**Runs in the Family**

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**Summary**

Let's talk about the Starks. Take a moment to be overwhelmed by the utter, inescapable perfection of this family. Catelyn and Ned Stark are madly in love. They have five beautiful and talented children. Their eldest son, Robb, is a student at one of the top universities in the world. He plans on taking over the family business and making his parents proud. Their oldest daughter, Sansa, is destined to follow in his footsteps, and is considered the most eligible bachelorettes in the UK. Their youngest daughter, Arya, is headed toward a professional dance career. Their second son, Bran, has every teacher in the district cooing over his precocious intellect and their youngest, Rickon, is already displaying profound leadership skills.

And this summer, they come together for tears, laughter, and the occasional dead body.

Robb is in love with his cousin and has dated half the women in England. Sansa's boyfriend has literal skeletons in his closet. Arya will do anything and anyone to get ahead. Bran is being stalked by a delusional drug addict. Rickon is a bully and a creeper. Jon, of course, has
to deal with all of them.
People know Sansa Stark as the perfect young lady. She is the type of girl a man dreams about taking home to his mother and then straight into their bed. Her legs are longer than snow covered mountains, with vibrant red hair and jewels for eyes, a dainty figure with the right amount of curves to draw anyone's attention. Her voice is sweet and melodious, and she drew people towards her like an enchantress on a deserted island. She is obedient and well mannered, perfection in every single form.

The people who think this, however, will never get to see Sansa Stark as she is now: scantily clad in her favorite nightie, a transparent blue dress that reveals her tantalizing breasts and soaking cunt. The fabric ran down to the middle of her thighs, and despite its length, did nothing to hide the wetness dripping down her legs.

She casually brushes her hair off her shoulders, raising the dress up enough to give a little peek. She had no intention of hiding it in the first place.

Sandor Clegane stares from his doorway, entrance by the fantasy in front of him. He is stunned speechless and his lack of words only serves to amuse Sansa. The sound of footsteps awaken Sandor to reality, and he promptly slams his door shut.

He stalks towards her and takes a hold of her lips. “Is it my birthday?”

Sansa giggles and she jumps on him, her legs wrapping around his waist while their lips meet. He ravishes her body with his rough hands and forces her against the wall to give her more, thorough attention. “I take it your last day went well,” he suggests when they part.

Happy that he remembered, she begins to plaster kisses along his neck as she explains. “Couldn’t wait to see you.” She tries to tighten her legs around him and rubs. His crotch dampens from the contact.

It is a challenge, but he manages to locate his bedroom door. “Your parents must be very proud.” He wouldn't know, he never went on to college. He also doesn't give a flying fuck, but it also turns the bird on when he talks about her mum and dad when he's inside her. He might make her call him daddy later. She kisses him, and soon the only thing he could think about right now is how great her ass from behind.

“Proud enough to let me stay the night at a friend’s house,” She whispers in his ear, causing his cock to harden even more than he thinks is possible.

They finally reach the bed and he drops her onto the sheets. Sansa excitingly pulls him on top of her. He could see perky little nipples and he backs away to undo his jeans. To his horror and delight, Sansa lays there, displaying herself like a Greek goddess. She isn't even trying to help him, just enjoying the show. Her legs provide a bit of an opening, a wanton invitation to take what is his.

When he is finished watching, he pulls off his shirt desperately and then ravages her lips, earning a delighted little shriek from the eager teenager. He is on top of her now. One of his hands found their way to her pussy, feeling the heat that is radiating from there. Sandor's fingers rub her slit before diving in completely. He plays with her a bit and he can hear Sansa moaning through her kisses.
When they stop for breath, Sansa gives these weak little whimpers of protests. The noise makes Sandor's cock leak more precum and he knows he has to get inside her. With one hand still fingering Sansa to no end, Sandor frantically searches his drawer for a condom. He wastes no time putting it on when he finds it. The action causes him to stop finger fucking Sansa, and she responds by assaulting him with her lips.

In public, Sansa has this air of delicacy around her; an invisible stamp that says 'fragile' and 'handle with care.' In the bedroom, the red-headed vixen liked it rough.

For caution, he does a slow test nudge to be sure of the angle. He's done this a thousand times before, and half a thousand of those times were with Sansa (a scary thought now that he thinks about it). He knows the way she likes to be fucked and she knows how he likes to make love to her.

She scratches at his arm impatiently, telling him to hurry up without words. Sandor chuckles at her petulant expression. He backs out an inch and she groans in frustration. It doesn't last long before he rams himself forward, busting her open.

Her legs wrap around his waist, bringing him closer to her. She rocks her hips up against him, clenching around his dick the way he likes. “Good girl,” he praises her, earning a happy chirp. She's fucking adorable, he thinks to himself.

Sansa moans start to fill up the room, and it's the greatest turn on in the world. “Harder! Please!” She begs, and he has to laugh through his own moans. Even in bed, she's fucking polite. Sandor complies, nonetheless, making deeper, faster thrusts inside her. His heavy balls slap against the lips of her twat with wet smacks, while Sansa's own juices drip out of her. He could feel the slick even through his condom and regrets not barebacking. There's nothing better than being surrounded by her raw, tight pussy.

"You're leaking all over the place, little bird," She tightens at her pet name and Sandor has to dig deeper. “How long has it been since I've fucked you good and proper?"

"Too... long..." she pants weakly, and Sandor laughs.

“No wonder you want it so much–I might have to stuff your pussy a few more times a week if you keep getting this desperate for my cock.” She moans even louder and speeds up the movement of her hips. Sandor can feel her orgasm coming and he loves to have that little flutter around his cock.

He thrust into her a few more times and then maneuvers them so that she's on top. It's a great view, and he can see her nipples, red and swollen from the lack of attention. He takes one in his teeth and bites onto it. "Oh!" She moans.

He squeezes her ass, and she rewards him with another chirp. "Time to show me how much you missed me, little bird. I want to see you fuck yourself on me like it's the last time we'll see each other." As best as she could, she began to fuck herself up and down on his dick while Sandor continues to play with her breasts. They are the nicest pair of tits he's ever seen, though he supposes he's a bit biased. First loves are incomparable to an old fling.

Sansa keeps moving, trying her best to go faster, to please him, but she was already worn out from her first orgasm. He remembers one time she was so determined that she ended up slamming herself down on his tool until the neighbors called the cops. The screaming had gotten to them.

To make sure she doesn't get hurt (she told him she liked it, and he knew did, but rough sex three times a week wasn't healthy for either of them), he grips her hips to control her speed. Sandor pounds into her pliant, welcoming body until he is pumping a huge load into the condom. Sansa shudders
through a second orgasm.

He pulls out and carefully lays her onto the sheets. Tossing his condom to the side (he'll throw it away later), tucks her into his arms. Her nightdress, while still on, is stained with various fluids and ripped in a few areas; her thighs are bruised, and more liquids drip out of her swollen cunt. Sansa’s red hair washes over her like fire and sweat glistens on her body. It is a sight to drive any man towards a second round, but he was spent for the day. He has to wait until night time to try again.

“That was amazing,” Sansa applauds, she stretches out as much as she could without hurting and snuggles closer into Sandor's arms. “Was it always that great?”

“Dunno,” Sandor mutters, “Been so long without it, I can't remember. I think you broke my dick, though.”

Sansa playfully smacks him on the chest while her face burns as red as her hair, “It's only been two weeks!” Sansa had exams to study for and she couldn't afford any distractions. Sandor never complained once. He understood how important school was to someone her age.

“Two weeks too long,” he counters and then kisses her deeply before she could say anything else. Sansa slid on top of him. When they broke for air, Sansa laid her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

“I missed you,” she confesses. “I missed you lots.”

“Me, too.”

“Really?” She sounds so hopeful and Sandor finds himself smiling because of it. He quickly sighs to cover it up, and acts as if he was put off by her expression. Sansa tries to keep a neutral face but it doesn't work with Sandor. His kisses her again to assuage her fears. “I'm going to make you something to drink. You got to be thirsty after that.”

Sansa blushes so prettily that she earns another kiss. “I can help...” she offers weakly.

Sandor raises an eyebrow. “Can you walk?”

Sansa attempts to stand up but there's a painful reminder in her lower regions that says otherwise. She looks down. “I'll stay,” she murmurs.

Sandor chuckles and Sansa glares in embarrassment. He leaves the door just when Sansa throws a pillow at him.

In the kitchen, he grabs a few ingredients to make one of those ridiculous girly drinks that Sansa likes. He use to be reluctant about keeping the ingredients in his home, but then he thinks about those long legs and how her breasts fit in the palm of his hand. He thinks about her cunt and how it opened up for him like it was made for his cock. He thinks about the bruises on her skin that can be covered up but will still remain for days.

His cock twitches, and instead of getting glasses, he grabs a few bottles of water and wine.

It is going to be a long night.
For all the new readers: chapters are updated every Thursday. Previews of the chapters are available on my twitter account @cheshiresua.

All the pairings listed will be given a good amount of attention. Some chapters are centric on SanSan (like this ones) while others will focus on Jon/Robb, Jojen/Bran, etc. I follow the ASOIAF format where there are several different storylines going at once. If people request more scenes of a particular pairing, I try to accommodate them by adding giving them more "screen time".

I like comments. I think all writers like reading comments. So please comment if you like it. :)
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I hope you don’t mind, mum,” Robb apologizes over the phone. “But Jon is really special. When we met, we just connected. I mean, I felt like I’ve known him my whole life.”

Catelyn sighs. Where has she heard this before? Oh right, with Talisa, Jeyne, Margaery, Roslin (who ended up marrying her brother much to their dismay), Meera, Daenerys, Dacey...And it is a boy now. Did her son fall in love with all the available women in the United Kingdom already?

“How long have you been seeing him, Robb?” Catelyn asks, trying not to sound judgmental. Last time she disapproved, Robb eloped. Twice.

“Two weeks,” Robb gloats, “But I've been pulling him for a month. It was love at first sight.”

“Of course it was,” Catelyn agrees dryly. “I’m sure he feels the same way.”

“He...will. At the moment, he finds love to be...unfulfilling,” Robb reveals and Catelyn rolls her eyes. Her son’s in love with a realist, “But I’m so close to convincing him that the union between our bodies and the moment of perfection we accomplish together is a sign of future matrimony.”

It’s called an orgasm, Catelyn thinks dryly. But the whole ‘sex is love and love is sex’ is something he got from his father. “So his family won’t mind him staying here for the summer?”

“He only has his mum and she’s working in France,” Robb explains, “They're free spirits. You should meet his friends. Gods, what eclectic group of people. There's Sam...”

Robb spends a good while talking about Jon’s friends, how amazing this young man was, how she’ll love him. She always hates them before the meeting. Robb says independent and thoughtful and she hears ‘skeptical free spirit who probably hates being tied down.’ Adventurous is code for sex addict. Well travel means he’s easily unsatisfied. Catelyn patiently waits for the rant to end.

“Besides, Jon loves Yorkshire. He has some cousins he's been dying to see again. He's great with kids. All I have to do is persuade him to have them with me.”

“Well, that’s nice,” Catelyn responds indifferently. “I guess I’ll prepare an extra room for him.”

“No need,” And Catelyn is sure he's grinning over the phone, “Jon can stay in my room.”

Catelyn groans, “Robb, you are not having sex where your siblings can hear.”

“Don’t worry!” Robb soothes, “We won’t be having sex.”

Catelyn arches an eyebrow even though her son couldn’t see. “Is that so?”

“We’ll be making love.”

Catelyn almost throws the phone down in frustration. Before she could respond, Robb immediately speaks up. She hears a door opening in the background.

“Anyways, Jon just came in. God, he's gorgeous. You should see him, mum.” Robb sighs like a love struck fool. “I swear, every time I look at him, it's like watching Galatea come to life, kissed by the
lips on Adonis and birthed into this world with the beauty of Psyche and Eros."

And there goes the poetry.

"He wants to have sex."

"Did he say that?" Catelyn asks incredulously.

"No, but he's wearing grey. And he knows grey is my color."

She needs a drink.

"He likes to tease me like this. He always wears just the right color that says he wants sex. We've been doing it every day. And night. And in-between classes and breaks. God, it's like my cock is apart of him."

Some Irish whiskey would be good.

"I'm going to tell him the good news so that we can start packing. See you Tuesday!"

“Robb--” Catelyn starts before the phone hangs up on her. Once again, she is left completely alone.

The Stark Estate is depressingly empty without her children or husband around, and even with the servants, Catelyn feels alone. She sighs. Robb is at uni and wI'll not come home until Tuesday. When he did, he'll probably be spending most of his time with his new love interest. On the bright side, when said love interest breaks up with him for being too intense, too needy, and too commitment prone, she will be there to comfort him as always.

Sansa is staying at a friend's house, or at least that's where she told them she was. If Sansa is anything like her (pre-Ned), she is probably at some guy's place, enjoying her independence on her back and knees. She's lucky that Ned is so trusting, or else he wouldn't let either of his girls out on the street.

Arya has a performance with her dance class. Afterward, she will probably be celebrating with her friends. Her male friends whose she's probably shagged at least once. They tried reigning her in a long time ago and it backfired on them horribly. The best they could hope for is that she uses protection. Judging by the box of condoms a maid found on her dresser (and pills in her drawer), she'd say Arya was listening.

Bran and Rickon are camping (how Ned could get her to agree to such a thing, she doesn't know) with their caretakers Hodor and Osha. Rickon loved the outdoors and needed to be outside as much as possible in fear of him lashing out. Bran, after his accident, enjoyed the scenery of nature and had taken to bird watching and other activities. He hates feeling like an invalid, and did as many hobbies as possible to avoid such a thought process. Caelyn understands this, but that doesn't stop her from sending texts every fifteen minutes and getting irritated when Osha does not reply. She knows the woman disapproves of her 'coddling.' She once, in a more that almost got her fired, told Catelyn that she might as well cut off Bran's balls and feed it to the wolves.

After listing off her children, Catelyn grows more depressed. There is no one for her to cook for, to clean after. She had no babies to take care of or problems to listen to.

She should have had more kids, Catelyn regrets.

Catelyn Stark has always wanted to be a mother. As a little girl she would imagine herself in a beautiful home, a kind husband who loves her, and a large brood of children running around in pure
chaos. When her father introduced her to Brandon Stark, the son of her father's new business partner, Catelyn was sure she met 'the one.' He was handsome, her father approved, and like Catelyn, he was the oldest in a large family. They had a lot in common, both attended the same university, both popular and both enjoyed the social scene. Everyone agreed that they were a perfect match.

Then, she met his younger brother.

Ned Stark was nothing like Brandon, and it wasn't long before Catelyn realized she liked that. Brandon loved to spoil his siblings. At first, she considered it a trait of a good parent, the thing she wanted most in a partner. But when she saw the wicked mannerisms of Lyanna and the complete apathy of Benjen, she became disheartened. Ned was the one who helped his siblings with their assignments, and made sure they took care of themselves. He was the one who carried Brandon back to his bed when the man got too drunk to walk and made it incredibly painful in the morning so that Brandon would learn his lesson (he never did but it was still amusing to watch).

Catelyn praised him on it. Ned just gave her that half a smile and told her that he liked the practice. He revealed that he wanted a big family one day. When she asked him how many, he told her he wanted five kids, or at least as many his wife would give him.

Catelyn can't remember the last time she was so aroused.

She realized that while Brandon was handsome and charming, Ned was the man she wanted. The Tully born girl was nothing if not stubborn. She saw the way Ned looked at her and sought to use his affection to her advantage. She used to come out of the showers in nothing by towel, dress scantily in Ned's favorite shade of blue—the one that makes her eyes pop, and laughed at all the rare moments Ned told a joke. It wasn't long before they were sneaking off into the gardens and behind Brandon's back. A wedding and five children later, Catelyn knew she made the right choice. Ned eventually ended up taking over Stark Industries from his father (Brandon had gone to jail and lost his rights to the company outside his hereditary shares) and Catelyn became the perfect housewife. She got what she wanted, as always, and she adores her five children with all her heart.

Despite the fact that they all plan on abandoning her for the comforts of cheap whores and rent boys.

She grabs a bottle of Irish whiskey and the whole box of Bailey's Mouse Pie. One of the maids offer to cut her a slice but Catelyn growls at her. The poor girl simpers away.

When Ned came home, Farlan warns him of her poor mood. Ned is a little perturbed, but nonetheless braves the crises. He understands what his employee meant when he sees his beautiful wife devour a whole pie with little mercy.

“Are you pregnant again?” Ned inquires as he walked into a room.

Catelyn scoffs, “I wish, you're too busy to give me a baby.”

Ned chuckles, and Catelyn feels as if she's being patronize.

“Ned, what do you see?” Catelyn motions around the lounge.

Ned looks around curiously. “Nothing.”

“Exactly,” Catelyn hisses, “Nothing. My children are all gone. Do you know why?”

Ned thinks this is a trap. He answers anyways. “Well, Robb is at uni-”

“No Ned!” Catelyn refutes, “The real reason I am all alone.”
This will not end well for him.

Catelyn slams her nearly finish plate on the table. Ned winces, mostly because it was a family heirloom. “I am alone because my children are being taken away by a bunch of frivilous little tarts. Do you know Robb called today?”

This will definitely not end well for him.

“About what?” Ned asks neutrally.

“He's bringing a boy home this break. He says that this is the one.”

Ned snorts, “Did they run out of women in this country already?”

“That's what I thought!” Catelyn agreed. Ned sees a pout forming on her face, a positive change from her earlier depression. "His name is Jon and he's some sex fiend whose seducing my son. Robb was telling me how they have sex every night."

"He said that?"

"And it's such plain name! Who names their kid Jon?"

"My sister? My godfather's parents?"

"My children are leaving me," Catelyn sighs and leans on her husband's shoulder. Ned pats her on the shoulder in a comforting manner. "I wouldn't worry too much. Once summer break hits, this house will be happy and full again."

Catelyn moan. "Summer is so far away. It might as well be a dream."

"It's a week. Sansa's already finished with her school. It's just Robb and Rickon and Bran left."

"Arya?"

"Arya comes home when she wants to come home." He points out the obvious. All of them knew that Arya is just biding time before she applied to an academy or dance trope.

Catelyn agrees. "I'm tired of going home to a quiet household."

Ned hesitates for a moment. Then, bites the bullet and clenches the sword. Right now is the perfect time to break the bad news.

“Besides, I have a good feeling that this is going to be the busiest summer of our lives,” Ned starts out.

Catelyn goes on high alert. She knows Ned's 'bad news' voice when she hears it. "Is that so?"

"Yes." Ned coughs. "One might say it is the time to finally fill up all the empty rooms."

Catelyn groans. "Just say it."

“Cat—"

“Don't 'Cat' me. You use the exact same tone when you revealed you hired a caretaker for Bran without my consent."
"But Osha's doing a great job."

"Only when's not disagreeing with me."

"Discord evolves a society."

"So what is it? Robb does the same thing except he pretends it's good news."

Ned laughs softly, but then sighs. Catelyn looks at him with a mix of apprehension and boredom.

"Robert wants to come over."

Oh.

That is rather lackluster. "That will be interesting," Catelyn states. She has always had mixed feelings for Robert. She tolerates him well enough, but there are times where Catelyn couldn't stand being in the same room as the man.

"He's hoping to bring his children so that they can spend time together."

Catelyn did not know what to say to that. Instead, she does what she always does. Speaks her mind. "It's been nine years since he's had contact with them. How does he expect to bond?"

"He wants to take them hunting, amongst other things."

Catelyn shrugs. "Well, if there's anything a Lannister knows how to do, it's kill."

"They're expert hunters," Ned corrects.

"That's what I said," Catelyn sighs and says the next thing on her mind, "Cersei won't be happy."

Ned nods, "I know. She called my office seventeen times making death threats."

"Should I be expecting her as well?"

Ned eyes her cautiously, "Would you leave our children with him?"

"I wouldn't leave our dogs with him," Catelyn confesses seriously. As if on cue, Nymeria runs after Lady, the latter seems dead set on getting away from her aggressive sibling.

Ned agrees. "He's trying."

"Any man who can make me feel sorry for that witch isn't trying hard enough. I hugged her when she announced the divorce. That's how sorry I felt for her."

Ned smiles, and Catelyn feels herself relax. "Any more house guests?"

"Well..."

"Ned!" Catelyn seems aghast. "Who else?"

"You won't like the answer."

"When has that ever stopped you?" Catelyn asks him sarcastically. "Is it Brandon?" She asks horrified. Just the thought of seeing her ex again made her squemish. She already needed to buy extra packages of cigarettes during Christmas.
“No.”
“Lyanna?”
“No.”
Thank goodness for that.
“Renly?”
“I thought you liked Renly?”
“I did until my children caught him having sex with his boyfriend on our couch.”
“Well then, no.”
“Stannis?”
“You don’t like Stannis? When?”
“I like his daughter. I don’t like the potential chaos brought on by his seven stepsons. How did he meet Davos again?”
"Davos was a janitor at his company."
"Ah! The one he promoted to general manager and then became his vice CEO. Good for him." Catelyn whistles. "Didn't know he had it in him."
"It wasn't like that," Ned defends, though he can't fight the smile growing on his face. "Stannis is a good man."
"Of course! The fact that he promoted Davos after having great sex with him was a complete coincidence."
"How do you know they had great sex?"
"Davos has seven kids. You don't have that many children from bad sex."
"We have five."
"We have great sex," Catelyn smirks. Ned kisses her tenderly.
“No.”
Catelyn jumps into game mode. “Do I know them?”
“You have to know them to dislike them,” Ned teases her.
Catelyn hits him with a nearby pillow for his smart mouth. “Let's see...is it one of your old friends?”
“Yes.”
“But I don't like them.”
“You don't like a certain attachment that comes along with them,” Ned reluctantly discloses. He watches for the chain reaction.
Catelyn thinks further before she gasps. Her gaze darkens. “No!” She all but shouts at him.

“Cat-”

She shakes her head furiously. “I have accepted a lot of things into this house, each stranger than the next. I will not let him in here with Bran.”

“They need a place to stay. He was one of my best friends growing up,” Ned defends. "He saved my life." Ned takes her hands into his own. "Do you remember the fires from a couple of weeks ago? Well, their homes were hit. And he just lost his wife, and with his daughter going off to university, times have been rough. They can't afford a hotel right now. Meera is a good girl. Remember when she was dating Robb? You told me you liked her."

"This isn't about Meera, Ned," Catelyn hisses. "This is about his other child. The dangerous one."

"Jojen is..." Ned tries to find the words, anything that could provide ailtment to the situation. Aloe to a third degree burn. "He's special, intense, I agree. But I don't think he meant any harm--the psychiatrists all agreed that it wasn't anything perverse."

"I don't care what the bloody psychiatrist say! I care that, for months, our son had a target on his back and we allowed the archer to enter our home!"

"It was a phase."

"Bran was a child, Ned,” Catelyn emphasizes, obviously frustrated by how this was going. “Jojen was sixteen. Bran was barely a teenager, and for some reason, Jojen decided he was--what was the phrase he used--"the only thing that matters to him". Don't you see what's wrong with that?"

“I do,” Ned sighs, “But I owe a lot to Howland, and Jo-Meera is a good kid.”

"Do you even care about what he could have done to our son?"

“I doubt it was ill will," Ned disclaims. "I'm not saying he's completely ready to be out on his own but he's trying Cat. He goes to therapy twice a week and works to support his family.”

Catelyn laughs as if it was the funniest thing in the world. “Right, what did the doctors say again? He worships Bran, right? He saw Bran as a God.”

Ned groans. “I’ve met him, and I swear to you, he would never hurt Bran. He...”

Catelyn waits for it.

Ned takes a breath. “He loves him.”

It was too much for Catelyn to handle. "Fine. Fine! You can bring him into this household. You can even introduce him to the other kids but not Bran. If they ever meet, God forbid, I want them supervise at all times, especially by Osha.”

Ned agrees with no complaint.

Catelyn wasn't finished. “Jojen is allowed nowhere near Bran's bedroom and I want him on the other side of the estate. And if I see so much as a longing glance, or a brush of fingers, I am throwing him out, Ned."

“I'll do it myself if it comes to it,” Ned promises her. He places his hands on her shoulder in a motion to massage them. Catelyn brushes him off. “It'll be okay.”
“It better be,” Catelyn threatens. She storms off into her bedroom without a second thought.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter originally had six pages of Ned/Cat flashback. I cut it all out. ALL of it. What you are reading is literally all that was left. So stressed right now. Anyways, hope you enjoyed this chapter!

Kittens to those who could guess Robb's University! Waffles to those who could figure why I choose Yorkshire!
Robb Stark started dating when he was twelve, and since then, he's had over eighteen girlfriends. The oldest relationship was three months. Two left him at the alter. One left him for his uncle.

The reason isn't that Robb is a bad boyfriend. He's actually the perfect boyfriend, a regular prince charming who does everything possible to make his girlfriend happy.

He just really, really wants to get married.

And most of the women he meets--don't.

In all fairness, it is not Robb's fault he is obsessed with finding a wife. He's the son of the happiest couple in Europe. His father, "the quiet wolf," the forever brooding middle child who never spoke a word, the former army man who has never read a poem for enjoyment in his life, used to spend hours talking about how his was his first love. When he saw Robb's mother, the gracious and beautiful Catelyn Stark, he claimed to have fallen in love at first sight. He said their first kiss tasted like raindrops in a dessert, and that there was no greater feeling than to wake up next to the warmth of her body and the touch of her fiery locks and soft bosom. Robb has dreamed of his wedding day since he was five and played ring bearer to his parents vow renewal. He wants the dream house and the happy spouse. He wants a half a dozen kids running through the estate with a puppy attached to each of them. Robb has made it clear in all of his relationships that he's looking for The One. He's made it even more clear that he will never be truly happy until he finds her. This belief carried all the way through sixth form and the university, where he finds himself walking to a bar to meet up with his beautiful girlfriend.

It is universally acknowledged that the only way to get rid of Robb Stark (without feeling like a puppy murderer) is to find someone else for him to fall in love with right after breaking up with him. If not, Robb will fail in his studies (making your professors hate you), stop hanging out with his mates (making the men hate you), and become public enemy number one for breaking the heart of the Edinburgh's golden boy (making the other available women hate you because they have no chance with a man still pining over another woman).

With that being said, Jon Snow was not meant to be the sacrifice that day. Robb's girlfriend at the time didn't even know Jon as anyone other than the cute customer with the luscious, hair pulling curls. Unfortunately, Alys was desperate when her 'replacement' hadn't shown up at the pub that night. She had tried leaving Robb two times before, only to be charmed into another date. She couldn't keep going like this! She had exams! Jon had been the one to pick up the fork she dropped, and in her cowardice, the petite thing begged him to relay a message to her boyfriend. Jon agreed.

He had not expected the message to be 'I'm breaking up with you.'

Before he could get clarification, Alys ran into the boy's bathroom and climbed out the tiny window. The tiny, impossible to climb through for a human, window. Robb came in shortly after with a charming grin and a sensual voice, waiting for his girlfriend's 'news.' Out of pity, Jon tried to soften the blow by starting a conversation, and after ten minutes, Jon declared that the girl must have been stark-raving mad.

Robb was absolutely wonderful.
So wonderful, that after relaying the message, Jon foolishly asked if Robb wanted to come over to his place for some tea. Robb said yes. He would love some 'tea.' And with his perfectly shaped jawline and smothering gray eyes, Robb clutched Jon's hand and went to his flat that night. Several rounds of intense fucking ('love making,' Robb corrected) later, and Jon found himself with a stalker, who, after two weeks, wore him down long enough for them to go out on an actual date.

Thanks to that whole event, Jon is now fishing for his keys to their flat. It's so domestic that Jon prays his friends never find out. They would be so ashamed. Lyanna still refused to speak to him after finding out he was in a monogamous relationship. He even called Robb his boyfriend.

"Where did I go wrong?" She moaned.

Jon replied, "Somewhere after the second paternity test."

Speaking of disapproving mothers, Robb seems to be on a conversation with his right now. His boyfriend is in a good mood, meaning he is disregarding any signs of discomfort on his mother's part. Robb brightens up at his presence.

"Jon just came in. He wants sex," Robb assumes shamelessly.

Jon rolls his eyes. He could only imagine how awkward his mother must feel.

"No, but he's wearing grey. And he knows grey is my color," Robb explains with self-satisfied grin.

This makes Jon laugh. Feeling kind, Jon saunters over to Robb and sits in between his legs, making Robb groan softly. He entwines a hand into Jon's curls and tightens when Jon begins to mouth his crotch.

"He likes to tease me like this. He always wears just the right color that says he wants sex. We've been doing it every day." He licks his lips. "It's like my cock is apart of him."

Jon blushed. The boy really has no shame. Despite his boyfriend's inability to read a mood, Robb is too adorable to leave alone. Jon undoes Robb's zipper with his teeth, freeing his boyfriend's hard, mouthwatering cock. It's so big and wet. Jon licks his lips before bringing his mouth down on it.

Jon's oral fixation is a running joke amongst his friends. He loves giving head, loves the taste of a fat cock or a wet pussy more than anything. He likes how his tongue melts in the heat, or how badly his throat has to stretch to accommodate. Robb likes to receive almost as much as Jon likes to give, and they found themselves at a fun two-three times a day quota. Robb never complains to waking up to rich, intense heat or a quick blowie before he leaves for school. It's almost addicting how much Jon loves his cock.

"I'm going to tell him the good news so that we can start packing. See you Tuesday!" Robb moans out hastily. He quickly drops the phone in order to clutch Jon's hair with both hands. "Fuck, don't stop."

Jon made no plans to.

He suckles the tip before taking him all the way. Robb’s eyes roll to the back of his head as he begins to pant out excitingly. Robb has never been quiet in bed, and Jon loves it. He makes a little gagging noise which just spurs Robb on, and he begins to thrust into the tight heat of Jon’s mouth. His tongue slides along the underside of his cock and Robb groans. Jon looks up at him desperately, mouth stretching prettily around Robb’s thick cock.

“Love fucking your face,” Robb murmurs. “Love how you look with my cock in your mouth.”
Jon pulls off Robb before swallowing him whole again, bobbing his head in a slow, dragging way that Robb almost cums at. Robb is one of those guys who revels in giving praise and showering their partners in affection. He starts to rumble these little compliments and words of encouragement. ‘Beautiful’ and ‘Perfect’ were the most common. Jon hates to admit it but he's really eager at this point, and his hands start fondling Robb’s balls.

Jon's bobbing begins falling into a steady pace until Robb says, “I'm coming!”

Ever since he discovered Jon's limited gag reflex, Robb has stopped managing his self control.

Robb thrusts fervently into his throat. His eyes roams over the beautiful boy on his knees before pushing his cock past Jon’s throat to feel it flutter. The grip is hot and tight around him, and Robb tries to push in deeper. Jon responds by gripping Robb’s hips harder and pulling off to toy with Robb’s slit. Overwhelmed, Robb comes with a groan. Jon's mouth doesn't catch all of it, and Robb watches through half lidded eyes as his cum splatters on Jon's face.

Jon swallows what he can and wipes the remnants off his face with his fingers. Knowing how it gets Robb off, Jon crawls on top of Robb's lap. He slowly slips a finger into his mouth, blowing it for all its worth. With the cum on it, it almost tastes like Robb's cock. Before Jon could add in the others, Robb pulls Jon into a deep, tantalizing kiss.

When they separate, Jon rests his forehead against Robb and Robb lays sloppy kisses all over his face, like a puppy saying thank you.

“You are the most amazing man on earth,” Robb praises sincerely. The kisses get more wet, more intimate. “So perfect. So sexy. All mine.”

Jon loves it when Robb gets possessive. Robb throws Jon on the couch and hastily takes off Jon’s pants to get a clear view of that nice, firm ass. There’s some lotion on their table (they kept it all over the flat since Jon moved in), and Robb starts slicking up his fingers.

Jon can feel Robb hardening and he can't help but be impress by his vigor.

When Robb thinks there's enough slick on his fingers, he places one of them in Jon's entrance. He slides in easily and immediately decides that two fingers is ready to stretch the tight hole. Jon relaxes easily enough, already use to the glorious sensation of being fingerfucked by Robb. Moaning, Jon thrusts back on those coated fingers and Robb places a third digit in which jolts Jon back to reality.

“What...what were you...fuck...were you talking to your mother...god, don’t stop...about?” Jon huffs out.

Robb actually laughs at the question. “Is this the best time to talk?”

Jon takes a deep breath and tries to calm down. “When else can we talk?”

Robb chuckles. He moves his fingers to search for Jon's prostate. Jon can feel the joints rubbing against his sides raw. After a few seconds, the older boy cries out in pure pleasure. Robb does a scissoring motion to stretch him further. The hole looks absolutely obscene, pink and gaping around his fingers. Robb withdraws his fingers and Jon whimpers at the lack of sensation.

Robb teasingly places his tip inside Jon. He's still soft from earlier, but the feeling of the flesh rubbing against Jon's hole is frustrating and arousing all at once. He moves the head around the slick hole, lotion slipping out lewdly. “You should see yourself, Jon. You're so wet.”

Jon gasps in response.
Robb grins and pulls out completely. Jon whimpers. The teasing, insufferable penetration is still better than no penetration. He attempts to reach out for the cock with his hips, but Robb holds him firmly in place. The university student flips the other over until Jon is on his hands and knees. Doggy style.

“Figures you'd liked this position,” Jon pants out.

Robb doesn't reward Jon with a response. Instead, he slowly slips into Jon as punishment. Jon, tired from a long day and from his surprise, gives out instantly. Jon presses his forehead into the couch and lets out a wanton moan.

Robb reaches forward, lacing his fingers with Jon's own. It's one of those small, intimate gestures that helps Robb's argument that this isn't sex, it's love making. Jon likes it a lot more than he cares to admit, and maybe his body knows it because Robb's grunts get louder.

“I want you to meet my parents,” Robb informs him, as if talking about your parents is typical conversation during sex. Jon is less horrified by this fact than what is actually being said.

“W-what?” Jon's breath comes out in harsh pants as he tries to think. The squelching noises brought on by the thrusts made his thoughts hard to hear. “What-were you thinking?”

Robb's hips move back to his own grueling rhythm. “That my boyfriend deserves to know how serious I am about him.”

Your entire university knows how serious you are about me, Jon thinks half-serious, half-joking. He's surprise by how coherent his thoughts are. His cock hung heavy between his legs, leaking and throbbing. Robb is nothing if not attentive; he untangles one of his hands from Jon's fingers and reaches down and strokes him furiously.

Jon lets out a pleased sound, which somehow causes Robb to fuck Jon even harder. Jon comes a few moments later, crying out and shaking hard. It spurs Robb on to pound more erratic thrusts into Jon, pushing him flat on the couch and spilling deep inside him.

Jon sinks into the couch, his body is boneless with pleasure. He doesn't even know where the strength to roll over on his back comes from. Robb is quick to fall on top of him, and even quicker to cuddle. Jon can't help but chuckle when Robb nuzzles his neck affectionately.

“This isn't over, you know,” Jon mumbles. Their lips rub against each other while their fondling hands move.

“Sorry bout that,” Robb answers, lapping up the sweat running down Jon's neck. His inability to stay on track is one of Robb's most annoying traits, even to his best friends. “We can discuss it later.”

They don't. After recovering from their post-coitus haze, Robb suggested that they discuss it over dinner. Jon's stomach growled and he agreed. Robb tried to help (try being the operative word), but as a single bachelor from a posh family, he was absolutely useless with housework. It took a full thirty seconds and Robb's idea to use vegetable oil as salad dressing before Jon promptly kicked him out and tended to their meal in peace. He looked back only to see Robb cruising on the couch.

During dinner, Robb distracted him again by bringing out a memory from his childhood, playing with his favorite cousin (who coincidentally was named Jon).

“You remind me a lot of him,” Robb quipped. "I think it's the curls."

Robb is a sentimental bastard. He goes on and on about how regretful he was that he missed Jon's
visit last year due to exams. And the one before that because of a winter trip with his friends.

“I just really miss him,” Robb admits longingly.

“I can tell,” Jon grinned, despite knowing it was a ploy. “Careful, I might get jealous.”

“Don't be,” Robb appeased, taking a bite of his spinach. “You're much cuter.”

“How do you know?” Jon japes.

After dinner, Robb took a thirty minute phone call from mother, stalling 'the talk' once more. Jon doesn't like to think of his boyfriend as manipulative (he was but that doesn't mean that Jon actually likes to think it), but the way he casually congratulates his sister on her performance was perfectly planned. Jon ended up talking with Arya for a whole hour. He looked up once in the whole conversation, and found that Robb was on the phone with Theon. By the time both of them were finished, it was time for bed. Robb had an early appointment, and Jon really didn't want to have to wake him up. He reminded himself to talk with Robb after he gets home.

On Sunday, their bags are packed and ready for travel. By Monday, they are already boarding the train. Jon doesn't remember the details of how it happened, only that Robb should really consider a degree in law.

Theon Greyjoy is already waiting in their cabin when they get in. He's lying on one of the couches in a wanton 'fuck me' pose directed at Jon's boyfriend, and his shirt is button down enough to see his chest. It's shameless and tacky, and Jon almost bashes his head against the wall for not doing the same. He fights the urge to undo his own shirt. Gods, what is it about Robb that makes people so crazy?

“You're late!” Theon barks at them petulantly. He casts an appreciative look in Robb's direction, eying his body like a piece of meat. Jon bristles. He places himself in front of Robb to block those undressing eyes.

Robb sees no foul play, and steps aside to greet Theon. “We could have come together if you'd stayed with me like planned.”

Theon scoffs, “And listen to you two poofs fucking all night? No thanks.”

“Says the fashion major,” Robb retorts playfully. Theon grins. He catches Robb off guard when he pulls the younger man on top of him. Robb tumbles in laughter and the two wrestle like children in their limited space. Jon almost growls when Theon tightens his hold on Robb.

Jon's knuckles turn white. He knows that the right move would be to brush it off. Theon only wants a reaction. He knows that they are best friends, and that they have history. Jon's never been the jealous type; his best friends/ex-lovers Ygritte and Satin are proof of that.

But when Theon starts moaning, all the gloves are off. He grabs Robb off of Theon and throws him onto their side of the cabin. He then proceeds to send Theon a threatening look, and presents Robb with one that says he's not happy. The action leads to an uncomfortable silence which they sit through until the train starts moving.

A few minutes past. They look around at their surroundings awkwardly. When Jon's mobile rings, the music makes the situation even more awkward. Because of the ring tone, Jon already knows who it is. Knowing that there is no way for him to avoid answering, he takes it out and gets up to take it in the train's common room.
“Have something to hide, bastard?” Theon can't shut his mouth to save his life. The nickname is dirty, and Jon knows Theon knows how much it annoys him. Robb is about to defend him before Jon speaks up.

“It's my old boss.” Jon reveals. He doesn't elaborate, and allows the little demons in Theon's mind to plot maliciously.

Theon snorts, “That doesn't sound suspicious at all.”

“Theon,” Robb warns. Theon pouts petulantly and directs his attention to the window.

Robb switches his gaze to Jon, and his puppy eyes can't hide his curiosity for shit.

“I was his nanny,” Jon explains, maybe a little irritated by the distrust. Jon isn't a perfect angel, but he likes to think of himself as a good person. He leaves the room in a huff, not listening to Robb's pleas to come back.

After landing himself in the common area, Jon picks up the phone. He's a bit surprise to see it ring for so long, but his employer has always been a patient man.

“Mr. Baratheon?” Jon assumes politely.

“Jon, I need you.”

Always to the point, this one.

“Does Mr. Seaworth know what you're asking?” Jon hears a few breaking vases in the background and fights the urge to laugh. It must be hell raising eight kids. And to think, Stannis always wanted a boy.

“Don't be daft!” Stannis reprimands breathlessly. He shouts at one of the kids to stop hanging off the curtains. “Davos isn't here.”

That doesn't sound suggestive at all. Jon really needs to give him a lesson in euphemisms. “Where is he? Where are you?”

“He's signing the papers to our house. We've moved. North Yorkshire. Steffon, I swear if you-” Stannis pants out. There's a brief period of silence, and then a huge tackling noise that implies someone got hurt. The groan implies it was Stannis. The man, not the kid.

“Why did you move?” It's a reasonable question. Stannis was a corporate lawyer and most of the work he did was in London where the headquarters of Baratheon Inc. is located.

“Too crowded,” Stannis huffs out. “Housing prices are horrid. My condo isn't big enough for four kids.”

“I thought it was eight,” Jon asks curiously.

“Allard and Dale moved out already. Matthos and Maric are in university-”

“What if they come to visit?”

“Fuck! I forgot! No! Don't repeat what I'm saying! Stop it. Stannis! Shireen go back to your room-!” There's silence again, and Jon can only assume that he's trying to lay down the law. After a few minutes of crashes and cries of mercy, Stannis returns. It actually sounds peaceful. Stannis acts as if he just fought a great battle.
“How much will it cost?” Stannis bargains.

“How?” Jon doesn’t know why he feels thrown off. He knew this is what it was leading to.

“I can’t trust any of the help. They're the twits who gave Steffon and Stannis chocolate. It has to be you.”

Jon chuckles. It’s actually the sweetest thing Stannis has ever told him. “Stannis, I'm flattered.”

“I need you to get here immediately. I'll text you the address. Hell, I'll send you a jet. Please, Jon. I'll do anything.”

Dear Gods, Stannis is begging.

“Don't bother,” Jon informs him, amused. Stannis makes a noise of protests, but Jon cuts him off. “I'm heading to Yorkshire to visit...family.” Stannis has been sort of a father figure to him, up there with Uncle Ned and Aemon from the nursing home he used to work at. He doesn't need the man judging his life choices. “Just give me the address and I'll try to send you a schedule.”

“Thank you,” the relief in Stannis' voice is overwhelming.

“No problem,” Jon replies and they say their goodbyes. To Jon's surprise, he feels some serenity after accepting the offer. When he turns around, his serenity is shattered when he sees a conscience stricken Robb who has obviously heard the conversation.

“How much did you hear?” Jon calmly asks, placing his phone back into his pocket.

“Most of it,” Robb smiles sheepishly. “I didn't know you were a nanny.”

Jon shrugs, “I used to be.” It was a temporary gig until he could find something he was passionate about. He liked it well enough.

“Sorry for doubting you,” Robb apologizes. It's sincere, like all things Robb. “I just...I don't know anything about you.”

That's because we've only been together for two weeks, Jon sighs. He takes pity on him, and holds his face still for a kiss. It's incredibly public, and Jon could practically sense some of the other passengers watching. He doesn't care. Not really. When they part, Jon grins.

“You have all summer to learn.”

Chapter End Notes

By the way, do you guys want warnings in the beginning for the sex scenes or would you rather be pleasantly surprise? Obviously, I don't mind. If it's porn, I'll read it.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Arya is no stranger to hospitals.

The youngest Stark girl has always been drawn to danger, earning more bruises and scratches than all the boys in her neighborhood together. Her first bone was broken when she was five, and the black eye and swollen lip followed shortly after. She lacked an impulse control, an inability to reign in the energy deep within her. She mouthed off to her teachers and didn't play nice with the other girls.

When her mother decided to her enroll her into her first ballet class, the intention was to teach her discipline, or at least, give her a decent distraction before she moved onto her next death wish.

No one expected her to actually be good at it.

Arya Stark was a prodigy, her first ballet instructor declared, and was advancing three levels in the year she enrolled. Despite her late age in joining the art, Arya was already advised to move up in classes, or be transferred over to a more formal education. It got to the point where Ned Stark was recommended to enroll her under the private tutelage of Syrio Forel, a dancer of great, international renown. He, like all the others, claimed that Arya had the potential to become a professional dancer.

"When she is old enough, I will recommend her performance schools. Talent like that should not confined in a lackluster education."

Catelyn was ecstatic when she first heard the news. Arya had stopped picking fights with her sister, stopped getting hurt playing sports with the boys, and even stopped disobeying her teachers. She would actually listen to Catelyn and Ned now that she had something she wasn't willing to lose.

It wasn't until her fourth recital, when Catelyn visited her backstage to congratulate her on her stunning performance, that she realized the mistake she made.

Her daughter laid on the floor, collapsed in pain. Her feet were swollen purple with her nails colored black with blood, and with a closer look, Catelyn could see day old blisters and bunions, more than a few scabs, and some bleeding. Syrio had checked her once, his face covered in familiarity.

"It's broken," he told her youngest girl calmly.

Catelyn gasped in horror when she heard Arya laughed. "I could have told you that." She winced and bit her lip to keep herself from crying.

Syrio did not yell at her, nor did he criticize her for her foolishness. Instead, he praised her for her strength, as if dancing on a broken foot was her greatness accomplishment in life. "You did majestically! They sing praises of your name! Be careful, boy!" Syrio affectionately titles her, after her first performance with a male's part, "They might try to steal you away."

Catelyn saw her laughing all the way to the hospital. While there, she begged the Stark girl to quit--there were many other, safer hobbies to try out. Maybe she should sign her up for a an all girl's football team, or perhaps fencing. She always liked the stories of knights and warriors. Arya refused all of them. "I'm good at this," she reminded her, "I can be great." And as far as Arya was concerned, the discussion was over.
It's almost midnight when a young man rushes into the emergency room and therefore Jaime Lannister's care. On his side is the petite heiress known as Arya Stark, limping slightly from another dance injury. Jaime notes that her companion is a handsome lad, younger than Jaime himself but visibly older than Arya herself. From his clothes to his weary face, it was obvious this young man came from the estates, and that being generous. What was he? Eighteen, nineteen? Either way, he was far too old to be spending time with a girl like Arya, who looked thirteen to her actual sixteen. Dancers and their small frames were ideal jailbait. Arya smiles at him and laughs at his concern. Jaime wonders if that is a smile reserved for this young man alone, or her true face amongst friends.

"Good to see you again. I was getting worried you gained some self-preservation."

Arya rolls her eyes, but Gendry becomes more concerned. He's probably unfamiliar with the extent of his girlfriend's hobby. "Three hour performance," she reveals. "Nothing too serious."

Jaime sighs, wondering when it'll get to the point that a broken arm is no big deal as long as she could still be the lead. His father use to say that the best part of Arya is that she thinks she's the best, and she probably is.

But Jaime really doesn't want to think about his father.

"You know the drill," Jaime orders her, much to the young man's surprise. "What compelled you to come this time?"

Arya hops on the bed, and as always, brings up her feet for speculation. She's not wearing her pointe shoes, so he isn't too concerned about the damage. When Jaime takes her sneakers off, Gendry speaks again.

"I brought her in here as soon as she started to walk funny-what the hell is that?" He stares in awe at the complete ruin of Arya's foot. "I know you said you had ugly feet but fuck, that's a--"

"Gendry!" Arya shrieks indignantly, a little put off by his behavior. It's the most childish reaction she's ever seen him have. She playfully attacks the older boy who blocks it with laughter. Jaime watches in fascination, and when Arya notices, she stops hastily.

"Gendry, can you wait in the lobby?" Arya asks, trying not to make a big deal of it.

Gendry frowns. "You're not going to try and run away again? Right?"

He's not an idiot, Jaime will give him that. It must have been hell getting her here. He imagines a ferocious kitten clawing up its owner's arm to the vet. Arya promises to be a good girl and strokes his arm, affectionately definitely, sensually almost. When he leaves, Arya watches him go with a unique spark.

Jaime doesn't taunt her with Gendry's presence, but Arya explains anyways. "He's a friend."

Jaime arches an eyebrow, and recalls the boy's muscled arms, attractive face, and riffraff manner. He's working class at best, and definitely not the type of guy Arya would meet at her posh public school. "Just a friend?"

"Sometimes more," Arya coolly responds. "Would you like details?"

Jaime bristles at the offer. He doesn't bet against Arya to give him actual details. She still waiting for the moment he pisses her off enough where she explains how much his father liked her flexibility. "He's a bit below you, isn't he? Is someone keeping a little secret from mummy and daddy?"
"I'm not the one with the daddy issues," Arya retorts.

Jaime does not falter. "Still, out this late at night and with a man that looks like that. One would think you were hiding something."

"Well, Gendry is easy to hide behind. He's so big and strong," Arya smiles. "He takes after his father."

And the lion is chased into the trap: a den filled with torches and spears with wolves growling at the entrance."

"And who is his father?"

"Funny you should ask. See, remember the man your sister married because she got knocked up, and then years later, you realized he didn't stop fucking other women? Well, dun dun dun. Gentry is Robert's son. He's seven months older than Joffrey."

Arya never pulled her punches, physically or verbally. The girl could take it as good as she could give it out, and Jaime can't help but marvel at the pure ruthlessness she possessed. He returns to inspecting her foot.

"Well, it's not the worst thing you came here with," Jaime Lannister concludes. He checks for swelling and asks her to move it as well she can. There is not pain when she does, and aside from the cracked and blacken toe nail, there seems to be very little damage. "There might be an infection. Either way, we'll have to remove the nail."

"Surgically?" Arya asks, her voice slightly above a panic. She must not want her parents here. Jaime is almost tempted to say yes in order to spite her.

"It's almost completely off. I think the mixture will do just fine," Jaime informs calmly. He leaves the room for a few minutes to get the necessary materials. After ten minutes or so, Jaime arrives with the removal liquid.

"Shouldn't there be a doctor doing this?" Arya asks dryly. She puts out her feet anyways, use to the ritual by now. Arya can't even find it in herself to be grossed out. "I think I'd feel safer with a doctor."

"He's lighting a fag outside," Jaime informs with a smirk gracing his handsome face. His scrubs are surprisingly prim and proper. Arya does feel regretful that she never had a chance with him intimately. She didn't even notice when he speaks up again. "You're stuck with me."

Arya sighs, "Why are you always on duty?"

"Because I take the night shift when Brienne out of town and when Brienne is out of town, you happen to get hurt."

"Brienne's not here?" Arya asks curiously. "Where is she?"

"London, working with Renly," Jaime recounts bitterly. Arya giggles at his obvious distaste. His girlfriend's first love is as gay as pineapple and currently engaged to the football player, Loras Tyrell. He still didn't like it. "Apparently, her trip to Japan has made her his new favorite. He insists on having his favorite assistant every where he goes."

"What happened in Japan?"
"A photographer took a picture of her and demanded she come in for a photoshoot."

"I didn't know she modeled."

“She doesn't,” Jaime answers, “But apparently the androgynous look is popular there.”

“Good for her,” Arya says sincerely. Jaime prays that the Stark girl leaves it at that. He's not willing to talk about it further but knows that Arya will try. The stubborn brunette never left anything well enough alone. Especially things that weren't good for her. Especially men, the dark side of his mind whispers hatefully. “Can I ask you something?”

“No.”

Arya asks him anyways, her feet dangling around to prolong her stay there. He tries to grab onto the injured foot but Arya never stills. “You never liked me, did you?”

Jaime stares at her, wondering how she will react to the truth, wondering if there's a way to throw her off his scent. “I'm not fond of anybody, to be fair.”

“Oh, we both know that's not true,” Arya acknowledges. Jaime hides his expression well, but she could always see through such masks. “You joined the military to protect, you became a nurse to heal. You don't hate people, Jaime. Not even close. But you don't like me.”

Jaime looks into her catlike eyes, a enigmatic gleam that reminds him of his dark past. Arya is a clever girl, but she enjoys playing with fire, even after her fingers burn off. He finally manages to catch her foot and gets ready to paste the mixture on. Knowing she would act up, Jaime says the one thing he knows will silence her.

“You remind me of my sister.”

When Arya's smirk falters and no words escape her mouth, Jaime thinks he's won for once. He thinks the girl will be quiet, allow him to fix her wounds in peace. The process is almost finished when Arya speaks up.

“That's what your father said.”

Jaime nearly takes her toe off.

"That hurt, didn't it?"

In all honesty, Arya is surprised there wasn't an accident. She should be grateful by how stable he is. He bandages her feet and finishes up the job flawlessly. Despite his work ethic, there is definite resentment raging through that body. Arya wonders if she should be worried. It's a touchy subject for the Lannisters twins, and their relationship to Tywin Lannister is one of great turmoil and regret.

"If it's any consolation, I don't think about him, and I'm sure he doesn't think about me." she explains. "We had nothing."

"You had something," Jaime whisper bitterly. "He treated you with more care than he ever did his children."

"He wanted something from me and I needed something from him. There's no love between us.”

Then explain why he did what he did, Jaime thinks. "There was something."

"There was affection, and respect."
"That's more than he gave us."

Arya sighs, more than a bit tired of their familial drama. "You know what Jaime?"

Jaime raises an eyebrow.

"You like to play games. I do, too. So let's agree never play a game you aren't ready to lose." She looks at his arm. "You've lost so many."

They both remain silent. When Jaime finishes, Arya steps off the bed and walks out the doors as if nothing happened. She will either forget this night ever happen, or hold a grudge that will last decades. The girl has a will that rivals all his siblings, and Jaime wonders if that's what caught his father's eye in the first place.

Gendry drives her home instead of his place. The ride is painfully quiet, the silence only being broken by the call from her cousin. The news that Jon will be visiting for the summer made her happy enough not to criticize him for staying with his boyfriend instead of them.

Finally, Gendry stops in front of the Stark Estate. He stops across the street, perhaps fearful of the impossibly high gates and ominous air. Despite the reputation of the Starks, he never felt safe around it, only wonder. He cannot believe anybody could be raised in such a cold environment. He waits for Arya to get out. He doesn't look at her; he doesn't even say goodbye.

Arya will not have it.

“What's the matter with you?”

Gendry keeps his mouth shut.

“Are you serious?”

Gendry looks straight ahead.

“Stop being such a girl, Gendry,” Arya snaps.

No answer.

Arya makes a noise of aggravation. She angrily shifts the gear to park, undoes her seat belt, and crawls over to Gendry's lap. “What are you--?”

He doesn't finish his sentence before Arya kisses him. It's rough, a mess of uncontrollable lips and tongue. Gendry tries not to react, but Gendry's never been able to resist Arya for long. He grips her waist, kisses her madly, deeply, as if they are in love. Sucks on her neck and bites into her skin. Grabs her ass and digs bruises into her flesh.

When they part, Arya smirks in victory, and Gendry feels more like a tool than ever. She kisses him again, softly this time. He turns away. “Get off Arya.”

“Don't tell me what to do.” She giggles and kisses his neck.

Gendry groans and tries to push her off. Arya tightens her thighs around him, both turning him on and making him even more frustrated. She's stronger than most girls, Gendry knows that she can take down a man twice her size with little effort. He seen her do worst. “Get off,” he orders, keeping his voice firm.

Arya actually laughs, as if amused he could say no to her when no else has. Not really. She's a Stark.
People listen to the Starks like there word was law. She goes back to the passenger seat and places her legs on top of the dashboard but doesn't get out of the car. It's intentionally seductive and Gendry wonders how she could cause such a reaction within him. He's known her since they were children. He was sleeping with university girls before she even had her first kiss. “I'm not leaving until you tell me why you're acting like this.”

Gendry sighs in frustration. “How did you know that nurse?”

Arya doesn't hesitate to answer. “I'm in the hospital a lot. I know a lot of nurses.”

“You know a lot of dangerous men, too,” Gendry accuses.

“Is that suppose to offend me?”

Arya has never been ashamed about her promiscuity. Gendry respects that about her. He remembered a time when he used to like that she never wanted a relationship and never wanted to be anything more than friends. She was the only girl he considered a real friend, anyways.

“I'm worried about you,” Gendry says instead. “You're the type to peel off a scab just to see it bleed again.”

Arya becomes strangely quiet, and Gendry wonders if he step on one of Arya's landmines. He's knows she has quite a few, some of which he's been the victim of. Arya is open about a lot of things, but there are some wounds she carefully stitches up for no one to see.


The confession startles him, but it helps Gendry get the picture. Arya had told him her suspicions after finding her father's old school pictures with Robert Baratheon. They did the DNA test as a joke, and then the two found themselves solving the lost mystery of Gendry's father.

It was so anticlimactic, he laughed.

“Is that it?” Gendry asks. He does not buy the excuse entirely, but he's more forgiving now.

“No,” Arya tells him, “But it's all I'm telling you.” Arya finally gets out of the car. Gendry doesn't stop her, but he regrets not saying anything back. To his surprise, she stays a few minutes longer.

“Can we hang out tomorrow?”

“Arya smiles, and kisses him on the cheek. “See you later.”

Gendry sighs and bangs his head against the wheel. Lommy and Hot Pie were right. He is so whipped.

When Arya arrives at the home, she is nearly run over by her mother's storming figure. The red haired matriarch almost doesn't see her when she rushes to her bedroom, but stops to give her a kiss goodnight and congradulate her for her performance. She's sure it was stunning even if Arya didn't want her to come. Arya tries not to feel bad during the guilt trip but she fails. Arya can tell that she's extremely angry about something. When she leaves, Nymeria pounces on her, causing Arya to giggle when she feels the wet greetings. Her father follows shortly after, and welcomes her home.

“How was your performance?”
I got a standing ovation,” Arya offers, she fiddles her feet, trying her best not to show any discomfort. She wants to hurry and get her shoes off so her feet could breath. “What's up with mum?”

“My friend Robert is coming.”

Arya can't help the frown that arrives on her face. She composes herself easily enough, though. “I guess me and Gendry have something to talk about tomorrow.”

The statement makes her father more uneasy.

“Is there anything else I should know?” Arya asks.

“Another friend is coming to stay, and so is Robb's boyfriend.”

Boyfriend? “They need more women at that school.” Ned has to laugh at that. She tries to smile but earlier events made it forced. “Whose your friend?”

“We were in the army together. His name is Howland Reed.”

The bells are ringing in Arya's head. “The one with the son? Jordan?”

"Jojen," he corrects.

"That's the one whose caused that court case. The one about Bran?" The one you never told us about.

Her father nods.

"No wonder mum's bent out of shape.”

Arya doesn't know the details (only her mother, father, and Sansa were privy to that incident). She was away the entire year and all she knows is that when she came back, the name 'Reed' had been banned from their household. “Are you ever going to tell me what happened?”

Ned is reluctant. “I want you to draw your own judgments. The Reeds are good people.”

“Cause history proves I have the best of that,” Arya sarcastically mumbles. She picks up her bag and heads to her quarters. “I'm way too tired to have this talk so I'll just be off to bed. See you at breakfast,” Arya informs. She gives him a kiss on the cheek before heading for her bed. Nymeria follows accordingly.

Ned loves his daughter, but he fears for his life if Arya turns out to be the reasonable one.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter came a little later than usual. Sorry! :( I'm officially behind on all my stories. This story suddenly took a darker turn. There's going to be a lot of light and dark moments in between the sexy times. Jaqen was suppose to appear in this chapter but he didn't. He will. Eventually. Arya story arc has a lot of 'relationships' or in the words of Dane Cook, 'relationshites'
Ned doesn't go to bed until 3:00 in the morning, when he is absolutely sure his wife was asleep. He strips down to his boxers and enters. Despite the risk of startling her, he wraps her arms around her, which she subconsciously allows. After accomplishing his goal, he rests his eyes and eventually falls asleep. He wakes up 6:00, earlier than normal on his day off, and finds his bed empty and cold. Catelyn is angry with him, and even a night alone to her thoughts could not change that. Ned isn't surprised. Only a fool would think that time alone heals a wound.

He goes downstairs to find her in the kitchen but she isn't formally dressed. She is wearing the same blue nightgown she wore to sleep while her red hair is held in a loose braid. The maids are nowhere in sight, leaving the two of them alone. He sees her on her knees, rummaging through the refrigerator, trying to find something.

Ned watches by the doorway the whole time. He loves watching her little expressions, how she would have this little furrow in her brow when she was upset, to her little smirks of victory. His wife was adorable.

Ned walks up to her, his steps virtually unheard of. He used to be called the quiet wolf for his silent nature, coupled in with his ability to sneak up on anybody and everybody. It made it damn near impossible for Lyanna (and of course Brandon) to not get caught in their teenage years, not when their brother was on watch, waiting in the shadows like some creeper. Their father said their mother had the same power.

“Cat?” Ned murmurs softly.

Catelyn jumps and bangs her head against one of the refrigerator shelves. She lets out a string of curses that makes Ned flustered. He hastily heads over to her side to check for injuries.

“Are you alright?” Ned asks. He begins to investigate but Catelyn is clutching her head, covering the area that needs to be checked.

“I'm fine,” she tells him. She drops her hand, and though Ned can see a minor bump, there is no bleeding. He sighs in relief. He kisses it. Once the worst is over, he sees that she got more dessert. This time, it's ginger snaps, potato candy, and chocolate mint brownies. She sees his gaze, and blushes furiously.

“I was getting a snack,” Catelyn defends herself weakly. She looks down at her food selections and seems to contemplate putting one back to save her honor. There's nothing she doesn't like, though, and so she stares. They keep their drawers well stocked with treats of all kinds. The Tully sweet tooth was genetic, and almost every single one of his children have it.

Ned Stark doesn't know what to say to make his lovely wife feel better (he's never been good with words), so he brings a brownie to her lips. Catelyn flushes but opens her mouth regardless. They share a look, and Catelyn can see the guilt in Ned's puppy eyes.

“I'm sorry,” he tells her sincerely. “I should have asked you first.”

Yes, you should have. Catelyn wants to keep fighting, but being mad at Ned is hard since all his wrongdoings come from a good place. She settle for being content with his apology. “You have a
good heart.” Too good, really. It's why he does stupid things like invite his friends into their home. “It's why I love you,” Catelyn reminds him, and herself. She couldn't have been one of those pathetic little things that ignored their boyfriend's cheating and tried to change them. Nope, she just had to be proactive. It's why she left Brandon. It's why she choose Ned.

Ned continues to feed her the rest of the brownie, and smiles when she lets him. Once she is finished, there are traces of crumbs all over her lips. He makes a move to wipe them away, and unintentionally slips a finger into her lips.

At first, it was just a few gentle sucks, teasing little motions to get the chocolate off. But then Cateyn took the fingertips into her mouth up to the first knuckle. She ran her tongue over the pads of skin, looking up to her husband as she took more of the fingers into her mouth.

Without warning, Ned retracts them back with force causing Catelyn to whimper. Before she could ask why, he drags her over to his lap, making a mess of the desserts on the floor. He brings her down to meet his lips and grinds her into his lap. They kiss passionately, with Ned's hands roughly lacing through her braid and sending the band across the room.

Catelyn barely has enough time to pull down his boxers before he rips off her panties and throws it across the room. Catelyn makes a shrill noise of approval. She loves it when Ned loses control. It reminds her of their first time together, after countless days of 'accidental' touches and flirtatious little winks, she finally had him taking her like an animal in their living room floor, the woods, the basement, Brandon's bedroom.

Her thoughts become lost when she feels his unbelievably hard cock rubbing against her slit. It takes a little longer to get as wet as she used to, but once there's a drip, Cateyn presses against him to get him to go further.

"It might hurt,” Ned grunts out. Catelyn nods frantically. “Yes it will, now hurry up and come inside!"

"Cat, we should slow down."

"I've been taking your cock for twenty years,” Catelyn moans. "If you don't shove your dick inside me now, it's not the only thing that's going to hurt!"

Ned heeds her warning, and enters her in a single motion. Catelyn's moans ring throughout the kitchen, and she prays that no one hears her. She holds onto Ned like a lifeline and pants directly into his ear.

"I love your voice," Ned gasps out as he starts to thrust. He pumps into her eagerly, listening to her cries of pleasure spurring him on. He uses his wet fingers to play with her clit and elicit more moans from that beautiful mouth he loves. She's breasts are bouncing in front of him, one escaping the protection of her dress. Ned quickly takes it into her mouth and suckles on it like babe.

Because of their love making, neither of them heard the upcoming footsteps or the sound of a chair wheeling its way to the kitchen. The two were so lost in each other that as they were getting close to completion, it took a second for them to realize that the door was opening.

"Cover their eyes!” Osha's shriek is heard as she pushes Hodor aside to cover Rickon's view. Hodor is knocked out of the way before he could do the same for Bran. The poor boy is stunned silent as he watches his parents frantically try to compose themselves. He literally watches his father's cock slip out of his mother and feels the bile forming in his throat. Oh Gods, there's liquid. Gross.
Gross. And there's food all over the place. Even more gross cause that means there was something kinky happening.

Osha is busy taking Rickon away from the mess (like the good nanny she is), and Hodor seems desperately deliberating whether he should wheel Brandon away or not. The man looks so confused that Catelyn feels sorry for him. But she has other problems to worry about, like how Bran is now staring at them with his mouth open and his eyes as big as balloons.

Silence beat through the kitchen. Long and hard and cold. Catelyn can't look. She's staring at the floor like it's the most interesting thing in the world. She'll probably have to clean because she just had sex with her husband on it and her son caught her and Catelyn really needs to just stop thinking.

"I thought you were camping," Ned begins, more calmly than she ever could.

"There was an accident or something," Bran replies. "The rangers evacuated everybody."

Fuck the rangers and their woods. "Well, you probably want a bath right now," Catelyn suggest weakly.

Bran nods, frozen and stiff like a zombie made of ice.

Ned agrees, "Yes, I'm sure it got rather dirty-"

Bran goes white.

"From the woods! Because the woods are dirty, not sex-" Ned rectifies.

Bran looks ready to heave.

"Because sex is not dirty-"

Bran stares at the smashed desserts on the ground and on their bodies. Catelyn thought his eyes couldn't bulge any further, but he proves her wrong. Ned follows his gaze.

"Well, this time it was. But normally-"

Oh gods, they did it more than once? Bran was so blissfully happy believing that his parents have only had sex five times in their whole marriage.

"Well, normally we're not in the kitchen. Sometimes we are but most-"

"Be quiet, Ned!" Catleyn hisses, her face growing redder than her hair. "What your father is trying to say is-"

"I'm going!" Bran promises. He grabs Hodor's arm, signaling that they have to get the hell out of there as soon as possible. "I'll take that bath and... and... you can continue, or whatever! Come on, Hodor!"

"Hodor,“ Hodor agrees innocently.

"We'll be back later. Lots later," Bran informs them, though he seems more than reluctant to see them again.

"Be back for breakfast!" Catelyn shouts, reverting back to maternal phase.

Bran nods his head so fast that Ned thinks his head would fall off. The boy is wheeled away in at an
alarming speed.

They waited until the door slams shut. Catelyn sinks her head into her husband's shoulder, mortified.

"Oh my God," Catelyn says, when she could speak again. "We've scarred him for life."

Ned gently pats Catelyn's shoulder. "He'll get over it. We'll have to talk to them about it though."

“You and your talking was what got us into this mess,” Catelyn reminds with touch of bitterness and amusement. Then they look at each other and both bursts into hysterical laughter.

Breakfast is a ridiculously awkward affair. Judging by the lovey-dovey nature of her parents, she knew it wasn't because of their fight last night, and from the mortified expression on Bran's face and the confusion on Rickon's, she could easily guessed what went down.

Bran finally caught them having sex.

Well, it's about damn time.

Arya thinks it's cute how many of her siblings are in denial about their parents' sex life. Especially considering how active the two were. She's seen the tale tell signs of a mysteriously broken vase, and the suspicious marks on their bodies where they hope none of the children could see. It's not rocket science, and Arya is surprised it took so long for her younger siblings.

Robb caught them when he was twelve, underneath the bleachers of his football game.

Sansa was fourteen when Catelyn was receiving head in the living room.

Jon had said he'd seen them in their car when he was ten, but didn't think too much of it (his mother was Lyanna Stark after all).

Arya had also been ten and she was going to ignore it, but she really needed to get her ballet flats. So she just walked in and walked out without confronting either of them.

Uncle Benjen told her that he was fifteen and it was the garden. Aunt Lyanna said she was eighteen and it was in Brandon's bed (she also gave her a slew of curses towards her mother that Arya will not repeat).

The point being, Arya really doesn't get why everybody is freaking out over nothing. Taking the proactive, concerned sister approach, she decides to confront the problem head on. God forbid he thinks sex is a bad thing.

"Do you have any questions, Bran?"

Her parents' squeak of “Arya!” is followed up by Bran's face palming "Oh my god, why?"

Arya delicately places her mother's delicious poached egg on one of her whole wheat toasts and sprinkles it with black pepper. During her performance season, Arya got fairly obsessive about her diet. She always ate a lot, but nothing too fatty or oily that could damage her figure. "You're obviously upset. I don't want you to get the wrong impression about sex."

"Oh my god," Bran repeats dramatically. His face has yet to rise from it's place on the dining room table, and he seems hell bent on keeping it there.

Ned, however, takes Arya's words to heart. He rewards Arya with a nod of approval. “Your sister is
right. We should talk about what happened.”

"There is no amount of talking," Bran mutters through the table, "that will make any of this okay. No amount of talking will remove that image from my mind!"

“What a drama queen,” Arya complains under her breath. Bran finally gets up to shoot his sister a dirty look.

Catelyn tells her to hush before turning to Bran. “It's just that we're worried about you. I know that sex seems like a far off experience, but we want you to be prepared when the time comes.”

“That means use protection,” Arya quips. “And no babymama drama, alright?”

“Arya!” Catelyn gasps.

“What? I'm not the one caught humping my husband on the kitchen floor.”

“Arya!” Ned orders her more forcibly. He tries to get back into control. “Bran, what do you want to know?”

“What?” Bran asks, horrified. They are seriously not having this talk now, are they?

Ned looks at him grimly. “About sex. There must be some questions you have about our love making. We will try to answer you as truthfully and as honestly as possible. Please keep in mind, though, that while your mother has had multiple partners in the past—" Catelyn makes a choking noise. “I have only been with your mother. Also, you should note that the both of us are solely familiar with the mechanics of heterosexual sex—"

"Are you serious?!” Bran shrieks. This is so not happening.

“Yes, I have yet to feel urges towards members of my own sex. Therefore, I can not provide you with that sort of information.” Ned looks unbelievably serious. “There are clinics though, and we can go get the pamphlets together.”

Ned gazes calmly at his son, as if he had not seen his father's penis in his mother this morning. In the kitchen. Where his mother made his meals. Bran looks down at his food and suddenly feels very sick.

"Sex is a perfectly natural part of a relationship, especially in a marriage,” Ned says, not noticing his son's diminishing health. "Sex, though not exactly necessary to be happy, is a common way to show affection. Your mother and I love each a lot, and we like to show it by having sex."

Bran might have thought that was lovely way of putting things, if he had not seen them going at it like bunnies this morning. Such thoughts made him think about where he was conceived, like a couch or the garden, and oh my god, he's slept on the couch and in the garden!

“Please stop,” Bran begs.

“Dad, you forgot that Jon and Robb are currently in sexual relationships with their boyfriends. Bran could get advice from them if he starts to feel urges!”

“Shut up, Arya!” Bran complains before thinking 'did Robb go through all the women in the world already?’ “I don't need your advice!”

Arya rolls her eyes, and gets up, bringing her breakfast with her. “I was just trying to help. Now, if
you excuse me, this looks like it's going to be one very awkward sex talk that I don't want to be apart of.”

She ushers Rickon out of the room, whose attention span had no chance against such a topic.

Ned, however, seems to truly contemplate such a suggestion. “Arya has a point. How about we hold this discussion until Robb returns for the summer?”

"Yes, please," Bran agrees fervently. Salvation at last! He manages to force down a bite of sausage (dear god, why is he eating sausage of all things?) before Ned looks at him with a thoughtful frown.

“"You know what, Bran? I don't think it's too inappropriate for you to learn about protection now. Both homosexual and heterosexual people use condoms and it's good that you think about the sizes and the quality-”

There was a loud crash as Bran slides all the way to the floor.

When Sansa comes home, freshly fucked but still dolled up to look innocent, she sees Bran wheeling lifelessly around in the living room. She goes up to him in concern, but Arya stops her.

“What happened to Bran?” She asks worriedly.

“He saw mom and dad doing it.”

Sansa sighs. “Where?”

“Kitchen floor.”

“No!” The poor thing must be traumatized. “Did they...?”

“Yep, they even brought out our birth videos and showed them 'The Banana Trick.'” Sansa looks rightfully horrified.

"So they...?"

"Yep."

“And wrapped it around the....?”

"Uh-huh."

"And father talked about how he and Uncle Brandon once grabbed a whole bundle and just..."

"And mom was telling him that's normal so he should be prepared or stay single."

Sansa shakes her head. Her little brother will die a virgin.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Everybody gets together!
Officially, the story is going to happen in the next chapter. When I say 'happen,' I mean that there is actually a plot involved and everybody meets and there is chaos and
sexiness and torture. Some darkness. I have no idea where anything is going.
The Starks are an old family, and as a result, they have a great deal of family heirlooms. Amongst Robb's favorite is a silver ring with his family sigil on it: a large wolf with the words 'winter is coming' engraved on the inside. It's not particularly expensive, but filled with the richness of his ancestor's tales and the unparalleled spirit of determination that made the Starks who they were today. These were the stories that Robb used to hear growing up from his tutor, Luwin.

Despite its meaning, Robb has never thought about using it. For one, it has been in his family for millennia, and he can only imagine the throttling he'll receive if he gives it away. Secondly, he's a romantic, not an idiot, and he knows that no girl wants a 10,000 year old ring worth less than the down payment on a truck. It's an heirloom, a device for storytelling if anything at all.

Then, he met Jon, and suddenly the ring that has collected dust for thousands of years looks all the more appealing.

Robb has fallen in 'love' a lot, but some part of him has always been aware that it wasn't true love. He spends most of his relationships trying to fit each girl into that image of a perfect life, and tends to forget who the woman was in the end. Jon is special, because there is no need to fit him into that boxed in image. He wanted to fit that image around Jon. He came to the understanding that Jon and him may not always be together, and even soul mates could be separated.

That's why he wanted to make it official.

The ring is resting in his father's den, under lock and key. It will take some convincing, but Ned is a good man who believes in the value of love, and Robb is sure he can convince his father to give it to him. Besides, once his father realizes how amazing Jon is, Ned will begging Robb to make Jon his son in law.

Robb spends most of the train ride planning the proposal, the engagement and the wedding. A small, logical part in his mind starts to seep through and reminds him that Jon hasn't even said yes, yet. That he may never say yes, and break up with him before Robb even gets the chance. The infection called doubt wrecks his brain with other scenarios, such as his parents disapproving and Jon leaving him. It freaks him out to the point that Robb has made four (illegal) cigarette breaks in the last hour.

On the fifth one, Jon finally acknowledges that he needs to confront Robb about his unexplained stress, and to do so before one of the conductors discovers Robb's smoking habit and kicks him off the train. Before catching him, though, Jon decides to confront the only person who might know what's happening.

“What's up with Robb?”

Theon peers up at him from his magazine, before returning to his reading material. “Aren't you his boyfriend? Shouldn't you know why he's upset?”

I would, was the unspoken message. Jon glares at his boyfriend's best friend, who is eating up Robb's distress like half starved cat. Jon knows what a home wrecker looks like (his mother used to be the reigning queen of that practice) and he could spot Theon's tricks a mile away. The nipple slips and pouty lips may win over some men, but Jon knew how to keep a guy's attention from trollops
like him.

“He’s hiding something from me,” Jon concludes, trying his best not to sound worried. “I thought that, you, being his friend, would know what. But I forgot that you're just a friend.”

Theon bristles at the insult. “I'm not the one getting dumped,” Theon mutters, clear enough that Jon could hear him.

The bastard boy snaps up at the accusation. “Fuck you, you jealous prat!”

“I'm not lying!” Theon growls, “Why else do you think Robb's acting like a lunatic? He's been freaking out about it since last week. He doesn't want to hurt your feelings,” he mocks.

“We've only been together for three weeks!” Jon protests. "We've move in together already. He's not going to break up with me right after that.

“Yeah, and now the chase is over,” Theon smirks, knowing his words are getting to Jon. The boy had more abandonment issues than he did. “When he met you, you were this sexy, unobtainable challenge. Now he's had you, he's probably bored to pieces.”

Being an asshole doesn't make a person less convincing, and Jon finds himself swallowing every word of it.

“If he was going to break up with me, why would he introduce me to his family?” Jon retorts weakly, the insecurity making its way home.

“Because he'll have an easier time doing it when he realizes his family doesn't approve,” Theon deduces, “Do you seriously believe Robb's posh little family is going to accept the fact that their perfect son is dating a guy who has almost no future? Whose teenage mother got pregnant by some guy she doesn't even know?”

The words hit close to home, and Jon angrily storms out of the room. Theon almost feels guilty at the hurt expression on Jon's face. He quickly tells himself that Jon deserves it. If he didn't want people like Theon to know about his past, he shouldn't be so brazen about it. The bastard could afford a little shame.

Jon searches the train toilets for Robb. When he catches the barest whiff of tobacco smoke in the cubicles, he gently taps on the door. “Robb?” he whispers softly. He can hear some brief shuffling, before the door opens up to a smokey compartment and a severely panicked Stark.

Jon steps into the tiny area without question, and Robb closes the door to avoid getting caught. There is silence between them, and Jon begins to look around their confined space. He glances at the fags on the counter, and notices the one still in Robb's hand.

"Did you disarm the smoke alarms?"

Robb shrug like some disobedient schoolboy. "They're fairly easy to dismantle."

Fucking engineers and genius college kids. "Isn't that dangerous?"

"I'll fix it before we get off." He takes a drag from his cigarette.

“Those things will kill you,” Jon informs casually. There's no real bite to his words. Robb is in wonderful health, and his workload is probably going to kill him faster than a cigarette ever will.
Robb chuckles, and its husky appeal sounds absolutely pornographic. The younger man simply brings the stick back into his mouth and inhales. When he blows the smoke out, Jon is pretty sure he just got an erection. He's staring Jon with those intense bedroom eyes, and Jon feels himself growing a bit breathless. Robb obviously notices and beckons him closer.

“Come here,” Robb orders. “Open your mouth.”

Jon obeys and parts his lips as Robb takes another deep drag of the cigarette. He keeps it in as long as he can, before moving closer to Jon, pressing their lips together, and exhaling into his mouth.

Jon gasps when Robb slips his tongue inside, and there's something so arousing about the way Robb's breath heats up Jon's lungs with smoke. The taste is bitter and burnt, and Jon wants so much more. Jon wraps his arms around Robb, while Robb sneaks one hand around Jon's waist. Before they knew it, they are kissing each other passionately.

Their panting mouths are dry when they separate. Robb releases himself to take another drag, and to Jon's surprise, places his cigarette into Jon's mouth. Jon puts the tobacco to his lips, and inhales slowly. It's not the first time he's smoke (though it's certainly less illegal than those times). Robb watches him take another breath like it's the most erotic thing in the world, before leaning forwards and pressing his lips to Jon. Jon exhales, pushing the smoke into Robb's lungs this time. They do not part; Robb breathes the smoke out of his nose and they try to catch their breath in between harsh kisses.

When the air becomes too scarce to continue, Robb lets go, much to Jon's dismay. He takes back his fag and takes a drag. “You'd rather smoke than kiss me?” Jon asks in an accusatory tone.

Robb laughs breathlessly. “Trust me, there's nothing I'd rather do than kiss you.”

Jon pouts his pretty lips, and looks up at Robb through his lashes in an attempt to be sultry. “Then, why’d you stop?” He brings his fingers down to the hem Robb's trousers, suggesting a very nice reward if Robb answers correctly.

“A man needs to breathe,” Robb jokes, though his voice grows harsh as Jon begins to palm his crotch.

"That's ironic," Jon says, fiddling with the buckle.

Robb pulls Jon into another kiss. Jon grounds their hips together, causing Robb to groan. “I can't keep this up if you keep doing that.”

“You will if you want my mouth around your cock,” Jon threatens, kissing him more roughly this time. When they part, Jon is cornering Robb against the wall, and sucks his neck while talking. “Can you feel how hot it is? It's not that wet but I bet you can fix that if you put it in me. I'll be drooling all over that delicious dick.”

Robb uses one hand to grab onto Jon's hair and throw him down on the floor while the other one crushes the butt of his cigarette. Jon almost laughs at the fact that it's still lit, but then Robb knocks Jon against the zipper of pants, giving him a forceful reminder of what he wants.

Jon wants to take his time, but Robb will have none of that. He practically rips his pants open, before shoving his cock into Jon's mouth. Robb, eyes lidded, feels the validity of Jon's words. His mouth is hot from the cigarette smoke and it provides a sauna like sensation around his dick. It's also drier than usual, but Robb can feel the saliva pushing through to soak his cock. Always aiming to please, Jon is. It'll take a while for it to be fully drenched, and Robb doesn't have that long to wait.
“Fuck,” Robb grunts. “Your mouth isn’t wet enough. Maybe deeper…”

Jon thighs rub together, trying to get off on his own terms. Robb won’t have it and pushes his head up. “No love, you're gonna get off from me pounding this hole, or not at all.”

Jon chokes his response and attempts to swallow. “Good boy,” Robb murmurs proudly. He fucks his cock into Jon’s mouth until his tip is at his throat, then pushes inside it, his eyes rolling back at the slick tightness around his dick. Jon continues to swallow as Robb pushes further down.

Robb takes one last drag before crushing his cigarette against the wall and focusing completely on Jon. He places the now free hand against Jon's throat and squeezes. The tightened grip causes convulsions around his cock and Robb can feel Jon's neck bulge to accommodate his shaft.

“Yeah, that’s better,” Robb pants out. He still isn’t all the way in, but stops where he is about to pull in and out. “Fuck,” he moans, drawing the word out. “Gonna pound it in so hard, love, but make sure you keep quiet or else someone will come check on us. Okay?”

Jon would scoff if he could. If they haven't checked on Robb's smoking escapades, they probably didn't care, or didn't want to piss off one of the richest men on the train. Jon swallows hard nonetheless, coupled with Robb's firm grip around his throat. As a result, his muscles are milking Robb's cock in an exquisite massage.

After this, Robb lets loose, hips flying, ravaging Jon’s throat with rough, noisy thrusts. Jon is confident that everyone can hear the way Robb's balls slap against Jon's face. Jon keeps his mouth open wide, letting Robb use his hole however he wants. Robb concentrates on how his cock visibly stretches Jon's throat every time it thrusts in, a few solid inches distending on his neck. “So fucking hot,” he mutters. “You take my cock so good, love.”

Robb drags this out as long as he can, but his stamina has a limit. His balls are heavy and aching to release his load into Jon. “You ready to drink my cum down, pet?” Robb asks.

Jon moans and sucks him in hard. Robb hips provide a few more jerky thrusts, and finally lets himself cum. His cock twitches where it is deep seated. Thick globs of cum is released down Jon's throat in large spurts, and goes straight into his stomach. As he slides out of Jon's mouth, there is still some being released, and he keeps the tip in for Jon to clean.

“Oh Gods, Jon,” Robb grunts when it is over. He pulls his freshly licked dick out of Jon's mouth. “You were amazing.”

I better be, Jon thinks to himself, swallowing the remains in his mouth. Robb looks so satisfied that Jon is sure he'll be thinking about it until the end of their summer.

“You okay?” Robb asks, shifting his mood from horny to concern. “I can help you out if you'd like…”

Jon looks down to his deflated cock and smiles playfully. “I think you helped just fine.”

Robb tries to hide his proud grin, but fails miserably. Not every man can make his lover cum from receiving a blow job alone. “Next time, I'll return the favor,” he promises.

Jon shrugs. He gets up and buttons Robb's pants for him. “I rather you just pay lots of attention to me.” Instead of acting like a nervous wreck, Jon complains to himself. He removes such thoughts by kissing Robb again.

Robb smiles into the kiss, and pulls away. “Did you come in here just for that?” He doesn't sound angry or confused. In fact, he seems flattered. Jon already knows he's not going to tell the truth,
which runs along the lies of 'I heard from Theon that you were breaking up with me and I wanted to convince you otherwise.' Nope, never going to happen.

Robb is still waiting for an answer, though, and Jon decides to rely on the truths he is willing to share.

"I got worried," Jon confesses. "You normally don't smoke that much."

Robb flushes at being caught, but his heart begins to flutter at Jon's concern. Gods, how could he ever believe that Jon would say no? "I was just preoccupied with something. It's no problem, now."

Jon visibly relaxes. Then, another possibility hit Jon, and he wonders if his own actions have caused Robb to realize that maybe having an oversexed boyfriend wasn't a good idea and that he was sure he wanted to end it. "What were you preoccupied about?" He pushes.

Robb hesitates before answering. "I...was just thinking about my family."

Jon's heart speeds up. "Do you think they won't like me?" Don't sound sad. Don't sound worried. Be calm.

Robb eyes widen. "No! Of course not! They'll love you, Jon. I swear it."

"How about you?" Jon stares into Robb's eyes seriously. "You do love me, don't you?"

Robb almost looks offended that he asked. "Of course I love you! Haven't I made that clear everyday?"

Yes, you do, Jon remembers. He blushes shamefully. He was such an idiot for letting Theon poison his mind. The conclusion made him angrier just thinking about it, and before he knew it, he was storming off to give Theon a beating. He ignores Robb's demands to come back, and rolls up his sleeves to avoid blood.

Jon is so busy with his revenge, he didn't even notice his phone vibrating furiously.

"Ugh!" Arya almost throws her cell phone out of the car in frustration. From the rear view mirror, Ned looks at her in amusement.

"Is there something the matter, Arya?"

Arya groans, "Jon isn't answering any of my calls!"

"Maybe he's busy?" Ned suggests, "He's seems quite taken with his new boyfriend."

Arya glares, "Did he tell you that?" She cannot believe that traitor decided to actually settle down with some prat he's just met. "You know, the guy is probably a serial killer. Why else would you ask the bloke you've been dating for three weeks to move in with you?"

Ned chuckles at his daughter's jealousy, "Robb asks his boyfriend to move in together after three weeks."

Arya scoffs, "But that's Robb! Jon has more sense than that!"

"You should be happy for him," Catelyn advises, "Jon is such a sweet boy. It's nice that he finally found someone special instead of whoring himself out like some people."

That type of bitterness is reserved for one person. Ned holds his tongue from defending his sister in
front of their children (less it leads to a very heated argument), but makes a note to talk to his wife later.

Arya throws her hands up in frustration, “No one ever understands what I'm going through!”

Ned and Catelyn share an amused look. They decide to change topics by addressing their other daughter, who was currently having a relationship with her phone. Catelyn sees the occasion blush and the tightening of thighs, and immediately steps in.

“Are you excited to see your brother again?” Catelyn asks hastily.

Sansa looks up for the briefest of moments, smiles sweetly through her flush face, and answers her with a curt “yes” before looking back down.

“What do you Robb's boyfriend will be like?” She tries again.

“Same as always,” Sansa replies. She seems both irritated at her mother's interruption and thankful for a distraction. “They'll be completely different from the last one, and Robb will be madly convinced that this one is ‘the one.’” She finally puts down her phone and places it in her handbag for protection (against her siblings).

“Maybe he's right this time,” Bran quietly defends. They all (with the exception of Ned who was driving) turn to the second youngest in the car, riding in the backseat with his younger brother and shyly backing away from all the attention. “Wasn't mum his age when she found dad?”

"That was a very different situation," Catelyn denies promptly.

"Weren't you living together?"

"Only for the winter," Catelyn points out. And I was getting engaged to your uncle at the time, was left unsaid. No need to bring out old skeletons.

"Well, isn't Robb's boyfriend staying with us for the summer? Besides, this is the first time Robb is inviting someone to stay over for a whole season. He's never done that before, right?"

"Maybe he's trying to emulate mother and father's romance?" Sansa supposes. "Or show this mystery man what's awaiting him if they last?"

"Then, he has to be serious, right?"

It's observations like that, that make Ned a proud father. Bran has always had an 'old soul,' and when he spoke out loud, it was like enlightenment had fallen on them all. Ned uses his free hand to take Catelyn's and smiles. “Maybe,” he agrees. Bran smiles in contentment at the reaction. The rest of their drive is spent relatively peacefully, with a few stray arguments here and there between siblings.

“Freedom at last!” Theon shouts joyfully, sucking in the fresh air after being confined in a train's cabin for hours. Robb agrees readily, and the two boys began weird, inhaling rituals that drew far too much attention. Jon, having been practically raised in airports and private jets, paid no heed to the transportation. He merely checked his phone, and found several missed calls from Arya.

“I have to make a call to my cousin,” Jon tells Robb, “Tell them I've arrived.” The younger man nods, and kisses him in front of the entire station, drawing much attention. Jon tries his best to pull away, but Robb's tongue began to work its magic and Jon finds himself falling. When they finally separated, all the voyeurs (including Theon) hustle themselves away.
“Meet us at Platform Seven, alright?”

Jon agrees and attempts to find a quiet area amongst the bustling individuals. He sees a corner between a phone booth and a convenience shop, and heads over there quickly. Once there, he attempts to call his cousin to no luck. Either she was too busy, couldn't hear her mobile, or was ignoring him for ignoring her on the train. He hopes it isn't the latter. He knows Arya was a bit upset when he told her he had a boyfriend. She claimed he was falling into the trap of heteronormativity.

After a third voice mail message, Jon gave up, his mood seriously depleted. He detaches the phone from his ear, and Jon can finally listen to the sounds around him, including the cheerful barks of a very familiar canine.

Osha had ridden in a separate vehicle from the rest of the Starks, and her car carried Grey Wind and Ghost. It was supposed to hold the luggage. Osha doesn't know why they needed to bring the dogs, but Catelyn was adamant in her decision. She didn't mind all that much. Grey Wind was ridiculously well behaved and heeded all commands given by a trusted family member. The only problem was that ever since Ghost came (his owner, Jon, had to leave him at the Stark residency until he found a flat that accepted dogs), Grey Wind has yet to leave his side. She even caught them fornicating once or twice in the gardens. He also rarely let anybody near Ghost, and stalked him possessively.

It was practically incest. And kind of gross.

“Sorry bout that,” Osha apologizes calmly, not recognizing the victim. “He's usually not this friendly.” Ghost did not feel the same, however, and continued lapping at his owner's face.

“Osha?” She hears a familiar voice question. Once the large dog stopped his wet attacks, Osha could finally see the man's face.

“Jon?”

Jon laughs in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

“Picking up the king,” Osha reveals, playing on Robb's former nickname. “He just came back from Edinburgh, all educated. How bout you?”

“Meeting my boyfriend's family,” Jon admits sheepishly. “We've been...uh...living together.”

“Congratulations,” Osha responds with a smirk. “I remember when I first settled down.” Jon isn't sure if she's sincere or not, but there's always a minor amount of sarcasm whenever Osha said something. Jon doesn't dwell on it, though, when Grey Wind sneaks up on him.

Jon hasn't seen the other wolves since he dropped Ghost off, but he can't help but be surprised by how large Grey Wind has gotten. The beast was about the size of a real wolf. It made him believe the rescue rangers' tales of their puppies being wolf hybrids. The creature nudges his nose into Jon's hand to receive confirmation. After getting it, Grey Wind promptly heads over to guard Ghost's side.

Jon cuddles them both regardless. “So where are the others now?”

“At Platform 7, waiting for Robb.”

“Brilliant, I'm heading there to meet my boyfriend.”

Robb met up with his family with little hassle. The train had been on time for once, and his parents were too, so there was little wait or searching. Upon his entrance in the platform, he was immediately assaulted with kisses and hugs from his mother. So far, the day back home had started off great.
“Jon’s making a call to his cousin to tell them that he’s here,” Robb explains for his boyfriend’s lack of presence. He just finished hugging the last of his siblings (Rickon), and couldn't wait to be home again.

“Perfect,” Catelyn exclaims, trying her best not to sound apprehensive of meeting Robb’s boyfriend. She didn't think she'd feel so nervous but suddenly, the mysterious lover is becoming real. “Osha is trying to find parking. She brought Grey Wind.”

Robb brightens up even further at the mention of his companion. “You are aces, mum.” He kisses his mother on both cheeks shamelessly. Catelyn grins with pride. Most boys were ashamed to show affection to their mothers, but not Robb. She still remembers the envious gazes of the other mothers who had to deal with their own beastly teenagers growing up. While everyone is enjoying Robb's presence, Arya's mind caught a hold of something else.

“Wait, your boyfriend's name is Jon?”

Robb, who Arya swears has a switch for these kinds of conversations, nods enthusiastically. “Yeah, it's a lovely name, isn't it?”

“It's our cousin's name,” Arya emphasizes. She sees everybody looking at her strangely, and she wonders how everyone could possibly be so oblivious.

“It's a very common name, Arya,” Sansa smart mouths.

“I got that, Sansa,” Arya grits out. “But Jon told me his boyfriend's name is Robb, and that he's an engineering student at Edinburgh. Like Robb.”

Half of the family visibly blanches at the information. Catelyn is the first to attack.

“Did you meet him at uni?”

Perplexed by the sudden interrogation, Robb answers. “No, he doesn't go to school.”

“What about his family?” Ned questions, and Arya sighs. Of course, father would ask about that first.

“No siblings, but he's great with children.”

“Single mother?” Ned pushes. “Travels a lot because of her job?”

Robb looks almost hurt. “Yes, but are you seriously planning to judge him on that?”

Arya interrupts. “You said he was calling his cousins?”

“Yes.”

Arya frantically digs into her purse to check her phone.

Three missed calls.

All from Jon.

Shit.

Before they could break the news to a highly confused Robb, the 'pitter patter' of paws were heard. Grey Wind obediently came forth to be piled on with affection from his master. Behind him, a
familiar, curly hair twenty-one year old made his presence known to his boyfriend.

“\textquote{You're so good with animals,}” Jon praises fondly. He went straight to Robb upon seeing him, and did not noticed the other people on the platform. In other words, he hasn't noticed their horrified faces yet.

“I have a gift,” Robb claims playfully, “I can show you quite a few of them now,” he says suggestively, before pulling Jon into a searing hot kiss. Jon allows it this time, having his limit on PDA increase after seeing how sexy Robb looks with his cousin’s dog. Instead, he focuses on meshing their eager tongues together and placing those wandering hands on where it mattered.

When they separated, Theon is the happiest person in the world and their immediate family is staring at them like they just admitted to massacring a litter of puppies.

Chapter End Notes

I've been obsessing over Richard Madden and Kit Harrington pics, and while I don't like smoking (ironically for all the reasons but health), I am not one to deny that Richard Madden is one sexy smoker. Hence, I make Robb a smoker, because being perfect is hard work. And my heart CAN NOT HANDLE IT. On another note, I realized that I have developed a problem writing 'Richard' instead of 'Robb.' For some reason, I don't have this problem with Jon but it freaks me.

BTW, is it possible to write too many blow jobs for Robb/Jon? Cause this is my second one. I wonder if they'll get tiring any time soon. :( Oh well, this is last one in awhile. I've got to write more SanSan smut or maybe Bran/Jojen or something.
Jon did not take the news very well. His reaction was fairly typical, and no one was surprised when he ripped himself away from Robb, refused all forms of eye contact, and ran out of the station, face white as a sheet.

Robb, on the other hand, is taking it too well.

“I'm not breaking up with him,” Robb announces once they're on the road, much to his family's chagrin (and Theon's). “I refuse to let something like a little blood relation ruin the most meaningful relationship in my life!”

Ned sighs, knowing this was coming all along. He's just grateful that Jon (who had the sense to ride with Osha and Arya) will probably disagree. The boy looked absolutely horrified by the revelation, and almost ran into a wall trying to get away. “Robb...” He clears his throat. He has to be delicate about this, knowing how dramatic his son could get.

“Robb, you're cousins,” Catelyn snaps, stopping Ned before he could even start. She refuses to let him sugarcoat this. “When you two were younger, everyone thought you were twins. Some people even believed Ned had an affair.”

“You're not seeing the bigger picture,” Robb accuses, “All weekend, I was worried about you not liking him, and now that he's family, I know that you love him! Besides, you once told me that he was like a son to you.”

“I said he was like a daughter to me,” Catelyn corrects, “And that's because he's the only one who bothered to learn how to cook.”

All her children had given up before actually trying, and it didn't help that Ned had actively encouraged them to find a partner who will do it for them (the Stark way). Catelyn is definitely going to rub it in Ned's face when they get home. Look at what happens when your children follow your advice; they end up dating their cousins!

“Exactly! Don't you want me to be well fed? Being with Jon means never having to resort to fast food again!” Robb leans over into the driver seat to meet his mother's eyes. “Mother, if it weren't for Jon, I'd be fat...and hungry.”

Bran and Rickon snicker in the back, while Sansa rolls her eyes. Even Ned couldn't fight a smile from coming onto his lips. Theon and Catelyn are far from amused though.

Theon groans in frustration and brutally drags Robb back to his side. “Listen to me, Robb! What you have with Jon isn't real. It's just a product of your subconscious making friends with your penis. All that love you gave him was just you missing your family.”

To Theon's immense irritation, Robb actually has the nerve to snort. “Trust me, the loving I've given to him is not something I give to family.”

"Robb!” Catelyn shrieks, scandalized. She checks on Rickon to make sure he didn't understand. Once she is confirmed that he's too engrossed with his video games, she returns back to the fight.
Ned's throat makes this strain, choking noise and almost swerves into a different lane. At this point, Sansa decides to put her two cents in. "Robb, it's not right. Jon isn't some third cousin twice removed who we never see. He's Jon. We used to build pillow forts together, and force him to make us homemade ice cream. He might as well be our brother."

"It's not the same!" Robb protests.

The oldest Stark sibling tries to find an adequate response but his mind remains blank. As the outnumbered criticism begins to overwhelm his positivity and damper his reassurances of love, Bran speaks up in his defense. "If that's the case, then why are we trying to break them up? If they stay together, doesn't that mean Jon will live with us after Robb graduates? It'll be like having the whole family back again!"

Theon resists the urge to throttle the brat. Robb, however, brightens up. If Bran wasn't in the backseat, he would kiss him for being such a wise, open minded young man. "Bran has the right idea. It's almost as if you're trying to push Jon away when really, we need to keep him in."

"That's not true," Ned immediately defends. "We love Jon."

"Really? I couldn't tell," Robb bites back sarcastically. At this point, Ned sends him a warning look, saying that while he'll entertain the opportunity for an argument, he isn't going to let disrespect slide. Robb crosses his arms in petulance, but keeps his tone even. "Besides, he's only my cousin."

"Right..." Ned trails off, wondering where this is going.

"So you have your twin siblings, then your regular siblings, than your half siblings, and then you have your cousins, followed by your second cousins, and then we move onto-"

"That's so not right," Sansa argues. She knew she should have went with Arya and Jon. Now, she has to deal with the first circle of hell.

Robb looks scandalized, "It's completely right. Not to mention legal, in almost every single country on Earth."

"She means, it's not proper," Catelyn clarifies, while silently thanking the Gods for her reasonable daughter.

"The Targaryens' do it all the time!" Robb justifies, though is fully aware of how weak his argument is. That family is twenty tons of crazy in a small size Ziploc bag.

"You're not Targaryens!"

"How do you know? We don't know who Jon's father is!"

The final line sets the stage for another argument. The excessive yelling eventually led to Ned swerving into a few different lanes, and getting an excessive amount of cussing thrown at the car. From behind them, Osha, Jon, and Arya could all see the screaming motions of their mouths and the over the top hand gestures.

Arya only hopes that they get it out of their system before they come home. Ghost and Grey Wind are sleeping in the back, unmoved by the earlier declaration. She turns to her Jon, who is currently brooding on the side, staring outside the window like a puppy about to be euthanize. It's cute, in an incredibly pathetic way. Grabbing his arm, she manages to get his attention on her.

"Okay, in order to avoid...that," Arya motions to her parents' car. "Let me be clear. I don't care who
you fuck, and even if I did, it's not my place to judge you. All I want to know is how the hell could you not know?"

Jon groans in despair, but is grateful for Arya's understanding. He sinks his head into his hands in dejection, trying his best to avoid the Stark's eyes.

Even his curls look gloomy, Arya muses. She hears the curls mutter something she can't hear. “Care to repeat that?”

“It just never came up,” Jon manages out.

Arya calls bullshit. “This is Robb. Family always comes up.”

“Yeah, but he didn't give me any names. He just told me he was the oldest of four siblings, and when he talked about them, he just said 'my brother this...my sister that...'. There are a lot of girls who perform, and a lot of boys who are handicapped. I just never found a reason to put two and two.”

“The average family in the UK has 1.7 children,” Arya points out. Osha throws her a look through the rear view mirror which she ignores. “Are you seriously telling me this didn't ring any bells to you?”

“I was a nanny. My last employer had eight children, so no, it didn't,” Jon retorts, agitated.

Arya knows when to back off, and then focuses on another clue. “What about names? I can get why he overlooked yours-I still don't know why Aunt Lyanna changed your last name-but Robb Stark?”

“In my defense, I didn't know that 'Robb' was short for 'Robert,'” Jon explains. “I just thought that spelling his name with two B's was cute.”

“And the Stark?” Arya asks dryly.

“When I was in America, I met tons of 'Starks.' It didn't mean they were all related.”

It was a fairly sound argument. There was one thing that unnerved Arya, though. “So he didn't talk about you at all?” Arya raises an eyebrow. “I swear, one ex-girlfriend actually broke up with him because of that reason alone.”

Jon flushes a deep red, which makes Arya bite her tongue to keep from teasing him. “Yeah...he talked about me, it was just...he was so...”

“So what?”

“So...sweet,” Jon actually looks embarrassed. “It was like he was talking about his first love. Whenever he reminisce about something we did together, he would just go completely off topic.”

“Like what?” Arya asks curiously.

“He would remember these minute details, like how red my lips were after eating cherries or how adorable I looked in my green sweater or the way a bruise would form on my elbow after falling off a sled. Fuck, he was obsessive back then.” Jon doesn't mention that he, too, was becoming increasingly jealous over himself. That was just too pathetic. "I always got so irritated that I'd change the topic."

Arya sighs, and leans on his shoulder. It's a small gesture, but it causes Jon to relax a bit. “If it's any consolation, I don't care if you want to stay with Robb after this. I mean, I was a little hurt when you
decided to get a real boyfriend, because I thought we were together on that, but you have my support. And if you decide to leave him, just do it gently. He's a delicate little teacup," Arya jokes lightly. She really does want Jon to be kind, though. Robb is her older brother, and she loves him.

"Thanks, Arya," Jon smiles in spite of his poor mood. "So let's move on to a less incestuous topic. What's going on in your life?"

Arya shrugs, but there's a change in her body language that screams excitement. "I got an audition with the Faceless Men."

Jon's expression immediately shifts to one of happiness. "Congratulations!" He praises before pulling Arya into a lively hug. The Faceless Men was a contemporary dance troupe that Arya has wanted to join since she decided she wanted to be a professional dancer. "When's your audition?"

"Next month, so I have to be very careful not to damage anything. Oh, and be prepared for lots of evil glares and temper tantrums because with my new diet, I'm going to be a bitch."

Jon laughs mirthfully. "So don't get on your bad side and make sure you don't overwork yourself. Anything else? Do you want me to keep anyone off your back, or provide a distraction?"

Arya is reminded again of how much she loves her cousin. Jon never coddles her or tries to make her out to be somebody she's not. If he sees her pushing herself too hard or being too critical, he simply finds a way to get her to relax without forcing it on her. He knows that when she's stressed out or excited, the best thing was to give her space and let her come to him. Arya could understand why Robb was so infatuated with him (and slowly fights the jealousy seeping into her gut, the thing that makes her hate her youth and how Jon will never look at her like a woman).

"You know, when I get in, I'll be their youngest performer in history," Arya mentions offhandedly. Jon smiles sincerely. "Even better, your parents will be so proud."

"It also means I won't attend sixth form," Arya confides. The car suddenly makes an sudden motion, almost lifting them out of their seats. It is obvious that Osha heard. Arya was less worried than she should be; snitches get stitches and Osah knew the honor code well.

"I'm guessing you didn't tell your parents yet," Jon states, sharing a look with Osha, who is already foreshadowing the disaster.

"I was going to wait until I get in," Arya reveals. She is going to make it, though. Failure isn't even a possibility. "They won't be happy."

"It'd be a different story if your grades were poor. I heard your marks were spot on this year?"

"Am I to be blamed for the British government making their tests easier?" Arya complains. Both she and Jon smirk at the irony. Arya, despite her roughness, had a sharp mind and a talent with academics when she choose to use it.

"Well, know that I'm on your side the entire time," Jon vows. "If you need anything, I'm here."

"Just being with me is enough," Arya admits, before clutching onto his hand and laying a soft kiss on his cheeks.

"Hey! There's too much of that going on!" Osha complains loudly. The two cousins pull away immediately, before bursting out into giggles. Arya turns slightly to catch Jon's cheery expression and remembers how much she prefers this to his mopiness.
Before they get home, they make Osha swear not to tell Arya’s parents. Osha is many things, but she isn’t a snitch and promises to keep their secret. She does, however, warn Arya not to throw her into the line of fire when they find out. She loves her job and isn’t going to risk it for Arya’s hide.

Robb and the rest get back before the three of them, having lost them at a red light. Arya can hear that they are still arguing.

“Jon is sleeping in my room, like he’s been doing for the last three weeks,” Robb orders, which has little effect on his mother.

“I wouldn’t have let him do that before I found out you were cousins; do you honestly think I’m going to let that happen now?” Catelyn retorts. To his irritation, she tells one of the maids to ignore Robb’s complaints and clean up Jon’s old room.

Before Robb can ground out another refusal, Jon steps in. “I’m good staying in my old room. I think I’d prefer it.”

Robb looks crushed while Catelyn smiles victoriously. “It’ll be ready in a moment,” she tells her nephew sweetly, ignoring the glower from her son. “Are you joining us for dinner?”

Jon says yes, and tries to avoid his boyfriend’s betrayed expression. “I just have to wash up.”

“You can get ready in the guest room we prepared for...Robb’s boyfriend. One of the maids will show you where it is,” Catelyn motions one of the girls to get Jon.

Robb immediately dives in to give Jon a goodbye kiss before he leaves. Just as he is about to lean in to capture that beautiful mouth, Jon sidesteps and maneuvers him into a hug. It’s awkward and forced, and when Jon rips himself away, he’s looking down and fidgeting. “I’ll...um...see you at dinner.”

When Jon heads up the stairs, Robb is visibly traumatized. He stands like that for a good number of minutes, just staring at the invisible footsteps Jon left behind. After snapping out of it, he promptly turns to glare at his parents for their cruelty against him. “If we break up, it’s all your fault!” He accuses, before rushing up the stairs to either follow Jon or sulk.

Theon, who is practically jumping for joy at Jon’s negative reaction, pounces on the opportunity. “I’m going to ‘talk’ to Robb for a bit. Don’t worry, Mrs. Stark, you’re definitely doing the right thing. Robb’s a resilient young man, he’ll get over it,” he reassures before dashing after his unrequited love.

Catelyn sighs, knowing something is wrong if Theon approves. She is well aware that the blonde has been more involved in Robb’s breakups than the boy himself, and is more than a little horrified by her apparent assistance.

“Great, why don’t you just gift wrap him to the nearest slag?” Arya quips while rolling her eyes. Ned looks horrified by her language, and she leaves for her room before her father could berate her on it.

Catelyn rests a hand on Ned’s shoulder. Arya’s scolding could wait; she wants to have a talk with her husband now. Bran has already been ushered by Osha to the elevator, while Rickon looks around.

“Sansa, could you be a dear and-”

“Already on it!” Sansa chirps, making sure to keep a composed face for her sibling. She takes her eleven year old brother by the hand and leads him up to his room for her parents’ ‘talk.’ When they get inside his room, she hears his questions.
"Sansa?"

"Yes?"


"Then why does everyone want him and Robb to break up?"

Sansa sighs, detesting the conversation already. "Because it's weird, Rickon." She hopes he leaves it at that.

"But why?" Rickon pouts. "Mum and Dad always tells me that love is love."

"It's like me dating Robb, or you dating Arya," Sansa explains, she smiles a bit when she sees Rickon crinkle his nose in disgust. "Jon's like a brother to us, and Robb should know that."

"But I thought Robb doesn't see Jon as a brother. That's why they're dating, 'member?" Rickon actually looks a bit insulted. "If you see Jon as a brother, than you don't date him."

"Yes, but..." Sansa hates it when she finds herself outsmarted. Especially by an eleven year old. "You'll understand when you get older," she says instead.

Rickon actually growls, and Sansa recalls that it is the same sound she heard right before he bit something. The red haired maiden hastily puts her fingers away.

"People only say that when they can't think of a good comeback," Rickon snarls.

Sansa actually looks surprised. "Where did you hear that?"

"I heard Arya say it to you," Rickon smirks. "And it's true!"

Sansa really needs to have a talk with her younger sister on her poor manners. Look at what she's teaching their younger brother! "Nonetheless, when you fall in love, you'll see."

"I'm already in love," Rickon declares.

"Oh?" Sansa raises an eyebrow in curiosity. "What's this special girl's name?"

"Dunno," Rickon mutters shyly. It's the most adorable expression she's ever seen on him in a long time. "But she moved into the house next door with her family."

Sansa purses her lips. That means she's rich. The closest house near the estate (that wasn't apart of it in the first place) was a mansion of smaller means, but still large in comparison to most houses.

"How old is she?"

Rickon frowns, "I don't know that either, but she's super pretty and has this large gray scar on her face which is so cool. I was just staring at her, and she smiled at me."

Grey scar...Sansa briefly recalls encountering a mousy little thing hiding behind Uncle Robert's younger brother at a dinner function in London. She's never been good with names and connections (that's more of Arya's thing, strangely enough), but if they're the same person, it would make her around Bran's age. An older woman, already.
“Is that all it takes to win your heart?” Sansa teases. “A pretty face and a cool scar? Should I be worried about another Robb in the family?”

“Whatever,” Rickon pouts. “I already decided that I'm going to marry her. And I'll do it the wildling way.”

“Wildling way?” Sansa inquires, amused. She knows that Rickon loves their family history, of the raids and the lords and the wars and the Kings in the North.

“I'm going to throw her over my shoulder and whisk her away into my village to become my wife.”

“Oh, you have a village now?”

“We'll start our own village!” Rickon declares seriously. “It'll be a zombie village and I'll be the cannibalistic leader while she'll rule with her heart of gray.”

He looks so serious, that Sansa can't help but feel for him. “Good luck with that,” Sansa encourages, trying not to laugh. She hears a startling noise in her purse and checks her phone. There, she sees a text message from Sandor, telling her to call him back. “Be down in time for supper, okay?”

Rickon agrees. With that settled, Sansa dashes to her room to call her boyfriend. She barely has to wait for a ring before he picks up.

“Hey?” Sandor gruffly answers.

“It's me,” Sansa responds, playing with her hair flirtatiously, even though he couldn't see. “Sorry I couldn't get to you sooner. The whole day has just been one hot mess after the other.”

“Sounds rough,” Sandor consoles, “Everything alright with you? How's your brother and his new boy toy?”

Sansa giggles at the word choice. She adores that Sandor actually remembers and cares to ask whereas other guys would, at best, forget. “Oh nothing much, except the boy toy happens to be our cousin and now my parents are literally downstairs discussing ways to keep them apart. Also, my little brother fell in love with some older girl he wants to kidnap.”

There is silence over the phone, and Sansa is worried that she told him too much, that perhaps the information scared him off. She is about to apologize, try to take everything back, before Sandor speaks up again.

“So this summer, your cousin and brother are playing Romeo and Juliet incest version, and your younger brother is going to become a criminal?”

“That's it in a nutshell,” Sansa agrees, a little less humor in her tone. It sounds so much less entertaining when he says it. Sandor always had a way to bring her down to reality with his 'this shit is getting weird, better get out while I still can' tones and looks.

“I guess this is a bad time, then,” Sandor announces suddenly. He almost sounds guilty.

“For what?” Sansa asks, concerned.

“It's nothing...but a...business associate of mine is staying over and I really appreciate it if you don't drop by for a while.”

Sansa bites her lip, more annoyed than disappointed. “How long?”
“A week or so,” Sandor replies calmly. “Just until I can repay my debt and kick her ass out.”

Sansa is not naïve enough to dismiss the ‘her’ comment. “It's a woman?”

Sandor sighs, but he doesn't seem offended by her questioning. “I owe her a favor. Trust me, I wouldn't touch the bitch if you paid me.”

“I know,” Sansa responds calmly. They've been together for over a year now, and she knows that Sandor would never lie or cheat on her. A healthy relationship is based on trust, after all. “Okay, but you better call me when she leaves. We'll have a lot to catch up on,” she tells him suggestively.

“It's the first thing on my mind,” Sandor promises. After a few moments, he speaks. “I love you.”

Sansa smiles, content with the declaration. “I love you, too.”

Sandor hangs up, a little less agitated after talking to his girlfriend. He slips the mobile back into his back pocket, making sure it's secure and grabs a glass of wine for his guest. It's the most expensive thing he owns, and he doesn't care how much the bitch complains. If she doesn't like it, she can buy her own liquor.

He realizes, as he steps into his living room, that no amount of alcohol can make the smirking face of Cersei Lannister look any better.

Chapter End Notes

I promised some people that I would post this on Friday so I was desperately trying to get this chapter finished by 11:59 pm. (I live in Hawaii which goes by Pacific time, and is actually the slowest time in the world). That means that if the world is suppose to end at a specific time, I'll be the last to die. Anyways, I didn't complete my goal until...12:45. My fingers hurt so badly but I finished.
Sandor doesn't like Cersei Lannister.

He doesn't like how the woman's entire vocabulary consists of backhanded compliments, or how she makes the rules and expects everyone to abide by them. No one's opinions matter but her own and yet she still expects everyone to seek her approval for everything. Her toxicity spreads so that everyone within a five meter distance is sentenced to a lifetime of manipulation, and she has these inane bouts of paranoia in which she believes that everyone is out to get her. She coddles her eldest son, a vile piece of shit if there was ever one, and openly bribed his way out of jail time. And lastly, everything bad that happens to her is never her fault.

Naturally, Sandor would be the best judge. His family has worked under hers for decades now, starting with his father to her grandfather and his brother to her father and him for her. They're not friends by any means, but he's been there for her during her teenage pregnancy, her shotgun wedding, her divorce all the way to Joffrey's sentence, and Myrcella's accident.

Honestly, he shouldn't even be surprised when she shows up at his doorstep unannounced. Instead of indulging her as he's done for countless years, Sandor promptly slams the door in her face. That should remind her that her shit does stink.

Much to his bewilderment, he hears no further argument. No threats of eviction or death or whatever the Lannisters have up their sleeves. It is almost frightening how silent the world becomes. Sandor chooses to count his blessings instead of foreshadow curses, and he heads to the kitchen to get a beer.

He contemplates calling Sansa for a second, finding comfort in her voice alone. They've been together for a little over a year now, and were still at the stage where calling each other just to say 'I love you' was acceptable.

It isn't until he walks back to his living room does he realize why Cersei did not put off a fight.

"I thought I'd give you the opportunity to be a courteous host. I guess such responsibility is wasted on a dog like yourself," Cersei states offhandedly, lounging on the couch like she owned it.

"How the fuck did you get in?" Sandor snarls without even listening to her bullshit.

Cersei smirks, an ugly expression on her otherwise flawless face. She holds up a copy of his key. "'You live in an apartment filled with crooks and you don't expect your landlord to sell you out for a couple of pounds? Really Sandor, I expected better of you.'"

Sandor growls. "Get out."

"Make me," Cersei challenges. Sandor is tempted to grab his gun, not to actually shoot her but to scare her a little. Only it wouldn't work since Cersei knows Sandor. Knows that no matter how much he despises her, he wouldn't blow out the brains of one of his top client's daughters. Besides, there's too much history for him to hurt her.

"Why are you even here?" Sandor relents, taking a swig of his beer while getting a twinge of pleasure watching Cersei's eyes follow the bottle with envy.
“Oh you haven't heard?” Cersei wonders sarcastically. “My cunt of an ex-husband has finally decided to be a father for once and has kidnapped my children to his best friend's home for the summer.”

“The fat bastard did what?” Sandor questions incredulously. For as long as he's known Robert, fatherly is the least of his descriptions. The old drunkard hasn't spoken with his kids in over eight years since the divorce, longer by Cersei's accounts.

“Well according to Lancel,” Cersei's cousin who currently interns at Baratheon Inc. (a decision not made on his own accord), “His godfather just died and it made him 'rethink his life choices' which in turned, reminded him of what a shitty father he's been. So he's taken Joffrey, Myrcella, and Tommen with him North for the summer.

“And you just let him?” Sandor asks in disbelief.

Cersei glares furiously. “No, I didn't just let him. Believe it or not, the Baratheons have lawyers as well. To argue with Robert again meant going through a long awaited custody battle and I'm not going to risk that.”

“Why? It's not like you'll lose,” Sandor concludes. Cersei, for all her mental issues and smothering nature, is the only parent her children have known. Robert may have his charms, but he is a known adulterer and drunk, and has more than one domestic abuse report against him (though Cersei had decided to drop them all, the record was still there).

Cersei groans in frustration, as if Sandor is a child who could not understand simple maths. “A custody battle takes time, no matter how obvious the result will be, and I am not putting my children through that. Myrcella has auditions this summer for her performing arts school, and Joffrey has been doing so well in therapy. Who knows how horribly this could affect his psyche?”

“I think his 'psyche' is fucked up enough without the custody battle,” Sandor quips.

Cersei practically hisses for his blood at this point. “My son was damaged. He needed help,” Cersei denies.

“He needed to stop being such an abusive cunt,” Sandor retorts. He still remembered Sansa sobbing into his arms when Joffrey backhanded her that day. It took all his strength not to pulverize the little shit.

“Where do you think he learned that from?” Cersei counters back.

Sandor actually keeps his mouth shut at that instance, and Cersei simmers off on the couch. He, unlike the rest of the Lannisters and their employees, wasn't blind to the signs Cersei exhibited. He knows that when Robert got drunk, he got rough. He could see the swollen cheeks and bruised wrists when Robert held a little too hard. Cersei denied it for a good number of years, mostly to her father and to her friends, trying to play the perfect socialite. She would never admit that her life was anything less than spectacular, anything less than something to be envied. Robert never went far enough to send Cersei to the hospital, but Sandor could see it was only a matter of time before it went there. Cersei was a bitch, and she's done some pretty horrible things, but no one deserved to be a punching bag for their husband.

“Why me?” Sandor asks at last. “Does your brother live near here?”

“Living with Jaime means accepting the fact that he's dating that monstrous woman,” Cersei pouts.

“How about a hotel?”
Cersei mood visibly darkens, “My father has forbidden me from interfering. He's running for Prime Minister and when he saw how the polls jumped after Joffrey's public rehabilitation, he wants to continue the redemption PR. The hotels only take credit cards which my father can track. As far as he's concern, I'm seething in Sweden. Besides, you owe me.”

Sandor actually snorts. “I don't owe you a damn thing.”

“Fine,” Cersei agrees pleasantly, a startling concession that Sandor doesn't believe Cersei is capable of. “Then, I'll just call Catelyn and Ned Stark and tell them that their teenage daughter is seeing one of my ex-employees, and I'll let them fill the blanks on what you did for me.”

The urge to pummel Cersei rises again, but he keeps his cool for Sansa. “I have no idea what you're talking about,” Sandor lies smoothly. “But fuck you if you think I'm going to fall for an empty threat like that.”


“Sansa wanted to get as far away from Joffrey as possible. She would have ran straight into a crocodile's jaws if it meant protection.”

“Joffrey apologized to Sansa four months ago, and as far as I was concern, the two of them were on...neutral terms,” Even Cersei wouldn't call their relationship 'okay.' Sandor remembers that day. Joffrey had been given an assignment by his therapist to make a list of people to apologize for his crimes. Sansa had been seventh on the list, after his family. Sandor almost crushed his skull for putting Sansa so low. “Care to explain to me what she needed protection from when she ran into your arms last week?”

Sandor is about to accuse her of spying on him before he realizes that Cersei probably had a few of his neighbors on payroll by default.

“How long?” He grits out to Cersei's pleasure.

“A week, maybe two.”

“One week.”

“I don't know, I like the number two. Maybe even three,” Cersei teases viciously.

“One,” Sandor growls out, like an angry dog.

Cersei stares, as if contemplating whether or not she should push him on this matter. Then, she realizes there was no point. Her children will be here in a week, and that will be plenty of time to guilt Ned Stark into allowing her to stay with them during the summer. Besides, she doesn't think she could hide from her father longer than the time given.

“Fine,” Cersei agrees. “I trust you have a guest room in this disgusting flat?”

Ironically, he did. While Sandor is not a man privy to guests, he had one just in case of ‘emergencies.’ He's been in the business long enough to know that an extra bed was a godsend when someone was bleeding out on your new sheets.

“Good, now I feel this calls for a celebration. You do have some good wine? Don't you?”

Sandor bites back a response. Instead, he grabs his phone and heads to the kitchen. If Cersei will be
staying, he needed to make sure Sansa stayed the fuck away from his apartment at all cost. Like hell
was he letting the harpy sink her talons into his bird.

Meanwhile Cersei was not the only Lannister woman having a hard time finding decent living
conditions. Myrcella has been replaying the same piece on her cello for the last hour, trying to get it
eight right to no anvil. Her oldest brother and father have been arguing nonstop since they arrived in
London. Myrcella has to give it to Robert. She knows Joffrey was purposely baiting their father to hit
him so that he'd have a reason to call the police and leave the place. He blamed Robert for
everything, his violent outbursts to his criminal activities. She loves her brother but even she found
his behavior tiresome.

After screwing it up for the umpteenth time, Myrcella had enough. She doesn't even know how
Tommen could sleep through such a ruckus but she was having none of it.

Coming out the room, Myrcella pounded on the wall as hard as she could to get their attention. She
barely hears the minor thumps and prays that it is loud enough to catch their attention. Both Joffrey
and Robert (she still can't find it in her to call him father) turn to her.

_I can't hear myself play with all the noise_, Myrcella signs.

Joffrey seems more annoyed by Myrcella's interruption than angry, a huge improvement from his
past behavior.

_I'll stop yelling when he stops being an arse_, Joffrey signs back. _Why are you playing so late at night,
anyways?_

_I have to practice_, Myrcella defends. _Why are you fighting so late at night?_

_Can't we just buy your way to the school?_ Joffrey retorts, ignoring her question. Myrcella rolls her
eyes. Before she could respond, Robert speaks up.

“What the hell are the two of you doing?” Robert demands raucously. His voice echoed through the
halls, and Myrcella can hear her right ear ringing. A flash of feral crosses over Joffrey's face and
Myrcella is reminded of the old Joffrey all over again.

“You fucking wanker, your daughter can't hear and you don't bother to learn how to sign!” Joffrey
shrieks, almost identical to their mother right before she and Uncle Tyrion fought.

“You little twat, how dare you speak to me that way? I didn't know she was that fucking deaf!”

Hard of hearing, Myrcella corrects dryly in her head. Only one of my ears can't hear. She doesn't
bother to sign it, knowing that Joffrey wouldn't bother reading and Robert couldn't read.

Either way, she was putting on her earmuffs and blocking the noise completely. She could practice
early tomorrow morning, when they were both knocked out. She still can't believe her mother agreed
to let them go. Sure, she liked the thought of heading up North and revisiting her old crush (Robb
Stark) and spending time with the girl she's idolized for quite some time (Sansa Stark), but she
couldn't bear the thought of having to deal with this for a whole summer.

Chapter End Notes

This is a really short chapter. Sorry for that. Sorry about the lack of Starks (they will be
the center of the next chapter, though). Also sorry for the long update! I was being super lazy but now I'm back on track. I've actually decided to focus solely on this story for a while which means the next chapter will be updated earlier than usual. So yay! More chapters more often! My only other story will be put on a temporary hiatus. Hope you are all okay with that.
Jon’s old room is two rooms down from Sansa, on the right of Arya’s and on the left of Bran’s, across the hall and one room down from Rickon’s, and directly across of Robb’s. The guest room he changed in was at the end of the hall. Jon looks back on his decision and he realizes that he should have taken that room, lack of familiarity be damned. At least he wouldn’t be sneaking through the halls like some cat burglar.

Eventually, he has to talk to Robb. They’re going to have to discuss the parameters of their new found ’relationship’ and then discuss what’s going to happen. In Jon’s mind, that means breaking up and Jon is not ready for that. He is not ready to leave someone he cares about (loves) and respects and wants so desperately to be with it, it hurts. So fuck it, he’s avoiding Robb.

Each step is made with caution. Somewhere in his mind, there is a voice that shrieks at him to stop this nonsense. It’s the same voice that used to feed him odd little notes like “wow, your boyfriend and your cousin share basically the same lifestyle and family history, you bloody buffoon.” Jon ignores it as always, especially now, when it’s saying “you will be living in the same fucking house for the next couple of months so stop acting like an idiot and walk normally.”

Jon doesn’t listen again. He reaches his quarters without any confrontations from Robb, and for that he is grateful. He hastily enters his room and locks the door before Robb can catch him. He breathes a sigh of relief as his forehead presses against the door. He is safe.

Then, he feels Robb’s arms wrap around him and realizes that this is a trap.

“I was waiting for you,” Robb whispers, his lips grazing Jon’s ear before biting the top. He begins to suck that one spot on Jon’s neck that drives him absolutely crazy before unbuttoning Jon’s jeans. Jon didn’t catch on it immediately, but Robb is only in his boxers, shirtless, and is obviously expecting to get some.

That cheeky bastard! Jon fumes silently, before removing Robb’s arms and turning to face him. He’s ready to chew him out for coming to him like a dog in heat before Robb attacks him with intense, open mouth kisses.

“Robb-,” Jon is cut off again by a rather determined tongue. “Robb, we need to talk-“

“We don’t have much time!” Robb warns. Jon sees that his shirt is already off, and he’s pretty sure that all Robb did was look at it.

“For what?” Jon pulls off him. He attempts to get on the other side of the room, but Robb simply follows him and even manages to drag him onto the bed. He’s also working on Jon’s jeans.

Robb explains without stopping. “We’ve only got enough time for a quickie before one of the maids hear us and reports to mother. Don’t worry, I’ll be fast.” And the kissing resumes. Robb throws Jon’s trousers to the side. Again, Jon does not remember any of this. He can’t even recall lifting up his legs to remove the incredibly, far too tight jeans.

"Robb, we need to stop--!"

"No time, god, why are you so fit--?"
"Robb--let's talk--"

"No time, talk later. I can be fast--"

“If that was the case, we’d never be together!” Jon kicks Robb off and the eldest Stark boy goes tumbling on the ground like a rejected puppy. He tries to get up, before Jon stops him.

“Stay,” Jon commands.

Robb stills. Jon back up as far away from Robb as the bed would allow. Hopefully, the barrier of elevation will deter Robb. If not, then Jon’s temper will have to do.

“Good, now sit,” Jon demands firmly. Robb sits. “First off, what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m trying to have sex with you,” Robb answers bluntly. “You’re making it very hard.”

Jon almost bangs his head against the wall. “We can’t,” Jon reasons.

Robb pouts petulantly. “Why not?”

“Because of a little thing called a bloodline.”

Robb, still on his knees, walks over to Jon’s place on the bed. He hasn’t risen from the floor, but is instead rubbing against Jon’s bare leg affectionately. He runs a few kisses down the limb, bringing a shiver to Jon’s spine. “It doesn’t matter,” Robb persuades. He looks up into Jon’s eyes confidently. “It doesn’t matter because I love you.”

Jon falters for a second and Robb pounces.

Jon is backed up against the wall as Robb traps him between his thighs. They are still kissing when Robb cups his face and releases his lips.

“You’re so beautiful,” Robb tells him. He’s stroking Jon’s face with an intense expression. Jon’s breathing grows heavy, and he heats up (in embarrassment? Pleasure?) Robb looks ready to say something else before Jon pulls him into another kiss. If he couldn’t stop this (wouldn’t), Jon wants to focus this on the sex. He and Robb don’t belong together. They don’t really know each other. They have great sex but a relationship can’t be built on that alone.

They’re both hard as rocks and Robb takes out both their cocks in response. Jon knows that Robb has fantasized about this; about taking Jon apart slowly while his parents were in the house, risking exposure. Instead, now the fantasy has become warped and Jon is not sure he can risk anything anymore. Robb has him behaving like an animal, rubbing up on him in his childhood room.

It’s kind of hot.

Robb rolls his hips against Jon’s and Jon subconsciously matches him, hips jolting. Jon’s breathing is erratic; fingers clutching Robb’s hips hard enough that they’ll be all bruised. Their cocks are rubbing against each other, pre-cum dowsing the cocks. The friction is light, and Robb forcibly rubs them against each other to get them to cum.

“I’m gonna –” Jon whines, and he tries to look away before Robb catches him into another kiss. Robb begins to fuck both their cocks into his wonderful hands, not caring about the mess on his fingers. Thrust. Squeeze. Rub. Robb and Jon came together, coming into Robb’s hand. Jon’s eyes roll into the back of his head during their orgasm.
“God!” Jon gasps as he slopes against the wall. Robb follows suite, only he rests against Jon’s exhausted body. Instead of lying down quietly, however, Robb uses his remaining strength to lick the sweat off Jon’s chest. When he feels Jon relaxing against him, Robb latches onto a nipple, sucking and biting it lightly.

He did not expect the leg coming up to his chest to kick him off. While still in shock, Robb watches as Jon struggles to put on his trousers.

“Wait!” Robb calls out desperately. He tries to get up from his spot on the bed, but Jon quickly backs away from Robb and his penis.

“No, no! No more waiting and no more sex and no more-,” He makes a motion between the two of them. “-of this! God, Robb! What were you thinking?”

Robb looks a cross between torn, and almost offended. “I’m trying to save our relationship!”

Jon chokes out a laugh, though it sounded far from humorous. “Our relationship? Our relationship? We don’t have a relationship, Robb! We may have never had one! We have sex! Great sex, I’ll give you that but that’s it! That’s no reason to break your family’s heart over! Fuck, Robb, have some bloody sense! We didn’t even know enough about each other to tell that we were cousins!”

Robb tries to defend himself, only to see that Jon has already grabbed a shirt off the floor and is moving towards the door. “Where are you going?” Robb asks instead.

“To your mother!” Jon shouts out before slamming the door. He hurry down the stairs, knowing that he only had a few minutes before Robb ran after him. He tries to find his Aunt Cat but stops in his tracks when he hears shouting.

“How could you even suggest such a thing?!”

Sneaking a glance into the kitchen, he sees Aunt Cat preparing the vegetables while nestling on the verge of a screaming match with his uncle.

Uncle Ned is sighing, looking as if he aged a decade in the last couple of hours. “They’re both adults. They can make their own decisions-“

“And they’ll make the wrong one! Or at least, Robb will. Jon knows the consequences of bad decisions, he was raised, and I use that term liberally, by your sister after all. Robb is a boy. He doesn’t understand these things. You know how he is when he puts his mind to something.”

“I know that neither you nor I can stop him when he does,” Ned pushes, and his eyes narrow at the jab at Lyanna. “And I appreciate it if you stop talking about Jon’s mother like that while he’s staying here.”

Catelyn huffs, and if Jon didn’t hear just as many horrible things about Aunt Cat from his mother, he might have been offended. Fortunately, Uncle Ned is there to feel it for him.

“That’s my sister, Cat,” Ned says in a warning tone. “And Jon’s mother.”

Catelyn snarls, and settles on chopping the vegetables in a heat of rage. Jon became a bit worried she might cut herself. “Yes, and she does such a wonderful job at being both, doesn’t she?” Catelyn bites back sarcastically.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Ned asks, both angry and confused by the sudden declaration. Catelyn ignores him and continues chopping her onions. Ned forcibly takes it from her hands and
tosses it to the side. He drags her attention to him and glares. “What is that supposed to mean?” he repeats.

Catelyn, in an amazing feat of strength, looks Ned straight in the eye and speaks. “I mean, maybe if Lyanna stopped thinking about herself for a change, and thought about Jon’s well being, this wouldn’t have happened.”

Jon waits for Ned to blow up, but instead, he looks sad, almost resilient. “I thought we weren’t going to talk about this. Especially not with Jon in the house.” As if on cue, Ned looks around to see if there were any eavesdroppers. Jon hastily hides himself further behind the wall, even if his uncle couldn’t see him either way. When Ned turns back to Catelyn, Jon returns to his previous position.

“Why not? It’s too late to do anything now.”

“I don’t want Jon to-“

“To what?” Catelyn questions, now exasperated rather than upset. “Know that all of this could have been avoided if Lyanna had let us adopt him like we originally planned?”

Jon freezes. What is Aunt Cat talking about? He leans in closer to hear more.

“No,” Catelyn disagrees. “We were asking her to think about her child. She was sixteen years old with no plans and no one to help her but her family. And we did. Jon should have been raised with Robb as brothers. We already had everything prepared. I bought the crib, the clothes, I even picked out a name…” Catelyn trails off, stopping herself before she could cry.

Jon closes his eyes, taking in the words deeply. All of a sudden, Jon is reminded of how little he knew of his life. On the other side, Catelyn begins to compose herself. Ned makes a move to hug her but she shakes him off. She doesn’t want to cry over spilled milk, especially a carton from twenty years ago. She returns to her vegetables. “So what are we going to do about Robb and Jon? Ignore it until it goes away?” Because it won’t, she thinks to herself. Feelings just don’t ‘go away.’

“I’ll talk to Robb,” Ned offers, knowing that his original plan to ‘be and let’ is faulty at best. “But I’m sure they’ll settle down once they both realize that they are in over their heads.”

How would you know? You were Robb’s age when you married Aunt Cat, Jon accuses in his mind. The look on Catelyn’s face said she was thinking the same thing. The tension between them still lingered, but eventually Ned worked up the courage to kiss his wife, who didn’t reject him this time. She offhandedly tells him that dinner will be ready in an hour, having been delayed by their fight.

Uncle Ned heads outside the kitchen, which startles Jon. The curly haired boy runs back to the stairs to make himself appear as if he were just coming down. He pretends to bump into his uncle, who appears none the wiser.

“Hey,” Jon greets sheepishly. “I know it’s a bit late but uh…does...uh…Aunt Cat need any help with supper?”

Ned grimaces, but he tries to look normal for Jon, not knowing that the boy heard their fight. “You’d have to ask her, but I’m sure she’ll be grateful for the help.” He gruffly (affectionately, Jon reminds himself) pats Jon’s shoulder before moving out of the way.

Jon enters the kitchen with no small amount of hesitation. He knocks on the door just to be polite. Catelyn smiles falsely at his presence
“Jon,” she addresses. She grabs a bag of spinach and a large bowl for mixing. “Could you chop up the onions and turnips for the soup?”

“Sure,” Jon agrees, rolling up his sleeves. He grabs the ingredients without hesitation and begins chopping. “What are you making?”

“Strawberry spinach salad, Scotch broth, and cedar planked salmon. I need you to work on the soup. The maids are preheating the grill so I have to head over there after I make the salad. Do you remember how to make it?” Catelyn requests politely.

“Yes, it’s one of Robb’s favorites.”

An awkward silence comes between them.

Jon has to use all the power in his being not to stab himself with the knife. As if their entire conversation wasn’t awkward enough, he just had to remind his aunt that he has been living and banging with her son for the last couple of weeks.

Jon returns to make the soup. He never meets Aunt Cat’s eyes after that, and proceeds to get the rest of the ingredients out of the refrigerator. Ten minutes past without a word, and Jon has already prepared the pot and the lamb when Catelyn speaks again.

“When you’re done with the soup, get a few of the maids to help you prepare the dishes. They should already be done with the table by then. Oh, but don’t bother Palla. She’s in charge of getting the blaeberry pies ready.”

Jon nods obediently. Catelyn takes off her apron. She glances at Jon for a second, and then her gaze lingers. Jon tenses, wondering what he did wrong this time.

Jon, you should consider changing your shirt. It’s absolutely filthy,” Catelyn suggests (demands, he thinks to himself). Jon looks down at his shirt, trying to find the stains she was talking about. Before he could question her on it, he glances up and all he can see is the tightness in her smile and the bitter gleam in her eyes.

She leaves. After he is left alone for a few minutes, Arya stops by.

“Just wanted to check on the damage,” Arya reveals. “How was it?”

Jon releases his knife and heaves a heavy sigh. “Well, I’m not dead.”

“Of course not, you’re too adorable to die,” Arya teases, even stepping forward to mockingly squeeze his cheeks. Jon brushes her off. “So you still staying with us?”

Jon groans, “Sure, but I don’t know how long. You’re mom’s still upset and I can’t look her or Robb in the eye. I think she hates me.”

Arya scoffs, “She doesn’t hate you. If she hated you, you’d know it.”

“She hates my shirt,” Jon pouts. It sounded pathetic out loud and he wishes he could take them back.

Arya actually laughs. “No she doesn’t.”

“She called it absolutely filthy.”

“Trust me, she loves that shirt.”
Jon glares at her. “How do you know?”

“Because she bought it for Robb two months ago.”

Chapter End Notes

After quitting one of my jobs (that I absolutely hated), I finally have time to write again! Yay. I'm terribly sorry for the long update, but I also understand that you guys don't want apologies, but actual chapters. So they will be coming. No promises for an update time because I lied last time. And the time before that. :( 
Dinnertime amongst the Starks is always active.

Robb could spend hours cooing over his new girlfriend. Sansa never shuts up about her *ah-so-mazing* social life. Arya has some sort of sick obsession messing with her parents, Bran is there to provide a philosophical argument or psychological analysis, and Rickon’s overactive imagination usually led to some *interesting* discussions.

Thus, a quiet dinner is the first indicator that something is terribly wrong in the Stark household.

Ned clears his throat. As the patriarch of the Stark family, the task of revitalization befalls on him. Though never much of a talker, he has observed his family long enough and at some points, even participated in a few conversations, to understand the gist of instigation. He can do this. He may not have his wife’s charm or his siblings’ charm or any charm at all, but he can do this. “Robb,” he addresses, “How has university been?”

“Fine,” Robb answers curtly. He passes the strawberries around. Prior to the salad, the eldest son inhaled the soup once he realized it was made by Jon. Robb’s bitterness is evident through the sharp glares and lingering glowers he sends his mother and father. Ned, though he will not go against his wife, he can only imagine how hard it would be for his nephew to handle—will equally not protest if the boys continue their romance. To be petulant, Ned does not understand why he’s getting punished.

“How have your grades been?” Ned asks gruffly.

“Good.”

“Define ‘good’,” Ned orders. Never one for conversation, the middle child has always had a gift for making small talk seem like an interrogation. Catelyn rolls her eyes. She takes a dainty bite into her salmon.

“Three A’s, one B, one C.”

“That’s a bit of drop from last time,” Ned injects immediately, “Do you think you’ve had too many distractions this semester?”

Robb clenches his fork in his hand. The other people at the table look at each other. There’s nervousness and amusement and horror keeping people silent. The worst part is that Ned is not even trying to be malicious. He simply cannot not read a mood to save his life.

“It was a hard semester. I’ll do better next time,” Robb promises. He bites into a half-cut strawberry miserably. Some juice trickles down his lip, causing Jon to blush. He imagines licking it off and has to will his erection away.

“Perhaps you should take a break from rugby,” Ned suggests. “Sports take up a lot of time, especially time that could be used studying.”

Sansa groans at her father’s behavior. Catelyn choke a bit on her salmon. The Stark patriarch acknowledges their reaction with confusion. What did he say wrong? He thought he was offering a reasonable suggestion.
“Rugby is not a problem. I’m not distracted. The classes are just getting harder,” Robb clarifies. He stabs his spinach. Get to the point, he thinks. He knows his father was attempting to deviate the situation into talking about their relationship. He’s preparing for an attack. Robb is not falling for it, though. He can read between the lines.

Truth be told, Ned does not want to delve into their relationship. In fact, Ned’s primary concern is focusing on his son’s education. Other matters could be dealt with later, the solemn man deliberates. Right now, he needs to interpret what Robb is trying to say to him.

“I trust you to stop if it gets too much.” He knows Robb emulates him, at least enough to take the measures he did for his education. He wants to let his son know that he won’t be disappointed if the boy decides to take a break from rugby next year to focus on his grades. Just because Ned was on his university’s rugby team doesn’t mean Robb had to be. And his son is the captain, no less!

To Robb, this is a clear suggestion for him to abandon Jon before the situation got worst. “I can handle it,” Robb assures. He and Jon are meant to be. They could handle anything his parents threw at him.

Ned nods. So Robb believes he can handle it. Good, Ned thinks. His son is so talented.

“Hmm…” Ned ponders on his next statement. He wants to be reassuring. Robb is surely stressed out right now. He thinks of a compliment. “You’ve always been a good student.”

“Thank you,” Robb accepts suspiciously. He wonders if Ned is complimenting him for sake of lessening the future blow. Focusing on his studies was a strange move, but an efficient one. Try as he might, Robb cannot help the joy brought on by his father’s approval.

“Engineering involves a lot of maths, right? It’s never been your best subject.”

Oh, so his father was trying to tell him that he fell in love too often? Relationships were never his best subject, despite his countless experiences. Robb isn’t going to fall for it. What he has with Jon isn’t a simple relationship. It is pure, unadulterated, love.

“Yes, but I’m getting better. My professors say I’ll be getting top marks in no time.”

That is good news. Robb has always struggled with the topic (not like Arya, Ned muses proudly) but if he’s able to say it with such confidence, it must be going well. Robb would never lie to him–but just in case, Ned continues his questioning.

“Science is always changing, too. The smallest thing can change a whole outlook on life.”

So things change and people do, too. Is that what he’s trying to say? Robb cannot believe his father is using such an underhanded method to imply that his relationship with Jon is weaker now that he knows they’re cousins.

“I’ve always been good at science,” Robb grits out.

True, Ned thinks to himself. He’d forgotten about that.

“And you’re taking the course with management?”

This one was easy. How can Robb expect to manage his life when he could not even manage the love of his life?

“Mechanical engineering with management.”
“That’s good for the company.” He was surprised when Robb suggested it at first; he’d thought the boy would major in computer science or something of the like. Yet as Robb explained several years ago, he didn’t need to learn computer science. He aspired to improve himself and the company. Ned agreed. The decision would benefit them in the long run. Stark Industries focused mostly on security systems and Robb’s decision to study both the bones and organs of his company made Ned proud to be his father.

“That was the intention,” Robb retorts. He’s on edge, waiting for a derogative comment towards himself or Jon. They’ve been skating around the issue since they arrived at dinner.

“Do you think you’re overworking yourself?” To Ned, he meant the course load. For Robb, his father meant Jon and him together. The boy was nothing if not dedicated.

“No.”

With that done, Ned ventures onto a different subject. “How is your personal life?”

There it was.

“It was good,” Robb emphasizes the past tense. “I’ve been very happy since Jon came into my life.” He sends Jon a hopeful look.

Jon averts his eyes. Robb’s confidence falters.

Ned does not get the message. He thinks he’s found a good way to stir up a conversation. “You’ve always been a sensitive child. Don’t you agree, Jon?”

Jon drops his fork in surprise. “What?”

“You must have noticed while…being with him,” Ned finishes strangely. It will be hard to get around this with Rickon at the table. “His grades always took a drop around a bad break up. Did anything happen during exams?”

Jon almost chokes. “Nothing that I was aware of.”

“Were you together at the time?”

“Uh…yeah. We were.”

“Were you being overly intimate? Or perhaps,” Ned coughs, "not intimate enough? Were you pleased by his performance? I know he was pleased by yours.”

“Dad!” Robb protests. “It was hard!”

Ned gives him a strange look. “I know it was. Keep in mind that Rickon is here,” Ned warns cautiously, sparing a glance at the tiniest red head.

Jon turns red with embarrassment. “Uncle Ned--"

“It’s not that I’m not proud of Robb, I am. But his mother gets worried because he really can’t do anything by himself and we considered hiring a maid, but we want to teach him responsibility--”

“Dad!”

“But that’s the Stark in him. No cooking or cleaning. Ever. So now, we just hope he focuses on his studies. You understand why I’m asking, right?”
“Gods, everything is fine! Do you know how hard engineering is?”

Jon struggles with his words. “He seemed fine, I…um…try my best to help out the house so he can study.”

“Yes, you’ve been living with him,” Ned takes that in. “That’s good of you. I know he doesn’t make it easy. With the, um, intimacy. He has a lot of demands.”

“Oh dear God,” Bran mutters shamefully, just imagining the ‘intimacy.’ “Make it stop.”

“We try to get him to control it, but he has a big problem with that issue.”

“Issue?” Jon gulps silently.

“The sex,” Ned whispers, hoping to avoid Rickon’s ears. The youngest Stark rolls his eyes. He’s eleven, not four. “Don’t worry, we know you’ve done it. It can’t be avoided. It’s Robb.”

“Please,” Sansa grounds out. “Stop.”

“But I really hope whatever happens this summer does not affect his grades for next year.”

“I’m doing fine!” Robb screams out. Ned looks at him sharply. Robb, red-faced and ashamed, composes himself. “Everything is fine. I’m just getting used to the new material.”

He opens his mouth to offer another suggestion but fortunately for Robb and Jon, Catelyn cuts in. “Speaking of grades, Arya received wonderful marks this year. Sansa’s report is also exemplary. The teachers reported that they have high hopes for a good university.”

“I’m more concerned with Robb. He has a lot riding on his shoulders after he graduates,” Ned justifies. “And this is a very serious situation,” Ned adds on, hoping that his wife sees the danger in letting Robb continue depressed. He wonders if his family understands how important it was for Ned to get this point across. Robb needs his support. He is worried, damn it.

Robb stifles the urge to stab himself with the fork. Jon stops himself from interfering. This is the last place he wants to bring attention to himself.

“Harsh, dad,” Arya dryly comments. Neither of the girls is that insulted, but Arya needs to stop this heavy interrogation. At this point, she might have been the only one willing to deal with her father’s social awkwardness.

Ned interpret her words to mean she was offended. “I meant that Robb is going to inherit the company one day, he should be more focused,” Ned rectifies quickly. “I’m very proud of the two of you.”

Arya shrugs and takes a bite of her own meal. “Hmm…is that why you miss my last performance?” She puts on a hurt face.

Everyone but Jon looks at each other, guilt-stricken. Jon knows her well enough to know that Arya doesn’t give two shits who comes to her performance as long as those watching knew she was the best. Out of all the highly irregular and interesting people in the world, he can honestly say that he’s never met anyone tougher than Arya. This is the girl who danced on a broken leg, in front Tywin Lannister, on the same day her fellow dancers desecrated her costume with the word ‘whore.’ This is the girl who did a two hour show after getting her feet mutilated with glass. Arya is a warrior not a princess.
"I do have some news to announce," Arya reveals. “Mind you, it’s not as interesting as incestuous cousins,” Arya continues, enjoying the power trip of her older brother’s discomfort, “but I think it has some value.”

Jon stares at his cousin as if she grew another head. Was Arya seriously considering telling her parents now, of all times? “Arya, maybe you should wait for a better moment—"

“—My dance troupe is performing in London.”

Jon bites his tongue. He can taste the blood.

“Well, not all of my dance troupe. I’ll be the lead, either way,” Arya supplements casually. “Syrio says it’s a great opportunity for all of us and we start training in two weeks.” She throws a wink at Jon. “Who knows? Maybe a lot of important people will be there.”

The table floods with excitement. The two boys are momentarily forgotten as the attention focuses on Arya. And this is why Arya is now his favorite cousin.

“That’s fantastic, Arya!” Sansa is the first to praise. Inwardly, Sansa’s insides are fluttering in delight and envy. Oh, how she adores London! Her sister must be absolutely ecstatic.

Catelyn smiles warmly. While it still took her some time to get used to the idea of Arya as a professional dancer, she tried her best to be supportive. There are worst alternatives, after all. “Oh, I’m so happy for you! Is there anything you need us to do?”

“Why didn’t you tell us earlier?” Ned asks seriously.

Arya laughs lightly. “It was just so exciting, I didn’t want to damper the mood,” she says in airy, dry tone. “I just need parental permission. There were some legal complications last time that Syrio does not want to repeat.”

“What last time?” Cat and Ned repeat in unison.

Arya ignores her parents. “You guys are all invited, of course, but that’s a formality. Only Jon’s welcomed, unless he gets back with Robb, and then no. No monogamous, happy couples allowed. I don’t think they can handle it.”

“What/why can’t we handle it?” Catelyn and Ned ask together. In the background, Robb groans out that “they haven’t broken up!” Everyone ignores him.

“The play is explicit.”

She could already see her parents sweat. “The performance is about a passionate love affair between a young girl and this foreign stranger,” Arya begins. “He supposed to be her teacher, both… intimately,” she throws a mischievous look at her father, “…and in the metaphorical sense. Her accumulation in skill is supposed to reflect in her dancing.”

Her family remains silent.

“That sounds…interesting,” Catelyn finally musters out.

“It gets better.”

Jon lets out his first laugh of the evening. It is horribly out of place, but it lightens the mood considerably for him.
Arya continues, lost in her storytelling. “Overtime, she gets bored with this man. He’s not fulfilling her desires so she begins to look for other partners. She accrues more talent as she begins dancing with other people. There’s even this wonderful solo scene. It’s supposed to get to the point where she eventually surpasses the teacher, and they have this amazing, epic dance sequence in the end where they just dance until they both die. Le petite mort. Death by a little death.”

The image was not welcomed for anybody.

“Oh,” Catelyn lets out breathlessly. “Aren’t you a bit young to be doing something like that?”

“I believe my skill as a dancer surpasses such limitations,” Arya states proudly. Besides, Arya muses, I have more than enough experience in both fields.

“And this was performed…last week?”

“Yeah, but we did the PG version that Syrio had to edit because the hall wouldn’t let us perform otherwise,” Arya recounts bitterly. She brightens up. “This time, however, our audience is more age appropriate. And,” Arya practically beams at this news. “One of the Faceless Men saw the performance and heard about the original. He asked Syrio if he could adapt the performance with his select performers and him in the role of the foreigner. Those who get selected are going to be allowed to audition for the troupe at the end of the summer.”

Arya does not let it slip that she’s already been chosen and the performance was just a formality to see if all their candidates could actually dance alongside the Faceless Men. She looks at Jon and motions that she’ll explain later.

A long time ago, Ned and Catelyn would have had a thousand questions and a thousand more concerns. They may have even attempted to prevent such a performance from going on. After the events last year, the Stark leaders have decided that Arya was better left dancing to beat of her own drum. Arya loves them both dearly, but regardless of their permission or approval, Arya does what she wants.

“Be safe,” Catelyn offers, almost in defeat. Ned nods in agreement. “It’ll be a good experience for you.”

Arya smiles, sending Jon a look of triumph. He tips his glass to her.

“So…” Catelyn starts as she looks around the table. “What is everybody else doing this summer?”

No one answers at first. After a long pause, the sight of her father caused Sansa to speak. She smiles demurely, “I’ll be spending time with friends.”

“Kidnapping my princess,” Rickon answers offhandedly.

“Nothing,” Bran replies. He stabs angrily into his piece of salmon. Normally, this is the time Bran went rode horses or camped in the woods with his friends. A few nights ago, the park he used for such recreations closed down because of a mudslide and his specialized saddle was broken. It would take a few weeks to get a new one custom made. With his wheelchair, his options were severely limited.

It did not help that Bran’s friends had been slowly decreasing since his accident and ever since the events of last year…well, things did not look so well for Bran this summer, or the summer after that. The dinner table once again turns sour.

Catelyn smiles in spite of the circumstances. She’ll be damned if her son spends his entire summer at
home while he was here. “We’ll find you something to do. Perhaps you can volunteer at the reserves. That’s what you wanted to do last summer, right?”

The whole table stares at her skeptically. “I thought you said the reserves are too dangerous,” Bran questions suspiciously. The reserves were something of a pet project of the Starks. The old family has donated billions of dollars over the years to protecting endangered species and promoting indigenous species. “That’s why I wasn’t allowed last year.”

“Things change,” Catelyn lies. The idea of her son volunteering amongst those wild animals still scares her half to death. It is, however, the lesser evil. “You are older now, and we have Osha. I think you’ve proven yourself, right Ned?”

Ned recognizes the cue. Unlike his wife, Ned has never had a problem with Bran helping out at the reserves. Robb started volunteering around his age and the boy always looked up to his older brother. Plus, Bran has a gift with animals. “It will be a good learning experience.”

Bran brightens up. Catelyn feels as if she has bit the bullet this time. With Bran out of the house, the chances of him running into the Reed boy Slimmed down even further. The matter should have been settled. She forgot about Arya.

“It’s such a shame that Bran will be busy. I heard we will be having some interesting guests this summer,” Arya remarks. She sucks on her strawberry languidly.

Catelyn could kill the girl.

“Arya,” Catelyn hisses. “We can talk about that later.”

Arya blinks her eyes innocently. “But I thought it’d be important to know. Bran--”

“Arya--!” Catelyn snaps.

“--Uncle Robert will be coming this summer,” Arya clarifies. Catelyn chokes on her own words. Arya is smirking much to the red-haired woman’s chagrin. Arya, in response, sends her distressed mother a playful look. “Can you imagine all the funny, drunken shenanigans you’ll be missing? I swear, if he starts streaking, I’m taking pictures.”

Her mother shakes her head and palms her face with her hand. She doesn’t know what she did to deserve such a child, but by the Gods, she’s sorry.

Bran smiles meekly. “I think I’ll pass. Why’s he coming?”

The question never occurred to Arya, it seems. She turns to her father. “Why is darling Uncle Robert coming? I know it’s not to visit Gendry.”

Ned sends a look to his wife. This is where it gets tricky.

Arya hates Joffrey Lannister. Hates him with the passion of a thousand erupting volcanoes. Hates him to a point that if she saw him get run over by a car, she would literally maim the person who tries to call for help. At one time in their lives, she’s attacked him. It wasn’t a kid’s attack, either. She grabbed her pocket knife and tried to stab him with it.

That’s how much she hated him.

No one can pinpoint where or when this intense hatred started, but no one questioned it. Joffrey Lannister was a little shit, and one could wonder how Sansa managed to date him for so long. She
was young, though, and so naive back then... Catelyn almost shudders at the thought. Deep inside, she wonders how far he had to go for Sansa to realize the truth.

"Robert will be bringing his children," Ned explains. "He asks me to house them for the summer--"

"No."

The response is immediate. The frightening thing about it is that Arya did not seem angry. She had a fierce calm to her that was more terrifying than rage. "He’s not staying here," Arya tells them as if she’s giving Ned an explanation. "I won’t allow it."

This is where Ned puts his foot down. He loves his daughter dearly but he would be lying if he said he didn’t spoil her. There are times when Arya acted as if she was entitled to things she did not deserve. Disrespect is one of them. "This is our house, Arya. We do not need your permission. Robert is my friend and he’s staying here for the summer."

Arya’s eyes narrow. "You are letting a monster stay in your house?"

"Arya, please," Sansa pleads. She knows where this conversation is going and it is not one she wants to share with her family. "Joffrey has gotten a lot better--"

"You of all people should be supporting me on this." Arya repeats. "He’s a monster."

Sansa looks away in shame.

Arya turns to the rest of the table. "What about you all?" Jon, who has never failed to back her up, agrees. He’s seen Arya worked up like this before and he knows to trust the ballerina's instincts.

"If Arya feels strongly about it, I think we should listen to her," Jon supplements.

Robb shrugs. "I never liked the little shit."

Ned glares at both of them. Bran casts a watchful eye on the scene but keeps his vote silent. Rickon remains in the dark.

"Joffrey has had a lot of problems in the past," Ned explains. Arya has a rebuttal that is cut off. "But he’s working on them. Robert has assured me that he will be on his best behavior."

"Oh, and he’s the model of self-control," Arya laughs humorlessly. "Just because he’s paid a shrink a fucking fortune to say he’s cured doesn’t mean he is."

"Do not use that language in my house," Now it was Ned’s turn to be angry. Arya falters for a second before coming back in full force.

"Joffrey's a cunt."

"Arya!" This protest came from Sansa. "Arya, please, just let it go."

Arya turns to her, furious. "How can you defend him after what he did to you?"

Sansa could not tolerate it anymore. She stands up, furious. "That is not any of your business."

Arya looks at Sansa as if she just slapped her in the face. Finally, she bites her lip and gets out of her seat. "I’m going to my room. You can call me when you get back some fucking sense!"

Ned is in between emotions. He has no patience for disrespect, but he does not believe Arya is
entirely unjustified in her sentiments. He does not know what happened between Sansa and Joffrey, but he can only assume the best and imagine the worst. He just wish he knew.

“Sansa--"

“I am not talking about it,” Sansa interrupts. “Arya is just making a big deal about nothing.”

In the background, Jon chokes on his wine. How the hell did such a harmless comment turn into a disaster? It made his relationship with Robb seem like the bottom of Pandora’s Box in comparison. He will have to talk to Arya later.

Catelyn seems to be holding something in. She glances at Ned, before turning to Sansa. “Arya is just worried about you.”

Sansa shakes her head. “She’s worried about nothing. Joffrey and I are... fine. We’ve moved on.”

“It’s good that you’re willing to forgive Joffrey. I’m proud of you,” Ned tells her honestly. Now is as good as time as any. “You’ve always had a wonderful heart.”

Sansa smiles at the compliment. Yet, all her Stark instincts scream at her that something is wrong. "Thank you."

“That’s why I think you can handle what we’re about to tell you, and hope you can find it in your heart to forgive as well.”

Catelyn stares at the wall in defiance. Ned places a hand on hers as a sign of comfort. Whatever Ned is about to tell her has definitely upset her mother. The Stark CEO presses the button to call in Osha. Within a few moments, the Stark’s nanny is coming through the doors.

“I would like you to take Bran and Rickon to the living room.”

Osha agrees with a raised brow. The look on Ned Stark face told her to make sure they were not just sent away, but kept there. She begins hustling the children.

“But we haven’t even gotten dessert yet!” Rickon protests.

“You can have it after I talk to Sansa.”

“How come Jon and Robb get to stay?” Bran asks, almost a bit too calmly. If anything, he seems suspicious.

“Robb and Jon are adults, you two are children,” Catelyn borderline snaps. “Bran, leave.”

Bran opens his mouth again but then nods. He holds onto Rickon’s hands as he leaves the room.

He wants to eavesdrop but Osha’s face says she’s not having it tonight.

“Jojen Reed is staying here,” Catelyn blurts out before Ned could settle into it. She has given Osha more than enough time to wheel the youngest boys away.

Sansa is slack-jawed and the expression ruins her pretty face. They wait for her reaction. On the sides, Robb's eyes twitch with recognition but nothing emotional. He must not know the details either. Jon watches with cautious curiosity. Sansa says nothing.

“Howland Reed is a good friend of mine and he’s in a very bad situation right now.”
Sansa’s expression is replaced with something unreadable.

“They will be located on the other side of the estate and we will limit all forms of interaction between Bran and Jojen.”

Sansa takes a sip of her water.

“I’m not happy about it either,” Catelyn amends. “I--”

“Then you should do something.” Sansa snaps. She takes another sip of water. There is more silence before the Stark beauty sighs in defeat. Instead of arguing, she gets out of her seat. “I understand. Excuse me.”

Cately tries to stop her before she leaves. “Sansa--”

“I am not Arya,” Sansa says suddenly. She faces her parents. “I won’t fight when I know things are not going to change. All I want you to know is that I was the one who found out first,” the red head spits out viciously. “And I want you to remember why.”

The guilt on their faces is evident. They allow Sansa to return to her room without further protest.

The only people left are the last people who want to be facing Catelyn and Ned Stark together. Jon and Robb have been sitting across from each other all night, not saying a word to each other. Jon wants to ask about Joffrey or the Reeds, but knows that it is the last thing to question about. He’ll get all the answers from Arya. Robb wants to talk about their relationship, and he’ll do it in a language Jon understands.

Robb takes the initiative. “Jon--” I want to make this work-!

“I got a job with Stannis Baratheon,” Jon informs his uncle and aunt before Robb can finish his sentence. “He wants me to be his nanny again.”

“Were you his nanny before?” Catelyn asks, interested in this relatively harmless news.

“When he just got married. I quit when I moved to Scotland but I guess he’s been pretty overwhelmed.”

“With all those stepchildren, I bet,” Ned chuckles for the first time that night. “You should bring Rickon along with you. He seems pretty infatuate with their daughter. He couldn’t stop staring at her at the park.” He does not mention that Stannis almost threw a fit, believing Rickon's stare to be that of disgust. When Rickon called her scar beautiful, Stannis almost popped a vein for an entirely different reason.

Jon smiles fondly. “Oh, Shireen’s a real cutie. He’ll fall harder when he meets her. She’s Bran’s age, though. I wonder if they’ll have anything in common.”

“I just want him interacting with normal children for once,” Catelyn confesses. “His teachers are saying that he has a hard time getting along with the other children.”

“How un-Stark-like of him,” Jon teases. “I thought you were all natural born leaders.”

“Oh, he’s a leader, alright,” Cately groans in frustration and amusement. “But according to Mrs. Dubois, he’s taken to bossing the other kids around, and of course, they’re too terrified to disobey. He even has the older kids following orders.”
The conversation is at its lightest all evening. Robb is the first to dissent from this behavior. He was tired of being so utterly removed from the conversation and from Jon's life. These are things he should be discussing with him, his boyfriend, not Robb's parents!

“How much time do you plan on spending over there?”

Jon glares at his (ex/not-so ex/maybe even current) boyfriend. “We talked about this on the train.”

“You said it was part time. I think you’re going back on your word. How many hours will you be gone?”

Jon holds his ground. “We haven’t talked about it yet.”

“But I’ll bet you’ll take the full load, won’t you?” Robb insinuates viciously. “Tell me, will you be a live-in like last time?”

Jon face clouds with outrage. “Maybe I will,” Jon retorts. “I don’t have anything more important to stay for.”

“You have your family.”

“Oh, so we’re family now?”

“We’ve always been family.” Robb slips a hand on Jon’s thigh. “Sometimes more.” He tightens his grip.

Jon roughly removes it. Fuck Robb. “Let’s not do this.”

“You’re the one who wanted to talk.”

“Not here, not in front of your parents,” Jon hisses.

“They’re the ones who started this. We wouldn’t be having this argument if they didn’t disapproved.”

Jon growls at his accusations. “Anyone with a decent moral compass would disapprove.”

Robb slams the table. “You are being unreasonable.”

“No, you are,” Jon deflects. “In fact, you are so unreasonable that I can’t have this conversation with you anymore,” He stands up from his seat. “God, I didn’t even know you could be like this.”

Following Jon’s stride, Robb shouts out. “I guess you can mark this up on your list of ‘why I can’t fuck my cousin!’”

“That’s not a list, it’s a reason!”

“Semantics!”

“No, it’s not Robb!”

The fighting continues the entire way. It stops when they hear two doors slamming.

Ned and Catelyn look at their empty dining room. Making a silent agreement to leave, the two are interrupted in their stride to bed when they heard light footsteps from the stairs. Theon Greyjoy stares at the dining room.
“What the hell did I miss?” Theon cried frustratingly. You take one bathroom trip, and suddenly miss the entire show!

Chapter End Notes

I am a horrible person. I am sorry for not responding to your wonderful comments and basically ignoring all the amazing people who went out of their way to show their appreciation. I have made complaints about nonreviewers in the past and yet I ignore my own bad behavior. I want to apologize for the lack of updates and all the fears that this story has been abandoned. That is not true. Truth is, I’m just trying to get my shit together and it’s been hard. I am really grateful for all those who have stuck by me and the Game of Thrones. Thank you so much. I am going to try to update as much as I possibly can. For the past year, I’ve been putting off writing and forgetting how much I absolutely love it. So right now, I’m trying to remember the feeling. Thank you for being with me and I hope you’ve enjoyed this chapter.

So, let me clarify some things about Edinburgh University’s grading scale. A (70-100), B (60-70), C (50-59), D (40-49), E (30-39), F (20-29), etc. This is the Scottish-American translation: A=A, B=A-, C=B+, B=D, D=B-, E=C, F=D/F. The pass mark is 40% and it is relatively rare for students to regularly achieve marks of 70% or above (in fact, only 10% of students receive marks this high). Most Edinburgh students would be happy with marks in the 60s (55% of students receive marks between 60-69%). I tried to make Robb’s grades as realistic as possible. Engineering is a fucking hard degree. One of the most brilliant people I know is an engineering major, and has to work her ass off just to get a C in some classes.

In other words, Robb’s grades are equivalent to an American three A’s, one A-, and one B+. I actually think these grades are too good, especially for someone who does sports, too. Oh well.
Chapter 11

Theon has been in love with Robb since he was fourteen years old.

They first met in high school, when Robb had just entered Year 7. It was not on good terms. While Robb had established himself as an honorable, well mannered heir of Stark Industries, Theon had made a name for himself as the unwanted third son of Balon Greyjoy, the boss of the Iron Islands, a community of crooks located primarily in the Isle of Wight but have their hands all over the England as illegal traders. The Greyjoys, who had distinct ties to nobility, were the outcasts of modern day England and looked down upon by most, even commoners.

The former island dweller had been sent to Yorkshire to live with his uncle, an equally despicable human being with a penchant for loose women and gambling. For verbatim, his dad felt he was becoming too much of a pussy and couldn't stand to look at him. Even as a child, Theon had already learned to pretend that his dad’s words didn't hurt. Why did he care about what his old man thought? He was a shit dad anyways, Theon told himself. And if his brothers bullied him for being a pansy, they were just jealous. He was their mother's favorite after all.

With those reassurances as an anchor, Theon attempted to make the best of his situation while grumbling the entire time. He made up for his time at his bourgeois, all boys school by making everyone as miserable as he was. He got into fights, spent half his days higher than a kite and drunk the other half. He partied with college kids and went skinny dipping in the lake with the older girls. He messed around with some guys, too. He was cool. He was a bad boy. He wanted to prove himself so desperately it hurt. Every time they called his uncle in was another victory against his father.

When he first saw Robb, all he could see was an easy target. Total rich kid (so was he, but he was a cool one. He wasn’t some spoiled prat like this guy obviously was). Sheltered and well loved by his mommy and daddy. Theon stared down his perfect attire and combed back hair; his eyes narrowed at the way the teachers cooed at the younger’s good behavior, the way he smiled humbly when he was praised.

Theon had to fuck him up.

He and his lackeys did the usual. Pushed him around in the hallways, slammed his books against the floor. Sure, sometimes he pushed a little too hard and went a bit rougher than necessary. Sometimes, there were bruises. He wanted the kid to cry. When that didn't work, they got a bit more serious. They started stealing his stuff, calling him names and tried bullying him to submission. Robb never lost his composure and that pissed him off even more. In fact, more people started speaking out against the self-proclaimed bad boy.

Theon never listened to those posers. They never cared about bullying when it was some other kid. It was only Robb when people started giving a damn. Theon remembered the sick satisfaction he got from seeing Robb clenched his fist in anger, or the way his eyes darkened just the slightest or how his nostrils flared. He was so close to a reaction, he could taste it. Still, Robb turned the other cheek when he saw Theon. Grades were still perfect, and he even started to join clubs.

Out of nowhere, a little serendipity struck. It was a regular school day when Theon had decided to skip his geography class, lounging around the halls, and overheard someone at the staircase. They
were talking animatedly in whispers, which either meant it was one of those psycho freaks with the imaginary friends or someone was on their cell phone. The fact that they were doing it in the staircase instead of one of the safer locations meant that they were underclassman or new. None of the younger kids knew any of the good hiding spots.

“It’s okay. I told my teachers I was going to the bathroom. I’ll just tell them I got lost if they ask.”

This was going to be fun, Theon mused.

Theon lived for these situations. It was so easy to convince an innocent Year 7 or blubbering Year 8 to hand over their belongings with the threat of telling their professors on them. Their school was painfully strict about those things. At best, he could squeeze out a new phone and a couple pounds from some over-privileged brat.

“You’re worth the risk. You’re all that matters to me, Jon.”

Theon almost wept in joy when he recognized who that voice belonged to.

Little Robb was oblivious to the Ironborn male creeping up on him. Theon’s malice started to vibrate off the walls and his figure cast a shadow over Robb’s smaller frame. Normally, the boy had a much better guard than this, but Theon supposed his boytoy on the phone might be a distraction. The implication annoyed Theon but the older teen shrugged it off. Whatever. Who cared if Robb liked taking it in the ass? By the time Robb noticed the elder’s presence, it was too late. Theon snatched the cellular device out of his hands and held it above his head. Tantalizing him with his stolen good.

“What do we have here? Little golden boy skipping class to talk to his boyfriend?” He mocked.

Robb growled. “Give it back, Theon.”

Ooh, so the little bitch had a bite to him. Time for the push, Theon smirked maliciously. “You know, our school has a very strict policy on attendance, and an even stricter one on electronic devices used outside of education. Damn, that’s two rules broken in one. Maybe I should call the professor here?”

Robb lips trembled just the slightest but his gaze was defiant. “You’ll get in trouble, too, Theon. You’re not supposed to be skipping class, either.”

Theon scoffed. “Like I care about that.”

At that moment, the phone started vibrating again. It’s Jon. He saw Robb’s eyes widen at the name on the screen and the desperation in his eyes turned to pleading. Suddenly, Theon has the fucking greatest idea.

“You know, if you love your little boyfriend so much, how bout I show him some real fun?” Theon suggested, already filling the message box with memorized profanities. “How about ‘hey jon, when i see u again, i cant wait to have ur lips on my cock.’”

Robb blubbered like a fish. “No, you can’t put that!”

“Oh, right, bet you’re still a virgin. Maybe that’s too much for you. Oh look, I already sent it.” Theon announced innocently. Robb’s face burns in anger and indignation.

“Ooh! I bet you like to give orders, you little freak. Here, how about ‘im so hard rite now. Send me a pic of ur cock.”

Robb watched helplessly as Theon pressed the send button.
Hours later, when the two are taken to the headmaster’s office, Robb will claim that he wasn't sure what happened. All he knew was that Theon, devil incarnate, was texting his Jon. Jon, who left last year to live with his mother in Peru, Brazil, Germany, Italy and wherever his mother needed him. Jon, whose ebony curls can still be remembered bouncing on his bed. Jon, his best friend, his companion for life, his.

Theon was on the floor in seconds.

The fight was one of the shortest in Theon’s life and ended in the younger boy’s complete victory. Turns out that Robb wasn't afraid of Theon and his friends. He was fucking holding back. Robb was strong for his age, and resilient as fuck when getting revenge. The boy wrestled the phone out of Theon’s grasp in seconds and sat on top of his hips for the remaining time. Whenever Theon tried to get up, Robb simply grinded on him (who the fuck taught him that was an adequate means of self-defense?) and ordered Theon to sit still. While he desperately tried to text Jon to clear up the misunderstanding, Theon noticed that the boy was not. Getting. Up. Theon almost shouted on him to stop being such a homo, only to receive a hand over his mouth.

“Stay. Hush.” Robb commanded offhandedly. He said the same things to his dogs and they understood perfectly.

Theon, who would deny it to this day, got hard. Rock hard.

“What is going on here?”

Both of them stiffen at the familiar voice. One promising excruciating pain and crushed dreams.

If Theon thought the day could get any worse, he was wrong. At the headmaster’s office, they were effectively getting their asses reamed. Robb looked like he was ready to throw up in shame. His mother had arrived and any jokes the could have been made about the MILF in front of him were effectively dismissed upon seeing the enraged redhead. The woman was glaring daggers at him. He sunk further into his seat.

“Really, I expect this type of behavior from Mr. Greyjoy but you, Mr. Stark, are better than this.”

Way to keep himself unbiased, Theon thought bitterly. Nonetheless, Headmaster Cassel had every reason to assume the worst of him. The man continued his tirade of disappointment before settling on their punishments. Greyjoy rolled his eyes. What was it this time? A warning for first offenders, so Robb was probably going to be fine while Theon was expecting chores, maybe a suspension? God, his father was going to be so pissed…

“…expulsion seems to be the only choice you’ve left me.”

Theon jolted in his seat.

“What?”

Theon realized that the exclamation didn't come from him. Robb stood up immediately, aghast at the punishment. Everyone was bewildered by the negative response

“Headmaster Cassel, with all due respect, you cannot be serious. Expulsion is not the right punishment for something as petty as skipping class!”

“…you do realize he attacked you, Robb?” Resorting to first name basis, Theon noted. How close were these people? He should have known when Robb’s mom came in, hollering Rodrick at the top
of her lungs. He guessed posh people tend to stick together.

“I attacked him, Headmaster Cassel, and it was I who decided to skip class to call Jon-"

“Ah Jon, how is the young chap doing these days?” Cassel asked, slightly distracted.

Robb practically beamed. It was absolutely disgusting how the simplest mention of Robb’s boyfriend seemed to bring out an entire different person in him. “He’s doing great! Aunt Lyanna has just gotten a job in Brazil so they will be going there next week.”

Oh? Like a dog to a bone, Theon perked up at the word ‘Aunt.’ So Jon was his cousin...Jon who Robb had been cooing over, risking his immaculate record and sweet reputation, was a relative. That made Theon more happy than it should have.

Headmaster Cassel nodded knowingly, annoying Theon to no end. He’s even more confused by Robb’s abnormal behavior. If he had the headmaster as a family friend, he would be getting into trouble even more so, knowing he could get a free pass.

“Irregardless of the the circumstances of the fight, this is not the first time Theon has gotten into trouble nor is it his first incident of violence. I’m afraid we can no longer let him off with a mere suspension.”

Robb seemed torn. His honor refused to let this go. “I am afraid, Headmaster Cassel, that I cannot let this go. Theon was the victim in this whole incident, though not entirely innocent, but still a victim. I must implore that you find another solution!”

Who the hell talks like that anymore? Theon wondered, even his thoughts mocked the all too proper boy.

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Headmaster Cassel looked to the future criminal and his star pupil before heaving a sigh. For a second, Theon thought he’ll be getting off the hook. Maybe the prat wasn’t so bad after all?

“If anything, allow him to be under my tutelage and care, Headmaster Cassel. I shall whip him into shape!”

That little bitch.

Both the Stark matriarch and Headmaster Cassel were taken back at the suggestion. Theon was horrified. Then, a wicked smile appeared the aging educators’ face. The outcast knew he was in deep shit now. A thousand ideas must be running through the old man’s face to get him that happy. He loved causing Theon misery.

“I see…” Cassel noted thoughtfully. Robb was glowing with hope. “Well, normally I like to avoid allowing the victims to give punishments to the offenders…”

Theon sighed in relief.

“But given your exemplary school record, I cannot see why not. I trust you will be a good influence on Greyjoy, Robb! He will placed under your disciplinary care until the next break.”

“What?!” Mrs. Stark and Theon exclaimed at the same time.

“My son does not have the leisure to discipline delinquents, Rodrick!” Mrs. Stark announced. Her stink eye was particularly venomous. "Especially to an older boy whose...influence could harm my son."
“If it is what Robb wants, Catelyn, I cannot see a reason to deny him. Besides, Robb has shown great maturity outside of this incident and has proven to be able to take care of himself.”

Theon blushed in embarrassment. He does not need to be reminded that he got beaten up by a kid.

“Mother, Headmaster Cassel is right. I was the one who got into trouble and I cannot let another student throw his life away for my mistake. I will take this as a punishment as well as an opportunity to better myself and a fellow student.” Robb declared courageously.

Fucking hell, Theon knew from the look in his eye and the sincerity in his voice that he absolutely meant it.

Robb got out of his seat and faced Theon. Tilting his face up in what could be perceived as intimate, Robb told him the truth. “I will definitely not go easy on you, Theon Greyjoy.”

Theon popped his second boner of the day.

Years passed, and the two developed a strange and unorthodox friendship. Robb, true to his word, whipped Theon up to shape, badly. He had forced the older boy to attend all of his classes, do all his assignments, and forced a study regime for his exams. He was given Theon’s entire schedule, and seeing all his free time, actually forced him to join a club. Robb had chosen Home Economics.

It was a surprisingly perfect fit.

To top of all off, Theon was forbidden from seeing his friends. According to Robb, they were a bad influence. He couldn't stop Theon from smoking, and overtime (and to some sick satisfaction of Theon), got Robb into the habit of taking a fag or two after school. Robb, whose calls to Jon were lessening by every week (no reception, letters took forever, and all the other problems of a long-distance relationship), sought Theon out for companionship. Before either of the two knew it, Robb had managed to convince Theon into applying for university, with Robb promising to trail behind him.

Since then, Robb has called Theon his best mate and Theon agreed. Of course, whenever he called him a friend, it was halfhearted at least. Robb wasn’t his friend.

He was Theon’s boyfriend.

He just didn’t know it yet.

When Robb started dating, it was like a slap in the face. Why was Robb looking at other girls when the love of his life was right there in front of him? Theon decided that until Robb recognized his sexuality and his love for him, everyone had to go-pronto. Setting a foolproof plan, Theon launched a crusade against Robb’s girlfriends.

Theon has always been a lot smarter than other people gave him credit for—including Robb (of course, Theon liked to keep it that way). He wasn’t proud of his skills of manipulation (except he totally was), but he knew how to get people to trust him when they shouldn’t. Robb dated a variety of girls, but the two he happened to attract were easily placed into the only two categories that matter: the ones who wanted to get married and the ones who didn’t.

Theon worked accordingly to this rule.

For both types of girls, Theon knew it was important to develop some sort of relationship with them, not a friendship per say, but a level of communication that would encourage them to entrust their concerns about Robb to him. He would talk to them often about their problems and would build their
trust, making them believe he was on their side. At the beginning, he was the supportive best friend that only wanted to make Robb happy and not the conniving shrew that aimed to tear them apart, bit by bit. When their relationship started breaking down, he would give a little push in the wrong direction. Watch them break into apart until finally, said girlfriend could not take it any longer.

The ones who didn’t want to get married were easy. He played on their fears and Robb’s overbearing nature (which Theon thought was absolutely adorable). He reminded them of Robb’s desire to have children, how much he wanted a wife who would stay by his side and cater to him like his mother to his father, and then went on and on about how Robb was so adoring and kind hearted and so fucking ecstatic to have a girlfriend that felt the same way.

It was cake.

The career girls, the ones like Daenerys and Dacey, defaulted immediately. They had their speech down, one that Theon helped them make, with the basic “it’s not you, it’s me. I don’t want to be where you are right now, etc. etc.” These were the girls who left Robb like a punch in the face—a clear message that was fast and ruthless. The other girls, the good girls raised to be kind hearted beings that would never play with a person’s heartstrings, became overwrought with guilt. Girls like Talisa and Meera. Robb was a good man, and none of them could ever dream of leading Robb on like that. They broke it off immediately, leading to several weeks of heartbreak for Robb until he found his new girlfriend. These were the ones that remained friends.

Then, there were the ones who wanted to get married: the gold-diggers and con artists, or the occasional ones who believed that true love didn’t wait. These girls were the hardest. Here, Theon had to adapt and attack. For girls like Roslin, who was essentially a nice girl, just a little traditional and misguided, it was simply a matter of delving her attention elsewhere. She was Robb’s ideal woman to a tee—but lacked anything of substance. All it took was some convincing (and a very timely visit by Robb’s uncle), and Roslin started reconsidering her options. Robb actually cried on his shoulder when the invitations to Roslin and his uncle’s wedding came out.

It was magical.

Sometimes, things got hard. Dealing with Margaery Tyrell was liked dealing with a hurricane. You could prepare all you want but in the end, you still had to run for cover and recuperate your losses. It took almost two months get rid of her, and Theon had to employ some of his greatest tactics to do so. But Theon won when Margaery realized that Theon was not going to go anytime soon, and Joffery Baratheon had just gotten out of rehab. Margaery was the type that hunted the weak.

Theon still took credit for that break up.

While the girls were adamant on keeping Robb taken (sluts, Theon thought, all of them). The relationships became shorter and shorter. It got to the point that the very last girlfriend Robb had only lasted a week before she climbed out of a bathroom window in her pub because her little replacement never showed up.

Theon made sure of that.

After her, Theon had sworn that he was finally going to make Robb his-officially. No one was going to get in his way. He was going to remind Robb that women were nothing but trouble and after slyly placing a hand on his lap, suggest Robb try out different vendors for pleasure. Surely, there were a lot of fish in the sea but maybe he should try hunting with Theon. After a few shots of whiskey, they would scramble onto his bed in a flurry of limbs, sweat and lust.

But Theon never got the call from the bartender that night, was never asked to pick Robb up in his
melancholic state. As he waited for the phone call that could be the catalyst to everything he’s ever wanted, he was instead greeted with a five A.M. call from Robb stating that he’s found the one-another one.

A male one.

Everything would have gone according to plan if not for Jon fucking Snow.

Theon threw a fucking fit.

Women, Theon could take care of. Women, Theon was used to. Women were nothing as far as Theon was concerned.

But another man? Another man who has managed to sink his claws in his Robb? And take advantage of the fruits of his labors? Fuck no, Theon was not going to let this go. Theon turned Robb gay. There was no way he was going to let another man enjoy his fruits.

These irrational thoughts and obsessive schemes with no meticulous planning was what, in the long shot, ruined Theon. Everything he learned about getting rid of women was never used in his attack against Jon. The first thing that went wrong was their initial meeting. With all the other girls, Theon would layer on the charm and sweet nothings, showering compliments galore on the girl. Jon and Theon never liked each other from the start. You always had to get the girl to like you, Theon would tell himself as he took note of a girl’s dress and her ‘oh so cute shoes’ that were clearly last season. That’s how he got them to trust him-to tell him their secrets and insecurities. Except, Theon couldn’t go through with that with Jon.

His second mistake was not fixing his first mistake. After gaining the girl’s trust, all Theon had to do was start plant the seeds of doubt in both of their hearts. Open up the flaws in their budding relationship so that the confidant gains more power to use it against them. Robb was shit at fixing relationships. If Theon told Robb what his girlfriend wanted to fix (which she didn’t), Robb would go to the extremes to do it.

Jon never revealed a thing to him.

They loathed each other to their very cores. Jon never attempted to break their friendship up (not like some girls) but he never encouraged it, either. At the start of their trip to Yorkshire, Jon and Robb had only been together for a month, moving in together two weeks prior. Jon kept Theon and Robb time separate from Robb and Jon time, making their clandestine relationship a secret between the two of them. It was more intimate than any of Robb’s relationships and according to Robb’s retelling, it was the closest thing Jon has ever had as well. Theon was absolutely sickened, but no matter how hard he tried, nothing seemed to break them apart.

Until God decided to smile upon, and all his wishes were granted with a kiss.

Theon cheerfully brings up some booze to Robb’s room, the perfect addition for some late night comfort. The plan was a month overdue, but he supposed true love is better late than never. He opens the room without knocking, expecting a drowsy eyed, woe beaten young man; a scene that Theon has familiarize himself over the years. Instead, Theon is introduced to the sight of Robb obsessively hunched over a wall full of papers and red strings, muttering to himself about nonsense.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Theon exclaimed.

Robb turned over his shoulders with wild, red eyes. “I’m going to win Jon back.”

Not this again, Theon thought. Robb was supposed to be a depressed, sulking mess, ready to rely on
Theon for his sage advice on love and reconciliation. He was not supposed to be putting on his battle armor, preparing for a war against his family.

Theon inwardly growls. “Are you sure that’s what you want to do?” He asks through gritted teeth, not able to form a full smile yet. "He's your cousin."

Robb nods, not really looking at Theon as he stares longingly at a photo of him and Jon together, moving into their new apartment.

It should have been their apartment, Theon thought darkly.

“I know he still loves me. Jon…he’s…he’s the person I meant to be with for the rest of my life.” Robb sighs, as if frustrated by his own words. “I know I said this before, but I’m not going by the book here. I can’t just follow him around like a puppy, hoping he’ll see his senses. I can’t lose him like the others. He’s too important.”

Theon cannot hide his disgusted expression, but he manages to morph it into reluctant acceptance. He hopes it comes off as a friend who’s resigned to help a hopeless cause rather than a jealous admirer.

“Well, you’re an idiot,” Theon jokes, “And Jon’s a slut.” One that needed his ass reamed and not in a good way. “But I guess have no choice but to help. You can count on me.” Like hell.

Theon will break them up once and for all, and finally lay claim on Robb’s perfect ass. Theon drools at the thought of sinking his teeth into that perfect flesh. Robb can make his little plans for now, but as Theon stares at the wall, reading the formulations and plots, he knows that this will be the last break up he has to make happen.

Robb is his.

Chapter End Notes

All of you who read my stories, I’d like to apologize for my poor behavior and would like to rectify my wrongdoings with this chapter and any further chapters. I hope to bring you great upcoming joy with the power of porn and my general wackiness mixed a tiny bit of realism. I’m trying my best to go back to the period of my life where all I could think about is writing, writing fanfiction, original fiction, music, etc. Thank you for following this story and reminding Nonetheless, this is what I’m considering a 'introduction to plot' chapter. Jojen/Bran will hopefully come soon, maybe the next chapter or the one after that. I just want everything to come together as a conclusive plot instead of this story vs. the other story if you get what I'm saying.

Oh and Jon fell asleep in Robb's shirt that night. I was going to write it in but thought against it.
“I jacked off to Bran’s picture last night.” Jojen confesses.

The confession is not out of the blue, but it is not expected either. His psychiatrist does not seem particularly shocked, nor does he appear disgusted. If anything, the foreigner is heavily amused by the declaration. His gaze implores Jojen to continue. At least, that’s what Jojen imagines them asking. His pupils are diluted from his high and he can’t see through the smokiness. He’s sure the doctor knows what he was doing before session, what he does before all their sessions, but the man has never reprimanded him for it.

Jojen suspects the man wants him off the deep end, so desperate enough for intimacy that he will finally do something mad. People like his sister and father will never see it, people whose lucidity comes as naturally as breathing can never hear the monsters underneath their beds. The man is despicable for this, because while Jojen's whole family pushes him towards recovery, the doctor drives him closer to the ledge. There's a tightrope of sanity that the doctor trains him to tread, and it is exhilarating. Jojen stays high to keep himself from going too far. The cloudiness in his head keeps him from thinking about Bran and the things he'd do to him given the chance. The doctor knows this, and almost respects him for it. They're playing a game, and Jojen wants to lose.

“I’m not supposed to have it.”

“Are you talking about the picture?”

“Yeah,” Jojen agrees. “My sister took them all away from me when I got caught…well you know…She’d kill me if she knew I got my hands on another one, especially since we’re staying with them this summer. All month, she’s been telling me ‘you can’t mess this up’ and ‘it’s your last chance to do right.’ I don’t care about that really.”

“What don’t you care about? Your sister’s judgement? Or your recovery?”

“Either. Neither. All I want is Bran.”

“The boy you love,” the doctor describes for him. His voice is velveteen, like melted dark chocolate layered on top of a cake. Jojen is suddenly jealous of the smoothness in his consultant’s speech. He remembers Bran’s admiration of his own tone, how he softly commented to his older sister on her schoolmate’s beautiful voice. It's lovely, the enticing nymphet whispered to his eldest sister. His innocence was delicious.

Sansa had laughed when she heard the praise. He remembered her teasing little confessions, how she would transfer Bran's approval to him. Careful, she said slyly, if my brother ever meets you, he’ll probably fall in love. Oh Sansa, poor sweet Sansa. Sansa who slapped and attacked him once she realized the beast she welcomed into her home, who cried ugly globs of tears when she caught him that night.

The doctor's voice takes him away from his daydreams.

“How do you feel about this summer? Knowing you are so close to such temptation but can never taste what is yours?”
It feels like beetles burrowing beneath his flesh. “It’s for the best.” Jojen parrots without an ounce of conviction. He’s been practicing it for a year. His doctor knows the truth. He can see that Jojen is Tantalus, tortured by the sensation of Bran’s sweetness receding before he can have a taste and the touch of Bran’s form forever above his grasp. Jojen is starving for him.

His doctor smirks, and instead of highlighting the creases in his skin, it only made him look more distinguished. “Do you believe it is for the best?”

Jojen shrugs. Says nothing because there’s nothing to say. The answer is obvious. The doctor pushes anyways.

“Does Bran believe it is for the best? Do you believe that a boy you’ve worshiped from afar is without the will of forgiveness?”

Jojen leans back on the couch. “Bran doesn’t know about me.”

His doctor raises an eyebrow.

“His parents wanted to keep it quiet. They felt he was too young to understand, and they wanted him as far away from me as possible,” Jojen scoffs at their foolishness. “They treat him like a child.”

“Is he not one?”

No, Jojen denies venomously in his head. “He’s more than a kid. Bran…Bran’s beautiful. Everything about him is beautiful. They belittle him. Castrate his will until he's a glass doll they can keep on display. He's meant to be a king. He’s going to change the world through those eyes of his and they…they can’t see it. Not like I can. His soul is made by angels and they want to burn it to ashes. He’s not happy.”

"Can you make him happy?"

I can set him free. Jojen doesn't answer.

“You think his parents are stifling him? Limiting the potential you know to be there.”

Jojen contemplates saying nothing, but concedes that someone needs to hear the truth. If Jojen can convince one person of what he knows to be fact, he can die happy.

“When I was watching him, I could see how they treated him. How they all treated him. Like he was some invalid, a burden. His touch should have been blessing. I watched them sigh and worry when they should have felt honored to be in his presence.”

“They didn’t deserve him.”

No one does. “Bran should not be contained in a cage.”

The doctor pauses. He taps his pen on his clipboard once, twice. He thinks back on Jojen's words.

“Were you setting him free the night you got caught?”

Jojen tenses, because this is a sore subject, a vile piece of his history that he would sooner forget. “That…I couldn’t control myself. Bran was so close and so…I should have held myself back.” Until Bran was ready.

“You have guilt for your wrongdoings,” the gentlemen claims, his Eastern accent hiding his disappointment. He’s hardly impressed by the proof of conscience. “You do not, however, regret
what you feel.”

Jojen understands that this is a trap, one he’s fallen for numerous times and has led him from psychiatrist to psychiatrist. Nonetheless, he instinctively acts. “I will never regret what I feel for Bran.”

"Do you believe that guilt or shame, is proof of your humanity? Do you believe it to be necessary to being a good person?"

"I think it makes me forgivable."

The doctor nods. He scribbles a few things in his notebook. It reminds him of the sketchbook Bran carried around, the one he used to draw mythical birds and sigils. Bran had so many talents, and Jojen felt remorseful for not divulging for more information. He remembers his quiet mornings, haunting the hallways for a glance of the beauty, lounging in the parks for a chance that Bran might want to visit. His sister is right; he’s a fool, a mad fool.

“How did you get it?” The doctor changes the subject. He makes it a point to deviate their discussion when Jojen is ready to drift. The man is cleverer than any psychiatrist Jojen has ever had. He understands Jojen, and Jojen understands him.

"The picture?"

"Yes."

“My cousin’s boyfriend goes to the same school. They’re in the literature club together.”

“Is this the cousin that deals drugs? The gang leader who supplies you before our sessions?”

“That’s the one,” Jojen’s lighthearted attitude turns grim. “He’s older than me, you know? He’s older than me but he’s dating someone Bran’s age. That’s not fair, is it? Henry—that’s the boyfriend’s name—is fourteen. I have to take these sessions with you, not that you’re not doing a splendid job, but he gets to fuck—"

“Language.”

“—enjoy,” Jojen corrects himself, “his fourteen year old boyfriend while I can’t even be within two hundred feet of Bran.”

“Until June,” the doctor reminds him. “Your restraining order only lasts until next month.”

“His family won’t let me near him.”

“They already have.”

“He’s still underage.”

“So is your cousin’s boyfriend. That does not stop them, does it? I simply advise you not to get caught this time around,” his doctor jokes. “And perhaps push societal limits when you try.”

Joten bursts out into giggles. God, any other psychiatrist would be reporting this by now. Jojen should be arrested. They both should be rotting in prison for the schemes they come up with in this room. “My cousin told me the same thing.”

“He encourages you to act.”
“Sometimes, he calls me. Mocks me. He gets off fucking with people’s heads. He has Henry breathe into the mouthpiece, moaning, screaming. I can hear him coming and I pretend it’s Bran. Only it doesn’t work. I just want Bran more.”

“Do you think what he’s doing is wrong?”

"He's disgusting."

"You think he's a pedophile?"

“He’s hedonist,” Jojen clarifies. “He believes that humanity needs to revert back to its primal instincts, and seek pleasure for the sake of pleasure. That’s why he loves corrupting children.” Good children, sons of school administrators and sheriffs, apparently. “Meera hates him. She thinks he’s corrupting me, and I think she’s right. He’s the worst thing for my ‘recovery.’” Worse than you, goes unsaid. “But I want to listen to him.” All the time, the words grow harder to resist. Jojen relaxes into the chair.

“You desire the relationship he shares with his lover. It should come of no surprise that you wish to emulate his actions in hopes of satisfaction.”

