

Stannis fleetingly wondered whether he had the energy to try to get it up again and feel her clench up around his cock. Maybe. If Sansa wanted more after this...

She did.

It took a bit of coaxing, but he managed to get hard again and fuck her with all the strength he had left in his wobbly muscles. She mewled like a kitten and clench ed up like a dream, milking his cock for all he was worth.

Eventually they were lying properly in bed; naked and sated.

“That was fun,” Sansa murmured against his neck.

He hummed in agreement.

“We should cleanse ourselves of sin more often,” she went on. There was a pause for about a second after she spoke, and then she started to giggle.

He huffed out a laugh, and hugged her close. “Whatever you want, Miss Stark.”

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“Did you go to your prom?” Sansa asked, holding the camera that had just received a thorough workout earlier that evening -- before Shireen left for the prom and before the twins went to bed. First Bran had taken pictures of Stannis, Sansa, and Shireen, and then Sansa had taken photos of Stannis and Shireen, and finally she had taken pictures of Bran and Shireen. (Later, Stannis had also ended up taking a few pictures of Minisa, as she had insisted.)

It had been very strange to stand on the sidelines and watch the way his daughter had smiled at Bran, and the way he had returned each one. The teenagers had joked around and teased one another, and his daughter had been relaxed. At peace. Confident. She had practically been glowing -- possibly she had literally been glowing. Sansa had managed to make Shireen’s hair very shiny, at least.

Stannis remembered that for a moment there had been a lump in his throat as he had observed his daughter, and something in the air had caused his eyes to sting.

He didn’t know why his emotions had chosen to play tricks on him. Shireen had been growing into her beauty and confidence for a while now, so it wasn’t as if he had been caught off guard. Perhaps it was just his pride that had overwhelmed him. Stannis really couldn’t be prouder of the young woman his daughter was becoming.

Still, with Shireen all dressed up like that he didn’t want Bran to get any ideas. He’d taken the boy
aside and told him to bring her back before one AM or there would be Consequences. Judging by the expression on Bran’s face, Stannis didn’t think he needed to worry about Shireen returning late.

“Prom?” Stannis repeated, blinking at Sansa. “No, I didn’t.”

“Why not?” Sansa put the camera away and gave him a curious look.

Stannis sighed. “Robert tried to make me go. He even said he’d find a girl to go with me.”

Sansa gave him a sympathetic look. “What happened?”

“He somehow ended up having sex with her on prom night, before I even had a chance to give her the damn corsage. He must have slipped and fallen cock-first.”

Strange. Stannis had usually always felt a surge of bitterness whenever he thought of this incident. Now he just felt… faintly amused.

Sansa shook her head. “Your brother is unbelievable.” She sat down on the sofa next to him, and he put his arm around her shoulders. They were quiet for a little while.

“How about you?” he asked at length, finding himself curious.

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, her body tensing slightly.

Uh oh.

“You don’t have to tell me,” he said quickly.

“No, it’s - it’s okay. It’s just… it was my last year of secondary school. I went with Harry.”

Stannis squeezed her shoulder lightly, unsure of what to say.

“Everything was great at first,” Sansa said wearily, “he gave me a very beautiful winter rose corsage, and he looked incredibly handsome. Not to brag, but we were probably the best looking couple at the prom.”

She fell silent, and Stannis waited for her to go on, his stomach turning uncomfortably.

“I was crowned prom queen,” she said after a while, her voice sad.

There was another short silence.

“I went to the ladies’ room shortly after they gave me my tiara, and I guess the girl must have thought she was doing me a favour… she was, really. I didn’t feel like it at the time, but she was.”

Stannis was confused. What girl? What favour?

“She cornered me while I was fixing my makeup and told me that she’d… slept with Harry. The week before.”

He grimaced.

“Not the best time to find out that your boyfriend’s a cheating arsehole,” Sansa sighed.

Stannis kissed her forehead, wishing there was something more he could do.

“Of course, I didn’t want to believe her, but she… she had pictures. On her phone. And texts he had
sent her.” Sansa sighed again. “She was actually really kind.”

But…?

“But there was a girl in one of the stalls who heard everything. She must have told someone, because at the end of the night everyone knew that the prom queen had a cheating boyfriend. I had wanted to discuss the matter with him privately, after we left, but somehow he figured out that everyone was talking about us and he made a horrible scene. It was so embarrassing… I try not to think about it.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, stroking her hair. Silently, he reaffirmed his vow to make Harry suffer if he ever met him.

“It’s in the past,” Sansa said, cuddling closer to him. “But I wish I could have found out sooner. Maybe then I would have gone to prom with someone worthwhile.”

Stannis imagined for a moment what it might have been like to take Sansa to prom.

People would have gossiped about the prom queen for an entirely different reason if I had been her date…

Feeling a little strange, Stannis decided that they needed a distraction. “It’s a nice night,” he said, “why don’t you go to the garden? I’ll make iced tea.”

They untangled themselves and looked at each other. Sansa was smiling. “Yes… I could do with some star gazing,” she said. “Thank you.”

It was a warm summer evening - warm enough to make condensation appear on their glasses of iced tea - and the lawn chairs were wonderfully comfortable. Stannis had the baby monitor nearby in case the twins woke up - though they were rarely fussy sleepers these days - and he could easily imagine staying right where he was for the entire night.

Sansa looked at the stars, and he looked at the stars in Sansa’s eyes.

Time flew by.

Shireen returned well before one AM and sat down with them. She looked happy at first, but as Sansa started to ask her questions about how her prom had been, he thought he could see something melancholy appear in her eyes. For a moment he worried that something unfortunate had happened between her and Bran, but thankfully it was nothing like that.

Shireen explained that she was simply worried about what the future would be like now that her friends would be splitting up and going to different schools in different parts of the country.

Stannis hadn’t made any friends worth keeping in secondary school, but he remembered how he had felt that year… the mixture of sadness and excitement. The end of an era, and the beginning of something new. The change had been good for him. He’d met Davos at University, and he’d escaped from Robert’s shadow.

He looked at Sansa and felt his heart swell. Yes, change can be very good. Sansa had changed so much for him, and he was glad of it. More than glad.

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“She was actually really kind.”

But…?
they died, after all. Renly had no real memories of them, and carried no such burden. And yet Stannis would not change places with his younger brother for the world. Stannis had known and loved Steffon and Cassana, and he did not care that the price for that was to miss them always.

“It’s good to have people to miss,” he said.

Sansa reached for his hand and smiled at him. Her eyes were full of understanding.

