All is Fair in Love and War

by spankingfemme

Summary

Alt ending for S6E9 where at the end of the battle, things go a little differently for Ramsay, and Sansa gets her revenge by taking Ramsay and claiming him as her spoils of war.

(Fic continues on through S7 of the show where Petyr too faces his just desserts :P

Audio links will be added to every chapter as Jason is able to record them, so keep an eye out for your listening enjoyment! =D

Notes

Alrighty! So, my dearest hubby loves me so, and this story is a product of said love (yet another spin on poor Ramsay losing the battle where Sansa comes out on ‘top’ story (because that’s where I like to see her and even more so where I like to see Ramsay! *evil grin*) For those that have read Too Easy (the other Ramsay story hubby wrote for me), he’s not going to write that harsh in this fic! Hubby knows what I like and is catering this more in the vein of A Need to Suffer (since I like Sansa to end up being nice after she’s been so mean… I’m a mess in case you didn’t get that already! LOL!) This fic is my reward for dedicated exercise each day where I earn 4 paragraphs a day, so updates should be steady if not take a couple weeks in between! (One mention, if you have read Too Easy, hubby reused two or three paragraphs from that fic for a scene he was too lazy to rewrite LOL! *snerk*)
Okay, on to WARNINGS!!! This story is not for the faint of heart and will contain nonconsensual themes of rape, bondage, spanking, pegging, and many other darker themed types of sexual and emotional triggers; you have been warned!

See the end of the work for more notes.
He sat frozen in his saddle, his mind taking overly long to soak in the details of what he saw because it did not wish to see these things. He dully listened to the clarion call of the enemy war trumpets, not wanting to hear it any more than he wanted to see the advancing troops. Wave after wave of riders charged their horses down the small hillock that Sansa Stark and her reinforcements had suddenly appeared on and began to scythe into the back ranks of his carefully laid trap for Jon Stark’s forces.

He was slack-jawed, still trying to comprehend how this had happened as those riders cut a wide swathe through his men, laying waste to his armies in moments as the knights of the vale expertly circled his lines and victimized his foot-soldiers, who were unable to face the new threat to any degree with Jon’s men still on their flanks. His advisors had already fled he realized belatedly. His survival instinct kicked in then, and he spurred his horse into a retreat, but the entire ride back he felt numb with surprise.

His men seemed eager to close the massive gate that guarded the castle wall, and Ramsay supposed he couldn’t blame them, seeing as most of the enemy forces arrayed against them were cavalry, leaving them little time to get ahead of the bloodbath that would surely follow if Ramsay Bolton was caught out in the open with so few defenders.

As the huge wooden beam that barred the door was slid into position, Ramsay’s only remaining soldier of any rank who yet lingered nearby approached him with a look of concern on his face, “We are to take on a siege, milord?”

The sound of doubt trilled in the soldier’s voice, and Ramsay frowned at his obvious cowardice. With soldiers like these, no wonder he had lost the field, “Jon Snow’s army is destroyed.”

The soldier dared to reply, “As was ours.”

Ramsay grimaced in irritation, “We have walls and food; they don’t have the men to lay siege.”

At that moment a great booming sound followed by the crunch of wood splintering startled both men, and Ramsay’s face paled in dread as he saw a massive fist plow through the very doors he had just laid his trust in.

Even though arrows and spears harried and hurt that giant hand, it nonetheless proceeded to rip the door asunder in a few hard pulls, revealing Jon Snow and his forces beyond. Ramsay retreated more quickly this time, hoping to move faster than his pursuers could notice. All he had with him were the few useless advisors who had fled the field before him and were likely hiding inside the castle basement and closets, and those handful of his personal guard, who would be falling to the far larger force of Jon’s group any moment now.

He scrabbled down to an armament rack, snatching a bow and quiver from it. He had but one notion of how he might still yet be victorious; he would kill Jon Snow. Then he would die, of course, but better to spite Sansa with this last action than die groveling in a closet like his cowardly advisors.
would. First though, he loosed an arrow into the giant’s left eye, to insure that the great raging brute would not interfere with its long stride.

The giant died the moment the shaft pierced its brain from Ramsay’s expertly placed shot. Now secure in his position fully thirty paces from Jon and the soldiers behind him Ramsay paused to sneer at Jon, “I have reconsidered; let’s fight it out amongst the two of us.” He nocked an arrow, still smiling at the fact that this frustrating worm who had managed to wriggle out of two death traps on the field would now finally die as he should.

As he had raised his bow, though, Jon lunged forward, sweeping a shield from the ground that had been dropped by one of Ramsay’s personal guards as the giant had stomped him to death. Barely in the nick of time he raised the shield, blocking his face and continuing to advance on Ramsay with a seething glare on his face.

Ramsay’s smile widened as he thought that Jon must be thinking of his brother and how Ramsay had shot him through the back with similar bow so very recently. So fitting that Jon should die the same way, his rage obviously clouding his judgement, since moving closer only made it even easier for Ramsay to place a shot between his eyes.

He drew and fired, his smile faltering as Jon threw the shield before his face again. His smile turned into a concentrated stare as he summoned the considerable reservoir of focus he maintained as a skilled hunter to fire again, but once more Jon blocked. Somewhat vexed at the continued blocks Ramsay decided he should probably aim for his face and then switch to his legs as the shield came up; after all, Jon would be blind at that moment.

However, as Ramsay calmly loaded another arrow into his bow from the quiver he realized a split second too late that Jon was picking up his pace in that narrow window and that he wasn’t going to have the time needed for another shot. His composure was lost as he cried out in dismay as Jon charged forward, swatting his weapon away with the shield as he tried desperately for a final shot. Before he could react to the swing Jon brought the shield savagely forward, slamming it into his middle.

As the shield collided with his sternum Ramsay felt the air rush out of him and he gasped, falling backwards under both the force of the blow and under Jon’s weight as the armored man tackled him to the ground. Ramsay had never been brought to the ground in combat before and in fact had little experience in this sort of fighting at all. Before he could apply himself to what he might do, though, a gauntleted fist smashed into his nose, deriving him momentarily of all sense.

All ability to think whatsoever was robbed of Ramsay, and he couldn’t even raise his hands to guard himself as Jon rammed his hands into Ramsay’s face over and over again. He didn’t bother defending his face at that point, trying to smile up at Jon defiantly but having that beaten by a punch that broke his nose. Jon showed no sign of slowing his bludgeoning attack, and as Ramsay saw lights flash before his vision he realized that he was going to die this way.

He saw her just briefly through the haze of distorted vision and the blood in his eyes; Sansa Stark had arrived to see what Jon was doing to him and as he rolled his head back to look at his attacker once more he realized groggily that Jon had ceased hitting him. He was so far gone now he had failed to notice that the painful bludgeoning had stopped… he didn’t have time to ponder the reasons, as the soft caress of unconsciousness fell upon him, to which he readily gave in.

Ramsay Bolton raised his head slowly, pain blossoming in several locations throughout his face. He could taste the coppery, salty mix of his own blood and noted quickly that he could not fully open his left eye. Jon Snow had pummeled him into the ground with a fury borne of his loss at Ramsay’s hands, and Ramsay recalled only dimly why he had stopped short of breaking his head open upon
the cobblestone of the castle courtyard. He recalled now how Sansa had looked then, the hatred etched on her face. Ramsay had taken in a glimpse of that deep loathing before, when she had promised him that he would die today, out on the field before the battle yesterday. He had not realized then that it was no empty threat, but a prediction.

Ramsay’s eyes wandered around the room he was in; steel bars blocked the way in front of him in the form of a massive gate. To his sides were smaller doors, each also barred, allowing him to look inside at the shadowed forms lurking there, watching him with eyes that reflected the torch light that leaked into the room through the gate from sconces on the walls outside.

Hay lay strewn about here and there, as sometimes his hounds would track it into the main room of the kennel upon their paws. It was dark, so he had to assume that he had fallen to unconsciousness for some few hours, since his combat with Snow had been in the morning. Then he realized that someone was standing out in the courtyard beyond the gate. Not just anyone, either; it was her.

“Sansa… Sansa Sansa…” Ramsay croaked, clearing the blood from his throat so that he could speak, “Hello, Sansa.” She didn’t say anything, and her face was impassive, hiding the hatred he had seen in her before. He smiled; she was trying not to let him get under her skin. They all tried not to let him get under their skin, his victims, but he always managed. He had a reputation to uphold; there was a reason the Bolton banner depicted a flayed man.

He glanced around at the kennel, “So this is where I shall be staying now…?” He shook his head, “No… I think we shall be parting ways soon… but you should know you can never kill me; I’m part of you now.”

Sansa replied quickly but coolly; a statement ready for him, perhaps, “Your words shall disappear… your name shall disappear… all memory of you shall disappear.”

Those words echoed horribly in the room, accompanied only by the low sound of the snarling dogs. She smiled when he didn’t respond, and Ramsay grit his teeth as he realized that Sansa had not only noticed that he realized what she was likely going to do to him now, but was enjoying the nervous look it created in him. “Don’t worry, Ramsay. I only wanted you to think that you would be eaten by your own hounds today; how does it feel to be victim to your own sort of game?”

Ramsay snarled as viciously as one of his hounds, but didn’t say anything. What would he say, after all? He had already betrayed that she had managed to get under his skin instead of the other way around by the anger that was so clearly evident on his face. He cleared his composure as best he could and did his best to level her with an icy glare.

Sansa, for her part, did not seem to be affected by his attempt at quiet and subtle intimidation, instead continuing her own project, “No, I am not going to erase you that way; I’m going to erase everything you are with a variety of punishments you so amply deserve, until you are no better a man that the creature you turned Theon Greyjoy into.”

Ramsay’s eyes widened before he could regulate his countenance, and his breathing quickened. So, she meant to torture him after all before the end. In fact, she wasn’t just promising to simply torture him; she was promising to break him, sunder his will to live and make a groveling, sad specter of his psyche that would never again resemble the man he used to be.

He gulped but still did not reply; he knew from years of experience that a torturer only felt they were gaining ground when they received feedback from the tortured. Sansa had a cold, humorless smile on her face and a sadistic gleam in her eyes that reminded him of Myranda, which was ironic seeing as she could only have become this way from the naïve girl he had married due to his own efforts, just as Myranda had.
“Have it your way, Ramsay Snow; you’ll be screaming loudly soon enough. I’m sure that I will tire of your pitiful pleas in the days to come, so I shall enjoy the silence for now…”

Ramsay felt a rush of anger and knew that his face must be reddening with it despite his careful control of his features. ‘Snow’. She had called him that just to get a rise out of him, so if he were to buckle into his desire to lash out at her then he would of course be playing into her hands. Though the way she had worded it might have seemed like she would enjoy his silence, he was still fairly certain his ire would please her more, give her power over him.

So he continued to remain quiet despite what she had said, despite the fact that in almost any situation since he had become a Bolton in name that any person would dare to invoke his bastard title he would have been swift in his retaliation. He would just have to settle with punishing her for it later should she be so foolish as to consider him broken later, letting that thought console his roused ire.

Sansa for her part watched him, seeming to drink in the details of how he reacted, no doubt probing him for weaknesses. She turned and spoke to a soldier in the courtyard but they were too far away for their low conversation to be heard by Ramsay. He only managed to hear his name and the word ‘cleaned’. Then the portcullis door grated open and two big wildling men entered and cut him from the chair, pulling him from it none too gently and half-carried him from the kennel.

Ramsay looked around quickly as they traveled through the courtyard towards the castle proper, noting that the main gate stood open. His chances of escaping these two wildlings and the men that likely stood outside of the walls were slim to none, but less so were his chances once they had him inside the stone keep. Ramsay suddenly kicked the guard to his left in the shin, pulling right as he twisted his wrist in the grip of the other guard, already lunging forward to begin running.

The soldier whose shin he kicked snarled in pain but he did not release his tight grip on Ramsay’s arm. Likewise the other soldier proved resilient to Ramsay’s attempt to twist free, so both pulled back, completely stopping his forward momentum, so that instead of a run for freedom he received a vicious elbow from one side and a swift knee from the other which drove the wind from his lungs.

Consciousness once again threatened to flee from him, and he could hear Sansa as if she spoke from a great distance, “Don’t kill him; he deserves far worse than to simply be beaten to death. I don’t think he’ll be so stupid again, but ready yourselves to make him pay for such imbecile action without actually ending him. After all, he might be trying to make you angry so that you will spare him the fate I have in store for him.”

The soldiers murmured their reluctant acquiescence, and then proceeded to carry Ramsay by the arms into the keep, his feet dragging on the ground behind him. He was half of the mind to feign unconsciousness and then try once more to escape, but as they passed under the arch of the door and he felt the stabbing pain both in the back of his head and his ribs where he had just been struck, he decided that the pointless gesture would only allow them another chance to brutalize him, and offer him no reward for the attempt whatsoever.

They carried him down familiar corridors towards the lord’s quarters of the castle. Ramsay knew the layout well; after all, he had lived here for some time when he had moved in with his father, after Roose Bolton had taken the keep by betraying House Stark at the Red Wedding. Father had his man knife the pregnant bride in the womb of her unborn child right in front of the groom; Ramsay had always thought that was a nice touch.

Ramsay had to wonder why they were headed for such chambers instead of going down to the dungeon below or at least to the storage room where he had tortured Theon Greyjoy. But no, the guards instead took him into the master bedchamber where Ramsay’s father had recently slept and where he had even more recently slept after murdering his father and seizing control of the Bolton
He supposed on reflecting that before that it would have been Sansa’s parents’ room, and would likely now be Sansa’s room as the Lady of House Stark, since Jon could not be Lord on account of him being both a bastard and a member of the Night’s Watch. So why were these men taking him to the bedchambers of Sansa Stark? Perhaps he had read her all wrong and she had become addicted to his sort of love, and wanted more…

He must have been smiling at the thought, because one of the two wildlings carrying him suddenly took offense, “Give you something to smile about you shit-heel…” Ramsay recoiled to the force of a swift punch to his gut, and was thrown roughly onto a table, where the two made quick work of tying his arms and legs to the legs of said table with rope. Once done one waved a servant over as Ramsay watched on with a confused look etched on his face.

The servant first used a bowl of water and a cloth to gently clean the blood caked upon his face, then she drew a knife and Ramsay flinched, wondering who this servant was that she was going to be stabbing him now… was she perhaps an old fling that he had forgotten about? Maybe one of the few who had managed to escape his hunts, back for revenge? There were so many, it was hard to remember them all…

She moved forward and he closed his eyes, waiting for the sharp sensation of the knife piercing his side or stomach, since that would be the most painful way for him to die from a stabbing and his own personal choice when he knifed people; in fact, he had knifed his father in the gut on the day that he had ascended the Bolton family tree, and watched for hours as the man quietly bled to death.

But he didn’t feel the tell-tale sensation of a knife entering his bowels or kidneys; instead, he heard a ripping sound and peeked with one eye to see that the servant woman was cutting his shirt away. He frowned, watching as she methodically went about the task of washing him once more now that the bloody shirt had been removed, scrubbing him over thoroughly.

Then she drew the knife again and cut along the seam of his pants. He smiled, bewildered, “I think you have gotten confused, woman; there is no blood down there, or are you just trying to get a look at my cock?” The woman cast him a single look of mild annoyance and then cut the rest of his garment cleanly apart, leaving him naked on the table, “I would have you know that I could have taken those off to give you a view…”

A sharp cuff to the ear interrupted his witty remarks, and Ramsay glared at the wildling who had hit him, “I was only informing this simpleton servant that those trousers were probably worth more than any of you lot have ever seen, and…” Another slap to the head, this time a little harder. The guard didn’t even look irritated; he just had a passively aggressive expression on his face that dared Ramsay to say something else.

So Ramsay stopped talking, instead resorting to his own thoughts to pass the time. Well, his own thoughts were likely to provide more intelligent conversation anyways, he thought, his words and wit were likely wasted on these heathens. So Sansa wanted him naked… he watched, bemused as the servant cleaned his lower half in a way that one might prepare a corpse before burial.

Perhaps that was what the Stark heiress had thought to do; to intimidate him again with the prospect of imminent death. Well, that wouldn’t work; he was becoming desensitized to the idea of dying now as he allowed the fact to settle within himself, and frankly was less afraid by the moment as he contemplated the methods that would have to be used to kill him.

Hanging, most like. For whatever reason, most Houses of Westeros were big fans of death by hanging, even considered it somehow more civil than other means of execution, and being that Sansa
Stark had few allies and a need to rally the north, she would almost certainly need to hang him to present the best political representation of his death.

That thought niggled at his mind, though; it didn’t seem right. He frowned more deeply as he thought about it. This couldn’t be an intimidation tactic; Sansa had promised him a long and unhappy life to the extent of telling him that would be made into the image of his own victim Theon Greyjoy, so execution was off the table entirely. He mulled over the thought on how much Sansa must hate him to keep him alive when so many must clamor for his death.

A smile crept over his face at the thought of Sansa being unable to kill him. Likely he had cowed her in ways she herself did not fully understand, and so she could not bring herself to kill him; instead choosing such petty intimidation tactics because she could think of little else with her fear gripping her so. He liked that thought; Ramsay had always enjoyed inspiring fear, it was his greatest joy to do so.

Also if that bitch thought she was going to get anywhere by leaving him naked on a table she was barking up the wrong tree; Ramsay had never been the bashful type and bore no shame in his own nudity. No, she was going about all of this wrong, but she didn’t have his experience in these sort of things, or his will.

Silly Sansa; she should know better than to try to be a predator when she was so obviously the prey. Ramsay laid back and made himself as comfortable as he could, at least as comfortable as one could make oneself on a hard wooden table. He glanced over to see that his guard didn’t seem to enjoy either his company or his attitude or perhaps both.

He smirked; he didn’t much care what the wildling thought, and in fact relished the idea of causing the other man any form of annoyance. After all, the brute had the audacity to strike him in the face; something Ramsay would remember. Should the opportunity to drive something sharp between that guards ribs present itself he would take it, even if it would cause him pain; it would be worth it.

His smirk cost him as the guard slapped him across the face in retaliation for the expression. “Try to remember that you are about to be tortured beyond your ability to endure, shit-bag,” said the guard, “I assure you that whatever it is that Lady Sansa has in mind for you, it isn’t going to be pleasant.”

The wildling smiled at his obvious anger in response to the slap.

The guard continued to speculate on what exactly it was she might be considering, “I think maybe some shards of glass shoved under the fingernails might be nice, or perhaps a foot screw.” He leaned in to give Ramsay a menacing smile, “It’s this great big nail we slowly drill into your foot; very painful.” Ramsay didn’t need the guard to tell him what a foot screw was; he had used one on Theon not too very long ago.

The wildling guard went on with his litany of awful things she could subject him to, “There is of course flaying; I personally think it would be ironic and fitting for the only remaining lord of the Bolton bloodline to be flayed alive as is your family’s sick tradition. There are even more gruesome ways she could end the torture too, you know; have you ever seen an intestinal rack?”

Ramsay paled a little at all of the suggestions made. He had personally seen what these wicked contraptions and techniques did to their victims, as he had used all of them on someone at some point. Of course, at that point, he had never considered them being used on him… Sansa Stark didn’t have it in her to use such cruel forms of punishment, did she?

No, he thought. Not Sansa… he still remembered the first time he had laid eyes on her. He had known, even then; she was naïve. A spoiled little princess who went where the wind blew her because she had no strength of her own. He thought of the look she had given him at the kennel, her
promise to erase him as a man.

Also unbidden the memory of how she had glowered at him out upon the field surfaced in his thoughts, “You will die tomorrow.” That was all she had said, giving him a look so full of certainty. He hadn’t recognized her in that moment, but he had assumed it to be the anger the prey usually felt before it gave in to the inevitability of its defeat…

Ramsay frowned. But Sansa had not been defeated, nor her brother. They had won the day and Stark banners now fluttered once more from the archways of the keep. The symbol of the dire wolf now replaced the emblem of the flayed man that his father had his people drape over every entryway and high profile wall throughout the castle grounds and even without.

He tried to push this fact away from his thoughts but it ate at him; both at his sense of pride in the Bolton name which now resided with him, a naked man strapped to a table surrounded by enemies, and in his presumptions of Sansa and her inherent weakness. He had assumed that Theon had somehow grown a pair and whisked her off to safety before, but now he wondered…

Had young Sansa Stark actually convinced Theon; loyal, broken Reek, to betray him against or perhaps despite his training and better judgement? If that had been the case that would mean that Ramsay had grossly underestimated her. He ground his teeth together as he thought on how servile he had made Reek in those final days before they had escaped together.

He had allowed the cowed Theon Greyjoy to shave him in front of his father, taking blade to throat and shaving closely so as to prove to his old man how thoroughly and artfully he had broken the man. That Theon, that Reek, would have never betrayed him of his own accord. So it was Sansa, that cunt, that snake in the grass, only ever pretending to be weak until she was ready to strike.

It enraged and humiliated him to think that perhaps she had been patiently waiting to show him her hand all that time; that she might have feigned that naiveté he had thought he saw in her just to lower his guard against her long game. His expression grew thoughtful… what was her long game? He frowned again; of course, it was to return to her father’s land, and feel him out, find out what they were working with…

His heart hammered with surging hatred as he thought of that, that she had only been offering her hand in marriage to the Bolton house in order to avenge her brother’s death at the Red Wedding, to see what military forces they commanded so that she might then leave and summon her allies in the Vale, the same ones who had supposedly been vying for favor with his father by arranging the marriage.

Snakes, all of them. Though it still didn’t all seem to fit in his mind; like he was assembling a puzzle and the pieces seemed to match but didn’t quite align. He was missing something, but he knew he may never realize what it was; such was the nature of the puzzles one found in the greater game of life. For now he felt secure in the knowledge that perhaps he had in fact erred.

As much as he would rather think of her as a weak fool, Ramsay was too rational and level-headed to dismiss the notion that he could have made a critical misjudgment that had led to his current state of affair, strapped nakedly to a hard table and awaiting unknown tortures as he was. So if Sansa was in fact some sort of master infiltrator and strategist, why did she have him on that table naked and cleaned?

He didn’t know where to go with that, his mind drawing a frustrating blank as he tried in vain to summon an impression of what she was doing. Nothing. He must have fidgeted both with his discomfort of body and unease of mind, because his closest guard noticed and once more made comment, “Looks like you might finally be getting smarter…”
The guard flashed him a malicious smile, “…mayhap you’re thinking about all the things that might be happening to you, soon. I bet the only reason she’s taking so long is that she’s going to council on what to do to you, and there are too many options given. I for one hope she elects for them all…” The guard kept smiling, seeming to take genuine pleasure in seeing Ramsay’s dismay at his suggestion.

Ramsay turned his gaze away from the annoying smile on the guard’s ugly face. Yes, he would certainly be killing that man at some point in the future. Nonetheless the guard’s words got to him, despite his best attempts at convincing himself that they were the ramblings of a moron, he could not deny the possibility that lay in what the other man said.

Silence stood between them for a long time after that, as Ramsay pointedly ignored his guard, not even looking at his antagonist so as not to give them fuel for further irritating jests or jibes. Instead he relaxed or at least attempted to relax himself, doing and saying nothing and keeping his face as perfectly impassive as possible, a skill he was actually quite versed in.

Then she walked in and Ramsay felt his heart flutter at the sight of her despite himself. He worked expertly to keep his feeling from his face as he regarded her with his most cool expression, the one he usually had reserved for his father. That man had often caused him to feel things he did not want to feel, and he had needed to try equally as often to hide those unwanted emotions.

Sansa herself also was wearing a mask of cool regard, looking Ramsay over indifferently as she entered before turning to the guard, “Did he give you any further trouble?”

The guard shook his head, “No, ma’am; I think a few blows to the head and gut learned him better since we were in the yard.”

Ramsay couldn’t help but frown at the guard’s bragging. He couldn’t pass up the opportunity to remind all present whom they were dealing with, “My grandmother used to hit me harder… I chose to stay because I couldn’t pass up the opportunity to see if Sansa has learned anything at all from the time she stayed with me.”

Sansa only returned his comment with a stare at first, leaving Ramsay guessing as to how she would react to his reference to all the awful things he had subjected her to, rape not the least among them. Finally she replied, “Guard, I think I would like to speak to Ramsay alone; please leave us until I call out for you.”

The wildling guard clearly did not approve, frowning at Sansa as he replied, “But he is a killer and a coward; I do not think being alone with him is best…”

Sansa gestured to the restraints holding him to the table, “He isn’t going anywhere. Tied spread eagle upon that wooden table I do not think he offers threat to my person. I will be careful; thank you.”

The tone and manner that she stated thank you made it clear to the wildling that she had made up her mind and that he would not be convincing her to maintain an escort, so he simply nodded, moving out of the room through the single door that they entered it from, which served as the only entrance and exit barring the two windows.

Ramsay assumed he likely took up position just on the other side of that door, ready to enter should he hear anything suspect or if Sansa called for him. The door closed and Sansa walked up beside him, taking a long moment to look over the length of him, top to bottom. Ramsay gave her a crooked smile dripping with sarcasm, “I get that from a lot of women… so am I tied up like this so you can have a look?”
Sansa didn’t reply, still just looking him over as she walked around the table slowly, as if to take her time in doing so. She still wore that look of indifference though now it was possible that amusement tugged at the corners of her mouth. Of course, it was also possible that was what she wanted him to think, since it was now very clear to Ramsay that he wasn’t the only one playing mind games.

When she did speak he felt a shiver run down his spine after all the anticipation; if this situation had been on slightly different terms Ramsay might have really enjoyed it, but as matters were he disliked it greatly, resenting that she wasn’t nearly as interesting before when he had her in his custody… “They say that the best punishments fit the crime, but we have a problem in that…”

Ramsay looked over to her new position over his shoulder, doing his best to regulate his breathing evenly and keep a neutral expression on his face, as if he could care less for what she had to say but listened instead out of boredom, “…is that you have committed so many murders and other awful crimes that killing you for one of the ones that led to fatality…”

She put her hands on his shoulders casually and Ramsay fought the urge to jump at the sudden unexpected touch. She only rested her hands there, not throttling him or even gripping him uncomfortably. Ramsay would have thought that she would be loath to touch him, so the fact that she did so in such a nonchalant manner left him feeling ill at ease about her state of mind.

She left her hands there, speaking down to him as if he were an old friend than was being taken into confidence instead of a mortal enemy who was soon to be tortured, “…would most assuredly not be in any way fair. You deserve to die a thousand times over and therefore do not deserve the mercy of death but instead a life of suffering in which you are made an example to those who might think to be like you.”

She leaned down to whisper to him almost conspiratorially, despite the fact that they were in the room alone and that even if they weren’t, none would care what Sansa said to the Bastard of Bolton, “I don’t actually know what it was that you did to Theon that would make the man into being someone he wasn’t, and I am fairly certain you aren’t going to share your techniques with me…”

He could detect the slightest hint of a smile in her voice, “But that is fine, as I do not at all mind a lengthy process in learning how best to hurt you, as it will only give me option to be imaginative as well, perhaps coming up with some things even you would not have dreamed up. That would be great, I think, to best you in the art of suffering with my own brand of righteous punishment.”

Ramsay snorted, “So you are righteous, then? You’re a backstabbing slut and a lesser snake in a roomful of snakes… the person I should really worry about is probably Petyr, since he was obviously the brains behind your ploys. I should enjoy seeing you making a fool of yourself trying to do what I do best; please understand that no matter how nicely you ask I won’t be giving you any pointers…”

Sansa did not seem at all angry concerning his scathing remarks, which Ramsay found somewhat troubling and annoying; after all, that had been some good insulting. She took her hands from him and walked across the room, fetching a large oaken chair and dragging it across the floor so that it faced the area of the table where his head rested.

Once the chair was placed firmly, Sansa moved around it and sat down, regarding him with an expression that was still unruffled. Well, he thought, it was probably easy to feel on top and unfazed when the person insulting you was strapped nakedly to a table. He had to wonder now if perhaps that was the reason she had him put up like this…

Sansa’s face was still a head and a half over his despite sitting, as the table was not particularly tall. Not that it would have mattered; Sansa stood a head taller than Ramsay normally, so he was used to
his being taller than him. He had to wonder what Ned Stark had been feeding his children that they all ended up being so big.

Of course, Ramsay always asked himself this and things like this when someone was taller than him. A casual observer might say that Ramsay was detracting from the fact that he himself was simply a short, small man, but none ever had, as doing so would have likely led to the observer, casual or not, having his eyes painfully removed with a spoon.

She spoke after the awkward silence had extended past the point of manageable tolerance, “Poor Ramsay Snow… Jon must have rattled your brain; you of all people should realize that not only am I going to make you tell me whatever I want, the process of getting you to do so will certainly have you weeping with grief and begging for death.”

She watched him intently, apparently waiting to see if he had another witty comment about her inadequacies to throw in reply to her very direct statement. It was a challenge, Ramsay knew, and whatever front he might put up in front of her now, he was not so foolish as to think himself so different from the hundreds of souls he had broken; eventually she would get what she wanted…

Which left the problem in facing her challenge in the way she was essentially daring him to do; not only would it be an even greater loss of face once he did finally succumb, such open defiance would almost certainly lead to a great deal of suffering at an accelerated rate. For now, Ramsay had no choices about what was happening to him but in this, so the only wise choice…

Instead he chose another track, refusing to be cooperative, as that would be a defeat in and of itself, but resisting in a more passive fashion than his former blustering, which could only serve to make future escape attempts more difficult, “Oh I’m sure you can get a man screaming; like I told you before, I’m a part of you now, and I’m almost anxious to see how much of me is in you…”

Sansa stared at him as a slow smile spread from cheek to cheek. Ramsay could not say he much cared for that sort of sinister smile, and he found it ironic really to be faced with such after mentioning his own sadism ‘rubbing off’ on her. He had already misjudged her once… was it possible that Sansa had already been a cruel person not unlike him before all of this?

“My dear husband…” she started. Ramsay had almost forgotten they were still married by Westeros law. Funny that he would forget, he thought, not so long ago he himself had mentioned to Jon before field of battle that he so looked forward to having his wife back in their bedchamber. He supposed Sansa might have arranged this scenario for that very reason.

He certainly didn’t entertain the idea of returning here with her as a positive activity anymore, and was given yet further reason to view Sansa with new eyes; she certainly wasn’t the girl he had thought her to be. After taking a moment to run a finger along his arm and over his shoulder, Sansa continued, “…If I were you I would worry less about you being in me, and more of me being in you…”

Ramsay blinked; that response was a stretch from any reply he might have expected her to give him. What did she mean by that? Sansa seemed to enjoy the look of confusion she had evoked both from her statement and from the suddenly sensual way in which her hand continued to caress him. She ran her finger along the inside and outside of his thighs, along his abdomen and over his chest, tracing his shape as a lover might.

Ramsay raised an eyebrow; she didn’t actually want to fuck him, did she? He had only been joking and attempting spiteful play on the situation when he had made such insinuating remarks about her wanting to see him naked before; never would he have imagined that she would actually desire to lie with him as husband and wife after everything he had done to her and her brother…
Maybe he was just that intoxicating? Ramsay’s lifted eyebrows and slight frown might as well as said ‘Why not?’ He wasn’t a particularly endowed man, and while he was certainly athletic, he didn’t boast the bulging muscles of a Westeros hero, but he did pride himself on being exceedingly handsome; in fact, he often posed in front of a mirror hours at a time just to admire himself.

And let’s not forget his endearing personality; most people were rightfully afraid of him, but those few like him, like Myranda, and perhaps even like Sansa were drawn to him like a moth to flame. After all, he had the sort of powerful personality that any right-minded woman who was willing to take a risk or two wouldn’t be able to resist.

He smiled at her as she kept smiling down at him. She must have gone through all of that trouble to stage her revenge against his father, only to have him kill her nemesis and take his place, all while she fell in love with him even as she pretended to be revolted by his actions, like the proper princess she was faking that she was.

Ramsay’s smile widened a little further as he sat up as much as his bindings would allow, “Well then… if I had known you were actually enjoying it when I was taking you back then, maybe all the rest of this would have been unnecessary…” She placed a hand on his chest and shoved him down; she wasn’t pushing anywhere near as hard as she probably could, but her leverage made him hit the table fairly hard.

Ramsay did his best to take deep breaths, feeling winded from the sudden unexpected shove. Sansa was still smiling despite the unexpected violence, “Oh you’ve still got this all wrong. The longer it takes for you to figure out what I have planned, the more enjoyable I find it to be. But make no mistake; your wretched little cock will never again pierce my womb.”

The look of confusion reappeared on Ramsay’s winded face as the feeling of breathlessness finally faded. He tried to think of what she might mean but he came up with nothing. Was this all some sort of odd game; a tease of sorts? He remembered that he had invited several whores to get Theon excited before he had cut off the man’s dick…

Thinking this in conjunction with her comment about never penetrating her again caused his face to pale as he considered she might be contemplating having him castrated. Sansa for her part laughed at his loss of control over his countenance, and he struggled to regain a neutral face. Sansa didn’t know about him castrating Theon, did she? Well, he supposed it might have gotten around…

Ramsay failed horribly at trying to return to his poker face; the thought of losing his manhood was just too much of a threat to dismiss or hide from. Would she be having his own hounds eat it? He wondered. After all, he had threatened the possibility of that same exact fate to those who had assembled to meet him under banner of parlay out on the field before the battle…

If she did it that way, would she just allow a hound at his nuts, then; perhaps hold the mongrel by a leash and give it only just enough slack to reach his groin as he was bound spread upon the ground? He might have done something like that… and until recently he might have though Sansa the milder sort of person, maybe thought she would just have him clipped with a knife.

After that he might have imagined that she would then feed his genitalia to his hounds, perhaps even go so far as to make him watch, but nothing more depraved than that. Only now would he think her to be truly capable of the afore thought act, brutal and vicious in the style that Ramsay had become accustomed to in his own forays into his darker side.

But, he thought, if she planned on keeping him alive the first option would be risky, as the chance that the hound would wound him irreparably so that he ended up bleeding out on the ground would be quite high. In his own case that wouldn’t have mattered since he never promised his victims that
they would be surviving the ordeal. Well, unless he felt like lying…

Getting one of his plaything’s hopes up that they might actually live through what he did to them was a taunt that Ramsay had often enjoyed. In this scenario he realized he had several times now assumed that she would spare him because she had told him he would not die. Was this just one more thing that he was being proven wrong on?

As all of these thoughts raced through Ramsay’s head, his tormentor simply sat in her chair across from him, watching the dilemma of his mind play out on his face and Ramsay had to work very hard to bulwark himself against letting her read his face like an open book. Apparently she saw enough, though, as a slight smile creased her lips as she watched him.

Seeming no longer able to hold her actual intention back from him, even if only because she was eager to see his reaction to it, Sansa called a servant into the room from the hall outside. A young woman appeared, already carrying something in her arms and so apparently already versed in what Sansa would be needing from her. Ramsay strained to see but could not get a good look at it from where he was.

He heard a few telltale sounds though that gave him hints of what the strange object might be; a soft clinking sound like metal on metal and a leathery scraping sound from leather moving over leather. A harness of some kind? Ramsay had used many types of harnesses in his own craft; there were all sorts of restraints that made torture easier on the torturer…

However Ramsay was already bound… did she intend to unbind him simply to move him to a better position for certain painful activities? Perhaps they planned to bind him up to the bedposts to be whipped, though it was rather unprofessional to do such dirty work in one’s own bedroom; a good whipping could lead to blood on her fine linen sheets.

This could mean that Sansa was being amateurish in her choices of course, or it could mean she was a real freak who wanted to sleep in a bed anointed with his blood… either way it was still going to be an experience Ramsay would rather avoid. He decided he would stay cooperative until they loosened his bounds to relocate him, then he would make another escape attempt.

He braced himself for it; he would have to make this one count… either he met upon the thin chance that he could at least escape this room, or he died trying to do so or out in the hall beyond. If he could, he would attempt to kill Sansa and or the guard outside, depending on how things played out. Sansa never called the guard inside to remove his bindings, though…

Instead he heard her still playing with the apparatus, and he glanced over, curious what she was up to… would she be trying to undo his restraints herself? If she did, then that would greatly increase his odds of escape from this particular… Ramsay’s thought froze in his mind as his eyes widened in eventual realization of exactly what it was that Sansa was doing.

She was strapping the harness to herself, which comprised of leather straps that looped around her thighs and waist, securing a ring that rested over the front of her hips. Once she had tightened the straps so that the ring was tightly held against her, she adjusted the object that was attached to that ring until it was comfortable; a huge phallic item shaped like a massive cock.

She noticed that he had seen the strap-on, and smiled down at the open disgust and surprise in his face as it became clear to him at last what she had planned for him all along, “While you were unconscious I had a lot of time to think on what exactly I would like to see done to you. After giving it much careful thought and having a long discussion with a skilled smith, I decided the first thing that I must do before all else.”
She moved close, Ramsay’s face moving away from her fake metal member as it nearly touched his cheek, “You need to have done to you what you have done to others; I am going to rape you. I’m going to shove this huge metal cock into your asshole and pump you with it until you cry for me to stop, and then I will probably fuck you some more…”

Ramsay’s expression was one of horror; there was no longer any point to pretenses… if Sansa planned to go through with her stated objective he would lose more than his life. He tugged hard at his restraints, stopping as he felt the roped chafe his wrists painfully, “Let’s be reasonable, Sansa; we both know that if you do that you would be lowering yourself down to my level…”

Sansa merely raised an eyebrow at his statement, and though it felt ridiculous to speak about himself in such a manner, Ramsay didn’t know what else to say to try to avert such a grisly fate, and evade it he must, no matter what he had to say… “You’re a Stark, and next in line to become Warden of the North, no less! What would the others say if they realized what you are up to?”

Ramsay grimaced as she moved forward, placing the metal cock on his cheek. He had already moved his head as much as his restraints would allow, so he could do nothing to stop her from the blatant action. She continued to smile down at him as he squirmed in discomfort, “That would be your only hope, wouldn’t it? That I would be so worried about the opinions of those that refused to aid us in taking you down that I would fail to punish you as you deserve.”

Ramsay felt his heart pounding in his chest, felt blood rush to his face, could feel heat on his skin where she placed the contraption she had made for him. How dare she?! She wasn’t going to stop, he realized, and he was probably only giving her what she wanted by trying to squirm free of what she was doing, but how could he not try?

Even now she toyed with him, and despite his considerable self-control, Ramsay could not keep his rage and humiliation at the situation from bursting free in his voice, “You fucking cunt! You so much as touch me with that thing any further and I will make being torn asunder by my hounds seem like a summer dream to you!”

Sansa smirked at him as she moved the cock along his face, bumping over his chin, gliding along the nape of his neck and then trailing past his shoulder before the vile contact at last ended as she moved to the foot of the table. He knew that wasn’t where she planned to stop though; whatever misgivings he might have had about her personality before, he was coming to realize that she didn’t make threats she didn’t intend to follow through on.

Sansa ran her hands along the insides of his thighs again, just as before only this time there was far more sinister meaning to the apparent display of affection. No, it wasn’t affection; it was ownership. She was caressing him the way he had caressed and fondled so many of his own victims. Her hands declared with their possessive grasping that she could do anything she wanted to him.

She turned her head and shouted for the guardsman on the other side of the door. The burly wildling was through the door in less than a moment, “You called?”

Sansa nodded, casually pointing at Ramsay and ignoring the wide-eyed stare the guard gave her strapped-on cock, “I would like you to untie him and put him on the bed, tied to the bedposts.”

The wildling guard smiled knowingly at the situation, moving around to Ramsay’s head and untying his hands as he leaned down and whispered into Ramsay’s ear, “Not at all a suggestion of council I’m sure, but if anyone should be her pussy I would think it should be you…”

Ramsay glanced up at him with an unreadable face, looking forward in a docile fashion as the guard tied his hands together and then moved to untie his feet.
As soon as his feet were freed from the bonds, Ramsay brought a foot up hard, trying to kick the guardsman in the face. If there ever was a time to avoid the awful fate of being sodomized by Sansa Stark, that time was now, but he was going to have to be quick and vicious. He would have to strike so fast that it caught the wildling by surprise…

Except that the guard was not surprised. After all, he had every reason to believe that if Ramsay was ever going to fight back, it would be just before not doing so would lead him to a state of the most ultimate of humiliations. So it was that the wildling did not at all buy into his carefully staged act of complacency, never mind the fact that it was uncharacteristic of Ramsay anyways.

Ramsay tilted onto his back as the momentum of his failed kicked rocked him backwards on the table as the guard casually batted his strike to the side, allowing Ramsay’s own attack to rock him off-balance. The wildling surprised him then with his choice of retaliation; Ramsay prepared himself for a powerful punch to the gut or nose but that never came.

Instead of breaking his nose with a straight to the face or winding him yet again with a hook to the gut, the guard simply slapped him full across his cheek, driving his head to the side under the stinging impact of his flattened hand. Ramsay reeled from the sharp retaliation as the guard explained to Sansa, “Don’t worry, ma’am; I won’t do any permanent harm to your whore here.”

Sansa replied immediately, catching on and enjoying the game the guard started right off, “I do thank you; I want him to remain pretty for my pleasures… since he is so small and weak despite being a man, I’m sure we can all avoid hurting him too sorely when he steps out of line and needs to be put back into his place.”

Ramsay scowled bitterly, glaring hatefully at the guard as the other man chatted so flippantly with Sansa, simply resting a large hand on Ramsay, as if to let him know how easy subduing him would be if he tried escape once more. He felt a swatch of burning pain on the side of his face and was glad that the only mirror in the room did not face him.

If it did, he was almost certain that he would see a meaty red handprint across his noble face, so not seeing it was better if only to avoid that possibility. He glared at the man, gnashing his teeth as he spat out, “For you I will save some of my best work; you will die slowly and mourn living, but if I can help it you will live forever so…”

The wildling smiled, baring his teeth at Ramsay, “You know, as a reputed torturer and all, I would have figured that you would know that a man who feels the need to make threats is a man who isn’t prepared or able to back them. Save your sweet talk for your mistress behind me; I’m sure she plans on helping you clean up all of that sass.”

“Speaking of which,” piped up Sansa from behind the wildling guardsman, “I am eager to begin my ministrations of justice both personal and on the behalf of others if you would be so kind as to elevate him to his required place.” The guard glanced back and Sansa and nodded, grabbing Ramsay and hauling the other man to his feet in one swift, powerful motion.

Ramsay laughed as mockingly as he could muster, “As if you were doing so; those lords and ladies of the other courts will never have you lead them when they find out what you’re getting on to in here… you’ll be the laughing stock of every House, spoken of only when someone has a bit of wine and decides to select a person of ill repute of which to gossip!”

The wildling pushed Ramsay until he stood at the foot of the bed and then he placed one leg behind Ramsay’s and shoved him hard from the torso down so that Ramsay’s upper body slammed into the mattress of the bed. He could hear the guard’s voice, imagine that he was nodding toward the table behind them, “Please hand me those ropes, ma’am.”
Ramsay had been about to say something else to elaborate on his point that Sansa was going nowhere in life do to her awful, foolish mistake here, but being forced onto the bed so suddenly and unceremoniously had driven the words from him. Instead he growled at the treatment, clenching his teeth worriedly as he heard the guard’s words.

The wildling guard took his time securing Ramsay, often having one hand at his back and sometimes leaning his weight down on the other man as if to remind Ramsay that he could pin him under his superior weight at the slightest hint of resistance. He looped the rope first around each leg, tying both separately to one of the two bedposts at the foot of the bed.

Once this was done, the guard moved around and took Ramsay’s hands in his own, untying them only to retie each hand separately to the two posts at the head of the bed. So it was that Ramsay was tied spread eagle again after a fashion, only this time he was on his stomach, which rested on the mattress of the bed as his legs and feet hung down from it just enough for his feet to touch the floor.

But that was only because the bed was so high off of the floor, thought Ramsay; the Starks had originally built that particular piece of furniture, and they were of course all freakishly tall, perhaps with exception to Jon Snow, who was shorter than most of them. Perhaps whatever whore had been his mother had been a person of more normal height, he pondered.

Ramsay was only allowing his mind to wander like this because he did not want to focus on what was happening here, but even so he was still failing at it. Also, Sansa did not seem interested in doing this quietly, pulling his thoughts to the situation he was in with her words, “Are you comfortable, Ramsay? After all, I want you to be able to concentrate on me fucking you…”

The guardsman laughed; a throaty, menacing chuckle, “You have far bigger things to worry about than what’s going to be said by those boring, soft nobles of your southern courts, shit-stain. For instance, there is that great big cock she’s intent in placing up what is soon to become her own personal lady-hole…”

Sansa grimaced at the wildling’s choice of words, but she understood that he was just saying what he could to make Ramsay uncomfortable, which was the goal, so she didn’t say anything against the crude statements; after all, she did start it by being so very open with her intentions for Ramsay, “If you don’t mind, I’d like to handle this part alone.”

The wildling nodded, “Of course…” though he was obviously disappointed; he had very much wanted to watch her cause him such a deep level of humiliation firsthand, but seeming to content himself with the notion that he would at least know it was being done and perhaps even hear it was good enough for the time being, and he set off to stand outside again.

Once they were again alone in the room, Sansa turned back to look at Ramsay, who peered back at her as best he could over his own shoulder. She loved that he strained just to see her face; it showed how worried he was becoming over her intentions concerning what happened next between the two of them in that room.

His brow was creased with the anxiety his voice struggled so hard to hide as he craned to look at her. Sansa moved closer behind him, both as a threat and to make it even harder for him to see what she was doing, which only predictably increased his worry, “He is right; you had best save your energy for what I plan for you…”

She ran a hand along his leg and he shuddered to the touch of it. She smiled; she had felt the way he felt now while under his ministrations, not so long ago… she had reacted much the same way to what was happening, the bad touch. “I’m not the girl you thought me to be and I assure you that you have bigger problems than concerning yourself with what happens to me.”
She brushed a finger lightly over his skin at the small of his back, tracing that finger along his spine with the barest of touches until it reached his neck. His skin practically rippled under her touch; he was getting goosebumps from her efforts, recoiling but also unable to go anywhere, unable to stop what was happening to him, just as she had been unable to stop what happened to her.

“No, you need to focus on what’s happening to you; if only because I want you to feel everything that I do to you fully… I will certainly make you do so, one way or the other…” Ramsay still didn’t reply. She could see the side of his face from her position as he laid his head upon the mattress of the bed; his jaw was working. He had things to say, but he was holding back.

He knows where such things lead, she thought. He had raped her many times and done many other unspeakable acts at her expense; he had the privilege of knowing from having watched many victims break under his steady hand to know exactly what the future held for him, exactly how many options he hoped to entertain.

Whatever options I give him, Sansa thought with a smile. Like Ramsay’s options, none of them would be good ones, something that Ramsay once again held advantage of knowing first hand. So the trick to their little game, to punishing him in the most thorough way possible, was going to be in the details; surprising the unflappable torturer.

He might know many tricks that he had picked up over the years in how to cause a person suffering and dread, but Sansa knew from her time with him that he still wasn’t as subtle and imaginative as she could be; she would continually shock him with her choices, use what she knew of him to keep him guessing. She could tell that he was unhinged already, and she liked it.

She stepped closer now, doing everything slowly so as to give Ramsay time to accumulate a sufficient level of dread about what she did next. Sure enough, she could see in the muscles of his naked thighs and legs, his abdomen and even his clenching ass that he was already imagining her pushing herself into him with her prosthetic cock.

“You’re being so very quiet, Ramsay. I had thought that you would have so much to say to me now that we have finally returned to our marriage bed… I’m sure that if things had gone your way you would have spent long moments gloating over your victory before you attempted to rape me yet again. But here we are… since you are acting sufficiently cowed I suppose we may as well start…”

Her goading worked despite being so obvious a trick in getting him to speak when he would rather endure his torture quietly, if only because Ramsay could not allow a statement of him being cowed to be met with the seeming assent of silence, which of course they both knew, making Sansa’s words that much more of a bur in his side.

All attempts at pretending to be in control had long since fallen to the side, and despite the fact that he was giving in to emotion and in that way allowing her to control him, Ramsay could no longer push down the swell of burgeoning rage that pulled at him so hard that it made his stomach knot and churn under its tidal pull.

“Just know you serpent harlot that I will be annulling our marriage and murdering you in the future, but if you put that thing in me I swear I will make every waking moment of your life until I do nothing but a litany of regret for this moment so strong that it defines your very existence!” He frothed at the mouth his rage was so great.

Sansa only smiled down at him patronizingly, knowing that he could not miss how pathetic such threats were as they were being shouted over his naked shoulder as he lay there, tied to the bed under her, “That was very poetic, Ramsay. Also more than a little ironic, as I do intend to do something very similar to you.”
Sansa leaned down, putting her head close to his in an almost intimate way as she whispered directly into his ear, as if to express with the maneuver how helpless he was to take his rage to any physical level against her, “…I will of course make you forever regret every single thing you have done to me a thousand-fold, and will remember those pretty words as a guideline for doing so.”

Ramey’s whole body clenched as he struggled hard against the ropes holding him in place, but seeing that doing that only caused him more rope burns and chaffing, he stopped, panting with both the expended, futile effort and with his equally futile anger. He wanted to say ‘We shall see’, but he knew that would lead to her showing him what there was to see…

No matter how angry he might be over the awful sting to his pride all of this represented, deep down Ramsay was pragmatic, and knew that he was only raging in the first place to buy time away from her doing what she had announced she would do, even though he also knew that there was nothing that was going to happen to change that.

Thinking on that particular fact stung him and struck a blow to his rage, smothering it down to an ember of what he had stoked it up to be; no one was going to be coming for him, so what was the point of delaying the inevitable? Sansa was obviously enjoying his display, perhaps even craved it, and this distraction only made the experience better for her and her alone.

He realized he had gone quiet again and looked back to see that infuriating smile on Sansa’s face; he knew without doubt that she must have openly seen the anger he was feeling so obviously quenched by the rising tide of his despair. His entire body flushed with heat, and he turned his head away from her. Ramsay did not know what this alien feeling was…

Ramsay didn’t know what caused his skin to prickle, or what made his stomach tighten in such an unhappy way, but Sansa did; he was feeling shame. Ramsay was perhaps finally realizing how fucked he was, she thought, or perhaps it had just taken this long to finally punch through the shell of his massive ego.

Either way, she drank it in deeply, a first in what she would ensure to be a long and uncomfortable series of unhappy discoveries. Feeling that it was time to expound on what he was feeling, she jammed the head of her phallus against his ass-hole, causing Ramsay’s head to whip up, his eyes wide as he made a strangled, surprised sound.

Ramsay’s entire body locked up rigidly then, stiffening in response to the sudden invasion of the entrance to his forbidden place. Sansa took hold of Ramsay’s hips with both hands and rammed at him, shoving the fake cock deeper into his anus. Ramsay let loose a choked cry and she smiled at what he must be feeling.

From the way Ramsay squirmed on her artificial member after she pushed it further inside, he must have just become aware of the fact that all of his reactionary shifting and tensing was in vain; he was at her mercy and no physical effort on his part was going to push her out or even keep her from pushing further in.

Sansa paused there like that for a few long moments, the head of her dildo having penetrated him but going no further, only hesitating so as to give him more time to squirm and anticipate what came next, “Are you ready for me to take your virginity, Ramsay? You took mine, so I think it only fair that I take yours…”

Ramsay’s chest swelled with his heavy breathing as he let go of a held breath and did his best to steady himself in a situation where there could be no center of calm for him. He glared back at her, pouring all of his hatred into that glance, as if the look itself might be given the power to slay her for the brazen act she committed and the venomous words she dared speak.
As if to answer his bold declaration of enmity… no, thought Sansa, definitely as an answer to his futile animosity, she pushed again, enjoying how the physical act caused the hatred to slip from his face to be replaced with emotions she much more enjoyed seeing him enthralled to; shock, discomfort, anguish and despair.

She rammed at him a few more times, Ramsay turning his face away from her, apparently realizing too late that he would be unable to put on a brave face while she was plowing him with her crafted cock. Each time the phallus went a little deeper into his backside, until she could feel the flesh of her thighs press against the heated skin of his ass.

“I’m all the way in. How does that feel, Ramsay?” She had paused again, only shifting around by the smallest of degrees to continuously remind him that what he was feeling was in fact a fully engorged cock in his ass. She could only imagine the distress he must feel at the games she played with him while taking her pleasures from it.

Ramsay gasped out something too low to be heard; most likely a curse muttered under his breath. He was staring straight ahead now, his eyes distant as he turned all of his mental efforts to being somewhere else, because Ramsay simply could not allow that what was happening in that room to him was actually happening.

Sansa wasn’t going to allow him to do that, though. Instead she laid over him as she reached down and grabbed ahold of his hair, pulling his head roughly back as the fingers of her other hand bit deeply into his thigh as she pulled the cock all of the way out and then thrust it right back in, all the way to the hilt once more.

Ramsay gasped, his eyes widening again as it became clear that she was making it impossible for him to be anywhere but where he was, feel anything less than what he felt in that moment. Sansa gave him a smug grin as she continued her motion of pumping him with the full length of her phallus, “Isn’t this everything you imagined it would be?”

Ramsay replied with anger and hostility again because that was all he had left; it was clear to him now that she was going to be able to interrupt his best efforts at pretending he wasn’t being molested in such a fashion, so the only place he had recourse to return to was his deep and seething hatred towards her for what she was doing.

He didn’t dare challenge her now, so he remained silent, but he had to keep the fire in himself stoked; he had to stay mad or give in to despair. At the very moment that he let that happen, he will have lost the unspoken contest between them and she will have begun the progress of breaking what was left of his will.

But anger and rage did not under any circumstance last indefinitely. As the slow progress of time wore on, and she continued pumping into him in that most humiliating gesture of dominance that act itself could only provide him so much heated indignation of the sort that would allow him to grit his teeth and take it quietly.

After that point, he will have burned himself out of anger, and then all would remain would be the emotion that had to be present in the background of such a display; anguish. He knew he would fight against the overwhelming despair for a long time as well, as did most of his victims when he had played the part of torturer before.

But in each case without fail, that anguish, that despair, it had finally begun to wear a hole in the ego of the tortured, until self-pity replaced resistance and a desire for release from misery replaced pride. The mere fact that he knew this would be the case was making it that much harder for Ramsay to hold himself together; the fact that he knew that he was fighting a losing battle.
He couldn’t help but wonder how many of those he had hurt had managed to come to the conclusion he just came to themselves before he had broken their spirit. Is this what all of those women he had taken pleasure from had felt on the nights that he had pulled his own sort of joy from the wails of sorrow they made when he fucked them?

Sansa was getting into what she was doing to him now, thrusting harder into him, so hard that it caused Ramsay to rock back and forth upon the bed, the loud knocking of the bed’s wooden frame slamming against the far wall filling the room. Ramsay was reminded by the noise that there were people listening outside.

Did they hear the sound of the bed’s movements, or the sound of Ramsay’s anguished grunts of discomfort and seething rage? He tried to be quieter, but simply having to only made him angrier in the moment; if he had been more lucid he might have realized that the reason for this was because the idea of others knowing made him even more humiliated.

Ramsay’s flesh was heated red with embarrassment over the idea that news of what she did to him might be spreading beyond the room, perhaps even to everyone of import who mattered and those who did not, lords and servants all. Sansa’s skin felt hot for a different reason; she was really exerting herself now, sweat beading on her skin as she fucked him.

He glanced back and immediately wished that he had not. Seeing what she was doing to him was far worse even than simply knowing it was happening. The image of her pulling him up onto her dildo as she fucked him doggy style into the bed was its own class of humiliation, and Ramsay had about all he could take; he screamed out his rage, his fury.

Of course, once he had raged and screamed, bucking against his restraints with the force of his unbound fury for minutes that felt like a lifetime of bitterness and resentment, his throat raw and his voice hoarse from the power of his yelling, he was left with nothing else to throw out. Now that he was spent in that department he could only lie in his restraints.

He did so almost quietly, the majority of the sound in the room was of the woman behind him, as her hips made a wet slapping sound as she soundly fucked him. All the rage burnt out of his body, leaving him hollow so that the only remaining emotions he could be expected to feel seeped in to take over as expected.

His bottom lip quivered as he was forced to simply take what she was still dishing out without even being able to summon the energy necessary to rage, to scream, to froth at her for her actions, as wave after wave of humiliating thoughts crushed him under their iron soles. What she was doing, who would know of it, the fact that it would never stop until she decided to stop.

An unlikely thing to happen anytime soon; she was out to break him and if he had learned anything at all recently about Sansa, the real Sansa, not the Sansa he had thought to be meek and powerless, she wasn’t going to stop until she reached that goal. All his years as a torturer now worked against him; how much harder it was to face this knowing the end result...

Instead he found himself whimpering, pathetically as any of the many persons that he himself tortured and then had mentally and sometimes verbally mocked for such a display of weakness. He had thought on those days that he himself was somehow immune to such a state, as if being the one administering the pain made him invulnerable to it.

Deep down he had known that he was as frail as any person, and if he had understood himself better or had a proclivity towards wisdom Ramsay might have known that a large part of the reason that he himself had ever gained joy from putting himself in such a state of dominance was because until that servant named Reek had come along...
He had been called Reek, because no matter whether or not he bathed he smelled of decay, perhaps a curse from the gods for his strange attraction to the dead and the perversions he committed upon them. His father Roose had sent Reek to Ramsay and his mother because he couldn’t be bothered to involve himself any further than that, and everyone at the Bolton estate hated Reek.

Reek was what he had named Theon Greyjoy after having broken that man, because secretly he had needed another Reek. Theon’s betrayal of him cut more deeply than he would have ever admitted due to that attachment alone: Ramsay needed a Reek. Because Reek had told him what a noble lord he was, even when he was still just the bastard son of a Miller’s wife.

That was what Reek did to everyone, of course; he told them how amazing they were and raised them on pedestals, because Reek himself had such low esteem for his own worth that he was for some reason driven to have others see him in the same lowly light. Ramsay was a boy when they met, though, and before Reek had arrived…

Ramsay remembered it now; he was lonely… and a bastard. No one wanted him so he acted out constantly, becoming a problem child for his mother and everyone else around him. This of course only caused his mother to resent him even more than she already did for being the progeny of the man who raped her and murdered her husband.

This cycle continued for some time unabated, Ramsay continually finding crueler ways to try to feed the emptiness inside of him that had threatened to consume him, and then Reek had arrived. Reek of course lavished praise upon Ramsay as the lord he could be, and Ramsay drank all of the flattery, all of the adulation as if it were water and he a boy dying of thirst.

Reek told Ramsay he could be anything and do anything he liked, because he was better than all others, and Ramsay treated Reek like the lowly filth that he was. Ramsay remembered the day Reek died; he was executed for crimes that Ramsay had committed; Ramsay had fallen to gross murder and rape with Reek as his only mentor, and when it came time to pay for those crimes, Reek was also his only ally.

It had felt perfectly natural to let Reek take the fall for the awful things he had done to those people, and at the time, Ramsay had felt no remorse whatsoever for pointing a finger at Reek and letting them have him, only relief in the fact that he himself had not been implicated for the crimes and strung up to hang as a murderer and rapist.

But later, when the absence of that servant had begun to set in, when he was no longer complimented incessantly by the cowering servant who was always smelled and seen, and Ramsay had no one left who would speak to him but his overbearing father who seemed to consider him a nuisance at best and his mother, who avoided him as if he were the plague.

Then he realized in his heart of hearts how truly alone he was. He had sought companionship in the daughter of the Kennel Master, and for a while Myranda had amused him, distracted him from that hole that once again gnawed at his core. She even went on hunts with him, much as Reek had once done, but it was never the same.

And then she had died. He had of course assumed that Theon had killed her, but now, under the light of the many different revelations he had come to concerning the true nature of Sansa Stark, it was entirely possible that she had murdered her as well. Perhaps even killed her on her way out of the keep specifically to spite Ramsay. He cried out mournfully at the thought.

Sansa of course caught the outcry, hearing the note of sadness and indignation to this particular sound, “Are you finally starting to learn your place here, Ramsay?” She rocked into him a few more times, adding insult to injury. Ramsay’s face reddened with hatred for Sansa despite all of the rest as
he clung to the memory of Myranda.

“I’ve known my place all along you swine; if you think that mounting me with erase what I’ve done to you then you are wrong. What I did was special, and you will never remove it from yourself no matter what you do…” Ramsay wore a forced grin that spoke of his open malice, letting her see that he was yet ready to spit in her face, that she had not broken him yet.

Sansa lost her smile, and Ramsay felt a little thrill of joy in the victory that represented; he had finally gotten under her skin. She suddenly pulled the contraption out of his ass, causing him to gasp with the movement. Had he succeeded in angering her enough to kill him? It was truly a sad fact, but Ramsay could only hope so.

Sansa began unbuckling her belt, loosening all of the various straps that held the fake cock to her hips until it was loose enough for her to slip her legs out of it one at a time. She set it on the table and went to the door, where she spoke in hushed tones to the guard who was there. Ramsay strained, but he could not overhear the conversation.

Ramsay craned his neck to look back at her and saw only Sansa, who moved to take a seat across from him on a nearby chair. The guard whom she had spoken to was nowhere to be seen. Sansa, for her part, wore an expression that betrayed no emotion whatsoever, leaving him to guess as to what she might be thinking.

If she was to order his death, surely the guard would have come in by now, wouldn’t he? Perhaps she has asked for a weapon with which to personally kill him with? Either way, despite the appearance of outward calm she now showed, Ramsay was now completely sure that he had managed to get under Sansa’s skin.

The idea that his bold pronouncement had sent her reeling made him glad, especially with how sorely he ached to hurt her for what she did to him. He imagined that if she wasn’t already seriously considering killing him a valid option to quiet his words that he could get her there with only a little more goading.

“Are you thinking about all of the fun we had back then, on our wedding night and on many of the nights that followed?” Ramsay sported a sick grin, letting himself find his center again after how low she had dragged him with her domineering and raping. Sansa surprised him by replying without malice, “Yes, actually, I am.”

She gave him the slightest ghost of a smile, “I am reminiscing about each and every event where you spoke cruelly to me or physically abused me and even each instance where you did your best to intimidate me. I want them to all be very fresh in my mind as I test your theory.” Ramsay frowned, “My theory?”

Sansa nodded, “Have you forgotten already? You just said that I could not remove the stain of you no matter what I do. I not only intend to remove the stain of what you did from me, I will also remove it from you, so that you will shake and quiver in fear at the thought of what you once did, spending all of your waking moments trying not to remember.”

Ramsay’s brow furrowed. That had not been what he thought was going on at all, and caught him entirely by surprise. He felt a cold feeling run down his spine at the gravity of her slow statement as she said those words. He realized now what that meant; he had graduated to a different sort of torture, one that Sansa clearly thought worse than rape by a woman.

This news made the wait that proceeded her comment long and full of gnawing anticipation. He tried his best to quell the feeling, knowing full well that it was exactly what she wanted, but even the
notion of being able to deny her that wasn’t enough to silence his inner turmoil concerning the mystery of what horror next awaited him.

Audio link:

https://app.box.com/s/oml8dmjbumrwyg0o3nzp1faucdzhb7gk
Chapter Two

Tether

A servant walked in pulling Ramsay out of his deep fog of inner thoughts. She had in her hand a slender length of leather roughly three inches thick, two inches wide and two or three foot in length. He couldn’t fathom what that particular item might be for, watching curiously and with no small amount of dread as Sansa took it, thanking the servant.

The servant girl turned and left the room and Sansa stood there looking down at the strap in her hands. The way she held it; one hand wrapped around one side as if to grip a makeshift handle as the other held the rest of its weight palm side up made it clear to Ramsay what it was though. This leather was too short, wide and thick to be a simple binding.

She meant to hit him with it, the way she held it suggesting the way one wields a weapon, and the way she gazed over it the careful scrutiny of a person who wonders how well such a new tool might work. She glanced over to Ramsay to see that he was smiling, and not the strained half-hearted smile of a man trying to be fearsome against adversity.

No, this smile was the sort a man wore when he suddenly and perhaps un-expectantly just realized he had the upper hand, “Poor Sansa; you think I’m afraid of a bit of whipping? My mother raised me on cuts to the back if you didn’t notice the scars before. There is a reason why I am so good at what I do; I have known this pain well.”

Sansa glanced over at him, holding him in her gaze while she continued to maintain that expressionless look on her face. Ramsay could almost see the cogs turning in her head as she analyzed what he had just told her in relevance to her planned course of action. And then she smiled, a darkly satisfied smile that caused Ramsay’s own smile to falter.

She turned, walking back to the door and leaning out, presumably to speak to the guard just on the other side of it once more. Ramsay again strained to listen in on what was said but again failed; the distance was just too great, and Sansa was obviously talking in a tone of voice intentionally too low for him to hear.

She walked back over to him after a few moments of conversation had passed and whoever she had spoken to who was outside of Ramsay’s line of sight apparently went off to do as she had asked, as he heard the patter of footsteps distantly moving away from the door. This would be the perfect opportunity to escape, he thought.

Except that his bonds were far too tight, and knotted far too well. He struggled meekly against them for a moment, knowing before he even did so that it was a pointless and futile gesture. Sansa smiled at him as she approached, apparently having seen him struggle a bit and enjoying that he was anxious enough to try.

“Are you getting nervous, Ramsay? I thought you just finished boasting how easily you would
endure what I plan next for you, and yet here you are nipping at the bit to be free…” She moved around directly behind him where it was most difficult to see. He had a feeling she did so intentionally; if there was one way to keep a person nervous…

No one liked being unable to see exactly what was going to happen to them, especially when whatever that something was affected them negatively. Ramsay took a deep breath, calming himself. He had suffered countless punishments and abuses from his heavy-handed mother; there was nothing new or unforeseen in what he was about to feel.

He closed his eyes, waiting for the familiar sting of an angry thrash to his back. He would endure this as he had so many others as a young man. But the sting he expected didn’t arrive, and his waiting finally ended when curiosity got the better of him, when anticipation demanded that he crane his head back and try to see what took so long.

That was the moment that Sansa chose to strike, locking eyes with him as she brought the heavy strap down across his backside. Again she whipped him, this time also very low, on the curve of his ass. Ramsay started to chuckle, thinking that she was so very terrible at whipping a man that her strap was running errantly off course.

An instant later, as the strap bore down yet again on his buttocks he finally realized; she was hitting him on the ass intentionally! He grit his teeth, immediately annoyed. It didn’t take a genius to figure out that she was opting to demean him even further by choosing to tan his hide the way one would an errant youth.

He allowed himself to chuckle, laughing after a few minutes of steady swats that reddened his cheeks and sent bolts of stinging pain through his backside, “Are you so inept in torture that you would think this a way to break a man? I find your efforts laughable.” He knew he probably shouldn’t push her, but his pride demanded response to her insolence.

Sansa only leaned over to smile down at him as her hand continued its steady work. She didn’t seem to be tiring even slightly he noticed to his discomfort, “Feel free to laugh as much as you like now then; each instance of your heckling and jibes now will only taste that much sweeter in contemplation later when I have you sobbing like a baby.”