Jojen nods, “Last week, when I was picking up another stash, I saw him and Henry together.”

“Oh?”

Jojen got hard thinking about it. “They were having sex on his couch, in front of his entire gang. No one seemed to care that a twenty-two year old was pounding into a teenager like a blow up doll. He didn’t stop when he saw me, either, just pointed to the weed and told me to enjoy. That’s when he gave me the picture.”

The doctor could see the erection straining out of his pants. Jojen retains his calm despite his discomfort. “Would you like some next time? We can light up together.”

The doctor shakes his head. “I must pass, Jojen. I’m afraid I’ve never developed a taste for it. I appreciate the offer,” the doctor refuses politely. “It is a pleasure to know you still retain your manners under the influence.”

“I aim to please.”

“Still, your behavior has put me in a difficult position,” the doctor takes a sip of his tea. His tone teasing and bordering malicious. “With your restraining order nearing its end, I am supposed to sign off on your rehabilitation. You’ve done quite well but I’m worried that being in such close proximity to the object of your obsession will result negatively.”

Jojen grins, “I think you’d like that.”

The gentleman’s lips quick, cold and calculating. “I only want what’s best for my patients,” the Lithuanian clarifies. “I will sign off on it, regardless of my concerns. Nonetheless, I will recommend to your father that you come in once a week to check on your progress.”

“We might not be able to afford that.” The state was paying for these sessions, and without the looming threat of the court, they no longer needed to dirty their hands with Jojen.

“We can work something out.” The doctor stood up. He walked over to his desk without as much as a glance to Jojen. “I’m looking forward to hearing about your progress with Bran. God forbid you become misguided in your attempts of reconciliation.”
He grabs a box, neatly wrapped in black paper and red ribbon, sophisticated with a sliver of masculinity that the man exudes naturally. “I took the liberty to prepare a treat for this occasion. Your recovery is something to be celebrated, and I hope your family takes as much pride in it as I have.”

Jojen takes the box. “What is it?”

“Something I caught this weekend.”

Oh, meat. Jojen never refused a gift from the doctor, not when his dishes resembled courses out of five star restaurants and his family had trouble putting food on the table. It was almost touching how much the doctor cared, even if it was for his own, nefarious purposes.

“You didn’t have to wrap it up so nicely.”

“Presentation is success, Jojen. The sight of a jeweled chest overwhelms the sounds of hissing from within. Remember that when you are with Bran.”

Jojen smiles fondly at the image of his beloved.

“Thank you, Dr. Lecter.”

Chapter End Notes

So short chapter is short. This chapter got updated a lot faster than I thought it would. I was actually going to postpone it for next week but felt bad knowing that my other story probably won’t be updated for a while and I will probably not be able to respond to any of the amazing, lovely reviews. You guys are all bosses and I hope you know that.

With that being said, I hope you enjoy the long awaited Bran/Jojen preview~! I didn't know if people would get the hints with the new tag "guest appearances" and the creepy psychiatrist but for those who did: cookies!
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Here’s how I imagine Arya’s dance at the beginning of this chapter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfWm_PJdE1Q

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

During a performance season, Arya only eats breakfast with her family once a week. It’s a hassle for the others to wake up when she does, and Arya has to get up in time for her work out or else she’ll be late for school. It also helps that her early bird habits keep her from listening to her mother’s concern about wellbeing. Arya eats a great deal, but before exercising, having something in her stomach always becomes a nuisance rather than a luxury. In the summer, she can sleep in until seven. She does warm ups for thirty minutes, consisting of push-ups, sit-ups, and then some yoga to get her stretching. Sometimes, to increase her cardiovascular work, she goes swimming in their pool or bikes around the neighborhood instead.

At the end of her routine, she goes to her family’s studio, a gift from her father for her prodigal return. Turning the stables into a studio was hardly an effort for the affluent Starks, and it wasn’t as if they were being used since they renovated their lands up north, but Arya always feels a twinge of guilt when she sees it. She knows her father only built it to prevent her from leaving again.

While her family eats their breakfast, Arya is dancing. Putting in her iPhone, she listens to see what she’ll be doing today. If it’s a familiar tune, Arya performs the solo assigned to it. If it’s new, then Arya tries a spontaneous choreography. The latter never turns out particularly well. She smiles when she hears the remix of Hansine and Maclomaire’s “Everytime” come through the speakers. It was the first contemporary piece that Syrio had made for her when they talked about her career. Classical ballet was out of the question. Though Arya’s technique was solid, it was hardly at the technical perfection needed for the genre. Arya was an artist before a dancer. She was skilled as any novice professional (though she had years to go), but her passion set her apart from her peers. Contemporary ballet or dance was the best choice overall.

Before her ‘sabbatical,’ Syrio told her that there were several companies already interested in her. In a few years, they would be willing to extend an audition. The Faceless Men, however, got to her first. Or rather, Jaqen H’ghar did.

Arya messes up a pirouette thinking about him.

The man is annoyingly cryptic and infuriatingly attractive. Traits that Arya, for the life of her, cannot resist. When he first entered the Syrio’s dance studio, whispers broke out like a hailstorm. Everyone knew who Jaqen H’ghar was. He was one of the best dancers in the world and was coming all the way to dance with them. When he declared he was choosing one of them as the female lead, the tension trapped the girls in their place. They performed for him, did their stretches in front of them, and in the end, were lined up like cattle to be chosen. He tapped the shoulders of the five girls that made it to the final selection. Arya was not one of the slaughter.

The night after her audition, Arya found him in his hotel. She kissed him when he opened the door.
"I wanted to do that before you leave," she confessed. He paused, and pulled her into a kiss.

"The man hopes the girl knows this doesn’t guarantee a part." He told her when they parted. "I got the part," Arya said confidently.

"The girl is sure of this?"

Arya took off her coat and tossed it past him and into the hotel. "I got the part." Arya was not well-endowed nor was she a beauty in any particular way. Her skin was peppered with bruises and there were cuts on her feet. Jaqen found her eye-catching, and her confidence was more luring than an aphrodisiac. "I know I did. You can tell me if I didn't. That won't change what happens tonight." Jaqen believed her. He confirms her theory when he lifted her up and pushed her against the wall. There was a certain talent only dancers have in their bedroom. They paid attention to every detail of their partner's bodies, could kiss places no one else could reach, spots behind the ear, curves on the waist, stretched their legs so that they could show off private places no one else could touch. It was not only their limbs that was nubile and nimble. Jaqen moves Arya the way he wants her to, and Arya does the same with him. When they were finished, Jaqen watched with a heightened brow at her movements. She was leaving to get some water. She was worn, he knew it, but she got up acting as if he were just another partner in the bedroom or in dance. The notion made him more upset than he liked.

"The girl possesses much talent in this area."

Arya scoffed. She took his shirt off the ground and dressed herself. "You weren't so bad yourself." She drank his water and shook the bottle in his face. "Do you want any?" He thanked her and she threw him a bottle. She hopped back in bed with him and pulled his face down to kiss him, ruthless and loveless. He attempted to kiss her again when they finished only to be shoved onto the bed.

"The girl is stronger than she looks," he told her playfully, placing his uninvited hands on her waist, caressing his fabric on her skin. The sight of the girl in his shirt was mesmerizing and her face, so determined, so wanting, was enough to get him hard again. He lifted himself up to kiss her belly button.

"This girl," Arya mocked, "would like you to shut up and make your new partner feel welcomed."

Jaqen smirked. He grabbed her hips and with flexibility only a dancer could possessed, and reminded her that she was dancing for him.

Truth be told, Arya is quite fond of the foreigner. Quite fond of his body at least. The man is a god when he dances, each move so precise, almost inhumanely perfect. Arya looks forward to every possible lesson under his tutelage. A position she knows is hers.

She’ll get the part, she always does.

Arya continues her training for another fifteen minutes when she senses the presence of another. She smiles genuinely at the softness of the wheels trying to keep still. Only her little bird of a brother would be so polite as to wait for her to finish.

“What do you need, Bran?” Arya asks. Her tone is not at all harsh, but Bran flinches instinctively. Bran hates asking for help. He hates being the needy one in the family.

“Um…” Bran fiddles with his fingers. “Am I interrupting you? If you’re not done training, I can always come back later.”

“Nope,” Arya shrugs, grabbing a swig of her hydro flask. “I just finished.” As if he hadn’t been
waiting for her to be done this entire time.

“Oh, I don’t want to bother you. You can take a bath if you want. I can wait...” Bran offers nobly.

Oh, she wonders what this is about. Arya sighs. “Spit it out, Bran.”

Bran gulps, a guilty look approaching his face. Whatever Bran wants her to do or answer has him shaking. It must be a pretty huge favor for him to be so nervous. Arya hates turning down Bran’s requests, he gives so little of them. She hopes it isn’t too bad.

“It’s just...I...” Bran avoids her eyes. “Uh...”

"Yes?" She urges.

"It's honestly not that big of the deal...I kind of just want to...you know..." He struggles to find the words.

Arya rolls her eyes.

"I mean, I could probably ask someone else..."

“Bran!” Arya snaps, more out of fatigue than frustration. If only Bran could be a bit more assertive, they wouldn’t be having these problems.

“What if I said I wanted to date?”

Well fuck her, that’s...pretty big. Arya feels a chill run down her spine. Oh God, her cute, adorable, fourteen year old brother is talking about dating. Her little baby bird of a sibling, who spends his nights drawing comic book characters without the big breasts and revealing costumes because their mother thought it was degrading. No, he thought it was degrading. The Stark family's little chick of a child who wakes up in the morning to watch the clouds and play with the dogs...wants to start seeing people. Intimately. And he’s asking her about it, knowing that Arya is the rebellious one. The one who can’t judge him because she’s done worst.

Fuck her bad karma.

“Absolutely not.”

Bran’s face is torn between bewilderment and crestfallenness. “But you started dating when you were my age!”

Younger, Arya grimaces. And I wasn’t exactly ‘dating’ any of them.

“Bran, it’s not about the age.” That’s a lie. It is at least sixty percent about the age. Bran is simply too young to be dating. “I understand that you’re a lot more mature than your peers but that’s not the point.” Actually, no, that is the point. Bran, who hardly steps out of his shell for food, cannot be seeing people. He's a pleaser, he wants people to be happy, and he wants to make them happy. He believes in justice and reason and not creepy teenager boys and girls who want to take off his pants and play doctor. Arya once joked that the best way to play a prank on him was to hide his things in a room full of people and watch him suffer. "I can’t remember the last time you made friends. It would be so easy for some sick pervert to take advantage of that." Especially the kind that go after pretty boys in wheel chairs. “There are perverts out there, Bran.”

“I have friends!” Bran protests weakly. “And it’s one of my friends that wants to set me up, too!”
“Wait. Waitwaitwaitwait, are you already seeing-“

“There’s no one!” Bran panics. “I mean…there’s no one yet. I…”

Yet. He said yet. Needless to say, Arya is freaking out.

“Henry, one of my friends,” he emphasizes the word, more than little insulted at Arya’s previous insinuation. “Has a boyfriend-“

“And you thought that justified you to jump on someone’s dick?” It’s a bit crude, but if Bran can’t handle that kind of language, he shouldn’t be dating, Arya justifies.

“NO!” Bran shouts, aghast. “I, just, he has a boyfriend whose cousin-“

“No,” Arya repeats.

“You didn’t let me finish!”

“I didn’t have to. How old is Henry’s boyfriend exactly? And how old is Henry?”

Bran shifts his eyes nervously. Arya finds herself tapping her foot the same way her mother does before one of them would confess to a household crime.

“Henry’s my age. He’s in my English class. He writes, I draw. We're making a comic book together. His mother is our headmistress and his other mom works with Uncle Benjen. She’s a cop.”

Okay, good to know where she can find the smartass kid corrupting her baby brother.

“And…?”

“His boyfriend is…well…he might be twentytwo years old.”

Arya can feel her eyes popping out of skull. Oh, she is so going to get struck down for her hypocrisy one day but today, she’s a fucking older sister. And she’s not having it. “So your ‘friend’ wants to set you up with his pedophilic boyfriend’s cousin because, let me guess, he saw your school picture, the one you took before you hit puberty, and said ‘I might want to tap that.’”

Bran is positive that’s not the reaction he received. Though, Henry did tell him that the boy saw his picture and begged for a copy. It could be totally innocent. Lots of older guys want to keep pictures of younger guys they might be interested in. Henry told him so. "You're just too pretty, Bran." Henry told him.

“They’re not the same age. He’s in the same year as Sansa,” Bran defends. "And he seems really nice. We like the same things.”

The ballerina rolls her eyes. “That doesn’t make him less creepy.” God, Arya should just start calling herself kettle. “Listen, I understand you want to grow up. Mom does keep us on a tighter leash than the dogs.” Arya grabs a towel and wipes off the sweat building up on her body. She’s working herself up. “But dating older guys is not the way to do it.”

Yep, she’s going to hell.

The wheelchair bound boy frowns. “It’s not just that I want to be independent…I…you said I needed to meet new people. Spread my horizons.”

"I said horizons, not legs," Arya retorts. Bran flushes red and it's the cutest fucking thing Arya has
ever seen. “I know what I said and I mean it. But I meant as friends. Socialize.”

“We could be friends!” He defends.

“Please, you know I mean real friends, not ‘friends.’” Arya explains. Air quotes included.

“Like your friends?” Bran points out bitterly, hoping to rise some guilt out of Arya for her behavior. “You said your friends were great. Some of the most loyal people you know.”

“Exactly like my friends,” Arya announces shamelessly. She’s not playing.

Fuck no. Not like ‘my friends.’ Arya thinks to herself. Never like my friends. I sleep with my friends. You should not be sleeping with your friends. “Listen Bran, I may be a hypocrite for telling you this.” May be? She’s the biggest hypocrite in the world. There’s a special place in hell for people like her. “But I really think you should hold off on dating. Mom only just let you work on the reserves. If she finds out you dating behind her back, she might never let you out of her sight.”

Bran’s face turns white as a sheet. “Please don’t tell mom.”

Message received. “Promise to wait three years and I won’t”

“Fine. Promise,” Bran sulks, looking at his feet dejectedly. He briefly tells her that Jon is taking them out after lunch. He has a meeting with an old boss for a job this morning. When he leaves, Arya feels a wave of approval wash over her. No wonder Sansa likes to be so bossy. It feels good to do good.

Arya is so convinced of her moral achievement that she saunters her way to the showers without a second thought. She doesn’t see Bran opening his cell phone and sending a message to his friend, Henry. If she did, Bran would give her a repeat performance of what happened.

He would tell her that he is sending a message to Henry, telling him not to give out his number to the mystery guy. He will do this all while looking at his shoes, guiltily.

Far away, a young man stood his shabby little room, packing his belongings. He receives a little ‘bing’ on his phone, a ‘gift’ (no such things in his cousin’s language) from the older boy.

‘Hi! Um, this is Bran. Henry’s friend? I heard we have a lot in common so I was wondering if you wanted to talk some time. Give me a call or a text! I’m really looking forward to hearing from you! Have a nice day!’

Though formal for a text message, Jojen can’t stop his heart from skipping a beat.

Bran is so fucking cute.

‘Hey Bran, it’s Jo. I’m looking forward to this as well. Let’s find time to chat someday. I have a feeling we’re going to be really close. ;)’

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter is short. But I figured if I waited any longer, I was going to hit the one year mark again and I don’t think anybody wants that. For some reason, this story is taking a lot longer to get to the actual shenanigans. I’m just all about setting the stages right now and I feel like I’ve been doing that for a while. I really do need to find a way
to merge everybody’s plot lines effectively which is my main goal at the moment. Let’s just see what happens.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon Snow worked for the Baratheons shortly after deciding not to continue onto sixth form. He was sixteen, a combination of wistful and solemn, and wanted to have meaning in his person, besides being “Lyanna’s son” or “that bastard.” His record was not stunning, but there weren't any red flags either. He did fairly well in school, though was hardly an honors student, volunteered at a nursing home, and even to this day, considers joining the police academy. It was just his luck that he ran into a wailing Steffon and an utterly too composed for a lost ten year old, Shireen, at the grocery store. Quickly subduing their worries with promises of ice cream, Jon went off in search of their parents. It did not take long, as Davos practically ran to the cashiers after hearing the supermarket’s speakers announce the presence of two lost children, and Jon recalls the way his eyes widened at a horde of children following him like ducklings in the water. During a conversation with Davos, he hinted at needing a babysitter or a nanny. Jon, not one to look a gift horse in the mouth (and completely one to fall for such an obvious trap), offered his services. Stannis didn’t like him at first, but like many men, quickly took to Jon’s talent for dealing with chaos and his ability to soothe his lot of fiery dragons.

Years later, Stannis Baratheon is just as worn and wired as when Jon remembered. While Stannis greets him with a curt nod and a professional handshake, it is Davos that wraps him up in a warm hug and asks him how the years have been treating him.

“Very good,” Jon replies. He tells them he’s been living in Scotland for a few months now, and may be considering the police academy—again. Stannis awkwardly looks around, wondering what the protocol for giving advice is. He’s never been charming, Stannis that is, blunt and judgmental in a way that clearly stated he wanted what’s best and not what’s polite. He wants Jon to have a plan. He wants Jon to make up his mind. He wants him to follow his dreams and be happy, but he also wants Jon to be his nanny. At the same time, he doesn’t want to upset Jon, and now he’s in a conflict with his own mind. Is there a subtle way to tell Jon to get his life together? Can he kindly insinuate that this free-falling lifestyle of his has no future? Dear god, what if Jon ever finds a partner?

“Don’t mind him, Jon,” Davos remarks, lightness in his voice and twinkling eyes. “You know how he is. Come in, we had the maids prepare some tea.”

Jon smiles, and Stannis is relieved. Jon even makes a joke about how posh Davos has become, asking his maids to bring up a spot of tea.

“That’s their job,” Stannis points out. He coughs, realizing it may sound too harsh. “We pay them for it.”

Jon laughs, though not in a condescending way. “Never get tired of that sense of humor of yours, Stannis.”

Davos’s chuckles follow. The sound lightens the mood, and Stannis feels better about himself.

“So where are the other inhabitants of this fine, posh home?”

The children were practically waiting for the cue. Shireen and her little brothers come down in glorious tornado of tiny limbs, floral and paisley prints, plaid decorative pants, and an air of absolute joy. “Jon!” Shireen cried, the most confident of her siblings.
Jon wraps her up in his arms, lifts her and Steffon who is eagerly reaching out for a hug, and squeezes them tight. “Wow, you guys have gotten so big!”

And they have. It’s been two years since he last saw them, Shireen is already entering puberty and Steffon has grown at least half a foot. Stannis the Second, (who was previously just Stannis), is officially entering the realms of being an awkward teenage. He checks for Devan to no avail.

“Devan is out with some friends,” Davos supplies helpfully. “He says ‘hi.’”

“Teenagers,” Stannis mutters. He wants it to sound affectionate but was afraid that with his demeanor and tone, it would come off as spiteful. In the end, he keeps his voice unheard. Davos kisses him on the cheek, finding his behavior all too adorable.

Jon feels a pang of jealousy. He puts his two human carryons down to hug Stannis the Second, who is shuffling his feet on the side.

After their greetings, Davos tells them to go upstairs and prepare for the day. “We’re going to the mall today. Stannis returns to work at the end of the week.” They had taken time off to prepare for the move and also to prepare their new headquarters of Baratheon Inc, staying that the place stank of Robert’s failure. Stannis tells the children that they still need to talk business with Jon. The children whine, of course, but Davos shoos them away with ease. Jon supposed this was why he couldn’t deal with other parents. Davos ruled with an iron but fair hand, much like Ned. It was…reassuring, for lack of better words.

Jon and Stannis sip their teas. Davos rubs Stannis’s shoulders, and Jon watches their interaction, silently and enviously. He sees the quirk of Stannis’s lips, and the little twitch of his fingers to indicate he’s happy for the touch. Davos eyes always seemed to be filled with love, and the desire to kiss Stannis for being alive. Jon knows that they are happy. Knows that like Cat and Ned, they were meant to find each other in the world. Davos was there for Stannis after his wife’s tragic miscarriages, after two, horribly complicated divorces, and the subsequent custody battles that followed. Likewise, Stannis was there for Davos, through all five years of his wife’s cancer. He paid for the hospital fees, his son’s university fees, and then paid for the funeral.

There was a moment in his employment where Jon suspected an affair beforehand. Such a theory was vehemently dismissed when a drunken Stannis came home, carried in Davos’s arms and weeping apologies for his kiss upon Davos when he was sleeping in his wife’s hospital room.

No, Jon thinks, no affairs. No dishonorable, torrid relations.

Stannis almost immediately goes into wages, and moves onto hours. He tells Jon it does not need to be full time work, as the older boys will be coming in sometime this summer. Stannis goes into detail about his freshly made contract and is almost grinning in joy at its perfection. Meanwhile, Davos chats him up a bit about family matters. Dale and his wife manage a branch of Baratheon industries, specializing in shipping. Allard has recently become engaged, and as Jon judges by Stannis’s dismal expression, he isn’t too happy about it. "They're too young," he protests. Matthatos and Maric are in Liverpool and Birmingham respectively, earning their degrees. Stannis is incredibly proud of their hard work, and Jon announces he’s happy for them. Stannis genuinely cared for Davos’s children, seeing them as an extension of the man he loved. Davos loves Shireen with all his heart. While the older children refused because of their age, the younger ones were placed in Stannis’s will and have been legally adopted since Jon was last under their employment.

“…so due to their eventual return, I’m afraid we can’t offer the same live-in position as last time. You do have a place to stay, right? If not, we can provide housing nearby—”
“I’m staying with family,” Jon clarifies.

“Oh.” Stannis pauses. “Is it close? We might have you on call, and we need to make sure you have the means to get here as soon as possible.”

Jon squirms in his seat. He suddenly feels like he’s about to reveal a big secret, for better or for worst. “Actually, it’s right next door.”

Stannis pauses. "Next door?"

"Yes, um, I’m staying at the Stark’s.”

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

Stannis's throat feels dry. “…And how are you related to the Starks? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Uh, well, Eddard Stark is my uncle.”

“Oh.” Stannis looks over to his husband. He seems genuinely conflicted. Jon wonders about that, because on more than one occasion, he’s heard Stannis muttering profanities about Catelyn’s “batshit crazy sister”, and “Eddard Stark’s insufferable security system” though nothing demeaning. Definitely nothing to get worried about, at least. Perhaps, he’s surprised that Jon actually came from such means.

Davos coughs a bit. “Well, that’s good to hear. It means that the children get to see you more often. Here is your copy of the contract, please look it over and hopefully we can put you to work by the end of the week. How does that sound?”

“That sounds great. I look forward to working for you,” Jon responds hastily. They look over at Stannis, and after a few moments, Jon hears him mutter “…I knew she was pregnant.”

The phrase snaps up Jon’s attention. “What?”

Stannis quickly composed himself. “Oh, sorry Jon. I was just thinking about it. You’re…Lyanna’s son, aren’t you? Not Brandon or the other one…”

“Benjen.”

“Yes, that one.” Stannis clears his throat in embarrassment. “I apologize. But your mother is Lyanna Stark? And if I recall, you’ve only turned twenty-one this year?”

“Yes,” Jon confesses to both accounts, “Though we changed it to Snow. When my mother launched her career, she didn’t want to use her name as clutch for her success. Sorry, I should have told you.”

Stannis waves him off. “It’s none of our business. It’s just…did you know your mother was engaged to my brother?”

Jon pauses. He has to think about it, because his mother has been engaged to a great deal of men. “I think…she mentioned a Baratheon,” he says neutrally. She probably did at least. Then, he finds himself pained to ask. “How far did the engagement last?”

Stannis sounds almost gleeful when he tells him “All the way to the alter.” Stannis coughs to hide his suppressed laughter. “See, everyone knew there was something wrong after she threw up at her brother’s wedding—on your aunt’s wedding dress to be precise. And well, her father actually had to
drag her to her own mess of a ceremony, but before they could say their vows, she bolted back down the aisle and no one has ever heard from her again.”

Stannis recounts the day with a certain malicious fondness that Jon didn’t know he possessed. He hasn’t been this happy since he helped Cersei Lannister with her divorce and got her fifty percent of Robert’s fortune and cause him to lose his shares as majority owner. There was something about Robert that brought out the worst in Stannis. Davos knows this, and tightens his grip on Stannis’s shoulders, reminding him of their guest.

Stannis composes himself. “Just want you to know that you and your mother are always welcomed here.”

Jon nods. He looks over the contract briefly, and his cavalier manner seems to upset Stannis, who then demands that Jon look it over that instant, with Stannis lending him a helping hand. He gets quite close to Jon, leaning over his shoulder, his breath tickling his ear. If Jon was interested in being a homewrecker, he might have made a pass at his fit employer. Yet, he adores the children (and Davos for that matter) too much to let his libido dictate his common sense and morals.

“You know, since you don’t have too many activities plan, do you mind if I take them on trips with my cousins? I think Shireen would just adore the reserve that the Starks—”

“Not the youngest!” Stannis protests.

Jon raises an eyebrow. “have recently allowed Bran,” he emphasizes, “to volunteer at. He’s the same age as Shireen and I think it’ll be nice if she has a friend she knows when she enters school. She is new, after all.”

“Oh.” Stannis’s face heats up. “I’m sorry—”

“What’s wrong with with Rickon?” Jon interrupts, trying not to sound defensive.

Stannis, to his credit, looks uncomfortable and his eyes dart around like a caged tiger. Davos laughs and claps Jon on the shoulder. “No need to interrogate my poor husband, Jon. Stannis is just being a bit overprotective. He caught the boy staring at Shireen at the park the other day.”

“Staring?”

“Rather intensely, if I do say so myself.”

“Oh.” Now it was Jon’s turn to be embarrassed. “I’m sure he doesn’t mean anything ill by it.”

“Well he means to do something,” Stannis mumbles darkly, his eyes clouding over with fatherly rage.

Davos sighs in utter fondness. “He’s just being silly, Jon. To be honest,” he says this in a loud whisper, teasing Stannis with the secretive action but enjoying the twitch he gets when he plays the game. “Rickon is quite infatuated with little Shireen. He kept calling her beautiful and literally caught her a bird in the park as a gift. It was quite romantic if the bird, wasn’t, you know, struggling to get free.”

Jon can’t help feeling relief. “Rickon will be on his best behavior. I promise.”

“I don’t want any boys around Shireen.”

On cue, a loud thump could be heard from upstairs. Stannis cries bloody murder as Shireen yells at
him not to touch her underwear. There’s another thump and a promise of thrashing that will come if he or Stannis uses her kitty tights as rope ever again.

“It’s a bit late for that,” Davos points out. He turns to Jon. “There shouldn’t be a problem with them spending time together. Though, I fear Shireen might be a bit bored being around someone so much younger than her. I’m sure you’ll find a way for them to have an enjoyable experience.”

Jon gets up to shake both their hands. “Well, I’m taking Bran and Arya to the mall today. If I see you, we can use it as a test run to see how the children get along. I think it’ll be fun.”

They agree, Stannis more reluctantly. Davos goes upstairs to check on the children, while Stannis offers to see Jon out. When they leave the manor, Stannis corners Jon. He slams his body against the door in a heated manner, until their faces are mere inches apart.

“Stannis, we talked about this—” Several times, actually. Stannis has mastered the art of socially inappropriate gestures.

“Listen, I don’t want that beast around my daughter, do you understand?” He whispers, low and throaty, like a wild animal. God, sex with him must be amazing when he’s upset and stressed—which Stannis is, all the time. Jon begins to feel inexplicitly jealous of Davos.

“Rickon really means no harm—”

“He’s boy, which means underneath those ginger curls are seething rage of hormones ready to rape and pillage innocent young women—”

“He’s eleven!”

Stannis hears none of it. “And I knew your uncle—Brandon not Eddard, Eddard had no sex appeal, but I knew Brandon and he was a terror. I also know your cousin—the eldest one, and he had a new girl every season since he was twelve.”

Jon’s frowns at the thought of Robb. “Robb is—”

“Whores, all of them.” Stannis declares. He gingerly clutches onto Jon’s cheek, and by using a method that could have been seen as brotherly in the middle ages, his actions become erotic and erratic, and Jon won’t lie—he’s a bit turned on.

“You’re a good boy, Jon. Take care of my daughter. I don’t want her or you, for that matter, being corrupted by those sex addicts. Keep your chastity a little longer—for me.”

A little late for that, but Jon nods, breathless and a little arouse. “Yes sir.”

Stannis straightens himself up, not the least bit stimulated by his actions. “We keep this conversation between us, yes?”

“Yes sir,” Jon repeats. Good lord, that sounds hot. All his naughty fantasies of the naïve babysitter and the strong, dominating father return as Stannis struts back to his house to his loving husband’s arms. Jon hits himself on the wall. He is not a homewrecker. He has a boyfriend. Had a boyfriend.

Gods, he is a mess.

Jon supposes he’s lucky Davos is such a trusting partner. If Robb had seen Stannis and Jon just now, he’s light a fuse and blow up the entire world.
Robb, protected by the secrecy and darkness of his room, shields himself from the rest of the house. He pretended earlier today to be out with friends, when in reality, he stayed coped in a basement level room where dozens of computer screens aligned in a row. He temporarily programed them to keep an eye on the Baratheon-Seaworth Manor, knowing full well from his father’s documents that they installed Stark Industries security system days earlier. Lucky him.

Theon walks in; the only one to know about Robb’s secret hobby. They had used this room in their childhood to plan some of the best pranks in Yorkshire history, and to keep a healthy eye on any predators after Robb’s girlfriends.

“What the hell is going on?”

“Jon went to visit some old employers today. Stannis Baratheon. Former lawyer, and now head of Baratheon Industries after his elder brother lost his majority shares in a highly publicized divorce to socialite, Cersei Lannister. Previously married to Selyse Florent for five years, then married a Melisandre, just Melisandre, for a period of two months. Previously a follower of the Red God. Now married for five years to Davos Seaworth. Including Stannis’s child from his first marriage and Davos’s previous relationship, they have a total of eight children. Theon, I think I have a problem.”

“Robb, I know you do.”

“Theon,” Robb warns. “This is serious. Stannis is a threat. Look at this.” Robb replays the scene from this morning, the grinding and low whispers and threats. “I think he’s trying to proposition Jon into an extramarital affair. Theon, I cannot allow this!”

“How did you get access to their cameras?”

“I know all the override codes,” Robb admits. “But Theon, pay attention!”

“That’s super creepy.”

“Theon!”

“What?” Theon walks over to Robb, and wraps his arms around Robb’s shoulder in what might be perceived as a comforting gesture.

Robb freezes the still on Jon and Stannis together. “Stannis is trying to get into Jon’s pants. If I’m going to take Jon back, I need to find a way to make him want me more.”

“And how do you suppose you’re going to do that?” Theon asks, tiredly almost.

“Theon, I need to make him jealous.”

Robb turns around. He clutches Theon in a similar manner to how Stannis was holding Jon, and stares deep into his eyes. Theon swoons. “Theon, you are my best friend and greatest companion. I need you to do me a favor. I need you.”

“Anything,” Theon whispers reverently.

“I need you to pretend to be in love with me.”

Chapter End Notes
Not an excuse, but, I haven’t watched Game of Thrones in a very long time. Very long. Like three seasons have passed and I still haven’t watched it. Nonetheless, I have kept up with spoilers and will try to incorporate what I know of the books and what I will be watching with the show. So thank you to all that review. Here are my two chapters.

And anybody who wants to translate this story, feel free to. As long as I get credited for it, I will be completely happy for your effort. Thank you!
Chapter 15

It is almost impossible for a Targaryean to blend in with a crowd, and Lord Rhaegar Targaryen was no exception. Despite being hidden by sunglasses, his vibrant violet eyes sparkle through what the magazines claim to be *euphoric creativity*, his platinum blonde hair, tied up and pushed back, casual wear that harshly contrasts his bespoke suit. Rhaegar Targaryen is subject to every passerby’s cell phone. Though there is a limited population in the room, it is enough for Rhaegar to wince at the verbal lashing he’ll receive when he goes home.

“We should have had someone come instead,” Aegon whines. “Our pictures will be on every blog and tabloid in the world!” He hesitates to continue when he sees a girl staring from the corner of his eye. Instead of berating her, he winks when her friend or sister holds up her 6S. They flush and giggle, returning to her parents’ side for admonishment.

“That’s quite an exaggeration. There are less than ten people in this room, not including ourselves.” Rhaegar does not mind the imitation paparazzi. He is never confident that their disguises would work, but it felt nice to be a little hopeful. He prays that Elia will not be too angry at him for what he is about to do.

Seconds after they make their presence known at the art gallery, a man in black escorts the other guests to another room. Their dealer, a lovely Vanessa Marianna who is on loan from the Scene Contempo Gallery in New York, arrives with a grace Rhaegar could have mistaken for royalty.

“Lord Targaryen, it is lovely to finally meet you.” She requests for one of the aids to bring her some champagne and sparkling water before Rhaegar could refuse.

“It is lovely to meet you as well.”

Vanessa smiles and gets him comfortable as she directs him to another room, deeper into the gallery. “We normally don’t give art screenings in advance. I’ve been told to make an extreme exception with you.” Her tone is playful and without accusation.

“I must thank you for your consideration. It is a pity that I won’t be able to make the actual screening, considering I…” *Been banned, forbidden to go, explicitly demanded to stay no less than two hundred feet away from—*” have a concert during that time. But when I heard that you were in possession of Lyanna Stark’s work, I knew I had to come.”

Vanessa laughs. “Are you a fan?”

“The biggest,” Rhaegar admits. His son throws him a distasteful look. Ah, he must have heard the rumors. It’s amazing what one can find on the internet today.

Vanessa says no more as they arrive to their destination. She flicks on the light and awards him with the sight of several unclaimed and unhung treasures, beautiful photographs in glorious frames with ivy decorations and rose sigils. Some are covered in white cloths while others depict scenes and images of hospitality and hearth. “You’re rather fortunate. Lyanna’s work has become increasingly popular. Her showing next week is expected to have the entire gallery filled.”

Rhaegar barely listened to the woman. He is too focused on a particular photograph, three feet tall, depicting an old wooden horse on the ground of carpeted floor with someone’s hand lifelessly touching it. The figure is not shown except for his appendages, but the state of his limp form implies slumber. Soft hands, Lyanna’s hands if not for their apparent masculinity. A lover? He is jealous. No,
too intimate. A child but his large hands implies he’s much older. Suddenly, Rhaegar Targaryen begins to feel his age—the creeping of post-forties coming to him as he tries to imagine his youth, his Lyanna with all of her excitement and frivolousness, her long black hair running through his fingers and her pink, swollen lips pressed against his.

*I’m not your Lyanna,* he remembers, a crude memory of rejection follows a sweep of arousal. *I’m not anybody’s Lyanna. I’m my own person, you rich twat.* There was little heat to her words, only pity and a sense of resignation. *Go home to your wife, Rhaegar. Be her Rhaegar.*

He allows his finger to brush against the photograph one last time. “This one,” he says, finally. “This one for sure.”

Vanessa marks it off her list without hesitation. “You’ll have to wait until after the gallery showing. We won’t sell it but we’re required to have it there. Miss Snow is very particular about the presentation.”

Rhaegar nods thoughtfully. Then, he pauses when he hears the title. “Miss Snow? Not Ms. Snow or Mrs. Snow?”

Vanessa Marianna denies it immediately. “Oh no, the day that woman marries is the day winter forgets to come.” She says this in good cheer. “Snow is her surname. I believe she legally changed it several years ago when she gave...more attention to her career.”

“Oh,” Rhaegar says softly. Aegon spares a nervous glance at his father. Rhaegar walks over to another frame. He wipes away imaginary dust. “All this time, I thought she was married.”

He looks at the new picture beneath his fingertips. This time, it is a scene from a private plane, a schoolbook laying on a tray. There’s a figure looking outside the window, his face not shown. Young, in contrast to a picture. Next to the figure is a champagne glass filled with juice. “What is the theme of the showing?”

“Getting older, precious things. I’m afraid it’s still being set up.”

“Lyanna never said anything?”

“Lyanna is hardly a wordsmith.” Vanessa answers. She speaks without reproach. In fact, she sounds fond. “She expects her pictures to speak for her and for us to do the rest of the work. I’ve known her for a while now. She was my first artist. It’s why they asked me to come here to do her gallery.”

Rhaegar’s eyes become intense as he stares at the picture. Vanessa is worried but presents not even a sliver of fear. She has been through worse; she has seen hell and looked the devil in the eye, and she will not be frightened by some eccentric lord. “While I’m sure you possess the means to buy every single piece in the collection, I’m afraid we must limit you. I trust five shall be enough to satisfy your urge, and of course, any unsold pictures after the gallery will be up for sale.”

First there is silence. And then, agreement. Vanessa is relieved when she does not have to deal with a fight.

“I’ll take this as well. May I keep looking?”

“Of course. Take your time.” Vanessa takes a step back and gives the man his space. She makes a note to call Lyanna as a precaution.

When Rhaegar leaves the gallery, he is a small fortune down and five paintings richer. In his mind, he has to wonder where he’ll put them all. Nowhere Elia could see, that goes without saying. He
doesn’t wish to upset her in such a vulgar way. Though, the temptation of having Lyanna’s work in his bedroom brought all the familiar chills back down his spine. He giggles. He feels light and boyish, like some giddy adolescent adoring his first crush. His study, perhaps? His fingers twitch with newfound inspiration. It’s been weeks since he composed a new song.

“Father.”

“Yes, my son?”

Aegon opens his mouth.

Rhaegar waits.

Aegon thinks for a second, and then closes his mouth. “Nothing.”

Rhaegar gives him a once over.

“You’re so much like your mother, Aegon.”

Aegon beams with pride and resumes his behavior. He stares out the window like a dog.

Rhaegar sighs.

It wouldn’t kill their family to have a little bit of fire and hailstorm once in a while.

Daenerys Targaryen is at her dress fitting when her phone lights up, and she sees her brother and her nephew’s face plastered on the news. It’s a tabloid blog, but her brother’s curious appearance has her wondering what he’s been up to, and increasingly worried that there’s going to be a spectacle so near her wedding.

Seconds later, another notification pops up, and Daenerys frowns.

Unhappily Ever After!

A not so perfect fairy tale for the youngest daughter of the late Lord Aerys Targaryen and his widow Lady Rhaella Targaryen! In what claims to be the wedding of the century, this hightborn lady is set to marry the fearsome Khal Drogo, a prince from one of the Polynesian islands—rumored to engage in acts of ritualistic cannibalism and warfare! Oh the horror! Is there more to this spoiled princess than what the world gets to see? The Targaryen have been known for centuries for their “mental problems,” most recently after Viserys Targaryen’s mental breakdown in Prague and a decade earlier, Aerys Targaryen’s arson spree. Actually, it’ll be no surprise if this lady goes off the deep end! But that’s another story!

What we’re really curious about is the necessity to speed up the wedding. Daenerys has only just came back from her philanthropy trip three weeks ago and every wedding planner, caterer, and wedding dress maker has been tripping over their own feet trying to get into their good graces? Perhaps there’s a little someone the Targaryens aren’t revealing about themselves! She wouldn’t be the first hight born lady to pop a bastard out of wedlock. Oh well, we have to wait and see if she can fit into her dress…

The article goes on, and there are even some accompanying pictures, some from the day she stepped out the plan with her seven foot tall husband.

Daenerys angrily throws her phone against the wall. First of all, Khal Drogo is a chief, not a prince. Second of all, how dare they? She is fucking Daenerys Targaryen! How dare they insult her husband
like that? And her future child! She feels her stomach churn with something other than morning sickness and feels incredibly similar to righteous rage. She calls her publicist and then her business partners. She may be some spoiled lady, but she’s also a Targaryen and a shareholder in some of the biggest companies in the world. She wants that fucking reporter to burn.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Arya likes pointe slippers and buns on the side of her head, leotards that come in black, people who say ‘turn’ not ‘spin,’ and makeup that washes off with water not sweat. She likes bruises because they mean hard work, and sex because of the release.

Bran likes charcoal over oil, cares more about shading and lighting than color, and pays more attention to the detail of a crow’s eyes than the length of its wingspan. He wants a haircut, because his bangs keep getting in the way of his vision. He needs new gloves, because they are worn out, and maybe hand lotion when he forgets his pair at home.

Rickon likes men who listen to his orders, and women who don’t. He spends far too much time stalking the members of his community than can be considered societally acceptable, or normal, and will probably carry a record before he turns sixteen. He loves his family, but can’t control his impulses for the life of him.

The three of them are Starks, and could have had the whole world handed to them. Yet, they don’t. It is silly, but Jon is proud of them, because he knows how they could have turned out: listless and unproductive, lazy, or worse, boring.

They venture off to the food court, and Bran mentions his desire for a haircut. Jon teases him about wanting to impress someone special, and instead of Bran politely declining the notion or scoffing at him like some angsty teen, he blushes. He blushes like some fair maiden in a medieval ballad. Jon isn’t blind, or deaf. When Arya harshly stomps out any possibility, glaring at Bran and making threatening comments about how their ‘mother would never allow it,’ Jon keeps his mouth shut.

Instead, Jon suggests Rickon and Arya get them something to eat while he and Bran find seats. Summer is the first to spot an empty table, pitter-patter ing her way to their desired location. Her fearsome size wards off any potential suitors of the table, and at one point, she growls at a nearby couple trying to sit with them. When Jon realizes that Arya is safely out of earshot, Jon points out to Bran that he got “really nervous when Jon mentioned dating.”

Bran grimaces. “It’s nothing.”

“It doesn’t sound like nothing.”

“Trust me, it’s nothing.” Jon gives him a look and Bran relents. “Nothing has happened… It’s just texting. And we only just started today. Arya doesn’t like it.”

Jon nods. “You are fourteen.”

“Everyone keeps saying that!” Bran hits the table, resulting a few wandering eyes. He composes himself. “We’ve never even met. I’ve only seen a picture of him, and my friend knows him. He’s really nice, and…” Bran sighs and longingly strokes Summer’s fur. “We talk about the world and our dreams and life…”

“That’s a lot for one morning.”

“We’ve been talking all day.” Bran smiles to himself, his cheeks lighting up prettily. He babbles on a bit about their conversation, how wise he sounds, how light and meaningful their conversations
were. Jon remembers being that young and hopeful, feeling that affection, that infatuation. Jon understands why Arya is upset, and maybe he doesn’t know Bran as well as she does, but he remembers that feeling.

“I think you should give it a shot.”

Bran’s eyes brighten up. “Really?”

“I think it’ll be good for you. You seem to really like him.”

Bran nods. “I do. I love that he treats me like an adult.”

“Well that’s enough for me.” Jon hesitates. “But I still want to see your texts.”

Bran clutches onto Summer’s fur. The act of apprehension alarms her, and she prepares for a pounce. “Why?”

Jon smiles sympathetically. “I just have to make sure he’s not a creep.”

"He’s not! I swear."

"Well then, there's no problem in me looking at your texts."

Bran considers his options. After some hesitation, he takes his phone from Summer’s vest pocket and hands it to Jon. “You won’t find anything anyways. He called me as soon as I texted him.”

“Not helping your case.” Jon scrolls down to find a few messages. When he finds nothing incriminating, he hands it back to Bran. Shortly after, Arya and Rickon return with a plate of steaming chicken marsala, bubbling butter chicken, mild spice for their Northern taste buds and extra naan for dipping, a Greek salad with a side of hummus, heavily seasoned fries, and a thick, aromatic lamb and beef gyro. There’s some water and a side plate of beef they requested for Summer. They bring it to the table in take-out containers for easier traveling, and open them for a feast.

They are about to dig into their meal when Jon hears a familiar voice asking if he could sit down. Stannis and Davos arrive, not a moment too soon. Jon suspects they were waiting this entire time. All of them are carrying plates in their hands, filled with falafels sandwiches, lightly fried halibut and golden chips, and savory pies filled with skirt beef and potatoes, salty pork and sweet apples, with a side orders of pickled coleslaw and potatoes.

“Davos! Stannis! What a coincidence to find you here?”

They put their food down to avoid spillage and begin introductions. Stannis says, “Yes, it is truly a coincidence. We did not expect to see you here at all.”

Jon laughs to cover up the poor acting, and introduces his cousins. “Well, these are my cousins, Arya, Bran, and Rickon, you’ve probably met them already. You guys, these are my employers. I’ll be working on them as a nanny starting next week.”

“I know your father,” Stannis informs them curtly. Arya nods, remembering the him quite easily. She’s never seen the other, older man, though.

“Yes, at the charity gala a few years ago,” Arya remembers. “It’s been a while. Mother tells me you’ve moved here indefinitely.”

“Jon’s told us about you,” Bran points out. “You’re Uncle Robert’s brother, and you’re a solicitor,
"He owns the company now," Shireen brags. Her father turns red with pride. "It’s very nice to meet you. Jon’s told us a great deal about you all as well. May we sit?"

“Of course you can.” Jon moves out of the way so that Davos and Stannis can take a seat to his right, and Stannis the Second moves to the free spot on his left. He is quiet and solemn, and Jon will never seek to question whether or not Stannis the younger has any biological similarities to his namesakes. Shireen moves over to the Starks’ side.

“You can sit here!” Rickon offers.

Shireen accepts the offer, and is moving towards him until Stannis voices his disapproval.

“No.” Stannis shuts him down immediately. He orders her to sit next to Bran, ignoring the glower directed at him. Stannis then tells Steffon to sit next to Rickon. They are the same age—they’ll have plenty to talk about.

Shireen, ever the picture of filial devotion, obeys, and despite the odd circumstances, remains quite pleasant. Bran and Shireen become quite heated in a conversation about books, how Bran enjoys authors like Neil Gaiman, and Darren Shan, and of course, the occasional Stephen King novel, while Shireen raves about Tolkien and Ursula Le Guin. They talk about school, and how they’ll be classmates after this summer, along with Stannis the Second, who’s more into biology than fantasy.

"I'm going to be a doctor and cut people up," he announces. He returns his attention to an anatomy app, where he scores perfectly on each quiz.

Eventually, Shireen and Bran’s in-depth conversation becomes intense, more animated, and Rickon decides they are too close, speaking a language he does not understand, nor cares to. He pretends to drop his plastic knife and stabs his brother’s upper thigh—where he knows it stills hurts.

“Ow!”

They turn to Bran, who inspects his thigh for a bruise. Shireen, worried, places her hand on his arm and asks if he’s alright.

“I’m fine,” Bran glares at his younger brother. “I think I got a bug bite. It’s probably nothing.”

Shireen seems unconvinced. Jon changes the topic swiftly. They’ve all finished their food by now, and suggests getting down to business. “Is there anything you need, Shireen? Bran wants to get art supplies and Arya will spend an hour laundering around the mall, looking for a dress, deciding she’ll wear the same dress as she always does, and Rickon will…he’ll do Rickon. It's quite fantastic, actually. You'll have great fun with him.”

Rickon beams at the analysis. His joy is almost as great as Stannis’s annoyance.

Shireen thinks about it. “Well, I do need a jacket. The weather here is a bit chillier than I had hoped, even for the summer. I don’t mind going to the crafts store, though. I might like to pick up some yarn.” She reminds Jon of her multitude of craft hobbies. Growing up, Shireen was a sickly child, and her mother rarely allowed her outdoors. It wasn’t until Davos came into their lives that she was allowed outside. “I can pick out a jacket with Arya, or go with my brothers, afterwards. They’ll need something as well.”

“I bet you will look beautiful in a jacket.”
Shireen turns to Rickon. Rickon, who is a Stark with all nerve and no sense, tells her: “I bet you will look beautiful in anything.”

“Thank you, Rickon.”

“I mean it. Anything.”

“Thank you—”

“I could skin the hide of a cow and coat you in its blood, and you’ll still look beautiful. Better.”

Shireen's smile falters. “Thank you…I guess?”

"You're so beautiful, I would massacre everyone whose ever called you ugly and deliver their skins as a tribute. Because you're that beautiful."

The silence is impressive for their location. Shireen, an avid reader and lifelong literary lover, is at a lost for words. The food court appears heavy with discomfort. Arya, to her credit, does not burst out laughing. Jon saves the day by ushering them up, especially Stannis, who is glaring daggers at Rickon.

Stannis grabs Jon by the scruff of his neck and warns him not to let that “demented cannibal” anywhere near his daughter. Jon almost purrs at the placement of his neck, right where he likes it. Instead, he stands between Rickon and Shireen, forcing Shireen to walk beside Bran. Rickon seethes in bitterness. Jon wants to reassure him, but he takes a look at the newly minted teens, and watches as Shireen twirls her hair. She talks about Summer, and offers to crochet a new vest for him when it begins to wear out. Or maybe knit her something. She could do both.


Rickon swats his hand away. He doesn’t buy it, and frankly, neither does Jon. Shireen seems pretty interested in whatever Bran has to say. They get into the art supplies store when Rickon asks to speak to Bran—alone. Jon is suspicious, and is about to say no. Rickon, annoyed by the distrust, gives a sly, under the radar hand signal to the other boys, and the Baratheon-Seaworth lot dash into the store, wreaking havoc as they come. In a completely Pavilion manner, Jon runs after them, with Davos and Stannis following.

Arya, the least likely to fall for such tricks, warns them both to ‘be good.’ She enters the store as well, mostly to observe the chaos within the glass windows.

Rickon creeps out to his older brother. Bran knows Rickon loves him, would never do anything to harm him. He also knows that Rickon has a skewed sense of morality, and a child’s understanding of limits. Rickon clutches onto Bran’s handles and wheels him slowly away from the store. “Rickon…where are you taking me?” Summer, who is trained to attack when sensing danger, is at a lost. Rickon makes no sudden movement as they go forward to an open space.

“I think it’s time for you get away a bit, right?”

“Rickon, you’re scaring me.”

“What are you talking about? You’re my brother, Bran. I would never hurt you.”

“Rickon, can we go back into the craft store?”

“Look, Summer is right here and you know she’ll never let anything happen to you, right?”
“Rickon, you’re not funny.”

“Rickon, you’re going very fast.”

“Rickon, I think you need to stop. I’ll tell mum and dad.”

"Rickon, we are getting very far from the craft store."

“Don’t worry, I will find you later.” Rickon promises, and he’s sincere about it. “You just need to disappear for two minutes, five tops.” Hopefully ten or twenty.

The plan was for Rickon to take his older brother to the nice little bookstore on the other side of the mall, where Bran could peacefully read in silence and tranquility. It is a nice bookstore, too, and for the right price, they would have given him cocoa and a piece of cheesecake. Rickon would have bought Bran’s supplies, and he would have gladly done it, too, if not to help his brother than to play up his kindness to Shireen. Bran would have been safe and sound, and no one would have been none the wiser. Then, Jon, who was rightfully concerned about his cousins, rushed outside and asked Rickon:

“Rickon, what are you doing to Bran?”

And so, Rickon panicked. It wasn’t his fault! He panicked because he knew the only thing worse than someone finding evidence of a crime was when someone was caught in the middle of the crime. So he pushed Bran—and really, it was just a little push, but he’s a Stark and Starks are naturally stronger than most (at least that’s what his uncle told him), and so he pushed Bran a little too far.

“Damn it, Rickon!” Jon shouts. He orders Rickon to head into the crafts store. “I will deal with you later!” Rickon is, at first, rightfully terrified. Then, he remembers there’s a pretty little princess waiting for him, and decides to count his blessings when they come.

Summer is making a grand fuss when she chases down Bran. The barking causes people to move out of the way, avoiding a disastrous collision, but also prevents the wheelchair from stopping its locomotion. Bran keeps accelerating, and both the dog and the boy knew that without an act of god, Bran is headed towards a wall or worse.

Fortunately for Bran, there was a young man of high breeding and good taste, that had been out that afternoon. He is waiting for his tea at a coffee kiosk, being made by a lovely barista, when he hears the incessant barking of a large dog. The creature, the man notices, is truly magnificent. It’s silvery gray fur sparkled iridescently in the light, and its yellow eyes are fierce with protective worry. The man is an animal lover, and never fails to admire a truly grand piece in motion.

The man, whose leg limps with an air of profound pain, does not hesitate to place his cane on the floor. He waits for the boy to come closer, and as the wheelchair hits the obstacle in its path, there’s a small whiplash. The man catches the boy, holding onto his body as he slumps into his arms. Despite the extra weight on his foot, he takes it with stride.

The people erupt into applause, as he helps the boy into his seat. “Are you alright?” He asks.

Bran nods, embarrassed with a face red enough to burn. Oh, the humiliation he feels must be great. “Bran!” They both hear. The handsome savior watches as another young man, bearing a soft resemblance to the boy, except with the addition of beautiful curls and pouty lips, pulls Bran into a hug. Immediately, he is quick to check for injuries, bruises or cuts on Bran. Not wanting to be left out, the man himself makes a comment.

“Check his hands. If he tried to use the breaks, the wheelchair may have caused friction burn.”
The young man is surprised, but checks. True enough, there are slight blisters on his fingers, probably from the lacking of proper gloving. It’s far from serious, so their savior fishes out some unscented lotion and hands it to them. “Here, use this. It’s a miracle worker.”

Jon takes it gratefully. “Thank you, mister…?”

“Tyrell. Willas Tyrell. Please, I encourage to call me Willas.”

“I’m Jon.” Jon hands it to Bran who rubs onto his hands. It tingled. “Thanks you, Mr. Willas.”

Willas laughs. “Just Willas.” The man refuses to take the bottle back. “I don’t need it too much, anymore. I keep with me mostly out of habit.”

Jon tilts his head, confused, before he looks down. There it is, a rather obvious, scarred and disgruntled injury. “Oh your leg…it’s…”

“Permanent,” Willas supplies. He smiles, completely unperturbed by the situation. “I had to use a wheelchair for the first few weeks of rehabilitation. I understand the struggle of brake burns.”

To his surprise, Jon’s expression shows no traces of pity. His gaze is almost devastatingly straightforward, solemn as he looks Willas in the eye and thanks him a second time. Finally, Jon looks away, and seems to be stopping himself from smiling.

Jon refuses to lie to himself. Willas Tyrell is handsome. He’s attractive in the traditional, princely way, the kind of man who sweeps women off their feet in white horses and decadent footwear, before the days where thugs and bodybuilders became a desired norm. Willas was the kind of man with a perfect jawline and eyes that twinkle. “Well thank you for helping Bran out. I can’t say it enough. God, I can’t believe I let you alone with Rickon.”

Rickon? The wheels turn in Willas’ head as he asks: “If you don’t mind me asking, would Rickon happen to be a rather disgruntled sibling?”

“Worse, a jealous sibling.” Jon lets out a choked, rather amused and somewhat dark, chuckle.

Willas is reminded of the good old days, when Garlan and Loras would hide his things in impossible to reach places and push him down the hallways of their manor. “Oh, I remember that, too.” He turns to Bran. “Brothers are the worse, aren’t they? The problem with siblings is that they don’t hold back in their pranks. They go for the jugular every single time.”

By the grin on Bran’s face, he agrees. He probably finds it amusing enough not to be too angry at his brother. The second best thing about having brothers is that they don't treat you like an invalid just because you can't walk as well anymore.

Jon smiles, and grabs onto the handles of Bran’s wheelchair. “I have to get back to the others, though. It was nice meeting you.” And it was. The last time Jon met such a charming man, he ended up being his cousin. Willas has an air like Robb, as well. The whole ‘highborn son destined for great and glorious purposes’ thing going on. Jon wonders if being with Robb made him develop a type.

The two men share a last, longing glance at each other. A moment after rolling Bran away, Willas calls out to them. He offers to walk beside them until they reach their destination. “If you, of course, don’t mind me slowing you down.”

“No,” Jon disagrees. “Of course not. And you won't be slowing us down.”

Willas grabs his tea, and walks alongside them, his limp barely noticeable to either of them. They
make small talk, Jon reveals his relationship to Bran, and various little details about their lives. Normally, such banal conversations would annoy Jon, but he can’t help but be charmed by Willas. When they reach the craft store, Jon sees that all of them are already at the register. Even Rickon seems to be in the middle of purchasing something.

“Those better be my supplies,” Bran mutters darkly. He menacingly begins to wheel himself in the store, ready to give Rickon a great verbal lashing.

Jon tucks a stray curl behind his ear. If anyone asks, he refuses to admit he’s flirting. “I have to get going. Their parents are going to want to hear about this.”

“Pity, I would have loved to get to know you better. Perhaps, I can rectify that by getting your number?”

Guilt washes over Jon. “I’m sorry I have a—.” Oh. Jon pauses. Oh. He thinks again. Does he still have a boyfriend? Jon is no stranger to being asked out, but when he was with Robb, there was no temptation to be with another man. Now, here is an attractive, charming young man whose interested in him, but can he—? Oh.

What was he to Robb?

“I have a busy summer. And I—“

Willas holds his hand up. “It’s fine if you’re not interested.” He’s about to walk away, when Jon yells at him “that’s not it” before he could stop himself.

Willas stumbles for the first time that day, and Jon catches him. Willas clutches onto his shoulders, and winks. “You were saying?”

Jon tries to release him, but Willas has a firm grip. “You are interested?”

“I’m…” What could he say? “It’s complicated.” Jon winces at the stereotypical response. “I don’t feel right saying yes to you when I can’t commit.”

“Then don’t.”

Jon is taken back at the suggestion. Willas stabilizes himself, and fishes Jon's phone out of Jon's pocket. It is far too personal and aggressive, but Jon doesn't have the will to push him off, partially in fear of causing another injury. “I know I'm taking advantage of your kindness, Jon, and the fact that I'm handicapped. But I'm putting my number in your phone. You can delete it if you want, but one day, hopefully sometime during the three weeks I have left here, you're going to call me. And we're going to have a very, very romantic date, where I sweep off your feet, you tell me about your complications, and we...work around them.”

Jon understands why people say it’s all about confidence. A man can run a company, build an army, and lead a country based on how wonderful people believe he is. So Jon takes the cell phone. He doesn't delete the number. He watches Willas walk away, and regrets it immediately.
I really wish I hadn't start watching Game of Thrones again because I regret not putting Lyanna Mormont somewhere in this story. God damn, that girl is a badass.

Anyways, um...remember how in earlier chapters I complained about not knowing anything about England? Well that may change soon considering it's extremely likely I will be getting my Masters in the UK next year. So yay...very exciting. I say likely and not actually, because I can't get a Visa until I get a CAS from the University of Birmingham and I can't get a CAS without a degree verification and my school takes 8-10 weeks to give me one of those. God damn it.

Yet, I've been pretty dedicated to my writing, and am trying my best to post as many chapters as I possibly can to make up for my lack of commitment for the last year. Thank you very much, all of you!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It should be universal acknowledged that anything that can go wrong will, and anything that has gone wrong will only get worse. When that happens, one can only blame themselves. Either for not taking the proper precautions to prevent them or for leading themselves to the circumstances. For whatever reason, Margaery never hesitates to to ensure the best possible circumstances of any situation. She’s the woman who gets things done. She doesn’t complain about them. Whereas some like to call her a manipulative bitch with a snake’s tongue, she simply saw herself as diplomatic.

For those reasons, no one was particularly surprised when Margaery decided to become a solicitor. After all, she’s the girl who crushes compliment fishers with sly notes of improvement and a carefully worded critique. If they’re feeling fat, why wouldn’t they accept her offer to go on a jog? Is it wrong to ask a person who’s complaining about their intelligence when was the last time they read a book? The only question was whether she would attend Oxford, a solid school with a livelier reputation, or Cambridge, a home of tradition and serene landscapes.

“It has to be Cambridge,” her grandmother decided for her. The senior Cabinet member would listen to no further arguments towards her alma mater and its rival, and despite her son’s blubbering (most likely due to his own rejection Oxford—though he never tried out for Cambridge and would have been turned down regardless), Margaery complied.

Her third year into her degree, and a summer’s vacation before her LPC, Margaery is unpacking her bags from her vacation in Croatia. It is late morning, perfect for a quaint little lunch on the patio, surrounded by family who celebrated her final year of Cambridge, Triple First Honors, of course. She hums a tune by Lily Allen, considers dyeing her hair blonde and blaming the sun for her “natural” highlights when she returns to public life. She removes a mint colored, vintage bikini with neon linings, a black one piece, and few souvenirs for her ‘friends’. When she is finished, she leaves her bedroom to enter the dining area of her family home in Norwich. Rich scents of fresh blackberry pies and raspberry tarts, glorious strawberries with a few glasses of daytime champagne rest on the table. Lights fill the room, pretty little maids giggling and happy to be employed at the Tyrell manor and not, God forbid, the Lannisters or worse, the Arryns.

Margaery takes her glass and sits down next to her grandmother. Her eldest brother, Willas, is shown on the tablet, actually reading the newspaper despite being miles away, unlike their father who holds one up for display. Willas prized himself on his filial nature, and despite being in Yorkshire for work, he refuses to miss a family breakfast. “Traditions,” he once told Margaery, “Traditions must be kept sacred if a family is to stay together.”

On the screen, he mumbles a bit about what Margaery presumes to be animal husbandry or perhaps agricultural advances. Instead of admitting her ignorance, Margaery makes a vague, yet supportive comment that causes Willas to smile, all pixels and high definition. Technology has gone such long way. Her mother sips her tea with a spot of brandy for good health and her father whispers sweet nothings about her beauty, ever the lovebirds. Loras is on a training camp with his teammates, and Garlan is out in the countryside with his dainty and darling wife, disconnected from the world.

“He’s thoreauing his life away,” Willas jokes, relishing in how their grandmother rolls her eyes at the pun. Margaery giggles.

A few strawberries in and lightheaded from the far too strong champagne, Olenna discusses what
office Margaery plans to work at and what type of solicitation she’s decided on. “Divorce, dear. That’s where all the money’s at, and men don’t die like they used to.” “Our company could use another—” “Don’t interrupt me, Willas. It’s rude. Now, my dear. Let’s talk about marriage. I have a lecture for you.”

Margaery smiles genuinely, mostly amused because conversations about men with her grandmother always started with a good story. “Now Margaery, there’s no rush given your age, but as you advance in your career, it’ll be nice to keep a warm body in bed. No need to be an old maid like Willas—”

“I’m waiting—”

“For true love, yes my dear, we all heard the story,” Olenna shushes. “Here, Margaery. Look at your brother: smart, handsome, more money than God. Yet he’s single.” She spat out the word like curdled milk, as if his sitting there, alone, is some sort of public offense. “Wears his loneliness like it’s badge of honor. He can’t even blame the leg, you know. I won’t allow it. In my day, men didn’t do much in the bedroom. They just laid there, like some impotent starfish. Women were expected to do all the work. Women and bottoms. All you needed in the bedroom was a pointer facing up and a pretty mouth, and you were set.”

Willas, to his credit, laughs. At thirty-one years old, the CEO of Tyrell industries has gotten this speech a thousand times over, in a hundred different variations. “—And look at that gout, I dare say it’s getting worst! That’s what they do. Handicaps are like cysts, the infections bubbles and prospers all over your back, and suddenly, you don’t care anymore. You live with it, and let me tell you Margaery, rich people living alone is just not proper.”

“Worry not, I could always call up one of the nice young chaps I’ve met in Croatia,” Margaery teases her grandmother.

The elder woman scrunches up her noise. “Nonsense, the only good thing that country has is cheap liquor and spectacular seafood—that’s why their residents have so many crabs.”

Alerie lets out a snort, and Mace’s laughter is heard, always following the lead of his lady wife when it came to appropriateness and social cues. Margaery then thinks of another question. A more prevalent question. “Would your interest in our love lives have anything to do with Daenerys Targaryen moving up her wedding date?”

Oh, and wasn’t that news absolutely scandalous! Daenerys Targaryen, after the scathing report from one of the tabloid magazines, Daenerys sequentially moved up her wedding date from late August to mid-July, and uninvited every reporter from the procedure. She claimed there was a “lack of venue space.” She proceeds to invite families from around the world, turning it from the wedding of the decade to the wedding of the century. The reporter has probably lost her job, and is regretting her actions as they speak.

“As a matter of fact…”

“Grandmother, really,” Willas reprimands. “Haven’t you always told us to set trends, not follow them?”

“Not when it concerns highly publicized events where everybody is watching. Do you know how humiliating it will be for the both of you to show up alone? Why, even I managed to wrangle up some scoundrel for the night—”

“Mother!” Mace looks absolutely horrified. Willas chokes on his coffee before he starts laughing.
“Grandmother, are you seeing someone?” Bless her, Margaery sounds absolutely delighted.

Olenna waves off their excitement. “Margaery dear, let’s not waste our time with questions. Then we’ll spend our whole day asking ‘who, what, where, when.’ All very tiresome matters for an old woman—”

“Mother, is this true? Where in the heavens did you meet this man?” Mace sounds aghast. “Do we know him? How old is he? He could be a criminal for all we know!”

“Oh hush up dear. When you get to be my age, you stop looking for men with a good heart and start searching for men with a beating one.” Olenna takes a bite of her omelet. “The point is, Willas, you need to find someone. Nobody wants to be seventy and alone, trust me on that.”

“I thought this was about Margaery?”

“Oh don’t be silly,” Olenna scoffs. “This is about you. You’re thirty-one years old. With your looks and talents, people will begin to suspect there’s something wrong with you if you’re still single. Margaery is a tenacious lady, she’ll get married whenever she wants and not a moment too soon.” Olenna winks at her favorite grandchild. “Of course, I do expect her to have a date before the wedding.”

“Of course, grandmother,” Margaery agrees, pleasantly enough. “How would you like him?”

“Young, rich, hopefully with a title but not a necessity. Stupid, preferably,” Olenna suggests. “Marriages only work with two types of husbands: the ones who know nothing and the ones who know everything. Margaery, you are far too clever for the latter. Willas—”

“Yes, grandmother?” Willas asks tiredly.

“Find someone. You’re in Yorkshire, yes?”

“It would seem so.”

“Don’t be cheeky, Willas. Your leg can’t support the sarcasm.”

“Yes, grandmother. I am in Yorkshire.”

“Well, good. Yorkshire is the home of the Stark family. I hear they have a daughter who is of age. She seems to be a profitable match. Good breeding, pretty, a bit dull but that’s all the rage with women these days.”

“She’s 17.”

“As I said—of age.”

“I’m only nine years younger than her father.”

“Ned Stark married young. It’s not like you went to school with him!”

“What if she has a boyfriend?”

“If I haven’t heard about it, my dear, he’s obviously not worth mentioning. What was it your brother used to say? ‘Just because there’s a goalie doesn’t mean you can’t score.’”

No one dares correct her. Instead, Willas shakes his head in defeat. He asks, finally. “What if I already found someone?”
Olenna raises an eyebrow. “Have you?”

“It’s very much a possibility. And try switching pronouns, grandmother.” Willas drinks the last of his beverage and looks Olenna straight in the eye. Even if he is protected by miles of distance, it is still a bold move.

Olenna does not bite. “A possibility isn’t an opportunity, Willas. Bring whoever you like. All I ask is for you to bring a suitable, preferably beautiful, partner to the biggest event of the decade.” She bites into a tomato. “That way, even he’s an idiot, he’ll at least be nice to look at. A painting may not serve a purpose but we still hang it, don’t we?” With that being said, she motions one of the maids to take away her plate. It is time for her daily stroll in the gardens.

Margaery wipes a crumb from the side of her lip. “Do not fret, brother. You know how she is about appearances.”

“Oh, I don’t worry about our dear grandmother. She knows that in the end, I’m the one who has to take care of her into old age. I’m quite looking forward to wheeling her to book clubs and bingo nights. Good day, Margaery.”

Willas turns off his screen before he hears the rush of laughter from his family. He leans back on his chair, thinks for a bit about how being unattached has affected his life, and starts messaging his leg. Finally, he gets up, winces at the pain, and sits back down. He glances at his tablet and then his phone.

He contemplates his options; he could wait for the beautiful, curly haired boy he met at the mall yesterday to call, or he could have another chat with his darling sister about her trip to Croatia. He could have a private conversation with his grandmother, and perhaps annoy her until she reveals the identity of her suitor. His brothers are out of the question. Maybe, he could take his grandmother’s advice, and make an appointment with the Starks. He’s always wanted to visit their legendary reserves. He might even see a wolf.

Chapter End Notes

So...a lot of things to get through today.
1. The next two chapters are going to be pure angst—and some angsty sex. Maybe a little laughter but it'll be less of a 'haha' situation and more of a 'haha oh shit there’s pain and now I’m fapping and laughing through tears.’
2. The next two will be completely centered on Jon and Robb’s relationship. And a brief mentioned to Bran's accident.
3. I’m want to be more receptive to my readers so if anybody has a request for this story, now is a good time to tell me. I’m only finished up to chapter 20. Want to see two people interact? Tell me. Want me to focus on a certain couple? I'll give it a shot.
4. I’m going to try updating on Fridays. Nothing seems to happen on Fridays.
Catelyn is deciding between dresses for the wedding when her children arrive home. There's angry thumping and threats, a bit of pleading, and a great deal terror being promised. She sighs, and calls her assistant to tell her to bring both tomorrow; she’ll decide after trying them on. She hangs up and braves herself for the storm ahead. When she moves to the living room, Catelyn is immediately bombard with angry accusations and screeching defenses. She understands nothing, and hesitates to go further so that she may actually understand what is going on.

 Arya walks past her with a shopping bag, and makes a quick comment about how she ‘bought a dress so no one can complain. It’s black. Like my soul. And my feelings about going to this wedding.’ Indeed, Catelyn does not complain. It’s the best she’s going to get from her youngest daughter. Bran goes with her upstairs, and shields his eyes from his mother when she greets him. Already, she can tell something is wrong.

 When Jon sees her, a sullen Rickon follows. His face scrunches up in preparation for the lashing he is about to receive and his fist curls. She wonders what he did now, and why Jon looks so upset.

 “Aunt Cat, I don’t want you to get too worked up...”

 “What did he do?” And Catelyn, at this point, is more tired than worried. She and Ned have settled on Rickon being the troublemaker of the family, and nothing he does can surprise her anymore. She stifles a yawn.

 Jon doesn’t say anything at first.

 Catelyn raises an eyebrow. “Well, spit it out. Hurry up. How am I to punish Rickon this time?”

 Jon bites his lip. “Bran is fine,” he begins.

 The hair on Cat’s back rises, and a strong, defined grimace appears on her face. Suddenly, she is entirely awake and a fierce presence overcomes all of them. “What. Did. Rickon. Do.”

 “Bran didn’t get any serious injuries, and he’s not angry—well, not angry now. He was upset but they’re mostly over it.”

 Jon reveals the rest of the story with grave reluctance. He wonders if he can backtrack his claim. He can see the fiery rage of his aunt and decides that like Band-Aid, it is best to get the news over with. “Rickon pushed Bran’s wheelchair and slid him across the mall.”

 “RICKON STARK!”

 “Bran is fine. He was able to use his breaks before he crashed anything. He didn’t even get that far. I was able to catch up to him before anything bad happened.”

 “Anything bad happened? ANYTHING BAD HAPPENED? My son was thrown like a ragdoll by his own brother and you don’t see that as something bad happening? Jon, what is wrong with you?”

 “Aunt Cat—”
Catelyn’s entire demeanor changed into a frazzled, unhinged creature hell bent on restitution. Rickon huddles behind Jon for protection. Jon does not know how this is going to end, but he knows well enough to never let a child witness their parents fighting—even if it’s just one of them. He nods at Rickon to leave while Catelyn continues her concerns.

“I knew I shouldn’t have let him out of the house. God, what was I thinking? Jon, why weren’t you paying attention to him? You know Bran can’t be left alone for too long. Damn it, how am I supposed to let him volunteer at the reserves now—”

“Bran is fine,” Jon interjects, entirely for Bran’s sake at this point. “It was a prank. It won’t happen again.”

Catelyn isn’t listening. “Where is Bran now? He must be absolutely traumatized!”

“Bran is not traumatized. He’s in his room, resting for the next couple of days. He’s very excited about the reserves. Please don’t take it away from him.”

“How can I not?” Catelyn all but screech. “After what happened today? Jon! Think of how Bran’s feeling. He probably doesn’t even want to go there anymore.”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing,” Jon defends. “And Bran desperately wants to work there. He’s wanted to since he was a little kid. He was begging me not to tell you because he thought you would forbid him from doing so.” Looks like he was right. "Aunt Cat, these things happen. Brothers prank each other all the time. Friends do that. Bran is no different.”

“Bran is different. He can’t be treated like everyone else. He can get hurt.”

Jon finds himself indignant on Bran's behalf. “Everyone gets hurt, Aunt Cat! That doesn't mean we lock them in a box or stick them in a bubble.”

"So we should just let them go galavanting into the wild, where they could get maimed or worst. Splendid idea, Jon. You are doing the Baratheons a major service!"

"I am trying to do Bran a service!" Jon counters.

"You can do that by actually watching over him and making sure he's okay!"

"We can’t treat him like an invalid his entire life!"

“I’m not treating him like an invalid, I’m taking care of him!” Catelyn denies. “You don’t understand!”

“He’s my cousin. I understand he wants some freedom and you’re—” The words die on Jon’s lips as he tries to rationally explain he’s stance. He stares deep into his aunt’s eyes. “The way you’re going at this is…you’re stifling him, Aunt Cat. The whole car ride home, he kept begging me not to tell you, because he’d knew you’d react like this. He—“

“Don’t Jon.”

Jon doesn’t listen. “He can’t reach his potential—”

“Jon I’m warning you to leave this—”

“—if you keep sheltering like a clipped bird—”

“How dare you—"
"—he's never going to learn how to survive. He needs space, Aunt Cat."

The words are a trigger for everything Cat fears. She remembers the police station, the courts, how that boy stared at her with such contempt, or worst, disgust at her behavior. He was acting as if he knew best, as if he cared for Bran all those days and nights, worrying whether he was going to wake up or not, holding him as he cried about never being able to walk again, to run, to climb, to swim, to be alive. *I know him better than you think, Mrs. Stark. I know his heart. You want to limit him, I want to set him free. He needs to hold the skies in his arms, and lift the sun on his skin. He needs space. He needs more than the disinfection and the training wheels. He needs the grass and the worms, the stars and clouds. Not the trash you feed him--a cripple's bible of self-pity and false hope. He is a hawk in the skies, not some clipped bird--*

"It should have been you!" Catelyn shouts. She yells it to an empty house, a declaration of frustration and anger, a fleeting moment of release for her own soul. She did not remember that Jon is there, right in front of her, always on her side.

The hallway chills and silence enters the house. Time stops for Catelyn and Jon, if only to give them an opportunity to save themselves from what will happen next, to take back anything they’ll regret. Catelyn hears the ringing in her ears, and the irritation builds and mounts onto her tongue like an icon on a skyscraper.

"Bran only got into the accident because he heard that you were visiting Robb at the reserves and he was jealous you were always spending more time with Robb than him. He thought that if he could go to the reserves by himself, you would like him more. He was *nine*, Jon. He wanted to be *free*, *independent*. So he left home without permission and then he crossed the street and he wasn’t looking and then that car—"

Catelyn wills herself to stop. Time began again. The realization of her confession hits her like a freight train, and before she can apologize. Jon stops her.

"I know."

Catelyn gasps softly. She wants to tell Jon she didn’t mean it but he continues.

"I know what happened. I’ve known for a while now."

"Jon, I didn’t mean to—"

Jon looks down at his feet. "It's why…it's why I haven’t come back in to visit. You were all mourning, and Bran hadn't woken up. I heard you talking to Uncle Ned about me and I remember you saying this wouldn't have happen if I...if I wasn't here. So I thought I leave, I just...I didn't want to stay where I wasn't wanted."

"Jon, that was--"

"You were angry. I've never seen you that angry, not even at my mum. But you...you were right. It was my fault. I thought that if I left, you'd get Bran back." Jon pauses. He smiles, and it's absolutely heartbreaking for Catelyn to see. She's never wanted to see that expression on any of her children's faces, certainly not because she caused it. "And you did. He came back to you, and I was gone and I thought: it's true. Everything is better when I'm gone. You'd get your family back, and I could...I could do something with my life. You Starks, you were always stronger together than with me."

Catelyn tries to say something—anything to make this better.

"Maybe I should have stayed away."
"Jon, please," Catelyn begs. She wants to get a word in, anything.

“I think Rickon—” Jon informs her, tone flat and unreadable. Catelyn wonders if that is worse than anger. “—needs to be punished. According to how you see fit, of course.”

“Jon, I’m sorry—“

“I’m going to go out for a bit. I think we both need to cool down.”

Jon wonders if he should wait for Aunt Catelyn to gather herself. She will want to make an apology soon, but the anger, the part in him that is so Lyanna in the sense of willpower and vindictiveness wants her to feel guilty. As guilty as he did when he heard of Bran’s accident, when he ignored Robb’s messages for four years until eventually, he forgotten what his cousin, his best friend looked like.

Jon’s never forgiven himself for Bran’s accident. And maybe, just this once, he wants someone else to feel his misery.

He is out of the manor when his phone rings and Robb’s number flashes on the screen. Jon didn’t bother to check if Robb was in the house prior to entering, but the thought of being with Robb, being comforted by Robb, made him weak. He is susceptible now, and if he sees Robb tonight, he knows he will fall for him again. It makes him want to ignore the vibrations.

“Hello?”

“Hey, is this Jon?”

That is not Robb’s voice.

“Yes, this is he.”

“Hey, I’m Dacey. I’m a friend of Robb’s. I’m calling to say that your boyfriend is utterly pissed right now. And I don’t know what’s going on with you two but Theon, you know, Robb’s friend, is acting like a total slag and—”

“Where are you guys?” Jon asks. He repeats the address for confirmation and adds it to his notes. “I’ll be there right away. Don’t…don’t let Theon go too far.” Jon dashes back to the manor to borrow the Stark’s car for the second time today. Catelyn is already upstairs. He breaks every speed limit possible, and he wonders briefly if the lack of law enforcement is because he’s too fast for the cops to bother, the neighborhood is completely empty, or that everyone in the county recognizes the Stark’s vehicle.

Robb, contrary to his friend’s beliefs, is neither plastered nor pissed, drunk nor legless. He is tipsy, red with bad judgement and ill intention plans, and lacks hindsight and paired vision. Theon is sitting comfortably in his lap, running his hands through Robb’s hair and whispering dirty suggestions into his ear. Robb appreciates the effort, but tells Theon to save it for when Jon gets here. Theon justifies himself by saying it would be odd for Theon to suddenly start hitting on Robb upon Jon’s arrival.

“That would hardly look natural, would it?”

Robb reluctantly agrees, but warns him not to go too far. His friends are watching as well (ah, the intensely brutish Dacey Mormont, and the honorable Jory Cassel who glares at Theon with such fury, and a few other unmentionables) and he doesn’t want them to think his relationship with Jon is cheap as few bottles of tequila and swill.
Theon pouts, but doesn’t hesitate to enjoy the moment. He’s running his hand up Robb’s thigh when he spots the darkly dressed figure coming into the bar. There goes his night. Jon comes in, ignores the attention of a woman who asks him to show her a good time, and goes further into the pub. They’re sitting on couches, happily chatting, when Jon, in all his sulky glory, catches them. His expression is far from happy.

Robb, out of habit, removes Theon from his lap but Theon remains firm in his seat. His reminds Robb that they’re “making him jealous, remember? Play along.” And Robb does so obediently. He laughs a little harder, asks about Jon in his whispers in Theon’s ears (“is he looking at me? Is it working? Do you think he’ll drag me away from here?”) Theon laughs. He doesn’t find anything of what Robb is saying amusing, but he knows from Jon’s nostril’s flaring that he’s upset, he’s furious, and yes, he’s jealous. Theon knows that jealous people do stupid things. When he agreed to Robb’s plan, he was aware that Robb might have the right idea. Jon may be overcome with possessiveness and drag Robb back into his arms and have his wicked way with him. Or—

He might get so angry; he’ll leave Robb for good. He will have had enough, knowing that Robb hasn’t changed his ways. He can move on from Jon. Jon was nothing to him.

So Theon rubs Robb’s shoulders, nibbles on his ear, and laughs like a whore in a brothel.

Just. For. Jon. To. See.

*Watch me, Jon Snow. You won the battles, but I'm going to be fighting the war. I'm going to fuck your boyfriend so good he screams, and it'll be my name he'll remember. He's more mine than yours now.*

“Robb,” Jon addresses.

Robb waves at Jon. Casual, and without any of the clinginess that Jon so desperately hated and craved at the same time. “Hey, Jon, everybody this is Jon. My boyfriend.”

Jon nods at the guests, who sit awkwardly, watching the events go by. None of them know what to do. “Robb, you’re drunk.”

“I’m not drunk.” He really isn’t. “I’m just hanging out with some friends, having a pint, and wondering when my boyfriend, you do remember we’re still together right, has been avoiding me all week?” Robb continues. “Hey, do fancy a pint? This pub serves some of the—”

“I’m driving,” Jon points out. “More specifically, I’m driving you home. Dacey,” he threw a look to the only girl at the table. “Called me to tell me you’re pissed, and obviously not in your right mind.” He glares at Theon, who flips him a ‘V.’

Robb, in attempt to sound nonchalant, shrugs. The action infuriates Jon, who’s so used to Robb’s affection and care. Robb removes Theon in his lap, gently, and gets out of the booth. He goes up to Jon. Jon can smell the booze, and look into his red, glossy eyes, and wants no part of it. He’s seen Robb drunk before and this time—this is different. When he tries to kiss Jon, the Snow boy turns away.

Robb, in the most heartbreaking matter, shrugs again. “Guess I’m staying here, then.”

Dacey, who’s concern is that an older sister now, suggests he go with Jon. “You’re not yourself.”

Robb refuses. “I want to stay where I’m wanted.” He pulls Theon closer to him.

Theon giggles, and agrees. “Oh, you’re definitely wanted.” And then Theon decides that in spite of
Robb’s potential anger, the temptation is too great. He kisses Robb, lathers saliva onto his tongue and suckles on the flesh like candy. He completely ravishes the inside of his mouth.

Watching them was like having someone punch Jon in the gut.

Robb is stunned by the action. He attempts to dislodge Theon, who is aggressively going at his face. When he finally goes up for air, Robb laughs. He tries his best to play it off as two friends playing around and fails miserably. Everyone stays quiet.

Jon is livid.

If Robb was any more drunk, he wouldn’t be able to see the other emotion nestling in Jon’s eyes. Jon, who is so used to hiding his disappointment and resigned to dealing with the worst that comes, looks heartbroken.

Robb broke his heart.

Jon doesn’t stay for excuses. “You can drink yourself to death for all I care,” he spits out. He rushes out of the pub, praying no one can see the tears building up in his eyes. He gets to the car, and ignores any attempts from Robb to salvage the situation. He takes deep breaths and fights the tears from falling. He’s not going to cry over this. Instead, he punches a nearby post and ignores the pulsing in his fist. "Asshole!" He shouts to the sky. "Fucking lying, two timing, asshole!"

He gets into the car and drives back home, where he is equally not welcomed. At least the manor is big enough for him to avoid the Starks that hated him. He considers sleeping in Arya’s room because no one bothers her. He wants that, the loneliness, the security of solitary and the predictable nature that comes with relying on oneself and oneself only. Fuck this, Arya and his mother were right. People are undependable. They say things, and they let other people walk away from them.

No one wants to fight for love anymore. This isn't the Middle Ages. They want you to give yourself to them, and then, they get to decide whether they want to keep you, Jon. Sweetheart, I want you to promise to never give yourself to anybody. Never be the second person in anybody's heart. Never be content with being cherished if it makes you weak. If they deserve you, they'll fight for you. They'll give up everything to be with you.

Jon thinks about Robb. Robb, who has obviously gotten over him and under Theon. He knew there was something between them. To think, he was willing to…he was going to try and work it out with Robb. Maybe it was his punishment. He planned to use Aunt Cat’s words as justification for his reunion with Robb. Maybe the Gods saw his bitterness, and raised him irony. Robb didn’t want him anymore.

Jon grabs his phone. Then he drops it, wondering what he’s thinking. No matter how angry he is, he still cares about Robb, maybe even l— and the admittance of that emotion, love, makes what he does next all the more painful. He dials a number on his phone and waits for the person to pick up.

Chapter End Notes

1. I’m really enjoying the discourse going on in the reviews towards Robb and Jon’s relationship. I think the reviewer Rose aptly described how I envision Jon’s thought process before writing his behavior, but I also like hearing how the Theon/Robb shippers justify their reasoning for wanting to see them together. This is great. You guys
are great.

2. I have no plan on how to end this story. It can go on forever for all I care. I do, however, take into account reviewers’ opinions. So yes. Keep on suggesting things. Keep on asking.

3. The Brojen love is strong. As a warning, though, Jojen is going to get very creepy in this story.

4. I’m redoing people’s ages. I’ll try my best to edit the story to fit the new circumstances. A lot of people have expressed their concerns about Bran and Arya’s ages, and to be honest I was beginning to regret making them so young. The changes aren’t that extreme, but fit the storyline.

Here are the new ages:
- Rheagar (48) > Viserys (29) > Daenerys (24)
- Brandon (44) > Ned (42) > Lyanna (36) > Benjen (34)
- Catelyn (44) > Lysa (39) > Edmure (32)
- Robert (42) > Stannis (38) > Renly (29/30)
- Cersei (36) > Jaime (36) > Tyrion (28)
- Willas (32) > Garlan (27) > Loras (24) > Margaery (21)
- Jon (21) > Robb (20) > Sansa (17) > Arya (16) > Bran (14) > Rickon (11)
- Meera (19) > Jojen (17)
- Gendry (18) > Joffrey (17) > Myrcella (14) > Tommen (11)
- Rodrik (29) > Maron (28) > Asha (24) > Theon (21)
- Sandor (30), Gendry (18), Robin (11)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Warning: M/M sex scene

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes half an hour for Robb to realize that Jon is not coming back. When that happens, Robb rushes out of the bar, hoping that Jon is simmering in the Stark's family car, trying to collect himself and waiting for Robb to catch up to him. Jon will yell at him. He might punch the wall next to him and scream his bloody lungs out, and Robb will take every insult, every degrading remark and he will not argue. He will listen and get on his knees and beg for Jon's forgiveness. But he can't. Jon is nowhere in sight. Robb fucked up. He fucked up so badly, he could cry. And maybe it’s the alcohol, or Jon’s desertion finally hitting him, full force, knife through the cut, and punch to the face, but Jon left him. Robb starts crying and swearing and cursing the gods, and fuck, fucking shit, he's such a fucking screw up! Theon runs outside to see a sobbing Robb, and pulls him into a hug. A genuine hug. Not the kind of hug he gave when Robb’s girlfriends broke up with him and he was happy to be the only one in his arms again, or the kind where he just wanted to feel Robb’s skin. This is the kind of hug Theon wants to give Robb because he’s suffering and there’s nothing he hates more than to see Robb in pain.

Theon waits for his cries to die down, and wipes the water from Robb’s eyes. Robb asks Theon if he looks like he’s been drinking.

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

They return to the bar, where Theon orders a round of shots and another pint of beer and Robb just inhales it until he’s sick. He talks about Jon. He talks about him every second he can, until Theon’s ears feel like they're bleeding and even he’s beginning to love Jon a little. Theon’s about to call for another pint, when Sansa’s screeching voice silences everyone. “Robert Stark, you put that pint down right now or so help me Gods, I will shove a beer bottle up your arsehole and drag you by a leash.”

Theon doesn’t know what’s scarier, Sansa yelling or Sansa sounding exactly like her mother when she does.

Robb is as pissed as Dacey thought he was an hour earlier, and while he fights Sansa’s grip for the first few minutes, he eventually submits, whimpering about her cruel treatment. Theon limps towards them, and Sansa begrudgingly takes them both into her car. Robb is tossed into the passenger seat while Theon is shoved in the back.

“I can’t believe you! I’ve never heard Jon so angry before! How could you—Gods, do you even—you know he’s in his bedroom right now, listening to angry Rhaegar Targaryen music—like—I didn’t even know classical music could sound so warlike and he’s listening to it, acting like some brooding, mopey child—and you—what the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Sansa,” Robb whines. His head hurts so much. "Sansa...it hurts. Everything hurts right now.”
“Oh, oh I’m so sorry I’m hurting your feelings,” Sansa mocks. She makes a harsh break at the red light, causing whiplash for Theon and Robb’s stomach to lurch. “If you throw up in my car, I swear to Gods, Robb, you will clean it up.”

She glares at Theon who is trying to keep awake. Then, she sees Robb, who is already lulling into sleep. Sansa sighs for the millionth time tonight. “The least you could have done is break up with him first.” She turns to Robb for an explanation, but he doesn’t hear her. His snores are light throughout the drive home.

When they get back, Theon offers to carry Robb. Sansa watches him stumble his way to the door, and almost trip on his own feet. She promptly refuses. “You’re only going to make things worse.”

Theon glares through the gogginess, and moves towards the stairs on his own.

Robb is heavy, weighs a ton when there’s a pound of alcohol and piss inside him, and he thrashes. He tries to escape Sansa’s arms, and more than once he succeeds. But when Robb is drunk, he is also weak. And slow. Sansa catches up to him easily, and even allows him to continue some way on his own before she gathers him up again, body leaning on hers, and takes him to his room. He’s mumbling about something, and sounds absolutely miserable. Sansa’s only experience of Robb legless was his sweet sixteen, and he was the happiest drunk she’s ever seen. All red faced and giddy with upcoming adulthood. Robb mumbles something but the only words she can decipher through his slurs is Jon’s name. When he passes his room and starts pounding on Jon’s, Sansa realizes he’s trying to apologize.

Jon never went to sleep. The night is plagued with nightmares and former regrets resurfacing. He hears pounding on his door, and Robb’s voice. He comes out to tell him to be quiet—he doesn’t need another reason for everyone to hate him. He also wants to punish him, to make him feel like shit for rejecting him tonight. The second he opens the door, Robb tackles him. He is begging for forgiveness. The babbling and the crying and the sweet nothings, spoken when Jon feels like the most worthless person in the world, is exactly what he needs to hear tonight.

Robb tells Jon he is perfect, smart, witty, kind—that he is deserving of more than Robb (and wasn’t that the kicker? Robb Stark thinking someone was above him). Jon holds him. Finally, he lets go and tucks him into bed, and strokes his hair. When Robb says ‘I love you,’ Jon whispers it back because he knows it won’t be remembered the next day.

“Coward.” Someone call him.

Sansa waits by the doorway. Her stare is filled with judgement and remnants of disgust. She looks at him like she wants to say something, and he doesn’t doubt it. Sansa always wants to say something, to correct something that can’t be fixed. Finally, she sighs, full of frustration and fatigue, and walks away.

Jon leaves to follow her. He stops when he is pulled back—Robb took a hold of his hand and refused to let go. Jon, tempted to stay and lie with him again, decides to leave. It’s a bit of struggle, but eventually, he gets away.

Sansa sits in the dining room table alone, eating leftover lemon cakes in silence. When Jon comes in, she says nothing. She does not spare him a glance.

“Are you angry with me?”

Sansa takes another bite and chews. Slowly. Looks at the wall with eyes glossed over, and a mouth pursed with petulance and chews.
“Sansa, if there’s something you want to say, just say it.”

Half her cake is left, and Sansa keeps on eating.

Jon gives up, and turns his back on Sansa, who finally puts down her fork and tells him she’s hungry.

“What?”

“Tonight, I was supposed to be out getting dinner with my boyfriend. But then you called so now I’m hungry. And I want something to eat. You’re the only one of us who can cook and I figured you owe me.”

Jon could protest, but he doesn’t. He is a pushover for the Starks, always has been. “Hash browns okay?”

“Can’t cook. Can’t complain. I’ll take anything at this point.”

He finds a frying pan and grabs potatoes and onions from the fridge, and seasoning from the cupboards. Cheese is already on the counter. “He’s your brother, too,” Jon mutters. He lights the stove and pours some oil into the pan.

“But he’s your boyfriend. Or was he? I’ve been so confused the last week.”

Jon grips the knife handle a little too tightly. He chops the potatoes. “I haven’t decided yet.”

“Robb has. Aren’t you being unfair to him? Leading him on when you’re not sure.”

If Jon is not so frustrated, he would have patted himself on the back for his composure. He wants to yell at her that she doesn’t understand, she’s a child, but realizes that would sound too petulant. Instead, he tells her. “Sansa, I’m sorry you had to pick up your own brother from a pub when he was passed out. But I couldn’t—I needed some time to myself. Please understand that.”

Sansa stares at him. Jon hopes she is finished interrogating him and they can wallow in their own thoughts as always. Much to his surprise, she agrees with him. “What don’t I understand? You needed time to think. You just watched your boyfriend make out with another man—a man who, most undoubtedly, has been planning your demise from the very beginning. You have every right to be angry.”

Jon pauses. “But?”

“But nothing. Theon went too far, and Robb lets him.” Like he always does. “It’s about time Robb learns from his mistakes.”

Jon frowns. Her words spark a series of memories that lead to an obvious, if not frustrating conclusion. “Theon does this often.”

“Sabotage Robb’s relationships so he can comfort him? Of course. Robb is his reason to live.” Sansa’s expression turns sour. “He’s been in love with him since they were teenagers. Robb never felt the same way, and instead of confessing his feelings, he did nothing. Oh wait, that’s a lie. He singlehandedly ruined every one of Robb’s chances for love.” Sansa shrugs. “It’s quite fitting, isn’t it? Robb’s oblivious to everyone’s feelings but his own.”

Jon looks down to the frying roots, crackling as they browned to the desired amount of crispiness. He adds pepper. “I fell right into his trap. Did you know what he was doing?”
Sansa nods. “Theon is pretty sympathetic when he wants to be, and...a part of me hoped it would happen.” Jon gives her a look, beckoning her to continue.

“I want Robb to be happy. I’ve always wanted that, for all of my siblings. I wanted Robb to finally settle down and find someone who love him for who he is.” Sansa gets up and grabs two glasses and a pitcher of milk. “Careful what you wish for.”

Jon chuckles darkly. “I guess I must have been a disappointment.”

“No. You are perfect for Robb.” Sansa looks at him. “But you don’t think so, do you?”

No, I’m not, Jon thinks. He doesn’t answer with that. “If I gave him up, at least I know he’ll be loved.”

Sansa’s smile is tinged with sadness. “And that’s why it’s you I’m worried about, not Robb.”

Jon almost drops his spatula. He asks, “Why would you be worried about me? I’ll be fine.”

“Fine is not love,” Sansa clarifies. “Fine is for people who are content with being unhappy. You’ve always been fine, Jon. You don’t accept love easily. You accept blame before you even think to take a compliment.”

“Sansa—”

“I know what happened with mum.”

Jon stays silent. He turns off the stove to keep himself from burning her meal.

“I was coming downstairs, and I...I heard everything. I heard what mother said, and it was horrible—we don’t blame you, not at all—”

“I know. Sansa, you don’t have to—”

“No,” Sansa tells him firmly. “You need to hear this.”

Jon listens.

Sansa swallows her milk to give her time to collect her thoughts. “But you accept it. You’ve always have.” She looks over at Jon, and he stares at her in disbelief. “Do you remember, when we were children and Arya broke that man’s window? And she was all moody and ready to run, but you went ahead and told them you did it. And they loathed you for it. They blamed it on your mother, and called you a bastard.”

Jon did remember. He remembers every horrid insult thrown at him, and how they grabbed him by the arm and called his uncle. They called him an ingrate, a stupid troublemaker who needed to be punished. Ned had to come over to pay for the damages. Arya had confessed to their parents immediately, but the damage had been done. “Arya tried to tell them the truth, but no one believed her. To make her feel better, you told her it was your idea to play football so either way, it was your fault. That was the first time I saw her cry.” Sansa shakes her head. “Do you know why she was crying?”

“She was sad I had to get into trouble.”

“No, Jon. She was crying because you actually thought it was your fault.” Sansa is on a brink of tears. “You actually believed you were responsible for Arya’s actions. You were genuine when you
said sorry. Jon… I don’t want to be cruel but I’m begging you. Don’t do this to yourself.”

“I don’t understand.” Jon is exasperated, and he wants the conversation to end. He grabs a plate and tries to ignore what Sansa is saying. “Listen, I’m just going to leave your plate here and get some sleep—”

Sansa wipes away the tears from her eyes. She continues with a sense resilience only seen in soldiers. “Robb is going to win you over. I know it. We all know it. He’s going to convince you to run back into his arms, and live happily ever after. But it's not going to be like that. This is real life, and there are no 'happily ever afters.' Robb isn’t going to be the one who’s going to suffer in this relationship.”

“Sansa, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Sansa’s eyes turn cold. Jon has never seen her like this, and he wonders what has happened in the last year that has aged her so. “I do. I know that you’re the bastard, and he’s the Stark heir. I know he’s the golden child who does everything right, and you’re the child who’s never had a real home. I know what they say about Aunt Lyanna. ‘I pity the man who falls for her. He’ll get eaten alive.’ ‘Such a shame that a man like Rickard Stark raised a whore.’ ‘No wonder that child is so screwed up. Look at his mother.’ Do you remember that?”

Jon remembers every word.

"When they find out who you are, Robb is going to be the man kind enough to look past your faults and love you. But you? You’re the whore who seduced him and led him down the wrong path. At best, you two will be made fun of and that feels like shit.”

Jon slams the kitchen counter. Sansa winces. “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he repeats, though his words feel more hollow than before.

“Jon, please…”

Somewhere inside Jon knows she’s not lying. He’s only ever heard rumors about Sansa’s boyfriend from Arya, but he knows the man has never met Ned or Catelyn. Sansa isn’t stupid. She knows it is only a matter of time before they meet, and she’s prepared for the worst by the looks of it. Jon wonders if she’s willing to give everything up for this mysterious man.

“Love is hard. Love deemed disgusting by society is harder. The mockery, the dirty looks, the rumors; that’s not something that goes away, not in this family. And it stays in this family. You have to be willing to fight for him, and that’s not possible if you’re not sure he’s worth fighting for.” She walks up to him and embraces him. The action stuns Jon, and finally, he weakly wraps his arms around her. “I love my boyfriend. He loves me. I fought for him and he fought for me. We’re not what you call an appropriate couple but we’re stronger because of it. I’m so happy.”

She pulls away. She wipes a stray hair from his face. “I want my brother to be happy, but he’s not the one paying the cost for this. Decide for both of you what’s right. If you love Robb, you need to decide how you’re going to be in his life. If he can’t understand the consequences of his actions, you need to make the decision that both of you can live with.”

Jon stares at her. He says nothing for the longest time. All he can do is look at Sansa in the eye, watch her blue orbs challenge to say something, to do anything.

"Can you fix yourself a plate? I already finished cooking the food," he asks her softly. Then he, like many weak men before him, walks away. Sansa watches him leave.
Jon knows he will not sleep that night, but he can still imagine a loop of Sansa’s words. When Jon enters the bedroom, Robb is resting soundly. Jon, weak for a lover’s touch, climbs into bed with him and wraps his arms around his cousin like old times. Tomorrow morning, he promises himself. He will tell him tomorrow morning.

This once, and just this once, Robb makes it easy for Jon. His internal clock forces him to wake up at an ungodly hour despite his blinding hangover. He is not alone, and for a second, he believes Theon has sneaked into his bed again. Instead, the warmth is derived from the body of a man much, much paler than Theon’s natural tan, and a wave of curls rest beside his on his bed—no, Jon’s bed. He is in Jon’s room, and his body flushes.

Jon groans, having finally been able to nod off. Robb kisses him before he becomes fully conscious. Jon wants to barter for more sleep but is distracted by the kisses for attention. He remembers where he is, and unlike the other times in this house, he does not pull away. Robb adds in tongue, and he licks his mouth with eagerness. Robb leans further in, and wraps his arms around Jon to hold him close.

Jon is awake, and isn’t pulling away. Robb wonders if he’s entered a dream, but knows it to be real when he grabs onto Jon’s ass and there’s a moan, a delicious, throaty moan with the potential to grow and multiply.

“I missed you so much,” Robb whispers. Jon says nothing. He keeps kissing Robb like it’s the last time they’ll see each other.

The morning is still young. No one is awake except for the maids, and none of them come upstairs at this hour. Jon and Robb enjoy their fleeting moment together. Robb strokes Jon’s hair and asks if he’s being too forward for asking him if they could make love. Jon says yes, but through his giggles he says he doesn’t care.

Robb slips his hands into the waistband of Jon’s shorts and cups and squeezes Jon’s cheeks until they are embedded into his memory. Jon’s moans grow louder as his kneading becomes harder and his fingers dip into into Jon’s hole. He adds in one finger, and then two. He pushes in and out of the puckering hole and lets it clench around him as if it is his cock. Jon grips onto Robb’s shirt.

“Does it hurt?”

“No…” Jon whimpers. “Keep going.”

Robb takes his fingers out and turns from Jon for a second. He masterfully twists his body so that he can reach the floor and grab his jeans. There, he takes out a bottle of lube. “I had high expectations last night.”

Jon wills himself not to laugh, and fails. He hugs him.

Robb is liberal with the lube, and douses himself with KY jelly. It’s been a while and he’s sure Jon’s been faithful—he's made sure of it. He plays with the goo for a bit, allows it to drip over his fingers and into Jon’s pried hole like cum. He returns to his ministrations and begins pumping in his fingers slowly, occasionally brushing against Jon’s prostate. Jon can only moan and cry. Robb plays with his body for endlessly, relishing in those soft noises of pleasure, and soaks in Jon’s wordless praise. Jon demands nothing, and allows Robb to do as he wish. Jon gasps when Robb stretches him from side to side, spreads his fingers so that he’s gaping.

Robb refuses to push his luck.
He lathers his cock up with the gel, and gets on top of Jon. He looks down at him and calls him beautiful. Jon blushes, but doesn’t deny it. Instead, he reaches up and kisses Robb again. The reaction is stunning so Robb continues the praise. “You’re beautiful. I can spend my entire life inside you. I just want to spend all day coming in you until you can’t walk.”

Robb cradles Jon’s hips close and enters him slowly, letting Jon feel every inch being worked into as if he was always meant to be there. Every small movement feels exquisite, and as he gets closer to Jon’s prostate, he can feel the heat of Jon’s body wrapped around him and the hole clench. Jon encourages Robb by willing his body to squeeze and tighten around Robb, milking him for a full load. Robb works a slow and steady piston into him. The sensation makes Jon’s eyes roll up and Robb has trouble breathing with the beauty below him.

They go on forever. Robb keeps Jon full but never sated. His cock thrusts up to Jon in long and slow motions, each hit rubbing Jon’s insides with more liquids and gels until he’s absolutely slippery and Robb’s dripping out of his hole. All the while they kiss, they bite, they mark. Jon wraps Robb up in his legs and tells him to never stop.

When they are finished, Jon takes one last look at Robb. Happy, sated Robb who’s probably dreaming of their wedding, their lives on this estate, and their dogs, happily running together in the woods. Jon knows what Robb wants, and the desire grips at Jon’s heart like an anchor tied to a man. Robb wants to take Jon to dinner parties and introduced him as his partner. He wants Jon to be happy, and he wants the insults and slurs to stop.

But they won’t.

“I’m sorry.”

Robb startles from his post coital high. He turns to Jon, still smiling. “What for?”

“I’m sorry,” Jon repeats, unable to form the words. “I’m so sorry. This wasn’t fair to you.”

Robb becomes worried. “Jon, what’s going on?”

Jon limps out of bed. He searches for his pants somewhere, and tries his best not to look Robb in the eye. Robb will have none of it. He grabs onto Jon’s hand and forces Jon to look at him. He pulls him back into the bed, and cups Jon’s face and keeps him there. Jon’s eyes are closed. “Jon, look at me.”

Jon turns his head.

“Look at me, damn it!”

Jon takes a deep breath and open his eyes. They are completely dry and loveless.

“Jon, what’s the matter? I thought…is it about last night? That was nothing. Theon and I were just playing around. I love you. You know I love you.”

Robb grabs onto Jon’s hands and presses his lips against them. He stays there for several moments and then kisses him again.

Jon takes a deep breath, and pushes him away.

“I can’t do this, Robb. We can’t do this. It’s not worth it.”

“No,” Robb refuses to listen. “No, I’m not hearing this bullshit again. I love you. That’s the only thing that matters. You and me. I care about you. I care about this. What we have is real, you love
me, don’t you?”

Jon has never said it to Robb, not when he was awake at least. He’s told Sansa, he’s told himself. But he’s never said it to Robb, and he doesn’t want to. He can’t. He knows those words are the only strands of hope Robb needs to hang on forever, and Jon won’t do that to him. Jon won’t do it for himself.

*It's okay to be selfish, Jon. That just means you're looking out for yourself, and there's nothing wrong with that. People like us...we need to love ourselves before we love other people.*

Jon is cruel. He has already done so much to Robb.

“I…I’m not ready to fight for you, Robb. I love you…like a brother. I realize that I’m not…we’re not worth the trouble. I can’t love you in the way you love me. I’m sorry. Please…let me go.”

Robb stays silent.

"Robb? Please...I'm ending it. For good. I...you'll find someone else. You've always have. Okay? Let go."

Robb lets go of his hand. He gives up like a desperate man who handing by a cliff. He watches Jon dress himself, and as he looks for a shirt, Robb stops him.

“No,” Robb says, the words coming out automatically.

Jon tries not to cry. “Robb, I have to go. I—” He gets up. Robb stops him.

“I’ll leave,” Robb says instead. Jon looks at him of his own volition. “This is your room. I’ll leave.”

"It's your house," Jon protests. The Starks owe him nothing--none of them do.

"It's our house. This is your room. I will be the one to leave." Robb gets up. "I'm sorry for bothering you last night."

Jon does nothing as Robb gathers up his clothes. He asks if Jon can tell his mother he won’t be at breakfast. “I want to get some things done at the gym.”

Jon could nod and say yes, but he'd be lying. Instead, he tells Robb: “You have a hangover. Let me make you something before you go.”

Robb turns him down. “I’ll be fine.”

And he leaves.

Robb goes to his room to get his gym attire. His mind is pounding and his heart aches and he’s angry. He heads to the Stark facilities. They have five punching bags, all in a row. He used to box as a kid. Did a bunch of martial arts because his father believed they provided discipline when he was too busy working. He put on some clothes and practiced some hits. His hits got harder, and harder, and harder, until he is sure something is sprain or broken. And then he hits the punching bag again. Every hit makes him forget about Jon. He forgets about the night they met, he forgets about their dinners together where he learned that Jon loves to over season his vegetables with pepper, and forgets waking up together and how Jon would let him steal the covers. He doesn't want to remember their dates in the park, meeting up for coffee after class, listening to Jon complain about his household habits, their conversations during the sunset, the rare days Jon would follow him to class and pay attention because he wanted to be able to understand something Robb cared about. Robb
associates the pain from each hit with a memory and trains himself to forget and he can’t.

Instead, he keeps the memories. He plays them over and over again.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter is lighter. The Stark genes are strong. Willas appears again. The Reeds finally come to Winterfell. Jazz hands.
2. Brojen is taking awhile to come. I think I should just write a separate story to fill the fandom void.
3. This chapter is short. Next three chapters are much longer.
4. So...R+L=J might be canon.
5. I’m severely entertained by Brexit. I know I shouldn’t be, but a few years ago, I was forced to argue for the UK leaving the EU (I did British Parliamentary Debate as an undergrad and we don’t get a choice in which side we get). My tagline was “It’s time for us [UK] to leave the sinking ship [EU].” I won that debate.
Chapter 20

The rules of courtship must have changed since Willas was in his twenties, because he recalls a waiting period of a week—less, if one played their cards right. He thought that by putting a time limit on his stay, the boy beauty would hasten their transactions by at least a day or two, and yet here he was. Five days have passed since Willas gave Jon his number. He hated to sound conceited but he expected a text by now, or at least a missed phone call, preferably by a blushing snow skin boy who would hang up as soon as the phone rings. But no, nothing. He assumes the complication became a problem.

Oh well, Willas thinks regretfully, these things do happen. He hopes Jon is happy, though he’s sure he could have made him happier. With his solidary status confirmed, Willas figured he might as well take his grandmother off his back, and called the Starks for a tour of their reserves.

To be honest, it is no hardship for Willas to visit the park. His leg still pulses, but it is a dull pain. Cool air and the fresh scent of grass—naturally fertilized, organically grown grass, always made him feel better. He sees the birds of prey circling the skies like dragons, and is reminded of his own hawk collection at home. There are miles of flowers, a few butterflies dancing on the tips of their pedals, and he makes note of all the buzzing beetles and slippery worms on the ground. From afar he can see the deer, prancing with one another. The reserves are large and vast, and it feels like another world here.

“You have done a magnificent job,” he praises. “The Stark reserves are legendary where I’m from.”

Ned Stark nods, serious but inwardly proud of his efforts. He tries not to show his conceit. Willas understands that this is not an attempt of false modesty; Ned is simply someone who is not used to taking compliments. “Yes, protecting the natural reserves has been the duty of the Starks for several generations.”

“I’m happy to be of service to you.”

“We are glad to receive your aid.” Ned’s eyes dart across the field. They walk closer to the deer, and Willas is surprise when they do not run away. Ned notes his surprise and responds that, “the deer know they do not have to fear humans here—only other predators. We do not interfere with the natural order of life.”

Willas understands. “I appreciate the effort. Is your entire family as involved in maintaining the area as you are?”

Ned does not hesitate. On the topic of his children, he allows himself to be proud. “My eldest son used to volunteer here in his teens. He goes to university now but he helps out when he can. Both my daughters did their work experiences in the office, though the younger one, Arya, did do some field work. My second oldest son starts volunteering today.”

“I’m jealous,” Willas admits. “I’ve always loved the outdoors. My parents encouraged me to handle the corporate matters of our company, but I enjoy getting my hands dirty. There’s something about being a part of the labor that makes the whole process more worthwhile.”

Ned agrees with the philosophy. If it weren’t for his brother’s untimely prison sentence, he would
have opted to take a more physical role in his family’s company. “I believe you handle the livestock maintenance.”

Willas nods. “I do now. After my accident, my family wanted to limit my interactions outdoors. My grandmother wouldn’t have it, though. She said only cowards use excuses to prevent the pursuit of their dreams. I go on walks as often as my leg allows, and can ride horses with the proper saddle.”

"Your grandmother sounds like a fine lady."

Willas laughs. That is an understatement. "She is a handful, but I'm grateful to have her around. Without her, I would never be able to pursue my dreams."

Willas loves animals, always has and always will. He still spoils the hell out of Camellia, his beautiful chestnut mare that trampled his leg when he was a teenager. His family wanted to put her down, especially since she was a gift from his friend, Oberyn. They suspected foul play the night the two of them decided to sneak out of their rooms for a ride in the dark. Willas would have none of it, though. Children made mistakes, and they were such children back then.

“What happened to your leg?”

“Horse riding accident.”

“My son was paralyzed in a car accident.” Ned confesses. The news surprises Willas more than it should. He doubts his grandmother was ignorant of this fact, and wonders just how much thought went into her decision to whore him out to the Starks. Of course they would have a paraplegic son. What was he thinking? “His mother was opposed to him being here, but she was convinced otherwise.”

“But you don’t mind?”

Ned sighs. “Some people never learn how to swim unless they’re pushed into the water.” He squints his eyes, and Willas thinks it’s because of the sun before he catches sight of someone familiar. “Bran is coming. He’s the one I was talking about.”

Willas does not have enough time to be surprised before the heart-shaped face comes into view. Bran’s eyes widen. “Willas?”

Willas waves hello. “Nice to see you again.”

Ned raises an eyebrow. “You two know each other?”

“We met the other day at the mall. I saw him wheeling down—”

“—And he gave me the lotion to help with my friction burn. After I stopped the breaks. Myself.”

Willas doesn’t say anything in response. Ned catches his raised eyebrow and in return, becomes as unconvinced of the story as he originally was. Bran senses this, and is trembling in trepidation. He looks into his lap, thinks for a moment, and then opens his mouth to add detail to his story. “And—”

The boy should never play poker, because after two brief encounters, Willas can already find his tell. The boy's father must agree, for he is staring his son down with a stern expression made for enacting discipline and serving punishment. Before Bran can dig himself a deeper hole, Willas beats him to the punch. “Your son is very brave, Mr. Stark. Lesser men wouldn’t have been so self-efficient.”

Bran stares at Willas, alarmed by the agreement. "Uh..."
"Is he?" Ned questions.

"Yes, I was surprised a boy his age was so clever as to maneuver himself to safety. He waited until he reached a floor that was dirty to stop his break, so that the friction slowed him down. If he were riding on freshly mopped floors, he would have surely ran into a wall."

"That's clever?"

"If he tried to stop himself on clean floors, the heat from the brakes would have been too hot to withstand and too powerful to stop. He choose the best option."

"Hmm..."

Ned continues to be as distrusting as before. He looks at Willas' sharp smile and Bran's wide eyes, and sighs. Wise man, Willas thinks, turning down this battle. Willas then suggests Bran show him around. "We can make it his first duty. If—of course, he doesn’t mind."

“I don’t!” Bran announces. He gives himself a head start on the path, (actually wearing his gloves this time, Willas notes). “Follow me!”

Ned is tempted to go after him, but figures it is finally time to drop Bran into the water. He tells him to come back in an hour, and in one piece. Bran and Willas are already on their way; Bran eagerly chatting about how a certain bird species has flown in for the summer.

When Ned Stark is out of sight, Bran thanks Willas for his discretion. “I had to tell them that I handled it by myself. Mother already wanted to cancel the volunteering and I was afraid she was going to tell father not to bring me. I’m sorry.”

“What are you sorry for?”

Bran furrows his brows. “For lying. For taking away your good deed.”

Willas laughs. “Bran, if a man ever complains about losing his good deed, it is a good indicator that he is a bad man.” He grins, like a child caught performing mischief but feels no shame for the crime. “Besides, I would have done the same. Hell, I have done the same.”

Bran is relieved. He makes a right turn, where the smell of wild violets end and a powerful bog begins to overwhelm. Years of horse manure and hawk droppings has gotten him immune to strong odors, but he is impressed but Bran’s nonchalance. There’s a sign indicating they are near a swamp.

“I just don’t want people thinking I need to be saved.”

“We all need help sometimes. We are only human.”

“Not all the time.”

The mood sours considerably after the declaration. Willas cheers him up by talking about the reserves. Bran starts explaining how his father is developing the swamp because of the animals often ignored on the endangered list. From his conversation, Willas can conclude that Ned Stark is a lucky man. Bran is bright and enthusiastic about the work his family does. While he cares little for the security business, he is hardly naive about the subject. Most children would shun the darker parts of their parents work (say, for instance, the thousands of animals slaughtered for food each year), but Bran is aware of how the military utilizes his father’s systems. He’s far more concerned with preservation, though. Willas learns he wants to travel, and when he’s an adult, he considers simply running away and traveling the world.
“Where would you like to go?”

Bran thinks for a while. “Brazil, and China to see the tigers, and maybe Vietnam or Laos. Or South Africa. They have a huge black market based on poaching and animal trafficking.”

Willas finds himself overwhelmed with statistics on ivory trafficking and the number of dead rhinos and elephants a year. He suspects Bran will be quite the philanthropist in the future; he already has Willas reaching for his checkbook.

“…that is, if I can find a way out of my wheelchair.”

The bitterness is familiar, and leaves a horrible taste in his mouth; the tang of sour lemons and curdled milk. Willas tells him with utter confidence that he is not an invalid. “You can do anything you wish. Paralysis is not a death sentence, and people have done more good in the world working with less.”

Bran pauses, and for a while, Willas wonders if he sounds too preachy, or insincere. He decides he should avoid either by explaining his own circumstances.

Instead, Bran beams.

“Thanks Willas. That means a lot to me.” His voice is sincere and melodious. He glows like an iridescent angel. Willas heart skips a beat, and he has to lean on the tree to compose himself. If all of Ned’s children are as pretty as his son, maybe he should heed his grandmother’s advice and make a call.

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. It’s just my leg,” he lies.

Bran accepts the excuse. He asks if Willas travels much, and Willas says he does. He talks about his recent trip to Peru, and while Willas is only half engaged in his own storyline, Bran is wide eyed and awed. He tells him that he’s jealous of people like Willas. Then, he begins on his own family and their vacations. Willas picks up on the name Jon, and how he travels the world with his mother.

“How is Jon doing these days?” Willas asks. He carefully lightens his tone to sound nonchalant, and even looks at a flower—as if he were inspecting its oddities—to express his disinterest. Bran bites, but there’s a evasiveness in his answer that makes Willas wonder if he was convincing enough.

“He’s okay. He’s been kind of quiet recently.”

“Oh.” Willas makes a risky move, and asks if it had something to do with Jon’s… boyfriend?

Bran freezes. “You know about that?”

“We talked about it while you were buying your materials,” Willas replies. “I was asking him on a date, but he turned me down.” Willas sighs, and displays a disappointed expression. Sad. Pathetic. Doglike. “I mean, he sounded really conflicted. It’s such a shame though. I was rather taken by him.”

“Well…” Bran seems conflicted about something. Willas wonders how much he understood about their situation and how well he knew the other person, before he admits that: “They just broke up. But Jon is pretty beat up about it.”

Willas wonders if a dozen roses would be too tacky for a first date. “That explains why he didn’t call me.” He looks into Bran’s eyes. He knows that to honest people, a stare conveys truth and hides bad
intentions. “Do you know why they broke up? Is there anything I can do?”

“Personal reasons,” Bran admits diplomatcally. Willas raises an eyebrow. Personal reasons can mean so much, but there’s always a hint of scandal attached to them. If he knew anything from Margaery’s brief romance with the eldest brother, ‘personal’ meant something went wrong within the family. And the Starks are certainly an interesting family.

He’s a bit excited.

“Bran, I hate to put you in this position, but do you think Jon would be interested in getting a call from me? He is absolutely marvelous, and I don’t want to lose my chance with him.”

Bran is taken back. “Well…I…it’s complicated.”

“The best things normally are,” Willas declares. He reminds himself to curb his excitement. While he loved the normalcy of his routine life and day to day adventures, he also craved interesting interactions, vibrant socialization that changed a person’s life. He chooses to opt out of his fascinated stance, and go for sincerity instead. Sincerity, integrity, and honesty—that’s what the Starks like.

“Please Bran, all I need is a number. If he turns me down, I won’t bother him again. I just…I have to try. I really felt something with him.”

Bran seems troubled. He glances back and forth, as if expecting a wandering infiltrator. Willas wonders if that was a legit worry, or paranoia. He noticed that Ned did the same thing whenever he talked about his family. Nonetheless, Bran grabs a piece of paper from his notebook and writes down a number.

“…ob is going to kill me,” he mutters. Bran cautiously hands Willas the paper. Willas fights his shit eating grin. Starks…even when they don’t trust you, they still believe in you.

Willas folds the paper in half and puts it into his back pocket. The sun is beginning to set so Willas suggests they head back to the camp. Bran seems conflicted by his actions, and considers reversing them, either by asking for the number back or confessing to Jon what he did. Willas doesn’t want either to happen. Willas distracts him by discussing about his hobbies. He talks about breeding hawks and horses, and hooks Bran’s attention in until the end of the road.

A gust of wind passes by them, and messes Bran’s hair. He needs a haircut, Willas muses. Leaning forward, he uses his free hand to brush the strands off Bran’s hair. “If you’re going to be working here, you should consider cutting those bangs. It’ll ruin your vision to have them constantly in your eyes.”

“I was supposed to get them cut at the mall,” Bran defends. “Not my fault Rickon tried to kill me.”

Willas laughs. Bran, when he pouts, reminds him of his youngest brother. Loras always threw the biggest fuss when it concerned his hair. Willas leans forward to ruffle those overgrown locks and causes a yelp of protest when he does. Bran swats him away, but Willas prevails.

“What’s going on here?” Ned’s question is rough and full of accusation. Bran is taken back by the rudeness. Willas, who is used to hearing that tone from the overprotective fathers of the women his brothers dated, is taken back when it’s directed towards him. He’s a cripple—he’s never gotten the threats. People feel sorry for him.

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“Just a bit of horse playing,” Willas admits. “I was suggesting Bran get a haircut. It will probably be easier for him to move around when he’s not constantly wiping his bangs out of his pretty face.”
Ned snarls, “We’ll take care of that. We don’t need your concern.”

There’s an air of awkwardness that comes with the darkening sky. Willas, wary of Ned’s newfound antipathy, chooses his next words very carefully. “Ned, I was wondering if you and your family would like to join me for dinner some time before I leave. I found a delightful restaurant that I think you will enjoy, if you haven’t already been there. They use all of our products, and serve the best pie in the country. I swear on it.”

“I’m sure you’ll like it if my family was there. Bran, especially.”

“Well…yes. That’s why I’m inviting all of you.”

Realizing his own answer was not satisfactory, Ned gruffly says he’ll think about it. “Come Bran. We need to go home. Do you have a ride, Mr. Tyrell?”

Oh…so he’s no longer Willas. Willas does not bother to hide his confusion at the sudden change in attitude, but does add some goodwill onto his face and a nonthreatening smile. “My driver should already be waiting outside. Thank you, Ned.”

Willas walks ahead of them. He decides to play up his limp, maybe even spark some guilt into the Stark patriarch. When Willas is out of sight, Ned turns to Bran.

“What did you two talk about?”

Bran grimaces. He does not feel like answering his father’s question, not after Willas was being so civil and gracious towards them. He’s disappointed at his father’s rudeness, and he understands why his mother is so often irked by her husband’s poor graces. “You were being very rude, father.”

Ned, who is used to being scolded for his poor manners, relents. He is revived in seconds by some form of righteousness that usually gets him going, and asks Bran again, what were they talking about it?

“Like we said, my hair,” Bran answers. He does not feel like explaining Willas and Jon’s odd flirtation, not with Robb and Jon’s separation fresh in the family.

“And that’s all?”

“We talked about animals, plants, and you know, the reserves? What else would we be talking about?”

“You didn’t talk about anything personal? Something you can’t tell me or your mother?”

Bran frowns. How much did his father know? Was he listening in—? No, if that is the case, he wouldn’t be asking all these questions. “Nothing, father. We were just talking about the reserves. If it was something serious or worrisome, I would tell you.”

“Really?” Ned looks worried. “So you’re not hiding anything from me.”

Bran stares at his lap for a lap and breathes. He then looks up. “I promise.”

Ned is troubled. He wants to push this, but he doesn’t push so far that Bran closes himself off. He’s done that before. He’s good at that. Yet, the detective in Ned, the one who spends his quiet nights reading thrillers and mystery novels, and watches crime dramas while actively participating in the detective’s storyline, doesn’t relent. At an impasse, he suggests a break. “Let’s go home. Your mother will be worried if we stay any longer.”
Bran agrees, and is already wheeling his way out of the difficult conversation. Ned stays back to check on a few video feeds of Willas and Bran. The drones are supposed to check up on the animals, but he swore to Catelyn he’d use them to track Bran's whereabouts at least every half an hour. While he previously protested Catelyn’s overprotectiveness, he will have to admit his wife has some weighted concerns.

Bran has always been a pretty child. He and his siblings take after their mother in pure loveliness and, and he hates to boast, but his children are the most adorable Stark pups ever conceived. Catelyn calls him a doting father, but he’s honest about his children’s charms, and wants to protect them from all unsightly perversions. As a babe, Bran has consistently received unwarranted attention. He’s sweet, and that saccharinity attracts pedophilic stingers and lustful maggots that don’t deserve his son’s honey.

He’s not sure what he sees in the cameras, but he doesn’t doubt there’s a twinkling in Willas’ eyes that screams predator. They are talking in hushed whispers and secret messages, and after Jojen, Ned has to be cautious about people who express interest in Bran. He’ll have to look into Willas’ reputation.

Earlier, at the Stark Manor, Catelyn is overseeing the movers. Howland Reed insisted that they did not have to go through the trouble. No one in their small family owned enough possessions to require such extravagance. Catelyn agreed, but Ned liked to treat his friends and felt that the three of them lost enough that they deserved to keep whatever they had close. Howland is a craftsman, and while his jobs are far and in between, his work is beautiful.

Howland expresses nothing but his gratitude. Meera, who is growing up to be a fine young woman, is quick to say thanks as well. She tries to make pleasant conversation, but the overwhelming, overweight elephant in the room is stifling all of them. The words exchanged are terse and uncomfortable. Eventually, Meera, who is normally cheery and sociable, has to opt out. The tension is too much, even for her.

“Mrs. Stark?”

She recognizes that voice anywhere.

Jojen walks towards her, a sense of bravado and shamelessness that makes his sister cringe, and his father sweat. Catelyn thinks his confidence is vulgar; his entire presence is obscene and he makes her skin crawl. “I want to thank you personally for what you’re doing for us. I’m very grateful for your kindness, given our history—”

“It was my husband’s wish. Not mine.”

“Nonetheless, I’m thankful—”

Immediately, Catelyn tells him her son is not here.

Jojen remains unperturbed.

“Bran lives in the main house. You will not have contact with him, you will not speak to him, and you will not even look at him. I will make sure of that. If I see you lay a disgusting finger on him, I will have you arrested and prosecuted and you will never see the light of day again.”

There is silence.

Jojen finds the speech a tad bit dramatic, but says nothing. He wants to defend himself, tell her that he’s never touched Bran intimately, and that she’s being unfair. She’s willing to let Joffrey stay, the
guy who beat Sansa *black and blue*, and she’s not willing to give him a chance? He knows it’s because she’s unaware of what happened back then, but Jojen can change that. He can make himself look better in comparison, and he doesn’t.

That’s something he has on a Sansa, and he’ll use it when the time comes.

Catelyn is so angry, she doesn’t see the intoxication in his eyes. For that, he’s grateful to be hated so much. The whole world is always more pleasant when he’s high. His sister grabs him by the arm and agrees to Catelyn’s conditions.

“Go,” Catelyn hisses out.

Jojen walks away. He shrugs off Meera’s grip, and says he will have a look around the premises.

“Nowhere near the main house,” Meera warns.

“I know, I know,” Jojen waves off her concerns. There’s nothing at the house for him. Bran is at the reserves. He already checked.

Jojen wanders around forever. He breathes in the pure air, and takes in the scent of trimmed grass, wildflowers and weeds, a sky perfumed with bird feathers and raven sweat. He drops onto the field and lies there. He plays imaginary songs in his head. He dreams of Bran and all that delicious, untouched flesh that yearns to be marked and that sweet voice that cries out his name.

“What are you doing?”

_Hello darkness my old friend_

_I've come to talk with you again_

_Because a vision softly creeping_

_Left its seeds while I was sleeping_

Jojen is a poor man, but he’s not a bad one. He does not hunt children in their sleep, nor does he steal their souls into the night. Not like the moon spirits or the fairies, not like the gypsies and the thieves. *Why does he have green eyes? They're always staring at me. I think he's looking into my soul like there's something wrong with me. He's not human. He keeps staring at me like I'm his...*_

Jojen snaps out of his thoughts.

“Listening to the birds and the bees. What are you doing here?”

The boy behind him pouts. “I live here.”

“So do I, now.” Jojen smiles like a child who has found a friend. The boy is taken back, because he wants a friend. His beast towers over the Jojen and nestles his nose into his face. The canine’s saliva drips and dribbles, yet there are no screams. He is not upset, not like how the boy’s sisters are when Shaggydog drools over their pretty dresses. He laughs instead.

Rickon is relieved. He has been warned not to go near the guests, but surely it will be okay this once. Shaggydog means no harm, and Rickon’s been so bored since mother punished him. He’s trapped, he’s caged, he’s *grounded*, and it is quite unpleasant.

“Just running around. I’m playing catch with Shaggy.”

“I’m not surprised. Your home is marvelous. I don’t understand how you could spend a moment
indoors when there’s a body of beauty out here.”

“Wait till it rains.”

“Thanks to your father, I won’t have to,” Jojen replies. The skies are lovely for English weather. Rickon, poor thing, is bristling with unresolved energy. He must be so lonely, cooped up in that house with no one to play with. “What’s your name?”

“Rickon.”

“Well, Rickon, I’m Jojen.” He gets up and holds out his hand. “It is nice to meet you.”

Rickon takes it, but he’s a cautious bugger who immediately goes to his dog’s side. Smart boy; Jojen appreciates a bit of cleverness. “Do you have anyone with you right now?”

“What?”

“Because I… I don’t suppose you would like to… I’ve been quite bored,” Jojen admits, adding a smidgen of embarrassment into his confession. It would be incredibly suspicious if an older boy was actually eager to spend time with someone so young. “Do you mind if I play with you?”

Rickon brightens up. Since Bran is gone, Jon is working, and Robb is doing a task on behalf of their mother, no one’s been up to spend time with him. Mother never likes to get dirty, and Sansa is on a date.

He eagerly takes Jojen up on his offer. He instructs Jojen on how to play catch with Shaggydog, especially since his wolf tends to be very aggressive. Nothing new or appears dangerous. Jojen needs to be careful, but Shaggy already likes him so there should be no problems.

They chat a bit about how their summers are going so far. Jojen’s story is considerably duller, but Rickon does not mind. Shaggydog is eagerly catching every Frisbee and ball, and performing some of the most intricate gymnastics while doing so. Rickon reveals that he’s trained his dog on how to terrify his classmates so he can assert his dominance over them.

“You will go places,” Jojen declares. He’s not lying.

“Thanks.” Rickon gives Jojen an odd stare. “You know, mum told me not to talk to any of the guests. She said they wouldn’t want me bothering them. Am I bothering you?”

“No, not at all.” Jojen shakes his head. “Remember, I wanted you to be here. You’re doing me a favor by making sure I don’t die of boredom.”

Rickon grins at the response. “Good, because I think I like you.”

“I think I like you as well.”

Someone calls for Rickon, and on reflex, he grabs Jojen’s arm and drags him further down the fields. If Jojen is upset or surprised by the manhandling, he takes it with stride. “Over here!” Rickon says hastily. They move further into an area of the woods, where they are less likely to be seen. When they are finished running, Jojen asks about his behavior.

Rickon clarifies the situation.

“Sorry, that was my caretaker, Osha. I…” Rickon looks down at his feet. “I got into trouble recently, so if she sees me talking to you, I’ll be in big trouble.”
I will be in big trouble, too, Jojen agrees. He’s not as worried as a man with his record should be. “We’ll have to keep this our secret, then.”

Rickon agrees eagerly. He’s good at keeping secrets—better than Sansa is, at least. Shame about that particular friendship, Jojen sighs.

Shaggydog, tired from all the running and catching, decides to rest underneath the shade. Jojen asks what his crime was. He already knows what happened after talking to Bran the other night, and when the rage subsided over Bran’s accident, he soaked in the sound of Bran’s laughter. If Bran isn’t angry, then neither is Jojen.

Rickon has the decency to look ashamed when he confesses he pushed his older brother down the mall, and his wheelchair rolled out of control. “I didn’t think he would go that fast.”

Jojen laughs, not finding the situation funny in the slightest but he needs to soothe Rickon’s worries. “We all do crazy things for love.”

Rickon is quick to agree to the sentiment. He spends another ten minutes going on and on about Shireen Baratheon and her beautiful scar, how smart she was, how she’s learning how to do a bruges lace crochet and a broomstick lace crochet, and she’s having a hard time with the former, and he wants to help but he’s terrible with his fingers unless he’s punching something.

Jojen shares his own secrets; carefully omitting names and past events. He tells Rickon he feels the same way about someone; he talks about how he wants to treasure him and take him away from here. He wants to travel with him and see the world by his side. Rickon agrees wholeheartedly.

“You should. I think he’d like that.”

“Thank you, Rickon.”

At last, Rickon decides it’s time to get back. “Osha will kill me if I stay out any longer.”

Jojen agrees. “I hate to see you die.” Then he pauses. He hated if their meeting became a missed opportunity. Before Rickon leaves, Jojen makes an unassuming and generous offer to always be there for him. He does not mind lending an open ear, or a helping hand when playing with Shaggydog. Rickon approves, happy to have an extra friend to spend his time with—especially one living so close.

Jojen is whistling when he returns home. Meera is immediately suspicious, but Jojen pacifies her by saying he was enjoying the finer areas of the Stark Estate. He gives details of his discoveries, of the baby violets growing beside the dirt pathways and dry rocks that feel like charcoal upon touch. The description convinces Meera to pardon the potential wrongdoings. He wants to feel bad; Meera has always defended him, but he’s absolutely giddy with his progress.

There’s no possibility of reconciliation with Sansa. He needs someone on his side, someone to get him into that house undetected and welcomed. He chose Sansa before because she was accessible, and his friendship with her would not have raised any red flags. Now, he has a better way in. Rickon and Bran are the closest of their other siblings. Yes, Rickon is a fine option.

Chapter End Notes
1. Next chapter: Sansa/Arya bonding, the Baratheons arrive. Robert meets Jon.
2. Sometimes I lie awake on my phone, doing revisions on previous chapters. Ch. 4’s conversation between Arya and Jaime has changed and the ending to Ch. 5 was altered. I also lengthened the Jaquen/Arya interaction in Ch. 13.
3. Bran/Jojen get some love in Ch. 24
4. There was minor, heated discussion that occurred recently about the quality of the books vs. the television series. I agree that this story’s commentary section is not the platform for that. You have every right to discuss your disapproval. But please do not attack other people’s opinions. There are parts of the books I like and dislike. For example, I hate Tyrion learning how to ride pigs, because it felt very degrading to his character. There are parts in the television series I like and dislike. Like Dorne. Dorne was not good.
Chapter 21

Three days after the Reeds move in, the Baratheons follow. On the morning of their arrival, Arya finishes her training and tells her family that she needs a ride to the mall.

“For what?” Her mother asks. Her tone is equivalent to a warden in a prison complex. She’s been on edge since the Reeds came and her fight with Jon has left her in a tense, self-loathing state of mind and a need to dominate everything she comes in contact with, regardless if it’s as uncontrollable as a hurricane or as agreeable as a flower bud in spring. Arya is certainty someone she has no luck reigning in. The last time she seriously tried to inflict a punishment, her youngest daughter responded by running away from home. For a year.

Today, she is itching to enact some discipline. Though she loves her daughter, she refuses to be one of those mothers whose fear of abandonment keep them from administrating a proper grounding, a necessary spanking, or both. Arya is her daughter, and it is her job to raise her. She can play a bluff with the best of them, and Arya knows this. That’s why Arya looks her straight in the eye and says she’s going shopping for shoes.

“We just bought you a new pair of flats two weeks ago,” Catelyn points out. She’s suspicious.

“I need them for the wedding.”

Arya rolls her eyes. “I need shoes.” Bran whispers to his brother something that sounds like an accusation. Arya could smack him, but instead shrugs off their skepticism. “What? I buy shoes.”

“You buy ballet flats,” Ned says pointedly. “And then you beat them, burn them, carve them up with a razor.”

“First, that’s called breaking them in.” She rolls her eyes. “Second, I need shoes. You know I need shoes. I haven’t needed formal footwear since I was twelve and I outgrew the ones I have.”

“And I suppose the fact that the Baratheons are moving in today has nothing to do with it.”

“The Baratheons moving in today has everything to do with it,” Arya retorts. “I was going to wait until the day of the wedding and miss the entire ceremony and then come only for the reception. My master plan is now ruin.”

No one knows if Arya is serious or not. Arya hates public events. She hates going shopping. She hates Joffrey more than she hates shopping and public events, and that is a feat.

Still caught in their disbelief, no one makes a move. Finally, Sansa stands up. She has just finished her breakfast, and offers to drive Arya to the mall. She also invites herself on her sister’s shopping trip. “I could use a pair of shoes myself. I’m still trying to come up with the design for my dress and maybe a new pair will inspire me.”

Their parents agree without hesitation, and ignore the potential consequence of their actions. Their
daughter has expensive tastes.

She tells Arya to get ready, and she’ll meet her at the car. Arya groans about being treated like a child, but complies nonetheless. This is not a fight she wants to waste her get out of jail card on. When they reach the car, however, she is free to complain to her older sister about the injustice inflicted upon her.

“I don’t need you to keep an eye on me,” Arya informs her older sister. The chagrin is melting on top of her tongue.

“But our parents do,” Sansa retorts.

They head to the mall, in which Sansa plays her own playlist and forces her to listen to repeats of the Billboard Top 100. Arya enjoys a good pop song every now and then, but refuses to admit it. She asks Sansa if she ever listens to anything tasteful, like Yiruma or Turnage. Sansa quips that she has seen Arya’s playlist and its more Nicki Minaj than Beethoven. Arya flips her off, and says she’s versatile.

“That’s what she said.”

Arya stares at her sister in shock. “Did you just—?”

Sansa is focused on the road and doing a horrible job at disguising her grin. Arya bursts out laughing, and Sansa follows suit. Arya tells her to hurry up and get to the mall. If there is one thing the two of them are grateful for, it is that the year apart made them closer than ever. People always appreciate their loved ones more when they realized they might not always have them around. They agree to be educated young women and switch to the news channel where they hear reports on the serial killer and how human bones were found in the excrement of dogs. Arya switches it to an old school station filled with nineties R&B.

They get to the mall, and Sansa asks where she wants to go. Arya shrugs and suggests the department store, saying any pair will do as long as it matches her dress and her soles touch the floor. Sansa stares longingly at the window displays of the designer tycoons, and keeps recommending a look each time they pass a new one.

Arya sighs. “Sansa, money is like insurance. Just because we have it doesn’t mean we should put it to use.”

Sansa pouts, but can’t deny the logic. She tells a pair of Jimmy Choo’s goodbye and waves farewell like she would a lover going to war. After blowing a kiss to a sparkling pair of stilettos, Arya submits. She tells her sister “one store” and then they are going home. Sansa almost squeals in the delight, and Arya will not lie; her sister’s smile is beautiful.

The saleswoman greets them politely, a little hesitation reserved for youths but respectful nonetheless. She asks if they are looking for anything and Sansa is quick to say they are looking for shoes for a wedding. Sansa is not so tacky as to point out whose wedding they need it for, but she is smart enough to remark that it needs to be from a new season so that “it does not look out of place in July.” Then, she hints that Arya just bought a dress and describes the detail with such extravagance, even Arya believes she bought such a thing. The woman fills in the blanks for herself, and immediately offers them a look into their newest collection.

Sansa mentions being thirsty and they offer her and Arya water bottles and cookies from a nearby bakery. “Would you like plain or sparkling?”
“Plain,” Sansa answers. Her eyes focused on a pair of sparkling blue heels.

“Same,” Arya copies, far less interested.

They look around, and Arya asks if they have anything flat.

The salesperson does, but suggests heels anyway. “Heels will look wonderful on someone with your posture.”

Arya does not doubt it. “Heels thicken and shorten the Achilles’s tendon and potentially pulls muscles and joints out of alignment with the pelvic and the spine,” Arya informs. “I don’t wear heels unless I have to.”

Sansa rolls her eyes, and to the salesperson’s relief, says that Arya’s “pointe shoes probably cause more damage than two inches ever will.” The woman asks if she's a dancer, and Arya says yes. She leaves to find her a pair.

While they wait, Sansa grabs the shoes she’s been eying and also a gorgeous crystal mix pump. Even Arya appreciates them. Instead of complimenting Sansa’s choice, she asks her “Isn’t that a bit out of your price range?”

Sansa smiles. “I’m already saving father a fortune by not buying the dress. I’m sure he won’t mind if I go a bit overboard on the shoes.”

Arya sighs. “Aren’t you supposed to be adjusting to a life of banality?”

Sansa scoffs. “Trust me, Sandor isn’t banal.” She tries on the dark blue ones first, hoping she might love them enough to forgo the beauty of the others. There’s still a dozen she has to try on and it’ll save her and parents’ strife if she only buys the one. “Besides, it’s not like being with him means I have to give up the finer things in life.”

“You know, if you hadn’t mentioned Sandor’s name, this story could have passed the Bechdel test.”

“What?”

“Just saying, it wouldn’t kill two intelligent young women to talk about something other than men.”

It is Sansa’s turn to roll her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Arya, for my internal sexism. Please, tell me, what are your thoughts on Britain leaving the European Union?”

“Well, I’m not going to lie, I’m a bit concerned about how the Stark Industries’ stock is dropping but since our company has ties to the US, I think we’ll be alright. It’s only the European markets that are truly worrisome, and let’s be honest, it was time for us to leave that sinking ship anyways, and Germany was being a bit of a bitch. Of course there’s Scotland threatening to leave again—”

“Which isn’t going to happen because Scotland is always threatening to leave.”

“Hey if I could do it…”

Sansa laughs in spite of herself. “Okay, okay, I get it. I'm putting the women’s movement back a few years.”

“Well, if you can live with yourself than I guess I have to…” Arya mock sighs. “So what’s going on with you? Is Sandor treating you all right?”

“He treats me like a princess.”
“Even if he can’t afford a pair of thousand dollar heels?” Arya teases.

Sansa hums. She lifts her foot up and admires them thoughtfully. “Even if he can’t, I can—one day at least. It’s not like I plan on relying on mum and dad’s money for the rest of my life.”

“But you’re okay risking,” she motions to the store. “all of this?”

Sansa repeats her sentiment. Her conviction is as strong as it was before, when Arya first caught the two of them together. “If I wanted to shrivel into an old, loveless crone with a room of nice things, I would have stayed with Joffrey.”

Arya approves of the sentiment. She was apprehensive of their love at first, mostly because she knows Sandor, has heard of his reputation and understands the man is dangerous. She never wants to see her sister get hurt, but at least Sandor can protect her blood. She looks at Sansa again, and sees her maturing into the woman she’s always wanted to be.

They’ve all gotten so old.

“Speaking of Joffrey…”

“Arya…” Sansa warns. “I thought you didn’t want to talk about men.”

“Joffrey’s far from a man. He’s a deranged little bitch, the kind with three legs instead of four and is too small to do anything but bark and pee.”

Sansa giggles. It’s taken a while before she could laugh about Joffrey. “Okay, ask away.” The salesperson comes out to deliver the new pairs of shoes. Sansa takes a moment to coo at them. For flats, they are lovely. “Try them on! Try them on!” She cheers.

Arya complies with Sansa’s request, puts on the sheer ones with polka dots. While admiring how they look on her feet, she asks Sansa why she never told their parents about what happened.

“You know why,” Sansa says. She does not look angry, but tired that she has to repeat the answer.

“I want to hear it again. To see you if you still believe it.”

“How many times will it take for you to be convinced?”

“The same amount of times you needed to repeat it yourself.”

Sansa sighs. “Father always says you’re too smart for your own good.”

“He’s not the only one.”

Sansa shakes her head. She asks the woman for another pair she’s seen in the catalogue. She leaves them alone and begins. “Remember when I first met Joffrey? I thought he was the most handsome boy in the world; he looked just like a prince, like the one sin the fairytales mum used to tell us when we were children.”

“I hated those fairytales.”

“But I loved them,” Sansa confesses. “I loved them so much I wanted my own prince. I wanted to be a princess and live in a castle and have the prettiest dresses and the loveliest necklaces and rings and I wanted all the cutest puppies and have tea parties and eat lemon cakes and I thought Joffrey would give me that.” Sansa smiles to herself. It’s sad and regretful and all the things she felt about the past. “When he first hit me, I forgave him. He told me he would never do it again. He gave me a
pretty necklace and said he loved me. The next time he hit me, he bought me a dozen pink roses and my favorite chocolates and said he was sorry—again. And he kept doing this, and I kept forgiving him because I truly believed he loved me.”

“Sansa—”

“When I decided to leave him the first time, he called me a whore. He asked me what he needed to buy to get me to stay. Because that’s all I wanted, right? Things. I was some whore he could buy and beat.”

“Sansa, you know you’re not—”

“I know,” Sansa snaps. She looks away, a bit ashamed of herself. “I know now. But back then, he was so convincing. He made me believe it was my fault I got hit, that I was using him and I deserved it. And why wouldn’t believe him? He was first boyfriend! That’s life for a fourteen-year-old girl.” Sansa shakes her head. “I was so ashamed of myself. He kept telling me he would tell our parents what I did, what I was doing. He said they raised a whore. That they would be so ashamed of me.”

“They wouldn’t believe that.”

“I know, but all that mattered was that I believed him.” Sansa has a far off look. “But one day, Joffrey went too far. He never touched my face, said he liked me pretty, but he…I was hurt, Arya. I could have died. And Sandor, he was working for them at the time, was furious.”

Arya stays silent.

“He promised me he would take care of it.”

“And he did.”

Sansa looks down. She has a soft, distant smile on his face. “He did.”

Joffrey Baratheon got into a car crash a few years ago that led to his rehabilitation. Earlier that night, he was caught at a bar screaming about how he was the king and attempted to execute everybody with an ancestral crossbow his grandfather kept. He ran out of arrows and ran to escape form imaginary ghosts. Reports said he was already beaten and mangled when he came, but other claimed it was from the crash. His tox screen was through the roof.

Arya remembers it vividly. She then asks why mom and dad needed to be kept in the dark. They know what kind of person he was; they would never blame her.

“But they would blame themselves.” Sansa explains. “They introduced us. Joffrey was a good actor, then. Everyone thought we were the perfect couple, and mum and dad were so happy that we were together. Another Stark marries their first love. Uncle Robert and father would joke about how they would finally be a family. And I…when the crash occurred and Joffrey’s problems were uncovered, they would ask, every single night, what happened between us, why we broke up so suddenly, what did he do to me? Mother was already killing herself over Bran and you…” Sansa looks guilty. Arya knows why. That was the year before she left. She was already out of the door by then. “I couldn’t do that to them. I can’t do that now.”

Arya is not satisfied with that answer. She knows she’ll never be satisfied. “It’s not right. He deserves justice for what he did to you.”

“We all have our secrets.” Sansa gives her a pointed look. “I know you have secrets. Good ones. Ones you’ll take to the grave.”
Arya stares at her. She's not denying it, but hell if she confesses anything. “What makes you think that?”

Sansa stares at her in disbelief. “What happened to you? You completely disappeared without so much as a note, and then after a year, you come back. Mum was so happy for her prodigal daughter; she was too afraid to ask. So tell me, what happened?”

“Mother and father tried to control my life and stop me from dancing. I left.”

“What happened when you left?”

Arya refuses to say anything. “That’s private.”

“Why should I tell my secrets and you don’t have to tell yours?”

“Because it’s different.”

“How?”

“My secrets protect myself. Your secrets protect other people—people who shouldn’t be protected.”

The saleslady comes back with a new pair. She asks if the young women needed more alone time to talk. She does not sound aggravated, and appears sympathetic. She puts a comforting hand on Sansa’s shoulder, which makes Arya raise an eyebrow. The woman could afford to look less like guilty for eavesdropping.

Sansa, in all her grace, thanks her but wants to know more about the bespoken Cinderella slippers. The woman cheerfully explains that they are custom made and designed to fit the user perfectly. Arya looks down at the shoes she’s been trying on forever, and decides to give it one last test run.

To the surprise of the saleswoman and Sansa, Arya does a pirouette perfectly much to the squeals of Sansa, who shouts that the shoes are “600 pounds, you monkey!” Arya laughs as removes them from her feet and says she’ll take them. The woman shakily says she’ll ring them up.

When they get to the cash register, there’s a man paying for his purchase as well. He’s a man of short stature, blond hair and high regality, and Arya and Sansa recognize him immediately. Arya wonders if this shall be summer of reckoning. It seems everyone’s past will come to haunt them.

“Mr. Lannister,” Sansa greets politely. Whether she does so out of courtesy or guilt for a man who is often overlooked or both, no one can be sure. Regardless, Sansa has always been fond of the youngest Lannister, especially when he’d offered his protection from Joffrey, time and time again. "What are you doing here?"

“Business, though today it's rather personal. I’m buying a gift for my girlfriend. The wedding of the century is coming up and we must be prepared.” Tyrion replies, as easygoing as always. “I assume you’re doing the same.”

“Of course,” she agrees. “Do you need any help?”

Tyrion shakes his head. “No, my love was extremely specific in what she wanted. I think she’ll throw a fit if I dare deviate. I see you only bought one pair.”

“Yes, it’s for my sister.”

Tyrion places his brown eyes on Arya, and there’s a flash of recognition.
“Arya.”
“Tyrion.”

Sansa looks at them back and forth. “Do you two know each other well?”

Arya smirks. “I know all the Lannisters.”

“We could change that if you want,” Arya offers suggestively.

Tyrion chuckles, amused by the suggestion while Sansa looks horrified. “No, thank you. Not a day goes by where I don’t worry about my head when he’s alive—I don’t need to be concerned about my cock, too.”

Sansa has had enough. She says they have to get going, and is pulling out her credit card when Tyrion stops her. “Let me pay for this, I insist.”

“Oh, I couldn’t—” Sansa refuses, already shoving her card in the direction of the register. Tyrion’s black shines brighter than her gold. Arya does not lift a finger in protest.

“Send your father my love.”

“I will.”

“You can exaggerate the story if you like.”

“My cock, Arya. I like it very much.”

“I could too if you tell the story right.”

“Arya! Stop!” Sansa hisses. Arya tells her sister she isn’t serious. Tyrion is amused by the commentary. He wishes them a good day, and perhaps, he suggests, they keep in contact for any interesting news. “So much is going on this summer.”

Arya winks at him and promises to give him an update if anything interesting happens.
When they get back into the car, Sansa is still screeching about what Arya said. Arya is in a good mood, though, and tells Sansa to rest her vocal cords. Her ears deserve some peace before they get home. When Sansa asks what she means, Arya tells her that Tyrion is here for drama.

“Prepare for your ear drums because there’s a good deal of screaming when we get home.”

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After Robert and his children are settled in a separate wing, Ned takes Robert to the patio to have a bottle of lager. They talk about old times at university, and their rebellious teenager years at Westchester—“your rebellious teenage years, Robert,” Ned corrects), and lastly, marriage. Catelyn is preparing dinner while the two wait. Robert thanks her for her hospitality.

“I don’t know how you do it. Catelyn’s a great woman, but staying with the same woman your entire life? Waking up to the same face every morning? I’d kill myself if I ever did that again.”

Ned chuckles and looks down. “I’d kill myself if I couldn’t see Cat’s face every day. She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me. She’s given me all I’ve ever wanted.”

“And you’ve never been tempted, just a little, to stray? Look at another bird crossing your path…”

Ned shrugs. “I don’t like looking for trouble in a bad place when I have a good thing at home. You don’t get many chances at love in this world.”

Robert shakes his head in disbelief. “You know, Ned, you never ceased to amaze me.”

“I try.”

Robert takes a swig of his beer. “There’s only one woman I’ve ever dreamed of spending my life with…”

“Robert, no.”

“Your sister was the love of my life.”

“No, she wasn’t.”

“She belonged with me. If your sister had stayed, we would have been bound by blood. Brothers, once and for all.”

Ned shakes his head. “Robert, Lyanna couldn’t be tied down, not by our father, not by you, and not by any man.”

“When she left me at the altar, it was like a stake in my heart. I never knew why she left.”

She didn’t love you, goes unsaid. She hated the thought of living a lie, was also muted. The statement raises another, more prevalent concern that needs to be addressed. “Robert, I need to tell you something. While you’re staying here, you’ll also be living with…”

“She would have never disobeyed me like Cersei did. She would have made me happy, happier than that bitch ever did.”

Ned always gets uncomfortable when this topic came up. He loved Robert; the man was a brother to him. But he would be lying if he said that he approved of Robert’s actions or thoughts. The man had a mean bone in his body that was aggravated by all the alcohol he inhaled. It was his crutch when times were hard, and his ex-wife often suffered for it. Despite his feelings for her, he knew that after
Myrcella’s accident, he could not let his friend raise his children. He never told Robert that he was the one who sent the case to Stannis, knowing that the only man alive willing to fight the Baratheon name on a legal case was another Baratheon.

Catelyn interrupts them with a tired, pale face.

“What’s the matter?” Ned asks.

Catelyn grimaces. “There’s someone here for Robert.”

Robert raises an eyebrow and maneuvers himself to the dining room. Cersei sat on the living room couch, drinking a glass of wine and looking as pleasant as she always did in their far too long marriage. “Hello Robert.”

“Hello Cersei.” Robert glares at her suspiciously. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m staying here. You didn’t think I would leave you alone with my children, did you? Will this be a problem?”

Ned watches them. That was civil enough.

“That depends, have you stopped wanting to fuck your brother?”

Ah, there it goes.

The yelling began. Sansa and Arya came home, mid-way through the fighting and neither of them wanted to deal with the drama. Arya manages to toss a glare towards Cersei before going upstairs.

Catelyn will have none of it. She breaks up the argument before it cumulates in violence. “As long as the two of you are staying in our home, you will behave as guests should. That means, you do not fight in front of my children. You do not swear in front of my children. You do nothing that could set a bad example to my children. You will not be staying here unless you can say something nice about each other. Right now.”

They are silent.

“Now,” Catelyn threatens.

Robert looks at his best friend’s wife. He looks at his own ex-wife and sighs. “Even with all the evil weighing down your body, your breasts look pretty good.”

Ned coughs. "Robert--"

"You heart must be as strong as a horse. It’s the only way you can drink the way you do and not be dead."

"I know with all your crazy, you find it hard not to behave irrationally. I'm impress you haven't killed someone."

Cersei purses her lips. "You must have been a genius in your youth, because even with all the brain cells you lost, you can still formulate words."

"Your money makes up for most of your bullshit."

"I'll bet you'll do well in the cold with all the fat you've stored--"
"That's enough!" Catelyn intervenes. The two say nothing else. Catelyn will consider it peace.

The door opens on them and Jon announces he’s home. He comes into the living room from his first day on the job at Stannis and Davos. He was supposed to be starting tomorrow but was called in to help prepare one last family dinner. He is worn and weary from the experience. He had forgotten what it was like to have to divide his attention between four children.

He sees two unexplainable guests and cautiously walk towards them. He hates greetings; he got that from his mother. With an awkward shuffle and great reluctance, he goes up to the two and reaches in for a handshake. “Hi, I’m Jon, Uncle Ned’s nephew.”

Cersei stares distastefully. Robert actually bursts out into laughter. “Ned, you never told me you had nephew! I should have known Brandon managed to knock someone up!”

Jon frowns. “I’m not Uncle Brandon’s son.”

Robert’s eyes widened. “You’re shitting me. That little sociopath managed to copulate with a woman? He got over his fetish for old cocks, did he?”

“Oh…are you talking about Uncle Benjen?”

“Of course…” Robert stills. “Wait, if Brandon is your uncle and Benjen is your uncle…” He turns to Ned and narrow his eyes. He goes up to his best friend, the man he considers a brother, and in a heated whisper made louder by lowered inhibitions, “Ned, why didn’t you tell me you cheated on Cat?”

Cersei groans. “For the love of God!” She puts down her wineglass. “He’s not the honorable Ned Stark’s bastard son. Are you an idiot?”

“Don’t talk down to me, woman!”

Ned sighs. “Robert, this is Jon Snow. He’s Lyanna’s son.”

Silence. After a moment’s hesitation, Cersei starts laughing. Hard, uncontrollable laughter. This is the happiest she’s been in her entire marriage. She takes one last swig of her wine and walks away to her designated room. She turns to Ned. “You can handle this.”

Ned remains solemn. Robert looks horrified.

“Ned, how long have you known about him?”

Ned sighs. “His entire life.”

Suddenly, Robert appears furious. “How could you keep my son away from me all these years?”

“What?”

“What?”

“He’s like what? Twenty? Twenty-one? I have to be his father! Me and Lyanna…Ned, me and Lyanna did it. We had sex, there’s no one else it could have been.”

Arthur Dayne, Rhaegar Targaryean, Oswell Whent…There are plenty of options. Jon lists them in his head immediately. He hasn’t even gone through all of them yet.

“Robert…”
“Sir, I don’t think you’re the only option.”


“No!”

“Are you sure? I think she was raped. She must have been raped. Jon, me and Lyanna were in love?”

Jon is taken back. His mother has maybe mentioned Robert Baratheon but if she didn’t talk about him with any sort of fondness, there must have been nothing there. Instead of dealing with him, he grabs his phone and does what he always does when dealing with his wayward mother. He waits for the dial tone.

“Jon?”

“Hey, I have a Robert Baratheon here claiming to my father…can you take care of this?”

A woman demands something in French over the phone, and Lyanna replies harshly. “Hand the phone over to him.”

Jon obeys. “It’s my mother.”

Robert is so excited; he latches onto the device. Before he can say anything, Lyanna’s ice cold response shuts him down.

“Hey Robert. Sorry about leaving you at the altar twenty years ago but Jon’s not your son. He’s too pretty. Okay, bye.”

Chapter End Notes

1. Chapter 22 was one of my favorite chapters to write. It was previously the longest chapter I’ve ever written until I finished chapter 23. Lyanna Mormont makes an appearance. There’s some Davos/Stannis action.
2. My newest story is up. It’s a three-part story and my first foray into the alpha/omega genre. The first part is centered on Howland/Ned (with N+H=J) and covers Robert’s Rebellion and ends a little after Jon’s birth. The second part is focused on Robb/Jon, and the third part, as promised, is Jojen/Bran. There’s a lot of sex, and it’s pretty dark. If you read the first part, that’s the lightest it gets.
3. I’m want to update on Sundays, and instead of posting an extra chapter a week or making you wait a few extra days, I’m slowing updating a day sooner each week. Because I’m weird like that.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

There’s some Davos/Stannis action here. It starts with “Don’t make me say it.” And ends with “STANNIS! I need to—what the hell is going on here?”

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Since the Baratheons arrived, the Stark household has become a physical manifestation of Pac-Man. Everyone, from the Starks, the Reeds, the Lannisters, and the Baratheons, takes turns at being the ghosts. They want to evade, and they want to capture.

Arya and Sansa avoid Joffrey. Joffrey, while not looking for either of the girls (and simultaneously not not looking), is avoiding his father. His father is trying to seek out all his children (and Jon), because damn it, he wants to be a better man so “come back here you little shits,” but with the exception of Tommen, he does not succeed. Myrcella, sweet little thing who looks at Robb like he hung the moon, is trying to avoid her father and mother, because she has an audition to practice for, and will not trade precious rehearsal time for all the gold her mother can offer (though she’s willing to negotiate if the offer is Robb). She stares longingly at the eldest Stark boy when he’s not looking, and Robb does not notice or does not care. Cersei does, and considers blackmailing her daughter in order to take her shopping, but throws the idea in the back of her head. She’s too busy avoiding her ex-husband, like Robert avoids her. They run into each other against their will, because the Starks did not bother to accommodate their wishes to live in separate houses.

“Uninvited guests do not get to make demands,” Catelyn coldly informs. It was the happiest declaration she’s made all week, especially after the night with Jon and Robb.

Tommen avoids Rickon because the redhead terrifies him. Like his father, Rickon finds him anyways, and demands he come with him to follow Shireen. Tommen argues that stalking is wrong, and an invasion of privacy.

“Don’t be stupid. If watching people is so bad, then why does everyone do it?”

“People don’t…”

“My father does it. He keeps cameras on all of us. It’s for our protection. Robb does it. He makes sure that bad men aren’t mean to his friends. I’m a Stark. We protect people. That’s what Starks do. Some people need to be watched over. Some people want to take other people away from the ones they love.”

“I don’t think…”

“Why are so adamant in keeping me from Shireen?” Rickon glares at the boy. “Are you trying to take her away from me? Huh? Are you?”

Tommen denies the accusation. “Shireen is my cousin!”

Rickon rolls his eyes. “Like that means anything, pervert.”

Tommen says Rickon is scary. Shireen won’t like him if he’s—Rickon hits him and says if he
doesn’t shut up, he’ll hit him again. Sometimes, Tommen cries. Rickon tells him to suck it up and be a man. Tommen cries harder. No one knows why Rickon drags the youngest blond on his adventures except for Catelyn and Sansa. The answer is human sacrifice. Rickon simply wants a scapegoat in case he gets caught.

During his grounding and Bran’s volunteering, Rickon spends a great deal of time with Jojen. Jojen, who is nice and plays with him without treating him like a burden, asks a lot of questions about Bran. Rickon knows there’s something odd about that, especially when the questions become requests to retrieve goods from Bran’s room, like pants or pens with bite marks. Rickon is not stupid; that shit is weird. But just when he’s about to question Jojen’s behavior, the older boy talks about a secret pathway to the Baratheon house and the concerns disappear from the Stark’s mental vicinity. Rickon has more than the Tully coloring—he has extreme tunnel vision and it is a horrible attribute for a child as reckless as him.

In exchange, Rickon reveals day to day notes on Bran. He’s careful not to reveal anything too embarrassing about his brother. He reminds himself of how sickeningly nice Bran is, and Rickon doubts there’s a person in this world who wants to hurt him. Rickon does, however, question Jojen’s motives when the Reed starts asking about his mother’s whereabouts.

“I just need to know if she’s in the house or not. Specifically, when Bran is home.” Jojen smiles. “It’s nothing nefarious, I promise.”

Rickon does not know what ‘nefarious’ means but he doubts Jojen’s honesty.” “But why would you need to know when my mum—”

“You know, I found the strangest tree yesterday. I was looking for some time alone and imagine my disappointment when I turned my head and saw that it was right across from Shireen Baratheon’s bedroom window…”

Well played.

So occasionally, Rickon texts Jojen about his mother’s whereabouts. Eye for an eye, right? He comes to the conclusion that if Jojen is really dangerous, there’s no way his dad would allow him to live with them.

Jojen absorbs the information like a crack addict. Halfway through the week, he grows bold. He enters the Stark home when it is practically empty, and watches Bran from his doorway when he’s enraptured in a book or obsessed with his latest drawing. It is a little creepy, but Summer looks out for Bran twenty-four hours of a day, so what’s the difference with Jojen doing the same?

While watching him, Jojen notices that Bran is avoiding his eldest brother. The act is quite hard, especially with how Robb is trying to fill the void in his heart by pressuring his siblings to spend time with him.

Bran feels guilty for giving up Jon’s phone number to Willas. He knows that it is only a matter of time before Willas calls and Robb finds out. Then, he will throw a fit. Maybe he will cry. But in the end, as Robb is with all his enemies, he will be out for blood, and Bran does not want to be marked as a traitor. Bran does not know Willas that well, but he knows that guys like Willas get what they want. Always. Willas will make Jon his and it will be all Bran’s fault.

Robb, out of all his siblings, has his work cut out for him. He is avoiding his parents, for practical reasons. He is avoiding Jon, for obvious reasons. He is avoiding Theon, for no reason. While he knows it is unfair to ignore the older boy so fervently (it was Robb’s idea to make Jon jealous after all), Robb can’t fight the feeling that maybe, quite possibly, just a little bit, Theon went too far on purpose. Theon has never liked Jon. Robb wouldn’t be surprised if Theon stirred up the pot to get Jon upset. It’s an unlikely theory, but Robb cannot shake off his suspicions. His main concern is that
Theon will do something stupid in their time apart. Theon always gets into trouble when Robb is not there to reign him in.

To further his cause, Robb begins facilitating bonding time with his siblings. He takes Sansa out shopping and he offers to teach Arya how to drive. Robb’s timing was impeccable. Arya, who is growing increasingly annoyed by Sansa and her incessant questioning on her relationship with the Lannisters, is desperate to get out of the house. Arya is so grateful, she does not call out Robb for spying on Jon in their basement.

While Jon is scared to face Robb, he does not avoid him. He’s played a coward too many times, and he is the one who broke up with Robb so he deserves to be tortured by the man’s handsome face and gloomy disposition. Robb makes it unbearably easy for him. On the other hand, Jon is a complete coward and a vengeful son of bitch, so he avoids his Aunt Cat and refuses to give her a chance to apologize. The guilt from his actions makes him avoid her further because shit—he is a horrible nephew and human being.

Speaking of assholes, Jon is avoiding Theon because he’s positive that he will punch that dick in the face.

Aunt Cat and Uncle Ned do not approve of violence in their home.

They would have to be in the same room together, however, for them to enact a punishment. That’s not happening because Aunt Cat, after her incident with Jon, is too ashamed to face her husband. Ned is at a crossroad of emotions. He’s looking at a wall filled with red, yellow, green, and blue yarn, trying to keep track of the failed relationships he’s witnessed the last couple of days. He follows all of his children on his cameras and does not like what he’s seeing. He thinks everybody is avoiding him, because whenever he approaches someone to talk, they run away. Ned does not notice the people walking behind him, and assumes that it is he, who is separating his family. He does not know what he’s doing wrong, but he intends to change it.

The only person who is not avoiding him is Robert, except Robert is obsessed with getting Jon’s DNA. He’s desperate to prove that Jon is his biological son, and develops a diabolical plan to compel Lyanna into an expired shotgun wedding.

“Where is he, Ned?”

Ned reluctantly replies, “At work.”

Because Ned already refused to let him collect DNA directly from his room, Robert is forced to get Jon’s consent on the matter. “Where does he work?”

“At your brother’s.”

“What?”

“Robert, Jon works for Stannis. He—” Before Ned can finish his question, Robert is marching out the door. He asks to borrow Ned’s car, and takes his keys without waiting for a reply.

“—is his nanny. He works next door.” Ned sighs. At least that will get Robert out of his hair for a while and keep Jon safe.

That morning, Stannis offers his protection to Jon from Robert, his ex-lover, and his aunt, by telling him to get his “ass to their house as soon as possible. I saw that freak looking through our windows.” Jon complies. He tries to look for the youngest Stark beforehand, but fails to find any trace of him. Jon does not want to make any assumptions, but he’s dead sure Stannis is right. Rickon would not be avoiding him if he wasn’t guilty as sin.
Stannis may hate the Stark boy, but he’s grateful for the catalyst in his domestic sphere. Jon has developed a newfound dedication to his job, and an undeniable loyalty to his employer. He does not defend the little ingrate, but instead apologizes for his cousin’s actions and swears to punish him when he gets ahold of him. Furthermore, Stannis cannot remember such a rapid reaction time to a request. Jon has been sending him thirty minute reports since he got to their house, and texting efficient and grammatically correct updates on his children.

Davos is going through last month’s numbers when he stops midway his report to tease Stannis about his homesickness. Stannis glowers. “Don’t be silly. I know Jon can handle himself. There’s only three of them this time. Devan can take care of himself.” Somewhat.

Davos is unconvinced. “It’s okay to miss our children. We’ve been spending every day with them for the past week. It’s normal to feel overwhelmed by the distance.”

Stannis flushes at the wording. Our children. Not Stannis’s child. Not Davos’s children. Not Davos and Marya’s children. Their children. Five years, and he’s still red as an apple. Davos heads over to Stannis’s side and puts the reports on the table. He motions Stannis to stand so he can hold him, and places his hands on Stannis’s hips. He kisses him.

“We’re at work,” Stannis protests.

“You are the CEO of Baratheon Inc. You are the owner of the largest hedge fund company in England. No one can come in without your say so. Enjoy it, Stannis. You’ve earned it.”

The words do something magical to Stannis. He cranes his neck to give Davos better access. Davos complies with a trail of happy kisses. Stannis moans, loudly, and Davos asks Stannis what he wants.

“I want…” Stannis turns red. He’ll be happy with anything. But then there’s always that one thing they can’t do because it makes Stannis scream. “For you to…to do that thing.”

“What thing?”

“That…that thing you like to do. The dirty thing. With your tongue.” Stannis looks down. He gets frustrated with himself. “Don’t make me say it.”

Davos kisses Stannis again and says he would love to do ‘that thing’ for him. Stannis nervously turns around. He cannot see Davos getting on his knees, but he can hear Davos dropping to the floor. Davos pulls down the waistband of his husband’s pants. He caresses Stannis’s ass and expresses his admiration with kisses and squeezes. Stannis shivers in anticipation. He wants his husband to get on with it; he wants to feel his tongue inside him.

Davos pulls Stannis’s cheeks apart until they are wide enough that he can see the winking pucker. He leans closer and puts his thumbs inside Stannis and spreads his hole until it accommodates the intrusion. Without hesitation, Davos’s tongue enters his hole and begins licking the inside until he’s sloppy and wet like a cunt. He sucks and licks and probes deeper and deeper until Stannis is clawing on the table. He tries to push onto the tongue but Davos holds his hips in place. The next couple of minutes are torturous.

Davos pauses and takes a look at the swollen entrance, all cute and wanton, and desperately aching for some fulfillment. He slaps the ass, and takes a good look at Stannis’s cock and ball, all hard and leaking. “Do you want my cock or my hole when I’m done?”

“Later,” Stannis groans out. “I’ll decide when you’re finished.”

Davos grins and goes back to eating Stannis out. He could continue forever, but the thought of them
both getting off inspires Davos to hasten his pace. Stannis is so close to coming untouched, that he
never expects, after five years, to be reminded how much he hates his brother.

“STANNIS! I need to—what the hell is going on here?”

Within seconds, Stannis trips over himself trying to escape Robert’s perverted gaze. He crashes to the
grounds, and struggles like a worm hit by a spade. His face is on the floor. His pants are wrapped
around his knees. He spends a good couple of minutes trying to clean himself up while Davos stares
at Robert with admirable coolness and nonchalance. He would help his husband up, but that would
only add insult to his already wounded pride.

Robert marches forward. Stannis, finally dressed, reaches for Davos’s hand. He dusts himself off and
turns to his older brother. Davos and Stannis stand, side by side, to face Robert. Robert grumbles
something about having another “poof in the family” and takes a seat.

“Stannis, I need to talk to you about something.”

“I heard you the first time.”

Robert’s eyes narrow. He glances over at Davos and nods at him. “It’s a family issue. I suggest
sending your secretary off somewhere.”

Stannis bristles. “Davos is family, and he’s not my secretary. He helps run the company.”

Robert scoffs. “If he’s a brother, I’ve never met him. Though apparently he sucks enough dick to
qualify.”

“He is your brother in law and you met him five years ago—at our engagement party.” And after
that, there was no way he was inviting Robert to their wedding.

“Fuck me! Aren’t you married to that crazy redhead?”

Stannis almost beats him over with a stapler. Davos holds Stannis back. He turns to the older
Baratheon and introduces himself. “Davos Seaworth, it’s good to see you again. I am happy to say
that Stannis has been my husband for a good five years and that lapse in judgement is severely over
with.”

Robert shakes his hand hesitantly. “Guess since my brother can’t please a woman, he decided to
become someone else’s, huh?” Robert laughs heartily at his own joke. Stannis twitches, and Davos is
quick to change the subject.

“Perhaps, we can move onto why you are here.”

Robert agrees. Stannis has never had a decent sense of humor. “I’m here to talk about Jon.”

“No.”

Robert is taken back. “What?”

Stannis pauses. “Oh, I’m sorry. I’m so used to shutting down your inane plans that I wasn’t listening.
Who was it you wanted to talk about?”

“Jon Snow, your employee.”

“Oh, in that case: no. Have a pleasant day, Robert. Don’t come back.” Ever. Burn at the stake or get
buried in a ditch somewhere.
“Listen Stannis, you don’t know what you’re dealing with. Jon Snow—”

“—is Lyanna Stark’s son. I know. He told me.”

Robert clenches his fist. “When the fuck was this?”

“A long time ago,” Stannis lies. “He’s my nanny. Of course I would do a thorough background check on the man who takes care of my children. Did you honestly think I would let some stranger inside my home?” That was exactly what he did. In his defense, Davos was quite convincing, and the children did love him. Besides, when has Davos’ gut ever been wrong?

“He’s your nanny? What the—so he’s not here?”

“Of course not. He’s at home with the kids. And you are not allowed anywhere near him,” Stannis declares firmly. “I’ve been through sixteen nannies. I can’t afford to lose him.”

“Did you know that he could be my son?”

Stannis scoffs. Jon Snow could be anybody’s son. Lyanna Stark was and is a very . . . popular woman. “I doubt that’s a fact or you wouldn’t be here.”

“But there’s a chance! I have to find out.”

“And what happens if you’re not the one? Will it finally get it through your head that Lyanna did not want you?”

“Lyanna and I were—”

“—in love. I know. You told me. You told everyone. But the thing is you weren’t in love.” Stannis pretends to be putting away some papers. “And even he is your son, Jon is twenty-one years old. He’s an adult. He doesn’t need a father figure, and his mother did fine without you. You want to use this to claim Lyanna and let me tell you something: that doesn’t work. Children don’t keep relationships alive. Your partner does. You do.”

Robert slams his fist on Stannis’s desk and gets up. Davos takes a protective stance and steps in front of Stannis. “Who do you think you’re talking to?” Robert roars. “You think because you found someone who can stand you long enough to walk down the aisle that you’re an expert? How long do you think this will last, with your personality? He’ll be bored to death of you and when the next best thing comes? That’ll be all you have. Money and a name.”

Stannis does not hold back. He can withstand the insults directed at him, but Davos is his husband. He starts throwing out every dirty secret, every love child, and derogatory name and broken skeleton at his older brother. He talks about Robert’s black outs, the bruises on Cersei’s body after she got too mouthy, how Stannis had to spend half his life cleaning up his mistakes. Robert tells Stannis that his wives never loved him, one was force to marry him by her father because she was pregnant, and then miscarried anyway, and the other only wanted him for his money to fund a cult. They trade insults like stock. Davos allows Stannis to handle it at the beginning, but when Robert attacks Shireen and claims that Stannis failed her by letting her get sick, Davos demands he leaves.

“What did you say to me?”

“That is our daughter you are talking about. I want you to leave.”

“Your daughter? Which one of you gave birth?” He mocks.
Davos stands up straighter. “I love that girl like my own. She is my child as much as she is
Stannis’s.”

Robert, whether he is impressed by Davos’ declaration, or tired of fighting with his younger brother,
leaves in a huff. He swears that he will get to the bottom of Jon’s paternity, whether Stannis likes it
or not.

When he leaves, Stannis curses his luck. He is about to grab his cell phone to warn Jon but Davos
already has his out. He begins texts at the speed of millennial.

“Aren’t you going to call him?” Stannis asks.

“He’ll pick this up faster.” Davos tells Jon about Robert’s plans, and orders him not to let him into
the house no matter what. He also tells him to prepare Stannis’s favorite meal, because he’ll be in a
bad mood for the rest of the night. When Davos sends the message, Stannis is completely sprung. He
sinks his head into his hands and grumbles about his upcoming meeting.

“You still have thirty minutes,” Davos points out.

“I can’t relax in thirty minutes.”

Stannis is never truly relaxed. “I can give you a massage.”

“I don’t want a massage; I want…” The words die on Stannis’s lips. He groans miserably.

Davos and Stannis share the same thought. Stannis takes a deep breath and follows through on an
idea. He licks his lips and awkwardly looks up to Davos with a mimicked expression of seduction.
He’s stiff and anxious, and so nervously he could bang his head on the mahogany desk and still not
beat the humiliation out of his head.

Davos is already hooked.

“Davos?”

“Yes?” Davos asks, a teasing note in his vote.

“I think I made my decision. About earlier.” Stannis whispers something in Davos’s ear. The older
man’s eyes widen, and then he chuckles. He pulls Stannis towards him. They kiss.

“As you command, my lord.”

Jon is baking with Shireen when he receives the messages. He puts the phone away, and returns his
attention to the Baratheon sweetheart decorating cakes with edible diamonds and pearls. Her brothers
are in the living room watching TV. They turned down Jon’s offer in the kitchen.

“You don’t get lonely being the only girl?”

Shireen shrugs. “It’s better than London.” She begins quilting the pink delicacy with the precision of
a surgeon. “When I was living with mother, she wouldn’t let me talk to anybody, or go anywhere. I
was home schooled because it was ‘safer.’”

Jon frowns. He’d forgotten that Shireen didn’t live with her father until his second marriage.

“Melisandre was nice, but scary,” Shireen explains when he asked about it. “She tried to teach me
about her faith, but her stories were boring and strange. So I didn’t listen.” Shireen shrugs. “She told
father that I should continue being taught by her for a ‘proper’ education.”
“Your father let that happen?”

Shireen does not look at Jon. She is completely focused on the lines of the cake. “When I was younger, father took me to an event with other children and they made fun of me. Father didn’t know what to do.” She finishes her work and moves on to the jewelry. She carefully organizes them in separate piles. “Davos was at the hospital a lot. His wife was dying. Father tends to make bad decisions when he’s sad and Davos isn’t around.”

Shireen smiles to herself. “But now Davos is here. He’s my second daddy now, and father is happy and I have brothers and I have you and everything will be okay. I’ll go to school, and Bran already promised me at least three friends when I get there. They’ll be boys too, but I’m looking forward to it.”

Jon thinks about Ygritte and Val, and hopes that Shireen can find a few female friends of her own. He doesn’t think it’s necessary, but Jon doesn’t want Shireen thinking less of herself because she lacked female role models. Maybe he should consider signing her up for a class, or asking his uncle if he knew any families with girls Shireen’s age.

“In that case, do you want me to bring my cousins over more often?”

“Well, Bran was talking about his comic book he’s working on, and I’ve wanted to see it. Rickon is nice, but he needs to stop watching me outside my window.”

Jon freezes.

“Don’t worry, I’m not angry. He’s just a kid, and I’m sure his crush will pass. But when he gets older, it’ll be super creepy so you should establish some boundaries. Plus, father might get an ulcer. The doctors are worried about his stress levels.”

Jon clears his throat. “…I’ll talk to Rickon about that.”

Shireen returns to her counting. When she finishes, she frowns. “We’re don’t have enough jewels.”

Jon looks over to her piles. “Can you make do with what you have?”

“No,” Shireen refuses. “If you’re going to do something, you do it right. We have to go to the grocery store.”

Jon thinks about it. Davos did ask him to make something Stannis will like, and Devan is old enough to watch his younger siblings for an hour—he probably won’t kill them. Jon already prepared their snacks, and they’re pretty consumed with the new television series they are binge-watching.

Sighing, Jon agrees to Shireen’s request. He tells her to grab her coat. While she dashes upstairs, Jon heads to the living room to warn Devan. “Devan, I’m going to the grocery store to pick up something for Shireen. Don’t let anybody into the house unless they have a key and the security codes.”

“Then, I wouldn’t need to let them in.”

“Exactly, take care of your brothers.” Jon pauses, in case his message wasn’t clear. “Oh, and your Uncle Robert is here so don’t let him in.”

Devan’s eyes haven’t left the screen. “Because Stannis would give his security codes to the man who was caught banging his ex-wife at his engagement party to his second wife. Yeah, I got it the first time.” Commercial break goes on and he gets up. “Did you prepare snacks?”
“In the kitchen!” Jon yells at the doorway. Shireen comes rushing down and waves her brother goodbye for the trip. Devan ruffles her head as she passes. She tells Jon she’ll meet him at the car. As an afterthought,

Jon tells Devan: “Don’t let your siblings touch the cake!”

“Got it!”

“And take a break from the TV to do something productive!”

Devan rolls his eyes. “Jon, I have two dads. I don’t need a mom, too.”

Jon chuckles tells him goodbye. The second he closes the door; his phone gets a text message.

‘Take me wit u 2 the store’

Jon is about to text him back. He wants to know how Rickon found out where they were going, but then he receives another text.

‘Do this 4 me or I will do something stupid. Again.’

You shouldn’t be doing that anyways, Jon thinks. He texts back that he has to ask Shireen.

‘K. Do it. Now.’

Jon groans and sees Shireen eagerly waiting at the car. After unlocking it, he tells her that Rickon wants to come along but not if it makes her uncomfortable. Shireen giggles and says it’s fine but he needs to stop watching her through the windows.

Jon relays the message and is met with a hesitant ‘fine.’ He promises to stop looking into her bedroom window but makes no such vows towards her living room.

“It’s for her own safety, he defends. “People are crazy.”

They pass the Stark entrance way and Rickon is already waiting outside. He gets into the back, right behind Shireen who sits in the passenger seat. If Rickon is upset, he doesn’t show it and stares longingly at Shireen’s backside. He focuses on where her braids come together and opens up her face to show off her scars. Shireen, with too much maturity for a fourteen-year-old, has long stopped covering her flaws. If people want to look, let them.

They get to the grocery store and head to the bakery aisle. Rickon is quiet, too quiet, but Jon chalks it up to him wanting to avoid a greater punishment then the one he’s going to get when Jon informs Catelyn and Ned about his behavior. For now, the youngest Starks settles for watching Shireen from a polite distance.

While Shireen picks out her decorations, Jon thinks about what he’s going to make tonight. He turns around and runs into a familiar face.

“Oh, sorry I wasn’t—oh. Hi.”

“Uh…”

Seeing Dacey Mormont in a grocery store feels equivalent to finding a bear in a zoo. It is not an abnormal sight, and some might say it’s expected, but there’s something wrong about the image. She coughs when Jon keeps staring at her. “Hi, I’m Dacey. One of Robb’s friends…we met the other night. Sort of.”
Jon composes himself and holds out his hand. “Yeah, you called me. I’m Jon. I’m sorry, I should have introduced myself then.”

Dacey shakes it. “No, it’s…alright. Robb was a right prat and Theon was…Theon is an ass. I’m just going to say it. He’s an ass. I’m sorry you had to go through that. I heard…” Dacey hesitates. “I heard you guys aren’t together anymore.”

Jon shakes his head. “No, we’re officially over.” He tries to smile but fails.

“Are you still living with the Starks?”

Jon wonders how much she and the rest of Robb’s friends know about them. “Yeah, I mean, they’re family.”

Dacey seems surprised. Then she grins. “That’s good of you. I’ve dated Robb before and I know how he is. I’ve never seen him act that way, though.”

The news surprises Jon. “You did? What happened?”

Dacey shrugs. “We grew up? I was his first ‘girlfriend.’” She adds quotation marks for emphasis. “We were twelve. Back then, it was just holding hands.”

Jon remembers his youth as a combination of Stark family dinners and private jets across continents, playing doctor with a much younger Robb, having his first kiss stolen by his best friend after getting pissed, losing his virginity to Ygritte at seventeen, experimenting with Satin, and other trysts he placed in a mind folder labeled poor judgements and bad decisions.

“Yeah, I understand.”

Dacey’s response is interrupted by a petite girl with a fearsome expression on her face. She carries a cart full of roots, greens, and steak meats. “Dacey, enough small talk. Let’s go home and fail at home economics.”

Dacey closes her eyes and displays a pained expression. “Lyanna, we are not going to fail. I told you…”

The name caused Jon to raise an eyebrow. He forgot what a common name it was in this region. “You told me I needed to learn how to cook. I told you that I rather learn how to make money and hire someone to cook for me.”

“Lyanna…”

“Then you said ‘that’s not the way the world works.’ And I said ‘Dacey, you are twenty years old and your greatest achievement in the kitchen is not burning water.’ Now, we are here. Wasting money on food we cannot cook.”

Dacey looks like she’s fighting an internal battle. Instead of engaging in the walking entity of sass that is her little sister, she turns to Jon. “Jon, this is my little sister, Lyanna. Lyanna, this is Jon. Uh… he’s Robb’s cousin.”

The title causes Jon’s heart to ache. Instead of lingering on the feeling, Jon says hello. Lyanna nods at him. Shireen comes back with her choice of sugared gems and crystals, along with a bouquet of gumpaste violets and roses and cupcake wrappers. “I thought I could make cupcakes next week so father and Davos can bring them to work.”
Jon tries not to coo at her. “That’s a great idea. Let’s make a stop at the produce section. What do you think your dad would like to eat today?”

Shireen thinks about it for a second. “Well, if he has a bad day, we can make Lancashire Hotpot since we have time. And Italian meatballs. He likes them better than Swedish or Welsh meatballs but refuses to compliment Americans so we almost never have them.”

Jon tells her that it’s a great idea. He’s about to say goodbye to Dacey and Lyanna, when Lyanna goes up to Shireen. “You’re new here.”

Shireen takes a step back. “I am.”

“Where are you from originally?”

“London.”

“Who are your parents?”

“Stannis and Selyse Baratheon. Well, my father remarried so I have another dad now. His name is Davos Seaworth—”

“That’s too many words. Who are your parents?”

Shireen is stunned. She answers, “Stannis Baratheon and Davos Seaworth.”

“How do you know this one?” Lyanna motions to Rickon. Jon did not notice it before but Rickon is standing very, very far away. He looks at Lyanna like she’s the Queen of Hell and plans to bring forth all that is unholy.

“He is Jon’s cousin. Jon is my nanny,” she informs before the younger could question their relationship.

Lyanna frowns. She stares at Shireen like a bear waiting to strike a languid fish, the kind that has given up the stress of going upstream and is now content to be lingering near a log and waiting for its death.

“So you can cook?”

Dacey and Jon look at each other. Jon leans over and whispers, “Where is this going?”

“I don’t know, but the last time Lyanna talked to another girl, she ended recruiting someone for her plans to become the leader of the world.”

That’s all Jon needed to know. He tugs on Shireen’s sleeve. “Sweetheart, let’s go get those ingredients. I don’t think we should leave your brothers alone any longer than we have.”

Shireen nods, and is about to follow Jon’s lead when Lyanna grabs her and pulls her back. “I’m not done talking,” she exclaims. Her eyes peer straight into Shireen. She does not even glance at Shireen’s scar, a first for many. “Why did you learn how to cook?”

“...Because it’s useful?”

“Do you know where to hit a man to leave him paralyzed for life?”

“...No?”
“Can you recite the ingredients used to make a hydrogen bomb?”

“No.”

“Well, that’s useful isn’t it?”

“I guess?”

“So it’s not about the utility.”

Shireen looks to Jon for help. Jon is as confused as she is. Finally, Shireen tells her she likes it.

Lyanna scoffs. “Who taught you how to cook?”

“My stepfather, Davos. And then Jon, my nanny. My brothers are bad at it.”

Lyanna looks displeased by the answer. “So you were trained by men to serve men. And because you’re a girl, you like it. Were you told women belong in the kitchen, too?”

This time, Shireen’s eyes narrow and she removes Lyanna’s hand. Roughly and ready for an argument. “Women do belong in the kitchen. Men belong in the kitchen. If you need food to survive, you should be in the kitchen. Cooking it.”

Lyanna’s frown decreases by a miniscule. Her mouth screams murder but her eyes are intrigued.

“You don’t have many friends do you?”

“Why do you care?”

Lyanna stares her down. She looks at her oldest sister, and then at Jon. She considers her options, and before anyone can do anything, she goes into Dacey’s purse, ignores her protest, and grabs a pen and paper.

“I have a slumber party on the first full moon of the month. You will be there.”

“What?” Jon exclaims.

“No!” Rickon protests. He leaves his safe spot so that his complaints can be heard. Lyanna ignores him and turns to Shireen. She writes down her number and address.

“Here. Don’t be late. I can’t stand tardiness.”

“I will?” Shireen coughs. “I mean…I will?”

“I like you. You can cook, and you have a brain. I like having friends who know things I don’t. Those are the friends you really need.”

“Oh,” Shireen takes the information. “So…what do you during sleepovers?”

“We play games. We eat food we order. We roleplay what we would do if we were given more power in the world and deal with problems like food shortages and enemy attacks. Do you want to be a princess?”

“I can be a princess?”

“Someone has to be. It’s a lot of power and you have a lot of enemies. No one has been ready to take the mantle yet.”
Shireen, having completely forgotten their bitter interaction, accepts the invitation.

“I’ll expect a call from your guardian. Tell them to ask for Lyanna Mormont. Once that happens, we can exchange further details, such as transportation.” She looks at Jon. “I’m sure you will take care of that.” She turns back to Shireen. “If you are well received by my friends, you will be invited to more events. I like to go hunting. How old are you?”

“Fourteen.”

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“No.”

“Are you interested in dating?”

Shireen blushes and think of Bran. She shuts that train of thought down. “No.”

“Good, men are the last thing we need at our age.”

Before Lyanna leaves, she sends Rickon a look of courtesy. “Stark.”

Rickon retaliates with a glower of his own. “Mormont.”

All of them leave the grocery store in the next half hour. The Mormonts leave before the Starks, because Jon still needed to pick up the items for dinner. He drops Shireen off at her house first so that she can prepare the ingredients beforehand, and Jon tells her to make her brothers help. Afterwards, he takes Rickon home.

The second she leaves the car, Rickon is quick to voice his disapproval. The friendship, he claims, will ruin Shireen. “She’ll eat her alive. Lyanna Mormont has no mercy for the weak. She broke a kid’s arm when he called her sister mannish. She took me down with a single tackle. I couldn’t get up for a week.”

“You fought a girl?” Jon teases.

“When a bear comes at you, you don’t stop to check its part,” Rickon tells him seriously. “When Lyanna Mormont goes after you, you bet I’m throwing a few punches.”

“Why on earth did she attack you?”

“I didn’t do anything,” Rickon explains. “One of my underlings told me she was strong for a girl. I dragged him over to her class to apologize to her.”

“Why?”

“Because women aren’t strong for girls, Jon.” Rickon tells him, the petulance practically visible in the air. “If you are strong, you are strong. It doesn’t matter what you look like.”

Jon is taken back by the declaration. Wow, Jon thinks, Aunt Cat and Uncle Ned raised him well, didn’t they?

“And then I hit her.”

Jon almost slams the brakes. “You did what?”

Rickon sighs. “Jon, if you want to test someone’s strength, you get them to hit you. Men or women.
So I told her to give me her best shot, and she told me to eat shit and get the hell away from her. Then, I hit her. I never saw that tackle coming…” Rickon remembers it like it was yesterday; his face is completely in awe.

Jon does not know what to say. So he laughs, he laughs and laughs until Rickon flushes a red as dark as his hair and tells him to shut up. Jon doesn’t, and only collects himself when he gets to the Stark home. He tells Rickon that he’s eating the Baratheons and won’t be home for dinner.

Rickon rolls his eyes. He already knew that.

When Rickon comes home, he yells to announce his presence. Shaggydog is already running to the entranceway, excited for his master. His mother greets him, and he relays Jon’s message as asked. His mother appears disheartened by the news but recovers enough to tell him to take a bath. Rickon grimaces. He heads upstairs and does as requested. By the time he is finished putting on his clothes, dinner won’t be ready for two hours. He settles for wasting his time watching the telly. Suddenly, the door slams open.

“You are such a hypocrite, Robb, it’s not even funny!” Arya screams.

“How am I a hypocrite?” Robb yells back. “I’m just saying that maybe you should start respecting yourself a little more—!”

“I respect myself just fine!”

“Really? I couldn’t tell!”

Arya shakes her head and laughs. “Oh, like you’re so much better? You call a girl your girlfriend and that means she’s special, that you’re not slutting it up with a new bird every month? What does a relationship even mean to you? How is Jon any different from all the other girls?”

“Don’t start that with me, Arya!”

“I don’t need other people to define me, or my happiness, Robb! You! You’re afraid of being alone! Everything about you is about being with someone else! Do you even have an identity, Robb?”

“What the hell do you mean by that?”

“Robb Stark, Ned and Catelyn Stark’s son. Robb Stark, the heir to Winterfell and Stark Industries. Robb Stark this, Robb Stark that. Your entire person is made of titles and responsibilities!”

“That’s because I care about other people!”

“I care about other people!”

“No, you don’t! You don’t worry about the consequences of your actions, everyone is just another stepping stone for you! You’re spoiled, Arya! You do whatever you want because you know you can always count on mother and father’s support!”

“And you don’t? At least I’ve tried living on my own, and you know what? I’ve succeeded. You have never strayed off your ‘path,’ Robb! You’ve never taken a risk unless it’s being backed up by a dozen of your friends!”

Before Robb can say anything else, she heads to her bedroom. Robb orders her not to turn her back on him and she ignores him. On her way up, she tells her mother she’s going out. Catelyn protests but they fall on deaf ears.
Catelyn gets down to the living room, and asks Robb what happened.

Robb groans. He wants to hit something.

“I took her driving.”

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter: Robb/Arya go driving, Ramsey is his own warning becomes a warning, and some Gendry/Arya interaction, and a throwback to the original series
2. Nothing happened this week.
Arya switches lanes like a pro, and can parallel park with her eyes closed. When they get off the motorway, Arya suggests getting something to eat for a job well done. Her driving is faster than Robb likes, but she’s efficient at turns and knows exactly what she is doing.

Robb’s eyes furrow. “You already know how to drive, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. Gendry taught me.”

Robb recognizes the name as the young mechanic Arya is always hanging around with—the one who fixed their father’s car when it broke down a few years back. Arya gave him her number within moments of meeting him, and though he swore to their father back then that “he doesn’t go for jailbait,” Robb wonders how long he lasted before his little sister dug her claws into him.

“When?”

“Last year, before I left home. It felt like a good skill to have.” And hot wiring a car, but that’s a completely different discussion, and she rather not have her brother advocating for her separation from Gendry. It is not his fault he’s whipped.

Robb frowns. He’d forgotten about that. “Where did you go?”