*I would miss you*, he told her without words. *I love you.*

Her expression softened, and Stannis felt as if she had read his mind. Everything about her expression told him that she felt the same way.

Sansa turned to smile at Shireen. “And we’ll be here for you. We’re not going anywhere.”

“Well you better be! I’m quite attached to you guys,” Shireen said without missing a beat, her tone laced with dry humour.

For the second time that night, Stannis felt a lump form in his throat.

He was quite attached, too.
“How was Winterfell?” Stannis asked, keeping his voice low. The twins were sleeping, and he and Sansa were in the process of transferring them from the car to their respective beds while attempting not to wake them.

“Good,” Sansa said, a little out of breath. Carrying Minisa up the stairs was a little harder for Sansa now that their daughter was no longer a little baby. Stannis had Steffon to contend with, and was breathing a little quicker than usually, too. “Although Dad’s a bit worried.”

“Oh?”

Sansa nodded, but didn’t say anything else until the twins were tucked into their beds, and she and Stannis were safely on the other side of the nursery door.

“He’s worried about Robert.”

“Robert? Why?”

“He’s been calling a lot and wanting to talk about the good old days, and he keeps trying to get Dad to go fishing with him, or come visit.”

Stannis didn’t understand. “Why does this make Ned worry?”

“It’s just… more than Dad is used to. He’s worried that Robert is bored. I offered to invite Robert over for dinner next week to help keep him occupied. Do you mind?” Sansa chewed on her lip. “I would have asked you first, but Dad seemed really worried, and it’s just one dinner.”

Stannis tried not to grimace, but somehow a grimace must have made it through.

“He’s your brother, Stannis.”

Stannis knew better than to argue with that tone of voice. He sighed. “Of course he can come to dinner.”

Robert wasn’t quite as bad now that he was no longer drinking, anyway.

Sansa smiled and gave him a kiss on the cheek. They made their way to the kitchen and set about making themselves tea.

“How about you? How was your day?” Sansa asked once they had settled in the living room, steaming cups on the coffee table in front of them. Sansa had curled up against his side in a way that Stannis would never get tired of, and he put his arm around her.

He told Sansa that he’d trimmed the sunflowers and that Renly and Loras had dropped by. He also told her about his conversation with Shireen.

“Shireen doesn’t want to study economics,” Stannis said, careful to keep his voice neutral.

“No?” Sansa sounded more polite than surprised.

“She doesn’t know what she wants to do, but she - she doesn’t sound very interested in working for Baratheon Enterprises... in any capacity.”
Sansa rose up a little and looked at him, searching his face. “You didn’t give her a lecture, did you?”

“Of course not,” Stannis said, feeling a little stung. He wanted Shireen to be happy, not go into the family business out of some misplaced sense of obligation. Anyway, with one thing and another, Stannis was wondering whether his daughter might end up following in Sansa’s footsteps. Shireen had never quite looked as happy as she had when she had been teaching Sansa low Valyrian.

“I’m sorry I doubted you,” Sansa said, kissing his lips. “What did you say?” She reached for her cup of tea and took a sip.

“I told her not to worry about it,” he said, eyeing Sansa’s mouth. He was more interested in kissing her than drinking his tea. “She’ll figure out what she wants to do eventually.”

“Yes, I’m sure she will.”

Stannis drank some of his uninteresting tea.

“Maybe we could encourage her to do some volunteer work, like Bran did?” Sansa said, her eyes brightening. “It might help her figure things out like it helped him.”

“That’s a good idea,” Stannis agreed, liking the way Sansa smiled at his words. “Why don’t you mention it to her?”

“I will. One of the teachers I work with was talking about this project the other day that might be perfect for Shireen. It has to do with teaching English to immigrants who speak low Valyrian.”

Their eyes met, and Stannis knew that Sansa had been wondering whether Shireen might like to be a teacher, too. There was a hopeful look in her eyes, and her cheeks were a little rosy. They didn’t put their thoughts into words, but that was only because they didn’t need to.

They sipped their tea.

“What did you want to be at Shireen’s age?” he asked, changing the subject slightly. He was fairly sure he knew the answer, but he wanted to know what Sansa would say.

“A teacher,” Sansa said with a smile. “I figured it out right around that time. But when I was little I wanted to be a princess ballerina.”

“You couldn’t have been a princess and a ballerina,” Stannis said, shaking his head.

“Why not?” Sansa asked, leaving her tea on the table and burrowing close to him again.

“Being a princess is a full time job,” Stannis said, stroking Sansa’s arm absently. “They usually act as diplomats and philanthropists.”

“Well, what did you want to be when you were little?” Sansa’s voice was a little muffled; her face was pressed to his shirt.

“The captain of a ship. Shireen asked me that, too.”

“You didn’t tell her about your more recent aspirations to become a septon?” Sansa asked, her voice a little too innocent now, and a lot less muffled. She was peeking up at him with an impish look in her eyes.

Stannis felt his face warm. “No. That’s not… I mean, no.”
Sansa laughed, and Stannis felt her body shake against his own. It was rather enjoyable.

“I think we should get you a captain’s hat,” Sansa said, still giggling. “I’d quite like to see you wear one.”

“I can’t just wear a captain’s uniform without earning it,” Stannis said, feeling a little shocked at Sansa for suggesting such a thing.

“Who said anything about the uniform?” Sansa whispered. Another peal of giggles followed. “I just want you to wear the hat, and nothing else!”

Stannis looked at the ceiling in exasperation for a moment, but huffed out a laugh despite himself.

***

Stannis should have known better than to offer Robert his little finger. As always, his older brother took the whole arm.

“Do we have any rat poison to put in Robert’s coffee?” Stannis grumbled under his breath, carrying a stack of plates over to the sink while Sansa went to make coffee.

“He’s not a pest, darling. He’s your brother,” Sansa said, a note of exasperation sneaking into her tone. “You could try to be a little nicer to him.”

Stannis scowled at the plates he was putting in the sink. He had been nice to Robert the first time he had shown up for dinner. That had been when Sansa had actually invited him, and made all the appropriate arrangements. Tonight was the third time Robert had shown up without giving Sansa or himself much notice. Maybe he was Stannis’ brother, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t also a pest. Thankfully Sansa usually cooked large meals…

Still, it wasn’t fair.

Stannis pointed this out to Sansa, and reminded her that Robert had a perfectly competent cook at his house, and that he shouldn’t be disrupting their family routine.

“Isn’t it obvious he’s lonely now that Myrcella is away in Dorne?” Sansa asked, turning away from the coffee maker.