Ramsay growled at her confidence, but he couldn’t keep a sliver of worry and fear from working its way into his heart… what she said was true enough, though he supposed that if she did manage to eventually break him it would be pointless to worry about additional loss of face. He tried to focus on that fact, willing himself to stay strong.

Sansa for her part kept the swats coming, leaving his ass burning with welts applied again and again until they crisscrossed his behind in a manner that left both cheeks a haze of splotchy red and purple. The way that Ramsay was tied only allowed her better convenience for what she did and left him with a unique sense of helplessness.

Ramsay was new to that feeling; helplessness. He had always had a surplus of confidence that no matter what he would beat the odds, especially once Reek had begun bolstering his morale and ego. But now he was here… no Reek, not even Theon Reek… and completely helpless to the whims of a woman that hated him like so many others.

Like so many others, but far more capable at the moment of expressing her hate in any way she chose, even if it was to simply strap his ass as if he were a delinquent child rather than the former ruler of the castle they both now resided in. And yet she continued, tirelessly, and he could only look back from time to time, mortified.
Had he truly wronged her so badly that she would go to such lengths, to have so much stamina for the sole act of punishing him? Well, he supposed that he had taken her to bed against her will numerous times, and hurt her intentionally while doing so for his own amusement. And of course there was him murdering her child brother for sport…

He supposed he could not deny she had enough incentive to do this and far more. He started to feel the first strain on his resolve then as his mind continued to focus on the horrible and unavoidable sting in his rear despite his best efforts to dwell on other things. She was just doing it too much and all in the same place…

It was alarming that he was losing his battle against her tortures to such a pathetically simple punishment. Ramsay would have liked to say that he could courageously endure any form of punishment and still spit blood at her just to spite her, but courage of that kind took something that he didn’t have.

As a professional torturer who enjoyed his work immensely Ramsay knew that the toughest people endured pain because they had something especially important to lose that they were willing to die for to protect, that only the greatest pain could rip from them. Ramsay didn’t have that; he loved no one and had no code to violate.

With only his self-interest to buoy him, it would take far less time to break down his resolve when the only reason he endured the pain was to try and reduce the amount of humiliation he suffered. When one was subjected to constant, stinging pressure of this sort, though, doubts began to crowd the mind; wasn’t he already humiliated?

What was the point of putting up a front of strength when all that coursed inside was fear and degradation of pride? Wouldn’t it be better if he played along, if only for now, so that she would hurt him less? These thoughts and many more like them swirled in his head, products of his desire for release from his torment.

Ramsay finally let out a cry of pain as a particularly painful swat found the underside of his ass, striking the tender flesh in a way that left a searing wake that she only compounded with the next swing. Once that floodgate had opened Ramsay could no longer control himself and now he cried out in anguish with every strike she laid.

This was the next step, he realized; he was losing control. He was all but overtaken with the physical abuse he suffered at her hands and the effects only continued to accumulate as a snowball does when rolling along a snow-covered bank; becoming larger and larger with every turn. He was screaming out now, letting his pain out with his voice.

But that wasn’t enough. No matter how loudly he shouted and screamed, the pain was still overwhelming. The memory that he had just told her that he could handle her strapping came back to mind, and the corners of his eyes stung with tears of rage and humiliation. His skin prickled, and he felt like it was on fire.

That fire was both a result of his humiliation and an effect of the pain where his ass was concerned, he knew, but only the sting to what pride yet remained in him could be causing his ears to heat and his stomach to knot the way it did. He might have wondered then, despite knowing that the wondering was a terrible idea…

But he might have wondered what he might sound like to another, to imagine how terribly pathetic his cries of pain must sound, how childish his squirming against the restraints that held him must look, but he never got the chance to wonder at it before realizing that he was in fact being observed. Jon Snow and several others he did not know had entered…
They had entered the room and he had been unaware of the fact due to the noise he himself was making, so there was no doubt whatsoever that they had heard his weak screams of anguish and seen his sad display as he jumped about against the ropes holding him to the bed. His memory was suddenly crystal clear on how badly he must have looked.

They didn’t say anything, just watching him as Sansa continued her relentless punishments. He had made a strangled sound when he had set eyes on Jon watching him from the side of the room. Jon had purposely moved within his line of sight rather than remain behind him; he wanted Ramsay to see that he was watching him.

Ramsay grew red in the face, almost purple even, as he suddenly squelched his own cries of distress, not wanting these others to hear any more humiliating noises issue forth from him, but his effort was in vain. As the next swat and then the one that followed it landed home Ramsay could not help himself but to twist and shout.

She had long since worked him past the point that he could bear the degrading sting that single strip of leather continued to cause him, and Ramsay wondered now if that had been her plan all along; had she orchestrated calling on the others and then immediately starting on the strapping with the intention of them seeing him in this state?

No doubt she had; Ramsay continued to underestimate Sansa Stark, apparently, regardless of the fact that he certainly should have learned his lesson concerning that by now. He looked away from Jon, his jaw tightening in an amalgam of pain, rage and newfound humility. He could no longer look into the other man’s dark eyes.

And yet Sansa still continued the awful rain of blows that she levied against him. He could hear that some of those he did not recognize who had come in with Jon were whispering to each other in low voices, very likely about the spectacle on display before them, but Ramsay could not hear what they had to say over the cacophony of leather striking flesh and sadly, his own feeble cries.

Not knowing what was said was perhaps in and of itself worse than if he had heard some withering insult to his character based on the show he was so inadvertently giving. The pinpricks of water on the corners of his eyes became droplets of withheld tears that only the last wisps of his shredded pride managed to keep in check.

After all, hollering and squalling like a newborn babe to the administration of a simple spanking was devastating to ones ego, he thought, but to allow himself to actually shed tears, to cry in front of these people who he loathed and who loathed him, that would be the very definition of everything he could no longer bear to happen.

But happen it would he realized with a crawling sense of alarm; the pain and humiliation demanded more from him every moment as tender flesh continued to succumb to merciless sting of lash and his mind reeled with the sick feeling of knowing that everyone he had most recently threatened will know, even see what Sansa did to him.

He knew from many personal experiences that it was only a matter of time, once again reflecting on the dimming feeling such knowledge cast on his efforts to resist and the irony of the torturer thereby being more susceptible to torture in his own case. He growled between shouts, feeling all of the fury his resentment managed to muster bleed out into the air with his voice.

Soon enough he was back to mewling like a caged kitten, his cries sounding more and more like crying until eventually the part of him that still held onto the futility of maintaining this one last vestige of his rapidly burning pride gave way, torn asunder, and in its wake lay Ramsay the broken, formerly lord of this castle but now crying like a baby upon the bed.
Exactly as Sansa had promised it. She continued her work and his lamentations became louder for it and for the fact that he was finally done for. He imagined how he must look now, blubbering on and weeping as he lay prone over the bed, his battered ass covered in red and purple welts from the constant pressure Sansa applied.

He could not bring himself to look at any of the strangers in the room who had come to see him bawl on like a child in such humiliating fashion, for fear of what he might see reflected in their eyes of himself, and he most certainly did not look at Jon, whom he had promised so many foolish and now completely idle threats…

Did he now carry the same aspect that his own victims had shown him after many hours of what had once been fun torturous play? Did he whimper now to their ears, or cringe to their eyes the way that Theon Greyjoy had done after Ramsay had removed him of his manhood?… did he look as broken and pathetic?

This thought acted as a catalyst to his already unendurable torments, and Ramsey gave out a shuddering cry of remorse as he felt the warm hot sensation of salty tears tracking their way along his cheeks to follow the curve of his chin and drip down upon the bed beneath his head. He roared a few times in anguish but mostly he sobbed.

He was undone. Only at this point did Sansa finally stop slapping the backside of him, allowing his pained body precious heartbeats of time in which the awful stinging, nettling pain did not continue to push him further past the edge of his tolerance, “Now you will beg us to forgive you for your crimes, Ramsay Snow.”

Snow. She had called him by the bastard title in front of those there to witness… “I am Ramsay Bolton, last of my line, and…” his sentence was broken by a swift and immediate reprisal. As the lash came down across his tender flesh he shrieked, his words of defiance lost to the wail of a man who must give way to great pain.

Sansa Stark continued, “You are no one and nothing, last and least of a line that ceases with you and even before you. Your father’s legacy is gone and shall never rise again, leaving you as you were and ever will be; Ramsay Snow, bastard of a bastard that is unwelcome to the North. Now beg us for forgiveness for your crimes.”

Ramsay choked, still feeling the undeniable sensation of wetness on his face from his very recent tears, still hearing himself sniffle like a small child as he continued to wrestle with himself to get ahold of both his body and his own mind. What she asked was something he could not give, would not give until the day he finally died…

The strap came down hard against his recovering flesh and the sharp, sudden sting of it made him cry out in shocked agony. In a way having a single blow delivered to such tender flesh after all of the rest was somehow worse than even the litany of blows that had preceded it. With horror coursing through him he came to a realization then.

He was going to end up saying what she wanted; under torture, eventually almost everyone talked, and Ramsay had already come to the conclusion that he was not the rare courageous or insane soul that would be able to absorb punishment indefinitely before the pain itself began to shape him. As a torturer he had lived for that definition.

Now it spelled the unraveling of him, and he broke back into tears, silently grieving openly now for the man that he used to be, the man that Sansa was going to effectively beat out of him. Here and now she bore his soul not only to those present but to himself, and there for all to see was just another man, full of weakness, doubt and fear.
Ramsay lowered his head, pressing it into the mattress of the bedding, not wanting the others to see what he felt, as he could only imagine that his grief was like an open book laid out upon his face. He suddenly felt a sudden strong desire for Reek’s presence; not the false simulacrum that Theon Greyjoy presented but his Reek.

The Reek who had died because Ramsay had been about to finally pay the price for his crimes, the Reek who would know just what to say now that he was at his lowest, even lower than he had ever been as a child. He would have said something encouraging to raise Ramsay’s spirits, and lavished praise upon him as the great and noble creature that he truly was.

But he wasn’t any of those things was he? Ramsay thought as he shuddered in convulsion both to his wracking sobs and reactive jerks to Sansa’s slow and steady continuance. No… those had all been lies hadn’t they… contrivances of a madman that had been taken in by the sick lonely heart of a boy too stupid to realize until now.

No one was going to save him, Reek was dead. He had been dead for some time now, and it was thoroughly proven that he could not be replaced in any fashion. Ramsay was too far along in his defeat at the hands of his enemies to delude himself any further with fanciful tales of his own greatness. That of course only left the pain, and nothing to feel but more loss…

He didn’t know how long this went on that way, with him on the very brink of madness, a sort of delirium of pain both physical and otherwise. The nature of torture was often that the tortured did not know when it would stop, making living in the moment of pain they were in all the easier, which was exactly what they didn’t want to do.

Time stretched out, bending, warping and lengthening as every detail of what happened etched itself upon Ramsay’s mind forever. The way that Jon had gazed so nonchalantly at him from underneath his serious, dark brow. The barely-audible whispers of those watching, who perhaps made sport of him, or worse, maybe even pitied him.

He would never know, as their voices were drowned out with his own pathetic cries, which could be missed by none and which he would always remember with deep and resounding shame. The brief moments that became eternities of anxiety in which he almost held his breath, waiting for the strap to fall again.

And of course the most memorable feeling of all; the harsh stinging recoil of a leather strap slamming solidly upon his tortured flesh, always compounding further pain that had long since become unbearable. He felt everything in the clearest focus, and his mind was beginning to become numb to the voice in his head that had demanded he stay strong.

So now he only had one desire really, as his id was pushed further and further back to the furthest most forgotten places of his psych; he wanted to be free of this pain and humiliation. The degradation did not become less by his attempts to hold out he reasoned, even as he admitted to himself that the reasoning itself was a slip in his willpower.

Regardless of that fact his need remained, the desire fortified every moment by the precise and slow punishments that he endured at Sansa’s hand for his refusal to cooperate. He needed to comply, to throw the illusion of control aside and relinquish this final item he still pointlessly held onto, this last victory for her to have and yet another defeat for him.

The pain continued, making the decision that he wrestled so hard with easier and easier to entertain. The sorry state he was in both concerning the now unbearable pain and the burning shame made it hard if not impossible for him to even remember why he had dug in for a fight to begin with, seeing as since he was the tortured and not the torturer he was destined to lose…
What was it he had once said to Theon Greyjoy as he had tortured that poor fool? Something along the lines of “If you think this has a happy ending, you haven’t been paying attention…” Was he entertaining some sort of fool’s notion that he was going to somehow live through this, or that he could even endure forever with his dignity intact even?

He only wanted it all to end, and Sansa’s option of ending it by breaking him so thoroughly in front of Jon was so terrible that even death would be far more preferable. With this in mind he summoned every last ounce of strength left in him to muster a spiteful retort, “I would sooner die than give this cunt another breath…!”

He forced a manic smile through the excruciating pain, though he doubted that it bore any semblance of the intimidating malice he was trying for, what with him face down on the mattress as he was, “Though while we are all here why don’t we talk about the awkward way your brother ran when I was playing with him…!”

Sansa hit him with a particularly painful swat and Ramsay had to take a moment to collect himself, fueling his burning need for the sweet release of death into his angry words, knowing that the only way this awful condition was going to cease was if he enraged emotional, predictable Jon into killing him in a fit of rage.

“You would have thought that the boy would know not to run in such a straight line, I had to be careful not to hit him on accident with those first few shots since he was making it so very easy. I suppose that sort of stupidity runs in the Stark family, eh? Lately it seems that your luck as a group has run out and you all die one by one from being so very stupid…”

“I mean, first that idiot Ned Stark gets himself beheaded because he’s too naïve to survive real politics, and then your brother Rob believes himself the capable sort and declares war on a house that clearly outmatches yours in every way… how did it feel for you simpletons when you found out how easily my father disposed of that fool?”

Ramsay could not see Sansa to gauge her reaction, but he could see Jon, and by the tensing of the muscles in that man’s jaw he could guess that he was making him very angry indeed. Fueled to go on by the success of his attempt to anger despite the fact that Sansa continued to strike him Ramsay went on to add more spiteful words to his jab.

“I always thought that was well played; did you know they started off by stabbing your brother’s whore wife in the belly?” His lip curled in a malicious sneer, “We wouldn’t want anyone thinking that more stupid bastard Starks would be acceptable, would we? Your brother made it easy on us too, what with his idiot’s grasp on who not to break promises to.”

Jon stepped forward, his whole body tense, one hand absently reaching for the pommel of the large sword at his hip. Ramsay smiled, pouring every ounce of his hate for the bastard that had beaten the odds and bested him into that smile, coaxing, even daring Jon to strike him down, and making it clear that it was his only option to be rid of him…

Come on, he thought to himself, draw that Valyrian steel sword from the scabbard at your hip and cut my head from my shoulders at the neck… end this nightmare and release me from this wasting! But Sansa’s voice called out, clear and calm, “Don’t let him get to you, Jon. Look at him; death would be a release and he would have you be his executioner.”

Jon paused, warily sizing up Ramsay as the latter squirmed against yet another awful blow to the backside. Ramsay did all in his power to belie what Sansa said, holding the manic grin on his face through sheer force of will, pressed upon by the barrage of punishments he received to excel in this, “He doesn’t have the stomach for it anyways…”
Such threats would be completely idle at this point of course, but people often responded negatively to threats, so in desperation Ramsay continued to push his luck, “…he is going to let me live as you do, thinking that he has won as you do, until the day when I have freed myself from your sad little vengeance and he is made to watch me fuck you to death before I gouge his eyes out, so that it may be his last sight…”

Jon tensed again, and for a moment that became an eternity by the magic of suspense Ramsay entertained the hope that he might still strike him down, but instead Jon let out a long, slow breath that spelled the greatest loss Ramsay had yet suffered that day, “You are right, Sansa. I won’t let myself consider the notion that someone rendered so pathetic can threaten us.”

Ramsay frowned deeply as a knot of fear and loathing coiled itself around his heart, making him sick to the stomach and dry of mouth, until a moment later the leather strap came down yet again and he screamed out in pain once more. They would be continuing from here he knew, for as long as it would take…

He managed to catch a glimpse of Sansa’s arm and form as she lashed him from over his shoulder, peering back because he could only hope that she was beginning to tire, that the strain of strapping him over and over for all this time might finally be registering as some form of exhaustion on her. But she did not seem to be tired at all.

In fact, perhaps because of his incited words she seemed if anything to be invigorated, and from what he could see from his awkward angle she was still spanking him quite avidly, and showed no sign of slowing any time soon. He closed his eyes together tightly, groaning out his anguish against the pain and the state of things and those present… everything.

So it went on and on, Ramsay yelling, shouting, screaming and even crying as those that wanted to see him suffer most looked on. His sobs and cries were the only thing to fill the room for the longest time as his will was shredded like a cloth of rope, unwinding strand by strand; swat by hard, merciless swat. At long last, he gave up.

Sansa paused, leaning closely as she heard Ramsay mumble something barely audible and most certainly indecipherable. There was no doubt what would cause him to speak in such a fashion; they had all been waiting patiently for the moment. “I didn’t hear you… you’re going to have to speak up; we all want to hear what you have to say now.

Ramsay went quiet, of course, as she apparently expected him to do. Sansa was ready for that timid silence though and immediately gave him good reason to consider her command more thoroughly with several mercilessly hard swats to his already incredibly tender and reddened backside. Ramsay jumped and howled at the sudden pain.

Tears coursing their way away from tightly closed eyes and head bowed in the greatest of shame Ramsay finally spoke again, this time in a voice that was the barest of whispers, as if saying what he said quietly would somehow make it less poignant, as if words spoken softly might somehow have far less weight to them.

“P… please. Kill me.” There was nothing to greet his request but silence, and Ramsay could not bear to look anyone in the room in the eye in this greatest moment of weakness, so he lay there blindly waiting, as if not looking at them would in some way make them unable to see him, the sort of thing a child might try.

But like a child, Ramsay had been rendered to the greatest apex of helplessness, so it made sense that given nothing else to do for his own tortured mind, he would fall back on this. He quickly grew very frustrated as the silence continued; were they toying with him? This brought images of what
expressions might now color their faces.

He imagined the looks of barely suppressed laughter, perhaps, or maybe simply small satisfied smiles of deep satisfaction at seeing such a state in the man with whom they felt so much contempt. The wait only made not knowing how they reacted to his humiliating plea that much worse. It was bad enough that he was being made to beg at all...

This frustration easily stoked into rage and he screamed out his request in a fashion that sounded decidedly more like a demand. Surely they would not give in to demands but Ramsay was at wits end and so bothered and agitated by the whole scenario that he simply didn’t care as he recklessly yelled, “Kill me! Kill me now!”

Finally he could avoid looking no longer; the fact that he could not see them and what they did with his eyes shut against the pain of his groveling was gnawing at him, and his imagination may well be worse than the truth at this point, so he finally ceded shutting the sight of them out and looked around quizically, wondering why he was not yet dead.

Jon stood as stoically as before, unmoving and calm of face as he simply watched Ramsay’s suffering, just as he had been before Ramsay had lowered himself further with such a request. The others also seemed uncaring of the sentiment, and Ramsay’s heart sank, especially as he heard Sansa’s voice over his shoulder.

“Silly bastard; no one here is going to kill you. Do you really think we are simply going to forgive you of your crimes and grant you the mercy of death because you asked for it? You seem to think that the only thing we want is to see you suffer but you have clearly forgotten what it was that I told you that you were going to have to do before I stop…”

Ramsay had been lost in the world of his own misery that had been created in that room with those people for so long that he had forgotten what exactly it might have been that she was speaking of for the briefest of moments, and then it returned to him exactly what he would rather die than do for Sansa or any of them.

She wanted him to recant, to ask for forgiveness. Such a plea for mercy made him sick to imagine himself doing but it wasn’t much more than the plea for mercy he made by begging for death was it, asked the part of him that continued to slip with the questions that undermined his will. He could not… could he?

Ramsay took a long shuddering breath in the silence that ensued as all present waited for him to answer her simple question. His breath wasn’t the only thing that shuddered either; despite the seemingly comfortable position he held with most of his weight upon the soft mattress of the bed, Ramsay shook with exertion.

Not because he had done any of the work in the dealing of the punishment (Sansa had handled that with a stalwart manner that belied her feminine frame) but because simply receiving it had taxed him greatly over time, as his various muscles, some of them muscles he had in his life had little reason to exercise, strained against his bonds.

So long had it gone on that he was literally fatigued from struggling against the cords that held him and screaming at the top of his lungs. His mouth felt dry and his throat was sore from how much, how loud, and how often he had yelled in such a way. So he lay there, in every way spent, knowing that he could not endure saying no.

The sound he made barely even passed his trembling lips, and Sansa gave him another swat, clearly tired of his stalling and unsatisfied with the volume of his complete surrender. “I’m s-sorry…” he
finally stammered, after she had belted him twice more for the delay. Sansa was still not satisfied, “Louder, Ramsay… not everyone can hear you.”

“I’m sorry!” he called, shutting his eyes again against the sting of the newly inflicted strapping and the humiliation that threatened to swallow him whole like a tidal wave swallows a foundering boat at sea, “I’m sorry and… and I beg forgiveness!” The room was quiet again as before, and when some time passed he looked around him.

The looks he received from the others varied from person to person; one noble smiled smugly at him, and a small girl just glared at him with the most intense and unwavering gaze. Jon continued to be difficult to read, simply watching Ramsey with an expression of tightness at the lips and eyes that suggested he was holding back.

Ramsay heard Sansa move away from him and a light tap on the table behind him that might suggest she had set the leather strap down. He let out a long, pained breath he had not realized he had been holding, feeling a deep, aching relief that she was perhaps finally going to stop hitting him across the backside.

He trembled from his head to his very toes the stinging sensation that still lingered across his bottom was so intense. It did not dissipate rapidly as he might have hoped, but steadily burned at a slowly receding pace. Still, it was a hell of a lot better than receiving any more swats to add to the buildup of welts that surely reddened his ass.

He knew that sitting was going to be difficult at best for a while, and perhaps might even have to lie on his stomach to get any rest. The thought of these two things sent another chill of heated embarrassment through him. Every time he thought he had been brought as low as possible by Sansa and her demeaning punishment, he realized it could get worse.

That thought did not bode well for him, he realized. Maybe Sansa was a cleverer torturer than he gave her credit for… as he had mulled over before, it certainly wouldn’t be the first time he had underestimated her… Ramsay fidgeted against his bonds, but despite the fact that he was lying on a mattress, he could not get comfortable.

No, he thought, comfort was going to be something his captors would certainly deprive him of, he should expect that much at least. The fact that the bed he lay on was soft in contrast to his burning posterior was merely a niggling, taunting thing. He still could not see Sansa from the angle she purposefully held herself at.

Which of course was more than likely an intentional maneuver; why stop hitting him and then show herself when remaining invisible left him guessing as to whether she would actually stop? Would she actually stop? The quiet that pervaded unnerved him yet again and he silently berated himself for his own weakness.

Sansa’s voice rang out, “I think you can all see that merely killing a man such as Ramsay would be to deny us all that have suffered at his hands the justice fitting his crimes.” Quite a few frowned at her words, either in disagreement or perhaps doubt, and she continued, “Either way I brought you all here to make a simple statement.”

All of those present looked to her attentively, but none as much so as Ramsay, who strained hard to catch a glimpse of her face. What was this statement? Surely it would a horrible thing for and concerning him, but he could not help himself at this point from succumbing to the mortal weakness of curiosity.

Sansa continued to speak to those gathered in a clear, concise voice, “I am certain that every single
person in this room and many, many more who are not present bear grievance and ill will toward the broken man that lies before me, but I think myself in the right in declaring that none have recently suffered as we have since…”

There was tense silence in the room as she seemed to gather herself to continue her line of thought, “…since this monster of a man murdered our brother in cold blood before all as nothing more than a statement of malicious sport.” She turned cool blue eyes down to regard Ramsay as she stepped around so that he could see her fully.

She continued to address the others present, “What I have done to this man today will be the least of the things I shall do to see him suffer even a fraction of the suffering he has caused in others, because justice demands it, the law demands it, the old gods and new must see it, and we who have endured his villainy deserve to see it.”

She lowered herself, taking Ramsay’s face in one hand as if to ensure that he would look at her as she spoke. Ramsay was riveted though, so the gesture was largely unnecessary; he could not look away from the bitter challenge in those eyes if he wanted to, “Ramsay shall stay with me, and I shall keep him as he kept Theon Greyjoy, as he kept me and countless others.”

She stood up tall again, and Ramsay still could not keep himself from staring at the steely way she looked at him as she said those alien words, things he had certainly not expected her to say. He was so shocked in fact that he almost couldn’t feel the searing bolt of shame that punctured his heart with her words.

In front of these people, no, for them to witness it was to put it before all of the noble houses, nay the whole of Westeros… she had taken everything from him, not merely stripping him of lands, holdings and title but making him as less than a servant; a slave kept for the sole purpose of punishment so that those who felt wronged by him might feel better…

The shame swirled around in him, igniting once more the man he had spent so many years trying to become, the noble he had so many times convinced himself he was or at least whom he wanted to be. Shame turned to anger and anger to rage in a split moment, and he reacted, not thinking, so shamed, so lost in himself that he could not think.

He flopped about in his bindings, frothing at the lips as he decried the absence of the person he once was, as he raged against defeat already tasted like the poor sport he had always been, “Yes keep me alive and close to you, you fucking cunt, and one day I’ll…” he didn’t get any further before the snap of leather on flesh echoed through the room, cutting him off as he instead cried out in intense pain.

Ramsay hissed, his breathing rapid again in the silence that ensued the sharp, clear pain he once more felt on the extremely tender flesh of his backside. He looked back over his shoulder, seeing that Sansa was allowing him to see her face now. She had an eyebrow raised, but her hands were folded over her chest.

So she had not hit him… he strained hard to crane his neck a little more and caught a glimpse of the one who had snatched the leather from the table it had laid upon and soundly struck him, ending his tirade rather suddenly. He saw a great, black, feathered cloak. Jon. Jon had struck him for insulting his sister, apparently.

Ramsay should have expected that really, or at least that there would be some recompense paid for his careless words but he hadn’t been thinking, had for some crazy reason, some deluded idea somehow forgotten everything that had brought him to tears in front of these people in the first place. He felt such a fool.
This event, Jon hitting him, it was just more shit on top of the steaming shit pile that he was being shovel fed and forced to swallow. He made a strangled, odd sound that was a result of the many, many different emotions that all surged in him at the thought of Jon taking a turn at the lash on him. Every time…

Sansa spoke while his mind reeled with twisting, broken thoughts of shame, anger, pain and indignation, “Have you gotten that out of your system already? He only hit you once… pathetic. After all that talk of how well you can receive such things… but then I suppose everyone here knows you’re just all talk now don’t we?”

Ramsay was so red in the face he was practically purple, but no matter how enraged he was, no matter how insulted or indignant, the last strapping still lingered as a memory of the brutal sting he could surely expect if he said any of the things that might boil within him right now. Jon was probably simply waiting for such an excuse.

So instead he simply turned his head aside, wishing that he could do more to prefer silence with some tiny shred of dignity but knowing that boat had long since sailed. Instead he would have to settle for the only option he still had remaining him, which was to say nothing and appear weaker for it, though not as weak as he’d look if he protested and was thrashed again.

He took a long deep breath, trying to steady himself and hating how that breath shuddered due to the stress he remained under. His heart still thudded wildly in his chest, and he had to wonder if anyone had ever simply been humiliated to death. Death would certainly be a release from what he felt now, so if one could die of shame, he prayed for it…

After the tenuous silence had continued unabated for some time, all of the people in the room simply staring at Ramsay as he looked away and tried not to focus on the stares that felt like they bored into him, Sansa spoke again, “Yes, I thought so.” Ramsay could hear her turn on her heel to regard the rest of the room once more.

“I think I shall publicly and privately spank him as one does a small child at times of my choosing from here on. It’s fitting that a man who subjected others to such awful acts of pain and violence should fill these halls with pathetic whimpering and crying from the sort of corporal discipline that we would expect our young to endure.”

Ramsay felt tears of shame escape his eyes and roll down his cheeks, burning trails of fiery humiliation as they worked their way unbidden across his countenance. He gasped in raw, restrained hurt at the words she spoke and what their meaning was for his future, but he said nothing… he had learned better than to speak now.

As weak as it might appear to be to continue enduring what she did in silence, he had been brought low enough now that he didn’t care anymore; he just wanted it to be over. She obviously wasn’t going to kill him, so he could only hope for an existence as Reek… Theon had once had at his side, maintaining quiet obedience in order to avoid punishment.

How did he become her Reek? When did this happen? When he had been ravishing her virgin body in this very room only a short time ago he could never in his life have imagined such a reversal of roles. No… this was more than role reversal; he had dominated Sansa and controlled her with fear… at least he thought he had.

But this was something else entirely, this was what he did to Reek, except… his lip trembled as the tears continued to flow as he remembered his bold words and fake spirit as he had put on a display for Sansa so shortly ago. Except he had endured far less than what Theon had and broken just the same; she had proven him weaker than that Greyjoy…
Each noble stepped forth in turn, approaching the bed so that they could get a good look at the former master of Winterfell, the former Lord of the Boltons, who’s everything had been stripped away from him, leaving only the shivering, crying, pathetic has-been of a man lying upon the bed of Sansa Stark’s master bedroom.

Each regarded him differently; the little girl simply continued to glare, an old man with trailing white hair spat dryly as him, a wildling approached and laughed at his face. Finally Jon approached, setting the leather strap down on the bed in front of Ramsay’s face, as if to make a silent promise, only leveling him with the same serious, quiet stare as ever.

They all left the room as Ramsay shook humbly on the bed, partly due to stress, partly because he was practically bursting with all of the many things he wanted to say but for which it was in his best interest not to say. So he quietly endured, wondering at the irony of it, wondering if this was what Theon had in fact felt.
Chapter Three

Learn Your Place

Once all of them had filed out Ramsay realized that Sansa alone remained in the room with him. She moved around him to sit just as she had before she had begun the long process of shaming him. It had been a long process, hadn’t it? Try as he might, he was entirely uncertain as to exactly how much time had passed.

The slow, steady punishment that Sansa had made him endure both before and after the arrival of her guests had seemingly distorted his sense of time. He could only hope for the sake of whatever tattered remnants that might yet remain of his sense of self that he had at least held out for a lengthy duration before collapsing so completely on himself.

But that didn’t seem likely. Much more likely it was that the things that had happened to him in that room had lasted no more than a few scant hours. Ramsay had tortured people for days on end without them weeping as he had from such a stint… and the fact that she never drove nails into him or removed body parts made it worse…

Just an ample and judicious application of swats to his rear and only his rear, as if he were a young man who had erred and needed a good swatting to correct him… it was a never-ending source of personal humiliation to know that something so simple, so basic would spell the unraveling of his personal willpower.

As a torturer he had often spent hours working a victim over to find what would really make them sing, often having to implement crueler and more brutal techniques and devices to succeed, but Sansa had done so little to dominate him so completely… he glanced over at Sansa, seeing that she was smiling with one side of her mouth.

Apparently Sansa was enjoying the play of humiliated guilt and helplessness that was so firmly planted on his face, and was not shy about letting Ramsay see that she did. In fact, she probably wanted him to see that his suffering was making her so very happy. Ramsay frowned in a rising sense of agitation at this, but that too seemed to please her.

Sansa stood up from her chair, walking over to stand behind Ramsay now that it was only the two of
them again, “Now that we are alone again, I’m afraid I must make a confession to you, dear ‘husband’.” She ran a hand ever so lightly over the scorched flesh of his tenderized backside and Ramsay flinched and hissed even at this.

It stung, her touch, but the worst part was the unwanted affections; he wanted such things from her less now than ever. She continued speaking as her hand went on exploring his reddened posterior, “Punishing you until you begged for death…” he flinched, “…until you cried for mercy…” he flinched again, “…it has made me very wet.”

Ramsay’s eyes widened as she squeezed one cheek gently, certainly knowing that it would send a shock of pain through him when he was so very tender, “Now where did we leave off?” She leaned down to whisper almost conspiratorially into his ear, “That’s right; I was fucking you, and you thought to test me, see what I would do…”

She went on, her breath hot on his ear as he shook in her grasp, her hand clamping down painfully on his exposed buttocks, “…and now you have. So now I’m going to return to enjoying you as I had started before, except this time hopefully you have finally come to know your place in all of this, or is there anything you’d like to say?”

Ramsey shook his head, his mouth a very tight line as he almost literally swallowed his pride, taking gulps of air and breathing rapidly in her grasp. How was she making him feel so ridiculously vulnerable?

Ramsay would of course guess that it was a culmination of all that had happened in that room within the last few hours, but…

…But it was far more than that. Sansa had been getting underneath his carefully laid veneer since the beginning, and no matter how hard he struggled to return to his cool, perhaps even cold disposition, that demeanor that he had long ago created to show others when he wanted to frighten them or assure them that he was unaffected…he failed.

No matter what he told himself or how hard he reached for that inner calm that had spared him from showing emotion to father or even mother in the past, Sansa somehow rubbed it away from him now, and as she shared with him her intentions to continue her indignities to his ass he found himself sniffling like a beaten dog.

Now he simply lay there saying nothing, to the apparent great satisfaction of Sansa, whose bemused smile spoke volumes as to her enjoyment of his quiet servility. She leaned back and gave him a playful swat that caused him to cry out in startled pain. She called her attendant to herself and
moments later Ramsay heard a familiar sound.

The sound of leather on leather and the tiny click of small metal joints occasionally clicking into each other to create an almost bell-like noise; she was being fitted once more with her harness... Ramsay gulped hard, wondering suddenly how many others might know of this particular treatment. The guards and her chamber-maid for starters...

She had not performed this particular humiliation before the others... his gut twisted at the thought of those noble men and women seeing that certain degrading act... but servants spread news like wildfire. Even if Sansa were to command them to silence soon the whole of the castle would know that she was pegging him.

Also any noble worth his weight would know to occasionally find out what the servants knew, at least if he or she wanted to remain Lord of the castle, and then they would know and spread that knowledge to the prestigious of other houses... Ramsay felt his face heating at the thoughts that spiraled around within his head.

He wasn’t sure why he was letting any of those thoughts affect him; after all, he had essentially just been publically shamed down to the level of bastard-less-than-a-servant, so why care any more about those whose favor and affluence he once dreamed of accruing? He glanced back to see Sansa; he certainly had more pressing matters to think on...

Like the giant phallic shape designed from bent and hammered metal, expertly molded into the shape of an obscenely large cock. Ramsay couldn’t help but wonder who exactly it was that made the thing she strapped to her thighs. The leather was stitched perfectly to fit Sansa’s form, and the work of the interlocking rings that let her attach the dildo...

There was no mistaking master craftsmanship, so whomever she had conscripted to have such a device made was not simply knowledgeable about the arts of working leather and smithing metal but accomplished at it as well. There was only one man of such caliber in the hold, and Ramsay knew that man.

How many suits and swords had that man forged for his father’s armies of late, only to join Sansa in creating such a blasphemous item now? He seethed with constrained fury at the betrayal, not because he cared about the man or even knew anything about him for that matter, but because he couldn’t help envisioning how that must have went...

How awkward a conversation piece it must have been for Sansa to bring to the blacksmith down at his workshop, not so much for the smith himself or even Sansa for that matter, but for Ramsay. How
humiliated he felt now as he thought loosely on the awful words that would have to be traded to convince him to make it.

Had he decided to do it simply because she was in power now, and he feared upsetting his new ruler, or did he oblige because he perhaps also reveled in the opportunity to make Ramsay suffer as yet another member of the ‘oppressed’ Ramsay had so badly vexed. He glanced at the heft of the item as she screwed it in place; yes the man clearly wanted him to suffer.

From the tip of the head to the root of the shaft the thing had to be a foot long, and the girth of it was equally obscene… he had no idea how she had ever managed to fit it inside of him, and he squirmed at the thought of her placing it in him once again. He remembered with the cruel clarity that one remembers things they hate most.

It had been an awful sort of invasion of his self, and now after all else that had happened this day between himself and Sansa he was somehow more effected by the notion of such violation. She of course took her time once she had completely strapped the awful device upon her shapely hips. She walked over, pausing behind him.

Ramsay’s cheeks were crunched together; he couldn’t force himself to relax even though he knew tensing like this would only make it hurt more when she inserted her false cock. Sansa made the minutes stretch to infinities as she slowly ran her hand along the braised skin of his ass, seeming to enjoy the heat of his punishment there.

She placed the head of her dildo against him, causing him to flinch and strain further, despite the pointlessness of doing so. He was as like to tire himself out as do anything whatsoever to slow her ravaging of him. She spoke slowly, enjoyment in her voice, “How does it make you feel to know that it was I that took your virginity?”

Ramsay balked, glancing up at her over his shoulder. This wasn’t the first time she had mentioned this; Sansa seemed to enjoy taunting him with the fact that she had humiliated him in a way that no living person ever had. His frown deepened and he turned his face into the mattress. The least he could do would be to hide his face from her.

Sansa did not seem to be interested in letting him ride out the act of degradation in any manner of his choosing, however. To his surprise he saw that she began to untie his bonds at the feet, surprising him further as she moved to untie his hands. Ramsay hesitated for a moment as his hands slipped free, which was very unlike him.

But that moment passed as everything that remained of his will to live threw him into action. With a
growl he twisted, prepared to strike at her with his fists. Already he felt a surge of adrenaline at the thought of choking her to death. A death far too fast, true, but he would want to make sure she was dead and unable to call for help for his escape…

Except that he was unable to twist around. Sansa grabbed his arms from behind him and slammed him into the bed. Ramsay tried to rise again, but she quickly placed her weight on him to pin him down so that his face remained to the mattress as she quickly tied his hands together. He struggled to pull his hands free but Sansa was stronger than she looked.

Ramsay was wide of eye at the realization that Sansa was ‘man-handling’ him; in all of the times that he had raped her, it had never occurred to him that she was more or less allowing him to do so. Her resistance was a token thing at best, likely because she realized that if she did manage to completely resist her lord and husband it would only have made more problems for her.

But now the shoe was on the other foot, and the fact that Sansa was taller, heavier and stronger than him was no longer something that could be missed as she savagely yanked the small man about the bed to get him where she wanted him. Once his hands were tied behind his back she swatted his ass hard with her hand, making his back arch as he yowled in pain.

Sansa kept her weight pressed into him, pinning him as Ramsay continued to try to roll out from under her. Every attempt was met with another swat, which only seemed to enrage Ramsay at first, causing him to redouble his efforts to get free, wriggling this way and that, but after this had continued for some time he finally subsided.

After all, trying to worm his way free was not only failing to free him from Sansa’s grip but was also furthering the punishments he received for the attempt, and with enough of that negative reinforcement even Ramsay had to admit to himself that all he was truly doing was inviting more pain for himself.

So he went very still, trembling a little at the fresh stings she had administered; his ass was after all still criss-crossed with welts from her previous endeavors, leaving him extremely tender and vulnerable to further pains received. Sansa paused that way for a while, perhaps to be sure he wouldn’t try again or maybe to make a point, he didn’t know.

Then she slowly mounted him, placing herself behind him and lifting his hips so that he was raised on his knees with his chest and face upon the pillows of the bed. He thought to try to roll away again but before he could act on it she slapped him, “Don’t try it.” He hissed at the sting, freezing in place as he tensed against the burn of it.
She seemed to be able to read him very well indeed to have punished him preemptively he thought. This of course added further discouragement to further attempts; if she could tell he was going to try before he even did so what chance did he have to succeed? She could have done that as a bluff, of course, but how to tell?

And more importantly… did he wish to risk the pain that would immediately follow a failed attempt to call her bluff? Ramsay would like to say that he dared greatly but a core truth of himself that he had to admit now was that he actually wasn’t much of a risk taker. He was not a coward per say he told himself, but…

If he had in fact been the sort to take risks he would have accepted Jon Snow’s challenge to single combat and avoided the slight to his reputation in turning him down, as doing so never helped in gaining the respect of those soldiers who fight under one’s banner. He had to wonder if this would have gone differently if he had accepted.

As pathetic as it was, he found himself musing that it might have been better win or lose; he would have made himself a legend among his people killing Jon single-handedly if he had actually managed to best him in combat, and at worst he would have been slain, finding failure just as he did now but with the sweet release of eternal sleep before he could stew in that failure.

Like he did now. Like Sansa assuredly wanted him to. So he lay there, hating her and what she wanted and what she made him do and what he allowed her to make him do. He could only wonder how many of his victims had felt this way… Ramsay stayed perfectly still as best he could, his only movement due to his ragged breathing.

Sansa seemed to realize that he had given in to her command; he could hear the smile in her voice even if he could not see her with his head turned to the pillows as it was, “That’s right… you do what you are told and things will be less rough for you… though I don’t promise to be gentle…” Ramsay tensed again as she used her legs to spread his open.

Ramsay choked on his own voice as she put the awful thing inside him. Sansa began the slow process of ravaging him once more, her hands clasped tightly to his sides as she went about doing so, pulling him into her as she pushed into him from behind. Ramsay’s face was a picture of agony and misery he was certain.

Not only was she fucking him as if he was some whore to do with as she pleased but every time her hips clapped into his ass as she began to become more fierce in her ministrations he was rewarded with another dull ache from his own rear, his tortured cheeks not faring well with the excitement at all as they continued to remind him of what else she had done.
“Please…” he found himself saying. It was pathetic, really; Ramsay did not know who this man was that he had become, but apparently he begged… Sansa slowed but did not stop fucking him, “How many times did I ask you to stop when you raped me? Do you imagine I might have felt as you do now?” She spoke softly but…

…There was anger to her low spoken words, a resentment borne of the helplessness he had once forced her to endure. Ramsay could hear that note now, could feel it and finally understood better why Sansa did everything that she did to him. She was not a master manipulator as he often imagined her to be, nor had what she had been earlier been a lie.

No, Sansa was angry and hated him as so many others had come to hate him, but she had dared to act on that hatred where others had not for fear of him, and been clever enough and resourceful enough to see it done. In a moment of realization Ramsay came to the conclusion that he hadn’t been bested by a master spy.

No, he had been beaten by a combination of a willful woman and circumstance. This didn’t make him feel better of course; imagining that he had been bested because of the scheming of long range plans was easier to digest than being beaten because he had crossed the wrong naïve young woman with connections to the Vale.

He managed not to beg again, still a little shell-shocked that he had been wrong this whole time, and that Sansa Stark, who had likely never tortured a single person in her life, had so easily caused him to cry and plea in front of several noble families of the North. But why… no, he knew why she was fucking him; it was the basis of his discovery.

She was getting her revenge upon him, plain and simple. He had already figured that to be her motive when he had thought her a lady of multiple mysteries, but now it seemed much more personal, much more real now that he realized her reasons were simpler and closer to the heart. The way she went at him…

She was being rough now, but there was a familiar ring to the way she bent him over, how she placed her hand on his neck like so and thrust hard into him like so… she was emulating almost exactly what he had done the first time he had raped her, when he had taken her virginity. He supposed if her anger ran deep enough, she would want to repeat that upon him many times more.

“Please…!” he was begging again, but this time there was a different ring to it, a far more desperate cry for mercy. Now that he could guess as to her exact motives for what she did to him he could also guess how deeply she wanted to hurt him and how unlikely she was to actually show mercy. The thought gave him a sense of urgency he could do nothing with.
After all, there was nothing he could do but beg ineffectually; he was truly and irrevocably helpless. He glanced back over his own shoulder and saw that she was watching him carefully, perhaps taking in every detail of how he reacted to her assault. He recognized that look; she was getting aroused by what she saw, much as he had once been aroused by what he saw in her.

He bit his lip and turned his head away, hiding his shame as she continued taking what she would from him. He knew now that what she did would run its course; her raping of him was a venting of her own sexual frustrations and pain that he himself had inflicted upon her and the bitter irony was that this might be the only way for her to resolve it at this point.

Ramsay waited miserably for a very long time, and finally with a shuddering and a moan, Sansa released herself in a powerful orgasm caused by her gyrations against him, pushing hard into his tortured backside as she shuddered with waves of ecstasy. She lay atop him for some long moments, breathing hard from exertion.

Ramsay found himself relieved that she had finally subsided in her efforts, laying perfectly still beneath her and trying to regain his own breath and bearing as well, glad that the pounding sensation to his hurt buttocks had at last ceased. Sansa was smiling as she whispered into his ear; he couldn’t see it, but he could hear it in her voice.

“This is how I wish it to be every night for the foreseeable future; I will come in here when I am done with what business I must attend, and relieve myself of the burdens of my day by taking you in any way I wish… ‘Husband’.” Her hands started to move along his body again, “But I think that tonight I shall take you more than once…”

So the days went by with Ramsay forced to remain within the bedroom of the Stark House, awaiting Sansa Stark’s return so that she could resume committing varied and numerous acts of sodomy upon him. A guard watched his door at all times, ensuring that he did not leave the bedroom; he was not permitted exit, ever.

Sansa of course took no heed of how boring and tedious it was for a man to have to stay in a single room day in and day out with absolutely nothing to do, or perhaps she did and simply didn’t care; all part of her plan for his ‘punishment’ perhaps. He found himself tidying the place up at times, straightening furniture and sweeping the floor.

He would spend the majority of his time staring out of the window down at the courtyard and the rolling, snowy lands beyond the castle walls. People below would often see him looking out and point at him, speaking about him with voices too distant to be understood by Ramsay. At first this had soured him to looking out the window.
Over time however he grew to ignore it; let them say what they would of him, the former Lord trapped in the current Lady’s bedroom, he was going to stare out of that window because it was the least boring thing he could now do with his pathetic life. There were only so many times you could pace a room in thought before it became tiresome.

He often thought of trying to escape out of that window, but the stone beyond it was icy and treacherous, and the ground was several stories down. He had heard that one of the Stark boys had broken his back falling from the heights of that very same castle, and Ramsay had no intention of following suit.

And then there was the help, Sansa’s servants. Ramsay didn’t see many of them since there were only a few persons allowed into the Lady of the castle’s private bedroom, but she had one woman who came in to change the linens and chamber pot and see to the general cleanliness of the room. Ramsay didn’t know her name but she always hurried in her tasks.

In fact, Ramsay noticed that she downright rushed to finish her chores, never once looking in Ramsay’s direction and giving him a wide berth. He found this oddly amusing, and after she had visited a few times began to play games at her expense; after all, he was very, very bored and had nothing better to do with his time.

At first he simply would move himself closer to her, watching in amusement as she scurried to busy herself with her tasks further from his new position. He found that if he cornered her with his slowly advancing movement she would simply quit her tasks and leave the room altogether, returning to finish at another time.

This of course led to another game, in which he intentionally disrupted her work by ruffling the bed or disturbing the closet of its shoes just to watch her reaction when she returned to find that she would have to start all over again. He smiled widely at her frown, but she never saw his smile since she avoided even glancing at him.

Ramsay found this a little annoying for reasons he couldn’t personally fathom, striving always to push her a little more and grin a little more widely and darkly at her from his seat in the corner whenever she would first arrive or return to that bedroom. He had almost given up on her, and would likely have done so due to her patience, but as stated before, he was dreadfully bored.

So he kept up with his little pet project of seeing how far exactly he could push the chambermaid until the day when he finally got her to openly acknowledge his presence. He had just finished the process of dumping the contents of the chamber pot upon the area of floor she had last cleaned before his advance had driven her out.
The little old woman balled her fists, shaking with a surprising fury that caused Ramsay to chuckle. He couldn’t help himself; the woman’s ire was nothing less than comical. She glanced up at him, and Ramsay froze in surprise a moment before applauding her with a jovial smile, “Why there we are; finally you are polite enough to look when a Lord is about.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed, and she looked very much like she had something to say. Ramsay leaned forward, his eyebrows raised expectantly at what she might retort with, but instead of speaking she shook her head and turned around, gathering her bucket and mop, and leaving the room without a word.

Ramsay jumped a little at the sound of the room’s wooden door slamming shut as he stood there, baffled. Was the woman really such a pushover that he could take it that far without result? He decided then that he would need to find a way to up his game come tomorrow. Perhaps next time he would dump the pot on the bed.

He wrinkled his nose at the thought; no, no that would be too much. Sansa might violate him every evening in the most humiliating ways, but she still let him sleep on the bed, often falling asleep clutching him to her, so he wouldn’t want to intentionally befoul his very own sleeping space. No amusement was worth that much.

He was smirking with satisfaction for some while after the incident though, setting a chair near the window as had become his habit and looking out at the view beyond with a small cheer to his otherwise bleak and loathsome existence. With that small victory, he had managed to win something intangible back for himself.

He looked about for a while, trying to see if anything interesting might happen in the courtyard below, perhaps another fight between the visiting soldiers and the wildlings, those were always somewhat less dull than the regular drudgery of simple people going about with simple tasks. But no show for Ramsay today; the wildlings kept to themselves in their camp outside the walls.

He sighed as boredom once again sank its claws into him; it took so little for him to grow bored after all. He leaned back into his chair, watching a bird of prey circle the castle from up on high, and gazing serenely out at the looming white mountaintops. Frozen; everything in the north was frozen this time of year.

His reverie was suddenly and rudely interrupted by a cuff to the back of his head. Ramsay was knocked aside, falling from the chair gracelessly as the furniture toppled with him. He looked up with surprised eyes to see a guardsman glaring down at him, his post apparent by the chain shirt he wore and the sword strapped to his hip.
Ramsay quickly scurried back to the wall beneath the window, his wide eyes tracking the movements of the obviously angry guard. The guard still had his fists balled in a universal expression of impending violence, or in this case further violence, and a sour expression sat upon his face, “What is this I hear of you hassling the chambermaid?!”

Ramsay sat bolt upright against the wall; the old woman had told on him! He gave the guardsman a large smile as he slowly raised himself along the wall to standing, “Hassling? Well, occasionally I have tried to engage her in simple conversation, but she has always ignored me in the most rude of ways…” He shrugged, “I…”

Ramsay’s head snapped back as the guard punched him squarely in the mouth with a fist that was moving far faster than what Ramsay was expecting. He staggered a few steps away, one hand on the wall and the other on his bleeding lip. The soldier growled at him, “You threw a chamber pot upon her work.”

Ramsay grimaced at the guard’s warning glare; saying the wrong thing now was going to earn him a sound beating, so he served himself best now by saying nothing at all. The guard maintained the steady glare for some long moments, his eyes both searching and daring Ramsay to say or do anything he might regret.

“Have nothing to say for yourself then, Snow?” Ramsay’s teeth set tightly at the insulting reference to his former name, but he remained silent. The soldier went on, “If you have taken to playing with shit like some kind of man-infant, perhaps I should discourage you by placing your head within the pot… would you like that?”

Ramsay’s teeth grated at the disgusting threat of humiliation but he simply shook his head, “No… your point is well received.” No point in riling the man any further; he was in no place to so much as defend himself. The soldier and Ramsay turned as a voice called from across the room; it was Sansa Stark, “What is going on here?”

Ramsay stiffened at the sound of her voice, his eyes widening a bit in both surprise and unwanted and unexpected fear. After all, her voice was resonant with what happened in the bedroom to his dignity each evening, and that was certainly something for a man to learn to dread, a regular activity that never grew more tolerable, only less so.

The guard turned, also seeming a little surprised by Sansa’s sudden appearance, “Lady Sansa… this lot has, according to your chambermaid, been ceaselessly harassing the help to the point of literally soiling the room with shit. I came inside when I saw how aggravated the poor woman was; you know how meek she is.”
Sansa nodded as she walked into the room to join the two of them, her gaze leveling on Ramsay as she did so. He stiffened further at the way those cold eyes studied him, “Yes, I know well how hard it is to get under that patient woman’s skin; Ramsay must have worked very hard to irritate her so that she would inform you that way.”

The guard nodded again, “Aye, so I came in and cuffed him a bit. He’s still got a mouth on him, though, and I’m not entirely sure the lesson has sunk in.” The guard spat at the floor as he spoke, leveling Ramsay with an angry expression that told the latter that the former very much meant every word of his threat.

Sansa shook her head in the universal sign of negative, however, holding up a hand dismissively, “That won’t be necessary. I appreciate your immediate attention to this serious matter, but I will attend to his discipline from here on in.” She turned to regard Ramsay, who now stared at the floor, kicking his feet together sheepishly.

The guard seemed hesitant for the briefest of moments, but then a strong sense of duty and obedience seemed to take hold as he saluted and walked out regardless of whatever personal reservations he might have had; after all, Lady Sansa was his superior and no matter what the circumstance it was not his place to question her orders.

Once the soldier had exited the room to the sound of the heavy wooden door closing, Sansa finally broke the silence between them with words, “I would say you chose the right person to torment in the guise of my chambermaid but I suppose I didn’t leave you anyone else to harass. I know it must have taken some time…”

She walked over to the window, looking out at the courtyard beyond but still facing Ramsay and clearly watching him regardless of her direction, “…that good woman is as sweet and humble as they come, and with the sort of patience that can only come from being mother to a great number of children and grandchildren.”

Ramsay shrank back from the window a bit as she approached. Sansa did not seem angry but that didn’t make him feel better about her reaction to this discovery. He only licked his lips nervously, quietly watching and listening to what she had to say. Sansa went on, “I blame myself in part for not anticipating this event…”

Ramsay stood straight again as she suddenly turned to face him, a dangerous resolution flashing in her half-lidded expression, “…but you can be assured that I intend to punish you severely for testing her and thereby me in this way.” Her eyes panned across the room, searching. At last they came to rest on a nightstand across from the bed.
She nodded towards that piece of furniture, giving the baffled Ramsay instruction, “Bring me the hairbrush there.” Ramsay looked back at her after glancing at the indicated item, a tense silence hanging between them. Sansa did not often directly order him to do anything, but when she did it was always a blow to his shattered pride.

Ramsay gulped, licking his lips nervously; he still tasted the coppery remnant of the drying blood upon his face where the guardsman had struck him. After the moment of quiet stretched dangerously close to disobedience he made the choice he always did; the only one he really had that wouldn’t cause him unnecessary suffering.

Ramsay strode over to the nightstand, snatching the hairbrush there and strode back over to Sansa, practically throwing it at her with the way he savagely tossed it. He was curious if the only reason she had made him do such was to make a display that he feared her reprisal. He shook with the surge of frustration this caused him as he glared at her.

She glanced down and then looked him in the eyes again, “Now take off your pants.” Ramsay froze, his heart racing at both the words she chose and the tone she used when addressing him. She usually reserved that particular way of speaking, words and otherwise, for when she took him to her bed at night.

He broke into a nervous sweat at the thought of the biggest thing about his life now, the one that he spent every waking moment trying not to think about, threatening him once more. It was far too early though, he thought, his eyes darting to the sun outside which still burned softly behind the fog of the mountain.

But then he supposed that Sansa didn’t really have to keep any sort of schedule being in the position over him that she was, nor had she ever told him that she would only ravish him at night. Ramsay swallowed hard, feeling himself tense up in several places in reflexive memory of what it was going to be like shortly.

Sansa seemed to pick up on what he was feeling, or at least what he was anticipating, because she smiled in amusement at him, “No, I’m not going to do that to you… at least not yet. I did not ask you to retrieve my brush for me because I felt a sudden need to brush my hair.” She slapped the brush against her other hand hard.

Ramsay wondered at how she could read him so easily, but he supposed that having subjected him to rape so many nights in a row had taught her what ways he reacted to it. That thought fled from his mind as she spoke and struck her hand with the brush, however, as it became immediately clear what she actually intended to do to him.
Ramsay could only respond dumbly, his face a twist of confusion and apprehension, “Wait… what?”

Sansa only replied by smiling wider at him, “I’m going to put you over my knee and spank you; after all the guardsman was right… you have been acting like an infant throwing a tantrum.” As she said this she walked over to sit upon the bed.

Ramsay stood rigidly watching her, his hands curled into fists at his sides. Did he dare to resist her humiliating treatment this time? Every other time he had tried to argue with her or dared to physically fight what she decided to do to him it had gone badly. Why did the idea of receiving a spanking crush him so?

Regardless of how this particular treatment made him feel, though, Ramsay knew he would have to endure it of his own volition or there would be further discipline; Sansa was proving to be a tough mistress, and not giving her what she wanted would lead to further problems, and Ramsay without solutions.

So he reluctantly moved over to Sansa, who continued to sit waiting patiently for him. She patted her lap and instructed further, “Lay yourself down over my lap so that I may easily give you what you so desperately need.” Ramsay’s face flushed at her words and the gesture, but mostly at the air she held, how she talked down to him.

He continued to hesitate and this seemed to cause her a slight bit of ire, as she raised an eyebrow at him, “You aren’t going to make me repeat myself, are you?” Ramsay bristled at the treatment, at the whole of the affair, but what was he to do? He knew that the guard who had roughed him up stood just outside the door.

No doubt listening for him to make any form of trouble that would give the soldier cause to rush back into the room and make Ramsay into a veritable punching bag. Not only that but he had discovered that Sansa herself was actually quite formidable in her own right. Sure, she didn’t know much about fighting, but neither did he.

Normally, that would still give him an advantage over a woman, but Sansa was not an average woman. For one, she was no meek, passive soul like the other women he had brutalized, nor was she of average stature; Sansa was both taller and heavier than he with his slight frame and short height, giving her a solid advantage.

No, Ramsay thought, he didn’t want to go down that road again; whatever chance he might have of overpowering Sansa was negated by the fact that he stood in her castle occupied by her guards, and he didn’t feel like suffering the added degradation of being man-handled again by a woman. So with
a sad sigh, he complied.

Ramsay carefully lowered himself across her lap, feeling strained at the whole of the affair. He tried his best not to look at the standing mirror across from them but his eyes found it from time to time nonetheless; he looked absolutely ridiculous propped across her lap with no pants, and the image was only compounded as she started to slap him.

It was beyond embarrassing to see himself treated like a young boy in the lap of his mother, as that image he saw would suggest, so he did his best to simply stare down at the floor, using all of his willpower to try to shut out as much of what was happening to him as he possibly could. Sansa of course made it hard.

As her hand peppered his ass with a series of swats that left his pristine white cheeks covered in hand-shaped red welts that started to merge together over time, giving the whole of the arch of his buttocks a reddish glow, she spoke to him, “Surely this isn’t what you wanted when you acted like some sort of juvenile delinquent, was it?”

Ramsay choked on a reply, taking a moment to swallow back his pain and humiliation to decide what best to say. He wanted to rant and rave at her, to call her a whore and a raging cunt, to insult her and her family living and dead, or to at least remain quiet, as some sort of passive defiance to her overbearing domination.

But the former was likely to get him even more of this sort of treatment, perhaps even push her to make it worse, like fetching an implement worse than a brush or displaying his shameful position publicly again, and the latter would likely do the same or at the very least do him no good, as she patiently waited and continued hitting him.

For he now had no doubts at all as to Sansa’s patience, and also knew that he could stand for little enough of this awful treatment as it was, so he would need to opt for the easiest way out and give her what she wanted. He swallowed his remaining pride and told her what she wanted to hear, “No, Lady Sansa, I did not…”

Sansa nodded, as if having expected him to say nothing else, “Then why would you act so childishly if you did not want me to treat you as a child? Your mischief speaks of a young man crying for attention. Now you have it.” Ramsay squirmed under the administration of her hairbrush as she suddenly began hitting him with that instead of her hand.

Under the sharp new stings of what she did Ramsay found it hard to concentrate on speech, trying his best to tell her what she wanted to hear but a little confused now on what that was, which only
left him with more urgency and uncertainly than the already considerable levels of such that he had already been feeling.

He strained to speak quickly anyways, saying what came to the top of his head in a fast effort to relieve himself of the punishments he received as quickly as possible, “I… I do not know… wait… ow!” Sansa apparently did not agree or approve of this first attempt and Ramsay whimpered, already unable to tolerate what he was getting.

Unable to tolerate but also unable to evade. As he started to squirm harder against the rain of blows the brush dealt to his butt, and eventually started trying to buck free despite knowing that such might anger Sansa, she responded by tightening her hold on him. Her free hand roped around his waist, pulling him tightly against her own waist.

Also, her right leg wrapped around his calves, holding his legs pinned down so that he could not kick with any sort of leverage. A feeling of helplessness settled in on him as her grip gradually became concreted and his frantic mind grasped that he could not get away from her even if he gave it his best effort.

She didn’t say anything, but the brush kept coming down harder on the tortured flesh of his exposed cheeks, and Ramsay felt stinging tears in his eyes well up in an inconvenient and unwanted way. He didn’t know whether she was hitting him harder because he involuntarily bucked in her grip or because of what he had said.

Perhaps both, but either way he had to cling to the option of the latter because it was the only one of the two that he could potentially rectify. His mind raced as he tried to think of what to say that might appease her, but the painful swatting made concentration all but impossible, so he opted for the truth, hoping it didn’t make things worse.

“I was bored! I was just trying to get a rise out of your woman servant…!” Sansa did not slow, but the brush also did not seem to be hitting him any harder either. She still didn’t respond though so Ramsay elaborated, willing to tell her about anything now to get her to stop, “She wasn’t responding to me, I just wanted her to look at me!”

Sansa nodded and her rhythm slowed ever so slightly, “Ah… so you did in deed throw a tantrum, and entirely because you didn’t feel that you were being shown enough attention.” Her hand continued its work as Ramsay squirmed to its delivery, “No… that’s not it! She was showing disrespect… servants shouldn’t…”

Her hand sped up again at the sound of his words, and he was interrupted by the terrible sting
inflicted as she struck him particularly hard in obvious punishment for his statement, “That was not a question but a statement of fact Ramsay. I did not say it because I wanted your opinion on how you acted; that was plain to all involved.”

She continued to speak even as she continued to spank his now tortured and deeply reddened ass as he squirmed in her grip, “As to your attempt to justify yourself, you should know these things; One, you are not in a position to defend your actions and will speak when spoken to. Two, my chambermaid is not required to show you respect.”

Every time she counted out one of her reasons her hand brought the brush down hard as a sort of accentuation of her argument, the sort that from Ramsay’s point of view certainly could not easily be ignored, “Three, she did not show you anything one way or the other, she only did her best to attend her duties without interaction with you.”

“Four, if she had said or done anything that might be construed as unseemly or rude, then no one in this castle would fault her for it, since you have committed atrocities enough to earn the hatred of many. Five, you speak as if you still bear your stolen lordly status, as if anyone here sees you as a noble; they do not.”

She shrugged at him offhandedly as she continued to pepper his ass with swats, “So as you can see you have no argument to stand on even if you were being given the right to argue, which you aren’t. So shut up and take your discipline for acting like a child and stop whining and mewling about it like one; it only further cements the image.”

Ramsay was fully red in the face, seemingly unable to speak or at the very least biting back his words less they cause him even more trouble. His feet occasionally kicked out as she mercilessly administered her form of justice, and he scrambled to think of what he might say to end the whole awful debacle. In the end he could only come up with one thing.

“I’m sorry!” he cried. He strained to look back at her over his own shoulder, so that she might see the plaintive, pleading look on his face, “I have erred please forgive me!” Sansa was so surprised by what he said she actually stopped hitting him for a moment before resuming after that moment of being taken aback.

She raised an eyebrow, a slight smile sculpting the corner of her mouth as she replied, “Well, I certainly didn’t expect apology or begging this early in your punishment. Well done; I must say that I am pleased to see how positively a little physical negative reinforcement can affect you, and glad to see you put your pride away.”
Her comment alone stung and Ramsay looked away, burying his face in the bedding below him so as to hide the humiliated expression on his face from his tormenting mistress. He could still hear her words though, and he most certainly could not hide himself from the sting of her repeated blows to his posterior.

Sansa set the brush aside, but then went on to continue slapping his practically glowing red arches with her bare palm, which also started to shine red as she applied herself so vigorously to spanking him that her own hand was becoming heated with it. Ramsay wasn’t entirely sure but for a moment he thought she might be enjoying herself.

“Tomorrow I will have you clean my bedchambers out at first light and then you will humbly apologize to my chambermaid for your crass behavior, begging her for forgiveness.” Ramsay was very quiet for many long moments after she said this and Sansa’s face turned up again in a wry grin, “You still find that hard don’t you?”

Still he did not answer, and Sansa seemed to gain knowledge of how he felt on the matter by that fact as if he had actually spoken, “You don’t want to lower yourself to the level of apologizing to someone that you somehow still consider lower than you, despite being a fatherless bastard who has lost what stolen holdings he had to his smeared name.”

Ramsay twitched, and not just because of the awful lashing he continued to endure, which was certainly causing him to twist and dance in its own right, but because Sansa was hitting the proverbial nail on the head while insulting in the vilest of ways at the same time, attacking his weakest point, which happened to remain his legitimacy.

And yet still he did not answer, so Sansa reached over and took the brush in hand again, and the sharp sting of its descent snapped Ramsay out of his quiet with a yowl as Sansa took to punishing him now for his passive disobedience. “When I speak to you expecting reply you will answer me, and you will do so promptly.”

Ramsay’s back arched as she landed another string of searing blows that left him breathless in an awful moment where he wondered if he would be able to regain his speech in order to say what was needed to stop the awful rain of painful swats that took his breath away to begin with. Oh what cruel irony that would be!

But he found his words quickly enough, pain being one of the greatest of motivators, “Yes… yes, I will do as you say!” He slumped forward, panting hard as Sansa finally ceased in her ministrations concerning the spanking. He glanced back to see her nod curtly, “Good.” To his great relief she reached over to set the brush down once more.
Sansa ran her fingers lightly over the raised flesh of his welted ass, commenting in an amused and relaxed tone, “The back of that particular brush has our house’s emblem engraved in relief on it; I find it rather fitting that in some places on your rear my father’s sigil can now be clearly see in red and white pattern.”

Ramsay flushed again, feeling the tips of his ears burn at the notion that she was marking him with her family crest as she punished him. He just wanted it to be over and patiently waited, being as he had no choice but to do so. Thankfully, Sansa did not return to hitting him with her hand again, which is what he feared she might do.

Also though she did not immediately let him up, instead keeping him upon her lap in that most awkward and humiliating position, entirely for the effect of shaming him further Ramsay had no doubt. “If my chambermaid does not approve of your apology we shall repeat this process, perhaps in front of her next time.”

With a suddenness that Ramsay found almost surprising Sansa stood, pulling him to stand by the crook of his arm. She looked him up and down and tapped at her chin thoughtfully, “I think I shall have you remain pant less until such a time as I don’t have the constant feeling that I might need to discipline you at the drop of a hat.”

Ramsay felt the blood rush to his face, his ears burning he blushed so hard in his unrivaled shame at her comment, “You mean to leave me walking about nakedly? That is no way for a…” Sansa put a finger to his lips, cutting him off, “If you were going to say ‘Lord to act’, then you still aren’t paying attention to your new place here.”