Arya takes a left turn. “Why does everyone want to know that all of a sudden?”

“It’s a reasonable question. You were gone for a year, Arya.” Robb stresses the ‘year’ aspect.

“And so were you.”

“I was at university. Mum and dad knew where I was. We had no clue you were alive except for the occasional phone call and that email you sent from Aunt Lyanna’s townhouse—which you broke into.”

“First of all, that wasn’t her townhouse. That was her former beau’s beach house. Secondly, why does it matter so much where I went? I left. I came back. None of us can change the fact that it happened, and I don’t plan on running away again. Once was enough.”

“Once was too much.”

“Once was necessary for me to find myself.”

Robb doesn’t agree. “Your relationships with other people define you. Your values, your likes and dislikes, how old you were when you first learned to speak, who you fall in love with…Arya, we’re your family. We should be a part of you.”

“Sometimes you need to remove the things that make up who you are so that you can see if that’s actually you.” Arya signals for a right turn. “Robb, nothing bad happened to when I was gone. I went to New York, spent some time in Asia. I danced, I found a way to make ends meet, but I’m fine. I’m not ashamed of what I did.”

“Then why won’t you tell us what happened?”
“Because I don’t like dredging up the past in a way that only makes people upset. My life is my life. I own it. I live it. I should be the one to endure it, not you, not mum, not dad.”

Robb wants to protest, but he knows that Arya will not budge on this matter. Instead, he gives a name of nice café that serves French Paninis and ice tea that’s far too sweet, and offers to treat his younger sister. She agrees, and after some time, puts on the radio, where the news of a mangled finger was found underneath a trash can, not too far from where the bone filled shit was discovered. Robb switches the channel.

“It’s depressing,” he justifies.

Arya turns it back on. “It’s the most exciting thing to happen all year.”

Robb fights her and switches to some music. “Dead women are not ‘exciting’ stories, Arya, they are tragedies. People are dying.”

“That’s what people do.”

Robb stares.

Arya scoffs. “It’s a quote.”

Robb continues to judge her.

“It’s from Sherlock.”

“The books series? I don’t remember—”

“From the BBC series. For goodness sakes, watching the telly once in a while will not kill you Robb, no matter what father says.”

“Father wouldn’t lie to us,” Robb defends. Arya pouts, but eventually comes to the realization that Robb might be serious and actually believed their father when he said that television was dangerous and caused brain damage, and that the only reason they kept one in their house was to watch the news.

They get to the café, and are seated near the window. She orders an iced jasmine and mandarin orange tea blend, and asks for time to look at the menu. Robb requests a dripped iced coffee and chooses to order with Arya, despite already knowing what he’s going to get. While they wait for their drinks, Arya wonders about the serial killer.

“I heard he feeds his victims to his dogs, and chases them throughout the city at night, when no one is on the streets. I also heard that the victims are all prostitutes, so no one helps them or they can’t get help legally.”

Robb nods. “It makes sense. Killing for fun is not like killing for greed or envy. You want to keep doing it then you need a plethora of victims. Or the funds to keep moving elsewhere.”

“Or both.”

“Or both,” Robb agrees. “If he’s moving north, he’s going to be trouble, though.”

“Do you think Uncle Benjen will be put on the case?”

Robb shrugs. “If they know what they’re doing. But they definitely have to bring in new people soon.”
“Why?”

“The case is getting too big. They started investigating again in West Yorkshire and found similar cases in Bradford and Lancashire.”

“How do you know this?”

The server comes back with their drinks. Robb orders a turkey and pesto panini and Arya gets a small salad with dressing on the side. When she leaves, Robb tells her that he overheard Uncle Benjen and Ned talking. He keeps his tone even, and bites into his sandwich with perfect nonchalance. Arya then asks how he really knows.

"What do you mean? I just told you--"

“You just said you didn’t know if Uncle Benjen was on the case, and now you revealed that you heard them talking about it. You have no reason to lie about it now, which means you were lying earlier. How do you know?”

Robb stares at her, a little bit amaze that she caught his lie so fast, and then laughs. “You caught me.”

“I’m good at that.”

Robb sighs. “I was checking our sales reports and noticed that there was an increase in home security purchases in those areas. I asked father and he confirmed it.”

“Father told you information about a classified police case? Which he's not supposed to hear about in the first place?”

Robb drinks his tea, biding time to find an appropriate answer. Arya narrows her eyes.

"How dumb do you think I am?”

"Arya—"

“You’re watching us again, aren’t you?”

Robb drinks his tea.

“Robb!”

He keeps drinking until he’s full and choking.

“Robb, it’s bad enough that father does it, but now you? Anywhere else, this would be a crime. I can't believe I can’t even go to the bathroom without someone being able to track the frequency of my bowel movements.”

"I have a very good reason for doing so,” Robb announces. He tries not to look guilty, and goddamn it, he probably has already justified it in his head. As he speaks, there is more conviction in his voice. To him, Arya's privacy is no concern if it means her safety. He sounds like their father, and it is absolutely infuriating. "In these times, it's important to be cautious, even overly so. I rather be sure of where everybody is than to wonder if they're laying in a ditch somewhere.”

"I don't care if you have a good reason,” Arya retorts. "You need to stop, or I'll tell father." Because only one person is allowed to be the paranoid bugger in their family, and even he will not approve of Robb's ability to access private security cameras.
"You can’t do that, Arya."

"I can, and I will. I don’t like feeling like a prisoner in my own house."

"I’m not watching you."

"Like I believe that, and even I wasn’t your target, I still can get mixed in the crossfires—"

"I’m watching Jon!" Robb blurts out.

Arya is taken back.

"I was worried about him working for the Baratheons and so I hacked into their systems—I know, it’s illegal—"

"And morally egregious but go on."

"But then we broke up, and I just…I kept watching. Okay? It makes me feel better to see him."

"Why not try talking to him?" Arya asks. "Why not treat him like an actual person and have a conversation with him? You’re keeping tabs on him. That’s not healthy, for either of you."

"It’s therapeutic," Robb justifies. "I can’t face him without wanting to get on my knees and beg him to take me back. But that’s not an option anymore. Jon has made it clear he doesn’t want me."

"That’s never stopped you before."

"Well it has never worked before," Robb snaps, his bitterness is strong enough to taste. "Things need to change. I need to change."

Arya stares. She knows she should push the camera thing further, get Robb to stop this insanity, but she can’t. Instead, she sighs. Robb was torn by the break up, even more so than Jon. As much as she cares for her cousin, she also wants Robb to get better.

"If you really want results, changing bad habits is a good place to start. But in the future, I think you should be more focused on us."

"Us?" Robb raises an eyebrow.

"Yeah, us," Arya spins her straw around. "Me, Sansa, Bran, and Rickon. Your siblings. I bet you never realized it either."

"What?"

"Robb, we’re tools for you. You spend the most time with us after you’ve been through a break up and need the distraction. That’s how we knew you were single."

"I don’t…” But the words die on Robb’s lips. He remembers going out with Jeyne and forgetting to pick Arya up from school. When he finally realized what happened, Yoren had already showed up on their doorstep with a black eye because Arya thought she was getting kidnapped. He also remembers dropping Sansa off for a date with Joffrey so that he could spend time with Talisa, and getting a phone call saying she dumped an entire cake on Cersei and left the house during a storm. Fuck.

"I’m the worst fucking brother in the world," Robb moans. He sinks his head into his hands.
Arya shrugs. “It’s okay. I’ve stopped worrying about it.”

“No!” Robb protests. “No, you should not be okay with my shitty brothering.”

“‘Brothering?’”

“Yes, brothering. I can’t believe…if this were the middle ages, I would have sold you off for a cattle and a goat for winter.”

Arya rolls her eyes. “Don’t be dramatic. I’m a girl, you would have had to pay a dowry to get me away.”

“I’m not being dramatic, and it’s not funny. What if you were held hostage somewhere? What if father dies and I can’t take care of you because I don’t know what to do? Fuck,” he repeats. “Fuck, I can’t believe it.”

Arya giggles. She tells him it’s fine. They know he loves them. Robb shakes her head and starts mumbling about the shit he’s done in the past. While he gets lost in his own maniacal strategy plans, Arya catches the eye of a dark haired man from another table. He’s sitting with a group of guys, trading japes with one another, and throws her a wink. Arya smiles and looks away. Not her type.

Robb notices, and looks behind him. He turns back to face her. “Stop.”

“What?” Arya asks innocently. She sips her drink like Lolita come to life, and Robb is not buying it.

“He’s too old for you.”

“Really?” Arya glances over again and the guy is talking to his friends. “He’s your age at most, and besides…” Arya grins. “I’m sixteen now. No one is too old for me anymore.”

The statement makes Robb uncomfortable. “Except him. He’s too old for you.”

Arya shakes her head. “You’re taking to brothering pretty quickly.” Robb can be so silly sometimes.

She smiles at him. “Do you know why I’ve never had a boyfriend?”

Robb never noticed actually, with all the gentlemen callers riling up her phone.

“Because when people are young and get in romantic relationships, they fuck themselves up for the future. They begin to see themselves as being whole with another person and not whole by themselves. They don’t have time to respect themselves because they’re thinking of their partner’s opinions, they don’t have time to develop friendships because they want love.”

Robb remains silent.

“If you want Jon, then give him time. Be friends with him. Fall in love with him again.”

Robb looks down. “I don’t know if I can do that.”

Arya tells him: “You used to. And he loved you, too.”

Robb looks at her in her surprise, and then chuckles. “When did you get so smart?”

“Last year,” Arya quips and laughs with him.

They get their food and eat it in relative comfort. They chat about miscellaneous things, like Arya’s London performance and how she’s working with Jaqen H’ghar. She talks about university with
Robb, and carefully avoids his questions about college next year.

Near the end of their meal, Arya goes to the bathroom. Robb watches her leave, and does not miss the guy from before checking her out. More importantly, he was staring at her legs and ass. He turns to his friend and makes an unheard comment, before giving Arya a onceover. One guy says something and they all laugh.

Robb knows enough about guys his age to know he’s not admiring her shorts. He leaves his table and goes up to the ringleader whose been watching this entire time. The guy sees Robb go up to him and smiles, guiled and full of kindness.

Robb doesn’t buy it.

“Can I help you, sir?”

“Yeah,” Robb answers. “You can help me by removing your eyes from my little sister.”

The young men around him laugh. The guy smiles. “Oh you’re her older brother. I didn’t see that coming. That’s good.” He actually sounds happier. Before Robb can tell him to back off, the guy continues. “You know a girl’s real whore when she dresses like that around her brother. Means she’s begging for a good lay.”

His friend laughs, and Robb fights back his own chuckle. Jokes on him, because this fucker is not the first person Robb’s considered killing and he won’t be the last. Hell, he’s a Stark. He can make some asshole disappear with nothing more than a pair of matches, baby powder, and an unidentified vehicle.

“Care to repeat that?” Robb warns.

The guy smirks. “I have this game, you see. It’s called ‘Find the Whore.’ We go to a room full of people and we try to spot the one just asking for it. Then we take her home and show her what’s she’s missing, And I never lose. So when your sister comes back, why don’t I give her a—”

Robb grabs his head and slams it against the table, over and over again, until there’s a sudden shriek and a rain of gasps. Then, the whole restaurant quiets. When Robb lets go, the man’s face is bloodied from a broken nose. He looks at the other men. “Anyone else?”

The other young men get up. The asshole cups his injury. “You’re going to regret that,” he tells Robb. He’s smirking as the blood runs past his lips, and he’s completely calm.

“Oh really?” Robb challenges.

Arya chooses that moment to get back, and looks at the situation at hand. “What happened here?”

The bleeding man walks up to Arya. He becomes dangerously close. Robb clenches his fist and is about to push him away from her when Arya takes it a step further. Literally. She goes up to the man nursing a broken nose and meets him face to face, mere inches apart.

“What did you do?”

The man does not flinch. “Your brother just attacked me. I’m innocent—”

“What the fuck did you do?” Arya repeats.

The guy stares at her unflinching face. He turns to Robb. “Oh, she’s good.” He cackles and turns
back to Arya. “See, pretty lady. I called you *whore*. I can smell it on you. See that your little throat is meant for cum guzzling and that ass is supposed to spread and used and *I generously offered my services* to your brother.”

“Is that so?” Arya is unimpressed. Bored, at worst. Her behavior unnerves the young man because she can see his smile falter. He’s not used to dealing with women who can handle themselves. He has probably never met a girl who could fight back.

Robb is about to give him another punch in the face, and honestly? Two or three years ago, Arya would have done the same. Instead, Arya gets closer to a point their lips are almost touching. She tells him the truth.

“I don’t want you.”

The man’s eyes narrow. His smile doesn’t leave his face but it becomes tight, unhappy.

“But I am a whore,” Arya tells him, her voice as sweet as sugar drops and candy canes. “I am a whore and I don’t want you. Do you understand that? That’s how pathetic you are. *A whore doesn’t want you.*” She caresses his face. He flinches because she’s being tender. “I bet you’re thinking about me now. I bet you’re imagining me on that table, crying, begging you to stop. But I won’t. You’re calling me a cunt in your head and it’s killing you that I’m not scared. You’re bigger than me. There’s six, seven of you and one of me, and my brother probably can’t stop all of you. But even if you fuck me, you can’t own me.”

His smile is gone. “You—”

“Me?” Arya whispers. “Me. I’m going to my car. My brother is going to pay the bill for me because I’m a whore. And then I’m going to walk away like a whore, and I’m not going to think of you, like a whore—but you’re going to think of me.” She grins. She leans into his ear. “You’re going to look at my smiling face and you’ll remember it for years. Because guys like you? They don’t forget about whores like me.”

Arya walks away. Robb quickly drops a few bills on the table, and runs after his little sister. She gets into the passenger seat. When he gets in, Robb asks her “What the hell were you thinking?”

“Shouldn’t that be my line?”

“I had every right to get angry. He called you a whore.”

“Which sounds like it should be my problem, not yours. Another piece of advice, Robb? Next time, maybe slamming a guy’s head into the table when he’s with seven other guys is not the best idea. I wanted to avoid an altercation.”

“Since when? You love a good fight!”

“I like to fight battles I can win.” Arya rolls her eyes. “Come on, years of counseling and disciplinary action and the one time I prefer words to conflict, you have a problem with it.”

“Arya, I don’t have a problem with how you dealt with him. I have a problem with how you described yourself. You shouldn’t be saying things like that.”

“Like what?”

“You called yourself a whore!”
“Well I’m certainly not a lady.”

Robb almost hits himself on the wheel. “It’s disrespectful to yourself, and you can’t go riling up guys like that!”

“Like what? I’m not riling anybody up. I’m defending myself, like you tried to do.” Arya scoffs. “Robb, I know you said you’re going to be a more attentive older brother but I was hoping for things like gifts, a new leotard or food. None of this ‘protect my sister’s virtue’ bullshit.”

“Arya, I’m worried. We just spent half an hour talking about girls getting hunted down and mutilated, and you pissed off a guy who basically fantasized about raping you! What if he was the serial killer?”

“What if he was? I’m sure attacking and humiliating him in public might have done a bit more damaged.”

“I’m your big brother. It’s my job to deal with scum who want to hurt you.”

Arya stares at him seriously. “Robb, I’m not some damsel in distress. I don’t a glass slipper or a prince to slay my dragons. I will deal with scum who want to hurt me.”

Robb frowns. He keeps his voice low, but even with a mutter, Arya understands him. “This is so like you...you’re too fucking reckless...” He says more things, and Arya snaps.

“Just because Jon leaves you does not mean you can take your anger out on other people, especially me,” she throws at him. “You can’t protect me, and you’re not responsible for him.”

Now neither of them are happy, and Robb tightens his grip on his steering wheel and retorts with another backhanded comment. Arya rages up and snidely remarks on his lack of priorities. They continue with even tones for the first street, and are up to full blow yelling when they reach the drive through. They don’t stop until Arya is running up her room.

After the fight, Arya decides she needs a walk. Serial killers be damned. She gets a leash, and goes to the yard to get Nymeria. She dials Gendry’s number on the way down and asks him to come along with her. When he refuses, she name dropped the serial killer. Gendry tells her serial killers should be afraid of her. Arya tells him to shake his ass and pick her up. He does.

Nymeria is in the yard, watching the east house with an alarming amount of stillness. She’s never liked the Baratheons or the Lannisters, and would growl at Joffrey whenever he got near or would bear teeth at Cersei. Sansa used to accuse Arya of training her to do so.

Back then, Arya scoffed. “I wish I could train Nym to follow my commands.” She told this to Sansa and got a huff and an argument in response.

Gods, they were children then. Now, Nymeria has grown up and so has Arya. Nymeria is smaller than her siblings, but there are moments when she becomes abnormally wolf like. She stalked people and observed them for hours as if they were prey. When she ‘played’ with her siblings, it was closer to fighting than actual roughhousing one expects from siblings.

Arya calls out her name and waits for Nymeria to come to her. She clips on a collar and leash, which is loose and easily removable, but keeps up appearances for the family. All the dogs are clever enough to be left to their own devices. But their big sizes leave people agitated, and they’re required to put them on leashes when they go out. Only Summer is allowed without her leash in public, and that’s because of her vest.
Gendry texts her that he’s on his way. He’ll meet her on the next block to avoid running into Robert or his children, or worst, Cersei.

The walk to Gendry’s car is longer than she remembered. He used to park there all the time, when Arya was thirteen and not allowed to even think of boys, let alone be going out with them in the middle of the night. Till this day, she wonders if her father actually believes that ‘midnight dance classes’ were actually dance classes.

She reaches the Baratheons’ home, and notices that the sun is oddly bright today but no one is on the streets. They are probably at the mall or out at the park or at home. She heard that women have been keeping themselves in, and men are at home with no birds to chase.

There’s a light breeze, but not so much as a wisp of hair or a broken fingernail. It’s empty enough to hear a ghost moan. With the exception of the random vehicle driving down the two-way street, Arya sees nothing.

She passes the Baratheon house, and is now walking by fences that look like prison bars. The next house over, their yards are not as well trimmed. The weeds escape the fences like hands grasping for freedom. Nymeria growls at something. Arya looks behind her.

There’s no one.

Nymeria keeps growling. “Hush,” Arya orders. Nymeria does not listen. She starts barking. Staring at the streets and the random cars passing through. She barks at the houses beside them. “Hush,” Arya repeats. Nymeria bears her fangs, and there’s the wolf in her again. She never listens, and Arya doesn’t know why she tries. Instead, she bends down and cups her dog’s face and asks her what’s wrong.

Someone grabs her shoulder.

Arya turns around and punches them in the face.

“What the—Arya!”

“Gendry?”

Arya watches in horror as her best friend clutches his nose.

“Fuck!” he swears. “We talked about this! You can’t just go stabbing people you just met!”

“I didn’t stab you!” Arya defends. A voice in her head says she should have said sorry first, and so she says “Sorry! Are you okay?” after.

“Yeah, yeah…” Gendry checks his nose. There’s no blood, so Arya went easy on him, but it definitely feels strained. “At least it isn’t your knife.” He glances at her pocket, and notices that her left hand is on her knife. No wonder this one didn’t hurt as much.

“You punch with your right hand?”

“My aim is better with my left hand,” Arya clarifies. She remembers her father’s self-defense education. Do the most damage with what can cause the most damage.

Gendry shakes his head. “So what did you want to talk to me about?”

“I…” Arya tries to find the words. “I want to go for a drive.”
“With Nymeria?”

“She helps me think.” The dog stands at full alert. She hops on Gendry’s stomach and attempts to stretch up and lick his injury. Gendry appreciates the effort and bends down to make it easier. He scratches beneath her ears, and Arya tells him to stop.

“She likes it.”

“She’s only doing it to get the passenger seat. Nym, he’s not giving it to you. You’re staying in the back.”

Nymeria whines a bit, and licks Gendry one last time. She gives him her biggest puppy-dog eyes, and acts insanely cute, but Gendry eventually agrees with Arya. With a growl, she returns to Arya’s side, proving her master’s point.

They head to his car. They keep all the windows down because Arya demands to feel the air in her face and so does Nymeria. Princesses, both of them. They drive for an entire hour without saying a word. Arya keeps her thoughts to herself, only making occasional demands to change the music. She taps her feet and hums to herself. There’s a slight doze to her head.

Arya phone dings and there’s a message from her mother telling her to come home. Without asking, Gendry makes a U-turn and heads back. They stop a block away again, when Arya asks Gendry to come with her. “You should meet him.”

“Who?”

“The pope…who do you think I’m talking about Gendry?” She raises an eyebrow. “They’re staying for the summer and will be leaving before we know it. This could be your last shot.”

“He’s not my father, Arya,” Gendry inform her. “He didn’t raise me. He left me with my mother and never looked back. All those millions and he’s never so much as spared me or my mum a glance.”

“Well then you should tell him that.” Arya looks towards the direction of the house. “I don’t care about him, but I care about you. I think you need the closure.”

Gendry contemplates his options. He thinks about all those days wondering when his next meal was, living in the estates and trying to stay on the right side of the law even though it was so easy not to, quitting school because he had no choice, and then finding that picture with Arya, and realized that all of it—watching his mother cry at night, telling his teachers he was dropping out, the hungry nights after working his ass off all day—all of it was for nothing.

“I’ll go in. But if he doesn’t want to see me, that’s it. We won’t talk about this again.”

“Deal.”

Gendry drives them across the Stark estate and walks her to the door. He pauses at the entrance, a little terrified by the spikes on the gates designed to keep men like him out, and is in awe when Arya types in the passcode and invites him in. The doors open up for him.

He’s inside.

He sees freshly cut lawns and bountiful flowers more beautiful than the blooms on the first day of spring, or his week in Wales when his mother finally scourged up enough money for a vacation. They walk past the house and through the windows, he sees carefully aligned oak furniture and paintings from famous artists and genuine artifacts from areas around the globe. Arya’s mother is
talking on the phone, and she’s wearing a fancy dress and her hair is tied back in a regal manner, not like the women at the pubs he frequents, who let their hair down after a few drinks or push their dirty blonde hair into a loose ponytail to get it out of their faces. Nymeria follows them the entire way, and even she is pitter-pattering down the pathway with greater dignity than he can ever muster.

Arya is unimpressed by all of it; to her, this is just her home; this is the Winterfell Estate, this is the Stark Manor; this is where she was raised in her entire life, and to her, it’s just a gas station in her grand journey of the world.

She drags him by the hand to the east wing where Robert is staying. “My father told me that Winterfell Estate was once this gigantic fort with towers that could reach the sky and the entire area was covered in stone and ice. Everything fell apart in this large battle, cannons and the dead rising to tear down the walls and wreck habit on the inhabitants. Finally, when they rebuilt, they wanted to honor the people who had fallen, and decided not to cement the grounds or anything of that like. Instead, they divided Winterfell into separate houses and turned the fort into home. The only thing that remains from the original design are the godwoods.”

“Godwoods?”

“They’re traditional forests of the Old Gods. We even have a weirwood tree—that’s a tree with faces carved into them.”

“I didn’t think people still followed those practices.”

“We do,” Arya proclaims proudly. Finally, they arrive at the entrance of the other house. From outside the window, they can see Robert. He’s having a pint and watching a football game with Myrcella. Bless the girl, she is as kind as she is beautiful. She does not look put out and watches the match with the attentiveness of a referee. She makes a comment and in response, Robert asks her something. Suddenly, she brings out her hands and tries to show her father something. Maybe teaching him a word or two. Robert tries to mimic it, and fails. Myrcella laughs, and though embarrassed, Robert has a happy expression on his face. Myrcella continues to help him until he performs it properly.

“She seems nice,” Gendry says at last.

“She is,” Arya agrees. “I don’t know how given she’s lived with monsters her entire life.”

Gendry smiles in spite of the circumstances. “She’s blonde, like my mother.”

“Gendry…”

“What’s she like?”

Arya hesitates to answer, because she doesn’t know Myrcella that well, except that she has a crush on Robb and is the smartest of her three siblings. But she does not want to disappoint Gendry, and tells him: “She’s auditioning for a performing arts school in London. She’s a cellist, and she’s pretty talented. She…” Arya struggles to come up with words. “She’s good with her hands. One time, at a Christmas party, Cersei and Robert made everyone in the room stop what they were doing to listen to her play the piano.” That night was the happiest Arya had ever seen the two of them together. “She…”

“Is she deaf?” Gendry asks. Myrcella has started teaching her father on another phrase. Robert is long distracted from the match and is completely enraptured by his daughter’s tutelage.

“Half-deaf. When she was younger, someone tried to kidnap her and…they got her before a ransom
was made but the van she was taken in was really dirty and she caught an infection in her ear and…”

Arya lets him fill in the blank. “She still plays music though. But Cersei asked for a divorce afterwards, and they moved away.”

“She’s sounds amazing.”

Arya wants to laugh at his admirable tone, but she knows that’s unfair of her. Gendry has never met his siblings, may never meet them in person. Myrcella says something to her father, and he waves her good bye. Awkwardly, Robert reaches up for a hug. Myrcella seems surprised, but then kisses him on the cheek. Robert chuckles, pleased by the action. The moment was sweet. Gendry felt wrong intruding on them from afar.

“Let’s go. I don’t want to meet him tonight.”

“Gendry, please…” Out of nowhere, Nymeria barks. Arya tells her to be quiet, or they’ll get caught.

“Arya, I can’t do this. I’m a fucking drop out who works as mechanic. I’m not some pretty blonde heiress…”

Arya tries to reason with Gendry but her efforts are interrupted by a familiar nasal voice, rich with maliciousness.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here?” Joffrey mocks.

“Fuck off, Joffrey,” Arya exclaims, a little tired of this bullshit. Nymeria almost escapes her leash, and Arya has to pull her back. She pulls on Gendry’s sleeve. “Let’s go.”

Joffrey stops her. Up close, she can smell the alcohol on his lips. “Oh, don’t leave so soon. I want to have little talk with you.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk to you.” Arya drags Gendry away. Joffrey latches onto her arm and pulls her back. Nymeria’s leash slips out of her hand and her mouth takes ahold of Joffrey’s wrist. It is a mere scratch, but it leaves Joffrey howling in pain.

“You little bitch!” Joffrey shrieks. “I’ll have that dog put down!”

Fear flashes onto Arya’s eyes, and concern weighs on her face. Joffrey hand is bleeding. Gendry, forever protective of Arya, goes forward and punches Joffrey in the face. “Don’t talk threaten her like that,” Gendry orders. Joffrey clutches onto his face, and is now swearing about his broken nose. Gendry tells him to stop crying because he did not punch him that hard.

Arya protests. “You can’t just punch people for me, Gendry! You have a record!”

Gendry looks at his fist and turns to her. “I was talking about Nymeria. Poor dog has no way to defend herself.” Arya, in spite of her trepidation, smiles. “Besides, I only punched his mouth. Idiot doesn’t even know where he got hit.” Arya laughs. Her humor is short lived when Joffrey begins swearing up a storm and menaces her with promises of the cops, and a trip to the pound and a needle. He continues to say that Nymeria is dead; her last meal comes tonight; he is a goner.

The whining attracts the other residents of the east house and the main house, and suddenly, all the lights go on. Doors are opened and people rush to the scene of the crime. Upon seeing Joffrey’s swollen lip and bloodied hand, they are aghast. Robert and Myrcella are shocked. Cersei’s face burns with rage. Catelyn and Ned are surprised by the injuries, but are more surprised to see Gendry present. Robert asks what is going on. He turns to Gendry and asks who he is, and if he attacked his son. He asks if Gendry knew who he was messing with and whether he was aware of the
consequences of his actions. “That is my son, you little bastard! Do you think you can get away with this?” In a booming voice, he tells Gendry he is Robert Baratheon, and he demanded Gendry pay for this. Ned tries to stop him from saying anymore. Arya attempts to drag Gendry away. She’s made a mistake, and she refuses to allow Gendry to suffer any further for it.

Robert’s presence does something to Gendry that no one expects. He does not cower, nor does he allow Robert’s ignorance to hurt him. He takes every insult with stride, and puffs up his chest in honor with every spiteful threat. He turns to Arya, and sends her a look that settles her guilt. Gendry does not regret tonight, but he plans on making Robert pay. When Robert finishes, Gendry is quick to respond all the callousness with sharp words of his own.

“You want to know who the fuck I am? I’m Gendry Waters. Your fucking bastard son.”

The declaration forced the Starks to call for a mediation.

Before they enter the room where Cersei seethes and Joffrey whimpers about his broken hand (Arya insists it is just a scratch), Robert asks how long has Ned known about him. “A long time, Robert,” Ned responds evenly enough.

“Do you know about all of them?”

“Arryn did,” Ned admits. “He said you prepared a fund for all of them in case a new one popped up. He left the matter to Stannis to handle, but sometimes Stannis asks for my help in securing them homes or jobs. I found Gendry at a cheap garage that was a front for some mob. Had him transferred over to nicer place, better business.”

Robert chuckles. He looks into the other wall and sees Gendry glaring at the Lannister children. Myrcella looks away in shame, while Joffrey makes a few snide comments about bastards and lowborns. Tommen, so innocent and pure, was sent to be by his mother.

“Varys prepared that fund. That poof told me it would help avoid a lawsuit. Stannis agreed, and so I agreed.” Robert shakes his head. “Just my luck the boy who looks like me gets involved with your daughter. I always thought she look like Lyanna.”

Ned’s eyes twitch at the mention of a relationship, but he does not retaliate with a denial. Instead he tells Robert they need to take care of this first before he gathers anymore regrets. Catelyn agrees, and while she has stayed silent for most of their conversation, she does push them into the room to settle this matter.

Cersei is hungry for vengeance. She does not care if Gendry is Robert’s son, and actually uses the bloodline as proof that Gendry carried Joffrey ill will. “He did this on purpose, Cersei reasoned. He wanted to hurt Joffrey.” Cersei wants to call the police, and she wants the dog as dead as Joffrey desires. Joffrey moans that his hand hurts, and Robert fights the urge to tell him to shut up. If he says anything, he’s sure Cersei will be screaming of favoritism. She was already eagerly waiting for the moment to whisk them away from Yorkshire.

Arya is the first to defend Gendry. “Joffrey grabbed me and Nymeria bit him to protect me. They’re trained guard dogs. That’s what they are supposed to do!”

“And what about that boy? Is he trained to assault people on your behalf as well?”

Arya retorts that Joffrey called her a little bitch. “Besides, Joffrey has a history of violence. His record is still on file. You call the cops and it’s our words against his.”

“You can’t expect me to believe that boy has never committed a crime,” Cersei sneers, because she
knows about the whores Robert used to play around with and she’s well aware of the children they breed. The estates aren’t typically known for producing nobles and millionaires.

Arya stills at the implication, and so does Gendry. Cersei grins when her theory gains ground. They are all on equal playing fields, then. She turns to Robert. “If you do not press charges against him, then I will.”

“That’s not fair!” Arya protests. “Joffrey wanted to hurt me!”

“I did not! She’s lying!” Joffrey screams. “Her dog attacked me, and now she’s trying to save the beast by making it seem like I did her harm. I only wished to talk to her!”

Robert says nothing.

Jon and Robb are standing on polar opposite ends of the room. Before Jon can stand by Arya’s side, Robb warns Cersei to calm herself. “Ms. Lannister, forgive my rudeness but you are not exactly a valued witness to the incident. Let’s hear all sides of the story.”

“Your sister—”

“—Is not a liar. And your son does not exactly have the best reputation in this house. You are a guest here, and I don’t appreciate the demands you are placing on us. We are Starks. We listen to family first and the threats of others, second.”

Cersei is taken back by the declaration. She huffs and continues screaming to Robert and repeating old threats. Arya, on the other hand, is warm with love. She looks at Robb, and though he does not smile, he sends her a nod of good faith and support. He may be mad at her, but she is still family, and she will always have his loyalty and trust.

“And let’s be honest: your son is a royal prick.”

And then, there’s Theon. Cersei is about to lash out at him but Theon merely raises his arms in innocence. He cares little for these matters, but he will stay by Robb’s side until the end of time.

Cersei does not falter, and continues yelling at Robert to fix this. Robert responds by saying he is trying to, but he needs time to think. He orders Cersei to be silent, and is surprised when she asks him “or what?” Robert is tempted to backhand her again, but pulls himself back. He is stronger than that.

At first when I see you cry

It makes me smile

Yeah, it makes me smile

At worst I feel bad for awhile

But then—

Theon picks up his cell phone before the ringtone goes any further. “Hey, what’s up?”

They all stare at him.

“Yeah?”

“Uh-huh?”
“Okay then.”

Cersei wants to go on arguing but is surprised when Theon walks past her and hands his cell phone to Joffrey. Joffrey glares at Theon like he’s shit on his shoes. “My hand is injured, you ingrate.”

Theon, being the walking ball of ‘I don’t give a rat's ass’ he is, shoves it into his other hand. “I think you might want to.”

“Who is it?”

“Someone who wants to talk to you.”

Joffrey narrows his eyes. “Put it on speaker, then.”

“I don’t think you’d like that.”

Joffrey frowns. He puts the phone to his ear and asks, “What?” Joffrey waits for a moment, and everyone watches his face changes from surprise to shock to anger and irritation to bitter reluctant. “Fine, but don’t go expecting any more favors from me.”

He hangs up the phone and throws it on the table. He turns to Gendry.

“Given that we are brothers, I’ve decided to forgive you on the condition that I never see you again. This is your only warning.”

“Joffrey—” Cersei protests. “You can’t let him get away with this!”

“I’ve already decided!” Joffrey snaps. He turns to Gendry. “You are lucky I’m so kind.”

Gendry raises any eyebrow. He looks at Robert and looks back at his half-brother. “Agreed.”

Gendry is already heading outside when Arya stands up to follow him. Before she reaches his side, she receives a text from Sansa.

‘You’re welcome.’

It is written right underneath Arya’s warning to not come home tonight. She had not wanted to involve her sister with the asshole's issues anymore than she already has. She feels a wave of guilt overwhelm her, and it does not settle, even when she gets a second text warning her that Sansa expects her to answer some questions when she gets home tomorrow. Arya groans, knowing she now owes Sansa a great favor. When she catches up to Gendry, she thinks of nothing but apologies and false promises to keep him happy and to comfort him. Instead, she asks if he is alright and if there is anything she can do.

“I think enough has been done tonight.”

Arya frowns. “I didn’t want it to be like this.”

“I know,” Gendry shrugs. “We can’t always get what we want.”

He leans towards her, and just when it looks like he’ll kiss her, he instead reaches out and pats her on the head.

“Not even a kiss?” Arya teases.

Gendry tells her not tonight, and not at the Stark doorway. “Bye, my lady.”
“Not a lady,” Arya whispers. "Get home safely."

Gendry leaves the manor and heads across the street. When he arrives to the car, he hears a twig snap and turns around. There is no one there. He frowns, and opens the door.

“Excuse me?”

Gendry turns around. Before him is a curly haired man with bright eyes and a smile. His hands are in the pocket of his trench coat. “Yeah?” Gendry asks, eyes on the man’s hands.

“I was a bit lost and was wondering if you could help me find this address?” He takes out a piece of paper, and Gendry, on reflex, takes a step back. The man is not offended by the obvious display of mistrust. He seems amused. He hands the paper to Gendry.

Gendry recognizes the street name as the one he is on, but tells him that he’s a block early. “You need to head forward. It’s the second house on your left.”

The man thanks him graciously. “Thank you. I’m a rubbish at directions. I swear, I could get lost in a bathroom.”

Gendry nods, unamused but remembers his manners. The man asks if he’s going home tonight. Gendry says he is, he just wanted to drop a friend off from home.

“Friend or friend?” He winks.

Gendry cannot help a chuckle. “A little bit of both, actually.”

The man laughs with him and finally agrees to leave him be. He thanks him a final time, and gets back into his car. He leaves first, and Gendry waits until he is out of view to check his backseat.

It is empty.

Gendry breathes a sigh of relief. He is not dealing with a horror movie tonight.

Chapter End Notes

1. Who is the mysterious man I wonder…? I mean, we all know who it is, but I figured I add in some suspense.
3. Thank god, I wrote this chapter in advance or else it would have come out seriously late. I’ve been obsessed with my other story that I haven’t been able to give this one any attention. I’m hoping I’ll be able to set up a schedule in August for my two fanfiction stories and my original work.
4. I’m really sorry for not responding to reviewers. You guys deserve so much more attentiveness when it comes to your fanfiction writers. I’ll start on my responses again on this chapter and try to answer any questions and requests you have following this chapter!
Sansa hangs up the phone. Sandor comes back with two plates of chicken Alfredo, and Sansa moans at the smell of cream and buttery chicken. He sets both their plates down while he goes into the kitchen to get some wine. Sansa is already bouncing. Sandor comes back and hands her a glass of white.

“I’m so hungry. This smells amazing,” Sansa tells him. She digs into her plate and moans. “Have I ever told you how much I love that you can cook?”

Sandor chuckles. “It's just chicken, cheese, and pasta. How come you never learned?”

Sansa takes another bite. “No one in my family knows how to cook. Except my mother, and Jon.”

“None of your siblings?”

“It’s not the Stark way,” Sansa explains. Sandor sighs, as if exasperated by her ignorance. She grins at him and continues to eat her meal. Sandor takes a bite of his own dish. It is pretty good; but hell if he ever reveals to Sansa that he knew she was shit in the kitchen and he figured that if she wasn’t going to be the one who survived there, then he’ll pick up the apron in her stead. Carving a chicken isn’t too different from cutting up a man, anyways.

“What was the mess about?”

Sansa takes a sip of her wine and peers at him.

“Don’t,” he warns her.

“Don’t what?” Sansa asks innocently.

“Don’t look at me with your big blue eyes and start coming up with fancy words so that you can avoid telling me the truth.”

Sansa pouts. “I don’t want you to be worried.”

Sandor sighs. “Is it about Joffrey?”

“How do you know about Joffrey?”

“Because his bitch mother was staying with me last week.”

“Cersei Lannister was staying here?” Sansa sounds aghast. “And you never told me?”

“You didn’t tell me about Joffrey.”
"That’s different!"

"No, it’s not."

Sansa stares at him, open mouthed and then frowns. “Okay, it’s not. But still, we should be telling each other these things.”

“We’re telling them now.”

“We should be telling each other these things when they happen!” Sansa exclaims. She puts down her plate in frustration. “I don’t even know why I’m upset but I am.”

“Are you?”

Sansa has to think about that. “I don’t know but I feel like I should be.”

“Alright, what do you want me to do about it—whatever it is?”

Sansa picks up her plate when she realizes she has no clue. “I don’t know. But we should do something.”

“Okay, well then why don’t you tell me what happened and we’ll decide from there.”

Sansa bites her and twirls her fork. She stops when she realizes that Sandor used fettucine and not spaghetti, and it looks stupid to do so, not cute. “My sister got into a scuffle with Joffrey tonight, and I decided to help,” Sansa confesses.

Sandor chugs down his glass. “What did you do?”

“I told him he should repay mercy with mercy, and reminded him of how kind I was not to press charges against him all those years ago.”

There’s a silence. “Your limitation period is almost finished.”

“I know,” Sansa says. “But he doesn’t.”

“Fuck,” Sandor says. He shakes his head. “What if he tries to get back at you?”

“Then, you’ll take care of him of him, won’t you?”

“Will you be okay with that?”

Sansa shrugs.

Sandor stares. “I’ve been a bad influence on you.”

“I like it,” she teases. She begins eating again. She licks the cream off her lips and stares up at him through her long eyelashes and tells him, “This is really good.”

Sandor chuckles, and asks if she wants to watch a movie while they eat. Sansa says if they watch a movie than it’ll get late, and she’ll have to stay over. Sandor responds that she should stay in anyways. He doesn’t want her going out there alone. He’s spoken with his contacts, and there’s something out there that he doesn’t want her to get caught in.

“The nights aren’t safe travel in, little bird. You might meet someone dangerous.”
“You’re dangerous.”

“I am,” Sandor admits. “But I’m on your side. And there’s someone out there chopping up girls, I don’t think he’ll be so inclined to fall for your pretty eyes like I did.”

Sansa pouts, and pretends to be reluctant when she agrees. Truth be told, she’s happy she’ll have an excuse to stay over her "friend’s" house when it gets too late. If she plays her cards right, she maneuver more accidents in the future and be forced to stay over a lot.

“If I stay over any more, I’ll be living here,” Sansa jokes.

“What’s wrong with that?” Sandor asks. He puts in a DVD of an action movie starring an actor Sansa likes, and hits play. He gets back to the couch to see Sansa staring. “What?”

“Do you mean it?”

“What?”

“Living together…do you mean it?”

Sandor shrugs. “Like you said, you’re already here half the time. I figured that’s what we’ll be doing when you leave for uni.”

Sansa feels herself choke up. “But I told you I’m thinking about studying in America!”

“And I told you I knew people in New York. That’s where you wanted to go, right?”

“Yes but…” Sansa wonders why she’s so taken back. Sandor is right. They have talked about this before, and each time, Sandor has been incredibly accommodating to Sansa’s dreams for the future. “You’re okay with moving for me?”

“All the schools you’ve talked about were in London or New York. I told you I can get worked there. It’s not like you’re asking me to move out to some fishermen’s town on the coast of Spain.” Though, to be perfectly honest, he would have followed her there as well.

“But…” Sansa bites her lip.

“What’s the problem, dove? Do you not want to be together after you graduate?” The possibility is a real one, and while Sandor knows that it will kill him, lead him to throw himself to suicide missions and death squads, he’ll wish Sansa the best if it means her finding her way in this world.

“No!” Sansa protests. “I just…I don’t know how you could be so willing to move for me when I can’t do the same for you.”

The confession is heartbreaking, and for all the right reasons. Sandor would never ask Sansa to give up anything for him, and that makes Sansa want to cry. She knows she’s selfish, and she loves that Sandor thinks of her enough to sacrifice everything.

Sandor pretends not to care. “I don’t want anything but you.”

Sansa kisses him, and almost knocks the plate out of his hands when she does. She tells him she loves him and has only ever wanted him and she hopes they’re happy together. They continue to watch a movie for the rest of the night. Sansa receives a phone call from her mother, and she responds that she’s staying the night at a friend’s place. Her mother does not buy it for a second, but she’s worn and wearied from the incident with Joffrey and she’s let it go before, another hundredth
time won’t change anything.

When Catelyn calls Bran’s location, she is met with the snide reprimand of his school’s headmistress. She tells Catelyn that picking Bran up at this time at night will be too much trouble on her end. Regina, with feign innocence and faux worry of having put Catelyn out of her way, insists on letting Bran stay over tonight. “Henry is always sleeping over at your place. Let me return the favor.”

“It’s not trouble at all,” Catelyn corrects, hoping she suppressed her irritation enough that Regina could not tell how badly she wishes to strangle her. Regina can always tell when someone is being snide.

“No, but as an educator, I am in charge of the wellbeing of children, and I can’t possibly encourage one of my students to wander on the streets.”

“He won’t be wandering,” Catelyn snaps. She takes a deep breath and removes all derogatory names towards Americans in her vocabulary. “I’ll be right outside.”

“But Bran should be inside. In the safety of my home.”

“My home is the safest place for him. In case you don’t remember, my husband runs the world’s best security company.”

“Well, my wife is a cop. If something were to happen, you’re going to call her anyways.”

They continue the conversations for a long time, throwing words like ‘serial killers’ and ‘guns’ and ‘mutilated women’ and ‘pedophiles’ with the addition of insults and backhanded compliments towards each other. By the time they finished, Bran has already finished inking four pages and coloring two. Henry finished the script for the ending. Regina enters the room and says she’s making some pizza bites and popcorn balls.

“So Bran is staying the night?”

“Yes,” Regina grins victoriously. “He has no choice. His mother will too inconvenience to do so.”

Bran stares at Henry who is unperturbed. When she leaves to get the snacks, Bran sends a look to his best friend. Henry shrugs.

“Mom has trust issues—well, she doesn’t like it when people don’t trust her.” He looks over the completed pages. “She thinks that when your mother doesn’t let you stay over, these are really nice,” Henry compliments the work, momentarily distracted. “—it’s an attack against her ability to raise children.”

“Oh.” Bran frowns. Bran would have questioned the notion further, but the phone in his left pocket beeps, and he grabs it before he has a chance to realize he left his phone on the table. What he sees on his pseudo-cellular proves that it is certainly not his. He shrieks, loudly, and throws the device up in the air. Henry catches it before it drops to the ground and when he sees the message, forces it back into Bran’s hands.

"Take it!"

"I don't want it!” Bran protests.

Henry’s mom pops in to check on the noise and asks what’s wrong.

“Nothing!” Henry squeals out. “But Bran has to use the bathroom so I’m going with him—you
“Bran knows how to get there by himself,” Regina points out. She crosses her arms, immediately suspicious of the excuse.

“Well, he wants me to keep him company. Girls do it all the time.”

“No, they don’t.”

“We need to talk about something private.”

Regina narrows her eyes. “How private?”

“Guy stuff.”

“Guy stuff? Or older guy stuff?” Regina takes a step further. “Who was texting your phone just now? It better not be—”

“It was my phone, Mrs. Mills!” Bran comes to Henry’s defense. He holds it up in his hands for evidence, after making sure there is nothing incriminating on the screen. “My mother was making sure I was safe.”

Regina frowns. For a second, the boys think that their lies failed, but then Regina angrily stomps back into the kitchen, swearing a storm under her breath about psychotic gingers, and comes back with a bowl of deceitful health snacks disguised as unhealthy promises. “Your mother needs therapy,” she tells Bran, before marching into the other room to vent to her wife.

Henry, in an amazing bout of strength, drags Bran back to his chair and wheels him to the downstairs’ bathroom. When he first visited Henry’s home, he was surprised by how spacious it was, even with Bran's wheelchair, it could easily fit two more people inside comfortably. Henry is taking advantage of this when he locks Bran and himself inside. Bran waves the cock defiling his not-phone in front of Henry’s face, and the writer swipes it out of his hand, blushing furiously.

“Sorry you had to lie for me, but my mom checks my messages when she thinks I’m not looking. She’s probably doing it now while I’m gone,” Henry explains. If Bran wasn’t a Stark, he would have found that information to be disturbing and worrisome. Instead, he is a Stark, and his parents put cameras all around the house, and in Bran’s bathroom because Catelyn is afraid he’ll slip and fall to his death.

“How did you get it into my pants?”

Henry isn’t trying to be mean, but he’s definitely Regina’s child when he bluntly points out that Bran can’t feel his legs. “It’s not that hard to slip something inside your pants.” Henry pauses, grins as his mind conjures up some perverse joke, and then shakes his head when Bran sends him a warning glower.

Bran frowns. He could counter that argument, but instead, focuses on the curiosity burning inside him. He thinks about the picture, about the…sex and asks what’s going on. “Did your boyfriend send…that?” Henry smiles, amused. Bran glances over at the mirror and sees that his cherry red lips are the same color of his skin.

“Peter has gotten himself into something dangerous again. One of his friends moved here, so he doesn’t want me around.” The corners of the smile weigh down into a frown. “But Peter does not handle celibacy well and if he doesn’t stick his dick into me, he’ll take up the first offer he gets. That’s why he keeps sending me these pictures. It’s his way of telling me he still wants me.” To his
surprise, Henry tosses the phone back at Bran. He tries his best not to look, but manages to see that Henry did not respond.

“You’re not going to text him back?"

“Nope, because if he’s doing this, then that means he cares more about my safety than getting laid. If that’s true, it means he’s getting involved with someone really dangerous. So I’m going to punish him for it.”

The statement unsettles Bran, and though he could think of a number reasons why, it does not stop him from asking about Henry’s relationship. “Why are you with him? He seems…off.”

“Probably the same reason you’re still talking to Jojen.”

Bran is taken back. “What do you mean?”

Henry puts his phone on the kitchen sink. “Listen, I’ve seen how your mother treats you. My mom treats me the same way, like we’re made of glass and can’t do anything on our own. It comes from a good place, but…sometimes I want to have some fun, too. Don’t you?”

Bran is inclined to agree, except he remembers the fight Henry and Peter had after school one day, when Henry caught Peter slipping one of their classmates a plastic bag filled with white powder and refused to see him for weeks. Peter snuck into the school to apologize to Henry personally in the boy’s bathroom. Bran frowns and asks, “But…is it the right kind of fun? Aren’t you afraid of getting into, I don’t know, trouble?”

“It’s not like I’m joining his gang, or anything. I just hang out with Peter and we do stuff,” Henry explains. “Besides, doesn’t it feel good to do something wicked?”

Bran fiddles with his fingers. He musters up an amicable nod, and then dives deep to dig out some courage. He takes a deep breath, shuts his eyes, and asks, “Like, what kind of stuff?”

Henry raises an eyebrow. “You know, stuff. Peter really likes that he’s my first—he has this major virgin kink because he wants to teach me everything. He loves tying me up and making me follow orders in these skimpy outfits, like a sexy maid or, this one time he had me in a sexy Tinkerbell costume, which was freaking weird. But you know, it wasn’t like a red light for me or anything.”

Bran, whose face is already bleeding red, asks him for more details.

Henry has to think. “Well, he’s also a major exhibitionist. Sometimes, we’re just making out on the couch, and his friends come over. All of a sudden, he has to have me on my hands and knees, or you know, just my knees.”

Bran nod as if he actually knows, instead of just assuming from the various details Henry lets on about his personal life. He’s not a kid, he knows about sex, his parents just gave him the talk a few weeks ago—a fact that actually de-ages him in some way—but he’s curious. And it may or may not be because of the really nice, older boy who calls him up every day to check on him and make sure he’s happy.

Henry asks Bran if he’s thinking about Jojen.

“What?”

“Well, that’s why you’re asking me, right? Because you’re thinking about doing things with him?”
A lump finds its way to Bran’s throat. “I…well…I don’t know. I’m not looking for that kind of relationship.” Bran wants a friend, who he can share his deepest secrets with and build a bond of trust and love, and hold hands with and maybe kiss every now and then. And while making out looks really good, and Henry makes sex sound really, really good, Bran is man enough to admit he’s not ready.

“Okay, maybe not now. But you’ll want it one day, and Jojen definitely wants you. Have you thought about all the things you wanted to try out?”

“Oh…” It’s a good point, but the thought never crossed Bran’s mind. He wonders if it’s because of his…condition. Suddenly, another fear strikes his heart. “What if I can’t get hard?”

“What?” Henry sounds surprise.

“What if I can’t…do stuff with him?”

“Have you tried masturbating?”

Bran shakes his head. “No! I mean, I never wanted to.”

“You should give it a shot,” Henry suggests.

“I…but I don’t know how. I don’t know the first thing to do with another guy.”

“It’s okay, Jojen will teach you. It’s like I said, right? Older guys love teaching things.” Henry winks, and Bran fails to copy his confidence. Henry tries to soothe his worries by giving him instructions on how to give a decent blowie, or how to curl his fingers so that he can hit his prostate. He talks about rolling his r’s, and licking up the glans because that’s where guys are most sensitive. When things get too explicit for Bran’s ears, he suggests that Henry’s mother will get suspicious if they take too long. Henry freaks out, and starts wheeling Bran out of the room.

He returns home the next morning, and curses the night before with Henry’s name. He remembered his sleepover vividly, because while he was content with staring at the ceiling, trying to imagine the location of the stars, Henry was reading over his boyfriend’s messages and then finally submitted to his pleas. He demanded Bran help him send a dirty, full bodied picture so that Peter could be jealous of the fact that someone else saw him naked. The reaction was perfect, and Bran wanted to die. When Henry finally went to sleep, Bran was haunted by another concern. He looked down at his paralysis, his scarred and unmoving legs, and wondered if it was such a stretch to believe that someone would reject him for them. What if his other parts didn’t work as well? The doctor never mentioned it, but it was a possibility, wasn’t it?

The thought is on Bran’s mind when he rolls through the door. His mother is frantic with worry, but Bran ignores her concerns and asks if he could go to bed. Catelyn accuses Regina of letting her son run wild when she hears he did not get any sleep. Bran soothes her concerns (and spares his headmistress the drama) by saying it wasn’t her fault, he just has a lot on his mind.

“Heavy’s place was a lot of fun,” Bran tells her, and in hindsight, his sleepover was a turning point in his life. Catelyn’s face falls, and sends him to his room. He knows he won’t be sleeping today either. All he’ll be thinking about is Jojen, sex, and the possible inability to have either.

He passes by Robb on his way out of the elevator. Robb asks Bran if they could have a talk, and while Bran intends to refuse him, he is convinced that this is the perfect opportunity to have all his questions answered when he remembers Arya’s earlier suggestion. Robb is dating Jon. Robb was dating Jon. Robb used to be in a relationship with a man, and knows all the mechanics but has all the
common sense not to tell Bran what he does not want to hear. Robb is his brother. Brothers are
sworn to protect each other by the unwritten laws of the bro code. Robb can keep a secret.

“Come in,” Bran offers, and tries not to yawn in his presence. His mind is positively wrecked with
fatigue. Later, he will accuse exhaustion as the primary factor in his decision to ask Robb of all
people for love advice.

“I know it’s a bit late, Bran, and you’re probably going to tell me it’s not a big deal, but I wanted to
say sorry for not being there for you.”

“Oh that’s cool—”

“No, it is not,” Robb denies. “I’ve been using you to satisfy my own loneliness.”

“That’s fine,” Bran interrupts again. He wants to get this over with. Seeing Robb guilty makes him
feel even more guilty for what he did to him. “What are brothers for?”

“No, it’s not. I’m supposed to be there for you—”

“—you can be there for me now—”

“—I hope to. Hey, why don’t we spend some time together—”

“—Robb, I need to—”

“We could go out to eat, or I could hang out at the reserves tomorrow—”

“I need you to talk to me about sex!” Bran blurts out.

“What?” Robb’s eyes look like they bulged out of his head. “Sex? Like…”

“Like the common way to show affection, especially with people who love each other a lot.”

“Haven’t you already gotten the sex talk?” Robb hesitates. “Maybe, we should get dad to do this;
he’s had a lot more experience.”

“No!” Bran protests. “It can only be you! Dad can’t help me here. He doesn’t know how to do
it… with guys.” Bran winces at his own explanation. “And I… like a guy. And one day, I might want
to have sex… with a guy.”

“Oh.” Robb’s face becomes furious. “Bran, I hope you’re not being pressured into anything you
don’t want to do. You can say no whenever you want.”

“I know!” Bran squeaks. “Why does everybody treat me as if I’m some sort of invalid?”

"Bran, you're too young to know these things. Maybe you should wait a bit—"

"No!" Bran shouts. "I'm not too young to know. It’s not knowing that’s scaring me. What if one day
I meet someone special and I want to have sex with them but I don’t know what to do? What if I
can’t tell the difference between nervous virgin jitters and ‘there is something wrong, I don’t feel
safe?’ If I know what to expect then I can protect myself! A guy won’t be able to convince me to do
something I’m not comfortable with by saying it’s normal if I know it’s not!” Bran reasons, a fierce
conviction in his stance. Almost instantly, he feels like an idiot for making such a declaration. He
waits for the disapproval. Robb sighs instead. He mutters something like “you’re too young for this,”
and Bran’s face deflates. He is about to ask Robb to keep the curiosity a secret until he sees his older
brother take a seat on his bed and asks Bran what he wants to know.
“You’re really going to tell me?”

“You’re not wrong. I don’t want you to be taken advantage of by some creep who makes you think that being scared is normal.”

Bran beams. He thinks about all the stuff Henry talked about, and things that were on his mind before. They come out in a vomit of concerns and excitement. “Uh, well…how much will it hurt? How can you tell who’s the top and who’s the bottom? What is a gag reflex? What is felching? How do I decide on a safe word? Who—?”

“Oh!” Robb makes a time out sign with his hands. He takes a deep breath. Gods, who is teaching Bran these things? “Let’s start with the basics. Do you know how two guys have sex?”

Bran opens his mouth, closes it, and then nods.

“Okay, you’re nodding but I don’t believe you. How do you think two guys have sex?”

Robb listens to his little brother describe anal and oral sex with utter technical precision, and without describing any sort of emotional attachment or anticipation of the act. He makes it sound like a chore, something he has to do to please his boyfriend, and that worries Robb more than anything. He stops Bran before he goes any further. Bran furrows his brow, probably concerned that he got something wrong or said something immoral. He remembers Bran’s previous answers. He didn’t ask if it hurts, but how much it’ll hurt.

“First, anal sex is not a requirement between two guys. You can have great sex with your boyfriend without there being any penetration.”

Bran is taken back. “But is that really—”

“Yes,” Robb answers before Bran can even finish his question. “Frottage and oral counts as real sex. I think, when and if you’re ready, you should try it once and see if you like it. It hurts the first time, but that’s why you need lube, and patience, lots of patience. And once you hit that prostate, gods, it feels like heaven. If you get used to it and you trust your partner with your life, you can start to go faster, maybe get more…adventurous, but not a second earlier,” Robb warns. He’ll kill the guy who forces his little brother into doing anything he doesn’t want. Hell, he’ll kill him for suggesting it.

Bran nods. He stares at Robb as if analyzing him, and considers his options. Then, he turns away. He tells Robb that’s enough for tonight, and thanks him for his help. Robb sighs and asks Bran to just speak his mind—he’ll be happier for it and much less confused if he does.

Bran gulps. “You said it hurt? Have you ever tried…doing it?”

“Yes,” Robb answers before Bran can even finish his question. “Frottage and oral counts as real sex. I think, when and if you’re ready, you should try it once and see if you like it. It hurts the first time, but that’s why you need lube, and patience, lots of patience. And once you hit that prostate, gods, it feels like heaven. If you get used to it and you trust your partner with your life, you can start to go faster, maybe get more…adventurous, but not a second earlier,” Robb warns. He’ll kill the guy who forces his little brother into doing anything he doesn’t want. Hell, he’ll kill him for suggesting it.

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Bran gulps. “You said it hurt? Have you ever tried…doing it?”

“Yes, of course.”

The nonchalance surprises Bran. “So you’re the bottom?”

Robb laughs, making Bran turn red with embarrassment. He must have asked a really stupid question to get that kind of reaction. He tries to save face by saying he needs to look over his drawings, it’s getting late and—Robb soothes his concerns with an apology. “I’m sorry for laughing.” He smiles warmly, and is now leaning against the wall next to Bran. “It’s a fair question, especially with all the stuff on the internet now.” Robb looks up at the ceiling and then back at Robb as he explains, “Bran, there is no ‘top’ or ‘bottom’ in relationships. There are people who prefer penetration, and people who prefer being penetrated, or both. There are guys who like giving head,” Like Jon. Robb shakes the thought away. “And people who like to receive. It’s perfectly fine to do both. I love being inside Jon,” Robb confesses.
Bran scrunches his nose in disgust, but does not stop Robb from continuing. He may not want to hear about his brother’s sex life, but he fears he has to. “And I’d be lying if I said having his cock inside me felt just as good. But it’s nice, sometimes, to feel someone become a part of you. I know Jon enjoys it both ways, but he accommodated to my preferences because he respected my boundaries. In return, I listened to what he wanted, and we decided on what we could enjoy together as a couple.”

“Was there anything you didn’t like?”

“Yeah,” Robb admits. “I’m not the first guy Jon has ever been with. He is, however, my first boyfriend. I knew just as much as you did not when we first got together. But,” Robb shakes Bran’s hair. He wonders why everyone loves doing that so much. “He was patient with me. We talked about things we were willing to try, and things that made us uncomfortable. Turns out, I really like giving orders.”

Bran rolls his eyes. Figures Robb would be into that. Robb laughs at the reaction, he grins and informs Bran that Jon really loves “giving head” just to see him squirm. After he’s gotten a good laugh out of Bran and a pillow shoved his face, Robb says that he trusts Bran’s instincts. “The person who knows you the best is you. If you’re curious, that’s means you’re interested. But if you’re unsure, it’s a good time to inform your partner you’re not ready.”

“How can you tell the difference?”

Robb thinks about the best comparison. “If someone suggests something to you and you get butterflies in your stomach and a tingle down there, you should look into it. If the suggestion makes you sick to your stomach and hide under your covers, I suggest avoiding the act altogether. Don’t entertain it at the cost of your own sanity, and don’t lead your partner on. If you feel more comfortable further into the relationship, you can always go back to it.”

Bran feels relieved, except the words tingle down there ring in his head like the incessant church bells of a religion he doesn’t follow.

“I don’t know if I can get the tingle.”

Robb grins, unaware of Bran’s drop in mood. “It’s probably because you haven’t gone too far yet but when it happens—”

“No,” Bran says softly. “I don’t know if it’s possible.”

Robb grows quiet.

“Robb, I haven’t felt my legs in years. I’ve never…touched myself. What if I…what if I get really close to someone and it turns out I can’t be intimate with them? What if they hate me for it?”

“No one can ever hate you, Bran.” Robb tells him. Bran frowns as if he doesn’t believe him.

Robb sighs. “I’m not going to lie to you. I won’t say sex is not important, because for me, it is. I love sex, I love having that intimacy with my partner.”

Bran wonders if there’s a nice way to ask Robb to leave so that he could cry.

“But to some people, sex isn’t a big deal. Maybe your first boyfriend won’t be satisfied with a completely romantic relationship. If he leaves you because of it, that just means you’ll be single for the person you’re meant to be with.”
“But I really like him!” Bran blurs out. He sees the surprise in Robb’s eyes and turns away. “If you really care about someone, shouldn’t you try your best to make them happy? I want him to be happy because he makes me happy.”

Robb agrees with the logic, but Bran is his brother and his wellbeing is paramount. “You’re not going to be happy if you’re obsessed with being good enough for someone else. I…” Robb stops. Suddenly, the ghosts of his past girlfriends tackle him with an amazing amount of fury. He remembers their constant excuses for breaking up. “I am not a mother,” said Dany. “I am not a wife,” said Dacey. “I’m not perfect,” said Talisa and Jeyne. When they broke up, Margaery kissed Robb at his graduation and told him she was going to Cambridge, not Edinburgh, and she never actually planned to leave with him in the first place. When he asked why, she touched his face and said the girl he saw in her was not who the girl she was.

Robb puts his head in his hands and whispers, “Fuck.”

“Robb?”

“It’s nothing,” Robb says. “Bran…this guy, he likes you, right?”

Bran bites his lips and nods. Robb takes his hand and tells Bran to call him. “If he likes you, it’s because you’ve made him happy. And by your logic, he wants to make you happy as well, right? If he knows you, he won’t…ask for anything until you’re ready. If you’re meant to be together, then you’ll want the same things and trust me, your first intimate moment, whether it’s losing your virginity or sleeping underneath the stars, it’ll be perfect.”

The words are like a panacea to most of Bran’s worries. Bran thanks Robb for his advice. Robb says no problem, and leaves the room so that he can collect his thoughts. Bran attempts to salvage some courage in his muddled concerns, and takes his cell phone out to contact Jojen. He wonders if he should text, but decides the issue is too serious to risk miscommunication. He calls him.

“Hello Bran,” he answers on the first ring. His voice is smooth as velvet, and Bran imagines cream cheese frosting on top of devil’s food cupcake and there’s a delightful shiver up his spine. Bran guesses that’s part of the tingle Robb talked about.

“Hey, Jo,” Bran wonders why his face is so hot. “I wanted to talk to you about something.” Stupid. You just called him, Bran thinks, of course he knows you want to talk to him about something.

Jojen tells Bran he can talk to him about anything. “You can’t even begin to imagine how good it feels to hear your voice.”

Bran coughs, because the sentiment is returned but he can’t bear saying something so embarrassing. He doesn’t know how the older boy can say those kinds of things without shame—Bran would have an easier time burrowing a hole in the sand and sticking his head in it.

“Bran?” Jojen sounds so concerned.

Bran takes a deep breath. “Jojen, I was with Henry the other night…” He explains that they discussed relationships, and the intimacy expected of being in one. With a minor tremor in his fingers, Bran confesses that he really likes Jojen, and he wants them to go further. He wants a boyfriend. His heart is practically exploding with excitement at the hope that they will meet in person soon. “But I’m scared,” Bran reveals.

“Of me?”

“No!” Bran protests. “I’m scared of getting serious. I don’t want to get attached to someone who
might walk away for the first person who is willing to put out. I don’t want to be with someone who
doesn’t want me for who I am and what I can or cannot do.”

“Bran, there has never been a moment in my life where I wasn’t serious about you. You are perfect.
You’re more than I deserve. Anyone who says otherwise is a fool or a liar. You are the only thing
that matters in this world. I don’t care if every moment we spend together is in your garden playing
with Summer, or if all we do in bed is listen to the rain fall on the window panel. I can go at your
pace. Our first time together, it’s going to be wonderful because we’ll both be ready. There are so
many things I want from you, and it’s not only physical. I want you in every way. And if you’re the
one making the first move, it will be more special because I’ll know for sure it’s what you want.”

Bran finds it hard to breathe. Jojen’s speech made him overwhelmed. He wonders how to respond;
what kind of declaration he can make but he knows that nothing he says can remotely match the
passion of the older boy. Instead, he asks Jojen what will happen if Bran is not ready for years.

“I’ll wait years,” Jojen pauses. “I’ll wait forever. You give me life, Bran.”

Bran gulps to relieve his dry throat. He feels hot underneath his collar and wonders if he should
change into something more comfortable. “I—” What could he possibly say? “What do you think of
doing with me?”

“Are you asking me about my fantasies, Bran?” Jojen teases. His voice turns to husk, and Bran can
only imagine the way his eyes must be looking at him. He fears that if he does not stop blushing, all
his blood will leave his body and make his head burst. “Are you asking me if I lie awake at night,
thinking about your body underneath mine? How I envision the way you would squirm when I lick
down your pretty nipples to your belly button? How I would just wrap my tongue around your
cock?”

Bran mouth is try. He finds himself envisioning Jojen’s hungry gaze, and wonders if it would be
wrong, a little too daring to ask him to continue. Jojen does so regardless of any encouragement. “I
would make you feel so good, Bran. I would worship every part of you. I would suck your fingers
until they are dripping, and douse your skin with kisses. At night, I would take you to the godswoods
where I’d hold you in my arms and count the stars and pray that they would fall so you could make
wishes on them. I would never let you forget what it feels like to be loved.”

He can imagine it, and he’s squirming in desire. “I want that,” he whimpers. “I want to meet you.”

Jojen sounds elated. “I want to meet you, too.” There is a pause. “Call me tomorrow, and we can
schedule a meeting time.”

The phrase is more technical than Jojen’s usual manner of speaking, but Bran is so immersed in
arousal that he does not notice. He says goodbye, and drops his phone on the bed. When he positions
himself further up, he only makes himself more uncomfortable. He frowns, and looks at his lower
regions where he spots a very unfamiliar, but absolutely distinguishable erection.

Bran bites his lips. His door is unlocked but getting up to close it is such a hassle. Bran weighs his
options before he tugs at the waistband of his pants.

Slow, and with a lot of patience, Bran remembers.

“Who were you were talking to?” Meera asks when Jojen hangs up.

“Dr. Lector,” Jojen lies. “He wants to check up on my progress since coming here.”

Meera tries to read his face but Jojen is calm, his heartbeat is soft and steady and he stares at Meera
with clear eyes. After a few more moments of suspicion and pause, Meera says, “That’s nice of him. He’s a good doctor.”

Jojen puts his cell phone in his bag. “His empathy to my situation is astounding.”

Meera sighs. “How are you doing, Jojen? The property is big, but it’s not big enough to hide you two forever. You’re bound to run each other, or at least see each other once.”

Hopefully more than once, Jojen thinks. Meera does not have to know that. Jojen sits down on their couch, a lovely piece of furniture, pure Italian leather, which no one enjoys sitting on because it is too expensive to relax in, and offers Meera a seat. When she does, Jojen immediately explains:

“Meera, you need to understand that my recovery is a working process. You can’t go from being utterly consumed with the thoughts of someone as beautiful as Bran, to not acknowledging his existence. I’m trying to respectful, but attaining satisfaction in the matters of the heart has many causalities.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m saying I want to be loved; I no longer wish to stare at my affections from afar. Dr. Lecter has encouraged to find an equal, not a fantasy and I’m following his advice.”

Meera furrows her brow. She’s uncomfortable, because she believes Jojen but is also too smart not to remain cautious. Jojen smiles; he brushes a curl away from his sister’s face. “Don’t look so sad, Meera. I hate it when you’re sad. You look too much like our mother.”

“Jojen…”

“Though, we have to be grateful you aren’t as fragile, or father would lose a daughter and a wife.”

Jojen hopes the matter is settled, as most conversations are when someone mentions his mother. Before he can leave, Meera tells him they need to talk about something else. She takes a wad of cash out of her pocket and places it on the table.

“I found this in my coat last night.”

Peter raises an eyebrow. “Congratulations? Are you suggesting I scour my wardrobe for loose change?”

“This isn’t loose change. That’s over two hundred pounds! I bet if I checked father’s wallet there would be an influx cash as well.”

“Father has gotten several new clients since moving. He knows how finicky you are about taking money.”

“Because we talk about it. Together. You listen in the shadows and whenever times are hard, we mysterious find a way to make ends meet.” Meera takes a deep breath. “Jojen, are you working for Peter again?”

Jojen’s stance is unwavering. “I told you not to look so sad.” He wraps his arms around his sister and ignores her stiffening. “After all these years, I still cannot tell when you were most miserable: when I got arrested or when our mother died.” The smell of carbon monoxide is almost off his clothes. He picks up the money and places it in Meera’s hands. “Compared to that, me spotting you a bit of cash every now and then is nothing to cry about. I want you and father happy, because if you’re happy then I’m happy, and being happy keeps me sane.”
Chapter End Notes

1. Next Chapter: Guest stars appear! Benjen makes an appearance. Ramsey appears. This story gets dark. The darkest this story is probably going to get is the next chapter and then it will return to normal.

2. I don’t agree with the idea that sex is unnecessary in a relationship. I think some relationships will value sex above other aspects, and some people will value other aspects over sex. I think instead of dismissing someone as a jerk just because they break up with someone for not being able to supply what they want (like what else are they supposed to do, force their partners?), it is important for people to find the person they’re compatible with. I didn’t want the conversation with Bran and Robb to go all “yeah, he’s a jerk for wanting sex from you” and leaned towards the whole “Well maybe he’s not the one.” Got a little serious there.

3. God, I’m sorry for not answering more commentary.

4. I forgot today was Thursday. I was like “oh shit, I have to update.” This was not good. I am no longer ahead these chapters. I am on track. I only completed the next chapter instead of two. This does not make me feel comfortable because the last time I was on track; I didn’t update for a year. Anyways, Thursdays are the day I’m going to update now. It feels a good day. I’m done changing days.
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Warnings for this chapter: some description of violence and heavy drug use by certain characters. Ramsey pops in and stays. Shit gets pretty dark here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Myranda Kennel was female, early twenties, white, brown hair and brown eyes, pretty or would have been if her face wasn’t completely torn apart. She was a fighter, judging by the signs of struggle on her arms; she fought to the death. Her fingernails were completely ripped off from her desperate attempts to fight off her assailants—a pack of vicious dogs hungry for human flesh. Behavior analysis points them to being hunting dogs, like hounds or possibly guard dogs like Dobermans. For the life of them, no one at the precinct was able to figure how such large creatures could walk the streets unnoticed.

“He’s escalating,” Emma points out. She just came in with an arm holding a coffee tray and another bag full of pastries. Yoren wonders if it is an American thing to always have snacks on hand. Today are apple strudels and bear claws, all baked by her gorgeous and fearsome wife. Emma is one of the only women in the murder force, and is also one of the few who actually manages to stay married to her first spouse. She sees the pictures and points out that Myranda wasn’t a prostitute like the others.

“She might have known the perp,” Yoren agrees. He takes his coffee and sips it; the picture of leisure as he leans back on his rolling chair. “We got one or two accounts saying that the women were propositioned by a couple. Maybe they had a lover’s quarrel, or she wanted out?”

“Maybe she got jealous,” Benjen recommends. In contrast to his partner’s backwards mobility, he moves over the desk to take an apple strudel from Emma. His ass is on full display, directly in front of the commander’s office. Yoren rolls his eyes at the view. Benjen is wearing his fuck me jeans. “This guy, whoever he is, likes a chase. Maybe he got attached to someone and that pissed off his partner. She got insecure and decided to take matters into her own hands. Guy doesn’t like his toys being taken away, or he doesn’t like it when someone disobeys his orders. Took her out for a hunt. She figured out that she was the prey. Lesson learned.”

“Not everything is about jealousy when a woman kills,” Emma grumbles, though she barely believes it herself. “She can be bystander—maybe she saw something she shouldn’t have and he removed a witness.”

“She’s a pretty frequent witness, then. We have a paper trail on her. She moved to every location the murders frequented. No more than an hour away from the next spot,” Benjen bets. “I say she was in on it. It explains her moving record, and why her murder is so different from the others. All the other girls were taken away, hunted down, and then killed. She was just hunted down.”

“There are plenty of explanations, maybe—will you stop doing that? He’s not going to look.”

“Doing what?” Benjen asks as leaned over to grab a pen, or a paper, or something that would make his ass clench from outside the Captain’s, otherwise known as the Lord Commander, window. He is strutting up a storm, practically preening for attention.
“Doing that,” Emma accentuates *that*, because she knows Benjen knows. Everyone in the precinct knows about Benjen’s daddy issues. “We have a case to work on.”

“He’s going to look,” Benjen denies. “They always look. It is only a matter of time before he gives in to this perfect Stark ass.”

“He’s not going to look, he has more important things to worry about. Like dead women in Yorkshire.”

“Well, not looking is not going to bring them back.”

“Aren’t you supposed to mourning?”

Yoren scoffs. “His sugar daddy died, not his boyfriend. The only one mourning is his ass at the loss of an old, wrinkly prick.”

“Just the way I like ‘em,” Benjen admits. His tone is dry and welcomes good banter. “And he wasn’t my sugar daddy—I wasn’t with Mr. Arryn for the money, just the sex. There’s just something about being on top of a guy who is old enough to remember Churchill that really gets me going.”

“You lost me at Mr. Arryn,” Emma retorts. “You called your lover by his last name.”

“It made him hot. He loved being reminded of his age just as much as I love reminding him. His wife never appreciated the way he worked his cock, said he was too old to please her. Turns out, she was just frigid.”

Emma rolls her eyes. She looks at the Lord Commander, who seems enraptured by papers. “Either way, let’s get back to the case so that we may save some lives. Can we all agree that the victim knew the attacker?”

“Aye,” Benjen and Yoren chimes in. Benjen looks into the metal plate and sees the Lord Commander in the reflection. He is still not staring. He pouts and asks how hot the coffee is.

“No,” Emma replies.

Benjen pours a bit of his mocha onto his pants. He makes a declaration to undress.

“Stop it!”

Yoren laughs. “Ten pounds says he calls in Stark for some discipline.”

Emma agrees to the bet, and when the captain comes out, eyes full of fury, ordering Benjen to make his get inside his office, she swears. Benjen walks with a glide and smirk. He enters the office, and once there, he casually pulls down the blinds.

Emma turns to Yoren, and also sees the entire precinct watching. “You’re all perverts,” she reprimands.

“Better his ass than yours,” says Yoren. “That’s a sexual harassment suit waiting to happen.”

“People are dying and we’re betting on asses.”

“I’m betting—you lost.”

Emma rolls her eyes and gets back to work. When Yoren sees how sensitive she is, he walks up to the board. “You’re right about one thing: he’s escalating. Even if it was a fit of passion or something
of the matter, if we let him get away with this, he’ll think he can get away with more. He’s gotten away with a lot already.”

The notion is frightening. Emma suggests looking at all the new residents that moved within a twenty mile radius to the crimes. Ones who live in open areas perfect for dogs to run and hunt, private residents, for example, or a home that might have soundproof rooms. Yoren suggests looking at large spots of land, particularly people with enough real estate that the crimes are so distant, finding them would be equivalent to pinpointing a tree falling in a forest.

Yoren has already prepared them. He talks about the few suspects they have, particularly the ones with records. Some older criminals who got out of prison and were recently released, and a few juveniles who are supposedly ready to join ‘the outside world.’

Emma takes the files. “I can’t believe you guys don’t close records when they turn 18.”

“Once an asshole, always an asshole,” Yoren remarks. He looks around. “Don’t quote me on this, my money’s on these younger guys. Here are their files. Messed up in the head, both of them. Seems like the type of thing loonies would do.”

“Who are they?”

“First one is Ramsey Bolton. His father is Roose Bolton; he does military contracts for Stark Industries. Ramsey moved here to manage the contracts while his father is working in Russia. He has a history of violence and sexual assault. He went to a detention center when he was fourteen for those reasons. When he was eighteen he was accused of raping a classmate. Girl who accused him died from an accident before there was a trail.”

“Well that wasn’t the most suspicious thing I’ve ever heard,” Benjen points out as he comes back. To no one’s surprise, he does not sit down on his chair.

“Rough lecture?” Emma asks.

“The roughest.” Benjen smirks.

“Smart kid,” Yoren continues. He ignores the interaction for actual police work. “After the incident, he deferred his admission to Oxford and studied abroad at Yale University. He graduated in the top percentage of his class. His psychiatrist says he might be a genius.”

“So we have an intelligent suspect with lots of money to move around, killing young girls? This just keeps getting better and better. I don’t even want to hear about the other one. My money is on him.”

“Don’t be so quick to judge,” lectures Benjen. “There’s more than meets than eye.” He takes out the file on their second suspect.

“Second is Jojen Reed. He got arrested when he was a juvenile for stalking, breaking and entering, and has gotten involved with drugs, both using and selling. He’s more into little boys than girls, but his record states that he’s not afraid to snap a finger or two to get things done. You’ll see how in his record. Like Bolton, he’s smart. Unlike Bolton, he’s been tested. Qualified for MENSA three years ago.” Yoren whistles. “We should look through the other files, but my gut says it’s one of them.”

Emma’s eyebrow furrows. She flips through the file. She sees a familiar name, and questions his legitimacy. “Is he related to Peter Pan?”

“The drug dealer?”
“Yeah.”

Yoren moves a couple of papers around. Benjen takes the faster route and looks through his computer screen. He finds the file almost instantly, and spins the screen around to show Emma. “Jojen’s mother was Pan’s mother’s sister. They’re cousins.”

Emma slams the file on the desk. “Changed my mind. I think it’s him.”

Yoren chuckles. “Let’s not get hasty. Is there bad blood between you and Pan?”

“You could say that.” Emma really does not want to get into the drama of her son and his hopefully ex-boyfriend. “All I know is, you have to be really messed up to work with Pan.”

And if there are two words to describe Jojen Reed, it is ‘messed up.’

Jojen Reed can count his best traits on a single hand. His intelligence, or at least the numbers he scored on a test when he was a child, is one of them. So far, his IQ has been his guarantee when shit hits the fan. His mind is his safety net and his curse. Long ago, it was the argument used to sway a corrupt judge who was unable to handle how a man of Stark’s wealth can hold such honor and not be swayed to provide a ‘donation’ towards the judge’s wellbeing.

Jojen sees the world in particles, in alternate dimensions and cosmic forces unable to be understood by man, and that makes him attractive to prestigious universities like Cambridge and MIT. He would never leave too far from home, though, from either Bran or from his family. The latter, particularly, needs him.

His second best trait, the one that reminds him of his beating heart, is his devotion to his family. On his life and on his soul, Jojen swears he loves his family. His father is a good man who stays by his side, even when he knew Jojen was guilty of the crime against his best friend’s son. He was the one who got on his hands and knees and begged Mr. Stark “to forgive Jojen. He’s my son, Ned. I love him, please, I can’t lose someone else. Please, if you have any respect for me, you’d forgive him.”

His sister is fierce and intelligent, and has worked to the bone to put herself through school. She wants to provide a better life for him and their father. She loves her father’s art. She loves how the wood speaks to a person’s being instead of catering to the masses’ affection. She does not want him to give it up, and so she hopes to provide for them. She loves Jojen, and prays every day for his mind to hear reason and not wayward voices.

But we can’t always have what we want, Jojen thinks. He smiles to himself, unpleasant and without amusement, because while he loves his sister and commends her efforts, he knows that hardwork and labor is not enough. A degree takes time, a job needs to fertilize before it grows into something substantial. Meera has loans, and though her scholarships are effective, they are not a panacea for her student debt. They need money, and Jojen loves his family enough to find a way to provide it.

There’s a hotel within the city that enjoys hiring baby faced boys with smooth voices. They judge the young men on their ability to smile and charm aging women, sing praises with tongues laced with honey and cyanide to them. They form a world where they can relive their golden years first, and their pasts never. Jojen doesn’t even have to sleep with them. Just be there, hold their hands while they tell him stories of their youth. It is not a fun job, but it is legal and profitable in more ways than one. The women are eager to slip Jojen a fresh tenner every time he throws them a wink or delivers a well-illustrated premonition (“I’m psychic, I swear, and I see a desirable future for you,” he purrs, just the way they like it and tells them anything but the graveyards and crows he truly imagines), but
it is also provided a believable alibi to his family. They would much rather accept that Jojen is whoring his time out to various grandmothers and fading duchesses than to worry about his lingering hands in his cousin’s side businesses.

Jojen is a screw up but he doesn’t screw up. He’s smarter than half the boys Peter employs, and because Jojen loves his family, even those who do not deserve to be loved, Peter trusts him. He gives Jojen odd jobs every now and then, and the pay is phenomenal and the benefits unheard of (seriously, who else considers a bag full weed and a sliver of snow a ‘bonus’). Jojen supposes that is his third best trait. He doesn’t waste his money on stupid shit. He’s a sucker for the good stuff but he’s not an addict. He wouldn’t pay for this crap, even though it feels like heaven, because that’s money Meera needs for her tuition, and that’s cash his dad could use to buy a new knife for his newest piece. That’s food on the table, and that’s fire in the hearth.

The jobs aren’t as dangerous as they were before. He makes deliveries most of the time, and sometimes it is as simple as playing messenger for Peter’s boyfriend when they have a spat. Then, Peter gives him the cash and in sequence, he puts it in his father’s jeans or his sister’s jacket (though he supposes he’ll have to find a new way to go at it—maybe start a savings account or a safety deposit box that cannot be traced).

There’s nothing odd about today, except that it is fuller than usual. Jojen took a morning shift from his coworker, and though it was slow, the women were friendly with slippery hands. Afterwards, he made a few deliveries to the estate, and avoided a cop who tried to proposition him for a baggie. He politely refused and told him he didn’t trade. They both knew he was lying, but without evidence, neither of them could act. Jojen has a gift for spotting coppers. At the end of the day, he returned to Peter’s hideout. Everything went perfectly well, except for the chill in Jojen’s spine that proclaimed a messy evening. Sometimes, he truly hated his cousin.

Today, Peter has a guest over. Upon Jojen’s arrival, Peter’s eyes light up with recognition of a smooth day’s work. He introduces him to the fleet of young men who are too old, with hands too dirty, to be recruits for Peter’s lost boys—he likes them young and uncorrupted, which these men certainly aren’t. In the center is a handsome, chilling young man who smiles like his teeth are made of knives and his tongue quivers for blood. “This is Ramsey Bolton,” Peter familiarizes. “We were cellmates in juvie. I invited him over to discuss his hard work over the last few weeks.”

“It’s good to meet you,” Ramsey greets, and oh, how he sounds so excited. Jojen hates it. He’s already imagining his death by a hundred starving dogs. Maybe in another life, he wistfully dreams. “Would you happen to be this legendary Henry I’ve been hearing about?”

Ramsey’s back is turned from Peter, so only Jojen sees the flash of surprise that passes his cousin’s face. Then, he spots the irritation as Peter sends Felix, his right hand man a look, and receives confusion in response. Now, Peter is angry. He hides it as soon as Ramsey turns to face him.

“Actually,” Peter clarifies. “He’s my cousin.”

The air grows tense. Ramsey disregards it with a chuckle. “Oh, I just thought because he looked so young…really, your family’s veins must be running with the fountain of youth. I bet none of you ever age. I’m jealous. What is your secret?”

Peter chuckles and smirks like he’s amused. He splits the cocaine into four straight lines with a gift card from a toy store, and Jojen scoffs as if it isn’t the most ironic sight ever. Then, Peter tears the paper decorated in snow apart into perfectly even halves and slides Ramsey’s share over.

“Salute,” Ramsey announces. He grins like a trickster as he snorts a whole row. Peter smirks, and sends an order to Felix with his eyes. Jojen watches with no amusement when the boys, some as
young as Bran, bring the other men some of their own pleasures. While they enjoy their intoxicated pursuits, Ramsey becomes relaxed. He leans to the chair, and peers his wily blue eyes onto the gang leader. “I bet you’re wondering why I’m here.”

“The thought crossed my mind, yes,” Peter admits. “I thought I’d gotten rid of all the major competition.”

Ramsey waves off his concerns. “Oh, I’m not interested in ruining your monopoly. I’m an honest man, now.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes,” Ramsey chuckles. “Graduated from a fancy university in America, away from trouble. Started anew. I’ve even got a real job now, working for my dear old dad. No more off the book sales; all my crimes are sanctioned by the government.”

“Good for you,” Peter praises. “But from what I hear, even if you’re not dealing in drugs, you’re still dealing in bodies, or am I mistaken?”

“More like leaving bodies,” Jojen mutters without thinking. Ramsey is surprised by his sudden input, but instead of becoming defensive, he laughs. His men follow suit and laugh harder.

“Yes, old habits die hard. I haven’t found ‘the one’ to capture my heart completely.” Ramsey sighs. “I thought it’d be Myranda; she was childhood sweetheart. Her father took care of my father’s hunting dogs—I do love those dogs. Loyal, savage beasts. Not like humans. Nothing so weak. Then, she got a little mouthy, got boring, and while she was amendable to my games, she didn’t have what it takes to keep my attention.” He moved towards Peter. “So I found other playmates, and then she got jealous and thought she could keep my attention by fucking another man. I decided to remind her who she was messing with.” He snorts up another line.

“You were jealous,” Jojen points out.

Ramsey laughs, crude and rough. “No, she wasn’t enough to get my blood pumping. I just don’t like it when my things think they have a mind of their own.”

Jojen is disgusted. He wants to leave as soon as possible, but Peter calls for more celebration, more drugs and more alcohol to warm their bellies. Jojen knows if he leaves he won’t be receiving his payment, so he steps outside to escape the catastrophe and tries not to think of the crying victims and wailing women, their bloodied corpses on the streets, and their nails covered in excrement.

After hours and hours of tortuous shouts of glory, the noises die down and the men are escorted to their cars. Ramsey is not stupid enough to not prepare a designated driver, and another beast of man carries him to their car. Jojen hands it to men like Peter and Ramsey. They know how to make their bitches reliable.

Peter sees them out, and once he reaches Ramsey’s car, Jojen watches as they embrace like old friends departing. Ramsey slips some bills into Peter’s hands, and while the other man refuses, he is eventually pushed into accepting. They hug again. Peter walks pasts by Jojen, and the lonely house encourages Jojen to follow him inside.

As soon as they reach the living room, Peter pushes the contents of the table onto the ground and lets the air become polluted with the fog of depravity and addiction. “He knows!” Peter shouts. “He knows!”

Jojen frowns. It has been a long time since Peter has behaved in such a manner. “What are you
talking about?”

“I’m saying that Ramsey Bolton knows about Henry.” Peter finds some more things to destroy, artifacts and decorations get thrown to the ground in rage. He grabs a poker for a fireplace he doesn’t have and starts whacking the ornaments off the shelves. He accidentally hits one of his boys, and doesn’t look the least bit guilty. “He knows because someone told him.” The boy groveling on the floor looks fearful, and Peter takes it as a sign of guilt. He beats his face first, and ignores his scream when he starts on the leg. “Did you tell him?” The boy whimpers. Peter stabs his face into the ground. “I asked you a question: did you tell him?”

Jojen stops his cousin from going further. “He’s too scared to speak. You’re blowing this out of proportion.”

“You don’t know Ramsey,” Peter warns. “He likes weakness. He knows he’s found mine, and I don’t have his. He has the upper hand. He knows something about me that I don’t know about him. He can hurt Henry, and he knows that hurts me. Fuck!” Peter drops the poker onto the floor. He starts pacing around the room. Jojen reads it as a sign of the storm, the omen before the apocalypse.

Jojen reminds him that his dramatics serves no purpose, and neither does beating his men until he finds a traitor that may or may not exist. “Henry’s mother is a copper. Not even a lord can protect himself from a mother’s wrath. Besides, you’re worried about the disadvantage, right?”

“I’m not worried, I’m angry,” Peter hisses. “What would you have me do?”

“Find someone he loves.”

“Ramsey loves nothing.” Their kind do not have attachments. “Everything he owns always breaks before we come to love them.” Peter already expects the worst for Henry, and his cock grows hard at his lover’s tears. Jojen wonders if he would have killed Peter by now if he wasn’t family.

“Well, what made you desire Henry? Why has he lasted so long?”

Peter quiets for a second, and then he answers: “Because he’s broken.”

“What?”

“Do you know why I’m so fascinated by Henry? Because he’s broken and no matter how hard he breaks, I know he can be healed. I know that no matter how many times I shatter him to pieces, there’s someone waiting to put him together. He has someone—someone who will love him regardless of what I can do to him.” Men like Ramsey fear and crave that one person who can never be broken. It makes them feel powerful and powerless at the same time.

“Then find that person and give him to Ramsey.”

Peter chuckles. “No…if Ramsey found out about Henry, it means he’s keeping tabs on me. It has to be someone he can’t control, someone living outside his line of sight. Someone I can trust.”

“No.”

“What?”

“I’m not going to be responsible for bringing an innocent bystander into your sick games.”

Peter scoffs. “I’m not asking for you to slaughter a baby and send it to the altar. Find me someone broken. Someone pretty enough to catch Ramsey’s eye. Someone who has enough people who love
them that they could escape Ramsey’s grasp but not enough people to shield them from their own self-loathing.”

“The world is filled with bastards, cripples, and broken things. You’ll find someone without my help.” Jojen is not a good man, but there are things he will not do.

Peter glares. He will not be denied. “Maybe I will go looking and find someone incompatible. Someone who will just spark Ramsey’s wrath. Perhaps a stubborn little Stark girl or boy…”

“Maybe I can burn your house down and everyone in it.”

“Like mother, like son?”

“Peter…” Jojen warns. Peter refuses to back down and when he looks prepared to give names for potential victims, Jojen brings up another argument. “Even if I were to give him someone, what’s to say he’ll keep them? People like that, they throw away their toys even after they come to love them.” Like monsters, Jojen believes.

“Kids who throw away their toys may one day become collectors. Ramsey wants that ‘person to give his heart to’ and if there’s one thing you are good at, Jojen. It’s finding a person’s true nature underneath the disguises they display.”

Peter drops on the couch and asks for the profits from today, as if the matter has already settled. Jojen hands him the total, and from it, Peter leisurely counts it and then rewards him with his share plus a little extra on the side. He always does this, and Jojen wonders if it is because he’s family or if he knows the bit of generosity keeps Jojen coming back for more.

Before Jojen leaves, Peter repeats the order. “I’ll call you tomorrow to see what you’ve accomplished.”


Because of Theon’s consistent presence in their house, Winterfell has a de facto room for Theon with all his personal belongings from his clothes to a safety stash of cigarettes that Mrs. Stark contributes to on her more stressful days. While the Starks protested his original involvement with their eldest son, Theon likes to think he’s grown on them in his own way. At least, enough that they would leave him alone in the house and not be worried about missing objects when they come back.

The Greyjoys are a notorious crime family stationed in Liverpool. They began in the 1740s with the transatlantic slave trade—back when their businesses were still legal. On their tax papers today, they are fishermen. Underneath it all, they are common crooks who are slowly losing their power to young, bigger start up criminals who know how to work the system with cool manipulation over hard, crude force. Theon has never told anyone, but he suspects it is only a matter of time before his older brothers get arrested for their recklessness. Asha, who is born to rule, is simply biding her time for when they go too far. Their father favors her as well. He knows that if anybody can bring the Greyjoy name to their former glory, it is her.

Ever since Theon met Robb, he made a vow not to think of them again. His father found him too soft, and unlike his sister, who wanted him gone to escape their family’s hard life—she didn’t believe he could handle it, not her poor, weak little brother—his father wanted him out of his sight. He already tried to be the child Balon Greyjoy wanted, and hated himself for it. He hated how rough his hands became when he punched a guy in the face, hated the people he surrounded himself with, hated that he could never make someone smile unless he was pretending to be some douche. He decided that if he could not be the perfect Greyjoy son, then he can be the best friend and boyfriend
to one of the most powerful men in the world. Robb will go places, and Theon will be by his side.

Ride or die, bitches.

And though it was a slow process, he knows the rest of the family is warming up to him. It helps that Robb’s last boyfriend (former beau, ex, all words are so delicious to his ears) is his cousin. Sansa, especially, has taken the advantageous position of being his friend, especially considering he’s been accepted as a transfer to Central Saint Martins, a school he knows she has her eye on. When he is undressing, he takes a casual glance as his hands because they’re still rough—but not from fighting or from hard labor like his brothers, but from years of putting his bitterness to his work. “We do not sow,” his family motto, can go down in flames, because Theon does sew and he does it well.

He puts on his swimming trunks and heads to his favorite place in the house—a high tech twenty-meter marble pool with turbos and a waterfall. It is extravagant, but one of the many prized facilities of the Stark estate. Catelyn Tully was a competitive swimmer in her youth, and along with a grand sept, Ned Stark completely refurbished their pool to cater to her childhood dreams of being an Olympian. In total, Winterfell has two top of the line gyms with the latest equipment, a dance studio, several acres for jogging through the gardens, a playground, and north of their estate, they owned a stable.

The entire family is obsessed with fitness. They don’t care about attractiveness as much as they prize their health and hard bodies. Theon was in awe when he first visited. They have a paralytic kid riding horses, a ballet prodigy, an obstacle course disguised as a playground for Rickon, Robb competed in boxing and rugby, and Sansa, who he originally thought to be a run of the mill lady, participated in track. For a while, he suspected Robb was a part of a cult that wanted their members to become Olympic gods. It would not have changed anything if he was, but Theon would like to know what he was dealing with before they got married.

When Theon gets into the pool, his phone rings. He dips into the water and ignores the lyrics “at worst, I feel bad for a while…” so that he can be left alone to his thoughts. He knows who it is already. He tries to see how long he can hold his breath.

Underneath the water, he remembers the text message he received a week earlier from Asha. It was short, and rough, and demanded he come home. Their mother misses him. Finally, in a gentler manner, she confesses her concern by saying that he “was her brother, too.” For some reason, the women in his family have always cared about him as much as the men don’t.

He remembers his mother fondly but not well. He can feel her hands on his hands, teaching how to hold a needle properly and encouraging him to make his little designs of seashells and crabs. She kissed him and loved him, even when his father called him indulgent and his brothers teased him for being a sissy. He remembers Asha as the girl who pushed him into the mud, and when he cried, she told him to shut up and be a man. To fight back. To attack her. He kept on crying, and the next morning, she bought him a chocolate bar with her own allowance so that he would forgive her. He didn’t.

He remembers how his brothers once locked him in one of the boat’s cabins overnight for a prank, and slept amongst the stench of fish guts and the clacking of lobster claws. He remembers getting a cold from the sea water, and how his father, instead of taking him to the hospital, put him in his room without medicine and only gave him a thin blanket to warm up. He remembers his mother crying, and his sister pounding on the door, trying to get in but the lock was on and Theon couldn’t move.

Throughout his memories, he cannot forget his uncle who he was sent to live with after Theon got expelled for assaulting another kid in school. Theon gets out of the water to take a huge breath before diving back in. He lasted almost a whole minute. The phone is still ringing. On his second time
under, he thinks about his uncle, Euron and wonders the ways he could die. As much as his other uncles were indifferent to Theon’s presence, they were adamant in not allowing him to be sent to their menace of a brother. Victorian destroyed a table and called Theon’s father mad. Aeron asked him to reconsider and Balon, in his unique brand of sadism, slammed a door so hard the hinges screeched like a dying woman and the younger men shivered. Balon ordered them to stand down.

Theon heard horrible things about the man, and his mother warned him never to be alone with him. For all the good it did, Theon quickly found out that whatever Euron wanted, he got. If he wanted to make Theon submit, he would. He tortured Theon in a way he would never confess to, not even to Robb. He keeps those dirty sheets a secret, and denies those immoral trysts against the wall as if his life depends on it. Theon is scum, he’s disgusting, and he’s a fucking mess of a human being, but he’s not someone’s bitch. He won’t tell a story to people who don’t care.

Robb was godsend when they met. He spent every waking moment with Robb and the Starks, because as long as he was with them, with sheets that are clean and clothes that were brand new because Mrs. Stark had bought the wrong size, he was free from the Greyjoy influence.

As long as he has Robb, Theon is safe and he is secure and he is happy. No one else deserves to be as happy—Theon deserves Robb. He’s suffer enough. He wants someone who is good and kind and not as messed up as him. Robb will make him so happy. Being a Stark will be wonderful.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next Chapter: Jon and Robb finally face each other. Then, it all goes to hell.
2. I’m not a Theon/Robb shipper. But damn it, I feel bad for him. I wonder if you all recognize the differences in Theon’s thoughts about Robb vs. Jon’s thoughts about Robb because I worked to put in the subtleties of why I prefer one relationship over the other.
3. Jojen is super amoral in this story. But he loves Bran so that makes it all okay. :)
4. Still on track, but not ahead. Maybe this week, I'll get to writing those two chapters.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the people who were so supportive and kind to me. The story has been taken down and I can finally put this behind me. I don’t know if Ao3 interfered or if the author did it on their own accord. Either way, I wanted to celebrate by posting this chapter early. :) I also want to thank 13SapphireStars13 because I wrote in a quote from your review. I’m sorry! Especially in light of what happened, I hope I didn’t upset you. I will change it to something else if you’d like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Robb’s father once told him that if he woke up with his head spinning like a wooden top, it meant his life was out of focus. The only way to cure disorganization was to do something simple, something so infuriating straightforward that not even the world’s hardest hammer could bend it. Robb left for the gym at a godforsaken hour to hit the punching bag like he was slamming his fist into a rugby rival’s face. One whose illegal move was missed by the referee.

When he is finished and his knuckles are white and his hands bruised purple, he walks into the kitchen. His head is clear and he muses that today is a great day for pancakes. He gathers up all the ingredients, flour, blueberries from the garden, fresh milk, and takes a whisk, pans and bowls from the cabinets. He hums a eighties rock song from his father’s vinyl, grinning like a fool, before he realizes that it is all for nothing. He cannot cook.

To satisfy his urge to break something, he smashes three eggs against the cutting board and slides them into a bowl, shells and all. Suddenly, he is furious. He cracks another egg. He smashes a few blueberries. He throws the flour in the air. Had he not receive a notification from his phone, claiming that the weather is perfect for a camping trip, he would have continued his egg cracking vendetta.

Robb assigned the alert because he’d been planning to invite Jon and his siblings on a retreat so that they could get to know each other. Robb thought about sobbing his lungs out, but finds that the self-loathing aspect of his soul was exhausted. He needed more batteries for his misery, because the ones he was running on—the countless memories of Jon reminding him that he was not ‘relationship material’ and Robb ignoring every single word, was almost gone. Today, he wants to purchase a new device.

Robb walks up the stairs with unbroken eggs, fresh berries and carries a sealed bag of flour underneath his arm. Then, he knocks on Jon’s door.

Jon opens it on the fifth or sixth knock, and is only half awake when he does so. When he sees Robb, his mind swallows shock and the serum is faster than any caffeine pill. He stumbles out a “what morning you doing good here?” before deciding on the polite “good morning” should go first. Then, in attempt to sound smooth because he is drained from working with the Baratheons yesterday and spent hours last night digging a hole to bury his guilt corpse, extra fresh and big as a giant, he asks how Robb is doing.

Robb unleashes everything. “I was making pancakes. I needed to clear my head because the world was spinning and then I got hungry and pancakes, the overwhelming desire for pancakes entered my
body—no, not my body, my soul. My inner being demanded I eat pancakes. Maybe it was because I went boxing and I was hungry. Maybe it had nothing to do with the boxing. I could have just been hungry. But I needed pancakes. I got all the ingredients, stared at the blueberries and eggs and you know what?"

“You can’t cook?”

“I can’t cook!” Robb agrees. He laughs. “But why did I get the ingredients if I can’t cook?”

Jon does not know the answer.

“Because pancakes aren’t actually pancakes. Pancakes is Jon and Robb. I need pancakes, the same way I need you—please don’t give me that look—that’s not what I mean! I need you to be by my side, Jon. I don’t care if it is as a friend, a cousin, a brother but I need you. I want to start all over, I want us to be together and love each other.” And maybe have sex—but Robb is not stupid enough to say that out loud. “Please make pancakes with me.”

Jon is tired. He wants to sleep for another five hours, before he has to head over to the Baratheon house to plan a picnic for his bosses. Yet, Jon takes one look at that face, those perfect blue eyes he used to read in the morning, because they were clear when it was raining and crystal when it was cloudy. He sees the flour weighing on his shoulder, and trails downward to his knuckles which are on the verge of bleeding and Jon wants nothing more than to kiss them better and maybe make an ice pack.

Robb requesting his presence for breakfast is the most progress Jon has gotten all week, and the act is heaven sent. Pancakes and reconciliation and a cute Robb making him feel like soft sweaters and warm milk.

“Well, I don’t want you to burn down the house,” Jon says instead of ‘I love you.’ For a moment, he is concerned that the humor does not make it through, but Robb’s grin proves otherwise.

When they arrive to the kitchen, the place is a mess. Jon is thankful Aunt Cat isn’t here to see this catastrophe. He questions the egg vomit in the trashcan and Robb replies with a lazy shrug, saying his first attempt got out of hand.

Jon refuses to linger on the sentiment. He organizes the ingredients into one pile, the measuring cups and the bowls into another, and the last was on the stove with a slip of butter inside the pan. He does not turn on the heat until he finishes mixing the ingredients. Robb watches, fascinated by the way Jon swirls his wrist and the flick of his fingers when he adds in the yeast. He says it makes the pancakes fluffier. Watching Jon in the kitchen is more enticing than seeing him posing in his boxers. Robb, entangled with the domesticity, attempts to build a conversation with Jon. He starts small.

“Do you remember how old you were when my mother taught you how to cook? You were did so well. It’s like you were made to wear an apron.”

Jon hesitates to drop the blueberries in, and then rains them into the mix unceremoniously. He seems wistful. “Eight, I think? Maybe seven? That was a long time ago.”

“Why did you learn?” Robb asks. “I know Aunt Lyanna just dropped you off for the summer. Were you trying to get along with mother, or was it because Aunt Lyanna couldn’t cook, or…?”

“Yes, yes, and yes,” Jon answers. He pauses. “I think it was after you won your first rugby game. I couldn’t join you no matter how much you begged. I arrived too late for the practices. But you came into my room and started crying about how you thought you were going to choke the next match.
You kept saying 'everyone is going to hate me, Jon. I’m the one who they’re counting on.”” Jon scoffs, though the noise is tinged with delight. “Imagine if rugby was a team sport.”

“In all fairness, I was nine.”

“I told you that winning wasn’t important.”

“That’s what losers say.” Robb answers before he can stop himself. The sentiment was a phrase from his past, from the hot-tempered boy who would chase after goals like girls, who held an illegal boxing match without gloves because his opponent dared him to. The conceited nature of his own statement amuses him, and he starts to laugh. “Okay, I was a dick back then.” He strides over Jon’s side and swipes a berry from the bowl. Jon swats him with the whisk.

“Down,” he orders. “Don’t you want to hear the rest of the story?”

“Sorry,” Robb grins sheepishly. He sucks the batter off the berry and chews. “I couldn’t resist.”

“Either way, you won me over. I just had to make you feel better. I asked Aunt Cat to teach me how to make you pancakes. You were obsessed with them. Buttermilk, strawberry cheesecake, chocolate chips, but most of all, blueberries.”

“You promised to make me a plate of pancakes for every goal I made.” Robb pretends to be aghast. “I was bribed!”

“Yes, you were. Your honor suffered a great defeat.” Jon grins. “Death by blueberries.”

“Practically medieval.”

Robb swears the kitchen became brighter with the blissful bells of laughter. Robb creeps his wandering hand past Jon’s own. Jon captures the slippery digits instantly. Robb plays off the gesture as a thief getting caught, and Jon is none the wiser.

“Do it again. I dare you,” he challenges.

Robb complies. He plays the game, he aims for blueberry after blueberry, and even throws in a few pinches of flour. Over and over again, Jon captures his hand and intertwines their fingers. “Caught you.”

“For now,” Robb teases. He pulls his hands a way, careful not to linger in case Jon fears the electricity pulsing through their palms. He feels it, and if he allows Jon to focus on the magnetic force, he will run away like he always does. He makes sure to escape Jon’s peripheral several times, just to keep the game exciting, and lets Jon win at least half the rounds.

Jon cannot stop laughing. He only quiets down when Robb shushes him in fear of awakening their entire family.

Once back on track of their breakfast, Jon continues the second part of the storyline. “You grounded the ball five times, and scored a penalty kick the referee should not have given you because you got fouled on purpose.” Jon smiles to himself. “For such an honest guy, you’re just full of deceptive moves, aren’t you?”

“I like to be unpredictable. Keeps things interesting.”

Jon hums. “I came up with a dozen new recipes so that you wouldn’t get sick of them.”
Robb remembers the maple bacon chocolate with great fondness. “They were delicious.”

Jon finishes making the batter and grabs the ladle. He turns on the heat and lets the butter melt all over the pan. When the steel is completely covered, Jon drops in the mix for the first batch. The mood lightens considerably, and as stress as Jon is about their interaction, Robb cannot miss the smile on his face.

He leans over to rest his chin on Jon’s shoulder. He is careful to place his hands half a foot away from Jon’s hips. He does not want to scare him; their progress has been too great. He makes an exaggerated breath and moans at the smell of sizzling blueberries. The berries dye the batter with lightning strips of purple. “Don’t tell mother but you’re my favorite cook.”

Any respectable young man would have requested Robb move away, but Jon is far from respectable. He thanks Robb and ignores their proximity for the sake of letting the sensation linger.

Robb makes a prayer towards his nether regions, and distances himself an entire centimeter. “Do you want to go out sometime?” He murmurs, lost in the song of their reunion.

Jon snaps his head in Robb’s direction. His eyes are wide and fearful. Robb attempts to rectify his mistake.

“I meant as friends!” He clarifies.

The look on Jon’s face says he doesn’t believe him.

Robb takes a deep breath. He cannot sound defensive about the situation, or else Jon will know he is lying. Robb is a terrible liar. The room for error has passed, and Robb spares not a single second longer to reply. He maintains a resolved stance.

“Jon, I’ve been through hell these last few days. Just because I respect you and have accepted your decision doesn’t mean I can let go all at once. I miss you.”

Jon is inclined to agree. He turns the stove onto a lower heat. “I…I missed you, too,” Jon confesses. “These days haven’t been easy for me either.”

Robb considers asking if Jon has changed his mind, but brushes the optimism away. If Jon wants him back, he knows he can have him. Jon is maintaining his standpoint, regardless of who suffers from it.

“I spent some time talking to Bran and Arya. Turns out for kids, they’re pretty smart. Smarter than we ever were at their age.”

“I could have told you that,” Jon replies. Despite the jest, the comment alleviates the original pressure in the room.

“I realized that we…I’ve been going at our relationship the wrong way. I admit, I don’t know you that well. The only thing to do about that is to be your friend again. Jon, I want us to recover our childhood bond. When there was none of these complications, none of these worries about sex or romance. When we loved each other unconditionally and did not have to worry about what other people had to say.”

Jon is moved. Yet he cannot fight his suspicions, and voices his concerns. “So there’s no ulterior motive here? You don’t want me back?”

Robb could not bring himself to lie, so he fuddles with the truth instead. “I do want you back—
whether I get Jon Stark or Jon Snow, that's up to you. I want to be by your side. That’s what I want.”

They wait a moment. Jon returns to the pancake, slightly burnt but still scrumptious.

Finally, Jon agrees.

“Okay.” He flips the first layer onto the plate, and gets started on the second part of the stack. “What do you have in mind?”

Robb perks up at the submission. “I was thinking we could visit the reserves! We used to go all the time when we were kids, and…maybe make up the date we were supposed to have.” Robb remembers waiting for Jon for hours because his flight got delayed. When Jon finally arrived, Robb made the suggestion of camping in the safe zones of the reserves instead of heading home together. He told Jon he would wait for him. He did not expect Bran to try and follow them. Robb never saw Jon that day or any day after until that fated meeting in Scotland.

“Can we bring Bran?” Jon asks softly.

There’s apprehension that does not deserve to exist. Robb does not hesitate to agree. “I think that’s a marvelous idea.”

Jon finishes up the first stack with a conversation about their work and school. Robb feels at home again when Jon tells him to get their utensils—he can’t expect Jon to do all the work. The command is light and teasing. Glee bubbles within Robb as he gets their knives and forks, and sets the silverware next to each other so that the conversation is more amicable.

When Jon sits down, Robb suggests they do it this Friday. “The sooner the better. I heard the weather will be lovely.”

Jon heard the same thing, and dread boils in his stomach when he turns down Robb’s offer. “I have plans that night.”

Robb, for all intents and purposes, cannot sense an ill omen if it hits him on the head. He asks if Jon is working that night.

Jon could agree with the suggestion, he could lie and soothe Robb’s concerns, or he could be a man, suck up his fears through a soulless straw and tell the truth. In the spirit of their comradery, he chooses the last option. If Robb is serious about being friends, he deserves to know. “I…I actually have a date that night.”

Robb pauses mid-cut of his perfectly golden pancake before returning to make a perfect triangle. He bites into the buttery goodness, allows the creamy bread, more soufflé than breakfast, to melt in his mouth. The blueberries pop, and the butter skips on his taste buds. He chews as if the treat is a rare delicacy. “Well, maybe we could do it on Saturday then. Either way, we have to ask Bran if he’s available.”

Jon, in contrast, almost chokes on his own pancakes. He wants to ask how Robb is so calm about the situation, but finds the question narcissistic at best. He has never been one to look a gift horse in the mouth, and says he’ll put forth the request.

“So do I know who you’re going out with? Is he or she a friend?”

Jon is reminded of the man he’s been seeing for the last month. He rises his hackles despite Robb’s lack of weaponry. The chime of innocence is the vocal equivalent to a Trojan Horse. “I don’t think talking about him is a good idea.”
“Why not?” Robb asks. “If we’re going to be friends, I’m going to need to hear about your relationships. You need to trust me, Jon.” Gods, his tone does not miss a beat. He sounds like an inquisitive girlfriend rather than a jealous ex-boyfriend. Jon knows better, he does, but he cannot help but be hopeful that Robb is willing to let him move on and be happy. There’s a hiss in his mind that’s screaming for Robb to act jealous, to demand answers from Jon and cause a scene over him but he shuts that voice down. He needs to set an example.

Jon pours maple syrup over his pancakes. “His name is Willas Tyrell. He’s here on business.”

Robb recognizes the name at once. “Of Tyrell Industries?”

Jon is surprised. “Yes. Do you know him?”

“Not personally, no,” Robb answers. His mind is already conjuring up all the facts he has on the Tyrell CEO, and a couple of theories as well. “I used to date his sister, Margaery. She studied here for a year before going to Cambridge. She told me their entire family is very close.”

Jon nods. “Willas says that as well.” The conversation is more comfortable than Jon would have liked, and contrasts the awkwardness building inside of him. Before Robb can ask him anymore questions, Jon announces he needs to get to work. If he heads there now, he will be an hour early but Stannis respects punctuality. He devours the pancakes in a flash, ignoring the obvious stomachache that will come. Robb watches him from the corner of his eyes and wonders how many cameras he has to hack to get the recording of Jon eating. He does not finish when Jon does, but when Jon puts his dishes in the sink, Robb surprises him from the behind with a hug.

“Have fun at work,” he tells Jon. He cannot resist placing a goodbye kiss on Jon’s cheek. “I’ll see you when you get home.”

Jon meekly nods, and gets out of Robb’s way. The eldest Stark eats his pancakes alone, and tries to unclench the hold he has on his knife. Old Robb would have thrown a tantrum by now. New Robb is smooth. New Robb is going to get his shit together. New Robb is going to finish these delicious fucking pancakes, and then he is going to go upstairs and do some work for the company. Before that, he is going to stalk Willas Fucking Tyrell and make sure he is good enough for Jon. He puts all the plates into the sink for the housemaids to clean and heads to his room where his laptop awaits.

Before using his advanced search engine, Robb prepares himself for a good looking man. If he is a Tyrell, he is guaranteed to be a supermodel in a business suit or a god in a jersey. All of Margaery’s siblings are as beautiful as she is. One of her brothers is married, strong as an ox with a mind to match, kind and wholesome—Willas cannot be him. Her second brother is Loras, soon to be married to Renly Baratheon—Robb attended their engagement party. He knows Loras is about as sharp as a decade old crayon. He is not the type of guy who could catch Jon’s eye. Willas has to be the oldest. That means he is the CEO of Tyrell Corporations, which also means he has his wits about him or else the infamous Queen of Thorns would never allow him to take the reigns over their empire.

Fuck, Robb thinks, fuck his life for Willas being available.

He uses a basic Google search first, finds a few articles about Willas’s impressive work ethic and legendary achievements—at least by corporate measures. The eldest Tyrell prefers to stay in the shadows otherwise. No reports on his relationships. Not a single photograph of an affair. He has a noticeable leg injury from a horse riding accident when he was a teenager. Smart, graduated fourth in his class at East Anglia with a degree in business and agriculture. Strongly involved in philanthropy, specifically in conservation and world hunger. He donates a portion of his company’s produce to feeding starving populations in third world countries, and spent a year in Rwanda to personally provide aid.
Robb slams the computer screen down in anger. *He is an angel.* He even has that wounded duck expression on his face whenever he talks about his injury. He takes several deep breaths, before opening up his computer screen again.

No, Robb refuses to give up. If a man that perfect is single, there must be something wrong with him.

Jon believes that their separation will be good for them, but that only means that it is Robb’s duty to ensure that his cousin receives the best possible partner. He loves Jon, and he is going to guarantee perfection. Robb moves onto his advance search engine. Everyone has a skeleton in their closet. A man like Willas has an electronic footprint whether he likes it or not; Robb is not some teenage girl going through her crush’s Facebook or Twitter. He pulls out a blank notebook and titles it Tyrell. He means business as he scribbles down every single piece of information he can get.

Arya pops in after her workout to ask Robb if he can take her to dance practice. She knocks on the door twice and receives no response. She knocks on it again, and there’s nothing. Finally, she opens the door and sees Robb hunched over his computer screen with an array of papers everywhere and a notebook filled with illiterate scribblings. Robb has not looked up from the screen once.

“Robb?”

Robb can type an estimated ninety-five words per minute, as evident of his test scores and the flurry of dust he leaves behind when he obsesses over a new project. Her older brother is immersed in his target, and believes no detail can be spared when going forth on a new endeavor, no knob or nook should remain unclaimed. It is what makes him successful in his academics and in his career. Such a trait makes Arya worried when he focuses that attention on other people.

“What are you doing, Robb?” She asks, cautious of how he’ll react to her presence.

“I’m taking your advice.”

“What advice?”

“I’m going to be Jon’s ‘friend.’” He does not look up from the screen. “You were right. If I really love Jon, I would want him in any form he’s willing to give me, and that is friendship.”

Arya is suspicious of the display of maturity, especially when his eyes gleam manically.

“What are you working on?”

“Jon and I are going camping sometime this weekend.”

Arya stares at the scene before her, and wonders if she should play along or question Robb’s motives. Camping is the playground of serial killers. “Good for you…?”

“We would have gone on Friday but Jon has a date. With a guy. Who is not me.”

Arya has a lump in her throat. “Are you okay with that?”

“Yes, why wouldn’t I be?” Robb laughs. He sounds delirious. “I am just so happy that my ex-lover, the man I was supposed to marry, is going on a date with another guy richer, smarter, and more charitable than me. It’s fucking great. I’m so happy that Jon found someone worthy of him.” Robb’s focus never wavers. He mutters nonsensical things like, “Martell…bad blood…Obie…who the hell is Obie…”

Arya backs out of the doorway.
Robb catches her retreat. “What did you want, Arya? Is there anything I can do for you after you’ve given me such fine advice?”

*Besides not killing her*, Arya states that she needed a ride but is sure Sansa can take her. “She’s about to finish her jog anyways—*you do…whatever* this is, Robb.”

“Thanks, Arya.” He puts down his pen. “Willas Tyrell seems like a wonderful man—that’s Jon’s date. Despite having a leg a step away from amputation, he has a clean bill of health. Blood pressure is currently a steady 110/80, though it deviates. Sometimes, it drops lower depending on the hours he puts in at work, and on other occasions, it heightens when he puts on a bit of weight. The heaviest he has ever been was fourteen stone and four—right after his accident. Stress eater. Mild case of depression. He’ll enjoy Jon’s cooking skills. High cholesterol runs in his family. Last month, he placed in over eighty hours of overtime—how on earth does he think he can give Jon the attention that he needs—*never mind.* He has a 971 credit score—not surprising given that his family is bloody rich. His national insurance number is—”

“That’s government information!”

“A government that uses our firewall systems. I can’t break into a house if I know the security code.”

“You can if the house is in another person’s name and you don’t have their permission to come in,” Arya protests.

“That’s a technicality, Arya. Say I kill someone and the cops come. If they said there are no signs of breaking and entering, it’s not listed as such. Therefore, I am not doing anything wrong.”

“No! Just…no, Robb.”

Robb ignores her. “I think I saw him once, at graduation. He was taking pictures with Margaery. Nice guy.” But then again, he thought Margaery was nice, too and she crushed his heart and sprinkled the remains all over his graduation gown.

Sansa chooses that moment to return from her job. She pops in, effortlessly beautiful with a sleek ponytail and classic Lululemon attire. Arya is reminded of the models in those Victoria Secret commercials advertising sportswear. The ones who look perfect when they should be dying. She knows she’s never looked like Sansa when she’s finished a work out.

“Arya, do you have spare earphones? Mine broke.”

“Sansa!” Robb shouts. Sansa stares at her brother incredulously.

“Robb?”

“Sansa!”

“I have them,” Arya interrupts. “Come on, they’re in my room. Let’s go.”

“Sansa, I need a favor from you.”

“Don’t answer him—”

“What do you need?” Sansa asks, a little breathless and fatigued from her workout. She can feel the dead skin contaminating her sweat and causing erdu, and she desperately wants to take a shower. “Is it going to be quick? Because I really need a long, hot bath.”
“Do you have your phone on you?”

“Always,” Sansa responds. She takes it out and Robb grasps onto the monstrosity of flamingos and polka dots. “What are you doing?” She asks as she tries to get it out of his hands.

“I need Margaery’s phone number—found it. Thanks, Sansa!” He writes the number down.

“Why do you…” Sansa recognizes the look in Robb’s eyes and immediately regrets humoring him from the beginning. Instead of asking him head on for the truth, she turns to her sister and demands an explanation.

“Long story short. Jon is going out with Willas Tyrell this Friday night. Robb is not handling it well.”

“I am handling it just fine!” Robb denies as he takes out a two-year-old notebook titled Margaery from his trunk of girlfriends past. Out of sick curiosity, both girls sneak their way to the sealed trunk before Robb regains the sense to close it. They find stacks of books on Daenerys Targaryen, Meera Reed, even one coated with dinosaur stickers from his days with Dacey.

“He has Daenerys’ psych evaluation,” Sansa gasps. “From when she was seven years old!”

“Is that half as bad as the list of potential organ donors in case they ever get into an accident?” Arya brings up a page from Talisa’s notebook, listing a series of relatives, their blood types, and any listing medical irregularities to make sure their bodies did not reject the treatment. “Oh god, he has blackmail and incentives in case they refuse.”

Sansa goes up to her older brother and slaps him on the shoulder with Alys’ report. “Why do you have all these?”

“Because I don’t have an eidetic memory,” he explains. “How else am I supposed to know every single detail about my girlfriend’s lives?”

“You’re not,” Arya groans. Another thought occurs to her. “Okay, how on earth did you not realize that Jon was your cousin with all of this here?”

“When I was presenting evidence on why we should rent a new apartment, I pulled up his bank records. He got angry and threatened to move out if I did it again. The temptation of using private knowledge on a daily basis was too great, so I placed a block on any details relating to ‘Jon Snow.’” He has since removed the block, but he does not tell his sisters that.

The sad part of the explanation is that Arya becomes slightly more convinced that Jon is as close as true love as it gets for Robb. Before she can express her sympathies or voice her disapproval, Robb hands Sansa back her phone. He proceeds to grab the both of them by the scruff of their necks and tells them not to worry as he kicks them out of his room.

“This is for Jon. I am making sure that Willas is a good match for him.”

“What if he isn’t?” Sansa points out. “What if Jon just wants to be with him—even if he isn’t perfect?”

Robb thinks about it, and Sansa, in the bleakest night with not a window of salvation, sees a sliver of hope in Robb’s contemplation. Then, Robb brightens up with the most brilliant idea.

“I could just kill him.”
Sansa blanches. He shuts the door in their faces. Sansa and Arya do not collect their wits in time for them to stop his self-imprisonment. They start pounding on the door, and then they remember the time of day, and resort to gently knocking.

“Robb!” Sansa hisses out. “You can’t kill Willas, it is illegal!”

Arya scoffs. “That’s never stopped him from doing anything.”

“Robb, you could get suspended!” Sansa corrects herself.

“Much better, but mention father,” Arya whispers. “That always gets to him.”

“Father will be very disappointed in you!”

“Only if I get caught!” His voice is muffled through the doorway. He opens it to soothe his sister’s concerns. The look in his eyes resembles the ferocity of a general facing down a treacherous deviant. He is powerful and in control and he wants to slay his enemies and dance in their blood. “If Jon falls in love with him and he turns out to be a serial rapist, he’ll be heartbroken. If I kill him, I’ll make sure he dies a warrior’s death. Jon will be happy, and he’ll think ‘well, my last boyfriend was a serial rapist so dating my cousin can’t be that bad.’”

“He is not a serial rapist!” Sansa protests.

“Well I’m about to find out,” Robb claims as he shuts the door on them again.

Sansa rests her head against the door. “He can’t kill Willas! That’s Margaery’s second favorite brother!”

Arya raises an eyebrow. ”Who’s the first?”

“Loras, but only because Margaery suspects Willas is playing dumb and might be smarter than her.”

The truth sparks a discussion in her brain, as she nosily asks, “Who’s your favorite brother?”

“What?”

Arya appears detached from the severe situation. Sansa is incredulous. “Is this really the time? Robb is planning on killing someone!”

“We come from a big family. There’s bound to be a ranking. You must have thought about this before. Hell, I’ve thought about this loads of times.”

“I love everyone equally,” Sansa claims as she returns to pleas. ”Rob, stop this insufferable behavior right now!” Sansa likes Margaery, and she has a feeling that the older girl might stop being friends with her if Sansa’s older brother kills her older brother!

Arya calls bullshit. “Everyone has a ranking. Even our parents have a ranking.”

“What’s your ranking?” She asks, exasperated.

“Easy. Jon’s first—yes, I consider him my brother. You’re second. Don’t give me that look. You taught me how to use a tampon. Next is Bran. Easy choice, he and I played together the most when we were children. Robb goes next. Rickon is last, but that’s more an age factor than an actual indicator of affection.”

Sansa sighs. She looks back and forth in case her other brothers have woken up from the noise and

“Bran is last?” Arya all but shouts.

“Shh!” Sansa almost groans at her sister’s big mouth.

“How can Bran be last? He’s adorable! He talks to birds and drinks juice out of a bendy straw!”

“I don’t not love him,” Sansa defends. “I just get along with him the least. Besides, you ranked Rickon last. Shouldn’t you feel ashamed putting our baby brother at the end?”

“I have a justifiable reason for choosing Rickon. What’s yours for choosing Bran?”

“We just haven’t been able to get along, okay? Bran and I drifted apart when you were gone, and we don’t spend as much time together anymore. It’s nothing.”

“Sounds like something,” Arya mutters. Robb interrupts their moment by opening the door to reveal Robb dressed up in business casual, a simple but suave button up shirt coupled with a pair of dark pants. He is holding his laptop case, and looks every bit the young professional Ned parades him to be. His hair is slicked back, and he shaved. Arya does not know what’s more disturbing: the fact that he keeps a shaving kit in his room or that her older brother, who possess all the means to perform a murder, is now the equivalent of a twenty-something Patrick Bateman.

“If you excuse me, I’m going to check out the Aldwark Hotel. They’re an old client of ours, and I want to offer them a chance to update their security. Then, I am going to have lunch at the Blue Wisterias.”

“Alone?” Sansa knows those names, and she knows Aldwark is the principal hotel used in the area for housing business conglomerates. She is also aware that the restaurant named is far from a rinky dinky drive through.

“Yes, I checked their guest list, and the hotel has a string of interesting occupants that may be interested in hearing about the new advances in Stark Industries.”

“What about the restaurant?”

“The restaurant has raved reviews, especially after the Tyrells started providing them with their top of the line produce. A great chance for surveillance.”

“Are you okay?” Sansa asks. Arya rolls her eyes because she already asked that and Robb lied. Her brother is obviously not okay. He is so far from okay that ‘okay’ has divorced ‘fine’ because ‘fine’ was having an orgy with ‘disaster’ and ‘meltdown.’

“Sansa, I am in a good place right now. I’m going to focus on my work and make father proud.” He pauses and turns around to make sure the door is closed. “I hope you know I was joking about earlier. I wasn’t going to kill Willas.”

He leaves in a hurry and turns around to asks Sansa and Arya to explain to their mother that he won’t be at breakfast today. When he is gone, Sansa asks Arya if she saw it.

Arya groans. “Yeah, I saw it.”

Sweet tooth comes from the Tully side, the inability to cook is all Stark. Tunnel vision is a Tully trait. Paranoia is a Stark’s curse and blessing. Tully colors are red and blue. Starks are black and gray. They are all their parents’ children, except on some occasions, they lean towards more one than the
others. Only Sansa and Rickon can tell a lie without giving the truth away, all the other Starks have
tells. Arya taps her left foot. Bran looks to his feet.

Robb looks behind him.

Chapter End Notes

knows that it was their idea.

2. Okay, game plan:
August 25th (12:00 AM/Pacific Island Time): Chapter 27 Update
August 26th-September 21st: Hiatus/Break
September 22nd: Chapter 28 and Chapter 29 Update
September 29th-: Weekly Updates Return

3. Anyways! I will set up a Tumblr to take requests next week. I can’t guarantee I will
complete them, but I will try.

Will(s):
Almost anything. I’m good with darker subjects like rape or underage
It does not have to be GoT/ASOIAF. You can request other fandoms—I’m willing to
expand my horizons. I am a major comic book fan and I still read manga. Um…and I
watch a lot of TV. And I know how to read. I don’t play video games but I know the
mythos of different series—I like the fanfiction. (Assassin’s Creed, Outlast, etc.)
And honestly, I can research well enough for a one-shot of smut. For real.

Won’t(s):
No RPF(s)—I get too nervous imagining them that I cannot write.
Scat. Major watersports—Not my thing.

There’s a lot more, but I’m keeping it simple. There’s no limit on requests. If I don’t
write it, I probably won’t say anything. If I do, I’ll send you a note. I don’t kink shame.
:)
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Arya and Jaqen scene at the end. Yay.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Halfway through Guns N Roses’ Welcome to the Jungle, Margaery Tyrell picks up her phone.

“Hello? Margaery Tyrell speaking,” she answers without a trace of guile. Margaery has mastered the art of appearance; with a single question, she can replace a complete stranger with a childhood friend and, a novice with a professional. On his car speakers, she sounds every bit the rose she is. Robb cannot help but smile. It is heartening to learn that she is happy and well.

“Hey, Margaery, it's been a while.”

“Robb?” Margaery laughs. For some reason, it reminds him of bells ringing. “Is that you?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“Well, it has been a while!” She seems amused. Robb has not spoken to her in years. With the following girlfriend, he had thought to make amends. They agreed to leave their hard feelings in the composte and prepare the fields for friendship. Robb is grateful she considers his contact charming rather than bizarre. “How have you been?”

“Good,” Robb says at first. Well, he’s been worst so he’s not lying. “You?”

“Good,” she mimics. There’s light teasing in her voice that makes Robb sweat. Out of all his girlfriends, Margaery was the most difficult. And though deceptive and entirely too clever for him, he found her to be the most intriguing member of his past. “I’ll be in my last year of Cambridge soon, and then I’ll be starting my practice course. I’ve been getting loads of offers. It’s all very exciting. Your company is one of them. Have you heard about that?”

Robb has not, but he isn’t surprised. He knows that Margaery’s loyalties are to her family in the end, but Stark Industries would be a fool not to acquire a sample of her intelligence—however brief. Besides, Stark Industries and the Tyrell Corporation are not in competition—not even close. “We’d be lucky to have you.”

Margaery laughs again. “If I remember correctly, you’re at Edinburgh. Are you in your third year now?” She asks as if she doesn’t know.

“Yes,” Robb answers, as if he doesn’t know she knows. “I just finished my second year. Time flies by pretty quickly. My father has already tasked me with a few assignments for the company. That’s why I called you.”

“Oh?” Margaery is intrigued. She enjoys talking business—it’s her favorite form of conversation. “So this isn’t a call of pleasure?” She is purring, trying to get a rise out of him for the sake of a better deal.

Robb has become immune to her flirtations—a far cry from his puppy eyes and everlasting adoration when they were dating. His tone is steady when he confirms her assessment. He is not harsh, his
poise is a blessing from his mother. He is glad he will never have to find out what life would have been like for him if he had his father’s social skills.

“It is,” he agrees easily enough. “I wanted to talk to you about updating your security systems. We recently brokered a new deal with an overseas company. Japan, to be precise. The new software runs substantially smoother than the previous ones. We’re still in the testing stage but we’ve received positive results so far.”

“Very impressive,” she praises. She tries her hardest not to sound impressed. “But the Tyrell Corporation has already installed all the latest advancements from your company. I’ve never felt safer.”

“Oh, I’m well aware of that. Your business is appreciated.” Robb does not falter. “I figure I should let you know, as a gesture of good will between us. Since Tyrell Corporation is hoping to advance their production globally and provide a bigger presence in the east, they might like to guarantee potential partners of their commitment to those countries. Foreign agriculture does not have the best reputation in the Asia, especially after the farmer’s suicides in India and the riots in Nepal…”

“And how could a security company help us with this?” Margaery loves business but she hates complications. Robb knows from experiences about the clippers she keeps on hand whenever a bud needs to be nipped. She is on the edge of defensive.

At least she’s interested, Robb muses.

“Stark Industries, on the other hand, has been in league with countries from around the world. Japanese corporations are constantly doing business with us, and we have brokered several successful agreements with third world nations—countries that your company is interested in renting lands from. I would be happy to throw in a good word for you.”

“That would lovely,” Margaery tells him evenly. “I suppose you would like something from us in return.”

“Did I not say to consider this as an act of good will?”

Margaery remains suspicious.

Robb laughs. “Well, my father has been very grateful to the support lent to us by the Tyrell Corporation. Our reserves are prospering immensely. We’re hoping to expand our safaris and would appreciate your continued support.”

“How philanthropic of you,” Margaery quips. Even over the phone, Robb can tell she does not buy the entire story.

“We would also appreciate further alliances in the future. Say, a heads up if anybody tries to interfere in our field.” He’s heard from a few board members that several Lannister members are aiming to expand their markets, and are considering security as a field.

“Of course.” Margaery sounds more secure in this agreement. “I think that will be beneficial for both our families.”

"Wonderful. Would you be willing to travel north to discuss this in person? I would love to see you again.”

“Are you trying to seduce me, Mr. Stark?”
Robb laughs. He remembers why he thought he was in love with Margaery all those years ago. Beyond the fact that she is beautiful and intelligent and all those traits he admires and yearns to emulate, she is fun. Like Jon, she made him laugh. And like Jon, she made him cry as well. He knows better than to dip his wick in her quicksand again.

“Maybe I just miss you,” he retorts. He matches heat with heat, and there’s nothing sexier than a man with confidence. A lesser woman would have melted like butter. But Margaery knows Robb only talks to women like that when he has an agenda. He closes deals with that voice, and he acquires girlfriends through his speeches.

Margaery suspects she’s in the former category.

“Unfortunately, I am busy for most of the week. And to be honest, Robb, I know you adore your county but a semester was enough for me.”

“Got it. Is there anybody you know who would be willing to make the trip? Someone you trust?”

Margaery does not even have to think about it. “You’re in lucky. My older brother is in the area for business. He’s almost finished but I don’t think he’ll mind staying for a few more days.”

“Are you sure? I’d hate to keep him away from his family.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it.” Robb imagines her delicate hands— the perfect manicure, French tips or even a tasteful baby pink acrylic, brushing off his concerns. “He’s quite infatuated with a boy he met there. I’m sure he’ll take any excuse to stay longer.”

Robb tightens his grip on his steering wheel. “That sounds great. Can you give him my number and have him call me when he has the time?”

“Of course.” Margaery pauses. For a moment, she considers asking if there’s another reason he called. She does not doubt that business is a concern of his—for as long as she’s known him, he’s always been committed to his father’s company. When boys their age were still finding themselves, Robb was completely aware of his wants and desires. She considered his drive as his allure and simultaneously, his repellent. “I’ll set it up at once.”

“Thanks, Margaery. You’re aces.” She can see him grinning in her head, a strings of pearls aligned to make a necklace a girl swoons for, and her heart flutters with the memory of tussled sheets and bubblegum pleasantries.

“Bye, Robb.” She hangs up, and wonders if he’s single. Then, she giggles at her own naivety.

After calling Margaery, Robb dials another number.

“Good afternoon. Martell Dynasties. You’ve reached the London office. How may I direct your call?”

“Doran Martell’s office, please.”

“May we ask who is calling?”

“This is Jory Cassel calling on behalf of Stark Industries.”

There’s a pause. He hears some papers being shuffled. “One moment please.”

He waits just that moment, and is immediately redirected to a Spanish ballad. Robb cannot
understand a word; he can barely speak the French he took his A-levels in. Not like Jon, Robb admires, Jon’s French is lovely.

“Hello. You’ve reached Doran Martell’s office. He is not in right now. Can I take a message?”

Robb snaps out of his thoughts. “Good afternoon. This is Jory Cassel. I wanted to reschedule the skype appointment. Mr. Stark has become preoccupied with another venture, something that requires the utmost attention. I hope you understand.”

The implication is a little more than a threat. Everyone knows the reputation of Eddard Stark is that he would never miss a meeting or avoid appointments unless the issue is paramount. The woman is so concerned with the possibility of involving national security that she does not acknowledge that no such meeting existed before this moment.

Before she could find the inconsistency, Robb proposes a solution. “Since he cannot make it next week Thursday, Mr. Stark would like to suggest his son take his place.” He suggests an inconvenient time—one he knew Doran Martell could not make.

“I’m sorry. Doran Martell is completely booked for that day.”

Robb hesitates long enough for concern. “We won’t be available for the rest of the week.” He sighs. “Between you and me, the issue is not urgent. Stark Industries simply wants to initiate a relationship with Martell Dynasties. We would be more accommodating, except the CEO of Tyrell has a date,” Robb perfects a beautifully-made, exasperated sigh, “and due to already existing relations, we have to adhere to his schedule.”

The secretary makes a sympathetic noise. “I understand, perhaps—”

“Excuse me. We’re receiving another message from one of our main vendors. How about I call you some time tomorrow, and we can continue this conversation?”

“That would be fine. Thank you, Mr. Cassel.”

Robb hangs up. If he played his cards right, the message will get to the right person. He checks his planner and finds there’s only one number left. He decides she can wait. He wants to be at his full strength when he confronts her. Robb scrolls down his playlist, and finds a new song to enjoy his ride to.

The gods of dance wanted Arya on the stage, for they invoked a charm of green traffic lights and speeding grandmothers. Arya arrives miraculously early, a salmon bagel contently in her belly, and well hydrated for the next six hours of practice. Syrio seems surprised to see her, checks his watch once and then checks it again a second time to be sure.

He tells her, “You must really want this.”

“I do,” she says, but only to herself. To Syrio, she nods in agreement.

She drops her bag in the carrier section and goes to stretch. There’s only one other girl who arrives earlier than she does and it is Waif, her understudy. Waif is glaring daggers and knives; she wants Arya to screw up in the smallest matter to the big bang so that she can lord it over her. Arya refuses to submit. She is not going to be late, she is not going to screw up, and she is going to dance until the stage is stained with her blood and the room reeks of iron.
More girls come in. Most of them are not in the performance, but participate in the fundraising. All of them hope that their hard work and efforts will lead them to being casted in the future, and for some of them, their theory proves true. Syrio pays attention to everybody. When there’s a complaint, a whine about the late night practices, a grumble about the unfairness, he hears it. He sees the understudy that practices her heart out beside the star performer and he’ll find something for her next time.

The girls file in ten minutes after, and after twenty, everyone who is supposed to be in the room, is. Syrio begins the conversation by thanking them all for being there, and welcomes them to their summer training. He explains their summer schedule, and congratulates them all for making it this far. When on the subject of their grand performance, they must also discuss fundraising, and how a number of the girls will have to perform at their opening party. Pyp asks why the guys can’t dance with them, and Jorelle Mormont points out that girls bring in more money.

“All the fat old pervs rather watch us shake our asses than yours. Unless, of course, you’re eager to have your leotard-clad ass spanked.”

Pyp turns red. He keeps his mouth shut after that.

Syrio goes on for a while, discussing the order of their performances, everyone’s roles and positions, how they must all work together to achieve their goals. Dancing, he reminds them, is not made up of solo performances but a solo performance of dancers. The line is cheesy and distressingly heartwarming and brings a smile to everyone’s faces—except the Waif’s. She is solemn and sulking in the corner where mushrooms grow and spider webs prosper.

“All the fat old pervs rather watch us shake our asses than yours. Unless, of course, you’re eager to have your leotard-clad ass spanked.”

Jorelle asks if she said something, and Arya waves her off with a “nothing.”

Someone opens the door, and the smiles drop from their faces. With the fairy dust of nutcrackers and witches, everyone’s posture is perfection. They preen for the golden geese that have enter their peripheral. “Look at me,” says their lithe bodies. “I’m special,” screams their eyes. All of the students in the room have been dancing since they were three; all of them selected from hordes of aspiring eight-year-olds hoping to become prima ballerinas and cavaliers. It’s a lie when people say that ballet turns a person needle thin or gives them nymphet nimbleness. The teachers pick the true potentials out when they are young. Then, they enter the big leagues in hopes of joining the biggest league: an actual dance troupe.

The girls can not stop their breath from catching when Jaqen H’ghar walks into the room.

“He is as handsome as ever,” whispers a girl from the second row. Arya agrees but has the sense not to say it out loud.

Jaqen’s pheromones secrete with his steps—the dust rises every time his foot hits the floor and the chemoreception imbedded in every dancer is activated with unusual amounts of sharpness. Out all the Faceless Men, he is the most recognizable. His face is the envy of every dancer; half of the troupe’s full houses are credited to his being.

The second person to enter the room is not as intriguing; she does not make their loins wet with lust. She does, however, bring forth an air of excitement and sunniness to their otherwise high pressured and stakes filled environment.

Lady Crane is a legend. She is one of the few dancers who has not faded in old age; now gracing a movie screen instead of the center stage. “Not out of love,” she defends, “But necessity.” Dance is
cruel to the body, and at her age, she can no longer perform the way she used to. She is a realist, but stands as a beacon of hope to the girls and boys. Instead of dying off like the other swans, or harboring her own nest of vicarious chicks, Lady Crane remains in the business. She choreographs, she teaches, she performs—albeit not the way she would prefers, but her livelihood is secured for the decades to come.

“For the next eight weeks, Lady Crane and I will be supervising the rehearsals as directors and the original choreographers. Please show your deepest respects for the woman who has taken time out of her busy schedule to attend to our pool of misfits. If all goes well, you will learn plenty from her.”

“And hopefully, I will be educated by all of you,” she says, charming as a lady in court. “May none of us become disappointments to one another.” Quicker than lightning, a vicious gleam flashes in her eyes. The students shiver except for Arya, who is exhilarated as an ant dosed on a sugar cubes and candy canes.

The students clap, and Lady Crane delicately thanks them for their appreciation.

Syrio introduces Jaqen without having to. “And I welcome Jaqen H’ghar; you may remember him from our auditions. He will be our primary liaison with the Faceless Men and the male lead in the recital.”

Wylla Manderly raises her hand and asks where the other Faceless Men are. “I thought they were supposed to be a part of the performance as well.”

“They have already learned their steps,” Jaqen informs. “They will be joining us on the second week for cohesion. They prefer not to come until you are at the level necessary to perform alongside them.”

"Oh." Wylla cannot hide her disappointment. While she is one of Syrio’s selections and was invited to perform on stage, her role is curt and a little more than a background accessory. She wants to meet the other dancers in hopes of gaining leverage. Everyone knows that Arya is guaranteed a spot, and the Waif is almost a sure thing. The others are still fighting.

Once introductions are finished, everyone is ordered to their positions. They do their daily exercises with agony weighing down their shoulders and nerves threatening to explode with a single touch. Jaqen never stays in the same place for long. He inspects the chosen ones with unsettling stares, and his gaze lingers on an unselected few that could have made it but didn’t. He stops only when he reaches Arya.

She is in the middle of a reaching Rond de Jambe when Jaqen places his hand on her back and tells her to straighten her spine. She obeys and his hand reaches just high enough to be registered as decent.

“Perfect,” he murmurs. His hand travels down her thighs, and he orders her to keep her body parallel. His touch does not go away, not even when she returns to her first position.

Arya can barely breathe.

“You should leave me alone.” She is taken back. Is that her voice, so calm and composed in the face of danger? She has been doing this for far too long. Men, and sex, and sensuality. “Everyone will say you favor me.”

“Does a man not?” He asks, and his sea borders the lands of curious and charmed. He wonders to himself how much he cares as he places his fingertips on her waist and admires the fragility of her
body. Small and supple and easy to mold and easy to break. Her bones are hard and her muscles
tough. They are next to the mirror. Their location, which Jaqen is sure is an act of provocation,
arouses him. As a boy, full of carnal whims and youthful passions, he used to fantasize about fucking
his partners over the Barres. He imagines Arya sitting on top of the bars, spreading her legs for him
while he splits her in half, tips her over so that her ass is the only thing keeping her on the pole and
she is forced to watch herself in the mirror. Arya is tiny; when she is filled, she appears obscene. He
leans down and keeps his breath hot on her neck.

No one dares look at them. No one has the courage to break their position and risk Jaqen’s
wandering attention. They do not need to see them to watch them; Arya can sense their disgust and
relishes in their envy. She will play the game if Jaqen likes, but she does not intend to ruin her
practice in the process.

Syrio instructs them to move on to the next exercise. Jaqen releases Arya, and without missing a
beat, she resumes a proper attitude. Jaqen returns to his scouting. He crosses paths with Syrio, who
grabs his arm before he can move onto the next row. He has to pull him down to whisper in his ear.
Jaqen is a tall man who is flexible to demands.

“You’re not the first instructor to sleep with his student and you will not be the last. But you will be
very careful about how you treat my protégé. She is not a mouse to feed your snake,” Syrio hisses,
and he sounds as if he just grew a fresh threat on top of his newly shed skin.

Before Jaqen can respond, a quip in derision, a jeer about a teacher’s inclinations towards his student,
Arya captures his attention again. Her hands move the way wind is drawn on paper—like waves in
the sky. She is boneless and for a brief moment in time, he believes he’s obsessed. Arya smirks when
she catches him staring. She forgets herself, and moves a second slower than the rest of her
classmates. She quickly returns to pace.

Jaqen chuckles. Syrio is not amused.

“Arya, that boy,” he emphasizes the contrast to Jaqen’s own title for her. Arya is Syrio’s boy, and he
will do anything to keep her from becoming Jaqen’s girl. “-has a lot of potential. She will prosper
under professional guidance.”

“A man can be professional while succumbing to his personal pleasures.”

“Give her one and forgo the other. Let the sun illuminate the flower, and the winds move the leaves.
She does not need the hands of a praying mantis on her form.”

Jaqen sighs. Syrio is a worrisome creature, and though Jaqen considers him a convenient companion,
he does not possess the strength to stop the younger man’s interest. Jaqen craves her again, and again,
and as many times necessary to get her to submit to him like the others. He wants to drown her with
pleasure—enough until she loses her voice and the feeling in her legs. He wants the only thing to
carry her on the stage is the vibrations of symphony and strings.

The exercises end and the lessons begin. Syrio walks over to Lady Crane, and makes a suggestion
Jaqen cannot hear. When they are finished talking, Lady Crane sends him a derisive look, and walks
over to Arya. The girl grins in delight. When Syrio comes back to his side, he reveals that Lady
Crane will be giving Arya a private lesson.

“Was that necessary, friend?”

“Arya appreciates the assistance. She wants her solos to be perfect.”
Lady Crane and Arya walk past them to get to the door. Jaqen’s fingers touch hers, and there’s a spark that forces their gazes to meet. Arya is the first to look away, but her timing to turn is slow.

Want, Jaqen believes, is not something men can control.

To his credit, the German stays for the entire lesson. He provides instruction to the students—as he has been assigned to do, and through the flushes and the terrified expressions, his insight leads to admirable improvement.

When the first portion of practice is over, the students are given a break. Jaqen offers them a chance to meet him in his office for notes, but does not stay after class to give them. He walks past the glass window that contains Arya and Lady Crane. Arya is bouncing; she is practicing her first solo—the dance that begins the play. Arya’s character is supposed to be the picture of innocence; a young, nubile heiress who rides horses amongst a field of lilies and freesia. Arya, to several people’s disappointment and delight, performs it with grace and familiarity. She is as much a spirit as Ariel of the Tempest, and her eyes extend a certain softness resembling teddy bears and cream.

“Mr. H’ghar?”

Jaqen turns around to see Waif. For someone so expressionless, she cannot suppress her bitterness. She was watching as long as Jaqen was.

“Yes?”

“I want to talk to you about the upcoming performance.”

He figured a conversation was in procession. He wonders what took the understudy so long to confront him; he knows her jealousy has been seething for a while. He agrees to take her into his office; a loan from Syrio that held too many possessions for him to feel at home.

Once the door is closed, Waif goes forward with her complaint. “Why did you choose Stark for the role? I am the better dancer.”

No one ever accused Waif of subtlety.

“You are,” Jaqen agrees. “Far better.” The confession surprises Waif, who expected a long line of excuses and an explanation that traveled in circles not rays. Her disbelief is taken over by her outrage.

“Then why did she get the part?”

Jaqen ignores her. He looks through his collection of recordings.

Waif’s frustration grows. “Did you sleep with her?”

“A man did.”

Waif makes a noise that imitates a drowning fish. Loud, bubbling gulps of misery, and the sound entertains Jaqen. She was his favorite once. But she bored him easily; she was all talent and no passion, a flawless design when he desires the chaos of broken windows and faulty roofs. There is no beauty in utility; no lust in function. Jaqen wants a hurricane; not the rain.

“So it’s true then, she—she got the role by sleeping with you.” Waif’s frown turns into an ugly sneer. She is aghast to have lost her opportunity to some slut. “That’s not fair! She’ll ruin the performance. She can’t do the part! I—”
Jaqen dismisses the allegation. He finds what he was looking for. “She received the spot before a man and girl slept together.”

Waif is taken back. She recovers, and accuses him of lying.

“Why would a man lie?”

“So that—so that you can save your own face!”

“A man does not need saving.”

He tells her to take a seat while he places the DVD in the player. He begins the video. Waif is alarmed by his nonchalance, and thinks of vengeance for her disgrace before Arya’s obnoxious laughter is heard. She sees Arya’s audition being played on the screen, starting from Arya’s introduction.

“What style are we going to see today?” Lady Crane asked.

“Contemporary,” she told them, before laughing again. Nervous giggles, Waif concludes, they all nervously giggle when they are put on the spot. Waif never succumbs to such ticks. She is proud of her restraint. She never laughs in the face of adversity; she is the picture of professionalism. Someone cued the music for Arya, and the Stark delved straight into her performance. She became lost in her dance—Waif can see how her eyes cloud over before a quarter of the piece is through. Her movements were organic and intense, and she was so absorbed with her own arms and legs, she missed a beat.

Jaqen turns the television off and the Waif’s attention shakes. She cannot think of the words to say, and finally starts with the obvious. Arya’s flaws, which she has recorded every single day. “Her rhythm was off by half a second. She didn’t follow the song.” Waif curses her syntax. She sounds petulant, not instructive, and Jaqen can claim her resentment leads her to being unnecessarily unfair towards Arya.

Jaqen returns the DVD to its case, and hands it to her.

“What am I supposed to do with this?”

“Watch it. Watch it until blood pours out of your eyes and dyes your green red. You are not wrong. In terms of technique, your work is perfection.”

When Waif opens her mouth to submit another objection, until Jaqen continues. “A man does not want perfection, a man wants passion. He does not want flawlessness, he wants effortlessness. Arya does not fake her motivations, she does not need to pretend to be the girl, she is the girl. She captures an audience’s heart with a single step.”

“I can do that!” Waif protests.

“A man noticed that you did not blink during her performance. Why is that?”

Waif is speechless. When she tries to answer, Jaqen silences her with his own theories. “The girl enamors, she plays the Venus in a flytrap and captures a person’s soul before they recognize themselves as prey. They see her sweat and they imagine licking the water off her flesh. She stretches her legs, and they imagine them wrapped around them. She seduces an audience. Can you seduce an audience?”

Waif says nothing. Jaqen pushes further.
“Can you make a man want to fuck you?”

Waif has heard enough. She swats the disk out of his hands and storms out of the room. She swears, before she leaves, that she will get the part. “I’m still the understudy,” she threatens.

“That you are.” Jaqen is not the least bit concerned. He has no doubt that Arya will be on that stage, beside him, where she belongs.

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After their independent practice expires, Lady Crane invites Arya for a spot of tea and rum. Arya accepts the tea and forgoes the extra splash. “I still have another three hours of practice,” she reminds her.

Lady Crane accepts the excuse. “That was a test,” she jests.

They laugh.

Lady Crane asks what she plans to do after retirement. The question is dismal, but sensible. Arya takes no offence, for she understands that Lady Crane, out of everybody, is sympathetic to the struggle of a body past its prime. Arya has often contemplated the fate beyond her thirties, thoughts propositioned by her mother and father. As the daughter of Eddard and Catelyn Stark, her financials are stable. She will never have to marry well, or bear the agony of squeezing a child out of her tight pelvic floor. She can continue to work behind the scenes, passing on the sacred flame either as a coach and teacher, or work in administration. Dance is a cult that does not take kindly to outsiders. Otherwise, she can pull a Lady Crane and consider acting. She enjoys traveling, and has developed a modicum of skill with roleplay.

“Marry well,” she answers. Lady Crane bursts out laughing, and Arya cracks a smile as soon as she says it. Lady Crane reveals she has never been married, but has taken many lovers.

“My taste in men range from vile to utter filth. I was never stupid enough to marry; I knew myself too well,” she proclaims. “What about you?”

“Marriage, or men?”

“Both.”

Arya sips her tea. “I like men who are not good for me.” She thinks of Gendry. “And I like men who are too good for me.”

Lady Crane hums. “The trials we women go through.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Arya brings forth her cup to salute Lady Crane’s glass of rum. She drinks her hot chai and waits for the spice to scratch her throat. Afterwards, she confesses that she’s not the marrying type. “I don’t think I can ever be happy in one place.”

“I thought that, too, when I was your age.”

“What happened?”

Lady Crane smirks, devious as the devil, bold as a harlot. “I was right.”

Arya giggles so hard she ends up falling to her side. She wonders if Lady Crane laced her tea with something stronger than cinnamon. She wipes a tear from her eye.
Lady Crane finishes her glass and pours another.

"If you drink anymore, you won’t be able to stand for the rest of practice."

The retired ballerina’s eyebrow raises. "I've been doing this a lot longer than you girls have. I know what I can handle."

When she is halfway through her second glass, she informs Arya that, “I only ever drank after a performance, and never, ever before. When I could no longer perform on stage, I kept drinking. If I didn’t have acting, I would be laying on a couch for the rest of my life, smelling of booze and bonbons. Thank god for my talent.”

Arya agrees, for she does not know where she would end up without her dancing.

“It’s a lonely life,” Lady Crane reveals. She is wistful. They are mere minutes away from joining the other dancers. “You never stay in one place for too long; you never have time to develop relationships. Every dancer is a competitor. They can be your friend one day, and your rival the next. Ruthlessness, a trait praised in men, is abhorred in women. Never listen to those laymen, Arya, and never let your affections prevent you from achieving your dreams.”

Arya soaks in the advice. “Do you regret it?”

Lady Crane has been dancing since she was three. She is still dancing today. She walks outside without her sunglasses in Paris and is immediately recognized by half the city. She has more friends now than she ever has before, but none of them are close enough for her to attend their children's baptism or stand at a wedding. She enjoys her brief moments with her students. She is successful. She is the dream.

“No,” she answers. “If given the chance, there is nothing I would do differently.” She pauses. “Well, maybe fuck a few more men.”

Arya looks down at the sliver of tea left in her teacup. It is nearly the same amount in Lady Crane's. They chink their glasses one last time, and down the remains. When they are both finish, Lady Crane gets up, opens the door and holds it.

“After you,” she invites.

Arya hesitates, and then walks out.

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By the time the rehearsals are over, half of the kids have seen the light on the other side of the tunnel and the other half are being spit roasted between heaven and hell. Arya does not know which half she is on, but she is pretty sure she’s seen purgatory on the way to heaven because hell is full of girls like Waif.

Syrio sends them all to the showers. He makes sure all of them have rides home, and refuses to let them leave before he sees them off. When he returns to the studio to get his belongings, Arya is there. "What are you still doing here?"

Arya informs him she wants to stay a little later for practice.

“I have a home, too,” Syrio prompts her. “And I am responsible for seeing Lady Crane to her hotel.” He tries to sound teasing, but in reality, he is as tired as the rest of them. These rehearsals always take a number on his body. “I am not as young as I used to be. I can’t go on all night.” Lady Crane says
nothing as she waits on the sidelines for an answer. When Arya tells him to leave without her, he refuses. He wants to see her get home safely.

“You let me close the studio before,” she reminds him.

“Before we did not have a killer on the streets. I must make sure all my students are safe.”

Arya tries to counter the argument, but is met with the same firm opposition. Before she can go forward with her “I am not a child” speech, Jaqen places his two cents in.

“A man will stay.”

Both of them look alarmed.

“We should practice together for the sake of solidarity. A man barely had time to spend with his partner all day. A man will take her home afterwards.”

Arya leaps on top of the saving grace. “See? Jaqen will stay.”

Syrio desires nothing more than to keep them apart. Alas, he is tired and Arya is not the child he cradled into greatness. He tells her to be safe, and descends to the parking lot with Lady Crane by his side.

Despite their lack of distance, Arya is concentrated on her dancing. Jaqen complies by keeping his hands where they belong, and guiding her through her positions. Their first dance was supposed to be full of fumble and inelegance. Arya is too comfortable in her own body so Jaqen rectifies this by whispering dark secrets and insecurities. For a moment, her confidence is lost and she turns into a little girl, unready for the big, bad world ahead of her. They practice the dance again, and this time, Arya performs well without the instruction. “But not good enough,” Jaqen points out.

The comment frustrates Arya, who practices harder the second time they run the routine and harder after that. When they finish, the night is pitch dark. Arya’s phone rings like her mother is warning her of the second coming. She grabs her bag and takes out the keys. Jaqen swipes them away from her.

“A girl can shower,” Jaqen advises. “A man will take care of the studio.”

“Do you even know how to close it?”

Jaqen gives her a look.

Arya sighs. “Fine.”

Syrio receives children from some of the wealthiest families in England. Though he has a few girls and boys who come from lesser means, the fees he charges for his privileged pupils make up for them tenfold. He receives heaps of donations every year from numerous dance troupes for the opportunity of having first pick of the litter. Their showers are always steaming, and their facilities are never less than top notch. The have organic soaps and fluffy loofas for cleaning, and shampoos and conditioners from actual stores instead of the generic brands sold to hotels.

Arya moans when the water hits her muscles. For a while, she does not do anything. She just stands underneath the shower head and lets the steam release her pores and the water douse her. Her head hits the shower wall and for the first time all day, she takes a break—she stops overworking her body, she stops thinking about the future, everything just ends.

All at once, the pressure returns to her full force. She thinks about failure, and what it means for her
to falter during this performance. She remembers that she is Arya Stark, and that things are expected from her because she isn’t a normal girl—she’s a Stark. She is a girl who has been given everything: tutors for when she falters, world renown dance teachers, the best equipment money could buy—what does it mean for her when she falls? She should be the best because her parents can afford the best when other people can’t even afford mediocre.

Her thoughts consume her, and when she hears the shower door open, she does nothing. She does not even turn around to confront the presence behind her.

Jaqen grabs the soap, and lathers himself up. Arya smells the salt on his skin and finds herself more surprised that he can sweat than by the fact that he’s behind her. She turns around. He walks towards her until her back is touching the wall. For the longest moment, they just stare at each other. Arya makes the first move. She runs her hands through his hair and lets her thumbs brush against his cheekbones. Then she traces down his chest and he captures her hands. He pushes her against the wall.

“What do you want?” He asks her.

Arya raises an eyebrow. “Don’t you mean, ‘what does a girl want?’”

He leans down and kisses her. She responds favorably to his actions, and their tongues languidly play with each other until he pulls away. Arya’s heart is calm. He asks again. “What does Arya want?”

Arya craves the admiration from being acknowledge as the best. She wants everyone to recognize her name beyond her family’s titles and lands; she yearns to capture everyone’s hearts with her soul and not anybody else’s. She lusts after Jaqen, but like all her lusts, she is willing to forgo him for the end game. Arya does not want him. *Arya Stark wants the world.*

She pulls him into a kiss this time, like their first time. She has to be in control because every aspect of her life is a result of her family’s manipulations. She claws her way out of her mother’s dresses and her father’s guiding hand, but she is still a Stark. A fact, she loves and loathes, and Jaqen hopes to make a distant memory.

Jaqen grabs her hips and tries to wrap her thighs around him but she pushes him away. He is taken back by the gesture, and rescinds from the kiss. He looks into her eyes and she looks into his. She resumes their caresses, and allows him to move downwards so that he can attack her neck. She gasps when he licks and nips, but when he bites her, she pulls away again and slaps him—hard.

“No marks,” she warns him. “You don’t get to mark me.”

Jaqen touches his cheek. The pink of his bruise is covered by the steam of the shower. The time he takes to recover from the action is enough time for Arya to decide to leave. When her shoulder and his are side by side, he stops her. He throws her back against the wall. His intentions are not to force her so he isn’t rough. He puts his hands side by side of her face. He pauses, he doesn’t hesitate. He waits for her to move. She stares at him but does not leave.

In response, Jaqen leans downwards to suck her breasts. Her buds are barely blooming and her nipples are little more than ladybugs. Jaqen thinks they are prettier than Persephone.

Arya bites her lips when he travels downwards. He licks her abs, perfectly aligned from years of training. He gets on his knees and runs his tongue along her pelvis, almost completely hairless except for a small patch. Arya likes being prepared for anything. She’s always well shaven and smooth where it matters.
Jaqen shows his appreciation by touching her pussy with his tongue and then sucking on her clit until it becomes red and swollen. He divides his time between kissing her labia and humming on her clit. The vibrations send a shock throughout her body. She lets out a throaty gasp before clamping shut again.

“Fuck!” She swears. She doesn’t want him to win so easily.

Arya rests her cunt on his face and rides him like one of her family’s horses. The water rains down on them, and stifles most of her moans. She interweaves her hands into his long hair and pulls at it. He glares at her and digs his tongue deep inside for revenge. He hits all the best spots, and lathers constant attention on her lower lips. He does not fuck her with his tongue; he massages her labia and reaches for her g-spot. His tongue brushes against it several times but never hits it. He stuffs her with his tongue. He plans to keep eating her out until she is screaming.

Jaqen does not have to wait long. After he makes a rather hard suck on her clit, she lets go of her bleeding lip and wails. She orders him to go faster, to make her come all over his face. She wants his lips dripping with her. She promises to let him fuck her however he pleases if he lets her come this once. Jaqen smirks, victorious, and abides to her wishes.

When she orgasms, she stains Jaqen’s face and turns his lips red. He gets back on his feet and leans down so that she can taste herself on his lips.

“Disgusting,” she informs him as soon as they part. She is gasping. Her words come out as pants. She sees stars and black splotches and wants to lie down and catch her breath.

He chuckles.

“It’s an acquired taste,” he admits. “Would a girl like to go home tonight?”

So she’s back to being ‘a girl’ again. Arya wonders how long this man planned to mess with her head. She sighs, because she knows that after a few minutes, she’ll be restless again.

“We can go to your hotel,” she surrenders. For as long as the man is here, she wants to get her money’s worth of his tutelage. In her head, she imagines of all the positions a man as flexible as Jaqen H’ghar can perform.

Chapter End Notes

1. I didn’t plan it but I am coming back on the first day of fall. September 22nd is the Autumn equinox. I am the bringer of leaves.
2. Anyways! I set up the Tumblr page: sometimesimeow . tumblr. com
   The first post lists the rules (and there are only two posts so I guarantee you’ll see it). I’ve been afraid to reblog anything because I wanted to make sure the post was available to all eyes.

For all the readers and writers of this world: may your stories be filled with smut and fluff and joy and tears. May the characters you read be true and lively. May the work you read be original. May your prompts be filled and your favorite stories updated. May your skin be cleared and people be nice to you. And may cyclists stay in their designated area and not transfer over to your car lane.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Honestly, I took the whole ‘hiatus’ thing more seriously than I intended. This is my first chapter back and it is the only chapter until next week. I apologize. I know I promise two chapters. Fortunately, this chapter is very long.

Warnings: Major dub-con sex scene. It’s a Ramsey dub-con sex scene so that’s the best it gets with him. Degrading language. I find it hot but others might not. It's at the end, and I'm a hundred percent sure you'll know when it starts.

Robb arrives at the Blue Wisterias at approximately 11:25 AM, positively ravenous for a decent plate of Bavarian cream and strawberries, or a bowl of salted caramel pudding. His sweet tooth is acting up again. He remembers his father’s austerity and controls himself. He may have performed a king’s worth of duties—multimillion dollar contracts are not exactly easy to manage—but that does not mean he can behave like a barbarian. The waiter comes by and provides him with some suggestions. Robb nods his head politely, but in the end, asks for none of the recommendations. He wants something small to settle his stomach, a chive blini with Crème Fraîche, quail eggs, and tarragon, and tells the man to leave the dessert menu. Before he goes, Robb asks the man for the wifi password. He pulls out his mobile. “I have some business to get done. Is that alright?”

The waiter, used to the corporate types occupying his lunchtime slot, hands the information over without a fuss. Robb thanks him and waits until the man is gone to obsess over his phone. The waiter is grateful. He has worked in customer service long enough to know that when a guy like that comes in, consumed with his numbers and statistics, he will barely notice his treatment.

For such a prosperous brasserie, Robb is disappointed by their computer security. After connecting the wifi to a separate router, he is able to find a way into the restaurant’s reservations page. He scrolls through the appointments on Friday until he sees a golden star—how quaint—attached Willas Tyrell’s name.

While Robb considers his agenda for Friday night, he receives a phone call from an unknown number. He recognizes the area code instantly, and waits for a ring or two before picking it up.

“Robb Stark speaking.”

“Buenas tardes, Robb Stark. This is Oberyn Martell, brother of Doran Martell.”

Wow. Wow. Robb catches his breath. Now, that is a voice he wants narrating his sex life. He wants that voice. He wants to make love to that voice. He wants to stick his dick down that—okay, no old Robb. New Robb can control his penis.

“Yes?” He squeaks. He takes a breath. Deeper, he tells himself. More masculine, with the possible implication that his balls dropped. “Yes, this is Robb Stark. I’m happy to hear from you. Have you called to schedule a meeting for your brother?”

“Si, but unfortunately my brother is not well. His doctor has limited his traveling capabilities to only the most crucial circumstances. I hope you are not offended.”
“Oh, not at all.” Robb tries to curb his excitement. He does not want to appear too eager. “It’s wonderful to hear from you, Mr. Martell. Are you in England right now?”

“Please, call me Oberyn. And yes, I am in London as we speak. Though I confess I am visiting for pleasure over business.”

“Oh,” Robb musters just the right about of sympathy to sound sincere. “I’m sorry to disturb your vacation. I’ll call again next week—my schedule is completely booked until then, but I can move a few things around.” He adds meat to the pretense by implying that doing so will not be a problem. “With how infatuated Mr. Tyrell seems to be with his new beau, I’m sure it won’t be that hard for him to accommodate.” He remembers Margaery’s assurances. “If anything, he will jump at the chance to stay longer.”

“Nonsense,” Oberyn interrupts. His voice carries a bit of an edge this time. “I am always at the service of my brother. I hate for him to lose a potential alliance.” Oberyn Martell had a reputation for being hot-headed and callous, so Robb is surprised by the tact he displays when he asks Robb about the Tyrells. “I hope the Tyrells are comfortable with you contacting us. They have a habit of making accusations against our good name.”

Ah, the infamous horse riding incident. There are a number of ways to answer the question, and Robb has a million excuses listed in his head. Thanks to Willas’ emails, he knows the perfect response. “Willas Tyrell has nothing but praises for you and your family. He was the person who recommended we speak.”

The compliment lightens the mood, even over the phone. Struck by cupid’s arrow, Oberyn turns a new leaf during their conversation. He praises Willas with the ease of a bard. “I have traveled the world and have yet to meet a man quite like Willas. He is a diamond amongst coal.” He pauses. “It is quite unlike him to have canceled on you so suddenly. He is a professional in every degree. Do you know of the circumstances regarding his withdrawal?”

“Yes, though that might have been my fault.”

“Oh?”

“See, my cousin is staying over for the summer, and I made the folly of introducing them.” Robb chuckles first for authenticity, and second to clear his throat of cupidity. He cannot afford to sound like a spiteful lover. “I should have known he would fall for Jon. Everyone does.”

Oberyn says nothing. The silence upsets Robb, who needs the fury of a thousand fighting men and the jealousy of a hundred harpies. So he continues his praises and is careful not to sound too love stricken. “I hope this does not sound as if I am being advantageous, but I am grateful Jon has found someone worthy of him. He is my beloved cousin. I love him more than life. And Willas seems like a wonderful guy. Jon deserves that.”

“Is he truly as amazing as you claim?” Oberyn is doubtful. Angry almost, that Robb can even make such a comparison. “I have never met anybody worthy of my...friend. Ever. I doubt such a being exists.”

“Jon is perfect,” When Robb realizes how defensive he sounds, he coughs. “I mean, he is a beaut-attractive young man. I swear, the way his curls bounce on his shoulders is reminiscent of sprites hopping on waves, and his smiles are like diamonds. Rare, precious diamonds and you’ll find yourself digging to the ends of the earth for a chance to get one. He can make anybody’s heart skip a beat. I swear, you don’t want to get me started on his body—I mean, he’s quite fit. In a completely objective way. Because he’s my cousin. Only my cousin.”
Oh shit. Oh shit. Oh shit. So much for not being in love. Before Robb can retract his ode, Oberyn asks:

“What does this Jon do?”

“He’s a nanny.” For now. “And the way he is with children—gods, one time we were at the park and this kid got lost, bawling and screaming and would not let anybody near him to help. We tried to get him to the playground but he wouldn’t follow anybody. Jon was magic. He held his hand and got him to trust him so that we could find his parents. He did everything he could to make him happy. He played with him, talked to him—he was just... he was an angel.”

Robb slams his head against the table. Why does he keep doing that? He receives his dish at that moment and the waiter quickly retreats.

“Willas loves children,” Oberyn admits at last. Robb perks up. Oberyn is wistful when he relishes how doting Willas was on his offspring. “I have eight daughters. My oldest is barely younger than him. You can imagine how terrified I was of introducing my girls to him.”

“Did he liked them?” Robb is hopeful for a ‘no.’ The thought of a chink on the golden statue that is Willas is orgasmic.

Oberyn laughs. “He loves them, and they love him. All the time, they ask me and my girlfriend, ‘when is Uncle Willas coming to visit?’ or ‘I miss Uncle Willas.’ I watched them play in the water gardens all day, and to compensate for his leg, he would make up these new games so that they would not feel guilty for leaving him out.”

“Great,” Robb mutters. He says again, louder, how happy he is to hear of the fact. “He and Jon have something in common.”

Oberyn scoffs; he resembles a bitter horse. “One thing you should know, Mr. Stark, is that Willas wants the fairy tale, not the movie. No one has been able to convince him that perfection is not an option. He wants true love. He wants the perfect wife. He hates sharing and compromises and mistakes.” The older man sighs. “It’s a shame he has never been able to find that someone who can give him what he wanted.”

Robb swallows to satisfy dry throat. In order for the words to come of his mouth, they claw his tongue apart. “Well, maybe they will have something special.”

“Perhaps.” Oberyn returns to his usual state—vibrant and passionate and full of life. “Or perhaps he will fail—like all the others who could not meet the impossible Tyrell standards.” Robb hears a voice over the phone. Oberyn responds in Spanish, before returning to the conversation. “I can meet with you this Friday. I’ll take a plane immediately.”

“Are you sure? I’d hate to cause trouble.” Robb means it this time. Then, he almost slaps himself. No, he thinks. This is for Jon and making sure Willas Tyrell is the man he claims to be. To that, he needs to clean up those revolting loose ends.

“No trouble at all. How about I fill your empty slot? Hmm? We can have dinner. I know a wonderful restaurant. Have you ever heard of the Blue Wisterias?”

Robb takes all his doubts and pounds it to dust. He focuses on the grand prize. Everything is falling into place, and he will not allow anybody to catch the pieces before they land—not even him. “Yes, I have. Willas recommended it to me.”

Robb can practically see the smirk on Oberyn’s face. He hears another word, perhaps the Spanish
equivalent to ‘figures’ and agrees to let Oberyn make the reservation.

“I look forward to meeting you.” More importantly, Robb looks forward to reuniting Oberyn with his friend.

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Robb departs the restaurant with two cheese tarts, a Battenberg cake, and sticky toffee pudding for his mother and little siblings, sans Arya. The last time he brought her dessert during a training season, she threatened to throw out his laptop. On his way home, he develops a craving for some brandy snaps and stops by a grocery store to pick an instant pack. He spots a cartoon of raspberry ripple on accident (and he swears it was an accident—never mind that the two items are four aisles apart) and picks it up for Bran. If Sansa was with him, she would have accused him of eating away his guilt—Robb would deny it. He is not guilty of anything.

He drops everything off in the kitchen and asks one of the maids to get him a bowl and some chocolate syrup. Once she hands it over, he carves out two scoops and douses the frozen confection with layers of hot fudge syrup—just the way Bran likes it. His little brother will worship him.

On his way upstairs, he hears his little brother on the phone and waits for him to finish.

“A lecture? A physics lecture?” There’s panic in Bran’s tone. “Do you…I don’t think I’ll be good company for that. I’m rubbish at any science that’s not anatomical or cannot be made into a landscape painting.”

There’s a pause. Robb assumes the guy on the other side is persuading him otherwise. Suddenly, Robb is relieved. How harmless can a guy be if he’s planning on taking his little brother to a science convention? No shoulder-yawn moves, no necking in the night, just a dark room where all potential sex appeal is wiped off by the aging professor on stage explaining antimatter and star cycles.

Bran giggles and he sounds adorable—albeit flirtatious. Their sexual inclinations are a result of their fused Tully-Stark genes. Their sexual prowess came from their Tully side, and their inability to control or recognize their urges was all Stark. At least Robb knows the actions are subconscious. He hears Bran submit, “yes, he will give it a shot” and “no, he cannot be angry at him if he falls asleep.” They say their goodbyes, and Bran hangs up. He is more red than the raspberries in Robb’s hands.

Robb makes his grand appearance with a bowl of slightly melted, but still delectable, ice cream. Bran is ecstatic and reaches out for the bowl.

“Thanks, Robb!” Once in his hands, he devours it. “What’s the special occasion?”

“Isn’t that my question?” Robb teases. “It seems you and your mystery man finally set a date.” Bran blushes. He mutters about the invasion of privacy, but can’t stop his smile. “It’s nothing special. He wants to take me to a lecture. Some famous physicist is coming here to discuss the theory of universal…waterfunctions? Wavelengths…? Wave…”

“The theory of universal wavefunction,” Robb corrects. “Also known as the Everett Interpretation, or MWI, the many-worlds interpretations.”

Bran stares at him.

“Parallel universes.”

Bran groans. “How do you know these things? How does everybody know these things?” He digs his face into a pillow. “Jo is going to think I am an idiot.”
“I have to take physic courses for my degree,” Robb clarifies. “You’re not an idiot. Just because he knows something you don’t, does not make you any less brilliant. It just means you have a lot to learn from each other.”

Bran chomps on his early dessert. “I guess.”

“You’ll be fine. He is going to love you. He probably chose this as a first date so that he can impress you.” Inside, Robb is squealing with excitement. His little brother’s first date. With a nerd—someone who could not possibly pressure anybody into having sex. To think, he was actually worried about Bran getting his heart broken by some pervert with a fetish for wheelchairs; the kind of guy who uses the pick-up line: “I know your legs don’t work but I bet your tongue still does.” He is safe.

Bran finishes up his ice cream. When he is about to ask Robb about his day, he gets a phone call. The caller’s name flashes on the screen like a scarlet A and before Bran can swipe the treacherous device out of Robb’s peripheral, the older boy lunges at it.

“Robb, I can explain—”

“Why the hell is Willas Tyrell calling your phone?”

“I-I…I…wrong number?”

“He’s on your contact list!”

“A so wrong it’s right number?”

“Bran!”

“I’m sorry!” He takes back the phone to cancel the incoming call and accidentally presses answer. No! Bran screams in his mind. Willas’ perfect, stupid, incredibly grateful voice comes through the phone and thanks Bran for all his help.

“Hey Bran. You probably already know this, but Jon said yes. I called him today to confirm the date—clingy I know, but he seems like the type who would bail—and he told me he was looking forward to seeing me again.”

“That’s nice, Willas!” Bran squeaks. Robb is growling. “But this isn’t the best time—”

“I want tell you how grateful I am. There’s no way I could have done this without you.”

Bran blanches. He acts in the name of personal salvation, telling Willas that there’s no way this has anything to do with him. “Oh, I don’t think you can blame it all on me.”

“No, I owe it all you to you.”

There’s a pair of scissors in Bran’s craft’s container that Robb eyes with a discomforting about of consideration.

“Really? I didn’t do anything. At all. Nothing.”

Robb returns his gaze onto Bran and he is glaring daggers—no, he’s shooting lasers.

“Are you kidding?” Willas laughs. “When I told him you gave me his number; he knew that I had gotten your stamp of approval. If it wasn’t for you, none of this would be possible. Bran, you brought us together.”
Robb takes a step closer. Bran whimpers.

“Anyways, I’ll let you get back to your business. I’ll see you soon!”

Willas hangs up. Bran prepares his defense. “Robb, I can explain.”

“Can you, Bran? Or should I call you Brutus?”

“Robb! I’m not Brutus! I didn’t betray you!”

“Of course not! Brutus didn’t give Ceasar an explanation. Brutus just stabbed Ceasar. Like how you just gave Willas Jon’s phone number.”

Bran rolls his eyes. He doesn’t feel that bad. He’s guilty of giving out his cousin’s phone number, not murder.

“I’m sorry, Robb. I really am. But…it’s not like you two are still together and Willas is a great guy. He’s funny and nice and he really likes Jon. They’re super compatible. I mean, they both love animals and traveling and food.”

The appeasement infuriates Robb more. “Great, Bran. So you found a better me for Jon. Why don’t you just rip out my heart and feed it to Summer?”

“Hey!” Bran protests. “First of all, Summer doesn’t like human flesh. It’s too bony and lean. Secondly, you’re supposed to be getting over Jon. Why are you behaving like this?”

“I am behaving like this because I found out that you were never on my side. I bet you wanted us to break up!”

“I did not!” Bran doesn’t know what he wants. “I was on your side—no, I am on your side. But I want the both of you to be happy. You’re the one who told me that just because two people like each other doesn’t mean they’re meant to be with each other.”

“And what about me?” Robb protests. “What about my happiness? I want Jon to be happy—more so than anybody. But what kills me is the fact that my little brother thinks I’m not good enough for the man I love!”

“Robb, you need to be reasonable. You’ll just find someone else—”

Bran shuts his mouth mid-sentence.

Robb becomes deathly still.

“Robb, I didn’t mean that.”

“No, you did.”

“Robb, please.”

“You think he’s just another fling. You all think that.” Robb almost punches the wall. “After all, I’m Robb Stark. I get a new girlfriend every single month and I can’t find one person to stay with me—but that’s okay because there’s plenty of fish in the sea and I keep swimming. Everybody assumes I’ll just ‘get over him.’ Let me tell you something, Jon is my first boyfriend. Do you think it was easy for me to accept that I was suddenly into guys? Because it wasn’t. And I’m not. I’m into Jon. Jon is the first person I have ever wanted to give a real ring to, not some mass produced item from Kays or a Harry Winston trend. I was going to ask father to give me the family ring to propose with. I wanted
to take all of us camping instead of springing on an engagement like I did all the others because I
needed him to like you all. I needed you to like him because I wanted us to be a family—not Robb
and his new girlfriend, or Robb and his future wife. For gods’ sakes, I don’t even use a condom with
him! So no, Bran, Jon is not some fling. And you think he is, and that’s why you thought it was okay
to give Jon’s number away to someone who deserves him because I don’t.”

Bran is taken back. The horror of what he’s done finally settles in. He feels like compost in sewage
water. “Robb, I’m sorry.”

“Sure you are,” Robb agrees. “Maybe Willas can send you a fruit basket to make you feel better.”

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On the third floor, Sansa and Theon share a sewing room that’s the size of an average studio. It has
dozens of mannequins, several yards of fabric, and beads and ornaments carefully organized into
separate containers. There’s a stereotype about how messy artists are, but Sansa and Theon refute the
claim with their existences. They compartmentalize everything in order for their personal belongings
to not cross paths and have a middle ground where they share their goods—paired with a sign-in
sheet consisting of what is borrowed, the length of the lend, and the amount being taken.

Today, they are sitting together on the neutral ground’s couch. Theon flips through her portfolio and
provides his input on which design he thinks she should keep and which should be removed. Sansa
has the oddest obsession with dragonflies, and so he all but crushes her soul when he ends up
eliminating half of the dresses that contain the insect.

“There’s nothing wrong with having a theme.”

“I like krakens and mermaids but I’m not going to embed them into every suit I make. Stop it, Sansa.
You aren’t Kate Spade launching a new collection. You’re an applicant who needs to show the
admissions office you have flexibility in the midst of your distinguished aesthetic.”

Sansa glows. “You think I have a distinguished aesthetic?”

“Yeah, the same way I think dirty sex is awesome but will still refuse to fuck in a mud pit.”

Sansa purses her lips in disapproval at the analogy. Theon ignores her to list his favorite sketches.
“You should shoot for twenty-five to thirty different looks, and you’ll need quality photographs for
the finished product. If you’ve used any couture technique, those need to be highlighted in the
photographs. How long do you have again?”

“A year and a half.”

Theon raises an eyebrow.

Sansa blushes. “It’s good to be prepared. It’ll take me months to make some of these dresses.”

Theon rolls his eyes, though inwardly, he respects her dedication. “You don’t have to make all of
them—just the best ones. You might come up with something better later and there’s a chance it’ll
contrast with the original theme.”

Sansa grimaces, but nevertheless heeds his advice. She gathers up her papers and divides them over
on her side. She asks Theon if she could get the portfolio he submitted to Saint Martins. He
scrummages through his belongings—grumbling the entire time—and tosses his flash drive over to
her. “Here.”
He hopes his pieces don’t psych Sansa out. Their styles are completely different—Sansa aims for
timelessness, chic and classic outfits that can be worn throughout the decades versus Theon’s
flamboyance and couture.

Sansa thanks him, and her smile is the second most genuine and heartfelt smile he has ever received.
“You smile like your brother,” Theon comments, and there’s degree of fondness he cannot remove
from his voice. He figures a compliment would not hurt the situation—given that Sansa may be the
only future in-law who likes him.

He tries not be unnerved when her smile drops. Hesitantly, she puts the goods in her bag and asks
Theon if he’s still in love with Robb.

Theon shrugs. His faux nonchalance fails him when he glances at his reflection in the mirror and sees
his anxious expression. So he tells Sansa that it’s none of her business, and she should focus on
getting into a good school rather than his love life.

Sansa sighs. “Listen, Theon, I’m grateful you’re helping me but…I know why you’re doing this, and
it’s not out of the goodness of your heart. You want me to like you.”

Theon glares. ”Why the fuck would I care about how you think of me?”

“Fine, let me correct myself. You don't want me to like you, you want an ally. You think getting at
least one of Robb's siblings to be on your side, you'll be able to win his heart.”

Theon glares at her. Who does she think she is? “And you’re such a saint? We've shared this room
for years, and you only started talking to me when I got into your dream school. You’re using me
just as much as I am using you.”

To his annoyance, she does not deny it. The accusation does nothing to stop her lecture.

“Be that as it may, I think you should…” Sansa rubs her temples. "Theon...it's time to get over him.”

What. The. Hell.

“What?”

Sansa winces at the shriek. “Listen, I’ve been watching Robb for the last few days…and there’s
something about this break up that’s really messing him up. I mean, he’s always been a bit crazy
about his girlfriends but with Jon…it’s on a whole other level.”

Theon is adamant about keeping the code of clean in the sewing room, otherwise, he would have
knocked over a few pins by now. “Jon was a fling,” Theon hisses. “All of them, they were just
flings. Robb doesn’t know what’s good for him. He doesn’t know what he wants.”

“And you do?” Sansa challenges. She gets up. “Theon, you’ve never given Robb the opportunity to
genuinely fall in love.”

“So it’s my fault Robb has shit taste in people? None of those girls were good enough for him—if
they were, it wouldn’t have been so easy to break them up. They weren’t right for him.” Not like he
was. Theon was perfect for Robb. Theon is his best friend.


“But you don’t think I’m worthy of your precious brother. Not like those whores.”
“Stop,” Sansa orders. Some of those *whores* are her friends. “I’ve been a front row witness to all of your past manipulations. I am not saying you are the only one to blame because I don’t know if any of those relationships would have lasted with or without your interference. What I do know is that those girls were never given a fighting chance to be anything more than an infatuation. And with every new relationship, there was a ticking time bomb attached to it. Robb behaved like a buffoon because of it. He was terrified of things blowing up in his face that he rushed into love too fast and snipped too many of the wrong wires in the process.”

“What do you want, Sansa?” Theon growls. “I’m not giving up on Robb.” He is so close—the opportunity for his master plan is finally coming to an end.

“Give yourself a chance to be happy,” Sansa advises. “Forget about Robb. Be the best friend you can be, and find someone who loves you for you and not the façade you put on to get close to Robb.”

Theon’s phone decides to ring. There’s only one person it could be, and Sansa begs him not to take it. “For as long as I’ve known you, you’ve never missed Robb’s call.”

“And I’m not starting now.”

Theon picks up the phone.

“Hey, Robb.”

“Theon? Gods, it’s good to hear your voice.”

Theon’s heart flutters in delight. Sansa shakes her head in disappointment. She knows Robb means nothing by it, but her heart breaks by how effortlessly Robb leads his best friend on.

“Listen, I’m sorry for avoiding you these last few days…I just…I needed some time to think. Can we meet up? I really need to talk to you.”

Theon’s heart skips a beat. This is it. This is his moment to shine and no one, not even Robb’s family can stop him now.

“Yeah, of course. I’ll meet you anywhere.”

Sansa rolls her eyes. Theon glares. To further infuriate her, he tells Robb that he will do anything “to hear his voice again.”

“How about we meet up at the bar? I’ll get us a private table and we can talk.”

“Sounds great, thanks.” Before he hangs up, Theon pauses and then confesses to Robb that he really misses him. “I hope I’ve haven’t done anything to upset you.” His voice is laced with sincerity and saccharinity. Sansa’s stomach churns at the contrast between Theon’s smirking face and the pitiful nature of his speech. He’s lied to Robb far too often if such a combination exists.

Robb’s guilt radiates through the phone. He reassures Theon that he alone is responsible for their distance and he wants to make it up to him. Theon forgives him easily and says he will meet him as soon as possible. When Theon hangs up, he is grinning. Sansa frowns.

“See, Sansa? Robb and I are finally getting our happy ending.” He puts his phone in his pocket. He grins. The time has come. He is going to find love, or die trying.

-
Robb and Theon meet at the pub where Robb’s relationship with Jon ended. To the Stark heir, the location is the unsexist place he can imagine: a reminder of booze filled regrets, a bar wet with tears, poor judgements and ill made plans. Numerous girls and a number of guys go up to him for a chat. He turns them all down, saying he is waiting for someone. Theon arrives when the latest flirt is shot down. He glows when the girl sends him a glare. Yes, Theon grins. That’s a glower of jealousy. She is jealous of him.

When they meet up, they hug like lovers—not friends. Robb leads him to a table—there’s a private room prepared for their VIP guests and Robb is basically royalty in these parts. He orders for Theon like he always has— because Robb knows Theon’s favorite drink. Theon wants to call this their first date, but realizes that’s too tacky. He’s a man of class after all.

They start their conversation with small talk. Robb must be overwhelmed with guilt if he’s too nervous to look Theon in the eye. The older boy finds it adorable, and takes Robb’s hand. He assures Robb that there are no hard feelings. He understands that Robb needed some time alone to collect himself after the breakup. Besides, it is not like his life revolves around Robb either. “I’ve been working on my designs, and I’m helping Sansa with her application. Do you know that she’s a year ahead?”

They laugh about it—the way couples do. They get their drinks and Robb takes a long, hard chug. He almost slams the glass on the table.

“Theon, I know this sounds out of character for me, but…I’m going to try and let Jon go.”

There’s a tourney of candy knights and popsicle lances jousting inside of Theon’s heart. This is it. This is fucking it. Theon swears he’ll start praying again after tonight. He’ll visit his fucking weird-ass church and go swimming every day in the testicle popping, balls-freezing ocean if the Drowned One gives him Robb, once and for all.

“I mean, I’m still crazy about him, and there’s just one last thing I have to do before I completely let go.”

“What?” Theon asks. He’s clenching his fists so hard his manicured nails are digging into his skin and causing baby cuts on his hands. He leans forward enough that he might fall over the table.

“Jon has a date this Friday. The guy seems…adequate.”

That fucking slut. That stupid twat. Theon can think of a million different insults and none of them taste as delicious as the savory sensation of Robb finally being his. Theon nods his head so rapidly it just might fall off. “And?”

“And I think he might make a decent match. For now. But I…I just want to make sure. I have a plan—” Oh god, one of Robb’s ridiculous plans that have a fifty percent success rate and a fifty percent ‘burn the building to the ground’ rate. “—And it’s brilliant. I’ll be able to see this Willas Tyrell’s true colors.”

Theon pretends to be interested. Robb lost him at “completely let go.”

“And then you’ll be over him?”

Robb chuckles. “Well, I don’t think I’ll ever be—”

Theon cuts him off. “But you won’t pursue him after this?”

Robb shakes his head. “Not unless he goes after me. I think it’s time for me to get a grip. Enjoy the single life for a while.”
Theon’s heart drops. “What?”

Robb motions the awaiting waitress to fix him another drink. She already has his favorite prepared. “Cheers,” he tells her, all charms and style. Theon snaps his fingers to get his attention.

“What did you say? About being single?”

Robb nods, and sips instead of chugs. This time, he enjoys his whiskey and the accomplishment of attaining maturity for the first time. He feels more like a man now than ever.

“I haven’t been unattached since I was twelve. Arya was right—I don’t know myself that well, and maybe it is time for some rediscovery. Perhaps…I was meant to fall so madly in love with Jon so that no one could replace him afterwards. I think this is the best decision for me. I can focus on other things.” Like stalking Willas Tyrell, ruining his life if he does Jon harm, and/or potentially killing him and getting away with it.

“But…” Theon chokes up, he grasps for salvation with his hands and there’s nothing to hold onto. Finally, he takes his drink and gulps down his lager like it’s water and his mouth is on fire. Then, he takes Robb’s drink and lets the liquid burn his throat. He needs it. Robb warns him to slow down.

“Theon, is something the matter—”

Theon responds by grabbing Robb’s collar and kissing him. He smashes their lips together with more finesse than actual romance. He’s panicking, and it shows in his sloppy tongue and chapped lips and the taste of rich whiskey and cheap beer.

Theon releases him when he runs out of air.

“I love you!” Theon confesses.

Robb touches his lips. He stares at Theon, jaws drop and eyes wide with shock.

“I’ve loved you since we were schoolboys and you were this sexless nerd who wrestled me on the ground and gave me a hard on. I love your family—even if they can’t stand me half the time because they’re the only family I’ve really known. I love that your mother knows my size and pretends to buy clothes on accident because she knows my family would never pay for them. I love that your father set up a fake scholarship so that I could attend the school of my dreams. Your siblings are the most annoying brats in the world and I love them. Robb, I want to be with you. I want to be a Stark.”

Theon stares at Robb like he’s a god, but Robb cannot reciprocate. He looks at Theon as if he’s seeing him for the first time, and unfortunate, there are no hearts in his eyes and his skin is flawless—free from cupid’s arrow. Robb is sorry, but worse of all, he is pitying Theon, as if he just discovered how poor, how useless, how unimportant the Greyjoy is in the grand scheme that is Stark.

“No, Theon thinks. This isn’t supposed to happen. Tonight is a fairy tale. Robb is his prince, and he is the princess whose been given his voice back.

“Theon, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know you felt that way.” Robb’s eyes glistens with tears. Theon gets up from his chair. He tries to run for it. Robb calls him back, and on reflex, Theon stops. They do not face each other.

“Theon, you…you are my best friend. I don’t…I wish I felt the same way.”
The kindness feels worse than a flat out rejection. For the longest time, Theon has been avoiding the truth, the notion that Jon isn’t special, that Robb could suddenly fall in love with the man whose been here for him the entire time. But no, Robb won’t even try for Theon’s sake. The Stark reaches out for Theon’s hand but Theon shoves him off. “Don’t touch me,” he spats. “Don’t…fuck you, Robb!”

Theon runs out of the room with Robb calling his name. He took a cab to get here and he’ll need one to return home—Robb’s home. Theon curses and tries not cry. A cab means waiting on the corner and giving Robb the opportunity to catch up to him and persuade him to forgive and forget and Theon is tired. He is so tired of playing the best friend. He wants to be the boyfriend. He wants so desperately to be the one that gets obsessed over and bought gifts and treated like a prize.

He hears Robb come closer, and he reacts badly. He grabs a guy, the closest guy that looks relatively decent through his tears, and forces their lips together. The act invokes a minimum amount of silence and a few awkward and interested looks.

Before the young man could counter with a negative reaction, Theon makes his intentions clear.

“I want you to fuck me. Here. Now. In the bathroom, in your car, I don’t care. I want you to make me scream.”

The shock disappears from the man’s face and a malicious grin replaces it. For a second, Theon regrets ever making the offer. He has no time to linger in his stupidity when he is dragged to the nearest bathroom, outside of Robb’s reach. Theon is thrown like a ragdoll into an open stall and his head hits the concrete wall. The man locks their compartment.

“Fuck you!” Theon shouts. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

The man grabs Theon’s hair and shoves his face against the closed door. “Ramsey Bolton.” It sounds like he’s bragging. “But you can call me sir, or master.”

Theon turns his head to spit in his face. “Fuck you!”

Ramsey slams his head against the wall again. Theon whimpers. Ramsey gets harder. Fucking sicko, Theon thinks. He struggles to get away. Ramsey holds him back, grabs his jean button and rips it off. “That’s exactly what I’m planning to do, bitch.” He leans in to whisper in Theon’s ear. “That’s what you asked me to do, you stupid slut.”