Stannis blinked. He had thought that Robert was just bored. After he quit his main hobby of getting drunk at all hours of the day, Stannis had figured Robert didn’t have much to occupy his time.

“Think of it. He’s suddenly all alone in that huge house,” Sansa said, her eyes brimming with sympathy.

“He has Ramón,” Stannis muttered. He knew the household help didn’t really count, but still. Technically, Robert wasn’t alone in the house.

Sansa wasn’t impressed with his argument, and when he asked her why Robert couldn’t bother Renly or Ned, she threw his own words back at him.

“You said it yourself – it’s the family routine. Loras and Renly are alone, and my parents only have Rickon around. But we have Shireen, and Minisa and Steffon. It’s probably more family-like in his head.”

Stannis scrubbed his face with his hands and resisted the urge to groan. *Typical Robert.* Stannis
would never behave like this. Why couldn’t Robert ever just cope with things on his own? Without resorting to alcohol or leaning on everyone around him and making a nuisance of himself?

“Well, we can’t be his crutch. The birds leave the nest one day, it’s normal. I’m not going to camp on Robert’s lawn when Shireen leaves home one day.”

Sansa gave him a soft, almost sad look that he couldn’t quite read. “It’s not the same. You have me, and Steffon and Minisa. Imagine if things were different. If the twins and I were not in the picture, and it was just you and Shireen.”

Sansa’s words pierced his heart like a knife. The images that filled his mind - images of what his life might have been like if he had never gone to Bran’s twelfth birthday party - weren’t anything horrible per se, but knowing what he would have been missing out on was painful in a way that Stannis couldn’t put into words. Everything would have been different. Shireen might even have moved to Brightwater with Selyse. He might have been all alone.

Like Robert.

“I don’t want to imagine that,” was all Stannis managed to say, though he tried to tell Sansa the rest with his eyes.

Sansa understood. She wrapped her arms around him, drawing him close. The contact, the reassurance was exactly what he needed, and he squeezed her tight, needing to feel every inch of her pressed close. She was warm and soft and wonderfully present in his life, full of love for him and the children. He felt a lump form in his throat.

“How’s the coffee coming along?”

Sansa disentangled herself from their embrace and smiled at Shireen. “It should be ready soon. Could you tell Robert?”

Shireen nodded and left.

There was a time when Stannis might have felt awkward about Shireen catching him and Sansa in such an intimate pose, but that had been years ago. At the moment he just felt a mixture of gratitude and a petulant sort of irritation. He was grateful for the opportunity to compose himself a little and get rid of the lump in his throat, but at the same time he wished he could have had a bit more time to hold Sansa.

As if she had read his mind, Sansa stepped back into his arms as soon as Shireen was gone. This time she kissed him, too. He met her lips eagerly, though he was careful not to get too carried away in case there were further interruptions on the horizon. It was difficult to keep that in mind, however, when Sansa seemed to be doing her best to tempt him to pick her up, carry her to bed, and spend at least an hour showing her how happy he was that she was in his life.

“I love you,” Stannis murmured when the kiss broke, letting his hands trail down her sides and linger at her waist.

“I love you, too.” She smiled, and they gazed into each other’s eyes for a moment. After a little while Sansa sighed. “We should bring the coffee out.”

Stannis sighed, too. “I suppose.”

A gentle hand stroked his cheek. “Promise you’ll be nice to Robert?”
“Yes.” How could he do anything else?

Being nice to Robert wasn’t exactly easy, but it was manageable with Sansa and Shireen around to help. It seemed that Sansa was right, and that Robert missed Myrcella quite a bit. They talked it over, and Stannis bristled when Robert failed to comprehend that Myrcella was grown up and allowed to make her own choices. In the past he would probably have given up on the conversation at that point, but Sansa gave him a series of looks that conveyed that he had promised to be nice, and that he should offer to help, and thus he persevered. His forbearance paid off in the end. It turned out that the only thing they needed to do to cheer Robert up was point out that the holidays weren’t too far off, and though they couldn’t promise that Myrcella would return to Robert’s house for Christmas, Shireen promised to ask Myrcella to return Robert’s calls and at least discuss the matter.

“Children can be so ungrateful sometimes,” Robert said after extracting the promise from Shireen, his voice unusually somber. “They think that having parents who care about them is stifling and embarrassing, but they don’t know… they don’t know how lucky they are.”

Stannis searched Robert’s face. It was strange and surprising to hear insightful words about parenting come out of Robert’s mouth. After all, Robert wasn’t really the most experienced parent; he had barely raised his children.

And yet…

_They don’t know how lucky they are._

Stannis swallowed, and a pang of grief pushed all other thoughts from his head. Robert looked mournful, too. For a long, bittersweet moment Stannis felt like he was on the same page as his brother. A rare occurrence.

“No. No, they don’t,” Stannis heard himself say, his voice seemingly coming from far away. He had been thinking something along these lines not too long ago, hadn’t he? It had been warm, and he’d had iced tea... “But perhaps it’s better that way,” he added, thinking about love and loss, and whether his parents would have been stifling and embarrassing if they’d had the chance.

Robert gave him a tired smile. It wasn’t as wide as his usual grins, and seemed weighed down by a combination of different emotions. “Thanks, Stan.”

Stannis tried to return the smile, but he suspected it was weighed down, too.

The weight lifted, however, when he looked at Sansa and Shireen. Sansa was smiling at him and Robert, and Shireen was looking at Sansa thoughtfully, her eyes bright.

Stannis might not have his parents, but he had his girls, and he had the twins and his brothers. It was more than enough.

***

Stannis loved coming home from work. As soon as he walked through the front door he was always enveloped by the familiar scents of the house, the children, the garden, and faint traces of Sansa’s perfume. Sometimes the twins would greet him at the door, enthusiastically babbling about one thing or another, and sometimes he’d be able to hear sounds from the kitchen that meant dinner was being prepared.

Today he was lucky enough to have Sansa greet him at the door. This happened every now and
then, when Sansa wasn’t too busy somewhere else, and he always appreciated it more than he could express.

“Good day at work?” Sansa asked, kissing his cheek and wordlessly helping him with his coat.

“Fine,” he said, seizing the opportunity to hug her from behind when she turned to hang his coat in the foyer closet. He kissed her neck. “How about you?”

Sansa made a pleased little noise and wriggled in his arms. “Fine, too,” she said, giggling when he kept peppering her neck with kisses. “You have a present in the bedroom.”