She went on, patting the side of his face in a patronizing way that was a sort of universal language for mocking dominance through personal touch, a taunt of sorts, “You’ll do whatever I say no matter how you feel on the matter besides, because you are not a lord; you are in fact of lower station than the chambermaid you offended.”

Ramsay’s jaw worked against the new wave of resentment and humiliation this statement caused and worse yet Sansa could easily see his unhidden ire, smiling in a small way that gave reason for him to think she might be enjoying toying with him with such direct insults. He could only suppose that doing so was further pointing out how little he could do to stop her.

She moved in closer, her breath upon his face as she spoke to him intimately, the way the closest of friends might conspire together or perhaps the way two lovers might share an important secret, “I know you have often made a habit of walking about your quarters without garb, and when I had you upon that table earlier you had no such issue…”
Ramsay flushed again, as her words made him consider what it was that he was actually shamed about. Before he could give it much thought though she gave words to his thoughts, “You are only worried because it will serve as a constant reminder not only to you but also to others that I will take you in hand for your sins…”

Ramsay pulled at the collar of his shirt, feeling even more heated with the uncomfortable air Sansa was creating between them as he gulped wordlessly, not answering her statement but knowing that silence was still answer enough as to the truth behind her words. She went on, “And you know that all will see the marks upon your rear…”

Ramsay grimaced, immediately regretting doing so as a slow smile of satisfaction spread from one side of her mouth to the other. Why was he so completely unable to regain control of his composure? He kept feeling like he might be on the verge of reasserting himself into a state of calm indifference, his usual veneer…

But then Sansa would do and or say something that shattered his countenance entirely. He found himself wishing with every fiber of his being that she would just turn around and leave the room, so that he might start trying to reassemble the pieces of his broken pride and confidence. Sansa didn’t go, though.

Instead, she stood there, intimately close to him, watching his face closely as he stared at the floor in his shame, shifting from foot to foot, trying not to think about the tender, stinging sensation he felt on his heated cheeks as cool air blew in through the window across his naked flesh. A thought occurred to him, “Milady…”

“If I am to be pant less at all times with winter falling over this already cold land, will that not cause me to catch my death?” Sansa was still smiling when he glanced up to see her face, and when he did she answered, “We’ll close the window and tend the fire. I suggest you spend an adequate amount of time in bed…”

She reached around and squeezed his left cheek, causing him to wince, a whimper escaping his throat before he could think to stop it, due to the suddenness of the unexpected action. This only seemed to please Sansa more, her eyes alive with something that scared Ramsay deeply, “After all, I’ll be taking you to bed nightly still…”

Ramsay gave way to a very deep frown, still staring at the floor as he moped a bit, giving in to despair and self-pity, “I am… indisposed as of this event, yes? Perhaps we could wait until tomorrow or the day after to…” Sansa cut him off with a chuckle that told Ramsay that was never going to happen, “I think not.”
She elaborated, “It’s almost funny how you still attempt to barter and deal as if you had anything with which to trade for what you ask or had any ground to stand on whatsoever. If you are going to beg me not to fuck you in the ass again tonight then you will need to do it properly if you hope to have any chance of success.”

Ramsay balked at this, his tone changing due to his frustration, fear and shame all mixing together so powerfully that he felt completely out of control, like his whole situation in this new life forced upon him was spiraling further and further into chaos, “But… I’m sore… surely we can abstain for…” he looked at her as she raised her eyebrow.

“Please…” Still she seemed completely unmoved. Worse, the expression on her face hinted that his request was downright ludicrous in her sight, and amusing at best, offensive at worst. He had to wonder for a moment if she wouldn’t punish him again for what she perceived to be him speaking out of turn… the cheeks of his face flushed as red as those below.

With some amount of hesitation and no small amount of humiliation Ramsay went down to one knee and then the other, speaking at the ground in harsh, rasping, forced words because he was unable to say these awful things while looking her in the eyes, “Please… please give me the night.” As awful as what he was doing was he could not stop.

As much as it made him hate himself, all Ramsay could think of was how much more painful and degrading it would be for her to fuck him anally while he had yet to recover from this most recent punishment. He knew that as tender as he was that everything she did would only make his suffering worse.

Sansa’s face screwed up into a thoughtful look as she tapped her finger to her chin thoughtfully again, though Ramsay sincerely doubted she needed any time to decide; she had likely already decided what she would do with him and was making him endure awaiting her answer simply to cause him further anxiety over her choice.

Sansa let out a long, deep sigh and nodded, “I suppose because you begged so very, very meekly, your humility should be rewarded. I’ll let you have this one night to think on what it took to alleviate your own suffering.” Ramsay couldn’t look at her, his shame was so great he felt like humiliation alone might kill him.

A person couldn’t die from shame alone, could they? Ramsay didn’t actually think this could be the case, but from the way he felt right now, his stomach tight and his mouth dry as wave after wave of nauseating negative emotion pulsed through him, he could be convinced that it was within the realm of possibility.
But… she had said yes, and as awful as the truth of his subservience was, he was immediately relieved to a shameful extent that he would not have to endure her… ministrations again this particular evening. He gulped hard at the sense that this whole situation instilled in him, feeling sick with how Sansa so clearly reveled in it.

She waved at the window casually, “Shut that and tend the fire. Tomorrow we shall see how well you can grovel for the appeasement of my servant.” She watched him as he slowly stood, trembling, and made his way over to the window, shutting it as a chill swept through him. She hadn’t been speaking false before.

Ramsay would need to stoke the fire hot and likely also spend much of his time wrapped in blankets if he wanted to avoid frostbite on his toes or worse, his manhood. The tiniest of winds had blown through that window before he had closed it, but even that promised a bitterly cold winter ahead of him with her command of pantlessness.

Sansa seemed to be satisfied and finally turned to leave him alone in the room, which in itself caused him to release a breath he had not realized he had been holding in relief. Ramsay stood there for a long while, just reeling from all that happened and how completely incapable he was of knowing where to go from here.
Worthy Apology

Audio Chapter: https://app.box.com/s/btmucfn2nery2c6miyhrym6yh4sbb6zp

Chapter Four

Worthy Apology

Ramsay woke with a start, rolling over as his mind groggily returned to the mortal coil and almost immediately regretting the habitual movement as the welted, tender flesh of his backside caused him to hiss and flip quickly back onto his side. Ramsay had always enjoyed sleeping on his back prior to his odd relationship with Sansa.

Now though he was resigned to trying his rest upon his side to avoid irritating the wounds her punishments left upon him in the form of grisly rashes upon his buttocks. He had tried to sleep on his stomach as a safer alternative to avoid accidentally rolling onto his back as often but he found the position utterly uncomfortable.

Along with the stinging pain came a torrent of humiliating memories he would rather have left forgotten within the hazy realm of whatever dreamland he had visited the previous evening. What Sansa had done to him, what he had done, and how he had further embarrassed himself, an activity he seemed unable to avoid repeating.

And of course he remembered what he still had yet to do. His face soured at the thought of having to apologize to a lowly servant for anything at all, never mind that he was having to do so to a servant that he had been attempting to instill some form of respect in. Now this woman, whomever she was, would never properly fear him.

Nor anyone else for that matter, he thought drearily. He rose and looked over to the mess in the corner he still had left to clean up. He had started the task last evening after Sansa had finally departed, but discontinued the activity when bending over repeatedly to scrub at the floor had caused him too much discomfort.

Then there was the humiliation, to be certain, probably the biggest reason he had stopped and left the work to sit until the morrow. The wounds to his ego were far larger and even more painful than the other maladies he suffered, and in the evening just after what she had done to him Ramsay still felt too fresh with that injury.
But now he would need to get to work and finish the job, especially since he could see from glancing at the window that he had overslept and that the roosters of the keep must have long since crowed their rallying cry for morning’s arrival. Whatever he might think of Sansa and what she did, he didn’t doubt she would offer more of it if he failed to do as told.

That thought of course caused his face to burn with renewed shame that his station in life, which he had worked so long and hard to improve, had led back to him acting with fear of repercussions from those that ruled him. Before it had been his father, whom he had strove to impress, and now Sansa, who might be the first person he ever truly feared.

Another thought to be added to the growing pile of reasoning that could only leave him flushed with intense self-loathing and a more than ample helping of self-doubt. That he found himself kneeling to muck up filth in this manner simply to avoid a… even in his thoughts he had trouble allowing himself to say it…

A spanking. How awful to even consider such a crass child’s punishment as the default way that Sansa brought him to heel and worse that it was so terribly effective, saying numerous negative things about his character and resolve as a man. He tried to stand up and throw the cleaning pail out of the window a few times, but in the end he did not dare.

He would stand there, shaking with the fury of his own weakness, feeling almost enraged enough to act against his fear but ultimately impotent. As great as his shame and his rage over the whole of the affair was, he found that his reasoning mind was still more than conscientable of the fact that if he were to toss those things out…

She would then be forced to make an example of him, and likely to the whole of the court if he did something as openly public in his defiance as hurl objects out of his window into the courtyard. The idea of the greater shame in being made to suffer such very specific ridicule before the eyes of his peers again was dreaded even more than his current circumstance.

In the end in every single instance of his near-rebellion, he found himself setting the wash bucket back upon the floor and lowering himself with an awful sense of resignation to his knees on the floor, taking the cloth from the bucket and reapplying himself to the scrubbing of a mess that he had meant to be a lesson to another.

Eventually despite a great many hesitations and his overall disdain for the task at hand causing him to move as slowly as a cold snail, he finally finished the task of cleaning the mess he had made. He miserably retreated to his bed, feeling soiled by the fact that he had been made to commit to an act out of fear.
Given his own nature and predilection to forcing others to do things against their will for gain and amusement, Ramsay had a special insight into exactly what Sansa had done to him here, making the sting to his already ravaged pride that much greater. He had to wonder how much more of such treatment he could take.

He sat upon the mattress of the large double bed, pulling his knees to his chest and curling into himself in what anyone watching would be able to recognize as universal body language for a person feeling most miserable. Painted on his face was a deep, unhappy frown to match the rest of his pose as he thought on his plight.

He tried hard not to think on it, but where else could his mind go when he was literally being forced to stay within the confines of the bedroom? He couldn’t take a walk to clear his head or find a book to distract himself in study, not that Ramsay had ever been an avid reader, but within these four walls all he had was contemplation.

The sound of footsteps outside finally interrupted his train of deeply self-pitying thoughts, but he did not find the change of atmosphere to be as welcome as he might have expected; Sansa’s return to him today would not herald anything good for Ramsay. She had kept her promise and not harassed him the previous evening.

She had simply walked into the room and disrobed, putting on her nightwear and settling down to sleep for the evening. Not a word had passed between the two as Ramsay had quietly pretended to sleep, watching her through narrowed eyes. But now he was certain that they would have to become engrossed in a rather unpleasant conversation.

As the footsteps grew closer Ramsay could hear that there were two sets of feet involved, and his mouth twisted into an even deeper frown that bordered on a grimace. As the two entered the room he saw what he had expected; Sansa had her chambermaid in tow with her. He sat there as they approached, glaring at the bedding.

There were a few awkward moments of silence in which Sansa and her chambermaid simply stood before Ramsay, staring at him as he remained seated on the bed and tried not to look back at them. Occasionally he would glance up at Sansa, who stared at him evenly with an expression on her face that he could not read.

In those micro-moments in time he was pressed upon by a wonderment of whether or not she expected him to begin speaking and if so, what exactly it was that she wanted to hear him say. He wished he knew exactly what would suffice to her by way of this ridiculous apology, but it seemed that she was going to make him feel it out.
After the tense silence had continued well past the point of comfortability, Ramsay could only assume that Sansa expected him to say what he would right off, and he opened his mouth to speak. No sooner had he done so that Sansa spoke, “Ramsay here can barely make eye contact as you can see, nor will he rise to meet us.”

Sansa glanced over to her chambermaid with a knowing expression and a confident nod, “He is ashamed of his behavior as I told you he would be.” Ramsay flushed with heated energy of the negative sort, the worst kind in fact; there was nothing he could do with this awful shame in the situation he was in but to swallow it.

He could now only wonder at what things had been said to this servant woman about him, and it bothered him to no end despite trying to let it go. He told himself that this little old woman who emptied chamber pots for a living was inconsequential to him but he knew better; she was a servant in a castle.

If the other servants didn’t already know what she did of him they would soon enough. Servants spread rumors faster than lords did, part of the reason why Ramsay had chosen to torment her in the first place; if she could be made to properly fear him then maybe the others would follow suit… but not now. No, now he would be a laughing stock.

It wouldn’t just be the lords of the realm that gathered to mock him in hours of boredom, but even the scrubbers of filth and muckers of stables would mingle with the pure intent of taking humor in how low Sansa Stark had brought Ramsay Bolton… no… Ramsay Snow they would call him. At least, these are the thoughts that ran through Ramsay’s head.

He could only see the worst sort of tormentor when he looked up into Sansa’s face, with all the plots he could imagine and even the idea of grand plots beyond his ken seeming to be wheeling about in her eyes when she looked back at him with that smug, superior almost smile of hers. He was so caught up in this he almost didn’t hear what Sansa was saying.

“I said; are you ready to tell her just how sorry you are, Ramsay, or am I going to have to remind you of how very sorry you are?” Ramsay stiffened at those words, glancing over to the chambermaid, whose name he didn’t even know. Probably better to remain that way, he thought to himself, but had Sansa told her what motivated his ‘shame’?

Regardless of whether or not she knew prior to this debacle, she would certainly know about it in greatest of detail if he continued to delay what Sansa was demanding of him, and not only did the idea of the current event turning into another awful lashing seem bad for that reason he thoroughly did not wish to anger the mistress of the keep into action for a multitude of other reasons.
He parted his lips again, half expecting Sansa to interject with another timed interruption, but she said nothing and he was left having to enunciate his poorly construed apology, “I… um… I have given the matter of my treatment to you before a lot of thought and decided that perhaps I did not treat you fairly…”

Sansa crossed her arms over her chest, her expression flat and obviously unimpressed, “You should probably start over; not only are you using the wrong words no one is about to accept such barely attempted false sincerity. Remember what I said would happen if your performance here was found unsuitable.”

Ramsay felt his chest constrict even as his hands curled into fists at his sides. His mouth felt dry even though he wasn’t thirsty, as if the notion of the words that had to play out over his tongue made that tongue into sandpaper in his mouth. He smiled in a false, tight way and began again, “I wish to ask your forgiveness for my behavior, as I know I have not acted in the best…”

She interrupted him yet again, “Still not good enough. You sound like you are trying to sell her stolen clothing in a back alley, and you are still no closer to using the right words.” She walked over and picked up a familiar item; the brush that she had so recently used to braise the underside of his buttocks, with the carved image of a wolf on the back.

Ramsay went completely shock still at the sight of her taking it in hand, his breathing becoming unsteady and erratic in his own ears as his heart started to race in his chest. What the hell was she wanting him to say? Was there even anything he could say to make this end well for him? He chastised himself for thinking there might have been.

After all, how many times had Ramsay himself offered a scrap of hope like a dangling rope ever out of reach to his victims, just to mock them in the end for the futility of hoping? Was that what Sansa was doing now, just getting him to think that if he played by some sort of rules and was a good boy, he wouldn’t still be punished?

But she had told him that she would make him like Reek, though, he told himself. She had promised that when she was done with him there would be little difference in the way that Ramsay obeyed her and how Reek had been trained by Ramsay to obey him. He had treated Reek well enough, mostly, when Reek had been obedient, because rewards were incentive…

He looked up at her as she crossed back over to stand above him and he sat there, his lower half covered by the blankets of the bed as he was prone to do since she had declared that he could no longer wear pants without threat of punishment, he was left torn with the notion of whether she was going to reward him for obedience or punish him for false hope.
“You are still wording yourself in the manner that does not nearly display the level of heartfelt regret and overwhelming humility that I promised her she would see tonight, which she will most definitely see here tonight. Do you think that I will not spank you again right here in front of her until your answers become more pleasing?”

Ramsay grimaced at her words, unable to make eye contact with her or the maid out of sheer humiliation, so instead glaring down at the sheets of the bed with an intense, focused stare, “I… I don’t know what it is exactly that you want me to say…” he licked his lips, “…I am very sorry and shamed about what I did…”

Sansa frowned at his words, clearly still not pleased, “You obviously don’t, since you are only repeating what I said.” She swatted her other hand with the brush in a menacing manner as her eyes narrowed dangerously, “I’m not going to tell you what to do since that would be making it too easy for you to fake your way through this apology.”

Ramsay’s mouth opened and closed a few times as he was overwhelmed by a feeling of trapped helplessness. How was he supposed to put on a convincing show for Sansa if he wasn’t aware of what she was looking for? Well, he supposed, that was probably the point… this whole thing was likely rigged to end with another degrading spanking no matter what he did…

The thought that he would have to endure another humiliation of that nature helped to spur him to try something degrading for the small chance of avoiding it; he would actually apologize. He shifted around under his blanket so that his knees were under him and bowed to the chambermaid, his jaw tight with restrained anger and shame.

“I was wrong to annoy you as I did… I was acting out like a child out of boredom…” he turned watery eyes towards the woman, doing his best to funnel the humiliation he felt in prostrating himself to a servant into a convincing apology, “…and I was punished like a child for it, so now I humbly myself and ask for your forgiveness.”

The servant woman seemed a bit taken aback by Ramsay’s level of sincerity, putting a hand to her chest in a universal sign of surprise when exhibited by those who were not prone to the feeling, “Well… very well young man… I did not expect I would be saying this given your reputation, but for this more recent rudeness at least, I forgive you.”

Ramsay felt a rush of relief at those words, unexpected relief; he had not expected that this surly old woman was going to say anything so positive despite his best performance. Sansa smiled and gave Ramsay a knowing look as she moved to set the brush back down where she had gotten it from. He felt his relief tarnished by the knowledge that Sansa still got to see this miserable display.
Sansa motioned to her chambermaid, “You are free to go, Ramsay has already cleaned up the mess he made and tidied the room as part of his apology. Take the rest of the day as consolation for the trouble he caused you in the interim.” The servant curtsied in a manner to Sansa, “Thank you, mistress, have a pleasant evening.”

She turned to leave and Sansa looked down at Ramsay, who was sitting back again against the headboard of the bed, the blanket still wrapped around his lower half. She licked her upper lip slowly with her tongue in a lewd manner, staring at Ramsay through slatted eyes, “Oh, I do intend to have a very pleasant evening.”

Ramsay had always preferred bold women, and Sansa had proved herself to be the boldest, most headstrong woman he had ever known, but the sex appeal from this was always dampened by his knowledge that she wasn’t thinking of fucking him when she made such lascivious comments, but that she was wanting to anally violate him.

She still called it fucking, of course, and she often told him that he should feel lucky that he was being fucked nightly by the lady of the house rather than being executed, but not in a million years did Ramsay ever think he would find it possible to conceive of himself as being ‘lucky’; her ministrations were rape and they would always be rape.

Which of course made him wonder almost absently as she commanded him to exit his blankets and bare his ass so that she could ‘get a good look at him’, what were the other lords saying about him now? Had they allowed the name of Ramsay Bolton, or worse, Ramsay Snow slip into obscurity as boring news no one cared about?

Or, perhaps, he thought as he bent over nakedly to Sansa’s instruction so that she could run her hands over him in that suggestive way that she did, perhaps those nobles still talked about him almost daily as a sort of amusement, trading stories of how he was routinely raped by a woman as a sort of lesson in how to be a fool?

Sansa distracted him from his thoughts by giving him a light slap across the bottom. He cried out in surprise from the suddenness of the sting, “Ah! What was that for?!” Sansa merely smiled down at him when he craned to look back at her, “I was just being playful… besides, I don’t need a reason to do it; you are mine, and I can do with you what I like.”

Ramsay’s face flushed at that comment and he turned back to face the bedding again, not wanting her to see how ruffled her words made him but certain that she knew anyways, “I… I’m doing what you said… please don’t hit me.” Sansa chuckled at his words, continuing to massage his ass in a lewd manner, “I rather like it when you say please.”
Ramsay’s jaw worked but he said nothing, because there was nothing he could say that would help, and nothing he dared to say that wouldn’t. She shoved his upper torso down and he felt her climb on the bed behind him. He knew she hadn’t put her device back on, but she still seemed to enjoy humping at him this way, as if testing him out before going for a ride.

Ramsay lowered his head until it rested on the sheets of the bedding, closing his eyes and wondering if he would ever again know anything other than fear, degradation and self-loathing. Because at the rate that she was going, Ramsay was starting to question how close to being like Reek he had come. After all, he was doing everything she told him to now…
It had taken a long time of doing what she asked, of begging when needed, of prostrating himself upon his knees more than once, but finally Ramsay was again allowed to wear pants and even allowed to walk the courtyard with Sansa in the mornings at first light, as well as allowed to attend dinner, though at the servant’s table.

At another time this would have been a crushing blow to Ramsay’s ego, and he would likely have had something to say about the mere suggestion that he dine with those he would have once considered his lesser, but after months of being confined to a single room, and within that room being almost entirely confined to the bed by the cold of winter, his view had changed.

As much as it pained him, he was happy for the opportunity to get away from the boredom that had eaten away at his mind like a dull saw for so long, to see other people, even if those people obviously despised him. He noted quickly that the other servants chose not to seat directly aside him, a few choosing to stand while eating once seating was full rather than be so near him.

He supposed he could not blame them given his tendencies past; Ramsay saw one servant who glanced at him nervously whom he distinctly remembered whipping fervently over spilt wine back when his father had the run of the keep. He had not exactly treated any of them well, he supposed, though oddly he didn’t find as much joy in their fear as he once would have.

Just one of the many aspects about himself he had noticed changing as of his peculiar relationship with Sansa Stark. Ramsay would just sit there quietly, watching the people milling around him as servants set out plates and food and the nobles who visited with the Starks spoke of various things concerning military and state.

At first Ramsay thought it queer that they did not object to his presence in the room, seeing as some of what they discussed with Jon Snow and Sansa could be regarded as sensitive information, but on reflecting on his role as a slave concubine to the lady of the house, still always under guard as he...
was, he supposed no one worried.

He had numerous times given thought to continuing his efforts to find a way to escape the keep, to flee Sansa and all of the things she did to him, but if he were to manage such an unlikely mission, where would he go? Certainly word of his humiliations at the hands of the Starks would have reached his homeland.

The only thing more awful in his mind than facing further degradation here in the hands of those who had been his enemies would to be to return home and have to explain his utter defeat to the various uncaring and merciless members of his family, who would almost assuredly flay him on sight as an example of why not to sire bastards.

Then of course there was the other reason, which he would not admit to himself but which never the less niggled at his thoughts, rousing a deep and foreboding dread within him; if he tried to escape and was in the most likely event caught, Sansa would once more have very good reason to punish him openly in some tragic new way.

Ramsay pushed his mind away from such thoughts, trying instead to focus on the cheer of others in the room. He was of course not allowed to sup of the wine or dine on the finer sweetmeats that those at the main table enjoyed, as even those servants who had these things at the servant’s table did not so much as consider sharing such treats with him.

But they enjoyed those things, and Ramsay lived vicariously through them as he quietly watched them eat, drink and carouse happily with each other, making rude jokes and bold boasts. Seeing them in such a state as he did was a relief from the gloomy attitude they had when around him and aware of his presence normally.

At first Ramsay had told himself that he enjoyed the melancholy that he imposed on servants that served near him, but even Ramsay could only endure such an atmosphere for so long before it started to make him feel depressed by proxy. Normally he would have commanded the servants to dance and make jolly to lighten the mood.

But the days when Ramsay could make commands to anyone, even the servants, were now well past. Sansa had caught him trying to give a servant an order on the first day that she had allowed him the new privilege of dining in the main hall with her, and not only had she tanned his hide full sore, but he had been unable to attend the hall for a week.

That time away from the option of some form of company other than the one that Sansa gave him against his will nightly showed him how much he wanted to be in the dining hall for his supper, so
he did his best not to interact with the servants at all, so as to raise no one’s ire. He laughed as a young girl slapped a lech across the face.

The servants at the table all looked his way when he scoffed, even the young girl and her lech, and all of them immediately busied themselves with something else, avoiding looking at Ramsay any further. One servant even groused as he cut at the potato on his plate, “Can’t believe they are letting a mad dog wander the hall without a chain…”

Ramsay felt the blood rush to his face as anger coiled in his chest, urging him to stand and berate or perhaps even cuff the foolish servant who dared call him names so directly, but he swallowed his anger, working to keep himself in check. Doing such a thing would not serve him in the longer run of things for several reasons.

Reason one; if he was to strike the servant now or perhaps even if he merely shouted some form of chastisement at the fellow, his outburst would most certainly draw the attention of the nobles seated at the main dining table, and Ramsay had spent each evening in attendance doing everything he could to avoid their attention.

It was bad enough that he was sitting at the servant’s table at all, he most certainly did not want those at the table he thought he should be sitting in to be made aware of his presence at the servant’s table. Likely they had all seen him seated there already, but on the chance that some had not noticed him he wished a low profile.

Reason two; if he started any sort of altercation at all at the dining room, it was entirely possible that the action would provoke Sansa into deciding to punish him publicly again, and for Ramsay Bolton, few things held more disgust than the idea of having to endure something so humiliating before his former peers again.

So he bit back any venomous words that he might have otherwise allowed to surface to his lips, his hands balling into tight fists around his eating utensils as he strained to avoid allowing himself to stand or otherwise physically act on his outrage. After a moment he smiled tightly as he glared at the servant, “You know, you remind me of someone I once knew.”

The balding, gangly servant looked startled when Ramsay addressed him, then scooped up his dinner plate despite the fact that he had only just sat down to eat it and hurried from the room with all haste. Ramsay frowned in great annoyance; the least the man could have done would have been to ask who he reminded him of.

Now Ramsay was without a proper window to finish his statement, which was going to be a clever
analogy about some servant he had once gutted just to see what his intestines looked like, but now he couldn’t even finish delivering his threat. What a coward, Ramsay thought, relaxing himself so that he might finish his meal in peace.

He noted quickly that the offensive peasant wasn’t the only one leaving early; others at the table also collected their food before finishing and exited. Before long, Ramsay found himself alone at the table. He frowned as he quietly and contemplatively chewed at his food. After a while he set down his napkin and silverware and rose.

He wasn’t finished with his food either, and though he had been hungry still only a few moments before, he found he no longer had anymore appetite for his food or the hall itself for that matter. The two guards that escorted him everywhere watched him as he moved to return to Sansa’s quarters, moving to follow as always.

As he strode back to the room he tried to tell himself that he had merely lost his appetite due to the irritation and annoyance that the cowardly servant had foisted upon him with his insolent comment, but no matter how well Ramsay might lie to others, lying to himself was always harder; he was truly upset because they had all absconded rather than speak to him.

It wasn’t as if he needed to speak to peasants at all in the first place, right? After all, didn’t association with lessers bring a man down? Ramsay tried to tell himself that he didn’t want interaction with the servants, but he as a torturer was aware of the effects and depredations of simple loneliness. He had no one to speak to but Sansa, after all.

After so much isolation, it was impossible for him not to want to seek social stimulus in some fashion or the other. He sighed, thinking that this whole affair was just one more way that Sansa continued to torment him. He had been genuinely surprised when she actually allowed him privileges, but he should have known there would be a catch.

The catch was that now Ramsay was a socially awkward creature who had to start all over again from the very bottom with servants… but, he thought to himself, I will find my feet again, and perhaps one day I will even manage to find allies in her own keep. That thought cheered him considerably, even though the notion was a long shot at best.

Then something unexpected happened; Ramsay stopped, suddenly aware that he was completely alone in the hall. Where had his guards gone? He looked down the hall one way and then the other, turning around in confusion. A few doors down a man stepped out of the pantry room with a club in his hand. It was the gangly, balding man from the dining room.
In a flash Ramsay knew what was transpiring here; his guards had conveniently stepped away so that this vagabond might step in and rough the bastard up without any witnesses, perhaps intending to return his beaten corpse to Sansa afterward. Ramsay stood tall, glaring at his attacker as the latter advanced down the hall.

“I shouldn’t have to be the one that does this, isn’t right that a mad dog gets pampered like a pet when it’s bit so many times…”

He stepped in, swinging the wooden club at Ramsay’s head in a vicious arc, but Ramsay ducked under the slightly taller man’s arm, charging forward to tackle him to the ground.

Ramsay had always favored the bow, telling himself that it was because it was a weapon of true finesse and skill, so therefore the only real choice for a lord, but the truth of the matter was that Ramsay was a small man and lacked the raw physical power needed to kill another man in a toe-to-toe match of melee combat.

Nevertheless, Ramsay was younger than his attacker by a sizable number of years, and the balding man was not that much bigger than he, so he applied his advantages of vigor and unexpected viciousness into a rapid assault of punches to the other man’s skull while doing his best to keep the club pinned down with his other arm.

Ironically, Ramsay thought of the way that Jon had struck him when that man had bested him in a brawl, and tried to position himself over the man as Jon had done to him, striking as directly as he could, as Jon had done. Suddenly though the other man shifted as he caught hold of Ramsay’s arm, throwing himself to the side as he hurled Ramsay off to roll beside him.

Ramsay wheeled around as fast as he could, throwing his legs up and over so as to launch himself into a roll away from his attacker, hearing the crunch of the heavy oaken club slamming into the stone floor so hard it sent tiny stone chips flying from the point of impact, which was where his head had been only a scant moment before.

The other man was enraged, Ramsay could see unbridled hatred burning in the one eye that remained visible; the man’s other eye was swollen shut already from Ramsay’s desperate pummeling. Both of his lips had been fattened by that rain of blows and a veritable stream of blood oozed over and down his face from his broken nose.

The gangly aggressor cursed at him as both men scrambled to rise, Ramsay scrambling away from his armed assailant and the latter scrabbling to close ground. As he snarled at Ramsay the blood on his teeth made his large, crooked, and yellow teeth look particularly menacing. Ramsay gasped for breath as he threw himself into a run down the hall.
The older man was still quicker than he looked, and he managed to hook a hand around the escaping Ramsay’s leg for just a moment before Ramsay’s sprint tore him clear of that hand, but not before the motion of it had tripped him up in an unrecoverable fashion. Ramsay only made it a few more steps as he stumbled before what balance he retained ran out.

A hop, step, and a desperate lunge later Ramsay landed hard on his stomach, feeling the rough stone bite into his elbows, knees, and the palms of his hands. The only favorable outcome of the trip was in that it had also sent his attacker reeling off balance, and the larger man landed with even less grace just behind Ramsay and a bit to the side.

Ramsay began to quickly crawl forward, seeing that he was nearing a set of stairs that descended to the lowest level of the keep that wasn’t the crypt; the floor that housed the main entrance that guests and servants alike would use to enter and exit as well as the greeting room, the main hall, and several variations of utility rooms used primarily for storage.

His aim was to roll himself back into his desperate run upon the stairs so as not to lose momentum in putting distance between himself and the armed man, but his crawl proved to be too slow, and the other man leapt upon him with great rancor, bringing his club up with full and obvious intention of using it to brain Ramsay to death.

Ramsay reached both hands up, tying the other man’s weapon arm up enough so that he could not swing with any real leverage or force. His attacker repaid this action by bringing his other fist down brutally on Ramsay’s face, but other than to squirm in the best way he could to avoid the brunt of those punches, Ramsay could not afford to redirect an arm in defense, lest his attacker swing the club with momentum.

His eyes searched frantically as he felt the other man gradually shift his weight over Ramsay to solidify his position, and he knew that if he didn’t do something fast he was going to eventually lose this struggle. As his aggressor moved again to sit upon his hips Ramsay rolled himself with every last ounce of strength he had left.

That roll sent both of them tumbling down the stairs, and as they were still both possessed with fighting the other the fall was hard and quickly escalated to break-neck speeds. Ramsay cried out as a shoulder slammed down hard on the corner of one step, and again when the other man fell across his leg while it was coming down on another step at odd angle.

He heard the other man cry out numerous times in pain as well, and he could only hope as they tumbled that he would come out the worse for it, or perhaps even manage to break his neck in the fall. As they both fell to the floor of the main hall, Ramsay heard a few servants cry out in startled
shock, and he glanced up to see a woman staring down at him in fear.

“Help!” he cried, “This mongrel is attempting to assassinate me!” But the servant woman and the young girl at her side proved unhelpful to Ramsay’s plight, as both turned abruptly around to exit the room with all haste. Ramsay cursed as he glanced back to see that his attacker was starting to crawl back to his feet.

The two were once more alone, and Ramsay could tell from the way the other man was rising to stand that his legs were undamaged, unlike Ramsay’s own leg, which felt pained without even attempting to put weight on it. His one advantage seemed to be that his attacker was moving slowly, as if dazed, perhaps addled from the fall from a blow to the head.

Also, he noted, the club lay on the floor a scant few inches away from himself. With a surge of adrenaline, Ramsay launched himself forward, both snatching the club in one hand and crying out in pain as his other hand clasped his hurt leg. Realizing he would be unable to stand, Ramsay clenched his teeth and fought through the terrible, sharp pain in his leg.

Using the momentum of his movement in grabbing the club, Ramsay dove for the other man, swinging the club with all of the force he could muster, knowing that his life depended on it. The head of the club smashed neatly into the front of the unfortunate fellow’s knee, and he wailed in pain and surprise as he crashed to the floor.

Not wasting any time and not wanting the other man to have a chance to regain his wits, Ramsay hauled himself over the other felled man and drove the club down onto his head. There was a dull thud at the first impact as Ramsay caught him perfectly between the club and the stone floor and the man jerked underneath Ramsay.

He brought the club down again, gritting himself against the pain that the strain of exertion caused both his shoulder and leg, and this time there was a harsh crunching sound as the improvised mace collided with the other man’s face. On his third swing the crunching sound occurred again but was matched by a telling wet squelch.

Only then did Ramsay let himself a moment to really see what his desperate assault had yielded, grimacing at the mess that had once been his attacker’s face. The other man’s head was completely caved in now and there was no doubt whatsoever that he was irretrievably dead. Ramsay let go of the club and it rolled away, leaving an arcing trail on blood on the floor.

He glanced around, seeing that he was still miraculously alone with his attacker turned victim, and he was for a long few moments paralyzed with indecision on what he should do next. If he waited here
he could be killed on sight by any guard that passed through, as given his notoriety he was unlikely to be given the benefit of the doubt.

On the other hand, if he waited and his own guards returned, they would almost certainly weave a tale for Sansa with Ramsay as a blood-thirsty villain, and likely after killing him to be sure of his continued silence in the matter. After all, it was obvious that this whole set up involved those guards, and likely was meant to be his end.

His gaze darted left and right, trying to discern whether anyone might be approaching, but since the two female servants had fled, he was alone in the large room. What if he went to Sansa? Well, even if he somehow managed to find Sansa before being located by a guardsman or some other antagonist that wouldn’t help…

After all, it would be his word versus theirs, and Ramsay couldn’t think of a reason why Sansa would be inclined to take his word over anyone’s. And if he came across Jon or some other ranking member of the House he would have even less chance of convincing them that he had just killed the bleeding man before him in self-defense.

As long a shot as it would be, Ramsay realized that he would have to run for it; he had no choice. His heart thudded violently in his chest as he came to this desperate conclusion, and he worked to steady his frayed nerves, which were still subject to the adrenaline rush of his very recent life or death fight against a servant whose name he still did not know.

Ramsay raced limping for the hallway opposite the one that the two women had passed through; it would be best to put as much distance between himself and whatever guard those two were certain to arouse after witnessing the conflict in this room. He felt fortunate to have spent a fair amount of time living within the keep, or he might have had to worry about turning the wrong way and being unable to find the exit.

As it was, though, when Ramsay approached the main doorway, which was a set of oaken doors set into the stone of the keep, he had to start rethinking his mad rush for the closest exit. For one thing, there was a set of guards milling around the main entrance, which was probably something he should have counted on; standard security for a keep.

For another thing, even if he was able to sneak past those men and slip through the door unseen the main doors had no obstruction near them whatsoever, and anyone in the surrounding courtyard would be able to see him the moment he passed through the threshold. His mind raced for an alternative but he could only come up with one bad one.
It might have broken the Stark boy’s back, but he would have to find a window and manage his way along the outer wall of the keep if he was to have any chance of navigating his escape unseen. And he would need to be unseen, he realized; even if he managed to get completely off of the keep grounds, they would be sending riders after him if they spotted him.

Ramsay scolded himself constantly as he hurried back the way he had come, headed for the stairs. For one thing, this business was a fool’s errand, and his chances of success were so low that he might as well pick up that club and fight the guard to the bitter end; at least that way he wouldn’t die a coward’s death with an arrow in his back, running away.

Also, if he was going to actually enact such a daring escape, he would have been served to have thought of it well before now, when his chances of doing so had not further diminished. His eyes widened as he approached the entry room again and heard footsteps coming from the opposite hallway. He leaped aside, hiding behind the stone stairwell.

Voices rang out loudly from an uncomfortably close distance, “Did you see which way he went?”

A feminine voice answered, “No, sir, me and my daughter fled when we saw that savage Bolton attacking this poor man.”

There was a moment of silence and the guard could be heard again, “Well he didn’t come our way. You check the entrance in case he was stupid enough to try the main door. You and you, come with me upstairs.”

Ramsay heard the sound of armored feet slamming against the stonework directly above his head, holding his breath against the thought that the guard who had been ordered to go to the entrance might think to check behind the staircase, but as he watched that guard instead went down the opposite hall, towards the entrance.

Ramsay let out a slow, steady breath that he had been holding, as if trying not to even breath too loudly, lest those pursuing him so closely hear. His mind raced; what now? He couldn’t just remain behind the stairs; one of the guards would have to eventually think to look in so obvious a hiding spot, so close to the dead servant.

After a moment’s thought he decided to go up the stairs, after peeking around the stairwell to see that the servant women were slowly returning down the corridor the guards had come from. Sure, he would be chasing the guard’s tail going this way, but he had already ascertained that he needed a window to escape and that time was not on his side.
Things would go horribly awry if even one of them turned around to return the way they had come for any reason, but Ramsay was a man without real options, so he rolled the dice and crept up the stairs on all fours so as to lighten the sound of his footfalls. It wouldn’t do for the men ahead of him to realize that there was another set of feet on the steps.

The stairs felt far, far higher than he had ever remembered them being, but he had to suppose that fear was an excellent heightener of stairs. The pain in both his shoulder and leg only made the gap from the bottom to the top of the stairs more exasperating to traverse. His only consolation as he ascended was that the men ahead of him were not trying in any way to mask their own steps, which served both to let him know that they were still walking away and to further hide his own noise.

The sound of their movement became muted and he hoped against all hope that it was because they had exited the stairwell and not that they had stopped and were about to turn around. He found himself holding his breath again as he came to the final steps leading to the second floor, letting it out again as he heard and saw them moving a distance down the hall away from the stairs.

Taking a moment to build up courage and praying that none of them would see him dart by in the corner of their peripheral vision, Ramsay threw himself as low as he could into the nearest open door, also praying that the room was unoccupied. It would be highly unfortunate to escape the guard’s notice only to bumble into a servant or guest.

To his great relief the room was in fact unoccupied, and Ramsay looked around, quickly recognizing the adornments of an empty guest room. He froze a moment, listening intently for someone to cry out about a man they had seen dive from the stairwell into this room, but as far as he could tell, the guards had not made him.

Standing quietly he shut the door over most of the way, glad that the hinges did not squeak. He wanted to block view into the room from anyone that might ascend the nearby stairs but he didn’t dare close the door entirely both because it might make too much noise on shutting and because one of the guards might be suspicious of an empty guest room with a closed door.

That last bit might be a little paranoid, but Ramsay was certainly feeling justified in feeling a little paranoid now. As fast as he could reasonably move while still retaining what stealth he could muster he searched the nearby dressers for bed linens, which he began to knot together into a sort of makeshift rope.

He had been doing this for a minute or two before it occurred to him that his haste was making him irrational; he should check the window first. The foreboding he had started to feel proved justified as he cautiously glanced out of the window; this particular window overlooked an area of the square
that would be far too conspicuous to climb down by rope.

Ramsay silently cursed, his eyes seeking another recourse and finding only one before he made what had to be a quick decision based on the limited amount of time available to him. He tossed the partially finished rope of sheets under the bed and peered out, seeing if anyone might be milling about overly close to his window.

Seeing that this was not the case, Ramsay took a deep breath and climbed out onto the outer window ledge as carefully as his haste could allow. As dangerous as it was to tread on the narrow surface so far up, especially in such a fast manner, Ramsay would be just as doomed to be spotted by someone in the courtyard as he would if he fell.

Thankfully, Ramsay had never suffered any special fear of heights, but still he did his best not to look down, telling himself that if someone was to spot him now, looking at them wouldn’t help his predicament one iota, so instead he focused all of his concentration on the tiny ledge that his boots just barely grasped.

He thought to himself then that perhaps he should have taken his boots off beforehand, as he felt the soles of his feet slip yet again treacherously close to causing him to fall as he gingerly made his way east along the length of the keep wall. Barefoot he would have found better purchase, sure, but even after only a moment outside he could feel the bitter chill of winter.

Had he divested himself of his shoes he would be at risk of frostbite; losing toes would certainly not help in his escape, and even if he thought he could tough it out for the climb, he had no real way to carry his boots with him. Obviously, leaving them behind wasn’t really an option, so he supposed he was doing the only thing he could, hazardous as it was.

He kept inching his way along in tiny steps, knowing that it would be easy for someone to spot him at this juncture if a single person wandered near or looked this way, but also unable to go any faster, as falling became more of a threat as his boots became slick with contact with the ice on the stone beneath him.

Finally he reached the corner, and with no small amount of effort that left his fingers raw and his muscles strained and aching with effort he rounded it, scrabbling for purchase as he nearly slipped and fell to a certain death on the other side. He let out a long breath, resting his head against the keep wall for a moment; at least now he should be relatively out of sight.

Knowing that he couldn’t afford to remain clinging to the wall any longer, he began to work himself along the new wall until he reached one of the windows on this side of the keep. Peering into the
window as carefully as his new perch allowed, Ramsay looked around, praying that the room was empty.

It was not.

The same servant woman that had seen him downstairs was tidying up what looked to be another guest room, and Ramsay let out a sigh of annoyance at his awful luck, looking down the wall and seeing that the next window was quite some distance further along. His fingers ached and his legs grew weary exemplifying the pain felt from his injuries, but it became apparent quickly that the servant wasn’t done and might not be leaving anytime soon.

He couldn’t remain, so he started to carefully move past the window, minding the treacherous ice of the ledge as always. He glanced up as he was doing so and saw that the servant woman was standing in front of the window gawking at him. Apparently she had been moving over to clean something nearby, the rag she had intended to clean with still in her hand.

“Help… help!” she cried, her voice echoing loudly in Ramsay’s ears as she ran back towards the hall, waving her arms frantically. Ramsay’s heart raced again as he started to work harder to make the next window; he certainly couldn’t use that one now. But in his haste he moved too clumsily, and his booted foot slipped in a way that he couldn’t recover from.

With a cry Ramsay felt the wall pull away from him as his grip was completely compromised, and then all he could feel for a horrifying few moments was the frigid air rushing around him as he plummeted to the ground, spinning as he fell in a dizzying way that left him disoriented as the ground and sky spiraled around his head.

His path straightened after a moment, and he saw the ground rushing up beneath him, so he put his hands in front of himself, knowing that from the height that he had fallen that the gesture was futile. The air rushed from his lungs as he collided with the earth, but instead of hard dirt and breaking bones he found cold snow that bent to his descent.

Ramsay sputtered, spitting snow out of his mouth and snorting it out of his nose. He was still alive. The landing had still hurt considerably, and he lay stunned for a moment by the stinging pain of falling into the snowdrift, but nothing was broken; the freshly fallen snow from the previous night must have been sufficient to break his fall, though the hard-packed snow underneath let itself be felt.

He knew he should run despite the pain, and after a few moments of coaxing himself into action his body responded. He lifted himself on shaking arms and legs and crawled through the snow until he
could stand. He heard shouting from the windows behind him, “There he is! He’s in the courtyard!” and then he had to run.
Ramsay’s mind raced; they would be closing the only gate to the courtyard soon, but the soldiers on the second floor might not be able to flag the gate guards quickly enough to stop Ramsay from passing through first. He ducked behind a wagon, his breathing ragged as the strain of his endeavors started to get the better of him.

Also, the thought was dawning on him that he couldn’t just waltz out of the gate. He would need some form of distraction… Ramsay looked around, seeing a lantern in the wagon behind him he quickly snatched it. Realizing he had nothing to light it with he searched around desperately for something that might work.

There was no flint sitting conveniently in the wagon, though, and Ramsay did not readily see any dry twigs he might use to manually ignite a flame. He froze as a voice rang out close by, “There! He’s there, by the wagon!”

Ramsay hurled himself away from the wagon and away from the voice, having no plan on where to go, only knowing that he had to escape the guard that had spotted him.

The only thing around that offered itself as a hiding place was the nearby stable, so Ramsay ran there with all of his might, pulling in icy breaths of the cold air as his lungs screamed for him to stop. He couldn’t stop now, though, so Ramsay willed himself on. Inside the stable he ducked into one of the horse stalls, silently hoping that he was not kicked for the act.

To his satisfaction, the mare whose space he had invaded only gave him a puzzled look, and Ramsay listened to the sound of the approaching guard, working to steady his loud and desperate breathing. An idea struck him, and Ramsay unbarred the door to the stall, giving the mare a hard slap with his free hand. The animal neighed loudly and charged out of the space.
Ramsay stayed as low as he could, favoring his injured shoulder and limb as they protested his constant rush, but still pushing himself to move as fast as possible as he slunk from one stall to the other, unlatching them all and sending the horses inside fleeing for the exit to the stables. He heard the men outside crying out and knew his miniature stampede was causing the commotion he needed.

Still walking as low as possible, so that his knees shook with the strain of doing so for such a prolonged period, he exited the back door of the stable, away from the scene he had created, glancing back to see that many people were rushing to try and apprehend the runaway horses. As he drew closer to the wide gate though his heart sunk; the guards posted here had not left.

Not only that, but a guard rapidly approached those at the gate, shouting warning as he joined them, “Ramsay Bolton has escaped the keep, and likely roused those horses; stay your post and let the others coral them. We think he’s trying to make the gate.”

Ramsay silently cursed to himself… what terrible luck.

He looked around, thinking about what options might remain to him. The keep wall was sheer and slick with ice; with his injuries he could not see himself committing to such an act of athleticism, which he probably couldn’t have succeeded at in better health or weather. Even were he to somehow scale that wall, there were still guards on the parapets.

He glanced back to the wagon beyond the stable, which he had hidden behind when first running from the castle proper. Perhaps he could hide within until morning, and be ferried out of the keep? No, there was nowhere within that cart he could hide that he wouldn’t be found; the guard would be certain to thoroughly search any cart leaving the keep until he was found.

His mind continued to race as the distraction of the guard’s voices ringing out across the courtyard could be heard, but he couldn’t think of anything, instead remaining hunkered in the shadow of the wall, frozen with indecision and a growing hopelessness. The calls started to draw closer, and Ramsay was startled from his reverie.

Plan or no plan, if he didn’t move out from the open to another hiding spot he would be discovered. He moved quickly and quietly away from the sound of those men, wincing at the growing pain in his leg. Now that the initial rush of it all had faded somewhat, the pain that had always been there was getting harder to ignore.
He wasn’t sure why he even bothered continuing this mad game; those soldiers were going to search 
every nook and cranny of the castle until he was found, so he might as well search out a weapon and 
die on his feet. The notion became a brighter one the more the pain from his shoulder and leg seeped 
into him.

But ultimately Ramsay did not want to die, as he surely would if he was caught, so he pressed on, 
tripping clumsily over a pig trough as he took a shortcut through the hog pen. He landed hard and 
gracelessly, groaning as he sat up. He glanced at the nearby hogs and the overturned trough and 
wondered if he was fated to die with the swine in the mud.

No guards seemed to be alerted to the sound of his crashing fall, though, so Ramsay picked himself 
up slowly, glancing around for his much needed hiding place. He saw nothing useful with the pigs, 
so he moved on, knowing that continuing to travel around the court was dangerous, but he was high 
on danger and low on options.

After moving once again across the entirety of the courtyard both to avoid the guards who were 
spreading throughout it and for lack of finding anywhere useful to hide, Ramsay started to think on 
how best he might actually evade the current spreading net of his pursuers. True, he no longer 
entertained any hope of escape as things were, but he had to find somewhere to rest, allow himself 
time to think.

He glanced at the keep door, noting that the guards who had been manning it were now in the 
courtyard with the others to join in the search, all of them no doubt very worried that Ramsay 
might actually escape them all. He licked his lips; it was insane, but he was going to have to reenter 
the keep, if only because he had nowhere to hide here and because they might not expect something 
so bold.

Looking both ways he steeled himself and bolted for the door, hobbling along with a gait that must 
have looked almost comical due to his injury and the fact that he was still trying to remain somewhat 
low so as to avoid detection. His heart hammered away at his chest and he could not for the life of 
him draw breath until he reached the door.

Once there he hurled himself through and swung around the door frame to slam into the stone just 
beyond and to the side of it, so as to be out of the view of those that might glance at the door from 
the direction of the courtyard. He took deep, ragged breaths, trying with all of his might to slow his 
breathing now that he was actually breathing again, so as to not make so much noise.

The first thing he did once there was glance at his new surroundings; no one was within the area, 
allowing him to relax a tiny fraction. He carefully and slowly looked around the corner of the door’s 
frame, holding his breath again in trepidation as he did so, but he let that breath out in a rush of relief 
to see that no one was approaching; he seemed to have been unseen.
Now that he had made it this far he had to decide where to go from here… he let out a slow sigh of despair, almost laughing at the pointlessness of even trying to hide in the very place he was trying to flee from. He had an idea then; what about downstairs in the larder? He had never gone downstairs before, but there were stairs heading down, so there must be a larder.

Or a wine cellar, he thought to himself as he slunk towards the stairs he would need. In either case, the soldiers would likely not put much stock in the thought that he might have gone down there, at least at first, and at this point there would probably be a low chance of finding even a servant in the area. Plus, there would be food.

He moved with growing conviction; if there was someplace worthy of hiding in downstairs he might actually be able to hide there long enough for the castle to drop its guard and think him gone from the region entirely if he could find food to sustain himself with for the long wait. Of course, it was improbable he could hide from the extensive search that was coming, but everything he was doing lately was improbable.

Well if it’s a wine cellar that plan isn’t going to work, he thought to himself with a frown. His frown turned into a smirk as he thought on it further, reflecting that at least he would be able to spend his final days getting drunk on Stark wine, that would be sure to ruffle old Jon’s feathers if nothing else, and certainly wasn’t the worst way to go.

When at last he made it to the final set of steps leading to the area beneath the keep that had been carved into the earth, his eyes widened as he took in a sharp breath; this place was neither a wine cellar nor a larder. Ornate stone statues flanked massive columns and caskets in a great underground hall that stretched out further than he could see; he was in a crypt.

Ramsay just stood there for a while, transfixed by the unexpected sight of the graven statues and the long stone caskets that marked the passing of the Starks of yesterday. Then in a sudden surge of action he remembered that he was running for his life, and took off down the dark hallway, searching out an appropriate hiding place.

Ramsay’s heart had begun to sink at this latest revelation, since the fact that this place was neither a larder nor a wine cellar greatly upset his plans for waiting down here. After moving quite a few hundred paces into the crypt he came upon a stone wall marking a dead end. He took a moment to give a hearty chuckle at the irony.

He sat upon one of the coffins then, one unmarred by a hundred years of dust; this one must have been recently interred. Perhaps it was old Ned Stark, whom he had heard was the victim of being naïve to court intrigue. But no, it couldn’t be him, for he had also heard that Ned had been denied an
honorable burial, his head mounted on a spike at the capitol.

It couldn’t be the young and daring Rob Stark either, since his body had been paraded around by the Freys with the head of his own pet wolf stitched to his dead shoulders, forever to serve as a testament to any other noble who would so carelessly break an agreement of marriage for some pretty young maiden that caught his fancy.

A noise disturbed his thoughts as soldiers could be heard talking at the entrance to the crypt… “…but why would he come down here? It leads nowhere. “

Another voice, “Just do your job and look; until we find him we can’t assume anything. If that murderer manages to slip us it’ll be our heads.”

In a panic Ramsay looked left and right, but the shallow alcoves of the crypt would prove useless once the guard brought his torch down Ramsay’s way. He could see now the bright light of it as they descended the rest of the steps to the crypt floor. He glanced to the statues, but those were not large enough to hide him with any reasonable certainty.

Driven by desperation, Ramsay turned his eyes down to the stone casket he had been sitting on only a moment before. Each was built quite large as was the custom for lords and ladies of one of the great houses, and he knew that there should be just enough room for himself and the corpse if he were to hide inside.

It was terrible luck to tamper with the bodies of the deceased, and Ramsay had to ask himself exactly what lines he was willing to cross to escape those that searched for him, especially because he had so little chance of continuing to evade them. After a moment’s time and with the realization that the lid would make noise that would be heard if they drew too close, he made his decision.

Ramsay pulled at the heavy stone lid as quickly as he could, gritting his teeth at the awful noise that it made as he did so. He could only hope that they were too far out to have heard the sound, rushing to clamber inside the dark space as soon as it was opened enough for him to squeeze himself inside. He pulled the lid back into place.

Once again, it made that harsh, gravelly noise, and this time he heard a voice startlingly close by speak, though sounding muffled on account of his new position within the stone casket, “Did you hear that? I think someone’s down here!”
Ramsay held his breath as he listened to the sound of booted feet upon the stone just outside of where he lay.

His heart beat furiously within his chest, sounding impossibly loud to his own ears within the muted confines of the crowded space. Now that he was inside he could feel the unsettling feeling of the body beneath him pressing him from below, and he did everything in his power not to imagine an angry ghoul wrapping its dead hands vengefully around his throat.

After what seemed an eternity of painful heartbeats the silence was finally broken by the voice of the second man, “There’s no one in here; must have been a rodent you heard, or perhaps you’re getting jumpy in your old age.”

The first grunted his dissent in a voice that Ramsay couldn’t quite make out, and then he heard the sound of retreating footfalls.

Ramsay let out a long, slow breath of relief, mixed with apprehension as the growing sense of despair that he had felt before started to return. Where to from here? He had effectively entombed himself, and perhaps rightly so as his opportunity for surviving the choices that had led him here seemed bent on ending him.

He tried to relax himself within his newly created prison of his own making, but still the body below pressed into him. He thought on how best to solve this new conundrum as well as plot a manner of survival for the coming days. He had eaten and drunk shortly before his assault by the unnamed servant, so it would take some time before he became intractably thirsty.

Still, the guard would be at full force for a period that would likely exceed his growing need for drink, so later on he might be pressed to venture out from the crypt and seek sustenance or escape, whichever he could best manage. Deciding that to be the best he could formulate for now, he focused on the stiff beneath him.

It was uncomfortably tight in the coffin, and if he was intent on surviving by hiding within it, he was going to have to arrange it so that he wasn’t laying upon a dead person. It didn’t take long for him to come to the conclusion that the best solution to this problem would be to simply place the corpse in another coffin.

They were dead, what did they care if they had to double bunk? Besides, they were all family, and perhaps these Starks had been something like the Lanisters in life… Either way, Ramsay would be free of both his guilt for squashing a body under him and the annoyance that was inevitably created by the sensation of someone underneath him.
He waited until he was certain that the men who had entered the crypt in search of him had exited and were long gone before carefully sliding the heavy lid aside once more, clenching his jaw at the awful grating noise that it made and the blossoming pain in his shoulder as he did so. Then he stuck his head out, his wide fearful eyes surveying his surroundings to be certain that he was alone.

There was no light save the few torches that burned in sconces down the hall, and the room lay empty except for himself, so he launched himself from the coffin, not realizing how much he hated being inside it until that moment. As soon as he had he looked down he could see who’s body he had been laying atop; Rickon Stark.

Ramsay stood there a moment, looking down at the corpse of the boy he had so recently murdered, frozen by the destiny that had led him back to him. Was this Rickon’s revenge, to watch him starve while hiding like a coward in a crypt? He should have known it would be him, no wonder that it hadn’t smelled worse; the cold and his recent passing meant he hadn’t started rotting yet.

Ramsay lingered for a moment longer, caught in the irony of what he was doing so powerfully that it physically held him like a great big vice of uncertainty. He liked to think that he wasn’t a superstitious sort, but only a fool discounted the possibility of all things beyond his own ken simply because he wasn’t able to reason it with his own experience.

Finally though he found his will to act once more, if only because that age old force of self-preservation drove him ever forward. He took the body and moved it to the next nearest casket, which was covered in the thick layer of dust that he noticed Rickon’s grave had been absent of. An ancient body then, likely interred for decades if not centuries.

He worked at the heavy stone lid as quietly as he could, gagging at the stench that escaped when he had cracked it open. It was so nauseating that he had to step away for a moment, putting his hands on his knees and doubling over as he took great big gasps of relatively fresh air so as to avoid retching due to the foul odor.

Oh, what a world this one had become to him, that Ramsay now found himself in the habit of opening graves like some common and lowly robber of the deceased. He did his best to shelf his growing indignity as well as gird his stomach for the smells he was going to be unable to avoid, pulling his shirt over his mouth as he returned to his grisly task.

Rickon was light, at least, having been a thin boy as he was. Ramsay lifted him up once he had opened the other casket enough to squeeze him through the opening and with some difficulty worked him inside of it so that he would fit with whatever skeletal person it was that was going to be sharing its space with its new roommate.
He found himself wishing as he did that he had opened the new grave more to accommodate levering a second body inside, but Ramsay had been loath to spend more time hovering over the disgusting display than needed, and so in yet another cruel twist of fate ended up doing so for even longer as he worked to put Rickon in.

Funny that, he thought; cruel twists of fate. His entire life of late seemed to simply be a long chain of cruel twists of fate, as if the gods were having a go at him for their own divine amusement. It was easy for him to lose himself in his self-pity now, covered in grave dust with the smell of the deceased still cloying his nose as he slid the coffin lid home.

It still seemed like it was only yesterday that he had achieved it all and was not only the Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, but also gathering political alliances and armies that would one day secure him an even greater future. Who knows, if not for the sudden arrival of the Knights of the Vale, maybe he would have done more…

Ramsay sighed as he returned to the coffin that he had started in, so recently vacated by Rickon for his own comfort. He had begun to relax due to his relative safety down in the crypt; it was so very quiet there, like a place where men dared not tread. His nerves jumped as he heard the sudden commotion of guards approaching once more, and he dived for his hiding spot.

He worked quickly to pull the cover back over himself, mentally screaming in helpless despair at the harsh, awful grating noise it made despite his attempts to do so quietly.

“There, there it is again! That noise I told you I heard from before!” Ramsay quietly cursed to himself under his breath, wishing he had been quicker in returning.

There was the muffled sound of armored men with booted feet striding over until they were very near, and Ramsay held his breath. His breathing should hardly tip anyone off from within the casket, as it would be fairly impossible to hear through the stone, but he found himself holding on to that air anyways.

More voices from outside of the casket, “I swear I think your ears are going out on you, old man. There wasn’t anyone here before, and there isn’t anyone here now.”

The older more baritone voice responded, sounding irritated, “I know what I heard fool boy, and that was no cat or rat to make such a sound. It was like huge claws on stone.”
The younger man responded with a tone that rang of incredulity, “I don’t know but I think that Jon Snow left his dire wolf upstairs. I’m sure if such a beast was down here we’d see it.”

The other man sighed and Ramsay could hear a set of feet pacing around just outside of his hiding spot, “Yeah but it was loud, I don’t know how you’ve missed it twice now.”

“Maybe because you imagined it? Look my hearing is perfect, and I didn’t pick up on any crazy claws on stone sounds, unless you’re going to tell me one of those statues was moving around down here?”

The brusque voice responded angrily but not without a strong hint of resignation that allowed Ramsay to begin breathing again, “Well when you put it that way it does sound ridiculous.”

Ramsay counted his blessings, thinking that perhaps not all of the gods were out to see him fail, when he heard the booted feet begin to retreat back the way that they had come. Then one set stopped, and he heard the older man’s voice echo through the crypt again, faint but still clearly heard, “Wait… the dust on this coffin has been disturbed…”

“What do you… oh shit do you think this guy would hide inside the fucking coffin?”

Ramsay’s heart flew into his throat as he heard the quickly escalating situation outside, but he couldn’t begin to think of an exit strategy from his current awful predicament. His hands flew to the lid but they froze there; he couldn’t exactly hope to open it undetected.

He heard the sound of another casket being opened, most likely the one he had disturbed which now held the body of the recently departed Rickon Stark, and he knew that these men would know which one he was in as soon as they observed the new occupant. His only hope was that his noise would be disguised long enough for him to get a head start…

With wild abandon fueled by his surging fear, Ramsay pushed past the pain in his shoulder that shoving so hard against the stone lid caused and threw himself out of the casket so that he might better continue running for his life. The guards were certainly startled, but the noise they created in opening the other coffin had not masked his own noise as he had hoped.

Knowing in that instant of time that this game had become a deadly race, since he had no real chance of defeating two armed and aware guardsman in combat, and because the older man on the right was
scarred and bore the look of a veteran, Ramsay launched himself into a sprint aiming to run for the exit beyond them.

The younger guard proved to be quicker of wit than was healthy for Ramsay, however, and equally fast with his reflexes; he lunged at Ramsay as the latter tried to bolt by, stopping his forward momentum by slamming Ramsay to the ground and quickly barring his arm behind himself, pinning him. The younger guard was smiling, “Whelp… guess you were right. Sorry, Groves.”
Chapter Seven

What Lurks Beneath

The two soldiers who had found Ramsay were none too gentle in returning him upstairs. The older man rewarded his first attempt to make a break for it with a resounding punch to the gut that let him winded and reeling for quite a spell as the younger man levered his now suddenly much more cooperative body up the stairs.

Ramsay was already trying to analyze what this meant for him now; these men hadn’t killed him outright, which was certainly what those who had conspired to have him killed would have done. After all, he was suddenly a loose end in a murder plot, and could finger the two guardsmen who had been watching over him before as conspirators.

These two must have been genuinely uninvolved, but regardless of their level of involvement with those that would have seen him dead, they were surely leading him to that fate now, and it would be in his best interest to stop that in any way he could, "…W-wait!" he finally gasped through the effects of the doubling punch.

They paid him no heed, though, and neither man so much as gave him regard as they continued to haul him towards his certain doom. Would they bring him to Sansa? A thrill of hope plucked at his heartstrings at the thought of the unlikely possibility that he might convince her of the truth, however unlikely.

He took a breath as well as he could through all of the pain inflicted on him by the rough handling, not only from the attack he had just suffered but also the pains inflicted by his injuries from the previous attack on his person by the servant with the club; his shoulder ached terribly and he limped in an awful way. "I’m certain you have every reason to mistrust what I say, but a servant tried to murder me this evening!"

The older man did not give him the time of day, but the younger man at least responded in a fashion that told him he was at least being listened to, even if it was delivered by way of disbelieving scoff, "Oh yeah? Well if you acted in self-defense why did you run?"

"Because the only reason that man was able to attack me with a cudgel right here in the keep is because the guards charged with watching me abandoned me to my fate!"

Their pace had not slowed, as the two continued to drag him wherever it was that he was intended to go. The older guard answered now, "And if they did, perhaps they had the right of it."

Ramsay went quiet now, knowing with that answer that he would find neither allies nor sympathy from these two men. He tried to lurch free again as they neared the entrance of the barracks, and was rewarded for his efforts with a painful punch to the kidneys. He gasped in pain as the young man behind him warned, "Next time I'll hamstring you; make it easier on us that way. Don't tempt me."

Ramsay gave in to his despair then, knowing there was nothing he could do to escape the inevitable result of his wild folly in trying to escape this place. He hung in their arms, letting them carry his
weight now as he gave up on it all, his head low as he contemplated how much time he might yet have left to live.

As he had already noted and which had spurred his last desperate attempt to free his newest captors, he was being brought into the castle barracks. Here, the soldiers in the standing army were boarded, as well a number of rooms that were set aside as war council chambers, training rooms and offices for the ranking men.

It was to one such office that he was taken, which left Ramsay a little confused. He had fully expected that these guards were planning on using the few cells that the barracks afforded for unruly soldiers and prisoners of war to house him until they could be debriefed by their superiors, but instead he found himself being forced to sit in front another soldier, who watched as he arrived.

Ramsay's eyes widened with realization; he must have been wrong about these men, they were in cahoots with those that wanted him dead, and perhaps this officer was at the top of that chain! He should have guessed from the way that they had so easily brushed his story aside and their obvious disdain for him…

Deciding that he was going to die anyways and no longer caring if his actions might rile his captors, Ramsay gave the great, brooding officer a look-over as he reverted to old habits and sought a good reason to insult him, "Furs, untrimmed beard, fetish for bone necklaces; you must be one of Jon's wildling dogs."

The wildling captain narrowed his eyes at Ramsay, moving around his wooden desk to sit upon it as he folded his arms over his chest and glared down at Ramsay, "Report."

The older soldier answered, "We found him hiding in the catacombs, in Rickon's casket, because apparently he's rude like that."

Ramsay only smiled, hoping that these men would take some form of insult from it; sure, it was petty, but since he was going to die anyways Ramsay thought to himself that he owed it to himself to give himself over to some gratifying pettiness. The behemoth of a captain didn't respond to his attitude, though, "Why's he here, then?"

Ramsay's smile faltered; why was he asking that? The older soldier he had heard to be named Groves spoke again, "I might have run him through, but Willis here had already taken him down alive, so we figured we'd give the uppers a chance to behead him by the book and all, since it sends a better message."

The bearded officer shook his head and shrugged at them, "So why didn't you bring him to a cell… once again, why is he in my office?"

Groves gave a noncommittal look as he shrugged in return, clearing his throat, "Well, this murdering asshole seems to be under the impression that he's a murder plot victim; says it's why he ran."

Willis spoke under his breath at that, but was close enough that Ramsay could hear him, "As if killing that shit-stain would be murder…"

The big wildling looked confused, "And what, you believed the desperate ravings of this lunatic? Do you need someone to help you see what kind of man he is?" He glanced at Ramsay, "He's a liar, now please take him away."

Not one to be deterred, Groves continued unfazed, "He implicated the guards meant to be keeping tabs on him sir, indicating that they might have enabled that whole fiasco with the corpse we found..."
in the entry room."

The wildling scoffed, "Of course he did; next he'll be telling you how it was a dragon attack that bludgeoned the poor bastard to death."

Groves went further, only nodding, "And I wouldn't normally give a man like him the time of day, but he was under strict guard, and there is no way those guarding him could miss either an attack on his person or him attacking a servant with a weapon as lacking in subtlety as a fucking club, sir. Has anyone reported on how this happened?"