He presses his hard on against Theon’s crack. He’s impressive, and with a different personality, he’s exactly the type of guy Theon would have a one night stand with. Theon’s pride orders him to fight back. He made the mistake of propositioning the sick bastard, but that does not mean he should stay to regret it. When he tries to elbow his assailant, the move is met with a harsh slap on the ass.

“Listen, I’m not the bad guy here. You came onto me. You shoved your cunt in my face and asked me to jam my cock down your throat. What was it you said. ‘I want you to make me scream,’” Ramsey mocks. “Well, I want to screw your pretty like bitch brains out. You’ve caught my eye the moment you walked into this pub. You’re the prettiest hole in this dump and I’m not leaving until I pound your brains out.”

Theon’s cock is straining against the door. Ashamed and red with humiliation, he asks Ramsey if he truly meant it. “You think I’m the prettiest person here?”

Ramsey thanks some god he doesn’t believe in. Fuck, he must have done something special in his last life if he manages to catch a bitch with low self-esteem and an ass that would not quit.

“Considering everyone in this shithole is equivalent to a subpar mongrel, I wouldn’t take that as a
high compliment. Serves me right for listening to an idiot’s recommendation.” Theon’s face faltered. He returns to struggling again, and almost succeeds until Ramsey rips off his boxers and shoves his finger in his ass. Theon yelps. He fights back harder.

Ramsey loves a good rollercoaster. “Gods, this ass is a treasure. Tight as a noose, just the way I like it. I take back what I said. You should be proud of this desperate hole. I bet guys are just lining up for a chance to get in. In fact…” Ramsey scissors Theon with force. Tears welled up in Theon’s eyes. Ramsey leans down and whispers his final verdict. “I think I’ll pass. I don’t like used goods.”

Ramsey releases Theon from his grip. He buttons up his own pants and sighs dramatically to convey his disappointment. He mutters, louder than his usual grumble, that he cannot believe he almost wasted his spunk on damaged goods.

“I’m not damaged!” Theon defends. His pants are still unbuttoned. His face is wrecked with red eyes and dried tears, and his lips—those sexy, pink, cock-sucking lips—are quivering. If this bitch is not ready to get on his knees in the next ten seconds, Ramsey is going to force his cock down his throat. Shit, he should have just raped him when he had the chance. “You’re a fucking psycho.”

Ramsey pretends not to care. “Whatever. Get out of my face. I’ll find some trollop to ride me before the night is through—even an ugly virgin is better than some pretty slut.”

Theon twitches. There’s that look again. That semblance of hope that appears whenever he’s being complimented in the worst way. Pretty, he likes being called pretty. Ramsey uses it again to make sure.

“You said I was tight.” Theon points out. He’s petulant now.

Ramsey corners Theon and leans in until their lips are almost touching. “Yeah, and I meant it. But I’m sure pretty boys like you know how to keep themselves nice and snug for their next master. It keeps the cocks coming.”

Theon grimaces. He says, this time with falsified confidence, that he’s “better than all the whores and virgins in the room.”

Oh, and Ramsey does not doubt it. “Prove it.” Ramsey challenges. “Give me what you promised.”

Theon knows it’s a trap—he’s not stupid. But he was planning on getting fucked anyways, and he really wants to prove this son of a bitch wrong. He turns around and shoves his ass out.

Ramsey lines his cock against Theon’s twitching hole and rams it in, setting a rhythm of ruthless pounding from the start. “Fuck!” He shouts. He has to grip on Theon’s hips for balance. “Fuck, your cunt is better than I imagined.”

Theon moans at the intrusion. His eyes watered. The violation is brutal and arousing, because while Ramsey goes in without lube or consideration, he’s also a master in hitting Theon’s prostate every single time. The violation gets worst when Ramsey starts speaking.

“Fucking hell, you’re better than a fleshlight! I bet you love this! Being made into someone’s personal slut—bet you love the thought of being my private cock sleeve. You really lucked out tonight, because I’m going to ruin this hole.”

Ramsey controls the pace at all times. When Theon’s knees begin to buckle, Ramsey shoves him further against the door and goes to town on him. Numerous times, Theon attempts to match Ramsey’s thrust. Instead, he clenches down on the hard cock, making him tighter than ever.
Ramsey swears a storm. He calls Theon’s vile names, and makes even more disgusting promises, starting with how he is planning to indoctrinate Theon into being a cum dumpster, and make him forget that his head is filled with anything but thoughts of cock.

At last, Ramsey releases a huge load into Theon’s ass. He’s so distracted by Ramsey's flaccid cock being removed from his ass that he doesn’t even have the sense to worry about the lack of protection. He slumps to the ground. Drool pours out of his mouth.

Ramsey cannot control himself. “That was the best sex I’ve ever had,” he gasps. As soon as he says it, he regrets it.

Theon smirks, and though debauched and ruined for all men, he knows he’s gain the upper hand. “I told you so.”

With any other whore, Ramsey would have smacked him around for being so cocky. Instead, he sees the pretty hole dripping with his spunk and wonders how many loads could he shove in his ass and force him to guzzle down his throat. The possibilities are endless.

“I should keep you.” Ramsey winces at the affectionate tone. He amends himself by saying that, “It’s always nice to have a bitch on hand.”

Theon continues grinning.

Ramsey gets up, and instead of demanding Theon to stay, he offers to pay for his cab ride home. “It’s the least I could do for a decent screw.” At this point, he plans to ruin him with a few extra bills—make him feel really cheap and whorish.

The word ‘home’ sparks something within Theon, and the boy begins groveling. He’s reckless and stupid and this results in a terrified, passionate kiss. Before Ramsey could protest, Theon is already on his knees, taking ahold of Ramsey’s limp cock. He does not bother to breath before he bends down and swallows his cock whole.

Ramsey closes his eyes and groans. Theon scraps his teeth on the sides—just the way he likes it. The action makes him feel huge.

Theon manages to force an inch down his throat.

“Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes,” Ramsey mutters. “I’m definitely going to keep you.”

Chapter End Notes

1. Hello everyone! It’s so nice to be back! I actually swore off fanfiction for the entire three weeks. My philosophy was that if I am absconding from updating then I should do the same for reading. It was torture.
2. I’m sorry to say (again) that this is the only chapter being updated this week. But I swear, the chapters will be consistent and I won’t be taking any more hiatuses until next year. I pray that this is finished before then.
3. I have decided to take three of the five prompt requests. They will all be oneshots. I’m sorry, but I can’t do anything more than that right now. I am still open to taking requests.
4. Next chapter: Jojen and Bran’s date! Fluffiness to counteract the tragedy that was in this chapter!
5. Thank you all for your support. I hope you guys have a great autumn equinox, and if
you're from Australia, a great spring. The mercury retrograde is over with. If you're into astrology, this means that life is going to get a lot better. Have a great fall!
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Nothing to warn people about except one (and a half) guest appearance(s).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bran changes his outfit four times before Jon drags him into the car dressed in a pair of sweatpants and a black t-shirt that showcases his nipples when the temperature drops the slightest degree. Jon deals with Bran's concerns with the patience of young man experience with squabbling siblings and elderly disputes. Despite this, he is not immune to irritation and cannot help but roll his eyes when Bran frets about the matter in the car. He theorizes that such a blatant display of mammary glands appears sluttish, and that's the last thing he wants to display. "Class not ass," he quotes—and the proverb is vaguely reminiscent of Aunt Cat or Sansa, but Jon can honestly expect Theon saying such a thing as well.

"He's going to think I'm a tease, or that I want him to attack me and get him arrested!" Bran moans.

Jon reassures him that he has nothing to worry about because Bran looks fine, and this 'Jo' is already half in love with him. Jon has read the texts. He's listened to the conversations. He knows the older boy is bonkers about Bran and reassures him of this. Bran heads his assurances as if they are raindrops in a monsoon. He wants the date to be perfect. Jon takes a different approach and reminds him of his familial lineage. "There's no way someone with siblings like yours can be remotely unappealing." Bran has those same Stark and Tully genes, and in combination, they produce visual royalty like Robb or Sansa, or unconventional scene stealers like Arya and Rickon. While Bran falls into the latter category, there is little to be ashamed of in the looks department.

When they arrive at the science museum, Bran makes a heel face turn and demands that they go home. Jon puts his foot down. "You're going on this date. You will have a wonderful time with a boy who worships you and you will be happy."

Bran begs him to reconsider. Jon repeats his answer and unlocks the car's doors. "Flutter away," Jon orders. "You have a couple of hours. We told your mother you're working on a project at Henry's house. If the date is not what you expected..."

"I go to the bathroom to text you discreetly and we pretend there's a family emergency." Bran gasps. "Do you think anything will go wrong?"

Jon gets out of the car to gather Bran's wheelchair. Then, he opens the door on Bran's side. "Nothing will go wrong. You just have to give it a shot." He helps Bran onto the device and leads Bran to the entrance where he is expected to meet Jojen. There are several people who fit the age range, but the one who catches Bran's eyes is a tall, fair skin boy with eyes that can only be described as drop dead gorgeous (or Green Lantern's ring if one is in a comical mood) and is looking at his phone like he's waiting for somebody and gods be damn, Bran is not ready to go out with a man that looks like that. He tries to turn around but Jon has a firm grip on his handles and rolls him towards the fountain. When he is close enough, Jon makes a dash back to the car. Bran is close to hyperventilation when he does so, and tries to follow him, or at least protest his treacherous ways when someone calls out his name.
“Bran?” He hears. Bran shuts his eyes. He is too late, and he needs to cut off the gorgon’s head in order to win the princess. He bites his lips and turns around. Jojen is staring at him, and there’s no mistaking the look in his eyes. “I can’t believe you’re here.”

Jojen thanks the gods he decided to brave through his nerves sober. He would have regretted his high until the day he died if he missed a moment of Bran’s exquisiteness. The boy is every dream, every fantasy, every wish he’s had since the day he was born, and having him in front of him was like drinking ambrosia. He introduces himself as Jojen, and calls Bran stunning. He pulls back his intensity when the younger boy blushes and looks away.

“I like your shirt,” he tells him. “And great idea with the sweatpants.”

“Really?” Bran is doubtful. Jojen is wearing a button up shirt with slacks—he looks every bit the model student his intellect implies he is.

“Yes. The lecture will be long so I’m glad you opted for comfort. You’re so clever, Bran.”

Bran lights up at the compliment. Jojen takes the initiative to wheel Bran towards the slope. He breaks down the complexities of parallel universes through analogies and metaphors. The last thing he wants is for Bran to be so frustrated with the terminology that he leaves. Jojen’s inadequacy will not prevail today.

“And the best thing about today’s lecture is that Dr. Wheeler is going to discuss how alternate universes interact with each other. A lot of physicists shy away from the topic because it borders the science fiction.”

“Really?”

Jojen nods. “There’s a lot of stigmas attached to it.” He grins. “It is a good thing you’re interested in science fiction.”

Bran nods his head and tries to keep up when Jojen returns to his lesson plan. Bran appreciates the simplicity of Jojen’s explanation and links to the vocabulary to his late-night cramming session.

Minutes before the lecture starts, Jojen gives him a corner tour of the museum where they touched these plasma globes and blue electricity traces to Bran’s fingers.

Bran giggles and Jojen’s heart skips a beat. If only one of Jojen’s friends did not recognize him, he could have devoted his last five minutes to Bran.

“Well, I’ll be damned! Jojen Reed, is that actually you?”

And for the first time since they met, Bran saw Jojen wince. The older boy turns around to exchange pleasantry, but Jojen’s shields rise like the Great Wall of China and he locks up his emotions like treasures in a vault. His manners are impeccable and his tone is polite, but his posture is tense and unforgiving. Bran wonders what cause the change in demeanor, but Jojen returns the greeting with falsified contentment.

“It’s been a while, Myles.” Jojen, out of respect for etiquette, asks how his family is doing.

“Oh the usual… my older brother is trying to take over the world and Beckett is getting involved with rugby.” The youth shudders. “Sometimes, I wonder if we’re actually twins.” He glances over at Bran and introduces himself. Bran notices his accent is off—a mixture of Irish, English and American.

“Myles Fowl, it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Are you a friend of Jojen here? Or perhaps doing one of those ‘big brother-little brother’ schemes?” He scowls before Bran can answer. Truth
be told, Bran does not know how to answer. There’s too little time to explain his relationship with
Jojen. His friend? His date—? Each suggestion makes him feel as if he’s jumping the gun and
walking backward at the same time. “My professor tried to manipulate me into one of those charity
projects—said it was my duty to help nurture another great mind into this world. Bullocks and
bullshit, I swear. He just wouldn’t stop! I had to make it clear to him that every moment away from
my lab is the dismantlement of a greater mind.”

Jojen raises an eyebrow. Myles must have read this as a sign of disapproval. He rectifies his faux pas
by saying he admires Jojen for his dedication to the scientific community. Bran seems like a worthy
pupil. Before Bran can correct his mistake, Jojen beats him to it by clarifying that he is not Bran’s
mentor. “We’re on a date.”

Myles, who Bran initially reads as pompous and vain, turns a furious shade of red. The boy stutters
out a response that is incomprehensible, and the Stark is fearful he’s made things difficult for Jojen.
What if the boy found him unworthy? Did Bran accidentally cause Jojen to be an outcast from his
friends?

“Oh! Wow! Boyfriend! Okay! He’s very cute…you’re very cute!” He praises. Bran is taken back by
the compliment. He did not expect such a positive response. Myles laughs nervously. “Well, I see
why you’ve taken a break from the center. Shame, the program has not been the same without you.
How long have you been dating?”

Again, Jojen answers, “Just this week. This is our first date.”

Myles nods furiously. “That’s great news! I couldn’t drag one of my partners to these events. If I had
someone that is—shame that everyone I meet at school is a prat with a single digit IQ—you think for
a school promising the most challenging curriculum in Europe, there would be better
conversationalists. The Citadel…what a load of crock!” Then, he hesitates and stares at Jojen
strangely. “Well, if he’s not the reason you’ve gone missing, what happened? You’ve been out of the
program for over a year! Seeing you here…it’s like you’ve come back from the dead!”

Jojen tightens his grip on Bran’s wheelchair handle. He decides that the only way out is to force an
uncomfortable conversation in. “My mother died.”

Myles blanches. He struggles to find the right words, and goes for a shamefully generic response of
“I’m sorry, what happened?” The genius cringes at his own ineptitude.

“Suicide.”

Two of the three young men are startled by the confession. Bran’s eyes widened. Jojen sends him a
pitying look and squeezes his shoulder to indicate that he’ll explain later. Bran could push, but holds
Jojen to his silent promise and keeps his concerns muted.

The statement is the last nail in the coffin, and Myles bids his adieu. “The lecture is about to start and
I need to get to my seats—I’ve already reserved a place in the front.” He offers a chance beside him,
but Jojen politely refuses.

The future physicist rolls Bran to the disability seating. The location is plush and vast in space—to
which Jojen explains that ‘Stephen Hawking made waves for the handicapped.’ They sit down.

As soon as Dr. Wheeler arrives on stage, there’s a sudden round of applause that Bran is obligated to
join in. The man is much younger than Bran expected—early forties at most. There’s a certain
nerdish charm he exudes when he talks about his childhood in America, his obsession with
Dungeons and Dragons, and his love for his friends. The childhood interlude leads into his theory.
Bran is taken back by the claim that “the foundation of the multiverse relies on the understanding of Brane cosmology’s theories,” he finds the discussion intriguing. He makes mental notes to keep it for his future plotlines.

Jojen half listens to the lecture, and half watches Bran out of the corner of his eye. His date is paying attention to whatever he can, and though there are occasion flickers of confusion, Bran remains alert and awestruck. His hands are rested on both the armrests. Jojen has an opportunity.

He inches towards the virgin palm. Bran’s fingers twitch and Jojen retreats. He curses his cowardice and tries again. The hand is right there, so petal soft and snow white. He slinks closer and closer until he’s an inch away. Bran’s finger clench when the doctor lets out another vibrant proclamation—Jojen isn’t listening. Bran returns to normal and leans against his chair. Jojen can feel his warmth. He withdraws from the heat to develop a game plan. His schemes are cut short when Bran squirms and makes a move to place his hands on his lap. Jojen acts instantly. He grasps onto Bran’s hand and links their fingers together. He forces them on the armrest. He makes sure not to look at Bran in the eye.

Jojen did it. His heart is pounding in anticipation but he did it.

He held Bran’s hand.

And Bran is not pulling away. If anything, he’s encouraging their intimacy by curling his fingers so that their digits intertwine. Jojen gasps.

He is holding Bran’s hand, and Bran is allowing it.

If he bothered to look at Bran’s face, he would see an equally red, love-stricken boy.

The lecture finishes with two utterly wrecked young men holding hands. Forced to let go, their parting does nothing to cure Jojen of his paralysis. His dazed mindset continues when he wheels his date to the dining area and does not diminish—not even when he orders his meal. When they get their dishes, Jojen relishes in the sensation of Bran’s skin.

“So…” Bran begins nervously. He nibbles on his chips. Jojen wants to be one of those chips. He swears at his lack of self-control. “That was interesting…”

“Was it?” Jojen draws out; thoughts tunneling through the crevices of his brain. He can barely remember a word spoken, still enraptured by his progress. They held hands, Jojen moons. He recovers enough to ask Bran if there’s was anything he didn’t understand.

“Most of it,” Bran admits, a nervous, sheepish smile following his confession. Jojen chuckles and the noise makes Bran swoon. “I got that alternate universes are based on…string theory?” Jojen does not correct him so Bran assumes he’s on the right track.

“Correct, but Dr. Wheeler used the example of a tightrope, but I think that’s an outdated image.” Jojen grabs two of Bran’s chips and lathers sauce between them. He smirks at Bran’s pouting protest. “So let’s start small. I want you to think of each chip as a parallel universe and the sauce is the spacetime between them. Now, imagine yourself as a fly. You can hop on one chip, but if you try to get to the other chip, the sauce stops you.” He mashes the chips together. “However, if we’re following Einstein’s law of general relativity, the spacetime can get warped. And notice how the chips are getting soggier before the movement?”

Bran nods.

“So do our universes. Every action or change to the spacetime affects our current universe.” Jojen
suddenly forces the two sides together, leaving potato-ey, saucy, mess. “For the two universes to meet, there’s need to be energy—an intense, massive amount of energy. And if you happened to be in the sauce when that happens…”

“You die,” Bran squeaks out.

Jojen nods. “Everything caught in the spacetime gets decimated. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on who you ask, you won’t be able to find an institution with the means to produce a proper experiment.” Jojen chuckles. “So we won’t be meeting the alternative version of ourselves anytime soon. No princesses or dragons for us.” Jojen sends a sly look over to Bran, and the sultry expression alone makes him squirm. “Though I imagine the other me is having the time of his life calling you, ‘my prince.’”

Bran coughs up his soda. Jojen offers him his water bottle. When Bran recovers, Jojen asks how long he has him until. Bran reveals he is supposed to be at home at six, and Jojen checks his watch. He lights up.

“I get you all to myself for two whole hours? I must in heaven.”

Bran rolls his eyes. He recognizes Jojen’s sincerity but finds himself building an immunity to Jojen’s flattery. He has to find a way to keep his heart from bursting with every compliment. Nevertheless, he believes his heart fluttering around Jojen is a permanent condition.

Taking a break from the science conversation, Jojen asks about Bran’s week. He listens with his full attention, as he always does when Bran talks about his life. He leaves out his familial drama, and the absence of his siblings in his discussion raises a dozen red flags.

“Is there something wrong? You haven’t mentioned any of your siblings.”

Bran swallows his own saliva. “No…there’s just nothing going on right now.” He will not be the one to ruin the mood. Things are going great—way better than anticipated. “I mean, Arya is doing her dance thing and Sansa has a boyfriend and Rickon is being Rickon…he’s always getting into trouble…things are fine. Boring, really.”

“What about Robb?” Jojen asks, and the pointedness of his question is as unnerving as a nun. Bran gulps and is about to sputter another lie when Jojen stops him. He reaches over to grab Bran’s hand and reminds him that, “You can tell me anything.”

Bran lower lip quivers. “Robb is…Robb and I aren’t getting along right now.” Somewhere in their universe, a cat runs across the room, trips his owner, and everything on the table spills to the floor. Bran mimics the experience and misery pours from his mouth. Jojen is as attentive as ever and not once does his adoration falter. At the end of Bran’s rant, Jojen reassures him that he is not at fault—his brother’s love life does not rest on his shoulder and he has no right to blame him for any of the follies.

“But I gave Willas the number—”

“—which would have only happened if you thought Willas was worthy of it. Jon trusts your judgement and so do I. It’s on your brother if he doubts you.” Really, Jojen sighs, Robb appeared to be a more sensible man when he was dating Meera. “I would have given a suitor my sister’s number if he met my standards.”

The comment lifts bricks and boulders off of Bran’s shoulders. While he inwardly knows Jojen to be biased, the relief of being told he is not at fault is immeasurable. He smiles.
“Thank you, Jojen.”

Jojen stares at Bran. There are millions of universes where Jojen Reed exists, and not one of them would have been able to resist Bran Stark’s smile. Jojen leans forward, and Bran catches his breath. Bran’s entire body tenses, his breath is held still, and the hair on his back rises. His lips pout subconsciously and he bites them for a second—a moment where flesh meets teeth and the interaction results in red, apple delicious red.

Then, Bran’s phone rings.

They freeze. The phone keeps ringing, and they rise to action. Jojen pulls back. Bran retrieves his phone. Both of them scream in silence, and once the moment has passed, they yell at the heavens above for their misfortune. Jojen curses his eagerness—he’s going too far, too soon, and the universe is cockblocking him for it. Bran needs further wooing, more intimate discussions and dates consisting of star gazing in the gardens. On the other side of the kiss that never was, Bran swears a grave punishment to whoever interrupted their date. He was so sure that Jojen was going…

“Hello?” Bran answers, sour as a lemon. He glances over at Jojen to make sure he isn’t insulted. To his relief, the older boy casts an understanding smile. If anything, he is curious.

“Bran I need your help!”

“Rickon?” Bran raises an eyebrow. “Rickon, I’m kind of busy—”

“Shh! Don’t talk so loud!” Rickon interrupts. There’s some shuffling over the phone. “They might hear you!” His voice is hushed, but the urgency of his whisper is loud and clear. Bran almost hits his head. He loathes to imagine what trouble his little brother has gotten into.

“Rickon, what did you do now?”

“It’s not my fault!” Rickon defends. As if realizing who he is talking to, he changes his tune. “I mean…it is my fault. Completely my fault, but that doesn’t matter now! I’m trapped, Bran. Trapped!” He quiets down, and Bran swears he hears a high-pitched giggle in the background. There’s an absence of breath on the other end, and Bran can practically see his brother on the other side, hiding his breathing through inane measures and curled up in a ball for discretion. Then, the giggling dies down and he hears a door shut. Rickon speaks again. “I was tricked! Bamboozled! Lyanna Mormont, she—” The laughter returns with an accompanying trail of footsteps. Again, the door slams and Rickon regains his voice. “Bran, I need you and Robb to pick me up. Don’t tell Jon. Or Sansa. They’ll kill me if they find out.”

Find out what? Bran wants to ask but deep inside, he knows he’d rather not hear the answer. “Where are you?”

“At the Mormont house, keep up, Bran!” Rickon chides. Bran rolls his eyes. Rickon proceeds to give him the brief explanation of his predicament. He spins a tale of infiltration. Lyanna Mormont was having her bimonthly sleepover and he was determined to get access to Shireen’s innermost secrets while also shielding her from Lyanna’s influence. Lyanna must have seen through his plans because she installed a program that prevented anybody from leaving the house without inputting the passcode. He was stuck, and the girls were arriving. To get him out, Bran needs to get there, distract the girls, and get Robb and to override the alarm codes.

Rickon is about to give further instruction when Bran cuts him off by informing him that he and Robb are not speaking to each other. Bran is tired of letting people walk all over him. Jojen is right. He will not apologize without wrongdoing. He’s having fun on his date, and Robb is being
completely illogical. Rickon is a troublemaker, and it is time for him to face the consequences of his actions.

“I’m busy, Rickon. Whatever you did, you need to take responsibility for it. You’re not a baby anymore.” Bran takes a deep breath. “I won’t help you.”

Silence.

Bran awaits the storm.

Nothing.

The muteness alarms Bran more than a thousand screams. Was he being too harsh? He held his ground but wonders what he will do if Rickon hangs up. Oh, the eleven-year-old will never forgive him if Bran’s callousness leads him to lose his first love!

On the other side, Rickon is stunned by this newfound assertiveness. He finds his voice. He does not have many moments left to talk and will not waste it. He starts by telling Bran that he is sorry for ruining his date, and he adds that he genuinely means it. “I love you. I hope you’re having fun. Is he nice?”

Bran stares at Jojen, who stares back. They smile at each other. “He is,” Bran agrees.

Rickon says he’s glad to hear it. Then, he reminds Bran that he is not the only Stark who is not where he is supposed to be. “When you’re finished, are you going to get Jon to pick you up? I mean, you’re not calling mum, are you?”

Bran’s throat dries up like a grape in the Sahara, and he takes his entire cup of orange soda and downs it like an alcoholic with a bottle of whiskey. That little shit. Once sated, he finishes up hacking the dribbles that went into the wrong tube and wipes his mouth. He whimpers to Rickon that “he’ll be there.”

“Good.”

Bran is left with a dial tone. His mind runs through a thousand apologies. I’m sorry, my brother fucked up. I’m sorry, I have to stop my brother from doing something stupid. I’m sorry, my brother is ruining my life but I really like you and I would love to reschedule our kiss. He hears the chiming of keys and jumps to the worst conclusion. Jojen is up and preparing to throw away the trash. Bran’s heart sinks. Jojen is abandoning him. He’s leaving him and Bran will never see him again and it will all be because of Rickon and stupid, impulsive ways—.

“Let’s just get rid of the rubbish, and I can give you a ride instead of your brother.” Jojen offers a kind smile. “We can even plan our next date—something you love.”

Bran gapes. “You want to see me again?”

Jojen is surprised by the question. “Of course.” He pauses. “Do you not want to see me again?”

“No!” Bran squeals. “I just…I thought that…Rickon…”

“Your little brother got into trouble and now you have to bail him out. It happens.” Jojen immediately thinks of Meera. “I love how important family is to you. I am not going to condemn you for it. If anything, it makes me love you more. So let’s do this. We’re going to call your older brother, save your younger brother, and figure out where we’re going on our second date.” Jojen takes ahold of the handles. “You ready?”
Bran considers responding but knows that nothing short of a love confession is leaving his lips. He nods instead and is pleased when Jojen directs him to the parking lot. He swoons. Jojen even knows his preferred ‘rushing’ speed.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next Chapter is where Ramsey and Theon left off.
2. This chapter I will finally start responding to reviews again. Thank goodness.
3. I was in the middle of revisions when this screen suddenly got deleted and I had to start over. That was not fun.
At three o’clock in the afternoon, Robb and Theon have set a personal record for longest ever post conflict limbo. Robb had been dialing Theon’s number like a man on crack, and every redial acted as a hit. He tried tracking down Theon's number, but wherever the Greyjoy was, there must have been a satellite in the vicinity that was making the signal bounce.

Robb tries calling the number again, but when he hears the voice mail pick up his call, he throws the infuriating device onto his bed. He marches out of his room and across the hall. He barges into Jon’s room. There’s no one there. Robb remembers that Jon drove Bran to his friend’s house—a lie, Robb growls, because Bran was on a date. Robb enters Bran’s room and sees a pile of clothing on the floor. “That treacherous tart,” he hisses. He heard the crisis this morning and knew the little traitor was terrified of screwing up his chances to suck dick. And he isn’t alone. Robb imagines Jon’s intentions are not far off from his little cousin, Jon craves a solid member in his mouth, is probably creaming at the chance to be with Willas and suck that limped leg’s golden dick. Because Jon just loves to suck cock. He is a cocksucker and Willas is a dick. Robb leaves for Arya’s room and when he gets in, unsurprisingly, she’s gone. Oh right, she told them that she was at dance practice but he knew the truth. Arya was a paranoid munchkin who always locked her door unless she was too excited and the only thing that made her excited was dance and dick. She was sucking dick like the rest of them! He sends an accusational glower to the second oldest Stark’s room and kicks the door down. He sees underwear on the ground and picks it up. He clenches onto them in anger. Black panties! Black panties on the ground meant she was wearing the red ones and red panties meant dick sucking! His sister is a whore. He should have known.

Sansa is a part of the licentious community of cock loving Starks. He knows where she is—sucking her boyfriend’s dick. Sucking more dick than all of them combine. Everyone in Robb’s family is leaving him to become a bunch of dick suckers and that’s not fair!

The mania launches fireworks in his head as he compiles thousands of inane theories consisting of his siblings disloyal and dishonest behavior. He needs sweets. He’s desperate for some cream—he knows his mother has a secret stash somewhere. He’s ready to grab a bag of sugar and a spoon and shovel it in his mouth like a dead body in a trunk. He goes upstairs to look for the goods. The kitchen is too obvious. The maids are there. He does not want to be seen. He walks pasts his parents’ bedroom and freezes.

Panties. They hang on the doorknob, mocking him. No, worse than panties, he thinks. His eyes narrow at the lace. Red panties.

Without permission or prompting, he barges into the room and catches his parents el flagrante, soiled in sin, his father’s dick poking out of the sheets and his mother’s face caked in semen. Those hussies! They scramble to hide their shame. His mother speaks first. Aye, this must have been her doing. She must have seduce Robb’s father with her seductive wiles; the same hereditary techniques she passed onto her dick loving children.
“Robb!” She scolds, and oh how clever she is to turn the tables on him. “What have we told you about coming in when mummy and daddy put a pair of pants on the knob?”

“You were sucking dick!” He accuses furiously. He turns to his father. He glares. “You were letting her suck your dick! How could you? What kind of example are you setting for your children? That two people can suck dick whenever they want? As long as there’s consent and boundaries are respected?”

That is exactly the kind of message he wants to give to his children. “Robb…we’re married.”

“Oh, so you’re using the married card again. Well, that does not give you a free pass to stick your cock inside my mother whenever she asks for it. You need to learn some self-control.” Robb’s indignation, which he often confuses with passion, is blazing. “And chastity! What ever happened to chastity? We Starks use to have a community; one that puts our family first and our loins second! If one person in our family is not having sex, then no one else can either.” Robb nods at his own proposal. The wheels turn in his head as he develops plans for voice activated chastity belts and fingerprinted tongue locks.

Ned sighs at the irrationality. He checks on his wife, who is both concerned about her son’s behavior and annoyed that he caused her orgasm to flee. Having dealt with years of Tully temper tantrums, he knows exactly what to do. “You’re distraught,” he points out. Robb is displeased by the diagnosis. He is about to protest when Ned makes room in the center of the bed. He urges Catelyn to do the same. She groans.

“Ned, I think we should…”

“Robb is upset. He needs to lie down and think about his feelings.” Catelyn’s mouth is still open, but she complies with the demand—if not a bit reluctantly. Ned turns to his eldest son. “Let’s talk about this. Come. Lie with us.”

Catelyn tries to leave, but Ned stops her. “Stay. Catelyn, our son needs us.”

“Ned, we’re not exactly dressed for this conversation,” she grits out.

“I don’t mind, mum. I know what you did,” Robb chimes in, sounding resigned with a touch of bitterness. He crawls onto the sheets and rests in the center. He waits for his mother to lie down again. “Less clothes mean less secrets.”

Ned nods his agreement. His cock is already flaccid. From his point of view, the appropriateness of the situation is a nonissue.

Catelyn ignores the dysfunctional scene before her and gets back on the bed. Robb snuggles closer to her. His affection causes her to sigh and submit to his plea for comfort. He is their first born. They are prone to doting on their children but how could they not with such lovely babies? Ned, who is not a man to spare the rod, simultaneously does not hesitate to reward his children for every and any accomplishment they achieve. He, like Catelyn, often felt unsettled with the presence of moaning spawn.

In the bed, a womb of wool and fur, Robb reiterates the timeline of his broken heart and subsequent betrayal (leaving out the scandalous detail of his little brother’s affair—he’s not so angry as to betray his own kin) and his fight with Theon, who refuses to pick up his phone. The worst punishment for a stalker is a disappearance. He ends the rant by lamenting the birth of Willas Tyrell. His mother lets him lie on her bare shoulder and strokes his hair. She spoils him with praises, calling him a strong, resilient boy who will find a way above these circumstances. Inwardly, she cheers at the hope that
her nephew has found a distraction from her son. Willas Tyrell, she muses. The only way Jon could have done better was to stay with Robb. While Catelyn celebrates Jon’s newfound romance, Ned simmers in his own suspicions. He tastes each piece of information and swallows it with a grain of salt. Willas is as smart as he looks—using Ned’s nephew to get to his son. He could sense the predator in the man; a vicious beast who is willing to play with the heartstrings of an innocent boy for the sake of feasting on the flesh of a babe. He will not make the mistake of accusing the CEO outright—he’s had too many problems in the past concerning that habit—(Cersei Lannister still sends him Joffrey’s blood test every birthday) but instead voices his approval Robb’s methods

“Willas Tyrell, I’ve met him. Nice, but he seems…soft.” Conniving is the right word. “Jon enjoys being active. He deserves someone more…adaptable to a sportsmen lifestyle.” As soon as he says it, he’s proud. His wife is wrong—he can be tactful. Why, he's as sly as a snake!

Catelyn disagrees on the spot. “I knew his mother. She was my upperclassman at Glenlola. Willas is a fine young man and I’m sure he’ll make Jon very happy.” She squeezes Robb’s shoulder. “Surely, I raised a boy who wanted the best for the people he loves.”

Robb whimpers because she did raise such a man and he hates disappointing her. He recites the mantra in his head. I want Jon to be happy. I want Jon to be happy. Jon is happy with—. Me. Willas. Me. Willas. Robb's head is wrecked trying to find the ending to that sentence. Thankfully, his father pulls him away from his thoughts and forces them face to face.

“Robb, I raised a man who can pick his battles. A hunter, a wolf, a man with instinct and integrity. If you feel something is off about Willas, act on it. Follow him around. Make sure he is never around Bra-Jon. Jon should be protected.”

“Ned! Robb’s poor behavior should not be encouraged. He needs to think things through like a gentleman—not a half-crazed loon!” She rubs her son’s shoulder. “Listen, my little king, some relationships are not meant to be. Like your uncle Brandon and me! Where would we be if I, against all odds and criticism, refused to take my chance with your father?”

“You did not take a chance—you seduced me,” Ned grumbles. He follows in after with his own retort. “And think of all the problems we could have avoided if your grandfather looked past my brother’s exterior and saw him for the hotheaded, unfaithful man he was.” His blood boils at the memory. Several holidays ago, he gathered up the nerve to ask his brother how he could be unfaithful to a woman as beautiful and bright as Catelyn Tully. They were young then. The twenty-year-old shrugged and told him he couldn’t resist—"There are too many fishes in the sea. You can’t expect me to eat Tilapia my whole life."

The fist fight that followed was brutal. Catelyn cried—for she was a lady and ladies cried when their loved ones are being taken away by EMTs (they also developed a spontaneous phobia of hospitals, which forced her to spend the next few days in the Stark estate being catered to by Ned—Catelyn demanded it was the only fitting punishment while slyly undressing her future husband with her eyes).

“Ned.” Catelyn warns him. Her memory of her stripping off to reveal her skimpy bikini in their once shoddy pool—a great risk for she could not pinpoint Ned's exact affections towards her but knew she had to take a chance on this wonderful man who loved children and learned all his staff’s names because he understood the value of hard work. “Robb should let Jon and Willas be.”

“A small investigation never hurt anybody. Except the guilty.”

“Ned!” The storm rears their grey clouds and his parents begin their disagreement. Robb takes one final breath. He absorbs the comfort of his parents’ scent, made heavier by their mid-coitus sweat and
leaves the vicinity.

Once Robb returns to his room, he hears his phone ringing. He dives onto it.

“Hello?” he answers. He expects to hear a hesitant request from Theon, either to pick him up from whatever shithole he’s crawled in or a copper requesting a pickup for someone that needs to get out.

“Robb? It’s Bran.”

“Bran?” Robb clenches the phone a bit tighter. He holds back his irritation and focuses on the anxiety in his chest. Bran and him are technically not on speaking terms, so if his little brother is calling, it must be serious.

“Yeah, I’ll explain to you later, but I need you to meet me at your old girlfriend’s house. Rickon’s in trouble.”

“Which one?”

“The tall one.”

Dacey? Robb, who is worried but not stupid, asks if Rickon is in trouble, or trouble.

“Both.” There’s an exasperated groan shared by the two of them. Robb hears someone over the phone ask for directions. Bran responds with a “left turn on the next street.” That must be Bran’s date. Robb’s heart aches. He hates being single.

“Okay, I’ll get there as soon as I can.” He hangs up, grabs a coat, and his keys. When he goes downstairs, he ends up running into the last person he wants to see. Jon is blissed out and content with the world, which means he’s either worked with one of those attention-seeking Baratheon brats, or had wickedly good sex. Robb acts up his rush by dashing past Jon and pretending not to see him. Before he could walk past his cousin—wearing body spray layered with sugar glazes and vanilla—he catches a glimpse of Gage’s Mellow Yellow and Green Dots Delight box, and stops in his tracks.

“Do you have cake?” Jon grins.

“I wanted to celebrate Bran’s completed comic book,” Jon announces with a wink. Jon and Bran used the phrase as code for the latter’s romantic indiscretions. “And one of the kids is having a sleepover. I wanted to celebrate so I stopped by a bakery on my way back. I’m saving strawberry tiramisu when she gets back.” He smiles to himself. Robb’s heart flutters. Jon loves those children—he’ll worship theirs. “It’s Shireen’s first sleepover so she’s super excited.” Jon becomes aware of Robb’s frantic appearance and asks if anything is wrong.

“Nothing,” Robb lies. For there's nothing he wants to do more than bask in Jon's happiness and share a moment of domestic joy, a little bit of cake and tea on a cold night where they share their day’s stories and think about the future. Jon, not entirely convince, lifts up his bakery box. “Okay, well I got you a sunflower cake with extra sunshine.” He heads into the kitchen to put them away and puts some molasses into his step. Robb wants to use this opportunity to escape, but he immediately recognizes the trap. Running away from cake is as suspicious as it gets in this family. He waits for Jon to come back to say goodbye.

When Jon comes back, cake less, Robb's resolve crumbles for a brief moment. Jon asks about Robb’s plans. “Where are you heading off to? A pub?”

“Uh…yes?”
Jon raises an eyebrow. “Are you asking me or telling me?”

Out of habit, he teases Jon’s about his authoritarian approach. “Are you going to spank if I give you the wrong answer?”

Jon bristles, His face turns red with embarrassment and he bites back a clever, flirtatious retort. He’s been working with children for too long and Robb happens to be the worse of his charges. “Where are you going? Honestly, this time.”

Robb considers lying but knows that’ll take too long. He settles for a half truth. “I’m picking up Rickon from a friend’s house. The party ended early.”

Jon frowns. "Did something happen?"

"Not sure. He just needs me to pick him up."

"Why you? Why not mom or dad or me? He knows I was out."

"Well, I am his big brother," Robb points out. He savages some indignation and puts it into his next question. "Why? Do you think he can't rely on me to pick him up?"

Jon does not take the bait. He can tell the difference between Robb’s fake indignation and his genuine irritation. “Where is he?”

Robb sighs. “At Dacey Mormont’s house…don’t ask why, I don’t—”

"Get your keys. We need to leave."

"What?"

Jon grabs Robb’s wrist and drags him down the hall. The action is sudden and rough, a tragedy for it forces Robb to ignore the enjoyment of Jon’s skin.

“We have to leave immediately. He’s going after Shireen.”

“For murder?” Jon groans. Fucking hells, where did they go wrong with this boy?

“No, he’s spying on her!”

“Oh well, that’s not so bad.”

“Robb!”

“I mean that’s horrible. He should respect Shireen Baratheon’s revulsion of his presence and keep a healthy, court-agreeable distance.”

Jon sends him a look saying he does not appreciate the sarcasm—the same look he used to send Robb when he asked for help with the housework of their flat, and Robb’s attempts failed so miserably that Jon had to send him to the couch so that the Stark would not get in the way, and his only response to his jail sentence was a saucy grin and a sly innuendo. Robb manages to produce the same, sexual gaze, but holds back the comment.

In the car, Jon calls Bran to receive further details. He is livid—and Bran does everything he can to call him down without incriminating Robb. The reveal that “Robb watches you, too” will help no one, least of all Rickon—who is trapped in a closet in the least metaphorical manner the proverb could mean.
Bran explains the situation with lots of speed and little finesse. Jon suspects the soft-spoken boy theorized that leniency is a companion of confusion. Bran is dead wrong. Jon absorbs the information and prepares a devastating punishment for Rickon once they get him out.

When Jon hangs up, he repeats the information—mostly as a note to himself but since Robb is in the car, he pretends to make a conversation. “Okay, so Rickon took a cabbie to Dacey Mormont’s house for ‘unknown reasons’ and now he’s trapped there and can’t get out.” Had Robb not recognize the dire situation, he would have laughed at the air quotations. “Because he did not plan ahead, he is now trapped inside a house with no forms of escape. The codes are changing every hour—”

Robb interrupts by saying it’s the latest in home technology. “You connect the alarm to your phone and change it upon request. They must be doing it for individual rooms.” He is predictably hushed for not reading the mood.

“And we have to save his ass. Perfect.”

Robb shrugs. Rickon is his brother so he’ll support him whenever. Robb looks down at his phone and checks for any messages. He tries calling Theon again, followed by a text with the denotative message of “My brother is in trouble. Meet me at Dacey’s house.” And the connotative implication of “I’m emotional guilt tripping you so please come before I break out the broken leg possibility.” He sends the message and sighs. He hopes this one gets through at least.

Jon sees his panic and tells him not to worry about Rickon.

Robb scoffs and says he’s not worried in the least. “Rickon is a survivor. He can handle himself.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“Theon’s not picking up his phone.”

“Again, what’s the problem?”

Robb sends him a tired look. Jon sighs, and asks what happened between the two of them. When he came home this morning, there was no sight of him. His morning was too pleasant for his liking.

Robb keeps the storytelling to a minimal. He’s already revealed too much to too many people, and he does not need Jon to know the main issue of their fight had to do with Robb’s ignorance. Jon has always been suspicious of Theon and early in their relationship, tried to insinuate foul play. Robb didn’t believe him back then but he understands now that Jon was correct. His pride refuses to give Jon proof of his naivety; his heart needs space to contemplate it freely. Theon is in love with him and there’s not a thing he could do about it.

“I told him I wanted to stay single for a while and he got really upset. We started saying mean things.” Lie. “And accusing each other of wrongdoings.” More lies. “I have to apologize. I was too honest and it broke Theon’s heart. I’m worried. I have no clue where he is and it’s scaring the shit out of me.”

Jon uses his free hand to hold onto Robb’s. He reassures him that everything is going to be alright. Theon is probably out with some one-night stand and if he’s gone for this long, that means he's having both the best and the worse sex of his life.

“What makes you say that?”

Jon grins for the first time since he heard about Rickon’s escapade. “Robb, Theon’s resilient. The only way for someone like him to get over a guy like you is to have the dirtiest, raunchiest sex
possible with a complete asshole who will ruin him. Trust me, whatever happened last night, it'll make him forget about you for days.” He makes a left turn. “That’s what I would do.”

For a man who rejects any similarity to the bastard, Theon and Jon are true to their impulses. Theon rests on a king size bed, wrists bound on the bedposts, mouth stuffed with a ball gag, and a crimson blindfold over his eyes—silk, because even though Theon’s refused to be someone’s bitch, Ramsey forced him onto his bed anyways. He complained so much about the quality of his handcuffs that the Bolton bastard relented with his higher end goods. Theon’s body is covered in cum; there are fresh splotches of semen on his torso, his legs, his ass; the places that aren’t dripping are caked on and crustied. He is boneless from release. He cannot move, and he stopped protesting ages ago. Right now, he could be replaced with a sex doll and no one would be able to tell the difference.

His unresponsiveness does nothing to deter Ramsey’s orgasm. If anything, the creep likes it better if the bondage is any indication of his inclinations. Ramsey shoves his cock in Theon’s face and slaps his cheek with it. He wants his money shot and rubs himself so hard that Theon wonders if he plans on hammering out his teeth. Ramsey unleashes a large, husky moan and shoots all over Theon’s face.

“Fuck, that’s good!” Ramsey announces. He drops down beside Theon and sounds all proud of his orgasm—as if this one masturbation sequence was better than Theon’s hole and his mouth or his fucking smooth hands that have been lathered with hand cream every single day since he discovered shea butter. His indignation inspires him to shake his hackles and make a demand of release through his muffle.

Ramsey contemplates the action. “If I let you go, you have to promise not to attack me again.”

Theon nods frantically. Ramsey sighs. He regretted the offer as soon he made it, but there’s something about the way Theon begs that drives him crazy. As he undoes each tie, he’s already contemplating all the potential problems to occur. The bitch is a mouthy one and it’ll take more than an eighteen-hour fuckfest to rid him of that attitude. Oh well, he muses, at least he has the punishment to look forward to.

When Ramsey removes the last ribbon, Theon spits out his ‘chew toy’ and throws it across the room. He lunges at Ramsey and knocks him on his back. He tries to choke him and Ramsey laughs harder than he has his entire life. The sound incenses Theon, who moves in for a punch. Ramsey kicks him off in response. They wrestle for a good amount of time, tumbling in the sheets, falling off the bed. Theon’s pushing and screaming profanities, scratching any part of Ramsey’s skin he can get his hands on. In the end, Theon’s body has experience hours of forced orgasms and his eyes have reached parts of his skull he has never thought possible. He rolls onto his back to experience the sweet sensation of rest. His body has been used—he feels raw, violated, and oh so wrecked.

Ramsey asks if he’s ready to behave. He crawls over to Theon and nuzzles his neck. If it weren’t for the wandering hand fingering his hole, he would have thought the action was affectionate. Fortunately for Ramsey, Theon’s limp figure doesn’t have the energy for a fight.

"Sod off, you fucking asshole. I told you I didn’t want to be tied up.”

“But you enjoyed it.” Ramsey sucks on the flesh. Theon stifles a purr of approval—he is sucker for attention. “I could tell you would. Bitches like you pretend to be so much better than us plebs but that doesn’t stop you from getting down on your knees whenever the thought of a long, hard fucking makes itself known.”
“I’m not a bitch.” Theon scoffs. “And you’re not a pleb. This flat costs at least a thousand pounds a month.”

“Actually, I don’t pay rent. I own it.”

“Fuck you.” Ramsey giggles, the calling card of a child whose prizes mischief or an unhinged stranger with a chainsaw. Nonetheless, the fatigue is eating Theon’s sanity and he begins to adapt to his one night stand’s strange proclivities. He’s been called far worst by his family members and the asshole did just give him the best sex of his life—not that he’ll ever admit it to this lunatic.

The cock touching his thigh hardens. Theon regains the strength to push his assailant off. “We just fucked for hours.”

“What’s your point?”

“Hours, you twat!” Theon struggles to get out of his grasp. “And I bet I wasn’t even conscious for most of it, you fucking rapist.” He grabs a nearby shirt, and sniffs it. It’s not his, but it will do for a quick escape.

“Where are you going?”

“Home.” Theon looks for his phone to message Robb. The Stark must be worried sick. He’ll have to start all over again now that Robb knows about his feelings for him. He groans. Robb will never trust him alone with one of his lovers again. Then again, Theon realizes, Robb is now dedicated to his own self-discovery—without girls. This means he won’t have to watch Robb get moony eyed over some undeserving twat. Yeah, he can work with this new ‘single, find himself Robb.’

“Looking for this?” Ramsey asks. He waves Theon’s phone around like a master lording over his dog with a treat.

“Your boyfriend’s really worried about you,” Ramsey points out (He’s glaring—no staring at the words on the screen. He’s not jealous—there’s no way he’d be concerned over some cheating slut.). Theon is livid. Ramsey is reading personal text messages from Robb for Theon's eyes only. He musters all his strength to rescue the device from the psycho’s hands. Ramsey easily fends him off. He pushes Theon back on the bed and climbs on top of him.

“‘Theon, I’m sorry.’ ‘Theon, we need to talk.’ ‘Theon, please pick up your phone.’ Wow, he must have really fucked up!” Ramsey grins. His bends down to deliver a vicious and bloody bite on Theon’s neck. Theon screams. He struggles to break free but he can feel the teeth lodge in his bone. He finishes it off with languid lick on the scar. “I wonder what he’ll do when he sees my mark on you. Maybe he’ll figure out what I discovered in seconds—that you’re nothing more than a pretty whore. A warm fleshlight that knows how to clench and cum upon command.” Theon whimpers. He turns away so that Ramsey cannot see his tears. The Bolton forces him to face him. He grips onto the boy’s hair, and hears him whisper. “…notmyboyfriend.”

Ramsey pauses. “What?”

Theon sniffs. “Robb’s not my boyfriend. We’re friends.” The confession distracts Ramsey enough that he lets go. Theon uses the time to wipe away his tears. “We got into a fight at the pub and I didn’t want to go home…” he explains.

“You live together?” Ramsey sounds doubtful. Then, he gets angry. "You lying slut. Do you honestly think I believe that I bullshit?"
“Only for the summer!” Theon clarifies. "And it’s not just us—we live with his family. It’s his parent’s home.”

Ramsey scoffs. “He still lives with his mother?”

“For the summer,” Theon defends. “And he goes to school, too. He’s at top of his class and he’ll run Stark Industries one day and…”

“What?”

Theon shuts his mouth. Shit, he didn’t mean to say the last part. “Your friend is a Stark? He’s…he’s Robb Stark.” There’s an undeniable chill in Ramsey’s eye. Theon panics, and tries to recover by saying he exaggerated. Ramsey hears nothing of it. He mutters something to himself, phrases of connected fates and vengeance. Theon takes the shot and aims for his phone. Even in his scheming, Ramsey stays aware of his surroundings. He pulls back before Theon can swipe it from his hand. He reads the new message. “It’s seems your friend is having trouble with his brother. A Rickon?”

Theon does not give up. He keeps on trying until Ramsey clutches onto his neck and kisses him until his lungs give out. He throws Theon on the bed and gets off. The younger man wonders what’s in store for him, and reminds Ramsey of the pre-existing conversation. “Since Robb’s not my boyfriend, you can’t make me do anything for you. I can’t be blackmail. Just let me go—” Ramsey interrupts Theon’s ‘persuasion’ with a pair of jeans. He tells him to get dressed.

“I’ll give you a ride,” he offers.

“What?” Theon’s fingers clutch onto the pants. He holds them up a bit higher, as if the denim will shield him from Ramsey’s manipulations.

Ramsey holds his hands up in innocence. “You don’t have money for a cabbie, nor any means of going home. I checked your wallet. So, out of the goodness of my kind, merciful heart, I’ll give you a ride.”

Theon’s eyes narrow. “Why?”

“Well, I can’t just let you wander the streets alone. My conscience would never allow it. There’s a serial killer out there. He might hurt you.”

“Like you care.” Ramsey chuckles. “Nope! But I don’t want my new booty call to disappear on me so soon. Thanks for the number. I’ll trust I’ll be seeing you very soon.” Theon thinks about protesting that ‘he’s never given the twat his number’ but settles on a succinct: “I rather eat pig shit.”

Ramsey’s grin grows larger. He puts on a t-shirt and draws closer to the younger man in a predatory fashion. He gets on his hands on knees but there’s nothing about the action that seems submissive. He’s crawling towards the Greyjoy like a tiger or a wolf. “Don’t be like that, Theon. We had such a lovely time last night.” He strokes Theon’s cheek. The softness unnerves Theon, whose only experience bruises and scratches under Ramsey’s hand.

“What will you do if I refuse?”

Ramsey stares. In a single moment, he grabs Theon until their chests are touching each other but their lips are an inch apart.

“If I don’t see you again, I’m afraid I will become very upset. I’ve developed a…taste for this body of yours. I intend to have my fill.” He licks the spot where he marked Theon. Theon shivers. “I’m going to give you back your phone. Then, I am going to drop you off a few minutes away from your
intended destination so no one sees us together. In return, you are going to pick up all my phone calls—no matter where you are. I don’t care if you’re on the toilet or getting fucked by another man—and it better not be the latter-ever. I don't need some diseased whore in my bed." Theon whimpers when he tugs his hair. "I call. You answer. I tell you to get on your knees. You bark. If you don’t…well, let’s not get to that point.” He brushes away Theon’s hair. He rubs his finger on Theon’s lips. God, he loves that mouth. He’s tempted to break a few teeth to get him really slurping him in.

Theon falls victim to an esurient manchild who fucks his mouth with vigor and viciousness. Theon’s mouth gets ravaged and raped by Ramsey’s tongue. As soon as they part, Theon whimpers out his approval. Ramsey leaves the bed to get him a new pair of clothes. Theon will be wearing his old ones from last night. He will not take a shower. “Be careful about letting people get too close to you. You reek.”

Jojen offers to stay with Bran until his brother arrives, but Bran turns him down. Logically, Jojen is relieved. Robb might recognize him from his brief stint as Meera’s boyfriend and that might lead to some accidental revelations to their wolf mother. Things are going too well for Jojen. Once Bran and him are officially lovers in mind, body, and soul, bound by the gods and forces beyond the earth, no one can tear them apart. But for now, their bond is fragile and the egg must be nurtured before the raven is born.

He is, however, reluctant to leave Bran’s side. “Would it be too much to ask you to call me after this fiasco is finished? I want to see you again.”

Bran blushes. “When?”

“Every day,” Jojen blurts out. He laughs at himself. Bran doesn’t know how serious Jojen is, and every bit of his honesty could be interpreted as jest. “Whenever you’re available? I just want to see you. Gods, being without you…it’s just unbearable. I wish I could come with you but…”

“It’s family business,” Bran clarifies. He takes Jojen’s hand in his. Jojen is taken back, as the action is the most forward Bran has been all day. “I would love to hear from you again. I…I had a really great time. I’m sorry it ended so soon.”

Jojen squeezes the offered palm. “I did, too. I…” His words die on him when he sees the incoming lights. The street is completely empty. Few people are willing to travel this far for the sake of anything but business, and at this time at night, there was either the worst business to be had or no business at all. The latter is almost assured, given that the former would never alert anybody to their location using headlights. Jojen stares at one of the familiar, incoming cars. His eyes narrow. “That’s my brother…I…” Bran smiles at him. “I’ll call you tonight. I want to see you again, too.”

“Do you know I look forward to the most, next time?” He attaches a suggestive look. Bran turns red as his mother’s hair. Jojen leans down, and Bran panics. He did not prepare for this to be the moment. Instead of closing his eyes or leaning forward to reciprocate, he freezes. Jojen pauses midway to tell Bran, “the perfect first kiss.”

Bran’s heart tackles his ribcage. It wants out, and into Jojen’s arms. Jojen reluctantly leaves and tells Bran to be safe. He carefully leaves when the lights are drawing near—enough brightness for a distraction but not enough for seizures. Jojen disappears while Bran is still wincing. Soon, his brother and cousin come running out and a few minutes later. They hug. Both of them ask if Bran was alright waiting alone, but Bran tells them he wasn’t alone. Before they could read into his enigmatic statement, he points out that Jojen waited until they came.
“A man of mystery,” Jon notes wryly.

“Shame, I’d like to meet him,” Robb agreed.

Bran is immensely grateful it did not come down to that. There’s a reason why Sansa has not brought her boyfriend home yet. About ten minutes later, Theon arrives on foot. They know he must have been given a ride—and no one believes it was by cabbie, as evident by the huge love mark on his neck. Theon gives them a cover story of a bug bite. Jon remarks that he must have been bitten by a radiative centipede for a hickey that big. Theon asks him to “sod off.” A fight brews between the three of them. Bran attempts to intervene but is met with ignorance and dismissal. Finally, he prepares a dog whistle he cares for Summer and blows. The noise is supposed to only work on dogs but…

“What the hell was that?” Robb asks as he shuts his ears. Jon had winced at the frequency, but the sound did not physically pain him as it did Robb. Theon was unaffected.

Bran puts the whistle away. “Now that I got your attention, let’s get straight to business. What are we going to do about Rickon?”

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter is a recap on how Rickon got himself into this mess. It's one of my shorter chapters. The next two will be focused on Rickon, Shireen, and Lyanna because I've been ignoring them for a while.
2. You can still send requests to my tumblr page: sometimesimeow. There’s no ask button so you'll have to message me. But there’s a Willas/Jon story fourth on my lists of requests from the comments.
3. Hackers suck. Last week, I got one of my emails hacked. I made a website to showcase my original work (because I don't like fiction websites--too hard to navigate) and that got hacked, too. One of my credit card's info got stolen. It got to the point that I started laughing because so many bad things happened that all you can do is laugh. And they're all first world problems, too. :) :) :) 
4. I finally figured out the ending to this story. You are still welcomed to make requests for the story because I don't know what happens exactly in the middle but the ending--done.
Lyanna Mormont has three stuffed bears carefully seated on her windowsill and her bedsheets are made of plain blue wool. Her closet contains a healthy amount of skirts, pants, and dresses—jeans are folded next to the sweaters, and her accessories are located in the same drawers containing her shirts and undergarments. She owns a bookshelf with several classics and textbooks and organizes her assignments in alphabetical order. Anything from the previous year is disposed of immediately. When he was snooping, he noticed that Lyanna receives exemplary marks on all her assignments. She has another container filled with her football activities but they are located near her hamper for efficiency. Rickon has been stuck in the closet for hours—he's memorized every single detail of the slayer’s room, and he finds the place absurdly dull for someone so remarkably interesting. If anything, her austerity tells more of her personality than the thousands of flowers and gemstones filling up Sansa’s room or the layers of dirty clothes in Arya. He becomes annoyed—there’s something unnerving about someone his age being so mature. He wants to mess up her bed or knock down her books. She’d kill him—but he’s been in the closet long enough to hallucinate the benefits.

Rickon sighs. Being alone with Lyanna, or the lack of Lyanna has gotten him more invested than he liked. He should have never come, but now that he’s here, he cannot leave. Literally. He’s stuck. And it’s all Lyanna’s fault.

Lyanna, for all her adult mannerisms, finds an outlet torturing Rickon. She pretends not to care about him but relishes in the fact that she can claim an imaginary moral high ground. The teachers are terrified of her, but the students respect her enough to leave her alone and do her bidding at will. He should not be as surprised as he was when Lyanna extended her friendship to Shireen. She sought the best for her empire (and there was no one better than Shireen Baratheon) and was determined to rid herself of her enemies—namely Rickon. From the moment she’s met Shireen, she could see how Rickon felt about her and launched a war against him, beginning with an invitation to her sleepover.

Jon called him overdramatic. “Lyanna may be…precocious, but I think her and Shireen will get along. Davos and Stannis already met her. She’s made a good impression on them.”

Rickon groaned. It was a trick, he tried to convince his cousin. Jon brushed him off.

In a way, this was all Jon’s fault. His inaction forced Rickon’s hand. When he overheard Jon promising to take Shireen to the party early—Lyanna requested they “prepare” beforehand, Rickon took initiative. He called one of his minions and they called Catelyn Stark to sanction a sleepover. Ten minutes later—Rickon will have words with the little bastard about that—the Frey child called Catelyn Stark to ask if Rickon could stay over. Catelyn agreed without hesitation—it’s not like he’s Bran, Rickon muttered to himself. He shook his head. This was no time to be feeling resentful. Catelyn dropped him off promptly, giving him more than enough time to call a cab and drive all the way to the Mormont manor. Most of the residents were already out, and Rickon knew enough of the location to sneak in. The Mormonts were long time employees of the Starks and his family kept blueprints of all the houses they provided services to.

Here’s where Rickon should have known something was wrong.

Rickon knew the security codes and lock combinations to the Mormont gate. He knew the right passageways to go through at all the right times. He even, to some degree, knew where all the hidden
surprises were because the Mormonts loved a good old fashion bear trap hidden in the grass. He did not know, however, who was in the house and who was leaving. The fact that he was able to get in without being seen should have struck him as odd, but being a prideful young boy, he ignored it. Rickon is not an idiot but he’s a Stark in love and a Tully in training and that disastrous combination leads him to perform acts of face palming, mouths gaping, and fist balling stupidity that not even Robb can condone.

But Rickon ignored his better instincts. He was the type of person to travel straight because everyone knew that the fastest way out of the forest was to go through it. He managed to sneak all the way into Lyanna’s bedroom (a discovery made through several trials and errors) before the inkling that something might be wrong occurred to him.

Rickon’s intention was to do a quick in and out job—secure a few cameras in carefully placed locations and be on his way. He did not expect Lyanna’s room to be so open. There was no place to hide a camera except in spots that were either too high or too secluded to be effective. He walked towards the closet to inspect the espionage potential. Before he could finish his scan, he heard footsteps coming towards him. He sprang into the closet and slammed the doors shut.

“I thought we were going to bake cookies.” He recognized Shireen’s voice anywhere. He swooned.

“We are but we should change. You have a pretty dress on. We should not let it get dirty.”

Shireen denied the sentiment. “I brought pajamas. That’s what I’ll be staying in most of the time so I can just stay in this and change later.”

Lyanna paused. Rickon breathed a sigh of relief. If Shireen could convince Lyanna to go back into the kitchen, then Rickon could use the opportunity to escape. Lyanna was determined to make Shireen and Rickon suffer.

“I already borrowed sweats from my older sister. Here. Take it.”

Shireen’s nimble fingers captured the tossed hand me downs. She was helpless, mute, unable to deny anything Lyanna forced upon her—be it her sister’s clothing or her friendship. She asked for privacy to change and Rickon swallowed his spit the wrong way. He choked. Both girls were alerted by the noise. Lyanna turned her attention to the closet. Her eyes narrowed. Rickon huddled to avoid being seen. For the longest time, Rickon believed she would investigate the sound. He surprised her by turning back to Shireen.

“What was that?” asked Shireen.

“Nothing,” Lyanna pointed out. Her response was fast—too fast. “My house is very old. Sometimes the pipes get stuck and rub together.”

“Oh.” Shireen made no sudden movements. She remained clothed in her personal wears.

“What’s the matter now?”

“It’s just…” Shireen’s face burned. “I’m not used to dressing in front of others. Can you wait outside?"”

“It’s my room.”

“I know but…”

“We’re both girls. I live in a household filled with only women. I’ve seen your parts my whole life. I
have your genitalia.”

Shireen struggled with a response. Rickon suffered indignation on her behalf. He almost tore apart the closet doors to come to her defense and had Shireen not brought her shaky fingers up to her dress, he would have. Rickon froze as the barest hint of skin appeared on Shireen’s neck. He salivated when she undid her second button and fell apart when he caught sight of her pulsing scars. They were layered on top of her skin like flat Twizzlers and bulged out like a three-dimensional tattoo. He thought they were stunning—but Shireen lacked the same affection for them. She was an utter wretch when she began to remove her dress.

Flashbacks of her younger years came forward, and her shoulders were burden with the cruel jeers and disgusted looks of her classmates. She remembered sitting out for her swim days because the kids refused to enter the pool after her. They were afraid of being ‘contaminated’ and their parents were equally resentful. She could never forget the way the girls in her locker room would stare or the incident where one crossed paths with her and demanded to go to the nurse’s office because she was sure Shireen infected her. Despite the severe circumstances, Shireen withstood the abuse for as long as she could to prove to herself and her family that she was not a crybaby. She was **strong**—though not as strong as Lyanna, who grew impatient with her whimpering and wiped the garments off her body so fast Rickon’s pervasions remained unsatisfied. Lyanna’s position was strategic and purposeful—she placed herself directly in front of Shireen and covered the closet view.

Shireen gasped. She closed her eyes and prayed for the best.

“Here,” Lyanna said. She did not miss a beat when she forced her sister’s shirt into Shireen’s hands.

Shireen opened her eyes. She expected Lyanna to walk away afterward but the girl stood there—staring. Her gaze was neither hurtful nor pitying. She seemed intrigued, a sentiment confirmed when she asked Shireen about the source of her scaring.

“They look like burn marks, but those are skin lesions underneath them. I’ve seen them in pictures of sclerosis. What happened?”

Shireen got dressed immediately. She tried to keep her voice calm. Lyanna’s gaze was unnerving as they were inquiring. “An experimental treatment. I have—**had** scleroderma.”

Lyanna raised an eyebrow. “Going through an experimental treatment seems a bit much for an autoimmune disease.”

“**Diffuse scleroderma,**” Shireen clarified, letting her indignation slip out by a sliver. “It started to affect my lungs and heart so I couldn’t breath properly. My parents signed me up for an experimental treatment and it cured me of the major symptoms but…”

“The scars are permanent.”

Shireen nodded. “Sometimes I get the spots but the burns from the treatment cover them up.”

After her curiosity was sated, Lyanna did not speak of the matter again. She moved onto business: their sleepover. “There will be seven of us altogether. This is the first time we’ll be…making desserts instead of ordering them or buying them premade. I expect there to be no complications—no ovens blowing up, no stoves being lit on fire, none of the stuff you typically see in a kitchen.”

“What kind of kitchen do you have?”

“One that’s highly flammable.” Lyanna sighed. "My house is old, Shireen."
Shireen laughed and felt relieved when Lyanna smiled in response. She was a frank creature of a humor as dry as year old paint, but every new discovery made Shireen elated. She was delighted to be this person’s friend. She listened on as Lyanna discussed the night’s future. She wondered what kind of friends Lyanna would have. Would they be as straightforward and fearsome as the girl herself? When Lyanna stated she liked people that challenged her, did she mean they were akin to Shireen? How would they handle her presence within their sisterhood? Shireen heard that hazing situations were common in cliques and she did not know if having a girlfriend was worth it. Although…

Shireen took in her surroundings. She was in another girl’s bedroom. Her sleeping bag was located next to the closet and marked her territory for tonight’s slumber. She was going to bake cookies with this strange girl she had met twice, and be joined by half a dozen girls whose names she didn’t know. Lyanna Mormont was the type who said whatever was on her mind and twisted the knife without reserve. Shireen felt safe with her. If she was the ringleader in her group—and Shireen had no doubt that was the case—there was no way she would select someone who would make Shireen feel uncomfortable.

“What’s going on in your mind?” Lyanna pursed her lips. “Tell me. And don’t lie, I can tell when people lie.”

Shireen hesitated and then brushed her hair behind her ear. She got into the habit because Davos encouraged her to show her pretty face.

“I’ve never had a female friend before,” Shireen admitted. “I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do.” She was ashamed of the confession. Lyanna had loads of girlfriends. She must think there was something wrong with Shireen if girls didn’t like her.

“Do whatever you do with your male friends. Find a common interest and focus on that for conversation. There’s not much of a difference.”

Shireen was doubtful. Lyanna furthered her explanation by explaining that there was nothing wrong with Shireen. “Humans are creatures of habit. You live with only men. Of course, you will have more male friends. I was raised in a household of women. I find girls easier to deal with. When they meet me, boys are…”

“Intimidated?”

“Emasculated,” Lyanna growled. “Except for Rickon, but he’s a Stark. They have no sense of fear.”

Rickon knew it was an insult but chest puffed up regardless. Shireen laughed and agreed with the sentiment. Despite Lyanna’s assurance, Shireen’s self-esteem forced her to keep her opinion. For further persuasion, she pushed Lyanna for advice. “When I was in London…the girls weren’t nice to me. So my parents took me out and I…was homeschooled for a very long time because of it. I don’t think I can handle a repeat of what happened.”

“You won’t.” Lyanna sounded so confident. “I choose the people I associate with wisely. If they engage in bullying, there will be a punishment.”

Shireen became worried. “What kind of punishments?”

“Warranted punishments.”

“What are…”

“Punished, Shireen. Punished.”
Shireen shut her mouth.

When they were finished with the overview, Lyanna stood up to indicate her departure. Shireen followed with the obedience of a puppy. Before they left the room, Lyanna turned around and lodged her hands onto Shireen’s breasts. Shireen squeaked at the intrusion.

“What are you doing?” She squealed. Oh dear gods, she was being fondled. Lyanna tilted her head and made an approving noise. When she let go, Shireen was too shocked to be cross. Instead, she gaped and sputtered out unrecognizable words and questions.

From the closet, Rickon practiced his internal scream. Someone else was touching his girlfriend slash future wife slash soulmate’s breasts and it was not him. He could do nothing to stop it. He’d seen enough movies to know that once a girl took off her clothes, getting caught was no longer an option. He was condemned to the prison and he did not even enjoy the crime. While he was lamenting his actions, Lyanna defended herself.

“Oh, don’t give me that look. Girls grope each other’s breasts all the time. It’s perfectly normal.”

Shireen was about to protest before she recognized her lack of grounds. She had no clue what girls did in sleepovers. Perhaps Lyanna was right, and girls grabbed each other’s parts all willy-nilly and proceeded to do things in the videos her brothers liked to watch.

“You have a respectable pair of tits,” Lyanna continued. She opened the door and motioned Shireen to go forward. “Women in my family either carry melons or as flat as a board. There’s some charm in a pair of average sized breasts.”

Rickon gurgled about the injustice. Shireen was not average in any way, shape, or form. She was exceptional. His impulsiveness led their attention towards him again. He covered his mouth to cover his breathing.

“Are you sure it’s the pipes?”

Lyanna was quiet for the longest time. She stared directly through the closet slits and into Rickon’s eyes. Finally, she reaffirmed her initial statement. “…yes.” She turned to Shireen. Her face betrayed no emotion. She was stoic when she asked, “What else could it be?”

Shireen had an answer but chose silence over it. She was being paranoid. “Nothing. I hope it stops when we get to sleep.”

“It will.”

There was a knock on the door. Lyanna allowed the person to come in and Dacey was revealed. She smiled at Shireen. “Your friends are here. Should I send them up?”

“No,” Lyanna told her. “We’re going to the kitchen first.”

“What’s in the kitchen?”

Lyanna did not respond. She was staring at the closet.

“Lyanna, what did you do?” Dacey’s question bordered on exasperation and fear. Shireen was concerned by how genuine the worry was.

The youngest Mormont pulled her attention away to relieve her sister’s paranoia. “Shireen and I will be baking sweets with the other girls.”
“Will that be alright?”

Lyanna bristled. “You said we should learn how to cook.”

“You said that wasn’t a possibility.”

Lyanna shrugged.

Dacey continued the sentiment by pointing out that, “If something bad happens, I can’t help you. You’re basically swimming with a drunk lifeguard on duty.”

“We have Shireen.” Lyanna pushed her newest friend forward. “She needs to prove her worth.”

“Friends don’t have to prove their worth,” Dacey lectured. She nonetheless moved out of the way to grant Shireen access to the hallway. Lyanna lingered in her bedroom. She ordered Shireen to get acquainted with the rest of the girls.

“You should get to know your new friends. Some of them go to your school and one is in your grade.”

“Who is she?”

“Find out,” Lyanna instructed. “That’s how you make friends. You get information on them and you used that information to build alliances.”

Shireen was a bundle of nerves when Dacey led her downstairs. She was not ready to talk to girls. She wanted Lyanna there to mediate, to hold her hand, to guide her through the fearsome process but the Mormont shut the door in her face.

Left alone, Lyanna wandered around her spotless room and investigated the contents. Her fingers traced every surface—from her folded blankets to her dustless desk. She molested her books for wires and squeezed her stuffed animals for cameras. She moved as if she was scraping steel on top of the lacquered wood. Then, she walked towards the closet.

From where Rickon was, the pressure was heavier than gravity times infinity. He already made enough noise to attract her attention. The pressure was immense. Logically, she should be bursting in any moment. As soon as Lyanna’s hand touched the closet door, she turned on the balls of her feet and tossed her comforter for refolding. She spared Rickon nothing—not a corner glance or a fraction of a sweeping gaze. Rickon prayed for the senselessness to be a fool who counted his blessings—but his tired eyes missed too many warning labels and he could not risk falling for another trap. When Lyanna finished her ministrations, she walked over to her door. Next to the light switch was a panel of numbers. Cold sweat froze Rickon’s back.

Lyanna used one hand to cover her tracks, and the other to type in a code. “It’s been a while since I had to resort to this. It’s hard to recall the code.” The light turned green. “Fortunately, that just makes it harder to guess.”

Lyanna left her room dancing to the sound of Rickon’s internal scream. With her footsteps echoing in his waking nightmares, he sprung out of the closet and darted over to the door. He tried his best to unlock it, used every override combination he could think of, only to be disappointed by the constant red beeping. He was stuck. Older houses had a limited amount of chances—five or six at most. Only freaks like Robb kept the passcodes on hand. For the first time in his life, Rickon asked for help.

-
Bran downloads the blueprints to the Mormont house while Robb is fighting with his ex-boyfriend and best friend. He figures he’d give them ten minutes for a healthy spat—Robb’s disagreement with Bran paled in comparison to his precarious situation with Theon. When they reunited, the older Stark was giving out hugs and kisses like he inherited Hershey’s. At the moment, he is lecturing Theon as if he has the right to. (Bran isn’t aware of the details but he silently advocates on Robb’s behalf—he’s too busy saving his little brother’s ass to do so out loud, however. Theon is reckless and stupid, and while he’s always been a second brother to him, there were moments in their history when it was clear: he needed to be taken care of).

Theon, whose habit is to put up a fight for the first five minutes, dimmer into a slow reluctance for the next two and finally accept Robb’s dominance in the last few, stands his ground. He reminds Robb that he is his own person. He can do whatever and whoever he wants. He says to Robb, “It’s not like you care. Or even try to care.”

Bran recognizes a landmine when he sees one, and digs deeper into his planning. He’s heard from Shireen that the Lyanna, the youngest Mormont girl is having a sleepover tonight and he knows Rickon is stuck somewhere in her room. Bran’s father is adamant about providing the best security for his customers and is doubly cautious towards his employees. Like their home, the Mormont rooms are given their own individual security locks. Most people don’t use them—in their family, only Arya, Robb and their father employ the method and their usage is sporadic at best. Lyanna was using the protection as a prison for Rickon. Over the phone, he swears Lyanna is keeping him trapped. For good reason, Bran bitterly responded. Rickon growled and told him to mind his own business (and threw in a threatening comment about minding other people’s privates). Bran shut up immediately afterward.

When Robb, Theon, and Jon’s fight runs over their allocated amount, Bran step in to remind them that they are here for a reason outside of their polygamist spat. They need to get Rickon out and undetected.

“He doesn’t have a lot of time. He says the girls are baking right now and will move on to watching movies. They’ll be upstairs in a few hours—three tops.”

Jon groans. He cuts their fight short by asking Robb if he can get Dacey to help them out. “Maybe she can help Rickon out and have him escape through a back door?” So that he can kill the little ingrate on his own time, goes on unsaid.

Theon scoffs. “You’re mad if you believe Dacey Mormont will let a boy who sneaked into her sister’s bedroom go unscathed.”

Jon glares. He turns back to the Robb and repeats the question. “Do you think she’ll be willing to help?”

To everyone’s disappointment, he agrees with Theon. “Dacey would sooner kill Rickon than help him. At best, she’ll drag him out and call our parents to enact punishment. We’ll never hear the end of it.”

Instead of brainstorming more poor ideas, Jon accepts the possible outcome as justified. Rickon should be punished. If he continues down this road of perversion, it won’t be long until he escalates and becomes a more active version of Robb. One obsessive Stark is bad enough, but two? Jon shudders at the thought.

As if reading his mind, Robb reminds Jon of the Stark family pact. “Jon, Rickon needs our help. I understand he’s in the wrong, hells, after this, we can punish him together! On our own terms. But gods, he’s a boy in love. We can’t just take that from him and let him ruin his chances on in one night. He’s begging, Jon. Please.”
Jon sighs. He wants to refuse, but a single look into those perfect blue eyes and Jon falls apart. He asks Bran what they needed.

Bran answers with the truth. “A miracle.”

Robb grabs the phone out of Bran’s hands and studies the information. The Mormont house is old and he discovers that the wrong passcode has already been done twice. He tested out the potential override code on his mobile to get through the gates and succeeded in breaking through the first barrier. If what Rickon is saying is true, the girl’s party will be held in the kitchen or the living room on the first floor. Lyanna’s room is unknown except that it’s on the second floor. Dacey will be keeping an eye out like a decent chaperone and be situated in a room not too far off from the girls but distant enough to be out of the way. He knows that the eldest Mormont girl likes to stay in the room closest to the door because her little sister gets testy when her favorite scene is interrupted by a consistent doorbell.

There’s a possibility of success if they can distract the girls to a nearby room. Robb runs down the list of adequate distractions. He could try and seduce Dacey into letting him in. Then, he could set off all the sprinklers and mess with their plumping system so that the house floods. He could dress up as a mass murderer and force the girls outside where he’ll head in and sneak Rickon away. He considers making a report to the coppers about a strange man in area wielding a butcher knife, and allow the cops to question the girls about his whereabouts. Those investigations took forever. At worst, it will buy them more time.

When he reiterates the solution out loud—Jon angrily turns them all down. “We are not ruining Shireen’s first sleepover because Rickon cannot keep it in his pants.”

Gods, Jon is so sexy when he’s being protective. Robb agrees to Jon’s requirements with a mild swoon. Theon does not and suggests they set the house on fire instead. “They’ll be heading to a safety exit so Rickon can escape.”

Jon considers whacking him on the head. “Your idea of a distraction is arson? Are you mental?”

“I don’t see you coming up with anything better, bastard.” Theon glares. “Besides, the house is huge. We only need to set the alarms off—not burn the entire house down.”

“No,” Robb disagrees before Jon can. “We would need to burn the entire house down. The manor has heat tracking system. It locates the cause of fire and incapacitates the heat before it can get too far. The only way to encourage emergency evacuation is set off simultaneous alarms.”

“How many matches will that take?”

Jon hits him this time. The boys get into a scuffle which leads to Robb joining in to break up the fight. He makes it worse when he pulls at Theon’s arm and Theon’s response is to yank Jon’s hair. Jon grapples Theon to the ground. Robb tumbles down with them.

Bran affirms his earlier suspicion. This sausage fest needs a woman’s touch.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter includes Rickon’s escape plan. I had the hardest time writing that chapter so don’t expect much from it. Instead look forward to the following chapters.
Because I haven't gotten started on them yet so there's still time for requests. We get two major reveals in Ch. 33 and Ch. 34 and Jon and Willas date got mysteriously pushed back. We will also get a return of a guest star so that's nice. I'm behind again (which is one chapter ahead). Here's hoping everything pulls through.

2. Can anybody name all the guest appearances and where they come from? I just want to see if someone can get the full roulette. :)

3. Time passed by really fast. But everything is okay now in my life. My website should be up by next week so I'll finally have a place for my original work. Super excited for that. :) I think once I have that up, I'll get back into "steady schedule" mode and be able to finally do the requests.

4. Thank you for everybody who commented. Looking forward to hearing from you!
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

On average, ninety-five percent of cookie dough ends up in a person’s mouth before it even hits the oven. When Wylla Manderly tries to swipe a few chips, Lyanna slaps her hand hard enough to give her whiplash and forces her to spit the saliva laden mixture into a napkin. The hostess is adamant in her belief that hazardous materials are at play and such chemicals are not allowed in their orifices.

“You’re going to get salmonella,” she lectures. “And die.” The warning is something Shireen’s father would have said, but coming out of Lyanna’s mouth, the statement mimics a martial command over parental concern. She condemns Wylla to the chopping area—the portion of the kitchen that has been relegated to a pizza hut because they needed substance and Lyanna was already in for a penny so she decided to go for the pound.

While the girls are distracted with busy work, Lyanna orders each of her friends to drop off their sleeping bags in her room. She makes them go up one by one. Shireen finds the behavior peculiar but is terrified of drawing attention. Her goal is to blend into the community, not stand out as a leper. While she stirs the chips into the last batch of batter, she looks down and keeps her thoughts to herself. Ironically, if she had bothered to ask the other girls, they would have informed her that they too found the command unusual.

Lyanna is adding in the extra candies—a collection of Reese’s, crushed Butterfingers, chopped up Bounty and Chomps—when the last two girls return. They ignore her harsh stare and continue their giggling. Shireen admires their brevity. Lyanna asks if they could find a place in her room and the girls agreed that there was no problem. One of them points out that Shireen’s added presence adds a homier touch to their group. Shireen flushes in pride. She continues mixing with a hum on her lips. The sentiment is sweet but unnecessary. Lyanna could care less if they made Shireen comfortable as long as they didn’t make her uncomfortable. No, Lyanna had only one thing in mind when she sent those girls individually.

Lyanna wanted to make Rickon Stark sweat cold, hard balls of fear.

By the looks of it, no one but her has noticed the extra presence in her room. She has yet to settle on a suitable punishment for the pervert but she wants it to be good. She is well aware of the boy’s obsessive crush on her newfound friend and while she finds the extents he’s willing to go through admirable, she has little patience for burglars and creepers. Especially incompetent ones who tripped her alarms upon entering the gate.

Hastening his discovery would only put him out of his misery. The best way to bury someone is to dig a hole too deep to climb out of. Lyanna puts the last of the cookies and pizza into the oven and orders the girls upstairs to change. “You must feel disgusting,” she insists.

Beth Cassel disagrees and licks her fingers off to savor the delicacy. “This was fun. We should do this next time, but bigger. Something more fulfilling—ooh! Like cakes or pie! I bet we could do it. Shireen’s a great teacher,” she praises. “The food smells amazing.” Beth is the same age as Shireen and her future schoolmate. Lyanna’s reckoning is temporarily forgotten when she sees Shireen’s face light up.

Lyanna retrieves her vengeful spirit when she hears creaking from upstairs. Her house is old. The floors creak when there’s a mouse sleeping on her bedsheets let alone a primary schooler in her
“The food won’t be ready for half an hour. Dacey can take them out for us when they’re ready.”

“I can?”

“You can,” Lyanna reassures. She turns to Arra Umber. “Set the alarm five minutes early.”

“I heard that.”

Lyanna raises up ten fingers. The girls laughed and Arra sets the alarm for exactly twenty minutes. Lyanna shoos the girls upstairs and is tempted to order them into a single file line so that they could enter her room one by one; each footstep hammering nails of terror into Rickon’s soul. Odd commands are commonplace in her household but they needed to be justified by internal reasoning on her guests’ part and without her personal input. She wants to avoid the questions attached to that particular command. With great reluctance, she carries on silently but asks her friends to walk slowly.

“My stairs are creaking,” she tells them. She’s not lying. They creak every day, but no one ever minds. Her mother has been busy with work and most of the time Dacey is too worn out from her school and work experience. The only other person who can fix the stairs is Alysane and she has other priorities—namely her newborn child fathered by a mysterious man none of her sisters can ever dream to meet.

The girls tumble into the room like the seeds of a dandelion. Some race to Lyanna’s bed while others make themselves comfortable on her carpet. The most peculiar quality in her sterile room is a monstrosity of fluff on the floor—pounds of pillows embroidered with bears, stacked on top of each other. Lyanna suggests they change into their pajamas and carefully leans against the closet as they oblige. Shireen is less nervous the second time around, especially since the other girls are minding their business instead of eyeing down hers.

Once the last girl is finished, Lyanna slaps her closet door, a grand gesture that gathers everyone’s attention, most of all Rickon, whose face was peering against the door for a glimpse of Shireen and had the wind knocked into him. His head slams against the wall. Lyanna hears a few of hangers tumbling down. The girls hear it too but suspect no foul play except what originates from Lyanna.

To remove the attention away from herself, Lyanna asks Shireen a question. “Since we’re getting acquainted, Shireen, what are your plans?”

“For tonight?” Shireen squeaks.

“For life.” Lyanna strolls over to the bed with the dignity of a shield maiden. “You must have goals in your life. I can’t be friends with someone who doesn’t have goals.”

“Oh.” Shireen brushes away a strand of hair. “Well, my father owns a hedge fund and I’m planning to take it over one day.” She does not mention that her father is only the partial owner. Uncle Robert and Uncle Renly both own minimal shares, but either lost or sold so much of them that they no longer owned a high enough percentage to placed them on the board. Their interest in the family business is nonexistent. Uncle Robert travels the world and owns stock in various companies and Uncle Renly is enamored with his magazine. Their laissez-faire treatment of their legacy made it easy for Davos to convince the other shareholders to sell their stocks to her father and make him the majority owner.

“Oh, that’s where I know you,” Wylla points out. “You’re the Baratheon heiress.” Out of all the girls, she is the only one Shireen vaguely recognized upon meeting. Though they’ve never spoken,
she remembers seeing her at a party somewhere, decked out in silver and diamonds. Her grandfather owns private ports and leases the area out to sailors and shippers. “Has it already been decided that you’ll inherit the company after your father?”

“There’s no other option,” she informs. Her response borders on a snap and Lyanna picks up on the defensiveness like a bear to a fish.

“Don’t you have a cousin?” Wylla asks. Her intention is not to upset Shireen. As someone whose family remains intimate with the politics of aristocratic legacies, a curiosity towards the Big Seven has been instilled in her over the years.

“He’ll get it over my dead body,” Shireen hisses.

Shireen, on an objective note, understands her interest. Yet she cannot help but defend her position as heiress against Joffrey Baratheon. She refuses to lose to a demented ingrate whose father stole the position from her own because he was older and had “charisma.” Never mind that Stannis eventually received the crown—Shireen used to look at the albums of her father’s academic accomplishments and sportsmanship awards and wonder why he had to be unhappy for so long after working so hard. She refuses to let that boy take her father’s hard work away from her.

Wylla is taken back. Shireen’s face burns with embarrassment, but with her scar, her skin appears to be pulsing with rage. She regrets her dramatics as soon as they appeared and hopes no one thinks the worst of her. She already looks like a demon—she doesn’t need to be acting like one as well.

“It’s an admirable goal,” Lyanna agrees. The other girls chime in their support, with Beth Cassel praising her for not wasting her parents’ resources.

“If my father wasn’t the headmaster, there’s no way I could attend a public school. I see so many girls wasting their parents’ money and it’s so frustrating. Being given everything and not using it to better themselves. Thank goodness you’re not like that.”

Shireen breathes a sigh of relief. She has not been fed to the lions just yet. Furthermore, she cannot help but grin when she realizes that her newest friend has shared a fact about herself. Beth is the headmaster’s daughter. Parental information is something friends share with each other.

“But don’t get too impressed. Working hard does not stop you from being fortunate. You’re luckier than most of the girls in the world.”

Shireen pouts at the glory lost. She asks Lyanna what she wants to do. “Take over the world or something?” She means it as a jab, but the other girls laugh.

Beth answers for Lyanna. “Sorry to disappoint, but Lyanna’s going to be a doctor.”

Shireen’s jaw drops. “You?” She asks before she can stop herself.

Lyanna glares while the other girls laugh harder. One of them points out that they all had a similar reaction to the news. Lyanna counters that the shock is undeserved. “The last thing I want to control is a literal natural disaster. I’ll do more harm than good if I ever aspire for something that doesn’t want to be mine.”

“But why a doctor?” Though Shireen values her presence, she admits that Lyanna is the last person she wants by her bedside. Lyanna goes over to her bookshelf to retrieve a worn out volume that smells of mothballs and moss. She tosses the book over to Shireen and orders her to open it. Shireen complies, albeit fearfully, and sees pages of handwritten notes of varying signatures.
“Turn to page five,” Lyanna instructs. Shireen complies and sees a familiar name instantly.

“That’s my family!” She reads over her list of ancestors. Men and women who once held the lands and titles that her family prospered off of. Some of them shared the same names as her current relatives.

“Over the centuries, noble families have been dropping like flies. Their lands and castles are impossible to upkeep and their investments no longer show the merit they used to. Their former glory is lost. Like idiots, those people relied on their inheritance to get them through the days to come. If they had any sense, they would have followed the examples of their leaders.” Lyanna walks over and takes the book from Shireen’s hands.

“The Lannisters started it when their mines depleted. They used the rest of their savings towards colonization and finding finite resources they could exploit. The Stark took note of the changes in time took an austere lifestyle approach. Unlike the other noblemen, they did not wait until they were forced to downsize. They stopped repairing their castles and built homes instead—for them and the noblemen who resided in their area. Over time, more noble houses in the country lost power so other houses invested in the modern world. The Tyrells started importing their produce to different countries. The Martells, who initially kept to themselves, suffered a huge draught. The climate change affected their agriculture, forcing them to move onto more substantial areas like textiles. The Tullys invested in energy—namely electricity. The Arryns worked on communication, though their stock has gone down with the death of their CEO. The worst of them were the Greyjoys, who became heavily involved in the slave trade. When that became illegal, they resorted to crime. Their influence is waning each day.”

Shireen nods. She’s heard the history before but found the matter boring compared to her fantasy novels. Coming from Lyanna, the words shoot straight into her ear. “Your family, the Baratheons, got more involved in the banks, given that the current lords owed a lot of money to them. Over time, they started to gain more control over their debtors.”

“What about the Starks? What did they do?”

“Security systems, obviously.” Lyanna plays with the pages until she lands on the Stark family tree. “The Starks began by working for the government. They temporarily separated from the country and used their distance to be hired as legal mercenaries, or as they’re called today, ‘private military contractors.’” The look on Lyanna’s face made it clear she did not care for the term. “They do what the government can’t do. When they got reinstated as citizens, the Starks focused on maintaining an acceptable public image—basically locks, safes, alarms. Move up the levels and that means online security, physical access systems for companies, monitoring. Get good enough and you don’t even have to give out anything. There’s consulting. Intelligence litigation and vulnerability management. The highest is military. The Boltons, who’ve been a part of the North since the beginning, are in charge of managing defense contracts. The Karstarks are in charge of developing the new systems and installation. The Mormonts are traditionally in charge of the domestic issues. I think it’s the same for your family as well.”

Shireen remembers a man from the Caron family being in charge of advertisement and wonders how far the other managers go back in their history. “What does that have to do with you being a doctor?”

Lyanna closes the book. “Dacey is going to inherit my mother’s position, as the law of nepotism goes.” She takes the book and puts it back. “Alysane is already doing her work experience in the company. My sisters, regardless of what we tell them, will end up working for the company. Whether I am there or not there, my presence will be completely disregarded. I won’t do anything of value.”
“That’s not true,” Shireen defends. Lyanna can do anything she wants to and the older girl doubts there’s someone who can stop her. Lyanna raises up her hand to silence the Baratheon heiress.

“Security is a field where we are responsible for the lives of others before ourselves. I’ve seen people die because someone couldn’t get to them in time. I have responsibilities beyond what my family name is—I need to be able to salvage people whenever I can, not just if I can.”

“Oh.” Shireen is speechless.

She admits her desire to take over her father’s company is selfish—she wants to prove to herself she can do it. She wants to prove to other people that she’s stronger than what they expected of her. Her admiration for Lyanna grows. The other girls watch with bemused expressions when Shireen is swayed into Lyanna’s encompassing influence. The sentiment is shared by the shrouded Rickon, who stares at Lyanna through the closet in a whole new light. When he sees Shireen’s smitten expression, however, he decides to put an end to it but knocking down another round of hangers.

Shireen snaps out of her trance. The girls all direct their attentions to the closet.

“Lyanna, you have got to get this house fixed up,” Wylla groans. “I get that you’re used to it but it’s terrifying to use the bathroom in the middle of the night and think an ax murderer’s behind you because you hear creaking on the roof.”

Lyanna says there’s nothing wrong with her house while narrowing her eyes at the closet.

“It’s older than the gods.”

Beth agrees. “Remember when we went upstairs to your attic and my foot was nearly impaled by that board?”

“Don’t make it sound like you were punctured. You only got a few splinters.” Lyanna grumbles.

“I had to go to the hospital!”

“But no one died,” Arra Umber points out. “Not the worst Friday night we’ve had.”

Before Beth can respond or Shireen could ask questions, Lyanna dismisses her concerns. “You’ll be fine,” Lyanna assures her. “Besides, I’ve been taking first aid for a while now. I can fix you up if anything happens.” Lyanna walks over to the wall beside her closet door. She slams the doors open and there’s no one there. Her sweaters and jeans are bundled on the ground and if Lyanna had the decency to unravel them, she would see a redheaded Stark at her mercy. “See, no monsters.” Lyanna turns around to face the girls. “You’re all safe with me. I grew up learning how to break bones. It’s only fitting I figure out how to fix them, right?”

Lyanna slams the doors shut. As soon as she closes them, Rickon tosses the sweaters away. He takes huge gulps of breath before falling down on the duvet of knits and wool. He’s played into every trap, made all the possible setbacks. He’s not going to make his situation worse by drawing more attention to himself—and he means it this time. He remains quiet for the rest of the sleepover. Even when the girls leave to pick up the cookies, he does not make a sound. The house would have to crumble to make the pipe bit any more believable.

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When Dacey left her movie to retrieve a pop, she discovers her sister set the alarm ten minutes early. Spiteful in the way sisters are of each other, she takes Lyanna’s lack of faith as a challenge and makes a mental note to collect them exactly as the watch intended. Those cookies are going to come out raw as a monkey’s ass and Lyanna has her own paranoia to blame.
When she retreats to the couch, five minutes before the alarm goes off, Dacey hears the doorbell ring. Her intuition urges her to ignore it—she has cookies to retrieve and lessons to give. Real domestic shit. The doorbell rings again and Dacey tells herself that the only person who would be at her door this late at night is a serial killer. If she waits five minutes, she can go into the kitchen, secure the cookies, grab a knife, and then stab the serial killer before he hurts any of the girls. Her discourtesy should be commended. The doorbell rings a third time but all she can do is glare down the timer. She uses her mind to push the minutes forward and with each second she finds herself more successful in her goal—as all matters revolving around time are. The guest is insistent and attacks her in the most medieval way.

She gets a phone call.

Dacey snatches up her phone and without a hello, asks her caller if he wishes to die a violent death or suffer castration, the latter of which is directed towards Smalljon if he had the gall to call her tonight for phone sex. Her girlfriends know better than to bother her during Lyanna’s sleepover—a biweekly occasion that brought the worst of the Mormont girls because of the circumstantial misfortunes that become of them on these nights. Maybe it was the full moon, maybe it was the fact they still drank spring water from a mountain they weren’t entirely sure produced liquids.

On the other line, there is a long winded pause and a then a hesitant address. “…did I call at the wrong time?”

“Yes, you did. What is your emergency? Is it a Meera or a Roslin?”

“It’s a…what’s the minimum for me to call you again?”

“On average, a Margaery. But tonight is Lyanna’s sleepover. You need at least a Daenerys bordering a Jeyne slash Talisa to bother me.”

“Can we please stop calling that level Jeyne slash Talisa? I’m still trying to forget about what happened.”

“You’re trying to forget that you dated twins and didn’t know until you showed up at their conjoined birthday party?”

“They were fraternal twins and they had different surnames.”

“Robb, they were nearly identical,” Dacey reminds. “Besides, we’d thought that after that particular incident, you’d be a bit more cautious about choosing your partners. I didn’t think you’d miss the insignificance of a surname twice. Whatever happened to the crazed stalker I know and love?”

Dacey hears Robb groan. His dating history will forever be the seasoning of his roast. She grins despite her predicament and asks what he needs help with. “I’m feeling generous and you’re amusing me.”

“Can you come to the door? I was ringing it but no one was picking up.”

Dacey leaves her couch to greet her friend. When she opens the door, she sees a worn out Robb dressed in his button downs and dress pants—an attire signifying that a formal meeting precluded his visit or he was in the midst of one his lurker plots. Either way, she understands that nothing good could come from his presence. She invites him in regardless.

Robb turns her offer down. “I only wanted to talk to you for a bit. Do you mind if we have a moment on the porch?”
Truth be told, Dacey should mind. She should loathe whatever scheme Robb wants her to participate in but she doesn’t. Robb has dragged her into a number of plots in their youth, all of them entertaining as they were troublesome. When she follows him on her porch, she anticipates the worst because she is friends with a madman and she loves it. “Is it urgent? Should I call Smalljon?”

“Depends. Tonight, I just want to talk.”

Dacey is both relieved and disappointed when she follows him on the porch. She knows she cannot afford to leave the house while her sister is home alone but at the same time, she misses the thrill of her schoolgirl adventures. She and Robb, Smalljon and the rest of them use to have the time of their lives.

“Okay, I can’t be long. There’s a serial killer on the loose and I have to protect him from my sister.”

Robb laughs but there’s a nervous edge to his giggle. He becomes more peculiar when he tries to sit on the patio chair and before Dacey can warn him, his ass slips past the fabric and drops him to the floor. Dacey rushes over to help him out. Robb does not laugh like she expects; instead, he curses about the length he goes through and asks Dacey what’s wrong with the chair.

“The bottom is bonkers. No one can sit on it.”

“Why do you keep a broken chair?”

Dacey sighs. “For the memories, Robb.”

“What memories? The memory of a broken ass? A twisted leg? You could get hurt!”

“We like to keep our history intact. Mother is a bit of a hoarder.”

“It’s broken.”

“So? Everything in this house is broken, Robb,” Dacey sighs.

“Since when?”

“Since forever!”

“You updated your security system two weeks ago!”

“Security is different from furniture.”

Robb mutters the injustice of her living in such poor conditions. “I’m getting this hell hole fixed.” Dacey curses because she knows he is serious. Robb is generous to a fault; he believes his wealth is a blessing and a responsibility and he never hesitates to lend a dollar to people in need. The problem is that for a man of Robb’s fortune, almost everyone is in need by comparison.

“My house is fine. What are you doing here?”

Robb opens his mouth. Then, he closes it. “I’m…here to check on you?”

“You wanted to talk about me?” Dacey raises an eyebrow. “Why would you need to check on me?”

“Because you live in a death trap.” He walks over to the door and plays with the handle. Against her protests, he lets himself in and tests out the stability by tapping on the wall. He presses his ear against it and frowns. “Your internal infrastructure is damaged.” He wanders around to check out more details. Dacey gives up on stopping him. He asks her about the pipes. “They must be rusted ten times
over. When was the last time you had them replaced?”

Dacey remains silent.

Robb glowers at her. “Dacey…you have gotten them replaced right? This house is almost as old as mine. The first modern sewage system was built with lead.”

“We’ve been busy,” Dacey defends. “I’m sure my uncle or grandmother or someone in my family had it repaired at one point in time.” Maybe.

“How is this house still standing?”

“The iron from the blood of our enemies?” Dacey suggests.

Robb is unamused. Dacey wonders how long the lecture would go on for. If Robb is passionate about anything, it is about the well-being of his loved ones. Time passes by as she watches him rant about her untreated wood being the perfect breeding ground for termites and how she is the prime target for mold and mildew.

During this time, Robb forgets about his original plan to distract Dacey because he is so utterly focused on preparing her for the avalanche of brick and wood. He drags her down on the floors and gives her an estimate on how long they’ll last before they start becoming trap doors.

“Better for my enemies,” she counters. Robb grows more exasperated with the nonchalance and begins to work on the windows. He taps on them and then punches it with finesse. He swears a storm afterward.

“You have bulletproof windows that are designed to prevent light but floors that date back to the 17th century.”

“Sometimes mother gets nostalgic.”

“Your mother ran a motorcycle gang in the eighties, she didn’t own a brothel for Henry the Eighth.” His bitching grows incessant and he gets to the point where he threatens to put Smalljon on the line and ask how he could let his girlfriend live like a tramp. Dacey points out that she’s not his responsibility to take care of and he respects her life choices because he’s a real man. Then, Robb hits a nearby table and one of the legs crumbles into dust.

“Okay, so he hasn’t visited in years. Regardless, my house is just fine. People would kill to live in a home as grand and as cultural as this one.”

“They wouldn’t have to kill anybody, they could just let them live in this house and watch them die.”

They continue arguing. Dacey, who is as stubborn as bull, refuses to let Robb lecture her into obedience and Robb is unable to allow one of his best friends meet a dishonorable end by her own house. Neither of them is aware that the cookies are burning.

Behind them, Arya uses the opportunity to sneak into the doorway. Jon has already secured a spot at the back entrance. Over the phone, Sansa informs her that the girls will be coming down to pick up the cookies. She should find a place to hide until the footsteps are finished. Almost immediately, Arya discovers a broom closet and shoves her body inside. The door hinges when she tries to close it.
“Fuck,” she curses.

Sansa hears her and asks her what went wrong. She panics enough for the entire group and is silent when Arya explains the door is broken. “This entire house going to fall to ruins. I almost stepped on a nail,” she hisses.

Sansa chalks it up as a sign.

“We shouldn’t be helping him at all. Rickon should face his punishment for sneaking into a girl’s room. What kind of message are we sending to him? That it’s okay to be a stalker? To be a creep is acceptable and we’ll be there to bail him out whenever?”

“Arya,” Arya interrupts. She keeps her voice to a low whisper. From above, she can hear the girls coming down the stairs. “Rickon is our brother. We are obliged to help him when he does something wrong. It’s the Stark way.” She plays with the handle. “Besides, he’s eleven. He’s not some mass murdering lunatic or a serial rapist. He just wanted to see the girl he likes.”

“Yeah, and next week, he’ll be watching her undress through the window. Slippery slope, Arya, slippery slope.”

Arya has no patience for her do-gooder behavior. “Okay, Sansa. Let me put this in a way that will make you compliant.” Sansa makes a noise of disapproval. “Rickon knows all of our dirty secrets. All of them. He’s not afraid to use them against us. So unless you want mum to find out about your secret boyfriend, you keep your mouth shut and navigate me through this house.”

Sansa gapes. Through the phone, she screeches that Rickon would never do such a thing. “He’s just as loyal to us as we are to him.” Never mind that seconds earlier she was on the verge of selling him out.

“No, but can you imagine being at the dinner table and having him shame you with puns and insinuations. It’ll be torture. We’ll be eating our food and he’ll pull some crap like ‘oh, mum, dad, do we only eat female chickens or do they eat males, too. I would love to try a cock, don’t you agree, Sansa?’”

“What?”

Sansa is aghast. She tells Arya to get back to work and to hurry.

Arya hangs up and leaves the broom closet. She runs up the stairs, careful not to hit any spots that cause a creak or a crumble. When she is in the hallway, she follows the directions given to her by Rickon and finds the room.

Over the phone, Sansa lists out the possible override combination. “This is the tricky part. We managed to get their security codes but we can’t tell which one belongs to which room. Plus, after six chances, the alarms get triggered.”

Arya does not see the problem. “So? I have exactly six combinations.”

“No, you have four guesses. Rickon used up two of them. So choose carefully which of the six combinations you’re going to use.”

“Sansa!”

“Don’t worry,” Sansa soothes. Arya is not dumb enough to miss the smugness in her tone. She wins regardless if Rickon gets caught or not. After all, she made the effort to help him. “Your chances of
getting them right are over sixty percent.”

“Oh, like Russian Roulette. Perfectly safe.”

“Okay, your attitude is not appreciated.”

“Your—” Arya gets cut off by an incoming guest. She panics and hangs up as she looks back and forth for an escape. When she sees none, she jumps on top of a doorknob and uses the momentum to grasp onto the hanging chandelier. The girl dashes past her to enter the bathroom. “Fuck,” she swears. She is confident she can hang all night, but judging by the dust coated lights and cringing nails, the chandelier does not feel the same way. She considers her options and decides that this escapade is not worth her dancing career. She drops to the ground before the ground can hit her and runs to find a hiding space next to a painting and a table. Holding herself impossibly still when she hears a flush, she prays the girl is in a rush when she runs downstairs to join her friends.

And the girl stops at Lyanna’s doorstep.

Arya holds her breath.

“Oh shoot, I need the passcode!” The girl grumbles when she is unable to turn the knob. “Lyanna has gotten so paranoid lately…”

She leaves in a hurry, missing Arya as the older girl slinks closer into the shadows. When she is officially gone, Ayra takes a deep breath and grabs her phone. Since Lyanna is the youngest, she assumed her code would be the latest one. That theory results in a bleeding red dot. She puts in the second option and that’s a bust as well. Before she can waste her last two chances, she texts Robb for help.

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Robb gets the text message in the middle of his critique. He’s checking the dust on Dacey’s couch—which he swears is laced with mercury.

“The couch is a gift from the Forresters.”

“When?”

Dacey rolls her eyes. “It’s only thirty years old. It was an anniversary present for my grandparents.”

Robb wants to explain to her that the only thing a couch can be when it reaches double digits is a rodent’s nest. He reluctantly switches his attention when he receives a second, more urgent text asking for his assistance.

“Hold on, I have to take this. And don’t think your cabinets are off the hook.”

Dacey shakes her head. She watches Robb fumble and grumble about his text messages but proceeds to answer them to the best of his ability. While he is typing, he asks Dacey how often she changes her personal codes. After listening to her best friend lecture her on biohazards and bodies punctured by wooden planks, she cannot sense a trace of ulterior motives. She answers without hesitation.

“I change mine’s every six months. Mum adjusts our home security more frequently.”

He smiles. “At least you’re doing something right. Are your sisters as tactful?”
"Gods no," Dacey groans. "Jorelle and Lyra can barely be trusted to memorize their own middle names let alone a new passcode every week. They still use their birthdates. We barely utilize them, though, so there’s no point. Besides mum and myself, Lyanna is the only one who changes hers remotely frequently."

Robb says her family is better than hers. He tried to encourage his siblings to replace their passcodes every month but they have either refused or stopped using them altogether. He finishes up his text message and goes over to the cabinets as promised.

Before Dacey could wait to be lectured, she hears her little sister call for her. “Be right back,” she promises. Robb waves her off as he begins tapping on the wood. As soon as she leaves, he presses his phone against the base station on the wall.

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Jon sees the green dot flashing. He grins and more than a little fondly, he inwardly cheers when he realizes this success is one of Robb’s successes. He loved making cakes for Robb whenever he scored well on a test or received particularly fine praise at his rugby practices. When he enters, he sends a quick text message to Sansa and Theon saying he’s in position.

Sansa gives the okay for Bran to make his phone call. While her younger brother is properly distracted, Sansa turns to Theon and asks if he’s feeling alright. She overheard from her mother about what happened to him and Robb at the bar.

Theon shrugs, as if the whole situation is no big deal. “We’re going to remain friends for now. It’s fine.”

“Oh.” Sansa looks away. Sansa does not ask any further questions, but she is not foolish enough to disregard the term ‘for now.’

Theon does not meet her eyes. Instead, he plays on Robb’s laptop for a bit. He is not as computer savvy as Robb, but he understands the fundamentals of programming from dealing with the Starks all these years. This includes unlocking GPS satellites, switching the system from automatic to manual, or focusing a camera’s resolution on a particular target. That was heaven during their rugby days.

Inwardly, he thinks about his master plan to get through to Robb. Jon is going on his date this week. If Theon plays his cards right, then Jon and this Willas guy will have a blissful future together in Norwich and stay far, far away from him and Robb.

The best part about last night is that Theon is more confident than ever that Robb loves Theon as more than just a friend. He saw the texts messages. He listened to the voicemails. Similar to his reaction with Jon’s dating life, he got extremely jealous over the possibility that Theon could be with another man. He smiles to himself as he thinks about Ramsey. Ramsey is perfect for making Robb jealous—and he’s great in bed, too.

There wasn’t going to be any difficulty using him to make Robb want him.

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The girls’ cookies are mildly charred when they receive them from their culinary furnace. Lyanna mutters that she should have set the timer at fifteen minutes beforehand, but finds herself unable to complain when she sees how thrilled the girls are by their creations. Only Shireen looks dejected but brightens up immediately when Beth compliments her.

She is about to order them to the living room when she hears her sister groan about the couch. She
hears another voice respond, an unfamiliar voice but not one that belongs to a stranger. Like many curious girls, she decides to investigate. Lyanna peeks into the living room and her eyes widen at the sight.

Robb Stark, her sister’s ex-boyfriend, and Rickon’s older brother is investigating her house. He begins by checking their decrepit couch and complaining about the mercury-infused linen. She narrows her eyes when his phone gives him a text alert and becomes overcome with suspicion as he begins to question her sister on their security habits. Not wasting any more time, she retreats back into the kitchen and from a distance, calls out for her sister. She remains far enough from the other girls that they cannot hear.

Dacey arrives. Before the eldest Mormont girl can question her motives, she is dragged into a corner of the room where no one can hear them.

“What the hell is Robb Stark doing here?”

Dacey pulls her hand away and rubs her wrist. “He came to check on our house.”

“Why?”

“Because we’re one screw away from becoming a construction zone?” Dacey suggests. “Lyanna, he’s not a stranger. I know you’re worried about the serial killer but trust me, it’s not Robb.”

Such a thought has nothing to do with why she’s paranoid! “How does he know about our house? He hasn’t been here in years!”

“I don’t know, Lyanna. Why else would he be here?” Dacey too assumed that Robb used the house as an excuse. Only in her mind, he found out about her conversation with Jon and wanted to discuss it with her. She chose to count her blessings and be happy he wasn’t here on a get Jon back scheme.

Lyanna opens her mouth to answer but quickly shuts it. She’ll be in as much trouble as Rickon if Dacey finds out she let a boy stay in her closet just to humiliate him.

“Why’s he alone?”

“Because you dragged me out of the living room.”

Lyanna’s begins to push Dacey back to her quarters. “Keep an eye on him—don’t let him out of your sight.” Once Dacey gets her foot in the other room, Lyanna dashes back to the rest of the girls. Pass the allure of sweet smelling morsels and boiling pizza sauce, she sees they already started to enjoy their slices. Beth pushes Lyanna’s plate towards her. “Here’s your portion.”

Lyanna disregards the food. She looks around. “Where’s Shireen?”

Beth swallows her piece. “She got a phone call from one of her brothers. She decided to take it outside.”

“She let her go outside alone?”

“She says she’ll be back in a moment.”

Lyanna thinks about banging her head against the table and decides against it. Being frustrated won’t do anything for her. Just as she’s about head to the backdoor to get Shireen, the lights go out. One girl screams in terror while Lyanna curses with more viciousness than someone her years should possess. She orders everyone not to panic. She grabs a flashlight she knows is located in the second
drawer and uses it as a directory.

“There’s candles underneath the sinks. Beth, get them and light them with the stoves. They run on gas so they aren’t affected by the blackout. All of you, stay here.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to get Shireen.”

“No you won’t,” Dacey instructs when she comes into the kitchen. Like Lyanna, she is also holding a flashlight. “We’re heading to the backdoor now. We’ll send her in if we see her.”

Lyanna glares at Robb. The darkness shields her glowers with like the shade shielding archers in a tree. Dacey and Robb move forwards to the outbox despite Lyanna’s protest. Truth be told, she wants to head upstairs but knows that’s a horror movie willing to happen and she’s not getting hacked by a chainsaw tonight.

Beth tries to soothe Lyanna’s worries. “Shireen is fine. She’ll be here any moment, I bet.”

“How do you know?” Lyanna retorts. “Nothing ever good happens during a blackout. I need to get her. She could have fallen down a trap door or a pithole or dropped into the basement. It’s a mess. I’m pretty sure there’s a mummified relative there.”

“What is wrong with your house?” Lyanna turns around and shoves the light into Shireen’s face. Placed in the wrong direction, the girls scream. Shireen winces and tries shove off the familiar reaction. It turns out to be relatively easy when Lyanna whacks her on the head.

“What are you doing going outside when there’s a serial killer on the loose?”

Shireen apologizes. “I had to…my brother called. He had a few questions he wanted me to answer. Personal questions.”

“Why’d you have to take it outside?” Lyanna asks. In the dark, she was twice as menacing.

“He didn’t feel comfortable with the noise in the background. He said he needed to speak to me alone. I wasn’t that far. I was just outside the backdoor.”

“What?”

Shireen raises an eyebrow. “I was practically in the house. Gods, you’re paranoid.”

“No, I mean, how did you get through the back door?”

“It was open.” Shireen pouts. “Really, for someone who values privacy, you should really pay attention to that type of stuff. Anybody could have come in.”

“Did you lock it?”

“Yes, of course, I did—“

Lyanna groans. “Well, you shouldn’t have!”

“What?” Shireen is taken back. “Lyanna, you can’t leave those types of doors unlocked.”

Before Lyanna can explain her positioned, the lights went back on.
Dacey comes back with a triumphed grin. Robb Stark is by her side. “Sorry to interrupt. Someone must have accidentally triggered the light box when they closed the door manually. God, that’s such an archaic security measure.”

“I’ll have it fixed when I get the renovations on your house,” Robb promises.

“You’re not getting anything fixed except what’s down there,” Dacey threatens. She turns to the girls. “The problem should be solved. Are you girls okay?”

“How did the door get unlocked in the first place? She would only need to manually close it if it was already opened.”

“One of us must have forgotten to,” Dacey shrugs. “We have so many codes, Lyanna. We forget them all the time.”

“I never forget. Not on my sleepover days.”

“Lyanna,” Dacey warns. “I’ll check all the locks before we leave tonight and the cameras for good measure. For all we know, the mice chewed on one of the wires and caused an outage furthered triggered by manual use. It happens. Look at our house.”

Lyanna remains unconvinced. She wants to argue but refuses to do so in front of Robb Stark. Instead, she orders Wylla to go up to her room to get something from her closet. She gives her the code. Wylla is confused but does as commanded. Robb is about to leave when Lyanna asks him to stay.

“I want you to stay for this.”

Dacey calls her childish, but Robb does the unusual and agrees. He’s calm, which confirms Lyanna’s suspicions. When Wylla comes down, she is empty handed. “What did you want me to bring again?”

Lyanna considers making up an item but then shuts her mouth. She mutters nothing as she crumbles inwardly in defeat. Well played, Rickon Stark. She looks into her sister’s eyes and asks if the rest of them can have the living room area.

Dacey complies. She takes Robb by the arm and shows him to the door.

“Sorry about my sister…she’s intense.”

“No, don’t be sorry. She’ll go places for sure.”

Dacey laughs and says that’s one way to look at it. Robb wanders back to his car with a mind of refurbishment and renovations and thinks of all the new security systems he could be making. Sansa, Jon, Theon, and Rickon are in their own car while Arya, Robb, and Bran take their second one. The eldest Stark girl and the Snow boy took on the responsibility of disciplining the youngest Stark.

At the end of the night, Shireen puts her two cents in for the movie commentary. She is blissful and happy and chatting up a story. On the far side of the room, Lyanna is watching a video. The cameras are blocked during the darkness. Certain aspect of the cameras had been removed, most likely from an outside source. Nonetheless, it does nothing to stop the cameras working outside the Mormont security cameras, such as the one Lyanna placed in her teddy bears years ago. She sees Rickon sneak into her closet.
“Pervert,” she mutters.

“What’s wrong?” Shireen asks.

“Nothing,” Lyanna answers as she tucks her camera phone away. “I’ll just take care of it later.”

Chapter End Notes

1. Oh wow. Okay. For my other story, it took me one day to write nine thousand words. This chapter took me two weeks. I am officially behind and have yet to complete Ch.33. So forgive me if next week, I update at night instead of the morning (or whatever your time is—I usually update at 12:00 AM-2:00 AM Hawaii Time)
2. I am so happy that I finished this chapter. To be honest, this one was extremely hard to write. I’ve never written an escape scene before so I think I bit off more than I could chew. I had to cut it short for this reason. I hope it is not too messy!
3. Nonetheless, I am definitely looking forward to the next chapter! My plan for the next three chapters is to explain a few things:
   - Jojen’s past is going to be revealed
   - Sansa’s history with Sandor and Joffrey—I’ve been getting a lot of requests for more SanSan so I want to fulfill them

Since I have not written anything yet (but I will get it done on time), is there anything you want me to explain that’s been confusing? I want to answer everything I can during these chapters without spoiling the ending.
To no one's surprise but their parents, Rickon is on his best behavior all week. He even keeps a safe distance from Shireen—the recommended amount advised by courts in harassment suits and definitely not of his own volition. His siblings told their parents that Rickon caused a ruckus at the Frey house by sneaking out of the sleepover and walking home because he got bored of his company. Rickon played along without a single hitch in his deception. His mother made it clear that she would not tolerate his rudeness in the future. She kept him under house arrest, or as they liked to claim, ‘grounded until the next full moon.’ In the past, a simple grounding was nothing. It was not until his siblings offered their time as prison guards did Rickon actually come to terms with his entrapment.

With the few spurts of freedom he has, Rickon complains about the situation to Jojen. He emphasizes on the injustice of their punishment.

“They’re keeping me trapped! I overheard Jon saying that Shireen wants to visit a pool. We have a pool! Instead, he’s planning to take them to a lake! Do you know what that could do to Shireen’s skin?”

“What can it do?”

“Who knows? But it’s either going to have a really good effect or a really bad one! Can you imagine her skin glistening with water? Or bursting into hives? So many things could happen and I can’t watch a single second!”

Jojen fights back his amused smirk. Rickon’s precocious nature will be the death of him. “You’ve gotten yourself into enough trouble. Shouldn’t you take a break from all this surveillance?”

“But she’s beautiful!” Rickon’s exclamation is entirely sincere. If Jojen asked him where the sun shines and the flowers bloom, Rickon would answer ‘Shireen’ with every fiber of his being. Jojen appreciates the passion. Rickon’s schoolboy crush made his feelings for Bran seem normal.

Before Rickon can call his older companion out on daydreaming, Jojen changes the topic by asking what the youngest Stark plans to do once he’s free. Having held Bran’s palm in his hand, Jojen believes he’s a bit of an expert in getting one-sided romances to be reciprocated.

“Have you tried courting Shireen?”

Rickon rolls his eyes. “Of course I have. That’s what I’ve been doing this entire summer. That’s what got me into this mess with my family.”

Jojen laughs. “No, I mean …actually courting her. Sending her love letters, or love texts. Finding out how she is feeling that day and if she doesn’t respond, give her time to enjoy her solitude. Give her flowers. Read the books she likes so that you can quote them in a conversation because you know it makes her smile when she realizes you thought so much of her.”

Rickon stares at Jojen like he grew a second head. “…does that work?” He sounds amazed.

Jojen grins. “It worked for me. Bran and I are going to have our second date soon.” To save Bran’s innocence, he refuses to investigate the methods Peter used to acquire the items Jojen asked for. His
cousin owes him a number of favors and he cannot think of a more worthwhile cause to cash them in beside Bran’s smile.

Rickon is not sure he believes Jojen—the older boy is equipped with loose screws and faulty reasoning. He cannot deny, however, that Jojen has made advances with Bran that Rickon could only dream about with Shireen. *He held Bran’s hand*. They might start kissing each other soon. *On the lips.*

From doubt to regard, Rickon vocalizes his brainstorming to Jojen who in return, aids him by rejecting any advance that might be misconstrued as threatening. They continue their conversation consisting of Rickon’s rapid-fire ideas and Jojen’s lazy responses. Jojen does sense the oncoming presence—he saw the flash of red from afar—but cannot find the point in shielding himself from ridicule. The summer is to run another two months. He might as well face the music—even if it is only the interlude.

“Rickon, what are you doing out?”

Sansa keeps her composure though Jojen can tell, underneath all that stiffness and poise, she is seething with rage. Rickon is far too comfortable with him—his body language, Shaggydog’s familiarity—she knows that this is not the first time they’ve met. She suspects the worse—he does not blame her but he cannot help but feel resentful that she thinks so little of him. He crossed the line with Bran, yes, but only because he is *Bran*. Rickon is charming, the way all Stark-Tully breeds tend to be, but he is not *Bran* and Rickon will never cause his brain to have a biopsy of reason and rationality.

“I’m still at home,” Rickon defends. He senses her mood as well but owes it to him being grounded and wandering around without permission.

“You still need supervision. Go inside and have Osha get you a snack.”

Rickon grumbles—he hates being given orders. He gets up regardless and says goodbye to Jojen. Sansa watches her little brother pitter away into the house and then directs her attention to Jojen. He defends himself by saying he is not interested.

“I wasn’t aware pedophiles had a type.”

“They do,” he informs her for the sake of contrary and correction. “And I’m not a pedophile,” There is sass in his sentence. They have been through this before. “Bran is the only one I have ever wanted and he will be the only one I ever want. My love is not confined to a contraption used to segregate society.” He smiles at her—completely at ease, as if they are in the fields on holiday, enjoying the sun. “How are you, Sansa?”

Sansa ignores the question. “I don’t want you talking to my brothers—either of them. You are going to stop all communication with Rickon and if I find out that you have contacted Bran—”

“Too late for that.”

Sansa’s eyes widen. “What?”

“Yes, I figured I’d be honest with you to make up for last time. What does it matter anyways? What can you do to me?” Jojen challenges.

"I can have you arrested. Again."

"Yes," Jojen agrees. "You could. I let you do that last time. I'm afraid, though, I cannot let you get
away with it again." Jojen sighs as he thinks about Bran's smile, the shape of his knuckles, the pen marks on his fingers. "I never thought I would get to where I am today. I will not lose him this time."

Sansa scoffs. "And how are you going to stop me?"

“Well, in order for you to stop me, you'd have to tell your mother. And I’m not the only one with a past, Sansa. The difference between the both of us, however, is that I have paid my dues. When will you remove your debts? Because as far as I am concerned, you had someone else write the check.”

“Is that a threat?” Sansa asks. She grasps onto the remaining crumbs of courage that’s left on the plate and they do nothing to sate her fear. “Because I’m not falling for it. You have nothing on me but the odds are against you.”

“And what did I do? No, what did you see me do that night? The lights were off. You saw nothing but what your mind imagined. If not for the evidence in my room, the prosecutor would have never been able to use your testimony. Your truth does not exist.”

“Jojen, I am warning you. As someone who was once my friend, you know I would do anything to protect my family.”

“I know,” Jojen assures her. “I know everything. Things you have told me; things you haven’t told anybody. We swim in the same circle now and both our moral compasses are leading south.” He looks deep into her eyes. “I’ll tell you a secret, Sansa, as someone who was once your friend. Bran and I are going to fall in love. Regardless of what you do, what your mother does to separate us, there is no point. The strings have come together to make our romance a reality. They cannot come undone. While you would do anything for your family, I would do anything for Bran.” He gets up.

Chills dance on Sansa’s spine as she latches onto Jojen’s arm. She looks into his eyes and they are hazy—they are always hazy and fearsome and peering. She holds her ground despite her fear. Desperation enters her heart and she throws a low blow. “If you love him so much, you’d want him to be happy. He won’t be happy with you.”

“You don’t get to decide that,” Jojen replies sharply. “No one but Bran and I get to make that decision.”

“Bran is fourteen. He cannot make those kinds of decisions!”

“Were you not only a year older than him, Sansa? When you fell in love with Sandor?”

“This is not about me. This is about Bran and doing what is best for him. I know that look in your eyes, Jojen.” Sansa turns around. “You are mad if you think I will let this go.”

“No, I am fine. You are mad if you think I won’t tell your boyfriend what really happened that night with Joffrey.”

Sansa stops. She turns around.

“Don’t pretend like you are a saint. There’s darkness inside you—a shrewd sense of entitlement embedded in your soul that demands the world. What other people do not see is the lengths you would go to achieve it. They think you are weak but in reality, you will survive us all.” Jojen reminds her of the ultimate truth. “I see everything,” he tells her. “I am not stupid. I helped you back then because I needed you to be distracted enough. You knew there was something wrong about my compliance and you did nothing because you were desperate. We are not good people, Sansa. We are lovers—and in this world, love is stronger than any man with a bag of gold or a sword.”
They stand together in silence. When Sansa says nothing, he chooses to make his departure. Sansa, for all the hatred in her heart, does not bare him the same ill will she does Joffrey for Jojen is right. They are cut from the same cloth and though she loathes to admit it, she understands Jojen’s motives as disillusioned but pure. She is sickened with herself.

Instead of returning to her design room, she grabs her keys and heads to the garage. She thinks about Bran and her mother and wonders what fate is waiting for the girl who is willing to betray her own family for the sake of protecting her first love.

No, she thinks. She cannot start lying to herself now. Sansa understands that whatever Jojen claims to know (and he knows more, he always knows more than he lets on, for if she gives him bones, he will find the meat), the knowledge incriminates her most of all.

While Sansa is consumed with her thoughts, she barely has time to notice her surroundings. The situation is ideal for a tragedy. When a young teenage boy, not much older than Bran, runs onto the street, there is no reason Sansa would not hit him; not leave him as broken and bruised as her younger brother for demons to feast on.

She is fortunate in the regard that she steps on the brakes in time. The boy in question expresses his grievances with words that would make a whore blush. She takes it all with heavy breaths and grand relief.

Like Joffrey, she was born with a pot of gold. Her stomach churns and she pulls over to the side to draw some heavy breaths. When she regains her health, she recalls the last time she was put into this situation. The memory pacifies her. Whenever she thinks about Joffrey, she remembers that everything she has done, was done to bad people.

If Sansa Stark could return to any point in time, she would return to when she was fifteen. Not fourteen, when she first accepted Joffrey’s date and fell madly in love and then devastatingly on the floor when he first struck her. She wanted to remember every hit he gave her so that she would have the sense not to believe in “I’ll never do it again.” Fifteen was how old she was when she forgave him the second time. Fifteen was when she was self-deprecating and desperate enough to be with a boy who hit her because she believed she was damaged goods. She did so many stupid things when she was fifteen, but getting into a car when Joffrey was drunk was one of the worst.

Sansa sat in the backseat. She was condemned there because Joffrey’s friends decided to tag along and only a whipping boy let his girlfriend ride shotgun when his mates were in the car. Instead of dropping her off home, he drove to the nearest pub, playing music that made her eardrums pop and keeping the windows down so that the pedestrians could hear their cheers. He kept going faster and faster. His friends were hooting and howling—one made a pass at Sansa. Touched her thigh and called her pretty. Joffrey was too intoxicated to care. He would find out about it later and blame her—he always blamed her for everything.

The car accelerated until the street lights blurred into streaks and shooting stars. Sansa wanted to cry. She prayed for a copper to see them. It would be humiliating to have to face her parents but anything was better than death. Joffrey cheered into the sky as he went a staggering twenty miles over the speed limit. The bile pushed pass Sansa’s throat. She tried to swallow it back.

Out of nowhere, Joffrey slammed the breaks. Sansa’s head hit the back of the car seat at full force. The vomit poured out of her throat. She could hear Joffrey swearing but it wasn’t at her. He was screaming profanities at whoever was in front of him.
“You stupid cunt! Get the fuck out of my way! What the fuck is wrong with you!” Sansa looked up and saw a teenage boy flip the ‘V’ before scampering off once he caught sight of the other men in the car. Joffrey choose his friends wisely. Cowardly brutes who liked gold and the whores it bought them.

Joffrey returned to his recklessness shortly after. Sansa saw the green on the floor and for the first and only time tonight, was glad for the lack of lunacy in the vehicle. No one could pin the vomit on her.

They arrive to the pub with prior inebriation and caused a scene upon entrance. Sansa sunk in their shadows. She was the only girl amongst a group of vulgar young men and she cringed at the thought of running into someone she knew. The only saving grace was that Joffrey chose a pub that was nearly empty, a hole in the wall with scatterings of unsavory individuals who stared but did nothing.

Joffrey demanded a pint for him and all his friends. When they came, he demanded another and then called for round of shots. More brown, gold, and white foam made its way onto their table and Sansa wondered how long she could stomach the madness. She could taste her dinner again. She thought about leaving but realized she had no ride. The only other option was to wait for Joffrey to be finished.

Sansa got up from her seat. When Joffrey grabbed her arm, tightened his fingers around her wrist and forced bruises on her flesh, he asked where she was going. She told him she was getting a drink. He liked it when she drank—alcohol made her soft and pliable. She never got as drunk as he would like, though. He stared at her suspiciously. She could tell him the sky was blue and he call her a liar. Finally, he let go of her wrist. Once at the bar, she asked for the owner to call for a cabbie.

The man complied with a weary glance towards his new patrons. If not for Joffrey’s grandfather, the men would have been escorted out before they even got through the doors. The sound of a stumble drew near and Sansa winced. Joffrey and his pungent breath felt heavy on her neck.

“What’s my girl ordered?” He slurred. He swung his arm around Sansa like he was laying a jacket on a chair. He pulled her towards him. His touch felt like a slug slobbering on her skin.

The bartender, to his credit, did not answer. Instead, he pulled out a glass and made a show pouring out the golden liquid. He pushed it towards Sansa. Sansa stared at the bartender as if he was a traitor.

“What’s the matter? Drink it.”

Sansa hesitated. She wanted to refuse but the grip around her body grew tight. With a shaky hand and water welling up on her tear line, she took the glass and sipped. She paused and took another gulp. She let the fizz pop on her tongue and savored the sweetness. Soda, she thought, with added foam for the pretense. She took in slow sips, making a show to wince whenever Joffrey was watching. When he was satisfied, he went back to his mates.

They continued to be amused with themselves like monkeys in the zoo. When five minutes passed, the bartender took away her drink and discretely handed her a note, saying that the cabbie was here. She told Joffrey that she was going to the bathroom. Almost as soon as she stood up, Meryn Trant called foul play.

“What’s your girl going?” He asked Joffrey.

Joffrey, forgetting Sansa’s excuse immediately, narrowed his eyes. “Where are you going, Sansa? I didn’t say you could leave.”
Sansa composed herself. She smiled and lied, “The bathroom, Joffrey. I told you.”

“That’s not where the bathroom is,” he told Joffrey. “I think your girl is trying to pull one over you.”

The accusation incensed him. Sansa’s eyes widened as Joffrey marched towards her. She tried to run. He caught her in his grip and dragged her to the table. Her heart was pounding. He dug his nails into his skin. She could see her blood on his nails. She sobbed and begged Joffrey to stop. “I was going to the bathroom, I swear! Joffrey! Please! You have to believe me! I would never lie to you! I love you!”

“I hate liars,” he hissed. “You’re such a good fucking liar, aren’t you, Sansa?” He tossed her onto the table. Sansa cried louder as her back slammed against the edge.

Joffrey looked at his men. “I think my lady needs to be taught a lesson.” He nodded towards her. “Why don’t you show her what happens when pretty little girls act like whores?”

Sansa screamed as the men grabbed her by the arms and held her down on the table. The bartender watched but did nothing. He walked away. The man must be indebted to the Lannisters—Sansa was used to the indifference whenever Joffrey’s family got involved. One of the men ripped apart her skirt. The other tore off her blouse. When she felt an erection against her palm, she screamed again, praying to the gods someone heard her.

“Please Joffrey! Stop! I’m sorry! I’m sorry for lying to you! I won’t do it again!”

Meryn took the opportunity to slap her. Joffrey had another swig of his drink. Then, he scolded his friends for being too harsh. “Try not to ruin that face of hers. I like her pretty.” He did not seem to care if his friends did anything else. He let them squeeze her breasts and massage her thighs. When Boros Blount drifted towards her cunt, things were put to an end.

Sansa could feel the blood drip on her thighs before she could see it. Boros’ head was being split apart by the wooden table he laid her on. His head was slammed repeatedly. Every time he was brought up, more blood rained on her. Her wrists were set free but by then, it was too late. Boros’ limp body fell with a thump—a sound reminiscent of his heavy form. The other men were just as lucky. Sansa watched as they were thrown on the ground, against the walls, and tossed on top of the counters. They were beaten within an inch of their lives. All of them would not leave this bar without swollen sockets and open wounds. Some would need to be hospitalized. Meryn Trant withstood the beatings the longest. He tried to slam a bottle on his assailant’s head. Sansa was grimly amused when her savior showed no signs of terror. He took the shattered glass pieces and shanked his stomach. Meryn Trant fell to the ground.

All the while, Joffrey hid like a coward.

Sansa took note of her savior. She recognized him instantly for his trademark scars and large form. At fifteen, she only remembered Sandor as Joffrey’s disfigured bodyguard who quit several months into their relationship. Though he was not handsome, Sansa found him intriguing in the way posh girls did with all dangerous men. When Sandor was finished with Joffrey’s mates, he faced their leader. The boy shrieked with every step. He tried to save himself by appealing to his sense of nostalgia. He reminded Sandor of his past employment. When Sandor proceeded, Joffrey screamed that he was Joffrey Baratheon. His father would make his life hell. His grandfather would have him killed. Sandor bore the bastard no regard. He took another step further and grabbed him by the collar. Sansa gasped as her boyfriend was lifted in the air with one hand.

Sandor said nothing. He wanted Joffrey to beg.
Snasa had never felt arousal before that day. Whether it was seeing Joffrey grovel and watching Sandor brutalize half a dozen men to defend her honor—like she was princess and he was her knight—she knew that she was dripping in more than just blood.

She was distracted from her thoughts when she heard Joffrey squealing. He sounded deliciously like a pig and she was feeling peckish for some bacon. To her disappointment, Sandor did not smack him around like the others. He was still a Lannister, after all. Instead, Joffrey was tossed towards the door like an empty sack. His ass hit the floor first.

“Get out,” Sandor growled. “If I see you again with her, your grandfather won’t be able to save you.”

Joffrey scrambled to the door and crawled his way out. He did not look back to check on Sansa. Sandor could have raped her for all he cared. When he was out of sight, Sansa took a few shallow breaths—for her, the nightmare was not over. Any one of those men could wake up, or Joffrey could return. Her fears were assuaged when she felt a jacket drape over her shoulders. Unlike Joffrey’s arms, she felt safe under its protection. She looked up at Sandor but the man was already at the counter. The bartender had a piece of cloth and ice prepared. She saw his ashamed expression.

Sandor returned to her side and pressed the coolness against her cheek. Tightening her thighs, she made sure to keep her expression demure underneath her lustfulness. She was lady, after all. “Thank you,” she whispered, hoping her breathlessness could be disguised as relief over desire.

“We should call you a cab after we get you fixed up,” Sandor told her. He ignored her gratefulness. “Or I could give you a ride but I don’t think you want to be next to a man right now—”

“I would love to ride with you!” Sansa protested. Oh, she flushed with shame. She must sound so wanton! “You saved me. You are…Sandor, correct? You used to work for Joffrey.”

Sandor grunted. “Fucking hells, I can’t believe you remember that.”

Sansa smiled. She hoped the blood didn’t stain her teeth. “You were always so kind to me, of course I remember.” She touched his arm. “If it is not too much of an inconvenience, I would be grateful to have you take me home.”

Sandor seemed reluctant. He turned around and asked the bartender if he needed anymore assistance. The man shook his head. Sansa grinned triumphantly as Sandor helped her to her feet. She did not know if her lightheadedness was feigned, but she did know that she was tired. She wanted to be held. Sansa took one step forward and landed in his arms.

“I’m sorry,” she told him. Her forehead was still resting on his chest.

“Yeah.” He responded by wrapping his arm around her waist. “This okay?”

Sansa nodded. His touch felt good.

He took her outside and led her to his bike. He asked if she was well enough to ride, or else he would order her a cab. Sansa assured him that she would be fine as long as they sat extremely close together. When he asked if she still lived at the same location, she hesitated to answer.

Sandor waited.

“Can we…I don’t want to go home right now,” she answered. “Just drop me off somewhere near and I’ll be fine.” She set out the bait. If Sandor was half the man she hoped he was, he would take it.
True enough, Sandor growled. He offered up his own home in response. “You can wait there until the bruises settle. I bet your parents think you’re staying over at a friend’s house.”

Sansa nodded. She got on the bike and let him put on the helmet for her. She told him she had never ridden a motorcycle before. She shivered when he touched her neck to get her hair out of the way.

During the ride, she pressed her tender breasts against his back and hoped he could sense her perky nipples against his shirt. He was not wearing his jacket—she was and the scent of his aftershave was intoxicating—but that meant he had no protection from her arousal. His back riddled with scars and keloids. Sansa’s hands caressed the muscles on his chest. Her purrs were overwhelmed by the sound of the engine. Joffrey was not as hard. Sandor was a real man.

The ride to his flat was short. Sandor lived in a middle class neighborhood with tinted windows and empty streets. He kept Sansa by his side at all times. When they got into his flat, he took back his jacket and offered her a seat on the couch. When she took it, he went to his bedroom to find her a shirt to wear. He returned and asked if she’d like a drink.

Feeling bold, she requested a glass of wine. It was the only alcohol she could tolerate and she hoped the elegance of the liquor made her seem older. Sandor’s lips twitched as if the action contradicted her intentions, but he complied to her request.

“I only got the cheap stuff,” he told her when he handed her a glass of red. “Don’t blame me when it burns through your tongue.”

Sansa would never blame him for anything. She took the glass and made a few sips. He grabbed a beer and told her where the bathroom was. “I have a guest room you can stay in. The swelling should go down by tomorrow.”

The mention of her mother and father made her seem obscenely young. She put down her glass and left to change. She tried to sway her hips a bit when she walked—at fifteen, her body was already reaching her twenty-five. She knew she was beautiful and Sandor knew it as well. She could feel his eyes on her.

Her return was well received. When he saw her in his nightshirt—and only his nightshirt, he paused. Sansa bit back her grin when his eyes trailed onto her thighs. She tried to wash off the blood on her skin but the residue was still there to remind him what he won. Her sister would lecture her mercilessly about her behavior—she was not some prize for men to fight over. Yet, the thought of the lengths Sandor went to keep her chastity made her burn. She wanted Sandor to appreciate her more.

In the past, Sandor was always kind to her in his own rough way. Joffrey’s cruel intentions emerged in the third month of their relationship. She still remembered her first bruise—left cheek with a scratch below her eye. Before, she did not appreciate Sandor’s efforts to prevent the escalation. Then, he was gone and Joffrey became more brutal and there was no one to back her excuses anymore, no more seconding on events that never occurred.

She forgot about him until tonight.

To her surprise, he asked if she would like something to eat. He could order something for her. The lady in Sansa did not want to intrude but the teenager in her wanted to be spoiled for once by a man who was not a part of her family.

“Yes, that would be nice. Thank you, Sandor.”
Snador nodded and asked if curry was acceptable.

“I love curry,” she told him. She was lying. Curry was fine, but she didn’t love it. She loved that Sandor was getting it for her. Then, he let her pick whatever channel she wished and offered her a sheet if she found his apartment chilly. He refilled her wine glass when it was done and set the plates when the food came. For the first time in a year, she was being treated the way she always imagined she’d be and the man who was treating her that way was not her boyfriend.

Sansa did not mind one bit. Later into the evening, she grew more entitled. She enjoyed making demands for she made so little in the past couple of months. She did not answer any of Joffrey’s text messages—no matter how threatening they became. In fact, she pretended to be more scared than she was when she saw the first one. Sandor told her to call him if he tried to hurt her again.

“You’re being so kind to me. I don’t know how I could repay you.”

Sandor savagely ripped off a piece of chicken. “I’m not doing much.”

“You saved me,” Sansa argued. She made sure to bat her pretty doe eyes up at him. “I don’t know what would have happened if you didn’t come in time.” Joffrey would have let them continued to rough her up. Touch her more. Violate her in all but the worst way. The only thing he would not have done was let them rape her themselves. Joffrey always needed to have the first taste.

“Yeah.” Sandor took another swig of his beer. “Well, I didn’t do much for you back then. Might as well put in some effort now.”

Sansa tightened her grip around the scar. She did not want this conversation to turn into a guilt trip. She figured that on some level, Sandor might have only saved her for the sake of relieving his past regrets. He owed the Lannisters a lot. The second he was freed from his debt, he left with only a warning for her to get out while she could. She did not listen. Sansa would never blame him for doing what she could not.

“How did you get your scar?” She changed the topic after finishing her second glass of wine. The curry was half finished. She was feeling frisky.

“My brother.”

Sansa stared. Sandor sighed when he saw her expression. “You really want to know?”

After a pause, Sansa nodded.

“I was seven years old. Every time my father came back from his business trips with Joffrey’s grandfather, he gave us a gift. Except I decided that I wanted my brother’s toy. It was a wooden knight, all painted up. Gregor didn’t give a shit about it. He was too old for toys, he said. But he didn’t like people touching his things and he didn't like me. One day, he caught me playing with it. Are you listening, pretty bird?”

Sansa gasped. She was in too deep; she could not even enjoy being called pretty by Sandor.

“He took me outside where we had a grill. Without saying a word, Gregor turned it on. I tried getting away from him but he made me watch. He broke my arm so that I couldn't struggle. He forced me to stare at it until I could see the coals turning red. When it started to sizzle, he shoved the side of my face onto the burning coals and held me there while I screamed. Do you know what happened afterward?”

Sansa shook her head.
“Do you want to know?” He asked her again. He was daring her. He was waiting for her to say no, to go to bed, to apologize for pushing him. Sansa stayed.

“Nothing,” he answered. “My father was too weak to stop him. The most he could do for me was get me medical attention and that demanded a lot of money. We became more indebted to the Lannisters after that. Every day I worked for your bastard of boyfriend, I wanted to punch his golden face into his ass.”

Despite her misery, Sansa coughed out a laugh. She wiped away her tears and looked at Sandor. Try as she might, she could not hide the pity on her face.

Sandor shook his head. “Don’t look so shocked, little bird. Not everybody grows up with brothers who read them bedtime stories and check their closets when they are scared. Some of us just get the monsters.”

Sansa knew this intellectually but her heart did not understand. Even Joffrey, a monster by all means, used all the red left in his black soul to love Myrcella. She put down her plates to lean over to Sandor’s side.

Sansa reached out to him. She hesitated. “Can I touch it?” She asked softly.

Sandor stared at her. Then, he nodded.

Her fingers traced the lines of his cheekbones—so sharp she feared they would cut her and turned the pulsing skin red if she bled over his leather. She brushed away his thin, dark hair on the right side of his face. She wanted to see the contrast of ruined flesh and the untouched man. She tried to imagine what he would look like without the scar but she couldn’t. Sansa was not sure she wanted to. Character was what they called such destruction when they were being nice. Sansa touched the hint of bone where flesh was seared to a point of no return. He flinched. She touched the hole where his ear should be. She trailed further down where the burns met his lips. Half of his wonderful lips were smooth as butter and the other half felt like hides.

Without warning, she kissed him.

His lips were charred and hers were cherry red. Together they fused to form an unforgettable moment for Sansa who had known nothing of passion or desire. She opened her mouth and let his tongue enter her. She made a shrill noise when she was pulled into his lap. He placed his hands on her waist. This was nothing like Joffrey. The men who assaulted her could not compare to the pleasure of being handled with care. Sandor’s hands were rough but they skirted so delicately on her body she thought he was holding glass. Her hands were still on his face. When they parted, she kept them there so that she could look at him.

His face was misery incarnate and she wanted nothing more than to kiss him all night.

“I want you,” she told him as she pulled him into another kiss.

Sandor resisted for a brief moment. He told her she was fifteen—too young to want anything. She denied it.

“I want you,” she repeated. “You must want me back.” He had to. She could feel underneath her, growing harder with every second as she kissed his neck and fondled his body. He had never been with a woman as beautiful as her—she could not confirm her suspicions but she knew she was right.

Without a word of protest, he took her into his arms and carried her off into his bedroom.
In a romantic comedy or a perfect world, that night would have led to consummation—powerful declarations of love and lust and devotion. He would have taken her maidenhood in a second and she would have enjoyed every moment of it. But the world was not so simple, and the memories from earlier resurfaced. Whether it was the roughness of her treatment or a belated response to trauma, she was reminded of Joffrey and his friends and the way they mistreated her. She was helpless again. She cried out in protest.

“Stop!” She shrieked. As soon as the sound left her, Sandor’s froze.

Sansa realized what she had done and tried to protest. “No! Sandor, I didn't mean that—! I want you! No, I won’t—”

He punched the pillow by her side. Sansa gasped. Immediately after, Sandor got off the bed and ordered her to get some sleep.

“But Sandor—”

“Go to bed, little bird. I’m not asking you again.” He sighed. “I won’t be able to control myself a second time.”

Then don’t, Sansa’s mind cried. Yet, she could not deny that she was shivering and the goosebumps were not from the cold. He shut the door on her before she could change his mind. Undone by her own cowardice, she resigned to laying on the bed and keeping her thoughts company. She wanted someone by her side. She played with her hair and checked her breasts and body for imperfections and found nothing. At fifteen, she was a conceited in the way beautiful girls pretended not to be. No matter how hard Joffrey tried to break her, he could not deny her beauty. Her parents would never allow self-deprecation in their household. Instead, Joffrey called her stupid. Only a small part of her believed that—the part that encouraged her to stay with Joffrey even when he was clearly a monster.

Sheltered by her own confidence, her thoughts turned to Sandor. She remembered his time with the Lannisters and her memory became contaminated with vivid recollections, some real and others imagined. She supposed he always wanted her if the looks he sent her were any indication of desire. She hoped they were.

Sansa turned her head and her nose touched the pillow. She inhaled Sandor’s scent. He brought her into his room with the intention of fucking her like she was his woman. There was so much musk and sweat and iron. He was a man, wasn’t he? Surely, he came on these sheets at least once, either by his own hand or by through another woman. She stifled her jealousy at past indiscretions that may have never happened or at least occurred before her time with him. Her hand trailed down lower. She bit her lip but then released it. She wanted him to hear her.

The thought of Sandor barging in mid-fantasy was enough to get her coming. Instead, she thought about Joffrey. Throughout their relationship, she forgave him for crimes that were hellworthy. She would not let this matter go.

Whenever the notion of separation came to her mind, Sansa defeated them with her own doubts. She could not bear to explain to her parents about the matter of their break-up. She feared that doing so would cause her to fall apart. She also imagined the complete destruction Joffrey would do to her reputation. The pictures he took of her, the way he would speak about her if they left. They would believe him. He was so good at playing the part of the prince. With the exception of a few, her classmates would decimate her socially.

To leave him, she would need to ruin him. His grandfather was too good at saving his reputation,
there was no way a simple scandal would be enough. Sansa alone would be powerless to make such an occasion occur. Yet, she did not need to be alone. Sandor was there. Sandor, who wanted her and protected her and felt so guilty about leaving her the first time. He would not let her go back to Joffrey or any of the Lannisters.

Sansa dug another finger into herself and came. For the longest time, she laid on his bed and imagined their life together. She was such a child but at fifteen, everything was forever and everything was the future.

With shaky legs, she got off the bed and wandered through his flat. Instead of being in his bed, she found him with a glass of whiskey looking over some papers.

“Working?” She suggested. Her presence surprised him and he got up with an expression to kill. She pretended not to be scared and walked towards him.

“Thank you,” she said, for the hundredth time. “For everything. I can’t remember the last time someone treated me so kindly. You are such a good man, Sandor.”

“No, I’m not.”

He wanted to keep their interactions curt. She knew why and yet she could not allow him this victory. She touched his arm. He winced. He was seconds away from removing her hand when Sansa told him that she would like it if they kept in touch.

“Joffrey…I cannot imagine the things he has planned for me when he sobered up. I think I could use a friend for next time.”

“What?” Oh, his deep, raspy voice almost shouted that. “You’re going back to him?”

Sansa played up her reluctance. She hesitated for the just the right amount of time before slowly nodding. “…I don’t have much of a choice. Joffrey, his family could ruin me. And, if my parents found out what he did, they would never forgive themselves. I’ll just wait it out. He’ll grow bored with me. I’ll attend a different university and then it will all look natural.”

She continued her excuses, knowing full well by Sandor’s tightening fists that he was growing more frustrated by the second. She ended her rant by telling Sandor she was thankful for all his help, but —“You know how the Lannisters are. You left them for it. I don’t have that luxury.”

For that last comment, Sansa felt remorse. It was wrong of her to use his guilt to her advantage but it needed to be done. She would make it up to him later. She promised to make up as many sins as possible in their future.

Sandor behaved accordingly. He forced her to face him by grabbing onto her shoulders and keeping her in his grip. The roughness was familiar but the concern was not.

“You’re not going back to him,” he ordered. “Over my dead body.”

He took Sansa’s breath away with that declaration. She responded by raising up her hands to remove his.

“I wish you didn’t leave,” Sansa whispered softly. “I would have liked it if you were by my side instead of Joffrey.”

In the following year, Sansa would come to the realization that Sandor, for all his strengths, considered her his greatest weakness. She was right—he had always wanted her. The thought of
watching her get hurt while he was powerless to stop it forced him to leave—leave before he could develop anything of substance for her. Yet she was here now and offering him everything he had ever wanted. He owed the Lannisters nothing.

Sandor pulled Sansa into a lustful, long-awaited kiss. Sansa wrapped her arms around his neck and further the kiss. Patience lost, he took her to the couch and caress her body with care and precision. He was not used to ladies, but he tried his best to treasure her. Sansa doubted they would get far tonight, but she knew the gears were already in motion.

When they parted he moved onto her neck. Sansa sighed in pleasure.

Sandor leaned into her ear.

“T’ll take care of it,” he promised.

Sansa allowed herself the freedom to touch Sandor wherever she pleased. He controlled himself. She was still fragile from that night so he would let her be in control. She touched his scars, some no older than a day and the tingles down her spine were relentless. She was sure he would take care of everything.

Sansa’s driving is impeccable when she reaches Sandor’s apartment. She received a traffic notification about an accident on the freeway and had to take the longer route. She is good about keeping her alerts. She still remembers hearing about Joffrey’s disaster over the news. He was hospitalized for two weeks. All at once, his secrets came out on his deathbed. No one knew where the sources came from. No one except for Sansa and Jojen. When Joffrey woke up from his coma, Sansa’s stomach dropped in fear but she pulled through when it became clear that no one expected them to stay together. He was damaged goods. Footage of his vile behavior came to light. Someone leaked a video of him verbally abusing Sansa. (She would forever be grateful it was not a video of a post-beating. The point of this was for her to leave gracefully, not be the victim). He should have died—his reputation would have stayed intact.

Stepping out of the car, she sees one of Sandor’s neighbors wave at her. She waves back with a smile. The days where Sandor kept her under his shadow were over. No one would dare harm her now, not when she became Sandor’s ‘woman.’

She opens the door to his apartment and he is cleaning something he doesn’t want her to see. He keeps the case cover up. When she makes her presence known, he puts everything away to devote his attention to her.

She walks over to him and kisses him with the same passion she carried that night. He kisses her back and carries her to his couch where he lays her down and climbs on top of her. They shared no words when he takes off his shirt for her viewing pleasure. He lifts up her shirt so that it bundles beneath her breasts.

“I love you,” she confesses when he licks her stomach.

Sandor tells her that he knows. He pauses from his ministrations to ask her what she wanted from him.

Sansa pulls herself up by wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him. “This,” she rasps out. “I wanted the choice to have you,” she confesses. She is so vague. She wonders if he will understand what a cruel person she has been and if he did know, did the love he carried for her make up for her
“What happened?” He asks again.

“I’m not a good person,” she tells him instead of explaining.

Sandor scoffs. “Compared to me, you’re a saint.”

Sansa laughs in spite of her sorrows. She continues her advances until they are making love on the couch and on the floor and somehow manage their way onto their bed. Once she is in her right mind, she confesses everything to Sandor—about Jojen.

“I have to stop him before he gets too close to Bran. He already made his advances.”

“You won’t tell your family, will you?”

Sansa grimaces. “I have no proof. And he knows things about me that I can’t let go. He knows about Joffrey. He might know about more.”

That was bad, thought Sandor. He sighed. “Do you need me to do anything?” Sandor offers without hesitation. Sansa puts it under consideration.

“We’ll see. But I won’t let him hurt my family again. He’s insane.” Sandor pushes her hair away from her face.

Sandor did not bother asking about the details last year. He saw how distraught Sansa was—how overwhelmed she was when she discovered that no one believed her. He would never doubt her. Yet, he felt that if he was going to join her crusade, he needed to know more.

“What happened with Jojen that night?”

For the longest moment, Sansa said nothing. She stared off into space with dead eyes before she answered him.

“He tried to rape Bran.”

Chapter End Notes

And that’s my version of a cliffhanger.

So, there are a lot of author’s notes today.

1. Next Chapter: Hannibal returns. Yes, this will be a Jojen/Bran chapter! That’s all I can say right now because I have yet to write it. Depending on my work ethic, it will either be one long chapter or two short ones.

2. I recently launched my website: Murder at the Cathouse. I’m super excited to have a little place of my own! The site is still a work in progress but I have two short stories up (non-smut for now) and this delightful Sexual Harassment Chart I think everyone will enjoy. I am sorry to say that Tumblr is not for me. I will keep up sometimesimeow to take requests—though I am still working on the three I have accepted which, I promise, will get done. I apologize for my shortcomings!
Please also follow me @cheshiresua on Twitter if you want previews of the chapters!

4. Lastly, NaNoWriMo coming up. It’s my first year participating and I have yet to settle on an idea. Sorry to trouble you, but I would appreciate your opinion. I am torn between:

Plan A: A boy is mistaken for a prostitute and decides to play along despite how obviously unstable his client is. They play house until it becomes obvious both of them have ulterior motives being in that apartment building. Superhero thriller. Smut.
Plan B: A powerful mermaid species has one weakness. They can only reproduce with their soulmates and cannot hurt them. One day, a crime boss kills the mermaid’s entire family. She kills his gang but finds out that the murderer is immune to her powers. Fantasy horror. Contains smut.

5. Otherwise, I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Thank you all who commented and I hope the SanSan lovers were satisfied. By the way, their history is not over yet. There’s still a few plot holes I have to fill up to make Jojen/Sansa conversation make sense because I got tired and had to cut stuff out. Afterward, the story will get redirected to Jon/Robb eventually (I’m thinking chapter 36). I will keep you posted.
"When Jojen finalized the details of his second date, he thought it proper to schedule a session with Dr. Lecter. He was pushing his luck avoiding him. Meera was growing suspicious. Jojen made an appointment for 9:00 AM. Dr. Lecter was no stranger to odd hours—his afternoons were racked with psychopaths, his nights a playground for prey, and the only leisure he had that entire week was held exclusively for an adoption agency. When he received the call, dead at night and on short notice, a flash of anger came upon him. The behavior was quite rude. Nonetheless, Jojen apologized profusely for his interruption of Hannibal's pre-coital rituals. Grievances were forgotten.

Jojen was one of his favorite patients; he deserved companionship for his hardships and a mentor to smooth the ridges of his craft. He accepted Jojen’s explanation for his abruptness.

“You were right, Dr. Lecter. Having Bran by side has released me from my shackles. I believe my progress warrants one of our…special conversations.”

Dr. Lecter nodded though there was no one to see. He was having a nightcap—dressed in his pajamas while his lover slept on their Egyptian cotton sheets, waiting for Hannibal with his legs spread. “I am delighted to hear that.” Hannibal listed his sparse availability and Jojen agreed upon the early slot. Before the boy hung up, the psychiatrist invited Jojen over to his house. If they were partaking in each other’s company—alongside the crooning birds who only knew the sight of the sun and the smell of dew grass—they should aspire for optimal comfort.

“I will make us breakfast.”

“I’d hate to inconvenience you.”

“Nonsense,” Hannibal assured. “There’s nothing more delectable than having a guest over.”

Jojen arrives ten minutes before his session. Dr. Lecter’s manor appears as if in the middle of an identity crisis. He has researched enough about Bran's interest to pick up a few things about art. From that, he assumes the house was built during the transition from the Romanesque period to the Gothic preference—as indicated by the flamboyant arches that frame the doorway and windows, while the severity of slaughtered men decorated the frescoes. Jojen found the image quaint. He knocks on the door twice. It occurs to him that he should ring the doorbell instead—the house must be as grand inside as it is out and his physician may not have heard his call. When he settles on the idea of pressing the ringer, the thoughts are for not. He can hear Dr. Lecter’s footsteps coming forward. When he opens the door, the man looks established. He wears what Jojen can only describe as dress pajamas.

“I apologize for not receiving you earlier. I wanted to finish setting up the table.”

Jojen tells him that the wait was no grievance. He is led to the kitchen, where an immaculate dining table is set up. On top of it is their beautifully displayed meal. Dr. Lecter describes the entire expenditure as “sourdough focaccia with mozzarella di bufala and tomatoes paired with a dipping sauce of olive oil and balsamic vinegar.” To add practicality to the luxury, he prepared sausages made of pork, jalapenos and mango for protein. On the side, there are two cappuccinos with a leaf
Jojen expresses his gratitude. The smell is mouthwatering. “This is too much, Dr. Lecter. I hardly deserve such extravagance.”

“I aim to make my patients as comfortable as possible. I find good food elevates any conversation. Please, have a seat.”

Jojen complies.

The kitchen has large windows that display a view of the yard—several hundred square feet of trimmed foliage and the greenest grass Jojen has ever seen—even on the Stark estate. Dogs are scattered throughout the area. They howl, bark, yip—whatever it takes to capture their master’s attention.

“You your husband does not mind you having breakfast with another man?”

Dr. Lecter blocks his smile with his fine china and steaming café. “My Will understands how important it is for me to take care of my patients.” He puts down his cup. "They tend to get unruly when I don't give them enough attention."

Jojen would be more worried if he gave them too much attention—like him. He takes a bite out of his sausage. The sweetness of the fruit melts on his tongue and he almost moans from the contrasts of the spices. “He is missing out. Are you sure you don’t want to invite him in?”

Dr. Lecter shook his head. “He prefers the company of the canine variety. Who am I to deny him?”

Jojen finds himself agreeing with the unseen man. The species have become quite endearing as of late. “You have quite a few dogs. I never expected that of you.”

“Oh?”

“You carry the air of a man who abhors disorder and chaos. I imagine those creatures must shed more fur than mountains do snow.”

Dr. Lecter chuckles. “They are a handful,” he admits. “But they serve their purpose well.”

“For protection?”

“For my husband,” The Lithuanian dips his bread into the oil. “They keep him happy. For that reason, they bring me joy. On occasion, they make worthwhile companions on a hunt.”

Jojen watches one of the Saint Bernard’s tackle their comrades. Whimpers echo in the air. Dr. Lecter’s husband orders them off with a manmade whistle. Jojen finds their obedience impressive and voices his approval. "Are they trained?"

"Only by my husband's loving touch. They are not bad for a pack of strays.”

“No purebreds or pedigree?”

“None.”

Jojen grabs the focaccia. The display is too beautiful—he takes no pleasure in ruining the image. Dr. Lecter has no such qualms. Jojen keeps his bites small to avoid crumbles.

“Tell me about Bran,” Dr. Lecter asks once they are halfway sated. “The last I heard of you, you
“were taking him on a date.”

Jojen wipes away the cheese on the side of his lips. “I took him to a physics lecture. We were about
to kiss but he had a family emergency.”

“You choose an area of expertise to display your prowess. A move of the old, but effective I
assume?”

“He had stars in his eyes when I spoke,” Jojen sighs. “I couldn’t keep my own off him.”

“Love is an opiate found in the deepest tunnels of the lucidity, that make men leap into despite the
threat of treachery. I found that even the greatest minds will crave the sharpness of Eros’ point.”

Jojen smiles. “And you, Dr. Lecter? Were you such a victim?”

Dr. Lecter does not answer the question directly. He cuts off a piece from the final half of his
sausage. He asks Jojen if the boy is familiar with East Asian folklore.

“I can’t say I am.”

Dr. Lecter’s fingers twitch. “There is a common belief in Japan that lovers are joined together by the
‘Red String of Fate.’ According to this myth, the gods tie an invisible red cord around the fingers of
destined lovers. In Chinese myth, the string is wrapped around their ankles and connects soulmates to
each other—regardless of their intentions. Death has knuckles and joints connecting to every living
being on this earth.”

Jojen raises an eyebrow. “Sounds ominous.”

“For those destined for brutality and misfortune, that is true. But for those who are loveless and
whose pleasures are unreciprocated, it is their highest advantage. No matter where we are in this
world, the thread that keeps our gloves intertwined remains intact.”

If I am meant to be with Bran than I shall be with Bran, Jojen translates. Dr. Lecter is a monster who
blooms flowers on his tongue. Jojen blossoms under the lyrics; whether he becomes a rose or a
flytrap is up in the air. He hears the door open and Dr. Lecter’s husband makes his appearances. The
man hesitates when he sees the two of them.

“Am I interrupting?”

An American, Jojen notes, whose accent holds a drawl Jojen has only heard in movies. Dr. Lecter
smiles at his spouse. “Not at all. We are not even finished with our breakfast.”

Will walks over to get a cup and some ice. “Well, I’ll leave you to your own devices.”

Jojen says nothing as the man walks pass him to get to the other room. Up close, Jojen admires his
handsome face—his blue eyes are as wide as a baby deer’s and he has the softest curls he has ever
seen on a man—Bran’s cousin included. His skin is ivory, much like Bran’s own, and there’s a
fragility hiding underneath his iron exterior. Jojen makes the mistake of staring a bit too long and
they lock gazes. For the brief second, Jojen feels himself being invaded—as if someone has
possessed his body for observation but not purpose. He turns away for the sake of survival.

Will says nothing.

Directing his attention back to Dr. Lecter—the bastard is smirking and Jojen is not naïve enough to
believe it has nothing to do with all-seeing spouse—he compliments the man for his choice of
partnership.

Dr. Lecter, who has been a proud man for as long as Jojen knew him, never looked more gratified by a compliment. “For as long as I have walked this earth, I have found no finer creature.”

“I assume your years on earth vastly outnumbers his?” Jojen quips. He drinks his coffee and avoids looking at Dr. Lecter. Jojen’s tongue has been running amuck as of late. Though hardly a child bride, it is obvious that there’s an age difference between the two. While Dr. Lecter is the epitome of gentlemen and an icon for silver foxes, his spouse is comparable to a waif, a certain youth-driven boldness that comes with being acquaintances with Death but not friends.

Jojen hopes Dr. Lecter does not take too much offense.

“Careful Jojen,” Dr. Lecter warns, though his tone remained civilized, almost jesting. Jojen sighs in relief. He does not need to be this man’s enemy. “I’ll let that bit of rudeness slide this time but be careful.”

Jojen says he is sorry without meaning it. He does not know why Dr. Lecter chose to move into a dead county to restart his practice but Jojen understands that like the universe, there are some questions that will never have answers. All he needs to know is that Dr. Lecter, on the same degree that people admire colors that are not their favorite, likes him. They spend too much time conversing about non-therapeutic subjects for his assumption to be anything but the truth.

“How did you seduce your lover?” Jojen wonders. Will unnerves him in the same way that Sansa or Robb or most of the members of House Stark unnerves him. They all carry dark spots in their souls but the majority of them bask in a golden glow of goodness. Jojen, who has not known the light since his childhood—an estimated year before his mother was first institutionalized—is not sure how to handle that.

Dr. Lecter’s best advice is no advice. “I do not believe my methods will prove effective in your situation.”

“He was your patient, wasn’t he?”

“In my defense, he was an extraordinary patient.”

Jojen sighs as if he is disappointed in the doctor—a part of him is. He suspected that a man as mad as Dr. Lecter would not settle for anyone less than absolute godliness and the only way to seek such perfection is to know the person’s mind intimately.

If only the story was not so cliché.

Jojen shakes his head to avoid lingering on those thoughts. Instead, he finishes off his meal. On his last bite, Dr. Lecter asks about Jojen and Bran’s first meeting.

Before he answers the question, he pauses. He puts his fork down and offers to put it in the sink. Dr. Lecter allows him but pushes the question once more. “I assume the memory is as clear as the pools of an empty pond.”

“A pond that is too clean won’t have any fish,” Jojen jokes from the counter.

Dr. Lecter’s lips twitch in amusement. "Is it not worth the satisfaction of an untouched drink?"

Jojen reminds Dr. Lecter that he already knows how they met. “Last year, when Sansa brought me over for tutoring. She needed help on her physics A-Levels but didn’t want her parents to know she
was struggling.”

“And so you were hidden in her room for the time being, away from sight.”

“I didn’t mind. Sansa was my friend.”

“Funny how often our close friends become our deepest enemies.”

“If only we could all be tied together,” Jojen quips.

From afar, there’s a contemplative look on Dr. Lecter’s face. Jojen pretends not to see and runs water on his plate. He returns to his seat while he ponders the circumstances. Jojen assumes that the question is another one of Dr. Lecter’s mind games and attempts to discover the trick before he answers. Jojen, for all his foresight, can only scratch the surface of the curious façade. He formulates a response in his head. There’s no going back in Hannibal’s mind maze. Dr. Lecter waits patiently for the tale as if does not expect a fabrication. Together, they have found the equilibrium of not trusting someone and being their friend.

For the purpose of throwing off his not-friend, Jojen starts telling the truth.

“It seems you have caught me, Dr. Lecter.”

Dr. Lecter has a glimmer in his eye. He wants to see where Jojen takes this.

"To be perfectly honest, I met Bran a while ago. My father…suggested that I keep the fact to myself. He said that if I told them the truth, the incident would appear premeditated.”

Dr. Lecter is intrigued. “You never said anything before.”

“I was afraid you wouldn’t sign off on my recovery,” Jojen lies. Truth be told, he never trusted Hannibal enough not to delve deeper once he realized how messed up Jojen was. Since reuniting with his love, Jojen has aspired to be better—if only for Bran’s sake. The frequency of his deliveries have been cut in half and he spends more time with his studies than ever. He smokes less, snorts less, masturbates more. He hopes Hannibal does not let his efforts go to waste.

“Tell me about it.”

Jojen remains unflinching.

“We met at a hospital,” Jojen reveals at first. “When my mother was institutionalized.”

“How long ago was this?”

Jojen sighs. “Bran had just gotten into an accident—the one that caused him to lose his legs.”

“And your mother?”

“First your patient and then my mother? You are better than this, Dr. Lecter.”

Dr. Lecter chuckles. “My dear Will calls it ‘lazy psychiatry.’”

“He and I have that in common.”

“Nonetheless, I will insist you answer. With each honest statement, the fruit of denial further shrinks into the distance. You want that, don’t you? To be cured of the proclivities that may lead you to harm whom you love? Proclivities passed down by your maternal lineage?”
Jojen tries not to glare. "You know why my mother was there."

"Remind me again."

Jojen contemplates a lie. He wonders what Dr. Lecter would do then. After a moment, Jojen tells him the truth. "The first time she was institutionalized was because of her depression. She tried to kill herself after Meera was born. The doctors said it was PTSD. Two years later, I came into this world and it got worse. The doctors tested her—turns out she had a bipolar disorder all along."

"What happened afterward?"

"They gave her medicine," Jojen repeats what he has been told. It was a long time ago. "At first, everything was fine. She took it for the first few years without complaint. Then, the medicine stopped working so they changed her dosage. She didn’t take to it well. The pills made her sick; she used to throw up every morning and night. She had these tantrums. She decided to stop taking them when it became too much for her. Dad was furious when he found out."

"How did he find out?"

"He caught her flushing her medication down the toilet. I was in my room. He came home from delivering one of his pieces and found out that she clogged it." Jojen chuckles. "She threw the entire bottle down the hole."

"How did he react? Did he yell loud enough for you to retreat underneath your covers? Or did he try to inject reason into the madness?"

Jojen wonders how he should answer that. "He was not so much angry about the pills as he was about the fact that I wasn’t fed yet. My mother was too busy cleaning up her mess to get me lunch. He sent her to the hospital after that." Jojen has always been careful about using the word 'sent' and not 'forced.'

"I assume she didn’t respond favorably."

"Fought him kicking and screaming."

"Do you resent your father?"

"No."

"No?"

Jojen has been asked this question before, mostly by the numerous psychiatrists he had been assigned to before Dr. Lecter and a few relatives who knew of his situation. His answer is unsatisfactory. They always think he is hiding internal resentment for the man who took his mother away—never mind that doing so saved Jojen and Meera's life.

"My father did what he had to do."

"A mature assessment. Your father must be proud of you."

"He tells me so."

For as horrible as Jojen is to his father, for the blood bags and scrolls of shame, the man has never loved him less. He knows he would not be alive if it were not for his father. His mother didn’t want children. His mother wanted a husband. His father, on the other hand, wanted children. His father
did not need a wife.

Dr. Lecter moves on. “When you met Bran, how did you know he was the one?”

“You don’t believe in love at first sight, Dr. Lecter?”

“Whatever I believe in does not exist in our conversation. Your world is of your own making, Jojen. The laws of attraction are formulated in your design.”

“Like a god,” Jojen muses. “If you truly believe that, one might question your moral boundaries, Dr. Lecter. How do you stop a man who fancies himself divinity?”

“The same way an ant would protest a lion’s touch.”

Jojen laughs for that joke. He proceeds to disagree with Howland’s analysis. “If there is any holiness in the world, it is held under the protection of Bran’s body. To say otherwise is sacrilege. I saw it in him when he was being wheeled into the emergency room, decked out in halos with his fingers clenching onto the sheets. He was fighting for his life. I visited him in his room and his body was ice but his mind burned with the sun. His wings were clipped by fate and yet the flush of earth’s finest roses appeared on his cheeks.”

“What else?”

Jojen complies. “I visited in his room after he stabilized. He was in a coma. Doused on anesthesia and painkillers, morphine and dreams. I touched his hand for a brief second and I swear, he grasped onto me. I will never forget the feeling—” Especially not after their date. “—then I bent down and kissed him. His lips pursed. His eyelashes fluttered for a second. Then, the heart monitor began to beep. I kissed him again; I saw the world in a different color. He started to wake up—I thought I was in a fairy tale.”

“He woke up for you.”

“It was as if I was meant to be there.” Jojen smiles to himself.

Dr. Lecter puts his own plate away. Such an action was long overdue. He asks Jojen another question and he makes it sound so casual, Jojen almost believes he intended polite conversation.

“Did you seek out Sansa Stark on purpose?”

Jojen is quiet. He chose honesty with the intention of unsettling Dr. Lecter’s opinion of him but must deal with the consequences of digging his own grave. He wonders if his past virtue warrants him a piece of vice.

“No.”

Dr. Lecter seems bemused. “I thought we were being honest with each other.”

Jojen captures his eyes and after an unrelenting staring contest, looks away. “How can you tell when I am lying?”

“A gift I have no qualms about flaunting.”

Jojen sighs. “I was not the one who sought her out.”

“No, she did. She needed a tutor and you responded to her request. But you had no intentions of befriending her and no need to make her trust you...that is until you heard her name?”
“I thought it was fate,” Jojen admits. “I had not seen Bran in years. I wondered about him every single day. Any news of the Starks that appeared in the papers, online, anywhere, I read for the sake of a single line or a glimmer of his figure. Then, she came to me. She asked for my help. She invited me to her house.”

“And what did you do, Jojen?”

Jojen is responsible for all wrongdoings; he has been told that enough times to make himself believe it and it is only under the doctor’s guidance that he realizes the truth. Dr. Lecter has provided him with a new set of lens—one that forces him to come to terms of his own faults and the vices of others.

“I knew if she trusted me, she could take me to Bran. I did things for her I wouldn’t do for anyone who wasn’t my family.”

“But your intention was to have her as family.”

Jojen nods. “I was close. If not for my own recklessness…I would be with him by now.” Jojen is sure about that. “She was going to bring me over to her house to celebrate the success of her A levels. ‘Finally!’ I had thought. I was going to meet Bran outside the whispers of the walls. He said my voice was beautiful, did you know that? That’s all he’s ever known of me. Yet when we exchanged numbers, he did not recognize my voice.” Jojen tightens his fist. The bitterness can be tasted on his tongue.

“Yet,” Dr. Lecter pushes. “You could not help yourself.”

Jojen does not answer. He refuses to indulge in the nightmare. That was the past; he refuses to settle for anything less than the glorious future set ahead of him. He does not want to play this game. Instead, he takes the initiative and asks the next question.

“Do you think I should tell him the truth?” He wonders. The thought has been on his mind for a while. The lies will eventually resurface. He will not keep Sansa silent forever. Catelyn Stark will sooner murder him. But he needs Bran like he needs air and earth and honey and stars—for nourishment and joy, Bran has to be by his side.

“If the circumstances come together, why not grasp the opportune fortune?”

“He might hate me.”

“There are no obstacles in the trial of love that are impossible to overcome.”

Jojen chuckles. “You sound like a romantic.”

“I am a champion.”

Jojen looks in the direction of the living room where Dr. Lecter’s lover awaits him. Ah…he would be the expert, wouldn’t he? They continue their discussion in Dr. Lecter’s study, where Jojen sees a collection of fearsome pictures. He cannot recognize the artistic technique nor could he pinpoint the influence. “Bran would love these,” he mutters. Dr. Lecter critiques him.

“It is rude to mumble.”

Jojen speaks up the second time. “Bran would love your work. He was classically trained before he switched to comic art. He’s thinking about going to art school.”
“He might like Paris,” Dr. Lecter suggests.

“Paris is very far away.”

“I prefer not to linger on the distance but the atmosphere—it is the perfect place for a pair of young lovers to settle down discreetly.”

Jojen’s lips twitch. “Oh?”

“Yes, I went to school there before joining John Hopkins for my residency. They have a few notable universities—and you could always pursue your graduate studies elsewhere.”

The notion is beautiful. He imagines a simple flat all to themselves, with white walls covered in Bran’s drawings and a balcony for Jojen to admire the open sky. He sees books scattered about a mattress on the floor because it is too much of a hassle to climb out of bed in the morning and they could barely keep their hands off each other to try. The place would be dirt cheap and small as a mouse’s home but perfect because Bran was there and that was all that mattered.

“It would be perfect,” he says out loud. He waits for a moment and as Dr. Lecter settles into his chair, he decides that for his second date with Bran, he wants it to resemble their future.

“I’m going to tell Bran,” he confesses as soon as he sits down.

Dr. Lecter shakes his head as if Jojen was the child he never had.

What a foolish boy, the doctor thinks to himself.

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After doing several extensive Google searches on Oberyn Martell, Robb decides that if he does not gain a new layer of abs and a voice as rich as Godiva, then he is not attending the dinner. For the following week, Robb has made the gym his second bedroom. He eats, breathes, and snorts up adrenaline like a junkie, doing mile long runs and weight lifting like he’s got an audition to be a Hemsworth brother. When his mother and father ask about his increased drive, he explains that he is training for rugby. He convinces them that since he has been assigned captaincy, he needs to set an example for his men. His father is the first to express his approval. He even suggests they eat healthier. While all the children are sugar addicts, they also grew up with two accomplished athletes who stressed the importance of activity. Robb feels guilty for lying to them but reassures himself that things worked out for the better. The change in diet actually encouraged Arya to eat with them occasionally.

When he is finished with his final session, Robb checks himself in the mirror. He knows the effects are kicking in—he caught Jon staring a few times while Robb had accidentally accosted him in his room, post shower, for towels or soap or whatever the fuck he said he needed. Willas may be handsome and have the arms of a Tennis pro but overall, Robb is the superior specimen.

Unless, of course, he is being compared to Oberyn Martell.

Robb analyzes his body and finds that while everything has expanded for the better, he is not fit enough to stand next to Oberyn Martell, king of men. Without a doubt, the Spaniard will make him look fat. He cannot afford to look fat in front of Jon. He finds himself getting angry as he scrutinizes the lard in his ass and his asymmetrical cheekbones. He simmers in his thoughts as if his mind is brewing a pot of sludge and defamatory statements. The worst part is that Robb is better than this. His mother and father raised him to never compare himself to the unfair standards propagated by the media. But this wasn't the media ruining him, this was about dealing with better-looking men in real
life.

If his father was here right now, he’d tell Robb not to worry about it. He’d tell Robb that he was beautiful. And that anybody would look bad next to Oberyn Martell.

Sansa would look bad next to Oberyn Martell.

Sighing, he makes plans for some pre-date stretching before his date. For now, he heads to the kitchen for a light energizer. His mother and Jon have been preparing him snacks every single day. He grabs a bowl of Jon’s homemade Vietnamese yogurt and a handful of strawberries and granola.

Before he can dig in, he hears the doorbell ring. Robb pouts, looking at the delectable reds that blend so beautifully with the golden honey and creamy whites. Fortunately, a maid catches him about to stand up and offers to get the door. She has always been fond of the eldest Stark.

Robb devours the bowl as soon as she leaves. He is halfway done with he hears a set of footsteps enter the room. Robb’s hackles have yet to rise. The staff members, while on good terms with the Stark, are not prone to chatting. He only turns around when he hears a smooth but unfamiliar voice.

“I hate to interrupt your meal, Robb Stark, but I’d like to have a word with you.”

Robb turns around, a bit wide-eyed and cautious. When he sees the individual, he is taken back at the sight of his ex-girlfriend’s brother in the kitchen, holding a picnic basket and a bouquet of flowers.

Chapter End Notes

And then he takes the flowers for himself because Robb is an insecure puppy. And I listen to a lot of Nick Helm songs. If you have time, please rewards yourself with “He Makes You Look Fat” and “Love You Tonight.” And watch some panel shows. Once you go Brit, you can’t quit.

1. Another too short of a chapter for the lateness. I am sorry for the delay. For those of you who followed me on twitter, I did give a warning. Anyways, good news! Tomorrow is my first day off from work in seven days (my workplace is currently understaffed and as ASM, my manager and I have to fill in the shifts. Luckily I am going on a six hour writing binge to celebrate. This means (hopefully) prompt updates, fulfilled requests, and progress on my novel and blog.

2. The next chapter includes Jojen and Bran’s first meeting and their first date. It will much longer than this—I promise. I will also post at least one request within the following week, too.

3. Thank you for your patience. For updates and previews of my chapter, please follow me on twitter @cheshire sku and visit my website: Murder at the Cathouse. AO3 has been having a major problem with email notifications. I contacted them about my other story but I think doing so made things worse because now I’m not receiving notifications for anything. :( So please, follow me on Twitter. I will be better.

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed this chapter!
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Creepy people doing creepy things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Robb is caught between the rock of brotherhood and the hard position of being a son. Ever since Bran’s accident, Robb vowed to ensure his little brother’s happiness at any cost. He made this oath under the impression that Bran wasn’t Arya—there was no way Bran’s decisions would contradict those of their mother. The fourteen-year-old’s greatest act of rebellion to date was having a secret boyfriend—whom Robb was misled to believe was a sexless physics nerd whose love for Bran was reserved to soft hand holding and Disney worthy kisses—and yes he did read Bran’s texts.

But this is not some sexless physics nerd; this is Jojen Reed. Jojen Reed has brought flowers for Robb—and of course the older boy takes them because who doesn’t like flowers—in a show of good will and as payment for the older boy to listen to his side of the story. Robb is nervous, as one should be around a stalker and for the fact that he has a date to crash and this is not how he imagined the pre-ritual going. His nerves are chewing through his flesh and he needs sugar.

Having watched the Starks for weeks, Jojen pulls out a plate of tiramisu from the basket. He delivers it to Robb and Robb knows he should not take it—again, he has a date with Oberyn Martell—but damn it, he has been starving himself all week and he wants that cake. He grabs it and sets the cup aside his yogurt. He deserves two treats today.

Jojen takes Robb’s acceptance of his gift as a good sign. He grabs a seat beside the young man and waits for Robb to finish appreciating the first bite. Jojen recalls Meera baking Robb a cake for his 15th birthday because she could not afford anything else. Robb loved it; he acted like it was the best cake he’s ever eaten. Meera laughed when recalled the event. She told Jojen that Robb genuinely meant it; the older boy had eaten three cakes that night and could barely taste anything during his post-sugar high. Jojen remembers that though they’ve only met once and that moment was as brief as a glance, he respected Robb. And yes, perhaps he hoped him and Meera would have stayed together a bit longer for the sake of introducing Jojen to Bran, but he has made a resolution not to dwell on what could have been.

“Meera says ‘hi.’” Jojen begins with the neutrality of common ground. He is lying. Meera has not said ‘hi.’ Meera does not know he is here. Jojen stifles his guilt with his own reassurances. He is quite confident that once his older sister is over the lies and betrayal and the whole ‘going behind her back to date Bran and ruin his recovery’ thing, she will want to say ‘hi’ to Robb. “She’s been wanting to visit, but with all the tension between our families…”

“Yeah, uh, she texted me.” Robb swallows and the taste is so good but the atmosphere feels so wrong.

“Oh? Right, sure she did. You’re still friends.”

“Yeah, we are. Meera’s great. Is she, um, still dating that guy? With the…um…with the face. From her school?”
“Oh um…no. She broke up with him. She um…she wanted to focus on her studies. She’s starting her work experience next year.”

“I know.” Robb needs a drink. “She…uh…she told me she’s working at the reserves. The research sector. She told me that.”

“Of course she did. Right. Because friends tell each other things.”

“Yep.” Robb nods. “And we are friends.”

The two of them sit in silence. Robb puts down his fork and offers to get Jojen a cup of tea. “Um…since you’re a guest, I should get you some. But uh…I’ve never made tea before. I can try, though.”

“That’s quite alright.” Jojen refuses to be worried about a man who is not only older than him but is deemed an appropriate supervisor for the love of his life. He winces when the pots fall out of place and the avalanche is heard throughout the kitchen. Jojen gets up and offers to make the tea for himself. Robb, who protests out of habit, is relieved when Jojen holds his ground and pulls out the kettle. Robb sits on the table and enjoys his cake.

“Earl Grey,” he requests once Jojen turns on the stove. It takes him a moment to realize that Jojen is neither the help nor Jon, who finds his spoiled behavior entertaining after the customary complaints. To his relief, Jojen does not seem insulted. Instead, the younger boy asks where the tea bags are. Robb points him to the second cabinet. The beverage acts as an icebreaker for Robb, who watches Jojen familiarize himself with the kitchen.

“Do you know how to cook?”

Without missing a beat, Jojen admits that he is learning. “I know how to make simple meals—pastas if I use the instant sauce, stir-fry, a few chicken dishes. My doctor offered to give me lessons if I wanted to improve.” Jojen pauses. Instead of going back to his seat, he stands, watching the water burn.

The elephant in the room trumpets and the sound is bursting and boisterous. Robb chooses to ignore the creature until the time is right. He compliments Jojen on the virtue. “I think that’s a good idea. Lord knows none of the Starks can cook.”

Jojen has a hint of smile on his face. The kettle whistles and Jojen moves to pour the water into the two tea cups. When he was retrieving the tea bags, he had the sense to take the sugar and the honey located alongside them. He brings the plate over to Robb. They sit in silence. Jojen takes a sip; he allows the liquid to burn his throat before taking the plunge.

“I’ve been seeing a psychiatrist for about a year now. He was assigned to me after I was sentenced to a detention center for six months and I continued seeing him afterwards. He’s been…helpful.”

Robb swallows his tea to wash down the grudge of cream in his throat and the thickness of tension in his stomach. “That’s…good to hear. I’m happy for you.”

“Do you know why I was sentenced?”

Robb pauses. He selects his words with the precision of surgeon. “I’ve heard stories.”

“From Sansa? Or from Meera?” Robb understands the bias of both parties. He tries not to dwell on either heresy.
“Both. They were rather conflicting tales.”

“And the truth lies somewhere in the middle?”

“I suppose so,” Robb agrees. “But I doubt I’ll get there with you.” The last statement is intended to be a jest but sprouts out of his mouth like an accusation. Robb winces, not because he is guilty but because he is not. Meera is his dear friend but he trusts his sister. Meera would go to hell and back for her brother and she would defend him to her dying breath, regardless of whether he is innocent or not. It is faith in the law that keeps him from removing Jojen from his presence. The courts found him guilty but not of all sins. Sansa’s pleas ring through his head at the same time Meera’s reasoning—her desperate yet sound contentions are racked against each other.

Jojen has no shame. He laughs. He thanks his lucky stars for a sister he does not deserve and a father whose loyalty extends not only to his family but to his friends and by some, dumb luck, his best friend reciprocate his devotion. He laughs because he knows he is one for one. Rickon will take his side. Sansa loathes him. He is left with Arya and Robb and he has the strongest inclination that Arya will swing in her sister’s favor but Robb—Robb, who grew up with the values of an honest man, who was taught that every person deserves to have his story heard, no matter how damning the evidence—he has a chance.

“The truth is that I love Bran,” Jojen confesses. “That truth is that I’ve been courting him since the beginning of this summer and that we went on our first date last week. The truth is that I’m not going to stop seeing him unless he asks me not to and no one can tell me otherwise.”

“I know that’s the truth,” Robb finishes for him. “Or else you wouldn’t be here.” He stops. “Why are you here?”

“To take Bran out on our second date.” Jojen lifts up his picnic basket and a folder of unknown files. Robb is curious but Jojen pulls back the goods. He meets Robb’s eyes—an action intended to display honesty even thought there is none. “We’ve established one thing in the last twenty minutes.”

“And what is that?”

“That while I may not be an honest man, I am not a dishonest one either.”

Despite the dire situation, Robb cannot help but quirk his lips. He credits Jojen with the cleverness his sister raves about. “Well then I am inclined to hear your side of the story.” Robb keeps his expression neutral. “Go on.”

There are a million places to begin so Jojen settles on the route most indicative of his sanity—the one riddled with half-truths and white lies. “Last year, your little sister asked me to tutor her on her A-levels. She didn’t want your parents finding out she needed help with her studies so we pretended to be working on a project. We became friends—or at least, I thought we did.”

“She thought so too,” Robb clarifies. His first instinct is to defend Sansa. His second is to care for Bran and that means provide Jojen with the benefit of the doubt, if only for the smile Bran has whenever he receives a morning text from the older boy. “She passed, if you’re curious.”

Jojen could care less. “I’m happy for her.”

Robb looks away for a second, as if to collect his thoughts, before turning back to Jojen and asking him how Bran plays into this story. He’s heard Sansa’s accusations—“He attacked him, Robb. I know what I saw. He snuck into his room like a rapist and fondle our little brother!”—and Meera’s defenses—“The room was pitch black. Your staff confirmed this. Unless your sister is the latest
advancement in evolution, I’m going to assume she does not have night vision!” Both continued their arguments for nights to come. Robb loves his sister, but the evidence was against her and even the judge considered her testimony to be unreliable. Meera fared no better. Who, but a Stark, understands the love one has for a brother?

“Bran was in the house during these sessions. I used to walk past his bedroom on his way to Sansa’s. Before long, I was making excuses to wander the hallways.” The memories of such days linger in his mind like the aroma of sugar and apples out of the oven. “I remember watching Bran huddled over a drawing or a book; he would use his laptop to look up creatures he’s never seen and create homunculi to decorate his walls. I became entranced.”

“So I’ve heard,” Robb notes with wry dismay “They found a number of photographs in your bedroom.”

“An imitation to keep my whims at bay,” Jojen justifies, hoping Robb does not consider his ‘whims’ to belong to a deviant. He wants to avoid sounding defensive. “I want-needed something to keep to memory. I admit,” he tries to chuckle, smile, or do anything to rid himself of the madness in his eyes, “I was overeager. But you have to understand, from the moment I saw Bran, there was no one else in the world for me.”

Hannibal advised him to heighten his pitch by the slightest degree to appear more honest. Eye contact, no matter how painful, is a must to be considered trustworthy. Before he arrived to the Stark’s main house, the two of them listed out plights to plea for Robb Stark. Robb is no stranger to forbidden love; if it was any other boy but Bran, he would have express his support from the start.

Except, this was not any other boy, this was Bran.

Robb keeps his distance nut he allows Jojen to continue.

“But Bran was thirteen and I was not. Those pictures were the closest I could get to the real thing; I couldn’t court him like I would a peer. I kept my hands to myself. This, I swear to you.”

“That night…”

“Nothing happened,” Jojen tells him. He makes the effort of swearing on his mother’s grave—may she never wake from the kiln she rests in. “I…heard he had a fever. I went inside his room to check up on him. I…may have touched his forehead—but I needed to see if he was okay.”

Robb narrows his eyes suspicious. “You expect me to believe that?”

Jojen sighs, as if he is exasperated, as if he was the one who was wronged. “I checked his temperature. He was on fire. He kept moaning for comfort and coolness. I tried to take the sheet off him and his shirt rose. I…may…I wiped off the sweat off his stomach. I did not mean to go beyond that, I promise. It just…it felt so good touching him.”

“So Sansa misunderstood the whole thing? She imagined everything?”

Jojen has offered his fair share of guilt. Any more admissions and Robb will never allow Jojen within ten feet of Bran. “I was willing to wait. I am willing to wait. After Sansa reported what she saw, the police went through my stuff. They saw the photographs and my writings and called it an obsession but it was not. Robb, I was infatuated and now…now I know Bran. My feelings have not changed except for the better.” He clenches his fist. “I know we’re both young. Bran is only fourteen. But I’ll wait for him forever. I don’t care if our first kiss happens tonight or in a hundred years. Please, regardless of what Sansa has told you, hear it from me. I love Bran and I will do
Robb’s expression softens. His grimace has melted into a contemplative frown. His eyes are no longer accusatory but sympathetic. He is pained and Jojen relishes in his victory against Catelyn and Sansa Stark. Before he could dig the dagger deeper, the sound of the door opening alerts both the young men. He hears Bran’s chime through the halls. His father’s heavy footsteps follow.

Jojen remains still. He remembers his list. If he runs now, Robb will consider his actions cowardice and rule that his declarations from before are made of hot air. When Bran draws closer, Robb redirects his attention to Jojen and orders him to wait on the porch.

“I can stay,” Jojen affirms. He is too close.

Robb sighs; the breath weighs on Jojen’s mind. “Don’t worry; I’ll send Bran outside. You can have your date tonight.”

Jojen cannot leave fast enough. He dashes outside before anyone can see him. Left alone, Robb stares at his tea, cake, and yogurt. He takes a moment to consider what has happened and sinks his head in his hands. Bran’s wheels scratch the floor and Robb looks up for the sake of glaring. Bran responds to the glower with an innocent ‘hello,’ as if his boyfriend didn’t just accost Robb with his ‘ride or die’ speech and bribed him with tiramisu and flowers.

The younger boy glances at the bouquet of sunflowers and coos at their loveliness. “Who are the flowers for?”

“Me,” Robb answers defensively. Just because he is the only person in this household not sucking cock does not mean someone won’t buy him flowers. “Your boyfriend gave them to me.”

Bran almost falls out of his chair. “What?”

Robb nods, staring at the flowers and wishing they were not laced with ulterior motives. The last time he got flowers was when Joffrey had sent them to Sansa as an apology gift but his little sister had thrown them in the trash. He retrieved them for the sake of brightening up the décor. His mother still receives blossoms from Mr. Baelish and if they were willing to utilize the gifts of one creep, they should do so for every other.

“He asked for my permission to date you.” An embellishment of sorts. He is sure that Jojen will continue courting Bran with the fury of a thousand hurricanes regardless. Yet, he has a soft spot for men in love, especially those who resort to viciousness to remove their obstacles.

Bran gapes. He stares at Robb as if trying to catch him in a lie.

Robb informs him that Jojen is waiting outside for him. “He’s been waiting to take you on a second date.” Bran does not move. “You should hurry. He had a picnic basket. I don’t think it’s a good idea to let the food spoil.” When Bran still does not budge, Robb sighs. He gets up and takes ahold of Bran’s handles. He delivers him to the backyard porch where Jojen is nowhere in sight. Robb purses his lips, hoping the younger boy was not caught by a member of the staff and forced to flee.

“What’s that?” Bran points out. Robb sees an envelope on the couch, with Bran’s name written in the most illegible print Robb has ever seen. He is about to open it when Bran coughs, a forceful look on his features. He swipes it out of Robb’s hands. Robb’s little brother flushes beautifully. He tucks the letter into his chair and asks Robb to wheel him to the godswoods. Robb chuckles, wondering what event the maverick has planned for his sweet brother. His humor is lost when Bran asks Robb for a favor.
“You want me to do what?”

Bran brings out a blindfold hidden in the package. It’s the type of fabric sold as a gag gift in sex shops and pornographic catalogues. “He wants it to be a surprise.”

Robb chokes on air. He tries to protest but Bran masters the most innocent bow behind his head and his eyes are covered for Jojen’s surprise. He tells Robb that he is ready and Robb is too afraid of the answer to ask ‘for what.’ He swears that if Bran is entering a garden of debauchery and boxed dicks, Jojen will no longer have to worry about prison because Robb is sending him straight to hell.

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When asked who his favorite artist was, Bran would answer relatively notable names in Pop Art such as Roy Lichtenstein or Luis Toledo. He is not lying. Out of all the genres, perhaps, save works from the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their successors, he enjoys pop art the most. With every painting or sculpture, Bran is reintroduced to a world of vibrancy and business, of comic books, graffiti, trash, protest art, lifestyle collages. His parents are supportive of him to a fault. They take him to galleries and fly him out to auctions for the chance to acquire the real deal or a spectacular imitation.

Yet, while he is not telling a lie, he is not admitting the truth either. He respects those artists as inspirations and influences, but they’ll never provide the same joy for him as a sample of Dustin Nguyen or Fiona Staples’ print will. He wants the story, the expressions, the action and the drama; he wants to live the tale. It’s why got into comic books and graphic novels in the first place.