His blood started to run hot. “What kind of present?” he murmured, letting his hands roam a little more freely than before. It had been a while since they’d done anything... adventurous in the bedroom. They had been in a tender mood as of late, and whenever they had found the time, their lovemaking had been slow and gentle. Stannis enjoyed this quite a lot, but he also liked it when they experimented. Had Sansa bought him some new toy for them to try? … Or something to wear? Did she want to try roleplay again?

Sansa swatted his hands away before he could start groping her very obscenely. “I don’t know,” she turned around to face him. “It’s not from me.”

Stannis furrowed his brow, and swallowed his disappointment. “Well, who is it from, then?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. You can open it later. I need help with dinner. Unless you’d rather look after the kids and send Shireen to help me in the kitchen?”

Usually he might have preferred to look after Steffon and Minisa, but at the moment he was still a little aroused and in the mood to stay near Sansa. “I’ll help with dinner.”

He chopped vegetables for the salad as quickly as he could, wanting to free his hands so that he’d be able to distract Sansa from her own tasks.

“Groping me is not helping, Stannis,” Sansa said after a little while, obviously attempting to sound stern, but failing.

Stannis gave her arse one last squeeze and retracted his hands from underneath her skirt.

“Wash your hands and check on the chicken,” she instructed, shooting him a fond look.

He did as he was told. As soon as he was done he planted himself behind Sansa again, watching over her shoulder as she stirred a fragrant sauce. Noting that she wasn’t doing anything that required her full attention, he pressed himself close, rubbing his groin against her arse.

“Stannis…”

He closed his eyes and fantasised about bending her over the kitchen table. He had never done that, as Sansa always refused to get up to anything ‘unhygienic’ in the kitchen. The dining room, however…

“Stannis, we’re not alone in the house,” Sansa said, snapping him out of his daydream.

“Where are Shireen and the kids?” he asked, rebelliously bringing his hands up to cup Sansa’s breasts through her dress.

“Upstairs.”
He wasn’t pushing his hands away.

He eyed the door that led from the kitchen down to the basement, contemplating his options. Perhaps Sansa hadn’t bought a new toy for them to try, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t do something adventurous, did it? He squeezed Sansa’s breasts and heard her mewl in response. The sound went straight to his groin, and before he knew it, he had made his mind up.

“What are you doing?” Sansa asked, her voice incredulous.

“Turning the heat off so the food doesn’t burn,” he explained.

Sansa started to question him further, but her words turned into a scandalised squeal when he quickly opened the basement door and dragged her her down the stairs.

“Are you insane?” Sansa whispered in outrage, though her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

There was a table next to the washer and dryer that was usually covered in a few piles of folded laundry. Stannis moved a stack of Steffon’s clothes to the side and manhandled Sansa until she was sitting on the edge, her thighs spread to accommodate him between them. With him standing, and her sitting on the table, their bodies lined up in almost the perfect way.

He kissed her until she was breathless, and ground himself against her with complete abandon. Was it insane for him to want her? Insane for him to want spontaneous sex with his gorgeous wife? To want it somewhere else than in bed for once? To want it even though the children weren’t sleeping?

Maybe. But he didn’t care.

His hands went to his belt, his lips went to Sansa’s neck, and she moaned and spread her thighs wider.

His trousers dropped to his ankles, his boxer briefs followed, and his hands found their way under Sansa’s skirt. He pushed her panties aside and fingered her gently, testing the waters. She was just about wet enough. He replaced his fingers with his cock, rubbing the head against her folds and coating himself in her moisture.

“This is crazy,” Sansa whispered, sounding both aroused and nervous.

He pushed his cock inside in one smooth movement, grunting with pleasure.

Sansa closed her eyes and wrapped her arms and legs around him, holding him inside. He liked it at first, but as soon as he started to thrust it became cumbersome. He wasn’t in the mood to grind against her. It would take too long. He wanted to fuck her properly, and for that he needed more freedom to move.

His recent fantasy from the kitchen still fresh in his mind, Stannis untangled her limbs and took a step back. He heard a wet noise as his cock slipped out, and a little whine from Sansa.

“Turn around,” he requested, his heart beating fast. “Bend over the table.”

Sansa’s blushed deeply, but she did as he asked.

Stannis flipped her skirt up and pulled her panties down until they were wrapped around one of her ankles. She spread her thighs without being asked, and Stannis wasted no time plunging his cock back in. She was even wetter than before. He grabbed her hips and squeezed her a little to show his
appreciation.

Thrusting was easy now that he was in full control, and though he tried to ease them into the fast pace he wanted, he was already giving her quite a pounding after less than a minute. The smacks of their bodies meeting and Sansa’s erotic little gasps were filling the basement, but Stannis was hoping that the noise wouldn’t carry upstairs.

“How do you like this?” he asked, a little out of breath.

Sansa made a high, slightly choked sound -- something like a gasp and a cry. “Gods, Stannis… it’s so good,” she then said, her voice a little slurred with pleasure.

“Yeah? You like it?” He fucked her harder, and felt as if his higher brain functions had shut down.

“Yes!”

“You want it?” His voice had deepened, and the questions were coming from some unevolved part of his brain, escaping his lips in between grunts. “You want it hard?”

“Yes - please, yes,” Sansa moaned, clenching up around him.

“Fuck - fuck -” He went into a frenzy of slamming himself into her, letting go of all self control and revelling in the way her inner muscles were squeezing him convulsively.

His balls tightened up as Sansa cried out, and they were both panting as he spilled his seed, his hips still thrusting erratically.

Once they had caught their breath and cleaned up, Sansa shook her head at him. “You really are insane.”

He decided to kiss her rather than tell her that he disagreed with her. At the moment he happened to think that he was brilliant, not insane, and that walking back up the stairs on wobbly legs was a small price to pay for his stroke of genius.

Shireen shot them suspicious looks when it was time for dinner, but Sansa acted like her hair was always a little disheveled, and he somehow managed not to get awkward. After that, the routine of getting Steffon and Minisa to bed distracted them all.

It was late by the time Stannis entered his bedroom and saw the present Sansa had told him about. It was in a fairly big box, and looked unlabeled.

Curious, Stannis opened it. Inside was a glossy garment bag, emblazoned with the logo of a designer that Stannis knew to be quite expensive. He raised an eyebrow and opened the bag.

He snorted at what he found inside.

“What is it?” Sansa asked, entering the bedroom. “Do you know who it’s from?”

“It’s from Renly,” Stannis said, rolling his eyes and turning to show Sansa what he was holding.

“Is that - ?” Sansa tilted her head to the side and furrowed her brow.

“Yes,” he sighed. “I told you he and Loras dropped by a few weeks ago. He saw me gardening.”