For the first time the officer seemed to be taking the notion that Ramsay might be telling the truth seriously, even if he still looked unconvinced, "Not that I know of. Now that you mention it I had found it odd that none of the guardsmen who were assembled for search seemed to know what transpired, but we had the pressing business of chasing down a fugitive at the time…"

The bearded officer ran a hand through that beard, tugging at it thoughtfully, "I had assumed that was the reason no one was worrying with such details, important as they were, but certainly someone should have said something by now. I will check with the other officers and see if anyone recalls who was watching over him at the time."

Ramsay let out a long sigh of relief at what could only appear to be a generous turn of luck. That these soldiers were giving him not only the time of day but also launching an inquiry into what might have actually happened with the servant who had assaulted him cemented in his mind the possibility that he might actually be saved!

The soldier named Willis spoke up, "What would you have us do with the prisoner in the mean time?"

The grizzled officer glanced Ramsay's way before gesturing away offhandedly, "Throw him in a cell somewhere. Can't say I much care what happens to him but the Lord and Lady should be informed before any sort of harm comes to him."

Ramsay was hoisted from his chair bodily by the arms then, and carried from the room almost before he could even register the command that had been given. He was nervous at the prospect of simply being filed away somewhere where he might still remain vulnerable to further attacks from his hidden and unknown enemies.

Which could be anyone… in fact was probably everyone, but he tried to focus on anyone who might have specifically orchestrated his death in this one instance. Still the list was too long; it could have been almost any of the noble houses, including his own, or any of the numerous soldiers who had suffered from the recent war…

It could have been the servants themselves who had planned the attempted murder and coaxed the guards to step away; it wasn't as if Ramsay hadn't murdered a servant or two in his time at the keep. Also, that particular explanation would better reason out why it had been a servant that had actually gone for the kill…

It could have perhaps been Jon Snow, who had no small reason to see him dead, and perhaps tired of his sister's games with him and so perhaps sought to remove him from sight. That one didn't feel quite right but Ramsay would certainly understand the emotion behind it if Jon did feel that way. Really there was only one person he didn't hold suspect.

Sansa Bolton. Or was she back to calling herself Stark again? Their marriage had of course never been annulled, but considering the way that she had spoken concerning his family and her intent to
strike it from record, he doubted she would be holding onto it. The two men had carried him only a short way to the holding cells.

As they thrust him inside Ramsay felt compelled to speak his thoughts, "Wait! If you leave me here those that would see me dead may succeed! After all, my own guards were involved!"

Willis shrugged, "They would be doing the world a favor I'd say."

Groves sighed, shaking his head, "Annoying as it is, the fool might have a point; I'll stay and see that nothing funny happens while the captain does his work."

Willis made a dismissive gesture, "You have fun with that giving yourself work thing, old man; I'm going to go see Anne about some ale and a warm place to stuff my cock tonight." He gave Groves a wide grin, "While I'm enjoying myself in the glow of good drink and fine company this cold night I'll think of you, guarding a man who deserves to die from those who might see justice done."

Groves gave him his own hard grin and made a shooing gesture at the younger man, "If only the world were as simple as imbeciles like you see it, boy, I'd join you. Now get the fuck out of sight if you've nothing pleasant to say you little shit-bird, and leave the responsible choices to the adults while you go squander your money on getting the crabs."

Willis made an offensive gesture with his hands but both men continued to smile, giving Ramsay the impression that they often spoke to each other in such a crass and forgiving fashion. Groves seemed to settle in and Ramsay realized that was all of the excitement he would likely be seeing for some time. Now all that remained was imprisonment…

As the time started to creep slowly by with no companion to its silent wait for Ramsay beyond the motionless, quiet guard, Ramsay was finally able to truly relax into the painful aches he had accumulated in the fast-paced excitement of his numerous near-death experiences of the past few hours.

His shoulder hurt badly along with an assortment of other deep bruises that he had sustained throwing himself around so recklessly, some of which he could not recall attaining, but it was his leg that hurt the most, icy shards of pain slicing constantly throughout the area of his lower leg and making it all but impossible to stand, so he sat on the meager cot the cell afforded.

He wanted to pace as he thought, but walking unnecessarily with his bum leg didn't seem wise, so he tried to funnel his nervous energy instead into productive reasoning on how best to escape the predicament he currently found himself in. Mostly, this just meant he fidgeted a lot in his seat as his hands worried themselves ceaselessly.

Even if they decided that someone was out to murder Ramsay for his crimes against… well, almost everyone, those that ruled over his detainment; Jon, Sansa perhaps, maybe some others… they might decide that it would be best to just save themselves any further political intrigue and behead Ramsay before he could be assassinated.

After all, if he met his fate at the hands of some form of vigilante justice and proof of this was displayed in court it could seriously undermine Jon's position in court. Even Ramsay had heard the half-crazed cries of 'King of the North!' from his holdings within Sansa's quarters. If Jon was going to solidify his position in these lands a loose end like Ramsay would certainly be a mistake.

He fidgeted further at these thoughts, his worry intensifying; the thought that Jon might actually be behind all of this made more sense in light of that revelation too… if Jon truly did want to see Sansa's plaything discarded he would have little option for survival in the coming days. With the clout he
carried, Jon would eventually get his way.

His brow furrowed at the thought; Jon Snow undermining his sister with cloak and dagger tactics might have been something Ramsay himself would have done, but somehow, and he wasn't sure why, he wasn't entirely convinced that this would be the ploy of the man that had always challenged Ramsay so very directly…it didn't seem like his character.

His lips pursed; if not Jon, then who? His thoughts were interrupted suddenly by his keeper, whose gravelly voice caused him to jump in surprise due to the complete silence they had so long shared now, "You don't look a lot like the cocky shit I saw sitting on his high horse during the meeting before the battle with his big threats. You look scared."

Ramsay bristled at the insult at first, but then deflated, hanging his arms limply at his sides as he sat upon the simple stone bench within the cell. He could rail at the man who was perhaps his only ally in the world, at least in some manner of speaking in that he did not wish Ramsay dead, at least not immediately…

Or… he could accept that what Groves was saying was true in both senses; he was no longer the same man who had once haughtily spat vehemence at his enemies, tall and proud. Also, he was very much indeed as scared as perceived; only a fool railed against something that stood out as being so painfully obvious.

Ramsay let out a long sigh, releasing the tension that had coiled within him at the astute observation in a gesture of surrender rather than the venomous words he had already summoned to the tip of his tongue, "Yes well my horse is gone from my person, and I sit covered in blood and caked in mud within this tiny cell…"

He turned his gaze to regard Groves, his expression most bitter, "…waiting to be murdered by my assassins once they have bested the solitary aged guard who stands between them and my death. I might have a little reason to feel fear, but let's ask a more puzzling question; why do you really care one way or the other if I die?"

Groves shrugged, "Do you really want an honest answer to that?"

Ramsay squinted his eyes at the older man, "…yes?"

The old veteran moved closer, leaning against the stone of the wall just outside of Ramsay's cell and folding his arms over his chest. He made a noncommittal gesture, "I really don't give a shit whether you live or die."

Ramsay's brow knotted up, looking perplexed, "But then why have you so many times spoken in my defense?"

Groves smirked, "You haven't been paying attention; I haven't once defended you. I might not give a rat's ass for you, but I like to believe I'm good at what I do; the only thing you saw me do was good soldiering. If the lady asks me to sever your head from your shoulders tomorrow I'll comply happily enough."

Ramsay frowned, folding his own arms as he leaned back against the cold stone of the cell wall behind him, "Well, I suppose I'll be content with that, then. Better than your halfwit partner…"

It was Groves' turn to frown, as he commanded with a voice clearly accustomed to authority, "You'll not speak such of Willis; he's a fair shot smarter than you, dumbass. He would as soon kill you as look at you, sure, but that impulse just might make him wiser than the both of us, for all the things…"
I've heard you capable of."

The older man leaned forward then to take Ramsay's measure, his hands taking hold of the bars to the cell as he did so, "Is it true that you murdered your father's wife and your newly born brother by setting your hounds on them?"

Ramsay tensed. He had to assume that such a bloody tale would be common knowledge in this keep. He remained quiet, not replying, but his silence seemed to speak volumes in and of itself. Groves gave him a look of utter contempt, "Baby murdering filth." He spat at the ground and Ramsay found himself flinching as if the old soldier had hurled a spear or fired a bolt at him rather than simply expectorated a bit of spittle.

It was almost odd, feeling guilt for what he had done at that time. In killing his defenseless baby brother and his father's harmless wife he had justified his actions by telling himself he had no other real options, despite her pleas to allow her to leave forever with the infant. Then he had told himself that his bid for power afforded no compromise.

But now, now he had no power, and all who shared meaningful blood ties to him within this realm lie dead by his own hands. He was a kin-killer, and as Groves had so pointedly mentioned, a child-killer even, but none of his reasons for doing such abominable things stood against the failure his life now represented.

He had murdered for power and now he had none. Fate would allow him no reward, and for the very first time Ramsay allowed himself to wonder if perhaps his own actions had led to his failure in his vie for the tile of 'Warden of the North'. Had the gods, whether those old or new, turned against him for patricide?

Ramsay had never been the type to dabble in religion or superstition, but losing everything had a tendency of making a person begin to reevaluate all of their most rooted convictions and beliefs. Not that he saw himself turning into a true convert, but Ramsay very much believed in action and consequence, and lately he felt much of the later.

Regardless of how stalwart he had once felt in his resolution that killing that child was in his best interest, in protecting everything he had worked so hard to make his, right now he could not do so much as bring his eyes up to meet the judgmental glare of the lowly soldier who deigned to condescend him for those actions.

Instead, he kept his gaze to the floor as he continued to frown dejectedly, wallowing in his own self-pity over how he felt in the present moment, both physical pains and otherwise. Groves seemed to tire of waiting for Ramsay to rise to his less than subtle challenge, and returned to his spot, leaning once again on the stone just outside of the bars.

Some time passed before Groves finally spoke again, "Maybe I am doing the right thing though; maybe Lady Sansa's choice to make you live with all you've done will be everything you deserve, assuming some part of you remains capable of normal human feeling. I certainly hope it haunts you for a long fucking time."

Ramsay didn't have any reply to that, choosing instead to continue his vigil of silence, which had become his best way to combat Groves' aptly deserved taunts. They remained for some time that way, neither saying anything to the other as they waited for whatever fate still might have in store for the late Ramsay Bolton.

What was he now, he wondered? Technically or at least in the eyes of others… was he Ramsay Snow, or perhaps by merit of his marriage perhaps some might think of him as Ramsay Stark… did
Sansa feel that way? His thoughts were broken by a sound outside his cell and Ramsay's eyes widened when he saw a shadowy figure had somehow slipped inside unheard.

Not only that, the unknown figure had an arm clasped around Groves' throat, and had backed the soldier against the wall, the former bracing the choking arm with his other hand as the latter desperately grasped at the other's arm, able only to emit the barest of noises as he struggled in vain to breathe.

A thrill of panic shot through Ramsay, as he knew that once this guard was dead there would be little to bar the assassin from murdering him like a rat in a cage. He raised his voice quickly, crying out desperately, "H-help! Someone help, this man is murdering a guard!"

It was then that Ramsay noted only barely in time that the person assaulting Groves was not alone. He jumped back as a short sword filled the air where his chest had been.

A second man clad in black stood on the other side of the bars, having tried to use Ramsay's distracted state to murder him with a blade through the ribs. From what little Ramsay could see of his face from behind a tightly bound cloth he registered annoyance.

Now he would have to unlock the cell to kill Ramsay. He turned, seeing that Groves had wedged a hand under his assailant's arm, preventing him from being choked completely. The second assassin grunted in irritation and approached Groves with sword raised, clearly planning on placing a careful thrust into the soldier to forever end his struggles.

Ramsay glanced around, unsure what he was looking for, exactly; after all, there wouldn't be anything that could be used as a weapon that would be kept in a cell, right? Desperate, though, he looked anyways, and when his eyes came upon the chamber pot in the corner he snatched it up without thinking and hurled its contents through the bars onto the second assassin.

The pot had been rather full, so the awful splash and resulting smell caught all three men by surprise.

The second black-clad killer cursed and thrashed about as he took the brunt of the odd assault, "You mother fucking whore-mongerer! I'll fucking kill you for that!"

The first assassin sputtered and shouted at his partner, "You're already to kill him… just kill this asshole guard already!"

The second thug lifted his blade again as the first wrapped his legs around Groves, forcing the old guard to fall back against the wall in a way that left him vulnerable to the incoming killing blow. Just then the door swung open and Willis walked in, a smile on his face and a bottle in his hand, "Despite myself I couldn't make too much merry without…"

His smile dropped away and Willis grabbed for his sword when he realized what he was walking into, but his draw proved too slow as the second assassin whipped his sword around, slashing Willis across the throat. There was a wet crunching sound then, and Ramsay looked to see Groves had slammed his attacker's head against the stone wall behind them to great effect.

The first assassin went limp, a gory trail of blood and brain matter on the wall tracing his path to the ground. The second assassin whirled about to face Groves as the soldier drew his blade and took a quick step towards his partner's killer. He brought his heavier sword down in a brutal swing even as the assassin lunged to stab him with his own sword.

The assassin's sword caught against the leather of Groves' armor, though, shunted to the side, and even though it did cut through the protection to slice into the veteran's side, the blow was redirected...
enough to render it non-fatal. The assassin was not so fortunate, as Groves' blade tore into his shoulder and through, severing his arm and much of his chest entirely from his body.

There was a spray of blood from the grievous wound so close to the heart and the assassin fell to the ground with wide eyes and open mouth, as the shock of his injury left this expression permanently affixed, since blood loss would take him in mere moments, giving him no chance to regain his wits before his imminent death.

Groves clasped a hand to his wounded side and walked over to kneel next to Willis' fallen body. He turned his partner over, taking note of his injury, "...Dead."

Ramsay stood motionless in his cell, the entire incident a dance of death over his own fate over which he had little power to affect.

The soldier pulled a cloth from his pocket and wiped his blade clean before sheathing it once more with practiced ease despite his awkward position on the floor. He grabbed the bottle Willis had been holding, which had rolled onto the floor nearby. He popped the cork off, putting it to his nose for a moment, "Garbage swill... you always had such poor taste, Willis..."

Despite his words he took a long draught from the bottle, gulping it down like a man desperately thirsty. He sat there quietly looking down at Willis' corpse for a while before glancing over at Ramsay, who still stood where he had been, unsure what to do with himself. Willis had wanted him dead... would this soldier honor that wish now?

"Here..." Groves said as he extended the bottle towards the cell bars. Ramsay was nonplussed why he was being offered a drink, but still he moved over to reach through the bars and took the bottle that had been proffered.

Ramsay took a drink from the bottle, making a face as exceedingly strong alcohol burned its way down his throat.

He had no idea how Groves had managed to drink the vile liquid as if it had been water, and handed it back, already beginning to feel tipsy, "Why... why give me a drink? I thought you might blame me for his death..."

Groves shrugged, "Maybe it's your fault..." he took another long pull from the bottle, coughing a bit before continuing, "...but you tried to help, even if you did throw shit all over me."

They sat quietly for a moment before Groves spoke up again, "I'm certain you only tried to assist me out of nothing but self-interest. I get it; you were trying to save your own hide, but regardless of why you did it, if you hadn't that fucker would've skewered me, and Willis would have still died, except there would've been no one to avenge him."

After the silence permeated the small room for a while longer Ramsay ventured conversation once more, "Shouldn't you be telling someone about all of this by chance?"

Groves glanced his way, shaking his head, "No. Can't leave my post; could be more of them. Someone should be here soon enough with news from the captain."

Ramsay nodded, "Well then perhaps you shouldn't be getting sauced? If we were to be attacked in force again it might be best if you were sober..."

The veteran only glared at him, "Go fuck yourself."

Ramsay nodded again, putting his hands up in a gesture of surrender, "Right. Duly noted." Ramsay
moved over to his simple cot, laying himself down and trying to assimilate everything that had just happened and what it might mean. He found himself exceedingly fortunate when all things were taken into consideration; assassins like those two were rare, highly trained and highly effective he was certain.

Also, they would be exceedingly expensive. After all, it would take a great deal of incentive to convince two men, even highly skilled ones, to infiltrate a fortress like this one just to kill a man. The fact that they were hired killers made Jon less of a suspect now; with all of the keep's soldiers at his command, he hardly needed to hire out, and once again, Ramsay being killed by another agency would've cast a shadow on his ability to manage his prisoner. Once again secrecy wasn't his best option.

Ramsay's thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of two men who barged into the room, both of them with the look of warriors about them. Groves stood as they entered and Ramsay relaxed as the former did not seem perturbed by their appearance; they must be wildling members of Jon's allied forces.

The first to enter, a burly man with a head full of unkempt, wispy orange-colored hair glanced at the bodies of the three men on the floor, taking in Groves and Ramsay before speaking, "What just happened here?"

Groves responded simply, "Assassins. They admitted being here to kill the prisoner when they still had the upper hand."

The second wildling, a man with greasy, raven-colored hair that was pulled back tightly into a ponytail scoffed, "Not very professional of them..." he gave the body of the second assassin a kick to roll him over, "...but they're too well equipped to give me the impression that they were amateurs."

Groves nodded, "Quite astute of you..." he pointed to the body of the first assassin, "...this one only blurted it out when Ramsay threw shit on us."

The fiery-headed warrior laughed, looking at Ramsay, "You threw shit on them...?" He took in a long inhale and made a face, "...you sure did. What the fuck was that about? Couldn't win the war so decided to hurl feces?"

Ramsay frowned as he stood to glower at the soldier, but he did not offer reply. Instead Groves did so, "He was making a much-needed distraction when I sorely needed it."

The black-haired soldier scoffed again, his green eyes filled with merriment, "Likely to save his own ass, since he was next on the chopping block, but I wouldn't be too surprised if it turned out he's just an opportunistic little shit-flinger."

Once again Ramsay fought the urge to respond, knowing that nothing he said to this man would aid him. When it became apparent that he wasn't going to rise to the bait for this soldier's amusement the first warrior pressed on, "My fellow here will aid you in disposing of these bodies and seeing our man properly interred; I'll remain here for now so that I can see if our prisoner here has anything useful to tell us."

Groves simply nodded and handed over the key to the cell from his pocket by way of response, then he and the raven-haired warrior began the process of dragging the corpses of the recently slain from the room. The remaining warrior then stepped close to the bars, removing his heavy furred gloves to reveal the calloused, course hands beneath.
He unlocked the door to the cell and flung it wide open, tossing the key onto a nearby table. He fixed Ramsay with a hard stare as the former gave him an inquisitive look, "You are free to attempt escape any time during this talk; I could use a bit of fun since I seem to have missed all the action that took place in this room."

Ramsay sat down in way of response, making it clear that he was uninterested in such an obvious ploy that could only end with him receiving a swift and sound beating. The big man nodded, smiling, "Good; I am glad in knowing that you understand how this is going to go. I will make the rest even simpler for you; I'll ask you questions and you will answer them honestly. Right?"

Ramsay nodded, tensing at the dangerous look that permeated this man as the latter walked into the cell to stand very near to where he sat. He had a sloping forehead and a wide, flat nose. His eyes were set somewhat close together and overall his features made him somewhat unattractive, but did not at all detract from the menace his cold blue eyes projected.

"First question; what happened earlier in the keep? Take your time and tell me everything you remember."

Ramsay licked his lips and spoke evenly, "The guards assigned to watch me simply left, I'm not sure exactly when, but when I noticed was just before a servant attacked with a club on the stairs. He made it clear that he was there to assassinate me."

The warrior nodded, clasping his hands behind his back, "And then what?"

Ramsay continued, "We fought… everything is somewhat of a blur now, but at some point we fell down the stairs as I wrestled to get the club from him, and then I… then I killed him with it. He was trying to murder me I didn't have any choice…"

The big man held up a hand, signaling Ramsay to stop, "I'm not interested in the morals of this story; just give me the facts. After this you decided to run, yes?"

Ramsay nodded, looking down, "Well, I knew that if I stayed in the hall with the weapon and the body, someone was going to come in and assume that I had simply murdered a servant, and since my guards had disappeared…"

Suddenly the big man's hand came across Ramsay's face so hard his head jerked to the side. He brought his hand up to a bleeding lip as he stared up at the warrior with a startled expression.

The red-headed warrior let out an exasperated sigh, "If I wanted to know your thoughts on what happened I would have asked for them. I don't care why you did it; let's just cut to the part where you ran, yes? A servant claimed they saw you on the ledge outside of a window, was this true?"

Ramsay nodded, feeling sobered from his reflection by the soldier's insistence on simplicity, "…I, uh, I climbed onto the outer wall, attempting to find a way to skirt those pursuing me."

The warrior nodded, "The snow outside showed that you fell and then ran for the stables, where you released horses. Did you go to the crypt from there?"

Ramsay nodded again, "Yes… I tried to hide in one of the caskets, but Groves and Willis found me and brought me to the captain once I told them of the plot to kill me."

The big man scratched at his bearded chin, "So you knew of a plot to kill you?"

Ramsay shook his head, "Well, not at first; I only assumed that I was the target of some plot with the disappearance of my guards and the servant trying to kill me. Also…" he pointed to the fresh blood
stains on the ground, "...with more recent events."

"Has anyone specifically threatened to murder you in the last few..." the big man seemed to reconsider his words before shaking his head, "...never mind that won't help."

Ramsay tentatively posed another option, "I understand you are in a great hurry to find the person responsible; perhaps I could assist in speculation as to whom it might be?"

The big warrior frowned down at him a moment before shaking his head at Ramsay, "No; you've got the respect of no one in the entirety of the North, never mind this keep. Even if you came across something useful, there's not a person that is going to give scum like you the time of day."

Ramsay gulped, blinking at the harsh appraisal of his current political standing, mostly because he knew in his heart that it was true.

The big man sighed again and turned, stepping out of the cell and closing the door before locking it again, all the while keeping Ramsay within his peripheral. He pulled his thick gloves back on after slipping the key into his pocket, "I'm going to stand here until they get back; do me a favor and don't bother me with your speech."

Ramsay drew back, avoiding the harsh glare of his newest caretaker as he laid himself back down upon the simple cot within the cell. He couldn't help but think on what had been said to him concerning his current reputation. He knew that he had made an ill name for himself, but as dedicated as he had been to raising his rank, he had failed to give it much thought.

As much as Ramsay would love to say that he didn't have a single care concerning the thoughts of others towards him, only a fool would convince himself of such folly. Everyone cared what others thought of them; if Ramsay had not been so worried about how he appeared in the eyes of other men then he would never have bothered striving for prestige in the first place.

He had been entitled, told himself that the things Reek told him were true, that he was special above all others, but from the beginning a part of him had always doubted that and he had striven so hard to prove to them all and to himself that he was right. That Ramsay Bolton could and would rise to the greatness he so deserved.

Except now everyone had a very different opinion of what it was exactly that Ramsay deserved, though most of them seemed to agree on a violent and gruesome death. He pulled his knees to his chest, feeling more than a little cold in the isolated cell. They didn't exactly hand out blankets of fox fur to prisoners so he would just have to tough out the night.

He tried to move his mind to other matters but he kept returning to thoughts on where he was in life and why. He had done so many awful things, both in company of his black-hearted guardian Reek and afterwards of his own free will. He had acted as if he were some sort of god, like nothing could go wrong and he would never be held accountable.

Even after he had tossed Reek to that rabble of peasants to be lynched he had failed to allow his near miss with paying for his crimes to teach him anything at all. He had been acting like a madman, without the wisdom to understand that the only reason he had made it so far was because he had been fortunate and nothing more.

What was it his father had called him? A mad dog, he had said. His father had warned him rather straight-forwardly that if he continued on his reckless path that someone was going to come along that would be the end of him, but instead of realizing that his father was trying to help him with perhaps the most important thing he could hear, he had murdered him.
Ramsay lowered his head as he allowed himself to try to wrap his mind around exactly how many people might want him dead at the moment. Any one of the other houses of the North, of course, both for his own crimes and those of his father for their betrayal of Rob Stark. Perhaps the entirety of the Iron Isles for his mutilation of Theon Greyjoy.

Those houses of the north whom his father had managed to sway for his failure to defend Winterfell despite the size of his armies and the strong stone walls of the keep, due to his arrogance allowing his enemies an unprecedented win on the field of war. He had heard that his ploy there had gotten Smalljon Umber killed, which wouldn't sit well with that family…

Even the Lannisters might want him dead for his failure to hold such a strategically important position in the north, and because his loss here could easily be seen as the entire reason Jon had been named 'King in the North'. The blame for any rebellion that fomented here could easily be laid to rest on his head, and the Lannisters might be capable of the subtlety that he suspected to be in play.

And the Vale… he hadn't really given it much thought by why exactly had the Vale ridden to Jon's aid? True, the Starks were related to the rulers of that faraway land, but why would they march all the way out here to assist a bastard? Sansa's doing, likely, but wasn't the current ruler of the Vale a paranoid shut-in since her husband's death by poisoning?

A topic he would have to breach with Sansa later no doubt, but the list continued well past the Vale so he couldn't let himself puzzle over it overly long. Could it be his own people that were trying to have him silently executed? It would certainly make sense for the Bolton clan to seek his death, especially since his father's death followed by his father's wife and newborn child's disappearances likely raised many questions.

In fact, the Bolton's having a part in undermining Jon could help to repair the family's shaky political standing after the events that Ramsay had started, sort of an 'We're terribly sorry for what that bastard did, but here, we've cleaned up the mess for you' kind of way. If his family didn't somehow save face after this they would be doomed to obscurity at the very least.

No, that didn't fit very well; he was far removed here from his family's estates in the south and the attacks on him had been entirely too coordinated, suggesting that there were agents of his demise close to home. So the northern houses then, perhaps someone trying to oust Jon from his newly acquired fame so they can lead the north?

Ramsay knew most of the men who led the various houses that laid claim to the territories of the north, or had at least at some point met with them all. He liked to believe he was a pretty good judge of character and able to ferret out the sort of person that might be capable of turning his back on his fellows.

He had found such a kinship with the Umbers and the Karstarks, especially given the latter's history with Rob Stark, who had beheaded one of their own. But of the remaining houses' leaders, he could think of no one that would stoop so low as to use assassins to murder Ramsay just to make Jon seem weak. As a group they proved to be aggravatingly righteous, which was why his father had been unable to sway them.

Ramsay scratched at his scalp, feeling lousy and unable to figure out who was left that might still be both close by, have motive to kill him and defame Jon, and the resources to hire multiple professionals to see the deed done. He was missing something he knew, but he just couldn't seem to put his finger on it.

The door opened then, startling him out of his thoughts. He looked up to see if the captain had finally arrived, or if there might be more assassins come to claim his head. The big man guarding him also
raised himself to a ready position, apparently considering this a possible option as well, his meaty hand clenched over his sword hilt.

To his surprise though it was neither of those two things but instead Sansa Stark, who cast a worried look over his way before moving to address the big man, "I shall take the prisoner; please release him from his cell."

The soldier shook his head, "Nay, ma'am; he's in custody because folk are trying to kill him; I give him to you and that'll just put you in danger."

She nodded, "I understand but I've already spoken both to your captain and Jon Snow and they have agreed to release him under guard to my private chambers as he was before."

The guardsman raised a red eyebrow as he glanced over Sansa's shoulder and then back to her, "I don't see any guard's ma'am…"

Sansa gave him a slight smile, "That's because my guard is you…" she turned to address Ramsay, "Come along my dear it is time I brought you back where you belong."
The walk back to Sansa's personal rooms was a long, silent one. Ramsay occasionally glanced at Sansa or the big wildling that escorted them, but neither seemed interested in conversation, and he couldn't think of a way to breach the tense silence. Or perhaps it was only he that was feeling so very tense? In any case, the wildling looked angry.

With that in mind, perhaps it was best that he did not speak for now. For Sansa's part, she seemed to be rather unreadable. Ramsay both wished she would say something that would indicate what she felt about him at the moment and dreaded her doing so; as long as she did not, after all, the longer he could entertain the notion that perhaps she wasn't angry with him.

He spent much of the long trip going over in his head how he would reply to the questions that Sansa surely had, and how best to plead his case so that she did not judge him harshly for killing the servant that had attacked him. He wondered; would she order him executed if she thought that he had simply murdered the man to escape?

A sobering thought. Ramsay did his best to follow along and not give her or the wildling any reason to think he was anything less than compliant. The wildling still looked angry, with a severe scowl etched on his face. When Ramsay dared to glance his way, he would direct that glare at Ramsay so piercingly that the smaller man would immediately look away.

At long last they arrived at the room that had become so very familiar to Ramsay, and Sansa directed the new guard to wait outside. The wildling glanced at Ramsay and looked back to Sansa as she did so, "It wouldn't be best to leave you alone with him."

Sansa gave him a dismissive gesture, "I have handled Ramsay alone many times previous to this one; everything will be fine."

The big man did not move from where he stood just inside the door, "I insist on keeping him within sight."

Sansa shook her head, "And I insist on having some privacy. I am the ruling Stark of this keep and Jon Snow's sister; I'm telling you to wait outside."

The large wildling seemed unruffled by her display of authority, instead folding his arms across his chest, "And I'm Eroc, and I'm not going anywhere. You want to keep your pet near you fine, but we'll do it my way. I'm not some southern soldier for you to order around; if you want my respect, sister of Jon Snow, you'll have to earn it like he did."

Sansa sighed, seeming to let the matter go as she turned away from Eroc and walked over to Ramsay, who stiffened a bit at her approach. Was she going to question him now? Why did he feel so apprehensive over it? She pointed to a large wooden tub of water in the corner of the room, "Bathe, Ramsay."
Ramsay glanced at the wash basin and then back at her with a puzzled expression concerning her priorities, but he supposed that Sansa had always stressed cleanliness in the past, so he moved over to it without objection after a moment, removing his ripped garments and reaching a foot out tentatively to test the water.

Surprisingly it was warm, not at all the cool or down right cold water that he might have expected. Sansa must have had the bath drawn by her servants even as she was in transit with Ramsay. He carefully lowered himself into the water, wincing here and there as he did his best to accommodate his injuries as he did so.

The water was far warmer than he had expected, but now that he was submerged he realized that it might still be a stretch to refer to it as 'warm'. He had best finish his bathing soon or he risked sitting in a tub of cold water at the least, perhaps even catching cold from the exposure at the worst. He started scrubbing awkwardly due to his injured shoulder.

Sansa sat on the floor beside him and took the sponge from his hands, "I will handle this." With deft movements she began to scrub at Ramsay, cleaning him thoroughly and swiftly. He felt somewhat strange having her do so, especially with the big wildling watching so avidly, and thinking on how he couldn't even seem to wash himself caused him embarrassment.

Why this was Ramsay couldn't quite figure, but Sansa had a way of making him feel awkward about things that didn't use to bother him. He was not about to object to her ministrations however, both because she was doing a better faster job and because he didn't dare to seem in any way belligerent, since he didn't want to paint himself in a negative light.

At length Sansa finished her work, but the fact that they continued to spend so much time together with nary a word passed between them was starting to eat at Ramsay. He was practically dying to know what Sansa thought of the most recent events, and for reasons he could not fathom was becoming incredibly anxious in not knowing.

Sansa took him by the arm that wasn't hurting and gently lifted him from the tub, toweling him down despite the fact that he told her in a meek voice that he could manage on his own. She only ignored his statement, thoroughly buffing him with the cloth until he was completely dried head to foot. She set the cloth aside and took him by the arm again.

Ramsay's heart was racing, and it took him a few moment's to figure out why. Her expression, her terse words and the exacting way that she moved; they all reminded him of the way she acted whenever she had been displeased with him, just before she elected for some form of punishment. Was that it? Was Sansa about to punish him?

Despite needing to know Ramsay stayed quiet, gulping with a dry throat as he allowed her to lead him over to the bed, where she commanded him to sit. Ramsay sat on the edge of the bed immediately, looking up at her with worried eyes as she stared back down at him. A long moment passed and finally she spoke.

"I want you to answer honestly and quickly to each question I pose to you now, Ramsay; your life depends on it."

Ramsay nodded his head by way of response, but seeing that Sansa didn't continue he realized she wanted more than a shaking head, "…Yes. Yes of course."

She placed her hands behind her back, giving him a very stern look, "Did you attack your guards and kill a servant in an attempt to escape this keep?"
Ramsay blinked at the question, "What? No, I didn't attack my guards; they simply vanished, just before a servant with a club made an attempt on my life!"

Sansa nodded, but gave no indication of whether or not she believed him, "So you claim that the club was in the servant's possession, and not on a guard that you assaulted? As in you did not take that club from your guard and attack a servant who blocked your flight down the stairs?"

Ramsay shook his head vehemently, "No! The servant had the club when he attacked me; I only took it from him in my struggle to survive his attack!"

Ramsay had to wonder what exactly Sansa had been told to question him in this unexpected manner. Suddenly it occurred to him that it was possible that the guards who had conspired to see him killed had fed the superiors of the castle a false story where he had assaulted them in order to not only save them from guilt but further incriminate Ramsay.

He licked his lips, "Have you managed to find the two guards who abandoned me to my fate?"

Sansa raised an eyebrow at him, "Why would we ever lose guards?"

Ramsay nodded, "Well I wouldn't think such a thing possible before this recent event, but the captain I spoke with related that no one came forward concerning what happened when he questioned his men as I fled…"

Sansa interrupted him then, "That brings us to another question I have to ask you; if you were innocent of murder, then why did you attempt to flee the keep? Don't try to tell me you weren't fleeing or that you were being pursued by servants, because I'll know better…"

Ramsay shook his head, "I wasn't being pursued, but I might as well have been for what would have happened."

Sansa narrowed her eyes at him, "Feel free to explain your logic there. Hard to imagine a person free of guilt running."

Ramsay cleared his throat and did his best to relate the complex series of thoughts and emotions that had led to his decision to risk the impossible and try to flee a guarded keep despite his status as a prisoner, "Well when the servant who had attacked me lay dead at my feet, I realized that in my position I looked extremely suspect…"

He continued, "…also, knowing that it could be no coincidence that those meant to safeguard me and prevent my fleeing were gone meant I could not trust the soldiers of the keep, who may very well have simply finished the job that the servant who had accosted me had failed at, murdering me before I could plea my case."

Sansa sighed, "Do you really think it so likely that so many of our soldiers would be on the payroll of some mysterious group that wanted you assassinated despite the fact that you are already a prisoner of war? Do you know some secret that would make your life a danger to some great plan of the Lanisters, perhaps?"

Ramsay shook his head, a bit baffled on that note still, "No… I still haven't been able to guess exactly why someone would go to such lengths… if it wasn't for the disappearance of those guards I would have simply thought it the angry revenge of a lone servant and given it no further consideration… just tell me this…"

He licked his lips again, his throat feeling a bit dry with anxiety that had been following him like a cloud for some time now, "…do you really think that I bested two armed soldiers with my bare
hands and then only took a club from them when they were equipped with several swords each, then to assault a servant in the hallway? How many servants would try to stop an armed man from fleeing?"

He gestured to the bruise on his shoulder, "I was injured multiple times as I fell down the stairs trying to keep my would-be murderer from killing me."

Sansa nodded at the sight of the bruising, "There were reports that you were injured in your attack on the guards, so that does not help your story." Ramsay's arms sank as he sighed, feeling deflated, and Sansa went on to reassure him, "But I also think it is fishy to think that you bested two of our best in such a fashion, and that they would fail to alert the guard before they did."

Ramsay's face brightened with hope that the lies of his enemies might yet fail to have him executed by the Starks after everything he had survived, "And what you said about the captain I had not yet heard. If those two failed to report while being so obviously debriefed by their superior it only casts suspicion on their story."

She stood tall, folding her arms behind her back, "Also, I spoke to a guardsman who informed me of several assassins who lay dead in the barracks, which does a great deal in painting a picture more complicated than a simple escape attempt. Still, why did you not come find me once you realized the trouble you were in? I find it hard to believe death in an escape attempt a more rational choice…"

Ramsay's heart practically sang with renewed hope at the realization that Groves must have searched out and spoken to Sansa directly on his behalf. For all of his talk about not caring one whit whether Ramsay lived or died, the old soldier had yet again aided him. Ramsay felt a sudden pang of something unfamiliar as he tried to sort out how he felt about that.

Sansa cocked her head at him, "Hello… I'm talking to you, Ramsay… or do you not have anything reasonable to say in your own defense on this?"

Ramsay started, realizing abashedly that he had let his inner thoughts pull him away from the important conversation at hand, "Oh, no… I, uh, at the time I was fairly convinced that given the apparent evidence that you wouldn't believe my side of things."

Sansa's brow drew up at this, "So you don't think I would have believed your guards had abandoned you if you had come to me without them? I ordered those men to guard you, so their absence would have said much in your defense, which I'm sure why it is a large part of what you tell me now to convince me of your innocence in this."

Ramsay shrugged, "I wasn't really sure that I would be able to make it to you without being made, perhaps even by those same two guards…"

Sansa shook her head, folding her arms over her chest as she frowned at him, "That is foolish; the same would have been even more likely in the event of you attempting to leave, not to mention the additional risks of escape."

Ramsay went quiet and Sansa put a finger under his chin, because at some point when she had been talking he had unconsciously begun to look down at his feet, "You might have gone so far as to convince yourself that is the reason you fled, but anyone capable of putting this together can see that that's completely unreasonable."

She went on, "You ultimately went with the incredibly foolhardy choice of attempting to escape because you wanted to escape, and this was just an easy way for you to excuse yourself from it, but don't think that I'm going to buy into that malarkey just because you want it to be true. You tried to
run from me, and I promise you will regret that choice…"

Ramsay's eyes widened at her sudden threat, and she took her hand from his face as she stepped back, "...but first I have the murder of one of my guards and the betrayal of a couple others and a servant to look into." She glanced over at Eroc, "I trust you can keep him in line until I return?"

Eroc grunted, "I don't feel like I have much choice when you ask like that. Tell Jon that I need him to update me on what he wants done with this one, and I will stay to keep him company."

Sansa nodded, "Deal; I'll tell him you asked." She glanced back at Ramsay, who was still looking uncomfortable with the end results of their conversation, "Don't cause Eroc here any trouble, or I'll see to it that the punishments you receive for your foolishness today are increased..." She sighed at him, looking a little exasperated, "...and stay out of trouble, Ramsay..." and then, she turned to leave.
Chapter Nine
While You Were Away

The first thing Ramsay did upon Sansa's exit was to dress himself. She hadn't forbid him from doing so in this case, after all, and having to sit nakedly upon the bed as she had grilled him for information while the guardsman Eroc had watched on had made him feel more vulnerable than he would have liked to have admit.

The wait for Sansa's return was turning into a really boring event by Ramsay's estimation. He paced the floor back and forth for a while initially, still occupied with the nervous energy the recent conversation with Sansa had filled him with, and then he had sat and tried to strike up a conversation with Eroc, who only grunted disdainfully at him.

Abandoning his attempts to communicate for leisure with someone who clearly didn't like him and additionally wasn't at all abashed about knocking Ramsay around for fun and sport, he went back to sitting in silence with nothing but his own circular thoughts to keep him company. Circular, because he still couldn't pin who might be out to kill him specifically.

Glancing around the room vainly as he had so very many times since his first imprisonment within the master chambers of the Stark's abode, his eye traversed their way along the familiar cracks of the place as he dolefully dwelled on his return to being a pet and slave of the Lady Sansa. He sighed, wondering if it might have been better to be assassinated.

At least then he could have died in a somewhat interesting fashion, and maybe the oddness of his murder in Stark custody would even help to erase or at least cover over some of the awful smear Sansa's actions had laid across his name. He shook his head before resting his chin miserably on his hand, the elbow of which rested on his knee.

No, he highly doubted that even something as scandalous as his untimely execution would probably only end up painting his memory forever in the eye of the populous of the seven kingdoms as a man even more miserably pathetic than he was certain they all saw him now. Ramsay grimaced at how those outside must see him.

Long periods of time to himself always came back to this; Ramsay brooding on what might have been, and how awful things had indeed become in reality. As he always did. Ramsay tried to remove his mind from such thoughts, but equally as usual, he failed miserably in the effort to do so and eventually returned to those same dreary thoughts.

Standing up suddenly with the intention of returning to his pacing, Ramsay heard the ringing sound of steel and turned to see a fully alert looking Eroc standing ready and glowering at him from across the room. Ramsay raised his hands, realizing that he had startled his newest guard, "Ah, just standing… a little jumpy there are we?"

Eroc grunted at him and returned the big blade smoothly to the sheath at his left hip, "Avoid sudden
movements. Doing so enough will irritate me enough to do something about it."

Ramsay frowned, "So I'm not even allowed to move in the fashion that I please, despite being unarmed? I thought you wildlings weren't much for rules?"

Eroc scowled and strode a few steps over to where Ramsay was. The latter, startled by the larger man's sudden advancement, backpedaled until he struck the chair behind him, which he tripped over, falling into a clumsy heap at Eroc's feet. The big man spoke, "We aren't, but neither are we tolerant of nattering prisoners."

Ramsay, feeling embarrassed by his fumble over the chair and cowed by Eroc's intimidating physique towering so closely over him, simply nodded. Eroc stood there for a few moments more that seemed to Ramsay to stretch into a lifetime of waiting awkwardly, not even daring to rise, until finally the wildling returned to where he had been standing.

Eroc placed his arms crossed over his chest and leaned against the wall near to the door, watching Ramsay with a decided note of guarded disinterest. Ramsay stood himself up, rectifying the chair as he did so and patting himself down, still feeling a little sheepish over his clumsiness in the face of intimidation.

He returned to pacing as he had first intended, as he had when Sansa had first left the room, but despite the invigorating physical activity, he could not keep his thoughts from hurrying back into a state of despondency. Fortunately for Ramsay, after walking this way for some time he began to feel exhausted.

After everything that had happened that day, with aching leg and sore shoulder protesting his choices in life, Ramsay slowly crawled into the bed, feeling so tired now that his mind and body had to react to this need despite his elevated state of anxiety. He did not bother to disrobe, deciding that when Sansa returned it might be best to have his garments on.

He sighed, knowing that would likely not stop or slow her should she decide to 'take him to bed' as she had so many times since that fateful day she had enlisted the castle smith to make a phallus for her. He glanced over at the silently brooding Eroc, wondering if she would ask him to leave before, or if the man might refuse…

Ramsay tried to shake himself of such thoughts, as dwelling on them did him no good. Best to wait to cross that bridge when I come to it, he thought. After all, thinking on it wasn't going to offer solutions. He frowned, thinking on the why of that mental statement; it was because Lady Sansa got what she wanted, and he doubted she'd stop because Eroc was watching.

Despite these terrible nagging thoughts, Ramsay's weary mind finally managed to find slumber within the dark, cool room of the castle. He awoke some time later with a start, realizing instantly that he had been sleeping for a while, and immediately glancing around for Sansa, almost expecting her to be waiting at the foot of the bed.

Ramsay wasn't sure why he felt guilty, since his reasoning mind told him he had done nothing wrong, but after her threat before he supposed he was especially tense about her being angry with him. As his eyes scanned the room, he realized that someone had lit a single candle that shown a soft yellow light on the chamber, but Sansa was not present.

The light of the candle did reflect in the whites of a large man's eyes though, and Ramsay could see that Eroc was still watching him, though now the big man was leaning on the wall opposite of the one he had been resting on when Ramsay had drifted off to sleep. Ramsay wasn't sure if his waking had drawn the man's gaze or if he had simply been watching Ramsay sleep.
Thought of the latter made Ramsay shudder uncomfortably, but his mind was already moving on to other thoughts that had to plague him now; where was Sansa that she would be gone all hours of the night? He cleared his throat, "Guard… have you received tidings from the Lady? It is strange for her to be gone so long…"

Eroc merely raised an eyebrow at Ramsay, choosing not to respond. Ramsay for his part started to become agitated by Eroc's general level of uncooperativeness, throwing the covers from himself in a bit of a huff as he rose quickly due to his annoyance. He regretted that choice immediately, clutching his sore shoulder and rubbing at his leg.

Sleeping had given his injured parts plenty of time to become stiff with inaction and now moving caused him a shocking level of pain. After a few moments awake and after being more careful with his movements the pain subsided back down to the usual tolerable dull ache he remembered from the evening prior.

Once this uncomfortable period passed he remembered what it was that had so aggravated him in the first place, and he turned his full attention to Eroc, his ire only fueled further by the bout of discomfort he had just endured, "I know that you feel no obligation to the Lady of the house, but if your small mind can fathom this; she pulls the strings out here."

Eroc unfolded his arms and stood away from the wall, glaring down at Ramsay in a dangerous way that caused the latter to gulp in nervous response, but he continued, feeling it might be best to get his message across sooner than later, "If you don't want to be consigned to mucking out the stables for the rest of your time here, you need to obey."

The big warrior simply stood there a moment, seeming to take his measure, and then he took a step towards Ramsay, "Are you telling me to fall in line, prisoner? Do you even realize how stupid you look right now?"

Despite his impulse to back away Ramsay stood his ground, deciding that perhaps intimidation was the only thing this savage would respond to, "Your mistress might be in peril for all we know; I see only one uncouth idiot between us."

Eroc stepped forward and raised his arm as if to backhand Ramsay, causing the latter to flinch, but he paused, seeming to decide against it. He lowered his arm and instead scratched at his bushy facial hair with his forefinger and thumb, "What a fancy word; uncouth. Created by an arrogant asshole from the south who wanted to feel superior I'm sure."

Eroc reached forward and gave Ramsay a gentle push. At least, it was perhaps gentle by Eroc's standards, but for the far smaller man it was a sizable application of force that left him careening backwards onto the bed behind him, "So now we only really have one question we need to answer; how shall I do it?"

Ramsay was breathing hard, his heart hammering against his ribs so hard he would have thought it would burst if the adrenaline pumping through him wasn't making him numb to all feeling, trapping the moment in a way that felt both fleeting and timeless. The wildling had called his bluff and the reality of things was all that remained.

Apparently, intimidation was a poor choice against a man who clearly chose physical deeds over words, and Ramsay wasn't going to be scaring anyone into submission in his current incarcerated and injured state, never mind a man that outweighed and outsized him by more than double. He suddenly felt very foolish for trying.

His eyes were wide as he responded a bit dully, his words ringing in his own ears since there was
nothing intelligent he could think to say that might reverse the course that things now took, he could see the tensed readiness in the huge warrior's cording muscles, and he wondered numbly if he was about to die now, "...Do what?"

The warrior bellowed a hearty chuckle that didn't ring in the slightest as mirth and answered, "Punish you. How am I going to punish you?" The red-headed man glanced over at the phallus that Sansa had often used to sodomize Ramsay, "Shall I fuck you in the ass? The lady of the house whom you currently embarrass yourself over has enjoyed that often, yes?"

Ramsay's throat constricted as his eyes widened further; could this man actually be entertaining the idea of raping him? "I... I don't know where you got that assumption, but..."

Eroc's laughter, deep and menacing cut him off, "Don't lie to me little worm; I can see through you as if you were made of glass. Your reaction alone tells me all I need to know about our lady's secret pleasures."

He took a step closer to the bed and Ramsay scrambled back, quickly meeting the wall of the headboard behind him and far too close to the other man to risk trying to slip off of the bed to either side. Eroc would certainly take the action as flight and give pursuit, and where was Ramsay really to go being as he was a prisoner there?

The big man started speaking again, "That cock there though, there are limitations to what she can rightly do with it; maybe you need a man to make you his bitch, perhaps that will curb that annoying ego of yours?"

Ramsay shook him head vehemently, "No... No! That's not necessary... I promise to be good."

Eroc chuckled again, "Is it that easy to cow you then? No wonder Sansa has been going at it so long; it's rare to find a man so subservient."

This caused redness to flare in Ramsay's cheeks at Eroc's apparent accusation of weakness, "I-I think it's perfectly normal for a man not to wish being violated by another man. Please... I'll do what you say... let's start over shall we?"

Eroc laughed yet again, "Do I look like some fickle-minded northerner to you whose path can be redirected by words alone? Where I come from once you have erred there is nothing you can say to avoid getting what is coming to you." He glanced over to the table closest to the bed now, moving over to it and picking up the leather strap there.

The big warrior turned the simple leather strap over in his hand, seeming to test its weight with both his hands and eyes as he looked it over, "Lucky for you I don't fuck men, and you are certainly not my type if I did, so I think I'll consider the lady's other means of putting you back into your place, groveling as you so rightly should."

This new turn of events certainly wasn't getting sodomized, but Ramsay could not say that his heart leapt for joy at the prospect of the new suggestion, "She usually just comes to an agreement with me; after all we are all civilized here..."

Eroc shot him a poignant look, still smiling in a way that didn't touch his eyes, "Amazing that you still are finding ways to insult me; do you even realize you're doing it?"

Ramsay opened his mouth to respond but Eroc surged forward suddenly and clapped a hand over his mouth. Ramsay reacted by grabbing at the bed under him, but the huge wildling was already far too close for even the ill-conceived idea of flight to have merit. Eroc spoke, "Shhh, I grow tired of your
lies; it is clear to me that statement wasn't even true. I don't see Sansa giving you any ground."

Eroc's face split with a wide, tiger's grin as he glared down at the helpless man unable to respond below him, "Yes this simple strap seems to make you squirm enough, so I will show you that even a backwards, stupid 'wildling' like me can perform acts of magic with words; I am going to hit you until all of your words fall out."

Ramsay wriggled in a desperate attempt to crawl away that he knew was destined to fail before he had even begun, but was unable to resist the temptation to try anyways in the face of Eroc's threat. Eroc easily caught him as he wildly gyrated towards the other side of the bed, hauling him back to the center with one hand in an almost effortless pull.

"Wait… wait! This really isn't your duty, guard; you overstep! You are meant only to watch over me, you have no authority to meet out such punishment. I'm telling you, you are confused about what goes on here, and you are making a huge mistake!"

Eroc pushed him hard into the bed against another attempt to wiggle free, wrapping an arm around Ramsay as he turned the smaller man around to face away from him into the bed. Eroc then rested himself upon his knees, holding Ramsay semi-suspended in his grip in a way that left the other man with little leverage, "Ha! If anyone is confused here it is you, little man. Do you think I care about any of that? I tell you what; I'll ask again in a few minutes…"

Ramsay let out a roar of indignant anger as Eroc ripped his pants from him so hard there was a tearing sound as some of the fabric that did not survive the brutal yank. Ramsay could feel the cool air of the room rush over his naked flesh and could also feel Eroc reaching his arm back to strike him with the strap, "D-don't you dare!"

Ramsay's warning had no effect on the actions of the giant guardsman though, which Ramsay should have known would be the case. If anything, it might only be adding fuel to the already considerable fire burning in Eroc's eyes, as the other man only growled at him and struck him again and again in response to his demands.

Ramsay bucked and kicked, and his back arched as Eroc mercilessly brought leather to flesh, but other than that and screaming, he was helpless to do anything to change his state; Eroc had him pinned tightly under his big arm, and there was no way for him to feasibly free himself. He was trapped. Ramsay screamed wildly once this feeling set in.

He gnashed his teeth and swore and threatened. He warned and reasoned, and finally he began to beg and plea, "P-please… why… why are you doing this?!"

There was a humorless rumble from deep in the big man, "Because you so obviously needed it. I'm glad that Sansa chose a kiddie punishment for you; it fits you."

"Please… I'll behave; just set me down, and you won't hear another word from me… I'll be as quiet as a mouse!"

Eroc only shook his head in the negative, "I told you I'm going to make all your words fall out; once I've done this enough you'll stop talking alright."

"No…Nooooo…." Ramsay did what he could to gird himself for what was coming but there wasn't really any practical way to do that. Eroc shifted underneath him, laying Ramsay over his lap so that Eroc at least could be more comfortable. He was settling in for the long haul, Ramsay knew. He tried to roll away as Eroc did so, but the big man easily caught him.
"You keep squirming like that if you want, but don't think I'm not going to make you regret it."

The strap came down hard and Ramsay yowled in pain. Eroc brought the leather down with a great deal more force than Sansa did, overriding the fact that he didn't have her particular finesse for finding Ramsay's weak spots by bludgeoning him so hard that the sting of it shook him to the core. There was no way he wouldn't be bruised after this.

Perhaps even terribly bruised; maybe he could convince Sansa of this maniac's savagery and not only evade whatever she might have in store for him but also remove himself of the brutish oaf? A possibility that had to enter his mind, but which was having difficulty being entertained while still in the middle of receiving said bruises.

He was ready by this point to say or do anything Eroc wanted, so long as the big man would release him, because for whatever reason he seemed to be hitting Ramsay in a manner that suggested he was waiting for something. At least Ramsay had to hope that he was waiting for something and not just planning to hit him indefinitely…

"I-I'm sorry… please I'm sorry…"

Ramsay apologized in every way and manner that he could, as sincerely as he could, so that he shook with the sincerity of his apology, but Eroc didn't budge an inch, only grunting at him as his hand continued to steadily apply that awful leather to Ramsay's ass.

"Why are you doing this… what do you want… please… s-stop, I'll do what you want I swear… just tell me what you want!" The other man didn't respond and Ramsay found himself at wit's end; did Eroc actually want anything? The notion that the big man might just be hitting him for the joy of doing so resurfaced in his mind.

He tried to think of what else he might say or do but nothing came to him, only impeded thoughts that had trouble floating through the haze of pain that his incredibly heated and sensitive backside sent him. He ducked his head and took the beating as best he could at that point, finally succumbing to the fact that he had no options.

In that state, weary from the act of tensing against the painful shots to his ass, physically drained from shouting and flexing in futile attempts of escape, he gave himself over finally to the humiliation this entire scene created in him, and he wallowed in his own self-pity and self-disgust. How had he allowed this to happen?

All he had wanted was to… what had he wanted? Ramsay wasn't sure anymore. Something about finding out where Sansa was; was that what this was all over? No… no this really started when he had taken offense at what the big man had said and even more so in the way that he had said it. When it boiled down to it, this was about pride.

His pride had caught him up and landed him into another fine mess this time. Thinking this caused Ramsay to feel a sting in his heart that couldn't go unanswered in his face, and he wiped at his eyes as tears rose unbidden to pester him. The more he tried to push the feeling away the harder it lodged itself within him though.

With the grinding relentless forward motion of a machine his tears continued to flow and the pangs in his heart continued to wash over him in waves. Why couldn't he be entitled to even a small sliver of pride anymore? Since when did the untamed savages from the north come down to tell men of noble blood like him what to do?

The sound of leather smacking flesh filled the room, filled Ramsay's head. And how was it that this
one was able to do such things to him? He wept then, his cries matching his tears as he was finally unable to mask the full extent of his grief. His ragged, mournful calls were what now filled the room, and it took Ramsay a few moments to realize Eroc had stopped hitting him.

Ramsay clambered to his feet once he decided that Eroc wasn't poised to stop him, pulling his now tattered pants back onto himself while moving cautiously away from the other man. Ramsay caught a glimpse of himself in the full-length mirror opposite the bed; he was stooped over, shaking as he clutched his pants to himself.

He in no way represented the man he had once been; this sniveling, broken thing drove him to feel a wave of bitter pity for himself. He saw the fear in his own eyes that he had come to expect from his former subjects; that fear that he had lived to compel from others was in turn being compelled from his own person.

Ramsay's face turned down in a severe, unhappy frown, and he wiped bitterly at the wetness on his face that stung his pride just as much as the very physical sting he could still feel quite pointedly on his posterior. Eroc stood, stepping clear of the bed and drawing close to Ramsay, which caused the smaller man to flinch reactively.

Eroc didn't say anything for long moments that could have been minutes to Ramsay for the way the silence made him feel; shaky and uneasy, tensed for the next awful thing that might go wrong is his already turned upside down life. He couldn't help but wonder if Eroc was perhaps enjoying his fear as he used to enjoy it in others.

The way that the large red-haired warrior acted certainly lent credibility to the idea that he had a sadistic, mean streak the likeness of the one that Ramsay had once so thoroughly enjoyed. Was that what he was doing now, allowing the awkward silence do the work of intimidation for him just to watch Ramsay squirm?

His face was impassive, the set of his strong jaw and intense eyes unreadable to Ramsay, whether because the bigger man was a native of the frozen lands and therefore a culture of expression beyond Ramsay's ability to read, or because he was intentionally masking his mood to keep Ramsay guessing he did not know.

Ramsay had often employed similar tactic to the art of scaring people; when people couldn't read you, and you seemed to act impulsively and erratically, it put others on edge, made you truly unpredictable and a dangerous, unstable wild card. Kept folks tense to smile when you should frown, be silent when you should speak.

Eroc caused him to jump when he did speak, which had still only been enough moments for Ramsay to formulate these thoughts, and he watched the bearded warrior with wide eyes, "I'm going to keep this simple, as I have always done, though now even a clever southerner like you should be able to understand me…"

He reached both of his hands out, taking Ramsay by the shoulders before the smaller man could move away. He flinched at the touch and then went very still, like a mouse that had been caught in the coiled grip of a snake. Eroc now had his undivided attention, which seemed to be what the big man wanted, as he looked him in the eye.

"After all of this, do you now understand the nature of where you stand?"

Ramsay gulped, hurrying to respond when he saw that Eroc was starting to frown, evidently impatient with Ramsay's lack of haste in response, so he quickened his words, "Y-yes… yes I now understand."
The big man released Ramsay's shoulders, and the latter let out a sigh of relief, "Good."

With that Eroc turned and moved back to the place he had last been standing before the whole affair with the spanking had started and leaned against it once more with his arms folded as he had before, as if nothing at all had happened. It was as if he had been there the whole while by his bored expression; nothing of note.

Well, except for the way that Ramsay felt perhaps, as he remained standing where he was for a few more moments, still shaken and very much under the influence of the rushing of his own blood after all that had transpired, not to mention the painful stinging throb that continued to pulse from his bottom under his pants.

He felt no desire to sit, especially since the seat of him indicated that doing so would likely be painful, maybe for some time even. At the same time, he didn't want to remain where he had been when Eroc had given him the end of his pointed and scalding message. Deciding that pants were first on the agenda he went to the dresser.

Sansa had a number of items, trousers and the like that he could wear, though nothing as fine as the pair of breeches that Eroc had so efficiently ruined. Ramsay still wore his deeply disappointed frown as he searched through what was available to find something that would be adequate enough to house his lower body.

He slipped into the new cloth slowly, hissing a little once he brought the pants over the rounded shape of his ass; even the finely woven fabric was painful to the touch, Eroc had bruised him so thoroughly. Eroc didn't respond to Ramsay's discomfort, but Ramsay still wasn't certain that the man wasn't taking quiet, hidden glee at his discomfort.

Once this was done Ramsay could start feeling at least a little changed from the man who had been cowering before him in the mirror across the room, though he still not dare to glance at his reflection again, so scared was he of seeing that frightened image once more. He started to pace a bit to vent his nervous energy.

Nervous energy he had in abundance, not only due to the most recent incident with Eroc but a culmination of all of the untoward things that he had been faced with recently. At first, it seemed that pacing might help vent some of that unwanted anxiety, a way to physically divert himself as he thought out how to better his situation.

But this was not the case, as he could not clearly think for long before the discomfort brought on by his fresh bruises made him have to stop pacing in order to settle himself. Just the activity of walking back and forth along the room caused him unease, as the fabric of his trousers grated against the raw flesh of his buttocks.

He scowled, even daring to turn that look of resentment towards Eroc for a moment, being as it was entirely the big man's fault that he was faced with the feeling of ire in the first place, but he quickly changed his tune and looked away when Eroc stepped away from the wall and gave him an expression of mild interest that frankly terrified Ramsay.

He certainly wasn't aiming for a second round of what had so recently occurred, so Ramsay sat on the bed, averting his eyes and regretting putting his weight on his tortured backside as he grimaced. He did his best to avoid seeming challenging, and to his great relief Eroc seemed to take in his defeated expression and returned to bored guard duty.
Chapter Ten

Entreaty

The next few hours saw Ramsay in a state of irritable boredom, as he shifted around on the bed pointedly looking away from his jailor at nothing whatsoever, wishing that he could simply fall back to sleep so as to burn away the time. He wasn't going to be able to fall back to sleep, though, not with the way events left him feeling at this point.

So instead he felt the seconds ticking by in the slowest fashion possible, time dripping through the skein of aggravation so that every moment was a horrible eternity. He was almost annoyed enough to try speaking to Eroc once more… almost. Despite how his confinement and boredom made him feel though the option of talking to his keeper still shone as a worse plight.

Ramsay was fully convinced now that Eroc was perhaps just as miserably bored with the waiting as he was, but in the large warrior's case he was also looking for a good excuse or even a moderately passable excuse to enjoy passing the time by making Ramsay's time with him even more miserable than his own was.

Ramsay was almost relieved when Sansa returned, as part of him had worried that she might have been assassinated by those seeking to do him harm; not a likely event, sure, but since he still didn't know the agenda in full of those hunting him, the possibility wasn't entirely out of the question. If Sansa was killed Ramsay would have no one in the keep around that didn't want him dead.

She walked in looking tired; she had been up almost all of the night Ramsay realized, so she was likely exhausted. She glanced at Ramsay where he came to rapt attention upon the bed at seeing her form shadow the doorway, then she looked over to Eroc, "Thank you; I should be able to handle things from here if you wish to leave."

If Eroc was tired he showed no sign of it except perhaps by the slow manner in which he had been moving, and the easy drawl that he addressed Sansa with, "You still haven't told me what Jon said he wanted done."

Sansa nodded curtly even if she also did let loose an exasperated sigh, "Jon told me he would like for you to remain in guard of Ramsay in addition to myself for the time being, but I have already informed him that I can handle Ramsay just fine alone, so you should go get some rest if you need it; I understand it is late and your shift started early."

Eroc grunted, "I'm fine…" He glanced at Sansa, looking her over, "…I have no doubt that you can handle this little man; from what I've learned of him and the things I've heard, you do just fine. I think I'll stay just a little longer, though; I want to see how things go from here."

Sansa gave him a look that spoke of confusion, "I beg your pardon?"

Eroc let out a low laugh that resembled somewhere between a scoff and a guffaw, "I had to remind
him of his place while you were gone; tried to talk to me like he was 'king of the north,' and I was some southern peasant for him to kick around."

Eroc went on, "Of course, I straightened him out on that number, so I doubt he'll be making the same mistake again. Been quiet as a mouse ever since."

Sansa turned to regard Ramsay, whose cheeks and ears had begun burning at Eroc's story of what had happened, insulting and truncated as it was.

He had hoped fervently that Eroc would just leave when Sansa returned, that he would go and perhaps Sansa would never have to know about the awful events that had transpired while she was gone. But Eroc apparently wasn't quite done at making him even more miserable just yet, and had surprised him by going so far as to mention the actions he had taken.

Sansa walked over and looked Ramsay over, her hand reaching out to turn his face to look at her. Perhaps she had been expecting a black eye or two, Ramsay thought. She did seem to finally notice something that her tired mind had overlooked until this point though, "Ramsay, who said that you could dress yourself?"

Ramsay's eyes widened in sudden surprise; he knew that Sansa had given command that he was to remain pantless before, but with everything that had happened he supposed that he had assumed that at least for the time being that particular command might have been suspended or at the very least put on temporary hold.

Apparently not, though, judging by the way that Sansa vindictively glared down at him. He found himself sheepishly removing his pants then, though gently as his backside was still quite raw from the very recent ministrations that Eroc had laid upon him during the big man's own bout of personal retribution. Sansa waited patiently.

Once he had been divested of his pants she grabbed him by the arm, hoisting him the rest of the way up so that she could see his bottom. Ramsay covered his face with his other hand as she marveled in surprise, "I must say, I did not expect you would do this; what made you decide to spank him?"

Eroc shrugged almost dismissively, "Seemed like a good way to go about it at the time."

"Did you do this in particular because of things you have heard about how I punish him, or was that mere coincidence?"

Eroc shook his head, "I have heard tale of how you make the little bitch holler loud enough to echo out to the courtyard, but I chose it mostly because he so obviously fears it."

Sansa still hadn't allowed Ramsay to sit back down as they spoke, since she was still admiring the crisscrossed arrangement of welts and bruises adorning his buttocks which spoke testament to the sustained punishment he had faced under the big man's strong hand. Being in that position only made the words he heard that much more humiliating.

Ramsay felt sick with shame, and was immensely grateful when Sansa finally let him go so that he could hide himself from their open view. Sansa was nodding to Eroc, "He is a like a child in a man's body at times, so it's the right sort of way to deal with him when he misbehaves. I didn't expect you to punish him, but I thank you that you did not beat or abuse him, since he is so childlike."

Ramsay was grating his teeth together now, feeling a swell of rage he could do nothing with as her words continued to humble him further and further. Eroc pointed to Ramsay, who was avoiding eye contact with either of them, "I don't know why you have grown so attached to this one, but I must
ask; are you to punish him now?"

Ramsay's eyes came up, widening in sudden apprehension; was he to receive the punishment that Sansa had promised him before leaving now? He was full sore from Eroc's hand at the moment, and the idea of having yet another punishment laid down on top of the tender hurt he already felt made him squirm anxiously.

Sansa nodded, making his heart skip a beat, but her words helped him to relax, even if only slightly, "I will be punishing him, but I am weary from the long day, and I will need to think on how best to punish him not only for running away earlier but also for causing you issues while I was gone."

Ramsay's jaw dropped, "But all I did was ask him to help me find you! I was concerned…" he whined.

His complaint died on his lips under the pressure of Sansa's glare. Sansa clearly did not buy into his excuse, reinforcing the notion as she replied, "I'm certain that is not all that you did… do I need to ask Eroc exactly why he punished you?"

Ramsay gulped; the question had seemed more like a threat than inquisitiveness, but he nodded anyways.

Sansa turned to face Eroc, "Why exactly then did you punish Ramsay while I was away… is he correct in his affectation that you punished him for little to nothing?"

Eroc raised an eyebrow, seeming to be a little surprised, "Well… I suppose you don't really know me, so I won't let that insult me. Tell me; with all that he has done, do I really need further reason to harm him?"

It was Sansa's turn to nod, "Yes; he is under my protection as my prisoner now, so I would only have him punished in the way of my choosing for just reason." She squinted at Eroc, "But I get the feeling you already know that. Thank you for going no further than you did."

Eroc nodded, "I suspected it, though I can't rightly say I've yet come to know the depth of your character. In answer to your question; the little shit had the nerve to think that he could actually command me, as if he was still lord of the castle despite the blood of his dead soldiers littering the ground outside these walls."

This seemed to be what Sansa was looking for and she gave him an appreciative look, "Thank you; I had the feeling it was likely something of the sort." She turned once again to look at Ramsay once more, "Having to verify what you did is only going to make the punishments you must receive for your insolence that much worse."

Ramsay's face was twisted in a look of incredulity, and he stuttered, "Wait… what? I only insisted that we go look for you because the treasonous cur refused to even consider my valid point that you might be in danger! Why would you even take his word over mine besides, nor even give his opinion merit? He is a wildling dog!"