Robb does not know this. All he knows is that when he releases Bran from his blindfold to the sight of over two dozen pictures posted on every tree in eyes’ view, Bran is the happiest Robb has ever seen him since the accident. His eyes are blown out of reasonable proportion and his mouth is as open as the moon. Jojen has just finished setting up their meal but the gallery is clearly the pleasure of the evening. The pictures are so perfectly aligned that even Robb is awestruck. He composes himself in time to exchange a nod of approval towards Jojen. Bran does not notice his older brother slip away.

Jojen initiates their date by moving Bran to their picnic blanket. Instead of removing Bran from his wheelchair, he prepares the softest shawl and wraps it around Bran for comfort. He adds a table stand to lay on Bran’s lap and helps set up a plate. He asks Bran what he would like, but the younger boy is too overwhelmed to decide so Jojen makes his decision for him. He hands him a mug. The boy takes it before realizing that he is not alone.

“W-what…are…how did you do this?” Bran gasps when he sees an autographed picture from Fiona Staples—a sketch of her character from Saga.

“People owe my cousins a lot of favors and my cousin owes me a lot of favors and so here we are.” Jojen is amused. “I must admit that most are copies, but there are a few—”

“Some of these are genuine?” Bran announces. Shock electrifies his body. “These must have cost a fortune! Jojen, you really didn’t have to!” Bran has been made aware of Jojen’s financials from the start. The older boy refuses to engage in superficial dishonesty. He does regret, however, the horrified expression on Bran’s face when he realizes the cost of these pictures. Copies were costly as well, but genuine pieces from these artists must be worth a fortune.

Jojen laughs. “I only spent a bit to purchase the copies. Turns out some of my clients are quite charmed by the fact that I intend to make my boyfriend the happiest guy in the world. They were very generous with their tips.”
Bran blushes at the title. Boyfriend, he thinks. He cannot help but be amazed by his own fortune. Fourteen, and his first boyfriend is charming, smart, and ridiculously handsome.

Jojen refuses to listen to any more protests. He leads Bran around each sketch as if he is a tour guide, getting a ridiculous amount of details wrong and instead of finding his inaccuracies annoying, Bran is smitten by Jojen’s effort. He ends up correcting him half the time before assuming the role of the teacher. Jojen listens as if every word needs to be reprinted on an exam. Bran tries his best not to blush when Jojen calls him ‘wonderful’ and ‘blessed.’

They are on their last picture when twilight enters its last moments. The moon will rise and Jojen will have to leave.

The whole ordeal is tortuous because Jojen is forced to remain on the same land, knowing that Bran will always be at arm’s length but never within touching distance. He wants to kiss Bran senseless in the night. He wants them to sneak out into the godswoods for midnight trysts. He can do that, but before anything happens, Bran needs to know the truth. If Jojen reveals his living conditions, Bran will want to know why he did not say anything sooner. He will want to know why Jojen’s identity was kept secret when his father was such a pivotal member in Ned Stark’s life. If anything, they should be best friends.

Jojen wheels him to the picnic blanket, resting underneath the tree. He carries Bran off his chair so that he can position him against his chest. They lean on the tree and watch the day turn to night. Bran is hot—hotter than he was that night. This time, however, Bran was his. He cradles Bran’s hand. He presses his lips against the boy’s hair. The moment is coming. The sun dies and the moon rises into the night sky. It is beautiful, though only a quarter moon. Bran croaks his neck so that they can face each other.

The date has turned the Stark bold—he resembles the wolf on his family’s sigil. He leans in with the most forwardness he has ever drawn out of his life. Jojen will not make him suffer any longer. They kiss and the moment is tender. Bran is red and breathless when he parts. Jojen is breathless and insatiable. There’s a moment of unspoken agreement between the two of them. They are bundles of uncertainty and hormones. Bran clutches onto his hand. He opens his mouth and licks his lips. Jojen leans in with more force. They kiss, more ravenous of each other. Jojen cradles Bran’s body towards him. He slips his hands underneath his shirt. He wishes he could get enough but he fears such a sensation is an addiction without rehabilitation. Jojen craves and Bran wants.

Jojen growls. He cannot resist maneuvering their positions so that Bran is seated on his lap. There is no strength in Bran’s legs to support his body so he must fall on Jojen’s chest. Jojen makes no complaints. Bran is his for tonight. They partake their fill of each other. Bran, who is so inexperienced in the realms of fantasies and deviances, acts on the instincts that are ingrained in all Starks. Jojen, true to his faith, is equally untrained in the act but relies on the images of his deepest desires. He has been Bran’s since the moment they’ve met, regardless of age restrictions and whatever propriety dictates.

Bran removes himself for air and despite Jojen’s attempts for more—the suckling on his neck is surely a purposeful attack on his sanity and the licks to his collarbone doubly so—Bran asks that they control themselves.

"Why?" Jojen growls.

The sound sends shivers up Bran's spine. He blushes when he tells Jojen that he wants their first kiss to be a wondrous moment by itself. He wants their first everything to special for what they are.

“Is that weird?”
Jojen protests the notion. Reality settled in. “No, you’re right. I want every moment to be special, too.”

Bran smiles so brightly, he makes the stars swoon. Jojen’s heart lurches and he knows the truth must come out. He swears that after tonight, he will never tell a single lie to him again if it means forgiveness. If Bran will let Jojen taste those lips for days to come, he will become the best man he can be for him.

What he does next is out of his control; he is out of fucks to give when he blurts out to Bran that they’ve kissed before.

Bran reveals a number of feelings on his face, but the two most prominent emotions are confusion and disbelief. “How—? Jojen, I think I would’ve have remembered—“

“Not if you were sick,” Jojen interrupts. “Not if you had a fever of 38 degrees and could barely remember your own name let alone the strange boy who crept into your room at night to watch over you.”

Bran does nothing. He tries to smile, but the reluctance is evident. His expression pains Jojen, who never wants to put such uncertainty on Bran’s face again. “Jojen, I haven’t been sick all summer. In fact, the last time I was that sick was…”

“Last year,” Jojen finishes. “When you were thirteen and I was sixteen. A year before I was sent to a juvenile delinquency center for stalking and harassment.”

“What?”

“Remember when Miles asked about my disappearance? It wasn’t about my mother. She died several years ago. She committed suicide—I wasn’t lying about that. But—she wasn’t—she had nothing to do with what happened between us. Between me and Sansa.”

“What? Sansa?” Bran is taken back. He pulls away as far as he can but his body is stuck. Jojen has forced him to hear the brutal truth and it hurts the older boy as much as it stabs daggers into Bran’s heart. “What does Sansa have to do with this?”

Jojen swallows. “If I tell you, you must promise to listen. You have to promise to give me an answer about us. I will never stop fighting for you to forgive me if you don’t and if you do, I will never stop making you happy.”

“Jojen, you’re scaring me.”

“Promise me, Bran. Please, I will take you home but you need to promise to listen.”

Bran is helpless. Jojen asks him again, “Promise me.”

After a pleading glance, a look that aims straight into his soul, Bran nods. “I promise,” he whispers.

Jojen sighs; he is relieved but he knows he should not be. The hard part begins now. Here is where the manipulation comes to hand, where the lies must become truths but truths Bran can appreciate and forgive. Even the most unforgivable crimes can be locked away in the mind palace if the love is strong enough; Hannibal and his husband are proof of that.

“Last year, I was sentenced to a year at a juvenile detention facility for harassment and stalking. I was released after six months on good behavior, but my restraining order stood until the beginning of this summer, when I was no longer required to stay sixty feet from Brandon Stark.”
Bran chokes. Jojen takes a few deep breaths.

With courage that surprises both of them, Bran asks the real question:

“What did you do to me?”

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“Nothing that can ruin your reputation?” Jojen asked as he scanned Joffrey’s iCloud for injustice. There were hundreds of incriminating photos. He supposed that Joffrey’s grandfather must have the world’s busiest social media advisors to keep his grandson in check. Jojen had the grandest selection—substance abuse, animal abuse, domestic abuse was out of the question, but the rest was fair game. “I don’t think you have to be too worried about that. There’s enough on this phone to get him locked up in the bin for decades.” He removes a picture containing Sansa’s bruised arm.

Sansa told him to select only the best and to plan them accordingly. “If we release them all at once, it looks like sabotage. We can have reporters find them after the accident.”

“How are you so sure there will be an ‘accident?’”

“Sandor promised me he would take care of it. There is only one way a man like that takes care of things.”

“He takes care of you pretty well,” Jojen teased with a suggestive shimmy of the eyebrows.

Sansa threw a pillow at his face. Jojen laughed.

Sansa’s phone received another text. She jumped at it before Jojen could beat her to it. It was a game they played. Jojen embarrassed the shit out of her and Sansa pretended to care more than she did. When he saw the disappointed look on her face, he knew who the sender was immediately. She tossed the phone on the side. From the glare in her eyes, she was praying it broke.

“Joffrey wants to meet up today. He says he has a surprise for me.”

“Can you turn him down?”

“I turned him twice this week already. He’ll suspect something is amiss.”

“Oh, so I suppose facilitating a gang rape of his girlfriend doesn’t count as something ‘amiss.’” Jojen returned to his research. The apathy in his tone made Sansa envious. She wished she could sound so nonchalant while judging her companions. Jojen was impossible to read and Sansa was told she was an open book.

“He isn’t going to hurt me. This is his apology week.” Sansa grimaced. “He hurts me and then he gets me to forgive him with gifts. If I accept the gifts, he calls me a whore. If I don’t accept the gifts, he berates me for being fickle.”

“So go,” Jojen advised. “Accept the gift and play the game.”

“Are you serious?”

“You want to take him down, you need to make sure he cannot tie any of his downfalls to you. Attend the masquerade. Besides, Sandor will be encouraged to move faster if he sees you’re still with him. He loves you.”

Sansa was as red as her hair. “Stop it.”
Jojen repeated himself instead. “You know he loves you. He just needs motivation to act. Be his motivation, Sansa.”

Sansa giggled, the sound was as light of Christmas bells. He found the noise charming, if more feminine for his tastes. She took the phone and asked Jojen if she should text Sandor that she was going out with Joffrey.

“Definitely,” Jojen encouraged. “He’ll be mad with jealousy. Give him the locations as well. That way, he can keep track of you and it’ll give the impression you’re more afraid than you actually are.” Jojen added that if Joffrey saw her on her phone most of the time, he will assume the worst. That way, she would be able to provoke a violent reaction. “You want that, don’t you?”

Sansa, who was a lady and was taught to abhor violence, did desire such an outcome. She wanted to be fought over—and Sandor would kill Joffrey if the circumstances permitted. Sansa bit her lip. “I think I should go. And call Sandor, too.”

Jojen approved of her idea. He offered to stay behind to smooth out the details of their future endeavour.

“If your parents ask, I’ll tell them you left to pick up supplies. There’s a lot of work to be done so one of us had to stay behind and you’re the only one who can drive.”

Sansa laughed. “You are such a good liar.”

Jojen accepted her compliment—regardless if that was the intent. While she got ready, she thanked him for his encouragement. “You’re the only one I trust to tell about Sandor. Everyone else would have judged me.”

“We have a right to be with the ones they love. Regardless of societal restraints.”

Sansa agreed. She turned around and asked if Jojen was interested in anybody. “Maybe I can help with them? You’ve done so much for me!”

Jojen gave no inclinations to the truth. His lie was cut short when loud, hacking noises were heard through the walls. There was murmuring in the hallways. Sansa’s expression was dismal. Jojen kept his concern to a minimal. He wondered, out loud, if the person was okay. His heart lurched with each cough and he hid his clenching fists. He wanted to see Bran. He needed to make sure he was okay.

“That fever is only getting worse. If it gets any higher, we’ll have to take him to the hospital.” Jojen knew why she was opposed to the action. Bran loathed hospitals.

“That’s Bran, right? Your youngest brother?”

“Right name, wrong brother. Rickon is my youngest brother.” Sansa sighed. “Bran has been sick all week. I’ll get some medicine on my way home,” she mumbled, mostly to herself. “I think we’re almost out of lozenges, too.”

Jojen could see the gears twisting in her head. She glanced over at her phone. He knew she was considering turning down Joffrey’s offer with the truth. Every bone in her body was telling her to care for her brother.

Jojen frowned. It was a pity that Sansa was a good sister, but he needed her out of the house. They say Bran earlier today. He was allowed to stand by the door while Sansa read him a story. If he interfered any more in Bran’s life, he would not be able to recover from the suspicion. He tried to
convince her and himself of Bran’s recovery.

“He’s going to be okay. You told me the doctor said that the fever was not serious—it’s just reaching its peak. I hate to say this, but you being here is not going to make a difference.” He kept his tone neutral with a touch of no-nonsense to further his point.

Sansa, who desperately craved the bloodbath that was to come, submitted to Jojen’s reasoning. She hesitated and took some money out of her wallet. Jojen was about to protest but Sansa refused to listen.

“You’ve done so much for me. I know it isn’t cheap to miss work to help me and I don’t feel right making you pay for a cab to go home. If it gets too dark, don’t feel obliged to stay.” Sansa held out the money. Her hand did not waver. “I’m not leaving until you take the money and if I found out that you’ve given back, I will return it tenfold.”

Jojen sighed before grabbing onto the paper. Sansa thanked him again before making her departure. Before she left, he could hear her conversing with her mother. She was a fright as of late. Whenever she was not at Bran’s bedside, she was knitting or weaving prayer circles or dream catchers or whatever her faith dictated her to do. Jojen bared her no mind. He knew that today, Catelyn Stark had a dinner party. The maids were in charge of taking care of Bran and Osha would be babysitting both Rickon and Bran tonight. Rickon had become a handful as of late. The wild woman had more concerns than to deal with a child whose only remedy was slumber.

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After an agonizing hour, Bran was put to sleep. He was whimpering, the heat was too much for him, but he craved the softness of the sheets. The maids could do nothing but check his temperature and refill his cooling pad. When the last maid left the room, Jojen struck. He had been waiting beside the door of Sansa’s room, peeking through the crack, hoping for an opportunity.

The room was pitch black. Brightlights hurt Bran’s eyes so the maids found alternatives sources on them if they needed a guide through the darkness. Bran was sleeping but he was unsound. His whimpers were akin to kitten’s mews and he squirmed and struggled as if he were a newborn. On his dresser was a bucket of water with melting ice. The ladies were supposed to take it with them to refill. They must have forgotten it.

Jojen dipped his hand inside the coolness. He used his wet hand to sprinkle the water over Bran’s face. The boy cooed. He motioned his head in the direction of the relief and Jojen could not resist drawing closer. Like a cat, Bran purred into Jojen’s hand. His fever was present, but beneath Jojen’s cool hand, it felt warm and delightful. Jojen continued the process of dipping and relief before he decided there were other parts of Jojen’s body to explore.

Removing the sheets provided an entertaining reaction. Bran took larger breaths once the weight of the cotton was gone, but squirmed as if searching for comfort. Jojen used his dry hand to run his fingers through Bran’s hair. His wet hand was placed carefully on top of Bran’s stomach, massaging circles for comfort. Bran drew closer to him. Jojen was elated.

Feeling bold, restless, Jojen moves upwards to play with the prettiest nipples in the world. He teased and pinched gently, as if he were not even there. Bran giggled and it was the happiest expression Jojen heard from him all week. He knew all of Bran’s expressions by heart. He smiled to himself and leaned downwards.

Bran’s lips were redder than before. His skin was pale—pasty from illness and malnourished form the lack of sun. Jojen thought he was beautiful no matter his appearance but he would be lying if he
said he did not prefer the glow of health. Yet, despite the state of his complexion, Jojen remained fixated on those lips. With the desperation of youth empowering him, Jojen climbed onto the bed to straddle Bran. The image was perverse. He was almost a man and Bran was most certainly not. Yet, he could not deny himself a simple kiss. Bran was magnificent. Jojen was a worshiper of the divine. Should he not taste his god’s love directly? Could there be any other reason for such physical divinity to present itself to him if not to take advantage of good graces? Jojen thought so and leaned down to press his lips against Bran’s. The sensation was soft and unreciprocated but Jojen shivered from the passion. He kissed him again and again; he pushed down further to savor the taste. His hand, which already rested on Bran’s stomach, moved downwards.

Jojen’s wayward palms were resting on Bran’s hips before he became aware of his advancements. He took a moment to consider his position. Bran was underneath and there was no greater bliss than to feel his soft body under his own. Bran was unaware but his body was willing. He churned and craved Jojen’s touch—the touch of a follower.

Yet Jojen knew he could sink no further. He groaned and to prevent the passion of earths and storms, Jojen sank his head into the pillow and screamed. There was no greater agony than this moment and not even the fumes of carbon monoxide could compare to the victory of conscience and self-control.

Bran’s body was supple and willing—but his soul was not. Jojen left the bed. He looked down on the magnificent child and swore he would wait for him. "One day, we’ll be together and be so happy.” Bran moaned his approval. Jojen wiped a sweat-drenched bang from his face. He was about to return the sheets to his body when he noticed Bran’s lips pucker. He was sick man, Jojen thought. Sicker than the boy in front of him, for sure. Before he could talk himself out of it, Jojen leaned down for a final kiss.

“Get away from him.”

Jojen looked up. Sansa was at the doorway. Her eyes were blazing. Her teeth were snarling. Jojen could not move. And when she started screaming, he said nothing.

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Jojen will never forget the sensation of Bran’s skin upon his. Even having him in his arms right now cannot remove the memory—it is only another memory to be added. He conveys the sentiment to Bran, who says nothing. Jojen wants to cry. He wants to mourn what never was and could have been. He wants to beg for an answer, but the look on Bran’s face is enough to warrant a thousand whippings.

Jojen stands up. He walks over to the wheelchair and prepares it for Bran. He hesitates to pick the younger boy up, for his Bran is still frozen. He tells Bran he is sorry. He understands if they boy never wants to see him again. He is sure the boy would rather die than be touched by him again. Nonetheless, the night is coming. “And I need you to return you home.” He draws the chair closer.

Jojen wonders how long it will take for Bran to forgive him. A year? Maybe two? Maybe he could get his degree and come back for him, a changed man. No, he will never change. Men like Jojen keep their proclivities until the day they die. But he can come back successful, worthy of him if only by a fraction. Jojen muses all these alternatives while he lifts Bran up. He pauses for a second to savor Bran in his arms. The boy stiffens but does not protest.

When Bran is secured in his seat, Jojen is ready to take him home.

Bran opens his mouth to ask, “Aren’t you going to clean up?”
Jojen, who is stun by the speech and overwhelmed by the statement’s neutrality says he can do it later. “What’s important is getting you home and safe.”

Bran stares at Jojen. He says nothing and Jojen is overwhelmed by the compliance. He bends down to pick up blanket and scarp porcelain. He puts them all in the basket. He sees the shawl and picks it up. He is shaking. He moves forward to offer the warmth to Bran and without any further questions, the younger pulls him into a kiss.

The move is hesitant, as if Bran himself does not know what came over him. Jojen does not protest. He does not ask questions. They kiss until it is Jojen pulling away out of fright. He worries his love is possessed but when he looks into Bran’s eyes, they are teary but clear.

The next words are a hymn and a prayer at once. Jojen cries without meaning to. The act brings more humility to him than either of them thought possible. Bran is surer than ever of his decision. “I forgive you,” he whispers.

Chapter End Notes

1. Oh, so next chapter is the long awaited Jon/Robb/Willas/Oberyn chapter. Plus, a Targaryean will show up in this chapter—or I will update two chapters in one week because the Targaryean scene is long but not long enough to warrant its own chapter but significant enough that I want it in because I’ve been ignoring the Targaryeans and they’re pretty important.

2. Don’t worry all the Arya fans! So after the Jon/Robb centric chapters, we’re going to center on Arya. Arya will have a huge portion to herself—this is why I kept her centric chapters to a minimal. I’m outlining right and we’re looking at least four Arya centered chapters (remember she is going to London soon). Plus, we fucking get Tywin Lannister. My not-so-guilty pleasure.

3. Which reminds me because I will always be doing this—please follow me on Twitter for updates and previews: @cheshiresua.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After her father died, Lyanna Stark wore black for an entire year. The news of his death shook her at first, maybe put her out of place, but did not ruin her. She thought she numb. She thought her lack of reaction proved she was made of ice. It was not until she was bawling on the carpet of a thrift store, picking out a black dress with a tasteful silhouette her father would have approved of that she realized, her father was dead. She rushed to her hotel room, bought a ticket for her and her son, and left with all her luggage intact because her father hated waste. The bags were heavy. She traveled light her entire life—she was the type of woman who made a habit of leaving behind packed suitcases in hotel rooms, spent an enviable amount of time hopping vacation homes and dancing on the couches of her male companions—and yet was forced to break her habits to accommodate her father’s passing. Jon followed her example. His mother bought him an all-black suit for the funeral. The look was debonair—he thought it made him look like James Bond. At six years old, the impact of losing this imposing man he’s only heard about in stories and met when he was young enough to forget everything was low.

Rather than mourn, Jon watched the room. Paid attention to the details because he had no heart for this stranger. His mother was crying. She was being comforted by her two brothers which meant they were Jon’s uncles; two men he’d never met before but was supposed to care about because his mother loved them and he loved his mother. One was married to a woman whose hair was as red as pickled persimmons and gave him cookies for being so strong. Jon liked her, though he could not comprehend her standards of strength. To distract him from the grief he did not have, she took him aside to meet her son.

Jon heard the best thing about having a home was the haven; the relief of having something waiting for you after a bad day or a long day or an every day; a permanent cradle of plush blankets and sleeping puppies and warm milk.

When Robb hugged him, promised him that everything was alright, that he was safe, Jon understood what a home was and he wanted it. He wanted his cousin to never let him go and to care for him and to say he looked pretty in black and to hold him in his sleep when he had nightmares. When Robb met him, his smile resembled a lighthouse—a beacon of love and Jon could think of nothing more worthwhile than keeping him happy. He did whatever Robb asked of him those next few days and when his mother declared she wanted him to settle with the Starks while she went on a dangerous assignment, he was elated because it meant he could be by Robb’s side. They did this for years: Lyanna had work; Jon stayed over; Lyanna came back to pick up her son and Robb cried as if he was a wife whose husband had gone to war.

After Bran’s accident, Lyanna switched her interests from journalism to producing her own fine art. Her reputation proceeded her so to avoid the same faces from her childhood, shameless sycophants and the disapproving private, she took on a pseudonym to promote her exhibitions. Then, she made turned her pen name to a legal name. Jon was never asked if he wanted the change. The image of Bran being hooked up to the resuscitator was burned into his mind.

Jon became a Snow the day he told himself that he did not deserve to be a Stark.

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“You’re wearing all black again.”
Jon jumps from the sudden observation. He turns to his doorway and is surprised to see his aunt staring.

“Sorry,” Jon tells her—a habit he never got rid of.

“Don’t be, it’s a good color on you,” Catelyn assures him. She smiles, kind and apologetic, and walks up to him so she can fix his collar. Jon lets her. He does not look her in the eye.

When she is finished, their gazes connect. Her eyes are sad. “Jon, I—”

“It’s fine,” Jon cuts her off. He realizes how harsh he sounds and curses in his head. “I mean, I get it. You were angry and you didn’t mean to hurt me. It’s okay.”

Catelyn frowns. “Jon, I didn’t mean to say it at all.” She sighs. “And it was not okay for me to say that. I’m sorry, Jon. What happened to Bran was not your fault.” She cradles his face and admires those beautiful features she adores on her husband. “I love you. You are a part of this family. Your uncle and I want you to remember that and no one, not even me, can change that.” She kissed his cheek. “Now let me get a good look at you again.”

He takes a step back for his aunt to observe him and she whistles. “Willas is a lucky man.”

“I think most people would agree I’m the lucky one.”

Catelyn hums as she plays with his hair. “You’re both lucky. He’s downstairs waiting for you. I’m afraid your uncle is giving him quite a fright. I swear he’s the worst with these things. You should have seen him when Robb brought Dacey over.”

Jon chuckles, knowing full well that Dacey’s arrival marked the beginning of the end for the Starks. With Robb being the eldest child, it must have dawned on both Ned and Catelyn that their children would now be opened to dating and relationships and the worst of it, sex. The horror of the incident reminds Jon of a lingering thought in his head. His aunt is about to leave when he stops her.

“Aunt Cat?”

“Yes?”

“Um…” Jon fumbles with his watch. He tries to sound casual when he asks the next question. “Have you seen Robb? He wasn’t here when I came home.”

Catelyn frowns. She tries not to sound too uncomfortable when she tells him he’s out. “He has a date.”

“Oh,” Jon utters. Catelyn stays to study Jon’s reaction and is relieved when there is none. Jon thanks her and searches for his wallet. With some hesitation, she leaves to check on Willas. She wonders if she should comfort Jon or if her initial analysis was right—that her reassurance will cause Jon to recognize his undying passion for her son and abandon this fine young man with connections downstairs. She is grateful for intuition. The latter is definitely more likely to occur.

Jon fixes himself up and takes one last look in the mirror. Tonight, he looks good. He looks like a guy going on a date with the heir to a multi-billion-dollar corporation who is handsome and smart and would never try and change Jon because he believes Jon to be a stunner with his smile and perfection in black.

He is moving on. Robb is moving on.
As he is walking downstairs, he decides to wish the best for Robb’s date. He smiles as his mind hisses about the rebound whore who was lurking in the shadows, waiting to scavenge the pieces that were Jon’s. He hopes she is pretty. With curls Robb loves to pull while he is inside her perfect ass and giving orders on how good she takes it even though it will never compare to how well Jon slurps up his cock.

***

Before Jon can be whisked away to a land of caramelized pears, lightly breaded trout, and fluffy soufflés, Willas must suffer through an agonizing interview by the Papa Wolf before him. From the moment he stepped into the Stark household, Ned Stark made it clear he was not welcomed. To his credit, the man did not say a disbarring word in the presence of his wife but instead settled for glaring at him—like he was a gift horse with big teeth. Catelyn, on the other hand, was a pleasure to be acquainted with. She reminded him of his own mum. He had the good sense to bring her flowers and in payment, he received a dazzling smile. She offered him a drink as soon as he walked through the door and complimented him on his endearing expression and fashionable attire. The contrast of treatment between the two spouses unnerved him.

Reading the tension in the room, Catelyn offers to get Jon. While Willas is elated to go forward on his date, he is not particularly excited to be left alone with her husband. He keeps to his defenses and smiles through the personal questionnaire.

Ned’s eyes narrow as soon as the grin appears on Willas’ face. There are rent boys with more shame than him. His inner beast is growling at the deviant. He confirms that Willas is just as old as he thought he was which was too old for Bran. He even has the nerve to ask about his precious son’s wellbeing.

“Bran is out. He does that sometimes. Goes out. With his friends. With his dog. He’s not as naïve as you would like.”

“That’s great! I’m happy he—”

“One time, when he was a kid—he’s still a kid but when he was a much younger, softer kid, a pedophile tried to kidnap him and Summer ripped his throat open. The man died. He died because he was trying to hurt my children.”

“Oh, was Bran okay—?”

“We were supposed to put Summer down but I made a few phone calls. My brother is a cop. We have connections everywhere. Starks know how to take care of people.”

Willas considers answering but instead reaches for his scotch and swallows his fears in liquid form. He’s never experienced this in his life. Parents love him. They find him nonthreatening and sweet. He was handicapped; people are supposed to feel sorry for him, not intimidate him for taking their nephews on dates.

Hearing the familiar trail of wheels, he considers kissing the ground to show his reverence to the merciful gods above. Bran is surprised to see him but greets him with the same shy, appreciative smile Willas remembers from the last two times they met. The younger boy becomes nervous for a split second, glances back and forth, before breathing a sigh of relief.

Curious, Willas wonders but brushes his suspicions off like dust. His sister used to tell him that their family has made him paranoid. All their pranks and their plots. He sees a wink and assumes there’s a scheme regarding the wine. “Hello, Bran.”
Bran smiles. “Hey, Willas…are you here to pick up Jon?”

Willas nods. “Your mother is getting him for me. Thank you again for arranging this date. I wouldn’t be here without your help.”

“I think about that every day,” Bran mutters.

“What?”

“Nothing!” Bran chirps. He tells Willas good luck and tries to retreat to his room. Willas cuts his journey short by handing him a few brochures.

“I got them for you since you wanted to travel. I asked a few of my colleagues and they recommended a number of art workshops for kids your age. I think you should have a look at them.”

Bran is hesitant in taking them—which Willas chalks up to the disbelief of having one’s dreams within arm’s reach and not Bran’s conscience heaving up buckets of guilt. Robb has just forgiven him and here he is, accepting another bribe from the Tyrell heir. He blushes a treacherous glow and thanks Willas.

Willas puts a hand on Bran’s shoulder and is about to respond with a standard ‘it was nothing’ and a heartfelt ‘you deserve this’ when Ned walks over and swipes Willas’s hands off.

“That’s enough touching,” he grunts out. He takes the pamphlets from Bran’s hands and assesses them for pornographic material and subliminal messages to cross-dress in his sister’s lingerie. When he confirms there is none—and even takes a moment to appreciate the spring program in Tibet—he returns them to Bran. “This sounds like a good opportunity.”

Before Bran can agree, his mother’s familiar shrill of worry is heard from the staircase. “What sounds like a good opportunity?”

Catelyn walks up to them with smiles and graces. She must have made up with Jon, Bran thinks, and would have been happier about their reconciliation if she wasn’t redirecting her grief onto him. She spots the words ‘workshop’ and absorbs the various destinations printed—all international, which might as well have been a bullet to the heart considering she equivocates London to Mars, so China and Monaco were in another galaxy. Before she can rally up a riot, Willas steps in—figuratively.

“I hope you don’t mind. Bran expressed an interest in my travel experiences and thinking about it reminded me of my grandmother. She had the most enthusiastic approach to my upbringing,” He chuckles—the perfect combination of exasperation and fondness. “I grew up in these programs. They have excellent facilities and the ones I recommend are accommodating to people with disabilities. There’s one in France I attended for a year. I was a part of their business sector but they have a world renown art program.”

Catelyn is unable to respond. She wants to protest but doing so with the reason ‘Bran cannot handle it’ is unacceptable in Willas’ presence. Instead, she settles for a neutral, if not tight lipped response of “we’ll look into it” and following Bran’s hopeful expression, “if we can fit it into his current schedule.”

Bran beams. He tries to send Willas his gratitude with his eyes. Ned catches the gaze and interprets it as longing. He clenches his fists and wheels his baby boy to the elevator where he can be hidden from predators. England will have a week of sunshine before he lets his son develop a crush on this homoerotic hitman. This is how it all starts. Willas is luring Bran into a false sense of security with his good deeds. Afterward, there’s the hero worship. Locked rooms. Playing Doctor with no clothes on.
“You keep your clothes on, Bran.”

“Dad?”

Ned does not respond—only mutters vengeful nonsense.

At last, Jon descends from the staircase. Willas cannot get up fast enough. He limps with a speed comparable to actual strides and when he arrives too soon, takes a moment to enjoy the view.

Jon is delectable in black.

“You look wonderful,” Willas bites his tongue to keep him from confessing what he’s truly thinking. He imagines Jon will look fantastic on top of him—riding him with the skill of a jockey and muttering sensual phrases from those swollen lips. “Black is your color.”

“So I’ve been told,” Jon replies. He departs the household after giving his aunt a kiss on the cheek and promising to be home before midnight. Catelyn tells him to stay out as long as he likes.

“I was your age when I met your uncle,” she says with a wink. Jon flushes and practically runs out of the house. Before Willas can follow him, Catelyn grabs his arm. In a heated whisper, she tells him to make his move. “Tonight is not the night to be a gentleman, Willas. He may not seem like his mother’s child, but underneath that heartfelt demeanor is a festering ball of sexual frustration and outrageous kink. He will put out so make sure you stay out.” She releases him from her hold. “Good luck!”

Catelyn Stark slams the door in his face. She grins triumphantly. Fulfilling the void left behind in her nephew’s heart will be her only focus tonight. After listening to her son mourned the loss of Jon’s fantastic ass, she knows that after having a taste, Willas will work his entire life to pay off the meal.

She ignores the sound of fluttering wings coming from her son’s bedroom and decides she will until tomorrow to dispose of the garbage tainting his mind with false hopes and dangerous ambitions. Willas meant well so she’ll forgive him for this one indiscretion, but he does not know her son the way she does.

***

The car has more than enough space for two people to lie down in, but Willas disregards the meaning of a respectable distance and seats himself so close that their thighs are touching. His intentions are about as subtle as a call girl named Vegas working a street corner. The whole situation is balanced by the fact he is not suggesting a quickie in the limousine but instead rambles on about his work, his life, and his family.

The proper side of Jon, the region of his mind that remembers his manners and remains influenced by the Stark’s posh upbringing, considers playing coy. This consensus is quickly overturned by Jon’s penis. His self-control has never been so wrecked before. Robb ruined him. Jon is so used to getting cock delivered on the daily that he does not wait for Willas to finish his story about gods-knows-what before he starts massaging Willas’ tender leg and asks if it hurts when he touches him.

Willas never stood a chance.

And I was trying so hard to be a gentleman, Willas muses. Jon lavishes his mouth with kisses and tries not to crawl on his lap. Willas keeps a hand on his neck to keep their situation under control. When they separate, Jon mews and the desperation gets to Willas; he lets go of Jon’s curls and lets the boy run wild. Jon recaptures his lips at first but then travels downwards to his neck and sucks hickies into his flesh. Willas sits back and enjoys the ministrations. When Jon’s hand works on his
zipper, he pauses their foreplay and reminds Jon of their dinner plans.

“I want nothing more than to treasure you, Jon,” Willas mumbles. He is prepared to rim Jon’s ass for hours and make him come from his tongue alone. Then, when Jon’s hole is sore and swollen, he plans to have Jon riding his cock all night.

The car finds their destination and the two resolve to spend a few more moments kissing. Jon curls his tongue the way Robb likes it and Willas responds deliciously—curls his toes and grabs Jon’s ass like he belongs to him. Jon giggles and gets away before they ‘go too far’ as Willas feared. Despite the older man’s whimper, Jon bites Willas’ lower lip as a promise of things to come.

Jon gets out of the vehicle first. He helps Willas to his feet and together they walk into the restaurant. The journey is long given Willas’ injury, but Jon fills the void with his own personal anecdote. Against his better judgment, he spends most of his time narrating Robb’s accomplishments and their recovering relationship. He tries to stop himself a number of times—talking about an ex is an infamous dating blunder—but Willas pushes and a slew of compliments is iterated despite his conscious attempt to avoid the subject. Willas does not know about him and Robb—only that Jon loves his cousin and as a potential boyfriend, wants to learn about all the people Jon loves.

“Oh look, here we are. Time passes by, doesn’t it?” Jon opens the door.

Willas agrees. “Yes, especially when you talk about someone you love.”

If Jon had a glass of water, he would have been choking. He warns himself to be careful this evening. No more talk or Robb. No more longing for exes. No more looking to the past for what could have been and more heading to the future for what can be.

The host’s eyes widen in the presence of Willas Tyrell. He escorts them to their table without a moment’s hesitation and reiterates retired dribble expressing their gratefulness for his patronage. The table he leads them to is private and away from their other guests. On their way there, Willas is stolen from him. His back is turned when he hears Willas’ exclamation of surprise and in seeking out the source, finds a devastatingly gorgeous man making out with his date.

While Jon gapes at the unintentional infidelity, he is not ignorant to the familiar mass lurking behind a leather menu.

“Robb?”

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While Jon deals with the initial betrayal of being spied on—because there is no place in hell, heaven, or earth where Robb’s appearance is coincidental—and ignores the relief that cools down his boiling jealousy. Robb is not on a date. He is here and he is spying on Jon because he is not over Jon and still madly in love with him.

Following his conceited analysis, his relief dissipates to self-loathing for being a complete asshole. He should want Robb to move on, Jon reminds himself. Robb moving on means he’ll be able to find a partner worthy of him and let Jon pursue something substantial with Willas.

Jon moves forward to retrieve his partner for this evening, but this god of a man refuses to let go. If anything, Jon’s impending presence gives him the courage to pursue more liberties. Instead of just jamming his tongue down Willas’ throat, he uses hand to cup his ass. The entire restaurant stares. A few men and women cough. Some shield themselves with menus to conceal the fact that they are watching. The majority are all waiting for Willas to get ravished on a nearby table. They are
disappointed when Oberyn runs out of air. Before he lets go, he stares into Willas’ eyes with longing. He cradles Willas’ cheek; the gesture is a mockery with its gentleness—there’s no point maintaining courtesy after that brutal display of sensuality. Willas takes a step back and is shaking. Jon helps him stabilize. “Oberyn…” Willas breathes out. He smiles tightly, an impossible feat given the state of his lips. “I didn’t know you were back in England.”

“Sí, I had business to take care of on behalf of my brother and was offered a chance to befriend the Starks. Doran begged me to lend a hand. I could never deny my brother anything—family is incredibly important. Though fate must be fond of me to bring me the pleasure of your presence.”

Willas chuckles. His laugh is cut short by his own breathlessness. He coughs and returns his attention to Jon. “Um, Oberyn, this is Jon, my date.” He says the last word firmly—making clear there are no misunderstandings Oberyn can take advantage of in order warp Jon’s psyche. “Jon, this is my friend Oberyn.”

Jon offers Oberyn a cautious smile and a handshake. “You must be very good friends.”

Oberyn ignores his hand and kisses him on both cheeks. The friendliness unnerves Jon, who remains silent despite his obvious discomfort. “Yes, I hope I did not make you uncomfortable. I’ve been away from Willas for so long, I could not control myself. Is he not the most handsome man in the world?”

Jon does not answer. Oberyn interprets Jon’s silence as anger. His next smile is unnerving; he has plenty to gloat about with his ripped body and soul crushing charisma. To avoid Willas’ wrath, Oberyn opts to sings praises of the younger man before. “Jon, I’ve heard many things about you from your cousin. He is right—you are quite stunning.” He brushes a curl from Jon’s face. Jon shivers; Oberyn’s hands remind him of snake scales rubbing against his skin. “Pretty as a picture; Willas, I see your type has not changed.”

The comment irks Willas. Jon sees more frustration on Willas’ face than he thought possible of the older man. “I think history has proven I don’t have a type.” Willas leans on Jon’s shoulder. “We should go to our table.”

Oberyn refuses to let them get away. “You are leaving me already? You must be joking. Me estás tomando el pelo. I cannot accept that. Please, why don’t you sit with us? The more the merrier, they say.”

“I am sure Robb would rather his business dealings be held in private,” Willas tells him.

“I don’t mind,” Robb pops in for the first time tonight.

“I am sure you don’t,” Jon hisses.

Robb does not cower under Jon’s glare, though he is tempted. Instead, he stands his ground when he confesses that “he will never turn down a chance to spend more time with Jon and to get to know the man courting his beloved cousin.” Jon does not scoff like he wishes to. He does not want to alert Willas to the internal drama within his family.

“If you excuse me, Oberyn, your friend and I have a date tonight. Which we are in the middle of and will be continuing. Alone.” The last word is directed towards Robb.

Oberyn recognizes an attack when he sees one; most of the time, however, they are directed towards him. He narrows his eyes at Jon. This little shit whose balls dropped yesterday thinks he’s man enough for Willas Tyrell—Oberyn is already imagining the ways he can teach this brat a lesson. He
corners his rage elsewhere; for now, he leans in to give Willas a peck on the lips—chaste as rainbows compared to his earlier actions.

“Perhaps another time,” Oberyn suggests. “There’s so much to catch up on. My daughter has gotten married.”

Willas bites the bait. He loves Oberyn’s daughters. “Who? Don’t tell me Tyrene…”

“Obara,” Oberyn corrects. He smiles fondly. “Obara has wedded the stepson of a Baratheon. I have much to complain about.”

Willas is taken back and then settles onto chuckling. “I cannot believe there is a man alive who can get that girl to an altar.”

“I think she was as shocked as the rest of us. When I saw her walking down the aisle, she looked possessed.”

Willas laughs. “I’m sorry I could not make it.” The atmosphere lightens as planned; Oberyn’s domineering presence fades into a familiar comfort for Willas. He leans in. Jon stops the motion by reminding his date, adding an arm stroke and battering lashes, that their table is waiting. Willas snaps out of his nostalgic trance. He straightens as much as possible in his condition and sends Oberyn a displeased look. “I will try to fit you into my schedule,” he says evenly. “I'm quite busy.”

Jon and him depart before Oberyn can protest the unfair assessment. As soon as they are left alone, Willas proclaims countless apologies. “I’m sorry, Jon. Oberyn’s behavior was unacceptable. He—fuck! That man does not understand boundaries. If he saw a wall, he’d just get a tractor and plow through it. Shit, I didn’t mean to—his grip is like a vice, do you know that? And he has this presence—I don’t know how to explain it—it suffocates you like quicksand.”

Jon has never heard Willas swear so much. His disheveled appearance is almost entertaining enough to make up for the offense—almost. In any other situation, he’d give the person hell for putting him through that. But he cannot shovel all the blame onto Willas; he cannot even do so with Oberyn—there is a reason that the Spaniard was here tonight and it wasn’t for a business dinner as he claimed.

“—knew I was here!”

Jon interrupts Willas’ rant to confess his involvement. “Willas…I think I might know the answer to that.”

Willas stares at him.

“Do you remember my ex? The one I broke up with a few weeks ago?”

“Of course, learning you were available was the highlight of my week.” Willas’ charm resurrects itself and Jon feels the guilt churning in his stomach.

“I forgot to mention why we broke up.”

Willas is quick to come to his defense—he is a gentleman, after all. “That’s fine, Jon. I don’t want to push you into revealing anything that might make you uncomfortable. What’s in the past is in the past.”

“Well…” Jon winces. “…it might not have remained in the past.”

“What do you mean?”
“The reason I broke up with my ex is because I found out he was my cousin. You know, the guy Oberyn is currently having dinner with and might still be in love with me.”

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“I apologize, Robb.” Oberyn sits down and pours himself a glass of wine. He ignores the sweaty waiter assigned to them. “There is something about Willas Tyrell that makes me lose control of my inner beast. That face, that chest, that ass…you should have seen it when he put on weight. It was like touching a cloud.”

“There is nothing to apologize for,” Robb soothes. “We are both men here. I, too, feel something whenever I set my eyes on J—just the right person.” He takes a bite of his appetizers to cover up his mistake. Once he swallows, he asks Oberyn about his girlfriend. “How does she feel about your passions?” Robb has heard rumors but—.

“Oh, Ellaria loves Willas. She is always asking me: ‘when will Willas visit again?’ and ‘what is Willas up to?’ She asks for his cock almost as much as mine.”

Robb is glad he had the sense not to drink when he asked that question. “Oh, so Willas has shared a bed with you before?”

“Many times,” Oberyn expresses proudly. “We were lovers—all three of us. Having him within our circle fulfilled us in a way we could have never predicted.”

“Is that so?” The bubbles of joy gurgle within his throat. He knew there was no way Willas Tyrell was as perfect as his sources made him out to be.

“Yes, unfortunately, Willas’ grandmother was the thorn to blossoming love. She refused to believe we were happy and overtime, poked holes in our sails. We remain companions of the soul, but our bodies have not met for some time.”

“My condolences.” The only thing worse than a sexual deviant was an adult pushover. Robb records “prone to emotional manipulation by his grandmother.

“Yes, but…” Oberyn smirks. Even the evil is enchanting on his disgustingly handsome face. “Willas has never been able to forget me. He longs for the touch of a real man and none of his lovers have ever sufficed. Jon is no different.”

There is a pause. The mood sours. Robb’s tightens his grip on his wine glass. “What do you mean?”

“No offense to your cousin. He is as you described: beautiful. But a pretty face is not enough to keep a man like Willas Tyrell. He needs more…how do you say? Substance. Someone as ill-equipped as Jon will never be enough to satisfy him.”

“Oh, he is plenty equipped,” Robb snaps. “Not to mention, thoughtful and loving and independent—perhaps Willas can learn consideration while he is with Jon. After all, the man is shameless enough to kiss his ex in front of the man he is supposedly courting.”

Oberyn slams his glass on the table. “Willas Tyrell’s heart beats with the call of compassion and his tongue is soaked with wit. Your Jon, a bore if I ever met one, should feel lucky to be in his presence.”

“My Jon is the epitome of wild wolf dashing through the snow covered mountains. He cannot be tamed—unlike your Willas, who lets his family run his life and brainwash his heart so that he hurts the people he loves most. My Jon cares about people and would do what is best for them, not what is
best for him.”

“No me jodas—My Willas is loyal to his loved ones and welcomes a good future with every step he takes. There is nothing wrong with his decision making. He has taken more burdens than men twice his age and refuses to resent those who shape his identity, for better or for worse.”

“If he even has an identity,” Robb scoffs. “He is a Tyrell. His grandmother makes his identity.”

“Shut your whorish mouth, cabron. I would rather he be loyal to his family than some heedless tramp who crawls into any bed that has silk sheets. Or did you not think I would not do my own research on your cousin? The boy has a habit of fucking rich men.”

Robb stands up. “Are you trying to insinuate something, Oberyn Martell?”

Oberyn follows suit. “I thought I was saying it, Robb Stark.”

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“He is fucking crazy.”

Willas laughs heartily and encourages the waiting server to leave behind the bottle of wine and asks for another on the way. The man leaves them alone to perform the task.

Jon continues his story, “He brings out all these story boards—and I remind you, we weren’t together at this point—and there are these pie charts about the money we would save on shared living expenses—never mind that Robb has never worried about money in his life. And that wasn’t the worst of it.”

“There’s more?”

“He had my credit score and bank statements aligned next to the board containing the statistics. And the data? ‘The benefits of having frequent sex’ and ‘reasons why orgasms are more easily attained with a regular partner.’” Jon wipes away a tear. He cannot remember the last time he laughed so hard. “But I ended up saying ‘yes.’”

“To moving in or being his boyfriend?”

Jon drinks the last of his wine. “Both, I guess.” He smiles to himself. “He calmed down over time and I don’t want you to think he’s…Robb is amazing. He is the best person I know. He—”

“I get it.” Willas genuinely gets where Jon is coming from and the empathy is a relief. “Oberyn is the same way. I mean, he’s interfered with every single relationship I’ve had for the last five years—”

“Five years?”

Willas laughs. “Ever since we broke up, he’s been begging for me to return. He checks out all my lovers and proves to me they aren’t good enough. Says if they’re not willing to fight for me, then they are not worth my time. Turns out, a lot of men don’t want to compete with a handsome, practically mad, world-traveler with an inheritance and a criminal record.”

Jon wonders where they find these guys. “Please tell me he was a drug-dealer or something mild like that.”

Willas grins.

Jon laughs; tipsy from the alcohol and in the mood for a bit of frisking. “You’re full of surprises,
aren’t you?”

“I guess I like bad boys.”

Jon smirks. “I thought you didn’t have a type.”

Willas hums and finishes the last of his wine. “I lied.”

Their server returns with their bottle. He opens it for the both of them and is about to pour when Willas stops him. “We can take it from here.”

“Sir, it’s customary for—”

“I said it is fine.” Willas gets up. “Please hand my date the bottle. I think we would like a stroll in the gardens. Please have our appetizers sent to the patio. I know it’s a bit late to start filling up but I prefer something to eat before I pass out on liquor.” He winks at Jon. “Let’s take a walk. We can escape from the back so they don’t see us.”

Jon swipes the bottle out of the waiter’s hand and grabs the glasses. Roses are not in season this year, but Jon appreciates a good lily every now and then. He pours them another glass of wine. Feeling bolder than ever, Jon asks Willas why things didn’t work out with Oberyn.

“Besides the fact that he’s, how did you describe Robb? Fucking crazy?”

Jon chuckles. “Yes, besides that.”

Willas swirls his wine. “Oberyn has a longtime girlfriend—Ellaria. She happens to be the mother of his four children.”

“Oh.” So it is one of those things.

“She is wonderful. I’m not particularly fond of the female form but there is something about her that makes me smile.” And Willas does smile in her memory. “I’ve been friends with Oberyn forever. One thing led to another and we…slept together. I don’t know why I thought he’d keep it a secret—he doesn’t keep anything a secret from Ellaria, or me for that matter. She wasn’t angry. She wasn’t even threatened. She asked me to join them one night so, out of fear and curiosity, I did.”

“Ah.” So it is not one of those things.

“One night turned to many nights which turned into more nights alone with Oberyn and some nights just cuddling with Ellaria and their children. And…I was so young then. We talked about traveling the world together and their children and buying our own home and it was a dream…”

“But some dreams don’t come true,” Jon finishes. “And some dreams become nightmares.”

“And nightmares can become a reality,” Willas chuckles. “Ellaria may not be his only but she is his one. Being Oberyn’s third is not worth the humiliation towards my family and it is not worth my reputation.” Willas sighs. “So I told Oberyn it was over and he didn’t believe me. He blamed my grandmother. And all this time, he’s been pursuing me, trying to get me to change my mind.”

"I could have told you he would do that. That is not the face of a man whose been told ‘no’ often."

Willas laughs. "I guess not. But Jon, I made a choice and I chose me. I chose my family.”

“Do you regret it?” Jon whispers.
Willas’ expression is sad, but there’s no shame in his answer. “If Oberyn were to get on his knees tonight, I would still say no. I love him, Jon. But I can live without Oberyn and Oberyn can live without me. There’s no shame in doing what’s right over doing what feels right.”

Jon swallows to soothe his dry throat. Willas sees his distress and lends a comforting hand. “You made the decision to protect Robb over protecting your heart. Jon, feeling remorse is not the same as making the wrong decision. I never wanted to hurt anybody. It took a long time for me to get over Oberyn—I still get lightheaded when I’m around him—but I moved on. I am here with you because I think we can have a future together.”

Jon meets Willas’ eyes and they are full of hope and wonder—just like Robb’s. Willas kisses him at that moment. There’s less passion and more sweetness, kindness with every suckle and lap. When they part, the world is calm. Willas cradles his face.

“If we cannot have who we want, then let’s be with the people we need.”

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter: Targaryens are back in the picture. I found a way to lengthen the chapter to actually be eventful. Next next chapter: Arya gets her story arc—and we finally get motherfucking Tywin Lannister and a yacht and sexiness (there will be warnings—don’t worry if it squicks you out) and more Jaqen H’ghar!
2. Next week, there will be no update. I have my LSATs on the 3rd (my plan B if my writing career does not work out). Originally, my plans were to update last week, update this week, skip a week, and have the following week enter Arya’s story arc. Then, I got sick and my plans were derailed.
3. I hope you enjoyed the chapter and Happy Thanksgiving! Or Happy Black Friday today. I do not celebrate Thanksgiving so my amount of care is very low.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Turns out, being fucked doesn’t feel as good without the fucking involved.

Instead of whisking Jon to his five-star resort for a night filled with wreckage and ravishment, Willas decided that the best thing for them is to allow each other space. He believed that by restricting their intimacy to deep conversations about their exes and dark chocolate bombe, they would improve their understanding of one another. "Don't get me wrong," Willas soothes. "The reveals tonight made me more interested than ever, but I think that both of us are too overwhelmed to take their relationship to the next level."

Jon disagreed; Willas was about as misguided as the Cuban Missile Crisis if he thought that leaving Jon alone was going to do either of them good. More than ever, Jon needed the physical reminder of being wanted. He hid his lustfulness underneath his solitary exterior, but he liked being touched, fondled, manhandled. In spite of his protests, Willas refused Jon’s plundering tongue and made the decision for both of them.

When he gets home at ten at night instead of three the next morning, Aunt Catelyn is horrified. She asks him what went wrong. "Nothing." She asks if Willas was impotent. “No.” The erection in the limo proved otherwise. She asks if he wants to talk about it. “Definitely not.” Then, she pauses and asks if he needed advice on how to sleep with a man with a handicap.

“Oh, gods no.”

“It is alright, Jon. When your uncle was on a medical discharge, he and I figured out numerous ways to work around his broken leg. I can teach you right now, and we can call Willas and get you in his bed before sunrise.”

“Aunt Cat, I am going to my room and forgetting you said that.”

“You are Lyanna’s son. You cannot be disturbed that knowledge!” She shouts as he walks up the stairs.

An hour later, Jon overhears Robb coming home. He makes quite an entrance—the door slamming and cursing spittle variety. Aunt Cat is livid. Jon hears her hiss, “What did you do?” to which Robb replies, without an ounce of shame, “I defended Jon’s honor.”

Catelyn’s reaction makes it clear to everyone but Robb that it is the wrong thing to say. There is a great deal of rumbling and stumbling and unintended threats. Aunt Cat says something about bruises and black eyes—and Jon thinks: what did Oberyn do to him? Then he wonders, in growing horror, what did Robb do to Oberyn? He hears his name being mentioned, and Jon shivers from hearing Robb’s husk. Of course, Robb would get into a fight over Jon—Jon has been back for less than a month, and he is already destroying Robb’s reputation. The boy is fighting; he is ruining potential business alliances and it is all because of Jon. Catelyn uses the phrase “consequences of his actions”—and Jon grabs a pillow to blocked out the rest of the argument.

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The next morning, he calls in sick for work. Stannis is not amused—he asks Jon to come over regardless. If one of the kids get pneumonia, Jon will have to take care of them anyways so he might
as well risk it. Davos hears the offer, reprimands Stannis’s counteroffer, and then agrees to take the day off instead. There are no significant meetings and he can afford to play with his children instead of politics with Stannis.

He asks Jon if he is alright and his concern makes Jon regret lying.

“I’ll be fine by tomorrow,” he promises.

“Ah, the mysterious one-day flu.” Davos chuckles. Jon knows he’s been caught in his lie. “No problem. This might actually be a good thing. We haven’t been spending enough time with our children. I think once Stannis sees how much fun we had without him, he’ll finally be persuaded to take a day off for himself.”

Jon sighs in relief. “Thanks, Davos.”

“You take care of yourself.”

Jon says he will but doubts whatever is going on with him can be fixed.

Without the pressures of employment, Jon uses his free time to do a few things he hasn’t done in a while. He calls up his friends and starts wondering if they are alive or not—all in jest. He calls up Sam first but as customary of medical students, he is busy. He moves on to Ygritte and as expected, she mocks him for his ruined fairy tale. There’s a moment in her criticism where she takes her insults a step too far and ends up apologizing awkwardly when she realizes his feelings were genuinely hurt. She offers to visit him for a night out and promises to bring Tormund—who is the best at making Jon forget his troubles—never mind that he does so by bringing in more trouble. Jon ends up taking a drive and finding a café, making more phone calls and catching up on other people’s lives. He settles into a pattern and what unnerves him is whole the entire situation feels out of place—as if he were looking at himself through a window. Jon wonders why that is. He and his friends always lived apart. They used to make these kinds of phone calls all the time. Little tidbits of information passed through their ears like migrating geese that somehow always find a way back to one another. Yet, it feels wrong, somehow.

He orders eggs benedict. While waiting for his food, Sam returns his phone call.

“Jon? Is that you?”

“Hey, Sam.”

“Hey!” Sam cheery, albeit nervous, greeting makes Jon’s stomach settle somewhat. “It’s good to hear from you again. I heard from Ed that you’re back in Yorkshire for the summer?”

News travels far too fast within their circle. “Yeah, I’m just having breakfast right now. How about you?”

“Oh, I’m on my break. Not my real one—no one’s been able to get a break these days.” Sam whispers into the phone, “A lot of our oldies are beginning to ‘fall off the bandwagon’ and you know, not get back up. Forever.”

Jon wonders if it is in bad humor to chuckle. Ever since Sam's father disowned him, Sam has been working as an orderly at a five-star nursing home. The older boy rarely had a free moment between his job, his pursuit of a medical degree, and his new family. In fact, Jon is surprised he even found time to call back.
He sits back and listens to Sam babble on and on about Gilly’s new bakery job and his son’s first words. “He’s gotten so big, Jon, you have to come visit!” Sam loves talking about his son—and Jon will never say otherwise regarding the lineage—and treats his girlfriend like she’s the last diamond in the world. They live on the site of the nursing home—an impossible occurrence if not for the demands of Aemon Targaryen. Aemon refused to have anyone else caring for him and as a Targaryen, his demands must be heard at all cost. They gave Sam everything after that—even paid for his schooling on the condition he works for them for them for after he graduates.

“How is Aemon, anyways?”

“Oh, well you know, he’s…Aemon. Wise. Old. But you know his nephew, the composer you like?”

“Rhaegar Tagaryean,” Jon corrects. “Everyone knows him.”

“Yeah, he’s been visiting a lot. I thought I’d get you an autograph but we’re not allowed within two feet of him when he visits. Special measures. Posh people, you know.”

“Sam, you are posh,” Jon reminds him. He assures Sam there is no love lost. “The only reason I like him is because my mother used to play his music all the time—she said it was the only thing that got me to sleep.” Jon shakes his head. The waitress brings him his orange juice. “I think she just wanted an excuse to listen him. There’s a song on one of the albums dedicated to her. ‘The She-Wolf Wearing Roses.’” There was no subtlety there.

“Seriously?” Sam pauses. “Jon, you don’t think he could be…”

Jon shrugs though his friend could not see him. “Maybe? Either way, he’s married. He was married when I was born and he is still married now.”

“His poor wife,” Sam mumbles. He must be thinking of Gilly. Jon has to smile. Sam is more faithful than a dog when it came to the people he loves.

“But you know,” Sam continues on. “Aemon misses you. I mean, he never says that he misses you but he’s over a hundred and he still remembers you used to work here. And it was only for a few months! That’s got to count for something. You should come visit if you’re nearby.”

Jon pauses. The nursing home is located on the outskirts of town. While going there is far from a visit to the post office, it is not a journey to the center of the earth, either. It might take an hour, two tops to get there and back.

The waitress comes back with his eggs benedict. “Yeah…I think I’ll do that,” Jon replies. “Maybe I’ll get to hear little Sam call me ‘Uncle Jon.’”

He can practically hear Sam beaming.

***The nursing home is as opulent as he remembered. The Targaryens pay thousands of pounds a month in donations to ensure Aemon receives the best possible treatment. They send scouts every other week to observe the facilities and and sometimes they send in spies. The doctor to patient ratio is 1-5 and the nurses, double that. There are countless activities, dances, anything they can do for their patients, they will. Their efforts are wasted on the one they hoped to impress the most. Aemon spends most of his time in the library, which have all be stocked with audiobooks and braille translations.

Jon greets the receptionist—a pretty thing who shouldn’t but somehow still pleases the old men with respiratory failure and near blindness. She calls Sam who welcomes Jon with open arms. He warns Jon that he’s still on the clock for another three hours but they can do lunch. Gilly is bringing
something from work for all of them.

“She’s excited to see you, too! And she’s bringing baby Samwell along,” Sam gushes.

Jon rejects the trouble of having lunch brought over to him and offers to pay, but Sam insists. “I can afford to get you lunch. Besides, you helped me out a lot when my father let me go. I’m just happy we’re catching up now.” He brings Jon over to Aemon who was lounging in his wheelchair, reading a book. “You should spend some time with him while you wait. I told him you were coming.”

Sam wanders off to fulfill his next task and leaves Jon alone with Aemon. Jon makes no sudden movements. He watches Aemon mutter senselessly about a particular paragraph and turn the page without vigor. Jon takes the opportunity to step forward. “How are you enjoying the novel?”

“I’ve read better,” Aemon answers dryly. He is not surprise to hear from Jon and he does not bother to turn around, either. Regardless where he directed his attention, his blindness prevented him from seeing Jon. “With the ink, the words no longer burn into my head. Damn braille.”

“How are you doing, Aemon?”

“Well you know what they say. At a hundred and two, every day above ground is a good day.”

Jon bursts out laughing. Another orderly brings Aemon his tea and sets one down for Jon without him asking. Before Jon could question the action, the man leaves them alone.

“Sam told the workers you were a relative,” the man clarifies.

“Oh.” Jon supposes he might as well be. He takes a sip. “It’s good.”

“The people in charge think that buying leaves equivalent to the cost of a heart transplant will perform the same function.” Aemon hums. “They do smell nice.”

“So I guess you’re not crazy about this place?”

Aemon shrugs as much as he can. His bones are brittle and movement has become a hardship. “It’s peaceful,” He answers tactfully.

“It’s boring, you never liked boring.”

“I am not used to it, no.” Aemon corrects. “For over fifty years, I worked in the police force—started off as a detective. Catching rapists and serial killers. But then all the technologies started coming in and I thought: ‘Oh, that looks interesting.’ It helped that my health was waning. They were trying to get me to put on a desk job. I said ‘no.’ Have you ever heard of the Night King?”

“Of course.” Aemon has told him the story numerous times.

“The most legendary case of the eighties and I was there. I helped catch him. It was my first case as a forensics scientist. No one knew what I did. I was an old man, even then. Mormont, my old partner, would bring all these clues and no matter what I said to him—‘Joer, I’m not doing that shit anymore,’ he didn’t listen. Hated his partner. Allister was a cruel man. The kind of man who liked to break other men—would be a criminal himself if he thought he could get away with it, would have if the Mormont wasn’t there. But Mormont and I did it together. We found him right before he ‘converted’ someone else. A Stark if I remember correctly.”

Jon rolls his eyes and drinks more tea. Aemon remembers everything and he knew Jon knew the story by heart.
Benjen was the one who was kidnapped.

Benjen now served on the same police force that rescued him.

A happy ending.

Aemon grimaces. “The biggest case of the decade is happening right now and I’m not a part of it. It makes an old man feel nostalgic.”

“They’ll be fine,” Jon reassures. “Besides, dead prostitutes and man-eating dogs cannot be good for your health.”

“I cannot think of anything better.”

Jon shakes his head in exasperation. Aemon takes the opportunity to talk about Jon and his career choices. “I heard from Sam that you’re staying for a while. Have you found a job? You must be restless.”

“I’m a nanny again.”

“And after?”

“There has to be an after?” Jon jokes without feeling the humor.

“Children grow old. Trust me, I’ve been watching men kill the boys in them for ten decades.” He pauses. “It is rewarding, seeing the people you’ve raised do well as adults. But it takes a lot out of you. I helped raised my nephews and nieces, my grandnephews and grandnieces. Tried to protect them. Failed most of the time but I tried.”

“I’ll be fine,” Jon assures. If he dwells on the subject of family, he fears Aemon will have another attack. “I was thinking of the police force or maybe the military for employment. Something active.”

Aemon acts as if he didn't hear Jon. “Your mother is an artist, isn’t she?”

“She’s a photographer, yes.”

“But you never had an aptitude for art?”

“Nope,” Jon laughs. “I never even drew on the walls.”

“How about music? Did you like music?”

“Everyone likes music,” Jon admits. “But I never bothered to learn anything. That kind of talent takes lessons and I was never in a place long enough to take them. Never wanted to when I got older, either. I lost my roots and settled for dancing the wind.”

“And why are you staying now? Here?”

Jon does not answer so Aemon does for him. “Whoever is making you stay must be someone special.”

Jon denies it immediately. “Just family, Aemon. I’m a Stark, remember?”

“Family is special.” Aemon grabs his cup of tea. The cup shakes. Jon offers to help him but he refuses. The footsteps from behind indicate Sam’s presence. Jon turns around and sees Gilly cradling her little boy. The boy cheers.
“Gramp-pa! Gramp-pa!”

Jon coos when Gilly hands Sam over to him. “Oh he’s lovely, Gilly.” The boy does not appreciate the compliment. He fusses from being in the hands of a stranger and reaches out for Aemon. “Gramp-pa!” To his credit, he does not cry but he’s obviously unhappy.

His parents smile nervously. They don’t want to insult Jon by taking him away but they hate seeing him unhappy. They are doters; Sam and Gilly both vowed to make sure that little Sam never felt unloved—not like they were. Jon, using his childcare knowledge, starts lifting the baby up. The bouncing movements alleviates some of baby Sam’s stress and he begins to giggle. He tries to touch Jon’s face but ends up grabbing his curls instead.

“Oh he likes you!” Sam announces. The relief is obvious. Jon stands up and keeps baby Sam safely tucked within his arms.

“So lunch?” He reminds them. He turns to Aemon and leans down. “Say goodbye to your grandpa,” Jon suggests. The boy happily obliges with a peck on Aemon’s balding head. Gilly cheerfully pushes the two men out of the door. They all say goodbye to Aemon, who waves them off, smiling at the baby boy who calls him grandpa without a single drop of blood to connect them.

***

Sam kills Jon’s reserve with kindness. After listening to Sam update his life, he pushes Jon with smiles and comforts. He reminds Jon of their friendship together—their five years of non-sexual bondage and the comradery they faced against bullies and poverty (both on Sam’s part). Sam has been there at Jon’s lowest and has never said a disbaring word against him. Eventually, Jon relents and tells him everything. From Robb to the Starks to his fight with his aunt to Willas and all the way to Oberyn.

At the end of his confession, Sam stares at him wide-eyed and gaped-mouth and asks:

“How did you not know Robb was your cousin?”

A pregnant pause stretches between them. While Jon is figuring out his explanation, he comes to the realization that Sam knew.

“What?” Jon manages to stutter out. “How did you know?”

“It was kind of obvious, wasn’t it?” Sam looks at Gilly who pretends not to be listening. She jumps when Jon catches her gaze and returns to her son. Jon redirects his attention to Sam, red-faced at the acknowledgement that Sam’s entire family knew what he didn’t.

“His last name was Stark and he was the same age as your cousin. His picture in online. I just thought you were trying not to bring attention to it.” Sam winces. "I guess that wasn't the case.”

"No!" Jon protests. "That wasn' the case. I would have never--no!” He takes in what Sam just told him. "Wait--We?"

“Oh well,” Sam chuckles, his nerves dancing on his tongue. Jon looks horrified. “We all knew. Me, Ygritte, Tormund, all of us. But we’re British—Kind of inappropriate to talk about kissing cousins. Like my mum always says ‘keep it proper, keep it discreet.’”

“So you all knew?”

“Like I said, we thought you were trying to keep things quiet and we love you, Jon, so we tried to
follow your lead. We didn’t think you…you know, didn’t know.” Sam winces. “I guess we should have known you wouldn’t date your cousin.”

“Yes, you should have known that,” Jon grits out. He imagines that’s why Ygritte was laughing so hard on the phone. She knew. He winces and leans back on his chair. His body is burning with humiliation. He cannot believe that everybody knew but him. God, he must have looked an idiot.

Sam tries to soothe his concerns. “It’s okay. I mean, yeah, you didn’t know but it’s not like it’s a big thing. Our queen is married to her cousin and look at the Targaryens. Now, that’s a family.”

Sam’s words do nothing to comfort Jon. He continues to wallow in his own misery until Sam tells him that it does not matter—he’s with Willas.

Jon is quiet.

“Jon…you are with Willas, aren’t you?”

Jon groans into his palms. “I…I don’t know. I mean, we sort of are, but not really. We’ve gone on one date and we haven’t made anything official yet.”

“Do you want to—?”

Before Sam can finish his question, Jon lashes out. “I don’t know! I—he’s a great guy. I don’t want to lead him on. He’s smart and funny and charming and he likes me for me but—”

“But he’s not Robb.”

“He’s not Robb,” Jon repeats. “He doesn’t—I like him, Sam. I like him so much. But he doesn’t know me like Robb.”

“How well does Robb know you if he couldn’t even tell you were cousins?” Gilly points out.

Jon glares at her. Gilly looks away. Sam coughs.

“I think what Gilly means is that maybe you aren’t giving Willas a chance because you’re still hung over Robb?”

“No—!”

Sam gives him a look.

"Okay, maybe.” Jon sighs. “But Robb—Robb knew me. We got each other pegged from the start. He didn’t act like he knew me when he didn’t and sometimes—sometimes it was aggravating because…” Jon takes a deep breath. “He could tell what I wanted even if it wasn’t what was right but he could always convince me to do it. Just let myself be happy. So I did and…fuck—”

“Language,” Sam coughs. He gestures over at baby Samwell.

“But I liked it. I liked being his. I liked belonging to someone.” His mother would be crying tears of blood if she heard him.

“You don’t think you could ‘belong’ to Willas?” Sam winces when he uses the word. He hates those types of terms—those possessive pronouns over people. Jon was there when Sam took Gilly from her abusive home; when he stood up to her rapist of a father and told him, in one of his greatest acts of bravery, that Gilly was a ‘girl not a goat’ and deserved to make her own decisions.
“I don’t think I have much to offer Willas other than companionship.”

“That’s not a small feat, Jon.” Sam sounds so hopeful. “We all need someone in our lives. I don’t know what I would do without you. And I think I’d die without Gilly or baby Sam. They’re everything to me.”

Gilly drops Sam’s bottle. She stumbles to pick it up, but even at a distance, Jon can see her flushed skin and elated smile. He catches Sam’s fond expression and wants to laugh and cry at the same time. Who would have thought that Sam Tarly would be his relationship goal?

“Yeah, but with Willas, I don’t know if we can make something together. I feel like with him, I’ll be riding the passenger seat not building the car.”

“It could be because he’s older,” Sam suggests. “Older men have everything put together. It’s easier with Robb because you were at the same place.” He smiles. “Which is nice but some things aren’t easy, Jon. Good things require work.”

“I know!” Jon does. He has chosen his battles based on the effort worth fighting them and the casualties involved. “I’m…I…I never thought I wanted a relationship and now romance is encompassing my life in the most unsettling manner. I don’t know how to handle it. If I should handle it.”

"Why wouldn't you?" Sam leans forward. "You are worth it, Jon. I hope you understand that."

Jon wants to and he starts delving into the pros and cons of entering another relationship. Sam allows Jon to stew in his own loathing. He offers more pieces of advice; some of which Jon takes to heart and other pieces he throws to the dogs. At the end of it, he still is not any closer to his decision.

***

Ever since Elia found the photographs in his study, Rhaegar has been boiling in more hot water than he cares to confess to. Elia has never been an aggressive woman—taking more after her eldest brother than her younger, but she can give a man ice burns with her passive transgressions. During their little games—Elia hates it when he calls them that—Rhaegar takes one of two approaches: he’ll either make herculean attempts of seduction or he’ll respond with the same iciness. When he received his uncle’s phone call, one that indicated his poor health and inability to attend Daenerys’ wedding, his decision was made for him.

Rhaegar has been in North Yorkshire for over a week now. Elia is livid but she says nothing; not a peep or disagreement that her husband is frequenting the town of his former mistress. He’d be lying if he said he was not hoping to catch a glance of Lyanna, but he knows she’s in France. He spends his time walking through gardens and acquiring inspiration through nature; he travels through every block, trying not to get seen. Fortunately for him, Lyanna’s childhood home prizes its discretion—a reason their affair was able to go along as much as they did.

Today, he makes a visit to his uncle to inquire about his health. He’s hoping for a miracle. Aemon loves Daenerys and while not a significant figure in her life, he desperately wants to attend her wedding. Daenerys does not fault him for not taking care of her the way he did Rhaegar; his health had declined too heavily by the time she was born. Yet he tried, and his efforts damn well saved Rhaegar’s life from his father; the cruel, ‘Mad King’ as they called him.

And if it weren’t for his uncle, he would have never met the love of his life, what with all the times he visited the town.
Rhaegar is humming to himself when he arrives. He is mindlessly going through different tunes, organizing percussions and strings in his head, trying to settle on a possible new piece. He parks his car in his usual guest spot. None of the notes sound worthy enough to be put on paper. He walks past an individual on his way there; his head is in the clouds. His eyes only catch a glimpse of the body of curls before the song writes itself in his head and he stops dead in his tracks. He turns and stares.

Rhaegar is immersed at the sight of hair that bounces like curls of chocolate and pale flesh with veins resembling blue roses in a stream. He hears sharp violins and a flute ensemble luring the snow out of the clouds so that it can rest on the flowers like dew. He hears the powerful cellos vibrating through the thick trunks of oak and ivy. He hears animals snoring on their first night of slumber and he wants to hear the song; he wants to hear it so badly and let it guide him through the woods like a wolf.

He hears Lyanna’s laughter.

Rhaegar acts on impulse. He runs up to the boy—he cannot call out his name because he doesn’t know it. He is a stranger to this boy and he doesn’t want to be. “Wait!” He yells instead. “Stop!” As he is running, the boy is already getting into his car. The boy turns it on without hearing the dashing stride or the proclamations for hesitance. He has too much on his mind but Rhaegar will not let it deter him.

By the time Rhaegar catches up to him, he is prepared to leave. Rhaegar is desperate so he thinks like a desperate man. He chases after the car and before the vehicle can accelerate, he throws himself on the bumper and slides up against the windshield.

The boy’s first words to him are ‘what the fuck.’ He is elated to hear his voice. Soft, but deep.

In spite of the sore arms, tender muscles, and blood rushing down his head—he might have a concussion—the music is still playing. He looks into the boy’s eyes and finds out that they are grey—like Lyanna’s.

Rhaegar is wistful. Before he passes out, he notes that the boy even sounds like her when she is angry.

***

Jon bangs his head on his steering wheel.

He recognizes the man immediately and picks up his phone to call Sam. Before the heavy-set man can answer, Jon interrupts him.

“Sam… I think I just killed Rhaegar Targaryen.”

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Arya Stark thirsts for drama like succubus after sex. She would have loved to hear about Jon’s escapade when he got home. It’s not every day her favorite cousin performs a hit on one of the most famous men in the world.

Unfortunately, tonight Arya would receive no such message as she receives an urgent call from Syrio instead. Tywin Lannister called. And he wants their troupe to perform at his campaign party. The sum he offers as a donation is excessive and extreme like all things Lannister and it makes Arya wet and livid to hear it. Syrio, who knows nothing about their relationship, is eager to get her on a train. Tywin has already booked her ticket in first class. He has prepared her hotel room. He pulls the strings and they follow along.
Arya’s fingers move ahead of her pride and she texts her entire family the details. She calls a cab before she packs her bags and gets ready to head out.

The entire thing is rushed and aggravating and it makes her want to scream.

Tywin likes that.

Tywin likes pushing her to the limit because he believes it makes her shine like gold.

Jon does not get her text until later tonight.

She isn’t there to comfort him on the biggest news of his life and she will live to regret it when she finds out that Jon met his real father on the same day Arya goes back to the man who took her virginity.

Chapter End Notes

1. If I could describe myself in two words, it'd be: hot mess. I'm just all over the place right now. Update times are going out the window, plans are being thrown around, lots of bubble wrap in my life.
2. Rhaegar was supposed to talk with Jon this chapter but I got tired and couldn't finish. It's happening next chapter.
3. ARYA ARC IS ABOUT TO COME UP. Tywin is there. I got a request for a little Jaime/Brienne so we are popping that shit in there for the shits and giggles. More Jaquen. Maybe Gendry will row in there. I don't know.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

The Arya Arc has officially started.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Arya and Tywin’s have a weird overtly sexual thing going on here but nothing explicit. Might be squicky regardless because Arya is underage but this is me and I don't care too much as long as it is fiction.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Fourteen girls on a train and not one of them can disrupt Arya’s thoughts. Her frosted exterior contrasts the bubbling excitement of her fellow dancers. No one is upset by the short notice—they are eager to perform. The campaign dinner for a prime minister nominee introduces a herald of sponsors and donors—people who have sway in the dancing world by merit of means alone.

For the first hour, Arya caroled with the rest of the girls. She giggled at their jokes. She made exclamations of her delight before settling into her thoughts for the rest of the trip. She still had two hours to go before they made their way to the hotel.

Despite their numbers, the girls were given ample room with their first class cabins and two personal cars for their use. Arya had to share with another girl but as long as it wasn’t Waif, there was still a chance she’d wake up if she dozed off. Jorelle is considerate enough. She leaves Arya alone and chooses to spend her ride on her iPad over her phone. Arya is left alone to her thoughts. She thinks about London and more specifically, Tywin Lannister.

Arya has not seen or heard from Tywin Lannister in over a year. Regardless, she has heard of Tywin—heard of his prime minister nomination, his various business expenditures, and his brutal corporate takedowns. More than once, she has come to contact with a rumor regarding his intention to overthrow the Starks from their hold in the security market—all to no avail.

Arya keeps herself clear from such nonsense. She chooses not to think about Tywin at all. She pretends not to know what he sounds like when he is inside her or how his hands feel on her tiny little waist. Arya has spent months forgetting his fingers prying her open, how he instructs her because he doesn’t have the strength to maneuver her the way he wants. Arya never minds putting in the extra effort if the outcome is worth it. Tywin Lannister, for all his brittle bones and delayed refractory period, is worth it.

Because Tywin Lannister fucks like the lion he resembles and Arya could not have had a better teacher in that regard.

Arya makes a little from the memory.
“Is something the matter, Arya?”

Arya jumps. She turns to see Jorelle staring, a bit taken back by her surprise. She smiles and waves off her concern.

“I’m just thinking about London,” she half-lies. She looks out the window of the train. “It’s been a year since I’ve been there.”

“Oh, I thought your family would make frequent trips there. It’s the financial capital of Europe.”

“My father does,” Arya clarifies. “And my older brother. But I don’t really get involved with the family business.”

“Well, it is exciting. Mr. Lannister truly went all out for us.”

Arya scoffs. “He can afford it.”

“True.” Jorelle laughs. “But he doesn’t have to. It’s nice of him.”

Arya says nothing. Nice is not a word one associates with Tywin Lannister. The lights get brighter and bigger, indicating their diminishing distance from London. She opens her mouth and without thinking, points out that: “Tywin Lannister likes to put on a good front.”

“What was that?”

“Arya…you call him ‘Tywin’ not ‘Mr. Lannister’ or ‘Tywin Lannister’—you know, like a title? You sound familiar with him.”

Oh. Arya wonders how long she’s been doing that or if anybody else picked up on it. She hoped not. Jorelle was a Mormont—those girls were unnaturally perceptive.

“I met him a while ago. Last year, after the Red Shoes performance.”

“Oh…” Jorelle remembers something. “That’s the performance that made you quit dancing, right?”

“No, that’s the performance where my mother made me quit dancing,” Arya corrects. “And I didn’t quit. I just…disappeared for a while.”

“You ran away from home. Everyone was talking about it.”

Arya shrugs. She does not look Jorelle in the eye. She keeps her aloofness intact because it hides her shame. Instead of answering, she pulls the curtain together so that the stars outside could no longer
look in.

“Arya?”

“I’m taking a nap. Can you wake me up when we get there?”

Jorelle stares. “Sure,” she agrees and puts in her earphones.

Arya grabs a blanket and tries to get some sleep. Rather, she looks at the red sheets and remembers the last time she met such redness.

***

Hans Christian Anderson claimed that *The Red Shoes* was inspired a rich woman who patroned his father to make her a pair of red shoes for her daughter. The man bound the soles with red silk and leather. When the woman received them, she threw them back in his face and said that they were trash. In response, Anderson’s father cut up the shoes in front of her.

The story of the *The Red Shoes* served as revenge; a message to all the spoiled girls in the world who favored vanity over compassion. Arya remembers every dig she received after attaining the coveted role. Most of them told her she was perfect for it—she was a Stark, after all. She has had everything handed to her for most of her life. Spoiled, privileged, a poseur in the highest form. She ignored them and choose to admire her new red shoes that her mother had custom made for her performance.

The shoemaker crafted them with satin and leather instead of silk. The color, which started off as cherry bright, was darkened with Arya’s blood. She told her mother—hours before her performance—that the wetness from her sweat. She lied because a costume malfunction was better than the truth. Someone placed glass her in shoes the night of her performance. She ignored them and choose to admire her new red shoes that her mother had custom made for her performance.

Arya did not scream when she found out. She merely took them out and powered through each act. When her mother came to visit her on the interlude, she smiled and said nothing was wrong. Gave her excuses while her feet bled out. It was not until the performance was over, her feet worn and washed with iron, did she allow herself to be admitted to the hospital. She called her own cab. She told Syrio not to worry. She’s handled worse, she reminded him, despite the fact that ‘worse’ was not the worst. Before, her injuries were credited to her exertion and carelessness. This was an attack. Someone tried to hurt Arya because they were threatened by her.

During the cab ride, she focused on who could have done it. Jorelle and Wylla were out of the question. Those girls were too honest. Waif liked to see Arya hurt but she was performing in another city. She could have gotten someone else to do it—Pyp was as easy as water to influence. She thought long and hard before her head started to hurt as much as her feet. By the time she reached the hospital, her body was aching from toes up.

She stepped out of the cab and crumbled to the ground. When the driver asked if she needed help, she turned him down. A security guard found her bloodied footsteps leading to the reception desk before she was hustled in by Jaime Lannister.

***

Arya heard her mother before she saw her. Jaime was removing the last of the glass shards from her feet. Arya hissed when he cleaned the wounds. The timing was horrible. Catelyn marched in to see her daughter—strong, bold, fearless Arya—gasping out in pain. Her father was upset as well but he kept calm. She was ordered to stay outside.
Catelyn spoke before Arya had a chance to defend herself.

“Arya, what happened?” Her mother was terrified. She rushed over to check on her daughter’s prognosis. Jaime was shoved away while Catelyn investigated the open flesh. Arya took back her limbs and shrugged, downplaying her pain for the sake of appearances.

“Someone put glass in her shoes,” Jaime explained as he picked himself up. “We had her X-rayed to be safe but from what I can see there’s no permanent damage. A few nerves were hit but she’ll recover in time. I give it two weeks.”

“And I’m supposed to take your word for it?” Catelyn asked. She was livid when she heard Jaime was taking care of her daughter but the sight of him made her sick. “The man whose actions compromised my son’s well-being?” She was glaring. “You should be a patient here, not treating them.”

“Catelyn,” Ned reminded her that they were in public. He walked up to her and kept a hand on her shoulder in comfort. He was not doing this for Jaime, as indicated by the menacing glower towards the blond. He held his wife back for the sake of her own sanity and directed his eldest daughter outside so that she would not hear the vile droppings of her mother’s tongue.

“Who did this?” Her father asked.

Arya turned her gaze to her father. Her calm disposition was unwavering. “I don’t know who. It was just a prank.”

“A prank, Arya?” Catelyn looked ready to scream. “Your feet are mutilated! This is not a prank!”

“I’ve had worst injuries.”

“Not ones that were caused by other people!” Catelyn paced around the room. Arya watched for a moment before returning her gaze to Jaime.

“Can you finish up?” Arya asked. “I want to hurry up and leave.”

Jaime sighed. He returned to his normal position got started on the gauze. “The doctor recommended you stay overnight.”

“No.”

“Yes, Arya,” Catelyn interrupted. “You are staying. And then you are coming home and we’re going to discuss this and what we’re going to do about it.”

“Syrio is already working on finding the culprit. There’s nothing we can do.” The alcohol burned her skin.

“You can quit dancing.”

Arya stilled.

“I don’t want you performing anymore. Not with those girls—that environment is toxic. I am going to inform Syrio tomorrow that I am pulling you out.”

“Absolutely not.” Arya glared. “You can’t make me quit.”

“Yes, I can.” Catelyn’s expression was equally fierce. “I’ve let this go on for too long. It ends tonight. I’m not letting this happen again.”
“All sports have risk. You didn’t make Robb quit when he got his arm broken in rugby. Or when his leg got a sprain. How is this any different?”

“Robb’s teammates weren’t putting glass shards into his shoes!”

“Oh, is that it? What about when you tried to get me to quit last year and the year before that? No one was responsible for those injuries.” Arya got up from the bed. She ignored the blood seeping out of her feet. Jaime tried to stop her and she ignored him. “Face it. It’s because I’m a girl and girls can’t handle these kind of injuries. We’re too weak to withstand the bullying. Robb has to deal with being the heir, the captain of his rugby team, being your perfect son and you never said anything about him not being capable but me? I’m too delicate. *I’m a girl.*"

“That is not what this is about—"

"You tell yourself that."

"I am telling you this: you are quitting."

"No!” Arya slammed her fist against the bed. “I’m not quitting. I’ve worked too hard for this!”

Catelyn became deathly quiet. “You don’t have a choice,” she told her. Her voice was like ice.

Arya stood her ground. “I think I do.”

“I won’t supplement your dancing anymore. No more shoes, no more lessons, nothing. I will cut you off if it means keeping you from getting hurt. You’re still a minor. Syrio can’t keep teaching you without my permission and I will be damned before I let you back into that hellhole again.”

Arya froze. She turned to her father who looked away. “Father?”

Ned sighed. “This is going too far,” he told her. His voice was soft, yet there was an edge to it. She could hear the desperation to get her to quit that did not equate her mother’s but was present. “You are talented young woman and can aspire to anything. You don’t need this.”

“But—” Arya heard herself choke. “I want this.”

Ned looked away.

Having won the battle, Catelyn turned her attention to Jaime. “I want different nurse to tend to Arya.”

Jaime looked down. “Mrs. Stark—”

“I will not have the same man who cost my son his legs to be helping my daughter. Get me another nurse.”

Jaime looked down.

“Get me another nurse,” Catelyn repeated. “I’ve heard your excuses and I will not forgive you; not for a second. I—”

“I want him to stay,” Arya interrupted. They turned to her. Tears welled up in her eyes. “I want you all to leave.”

Ned tried to reason with her. “Arya, you’re hurt. We’re not going to leave until we know you’re okay.”
“Leave!” Arya yelled, louder. Sansa jumped. She had been quiet for so long that when she protested Arya’s anger, she only received more rage. “Leave! I don’t ever want to see you all again! Just go away!”

There was hesitance. Arya got frustrated to march to the other side of the room and bloodied the floors like a painting. The image made her parents sick. She furthered her uncouth behavior by throwing the vase at the other side of the room. She was careful not to hit anybody. She wanted to make a statement. They obeyed her order. They were escorted away by an orderly while Arya returned to the bed.

Before they left, Catelyn told Arya that she loved her. “I’m doing what’s best for you.”

Arya refused to answer. She knew the moment her mother left her room, the red-haired woman would burst into tears. Arya shut her eyes and swallowed a sob in response. After a few more moments to herself, she returned to the bed. She looked into Jaime’s eyes and told him to get to work.

Jaime was quiet when he helped her. He bandaged up her left foot.

“Judging by your silence, you still have a guilty conscience for what happened.”

Jaime said nothing.

“Good.”

Jaime looked up and saw that even with her tearing eyes, she held a striking gaze. “You don’t deserve peace,” Arya told him. “I want you to take care of me so that you remember what you did.”

Jaime, who was born proud and ignorant and with all the luxuries of the world but none of the drive to keep them, told her he didn’t care. “I made a mistake. Mistakes happen. I got over it.”

“You’re a lying piece of shit.”

Jaime stared back at her with dead eyes.

“My mother did the research. She never believed in coincidences. She looked into every nurse and doctor tending to Bran that day. Guess what she found out about you?” Arya’s tone was mocking. She smiled. She wanted to hurt Jaime the way she had been hurt and she was good at it. She lacked the conscience to feel for other’s pain when she was consumed with her own hatred. “You weren’t supposed to be working. You had PTSD and got addicted to pain meds for your hand. You were supposed to be recovering. But you decided that instead of being secreted away to a cushy rehabilitation center paid for by your daddy, you applied to a hospital to spite him. You got the medication mixed up. Bran’s body didn’t like the combination you made, did he?” Arya’s smile turned into a snarl. “You fucked up my brother for life.”

Jaime was used to excuses. He had been making them his whole life and could not help his defense from coming out. “He would have been paralyzed anyways.”

“Reports can be wrong. You were wrong.” Arya stuck out her feet. “Finish the job. And then get my X-rays.”

“Why?” Jaime asked. He could not stop the venom from seeping through his lips. “You won’t be able to dance after this.”

“Finish. The. Job.” Arya looked him dead in the eye. “Or are you too high for that?”
Jaime did as he was told. During the entire process, he did not utter a single word in her presence. He seethed in his own self-loathing and visible hatred, but kept silent. Arya had her own secrets to bear.

***

Before her parents had a chance to coax Jon on their side, Arya called her favorite cousin. She explained to him what happened. She told him she needed someone on her side. “Jon, this is my dream. They cannot expect me to give it up.” Then, in a quiet, more insecure voice, she asked if she could stay with him. “Would you have me?”

For the longest time, Jon was silent. “Arya, are you crazy? I can’t believe you would ask that.”

Arya’s could feel her heart plummet into the bottom of her stomach.

“You’re always welcomed by my side, Arya.” Jon sounded so sincere. “You don’t even have to ask.”

She breathed as if air was a luxury she would never have again. “I love you, Jon.”

“I love you, too.”

Arya’s heart fluttered in the loveliest way. Her own longing was replaced by irritation when she heard the pop-up on her phone, warning her that she was running out of batteries. She didn’t have a charger on her. One of the nurses might but it seemed silly to call them in for that purpose. “Jon, my phone is dying. Can I call you back later?”

“Yeah. Looking forward to it.”

Arya could not help but smile. She got off the bed. Her feet still hurt. The bandages made it hard to move. She shouldn’t have been walking but there weren’t any crutches in the room and she wanted to speak to Jon again.

Fortunately for Arya, the halls were empty of nurses ready to drag her to bed. She looked through the glass doors and found nothing except sleeping or possibly comatose patients. Maybe even a dead guy. Eventually, she came upon the nurses’ lounge. One of them must have a charger, she thought.

She made a creak in the door and heard arguing. Instead of retreating elsewhere, Arya opened the entrance way further to peek in. She saw Jaime Lannister fighting with an older, more distinguished version of himself.

He must be Tywin Lannister, Arya thought. She’d only seen him before at parties and back then, she was a child. Even from afar, she could tell that both men were trying to keep their frustrations at bay.

“You think you know everything.” Jaime slammed his mug onto the table. Both his hands—even the artificial one—was shaking. “Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong? That I might know what’s best for me?’

“The thought might have crossed my mind if you ever gave precedence to do so.” Tywin glanced at his hand. “All your life, you’ve let yourself be influenced by others. First it was your sister, then your brother, and now your girlfriend tells you what to do.”

“Brienne doesn’t tell me what to do,” Jaime defended. “We’re equals. Do you know what that word means?”

“I am aware of the denotation.” Tywin’s sarcasm is light and poignant. He doesn’t try as hard as
other people to sound smart. Arya respected such a tone. “Nonetheless, it is hard to believe when one
takes into account your actions. You’ve moved here on her request. Got a job here as a nurse—at
least there was some respectability when you were a doctor but a nurse—because she wanted you
to. Got your hand blown off—”

“That was not Brienne’s fault!” Jaime took a deep breath. “I already told you. My group made a
miscalculation. None of us were responsible for missing that bomb. And I moved here because I
wanted to get away from this family. It was the furthest I can go.” He let out a laugh. “I’ve never
been a good person. But Brienne makes me believe I can do good things.”

Tywin scoffed. “You must be doing a world of goodness, Nurse Lannister.” He pronounced the title
like sewage.

“I can’t be a surgeon with one hand,” Jaime repeated. “And doing work keeps me grounded.”

“Because you want to be normal.” Tywin hated the sentiment. “You are not an average man, Jaime.
You are a Lannister. You could have been so much more and yet you are here—stuck in the north,
drawing blood from the old and the feeble.”

“And one day, I will be sticking a needle into you.”

“You will have to compete with your brother for that opportunity.”

Jaime stood up to get ready for another round. “Listen, I don’t want to go home and I don’t want to
take over the company. I don’t need you anymore.”

Tywin remained silent for longer than Jaime has ever heard him. He was prepared for scathing
response. He was not disappointed.

“You don’t need me now,” Tywin agreed. “But that will change, won’t it? Just like all those years
ago, when you were a step away from losing your license to negligence, because instead of listening
to me, you decided to behave like some corner street whore begging for his next fix.” Tywin snarled
at the memory. “I saved you back then and I will save you again. You were completely intoxicated.
Cost a boy his legs because you could barely count to ten, let alone prescribe the right medication. I
heard that the boy screamed all night. Is that true? Do you remember that?”

Jaime did. He could not face his father. He looked like a boy again.

“And yet—you have the nerve to say that you don’t need me?” Tywin scoffed. “You’ve never
understood what hard work was—everything you have, I gave to you.”

Arya took the opportunity to make her appearance. She would have no more of this nonsense. Her
screen was pitch black and she needed to get it charged.

“I don’t hate to interrupt because I don’t care, but I really need to charge my phone.” Arya winced.
The blood was seeping out of her bandages.

Jaime stood up to reprimand her. “You’re supposed to be in bed.”

“But I’m not,” Arya reminded. “Because I’m not a fucking invalid and I need my phone to charge.”

“You’re bleeding on the floor.”

“This is a hospital. If your custodians are not used to cleaning up blood, then they’re not doing their
jobs.”
Tywin made a noise in between a scoff and a cough to cover up his amusement.

Jaime was about to drag her back to her room—probably kicking and screaming—when his pager lights up. He checked it and groaned. “There’s an emergency on the second floor.” He muttered something about his frustrations, glanced back Arya, before putting the device away. He walked over to a drawer and pulled out a charger. He tossed it over to Arya. “Here. I’ll be back in ten with a wheelchair and we’re putting you to bed. Stay seated. Don’t move.”

He was almost out of the room when Arya, in her natural state of snark, told him, “Thanks, daddy.”

Jaime’s disgust could be felt across the room. He refused to turn back. He would only see Arya’s smugness and that was the last thing he needed tonight.

Having gotten her fun, she resumed to her original intention of getting her phone charged. Arya sighed as soon as she plugged it in. Her boredom resurrected itself from the ashes of her solitude. Without Jaime, there was no one to amuse her.

I should have brought a book, she thought, or at least messed with Jaime a bit more.

With little to no options left, she turned to Tywin. He was waiting for his son; the man was not finished beating his son’s self-esteem just yet. Like a cat prowling through alleyways for mindful mice, Arya hopped onto the counter beside him. Her hospital gown—a thin sheet with nothing underneath—rode up. Her feet hurt but the intrigue in his eyes made it worth it. She imagined the expression on Jaime Lannister’s face when he came back to see his father flirting with a child.

“I assume you’re doing that to aggravate my son.”

“Doing what?” Arya smiled and crossed her legs. This time, she made sure that he could peek underneath. “We’re waiting for the same person. We might as well talk and find out if we have other stuff in common.”

“We could talk if you were sitting over there, where you were assigned.”

“But then I couldn’t look you in the eye.” Arya glanced over to the table where her phone rested before turning back to Tywin. Even supported by the counter, her eyes reached his neck. He was taller than she remembered. Up close, his stature made him more intimidating and coupled with his presence, he appeared every bit the dictator the press accused him of being. It made her want to get closer to him. “People don’t look you in the eye often, do they?”

Tywin’s lips twitched. “No, they do not.”

“Because you scare them.”

Tywin drew closer to her. Arya kept her gaze firm. “Do I scare you, girl?”

“No.” Arya smiled warily. “But you are quite scary, especially just now.”

“I was being a father.” He told her. “Fathers are responsible for putting their sons’ head in the right places.” Even if they have to wring their necks in the process.”

Arya laughed. “Yeah, I have a father, too. I have a mother as well. And I can honestly say that parents don’t always know what’s best for their children.”

Tywin looked over to her feet. The blood was beginning to dry on her bandages. Arya covered her embarrassment with a smile.
“It looks worse than it feels.”

“I bet it wouldn’t do either if you bothered to take your parents’ advice.” He studied her features. “You’re the Stark girl, aren’t you? The ballerina.”

“Oh, you’ve heard of me?” That was good to know.

“Men of my stature are expected to have some knowledge of the fine arts.” Tywin chose that moment to lean on the counter beside her. “And you are a Stark.”

“Know thy enemy,” Arya mocked. “And yes, I am. Arya Stark,” she introduced herself. She stretched out her legs mid-air. “And this? This is good. If someone hurts you, it means you are worth getting hurt.”

“A faulty perspective.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be a lion?” Arya teased. “Do lions pay any attention to a three-legged hyena? I would have thought you were above that.”

“True.” Tywin smirked. It was the widest smile she had ever seen on the man. “If only my children had half your wit.”

Arya heard that the youngest, the dwarf, was cleverer than Jaime or his sister combined. She dared not say a word, however. Having caught his attention, she resolved to keep it. Instead of responding, Arya walked back to her phone to check on its status. The ten-minute mark had passed and Jaime had not come back. Her phone was a little over twelve percent. She pretended to be interested in something and did her best not to get distracted by the man beside her.

Tywin was not used to being ignored so he acted upon the new sensation. “Aren’t you supposed to be resting those feet?”

Arya smiled in an indiscreet manner—she couldn’t help it. She always smiled when she won. She hopped onto the table and kept her feet up. Not once did she look up from her phone. “There, I am resting.”

“You are incorrigible.” She could hear him walk towards her. Before she could prepare herself, he became dangerously close. His shadow covered her body and before she could hide the contents of her phone, he took it from her. He did not look at the contents; he never gave the impression that he cared. Tywin placed it screen down on the table.

“It is bad manners to look at your phone when talking to someone,” Tywin reminded; his voice was low. “Since your parents did not bother to teach you manners, I’ll take matters into my own hands.”

“How kind of you.” Arya licked her lips. She looked up to Tywin. “Now tell where will you put those hands?”

“Careful girl,” Tywin warn. “You may be a Stark but don’t think that will keep you safe.”

Safe? Arya never played it safe. “Are you going to hurt me, sir?” Arya could never play the innocent angel. She was too busy dealing with the devil. “As you can see, I am quite used pain.”

“I am aware.” He leaned down and grab her foot. To her surprise, he squeezes it. The pressure is not painful. Kind of like pushing a bruise to get the flush of endorphin. “You’re not feeble; neither in body or mind.”
“Not like your son.”

Righteous anger flashed through Tywin’s eyes. While Jaime infuriated him with his lack of cunning and drive, he was still his son. Tywin Lannister demanded nothing less than the utmost respect towards his family.

“You’re a callous thing, aren’t you? A testament of your youth.”

Arya’s eyes narrowed. She wondered where he was going with that accusation.

“You don’t even know enough to be afraid of this world. Your parents sheltered you yet you believe they’re a liability. You are nothing without your name. You’re just like my son—no. You remind me of my daughter.”

Arya shoved him away from her. While glaring at him, she noticed that he was doing everything in his power not to laugh. Arsehole, she swore within the privacy of her mind, what a fucking arsehole. She got on her feet and ripped out the charger from the socket. She heard Tywin warn her about taking care of her health. “Try not to kill yourself. If you pass out from blood lost, that foolish son of mine will be blaming me.”

“This is the hospital. If I’m going to pass out anywhere, this would be the place to do it.”

Arya rushed out of the room. The fury from the comparison made her forget the pain on her bottom soles. At the same time, it prevented her peripheral vision. She never saw the collection of wheelchairs for emergencies or the stray clutches leaning on the window of an empty room. She was livid when she realized that all she could dream about was Tywin Lannister.

***

Arya was sent home the next day. She refused to sit still while her mother placed sanctions on her future. Jaime warned her that while she would recover, she needed to rest for two weeks at minimum for all the nerves to heal. She began the week off petulant. She was sure her mother would concede to her demands. When Catelyn remained stoic, Arya switched gears to her father. To her surprise, Ned did nothing. He agreed that her behavior had been reckless. When Arya pointed out that she wasn’t the one who put glass shards in her shoes, he used that as evidence that she should stray away from such a toxic environment.

“These women are supposed to be your friends, Arya. We wanted you to have a community you could trust. You can’t say that you trust these girls after what happened.”

“It was one girl.” Wylla and Jorelle kept her updated on the investigation. There was no luck. “If someone did the same thing to Robb or Rickon, this wouldn’t be an issue.”

“I don’t want to hear it, Arya.”

Arya huffed and left the room.

On the last week, Arya’s feet were relatively healed. She could walk, run, dance if she wanted to. Catelyn prepared for the argument but it never came. Arya stopped fighting. She stopped speaking altogether and reserved her words for her cousin, Jon. Catelyn recommended a psychiatrist which Arya gave no opinion about and that frightened her most of all.

Arya was nothing like her siblings when she was depressed. She did not shut herself from the world—not like Bran after his accident or resolved to use violence like Robb, who would lash out in the gym on his worse days. She resumed her familial activities: dinner with the family, going to school,
but there was something unsettling in her calm.

She seemed broken.

To rectify their relationship, Catelyn Stark decided it was time to talk to her daughter. She brought home her favorite dessert and preferred flavor of tea. When she knocked there was no sound. When she went in, Arya’s room was empty. A few of her belongings were nowhere to be found. And there was a note but Catelyn already knew what was on it.

Arya was gone.

***

The last time Arya went to London, she rode in coach not first class. She wanted to savage her money as much as she could. She only brought cash to avoid tipping off her parents. She did not know how long she would be away from home or whether or not she would return. Calculating everything in her head hurt. She thought about America instead, where the dance community was larger and more prevalent than England’s. New York City sounded fun.

If she could get there, at least.

There were a few places that would pay under the table but that was hardly a source of income. She knew there was a possibility of looking for places that were hiring those kinds of dancers and while Arya was not opposed to such professions, she was positive that any place willing to overlook her age was a cover for a sex ring.

The second problem was her family. Her parent would be scouring the world for her and they had the means to do so. Stark security systems were everywhere. Arya walked pass a security camera. She pushed her hoodie down further.

On her way out of the station, she stopped by a coffee shop and took out her laptop. She started looking for motels to stay at when she came across a news article indicating Tywin Lannister’s run for prime minister. He was most likely going to be their next leader.

Before she booked her room, she stared at Tywin Lannister’s face. He was good looking and not just for a man his age. She flushed when she thought it. For gods’ sakes, he was older than her father!

And yet…there was an appeal to him she could not shake off. He was a powerful man. Powerful men had an allure about them—no one could blame Arya for being tempted. Her assessment made her realize a key fact she initially overlooked.

Tywin Lannister was powerful enough to protect her from her parents.

Doing her own bit of research, she closed the tab of hotels and instead focused on real estates in London. Tywin was here on business often. He would not be staying at a hotel—there were too many risks attached to staying at an unknown location. He, without a doubt, would have a flat. Some place obscure but grand. Tasteful in case he had guests. Tywin was not the type to spend money wastefully but he had an image to maintain.

Two hours and an espresso later, Tywin Lannister heard a knock on his door.

He was surprised to see Arya Stark at his doorstep, no more than two weeks after their meeting. She handed him a bag of cakes—expensive pastries at that—and invited herself and her luggage in.

“I thought it’d be rude to show up unannounced without a gift. I hope you enjoyed them. They smell
like heaven’s tears.”

Tywin did not thank her for them. “Why are you here?”

“I have a propositioned for you,” Arya answered. She sat on his couch and inhaled the scent leather. It smelled like wealth.

“How did you find me?”

“Dancing may be my trade but I’m still a Stark. This is what we do.” If she wasn’t trying to get on his good side, Arya would have pointed out that she only took so long because she wasn’t her brother. He would have found Tywin, his national ID, and his bank numbers in half the time.

“I see.” To his credit, Tywin does not appear unsettled by her presence. He fixed himself a drink. “Which means we have to resolve the initial question. Why are you here?”

Arya fluttered her eyelashes the way she had seen Sansa do. “I wanted to stay the night.”

Tywin scoffed at her attempt of seduction. “Now why would I let you do that?”

“Because I want to stay in your bed with you in it.” She took off her jacket. She hoped he could not see past her false bravado. Arya’s palms were sweaty. Tywin either did not notice or did not care or did want to reveal his own intentions so he kept his stoicism.

He walked over to hand her a drink. Unlike his, it was a clear liquor. She knew it was alcoholic, though and thanked him when she took it. She smiled when she took her first sip, never mind that the bitterness made her want to vomit.

Fuck, that was strong, she thought as she nursed her drink her hands.

Tywin seemed amused by her lack of reaction. He sat down next to her. Arya wondered if he gave her the stronger liquor in an attempt to lose face.

“I don’t know what gave you the impression I would be interested,” He told her. “But I don’t fuck little girls.”

“If you could see what I can do with my legs, you wouldn’t be calling me a little girl.”

“Bodies that haven’t developed yet tend to be more limber.” He glanced over at her chest. He was far from discreet yet Arya felt no perversion. He was trying to humiliate her.

Fuck if Arya was going to let him do that to her.

“You know, I heard that my father publicaly renounced you for prime minister. That must have been annoying.”

Tywin scoffed. “If you’re suggesting that sleeping with his underage daughter will to lead to rise in the polls and not a jail sentence, you are clearly unaware of the way politics work.” Tywin finished his drink. “Go home to your parents.”

“I don’t want to.”

Tywin was about to tell her that children cannot always have want they want but she surprised him.

“The satisfaction from sleeping with me won’t come from the reveal but the secret.” Arya set down her drink. She had no intention of going through with this drunk like a coward. “This isn’t about sex,
even. This is about power. I’m a Stark. I’m the daughter of a man who could very well cost you this election with his opinion.” She looked him in the eye. “You’ll be seeing a lot of my father. And every time you look at him, every time he shakes your hand, he’ll be shaking the hand of the man who ruined his daughter. Wouldn’t that feel good?”

Tywin pretended to be unconvinced. He was not expecting any company tonight. He could use a pretty, clever girl in his bed. “You’d do that to your own father?”

“I love my father,” Arya swore. “What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him. And you won’t say anything. The scandal could cost you a career. This is more of an…internal pleasure.”

Tywin touched her cheek. He pressed his thumb against her lips—a touch of wetness from the liquor. “You’re too smart for your own good, has anyone ever told you that?”

Arya smiled and sucked on his finger for the briefest moment. “Yes.”

***

The car is waiting for them when they arrive to London. Three limos for fourteen girls and two chaperones. They are taken to a five-star hotel where the receptionist greets them as if they were landowners from Dubai and have completely changed their standards on quality service.

Their rooms are marvelous as expected by the hotel’s reputation. Each girl is given a welcome basket.

Arya picks up her goods and settled onto the bed. Within it, she receives a welcome letter with an additional message attached. She sighs when she reads it. It did not take long for her to get off the bed and grabbed her coat.

“Arya, where are you going?” Wylla asks.

“Out. I have to do something.”

“If you stay out too late, Syrio will get angry.”

“I’ll be back before he wakes up,” she promises.

Arya takes the elevator to the penthouse suite. She chuckles at the irony.

This time, Tywin Lannister is waiting for her.

Chapter End Notes

1. Okay, Jon and Rhaegar did not get their scene in this chapter. Writing Tywin and Arya became more fun so I decided to focus on that. I decided to keep this chapter ‘sexual tension’ and drama rather than humor and ‘self-realization.’ They’ll probably show up eventually.

2. Oh my goodness, I watched Yuri! On Ice and it is spectacular. I kind of regret not making Arya an ice skater. Nonetheless, it is the first anime I’ve watched in five years (I usually just read manga because I am impatient and don’t like to wait for scenes to happen when I can just read it through) and it did not disappoint. It's actually making me
get used to tumblr because I've been scouring for like-minded people.

3. If Crown the Wolf gets finished in time, I think update times are officially back to normal.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

There is a sex scene in the beginning with Tywin and Arya. The scene begins at (“Tywin does not mention the event in bed”). and ends at a five-star line break or, “*****”, instead of three because I wanted to make it easily distinguishable. Rhaegar gets really creepy in this chapter in regards to Jon. Played for sick laughs.

When doing her A-levels in Psychology, there was this study that fascinated Arya. Her professor explained that the traits we loved most about someone would end up being the reason we hate them later on in the relationship. Like how admiration for one’s ambition becomes spite for their selfishness and how confidence transforms into conceit once the rose-tinted glasses came off.

“Our greatest strengths often become our worst adversary,” her father told her in response to the observation. She was doing her assignment in her father study—a habit from her younger years. Somehow, she knew she only started it up again because her father wanted the reassurance she was there. Back then, Arya stared down at her textbook, ran a finger down the spine, before closing it to focus on her training. She could always finish her homework in the morning.

Here in bed, she wonders if the same can be said for Tywin Lannister. She lists his strengths in her head: ambitious, like her, smart—is scheming a better word? He is handsome; age is hardly the inevitable parasite of beauty society makes it out to be. Powerful, definitely; his presence is enough to make a lesser person weak-kneed and star-eyed.

Cruel is a more apt description.

There was headliner last year where one of his aides intercepted a potential assassination attempt. No one was hurt. The bomb was fake. Arya remembered that she was terrified regardless and called him, in a fit of madness, but hung up as soon as she heard his secretary’s voice. She supposed he knew—she was so worried she did not have the sense to hide her caller ID.

Tywin’s cruelty could have gotten him killed. He would have deserved a slow, violent death—she witnessed so much misery while in his care. The Chambers was an underground of blackmail and secrets, and Tywin controlled the pipes where the worse sewage was kept. She should have accepted his death as evitable—not run to the phone as soon as the possibility became a reality.

Tywin does not mention the event in bed.

His kindness ends with that small mercy. Tywin’s cock is buried inside her, making these slow, deep pumps into her body, prolonging the pleasure for as long as a man his age can. Tywin is not as young as he once was. He cannot go for hours on ends and so he tortures her. He uses his skilled fingers to pinch her clit and his mouth to suck her tits. Only when her toes curl and her nails scratch his back does he go further. He bites her left nipple and her pussy tightens around his cock, milking it for all its worth.

“Fuck,” she swears. “Go faster.” She regrets his age; if only for the fact that if he were younger, he could be doing this to her all night. She could feel Tywin smirk against her breast. He grabs the
underneath of her right thigh and pushes it against her chest. It allows him to go in deeper until she
can feel him against her cervix. He is big—or Arya is small. Either way, he stretches her to
impossible lengths when he is all the way inside.

She starts crying out and unlike her movements, she is loud. Half of it is her impulse to make a scene.
She is a performer, and nothing beats the satisfaction she receives whenever she sees the look on
Tywin’s face, wondering if she is truly enjoying his vitality or if it is all a farce. The other half is
genuine. Tywin fucks like a beast and Arya loves it. A lot of dominant men are kittens in the
bedroom but not Tywin, who is a lion inside and out.

He won’t last much longer; Arya could tell by the way he fucks her. He is pulling out, dragging his
cock out of her pussy and she could feel the veins of his cock rubbing against her insides. Almost
immediately after, he pushes in a hard, swift, move. He does this over and over again until she feels
herself breaking.

Arya whispers the words “oh gods” over and over again and shuts her eyes to avoid the smug look
on his face. With a final thrust, he buries himself all the way to the hilt and she climaxes. She swears
she blacked out for half a second. Tywin releases inside her after. She wants to laugh but it comes
out a guttered, choked moan.

“Of course, this would be the only thing you’d ever want to come second in,” Arya mutters.

Tywin must have heard her because he chuckles. Arya flushes with pride and she is embarrassed by
her own foolishness. She shouldn’t be proud that she is one of the few people whose made this cold
man laugh, but she is.

Tywin leaves the bed to pour himself a glass of water. He asks if she wants some and she refuses.
“I’d rather have a bath,” she says instead. It’s a preposterous request to ask the most powerful man in
England and yet it is one she feels well-equipped to make. He walks, bare ass and proud of his
flaccid package, to the bathroom. For some reason, he adheres to her spoiled requests and for the life
of her, she cannot understand why.

*****

The water is hot enough to burn and yet all it does is remind Arya of the coolness of Port Hercules.
She remembers the yacht Tywin chartered for his guests last year; an unusual extravagance that
contrasted Tywin’s tasteful expenditures but one that disguised the illicit nature of Tywin’s meeting
well. The men he met with were the type of people who did not question the presence of an
underage girl by Tywin’s side. If anything, they encouraged it with their lewd remarks and the
slovenly lick of their lips. She sees her bare fingers and remembers when that was not the case. Back
then, she wore a simple gold ring with a black turquoise centerpiece. Tywin wanted her to have
some degree of frivolity on her. It added to the show. She mocked him for it but he paid no mind to
her jeers. He bought her a dress instead. To her distaste, she liked it. It was black and plain, but
flattering on her thin body.

“If I wanted a whore, I would have bought one.”

Arya had smiled thoughtfully to herself. “What do you want?” She had asked him.

Tywin, as expected, did not answer her.

Even after fucking her, he keeps to himself. He visits her in the bathroom, dressed in a silk robe that
makes it clear he does not intend to join her, and brings her a glass of whiskey.
Arya thanks him and eyes him warily when he sits on the edge of the tub. She takes a sip.

“I suppose it’s time for me to ask why I’m here.”

“Then ask,” Tywin agrees. “The role of Daddy Longlegs only works if the beneficiary is willing to accept her benefits without question. Ignorance has never been your strength.”

“Bliss is overrated,” Arya informs him. She sets her glass down and leans over to where Tywin is. Some of the water threatens to spill over but neither of them mind. “How is your campaign, Tywin? I heard reelection is almost guaranteed.”

“Don’t ask questions you know the answer to.”

Arya does not mind the dodge. “It is rather fortunate that after so many scandals, you still managed to come up on top. After all, who else can the country turn to but one of the few, organically British leaders of the financial world? I swear, it’s like Brexit was made to keep you in power.”

“People like to be relieved of their responsibilities when their actions carry weight.” Tywin brushes a strand of wet hair from her face. “That’s not my problem.”

“No, it is not,” Arya stares at him. She recalls the observations she made on the way to the bathroom. She swore she saw a glimpse of red in the closet covered in plastic. A new dress for a new occasion. All made in the image of Tywin Lannister. She wonders if he has the ring she returned.

“What do you need me to do?“ Arya asks. Solemn without any pretense of foolishness. Just the way Tywin likes it.

“There’s someone I want you to meet at the fundraiser,” Tywin informs her. “A man of the Martells. He is here to strike a deal with a CEO of a major network—a network I hope to get my hands on.”

“And how am I supposed to help with that?”

“The man has perchance for pretty girls; one of the main reasons he’s even considered attending the event is the knowledge of a dozen young women dancing for him.” Tywin gets his phone and pulls out a picture. “I need you to spend some time with him; get an assessment of the amount he’s planning to bid and lend the assumption that I am not as interested as his sources claim.”

Arya takes the phone from him. “Don’t you have enough money? Is there a purpose for this besides your ego?”

“You can never have too much power,” Tywin denies. “And I’d be doing them a favor. The company is in shambles and with my leadership, it’ll finally have the means to rise up from its potential bankruptcy.”

“Your altruism is astounding.” Arya turns off the phone and hands it back to him. “But let’s pretend that I do know you. Having a network, however mediocre, gives you moderate control over the media. Put enough click bait, a few cleverly disguise controversies that actually illuminate your strengths and that means hours and hours of free press and instant viewership.”

“A good deed is a good deed regardless of the intentions.”

Arya sighs. She cannot argue with that philosophy. She leans further into the water and tries to absorb as much of the remaining heat as she can. “I’m not opposed to helping you nor do I have any longing attachment to the Martells. But what’s in it for me?”
“Whatever you want within reason and worth,” Tywin answers without hesitation.

Arya smirks. “That’s my favorite answer.”

Tywin seems unsure of whether to chuckle or to sigh. Instead, he tells her, “I’m not expecting you two to join in congress, though if that produces the best results, by all means—get the job done and I’ll see what I can do for you.”

“I have an idea in mind,” Arya informs him. She smiles at him, thinking about the gold watch she caught on his wrist when she first entered his hotel room. He had just unclasped it when she jumped him. “It’s customary for dancers to find sponsorships and do commercial work as a way to further their income. It has been generally assumed that I plan on using my family’s wealth to avoid this.”

“And of course,” Tywin adds dryly. “Adhering to ones’ expectations is below you.” He contemplates her words and asks, “I suppose once you’ve been indoctrinated to a troupe, you’ll be aiming for exposure. Dancers who are well-liked by the public tend to receive more lead roles, regardless of their talent.”

“It is so refreshing not having to explain things to you. Is that how you feel when you speak to me?”

“You run along the lines.”

Arya finishes up her glass. “I’ll be offered a place after this performance. Then, I’ll be expected to go through training and make a formal debut in the following year. It would really help me if I received a sponsorship from a well-known brand to determine my role.”

“And what do you have in mind?”

Arya takes a moment to think; she even puts on the performance of giving a thoughtful glance to the ceiling. “Tiffany & Co. has started to use celebrity clients for their brand. Surely a word from the Lannisters could sway them into looking in a particular direction for ambassadors.”

Tywin dips his hand into the lukewarm water. “I assume so. We do supply them a great deal each year.” He brushes against her lower regions. “Fair enough. You get me what I want and I’ll make the call.”

Arya purrs when he sticks a wet finger inside her. As ripples of the water fill her up, she bites her lips and tilts her head backward, losing herself in the sensations.

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Rhaegar Targaryen left the car accident with a bruise on his knee and a scrap of his shoulder and declarations of near death that became nonexistent when a young man—the visible product of genetic perfection—came into view. Rhaegar could recognize a Stark anywhere. And when the boy helped him up, he swore the boy’s curls framed his face in the exact same manner as Lyanna’s did. The most telling truth came when the Stark turned around to open his car’s door and Rhaegar was reacquainted with an ass rounder than the moon and bouncier than a yoga ball. It is an ass he had fondled and obsessed over. An ass that he had indoctrinated into memory and placed into photographs currently stored in ironclad safety boxes. An ass like no other. But Rhaegar knew better than to rely on memory and wayward hopes; he needed to make sure his theory was fact.

Jon feels the hand on his bum before he sees it. Having lived with Robb for so long, the instinct to protect his bottom is gone. It is not until his left cheek gets squeezed like a stress ball does he protest.

“Get off me, you pervert!” Jon shouts. He kicks the man in the gut and watches the silver-haired man
crumple to the ground. The composer clutches his gut and whispers, “Lyanna, you hurt so good.”

Jon freezes.

Fuck, not this again.

Jon considers the consequences of a hit-and-run and decides that he’s done his part by calling Sam. He hightails it back into the car and is given a heart attack when Rhaegar Targaryen creeps between the cracks of his door and latches onto his lap. Jon yodels like a Swiss hanging from the alps while the man begs him to reconsider.

“Please…whatever your name is…just…let’s talk. I promise not to press charges or follow you afterward. Just—” Rhaegar’s ribs are burning. “Let’s have lunch.”

Jon understands that his options are limited. The man is clutching his body like a life vest. The nurses will be out any second to cater to Rhaegar Targaryen and everyone will know what will happen by the end of the day—gossip travels faster than an STD in these groups. While Jon can care less about what’s said about him, he knows this will not end well for his uncle and aunt, or his mother for that matter. He sighs and unlocks the passenger door.

“One lunch,” Jon warns.

Rhaegar grins in triumph.

***

Rhaegar takes Jon to a discreet bistro further north, located on top of a farm and doubles as a bed and breakfast. The wine menu is noteworthy and the décor tasteful and minimalistic—the ideal place to stay with one’s mistress. Rhaegar orders him a light entrée and a glass to go with it. He is considerate of Jon’s appetite but disregards the tension building between them. He waits until Jon has drunk half his glass before asking him any questions beyond the standard and orders another bottle for Jon to ‘test the flavors.’

Jon is not naïve, nor is he stupid. If anything, he is irritated by the consideration. He dislikes many things about this man, starting with the way he scrutinizes his body like a piece of meat. His annoyance is furthered when Rhaegar orders the dishes without Jon’s approval. His excuses are light declarations. "I know you'll love it, Jon." "It tastes so good, Jon. I can't let you leave without having a bite." "Come on, trust me, Jon." His mother has warned him about guys like this, maybe even because of the guy in front of him.

“This is a nice place,” Jon says evenly.

“Yes, it’s one of my favorite restaurants in the area.”

“It’s a bit far.”

“I like the privacy. The atmosphere makes it ideal for getting to know one’s company.”

Jon pauses. “Did you take my mother here?”

Rhaegar smiles. He takes a sip of his red wine and there’s not a stain on his white teeth when he finishes. “I did,” he answers.

“Does your wife know?”
Rhaegar does not have the decency to look ashamed. “No, I’m afraid not. She wouldn’t let me out of her sight if she did.”

Jon scoffs. “I doubt she has to ‘let you’ do anything. I don’t think you mind her opinion too much.”

Rhaegar sets down his glass. “What makes you say that?”

“In my experience, men who have mistresses don’t care too much about their wives’ feelings.”

Rhaegar chuckles. “I had one mistress and that was your mother.”

“One mistress is one too many.”

“Or just enough. At the very least, Elia is fully aware that I value her above a common call girl. Your mother is someone special and I have never contaminated my adoration of her by entertaining other women besides the one I was obliged to.”

“She told me you were the biggest mistake of her life.”

Jon mentioned Lyanna in some dismal attempt to throw the man off. He does not expect it to work, let alone cause the reaction that it did. Rhaegar’s composure drops in a blink of an eye and the mood darkens so much so that Jon believes that hands are asphyxiating him. The waitress brings their food. Jon attempts to focus his attention towards the dish, but can not help but glance over at the other man.

Rhaegar is staring at him again. Jon cannot pinpoint the heat behind the gaze. Jon’s stomach churns at the suggestion of lust. All his life, he has been thankful for the Stark look. He has his mother’s hair, her eyes, her lips, her ass—which more than a number of her ex-lovers have commented on. There were times, however, when one of Lyanna’s past lovers noticed their resemblance and sought to win his affections. “If I can’t have her, maybe her son will do,” said one man whom Jon shivered to think about. During those pivotal and sometimes frightening moments, he wishes for the slightest resemblance to his father, anything to sway their potential desire from him.

“You weren’t the only man she was with,” Jon says at last. He hopes this will remove the glint of desire from this man’s eyes. “I don’t know who my father is and neither does my mother.”

Rhaegar lets out a laugh and it’s as beautiful as the harps he coordinates. “She does,” Rhaegar assures him. “Don’t worry about that.”

Jon is taken back. “How do you know?”

Rhaegar’s eyes sparkle. The purple gleams like amethyst. The mirth unnerves Jon; it makes him feel as if there is a secret everyone but him knows about. He can understand why his mother left this man; he just doesn’t understand why she stayed in the first place.

“Given the time frame of your conception, there is no doubt that I could be your father. My family has a history of genetic diseases and mental illness. It’s more prevalent in my family than most. If Lyanna is the woman I believe she is, she would have had a paternity test to see if this was a concern for you.”

Jon hesitates. All at once, his mind recalls the numerous ‘counseling sessions’ in his youth and the abnormal check-ups he received as a kid—visits to the doctors that were exclusive to him that involved thousands of questions ranging from how his day was to whether or not he had violent thoughts. There tests that varied throughout his life; none of the examinations were invasive. The lack of trauma made it easy to forget—until today.
Rhaegar notices his hesitance and smirks. Yes, Lyanna definitely checked. She must not have cared for the results.

Jon continues to wonder about his past. Lyanna was not an overprotective parent. She hates rules and regulations and evaluations of all sorts. She never wanted Jon to suffer through the harsh restrictions she has as a child. Despite that, she was insistent that Jon get those tests. She demanded reports from Uncle Ned and Aunt Cat each month about his behavior. It wasn’t until Jon was sixteen that the visits stopped.

Despite his curiosity, Jon never questioned his mother. The tests were more of an inconvenience than a chore and the doctors were soft-spoken and kind. They gave him candy after each visit and he loved to see the proud look on his mother's face each time his results were revealed or how strangely elated she used to get whenever he got a sunburn.

“Yes, you’re my son,” Lyanna would exclaim while applying the Aloe Vera. “We Starks burn so easily.” Then, she would ruffle his curls and give him a kiss.

The memory was so innocuous that Jon wonders if there were other clues his missed in the past. Probably, hundreds. Little gremlins of facts littering his mind that he always brushed aside.

“Can you cook?” Jon asks in volume just above a whisper.

Rhaegar smiles, remembering Lyanna’s burnt eggs and undercooked sausages. “Quite well, actually. I find the activity relaxing. I would be happy to teach you if you’d like to set up a date.”

Jon shakes head. “I’ll pass, thanks. I rather this be our last meeting.”

The statement turns Rhaegar’s body rigid. “And why would you want that? I could be your father, Jon. And even if I'm not, I would love to get to know Lyanna’s child.”

Rhaegar reaches out to grab Jon’s hand. He cradles it and uses his thumb to rub circles on his skin. He is about to go in for a kiss when Jon pulls his hand back.

“Thanks, but I’m content where I am.” If Rhaegar had made the offer years ago, he might have taken it. As a teenager, all he wanted was a father. He tried to search for them in Lyanna’s lovers and his uncle and felt unsatisfied with the result. Today, as a young adult, he is surrounded by family who loves him and friends he can trust with his life. “I don’t mean to be rude but I don’t need a father in my life. Lyanna has been a great mom and Uncle Ned and Aunt Cat have always given the...uh...stability I’ve always wanted. And...”

Rhaegar latches onto the hesitance. There’s a desperate look in his eyes. “I don’t doubt that. But wouldn’t you like to meet your siblings? I know my youngest has always wanted to be an older brother.” That is a lie. Aegon loves being the spoiled youngest son. But Rhaegar knows that if Jon was raised by Ned Stark then family is integral to his being. Rhaegar keeps his outward appearance serene but inwardly, he is a storm of mania and lust. The boy is gorgeous; a male replica of the woman he loves. If he can have him in his home, then Rhaegar is confident his life will be complete. Who knows? If Jon is his son, then perhaps he can convince Lyanna to solidify their bond once more.

And if he isn’t, then he is sure Jon will look lovely on top of his bedsheets...

Jon smiles and it is the first time he’s done so all day. “I think they’ll be happier without the drama. Besides, I have my hand full in the siblings’ department—”

The table shakes. “Lyanna has other children?”
Jon is startled by the furious inclination. The man’s eyes are burning. Jon clarifies out of fear. “No—I mean, my cousins. I have a lot of them. We’re all very close.” Too close, but that is a discussion never to be had with this man.

Rhaegar brightens up. “Ah, yes. The Stark children.” He grins. “Well, it’s not quite the same, is it? No matter how close, having a brother and having a cousin is an entirely different thing altogether.”

Jon requests a glass of water from a nearby waitress. “Like what?” He asks as he is handed a glass.

“No—you can marry one but only fuck the other.”

Jon chokes. He spends a good minute coughing out the excess while listening to his potential father chuckle at his own poor taste. Jon vaguely remembers his mother commenting on Rhaegar’s twisted humor and a terrible story of how the man answered a call from his wife while Lyanna was giving him head in his office.

Rhaegar scoots his chair closer to Jon. He pats Jon’s back to ease the waterway and then rests it there for the duration of their meal. “There, there, let me help,” he soothes. The pats become rubs and Rhaegar’s hand travels from the middle of Jon’s back to the top of his nape. The situation becomes disturbingly intimate.

“I—I think I’m okay now.”

“Are you sure?” Rhaegar murmurs.

“Positive.” Jon’s attempts to get away are foiled by Rhaegar’s firm grasp on his neck.

“Gods, you are beautiful. Even your neck is the same as hers. I knew you were Lyanna’s child from the moment I saw you. No one else could give birth to such a pretty child. I’ll be honest with you, Jon. I hope you are my son. Nothing would get me harder than the knowledge that she’ll always have a part of me inside you.”

Jon closes his eyes and count to ten. There are witnesses, he reminds himself. If he can survive this lunch, he can find a more discreet way to commit murder. There’s a lake further north. He remembers driving a few of the patients there to go fishing. It wouldn’t be the first dead body the patients found.

“Please back off, Mr. Targaryen.” Jon is proud of how calm he sounds.

“Call me Rhaegar. Or daddy—whatever you prefer. Papa has a nice ring to it, as well.”

Jon surveys the restaurant for smart phones. He does not want his regurgitation on one of the world’s most famous men to be on the internet. “Rhaegar, there’s a chance I might not be your son.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t mind.” Rhaegar runs his thumb down Jon’s face. He lands on his lips—Lyanna’s lips. “We’ll just have to find another excuse to get to know each other.” Like a teethed worm from the bowels of hell, Rhaegar draws closer until his lips are almost on top of Jon’s.

Jon falls off his chair trying to get away. He scampers on the floor like a headless chicken before getting up. Once on his feet, he pulls his seat to the opposite side of the table—away from Rhaegar. He asks for the check. When the waitress does not come fast enough, he screams for one.

“What’s the matter, Jon?” Rhaegar tilts his head in confusion. He looks like a child. A gorgeous, sociopathic child whose moral compass has been wrecked by centuries of inbreeding. “I just want us to get along.”
And I want a restraining order, Jon laments. He lets out a groan of frustration.

Rhaegar relishes in the sound. “Jon, make that noise again. You sound just like your mother.”

Jon dashes out the restaurant before he has to hear another word. The cool, fresh air alleviates the tension in his lungs. He takes a deep breath. Another. And another for good measure. “Jon, where are you going?” He hears behind him. Jon does not bother to turn around. He knows if he does, he’ll see Rhaegar in all his silver-haired glory standing outside the entrance to the restaurant, smiling with every single perfectly white molar gleaming at him. Jon runs without thinking. Rhaegar chases after him like champion. Before he can retreat to the sanctuary of his vehicle, Rhaegar all but tackles him against the car. He presses his body against Jon and relishes in the feel of a Stark grinding against him once more.

“If there wasn’t a chance you were my son, I would have fucked you top of this car, right here and right now,” Rhaegar swears. Jon shuts his eyes. He prays to whoever gods are listening that what is in Rhaegar’s pants is a misplaced banana straining to get free. Jon attempts to reason with the man.

“Well, that can’t be the only reason. What about your wife? Where does she come in this?” Jon asks, more than a bit desperate.

Rhaegar plants a chaste but morally ambiguous kiss on Jon’s neck. The man has an obsession with that particular part of his body and Jon does not want to see it at full force.

“Elia and I have an understanding. She’s the perfect wife and I play the perfect husband when she needs me to be. If you’re worried about her being bothered by this, don’t. She didn’t say a word about Lyanna and I imagine she’ll be relieved not having to compete with another woman this time.”

“That doesn’t make it right!” Jon holds up his arms to block Rhaegar. “Are you saying that after all these years of being married, you don’t feel a thing for her?”

Rhaegar is frozen by the accusation. Déjà vu hits him as he recalls Lyanna’s rage on the night they broke up and is followed by his personal indignation. His gaze turns into a glare. He makes the same arguments he did that night, hoping his genetics are accompanied by his sense of reasoning. “I never wanted to get married, Jon. Elia wanted it. Our mothers wanted it. I was trying to appease them. I never promised Elia fidelity and I made sure she was aware of it before she married me. I will not be held responsible for a promise I never made!” Jon can feel his skin burn from Rhaegar’s gaze. He tries to look away but Rhaegar grabs his face and forces him to look in his eyes. “I fell in love with Lyanna and was trapped in a marriage I didn’t want. When I offered to divorce Elia for your mother, Lyanna refused me. Can you believe that? Your mother turned me down. She didn’t want to get bound to a man who loved her, who was willing to leave his family for her. You know what she told me? She said that she wasn’t ready to devote herself to one man. She was a child, she called herself. A fucking child, she says! She wasn’t a fucking child when I was fucking her.” Rhaegar laughs at the incredulity. “But I loved her and she loved me. That’s the reason she didn’t go through with that shotgun wedding with that boar of a man. Because she was always in love with me.”

If Jon looks hard enough, he can find the will to protest Rhaegar’s reasoning. Instead, he decides that this is not his battle and therefore not one worth fighting. Without thinking, Jon knees him in the groin. The man lets go of Jon to make friends with the ground. Jon gets into his car and before he can make his escape, he pauses. He thinks about what he just heard. He looks down at the body below him. Then, he lets out a heavy sigh filled with exasperation. As Rhaegar is getting up, Jon unlocks the passenger seat and rolls down his window.

“Get in the car and I’ll take you back to the nursing home where your driver can send you back.”
Rhaegar stares.

“This offer is only available for the next ten seconds.”

Rhaegar does not protest; he gets in.

The drive is quiet compared to the ride to the restaurant. Previously, they were able to fill the silence with questions about Jon’s age and interests. Now, they had nothing to fill the void but Rhaegar’s lingering regrets and Jon’s unspoken thoughts.

Bravely, Rhaegar asks why Jon is driving him back. Jon could have just left him there. He would have been fine. He could have gotten the innkeeper to give a phone call.

“I wouldn’t have said a cruel word about you, Jon,” Rhaegar assures. The Targaryen has returned to his sweet disposition. Jon knows better this time. He grips the wheel a little harder and keeps his eyes on the road.

“Do you love your wife, even a little bit?”

Rhaegar wonders about the fascination Jon has with his wife. “Of course, I do. She is a wonderful woman.”

“But you’re okay with hurting her?”

“She knew what she was getting into when she married me. She knew I would never be hers completely. When she said ‘I do,’ she accepted that this was her fate.”

“So you acknowledge that you are hurting her? That she has to live with the knowledge that she will always rank second in your heart?”

Rhaegar sighs. “Yes.” He tries to ease Jon’s concerns. He has been told that his smile is mesmerizing. “But I make her happy as well. That’s why she’s still with me, because her happiness outweighs her sorrows—even if I am responsible for both.”

The rest of their ride is silent. Jon takes Rhaegar to the nursing home as promise. When the older man gets out of the car, he extends his invitation again. “I do mean it, Jon. I want to get to know you. It is narcissistic of me to assume, but I know you’re mine. And even if you’re not, I want you to be.”

Jon does not respond. Instead, he locks the doors and drives far away. He glances over at the passenger seat and notices a strand of silver hair lingering on the leather. He picks it up before leaving it there. It’s a very distinct color. He’ll be able to find it later when he needs it. When he gets home, he goes upstairs to take a nap. He stops by Robb’s room and decides the temperature was better suited for sleep. He huddles underneath the covers and inhales Robb’s scent. When he wakes up, six hours later, he’ll wonder why Robb didn’t come inside and join him.

Jon will ask him later. Right after he calls Willas.

Chapter End Notes

1. As my move date draws near and the company I work for keeps screwing up, I’ve
been a bit overwhelmed. There are a few more things I have to take care of before I leave. Therefore, weekly updates will not return until March. But they will return. Ideally, I would like to finish this story at the end of August, which leads us at about twenty-four more chapters (If I were to update consistently every single week).

2. I love making Rhaegar a creep. He just makes it too easy.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Welcome back, everybody! Here is the new chapter since my hiatus! Chapters for Runs in the Family will now be updated on Wednesday. I'm so happy for everyone's warm wishes and happy thoughts. Hope you enjoy this chapter.

Note: The dance routine I imagined was closest to this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Llwy7wUW1m4 with Arya performing the second soloist (and Waif performing the first). The original dance from the TV series, "Hit the Floor" is better though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The dresses provided for the dancers consists of a solid black bodysuit with a layer of tulle for the skirt. It is a Lannister event, so the sheer material contains spots of gold for glamor. The lack of frills makes it ideal for dancing. They curled their hair and made sure their lip glosses gleam in the light. The routine is simple compared to their usual performances. After all, they are here to entertain Tywin’s guests, not network for themselves. Doing well tonight means that opportunity will come later.

Everyone waits in position, overwhelm with excited giggles. Since none of them are worried about their performance, all that is left is the exhilaration. Like copper butterflies, the duration of a dancer’s career is limited. It isn’t just their bodies that broke down, but the appeal of the stage wavers with each performance. Arya is grateful for her youth. She is still star-eyed whenever she puts on her shoes; she still finds her sweat as refreshing as the rain.

Finally, the announcer finishes his speech by leading into the dancers’ introduction. Syrio gives the cue to start the music. The girls advance towards their positions. They put on happy smiles and have fun. This is nothing, they reminded themselves. This is just a practice. Barely a show. Waif’s solo is first and has the most technical movements. Arya reluctantly admits that her dancing is perfect; Waif cannot make a mistake if she wanted to. Arya is next and while her role isn’t as complicated, it relies on her charisma more than her skill. She lets herself loose with it and judging from the audience’s smiles, she knows her appeal is noticeable.

When the entire performance is done, the audience gives them a round of applause. No whistles or cheering—this is a posh event after all. Though nowhere near as impress as they would be at an actual performance, it is enough for Tywin Lannister. The girls return to their dressing room where they get ready for the actual party. They only have a short amount of time to prepare themselves. Some put on a different shade of lipstick to differentiate from their friends while others are desperate to put on their complicated laced dresses or their too high platform shoes. Arya puts on the red dress that Tywin bought her. Had it not been for her height, the dress would have been obscenely short. Fortunately, the long sleeves keep the look from being inappropriate and the flowing skirt provides her with mobility. Arya misplaces her lipstick and is about to go outside without it when Wylla lends Arya her Dior.

"Here," Wylla offers, “It’ll match your dress.”

Arya takes it. “Thanks.”
Wylla smiles and fixes up her hair one last time.

“That dress looks beautiful on you. Is it new?”

“Yeah, I’m surprise it fits.” Arya smacks her lips.

“Tywin Lannister, I assume.”

Arya caps the lipstick.

“I went to visit you and Jorelle last night—I thought we could have a sleepover or something. But you were gone. And you were gone the entire night. I know, because I stayed with Jorelle instead.”

“I had something to do.”

"Something or someone?"

Arya keeps silent.

Wylla looks around. Most of the girls are already leaving to join the guests. Only a select few remain, second guessing their appearances because they are afraid of looking anything less than perfection for potential sponsors. She sits down. “I checked the front desk. I told them that my father was interested in booking the royal suite for my performance. They said that it was occupied until the end of the week so I went upstairs and saw one of the maids bring up an expensive bottle of whiskey. Guess who opened the door?”

Arya returns the lipstick. “I don’t have to guess.”

Wylla takes it back. She sighs, exasperated if anything. “Listen, Arya. I get it. I do. Well, not really but I sort of kind of understand it. I know what it’s like for all your hard work to be credited to your family and it feels like shit. I know you don’t want to rely on them financially and hey, as far as sugar daddies go, Tywin Lannister is—”

“He’s not my sugar daddy.”

“You slept with him and he bought you Valentino. He is a sugar daddy. And yeah, I’ll admit, pretty hot for an old guy. But Arya,” She sounds so tired. Arya fights a sigh. “Tywin fucking Lannister? Your parents will kill you. I’ll kill you. Jorelle will cry because she’s a cryer and her sisters baby her—even her younger sister texts me to check on her in case she’s injured—and she’ll panic and think you’re a prostitute which is cool, good for you, you’re a whore anyways so at least you’re getting paid, but this is not something I need right now and I can’t be worrying about you and Jorelle and getting sponsors so you need to shut this down. Now. Tonight. Understand?”

“Yep.”

“Yep as in ‘I understand what you’re saying and I will take your advice and stop sleeping with morally egregious men’ or ‘I understand what you’re saying and I don’t give a fuck but thanks for the concern?’”

“The latter.”

Wylla groans and curses the heavens above. “Arya!”

Arya laughs. “I’m apologize for your concern. I didn’t mean to make you worried.”

Wylla glares. “No, I am not worried. I am fine. Jorelle is worried. You left her alone at night.”
“But you’re the one saying something.”

“But because it needs to be said. And no one else will say it,” Wylla grumbles, “No one said anything about Jaqen either.”

“You know about Jaqen?”

“Oh, fuck off, everyone knows about Jaqen. His eye fucks alone could get a woman pregnant.” Wylla leans back in her chair. She’s given up on looking perfect and she has not even left the room. “What I am saying is that you should be careful. If Waif finds out about Tywin…”

“Then maybe Tywin will shut her up for me.” Arya shrugs. Her nonchalance sparks a visceral reaction within Wylla and the girl storms off. “Fine, your funeral.”

Arya does not want to smile but fighting the reaction is hard. She follows her companion to the door and grips her shoulder.

“What?” Wylla hisses.

“Thank you,” Arya tells her. She means it as well. “Thank you for caring about me.”

Wylla grimaces. She shoves her hand off her shoulder like some sort of petulant child. “Your personality sucks.”

“I know.”

“And Jorelle thought you got kidnapped last night. She’s the one who forced me to check up on you.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll stay in our room tonight.”

Wylla walks closer to the entrance. Jorelle is there, fiddling her fingers. In a way, she’s the black sheep in her family. Where all the other Mormont women are known for their aggressive natures and their ambitious dreams, Jorelle is withdrawn and even-tempered.

“I hope it’s worth it,” Wylla tells her. Arya looks at her curiously. “Whatever you have going on with Tywin, I hope whatever he’s offering you is something worth the scandal and the shame you are bringing to your family.”

“He’s offering me Tiffany’s.”

“Oh fuck you.”

Arya laughs and her laughter causes Jorelle to smile. She asks the girls what took them so long.

“We were discussing sponsorship,” Arya lies.

Wylla goes along with the story. “Arya here has a white whale she’s hoping to attract this evening and so do I. All that’s left is you. Have you got your eye on anybody yet?”

Jorelle shakes her head. “I… I don’t know these people like you two do. You posh folks are on an entirely different level. Besides, I doubt they’ll care about me when they see you.”

Wylla is quick to call her out on such nonsense. She grabs her arm and leads her away. “If you are doing the play, that means Syrio expects the best from you. Come on, let’s go find you a man or woman to flirt with.”
“I don’t know how to flirt.”

While Arya is inclined to join them, she spots a familiar face. Arya turns towards her friends. She gently taps on Jorelle’s shoulder and directs her towards one of the men. “That guy over there is Ralph Buckler. The Baratheons are the largest minority shareholders for his company.”

“So?”

“So your sister is friends with Shireen Baratheon—the heiress of the Baratheon fortune.”

Discomfort washes over Jorelle. “Isn’t that nepotism?”

“No, because you’re not related to him.”

“Arya,” she warns.

Arya shrugs. She slowly distances herself from her friends. “Listen, I have work to do. But Jorelle, right now, the way to get sponsors is through charm and connections. You have your sister. Go with it.” Jorelle looks towards Wylla who turns the other cheek. Arya is already walking towards a completely different stranger.

Jorelle frowns. “I thought you two hated using your connections.”

“Well, we hate using our connections. But we have connections to use. You have a batshit crazy sister—who I love dearly and is one of my closest friends—and it’s so rare for you to take advantage of her insanity so I say go for it.” Without another word, Wylla drags her friend towards the Buckler male.

***

Arya walks towards Tywin Lannister with soft steps and a shy smile. His eyes light up the way grandfathers do on Christmas and he places a tender hand on the small of her back. The scene is charming; it reminds the guests of a movie scene. The kind where a gentle family member introduces two young lovers to each other at a stuffy banquet and they find solace in each other’s eyes.

“Everyone, this is Arya Stark. She is the head dancer of the troupe you saw perform. She’ll be the female lead in Syrio’s new production with the Faceless Men.”

“Oh how wonderful,” says an elderly blond woman. She bears a striking resemblance to Tywin and sounds bored to death. “You were lovely, Miss Stark.”

“Their work is impressive. You must be very honored,” said another man. Unlike the rest of the Anglo-Saxon population, his skin is warm and his voice is lit with exoticism. Though Arya is sure he works for the Martells, he is not the man in the picture.

None of these men are.

“I am, sir.” Arya keeps her sweet demeanor and stops herself from looking to Tywin for support. She does not need these men questioning her motives. Arya turns on the charm.

The boy, the youngest person of the group before Arya joined them, raises an eyebrow. “Stark? Are you any relation to Eddard Stark by any chance?”

Arya brightens up expectantly. “Yes, he is my father. Have you met him?”

He shakes his head. “I have not. Hopefully one day, though. My family is hoping to do business
with Stark Industries. In fact, my uncle is in Yorkshire now, hoping to strike a deal.”

Arya giggles, and it is about as real as margarine is butter. “And why are you here?”

“I’m trying to learn the business myself. I have a transaction in London that my father’s given me the responsibility of.”

“That’s amazing.” Arya has to think for a second—what does ‘awe’ and ‘so impress I could drop my panties’ look like? “You’re like what? Eighteen? And you’re already helping out your family? It’s so refreshing to see real men in this world of ours and not boys living off their parent’s dime.”

“I’m seventeen, actually.” The boy smirks, proud of her assessment. “I don’t think I’ve introduced myself yet. I’m Quentyn Martell.”

Arya giggles because laughter is the only thing she can stuff her mouth with. She wants to retort that her brother has been studying encryption since he first laid hands on a computer. At the age of twelve, he was already participating in meetings about firewall improvement. She will have to wait until they’re alone before she starts working her magic. Arya is confident the boy is a lady-killer where he is from, judging by the smugness etched on his face. Arya licks her lips. She loves breaking down these boys.

As if reading her thoughts, Tywin pinches her backside. Arya, to her credit, straightens up but does not catch his eye. They are strangers, she reminds herself. He is her sponsor and nothing more.

“I wish I had your enthusiasm for my family’s work.” Arya continues. “I have no talent for business—I’m such an open book, people can see right through me. It’s so embarrassing!”

Tywin looks away to keep himself from displaying amusement. He has a reputation to keep.

Quentyn laughs. “Honesty is not a trait to be ashamed of.”

Arya laughs. If she laughs again, her muscles are going to fall off from overuse. “That’s why I love dancing so much. It’s the only place I know where you can be completely honest in body and soul.”

“I can think of a few other places,” he tells her with a wink.

This time, Arya laughs and places a delicate hand over her mouth. The action distracts him from her eye roll. Tywin interrupts their conversation by excusing himself. “We seem to have become a nuisance to you two. Quentyn, I believe we can settle whatever business we have at the meeting tomorrow.”

While Quentyn is charmed at the prospect of getting to know Arya, his attendant is unsure. Tywin adds that Quentyn is young and deserves to enjoy the benefits of youth. “You took on a great deal of responsibility by taking on this assignment last minute. I believe you should be allocated some joy before entering adulthood. Have a good night.”

The rest of the adults follow him. Quentyn’s attendant whispers something in his ear that the boy brushes off. They have a discreet row which results in the older man storming off. Quentyn reverts his attention to Arya and holds out his arm like Aladdin on a carpet ride. Arya takes it—though she vaguely considers suicide to spare herself the humiliation of adhering to a cliché.

The symphony plays a light melody perfect for ballroom dancing. Quentyn pulls her in his arms. Wylla sends her a look of disgust. She knows a fuckboy when she sees one and is judging Arya harder than Simon Cowell.
“You’re a great dancer,” Arya tells Quentyn.

“Thank you.” He spins her which gives her a window of opportunity to display her displeasure before he takes her back wearing a smile. “I think it’s because I have such a beautiful partner.”

“I’m flattered.” Quentyn is obviously unused to the formal movements of a waltz but makes do with his natural rhythm. Arya was not lying earlier; he is a good dancer for an obvious beginner. The steps buy her some time to think. “So how busy will your work keep you this week?”

Quentyn chuckles. “Are you asking me out a date?”

Not a chance in hell. “I might be.”

“Well my schedule is packed but I could open it up for someone as pretty as you.”

Arya gasps just the slightest to display her flattery. “Oh, I couldn’t ask that of you. Besides, I’d hate to take your time away from Tywin. He’s been so generous with us with the hotel accommodations and our troupe sponsorship…”

“I think you’re worth it.” He gives her a blinding smile. Arya returns it. Her face hurts.

Out of nowhere, Quetyn expresses his thoughtfulness. “Speaking of Tywin Lannister, were you as surprised as I was when you met him? Compare to the rumors, he’s quite…underwhelming.”

Arya decides not to correct this fool and agrees with him. “I know! My father actually warned me about coming here. But when we met, he was so kind to us. I mean, he wasn’t one for conversation and he barely looked at me…” Arya laughs to indicate a joke. Quetyn joins her. “But he has gone above and beyond his duty. Frankly, I don’t even know why I was so scared to come here in the first place. How about you?”

“Yes, I was nervous as well. But to be honest,” Quetyn whispers as if they are sharing a secret. Arya wonders how many times he’s used this trick on girls. “I’m not quite sure how to deal with Tywin Lannister. I expected a shrewd businessman with a ruthless disposition. Instead I get an old man fading from his prime. It’s…lackluster.”

Tywin will make him eat his words. Arya nods in agreement. “I suppose so. But old age makes one appreciate the finer things in life. The other day, when I was thanking him, he told me the loveliest story about his grandchildren.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, he told me that he was inspired by his grandson, Joffrey, to make amends with the people he’s hurt. Since his wife always loved dancing, he wanted to support our troupe. He’s even backing out of a purchase for this media company in order to donate to the arts. His granddaughter, Myrcella, is so excited.”

“What?”

“Oh, Myrcella. She’s a cellist and utterly amazing. And she’s a complete inspiration! Have you heard? She’s half-deaf from this horrible incident years ago but still manages to play like a pro. I hope you meet her one day. She might be performing here instead of me—.”

“No!”

Arya stares at him with faux shock. Quentyn chuckles nervously. “Sorry, I meant—no, I would love
to hear her perform. But what did you say about the donation? Where did it come from?"

“Well, I’m not sure of the details. But Myrcella told me—her father’s a friend of mine’s—that her grandfather is redirecting his company to more philanthropic pursuits. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Quentyn grips her backside tighter. “Yes…it really doesn’t match his reputation, though.” Suspicion lingers in his last statement. For the first time, Arya is impressed by this fool. He’s not as stupid as she thinks but he’s not smart enough to hide his skepticism.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Arya sighs all of a sudden. Quentyn is surprised. “He’s pandering to the public for votes since his election coming up.” She offers him a resigned look. “But to be honest, I’m not sure I care why he’s doing it. There are so many schools that need decent art programs and troupes like mine are losing funding every day. Even if it’s to get votes or evade taxes, I can’t help but be happy that something good is happening. Isn’t a good deed a good deed no matter what the intentions?”

Arya’s honest analysis is the magnet to Quentyn’s compass. He deviates from the North and heads straight to South where she wants him to.

“I guess I can understand that,” Quentyn confesses. He turns to look at his attendant. “Listen, I have to make a phone call. Maybe we could see each other this week?”

“Count on it.” She’d rather dance with tacks in her shoes—*again*. Arya sweetens the deal by kissing Quentyn on the cheek. She is worried about being too aggressive when the young man flashes her a wistful grin. Arya takes back what she was thinking earlier. Quentyn is cute—she might sleep with him if she gets drunk enough.

While Quentyn gets some privacy with his attendant, Jaqen swoops in. Arya eases into the dance as soon he whisks her onto the dance floor. Unlike Quentyn, who only knew the basics of formal footing, Jaqen is a professional. The song is a bit more upbeat and feels more like a battle than a seduction.

“Lovely work—if I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were falling in love.”

“But you do know,” Arya teases. “I am talking to potential sponsors. That is part of my job, is it not?”

“Yes, the flirting and charming and seduction…all things a girl has been trained for, has she not?”

Arya purses her lips. Jaqen is right. She chose dancing to avoid the bureaucracy of her family’s business and yet it appears escape has never been an option for her.

“Names are curious things. Each one carries a history and it is the history that a girl must carry her whole life. Has a girl thought about losing her name and taking on her own?”

She understands why her aunt took on a pseudonym. Yet, Arya has dealt with the drama of being a Stark and though she despises the accusations of preferential treatment, she loves her family too much to end it.

“I am Arya Stark. A thousands names and faces could never change that.” She glances over at Tywin and sighs. Then, she looks into Jaqen’s eyes. “There is love in my name and why a fight a love as strong and pure as that of a parent to a child?”

Jaqen’s expression is unreadable. He seems amused—there’s a twinkle in his eye—but whether he believes her or not is left in the air. “Have you ever been in love? Not the sweet embrace of a mother but the kind of bleeding love that leaves you so desperate, you would trade your last breath for a
kiss?”

Arya shakes her head. “No, and I don’t care to. That kind of love…it’s destructive.”

“But powerful. It is the love that gives you a dance worthy of a thousand ships.”

“A thousand warships,” Arya corrects. She offers Jaqen a sincere but sardonic smile. “My most passionate affair is the one I have with my body and the stage. When you love someone, you should be willing to give them everything—nothing less than your whole body and soul. If you do not, it is not a love worth giving and you are cheating your partner of that happiness. I made the decision to forgo a fervor romance for a tender friendship and I have not regretted it since. This is the greatest act of love I can give to the man I love.”

The song stops and Arya lets go of him. She walks towards the gaggle of elites interested in Eddard and Catelyn Stark’s youngest daughter.

***

Arya makes up for last night’s abandonment by watching movies with her friends and ordering a platter of fruits and cheeses to their room. Tomorrow, they begin dress rehearsals and will hit the London stage in a week. They are all pretending to be calm while their intestines entangle themselves. Arya hides her nerves through nonchalance and dry commentary. She does not want to frighten them with her self-doubt.

When they are asleep, she places a cover over the girls and heads to the bathroom. Arya sits in the bathtub and shuts the covers for the illusion of privacy. She dials a number on FaceTime and waits. After five dial tones, Gendry picks up the phone.

“Hey Arya.” He sounds tired and yawns more dramatically than necessarily. Arya rolls her eyes. She does, however, appreciate his shirtless status.

“Having fun without me?” Arya asks. She looks behind him and sees blonde hair scattered on his pillow. She raises an eyebrow. “Never mind, I know my answer.”

Gendry groans and gets out of bed. He heads to the bathroom. “How’s London?” He asks. He doesn’t bother to explain and she doesn’t bother to ask. They are beyond that.

“The same as I remember it.” Arya sighs. “Dirty, with a sky full of clouds and streets crowded with people I hate.” She pauses and blurts out, “I met Tywin.”

Gendry is an open book—he cannot pretend to look surprise, not even for Arya’s sake. “What did he want?”

“Business as always. What else could it be?”

“You made another deal with the devil.”

“But I got myself an amazing sponsorship with it. I’ll have the world at my feet soon.”

“You don’t sound happy about it,” Gendry points.

“Because it’s becoming real now.” Arya smiles without it reaching her eyes. She leans back and lies down in the tub. “All the sacrifices I’ve made and all the games I’ve played are coming together next Friday. Can you believe I’m actually nervous about performing? I haven’t been this afraid in years.”
That’s because it has been child’s play until now,” Gendry reminds. “Now you’ll be on a stage that deserves you.” The expression on his face is one that makes Arya’s heart stop. Gendry smiles at her, dopey and tired, but it tells Arya that she’s the most beautiful girl in the world. The smile reminds Arya that he’s met her when she was nothing more than a spoiled rich kid who punched her father’s car when it broke down and broke her fist. He was there for her when she broke down in Tywin’s suite, a week after they discovered who put the glass her shoes and she found out it was one her closest friends. He was there to pick her up at the airport when she finally returned to England after a yearlong absence and there to comfort her when she was terrified of reuniting with her parents.

“Do you love me, Gendry?”

Arya forgets how often she speaks without thinking. Before she can back out of her question, Gendry answers her.

“Yes.”

Outside of her family, Gendry is the only man who’s ever seen her cry. So she cries and it’s soft and choking and she tries her best not to let anybody hear, not even herself. “I love you, too,” she tells him. The words are hollow, though, because there’s another, unspoken question that neither of them ask because they already know the answer.

Gendry is kind in the cruelest way. He starts talking and Arya loves him too much to tell him to shut up.

“When I realized I was in love with you, I used to think about us together—ten years, twenty years from now. And my dream was the same. I would be a mechanic at this small garage and I’d come home to our kids and you would be waiting for me, every night. We would sleep in the same bed in this nice, little house and we would be happy. Don’t get me wrong, we would argue every day—”

Arya laughs and shakes her head at the image.

“—But I would still be happy, listening to you bickering. That’s all I want.” There is a longing smile on Gendry’s face and Arya understands what it is for before any more words are spoken. “Do you know what’s wrong with the picture?”

Arya looks down. She nods as the sugar from the confession leads to a bittersweet aftertaste. “I do.”

“I want a family, Arya. I want to be a father. I want a simple job and a simple house and a stable life. That’s all I’ve ever wanted because it is what I never got.” Gendry takes advantage of her silent. “But you have all those things and you don’t need them. You want more and I love you for it.”

Arya wipes away her tears.

“I love you, Arya. I always will. That’s why I want to see you on stage, doing what you love. I want to turn on the telly and hear about the countries you’ve traveled and the people you’ve met. I want you to be happy and you won’t be happy with me. You won’t be happy being my wife. You won’t be happy having my kids.” Gendry copies her by leaning back against the door. “And I won’t be happy with you. I want a wife who cares more about her relationship than she does her career. I want the mother of my children to want to be with them more than she wants to be on stage. I’m not getting that with you.”

“We want different things,” Arya concludes with regret heavy in her voice.

“Yeah, we do. And sacrificing our happiness isn’t proof that we love each other. It’s the shovel for
our grave. There’s no compromise for us. I love you and I’m not going to be the reason you give up on your dreams."

“I don’t want to be yours.”

Gendry’s assuredness never wavers throughout his speech. “You are going to take everyone’s breath away, Arya. You took mine’s the first time I saw you dance. So on Friday, get on that stage and make the world remember Arya Stark. Be perfect. Be yourself. Be the woman I love; the girl who never once conformed to anybody’s standards. Give me the reason to give up on you.”

Chapter End Notes

1. I'm officially moved into my new place. I choose an AirBnB extended stay option because I didn't want to sign a lease until I knew I actually liked the city. :) I'm pretty happy with my choice of stay and it offers a lot of down time for my writing.
2. Over the hiatus, I complete two and a half chapters of Runs in the Family, two chapters of Crown the Wolf, one one-shot, and one chapter of a Yuri on Ice! Story plus a number of articles for my two blogs. Update schedule will go like this:
   3/1/2017 (Today): Runs in the Family Ch. 40
   3/4/2017 (Saturday): Crown the Wolf Ch. 12
   3/6/2017 (Monday): Kneeling on Broken Knees (Jon/Robb Oneshot and Prompt Request)
   3/8/2017 (Wednesday): Runs in the Family Ch. 41
   3/11/2017 (Saturday): The Sugar Cube Boys Ch. 1 (Yuri on Ice!! Story Premiere)

Added Note: So one of my favorite fanfiction authors recently posted a note, which I respected and somewhat admired her for, and it said she was suspending her account because the number of reviews to her hits, bookmarks, and subscribes were severely disproportionate to one another. Though some people might think she was being dramatic, but as a writer, I agree with her choice. Fanfiction don't get paid for this. It's free whether I update every week or once a year. And no one wants to be the writer who says "oh if I don't have ten reviews, I'm not updating." That's bitch stuff. I transferred from ff.net to AO3 to avoid that behavior. But it still gets irritating when I see people bookmarked or subscribed to my stories who have never reviewed before, especially since I go to the effort of posting regular updates.
I'm not suspending my account--that's not fair to the people who have reviewed but I will say, I don't appreciate it and I certainly don't like the fact that I spend hours on these chapters and some people can't be spared a few minutes to write a comment. Sorry to end this update on an unhappy note.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Flashback chapter! :)  

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jon woke up in the darkness to the sound of clacking keys and saw his lover hunched over his laptop; his face immersed in backlight. Jon checked the clock. 6:49 AM.

“Have you been working all night?”

Robb leaned back in his chair and rubbed his eyes. He let out a groan. “What time is it?”

“Almost seven.”

“PM?”

Jon sighed. “We went to bed at ten.”

“Fuck.” Robb laughed at his own suffering. “This assignment is killing me.”

“It wouldn’t have if you’d just kick that freeloader out sooner. Now, you’re stuck doing his share of the work.” Jon got out of bed. He tied the drawstring of his sweatpants to keep them from falling off. “Why aren’t the other members helping you?” He asked before leaving the room.

“It’s my fault,” Robb told him, he upped his volume so that Jon could hear. "I gave the other guy too many second chances—I don’t want to burden them with my mistake.”

“You’re a team! That’s the point!” Jon yelled from the kitchen.

“I don’t want to be lectured on that by you!” Robb shouted back without heat. He paused. “What are you doing?”

Jon popped his head in.

“Making you some tea and then putting you to bed.” He returned to his task.

“I have class in two hours.”

“Two hours is better than nothing. I’ll wake you up—don’t worry.” Robb heard the fussing in the kitchen. Instead of arguing his definite loss, Robb focused on saving his project. The plans weren’t perfect but they were good. He had half an hour break before class started to clean it up.

Robb leaned back on the chair to stretch. He let out a huge groan while his morning wood rose halfheartedly. His body was a Pavlovian delinquent; he associated aching muscles with thrusting hips, the perception of all night love-making and hands bonding Jon’s wrists because he was too eager to get the handcuffs from the dresser.

Jon arrived with a cup of tea shortly after his fantasy. He raised an eyebrow at the sight. “Don’t tell me your project was that good.”
“It isn’t.” Robb took the tea from his hands. “But you are.”

Jon rolled his eyes. Robb sipped his tea. He almost choked when he watched Jon get to his knees. “What are you—? Oh…” Jon’s hands pulled down his boxes and unleashed his cock, still not completely hard but considerably impressive. Jon mouthed the tip.

“You don’t have to…” Jon sucked on the head. “…fuck that’s good.”

Jon kissed the tip. “I always wake you up with a blowjob. It’s a habit by now. Don’t think too much of it.”

Robb sighed. He was trembling as Jon engulfed him halfway. The young man’s mouth was wet and hot. He was lathering his member with saliva and it felt so good soaking in the heat. There was something pleasant about being inside Jon’s mouth, even when the possibility of an orgasm was nil. “You’re so fucking perfect,” Robb moaned. He put his tea aside, fearful of spilling. “My pretty little cock warmer,” he called him as he entangled his fingers through his hair.

Jon spent a few more moments sucking on Robb’s member. Though the his twitching hole was aching for fulfillment, Jon disregarded the urge. Jon was not doing this for his pleasure; he wanted Robb to relax enough to be lulled—much-deserved—nap.

The Snow child licked the glans and slurped the pre-cum as if it were a delicacy. His attentiveness was a blessing. Before long, the cock was heavy as a rock in his mouth. He knew from the growth of Robb’s size that the boy was getting ready to cum. After a few more minutes of careful ravishment, Robb came all over Jon’s face, letting his semen splatter onto Jon’s curls. The sight was filthy.

Robb shut his eyes and sighed in pleasure. “I needed that,” he confessed.

Jon cleaned up his face. “I know.” He smirked and got off his knees. “Now let’s get you to bed.”

Robb groaned as he was dragged out of his chair. If his muscles were sore in the chair, his bones were gelatin standing. When Jon half-carried him to the king-size accommodation of cotton and pillows, Robb grabbed him by the hips and dragged him down with him.

“Robb!”

Robb made a happy noise while ignoring his boyfriend’s protests. He snuggled against Jon’s chest. “You’re so warm,” he praised. “Let’s go to sleep together.”

Jon tried to shove him off. “No, I have work to do.”

“Today is your day off.” Robb knew this for a fact; the two of them were supposed to go to Stockbridge for a street fair after his classes. He was already envisioning the thirty different flavors of cupcakes, the local raspberries joining the lightly whipped cranachan and the gallons of caramel toppling the shortbread. Jon would limit his sugar intake to avoid a stomachache but little did he know that Robb spent weeks developing methods to sneak extra treats under his reservoir.

Jon struggled for a few more moments before settling into bed with Robb. Why did he even bother to fight? He wondered. He would end up in Robb’s arms regardless. “I wanted to look for another job.”

Robb frowned. “Why?”

Jon shrugged as much as his limbs allowed in the embrace. “No reason.”

“Why?” Robb pushed. He let go of Jon in order to meet his eyes. His face showed no signs of
fatigue, only concern. Jon touched his cheek and the man winced. The Snow could imagine the horrors going on in his mind: ‘Was Jon unsatisfied with their relationship?’ ‘Was Robb paying so little attention to Jon that he couldn’t see how unhappy he was?’ ‘Why does Jon want to spend less time with him?’ There were thousands of inane theories that must be passing through his head and against his conscience, Jon laughed.

“It’s nothing,” he promised. “It’s just that you have your whole life figured out for you. You’re already halfway through your degree and afterwards, you’ll work for your dad. I… want to be able to support you when that happens.”

“Don’t you support me already?” Robb questioned. “I mean; my apartment looks great since you’ve moved in. And I’m actually eating proper meals.”

Jon shook his head. “I meant…” He took a deep breath. “Imagine if I figured out what I want ten years down the line,” if they lasted that long. “And you’re at the height of your career. All you want to do now is relax with me and have a good time. It’s not fair that after giving up your youth, you can’t reap the benefits. Instead, you’re too busy helping me get what I want.”

Jon hoped the explanation was sound. He saw Robb sigh in relief.

“Thank the gods; I was worried I’d done something to upset you.” Robb shook his head. Out of sudden, Jon is pulled into a hug; his lungs squeezed like lemons in the embrace. He could feel Robb’s grin against his skin. “I’m so happy you think we’ll be together for that long! I knew I was going to convince you!” Robb kissed Jon’s chest, ignoring the dozens of yelps and protests leaving his lover’s mouth. Each sound was deafened by Robb’s suckling lips. The Stark called each nibble ‘the taste of victory.’ “Jon, I’m so thankful you think so much of me. But more than anything, I want you to be happy, Jon. I’ll support you whenever and in whatever you want to do. That’s the beauty of a relationship. Besides, I don’t want you rushing into anything and being miserable, especially now when I’m too busy to notice anything wrong.”

Though Jon cursed Robb’s naivety proudly, he had to turn his head away to hide his smile. He knew Robb would say something like that. He kissed Robb’s forehead. “I know,” he said as he stroked his hair. “I just figured it would be easier if we go through the ‘not-quite-there in-my-career’ stage together.”

“Nothing’s easy.”

Jon gave him a reprimanding look. Robb grinned sheepishly and tried to get out of bed. Before he could remove the sheet, Jon pounced on him. “No.”

“No?”

“No,” Jon stressed again. “You need sleep.”

“I need to help my boyfriend find himself a career. Just let me get my laptop and we can do some good old research.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No,” Jon repeated. “We can brainstorm here,” Jon offered. He needed to make sure Robb stayed in bed. The two-hour nap was diminished to an hour and half if they were lucky. Robb fell back on the sheets. He drew Jon closer to him. Jon pulled the covers further up.
“Well, let’s talk about what you’re good at,” Robb began. “You’re beautiful; the most beautiful person in the world. I’d tell you to become a model but the thought of someone laying their eyes on this perfect body...fuck, it makes me go mental.” Robb kissed his bare shoulder. Jon rolled his eyes.

“You’re ridiculous.”

Robb laughed. “You’re perfect.” Robb licked his lips. He lifted his fingers in order to pry Jon’s mouth open. Jon did not hesitate. He started sucking.

Robb swore. “Jon, gods...You embody sex. I think the gods placed you on earth to be the incarnation of temptation.” He took out his wet fingers and slipped them into Jon’s boxer shorts. He found Jon’s cock.

Jon gasped.

“Sometimes, I wonder if I’m addicted. I can’t imagine what it’s like not to be inside you, to have you inside me. I swear, your fluids are like an aphrodisiac. Even your sweat drives me crazy.”

Robb squeezed Jon’s cock. His hands were rough. His grip was firm. Jon whimpered. “Should I put that on my resume? I bet I’d could get any job I wanted.”

“Don’t be silly,” Robb rebuked. He enforced his displeasure by pinching Jon’s tip. Jon’s back curled in pleasure. “You’re mine.”

“Yeah...what else?” Jon wanted to be lauded with compliments. It was the kink he never knew he had. Years of being the bastard child of Lyanna Stark, of being hidden in the shadows, of being the family’s dirty little secret, made him desperate for praise.

Robb hummed. He returned to his gentle ministrations. “There’s so many things you’re good at, Jon. Every day is like a dream; I come home to a nice, home-cooked meal, a clean house, and a nice, warm bath waiting for me. Gods, I never imagined I would be this lucky.” Robb shot up from the bed with the biggest smile Jon had ever seen. Jon yelped when his cock was dropped. Damn it, Robb. He loathed to see what conclusion made Robb so happy.

“You can be a housewife!”

Jon pulled his boyfriend down. “Stop it, Robb.”

Robb kept on going, even as he was dragged into slumber. “Housewives are amazing. They run the household and make sure their children are well taken care of and keep their husbands from overworking themselves. My mother is a housewife. We can adopt fifteen children—”

“Why fifteen?”

“That’s how many players you need to form a rugby team.”

Jon shoved a pillow into his boyfriend’s face. “Go the fuck to sleep, Robb.”

Robb pouted. “Okay, but that’s not a ‘no.’ Right, Jon? I didn’t hear a ‘no.’ We’ll put it as a ‘maybe.’ It’s good to have options.”

Jon shook his head. He should have never said anything. Now his lover was anything but tired. He was distracted enough that he didn’t notice Robb leaning over to their bedside table and grabbing his phone.
“Let’s just look up possible professions.”

“Robb!” Jon tried to grab the phone. Robb, the bigger of the two, fought him off. “So aside from being a spectacular spouse, you are brilliant. Strong, you were able to carry me home that one time I was pissed—just hauled me on your shoulders, I was so turned on.” He thought for another moment and grinned. “Protective; good at planning and investigation—you love those detective dramas and you tend to figure out the culprit before the episode’s finished.” Robb’s fingers worked themselves into a frenzy. Jon was worried they would fall with how hard they were hitting the screen. “I rather you not travel for work. You’ll be the primary caretaker of the family—not that I won’t participate! I’ve always wanted to be a father. But running Stark Industries will take most of my time…you won’t mind, will you?” Robb was anxious when he asked.

“Yeah, I figured that would be the case.” If they lasted that long, Jon’s conscious mind reminded him. The noise was high-pitch and screaming; Jon longed to turn it off.

“Are you really sure? That’s what you want? And you’re not saying this to keep me?”

“I could stab you in the heart and you’d still take me back. I’m not worried about keeping you,” Jon confessed dryly. “And can we please stop talking about our metaphorical children?” The notion made him more unsettled than he’d liked to admit. Despite his earlier contentions against having children (he’d always imagine himself as the fun uncle rather than a father), the thought of taking care of Robb’s kids was not entirely unpleasant.

Besides, the look of relief on Robb’s face was terribly charming. He returned his attention to the phone and pressed ‘enter.’ “And the results are in…”

Jon waited.

Robb’s face fell. “Oh.”

Jon blinked in confusion. “What does it say?”

Robb grimaced. “Police officer.”

“Really?” Jon took the phone from his hand. He looked at the other options but nothing else looked appealing. He blinked once or twice. “Huh. Never thought I would get that.” He figured he’d get a job in caretaking, given his past professions.

“It’s just a search engine response,” Robb pointed out. He took the phone back and placed it on the dresser.

Jon’s thoughts lingered on the suggestion. “My uncle is a cop—well a detective. He was one of my heroes growing up. I used to jump on him when he came to visit; he had the best stories to tell.” He smiled to himself. “He lived every day with a purpose.”

“Doesn’t mean anything. Let’s go to sleep.”

Jon stared at Robb strangely. “What’s wrong?”

“What do you mean?” Robb grimaced. “I’m tired. I want to go to sleep.”

“Wait.” Jon reached out to play with the scruff on Robb’s face. “You sound upset.”

“I’m not upset.” True, Robb didn’t sound upset. Upset was the wrong word, Jon supposed. Unhappy or disappointed would have been a better choice. Unable to keep his mood under control, Robb
sighed. “I…listen, my uncle is a cop, too. Sure, his stories were cool but that didn’t change the fact that every time he went out, he was facing dangerous criminals. I don’t want to have to worry about you.”

“There are good parts, too,” Jon declared. He kissed the side of Robb’s cheek as a form of comfort. “Doing a service for the community. Keeping wonderful, good people safe.” Like Robb. “Protecting the innocent.” The adventure. The excitement he couldn’t get as a nanny or a caretaker for the elderly. “And…” Jon said with a teasing smile. “I heard the commander of Yorkshire is a total _daddy_."

Robb burst out laughing. “Is that what’s in your uncle’s reports?”

“What? I thought all uncles taught their nephews to check out older men’s packages when they hang out?” Jon pretended to be surprised at the information. His eyes were wide and innocent. His grin was mischievous.

Robb shook his head. “Nope, I’m afraid you’ve been misled, my love.” His laughter died down. “I have two uncles. One’s a complete skirt chaser and the other is as straight-laced as they come. All he cares about is catching villains. He barely speaks to us when he visits.”

The two continued laughing together. Jon, high on the euphoria of good humor, climbed on top of his boyfriend and kissed him. The kiss was deep and full of hygge, the comfort of being in bed with a partner he cared deeply for and the warmth of being worshipped by a perfect man. “Let’s not worry about it,” Jon soothed. “I don’t even know if I want to be a cop. It’s an option, remember?”

“Like being a housewife?” Robb asked hopefully.

Jon could not deny him anything. “Yes, like being a house _spouse_,” he corrected.

Robb, in his excitement, flipped him over. Now on top of him, Robb delivered a swarm of puckering love bites and pecking kisses. “I love you so much,” he swore. “So much. You’re going to love being my wife.”

“Husband!”

“Spouse,” Robb said at last. “And I’ll support you if you want to be a cop or a barrister or whatever it is you want.”

Jon wanted to give into the affection. He did, however, give one last warning to Robb’s enthusiasm. “If you don’t get some rest, you’ll be too tired for the fair. I’m not going to accommodate your sweet tooth if you’re cranky.”

“I’ll get some sleep when I come back from class,” Robb promised. He traveled downwards to get a taste of Jon’s cock. Jon whimpered when he felt Robb’s lips trail down his stomach.

“See, this is why I think you’re better off at home. I’m worried what would happen if you’re surrounded by all those authoritative types.” He kissed Jon’s belly button.

Jon chuckled when he felt Robb’s beard brush against his pelvic region. “Sounds like a challenge.”

Robb kissed the bottom of his cock. “Just a fact. You like me telling you what to do too much.”

Jon disagreed. “You like telling me what to do. I like you enough to do it.”

“And how many guys did you like enough to listen?” Robb pinched the tip of Jon’s cock. Jon
shivered deliciously. Pre-cum leaked from the entrance and though his eyes were closed, he could imagine it wetting Robb’s lips. Jon wanted a mouth on his cock—stat.

“Only a few,” Jon answered. Honesty was the best policy; especially if it meant the divine torture that was to followed.

Robb’s jealousy was boundless. The gripped the cock but did not move and there was no way to cum when his dick was being constrained.

Jon moaned. “But it was just light teasing most of the time,” Jon confessed. He sighed when Robb loosened his grip. “Nothing extreme…promise…I never let myself go as far as I have with you.”

Robb was relieved. He licked the side of Jon’s cock. “How many men did you love?”

Jon squirmed in place. “None.”

All at once, Robb engulfed the member in his mouth. Jon trapped his head between his thighs in pleasure. He moaned—louder than he ever had before. The surprise undid him. “Robb!”

Robb let go of the cock in his mouth. Faster than Jon thought possible, the older boy launched a sneak attack on his lips. The kiss was aggressive and lacked sensuality; there were no tongues. Instead it was playful and brief.

“I’m going to be your first love,” he said as soon as they parted. “Not the guy you love as a friend. Not your brother. I’m going to be the one you fall deeply and maddeningly in love with.”

Jon gasped when the mouth was on his cock again. “My mother used to tell me that love is a drug; it’s addictive and powerful and dangerous all at the same time. It makes us dependent on it for happiness and when we lose it, we become mad from withdrawal.” Jon chuckled when his cock left Robb’s mouth. The cold air touched his cock for a brief second before Robb straddled his hips. “She said that the only love we can depend on is the love for ourselves, for our family, and maybe our friends.”

“Your mother is cynic. I’m going to have the time of my life changing her mind.”

Jon bit down a smile. He refused to indulge Robb’s arrogance. “You’re pretty cocky, Stark.”

“Just confident,” Robb countered. “I know that once I’m done with you, you’re going to call your mother and tell her she was wrong. You’re in love and there’s nothing she can do about it but attend the wedding.”

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That morning, Jon had less than half an hour to fix up a substantial breakfast. He settled for a banh mi with egg and sliced cucumbers, wrapped it up, and sent Robb on his way before he was late to class.

Today, Jon wakes up in bed alone. He checks the clock and sees that it is a half an hour past nine. Dinner is over. He looks around and sees that he is in Robb’s room. There is an extra blanket on top of him.

Robb must have done that.

Jon curses his callousness. He jumps up and wonders what it must have been like for Robb to come home and see his ex-boyfriend lying in his bed. Jon can no longer justify his insensitivity; his
spineless behavior has exceeded ignorance and has come to bordered sociopathy. After taking a few more seconds to linger in Robb’s scent, Jon gets out. He is reluctant to do so; weighed down by fond memories and nostalgia and bitterness—grave bitterness he’s had for years but has never noticed until tonight. He thinks about his mother and for once, there is no fondness or admiration or understanding. He is angry at her and it is unfair. It is unfair for him to be angry at a woman who is not present to defend herself.

Jon leaves the bed and checks his phone. His screen is riddled with missed calls and unread text messages. Most are by Willas. They have a date tomorrow. Dread fills the pool of his stomach. He should cancel—he’s in no mood to be burdened with romance, especially after what happened with Rhaegar Targaryen. Willas will understand. Jon is good at attracting understanding men, not like Lyanna, not like his own mother who was, and still is, a magnet for the depraved and the obsessive. She drove men off cliffs and shattered them into pieces. And Jon was just like her—everyone said so.

Jon finds it hard to breathe.

He grabs onto the desk for support, knocking off a few books in the progress. He ignores the constriction in his heart, how these invisible arms coil around his self-worth like a parasitical life-sucking fungus. He takes deep breaths, one after the other, and straightens up.

Jon hears a knock on the door. He cringes.

It can be anybody. It can be Robb, wanting his room back or to talk about his presence in it. It could be Aunt Catelyn, wondering about his presence in Robb’s room and the status of their relationship. It could be Arya, simply concerned for his wellbeing since he was in Robb’s room. All the while he is thinking this, he wonders why he choose to be in Robb’s room. Why was it so instinctive for him to seek out his cousin for help? He feels like a damn fool.

Understanding that evasion is not a possibility and escape impossible, he takes a few, foreboding steps forward. He winces when his hand is placed on the knob. Then, he opens it.

If he had trouble breathing before, he’s having a cardiac arrest now.

“Mom?”

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter features Lyanna and Jon.
2. After that, I think I’m going to revert to some of my usual quirky, contaminated crack that I produced in earlier chapters because I miss it. There’s been so much drama, I need to bring the comedy back.
3. Thanks for all the reviews. I hope you enjoy the next chapter.
Benjen Stark departed from adolescence and entered the throes of puberty on the night his father held a stag party for Jon Arryn. The man was suckered into his third marriage after Holster Tully, seeking to cover up his daughter’s ‘abnormal weight gain,’ launched an elegant dinner party celebrating her success at ‘a fat camp in Switzerland.’ At the party, Lysa was behaving erratically, losing her wits in liquor and drowning herself in self-deprecation. In contrast, Jon Arryn was in the midst of a joyous celebration, having announced his retirement a month earlier. He enjoyed the wine freely. Seeing an opportunity, Holster did not hesitate to bring the two together in a drunk one-night stand nor did he pause when he switched his eldest daughter’s pregnancy test to trick the two into getting married.

In comparison to the scandal of knocking up his friend’s daughter out of wedlock and abandoning her at her lowest, Jon Arryn figured marrying a woman a third of his age was expected of him. While the plot was devious, the stag party was tamer than a milkman without a mistress. The men were old and tired and Jon was clearly upset about the marriage. He finished his beer with a heavy swing and left to get another. Benjen watched from his spot on the dining room table as the man staggered to the fridge and refused the maids’ help. Benjen swooned over his silver hairs before he even knew what swooning was. He licked his lips imagining the color the hair of Jon’s pubic region.

“Do you need some help?” Benjen asked. He stood up and helped steadied the much older man against the counter.

“Ah…thanks,” Jon groaned. “You’re a good boy, aren’t you?”

Benjen felt a tingle down his spine. He shivered. “Only if I am treated right,” he said, cautiously. "Do you want me to be a good boy for you?"

Jon nodded. He was oblivious to the innuendo. “Your brother used to talk about you. Said you were the one he could count on more than anybody in his family and…oh fuck.” Jon took a moment to compose himself. He wasn’t as young as he used to be. The alcohol pounding a migraine into his head.

Benjen kept a resting hand on his shoulder. “Maybe you should get some sleep,” he suggested as he purred into his neck. He hadn’t realized his voice could sound like that. “We have a guest room…or I can take you to my room.”

There was something about that suggestion that didn’t sound right. “Why would I sleep there?”

“Because my room is closer,” Benjen advised, wide-eyed and innocent. “And it’s warmer. I’d make it super comfortable for you.” He leaned in. "I'd make you very comfortable."

The reasoning was sound; Jon’s resolved weakened with every soothing stroke of the back. He might have gone to be with Benjen had the boy’s father not arrived to check on him. As usual, Rickard ignored his youngest son. When they left, Benjen sighed and went back to his room. There was time, he thought as he sipped his Earl Grey. There was no reason to give up. In the end, he was right to refuse surrender. After two more years of strategic planning, fantastic seduction techniques, and the improper use of his family’s surveillance system, his determination wore down Jon Arryn’s restraint.
Including Jon, Benjen had his unhealthy array of lovers to thank for his lovemaking skills, each one more prosperous than the other; each one old enough to be his father or even his grandfather. They were more than happy for his daddy issues; it just meant they had a lover who didn’t fake an orgasm. Yet above all of them, Jon Arryn was his favorite. There was something more devious about sleeping with him above anybody else—probably because Jon was his father’s friend. It certainly wasn’t the money.

When the CEO of Arryn Enterprises died, Benjen attended the funeral and stood beside Arryn’s wife—only a little older than himself and a thousand times more bitter. He smirked as she sneered. Jon took advantage of the fact that he outlived his friend, Rickard. The corpse was no longer restrained towards his affections for Benjen; he had no qualms leaving a parting gift to his lover—one that could only be described as an inheritance. In his will, Jon thanked Benjen Stark “for making [his] final moment worth living and the tightest ass [he’d] ever had.” Ned was horrified. Yet, a loving brother and ward to the end, he remained supportive. Jon’s wife was livid. She cussed and swore at him, cradling her demented son while doing so. Benjen just shook his head and dealt with the lawyers.

Whereas some mistresses would lose themselves to sadness or move on without a second thought, Benjen did neither. He decided that mourning was the last thing Jon would have wanted for him, but finding a random man to fill Jon’s legacy was demeaning to their love. After a respectable period of thoughtful solemnity, Benjen set forth to seduce his White Whale: Chief Commander Jeor Mormont.

Unlike Arryn, Commander Mormont was not one to be swayed by the vivaciousness of wanton youth. Benjen was grateful for his growing body; he was never vain but over time, the Stark charm morphed from the appeal of a boyish nymphet to an eye-catching incubus. He thanked his good looks and Stark stubbornness for the feast underneath him: Jeor’s massive erection and ton-heavy balls felt like heaven inside him. Benjen ran his hands over his chiseled abs—decorated with rough skin and dry scars. Strong as an ox—not like Arryn who lost himself to the stress of a neurotic wife and an ill child—and showed it through his tight grip on Benjen’s hips. Jeor let the younger man ride his dick like he was getting paid for it, pulled on his too-long hair that went against regulation but he secretly loved and slapped his ass a little too hard. Benjen called him daddy. His moans would have made Ned weep. Poor Ned, who wanted so badly to believe that at least one of his siblings choose the path of righteousness but instead got a little brother who was milking out each drop of sperm from his boss’s cock as if it was his professional duty.

When Jeor was done and due for a nap, Benjen took the time to think about his family. It had been a while since he visited the family home; the place was never welcoming to him after their mother died and their father remarried his work. Rickard Stark spent most of his children’s lives trying to build up his empire through marriage contract and mergers, often losing sight of his children. The person who endured the worst of it was Lyanna. She was his father’s favorite and fearing death, his father did everything he could to secure a profitable match in her favor. He kept her locked in a cage, stifled her, coddled her until she was forced to break free or suffocate. On the rare moments they spoke, Benjen asked Lyanna if she would ever return to their family home for anything but a funeral. “Maybe…if I thought the person was worth it.”

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“Jon!” Lyanna cheered as she held him hostage in her arms. “Oh fuck, look at that beautiful face of yours! Fucking hells, you’ve gotten so big! By the gods, you’re more perfect than when I left you.” She kissed him, square face on the lips before pecking his face to death. “I just want to smother you with kisses. Shit, that’s such a ‘mom’ thing to say, right? Shit. Ah, fuck it. I miss you so much.” She squeezes him tighter. “I was hiding in your room, waiting for you to wake up. I honestly pressed my
ear against the wall, listening for a reaction like some sewage dweller.”

Jon’s amusement breaks through his shock and he laughs; he hugs his mother because no matter how upset he is with her, he cannot deny how much he loves her.

When they break away, he stares at her in amazement. She has not aged a day. “Hey, mum.”

“Don’t ‘hey’ me.” Lyanna grins. “Where are my laurels of praise? My unstoppable declarations of devotion? I don’t know if you noticed but I did all the hard work just now.”

Jon kisses her cheek and hugs her again. He feels like a child again. Subconsciously, he clutches onto her petite form—as if she’d run away from him if he didn’t.

“What are you doing here?” He gains the sense to ask.

“My exhibit in Paris just ended—sold out every piece, I’ll have you know, and I wanted to see my son.” She pouts. “Why? Don’t you want me here?” Her teasing is in high spirits. Once the high of seeing his mother fades so does his own cheer.

“No.” Jon shakes his head. “No, it’s good to see you.” He cringes at how uncertain he sounds. Lyanna picks up on it like a hound.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing.”

“Okay,” Lyanna agrees. “And when we’re done pretending I didn’t give birth to you, you can tell me the truth.”

“Mum…”

“What?” Lyanna stares at him. “I didn’t travel over 400 miles to be lied to. Tell me what’s wrong.”

Jon looks away. Lyanna’s instinct begs her to push, to ravage and bite and scratch through his defenses like the wolf she is. Her maternal experiences advise her otherwise.

“Listen, I haven’t been here in a long time. Do you know if Gage’s is still open?”

Jon breathes a sigh of relief. He nods. “Uh, yeah. I just went there last week to pick up some pastries.”

“Great,” Lyanna agrees. “Let’s go get some cake and sit in a park and talk like old people who have given up on the latest generation.”

Jon nods and smiles, but there’s no humor in his expression—just resignation. Lyanna is rightfully unnerved; her son has always been sullen and discreet but she’s never had to work so hard to figure out the root underneath his unhappiness.

They take the car and drive in silence. Lyanna figures the solemnity is for the better. Lyanna has done plenty of stupid things in cars and arguments; one noticeable example was when she was sixteen and fighting with Ned about her driving. She tumbled out of the driver’s seat and onto the open road.

When they get into the bakery Gage’s son, Turnip, is there to greet them. He remembers Jon but is too young to recall Lyanna. The woman chuckles when the boy fusses about, worried to have upset her with his poor memory. She assures the child that it is not his fault he doesn’t remember her.
Benjen will mock her to the high heavens if he learns how unfamiliar this place has become to her. Ned will frown. Brandon will not care; he hasn’t been around either.

They gather up their pastries and walk to a nearby park. Gage choose a fantastic location, thinks Lyanna. The bakery is perfect; located snug against a park, ideal for dates and conversations, meetings where one can enjoy a Turkish delight or a warm croissant without having to spend an extra dollar on the landscaping.

They find a bench and sit. Jon is focused on his brioche while Lyanna chews on apple turnover. Lyanna swallows another bite before asking Jon if he’s ready to talk. To her surprise, he says he is.

“Who’s my father?”

Lyanna chokes. Jon passes her the water bottle he had the good sense to buy and waits for her to relieve herself. Before she has time to think, he repeats the question.

Lyanna has never doubted this day would come but all her preparations were done for Jon’s youth. She used to fear Jon coming home, perhaps motivated by a callous comment from an ignorant twat or a cruel jeer from a too-tall bully. Yet whenever she was around, they were traveling. Traveling across the world with barely a second to breathe let alone ask about paternity. Years passed, and her saint of a brother shouldered the burden of fatherhood with a twinkle in his eye and satisfaction from a job well done.

She is not prepared for a young man in his twenties staring at her with such familiar brevity. Lyanna wonders if her father has come back to life to judge her.

“What brought this on?” She asks in a weak attempt to stall for time. “You’ve never cared before.”

“It’s not that I didn’t care,” Jon counters. “I just cared about you enough not to ask.”

Lyanna grimaces. “What, you don’t love me anymore?” She adds mirth into her tone so Jon knows she doesn’t mean it. Regardless if it worked or not, Jon remains grave.

“I want you to tell me who he is.”

Lyanna sighs. “Why?” Lyanna stands up from the bench and throws away her wrapper. She licks her fingers, fidgets, and then runs her fingers through her hair. She is upset—far more upset than she has a right to be but the indignation is there. “Why does it matter now? You don’t need a father, Jon. It won’t make you happy. Gods, my father drove me crazy. I was almost forced to marry some asshole I didn’t love because of him. And yes, I loved my father—don’t say anything about that—but it won’t change a thing.”

“Are you saying that because I don’t need a father?” Jon stands up. “Or because you’re afraid I’ll be like him if I knew who he is.”

“What?”

“I know you know who my father is.”

Lyanna groans. “Jon, I slept with like a hundred guys—”

“Rhaegar said you took a paternity test.”

Lyanna freezes up. She stutters as a mess of confusion and horror leaks onto her face. “What did you —?”
“He says that if you thought there was so much as a chance he could be my father; you would have had a paternity test done.”

“Rhaegar Targaryen is a sociopath,” Lyanna tells him. The commitment to her secret is present on her face. “He’s fucking insane—worse than his father because he can hide it.” She shakes her head. “What did he say to you?”

Like mother, like son, Jon avoids the question. “He is obsessed with you.”

Lyanna knows that too well. “What else did you find out about him?”

“He hit on me.”

Anger overwhelms her. “That sick fuck—!” Lyanna takes a deep breath. “Did he do anything to you? Did he…?”

“No.” Jon shakes his head. He pauses. “I fought him off.”

“Fuck,” Lyanna swears. “And he knows. He knows you could be his son.” Lyanna returns to the bench and rests her head in her hands. “Fucking Targaryens. Of course, he would hit on you.”

“Careful, that might be my family you’re talking about.”

“The Starks are your family, Jon!” Lyanna shouts. She looks up at him. They stare at each other; rage, concern, and contemplation passing through their eyes. Finally, Jon sighs and sits down next to her.

“Please…just tell me. Is Rhaegar Targaryen…is he my father?”

Lyanna shakes her head. “I don’t even know what he’s doing here…”

“Mom!”

“Alright!” Lyanna yells. “Okay, I’ll tell you…but you need to understand. This does not change anything. I don’t want you near him. He’s…he’s not a good person. There’s a reason I didn’t want him to know about you.” She screams at the sky. Jon waits until she is finished letting out her frustration. “And of course, he had to fucking come and ruin my fucking life and my son’s life like the fucking psychopath he is!”

She is panting when she screams some more. The birds fly out of the tree in shock. Jon watches as a fox steps out of the bush to judge her.

“Mom. Okay, I get it. And I know he's a creep; I’ve met him,” Jon reminds her. He rests a hand on her shoulder. “This does not change anything. I just…I need to know. Please tell me.”

Lyanna looks ready to cry. Instead, she sighs and shakes her head like an Etch-A-Sketch hoping to remove the paternity results from her head. “Okay…Rhaegar Targaryen…” She swears a bit. “He’s your father.” She lets out a deep breath, looks at the ground and waits.

The climatic aftershock never comes. There’s nothing. Jon feels nothing. The confessions only confirmed a theory. The relief or satisfaction he hoped he’d get from getting his mother to say the words does not come. Jon finds the void emasculating and wants to scream to reclaim some dominance over his life. He gets up and lets out his own slew of curse words.

“Fuck! Fuck! What the fucking hells!”
“Jon?”

“What is wrong with me?” He walks down the path instead of returning to the bench. Lyanna follows.

“What?” Her eyebrows furrow in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“There’s something wrong with me.”

“What?” Lyanna will have a heart attack by the end of the day. “Why would you say that?”

“Because I don’t care who my father is?”

“What?” Lyanna’s anger takes over her sympathy. “I just almost had a fucking break down and you’re telling me that was for nothing? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I don’t know!” Jon yells. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I thought learning about my psychopath of a father would mean something to me but it doesn’t. It…” Jon tries to compose himself. “I feel nothing. All I can think of right now is how cold I am and how I’m going to end up just like you or him and I’ll never be able to love someone.”

“Wait, what is wrong with me?”

Jon scoffs. “This isn’t about you, mother.”

“Too bad,” Lyanna snaps. “You made this about me. Now, what’s this about not wanting to end up like me?”

Jon refuses to answer. Lyanna returns to her natural state. She pushes this time and there’s no kindness in her actions. “What the fuck is wrong with me that you could compare me to that piece of shit?”

“Did you love him?” Jon interrupts.

“Where are you going with this?” Lyanna asks. Her exasperation is barely keeping up with her anger. “Stop changing the subject.”

“This is a part of the subject. Did you love him? Because he said he loved you.”

Lyanna shakes her head and chuckles—sneers at the thought of Rhaegar loving anybody. “His sense of love is warped. He damages you in order to make sure you keep loving him.”