Sweet? Stannis thought it was absurd and impractical. “I won’t be able to wear this in the garden,” he muttered, putting the couture gardening ensemble away. “I’d look ridiculous. Anyway, there’s nothing wrong with what I already own.”

Sansa gave him a slightly dreamy look. “Mmm.”

_Mmm?_ “What’s that supposed to mean?”

She smiled. “I like your gardening clothes. It’s fun to see wear them and let yourself get all… muddy.”

“You hate getting dirty,” he reminded her, thinking about the way she always avoided the muddy gardening jobs, scrunched her nose up at the fertiliser, and the fastidious way she always kept her gloves on -- even when she was just watering the flowers.

“Well, it takes me ages to get gardening dirt from underneath my fingernails,” Sansa said with a shrug. “But I still like watching you get all sweaty and messy… It’s sexy.”

“Is it now?” Stannis wondered whether today would be the sort of day where they had sex _twice_. That hadn’t happened in a while.

Sansa nodded and gave him a coy look.

Feeling like a much younger man, Stannis steered her towards the bed. “Interesting. Tell me more.”

Stannis ended up being wrong. It wasn’t the sort of day where they had sex twice. It was the sort of day where they had sex _three times._
“Stannis,” Sansa said, her voice carrying both a warning and a fair bit of amusement, “the children are right there.”

With a great deal of reluctance, Stannis stopped nibbling on Sansa’s neck. It was a shame the twins were starting to pay attention to what he and Sansa did with each other. Especially if there was anything like kissing involved. Steffon didn’t really seem to mind it much, but Minisa had some outspoken opinions. If it weren’t for their little eyes and ears, Stannis would probably have pulled Sansa onto his lap by now. Shireen was visiting Bran at Hardhome for a few days, and wasn’t in the house to roll her eyes at him and Sansa for getting too carried away.

“Just watch the movie,” Sansa said, cuddling up to him.

They were sitting on the sofa, and the twins were on the floor, their noses practically pressed to the TV screen. Brave was playing for the umpteenth time, and though Stannis had quite liked the story the first time he had watched it, he was thoroughly sick of it now.

“Perhaps we can continue once the twins are asleep?” he murmured in Sansa’s ear, liking the idea of fooling around in the living room. His hand wandered, and he managed to cup her breast for a moment before she gently swatted him away.

“I didn’t think you’d react like this to Shireen being out of the house,” Sansa said, raising an eyebrow.

“Oh? How did you think I’d react?” Stannis was fairly sure this was a pretty normal reaction on his part to getting a little bit of extra privacy. He loved Shireen dearly, but she was grown now, and she noticed things. He was still fairly sure she knew exactly what had happened in the basement the other day, and it made Stannis feel more than a little awkward.

“I thought you’d pace around and worry yourself sick about what my villainous brother might be doing to your precious little girl,” Sansa said with a laugh. “I mean, she’s eighteen now, and they’ll have all that privacy in Bran’s dorm and all that time to kill…”

The thought honestly hadn’t occurred to him until now.

“You think they’ll have sex?” Stannis asked, his voice a little louder than he had intended.

“What’s sex?” Minisa asked, tearing her eyes away from the screen to look at Stannis with her big, innocent eyes.

“It’s what parents do to make babies, darling,” Sansa said without missing a beat.

“Don’t tell her that,” Stannis spluttered, appalled. The twins were much too young for this sort of talk. Only three.
But Minisa had already lost interest and gone back to watching the bears on the screen. Sansa’s eyes sparkled with mirth.

Stannis shook his head. “You didn’t answer my question,” he said, refusing to get sidetracked.

“Yes, Stannis,” Sansa said patiently, “I do think Bran and Shireen will probably have sex during their visit. I know for a fact that they’ve been having sex for a while.”

There was suddenly a disturbing lack of air in the living room. “Why didn’t you say something? How long? I mean, since when?”

Sansa kissed him. She tasted nice.

“I’m not going to tell you that, and you’re not going to ask her about it. It’s between her and Bran, and it’s none of your business. I also think that if you stop and consider it, you’ll find that you don’t actually want to know.”

Stannis swallowed the argument that rose to his lips and tried to think about the matter logically. He had always known that it would happen eventually, but somehow he had convinced himself that it wouldn’t happen quite yet. He had also had the notion that he would know when Shireen took such a step -- that he’d be alerted. He felt oddly bereft now that he realised that he’d missed it. And… and it sometimes hurt for girls - the first time - didn’t it? What if Shireen had been hurt, like Sansa had? He hadn’t had a chance to comfort her, or support her… or punch Bran in the face.

“Is she all right with it all?” he asked, feeling a little helpless. “Does Bran always treat her well? Do you know?”

“Darling,” Sansa sighed, “you’ve seen them together. You know how respectful Bran is of her. Why would he act differently when they’re intimate with each other?”

A deep breath was in order. Stannis took one, and nodded. Of course he knew that. Of course.

“Did she talk to you?” he asked, needing to know. “When it first happened? Was she really okay?”

“We did talk a bit,” Sansa admitted. “And I’m certain she had a much better experience than I had, my first time. You shouldn’t worry about it.”

The pinched feeling in Stannis’ chest eased away. He hadn’t really noticed it until it suddenly started to fade, but he was very relieved to feel it go. Warmth took its place.

“You two talked about it? She confided in you?”

Sansa gave him a small smile and nodded. She looked proud and pleased, and her eyes were shining.

The last of his worries drained away. Perhaps he hadn’t been there for Shireen, but she hadn’t been alone. Sansa had been there.

“I’m so glad I married you,” he said, his voice coming out hoarse and a little raw.

“I’m so glad I married you, too,” Sansa returned, her eyes shining more brightly.

They kissed. It was a very sweet kiss that deepened as it went on, until Stannis started to feel quite ready to make love to his wife right then and there on the sofa. Unable to control himself, he pulled Sansa onto his lap, needing to feel her pressed close.
“Is that sex?” Minisa suddenly asked, causing Stannis to tear his lips away from Sansa’s and search for his daughter.

Minisa was looking at him and Sansa while Steffon’s eyes were still glued to the TV screen.

“No, darling,” Sansa said, moving to sit beside him rather than on top of him. “Mummy and Daddy were just kissing.”

“No baby?” Minisa tilted her head to the side.

“No baby,” Sansa confirmed.

Minisa thought this over for a moment before turning to look at the screen again, apparently out of questions for the time being.

Sansa shook with silent laughter, but Stannis was not amused.