Eroc's nostrils flared and he stood upright with his fists balled in a way that immediately caused Ramsay to cower away from him, placing Sansa in between the two of them reflexively. Sansa spoke before the large bearded wildling could though, "It is painfully obvious to me exactly how you managed to anger your guard enough to spank you."

She elaborated, "Not only are your words insulting but they are incredibly foolish, seeing how the person you insult has some power over you; perhaps I should simply let Eroc punish you again to
help you understand why you should think before speaking."

Ramsay shook his head vigorously, "No! No… that won't be necessary…"

Sansa gave Ramsay a hard look, "Prove it; I want you to apologize to Eroc not only for the ignorant and demeaning things you just said but also for your behavior before."

Ramsay's jaw dropped and he looked back and forth between Sansa and Eroc, the latter of which had relaxed into a happy smile, folding his arms over his chest as he waited for Ramsay's reply.

Did she really plan on having him humiliate himself with the proposition of actually apologizing to the brutish wildling? After all, what he had said had merit did it not? Everyone knew that wildlings were an unruly and unsophisticated lot, and Eroc had only proved this beyond doubt to Ramsay in the violent way he had handled him.

But Sansa was also watching him patiently without saying anything further, making it clear that not only was her statement not rhetorical, but that she was clearly expecting him to do what she had indicated. Ramsay licked his lips, feeling his face heat under the strain of the choice he now had to make. He must comply, or Eroc would surely be allowed another go of him…

The thought of that happening was enough to send Ramsay of the edge in making his decision, and with a great deal of reluctance he opened his mouth to speak, "Uh… I… erm… I suppose that the manner in which I spoke about your people could be considered unfair, so I ask you to overlook this potential rudeness…"

Eroc raised an eyebrow at Ramsay, scoffing, and Sansa shook her head, "That isn't going to do, Ramsay; I can see that you feel some need still to validate your own sense of pride with Eroc here so I'm going to make this clear to all involved by keeping it simple; you are to kneel on the floor and beg Eroc for his forgiveness."

Ramsay's jaw dropped even wider than it had before, his eyes widening in shock at her words as she continued, "If Eroc is not convinced that you are sincere with your words, or simply that you have not shown an adequate amount of humility, I encourage him to spank you again to help you remember your place here."

The big man's smile had widened into a grin that spread from ear to ear, and he watched Ramsay in a fashion that was almost jovial now. Ramsay felt sick to his stomach with the awful waves of humiliation that coursed over him. His mouth was dry and he felt like his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. How was he to do this?

Memory of how Sansa had made him apologize to her chambermaid rushed back into his mind, and he scolded himself for not seeing this coming; Sansa seemed very much to enjoy bringing him down a peg or three whenever he began to think himself someone else's better. He had no doubt after what he said that Eroc wouldn't punish him, either…

With legs that felt stiff and leaded with the weight of wavering resolve and conflicted inner turmoil, Ramsay haltingly and jerkily lowered himself to the floor until both of his knees rested under him and his head was bowed before the guardsman.

Sansa interjected before he could speak as he opened his mouth, "No; look at him when you speak."

Ramsay glanced over her way, feeling yet another blow to his ego in having to follow her strict commands, and hating that he would have to watch Eroc's gloating face as he gave the bearded man what he wanted. He did so, though, staring into the other man's eyes hatefully for several long
moments.

He took a long, ragged, deep breath before speaking, knowing that there was no way that Eroc would be convinced of his humility if he was glaring daggers at the other man as he apologized. Ramsay was fairly good at faking emotion, but the anger and humiliation were making it very hard for him to focus.

Besides, Eroc intimidated him to great degree as well, and he had to wonder whether the wildling was more animal than man; would Eroc know that he was faking it if he didn't actually speak from the heart of tearful repentance? Ramsay trembled slightly as he sat there upon his knees, wondering if Eroc could also smell his fear like a wild beast…

Deciding that the safest course of action would be to put as much truth into it as possible Ramsay chose to let as much of his overwhelming humiliation pour into his voice as feasible; he didn't regret his unkind words towards the boorish man in the least, but perhaps the dolt would mistake his angst over being demeaned for humility, "I… I'm very sorry."

The big man lifted an eyebrow at him by way of response. Ramsay felt his stomach tighten with anxiety; did the warrior doubt him or was he simply inquisitive as to what would cause prideful Ramsay to apologize so easily? Perhaps the guardsman was simply surprised to see how easily Sansa commanded him.

A long and awkward silence ensued then, making Ramsay feel pointedly aware of the fact that he still knelt on the hard ground before this man he so thoroughly despised. He began to honestly wonder if Eroc was going to speak at all and whether Sansa would accept him rising to his feet again when the large wildling finally did open his mouth.

"I was more apt to believe your words when I punished you, but I suppose I can accept this lip service for now." The bearded man smiled widely at Sansa, "I love how you push him around; I can see now why you keep him I think."

Sansa blushed at the suggestion that she was keeping Ramsay around specifically to enjoy humiliating him, but she apparently decided not to argue the point.

"S-so we are all squared then?" asked Ramsay as he stood from kneeling slowly and somewhat nervously, appearing as a man who acts hesitantly, never sure if what he is doing is correct and ever ready to switch tactics should his current method of action prove wrong.

Sansa turned to address him with fire in her eyes, her lips turned down in a slight frown, "Hardly."

For his part Ramsay gulped, returning her reply with silence, since the subject was hardly one he wished to elaborate on after her one-word answer. Instead he cast his eyes down, feeling absolutely wretched with anticipation of what might come next as he shifted from one foot to the next, his lower half naked to a cool wind that blew through the room, igniting his pained posterior.

The silence was broken a moment later by Sansa, who yawned, seeming to let the irritation she had been feeling fall to the wayside, at least for the time being, "It is very late, and I will retire now. If you wish to keep watch Eroc feel free to do so, but personally I must retire for my rest if I am to be of any use tomorrow."

Eroc replied with a simple nod, "I'll be going for a time then, but I may return tomorrow…" he gave Ramsay a wolfish grin, "…if only to see you put it to this little wastrel." He stepped forward towards Ramsay, causing the latter to reactively flinch, and ruffled his hair with one big hand almost affectionately before turning to leave.
Ramsay glared at the departing wildling’s back with a fiery hatred that had only been stoked further by the obvious display of belittling ‘affection’ that Eroc had displayed before leaving. He swore to himself many times in many ways that if he ever found a way to do so he would violently murder that man. He let out a dejected sigh. After all, as much joy as rumination of slaughtering Eroc in a multitude of vengeful ways brought him, Ramsay wasn’t foolish enough to think that he would ever get the opportunity to actually do such things, or even if he did that doing so would be the wisest choice he could make. He glanced over at Sansa.

She was disrobing herself, and Ramsay felt his throat go dry at the sight of it; Sansa was after all a beautiful woman, and her naked form roused him as it would any man with predilection for the female form. He found himself covering his genitalia with his hands, a maneuver he would certainly not have performed only recently ago.

He had done so almost instinctively, too, despite that fact. Sansa had certainly changed that in him, though Ramsay was fairly certain that he did not cover himself over some sense of modesty. No, it was far more likely that he was reacting this way out of a sense of fear; a thought that none the less merited no joy for him.

Ramsay had begun to display an erection at the sight of Sansa’s pert breasts, the supple weave of her hips and the appealing shape of her buttocks, and he could not help but to worry over what she might say or more importantly do should she realize that the man that had raped her so profusely was even now aroused at the sight of her.

He tried his best to will the untimely and unwanted stiffness away, but it had been a long time since Ramsay had been able to relieve his own sexual needs and so therefore his member proved unresponsive to his wishes no matter how hard he tried. Therefore he was left awkwardly trying to face away from Sansa so that she would not see it.

She was close though, and as was to be expected she called him to her bed with a simple gesture that had become somewhat routine between them. Ramsay headed that way but slowly and with a great amount of hesitance. He smiled at her nervously as he approached, his cock hidden behind both of his hands.

"Dear Sansa… may I ask why I may not wear pants today? I had thought that I had graduated from that particular… treatment due to good behavior…?"

Sansa glanced back at him, seeing that he was shivering a bit with the cold. Ramsay could only hope that she would think that he covered himself due to the low temperature.

She shook her head at him as she levered herself into the bed and under the covers there. She lifted the fur blankets and gestured for Ramsay to follow, "I was allowing you to dress yourself for a time, but that was before you failed to come to me as you should have and instead tore around the keep causing trouble for everyone."

Ramsay paused at her invitation to join her in the blankets; they usually slept together, particularly after she was done sodomizing him she often fell asleep atop of him, and while in his current state he did relish the thought of coverings and a warm body to lay against, he was anxious that she would discover what he was hiding at such proximity.

He licked his lips, "I am finding it particularly cold tonight… do you think that I might be allowed to don some more clothing… please?"
Sansa's eyes narrowed suspiciously at him and to his horror eventually trailed down to his cupped hands. With a swift movement she reached out and plucked his hands away.

His member had only just begun to abate its salute despite the stress of the situation, and not nearly enough to give the appearance of anything other than raging, lustful desire. Sansa was quiet, glancing up at him after taking the sight in fully, she was met with a sheepish, awkward smile from Ramsay, "I… uh… it has been a while for me…"

Sansa let out an exasperated sigh, "Just face away from me. Now do as I told you and get under the covers already; it is in fact cold, and I don't wish to endure it any longer on account of your sudden bout of modesty."

Ramsay didn't have to be asked twice, sliding in to lie down on his side, which was how he would have wanted to lay after Eroc had his way anyhow. He was only glad that Sansa didn't seem angry, though he supposed that time would tell how it would affect their strange relationship.
Comeuppance

Happy season 7 premier every body! =D I'm heading to work on finishing up the next chapter on ANTS, but if I don't get it out before Game of Thrones airs tonight, here's a nugget from Jason to tide you over ;)

Chapter Eleven

Comeuppance

The first sensation that greeted Ramsay in the morning sent him howling from his bed. A sharp, lashing sting across his naked posterior that both blossomed immediately and was just as quickly identified for what it was as he sprang from the bed that he shared with Sansa. He didn't jump far though, since the second thing his waking mind realized was that he was being held down.

Sansa sat astride him over his back, as he had either rolled onto his stomach during his sleep the evening before, or she had moved him thus before he had chance to awaken. From there she pinned his hands neatly over his head with one hand, ducking her head to the side as he jumped on waking, so that his skull did not collide with hers.

As her left hand held his hands firmly so, her thighs pinched together over his lower thighs and legs to pin him down, so that it did not become a part of his instinctual response and bound him from the bed in his surprised pain. Her other hand wielded a strap of leather with a woven handle; a new piece that she must have had commissioned for this exact use…

That thought in itself was a contemplation of humiliation; knowing that she must have sought out a skilled artisan just to craft yet another device specifically designed to bring him low, but his mind could not linger long on these things, since the act she performed with said strap pulled all of his attention. Her right hand came down again.

Another intense, sharp pain made itself known in him as he was struck again on flesh that had already been made somewhat tender by Eroc's attack on him the night before, and Ramsay howled in agony, nowhere near ready to receive such recourse so early in his day. On thinking of Eroc, his eyes scanned the room.

Memory surfaced dully through the haze of pain of what the wildling had said the night before, and Ramsay groaned to see that Eroc had in fact returned simply to see Sansa punish him. He bit his lip and his muscles tensed reflexively at the shame of the other man watching him be punished like this. Suddenly he cried out, "W-wait! I'm not ready!"

He had his head ducked down, instinctively hiding his expression from those present, as he knew that his shame must be clear there for all to see, but he could just barely catch Sansa's faint head shake as her response came, "We aren't going to wait all day, Ramsay; you have already slept half of the morning away and this isn't about your comfort."

Ramsay glanced back at her over one shoulder; Sansa was fully clothed and her hair was put up in a neat fashion, the way many ladies did when they had long hair and wanted it to remain out of their
way as they performed tasks of exertion. He flushed at the thought that what she was doing to him now might be thought of as such a task.

He was still reeling from the shock of being so rudely awoken to such a thing, and his mind was still fighting to take in basic facts about his surroundings as he twisted and cried out shamefully in her grip, all the while her hand peppering his ass with more red stripes from the lash she wielded. Gradually though he acclimated, to his surroundings, at least.

The light that shone through the window was bright, indicating that the sun had managed already to get quite high in the sky, and the roosters of the keep were silent, likely having long since cried out with rallying voice about the coming of dawn. The air was cold as it ever was in the north, but Ramsay knew with practiced ease that it felt warm enough to suggest a time of day close to noon.

He hadn't realized how tired he had been the night before he had supposed, but even with the nap he had after everything that he had been through plus his injuries it was no wonder that he had so desperately needed the rest. Concerning those injuries, Ramsay noted belatedly that what Sansa did to his backside was his only real source of pain.

The other wounds had quieted down to a bit of numbness here and there, and he also noticed that Sansa seemed to be taking great care not to lean or place pressure on the leg and shoulder that he had hurt during his failed attempts to flee the keep. Right; his attempts to flee… that was the major reason she was hitting him right?

Well, that and the fact that he had insulted Eroc on occasion, though he still felt slighted that she was worsening his punishment over what had happened while she was away even though the brute had already taken it upon himself to punish Ramsay in his own time; why did he have to be punished twice? He thought.

The pain was moving past barely tolerable as she continued and then past the marker of excruciating. As he approached and then passed the limits of his tolerance for physical duress, which was to Ramsay's great humiliation actually quite low, he tried to latch on to something that might end the source of his grief.

"Sansa, please… I'm sorry..." he choked out, despite the fact that Eroc was there, leaning in to hear his pleas for mercy, only shaming him yet further in doing so.

Sansa did not reply immediately, letting the sting of the biting leather be her only words to him for moments that stretched out into eternities for Ramsay.

Finally though she deigned to reply to Ramsay, in a voice that echoed of stern conviction and reproach, "I am not convinced. You can start on the path of proving what you say isn't yet more of your lies by telling me that you remember why we are doing this. Tell me what you have done wrong so I know you remember."

Ramsay choked on his words for several minutes; a very long time indeed to do so when under the steady beat of the strap that Sansa brought upon him again and again. He had at some point past begun to wriggle pathetically under the repeated pains, but Sansa held him very tightly, adding a feeling of trapped helplessness to the mix.

But despite the pain that she prompted him with so incessantly, Ramsay could not bring him to conjure the words she demanded of him, at least not readily. It wasn't that he didn't know what she wanted him to say; he had already many times, almost a countless number of times really, considered why he was being punished.
No, it was because telling her was somehow harder with the leering grin of Eroc so nearby. The big wildling was smiling ear to ear, and Ramsay just knew that he was drinking every moment of the degrading punishment Ramsay endured like it was a fine wine, and Ramsay was loathe to volunteer to add more to slake the man's sadistic thirst…

He couldn't hold out forever, though, and after only a few minutes of one last attempt to resist doing the only sensible thing that might give Sansa reason to stop, becoming red in the face for the effort as he glared at Eroc, he finally turned his face tearfully away as his will broke to the simple punishment, shouting out his great shame.

"I... I'm sorry… I should have thought better of trying to flee; I should have come to you!" he panted.

Sansa frowned, clearly not satisfied with this answer alone, "This isn't a punishment over simply making a hasty choice; apologize and confess as you should or it will be nightfall before we finish this task."

Ramsay's eyes bulged as she brought the strap down to accentuate her words, "Y-yes! You're right, I wanted to escape this place, I'm sorry!"

When Sansa didn't immediately reply Ramsay continued along that vein, "I knew what I was doing, and I wanted to flee you as much as my would-be assassins, if not more! Please, I chose poorly and I regret, please let this be done!"

He squirmed to and fro as her hand came down, and Sansa continued a moment longer before pausing.

She glanced over at Eroc, who only stood there with a smile upon his lips, an odd countenance on a face that was clearly more accustomed to frowning, "What do you think Eroc; is this man starting to seem properly repentant to you?"

Eroc scoffed, "Maybe, but with a snake like this one it would be best to go with your plan of staying on until the sun has set."

Ramsay drew breath sharply at the big man's words, but he didn't dare say anything one way or the other, holding that breath as he waited anxiously for Sansa's reply, sweat beading upon his brow. If he had any doubts about Eroc feeling personal animosity towards him, it was well and gone between this last statement and his presence at Sansa's punishment in the first place.

It seemed to Ramsay as if she took an awful long while to speak her mind, too, but finally she opened her mouth to speak, "I'm not quite done with him...” Ramsay's breath hitched again, "…but I see no need to overstate this when he is at least wise enough to repent his bad behavior." Ramsay let out his breath, unsure if he was relieved or not.

Sansa continued, "I do intend to give you something to remember this by though, Ramsay, since it quite often seems that such lessons so easily slip your mind. If you had remembered my previous treatment of you clearly you would not have dared to do something so boldly against what I desire for you. So I shall tan your hide full sore so that every time you sit you shall remember."

Ramsay's hands tightened into the bed, grabbing fistfuls of the sheets there as Sansa resumed her strapping of him with gusto, causing him to cry out with the intense explosion of blossoming pain that he felt upon his backside. The short pause in her work had actually made her resuming more painful rather than less so.
She started in at a steady, slow tempo, but her rhythm gradually increased in speed until the strap was a blur in the air, swatting his extremely reddened cheeks in a tempest of stinging bites that left Ramsay whimpering and screaming like a child, to his great shame. He heard himself beg in his own ears, marveling at how he did so reactively.

This scenario reminded him of Reek... no, Theon, and a host of others. These were the impulses that he had coaxed out of them with his tortures, when he had broken them down to the quick, when he had reduced them until they were as children of fear before him. Was that what he was to Sansa already; had she already so thoroughly trained him?

The thought was maddening, and Ramsay felt once again as if he was losing a part of himself, or worse, as if he was only now a piece of his old self that had fallen away from the rest of the identity that had once been Ramsay Bolton, and that this was all that was left. This quivering, squirming, sad man who trembled and cried as he received a spanking of all things...

His own voice continued to resound loudly in his ears, echoing off of the walls of the room as he poured out apologies and begged forgiveness. Most of all, that voice pleaded for her to stop; anything at all to stop, he would do whatever she said, demean himself in any way she wanted, if only it would mean that he would be free from the sting of her strap.

Pathetic. This was the thought that burned in his mind like a fiercely glowing ember, the sort that is ready to ignite all around it in a blaze. He was pathetic; he sounded pathetic with his yelps and wails brought on by her punishment, and his words were the weak mutterings of the defeated. How had he ever slipped so far?

Some older, deeply ingrained part of his self raged at the fact that he was acting this way, that he couldn't seem to control himself, that he couldn't seem to stop being so easily swayed into frailty, but that voice was buried now beneath the pain that repeated across his ass, pushing it further away with each stinging swat.

Ramsay had learned early how his relationship with Sansa was going to be, but with a man like Eroc watching, a man who might be in some ways similar to his old self in his sadistic nature, Ramsay could feel the tearing more acutely than when she punished him alone, when it was only just the two of them, he and her.

He could feel himself tearing away from what he once was, feel the way that he was becoming more removed from the man he had been most of his life, see that man dying a little with each breath he used to beg forgiveness. Having Eroc watch the death of his former self made him more aware of what it was that Eroc was seeing.

He had to wonder if Eroc knew what it was that he witnessed, or if he was as unintelligent as Ramsay had always assumed, and merely enjoyed watching another man in pain. Ramsay told himself not to look, but as usual he ignored his own sense and glanced at Eroc. The big man was smirking at him, and Ramsay could see knowing in the wildling's eyes.

He knew. He knew what sort of man Ramsay had been, perhaps more so than most due to the kinship they shared in inflicting pain. He knew and he was here because this was what he wanted to see; not just a man being hurt, but a former lord brought down and made weak, stripped of everything he had thought made him strong.

Ramsay ripped his eyes away from Eroc, telling himself that he was allowing himself an excess of emotional thinking, just as unable to control his own thoughts as he was unable to control his body as it jumped to Sansa's tune, or his voice as it sang her song for even the smallest chance that she might stop soon.
All of these things rolled down upon him to create a deep sense of self-pity in Ramsay, and the tears of shame and pain that flowed unbidden to his cheeks were joined now by those of the unique sadness that one feels when one is pitying oneself for one's lot in life. Ramsay had never been prone to such thoughts in the past.

But he no longer lived in that world; now he was this… this broken man who was so hated and reviled that despite being possibly one of the most pathetic creatures alive in the world, the only person who felt pity for him was his own person. His bottom lip trembled as these thoughts came, and he sobbed openly, giving way to his grief.

Sansa watched him cry so transparently for only a short while before she elected to cease swatting the underside of his arse. Ramsay stopped calling out in pain belatedly, catching himself rearing back to scream for another terrible stinging slap that never came. He gulped back the involuntary action self-consciously.

With trembling hands Ramsay wiped at his eyes, also pointedly aware of the fact that he was being observed. When he glanced over at his audience, Eroc, he saw that the large man bore a frown; apparently Eroc was unhappy that Sansa had stopped now. He had already stated that he wanted the event to carry into the night.

Obviously, Sansa stopping at that juncture was far too early by the wildling's reckoning, but Ramsay for his part was exceedingly glad for it. He wondered with a bolt-like feeling of shame if Sansa had stopped so quickly because he had been in such a pathetic state that even she had been moved to pity him; Ramsay certainly did not want pity.

Such an emotion directed his way could only further exemplify how very far he had fallen, how shamed he had become. Ramsay covered his face with his hands once he had rubbed away the tears that had streaked his cheeks, as if hiding his face now could somehow hide from all present including himself what had just transpired.

He found that he could not stop himself from sniffling for some time after she had stopped even though Sansa gave him no further direct reason to mourn or fear. He supposed that once his body had gotten into the powerful rhythm of extreme grief, ceasing the state was possible but not without some lasting echoes of its passing.

With time he managed to regain mastery over that as well, taking deep breaths so as to steady himself, taking strength in reminding himself that he was still being watched. He might have suffered terrible humiliation today before these two, even the hated Eroc, but why make that misery prolonged by showing how much he suffered?

All this time Sansa remained quiet, thankfully allowing Ramsay the much needed quiet and time he required to compose himself again. When his body at last stopped the majority of its reactive shaking, she finally spoke, "I hope that this particular lesson holds faster than the ones that proceeded it, so that it may be the last."

Ramsay found himself nodding his agreement with her into his hands both because he definitely didn't want to experience this situation over again and because he knew that Sansa would take offense if he didn't immediately offer her some form of the answer she was looking for. Eroc grunted dismissively.

The wildling seemed unconvinced, letting the other two know as much, "I doubt it; you will as like spend the rest of your days beating this lowlife for all that he has done and will do and still not repay him enough to straighten his idiot ways."
The bearded man's words cut Ramsay when he was already reeling from so many cuts, and he looked back at Sansa, hoping she would defend him.

But Sansa had no words for Ramsay's defense, except in turning aside some of the insult, "Let's not chastise him for things he may or may not do, but I understand that you feel he may never suffer enough for all the wicked acts he has committed and I would be hard pressed to argue such a practical point."

She continued, pulling one of Ramsay's hands aside as she did so and looking him in the eye, as if to make sure that he knew her words were more for his sake than Eroc's, "I would rather focus instead on letting Ramsay know that this was a swift justice that will meet its equal or greater with every of his misdeeds."

Her eyes bored into his with the fierceness of her determination, which Ramsay found to be in equal parts fascinating due to his relatively recent revelations concerning her nature, and terrifying, as that look promised nothing but pain for a man that dared to cross the will of the one who forged it, "Every time, for every sin."

Ramsay looked away, unable to continue meeting her look when she was so pointedly threatening him, and with him still sprawled under her in such an awkward and humiliating pose. He wished very much that she would let him rise, and the urge to simply do so was definitely there, but it was dampened by his fear of reprisal.

Sansa gave pause for Ramsay to reply, but when the other only allowed silence to fill the void between them she continued, her tone still crisply authoritarian, "You will not live in comfort here with me, Ramsay. You will not enjoy the freedoms of other men and you will at times be forced to perform services that you do not wish to."

Ramsay thought of how she sodomized him when she said that, a flush of heated shame coloring his face as he pointedly stared at the bedding, not even wanting to look at Eroc to see if the wildling might be thinking of the same degrading acts she had committed upon him and would likely continue to thrust upon his person.

If Sansa noticed him squirming with embarrassment under her knees she didn't give any indication that she did, instead going on with her speech to him, "But no matter what happens to you here and what you are made to do you must remember that through your crimes previous to your incarceration here you waived all rights; you have none."

"You do not deserve freedoms or choice, and quite a few persons residing in this very keep openly decry that you do not even deserve to continue drawing breath." Her face softened somewhat as she took in how these words caused Ramsay's face to twist in helpless sorrow, "I only want you to dwell on these things to help you gain perspective on where you stand."

"The time you spend with me or in fact anyone in this place can be terrible for you, but disobedience and malice will only prove to you how much worse your situation can become. I am using this moment we share together now to remind you that you can still live in comfort of a sort, at least relative to what you will experience if you resist."

What she was saying sounded familiar; not in exact words so much as in theme. She was telling him what he had told Theon in so many ways, in his attempts to recreate that blighted man Reek. Ramsay had offered him kindness at times, both because he enjoyed the confusion it created in Theon's poor, shattered mind, and because…

…Because it subjugated Theon, he realized. How much more quickly a broken man will jump to
comply when doing so will mean reward instead of the all too familiar lash of punishment. Ramsay was frowning as he wondered if this was another indicator of how like Theon Greyjoy he had become. Was Sansa already giving him the final pushes into becoming a slave to her?

This started a sense of revulsion over the man who had replaced the Ramsay that had been, but the cowering creature he had become pushed away the feelings before they could get anywhere near becoming something he might act on; Sansa had stopped her administration of punishments, and he did not wish to resume.

No matter how much shame and self-hate that he might feel, Ramsay refused to allow himself to return to what had just been happening, and he had no doubts that Sansa would continue to enforce her position over him as his superior, especially after what she had just said, so he watched yet another shred of forgotten pride slip away.

In its place remained the man who only nodded agreement to her dictates, a warlord perhaps at some juncture, but now just a man humbled. Eroc seemed to bore of his passive state, since it would mean no more punishments, and rose from where he had rested to leave, "Let me know if you have anything further you need…"

Sansa smiled, apparently satisfied that the generally unagreeable wildling now spoke of lending assistance, and she raised a hand as he turned, "Actually, I do have a request of you…"

Eroc turned to regard her, raising a curious eyebrow, and she elaborated, "…Jon made it clear that he wants Ramsay guarded at all times given the recent attempts on his life, especially when near me…"

Eroc nodded, "And you would ask that I fill that role." He stood silently for a moment, considering, and then nodded tersely, "Fine. It's not like I'm eager to return to the camp outside just to sit and wait there anyways."

Sansa bowed her head ever so slightly in recognition of his choice, "Thank you; I think you'll be a good fit."

The big man only grunted at this, obscuring his feelings on the matter with the ambiguous response. He moved to a somewhat darkened corner of the room to stand patiently instead of his previous path to the door leading out. Ramsay was stricken how such a large man could look so naturally comfortable standing; he supposed Eroc spent a lot of time on his feet.

To Ramsay's resounding joy Sansa finally moved to lift herself off of him, allowing him to remove himself from the thoroughly degrading position of laying nakedly there. He stood awkwardly nearby until Sansa nodded at him, "You may blanket yourself; I know it is cold and that there is a draft in here."

Ramsay eagerly went with this option before she had even finished uttering the words, quickly hiding his reddened posterior from view, as if doing so might in some way invalidate what had just happened to him and his shattered ego. He knew it did not, though, and looked away from both Eroc and Sansa, staring at the far wall miserably.

Sansa regarded both men, "I have much to do in the coming days, so I cannot stay in this room as much as I might like to sort things out with Ramsay. I assume he will be on best behavior with you as he knows thoroughly now I'm sure that you won't tolerate any foolishness."

Ramsay caught her staring at him and nodded serenely, noting with annoyance that Eroc was smiling at him.
As Sansa left and a quiet settled in, due to Ramsay's lack of desire for conversation being matched by that of his silent guard, he couldn't help but reflect on all that happened recently. He had been dreading Sansa's retaliation for his decision to escape for so long, longer even than he had realized until it had happened really.

There was a sort of relief that came with the fact that it was finally over, though, and Ramsay had to settle himself with the thought that perhaps this time he could manage to go for a while without such a humiliating display. He glanced with a seething look over at Eroc, but he knew a look was where it would have to end.

Despite how much he detested the wildling, Ramsay now knew better than any not to cross the warrior, knowing full well that the reward for such would be swift and probably more harsh than necessary. He grimaced at the thought that he would be forced to bow and scrape to such an uncouth bully, but life had been unfair in this.

Ramsay knew that life was often unfair, though it had been a lot easier to come to terms with this simple fact when things had only been going poorly for his enemies and those he elected to make miserable for his amusement. Now that it was he who suffered at the fickle whim of life he found himself far more ruffled.

He let out a long sigh, with it releasing as much of his animosity as he could, which wasn't much as he tended to be a man of brooding anger, but he managed to calm himself at least somewhat. This was his lot and as terrible as the overall meaning of what Sansa had said was, he was still alive, and the quality of that life could be better if he just reigned himself in.

That of course left him with quite a few questions on the matter of himself and what kind of person he was going to be in the future that had been thrust onto him when Sansa had refused him the escape of death. If Ramsay had just allowed himself to be killed he would have been free of this; his fight to survive had said something of his willingness to endure, didn't it?

Ramsay climbed back onto the mattress once more rolling over onto his side in the bed, wincing at how pained he was by even this simple action. What was Sansa's long range plan for him? What would she do with him once she thought him thoroughly broken? He might have thought she would either have him killed or simply retain him as a servant for the rest of his days, but...

There was something in her face when she looked at him that he recognized, something almost familiar. She wasn't as revolted by him as she had once been, and when she had entered the room after the attempted assassination to interrogate him he had thought he might have seen something like relief on her face.

Was she relieved that he had survived? Was she actually worried that he might have died in his mad dash to escape because she wanted to continue to see him suffer or because she for some reason actually cared what happened to him? His face twisted in puzzlement at the thought; why should he care anyways?

Ramsay could still lie convincingly to others, but he couldn't lie to himself; he recognized the feeling that tightened his chest at the thought; for some reason, it did matter whether Sansa cared for him. Perhaps because that would mean his death if she didn't, he told himself. She had been merciful, too… what did that mean for his future if she kept showing him mercy?
Chapter Twelve

Bait and Switch

The next day found Ramsay waking stiff and sore, but alive, well and past what he had to assume was the worst of the treatment he was going to receive on behalf of Sansa due to his prior behavior in attempting to escape the keep. While he obviously would have preferred if she had not punished him at all, he had to admit that it could have been worse.

For instance, he could have been killed by those that had been pursuing his death. Or he could have been run through by an eager guard of the keep, simply trying to keep him from escaping. He could have been put to death by Sansa herself upon his return to imprisonment. No, being humiliated again wasn't ideal, but finding the silver lining wasn't difficult either.

He rose slowly, giving himself time to try and acclimate to being awake, both mentally and physically. His shoulder and leg were almost distant pained memories now, barely causing him any issue at all, but his tortured rear was another story. He absently reached back to gently rub the sensitive area with a frown painted on his face.

That frown deepened at the sight of Eroc. The big warrior was ever watchful, fixing Ramsay with those pale blue eyes of his as he leaned against a far wall of the room with his arms folded over his wide chest. Ramsay glanced away at the meeting of their gazes, feeling shame simply by looking at the man who had witnessed all.

He knew he was perhaps overreacting, and his stomach churned to think that Eroc might even enjoy his meek behavior, a thought that Ramsay did not enjoy. Still, he didn't want to seem challenging to a person who was looking for a fight, and loathe as he was to do so, acting subdued would be the best way to avoid further travesty of justice.

The smaller man rose carefully from the bed, trying not to put too much weight on what pained him and wincing since that wasn't something he could avoid entirely. Once standing he wandered over to a dresser to pull out some clothing for himself. No pants, of course, the thought of why causing his face to heat all over again.

He stood there covering his genitals in an almost modest fashion, painfully aware of Eroc's gaze on him, when he finally came up with a plan to solve at least part of his problem. He moved over to the bed, taking some of the linens there and wrapping himself in them so that his lower body was no longer exposed.

He was violating her command in spirit but not necessarily by the words she had used to command it technically, so Ramsay could only hope that Sansa did not respond to his choice to garb himself this way with rancor. He had been frowning all along, but his frown deepened even further as he noted that his makeshift covering gave him the appearance of wearing a dress.

He adjusted it several times, trying to give the semblance of wearing some kind of robes, but ultimately the material and color of the linens in addition to their sheer nature continued to lend him the look of a man wearing feminine garb. He let out a sigh as he gave up, realizing that regardless of
how he did this he was going to carry shame with him.

Ramsay paced the room a bit before finally directing himself to Eroc, as unappealing as the gesture was, "Um… are we going to eat breakfast?"

The wildling cast a bored look his way, "The rest of the keep broke our fast hours ago; you'll need to wait for Sansa either way. She has been gone since early this morning and I have no intention of letting you leave without her say on the matter."

This caused Ramsay to sniff in irritation; since when did Eroc care what Sansa wanted? No, the man was denying him food out of malice he was sure, "Well then perhaps you could summon the servants to fetch me something? I'm starved."

Eroc shook his head at Ramsay, "And I don't give a damn. I'm certainly not your butler, prisoner."

This only served to rankle Ramsay further, but he bit his tongue to stop anything foolish from spilling out; he would be damned if he was going to be giving the brute any valid 'justification' in causing him yet more degrading pain. After a moment he released a long, bitter sigh, "Very well; I suppose we shall have to wait."

The red-haired warrior raised an eyebrow and tugged at his beard with one set of thick fingers, obviously surprised by Ramsay's words. It appeared to Ramsay that the man might have been expecting a different response from Ramsay altogether, and he was secretly pleased that at least in this small way he could surprise Eroc.

Ramsay paced the room until doing so started to pain his feet, still even now trying to discern who it was that had been trying to have him assassinated. He no longer felt any large amount of fear concerning that; the loyal guard of the keep would be extremely alert to any further attempts at infiltration, making Ramsay's murder less likely now.

Despite how important the topic remained, though, he couldn't help but continually allow his mind to drift back to the issue he had been debating well into the evening prior, Sansa. Just thinking of her brought on a rush of conflicting emotions so wrapped up and tied together that he couldn't even begin to tell them apart to even know what it was he felt.

The last remaining Stark had a hold on him that he had not really appreciated until the events that had caused him to truly analyze his relationship with her and wonder what it was exactly that she now wanted from him. Obviously, he had to assume that what she did started as simple revenge, a pure emotion that he knew well.

But had it moved into something else from there? As he had many times now, his mind recalled to his memory the image of her face, creased with worry as she had entered the cell where her people had been holding him protectively. Doubtless word of the attempted assassination had just spread to her; had she been concerned for his safety?

It could have been for a variety of other reasons that the sight of him had brought relief to her face; perhaps she had been worried that she had jeopardized her and Jon's reputations in keeping Ramsay as she had, and was glad that he hadn't been murdered, creating a political scandal. But Sansa had thus far given him little reason to think she cared about politics.

Not only that, but her behavior since then did not align with such a theory; if she had been truly concerned of that, she would have doubtless put him to death publicly at her earliest convenience; that was the option Ramsay would have elected for if he had to deal with such a conundrum. Well, she certainly wasn't Ramsay.
Still... Ramsay was broken from his thoughts as the object of them walked into the room, her dress billowing behind her ever so slightly at the rapid pace that carried her in, "Eroc, we must move Ramsay, Jon's orders."

She looked as if she was ready to explain further, but Eroc didn't question the directive, simply standing upright and taking a step across the room to grab Ramsay by the arm before glancing her way again, "Where to?"

Sansa pointed back out the way she had come by way of answer, "We are to move him somewhere those that have been tracking his movements are less likely to find him."

Eroc pulled Ramsay along as Sansa led him from the room, but the big man couldn't help but question the act even if he was going along, "Why move him at all?"

Sansa replied, "When we tried to summon the guardsmen who had been assigned to Ramsay for further questioning we discovered that they had disappeared entirely; a difficult feat to do in the military in general and even more improbable a task in a place like this. Jon decided that whomever is after Ramsay may not be done hunting him."

The red-bearded warrior nodded, his other hand scratching at that beard, "Seems like a lot of trouble to go to protect a prisoner... was he not fated to die once you were done having your fun with him anyways?"

Ramsay's breath caught in his throat for a moment, but he let it go when Sansa dismissed the notion with a shake of her head.

"No... I don't know what you've heard but despite the clamoring of those that would see Ramsay executed I have already made my will known; Ramsay is to remain alive so that the rest of his days can be spent in penance for his multitude of crimes."

Eroc shook his head, confused, "I don't understand why you don't just kill him; he's as bad as they get, and letting him live could send a bad message to other cunts like him."

Sansa shook her head again, "A lot of people feel the way that you do; more than not in fact. I have had to quarrel with one lord after another and even at times with Jon since this last incident, but I have convinced them so far of my cause; as I said when I first took possession of him as prisoner, death would be reward to him."

The wildling still didn't seem convinced though his tone suggested that he wasn't quite as opposed. He continued the discussion as they walked down one hallway and then turned to another, "I get that you want to send a message then; 'Sansa the torturer' perhaps, or maybe just let the would-be Ramsay's of the world know that you hold a grudge..."

He cast a look at Sansa as they walked, "...but this is all so very time-consuming when your efforts might best be applied elsewhere. You said yourself this puts you at odds with the other lords of what you call the 'north'. I don't know a whole lot about southern tradition, but don't your people frown on prolonged torture? Will keeping him hurt your standing here?"

Sansa just grimaced bitterly, "Fuck the other lords; I've had my fill of the politics of this land in ways you cannot imagine."

This caused a smile to bloom upon Eroc's face, and he gave her a warm look, "Well then, I might have gotten an entirely wrong feel for you on first impression. I think we shall be friends."

She returned the smile to him, giving a single nod as well, "I think I would like that; I'll admit that I
was worried about Jon's alliance with your people at first due to rumors I have heard of murderous savages, but since I have spoken to you and others of your tribes, I have come to value your honesty and straightforwardness."

The grin on Eroc's face spread even wider, "And I must say that Jon and now you have proven that our belief in the honor-less ways of your people to perhaps be exaggerated."

Sansa let out a mild chuckle, but there was no trace of real humor in it, "Well... for some of us at least..." her expression darkened, "Sadly a great many of us live up to those stories and more I'm sure."

Ramsay had stayed quiet so far despite the rude way that Eroc continued to thrust him along before him towards whatever objective Sansa led them, but his patience with not knowing was finally running thin, "Excuse me... where exactly is it that we are going? We have passed all of the quarters..." he frowned, "...am I being returned to a cell?"

The Lady of the keep shook her head, "No... Jon and I discussed it at length and we have agreed to move us to an older wing of the castle that hasn't served as quarters for some time, for a variety of reasons."

Ramsay's brow furrowed, "I am being hidden away... why? Wait... us? You are going to move yourself there... what purpose does that serve... why would you?"

Sansa reached a finger up and placed it on Ramsay's lips, "Don't worry yourself over the reasons for what I do with myself. In answer to your prior question; everyone in this keep knows that I have been keeping you in my quarters for the longest time, and that would be the first place that your pursuers would look."

This caused Ramsay's face to flush slightly, the warm, now familiar glow of embarrassment that he wore about him like the bedsheet around his waist resurfacing as he thought on the fact that everyone knew that she had been keeping him in her quarters like some sort of pet. Sansa went on, "Also a cell was where you were attacked last, so this seemed most prudent."

She stepped to a thick wooden door and pulled hard on it, gesturing inside. Eroc pushed Ramsay inside perhaps more roughly than necessary before stepping in himself. Sansa moved around them to light a few candles, revealing a still somewhat darkened room that had no windows and retained a smell that reminded Ramsay of a root cellar.

His nose crinkled at the odor, "It is little wonder why you no longer use this place... it isn't fit for human habitation."

Eroc smiled at Ramsay's comment but replied to Sansa instead, "Ah, he doesn't like it. That means it's perfect."

Sansa sighed at the two men, "It only has the one door and there isn't too much servant traffic on this side of the keep, meaning it will be less likely that we will be spotted entering or leaving. Since the place was recently used only for storage, would-be assassins will likely not even bother searching this area for their target."

She cut off her assessment there but Ramsay got the distinct impression that there was something she was leaving unsaid, so he voiced the concern, "What aren't you mentioning?"

Sansa turned a nervous smile his way, "Well... I suppose it wouldn't hurt to tell you, but the other reason we did this was to flush out any spies."
Ramsay nodded sagely, "I see; you only told this location to a few select persons and are waiting to see if I am attacked here, narrowing down the spy pool…” he frowned deeply, "but that would mean you are banking on another attack to my person…” he sighed, "I suppose I am not a high value asset so no huge loss there…”

Despite himself and his desire not to let his emotion show in what he was saying, Ramsay could hear his bitter disappointment in his own voice. Why would he have expected that Sansa would work to protect him? The way his stomach churned he wondered how unrealistic his perception of his relationship with Sansa had become…

He thought he might detect the slightest hint of a smile that never left Sansa's eyes, "Well… the baited trap is meant to be twofold; we don't just want to narrow the spy pool."

Eroc interjected, "You want to catch the next assassin. For interrogation."

Sansa nodded, "Exactly."
Chapter Thirteen

Hook, Line, and Sinker

Ramsay had offered objection to being used as live bait, even if a bit half-heartedly, but as expected Sansa was uninterested in hearing it, downright ignoring him to continue discussing the details of her plans with Eroc. Once she had told him everything, though, Ramsay finally realized that he had never been put in danger with her plan.

Knowing that put him at considerable ease, even though Sansa did warn that it remained possible that his would-be killers might still find a way around her defenses to Ramsay, making Eroc the last line of defense. As much as Ramsay hated Eroc, he had no doubts that the wildling would guard him efficiently; he was tirelessly vigilant.

Thusly reassured he was then told that he would have to remain secluded, holed away from everyone and everything in the room she had designated as his new hiding spot. Sansa wouldn't be able to visit him until the matter was resolved without risking a follower trailing her there, and she couldn't hole herself away as well.

Ramsay found this disappointing, and when the predictable question to himself of 'why?' cropped up, he told himself that it was most likely because the boredom would be far more complete with only stoic Eroc to talk to and generally keep him company. The giant was a man of few words, and those words to Ramsay were typically 'Fuck off'.

As expected, the coming days passed exceedingly slowly, and Ramsay soon began to resent the isolation which he discovered to be even more pressing than his previous imprisonments. Sansa had arranged for several weeks of food stuffs and barrels of water to be in the room before Ramsay had even been moved there.

In addition to this, the door had to remain shut at all times and no light source greater than a candle was lit to break the pall of darkness that fell over such a windowless room. On that note, a windowless room such as the one he now dwelled in permeated the atmosphere with a sense of claustrophobic, cramped closeness.

There was nothing to do to break the stillness of the place and time stretched and became increasingly intangible within the four walls of the new cell he found himself in. To make it all worse, Eroc showed none of the signs of distress that weighed so heavily on Ramsay, merely watching the other man as he paced and complained.

It would help if the big man felt at least a little uncomfortable given his own stress over the circumstances, reasoned Ramsay, but the fact that he only remained standing in a state of relaxed readiness as he always did strained Ramsay even further. He felt like perhaps the reason was that Eroc was amused enough by Ramsay's obvious distress.

In any case, Eroc always responded to Ramsay's incessant string of complaints concerning the nature
of their isolation by telling Ramsay to 'Shut up' or informing him that 'I don't care'. He always made these simple statements in a tone of voice that suggested he couldn't care less that they spent days in a dark room with no sunlight.

The man was a monster, Ramsay was convinced. And that was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Dealing with such a monstrous roommate would be bad enough, but the boredom alone felt like it would crush him beneath its weight. Ramsay had never realized how important it was that he be doing... something.

"I can't just stay down here indefinitely... this plan isn't flawless; someone could have seen Sansa escort us down here..."

Eroc nodded, seeming rather unconcerned about the mortal threat to their lives, "It is a possibility. Anyone she had sent in her stead could have been seen just as well, though."

Ramsay nodded soberly, "Yes... and entrusting the matter to another would have only increased the risk of leaking the details of her trap if it turned out they were untrustworthy. Obviously, we had to be shown the way somehow..." he sighed, "Then there is the risk that our hidden nemesis might be smart enough to tear the keep apart looking for us."

His brooding companion shook his bearded head in the negative, "Even a quiet search of that scale would be noticeable. No reason for servants or anyone for that matter scouring every old storage room. Your mistress has this thought out well enough."

The smaller man blanched at the title; Ramsay still did not think of Sansa as his 'Mistress', though he supposed the way she commanded him it wasn't a stretch to say so. Suddenly annoyed by the prospect in addition to the long boring interment in what he could almost label as solitary confinement due to Eroc's general level of unhelpfulness, he snapped, "Well I still have reservations about this idea; I think far more guards would be a better solution."

The big warrior glared at Ramsay, "Yes, it makes sense that you would think that more men would be sufficient to solve your problems. You had more men than Jon Snow, and thought yourself unbeatable to such a degree that you slaughtered many of your own men just to make a point and win your war with style."

Ramsay shifted uncomfortably at the mention of his failed military tactics, and Eroc went on despite the look of aggravation that covered the other man's face as he pointedly turned away from the bigger man, showing him his back, "You above all should know that numbers aren't everything. We Free People have outnumbered your kin for generations..."

Eroc seemed especially sore at the mention of this, and a foul mood fell over his face, "...but we were held back from leaving the frozen reaches with death on our heels by one wall and a mere handful of unseasoned warriors. I'd rather fight our foe in the open, likely far more than your cowardly hide does, but sometimes it isn't the smartest move."

The red-bearded wildling picked at his teeth absently now, all of the malice having faded from his face as if it had never been there. Ramsay let out a breath slowly, not wanting to advertise that Eroc had been making him very nervous. Eroc continued, "Doubt the head of this snake is going to show itself at all, less so against any kind of force."

Ramsay frowned, his tone bordering on patronizing, "Yes well if this foe is as funded as I believe and as clever as you believe, simply capturing an agent of theirs will likely yield nothing."

He paused when he noticed that Eroc was staring at him intently. The warrior gestured at him,
"Explain."

Running a hand through his dark, wavy hair Ramsay complied, "They will likely be outfitted with the means to avoid torture."

Eroc raised a brow, "What… like poison?"

Ramsay nodded, "Perhaps… or they could have been a fanatic or soft-headed individual. Perhaps an agent who was fed only lies to ensure that nothing but misinformation came from their capture."

The big man frowned, "You know, the more I learn of your people's ways, the less I like you southerners."

Eroc scratched at his bushy beard, "What exactly would cause a man to take the cowardly way out when it would cost him his own life?"

Ramsay shrugged, "Could be some foolish sense of honor or duty, or perhaps even more likely they would need to avoid the cost of living with failure."

The big man shook his head, "Living with failure is how we learn… you don't learn anything from poisoning yourself…"

The smaller man nodded, "True, but I'm talking less about direct consequences of failure; the people who hired them might target their families should they fail, that sort of thing. Why I've always said families are a weak link."

The warrior only grimaced in response to this, "Cowardly in the extreme; and yet your people call us 'barbarians'."

Ramsay scoffed, "Well, your people have a long history of attacking fringe settlements and murdering anyone the south has sent to study your culture."

Eroc nodded, shrugging, "Alright, so a lot of that has happened. There are tribes from the north that eat people too, but you must understand that we grew this way because the rest of the world shunned us."

Ramsay didn't care one whit for the plight of the wildlings, but he was happy that he had finally drawn Eroc into something resembling a decent conversation, so he continued the dull discourse of his savage people, "You lot can't really expect everyone south of you to take the blame for your barbarism, can you?"

The other man responded by giving Ramsay a flat stare, "You people built a giant fucking wall and viciously guarded any attempt on our part to farm the lands south of it, essentially meaning that all we owned was ice and frozen fucking tundra."

The former Lord Bolton glanced away at that, his tone less aggressive, "Well… it sounds bad when you say it like that…"

He continued, "…but the only reason we ended up putting that wall up in the first place was likely to stave off endless attacks by your people, who notoriously raid settlements for food because you don't want to work the land yourselves."

The giant warrior was gazing at Ramsay with an incredulous look now, "Where the fuck are you getting this? Are all of you southerners taught that garbage as babes? I suppose it would be easier for you all to continue seeing us as savages if that was the truth of it, but the reality is that though our
tribes were isolated from the south, we were never at war."

He elaborated, "Sure, some raiding was done, but you can hardly judge everyone north of an imaginary line in the dirt as responsible for it. We weren't a threat to the rich lords who raised that wall; we were just on the wrong side of it."

Ramsay leaned back in his seat, crossing his arms over his chest, "Well then why do you think the wall was raised?"

Eroc chuckled at that; a humorless gesture, "We of the north remember what haunts that place, what it is that your ancestors would build a mighty wall to protect themselves from, why you have for generations manned that wall with your Crows. We lived there, and we faced the horror that beats on the gates as we speak."

Confusion crossed Ramsay's face and he leaned forward, "What in the world are you talking about?"

Just then the door to the room opened, causing Ramsay to fall sideways out of his chair in surprise and Eroc to rise suddenly, hand on the hilt of his sword. Ramsay quickly righted himself to see that it was Sansa that had come to visit them.

She glanced at the two and spoke, "The trap was sprung and we have taken an assassin alive. I require Ramsay to come with me to where we are holding him."

Eroc asked no questions, simply taking Ramsay by the arm and leading him along to follow Sansa. Ramsay struggled with the sheet that was still wrapped around his waist as a covering, as his fall from the chair had loosened it somewhat. He felt ridiculous for having to deal with it at all, and wished that Sansa would simply allow him to wear pants.

But that would ruin the point of the shame game she played with him, he supposed; he should probably just be glad that she wasn't objecting to his use of the bedding as improvised garment, he thought. They walked for some time in relative silence until at last Sansa stopped before a door that appeared to be one of the servant quarters rooms.

She turned to the other two for a moment, "As I mentioned before, Ramsay was supposedly being hidden in this room, so that his would-be killers would make a move on him here. A squad of soldiers lay in wait for a good while and the gambit paid off. The capture went smoothly but he is extremely resistant to our efforts to get him to talk."

Sansa opened the door and let the others in, revealing a simple servant's room in which all of the furniture had been removed except a few chairs and a table, upon which lay spread a variety of bloodied implements. In the center of the room sat a haggard-looking man tied to a wooden chair whose face was covered in bruises and cuts.

A bearded man stood up as they entered, his salt and pepper hair and slightly balding pate placing his age somewhere in the late forties or early fifties. His eyes narrowed at the sight of Ramsay as they entered, "Forgive me for questioning your judgement Lady Sansa, but why in all the realms would you bring him here?"

He was greeted with a non-committal nod from Sansa as she side-stepped the issue for the moment, "Have you learned anything new since the last time we spoke, Sir Davos?"

Davos shook his head, sighing wearily as he gave Ramsay one last wary glance before turning his full attention back to Sansa, "No, milady. I must admit; I have no real talent for this sort of thing."

Sansa nodded to this, but it was clear from her manner that she had expected this response, "And I
would be glad to relieve you of the burden. I have sought out the talents of a skilled torturer to extract the name of this agent's employer."

The knighted smuggler could only stare at Sansa in shock for a moment, his gaze skipping over to Ramsay, "You want to give sharp instruments to your prisoner?"

"He will be watched carefully by the large man standing behind me, whom has already become quite proficient in his dealings with my prisoner. If you wish, you may feel free to remain and help insure that nothing goes awry in the process."

Davos shook his grey head, "No; I respectfully decline. I've had enough of this business I think."

Sansa placed a hand on his shoulder in consolation for the heavy expression on his face, "I thank you for helping in this, and though we weren't able to get this fanatic to talk I trust it is because he knows in his heart that you never enjoyed causing him pain."

Davos glanced over at Ramsay again, "Is that why you're going to have him go at it, then? I've heard stories, back before we even came here…"

She only responded with the barest of nods, and Davos let the matter go with another heavy sigh, "Fine. I'll be seeing you later I suppose."

He left the room quickly then, apparently glad to be removed from the scenario behind him. Once Davos had exited Sansa turned to Ramsay, "So yes, you heard correctly; you are being enlisted as a torturer in order to discover who it is that is trying to kill you. I suppose the fact that your own life is on the line should be sufficient motivation to see it done?"

Ramsay had been mute this entire time, stricken by the notion that Sansa would ever ask him to do such a thing. The idea that he would be able to pursue his most beloved trade again despite being a prisoner had never crossed him as a possibility in his wildest dreams. He spread a wide grin at Sansa, "Oh, I would have done it without all of that."
Ramsay threw the pliers onto the metal tray on the table next to his victim with a sigh of bored discontent. This assassin that Sansa had handed him was as dull as they came; he had been working the man over for hours now with an array of painful tools and all he had really accomplished was to cause him to pass out a few times from the pain.

The gaunt individual in the chair was covered in his own blood and breathing raggedly; Ramsay noted almost absently that he might just expire before any real information was gleaned from him. Eroc leaned against the wall nearest the door, and had been quietly observing everything that Ramsay had done with his usual look of disinterest.

When Sansa had first left Ramsay to his work hours past and the thin man tied to the chair had at last looked him over and taken his measure, he had dared to laugh at Ramsay. He never did say why it was that he laughed; he never said anything in fact, and Ramsay might have thought him to be a mute if it wasn't for that laughter.

He hadn't mentioned why he laughed, but Ramsay could guess that it was likely the fact that his lower body was draped with what was obviously a sheet of bedding in a manner that strongly resembled wearing a skirt or dress. Ramsay had taken offense, of course, and extracted bloody vengeance on the helpless prisoner.

The bound man had not dared laugh since, merely enduring the pain inflicted in silence for the most part, occasionally crying out when Ramsay maimed him in a particularly cruel fashion, but still not a word of speech. Ramsay set his hands upon his hips, looking the would-be assassin over once again, as if trying to find a weak spot.

He was an older man, in his late forties or early fifties, with a graying pate that was swept back, likely to accommodate his rapidly receding hairline. His eyes were as brown as the hair upon his head that had not yet grayed, and a wispy white beard covered his chin and the sides of his face. That face was pocked and weathered in a manner that suggested much time spent outdoors.

His clothes were a simple fare; not ragged enough to be considered peasant wear but not tailored well enough to seem like the attire of the wealthy, either. In all his features were rather plain and nondescript, which Ramsay supposed would aid this man in being an efficient infiltrator. He had managed to get to Sansa's trap unnoticed, which certainly said something.

From what Sansa said of his capture though it didn't seem that the man was much of a fighter, though, and had only entered the room armed with a poisoned blade, which had been taken from him. Whenever Ramsay gave him breaks in the torture to reflect on the next round of pains he would simply stare at the former with an unreadable expression.

Ramsay reared back and slapped him this time, allowing his irritation to color his temperament. When he had first been tasked to torture this man for information he had approached the job with gusto, but as time had gone on he had rapidly realized what he was dealing with and now that his
victim hung to life by a thin cord he found himself exasperated.

A scoff behind him caused Ramsay to turn and regard Eroc as the big wildling spoke; "That doesn't even look like interrogation anymore. You haven't asked this blighter a question in over an hour; he's clearly getting under your skin."

Ramsay's annoyance only grew at Eroc's statement of the obvious, "The man is obviously a fanatic! I've used nearly every tool here and he still dares to mock me with his glare."

Eroc unfolded his arms from over his chest and stepped over to where Ramsay stood, looking the frail prisoner over, "He's at death's door. I don't think he's mocking you at all; he seems to me a man resigned to his fate."

Ramsay waved his hand dismissively at Eroc, "What would you actually know of such matters?" Despite his words though Ramsay rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

The big warrior grunted at him, "You think you're the only one here who's had to do this before? You would be surprised how hard it can be to suss secrets from a Crow."

He replied to Eroc's statement with a frown, glaring at the prisoner, "Well, if he is resigned, then I suppose we need to realize why he is resigned if we are to have any hope of making him value his life again."

Eroc smiled, "There you go." He turned his blue-eyed gaze to the gaunt man in the chair, stepping forward, "Why are you so ready to die, prisoner?"

Ramsay's eyebrows shot up in surprise when the man finally answered, his voice strained and course due to the pain that wracked his body, "You will never make me talk."

He had been so focused on making the prisoner tell them why he was trying to kill him and who he worked for that Ramsay hadn't considered trying a subtler approach; but then Ramsay had always been unworried as to whether his victims died from the trials he subjected them to in the past, so he had never had need.

There was Theon, of course; Ramsay had worked especially hard to cause that man to trust him just so that he could shatter his confidence, and deployed a large array of manipulations to demean and destroy the man before he had even asked a single question, but that had been because he had always intended on turning the man into Reek, and knew such a transformation would take effort.

Ramsay straightened, a bit chagrined that the oafish warrior beside him had been the one to point out that he had been applying a hammer when he needed a scalpel. He had grown too confident in his own ability to inflict pain both physical and emotional and had failed to bother with the intricacies of the whys and hows.

He took a deep breath before starting, "You still fear death; every man does… but there's something that you believe in enough that you're willing to die for it, isn't there? Maybe honor drives you… are you afraid to disappoint some lord?"

The thin man didn't respond, merely continuing to affix Ramsay with that vacant look which he now knew to be resignation.

Ramsay put his arms behind his back and interlocked his fingers as he paced back and forth, trying to tackle the tough situation of dealing with a fanatic; in the past he had always simply let the buggers bleed out, but in this case he couldn't afford to let such stonewalled logic get between himself and what he needed to learn.
"No that would be boring, and I have tortured honorable men before; desire to live and survival instinct usually prevails over some simple code of ethics. So perhaps you aren't doing this for yourself, maybe you have a family who would suffer a great deal of shame if you were to speak now, or perhaps they would even be in real danger?"

The prisoner shifted ever so slightly in his seat at Ramsay's last words, and a smile bloomed across Ramsay's face at the indication of his discovery, "Yes. Someone will hurt those you care about if you betray them here…” Ramsay frowned, then, lost in thought. After some moments, he cast an irate look at Eroc. This information still felt like a dead end.

Unless… Ramsay spread his hands wide, smiling down at the helpless prisoner, "I would like to propose a counter offer to the one that your employer offered; tell me who hired you to kill me, or we shall find your family and make them suffer so horribly that they will very much wish they had died. Do you wish to know why my family's banner is a flayed man?"

The haggard man glared at Ramsay a moment before replying, "Empty threats; you don't know who I am nor whom my family might be. You might have been a Bolton once but I know well that Sansa Stark has neutered you. Even if you posed a threat to my kin, why in the world would I tell you anything seeing as your offer is no better than the other?"

Eroc scoffed, "He's got a point. It might have done you better to offer protection, though he'll never believe you would do so now. Wasn't your father a lord; how did you become so bad at politics?"

Ramsay's jaw worked in irritation, at first at the prisoner's claims that he was a Bolton no longer and then even more so at the fact that Eroc was actively bungling his attempts.

He turned to glare at the red-headed warrior, "Are you with me or against me?"

The big man only watched him shrewdly a moment before replying, "Good question."

Ramsay made an annoyed, dismissive gesture and scratched at his chin and the stubble thereupon, trying hard to determine what he could possibly do from here.

Eroc moved closer, speaking in a lower voice, "Should I inform Sansa that you are done here?"

The smaller man's brow furrowed in agitation, "No! I can do this I'm certain; now that I've got him talking there has to be a way to make him crack. Perhaps if I can figure out who he is?"

The warrior folded his arms over his chest, giving Ramsay an exasperated look, "As if he'll tell you now."

"Maybe I can question the guards that caught him here, or ask around if anyone recognizes him; perhaps there is some evidence of his house to be gleaned…"

Eroc shook his head, "The man obviously isn't daft; he wouldn't just leave his coat of arms lying about, and if he was easily recognized he wouldn't have been chosen to kill you. Besides, you really need to reconsider this whole 'I'll torture your family' bullshit, because you know as well as I that Sansa isn't going to back it."

Ramsay blinked; in his excitement of discovery and the trill of success he had for a moment forgotten that the man strapped to a chair in the center of the room wasn't the only prisoner there. He had no real power, and Eroc was right that Sansa would likely be inclined to refuse him on any and all matters concerning other houses.

His shoulders sagged as he had to consider failure as an option once more. No matter what he did,
knowing this man's motivation got him no closer to getting him to talk; it only made clear to Ramsay that he was going to be unmovable until such a time as he died. If blood loss didn't end him then… Ramsay's eyes lit up, and he smiled at Eroc.

"I've got it. We'll get nothing from this man, but that doesn't mean he won't be useful."

Eroc shook his head, clearly not following why this fact would make Ramsay smile, so Ramsay continued, "We shall set him free in good health with a purse of coin and wish him safe travels home."

The warrior was getting it now, but his mouth turned down in skepticism, "He won't go home."

Ramsay nodded, "No, but that isn't the plan anymore. Whomever sent him has a mole in the keep I'm certain of it; when they learn of his release his employer will know."

The big man appeared angry at this, "What, you couldn't get him to talk, so you're out to murder his family as some sort of petty revenge?"

Ramsay shrugged, "I could care less what happens to the murderous fuck's kin, but no, I mean to learn from Sansa's maneuver and apply it in my own way."

*** ... ***

From the view of the window of Sansa's chambers Ramsay observed the guards escorting the attempted assassin out of the keep. As instructed they gave the man a hefty purse filled with coin and instructed him to march away. The haggard prisoner looked confused at first, and then decried the instruction, trying to hand the money back to the soldiers.

"N-no, wait… you can't let me go! You can't! They'll kill my family… they will kill my kin. Please I wish to die for my crimes!"

Ramsay raised an eyebrow at the display; he hadn't expected the man to react quite so passionately, but this particular event had been accounted for.

He could hear Sansa behind him, where she watched surrounded by several servants that were acting as runners, "He didn't simply leave. Tell the group assigned to follow him to hold; I don't believe he will be assaulted personally now and following him in this weather could throw our plan."

Ramsay turned to address Sansa, "And if they do decide to accost him directly we could fail here."

Sansa shook her head, "Whoever is behind this has gone to great lengths to remain invisible; with that outburst I'm fairly certain they might even be aware that this is a trap. We'll send a group out under the pretense of a hunting party later to make sure our enemy doesn't go for the assassin for information."

The former Bolton glanced back out of the window; the haggard man was being pushed out of the gate and beaten by the guards. Eventually his resolve wavered and he began to run, though Ramsay couldn't fathom where the man might think he can go that would be safe.

Ramsay pursed his lips, "I still think it possible that he might abandon reason and run straight back to his family in his blind state of panic."

"Even were he to do so at best we could only follow him. In his agitated state he could well spot the tail we put to him, especially if he were to do something so risky. I couldn't blame the man if he ran to save his family, though." Sansa approached and cast a sideways glance at Ramsay, "Some of us
give a damn if our relatives are murdered."

That jab struck perhaps closer to home than Sansa realized. Killing his own father had not brought Ramsay any particular joy that such an action usually implied, despite what Sansa might think of him. He had always wanted Roose to accept him, and murdering the Bolton lord had been a reaction to being replaced in a permanent fashion.

Even as he had driven the knife home Ramsay had felt a pang in his heart; he had after all personally seen to it that Roose would never shower the accolades upon him that he had always dreamed of receiving as a child. With that one action he had destroyed an entire lifetime of childish hopes and wishes for acceptance.

She continued, "All of that being beside the point; trailing him would likely prove too late, as he is on foot and news can travel so much faster…"

Ramsay glanced over at her, then looked to the door. The keep was being watched carefully by persons that Sansa trusted dearly; if a rider departed a servant would arrive telling them who the rider was and what direction they were headed, so that they might ascertain if such a rider was or wasn't working for their hidden enemy.

No such servant appeared, though, and Ramsay started to worry that his plan might not work. Perhaps giving the assassin money had been too much; had he overplayed his hand? Surely if the mole in the keep was to act they would have done so by now; perhaps they would play to a cool head and have reasoned that the assassin gave Sansa nothing.

If they were confident in this there would be no need to act, as they could always carry out their threats against the man's family at a later date. This entire thing hinged on worrying whoever it was enough to have them either seek the failed assassin for questioning or to apprehend his family, so that he could be convinced to confess what he had given up later.

More time passed and Ramsay let out a nervous sigh; they seemed to have been outmaneuvered by a person who trusted in their ability to inspire loyalty through fear. He opened his mouth at last to air this grim news and at that moment a young man entered the room, speaking quickly, "Lady Sansa we have intercepted a message!"

***…***

Petyr Baelish halted as several soldiers moved to block his advance through the courtyard of Winterfell keep. Lord Commander of the Night's Watch and recently dubbed 'King of the North' Jon Snow moved to approach him. Petyr glanced from one armed man to the next, "I'll assume that you aren't interesting in simply talking."

Jon quietly stepped up to be closer to Petyr than the others, and Petyr gave him his best disarming smile, "I understand that you might have heard of my intentions for your sister, but I assure you that they are good intentions, and I remind you that bringing force to bear on the guardian of the Prince of the Vale could prove a poor judgement call…"

The black-clad Crow only shook his head at this guess before replying, "Lord Petyr Baelish, I place you under arrest for attempted murder on our prisoner and seeking to sow discord and unrest among my subjects."

The smile faded from Petyr's face and he steepled his hands in front of himself before answering, "Even if you had proof of such a thing…"
He glanced around at the men surrounding him, giving Jon a smile that affected only one side of his mouth, "...you're talking about the Bolton bastard that murdered your kin; why do you care if he finally dies for his crimes?"

Jon could tell that between Petyr's comment on his status within the Vale and his reasoning concerning Ramsay that his soldiers were becoming restless, so he moved to the point, which he likely would have done anyways, "We intercepted a message that you attempted to send in secret by raven to a group of men under your employ."

Petyr had stiffened now and was moving to reply but Jon held up his hand, motioning for him to save his words, "The words in the message were damning, but obviously you didn't sign it. Fortunately, the boy you sent to deliver the message to the raven was under no such duress as your assassin, and he has not only turned on you but offered up the names of others who will."

Realizing that the charade was over Petyr spoke plainly, "So what. As I said I only moved to see to the task that you have avoided. I know not why you let Sansa keep him on as you do but someone had to do something."

Jon was studying the avid expression on Petyr's usually calm face, "I don't know why you care so much, but my brother Rob was clear on this matter I think; we don't execute prisoners without permission from the lord holding them here in the north. Take him away."
New Beginnings

Chapter Fifteen

When Ramsay learned that Petyr Baelish had been imprisoned he gave Sansa a surprised look, "The very man who brought you to wed me in the first place? Why in this world would he seek to have me killed?" He thought on it for a few moments, "He did come to this place to defend you; perhaps that and this are linked; maybe he feels guilty for our union and seeks to correct it…?"