“Stop blaming him for everything,” Jon snaps. “Answer me. Did you love him?”

Lyanna bites her lip. She lets go and answers. “Yes.”

Jon turns his back on her.

“It’s complicated, Jon!” She yells as she catches up to him. “Love with Rhaegar Targaryen is not simple.”

“Love is never simple with the two of you!” Jon shouts. “And because of that, I am more fucked up than you can imagine.” Jon punches a nearby tree.

“Jon!”
The bruises and cuts paint red dots all over his fist. He tells Lyanna the truth. “I am terrified of being in love.”

Lyanna cradles his fist. She grabs some wet cloths from her purse and cleans it. She swears as more blood runs down his skin. While she desperate pats it down, she looks up at him and frowns. “Jon… please…”

She is shit at first aid; that will never change. Jon takes the cloth from her and cleans himself up. “I’m terrified of being in love,” he admits again, this time more breathless. “I see you. And him. He talks about you like you’re an object but I’ve never seen anybody speak with such passion, not even…” Not even Robb talked about him with such fervor. “He’d do anything for you—he said he’d offered to leave his wife, was that true?”

The shame on Lyanna’s face said it all. Jon shuts his eyes. “And you, you hate him. But there’s a tenderness in your eyes whenever you hear his music or his name and I see all this love between you two and it hurts because I know it’s destructive and painful and it ruined you both. I’m afraid that I’m going to do the same things to the man I love that you two did to each other and I don’t want that.” He clenches his fist. Lyanna tries to stop him from drawing more blood. “I don’t want to hurt anybody.”

Lyanna lets go of his hands and cradles his face. She stares into his eyes—his perfect grey eyes and tells him he looks like his uncle.

“What?”

“You look like him, more than Rhaegar or even me. People thought you were an illegitimate child before; it was the only scandal better than Rickard Stark’s rebellious teenage daughter getting knocked up.”

Jon tries not to laugh. “Is this your way of making me feel better?”

“Yes,” Lyanna admits. “Because it’s the reason I wanted you to stay with your uncle and his snob of a wife.” She grimaces. “Because even though I hate her—” She laughs and sobs to herself—a private joke in her mind. “I love the way she treats Ned. They are the happiest couple I’ve ever met and I wanted you to see that kind of love in your life. I wanted you to see what devotion is, not obsession. I wanted you to see friendship and fairness and equality; real love when people understand and respect each other.” Tears well up in her eyes and she fights to keep them from falling. “You are not me, Jon. You are not your father, either.”

“You used to make me swear off relationships.”

“Because I was worried for the same reasons you are freaking out now,” Lyanna confirms. “I was worried you’d be like me and find yourself in the arms of a man who’d ruin you and you’d lose your entire identity in him. But I know that’s not the case. You’re not me. You are your own person, Jon. I see your friends—god, I love your friends. And I love Robb—he reminds me of Ned but more passionate.” She smiles to herself. “You need someone like that in your life.”

The reassurance is palpable, comparable to a ship for a stranded man. Before he can respond, his phone rings. Jon takes it out and his heart stops.

“Is that Robb?”

Jon shakes his head. “No, it’s Willas.”

“Who’s Willas?” Lyanna tilts her head in confusion.
“New guy. Long story.”

“You and Robb just broke up.”

“A lot of things happened since then.” Jon sighs and places the phone on vibrate. “Mom…”

“Why don't you answer?”

“Because I'm talking to you?”

“Would you have answered if it was Robb?”

Jon remains silent.

Lyanna sighs. “Is he better than Robb?” she asks. “Does he make your heart sing like Robb? Make you lose all reason like him?”

“Please don't, mum.” Jon shuts his eyes. “I don't need another voice telling me what to do.”

“That's an all or nothing game,” she instructs. “You either don’t listen to me and ignore everybody else, or you take everyone's advice including my own. Can't pick and choose.”

Jon shakes his head. “Why are you saying that?”

“Because I know you.” Lyanna kisses his bruised hand. “I know all the bad of Rhaegar and all the crap from me turned you into the best thing in the world. Two negatives make a positive.”

“I hate math.”

Lyanna chuckles “I know that.” She looks up at him, her eyes are clear and resolute. “I know I didn’t raise an idiot—or a coward.” She lets him go. “I raised someone who was good and kind and cared about the people he loved.” She looks at the phone in his hand. “Do you care about this Willas?”

Jon thinks about his brown hair and kind smile. “I do.”

“Do you care about Robb?”

“Yes.”

“Then be good to them. Don’t make stupid mistakes.” She kisses his cheek. “Ned taught you better than that.”

Lyanna waits for Jon to send the text to Willas asking him to meet up. They walk to the car where he drops her off at her hotel. She doesn’t feel welcome at Winterfell, she tells him. He doesn’t understand and for that, Lyanna is grateful.

Before she leaves the car, he asks her for the truth. “What happened between you and Rhaegar?”

Lyanna hesitates. The memory is both terrifying and fond—like jumping out of plane before realizing the parachute wasn’t working.

“We ran away together,” Lyanna starts off. “He offered to leave his wife and I accepted it—at first. But in that five-star hotel, I kept listening to him make these calls and form these plans and he never once asked what I wanted. When I started adding in input, he either denied me or agreed on these conditions.” She bites her lip. “And things got worse. I tried to call my father and he got angry that I needed someone besides him. He kept me on watch. Had his employees keep checks on me. Finally,
I snuck a phone call to Brandon—just to tell him I was okay. He found me. We’re Starks after all. And they…they got into this big fight. Utter bloodshed.” Lyanna sighs. “I tried to stop it and ended up getting stabbed in my shoulder. They took me to the hospital and I…” Lyanna takes a deep breath. “I met Elia. His wife. And she looked at me like I was scum but she never once said a cruel thing towards me. She asked me if I was alright.” Lyanna never cries for herself but in Jon’s car, she cries for the poor woman who performed no crime but loving a man who did not love her back. “She tried to make a compromise between us. She said she didn’t want Rhaegar to suffer or their children to be abandoned and agreed to have a room set up in their mansion for me and…fuck, she knew I was pregnant—I didn’t even know I was pregnant! And she said she wanted our children to get along and that they could set a trust fund for you and I…” Lyanna shudders at the memory. “I fucking ruined this woman’s life and she was trying to make amends—as if she had done something wrong.”

Jon waits for his mother to end this story.

“I left him that day—told him I was a child. I was in over my head. And when he didn’t take me seriously, I drove him crazy. Slept with a lot of men to piss him off.” She laughs at her own promiscuity. “Father put a stop to it and tried to get me to marry Robert Baratheon. He was willing. I was not. So in the end, I decided to run away. Just get the fuck out of that world.”

The story ends with Lyanna’s kiss on his forehead. She gets out the car before hearing his response. “You got to see Willas,” she instructs. “And you…do what you always do. You think about him and what he deserves and you care…just like you’ve always had.”

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Willas receives Jon’s text during his night long paperwork binges. He stops himself from dashing to the phone. As soon as he reads it, a sense of loathing fell upon him, followed by resignation. He sighs, shakes his head, and resumes his paperwork.

Hey, its Jon. Can we move our dinner date to lunch? I really need to talk to you.

Unable to fight the knowing feeling in his head, he leans back and tries not to think of his sister or his grandmother. The blissful ignorance of optimism is eventually shot down. The Redwyne blood ran too deep to suppress the soaring Tyrell ambitions.

“Fuck,” he curses.

The text confirms it. Tomorrow, he is getting dumped.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter is a Jon/Robb centric chapter. We're giving a throwback to comedy soon which means Rhaegar will return (maybe in chapter 44).

2. I am trying to make my chapters longer because my dream is to finish this story in 69 chapters. That would make me very happy.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

While a yawn to some and a shocker for others, there has never been a descendant of Olenna Tyrell that has ever been dumped. Olenna went through great pains to expunge her family history of rejection. Ever since her tragic dismissal by Daeron Targaryean—which she swore to the heavens was of her own accord and not a result of his infatuation with Jeremy Norridge, his roommate in Eton whom he continued to live with as roommates until the end of his too-long life—Olenna had taught all of her children and grandchildren the crooks and crannies of relationships. She taught them how to find suitable partners with affluence—even the smart buggers who hid their fortune to avoid gold diggers. She took them to the mall when they were teenagers and asked them to seek out who had the most to offer in the bedroom. She reminded her blessed children that wealth was not enough for a spouse. Taking a page from her idol, Lady Bracknell: “A man who wants to marry should know either everything or nothing.” She turned to Loras and Garlan and told them to find someone who knew everything. She then turned to her right and said to Willas and Margaery the exact opposite. “Find someone who knows nothing.”

The children laughed at their prickly grandmother—at least Garlan and Loras did. Neither followed her advice, choosing two partners of average intelligence. At least, she thought, Garlan had the good sense to marry a woman who was silent and Loras’ future husband had a personality to handle Loras’ over-the-top indulgences.

Olenna was willing to work with their carelessness. Everyone, even her oaf of a son, Mace, had the good sense to accept her most valuable advice: how to tell when your partner wanted to leave you.

Olenna taught them the standard codes and phrases, everything from ‘we need to talk’ to preemptive suggestions for ‘a break.’ Her son was fortunate enough to find a wife in his childhood sweetheart. His options were so few that he could not afford better. Her grandchildren, however, were the champions of the courtship scene. They heeded their grandmother’s rejection phrases like crack-addicted squirrels and became mindful of every little movement of their partners’ interactions.

Her advice is guaranteed gold. So much so, that when Willas receives a message from Jon, indicating that he wants to reschedule their dinner date for lunch, he already knows the pillars of infatuation had fallen and what is ahead of him is a barricade of rejection.

Willas accepts the change of plans graciously; he never lets on that he is prepared for heartbreak. Jon is a decent young man. Willas can tell that leaving a specimen like himself would be a hardship—Jon will struggle to spare the Tyrell’s feelings. Willas can also tell that Jon would be swift—the band-aid method.

The garden of abandonment Jon selected is a quaint bistro well within his monetary means. Another sign, Willas notes, if he wasn’t already dead sure. People who break up with other people pay for their meals. The food is delicious—Willas never fails to appreciate a fine roasted chicken breast with gravy and well-seasoned carrots. The drinks are made too much sugar—just the way he likes his juice. He praises Jon to the heavens; each compliment lowers Jon’s resolve, pulling him into the temptation of prolonging his mission. Yet, the younger man is a Stark and Starks pull through.

Jon drinks a sip of red wine for liquid courage. The red stains his lips. He licks the remnants off. Willas almost drops his fork. Fuck, Jon is gorgeous. Willas wonders if it was possible for him to still get Jon into bed for pity sex. His legs may not work properly but he can lift like a champ and Jon

Ever the gentleman, Willas is quick to address his partner. He removes such thoughts from his head; he is a Tyrell and Tyrells do not settle for pity fucks. Jon has made up his mind, and his pride depends on coming out on top in spite of the dire circumstances.

“Yes, Jon?”

“I…” Jon looks away. “How do you like your food?”

“It’s delicious,” Willas tells him. He smiles gently and says, “I admire your fine taste.”

Jon flushes from the approval. He has a praise kink and Willas regrets not utilizing that fact sooner.

“I’m glad,” said Jon. He fiddles with his pasta. “I heard about this place from my mother.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah,” Jon admits. “Her…boyfriend used to take her here sometimes. It was one of their secret places. Nice, private…”

Secluded and perfect for a break-up in case someone caused a scene, thinks Willas. Jon’s mother must be in on it. “She made a good recommendation,” says Willas. “I’m glad we’re fortunate enough to enjoy it. Sometimes, people give us great advice and we choose not to follow it or it turns out that while the advice is good, it isn’t really for us.”

Jon chokes on his chicken. Willas keeps on eating.

“I guess.” Jon drinks some water instead. He takes a deep breath. “Willas, I want to be honest with you.”

“I feel the same way,” Willas agrees. He savors the juices of fine, ripened grapes on his tongue. “I want you to feel comfortable to say anything to me.” He touches Jon’s hand. “I understand that you have a hard time trusting people and I want to be the one to change that.”

“Oh…kay.” Jon switches back to wine. “Willas, you are honestly one of the most amazing people I’ve met in my life.” He waits for Willas to interrupt him. Willas smiles and keeps silent. He’s the one getting dumped; he’s not making it easy for Jon. Jon swallows his discomfort. “And I can’t thank you enough for being so patient with me.”

“You are worth it,” confesses Willas. “I hope you don’t believe I was troubled at all by what happened the other night. After all, it was my ex who caused a scene.”

“I know.” Jon sighs. “But I…”

“How has Robb been since that night? Have you spoken to him?” Willas asks, trying not to be too curious.

A rock of distress lodges its way into Jon’s throat. “Um, no, we haven’t. I didn’t speak to him at all.”

Ah, so the famous Stark heir had no input into Jon’s decision to break up with him. Willas does not know whether he should be relieved or disappointed. On one hand, he is rather pleased that the decision is not based on their comparison but Jon’s lingering affection. As a man with an ailment, he often suffered from the side effects of wavering self-esteem. He was smart about it—got the help he
needed when he did, but there was always a resentment he held about his infliction. Knowing that Jon had not had any contact with Robb made it clear that their relationship’s termination had less to do with him and more to do Jon’s inability to get over his loss love.

But no one liked being dumped and Willas can’t help but feel displeasure when he realizes he cannot maneuver his way out of the situation.

The only solution is to dump Jon first.

Willas inwardly sighs. He really wished this could have been something. As he finishes off his first glass of wine, he develops a new plot. Simply being the person not dumped was not satisfying enough. If he was going to lose out on an opportunity to a man like Jon, he might as well further his career in the process. He did come here for business after all.

“Jon, I’m afraid that’s not good enough,” Willas tells him. “How can you expected to move on in our relationship when you haven’t left that one?”

Jon tenses up as expected. “Actually, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about—”

Willas stands up all of a sudden. “I know what you wanted to say to me.” More so than Jon understands. “And I support you one hundred percent.” He didn’t have time to fall in love Jon so he supposed a bit of vengeance was necessary. His grandmother and sister expected nothing less from him. “I think I should have a talk with him. Jon-lover to Jon-lover.”

“What?”

Willas is quicker on his feet than Jon expects. When he tries to stop him, Willas sends a friendly reminder to the boy to take the check. “I’ll pay for our next date,” he says with a wink. As a man with a limp, he is not fast enough to outrun Jon to his car. The young man begs him to sit down so that they could have a proper break-up. Willas refuses—he’s watched over his brothers enough times to understand the benefits of playing dumb.

“Nonsense,” Willas denies. “I am doing this for us.” He turns to his driver and rolls up his window—not fast enough, however, for Jon to hear him give the order “to the Stark manor, please.”

As the car travels out of view, Willas chuckles to himself.

Yes, he thinks. This is much more satisfying than breaking up.

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Willas orders his driver to run the streets without remorse. He tells him not to worry about local law enforcement; today is the day for scandal. He never went to a rebellious stage but he supposes one incident of bribery won’t kill him.

Fortunately, the fates are rooting for him. He ends up in the Stark manor—ticket-free and ready for an altercation of his lifetime. He sees Jon’s car pulling up. The boy drove like the furies were on his trail. He rushes a bit to get in doors. As soon as he gets in, he uses a double lock to keep his once potential lover from getting in.

A maid stares at him. He smiles back at her. “I’m sorry to bother you but is Robb in?”

The maid nods, a strange expression on her face; Starks hire good girls, Willas muses. The young woman does as she is told. She knows who Willas is—having worked the night he picked up Jon for their date. She wonders if he found out about Jon and Robb’s relationship.
Oh, this will be a tale for decades, she coos as she notes every detail for future gossip.

The house is big but old. Willas hears the ruckus upstairs and walks over to a nearby chair to lean on. He massages his leg while he waits and fortunately, he does not wait long. Robb comes down with a sleek, slightly messy shirt that has two buttons undone for casual sex appeal. He tells Willas ‘hello’ and reintroduces himself like a gentleman.

Willas returns his handshake and inwardly praises the young man. He imagines the boy must want to rip his head off. He wonders if he can get him to try.

“Sorry to disturb you; I was just on a date with Jon and he said something that led me to believe we should talk.”

From outside the house, Jon bangs on the door and tells Willas to get out so that they could talk. Willas can hear Jon’s senses coming back to him when he searches for his keys. He tells Robb to act.

“We need to talk: old boyfriend to new boyfriend. If Jon comes in here, that’s it for you two. That’s years of unresolved sexual tension and bitter misunderstandings because I’m going to say some things about you that may or may not be true and we’re going to put him in a position where he’ll have to choose between the two of us.” Willas smiles, knowing full well that the younger man does not have the good sense to call his bluff. “You don’t want to put Jon in that position, do you?”

Without further hesitance, Robb rushes to the security box and types in a code, setting the house on a lockdown. Jon’s key is useless. They two heirs can hear him curses at the sudden barrier and tells whoever is listening to open the entrance. Robb orders the staff not to act on his request.

Willas chuckles. He has to give Robb some credit. The boy works fast.

“Okay,” Robb is breathing rather harshly. For a boy in best shape of his life, he needs to work on his endurance. “Let’s talk.” He looks at the door and a pained expression takes over his face. “But it has to be fast.”

“This won’t take long,” Willas assures. “After all, I’m only here to inform you that Jon plans on breaking up with me.”

“What?” Robb sends a regretful look at the security box and the door. He then glares at Willas. “Is this some sort of a ploy to ruin our relationship?”

Willas chuckles. “No, I’m not the type of guy to fight when the war’s been won.”

“I am,” Robb counters, naturally defiant. “So what’s this about?”

“Well, obviously this is about Jon.” Willas stares at him appraisingly. “And apparently Jon wants you: the guy who pretty much Stockholm Syndrome-d him into a relationship instead of the man who wants to learn about him.”

“I want to learn about him!” Robb protests.

“Really? You didn’t even know enough about him to figure out he was your cousin.”

“Why does everyone keep saying that?” Robb shouts. “I wanted to learn about him naturally.”

“Did you need a learning curve?”

“No!” Robb groans. “Listen, I get it. You’re angry that Jon is going to choose me and not you and
“this is some some chauvinistic face off where you try to prove you’re better for him than me.”

“I am better than you for him. There’s no argument about that.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Just about everything, mate.” Willas sounds so sure that even Robb is partially convinced of the truth. “Listen, we’re both men. We’re both heirs to multi-million-dollar corporation—well, mine is a billion dollars but who’s counting?” His sister, his grandmother, everybody in their fucking world. “We’re handsome—let’s not indulge in false modesty for the moment—and we love our families. Most importantly, we both like Jon.”

“I love Jon.”

Willas chuckles and there’s fleeting resignation in his smile that Robb is too heated to take notice of. “Yes, you do.” Willas will never get the chance to fall that hard. “But I don’t want to leave this place without saying my peace.”

“So say it,” Robb challenges. “Or is this some sort of retaliation intended to throw me off so you can claim the spoils of the victory?”

“That is exactly what this is,” Willas agrees. He rests his cane and takes off his jacket.

“What are you doing?”

“We’re going to have a fight, obviously.”

“Like chess?”

“No, no, an actual fight.” Willas rolls up his sleeves.

“You’re mental,” Robb scoffs. Willas loosened his collar. “I’m not going to hit you.”

“Why not?”

“Because you have a bum leg.”

“Bit of an ableist thing to say.”

“No, it really isn’t.”

“Isn’t it, though?”

“No, it really isn’t.”

Willas prepares his punch. He cannot remember the last time he got into a proper fight but he knows it was with his brothers so he does not hold back. When he manages to land one on Robb, he is pleasantly surprised.

“Oh, that was a great hit,” he praises himself. He understands his brothers’ rambunctious natures more.

Robb, on instinct, sends him a retaliation punch. It knocks Willas over. One of the maid’s shriek, stopping Robb from his rampage. His face is immediately overcome with regret. “Shit, I’m sorry. Here, let me help you up.” Robb leans over to give him a hand and Willas takes the opportunity to take him down.
“What the f—!”

The two end up grappling on the floor. Robb, once he gets over his shock, puts Willas into a chokehold. The two of them are too distracted with each other to hear the door opening. Jon comes rushing in like a bullet train. There’s no mistaking the compromising position so when he makes his presence known—a well-deserved and tactful “what the hell?” Willas elbows Robb in the gut, forcing Robb to tighten his hold. Willas pretends to lose consciousness and enjoys the sound of Robb’s verbal beating. Ah, Jon is livid.

Ah, Jon is livid.

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Jon ends up carrying Willas to his room. They consider calling an ambulance but Willas adds in a timely moan to indicate his unconscious but hardly hospitalization-worthy status.

“I think he’s faking it,” Robb tells his cousin as Jon carries him to his bedroom. “He’s doing this to get into your pants and you are falling for it by letting him into your room.”

“Shut up and open the door,” Jon snaps. “And don’t try to spin that whole ‘oh, he wanted to fight me’ spiel.”

“But he did!” Robb protests. “He threw the first punch!”

Jon refuses to listen. He gets Willas on the bed and closes the door. He tells Robb to get one of the maids to boil the tea. “The maids, Robb. Not you. You’ll end up poisoning him and then we’ll end up with a bigger mess on our hands.”

When they are alone, Jon sighs and sits on the bed. He waits to hear Robb walk down the stairs. He puts his hands in his head and says, out loud, that Robb is gone. “You can stop pretending.”

“Oh thank the gods.” Willas sits up on the bed and smiles. “How’d you know?”

“I worked at a nursery home for awhile. I had to earn the difference between sleeping, faking, and dead pretty quickly.”

Willas laughs. “I would love to hear about your adventures there.”

Jon quirks his lips. “Willas…”

Willas shakes his head. “I get it. You can’t get over him.”

“What was this even about?”

“I guess I wanted to size him up—see if he really deserves you.”

“I don’t know if I deserve him. Or you.”

Willas shakes his head. “There’s a thin line between humbleness and low self-esteem and I hope one day you pick the former to dwell.” Willas sighs. “I think a part of me thought that if I met him, I could persuade you otherwise. Young people are so easily infatuated that they don’t realize how easy it is to fall for the better partner.” Willas kisses Jon’s hand. “I have great faiths in my persuasion technique.”

Jon pulls away. “What’s the other reason you came?”
Willas shrugs. “Well, obviously now, Robb has no choice but to adhere to my demands. I am sensing a highly profitable alliance in the future.”

“He wants to kill you.”

Willas takes back Jon’s hand. “Hopefully, you can remind him about how forgiving I was when he attacked me and my poor crippled body.”

Jon laughs and it is a beautiful sound. “You’re a horrible person.”

Willas nods. “Yeah, and you’re going to hate me more for what I’m about to do.”

Jon tenses. “And what is that?”

Willas looks at him and his gaze makes Jon feel beautiful. He wonders about fate and realizes that Willas was not an obstacle in her plan but a test.

“Jon, I think we should stop seeing each other. You’re in love with someone else. I don’t want to get dumped. This is just not working out.”

Jon is taken back. He is silent for a long time before he ends up laughing his heart out. Willas still has a hand over his own and keeps it there for a final request. “One last kiss?” He suggests.

Jon can hear Robb coming upstairs. He shakes his head and agrees. “One for the road,” he corrects before leaning down and brushing his lips against Willas. The expression is chaste and sweet—like old friends parting rather than ex-lovers.

***

Jon opens the door before Robb has a chance to and takes the tea from his hand. Before Robb can come in, the older boy slams the door in his face and locks it. Robb waits, patiently as Greywind, before brightening up when Jon reopens the door. Willas is smirking in the background, sending him a look of victory. Dread overwhelms Robb’s body. Jon looks into Robb’s eyes and says they need to talk.

Oh fuck. He knows what those words mean.

The two of them reunite in Robb’s room, where Robb is quick to reiterate his side of the story. “He attacked me first, Jon. I didn’t want to hit him but I had to. And in my defense, I tried to help him up and he just dragged me onto the floor. Besides, what is the rule against hitting handicapped people, especially if they hit you? It’s a bit abeist, isn’t—”

Jon captures his lips in a kiss.

“Please stop talking,” he begs when they part. Robb is staring at him wide-eye. “Every word you say is just a confession that you hit a guy who can’t walk properly and trust me, there’s no way you can make that look good.” He takes a deep breath. “Just kiss me.”

Robb does not need to be told twice. They continue kissing until Jon lands on the bed. Robb stops their necking to take a good look at Jon. He sighs. “Oh fuck, he said you still loved me.”

“Yeah.”

“So he wasn’t lying?”

Jon laughs and brings their lips together by pulling on Robb's shirt. As Robb tries to unbutton his
pants, Jon stops him. “No,” he orders Robb.

Robb stares at him, crestfallen and the sight makes Jon’s heart weep.

“I want to take it slow,” he clarifies. “Like what we should have done.”

Robb tries not to groan. “Haven’t we been taking it slow lately? We can consider this whole month as a really long slow-motion scene in the movie of our relationship.”

Jon chuckles. “I want you,” he tells Robb. He lands kisses on his neck. “And I’m not leaving, Robb. We can take our time.” He smiles at his cousin and lover. He tosses himself onto the bed in a manner that is supposed to casual but gives Robb a hard-on regardless. “Didn’t you say you had something plan for us as a family? A camping trip?”

His erection is painful but not as bad as the lack of sensation od Jon’s skin. Robb sighs and lays down beside him. “Yeah, but it has to be next weekend. This weekend, we have to go to London and see Arya’s performance.”

“Good.” Jon grins. “I’m looking forward to it,” he tells Robb as he plays with the hairs on Robb’s chest. “Willas is going to rest before leaving. When he’s gone, we can discuss the perimeters of a… slow relationship.”

The pleasure of having Jon’s hands on his chest is enough to make him lose reason. Robb nods, he’d agree to anything at this point. Jon is grateful. The contract he promised Willas for not suing the Starks will be easier to obtain with a more complacent Robb.

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When Catelyn and Ned Stark arrive home, they are greeted with the sight of their son lying on their nephew’s lap, purring like a kitten who’s eaten the canary and washed its bloody body down with cream. He has never looked more content than his life.

Catelyn feels the foreboding stifle her. “Oh…I see you two made up.” She tries to salvage the last crumbs of decency she could. Her voice is high and squeaky—nervous from the gamble she’s about to make. “It’s great. I’m so happy you guys are behaving like brothers again.”

Jon entangles his fingers into Robb’s own. Their son snuggles further into Jon’s lap. “Actually, there’s something we want to tell you…”

***

Lyanna hears about the reconciliation before anybody else in their family. She smiles, glad that her son has found true love. Robb is a good boy—nothing like her lovers. She will have to have a talk with him before she leaves. She trusts any son of Ned, but a customary amount of fear was necessary for dating a Stark—or a Snow in their case.

When she arrives to her destination—a posh hotel whose standards of luxury she secretly adores but hates admitting because it makes her seem high-maintenance—she stands outside the entrance for a few minutes before the doorman asks if she is lost. She tells him she is not and walks in. She marches to the receptionist with more courage that she actually has and tells her who she’s looking for.

When the receptionist says there’s no one by that name, she rolls her eyes and pushes through like a
true Stark.

“Don’t bullshit me, I know he’s here.”

“I’m sorry, miss, but there’s no one here by that name.”

“Yes, there is. And I know he requested that no one visit him but trust me—he’s going to want to see me.”

“Miss—”

“Call Rhaegar Targaryen and tell him I am here. I will leave as soon as he says he doesn’t want to see me.”

The woman is contemplating between calling security and doing as Lyanna says. She makes the civil decision to call her manager. She is young but not stupid. If Lyanna is telling her the truth, then she’ll be held responsible for sending away an important man’s mistress. If she’s lying, then she’ll have to reveal the identity of a person who does not want to be known. When the manager arrives, Lyanna shivers—just a bit.

“Ah, Miss Stark. It has been a while.”

Lyanna stands her grounds “Yes, it has. I see you still work here.”

“Probably until the day I die,” the man jests. He leads Lyanna to the elevators without further discussion. The woman sighs—she made the right decision. “I’ve been offered promotions, but Rhaegar Targaryen is keen to have me stay at this hotel, so he simply offers me a raise each year—a lovely man. I do half the work of an executive for the same amount of pay.”

“Good for you,” Lyanna tells him tactfully. They arrive at the penthouse suite. He tells them to have a very good time with a wink. The action is cringe-worthy.

Lyanna swallows her discomfort and marches towards the door. Before she can enter a rampage, the entrance open and there is Rhaegar Targaryen—a god in human form. He is shirtless—having just come out the shower and Lyanna imagines herself licking the delectable droplets off his chest.

Lyanna hits the wall in a dramatic fashion to avoid her hypnosis. Bad girl, she scolds. If Rhaegar found her behavior peculiar, he did not say anything. His eyes burn with the embers of his family sigil. His gaze makes her a little wet—she cannot help her reaction. There’s a reason she’s avoided him this entire time. She is still in the cloud of nostalgia when he grabs her by the arm and pulls her into his room. He is raw and lustful—his lips are on her skin and chest and when he slips his fingers into her pants—she reacts in turn.

She slams the tip of her shoe into his manhood and kicks him with the heel.

“Okay,” Lyanna breathes out as she wipes his drool off her body. “Okay, now we can talk.” She takes a second to immunize herself from his pheromones. She thinks about her son and his memory gives her the strength to move forward. She grabs a nearby chair and slams it against the coffee table they once fucked on.

“We’re going to have a nice, adult conversation about how you’re a fucking psychopath and how I’m not letting you near our son ever again,” She told him as she tightened her grip on the chair and threw against the wall. One of the legs breaks off and she is quick to collect it, wielding the branch like a sword.
Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Lyanna and Rhaegar have a calm discussion on the matter of Jon. But not really.

One of my favorite plays is The Importance of Being Earnest and you cannot convince me that Olenna Tyrell was not based off her.

I was wracking my head trying to think of a way to break up that was funny but gave everybody closure. I ended up doing this. :) I wish their break up scene wasn't so fast. :( I'll try harder to pace the scenes better next time.

Someone called me ableist and homophobic on Tumblr for liking the manhwa Killing Stalking. So that's how the ableist comment got in there. Just a fun fact, haters are going to call you anything just to make you feel bad and half their insults don't make sense. And I have a high standard for insults because my Chinese friends taught be how to talk back to people. And for them it's not just "you stupid cunt" it's more along the lines of "I hope someone grabs a dildo and fucks your ancestors to the fifteenth generation" and like this is a legitimate insult in Chinese but it sounds fucking awesome in English. And all I want is for people who hate me to give me the decency of a proper insult. Just saying.
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lyanna’s rampage sees to the destruction of the suite’s vases and the dismantling of every single piece of art in the room. After the statues and paintings are disposed of, she launches an attack against the couch. Her chair leg violates the cushions until springs fly out of the seats, popping out of the vintage fabric like a jack-in-the-box. “My fucking son!” She shouts at everything but him.

Rheagar stands by the sidelines. “Is there a reason you aren’t looking at me?”

Lyanna whacks a lamp off the side table. “Because everything I look at you; I imagine bludgeoning you until the smugness bleeds over the carpet. Just covering your body with bloody splinters and having your brains”—Lyanna points her weapon at the Targaryenn. “—splatter against the floor. And fucking feminism has dictated that women have to be held accountable as men in regards to violence or else they’ll be inducing patriarchal norms that we are irrational and weak and too emotional to be held responsible for our actions.” Lyanna lifts up the stick and slams it on top of the glass surface.

“…she says as she breaks my end table.”

Lyanna glares. “You hit on my son,” she accused.

“In my defense, you gave birth to a very pretty boy.”

Lyanna threw the leg at him which he dodged. She marched over to him and slapped him across the face.

“What happened to reinforcing patriarchal norms?”

“My father once tried to sell me off in a political marriage. I’m allowed to benefit just this once.” She hits him again. He licks his bloody lips.

“I heard about that,” Rhaegar notes. He steps closer to her. “You bit the bullet by refusing his hand. I heard Robert Baratheon really let himself go.”

Lyanna’s hand balls up to a fist. She aims for a punch. He catches her wrist and forces their lips together. Rheagar grabs her hips and lifts her up so that they are at the same height. He pushes her against the wall and grinds against her much smaller form until she is moaning against his tongue. Lyanna wraps herself around him, his hard chest pressed against her tits, rubbing against her nipples. Her willpower loosens and she deepens the kiss. When they part, Rhaegar confesses that he still imagines her underneath every night. "I think about the way your back arches whenever I thrust my tongue inside you or how good it feels to clench my fingers in your curls when I fuck you from behind. When I saw Jon, all those delicious memories came flooding back.”

Lyanna gasps when his teeth brush against her collarbone. Her son’s name awakens her common sense. She shoves him off her. She hits him again. “You’re a disgusting, vile man,” she says as she wipes the evidence of his presence off her mouth.

Rhaegar chuckles, nursing his red cheek. “I am a connoisseur of beauty and like any great aficionado, I long for the taste of a superior sample.” He walks up to her; she takes a step back. “For a long time, I thought your eroticism was unparalleled. I spent hours memorizing your body.
Everything about you was perfection, from the curves of your calves to the tenderness of your
derriere and the swelling of your breasts.” He gets closer and closer until she is cornered once more. “I
never found anyone so alluring. At least, not until I learned what this heated trap of yours could
produce.” Rhaegar’s hands lingered on her cunt. “Absolute perfection.”

Before Lyanna can strike, the phone rings.

Like a wise man, Rhaegar walks away to pick it up. Lyanna’s breathing becomes heavy and loud. Her
inhales echo throughout the room.

“You’re such a cunt,” she curses at him.

Rhaegar smiles. “Hello?”

Lyanna waits for him to finish his phone call.

“I apologize for the noise. My companion and I are having a heated discussion…oh, yes, everything
is fine. I must offer my condolences. We’ve made quite a mess. Please expect a generous show of
my apology tomorrow.”

Lyanna rolls her eyes.

“Everything is going exactly as planned. In fact, I would love to order dinner. What is your most
expensive bottle of champagne? Ah, I see, and what is your second most expensive bottle? One of
each please. I believe it is going to be a long night. What is on the menu today? Both sound
marvelous. Rare, of course. My Lyanna loves the taste of blood on her tongue. Please send someone
up as soon as possible.”

Rhaegar hangs up. Lyanna narrows her eyes at him.

In a gesture of peace, Rhaegar raises up his hands in defeat and tells her he ordered them dinner.
“The food will be here in half an hour. It’s your favorite. Steak.”

Lyanna delivers more heat into her death stare.

“We can fight until the food comes,” Rhaegar offers. The suggestion goes down much more
favorably with the she-wolf.

***

The two of them almost miss the bell ringing, alerting them to the maid’s presence. When Rhaegar
answers the door, his entire appearance is disheveled. He does not fail to seduce the maid to
overlooking the mess; she winks at him and asks if she could stop by later. He politely refuses much
to the maid’s disappointed. Lyanna walks over to grab her plate. Though sporting calloused palms
and untamed locks, her beauty is enough to intimidate the girl. She scurries away in a hurry and
Lyanna snatches up her meal. They eat on the floor; Lyanna having destroyed the dinner table.

Rhaegar attempts to make polite conversation. “So is Jon in a relationship now?”

Lyanna stabs a knife into her meat. The sauce and blood ooze out. “Don’t talk about my son, you
pervert.”

“Our son,” Rhaegar corrects.

“My son,” Lyanna pushes. “Hell, he might as well be Ned’s son. My brother is the only father that
kid knows.”

For the first time tonight, Rhaegar displays his bitterness. “You say that as if I am to blame for our estrangement.”

"As far as I am concerned, you are."

"I'm not the one who abandoned the man she claimed to love."

Lyanna drops her fork. She narrows her eyes at him. “Really? You’re going to play the victim here?”

“You never told me you were pregnant. I would have never neglected him if I was aware of his existence. I would have been there for his first steps, his first word, any accomplishment or heartbreak, I would have been there by his side ready to accept his affection and provide him with my own. Our distance is a result of your secrecy. You deprived him of a father.” Rhaegar sighs. “If I didn’t love you so much, I would have never forgiven you for that.”

Lyanna trembles in rage. “So I’m at fault here?”

“I didn’t say that.” Rhaegar sighs. “Young men need fathers. A child as stunning as Jon needs a firm, guiding hand to lead him to all the right places in life. I did a background search on him—”

“You did what?”

“And he is an exceptionally intelligent soul. He could have gone places had I played a hand in raising him.” Rhaegar grins to himself. “Just imagining his tiny body under my sheets, reading bedtime stories, slipping strawberries into his mouth during desserts.”

“Do you hear the way you talk about him?” Lyanna’s lips curl in disgust. “He’s not your plaything or your pet.”

“You’re right, he’s our son,” Rhaegar agrees. “I had a right to know about his existence.”

“You lost that right,” Lyanna informs, hate seething in every word. Before Rhaegar can defend himself, Lyanna speaks up. “You call yourself an enlightened man yet you never stopped to wonder about why I didn’t tell you.”

“You were upset—”

“I was terrified,” Lyanna growls. Rhaegar falls silent upon the reveal. “I thought about telling you—or at least telling Jon—several times. The first time I considered it, Jon called my brother ‘daddy’. I was too much of a coward to tell him otherwise so I had my older brother explain to him that he didn’t have a father. Another incident was when I left Jon to live with Ned for a long-term assignment and I thought ‘maybe I should leave him with someone else.’ But no, whenever I had those thoughts, whenever the temptation came over me, I asked myself ‘why did I think that letting my son grow up without a father was better alternative than revealing your identity?’” Lyanna pauses. She stares him in the eye. “Because I knew I would rather kill him and myself than ever be caught within your family’s clutches once more.”

Lyanna stands up. "I have said my peace, Rhaegar."

Rhaegar does not follow her. He tells her, instead, that he would have given Jon everything. Lyanna scoffs. “Yes, at the cost of being the bastard son of Rhaegar Targaryen. He would never have a family; he would be an outcast—"
“We could have been a family!” Rhaegar stands up.

“I didn’t want to marry you!”

“Yes, you did!” Rhaegar shouts. His eyes are blazing. “You wanted to be my wife. That’s why we ran away together in the first place. That’s why you were so happy when I told you I was getting a divorce. But then you gave up. You gave up on us. You gave up on our family, Lyanna. If I wasn’t married already, you wouldn’t have hesitated to sign the papers. So do not tell me that you didn’t want us to be together.”

Lyanna is taken back. She clenches her fist and looks away. After a few minutes of personal contemplation, she sighs. “Either way, this is over.”

“No, it isn’t.” Rhaegar walks over to her and grabs her wrist.

“Do you plan on locking me up again?” Lyanna mocks, but there’s sadness in her eyes. “I’m not that stupid anymore.”

“I love you,” he confesses. Rhaegar gets on his knees and kisses her hands. “I love you,” he tells her again. “We can still be happy,” he swears to her. “It’s not too late.”

Lyanna shakes her head. Her face is stern and does not mirror her internal desire to sob. “Yes, it is, Rhaegar.” She takes her hands back. “I should have done this a long time ago, for both our sakes. Instead, I let this illness fester because I was afraid of moving on.” Lyanna releases a resigned sigh. “But I can’t keep doing this. It took me awhile but I can’t keep running.” She caresses his cheek. “Goodbye, Rhaegar Targaryen.”

Lyanna allows Rhaegar a few moments to process the information before turning her back to him. As soon as her hand twists the knob, Rhaegar speaks.

“Jon is my son, Lyanna. You cannot keep him from me.”

Tension clogs up the room and coils its demonic limbs around Lyanna’s throat. She becomes as still as a corpse. When she turns, her face expresses every boiling drop of rage, every thought of contempt, and every scathing insult she could imagine.

“Stay away from my son.”

“Our son.”

"Stay away from Jon."

"I can’t do that,” he whispers. His soft-spoken exterior contrasts the madness flickering in his eyes. “He’s my son, too. And I want him by my side.”

“Touch him and I will ruin you,” Lyanna warns. “I will reveal every secret thought, every torrid detail, things about our affair, about your family, that I can remember. Things that not even the infamous Targaryens can recover from. I will riddle the papers and the news with your lunacy until the nightmares of your family are ingrained into everyone’s head as if it were a memory. Can you afford that?”

Rhaegar chuckled. He sounded unamused. “You’d be ruining yourself in the process. And Jon. He’s a Targaryen, too.”

“He is not—”
“Yes, he is,” Rhaegar hisses. “There will be two spectrums of that media. One will claim me a madmen and the other will paint you as a homewrecker—where does Jon fit in? I can keep this quiet, Lyanna, and keep his slate clean. Draw attention to my affairs and the world will know I have another heir.” Rhaegar’s lips twitched. “Elia will be humiliated, but you know her, she will stay by my side. My children will never forgive you and they certainly will never consider Jon a brother.” Rhaegar chuckles. "He'll be more alone, won't he? He'll need me more than ever."

Lyanna takes a deep breath. She steps forward so that their chests are pressed together. “What do I have to do to keep you away from him?”

Rhaegar reaches out to cradle her face. “You can’t do anything, my love.”

Lyanna winces when he tightens his grip on her. “Jon has changed the game. I get you and I lose Jon. But Jon is half-mine. I'll have him at my side.” Rhaegar brushes a strand of Lyanna’s hair from her face. “And soon, I’ll have the other half that belongs to you.”

Lyanna lunges at him as he expected. Her claws scratch opens his face, leaving a visible and bleeding scar on his flawless Targaryen complexion. He laughs when she continues to attack him but he holds her off, eventually capturing her in his arms. When she is done struggling, he kisses the top of her head. “Tell Jon I look forward to seeing him,” he whispers before letting her go. Lyanna sends him a promise of murder before slamming the door with enough force to remove the hinges. When she is gone, Rhaegar takes the opportunity to fall into the trap of narcissism. He checks his face in the nearby mirror, entranced by his new mark by his lover.

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***

The latest victim’s face was gnawed off to become unrecognizable. Benjen arrives at the scene of the crime with an ass that is wailing and the respect of his fellow colleagues. They recognize a sex limp when they see one. Yoren, who is inspecting the body, looks up to criticize Benjen’s tardiness and instead slaps his back with pride.

“I see you captured the whale.”

“Eight hours,” Benjen confirms breathlessly. “He is in better shape than my father.”

“That is not an appropriate know about your father.”

Benjen chuckles. "My father was built like a beast. He had scars everywhere, muscles on top of his muscles, he was the kind of guy who would throw a twink around like a carousel while having him lodged on his cock.”

“How do you know this about your father?”

“Though I have to say, even though I’ve never slept with my father—”

“Thank gods for that.”

“Commander Mormont is far superior in bed.”

“Please stop,” said a voice behind them. Detective Swan is putting on her gloves as she purses her lips in disapproval. When they are on, she crouches down. "We have a dead body present. Show
some respect."

"This case cannot be as hard as Commander Mormont and I proved myself worthy of that case. This will be solved in due time."

Emma sighs. She sends Benjen a congratulatory nod. “I was just talking to Commander Mormont. Good for you.”

Benjen raises an eyebrow. “Did he tell you?”

“No, but he was complaining about his back so I knew something was up.” She inspects the lesions on her neck. “Turn the body on the side.”

Not one to avoid gore, Benjen and the rest of forensic team move the corpse by an inch.

“Like’s like our serial killer,” she confirms. “What number is this now?”

“Thirteen,” Yoren clarifies. “Our lucky day, huh.”

“Thirteenth one we found,” Benjen corrects. “His victims are staining the streets red—just because some remain black does not mean they haven’t bled.”

“How poetic,” Emma notes. She stands up. “Well, I guess it’s time to release the good news.”

“There’s good news in this?”

“There’s progress,” she clarifies. “Commander Mormont told me that if it’s another victim of the Bloodhound, we can start interviewing suspects.”

“Thought he said we didn’t have enough substantial evidence?”

“After thirteen kills, we’d be a fool to keep biding our time,” Emma shrugs. “He’s getting permission to interview our two suspects. The higher ups have been avoiding the scandal since Roose Bolton’s ties to the government are notorious but now they have no choice. First on our list is Ramsay Bolton. We can talk to the Reed kid last. We need to talk to their doctor for a basic profile. Fortunately for us, they share the same doctor. I’ve seen his name before. He specializes in criminal psychiatry.”

"Is he allow to share with us their sessions?"

"Not in detail, but he can tell us whether or not he believes they pose a threat." Against her better judgment, she glances over at Benjen and winces.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Why did you wince?”

“You’re quite observant.”

“Why did you wince?” Benjen repeats himself. Like a dog with a bone.

Emma sighs. “I checked their addresses. You’re not going to be happy when you learn where Jojen Reed lives.”

***
Last night, Jon slept in Robb’s room and repeated the action the next day. The bastard was sensible; he waited until everyone was passed out in their thousand numbered sheets to roam the halls for Robb’s bedroom. He would have escaped Theon’s detection if the Greyjoy was not already suspicious of their reconciliation. Theon waited for the footsteps; he lingered in the hall and watched with a heavy heart as the Snow child entered Robb’s abode. The asshole Stark did not even have the decency to warn him.

Instead, Robb has been avoiding him. Their secrecy makes his heartbreak worse. Giants and storms he can see coming; but unexpected drizzles of affection, the tender way Robb clutches onto Jon’s hand underneath the dining table or the affectionate caress of the cheek when the older boy leaves for work. Theon cannot avoid watching; one day, Robb will see Theon’s wounded expression—as bloodied and bruising as his rescues—and try to mend their long unraveled friendship.

Theon is not prepared for that day.

As soon as Robb sends him the text, Theon is packing his bags. He has nowhere to go; only his uncle and he’d rather swallow swords than spend a second alone with that man again. His false alarm comes in the form of a maid, asking if he has packed for Arya’s performance. He tells her yes before grabbing his designer suitcase and dashes off to the gods know where. He dials the only phone number he knows will answer.

***

Ramsay is full of derision when he picks him up in his car. He calls Theon a stupid skank for not being able to secure a tool like Robb and accuses Theon’s pussy from being too worn out to attract any man. He does this while massaging Theon’s cock and holding his hands through the self-deprecation. When Theon’s eyes start to well up with tears, Ramsay is silent. After he recovers, Ramsay continues but sticks to the slut-shaming and does not mention Robb’s name once. To drown out his thoughts, Theon gives him a blowjob before the older boy decides to park on the side of the road and drag him outside of the car. They fuck in broad daylight with Theon screaming his lungs out. A car or two pass, honking their approval. While Ramsay comes inside him, Theon remains hard. Ramsay tells him to get used to this.

“And long as you’re living with me, you pay rent. I don’t accept freeloaders. I expect payment every single day by the hour. If you’re in my bed, you’re on my cock. No exceptions. You don’t like it; you can sell your ass on the street corner for all I care.” Ramsay tightens his grip on the steering wheel as he makes the offer. If someone so much as touches Theon, he’s feeding them to the dogs.

Chapter End Notes

See I said “Let’s try to wrap up everything in 69 chapters” and then I add in this Lyanna-Rhaegar-Jon drama. I don’t know what to do with myself. :( To give myself credit, though, I did make an attempt to bring back the serial killer storyline and the Daenerys’ wedding.

Next Chapter: Benjen talks with Jojen and Ramsay. Guest appearance from Hannibal.

Goodness, so I am moving back home soon. The first draft of my novel is sixty-seventy percent complete (pretty good for a month's work). Packing is a bitch. I am ninety
percent sure that my luggage is overweight but at least I have nine hours to work on my writing. Fingers crossed.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

This may be my second longest chapters ever written for this story so I hope it’s worth the lateness. We’re going to have sex and drugs (cocaine to be specific) in this chapter, plus some dry humping. Ramsay and Theon are never going to have a nice, normal sex scene so let’s just get that out there. Bran is underage. Hannibal is bored. Officer Yoren is so done.

For lunch, Hannibal bakes fresh sourdough bread with a paštetas spread, made from the lard and liver of his latest hunt. He tops the dish with an aspic made of beef stock and veal and accompanies the sandwich with lorne sausages seasoned with peppercorn, sea salt, sage, and garlic. On the side is a salad consisting of fresh watercress and baby tomatoes from the garden. When the doctor hears his husband come into the kitchen, he asks the man to set the table. Will complies without question; the former cop heads to the fridge to grab two home-brewed beers. He places the bottles on the table and asks: “What does it say about our marriage that I can’t remember the last time we’ve eaten together? Alone?”

Hannibal smiles to himself. “As a professional, I’d say we are drifting apart.”

“Oh yeah?” Will walks up to Hannibal’s side. After their decade-long union, he still has problems looking his husband in the eye. He fiddles with the tomato instead; sneaks a piece into his mouth and bites, smacking his lips in the obnoxious manner Hannibal loathes but forgives him for because he’s Will. Hannibal turns to scold him for his bad table manners but becomes distracted by the rouge on Will’s lips. He bends down to kiss him instead. When they part, Will admires the tasteful presentation. “Who are we having today?” He teases, punning with the best of them.

The doorbell rings before Hannibal can answer.

“So much for a meal alone,” Will mutters. “Which one of your patients are we having today?”

Hannibal’s lips twitch, not quite a frown or a smile but definitely curious. “I’m not sure.” He walks to the doorway to reveal a pair of uniform cops.

“Officers, can I help you?”

“We’re sorry to bother you, Dr. Lecter. I’m Yoren and this is Officer Stark. Is this a good time?”

“Of course,” Will quips, coming out from the kitchen. “Our house is always welcomed to officers of the law, especially during mealtime. Would you like some sandwiches?”

“No thank you.” Yoren refuses. “We actually came here to ask questions about two of your patients, Jojen Reed and Ramsay Bolton.”

“I see.” Hannibal takes a step back to let them in. “Please come in.” The officers follow the gentleman to the dining room where a beautiful lunch is being served. Yoren is put off by their meal; far too decorative for his taste. Hannibal prepares a cup of coffee for each. “It’s the least I can do,” he
For the sake of his cooperation, they take the mugs. “You have a nice house,” Yoren compliments out of civility. “Should have been a doctor if I’ve known I could get a place like this.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal says as he sits down. He offers them a seat at their kitchen counter. “Before we start, I must warn you that as a psychiatrist, I am legally bound to the confidentiality of my patients. I apologize if I cannot be of much help because of that and I ask that you do not push the boundaries of my silence.”

“We understand that,” Officer Stark speaks up for the first time. His voice low and calm; Will is familiar with the tone. Men with his level of severity made the best interrogators. “But you are allowed to discuss observations as long as they don’t transgress into your sessions. And you are obliged to submit any behavioral signs that may imply danger to themselves or others.”

Hannibal smiles at the commentary. “A fine point,” he praises. “Not many people know that part of the law.”

“We are cops,” Officer Stark replies.

Yoren sighs at his brisk nature; the Stark only has charm when it relates to fellatios and older men. The doctor is on the younger side of Benjen’s preferred age range but he lacks the ruggedness the gerontophile prefers. He doubts the gentleman has ever gotten so much as a hair out of place. He apologizes for his partner’s cold shoulder. “The case is taking a toll on us,” and reveals a folder containing Ramsay’s picture. “How about we get started with the Bolton? It says here that Ramsay’s probation ended six years ago—after he left to attend university in America. Have you seen him since then?”

“As a matter of fact, I do,” Hannibal answers. “We set up the occasional session.”

“He must like you,” Benjen notes, a touch below accusatory but right above impartiality. “The word around the station is that you have a high retention rate amongst your criminal clientele.”

“Some people find comfort in having a neutral party to talk to, especially when their interests are condemned. People in my profession are often unable to disassociate their own morality from those they provide mediation to. Quite unfortunately, they begin to condemn their patients and drive them further off the precipice of no return.”

“And you are immune to those concerns?”

“I want to help those whose society has turned their back on. Being a criminal does not make them any less worthy of salvation, officer.”

Benjen’s expression is unreadable. He redirects his attention back to Ramsay. “What can you tell us about Ramsay? He has the capacity of violence; we know that from his record. Given the circumstances, do you believe he can be the Bloodhound Killer?”

***

Ramsay Bolton collects the damaged and forsaken, the girls who leave their houses sporting fresh bruises from their daddies or the boys who spend their nights giving blowjobs for a buck. He’s not one of those perverts who get off on defiling innocence—tried the whole schoolgirl thing in college and was disappointed with the results.

There’s no challenge in corrupting goodness. An object in mint condition is defiled as soon as it
leaves the box. That’s not to say Ramsay doesn’t ruin their cunts when he owns them. The Bolton has spent hours filling up his fleshlights with his cock, toys, beer bottles and baseball bats; he likes to experiment with how far they can stretch and boy do they *stretch* for him. He is fortunate that good boys and girls are never clever; all they need is a few gentle phrases, a tender caress or two, and before long, they’re opening up their creamy pussies in dark alleys or fingering themselves at a family diner. Ramsay has loss count of those types of whores. As soon as he breaks them, he throws them away, either in the garbage bins or he leaves them open for his boys. The only mementos he has of his expeditions are the occasion pictures or videos he took for leverage.

It was Ramsay’s older brother that taught him that the broken ones made the greatest game. No one notices a scratch on a broken window; punching bags can last years no matter how beaten they are. Ramsay understands the philosophy on a practical level; the damaged ones last longer but there’s no difference in thrill. When Ramsay meets Theon, Ramsay finally empathizes with Domeric. When Theon Greyjoy, *pretty, desperate, wanton Theon*, crawled on top of him that night, he understands his perfect brother and the similarities make him feel like a better man. When he’s inside the Greyjoy, Ramsay is practically giddy. Theon reminds him of a cesarean scar—a reminder of brutality and hope all at the same time. Ramsay likes that Theon isn’t as damaged as the others in his collection. Ramsay usually goes for guys with low self-esteem, the ones who’ve abandoned their manhood and let him do whatever he wants until he hits a little too hard. Theon isn’t one of *them*. He likes what Ramsay does to him—he just doesn’t want to admit that he likes it. He gets hot and horny over a little roughhousing but then rejects Ramsay after they’re done. With Theon, Ramsay doesn’t want him broken; he wants him to break and beg and admit that he needs Ramsay as much as Ramsay knows he does.

That morning, Ramsay wakes up sated—Theon forgets to blow him as they’ve agreed the night before but Theon’s ass makes a great cockwarmer so Ramsay fucks him when he’s asleep and then complains a bit at breakfast. Theon pouts about his leaking ass before giving him a blowjob before he leaves for work. Ramsay’s door closes from the outside so he’s not worried about Theon being a fucking idiot; leaving and locking himself out. Greyjoys are notoriously stupid. He knows he’s doing the right by keeping Theon in the house all day while Ramsay takes care of business. Unlike that freeloader, he has a job and obligations. When Ramsay finishes up, it’s an hour pass noon. The bastard celebrates by buying a few eightballs for him, his friends, and Theon. The good stuff from Peter.

When Ramsay reveals his treat, Theon is stunned while his boys scamper over to him like dogs, tails wagging and tongues out. “…What?” Theon’s voice is high and choke but his eyes are curious.

“…What?” Theon’s voice is high and choked, but his eyes are curious.

Ramsay smirks. “You ever try snorting coke off a dick before?”

Theon blushing. “Don’t be an asshole.”

That’s a no. Ramsay unzips his pants and takes out his cock, half-hard and getting harder with every step his bitch takes. Theon does not bother waiting for his command. He grabs the hem of his t-shirt and pulls it off over his head in slow motion. His eyes are focused on Ramsay. There’s no reluctance in his stride so consciously or not, Theon is being a tease. When he is done with his shirt, he pulls down his pair of borrowed boxers. Ramsay’s boys, who are high and hard, watch Theon’s strip tease with intense concentration.

You want him, Ramsay muses. You call all pump your puny dicks into him, but this slut is mine. He wants me.

“Such a hot fucking body,” Ramsay murmurs without meaning to. Theon smiles slyly and the

Theon chews on his lips, plumping those cocksuckers up. Ramsay licks his own in anticipation. He watches Theon get on his knees and reach out for his cock. Ramsay’s brain does not quite catch up with his dick, so he hesitates to get the bag ready in time. Theon places a careful, kitten lick on his tip.

Ramsay groans. He hands Theon the bag and orders him to prepare him. Most of Theon’s experience with cocaine is from movies like the *Wolf of Wall Street* and *Scarface*—he lines a substantial bump on Ramsay’s shaft. More than necessary but not enough to cause any major issues. Ramsay grins when Theon’s eyebrows furrow and he puts in the effort to make the drugs look nice. Theon is shallow in the best way; Ramsay prefers a bitch who puts in the effort to be pretty, and he loves one who can add a bit of presentation in his high. When Theon is satisfied with the positioning, there’s no hesitation with what happens next. The line disappears up Theon’s nose and Theon just lets out this deep, breathy moan of satisfaction. Ramsay chuckles, knowing that even Peter’s good stuff takes a few minutes to work. Theon is high off the scene. He’s turned on by the audience and the giant dick threatening to gag him till he comes. There’s a few sprinkles left on Ramsay’s cock and Theon laps up the remains like a dog.

Ramsay groans; he pulls Theon’s head off his cock to get a good look at him. Theon’s eyes are a little unfocused and his lips are more swollen than a gangbanged pussy. His nipples pucker up like strawberries on his sunshine skin, and he looks good enough to eat. His mouth gapes, all nice and dry, and there’s a soft little pant in his voice.

Gorgeous, Ramsay thinks. He relaxes the grip on Theon’s hair and allows the young man to get to blowing. Ramsay licks and sucks, angling his head so that Ramsay is awarded the best access to his throat. Ramsay takes advantage of the prize. He pushes down deeper, testing out the depth of his fleshlight. Theon’s legs quiver in response; the effects of the drugs loosen up his limbs and mind. He opens up his throat more, barely remembering a time when he was more than a cocksleeve. All he can think about is Ramsay’s thick cock. Ramsay continues to thrusts in, hard and fast, filling that pretty mouth with his tension and stress. He’s glad he decided to hold off on his high; the feeling of dominance is better sober; it’s perfect, so perfect, and then Theon gags and perfection transforms into heaven. Ramsay releases one of the biggest loads of his life. Like all good whores, Theon swallows his load but there's too much. He opens up his mouth to show off the warm cum drooling down his chin.

From 0 to 60, Ramsay’s cock springs up like a jack-in-the-box. Ramsay feels another wave of anger at how easy it is for Theon to make him lose control. More than ever, Ramsay is aware of how gorgeous Theon is; half the men are hard because of him and the other half came watching his horny ass shake. Their gazes weigh on him like boxes of lust and he is getting buried alive. In their eyes, he can see a reflection of Theon pawing at his dick, rubbing Ramsay’s hard-on against his cheek like a kitten after a milk bottle.

“Fuck,” he swears because one of his boys is getting ready to cum and he’s too close to comfort; Ramsay swears if so much as a drop sullies Theon’s backside, someone is getting skinned tonight. To avoid the drama, he scoops Theon up and hefts him on his shoulder. Theon squawks at him, his face burning like a virgin bride. Ramsay carries him back to the bedroom, kicks the door close, and flips him onto the mattress with a little bounce.

“If any of you cunts come in here, you are dead!” He shouts. Theon is blissed out on the drugs but he’s getting hard thinking about what happens next. Ramsay turns Theon over to get a nice rear-view of his ass. He grabs a bag from his pocket and empties the content across his cheeks and hole.
Climbing on top of the bed, Ramsay bends down to enjoy his pussy. He reminds himself that Theon is all his. Theon the one who sold himself to the devil. He’s the one that wants to be with Ramsay.

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“Everyone has a capacity for violence. Ramsay Bolton is merely more indulgent. He desires power, and seeks to dominate those around him. When they attempt to reclaim their ownership or dismiss his hold, he will cut them out of his life but not before humiliating them for their perceived wrongdoing. Hence his tumultuous relationship with his father, and their estrangement.”

“Estrangement?” Yoren looks over the notes. “Our reports say that he is employed by Roose Bolton.”

“That’s a recent development,” Hannibal reveals. “Ramsay has a temper, weak to his impulses but brilliant—obscenely so. I’ve had some marvelous conversations in our private sessions—none of which I am inclined to share,” he warns as Benjen raises an eyebrow. “His talents make his father acknowledge him but his lack of restraint provides Mr. Bolton with a reason for suppression. As expected, Ramsay lashes out against the binds. When he cannot escape, he resorts to more desperate measures.”

“Like what?” Yoren asks sarcastically. “Gnawing off his own arms?”

“Or biting the hands of his master,” Will remarks from the back. He refills their coffee mugs and gets a cup for Hannibal.

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees without divulging on what he is agreeing to. “While I cannot give you a confirmation on whether I believe in Ramsay’s guilt or innocence, I can tell you that the Bloodhound Killer is far more meticulous than the Ramsay I treated in the past.”

“How so?”

Hannibal hums. “The killer is a planner, a tracker that enjoys the chase as much as he lusts for the kill. Leading his victims to alleyways he knows are devoid of life, letting them wander the streets, building up hope and fear; that would excite Ramsay. But the threat of the occasional witness would diminish his cravings. Ramsay likes danger but he abhors complications. If the killings had been done in a more deserted location, the woods or a basement, I would have been persuaded otherwise.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“That’s my opinion.”

Yoren and Benjen share a look. Yoren pulls out another portfolio. “How about Jojen Reed? Does he display the meticulous traits of the Bloodhound killer?”

Hannibal avoids the fond smile rising to his lips. “I suppose he is a rather detail-oriented individual.”

***

Jojen Reed has a list of mental castrations for emergencies, organized by their ability to leech the blood out of his erections. He goes through the catalogue twice that morning, plagued with typical English weather fit for nothing else but lounging and sex, and none of them work his swelling cock. His love for Bran is his last claim to morality and like the Polish defenses of 1939, they go down in flames. At the moment, his wrists are tied to both sides of the bed and his ankles are similarly secured. To make things harder for him, he cannot see Bran—having been blindfolded because his
gaze made his boyfriend nervous. Jojen releases a slew of curses as Bran runs his hands coltishly over his chest.

Bran pauses his ministrations. “Is this okay?” he asks softly. His voice is saccharine and pure. Jojen is hard as rocks.

“Yes,” Jojen gasps out. “Bran, you feel so good. I bet you look so fucking gorgeous right now with your flushed cheeks and rosy lips. Just let me have a peek, Bran. Please. I need to see you.”

Bran bites his lower to keep from moaning; his fingers trail towards the blindfold but he hesitates to remove it. He is not used to praise about his sexuality, but his body is red all over and there’s a churning in his gut he deduces is arousal. Jojen’s words make him feel dirty and good and he likes his newfound power. He likes that he can make Jojen squirm underneath him and do whatever he desires because Jojen wants him that much.

The power trip rouses more daring within him. He moves his hands away from the blindfold and slips his hands underneath Jojen’s shirt. Both of them are fully clothed, which adds an air of decency to their date. While pressing on his chest for balance, Bran grinds his ass against Jojen’s cock. Jojen lets out a throaty groan. Bran giggles because he’s nervous and excited at the same time. He lifts up his hips and jerks forward again; this time the friction feels better; more intense because Bran is more confident of the result. Bran can’t stop himself any longer. He does it again and again. He rolls his hips on top of the wet spot staining Jojen’s pants and stops caring about the fact that he’s practically humping Jojen like a dog.

Jojen begs for release but his pleas are weak. After all, it was Jojen who led Bran into an ill-intention conversation of immobility and bondage. He supposed he had good intentions when he suggested the ropes; Bran was convinced that his paraplegic status would be a hindrance to their future lovemaking. Jojen wanted to make it clear that not being able to move certain parts of his body was nothing to be ashamed of.

In hindsight, Jojen will be happy the lesson took as well as it did. At the moment, his cock is aching and his cocktease of a boyfriend is driving him crazy. He agreed to the no-nudity rule for Bran's comfort and regrets the decision immediately. His jeans are tight. Bran's skin is soft and the barrier of cotton only makes the older boy more frustrated. He’s already so close, pleasure building in his stretched arms and legs, spreading down his spine and Bran's thrusts are growing more and more erratic.

“Am I making you feel good, Jo? Do you like it when I rub against you like a dog?”

Jojen manages a strangled “Yes” before Bran gives him a final bounce on his cock; his plushy ass is grinding against his hard-on like a beach ball. It’s a slutty little move he never knew possible coming from his sweet, innocent Bran and he loves it; his orgasm is exploding through him, erasing everything else he’s ever known. He forgets about his wrists and ankles straining against the ropes when his hips stutter and his cock pulses hot come through his jeans.

Bran sighs in pleasure and drops to his side. He reaches forward to pull down Jojen’s blindfold and admires the blissed-out look on Jojen’s face. His face is swoon-worthy and Bran, still high off his sexual confidence, leans forward for a peck on the lips—far too chaste for their previous activities. Rather than ask for his release, Jojen repeats an earlier sentiment.

“I knew you were beautiful,” Jojen admires.

Bran flushes and hides his face in the pillows. He hears Jojen’s chuckle, followed by some gentle coaxing out of his embarrassment. “I mean it, Bran. You were so wonderful; absolutely perfect. I
swear, I’ve never come harder in my life and you barely touched me.”

Bran works up the courage to look at him. “Did you really like it?”

“I loved it,” Jojen admits honestly. “How about you?”

A candy-pink blush decorates his cheeks as he shyly admits his enjoyment. “I liked it, too. I really, really liked being with you…that way.” His confession drives him further into his shell but Jojen’s appreciative expression—so loving and fond—keeps a steady grip on him. He continues. “It’s embarrassing but…fun. Like I had power even though I’m a…”

“Beginner?” Jojen suggests. Before Bran can correct him, Jojen asks to be released from his binds. Bran’s eyes widen. He hastily drags himself to each pole, pulling on the part Jojen instructs him on. Jojen made sure to research the best kind knot for these activities and the easiest ones to come undone. Jojen rubs his wrists as soon as he is free.

“I’m glad you like it.” Bondage is not his preferred kink but there is nothing wrong with testing out Bran’s boundaries. Bran will never question these things on his own and with all the parental blocks enforced in the Stark household, he does not even have the dark spaces of the internet to consult in. Though his intentions are far from pure, Jojen figures that as his boyfriend, Bran deserves a safe outlet for experimentation.

“Do you want to try it again?”

Bran blushes. “Yeah, I think so.”

Jojen leans over to give him a kiss—deeper than the one he was awarded. Bran melts in his arms. When they part, Jojen hugs him against his chest. “If you ever want to try something, tell me. I don’t care what it is.” Jojen will crawl through the streets of Yorkshire, butt-naked with a bone in his mouth if Bran so wishes it. “I don’t want us to keep secrets from one another.”

“Yeah,” Bran agrees, mumbling into Jojen’s neck.

Jojen groans; Bran’s hot breath releases a tingle down his spine. His afterglow is ruined when his work phone vibrates on the counter. He dreads the incoming message but understands his obligation to answer. Peter warned him about an upcoming job in the future—a big one with a hefty pay. He loathes the gods who made it happen today of all days.

“Give me a sec,” he murmurs, settling Bran on his side. He unlocks his phone and examines the coded text message.

“What’s the matter?”

“Just a work thing,” Jojen answers. “My cousin really needs me to do this job. I’m sorry, Bran. Do you mind if I…?”

“It’s okay,” Bran assures. He’s one of the lucky few who’s never had to worry about money and never will. He can’t possibly complain when Jojen has to support his family. “Do you want me to leave?”

Jojen sends a quick message and gets a response within seconds. “It’ll only take a couple of hours. Three, four tops. Do you want me to get you home or would you rather wait in my room?” His father is out delivering a piece—Ned’s connections have done wonders for his career, and Meera’s new project has her pulling an all-nighter. The only concern is Bran’s situation.
Bran blushes. “Um, sure. My parents think I’m at Shireen’s house working on an art project. She…” There’s a mixture of pride and shame on his features. “Agreed to cover for me. Wished me good luck.”

Jojen’s heart leaps from his chest. “I’ll get you some snacks before I leave. And pick up some when I come back. My password is…” Bran. “I’ll unlock my computer in case you get bored. There’s some notebooks if you want to work on something.” Jojen puts on his coat. He’s scampering around, hoping that the faster he gets the job done, the sooner he can be reunited with Bran. He dashes downstairs for the promised rations. While he prepares a sandwich, he wonders where he should hide his drugs in case Bran decides to snoop.

Probably the air vent where he can’t reach.

***

“Jojen is a determined and scrupulous soul; whereas as most men falter because of their pride, he has none. He lives and breathes for one person and that one person is the purpose of his existence.”

Yoren would be more grateful for the poetry if he wasn’t so unhelpful. “So you’re saying he isn’t a suspect?”

Hannibal pauses; from afar, Will sighs, dreading the tinkering of his husband’s thoughts. He laments the prospective move; England has begun to grow on him. The lady at the pet shop mistaken him for a Brit the other day.

“Jojen, like many men with his condition, has created a ‘mental life’ involving the person he obsesses over. Jojen, in particular, believes that the object of his desire is the only person he could ever love and tends to be motivated to pursue his infatuation based on this type of thinking. Stalking, monitoring them, investigating their likes and dislikes. For him, getting caught will lead to their separation so he’ll do whatever it takes, no matter the time or effort, to remove all traces of evidence.”

The behavior, while disconcerting, does not paint the portrait of a serial killer. Perhaps Hannibal realizes this, and adds, “I’ve had several patients whose delusions have gotten out of hand. They see the slightest flirtation towards their love ones, and paint their apartments red as a romantic gesture. All the person needs to say is hello to their loved one and suddenly, they are an enemy. The worst happens when reality settles and the revelation of their dismissed affair becomes apparent. They have absences of judgements. Often times, these behaviors emerge in violence.”

Benjen tightens his fist. He is aware of Bran’s connection to Jojen and wonders if Hannibal is alluding to any past or future dangers. He dares not say a word; Commander Mormont will have a fit if he believes Benjen to be impartial.

“What about Ramsay?” Yoren asks, distracting Benjen at the moment. “He has a history of violence. A lot of it.”

Hannibal takes a sip of his coffee to hide his smirk. “I am afraid I am not in liberty to discuss that matter.”

***

Theon makes the prettiest sounds when he is fucked out; his hole is overused and his cock is so limp, Ramsay swears he has a woman in his bed. With every thrust, Theon’s fingers tangle in the sheets tightly, begging Ramsay to stop while he spreads his legs for easier access. When they’re finish with
their latest session of the day, Ramsay is bone dry and ready for a snack. He orders Theon to go outside and make something to eat. Theon bitches like a wife but complies. When he walks outside, there is a touch of limp. Ramsay swears his cock twitched.

In the kitchen, Theon grabs four slices of bread, ham, cheese, and butter for toasties. He somehow manages to scavenge a can of tomato soup from the cupboards. His mother used to make him these when he was good; a treat for not pissing off his father. He had to earn the right to eat in his household and he figures the two hour-long fuckfest is a job well done.

Theon hears someone stumble into the kitchen and immediately tenses. Ramsay is not one for weakness; he marches, stomps, and destroys. Theon turns around and sees one of the Bastard’s Boys, Devan or Daemon or something. The man licks his lips and bile and fear fills up Theon’s throat.

“You look like he fed you to his dogs,” the man sneers. “Guess, he really wanted to destroy that pussy, didn’t he? Pumped you up real good.”

“Leave me alone,” Theon murmurs as he redirects his attention to the food. He closes his thighs, and instead of strengthening his defenses, more cum spills out of his hole. Theon winces as the stream drips down mid-thigh.

The dick cackles and it sounds like nails on a chalkboard. “Fucking bitch. You think you’re allowed to talk to me that way?” He gets closer.

“Get the fuck away from me,” Theon snaps. “I’ll scream and Ramsay—”

“Ramsay won’t give a fuck if I decide to try out his bitches. He gives us his whores when he's done with them anyways. Likes to see his sluts split between the two of us.” His yellow teeth resemble mucus and Theon tries not to imagine those fangs digging into him. “I’m just getting a little taste beforehand.”

Theon tries to tackle him out of the way but he lunges onto Theon. The man is bigger, stronger, and has no problem pinning Theon against the counter. Theon screams; he fights like a motherfucker, scratching, punching, spitting, and he does not let up for a second. Daemon or Deric or whatever his name is certainly didn’t expect a fight.

What happens next is a blur. The rapist is thrown off Theon and slams into the wall. Ramsay, who is dressed in his boxers and murderous intent, grabs the knife that Theon was using and pierces his friend’s shoulder blade.

“What the fuck, Damon? Did I say you could fucking touch him?”

“Ramsay—”

“Did I fucking say it was okay!” Ramsay thrusts the blade into Damon’s eye. He screams bloody murder and there’s blood everywhere. “He’s mine. Do you get that? He’s my fucking property. I own him. You don’t get to touch him.” Ramsay grabs his head and bangs it against the floor. One of the other boys comes in—another name Theon cannot remember. Ramsay glares. He throws the knife in the kitchen. “Grab a chair and some alcohol. I’m going to make this punishment hurt.” He kicks Damon upside the head. “And I’m going to make it last.”

He turns to Theon. “Hey, is the food ready yet?”

Theon stares at the grilling cheese. He hasn’t even prepared the soup so he shakes his head.

“Fuck, can you hurry it up?”
Theon glares. “I can’t control time.”

“Don’t fucking give me sass.”

Damon groans from the ground. He starts to beg for mercy as two of the guys drag him away. One swears at him, calling Damon a fucking idiot. The other shakes his head. Ramsay tells them to stop when Damon begins to apologize. “Mercy? You want fucking mercy?” Ramsay laughs. He turns to Theon. “You’re the one who almost got his ass reamed. Tell me. Should I give him mercy?”

Damon sends him a pleading look. He babbles to Theon about how sorry he is; how he was only playing around. He never intended to actually hurt Theon; it was just a joke. He’d never hurt one of Ramsay’s boys.

Theon remembers the fear he felt when he thought he was going to get violated; the horrific reminder of when he was a child and as helpless as a fucking fish out of water. He recalls his uncle ignoring his sobs while he begged for the Drowned One to take him to the sea. The sight of his assailant groveling is empowering. He imagines his uncle in the same position, a knife penetrating his bottom. The gruesome revenge is too good for words.

Theon returns to the stove without saying a word.

For a second, all Ramsay does is stare. This is their moment. The kind of moment he used to share with Myranda but it’s deeper because there’s none of that artificial connection. Myranda made herself to Ramsay’s image and boy was that devotion hot, but it was unnatural. Artificial. This? This is something so instinctive that Ramsay practically breathes it. It’s alive. It’s better than any orgasm and Ramsay cannot help himself; he grabs Theon by the hair and kisses him, hard and rough. When they part, he pulls out a steak knife from the drawer.

Damon never makes it to the chair. Ramsay has his fun in the middle of the kitchen while Theon finishes up their toastie. Theon does not watch; he doesn’t like to see people get hurt but he likes knowing that Ramsay is hurting someone for him.

***

“Violence has been indoctrinated into Ramsay since he was young—one could say as soon as his conception. I wish I could explain—.”

“But you cannot give details. We got that part,” Yoren interrupts. “Many, many times.”

Will scoffs from the kitchen. He prepares a doggie bag for the cops. If he remembers the good old days, the two of them will be out interrogating the suspects and that requires substance. Hannibal takes too much energy to deal with.

“If Ramsay is responsible for the crimes, he may have help. He is unusual; people are repulsed by his cruelty in the same manner they are intrigued by his brutality. His magnetism attracts the attention of others like him. He is not swayed by mere acknowledgement or material successes. His violent history stems for his need for a primal indulgence. Ramsay sees fear as a tool for his control or hold on a person. He does not want a challenge; he wants a complement.”

“I see,” Yoren’s brain pulses from the riddle speak. As a routine follow-up, he asks, “Has Jojen ever admitted to hurting someone?”

“I’m not in liberty to discuss that, either.”

“Great,” Yoren gets up from his seat. Benjen follows. ”We’ll keep in contact in case anything comes
Bran snoops through Jojen’s room as soon as the front door closes. He has Stark DNA; his people investigate matters that do not pertain to them and trust no one and everyone at the same time. He heard that his ancestors were killed at a wedding and got their family estate taken over by cannibal who fried human flesh or something or maybe someone got their heads chopped off by a godson or two. Who knows? There are too many stories to keep track of. All that matters is that evolution has dictated that Bran look through his boyfriend’s things.

He crawls everywhere he is able, searching for pictures of wrongdoing, bad habits he needs to be prepared for, a vegan cookbook or something of the like. He discovers a box of cigarettes—fine, his brother and mum smoke; most of the fags are in the box so at least he’s not a prolific user. Bran has mentioned that he does not mind smoking but he’s not fond of the smell, either. There’s some pictures of him underneath his bed and in his underwear drawer; Jojen has confessed to those crimes already. It is unfair for Bran to hold those less than savory images against him. Besides, there’s nothing wrong with being utterly devoted to your boyfriend and never looking at other guys. Some people would kill to be in his position. Bran continues looking, ignoring the gnawing of his conscience. There are odd trinkets here and there. He finds a picture of Jojen at science camp and another picture of Jojen with a bunch of guys—one of which is Henry’s boyfriend.

One guy has his face circled, prompting a series of questions. Was he an old fling? A crush? There are several facts about him listed in a pocket notebook. Bran does not want to be jealous but he has no way of finding out the truth. He cannot ask Jojen; there’s no way he can tell his boyfriend that he looked through his belongings without permission. He cannot believe he is starting their relationship on a lie.

“Officer Stark, forgive my rudeness but I cannot help but notice your attachment to this case. Jojen Reed, after all, is a devotee of your nephew and Ramsay Bolton works for your brother.”

“He works for a sub-branch of my brother’s company that later expanded into its own…why does this matter?”

“Merely an observation,” Hannibal answers. “That must be a lot of pressure on you. Your bond with your commander is truly exemplary. I cannot imagine what persuasions you’ve performed to be given such a high-profiled case. Have you spoken to your family on the matter?”

“It's not as big a deal as you would think. My family and I have built a wall for these matters and I tend live on that wall or go beyond it. Complete neutrality.”

“Quite admirable,” Hannibal notes. “I suppose that was quite useful for the Locke case.”

There was a pause. Benjen narrows his eyes. He recalls the Locke case vaguely. While not assigned to him, Commander Mormont considered silence to be a paramount objective. As a new detective, he
was encouraged to not dig deep and like a child, he obeyed. “What do you know about that case?”

“Not much as you, of course.” Hannibal sips his coffee mug as if it is not empty. “As the Locke boy shared a similar affliction with Jojen, I often used him as an example of what would happen in Jojen allowed his inclinations to get out of hand. The young man stalked several individuals before he was killed. Brutally so.”

“No one knows what happened,” Yoren notes dryly.

“Jojen and I spoke about our theories.”

“I suppose you cannot share them with us.”

“No, those are confidential. Everything from his insufficient manner of hiding his tracks to the exact moment Jojen suspects he died.”

Will refuses to hide in the kitchen any longer. He comes out with two bags for the road and portable travel mugs. “I prepared some sandwiches for you guys. I can tell you’re in for a long day.”

“Thanks.” Yoren takes the free food. Despite his reluctance to take food from strangers, he can tell from the aroma that the meal is going to be better than any drive-thru. He stares at Will and furrows his brow. “Do I know you from somewhere?”

Hannibal answers for him. “Will used to be a cop. He taught at the FBI academy for a few years.” The declaration is full of pride.

“You’re Will Graham,” Yoren realizes.

The announcement captures Benjen's attention. ”You wrote about the mentality of serial killers and how to detect their movements,” Benjen notes, a little more intrigued than he'd liked to admit. “Some of your papers are required reading for our profiling courses.”

“Glad to know my work is universally making people suffer in academic.” Will hands them the bag.

“I heard you retired.”

“I did. For love,” Will informs, showcasing his wedding band. “I’m a kept man now.”

Yoren scans the home a second time. Fancy decorations. Nice clothes. Artwork made by dead guys. “Not a bad deal.”

Will chuckles. When he gets close enough, he warns them to make an escape. “My husband has a tendency to psychoanalyze his guests so I suggest you get out while you still can.”

The cops thank them for their time. Hannibal walks them to the doorway. Before they leave, he offers them his services. “While I often find myself immersed in criminal affairs, I haven’t had the opportunity to delve into the workings of an officer in a long time. If you are interested, I recommend testing out a trial period with me.”

“That’s quite alright,” Yoren refuses. “I drown my problems with liquor and humor.”

“Ah,” Hannibal notes. “Well, if either of you ever change your mind. Perhaps we can discuss Officer Stark’s inability to deal with his father’s emotional abandonment and your history of falling for your partners once they’ve attained relationships with other people. I think it’ll be good for you two.”

Hannibal shuts the door before either of them can protest his evaluation.
When he turns back to the living room, Will is judging him. “What have you done?” He asks after he sighs in resignation.

Chapter End Notes

1. Next chapter will hopefully be on time. Have not planned it out. Fingers crossed. This was not a productive week for me.

2. So, it turns out that medical professionals can and are legally obliged to tell the authorities if they fear their patients pose a risk to themselves or others. So if someone confesses to being a serial killer, doctor-patient confidentiality does not apply. It’s not priesthood. You can lose your license for not revealing this information to the cops. However, if you admit to killing someone but it was a one-time thing, like say, killing your father for abusing your mother, the doctor is not obliged to tell anyone. Furthermore, they cannot give explicit details as to what is spoken during sessions. I tried to make that clear. So Hannibal can say that “Ramsay is violent.” He cannot say “Ramsay said he did this and that.”

Basically, the doctor has to assess the danger, especially if its criminals on parole. This is why psychiatrists are allowed to tell the parole boards if their patient is doing well or not but they are still not allowed to give actual details to the board. When you get a fucked up doctor like Hannibal, the evaluation gets a little screwy.
For better or worse, Howland Reed does not believe in labels. He supposes, if anything, he is an optimist who seeks the betterment of his circumstances rather than linger on old news and past behaviors. Labels serve as a reminder of a past better forgotten and present that is meant to improve. He is not poor; his material health is severely declined. He is not an artist; he is a truth seeker through the medium of wood. He considers Ned Stark to be an old companion who he almost shared a homosexual encounter with, and though the word ‘friend’ sounds nice, he doubts a friend would have the number of latent sexual fantasies he has towards that man.

His disregard has led to a number of jeers, from a high of ‘oblivious’ to a low of a ‘leeching devil whose children will rape the world.’ Howland pays them no mind. He understands that the accusation is based on his son’s past and though he cannot fault them, he wishes they would stop interfering with his son’s recovery. Jojen can do without the hateful words that people threw around like chimpanzees wielding dog shit.

Howland shakes his head. He unloads his newest piece—a bookcase with a carving of a pubescent Ganymede clinging on the side while being undressed by the claws of a majestic eagle. Upon his client’s request, a wealthy Greek banker who escaped the financial crisis on the backs of the working class, he adds an engraving at the top of Ganymede’s backside—a tramp-stamp that gave the owner an excuse to stare without offending his guest. He pushes the piece into the house and admires the rest of his client’s collection. While the house is no stranger to famous pieces of art, there are some obscure artists as well. His client coos at the craftsmanship as soon as he sees Howland’s work and pays the Reed a substantial bonus for his beauty. He promises another commission in the future and even offers to lend his name to a few friends. Howland thanks him for the business and accepts a cup of tea before he leaves.

While Howland waits for his cuppa, he avoids asking questions of his host. They talk about the weather and the news while avoiding personal details of his life. If he knew something about his insanely rich client, what would it matter? Who is Howland to judge the gentleman for his answers? Who is anybody to judge Howland’s son? Jojen is not a stalker; he is a young man with a less than healthy attachment to an underage boy. And who can blame him for that? Those Starks are extremely fuckable.

“What are you thinking about?” purrs his client. He hands Howland his tea without tasting his own.

“Oh, just my children,” Howland answers. He lifts up the cup, not noticing the anxious look on his companion’s face. More thoughts of Jojen cloud his head, and he puts the ceramic down with a sigh. The man’s face drops. “My son—he is such a smart kid. Some people call him a genius but I abhor labels. I like to think of him as a young man with a keen perception of the universe. And he is lovely, always working so hard to take care of his sister and me. Never resents me for a second for being unable to make ends meet.”

“He sounds great,” his client agrees. “You look stress. Drink some of the tea; it’ll calm you down.”

Howland hums and nods. He is about to drink, but Jojen’s memory keeps nagging him. He puts the cup down again. “I wish I could do more about the backlash he receives.” Howland bites his lip. He explains to his client that, “Jojen got into trouble with the law a year ago. A small matter. But the judge let him off with a lesser sentence because he knew Jojen had a good heart.” Not to mention
that Howland worked on that dreadful ‘heterosexual’ label the old barrister insisted on keeping. “It’s completely unfair for people to be so quick to brand my son. He is not a cow.”

Howland sees the other nod. He is eager; ready to swing his head off in approval. “I agree. People can be so harsh with their judgments. Now drink the tea.”

Howland thanks him for his sympathies. He places the cup up to his mouth, a sliver of the liquid touches his lips, but before anything can enter him, Howland reaches an epiphany. He slams the cup on the table—not a drop loss, inside or out of Howland. “You’re right. People are horrible and here I am, drinking tea. If anything, I should be convincing them to disregard his judgements and see him for the divine creature he is.”

“What?”

Howland kisses the man on the cheek. “You’ve been so kind to me, Mr. Nestoris. I hope you keep my number in the future.” The artist who is more than an artist skips out of the room, leaving Tycho Nestoris cradling his cheek. The banker glances over at the dejected tea cup, lukewarm with chamomile and roofies, and clutches its meager handle with regret. Soon, he thought, soon.

Howland climbs into his car seat and braves himself for the journey. He sends Meera and Jojen a text, telling them he will be home late. Catelyn might be at the estate, but first, he needs to facilitate a mediator. He drives to Ned. The man is most likely in his office, doing work in those cute suits of his and that ever sensual frown. Howland needs to talk to them both about Jojen. His son may have committed a crime but he is in no way a criminal.

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“We are all going to jail,” Jojen announces. There is not a shred of doubt in his voice, not when he is staring at eighty-eight pounds of broken cocaine bricks because one of Peter’s lost boys tripped over his own feet and the bales went flying across the warehouse. Their only saving is grace is that the docks are bustling with business, sailors and fishermen going on about their daily lives—no one can hear the boy’s screams as Peter kicks his gut until the blood erupts from his throat. Jojen sighs. While the rest of the boys watched, Jojen grabs a trash bag and collects the remaining pieces inside. Though the presentation is ruined, the stuff is pure gold and at worst, Peter will mix it with baking soda to sell on the streets. He’ll turn a profit either way. When he informs Peter of this, the young man calms down.

Jojen casts a side glance towards the bloodied mess on the ground. If the victim is lucky, Jojen, Peter, and the rest of the lost boys will finish in a timely manner—he’ll be able to call an ambulance and there’s a good chance the internal bleeding won’t kill him. If he squeals, Peter will.

Jojen’s cousin is visibly pleased by his dedication; he grabs one of the bags from Jojen’s hand and weighs it. He grabs the other and turns them both over to one of his men. They take it out to the truck and continue moving along as if the trip and the beating never happened; Patting Jojen on the shoulder, he tells him good job.

“You were made for this line of work.”

“That’s not a compliment.”

“Anything can be a compliment if you’re confident.”

Jojen orders the other boys to the final stack of goods but leads Jojen to the entrance. While they get closer to the door, Peter promises to increase his portion when they prepare the dust for sale. To his
credit, Jojen does not roll his eyes. Peter does the same thing each time the younger man refuses the option of a future with Peter. He reminds Jojen of his talents before offering him a substantial bonus to hook him back on the pole. Before Bran, Jojen used to play along, gathering incentives until he gets too high and they laugh it off. Instead, Jojen keeps silent to avoid spurring Peter’s streak. He graciously accepts the offer but refuses to negotiate further on his salary—the next step in their little cat and mouse game. Peter is suspicious, but before he can question Jojen’s behavior, one of their lookouts comes barging in.

“The popo are here! I repeat: the popo are here!”

Madness ensues.

The lost boys rampage over the warehouse like derange monkeys, swinging from crate to box and box to crate. Their survival instincts are not overwhelmed by their fear of Peter, or perhaps Peter is the cause of their hysteria because the teenagers latch onto the drugs and began cart it into the trucks in record time. Marching footsteps become an earthquake—Joen can tell the police were drawing near. The rest of the boys grab the remains and start hiding the coke within their bodies, one or two stuffing bags into random orifices. When the last of the amounts are ready to go, the steel doors slams open.

“Police! Put your hands in the air!”

Peter, in response, shouts the following words right before the rain of bullets fell through. “Operation human shield, motherfuckers!”

The bullets fly. Peter grabs a nearby runner and uses him to take the rubber bullet in the chest. He uses the kid as a cover on his way to the entrance. The poor boy is no more than a lump of marinated meat, made tender by two more rubber poundings and a tranquilizer dart. As Jojen ducks and rolls to a nearby crate, he notices several other senior members—Felix, for example—are also grabbing a junior party for protection.

Huh. Operation Human Shield.

“Run! Run! Run!” Peter orders. The lucky members manage to make their way outside, with one or two strays getting caught. Peter throws his shield at the policemen; Jojen uses the distraction to get to the doorway. He dashes towards his car, and just as he is about to leave, Peter rips open the passenger seat and hops in.

“Drive, Jojen! Now!” Jojen is tempted to park out of spite. The thought of arriving home in handcuffs dissuades him.

“You weren’t going to tell me about Operation Human Shield?” Jojen asks. His control is on the verge of collapse. He steps on the accelerator before Peter can have a chance to put on his seatbelt.

“Fuck!” Peter’s head bangs against the window. He is about to face Jojen, but his cousin makes another sharp turn, and he lurches forward. Peter grabs his throat; Jojen steps on the breaks. “Do that again; I dare you.”

Challenge accepted. Jojen removes his foot and returns to the other pedal. Without so much as glancing at the street, he drives straight into open traffic. Peter is just as mad as he is and the two have a standoff of balls with their lives on the line. Jojen, who is observing his surroundings, sees the cars get out his way. It won’t be long until they drive head first into an unlucky vehicle, especially not with the fact that their vehicle is swerving out of control. His hands are not on the wheel. Jojen’s foot is still on the accelerator. As they draw dangerously close to a red BMW, Peter clenches his
jawn. Finally, he lets go of Jojen to give the teenager an opportunity to save both their hides. Jojen latches onto the steering wheel and returns to a steady pace. He hears the cars honking and the distant sound of sirens. They need to get off the street.

“I can’t believe you came up with that plan,” Jojen tells him. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me. What the fuck? Operation Human Shield?”

“Henry picked out the name,” Peter informs. “And it was common sense. Police shootouts happen all the time in this business and bullet proof vests are uncomfortable. Plus, giving them to the youngins seemed like a waste of funds. Gets them scared, too.”

“I could have gotten killed.”

“Stop being a drama queen, they were rubber bullets,” Peter says. The cops used them whenever they infiltrated one of Peter’s jobs. That was the best part about using kids for his gang. “And it’s not like I betrayed you.”


“If I meant to betray you, I would have made you a shield in ‘Operation Human Shield,’” Peter points out. “Instead, I choose someone else as my bullet buffer. And he was smaller than you, so much less to work with. I put myself in greater danger for you. And here you are, berating me because you maybe could have taken a bullet or two? Selfish, Jojen, utterly selfish. If anybody should be offended, it’s me. Where’s my sympathy for dragging another kid into the line of fire?”

“You’re a saint.” Jojen rolls his eyes. “Doesn’t change the fact you didn’t tell me!”

Peter sighs. “Listen, it’s no big deal. Only the most senior members knew, and you’re a freelancer. Nothing personal. I wasn’t sure if I could trust you.”

“We’re family, you asshole.”

“Okay, there you go again, playing the family card.”

Jojen fights the urge to scoff indignantly. Just hours ago, Peter played the ‘family card’ to do this stupid mission. He tightens his grip on the wheel and tries to get onto an emptier road. His phone rings and he assumes it's Bran, wondering where he is.

“It’s an unknown number. You want me to pick it up?”

Jojen furrows his brow. He racks his head for a possible caller and receives nothing. “Yeah, hang up if it’s a telemarketer.” Peter answers and puts the caller on speakerphone.

A chill runs down his spine when he hears the voice.

“Hello Jojen, how’s your day been? Should I call later? You seem busy.”

The saccharinity of the voice is thick enough to turn him immobile. Chills run down his spine; a sense of numbness overwhelms him. With a deep breath, he smiles—tight and false. He is using his body to convince his mind that everything is fine.

“I’m quite well, Sansa. Tell me, what do I owe this call?”

“Nothing in particular. I was just thinking about you.”

The sirens in the background are getting louder. Jojen steps on the peddle to keep the distance.
“Really? I’m flattered and terrified at the same time.” His nonchalance sounds fake, even to his ears. “Should I be worried that your precious Sandor will come after me?”

“Of course not. But funny you should mention him.” Sansa gives a little laugh—far more real than Jojen’s smile. She is genuinely amused and more than a little vengeful. “He was visiting a friend near the docks, and he swore he saw you. He would have said ‘hi,’ but he thought you looked busy, so he called me instead. Reminded me that I owed you a gift. Did you like it?”

Oh, his devious, beautiful, red-headed friend.

“How thoughtful of you, but it saddens me to say I didn’t receive it. There was someone waiting for me at home so I left before it was delivered.”

Sansa hums in delight. Jojen bites his lips to hold back his laughter. Sansa is so smug; she has no clue that her brother is in his bed, washing Jojen’s cheap sheets with his luxurious scent. “Oh well, I guess I’ll try again next time.”

“Don’t be so sure there’s going to be a next time, Sansa.”

“Oh, I’m sure there will be, Jojen. Sandor has a lot of friends in those pools you dip your toes in and all it takes is for a little ripple to drown. Your probation relies on good behavior, doesn’t it?”

“You’re just begging me to talk to your parents, aren’t you? Tell them about your gift-wrapping skills.”

“See, I figured you might bring that up,” Sansa interrupts. “But see, I realized that we have an unspoken agreement about the matter. You don’t go to my parents about me and I don’t send them after you. This… gift… is a grey area.”

“You know I’m going to have to retaliate.”

“I figured it’d be on your mind.” Sansa smiles. “But you won’t hurt me, Jojen. Not while Sandor is by my side. All you can do is to try not to get seen next time. I might just have to send another man in uniform after you—a postman, of course.”

“Because you want to deliver a gift,” Jojen mocks.

“Yes,” she says and then there is a pause. “Have a good afternoon, Jojen. Keep an eye out.”

Sansa hangs up. Jojen wants to scream at the ceiling in rage. He composes himself as always, pondering on the best course of revenge that does not involve hurting her—physically.

Peter speaks up. “That’s Sansa Stark, right?”

“Yeah.”

“The sister of your boytoy?”

“The sister of my boyfriend.”

Peter nods absentmindedly. “Seems like she isn’t okay with you dating her little brother.”

“It is not her decision to be okay about.” Jojen keeps on driving. “What does it matter? You’re the one who set us up together.”

“I suppose you’re right. Besides, I’m no stranger to forbidden romances.” The sirens drift into
muteness and for a second Jojen feels safe. While he is lulled into tranquility, he barely notices his cousin sneaking over and unbuckling his seatbelt. When he does catch him, Jojen asks, “Why are you unbuckling my seatbelt?”

“No reason,” Peter answers as he unlocks the car door. “But you really should have told me about the target on your back. I could have been shot. I could have gotten killed.” Those are the last words Jojen hears before he is shoved out of the car like a puppy in suburbia. Jojen tumbles out of the street, nearly gets hit by a car or two, rolls underneath a truck, and lands on the side of the road. He moves his hand just when it is about to be run over and drags it through his hair. Thank goodness they are England because there is no sun. There is never any sun.

***

Yoren and Benjen are driving to the Stark estate when they see a wayward teenager walking in the same direction. From their view of his back, they notice a series of scars and bruises, as if the young man had gotten into a fight with the pavement. They drive closer to him. While the boy looks down, minding his own business, Yoren catches a glimpse of his face.

“Fucking hells, it’s Jojen Reed.”

“What?” Benjen stares out the window. “You’re right. What do we do? Should we grab him?”

Yoren swears at him. “Benjen, we’re cops.”

“They’ll never suspect us.”

Yoren ignores his partner. “He looks like he’s going somewhere. Wonder why he’s walking on the open street.”

“Maybe his car broke down or he lost his ride?”

“Maybe.”

While they follow him, Jojen snaps his head in their direction. The men jump. To their disbelief, Jojen begins to walk towards them.

“Play it cool, Stark. This is our chance. We can have him eating out of the palm of our hands.”

“We have more time for questioning if he gets in the car,” Benjen whispers. “It’d be easy. You’re good at picking children off the street.”

“For the last time, I was trying to bring your niece home—Benjen, he’s coming closer!”

Jojen knocks on their glass window. They jump. Benjen shares a look with his partner before rolling his window down.

“Can I help you, sir?”

“Ah yes, I’m sorry to bother you but my car broke down and it’s a bit of a walk from where I live. I think we’re going in the same direction. Can I trouble you for a ride?”

The men marvel at their fortune. Yoren speaks first. “No problem. Hop on in.”

Jojen complies to the order. He smiles, somewhat amused that his latest excursion inside a cop’s car is upon his request and unlike the last time, he is not wearing handcuffs. The day is looking up for him.
“So, do you have a name, kid?”

“It’s Jojen, Jojen Reed.”

“Of course it is,” Benjen mutters from the passenger seat.

“What?”

“He means it is a good name. Jojen,” Yoren clears up. “Not the sort of name a serial killer would have. And we’re not saying you’re a serial killer just because you are hitchhiking a ride. Not all hitchhikers are serial killers.”

“I am not a serial killer,” Jojen agrees, rather amused.

“Sounds like something a serial killer would say,” Benjen mutters. Jojen laughs at the joke and Yoren laughs harder and Benjen does not laugh as hard because by then, the laugh will have sound forced. When the laughter dies down, they are left with uncomfortable silence. Yoren cracks his knuckles dramatically and prepares for an impromptu interrogation. He ignores the exasperated look coming from his partner’s eyes.

“So, about your car, have you called a tow-truck yet?” Yoren starts out, casual as a pigeon eating chicken.

“My phone died,” Jojen explains. “Couldn't call a truck or a cab for that matter.” Wouldn't be able to afford it, either way. "Though, on the plus side, I don’t think I’ll be needing it much. Had a bit of a row with my boss.”

“Hope it didn’t turn too violent,” Benjen says, hoping to deviate from Yoren’s plans.

“Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Do you get into fights often?”

“More than I care to admit,” Jojen confesses. “I’m hoping to turn a new leaf soon. Today was a real eye-opener.”

“Oh?” Yoren latches onto the clue. “Anything happen recently? Say, two nights ago around 2:00 AM?”

“No, I was at home, talking to my boyfriend. He and I—we’re really getting serious and I don’t want him to have to carry all the baggage I have. Guess it’s true what they say: love changes you.”


Jojen pauses. “That would certainly be eye-opening.”

“Do you like dogs?”

Jojen thinks of Summer and his luxurious fur and the smile he brings to Bran’s face. “Sure, but I like my boyfriend’s dog the most. Don’t have any of my own, though.”

“Have you ever taken that dog out? Hunting?”

“He’s a service dog,” Jojen informs. “The sweetest disposition I’ve ever seen on an animal.”

“Oh, so you wouldn’t take him out in the middle of the night to go hunting.”
“No…I’ve never thought about it.”

Yoren winks at Benjen. Benjen rolls his eyes. He interrupts their strange conversation to ask where the boy is going. “We forgot to ask and ended up at the station.”

“Well, unless you want to come in and give a statement,” Yoren adds.

“That’s quite alright,” Jojen assures, unaware of the suspicious glare Yoren is giving him through the mirror. He tells them his address and then moves on their way.

When they arrive at the Stark estate, Jojen gets out of the car. He goes to the driver’s window and apologizes for his rudeness. “I’d offer you a cup of tea but I live in the guest house and it’s a bit of a walk from here. I’d hate to inconvenience you more than I already have. So all I can say is thank you.”

“The sentiment is appreciated,” Benjen tells him. Yoren is about to drive away when Jojen narrows his eyes. “I’m sorry, officers. I did not get either of your names.”

Benjen looks in the other direction. Yoren answers. “I’m Officer Yoren and this is Officer…Swan. Is there a problem?”

Jojen shakes his head and smiles. “I’m sorry, Officer Swan looked familiar. I was wondering if I offended him by forgetting. He was rather silent during our ride.”

“I think we’d remember a fine non-serial killer like yourself,” Yoren says. He shakes the boy’s hand and bids him a good day. While they drive off to the sunset, Yoren asks how he did.

Benjen raises an eyebrow. “You were about as smooth as chunky peanut butter.”

***

When Jojen returns to the house, Bran is reading a book upside down and the room is cleaner than when he left. Jojen does not appreciate the secrecy but his drugs are hidden and there’s an explanation for everything out in the open and more than a few lies for the secrets locked away. Bran drops the book when Jojen announces his arrival and he beams at Jojen—smiles like Jojen is the morning of Christmas and he’s a child guilty of opening his presents the day before. Jojen considers pushing him for details, reassuring that he loves him even when the younger boy snoops around his room; thus, guaranteeing that while Jojen can keep secrets from him, Bran will never be able to do the same. After today’s police bust, he decides to ignore the lies of omission and focus on the honest truth. He has tomorrow to confront Bran’s behavior.

“I missed you so much,” Jojen confesses as soon as he crawls onto the bed.

Bran blushes. Though guilt gently haunts his face, Jojen reminds him that their love is infinite. He kisses him deeply. Bran moans and kisses back. They indulge for a few minutes, taking short breaks for air before finding each other again.

When they part, Jojen delivers one lingering kiss on his forehead. “Sorry, our date ended so soon.” He comforts Bran with the knowledge that his absence will no longer be an issue. “I think I quit, or maybe got sacked. I’m not too sure.”

Bran nods, not able to look Jojen in the eye after his arousing make-out session. “It’s fine. But it is getting dark—I should go.”

“Yeah,” Jojen agrees half-heartedly. He gets up from the bed to prepare the wheelchair. When he
finishes dragging it to the bed, he pauses from lifting Bran to position. “Hey, can I ask for a favor?”

“Anything,” Bran promises sweetly.

Ah, fuck, Bran is too good for him. Jojen leans in and gives Bran another kiss. The younger boy purrs into his lips. When they part, Jojen smiles wistfully. “I...I’ve been meaning to ask but can I... can I get a picture of you? An intimate picture. I know it’s a bit forward, but I’d like something to remember you by on those cold, lonely nights.” Jojen presses his hand against Bran’s thigh. Bran feels nothing but he does blush at the offer.

“What did you have in mind?” He asks, not able to refuse Jojen’s gorgeous voice and smothering eyes.

Jojen smiles. “Just a simple gift from you to me.”

***

Sansa is celebrating her victory in Sandor’s bathtub, lounging in the bubbles with Sandor’s chest pressed against her back. While she relaxes against his muscled arms, she sighs in pleasure. This is the life; this is her future in New York or London or Paris—wherever the gods take her; this is where she is meant to be. Her dream is shattered when her phone vibrates.

“Don’t pick it up,” Sandor growls.

Sansa sighs. “I have to; it might be important. Mother has been going on nonstop about us packing for Arya’s performance.”

“When are you leaving again?”

“Tomorrow night,” Sansa sighs. “At least I’ll get to visit my schools.” She takes her phone and puts in the password. The image on the phone causes her to drop it in the tub.

“What’s the matter, little bird?”

Sansa says nothing.

“Sansa?”

Sansa remains frozen solid.

Sandor fishes out the phone from the tub. He adds in Sansa’s password and the picture is the first thing he sees. His eyes widen. “Sansa—”

"I’ll kill him."

"Sansa, you should stay calm—.""

“I am going to fucking kill him!” The wolf lets out her howl in the form of a bloodcurdling scream. Sandor throws the phone against the wall in hopes of salvaging what’s left of his girlfriend’s sanity. He knows the gesture is for nothing. No one can truly recover from seeing their little brother’s anus.
Due to my inability to read, I ended up deleting my Tumblr account when I meant to delete my blog. Oh well! My mistake was for the best. I applaud people for being able to withstand Tumblr’s environment because the toxicity was intense. I’ll return eventually but for now, no more Tumblr until I grow a thicker skin. Sigh. Sometimes, you just have to cut off the balls to keep the beast from growing.

So, without my Tumblr, I have to take requests the old fashion way. If you desire something, please write it in the comment section. Once I finish Mama’s Boys, the “time slot” will be filled with one-shots or short fics. I already have a Willas/Jon in mind—which involves a masquerade and hallway sex, and possibly a Rhaegar/Jon—which is up for debate.

This chapter is not early but it is not late either. I finished this at 11:35 PM Hawaii time. So yes, I am recovering from my day-late status.
When Howland arrives at Ned’s office, a pack of lagers in hand and a sensuous sway of the hips, he announces he has two questions for the man. "And you must answer them, or I'll be terribly upset and never forgive you." It’s twenty minutes past five and Ned is expected home by six; six-thirty at the latest. Ned knows he should postpone their meeting; Howland has a habit of stealing time under his nose, yet he could never resist Howland’s flair. He makes no attempt to escape, submitting to the thrall of Howland’s presence and the seduction of a good lager. The brunet walks over to him and sits on his desk, crossing one leg over the other. It reminds Ned of those stag films Robert watches, the one in memory is the young secretary desperate for a raise. He sips his bottle in amusement.

Howland pouts and pats him on the head with the cool bottle. “Pay attention, I am interrogating you.”

Ned chuckles. “Yes, your two questions.”

“Well first, you need to explain to me how, after all these years and five children, you are still the sexiest man I’ve ever laid eyes on.” Howland plays with the buttons on Ned’s shirt. “I swear; you have the body of men half your age.”

“Money helps,” Ned answers dryly. “And a state of the art gym that receives thousands of dollars in upgrades every five years.”

“You rich people and your extravagances.” Howland teases before directing his attention to Ned’s hair. The length is the one thing besides his gorgeous, bulging muscles that make him look like an outlaw and not a CEO.

A frown threatens to mire Ned’s lips. “Does it make you uncomfortable when I talk about money?”

“Because I have so little?” Howland teases. “No, I like it when you talk about your purchases. Makes me see what kind of things interest you—thought it was cute when you bought all those small airplanes.”

“Robert made fun of me for months when he found out.”

“In all fairness, you called yourself a pilot. You even joined a club. It was like you wanted to get bullied.”

“Jon Arryn said that’s what we’re supposed to call ourselves,” Ned defends. “And I didn’t get bullied.”

“Because Robert beat up anybody who tried. All they had to do was make one snide comment, and he’d hear it; made them eat lunch through a straw for weeks. No matter how popular he was, he wanted everyone to know that Ned Stark, short, boring, stick in the mud Stark, was his best friend. People thought it was so weird." Howland chuckles. "That is until you joined the rugby club together and gained a hundred pounds of muscle. You could have spoken Klingon, and there wouldn’t have been a dirty look in sight.”

“My brother made a lot of homophobic remarks, though.” Ned sighs. “Especially about me and Robert. And you and me. And you and the entire school.”
“Your brother went to prison. The list of things he can judge me on is laughably short.” Howland shrugs. “Besides, we went to an all-boys school in the eighties. Insults about sexual preferences were customary. And they all shut up after I slept with them.” Howland giggles. “Those were some fun times. I miss being the prettiest thing around.”

“You still are,” Ned offers. “Jory’s jaw dropped when he saw you walking to my office. I had to reassure him that you were my friend and not an escort. He was rather disappointed that he couldn’t get your number. Or rates.”

Howland recalls a man in his twenties with longish hair and a nervous glitch. Howland smiled at him —the same smile he uses when he is hooking a wealthy male client and wonders if he should have let the child off easy with a nod.

“Well, if I ever decide to change professions, you’ll be the first to know.” Howland pecks Ned on the cheek. “And you can tell that lovely young man I am open for business.”

Ned shakes his head. “I hope it never comes to that.”

“Why not?” Howland asks playfully. “I’ll even let you have the first taste. On the house.”

As always, Ned takes Howland’s words as a joke. He declines Howland’s offer with a faux apology about being too busy to invest in the Reed’s services. Howland sighs, the same sigh he always gives whenever Ned rejects him. Nonetheless, he chooses not to dwell on his disappointment. One of the reasons he adores Ned is his honor.

Since their conversation drops Ned’s defenses, Howland attacks. He takes advantage of the atmosphere to get off the desk and skip behind his friend. He moves his hands to Ned’s broad shoulders and grinds into the tension. Howland bites back a moan when his palms touch Ned’s body. No stranger to Howland’s skinship, Ned leans back.

“I must say, I love how firm your body is. Looking at it is enough to give me a hard-on but the feel of it…” Howland sighs in pleasure. “Just the best. You had the greatest cock in the school, too. No stranger to Howland’s skinship, Ned leans back.

“It’s normal,” Howland lies. His nonchalance is Oscar worthy. “Guys look at other guys in the shower all the time. There’s nothing wrong with a little staring.” He adds that Ned was never interested in being ‘normal.’ “You were so obsessed with Catelyn Tully that nothing ever interested you.” Howland laughs to himself. “I was so jealous of her. Catching your eye like that.”

Ned is about to reply when Howland massages into a particularly tight spot and Ned’s entire body loosen. He moans. “Gods, that’s good.”

Howland bends down and whispers in Ned’s ear. “I can be better,” he offers as he slips his hands down to Ned’s chest and runs his fingers up and down his torso. Howland licks his lips. He could spend all night playing Ned’s abs like a xylophone.

Meanwhile, Ned wonders about Howland’s second question. He remains oblivious to Howland’s sexual harassment. “Anyways, as lovely as your visit is, I don’t want to keep Cat waiting. She’s fixing dinner and worries when I’m not home by 6:30. I was hoping to catch her in an apron—she
has the loveliest collection, matches her hair and eyes. I wish you could see her.” Ned sighs in delight. “So what was your other question?”

“Hmm?”

“You said you had two questions to ask me. I hope it was as nice as the first.”

Howland’s eyes snap open; he backs away with his hands on his side and curses Ned’s sexiness. The man has a habit of caging his self-control and letting his yearnings run wild. Simultaneously, he swears at Ned’s faithfulness. Of the ninety-eight percent of spouses who remain faithful, Howland had to have a hard-on for the minority.

“Isn’t it drafty in here?” Howland asks as he leaves Ned’s side.

“No, but since I’m on the way out, you’re welcome to raise the temperature.”

“Howland, what are you asking me to do?”

“Thanks.” Howland walks over to the thermostat and turns up the heat. Once it is high enough, he undoes three buttons of his shirt and wishes for the best.

“So back to my second question,” Howland says. He saunters back to Ned’s table, bending over his desk like some tawdry hooker. He's happy he decided to sport his nipple ring; he can see the gleam on the vase. “Why is it that in the entire month I’ve lived on your estate, we’ve only seen each other a total of five times? Doesn’t seem right. If anything, I should be catching you in your bathrobe every day of the week.”

“I don’t have a bathrobe. I just tie a towel around my waist—Catelyn says she prefers the view.”

“I bet she does,” Howland mutters. The horrible thing is that Howland likes Catelyn, he does, and she is a wonderful wife to Ned. But there’s a part of him who knows that if he was in her shoes, Ned Stark wouldn’t be able to get out of bed each morning because Howland would have used him up like a nun used a vibrator.

Quite frankly, it isn’t fair.

“You’re changing the topic, Ned,” Howland teases. He sees a sweat drip from his friend’s neck and wipes it off with his finger before licking it clean. “Why haven’t we’ve seen each other?”

“We see each other,” Ned denies. “We went drinking with Robert and I took you out to meet potential clients—”

“Which I am grateful for but that’s not what I meant.” Howland tries to smile, but the looming reality hits him when he realizes he’s about to ask for his son’s forgiveness through the father of the victim. He wonders when the notion became unsettling. Then, he realizes that his conscience, of all curses, is acting up. “Ned, we can’t keep going on like this. This miasma of negativity is too thick to breathe and when we crouch down to avoid it, we end up crushing on those eggshells we walk on.”

“I am amazed by your ability to spew poetry and porn from the same mouth.”

“Ned,” Howland reprimands—though his smile resurfaces from the man’s attempt at humor. “My son’s probation is about to end. He is applying for university and when the scandal is revealed—because these things always come back, one way or another—people will talk. They will turn to your family to figure out what the appropriate reaction is and since this is England, people of my standing are not necessarily favored.”

“Howland, what are you asking me to do?”
“Give him a chance to apologize. Directly to Bran. I know it’s selfish.” Howland closes his eyes to make a quick prayer. He is doing a dirty thing, appealing to Ned’s honor; the former soldier loves a redeemed man, a man who can confess his sins and walk the path of righteousness after enduring a trial of fire. Howland, in truth, does not know what Jojen wants; all he cares about is his son’s future, consequences be damned. For all he knows, Jojen keeps a temple in his closet dedicated to Bran and sacrifices rabbits on a full moon in his honor. The matter means little to Howland. This meeting is about restoring Jojen’s reputation and singeing off loose ends, not about being good people.

Ned speaks, “Bran doesn’t even know what happened. We never told him.”

“All the more reason to tell him now.” Howland says pointedly. “Imagine what will happen when he does hear about Jojen. If they never meet under secure circumstances, Bran will never get closure. He will live knowing that the boy who once stalked him is out in the world and may still be watching him. Now, Jojen wouldn’t do that,” Howland is quick to clarify. “But Bran doesn’t understand him. Keeping silent means you are willing to sentence him to a life of paranoia and distress. And here’s the thing,” The clincher, the thing that will may or break his deal. “One day, Bran might make the decision to meet Jojen on his own. Regardless if I tell you he is cured, there’s a part of you that is not convinced. I don’t blame you for that. But if they are bound to meet, I am offering you a reconciliation on your terms.”

Howland’s point is valid. Jojen and Bran are bound to meet at least once this summer. He and Catelyn cannot afford a repeat of history. The only thinking keeping him from agreeing are his qualms. There is something about Howland’s proposition that makes him uncomfortable. He decides to stall until he figures out what it is. “Howland, I understand what you’re saying but this isn’t the best time for that.”

“Ned,” Howland says seriously—the most severe tone he’s taken in his entire life, sans Jojen’s trial. “I adore you and I trust your judgment. But Jojen’s restraining order is finished. He can contact Bran if he wishes. He asked me to come here, not as a courtesy, but because he wants to ask you for the right. And frankly,” Howland has practiced his stare all night. When he looks into Ned’s eyes, he can see his reflection and he is proud; proud to have conveyed the severity of his statement. “This isn’t your apology to accept and it certainly isn’t your forgiveness to give.”

The last statement is the nail in the coffin. Ned stands up. He takes the remote and turns off the thermostat while setting the office into a close. Technology is amazing, Howland wonders as the lights dim. He hears the speaker announce that a total shutdown will activate in five minutes.

“Arya has a performance this weekend. It’s opening on Friday so we’re leaving tonight to make the Saturday show. We want to avoid embarrassing her. I…will talk to Catelyn tonight about setting up a meeting between the two. You have my word.”

Ned’s word is better than gold. Howland embraces his longtime friend in thanks.

“You don’t know how much this means to me.”

“I do,” Ned responds because he does. He loves his children as much as Howland does and understands the depths of a father’s love. Ned caresses Howland’s face in a manner that makes the other man swoon. Howland asks as he fiddles with the hem of Ned’s shirt if his former classmate would like to seal their deal with a kiss.

Ned never fails to interpret flirtation as a joke. He laughs in humor and Howland laughs in a prize unclaimed and they continue laughing until they walk out the office. When he enters his car, the clock reads fifteen minutes past six. The day is not over and yet Howland is satisfied for progress made. He has sold his artwork, bought groceries, and negotiated with Ned over Jojen’s redemption.
Howland hums in delight. Jojen is going to be ecstatic when he learns that he'll get to meet Bran Stark—without the latter being unconscious.

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Howland regrets his jinx because the misfortune he is hit with can only be described as a curse. He cannot fathom how his son—who is brilliant in every definition, who has won awards for his intellect and was labeled, gods, does Howland hate that word, a genius—can be so fucking stupid.

“You are supposed to be a smart kid!” Howland yells, raising his voice to a height he never knew possible. He sounds hysterical to his own ears but for an outside audience, is no louder than a parent using their ‘outdoor voice’ for when they are frustrated with their children. “I know you’re smart! We had you tested! The doctors all said you were smart but I didn’t believe them! Hells, I wanted to get a fourth opinion but I thought four was an evil number so I didn’t! And now, I realize that I should have gotten you tested again because then I wouldn’t be so surprised when you pull shit like this!”

“Father—”

“Silence, child of mine!” Howland reverts to his dramatism whenever he is stressed. “You have disgraced my efforts and now I must seek a suitable retribution.”

Jojen winces. Near the doorway is Bran Stark, waddling in his wheelchair while looking guiltier than a boy of his innocence should. His presence is the latch holding together Howland’s sanity. Howland pauses his lecture to meet the Stark. The boy quivers and shrinks as he draws near.

Howland puts on a serene smile full of warmth and seduction—the same smile he used on the boy’s father. He hopes the young boy’s youthful innocence will allow him to disregard the sensuous nature of the grin because he cannot turn that off—not that Ned Stark notices it.

“Oh sweetheart, forgive me for scaring you. It’s just that you’re not supposed to be here. Jojen knows you’re not supposed to be here.” Howland shoots Jojen a bitter glare. “But he’s an idiot so he doesn’t care about how much trouble he can get just by looking at you.”

Bran hastily nods. He hopes Jojen’s father realizes that he’s nodding to the ‘trouble’ part and not the ‘idiot’ part. “I know! Jojen told me everything.”

Howland pauses. “He did?” He turns around to see Jojen’s sigh. Howland watches as his son nods, signifying his full discretion towards the Stark.

“I told him everything.” Jojen smiles and Howland’s heart skips a beat at seeing his happiness again. “We’re dating. I didn’t want our relationship to start off on a lie.”

If Howland is half as stupid as Jojen is being right now, he might have believed him. But instead of calling Jojen out on the lie, he focuses on the saving grace his son handed to him. Howland may not be able to quantify particles in his head, but he has spent his entire life cleaning up the messes of a depressed wife and a wayward son.

“Bran, I understand you are fourteen?”

There’s more hesitance in his answer. Howland sighs in relief. The boy knows he is a boy in the eyes of the law; he recognizes the danger in answering his age. “Yes, sir.”

“Jojen is seventeen. Now, I’m sure you are smart enough to know that at fourteen, you are underage and this relationship is illegal.”
“We didn’t do anything!” Bran confesses. “Nothing! I mean, we kissed. And yeah, we’ve done stuff but not that kind of stuff. All our clothes were on.”

“That doesn’t matter. If you’re dating, people are going to assume there’s been sexual activity. While there’s no way to prove it, there’s also no way to disprove it, either. Jojen can get into a lot of trouble for dating you. He can go to jail.”

The haunting reality crashes Bran’s daydreams. Before Jojen can comfort him, Bran speaks too fast. “I don’t want to break up with him,” Bran whispers; his voice is so soft Howland barely catches his concession.

Howland feels for him, but he has to protect his son first. “I know. And you don’t have to,” Howland reassures. He sighs when he sees the relief on Bran’s face. “But you need to be more discreet. If I caught you coming out of the house, who’s to say one of the groundskeepers won’t? Or a gardener? Or a maid? They’ll tell your parents and they will ship you away to some boarding school and Jojen…well, Jojen has a record. And he’s almost of age. Prison is a major possibility for him.”

Bran chokes. Jojen is desperate to comfort him but Howland sends him a look to keep quiet. “Bran, do you care about my son?”

Bran nods eagerly. Even in shaky uncertainty, the boy smiles like his father; there’s no deception in his grin and Howland’s heart breaks for the loss of innocence.

“I know Jojen loves you. He’s made that very clear in the past.” The last note is almost an accusation. “There’s nothing he wouldn’t do to protect you. Including taking the fall for this relationship if someone finds out. If that happens, it won’t be a case of ‘you fell in love.’ The media will paint him as a rapist and a pedophile. You will be nothing more than a victim and he won’t fight those lies. He will do anything to spare you grief, including letting you go.” The notion is false but effective. Jojen will chase Bran to the ends of the earth, regardless of a life sentence. Nonetheless, the guilt on Bran’s face is not only delicious but effective. Jojen narrows his eyes at his father in both anger and appreciation. The man is a master of manipulation and he’s turning Bran into something so pliable, he might as well be putty. “Bran, can you live with that? Can you live with the knowledge that you sent Jojen to jail?”

Bran’s breathing becomes harsh. Once his panic is fully set in, Howland becomes the good cop to his bad, and the healer to his disease. “Please, don’t take this as a threat.” Howland’s words are not a threat; it is the warning before the bomb is dropped. “You make my son so happy. I won’t keep you guys apart but I am concerned. For that reason, I’ll do everything in my power to help.” Jojen almost snorts. His father keeps piling the bodies on top of Bran and his lover is caving under the pressure. “But I can’t do this alone. I need you to promise to protect my son.”

Bran agrees without question. Howland smiles and kisses him on the forehead. He wishes the boy goodnight and tells Jojen to send him away, close enough to the estate that he can get there safely but far enough not to be seen. Jojen understands the distance, having mastered it weeks ago. Despite the trauma his father put his boyfriend through, Jojen is thankful. Bran clutches onto his hand in devotion and the assertion of their relationship makes him warm. He mouths a ‘thank you’ to his father. Howland catches it and rolls his eyes. He’ll tell Jojen when he returns to make it up to him with a university acceptance and a decent scholarship—the parental thing to say.

Meera comes home shortly. She sees Howland yelling—or however close he can to yelling—and asks what is going on.
“Do we have to tell her?” Jojen asks.

Howland crosses his arms. He uncrosses them when he catches a reflection of himself in the mirror. “We’re telling her.”

“Telling me what?” Meera puts her bag on the ground and sits beside Jojen, effectively offering her support while keeping him cornered.

His sister is so clever, Jojen praises inwardly.

“Jojen has been contacting Bran.”

“What?”

“They’re dating,” Howland adds. “Apparently. I talked to Bran and that’s the story they’re going with.”

“What?” Meera grabs Jojen by the collar. “Jojen, he is fourteen years old! Meeting him alone begs suspicion but his age? Dating him? Do you know how much trouble you can get into for just looking at him? What the hell were you thinking?”

“That maybe my sister would be more grateful I wasn’t dealing drugs?” Jojen shrugs. He is doing both, but he figures Meera deserves the deception.

“Jojen, you can go to jail if the Starks find out! I’m surprised the cops aren’t here yet.”

“Bran and I aren’t exactly shouting it from the rooftops.”

“Fuck, Jojen. This isn’t a joke.” Meera fights to urge to pull at her hair. She swears the pressure is making her frizz more than normal. “He could tell someone. You never know. He’s young. All it takes is one little fight, he overreacts, and you are screwed.”

Howland tries to calm down his daughter by saying he’s taken care of the issue. “I’ve spoken to Bran. He’s aware of the consequences of his actions if he were to tell.”

Meera’s head snap towards her father. “What did you say?”

Howland shrugs.

“I told him that if someone finds out about their relationship, Jojen would most likely go to jail and he’d be responsible.”

Meera’s jaw drops. Howland wonders about the incredulous look on her face when his daughter starts yelling.

“You emotionally manipulated a young boy into lying for you! You made it his fault if this goes wrong!”

“That’s the point of blaming the victim. Nothing else keeps them silent.”

Meera groans; she turns to Jojen to see what he has to say about the situation but the younger male shrugs. She throws her hands up in the air. “This is why Jojen has issues, dad! You cannot keep condoning his criminal behavior!”

“Bran says they haven’t been intimate. See what I just did? I took Bran’s word because I know Jojen lies. Does that sound like someone who condones criminal behavior?”
“In all fairness, Bran chose to be with me. I’m not forcing him to do anything. Plus, I’ve told him the truth.”

“You and I both know you haven’t told him everything,” Meera accuses. "You haven't even told me everything. The only person you tell anything to is that damn psychiatrist of yours."

They continue having a row on the matter until the doorbell rings. The Reeds freeze up. No one makes a move, each looking at each other to confirm whether or not it is an uninvited guest. When no one offers a suggestion, Jojen gets up.

“What are you doing?” Meera hisses. She has not moved a muscle since the visitor arrived.

“We’re in the living room. They won’t see us anyways so I don’t understand why we’re standing still. Secondly, I’m going to see who it is at the door.”

“It could be the Starks with pitchforks.”

“Then I won’t let them in.”

“No!” Meera snaps. She walks past Jojen and tells him to sit down. “I am getting the door. Starks are like dogs; they can sense impure thoughts and we cannot afford either of you projecting your illicit fantasies.”

“Too late for that,” Howland mutters.

Meera glares. “At least I can play dumb. Both of you keep me in the dark enough for that.”

With the decision made, Meera goes up to the door and looks through the peephole. The image through the lens leaves her confused and cursing.

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Sansa slams the door when she comes home, announcing her presence to her mother and the dead. Her arrival is a day earlier than expected so Catelyn suspects the worst: bloodshot eyes and tears turning her mascara into watercolor paint. Instead, Sansa blazes into the kitchen, burning hotter than her hair. Catelyn does not have time to ask her what happened before her daughter demands they bake a cake.

Catelyn watches her daughter shove the maids aside. She grabs bowls and pots and rolling pins—the child has never cracked an egg in her life and there’s utter bewilderment on her face when she takes out a whisk.

“Sansa, what is this about?”

Sansa analyzes a bottle opener and narrows her eyes. “I want to bake a cake. What is this?”

Catelyn takes the device before her daughter kills herself. “Why do you want to bake a cake? Do you want extra dessert?”

“No,” Sansa denies. She drops another stray contraption on the table. “I was thinking about baking one of the Reeds. As, well, a peace treaty.”

Catelyn takes a moment to herself to get over her shock. “…the Reeds?” She rushes over to her daughter to check her temperature. “Sansa, are you sick? Has the man you’ve been seeing given you an STD? Sweetheart, I know I told you that pregnancy scares are a great way to weed out weakness
in a man, but that doesn’t mean you remove protection altogether. You always get the man tested. That, or date a virgin. I mean, I know it is hard work but damn, are the results worth it. You can teach them to do anything you want.”

“Mother!” Though Sansa’s blood still boils from her battle with Jojen, the horror of her mother’s words pierces through her concentration. “I’m fine.”

Catelyn snaps out of her rant. “Right, this is about the Reeds. You are not baking a cake. You are not giving them anything.” Catelyn returns to making dinner, chopping through the onions like a samurai with a vengeance. The other maids awkwardly move in place but Sansa stops them. She sends them an apologetic look with a sigh.

There’s a corner in her brain that is dwelling on the fact that her mother knows she is sexually active but she shuts that corner off for her own sanity. She refers back to her original plan.

“We have two more months with them, mum. At this point, we are prolonging the unavoidable and quite frankly, the elephant in the room is taking up too much space. I'm not having it.”

Catelyn’s knife cuts through the board. Sansa’s winces but continues her speech. “As long as they live here, we are only making ourselves more miserable by evading them. I say we make the first step to becoming better people.”

Catelyn closes her eyes and sigh. “So you believe cake is going to fix things?”

“Or pie. Or any sort of pudding, really,” Sansa tells her. "I'm not going to be afraid anymore. I want Jojen Reed to understand that while I don't forgive him, I wish him the best for his recovery. He has left Bran alone and for that, I applaud him.” The last statement physically hurt to say.

Her sentiment touches Catelyn’s heart and stimulates her pride. She cannot believe she raised such an upstanding young woman. “I suppose we can make a quick red velvet cake—nothing extravagant but still delicious. I have some frosting left over from last night’s dessert. I think they’ll like it.”

Sansa brightens up. “Great! What do we need?”

“Sugar, cocoa, red food dye…” Traditionally, Catelyn makes her coloring with beet juice but she figures the Reed didn’t deserve that much of an effort. She rattles off the ingredients for Sansa to fetch. The girl stumbles through the cabinets and makes a mess of things, but Sansa is her daughter so she loves her despite her faults.

“So what do we need, like two pounds of sugar?” Sansa asks, dropping two bags onto the counter.

“Yes,” Catelyn agrees. “If your definition of becoming a better person is to give the Reeds diabetes, that is definitely the amount you should start with.”

Sansa’s face drops as she takes back one of the bags and puts it on the opposite side. Her mother is putting back the unnecessary materials and getting ready for the prime product. She cleans up a nice little workspace, even calling the maids back to help her make dinner. When Sansa is near the fridge, Catelyn calls out for some eggs—but only two. “We’re making a cake, not cooking for the Navy. Don’t overdo it, Sansa. You tend to be a bit much.”

Sansa obeys, regretting her impatience. If she had waited until tomorrow, she could have gotten Jon to teach her. While the inability to cook was a factor of their Stark genes, the desire not to learn was all Tully—namely, their mother’s ability to rip away any sort of joy that can be had in the kitchen. For some reason, the domestic sphere transformed their loving mama wolf to a shark out for blood. It was why Jon survived so well with her—he was used to being treated badly.
Unable to take the tension, Sansa makes a hasty retreat to her bedroom while her mother confects a sugar treaty. Catelyn says something about being ready in an hour. She barely notices her daughter’s departure. The timing is tight but doable for dinner. Sansa passes by her younger brother’s room on her way to her own and Bran looks so sweet, lounging on his bed without a care in the world. It isn’t until he turns over to the side that Sansa remembers the picture and almost loses her lunch.

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After the cake is finished, Sansa puts on a silver pair of heels and marches to their guest house. The first thing Meera does when she sees Sansa Stark is compliment her shoes.

“Thank you,” Sansa says as she gives the older girl a little pose. “Manolo Blahniks.”

“Of course they are.” Meera wishes she could tell Robb’s younger sister that the shoes are too much. Meera blocks the entrance instead. The younger woman is holding a delicious looking cake. By laws of etiquette, Meera has to invite her in for tea but she figures there’s no harm in prolonging the offer. After, a few minutes of awkward small talk, Sansa asks if Jojen is home.

“Why? Have you imagined he committed a crime again?”

Sansa responds with a tense smile. “No, but when he does, you’ll be the first to know. After all, who else can he trust for an alibi?”

“He doesn’t need an alibi. Just a hysterical ginger discrediting herself on the stand.”

"Or a troubled mother to help his insanity case."

Their bickering has the potential to last forever. Jojen gets up from the couch and goes to the hallway. “Ooh cake,” he says as he grabs the plate and heads into the kitchen. Sansa narrows her eyes at him and grits her teeth when he ignores her. Not even a greeting.

Meera bites her tongue before speaking. “Come in. I’ll make you some tea.”

“That’s quite alright,” Sansa rejects. She straightens up and the already tall girl is practically a giant in front of Meera. “I have dinner after this. I only wanted to drop off a cake for your family.” Sansa smiles. “I baked it myself.”

Bullshit, Meera thinks. She’s a Stark and Starks don’t cook. “You came all this way to deliver a cake?” Meera raises an eyebrow. “Is it poisoned?”

Sansa’s scoff ruins her smile. She resorts to the dignity of a hardened stare instead. “No. If anything, it is little unsweetened. But given what has happened between your family and mine’s, I figure I extend an offer of neutrality.” Sansa pauses. “Can I speak to Jojen now?”

“No,” Meera answers. “You speak to me.”

Though she is uncomfortable, Sansa puts on a brave face. She will not bow down to anyone, certainly not Meera Reed. “I’m afraid this matter is between me and him.”

“Well, if the cake is for our entire family then you might as well deliver the message to all of us. You should understand better than anyone how family sticks together.”

Sansa takes a step forward in her guest home. She corners Meera who is a good half a foot shorter than her. Meera curses her petite stature; it’s hard to look intimidating when her assailant can literally look down on her.
“You seem like a level-headed woman, Meera. Despite having Jojen as a brother and your family’s financial difficulties, you’ve managed to rise above your circumstances. I’d hate to hurt you—not after all you’ve accomplished.”

“Then don’t,” Meera snaps.

Sansa’s eyes narrow. “But your brother is dredging on dangerous territory. And I’m afraid that the law is no longer an option for me to consider—not after last time and certainly not after today.”

Today? Meera wonders. She clenches her jaw at the thought of losing her brother again and screams inwardly at whatever trouble he’s gotten himself into.

“Keep your brother in check,” Sansa orders. "Or better yet, keep him away from my brother. Because I know that he’s somehow managed to manipulate Bran into something twisted and you know that too. If memory serves, the last time you were this overprotective, it was a cover for his wrongdoing.”

“He was punished. He did his time. Anything that happens between them is none of our business.”

“As long as Bran is my little brother, it is my business,” Sansa retorts. “I will protect my little brother, just as you have, time and time again. Only this time, I have alternative means to keep him safe.” Sansa smirks. And there’s only so much you can protect him from.”

The hairs on Meera’s back rises. “Are you threatening him?”

“Was I being too vague?” Sansa mocks. "Yes, this is a threat. You—"

Without warning, Meera slams the door in her face. She rushes into the kitchen where Jojen and Howland are eating cake and drinking tea. Howland sees the panic expression on her face and mouths an order to Jojen to ‘pour.’

“What’s the matter, honey?” He asks as he walks up to her. He cradles her face in his hands. "Are you alright?"

Meera breathes a little heavier. She pulls out of his arms. “Jojen, give me your phone.”

“Why?”

“Just give it to me.”

Howland sends him a warning look and Jojen reluctantly complies. She swipes the phone from his hand and asks Jojen what would happen if she looks through his messages to Bran.

“They’re completely innocent,” he insists.

“Are you sure?”

Jojen nods.

Meera clutches onto his device and asks what would happen if she called Bran.

“He’ll tell you that he cares about me and wants to continue our relationship.”

“Do you really mean that?”

Jojen looks her deep in her eyes. “I do.”
"Can you promise to wait until he's sixteen?"

"If that's what he wants."

"Jojen!" Meera snaps.

Jojen sighs. "I will wait for however long he wants to. But I will swear not to pressure or even bring it up until he turns sixteen."

With her hands still shaking, she returns the phone back to Jojen. "Then, I believe you. I trust you. I know that no matter how many times you’ve lied to me, you are telling me the truth now." She says it like she’s trying to convince herself and not him.

Jojen takes the phone back. “What happened with Sansa?”

Meera grimaces. “Whatever war you two started. I'm in it, now.”

Howland looks back and forth at his children. He sighs. “As dramatic as that scene was, I feel like I should have said something earlier.”

“About what?”

“Well, I kind set up a reconciliation appointment through Ned Stark. Nothing is confirmed but Jojen will be able to meet Bran for an 'apology.'" Howland giggles because Jojen is far from sorry. The sound is almost maniacal. "I mean if you want to throw down with Sansa Stark then I will support you. But in my opinion, it’s a bit pointless."

Meera’s head nearly crashes onto the table.

“I fucking hate this family,” she mutters.

Chapter End Notes

One of my longest chapters and I still had to cut stuff out of my outline. :( Anyways, thank you for reading this!

Next chapter is going to have a brief moment of Willas and Olenna and the Starks go to London. Robb and Jon will get naughty. Theon and Ramsay make a reappearance with the cops. It's going to be a weird chapter.
Several hours after ending their encounters, Willas bought a ticket home. He was bound back in East Anglia on Wednesday afternoon. The Tyrell estate was bustling with flowers that day. Olenna minded her own business; she had her high tea while reading the cards sent by her grandchildren’s suitors. Her oaf of a son and his wife were at the train station, picking up her eldest grandson. Stupidity tended to make Willas smile, even in the worst of times. Margaery, her clever girl, was in the gardens vetting the candidates for her affection. She was swiping through the pictures of her phone, deleting the numbers that no longer entertained her. There were so many eligible men in the country that she was forced to widen her standards.

While Olenna finished reading an ode written by one of the Redwyne twins—her grandnephews were insufferable and slovenly, but at least they were half-decent literates—two maids arrived with more gifts. Each one was packing a floral arrangement and fruit basket.

“Who is it now?” Olenna asked. Roses and fruits. Always roses and fruits. The Tyrells owned one of the world’s largest agriculture company’s in the world, and people thought it was a good idea to gift them with things they already had.

“This is from Lambert Turnberry, and the other is from a Bayard Norcross, madam.”

Insignificant names were vying for the attentions of significant girl. Has there ever been anything more depressing? “Inspect and rearrange them with our personal floral wraps. We’ll send one to Baelor Hightower to celebrate his engagement and the other to my sister-in-law. My nephew always forgets his wife’s anniversary.”

“Shall we attach a card?”

“No, you shall send a dead body with the message ‘you will always have my heart’ carved into its chest. Yes, send a damn card.”

The maids rush off while another girl pops in. “Another delivery!” she chimed.

Olenna rolled her eyes. “We have more flowers in this room than the earth has the bees to pollinate them. Who is it now?”

“Oh, it’s from the master of the house—”

“I assure you, my son has never been the master of anything.”

The maid continues her announcement with less cheer. “It’s his daily bouquet for the lady of the house. The first one is to praise her for being especially lovely today and the second is because he ‘hoped she would be surrounded by something that could come close to her natural beauty.’”
The message made Olenna shake her head and sigh. She had to hand it to her son. The man couldn't be trusted to breathe. He did not inherit an ounce of her sense but at least no one could ever say that he did not treat his wife well. It seemed that Olenna’s discipline was not a complete failure.

Three sets of deliveries later, Olenna was prepared to throw the latest out. The men were damaged goods at this point. She was about to give the command when the faintest whiff of chocolate entered her nostrils. She ordered the hands that carry the boxes of gourmet cocoa to come forth. There was only one man with the wiles to send chocolate over flowers. She swiped the velvet card resting on top of the delicacies and saw a handwritten message—the sender had beautiful cursive; the sigil of a man with talented hands.

Slut, Olenna thought.

My darling Willas,

It comes with great pleasure and devastation for me to learn that you have become unattached. Devastation, because I know that with every heartbreak you experience, it is as if my own heart is ripping out of my chest. Though your trip did not bear the fruits you’ve toiled for, I beg you not to think your efforts were for naught. Seeing you again has sparked every visceral urge within me. Memories of our time shared flooded into my mind's eye and I replay the scenes like a lovelorn fool. I long for you, Willas. I believe I am the one who shall return the twinkle to your eyes and the smile on your glowing face.

Come back to me. My bed has been plagued with the chills of regret, and only your warmth can give me ailement. I miss the way your curly hair tangled within my fingers. How your insides were tight, hot, and how I stroked your special spot until you screamed. I remember how you begged, urging me to explode my seed inside your mouth; how your perfect, wet tongue and plump lips kissed my tip before I stretched out your throat. Most of all, I yearn for those intimate moments where we rested in each other’s arms.

Do you know when I discovered you were the missing link to our broken chain? It was years ago. Ellaria was swimming while we sat on the outside of the fountain. Your head was resting on my lap. When Ellaria raised her head above the surface of the water, you let her kiss you and held my hand as she did it. We shared something that day that I can never replace.

I will be coming to East Anglia to win back your love. I will not waver nor fail.

Your true love,

Oberyn Martel

“That is so romantic,” said one of the maids leaning over her shoulder to read.

Another girl sighed dreamily. “Oh, can you read it out loud?”

Olenna turned around to shoot them a glare. She crushed the card in her hand. “It’s filth,” she insisted. When she recognized the uncertainty on their faces, she ordered them away. “Don’t you have work to do?” The girls scurried like mice evading the family cat—a virile hunter whose meals run on the livers of the fallen. On their way out, her companion spy smacks her on the shoulder for getting them caught.

Before Olenna could think of a way to handle the situation, she heard Willas coming close.

“Grandmother, the prodigal son is home!”

If she ripped it up, Willas would discover its existence through the paper droppings. She quickly
shoved the letter into her bosom and fixed up her dress to conceal her criminality. “No need to yell, I may have cataracts, but it’ll be another ten years before they take my hearing.”

Willas laughed like a man without a broken heart. He came in and gave her a kiss on the cheek. His hands were holding bags of presents, sweets, and sweaters that people actually want and pieces of artwork from the unknowns that her son hung up because he believed it made him look cultural and distinctive. The fool in question followed their voices into the dining room. Olenna watched her daughter-in-law gasp over the newest arrangement to her name and kissed her husband senseless. Mace had been buying her flowers for all twenty years and not once does she get tired of them—or hay fever.

While they traded compliments with each other, Willas unraveled his gifts, displaying curd tarts and clotted cream and various other puddings. Olenna narrowed his eyes. The last time Willas ate so much was when he quit physical therapy to wallow in his grief like a pussy.

“Are you sure you’re okay, honey?” Alerie asked. Like her mother-in-law, she also recognized *kummerspeck* or grief bacon. Though Olenna was impressed by her insight, her brief foray into perceptiveness was not enough to change Olenna’s opinion of her. Olenna considered her the most foolish person in the room; if Mace was able to convince her to fall in love with him rather than his money, Olenna concluded that she must be simple. At least her intelligence skipped a generation.

“Hey, is that chocolate?”

Olenna stood corrected.

When Garlan comes into the room—a waifish wife in toll—he lunged onto the boxes of cacao bliss and opens a box, not noticing Willas’ surprise expression. “These are great. Willas’ ex used to send these by the pound when they were together. Who bought them?” He raised up a random piece to meet his wife’s lips. The young woman obediently chomped on the morsel and moaned in pleasure when the chocolate melted in her mouth. As soon as she swallowed, she pushed onto her tippy-toes and reaches for a kiss. The two were obscene; after three years of marriage, the couple behaved as if they were teenagers sneaking out for a quickie in the library.

Willas grabbed a box as well. Instead of eating the chocolate, he turned to Olenna and asked, “When did these arrive?”

Olenna remained calm. “Shortly before you did. I suppose he figured he had a fighting shot again.” Olenna paused, just enough to display her contempt in an academic fashion. “Do you think he could have found out about your thwarted romance?”

“Well, he did come to Yorkshire for his own business. That could be a possibility,” Willas mused. There was a small smile on his face, a glimmer of appreciation for the Martell that Olenna could not allow to prosper.

She shrugged with a perfected nonchalance. “Oh, so you've kept in contact with him?”

Willas shook his head. “No, I was preoccupied with Jon.”

Olenna thanked the Sweet Seven. “So how would he have been able to find out you left Yorkshire?”

“Well, I guess he… *spied on me.*” The waxing smile turned into a new full frown. “Of course he did.” He threw the box on the table and took a seat. “Mother, can you order the chef to fix me something to eat?”
“Of course honey,” Alerie agreed. She exited the room, leaving behind her eldest son, mother-in-law, husband, and her second oldest son in the throttles of passion with her daughter-in-law.

Olenna decided to use the opportunity to strike. “Willas, I understand you are upset, but this is not the time to remain feeble-hearted. You have to find a partner for the wedding.”

“I’m afraid I’m not interested in dating at the moment, grandmother.” He massaged his aching leg. It was his only vice in regards to traveling.

“Nonsense. This is the time you should be interested. I heard the young man you’ve been seeing is dating a Stark. The eldest Stark.”

“How do you know that?”

“I read your texts, my dear.”

“You have to stop doing that.”

“No, I don’t. I stayed married to your grandfather for over thirty years; I paid for the right to invade your privacy with monthly payments of my vagina. Let me say that while he wasn’t smart, he did have a dick as large as the stallions you breed.”

“Please stop; I don’t care if you read my texts anymore.”

“Good sex saved my marriage. It can save your relationship status,” Olenna informed. “Your father makes the bed drop to the floor, and yet your mother is still brave enough to climb on top of him. You need to get back in the game and show the world that the Tyrells have more to offer than any Stark.”

Willas shook his head. “Jon was in love with Robb Stark before he met me. I’m upset, but it’s not hostile. I don’t blame Jon or Robb. I wish them the best.”

Olenna scoffs. “Don’t be honorable, Willas. This is not the time or occasion for civility. You were a plot device to get those two together. Jon could have slipped a tenner in your pocket, blew a load on your backside, and it would still make you less cheap.”

“I don’t understand how I ended up in this conversation.”

Olenna flicked his forehead. He bit back curse; Olenna would have slapped him with a newspaper for getting out of line. “All it takes is a sliver of regret to reclaim vindication. Find someone for the wedding, Willas. Someone better. Use this,” she pointed to his head. “And this,” she patted him on the crotch. “I’ve seen you naked. The sausage you are packing is the reason I knew you didn’t sleep with that child bride—he would have never let you go if you did.”

“Grandmother, please stop.”

“Robb Stark will take him to the wedding—assuming they last that long. You need to bring someone else. You can’t possibly let this boy toy see you alone. Why, that’ll just confirm your social leprosy. You might as well kill yourself! It’ll be a lot less painful. Or humiliating.”

“Out of all your motivational speeches, this is only top twenty.”

Olenna swatted him on the head again. “We’ll find someone. Someone who can swallow the sword but still get it sharpened for dinner.” Olenna pretends to have random, ingenious idea. “How about we go see a show? There’s a performance by the Faceless Men that Tywin Lannister is funding and
there should be a plethora of eligible singles."

“That’s in London,” Willas reminded her. “I don’t think I’m ready for another trip. I still have to see my doctor for a checkup.”

“I’m sure Dr. Lomys can pencil you in today,” Olenna insisted. “We’ll make it a family trip in case you break the other leg making love. We can convince your brother to buy you a hooker to make sure everything works alright. Soon, you’ll be up and running as good as new.”

Willas sighed before agreeing. There was a scheme in the works and Willas was battered and broken down by the long trip, the break-up, the chocolates—god damn it, Oberyn—and no longer has the willpower to fight. Once he regained his strength, he could win the war. While submission guaranteed his survival, he made an attempt to prolong his defeat by opting for a compromise. “Sure, I’ll get some rest and give you my answer later.”

“No. You can make your decision now, or I can tell our men to drag you by the hind legs to London.”

“Grandmother, I am too tired to reach a reasonable consensus on the matter.”

“I am over eighty-years-old. Every day, I make decisions while seconds away from death. Fatigue is nothing.”

“If you don’t live to a hundred, I will throw myself off the roof.”

“Willas, you are going to London.” She pauses. “Loras is already there, and you can take Margaery with you. She needs to broaden her horizons.”

Willas scoffed. Margaery’s horizons include a roster of men, ranked in marriage eligibility, organized by name, and separated by wealth and inheritance. She had an entire library dedicated to the pursuit of networking. She had business partners on one shelf, potential ‘friends’ on the others—not to mention the spouses she planned to set them up with—a group of pathetic men and women who’d fallen for her but knew they never stood a chance—and on the sides were the ‘neutral parties’ she doesn’t wish to delete in case they become useful. In that folder were people like Robb Stark or Sansa Stark or just every Stark in existence. Margaery was fearless and terrifying and Willas was so proud of his little sister.

“Fine, I’ll go and take Margaery with me. Can I have a nap now?”

Olenna pursed her lips. “You are not a child, Willas. You don’t need my permission for a nap. You only need to listen to me when I tell you where to work, when to go out, what to say, who to date, and how to manage your lifestyle under the Tyrell name.”

Willas refused to answer. He made that mistake already. The next time Olenna saw him would be at dinner, and that was when he would have his fun. On his way to his room, he told one of the maids to grab his old wheelchair from storage.

“Is your leg acting up again?” The maid asked concern draped over her features.

“Yes,” Willas lied. “It’s probably all the traveling I did, but I want to take it easy for now. Can you have it sent to my room with the luggage? Thanks.” The young woman scurried off to grab the device. Willas grinned. He cannot wait to see his grandmother’s face scrunch up when she caught him in the wheelchair. She hated dealing with him when he used it. She knew he was emphasizing his pain to garner sympathy, but even she was not so crass as to ask someone in a wheelchair to prove he needed one.
The thought of her shock expression when she sees him wheeling into the dining room was enough to make him consider bringing one to London out of spite.

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The Starks book an entire car to themselves for leisure and ease. They receive a complimentary dinner upon their arrival, accompanied by their own dessert cart and an open bar. All of the children find a way to entertain themselves. Sansa is skittish as a cat on cocaine, checking her phone and texting Sandor for updates on Jojen. Her boyfriend humors her paranoia like a man who did too well and knows it. Rickon is glaring at Bran, climbing on top of the couches for the opportunity to steal his phone or at least read his conversations with Shireen. According to his older brother, Bran has been in contact with Shireen and his other friend Henry, all day. The information, unbeknownst to his brother and mother, is a lie. In actuality, he spent the entire morning contacting Jojen. Catelyn would usually be concerned with the fact that her son hasn’t taken his eyes off his phone in hours but she’s too distracted by the lovebirds at the end of the car. Robb and Jon have been inseparable since their reconciliation. Though Jon has the consideration not to engage in major public displays of affection, Robb does not. He’s been showing off their relationship like it’s the cure for cancer. “Oh hey, Darcy, I can’t hang out tonight, I have to pack for London with my boyfriend, Jon.” “No, Bran, I haven’t seen your notebook. Why don’t you ask my boyfriend, Jon?” “Yeah, I’m looking forward to going back to school, father. I can’t wait to move back into my apartment with my boyfriend, Jon.” “Yeah, Sansa, those heels look good enough to kill. You know who else looks good enough to kill—”

“Your boyfriend, Jon?”

Robb would grin. “My boyfriend, Jon.”

“You are an idiot.”

“You know who’s dating this idiot? My boyfriend, Jon.”

The child is insufferable.

Thankfully, the only person who can stand to be around Robb is the only person he wants to be near. They look happy in love, sneaking kisses when they think no one is looking and perhaps it’s Jon’s resemblance to Ned and Robb’s resemblance to herself, but Catelyn cannot, for the life of her, act against them. She’ll need more time to adjust but there’s nothing she can do to fight the throes of passion that has befallen on her children. If she is lucky, Robb and Jon will fall apart and she’ll be able to salvage her relationships with both of them.

“Are you okay?” Ned asks when he notices her attention has not wavered since their trip.

Catelyn sighs. “I suppose I have to be.”

“Well.” Ned coughs awkwardly. “If you can’t keep your mind off them, I could...provide a distraction?”

Catelyn stares at him in surprise. She grins, absolutely delighted. “Ned Stark, as I live and breathe, are you suggesting we have some quality time on a train?”

Ned blushed. “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“We were much younger then. I could hold in my voice better.”

“You have a beautiful voice.”
Catelyn bites her lip in amusement. She moves her hand over to his groin and gives his cock a half-hearted squeeze. “I suppose I need to clear my head.”

“I can help with that,” Ned moans.

“Can you?”

“Better than anyone you know.”

His answer is all she needs to stand up and head to the bathroom. Thankfully, their private car came with its own bathrooms. The only people who will hear her scream are her own children and since everyone has more or less seen them in flagrante delicto, she decides that her pride is no longer worth her orgasm. If anything, she has a duty to her generation and gender to showcase her sexual peak. Ned follows a second later, not understanding discretion as well as his wife. Everyone is too concerned with their own issues to notice their departure.

Everyone but Jon and Robb.

When Robb notices that his parents have left the vicinity, his mind does not put two and two together. He is, however, aware that they are more or less alone. With the boldness one will expect from an heir, he leans over and captures Jon’s lips.

When the part, a little breathless from waiting so long to do so, Robb asks if he wants a repeat performance. “I still get chills about the last time we were on a train.”

“I think the bathrooms are occupied,” Jon teases.

Robb shrugs. With a grin, he points out that the couches are comfortable. “They’re almost as plush as that ass of yours.” The most chagrining thing is that Robb said that out loud. To their fortune, no one overhears or doesn’t care enough to comment. The reassurance of everyone’s apathy does nothing for Jon’s nerves.

“Robb,” Jon hisses. “Your siblings are here.”

“So? I gave Bran the sex talk and I’ve seen Sansa’s underwear. She has red panties. There’s no way she’s a virgin.”

“Robb, stop it.”

Robb grins. He blows against his ear. “Let’s have some fun. No one is paying attention, and we’ll be discreet.”

“You don’t know what discreet means.”

Robb chuckles and starts sucking onto Jon’s neck, licking and lapping onto his skin like a dog. Jon bites his lips to fight back a moan. He can feel the hickey rising.

“Come on; it’ll be fun. Doesn’t it excite you, knowing we can get caught at any second? That my parents can waltz in and see my cock inside you?”

“Robb, you are a freak, and I love you but shut up.”

Robb pouts. He looks around and catches the eye of a blanket across the room. Leaning over, he grabs it and wiggles his eyes in a wicked gesture. “Sit on my lap; I promise I won’t try anything.”

Jon scoffs. “Robb, I was born at night, not last night. One does not sit on his boyfriend’s lap unless
he plans on putting out. Unless he is a tease.”

“Well, you may make me laugh but you definitely put out.” Robb quips. His grin never falters. “Come on,” he urges. “Doesn’t my lap look good?” He pats his thighs like he’s playing daddy and Jon is his good boy. The thought makes the Snow shiver. Jon hesitates longer to fake an air of decency before curling up into Robb’s embrace. His back is pressed against Robb’s chest and Robb spreads the blanket and Jon’s thighs across his lap.

Despite his initial reluctance, Jon cannot deny his arousal. His cousins may mind their own business now, but the second they turn around, they will see his flush expression from Robb’s cock jutting against his ass. He almost yelps when Robb undoes their belts.

Robb shifts a bit to grab his emergency lube from his pocket and dribbles it on top of his fingers. Jon chokes when he feels the two fingers pressing into his entrance.

“Love, you are so hot like this,” Robb praises as he kisses Jon’s bare neck. He puts in a third finger and starts to move inside him. He quickens his pace a bit, unsure of whether his parents are coming back. The risk makes their entire situation more thrilling and desperate. Robb loves how reckless they are acting. His fingers scissor and split Jon’s insides until Jon has to stuff his cousin’s fingers into his mouth to cover up his moans. When Robb believes Jon to be sufficiently stretch, he starts moving in, inch by inch until Jon’s greedy ass is wrapped around him.

“Robb,” Jon moans through his muffled mouth. The curly hair boy rolls his hips and rocks backward onto Robb’s cock. The movements are slow and inconspicuous, but if someone came close, they would be able to hear the little squicks of their joining. It makes Robb hot to think about, so he keeps buckling forward. He starts grinding Jon onto his cock.

When Robb sets a rhythm, Jon tries to slow things down by tightening and untightening around Robb’s cock. Robb lets out a filthy moan of his own.

“So good when you move like that, getting my dick all nice and wet,” he whispers into Jon’s ear. “You’re acting like my cockwarmer.”

Jon whimpers and his voice is so loud; it travels to the other seats. To Jon’s humiliation, Bran looks up from his phone. They are far enough in that their baggage hides them but if Bran were to squint, just the slightest, they’d be incriminated.

“Is everything okay?” He asks.

Jon moans out a response. “Fine, Bran. We’re just…trying to get some rest before the trip.” He winces when Robb thrusts his hips up a little too hard. He bites his lip hard.

Robb chuckles, and the sound is like velvet. “That’s the spirit. Show him how much you enjoy riding my cock.”

"Okay.” Bran turns his attention back to his phone.

Robb decides to add the finishing blow. When Jon’s ass makes another gratifying clench, he pumps harder against Jon’s prostate. If his thrusts weren’t so shallow, Jon would have been wailing in pleasure. He comes all over their blanket instead, leaving a stain on the wool. Robb spends a few extra minutes thrusting into Jon’s willing ass with leisure before spilling his own orgasm into Jon’s body. When they are finished, both young men decide to stay in their position. They close their eyes and drift off to a well-deserved nap. As long as no one moves the blanket, no one will be any wiser. Except Sansa, who watch the scene from the corner of her eye and had to bite her hand to keep
herself from masturbating. She told herself that it was improper for a young woman to touch herself to the lovemaking of relatives. No matter how delicious Jon looked when his cheeks were flushed, and his mouth gaped with pleasure. The hardest part of the whole ordeal was that she wasn’t able to retreat to the bathroom for phone sex with Sandor. If her parents weren’t back now, they would probably continue until the trip ended.

The sexual frustration is unbearable.

Her only distraction came when Rickon, after another failed attempt to grab Bran’s phone, ask her where Theon is.

Sansa sighs. She can’t tell Rickon the truth—that Theon couldn’t stand the sight of Robb and Jon in pre-marital bliss, so he bailed on their entire family. The answer will only depress him in the same way it made her angry. Instead, she tells him that Theon has other engagements.

Rickon raises an eyebrow. “Like what kind of engagements?”

“The kind that…” Sansa winces. “…involves meeting new people.” She becomes more compose as she explains that: “Since all his friends are Robb’s friends and he’s not talking to Robb at the moment, he’s putting himself out there more.”

“Don’t you mean he’s putting out more?”

“Rickon!” Sansa shouts, aghast.

Rickon shrugs. “It’s true. We all know he’s not going back home. He hates his family. So he’s probably freeloading off some sucker through his sucking. It’s okay. Mum once said: there’s nothing wrong with using what the gods gave you to get ahead.” Rickon pauses. “Or give head in Theon’s case.”

Sansa feels horror clutching onto her heart. “Rickon!”

“I was able to skip my math lessons to read books about cannibalism because my teacher likes curly hair boys. She even lets me use her computer if I sit on her lap. I get to watch cartoons for six hours.”

“Rickon, you are too young to know what that word means!”

“Sansa,” he shakes her head as if she is the naïve one. “Every school has a pedophile. It’s nothing special. Besides, I don’t let her touch me. The only person who will play with my privates is Shireen Baratheon.”

“How?” Sansa is more confused than she’s ever been in her entire life. Then, she is horrified. She gasps. “No! No privates! No touching! No! I won’t allow it!” Why are all of her brothers’ innocences slipping out of her fingers?

Rickon’s eyes become misty and far off. “It’ll be a beautiful day, ten years from now. I’ll be twenty…something. She’ll be twenty…something. The age difference won’t matter when you’re that old, look at mum and dad. She will never see our love coming. It’ll be a regular day for her, baking a cake, thinking she’s protected in her home. Then, I’m going to break into her house.”

“No.”

“We have wildling blood, Sansa. You can’t deny this. So I’ll grab her by her beautiful face and kiss her—that means we’re engaged.”
“No, it doesn’t.”

“That’s what the stories say, Sansa.” Rickon rolls his eyes. “If you kiss someone, you are engaged. I don’t make the rules.”

“Please stop.”

“We’ll get married underneath a tree—like the old days. I’ll murder our enemies and present a coat made with their flesh.”

“You are eleven. You don’t have enemies!”

“I will get enemies!”

Sansa drops her face into her hands. “Where did you learn these things?”

Rickon shrugs. ”I read, duh.”

”I meant the sex things.”

As if on cue, Catelyn and Ned Stark return from their sex-a-thon drench in sweat and other bodily fluids. Catelyn lights up a well-deserved cigarette and sighs with pleasure. She looks like sex, Sansa thinks horrifically. Her parents look like sex. Rickon sends Sansa a pointed look. She snaps her mouth shut, lamenting her family’s sex drive. When she regains her poise, she makes it clear to Rickon that she will no longer like to learn of his planned exploits.

“The bottom line is, Theon is fine,” she tells him, hoping that the original subject of his questionnaire will cleanse the sins of their conversation. “He has contacted Robb and explained his feelings in a calm and collected manner. He just needs time to recuperate from the blow.”

Rickon purses his lips in apparent suspicion. Then, he giggles.

Sansa raises an eyebrow. “Why are you laughing?”

“Because.” Rickon shakes his head. “That’s a really adult thing to do.”

“I know,” Sansa agrees.

“You don’t get it?” Rickon looks like he feels sorry for her. First, he thinks she’s foolish; now he’s pitying her. “There’s no way Theon Greyjoy, the guy who is singlehandedly responsible for the destruction of twelve relationships, whose pined after our brother for years instead of telling him, who abandoned Bran and me in a farmhouse just to have alone time with Robb, made a reasonable decision by himself.”

As soon as realization hits Sansa’s face, it is replaced by exasperation and exhaustion.

***

Hours before the train ride, Theon and Ramsay were in bed trying to fit as many vibrating eggs into Theon’s asshole as they could before he passed out. At four, Theon’s eyes were rolling to the back of his head. He was q shaking, drooling mess who wanted to get off so badly, he was humping the mattress like a dog. Gods, Ramsay fucking loved him.

It.

He fucking loved it.
A surge of anger followed Ramsay's mental slip-up and like always, he wrongly directed it at Theon. The older man shoved another egg up his playmate’s ass. Theon wailed. He came a third time since they started their little experiment.

“Fuck, it’s like your hole is starving for more eggs,” Ramsay whispered, almost reverent of the sight. Theon’s ass continued to milk the objects like they were cocks. Theon panted and jerked like a fish out of water.

“There are so many things I can fit into your loose cunt,” Ramsay told him. He slapped Theon’s ass. The roughness made the eggs go in deeper. They rammed against Theon’s prostate, electrifying his entire body.

Ramsay pulled down his pants and whacked himself to full hardness. He grabbed the strings connecting to the eggs and yanked them all out at once. Theon screamed so loud, his voice could be heard from the ground level. Ramsay took a deep breath. He stared at Theon’s gaping hole. It tried to return to normal but no matter how hard Theon clenched, it never closed completely. Ramsay could see his insides, and it looked as good as a creamy cunt. Pride built up his chest. He managed to fuck Theon’s ass open.

Just as he was about to shove his cock in, the doorbell rang. He ignored it, the head of his cock was pressed against Theon’s hole when it rang again. “Fuck off!” He yelled outside the door. He slipped inside with ease. Even though it was just the beginning, Theon’s pussy felt like Jello. Ramsay moaned. Theon was ruined. He was literally ruined for other men. Loose was nice but no man would ever want a cunt this used.

“This is the police,” He heard his guests say after ringing the doorbell a third time. “We heard a scream. If you don’t open this door, we will break it down.”

"Those fucking cunts,” Ramsay swore. He retracted his cock, ignoring the delicious whimper that came from Theon’s lips.

“Ramsay, please…I’m so empty.”

Didn’t he fucking know it? He was about to grab the eggs from the floor when the police issued their final warning. Ramsay growled monstrously. He grabbed the back of Theon’s head and kissed him before throwing him back on the bed.

“When I come back, I am going to breed your ass so hard, you’ll end up with twins,” he promised.

Theon’s whimper was his response.

Satisfied with his slut, Ramsay rushed out of his bedroom. He tucked his cock back in and grabbed a t-shirt off his floor to appear presentable. “I’m coming!” he shouted. He opened the door and revealed two cops. They introduced themselves as Detective Benjen Stark and Yoren, just Yoren. The name Stark made him narrow his eyes. He widened his door to let them in, familiar with the process.

“We heard screaming.”

“That was Theon,” Ramsay told them. He was not a beat out of place. “We were having some fun.”

"Theon is your boyfriend?"

"He's my cumdump," Ramsay sneered. The men twitched at the description.
When Theon heard his name, he crawled out of bed to see what was going on. He stopped himself from entering when he saw Benjen Stark sitting across the table from Ramsay. He shrunk back into the shadows, trying not to get caught.

“Can we talk to him?”

“Sure,” Ramsay agreed. “But he’s sleeping right now. Can we do it after, when he’s gotten more rest? You can ask me the questions you came here for.”

“What makes you think we have questions for you?”

“Why else would you come here?”

“We told you. We heard screaming.”

Ramsay smirked. “My neighbors know better than to call you. I’m sure of that. I have quite a reputation for making my partners scream.”

“Oh?” Benjen raised an eyebrow. “Care to list their names?”

Ramsay chuckled. “I would if I could remember them. You’d be amazed by a number of sluts in the city. You show them a big dick and they’re clawing at me, trying to get a free ride. Once I get my rocks off, they’re gone. I don’t keep bitches once I’m done getting my dick wet.”

“Classy,” Benjen noted dryly. “So, we heard you moved here several months ago?”

“Yeah, I just graduated last fall. Spent some the time in London before my father decided it was time I learned the family business,” Ramsay grinned. “You’ve heard of him, right? I mean, you are a Stark. You have to know about Roose Bolton.”

“He went to school with my oldest brother,” Benjen admitted. “Never met him personally.”

“Lucky you.”

Yoren watched the two interact before moving on with the questioning. “Ramsay, are you aware that your arrival fits in with the time frame of the recent killings?”

A severe expression overcame Ramsay’s face. “Of course I do. Considering I was responsible for one of them,” Ramsay admitted. “What?”

The two cops were shocked by the blatant confession. With mouths gaped and eyes full, they stuttered to come up with a response. Benjen, the warrior of the two, reached for his weapon. Ramsay did his best not to laugh.

“Oh, please don’t take it wrong the way! I meant … it’s my fault one of the girls got killed,” Ramsay clarified, though it only added to their confusion. “I knew one of the victims. She was a sex friend of mine,” he explained, emphasizing the sex part. “But she wanted to be my girlfriend. From the start, I made it clear that I wasn’t interested in that romance crap but she didn’t get the message. We got into a fight. Clawed at me, punched me, I had to fend her off.”

“Which would explain why your DNA would be on her fingers,” Yoren remarked, a sense of foreboding coming upon him. Their hypothesis was correct. Myranda’s death was not planned.

Ramsay pretended to be surprised by his analysis. “Which is why my DNA and the killer’s would be
under her fingers. I could never hurt her,” he lied. “But we were near the area. At a bar, in fact. Dozens of people saw us get into a fight. She left the bar alone—made her an easy target. I stayed and hung out with my friends.”

“How fortunate,” Benjen noted. “To have witnesses for the one victim that could be linked to you.”

Ramsay shrugged. “That’s not a crime.”

Benjen did not give up. “Do you mind telling us where you were for the other murders?”

“I’m only human,” Ramsay told him, pretending to be surprised by his request. “The, what do you call him, the Bloodhound Killer has been attacking women for months. I can’t remember where I was every single day of my life.” Ramsay smirked at him. “But if you can provide me the dates, I can get my cell phone. My calendar has all my events listed. I’m a bit neurotic, you see.”

Benjen narrowed his eyes. The reports were right. Ramsay was not stupid. It would have been too suspicious to be able to recall all his alibis offhand. By claiming he had a planner, he was able to provide an excuse without making it looked like he prepared for their arrival. He pulled out his cell phone. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Yoren and Benjen shared a look. Yoren grabbed his own phone to start recanting the known murders’ within the last six months.

“January 11th.”

“Birthday party, mine. We lit up an entire club for hours.” Yoren and Benjen glanced at each other. A party was a solid alibi but busy enough to sneak out of. Of course, a serial killer would choose their birthday to start their streak. The bastard was getting lucky in more ways that one.

“January 16th.”

“Had dinner over at my father’s place and stayed over. Trust me, that man couldn’t sleep through a feather dropping.”

Roose was a man who valued reputation. He cleaned up his son’s mess last time and he would do it again. There was no breaking him.

“February 14th.” That was a complete massacred. Four girls slaughtered like cows.

“Me and I friends were hooking up all night. You know.” Ramsay grinned. “The rejects who couldn’t get a date and have self-esteem so low, they’d fit you and your friend in as long as you told them they were pretty.”

“No, I don’t know,” Benjen told him.

Yoren saw him clench his fist. He continued the questioning.

“March 5th.”

“Out at a pub. My friends and I were celebrating a deal I made. We took a cab home. The bartender called for us and even watched us get in. I can give you the location afterward.”

“March 17th.”

“Another pub. Same one as before. One of my friends got a drink thrown in his face and the other
got into a fight. Everyone in the bar would have remembered us.”

“April 12th.”

“Myranda and I were trying out something new. The neighbors heard us.”

Benjen glanced over at Yoren. They were fighting a losing battle.

“April 20th.”

“At home. Alone.”

Benjen glared.

Ramsay grinned. “What? You don’t think I was busy every night? Who does that unless they were trying to hide something?”

“May 24th.”

“That was the day of the fight with Myranda. You know what happened. What else?”

Ramsay was prepared to show them out. Then, Yoren said the next date.

“June 1st.”

Ramsay paused. For the first time, the man appeared unsure. He looked down at his phone and squinted his eyes; it was evident to both of the detectives that he spotted an anomaly.

“What’s the matter?” Yoren asked, a little too smug for either Benjen’s or Ramsay’s liking.

“I…” Ramsay paused. He squinted at his phone and noticed something peculiar. “I was visiting an old friend. From my juvie years.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” Ramsay noted. He was curt, the cockiness from his voice disappearing and replaced with uncertainty. “Are you sure it was June 1st?”

“Yes,” Benjen said, though even he was unsure at this point. “Let’s move on.”

“Move on? There’s more?”

There was more confusion in his voice. If Ramsay was the killer, he was playing the role of a bewildered citizen quite well. The young man recovered but his stance was not as confident as before. He seemed…unnerved.

“Yes, June 11th.”

Theon recognized the date as the day he met Ramsay—and told Robb he loved him, of course. Theon built up the courage to peek outside and saw Ramsay going through his calendars.

“I was at a pub,” he answered.

“Alright, what about June…”
“Even if I had no alibi for another date does it mean anything?” Ramsay spat out. “There’s no way I could be the Bloodhound Killer. I’ve had alibis for most of those murders.”

The sudden anger made Benjen aware of how close they were to the mine field. He could hear the ticking radiating from Ramsay’s persona. He was going to blow. Benjen just needed to keep on pushing.

Unfortunately, Theon could hear the bomb as well. Without thinking, he walked outside.

“Benjen?” Theon asked, pretending to be surprised by his presence. “What are you doing here?”

"Theon?” Benjen could feel the bile build up in his throat. Ramsay's Theon was the Stark’s Theon.

Yoren raised an eyebrow. He’d seen the kid before at the Stark residence. A friend of the eldest. “You must be the screamer,” he joked, He almost laughed at Theon’s red face, but held it in due to the severity of the situation. He got up from his seat and stretched out his hand. “Detective Yoren. This is…”

“He knows who I am.” Benjen got out as well. “Does Robb know you’re here?”

Theon flushed. “He’s leaving for London to see Arya’s performance.” Realizing what he just said, Theon's shyness was replaced with a snarl. “And I don’t need his permission to be here. He isn’t my keeper.”

He should be, Benjen thought but didn’t say out loud. Robb would have never let Theon out his sight if he knew Theon was getting involved with men like Ramsay Bolton. “You should go home,” he warned. “Not getting your rocks off with him.” He spat the latter of the sentence out. “We all make mistakes.”

Ramsay glared. He got up from his chair and grabbed Theon to his side. The manhandled male did not protest. “This is his home,” Ramsay hissed. “He came to me weeks ago begging for a place to stay. I let him. I don’t even charge him rent. He pays me the good ol’ fashion way. Like a housewife.”

Benjen was not the only one to notice the way Theon shivered. “How did you two meet?”

“We met on June 11th,” Theon answered before Ramsay could. Ramsay pinched his side to discipline him but otherwise, let him talk. He was warning him not to get out of line but trusted him enough to speak. The faith was nice. “Um, I was at a pub with Robb but we got into a fight. I met Ramsay and we started…” Going out? Hanging out? Having sex? “meeting up.”

“So you’re dating?” Yoren clarified.

Theon wanted to say it was complicated. Ramsay agreed with the sentiment.

“This pretty little slut couldn’t get enough of my cock,” Ramsay told them. He squeezed Theon’s ass, earning a mew from the younger boy. Both Benjen and Yoren were unnerved by his treatment of the boy, especially Benjen, who had seen him grow alongside his nephew. “I decided to take pity on him when he begged to move in with me.” Ramsay grinned, though it was shakier than the ones before. “We’ve been fucking ever since.”

Yoren raised an eyebrow. “You expect us to believe you moved in with a guy you’ve been fucking for two weeks?”

Theon was insulted at that question. Yoren was a bit taken back by the fire of his answer. “I’m sorry,
should that honor be reserved for Stark heirs and their stupid cousins?"

“Not this again,” Benjen muttered.

Ramsay and Yoren shared something in common that day. They were both incredibly confused. Yoren turned to Benjen with a question mark on his face.

Benjen sighed. “My nephews,” he said as if the answer cleared everything up instead of bringing more questions.

“Your nephew moved in with his boyfriend after two weeks?” Yoren asked.


"More than one of your nephews moved in with a total stranger after two weeks?"

“In all fairness, it was to each other.”

“Wait, what?” Ramsay popped in. “Your nephews dated each other?”

“They didn’t realize they were cousins at the time,” Theon muttered.

“Wait--!” Yoren stood up. “Are you talking about Jon? Jon and Robb? They grew up together!”

“How the fuck does someone not know they are cousins after growing up with each other?” Ramsay asked. “My father recognized I was his son as soon we met.”

“Because my nephews aren’t that bright!” Benjen shouted. His announcement silenced the room. He massaged his forehead and sighed.

Ramsay turned to Theon. “You fell for a guy like that?”

Theon blushed. “He is very sweet.”

“So is sugar but if it had a dick I wouldn’t suck it.”

"You wouldn't?" Yoren asked. "That's the type of dick you should suck."

Benjen adjourned the meeting then and there. He told Ramsay that they would be in contact in an attempt to salvage the severity of the situation. It was not enough, but he was sure Ramsay would get the message. Or at least strengthen his defenses. If he did so, it would be more of an indication of his guilt. Benjen dragged Yoren out of there before they could switch topics.

When the detectives got on the road, they drove in silence. Finally, Yoren took the plunge.

"So...were you molested by your uncle or something? Is that the reason Starks never turn out okay?"

Chapter End Notes

1. Another long chapter. I am really determined to finish this within 69 chapters. This was not supposed to be so long but I hope it was good.
2. The Olenna/Willas scene was supposed to be a paragraph or two and ended up being two thousand words. In fact, everything about this chapter was made longer than it
really was. Theon and Ramsay weren't even supposed to get sexy times but they did.
3. In the early chapters, I used to get requests for a Jon topping Robb. I need to know if this is still a thing. Like do you guys want that? Yay or nay? I can make it happen upon popular request.
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Warning: Not a trigger warning but a “I rewrote the timeline so that the Starks were going to watch the Saturday show, not the Friday show because traveling makes me sleepy and I didn’t want to tucker them out.” I simultaneously put way too much and way too little thought into this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Starks book three rooms for the entire weekend: two suites, one for Catelyn and Ned, another for Sansa, Rickon, and Bran, and a studio for Robb and Jon to share. Ned prefers to have Robb and Jon take the extra room in their suite but his eldest child insist on privacy with his lover.

"The expense is extravagant for a weekend getaway," Ned notes.

“This is the first time we’ve been alone since the summer began.” Robb tells him. They are waiting for their keys. “I intend to make the most of it. Besides, wouldn’t it be nice to have a whole suite to yourself? You’ll have the freedom to do whatever you want to mother.”

“Your presence wouldn’t have stopped us from having sex,” Ned informs, a bit perplexed by the suggestion. “I assumed it wouldn’t matter with Jon’s screams drowning out your mother’s voice.”

“You’d been okay with that?”

“Yes.”

Robb is overcome with relief. “I knew it wasn’t a strange suggestion! Jon was adamant about getting a separate room. He kept saying that it was bizarre to have sex while you two could listen in. I tried to tell him you’d be busy with your own activities but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Your mother said something like that as well.” Ned finds it preposterous to assume that Jon and Robb wouldn’t be having sex just because they shared a suite. At most, the gags would be brought out. He even packed a ball just in case.

“I suppose we should humor them.”

“We should,” Ned agrees. He pats his son on the back. “Good thinking. Keep this up, and you’ll make a fine husband.”

Robb beams. “Funny you should say that. I wanted to talk to you about pro—”

“We got the key!” Jon runs up to Robb and grabs his wrist. He whispers something into Robb’s ear, and it makes the student break out into a wide grin. “Really?”

Jon bites his lip and nods. “As long as it isn’t bigger than a wine bottle.” Jon regrets saying so immediately. Robb interprets limits as permissions and normally, it's Jon's sore body the next morning that has to pay the cost for the lack of clarification. Without another word, Robb drags his cousin from the rest of the family. They are halfway through the elevator before the rest of the keys are distributed. Catelyn shakes her head in exasperation.
“We should call Arya. Her opening show should be over by now.”

“I already texted her,” Sansa tells her mother. “She hasn’t responded, yet. But it's her opening night so I assume she’s dead tired. We should just let her rest. We'll see her tomorrow, anyways.”

Catelyn sighs. “I suppose so. I just miss her so much. Help me put the children to sleep?”

“I’m not a child,” Bran grumbles. Catelyn is taken back by his attitude. When he realizes his slip up, Bran sends her a shy smile. “Sorry, I’m a bit tired myself.” He rushes to the elevator to avoid her questioning.

Sansa sends her a sheepish look. “I’ll take care of it,” she promises. They get to their rooms; when they enter, the boys want nothing more than a good night’s sleep. Sansa makes sure Rickon brushes his teeth and helps Bran into his pajamas.

Bran is less than pleased about the latter.

“I can take off my clothes, Sansa. I don't need help.”

“Apparently not,” Sansa mutters.

“What was that?”

“Nothing,” Sansa cheerily answers. “But you must be tired. Please, I insist.” Bran’s protests fail to dent in Sansa’s determination. She practically rips his shirt off his back. When his torso is revealed, Sansa scans his chest for marks. She prods and pokes, even flicks a nipple or two to check his sensitivity.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking your body for numbness. Are you having trouble feeling?”

“Yes, I think something might be off about my legs.”

Sansa pouts. Bran gets so testy when he’s tired. After checking the entirety of his top half, Sansa is no less suspicious than when she started. She sees no hickies and assumes they must be hiding in a more obscure location. The notion that they don’t exist never occurs to her. When Bran is about to remove his pants, he asks Sansa to leave. She doesn't. "I insist." "Which you can't do because I refuse." "Don't be stubborn, just let me take them off you. Close your eyes; you might even enjoy it." "Sansa, get out!" Sansa continues to 'help' him without provocation. The results are not pretty. Her hands are pulling down his trousers while he screams.

“Seriously Sansa, let go!”

Sansa is a lady; even when she is stripping her little brother of his sweatpants. “Don’t be like that, Bran. Just lay back and let me take care of you,” Sansa soothes over the protests. “Just pretend I'm Jojen.”

“What?”

“Nothing!”

Sansa goes through with her inspection. There’s nothing amidst and it gets Sansa angrier because she concludes Jojen refrained from leaving marks. That bastard! He knew Sansa would try and incriminate him. He is probably biding his time to wrong her brother. Sansa tosses Bran’s pants on
the side. She shoves his pajamas into his hands so he can dress himself. Bran hastily puts them on.

“What is wrong with you?”

Sansa tilts her head in confusion. “Sweet brother, what are you talking about?”

“T-hat! This! Wh-what you just did!” Bran sputters out.

Sansa sighs lovingly. “Oh, you’re so cute Bran. I told you: I was inspecting your body for injuries. It’s been a while since you’ve traveled so far away from home. I want to make sure everything was okay. There are so many things that can happen from the train station to the hotel. You could have gotten a bruise when we lifted you into the cab, a cut from a stranger’s sharpened nail, Jojen could have dicked you, ringworm, an assault from downtrodden robber…”

“What—?”

“Point is, I was concerned,” Sansa interrupts him. “And with Robb distracted by Jon, I’m the second oldest so I have to be responsible for all of you. So just let me take care of you. Like I’ll take care of Jojen.” Bran is speechless because he swears he heard her say his name. He never has a chance to question her because Sansa swoops in like a harpy eagle about to pluck a monkey off the earth. Her lips kiss Bran goodnight, cementing the end of her gaslighting.

When Sansa goes into the living room, she is met with incessant knocking. She opens the door to her suite and her mother barges in. She scolds her for being idle before thanking her for being a good sister. Treats and the water bottle all at once.

"I assume the boys are asleep."

"Yes,"Sansa tells her.

"Good. We need to have a talk."

They head to the fridge together. As requested, the hotel has provided them with a variety of puddings, from strawberry shortcakes to crème caramel, and a fresh pitcher of milk and wine. Sansa sets two plates. She receives a lemon cake while Catelyn takes out a piece of Mont Blanc. Together, they feast.

“Do you think Arya has come back to her hotel yet?”

Sansa shrugs. “She hasn’t texted me back so she’s probably busy.”

“She could be ignoring you.”

Sansa disagrees. “Arya’s not that self-centered. If she knew we were here, she would have checked to see if we were alive—all while pretending she doesn’t care.”

Catelyn giggles. “You’re right. That sounds like her.” She sighs, “Oh, I just wish we could have stayed at her hotel.”

“Was it all booked?”

Catelyn chuckles. “Worse; Tywin Lannister was staying there, and you know how your father feels about him.”

“Of course, I wrote a report on it.” Sansa tries to remember the exact wording of the Stark’s statement. “…Tywin Lannister has left a social and moral vacuum in which the rich can reign over
the poor and capitalized on the hungry...he has dismantled the infrastructures that aim to close the gap between classes, from his cuts on state education...etcetera, etcetera.’”

“Exactly,” Catelyn sighs. “I want us to be civil when we meet him and frankly, your father does not have the endurance to do so in the same hotel.

“Why is civility so important now?”

“Before,” Catelyn reminds her daughter, “He wasn’t funding Arya’s show, and his influences stretch beyond finances or politics. He has a stake in the arts, too. He can open doors for Arya.”

“I thought you hated her dancing.”

Catelyn admits that she does. “However, hatred of her career can’t stop how I feel about her. I love your sister; she loves dancing. I’ve tried to get her to quit and that just pushes her away from me. I can’t afford to lose her again.” She smiles sadly. “The only thing left now is to support her.”

“Like you’re supporting Robb and Jon?” Sansa teases, hoping to brighten the mood.

Catelyn laughs. “All my children are stubborn bastards who hate me.” Her mother shakes her head and bemoans her bad luck. Sansa smiles at her but there is no meanness. “Before I know it, Bran will have fallen into the arms of some hoodlum.”

Her daughter stops laughing.

Catelyn does not notice the end of her humor. Before she does, Sansa returns to the topic of her father and Tywin Lannister. “Do you think father can maintain his good graces tomorrow? I heard Tywin’s taken a liking to Arya; there are several pictures of them together at charity events and at her practices. I didn’t want to bring it up but…” Sansa hesitates but her mother’s calm motivates her to continue. “Father won’t like that, and he certainly doesn’t like to play games.”

Sansa’s mother does not seem surprised. She takes a bite of her cake and uncorks the wine. “Did I ever tell you how your father got to be CEO of Stark Industries?”

Sansa stares at her curiously. “I thought Uncle Brandon went to prison.”

“Uncle Brandon did go to prison,” Catelyn admits with tense cheer and a nostalgia that is inclined towards bitterness. “But that only removed him as the successor; it didn’t make him ineligible. Your grandfather didn’t name your father as his heir because he wanted Ned to prove himself.” Catelyn stabs her cake. Sansa scoots her chair further away. “He was worried he’d make the same mistake with him as he did with Brandon.” As she almost did with Brandon as well. “As soon as your father was finished with his tour, Rickard put Ned at the bottom of his company and forced him to work to the top. He would have never made his precious Brandon do that. Or gods forbid, Lyanna, that whore—”

“Mother,” Sansa warns. "The story?"

“Of course, after climbing to the top, your grandfather fell ill. Instead of using the last of his strength to give your father what he deserved, he wasted it on sentimentality. I mean, it can’t be that hard to change a will while saying 'I love you’—”

“Mother, please.”

Catelyn coughs. “The disease took him before a CEO was chosen. So the family was left with the dilemma on who was to inherit.”
“Even though father did all that hard work?”

“Yes,” Catelyn agrees, and her shark-tooth smile reappears. “It was up to the board to decide who would be elected as CEO. As majority shareholders, the Starks can cast one vote as a whole. Ned and Brandon stayed silent for obvious reasons. Lyanna remain neutral, that bitch—”

“Mother.”

“But Benjen casted his vote for Ned, and that’s why he’s the only one of your father’s siblings that was allowed to watch you when you were children.” Which is saying something, considering he slept with her sister’s husband.

“Please get on with the story.”

Catelyn does. “Now, Ned was the obvious candidate. He was dependable, hardworking and trustworthy; he kept a steady ship. He studied the material like a madman, got his degree, and had a stable business plan for the company.”

“Then what was the problem?”

Catelyn sighs lovingly.

“He was so boring.”

Sansa raises an eyebrow.

“Your father was a proponent for tradition. He was good at keeping the line straight but the shareholders wanted to see it climb. They wanted to take the company in a new direction. Brandon was a volatile fool who could have easily burnt the company to the ground but he was innovative; he liked change and he was not a complete idiot on security matters either.” Catelyn clenches her jaw. “Furthermore, people liked him.”

Sansa raises an eyebrow. “And they didn’t like father?”

Catelyn rolls her eyes at the irritable members of the board who still tremble in fear whenever she attends the board meetings at Stark Industries. “Your father couldn’t get clients like Brandon could. They trusted him but trust is built over time, and when you have 48 hours to convince a multi-million-dollar corporation to invest in you, time was not of the essence.”

“So what happened?”

“I did.” She grins. “I convinced Ned’s employees to rally in his honor. There’s a saying you should take to heart: never judge a man by how he treats his superiors but how he treats his inferiors. Ned was loved by his employees—from the custodians to the accountants. We dug up information on all the board members and had our prettiest boys and girls bend over the desk for a few of them. They did if for your father. Some of them were able to channel that love into doing anal. Especially your uncle; he had half the board eating him out.”

“You mean eating out of the palm of his hand.”

“That, too.”

Sansa takes a moment to process the information. “You blackmailed and prostituted people to get father a promotion.”
“The things we do for love.” Catelyn finished off her wine. “Remember, Sansa. It’s okay to bend the rules to get what you want. There’s no shame in a smile, even if it’s towards the scourge of the earth. All that matters tomorrow is supporting your sister on the job of her dreams.”

Sansa nods. Though the game of masquerade has rarely brought Sansa discomfort, the eldest Stark girl has never felt more proud of her deception. Like her mother before her, she, too, will help her family in any way she can.

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“What took you so long?”

When Catelyn returns to her husband, the man is stripped down to his boxers, and his idle hands are twitching for the chance to undress someone else. Catelyn asks him to help remove her dress, and she laughs when he almost stumbles over to do so, kissing her neck down to the small of her back.

“I was talking to Sansa,” Catelyn answers. She smiles when he starts to massage her tummy. He pulls her gently into his lap and returns his attention to her neck. “I have to confess; we truly lucked out with her. Out of all the children, she’s the one I worry about the least”

“Really?” Ned pauses. “Well, if you say so.” He continues kissing her until Catelyn turns her head. Figuring she wants frontal action, he launches an attack on her lips. She pulls back.

“What do you mean? Who do you trust the most?”

“To take care of themselves? Arya,” Ned replies without hesitation. “She’s proven she doesn’t need our help to survive. We can also count on her to give the kids a piece of reality if they need it and she’s career driven.”

“Huh.” Catelyn has a list of objections, but his argument makes sense. “Either way, we agree it's the girls we don’t have to worry about. I don’t know what to do with our boys. Robb is the most stable he’s been in a long time, and he’s dating his cousin.”

Ned could live with incest if he had the stability, to be honest. “Who do you worry about the most?” He asks curiously.

“Bran, for obvious reasons.” Catelyn is determined to keep that boy nesting until his wings lose the will to fly. “Things are going to be harder for him than for anyone else.” Catelyn sounds so sure Ned almost feels bad for disagreeing.

“Bran has a good head on his shoulders.” He says neutrally. “It’s Jon I’m worried about.”

“Jon?”

Ned nods. “Sometimes, that boy reminds me too much of my sister.”

***

Room service leaves behind a cart for Robb’s pleasure. The heir had ordered several different delicacies that have gone cold and two bottles of champagne that rest in lukewarm water. Jon is panting after their first round. Robb wants to pop the bottle, but Jon insists on getting another bucket of ice and a break.

“I’ll be right back,” he promises. He glances over to the champagne bottle. He takes one and hands it over to his boyfriend. “Then we can finish that up and try something new.”
Robb groans as the images fill his mind. “Come back soon,” he begs.

Adorned in a black robe, Jon heads out to the ice machine located in a hole in the wall. A few moments later, he feels a hand wander to his ass. After a healthy squeeze, he closes his eyes and moans. “Robb, couldn’t you have waited?”

“I’m afraid you’re too pretty to resist,” says a much deeper voice that is familiar but not welcomed. Jon’s eyes snap open. He drops his bucket and turns around.

“What the hell, Rhaegar?” Jon tries to push him off, but the man traps him against the wall. “Get the fuck off me!”

“Don’t use that language with me, Jon. I’m still your father.”

Jon struggles to get away. Rhaegar laughs off his violent attempts to break free; swatting away his hisses and scratches like a show of roughhousing between father and son.

“You’re so cute, Jon. I can see why your lover can’t get enough of you.” Rhaegar parts Jon’s robe to reveal the garden of love bites on his chest. He licks his lips. “Such a virile young man you’ve snagged. Of course, Starks are insatiable.” His arms wrap around Jon’s waist and he grabs both butt cheeks. “I bet his cock fits so snuggly inside your quim. Tell me, what has he done to this heavenly body of yours?”

Jon doesn’t know what he’s more disgusted by; the fact that Rhaegar uses the word ‘quim’ or the hands groping his ass. Both things need to stop, so Jon throws a punch at him. Rhaegar slams him against the wall before it makes an impact.

Jon glares after a few more futile squirms. “What do you want?”

Rhaegar smiles. He nestles his head against Jon’s neck and inhales. “Oh, you’ve been sweating. How about you take a nice long shower in my room? I can introduce you to Aegon. One look at you and he’ll be begging for a taste. How about it? A brother is only one step away from a cousin.”

The mention of Jon's brother—a young man who Jon may have heard the name of, makes him shiver. More than ever, he tries his hardest to escape. “Rhaegar, let me go.”

“Call me daddy,” Rhaegar insists. “And I’ll consider it.”

“Let. Me. Go.”

Rhaegar sighs. The child is stubborn, like his mother—and like him, he thinks giddily. Jon is his child, too. Rhaegar starts laughing, ignoring the frightened expression on his son’s face. He recovers the fallen bucket on the floor—keeping a firm hand around Jon’s waist to keep him from escaping. From the collection of ice cubes, he grabs a single one and presses it against Jon’s mouth.

“Suck,” he orders.

“What?” Jon prays for an intervention or a distraction—something that can give him the opportunity to make a run for it without having to scream ‘Rhaegar Targaryen is after my body.’

“I want to see you suck on it like it’s your mother’s breasts. I never got to see her breast feeding. It’s the hallmark of a father’s beginning.” Rhaegar’s face resembles a kicked puppy and Jon’s jaw drops. He wonders how it is possible for a man to look like the victim when he’s acting like a rapist.

“No!” Jon rejects. “Fuck no!”
Rhaegar shakes his head. He hates what he is about to say. “Jon, do this for me and I’ll leave you alone for the whole night.” The deal vexes Rhaegar—he shouldn’t have to negotiate to get his son to act like his son. Jon should want to suck on the ice cube for him. All Rhaegar wants is for them to make up for the lost time. Jon’s resistance proves that his dreams, those nights of cuddling together when it gets cold, or feeding him in his lap, are farther than distant stars in another galaxy. Rhaegar is a decent enough man to overlook the brainwashing he must have endured from his uncle. If Jon didn’t have such frigid father figure, he would have been on his knees, enacting all sorts of father-son bonding activities with him. Ned Stark has made Jon believe that Rhaegar’s behavior is inappropriate.

Jon contemplates his options. If he stays out long enough, Robb will come out to find him. He remembers his mother’s story about Brandon’s arrest and decides that he cannot afford a similar altercation for his uncle or for Robb. With great reluctance, he reaches out for the ice cube in Rhaegar’s hand.

Rhaegar pulls it away. He waves his finger back and forth. “Ah, ah, ah. I get to hold it.”

Jon scowls. He widens his mouth and lets Rhaegar push the cube between his lips. The object chills his lips; it does not move in, and neither does Rhaegar. He gives Jon pointed look and mouths at him to ‘suck.’ Jon scowls but does what he is told to do.

Rhaegar moans when he sees Jon’s lips—Lyanna’s perfect plump lips wrap around his ice cube, and he nearly comes in his pants when Jon starts to suck.

“Wait!”

For a second, Jon is relieved. He assumes Rhaegar sees the absurdity of his request and has rescinded his offer. To his disgust, Rhaegar takes out his phone. “I have to record this. It’s not every day a father gets to watch his son suck on an ice cube.”

“There’s a reason for—!” Jon is unable to finish his complaint before the ice cube is shoved back into his mouth.

“Yeah, now suck it. Be a good boy for me.” Rhaegar mutters.

Jon looks up at him through his long lashes, and instead of a death glare, Rhaegar sees the loving gaze of his former mistress. Rhaegar comes close enough to push the ice cube further in, and it causes his half-hard cock to press against Jon’s thigh. The feeling of his father’s erection makes him choke.

“Sorry, did I do that? I’ll be gentler next time,” whispers Rhaegar.