Unfortunately, he had no one to blame but himself for the fact that his daughter was asking about sex. He really needed to start minding what he said around the children. They listened to everything.

\textit{Soon those two will be asleep}, he reminded himself. \textit{Soon Sansa and I will have plenty of privacy}. That thought cheered him up.

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Stannis had contained his curiosity ever since he’d come home from work, but now that he finally had Sansa to himself inside the privacy of their bedroom, he intended to ask her a few questions.

“What were you and Shireen talking about this afternoon?”

Sansa was changing into her nightgown, but Stannis made himself ignore the flashes of bare skin and focus on her face. He was already in bed, though his book and his reading glasses were untouched and ignored on his nightstand.

“Love,” Sansa said, shooting him a wistful smile.

\textit{“Hello, love of my life.”}

Stannis nodded, recalling the way Sansa had greeted him when he had made it home from work earlier.

“Shireen’s in love?” he asked, not quite able to wrap his mind around the concept.

“Of course she is,” Sansa said, sounding exasperated. “You really should pay attention to these things.”

“Well, she doesn’t talk to me about ‘these things’,” he said, feeling that Sansa was being a little unfair. His annoyance drained away when she joined him in bed and rested her head on his chest, however. His wife was warm and soft, and it was good to have her with him. Stannis still remembered all too well what it was like to be alone. “She talks to you,” he added, stroking Sansa’s hair affectionately.

Sansa hummed and pressed herself closer, one of her hands playing with his chest hair. They were silent for a little while.
“When did you realise you wanted to propose to me?” Sansa asked, shifting around so that she could look at his face. Her expression was full of curiosity.

Stannis thought about it, but it didn’t take him long to recall. “Remember that dinner when Renly and Loras announced that they were getting married?”

Sansa nodded, her eyes widening a little.

“I started thinking about it then.” He remembered it very clearly. The dinner had been shortly after Christmas, and he had wondered whether he should have given Sansa an engagement ring rather than a necklace as a present.

“But we had only been together for about a year,” Sansa said, sounding a little incredulous. “You didn’t propose until much later…”

“I don’t like to rush decisions,” Stannis said mildly.

“How did you know you wanted to, though?” Sansa asked, sitting up and practically X-raying him with her eyes.

“I suppose I just realised I couldn’t imagine my life without you,” Stannis said, feeling his face become a little warm. He wasn’t embarrassed, but it was strange to talk about this. His love for Sansa was so much a part of him, and his certainty that she loved him in return was so powerful, that he didn’t really like to think about the fact that he had used to be uncertain about their future. Once upon a time, he had believed that she would leave him once she got tired of him, and it physically hurt to remember it.

Sansa was still searching his face for answers, and Stannis swallowed thickly. “You made me feel things I’d never felt before. You made me… afraid.”

“Afraid?” Sansa looked confused and a little upset.

Stannis sat up on the bed and ran a hand through his hair. “I’m not explaining this very well.”

“Why were you afraid?” Her voice was soft, and her hand found his and covered it.

He blew out a breath and accepted the strength she offered him. “Back at the start, before we moved in together… I didn’t know whether your feelings for me would last. The thought of having your love and then losing it… it terrified me. I knew I’d never recover from the heartbreak.”

“You proposed to me to make sure I wouldn’t leave?” Sansa asked, her brow furrowed, her tone incredulous.

“No,” Stannis said, horrified that she had jumped to that conclusion. He embraced her, trying to explain himself physically, since his words weren’t doing the job on their own. “As time went by I realised that I had nothing to be afraid of. We were right for each other. We were a family. Proposing to you… marrying you… it was just a way to make it official.”

Sansa hugged him tight, and he felt her lips on his neck. Their hug turned into a kiss, and soon they were lying down, their bodies glued together, their lips only parting for fractions of seconds so they could catch their breaths.

Eventually they broke apart.

“I told Shireen that if a person finds love and happiness, they should savour it for as long as it
lasts,” Sansa whispered, her expression open and sincere. There was no question implied, but Stannis couldn’t help himself.

“Forever,” he said, utter conviction filling every cell in his body. “I will love you forever, Sansa.”

Stannis didn’t know how she did it, but somehow Sansa managed to smile, blink back tears, and look achingly beautiful as she did it.

“Me too,” she said, her voice full of emotion.

After that, neither one of them spoke. They communicated with their bodies instead.

Heated kisses, soft touches, the scent of Sansa’s arousal, and the whisper of satin filled Stannis’ senses. Moans followed, and laboured breathing, as he pushed inside her, surrounding himself with love and pleasure and warmth. Their fingers were tangled up, palm against palm, and their foreheads were pressed together whenever their lips weren’t. Sansa arched her back beneath him as his hips thrust forwards slowly… almost sweetly.

It was an intense conversation that left them both feeling deeply connected, satisfied, and loved.

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Stannis was glad that Shireen offered to watch the twins while he and Sansa put the remains of their picnic away. He wanted a moment alone with his wife.

“Are you okay?” he asked, searching Sansa’s face as she folded up the old tablecloth with its new violently orange stain. He didn’t know why she was bothering to fold it since it would be going in the wash, but he didn’t comment on it.

“Of course I’m okay,” Sansa said, smiling at him. “I’m not the one who takes it as a personal affront when a three year old spills a little juice.”

She was teasing him, but Stannis didn’t let her distract him. “Are you okay with what Shireen said?”

“About Selyse and Milton? I think it’s great that they’re getting married. Aren’t you okay with it?”

Stannis blinked at her. He had forgotten that Shireen had told them about that. “Of course I’m okay. I don’t really care what Selyse does, but Shireen deserves to see her mother happy. I was talking about the other thing Shireen said.”

“Oh, about school? I’m thrilled!” Sansa said, smiling more widely. “It’s wonderful that she’s decided on a major. She’ll do wonderfully, and she’ll be an amazing language teacher one day.”

Stannis shook his head and stilled her when she went to put the leftovers of the chicken salad away. He stroked a lock of hair away from her face and looked her straight in the eyes.

“Shireen told you that she is who she is because of you,” he said quietly, watching for Sansa’s reaction.

His wife blushed. “Oh, that.” There was a short pause. “I’m more than okay with that,” she said, her smile becoming more thoughtful. “I know I’ve influenced her. Maybe not nearly as much as you and Selyse did when she was growing up, but I know I’ve left my mark. I’m proud of it. I’m proud of her.”
“I’m proud of you both,” Stannis said, feeling his heart expand. He truly was too proud for words of his girls and how far they had come.