Ramsay knew that was wrong even before he uttered it, before Sansa shook her head in the negative. From what he knew about the man's reputation, penitent did not seem to flow at all with his nature. Sansa enlightened him, "He wants me to himself, so I must assume that he found out that I was keeping you in my rooms…"

He blinked, "Jealousy? The man tried to have me snuffed out simply because I am here?" He thought on this and it made sense if Sansa was correct about Petyr wanting her. Seeing as how privately she kept Ramsay from everyone else in the keep, Petyr must have been outraged that he didn't know what Sansa's intentions were for Ramsay.

Killing him would have been the most logical solution for a man unafraid to take that route. Ramsay had to give Petyr credit for knowing what he wanted and how to deal with competition. Still, it was harder to appreciate such things when one was in danger of having a knife placed between his ribs. He let out a slow breath; he could finally breathe easier.

Sansa was watching him as he thought deeply, running his hands through his thick, dark hair, "The fact that Petyr was jealous of you has set me to thinking on how I am interacting with you."

He glanced up, unsure why a nervous thrill ran down his spine as he worked to fight past a lump in his throat to speak, "In what way?"

She placed her hands behind her back and gave him a level stare, maintaining a dedicated air of neutrality that Ramsay could not see through, either in her manner or her tone of voice, "Well, you are still definitely a prisoner to me within these walls, but perhaps I need to turn my mind to how I will present you in the future."

Ramsay squinted, wishing that she would stop beating around the bush and just say what it was that she was planning, "And what exactly does that mean?"

Sansa only replied by giving him a sly smile and glancing him over as if taking his apparel in for the first time, "Well, for starters, why don't you ditch the sheet and put on some pants."

***...***

Ramsay felt entirely uncomfortable even though he wore clothes now. He had been taken to meal with Sansa just as he had in the past, except instead of feeling a flush of shame from being relegated
to the servant’s table, now he felt a surge of nervousness because Sansa had brazenly seated him to her left at the main table.

As in, where the nobles sat. The nobles who had gone stiff when she had seated him and now glared at him steadily as he stared down at his plate, feeling even more out of place at the lord's table than he had sitting with the help, whom had mostly just avoided him. They definitely hadn't sat there staring daggers at him at least.

There were quite a few coughs and indignant harrumphs from around the room as he lowered himself into his seat, and he had noted before he'd lowered his gaze that even Jon Snow was staring at him from his seat at the head of the table. That man had given his sister a surprised look and now seemed quite somber due to the shift in mood in general.

Thankfully, Jon did not have all of the lords of the north in attendance, of course; most had either ridden home to personally manage family affairs or were simply not in attendance, perhaps part of the reason that Sansa had selected this particular evening to bring Ramsay along with her when she had decided to dine with the other lords.

She was the sole remaining Stark by blood, title, and presence and technically that meant that everything within Winterfell belonged to her, and all the technicalities of how that House was run was hers to decide. So it was that no one could object to her decision to so openly put Ramsay before them, despite Jon's official title.

He could still challenge her though, Ramsay supposed, though it would set both of them back politically by arguing in public over a prisoner. Subjects should certainly never see the family members of the ruling House bicker over any matter as it weakened public opinion on the ability of said House to retain unity in trying times.

Sansa had chosen her timing well then in instituting Ramsay back into society, though Ramsay was uncertain exactly what capacity she expected him to serve House Stark, since she hadn't deigned to tell him what it was that she planned, only that she had demanded that he ready himself for dinner. He didn't know his seating until she sat him.

This way she was certain to get Ramsay in without having to worry about Jon contesting the issue, at least immediately; Ramsay had no doubts that he would be pursuing the matter after this particular scandal had passed. For now though Ramsay did what he could not to stir the hot waters quietly waiting for the food.

His mouth watered at the smell, and his stomach growled at the sight of the delicious foods that came from the kitchens upon platters carried by servants. The food was not dissimilar to what Sansa had been feeding him within the confines of her quarters, but it was more freshly made, and the aroma of it keenly filled the air.

Before he could dig in though one of the nobles across from him, a thin older man with a wispy mustache and long white hair that curled about his neck lost his patience slamming his fist upon the table, "Is no one else going to address the dragon in the room? Am I to be made to eat across from this swine at this table?"

A grumble of assenting voices followed but was equally matched with scornful looks and comments by those that felt this noble's reaction was in poor form. Jon glanced at Sansa, his expression locked ever in a look of being in over his head, a fawn among wolves when dealing in politics. There was a bit of accusation there perhaps, but she did not respond to it.

Jon let out a long heavy sigh and then affixed the noble who had spoken with a stern look, "Please
remember that Lady Sansa is the presiding Stark of this keep, and that she can bring whomever she pleases to sit at her table."

This only caused more grumbling from those present, as voices rose to challenge or agree.

The thin fellow nodded deference to Jon but argued nonetheless, "I understand this, Jon Snow, but I think I speak for many of us here in wonder why it is that this rabid mutt is allowed to dine as if he were one of us. It was bad enough that he was allowed to wander the halls before, but this has gone entirely too far; is he a prisoner or not?"

A fair number of faces nodded to this sentiment; these nobles had almost all been wondering the same thing, and were relieved that someone had the gall to state it, even if doing so might seem insubordinate. Sansa set down the silverware that she had initially picked up to begin eating with, affixing the nobleman who spoke with an even stare.

"Are you Lords aware of what transpired in this keep after my brother Rob Stark was brutally murdered at the Red Wedding?"

This was met with a series of frowns and a great deal of head shaking for the most part; while aware that the Boltons had claimed the keep, few knew more than this.

She continued, "Petyr Baelish, whom you all now know to be a backstabbing, manipulative traitor, married me to the Bolton family in yet another bid for his own agendas."

Another nobleman down the table raised his hand politely, "Yes milady but on your first day of taking Ramsay as prisoner, you renounced his family name."

Sansa nodded, "Indeed I did; I recognized no authority concerning the edicts of Tomin Lannister, himself a bastard, as it related to Ramsay being given a family title, but regardless of whether I married him a Bolton or a bastard, we were still married."

Ramsay's eyes widened at this line of thought and there were gasps among those assembled as nobles present caught on to where she was headed with this reasoning.

The noble across from them stiffened further, his mouth becoming a tight line at the notion she presented. It was obvious he knew her meaning, but she spelled it out anyways, making sure that all knew her stance without doubt, "We are still betrothed, and since he was a bastard when we married, he instead took my family name."

Ramsay sat in a state of shock, glancing over to see that Jon's hands were tightening into fists upon the table. Despite his support for his sister, even he was having trouble swallowing what it was that she was saying. Ramsay didn't know what it was that Sansa had brought him here for, but he never thought it would be to name him 'Ramsay Stark'.

She must have known that this conversation would happen, he realized. Bringing him to the table had just been a clever manner of broaching the subject subtly. Jon had already supported her decision thus far now, so he couldn't risk argument lest he seem indecisive, which is a poor quality for a king, though Ramsay could see that he was just as upset as many others present.

After several long moments of awkward silence had passed and it became clear that Jon was not going to openly object Sansa's statement the noble that had led the argument against Ramsay set his utensils down and stood, glaring across the table at Ramsay, "Well, I suggest then that you annul your marriage by having him executed for his many crimes."

Sansa stood as well at the blatant gesture of disrespect to the Stark table, glaring at the noble just as
hard as he glared at her declared husband, "I was very clear when I first interred Ramsay into this keep as to my intentions regarding him and the reasoning behind them. He was and is a prisoner of this House and your king."

The noble glanced back at her again, some of his resolve waning as he glanced over to Jon, whom had leaned back into his chair to watch the debate, his finger idly touching his lip thoughtfully but with no indication that he meant to interject in any way to weigh in on the situation discussed. At last the noble snorted irritably.

"Very well; we can all agree that your House suffered more than any other by the hands of this madman, but please keep in mind that this does not refute the harm he has done to others. Every day I hear stories of other atrocities coming to light that this psychopath is responsible for, including the rape and murder of women in the woods and even the slaughter of a helpless baby…"

A murmur swept through the room that let Ramsay know that tales of his more secretive acts with Reek and less hidden, more recent murder of his newly born baby brother had indeed gotten around, since none of the faces present looked at all shocked to hear the news. Some of them even shook their heads, convinced of the truth of it.

Ramsay's jaw clenched and he stared down at the table in front of himself. He didn't dare to look up at Sansa now, afraid of what her reaction to hearing these crimes so directly might be. More than this, his heart hammered in his chest for a simple reason; why in the world did it seem so important to him that she cared to protect him? Was he really such a coward?

To his surprise, she continued to defend him, her voice ringing through the room in its usual tone of clarity and authority, "I am well aware that Ramsay is a criminal charged with many heinous crimes. I stated publicly that one of the reasons he is allowed to live is so that he may continue to atone for his wrongs. I did not bring him here to reintroduce him to court."

Her eyes scanned the room, as if to make sure that she had everyone's attention before she spoke again, which she did, "I have only pointed out that he is still husband to me by the laws of the land, but I fully intend to treat him more like a ward than nobility. He is a liability yes, but one which I have shouldered personally, so I ask the court to trust me."

Another rumble of low voices caught in isolated conversations, and the thin noble at last spread his hands in defeat, seating himself respectfully once more with a look of resignation plastered to his face, "Very well milady, though I sincerely doubt that I speak only for myself in saying perhaps you lavish too much on one whom is to us now a murderous sycophant."

Sansa nodded to him as she also resumed her seat, "Your reluctance has been duly noted, but I assure you that the only reason he sits here is so that I may more closely and personally monitor his behavior. Should he ever be so foolish so as to abuse his fortunate place at this table, you should be happy to know you will only be able to observe his swift remand more closely."

Ramsay shrank physically into his seat, chagrined that Sansa and the others spoke so openly about him and his fate while he himself felt compelled to remain silent. It wasn't that he didn't want to chime in; no, it was that he was savvy enough to realize that doing so would likely do far more harm than good, plus this way he observed Sansa's opinion of him.

He wasn't at all certain why it was that he valued Sansa's opinion, or cared what she might think of him beyond perhaps how it affected his own rate of survival, but Ramsay was past ignoring that part of himself that did in fact care, perhaps even deeply. He could not deny that he had started worrying over her…
He frowned miserably when Sansa made it clear that he was not being reinstated into nobility by merit of his new Stark name, and hated that she used the word 'ward', which ironically now placed him very much in the same position under Sansa that Theon Greyjoy had been under when he had been ward of the previous Stark lord of Winterfell, Ned Stark.

A hand laid itself lightly upon his arm and stirred Ramsay from his deep thoughts. Sansa was looking at him when his blue eyes found the owner of that hand, "You are just pushing food around upon your plate; eat your fill if you will so that we do not tarry here overly long; we still have a long evening ahead of us and I would be on our way."

Ramsay began eating, trying his best not to show how perturbed he was any longer, and also attempting not to look around at the nobles who shared the table with him. He could practically feel their eyes boring into him as he continued the simple act. He couldn't help but dwell on the 'remand' that Sansa had mentioned, which put him in a foul mood.

It made him feel like even her request that he finish his food might be a command with consequences should he dare to question it, at least it felt that way under the scrutiny of so many enemies in his highly embarrassed state. He had to wonder if Sansa would deign to go so far as to actually spank him in front of all present…

He shuddered at the thought; a truly terrible notion. True, she had publicly humiliated him from the very first of his imprisonment within Winterfell, but that made the idea of having to repeat that same experience in front of these men, some of whom had not been present the first time she did it, by no means any more appealing.

Ramsay sped up his eating, scarfing down the last of his food without really bothering with the luxury of tasting it; he was even less interested in still being here than Sansa was now. Once finished Sansa bid those at the table good evening, giving Jon the slightest nod of her head before rising from the table and bidding Ramsay to follow.

He hurried along, doing his best to not look annoyed that she called him along after her as if he were a lapdog. She took him with her as she toured the keep, holding numerous small meetings with various members of the house, a few other nobles, and a few select servants. The tasks she was seeing to were mundane, but Ramsay was glad for the stretch.

It was nice to have access readily to so much fresh air. Despite still being within the keep’s walls, Ramsay was overjoyed to be out of the cramped enclosure of four walled rooms, at least. It was amazing really how easy it was to take such a small thing as the tiniest freedoms for granted. He hung back mostly, ignoring most of what was said.

There wasn't really anything of import to listen to, after all; Sansa mostly discussed import or export of various foodstuffs, preparations for winter and a host of other less than exciting banality that came with being an overseer of such a large community plus a garrison or three of various soldiers. Mostly the people she saw ignored him too.

Mostly, anyways, though Ramsay noted on several instances that he was being spied from his position behind Sansa, and he took an inordinate amount of pleasure in staring back, perhaps even smiling at the more awkward servants. He did so enjoy it when their expressions betrayed not just curiosity but also a bit of apprehension.

After he had done this a few times, though, Sansa seemed to catch on that he was intentionally causing unease in her more skittish servants and commanded him to apologize to the young tanner's apprentice that he had most recently been terrorizing with a look that he liked to imagine said 'I'm going to find you later while you're sleeping'.
Flushing with humiliation, Ramsay had coughed and stammered out an awkward apology as he stared at the muddy ground below his feet. Sansa seemed satisfied with this act, fortunately, and went about her business as usual, while Ramsay for his part made no more attempts whatsoever to befuddle or scare her subjects.

Once all was said and done, Sansa gave Ramsay one last scolding for his misbehavior, telling him in a voice that he felt was far too loud and carried through the cold air too well that she was disappointed in him and that he was lucky she hadn't decided to spank him right there and then. This admonition was interrupted by Jon, who approached clearing his throat, "A word?"

Ramsay stood aside as the other two began their conversation, which he quickly discovered was to be about him. Not at all surprising, really, but no less uncomfortable. Jon wore a frown upon his face that spoke of all of the roiling questions and opinions that he had kept locked away behind a benign expression when they had been at dinner.

Mostly though Ramsay would guess that anger was the predominant expression, as well as perhaps surprise and confusion, "What was all of that back there…? You know as well as I and every other member of every great House of the north that annulling your marriage to Ramsay isn't even trivial in difficulty…"

Sansa's hands folded in front of her and her back straightened as she turned to face Jon with a neutral face. She did not reply but instead waited until he had said what he came to say in full. Jon continued, "He was married to you by Bolton decree backed by the approval of a king we do not and never have recognized."

Jon let loose an exasperated noise as he made a broad gesture of defeat at Sansa's apparent lack of care for the issue, "Why did you even marry him to begin with? I had assumed that you were still caught up in the back end of what happened in King's Landing; but when you claim now that you wish to retain your partnership…"

He shook his head, his eyes flitting around, giving him the look of a man who was searching for some hidden answer or attempting to find a clue to a difficult puzzle, "…I just don't know now what it is you are doing." He shook a finger at her with one gloved hand, "Also, don't think that I don't know that you announced that the way you did on purpose."

The King in the North looked very frustrated; something that might have amused Ramsay if not for the fact that said frustration could currently end up getting him killed. He loved seeing Jon at wit's end, but not when it pertained to Ramsay's survival. Ramsay tensed up, getting the feeling that this all might still end with a headsman's block.

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The King in the North looked very frustrated; something that might have amused Ramsay if not for the fact that said frustration could currently end up getting him killed. He loved seeing Jon at wit's end, but not when it pertained to Ramsay's survival. Ramsay tensed up, getting the feeling that this all might still end with a headsman's block.

The black-clad king went on, "I don't appreciate that you undermined me like that; I believe you knew that I would object to this and maneuvered to put me in my own way."

Sansa finally nodded now at this last accusation, "I admit that I did just that, but I assure you it is only because I couldn't trust you to see things my way…"

Leather creaked as Jon's hands balled into tight fists at his sides, and his jaw worked with latent anger. It was clear that Sansa had been about to say something else, but when she saw the hurt furious expression on his face she quieted, her gaze turning downward in obvious guilt for her decision. Jon waited some long moments to speak.

When he finally did his voice was low, almost a whisper, "We have to trust each other if we are going to survive; father always told us that. You didn't trust me; you worked around me and put us at odds with each other rather than trusting me. I'm going to trust you though, if only because we have
He pointed a gloved hand at Ramsay, "I'm going to trust that you can keep him in line, and that he
doesn't bring even more harm down on what little is left of our family. I cannot promise that I will
not end his life if I even suspect him of treachery, so I suggest that he is kept impeachable in his
manner." He turned his gaze to Ramsay, "You had best behave."
Getting One’s House in Order

Chapter Sixteen

Getting One's House in Order

The next day found Ramsay standing in the audience hall listening to the affairs of court such as they were for the north. Sansa insisted that he stand to the back of her despite the frowns and unspoken objections that passed over the faces of many of those gathered. One of the first things that Ramsay noticed was that Jon had summoned almost everyone.

Nearly every official of even somewhat high standing was present, including representatives for most of the Houses if not the actual heads of each House themselves. They all watched in rapt attention as Jon quietly walked to the center of the room and read a scroll to them all sent to him by crow from Daenerys Stormborn.

Apparently, the message within stated that the foreign empress had returned to Westeros to seize the crown lost by her father the Mad King, and that the impudent bitch actually expected the newly crowned King of the North to travel himself down to Dragon's Reach where her forces had recently landed and bend his knee in submission.

Ramsay couldn't help but chuckle at the balls on that woman, which of course drew quite a few ugly looks from those assembled, his voice carrying very well in the respectful hush that had fallen to allow Jon room to read the message. Jon turned to glare at Ramsay and the latter sheepishly ducked his head, staring at his feet with his hands passively behind his back.

Fortunately for Ramsay other voices quickly chimed in, eager to contest the very thought of their king doing something so incredibly stupid. Jon barked out a command for silence to hush the dissenting voices and explained in a calm but loud voice how important it was that they win the coming war against the Night King and his legion of undead soldiers.

The room grew somber as he reminded all present that they simply didn't have the men to hold the north alone, even if it hadn't been for all the recent warring they still didn't have a force ready to combat a foe who could raise the fallen to add to his ranks. Also, he mentioned that the mountain Daenerys sat upon was made of something called dragonglass.

Apparently, this ebony stone would actually kill the risen dead where normal steel weapons would fail. The only other route to destroying such unholy abominations was listed as being fire, which he then reminded everyone that Daenerys had in triplicate with her three fully grown dragons. Even one of the beasts could wreak havoc on the Night King's forces.

Objections arose, of course; after all, Jon's own family had suffered extensively at the hands of the Mad King in a series of events that had led to the rebellion against that monarch's rule, and many were quick to judge the daughter by the actions of the father. Not only this, but she had brought a horde of foreign invaders with her, that alone a damning action.

As far as many in the room were concerned, she was a heathen witch who wished to burn her way
across Westeros, leaving a trail of cinders akin to what her father had attempted with his dying breath. Jon had to shout to get the room calm again, and Ramsay was surprised to see Sansa stand to object against her brother with the others.

Ramsay smiled; seeing Sansa turn on Jon in any way caused him pleasure in having the opportunity to see a bit of chaos introduced to the bastard king's life. Being that she was the only blooded Stark still alive to everyone's knowledge, her voice also carried more weight than the others, and her objections weighed on Jon, who looked exhausted already with politics.

She spoke of Targaryen treachery and madness much as the others had begun to rumble around her, but being a direct descendent of the Stark lord whom had been murdered by the Mad King gave her opinion of the damage caused more worth. She emphasized she thought this a trap, aligning with the others in the room, making it clear that only Jon thought this wise.

Ramsay couldn't help but agree; Jon was being unreasonably stupid despite the dangers he spoke of; only a madman would put himself willingly into enemy hands on the hope of appealing to their better nature. Jon persisted, though, making it clear that he was going and that was that. When Sansa told him that he needed to be with his people he informed her that they would have her.

Sansa seemed surprised by the transfer of power but Ramsay was less shocked; there was really no one else for Jon to rightfully hand power to upon his absence after all. He was smiling even wider now; he very much enjoyed that Jon was likely off to get himself killed doing something pointlessly stupid while his wife attained supremacy over Winterfell.

Sure, the way that she constantly downplayed his position took a bit of the wind out of that sail, but he was in some way elevated by this he thought. Perhaps it was all in his mind, but Ramsay could not help but dream now of the day when he rightfully ascended to his place as master of Winterfell beside Sansa, and once more Warden of the North…

He snapped out of his reverie when Sansa finally turned to address him as the meeting began to disperse; Jon had not given room for anyone to even speak in contest of his final decision. He had simply walked out of the room, leaving the rest to do as they will. When it was clear that Sansa had nothing further, a murmur filled the room, and some began to file out.

Ramsay jumped when Sansa broke his train of thought and shattered his daydreams by grabbing his arm and whispering at him harshly; "Do not think that I don't know that you were not minding your manners as you stood behind me there just because my back was turned." Ramsay opened his mouth to respond but she spoke over him, "I saw those before me distracted by you several times."

"I was simply smiling!" he said in his defense, a little appalled that she was being so aggressive when he himself had said nothing during the meeting.

Sansa shook her head, "That was completely unacceptable during that meeting; there was no matter worth smiling over. Don't pretend you don't know the first thing of decorum in court."

Ramsay was just about to reply to this statement when Sansa reinforced the seriousness of her displeasure by giving him a swift and quite public swat on the backside. He jumped, snapping his mouth shut and feeling his face begin to burn in open shame. Sansa gave him a steely look and spoke slowly, "Don't do it again."

They were standing close together, and though the sound of that physical admonition had been of the loudest sort to Ramsay's ears, he could only hope that the dispersing throng hadn't been drawn to the noise. The room was filled with the growing sound of many voices speaking, so he could only hope that drowned out the noise of his quick rebuttal.
He simply nodded quickly, not wanting to add any more dialogue to the scene that Sansa had started over his smiling at Jon's expense. The reproach faded from her eyes and she pointed, "Come, we have a lot of work to do in finding out all of the details I'll need to know in order to properly run Winterfell, never mind prepare her for the coming winter."

The hours that followed this entailed a great deal of boring interactions with yet more uninteresting laymen. Ramsay had never enjoyed taking part in such meetings, and was fairly certain that his own father had delegated such tedious conversations to someone of lesser rank within the House. Sansa would hear none of his suggestions though.

"It's best to speak to the smallfolk personally, especially when morale is so very low; it helps to build a relationship of trust between a lord and his servants. At least that is what my father has told me. At the time I was too young to understand exactly what he meant, but I see here in this keep many faces that carefully watch to see if we give a damn for their welfare."

Ramsay scoffed at her words, "It isn't a lord's concern whether or not the peasants are happy; their fucking peasants, they'll always find something new to gripe about while you scramble around trying to please them. Also, from what I've heard of the affair concerning your father I couldn't be troubled with whatever 'advice' such a naïve man might have provided you."

Sansa whirled on Ramsay, her eyes flashing with a definitive look of insulted indignation. She dismissed the farmer they had been speaking with and turned back to Ramsay with a slow sigh that spoke of her effort in remaining calm. Ramsay had grown tense, even stepping back when she had first shot him that look of disdain.

His hands were clasped together now as he worried one against the other in an obvious sign of apprehension as he waited to see what she would say, and ultimately how much trouble his bold statement had gotten him into. He opened his mouth to speak but then closed it again; she looked furious and any attempt to explain his reasoning might make things worse.

"Ramsay, I know you have a lot to learn about how we Starks do things, and that you never knew my father, but I assure you that he was not naïve. He was honorable, and even more than that he was a good man. In the end he gave up even his honor to protect his family, and it cost him his life. That did not make him a fool; it made him extremely brave."

Her eyes had become a bit wet Ramsay thought, but before he could see if she might be on the verge of tears she turned to continue calmly walking along the path to the next task speaking as she did so, "Some say he was a fool for trusting the wrong people, but I would never fault a person for extending trust; the fault always lies with the betrayer of that trust."

When she turned to look at him again there was no sign of tears, but instead a hardness in her gaze that cut to the center of him, "My father was murdered by snakes who enjoyed playing games with the lives of others, and even if I am denied the opportunity to repay them for what they've done, I am certain they can't escape their own webs."

She paused for a long moment then on that old beaten dirt path, Ramsay staring at her, wondering what it might be that had deterred her from her usual persistence in seeing to the day's scheduled meetings in a timely fashion. At last, she started moving again along their route, but the thoughtful look never passed as if she were suddenly pondering many things.

Ramsay could only hope none of those things had anything to do with him; he was still waiting for her to suddenly declare punishment for his less than thoughtful words before, but to his relief it seemed he was not the one who was currently flitting about in her thoughts, "I'm going to add one more stop to tonight's meetings. I want to have a chat with Petyr Baelish."
Petyr had not been treated nearly as well as he might have expected a lord to be treated. When Jon Snow had declared his arrest, he had been led to a dark cell of the keep and thrown inside rather roughly. His clothing was now dirty, and he was not being given food and drink befitting someone of his rank. Worse, the guards ignored him.

Many times he demanded the right to speak to Jon about his right to a fair trial, and many times the men standing watch did not even bother to look his way, as if they were deaf, or he was speaking another language entirely. It didn't take much of this sort of insolence before he completely lost his composure cursing and yelling at them.

This was just as thoroughly ignored though, and Petyr finally gave up after he had screamed at them until his throat felt raw with the effort of doing so. He sat dejectedly against the wall; Jon had not even had the courtesy of placing him into a cell with a cot. The only item of 'furniture' available was the wooden bucket serving as chamber pot in the corner.

He knew he would see a trial soon enough; Jon was a Stark and he knew their kind well. He would follow the rules as Starks always did and he would see a fair trial. Once he discovered whose hands he needed to grease if necessary, or paid whatever fine might be imposed upon him for tampering with a Stark prisoner, he would be free.

After all, Jon couldn't hold him forever over trying to have Ramsay Bolton assassinated, of all people. He fidgeted uncomfortably upon the stone that lay underneath him; he couldn't help but think of how Rob Stark had executed high-ranking nobles in his own army over the killing of several of his prisoners… Jon wouldn't sentence him to death over this, would he?

Even more bothersome in general was the news he heard through listening to the guards talking amongst themselves to pass the time late in the night; Sansa had declared Ramsay a Stark through his marriage to her! This raised question over whether Jon would consider his attempts on Ramsay's life an attack on their House.

Worse, it raised a great many irritating questions in his own mind as to what sort of relationship Sansa was having with her prisoner. Why in the world would she choose Ramsay Bolton over him, even after everything the man had done to her? These questions assailed him when he tried to rest and lead him to many sleepless nights.

On one of those evenings though, as he tossed and turned, wondering how fucking long it was going to take his connections to the Vale to get him free of the place, Sansa's voice suddenly filled the small space of his cell. Petyr leapt to his feet, surprise evident in his face when he noted that the Lady Stark stood right outside of his prison.

"Petyr Baelish, I see that your confinement to this place has not treated you well; hopefully this bit of discomfort has given you incentive to be truthful. I have a few questions that I would like very much for you to answer."

He approached the cell door quickly, happy to speak to someone at last that might help him be free of the place.

"Lady Sansa, I would be overjoyed to answer any question you like with the utmost truth; you can trust me implicitly."

Sansa raised an eyebrow at this statement in an obvious expression of sincere doubt, but her words stayed to the point, "When you murdered my Aunt by pushing her out of the Moon Door back at the Vale, why did you do it?"
Petyr took on an air of shocked disbelief, raising his left hand to his heart in a universal sign of surprise, "Milady Sansa, I would never use such a word as hard as 'murder' to describe what befell your Aunt that tragic day back at the Aerie. What I did in pushing her to her death was a simple act of defense of you, since she was currently trying to throw you from the Moon Door."

Sansa shook her head in the negative at his reply, her voice steady and cold of emotion, "My Aunt was no longer trying to kill me when you pushed her; you only did so after interceding on my behalf and talking her down. When you delivered that underhanded fatal shove, she was still smiling at you, unaware of your murderous intent."

Petyr's face dropped all pretense of feigned innocence and his voice also grew distant and removed of the crime he was accused of, "I did what I had to do in your best interest. It brought me no joy to betray your Aunt like that but you saw how she was; if left alive she would have eventually done you grievous harm. She was insane!"

Once again Sansa shook her head at him, "Unhinged, perhaps, but no more so than one might expect a person to become considering the murder of her husband Jon Arryn. When she spoke to me I didn't sense true insanity, only a terrible jealousy towards me on account of the relations she thought I might be having with you…"

She tapped her finger against her chin as she said this last, watching as Petyr seemed to suddenly grow very uncomfortable with the flow of their conversation despite his best efforts to give off a calm demeanor. "Yes, she was madly in love with you if I recall; you had her very well wrapped around your… well, I'll avoid the pun, but you know of what I speak."

Petyr pulled at his collar as he responded, shifting from one foot to the other, "Yes, well… your Aunt and I had a very passionate engagement, though I think you know well enough that my relationship to her was entirely one that supported my desire to ascend in power; she held not a candle to you my dear. I stand by my assessment of her derangement."

Sansa continued to negate his claims, her expression darkening a bit, "Kind of you to admit that fact, as it only helps in supporting why it is that you insist on her lunacy; you were using my Aunt from the very beginning, and you intentionally kissed me where she would see it. You set the stage for her murder; you didn't just 'happen' across us at the Moon Door. You were there waiting; weren't you?"

His face paled a bit, but otherwise Petyr kept his composure, replying in even, measured words, "That is an interesting string of conjecture; but I think you are missing something in all of that… what is my motive to murder your Aunt at that time? I already had her loyalty, so why would I need to kill her to advance any further?"

Sansa replied quickly, "Because you didn't love her, as you already said. As many times as you have proclaimed desire for me, I would be a fool to think that you would consider my Aunt a part of the equation in our coupling. So, you arranged for her to die, leaving her boy of a son in charge of the Aerie; you get all the power by manipulating him instead without the unpleasant marriage."

Petyr scoffed, waving a hand dismissively at her words, "Really? What sort of cold-hearted monster do you think I am that I would kill a loyal friend for that reason alone?"

Sansa wasn't buying his routine, though, and she replied evenly, "I watched you order your men to murder a fisherman who had helped you secure me to your boat for less."

He opened his mouth and then closed it, no longer certain if what he had been about to say in the face of Sansa's accusations was going to measure up. Petyr had not expected her to bring up the cold-blooded murder of the dock worker that he had conscripted to ferry her to his boat the day that
Joffry was poisoned at his wedding feast.

Honestly, while it could still be merited that killing that poor bastard had made certain he could not tell anyone who was looking where Sansa had been taken, Sansa would almost certainly not allow that particular reasoning to justify murder given her current mood on killing people. He cleared his throat, trying to sum it up, "It had to be done."

Sansa narrowed her eyes at him, "Whatever you tell yourself so that you may sleep at night, though something tells me that you don't lose much sleep over the people you hurt as you climb the ladder of success toward the power you covet. So, you murdered my Aunt for what we shall call personal reasons… tell me, how long were you seeing her?"

His expression tightened, and Sansa seemed to be noticing that she was causing him to be nervous. To Petyr's dismay she seemed like she was enjoying the fact. "I only consummated my relationship with your Aunt as was required by law once we were married if you are accusing me of adultery as well of murder, I assure you that was not the case…"

"But I know as well as you that a relationship starts well before all of that for most, and I recall that the traditional period of mourning had only just passed when my Aunt pledged her vows to be your wife and take you as husband. Let's take what you said earlier about using my aunt to gain a step up politically and the fact that you don't mind murdering folk to get what you want…"

They both knew that this was what she had been alluding towards much of the conversation, so Petyr decided it was finally time to drop the pretenses and have her address her accusations directly. He took on an air of indifferent agitation, "Are you accusing me of murdering Jon Arryn, so that I could marry your Aunt?"

Petyr rolled his eyes at her, "If I was going to supplant a man in such a fashion for power, why not just murder Robert and woo Cersei?"

Sansa laughed at him, "Do you think I'm dense? You never have and never will have a chance with Cersei Lannister and you knew the rumors of her brother."

Before he could reply she continued, "I doubt you killed Jon with your own hands, you probably went so far as to have my weak-willed Aunt do it for you…"

His jaw had tightened at her words and she went on, her eyes reflecting that she had seen the truth in his expression, "She was easily manipulated, my Aunt. Though now we have a great deal more to explain…"

Petyr had underestimated this woman terribly and now he was at a loss as to what to say when so directly presented with an accurate guess as to his betrayals. The only thing he had now he realized was that Sansa was still only ruminating on conjecture; she had yet to obtain any sort of proof. Though at this rate he was on thin ice indeed.

Much had changed in this girl since she was the naïve little thing that Ned Stark had brought to King's Landing with him. He had gotten too used to her slowness to adapt to the violent politics that surrounded her and failed to see her become a dangerous player in that game. He made his face a mask of disinterest, "Indeed, much of your theory holds no logic."

She gave him a look offhand that told him that she was not so easily detracted simply by having her argument contested, "Well, that's what we are here working out, isn't it? So, let's see… if you had
Jon Arryn murdered to put the resources of the Vale at your disposal but didn't actually want my Aunt to be the one at your side…"

Her look of thoughtfulness continued as she pondered openly, "…then you would have wanted to somehow marry my mother whom you so desperately wanted, though as she was married to my father Ned Stark, you have to find a way to make her a widow first. So, the letter that my Aunt sent to warn us about a 'Lannister Plot' would have been your idea."

His blood rushed in his veins and his heart pounded in his ears, but Petyr worked hard to give her an almost disinterested look of feigned disbelief, "That's preposterous! While I have often done my best to instruct you in the matter of statecraft with an eye towards planning for all eventualities, there is no way I could have known your father would die."

Sansa stared at him for a long moment before replying, "You're right; you didn't know he would die, just as you didn't know that my mother would be murdered by the Frey's during the Red Wedding."

He smiled and started to say something dismissive, happy that Sansa was going to let the matter drop, but she talked over him, "You didn't know my father would die but you knew it was possible. You like to gamble. You probably chalked my mother's death up to a bad bet."

Petyr's face went stony again; she was almost correct. Many nights he had lain awake thinking about how he could have done things differently concerning Catelyn, which was an anomaly for Petyr; he had after all spent most of his life training himself to only ever look forward, to take his failures and successes as they came and ever be one step ahead.

However, Catelyn dying had been a crushing blow to that ideology, and even progressive Petyr had needed to reflect on the errors that led to such a tragedy. He had asked himself the one question so many times; how had he not anticipated that she would put herself in the line of fire? It was Catelyn after all, and he often wondered if he should have known better.

He often questioned whether it was in fact his fault that she had died. Usually when this terrible inner conflict surfaced, he would brush it away with a stance he found himself repeating internally like a defensive mantra; she had made her own bed by choosing the Starks over Petyr… she had made her own bed and then she had to lie in it, and he couldn't help that.

Such reasoning was harder to maintain in the face of Sansa's cold words concerning whether he even cared that her mother had died. Of course, he cared; Catelyn had been destined to be his, but cruel reality took her from him one final time. He decided that he didn't want to argue these feelings with Sansa, since they already made him feel shaky enough.

Instead, he tried to focus on the nature of her accusations, which were getting dangerously cohesive, "I'll admit that I have left a few things to chance, but the level of chaos you're talking about my having created intentionally would have been madness; I would have been risking everything on the mere chance that your mother would end up at my side."

Sansa watched him as he spoke, and Petyr was aware that despite the chill to the air that his face had become decidedly heated, and he worked not to fool with his collar or give any other obvious signs of his sudden anxiety. The way her eyes watched him though, they were part of the problem; it was like she was looking right through him.

When Sansa did at last speak, it was clear that she still dismissed all pretense on his part of his being innocent to any degree, "You forget how long I have had the opportunity to be witness to all of your schemes, both personally and through the words of so many others, Petyr Baelish. You instigated war because you believe you are very clever, not because you are mad."
"In fact, you are so very certain of your own cleverness, perhaps your ego never allowed you to consider that you might be putting my mother in danger. Still, given your history, I find it hard to believe you actually loved her or anyone else. You're a snake, and whatever it is that you thought to be love it certainly wasn't; love isn't self-serving."

That stung, since she was clearly representing both what he had previously told her concerning his fondness for her mother and the burgeoning love he had professed to have for Sansa herself. Petyr had so many times told himself and reminisced on the love he had held for Catelyn Stark, and he knew he wanted Sansa… why couldn't she understand?

At last he found words again after the stinging blow to his character, "Well… I had rather hoped you would have an at least slightly more favorable opinion of me after all that I have done on your behalf."

Her eyes flashed with an anger that caused Petyr to take a step back in surprise despite the bars that separated them, "Favorable? You call murdering my Aunt's husband and by proxy my father a favor?"

He retorted quickly, "I'm entertaining your speculations but please remember these flights of fancy you are having are conjecture, while the aide I provided you in helping you escape King's Landing was very real!"

She pointed an angry finger at him, "You whisked me away all right, so that I could play my part in your little games. I'm not sure how you intended to deal with Cersei, but I'm positive you've planned on using Stark ancestry to boost yourself to the iron throne for some time now."

She paused, "You had that ship waiting on the water to leave immediately after Joffrey's death. That man who led me to you, he had to have received instruction well before the poison took the king."

Her brow furrowed in irritated realization, "I can't believe I never even thought about it before, but it's obvious now that you were involved in that assassination in the first place."

Another angry finger was jabbed between the bars at Petyr, stabbing him in the chest accusingly, "Which means that all you were really doing in pulling me out of that mess was preventing me from being collateral damage as a wrongful suspect in his murder, like that poor dwarf, Tyrion. You were only cleaning your own mess, and once again, only because it benefitted you. I didn't see you whisking Tyrion away."

Petyr's brow furrowed at the tone of her voice, "The Imp? You would have had me kidnap the Lannister whom Cersei would have been clawing to destroy once her son died? I think this is just one more example of your erroneous reasoning; accusations of regicide aside, I think you must know that I saved whom I could in that volatile situation."

Sansa huffed, "That's exactly what I meant; even your defense of your actions is in showing that you wouldn't act selflessly. Lord Tyrion was kind to me after I was forced to marry him; despite being strangers and despite his reputation he was more considerate of my well-being than you have ever been with all of your claims of loving me. You traded me to the Boltons!"

Ramsay cleared his throat from behind Sansa. He had watched this discourse quietly thus far, but now he had the distinct impression that perhaps Sansa had forgotten his presence. Not only that, but he feared that the conversation was about to take a turn for the worse concerning his own part played in the events that the other two were recounting.

Petyr startled, squinting to take in Ramsay where he stood in the shadows behind Sansa. Normally he was more perceptive of such things, but Sansa had commanded his full attention since the moment
she had made her presence in the room known to him, and he had managed to overlook the simple fact that she had not arrived alone.

Petyr had reacted, but Sansa did not, not even slowing in her dialogue with Petyr to so much as recognize Ramsay's attempt to butt in. Ramsay was certain she had heard him; the fact that she paid him no heed meant that she both remembered that he was still there and that she didn't care if he was present for what she had to say.

Her counterpart in the argument behind the bars had not been able to marshal a response to her scathing words last spoken between the way she delivered them and the fact that Ramsay had provided a momentary but poignant interruption of thought. She was far from done chewing him a new one though, "You have often gloated over your ability to read people; tell me that you didn't know Ramsay for what he was."

Petyr stammered a moment, trying to gather his thoughts in the face of her growing fury, quiet but severe as it was, "It was an important political alliance… the only way that we could return you to court without risking threat from Cersei, since she felt the Boltons to be her allies…” he glanced over at Ramsay, "Obviously you seem to have changed your mind about them?"

Her face was still calculatingly difficult to read, but the smoldering anger remained in her voice, "Ramsay still raped me and hurt me, and his father still did nothing to stop it, and you still left me to that fate, not so much as a letter of explanation." Ramsay was cringing at her words, and Petyr could tell from the way that he stared at the ground that something had certainly changed in the dynamic of their relationship.

"Whether I have the former Lord Bolton here now or not should have little bearing on the hardships I still endured on account of you."

Petyr licked his lips; he was approaching the bottom of the barrel in things he might say in his own defense. Sansa's memory was impeccable in remembering his many offences.

"Lady Sansa, I'd have you remember that when… this man…” he said, gesturing to Ramsay where the other man stood, "…took your brother Rickon Stark prisoner and sent you threat of his death if you didn't face him in a hopelessly outmatched battle, it was I who answered your call for aide and mustered the troops of the Vale to your side!"

She shook her head at him, her scowl showing that she didn't mind entirely if she showed him how much he disgusted her, "Those soldiers only marched for you because you murdered my Aunt and her husband, to a war that only existed because you sowed contention between the Lannisters and my family, whereas otherwise the Boltons would still be banner men of my father."

"Proof!" screamed Petyr, at his wits end as to what to say about the bold truths she had managed to speculate, "Still I have yet to see or hear any sort of proof of any of the things that you profess to know despite not beholding any of it in person…"

"I watched you kill my aunt with my own eyes! You are already going to be tried for murder, the penalty of which is death!" Her eyes blazed, and Petyr finally went silent.

Sansa relaxed visibly. Ramsay noted that Petyr's stunned silence seemed to be a balm to her foul mood, perhaps, or at the very least she was finally getting the reaction she had been hoping to see as a proper response to her allegations. The man's face had gone ashen, and his mouth was a tight line; it was clear that he had no further defense to offer.

She had decided that he was guilty and that was that, regardless of what he might say. Demanding
proof for the validity of the other crimes really was meaningless since the ultimate price was already at stake for the one action she herself stood as witness to. Ramsay had seen this look many times; this was the face of a man who faces a true look at his own mortality and impending death.

As a person fond of creating that look in a plethora of victims, Ramsay had become acquainted with its particular feel, and he smirked at the sight of it. He had gotten a strong vibe of superiority and smugness from Petyr the last time that they had spoken, when the two of them had both exchanged mutual lies despite both knowing the other was a liar.

Seeing Petyr scared now was a rare treat really considering how long he had to go without enjoying such sport. However, as he grinned at the sight he noted Sansa had turned her head to glower at him. The smile fell from his face quickly as he turned his head down to stare at his feet. Sansa was obviously not pleased with his attitude, and he was suddenly walking on thin ice.

Thankfully for Ramsay, she turned her attention away from him back to Petyr after a long moment's time had passed, "You will receive a trial for all that you have done and be given the opportunity to throw yourself at my mercy in a day's time, Petyr Baelish. Until then, I suggest you spend your time considering how clever you actually are and whether further lies will aide you."

Petyr opened his mouth and then closed it before speaking in the universal sign of a man who wanted to speak but whom was conflicted on what to say due to the strain of the moment, "Wait… Sansa, it's clear there are terrible misunderstandings between us on my disposition towards you, I swear that everything I've done was for your good as well as mine!"

She wasn't hearing his words though, and was already turning to leave, beckoning Ramsay to follow along with her. Seeing her spurn him yet again while in the same motion inviting Ramsay to stay close to her spurred more of the same jealousy that he had felt before which had led him to try to have that man killed and thusly put him behind those bars.

This emotion swirled in together with the sea of other terrible feelings that swept over him like a wave and he reached his hand between the bars in a desperate, imploring gesture as he yelled after the retreating form of Sansa Stark, "Sansa, please! Sansa, wait…!" But she did not wait, and several moments later Petyr was left alone with his thoughts once again.
Chapter Seventeen

Seeds of Doubt

As they walked together down the halls, presumably back to Sansa's quarters to retire for the evening, Ramsay felt the insurmountable need to address his curiosity about what had happened, despite the dark look that Sansa had given him last, "I was wondering; why have a trial of any sort at all if you just plan on executing him for murder?"

Sansa glanced his way, letting out a long slow sigh as she rubbed one arm with the other, a sign to Ramsay in his long time spent by her side that she was feeling torn over something, "I'm not like you, Ramsay; I'm not just going to slit the man's throat in private. If I must execute him, it should be public, after a trial. He is politically invested in the Vale, and we want them to know exactly why and how this all happened."

"Why do you care?" he shrugged his shoulders indifferently, "Your brother Jon is not only the master of this keep but also the King of the largest of the seven kingdoms. My father made a habit of reminding me that the North is larger than all of the other kingdoms combined. Why would you worry about the opinions of a few brooding nobles?"

Sansa shot him a sour look as they walked, clearly annoyed by his statement. Ramsay looked away; he really hadn't been trying to put himself further onto her bad side. He knew where that could lead.

"Jon isn't just concerned with what we'll have to do about Cersei; he knows that an army beyond imagining is marching here to destroy us, and I don't want what allies we have bickering over anything unnecessary."

Ramsay snorted, "Do you really believe that the dead are marching for the wall? That they will somehow scale miles of ice, defeat the Night's Watch, and overwhelm all of the seven kingdoms? That they even exist in the first place?"

She stopped walking to turn and face Ramsay, her eyes narrowing, "You mean you don't believe Jon about the things he saw himself?"

He felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickling; it seemed that Ramsay was still treading dangerous waters with Sansa, so he gave what he hoped would be taken as a casually dismissive shrug and spoke as diplomatically as possible, "Well… I thought that if I were trapped on a frozen wall for life without warmth or women…"

Sansa gave him an incredulous look, "You are telling me that you don't believe Jon at all? That he marched an entire army of the Watch and Wildlings here just to put his boots up somewhere warmer?"

Ramsay put his hands up, palms open in a gesture of peace, "I'm not trying to call him a liar, but I imagine those on the wall and beyond it wouldn't need much convincing to march this way…"

Sansa shook her head at him, frowning and giving him an expression of sad frustration, "How you do not realize that your scenario of Jon convincing Wildlings and Crows to work together for those
reasons is far less possible than an army of the dead is beyond me. Before we defeated you, there
was an enormous army of hostile soldiers here that we had to deal with to even enter this keep."

He shrugged in response, "He's very charismatic, your bastard brother, I assumed. I don't know him,
and I sure as hell don't know those crazy wildling people, but I am more inclined to believe this is all
the work of men as opposed to falling prey to children's stories."

Sansa sighed once more and then seemed to decide that she didn't wish to argue the point any longer,
"Your opinion is noted. Keep it to yourself."

She turned and moved back towards their quarters, beckoning Ramsay to follow with her usual
subtle nod of her head that he jumped to comply with nonetheless. Sansa did not like to be kept
waiting, and Ramsay had decided some time ago that he no longer wished to cause her to become
irate over trivialities; he had enough to deal with.

His dreams that night were plagued by terrible nightmares involving Sansa. Strangely, it wasn't
visions of her punishing him in a variety of ways that left him distraught, but rather it was being
ignored. Sansa was punishing Petyr now, and Ramsay had been told to go into a small cage, from
wherein he could hear and see what she did to him.

At first, she was thrashing him as he squirmed, tied to a torture rack that was an exact replica of one
of the flayed man racks that the Bolton House used to flay their victims. She was using a whip at
first, brutality beating him as he screamed and thrashed in futile efforts against his restraints. Then as
Ramsay moved to the bars of his cage he saw that was not the case.

No, she was not whipping him with his body turned upside down upon the flaying rack as he had
thought but rather she was spanking him across the ass as he lay pinned against the rack upright, her
hand making small motions that nonetheless created large impacts, the sound of her leather strap
resounding against his flesh as he shouted in pain.

Ramsay felt himself blush in shared humiliation, for the first time in a long-time empathizing with
another human being on the subject of pain. He had a moment before been almost excited by the
prospect of seeing Sansa tear the flesh from Petyr's back, but now he actually felt a little sorry for
him. Not a lot, but a little sorry.

He squinted as he pressed his face against the bars, trying to see clearly the commotion across the
room through the filter of darkness. The fire in the hearth had burned down, and everything was
blanketed in shadows, making it hard to see. No, wait… she wasn't spanking him at all. The rack
wasn't a rack but was the curtains of the far window.

Sansa wasn't hitting Petyr with a strap either; instead her hand was tracing erotic, jagged paths back
and forth across his cock, and Petyr's head was thrown back as he cried out in ecstasy rather than
pain. As he watched, bewildered, she placed her mouth to his member and began to pleasure him
even further as he took her head in either hand.

Ramsay's chest suddenly hurt, and a sinking feeling in his gut made him instantly sick at the sight
before him. He wasn't sure why he should object or if he had the right to do so, or even if he
wouldn't get himself into serious trouble by interrupting, but Ramsay's heart hurt, and for reasons he
could not fathom he cried out, "No… stop!"

But they didn't stop. In fact, things became even more fevered between the two as they continued
sharing intimate acts of sexual congress, all the while ignoring Ramsay's ever more desperate cries
for them to stop, pressing hard against the unbreakable bars of his cage, reaching out to wave his
hand at the cavorting couple but unable to get their attention.
She didn't even notice him, despite his loud screams. No, worse; she was ignoring him entirely. She could hear him just fine, and as her and Petyr changed positions so that he could enter her in yet another manner, she looked right at Ramsay, rather, she looked right through Ramsay, her gaze not even halting on his tortured face.

Sansa saw him but could not care less that what she did caused him this terrible pain. She heard him but to her, he was as rain in the background, the sight of him no more noteworthy than the furniture. Ramsay roared his pained fury at the helpless feeling that this instilled in him shaking himself against the hard metal bars.

But he wasn't going to be able to free himself of the cage any more than he could free himself from the burning sensation in the center of his chest. Why did he feel this way; what about Sansa choosing to take Petyr made Ramsay feel this way? He did not know; he spent most of his time convincing himself that he despised Sansa…

That wasn't the case, though. Obviously, she had warped him around herself in some fashion through her various actions. He tried to steady himself, to make his breathing stable and shut out the sound of the coupling even as he turned his eyes away, squinting them shut hard against the terrible images he had seen that still burned in his head.

They only grew louder, though, as if they were building ever more into some great sexual crescendo, a terribly loud affair of lovemaking as the whole sorted business reached its apex. He covered his ears with his hands, but he still heard them, and even if it wasn't for this he could still see them, in his mind's eye, for it was the only thing his mind's eye could see.

Miserable and defeated, Ramsay sank against the bars of his cage, sobbing as he slid to rest in a sad heap upon the floor of his prison, wishing that there were something within with which he could kill himself. At this moment, Ramsay woke from his slumber panting at the terrible nightmare that had plagued his sleep.

He took several unsteady breaths as his mind began the slow process of convincing him that what he had just seen was not real. Sansa lay quietly next to him, but he could see in the failing light of the dying embers in the hearth that her eyes were fluttering open, perhaps wakened by his sudden surge upwards in the bed they shared.

Slowly she also rose, placing a hand upon his chest and commenting, "Your heart is racing; were you having a bad dream then?"

He only nodded. Normally one might be compelled to share what the dream was about after such a question, but Ramsay was uncomfortable with sharing it considering the content of this particular nightmare.

She noticed that he had chosen not to elaborate, and whereas before she might not have been as concerned with the happenings of a dream, his withholding clearly only made her more curious, "You're sweating as if from a fever; that must have been a very vexing nightmare. I have to wonder what it takes to scare someone like yourself. Were you dreaming of one of your victims?"

Ramsay thought a moment before responding carefully, in as obtuse a fashion as possible, but remaining close to the truth so as to make it easier to say naturally. He knew from experience that Sansa could be quite harsh when he was caught in the act of lying to her, "Yes, in fact I was…"

After all, Sansa had been in his dream…

She nodded somberly, "Well, I hope it was jarringly frightful for what it's worth; you need to learn some empathy for those that suffered under your rule before, and guilt is as good a route as any to
obtain the skill."

Ramsay remained quiet, allowing her false assumption of what his dream might have related to take form unhindered.

Instead, he changed the subject as quickly as possible while still remaining relevant to the questions that burned in the back of his mind after his terrible and confusing nightmare, "Sansa… you aren't planning on keeping Lord Petyr Baelish alive; are you? I mean… I know I questioned you about immediacy before, but I didn't think to ask if you planned on pardoning him."

Sansa narrowed her eyes at him, "That's a strange question to ask so suddenly; why would you care? Also, he is stripped of his title by Jon's sovereignty; Petyr is no longer a lord."

His mouth dropped open in astonishment that she hadn't immediately said no, "After all of the things you listed right there to his face, you would let him walk free of consequence?"

She shook her head, "I never said that, but I don't see why this continues to be a concern of yours." She cocked an eyebrow at him, "Are you feeling a little jealous at what you perceive to be Petyr getting out of the bind he has put himself in with his treachery when you did not manage to escape from yours?"

Ramsay shook his head vigorously, "No, of course not… I suppose that you have roped my curiosity; there isn't much else for me to set my mind to."

Sansa watched him quietly for a few more moments, leaving Ramsay to begin to feel a little uncomfortable with what she might say next, perhaps still a fading remnant of that awful dream that had left him so perturbed. Finally, she spoke, "I suppose I shall remedy that. As to Petyr Baelish, you should really concern yourself less with things that don't concern you."

Sansa glanced at the darkened window, "It is very late and not the right time for such conversation anyhow. You have been whiling much of your days away doing little, but I am taxed too much by my position as Lady of the House to go for too long without proper uninterrupted rest. Perhaps finding a worthy task for you will help you rest at night better as well."

With that she rolled over and pulled the fur blankets up to her neck to lock out the bitter embrace of winter that managed to seep in through the stone floors of the keep, and Ramsay was left with a strong impression of finality concerning their conversation. Disgruntled but not so bold as to take things further he rolled himself over in a huff, also hunkering down against the cold.

He had for a moment there almost felt like he could pat himself on the back for how cleverly and skillfully he had evaded her questions concerning his nightmare, as well as dodging having to explain why he did in fact care whether Petyr Baelish lived or died for his sins. But then she had just as quickly avoided giving him direct answers, leaving him guessing.

She hates him, he thought. The things he had seen in his dreams, odd and surreal now that he looked back upon them, they were far too ridiculous to ever actually happen. It was just a strange nightmare born of his own unmet sexual impulses he told himself; after all, Sansa had locked him up for some time now, and of course he hasn't had any in a while.

Ramsay told himself that as he did his best to reassure himself to sleep, and eventually slumber took hold of him and he returned to further dreams of Sansa and Petyr, though fortunately for Ramsay, this time at least he was aware that it was a dream. He tried his hardest to wrest control of the events of the dream, but it always played out the same general way, to his annoyance.
The following day found Ramsay following Sansa as she busied herself with preparing for the trial of one Petyr Baelish. She had to speak to a surprising number of people. Ramsay of course had always carried out sentences as needed to those that broke his father's laws without the proceedings of anything resembling a trial.

He found it fascinating how much time could be wasted on the silly notion of keeping things 'fair.' After all, to his mind, Petyr was already a doomed man whom had made the deadly mistake of crossing the lord or such of the castle within their own domain and without support or power. Why drag it all out with some farce of a show when he was already fated to die?

Sansa first went to see Maester Wolkan, whom was actually the same Maester whom had served his father Roose Bolton. That man had witnessed Ramsay murder his father in order to coup his title of Warden of the North. Since then the Maester had only ever glanced at Ramsay with cold indifference as he set himself at the task of serving Ramsay's former enemies.

Several times during her conversation with him, the Maester had suggested that keeping Ramsay along with her was a terrible mistake, always leveling Ramsay with a vindictive glare as he said so, but Sansa merely shrugged off such statements assuring him that Ramsay was 'under control.' The Maester's job in Petyr's trial apparently was simply in the recording of it from what Ramsay heard.

Once he had been notified of the time and place through his constant unwanted suggestions to perhaps try Ramsay for his crimes, they moved on, and Ramsay was happy to leave the self-righteous fat man behind. At least, this is how Ramsay perceived him. Sansa for her part kept glancing at him, perhaps considering the man's words.

After that they visited the commander of the Vale forces stationed within the valley just outside of Winterfell keep, every single noble or minor noble that happened to be residing with or visiting Sansa's domain, a knight named Brienne, whom was apparently some sort of beefy woman bodyguard to Sansa, and many others.

Once this huge entourage had been notified of the meeting later that day Sansa visited the cells where Petyr was being held, not to visit the man, but to inform the guard watching him there that he was to secure aid and move Petyr to the trial location at dusk. After doing that she returned to the great hall where it was to happen and sat.

Ramsay glanced out over the empty space of the otherwise unoccupied room and then turned back to Sansa where she sat placidly. He blinked, and then finally addressed her, "Sansa… we aren't due here for hours… why are we here?"

Sansa glanced over at him, "I have much to think on, and a room full of clamoring voices is less inductive to thought."

He nodded, moving to take a seat next to her, "Well, I suppose that makes sense, though we might just be here for a…"

Sansa looked upon him as he moved the chair, giving him a small frown, "That is not where you will be sitting."

Ramsay froze, still halfway down to the seat, "Surely you don't expect me to stand…?" Her silent stare continued, and he rose again in uncomfortable silence, staring out at nothing.

He would have given much to know what it was that Sansa was thinking at that moment, but since she wasn't forthcoming with any reasoning as to why he was being treated this way, he had nothing to go on. All she did was sit there and stare out at the empty hall, her face a perfect mask of neutrality.
of emotion. Was she considering Petyr's crimes this carefully?

Ramsay wasn't certain exactly why, but he felt annoyed by the prospect of Sansa fretting over the trial for her father's potential murderer so very much. He himself had never worried himself to any degree with the matter of guilt or the technicalities of such when he had been tasked with ferreting out those who might have betrayed his father's House.

He had simply visited the potential disloyal subjects, laid upon them a plate of punishments that felt suitable at the time, and watched as he was rewarded with appropriate amounts of both fear and loyalty. He found Sansa's hang-up over the trial to be unmerited when she could have just taken care of the matter personally in mere moments.

If she had wanted it to be public, she could have just killed him publicly, with very little extra time or energy devoted to that worm of a man. He supposed that was ultimately why it truly bothered him that she was taking the issue so seriously; Ramsay didn't like that she afforded Petyr so much attention despite everything he was accused of.

He shook his head, willing himself to let go of the lingering resentment towards Petyr Baelish. He even let himself have a nervous smile over the whole line of thought. The reason he was at all worried over how she felt about Petyr could only be related to Ramsay's nightmare concerning the two of them, and there was no use fretting over such things, right?

After convincing himself thoroughly that such a notion was ridiculous, that Sansa wasn't sitting there daydreaming about how best she might accept Petyr's cock. He began to wonder at the alternative lines of thought that might drive her current behavior. He smiled wickedly; maybe Sansa was taking a moment to enjoy her revenge.

He couldn't say that he had never set aside time just to enjoy a victory over those who underestimated him, though he found her timing odd in doing so before Petyr's body had yet had time to grow cold. A bit premature to celebrate victory before killing your enemies, and Ramsay's father would have condemned such a thing, but Ramsay supposed that Petyr was as good as dead, so what was the harm?

Still, it bothered him more than he would care to admit that Sansa would not allow him to sit with her now, and he wondered if she was going to make him stand there behind her throughout the trial. Such a worry finally bade him to speak, "Dear wife… have I done something recently to afford this punishment in being unable to sit?"

Sansa was deep in thought, and took a moment to shift her attention to him, "You aren't being punished at the moment. Trust me, if I were punishing you, you would know it."

Ramsay frowned, "But you made a show of placing me beside you at the supper table, so that all might know we are married equals…?"

Her sharp glare at this statement caused Ramsay to bite his lip, "I made the statement in placing you to my side that you are my spouse, but at no time did I declare us equal."

That stung Ramsay's remaining ego quite fiercely, and his lips puckered at the insult, "I see. You don't afford me any rights as a lord, as you have stripped me of such, despite giving me your surname."

"Exactly. Doing so would be forgiving you of all of your crimes, which even if I wanted to do so it is simply not within my right to try. You shall stand behind me in this important matter of court just as you have with every other matter, just as any person serving the House would who does not bear
the rank of nobility."

Ramsay shifted uneasily, and his jaw worked to show that on some level he was hurt and angered by her decision, but he said nothing.

They continued this way in silence for the better part of the remaining time before Petyr Baelish's trial. When the designated hour drew close, and the sun had waned in the sky, sinking with growing speed towards the horizon, all of the persons that Sansa and Ramsay had visited before and many more began to flock into the room.

The other nobility took seats to Sansa's right and left, but leaving her quite a bit of space at the head of the table. Ramsay stared at the empty seat afore him again with the same look of disdain he had been wearing during the wait for things to get started. Soldiers lined themselves along the walls, all of them Vale soldiers, Ramsay noted.

He hoped Sansa knew what she was doing, going without any sort of personal guard in this particular situation. If the soldiers of the Vale turned out loyal to Petyr after all then this could become a bloody coup before anyone from the remaining Night's Watch or the Wildling camp outside could hope to react. The prisoner himself was led down the center of the hall.
Trials and Tribulations

Chapter Eighteen

Trials and Tribulations

Two large soldiers flanked Petyr, one holding each arm right up until he was standing directly before Sansa and her peers for judgement. They let go of him and stepped back, but stayed close enough to imply that he wouldn't get far at all should he be stupid enough to try something rash. Petyr's gaze kept shifting to the Captain of the Vale forces present, Ramsay noticed.

The murmur of voices in the room grew as all assembled and then died down as Petyr was positioned for trial. Sansa lifted her head to speak and all grew quiet save her, "Petyr Baelish, you are being tried today for murder, treason and conspiracy against not one but several crowns, all so that you could prosper from the damage you left in your wake."

Petyr stood tall, lifting his head as he spoke out to the assembled throng, "These accusations are erroneous, and I would like to point out that I do not have adequate representation in this biased court. My lord the prince of the Vale must know what is happening here; I demand to be allowed audience with him to make this matter fair."

A sudden stifled grunt of a laugh escaped the lips of the Captain standing off to his side, and Petyr shot a glare his way, though he couldn't quite hide the fear there as well. If that man was laughing at his demand then the chances that the young prince was going to be of assistance in the matter were slim. He looked back to Sansa.

She was only watching him carefully, in a fashion that reminded Petyr too much of a snake waiting for the perfect moment to strike. "You are in no position to make demands, Baelish. Not only is this the case, but such an audience would do you no benefit at all; Dear Captain, could you please recount to the court the prince's words on the matter?"

Petyr's face was losing color as the large balding man stepped forward and cleared his throat to speak, quoting the prince of the Vale, "For murdering my beloved mother and lying to me, you may do whatever you wish to that man, I only wish never to see him again, though I do very much hope that you decide to make him fly."

Sansa watched as Petyr stiffened yet further to the words spoken, despite knowing beforehand that they weren't going to be pretty. His face took on an air of offended outrage, though his voice shook in fear and failed to carry the act convincingly, "You have misrepresented me to my liege, making this whole trial even more of a farce!"

A murmur whispered through the hall at the sound of Petyr's bellowed protests, but they disappeared quickly in the advent of Sansa's reply, "Your professed 'liege', a boy recently orphaned by your own actions in murdering his mother, was sent my personal testimony of what happened to said parent." She watched Petyr continue to squirm where he stood.

"Yes, I am acting as witness concerning your murder of my Aunt, so if you would like to try and
explain to this assemblage why they should not believe my first-hand record of events, please go ahead."

A long silence fell over the room then, not a sound emanating from anywhere, and no one moved, especially not Petyr, whom seemed as if frozen in place.

Ramsay watched him carefully; Petyr's face was unreadable, stuck in an expression devoid of emotion. The man certainly knew that defying Sansa's testimony was the only way he could have any chance of clearing himself of a charge of regicide, the penalty of which was most certainly death. At the same time, he must also know how foolhardy trying would be.

They all stood within the walls of Winterfell, ancestral home of the Starks, and even if he wasn't a terribly hated individual by the standards of most individuals present, not a soul in sight would be insane enough to deny the account of the only remaining member of the House whose banners now flew the walls of the keep once more.

In what Ramsay supposed should have been a predictable move, Petyr dropped down upon his knees in front of her, his eyes shining with desperation, "Sansa... everything I have done concerning you has been with your best interests in my heart whether you believe it or not. I didn't mean for any of the things that happened to go the way they did..."

Sansa's eyes hardened as she watched him prostrate himself before the mercy of her court. Clearly she had expected Petyr to put up much more of an argument, but the man had sense enough to know when he had been beaten, and when all outside support and chance of escape had been very thoroughly denied him.

When she did finally begin to speak, breaking the pall of silence that had fallen over the room, her words were terse and clipped, "So you no longer deny any of the allegations made against you concerning your murder of my Aunt and of the volumes of scheming that have caused so much death, including even my own father as your collateral victim."

Petyr only dropped his hands palm up onto his knees as he sank further to the floor, hanging his head as he let out a short sigh of defeat and resignation to his fate, whatever it might be, "I deny nothing; I only appeal to this court and especially to you Sansa to understand that the harm I have done was accident born of noble intention."

There was a silence that fell over the room then that could be felt by all present, as the assemblage waited to see what verdict Sansa would give now that the accused had so easily pled guilty of the crimes of which he was being held accountable for. Ramsay wondered if perhaps Petyr's defeatist tactic had caught her by surprise.

After all, he could only assume that the entire time they had stood there waiting, well, he had stood anyways, but he had thought that the most likely thing she had been doing as she sat there meditating was that she was going over the many things that might be said here tonight. All of the various arguments that Petyr might hold to sway an innocent verdict despite the odds.

Ramsay leaned forward a bit and cocked his head to the side, trying to get a read on whether Sansa might be annoyed or even angered by such a turn of events, but her face was stolid, reflecting not an ounce of how she might feel on the matter.

As tense as the wait for her words was for Ramsay and all of the others eagerly awaiting her verdict, the former Lord Bolton could only imagine how much more agonizing the silence was for Petyr Baelish, who squirmed a bit upon the floor, his upturned palms and forehead glistening with a bit of
nervous sweat. He was intelligent enough to have assumed the worse, but it made waiting for it no easier.

"Petyr Baelish, I have not the smallest of doubts that every single underhanded, manipulative, self-serving action you have taken has been both intentional and even in some cases malicious. Your claimed 'noble intentions' are at best laughable, and I have no intention whatsoever of showing you anything that might resemble mercy."

Ramsay smiled; he did so love the part where people were sentenced to death. Ever since he had moved into the keep proper to live with his father as a teenager, he had always relished those days when his father had commanded a man to be put to death, especially when they had annoyed the Lord Bolton enough to merit flaying.

Petyr's face had become quite grim now; he wasn't exactly surprised, but Ramsay supposed the man had as all people do held onto some fantastical thread of 'what if' that perhaps involved him surviving this experience. He sagged yet further upon his position kneeling before Sansa, his head hanging a bit as he stared at the floor and perhaps pondered his own mortality.

"As with the murderous and sadistic Ramsay Snow, you shall be withheld the mercy of a quick death, so that on the day that you die you will have suffered innumerably for your many heinous crimes. It is time that you were met judgement for every action you carried out to harm another, and death could only rob many of their justice."

Ramsay flinched at his name being used in such a negative connotation. Once he might have reveled in being referred to in such a tone of malcontent, but hearing Sansa say it brought him no joy. Even more than that though he blanched at her pronouncement that Petyr would be spared execution, along with almost all of the Vale forces present.

The remainder of Sansa's renewed court were less surprised by such a strange announcement, but the commander of the Vale guard stepped forward, his brow creased in consternation, "My Lady, surely you don't mean that he is going to be allowed to live after his many betrayals? This simply isn't how things are done in Westeros…"

The man glanced at those in attendance and could clearly see that many present shared his misgivings, "…if your brother Jon were here I doubt he would have passed such a verdict. The man has blood on his hands, and those lives must be repaid in his own blood."