Jon sucks harder to hurry the process along. He swipes his tongue against the ice cube to add heat. The ice cube melts until it is no more than a frozen droplet and Rhaegar has to push it all the way in. When everything is melted inside, Jon swallows as much as he can. Rhaegar retracts his fingers to wipe away the mess trailing down his chin. He stops recording when Jon is about to speak.

“Never contact me again,” Jon hisses. His voice is laced with venom and Rhaegar can’t help but admire how much he looks like a disgruntled kitten.

“I can’t do that,” Rhaegar says with a chime horror attached. The notion of leaving his child after such a performance almost brought him physical pain. “I met you while clouded with insecurities; for the last decade, I was so sure I had reached my peak, producing songs that touched the ears but not the soul. When I saw you that day, I knew that Lyanna had given me another muse. A son.”
Rhaegar breathes heavily into his ear. “I’m going to compose an entire symphony for you. You’re going to feel my love in every way.”

“I felt your love in too many ways.”

Jon uses his forearm to push Rhaegar to the side; this time, his father honors their deal and departs. He does not, however, hesitate to follow him back to his room.

“You promised—!”

“I will respect my promise, but I want you to understand that my offer is valid.” Rhaegar walks forward so that he can intercept Jon’s path. “Your brother and I have booked a suite just a floor above yours. He doesn’t know about you but he will. I would rather you two meet under circumstances of sweetness and not scandal, wouldn’t you?”

Jon tightens his grip. “If he wants to meet me, that’s fine. The only thing I want is for you to stop following me. I don’t want to get involved with you.”

“I’m your father; I have a right to get involved with you.” He says the statement so casually that Jon wonders if he is programmed to be deaf towards reason. “But, I’m not here to bond,” he lies. “I’m here for Arya.”

Jon stops in his tracks. He grabs Rhaegar by the collar with an extraordinary amount of strength he did not possess when he was attacked; he shoves Rhaegar against the wall. “Touch her, and I’ll kill you.”

“You sound like your mother again.” Jon smashes his body against the wall. Rhaegar keeps laughing. His head is pulsing. He mutters something about being glad that Jon is so healthy and it makes Jon realize that the man is not taking him seriously in the slightest.

Rhaegar explains, “Aegon saw the show tonight and became rather smitten with the female lead. Imagine my surprise when we found out she was a Stark. Of course, that was a lie. I wasn’t surprised; I did take him to the show with the intention of him finding Arya attractive. She looks so very much like Lyanna. Like father, like son. I might have tried to have her for myself if we hadn’t met. After all, who wants an imitation when he can get the real deal and their lovechild?”

“You’re sick.” Jon walks away. He doesn’t want a tantrum to alert the guests. Having Robb and Uncle Ned come out is one rescue he cannot afford. “Sorry to say, but Arya isn’t stupid.” Not after Jon tells her what Rhaegar is planning.

Rhaegar hums and the tune is the beginning of a future classic. Jon truly brings out the best in him. “Be that as it may, I’ve heard from my sources that she is ambitious, and judging from her dalliances with the Lannisters, she might be open to negotiation. What’s the harm in proposing a publicity stunt to further her career? You might not know this about your brother, but Aegon is a rising star in the theater world. Theatre and ballet. A perfect match. She might even grow to like him.”

“You're an asshole and Arya will eat him alive.”

Rhaegar laughs again. He grabs Jon’s ass for one final squeeze. Jon curses at him but keeps his tone low to avoid a scene. “Keep talking like that, and I’ll have to give you a spanking.” He lets go of Jon and walks away with a parting message. “Next time you’re naughty, expect to be bent over.”

Jon grabs a handful of ice cubes and throws it at his father. Surprise by the attack, he turns around. Jon looks him straight in the eyes and says: "There's only one man who can bend me over and it isn't you."
When Jon comes back to their room, Robb jumps him in excitement. “You took so long; I thought someone kidnapped you.” Before Jon can provide an excuse, his boyfriend dragged him and a lubed-up wine bottle to the floor. They drop onto a pile of sheets on top of a carpet.

Jon remains silent, and when Robb looks at him, he sees an expression of bereavement. Robb cradles his face. “What happened?”

Jon stares back at his boyfriend. The man is covered with concern and Jon is reminded of how grateful he is that his lover is not a psychopath. The young man deserves a reward for letting him go when Jon wanted him to. There are so many assholes in the world who deserve to have their asses kicked, and Jon is lucky enough to receive the love of a man who can murder those assholes and cover up the crime.

Jon takes off his shirt. “I’ll tell you later,” he promises. “After I let you do those dirty things to me.”

Jon is going to reward this gorgeous man. After dealing with Rhaegar, he’s never found Robb sexier. Here is someone who loves him; who let him go because it was the right thing to do. He’ll tell Robb the truth after they are finished; his problems will only spoil the mood. If he confesses after several rounds of love making, both will be too tired to move. That way, by the time Robb’s dick recovers, he’ll have cooled down some.

Robb considers pushing him for answers; he doesn’t want to go to bed while Jon is in turmoil. Yet, Jon refuses to let him be a good man. He flicks his tongue against Robb’s cock. Robb moans at the cool sensation. Jon must have sucked on some ice. Robb should consider doing more things with those ice cubes for one of those rounds. Jon is accommodating tonight and Robb doesn’t want to miss out on a chance to bring out the ball gags.

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In the suite above them, Rhaegar lies down on his king size bed and watches the show on his laptop. Days after his confrontation with Lyanna, he made a habit of tracking down their son’s every move. He was ecstatic to learn that the Starks would be traveling to see their youngest daughter’s performance. After they checked in, he paid room service to attach a camera to their cart.

The results are phenomenal. Rhaegar has never seen anyone get plowed so beautifully. Jon was born to be on his back. He wonders if the Starks knew what they were doing when they installed their harsh upbringing on a child whose mother embodies sex. Jon resembles a high-ranking courtesan with how wide his legs are spread and how eager his hole is to take cock.

The sight is almost orgasmic. Almost. While Rhaegar clearly enjoys watching his son get fucked by his cousin—they are both highly attractive young men, after all—it is nowhere as good as it would be watching Jon get used by someone…closer to home.

People never fail to mention the resemblance between Rhaegar and Aegon. If his eldest capture the attention of his youngest, the sex would be fantastic. Two mirror images indulging in each other’s bodies, screwing in the sheets and putting on a little show for their daddy.

As a father, it is his greatest wish to seek the best mate for his children. If Aegon switches his attentions from Ned Stark’s daughter to Jon, Rhaegar will be killing two birds with one stone.

His boys have a type after all.
I did not want to say anything because I didn’t want my opinion to sway the vote but I’m really happy most people didn’t want Jon topping. :) I would have written it if the majority wanted me to, but my heart wouldn't have been in it. In my dreams, Jon's bottom bounces.

And of course, I love writing creepy!Rhaegar. I haven’t decided if I wanted the oneshot to be dark-disturbing-creepy or black-comedy-creepy. But I will figure it out during my hiatus. Yes, my hiatus. Onto the next point:

HIATUS ALERT
I’ll be gone from May 14th until June 11th. Well, I’ll be gone from May 14th to May 27th but I’m taking an extra two weeks to plan and write the chapters. I’ll put out a schedule next week!
The large crowd at the theater gives Catelyn a brief estimate of the turnout for opening night. Needless to say, she is impressed. She’s heard from various sources that the sponsors limited invitations, guaranteeing the most exclusive guests while also opening the door for the guests desperate enough to pay whatever amount to be considered a part of the "exclusive" club. The ending result is that most of the people here came for the socialization, not the show. The outcome will benefit Arya regardless; no one will out themselves as uncultured swine eager for a way in rather than being the door. They will run with the crowd. Specifically, the connoisseurs of dance whom Catelyn knows will vouch for her daughter’s talent.

Before they enter the waiting auditorium, Catelyn encourages her children to mingle with the other guests. “Your father and I will chat up with old acquaintances.” From afar, she recognizes a few faces, and some of them are even friendly.

They agree, but as soon as they walk into the room, the children are swept into the crowd and washed to their designated shores. Sansa finds herself alone, Bran and Rickon are settled next to the bar where they have instant access to juice and fruit, and Robb and Jon find themselves in a discreet corner perfect for avoiding decency. They are on each other in seconds.

The dynamic doesn’t change when the Tyrells arrive. Margaery makes an entrance, sending coy smiles and sideway glances to anyone foolish enough to throw their fancy. The heiress heads straight to her old friend, Sansa. The two girls reunite with hugs and kisses, presenting a feast for the eyes as bachelors and boyfriends, husbands and sons, stop to stare at the two beauties. Willas’s arrival is more discreet. He does not want to ruin the mood of the honeymooners in the corner, and so, in defeat, he limps over to the bar where there is seating. Bran is there to greet him, and he does so like an old friend. He even introduces him to Rickon. “Ah, the brother who tried to kill you,” Willas teases—chuckling as Rickon burns with embarrassment. Rickon recovers and boldly begins a conversation about unrequited love.

It seems the Starks all carried swords in their mouths.

Tywin Lannister’s presence makes a significantly larger scene. The man comes down from the stairs, and each step makes the heat in hell drop. There is no sycophant strong enough to face him and no fool desperate enough to become rich. The only one who presents a challenge is the Starks. By the glare Tywin endures from their patriarch, the lion has no choice but to face the wolf in all his vengeful glory. Tywin, for the first time in many years, is eager. This is the moment he’s been waiting for.

“I see you’ve finally arrived,” Tywin notes. “Pity you couldn’t come to opening night. Arya was splendid. Though, I am not surprised.”

"No?"

"Arya and I have had many discussions about your limited support."

Ned growls. Catelyn puts a hand on his shoulder.

"And Ned and I have talked about your involvement," Catelyn says as she squeezes Ned’s shoulder.
"Arya is grateful for your sponsorship. Aren't we, Ned?"

There's an insult on the tip of Ned's tongue. He replaces it with: "We are proud of our daughter’s progress. Though as parents, we value our children’s happiness over their success. We aren’t in the business of abandonment."

Tywin’s lips twitch. “It is not abandonment if she runs away first.”

Catelyn freezes when the rumor resurfaces. She turns to Ned, and they share a look. When Arya left, gossip in the high societies latch onto the various possibilities for her absence, good and mostly bad. To this day, the Starks made sure to keep her disappearance a mystery. Tywin is not the type of man to indulge in baseless rumors; his assertion is telling, and the story is grim.

Ned’s eyes narrow. “I suppose your sons taught you that,” he retorts, ignoring the urge to investigate.

The bitter exchanges are interrupted for the final, breath-taking, jaw-dropping appearances of the night. The entire room falls silent.

Jon’s skin crawls, and he finds himself breaking his kiss to catch his breath. He tries to turn around, but Robb’s fingertips push into his back, leaving bruises on top of his fair flesh. Robb kisses him again; this time, it is not out of lust but protection. Jon returns the kiss in full force. He gently bites his lip; an unspoken urge to set him free.

"Is he there?"

Robb nods. "Yeah."

“I can handle this,” Jon promises.

Jon is lying, but fortunately, Robb is there to cradle him in his arms. “It’s okay,” Robb tells him. “I’m here. I’ll protect you.” He will prove to his lover that the trust placed in him is well deserved.

The Targaryen company consists of the family patriarch and his heir. Jon shivers when Rhaegar catches his gaze, and his son follows with a glare. Rhaegar whispers something into Aegon’s ear. The young man seems upset by the clandestine request, emphasized by his bristling, but a firm hand on his shoulder convinces him to obey. Without another word, the Targaryens separate. Aegon walks towards his half-brother with a grimace. Rhaegar heads towards the trio of Starks and Lannister. He greets them with misplaced fondness.

The British equivalent of a Mexican standoff involved a group of well-dressed men pointing out each other’s flaws and throwing their darkest secrets out like tea in the Boston Harbor.

Ned, Tywin, and Rhaegar do not fail to disappoint.

“IT’s been awhile since we’ve been in the same room,” Rhaegar greets. He grabs a glass of champagne from a nearby waiter and without taking a sip, points it in Ned’s direction. “Last time I saw you, your brother tried to kill me. That was what? Twenty years ago?”

“Twenty-two.”

“Ah, that’s right. Twenty-two years.” Rhaegar turns to Stark. "How’s the company?"

"Good."

Tywin turns towards Catelyn. "You must feel fortunate to have chosen the right brother. That is
some fine, heir-hopping work."

Catelyn's smile does not match her glare. "I chose the brother I love, Tywin."

"Still," Tywin hums. "To have so many options must have been a relief. I don't understand why you stopped at second son."

"Our families do possess an impossible allure. My father thought as much of your wife. Sometimes, I like to think she felt the same way," Rhaegar says with a little too much pep. Tywin's eyes narrow at the insinuation. The younger man continues to speak. "If I remember correctly, the last time I saw you was at my father's funeral."

"Yes, after he killed himself." Tywin takes a glass to match Rhaegar's elegance. Without an ounce of shame and maybe even a little pride, he notes that: "Men with psychosis such as his have a tendency towards self-harm. Shame you couldn't keep a better watch on him."

Rhaegar’s smiles with bared teeth. "A bigger shame is that our surgeons aren’t as skilled as we hope them to be, or else my father would still be alive. But I suppose Jaime’s incompetency made the transition from doctor to nurse more appropriate. If he couldn’t save my father, at least our citizens aren’t risking their lives in his hands…oh sorry, I meant hand."

"Yes, well, let me give you a hand for your recent concert."

"You saw it?"

"No." Tywin shakes his head like the suggestion is something piteous. "But my associates say they found the ode to your prime quite impressive. Do I sense a retirement coming soon? Good choice, to quit while you can still run. Age should be handled with dignity."

"Strange how the advice we offer is hardly ever the advice we take," Ned mutters. Catelyn rolls her eyes as they are brought back into the rat race.

Tywin’s lips twitch. "Eddard, you should be quite happy that Arya has attracted such an icon of the arts. This is the second time Rhaegar has been to this performance."

Rhaegar glares at the wily bastard. He recovers long enough to force a grin on his face and turns to Ned. "You should be very proud, Ned. Arya is a talented young woman."

"Yes," Ned grits out. He has been wrong about plenty of things in life but not about Rhaegar Targaryen and his twisted, teenager stealing ways. "So was my sister. I'm sure you've noticed their resemblance."

"Ned…" Catelyn warns, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"They do look a lot like each other," Rhaegar agrees. His lips twitch, and it isn’t until he finishes his sentence does Ned realize it is in triumph. "Yet, she pales in comparison to your nephew. Have you noticed that he’s the splitting image of Lyanna?" Rhaegar leans in, and Ned can feel the smirk against the air. "Especially that ass."

Ned lunges forward, and it takes all of Catelyn’s strength to pull him back before a bloody nose is dished out. A lady in every sense of the word, she performs a rare act of indecency when she kisses him on the lips, bringing forth the rise of scandalous murmurs.

When they separate, she turns to her fellow guests. "There’s a lot of bad blood in our group," she says sweetly, a perfect companion to her Stepford smile. "Perhaps we should all remember who we
are here for and that is Arya.”

There is a moment of contemplation that runs through Ned and Rhaegar’s mind. They are planning their next move, but Tywin beats them all to it.

“Of course,” the Lannister agrees. “I’ve put in a great deal of support for your daughter.”

“I bet you did,” Rhaegar mutters.

Tywin raises an eyebrow. “Care to say that out loud?”

Rhaegar decides to hold back on that particular insinuation. A theory isn’t a fact until one gathers the evidence to make it so. He turns to the matriarch of the Starks. “I agree, Catelyn. We should put this matter aside for tonight. I hate to let our pasts ruin our future together.” He looks past Ned and grins wildly. “And we have quite a future to look forward to.”

Ned and Cat turn to the direction of Rhaegar’s conceit and Ned’s blood chills at the sight.

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Weeks ago, Aegon Targaryen swore he would rather be eaten alive by wolves than make pleasantries with their company. When he came to watch the show yesterday, he never expected the principal dancer to be as enchanting as she was. He loathed to discover she was a Stark—but the heart wants what it wants, and when pumping, it holds the reigns over his mind, forcing him to send two bouquets to her dressing room to make up for the night he missed.

Following his father’s purchase of those dreadful photographs, Aegon discovered the cause of his parents’ tension-filled marriage. Over twenty years ago, his father had an affair with a Stark woman—the same Stark woman whose artwork resurfaced his father’s philandering ways. When Rhaegar came home to London, the man admitted to the affair; his father bore no shame over the accusation. Much to Aegon's disgust, Rhaegar told his son that a man’s passion is controlled by his loins, not his mind, and as a Targaryen, they are allowed to indulge in both.

"We have a 'fuck you' title and 'fuck you" money. With that much precedence for a 'fuck you,' why not deliver it to the rules we loathe?"

"Because society requires rules. The opposite of that is anarchy."

“Fire and blood,” Rhaegar reminded. "We are not ordinary men. We are dragons. Immortal creatures of myth and legend. We're mean to feast on something greater. Trust me, once you dip your tongue into ambrosia, you'll be breathing fire for a second taste.”

Aegon stared at him horrified. “No!” He denied. “No! I won't be dipping my tongue into anyone! Ambrosia is bad for you and it’s bad for your children so you stay at home and learn to love the ice cream your wife bought and you keep eating that ice cream until it’s finished and if you don’t like it anymore, you add Oreos, but you stay loyal to that ice cream because it is limited edition and once it’s gone, it isn’t coming back!”

The lecture solved none of his father’s peculiarities. If anything, they blossomed over the next few days. The highest point of his peculiarity was when he dragged Aegon to a hotel room a few miles from their home and brought him to the theater. After a brief discussion with his godfather, the two worked out the obvious conclusion.

Rhaegar Targaryen is having an affair.
And this one? He’s old enough to be Aegon’s brother. The Targaryen heir caught them last night, sneaking off for one of their dirty trysts. The tramp gave his father a pseudo blowjob with an ice cube and flashed his hard, perky nipples underneath his robe like a harlot. The two would have started banging on the floor if the little trollop didn’t relish in being a tease.

Aegon imagines that they are waiting for some private time to have some hot dirty sex. The image makes Aegon’s stomach churn and cock harden at the same time. Aegon groans. Nauseous arousal is the worse. He can’t help that his father’s mistress is gorgeous as fuck, but fucking hells, the guy is his father’s mistress. He probably still has Rhaegar’s cum inside him.

Aegon slaps a hand over his mouth and takes a moment to swallow his vomit.

When Aegon recovers, he greets the two Starks with reluctance dripping off his tongue. He says his name, “Aegon Targaryen” and ends with an emphasized “Rhaegar Targaryen’s son from his wife.” Aegon then tells them “nice to meet you” in a way that is definitively not nice to meet them. He asks “how are you doing?” in a manner that makes it clear he cares too much for a phrase that is synonymous with “hello.”

The whore remains silent—the guilt of meeting his lover’s son is probably getting to him. The young man who introduces himself as “Jon” entangles his fingers into his cousin’s hand and shyly says “hello” back.

Aegon’s heart skips a beat.

Aegon tosses himself to the wall in a dramatic fashion. He tries to control his emotions. Okay, so Jon is cute for a homewrecker. That’s nothing to lose his mind over. Hell, a lot homewreckers have sweet, puppy dog eyes that make every protective bone in Aegon’s body tremble—fuck! Aegon shakes his head. He comes back at full strength, ignoring the odd looks the younger men give him.

“So. Robb Stark. I hear you’re Arya Stark’s brother.” Aegon makes sure to direct all his attention to the Stark heir. Sometimes, the best punishment is rejection. He’s going to let Jon the Whore know that he’s not letting him ruin his night.

“Yeah,” Robb answers him, a little hesitant to interact after watching the older boy deal with his internal crisis. “That’s why we’re here to watch the show.”

“That’s a great reason. Family.” Aegon stresses with a flick of his tongue. Aegon raises an eyebrow when he sees Jon retreat under his cousin’s arm for protection. “Family,” he repeats. Jon makes another flinch.

Ah, so little mister ‘sleeps with married men’ has a problem when Aegon mentions family.

Aegon sneers. “Family is the most important thing in the world,” he announces. “And I will do whatever it takes to support my family.”

Robb seems to have shoulder the offense for his cousin. He steps in at once. Figures, the slut has a talent for wrapping men around his finger.

“I will, too,” Robb retorts. He glares at Aegon and the Targaryen is taken back by the force of the glower. “And I appreciate if you keep your family away from mine. Because I’m done with this little power play you and your father have going on with Jon.”

“Oh?” Aegon realizes what’s going immediately. “Guess the little tease is playing the victim now.”

“Robb, please don’t—”
“What the fuck do you mean by that?” Robb steps forward until he is inches away from Aegon’s face. He is one step away from instigating a theatrical shove which will accumulate to the traditional brawl.

“Exactly what it sounds like.” Aegon matches his glare with a smirk. “Tell me, has Jon told you what he gets up to at night? Specifically, last night? With my father?”

“Jon tells me everything,” Robb hisses out. “Including the things your father has done.” Robb scoffs. “Of course you would defend that monster. Fucking Targaryens.”

“Hey!” Aegon shortens their distance some more. They are fortunate to be separated from most of the crowd or else the image would be on every socialite’s blog by now. Nothing got views like the sight of two hot, young, virile men grinding on top of each other. “I’m not defending anybody here. I know what my father is doing is wrong.” The infidelity is breaking his mother’s heart and it kills Aegon to see his mother suffer. But as a Targaryen, he remains loyal to his family’s interests—no matter how twisted his relatives are. “But he?” Aegon points to Jon. “He should know better. Look at him; he’s prepared to bend over for me!”

Robb grabs him by the collar and drags him further into the corner where no one can see them.

“Robb!” Jon shouts under his breath. Low volume, heavy heat.

“Say that to my face,” Robb challenges. “Say that to my face and let’s see if yours remains intact.”

If it were not for his breeding, Aegon would have spat in Robb’s face. Instead, he reaches the bait and snaps it off the reel. “You’re so fucking deluded. You think my father doesn’t share all his nasty thoughts about your precious cousin there? ‘Jon has the sweetest ass—why don’t you cop a feel? I’m sure he won’t mind. Look at the way he yawns—can you imagine those lips wrapped around your cock?’ Father is throwing him at me.”

Robb tightens his grip. Jon rubs against Robb’s body. “Please, let him go. He can’t help the way he is. It’s all of Rhaegar’s brainwashing.”

Aegon glares. “I’m not brainwashed.”

Jon ignores him. “Please,” he begs Robb.

After a moment of contemplation, the Stark heir tosses the Targaryen aside. “One day, you’re going to run your mouth at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and I’ll be there to pound your face in when you do, you sick fuck.”

“You kiss your cousin with that mouth?” Aegon mocks.

“You bet your fucking ass I do.”

Jon grabs him and walks away. Aegon follows after. The three of them expect to part ways like in the movies, but the trio return to their grouping by the sway of two high-powered females with social credit and beauty unmatched by the heavens.

***

“…Now I’ve promised my womb to Renly and Loras’s firstborn so now I have to find a partner whose submissive enough to hold his tongue while I’m pregnant with my Renly’s gay baby.”

“You have plenty of options,” Sansa points out. “I always assumed you’d have more men under
your feet than those matching your stance.”

Margaery sighs. “I know, but none of them have the breeding I need. Anyone can get a show pony; I need a stallion. Pity about your brother. Now that is a man I could climb on top of.”

“Jon does that enough for both of you.”

Margaery laughs, and Sansa cracks a smile. “Sansa, you could always make me smile.” She sighs. “I think it’s the wedding that’s making me race beyond my biological clock. At this rate, I’m going to have to fuck Joffrey again.”

Sansa groans. “Don’t go down that dark path. He’s insane.”

“He’s manageable,” Margaery defends. “I leashed him once, and I can do it again.” She throws Sansa a smirk. “Besides, he’s pretty to look at and the heir to billions. I’d have two companies if I married him.”

“One more than the grave you’ll have to dig for yourself.”

Margaery smirks. “Who says it’ll be for me?” She stares at her surroundings, watching the bugs weave through the leaves of society with disinterest. “In all seriousness, your brother was one of the last good ones. Wonderful family. Smart. Career oriented. Great in bed. The timing, though. It’s only the timing.” She sighs. “The only options left are the Martells.” Margaery shivers. “Family rivalry aside, all the younger men cower under their sister’s gaze. You know how I loathe Arianne. I can’t imagine her as my sister-in-law with her fake Spanish accent—”

“I think she’s genuinely Spanish.”

“And her Indian-bought hair.”

“That’s her real hair.”

“Whose friend are you?”

“Yours,” Sansa promises. “But if you can’t stand Arianne, I’m wondering how you expect to tolerate Cersei Lannister.”

Margaery laughs. “My plan is to birth an entire football team and have them follow her around with chimes of ‘grandmother,’ thus aiding the constant reminder that she is old and ruined.”

The heiresses cackle at the image.

“Ooh,” Margaery whistles.

“What?”

Margaery nods towards a secreted spot from the crowd. “Look who decides to turn the England’s sexiest couple into the world’s hottest threesome.”

Sansa turns her head. She sees an unfamiliar stranger join her brother and Jon. “Who’s that?”

“Aegon Targaryen,” Margaery whispers. “Heir to the Targaryen fortune. Lord. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the new Eddie Redmayne.” Margaery chuckles. “Supposedly. There’s been a lot of hype about him since he starred as Hamlet at the Donmar Warehouse. Before that, he won the Best Newcomer Award for his role in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”
Sansa shakes her head in amusement. "I see you’ve found your next prey."

Margaery giggles. "Not this time. Apparently, he has his sights set on another maiden and I don’t care to compete with a woman of that caliber."

“Oh come one,” Sansa teases. “Who’s better than you?”

Margaery smirks. She watches as Aegon is led away to the corner by the eldest Stark. She licks her lips in appreciation of Robb’s roughness. Oh, how she misses the way he bruised her thighs and twisted his tongue inside her. Perhaps, she isn’t wrong when she made that joke about threesomes and debauchery. A girl can dream, can’t she?

Her breathing becomes heavy. “Let’s just say this is his second time watching this production and no one buys two bouquets of roses because he appreciates the art.”

Sansa’s eyes widen. “Arya, my Arya?” Sansa sinks her head into Margaery shoulder and shakes with laughter. “He’s so pretty!” Sansa chokes out. “He’s the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen!”

“Don’t you just want to see him lick a popsicle?” Margaery asks. “He reminds me of your cousin.”

Sansa closes her eyes to imagine the scene. “Fuck, he does,” Sansa moans. “Oh, Arya might like him. She’s never been interested in a guy that soft.”

“That’ll make the whip cream taste even better.”

The girl bursts into giggles again. When their behavior starts to draw attention, Margaery reminds her of their public presence. She drags her towards the direction of missing men. “Come, your brother and cousin should be finished interrogating him by now. It’s our turn. Let’s see if he can handle being with a Stark.”

The two saunter over with cheer that visibly contrasts the three boys. Margaery shares a look with Sansa, indicating an investigation is in order but that neither should let it be known of their suspicions. They are ladies, after all.

“Hi boys.” Margaery kisses Robb on the cheek which he half-heartedly returns and introduces herself to Jon. “I’m Margaery Tyrell. You must be Robb’s new sweetheart. Jon, isn’t it?”

"My soulmate," Robb corrects.

Jon flushes and glances over at Robb. Then, he nods his head with a bashful smile. “Yes, that’s me.”

“What?”

Aegon makes odd, cat-like hissing noises that clearly indicates his unhappiness. He is equally upset inwardly as his outward appearance conveys. This slut is not only sleeping with his father, but he were dating his cousin like some faux Targaryen and said cousin allows it? No wonder he’s so accepting of adultery!

Before he can soil his reputation with Sansa, Margaery smoothly intervenes. “Aegon, it’s so nice to see you again. How you’ve been since New Year’s?”

Aegon pauses from his internal outrage to remember her. The memory arrives easily; a woman with the amount of prestige and beauty as Margaery Tyrell comes as quickly as it came to the tabloids. “Yes,” he grits out. “You look lovely.”
“Well, this is Sansa. She is a dear friend of mine and the eldest daughter of the Stark family.”
Margaery grins. “That makes her the older sister of Arya Stark. They are very close.”

Aegon’s eyes twinkle with interest. “Hello, Sansa. I look forward to making your acquaintance.” But
family comes first. He returns to glaring Jon. “I can’t believe you’re dating him. Targaryen cock isn’t
enough for you?”

Sansa’s jaw drops. Even Margaery is taken back by the accusation.

“You wish it was,” Robb growls out. This little hate-fuck Aegon is trying to start with Jon is
reaching his boiling point, and crowd or not, he is going to break some bones and kick some asses if
the man keeps talking. “I gave you a warning. Take it and walk away.”

“My pleasure.”

Sansa stares in horror at the three of them. “What is going on here?”

“Nothing,” Aegon spits out as he marches to the bar. “If I’m lucky, your behavior will be a preview
of what to expect from Arya and then I will never have to deal with your family again. Not unless
Jon continues his fancy for fucking.”

***

There is not a Tully or a Stark in the world whose vision falls below 20/20. Good eyesight is one of
the various genes their family has been blessed with, resulting in two of the youngest Starks
obtaining a rare, 20/10 vision—define by their ability to see up to twenty feet what an average person
can see at ten feet from an eye chart.

The ability is preferable in situations like parties, where children are typically shoved to the side
while scandals run amok. Fortunately, Rickon and Bran miss none of it, and they bear no qualms
about sharing their findings with their fellow wayward companions.

“It’s like they are having a pissing contest. I bet if we wait a bit, they’ll take out their penises and start
measuring them.”

Bran stares at his little brother with a furrowed brow. “How did you learn these words?”

"School."

"Well, stop it."

“No pursuit of knowledge is unworthy,” Willas quips. “Is Jon unzipping his pants anytime soon?”

Rickon squints. “Nope, pants are on.”

“Damn.”

Bran sighs. “You need to get over him.”

Willas chuckles lowly. “Are you going to lecture me on doing better?”

Bran shakes his head. “No, but finding a partner isn’t about finding someone better. It’s about
finding someone right. Being single doesn’t mean you’re unlovable, just that you’re available for the
person you’re meant to be with.”

Willas looks down at the teenager with a smile. “That’s pretty good advice. Where did you get that
“Ah. Robb.”

“I think it’s universal advice.”

Rickon shrugs. “Hey, you might as well listen to him. He did win your man so he knows what he’s doing.”

Bran groans at the bluntness. “If I could stand, I’d hit you.” The paraplegic turns to Willas. “You’re amazing, Willas. You’ll find someone and they’ll be perfect for you. You’ll be able to talk with them about your family, you’ll go horse-riding together, and cuddle in the grass with dew wetting your skin…”

“That’s some bullshit right there.”

“Rickon!” Bran gasps. “Don’t use that language.”

“It’s the only word to describe the advice you’re giving to him.” Rickon hops on the chair because he can and Bran can’t. “Listen, Robb was able to get Jon because he forced him to like him. They did dirty stuff as soon as they met and then kidnapped him. Two weeks and they were already living together.”

“And then they broke up.”

“And they later got back together.”

“After Robb gave Jon the space he needed to decide who he loved.”

“After he got him hooked on some loving.” Rickon rolls his eyes. “You lost Jon. But you’ll find someone else and you can’t keep making the same mistakes. So none of that sissy stuff.”

“What do you know, Rickon?” Bran snaps, touchy that his goodwill is being thrown away for garbage out of the Stalker’s Manifesto. “You’re not seeing anybody. Shireen is two steps away from a restraining order.”

“Hey!” Rickon pouts. “Lyanna copped a feel with Shireen Baratheon within two days of meeting her. She didn’t get that far by backing down. She was aggressive.”

“Lyanna Mormont is Shireen’s first female friend. You’re the neighbor’s creepy kid who spies on her through her window.” Bran shakes his head and turns to Willas. “You have to give it time. Let the right person find you.”

“WIllas,” Rickon says, oddly serious. “Love is like modern art. You could have done it, but you didn’t and you spend your whole life hating those who could. So if you see someone you like, take them. Don’t listen to anybody. Just take them. They are there. Take them.”

“You sound like a rapist.”

“Shut up, Bran.”

Willas laughs for the longest time. When he finishes, he looks down at his unfinished drink. He becomes suddenly aware that he doesn’t like red wine; he prefers rosé. He orders red because Oberyn used to have it when they were together, and he found it wasteful to order more than one
bottle. Over time, he developed a taste for it.

“You’re right.”

“Who?” They say simultaneously.

“Both of you,” Willas tells them. “But I think the right person has already found me and is waiting for me to open the door.” He ruffles both their heads—he would have hugged them but a man in his thirties, hugging two underage boys tonight means front page exposure as a pedophile tomorrow. “Can you tell my sister I was sick? I have to do something.” He hesitates. “Can any of you lie?”

“I can.” “He can.”

Willas winks at Rickon. “Make it good. She’s sharp as a knife, so you need to be convincing.”

“Of course,” Rickon tells the bartender to get some dirty glasses. “We need to sneak him out without drawing attention.”

The bartender nods. “We get this all the time. Wine glasses or shots?”

“Glasses.”

Bartender gathers four, filthy, red-stained glasses. “Cab or personal driver?”

“Driver—”

“No!” Rickon waves his finger in disapproval. “If the driver sees that you aren't drunk, he’ll tell on you.”

The bartender nods. “He’s right. No witnesses.”

Bran raises an eyebrow. “Won’t it be weirder for him not to use a driver? Seems suspicious.”

Willas stares at the three males in front of him. “Why are you so good at these plans?”

“Experience,” Rickon says. “I’ve gotten into a lot of trouble.”

Willas sighs. “I can pretend to be drunk. I’m just going to my hotel.”

“I can mix you a drink that’ll make you reek of alcohol.” The young man is already shaking up a cocktail. He hands it to Willas.

Willas hesitates before downing it in one gulp. He barely feels anything.

“No alcohol. It just smells like it. I give it to teenagers who give me fake IDs. And alcoholics.”

“Nice.” Rickon approves.

With their plan set in motion, Willas stumbles outside on the down low. Rickon and Bran wish him the best. “Take them,” Rickon whispers dramatically. “And make them yours.”

Willas smiles warily. Fucking Starks, he muses.

***

Before the show begins, Rickon delivers the message to Margaery. Bran keeps silent. While the girl is clever, she is unaware of their previous conversation and therefore cannot come up with a reason
for Willas to leave that doesn’t relate to alcohol poisoning. With no viable theory, she decides to believe them. “For now,” she tells them ominously. Bran sweats up a storm, and before he can look down, Rickon smacks his face right up.

“What’s the worst that can happen if we’re lying?” Rickon tests out.

“My brother is forced to live his life as a sister-wife to his polyamorous ex-boyfriend and isolates himself from our entire family out of fear of disapproval due to our conflicting beliefs and our general rivalry with the Martells.”

Bran nearly faints.

Rickon has no shame. “Well, how on earth can talking to us lead to that? I’m eleven.”

Margaery purses her lips. “You’re right. That is hard to believe.” Naively, she assumes there is no way that two young boys can convince her brother to return to the arms of the wicked Martells and therefore the worse situation is not a possible outcome.

One of the attendants announces that the show is about to start. They are all ushered to their seats. To the Starks’ disgust, they find out that they are sharing a side to side balcony with the Targaryens and that they will have to split up due to their size constraints.

“How about you sit next to me, Jon?” Rhaegar suggests. He pats the seat next to him. “Come to daddy.”

“Over my dead body,” says Robb, Ned, and Cat simultaneously. They stare at each and form a protective shield around the snow wolf. Ned pushes Jon into his son’s arms.

“Don’t let any Targaryens near him,” he growls at him. “If he starts to get handsy, whisk him away and mark your scent.”

“I’ll cum inside him until it’s spilling out of his mouth.”

Ned nods in approval. “Good.”

“Wait, what?”

Robb takes him to the box adjacent to Rhaegar. The Targaryen grimaces but as his son leaves mentions that he loves the view. “And I’m not talking about the show.”

Jon shivers and Aegon mimics his discomfort. He refuses to sit next to his father after that conversation. While he looks for another place to sit, the girls speak up.

“Why don’t you sit beside us?” Sansa suggests. “I have a seat right here.”

Aegon searches around for a better option; Jon is in the other box and his father is humming his sex song. He takes the plunge and sits beside the beautiful red-head. Not wanting to start a fight with the only proper member of the household, he attempts to apologize.

“Listen, I want you to know that my behavior earlier—.”

“You know,” Sansa interrupts. “I heard a rumor.”

Margaery giggles.

“That you’ve developed a fondness for my sister and you might like to meet her.”
Aegon gulps. The thought is tempting as sunlight in England. “I would,” he admits.

“Good,” Sansa smiles sweetly. “Now, given what I just witnessed, I feel less inclined to make that happen. But I am merciful.”

"So merciful," Margaery choruses.

"And the only one here willing to forget what happened. So I could set up a meeting."

“I didn’t mean to—”

“Let’s stop talking about you.” Sansa’s smile never wavers. “If you are interested in Arya, then let me offer you some advice. The way to her heart is not through Jon’s ass-kicking, Jon,” She says as she turns to face him. “Is not only her favorite cousin, he’s her favorite sibling. He's always been a brother to us and a pillar of support for Arya.”

The lights dim. Sansa returns her attention to the stage.

“Think about that,” Sansa warns.

Aegon clenches his fist. If Sansa believes that, he, Aegon Targaryen is going to give Jon Snow a free pass for being related to one of the most spectacular women in the world, then he is...not entirely wrong. Arya comes out on stage in her drab dress and lithe, ballerina figure and fuck, Aegon is a Targaryen, and they do stupid shit for love.

Sansa smirks when she sees Aegon’s attention drain from the world and completely pours onto her younger sister.

***

Arya’s summary does not do the storyline justice. The first scene introduces the Girl, the virginal daughter of a lord, who is trapped in her castle while the people of her country partake in a festival celebrating fertility. She is shielded from the indecencies until she witnesses The Man making love to one of her servants through her window. She tries to mimic his dancing in her bedroom unaware that The Man is watching her. He gets closer and closer, until he is outside her room, watching her every move. When The Girl turns around, she finds herself stun that they are face to face.

Hesitantly, she lets him into her room. The Man who teaches her to dance outside of her frigid customs.

The audience watches with tight thighs and held breaths as The Man lays next to The Girl and onto the bed without touching her. The Girl is reluctant but allows him to undress her. The moves are sensual and slow. The Girl copies her teacher’s performance throughout the dance, following his every move but always a second off. The timing represents her inexperience. When they are done, their lips are barely touching each other but it looks like they came.

The dance moves on to the next morning, where The Girl is taken to the streets to celebrate the second day of the festival. She loses her teacher in the crowd and finds refuge in a brothel with several other young women. Robb recognizes some of the girls as a Mormont and a Manderly and maybe a few other socialites. They teach The Girl a few tricks and compared to earlier, the music is uplifting and fun; the moves are informal. At the end of it, she performs a fast-moving pique turn into The Man’s arms who finds her and lifts her out of the house.

They dance in an elevation of skill. The Girl finds herself catching more attention from different men. She performs a few short dances with the “whores” and the “men,” one after the other. As the
production continues, Girl dances away from The Man. When he catches her alone, their movement accumulates to a fight consisting of rough moves that resemble in harsh, metaphoric sex. There’s mimicry of slapping and tussling; the music is filled with sharp pangs and loud bases. In the end, The Girl cuts off all ties with The Man. The Man departs after the declaration.

The Girl is alone on the stage. Catelyn grasps Ned’s hand as they watch Arya’s solo. The Girl is at her pinnacle, not only is she supposed to display fearlessness and confidence; the solo is supposed to convey a young woman who appreciates the wonders of her body. The dance is bold, sensual, but also enjoyable to herself and therefore the audience. Everything from her fouettes to her piques are filled with life. There is passion when she turns and eagerness whenever she does a split or kick. At the end of the solo, Arya prepares for her final move. The Girl jumps several feet in the air in one count where her arms spread open as she spins to the ground and lands on the second count. As soon as her feet hit the ground, the audience gets to their feet for a standing ovation.

Arya is breathing harder than she has in her entire life.

Intermission arrives, and Arya’s eyes are wet as she leaves the stage.

***

Before intermission ends, Jaqen congratulates her on her successful solo. Arya wipes off the imaginary dust of her new costume. “You don’t have to praise me each time I don’t make a mistake. It’ll get tiring after a while.”

Jaqen chuckles. “A Girl is confident. Good. A Girl was nervous earlier.”

Arya pauses. She takes a deep breath. “You have a good eye.”

“Oh?”

Arya nods. The last act opens, and the dancers come together to perform the festival scene. The choreography is beautiful. Syrio was never one to neglect his dancers, even if they aren’t principal members.

“My entire family is here tonight. I was worried that if I messed up, even just a little bit, they would never let me join the Faceless Men. I wanted their blessing; I thought ‘if I do well enough, they’ll have no choice but to support me.”

“A Girl should dance for herself and not let a Girl’s family decide her fate.”

“I used to think like that.” Arya smiles to herself. “I still do. I’ll join with or without their approval, but I won’t be happy about it.” She stares at her parents through the curtains. “I don’t want to lose my home again.”

When Arya turns to Jaqen, she is jolted forward. Their lips meet in a tender but deep kiss.

“You will always have a home, and that is the stage. I will welcome you.”

***

The final scene ends with Jaqen and Arya’s final dance. The two of them are performing solo pieces in the beginning, several dozen feet apart but The Man and the Girl are staring at each other the entire time. They come closer and closer to each other until the dancing becomes a partnership. While their movements begin as slow, the music speeds up so that their competition becomes more wild and uncontrollable. Each move is matched by another more powerful gesture. There are more
floor and aerial movements. Soon, they become so fast that barely anyone can catch up with them.

The climatic move, Arya runs into Jaqen’s arms. He throws her up in the air and captures by the waist. Arya performs a solid vertical split while Jaqen lifts her up without a falter. Jaqen removes his hand, much to the trepidation of Arya’s family while Arya adjusts her form. Jaqen perform several steps while Arya moves in midair. The sight is beautiful and earns another round of applause. Soon, their movements grow slower until they are barely moving.

The Man brings her down to the floor beside him. They stare into each other’s eyes as the life drifts out of them and they become immobile and die in each other’s arms.

The curtain falls and second standing ovation is needed to convey the audience’s approval. Moments later, every curtain opens to reveal the dancers. Arya receives numerous bouquets and the sight of her cheering parents. She smiles wider than she has in her entire life.

Chapter End Notes

This story has reached 100K hits. Yay! I am officially the seventh most read story on this fandom within this site!

Either way, I hope you enjoy the dialogue between the characters. It was really fun to write Aegon in because he’s this spoiled brat but at the same time, he’s talented and a momma’s boy and stupidly loyal to his father. Lito from Sense8 was my inspiration. :) Uh, just so you know, Willas has not left London. He is simply making a very important phone call. I didn’t bring him here to make him disappear.

So, with that in mind. My hiatus schedule is right here

Cross your fingers that I can finish Crown the Wolf before Sunday so I don’t have to worry about it on my flight.
While the audience applauds her daughter, Catelyn latches onto her husband’s arm and drags him into the deepest crevices of the women’s bathroom. Her movements are swift and methodical; done before anyone can comment on their flight. She maneuvers her way to the facilities on the third floor and unbuckles Ned’s belt during her stride. Her panties are stuffed into her husband’s pocket and her hair is wild; a hair band is wrapped around her wrist and her lipstick is bouncing in her purse for instant post-coital clean-up.

Jon and Robb wait exactly five minutes before following suit. Stalls in the men’s bathroom are golden snitches in a field of bludgers but no one wants to fight over a dicking spot in an area intended for shit and piss.

Robb leads; Tully’s don’t negotiate when their balls are on the line. He pulls his curly-haired cousin into an empty, handicapped stall—the holy grail of bathroom love-making—and is over him like iguanas on a sun deck. Jon is responsive but his lips feel more like vacuums than kisses and his hands are struggling to find their place. Tension covers his entire frame like macaroni and no matter how hard Robb tries to fondle Jon, the older boy’s backside remains unmoving. Finally, the Stark heir lets go.

“Okay, okay, let’s just pause for a moment.”

“What’s the matter?” Jon sounds genuinely confused. Robb hates it when Jon’s confused. That means Jon and Robb are going to have to work through the problem rather than have Jon provide the answers.

“It’s just…” Robb sighs. “You’re not into it.”

Jon is taken back. He tries to smile but the expression falls short on his lips. “Are you kidding me? After what we just watched? Of course, I am.”

“No, you’re not.” Robb is an expert on arousal. Ever since he learned that women could fake their orgasms, he has been a dedicated pupil to the intricacies of pleasure. His tongue can fold origami out of cherry stems; his fingers are legendary for their ability to curl and scissor at the same time. “You’re too stressed.”

“I am not.” Jon pouts. When he sees the serious look in his lover’s eyes, his resolve falters.

“I can’t sleep with someone who’s not interested in me.” There is nothing that got his cock softer than a reluctant participant. Turning his partner into a spluttering mess of drool and cum is part of the appeal of sex. Without it, sex is reduced to two bodies humping.

“I thought you liked that type of roleplay.”

“Yes,” Robb breathes out. “But it’s hot because I know you’re pretending.” He tenderly strokes Jon’s cheek. “I love hearing you beg me to stop while your ass is pushing against my cock. It’s even better watching you grind against the sheets because I’ve tied you up for being such an ungrateful tease.” Robb growls the last part out. Ever the opportunist, he licks Jon’s ear. There’s no reaction from him, not even a shiver. Robb groans and sinks his head into the curve of Jon’s neck. “Talk to me.”
“Nothing is wrong,” Jon insists. He can tell Robb’s erection is deflating faster than a balloon at needlepoint so he acts. “Just pretend this is another game. Here, let me start.” Jon reaches down to undo Robb’s pants.

Robb grabs his hands before they can even touch the zipper.

“Robb—”

“I don’t need you to get me off.” Robb leans forward to give Jon a deep, comforting kiss that borders the realm of sex without crossing over completely. When they part, the Stark lands a chaste peck on his cheek. “I need you to tell me what’s wrong. If you’re with me, I want you with me.”

Jon hesitates; his tongue is dipped inside the drools of denial and they flood his mouth with lies. Within his head, the nagging screech of ‘Rhaegar, Rhaegar, Rhaegar’ grows louder. When he recognizes that sex is no longer a viable lifeboat, he sighs in frustration.

“It’s Rhaegar.”

“I figured.”

Jon runs his hand through his hair. “He’s planning something. Something…I don’t know, off. One minute he’s hitting on me and trying to get me to suck on his ice cube—”

“What?”

“—and the next, he’s talking about Arya and Aegon like we’re in the medieval century and he’s going to unite the kingdoms with their marriage.”

“Jon—”

“Which is fine; Arya can handle herself but it’s not just Arya. It’s not just me either. It’s my mother, too. I can’t read him and it’s killing me. I can read anyone.”

“Anyone,” Robb agrees. In Jon’s defense, if Rhaegar’s behavior was given a linguistic equivalent, it’d be gibberish.

“But I can’t read him.” Jon lets out a groan of frustration. “He says he wants to be my father but then he courts me like a lover and treats me like a whore.” Jon hears Robb growl. “At this rate, I don’t think he’s going to be satisfied until my mother is on her knees, playing the prodigal wife while I’m sacrificed on the mountain like a slave boy, legs spread for babymaking.”

“I think you have the stories mixed up.”

“Robb,” Jon warns.

Robb laughs, relieved that Jon’s spirits have returned.

Jon drops his hand in defeat. “This is going nowhere.”

Robb captures Jon’s hand and runs his thumb over Jon’s knuckles. The gesture is soothing; Jon’s heartbeat eases to the tempo of a cricket’s chirp.

“Don’t worry,” Robb assures confidently. “We will get through this together. We just need to come up with a plan to put Rhaegar in his place.” The confidence he emits is astounding; even he’s empowered by his own declaration. “We can’t let this go on. It’s hurting you and that’s hurting me.” Worse, it’s crippling his ability to make love to his boyfriend. Somewhere in his body, his libido is
readying its war armor. “You’re a Stark, Jon Snow. There’s nothing about you that makes you a Targaryen. He has no claim on you and I want him to understand that it’s pointless to try to lay one.” He cradles Jon’s ring finger and pulls him close before Jon notices Robb’s fixation on the digit.

Jon sighs, but there’s a thoughtful look on his face. Finally, he chuckles. “You’re going to keep me away from my big, bad daddy?” He teases.

Robb pulls Jon into a kiss. When Robb lets go, the younger man has a determined, steadfast look on his face. “I’m the only one you can call ‘daddy.’”

Butterflies flutter in his stomach. Jon tiptoes to give his cousin a sweet, chaste kiss on his lower lip and drags it forward. Robb responds by hooking Jon’s thighs around his waist and pushing him against the bathroom stall.

Back into the mood, Robb utilizes a part of his brain to strategize an end for Lord Rhaegar Targaryen and his demented son. Meanwhile, he works on leaving love marks on Jon’s skin. It’s not the message he hopes to convey, but it is a start. He looks forward to Rhaegar’s green-eyed glare. The suggestion works him into a frenzy, trying to get his rocks off in the smallest amount of time possible. Gods know they have to get back soon, having wasted so much time talking. They can’t afford to neglect Arya, either.

***

Half an hour after the show, Arya is about to finish up for the night. She’s delivered another stunning performance, confirming that the raving reviews from yesterday were not a fluke but a premonition. She walks out of the dressing room to get her family. Much to her displeasure, a familiar presence blocks her.

“Mr. Lannister,” she says with a nice, albeit fake smile. It’s hard to come back from her visibly disgruntled appearance but she’s always been able to clean up nicely. Had they been alone, she would not have bothered with the pleasantries. Unfortunately, Tywin is standing beside a portly, middle-aged woman with bottled blonde hair and an expression made to hammer nails. There’s a tightness in her jaw that screams Lannister.

“Arya, this Genna Lannister, my sister. Genna, this is Arya Stark. The girl I was telling you about.”

“Pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise,” Genna replies. She leaves her brother’s side and gives Arya a once over, circling the teenager like a hyena. Arya stands perfectly still and fittingly poise. After Genna is finished, she faces her brother. “She’ll do.”

Arya raises an eyebrow.

“Genna is my public relations manager. Before that, she managed her own firm. One of her old clients is an executive for Tiffany’s so I’ve asked her to set up an appointment with a representative.” Tywin pursed his lips. “She insisted on meeting you first.”

“I have a reputation to maintain,” Genna tells her. “I can’t have the Lannister name sullied for the purpose of returning favors. Good thing, you are quite tolerable.”

Arya’s is too happy to pay mind to the insult. “You work fast,” she teases.

Tywin offers her the closest thing to a formal shrug she has ever seen. Glancing back and forth through the hallway, he tells her that, “The deal will be finalized on Monday. I suggest you foster
“No problem.” Arya, unlike Tywin, shrugs like a louse-lorn college student. “I have no intentions of seeing that relationship go further.” She turns to Genna. “Thank you for the opportunity.” It is clear she is talking to Tywin.

Tywin ushers his sister to leave. He stays behind to talk. “A Lannister always pays his debts,” he reminds her. “I will look forward to seeing how you prosper in the future.”

“We all do,” says an upcoming voice. Arya looks behind Tywin’s shoulder and winces. Her parents are sauntering in with her sister and her friend, the Margaery girl. Her mother has a fresh coat of lipstick on and her hair is pulled back—indicating at some point, she was engaged in activities that caused the fuchsia to smudge and her hair to mimic the wind.

“Mum,” Arya grits out, hoping to keep the conversation to a minimum until they are far, far away from the sinister Lannister presence. “I thought I was going to meet you outside.”

“Were, but you were taking so long, I thought we should check up on you.” Catelyn glances back at Tywin and Arya. “What’s going on here?”

Before Arya can say anything, Tywin answers for her. “I just finished introducing Arya to my sister.”

"Oh?"

"She’s his public relations manager," Arya explains. "Mr. Lannister is recommending me for a sponsorship.”

“How lovely,” Catelyn notes dryly. "So she did your campaign, too?"

“Yes.”

“Well then she must be good.” Ned mutters. The jibe hits everyone, and before it can escalate, Sansa tests out her mediation skills by asking what sponsorship Arya is being considered for.

“Tiffany’s and Co.,” Arya announces.

“Oh, you must be so excited!” Margaery weighs in, her positive attitude drew the attention to the Stark’s middle child like a magnet.

There’s a moment that passes where Tywin, Catelyn, and Ned communicate through micro-expressions and pheromone diffusion—the way beasts do in the wild. After some silent consideration, Tywin makes a calculative decision to retreat.

“Since this has become a family matter, I will make my departure. Arya,” he addresses.

Arya looks up.

“Genna will contact you by Sunday. Unfortunately, she has forgotten her business card so you will have to contact me if you have any questions.” Tywin smirks. "I look forward to your call.”

Arya nods her understanding. As soon as he leaves, Margaery and Sansa are quick to coo over her successes. “You must be so excited!” Sansa cheers.

Margaery turns to Ned and Catelyn with a demure smile. “You two must be absolutely thrilled. Arya is truly on her way to becoming a star.”
Catelyn and Ned show off their own, albeit shaky, smiles.

“Yes, we are so proud of her,” Catelyn agrees.


“Couldn’t be prouder.”

Arya rolls her eyes. She double-checks her bag for all essentials and does a double-take when she realizes she’s forgotten her phone. “Hey, why don’t you guys go ahead?” Arya suggests. “I left my phone in my dressing room.”

“We can wait,” Ned offers.

Arya shakes her head. “I can’t remember where I put it and it’ll take forever to look through. It’s fine. We’re not having dinner until tomorrow anyways.”

Ned remains reluctant, but eventually, the grumbling of his daughter’s stomach wins through. Sansa turns red as her hair and runs to the beat of Margaery’s laughter. Catelyn sighs.

“Jon and Robb are staying behind to talk to you about something,” Catelyn tells her. “I’ll text them that you’re in the dressing room.”

“Thanks.”

When Arya returns, the place is understandably a mess. It’s a miracle that they know where all the costumes are at all. Syrio will have a fit if anything is lost. The Stark girl maneuvers through the clothes, shuffling through the tutus and fallen accessories. She tosses a necklace of pearls into an open box before they break someone’s leg. When she spots her phone—on her vanity of all things—she walks towards it.

Arya’s head is down when she hears the door opening. There’s no greeting. No acknowledgment of any kind. The footsteps are slow but heavy, like a tiger prowling through the branches. Arya is a natural at spatial awareness so when her assailant comes within two feet of her, she grabs her chair and launches it at him.

“What the fuck!”

Arya doesn’t stop there, nor does she wait for her attacker to gain ground. Her father once told her to never let the enemy rest until he’s passed out and bleeding. She grabs an umbrella prop and whacks the guy once.

“Stop it!”

“Oh shut up.” She whacks him again. Arya is brutal—she’s spent her entire life roughhousing with brothers in a no-holdbacks culture instituted by her father when their mother was not looking.

“No—ow!” The Stranger raises his hands in defeat. “My name is Aegon Targaryen!”

“I don’t care.” Arya hits him again. “You could be the queen and I’d still smack you for entering a girl’s dressing room like a pervert!”

“I wasn’t planning on doing anything—hey!” The next strike draws blood. She watches with pride as it trickles down his temple. “Will you just listen to me?”

“If you’re still conscious, you can prove your innocence. If you’re dead, you’ve proven your guilt.”
“What is with that logic?”

Arya raises up the umbrella.

“Wait!” He shouts. “Wait! I’m here to see you!”

Arya stops mid-swing. “What?”

“I’m a fan—I-I sent the roses. I wanted to meet you in person but I didn’t want your family to know because I’m positive they don’t like Targaryens and then I saw you coming into the dressing room—are you really not going to put that down?”

Arya is clutching onto the umbrella in the air—ready to strike at any given word. “Nope.”

“By the gods, you’re brutal.” To Arya’s amusement, he does not sound offended. If anything, he is almost reverent, or at least, definitively impressed.

After a few seconds of consideration, Arya lowers her weapon.

I am growing soft, Arya muses. It’s to be expected, of course. She’s always been a sucker for pretty boys and this boy was as pretty as they come. She squints at him for a little longer to determine if there is a family resemblance between him and Jon. There’s a nice softness to his cheeks and a fairness of flesh that could be interpreted as hereditary but that wasn’t substantial enough to warrant her sympathies.

“Get up,” Arya demands. “And turn around.”

Aegon hesitates to obey, but then he glances over at the weapon still lodge in Arya’s hand and does as she commands.

Arya tilts her head. True, there’s a curve to his behind but nothing on the level of Jon’s luscious bottom. She walks forward and grabs his hair.

Aegon jumps. “What are you—?”

“Ah, there it is.”

There’s that perfect, white nape; Jon’s secretive little spot that makes men and women swoon. It’s gorgeous. She admires it at first before reaching out and stroking it. Aegon shivers. The Targaryen is no stranger to sex but there’s something about Arya that throws him off. She’s not flirting with him, she’s petting him. Like he’s a cat.

Or prey.

All of a sudden, Arya stops. “Turn around,” she orders.

Aegon obeys instantly this time. It’s the first time he’s looked at her up close and she’s ever bit as perfect as he imagined. “Hi,” he tells, a little breathless but that may have been because of the concussion.

“Hi,” Arya replies, every bit as composed as she was on stage.

Aegon actually gets more nervous because of her calmness. He’s used to being the one leading girls on and twirling them around his finger. This time, he is the ribbon being wrapped. He takes a step forward. Arya lifts up the umbrella as a warning. Aegon tries his best not to look like a child when he shuffles through his pocket for his phone. His fingers are fidgeting all over the place. He must
look like such loser. “Listen, I know this is forward of me and I’m sorry, really sorry for coming here, I just think you were wonderful and I was wondering if I could get your phone—”

“Stay away from her!”

The door slams open, revealing Jon and Robb with fists blazing and eyes on fire. Arya is powerless to stop her older brother from tackling Aegon Targaryen to floor. Contrary to Robb’s posh appearance, the man is fit. He isn’t the captain of his rugby team for nothing. The powerhouse knocks the Targaryen heir to the ground and swings a punch that leaves his head lolling to the floor. There’s a crack and a struggle and Arya knows the Targaryen is doomed. If he can’t fight back with her, he’s a dead man against Robb.

Jon runs up to her, worried sick and starts cradling her cheeks and making soppy cooing noise. Arya finds it absolutely adorable. Until—she hears a groan from the floor, indicating the life slipping out of Aegon’s unconscious body.

Robb gets up and checks on her wellbeing. “Are you alright? How far did he get with you?”

“We’ll get him locked up if he even laid a finger on you, I swear.” Jon sounds so determined.

"I'm good."

"Are you sure? You know whatever happens, it is not your fault. You are not weak. You are perfect and wonderful and he's the one that is wrong."

The whole situation is terribly endearing. Arya hates to ruin it, but she’s a Stark and there is some goodness left in her.

“I’m fine,” she assures them. “I actually more concerned for the pretty boy here." Arya whistles dramatically. "He's going to be really disappointed when he hears I can’t make it to our date since I’ll be attending your trial.”

Jon and Robb take a minute to process her words. They look down at the body and see phone fallen at his side.

“Fuck,” Jon whispers.

“Oh yeah,” Arya agrees. “Fuck indeed.” Fortunately, for all of them, she's been through this before, though the circumstances weren’t half as violent and involved an all girl’s trip to Paris where she and a few of her mates got so pissed that they knocked Waif out with a wine bottle. The Stark girl heads to the costume section and pulls out an aged rum that Lady Crane keeps lying about.

They watch in horror as she pours the bottle over the Targaryen’s face.

“What are you doing?” Robb asks.

“Making him smell drunk. We won’t have to explain to the cabbie if they think he’s sloshed.”

Arya walks over to one of the costume trunks and pulls out a pair of sunglasses. She puts them on Aegon before taking a step back and frowning. “No, he stills looks too much like a Targaryen.”

Arya gets up and fiddles through the costume makeup. The place is truly a mess. This time, Jon speaks up. “What are you doing?”

Arya grabs up a bottle of red and blue dye. She sniffs the red one and gags. Immediately throwing
that container in the trash, she scents out the blue and lets out a grimace of acceptance. “I’m keeping us out of trouble. I can’t afford a scandal right now and knocking out the heir to the Targaryen fortune—that’s a scandal if there is one.”

Jon winces at her reasoning.

Arya starts mixing the blue with some water. “Get him in the chair.”

The boys lifted him up. While she runs the blue into his silver locks, she gives them slightly more details than they needed to know. Arya doesn’t want to incriminate them, but she can’t afford mistakes based on miscommunication. “If we can get him back to his hotel without getting caught, we’re in the clear. We just need to make sure we’re not accountable. Being seen with a Targaryen is risky enough.”

“Hence the blue dye,” Robb notes approvingly.

Arya nods. “The theatre has a back door so no one can see. It’s almost empty, anyways. All we have to do is find out where his hotel is and his room.”

“He’s staying at our hotel,” Jon tells her. “I don’t know the room but I can find out.” He winces. “Rhaegar probably has me listed as a guest.”

Robb growls. “That sick freak.”

Arya agrees but focuses on the larger issue at hand. “If he remembers anything from tonight, we’ll just say we never saw him. It’s our word against his and no one would trust a Targaryen over a Stark. We’ll be fine.”

“Wait.”

Arya and Robb turn to Jon. The oldest of the three grimaces. “There’s still Rhaegar. He might be in the hotel room. We can’t sneak him in if he’s there.”

The new information throws off Arya’s thinking. She takes a moment to reconsider her options but Robb beats her to it.

“We can kill him.”

“No!”

“Wait, let’s not knock him down just yet.”

“Arya!” Jon shouts.

“What?” Arya looks back in exasperation. “There might be more to the plan than he’s letting on. We won’t hear it if we don’t give Robb a chance to explain.”

“No, I’m saying we just kill him,” Robb confirms. “We can make it look like a robbery gone wrong.”

“No, we will not.”

“I think he means, we will not unless we can’t come up with a better idea.” Arya winks at her older brother. He winks back.

“Arya, Robb,” Jon warns. “We are not killing Rhaegar Targaryen.”
Robb disagrees. “Nothing sends a ‘he’s mine’ message better than murder.”

"And he is a creep." Arya was reluctant to let the potential murder of Willas Tyrell slide, but this is Rhaegar Targaryen. If what she’s heard about him is true, and it is because the information came from Jon himself, maybe a little stabbing action is necessary to put him in his place.

Hell.

“I said ‘no!’” Jon groans. He thinks for a moment before sighing. “Maybe if I just talk to him. Ask him out for dinner so he gets out of the room.”

“I’m not leaving you alone with that man,” Robb hisses.

“Well, then, what do you want us to do? We need to get him out of the room!” He shouts back, equally annoyed.

“He might not even be in the room!”

“We need to have a backup plan. You always tell me that!”

“Yeah! For like computer systems and essays!” Robb defends. “Not plans involving you being alone with your incestuous father!”

Their screaming shakes the room and provides an adequate alarm for Aegon’s forceful slumber. Arya watches the limp body regain motion. She glances over to the bickering love birds and slowly takes the umbrella back into her hands. Quiet as a cat and slow as a sloth, she raises it up. Just as Aegon is about to open his eyes, she whacks him on top of his head.

The crack heard when he hits the floor is loud enough to invoke silence.

When Arya is done with wiping off the blood on her umbrella, she sees both her brother and cousin looking back at her. She smiles, girlishly as Sansa taught her, which falters when Jon shakes his head and says “Don’t.”

Arya sighs. She’s never been good at lying.

“New plan,” Jon grits out, unable to let these psychopaths act on their own accord. “I will contact Rhaegar and ask him to join me in our room.”

“Absolutely n—!”

“You,” he growls at Robb, teeth clenching against each other. “Will be with me. We will talk to him under the pretense of a negotiation. Can you handle that?”

Robb stiffens. He crosses his arms and tries his best not to pout. “Fine.”

Jon turns to Arya. “Arya, can you carry him to the room?”

Arya nods.

“Are you sure?”

Arya rolls her eyes. “He’s like what? A buck fifty? I’ve lifted ballerinas heavier than him.”

With the plan settled, Jon tells Robb to call a cab using a spoofing app he invented for stalking his lover’s exes. The two boys carry Aegon’s limp body to the car, while Arya does her stretches. She’s
prepared to lift the dragon boy back to his room but she needs to conserve her strength first.

When they get into taxi, Jon and Robb are setting the parameters of the conversation. Arya secretly hides her smile from the two boys. They may be in big trouble, but Arya loves the rush; the danger. She couldn’t get this high in Yorkshire.

***

Peace never follows the good nor does it abandon the wicked. While Ramsay is pretending not to enjoy Theon’s post-coital snuggle underneath his arm—and is fully prepared to kick the boy out of his bed once he's awake—he receives an oddly timed phone call from one of his boys.

“What?” Ramsay growls out.

The caller sounds as nervous as he should be. Ramsay relishes in his shivers. “Ramsay, boss, sorry for waking you but, here's thing, and it's really big so I know you won't get too angry, but I was walking around town and…”

“Get to it.”

There’s a gulp; a pause. When Ramsay gives a command, he expects it to be followed through without hesitance. The bastard tightens his grip around his cell.

“What. Is. It.”

“There’s been another murder,” the voice whimpers. “And it’s not one of ours.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone! Meow meow! ^_^
I'm very happy to be back, writing again. I should be posting a new schedule out soon but for now, here is the latest update of Runs in the Family. I hope you all enjoy it! I've been very lazy but I hope I can update in a timely manner. No later than 11:59 PM (HST).

Please, leave your comments and suggestions. After London Arc ends, I'll be focusing on the Serial Killer Arc. Do you guys have any theories as to what's going on? I've been leaving clues all over the place but I'm curious to see what's everyone thinking. Some people have actually picked up on some clues which was awesome!
Rhaegar receives Jon’s phone call while sipping on his French 75 and listening to a recording of his newest composition. The intro is orgasmic, with his agent commenting that the violins were “so pornographic that he wished he had a penis to masturbate with.” High praise indeed. Rhaegar expects the song to be finished by tomorrow morning, but as soon as he hears that he’s received a phone call from Room 948, he estimates a later deadline.

“Jon?” He asks, trying not to let on he’s unzipping his pants.

“Hi, Rhaegar.” For some reason, Jon sounds more seductive when he’s reluctant. “It’s Jon.”

“Oh, I would recognize my baby boy’s voice anywhere. Tell me, what can I do for you?”

There is a pause. “I was thinking about what you said.”

“If that’s the case, I don’t understand why I’m still ‘Rhaegar.’ It’s ‘daddy’ for you.”

“Anyways,” Jon speaks, returning to business. “I was hoping we could discuss what a relationship between us would entail.” Jon is as serious as ever, Rhaegar muses unhappily. The composer has his work cut out for him, draining this adorable child of his uncle’s negative influence. He should feel free to dance in the wheat fields naked and go skinny dipping in lakes. Baby boys should not be so contained, and Jon is his baby.

Rhaegar repeats this sentiment to Jon, which causes him to respond in a deadpanned manner that:

“It’s astounding how many of the liberties you imagine for me involve nudity.”

“Can you blame me? You are gorgeous,” he purrs out. “What are you wearing?”

“Rhaegar,” he sighs.

“Daddy,” Rhaegar corrects. He sighs, unable to deny the frustration of his advances being refused.

“Rhaegar,” Jon repeats without hesitation. “I am wearing the same thing I wore at the play. White shirt, Black slacks.”

“What about your underwear? Are you a boxers or briefs boy? Maybe even a pair of lacy panties for special occasions?”

“I am not wearing panties, Rheagar, nor am I a 'boy' anything. I am a man.”

"I see. No underwear at all. Very scandalous. You're definitely my son."

Rhaegar hears his son groan, probably in pleasure. Rhaegar purses his lips. That Robb boy has got to go; he’s obviously a negative influence on his son.

“Rhaegar.” Jon seems obsessed with using his name. It is as if using it could distance the love they are building. Perhaps he’s taking cues from his mother, hoping formalities will be enough to separate them; playing it safe because he’s too afraid of being ignited by the passions of his loins. What does it matter if he’s ‘married’ or a ‘Targaryen’ anyways? All that matters is love.
“Listen, I am willing to talk. Would you be interested in coming to my room, tonight?”

“Yes!” He says, a little too eagerly. He clenches his fist at his lack of restraint. He cannot help it. One thought of those perfect Stark buns and he’s toppling over in pre-orgasmic bliss. He wonders if Lyanna taught her son on how to pull at his heartstrings. He doesn’t put it past her, that goddamn, vicious tease.

God, he loves that woman.

“You can come over now. I’ll make some tea. Do you have a preference?”

“Besides you?”

Without missing a beat, Jon replies, “I’m not on the menu.”

Oh, his son is definitely trying to seduce him with his blatant aversion. He wonders if the boy is attempting to get a new toy out of him—makes sense that his child would use his wily ways to achieve a goal or get some goodies. He has the makings of a whore and Rhaegar craves the power. Sometimes, a father is like a John; they provide funds in exchange for varying levels of affection. Other times, they are the pimps who help guide their children on the right path.

When Jon ends the phone call, he sends a text to Robb that the coast is clear and turns around to see his cousins dragging the unconscious boy out of the cabbie. Nothing about this scene is appropriate. Thankfully, the cabbie has been in the business for over a decade and has seen worse. He takes Robb’s generous tip with a nod of the head and goes about his business.

Right before they enter, Robb hands the Targaryen over to Arya, who throws him over her shoulders like a sack of potatoes. Robb grabs his lighter and throws it into a nearby trashcan, watching the garbage ignite into flames. The fire draws the attention of the doorman and several pedestrians, giving the Starks an opportunity to sneak themselves into the hotel. This late at night, people are either in bed or the clubs. Arya heads to the elevators while Robb goes upstairs.

Jon hears the knock on his door, signifying Rhaegar’s arrival. Jon curses his promptness. He must have left as soon as they spoke. Robb is not back yet, but he can’t afford to keep Rhaegar waiting.

Against his better judgment, Jon opens the door to Rhaegar’s beaming smile. The Targaryen does not expect to be invited in but instead lunges into a hug. Rhaegar is not subtle; his tentacles find their way to Jon’s ass and squeezes them like stress balls.

“I see you’re doing well,” Rhaegar sighs. “I could balance a book off this butt.”

Jon makes a quick prayer to the gods above. He’s not sure how long he can ward off Rhaegar’s advances. “I made some tea for us. Let’s sit down.”

“Hmm-hmm.”

Jon smiles tightly. He offers a not-so-gentle knee to the groin, which doesn’t so much as incapacitate his father as it surprises him.

“Rough,” he praises with a wink. “Like your mother.”

Are his balls made of silver? Jon wonders. “Make yourself comfortable.”

Rhaegar does as he is told. He crosses his legs and smotheres Jon with his sex eyes. Jon feels violated in more ways than one.
“I’m so happy you’ve agreed to further our relationship. There are so many things I can teach you; things that only a father can teach his son.”

“Like what?” As soon as Jon asked, he winced.

“Pleasures of the flesh your mind cannot fathom,” Rhaegar purrs. “I’d show you all the places you’ve never thought about touching, perform acts that would make a whore cringe. Trust me, Jon, we will explore this relationship like no father and son has ever before.”

“There’s a reason for that,” Jon replies. He places the tray on the table. “So I think we should set up some boundaries before we begin our…resolution.”

“Of course,” Rhaegar agrees. “How about for every bad, bad thing you do, I get to spank you?”

Jon nearly drops his teacup. He considers taking a sip before placing it back on the table. He decides that hot objects in his hand are more likely to end up on Rhaegar’s face than his stomach.

“I mean, boundaries in the sense of, well, appropriate times to meet each other in the daytime and where we can set up appointments to chat, like, crowded places. Little things that can help us move forward without feeling threatened.”

“I’m not threatened by the passion we have for each other.”

“That makes one of us.”

Rhaegar furrows his brow. “Do you have a problem with my oral affection?”

Jon tries to smile but cannot, not around this mad man. “I just think there should be restrictions on the things we can and cannot say to each other. For example, I would be more comfortable if ‘oral affection’ was off limits.”

Rhaegar purses his lips. “That doesn’t seem entirely fair, that Stark boy gets to give you oral affection.”

“He’s my boyfriend; he’s allowed to give me as much oral affection as he wants.”

“You tell him, Jon!”

Robb slams the door open, sweat dripping off his body like he’s had a run-in with the rain. He must have used the stairs in his zeal.

Rhaegar’s eyes narrow down on the Stark. “Oh…you’ve brought him,” he spits out.

“He’s a precaution,” Jon explains immediately, glaring at his boyfriend while he did so. “I figure we could use a neutral party to help us along.”

“His father hates me.”

“All for a good reason,” Robb declares as he frantically grabs some water from the sink and downs it like a starving man. He walks over to the couch and places his arm on Jon’s shoulder.

Rhaegar sighs. “You could be so much better, Jon. Starks are fine men if you need someone to lift you up on a counter and fuck your brains out but there’s no refinement in them. A son of mine deserves better. A son of mine deserves, well, another son of mine. I make beautiful babies.”

Rhaegar drinks his tea, not bothering to comprehend the disgusted looks of his hosts. He does notice
the way Jon frantically stabs his phone screen and sends a message, but he figures that’s a problem for a rainy day. His baby boy looks so pretty when he’s worried.

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Arya finds Aegon’s hotel key in his wallet and uses it to sneak into his bedroom. She is respectful of his motionless body but not so respectful that when she hears the stirring of his consciousness that she does nothing. Ever the fighter, Arya avoids the flight like the plague. She grabs a horsewhip from her bag—another prop from the show and one that Jon encourage her to ‘borrow’ to prevent Arya’s less sensitive nature seeping through if Aegon woke up. Another hit from the umbrella and his silver-haired half-brother (now an ocean themed beauty) will have brain damage for life.

“What the hell…?” She hears him grumble.

Arya walks towards him menacingly, whip in hand, and slowly prepares to strike. As soon as she raises the weapon in the air, Aegon catches sight of her assault. He scrambles off the mattress and tumbles to the floor as soon as Arya hits the comforter.

“Damn it,” she mutters.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Arya taps the whip on her hand. She raises an eyebrow. “You have a remarkably strong skull. Not many people can withstand a tackle from Robb and a couple bludgeons from me. You should be very proud.”

“What are you talking about?” Aegon glances at his bedsheets and his ruffled clothing. “Were you trying to rape me?”

Damn, his Targaryen beauty.

“No!” Arya scoffs. “I was just trying to put you to sleep. Now, we can do this the hard way or the easy way.”

Aegon grabs a chair.

“Aegon sighs. “The hard way it is.” She slams her whip where he stood, only to be blocked by the chair. Aegon smirks, thinking he gain the upper hand when Arya continues to get her hits thwarted. Aegon, despite his lean frame, is fitter than the average man. He takes his craft seriously, and that means perfecting his body to reach a masculine ideal.

Arya, however, has had over ten years of physically grueling training under an insane instructor and fifteen other crazy girls. She kicks the chair all the way against the wall. Aegon watches in horror as it breaks—legs and splinters everywhere, leaving him defenseless. His mind is a little woozy from the earlier beatings, but he has the reflexes to dodge the next attack on his form. Aegon jumps on the bed, jumps off, and dashes outside the room.

"You can run but you can't hide."

When Arya follows him, she sees he’s grabbed a lamp.

“I don’t want to hit a girl,” he warns.

Arya chuckles. “You know, Jon once told me that if a guy ever says that, he deserves to get his ass kicked.” Her whip hits the lamp, and it shatters.
Aegon stares at the pieces in his hand. Arya uses his distraction to strike his forearm.

“Ow!”

She moves forward to his leg, and the sound of leather hitting flesh is like aural crack.

“Fuck!”

Aegon whimpers when she strikes his dainty little waist.

“You make the prettiest noises,” Arya muses. “You know; it would be faster to get you to pass out by hitting your face. But after leaving that bump on the back of your head, I couldn’t bear it. I’m a sucker for a pretty face.”

Arya’s next move manages to get Aegon on the floor. There’s still some fight in him, and Arya cannot help but be entertained. She does love a challenge.

Arya raises up her arm for the final move, but Aegon places up his hands in defeat. “Wait!” he begs her. “Just, wait. Can’t we talk about this?”

Arya shakes head. "We really can't."

"Just tell me, why are you doing this? What do you want? Money? Revenge? Did I wrong you somehow?"

Aegon doubts he could ever do Arya Stark any damage. The girl is a goddess—albeit a goddess of a war and strife, but definitely a deity he can worship.

Arya shakes her head. “It’s nothing personal,” Arya informs. “It’s just that your family has become rather troublesome. Your father is interfering with the people I love and therefore, he’s interfering with me. Can't be helped.”

His family? Aegon thinks. Suddenly, the memories of being attacked by two grown men return to him. Righteous anger fills him, and as he is about to stand up to confront, the whip snaps against Arya’s hand. He returns to the ground.

“Is this about Jon?” Three-quarters of fear and an eighth of anger and an eighth of stress can mimic reason.

“Isn’t everything?” Arya considers lying. Then, she shrugs, deciding that even if she tells the truth, Aegon will probably not remember a thing after she’s done with him. She will have him begging for mercy. “Your father has been overstepping his boundaries, and it seems that the apple…” Arya traces her whip from his belly button to his chin. Despite their arrangement, Aegon is unbearably turned on. “…does not fall far from the tree. From what I've heard, you’ve been very rude to Jon.”

The Targaryen glares at her, hoping his rage will distract her from his erection. “Jon is destroying my family.”

Arya hits his shoulder this time; though the slap from the whip is considerably more gentle than the other hits. It is a warning shot, and Aegon loves it. “Jon didn’t ask for your father’s wayward advances. I get that you’re upset. He is the product of infidelity. But that’s no reason to take it out on him.”

“He’s a whore—.”
Arya’s next strike is far rougher than the earlier one. There’s no love in this hit. “Call him a whore
again. I dare you.”

Aegon spits out his bloodied saliva. “Whore.”

Arya has never made a threat she couldn’t follow through. For the first time tonight, Arya hits his
face. He hears her sigh when she’s done and almost moans when she bends down to cradle him. “I
really didn’t want to do that. Your face didn’t deserve it,” she murmurs.

Up close, Aegon notices that while Arya isn’t as beautiful as her older sister, she does have an eye-
catching appeal that transcends beyond her dancing. He can’t look away.

“Let me go,” Aegon grits out. “If you leave now, I won’t call the cops on you. I won't do that to
another artist.” Aegon pauses. “You have my word.”

“Honorable,” Arya muses. “Rare for a Targaryen.”

“You're kind of deceitful for a Stark.”

Arya smiles at his accusation. “I suppose it's the Tully side. We will do anything for family. You
wouldn’t understand.”

Aegon glares at her. While it was true that his childhood was chilled from the start, beginning with
his parent’s indifference to one another, their daily passive-aggressive battles, and a boarding school
that meant he saw them once a year at most—it doesn’t mean he loves them any less.

“Your cousin’s entire presence dishonors my mother,” he snaps.

Arya rolls her eyes. “It's not his fault he’s a bastard. He didn’t ask to be your brother.”

“But he does ask for my father’s cock!”

“…what?”

Aegon stops his yelling to process her words. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“What did you say?” Arya retorts. She stares at him incredulously. “Jon is dating my brother.”

“I know!” Aegon shouts. Sweat starts to drip from his pores. “But he’s…he’s um…isn’t he also…
fuckingmyfather?” Aegon asks, the last three words spoken in an inordinately high pitch. Shame
washes over him as the comment begins to lose all authenticity.

"Your father?"

Aegon meekly nods his head.

"Rhaegar Targaryen?"

"Listen, I think I’ve been seriously misinformed..."

"The answer is no." Suddenly, she gives him a look bordering on pity and disgust. "Listen, I get that
you are Targaryens and it's cool, as long as you guys consent and whatnot, but can you try to keep
this 'keep it in the family', I don't know 'in the family'? Because Jon may be related to you and yeah,
he's dating my brother, but still, it's a little weird how you guys keep pushing this 'blood purity' thing.
Jon doesn't even have a uterus for whatever freaky shit you guys have planned."
“No!” Aegon stands up in disgust. “No! No! Cousins are one thing but that is just—no! I am so much better than that.”

"That has yet to be seen." Arya leaves him alone. She goes back to the bedroom to grab her bag. "Listen, I have to go. This is...this is fucked up. Too fucked up for me. You said you're going to keep your mouth shut? Cool. I believe you. Will probably kill you if you don't, but hey, it's my word against yours."

Aegon gains the strength to follow her to the hallway. When she walks too fast, he grabs her. Arya does not like that, so she drops kick to the floor.

While he is groveling, he reaches out to her. "Wait!" He shouts, loud enough to draw the attention of other guests. Arya groans and stops in her tracks. “What did you say about Jon?”

“He’s dating my brother?”

“No, I mean, before that about him being…”

Arya raises an eyebrow, but all it does is draw attention to her glower. “What? A bastard?”

“No! I mean before that…”

“Your brother?”

“Yes!”

“Yes? That’s the reason you hate him, right? Other than the fact that you thought he was sleeping your father? You hated your incestuous brother.”

“No!” Aegon shouts at her. “I just thought he was my father’s mistress. What do you mean he’s my brother?”

“His mother was your father’s mistress.”

“I got that from the brother part!”

“Then why do you ask?” Arya rolls her eyes.

As the information transfers to his brain, the wires connect to one another, making more sense of Jon’s interactions with him and Robb’s defensive behavior. Greater than any impact is the horror of his father’s perversion and how, last night, he listened to the man masturbate over his brother’s sex videos.

“I’m going to be sick,” Aegon mutters, leaning on the couch; the same couch with more stability than his life.

Arya rolls her eyes. “Well, that’s life. Listen, I have to go. Jon is stuck in a hotel room with your father, and I’m not sure how long he can handle him. So we cool?” The clock says 11:00 and she has to get to bed. Tomorrow is the finale, and she can't afford less than her A-game.

Arya’s announcement grabs Aegon’s attention like a hooker’s ass. “Did you say my father was with Jon?”

“Yeah?” Arya is almost blown away by the flash of blue that brushes past her and leaves the suite. She sighs. Robb can protect Jon, she assures herself. Just in case, she sends them a warning message, hoping it gets there in time. When she hears the sound of broken down doors, shattered glasses, and
screaming from beneath, she makes the conscience-driven decision to see through this plan and all its consequences.

Fuck my life, she thinks, to be born a Stark of all things.

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At some point in their conversation, Jon is lifted up and placed on Robb’s lap, being hand-fed tiramisu from behind while having pomegranates pushed in his mouth from the front. He accepts the food gracefully, but he’s still unnerved by his father and lover’s competition of pampering. Instead of dwelling on it, he reaches backward to swallow a piece of coffee flavored cake, letting Robb brush against his lips and skim his fingers across his temples as if he is worshipping his flesh. The pomegranate seeds stain Rhaegar’s fingers and probably Jon’s lips, and he idly contemplates sucking the fingers in to clean them before his eyes snapped open, and he scrambles out of his seat.

“What is this?”

“What’s the matter, Jon?” Robb asks, genuinely concern about the dramatic reaction.

“You two just hustle me onto the couch and started feeding me things!”

“I wanted to show you want a good provider I was,” Rhaegar notes as he licks his fingers seductively. “A daddy should be able to give all sorts of things to his son.”

“And I wanted you to relax because some people make shit dads and just stress out their children even more,” Robb says sweetly.

Jon groans. “What is wrong with you two?”

Rhaegar gets up from the couch, but Robb beats him to it. He cradles Jon’s cheek and pulls him into a kiss, relishing in the growl he heard from Rhaegar Targaryen. When they part, he kisses him again for good measure. And then again. And he doesn’t stop until his tongue is licking every single part of his mouth. Rhaegar crushes a handful of pomegranate seeds.

Robb smirks as he turns around. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” Rhaegar snaps. He stands up. “But I am a little affronted that you think such a blatant display of showboating is enough to mark your territory. It’s such a childish, beta move of you.”

Robb glares at the Targaryen. “Careful, old man. The alpha of the pack always gets overthrown by the young, more virile male.”

“This is not National Geographic,” Jon mutters.

“I have more virility in my finger than you do in your entire body.” Rhaegar marches over to Jon and swoops him away. Before he can try anything, Robb pushes him off. He points at him aggressively.

“Don’t fucking touch him again.”

“He’s my son. I can do whatever I want.”

“No,” Robb shoves him again. Jon tries to intercede but is quickly sent to the background. “He doesn’t have to do anything you want. You’re nothing more than a creep who’s using him for his sick, jerkoff fantasies. Jon is mine.”

“I am a part of him that you can’t get rid of. He’s my flesh and blood. Without a father, he’ll always
be missing something; an empty hole he can’t ever fulfill.”

“Well, I’ve seen all his holes, and I have to say: he’s been filled.”

It’s the end of their conversation that night; neither of the young men realize that Rhaegar is still clutching onto his bowl of pomegranates. When he smacks the ceramic against Robb’s temple, Jon is too shocked to react until he hears the thud on the ground. By then, it is too late.

Rhaegar lunges on top of Jon and tackles him to the ground. Though Jon struggles, he is powerless when Rhaegar grabs a piece of cloth from his pocket and forces against his mouth. Jon kicks, punches, and grabs anything and everything he can but the fumes of the chloroform prove too powerful.

“I’m so sorry for this, love.” Rhaegar kisses him on his cheek as Jon’s body is drained of his fight. “I wanted to be more gentle with you but you’ve left me no choice.”

Jon’s eyes flutter close just as a shadowy figure comes up behind him tosses him to the other side of the room.

“I will kill you!” Robb growls, raging pulsing through his veins, making him look twice his size. Rhaegar sighs at the interruption. He tries to get up, but Robb is already on him, straddling his hips so that he can have easy access to his face. Robb is ruthless, punching him one after the other. Never one to give up without a fight, Rhaegar manages to escape by jabbing his fist into Robb’s opening. The distraction is enough to get away, but the younger male is stronger and built to withstand force. He shakes off the aftershock. Rhaegar groans. Stark men, he groans, just a bunch of oxen. Rhaegar grabs the teapot on the table and slams it against Robb’s cheek.

The water is lukewarm and but some of the liquid gets into his eye. Rhaegar tackles him against the wall. He uses the chloroform he dropped and tries to gag the younger male. Robb’s elbow jabs his back and Rhaegar groans.

Robb grabs his hair and slams him against the door. Rhaegar realizes then that he’s not strong enough to beat the boy in a fair fight but he can use his tricks. As Robb throws him back on the ground, Rhaegar finds a broken tea shard and stabs the younger man’s foot. Robb howls but keeps on kicking. Rhaegar is about to do it again when the door springs open and the knob bangs against his head.

Rhaegar is down for the count.

“Father, I am here to stop you from raping my little brother!” Aegon announces as he marches into the room. He does not get further than a foot in when his path is obstructed by the unconscious body of his father. He turns to his right and sees Robb nursing his head wound and turns to his left to see Jon trying to get off the floor.

Arya gasps. She rushes over to him. “Jon, are you alright?”

Jon rubs his eyes to ward off the dizziness. “What happened?”

“Rhaegar tried to kidnap you,” Robb growls. He pulls off the ceramic shard and bends down. Right before he can slit his challenger’s throat, Jon stops him.

“What the fuck, Robb? Put that down!”

Robb makes an animalistic noise. “He tried to take you away from me.”
“Put the sharp object down.”

The sad part is that Robb is seriously contemplating disobeying him. After a few moments of heavy thought, Robb sighs and drops the ceramic onto the floor.

Jon struggles to get to his feet. He stumbles into Robb’s arms and caresses his face. “I’m so proud of you for protecting me,” he soothes.

Robb turns red with pride. “I was so scared of losing you.”

Jon nods. “Me, too. I freaked out when I saw all that blood…until I realized it was just pomegranates.”

Robb’s stare burns into Jon’s soul. “Pomegranates are the fruit of forbidden love.”

Jon leans in to lick the juice off his face. “It reminds me of blood. Like you just killed my father because he wouldn’t give you my hand in marriage.”

“You know I would have killed him for you,” Robb promises.

Rhaegar lets out a little groan. Aegon echoes that groan with his embarrassment.

“I can’t be watching this.”

Arya agrees. “Guys, can you do this some other time…?”

“I can’t imagine my life without you,” Robb whispers, not bothering to listen to their small-minded ways. He pulls Jon into a passionate kiss that makes even Arya uncomfortable and turns Aegon into a spluttering mess. He grabs Arya’s arm and starts shaking her for answers.

“I’ve never been a big brother before. What does this mean? Do I do something? Protect his virtue?”

Jon pulls away from the kiss first. He latches onto Robb’s collar and rips the fabric apart. “Robb, I need you to fuck me. Hard. Like every thrust inside me is another slap to Rhaegar’s face.”

Arya coughs and turns to Aegon. “I think his virtue has been gone for a while.”

More clothing is torn off. Both of them jump when shreds of black fabric are thrown in their direction. Robb throws his lover down to the ground—right next to Rhaegar’s cataleptic body and a foot away from Arya and Aegon.

“I am going to fuck you like you are the king’s wife and I’m his enemy combatant, cuckolding him on his marriage bed.”

“Gods yes, that’s so hot,” Jon moans. “You get pregnant and then let him raise your child as heir.”

“What kind of fantasy is that?” Arya asks. Much to her displeasure, no one acknowledges her disbelief. They are too busy undressing and getting their rocks off. Aegon is trembling in horror. Arya feels for him. His younger brother is having sex in front of him and his father is half-dead on the ground. She does the only thing she can do.

She leaves.

“Where are you going?” Aegon asks, needing the firm hand of a strong woman. Arya sighs, because she has one baby Targaryen in her life and she doesn’t need another. Nonetheless, her conscience wins out and she is kneeling on the floor again, cradling Aegon’s beautiful, long fingers. He is truly a
feast for the eyes.

“Aegon, I want you to listen to my directions very carefully because I’m only going to say this one.”

Aegon nods, happy to be told what to do.

“Grab your father and get the fuck out of this room.”

Chapter End Notes

This was a very dialogue-heavy chapter which always worries me. I hope you guys liked it! I haven’t decided on what’s going to happen after this but Rhaegar is not entirely finished and neither is Aegon. I’ll probably refocus my attention to Theon and Ramsay because they are one of my favorite couples to write about. I love their dysfunction.

Anyways, I am super excited about the new Game of Thrones trailer and am so excited about getting this chapter out on time. I will also be posting the Willas/Jon oneshot on the 3rd of July so for all the Willas/Jon fans, there’s finally a happy ending for them!
Chapter 53

Aegon can cook; he’s a great cook, actually, the best in the family. Rhaegar assumes it’s on account of him being a prissy child, bursting into tears if his breast milk was so much as a drop below room temperature. To remedy his retentiveness, the family gave him cooking lessons, hoping that the difficulty would make him respect their chef’s authority. The plan failed, but while Aegon remained as finicky as ever, he did develop a new skill set and adjusted their family’s palette to match his own. The memory of Aegon chopping carrots into stars and making pate out of geese organs brings out a hum of nostalgia from his lips.

After getting out of the bed, Rhaegar walks off his headache by wandering into the living room. The tune carries on his lip. To his surprise, the kitchen isn’t bustling with spices or sizzling with meats; all is silent except for the pigeons nesting on the ledge, Rhaegar immediately wonders if something is wrong. He doesn’t remember what happened after Jon escaped his clutches, but he is sporting a few new bruises, a sore nose, and a head injury that may require a doctor’s appointment.

Rhaegar doesn’t fret. Lost memories are one thing but ever the optimist; he chooses to focus on the positives. His safe return guarantees another chance at Jon’s bottom and that’s something to look forward to, not a failure to look back upon.

The door opens, and Rhaegar sees Aegon entering with a bag of takeaway and a cup holder full of coffee. “I got breakfast,” his son mutters. “Eggs benedict and a fruit plate with yogurt. Figured your head could use something light.”

He sets the meal down on the table. Rhaegar helps put the food on plates. His son is uncharacteristically quiet, which doesn’t displease him as it makes him curious.

“Here’s your coffee,” Aegon mutters.

“Thanks,” Rhaegar replies smoothly. Despite his injuries, Rhaegar is pleased by the tranquility in the air. There’s peace in silence, and it allows him to appreciate the intricacies of nature. Before today, he’s never been aware of how the birds purr like kittens when they’re huddled together or how London’s traffic and pedestrian chatter harmonize to create an upbeat, urban song.

“You bastard!” Aegon yells, throwing his drink at his father’s face. Those glorious months of handling Lyanna’s tantrums has given him superb reflexes; dodging a boiling cup of coffee is no different than dodging a vase or a polo stick.

With his serenity ruin, he tries to confront his son on the matter, only to have his son throw a knife at him. Fortunately, the plastic utensil bounces off his forehead. Unfortunately, he doubts that the knife Aegon grabs from the cabinets will do the same.

“Aegon, what has come over you?”

Aegon points the knife at him. Rhaegar takes a step back but maintains his composure. This isn’t the first time someone has pointed a knife at him in his life; hell, this isn’t the first time someone pointed a knife at him this year. He lives in London, after all.

“You,” Aegon grits out. “Are a pervert.”
Rhaegar sighs. The boy spat the word out like a naughty accusation. “Aegon, I don’t know what you’re talking about…”

“Jon is my brother, and you were trying to kidnap him!”

“Okay, you might know something.”

Aegon charges at him. Rhaegar gets out of the way and grabs his son from behind before he falls and stabs himself. Aegon bristles like a wet cat. “Get off me!”

“You’re overreacting.”

“You cheated on mum!” Aegon struggles further. When he realizes that his grip on the knife is holding him back, he drops it. Rhaegar is relieved until Aegon starts to use his arms properly and elbows him in the ribs. Staggering away, Aegon grips his plastic fork and faces him with a mouth filled with disgusting accusations. “You tried to rape my brother!”

Rhaegar rolls his eyes. “I tried to facilitate a meeting between you two. After your behavior last night, it would have been a miracle to get him in the same room as you.” He shakes his head. “You are such a child, sometimes.”

Aegon splutters out his outrage. “I only acted that way because I thought he was your mistress!”

“I wish,” Rhaegar mutters as he maneuvers a plan to get out of this situation. “Aegon, I only found out about Jon a few weeks ago. I thought it’d be good for my two boys to get to know each other.”

“Really?” Aegon’s lips tremble. There's still doubt on his face, but his resolve weakens. Rhaegar’s prince has never been one to ignore a happy ending. His son hates drama outside the stage. His heir is a sop for stories; he slaves over the end game, the happy ending. To him, life doesn’t have meaning unless goodness prevails. Aegon wants to believe Rhaegar didn’t mean anything when he brought them here, and he needs a justification for his half-brother getting choked with chloroform.

“Yes,” Rhaegar answers.

Aegon crosses his arms. “Why didn’t you tell me?” He asks suspiciously.

“I wanted to keep the matter quiet,” Rhaegar says to him. “I was afraid you’d tell Rhaenys, and she’d tell your mother. You know how stress affects her.”

Aegon glares furiously. “She’d be a lot less stress if you didn’t have sex with teenagers!”

Rhaegar doesn’t have an ounce of shame on his face when he says, “That was a long time ago. Lyanna’s no longer a teenager. Neither is Jon for that matter—though he has his baby fat in all the right places…”

“Stop that!” Aegon shouts.

“Stop what?”

“Stop—stop talking about Jon like that. Stop talking about his ass or how pretty he is…it’s, it’s like you want to do things to him. Ba—dirty things.” Aegon is blushing like a virgin. The redness is more significant on his skin than anyone else—a side effect of the Targaryen paleness. “He’s your son.”

“Nothing wrong with being close,” Rhaegar counters. “Besides, I didn’t want him for me, per say. I wanted him for you. Of course, I expected you to share once you’ve had him, but I wouldn’t greedy
Aegon drops his fork in horror. “What?” Aegon hisses. The red on his cheeks spread and turns to an unusual shade of blue. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Rhaegar shakes his head, more than a little disappointed by his son’s lack of imagination. “Haven’t you imagine it?”

"No! Of course not! That would be wrong!"

Rhaegar ‘tsk’ at him. ‘Don’t answer that if you won’t answer truthfully. It’s not like you were raised together.’ A sly smile crawls onto his lips. It sickens Aegon because he can imagine exactly what his father’s thinking. “And Jon is just so god damn pretty.” The smile on Rhaegar’s face grows into something monstrous. He keeps on talking, much to Aegon’s horror. “No one would blame you for wanting a ride. Not with those gorgeous, cocksucker lips, they won’t. If it weren’t for his boyfriend, he’d be swallowing your load without question.” Rhaegar shakes his head. “Shame about the monogamy thing. I heard Jon has a great hole.” His sources had stories and Rhaegar has always enjoyed a good song. “Two months ago, you could have had him on his back without so much as a wink.”

By the time Rhaegar finishes talking, Aegon is nauseated and sporting an erection as hard as his headache. The composer walks forward, cradles his son’s face in his hands, and promises him no judgments, just the pure, unadulterated bliss of his brother’s hole.

“You are a stunning young man—with a little brotherly persuasion, you could have Jon all over you. Can you imagine him sucking your cock? Hmm?”

Aegon is red in the face. “No! I can’t!” He hesitates. “Can I?”

Rhaegar shakes his head. “Yes, you can. You can have anything you want, including Jon. Remember, no one knows he’s your brother. No one has to find out. All you have to do is take him.”

“No, it’s wrong,” Aegon says; but his resolve is weak, and Rhaegar’s gentle, fatherly sway threatens to change his sails.

“Once you come in his mouth, nothing will ever feel wrong again,” Rhaegar promises.

Fantasies of his gorgeous brother gush inside his brain, all accompanied by Arya’s sinuous body. He imagines the younger girl walking in on them with her trademark whip, purring about what bad, bad boys they’ve been and how he needs to be punished.

As those dreams become more explicit, Rhaegar leans in for the kill. Just as he is about to give his son a warm embrace of acceptance, the Targaryen heir jolts out of the way, does a rolling somersault to his phone and dashes to his room. At the doorway, he shouts:

“I’m telling mum!”

Rhaegar’s annoyance does nothing to mask his amusement. He takes off his metaphorical gloves and tells his son, quite bluntly, “Aegon, if I were afraid of your mother, I wouldn’t have cheated on her in the first place.” He takes a step forward. “Now come into my arms. Join me, Aegon.”

Aegon gasps indignation. He spins his heel and enters his room. Just as he’s about to shut the door, he swears never to be an accomplice to Rhaegar’s evil plans. “I will protect my little brother from the likes of you!”
“Rather dramatic,” Rhaegar notes. He crosses his arm and smirks. “And how do you plan to stop me?”

There is a pause; a moment of truth flashes before them and leaves Rhaegar feeling victorious. His chances are shot, when Aegon sends him a fierce glare and makes a declaration that runs Rhaegar’s blood cold.

“I’m calling Aunt Dany!”

The door slams shut.

Rhaegar is almost too late to react. He spends the rest of his morning trying to pry the phone out of his son’s hands.

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In an attempt to forget last night’s fiasco, Jon joins his cousins on a shopping trip for the so-called ‘wedding of the century.’ While Sansa and Aunt Cat are tackling the London experience with their battle-worn black cards; the men are getting their suits done. Jon sighs as Ned leaves the room to get the younger boys in their tuxes. He agreed to be Robb’s plus one when they were dating, thought against it when they broke up, did not think about it but subconsciously rejoined the guest list when they got back together, got off the list when he decided that there was no way in hell he was attending his potentially insane aunt’s wedding and thus, seeing Rhaegar Targaryen again, and then got suckered into it when Sansa mentions that Robb may have fucked Daenerys Targaryen.

And goddamn it, Jon doesn’t care how badly he wants to maim Rhaegar Targaryen. He cannot let his boyfriend go to his ex’s wedding alone. His dedication to his lover is enough to make him not kill Robb for forcing him to attend this horrible event.

“You don’t have to go,” Robb reassures.

“If you show up empty-handed, the press will crucify you, that’s humiliation you and the company don’t need.”

“I don’t care about that. I care about your safety. Hell, we don’t even have to attend.”

Jon sighs. “Robb, you cannot not go. You’re a Stark, and she’s your ex. You may have dated for a brief moment in time, but it’s important you don’t let her think she’s won.” Jon has gotten a full-blown lecture from Sansa on the matter. Hours ago, when he considered turning down the invitation, Sansa made it quite clear that it wasn’t a possibility.

“Daenerys has so graciously offered him an invitation to her wedding,” she explained to him, having cornered him in the lobby after he made the aghast suggestion. “The same Daenerys Targaryen who turned down his proposal because she was not ‘ready’ is getting married before him.”

“That was ages ago. They were teenagers. No one’s going to believe they were serious.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Sansa hissed. “She is now engaged to a hot Polynesian who looks like a god.” Jon inwardly agreed; he’d seen and masturbated to enough pictures of Khal Drogo to justify that claim. “Meanwhile, Robb is still not married. That means, it wasn’t that she wasn’t ready, she just didn’t want him. People with money talk. Robb already has a reputation, but it’s harmless because his pros outweigh his cons. Imagine what happens when that reputation turns into something of scorn. No matter how you think about, if he goes alone, she’s won.”

Jon shudders to think about it.
Back to the present, the irritation lingers, and not even Robb’s puppy eyes can get rid of it.

“Why did you have to sleep with every girl in England?” Jon mutters.

“Sorry? Did you say something?”

Jon shakes his head. “Nothing.” He looks at the door. “Why don’t you check on Rickon and Bran? I’m going to ask the sales associate a few questions.”

Robb nods dejectedly. When he tries to get a kiss, Jon gives him a half-hearted peck on the lips before dismissing him. The whole incident is chilly at best.

Robb walks into a separate dressing room where Rickon finished putting on his tux; he’s wearing suspenders, and a bowtie and Robb cannot help himself. He jumps on his little brother and pulls him into a tight hug.

“You look like a little James Bond!” Robb coos. When Rickon struggles to get out, Robb holds him closer. He plants a sloppy kiss on the ginger’s head, much to the younger boy’s disgust. Their father watches them with a small smile. Internally, his chest puffs up with pride for having inseminated his wife with such adorable children. Until the day he died, that will remain his greatest achievement.

Rickon, suspicious of Robb’s presence, asks what’s his problem. "Are you and Jon fighting again?"

Robb tenses up with Rickon still in his arms. Shields raise, and security goes on high alert as he defensively asks, "No, why would you say that?"

Rickon shrugs. The youngest Stark glances over Ned. When the man is busy getting measurements, Rickon takes the opportunity to asks if Jon is upset because he slept with Daenerys. "You know, Jon's aunt."

Robb startles. "How did you know?"

Rickon shrugs. "I know things," he says, right before commenting that Jon will probably get over this strife, so his brother shouldn't worry. "If you think about it, it's no big deal. Daenerys is only, like, the second aunt you've slept with. Remember Roslin? So in actuality, this is nothing. No one knows they're related and even if they did, they'd just assume incest is your thing."

Robb chokes.

“Robb,” Ned calls out. “Have you tried on your suit, yet?”

Robb jolts up and looks down nervously. “No, sir, I haven’t.”

Ned sighs and Robb falters even more.

Robb's expression tugs at Ned's heart, but the Stark patriarch does not have the courage to ask him what is wrong. The man tries to assess the situation the best as he can but finds himself getting less accurate as the years go by. While Robb will always be his little boy, adulthood has changed him. Ned can no longer lift his son up on his shoulders and the word ‘daddy’ has been reserved for strife-filled occasions. Guilt and fear accompany him as he begins to fret on whether or not he has pushed his son away. Perhaps he shouldn’t have let Robb attend Edinburgh; he should have advocated more strongly for a university with a commute. Catelyn insisted, after three cartons of ice cream and an entire bottle of scotch, that it was for the best that Robb left them. "If you love someone, you have to let them go," she had said as she burst into tears. The next day, Ned announced his approval, clenching his fist the entire time as their father-son memories flashed before his eyes. Thank god, he
didn’t send Robb to boarding school.

Robb, on the other hand, grabs a shovel and digs a hole of despair. It’s bad enough that Jon is upset, but his father is in a mood as well. The sales associate hands him his suit, and he puts it on, not meeting his father’s eyes. Robb wonders, not for the first time, if it was a wise decision to attend a school so far away from home. He did so to prove he was independent, yet finds himself regretted it more often than not. Sometimes, it seems like all that decision did was drag them further apart. What was worse was hearing his father welcome his choice with open arms, even saying he was proud of Robb for leaving the nest. If he knew it was going to make his father that happy to leave, he would’ve opted for boarding school.

When Robb finishes getting dressed, Ned excuses Rickon. He orders the boy to help out his older brother. “Bran is taking too long; make sure he is alright.”

Rickon obeys, sending Robb a sorry look. When they are finally alone, Ned walks up to Robb. The eldest Stark child holds his breath. He lets go of it when Ned reaches out to fix his collar.

“We’ll need to get you an appropriate tie,” Ned mutters. His voice is gruff and critical.

Robb nods solemnly. “Yes, sir.”

Ned winces at the ‘sir’ comment. The action emphasizes the sternness on his face, which in turn, causes Robb to tense. Ned considers a topic of conversation and opts for the safest choice.

“How’s Jon doing?”

Ned jumps when Robb’s lower lip begins to tremble. He looks ready to cry.

"We're alright."

Ned knows he's lying. Instead of leaving the matter, he demands a truthful answer in the kindest method he can muster.

"Don't lie to me."

“He’s angry at me,” Robb whines. His eyes get blurry as the weight of Jon’s frustration and his father’s disappointment add on his shoulders. This is another reason he avoids being alone with his father. It is bad enough he has to face his father’s disapproval, it’s the worse when he starts to blubber like a child when the pressure pushes on him.

Meanwhile, Ned has to bite his tongue to stop from fussing over his boy. In his head, Catelyn nags at him not to go overboard. Ned admits that he tends to go too far with his consolation; usually, Catelyn is there to be the voice of reason. One time, when Catelyn was visiting her sister, Ned bought Robb a horse to get him to stop crying. Without her presence to subdue him, he starts out small to avoid going overboard.

“That’s not okay.”

Unable to control his emotions, tears start to fall from Robb’s eyes. His father’s words said it all: he is a failure. No matter how beautiful the day, the sunlight shining on his mistakes is bright and blinding. He couldn’t protect Jon last night, and now he is putting the man he loves into another precarious situation. He is letting the Targaryens win. His father has every right to be disappointed.

“I just want to give up…” Robb mumbles. “Everything is going wrong.”
Ned panics, but his face is rock solid. He tells himself that a little touching won’t hurt. Physical contact is essential for comfort.

Ned swallows some self-control and makes two, solid taps Robb’s shoulder. “You will figure it out.” He moves upwards to pet his head. Though Robb’s hair isn’t as pronounced as Jon’s curls, there’s a wave and redness to them reminiscent of his breathtaking mother. He entices Ned to come closer. “You’re my boy, after all,” he reassures, hoping that’s not enough to be ‘civil’ again. His son is precious when he’s sad. As soon as he thinks it, guilt washes over Ned. He’s a horrible father to wish misery on his son. The empty nest is inevitable. Ned, the adult, ends their conversation with a heartfelt “I love you” knowing that the declaration is the limit of affection two British males can display. The words sounded frigid and forced, not because they are, but because Ned’s frequency with declarations of love is sporadic at best.

Robb tears die down. Ned is grateful. As he makes a move to step away, Robb sniffs. “Thank you, daddy.”

And Ned loses it.

He pulls his son into a chokehold hug and considers never letting him go. To his surprise, Robb doesn’t struggle like the others. Rickon bit him the last time he held on too long. Instead, Robb sinks into large arms of fatherly love and snuggles into his embrace. Ned’s face is unreadable, but inside, he is a skipping schoolgirl. Ned wonders if kidnapping his children and locking them in Winterfell is still an option. Catelyn dismissed it ages ago, but once menopause hits her, she’ll finally see the light.

“I’ve failed him, and now he doesn’t love me as much. We’re growing apart. Again.”

Ned shakes his head. “You’re overreacting,” he tells him, hoping his calm will settle Robb’s nerves. To others, he might sound cold, but inside, he is dancing with joy. It’s almost as if Robb’s a teenager again; running to his arms for the chance to cry about his latest love. Ned hasn’t been this excited since his precious pebble jumped into his bed weeks ago, accusing him and his wife of being sex fiends. His son and he are bonding again—finally.

“Have you tried having sex with him?” Ned asks.

“We didn’t have time this morning.”

“There’s always time for sex,” Ned advises.

“Isn’t that a distraction from a deeper issue?”

“No. Sex is physical love.”

Robb takes a moment to think. He brightens up. “Oh.”

Ned nods. “Where is he right now?”

“ Asking some questions about his suit.”

“Where is he, really?”

Robb pauses. “He is avoiding me.”

“That’s right.”

“How do I get him to stop?”
Ned pats down his son’s suit. He walks to the side and gets a tie. He puts the tie over his son’s neck. “Wear this. Go outside. Get him to tie it. Kiss him. Make him yours.”

Robb’s eyes sparkle like they’ve found the meaning of life. “Will that work?”

“Yes.” Catelyn once told him that she could never resist him in a suit. “Jon won’t be able to resist you in a suit,” Ned promises. “If his anger continues to blind him, get into a tux.”

Robb blushes at the suggestion. “Daddy…” he says softly, making Ned’s heart leap. His son is too perfect. “I’m not sure I want him to see me in a tux now. I want to wait.”

“It’s a useful trump card,” Ned pushes. Robb might think it’s a bit dramatic, but neither of them can assuage Jon’s anger level. It’s always good to have a backup plan.

“But what if it’s bad luck?”

Ned raises an eyebrow. “Why would it be bad…” Oh. Suddenly, Robb’s puppy eyes become sharp and wolf-like. Ned disentangles himself from his son. He takes a step backward and tries to clean up his mess. He tells Robb to leave—but not leave. “You should go get Jon. Before his…anger begins to get out of hand.”

“Dadd…?”

“Go,” Ned almost shouts, rather hysterically. At least to his ears. From an outside perspective, it sounds like he has a bad cough. Robb’s concern has him take a step forward. Ned takes another step back. He can’t bear to look at his son. He looks too grown up. Too much like a man. “Jon is waiting for you,” he murmurs, hoping it’ll be a decent distraction to Ned’s internal crisis.

The mention of his fleeting forgiveness motivates Robb to step outside. He thanks his father for his wisdom. Ned is stone cold. He reminds himself that this is another false alarm. He’s survived Robb’s engagements before, and all of them fell through because Robb was not ready. Is not ready. He is still a child. Children cannot be husbands; they can only be babies who still need their fathers for guidance. Because marriage is the start of the finish; it is the beginning of the end; it is death and bills and taxes—Robb is not ready.

Ned has half a mind to charge outside and tell them. He stops short an inch of the door when he hears a crash.

The sounds of ripped fabric echo through the door, scratching at Ned’s skin. Then, he hears laughter; horrible, treacherous, giddy laughter. Suddenly, doors are slamming, a sale’s associate horrified gasps: ‘you can’t do that in there!’ The sound of flying paper and bribery sings through the air. Money is stuffed in someone’s panties. The sales associate is silent with greed. Ned’s heart lurches in his chest. Robb moans. He declares his love for Jon. Jon, his sister’s son, a child he’s always thought of as his own, moans in ecstasy. Sex, but not any kind of sex; it’s toe-curling, lights-blinding sex. Cufflinks spill onto the floor. Hard metal against the cushy carpet. It is the sound of early morning adulthood. Horror passes through him as the news finally sinks in:

Robb is a man.

“Father?”

Oh, and the word stings like a hundred killer bees. No more melodic cries of ‘daddy’ or little Freudian requests in which they ask if he’d marry them. None of his friends have children as loving as his are. Were. When Bran calls out for him again, Ned grasps his heart in a metaphorical manner. His father trained him to keep his dramatics internal. While a storm rages inside his heart, his face is
flawless. On the outside, he only makes a noise of attention. Ned turns to his son and the sight of him makes him sweat.

Bran is gorgeous.

His middle child wears his tux like a boy on the cusp of manhood, and this time, Ned's shudder is visible. Bran is the last one of his babies with Rickon’s innocence long been lost to HBO and adult teeth.

Ned shakes his head. He cannot afford to lose Bran as well.

Without warning, he swoops Bran off his wheelchair and lifts him several feet into the air. His legs are dangling like a corpse on a crucifix. He stutters “What are you doing?” to his father, but his father ignores him.

“Never grow up,” Ned commands. When he says it, the order sounds as plausible as eating dinner or brushing his teeth. “Your mother and I will take care of you. Stay innocent. Stay pure.”

“Too late for that,” Rickon scoffs.

Ned ignores the comment. He hears it, clear as day, and perhaps on another occasion, he might have questioned the validity of that statement. For now, he chooses ignorance like he never has before. This is not the time to be a strong man; he no longer has the will for it.

“Do you understand?”

After a few more attempts to break free, Bran submits.

Ned asks again. ”Do you understand?”

“Yes!” Bran squeaks out.

Ned sighs in relief. He returns Bran to his wheelchair. He gives Bran and Rickon a once over and voices his approval. “Those are appropriate. Please take them off, and we will head out to lunch.”

The two dash off to safety. The boys are in such a hurry, neither of them remembers to take Bran’s phone with them.

When Summer’s bright expression fills up Bran’s phone screen to reveal a new text, Ned wants to resist. He has never violated his children’s privacy before and to be honest; the thought never crossed his mind. Unfortunately, the delirium of an empty nest can play tricks on one’s morality. Ned is a better man than this but today, he’s desperate. Logic is panic’s prey and it is feasting like a beast. Ned presses in Bran’s passcode. He knows all his children’s passwords by heart, everything from their emails to their shopping accounts, just in case of an emergency.

The message came from Shireen Baratheon, Stannis’s daughter, and it is innocent enough. She is expressing her delight over Bran’s comic creation and demands a second volume. Their conversation is innocent and exactly the type of thing a boy like Bran needs.

Then, he sees another, unknown name on Bran’s screen.

Ned knows all of his children’s friends, but this ‘Jo’ has never been mentioned. Ned’s finger lingers over his text box, and for a second, Ned convinces himself to step away. He is unreasonable, he tells himself. Bran cannot stay a child forever and snooping through his messages will only drive them further apart.
And then another voice comes through like an avalanche, and this time, it is Rickard’s booming disregard for his children’s sovereignty. He shouts his praises for efficiency and declares Ned’s inability to protect his son from the horrors as adulthood as weakness. Gods be damn, Ned lets him win.

Ned presses the text box.

He scrolls up the messages.

He drops the phone.

When Rickon and Bran come outside, dressed in their casual wears, Jon and Robb inform them that their father has already left. “He says he was feeling sick.”

Bran and Rickon shrug when they heard about his illness.

“It explains his weirdness,” Rickon notes.

Bran agrees. He suggests they bring him back some soup.

They paid for their suits while Ned returns to his hotel. The Stark head spends the entire time staring at the ceiling. After sundown hits, the Stark patriarch opens his eyes and looks around; he notices that all his children are gone. The truth hurts, and the sharp pain is significant enough that he wants to find the source of his misery. He realizes that he only has one person to blame.

His wife.

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Hours before Ned is stabbed in the back by the twigs of his empty nest, Catelyn faces her dilemma in the shape of a red-haired siren. Her daughter has abandoned her with several thousand dollars of merchandise on the ever-bustling streets of London, and as more people eye her Chanel purse and St. John’s dress, she realizes that she left her knife at home.

Catelyn groans as she searches through the crowds. The car won’t arrive for at least half an hour, and it is getting dark. Finally, she discovers her daughter on the edge of the street talking to an older man.

Her eyes narrow when she notices just how much older the man is.

Catelyn’s first instinct is to charge towards her daughter and rescue her from this pervert. She stops in her tracks when her daughter sends the man off with a hug and a promise for lunch the next time she’s in town. The real kicker is when he tells her to invite Sandor along.

To Catelyn’s fortune, she can blend in with the crowds despite the fortune hanging on her wrists. She listens like a rat in the sewer as they continue to chat.

“I’ll be sure to do that.” Sansa smiles brightly. “You’ll be the first person we call when we move.”

The man whistles in appreciation. “Moving in together already? Aren’t you a speedy little bird?”

Sansa blushes. “When you're ready, you're ready.”

The man can’t help laugh. “When I met Sandor, he was a mess. Drank himself to death every night, protecting trust fund babies and slamming deadbeats into walls for a mere buck.” The man grins. “And somehow, he manages to get the prettiest girl in England all to himself. Gods, he needs to tell me his secret.”
Sansa gives him another hug. “Bye Ray. Don’t be a stranger.”

“Never,” he swears. He leans in and tells Sansa a secret that Catelyn almost misses. “But take my advice. Guys like him don’t think they deserve girls like you. And hells, they’re probably right about that. So make him work for it every now and then.”

Sansa giggles. “I will. He certainly deserves it, after how hard he made me work for him.”

Ray bursts out laughing. “The second he finally makes an honest woman out of you, give me a call.” He throws her a wink. “Can’t keep letting you two living in sin.”

Sansa sinks her face in her hands to cover up her embarrassment. The advice would have been sweet if Catelyn wasn’t immersed with the man in question. She’s not stupid. Sandor isn’t an uncommon name in these parts, but it is a name worthy of note. There are a few people who this Ray character can be referring to, and Catelyn doesn’t like any of the options.

Sansa turns around, and instead of retracing her steps back to where she left her mother, the woman appears in front of her like a hellspawn she-devil.

“Mum?” Sansa’s eyes jump out of their sockets. Horror fills her as she turns around to see Ray’s dwindling figure. “How much did you hear?”

“Enough,” Catelyn answers, her lips stretch to a thin. She asks the damning question. “Who is Sandor?”

“Mother—”

“Because the only Sandor I know who can match that description is Sandor Clegane. The brother of a serial murderer and rapist, and the former bodyguard of the Lannisters. The same one who has a reputation for doing whatever the Lannisters ask him.” Catelyn latches onto her arm. “Please tell me it is not the same Sandor.”

Sansa doesn’t even have the dignity to deny it nor does she have the decency to look ashamed. Instead, she stares straight into Catelyn’s eyes and says, “Sandor doesn’t work for them anymore if that’s your primary concern.”

Catelyn’s eyes narrow. “You know damn well it isn’t.”

While she waits for a response, Sansa does something she’s never done before, at least, not while she isn’t screaming and crying her way back to her room. Catelyn’s resolve falters as her little girl, her dear Sansa is gone and Sansa Stark, every bit of the woman she’s always wanted to be, stands up to her mother by not standing up for herself.

Sansa straightens her bags and walks past Catelyn without another word. On instinct, Catelyn follows. This time, she is the child, the one toddling after the heels of a calmer, more restrained woman. Losing her composure, she yells at her daughter in the middle of the open street to stop. The noise causes some attention but in the end, this is London, and the focus is lost as soon as it comes.

“I’m not talking about this,” Sansa declares. “It is none of your business who I date.”

“I am your mother! How dare you say it’s none of my business?”

Sansa turns around; she is no less calm than before. “I am seventeen,” Sansa reminds her. “I can date who I want. We’ve been together for a while now, and I love him.”

Three years ago, she said the same thing about Joffrey. Catelyn is about to point that out when Sansa
beats her to it.

“This isn’t like Joffrey,” Sansa defends. “I’m not so infatuated with the prince that I can’t see the monster lurking underneath. This is me finally realizing that fairy tales don’t exist. I fell in love with a man who is every bit as horrible as you believe he is and it doesn’t matter.”

“Sansa!” Catelyn shouts. She sees people staring again and drags her daughter to a corner where they can talk more privately. “Sansa, he’s done things. He’s—”

“Killed people?” Sansa finishes. To Catelyn’s shock, there’s not so much as an inflection in her voice. “Torture them? I know, mother, and I don’t care.”

“What are you saying?” Catelyn wonders where her daughter has gone. “This isn’t like you,” she begs. “You are better than this, Sansa.”

“No, I am not.” Relief accompanies the acceptance in Sansa’s voice. Disappointment and distress do not even touch her tongue. It’s as if the concession of evil has relieved her of her sins rather than offer her penance.

“I don’t care what he’s done in the past or what he could do in future,” Sansa confesses. “I don’t care because I’m selfish. I’ve always been selfish. Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve always needed to have my way, and I was willing to say or do anything to get it.” Sansa sighs. She laughs to herself. “Do you know that Rickon and I are the only two of your children who don’t have tells when we lie?”

Catelyn opens her mouth to defend her daughter’s character; Sansa refuses to hear it.

“Mother, I don’t care what kind of person Sandor is as long as he is good to me.” Sansa is amazed by how good it feels to finally say it; to be able to declare her love out in the open, without the fear of consequence or judgment. “Sandor is good to me. He makes me feel like the sun wakes up to see me smile.” Sansa has never felt so powerful. “He never asks for anything from me; it doesn’t matter that I can’t give him as much devotion as he gives me. If I leave him, he’ll self-destruct, but he won’t stop me. For him, my happiness is the only thing worth caring about.”

“Even if what you’re saying is true,” Catelyn reasons. "A pedestal is no place to put your partner."

“But a hospital is?” Sansa asks her.

Catelyn is taken back. “Sansa…”

“Joffrey hit me.”

Catelyn turns as white as death. “What?”

“All those bruises I got in school? Those track injuries? That was all him.” Sansa brings on the tears. They come naturally, but the volume is higher than normal. She’s an excellent actress. The two redheads miss their car as Sansa regales the terror she endured as Joffrey’s punching bag.

By the time she is done, Catelyn is sobbing. She just cries in the middle of the street. Sansa holds back her guilt and reminds herself of the truth: this needed to be done.

When Arya confronted Sansa about Joffrey, she lied about why she’s kept the abuse hidden for so long. While a small part of it was to save her parents from the guilt, the other carried a sinister tinge: Joffrey Baratheon is her trump card. Sansa never expected to keep her relationship with Sandor a secret forever. When all was revealed, there needed to be a scapegoat to their rage. Under normal
circumstance, no respectable, loving parents would permit Sansa’s relationship with Sandor to go on any further. She would have to choose between them and the love of her life.

Unless—a worse alternative presented itself. The thought of using her abuse to her advantage would sicken some, but it only empowered her further. The last time Joffrey struck her, Sansa decided that it was the last time anyone would lay a hand on her destiny.

Sansa gets down on her knees and hugs her mother through the pain. “Sandor helped me survive. He was my hero.”

Catelyn gasps. “Your relationship has been going on for that long?”

“No,” Sansa lies again. “He protected me. He was trying to convince me to leave Joffrey. For the longest time, I didn’t listen.” Sansa used to fuck Sandor on Joffrey’s bed. She stayed with Joffrey an extra month just for that pleasure. Joffrey would have given a left ball to get inside her pussy, but Sandor could get her on her knees with a single word. The best days were when Joffrey traded disbaring comments about his hound. When that happened, Sansa let Sandor come inside her mouth. She would kiss Joffrey an hour later, laughing as he licked his lips and called her a slut for being so eager. When Joffrey found out about them—fucking on his couch after she called him over for ‘a night he would never forget’—all their plans set into motion. Sandor gave him the beating of his life. The drugs, the car crash—everything was so perfect it got her higher than any drug.

Now, the plan was coming to an end.

“Does he make you happy?”

Sansa hopes her triumph doesn’t show on her face.

“He does,” Sansa tells her; one of the first truthful things she’s says so far. “And I want you to meet him. Mother, I know you’ve envisioned a different life for me, but he’s the one. So please, I need you to understand that I’ve found someone who loves me and would die before they would ever hurt me.”

Catelyn can no longer say no. The last sentence clinched Sansa’s victory. With a heavy heart buried underneath defeat, Catelyn hugs her daughter back and offers her support.

Sansa smiles. With her parents in her back pocket, all she has to do is take care of one last loose end, and Sansa and Sandor can have their happy ending.

She lied when she said she didn’t believe in fairy tales.

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When she returns home, Catelyn sees Ned lying on the couch, practically catatonic. There’s a bowl of soup on the table and whiskey bottle he must have ordered from room service. She doesn’t bother to ask him ‘what’s wrong’ and instead reminds him that they have a dinner to get to.

“I’m not going.”

“Yes, you are,” Catelyn says tiredly. She wants to stay calm, but she’s already lost so much of her cool that there’s nothing but lukewarm rage inside her. “It’s Arya’s last night. We have to take her out to dinner.”

“If we go, we’ll only love her more, and it’ll hurt when she abandons us again.”
“Stop like acting like a child,” Catelyn snaps. “You have no right.”

Ned glares at his wife. “I’m acting this way because of you.” He stands up in a threatening manner and corners her. Catelyn holds her ground and matches the ferocity in his glower with one of her own. “Look at what your genetics have done to our children!”

“Me? What have I done but champion your children in their affairs, hmm?” Ned closes in on her and Catelyn responds by shoving him away. “It’s your fault our daughter still believes in true love!”

Even after what she experienced at the hands of her first boyfriend, Sansa still hasn’t faltered and neither has Robb after all his heart breaks. If anything, Sansa is more determined than ever to be with that dreadful man and Robb is already ringing the wedding bells. Catelyn cannot blame them. “You had to be such a wonderful fucking husband that our kids had to find partners who followed your example. You set such a high standard that when they found people who love and respect them, they couldn’t let them go! They could have been our children a little while longer if they had continued to date horrible men. But no! You made them too smart by giving them something to look forward!”

“I did that?” Ned grabs onto his wife’s hair and pulls her close. Their lips are inches away. “They wouldn’t have been able to attract anyone’s attention if you weren’t so damn beautiful!” He can feel her breath on his face and he’s never heard anything so arousing.

Catelyn gasps when Ned tears off the top of her designer dress and snaps off her bra by pulling the front, leaving the mounds to bounce.

“Look at these perfect breasts,” Ned growls. His hands return to her face and though his grip is firm, it isn’t even close to bruising. “This gorgeous face, that delicious cunt of yours—if our children didn’t have a mother who was a goddess in human form, none of them would have inherited your sexual prowess! If a night with them is even half as good as a moment in your arms, then their partners were doomed,” Ned declares. “This is your fault!”

“Oh, like I’m the only one to blame for that?” Catelyn asks angrily. She returns the favor by ripping his shirt open. Chaos ensues; the buttons go flying everywhere; Catelyn runs her hands down his muscular chest and moans. “You’re over forty years old and you have abs that can grate cheese. Look at these muscles!” Catelyn squeezes his arms and shudders in pleasure. “They’re as big as grapefruits. You don’t have an ounce of fat on you and I still have my love handles from the five children you put in me!”

“Those love handles are beautiful and you know this better than anyone!”

“Only because you tell me how gorgeous I am every day!”

Ned slams their lips together. His teeth clash against hers but his expert tongue manages to get them back into a steady motion. Meanwhile, Catelyn’s hands latch onto his zipper. Ned pulls away and glares. “This, this is what I’m talking about! Twenty years and you’ve made it impossible for me to look at another woman. Everything about you is blinding that no one else compares.”

“There you go again!” Catelyn hisses out. Her emotions get out of hand and she throws Ned onto the couch. There, she climbs onto his lap and pulls out his cock in anger. “Always so faithful and kind and forgiving. Every wife in our community has been cheated on but you won’t even glance at another woman. I could burn down our house and you’d still think I was a dream to behold.”

Ned’s hands slip underneath her dress. He shoves his fingers deep inside her cunt. She screams.

The Stark grabs her throat. “Make that noise again,” he orders, low and threatening. “I want to hear that intoxicating voice say my name.”
“Ned!” Catelyn shouts while wrapping her arms around Ned so tightly; they could have choked him. Her cunt opens up for Ned’s cock as he pushes into her, deeper and deeper until every single inch is inside her. The pleasure is too good for words, so Catelyn moans out her approval.

“Cat,” he groans. “You’re so goddamn tight; I swear you’re trying to choke my dick off.”

Catelyn moans louder. He is gloriously wrecked and Cat bubbles in pride when she realizes that she’s the one who makes him look like that. Ned flexes his hips upwards and Cat throws her head back in pleasure. It feels deliriously good to be fucked full.

“Ned.” Catelyn’s eyes slip closed. “If you don’t move…I swear I’m going to scratch your back open, you horrible, horrible tease.”

Ned licks his lips. He can practically taste Catelyn’s pleasure on his tongue while she tightens around his cock. They kiss and it isn’t nearly enough to sate him. He grunts out a noise of pleasure when she rolls her hips to get him churning inside her. She repeats it and Ned swears, she’s trying to ruin him.

He grips her body and tells her to calm down. “You’re too impatient.”

Catelyn smiles for the first time that night. She spreads her leg further apart and sneaks a hand downwards to guide his cock. Catelyn shudders when he manages to thrust right against her clit and the vibrations pulse against his cock.

“That’s good, Ned. You’re too good at this,” Catelyn gasps out. Her cunt opens up to accommodate him. She rides him more vigorously, pussy clenching like a vice. Ned loses himself to the pleasure of being used as an object. While his wife wraps her arms around his neck, he sinks his head into her breasts and sucks. Catelyn’s nipples are the most sensitive things about her. While he sucks, licks, and nibbles on the nubs, Catelyn rides harder. Near the end of it, Catelyn’s is overwhelmed with a deliciously familiar warmth; her body lights up with pleasure and bliss and starts grinding like she never has before. She comes with a loud, vocal cry that shakes the entire room. Her clit is tingling but Ned fucks through it to achieve his orgasm.

“You’re such a selfless prick, always making sure I come first,” Catelyn mutters.

Ned groans. He snaps his hips forward through her post-orgasmic haze until he’s shoved against her G-spot again. Catelyn feels another wave of wetness come through. She gasps. She should be too old to go the second round when the first hasn’t even finished yet, but as soon as Ned’s warmth floods her cunt, she’s already craving more.

Catelyn’s body sinks against her husband’s body. Her muscles are sore and singing but her pussy clenches whenever another spurt makes it inside her. She feels so good.

“We have to get ready for dinner,” Catelyn mutters. She sounds more sure than sorry—mostly because she’s accepted they’ll be late.

Ned kisses her shoulder. “They’ll wait,” he tells her, not a doubt in his mind. “I’m going to fuck you again until you’re limping to the car.”

Catelyn thrills in pleasure as she is the one pushed down on the couch. “Promise?” She asks sweetly. Their lovemaking becomes so intense that she doesn’t remember what they were fighting about until they are seated at the dinner table.

***

That night, Arya announces that she’s leaving school to go pro. The decision must have been
pending for some time, as she doesn’t even flinch when Ned begins to, half-heartedly, interrogates her ascent to adulthood. She answers the question easily, announcing that her mentor, an actress by the name of Lady Crane, has offered her old apartment at a fair price, she’s secured a two-year contract with the Faceless Men, and this morning, had a successful video meeting with a representative from Tiffany’s. She turns sixteen in a few months and by then, is legally allowed to file for emancipation if they attempt to stop her.

After being worn down by their four other children, the two of them let the matter go on without much of the fuss. Everyone is surprised when they move onto dessert without another protest.

“That’s it?” Arya asks.

Ned shrugs as he eats his flan. “You’re a headstrong woman. You know what's best for yourself. If this is what you want, we will support you.”

The Stark parents continue their meal in relative peace, humming a song in their heads to block out their own parent’s voices.

***

The next day, when the Starks are on the train back to Yorkshire, Arya makes the impulsive decision to confront them about their unusual behavior. The two of them look at each other. Without any verbal cues or spoken confirmation, they continue with the truth.

“Arya, we want you to know that while we love you and have a vested interest in your life, we’ve also decided that you know yourself best and can handle whatever life’s thrown at you.”

Arya squirms in her seat. “Alright…”

“That’s why, with our vote of confidence, we want you to always keep in mind one thing when the time comes for you to enter a relationship,” Catelyn tells her.

Arya raises an eyebrow. “What is that?”

Ned leans forward and with a guttered, tortured whisper, he says: “Don’t tell us anything.”

Arya stares.

“We don’t need to know,” Catelyn explains. “It’s your own business.”

“Unless it involves grandchildren, we want to remain in the dark.”

“It doesn’t matter if you’ve had an abortion or slept with, I don’t know, Tywin Lannister or that dancing instructor of yours,” Catelyn points out without an ounce of shame. Arya turns to her father and sees that he’s agreeing. “It’s alright, but it won’t be alright if you tell us. Do you understand, sweetheart?”

Arya inches closer to the walkway. “I guess…”

“There’s nothing shameful about secrecy,” Ned agrees. “You should keep secrets. If you don’t, we want you to, what’s that word, Catelyn? What you’re so good at?”

“Lying,” Catelyn helps out. She’s smiling when she says it.

“Right, we want you to lie.”
“Lie.”

“Lie like a sex offender,” Ned adds.

In the end, the two finish their discussion by demanding Arya not tell them a single thing.

The youngest Stark girl leaves their vicinity afterward and walks over to her favorite cousin and future brother. Jon raises an eyebrow. By his side, Robb is resting on his shoulder.

“What’s up?” He asks.

Arya is at a loss for words. When she finally comes up with them, she stares at Jon with absolute wonder as she paraphrases what happened.

“Jon, I think I’m finally on the same page as my parents.”

Chapter End Notes

Jesus Christ, this chapter came so late. I’m sorry. I just started a new job so I’m didn’t realize how bad my time management was going to be. Here’s hoping I work it out soon.

If you go back to chapter 2, you’ll notice that Daenerys was counted as one of Robb’s ex-girlfriends. I didn’t edit that; the original chapter did have this fact from the start.

So I really like writing Robb and Ned together. I remember, when reading the books, wondering why Ned never sent Robb away to be fostered (as him and Brandon were). Ned is fiercely protective of his children. I forgot which chapter, but in the first book, there’s a scene where he talks to Catelyn and the first thing he asks (or one of the first things) is where the children are. Catelyn thinks to herself that Ned always asks that, implying that he’s the one who wants to keep them close to home. So yeah, I translated that to boarding school because in England, it’s typical for rich parents to send their kids to Eton or Harrow (the former’s tuition is 80K a year). It’s strange for someone as rich as Ned not to send his son there and instead, chose a school close to home. Hence, this scene was created.
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

A lot of kissing and rough, unlubricated sex. Needless to say, it's Ramsay/Theon centric. It's also a very short chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are you nervous?”

Howland fixes the tie around his son’s neck. Despite the obstacles on their road, smiles. Jojen looks dashing in his suit. He’s worn it two times before, both on academic accounts, and Howland can’t stop grinning when he sees him in it. Nothing bad happens when he wears the suit. The tie is a thing from his school days, old and lackluster green, but Ned bought it for him after some kids were having fun tossing around the “poor kid” and ruining his uniform. Howland considers the accessory a treasure. The nostalgia might even spark a decent conversation. One worthy of private conversations set in a bathroom stall.

“No,” Jojen answers to the previous question. For a second, Howland feared he read his thoughts.

“You should be.”

“But I’m not.”

Howland shakes his head. “You twat,” he murmurs. Howland finishes the tie and strokes his only son’s cheek lovingly. “You look so handsome. No wonder Bran couldn’t resist.”

Meera pops her head inside. "What's going on here?"

"Nothing," they answer at the same time. Meera sighs and walks downstairs.

Jojen chuckles. He takes his father’s hand and kisses his palm. “It’ll be alright,” he promises. “Bran told me that his parents were in a good mood when they came back.”

“The sun alone isn’t enough to make the flowers bloom.”

“Good thing I picked that flower.”

Howland rolls his eyes.

They walk down the stairs to see Meera obsessing over their phone. She narrows her eyes at them, and it is the least insulting micro-expression to occur. Howland understands she's suspicious, but that does not stop him from frowning at her furrowed brow and pursed lips. Howland wants to scold her for ruining her good looks. Something motherly to replace the one she lost in the oven.

“Are you two ready yet?” She asks; she’s been irritable since the day started. “I don’t want to be late.”

“We will be fine,” Jojen reassures for the umpteenth time. “This is supposed to be a pleasant lunch where we can get along and patch our differences. I apologize to Bran. Bran accepts my apology."
We build a friendship that slowly turns into something more. A classic rom-com for all ages.”

“Except, if one of them figures out you went behind their backs, this romance becomes a horror film.”

Jojen smiles. “Good thing I like a little blood in my movies.”

***

The cookies are almost ready when the last of the red washes off Theon’s hands. It’s not the first time he’s made strawberry shortbread, but he hates how the jam stains his fingers. Theon hopes Ramsay appreciates the gesture. He doesn’t bake often, and he says sorry even less. In the end, he’ll blame it on the drugs and the sex and Ramsay for driving him insane. Theon is madder than mercury poisoning, and he cannot help but suck the shambles. His mind is impaired with blurs of blood, white powder, and sticky semen spilled on golden skin. Since Ramsay picked him up, the two of them reached heights of hedonism Theon didn’t even know existed.

And Theon loves it.

Ramsay is the bad boy every good kid secretly wants to fuck. Theon has never been good, and as an adolescent surrounded by posh schoolboys who’ve never even seen a girl, he might’ve even thought he was bad; smoking cigarettes and skipping class like some baby thug. Ramsay is on a whole other level.

First, it’s the drugs. Ramsay works out daily, but he takes a cocktail of narcotics like he has a terminal illness. Aside from their cocaine binges, Ramsay keeps a jar filled with Quaaludes, Adderall, Xanax, Vicodin—basically, any prescription drug Theon can name, it’s in the jar. The container never empties, and Ramsay pops tablets like mints. He shares with Theon—stuffs the pills down his throat with his tongue or sometimes hand feeds him when he wants to be gentle—and Theon isn’t ever sober to complain. In the back of his head, he can hear Robb lecturing him on his behavior. The voice is hard to ignore, but as soon as Ramsay comes home with a “special” substance, be it a syringe of morphine or a stamp of ecstasy, he finds that Robb is suddenly silent.

Then, there’s the sex. So much mind-blowing sex. Ramsay is an obscene fucker. Theon may be high when he thinks this, but sex with Ramsay is better than doing drugs. Ramsay makes him forget about everything, and not just Robb or the Starks, but everything. Theon gets bent over a table, and it’s like medicine. He ignores his sister’s scathing remarks when Ramsay is calling him his slut and all of his uncle’s touches feel feather light when Ramsay digs his fingers so far into Theon’s ass cheeks that he leaves indentures. All he can think about is Ramsay and his cock; it’s infuriating and incredible at the same time. Like falling off a cliff and then realizing you can fly.

The timer ‘dings’ and Theon’s temporary gains enough sobriety to stumble to the oven, grab his tray, and limp to the counter to prepare the confections. It’s weird, not being surrounded by dogs clamoring at his chest for a taste. They are being checked out by a breeder since going on a hunt yesterday. He takes a clumsy bite of the puppy shaped cookies, and when the crumbs spill on his bare chest, he doesn’t mind. The treats taste good. It’s a miracle he didn’t mix up the sugar with the salt.

His success is forgotten when he hears the doorknob turn. Theon ignores his limp to jump Ramsay when he enters. Theon’s kisses are sloppy and disgusting, his hands are down the older boy’s pants, and when he grinds his cock against Ramsay’s semi, it’s little more than an act of pussy wagging.

“Shit,” Ramsay mutters. “You really are a dog.” Ramsay doesn’t hesitate to grope his ass as he lifts Theon’s legs around his hips. His backup singers are whistling in the back as Ramsay carries him to
the dining room table. “A fucking bitch in heat.”

Theon whines. His mind is still hazy even as Ramsay throws him on the couch. The impact hurt. Theon responds by grabbing onto his tie and undoing it. Ramsay looks so fucking hot in a suit. In between the undressing him, Theon sneaks in another kiss.

“I baked cookies,” Theon gasps out. He doesn’t need to undress. Ramsay keeps him naked except for his boxers and a dog collar when he’s at home. Since he’s moved in, Ramsay hasn’t let him out of the house.

“Why the fuck would you pull some girly shit like that?”

Theon whimpers as Ramsay pulls him up by the hair.

“Wanna say sorry,” Theon tells him. They kiss again, and Theon wonders what Ramsay has planned for today. They’re in a kissing mood. He hopes there’s some ‘E’ involved. Kissing always feels better under ecstasy. “Shouldn’t have gone mental yesterday.”

Up until yesterday, Theon was convinced that Ramsay was faithful, if for no other reason than convenience. There was no point in looking for other lays when a hot piece of ass like Theon was waiting at home. Their cohabitation was peaceful. Ramsay went to work, he came home, did a shit ton of drugs and had a shit ton of sex with Theon without ever getting boring. He might have stopped by a pub for a drink or bought something from a 24-hour sex shop, but their routine remained blissfully straightforward and sinful. They haven’t talked about what they are, but Theon assumes that was because it was evident. Theon is a pet to be pampered and discipline, and Ramsay doesn’t take care of things unless they’re special. He destroys, he mutilates, rapes and reaps; but he doesn’t care and that makes Theon different. He’s special; Theon is better than the disposable holes Ramsay used to pick up.

Which may have been his justification for absolutely losing it yesterday.

Last night, Ramsay got a phone call and stormed out of their flat. He was furious. Theon was fine with his midnight interruption; he didn’t mind waking up in the middle of the night if it meant having Ramsay’s dick up his ass again. Sometimes, he brought presents.

He was not fine with the little slut Ramsay brought back with him.

Ramsay was his medicine; his cock to use and just plain his. He was no longer giving up what was his to any other whore who thought she was cute enough to compete with him.

Theon was done sharing.

Without warning, Theon grabbed the girl and slammed her head against the table. He continued to do so until her body limped under the abuse. Ramsay allowed the whole altercation to happen until her nose started spewing out blood onto the marble. Then, he grabbed Theon aside only to be bombarded with a fist to his nose.

Theon’s eyes widened at what he had done.

“You fucking bitch!” Ramsay shouted as he cradled his bleeding nostrils.

Theon made a run for it. He headed towards the bedroom. As Ramsay’s boys got ready to stop him, the bastard ordered them to stand back. Theon was his to hold and his to punish. He told them to do what they wanted to the girl. “Make sure I don’t see her again.”
The girl was too damaged to scream as they dragged her into the other room.

Theon was in the bathroom. Ramsay pounded on the door, shouting death threats and violent promises, making it clear to Theon that whatever concerns he had about letting Ramsay in were nothing compared to how wrecked he was going to be if Ramsay had to break in.

“I’m going to have you neutered, you fucking bitch,” Ramsay hissed.

The door remained lock. Ramsay tossed his entire body against the bathroom door. Each tackle weakened the wooden hinges until he finally broke the door down. When he landed inside, Theon was clutching onto his straight razor.

Ramsay glared. “Put it down,” he growled.

Theon had the nerve to pout. “No.”

Ramsay punched the wall. “I am not playing around!”

“Then you shouldn’t have brought that whore here!”

Ramsay marched forward. He no longer cared that Theon was holding a blade against him. He grabbed the blade from his hand and pulled it away from him, slicing through his palm in the process. The sight of blood had Theon shaking. He tried to pull away but eventually released the razor after Ramsay made it clear he was not letting go. To escape, he dashed past Ramsay only to be held down on the ground, kicking and thrashing about like a netted fish.

“You’re an asshole!” Theon screamed. He yelled so loud Ramsay’s ears hurt. “A sadistic piece of shit! Lying twat! I hate you! You fucking bastard!”

Ramsay clenched his fist. Anyone else would have gotten beaten until they were in a hole in the ground. He ignored his rising anger to spread Theon’s legs.

“Shut up,” Ramsay gritted out as he pushed the head of his cock into Theon.

“Who was she?” Theon hissed out. He closed his eyes to hold back his tears. “Were you planning to fuck her?”

“Well, I didn’t bring her back to play checkers.”

Theon responded by scratching his face. Ramsay rammed in, hoping to bring some sense into Theon. The Greyjoy screamed like a broken metal disc, yelling more tactless insults as Ramsay kept on thrusting. Ramsay was more than a bastard while he was inside him, he was scum, shit, a raging cunt—which ironically, Ramsay was about to use against Theon.

Eventually, Ramsay heard his anger die down to sobs.

“Why can’t it ever be me?” Theon cried as he tightened his arms around Ramsay’s neck. “S’not fair,” he murmured. “Don’t wanna share anymore.”

Ramsay rolled his eyes. He got up from his on the floor and pulled Theon up with him. “You’re such a little bitch, crying over some ugly whore.” He grabbed the back of Theon’s head and kissed him so hard, his lips swelled. Theon’s eyes were hazy when they parted. “You’re not my boyfriend. I don’t need permission to bring other sluts around.”

Theon shook his head in disagreement. “No,” he countered. “You’re not allowed to bring other girls
here.” He paused. “Or boys. And you can’t stick your dick in them anywhere else. Those are my conditions.”

Ramsay scoffed. “You think you have the right to conditions?” His grip on Theon’s hair tightened. Theon groaned. To Ramsay’s surprise, Theon remained resilient; he tightened around Ramsay cock. “Fucking hells!”

“No boys. No girls. Just me.”

“What makes you think you’re so special?” Ramsay muttered.

Theon unraveled his arms and used one hand to slip two fingers alongside his cock.

“Shit,” Ramsay swore. Theon stroked his shaft from the inside of his hole. Ramsay made short, jerky thrusts into him, forcing Theon to bounce on the cock like a helium filled balloon. To keep himself from moaning, Ramsay kissed him again.

***

Theon thinks about the kiss until this morning. It encourages to make right by Ramsay, and as long as he doesn’t bring home another hussy, he gets the cookies without the roofies. Alone except for his boy bitches; Theon is satisfied. He skips to the kitchen to show off his cookies, and though Ramsay opens his mouth, there’s a soft reluctance that gets overruled by his pride. He knows Theon won’t hurt him, but he also knows that Theon can be unpredictable when he is in a mood.

In the middle of his chewing, he kisses Theon until the younger man is swooning and says nothing when Theon frets about forgetting his coffee. It’s an American habit he picked up in the states, but Ramsay prefers the rich blackness of a fresh brew over the sogginess of leaves.

After Theon puts a pot on, he offers to fix Ramsay a bath.

“What’s with your obsession with baths?”

Theon loves baths. He spends more time in the tub than he does on the couch and it ranks second only to the bed. Ramsay has been forced to indulge him for the sake of avoiding the whining, screeching noise that comes out whenever Theon doesn’t get his way. He’s trained dogs before. He knows that a few treats keep them grateful—never mind that he doesn’t have to join Theon or even stay until his skin is wrinkly and they’ve overstayed their welcome by at least ten degrees.

While Theon prepares the hot water, Ramsay scans the bathroom. Theon must have scrubbed the walls clean; the image of his dog on his hands and knees is a pleasant sight.

The thing that captures his attention is his straight razor from yesterday. Ramsay favors cut-throats to modern razors; maybe he’s a traditionalist, but he likes the idea of holding a weapon for something as minuscule as hygiene. He picks up the tool and notices that it’s been cleaned.

When Theon turns around to invite him in, he tenses when he sees the blade in hand.

Ramsay smirks.

This will be fun.

“Theon.”

Theon jumps accordingly. “Yes?” he yips, sweet as a pup.
“I need a shave. My father was bitching about me coming to him unkempt.” Ramsay shakes his head as he grips the handle. “I tried to tell him it wasn’t my fault. One of my bitches was acting up.”

Theon flushes with embarrassment.

Ramsay hands the blade over to Theon and tosses him the shaving cream. Despite his shaking, Theon catches it. His releases a huge dollop of cream onto his hand and slathers it over Ramsay’s chin. Theon angles the blade to Ramsay’s skin. He’s utilized a straight razor before; Ned Stark used one and taught both his son and Theon how to handle them. Still, Ramsay doesn’t know that, and after last night, it’s a risk.

Ramsay can’t wait to see what happens.

Theon is surprisingly steady when he makes the first cut; he slides the razor through like he’s slicing butter and even pauses to brush his thumb against the smooth skin. Ramsay is handsome with or without his facial hair. Personally, Theon prefers him without it. It’s a weird admittance. He used to think he liked the rugged look; Robb prefers a shadow over not, but since he’s met Ramsay, the thought never crosses his mind. Things become difficult as Ramsay gets more handsy. By then, Theon has made his second cut and began to relish in the attention

“I’ll bend you over the balcony if there’s so much as a prick out of place,” Ramsay threatens.

Theon whimpers and keeps moving forward. He hears the water growing softer, indicating a potential overflow. He tries his best to hurry up. Just as he is getting started on the other side, Ramsay opens his mouth.

“The girl was found dead this morning.”

Theon stops mid-cut. After a moment’s hesitation, he returns to the task. “The girl from last night?”

Ramsay raises an eyebrow. “No, the girl I keep in the spare bedroom in case you bore me. Yes, the girl from last night.”

Theon shrugs. “What about that stupid twat?” He asks, trying to sound nonchalant while jealousy seethed out of his mouth.

Ramsay’s lips twitch. “She was eaten alive by dogs. The Bloodhound Killer strikes again.” He hums. “The real one this time.”

Theon is on the last strip. He pretends not to notice the darkening mood or how Ramsay’s fingers twitch like he’s aching for a blade of his own. He’s seen Ramsay with a knife before, and it’s impressive—in a frightening way.

“There’s more than one?” Theon asks.

Ramsay tenses and it is a miracle Theon catches the quirk in time for him not to slice through his skin.

“It seems the Bloodhound Killer has a copycat. Someone is trying to follow the fame of a truly talented master.” Ramsay is gloating and enraged at the same time.

Theon powers through. There’s a question on the tip of his tongue that goes ‘how do you know?’ That never sees the light. Instead, Theon washes the blade in the sink. “Isn’t imitation the sincerest form of flattery?” He puts the blade aside and moves over to stop the bath water from hitting the marble tiles. “I mean, it makes sense. The Bloodhound Killer is becoming a legend. Of course, he’d
Ramsay frowns, and he seems to be contemplating the notion. The mood lightens considerably when he finishes his thought, and his frown turns to a straight grimace. “Fair enough.”

He strips off the rest of his suit. Theon doesn’t hesitate to undress him.

“How do you feel about the girl’s death?”

Ramsay waits for an answer, and the answers comes out more fluently than Theon thought it would.

“Just goes to show that karma is a bitch,” Theon notes. “You can’t expect to intrude on someone’s territory and not expect the alpha to hunt them down.”

Ramsay doesn’t answer right away. Finally, he takes off the last of his clothes and gets into the bath. The water is still hot. Theon follows, dipping his entire head into the water before resurfacing like a child in a pool. He giggles as he prepares for more sex.

“After this, I want to watch a movie,” Theon suggests. “I downloaded this nasty one from the eighties, full of gore and sex. You’d like it.”

Ramsay thinks an exhibition film and some cookies sound wonderful. He’s wise enough to keep his mouth shut. “We’ll see. Maybe if you’re not acting like a total cunt for the rest of the night.”

Theon pouts and leans on Ramsay’s chest. He entangles his fingers with Ramsay’s bandaged hand. It’s a mess. He’ll have to redo them after they get out of the bath.

***

When they leave the bath, Ramsay sees his friends knocked out with cookie crumbs over their chests. He turns to Theon who whistles innocently. He grabs a plate of cookies that are shaped differently than the ones fed to Ramsay’s friends before leading Ramsay into the bedroom.

“Let’s have some fun.” He hopes the pills taste better with strawberries.

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Thank you for reading this chapter! I apologize for it being so short; the next chapter will be twice as long, I promise. I moved the Jojen/Bran lunch to that chapter because I just couldn’t write it. It’ll get more murder mystery-ish in the next chapter and I’m (hoping) the bring back Shireen, Rickon, and Lyanna to make up for this lateness.

I’m in a rather poor mood right now. I haven’t been this low in a while and I hadn’t expected to affect my writing so significantly. I couldn’t even reread it correctly. I just did a basic check and was done with it. When I have more energy, I’ll go back and work on it.

So, for those of you who read Crown the Wolf with Bronze and Blood, I won’t be updating with an actual chapter but more of an information sheet. It explains how the AO universe works, the ages of the characters, etc. I don’t want to start off next week by still writing that chapter and then throwing off the deadlines once again.
Thank you for understanding! Again, I will do better next time.
Some complications occur when your boyfriend’s parents are the same people who caught you stalking their son a year prior. The opportunity for a good first impression is no longer available, so the only thing left is the recovery. People love a redemption story. In the core of Ned and Catelyn Stark’s hearts, they want to forgive Jojen, or more accurately, they want to believe Jojen is not a threat. For now, as long as Jojen walks the earth, Bran is in danger, and they will do anything to relinquish this fear. Howland hopes his son has enough sense to falsify remorse to take advantage of this.

The Reeds walk over to the restaurant with a heavier step than usual. The Starks appear solemn. To Howland’s surprise, the only sibling in attendance is Sansa. Howland pouts. He hoped to see their nephew, Jon, or their eldest, Robb. His eyes would have feasted on them both. Jon was the prettier image of Ned when he was younger, barely on the cusp of puberty and so pliable Howland could have put him in an oven and baked bread. Robb is both Catelyn and Ned’s son—a beautiful mixture of his parents’ aesthetics; he has the Tully lustfulness and Stark sensuality coupled together to form pure sex appeal. According to Jojen and Meera, he has extended his support to Jojen’s cause, and it’s a shame not to have him play mediator.

When it is time to make their introductions, Jojen and Bran’s meeting goes last. Everyone holds their breath except for Jojen and Bran, who are so entangled with their pheromones of desire and delight that neither of them read the mood very well.

Jojen’s eyes see only Bran. He considers this meeting as role play for their relationship and turns up the charm when he should be shoveling out the shame. “I’m pleased to meet you,” he says, and the statement is perfect except for the wicked smile he has on his lips. Bran blushes, the sweetest sprinkling of pink Howland has ever seen on a boy and says the same. They shake hands. Jojen lingers.

Meera is about to put an end to it when Jojen speaks up. Howland swears his son is suicidal. “You’re so pretty, I feel like I’ve done you a discourtesy by not kissing your hand,” Jojen adds with a wink. He brings Bran’s hand upwards. “Let me rectify my mistake.”

Bran giggles. Jojen only manages a peck when Howland kicks him in the back of his leg and drags him to his seat at the table. “Behave,” Howland mutters. When no one is looking, Meera smacks him upside the head. “Idiot,” she hisses.

Both families settle down but not without a fuss. Catelyn spends a good portion glaring at Jojen during the small talk while Howland flirts with Ned without results. Sansa and Meera focus on their phones—keeping an eye on their respective little brothers without letting on that they’re worried. Things reach a boiling point when Jojen talks about the universities he’s applying to and Bran mention his potential college choices in return. Jojen licks his lips at one choice, saying “he’d like to see Bran in the uniform” and how “easy they are to take off.”

Catelyn stabs her knife into the table. “Excuse me?” She warns him. “I must have misheard.”

The threat bounces off Jojen. The teen is still staring at Bran when he says, in a nauseatingly fond manner, “Surely, you’d want a uniform that Bran can take off by himself.” Jojen tilts his head and
smiles. “For convenience, of course.” Everyone can tell he does not mean Bran’s convenience but rather his convenience.

Just as Meera is about to justify Jojen’s inappropriateness, Jojen brings up the elephant in the room. “I think it’s time to stop avoiding the issue.”

Everyone tenses. Meera takes Jojen’s hand in a way that displays comfort but in actuality is a leash. Don’t do anything stupid, her death grip says. Her nails dig into his skin, and he grins, not in spite of it, but because of it.

“I think it’s time to stop avoiding the issue.” Jojen winces the slightest when Meera digs deeper. “I realize I was wrong.” The nails begin to retract. “You are the most beautiful boy in this universe and every other. I am sure this world was created for you to walk this earth.” Meera’s nails come back, full force.

“By the gods, I will throttle you,” Meera grumbles under her breath. If the Starks don’t get to him first. Mrs. Stark is snarling. Meera glances over at Bran, and she swears, she can hear his heart flutter.

“Thank you,” Bran responds, flattered despite the over-the-top sycophancy.

“But my methods for catching your attention were wrong. I hurt a lot of people in the process of getting to know you. People I care about.” He glances over at Sansa, and though his eyes are gentle and full of regret, the red haired beauty knows better. “Sansa, I am sorry for what happened between us. It was never my intention to hurt you, but I did. I used you. I know it’s a lot to ask, but I hope we can move on.”

Sansa purses her lips. Bran stares at her, eyes wide and pleading for her to extend her acceptance. She frowns and settles for neutral ground.

“I understand,” Jojen replies. The problem is he does not care. He turns his attention back to Bran. “All I want is for you to believe that I have the best intentions for Bran. I would never hurt him.”

“We will see about that,” Catelyn snaps. She drinks her water and looks away to avoid the scolding gaze of her husband.

Bran,” Jojen addresses. The time of truth has come—at least to the rest of the Starks. “Do you forgive me?” He reaches out to grab Bran’s hand, but Meera pulls him back with such force, his chair almost tips over.

“If I have to hold you back one more time—”

“I forgive you,” Bran interrupts. He’s breathless and turned on and wants nothing more than to show Jojen exactly how much he forgives him.

Catelyn frowns. “Bran, maybe you should think about what he’s done…”

“But I forgive him,” Bran insists. He looks into Jojen’s eyes with enough sugary affection to give a child a toothache. “I want us to get along.”
Catelyn says nothing else. She turns to her husband who is nodding solemnly. “If that is what you think is best,” Ned agrees. “We will trust your instincts.”

The Stark matriarch sighs and reluctantly gives her blessing to end the plague upon their houses. “How lucky Mr. Reed is to have affection for my most compassionate child,” she seethes.

Jojen’s lips quirk in amusement. Before he can say something stupid, Howland claps his hand together. “How fortunate are we? To be able to settle this issue with such diplomacy,” Howland cheers. “There’s so much to talk about now that this silly issue is out of the way. So let’s enjoy our meal over some great conversation,” Howland advises. “We never know when it’s going to be our last.”

His timing is spectacular as a series of waiters came out to set their plates are set in front of them. Howland orders a scallop dish with mushrooms, kale, and garlic butter. He is mixing the ingredients in the creamy, aromatic sauce when he notices an item not listed on the menu.

“Oh dear.”

“Is something wrong?” Ned asks. He sets his fork down.

“It’s no big deal.” Howland calls forth a waiter. When the man comes, Howland makes it clear he’s sorry to bother him. “I hate to be that customer but there’s an eyeball in my food, and I would be grateful if I could get another plate.”

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Detectives Stark and Yoren, just Yoren, come into the restaurant with solemn faces and tension that can break a masseuse’s hand. Benjen’s agitation increases when he sees that the witnesses in question are members of his own family. Ned’s eye hones in on Benjen’s obscenely large hickie and the dread the officer feels is enough to make him forget the pride he had when he showcased the bruise to the entire precinct. Never before has he regretted his vanity.

“What is that?” Ned hisses before Benjen can ever open his mouth.

“Ned,” Benjen tries to reason.

“Are you seeing someone? Who is he? How old is he?”

“I’m supposed to be doing the questioning,” Benjen reminds, petulant. His brother can’t possibly think it’s still appropriate to interrogate him like he’s a hormonal teenager, especially at a crime scene. “Tell me what ha—”

“It better not be your commander. I know you’ve been eyeing him like a rump roast.”

Yoren snorts to cover up his laughter. Benjen shoots him a glare.

“Just because he’s your superior officer doesn’t mean he can take advantage of you. He should know better. Is it him? I’ll have a talk—”

“You will not,” Benjen replies, snippy as an adolescent on the cusp of puberty. “And no one is taking advantage of me. I’m thirty-four years old! You can’t tell me who I can and cannot do.”

Ned snorts. “You sound like Lyanna,” he warns. It used to be the most useful leash for Benjen’s jail-baiting habits. As an adult, the effects wavered.
Benjen rolls his eyes. “I’m a grown man, Ned. Stop being such an older brother and let me do my job.”

“If that were the only thing you were doing, I would.”

“Oh, sod off.”

“Hate to interrupt this heartwarming moment,” Yoren chimes. “But there’s a dead body we have to get to. I think we have more important things to worry about than Benjen’s daddy issues.” Yoren chuckles. “Or his big brother issues.”

Ned stares into Benjen’s disobedient eyes before relenting. He gathers up his family members and begins their questioning. The sentences are simple; an appetizer before they question the kitchen staff. They don’t know if it’s the work of Bloodhound Killer until they retrace the path of the victim. Benjen considers sending them home when he hears Yoren a cough. He elbows Benjen in the shoulder and gestures toward the side.

Benjen looks in the direction Yoren is signaling towards and sees Jojen Reed.

“You might have to stay longer,” Benjen announces, careful not to alert Jojen Reed’s attentions.

Catelyn frowns. “Why?”

“Standard procedure,” Yoren tells her; it’s the usual line he gives in this situation. Unfortunately, Ned Stark knows the law better than most officers. He dismisses the notion, pointing out that unless the police have reason to believe the Starks are involved, they can leave.

“Of course we don’t believe you’re guilty of any wrongdoing,” Yoren smooths over. He glances over at Jojen Reed, who is immersed in a conversation with Bran. “We’re trying to be thorough.”

“And we thank you for it,” Catelyn retorts. “So we’ll finish our statements and leave. I don’t want to expose my kids to this any longer than I have to.”

“We’ll make it quick,” Benjen promises. Once he finishes his brother and sister-in-law’s statements, he can move forward to interrogating Jojen. He has an extra set of generic questions prepared and begins listing them, one by one. He is almost done— the third question in—when Bran rolls up from behind.

“Is it alright if I leave early? Jojen’s offered to give me a ride home—”

“No,” says everyone except the Reeds.

Benjen is the first to defend his protests. “We won’t take long, but it’s essential we get every detail.”

“I can do that for them,” Howland interrupts. “It was my dish that had the eyeball. Neither of them touched their food.”

Benjen chills at his voice. He glances over at Yoren who is both intrigued and intimidated. Howland has that effect on people. The Reed is smiling at them like a cat who found out that the cage containing the canaries is unlocked. He presses his palms against Yoren and asks if he needs Jojen’s presence to carry on with their investigation. “I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Howland Reed. I found the eyeball? If I remember correctly, you said your name was Yoren? Officer Yoren?”

Yoren gulps as Howland squeezes his biceps. “Yes.”
Howland licks his lips. “My son will have a fit if he hears me say this but he’s quite a delicate young man. I don’t want him to be apart of this. It’s in his best interest to send him home, don’t you agree?”

Yoren coughs. “Mr. Reed—”

“Howland,” Howland purrs.

“Howland,” Yoren repeats. “We need all of your statements,” he lies. “Jojen needs to stay.”

“I agree,” Catelyn pops in. “It’s too soon to leave them alone together.”

Bran, who overhears the entire conversation, objects to the protective detail. “Mum, can I talk to you for a moment?”

Catelyn frowns and follows her son to the side.

“I want to leave.”

“It’ll only be a moment, Bran, and I can take you home—”

“I want to go with Jojen.”

Catelyn tightens her fist. “Absolutely not.”

“The whole point of this meeting was for us to get along. Jojen’s said he was sorry; let’s give him the benefit of the doubt.”

“It’s too soon. I still don’t trust him.”

“It’s not your choice who I trust.”

The sass in his tone alarmed Catelyn. Bran takes a metaphoric step back. He bites his lip and looks behind him where Jojen is pretending not to eavesdrop. “Please? I want to get to know him. Understand what happened. He’s not going to tell me anything with you guys around.”

“Bran, he might try something.” Catelyn cannot will herself to whisper her horrible hypotheses.

Bran sighs. “Nothing will happen,” he promises as if he holds power to defend himself. Catelyn shakes her head.

“No.”

“Mum,” Bran begs. “If he wanted to hurt me, I’m sure he could have already. We’ve lived together all summer, and I’ve been alone in the house before. This wouldn’t be the first time he’s had the opportunity to do something.”

“He might not have known you were home alone.”

“Which means he hasn’t been following me,” Bran points out. “Give him a chance to prove himself.”

Catelyn hangs between a rock and a hard place. “Why don’t we let Sansa drive you home?”

Bran stares at her wanly. “Sansa rode with us, remember? Jojen took his car to get here.”

“Well, why can’t she join you? She doesn’t need to be here either.”
“Because she makes things awkward. I want privacy, mum.”

Catelyn bites her tongue in annoyance. Her son is adamant on forgiveness and if it weren’t for her naïveté—the insipid belief that her son is still her baby and not running off with demented juvenile delinquents—she might have noticed something amidst about Bran’s stance. Eventually, his pleading eyes push her off the ledge and she, like a coward, sought advice elsewhere.

“Wait here,” she orders. Catelyn walks over to her husband, who is pulling at his little brother’s collar, demanding every sordid detail and promising retribution for his defilement. She grabs Ned’s shoulder and drags him away, much to Benjen's relief.

“Bran wants to leave,” she says.

Ned nods. “There’s no point to him staying.”

“He wants Jojen to take him home.”

Ned frowns. “How do you feel about that?” he asks, cautiously.

Catelyn glares. “How do you think I feel?”

“Not happy.”

Catelyn groans. She crosses her arms. “I don’t trust him alone with Bran.”

“He knows better than to try anything.”

“Does he? You heard from Sansa how manipulative he could get. He might trick Bran into doing something he’s not comfortable with.”

“Bran can make his own decisions—however, misled they may be.” Ned awkwardly shuffles his feet. He thinks about the picture on the phone and considers telling Cat the truth before deciding against it. In addition to speaking with Arya about her affairs, they made a silent vow to each other not to bring up their knowledge unless the situation is dire and demanding of it.

Catelyn groans. “So I should let them go home? Alone?”

Ned offers a compromise. “Have Jojen drop him off at Stannis’ home. Shireen is his friend and will house him until we get back. That way, we’ll know he’s safe and away from Jojen. Stannis will keep us updated.”

The plan sounds plausible. Catelyn reluctantly agrees. She is about to turn back to Bran when she decides to comment on Ned’s laissez faire parenting. “You seem very calm about this.”

“I know our son,” Ned explains. “He is a good, loyal boy who wouldn’t let someone else compromise his ethics.”

The statement is an odd one, but Ned’s conviction is oddly soothing. Catelyn returns to Bran and offers her acceptance and conditions. Bran agrees to them readily and scurries over to the Reed boy. Jojen, in response, tells his father about his departure.

The dominos fall before the officers can list their protests. Benjen is rather disheveled when he pulls on Ned’s shirt and asks about Jojen’s dismissal. “Who said he could leave?”

Ned sighs. “You don’t need our children here.”
“Yes, we do!”

Ned shakes his head. “I understand you want to be thorough, but there’s no need to bring my kids into this.”

“It’s important, Ned. I wanted to talk to Jojen. You can’t just send him off after I told you I wanted him to stay.”

“Jojen and Bran need their peace,” Ned explains, “This is a complicated matter.”

“This is a complicated case.”

“Is there something you’re not telling me?”

Ned will never forgive him if he finds out that Jojen Reed is a suspect in the Bloodhound Killer case and Benjen allowed Jojen to reside in their family home to avoid raising suspicion. Instead, he says he doesn’t like Ned overstepping his authority. It is true, but it isn’t the truth.

Ned pats him on the shoulder. “I didn’t mean to do that,” he says, “We’ll be fully cooperative from this point on. Asks us whatever you like.”

Too late, Benjen thinks to himself. “I need to talk to Yoren,” he mutters.

When Ned is left by himself, Howland sneaks up from behind. Ned catches him instantly.

“What’s the matter?” Ned asks.

Howland shakes his head. “It’s nothing. I wanted you to know how grateful I am that you’re giving Jojen a chance.”

Ned wishes he can do something about the murder. When he voices his thoughts out loud, Howland laughs. Howland has a nice laugh, Ned notes, it’s the kind of laugh that always responds to Ned’s humor.

“Either way, I’m happy. I always wanted our children to get along,” Howland smiles slyly. “Who knows? Maybe they can be even more one day?”

Ned scoffs. “I doubt it. If Bran is anything like his brothers, he’ll remain faithful to his boyfriend. Your son won’t change that.”

Howland is taken back. “Bran is seeing someone?” Ned swears it’s the first time in years that he’s seen his former schoolmate surprised.

Ned coughs. “I found some pictures on his phone. There were…inappropriate.” Ned blushes and turns away.

Howland wants to laugh, but the fear freezes his larynx. “Oh? Who is he? Would I know his father?”

“All I know is his name is Jo. It can be anybody.”

Howland chuckles; his nerves get buried underneath his snakelike tenacity. “Jo? How do you know it’s not short for Jojen? Our children could be pulling one over us, seeing each other behind our backs.”

Ned considers the possibility before shaking his head. “I don’t think my son would do something so deceptive.”
“They’re teenagers,” Howland scolds. “They’re not supposed to tell us anything. If Bran didn’t tell you about having a boyfriend, there’s a lot of things he can be hiding.”

Ned frowns. “Do you think Jojen could have…?”

Howland shrugs. “If Jojen was secretly dating your son, I would know. Trust me.” Howland sighs dramatically. “I’m concerned. My boy wants to move on. I don’t need a mysterious boyfriend rising unnecessary suspicions.”

Ned sees his point. “Nothing is going to happen,” he promises.

Howland tries to look convinced by Ned’s assurance but not so convinced that he can relax. “Have you spoken to Bran about the pictures yet?”

Ned shakes his head.

“People behave terribly under pressure. They’ll say anything to get out of a tough situation. What’s to stop him from throwing Jojen under the bus to guard his secret?”

“Bran would never do that,” Ned defends.

“How do you know?”

“Howland.”

Howland pretends to look ashamed. “I’m sorry. You and Cat raised good children. You can’t blame me for worrying about my son. I know it’s his fault for getting into this mess, but all I can think about is how one wrong move can take him away from me. Again.”

Ned rustles Howland’s head the way he likes it. Howland almost purrs. “Don’t worry,” Ned tells him. “As long as Jojen is a gentleman, there won’t be any trouble from us.”

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Jojen waits until they are at least fifteen minutes from the restaurant before he gets Bran on his back. The backseat is hardly comfortable, but Bran is friskier than usual. He makes the sweetest sounds—little gasps and giggles, urging Jojen to go further while unaware that he’s bulldozing through Jojen’s self-control. Bran has never been a good liar, but somehow, the success of deception makes him want to misbehave even more. Bran should be counting his blessings; instead, he’s pushing boundaries and talking about all the things he intends to explore in their relationship. The requests are innocent, but the way he moans them out as he licks Jojen’s tongue makes ‘going to the park’ sound like dirty talk. Jojen cannot refuse Bran, no matter what his common sense screams, and lets Bran runs his hands against his jeans and play with his belt buckle until he gets embarrassed by the erection pressed against his trousers.

Suddenly, Bran is a blushing virgin again, and Jojen is a hot, spluttering teenage boy who has experienced his first case of blue-balling. The results are expectedly disastrous, and the pain is profound.

Bran tilts his head to the side in concern. “Are you okay?” He asks.

If Jojen had not noticed the guilt on Bran’s face, he would have thought the younger boy was genuine about his confusion. The end results are the same: Jojen is whipped.

“Everything is fine,” Jojen lies. He smiles, kisses Bran on the forehead and helps him tidy up despite
the overwhelming soreness in his balls. He’d give one of them to cum, namely in Bran, and with that not being an option, he drives forward. Bran sends Shireen a text, announcing his late arrival.

When they arrive at Shireen’s house, Jojen and Bran kiss goodbye a few feet away from the entrance. Shireen is already waiting at the gate. She is precocious and pure and tells Jojen she’s happy to meet him. Jojen reiterates the notion. It’s odd; Jojen is aware Shireen has a crush on Bran, but the jealousy does not bubble inside him. Perhaps, it’s because he senses that she respects territory. Bran is Jojen’s boyfriend, and Bran is her friend. There’s hierarchy, but she accepts her position is lower than his. He delivers Bran into her hands and watches them grow smaller before they enter the house.

“Bran is here!” Shireen cries as soon as she is inside the house.

Jon pops his head out of the kitchen. “How did it go?”

Bran brightens up. “Great! They even let Jojen drive me home. I mean, I’m here because they didn’t want us in the same house alone but it’s a start.”

Jon smiles. “That’s good. In a few years, you’ll be able to tell them you’re dating. You’ll probably be married by then but baby steps.”

Bran pouts while Shireen muffles the giggles with a hand.

From the kitchen, Bran hears the pans sizzle. “I’m making beef cutlet sandwiches for lunch. Afterward, how does some homemade ice cream sound?”

Bran perks up. “Sounds delicious.”

“The meat is almost done. You should entertain yourself until then.” Jon returns to the kitchen without another word. Shireen shows Bran the living room where her brothers are watching the discovery channel in rapid fascination. Bran gets entranced by the image of a hawk swooping down to hunt some baby penguins. He returns but not before Shireen catches him.

“You know; I’ve never met a guy who didn’t enjoy watching animals.”

Bran jumps. As his brief embarrassment fades, he asks, “What do you want to do?”

Shireen thinks for a moment. Suddenly, her eyes lit up as if she has a million-dollar idea. “How about you show me your newest drawings? You told me you were starting on portraits. If they’re half as good as your comic book drawings, they’re bound to be awe-worthy.”

Bran turns red. “Um, I don’t have them on me. I left at my house.” Bran hesitates. “If you don’t mind waiting…”

Shireen shakes her head. “I’m not going to make you roll all the way home and back just to do me a favor.” She claps her hands when a better idea comes to mind. “How about I grab them?”

Bran blanches. “Uh, I don’t want to inconvenience you.”

“It’s no problem.” Despite her reservation about girls, Shireen is used to a bludgeoning her brothers with reasons and demands to get what she wants. She forgets for a moment that Bran is not her brother and keep badgering him until he submits. “I was hoping to see your house one day. I’m sure it’s lovely. Oh, but don’t worry. I won’t do anything weird. And I would never look through a person’s room. Where are your drawings?”
“In my desk—”

“Great! I’ll get the key from Jon.”

Shireen dashes into the kitchen. Bran hears her explaining to his cousin, and within seconds, Jon pulls the keys out of his pocket, tells her the security codes and sends her on her way. The door slams closed. Shireen dashes off in a whirlwind of fury.

When Shireen arrives at the Stark manor, she is intimidated by the size of the estate. It is bigger than the Baratheon family home but lacks the grandeur. The décor is tasteful but austere. There’s art everywhere and Shireen wonders which ones were Bran’s selection. She doesn’t stay to ask. After hearing some of the maid’s footsteps draw near, Shireen dashes upwards to Bran’s room. As soon as she’s in the hallways, she forgets one crucial detail.

She has no idea which one is Bran’s room.

Without her phone, the obvious method is trial and error. Shireen knocks out the first room for being too feminine, there are dresses and skirts everywhere, dozens stuffed animals and dolls, and at least a hundred pair of shoes, one, in particular, has Shireen checking out the size to see if they can fit. They can’t. The second one is out of the question for being too structured. All the books are aligned by subject first and alphabetical order next; her father would love this man. The place is spotless except for the clothes on the bed. Shireen leaves and enters the third room. She recognizes it as Jon by the newly bought cookbook and the detective series he lent to Devan several days earlier. The fourth place is artsy enough to be Bran’s, but as soon as she sees the ballet slippers on the ground and the fifty pairs bursting out the closet, she dismisses it as Arya. She sighs. Shireen surmises that the last room will probably be the right room—as always in fiction. On the fifth room, she sees a biography on Ted Bundy and is about to make a break for it when she notices something peculiar.

A week prior today, Shireen lost her favorite pink jacket. Jon swears he put it in the wash, but before it came to hang on the line, the article mysteriously disappeared. Shireen relocated her suspicions towards her brother, but no matter how much pressure she put on them, no one would budge.

Shireen walks over to the bed. She picks up the jacket and tightens her hold when she realizes it is her jacket and not a lookalike. She trembles and her trembling lasts even in her sprint back to her house. She runs into the kitchen and screams at Jon, throwing the jacket in his face. Jon hugs her when her emotions settle in and despite his loyalty to his family, he picks up the phone and dials Davos’ cell phone number.

Inwardly, Jon curses Rickon’s lack of foresight. He put the jacket on his bed of all things. Anyone could have seen it. Jon nervously fiddles with his fingers. He does not want to think about how Stannis will react.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the newest chapter!

Now, some of you might have guessed it but from this point forward, the storylines are going to integrate. I don't know if I can finish this in 69 chapters but I'm going to damn well try. Aegon and Rhaegar will return, one way or another, but not until this mess is halfway through. I'm not done with them yet but they will be put on the backburner.
Plus, Euron will be coming in soon. If I had to name this arc, it would be the Battle of Psychopaths.
Stannis’s face resembled a monkey eating peppers when he found about Rickon. It was the last thing the Starks needed that day, but the matter needed to be addressed. Rickon fucked up. Stannis huffed and puffed about it, even going so far as to scheme ways to get him sent to America to be tried as an adult—fortunately, Davos was present to be the voice of reason. He shuffled his husband to the side to speak as a whole. The good cop is a role he plays so well.

“I can talk Stannis out of pressing charges as long as I know Rickon is no longer a threat to Shireen’s safety. Obviously, we’re not going to be comfortable being your neighbors, but I don’t think it is fair for us to move nor is it appropriate for you to leave your ancestral home.” Davos glances over at Rickon who is glaring at the ground, petulant and not at all remorseful. “Therapy is a non-negotiable demand, however, if you want to keep the legalities out of it.”

"Of course," Catelyn readily agrees. With a heavy sigh, the Stark matriarch makes the most appropriate suggestion of them all—one that should have been made ages ago when Rickon began his biting habit.

“There’s boarding school,” Catelyn suggest. Rickon snaps his head up, looking horrified. She watches her husband’s shoulders drop in defeat but power through when he makes no attempt to stop her. “Ned went to Eton, but we’ve always been a close family, so we’ve avoided sending our children out. In light of recent circumstances, I think it might be good for Rickon to—”

“I don’t want to be sent to some stupid boarding school!”

“You don’t have a choice,” Catelyn snaps immediately. The interruption does nothing but grate her nerves. “Not after this.”

“And boarding school is the least of your problems,” Ned follows up with a glare.

Rickon is taken back. He slumps into the shadows with a shiver of regret. Both of his parents sound furious. He’s never seen them that angry.

Davos nods. “Can he apply this late in the year?”

“We’ll make it work,” Ned assures him. “There are a lot of schools.”

“Fine,” Davos agrees. “Please tell us when he gets accepted. Until then, we are not taking any option off the table." The threat is subtextual, and Catelyn is almost impressed by the lightness of it all. "But you need to find him a therapist, and if you're not with him, I want someone supervising him at all times.”

They nod their heads like admonished children.

"Ned? Catelyn?"

They look at him. With a dark glower, he says: “If my daughter comes crying to me over something your son has done, trust me, it’s not Stannis you’ll have to worry about.”
Several days later, the Starks find a distinguish psychiatrist by the name of Hannibal Lecter. Catelyn is adamant about getting a man with the finest credentials, even if his specialty is criminal, not pediatric. “Psychologists are people who weren’t smart enough to get into medical school,” she insists.

Doctor Hannibal Lecter has a spectacular resume. While his clientele is usually older, he is amenable to the Stark’s plea. In the case that he is unsuited for the task, he has given them his word to recommend a better substitute and spare them the trouble. Catelyn sets up the appointment the following week. Because Rickon is a child, he suggests they meet at his home rather than his office for comfort.

“Unless he has an allergy towards dogs. My husband has a pack of them.”

“Oh no, Rickon loves dogs. In fact, would you mind if he brought his own? It is a fearsome looking beast, but well-mannered compared to his owner.” There is forced laughter on Mrs. Stark’s end. Hannibal respects and pitied her for her dedication to propriety. “It might make him more agreeable during your session.”

Hannibal grants the request without issue. The dog is as well-trained as promised and sits at Rickon’s heel while they speak. He occasionally makes longing gazes outside, prompting Rickon to ask if he can let him have a run with the other dogs.

"He likes being around a pack."

“Of course,” Hannibal gets up, and Rickon follows. As soon as Hannibal opens the door, Shaggy goes running outside. The dogs are used to new pack members—they don’t even hesitate to invite their new companion for a run. Will minds even less. A soft smile appears on his face as the wolfy canine comes into his arm and licks his face.

“He seems nice,” Rickon notes when the return to the couch. “Pretty.”

“Yes, he is,” Hannibal agrees and pours him some tea. It’s one of Will’s recipes, but the peachy flavor and heightened sweetness are popular amongst children. “I’m a lucky man.”

“How did you fall in love?”

Hannibal’s lips quirk. “This meeting isn’t about me, Rickon.”

Rickon shrugs and Hannibal has half a mind to inform him that a gesture is not a response until the boy responds with, “You’re supposed to make me comfortable to tell you things. I’d be more comfortable if you told me about yourself.”

Clever boy, Hannibal thinks. “Why don’t you tell me about the first time you met Shireen?”

Rickon turns away. Hannibal is used to talking to body parts instead of people. He stares straight into Rickon’s head without meeting his eyes. “Rickon, your mother was explicit about her expectations. I don’t want to have to tell her you’re uncooperative.”

“I thought doctors weren’t supposed to talk about their patients,” Rickon mutters.

“I am allowed to give general commentary about your overall progress, but any revelations or confessions we have within our session are protected unless they suggest harm to yourself or others.”

“What?”
Hannibal chuckles. “If you were to tell me that you planned on hurting someone, I am obliged to tell your guardians, possibly the authorities. If it has already been done, then it falls under the realm of confidentiality.”

“Wait,” Rickon rubs his temples like an adult getting a migraine. It's strangely endearing; Hannibal wonders if it has been too long since they've had a child in their home. “So if I told you I broke into Shireen’s house, you can’t tell anyone, but if I reveal that I want to break into her house, that’s not allowed?”

"No, if you plan to break into her house, I have to say something. Wanting is not the same thing."

Rickon purses his lips in confusion. “Wouldn’t that just encourage me to commit the crime first and then tell you after?”

“Forbearance is easier than permission.”

“Has that happened before?” Rickon asks. “Did you ever have a patient just stalk someone he had a crush on and then come here and tell you afterward?”

“It’s a familiar pattern,” Hannibal agrees. “Quite recently, I signed off on a patient who turned the object of his obsession into a lover. We continue to talk about his course of action and how he is managing a relationship with someone he once worshiped. I also have another patient who comes in every so often to talk about his subversive hobbies. For him, I am an outlet. Since last week, we’ve discussed a new lover he’s grown fond of.” Hannibal pauses for effect. He’s gotten Rickon’s attention now, albeit reluctantly. “These sessions are to help you. To get you to a stage of accomplishment. I am not here to deter you from your desires but to follow the path towards them.”

Rickon frowns. “So you don’t think I’m crazy?”

“I believe you’re a passionate child with peculiar interests. I want my home to be a shelter. You can come here and speak of your ailments and actions, talk about your urges and as long as no plans are finalized, you have my silence.”

Rickon thinks it’s too good to be true. The dogs make a ruckus outside. They are happy, wholesome creatures. “Do you love your husband?”

“Rickon…” Hannibal warns.

“I mean, he’s different from your right? I can tell you don’t run in the same circles.” His mother has an eye for classes. He supposes all rich people do, himself included. “Shireen and I met at a park in our neighborhood. It’s this big, posh park where all the rich people take their kids, so you only meet people like you. But I can tell she was different. First, it’s her accent. She sounds high-brow. I mean, I have it, too. But she’s a city girl. I grew up here, so everyone knows I’m from northern Yorkshire.”

“Is that why you’re interested in her?”

Rickon shakes his head. “She has this beautiful scar. It’s weird. She’s embarrassed by it, but she doesn’t hide it. I overheard… I was eavesdropping,” he corrects. Hannibal nods in approval. If Rickon feels oblige to be honest already, they’re off to a good start. “Her father… stepfather says she shouldn’t hide it because our scars make us who we are. I think it’s great. Gorgeous. She’s dainty, too, but not weak, kind of like Sansa.”

“Sansa is your older sister?”

Rickon nods.
Are they that similar?

Rickon shakes his head. “No, Shireen’s more…shy but only to strangers. Sansa’s popular and outgoing with everyone. Shireen is quiet and likes to read books, like Bran. But she’s strong and stubborn; she argues a lot with her brothers so she’s really bossy. So it’s kind of like being around Arya, but not. And even though she’s one of the youngest, she’s always taking care of people. She makes sure her fathers are not working too hard and she’ll cook if Jon isn’t working. Things like that, you know?”

“Like your oldest brother, Robb?”

There’s a pause before nodding. Hannibal’s lips twitch. “Shireen seems to be the accumulation of all the traits you love and admire.” Hannibal puts down his cup of tea. “Sometimes, we fall in love with people, not for their similarities to ourselves, but for their differences. There are things we lack and want to have, but by having them, we lose a sense of our own person. Thus, we seek them out in others to fill the void. They become balancing mechanism for our whole. It makes sense that she would attract you.”

Rickon’s chest flutters from the acceptance. Feeling bold, he adds in, “Then, why doesn’t everybody understand that?”

“Because very few people in the world have ever felt that much intensity for a single person, and in their longing, they mistake madness for love.”

Rickon pouts and he looks so petulant, Hannibal cannot help but be amused. Perhaps it has been too long since there’s been a child in the house.

“It isn’t fair,” Rickon tells him. “Short of forcing them, isn’t all fair in love and war? Even a little brainwashing should be okay as long as no one gets killed. I mean, isn’t that just seduction with an edge?”

Hannibal almost chokes on his tea. Will comes in at that moment. Rickon brightens up. Hannibal notices that since their meeting, the youngest Stark has taken a liking to his husband. He must appreciate a fellow dog lover.

“Sorry for interrupting,” Will mutters as he takes the pitcher and gets himself his glass of ice tea.

“It’s alright,” Rickon pops in before Hannibal does. “How’s Shaggy?”

Will give him a little smile and side glance. “He’s good. I almost want to ask for your advice on grooming.”

“Start them young and keep them quiet,” Rickon replies.

The pun makes Hannibal’s lips twitch. “Would you like a light lunch while we continue this session? I can make us some sandwiches.”

“Sure, thanks.”

Hannibal gets up. “While I’m cooking, why don’t you tell me about your got into Shireen’s house? I’m sure that’s an interesting story. How do you like your meat cooked?”

“Bloody rare.”

Hannibal pauses and for a moment, he vaguely considers adoption.
While the doctor and the delinquent discuss the Baratheon infiltration, Shireen makes herself comfy at the Mormont’s family home. No one blames Shireen for wanting to get out of the house as often as possible and Lyanna is always willing to welcome someone into her death trap. She goes through the effort of making hot chocolate and chooses wholesome conversations that deviate away from the Starks.

“My uncle is the commander of the homicide unit. They’re in charge of the Bloodhound Killer,” Lyanna declares as soon as she sets down their mugs. Shireen is going through her binders, looking at the maps of the murders while also skimming over the forensic details. “I’m not much a detective but there’s value in recognizing patterns.”

“You’re so detailed,” Shireen admires. “You even connected the victims to their working posts.”

“Every prostitute in the city has a ‘spot,’” Lyanna tells her. “The hard part is figuring out how he chooses his other victims—the ones that aren’t prostitutes. I tried getting information from my uncle but he’s more closed up than a nun’s legs.”

"Lyanna!"

Lyanna ignores her. "He refuses to tell me anything."

“Is it because you’re a girl?” Shireen asks.

Lyanna scoffs. “When you have my mom as a sister and my grandmother as a mom, you best believe you get the sexism beaten out of you. No, he says civilians shouldn’t mess around with police work.”

“Well, you wrote ‘the Zodiac’ and ‘Ted Bundy’ underneath potential suspects so I don’t think he’s far off.”

“I’m trying to be a doctor, not a detective,” Lyanna snaps. “I just think we have a right to know. He’s attacking young women. I’ve seen all the TV shows, he’s going to elevate. But the police won’t tell the public anything because they don’t want to rouse any copycats.”

“Maybe they’re trying to cover up the fact that they don’t know anything.”

Lyanna shakes her head.

“Uncle Joer told my mum that they have suspects.”

“Why haven’t they arrested anyone yet?”

“They haven’t narrowed them down to one. There’s too much liability if they get it wrong.”

Shireen contemplates the situation. “They probably have their names at the station, right?”

“Of course.”

“Why don’t we pay them a visit? Find them out for ourselves?”

Lyanna is intrigued. “Really? You’d be okay with that?”

“Sure,” Shireen shrugs. And she means it. “Nothing takes a mind off a stalker quite like a murder.” She doesn’t mention that it sounds like fun, but she knows Lyanna senses her excitement. Yorkshire isn’t quite as exciting as London, but the serial killers bring about some nostalgia.
“I’ll get my sister to drive us!” Lyanna shouts as she runs into the other room. Shireen cleans up their belongings and tries to finish up her hot chocolate in the allocated time. For a second, she wonders if she should call Bran to join them. Lyanna won’t mind, but Shireen decides against doing so. She doesn’t want to be reminded of Rickon and without a doubt, Bran will bring up the subject in a hopeless attempt to mediate. He’s been texting ‘sorry’ all week. Shireen doesn’t blame him for what happened, not for a second, but her personal drama has been clouding her mind all week and she wants nothing more than sunshine of a distraction. She won’t get that from Bran but she might get a clear head from the mauled corpses of a serial killer.

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Going to Ramsay Bolton’s flat is comparable to riding a ship in a shitstorm. Jojen doesn’t enjoy looking for trouble, but when Peter offers him double his usual fee for a delivery and a two-gram bonus of seventy-six percent purity, he isn’t in a position to refuse. He has dates to worry about and university fees.

Fortunately for Jojen, Ramsay doesn’t seem particularly volatile this afternoon. He invites Jojen in and despite the Reed’s initial refusal, eventually, agrees to light a blunt. The hemp aroma does nothing to deter the wafting scent of cum. The entire place smells of sex.

“Busy morning?” Jojen asks while he lights up. He sucks in, letting the smoke pull into his lungs. He hasn’t been able to partake in a while, preferring to save up his funds for his boyfriend but a free hit is free. Soon, the feeling of ocean foam covers his entire body. It feels fucking fantastic. It is a goddamn shame Ramsay is there.

"Yeah," Ramsay grins lazily. "I even wore my fucktoy out. He's been in bed all day. I don't think he remembers what it's like not to be gaping all the time."

"Sounds nice." He can't wait for the day that he gets Bran so open.

“I heard from Peter you got yourself a little boyfriend.”

Fuck Peter, Jojen thinks. “Hmm…has he? How nice of him to share…”

“Yes, it was.” Ramsay takes another drag. “It must be hard.”

Bran’s image pops into his head. “Yeah, it is.”

Ramsay chuckles, “I meant dating a Stark. Their family is notoriously frigid. I bet your balls are blue by now.

Joen shrugs. “You’d be amazed.” He remembers Bran’s cheery red lips and the way his delicate fingers pull at the hem of Jojen’s shirt, drawing him closer before pulling the fabric off so that their bare chests are touching. “Where did you hear this from, anyway?”

“From my father, for one. Our families have done business together for a long time.” Ramsay drinks from his beer and offers one to Jojen. The boy politely refuses, asking for bottled water instead. He turns down a cup when it is suggested.

“Prissy,” Ramsay says with a sharp smile. He does have bottles on hand, however, and doesn’t hesitate to get one of his boys to deliver. “Plus, one of my current fucks has loads of stories to tell. You might have heard of him? Theon Greyjoy?”

Joen pauses with the water sloshing in his mouth. “Your newest lay is Theon Greyjoy?” Bran has told him enough stories of his eldest brother’s pining suitor and every single one is more miserable
than the next.

“Yeah.” Ramsay finishes up his beer. One of the guys is ready with another. The weed begins to have an effect on Jojen as his back sinks further into the leather couch. His skin is melting into the hide. He feels giddy and talkative and it takes more strength than he would like to use to shut up.

“He mentions something about ‘tight Stark asses’ once or twice.”

Jojen gaffes. “Yes, they are.” It’s a godly occasion whenever he gets to squeeze Bran’s perky little behind.

“Must be hard dating him, with them breathing down your throats. Have they found out about you two yet?”

“Since I’m not dead, I’m going to say no.” Jojen let out a string of giggles and is joined by Ramsay. “But we’re meeting at his house tomorrow...supervised visits only...” He takes in another drag.

“You’re like a child molester,” Ramsay adds unhelpfully. Jojen laughs. “It takes real shrewdness to get under their noses.”

“Well, it wasn’t easy,” Jojen says, ”But everyone has a weak spot.”

“Peter told me you were good at finding them.”

Jojen pretends to be calm while his pulse races. He remembers the sound of a newly open bottle and knows his water was untampered with but that does nothing to soften his suspicions. He chooses to be upfront about his next question. “Why did you want me to be your delivery boy?”

“You’re not much of a delivery boy anymore, are you? You’re fucking a Stark now; you’ve made it to the big leagues.”

“We’re not fucking,” Jojen snaps. The word feels disgusting in his mouth despite all the fantasies he’s had in the path. He doesn’t want Ramsay to think about, to sully Bran’s image with his thoughts.

Ramsay doesn’t care enough to comment. “Either way, he’s yours. He became yours because you found a way inside. Now, I need a way inside. I need you to do a job for me.”