They shared a lingering kiss, but when their lips parted Sansa insisted on putting the leftovers away so they wouldn’t spoil. Sansa winked at him when he offered to take the tablecloth down to the basement to be washed, and Stannis raised an eyebrow at her. Did she want him to drag her down there again?

Because he would not hesitate to do that.

Something about his eyes must have communicated his thought to her, because Sansa blushed and hurriedly busied herself with the chicken salad.

Stannis shook his head, smiled to himself, and took the juice-stained tablecloth downstairs.

***

Sansa was supervising Steffon and Minisa as they created artistic sculptures out of Play-Doh, and Stannis was furrowing his brow at a Sudoku puzzle when he wasn’t observing his family. Well, most of his family. Shireen was missing. She had gone off with Bran to do some shopping, and soon the two of them would be leaving for Brightwater to attend his ex-wife’s wedding.

It still seemed a little odd to him that Selyse was getting married. He was happy for her in a strange, detached sort of way, but he had been very relieved when he and Sansa hadn’t received an invitation to the wedding. His relationship with Selyse always functioned better when he stayed well away from her. He wondered for a moment how he would have felt about her decision to remarry if it hadn’t been for Sansa, but a sharp pain in his heart discouraged him from dwelling on it.

He never liked thinking about how his life might have ended up if it hadn’t been for Sansa.

The doorbell interrupted his thoughts, and Sansa gave him a questioning look. “Are we expecting anyone?”

Stannis shook his head and rose from his chair, his Sudoku puzzle forgotten. “I’ll go see who it is.”

As it turned out, a plant had somehow managed to ring the doorbell. Stannis stared down at the little tree that was getting mud all over his welcome mat, and examined the three lemons that were growing on it.

Sansa will love it, he thought, and imagined the look on her face. They had been meaning to get a lemon tree for the garden for ages, but somehow they had yet to get around to it. Feeling the corners of his lips quirk into a smile, he turned to call her name.

“Sansa, I think there’s something for you here.”

He scanned the street surreptitiously while he waited for his wife to come to the door, but didn’t see anyone. Renly? he wondered, recalling a previous garden-related gift from his brother.

Sansa and the twins came along soon enough, and Sansa’s reaction to the tree was just as he had expected. She was surprised, elated, and curious about how the tree had ended up on their doorstep.

“I have nothing to do with this,” he told her, still wondering whether this was his younger brother’s work.
Stannis stared at the tree and searched it for clues, while Sansa explained to Steffon that the plant in front of them was a lemon tree. His son wasn’t much impressed.

A familiar laugh floated across the street, and Stannis peered his eyes in the direction it had seemed to come from. Shireen and Bran popped out of hiding from behind a parked car, yelling tada and laughing as they joined Stannis, Sansa, and the twins on the porch.

Shireen and Bran were in a bit of a state, but their eyes were bright and their faces were flushed with happiness. Stannis wondered aloud how they’d managed to get so scratched and muddy, and Bran explained that the plant hadn’t been easy to transport. Stannis suppressed the urge to scold them for not thinking ahead when they’d decided to buy it. Everyone was happy; he didn’t want to ruin the mood.

He looked at Sansa and knew without asking what she’d want him to say.

“This was very thoughtful of you.” He looked at Shireen, feeling inordinately proud of her for doing something so kind for her stepmother. His daughter met his eyes for a moment, and there was something very sweet in her gaze. It was almost like she was a little girl again.

Steffon distracted Stannis by trying to maim himself by touching the lemon tree’s thorns, but he knew the moment he’d been having with Shireen wasn’t gone. It would always be there if he looked for it.

“These are lemons!” Minisa said, her little body quivering with excitement.

“Yes, darling. And we can make lemonade, and custard, and lemon pies, and lemon chutney…” Sansa said, almost quivering with excitement herself. She beamed around at them all, and looked at him with a bright gleam in her eyes. “Stannis, we need to read up on lemon trees. I think we could plant it at the far left side of the garden, near the tangerine tree, wouldn’t that be lovely?”

“Sounds like a good place for it,” he agreed, knowing that he’d need to change into his gardening clothes within the next ten minutes. He didn’t mind. Maybe he’d even wear the absurd ones Renly had given him -- make it a special occasion.

“Oh, Stannis! We have a lemon tree!” Sansa threw her arms around his neck, knocking the air out of him for a moment. Before he had a chance to catch his breath she kissed him, and Stannis forgot for a few seconds that he needed oxygen to live. He was too busy enjoying his wife’s lips.

Sansa kept chattering about the wonders of lemon trees as soon as they broke apart - as if they hadn’t just been kissing at all - but Stannis didn’t mind. He liked seeing Sansa so happy. But more than that, he liked seeing Shireen and Bran look so pleased with themselves and the reaction their gift had garnered, and he liked seeing the love that had obviously blossomed between them.

It felt good to see that his daughter knew what it was to be in love, and be loved in return. Stannis hoped she would always have that kind of love in her life, and that she would never suffer loneliness or bitterness.

It was what he hoped for all his children, and his brothers, too.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Stannis stared at himself in the mirror.

Fifty.

The number seemed to echo inside his skull as he took in every wrinkle, every inch of his head that was exposed and hairless, every grey strand that still clung on, and every bit of loose skin.

How did I get so old?

With a sigh he reached for his shaving things and set to work. He’d need to be at work extra early today. Davos had warned him that Robert was planning to throw him a big surprise party at the office, and Stannis needed to get most of the day’s tasks out of the way before the cake distracted all of his employees.

Stannis tried to be quiet as he went about his morning routine since Sansa was still in bed. As a teacher, her Easter holiday began a little earlier than his own, and she would be staying home with the twins today. Both Steffon and Minisa were excited about their first Easter holiday. But that was nothing surprising. They had started school in the fall, and everything about their new situation in life seemed to excite them.

Done shaving, Stannis bent over the sink to rinse the leftover shaving cream from his face. He nearly had a heart attack when he straightened his back and looked in the mirror.

“Sansa,” he said, sounding a little startled despite his best effort not to.

Sansa smiled and hugged him from behind. “Happy birthday, darling.” She kissed his neck.

“Some warning would have been nice,” he grumbled, though he thought he’d risk a heart attack any day of the week to feel Sansa press herself against him like this.

Sansa smiled and continued to kiss him. “You’re up early,” she murmured between kisses. Her hands had found their way to the towel he had wrapped around his waist after his shower. One tug and it was on the floor.

“I told you last night,” Stannis said, his breath hitching in his throat when Sansa’s hand started to stroke a part of his anatomy that was responding as if he were eighteen, not fifty, “I - I need to get to work early today. Robert’s party will ruin my schedule otherwise.”