Sansa waited until the armored knight had spoken his piece before she replied, her voice firm but respectful.

"I understand completely why you feel this way, Ser, but I remind you that my brother has placed me in command of Winterfell in his absence. He has faith in my ability to make such choices, and so I ask that you do the same. You say he has to repay his sins in blood and that is fair, but look at the man; he doesn't have enough blood in his body to atone for so many sins."

"I stand by what I mentioned in my judgement; Petyr Baelish will live, if only so that he may be met with the full course of righteous punishment."

The Captain glanced around, noting that no one else was standing to voice support of his argument. He had been camped outside of Winterfell with the bulk of his forces most of the time that he had spent with them after the Battle of the Bastards, and so he had missed Sansa's reform of Ramsay and the decisions she had forced upon her own court.

He hadn't missed Ramsay, though, and as he glared at that man standing behind Sansa it was clear
on his face that he didn't approve of that either and simply hadn't stated his feelings on it, "It seems you have made up your mind, Lady Sansa. I only ask that whatever form of tortures you use upon him be reported to my Lord so that he might know justice was done on behalf of his mother."

Sansa nodded to him, "A fair request; I will have a letter scribed with a full accounting of Petyr's daily punishments so that the Lord of the Vale might know that the man who harmed his family is being dealt with fairly."

That seemed to appease the knight, and he gave a curt bow at the waist, his lingering glare upon Ramsay moving to Petyr a sign that he wasn't entirely happy with the outcome, but that he was at least resigned to the decision Sansa had made. Sansa glanced out at the rest of the assembled nobility and military, "Were there any more objections or concerns?"

None answered, so she stood slowly, regarding the still shocked Petyr, who sat upon the floor with a look upon his face like a man in a waking dream, "Take him to the room I have prepared for him; I will be there shortly."

Ramsay blanched. Prepared. She had intended to keep Petyr alive all along. His expression was dour as the assemblage was dismissed and he followed Sansa as she made her way from the hall. He glanced over at her several times, but if she noticed the general foulness of his mood she chose not to mention it. Ramsay wasn't sure why he was so dismayed.

After all, Sansa was clearly going to torture the man, and Ramsay had always been game for such fun, but the simple fact that Petyr was being kept alive nettled at his subconscious in some hidden way that left him with no rest from his doubts. He might not be certain why he felt this way, but he knew one thing absolutely for certain; no good would come of this.

Petyr was dragged away from the hall by two Vale soldiers who were neither gentle nor considerate as he grunted his discomfort at being handled roughly. He was led out of the building but instead of going back towards the cell he had been held in before, they carried him into the keep proper, past a number of servant quarters and into one of the spacious rooms reserved for guests.

He was still in a daze after Sansa's completely unexpected pronouncement that he would live, so the odd fact that he was being brought to a lavish apartment rather than his dreary cell just joined the many strange feelings all of this left him with. After he was pushed inside however he realized several major changes to the room that set it apart from other guest rooms in the keep.

For one, most of the furniture had been removed, and the room was devoid of any sort of decoration. Secondly, there was an empty area of the far wall that sported a set of manacles set into the wall that one might have expected to see down in the dungeons. As the guards moved him over to them there could be no doubt that they were intended for his use.

One soldier locked his wrists into the iron rings as the other patted him down to be certain that he hadn't somehow come upon something to hide on his person that he might use as a weapon or to free himself. Once the first was certain that he was locked in tight and the second was positive that he had not secreted anything of use, they both left abruptly, as he had figured they would when finished.

Petyr stared at the wall in front of him, and the first thought that crossed his mind was to wonder why exactly he was facing the wall. Didn't they typically strap people into these contraptions so that they faced outwards? Perhaps so that the people holding them prisoner could see if they had expired or maybe just so that they could enjoy the agonized look on their faces…

He let out a long sigh and glanced to each side of him, trying to see exactly how much of his new prison he could see. Not much. Sansa had insured that there would be nothing for him to look at
except the brick of the wall before him. He thought to himself that maybe Sansa had implemented the first of his punishments; the trial of boredom.

After a mere few minutes of this the position he was having to stand in became uncomfortable. All Petyr could think was how in the world did prisoners go for months locked to such devices? Of course, they had been able to rest their backs against the wall behind them, whereas the best Petyr could do was lean into the wall in a most awkward fashion that didn't really alleviate his discomfort.

What felt to Petyr to be hours passed, and he shifted from one foot to the other, feeling like he was already beginning the process of losing his sanity to the granite that stared unceasingly back at him. The familiar sound of a door being opened behind him caused him to startle almost excitedly; he welcomed almost any distraction from the void he had been left to.

Petyr craned his neck, but he could not see Sansa and Ramsay as they entered the room behind him. Ramsay was glancing over the room with a deep frown firmly entrenched upon his face. Sansa approached Petyr until she stood just behind him, just close enough for him to barely see her in his periphery vision.

Her expression was still just as measured as it had been back at the hall, and when she spoke her voice was fluid and bereft of emotion, "Your punishment starts today, Petyr Baelish. Before I do things that will forever humble you as a person, I would like you to know that I have removed you of your status as a Lord, and sent out agents to insure that your holdings are passed into other hands."

Petyr lowered his head a bit, perhaps a sign that he was thinking on the implications of what she was saying. Ramsay watched him with a look of casual indifference; he didn't give a shit what Sansa did to Petyr, but he was hoping that at least it wouldn't be boring. Perhaps in response to what Petyr might be thinking Sansa continued.

"I have done a lot of work to ferret out all the assets you have hidden throughout Westeros, and as clever as you were in hiding much of it, I am confident that I have hunted nearly every brothel, business partner and spy down that you have maintained and removed them from your reach forever. My agents will continue looking for anything we have thus far overlooked until there is nothing left."

Now Petyr blanched; perhaps until that point he had not taken Sansa's threat seriously. If he hadn't, he certainly did now. When he spoke, he voice was filled with sorrow and self-pity, "Why would you do this? It doesn't matter… I am a self-made man. I wasn't born a noble, I earned it… wait… do you plan on releasing me?"

Ramsay's face became suddenly alarmed at the notion; with the decisions Sansa was making lately, he wasn't entirely certain that Petyr's freedom wasn't also on the agenda. Why would this fuck get to walk when Ramsay had been made a prisoner in his own house? To his relief Sansa immediately shook her head, "No."

"You will never again be free to make choices for yourself. You are forever beholden to a fate of atonement for your crimes, and will likely never leave the walls of this keep in your lifetime, barring decision made by your keeper, me."

Sansa's back was turned, so she couldn't have been aware that Ramsay's mood was souring even further, his lips puckering in a way they did when he was greatly displeased. What did it matter that Sansa wanted to keep this man like he had kept Theon Greyjoy? Still, the whole affair had him bristling with a strange feeling of hostility towards Petyr.

Petyr tensed, obviously considering what his tenure under Sansa and her House for all time was going to be like. Ramsay imagined that there would be a great deal of torture involved, especially in
the early days when it was new and interesting. He knew how this went, after all, and now he found himself hoping that she would bore of Petyr quickly and dispose of him.

Petyr was breathing harshly as Sansa moved closer to him; he couldn't see her after all, and though she had come unarmed he didn't know that. For all he knew, this woman whom had just promised him a lifetime of untold pain was even now lifting a dagger to carve flesh from his back. Ramsay smiled a little now; he never failed to enjoy seeing fear in others.

She didn't say anything, just lingering behind the man as he squirmed against his restraints, his skin flush with the stress she caused him and he worked hard to control his breathing. After this had gone on for some time she reached out and began ripping his shirt from him. Ramsay's pulse quickened; was she going to flay him?

It had been a very long time since Ramsay had the joy of watching a flaying, though he frowned as the follow up thought came along that Sansa did in fact not have a knife. She wore a simple dress that left no room to hide one, and when his eyes scanned the room he saw no evidence of a blade upon the simple bed or the sole dresser that resided therein. She bent down, tearing at Petyr's trousers to pull them off of each leg until he was divested of those too.

Unsummoned and unwanted came the memory of those awful dreams where Sansa and Petyr nakedly coupled almost within arm's reach of him, and Ramsay shook his head as if trying to rattle the errant thought loose and his burgeoning smile faltered and quick turned about face to a frown. Petyr was completely nude now as Sansa stepped back to admire her work.

She then moved equally wordlessly across the room to the small dresser beside the bed and opened the sole drawer in it to reach inside. Ramsay felt the exhilaration of happy relief at the thought that she had her blade for flaying stored here, or at the very least some terrible instrument designed to remove Petyr's appendages or otherwise cause him great discomfort.

That feeling was stunted as what she had gone to fetch revealed itself to be a long leather strap with a simple handle on one end. While this was a device clearly designed to bring Petyr great discomfort, this brought no joy to Ramsay, and again he found himself irrationally vexed over Sansa's choices in what to do with the fallen lord.

With the feeling that currently permeated the room, and perhaps the fact that she now bore a device that had at times graced Ramsay himself, he chose not to bring up his misgivings at that particular moment about what she was doing. Sansa stood squarely behind Petyr now, and the other man tensed again, feeling her closeness and knowing that she had fetched… something.

Sansa didn't start right away; instead she leaned in so that her breath tickled Petyr's ear and spoke slowly and deliberately, "I'm going to make you sorry that you ever crossed me or my family, and then I'm going to make you sorry for every choice you've ever made, and then I'm going to make you cry. You'll beg me for forgiveness and you'll beg me for death, but it will be an eternity before you see either."

Petyr was quavering as he stood nakedly pinned to the wall, his body shuddering like a leaf in a soft wind, and Ramsay had to admire how good Sansa had become at instilling terror in others. Petyr licked dry lips and opened his mouth to speak, but before the first syllable could escape him, Sansa brought the strap across his bared cheek with a suddenness that cause a sharp whip-like crack to echo through the room.

He screamed instead, his eyes bulging as he writhed within the narrow confines of his containment. Petyr hadn't been expecting this to happen, and his fingers flexed in and out in an extremely nervous pattern that Ramsay recognized as an inability to handle the situation that presented itself, "P-
Please... Sansa..."

Another harsh slap that resounded across him and caused both of Petyr's feet to momentarily leave the floor as he jumped in response to the pain. Ramsay himself began to squirm; this entire event was making him uncomfortable as well. He had never really experienced sympathy in any form before, but watching Petyr receive exactly what Sansa had given him succeeded in bringing back memories and ghost sensations.

He couldn't help but wonder how terrible it must be to be held in such a helpless state while Sansa did as she would, how excruciating it must feel to be forced to stand for it. It had always been easy for Ramsay to enjoy the suffering of others when he himself had never endured those cruelties, but now his body remembered what this was like...

She delivered more painful swats now, keeping a steady pace but very gradually increasing the tempo, so that Petyr was always getting hit a little faster, a little harder. If he reacted wildly to her first punishments, he was certainly so now, flailing against his restraints like a madman and hollering at the top of his lungs against the pain.

Ramsay knew this did no good in alleviating it, and soon enough Petyr would realize this to be the case also. He marveled at how quickly the whoremonger buckled under what Sansa was doing to him; already Petyr was acting like a man broken, and Ramsay could swear that he saw wetness in the man's eyes. He thought this would make him feel joy in that Petyr was so very weak, but instead it continued making him feel uneasy.

The former noble began to sob quickly, showing none of the anger, none of the frothing rage that Ramsay had once exhibited when pushed to this point. Perhaps he is just weak-willed, thought Ramsay, but his memory of the things Petyr had said in his defense niggled at his thoughts that this was incorrect. He wondered if Petyr's pride really was second to his affection for Sansa. Was that part really not bullshit?

If not it would explain why Petyr began to spill out a litany of apologies as Sansa thoroughly tanned his hide, blathering on and on until he was almost incoherent through the pain about how very sorry he was. Shortly after this came the promises, one after the other as to how he would make amends and do right by her.

But Sansa remained quiet through all of this part, only answering his words with the sharp sting of the strap, which spoke for her. Ramsay recognized what Petyr was doing, and credited Sansa for knowing that it was all a defense mechanism, one favored by the weak and pathetic. Petyr likely meant not a word of what he said, and Sansa wasn't giving his lip-service the dignity of a like response.

After this Petyr began to cry, just as Sansa had promised he would, his tears rolling from his eyes and he surrendered words in favor of deep, mournful, wracking sobs that resonated from deep in his chest even as Sansa continued to add layer after layer of bright red stripes across his backside. Ramsay felt shaken by the emotion coming off of Petyr in waves now, and the worst part was that it wasn't in a good way.

He almost wished to ask Sansa if he could leave, but he dared not interrupt, and he knew that she would not allow him to exit alone, leaving him feeling trapped in that room he no longer wished to be present in. He didn't like that Sansa was doing to Petyr what she had done to him, and he knew now that it must be for various reasons, because his own emotions on the topic swirled like a storm inside of him now.

And then, just as suddenly as it had started, Sansa stopped, stepping away from Petyr and raising her
hand to tuck a lock of hair that had come loose due to her exertions back into place. Her breathing was ever so slightly elevated, but otherwise she radiated a sense of calmness in her bearing and voice as she stated firmly, "This shall be the easiest thing you endure for your misconduct, Petyr Baelish. I want you to think on that as you wait for the next."

Then she turned upon her heel and made for the door. Ramsay was just as surprised as Petyr for a moment, the other man still tensed as if she might lay another stinging reprimand upon his person in physical form, but Ramsay at least understood the power of a well-played exit. He smiled as she swept past him to leave, "Well, I suppose that you…"

"Come, Ramsay."

His words were cut short as he hurried to obey, a bit chastened by the act, both in her clipped command and his automatic response to scurry after her. Sansa had him acting like a well-trained hound and he knew it, but to his chagrin Petyr now also knew it by the way that he had abandoned his insult to heel like a dog.

They walked down the halls of the keep for a few minutes in silence, Ramsay noting that they seemed to be heading back to Sansa's own quarters. Halfway there she suddenly rounded on him, shoving him into the wall and levering a hard look at him that made him squirm against her tight grip, "Why are you acting like this, Ramsay?"

"L-like what?" he sputtered. Though Ramsay knew very well what she spoke of; he had made a point of glowering and moping ever since Sansa's original decision to perform a trial for Petyr, never mind the excess of posturing he had done for all of her choices since. He realized nervously that she had not failed to notice at all.

No, she had just been ignoring the large volumes of negative energy he had been radiating her way in favor of focusing on the task that was at hand, but now he had her full attention, and suddenly all of that projected melancholy didn't seem like such a great idea in the purview of her burning gaze. It was clear in her eyes that she knew that he knew what she meant.

Sansa pulled away slightly and her hand lashed out to smack his backside, causing him to jump in surprise, his hand reflexively rubbing at the area as she continued to lock him with that steely stare. It hadn't really hurt; he had been wearing clothing and the awkward angle that she had hit him from blunted any chance of real pain, but he knew that wasn't the point.

The point was that this was a very real threat of him sharing Petyr's fate if he didn't stop doing what he was doing. He licked his lips, his worried blue eyes reflecting that he got the message and that he hoped adamantly that she was done punishing him for his misbehavior. Seeming mollified by his change of demeanor Sansa turned back to continue walking.

Following her in a far more subdued manner than he had been expressing lately, Ramsay wondered over whether her temperament towards his expressions of dissatisfaction wasn't strongly affected by the roiling emotions she undoubtedly felt concerning her dealings with Petyr. He imagined it must take a great deal of restraint to not go wild on a man who was responsible for the deaths of loved ones, even if he couldn't quite understand why she would bother doing so.

He reflected that the sharp manner of her speech and the agitated manner in which she walked must be due to her dwelling on thoughts of what she would have rather done to Petyr. At least, this was what Ramsay might have been thinking, but once they arrived at her quarters she proved to him yet again that he did not know her mind at all.

As soon as the door was shut behind them Sansa grabbed ahold of Ramsay and pressed him hard to
the wall as she had in the hall. At first, he thought she might be revisiting her argument from before and his heart trilled in fear inside him at what that might mean, but instead of hard looks and angry questions, she began to rip his clothes from him. Ramsay watched, stunned, as she removed him of his pants.

"Bend over the bed; I'm going to fuck you."

It took several long moments for the shock of what Sansa had just told him to make way for reasoning thought. Apparently Sansa was feeling impatient as well, giving him another cuff on the behind to stir him to action. Ramsay moved over to the bed stiffly, feeling like he was in some sort of dream, where everything happened in a sort of slow motion.

She had used the metal cock she had crafted for him on occasion when she had first taken Ramsay on as her charge, but it had been some time, and dreadful feelings of remembered discomfort and humiliation rose within him at the sight of her mounting the device upon her person and strapping into place once again.

Sansa glanced at him as he stood there by the bed, frozen with the feelings that assailed him, "I told you to bend over."

She moved closer and Ramsay flinched, "I-I thought that we had moved past this sort of depreciating activity… have I not been your faithful and humble servant?" Hearing himself say such belittling words about his own person churned at Ramsay, making him feel sick to his stomach, but how much more shaming it would be to continue as they were...

Sansa gave him a smile that was both cold and warm at the same time; if he hadn't been subject to the prospect of incoming sodomy he might have taken delights in such a look. Perhaps he had taught Sansa far more about sadism than he had thought. How terribly ironic that her lust for pain and pleasure in it would then be applied to him.

Myranda had often looked at him that way, when she had held him to the bed by the wrists, or imitated choking him while they fucked. But that had all been play acting, the two of them imagining as they fed their needs. Sansa wasn't playing at dominating him; she intended to actually do so, and not as a punishment this time, but just because it would cause her satisfaction.

Apparently he was still moving too sluggishly, because Sansa suddenly pushed him down so that he fell upon the bed, barring her left arm across his back as her right hand gave him a painful swat to the pale flesh of his naked buttocks. He was feeling panicked now, mostly by the fact that he didn't think that there was anything he could say to stop her, "Wait! Wh-what brought all of this on?!"

She paused, still holding him down firmly but seeming to consider his request for a reason to her sudden interest in taking him this way, "I suppose in the interest of keeping our marriage honest I'll share with you. I have always derived joy in watching you squirm when you got what you deserved at my hands, so when I saw Petyr jump and hop about as he got a taste of what is to come, I grew hot with need."

Ramsay's eyes were wide as he strained to look over his shoulder at her. When she had fucked him with the metal cock before, he had always assumed that it was entirely as a method of torture designed to emulate one of the cruelties that he had so often forced upon her. He had never once imagined that Sansa felt joy in the doing of it.

Sansa didn't give him time to reflect on this any longer, her right hand spreading his cheek to the side so that she could press the cool, smooth device against his taint. He went stiff as a board and cried out at the feeling as she began to push her false member inside of him, inch by inch, "N-no, stop!"
Please, I don't want this!"

She made a shushing noise as she continued to gently but firmly invade him further and further, until nearly all of it was inside of him, "I will be as kind as I can, but you will give me my marriage due, husband."

Ramsay stiffened further at those words; they sounded so very similar to the very words that he had often spoken to her when she had objected to his treatment of her. Sansa might be acting out of lust, but he would be remiss to think that there was no element of punishment not still in play with this. There was no arguing with her, he realized; he deserved this.

As promised, Sansa took care to enter him as painlessly as possible, though feeding her need soon drove her to begin working the makeshift cock hard inside of him, her hands grasping his hips to pull him up into her as she fucked him in long thrusts that caused Ramsay to cry out in pain and dismay. He didn't argue or resist anymore; he knew the futility in it, only laying limply as she had her way with him.

While he lay there, rocked by Sansa's growing passions, he kicked himself mentally for his jealousy concerning Petyr; he should have been less concerned with her fucking Petyr and more concerned about her fucking him. His yelling grew loud and his hands entwined themselves in the sheets as he grasped them firmly against the invasive feeling of what she did.

Suddenly Sansa pressed against him so hard that it drove him down into the bedding, and she gave forth her own cry of ecstasy, her body trembling against his as her faux cock drove very deeply inside him. Ramsay glanced back at her in amazement; it was still a lot to digest, seeing her derive such joy from this.

At last she sank to lay upon his back, breathing heavily and spent from her exertions. Ramsay felt a surge of relief that she had gotten what she wanted, since it meant that he might finally be free of his humiliating position beneath her, but this feeling was truncated when he felt her begin to slowly move the cock around inside him once more.

He looked back to see a predatory look in her eyes, and her breath played hotly over the nape of his neck as she whispered into his ear, "You're not done sharing with me yet, Husband."

As she began to work herself up again Ramsay began to reconsider how he had imagined this going; Sansa seemed zealous in her passions now, and no woman was restricted to a mere single orgasm. He braced himself as well as he could, feeling the sharp sting of frustrated, hopeless tears in his eyes; this was going to be a long night indeed.
With a groan, a dark-haired man rolled himself from his bed to the sound of someone’s infernal cawing animal. He blearily glanced at the window of the room he occupied as he lifted himself from the warm sanctuary of the soft linen sheets, but the window was closed with a set of small doors whose glass was frosted with cold so severely he could not see through them.

This didn’t bother him, though; his curiosity concerning whether the bothersome animal in question had been a rooster or not did not override his desire to keep the window shut against the fury of the winter that descended upon Winterfell in recent days. It had gotten colder in the last few weeks than he had ever known it to be.

Being as he had spent much of his life in the northern realm of the seven kingdoms, cold winters were in his blood, but this winter was colder than most, and he had spent a fair portion of his childhood a bit south of Winterfell. He winced at the feeling of the cold stone floor upon his bared feet, and quickly hopped over to the slightly less frigid rugs that lay before the dresser his clothes resided in.

There he let out a long sigh, allowing the heat from the fire in the nearby hearth to warm him, acclimating to the chill in the air gradually. He glanced at the reflection in the mirror behind and above the dresser that stared back at him, giving himself a familiar smirk. The man in that mirror had tousled longish hair and the barest wisp of a beard creeping in at the sides of his face.

“Ramsay Stark.”

That smile froze, melting slowly as an expression of uneasiness and perhaps even momentary confusion settled over the features looking back at him. It was so odd to hear those words roll off of his tongue, and more odd yet to consider the implication of them. Quite honestly, Ramsay was not even entirely sure what all of those implications might be.

Sansa Stark had renamed him, in a way putting the final nail into the coffin of his father’s legacy, which Ramsay had ironically started by murdering his own father, even before he had led the rest of his House to ruin in a war against Lord Commander Jon Snow, now King of the North upon ousting Ramsay as Warden of the North and thus leaving a void that needed filling.

The amusement had fully worn away from his expression now as a contemplative man stared out from the polished glass, Ramsay considering how everything he had done to bring Jon here had ultimately put the other bastard by birth upon the throne. And married Ramsay into his family. Did this mean that Jon was his brother?

His brow furrowed at the thought as he hurried to open the drawers of the cabinet beneath the mirror
to fetch out his clothing. Deep thoughts aside, there was a chill in the air despite the heat from the hearth, and nakedness was going to need to be remedied. Still, his thoughts remained on his new inclusion; by law, he was indeed King Jon’s brother.

As he pulled on the cotton breeches and linen shirt provided him by his wife, Sansa Stark, Ramsay marveled at the chain of events that had landed him a position as the king’s brother. Now, in another circumstance he might have been extremely enthusiastic about such an arrangement: being a king’s brother normally put a person within reach of the throne.

But this wasn’t a normal circumstance; Sansa Stark had tacked the name of her House to him by keeping their marriage vows intact, for reasons that he was still having trouble pinning down, but she had also made it clear to him and more importantly to Jon’s court that he was not going to be considered a noble in any capacity.

Essentially, he was a vassal lord, a prisoner not unlike Theon Greyjoy had been in when he was ward of Ned Stark. He would be decorated with all the dressings of nobility without any of the actual substance or power of the position. He might have been adopted into the family, but he wasn’t fool enough to think he was in the line of succession.

Ramsay sighed at this, looking around for his furred great cloak and donning it so that he might brace the fierce cold that awaited him outside of his room. Sansa had risen some time before him as she was prone to do, so he wouldn’t need to concern himself with her judgements about his ‘laziness to rise from bed’.

Still, he was as always eager to flex his newly afforded freedoms, one of which was the ability to leave Sansa’s quarters and wander about Winterfell as he pleased, as long as he did not stray past the walls of the courtyard. Sansa had gifted him this new right only a few nights past on his name day, and Ramsay had been both surprised and overjoyed by it.

Most people took their freedom for granted until they were bereft of it, and Ramsay had come to realize how smothering it was to be locked away in a single room indefinitely. So now, despite the deep chill that permeated the air of the hall outside of the room he stood in, he stepped out taking a deep breath of the freezing air and considering the musty smell to be that of freedom.

He glanced left and right down the dark passageways, which were lit intermittently by smoldering torches hanging on sconces set into the walls. The sun had yet to fully rise into the sky, so the keep was still blanketed in the last vestiges of night, but once the warm light of the sun managed to more thoroughly reach the openings and windows, things would become brighter.

Ramsay paused, not really certain what his plans for the morning were. It was often like this for him; he had already explored this place long ago. He had been living here for some time before the Battle of the Bastards had traded ownership back into the hands of the Starks after all. He let out another sigh, supposing another meandering morning walk would have to suffice.

He worked his way along the lonely corridor that passed by Sansa’s Quarters, which had been Ramsay’s quarters briefly after he had murdered his father to obtain them along with the tile of ‘Warden of the North’, and Sansa’s parents before that. That felt a lifetime ago to Ramsay, but he was certain the murder of Sansa’s parents was much fresher to her.

The passage was empty, and the halls beyond quiet as he made his way along; most of the servants didn’t begin to make their rounds quite yet, so as to give the later risers time to remove themselves from their rooms before beginning the mid-morning cleaning and whatnot. The first thing he did hear as he rounded to one of the open areas of the hall was steel on steel.
In a steady cadence of metal striking metal, the ringing of a smith’s hammer was easily the first thing that echoed its way to Ramsay’s ears. As he stepped out into the courtyard proper more sights and sounds of life became visible and audible to him, stripping away the sense that he was wandering a derelict castle all alone.

The smallfolk busied themselves with many different tasks all around him, likely having been at it before the sun had even fully crested the horizon. Besides the aforementioned smith who pounded away on a lump of metal that might become a horseshoe given time, a woman worked busily plucking the feathers from a chicken that she held tightly to her middle as she sat upon a wooden stool.

Across from her several soldiers, likely some of the few of the Night’s Watch that had survived the Battle of the Bastards, sat or leaned upon a low wooden rail that ran alongside the narrow dirt road that wound through the courtyard from the gated entrance. They spoke to each other quietly, their words too low for Ramsay to make out.

The horses in the nearby stable snorted and stamped appreciatively as a stable boy carefully doled out feed for their morning breakfast, mindful of the mares and stallion’s eager heads, which dipped in effort to get food before it was readily served. The sound of chickens and a rooster in an open pen nearby hinted at where the noise that had wakened Ramsay might have come from.

He pulled his hood up and then low over his face as he made his way across the yard. Hiding himself was a reaction to what he knew they thought of him, really; everyone knew whom he was despite the weak attempt at obfuscation, and when he walked near conversations died and silence reigned. Ramsay wasn’t sure why he didn’t just stalk past them plain to see.

In his need to hide himself from them, or dampen his view of them with that thick hood, Ramsay couldn’t help but see that the opinions of the others in the keep bothered him, even those of the lowly peasants. By avoiding them this way and making it clear that he sought no conversation with anyone, he was admitting that he felt ashamed.

That bit didn’t sit well in Ramsay’s mind, and he did his best to shrug it away as one might shoo away a bothersome fly, but the feeling and the thought remained despite his attempt to reassert his focus elsewhere. On that note, Ramsay’s eyes flitted about the yard as his walk became hurried, trying to find something to occupy himself with looking at.

The ground was a bit muddy, and there were deep grooves where wagons had occasionally made their mark in passage over the moist soil, and another sort of metallic sound could be heard across the way that took a moment for Ramsay to recognize. After a moment though it dawned on him what the curious clashing sound was.

Just as he rounded a parked wagon full of grain bags, Ramsay could make out Lady Brienne of Tarth. Despite the earliness of the day she was already clad in her full arraignment of heavy armor and was using the massive double-handed sword she preferred to smash into a wooden dummy, which was holding up poorly to the punishment.

She was using the flat of her blade to strike it with each powerful blow, but regardless of this the bludgeoning action was sending bits of cloth and straw flying from the target apparatus with each strike she delivered. Ramsay mused that in a very short time she will have removed the item of all of its crude semblances of false humanity.

Brienne stopped her work to stand up to her full height, breathing a little heavily from the exertion as she glowered at Ramsay. At her tallest she towered over the small man, striking an intimidating figure as her eyes expressed how loathsome she found him to be. Ramsay had never spoken to her
personally, but Sansa had been clear that Brienne was not fond of his presence.

As a knight protector vowed to protect the daughters of the late Catelyn Stark, Brienne did not have to openly voice her opinion for Sansa to know what she thought of keeping a man like Ramsay so close to herself, and he had at times when walking about the keep felt a prickle along his spine only to glance back and see the armor-clad woman watching him.

Under her glare he retreated, moving quickly to finish his round about the courtyard. He wasn’t sure why he kept doing this; it was the same thing every time, in fact sometimes worse, and yet he continued to return to his walks throughout the courtyard and all of the other varied parts of the keep where people of all sorts could revile him.

Well, he thought, it wasn’t as if he could go much of anywhere else or do much of anything else; he had been named a ‘ward’ of Sansa Stark, but no matter what sort of title he managed to claim in her eyes, every man and woman of the region branded him a prisoner at best, evidenced by how the guards always became tense when he passed near the gates.

Ramsay scowled, tying not to think on the matter; it always made him feel sore to mull over the issue of how others saw him these days. Instead, he focused on putting one foot in front of the other until he had finally left the courtyard behind him. From there he took the steps leading from the interior up onto the walls.

Thusly located where he could glance down upon the surrounding countryside from the height of the parapets, Ramsay took in the view of the northern reach in all of its icy glory. Rolling tundra spread as far as the eye could see in all directions, a seemingly endless expanse of land with no human presence felt.

Ramsay knew that there were hamlets and villages spread here and there along the scope of that view, but that they were far away enough to be hidden from the naked eye by the rolling hills of the landscape. He squinted, eyeing the one settlement that was close enough to just be made out from this distance.

It was a single farm he knew, from his explorations back when he had been the heir to the Bolton legacy and could actually leave the confines of the castle Winterfell. He snorted, turning his mind away from deliberation on the fact that he was disallowed from leaving this place. Instead he took a deep breath of the icy air and said for the one-thousandth time, “This place is a shithole.”

As usual, stating his feelings on the matter changed nothing, so Ramsay meandered along the walkway atop the parapets, eyeing that vast expanse below from between the stone crenellations of the wall as he did so. There were a few watchmen stationed at various points along the battlement, but they paid little heed to Ramsay, more concerned with what lay outside of the fortification.

Not that they seemed particularly pleased with his presence; Ramsay caught sight of one glancing his way just before the armored figure spat profusely on the ground between them and turned to gaze back out at those boring rolling hills. Ramsay took in a deep breath and let it out, somewhat refreshed; he had always enjoyed being hated.

Well, perhaps not in a way that others might understand, but ever since he had been a boy Ramsay had enjoyed getting under someone else’s skin. Perhaps it was just a matter of being able to wrest a little bit of power away from someone else, to make them lose their composure even just a little. It had always made Ramsay feel powerful and clever.

So with a somewhat lighter step Ramsay traipsed past the guard who clearly didn’t appreciate his company, bidding the man a good morning, to which he received no answer; not an unexpected
development. Then he hastened down a set of stairs on the next section of wall, suddenly possessed with a haste to get himself inside; the wind up top seemed even worse than below.

Hurriedly Ramsay made his way along the inner wall of the courtyard, where there was a stone roof over his head, but the cover did little to alleviate the bitter cold. In fact, the tunnel-like nature of that space seemed to only cause the wind to rush into him even more unfavorably, and he grimaced at the chill of it all.

It was only a short ways to get to the keep’s main door from there, though, and Ramsay practically threw the door open in his haste to get inside where at least the wind would be unable to reach him. Once there he glanced around, noting the interior. The Starks had not adorned their keep with any large amount of decorations.

Other than utilitarian furniture and a few banners depicting a snarling dire wolf, there was little art or finery to be seen, as Ramsay’s father had not added much of anything to what was present upon taking up residence when the Boltons had owned the place. Roose Bolton had, like the Starks apparently, had little interest in opulence.

Definitely nothing like the sort of keeps one would find to the south. The closer one got to the port of King’s Landing, the more extravagant the interiors and even exteriors of each keep and castle became. As if each lord would state his wealth by placing it all over the things he owned. Not in the north, though; here wealth was a secondary concern for many.

This land was a harsh one; between the bitter cold which claimed the old and young at a regular pace, the scarcity of game in many of the more desolate reaches, and the powerful, dangerous animals that prowled about, just staying alive in the unforgiving north was success enough. To actually thrive here was worth more status than gold.

Ramsay moved along the hallway that ran adjacent to the council chambers and the entry room, coming to a fork in the road of sorts and pausing for a moment to decide where exactly his whim would take him today. After only a moments consideration he veered off to the left and began making his way down the stairwell that led to the crypts.

The first time he had ventured down this way, not so long ago during his ill-fated attempt to flee his captivity under the Starks, he had been terribly dismayed that this room was full of dead Starks rather than tack and mead. Now he still wished that there was mead, but at least everyone down here was a dead Stark…

Ramsay had of course come here many times recently; the company of the fallen enemy, he had viewed them all as such, savoring that they were dead while he still yet drew breath. But that aspect had brought him less satisfaction with each day that passed, even more so now that Sansa Stark had actually named him a member of the family.

How odd it did feel for him to walk those storied halls now, glancing upon the stony visages of memorial statues that had been erected for all of the Stark greats. Sansa had insisted on taking him here after his recapture, not at all long after he had gone so far as to desecrate the resting place of the Stark boy Rickon Stark, whom he himself had murdered in cold blood.

Here she had regaled him with stories of all of the people who had been interred in the crypt, educated him of the noblest and the strongest, and of those that had died defending their home in days before Winterfell had even graced this country. Ramsay of course had been generally uninterested, especially as he had been rather raw about his recapture at the time.

He was fairly certain, at least at the time, that the whole ordeal had been some sort of attempt on
Sansa’s part to make him feel guilt or remorse for the things that he had done against her family. He had worked to show her then that he didn’t give a shit for her relatives any more so at that time than he had when he’d shot Rickon with the arrow that had killed him.

Of course, he had done so carefully, and perhaps in so subtle a fashion that it might have been missed entirely. After all, by that time Sansa had taken to public and humiliating displays of… Ramsay turned his mind away from it. He didn’t like to dwell on what Sansa sometimes even now still did to keep him in check when he ‘misbehaved’, as she called it.

Ramsay shook his head, as if doing so might free him of the bothersome thought that buzzed around within it currently, as if by shaking himself he could be freed of such terrible memories and humiliations of the past as if they were annoying, biting flies of the physical kind. Sadly, this wasn’t the case, and he had to work to turn his mind elsewhere.

So he instead focused his attention again on the grim statuary as he passed each. He noted today that while the other lords of the north or the south often had murals of their families painted to depict the leaders of their holds as solemn and commanding visages, he remembered none that looked as grim as those he saw upon that chiseled stone.

The face of each Stark seemed to bear upon it years of endurance and hardship; lives lived under the weight of heavy choices and the burdens of daily sacrifices made just to continue living. He wondered how much of that errant thought was himself and how much was Sansa. She had lectured him for a long while on the subject, after all.

He paused, noting that he had happened to do so in front of the elaborate grave of the most recently fallen Stark; Rickon. Not long ago he had crawled inside of the boy’s coffin, desperate for a place to hide. He wondered if Rickon’s ghost stood close by now, laughing at Ramsay who now revisited that tomb, just as trapped as before.

It had been an act of sacrilege, messing with the bodies of the dead as he had, and even Ramsay, whom never fancied himself as being in any remote way superstitious, had balked at it at least a little. He had to muse to himself now, wondering if the act of violation itself isn’t what had set the gods so thoroughly against him.

Ramsay had never once given two shits what the gods might think, the old ones or the new ones, but with the way his life had ended up, all of the crushing defeats and humiliations he was made to suffer when he had been so very close to making a real name for himself; one had to consider that maybe one had earned divine malediction.

He let out a long sigh. It seemed that self-pity and anguish over what he had lost was inseparable from his thinking. Every time he came on these walks he told himself that he was going to enjoy some fresh air, no matter how damned cold, to the full extent of the ‘freedoms’ that Sansa allowed him, but every time he returned to agonizing reflections.

With a grunt Ramsay turned from the bust of Rickon and hustled back to the entrance of the crypt. He supposed that there was just no escaping his feelings on the things that caused him daily strife; he did live in a gilded cage after all. Sansa might claim him to be a member of the family publicly, but she had made it clear to Ramsay that he had no say in his fate.
Chapter Twenty

Three's a Crowd

Brienne of Tarth waited as patiently as she could just outside the door of the largest chambers in Winterfell. Therein stayed the last remaining pure-blooded Stark, Sansa Stark, whom had claimed the bedchambers of her deceased parents for herself when she had returned to her ancestral home after the Battle of the Bastards.

Before that Roose Bolton had taken those quarters upon himself when he had joined the Lannisters in the treasonous murder of the former, short-lived King of the North, Rob Stark. The man had no qualm about laying his head on the bed of the very family he had so villainously betrayed, and as far as Brienne saw, Ramsay followed in the footsteps of his father.

That Sansa actually allowed him to stay in her very own bedchambers, and according to the rumors of the servants, even within the confines of her bed caused Brienne a sort of panic for which she had no recourse. After all, it remained her solemn pledge to the late Catelyn Stark that she would keep her daughters safe.

Of Arya Stark Brienne knew sadly little, as the young girl had run off during Brienne's pitched battle with the Hound, but ever since Brienne had found Sansa alive and well in the company of that snake Petyr Baelish, she had been elated with the chance to try and keep her oath and secure the safety of at least one Stark daughter.

When Brienne had learned of the arrest and trial conducted by Sansa for Petyr, she had been relieved to see that her and her half-brother Jon were at least wise to the deceitful ways of that man, but the news that she had spared him a quick death despite all of the crimes he was convicted of, and after all of her leniency with Ramsay Bolton… not to mention this news that Brienne had overheard from several gossiping nobles concerning Sansa actually giving Ramsay the Stark moniker… Brienne could only assume that Sansa had been hurt so badly by one or both of those men that she had taken leave of her senses, that she no longer had the ability to discern the danger she put herself in.

And, of course Jon did not make things any easier with the way that he had pandered to her every demand concerning Ramsay. Now that Jon was gone things were even worse, thought Brienne; before he might have allowed much out of misguided kindness for his ailing sister, but now Sansa had full authority of Winterfell, and there was no one to keep her in check.

She had been listening to the council of vipers for so long that she had learned to distance herself from council, which was good, but Brienne feared that Sansa only took council in herself these days, and worried that Sansa would not listen to reason if it presented itself an obstacle to whatever plans she might have for the two villains.

Brienne thought on these things as she paced back and forth before the door, her plated boots making
a muffled scuffing noise on the carpet below, and worried lines creasing her pale brow. She had waited until Ramsay proved to be away from the room to come, but now that she was here she hesitated, unable to summon the needed resolve.

Convincing leaders required skill with words. Brienne had met many persons now who had that ability in spades, but she had always found herself to be somewhat lacking in the ability to convince others with words alone. She had confronted several of the guard and the Maester, but no one else was interested in drawing the ire of the lady Stark.

She was without allies in what was seeming to become an increasingly bleak scenario of dealing with a young woman whose traumas and hardships had driven her mad. Brienne had briefly considered killing both Petyr and Ramsay. It would not have been terribly difficult given the level of trust merited to Brienne, but that same trust kept her from that route.

Regardless of what Brienne might think on the matter, Sansa would have seen such action as betrayal, and given the obviously tattered nature of Sansa's ability to trust others, Brienne could not bear the thought of being the person who broke Sansa of her ability to trust completely. Not to mention the terrible, permanent stain on her honor such an act would be.

So instead of taking action, which was and always had been Brienne's preferred method of dealing with any problem or obstacle, she paced here, torn over what might occur given that she had no way to directly confront the issue at hand without also potentially making the matter even worse than it already was.

She glanced over at the door, taking a deep breath and steadying her resolve; she didn't have all day to make a choice. Soon enough Ramsay would return or Sansa would leave making it more difficult to speak alone... on that note it suddenly occurred to Brienne that she had not heard the slightest of sounds from behind the door.

It was true that the walls were of thick stone and that the door was of solid oak, but in the silence now Brienne's already inflated sense of danger got the best of her and she laid a hand across the pommel of her great sword as she hurriedly rushed into the room. Her gazed flitted quickly about to take in the items of furniture and a smoldering fire in the hearth.

The room was empty. Brienne let out another sigh, feeling foolish for becoming so worked up about an interview that wasn't even possible. She had assumed the lady of the keep would be here, but in her absence, Brienne recalled belatedly that Sansa had been rising early of late to direct the efforts of the people here against both the coming battle and the winter itself.

Brienne might have thought of this before, but she could only assume that her distracted thinking on how to confront Sansa had her so wrapped up that she had overlooked the simple detail of where and when she might do so. She had seen Ramsay in the courtyard and come here on the hopes of such a meeting without thinking it through fully.

She turned, intending to leave and see if perhaps she could obtain an audience with Sansa elsewhere, only to pause at the sight of Ramsay lurking in the doorway. He frowned at her, "What exactly are you doing in my room?"

Brienne's lip curled back into an unpleasant expression and she replied gruffly, "I was checking upon the safety of my lady in her room. I could ask you much the same question, bastard."

Ramsay blinked. He had never actually exchanged words with Brienne of Tarth before, though he had heard she was quite blunt, he had never expected her to outright insult him. Not to mention that her statement boldly refuted his right to the Stark name, and there was no way that a person like...
Brienne had not been informed of his current station.

His nose wrinkled in disdain for the armored woman who proved so very disrespectful. Despite how odd it might feel to defend his new Stark title of all things, Ramsay was driven along nonetheless by his need to one up this troublesome woman, "Probably because I am married to her and this is where I share my bed with the lady Stark."

Brienne's eyes narrowed, and Ramsay smiled in the usual way he did when he managed to get under someone's skin, grinning from ear to ear. She suddenly surged forward though, causing him to startle and nearly fall over himself as she pressed in close to him much faster than her armored frame would suggest possible.

As his wide blue eyes stared up at her, she intoned a whispered threat as her own glare bore down upon him from her great height now seeming that much greater for her proximity, "Watch yourself. You are no wolf of the north any more than I am. I know you for the snake that you are; do not give me reason to make it any clearer."

With one big gauntleted hand she grabbed him by the shoulder, shoving him discourteously from her path as she made her way out of the room. Ramsay's mouth became a tight line as his nostrils flared at the sight of her retreating form and how she disregarded him so easily, but he was still too surprised to make comment as she took her leave.

As Brienne walked the halls of the keep looking for where Sansa had gotten herself to that she might have that much-needed discussion with her, she chided herself for allowing herself to show Ramsay so much of her distaste for him. It wouldn't help her to antagonize him, yet she felt a bit lighter for it anyway; it had felt good to see fear upon his face, if even for a moment.

***…***

"But milady, he is a danger to you and all you hold dear. Both of them are." Brienne did not have to expound on whom the other person was in 'both of them'. She had been heatedly discussing Petyr Baelish's continued ability to draw air with Sansa, and though it might well be a mistake to put her on the defensive concerning both men, Brienne felt she had to say it.

She had discovered Sansa near the war room; apparently the last lady of castle Winterfell had been discussing strategies for the continued defense of the place with the captains of both the remaining Watch forces and those of the Veil left behind to assist her by a grateful Robyn of Ayrn. Brienne had asked for a private conference.

Sansa had moved their talk to a nearby room, but had insisted that her councilors that yet hovered, were to be privy to whatever was said claiming that she trusted them and felt there was no reason to exclude any in whatever Brienne had to speak about. Another unfortunate circumstance concerning Brienne's necessary attempt to approach a personal subject.

The lady Stark had insisted though, and Brienne was left with no choice but to cede to her desire several times considering in that instant whether she should simply speak on something else and let the matter drop until a more favorable meeting presented itself. But Brienne had been doing just that for some time now…

She wasn't sure how much longer she would be made to wait before she could finally be able to catch Sansa in an isolated setting to bring up such matters between Ramsay sharing a bedchamber with her and Sansa's own insistence that Brienne speak before these men, among whom stood a maester that Brienne had heard served Roose Bolton.
It could be a long time coming, and Brienne's feeling of urgency was such now that she could no longer allow her desire to shield Sansa from political shame to prevent her from honestly and openly venting her feelings about both of the murderous men she harbored.

And yet Sansa still dismissed her opinions, "I am well aware of the risks of keeping them alive."

Brienne made a frustrated snorting sound as she rapidly expelled air in her irritation, "I have heard your reasons for taking these risks and I must say milady that I do not think that they weigh against the threat! Please, if you insist on keeping them alive so that they might meet their just rewards, let someone else handle it away from you!"

Sansa raised an eyebrow, "Are you volunteering? Did you want to be the one who punished Petyr Baelish and Ramsay?"

Brienne paused and then stood up straight, "I would gladly do so if you would permit. Being able to personally oversee them would do much to settle my concerns milady."

Sansa frowned at the bigger woman, "Well, this isn't about you. It wasn't your family that they murdered, not you they hurt."

The armored knight flinched at the intensity of Sansa's baleful glare when she said those things, and Brienne glanced away, wondering how in the world she was going to bring up her doubts about the wisdom of Sansa's choices without failing at it and perhaps making things even worse.

"But you can help, Brienne of Tarth." Brienne glanced over, a little surprised. Sansa had the barest wisp of a smile in one corner of her mouth, "Perhaps then your concerns can find satisfaction."

***…***

Ramsay was glad when Sansa returned that evening, for he had been fuming ever since his encounter with Brienne and relished the opportunity to find a way to perhaps use his closeness to the most powerful person in Winterfell to cause the armored woman some much needed distress after the way that she had disregarded him.

No sooner had he opened his mouth to tell her of Brienne's rude entry into their quarters as Sansa appeared in their door though did he spy Brienne at her shoulder, his mouth closing with an audible snap as he suddenly abandoned what he had been about to say. He thought he might have seen a flicker of mirth in Sansa's eyes for a moment.

Sansa cleared her throat and spoke once Brienne had also stepped inside to stop nearby, the female warrior clasping her hands at the small of her back and relaxing into a neutral stance, "I have decided that I shall be taking the lady of Tarth on as a personal guard for the time being, so she shall be making herself comfortable here."

Ramsay's lip quirked as he glanced at Brienne and then back to Sansa, "But isn't Lady Brienne already staying with us here in Winterfell? You mean here as in right here in this room? Why would you take such a guard now; has some form of new threat arisen?"

The Lady of Winterfell shrugged, "No, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared for the worst, and Lady Brienne is currently without task."

He shot a blistering glare at Brienne now, whom only returned his look with a flat stare of apathy. It was clearer than ever that Brienne had spoken with Sansa to secure this new arrangement, likely only so that she could continue to aggravate him. Here he had planned to put a thorn in Brienne's side for her insult to him, but she had already outmaneuvered him!
Ramsay had thought Brienne to be a stupid thing, all muscle and no brain, but now he realized he had misjudged her, but she was wrong if she thought she was going to catch him by surprise again. With a sigh, he rolled his eyes, "Fine, though I find her stare tedious." He picked up an empty cup and gestured at her with it, "Perhaps she could fetch us refreshment?"

A tight smile laced with the malice that drove his insulting comment covered his face as he stared right into Brienne's eyes, making no effort to hide his intent, but Sansa ruined his moment with her response as she handed him the rest of the tray of empty vessels, "I have business with her, why don't you be a dear and fetch us water while we speak?"

It had sounded like a question in words as it often did with her, but as always, her tone declared it a veiled command, and Ramsay frowned deeply as he quickly tucked the tray of items to himself and hurried from the room, his jaw tight with the realization that Sansa was going to ruin any further efforts of his to degrade Brienne.

No, quite the opposite, it seemed she was ready and willing to turn that game around entirely and leave Ramsay in the exact state he had wished for his new nemesis. When he got himself to the kitchen he threw the metal tray full of tin cups into the wash basin with far more force than necessary, causing a terrible racket and startling the nearby kitchen servants.

His hands were balled into fists, and all he could think of was the fact that he was helpless to really effect Brienne in any meaningful way. He almost left the kitchen but the notion returned to him that Sansa would be unhappy if he returned without water so with a heavy sigh he returned to retrieve what he would need.

Brienne watched him carefully when he returned, even going so far as to lift the cup he brought to her nose, as if smelling it for traces of poison. This ruffled Ramsay a bit, but he said nothing at the insult to his intelligence. He would not be so foolish as to attempt such an obvious ploy against the knight and found it ridiculous that she would consider him capable of it.

He mulled over that thought as he moved himself over to sit nearby whilst Sansa and Brienne continued the conversation that she had mentioned they would be having. They spoke on the logistics of Brienne's move over to their quarters, where she would be sleeping and when as well as where the armored woman was to store her things.

Mundane matters that bored Ramsay of course and allowed him to ignore the conversation entirely as he instead contemplated what it was exactly that Brienne wanted. She clearly thought him capable of incredible stupidity and seemed to assume that he was a waiting viper in the bedsheets prepared to strike her ward down at any time.

While Ramsay kind of enjoyed the idea that he was causing the blonde woman such unease, the fact that doing so was going to make his own life less comfortable, as she continued to invade his privacy and personal space due to her reservations, remained a problem for Ramsay as well, perhaps making it worthwhile for him to put her mind at ease.

He briefly considered that option; simply talking to Brienne once the two of them found themselves alone together and assuring her with words that he was in fact not planning to do anything to harm Sansa, which was in fact the truth. Ramsay had come to terms with himself that he actually cared both for Sansa and what Sansa thought of him.

If he only expressed how he felt about her, opened up a bit about the changes that she had presented in him… but fuck Brienne. Instead he turned his thoughts to how best to make her life one of such unbearable paranoia that she eventually either quit the cat and mouse game she played with him to protect her own sanity, or…
He smiled. Or she lost her shit in a way that got her removed from Sansa's immediate presence, if not by Sansa herself than at least by those close to her that might object to the presence of an extremely overzealous bodyguard. The next trick would be to find what it would take exactly to push her over that edge, so he waited, and he watched.

To his annoyance the two women spoke of him dismissively several times during their conversation. He hated being spoken of as if he was mundane; fear and reverence were what he wanted when people uttered his name, but long past were the days when that might have been the case in this particular house.

He did learn a few things though. In addition to the almost constant glances his way that Brienne employed, cementing his knowledge that she trusted him about as far as she could throw him, the armored lady asked twice about Petyr Baelish as they spoke, inquiring both where he was and what Sansa’s plans with him were.

Sansa was entirely dismissive of Petyr as well, waving off the fact that he was securely held in a cell of her devising, and that she visited him from time to time to ensure that he was feeling properly 'penitent' for all of the crimes he had committed, not going into detail and refusing to continue the line of conversation, which obviously vexed Brienne.

Ramsay of course knew what it was that Sansa did to the man, and why Sansa would not be keen to share it with Brienne, but he smiled at the thought that this strain of secrecy on their relationship might very well be the break he needed. He told Sansa that he was taking another walk and swept from the room, gratified to see that Brienne was obviously irritated when Sansa waved him on.

She clearly didn't like Ramsay's freedoms in the castle, thought Ramsay. In fact, it must irk her that he had simply walked away from her scrutiny at a time when it was inconvenient for her to follow him, given that she was still engaged with Sansa. He knew she would excuse herself to follow him soon, though, Ramsay had a sense for these things.

He waited at the end of the hall for all of a minute and sure enough, Brienne could be seen leaving the quarters. He smirked and rounded the corner, knowing the blonde woman had likely spotted him and would give pursuit. He moved with purpose then, striding down the varying corridors to his destination. Time to visit Petyr Baelish.
Chapter Twenty-One

Confessional

Petyr had been having a very rough time for some while now. Ever since Sansa interred him in this simple room she had been making regular visits to punish him in her own way for all of the harm he had caused her family with his play for power, and most specifically with his plots against her father and eventual betrayal of that man.

Sansa had asked him simple questions each time she had visited as she had applied the sting of the lash she used upon his backside, and Petyr had done his best to answer as honestly and wholeheartedly as he could. She had mostly wanted to know why Petyr had done it all; what exactly drives a man to make such decisions?

He had honestly answered that everything he had done was part of a somewhat loose plan to always bring himself a little closer to the throne. He didn't have the bloodline to be in any sort of line of succession, but he could at least ingratiate himself with the current ruler, which in this case had been the Lannister family.

It had been no happenstance that Petyr had forged a feud between that family and the Starks. He had known that Robert Baratheon would nominate Ned Stark as the hand of the king, and killing the current hand, who happened to be kin to Ned, and then blaming that death on the Lannisters cemented Ned as the new hand and turned him against that house.

From there Petyr only had to fabricate why the Lannisters would have murdered the previous hand. That proved simple once Petyr had learned through his network of spies that Jamie Lannister was the true father of not only the up and coming prince but in fact of all of Robert Baratheon's children. He did however attest that Robert's death in a hunting accident was not his machination.

No, that boar which had mortally wounded King Robert had just been incredibly good luck from the perspective of Petyr, whom had thought that his plan might perhaps fail through confrontation between Ned and Robert concerning the Lannisters, or at least taken a considerably long time to implement more events to push things over the edge.

With Robert dead though, Ned predictably made his move to seize the throne, and Petyr was there, ready and waiting to betray him, ensuring his death as a traitor and endearing himself to the Lannister family. Cersei had proven less grateful than he might have hoped though, and he had started his plot concerning Sansa.

As before, Petyr gave her tearful assurances that he had in fact not wanted her mother to perish in the conflict he had started, but that he had considered the possibility, and calculated it as an acceptable risk. As Sansa had thoroughly beaten him that night he had tearfully recanted to her through screams of pain that he had felt betrayed.

Twice had she betrayed him; once when she became beholden to Ned's brother, whom Petyr had
challenged to a duel for her hand and been soundly beaten. Catelyn had saved him from death, though; when that man had moved to run him through she had begged for his life, claiming Petyr to be 'just a boy'.

That first account he had let go of, on account of his miserable defeat, and he had even forgiven Catelyn, seeing as she had saved his life despite the fact that the words she chose humiliated him. But when that Stark fell and she moved to marry another, Petyr's feeling of betrayal only grew, and while he could never hate her enough to directly harm her, he would no longer seek her hand.

Nor protect her from the deadly repercussions of his plans, should she place herself in the way, which he had known in his heart she would. She had always chosen others despite his undying love, Petyr had explained, and his heart had grown cold from it. But then had come Sansa, every bit as beautiful as Catelyn, her spitting image.

When Petyr had conspired with the Lady Olenna to poison young King Joffrey he had created a plot to gain real hold on the Lannisters, since he had come to realize that Cersei was no power to be easily manipulated. But also, it had been done to kill the bastard king to free Sansa from his grasp, so that Petyr might whisk her away to safety.

Sansa had punished him terribly when he had said that bit, and Petyr had regretted it dreadfully, instead recounting the truth of the matter, which was that despite his affection for Sansa, he still planned to use her as he had used all of the rest of her family towards his own agendas. First, he had murdered her aunt, which was something he admitted he had always planned.

Having secured the Vale through Lyssa Aryn's orphaned son, he now had an army, and once he had married Sansa to the bastard son of Roose Bolton, the man whom had betrayed the Starks and become Cersei's Warden of the North, Petyr could then return to Cersei and inform her of this, pitting the Lannisters against the Boltons.

In exchange for a promise from the queen that he become Warden of the North upon leading the Vale to victory against Roose, he then returned north to carry out that plan. He insisted to Sansa for some time that he had not known what sort of man Ramsay had been, but she had not accepted this answer, and he admitted the truth shortly afterwards.

Petyr had heard things, rumors about the terrible nature of Ramsay Bolton, and in the end, it had not changed his mind concerning his final decision. On Petyr's return, he had found that Sansa had escaped and had to work quickly to return to her graces, to get her to ask him to help her with his forces from the Vale, which he had already marched toward Winterfell.

She ended up doing so, and Petyr was able to wage his war against the Boltons with the unexpected luck of also having Jon's forces there to secure his victory. The Boltons had to die to a man, of course, Petyr gave orders to that effect; no one could remain alive to disprove his allegations that Roose had betrayed the crown.

Now stood a serious roadblock to his progress though; Jon and his army of wildlings and Northmen from several Houses. The Vale forces were not about to turn on them as they might have on Sansa alone, which had been Petyr's plan all along; to apprehend Sansa as a traitorous regicide and return her to Cersei amid fanfare and pomp on his way to becoming Warden.

That last part did not come easily, but when Sansa offered to remove him from the wall and allow him rest he finally caved in, admitting through a hail of tears that he had planned all along to use and ultimately betray her, though he claimed no joy in it. Petyr had only truly wanted Ned Stark dead; the rest of his family were unfortunate pawns.
When she had held him down and punished him some more, he had apologized profusely in the way a broken man does, until he had passed out from the strain of it all, and Sansa had finally left him to his shame.

Petyr was certain after that affair that he would never again see Sansa Stark. Now that she had gotten the answer to the burning question of why Petyr Baelish had set out to destroy her family he assumed she would be thoroughly done with him, especially seeing the truly dark nature of his malice and disregard for her and her kin.

But no group of soldiers had arrived to carry him off. No armed escort to the chopping block. Petyr wondered why it was that Sansa left him alive of course, hoping that it wasn't truly to prolong the torturous lifestyle she had so far bequeathed him. But also, he wondered at the dread he felt of what would happen when Jon returned.

As a man that studied people as a way of life, Petyr felt he knew Jon well enough to be the sort whom followed in the footsteps of their father. And Ned Stark had a reputation for being a firm believer in sorting out criminals with beheadings. Considering everything Sansa did to him almost daily Petyr should look forward to it.

He should savor the idea of the sort of quick death Jon would offer him as a release from the constant trial his life had become, but even now after all that had happened, he found himself terrified by the prospect of dying. It made him feel like a coward that he couldn't face the prospect of ending himself, and it added another drop to his sea of shame.

But Jon wasn't back… yet. And Sansa had not had him executed, which fell in line with the things she had said during his trial concerning a long unhappy life of punishment and constant regrets. She hadn't punished Petyr in a number of days, though; something that Petyr tracked quite easily and well. He had to wonder what was keeping her from it. Had she truly tired of him?

There was a knock on the door, which caused Petyr to jump. The first reason for this was because he didn't truly expect anyone; he had nearly convinced himself that Sansa had washed her hands of him, and that the next person he would see would be Jon or an emissary of Jon, come to end the bitter extension Sansa had added to his life.

The other reason he was surprised was because Sansa would not have knocked before entering the room where she stowed him away, never had and never would. She was the Lady of Winterfell after all and had little reason to respect any desire for privacy that Petyr might have, or show him and form of respect whatsoever, really.

"Come in?" Petyr asked, feeling awkward for even saying such. Despite its lack of furniture this room was far more lavishly appointed than most prison cells, certainly, but he had not forgotten that he was a prisoner; not a guest. Having anyone treat him otherwise made him feel more uncomfortable than he might have expected to feel.

The door opened and Ramsay Snow entered, smiling widely at Petyr with that smug, toothy grin of his. "Hello Lord Baelish. I hope you have been finding your stay with us more accommodating of late than it was the last time I was in this room with you."

Petyr looked away, heatedly remembering the state he had been in then. He had been locked to the wall, and Sansa had been… punishing him.

A moment of awkward silence passed between them, Petyr aware of Ramsay's smug grin and Ramsay aware that Petyr was aware, and apparently enjoying the fact, "You know I'm not here on vacation… what brings a patricide to me today? I'm fairly certain that whatever it is I likely want
nothing at all to do with it."

The stab at Ramsay's slaying of his own father only caused the slightest falter in his cheery false smile and then Ramsay went on, ignoring the slight, "It has been some time since we have had the chance to converse…"

Petyr glared at him. "Yes… the last time we spoke was right after I had left Sansa in your care. You had promised me you would treat her well."

Ramsay spread his hands even wider than his smile in a mock gesture of accommodation, "Ah, but I did, I treated her so well that now she even runs things!"

The graying brothel keeper grunted as he rose to his full height to level Ramsay with an analytical stare, "Please, not only did you have no hand in that, the one dealt you isn't much better than my own."

Finally Petyr seemed to be able to blunt Ramsay's false bravado, and he gave the other man a small smile of his own as he said, "I may be locked away, but even from here I can tell that she has you on a short leash."

Ramsay growled at this, finally letting his smile slip away for a look more fitting his true feeling, "I do enjoy more freedoms than you, but yes mine is a gilded cage."

Petyr let out a short, humorless laugh, "And exactly what is the point of speaking to me then; do you somehow expect that I could be of help in an escape attempt? From here?" He gestured around the room.

Ramsay only smiled, waiting a moment with his head cocked to the side. The door nearly flew from its hinges at the level of force exerted on it as Brienne burst into the room. As she entered Ramsay turned towards her quickly, and she reflexively swung her fist into his face, easily swatting the small man aside under the weight of her heavy punch.

She advanced a couple more steps with her fists still raised and Petyr cowered, throwing his hands up defensively, "W-wait! I'm not trying anything!"

Brienne paused, her breathing heavy as she took stock of Petyr before her and Ramsay, whom slowly raised himself from the floor nursing the new bruise on his cheek.

Once she realized that he was in fact unarmed, she snatched ahold of Ramsay's arm and dragged him along with her as she made for the door, pausing for a moment to command Petyr, "Don't move."

Once out in the hall she called to the nearest patrolling guard and demanded that Ramsay never again be allowed entry into Petyr's room.

She then stormed down the halls of Winterfell, pulling Ramsay along with her as she made headway back to Sansa's quarters.
Chapter 22

Machinations

Sansa looked up in surprise to see the two of them when they arrived, likely due to the way that Brienne so roughly held him, Ramsay barely able to put his feet on the floor with the way she hoisted him.

"What is it… what has happened?"

Brienne shook Ramsay by the arm a bit in gesture, causing his whole body to shake as she had such leverage over him, "I followed this one to Petyr Baelish's room. I overheard talk of escape from outside of the door."

Sansa stood from where she had been sitting, knitting a winter shirt as she had been contemplating decisions that would need to be made with the coming storm. One eyebrow arched as she approached the two of them, her voice questioning. "Escape? Petyr Baelish couldn't possibly assist Ramsay in escape… how would you benefit in helping him, Ramsay?"

Ramsay spread his hands in a sign of helpless loss of words and finally responded as he shook his head, "I couldn't imagine I would milady; the man has no allies to speak of, especially after what you have done to destroy his resources… I swear we were plotting no escape; I was merely speaking to Petyr out of boredom…"

"Lies!" Brienne shouted angrily, shaking his harshly as Ramsay cowered, shielding his face, "There is nothing you do that does not play into one of your games!"

Ramsay continued to shake his head vehemently, "No, milady! I was speaking to Petyr on nothing of consequence, when Lady Brienne barged in and struck me without provocation!"

Sansa opened her mouth to level what was likely an angry scolding upon Ramsay for such and accusation but she paused when Brienne not only made no comment to defend herself but also averted her eyes.

Brienne had been caught up in the moment, her every action heightened by the danger she suspected to be brewing in the room she had been eavesdropping in on. Even though Ramsay and Petyr had only been separated from her by a wooden door, it had been built well enough so that little of the conversation made it to Brienne.

At first she had been terribly frustrated, but then she had heard the two men raise their tones, as if annoyed with each other, and she distinctly made out the words 'escape attempt', and she had made the decision to burst in and find out the truth of the matter. When Ramsay had turned to her so fast, she couldn't help but strike him.

It had felt pretty good hitting the smarmy bastard hard enough to send him reeling across the room,
but when she saw how forcefully he slammed into the wall after her punch and more importantly, that he was in fact unarmed, she had regretted the hasty call. More so now that Sansa looked to her for an answer to Ramsay's accusation that wasn't entirely untrue.

With eyes downcast in shame for her blunder for a few moments before making contact with Sansa's eyes, Brienne spoke, "I might have handled him a little roughly in the arrest, but only in the heat of the moment upon overhearing Petyr Baelish announce that they planned to escape from here. Don't trust him milady, he's a snake around your neck!"

Ramsay did the best he could not to smile. He could sense it now, see it in the way that Sansa and Brienne looked upon one another. Sansa had never entirely trusted the armored woman, and her gaze reflected doubt now in the face of Brienne's rash choices. Ramsay felt this was going perfectly according to plan.

He had whirled on Brienne intentionally, knowing that the warrior would strike him. The fall he had taken had been as hard as it was because he had thrown himself for dramatic effect. He had even leaned into the punch to ensure that it would bruise him as much as possible. He wanted Sansa to doubt Brienne's judgement.

"I will speak to Petyr, then. One way or the other, we shall discover what it was that they plotted, Lady Brienne."

Sansa was looking at Ramsay sternly as she said this, and he could feel her eyes probing him. Perhaps she had seen the snicker just below the surface of the agonized mask he had erected upon his face, so he did his best to maintain, not allowing himself to shift in his act under her scrutiny. Of course, if her suspicion of him caused her to question Petyr, it would still work towards Ramsay's goals…

One should never chew upon one's fingernails. Petyr Baelish knew this, had learned it early in life and taken the thought to heart along with all the other little nuances that were considered the correct behavior of a person of noble birth. Petyr had been born to a merchant of lower birthright, and even as a child he had wanted to be nobility.

For the past few hours he had chewed upon his nails several times, however. One should never lose one's composure. That was one of the biggest unwritten rules of leadership that was taught to those young boys and girls lucky enough to be born into the right families. Petyr had become quite good at this over the years he had thought.

Now though he looked a wreck, his wild fear and rampant anxiety etched as clearly on his face as it was upon his heart. Brienne had left some time ago with Ramsay, but Petyr was no fool; whatever trouble Ramsay had brought to him would soon enough return. Even if he was not held liable for whatever the hell that had been…

This incident was going to bring him to Sansa's attention. The sad fact was that even if he was judged as being innocent in whatever plot Ramsay had perhaps been planning, just remembering that he was there might give Sansa incentive to begin… punishing him again, as she had been until only recently. This was why he bit his nails, and why he could not maintain his composure.

The waiting was almost the worst part of it. Petyr might have thought being locked away in a room like this might have forced some sort of patience on him, but if anything his captivity had made it all worse. He was impatient to see what his fate was going to be, and his anxiety found no solace in any kind of activity, since he had nothing to do but wait.

When the sound of approaching footsteps could be heard through his door, Petyr jumped in surprise
despite the fact that he had been waiting for exactly this moment for such a long time. His heart
hammered as Sansa opened the door and stepped inside, followed by the brutish woman Brienne.
Ramsay also slipped inside behind the others and Petyr frowned.

Ramsay was here, apparently no longer under any noticeable form of arrest by Brienne. His heart
sank as he caught sight of Ramsay's carefully maintained blank face. The little bastard must have
somehow pinned whatever the hell this was on him. Petyr felt a tremor of fear run down his spine but
he forced himself to take a deep breath.

He hadn't done anything wrong after all. He was innocent, and therefore should have nothing to fear
concerning whatever had angered Brienne and brought both her and the Lady of Winterfell back into
his room, "Lady Sansa. Lady Brienne. How may I help you?"

Sansa wasn't speaking to him just yet though. She had moved purposefully over to the dresser by the
bed, quietly taking a leather strap stored therein out. Petyr's blood pounded in his ears.

When she moved to approach him again he held up his hands defensively as he often did in
situations like these, and as she always did, she swept them aside, dragging him into her grip as she
backed toward the bed to make herself comfortable there, all the while hauling the squirming form of
Petyr along with her.

There were no words shared between them as Petyr let loose a series of panicked grunts as she
pulled him into her lap with one hand while the other divested him of the linen slacks he had been
wearing, pulling them almost all the way off until they were wrapped about his lower legs,
entangling them. He glanced back at her, his eyes wide and full of fear.

Ramsay shifted from one foot to the other, as before feeling oddly uncomfortable watching what
Sansa did to Petyr now.

As she raised her hand to begin her punishment of him, Petyr let out a pitiful whine, "P-please,
Sansa… please… no…"

But Petyr had long since come to terms with how Sansa felt towards him concerning all of his many
crimes towards her and her family, and how very much he deserved whatever she might dish out, so
his cries for mercy were a bit hollow. They rang of his very real desire for her to show him such, but
also his words were devoid of real hope that she would.

With practiced ease Sansa adjusted Petyr into her lap, seeming to prefer this rather comfortable and
personal manner of punishing him today over the manner in which Ramsay had before witnessed,
with her giving Petyr a good hiding while the afore mentioned stood helplessly held in the restraints
that bound his hands to the wall.

He was no less helpless this way, of course, as Petyr had no leverage now in which to hope to pull
free, and Ramsay could see, no gumption to try. The thin graying former councilor did nothing now
but begin to weep even before Sansa had lain down the first blow. It was terribly pathetic, really, and
even Ramsay shook his head at such a pitiable sight.

The action continued along just as wordlessly for a few more moments as Sansa raised her hand and
began to punish Petyr's squirming ass, until Petyr's yells became words, filling the air between them
with apologies, even if he wasn't sure exactly what it was that he was apologizing for. This went on
for several long minutes.

Sansa asked him then, and many times thereafter as the treatment continued, to tell her what it was he
had been planning with Ramsay. Petyr only attested that he had no plot, and of course this caused
Sansa to keep on spanking him, certain that he was lying. However, after this same response remained beyond what Sansa reckoned to be Petyr's limits for questioning, she finally ceased.

She stood carefully, allowing the sobbing Petyr to crawl onto the bed, where he curled up, covering his face in obvious shame. Likely due to the way he carried on during the punishment, thought Ramsay; he had no illusions as to how well he himself did under such pressure, but Petyr seemed to handle being treated like this even more poorly than Ramsay.

It took little to get him screaming in fits of apology, and even less to reduce him to tears. Ramsay could only imagine what it must feel like to be that pathetically weak. His attention was brought back to the matter at hand as Sansa walked back over to himself and Brienne. Her disposition said she was unhappy, which both was terrifying to Ramsay, and exactly what he had wanted.

"He isn't lying; I can tell. He has admitted greater, darker secrets than what I'm seeking over far less, and I'm inclined to think that on his account at least that you were mistaken, Lady Brienne."

Brienne took this opportunity to shake Ramsay by the arm, rattling him where he stood by way of gesture, "Then punish this one well; I am certain that he is the cause of all this."

Ramsay had known this was coming, and his heart hammered in real fear of the closeness for which he tread to receiving just what Petyr had gotten and likely worse. Worse, it would be in front of Petyr Baelish of all things, and that cunt Brienne would have the satisfaction of witnessing it after all the games he'd played to get here.

So it was with very real conviction that he dropped down and prostrated himself before Sansa, begging, "Please milady, I've no idea of what Lady Brienne speaks; I swear that she must have misheard us! This is an honest mistake, please spare me punishment for this one thing, for I swear on this account at least I have done no wrong!"

Sansa glared down at him and Ramsay was almost certain for a moment that he was to share the same fate as Petyr or worse, then finally she let out a sigh, "Perhaps this was actually a misunderstanding, though if I ever suspect otherwise again it shall be your hide, Ramsay."

Brienne's response was immediate and angry, "You can't be serious! You're just going to take this man's word for it?"

She gestured at Ramsay as if there was something about him that Sansa was clearly missing, "This man…. this lying, manipulative man who has proven in the past to enjoy putting on games simply for the sake of seeing other people suffer through it?"

Ramsay worked to keep his face even, letting in just the slightest bit of what he thought might look like indignant offense at her spot-on accusations.

This he maintained while also doing the best he could to bury the feeling of dread it created to have Brienne call him out specifically for playing games, seeing as this entire situation was exactly that. If Sansa were to compare this to any other event he had manipulated…

His heart thudded in his chest, but the overriding emotion to catapult through him next was elation as Sansa shook her head at Brienne, "I told you before that this was not your affair to dictate, nor Ramsay your ward. You are aware of the man that he used to be, but Ramsay has been at my side some time now, and I am saying that I believe you made a mistake, knight."

It was difficulty itself not to allow a satisfied smirk to crawl upon his face as he glanced over to view the shock on Brienne's face, and he knew upon seeing it that his plan could not have gone more
perfectly. But then Brienne recovered, seeming to make the decision not to make a scene by giving in to how she felt, much to Ramsay's disappointment.

"Of course milady."

Sansa pointed back at Petyr and then her gaze drifted to Ramsay as she spoke once an uncomfortable silence had stretched between them for a period. "You will of course apologize to these men for the collateral damage of your mistake, I'm sure. I am glad at least that there doesn't seem to be some foolish plot to contend with after all."

She whisked from the room and Ramsay continued to pour all of his will into maintaining the look of concern on his face, lest he fall to mirthful laughter at the look on Brienne's face when she was left alone with the two of them and realized she was going to have to say she was sorry to them.

"Sorry," she said gruffly, and then she turned to leave, "Come, Ramsay; you are not to stay here."

Ramsay was not entirely surprised to see Brienne make short work of the commanded condolences in such a brusque way, but he felt the moment he had worked for was entirely too short this way, and couldn't help but extend it a bit, talking at Brienne's back before they could exit, "I'm sure you didn't mean for it to end this way, Lady Brienne... I forgive you."

Brienne halted for a moment, turning back to glower at Ramsay and seeing the less-than-sincere smile that he had planted firmly upon his face, knowing full well that she would know without doubt that he had just bested her, both from that smile and from the overplayed mock sympathy that dripped from his tone of voice.

Her eyes narrowed and his grin widened, waiting to see how she would reply now that he had proven himself cleverer than she had given him credit. But Brienne didn't reply with words, rather she threw her gauntleted hand into Ramsay's face for the second time that day, in fact in the same place that she had before, throwing Ramsay back onto the floor of the room with the force of the strike.

Petyr let out a guffaw of a laugh and Brienne shot a glare his way which killed the noise with a suddenness as he closed his mouth and raised his hands in surrender, though his face still fairly burst with amusement over seeing Ramsay hit again for his arrogance. Ramsay had a hand to his head, moaning as he sat up.

Brienne took a step toward him, causing him to flinch, "Now maybe the bruise shall be more convincing to the Lady of my untoward treatment of you. Before you go running to tell on me again remember that Petyr is a witness who may testify against you now that you have used him like a pawn, and that there are many ways I can hurt you that won't leave a mark on your face."

Ramsay's shock quickly turned to anger and finally his face settled on a sort of mollified resignation as it became clear that he understood that Brienne had him by the short hairs on this matter. A quick glance at the satisfied smile on Petyr told him that he would almost certainly back Brienne's story whatever it might be, just to spite Ramsay.

He hadn't endeared himself to the man by causing him to become punished by Sansa in that humiliating display, after all, and Petyr was probably just aching for some more come-uppance. Ramsay stood slowly, mulling over how thoroughly fucked this situation had become before he could even process it, and all because he had felt the need to unveil himself to Brienne.

Of course, he could tell by the way she looked at him now that she had probably already known this entire affair had occurred specifically to fuck with her, but being obvious about it had likely given
her license to unleash on him as she truly wanted, no longer weighted by the burden of having to prove Ramsay guilty.

All of these things fell to the back of his mind, however, as Ramsay couldn't stop himself from wondering what Brienne meant by hurting him without a mark to his face. Did she mean a traditional beating with fists to the gut, or…? No. Brienne had been present during Petyr's punishment, and seen him literally beg on his knees to avoid the same fate. She would spank him. He flushed redly at the thought.

Suddenly flustered and thoroughly brow-beaten in the face of what he had thought was going to be a glorious moment of triumph, Ramsay just stood there, staring at the floor as he balled his fists in impotent fury. He dared not meet the challenge in Brienne's face lest he tempt her to express her newly realized ability to punish him for it.

He tried not to let how he might feel rein over his face, but he felt that his efforts to do so were mediocre at best in the face of the incredibly strong feelings of humiliation he currently underwent. It was so much the worse that not only had Brienne flipped things around so quickly on him, but that he had to stand there as she watched his misery over it.

Finally feeling that her point had been made, Brienne grabbed him by the arm, which caused Ramsay to jump, expecting further violence or perhaps even that worst scenario of an extended punishment before the eyes of Petyr Baelish, but instead she used her grip on his appendage to usher him out of the door, "As I said, you are never to return here again without supervision."

She glanced down the long hallway once she had shut and locked the door to Petyr's room behind her, "We are going to return to Sansa's quarters, where you shall stay until allowed otherwise."

This was too much, and Ramsay had to object, "I am no prisoner consigned to a cell; Sansa has made it clear that I now have capacity to travel the halls of Winterfell as I please!"

The gauntleted hand that had a hold on Ramsay shook him, as if reminding him of the physical threat that the woman standing next to him still posed to his person, "You are every bit of whatever I call you, and that was no suggestion nor up for debate…” she positioned herself in front of Ramsay, still tightly gripping his arm, "…you will do as you are told."

Sparks practically played in the air between the two as Ramsay glared at her and she back at him, but the time came for one or the other to back down, and only one actually had the upper hand, so Ramsay lowered his head sullenly in defeat. She was cowing him at this point and being blatant about it, but Ramsay felt there was little he could do.

His mind raced on what he might yet do or perhaps something he could say to Sansa to clear this matter of Brienne pushing him around with threats of violence. He had considered telling Sansa what Brienne planned to do to him if he refused her, but it was humiliating to even think of having to say that to another person, even Sansa.

Plus, Sansa might not necessarily side with Ramsay this time if she knew that Brienne planned on spanking him as she did. He gulped as his face heated at the thought of the two of them spreading his greatest shame around even further than it already was. He seriously wondered sometimes if anyone didn't know about it.

A prolonged uncomfortable silence fell between them, at least uncomfortable for Ramsay anyways, for all he knew Brienne was enjoying this to the fullest. Ramsay seemed to be favorably brow beaten enough, so Brienne at length took him along and he gave her no more fuss nor attempted to pull away any longer.
Deep Water

Audio: https://app.box.com/s/lvhp9ioetg96xa1ijk62gwvu8sjdlyls

(It's been a while since these stories have been updated, and I'm sorry for that. I've been a bit down for months now and haven't been writing much. Thankfully, Jason has still been going pretty strong, and so I have two chapters and an epilogue to give you just in time for Christmas. All is Fair in Love and War has been completed, and I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I have. Wishing you all the very best as well as a happy holiday! *hugs and snugs*)

Chapter Twenty-Three

Deep Water

It felt like an exceptionally long walk back, even though it wasn't terribly far despite the size of the castle, due mainly to the fact that Ramsay was feeling just as much like a prisoner now as he had weeks back before Sansa had allowed him the freedoms he had lately been enjoying due to good behavior, perhaps even more so now.

After all, he had the taste of the ability to leave his room fresh in his mouth, and now he had to return to the terrible boredom and frustration that came with being stuck in one place unable to leave. To make it worse, he was being dragged there by his newest jailor, and though no one in the halls or courtyard seemed to pay them mind…

He felt like their eyes were stealing glances at him, taking in his latest fall from grace, mocking him for yet another failure to avoid things like these. He stared hard at the ground, trying his best to walk as casually as he possibly could with Brienne tugging him along the way she did, half dragging him upon the balls of his feet at times.

Upon arriving at the room Brienne gave him an unceremonial push and Ramsay had to catch himself to avoid tripping to crash upon the floor. Sansa was not there currently, perhaps having left to attend to matters of court. Brienne pointed at Ramsay, as if somehow he wouldn't know it was he that she addressed, "Behave."

She then stepped outside of the room, but Ramsay had a feeling that she was merely waiting just outside of the door for him to dare to leave against her command. In a fit of impotent rage he cursed excessively as he snatched a pillow from the bed and slammed it across the room. He had thought to kick over a chair or something, but prudence kept him from it.

Even in his current state of elevated agitation, he almost knew that if he did anything that might merit as reckless destruction of any kind, like endangering the furniture… that Brienne was going to storm in and make his day even more miserable. The fact that he knew this to be the case and that it affected his actions was maddening in its own right.

He sat heavily and dejectedly in the chair instead of kicking it, feeling defeated and helpless. He tried to gear his mind in a manner that he might think his way out of this mess, but cunning plans were how he’d spun the web he’d trapped himself in. If he had just left Brienne alone and allowed her time to become bored with him, she might have eventually left him be.
But no, he had insisted on creating conflict and justifying all of her reservations, perhaps even proving them in her mind; he was nothing more than a snake in the bed that needed to be removed. Now Ramsay would never be free of her, he thought dourly. He glanced out at the open entryway to the room, so close and yet so far from freedom.

He had become too used to the few privileges Sansa had allowed him, he realized; he should have realized the potential cost of his gamble as losing such again, as he had. Ramsay had only just been put back into the confines of these quarters and already he felt it just as suffocating and restrictive as he had before.

His mind wandered over what he might say to Sansa to get her to perhaps move Brienne away so that he might wander out again, or in some other way occupy the big woman, but he knew that Brienne would be listening intently to anything he might say to Sansa, and he was not eager to earn himself punishment that way.

Frustration was the order of the day, and only mounted ever further in Ramsay as he sulked moodily, crossing his arms over his chest in a dejected stance upon his seat. He could only wonder what Brienne might say to Sansa concerning the fact that he was restricted to the room once more. He assumed Sansa would have to notice eventually.

The next day found Ramsay waking to something being thrown upon him in his sleep. He shouted in surprise, startling in his bed and scooting himself back to the headboard as he hurriedly looked to see what had so suddenly landed upon him. It was a rough brown sack, and when he looked to see where it had come from he locked eyes with Brienne.

She stood over the bed he shared with Sansa glaring down at him, her pale eyebrows knitted in patient disdain, "There are clothes more fit for extended time spent outside than what you currently own in that bag as well as the tools you will be needing. Get dressed."

Ramsay snorted derisively, "What? Exactly what do you think it is that you are going to be making me do?"

For a moment it had seemed that Brienne might move away after saying the bit about him getting dressed, but she stopped and turned on him at the sound of indignation in his voice. She leaned in close, causing Ramsay to press himself a little flatter against the headboard behind him to retreat from her scowl, "You'll do as I say, or this morning will be the day you find out what I'm willing to do when you don't obey."

His lips trembled with ill-suppressed anger, but in the end Ramsay looked away, slowly and reluctantly sliding himself from the bed to root through the bag for the items she demanded him to wear. As he might have expected, it was a suit of winter clothes fit only for a peasant. He growled as he began to gear up, wondering what Brienne was up to as he did.

"You've got to be kidding me." Ramsay made as certain as he could that Brienne could hear the way he felt about this in his voice. His tone challenged what she was doing, for in this he felt that Brienne must know she was pushing the boundaries of what she could convince him to do on threat of violence alone. He snorted derisively at the sight before him.

They both stood in front of the small stables that resided within the interior wall of the keep proper. In front of Ramsay were quite a few hay bales that had recently been unloaded from a cart and set upon the floor of the open-aired stable. Currently Brienne was extending a pitchfork towards him, her other hand still pointing up.

His eyes followed that gesture to the loft a good six feet above the floor of the stable, at least a head
taller than Ramsay himself. She wasn't moving, her gaze fixed on him and her jaw set in a manner that suggested she wasn't interested in negotiating the command she had just given. Ramsay's hands balled into angry fists.

"How do you know I won't just run you through with that pitchfork…? I thought you had reservations about arming me?"

Brienne's eyes narrowed, "I wouldn't suggest you try. This isn't a proper weapon even in the hands of a soldier; it is a tool, and you will now use it to move that hay as I instructed."

Again Ramsay locked eyes with the woman who antagonized him, and yet again moments passed in which he grit his teeth and thought to rebel more directly, but as before he broke eye contact first, knowing what was on the line should he fail to obey. It had not escaped his notice that the nearby stable boy was watching them.

The only thing that could humiliate him more than what Brienne had insinuated doing to him would be her doing it publicly, here in the courtyard where there would be several witnesses, for Ramsay doubted she would politely retreat to a more private location to punish him. His face flushed with a unique combination of anger and humiliation.

In the end, he took the pitchfork and shambled forward, joining the stable boy whom was already stabbing and them heaving the hay bales up onto the upper floor of the building. It was heavier than he expected, and unwieldy as well, causing him to waver quite a bit as he unsteadily went about the labor he had been forced into.

Ramsay had pretended at menial work for a short while before, to fool Theon Greyjoy into thinking that he was a simple servant, but honestly Ramsay had done very little in way of work for the better part of his life. His mother had let him do as he wished as long as he stayed out of sight, and his father had done more of the same while also allowing Ramsay the comforts of a lord.

Now though Ramsay was expected to move these bales of hay, which despite their relatively small size and being made of hay, were a great deal heavier than he might have anticipated. His arms and shoulders strained as he attempted to match the pace of the stable worker, and a dull ache soon formed that forced him to slow.

He felt soon enough that he would not be able to summon the energy to work at that pace and slowed dramatically, the anger he had been using to throw himself into the work dulled by the intensity of the physical exertion needed. He was tired now, and his level of irritation at being forced to do the job in the first place continued to grow.

Finally when it was clear that he was looking terrible at even having attempted to match the stable boy, whom continued the labor almost effortlessly, he stabbed his pitchfork into a bale and turned a baleful glare on Brienne, "Are you done humiliating me for today or was there something else you had in mind? I'm clearly not cut from the same cloth as this dung covered peasant."

Brienne gave him a look that suggested she didn't intend to let up on him at all, "After you have moved all of these bales I have a number of jobs you can assist with."

Ramsay growled through his teeth, flinching and continuing his work when Brienne began to move closer in a threatening motion, though.

"What exactly did you do, woman; did you wander all of Winterfell looking for the hardest labor you could put me to task at?"
She gave him a curt nod, overtly ignoring his scowled annoyance at her candid acceptance, "Yes I did. I believe a lot more of this is in order, in fact."

He did his best not to say anything for a while, moving as slowly as possible so as to conserve his strength, jumping in surprise when something hard and heavy swatted him across the backside. He whipped his head around in time to see that Brienne had swatted him with the scabbard of her sword, "Pick it up; we've both a lot to do, and I'll not have you making him do all the work, Ramsay."

Ramsay's mouth opened and then shut as he thought better than to continue the argument when she had already started things off with such a strong warning. He didn't doubt for a moment that she was simply waiting for him to give her an excuse to become violently and savagely physical in her demands within the space of a heartbeat.

For all of his protest, Ramsay did what he could to see the task done, if only so that he could put the stable boy behind him for the day. Ramsay had noted that the boy shot Brienne and especially him quite a few sidelong glances as he worked, and Ramsay could only seethe at what imagined slights the peasant was thinking of him.

By the time the bales were all put up Ramsay was far more exhausted than he had been for many a year. Only once during a particularly exhaustive hunt had he ever strained himself so. Another whack on his bottom by Brienne's scabbard caused him to jump, startled, just as he had attempted to lean against the stable wall to rest.

"We've plenty more to do; you'll be allowed to rest when you've completed enough work."

Ramsay shot her a tired look, "Are you serious? Give a man a moment to get his wind, will you; I've only just finished your first slavish task…"

She swatted him again and Ramsay was sent moving, grumbling but not loud enough for anything to be made out.

He wasn't exactly going to skip for joy to his next assignment, but at the same time, he wasn't foolish enough to object enough that Brienne might take his words as true dissention. As always, he feared what the yellow-haired woman might do to make an example of this even more than he feared more back-breaking work.

The next assignment turned out to be less exhaustive at least, as Ramsay was directed to remove a sanding brush from the bag that Brienne had given him that morning. Then he was set to sanding a group of rough tables and chairs that had apparently been assembled only recently by the smell of the freshly cut wood.

She didn't say much, other than to tell him to get out his tool and to point at the furniture, "Sand it down smooth."

At first he had been relieved, as the task was a great deal less of an exertion than having to ply that infernal pitch fork, but Ramsay soon learned that monotony and repetition was its own form of cruelty.

It was tiresome work, as he dragged the sanding brush over the wood again and again, noting very little change, "This is going to take forever."

Brienne grunted at him, "We don't have that long; you have much yet to do, so I suggest you pick up the pace so as to finish in a timely manner."

Ramsay had already been at the brink of his ability to cope with Brienne's games, and as he sat there
performing that menial task, feeling the ache of unaccustomed labors in so many places throughout his body, he felt himself slip over the edge at this last reminder that the armored woman was just going to keep on pushing him.

There was a loud clattering sound as Ramsay threw the sanding brush down against the stone as hard as he could, "Fuck this nonsense! I'll not spend all of my day performing such labors under a power mad cow such as yourself. Let us take this to Lady Sansa, and see if she truly wanted for me to be so used, if you are so confident she'll agree with you!"

Quiet descended, as several other people in the courtyard of the keep stopped what they were doing to see the altercation. Brienne looked like she had been planning to give him another swift swat with her scabbard, but now she seemed to think better of it, setting it aside as she moved to confront Ramsay, "I am certain this isn't going to go your way."

She stood over him a moment, glaring down at him in a way that made Ramsay want to turn back to his work; she didn't look like she was bluffing. She hadn't said she would keep him from appealing to Sansa to stop her little program, though, and Ramsay thought he might sense that perhaps Brienne was simply hoping to bully him enough that he didn't try that route.

He stood his ground, glaring back at her with malice he didn't have to fake, and finally she sighed, "That was the final warning Ramsay; you really are a stupid little man."

Ramsay blinked as she threw this insult to his face, and then she was grabbing hold of him as he struggled to keep her from hauling him along with her. At first, he fought less, thinking that she took him to see Sansa, but when he saw she was seating herself nearby he fought fiercely, "N-no!"

Despite his frantic efforts to suddenly free himself Brienne's hold on him was like iron, and Ramsay found neither purchase nor leverage in which to gain the upper hand as she slowly pulled him into a position he had sadly come to know all too well, "Stop! I thought we were going to see Sansa; she may not approve of any of this!"

He had hoped that the desperation he felt would not bleed into his voice as he said this, but he could hear it himself that it had; things were spinning out of control too fast, and reigning in his own composure was proving an impossible task in the heat of the moment. Brienne only shook her head at him as she wrapped an arm around his waist.

Ramsay was entirely in her lap now as she sat upon one of the wooden chairs that Ramsay had been meant to sand down, and as her one hand secured his middle to her waist, the other drew back his pants, causing Ramsay to gasp at both the sting of the cold upon his exposed ass and the fact that she had just bared him publicly.

"I have Lady Sansa's full trust in all that I do with you, Ramsay. Your attempts to cause disruption between us are what landed you in this position, so if I so much as think that you are trying to play us against one another again this can only become worse for you. I have given you every warning; I don't even know how you manage to be surprised."

Feeling a wellspring of regret instantly flood him, Ramsay suddenly and passionately understood that he had made a terrible mistake in ruining the hard work he had put forth in getting this far without such a public rebuttal. It was as if he could feel the eyes of everyone present and even those that would soon be arriving to see the commotion, boring into him.

Judging him, all of them, peasants though most would certainly be. Brienne obviously felt that Sansa wouldn't stop this sort of thing, which Ramsay had of course feared, but even if Ramsay had been right and the Lady of Winterfell did disapprove of this punishment, it wasn't going to help him
escape what she did right now.

Wild with need to escape such a situation before it can spiral even further out of hand, and stimulated even further by the painful swats Brienne now began to apply after having slipped her hand from her gauntlet, Ramsay screamed out in desperation, "W-wait! Alright, I will do the chores and whatever else you like, please only stop this!"

Brienne grunted at him in a tone that sounded like annoyance, pausing as she took his measure as he lay there looking at her from over his own shoulder, his face expressively pleading. His heart held out hope that she might let this first true offense slide, but the feeling faded as she shook her head once, "No. You will do the chores because you don't want this to happen again. I warned you."

Ramsay stared at her in an awed fashion as she went about continuing what was apparently going to be a prolonged punishment. It had been a good while since last Ramsay had faced a public humiliation like this one, so much so that he had nearly forgotten the intensity of the feeling it created in him. Nearly, at least; he remembered well enough now…

He had pressed further than he should have dared and it was in fact just as Brienne had said; she had warned him. He had allowed his distemperament and his uncomfortability rule him and now he was going to be in an even worse mood, and whatever labors that Brienne might have foisted upon him, none would make him less comfortable than this.

The irony was not lost on him that soon enough that dreaded conversation with Sansa was certainly going to happen, as news of what Brienne did to him so publicly reached her ears wherever she was; the castle wasn't all that big. The Lady of Winterfell would likely even be alerted to these goings-on quickly enough to see them before Brienne had her fill.

Knowing Sansa and the unique, difficult to anticipate reactions she had to persons like Ramsay and Petyr, she could very well decide that Brienne should punish him more regularly! He wasn't sure where his bravado from before had come from, likely all of it born from desperation and delusional ego; he was fairly certain now that Brienne was going to get a seal of approval for this…

He attempted to draw his own attention away from how he felt, both physically and otherwise as Brienne heedlessly continued her shaming work, but despite his usual aptitude for ignoring others he couldn't get the other people in the area out of his mind. Constantly he imagined them all staring at him, even as he fought the urge to look to affirm whether the feeling was true.

Ramsay squinted his eyes shut, as if the act would keep him from hearing the murmur of the growing throng of peasants who had gathered in the yard to watch the display. It certainly did not keep him from hearing Sansa Stark's voice when she suddenly chimed over the chorus of mixed voices, all going quiet so as to give her voice room.

Brienne's victim jumped at the stern tone that she used as Sansa's words washed over him, "Brienne? What exactly is going on here? What were you two about out here?"

Her gaze passed over the unfinished wooden furniture, glancing to the gathered small folk, and finally came to rest on the armored woman and her counterpart.

Brienne of Tarth hesitated for a moment, and then set her hand down upon Ramsay's rump casually as she turned to regard her mistress, as if she might have been doing something ordinary like sanding a chair, rather than tanning a grown man's hide in public with her own hand. "Lady Sansa, I had recruited Ramsay for some civil duties, and he grew disrespectful."

Sansa considered this response for a moment as Ramsay held his breath, hoping against hope that she
would condemn this public display in some fashion, or at the very least relegate Brienne's punishment to a more private setting. Surely it wasn't civil for this sort of thing to happen out where everyone could see it, right?

But as Ramsay was aware that Sansa had in fact done this very sort of thing quite publicly to him on the very first day of her doing it to him, he knew in his heart of hearts that this wasn't going to be the case. He could see the answer in her eyes before she even began to speak, in the slight movements of the muscles in her jaw.

Ramsay groaned as her lips parted to give her answer, because he knew from so many subtle hints in Sansa's posture and tone after their time together that what she had to say was not what he wanted to hear, "I see. Continue as you are then, have Ramsay finish what tasks he was to complete, and then send him to my quarters, as I will have words of my own for him on this matter."

His heart sank even further into the depths of despair than it already had at the mood conveyed with Sansa's words; not only was this not going to halt, a fact that made him squirm reactively as Brienne reared back her hand to disturb the reprieve he had been given all too soon, but Sansa intended to add further to the sting was accruing here, he knew it to be so.

She had mentioned that Brienne was to send him to her quarters once he was done with his humiliating penance and degrading labors, but Lady Sansa Stark remained for the time being, folding her arms over her chest and relaxing into a stance that made it clear she intended to watch for a while, likely to see how Brienne performed.

Lady Brienne for her part renewed her task upon Ramsay's backside with vigor, apparently wishing to make up for the lost time during her short conversation with Sansa. Ramsay found that the little bit of rest he had gained as a result of that did not help him tolerate continued efforts of the knight in the least; in fact, it almost felt like it had made things worse!

Desperately Ramsay attempted to no avail to place his mind away from the pain caused by Brienne as she stolidly swatted him, but her renewed efforts weren't anything that he could prepare for, and to his great shame once again he found himself squirming and wriggling in the armored woman's lap to the tempo of the sound of her hand firmly slapping his flesh.

It wasn't a pretty picture he knew; despite himself his mind wandered again and again to what must be running through the minds of the small folk who watched his humiliation so avidly, or what Brienne now considered as he grunted and hissed at the pain she levied upon him so constantly, or most importantly to Ramsay; what did Sansa think of him watching him as thus?

To say that all of the slights against him made by the Lady Brienne made him feel small would be a drastic understatement of the fact; she had set out to humble him today and she had succeeded quite thoroughly. He only wished that he had set upon the wisdom he needed earlier and simply acquiesced to her demands early on.

If he had then perhaps he would not be enduring the hardship that he was currently undertaking. If he had set aside his terribly misplaced pride for even a little while, Brienne might have gotten bored with watching him struggle to work for his crimes against her and ceased pushing him so hard. But he had resisted, as he always did, he thought bitterly.

Ramsay closed his eyes tightly against his bitter sentiments and grit his teeth against the seething pain of not only his duress physical but the agony of trying to deny the fact that he was even pitying himself; how was it that time and again he found himself in this situation? When would he finally wizen himself enough to avoid this?
Brienne seemed to feel that he had endured enough, or perhaps the fact that his struggling had ceased as he had withdrawn within himself caused her to be satisfied that he at least seemed properly compliant, because she suddenly pull his trousers back over his pained posterior and righted him abruptly, "Pick up your tools."

He numbly moved to comply, one hand absently moving back to rub at a tortured cheek as he grabbed the sanding brush he had dropped when Brienne had so roughly assaulted him, at the beginning of what had become a memorable event for many, most notably Ramsay. He glanced over to where Sansa had been but he saw that she had taken her leave.

Likely once Brienne had finished with him Lady Sansa had decided that she had seen everything that required her time, or at least that she wanted to see. Clearly, she did not wish to remain in order to watch him continue the tedious task of sanding down furniture. Brienne cleared her throat imperatively and Ramsay jumped, moving quickly to return to his work.

It was slow going, monotonous labor, sanding those chairs and tables, and Brienne had him shoveling snow from the parapets that had accumulated there during the previous evening after he was done sanding. From there she had had him do a variety of other menial tasks, typically tedious or physically exhausting.

They were hard, and Ramsay wasn't any happier doing them now than he had been earlier, but he dared not voice his agitation this time, instead somberly working in the knowledge that it could indeed be far worse than it was. None of the tasks that Brienne asked of him were more awkward for the former lord than being publicly shamed like she had just done.

Finally, as Ramsay hefted a last bag of grain into the keep's storehouse, Brienne lumbered up behind him with news that was both sweet and bitter, "You are done for the day. See; it didn't kill you to do a bit of work. Such labor should help you build character, or at least help you remove your head from your ass."

Ramsay just frowned grumpily at her as she went on, "I wouldn't have to work so much to mind you like you were some juvenile delinquent if it wasn't for the fact that you still seem to think you actually still run this place. You're obviously confused about Sansa's place for you here at the keep, and it's my hope that this work reminds you of it."

Ramsay groused, "What; you're saying you don't think I pull my weight?"

Brienne stared at him for a long moment, really allowing the uncomfortable pause in which she wasn't replying take its toll. Ramsay looked away, fidgeting more than a little, pulling at his collar and shifting his weight from foot to foot, all the while aware that Brienne hadn't ignored the question; she was simply deigning not to respond. As if the question were too stupid to bother answering. Brienne had after all made it extremely and even unpleasantly apparent that she didn't think Ramsay was proving useful enough for the Lady of the House to keep him retained. Finally he could bear her stare no longer and huffed irritably, "Well, I hope that my service today at least was noted…"

Her eyes narrowed and she still stood there with her piercing blue eyes locked onto him, "You mean after having to coerce, cajole and even beat you into shape you finally did the few things I asked from you on this one day, yes. Do you think anyone has to spend the day following around any of the other folk of this keep seeing that they do what needs done?"

Ramsay grit his teeth and looked away, his face heating as his jaw worked. He should have expected such a scathing retort, giving Brienne's brutish, blunt way of speaking but he had allowed his
resentment about more than the work get the better of his tongue. For now though he wisely silenced himself, and Brienne gave him a push, "Come; the Lady awaits."
Deeper Water

Chapter 24: Deeper Water

They walked back to Sansa’s quarters, Ramsay feeling like the sounds of his own footfalls within the last corridor to her door resonated in his ears, like the final beats of the drum at the end of a somber performance. Each step took him closer to an uncomfortable conversation he wasn’t ready or desirous of having, after all.

He fidgeted with the hem of his tunic as Brienne moved to open the door ahead of him, her guarded form stepping back to allow the smaller man room to go inside ahead of her. His brow knitted in annoyance; did she think he was going to run for it? He had tried that route to great failure before, so she must think him either very dull or very cowardly.

The feeling was lost quickly though as Sansa loomed into view, approaching the two as they entered. She glanced at Ramsay's clothes and sniffed the air for a moment, also taking in the bag that he carried with his tools in it, "Set those by the door; you will be needing a change of clothes and a bath. You smell like the stables."

Ramsay frowned but did as instructed, glaring over at Brienne occasionally as the culprit behind his becoming unsuitable for mingling in noble company. Sure he had gotten a bit of dirt on him camping during a few long hunts before, but never had Ramsay smelled so thoroughly in a way that could only come from a full day’s labor.

When Brienne fixed him with her own steely gaze though he quickly returned his eyes to the ground, not wishing to wrestle with that beast again. Even the thought of challenging her made him cringe and squirm in sympathetic pain in those areas her brutish hand had so thoroughly applied itself to him. Ultimately his expression remained an unhappy one.

Sansa took him firmly by the arm and led him over to a wash basin that had been prepared, most likely by Sansa’s servants. A small fire had been stoked underneath the tub so that the chill of the fiercely cold winter would be removed from the water. She tugged at his tunic, saying simply, "Disrobe yourself. I'd see you cleaned."

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Ramsay began the process of removing his clothing but apparently Lady Sansa did not deign him fast enough, because she began to assist him from his garment, quickly removing him of all of his vestments until he stood there nakedly before the two women. Ramsay had never been one to be ashamed of his own nakedness before, but his relationship with these two made him feel oddly underdressed.

The Lady of Winterfell urged him to enter the tub and Ramsay was only too happy to slip into the warm waters that awaited him there. He sighed at the surprising pleasantness of it, feeling as if his muscles had begun to unwind themselves from knots he had not even been aware that they were tied in. A hot bath after such work was paradise, he thought.

He jumped at a touch from behind as Sansa leaned forward to take a cloth and vigorously scrub at him. She worked at it in a methodical enough fashion, but for some odd reason Ramsay found the
unexpected service made him feel uncomfortable. Many a time had he commanded, coerced or forced someone to do something like this.

But when Sansa's gentle yet firm grip slid over the contours of his body he felt ripples of electric feeling course through his veins, and the feeling of it made him restless. He tried reaching for the cloth but Sansa pulled it away when he tried to take over the washing. Finally he huffed at her a bit irritably, "I can wash myself!"

He had turned to glare at her as he said this, but his blood ran cold when he saw the look she gave him in return, and he turned to sit quietly as she continued her task of bathing him. Her voice floated down from behind and above him, "I'm well aware that you can and you know that. I am thoroughly tired of your attitude and understand entirely why Brienne was fed up as well."

Ramsay's eyes widened at the irate way that Sansa said this, and his heart returned to the hammering it had done before he had started the bath. He berated himself silently for allowing himself to forget so quickly that his mistress was angry with him and that he was already slotted for an uneasy conversation at the very best. He needed to watch that he didn't make it worse.

So instead of the barrage of annoyed banter Ramsay had been prepared to launch himself into, he chose instead to meekly lower his head and cast his eyes away from the reproachful look that Sansa otherwise burned into him. His shoulders slumped and he did his best to relax and enjoy the fact that he was being washed, but the tension remained.

Mostly due to the fact that Ramsay knew this quiet little exercise in cleanliness was just a precursor to the less pleasant things he would have to deal with directly afterward, so no matter how much he tried to put his worries from his mind and unwind he found that he could not. His muscles remained knotted in a state of tense apprehension.

Sansa was thorough but quick, and shortly after the scrubbing had begun she commanded him, "Stand; I'll towel you dry now."

Once again this was something that Ramsay was more than capable of doing, and again he felt irritation over the fact that she kept insisting on doing these things rising in him. Why was she doing this?

On mulling the thought over, no real answer came to mind, but Ramsay was bothered by the feeling that her closeness in dealing with him in such a hands-on way felt all too similar to the way that she touched him when she… had him over her lap. Even now Ramsay blushed in heated embarrassment and squirmed uncomfortably before standing.

With brusque, concise motions Sansa toweled him until he was completely dry. When you lived in the North you learned to get yourself as dry as possible when exiting the water of any sort of bath, and Sansa was as careful and detailed in removing any excess water that she could as Ramsay himself might have been.

He often wondered when she showed so much courtesy to him in manners like that why it was that she cared to be so compassionate with him in those small ways, when Ramsay had piled nothing but malice and sadistic mind games upon her when he had the in the position of being her lord. So many opportunities she passed by to make him unhappy.

And he would deserve it too. That was the part that nonplussed him the most; after all he had done none deserved her vengeance more than he, and yet she still took such pains to ensure that he was comfortable. In what had to be a large dose of irony, the fact that she took the time to make it so made him uncomfortable.
Maybe that was why she did it? Ramsay frowned at the thought; it didn't feel right. As much as he might like to think that maybe Sansa was playing some sort of long-term mind-fuck, he had come to know her rather well both before and even more so after the war. She was a Stark all right, but she wasn't the sort to toy with her prey.

Not like him. Not like what he had done with her back when things had been so incredibly different than they were now. He was thoroughly dry now, which was rather important in a climate like that of the lands which Winterfell resided upon, especially given how very cold this particular winter had become, apparently due to the Night King's resurgence.

Sansa moved to the bedroom, taking Ramsay gently by the arm to guide him along with her, then sat upon the large bed that the two of them shared. Still holding his arm with a light touch, she glanced across at him, for Sansa wasn't much shorter than he, even sitting, "I'm going to release you, at which time you are to lay yourself upon my lap."

As promised, she let go of him, but Ramsay only stood stunned, his mouth hanging open for a long awkward moment before he could find the voice to protest, "W-what?! I thought that perhaps you wanted to speak… why am I being punished… have I not yet suffered enough indignities?"

She raised an eyebrow at his response, and her lips quirked in an almost imperceptible way that Ramsay had come to recognize as annoyance.

Out of the frying pan and into the water, he thought. He was treading dangerously close to making matters worse, and he knew the reason was due to his refusal to do exactly as she had instructed immediately. A worried part of himself urged him to hurriedly comply, but he also knew what doing so would lead to.

His hesitation cost him of course, as Sansa frowned in a manner that suggested she had expected he would not readily do as she asked, but was disappointed nonetheless, "I would have hoped that after all this time with me you would have better learned that not doing as I say results in uncomfortable results for you."

She gave him a sideways look as she cocked her head at him, seeming to evaluate what she thought of his position, "I'm going to give you one last chance to choose to willingly submit to what is coming to you. The why of the matter can be explained during the process of obeying my command, but do not presume to stall…"

Sansa leaned in, glowering at him in a fashion that made Ramsay cringe a bit more than he would have liked to, "...because if you truly choose the path of resistance I will forcibly punish you all the same, only it will be far worse for you than it otherwise might have been. Do you wish to test me today as you have tested Brienne?"

Ramsay shook his head at her, his face a picture of conflicted thoughts as his humiliation warred with his fear of further humiliation. His muscles bumped out a pattern of confused half-compliance, as he shakily laid himself over her lap but not actually setting himself down upon it. Sansa grunted in annoyance and gave a tug, hauling him the rest of the way.

Once in that terrible and terribly familiar place Ramsay moved his hands to cover his face in shame, as if doing so would somehow mask his id from seeing what would be coming next. It had been some time since Sansa had punished him this way, and he had apparently fallen into a false sense of security in thinking that he would not have to endure it again.

He had told himself that it was a simple matter to avoid Sansa's ire really, and that as long as he was careful, their strange relationship could continue indefinitely without any more of the awfully
disconcerting and ego-damaging 'punishments' that she would dole out. After all, she had made it clear that he had to 'deserve' them first.

But it hadn't worked out that way at all in the end, and all the interim between the last time an event like this one and now had done was instill a unmerited bravado within Ramsay, making him somehow feel like he was in the clear, when all along he needed to be just as cautious as he had promised himself he would be in the beginning.

Suddenly he was jarred from his thoughts by an all too familiar stinging sensation, grunting in a fashion that ended in a pained hiss of displeasure as Sansa's hand collided with the naked flesh of his upturned ass. He squirmed nakedly in her lap, wishing that something was different about this encounter. No… he wished that a lot of somethings were different about this encounter.

He wished that she wasn't spanking him at all in this humiliating display, but rather exchanging words instead. He could parse words any day; he was good at that. But he had little recourse in how to respond to the repeated sting of her continuing swats. He wished he wasn't so nude, though he wasn't sure why it mattered.

Ramsay supposed upon giving the matter momentary thought that it must be on account of the physical vulnerability that was present in a person, even a person like Ramsay, when one was nude. Given that the act of punishing him in such a corporal manner was also so closely physical, he had to conclude that it made the act even more disconcerting.

With the vibration naturally caused by Sansa's rapidly descending hand and Ramsay's own understandably discomfited movements in response to her sharp swats, he began to slide a bit from her lap, and she reacted by reaching out to almost casually hoist him back onto her hips, pressing his hips against her own by looping her hand around his waist.

Once he was thusly solidly secured she returned to slapping him in the same measured manner as before, her face a solemn and difficult to read thing. Ramsay continued to hiss and grunt in chorus to the rhythm she set, his mind reeling from the predicament but also racing for something he might say to soften Sansa's mood on the matter even if he was beyond thinking anything he could say would stop this.

Nothing came to mind, though. At least, nothing that would actually help. Sansa and he had been doing this dance for some time now and she had made clear had little patience she had for his games. He might have some modicum of success in his little ploy with Brienne, leaving off the results of that ploy anyways, but from this vantage games were dangerous.

The trouble he was in now was substantial, of course, evidenced by the pain administered to his backside as he took a deep breath, letting it out in a jagged exhalation in his efforts to mediate what she continued to do to him. But he wasn't fool enough to think that this was the extent to which she would go if he tried something duplicitous.

So all in all, he did nothing but lay there, feeling helpless despite the fact that he was fairly sure that should he really try he might wrest himself free. No, he was held there by implication; by what he and she both knew would happen if he resisted in such a fashion. Despite the pain and soreness that screamed in his mind to flee he remained.

And it was hard. Becoming harder with each painful sting administered to his tender underside. He grit his teeth and gripped both the bed and Sansa tightly, so tightly in fact that his knuckles turned white for the effort. If he was causing Sansa discomfort by holding her so she either didn't notice in the heat of the matter or simply didn't mention.
He wished for a time that she would say something, anything for which to allow his mind a
distraction from the steady beat of the humiliation applied to him, something to let him dwell on other
than the nature of his suffering. It hadn't really even been that long, he knew, but already he felt like
he was at his limits.

To his great relief she did finally speak, seeming to have merely deigned to allow him time to stew in
his own thoughts in the interim, "I hope you realize, Ramsay, how surprised I was to find Brienne
punishing you in the square like that. Surprised, and very disappointed. I had thought that perhaps
you may have learned your lesson, but suddenly I question your conviction."

In some other position Ramsay might have thought of something clever to say in his defense, or
perhaps even some amusingly witty response to take the edge off of the situation for the both of
them, or at least to make things more entertaining for himself. But in this position he wasn’t in a place
to be entertained, even by his own charm.

On top of that, the repeated slaps to his backside made concentration difficult at best, and hindered
even creative thought, so his own words drawled out far more lamely than they might otherwise have
done, "W-why is that? I… I thought to regale you with my side of that story, but I knew before the
words could leave me that you would value her word over mine…"

Sansa raised an eyebrow at him and her hand ceased its descent for the time being, instead resting
upon the small of his back, "Are you telling me that you won't try to justify yourself in light of what
actions Brienne accused you of because you view my judgement as being marred by favoritism?"

Ramsay gulped; he was getting himself into hotter water by the moment he knew, and not only on
one account. On one hand, Sansa was taking the pitiable statement he had cobbled together to save
face rather poorly, and if he didn’t continue to follow this course to a more adequate answer for
Sansa, his day was going to become worse. On the other hand, keeping on this track against Brienne
led him to an entirely different dangerous set of options.

After all, should he annoy Brienne or somehow successfully sway Sansa to believe he was the victim
in the affair at the courtyard, Brienne would certainly make good on her threat to reveal the deception
he had been responsible for earlier on, of which Sansa was still blissfully unaware. Sansa's eyes
hardened and he knew that he was screwed either way.

Damn if he did, damned if he didn't, so he might as well try... "W-well, milady, I do not wish to
pit you against your champion in these trying times…"

Her eyes narrowed, "Oh no you would never do anything like that, would you?"

He gulped, taking a nervous breath before continuing, "...b-but I think that she can be far rougher
than she realizes, and over-estimated my… ability to handle a large amount of tough labors. I was
only tired and worn from a long day of work and desired some rest. I meant no disrespect! Though I
know she resents me and therefor took it differently… this is all a great misunderstanding!"

The pause in Sansa's hand continued, and she gave him a quizzical look, "You mean to tell me that
Lady Brienne was incorrect in her judgement of you? This is the second time you have accused her
of such, and while I allowed for the first instance based on the fact that my guardian had perhaps
seemed hasty, I find this happening twice unlikely."

Sansa leaned in to narrow her eyes at him, "I shall speak to her, and if I feel that you are saying this
simply to save your hide, I will tan said hide far worse than I had already planned."

Ramsay visibly relaxed at her words even as worry began to gnaw at his gut. At the very least, her
words meant a reprieve of some duration, likely tomorrow or...

These sentiments slipped away when he realized that Sansa was not releasing her hold of him, instead calling a servant over. Ramsay hid his face in shame as the peasant girl he didn't even know took in the sight of him bent over Sansa's lap. He was certain news of what was done to him within Winterfell had likely become common knowledge by now, but still he felt shame.

The Lady of Winterfell gestured to the young girl, "See yourself to Lady Brienne of Tarth, and let her know that her mistress has need of her."

With a short bow of the head and a word of acknowledgment the girl turned on her heel to send word, and Ramsay lay with mouth agape, knowing that his words had stalled nothing.

It didn't take long for Lady Brienne of Tarth to arrive having received Sansa's summons via the small sure-footed girl that had undoubtedly ran across the keep as quickly as possible. From Ramsay's point of view, she had been entirely too energetic and enthusiastic in her speedy relation of Sansa's ill-omened tidings.

In any case, he was made to lay there upon Sansa's knees as they waited for Brienne's arrival, with Sansa not so much as moving to cover his exposed posterior. Her hand merely lay gently upon him, as if awaiting its next chance to begin punishing him anew. He might have felt overly cold from what bit of the biting wind from outside slipped in, but...

But his lower half had been exceedingly warmed by the thorough slapping that Sansa had given him. He glanced back to take into account the damage she had done and immediately regretted doing so. His cheeks were pale normally, but now the lower halves were almost as red as cherries, with splotches of bruising here and there.

Welts shone all throughout the area, some even bearing shapes that suggested the curves of Sansa's hand, mostly her long fingers. Seeing his trembling flesh laid bare like that and knowing that not only had Sansa summoned a servant girl to bear witness to it but that Brienne herself would also be seeing it made him feel sick. Though in Brienne's case he supposed she had played a fair part in the making of it.

Speaking of that particular demon dressed up in full plate armor, the towering form of Brienne entered the room, and the metal fittings of her armor giving her away long before Ramsay actually saw her form fill the doorway. He looked away, feeling acutely self-conscious over the state that she had found him in, regardless of how little he should care of what Brienne thought.

He wasn't certain, but Ramsay could almost swear that he saw the very corners of Brienne's mouth twitch upward ever so slightly in the barest of smiles at the sight of him over Sansa's knee as he was, and the thought that she might be taking amusement in his further shame incensed him, Ramsay's teeth grinding in annoyance.

Brienne nodded to Sansa, "You called for me, milady?"

Sansa nodded in turn, lifting the hand she rested on Ramsay to gesture toward him as she spoke, "My ward here has stated that there might have been a misunderstanding concerning why you punished him only a short while ago, and I would have your thoughts on the matter."

Ramsay glanced back over his shoulder to look at Brienne, his breath stalling in his lungs at what she might say; there was no way Brienne wouldn't defend her punishment of him. Really he was doomed to have Sansa finish her own punishment, and now his chief concern was in how much worse things could get. It turned out, things could in fact get much worse.
Brienne's countenance took on a dark aspect as her brow drew down upon hearing Sansa relate the matter to her, and her stance changed a bit, spreading her feet to lean back stiffly with her hands folded in front of herself, head held high. The bearing she wore spoke of a certain rigid, very official air as she spoke, "Did he?"

Her gaze slipped down to Ramsay, whom looked elsewhere to avoid the penetrating nature of her eyes with him in such a vulnerable state. He did his best not to look anywhere or do anything at all, imagining that he was playing the part of the poor misunderstood victim. But Brienne knew better, of course, "Milady, since Ramsay has been so bold…"

She gestured behind herself to the door and presumably what lay beyond it, "…I had ousted him for foul play concerning our previous incident, and I admit milady I made the poor choice of keeping it to myself in hopes that Ramsay would behave himself knowing that I could unveil him should he prove troublesome."

Ramsay's heart dropped into his stomach and Sansa perked up, "Oh? You mean that nasty affair with Petyr I take it?" Her eyes grew hard as she glanced down at Ramsay and he for his part squirmed uncomfortably to receive such a look from her in the position he was in. "Meaning to say I take it that he was in fact involved in some plot as you had guessed?"

His heart, now located within his stomach, began to fire off rapidly, pounding so hard he had to wonder if Sansa didn't feel that beat against her legs, or even hear the sound that thrummed in his ears as his blood rushed to his head at the thought of what Brienne might be about to say. She shook her head slightly, "Not a plot between the two of them so much…"

Brienne gestured to Ramsay's prone form, "…the entire ordeal was actually a charade created by Ramsay with the sole purpose of making it seem I was overly zealous, milady."

Sansa's eyebrow arched high as she glanced at Ramsay with a pointed look as he solemnly looked away, "Is that so? Funny; it would seem that is what he accuses you of now…"

The armored woman nodded, "Yes, milady; I had spoken with Ramsay before whilst in the company of Petyr Baelish, making clear to him that I knew of his games even if I had no solid evidence to prove that he played them. Lord Baelish made clear that he would testify on account of Ramsay's duplicity, of course."

Ramsay had heard enough, and felt now that he needed to chime in on the conversation in his own defense, despite the awkward position he had to do so from, "Of course Baelish said that; he is feeling hurt over your treatment of him before and merely wants me to join him in suffering. You cannot believe anything that he says!"

Sansa scowled at Ramsay, "And I suppose you would have me disbelieve my chosen champion as well?"

He opened his mouth and then closed it, his face betraying that he understood implicitly the trap such a statement set, and that there really was no right answer anymore. Attack Brienne's credibility or judgement further and earn Sansa's ire, or roll over and accept the righteous anger that she will cultivate from him admitting wrongdoing.

Instead he gave a rather lame response, "I'm not saying that Lady Brienne is lying… only insisting that she might have become mistaken…"

Brienne shook her head, refuting the statement, "Ramsay already incriminated himself to my face; there is no mistake here. Only a fool digging a hole for himself."
Ramsay flushed red in the face at her insulting words and he bit his tongue, his mouth a thin line of irritation and worry. More than that though he watched Lady Sansa of Winterfell, for her weigh in on what was said was the most pressing, as the fact that he still lay upon her lap in humiliating pose with her offending hand resting upon him was not forgotten.

Sansa looked from Brienne to Ramsay and back again, her face placid as she clearly deliberated, "Thank you for your time Lady Brienne, and thank you for sharing this last bit of news with me. I ask that in the future you tell me of all of your concerns about Ramsay's intentions, as knowing such helps me decide in what ways I need to guide him."

Lady Brienne stiffened a bit, possibly at the fact that even in this small way she was in fact being scolded for not being forthcoming with what she suspected so strongly of Ramsay's earlier intentions, and it was clear that she took the matter seriously enough that even these words stung her a bit. She nodded at Sansa in a simple manner that conveyed understanding.

"I apologize for not sharing the matter with you immediately, milady. After the incident with Lord Baelish…"

Sansa raised a hand in a manner that suggested letting the matter go, "I understand completely, Lady Brienne. At the time I am certain that you might have wondered if I would doubt you."

She leaned forward and placed a hand upon Brienne's own gloved hand, "I would have you know that you have dispelled all such notions many times over by this time to me. I'm only sorry that I did not take your instincts concerning Ramsay's behavior earlier more seriously. Could you be a dear and fetch that hair brush from my dresser?"

Ramsay shifted uneasily at this last request, his heart pounding in his chest as their conversation made it clear to him that Sansa had already decided that he was very guilty. He doubted intensely that Sansa intended to use the brush to comb through her hair, not with him sprawled across her lap as he was. He didn't know what he could say now, so his words trailed to nothingness, "Sansa, please…"

Lady Sansa shook her head at him, her one arm roping around his middle and adjusting him against her own hips as the other gripped the hair brush tightly around the handle and lifted it high in the air over the squirming reddened ass below, "It seems you have been busy undermining everything that we had thought we were building here."

She paused, watching as Ramsay's breath hitched and caught in his throat, both in apprehension and perhaps even a little hurt over Sansa's tone of clear disappointment with him. Then she brought the implement down, causing Ramsay to hiss loudly as he strained against her grip, his hands taking hold of Sansa's leg as she stepped back into the rhythm she had discontinued before.

Except now that same rhythm was much, much worse, and Ramsay's eyes widened and watered at the sheer, terrible sting of it. It didn't help that he had been made so tender in those areas already by the ministrations of both Brienne and Sansa, back to back. His ass received everything it took very poorly now, from an item that was already going to pain him greatly.

He wheezed out a series of grunts, making faces as he strained this way and that. It took everything he had not to do the unthinkable and try to wrench himself from her grasp. He might be able to, should he try hard enough, especially with the pain she delivered as an excellent motivator. But should he try such a thing, within sight of Brienne even, he had no doubt things would become worse still.

So instead of trying anything as rash as making a predicament he had already worsened even more
calamitous, Ramsay grit his teeth and strained against the pain, enduring it as best he could as muscles trembled and back arched at the terrible sting delivered. Sansa finally gave voice to the feeling that hung between the two of them, heavy in the air.

"I am disappointed, Ramsay. In all of this time since the last time I needed to punish you in such a fashion, I had honestly come to believe you had learned your lesson…"

She paused for a moment to regard the panting form on her lap, as he glanced back with desperate blue eyes to meet her gaze.

"…But clearly you have not yet caught on to your place within these halls, in that you once again believed yourself so clever as to play your games again, to ply those old habits again, and with the audacity of thinking that I would not become wise to the fact that you have not changed as you had at first seemed."

Ramsay licked his lips, his mind quickly working to formulate an eloquent response to such a statement, some manner in which he might use honeyed words to pave over some of the damaged feelings he had caused in her, but she had begun to raise her hand to resume striking him with the brush within it, and instead he panicked.

So instead of saying something formulated to put Sansa's mind at ease in a manner that might seem dignified, he instead yelled, "I-I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Sansa… please by all the gods I am sorry!"

Sansa's mouth quirked, and then her frown returned, "I wish that I could believe you, but now after what happened in Petyr's chambers I have reason to doubt any words you speak."

She stopped hitting him with the brush abruptly and handed the implement to Brienne. Then she grabbed ahold of Ramsay's bicep with the now freed hand and hauled him up so that he could turn his legs a bit and be sitting with her. Her hand remained firmly clamped on him even as her voice firmly admonished him, "You lied to me, Ramsay. Right to my face you attempted deceit."

He wasn't certain why this accusation caused him such a plethora of mixed feelings, but it did, and Ramsay found himself squirming again, both from that boiling pot of emotional response that he could barely contain from his face, and the agitated way his rear felt as he tried to sit the way Sansa was silently demanding him to sit.

At first he attempted to meet her gaze, but after glancing up at the fiery way she regarded him, and worse yet seeing the disappointment so clearly painted upon her features, he dropped his own eyes quickly to the floor, feeling wave after wave of blistering shame burn away at him, heating his face and making him feel ill to his stomach.

All that he could manage was the lamest of replies, "I… I'm sorry." Ramsay realized how far he had come from the man he had once been in saying such so easily, and even more importantly, sincerely. He didn't bother hiding the way he felt from his eyes anymore, Brienne be damned; the fact that Sansa was so disappointed in him hurt more than all the rest.

More than the greatest of humiliations or the worst of nettling pain, her disapproval cut deeply. Ramsay had been wrestling with how he felt about Sansa for some time now, but at no time as much as this one was it clear to him that he not only cared what she thought, but that he deeply worried over her state of opinion concerning his person.

Sansa allowed the pall of silence to hang in the air for a good while before deigning to finally speak again, only watching as Ramsay shifted uncomfortably beside her, her hand still locked about the muscle of his arm with a tight grip, "Now I face another conundrum as well; you have caused me to
punish Petyr Baelish unjustly, and this must be remedied."

Ramsay blinked at her dumbly for a moment, not having expected that Sansa would care about that, at least not really, "But… you were already punishing him… didn't he already have it coming?"

She shook her head, glowering at Ramsay fiercely in a manner that made him shrink away from her as best as he could, "I punished him for the wrong reasons, and worse I was manipulated into doing so. It must be set right."
Chapter 25: Setting Things Right

Petyr Baelish was confused and more than a little disoriented as the Lady Brienne pushed him along before her through the straight hallways of Winterfell Keep. His breath plumed before his eyes and he shivered at the cold despite the thick and heavy furs that the armored woman had given him to stave off the bitter chill.

They walked briskly, for Brienne seemed to be in a hurry to bring him to whatever destination that had been planned for him. His heart pounded in his chest at the prospect of his destination. Thoughts of where that might be swirled around his head; had the time finally come? Was he to be carted before the court and executed?

His eyes took in the courtyard to his left. For one thing, no one was assembled there, nor was there any sign of an executioner of any sort, or even a podium erected for a hanging. Wherever Brienne took him it seemed it would be a more private affair. This did not necessarily make Petyr feel better, as he tried to imagine why.

Perhaps Lady Sansa wished to take a more active role in his death? Petyr knew from the extensive list of information he had compiled on House Stark that the lords of that family tended towards performing executions personally, so as to prove to their vassals that they did not shy from getting their hands dirty, but Petyr had a hard time imagining Sansa beheading him in some private room. That too would have had to have been public. He hoped.

Of course, a Lady Stark would be a new phenomenon in the whole Stark execution business, Sansa wasn’t her father that was certain and perhaps she had become fond enough of Petyr that she wished to execute him privately… Petyr's gaze flitted back to Brienne; maybe Sansa would have the hulking woman kill him quietly away from everyone's sight, even her own?

These deliberations weren't doing anything to slow the hammering stride of Petyr's heart, and he made a real effort to calm himself, though he found the task largely impossible to complete in full. After all, this arrangement with Brienne bringing him away from the room he had become so accustomed to was highly irregular, and boded nothing but ill fortune.

Finally the two arrived at Sansa's chambers. Petyr licked his lips apprehensively, a questioning, puzzled expression locked upon his face. He found this destination even more peculiar, and no attempt to strain his mind toward understanding lent any sort of answer or insight into why she would have him brought here of all places.

Brienne pushed the door aside and grabbed Petyr by the arm, ushering him inside with a thoroughly unnecessary amount of force as far as Petyr was concerned. After all, in all of the time that he had been a prisoner of Sansa within Winterfell Keep he had never once given anyone even the slightest of impressions that he was going to attempt escape or even resist in any way.
He gulped at the sight of Sansa, whom stood apparently awaiting his arrival, her hands folded calmly in front of herself as she regarded him through half-lidded eyes. Brienne pulled Petyr to stand just before the Lady of Winterfell, but not before Petyr's shrewd eyes picked up on the form of Ramsay, which was hunkered upon the great bed within Sansa's quarters.

Petyr could not see Ramsay's face, as the latter had the sheets of said bed pulled almost completely over himself. Petyr was only able to identify him as Ramsay by the tussle of brown hair above the blankets. For his part, Petyr's nostrils flared in sudden irritation at the sight of Ramsay freely sleeping within Sansa's bed.

It incensed him that Ramsay was allowed such luxury in addition to the apparent freedom of being able to travel the keep at his leisure. The sight of this made Petyr wonder if Ramsay also supped the fine foods of Sansa's table too, perhaps sitting as her right hand… these thoughts made Petyr irrationally angry to contemplate.

Ramsay of course deserved just as much as Petyr had gotten, so why did it seem as if Sansa somehow pampered him even as Petyr wasted away within that small room she had set aside for him? True, she could have put him in a dungeon, and Petyr ate well enough, but comparing that to what Ramsay seemed capable of filled Petyr with jealousy.

Those emotions were short-lived, however, as the story of what was really going on within Sansa's quarters began to unveil itself to him between the words spoken to him and the general mood of both Sansa and Lady Brienne. The first thing that changed the state of his own composure rapidly was the tone in Sansa's voice as she addressed him.

"I've summoned you here today to inform you that it has come to my attention that you were likely punished for something that you had no part in." Her voice seemed sincere. Petyr heard no malice or disdain, simply Sansa expressing genuine apology and even humility in admitting that she had made a mistake.

His jaw dropped. This had not at all been what he had expected, and he found himself having a hard time swallowing the fact that he had run aground upon such a wealth of good fortune. He had thought the matter had been done with too, that Brienne was going to use her suspicions of what Petyr knew to be Ramsay's ploy to keep the Bolton in check.

He glanced over at Brienne, but the knight's face was placid, unreadable. Did she tell Sansa in order to help Petyr? He doubted it; there was no love lost between him and the knight of the Sapphire Isles. He almost smiled then, glancing over at the form curled into Sansa's bed. It had to have been Ramsay; the fool had already done enough to make Brienne use her ace card against him.

Things became apparent enough though as Sansa spoke, "I only need you to answer me clearly now and with full honesty; were you aware of some plot to escape your place within the confines of Winterfell, Petyr Baelish?"

Petyr shook his head vehemently, "No, milady, I was not."

Sansa nodded at this, "Then it has come to my attention that Ramsay has sullied your name in one of his little games, and for such you have my condolences. You might be a prisoner here deserving of punishment for other heinous acts, but I wish no punishment levied that is not explicit in why it is deserved."

The former lord cleared his throat and shifted a little uncomfortably, his growing excitement over the turn of events dulled considerably by the reminder that Sansa had not forgotten his transgressions against her House. Sansa glanced past him to Brienne, "I believe that it would be best if we took a
more active role in Petyr's rehabilitation."

Petyr blanched at that, and the covered form of Ramsay also stirred in surprise as she spoke, "I would like you to take them both out tomorrow to perform these labors you have been having Ramsay do; I think it well and good that you have instated a sort of civil program for them to pull their weight and pay back the community that houses them."

The mounting surprise over the wind of change that had suddenly foisted itself upon him seemed to catch Petyr up within its grasp, and he just stared slack jawed and dumbfounded as Sansa coolly regarded him. The faintest edges of a smile graced the corners of her mouth at his look, "I have decided that if I am to keep you alive I must treat you as I do my other ward, Ramsay."

He wasn't the only person in awe of this decision, as it seemed to make Lady Brienne uncomfortable as well, perhaps due to the part she would now be playing in it. Sansa spoke quickly to her now, seeming to want to ease the armored woman's mind, "I am certain that together we can come together with a plan to turn even the greatest offenders into production citizens."

Brienne took a long, slow breath, glancing at the flabbergasted face of Petyr and then shifting her gaze to the curled form of Ramsay, whom was peeking from under his covers whilst trying to seem as if he was doing so, "You are too kind, milady, but your charges are mine and I shall not fail you. This shall be the strangest winter I have ever known, I'm certain."

Chapter End Notes

It's been a joy to have you along on this journey, and where I could see this story going on forever, all good things must come to an end. I hope that the end leaves you musing over Ramsay and Petyr's fates under the strict tutelage of Sansa as much as it does for me. If anyone can get our boys on the straight and narrow, it's Sansa with a little help from the honorable Lady Brienne ;)

I've made an easy audio list link for any that wish to hear Jason read you his story. I will attach it as a final closing chapter to this story.
*** Audio Readings ***

All audio:

Ch 1:
https://app.box.com/s/oml8dmjbumrwyg0o3nzp1faucdzhb7gk

Ch 2:
https://app.box.com/s/vuf10e14rx5ixoqaz0qcazypo4766x

Ch 3:
https://app.box.com/s/0nvbdn56k6tcbbzcq46vfln4kuebp

Ch 4:
https://app.box.com/s/btmucfn2nery2c6mihym6yh4sbb6zp

Ch 5:
https://app.box.com/s/j5ev4la7sv5ngx7yt91qd5reswi1h9g

Ch 6:
https://app.box.com/s/cr6vwujf7e1f2gocs2mypsxcenpbwg

Ch 7:
https://app.box.com/s/jotupsyvw7rnx3tn0be3wr03iwadjm

Ch 8:
https://app.box.com/s/4jrcvv5stwufz0yt5dyy7t0spx23d7

Ch 9:
https://app.box.com/s/zk2trcuff2lq0di1rvjnfvgyvavk2ga

Ch 10:
https://app.box.com/s/y1rzyayusa6tbp5r4x1ipmtoh9f93u

Ch 11:
https://app.box.com/s/bbb1q0lkaofbfbj131aj9veq0yskux

Ch 12:
https://app.box.com/s/b48lyjgmlx8tfsif7ay1rhi7nld0knk

Ch 13:
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Audio links for all chapters have been posted as a final chapter for you! Enjoy! =D
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!