“I know you told me that,” Sansa purred in his ear, “but I think you should let your schedule be ruined. It is your birthday after all.” She gripped his cock firmly and started to do things that made him want to call in sick so that she might keep going for the rest of the day.

Stannis closed his eyes and groaned, focusing on the pleasure of his wife’s touch. “I can’t,” he said after a minute of being completely irresponsible. “You have to stop.”

Sansa nibbled on his earlobe. “Make me.” She sank to her knees behind him.

Stannis wanted to resist. He wanted to stand his ground and refuse to turn around and give her
access to his aching cock, but he couldn’t. He also tried to tell her to stop before her mouth descended on him, but nothing at all dignified came out.

“Gngh.”

Sansa looked up at him, her lips around the head of his cock and her hand wrapped around the base. Her eyes were sparkling.

*Well, I tried,* he thought to himself, letting his head fall back, and tangling a hand in her sleep-mussed hair.

She knew what he liked better than he did, and had him coming much sooner than he would have preferred. They didn’t do this quite as often as they had when they had both been younger - back before the twins had been born - and he would have liked to savour it.

“Do you want me to return the favour?” he whispered into her ear once she had risen to her feet again, and he’d captured her in his arms.

“I thought you were in a hurry?” she asked, her tone a little coy.

“It’s my birthday,” Stannis said, deepening his voice, “I’ll do what I want.”

He knew it would take him a while to be able to sustain another erection, but he didn’t care. He intended to take Sansa to bed, see to her pleasure, and then start his day off on the right foot. According to his calculations, they still had an hour before the children would wake up.

It was a very enjoyable hour.

They were breathless and sweaty at the end of it, and Stannis would need another shower before work, but he ached in all the right ways, and he felt a little less worried about his age.

“How are you enjoying your fifties so far?” Sansa asked, as if she had read his mind.

“Aside from the new wrinkles, they’re great,” he said, revelling in the way that Sansa was running her hands over his chest, and the way her smooth, sweaty skin felt under his own fingers.

“New wrinkles?” Sansa asked, sounding intrigued.

Stannis nodded and drew her attention to the corners of his eyes.

She smiled, creating creases of her own. When he studied her closely he could see faint smile lines even when her face was at rest. No lines like that had formed around her mouth, and Stannis knew he’d have to wait a long time to see any frown lines form on *her* face.

“I love the crow’s feet,” Sansa said with a happy sigh. “I love everything about you.”

“You don’t think I’m getting too old for you?” he asked.

“Never,” Sansa said.

They kissed, and Stannis was just wondering whether he’d be able to convince his fifty year old body to gear up for more fooling around when there was a quiet knock on the bedroom door.

“Mummy? Daddy?”

Stannis and Sansa hurriedly scrambled for their discarded nightwear and covered themselves with
the comforter for good measure.

“Come in,” Sansa called once they were decent.

Minisa and Steffon poked their little heads inside and made their way to the bed. They both came to Stannis’ side and looked at him with earnest expressions.

“Happy birthday, Daddy,” Minisa said, her voice sweet. She was growing into quite the little lady, and with every day that went by, Stannis saw her pick up more and more of Sansa’s mannerisms.

“Happy birthday,” Steffon echoed, his face almost comically solemn. Though Steffon was not quite as serious as Stannis himself had been as a child, he was definitely not an exuberant menace. Robert complained that it was unnatural, and constantly tried to get him to climb trees and sword fight with sticks. Minisa usually told her uncle off for it. Politely. Even Stannis admitted that it was adorable.

“We made you a card,” Steffon said, taking his hands from behind his back and presenting a piece of thick paper that had been decorated and folded.

Stannis took the card and examined it. On the front there was a drawing of five people. He easily recognised himself, Sansa, Shireen, Steffon and Minisa. There was also a house, the ocean, the sun and a rainbow. Everyone was smiling, though Stannis noticed that the tallest stick figure had a small smile, and not a toothy grin. Inside the card there were words that had obviously been written in Minisa’s delicate hand. Though the letters were childish, they were still well formed for someone of her age.

Dear Daddy,

Happy birthday!

We love you very much.

Minisa and Steffon

Steffon had signed his own name, and his letters were bigger and messier than Minisa’s.

There was a tightness in his chest that made it a little hard to breathe, but Stannis smiled at his children nonetheless. A small smile -- not a toothy grin.

“Thank you,” he said, handing the card to Sansa so that she might take a look. She immediately started exclaiming over it, gushing about the drawing of the family and the correct spelling. He nodded along, unable to speak due to the lump in his throat.

“- and it’s just wonderful!” Sansa finished, her voice a little higher than usual. “Come here so that we can give you both a hug!”

The kids did not have to be told twice. Being invited to ‘the big bed’ was a rare and treasured occurrence.

Hugs and kisses were doled out, Steffon and Minisa each getting their fair share. After a little bit of cuddling Sansa told them to go to their rooms and get dressed, promising a special breakfast of pancakes for everyone.

Stannis was reluctant to let them leave, but knew that he needed time to compose himself, shower again, and get dressed.
“Sometimes I wonder if this is real,” Sansa said dreamily before he managed to get out of bed. “On mornings like these, it all just seems too good to be true…”

Stannis knew exactly what she meant.

“Every morning since I met you has been too good to be true,” he said, meeting her eyes and holding her gaze.

The smile that broke out on her face was dazzling, and the kiss that followed was as sweet as she was.

But it is true, he thought as he buried his hands in her hair and deepened their kiss.

It was true, and that made it all the better.

The end

Chapter End Notes

That's all folks!

If you're curious about why I decided to write an epilogue that is set a few years before the epilogue in darkstark's story, it is mostly because I felt like she did such a good job with her epilogue that I didn't really feel like I had anything to add to it. Also, while darkstark's story was coming full circle, ending the way it began with Shireen telling the twins her version of the story of how Stannis and Sansa met, I didn't think it was the right ending for this story. For this story I just wanted to leave you guys secure in the knowledge that Stannis and Sansa are having their happily ever after, soothing away each other's insecurities, doing it like bunnies at every opportunity, and enjoying some domestic bliss.

I'd like to thank darkstark for writing The New Girl and letting me play in her sandbox, and for reading and commenting incredibly helpfully on every chapter before I posted. I'd also like to thank Tommyginger for all her help with this story, her ideas and encouragement.

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to thank those of you who took the time to comment as I posted this monster. It kind of grew a little out of control on me. Oops.

Love you guys! ♥

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