Jojen’s lips stretch into a thin line. “No,” he answers.

“You’ll be paid handsomely for it.”

“There’s not enough money in the world.”

Ramsay is not perturbed. “You can calm down. I don’t want you to do anything to them, I just need you to get something from them. They won’t miss it; in fact, it won’t even be gone.”

“It’s still a ‘no.’”

The smoke is beginning to lift from his eye. He makes a gesture to leave but one of the boys block him. “I don’t think you’re in a position to refuse me, what with your rendezvous with the Stark boy.” Ramsay gets a few pills from a candy jar and pops them in his mouth.

Jojen frowns. “They won’t believe someone like you.”

“Yes, they will,” Ramsay retorts. He laughs. “They’ll take any reason to keep you away. And from
what I hear, your Stark can’t keep a secret.”

Damn Theon Greyjoy. “You think I don’t know about you?” Jojen responds, equally as determined. “The stuff you and your friends get into; there’s bound to be a paper trail no matter how careful you are. Do you want the police breathing down your neck? Because there are some things your father cannot save you from.”

The mention of Roose Bolton has Ramsay narrowing his eyes. Nonetheless, he composes himself with vigor. He grins with such confidence, Jojen is taken back. “Seems like we both have each other’s balls in a grip.” Ramsay takes a moment to enjoy the sensation of the ecstasy or Prozac or whatever the hell he took to escape reality. “The question is: who uses them more?”

Jojen reluctantly admits he’s right. He offers Ramsay leeway, knowing there’s only one way out. “What do you want from the Starks?”

“Submitting so soon?”

“Assessing my options. There’s only one way we’re getting out of this flat with our testicles intact. Tell me, and I’ll consider whether it’s worth it or not.”

Ramsay agrees after some thought. “I want footage on a certain street camera. There should be a code that allows me to access it from afar. You need to get me that code.”

Jojen furrows his brow. “Where would I get it?”

“Ned Stark should have it in his study, or you can access Robb Stark’s computer. According to my sources—”

“Just fucking say Theon’s name, we all know it’s him—”

Ramsay glares. “Robb Stark has access to all the cameras.” Ramsay shows him a paper with a street address and an angle. “This is the one I want. I trust you have some knowledge of computers.”

“I don’t know how to hack a password.”

“Then wait until he’s using it and sneak in when he’s not looking. I don’t care. I need this code.”

“What?”

Ramsay sneers. “That’s none of your business. As long as it has nothing to do with your Starks, you should be grateful.”

Jojen sighs. “Why don’t you ask your boyfriend to do it?”

“He’s not my—” Ramsay groans. He reaches out for another pill. “He doesn’t need to get involved with this.”

Ramsay doesn’t want to incriminate Theon; how sweet, Jojen thinks. It seems the beast can fall in love. Jojen takes the paper. “I intend to get paid.”


Jojen takes the money. “And I don’t want to hear from you again when we’re done.”

“No problem.”
Jojen stands up. He is allowed to walk to the doorway without an issue from Ramsay’s boys and once he is safely outside of arm’s reach, he gathers the gall to attack Ramsay’s where it hurts. “You know, Bran tells me a few things, too. You’re not the only one with a talkative lover.”

Ramsay raises an eyebrow. He’s amused. The shock he’s going to feel makes Jojen’s blood boil with eagerness and vengeance. “Really? Does he tell you about his school friends and his feelings, too?”

“He tells me about Theon.”

Ramsay laughs. “I know everything about Theon.”

“Do you know why he started living with the Starks?”

Ramsay grins. “Because his father was an asshole who kicked him out of the house? Yeah, I know the sob story. I get it. We have daddy issues,” Ramsay mocks. “You trying to hurt my feelings?”

Instead of being intimidated, Jojen smirks. “You don’t know about Euron Greyjoy, do you?”

“That his brother or something? The ones who died?” Ramsay never bothered to learn the names of two dead assholes.

Jojen shakes his head. “Euron is his uncle. The one who he was sent to live with after his father kicked him out. He never told you, did he?” Jojen hums in delight. ”He’s the man that Theon ran away from him. Bran told me he did something to him that made it impossible to stay. He never learned what it was but I have a few guesses. After all, there’s only so many things you can tell a child at that age.” Ramsay clenches his fist as Jojen continues. “You must be thinking about it; Theon was only fifteen years old when he came here. Pretty and sweet and untouched by any other man.” He can taste the rage oozing out of Ramsay’s skin. Jojen bets he’s imagining it now; the shadow of a monster violating Theon in a way Ramsay valued himself privy to. Jojen turns his heel. “I guess your fucktoy doesn’t tell you everything.”

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Shireen and Lyanna waste no time scavenging through the records when they arrive. Lyra spends her time there apologizing to her uncle in tears.

“She forced me!” the middle Mormont cries. “Twisted my arm and said she had to see a dead body, one way or another!”

“She’s so dramatic,” Lyanna explains to her friend. She rolls her eyes as they dodge another officer. “Have you found anything yet?”

“Just a few photos.”

“Let me see.” Lyanna takes the photos out of her hands and as soon as she does, the corpses’ portraits are stolen away by a handsome, long-haired gentleman with smothering eyes and a strong jawline. Lyanna frowns. “Are you a Stark?”

The question is less surprising than it should be. “I’m Detective Stark. These are my photos.”

Lyanna nods approvingly. “You must be the Stark who's sleeping with my uncle.”

“Lyanna!” Her uncle shouts.

Benjen brightens up. “Yes, yes I am,” he admits proudly.
“Benjen!”

“Mum says he’s been happier since he’s gotten laid. She told me we had to thank you if we ever met.”

“It’s been my pleasure.”

They shake hands. Shireen sneaks through his documents throughout his conversations. Her eyes widen over something Lyanna concludes must be juicy. Detective Yoren, who Lyanna met when he broke into their home during a police prank, thinking he was at her uncle’s house, finds them looking.

“I thought we told you that was off limits,” Yoren informs; he isn’t scolding and seems more amused than upset. Benjen narrows his eyes at the two.

“What were you looking at?”

“Nothing,” the girls answer in unison.

“We were just curious,” Shireen tells him.

“Now we’re less curious,” Lyanna joins in. The Baratheon heir grabs her friend’s wrist and drags her to the corridor before anyone can stop them. The two officers are distracted when the commander calls them into his office.

“What did you find?” Lyanna asks as soon as they are alone.

Shireen turns a ghastly shade of white. “Bran!”

Lyanna gapes. “Bran Stark is suspect? I should have known that wheelchair was just for show. What a great alibi.”

“No!” Shireen shouts. “I mean; Bran is in trouble. His boyfriend was on the suspect sheet.”

“Are you sure?”

Shireen nods furiously. “Yeah, ‘Jojen Reed’ and some guy name Ramsay Bolton are at the top of the list.”

Lyanna covers Shireen’s mouth in the least inconspicuous manner she possibly managed at a police station as two cops past them with curious glances. She lets go. “We don’t know it for sure. It could be that other guy.”

“Either way, Bran could be in trouble. I mean, he wouldn’t be on the suspect list for no reason, right?”

“True,” Lyanna agrees. “We have to figure out who it is.”

“What?” Shireen hisses.

“Don’t you want to protect your friend?”

“Yes, but—”

“Then, we have no choice. We need to get close to Jojen Reed and eliminate him as suspect or put him behind bars.”
Shireen lets out a moan of despair. “Stop trying to go Sherlock Holmes on me! You’re twelve. We’re silly little rich girls, not detectives.”

“Well, I’m not rich. You are.”

“Not the point,” Shireen groans. She takes out her phone and decides to call instead of texting. She cannot risk Jojen reading their messages. “I need to warn Bran.”

Lyanna grabs the phone as soon as it starts ringing. Bran picks up abnormally fast.

“Hello?”

“Give me the phone,” Shireen orders.

“Hello, this is Lyanna Mormont.” Lyanna sounds less murderous when she’s having a polite conversation. “I’m one of Shireen’s friends and Dacey Mormont’s sister.”

“Oh, hello.” Bran sounds confused but hopeful. Shireen knows that’s because of her avoidance. Her heart lurches at the thought that she drove Bran further into the arms of a serial killer with her rejection. “How can I help you?”

“Yeah, Shireen is busy right now but she wanted me to ask you if you wanted to hang out with your boyfriend for a…a…” Lyanna wracks her head for a viable excuse. “For a double date.”

“What?”

“What?” Shireen hisses.

“Yes,” Lyanna agrees. “I am…her girl…friend.” Lyanna speaks more conviction as she continues. “We are lesbians. I think about her boobs and she thinks about my blind ambition and willingness to kill.”

Shireen stares at her horrified.

“Oh well, congratulations. I didn’t know.”

“It’s a surprise to us, too. But we figured since you are also gaying, we should hang out as one big group of gays.”

Shireen hits her head on the wall repeatedly.

“Uh, sounds good.” Bran agrees. “But won’t it be a problem with Rickon and all?”

“No, because I will kill Rickon if he comes near Shireen again.” Shireen gets a chill. Lyanna sounds absolutely serious.

The two of them can here Bran gulp. “Well, do you want to have dinner at my place?”

Shireen shakes her head. “No, we want to have a double date in a public place where people can see us and no one can get hurt if someone turns out to be a serial killer.” Lyanna pauses. “By the way, is your boyfriend with you right now?”

“Uh, no, I’m alone.”

“Great.” Lyanna leans over to Shireen’s ear. “I should have asked that first.”
“You should have asked for a lot of things first.”

Lyanna returns to the conversation. “How about we go to the movies?”

“Too dark,” Shireen whispers, already apart of the plan whether she likes it or not.

“T mean, how about we don't go to the movies?” Lyanna corrects herself. "No occasion for conversation."

“How about a museum date?” Bran happily suggests. “There’s an exhibit I wanted to check out and they have brunch special. We can get to know each other.”

Shireen and Lyanna look at each other. After some reluctance, Shireen nods.

“That sounds good,” Lyanna agrees. “Get back to me on the details.” Lyanna hangs up with Bran can ask for her number. When the call is finished, Shireen looks furious.

“How could you say that?”

“We needed a way to vet Jojen. I found one.”

“We didn’t you let me tell him the truth?”

“And risk him not believing in you or in any word you say from that point forward?” Lyanna sighs. “He let the guy get away with stalking; if Jojen is guilty, he’s just going to twist your words around, saying you’re paranoid after Rickon. Besides, we don’t know if Jojen is the murderer. That’s no reason to ruin a perfectly good friendship.”

Shireen sighs at her reasoning. “But we’re not dating.”

“Oh relax,” Lyanna waves her off. “I’m twelve. He’s not going to expect us to be making out on the couch. Besides, after the murderer is caught, we can tell him it was just a ploy to lure out the killer.”

Shireen still doesn’t like the plan. Her protests are interrupted by a woman with flowing blonde hair. She pulls the girls aside. “What are you two ladies up to?” She asks in a ‘mommy’ tone the two have only heard in the movies.

“We’re discussing serial killers,” Lyanna admits. Shireen tenses with the honesty. “Coming up with our own theories.”

The detective crosses her arms. “I heard you two were doing more than that?” She raises an eyebrow. “It seems you were looking through the reports.”

Lyanna shrugs. “It’s not a crime to be fascinated with forensics. I could be the next Sherlock Holmes,” Lyanna suggests. “I thought adults were supposed to be encouraging education.”

The detective scoffs. “Nice try, but I have a gift.” She leans down. “I can always tell when someone is lying.”

“We’re not lying,” Shireen lies. “In fact, we’re just about to leave.” Shireen grabs her friend by the arm and takes her to her eldest sister. She shouts that it is nice to meet the commander, even as she sweats bullets to the car. Lyra is crying after her but Lyanna is as petulant as ever.

Detective Swan shakes her head. She walks towards the Commander. “Girls these days are really something, aren’t they? Sometimes, I’m glad I only have to deal with Henry.” That's a lie. Henry is only an angel when his hormones aren't affecting his judgment.
“Believe me, boys are harder,” Commander Mormont replies.

“Don’t I know it?” agrees a haunting voice from the doorway.

Everyone in the precinct turns, a hand on their weapons. Detective Benjen rises from his seat. Without warning, he walks up to the door and throws him against the wall. Commander Mormont is the first to shout the order.

“Calm down, Stark! He’s not worth it!”

The man laughs without a care in the world. No one can tell his larynx is getting crushed.

“Benjen, let him go,” Yoren soothes. “His face will still be there when you’re not in uniform, at the precinct, or surrounded by civilians. This is not the time.”

Benjen holds him for a good number of seconds before his grip loosens. After a few additional moments lingering on life or death, Benjen releases the man to the ground.

“What the fuck are you doing here, kiddie fucker?” Benjen asks.

Euron Greyjoy laughs as he gets up. “Funny you should mention that.” Euron gives his arms a stretch. “Because finding a nice piece of ass is exactly what I’m here for.” He grins. “Now, Officer Stark, can you tell me where I can find my slut of a nephew?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm strangely proud of this chapter. It's like watching Game of Thrones has revitalized all my Game of Thrones love. I'm super behind on my schedule but I'm definitely will be posting a smut-filled chapter of Crown the Wolf sometime before Monday. I have to post an updated version of the schedule. :( I hope you enjoy this. Things have been getting so dramatic lately, I need to bring back the fun in funeral.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Euron Greyjoy strolls into the police station like a bleeding cunt, thrusting his hips upwards as if anyone could miss his gargantuan cock making a mountain in his jeans. The man is grinning, mad as mercury, and as poisonous, too. He plops his ass onto the chair and shouts:

“Can a man get some service in here?”

“I’ll be happy to serve you,” Emma mutters, hand on her handcuffs and another twitching towards her baton. She wishes she was in America again, where cops didn’t have to be assigned lethal cases to hold guns.

“We’re all out of kiddie porn today,” Yoren pipes up. He shuffles the two raging detectives to the side and takes control of the reigns. “I don’t think there’s anything else on the menu for you, but you can always check out our cells. There are a few fuckers out there that might be willing to do you a solid.”

Euron laughs like a grackle, and the hysteria rings through their ears. “I’m going to have to take a rain check, but don’t think you aren’t in my thoughts, Yoren.” He blows the officer a kiss before turning to Benjen. “So Stark, how you’ve been? Not well, obviously. All that anger, harming an innocent civilian like that.” He rubs his neck dramatically for emphasis. “Don’t worry.” He winks. “I’ll keep the little police brutality a secret. We all have our days.”

Benjen is both uncaring and unamused. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Euron takes note in how all the other officers shuffle away, pretending not to have seen what happened minutes earlier. They know who Euron is, and they like Benjen too much to hurt his career. It pays to be well loved. Euron whistles his appreciation. “So much for Stark honor,” Euron jeers. “God, I love dirty cops. Gets me hard as a rock.” He pats his crotch. “Sure you don’t want to take me for a ride? I’d split you up real good.”

Benjen glares.

Euron starts cackling again. “Oh, that’s right, you like those shriveled ol’ sausages. Probably can’t handle my fat piece of man meat inside that twat of yours.” Euron shrugs. He strolls over to Benjen and rests his hand on the Stark’s ass. “But if you ever change your mind…”

Benjen nearly punches him. He settles for a firm push that has the Greyjoy almost toppling over the desk. The dark-haired detective skips any further civility. “What the hell do you want?”

Euron bats his eyes in faux innocence. “I told you: I’m looking for my nephew. Heard from my boys that he’s left the Starks and found a new master. A kinky one, too. Thought I pay them a visit and size up the man whose plowing my nephew’s cunt.” Euron licks his lips. “Maybe give him some tips.”

“Fucking hells,” Yoren mutters. “How are you not incarcerated?” Euron has been in and out of English prisons since the day he turned sixteen. He sold drugs, done drugs, been guilty of larceny, solicitation, pimping—fuck, they’ve even booked him for loitering but his lawyers are scumbags soaked in sewage, and they go through tunnels and trials to get him off—probably in an attempt to cover their asses. He’s managed to avoid several murder charges on technicalities and one highly
memorable insanity case. The only time they came close to sending him to prison for good was during the molestation and rape charge made by his nephew—a case that never went to trial.

“Oh, are we still on about that?” Euron bats his eyelashes innocently. The gesture makes the officers cringe. “Hey, I wasn’t doing anything I wasn’t asked to.”

“Your nephew never asked you to fuck him.”

Euron gasps in mock horror. “Me? A kiddie fucker? Why I would never!” Everyone stares at him in disbelief and anger. Suddenly, Euron bursts into laughter. “By the God, get a fucking grip. Theon dropped the charges, didn’t he?” Euron grins. “Kid could never make up his mind. One minute he’s walking around our flat in a towel and the next second, he’s on his back like a little bitch, crying rape. The boy just didn’t want to admit to his daddy that he liked dick and was so hot for it; he had to climb onto his uncle’s hot rod.”

The description causes a nearby officer to leave the room. They hear him regurgitating his lunch. Euron continues talking as if he doesn’t see the way the Stark’s hands throbbing. He clicks his tongue appreciatively. “Listen, one thing life has taught me? Never let a slut with daddy issues go to waste.” Euron tutts at the officer’s naivety. “But hey, we all gotta let go some time, right?” Euron skips over to a chair with wheelie feet and spins his ass around. “Speaking of Theon, I’m a bit worried about the kid. He’s my brother’s boy, after all. At least with the Starks, I know he’s got protection. You fuckers are everywhere with your cameras and shit—Couldn’t get within a mile of him without you noticing. By the time you guys stopped checking, I stopped caring. A win-win situation for us all.”

“What changed?” Benjen asks, his eyes mimic a sniper’s scope and they are trained for his skull.

Euron gives his lips a refreshing lick. “Can’t an uncle give a damn without being interrogated by the police?” He reaches into his coat, causing all the officers to grab hold of their weapons. Euron puts his hands back in the air. He hoots with delight. “Woah now! Everyone calm down; no need to get frisky.” Euron pulls out his cell phone and uses one hand to pull up a picture. He delivers it to Benjen. He shows it to Yoren, who impressively keeps a firm face.

“Confessing to murder? I was hoping you’d give me a challenge but a win’s a win,” Benjen says evenly.

“If only I could put that tongue of yours to better use, Stark,” Euron suggests. He swipes back his phone. “Apparently, the dead guy’s name is Damon. He’s an associate of Ramsay Bolton. Odd chap, maybe you’ve heard of him.” Euron rolls his neck to relinquish the tension in his muscles. He pretends not to see the way Benjen twitches at the mention. “I mean, I have. We have friends who run in the same circles. Never met him myself, though, heard he’s a nasty piece of work.”

“You would know.”

Euron chuckles. “Bet your ass I would.” He turns off his phone. “Now, I’m a guy who appreciates silence—I don’t care about these green boys and the things they say to get their dick wet. They’re boys!” Euron sighs dreamily. “But one day, I’m at the pub. Celebrating a fun evening, getting my rocks off with some bitch at the bar, oh, the stories I can tell about that ass—!”

“Get on with it,” Benjen snaps.

“And I hear from the guy next to me that they haven’t seen this Ramsay in a while. Girl I’m with—she gets super tight. Like she was trying to choke my dick with her pussy. I say ‘what’s up? Keep doing that shit, I like it’ but the bitch doesn’t say anything, so I start giving it to her…”
“You fucking—”

“Hey, she liked it!” Euron defends. “So she tells me she’s scared of this Ramsay fellow. Says he’s this major creep with a fuckload of fetishes; choking, blood, knives—fuck, it got me kind of hot.” What doesn’t? Benjen wants to ask. There’s a visible chub rising in Euron’s pants. “But suddenly, all the guys around us start joining in with their horror stories. They go on and on about how this guy is the fucking devil. What do I look like? A goddamn priest?”

“Well, you do have a habit of fucking little kids,” Benjen quips.

Euron ignores him. “Naturally, I’m getting irritated. And you know what else?”

“What?”

“I start to feel unappreciated.”

“Guess the city isn’t big enough for two psychos,” Yoren mutters.

“Exactly,” Euron agrees. “So I keep listening. But out of nowhere, one of the guys tells me that I Ramsay’s dick is taking a break from pissing to pound this pretty rich boy. Normally, I don’t care, but then I hear the little bitch’s name. Any guesses?”

Benjen doesn’t have to guess. He’s seen the evidence first hand. “Who?” He asks to maintain the act of ignorance.

“My nephew.” Euron gives a dramatic gasp before laughing. No one can tell if his behavior is an act or he’s genuinely insane. Either way, the homicide officers keep on their toes and raise up their guard. “Naturally, I’m concerned for the little shit. Just because we’re not fucking anymore doesn’t mean we’re not family.”

Emma has had enough. She lunges at him, and it takes two of the guards in the back to carry her away. Benjen feels bad for her. His momentary aggression has caused all officers to be on high alert, and it takes away any opportunity for the other cops to act.

“I can’t do anything about that,” Benjen tells him. He sits down. “Theon is a grown adult—now. He dates who he wants to date.”

“Some guys give other guys a choice,” Yoren adds in. Benjen’s lips twitch. Yoren’s two cents is always appreciated.

“You’re cops, aren’t you?” Euron asks. “Don’t think of me as a career criminal who’s slept with his nephew, but a concerned citizen. If this guy’s dangerous, you should investigate.” He spreads his hands apart like the messiah. “And in the meantime, you can tell me where my nephew is so that I can keep him safe. Right in my arms.”

Benjen shares a look with Yoren. The two of them hide their smugness through identical frowns. “We’ll take your statement into consideration. Until then, I suggest you go home.”

Euron chuckles; probably assuming that the two will do nothing of the sort. He saunters off with flair. Benjen is sure his vengeful mind is already working on counterattacks against his nephew. “I’ll see you soon!” He shouts as he marches on without looking back. They hear him singing all the way out of the building. When the sound stops, Benjen and Yoren get to work. They have a lead to follow.

***
His father used to say “optimism is the curse of practicality.” People will never fail to deceive or disappoint. While Ramsay avoided taking lessons from the leech lover, he couldn’t stop the messages from sticking. The words clung to his brain and rewrote his vision. Ramsay knew the only way to erase his father’s words was to prove him wrong. His impulsiveness caused Ramsay to behave foolishly. He put his faith in Myranda and then, a stranger. No matter how many promises Theon Greyjoy showed at their first meeting, this was an act of unforgivable stupidity.

“Fool me twice,” Ramsay mutters in contempt.

Ramsay drinks his whiskey and considers his next course of action as the shower turns on. For the longest time, Ramsay was sure he had Theon all figured out. The daddy issues, the unrequited love, the desperate attempt to latch onto some pride as his family’s name loses more value than dog shit. It wasn’t that Theon wanted to be somebody; Theon just wanted to be somebody that wasn’t him. His entire body was a whiteboard, and his self-loathing served as an eraser, waiting to be utilized. Sure, there were parts of him scribbled in permanent marker, but they were just lines—additions could be made to create a new picture and fuck—did Ramsay want to be an artist.

So many people are under the delusion that their partners want to be challenged. Guys use that line a lot; “I want someone to challenge me” or “make me a better person.” If he says that, then he’s fucking someone else. Men don’t want to be challenged; they want to win. After the novelty of the challenge wears off, it’s all about the prize. If there is no prize, they start to realize that the “challenge” isn’t all it's hyped up to be. They turn their attention elsewhere. Shakespeare fucking called it with his shrews. Ramsay is a monster, but he isn’t a hypocrite.

Ramsay doesn’t want someone to bitch about his decisions. He wants ride or die. He wants someone whose life’s ambition was to wait at home and spread his legs at a moment’s notice.

Myranda got close. She was exciting and fun and down for anything—until she started to challenge him. She second-guessed his choices, even threatened to go to the police if he didn’t respond to her calls. The last straw was her laziness: her reluctance to blow him when he told her to, the way she saw to Ramsay’s pleasure as if it were a chore. The two of them had a deal, and she had broken it. She became someone Ramsay hadn’t agreed to be with.

Theon was different and that was the problem. Myranda latched onto Ramsay because he was her first love. He ruined her. Theon had been broken before he had met Ramsay. It made things easy, but it wasn’t right. The thought of someone’s else fingerprints on Theon made him want to reach for his flaying knife.

And that isn’t okay.

Fuck the gods if they think Ramsay is going to sit around and be someone’s rebound.

Ramsay hears the shower turn off and he mirrors the action on his laptop. He erases his search engine of all results relating to Euron Greyjoy—call it paranoia but Ramsay hates leaving things to chance—waits for Theon to find him in the living room. The Grejoy is naked and wet and crawls onto the couch to give Ramsay a kiss.

Ramsay accepts and even goes as far as to stroke Theon’s hair tenderly. There’s a trill that escapes Theon’s throat when he does so. When they part, Ramsay caresses Theon’s cheek.

“Let’s go out today,” Ramsay suggests.

Theon is taken back. “Why?”
Ramsay kisses Theon again, harder this time but nothing on par to his usual roughness. “Because I want to,” he answers. Theon’s nods. The easy submission is excellent, but the question should have never been asked.

Ramsay doesn’t bother to call him out on his mistake. Getting angry will only ruin his plans. Instead, he goes to his closet and throws a shirt towards Theon. “Get dressed. I don’t like to be kept waiting.”

Theon hurries to get ready. He almost falls off the couch putting the shirt on and then runs into their room to find a pair of jeans. The eagerness is almost cute, but Ramsay doesn’t allow himself to dwell on those thoughts. He has a plan; for weeks, he’s been training Theon like a dog. Ramsay has followed all the rules. He’s established himself as the alpha; he’s provided rewards for positive behavior and punishments for poor actions; always one step ahead, leading the pack; Ramsay is strong, he’s smart, and he’s fierce and to Theon, he’s a protector.

Now, it’s time for the big guns.

When Theon comes out, Ramsay pays him a compliment and gives him a small grope of the ass before leading him out. The trick is subtle, but it does wonders. Theon follows him like a lovesick puppy, wagging his tail and yelling at him. They are in the car when Ramsay wipes a wet strand of hair out of Theon’s face and compliments the way he smells. Ramsay is careful to place his kindness at random points of their drive while throwing an insult or two when he has the time. There’s no real bite to it—it’s just a ploy. With dogs, positive reinforcement is simple. Good behavior equals treats. Bad behavior equals punishments. With humans, it’s more difficult. Some bitches have the audacity to use the tutelage against their masters. They start manipulating their owners to get what they want. This is why so many guys end up losing the reigns on their dogs. Ramsay knows better. He doesn’t want Theon to get ahold of a pattern now that the proper behavior is instinctive.

The second factor is obedience without question. Theon has mastered the ‘obedience’ aspect, but he still has a hard time with the ‘question’ part. Theon hesitates; there’s always a lingering thought of ‘why’ or ‘what’ instead of ‘yes’ and ‘whatever you want, Ramsay.’ So after driving halfway to his destination, Ramsay order Theon to get out the blindfold in his glove department and put it on. Theon pauses—again, and has to bite his lip to keep himself from asking questions. It’s not ideal, but it is a start. Theon lets himself get driven to god knows where without the protection of sight. Though it took more work than he would have liked, Theon has placed his faith in Ramsay.

After the fabric firmly is secured, Ramsay unzips his jeans and leads Theon’s mouth to his cock. Theon’s nose is buried in thick, dark hair while his mouth wraps around the cock. At least half of Ramsay’s shaft is tunneled inside Theon’s throat, and the feeling is glorious, worthy of their hell on wheels’ exhibition. Ramsay picks up the speed on the road and tries to concentrate while getting his balls blown. Theon is blind, but he can hear the occasion honking and jeers from the cars who’ve managed to catch a peek. Theon’s body gets rather bothered by the knowledge—he wonders just how people can see him giving a blowjob.

They’re staring at me, Theon blushes. They can see what a whore he is and what a stud Ramsay is for getting his bitch to do this for him. The attention swarms to his groin, and he’s hard as a rock. Theon works Ramsay’s cock steadily, figuring Ramsay probably wants the moment to last until they reach their destination. Ramsay seems to approve of the idea because he bobs Theon’s head nicely and slowly. It doesn’t work as well as Theon would like, and Ramsay ends up shooting in his mouth approximately five minutes before they arrive.

Ramsay pulls him off his cock before he parks. Theon reaches for his blindfold when he does so. “Keep it on,” Ramsay orders. Theon’s fingers slip past the knot and rest on his lap. Ramsay gets out of the car and opens the passenger door.
They walk through woods, with one or two branches brushing against his arms, and wet grass soaking through his soles. Theon is then lead to a closed environment, a house or a small building. The place smells like compost and pungent yeast. Ramsay keeps a firm hand on Theon’s back the entire time. He is led up the stairs with caution. Though dirt turns to wood and the temperature drops in their newfound surroundings, Theon does not build up the courage or sense to run away. He keeps the blindfold on and allows himself to be taken into false security.

When they get further inside, sharp barks and little growls echo throughout the room. They stop. Ramsay leaves his side, and it takes all of Theon’s strength not to latch onto his arms or cling to his legs. He hears the hinges of a door creep.

“Get inside.”

Theon cringes. He takes a step forward, and the new room is colder than the hall. Theon jumps when he hears a dog bark in his direction. The foul stench of wet dog fills his nostrils. Someone opens a cage, and one of the canines comes close enough that Theon can feel its rumble touch his skin.

“This one’s name is Kyra,” Ramsay informs. He walks over somewhere and opens another cage. This one is in front of Theon this time. “And this bitch is Jez. Real biter, she is.”

Theon whimpers. Ramsay releases two more, each on his left and right side. He is surrounded. Theon’s breath hitches when Ramsay’s fingers trail against his cheek and reach the back of his neck. He pulls off the blindfold but Theon’s eyes remain closed. He’s scared. He can’t run because dogs are chasers—they’ll hunt him down before he even gets outside. A part of him wonders if he’d run if there weren’t any dogs; if it was just Ramsay by himself. By now, he’s trained to fear Ramsay, to heed his orders. Theon’s not sure he can lift a finger against the man even if his life depends on it.

Ramsay wraps his arms around Theon’s waist, trapping him for good. “Open your eyes,” he whispers.

After a deep breath, Theon obeys as commanded. His eyes flutter open, and suddenly, his vision is overwhelmed with lights and the sight of yelping of hounds, jumping about like children on Christmas. Ramsay makes an order with his hands, and the dogs take it as permission to jump on Theon as they please. The largest one manages to get high enough to lick Theon’s face.

“W-what is this?” Theon stutters out as another pooch decides to launch a brigade of kisses.

“My dogs,” Ramsay explains. One tries to come up to him, but his command is immediate. The bitch whimpers but remains seated. “I keep them here because my flat only allows one pet. Didn’t want to choose.”

Theon laughs, his lungs almost giving out in relief.

Ramsay pets one of his dogs on the head. Hunting has been the farthest thing from his mind lately, so the dogs have been getting their proper meals on a daily basis. As far as Theon is concerned, they’re just a bunch of slobbering pooches—nothing like the beasts Ramsay trained them to be. The Bolton isn’t disappointed, though. Their upbeat attitudes have just the right effect on Theon.

Roose was a strict educator when Ramsay was a child, having him devour literature as a substitute for actual nutrition. The Bolton head never cared for the watered down tales made to accommodate the innocence of children. Of his favorite myths and legends, Ramsay quite enjoys the Greeks and their tenacious gods and monsters. How Hades just takes Persephone from her mother’s breast and makes her his queen without consent, or how Cronus swallows his children with the intent of maintaining power. There’s another story about Pandora, and how the foolish woman unleashes the
evils of the world: winged creatures of deceit and slavering beasts of treachery. The only blessing was when she shut the box before the worst evil escaped: hope.

“Hope is the worst of all evils, for it prolongs the suffering of man,” his father taught him. “People who hope never do. Hope is the mother of hubris, in which one believes themselves to be greater than a god—an unforgivable sin.”

At the moment, Theon is filled with hope; he’s the happiest Ramsay has ever seen him. Ramsay is behaving like a prince, and this small sacrifice on Ramsay’s part will last him years down the road. Now that Theon is aware of his capacity for kindness, he’ll hope for more. He will cling onto the dream for as long as Ramsay will have him and he won’t entertain thoughts of leaving—not without remembering this day.

Ramsay directs Jez and Kyra into the backseat, and when Theon notes, rather sadly, how the other can’t fit, Ramsay promises to take them out next time. They go to the park nearby, and it is isolated except for an elderly couple and a mum and pops shop on the street. Theon plays with the beasts while Ramsay buys fish and chips and two bottles of water. The date is simple and quaint but pleasurable for a shore-born boy who hasn’t seen the sun in days. Theon’s skin regains its natural glow, and his hair lightens the slightest. When Theon gets tired from all the catching, he returns to the bench beside Ramsay and rests his head on his master’s shoulders.

“I like this,” Theon mutters.

“What?”

“Being with you,” Theon answers. “This.” He looks at Ramsay and kisses him on the cheek. While Ramsay loathes chaste displays of affection, he has to admit that Theon’s attempts are endearing. He pets his boy on the head and proceeds with the final part of his plans.

“Theon, do you want to do this again?”

Theon hesitates; his forehead wrinkles in an attempt to see if this is a trap of some sort, before losing to hope. “Yeah.”

Ramsay smirks. He proceeds to kiss Theon until the boy is maneuvered onto his lap. Theon is breathless when Ramsay pulls his lips down to kiss his neck. He licks Theon’s nape. “You know, I am a very possessive man, Theon,” he says as his teeth scrape against the throbbing vein on Theon’s throat. “I don’t like sharing my things.”

Theon chuckles in an attempt lighten the mood. “Good thing no one wants to steal me.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.”

Theon watches Ramsay pull out his cell phone and turn it on. On the screen were dozens of missed messages, all from Asha and Robb. “Someone out there loves you.”

Theon reaches to grab it but pulls back at once. Ramsay sighs in disappointment. He opens up the screen and reveals the texts messages. “I’m giving you a choice, Theon. I can give you whatever you want—all I ask is for you to be mine. I want you to put me first above anyone else. To love and devote your time to me and only me.”


Ramsay’s lips land on Theon’s chest. “I know, but it is not enough. You still question me; you still covet things that you think you need but don’t because they don’t come from me! The way you
reached for the phone says something.”

“I didn’t mean to!” Theon defends. “And I stopped!”

Ramsay grabs his hair and brings their faces an inch away from each other. “You want to stay, then give everything up. Otherwise, you can leave. I’ll drive you back to the Starks, or your sister, or hell —” Ramsay licks his lips. “I’ll bring you back to your uncle—I’m sure his bed has gotten rather cold without you in it.”

Theon loses his breath. “No.” He shakes his head. “I don’t want to,” he says, bordering petulance.

“Then prove it,” Ramsay tells him. He hands out Theon’s cell phone. “Prove who your master is.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I’m want you to remove the dead weight,” Ramsay grits out. He can't believe Theon still doesn't understand. There's only two people in a relationship. "You got hurt because they were weak.”

"No, that's not true." Theon shakes his head furiously.

"They couldn't protect you. They didn't have the balls to do what needed to be done. I do. So they need to hear you make a choice. Me or them?"

Theon considers running away, but he can't. He goes through his contact list and chooses the easiest of his hard options. The phone rings several times before a rough and low, but distinctively female voice answers. “Theon?”

Theon hesitates.

“Go on,” Ramsay whispers. “She needs to hear you say it.”

“Theon, is that you? It's you, right? What the fuck? I've been trying to reach you for ages. I—”

“Stop.” Theon chokes.

“What?”

“Stop calling me," Theon explains. "Stop trying to…to get in contact with me. I’m tired of it. I’m not…I’m not a Greyjoy anymore. I’m…I’m Ramsay’s…”

“Who the fuck is Ramsay?” Asha sounds livid.

“He’s my…I belong to him now,” Theon explains. “I don’t want to hear or see from you again. Ever. I…Just stop contacting me, Asha.”

“Are you fucking serious? You ignore me for weeks and then suddenly, you think you have the right to demand me to leave you alone while you go on your rampage of stupid? Fuck that!”

“I don’t want to talk about," Theon begs. "I…I found someone who can take care of me.”

“Theon, you are grown ass man. You don’t need someone to enable you. God, fucking hell, shit, I’m heading over there, Theon.”

“No!” Theon protests. “I…I moved out of the Stark house and…just leave me alone. This is goodbye. Forever.”
Theon hangs up before Asha can give him another round of cussing. Ramsay wipes away the fat glob of tears.

“Very good,” he praises. “Now for the final touch.”

“Do I have to do it today?” Theon sobs. “I can’t—”

“Yes, you can,” Ramsay insists. “You have to. You can’t move on until you do.” He makes sure to sound especially tender when he says this. “This is for me. I can’t love you if I’m not the only person in your heart.”

Theon is so desperate to be loved. With the tears released like a dam, Theon selects Robb’s number. He’ll be able to hear Theon’s crying, Ramsay notes with glee.

“Theon, is that you?” The relief in the Stark’s voice makes Ramsay roll his eyes. He hates the man more than ever. “Do you know how worried I’ve been?”

“I’m… I’m okay,” Theon murmurs. When Ramsay senses his weakened resolve, he acts at once. He kisses Theon on the lips and slips his hands underneath his top. Theon moans.

Robb calls out his name incessantly, forcing Theon to answer.

“I have to tell you something,” Theon says when they separate. There’s an additional breathless quality to his voice, and it gets Ramsay hard. He makes sure to move Theon so that the younger boy is directly on top of his cock. The response is a small roll of the hips.

“For us,” Ramsay reminds him.

Theon nods like a soldier taking his position in the front lines. “Robb, I called to tell you… I want you to stop trying to reach me. I’m…” What is he doing? Breaking up with Robb? Destroying an almost decade’s worth of friendship? “I’m moving on. I don’t want us to keep seeing each other.”

“What the hell, Theon?”

Theon winces. “I found someone.”

Ramsay tugs his nipple with his lips, making his puppy shiver in pleasure. “Keep going,” he instructs.

“And we’re going to be very happy together, but I have to follow his rules.” Theon gasps. “And he doesn’t like me seeing other people and—” Ramsay licks the line between his abs.

“Theon, we are best friends. Who the fuck is this guy?”

Theon bites his lip. Ramsay cups his ass and orders him to end the conversation.

“I have to go. I knew you needed to hear it from me. Goodbye, Robb. For good.”

“Theon—!”

Theon hangs up before his former friend can get in another word. When he does, Ramsay takes the phone and slams it against the park bench, shattering it before throwing it into the grass. He pulls Theon to a kiss and mutters sweet words of endearing. “Good boy,” he says. “You did beautifully.”

Theon tries to enjoy the praise, but it is drowned out by his tears.
“I have no one now,” he whimpers.

Ramsay chuckles. He strokes Theon’s cheek. “You have me,” Ramsay denies. He kisses Theon’s forehead. “You only need me.”

Theon nods dejectedly. Ramsay lifts him up and places him on the park bench. He stands up and motions the dogs to come forward. “I want us to have dinner tonight—in public.”

Theon’s cries stifle a bit. He hasn’t gone out to eat in a while. Ramsay continues his seduction. “But first, we have to do some shopping. If you’re going to be with a Bolton, you need to look the part.”

Ramsay lifts him up and places him on the park bench. He stands up and motions the dogs to come forward. “I want us to have dinner tonight—in public.”

Theon’s ears perk up at the thought of shopping. “New clothes?”

It was a question but one of clarification, so Ramsay will overlook it. “Yes.” Ramsay gives him another kiss. They are strangely addicting. “Something pretty for my pretty lover.”

Oh fuck, did Theon go crazy at the word: lover. No, that’s an understatement. He goes gaga with infatuation; he wants to put a ring on the title and screw it to the ground. He latches onto Ramsay’s mouth like a leech and continues to tongue him until Ramsay laughs them apart.

“Hey, calm down. Before we get to the fun stuff, we need to get all the nasty business out of the way.”

Theon frowns. “But I already did what you asked.”

“And you did it splendidly,” Ramsay agrees. “But now I need your secrets.”

“My secrets?”

Ramsay nods. “Everything you’re afraid to tell anyone. I need us at a clean state.”

“Ramsay, I’ve told you everything about me,” Theon pleads.

“Really?” Ramsay’s grin is vicious. “Even your uncle?”

Theon’s blood runs cold at the mention of Euron. “That’s...You don’t understand. I abandon him. It's not important anymore; he's in the past. I've moved on. I have. I swear, he means nothing. I'm not damaged, I—!”

Ramsay refuses to listen. “No, you aren’t.” He tightens his grip on Theon. “Theon, we can’t keep things from each other.” Ramsay presses his fingertips harder into his skin. What cute, purple bruises they are. He wants to do more. Suddenly, he has an idea, and it’s a glorious, mad, fucking fantastic idea. “How about I tell you something about me first?”

Theon pauses. He figures someone as mad as Ramsay would have no secrets.

Ramsay gives him his last kiss of the day. “You swore to love me completely. So what if I told you I liked to kill people?”

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Shortly after the phone call ends—or rather, immediately after the phone call ends, Robb throws his phone onto the couch. He rushes to the kitchen and tells Jon to drop everything he’s doing. “We have to save Theon. He’s gotten into some crazy shit.”

Jon does not bother to look up. He continues stirring the soup. “Is it worse than that time he joined a
Robb is not sure. “I don’t know, but it involves a man.”

Jon sighs. “We can’t go anywhere. We’re watching over Rickon.”

Since getting caught, Rickon’s stealth has been used to surprise members all over the house. Therefore, it shouldn’t have scared the boys as much when Rickon pops his head out of nowhere and tells them how willing he is to accompany them on their mission.

“Dr. Lecter suggested I start putting more energy into helping people and Theon is a charity case if I’ve ever seen one.”

“Rickon!” Robb scolds.

“He’s not wrong,” Jon mutters. He puts his spoon down. “We can work on finding him tomorrow. Give Theon some time to think about his choices. Who knows? He might come back with his tail between his thighs by then.”

"Jon, Theon can be in serious trouble!"

"Or, he can be working on a new collection. Didn't you tell about the time he went missing for a month to do some design work?"

"Yes, but that time didn't involve a man."

“Maybe Robb's right,” Rickon agrees. “He chased away Robb’s girlfriends for over six years; he’ll probably do anything to keep this guy interested. I'd be worried”

Robb glances over at Jon in fear. Jon remains adamant about his decision. “It’s getting dark, and I’m not taking Rickon out this late at night. Tomorrow. Now set the plates for dinner.”

The young men follow his instructions, one with more reluctance than the other. In the living room, Bran pretends to be oblivious to the conversation. He texts Shireen like he always has and makes sure to delete the responses to his request.

Double date? Tomorrow? He asks her. After a few more minutes, Shireen accepts the offer. Bran finds himself looking forward to it more than he realized. It’s so normal. A double date. Rickon walks past him to get to the bathroom and Bran almost throws the phone at the ceiling to hide his treachery.

From this point on, Bran needs to be discreet. He certainly doesn’t want to witness the blowout of Rickon discovering Shireen's newest relationship.

Chapter End Notes

I worked on the outline while having a major Iwan Rheon marathon. I watched Vicious and Riviera and it was just freaking awesome. And then I fucked myself over by watching episode 4 of Game of Thrones ahead of time and because I am weak, I started reading script spoilers. Seriously, this is why I can't do drugs. I never know when to stop.
Sorry for not responding to comments. I promise to get better and I am super excited to write Crown the Wolf! :) I probably won't get it done by tomorrow but I might be able to pull a miracle off by getting it out on Sunday. Here's hoping. Have a great day. Will try to respond more!
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jojen has an odd talent for creeping into Bran’s bedroom unannounced and unseen. The skill is telling of past, highly problematic espionage, but the Stark can’t seem mind—not when Jojen arrives, dressed in a white shirt with two buttons undone at the top. White shirts are for men what sundresses are for women—an article of clothing that is both beloved and revered as the goddess of apparel. No one looks shit in a sundress and no man can be downgraded by a white shirt.

He is terribly handsome, Bran swoons.

Because of that white shirt, Bran allows Jojen to climb onto the bed. He allows Jojen to kiss his neck and fondle his nipples. Jojen has been insatiable since their public “reconciliation.” He comes over every chance he gets and while it begins with a conversation, it usually ends with illicit caresses and cock-teasing, pre-coital make-out sessions. Bran tries to be good and strong but Jojen is really hot.

“We can’t,” Bran moans. “We have to go out today.” Bran bites his lips as Jojen sucks on his skin. “The Body Exhibit at the museum…with…Shireen and…oh.” Bran makes a strange, keeling noise he’s never made before.

“If you want to learn about the body, I’d make a great tutor,” Jojen suggests. He gently leads Bran on his back, a position he’s gotten awfully familiar with the last few days. His face is burning; Jojen’s tongue is traveling down his chest and his lips are sucking on every piece of skin he can find. The older boy’s hands are twitching. Bran is confident that in a few weeks’ time, he’ll be getting fingered in his bed while his parents are out. Robb almost assured him of that.

“I thought you said if Jojen is a good guy, he’ll wait until I’m ready!” Bran asked fearfully.

“Yes, and he will. Forget the law, they won’t find the body when I’m done with him.” Robb’s eyes darkened. He swore the worse torture following his declaration. The eldest Stark returned to the topic after his threat. “But how do I put this?” Robb paused and then his eyes sparkled once the answer came to mind. “Bran, do you like what you’ve been doing so far? The kissing and touching?”

Bran blushed. “I guess.”

“Exactly.” Robb nodded to strengthen his affirmation. “We’re Starks, Bran. Starks aren’t meant to be celibate. We just aren’t.”

The news was frightening and exciting at the same time. In the present day, Bran thinks about the possibility his desires have opened. Bran knows Jojen wants to go further. Bran wants to want to go further. Just as Bran is about to tell him that maybe a little more is alright, a knock on his door forces Bran to use all of his upper body strength to push Jojen off. The older boy acts fast. He rolls underneath the bed and is out of sight before Bran’s older brother walks into the room.

“Hey, we’re just about to head out. Are you sure you don’t want us to drop you off anywhere?”

Bran shakes his head furiously. “No, I’m good. Have fun on your…excursion.”

Robb gives him a chagrined smile. “Let’s hope Theon doesn’t make it too hard for me this time. If I’m lucky, we can get through this phase without me hauling him over my shoulder and planning a weeklong intervention in Iceland.”
Bran doubts it’ll be that easy. “Good luck,” he says instead. “I’ll be fine alone. I promise.”

“I know you will.” Robb pats him on the head. Before he leaves, he tells Bran not to get into too much trouble. “And tell Jojen he can stop hiding underneath the bed. He may have been able to avoid father’s cameras but he hasn’t found all of mine yet.”

The door shuts and Jojen shimmies out of hiding. Instead of being afraid or embarrassed, he seems put out—insulted even. “How many cameras does he have? I swore I found all the bugs.”

Bran scoffs. The number of electronic bugs outnumbers the actual organisms, three to one. When he voices this fact, Jojen displays a rather puckered expression. Bran can’t help but giggle. He ends up giving Jojen another kiss to comfort him, which leads to the older boy returning to his bed to continue where they left off. He massages Bran’s thigh and leads his head to the pillow so that he can straddle his hips. Bran tilts his head up to bares his creamy neck as a canvas for mauve bruises and blotches of rose. Joen’s teeth scraps against the collarbone and Bran’s breath hitches in anticipation. Before Jojen bites down, he lets out a deep, breathy laugh. Bran is curious about the chuckle until the older boy pulls away, eliciting a strained whimper out of Bran’s throat.

“No!” Bran protests as he tries to reach forward to his lips.

Jojen laughs even louder for his reaction. He gives Bran a swift kiss before getting off the bed.

“Wait! Where are you going?” Bran cries out. As soon as he says it, he curses his wantonness.

Jojen buttons up his white shirt. “We have a date to get to. Can’t have all of our fun here.” He leans in and gives Bran another kiss which the younger boy shamelessly accepts. “Unless you can think of a good reason to cancel?!”

Bran pouts. The top button of Jojen’s jeans is purposely left undone. “You’re a cheater,” Bran accuses; his eyes are focused on the rising bulge and they dilute in delight.

Jojen gives him a wry smile. “Punish me,” he suggests. The Reed boy gets close enough for Bran to pull him down. They kiss with more roaming hands and unspoken allowances. Bran sighs in pleasure as Jojen begins to work at his neck.

They’re definitely going to be late, Bran thinks.

***

Approximately ten minutes from their meet-up time, Lyanna checks her watch and confirms that their companions are late. “Within five minutes, a brain without oxygen will start to experience brain damage. Ten and we’re dead. We are dead, Shireen. They have killed us.”

“Don’t be dramatic,” Shireen snaps.

The Baratheon heir is shaking from nerves. The whole situation is rather discombobulating and her friend’s attire and attitude do nothing to assuage her concerns. Lyanna is wearing a shirt with teddy bear print and overalls, coupled with a watch that works in analog. She is perfectly at ease. The Mormont is the most adult-like child Shireen has ever met.

“I’ll place my bets that they’ll be at least half an hour late. Starks are notably virile.”

“Lyanna!”
Lyanna shrugs. “My sister dated the eldest. They made out all the time and I mean all the time. No matter how mild-mannered Bran is, he is getting the D.”

“I can’t listen to this!” Shireen hates how frantic she sounds. “What if he’s getting killed right now? Maybe we should call the cops,” Shireen suggests. “We’re in over our heads!”

“And let our plans got to waste? Absolutely not. I am a Mormont and we are not quitters,” Lyanna tells her. “Besides we have no proof; we’re doing this to confirm whether he’s a killer or not.” On a side note, Lyanna adds that all the victims have been women. “If anything, Bran is completely safe. We’re the ones who are going to get killed if Jojen turns out to be the killer.”

Shireen’s jaw drops. “You’re not helping!”

Lyanna doesn’t seem to mind her apprehension. “We’ll be fine. I got a list of all the murder dates.” She pulls out a piece of paper. “We just need to confirm where Jojen was at those times and whether he has the means to perform those kills.”

Shireen is surprised. “Did your uncle give you that?”

“Yes…” Lyanna pauses. “No, actually, he did not. No one in their right mind would give confidential police data to a twelve-year-old girl.”

“How did you get that?” Shireen narrows her eyes suspiciously.

Lyanna responds by rolling her eyes. “I asked my mother for it,” she explains. The youngest Mormont hands the page over to her friend. “No one tells my mother no, not even the commander of the homicide department.”

Shireen stares. “And why did she get it for you?”

“My mother believes that if her daughters do anything, it needs to be done right. She encourages our aspirations.”

Shireen looks over the paper. She and Lyanna quiz each other on the dates until the boys arrived, which takes another twenty minutes. They stand up at once. Shireen shoves the paper in Lyanna’s backpack while Lyanna comments on the older boy’s attractiveness. “If I wasn’t fake gaying with you, I’d be real straighting with him.”

“Lyanna,” Shireen warns. “He could be a serial killer.”

“From a purely observational standpoint, he is the most attractive person out of us four.” Lyanna looks the teenager up and down. “And Bran must think so too because they are sporting sex hair.”

“Ly—”

“Hello,” Lyanna interrupts as she walks forward to introduce herself. “You must be Jojen Reed and Bran Stark. I am Lyanna Mormont—Shireen’s girlfriend. Who is gay.”

“You don’t have to say you’re gay every single time,” Shireen hisses.

“Ignore her. She’s still coming to terms with our love.”

“It’s almost like it doesn’t exist,” Shireen points out sarcastically.

“Darling, no one cares,” Lyanna whips out; sharp as a whip with blades. She returns her attention to the boys. “There’s a tea room where we can have breakfast—or, brunch since you two were late.”
Bran blushes in embarrassment. “Fornicating, I bet.”

“Lyanna!” Shireen scolds, her own face mirroring Bran’s ungodly shade of red. She hopes upon reaching medical school, the youngest Mormont took a rigid course in bedside manner.

“Let’s go.” Lyanna turns her heel and leads them to the restaurant. On the way there, she attempts to work her nonexistent magic; it is like watching a madman perform Harry Potter spells and the results are just as disastrous. “So Jojen, do you frequent any pubs, specifically one located in the south district named Bonds and Bitches?”

Jojen raises an eyebrow. “I’m not much of a drinker.” Alcohol has never been his drug of choice.

“So on March 5th and March 17th, you were not anywhere near that district?”

Jojen smiles easily. “It’s been a while; I can’t say I remember exactly where I was at that time.”

“That’s not a ‘no.’”

“So Lyanna, do you know if the tea room is serving raspberry tarts? I love raspberry tarts. And pie! I could use a boysenberry pie about now.”

“Who knows what they serve? Look at the menu when you’re there.” Lyanna gives Shireen an exasperated look. “Tell me, do you have a family?”

Jojen glances over at Bran who is undoubtedly as confused about the situation as him. “Yes, I do. One sister and a father.”

“Is your mother dead?”

“Lyanna!” Shireen shouts. “You can’t just ask people if they have dead mothers.”

“She killed herself when I was a boy,” Jojen answers, much to his amusement and Lyanna’s satisfaction.

“That must have been very traumatic. Has her abandoning you affected your self-worth and/or caused resentment for women?”

“Gods be good, Lyanna stop.”

“Not at all, my sister has been a positive influence in that regard.”

“Good.” Lyanna uses a tone that says she doesn’t believe him. They reach the tea room and are made to wait a few minutes for a table. Once they receive their seating, they sit down and talk about their plans. “The body exhibit has a tour in an hour or we can do a self-exploration. Which do you prefer?”

“I rather go at my own pace, if you don’t mind,” Bran chimes in. He smiles shyly. “There are some pieces I want to see and it’s no fun speeding through.”

“Of course, Bran,” Shireen readily agrees. “I know you have the best taste.” Out of nowhere, a blunt pain hits her knee. “Ow!” She turns to her side and sees Lyanna sipping her tea languidly. Her phone beeps with an upcoming text message.

Stop flirting. You’re on a date with your girlfriend. Have some shame.

Shireen sends Bran a tight smile. She kicks Lyanna back, causing the munchkin to yelp.
“Are you okay?” Bran asks.

“We’re fine,” they say in unison.

Lyanna drinks her earl grey with relative annoyance. “Enough about us. Tell us about yourselves. How did you guys meet? What made you fall in love? Was it your mutual love of dogs? You do like dogs, don’t you Jojen?”

With the attention back on him, Jojen responds accordingly. “I’m quite fond of them.”

“Yes, well dogs are good, loyal creatures. I prefer cats myself. More independent. But the thing about dogs…” Shireen notices that Lyanna has a habit of deviating the conversation in an attempt to sound ‘natural’ but it only makes her next statement more suspicious. “...Is that they’ll do anything. If you tell them to jump, they jump. Tell them to fetch, they fetch. Tell them to rip someone’s head off and chew on their bones and they will.”

Silence fills the table. A young waiter draws near to take their orders and turns the heel in the other direction as soon as he hears Lyanna speak. Bran coughs. “Uh, well they’re also nice to cuddle with.”

“Yes,” Lyanna agrees. “You can use them for cuddling, too.” Lyanna pauses her second sip to add sugar to her tea. “Tell me, Jojen. Have you ever gotten sexual pleasure from beating people?”

Shireen thrusts her hand in the air. “I am ready to take my order!” She shouts, every bit like a tramp her father made her swear not to be. The server reluctantly drags his feet towards her.

“Never.”

“Have you ever gotten sexual pleasure from being beaten?”

The server turns around before Jojen can answer. Shireen almost slams her head on the table; at this rate, they’ll starve. Shireen’s fingers twitch for the chance to stuff Lyanna’s mouth with sweets and silence.

“I have not.”

“Have you ever tried either situation?”

“I’ve never expressed an interest in such acts.”

Lyanna remains unconvinced.

“What if Bran wants you to spank him?”

Bran chokes on his tea.

“I’d do it in a heartbeat.”

“What?” Bran coughs out.

Shireen jumps out of her seat and runs to the waiter. Before he has the chance to escape, she drags him to the table and demands he take their order. He is shaking as he does so and looks like he rather be anywhere else but there. Shireen refuses him the mercy. If she must suffer through their caricature of an interrogation, then so must everyone involved.

When the young man leaves to deliver the instructions to the kitchen, Lyanna resumes the role of
interrogator.

“I understand you’re quite taken with Bran.”

This time, when Jojen smiles the corners of his mouth sharpen into knives. “I feel I was born to meet him.”

Bran turns red as expected. Shireen, for the sake of decency, praises the romantic notion. “I’m so happy you’ve found each other.”

“So do you tell all your exes that?” Lyanna asks, not cruelly but the blow is killer. Bran seems nervous about the question. There’s doubt in his eyes. While Bran’s innocence has long been fact, Jojen’s own celibacy is merely theory. He confirms and denies any suspicions they might have about him in his answer.

“I’ve never been with anyone but Bran.”

Bran nearly drops his cup. “What?” He asks, tremors of disbelief rolling off his skin. When he tries to clarify his statement, it only comes out in more vagueness. “How? What? I—ha—how?”

Jojen shrugs. “You’re the only one I’ve ever wanted. No one else compares.” Jojen speaks as if his answer is obvious. Given that the Reed is a man of science, his words seem like fact to Bran.

Lyanna hums like the buzzing of killer bees. “That must mean a lot of lonely Valentine’s Days. A lot of unresolved sexual frustration.”

Jojen remains cool, but an edge of tenseness makes its way to his eyes. “I never minded it much.”

“What were your plans this Valentine’s Day? Did you spend it alone?”

“I was working,” Jojen insists. “It was a good day for me.”

“Where you working all night?” Lyanna pushes.

“Yes. I had both my jobs that day.”

“Oh, so you were out when the massacre happened?” Lyanna asks. “The one by the Bloodhound Killer.”

There’s a moment when people being made fun of finally realize they’re the butt of the joke. A similar look transpires when a man who is being fooled understands the ploy. The difference lies in anger versus suffering. While Lyanna excels at understanding people, she fails at reading them. Shireen is the opposite. She recognizes their mission is compromised the second Jojen’s eyes start to flare. The Reed boy handles his temper well; he doesn’t want to upset Bran and that’s a saving grace Shireen hopes will last. She remains vigilant about any physical upsets. At this point, they’re both in danger if he turns out to be the killer.

“I was,” Jojen answers. “In fact, I was near the incident when it happened. My cousin gave me a job in the area. I was close enough to hear their screams.”

“Oh?” Lyanna is intrigued. Shireen texts her about their failure but Lyanna ignores her phone. “You don’t feel responsible?”

“For what? I was lucky not to get involved.” Jojen drinks his tea. “I feel for those girls, but I couldn’t help them even if I was there. I’d just be another body count.”
“That’s all they were to you? A body count.”

“There are plenty of things I would give my life for. They weren’t a factor. There are so many people who don’t mind their business and get themselves killed.”

The response gives Lyanna a chill. She preservers regardless. “I understand.” Shireen is unsure on whether she should admire her friend’s bravery or condemn her foolhardiness. “Staying alive is important. I’m sure you plan on taking good care of Bran. Make sure nothing happens to him.”

“I will,” Jojen agrees. “I’d do anything to keep him safe.”

“My mother used to tell me to never say ’never,’ and that ‘anything’ doesn’t mean anything.”

“Well, when I say anything, I mean *everything*.” Jojen leans in. “I’d kill for him.”

“Apparently, you would die for him.” Lyanna takes a small breath. “It makes me wonder what else you would do.”

The waiter returns with their order and they enter a long, uncomfortable silence.

Shireen feels her phone vibrate and the message has her eyes widening.

*I think he’s innocent.*

“What!” She says out loud. When the boys turn to stare at her, Shireen stutters out an apology. “I … Lyanna, come with me to the bathroom.”

Lyanna gets out of her seat wordlessly. Shireen does not bother to contain her irritation when they are alone. “What do you mean you think he’s innocent? He literally told you that he was at the scene of the crime!”

“He knows we suspect his involvement. A guilty man would deflect; an innocent man wouldn’t care. Instead of proving his innocence, he’s going along with the charade. I think he’s innocent.”

“So him acting guilty makes you think he’s not?” Shireen glares. “That doesn’t make any sense!”

Lyanna ponders Shireen’s outrage seriously. “You’re right. He could be playing us. He knows we can’t do anything about it if he is the killer, so he might be taunting us.”

“Lyanna, we don’t have for this.”

“Or he is so sure of his innocence he doesn’t care if we believe he’s guilty or not. If he gets caught in his lie, it’ll put him in an unfortunate spot. He seems to be smart enough to know that an ill-placed omission is better than an incriminating lie.”

“Lyanna, stop.”

“But the best lies are those with truth in them. By admitting he was there, he could be using his status as a suspect as an alibi. All he has to say is ‘if I was the killer, do you think I would be stupid enough to admit I was there at the scene of the crime?’”

Shireen sighs. “Lyanna, we need to get back to the boys.”

“But, that’s a huge risk. A truly clever person knows that the greatest precaution would have been to ensure an alibi because those cases usually don’t end up in court. I don’t think he’s stupid so he’s probably innocent.”
“Fine, he’s innocent—”

“Although…”

“No!” Shireen puts her foot down once and for all. “No more theories, Lyanna. We are not detectives. You are not a detective. I know you think you’re good at everything, but you are not good at this.”

Lyanna’s mouth forms a shape between a grimace and a pout. “You’ve gotten really mean ever since we started dating. You should fix that.”

“We are not—” Shireen shakes her head. “How about we forget about this and enjoy our date with Bran and his non-serial killer boyfriend.”

Lyanna agrees without much argument. She makes one more stipulation before they return. “We shouldn’t have too much fun; it will make our separation more traumatic. I want our parting to be sad but plausible.”

“Whatever you want, Lyanna.”

Lyanna makes a pleased note. “I like the sound of that.”

***

The exhibit contains over a hundred models of the human body, ranging from Renaissance depictions of David to plasma membranes focusing on the intricacies of a phospholipid. Jojen proves to be an adequate teacher in the latter.

“They can form lipid bilayers because of their amphiphilic characteristic…” He begins, followed by more babble. “…in order for hydrophilic particles to pass through they need a transport protein…”

Lyanna devours the facts like a lysosome digesting bacteria—another displays Bran and Shireen resignedly watch with their respective dates. Her interest is not enough to be endearing, and even Bran, the marshmallow that he is, jumps at the chance to go further in the exhibit. Jojen follows shortly after, but their distance offers Shireen and Bran a moment alone.

“She’s…um…really interesting,” Bran notes kindly. “Really smart,” He adds. “You must—”

“We’re breaking up soon. Don’t worry about it,” Shireen interrupts. When she realizes the harshness of her words, she is quick to solace the situation. He must think I’m some heartless bitch! Shireen thinks. “I mean; we’re still going to be friends! She’s awesome, in her own crazy way but we’re not…we’re not good as a couple.”

“Oh.” Bran appears to be at a lost. “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s going to be mutual. Promise.”

Bran is a wise child; chooses to change the topics rather than linger on the absence of heartbreak. “She’s pretty intense; Jojen is the same way.” Bran laughs to himself. “But I guess it’s good considering how well he answered her questions. Do you know why she acted like that?”

Shireen sweats before she answers. “No, she’s…very peculiar.”

Bran laughs. “I got so nervous when I heard her speak. There’s something about her that makes you off-centered. It felt like an interrogation. I was one step away from giving her a report.”
“Hopefully, Jojen feels the same way. Then, we can be done with this mess.”

Bran stops in his tracks. “What mess?”

Shireen wonders how she could be so stupid.

“Nothing, Bran. It has nothing to do with you,” she quickly replies.

“Who is it about? Is it Jojen?”

“No! Well, yes, but it’s not what you think! He seems like a wonderful guy now that I’ve gotten to know him, but—”

“ ‘Now that you’ve gotten to know him?’ As opposed to what? You’ve only met him once.” Bran rolls a little faster to escape Jojen’s incoming footsteps. Shireen struggles to keep up. “Did my sister put you up to this? My mother?”

“What are you talking about?”

“As if you don’t know,” Bran accuses. “Are you trying to break us up?”

“No! Of course not! How could you say that?”

“So the thought has never crossed your mind?”

“Never is a strong word. I would have if—” Shireen covers her mouth at once.

Bran narrows his eyes. In them, Shireen can see a sparkle of betrayal. “You would have if what?”

Shireen begs him to drop it. “It’s nothing. Let’s enjoy the exhibit. Lyanna and I made a mistake but we were probably wrong.”

“Probably wrong?” The insult burns on Bran’s face. “So you’re not convinced of whatever it is you were trying to figure out about Jojen?”

“Bran…”

“What were you trying to find out? I’ll tell you right now. Jojen tells me everything.”

“He probably wouldn’t tell you this if it is true,” Shireen retorts.

Bran makes a ‘humph’ noise—as if she insulted him. For all Shireen’s knows, she probably did. The whole day has turned her steady sense into a windy whimsy.

“What was it?” Bran asks. “I want to know what was so important that you would go behind my back.”

“Bran, really, it’s all a misunderstanding—”

“Tell me.”

“Bran!”

“Tell me.”

“By the gods—we thought he was the Bloodhound Killer!” Shireen shouts, catching everyone’s attention within a five-foot radius—including the person in question. “Lyanna’s uncle is the police
commander and we found out he was a suspect! You are dating a murder suspect! Are you happy now?” All eyes turn to Jojen, who is standing there surprised but not angry. Lyanna gives her a look of exasperation and if Shireen could see her own expression, she’d be a figure of embarrassment. The one who looks absolutely livid is Bran.

“You invited me out because you thought my boyfriend was a murderer?” Bran asks in disbelief. “Do you think I’m so stupid?”

“Not stupid,” Shireen begs out in a way she hopes will exonerate her. Unfortunately, she ends up digging herself a bigger hole. “But it’s not like you could defend yourself if he was.”

It was the wrong thing to say and Shireen regrets it at once. “I didn’t mean that.”

“I can take care of myself just fine,” Bran hisses out. In addition to the venom, Bran’s tone is laced with injustice and mortification. It was one thing for his older sister and mother to fear for his virtue but his friends? They are supposed to be equals. He doesn’t need them to patronize him. Bran turns his wheelchair and rolls forward to Jojen. “I want to go home.”

“As you command,” Jojen agrees, smooth as butter and easy as lube.

“Bran, please,” Shireen pleads. “I promise; I was doing this for your own good. I didn’t tell you because I was afraid you’d get hurt.”

“Yes, you and my mother and my sister always want to protect me. Well, I don’t need protecting,” Bran insists. “I may not be an adult but I am old enough to know what I want.”

Lyanna has the nerve to roll her eyes at the statement. “Please, we’re children. We don’t know what we want. Except for Jojen. We all know what he wants.”

Shireen glares. “Lyanna! Not helping!”

Bran feels his face heat up in anger. “Well, maybe I want what he wants!” Without another word, Bran storms off with Jojen pushing him to the exit.

Shireen is taken back by the declaration. Her mouth is still gaping when Lyanna sneaks over to her side. “I told you he was getting dicked.”

***

When they get home, Bran demands Jojen slam the door and drop him on his bed roughly.

Jojen smiles in amusement. “You know I could never do anything but treasure you.”

Bran ignores him. “Too bad. You’re doing it. I need to live out my anger vicariously through you.” Jojen compromises by slamming the door and tenderly placing his lover on the bed. Once Bran is comfortable, Jojen works on loosening up his shirt, starting from the sleeves to his collar. “I can’t complain about having you all to myself but are you alright? You sounded so hurt.” Truth be told, it was terribly arousing to hear Bran defend his honor. In Bran’s eyes, Jojen is faultless.

“She thinks you’re a murderer.” Bran pauses. “Why aren’t you more upset? The police believe you killed those girls!”

“If they haven’t contacted me now then that means they haven’t gotten any evidence. And they won’t find any because I’m not the killer.” Jojen joins him on the bed. “Besides, I was distracted by other things.”
“What other…?” Bran’s face flushes as he remembers his open declaration. “Oh.”

Jojen grins. “You said you might want what I want.”

Bran stutters out a defense before swallowing his sword. “Maybe,” he submits. “Yes.”

He is absolutely stunning when defeated, Jojen notes. “And do you know what I want?”

“I…yes.”

Jojen leans down to kiss Bran. The younger boy holds his breath. As deviation drew closer, Jojen’s lips brush past his lips and hits his forehead. “Let’s talk about this again when you’re sure.”

Jojen rolls over to the side and digs his face into Bran’s neck, breathing in his scent and the softness of torso. Shock falls upon Bran in a way he wanted to fall upon his bed and it feels the same—hard and uncomfortable. “You’re not going to try anything?”

Jojen hums in delight. “I will, but I’m not willing to risk our relationship on a maybe.” He slinks his hand onto Bran’s hip and squeezes his side. “That doesn’t mean we can’t have fun while we figure it out.”

Bran whimpers when Jojen kisses him. Jojen’s hands move up to Bran’s waist and his lips rumble against his stomach as he whispers his endearments. “I could do this forever,” he whispers.

The words catalyze a new reaction, one of fear. Bran catches his breath as Jojen trails below his collarbone to keep from being seen, but it’s a close attack. Bran imagines if he so much as bend over, his mother and siblings will bear witness to those sinful little marks. The idea of bending over brings forth another chill, but does not take away enough heat for Bran to forget the prominent problems.

“Jojen, do you remember what Shireen said…?” Bran moans.

“What about it…” Jojen murmurs.

Bran grips his boyfriend’s chest. “The fact that the police think you’re the Bloodhound Killer!”

“Oh that.” Jojen shrugs the accusation off. “They don’t think anything. They’re still gathering evidence. I wouldn’t worry.” Jojen moves downward.

Bran stops him with a single hand. “But I am worried. I’m not stupid, Jojen. And you have a record—that’s not good for you.”

Jojen opens his mouth to ease Bran’s concerns when a treasonous idea enters his mind. He uses all his nerves and neurons to remove it but it lingers, eating at him. No, he thinks. He swore not to bring Bran into this mess. Bran catches his grimace and misinterprets his dismay. He clutches onto Jojen’s face.

“We need to do something. Maybe Shireen is right and a little investigation wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“Like solve a murder?” Jojen muses. He chuckles darkly. He has a good idea who's responsible and he isn’t looking to play cops and robbers with a madman.

Bran doesn’t appreciate the tease and pinches him on the arm. “No, like prove your innocence in a way that they can’t doubt you.”

The opportunity is too good to pass up.
It’s just this once, Jojen surmises. This little favor and Ramsay will be out of his life and the only criminal he has to deal with is his cousin. With that thought settled, he acts as once.

“I guess you’re right,” Jojen admits. “I should figure something out. Is there any way you can get into police evidence?”

Bran is surprised by the suggestion. “Why would we need that?”

“So that I can find out what they know. It’s not enough that I have a record. There must be something else that’s getting them to suspect me.” There could be a lot of reasons, but Jojen is hardly the only delinquent in the city. Even he’s unsure of what led them to him. “That way, I can figure out what’s incriminating and see what I need to do to counter the bias. Gods help us all if I’m being framed.”

The fear on Bran’s face is what Jojen needs to steer the conversation the way he wants. “If we know more about the killer, we can stay clear of his way. All we need to do is find a pattern of some sort.” Jojen sighs.

“We could ask around?” Bran suggests.

“I don’t want to draw attention to ourselves by talking to witnesses. That’ll only inspire him to act more brutally.” Jojen pretends to think for a moment. By the love of some twisted god, Bran makes the final move.

“I can look up their evidence. Maybe even check the cameras of the incident?”

Jojen pretends to be surprised. “You can do that?”

Bran nods shyly. “Robb’s always been a bit mental on the subject of safety. With a serial killer in the area, he’s gotten more paranoid. Checks the city’s cameras more often than usual.”

“Can you get into his computer?”

Bran nods. “I know everyone’s passwords.” Bran blushes. “…I like to check up on things, too.”

There’s the Stark in him. Jojen was wondering when he’d get to witness it in person.

“Bran, if this is what you want to do…” While not an obvious exit, Jojen would never forgive himself if he didn’t offer Bran a chance to escape from this crime.

Bran doesn’t hesitate. “I know you’re not a killer, Jojen. But I won’t be comfortable if this is looming on our shoulders.” Bran sits up from his bed. “We’re lucky Robb will be out for a while; we won’t get another chance like this in the future.”

Despite his reluctance, Jojen picks up his boyfriend and carries him to his wheelchair. The two of them roll over to Robb’s bedroom. While Bran gets settled in, Jojen goes to the bathroom. He sends Ramsay a warning—telling him he needs to stall the Stark as long as possible if he wants the information. Ramsay response is succinct. A second reply follows.

That won’t be a problem, the Bolton replies.

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Shireen storms off as soon as Bran does, absolutely outraged at Lyanna for getting her into this mess. Lyanna is no source of comfort. She admits a "lack of guile" for their mistakes but refuses responsibility on anything else, especially Shireen's participation.

“You made a choice to join in. That’s on you. I can’t help that you can't keep your mouth shut.”

Shireen huffs and almost swears, but catches herself in time. That response will only seed more
aggravation. Shireen leaves Lyanna in the anatomy exhibit, surrounded by bare muscles and thready veins. Lyanna checks her watch and remembers that a second tour is occurring, beginning all the way at epithelial tissues. She is alone.

Distance and time is all she can offer for Shireen’s anger. Lyanna stays where she is and admires the ‘art.’ The curator was precise. Each structure is vivid with details. The human models resemble slaughtered animals hanging from their stands with their meat brimming with red flesh and white bones. Lyanna wants to touch but resists. A part of her temperance is from respect and the other is fear; she doesn’t want to feel something so real.

As time goes on, the solitude becomes unnerving, and the bundle of bodies more so. Their open eyes are still and locked on her. Some empty and hollow. Some bulging and swollen.

“I’m being silly,” Lyanna whispers to herself. She supposes she should get used to the presence of lifeless forms. In the future, these figurines will be corpses and she’ll be responsible for cutting them up and finding out what’s wrong with them.

The thought provides no comfort when she hears the soft clattering of plastic. She looks behind her and sees nothing. When she looks back, she is still alone.

Deciding that Shireen has had enough time to consolidate her thoughts, Lyanna decides to seek out her friend for reconciliation. She dials Shireen’s number and when she hears the ringtone, she smiles in triumph. So Shireen is coming to her—she didn’t even need to call!

I should have waited longer, Lyanna thinks.

The youngest Mormont follows the sound outside. Lyanna turns to ice when she looks down and sees the phone on the floor and its owner nowhere to be seen.

Chapter End Notes

Ah...poor Shireen. :( I do so much to that sweet girl.
It is sad and safe to say that I'll probably be updating this story every 2 weeks instead of a week. I hadn't realized how hard it was going to be to manage school and work and my "extracurriculars" at the same time. :( For these reasons, Crown the Wolf, the other story I'm sure a lot of you read won't be posted until next month.
I really hope to get everything on track for October. I really sorry for this hiatus after hiatus. I want to say I appreciate everyone who reads and reviews and that you are all amazing and thanks so much with sticking with this story despite my erratic updates and failed promises.
See you in October!
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One day, perhaps someday soon, Ramsay Bolton will understand that he was tricked. He was tricked harder than a whore on a corner. It was the kind of trick on par with leprechaun’s gold and the emperor’s lily white ass—a trick that disguises itself as a treasure when in reality, it is trash mixed in a bag with designer tags. Theon Greyjoy may seem like he is worth the trouble now—decked out in two hundred pound t-shirts and shoes by Gucci—but somewhere down the line, now is going to be then, and once now becomes then, now is over.

The problem with people is that they are not machines. They don’t compute an error or recognize viruses or learn from their goddamn mistakes. No programmer can help Ramsay realize that human beings are not toys. There are always going to be people who want them even after they are broken. He cannot run a sledgehammer through it and then go bam-bam, no thank you, ma'am. His tools are not good enough.

And later, Ramsay will dwell on these implications. They will fester in his brain like a battle wound and pus over like an infection. Maybe, he might heal. Maybe not. Until then, however, he focuses on the now. Now, his phone is ringing in the rather inopportune time that Theon has stripped off his jumper. They're shopping, and Ramsay had demanded that he wear his new wardrobe upon purchase, which made Theon skip to the room in delight. Usually, Ramsay would have rejected the call, especially since Theon is giving him a coy look as he buttons up his new shirt. But his father warned him days earlier about dismissing another one of his messages, especially since this was considered his "last chance." Ramsay was good at his job, but he wasn't irreplaceable. So the Bolton growls and unbuttons his pants. Once Theon gets on his knees, Ramsay answers.

"Get ready, asshole, cause I’m coming for you."

Anyone else, and that threat would have softened some testicles. But not Ramsay—the Bolton always liked a little danger.

"Who the fuck are you?” Ramsay answers, equally aggressive. Theon stops mid-suck until Ramsay grips his hair and deepens his cock inside. Theon chokes.

Ramsay rolls his eyes to the back of his head. Fuck, that feels good.

"Robb fucking Stark,” the man answers like he expects Ramsay to know who he is—and Ramsay does, but the pure narcissism in the Stark’s tone raises his bile and blood.

“How the fuck did you get this number, prick?” The unease is reasonable, but the indignation in his voice covers up his concern. Seriously, how did he get his number?

“THEON’S ON OUR FAMILY PLAN, BITCH. I LOOKED THROUGH HIS PHONE RECORDS, GOT A LIST OF HIS MOST RECENT CALLS, AND THEN TRACKED DOWN THEIR IDENTITIES. OBVIOUSLY."

“That is the farthest thing from obvious.”

“MAYBE FOR A BACKWARD PREDATOR LIKE YOURSELF, BOLTON. BUT I THINK AHEAD.”

“And I’m getting head. From your best friend.” Theon chokes upon finally realizing the identity of Ramsay’s conversation partner. Ramsay tightens his grip on Theon’s hair and continues the
conversation. In the background, the Bolton hears a noise of protest from an apparent speeding infraction.

“I’m grateful you called,” Ramsay says with a forced grin. Robb couldn’t see him, but he wouldn’t past the man to hijack the security cameras (not that there were any in the room. But Ramsay has always been a drama queen). “I’ve wanted to meet the great Robb Stark for ages. I bet you’re tracking this phone call right now, just gagging for a go at me.”

“The only person I gag for is Jon.”

The sound of swerve and an irritated inquiry of ‘how did that even come up’ is heard through the phone.

“I am tracking your phone, though,” Robb admits. “And when I find you, I am going to—”

Ramsay hangs up.

Theon is released from his hold at the same time, and the Greyjoy stares at him with no small amount of awe and shock. “Did you just hang up on Robb?”

“Yeah,” Ramsay answers, trying to sound nonchalant while his chest is bursting with pride.

“W-wha—why?”

“Because anyucker who calls to give me a fair warning is a fucker who won’t play dirty. People who don’t play dirty? They deserve to get sucker punched in the balls. Since he can’t prepare me over the phone, he’ll do it in person, and I want to cut him off with a fist.”

Instead of being impress by his analysis, Theon is simply annoyed. “So he’s coming here?”

“Yeah.”

“And we’re just going to wait? Like sitting ducks?”

“I like to think we’re the ones with the guns.”

“Then why are we waiting to get shot?”

Again with the questioning, Ramsay notes with a grimace. “Do you have a problem with my methods?”

Theon hears the agitation and has the sense not to push. “Of course not.” He does not, however, have the sense to stand obediently like some mail order bride. Gay, he is, geisha, he is not. “Is it alright if I get some ice cream? I’ll take the dogs,” he promises.

“Sure, you could use a snack for the entertainment.” Ramsay reminds him to stay close. “I want you to watch when Robb comes.”

Some time ago, Theon wanted the same thing as well. He has the sense not to say it out loud.

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It was the classic bait and switch. Robb looks so insufferably proud of himself for coming up with the plan that even Jon finds him a tad less endearing.

“Are you ready?” He asks as they come across an unsuspecting Theon, one hand on his ice cream
cone and the other on his leashes. Two vicious hounds remain on high alert, train by their master to scour the area for threats. Grey Wind and Ghost growl at them. Jon does his best to settle their savage fury, but he finds himself more preoccupied with Robb’s overreactions.

“Yes,” Jon agrees. “I’ve been ready since I got in the car. Let’s hurry up and get him before he—”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me!”

“—notices us.”

Robb is a wolf in many ways—he acts upon instinct and is lunging towards Theon within seconds. Jon joins in because, hey, he loves the impulsive mama’s boy more than life itself, and before either of them know it, they are grappling Theon to the ground and hoisting him onto their shoulders. The hounds bark like madness nipping on their toes and would have lunged if Grey Wind didn’t alpha the fuck out of them. Ghost, the only one deriving any pleasure from this situation, starts nuzzling his head against his brother in a ‘come hither, I’m in heat and must be bred’ motion. Grey Wind stands firm; he barks at Ghost to behave, and the runt obliges, liking a little bit of a charge in a canine.

Jon wonders if he’s far too invested in the lives of his dogs until Theon kicks Robb in the face, throwing him off their balance. He drops to the ground and makes a run for it.

“Damn it, Theon!” Robb yells as he cradles his bruised jawline. Jon doesn’t have time to comfort his boyfriend. He makes the logical decision to run after Theon and leave his boyfriend on the cement. Jon reasons that the act, though heartless, will be regarded as necessary. And if it isn’t? Well, Jon doesn’t care because there is no way in hell he is going through this again.

The bastard chases the Kraken to a store’s bathroom, where the boy is caught trying to climb out the window like some purse-stealing cat. Jon lunges at his hind legs before he has a chance to shimmy out, and drags him to the floor.

“Why do you always go for the legs?” Theon shouts as he struggles to break free. "Let go!"

"No!" Jon pulls his hair.

"What the hell!"

“You know what’s down there,” Jon accuses as he puts the young man in a chokehold. “You inconsiderate, dim-witted, spoiled twat!”

“Well, you’re a whore!” Theon responds succinctly.

“You’re the one sucking dick for silk! Nice shirt, by the way!”

Theon responds with a punch in the gut. Jon holds his stomach in pain and Theon uses the opportunity to dash out the store. Jon follows almost at once and manages to pull him down by clutching onto the hem of his shirt. The two of them topple over a mannequin and land on top of a skinny jeans display. The store’s employees are too shocked to do anything but gasp. Robb chooses this chance to rush in and is about to separate them when Ramsay makes a sudden appearance.

“You!” Robb shouts. He recognizes the man from his lunch date with Arya. Of all the men Theon can fuck around with—Robb has no time to finish his thoughts. The psychopath is furious; he makes no attempts to hold back his punches—literally. Robb manages to block the second hit and get him into a chokehold. The two of them hop out of the store without once drawing the ire of their love interests. Theon, however, manages to escape Jon’s grasp a third, fourth, or possibly fifth time and takes off once more. Jon groans in exasperation.
“Stop running, Theon, you’re really bad at it!” The only time Theon has ever gone at a decent speed was during a sale at Selfridges. Jon catches up to him at a water fountain, where the two end up falling inside the still waters. Their tussle eventually evolves into a wrestling match which forces their lovers to pause.

Ramsay and Robb grow still as stone and hard as rocks when they see Theon and Jon. The two of them are dripping wet. By the good gods above and below, the young men are wearing conveniently thin shirts which results in hardened nipples and slippery skin. Their fighting echoes in the atmosphere through sounds of slick and squelches while their moans ripple through their eardrums. It is terribly arousing, and both Robb and Ramsay have erections as a result. They make no attempts to hide it.

“Robb?” Rickon asks in the background. Robb ignores his little brother to focus on the gorgeous beauties before him.


“Hush up, Rickon. The adults are busy.”

Busy being perverts, Rickon thinks to himself. If he were interested in penis, perhaps he would have found the sight appealing, but as is, he is far too concern the blaring sirens coming in their direction. Unable to attract their attention, Rickon rounds up the dogs and prepares himself for questioning.

Adults, he shakes his head in disappointment.

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While the cops are quick to cuff them, their booking is delayed due to the busyness at the station. A scandal is in the midst, and no one has the time to concern themselves with a scuffle at a mall—especially not one that involves a Stark and a Bolton. Thus, a rookie is assigned to them. He is ordered to let the boys off with a warning—which will inevitably bring forth a complaint of nepotism in the future—and complies despite his wishes.

While they are waiting for Theon to be done with his questioning, Robb leans over to Jon for a favor. “Can you distract the Bolton?” He pleads. “I want to speak to Theon.”

“What?” Jon closes his eyes in frustration. “Robb, we’re in a police station. We’re being let off with a warning. I think we should count our blessings and leave.”

“Jon, I just need a few minutes.”

“Robb—” Before he can go on and on about lost causes, the Stark heir unleashes his fiercest display of loveliness: wide puppy dog eyes and an even more savagely adorable, quivering lip. He begs his boyfriend to reconsider.

“Please, Jon? I can’t just let a near decade’s worth of friendship disappear like it’s nothing. One last time and I’m done.”

Jon bites his tongue. “Promise?” He gives in at last, losing to his cousin’s impenetrable willpower.

“Promise.”

Jon shakes his head, disappointed in himself and his cousin, and gets up from his seat. He goes over to the Bolton, who addresses him with suspicious eyes. When Theon comes back, Robb goes up to him before anyone can see him leave the room.
“One last time,” Robb promises for the second time that day. “Just hear me out for five minutes, and I won’t bother you again.”

Theon opens to mouth to protest, but then he sees Ramsay on the side, somewhat interested in Jon—in the way dogs are interested in birds they can ravage, and relents. “Five minutes,” he reminds his best friend.

The two of them head to the bathroom where they spend their first minute in silence. Robb is awkwardly pacing about, which results in Theon tiredly asking him if he remembers his promise. “You’re down to four minutes.”

“I’m thinking,” Robb defends.

“It’s going to be three soon.”

“Don’t be a prat,” Robb warns. He closes his eyes and leans against the sink. “By the gods, Theon, what has gotten into you? Ramsay Bolton? Did I tell you I’ve met him before?”

“What?” That is surprising news. “When?”

“A few weeks ago,” Robb clarifies. “We saw each other at a café. He said some things about Arya. Horrible things.”

“That’s just Ramsay,” Theon retorts. “You can’t take him seriously ten percent of the time.”

“That means I have to take him seriously the other ninety percent?”

“He’s an acquired taste.”

“Well, most people who intake poison don’t live long enough to develop it.”

“Is this how you’re choosing to spend your last two minutes?” Theon scoffs. “Just go home with Jon and live your life happily ever after. You don’t need me in that fairy tale. So leave me alone.”

Robb punches the wall without warning. The action causes Theon to jump and freeze. “For gods’ sake, do you always have to see the world in black and white? I’m with Jon so I can’t be friends with you? That’s bullshit. You’re my best friend.” Robb rubs his temples. “Let me ask you something.”

Theon frowns. “What?”

“You and Jon are drowning. Who do you think I would save?”

Theon rolls his eyes. “What are you doing, Robb? Psychology? You and I both know that doesn’t work.”

“Just answer the question. Honestly.”

“Honestly?” Theon doesn’t hesitate. “Jon, of course. But you would try to save both of us. Plus I’m the better swimmer, so naturally, I come next.”

“Exactly,” Robb agrees. “You know me so well!”

Theon stares at him as if he is insane.

“Now, Ramsay and I are drowning. You know who I think you would save?”
“Robb, please stop it—”

“I think you would choose Ramsay first. Because you’re a selfish cunt who wants desperately to be someone’s number one choice, and you think that in that same situation, Ramsay would choose you. And hey, maybe he would, I don’t know the monstrous shit that well. But then after you’ve saved him, and I died, you’d feel immensely guilty and do something stupid and self-destructive and get yourself killed.” Robb is grinning like a madman. “Do you know how I know that?”

“Because we were best friends for almost ten years?” Theon answers tiredly.

“Exactly,” Robb says. “We are best friends. You dating a douchebag won’t ever change that. And even if we never talk again for another ten years, I want you to know that I’m not just going to cut you out. We know each other too well for that. So fuck that phone call the other day because I don’t care what you do. You’re a brother to me; family doesn’t fuck off because someone tells them to.”

For the longest time, Theon doesn’t say anything. He looks to the side to avoid Robb’s gaze. After another moment, Theon sighs and tells Robb his time is up. “I even gave you an extra minute.”

Robb doesn’t move.

“Robb, you promised.”

“Fuck promises. You know I wasn’t going to keep it.”

Theon, after the longest time, cracks a smile. “I did.”

“And you know I was never going to abandon you.”

Theon glances outside the door as if he expects Ramsay to come in at any second. When he doesn’t, Theon nods. “Ramsay wants to isolate me. He wants to be the only one in his life.”

“Abusers tend to do that,” Robb says knowingly. “Listen, we can get you out of there as soon as possible. You don't have to worry. Boltons don’t have nearly enough resources to go against the Starks.”

“I’m not leaving him.”

Robb sighs. “Listen, I know you think he loves you and can change—”

“He doesn't need to change,” Theon tells Robb. “And even if he did, that’s not why I’m staying with him.”

Theon goes to the sink to run some water and splash it onto his face. When he is done cleaning himself, he grabs a towel to dry himself. “He needs me,” Theon tells Robb with so much conviction it can break a brick wall. “He chose me. He’s falling for me. I’m the only person in the world he can truly be himself with, and the feeling is mutual; I’m the one he saves when drowning. You already have Jon. I deserve someone, too.”

“You deserve better.”

“A better choice does not mean the best choice. Not for me. He doesn’t care that I’m fucked up. He doesn’t care about what happened with my father or my uncle. He wants to take care of me. It’s not out of some twisted, moral obligation. It’s not like you—”

Robb opens his mouth to protest, but Theon shuts him down.
“You helped me out because I needed help. Because you needed to be the hero. And I was so grateful for it. But you want to fix me. Ramsay doesn’t care that I’m broken. Robb…” Theon closes his eyes. “I’m so tired of sweeping myself under the rug so that you don’t see my pieces.”

“I don’t want you to pretend to be someone you’re not.”

“I don’t either,” Theon agrees. “That’s why I’m staying with Ramsay.”

Theon, after weeks of separation, closes their distance with a hug. He holds onto Robb until the younger man lets go.

“You’re still my brother,” Robb reminds him.

“I’ll try to contact you,” Theon promises instead of responding. “Once Ramsay and I settle into our arrangement, we’ll meet up.”

“Can you promise that?”

Theon gives something in-between a grimace and a reluctant smile. “The Boltons are constantly doing business with your company. Eventually, I’ll have to play mediator.”

Robb nods. “So do you plan on returning to school?” Robb asks. “Is he letting you go back to London?”

Theon looks down with the slightest bit of shame before returning Robb’s gaze. “I’ve never been much of a student. All talent without the work ethic. Besides, lots of designers don’t have formal educations.”

No, then. Robb doesn’t bother to hide his disappointment, but he does bite down his response. Their reconciliation is a fragile thing, with the slightest insult having the potential to crack the foundation. The two of them share a moment of quietness to finalize their resolution. Neither are naïve enough to believe this is the end to their strife but for now, it is enough. They’re brothers, after all. No battering boyfriend, unrequited love, or daddy issues can stop that.

When they finally leave, a violent scene awaits them.

“Rickon!” They hear Jon shout.

They rush over to the station’s center where they see Stannis Baratheon assaulting Robb’s youngest brother.

“You did this!” The man accused furiously.

Robb watches his uncle—the first time he’s seen the man all day—pry Stannis off Rickon.

“Mr. Baratheon, calm down,” Benjen tells the grieving man.

“Don’t tell me to fucking calm down!”

Robb steps in. “What’s going on?”

If Benjen is surprised by Robb’s presence, he doesn’t show it. He glances over at Jon and tells their party to leave at once. “We’re in the middle of an investigation. You need to take your brother and Jon and go home immediately.”

“We don’t need to go through a damn investigation. Her kidnapper is right here.” He points the
finger at Rickon. “The other day, we found out that Rickon has been stalking my daughter for weeks. And today she’s gone? Right after they’re about to send the little sociopath to boarding school? You don’t see the coincidence?”

The situation is pretty damning, Jon admits. Of course, he knew it to be impossible and so did Robb, who steps in to confirm Rickon’s alibi.

“Rickon has been with us all day.”

“Yes, and there’s no way you Starks wouldn’t lie for each other!”

“We went to the mall,” Jon tells him. His voice is soft and soothing as he tries to comfort his boss. “Stannis, I wouldn’t lie to you, not even for my cousin.”

The notion does little to comfort Stannis. If anything, he became more erratic without a suspect. “Then who could have done this?”

Robb turns to his youngest brother, who is both shocked and horrified. Once the eldest Stark caught a glimpse of his sibling’s face, he knew the boy to be innocent.

“Shireen’s been kidnapped?” Rickon asked. “How?”

“She was out with your brother,” Stannis hisses out. “And now she’s gone.” Benjen rests his hands on Stannis’s shoulders which expectantly does not go over well.

“Get your hands off me!”

“I need you to stay calm, Mr. Baratheon. Given the circumstances, the kidnapping will most likely be followed by a ransom. We need you to stay vigilant for contact. Can you do that?”

Stannis shoves the Stark off him. He sends Rickon one final glare before addressing the situation at hand. “We haven’t received any demands,” he grits out. There’s a part of him that swears a Stark is involved, but even he can’t fight an alibi.

Yoren takes the young men to the side and informs Robb and Jon that they are bringing in his brother for questioning. “Besides Lyanna Mormont, he is the last to have seen her.”

“Lyanna?” Rickon overhears. “She was with Shireen?”

Yoren seems reluctant to share the information but eventually relents. “She’s already given her statement. I called your parents to come with your brother, but you should really go home. I don’t think your presences are welcomed.” He spares a knowing glance to Rickon.

Before Rickon can protest, Robb agrees. “We’ll take Rickon home.” He places a firm grip on Rickon’s shoulder, warning him against a statement.

Rickon is fuming mess when he arrives home. He runs to his room without sparing a glance to his brother and cousin, resulting in shared sighs and whispered conversations between the lovers. When he is safely inside the comfort of his room, Rickon pulls out his burner phone to make a secreted phone call. He sneaks into his closet and starts his monologue of betrayal.

We need to talk, Rickon writes. Pick up the phone, Lyanna. You know what this is about.

Lyanna responds almost immediately. She ends up calling him, and when Rickon picks up, neither of them are slow to the draw. Their entire conversation begins and ends with angry accusations and
wrathful promises of vengeance. The two of them blame each other for crimes known and unknown, and it goes on for hours until they are both sated. Finally, at the end of their screaming match, the two of them are left with hoarse throats and silence from their own guilt.

“Are we ready to get to work now?” Lyanna asks at last.

Rickon pauses.

“Yeah,” he answers.

“Good.”

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Shireen wakes up in a well-painted cellar and a warm meal placed on the table. Not a fool in the slightest, Shireen recognizes she has been kidnapped. She remembers what happened to her cousin Myrcella and knows that any foolishness can result in bodily harm—not that she is unfamiliar in that regard. Shireen stares at the food on the table and feels her stomach rumble, upset at the lack of substance. She knows better than to take food from strangers so she politely asks for proof that the food will not kill her. When she receives no response, she thinks about her chances. If it a ransom situation, the food is safe. The kidnappers will not risk harming their paycheck. If it is for something else entirely…well, Shireen’s a dead girl walking.

After a few more minutes of waiting, a letter slips underneath the door. Shireen goes up to retrieve it and receives the response she’s been waiting for.

Do not worry, dear. The food is safe. I have no intentions of harming you as long as you swear to be on your best behavior. I have other plans besides your passing.

The message is vague, for sure. Shireen is well aware she cannot trust this mysterious kidnapper, but she has no choice. She cannot starve herself, and the food does look incredibly appetizing. Shireen notes the words “best behavior” and using her better judgment, thanks them for the warning.

She sits on the table and eats her food bit by bit throughout the hour. She hopes, that if it is poisoned, she can at least control the amount she ingests. After a few bites, she genuinely hopes the food isn’t tampered with; it is actually quite delicious.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, finally, another update! I'm actually quite proud of how things chapter turned out. When I wrote it, I wasn't that enthusiastic but I like the end result. Out of all my stories, this is the one I want finished the most. Not in a bad way, but it a "I'm ten chapters away from the ending and let's be honest, anything over a hundred chapters is a bit much" and I want so desperately to finish this before the next season airs. Here's hoping! I want the next ten chapters to be like the final season of House. You know it's ending but hopefully it ends with a bang.
Chapter Notes

So another chapter (relatively) on time, which is a good sign my life is going pretty well. Cross fingers that this continues until the end of the summer. Preferably before law school starts (August 20th).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Since Shireen’s disappearance, Rickon's transition from warrior to worrier to just plain worn out unsettled his entire family. Life lost all meaning for Rickon. He stopped talking in extremes, ate like his teeth forgot they were there, and only left the house to walk Shaggydog. After a while, he refused to leave his room altogether and, as Sansa suspects, bathe. His misery was mimicked by several members of his family. No Stark has had a decent conversation in months. Stannis took time off from work to help his family cope, resulting in Jon’s undiscussed termination. The Snow fared as expected—a brooding train wreck. He spent more time at the police station trying to get clues (and then transferring any 'secreted' information to Davos) than he did with Robb. Robb, unsurprisingly, was feeling neglected. To his credit, he did not whine or complain, opting to behave as the supportive boyfriend rather than the clingy sidekick. Sansa could tell he was struggling. Arya hadn’t been in the house in weeks—completely unrelated to the kidnapping; her rehearsals with the Faceless Men have taken so much of her schedule that her older sister was ninety percent convinced that the youngest Stark girl was unaware that a crime even happened. And last, Bran spent all his time at Jojen’s, torn apart by guilt, which honestly worried Sansa the most because Jojen is scum and scum take advantage of a small spot on a squeaky clean surface and tries to make it worse. If no progress was made soon, Sansa was positive that Bran wasn't coming back in the house a virgin.

Despite the potential de-virginalization of his most innocent child, Ned Stark seems more concerned with the foremost matter: Rickon. Today is Rickon’s weekly visit to therapy, and Ned knows he cannot afford a missed session. Knocking on the room once, Ned feels satisfied that he acknowledged his son’s right to privacy before exerting his right as a parent by entering his override code.

“Rickon, it’s time to go to Dr. Lecter’s.”

Rickon opens the door, completely dressed.

Ned stares, unable to react.

Rickon is never ready—they make it a point to tell him appointment times an hour earlier so that they have time to force him out his pajamas and brush his hair. As of late, this meant bathing as well. Sure, Rickon knows when his mandatory meetings with Dr. Lecter is, but it’s up to him and Catelyn to sort out the details prior. Hannibal Lecter is notorious for dropping patients based on punctuality.

But this time, Rickon is completely prepared. He raises an eyebrow at his father’s dropped jaw and walks passed him.

“Wait!”

Rickon stops. “Yes, father?”
Ned wonders if Rickon is possessed—namely by his older brother’s ghost. That can’t be, Ned thinks. Rickon is cold as a corpse whereas Robb’s obedience was always tinged with the sweetness of a puppy. Ned wonders if that’s the reason he and Cat had so many children. Robb was such a good child, and they thought they could use another like him. And so Sansa was born and she was a dear as a doe. With their two beautiful babies in mind, Ned and Cat tried for another and got Arya. Arya, the troublemaker. Arya, the bringer of tears. But the two Starks never faulted her for she livened up their family affairs with such zest that they had to try for a fourth child. After all, laughter kept one healthy, and so Bran was brought into this world. Bran was a mess of candy canes and honey drops and they thought ‘what the hell’ and had Rickon, who was every bit their little beast. They tried for another but their doctor insisted that five children were enough. Apparently, Catelyn’s womb took too many beatings the last few decades (Starks were easy to make but not so easy to push out)—and oh. Ned realizes that Rickon is staring at him. Again.

“You’re…” Ned clears his throat. “Not late.”

Rickon nods. “I called Dr. Lecter and asked if we could do the session an hour earlier.”

The response is adequate; actually, it’s impressive given the display of self-awareness Rickon has never possessed. This is puberty at its finest. All Starks reached their emotional peaks before their physical, and before long, Rickon will be sprouting body hair.

Ned, without the cue for a proper response, gives a grunt of approval. Inwardly, he is dying. His son is growing up. Getting dressed on his own, rescheduling appointments, reaching an emotional maturity that allows him to face his demons without resorting to kidnapping children and claiming them as his own while lying to his wife for fifteen years—but Ned’s mind digress. He should be proud.

He is proud, Ned assures himself.

They are putting on their seat belts when Rickon announces that he’s narrowed down his choices to Harrow and Wellington.

“What?”

“Wellington has a better sports team and it’s on a nature reserve. Harrow has a good team, too, and it’s near the city.”

“You don’t like the city,” Ned reminds him, a little too quickly. “And Harrow’s an all-boys school.”

Rickon makes a face—the first one he’s made outside of wry indifference. “So I’d be stuck with a bunch of posh tossers who’ve never spoken to a girl in their lives? Wellington, it is.”

Ned makes a left turn. “What is this about, Rickon?”

“Boarding school,” Rickon reminds him. “I’m still going, right?”

Ned grunts again for lack of better options. “We’ll have to talk about it.”

Honestly, Ned figured that Shireen’s disappearance would result in a win-win situation. If they found her, Stannis was going to uproot his family and take them far, far away from North Yorkshire as possible. Once that happened, there would be no stalking and without the stalking, there would be no need to send Rickon away to some prison disguised as an educational institution. Ned loved his time at Eton—truly, he did—but his children didn’t need walls to keep them safe, and they certainly didn’t need an absent father sending them letters every quarter because he was too busy mourning the loss of his wife, resulting in his oldest son becoming a criminal, his only daughter a mistress, and his
youngest son a grave robber. They needed strong parental influences who can patted their heads and
gave them kisses and cookies and told them they loved them.

“Things are awkward around here,” Rickon reminds him. “Stannis and his kids keep giving me dirty
looks. Even Jon’s avoiding me.”

Ned tightens his grip around the wheel. “I’ll talk to them,” he promises. “They know you’re
innocent. We know it. They shouldn’t be taking their frustration out on you.”

“Well, I still think it’s a good idea,” Rickon says. “If Shireen isn’t here, I don’t want to be either.”

The admission is as upsetting as septa whoring herself out for a church bake sale; it is even more
disheartening to hear it said out loud. Ned drives up a hill.

“Dad?”

“I’ll take care of it later,” Ned promises with the roughness of gravel.

Rickon sighs. “It’s not you, dad. It’s me. I have to leave and become a man.”

Ned receives flashback to the day Robb went on his first date without a chaperone. ‘I need to
become a man,’ he said. Or the day, Sansa foregone her training bra to purchase a lacey contraction
that would inevitably cling to his briefs in the laundry. ‘I’m a young woman, now.’ The worst was
when Arya needed him to pick up tampons instead of pads. He demanded to know what was so
wrong with pads—only to get a shake of her head. ‘I can’t wear a leotard with pads, dad.’

Lies, he thought.

“What’s the rush?” Ned grumbles; muffling himself to keep his hysterics in check. “You’re not even
a teenager. You should enjoy being a kid a little longer.”

“Shireen needs a man. When I see her again, I want her to know I’m not the same creepy kid who
stole her sweater and broke into her house. Puppies don’t get mates, dad. Wolves do.” Rickon
pauses. “If I ever see her again.”

“Don’t lose hope,” Ned tells him. There’s a corner section of his head that’s booking appointments at
a fertility clinic. Catelyn mention wanting more kids. And frankly, Dr. Luwin didn’t say it was
impossible—the fact that Catelyn’s cervix has taken more poundings than Dresden is an
exaggeration at worst. “I doubt they intend to kill her—given how much time they spent following
her shows that she’s a specific target.”

“Has there been a ransom note?” Rickon asks hopefully.

Ned shakes his head.

Rickon looks away. “Most kidnappings are done by relatives, usually as a result of a custody battle;
otherwise, the kidnapped victim is almost always killed within the first twenty-four hours.”

Ned can feel a headache come. Sometimes, he wishes his children aren’t as smart as they are.
“Shireen’s mother is in London. She hasn’t left her…estate in weeks.” Ned is careful not to use the
word cult. Stannis was ruthless during the divorce. He not only sued for full custody and adoption
rights for Davos but also tried to secure supervised visitations for Selyse. The woman was livid.
Selyse, for all her faults, loved her daughter. The problem was that Stannis did, too. And whereas
Selyse wanted her child to prosper under the Red God’s protection, Stannis—who was briefly
entranced with the fiery lord’s promises before getting his wits slapped into him by his then friend
now husband—refused to let his daughter step foot into the Red God’s threshold.

Ned turns to Rickon. “But the kidnap released a video the other day. She looked…well.” Not molested didn’t seem to be the best phrase, so he opts to keep it simple.

“What was she doing?”

This is the matter that confused the police. “Eating,” he explains. Resting. Reading. Everything a young woman would do on a lazy Sunday afternoon—minus the internet. The mystery has been driving the police mad. The video lasted twenty-four hours and was fairly recent. She didn’t look worse for wear, though the bags under her eyes indicated lack of rest. Fortunately, the insomnia seemed self-inflicted. The mysterious figure did not touch her once. The food he had given her looked delicious and well made. The books were completely appropriate if not a bit advanced for her age. The music in the background was classical. Sometimes instrumental, sometimes operatic. He brought her a change of clothes—again, age appropriate. Though strange, it was clear the video had no sexual undertones. He was observing Shireen, as one would observe a sea monkey or a fish. “But since they know she’s alive, they’re working harder than ever to find her. You just need to have hope.”

Rickon nods, though he remains upset. He grabs his phone and starts playing one of his strange video games. While Ned focuses on driving through the orchard of trees that covered Dr. Lecter’s estate, Rickon uses the opportunity to text Lyanna the news: Shireen is alive.

*and hes not a kiddie fucker,* Rickon texts for good measure.

***

Ned calls for his wife as soon as he passes the doorway. His arms are filled with groceries—at least three different brands of whip cream, butterscotch, and his wife’s five favorite Haagen-Dazs flavors. His cell phone is set to a playlist which contains every song his children had been conceived to, and a few more that have been known to get the juices flowing.

Sansa is no substitute for her mother, but she ends up being the one coming down the stairs to inform her father that her mother is out.

Ned hands his bags over to a maid. “Where did she go?”

“Grocery shopping.” Sansa makes a face at the bags in his hands. “I can call her—”

“No,” Ned tells her. Their aims were almost surely shooting in different directions. “I’ll wait until she gets back.” He can put on her favorite underwear to help set the mood. He considers lighting some candles, but then remembers what happened four anniversaries ago where the dogs wander in and almost burnt down the house.

Before he goes upstairs, Sansa asks if he took Rickon to therapy.

“Yes,” he answers.

“Did he seem…okay? This whole thing has been hitting him pretty hard.”

Oh kind, sweet Sansa. Ned walks over to kiss her on the forehead. “He’s going to be alright. This incident has been…eye-opening. I’ve never seen him so mature.”

Sansa raises an eyebrow. “He’s taking it well?”
“Better than expected,” Ned clarifies. “Rickon’s willing to heal, and that’s more improvement than I expect.” He squeezes her arm. “He’s even chosen a school to attend this fall.”

Sansa’s face twists. “So he didn’t ask about the progress on the case or anything about Shireen’s wellbeing?”

Ned feels like he’s walking into a trap. Then, he remembers that no, Rickon didn’t ask—Ned volunteered the information. “No.”

Sansa frowns, ever disbelieving. He wonders when she developed such a skeptical character. She used to hang on his every word.

The Stark girl eventually tells her father to enjoy his date. “You deserve a break.” She kisses him on the cheek before going upstairs. Her cousin catches her on her way to her bedroom, and though he’s taken the role of chief brooder on their estate, Sansa is grateful to see him out and about. She finds her relief misplaced when he opens his mouth.

“Sansa, I’m glad I ran into you.”

Sansa smiles. There's a tenseness added to the corners of her mouth. She suspicious and Jon knows this. “You ‘ran into me’ in front of my bedroom?” She leans her head against the door. “That’s a trap, Jon.”

Jon has the nerve to chuckle. “I guess I’m caught.”

Sansa nods.

“I need to ask you a favor.”

“There's a tenseness added to the corners of her mouth. She suspicious and Jon knows this. “You ‘ran into me’ in front of my bedroom?” She leans her head against the door. “That’s a trap, Jon.”

Jon has the nerve to chuckle. “I guess I’m caught.”

Sansa grimaces. “I see.” Damn it, Arya. “And what else did she say about him?”

“Nothing.” Jon dares to meet her gaze with a pair of puppy eyes. “Well, just that he’s, uh, well-connected. And maybe he could clear up what happened with Shireen.”

“Sandor’s reformed.” Sansa winces when she inadvertently reveals his name. “He doesn’t do that kind of work anymore,” she lies. Sandor does all sorts of jobs to make ends meet, and Sansa is not so naïve as to believe they’re all legit.

Whether Jon believes her or not, he continues with his request. “But he knows people. I was hoping he could point me in the right direction, you know? Someone who’s more knowledgeable about this kind of stuff. A professional.”

Sansa takes a moment to contemplate her choices. The request is reasonable and moreover, doable, but Sansa is reluctantly to pave the road for which Jon (and by association, Robb) can endanger themselves. Jon is right—this is done by a professional. Sandor almost said as much when Sansa told him about the case. This business with Shireen will reopen some of Sandor’s old wounds and Sansa doesn’t need him getting acquainted with his former mates. There’s a reason some of his friends were cut off while others weren’t.
At the same time, however, this gives Sansa an opportunity she hasn’t gotten in a while. Besides, she loves it when Sandor gets a little too aggressive, wrought with worry and so easily succumbed to his territorial instincts.

“I’ll ask him,” Sansa agrees. “But I’ll need a favor from you.”

“One favor?”

“One big one or a few small ones, we can discuss the details later.”

Jon doesn’t like the way his hair stands on his back, so asks: “What are they?”

“You’ll see,” she says, smiling like she’s a queen who’s won a kingdom by murdering her husband. Her smile reminds Jon of Arya, and he wonders if the sisters weren’t more alike than they claimed to be.

***

“My father is worried about me,” Rickon tells Hannibal. The man places a ham and cheese panini on the table and two cups of orange-hibiscus tea. The pitcher was fresh, not a drop of precipitation on the glass.

“I assume your friend’s disappearance must have been difficult for you. If you have been displaying peculiar behavior, he is obliged to worry,” Hannibal informs him. “He would have failed you otherwise.”

“My father doesn’t fail at anything.” Rickon bites his sandwich.

“All parents fail their children. It’s not a choice.” Hannibal pours him a cup and hands it to Rickon.

“Thanks.” Rickon takes a deep gulp. “Do you have kids, Dr. Lecter?”

“This isn’t about me, Rickon. I told you that.”

“Yeah, but do you? I mean, isn’t it your job to get me to open up to you? I’d be more willing if I knew more about you.”

Dr. Lecter’s lips twitch, which means he wants to smile but cannot—he needs to remain professional, needs to be the figure of authority, of control. Ironically, Dr. Lecter reminds him of his father more than anyone at this moment.

“I do not have any children,” Dr. Lecter answers. “I almost did, once. And accurately enough, I failed her.”

“What happened?”

“It does not matter,” Hannibal says. “The past shall remain the past, and what grows on top of the burial is the present and if fortunate, the future. I did not want a child, then; I wanted Will, and he wanted to be a father. I used her as a boon for Will, and in the end, we all suffered for it: Will, me, and the girl.” Hannibal sipped his beverage. “She is gone now.”

“You don’t think about her?”

“No.” Hannibal remains honest. “Though I suppose my conscious efforts could only go so far. I’ve considered adopting as of late. A service to my relationship with Will. Fatherhood becomes him.”
“Really?” Rickon is halfway through his sandwich.

“Yes; it is one of the reasons I’ve increased the number of youths in my care. A journey of self to recapture the paternal love that left me as a child.”

Rickon almost snorts at his poetic interpretation. “And what did you realize?”

“That as a father, there is no greater joy than the ecstasy of watching one’s child surpass us.” Hannibal tilts his head, and Rickon can see that he’s observing him. “I learned that watching you. I wish to see you succeed, Rickon. I believe your triumphs shall be the last sign I need to start a family with Will.”

The whole conversation is unsettling, he becomes so disconcerted that he stops chewing mid-way and settles for long, slow bites to distract himself from the tension. When Hannibal leaves his seat to walk to his record player—an antique device that aged arguably well—things get even weirder. Rickon frowns when he hears the song.

“This is from that TV show, A Song of Fire and Ice.”

Hannibal hums. “Is it? I received it as a gift. I am not surprised—the composer often does commercial work, a pity, as his personal symphonies are more to my preference. Have you heard of him? Rhaegar Targaryen?”

“Yeah, of course, but.” Rickon squints at Hannibal suspiciously. He contemplates what he can say, without sounding like a lunatic, and after some consideration, comes to the conclusion that he may be projecting. “It’s uh, one of Shireen’s favorite songs. I think this one is ‘The Onion Knight’s Bet,’ or something like that.”

“How perceptive,” Hannibal praises. “You have a good ear, even for music outside of your preferences.”

“My parents used to take me to a lot of concerts. They still do. I used to complain before they started getting smarter about my punishments.” Ned and Catelyn were disciplinarians in their own rights and never gave up finding the “perfect” punishment to suit each of their children. Most of the time, Robb was sentenced to a long-winded lecture of the disappointment and potential disasters his actions brought, leaving him confined to his room for a day, writing apology notes and crying over his missed opportunities. On the other hand, spanking worked wonders with Sansa; the girl usually started bawling after the first strike. Bran was impossible with force, getting teary-eyed after being told to bend over, so they settled for lost privileges. Legend has it, Arya is more difficult than Rickon. They tried everything with her—positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, negative punishment, every psychological trick, tried and failed. Rickon is the odd man out—he’s ignored. And if there is one thing the youngest child is not used to, it’s being treated like he’s invisible. He does not know where all his abandonment issues come from, another life and all that nonsense, but they’re there.

“I still don’t like it that much,” Rickon tells him.

“It’ll grow on you,” Hannibal says instead. “When you love someone, the smallest gesture that reminds you of them will make you happy.”

“If you say so.”

Like always, if you throw Hannibal a bone, he takes the whole skeleton. “Rickon, from my experience, it is best to act with passion, for only infatuation is taken with triviality. And if they
refuse your advances, be unwavering. If they are overwrought with loathing, force them into love. A stone will turn to sand if beaten hard enough.” He walks only to Rickon and places a firm hand on his shoulder. “You must be fearless, Rickon, do not be afraid to be hated, for hatred is not the end of a great love. It is merely a new beginning.”

“Dr. Lecter…”

“Shireen is a child,” Hannibal tells him with great resolve. “Her emotions are primitive. As she grows older, she will recognize the soul in your struggles, and find your efforts endearing. Her stone heart will crumble; I swear on this.”

Despite his eccentricities, Rickon is moved by Dr. Lecter’s speech. “Thanks, Dr. Lecter. I feel like you’re the only one who believes we can be together.”

Dr. Lecter nods. “I, too, have felt the wrenches of unrequited love. But with the effort I encourage you to take, I gained his heart.”

Rickon smiles ruefully. “Did Will hate you as much as Shireen hates me?”

“I cannot quantify emotion, but I believe their avarice was more or less the same.” One could say more, but Hannibal figures he keeps that to himself.

At last, Rickon sighs. “That’s nice, but it doesn’t change the fact that Shireen is gone. The police have no clue where she is, only that she’s alive. I told you about the video.”

“Ah yes, the video.” Hannibal learned Rickon received word of it at the beginning of his session. He wanted to send it personally to the Starks but felt that would lead the police too closely on his trail. “I am glad it has brought you comfort.”

“Yeah. I told you that me and Lyanna are trying to find her, but we have no clue where to start. I mean, Lyanna looked through her cell phone…”

“Yes, that is a valuable clue,” Hannibal urges.

“But I feel like I’m missing something.” Rickon frowns. “I know she’s still in the county—I mean, why send the video if she wasn’t? Why encourage the police to keep looking if the kidnapper didn’t want her to be found?”

“Very good, Rickon.”

“It’s like he’s playing a game.”

“Yes, Rickon. What kind of game is he playing? Is he testing the police? Or is he after someone else?” Hannibal pushes. “A protégé, perhaps…” He mumbles under his breath.

Rickon does not catch the last part. “I can’t explain it, but she feels so close. Like she’s right under my nose…”

Hannibal stands up immediately. “Forgive me, Rickon. I believe I’ve forgotten something in my desk. Would you mind waiting a minute?”

Rickon nods without looking. While Hannibal is scrummaging through his papers, he swipes all his drawings onto the ground with a dramatic, table-flipping level force, causing them to fly in the air and land all over the room. A few rests at Rickon’s feet.
“Oh, it seems, I accidentally knocked them all over the room.”

The youngest Stark picks one up.

“What are these?”

“Oh, drawings from my surgical years.”

“You’re really good.” Rickon peers at the precision of the ligaments. “My brother would love these.”

“You are too kind.” Hannibal walks over. “There is an exhibit at the museum you can visit if you’d like to see more. I believe they’re close, however…”

“Yeah, that’s where Shireen was…” Rickon stops midway in his sentence. A lightning bulb turns on in his brain and stands up. “Dr. Lecter, I know this is an unorthodox request but can I—”

“Yes.”

Rickon is taken back.

“I did not mean to interrupt you. My apologies.”

Rickon thinks nothing of it. “I need to end this session early. Do you mean keeping this between us? I know you technically can’t, cause I’m a minor and all—”

“If it is absolutely necessary, I can make this exception,” Hannibal answers. “Do you have somewhere you need to be?”

Rickon nods ferociously. “The museum—I mean, crap!” Rickon waits for Hannibal to scold him or stop him. But unlike most conscientious adults, Hannibal gets up and offers him a ride there.

“That sounds like a marvelous idea. We can continue our session there.”

“Really?” Rickon is taken back.

“Most children should be more accumulated to the sciences. Perhaps, we’ll make a doctor out of you yet.”

The Stark boy goes against his better instincts to question and goes to his second instinct—not looking a gift horse in the mouth. “Thanks, Dr. Lecter.”

“My pleasure,” Dr. Lecter answers. “I have to grab my coat. I believe I left it in the basement.” He should feed Shireen before he goes out—if Will finds out Hannibal has held another girl hostage against her will, he will have a fit. Good thing, he’s been busy with the new dog Hannibal bought him.

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The bar Sandor recommends is a seedy location on the southmost part of town. He frequents there often, mostly for work, and tells Sansa that there are various bodies that deal in information. Robb spent over an hour trying on outfits, claiming that he doesn’t want to look too muggable. He picks through leather jackets by Alexander Wang and some hole-filled monstrosity priced in the hundreds —gifts, he insisted, because Sansa would never forgive him if he bought something new without consulting her. Eventually, Sansa ends the fashion show by telling him they don’t need to look at him; they can smell his money.
“We should get going. Sandor doesn’t know I’m going with you guys, and if he shows up when I’m there, well…” Sansa grimaces. She hates getting Sandor upset. When Sandor and her fight, it usually results in Sandor taking a job outside the city, or worse, the country for an extended period. He comes back from bruises and broken bones, which isn’t as unfortunate as it sounds given that she gets to wear the uniform she likes when playing nurse. The thing that kills her is the distance and his sulkiness and how he goes around shirtless but refuses to touch her.

Nonetheless, Sansa’s been restless as of late. And while she’s sure Jon can take care of himself, she’s not as confident about her older brother. Robb is a cunning little wolf, specifically in regards to business and technology, but he’s honorable to a fault, and his book smarts won’t clash well on the streets. So on her and Jon’s insistence, they take their least expensive car and drive off into the estates.

“The kid we’re after belongs to the ‘Little Birds.’ They’re a gang that is run by ‘The Spider’ who’s real name is—”

“Why are they called ‘Little Birds’ if their main guy is called ‘Spider?’” Robb asks, possibly petulant because they prevented him from wearing a suit.

Sansa rolls her eyes. “I’m not exactly familiar with the systematic approaches to name bestowment in a gang.” She turns back to Jon. “But according to Sandor, they know everything. It’s their specialty; informant work and identity trades. Very high-end and discreet.”

“If they’re so discreet, how do you know about them?” Robb asks.


“I just want to make sure I’m getting my money’s worth.” He brings out his wallet.

Sansa swipes it out of his hand. “Put that away! They see your Gucci, and half the guys here will be bending you over for a chance at your wallet. And then take your ass as a warning.”

“Okay, no one is taking Robb’s ass,” Jon interrupts. “And you need to calm down.”

“Stop acting like you’re an expert on this because you’re dating a criminal. I mean, you’re wearing a fake tattoo,” Robb snaps. He references the masterpiece on her waist and lower back; it portrays a large hound entangled in the jaws of a red wolf. The can’t see the whole thing, as it went all the way to her butt and is only visible because of her crop tops.

“It’s not fa—” Sansa stops herself. She quickly parks the car. “Anyways…”

“Wait, what was that pause?”

Robb stares at her.

Sansa turns around. “Nothing,” she denies. “Now, we should come up with a plan. I say—”

“When did you get that?”

“Today, because it’s a fake—”

“Is this why you quit the swim team?”

“No, I quit the swim team because apparently having hickies on your breasts sets a bad example for the underclassmen.” Sansa scowls. “And track is better for the legs, anyways.”
“And why do you need nice legs?” Robb asks, not even bothering to keep an air of reasonability.

“Because Sandor likes the inside of my thighs,” Sansa hisses with an eyeroll.

“Sansa Stark—”

On any other occasion, Robb using his dad voice—and subsequently, Ned’s voice, which brings to light a whole new set of daddy issues for Jon, would be appreciated. For now, he has other things to worry about.

“How about we find Shireen first and lecture Sansa for doing the same thing you do with me later?” Jon asks, bringing them back to the present.

The two eldest Starks have the decency to look ashamed. They nod meekly at their scolding and get out of the car. Sansa advises them not to draw any attention or seek it.

“Don’t make any eye contact. They agreed to give me a private room in the back, so we’re to head straight there,” she emphasizes.

“That’s rather convenient,” Robb notes.

Sansa smiles as she walks into the bar. “Perks of being Sandor’s woman,” she brags, taking great pleasure in watching Robb bristle like a cat. Jon shakes his head at them. From what Arya told him, Sansa’s been a terror since Robb left for university. As the second eldest Stark child, she’s the one in charge of their estate whenever the parents went out. Independence becomes her, but at the same time, it pushes her to butt heads with Robb for dominance.

They trio do as instructed; they go straight to the back where a bald man in a purple suit awaits them. He is a flamboyant creature compared to the rest of the otherwise sketchy patrons of the bar, and judging by his pimp jewelry, of high means. He smiles at Sansa pleasantly.

“Hello, Miss Sansa.”

Jon watches Sansa take a step back. “Oh. Hey, Mr. Varys. I…I thought we were meeting one of your…”

“Little birds? Ah, yes that was the original plan,” Varys agrees. “But when I heard it was a request of not one but two Starks, well, I figured I lend a hand to you personally. Who knows? Maybe, Mr. Stark here will be in need of my services in the future.” Varys sips his tea. It’s odd he even has a cup; given they are in a bar in the middle of the estates. “I mean, just because your father has refused my advances does not mean his heir shares the same inclinations.”

Sansa swallows. She glances over at Robb, who catches her nervous gaze. Like any big brother, he takes the initiative to protect her by stepping forward.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Varys.” Robb takes a seat across from the man. “Though I might have to disappoint you by saying my father and I have a lot in common, especially in how we do business.”

“Yet here you are,” Varys almost sings. “Every action has a first. Our meeting tonight may be the last or a beginning.”

Robb smiles, tight but polite given the circumstances. “I guess that’s for time to tell.”

“That is true,” Varys agrees. “But patience, Mr. Stark, is something I have an abundance of.”
Robb clears his throat. He curses Sansa for talking him out of his suit; he feels safer doing business in tailored Prada than he does in jeans.

Jon steps forward. “We heard you might have information for us about the recent kidnapping.”

“Oh.” Varys shakes his head in disappointment. “Yes, such a shame for Miss Baratheon. As if her sufferings were not enough to fill an ocean, a storm had to past.” He smiles at Jon. “Tell me. How can I be of service?”

Robb speaks before Sansa gets the chance. His younger sister glares. “We are looking for a lead on who could have taken her. The kidnapper hasn’t gone forward with a motive.”

“No, I don’t think he would.” Varys brings out his briefcase, and it is a purple crocodile skin monstrosity that must have cost a lot, including the man’s dignity. “I believe I have just what you need.”

Jon takes a step forward, but his two wolf cousins block him.

“And how much would it cost us?” Robb asks.

Varys offers them a hum of contemplation. “Well, I am in no great need of funds. I am willing to perform an act of goodwill to cement a newfound alliance…”

“There will be no alliances,” Robb denies just as Jon says, “Fine.”

The two of them stare at each other. Jon straightens his back to declare he is not backing down, not for Shireen and certainly not to Robb.

Robb drags him to the side, much to his displeasure.

“Don’t manhandle me!” Jon snaps.

“We can’t be too hasty,” Robb counters. “We don’t know anything about him. Every word out of his mouth might as well be a lie; we can’t trust him.”

“If he has the information we need, it doesn’t matter. And if he doesn’t, then we haven’t lost anything. I rather take the risk and save a life, then not, and say I didn’t try everything.”

Robb raises his defenses. “Jon, we can’t be making deals with the devil just because we’re in hell.”

“That’s exactly when we need to grab a chair at his table.”

To avoid an argument, Sansa intervenes.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I’m pretty sure your clients won’t appreciate you being so helpful.” Her eyes narrow. “But you’re not afraid. Why?”

Varys’ voice is soft, and yet there’s an edge to his smile that puts all of them on their toes. “There are plenty of favors I can call when I am in need of protection. And I’d like to be of assistance to people I predict will have great influence one day.”

“You’re too kind.” Robb responds. “But my sister is right.” He ignores Jon’s glare. “Something’s wrong. Even with your…protection, you’re still putting an arrow on your back. Why take the risk for someone you don’t know?”

“I wouldn’t say we were strangers.” He looks at all three of them. “I know quite a good deal about
you; my little birds are often nested at those parties you frequent,” he says as he stares at Robb. “On the streets of those festering buildings where criminals sleep,” he claims as he runs his eyes over Sansa. “And at the galleries of free and unapologetic, where the rich can spill their coins onto their favorite photographs.” His eyes settle on Jon. “You are stunning, aren’t you?”

“Oh fuck no,” Robb growls. He is halfway towards Varys, ready to grab him by his collar and smack him up the head with his obnoxious suitcase when Varys continues his compliment.

“I meant that only as an appreciation of his aesthetic. Trust me; I do not hold an inclination for the sexes.” Varys peers past Robb and again, straight to Jon. “I am merely admiring Rhaegar Targaryen’s work.”

Jon’s backs off.

“Yes, my little birds have kept me truly informed,” Varys answers. “Especially on the Targaryen; they have me on what you may call a retainer,” he says with an insufferable sense of smugness. “Now you know something of me. We’re all equals here. There’s nothing to be afraid of anymore.”

“We’re not equals,” Sansa disagrees. To everyone’s surprise, she takes a seat in front of Varys. “You’re calm. Sandor always told me not to trust men who are too calm. Hard to tell what they’re thinking.”

“Your Sandor is smarter than anyone gives him credit for,” Varys notes. He folds his hands on the table. “First,” Varys tells the two males. “You two should have a seat.”

The two young men are reluctant but eventually, relent. Each takes a seat beside each other, with Robb in the middle.

“Quite recently, I was hired to make two new identities. The work was expected to be thorough, passports, certifications for work, highly specific licenses—the works. I did a rush order, which I normally don’t do except it was for one of my regulars. A real arms twister.” Varys sighs dramatically. “I am but a victim to his charms.”

“So that’s it.” Sansa ignores his earlier statements, focusing on the sole truths that matter. She narrows her eyes when she figures out the mystery. “He’s leaving. You know he has an escape plan, so it doesn’t matter to you whether he finds out or not.”

“No,” Jon disagrees, much to everyone’s surprise. “It’s not just that. There’s something else.” Jon takes a moment to contemplate the situation before he settles onto a strange conclusion. “Your client…he made a new identity because he knows he’s leaving. Even a rush order takes a lot of time, so he knew he was going. And if he’s leaving soon, then Shireen is…” Jon’s eyes widen. “She’s finished. We either find her in time, or she’s gone.”

Varys smiles. “My, you are a clever boy, aren’t you?”

Sansa, ever cautious, is the first to react to the news. “How do we know it’s the same person?”

“I don’t—not really,” Varys admits, though there’s a twinkle in his eye that says otherwise. “This client recently came to me looking to purchase a type of anesthesia that’s illegal in this country. A rather rare brand, and for good reasons. Similar to chloroform; portable with fewer side effects, but often a poison used for less…savory acts.”

Robb eyes narrow. “Like a kidnapping.”

“Or other things,” Sansa mutters, disgusted. “How do we find him?”
“That’s where I can help,” Varys agrees. “I don’t know his real name, or anything personal to be honest. Just enough I can get him supplies. However, I believe I know a way for you to find him.”

“What is it?” Jon asks.

Varys leans in, cautious of eavesdroppers. “For one of our meetings, the man had to take a call. Rare of him, to be so careless, but good for you. While he was out, one of my birds heard the contents on his side. Contents that can be traced to his identity.”

“And you’re so eager to share?”

“Of course,” Varys teases dramatically and with a gasp. “The information I am willing to give you about the call is free for your ears to feast.”

“What do you want?”

“It’s not a negotiation,” Varys declares. “The information is yours if you wish. And if it shall lead to possible favors in the future, then I would be most pleased.”

From free to favors; Jon grimaces at how their conversation wavers. Sansa is still on the rocking boat, and Robb is reluctant. Jon hates using his sexuality, but he needs this. He needs to find Shireen —so he does his lover dirty when he grabs the man’s arm and squeezes.

“Please,” he begs Robb. "I need you."

Robb frowns. “Jon, this is extremely dangerous.”

“So is this man,” Jon insists. “If he is right, we may never find Shireen after he flees the country. What if he takes her with him? What if he kills her?”

The moral dilemma weighs on him; Robb tightens his fists and bites his lip. He remembers Jon’s misery the past few days, and after remembering his boyfriend’s crying, he turns to Varys. “What did he say?” Robb asks.

Jon sighs in relief.

Varys gives the room a once-over. “This was in early December of last year. He was on the phone with his partner, romantic perhaps? Regardless, they were about to see a show together—the Nutcracker. He mentioned attending the show on the 13th and said he was going to see a particular dancer he wanted to sponsor.”

Sansa glares. “A play? That’s all you can give us?”

“I’m sure you’ll make great use of it. You Starks are resilient beings after all.”

Sansa gets up from her seat. “I knew I should have called Littlefinger.”

For the first time since they’ve met him, Varys seems to bristle. “I am sure that ghoulish creature would have been quite helpful,” he agrees. “He’s always wanted to add a Tully to his collection.”

Sansa turns red in offense. She is stopped from responding by Jon, who instead thanks Varys for his help.

“We’ll remember this,” Jon promises. “Thank you.”

Varys smiles at him. “Let’s hope you’ve gotten more foresight than your companions.”
The three of them walk out of the bar. As soon as the night air hits them, Sansa breaks out her cell phone. “That’s it,” she mutters. “I’m calling Sandor, and we’re going to break into Littlefinger’s house and get all the information we need. Let’s see him hit on me with Sandor’s gun against his head—”

“The gods, Sansa!” Robb swears. “Who the fuck are you dating?”

“We don’t need to go that far,” Jon tells her. “Let’s make do with what we have.”

“We have nothing,” Sansa denies. She pauses and stares at Jon strangely. “We have nothing, right?”

“Varys says the man went to see the Nutcracker in December.” Jon closes his eyes to think.

“It’s Christmas. The Nutcracker plays everywhere. Even Arya had a—” Sansa pauses. She turns to Robb, who starts blinking furiously in realization. The moment transfers over to her, who is both relieved and irritated that she got the clue after her older brother. “Damn.”

“He was looking for dancers to sponsor,” Jon asks. “Arya told me that studios like hers keep records of their sponsors.”

Sansa takes a deep breath. Ever the voice of reason, she reminds them that there’s no guarantee it was Arya’s performance he went to.

“Arya’s performance was on December 13th,” Robb notes. He’s looking at his cell phone, probably rushing through his planner. “She had it at the Bluehaven Theatre—it’s the biggest one in the area. If he’s masquerading as a high-society gentleman, he’s going to attend the best.”

The clues add up to a point where Sansa has no choice but to agree. She rushes alongside them to the car. “Arya should still be at practice. If we go now, we can gain access to their files.” Unable to wait, Jon steps on the gas. He knows he’s on the right trail and isn’t stopping until he hits gold.

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When Rickon suggests he wants a friend to accompany him to the museum, he is surprised Hannibal is so accommodating. The doctor spares no complaint when he picks Lyanna up at her house, even commenting how impressed he is that such young members of society have decided to join together in their grief instead of shutting their souls inside.

He drops them off at the entrance and tells them he will be back after he completes an errand. “It will take an hour, two at most. I trust you can work through your trauma in a healthy manner.”

The two agree immediately, grateful to be left alone. Once he drives away, they dash into the body exhibit, which is currently closed off from the public. They do not hesitate to sneak underneath the yellow tape but are taken back when they hear a familiar voice stopping them.

“What do you think you’re doing here?”

Lyanna and Rickon spin around in a whirlwind of edge and tension. Their eyes widen when they see Jojen and Bran together.

Lyanna, a horrible liar but quick as a cricket, shouts that they are confronting their fears. “Rickon’s doctor said it was a good idea,” she justifies.

“What are you doing here?” Rickon asks suspiciously.
Bran looks like he’s about to make an excuse, but Jojen beat him to it. “We’re trying to investigate her disappearance.”

Ah, the honest route doesn’t sound as bad when it comes from their mouths. It almost seems heroic.

Damn, Rickon thinks. He could have sounded like a hero.

“Who?” Lyanna repeats. “I doubt you care about her. She accused you of murder.”

“You both accused me of murder,” Jojen corrects. “Besides, I can’t hold a grudge against her now. Not when her disappearance is causing Bran so much strife.”

Rickon narrows his eyes. “So the traitor has some guilt?” He asks bitterly.

Bran glares. “I didn’t betray you, Rickon.”

“You went on a date with Shireen! Whatever happens to blood before beauties?”

“Blood before beauties?” Lyanna asks with a raised eyebrow.

“I’m not about to call my future wife a hoe,” Rickon explains.

“Rickon, Shireen doesn’t like you,” Jojen declares dryly, much to Rickon’s exaggerated horror. “And besides Bran went on a date with me, not Shireen.”

“It was a double date,” Rickon snaps. “As in, two dates for the price of one. He was with you, and he was also with Shireen.”

“I was there, too,” Lyanna pipes up.

“You don’t count.”

Lyanna is about to feel offended when the sound of footsteps interrupts her thoughts. “Hide!” She whispers.

The four of them dive behind the nearest display. The security guard only makes a passing glance to the exhibit before moving on. When he leaves, Lyanna breathes easily, as does Rickon. The only ones who don’t catch their breath are Jojen and Bran, who used their camouflage attempt to start a snogging session. Bran’s wheelchair is pressed against the wall, and Jojen is pressed against Bran.

Rickon bristles. “Get off him!” Angry or not, Bran is his brother, and he is not about to watch him get molested by a known pervert—and it is known, Rickon realizes, for Jojen was his friend once. Perverts of a feather flock together.

Jojen grins sheepishly while Bran looks utterly besotted. He quickly gains enough sense to look embarrassed, before claiming the ground for reason.

“Okay, let’s just put our arguments aside—however ridiculous,” Bran sends Rickon an accusatory look while Rickon turns away and grumbles. “And work together. We all want to find Shireen.”

“Some more than others,” Rickon mutters.

Lyanna takes the initiative and whacks him upside his head. She turns to the boys and reveals her cell phone. “Before handing over Shireen’s cell phone, I took screenshots of her whereabouts from the last few days.” Find My iPhone is a universal treasure.
“Why?” Bran asks.

“Because kidnappers of a certain caliber follow their victims,” Jojen explains as he reaches out for the phone. “And this one was certainly skilled. He targeted Shireen and knew she was coming to the museum. Made sure he wouldn’t get caught by the cameras.” Jojen flips through the pictures. He frowns as he goes through them.

“So if we go to the same places she went, we might meet someone who saw her kidnapper?” Bran asks hopefully.

“Yes,” Lyanna agrees.

Jojen hands the phone back to Lyanna. “The coppers here aren’t stupid. They probably covered those locations already. We’d be wasting time going back there.”

“It’s still worth a shot,” Rickon protests. “We might find something they didn’t.”

“Or we could be killing time while Shireen rots.” Jojen grabs Bran’s handles and moves him to the back of the room. “Let’s check out the scene again. You have a good eye, Bran. Maybe you’ll notice something they didn’t.”

“We’re retrace her steps,” Rickon tells him; his voice is more firm and sure than adults twice his age. “This isn’t up for debate.”

Lyanna does not bother to look at Rickon before she nods in agreement. “We might be over our heads, but we have a shot we’re going to take it. You can do whatever you want, but we’re going.”

Jojen opens his mouth, only to pushed into silence when Bran pulls at his sleeve.

“I want to go with them,” Bran declares. “I have a good feeling about this, Jojen. I think they’re right.”

Jojen frowns. Finally, he relents. “Okay, fine.” He grabs his cell phone. “But let’s do another surveillance of the museum. I have to call work to cancel if we’re going to be driving around the city.”

Bran’s resolve wavers. “You don’t have to miss work for this.”

Jojen shakes his head. He kisses Bran on the forehead. “You’re more important than those old women.” He walks into the hall to let the rest of them do their investigation. Meanwhile, he dials a number he wishes wasn’t becoming as familiar as it is.

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“Who’s this?”

“It’s Jojen Reed,” Jojen answers. “Cousin of—”

“Peter Pan.” Jojen can hear the smugness form on the other man’s face. The smile is no doubt as ugly as he remembered. “To what do I owe the honors?”

“I’m here with the Starks and their friend. They’re investigating into Shireen Baratheon’s disappearance.”

Ramsay scoffs. “So? What does that have to do with me?”
“The friend of the youngest one, she got her hands on the girl’s phone. Sees every place she’s been in the last few days. They want to check out each place and find suspects.”

There’s a pause.

“I don’t attend kid parties,” Ramsay replies. “Again, why the fuck should I care?” This time, there’s an edge to his voice. He’s no longer confident about his lack of involvement, and Jojen latches onto that fear.

“Because you were at one of the parties she was at. A gallery opening. If someone saw us together, it could cause problems for both of us.”

Ramsay recalls the only opening he went to and groans. Roose dragged him to that event ages ago, hoping to impress some investors and also use Ramsay’s violent history as leverage for a deal. A true pain in the ass.

“You were a waiter,” Ramsay reminds dryly. “I’ll just tell them that I was giving you my drink order.”

“I have on good authority that we might be suspects in this case. In my experience, and I predict yours as well, the police will see what they want to see. They will find out about us talking. They will find about the drugs.” Jojen takes a moment to consider his next move. If he reveals his purpose for being scared, he will be putting in a precarious situation—a position that leaves him vulnerable. But if he doesn’t offer leverage, Ramsay will have no problems hanging up the phone and offing him on the side as a consequence.

Ramsay snorts. “I’m not worried about a drug charge.”

Jojen is, and he is forced to admit it. “I wasn’t sanctioned by Peter.”

“Oh,” Ramsey lets out a low chuckle. “So that’s what you’re afraid of. You don’t want Peter to find out you’ve been selling behind his back.”

“I just wanted to get rid of my stash,” Jojen defends. "I wasn't selling behind his back." He resolved to change for Bran, and fuck was he determined to keep it. “The party was a recommendation. Rich people love their highs, so I figured it was a good opportunity.”

“So now you need me to bail you out from your big, bad cousin?” Ramsay mocks. “In any case, I had a legitimate reason to be there. And besides, you’re the one who dressed up in disguise and snuck into a party.”

Jojen rolls his eyes. “I didn’t sneak in. My doctor got me the job there. The point is, we need to make sure our stories are straight in case this gets out into our inner circles…”

Ramsay is about to taunt him on the matter when something odd catches his ear. “Your doctor got you the job?”

Jojen stops midway through his sentence. “What?”

“You said your doctor got you the job?”

“Yeah,” Jojen answers. He picks up on the older boy’s tone and is immediately suspicious. “Why?”

“Given your criminal history, I’m going to take a wild guess and assume you are talking about Dr. Lecter.”
Jojen pauses. “Do you know him?”

Well, fuck him with a goat’s horn. Ramsay closes his eyes in frustration. “I’ll make sure nothing leads to us. In the meantime, keep them away from that gallery until I say so. I need to take care of something.”

Ramsay hangs up before Jojen can get a word in.

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Ramsay wonders if Theon’s idiocy is contagious, for he is sure there must have been a reason for him not connecting the dots earlier. Instead, he walks in on Theon’s bath. Wordlessly, he takes off his clothes and fights off a yellow smile when Theon drapes his body over the side in anticipation for his arrival in the tub. The boy is grinning, genuinely happy for his companionship. It makes Ramsay warmer than he’s ever been, and he wants nothing more than to flay his skin off to get back the chill.

When he enters the tub, some of the water spills out and Theon giggles.

“What took you so long?”

Theon swims so that he’s on top of Ramsay’s lap. The Bolton leans against the ceramic and lets Theon continue his ministrations while he runs kisses down his neck.

“I was thinking.”

Theon kisses his neck. “About what?”

“I think a karmic punishment is in order.”

Theon hums. He reaches down to massage Ramsay’s cock. “For who?”

For the longest time, Ramsay says nothing. He just stares at Theon. He runs his hand through the boy’s beach waves and moves down to trace the freckles on his golden skin. Without a doubt, Theon is the most beautiful of his partners. The thought of another man tasting him, pushing his taut, fourteen-year-old body onto the ground and prying his body open—Ramsay’s body, now that ownership has been official—makes him angry enough to kill.

Ramsay tightens his grip on Theon’s arm. The boy winces.

“I was thinking you needed to get punished for reconciling with the Starks without my permission,” Ramsay says lazily. “And also for not telling me.” He releases a harsh slap against Theon’s bottom. Theon cries out hopelessly. The sound is music to Ramsay’s ears.

Ramsay decides a retirement party is in order. One final kill for the Bloodhound Killer. Euron Greyjoy needs to pay for what he did to Ramsay, and he needs to pay with his life.

***

Hannibal is quite proud of himself when he drops Rickon off at the museum. He has not only renewed Rickon’s sense of purpose in life, but he’s set forth an incredible challenge that will evolve Rickon as a person. He thinks of his deeds as he wanders into the basement for a chance to check on his guest.

Hannibal never visits Shireen without his costume, but the girl, though initially frightened, is calm and respectful when he appears. This isn’t her first altercation with a kidnapper, it seems, and she
knows better than to respond recklessly.

Never mind it if she did. Her behavior serves of the no preliminary condition for today’s favor. Hannibal brings her a phone. Using his hands, he displays several messages. The first thing that goes up is a finger.

Shireen glances at the phone. “One?” She pauses. “One call?”

Hannibal hands her the phone. He makes a sign for three and zero.

Shireen sighs. “I assume I’m not getting a thirty-minute phone call. So…thirty seconds?”

Hannibal nods.

Shireen stares at him. “You…want someone to find me, don’t you?”

Hannibal says nothing.

“So this might be my only shot to give someone a clue as to where I am.”

Hannibal wants to smile. He settles for doing so behind his mask.

Shireen thinks about her options and starts to dial the number.

Chapter End Notes

Once this story is finished, it will be ripe for re-edits. There's quite a great deal I would love to tweak, things I want to change, and of course, bonus scenes (which include Brandon Stark and Daenerys Targaryen--both of whom were supposed to appear but didn't) I want to edit. At the moment, doing so would mess up the storyline so I want to avoid that. Runs in the Family will end at 69 chapters even if it kills me.

On a side note, some of you may have noticed that it would have been impossible for Rickon to attend Wellington College because the real-life school only takes in teenagers. I decided to wave my hand on the matter. Artistic denial and whatnot.
Arya is an hour into her rehearsal when Jaqen decides that the song they’ve been dancing to for the last fucking three days is unsuitable for her pas de deux. She waits for his suggestion and is rewarded with the transformation from Lana Del Rey’s Off to the Races, a message of blind devotion change, to the vengeful melody of In My Feelings. The latest sponsor is a fan of the smooth vocalists and wants an entire performance influenced by the American’s work. Arya does not mind the request; she enjoys the singer well enough—hells, she’s even choreographed a solo to Fucked My Way Up to the Top—but it still begs the question as to why they are so accommodating.

“A girl asks too many questions,” Jaqen answers. “Since the dance has transformed its theme, we must revisit each move with a keen eye and see what can be kept and discarded. Again.”

“I have a name.”

“A man is aware,” Jaqen says easily. “Will the girl get into position?”

Arya does as told, but pouts the entire way. “Eventually, you’re going to have to stop calling me ‘girl.’”

Another member of the Faceless Men, and Arya’s current dance partner laughs before telling Arya not to worry about it. “He always does this with the new members. He called me ‘Roberto’ for an entire year before he learned my name.”

“Roberto?”

“It’s the character I danced in my first performance. Just wait. Once you’re finally used to it, that’s when he starts using ‘Arya.’”

Arya shakes her head. “Fine.” She asks him again, “So why are we doing this again?”

“Dance is as much a business as it is an art. If we wish to make our offerings through performance, we must acquire funds. A woman made an offer worth her request, and so, we shall obey. Now, redo the first sequence but slower.”

“If I go any slower, we’ll be fucking.”

“Then fuck.”

Her partner blushes. Arya’s lips quirk, but that’s all she gives Jaqen, because she refuses to let the prick think he can make her smile. Arya starts the dance again, and when her partner places his hand on her hips, Arya immediately tenses. The Stark girl has been training with her partner for five rehearsals. Five, eight-hour rehearsals—she’s spent more time with this man than her brothers—so she has a good idea of how his hands feel. His touches are soft, kitten paws with an uncertainty that resembles an Eton-educated preteen whose first conversation with a woman was an Amsterdam prostitute who was paid to blow through the awkwardness. And fair enough—not everyone can be a child prostitute. But despite all this, Arya likes him, so she remembers his touch because the more intimate they are with each other’s dance style, the easier it will be to work out the kinks of their performance. Therefore, it only takes a touch for her to recognize that this is not her partner.

“You’re supposed to be instructing,” Arya criticizes.

“Sometimes, a touch teaches more lessons than a tongue,” Jaqen disagrees. “Move, so that a man
may gauge the pace of a girl’s hips.”

Arya complies because Jaqen is testing her. She’s a member officially, but off the papers, her position is every bit as volatile as when she was merely a contender. Jaqen knows she has the skill to be a Faceless Man, but this is not a matter of her prowess as an entertainer. Now, Arya needs to be a professional and needs to prove herself instead of relying on her trademark quips. For the most part, the troupe enjoys her crass wise-cracking, but if her behavior interferes with their work, she’s finished. A class clown stops being funny when exams draw near, and the truth is the same for reckless teenagers who believe skill is a substitute for discipline.

Arya moves and allows Jaqen’s handling to help edge out her movements. He whispers in her ear that she’s too sinuous, that her body is too familiar with sensuality. He tells her to move with rage. “Dance,” he tells her, “Like I’ve told you I’m going to fuck the obedience into you and the Stark out.”

Arya officially concludes that Jaqen H’gharr can motivate a fish to walk and horse to fly because he is good.

Arya and Jaqen move onto the next part of the sequence when Jaqen suggests that instead of “pushing him away,” she bends her back when he attempts to “kiss her.” Arya agrees, and let’s Jaqen provide an “example.” Instead of following the release as the original choreography dictates, Jaqen pulls Arya up and lifts her off the ground. She is mid-way down when he orders her to wrap her legs around him. Arya complies but the move is clumsy from lack of preparations. Jaqen lets her fall almost to the ground with her legs clinging onto him for support. With a haunting amount of his skill, the principal dancer manages to bend down so that he can delicately place Arya to the floor, lifts both feet off the ground, and then rolls them over so that Arya is on top of him. The move, despite Arya’s faulty steps, is beautiful. Arya doesn’t even have to see it know she’d be awed in the audience.

“Am I interrupting something?”

Heads turn to the entrance and upon their guests’ appearance, Arya’s flashes with embarrassment. Jon is standing there. Watching her. And her siblings are there, too but she can care less about them because Jon is right there. Jaqen is on top of her. And she’s not going to lie; this may be her fantasy threesome.

“I’m so close,” Arya whispers to herself. She is an aphrodisiac and a porn party away from making all her dreams come true. Please, for New Gods and the Old, to all that is holy and right, let me fucking have this! Arya prays.

But Jaqen ruins the plot as soon as he gets off her. “A girl has guests,” he informs like Arya is blind.

“I got that,” Arya half-snaps and half-sighs. She stretches while she walks to her family, hoping to get the frustrated kinks out physically when the fantasy falls apart.

Jon ruffles her head. “Sorry for interrupting your practice.”

“It’s fine, Jon. Anything for you.” Arya wants to suggest he make it up to her, but Sansa—the ginger cockblock—stops her.

“Arya, do you know if Syrio keeps your sponsor information?”

Arya raises an eyebrow. There’s no reason for her not to answer that question—she trusts her siblings to know they aren’t planning anything truly nefarious, but more than likely, they’ll keep her
in the dark if she doesn’t ask first. “Why?”

“Arya, it’s urgent,” Robb presses.

“And so I want to know why. Syrio is recruiting a new dancer in Denmark, so I’m in charge of the studio until then.” Arya is exaggerating. Syrio didn’t leave her in charge per say, but he did give her his keys to lock up afterward.

“So the place is empty?” Jon says a breath of excitement and relief passes through his face.

“No, the Faceless Men are here. He’s lending us the space until he comes back.” The Faceless Men were due for another performance before the summer ends, and afterward, she and a few of the selected members will be headed off to London.

“Arya,” Jon calls out to her with sweet, pouty smile. “Please, we need your help. I’ll explain later, but for now, we just have to get a list of those sponsors.”

Arya melts under his glimmering grey eyes and falters at once. She’s a sucker for his pleas. “Syrio keeps the records in his office. I can take you there.” Arya sighs resigned to her fate. “Let me get the key.” That way, she can tell Jaqen she is taking a break and get an eyeful of his disapproval. The man is disgustingly possessive over her time whenever her family gets involved. She hopes that does not become a habit.

They thank her, and Jon delivers a hefty payment of a hug. Being a physical creature, Arya melts under his touch. He’s warm and comforting, like blanket cocoons and body pillows.

“I have to take a ten.”

Jaqen, with his ever bothersome nature, demands to know if she is asking him or telling him. Without missing a beat, Arya says she is telling him.

“A girl should prioritize her future over her past,” he suggests, in a subtly, derisive tone.

“A man should learn to mind his own business.”

“A girl’s disappearance affects a man’s business.”

Arya, somewhat petulantly, turns to her fellow dancers. “I’m sorry, but there’s a family issue I have to take care of. Ten minutes, tops,” she promises. The men and women do nothing to stop her, and while several annoyed expressions cross their face, most are cordial. They are already working on a new dance when she first went outside. Jaqen has the biggest problem with her sudden departure and stares at her so intensely; she can feel his gaze on her.

Arya returns to her family, but she is upset. She’s been doing well as a new member, and now, she risks the reputation of a flake. Divas are a dime a dozen, but chips are dandruff on the ground, a nuisance that’s hard to rid of and uncomfortably attached to the scalp of the troupe.

“Sorry about this,” Jon apologizes first. “We’ll be fast, I promise.”

“Don’t worry about it, Jon.” Arya smiles up at him. “I’m happy to help.”

“All you have to do is open the door, and we’ll take care of it,” Robb insists, only to receive a glare.

“If that were the case, I would have just given you the key.” Arya loses all her docility when speaking to her siblings. She’s the third oldest, so while Sansa and Robb were the princes and
princesses of their social circle growing, Arya was the black sheep. Jon was the only one who ever made her feel like she belonged. Arya has never let them forget this. “But I’m the one who knows where the files are and the password to his computer.” They climb up the stairs, and she leads them all the way to the end of the hall. Arya checks the vicinity. Everyone should be gone, but she can never be too sure.

Syrio’s room is as vibrant as a peacock’s rainbow vomit. The man is a performer who believes every aspect of his life should reflect his soul; artifacts that follow the earth’s timeline, souvenirs from every edge of the world. His desk is filled with pictures of seven wives and husbands, all happy as they could be; they were, after all, married to their philandering spouse. Arya has met some of them, and as a testament to Syrio’s charm, no one is truly upset with him. There are accolades from all over the world, evidence of his past troupes, hundreds of awards dating back to his childhood in Sicily. Arya loves this room because every item tells a story, a rich tale of life and love and Arya wants that for herself.

“She’s here,” Arya tells them. She pulls up the files from the computer and scrolls through them until she can see Tywin Lannister’s name. “All of our sponsors.”

“Thanks,” Robb says before taking a seat.

Arya tells them she has to get back to rehearsal. “Once you’re finished, just turn off the computer and go. The door has an automatic lock.”

Arya shuts the door behind her. For a second, she thinks everything is going to be okay. Last time she checked, she had four minutes to spare. Syrio won’t ever find out, and if he did, she doubts he’d mind that much. Her judgment tended to be sound, especially in regards to her family; it’s her personal life he’s concerned about, but he’s never been one to judge. Bad decisions and dance are the two things she’s always been consistent with.

Her hopes are dashed when a familiar, conniving figure slips out of the shadows like a damn poltergeist and appears in front of her.

Arya swears. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I see you’ve decided to expand your repertoire of crimes to breaking and entering. What’s the matter? Prostitution wasn’t doing it for you anymore?” Waif sneers.

“It’s not breaking and entering if I have the key,” Arya retorts, using one of the Stark’s many mottos in life. It does pay to be the daughter of a securities mogul. “And don’t you ever get tired of following me around?” Arya flaunts her guilt as a guise for innocence and tries to escape Waif’s questioning. The girl blocks her as expected, and Arya pretends to be amused, when in reality she’s irritated, and maybe a little scared she’ll lose the privileges she’s worked so hard to amass with Syrio. “Listen, you may not know this since you failed the auditions but I have a rehearsal with the Faceless Men. And frankly,” Arya laughs a little, but there’s no mirth. “I’m done, Waif. Fucking done. For years, I’ve danced beside you, suppressing my utter disgust because dance is one of the few things I value over the undoubtedly wonderful gratification of kicking your ass. So move out of the way, or I’m going to end up beating you one last time, and I don’t mean on the stage.” Arya tries to walk ahead but Waif blocks her one last time.

Waif glares at her. “You think I don’t see you for what you are, Arya Stark? You’re nothing but your family’s name. A spoiled little rich girl whose main skill is spreading her legs.” Waif’s eyes narrowed. “Yes, you have talent. Everyone always loves to go on and on about how talented Arya fucking Stark is. Well, here’s something they’d never tell you to your face.” Waif enters her bubble, and Arya balls her fist. She’s always been frighteningly self-aware and she knows that if there’s one thing she doesn’t like, and that’s people entering her personal space. “The only reason you’re this
talented is because everything else in your life is taken care of for you. You’ve never had to worry about how you’re going to pay your dance tuition or leotards. You never had to work a part-time job just to afford a new pair of shoes! You had everything handed to you! You can dance to the fucking moon because you have parents who can afford the spaceship. And then you have the nerve to act like you’re on the same level as me? We’re not equals, Arya. I had to fight for everything, not just dancing.” Waif pushes her hard enough Arya has to take a step back. “You’re nothing without your name.”

Arya would like to go on record to say that she doesn’t mean to throw the first punch at the Waif’s face.

"Fuck if I care."

Waif stumbles backward and she looks genuinely surprised at Arya’s complete apathy.

“Do you think I give a shit if you’re poor?” Arya asks her. “Do you think I’d feel sorry for you because I’m rich? I don’t. You can go back to the estates with your drunk mom and deadbeat dad because I don’t care what sob story decided to make you a villain because pity or not, you’re still the bitch who put glass in my shoes when I was twelve.” Waif composes herself, and Arya is happier than ever because she would have felt a little bad for bitch-slapping this girl to Spain if she was unguarded. “Right, think I didn’t know about that? I did. So I’m not sorry for being lucky. Because you know what, it’s a fucking lose-lose situation for me regardless if I feel bad or not. If I did nothing with my life, I’m just wasting my family’s resources, and if I am great for something, it’s only because my parents helped me out. So no, I’m not going to sing your sad song. You fuck up, that’s on you.”

There’s a ruthlessness in Arya that no one forgets yet they always underestimate. She’s been aiming to become a professional dancer her entire life, and the oversaturated, disgustingly competitive world of performance has warped her to a point where everyone, including her friends and family, are both her strength and her liability. Out of all her siblings, she’s the most goal-orientated. If she wants to accomplish a task, it’s getting done.

Everyone else can burn.

Maybe Waif realizes this and reverts back to instinct as a defense mechanism. She has the option between fight or flight, and Arya is not going to lie—she respects the girl for choosing the former.

What transpires between the two ends up being an all-out brawl because neither Waif nor Arya care about a prison sentence and there is no love between the two girls. They go for the jugular, groin, tits, and face and neither seem content until the other one is dead. Eventually, Waif lunges at Arya’s prize possessions—her legs. Arya’s reaction may not have been the best—tackling Waif onto the stairs while grabbing her arm so that she can use the girl as body pillow seemed like a good idea at the time but was difficult to reproduce at the moment—she nonetheless, succeeds in gaining the upper hand.

“Arya!” She hears Sansa yell in concern.

“Fuck off!” Arya throws another punch. “Get out and don’t interfere!” She hears Jon urge them to move and on their way past Arya, he passes her by with a high-five which she reciprocates because Jon, of all people, know when it is time to take a bitch out or go down fighting. Waif tries to swing her off, but Arya presses down all her weight while she does so. Arya brings down the hammer of the fucking gods and ends this ballerina brawl with a kill shot to the throat. The Stark gets off her former peer and grabs the fire extinguisher. Before she can get the bitch, Arya has a moment of clarity.
She wonders, is this how I want to end my life’s work? Tanya Harding her former rival?

As Arya brings down the fire extinguisher on the Waif’s leg, Tywin Lannister’s voice pops into her head, and she remembers his words from when she was fourteen.

Clever, he called her. Too clever for her own good.

So Arya stops mid-whack. Waif looks up at her with disbelief and hope. Arya takes the hope in her hands and crushes it under her fire extinguisher. In a split second, Arya throws the fire extinguisher through the window. The crash is heard throughout the studio. The rest of the troupe will be here in seconds. Arya acts fast. She takes a shard; Waif winces and waits for the upcoming blow.

It never comes.

Waif opens her eyes when she hears a gasp and groan of pain. She looks up and sees there’s a piece of glass sticking out of Arya’s arm. Her eyes widened, and before she could ask what’s going on, Waif hears the rest of the Faceless Men coming in.

“What’s going on here?” Jaqen asks, calm but cold like he’s barely keeping his temper in check.

Before Waif can react, the dancers swarm around her, grabbing her so she doesn’t escape. One person calls the cops.

“I-I didn’t, I—” Waif chokes on her defense. She looks at Arya, who is being taken away so that they may nurse her wounds.

Waif’s eyes widen. "You bitch!" She shouts. She turns to the other dancers. “She did that to herself! I swear!"

“Oh, so she stabbed herself?” One man asks her. “Did she punch herself in the face, too?” There are bruises all over Arya.

Waif sputters. “I only hit her! I never—She stabbed herself!”

“Give it a rest. No one’s that crazy.”

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The cops take Waif away. Practice is canceled for the rest of the night, but they can rely on one tomorrow, with twice as much to catch up on.

Arya’s duet is still intact, but she’s lost a solo for her wounds to heal. Arya understands the logic, but the blow still hurts.

“A girl should be grateful it’s just a superficial wound,” Jaqen points out. His fingers trace where the ambulance bandaged her. “How fortunate,” he muses.

“What can I say? I guess I’m just lucky.”

“Very lucky,” Jaqen agrees.

“Very, very lucky,” Arya adds. She lays a hand on his shirt and pulls him into a kiss. Their lips touch gently at first but quickly grows passionate under the smell of dried blood and pumping of adrenaline.

“You’re mad,” he whispers to her.
“No, I’m Arya,” Arya jokes.

Jaqen cannot help but smile and pulls her into another kiss to hide his laughter. She is his problem, now. All that's left are the Starks and she'll be his.

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Speaking of problems, Ramsay seems to have ninety-nine and all of them are bitches. Namely, one bitch and his ninety-eight problems. And maybe Ramsay was finally maturing because he took responsibility for those problems. He was the one who wanted Theon so he’s the one who has to take care of his baggage—even if said baggage can fill an airport.

“Have you called him yet?” Ramsay asks. He comes out of the shower, a flimsy navy towel wrapped around his waist, staring Theon down as the boy clutches his cell phone and trembles. He begs Ramsay to reconsider, but Ramsay grabs the cell out of his hand and hits the phone icon.

“I did not travel to this disease ridden hotel for nothing. Call him. Now.” Ramsay clasps onto Theon’s neck and squeezes.

Theon hopelessly obeys, sending Ramsay the saddest puppy eyes he’d ever seen on living, or dead, creature. The phone dials relentlessly, and for a second Theon is sure he'll get a message machine. His heart drops when he hears the smooth, poisonous baritone of his uncle.

“Who’s this?” Euron rumbles through the phone. The vibrations sends through his ear and he shivers.

“H-hi, Euron.” Theon closes his eyes.

“Well, fuck me with a ribbed dildo, if it isn’t my precious little nephew,” Theon hears him cackle over the phone. “What? Finally, escape the Stark nunnery and calling for a good time?”

“N-no!”

“Shit, I love it when you stutter. Good memories.”

“Uncle Euron—”

“Wait a second; I need to get comfortable. Not every day your dick-suckers gives me a call.” He doesn’t speak for a while, and Theon hears him settle somewhere in his home. He must have put his cell on speaker and place it right next to his crotch because Theon could hear his zipper come undone. Theon feels nauseous. Just as Euron is about sing an ode about Theon's ripe, tight picker with the wet noises echoing in the background, Ramsay swipes the phone out of his hand.

“Punishment over,” Ramsay mutters. His eyes are blazing blood, and Theon can smell the anger radiating off him. Theon’s mouth waters. The Greyjoy is so turned on; he wants nothing more than to bend over. Now. “Euron Greyjoy?”

“Who the fuck is this?” Euron pauses his motion.

“Ramsay Bolton.”

“Right,” and suddenly there’s a laugh. “You’re the little tease’s new shaft. Tell me, how’s the slut treating you?”

“Great,” Ramsay answers, his voice calm and even a little jovial. His eyes contain none of the
amusement. “Grade-a pussy on that boy. Don’t know how you could ever let him go. Seriously, he’ll
do anything for me. Doesn’t matter when or where, if I want his hole, all I get from him is ‘how far
do you want my legs?’” Ramsay licks his lips—he makes sure to emphasize the slurp over the
phone.

Euron grits his teeth. They could hear it, loud and clear. “Guess it’s a good thing I loosened him up
for you. He was tight little thing when I had him. Always telling me ‘no’ and how he wanted me to
‘stop.’”

“Yeah, he did that with me at first. But my cock gave him quite beating. Got rid of all that sass.
Sometimes, all a slut needs is a firm hand and a big dick. Some guys don’t have it in them to do the
proper training.” Ramsay sits on a chair. “But don’t worry. Theon was still tight as a fucking noose
when I had him. Guess your equipment couldn’t quite do the job you wanted it to.”

There’s added tension to the conversation that gets Theon soaking. He undoes his jeans and starts
pawing after Ramsay’s dick. No one, not even Eddard Stark has been able to get Euron to shut up.
Ramsay is already preparing for his second verbal bitchslap when Euron starts throwing his own
shots.

“But that’s not what I called you for.”

“Yeah?” Euron pretends to sound surprised. “And what you’d call for?”

“Well, I had some business to take care of so I booked a hotel for privacy. Didn’t know how their
entertainment was so I decided to bring my little bitch along. Heard about his history with you.
Figured I stop by sometime. Have a little chat.”

“I’d like that,” Euron agrees as easily as Ramsay thought he would. “Maybe, I can show you a thing
or two about discipline. Get a little threesome action going on here. Bet no one’s ever touched your
ass.”

Ramsay growls and says, “I feel the same way. Never fucked a senior before.”

“You have jokes?”

“I’m fucking hilarious,” Ramsay counters. “But I didn’t come to fight. I’m here to make a deal—
plain and simple.”

“A deal? Will I like it?” Ramsay hears the message in between the lines. Kiddie fucker is slobbering
over for the boy currently trying to suck Ramsay up like a straw. Ramsay grabs Theon’s hair before
he lands his lips on his dick. He mouths the word ‘leave,’ and the boy reluctantly complies, tail
between his legs, lingering in the room outside hoping to catch glimpses of their conversation.
“Because I’m not ashamed to say I’ve been craving some incest pussy for a while. He’s one of my
best lays.”

“Then I’m sure we can work something out,” Ramsay tells him. “I don’t mind lending out my toys,
not if there’s money on the line. I heard you’ve been quite active in ocean real estate lately.”

“Bought a few ports. A nice little collection of fishing boats. Some high quality, white trout. You
interested?”

“I am. I am starting a new expenditure soon. The supplier for one of my friends has been
compromised, and I’m willing to bet he’s looking for a more experienced choice. I figured what
better way to get into the business than dealing with a legend. You do have a reputation, Mr.
Greyjoy.”
“I’m a fucking king,” Euron agrees. “Theon’s fine with us doing business together?”

“Theon does whatever I tell him.”

Euron whistles. “Guess you got him hooked. But then again, he’s always been the type to get attached to fuckers,” Euron notes. “Never liked that about him. You know what was annoying? When I was plowing him, he used to call out for someone to save him. Fucking rude. Here I am, giving him the dicking of his life and I hear him call someone else’s name. Hela? Hel? Oh, right. Help.” Euron laughs at his own joke. “You know, that’s why his father sent him to me.”

Ramsay keeps his mouth shut. "Oh?"

“His daddy saw what a weak little bitch his son was turning into and decided to send him my way for some ‘correction.’ Maybe tighten his bitch thighs so he’d stop thinking about spreading them. I gave it my best shot, of course. I love my big brother.” Ramsay can hear his teeth gleam as he told the story. “But Theon didn’t try hard enough. His legs opened up real quick. His dad never forgave him for being a whore. That’s why he didn’t do anything the first time Theon went crying to him.” His tone grows strange. “But that sister of his—Asha. Well, she’s a piece of work. Damn near killed me when she found out. Left her family to start her own business, and my big brother loses his heir. Fuck, I owe a lot to him,” Euron muses. “That little tart did a number on the Greyjoy name. If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t be able to scavenge what I could after that bitch niece of mine tore her share of the Grejoy empire. Has even taken a few shots at me over the years.”

Ramsay listens to the story with apt attention. He waits until Euron finishes instead of speaking. His expression is unreadable. He knows Theon is peaking through the door.

“Listen, I have a few videos you might be interested in. Theon in his younger years. He’s pretty cute. Just like a girl.”

“Can I expect a copy?” Ramsay asks smoothly. “A gesture of goodwill.”

“I wouldn’t mind sharing the love if you don’t.”

“If we can come up with a suitable arrangement, I don’t see why your cock can’t have a pretty hole to warm itself up in.”

“And he’ll be willing?” Euron asks; the question surprises Ramsay until he hears the rest of the statement. “I want to see my niece’s face when I show her brother screaming for more.”

“Of course,” Ramsay promised. “He’ll be willing and waiting for you.”

They come up with details for meeting place and time; both agreed that offering up their hotel addresses poses a potential risk. Neither trust each other, and for a good reason. Ramsay has no doubt that Euron is planning a double cross as vehemently as Ramsay is planning his.

Euron is excited, but not so much that he is choosing to ignore the visible signs. He knows there’s a trap waiting for him. But if he can get a taste of Theon’s sweet ass, then the risk is worth it. Hey, if Euron plays his cards right, he can even call a few guys over to have some fun. Make it a bonding experience. Suddenly, Euron remembers that a dick stays hard postmortem. Fuck, wouldn’t it be a sight to see his nephew fucking his lover’s corpse?

Euron comes then and there.

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Shireen takes the phone from her assailant’s hand and calls the only people that matter right now. She has a theory, and while she is not a hundred percent sure she is right, Shireen knows it’s the only shot she has for a rescue. So she dials and prays and finally, the phone picks up.

“Hello?”

“Daddy?” Shireen asks, surprised by how teary and relieved her own voice sounds. She curses herself, wishing she was strong enough to hold back her relief. She cannot see her kidnapper’s face, but there’s a way his shoulders' jump that makes it clear he wasn’t expecting her choice.

“Shireen—”

“Daddy, listen to me. I don’t have much time. I—”

Stannis, stubborn to a fault, tries regardless. “Can you tell me where you are? Landmarks? Any trails? Familiar marks? Any—”

“Daddy!” She scolds. “I don’t know where I am. This person is quite skilled; I don’t remember anything when he brought me here,” she praises, knowing that she’s already lowered her life expectancy by calling her father of all people. She doesn’t want to piss him off further. “I only called because…I don’t know how much time I have and I just…” Shireen finds herself crying. She wants to stop because this is a part of her plan. She has to be strong. If not for herself then for her family. “I want to tell you that I love you. And Davos. And mom and I’m even fond Melisandre when she's not insane.” Shireen chokes on her own laughter. “I love my brothers. All of them. I love that when we go out, they call me their sister instead of their stepsister. That Davos calls me his instead of your daughter. And I love being your daughter. So much.”

“Shireen, you’re going to be okay,” Stannis insists—or rather, begs. "We will find you."

“Maybe,” Shireen agrees. “Maybe not. But I didn’t want to leave this world thinking you all didn’t know how much I love you.” She has a few seconds left on her minute, but Shireen hangs up before she can hear another word. She dries her tears with her sleeve. Then, she takes a deep breath and looks up. Shireen stares her assailant as straight in the eye as she possibly could and does her father proud.

Shireen Baratheon is a fighter. She could have died ages ago, but she didn’t. She could have let the bullying get to her, but she didn’t. She could have joined a cult, but she didn’t. She could have died ages ago, but she didn’t. She could have let the bullying get to her, but she didn’t. She could have joined a cult, but she didn’t.

“You don’t want to kill me,” Shireen tells him. “But I don’t put it pass you.”

The man and Shireen is almost sure it is a man, sits down on her bed. It’s unnerving, to be so close to the man. Close enough to stab, a little voice that sounds far too much like Lyanna whispers. But Shireen maintains her composure. She is a Baratheon, and she’s about to make a deal. “Here’s what I recommend. You want me to do something, and I don’t want to die. So tell me exactly what you want me to do and I’ll do it.”

Shireen remembers her father’s desperate plea and reminds herself what she is fighting for here. She’s getting out alive—no matter what it takes.
Chapter 62

Chapter Summary

Sandor meets Sansa's parents. Jon and Robb get a lead on the investigations.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Catelyn Stark was never a mean girl.

Despite how often Lysa Tully likes to besmirch her older sister’s reputation, Catelyn will go to her grave saying she was the most charming, amiable young woman who ever walked the halls of Victoria College. Sure, she was popular in her youth, but the reverence of her fellow students was out of her control. Being the eldest daughter of Hoster Tully and Minisa Whent meant that her luxuries were a birthright. Catelyn Tully could not help that she was beautiful, athletic, and rich any more than the fish in her father’s company could help being caught and served to the public. And she never bullied anyone—Catelyn was always sure to show kindness to whoever walked her path. She ruled her school through respect and love, and people returned in kind. The teachers adored her. She had admirers from all corners of the UK. If she wanted to, Catelyn could have easily acquired a position at any university of her choosing based on goodwill and smiles alone. The only evidence Lysa had to her claim was how Catelyn supposedly treated Petyr, her father’s friend’s son—a skinny little boy who mooned over her like a pig with feed.

And for that reason, Catelyn had to pause.

Okay, once, and just once, she was a mean girl.

One wrong does not make someone a bad person, Catelyn thinks defensively. The eldest Tully girl has nothing to hide but—it wasn’t exactly a story Catelyn could see herself confessing to her husband any time soon.

There was no good way to tell Ned that when he rejected Catelyn the first time, out of respect for his brother or some other nonsense, she went through a phase. Not a goth phase or a grunge phase but a sort Mad Hatter Madness that may have always been gestating within her freckled body, waiting for the push of resentment to be birthed. In this fit of insanity, Catelyn chose to hatch a plan, or rather, Catelyn decided to join forces with a boy who was in love with her, and had him come up with a plan. For all Cat’s beauty and brains, the Tully heiress wasn’t exactly devious. The poor boy didn’t know he was a pawn and not a player and Catelyn didn’t tell him otherwise. Catelyn said to him that she wanted revenge against Brandon for cheating on her. She told him she felt so stupid for trusting Brandon, and how "all she wants is a good man to love her." Petyr thought this "good man" was him. Catelyn never corrected him, though inwardly, she scoffed at the assumption that Petyr, a rat in every form, could ever consider himself "good." The boy was a scoundrel in every way.

The boy had used his position as Lysa's crush to gain access to their father's connections. Power by proxy is a dangerous game for a beginner, but Petyr was a prodigy in every word. He used Catelyn's father to gain access to a world he didn't belong in. He used his "power" to blackmail and manipulate his peers. Lysa would cry over his numerous affairs, and no matter how often Catelyn told her that he didn't love her, that those girls he 'played with' were young women he whored out to his 'friends'
for more favors, she didn't listen. She never listens, the stupid girl. Instead, Lysa retorted that Catelyn was projecting because Brandon was a manwhore and she only loved him for his status. What she and Petyr had was real. He was brilliant and handsome and would sweep her away once she was old enough to marry without her father's permission.

And Catelyn wanted to shake her head and laugh at such nonsense. Yes, Petyr was clever, but the boy was a fool for her, Lysa's older sister. Perhaps he was too proud to think a Tully could fool him. Catelyn let him believe that. The plan was simple, but ingenious once she learned the dirt Petyr had gathered up. Catelyn never had the sources to dig up such scandal, relying on pettiness and gossip to further her societal knowledge. Brandon's temper was more of a liability than Catelyn had been led to believe by Brandon's father. Petyr was able to uncover several arrest charges and a juvenile record. Brandon had several marks against him at the university, and one more disciplinary action could leave to expulsion and possibly jail time.

Huh, Catelyn had thought at the time. No wonder his father was so eager to get them married.

Petyr and Cat were going to have a date. Petyr discovered where Brandon was taking his latest tart of the week, and they would cross paths. Catelyn was willing to humor some handholding and a look of adoration or two but drew a line when it came down to physical affection. Once Brandon's attention was significantly caught, Petyr was going to egg him on for a beating. Back then, Petyr hadn't learned how to avoid physical injury when violence was necessary in his schemes. Cat agreed to call the cops as soon as the first fighting word was thrown to prevent greater injuries. When the police asked, Petyr would tell them that Brandon flew into a jealous rage from seeing Petyr with Catelyn. They did nothing to garner such reaction. Their interactions were innocent and mundane. Brandon was a dog that needed to be put down for the safety of society.

Catelyn agreed to his plans.

She never made that call.

While Petyr was being pummeled, Catelyn thought about what she would tell Ned. Perhaps, she would cry about her friend getting hurt. Swear to Ned that she saw Brandon with a girl with violet eyes, pretending that she didn’t know her name, even though it was clearly Ashara Dayne. Ned went on a date with Ashara two weeks ago. It was right after Catelyn confessed her feelings for him. Catelyn wasn't angry at Ned. He needed a distraction from what he felt for Catelyn. But Ashara needed to go.

To Catelyn's credit, she did not intend not to make the call. It just happened. Right as she was about to dial the number, Catelyn’s phone rang. It was from Ned. Catelyn picked it up immediately.

And Catelyn swears—swears to the Seven and her mother’s grave, that she wasn’t a mean girl. Someone called the cops on Brandon …but it wasn't her. Instead, Catelyn started sobbing to Ned about Brandon beating up her childhood best friend. Catelyn could have kissed Petyr for what transpired after. Ned ended up arriving and stopping the fight. Ned ended up saving Petyr Baelish. Ned ended up being the hero. Once Ned saw Catelyn, the middle Stark had an epiphany. He went straight for Catelyn Tully. Ned lifted her in his arms. He took her into the sunset just like the movies and the fairytales and now, Catelyn had the fairytale ending she could tell her children as a bedtime story, decades down the road.

Sans some less appreciated details and a bit more embellishment.

Petyr Baelish never quite forgot what happened, though his head injuries may have blurred some details in retrospect. He may have ignored Catelyn’s contribution to his suffering, but he could never forget the humiliation both Starks put him through. Petyr's presence has been a thorn in Catelyn's
side over the last two decades. It was bad enough they were acquainted in the same social circles, but Petyr managed to worm his way into Catelyn's life any way he can. He is on the board of Sansa’s school, has found numerous ways to incriminate Brandon, and Catelyn is sure he was responsible for the random investigation in Ned’s office. An anonymous tip, her ass. But as long as Catelyn kept a wary eye, maybe make a phone call or two a month with the ending line of ‘maybe if Ned died and even then, maybe’ she was normally able to avoid his spiteful maneuvers.

Recently, as in, this moment, Catelyn thinks about ignoring his monthly phone call. She thinks about ignoring it every month, before remembering how dire the consequences are. The phone calls are harmless. He asks about her health, her life, her children, and by children, Catelyn means Sansa. Petyr knows she has three boys, but has all but forgotten Arya, because out of all her children, Arya takes after her father the most.

For today, the asks how she’s doing, he asks how Sansa's doing, occasionally mentioning the boys for a brief second before returning to Sansa, and Catelyn responds, tight as a noose, that they are fine. Catelyn mentions she is still happily married, and Sansa is still doing perfectly well in school.

“‘I’m sure she’s very popular. Just like her mother.’”

Sansa is “very popular.” And from what Catelyn can see, she, like her mother, is not a mean girl.

“I heard she’s found a new partner.”

Of course, he heard that—Littlefinger has his “little finger on everything.”

“She does.”

“He’s quite a fortunate man to land a beauty like Sansa. Especially, considering his lack of wealth in such matters.”

“Looks aren’t everything.”

“Kind of you to think so. I assume you’ve met the man?”

Oh, that’s the target he’s aiming at. “No, I haven’t had the pleasure. It's been rather chaotic.”

“Is there a problem? The two seem quite serious.”

“No reason. Sansa hasn't had the time. I'm sure you know she's been overwhelmed with A-levels and university applications. Thank you again for the recommendation.”

“It's no problem. But, busy or not, you still should have met him already? Or is it because he can't make time for it? I’m sure ‘The Hound’ is rather engaged himself. Being a grown man and all.”

“Sansa is a mature young woman.”

“Just like her mother was at her age. But still—even the smartest women can make poor choices regarding lovers.”

A quarter of Ned will still be twice the worth of any man on this earth. If Sansa chooses half as well as Catelyn, then her eldest daughter was set for life, Catelyn thinks.

“Sansa is old enough to make her own decisions.”

“If you’re so sure about Sansa’s decision making, why deny yourself the inevitable? You should meet the man. Both of you. You wouldn’t want to get blindsided again, do you?”
Joffrey. Catelyn loathed any mention of that monster. The man knew how to pull at her hate-strings, even when Catelyn had scissors. It was a remarkable trait that Catelyn wished she’d learn during their friendship. All she gained was paranoia and the loss of sense to ignore his baiting.

“That’s none of your concern. She’ll have us meet him when she’s ready.”

“Cat, I worry. You know how much I adore Sansa, she’s like a daughter—”

Catelyn hangs up without another word. She places her cell phone on the counter and resumes her duties. Ned’s time has been consumed with the investigation, from granting access to his security footage—as legally allowed—to providing a volunteer workforce for their investigation, Catelyn does the bookings in their household, and it’s not too difficult to do some minor accounting for the company. An urge overwhelms her, an itch, an irritation, and she can’t help from glance at the cellular device a second time.

Catelyn does not want another Joffrey Baratheon.

Petyr was baiting her to meet Sandor. He wants her to disapprove of him, thus tearing a rift between her and Sansa in some hair-raising attempt to get to Catelyn’s oldest daughter. Petyr was beginning to understand that Catelyn was never leaving Ned. Sansa, on the other hand, was free game. Unmarried and beautiful as her mother, and now—legal. A drastic change from three years ago when they first met.

The whole situation is vile. Catelyn has half a mind to call in a favor, but as a lady, she can never allow her hands to mix in with that grime. No, it is best for all parties involved that Catelyn ignore Petyr’s warning. He is playing with her, and she is not going to fall for it. Not for one second—

—Although, Catelyn reasons. She sets down her pen and rubs her temples. Why would Petyr want a meeting if there isn’t a reason to disapprove of Sandor? If Sandor was Son-in-Law of the Year, Petyr would fight tooth and nail to make sure they never cross paths. What was wrong with Sandor Clegane—besides his age, his profession, his lifestyle, and his past—that made Petyr so confident? Catelyn can overlook a conviction or two, a violent history, issues given that they stay in the past. Sandor, from Sansa’s testimony, absolutely worships her daughter. Her little girl has never been happier.

—But, Catelyn remembers, Sansa was happy before, when she first dated Joffrey. And Catelyn was happy when she first met Brandon. Sandor may treat her well now, but men with baggage sometimes place their luggage where it’s not welcomed.

As soon as she thinks it, Catelyn knows she is doomed. The Stark matriarch grabs her cell phone and finds her beloved daughter’s name on her contact list.

Petyr wins this time.

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Sansa is looking up suspects when her phone rings. She wonders for a moment if it’s Uncle Baelish again. Her mother hates it when she calls him that, but Sansa retorts that Catelyn doesn’t exactly dislike him more than she dislikes Sansa’s actual relatives. Sansa’s interactions with him are easy to brush off. Unlike her mother, Sansa has learned not to play into his politics. If he steps out of line, Sansa can call up her boyfriend for a quick, steamy chat about how much she misses him and wants to see him. Uncle Baelish leaves her alone and runs scared. He’s not a fighter, not even close, and his power runs low with a man like Sandor who has no reputation to care for and no secrets to hide. Uncle Baelish made that mistake last year when Sansa turned sixteen. He thought he could scare her
away from Sandor.

Sansa made it clear that wasn’t an option.

Sansa knows what kind of man Sandor is. A rabid dog who has bitten off the hand that feeds him and buried it in his yard. People didn’t understand that such a beast was a puppy in her arms. Her father would disapprove, but Sansa has no qualms about using her resources to her advantage. Sandor likes protecting her, and Sansa likes being protected.

As to why Sansa hasn’t broken all ties with Petyr Baelish, well, again—Sansa has no problem using people if they offered themselves to be used. Uncle Baelish has connections. And if these names don’t pan out? He is a phone call away.

Fortunately, Sansa doesn’t have to resort to such tactics. The red-haired girl picks up the phone and sees it’s from her mother.

“Hello? What’s wrong?”

“Sansa, is that how you answer the phone these days? Why does something have to be wrong when I call you?”

“Well, Shireen Baratheon was kidnapped, and the last time I got a phone from you instead of a text, involved Jojen dating Bran. I don’t have much faith these days.”

Her mother makes a noise of disapproval. “Nothing is wrong, Sansa. I was thinking: why haven’t you introduced me to Sandor yet?”

“Excuse me?”

“Sandor Clegane. Why haven’t we met?”

Sansa pauses. Jon is giving her a look. She makes a gesture that indicates she’s fine, but she needs to take this phone call privately. And because phone calls are equivalent to earthquake alerts, Jon furrows his brows deeper in concern.

Sansa steps outside. “Mum, you have met. Remember when he was Joffrey’s bodyguard?”

She can practically hear her mother roll her eyes. “That’s not a meeting, Sansa. I meant a proper face to face conversation where we get to know his intentions. You are still planning on moving in together?”

“Yes.”

“Any thoughts of marriage?”

“Mum, I’m seventeen.”

“When you know, you know,” Her mother tells her. “But we don’t know him. Your father and I are having dinner tonight at Anguilla tonight. 7:00. Bring him.”

“I’m kind of busy right now, and in case you haven’t noticed, there’s a serial killer on the loose kidnapping children.”

“Then it’s a good thing you’ll have Sandor by your side. He can keep you safe, I assume? He wasn’t terrible at his job?”
“No, mum.”

Catelyn pauses. “We want this to work, Sansa. After Joffrey…all we want is someone who will treat you the way you deserve to be treated. You’ve always been our little princess. I understand Sandor is quite a deal older than you and he has a past,” Catelyn says delicately. “But if we know he loves you. If he moves the heavens and earth for you, we’ll accept it.”

Sansa sighs. “Okay, I’ll call him now.”

“Good, 7:00. I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Sansa swears as soon as her mother hangs up. She wants to kick something. Yell at someone. Instead, she walks back into the room to inform her brother and cousin of her departure.

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, but mum wants to see me tonight, and I don’t want her getting too suspicious.” Besides, it was almost five and Sansa needed at least an hour to prepare Sandor for the worse night of their lives.

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When Sansa leaves, Jon uses the opportunity to suggest a break. “I’m going to take a walk around the corner for some food.”

“Alone? Is that a good idea?”

Jon rolls his eyes. “It’s not even dark out.”

“There’s a serial killer on the loose. We’re trying to track him down. I don’t need to tell you how dangerous this situation is.”

“I’m not a child. I’m just going to grab some food at the convenience store. I will right back.”

“How about you stay and I go?”

“How about we remind ourselves who’s more likely to survive hand to hand combat?”

“Jon,” Robb’s tone shifts to a cordial arrogance that is almost dialectic amongst the posh. “I’m captain of the rugby team, and I box. My body is a weapon.”

Without warning, a stuffed manila folder is thrown at him. Robb isn’t able to dodge it in time, and the paper lands directly on his face.

“I feel so safe,” Jon notes dryly as he puts on his jacket. “I’m thinking a few energy drinks, maybe a few bags of crisps…” Robb walks forward to stop him. He kisses his neck, relying on his favorite form of persuasion to sway his beloved.

“Please, Jon. I’d feel better if you weren’t out on your own.”

Jon rolls his eyes. “How about we go together?”

Compromise. Robb digs it. “Give me a second to pack up the papers. I don’t want them out of sight.”
Jon agrees. Robb puts his arm around Jon’s waist as they walked to the nearest bodega. He sets his head on Robb’s shoulder, enjoying the silence amidst the afternoon weather. It was so quiet this time of day. Though, to be fair, it was quiet all the time. Jon used to marvel at the serenity. It was like a blanket of peace fell over hills and houses every night. “Do you plan on moving here when you graduate?”

Robb answers without hesitance. “Of course. I’ll get a position within the company and work my way to the top. Father doesn’t suffer fools so that will take a while, but I don’t mind the hard work.”

“You won’t stay in Edinburgh?”


Jon fights back a smile. There was so little this man couldn’t do. “You sound ridiculous.”

Robb grins back. “I’ve never considered living anywhere else. This is my home. Winterfell will be where I raise our children in, and it’s where I want to spend my final days.” He turns to Jon. “Why do you ask?”

Jon shrugs. “I told you. I’m trying to figure things out, finding my place in the world.”

“Your place—”

“—Is with you, I get that.” Jon looks at him as if he’s said something incredibly silly but endearingly sweet. Robb has gotten rather used to that look. “But making someone my life has never been my style.” Jon stops and surveys the neighborhood. “I love Winterfell. I love this city. All those fond memories, all the painful ones…it’s home for me, too.” Jon turns to Robb. He grabs his hand. “And best of all, it has you.”

Robb brings the gifted palm to his lips and kisses it. “I love you, Jon Snow.”

“And I love you, Robb Stark.”

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Sansa is surprised to find out that Sandor owns a tie. “I’ve never seen you wear one before,” she notes as he fingers work the fabric. She decides on a classic Winsor knot—solid and dependable. It’s exactly how she wants Sandor to come off tonight.

“Do you want me to wear a Rolex?”

Sansa cannot help her baffled expression. “You own a Rolex?”

Sandor shrugs. He walks over to his safe where he brazenly inputs the code. There, Sansa catches sight of an unfamiliar gun—a not-so-big surprise considering her knowledge of his familiar guns—and he pulls out the iconic watch case. She watches him put it on. “A man I worked with owned it. He died during a crossfire.”

“You stole it off his corpse?”

“Wasn’t doing him any favors to keep it. Figure I pawn it and move on, but…” Sandor sighs. “He loved this watch. Gambled and drank and fought his way to an early grave but no matter, he would never sell this watch.”
Sansa wonders what it says about her as a person that she smiled. Though many would write Sandor off as brute for his story, it was moments like these where she saw the man she fell in love with. As she did with the tie, Sansa helps him put the watch on. Sansa feels a thrill when she hears the clasp click around Sandor’s wrist. She imagines their future would be somewhat like this—Sandor begrudgingly accompanying her to important dinner parties and extended functions of pretenses. He would never complain because if Sansa wants the company, he would escort her to the ends of the earth.

“Let me do your hair,” Sansa tells him. She grabs some of his gel and styles it the way she likes. His hair is long, suited to cover up his flaws, but tonight, she wants the mark to be seen. Sandor lets her do as she pleases. Her touch is feather soft and though there’s a second where she lingers on the other half—the half that reminds Sandor every morning of what was possible and not what is—Sansa is more focused on the scar. She’s endeared to it, Sandor understands, the way beauties are endeared by beasts.

“Perfect,” Sansa says.

Sandor looks at himself in the mirror. He wonders if his bird recognizes that she long stopped molding him to please her parents. Instead, he suited her needs above else.

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“Sandor Clegane.”

Sandor offers up his hand for a shake. Ned responds in affirmation. Their whole introduction, from the meeting hands to the brief introductions, is thick with rigor. But Sandor, as always, powers through. Her father mirrors such obstinance. Neither of them expresses any discomfort, but it is present. The elephant in the room full of cubs. Following such acts, Sandor hands a bouquet off to Catelyn. The flowers are cheap, but the response is better than nothing considering the short notice. Catelyn smiles when she receives them regardless.

“Thank you, Mr. Clegane.”

“Please call me Sandor.”

Sansa is happy said please. A low bar set is still an obstacle crossed.

The four of them sit down, with Sandor pulling Sansa’s chair for her and Ned doing the same for Catelyn. No one says a word for a whole ten minutes. Finally, the server arrives with four glasses of water.

“Is everybody ready to order?”

As soon as he asks, everyone speaks at once, silences at the same time, before trying again to the same, miserable results. They all wait to see whose lips will be the next to the part. Sandor looks back and forth from his partner to her parents. He tells the fidgeting employee that he will have a whiskey. He nods at Sansa who is still staring at her parents. “She’ll have a glass of Moscato D’astri.”

“Excellent, sir. Have you decided on an entrée or an appetizer?”

While Sandor orders his plate, Sansa takes a breath makes her order. The server goes around the table until everyone has made their choice. The server leaves like he’s walking on coals and Sansa has never been more envious.
“Mr. Clegane—” Sandor looks her father straight in the eye. He does that with men. Intimidation, Sansa supposes. Never with women. For years, Sansa wasn’t sure he knew what the color of her eyes was. “What do you do for a living?”

Sandor doesn’t correct her father about his name. He doesn’t like formality, Sansa wants to say. To Sandor, any man who gave him respect was playing him. Before she can speak up, Sandor answers, “I do retrieval work.”

Sansa chokes on the water she’s been sipping. She wants to hit Sandor, because while “retrieval specialist” may suffice for his tax forms, her father owned and operated one of the largest security and private military companies in the world. Instead, her father gives a nod.

“Did you work overseas?”

“I used to,” Sandor admits. “But I rarely take jobs that last over a month anymore. When Sansa was taking her exams, I worked a stint in Iraq.”

“Military contracting?”

“Yeah.”

Sansa watches the madness unfold. The conversation wasn’t just bordering on civil. Was it almost…cordial? Normal? “This can’t be happening,” Sansa mutters.

“It was quite considerate of you to take the trip while Sansa was studying,” Catelyn points out. She is smiling. Not a forced a smile she puts on whenever she is helpless but cannot do anything, but a genuine smile.

“I didn’t want to distract her.” Sandor holds her hand underneath the table. Sansa looks at him. It took forever for Sandor to get used to showing affection in public. Even though no one could see, Sansa couldn’t help but be touched. “She’s amazing. I wouldn’t ever want to stop her from achieving her dreams.”

“That’s right. I heard you plan on moving with her when she leaves for university? Even if it’s out of the country?”

“As long as she wants me, where she goes, I go.”

“Yes, Sansa said you were in it for the long haul.” Catelyn shakes her head. “That’s what we wanted to talk to you about.”

Sansa takes a deep breath. Here it comes.

“I hope I don’t sound too forward when I say this…”

Sansa shuts her eyes. Just get over with, mother, she thinks. She cannot believe her mother was willing to start such drama in public, but she supposes it’s a useful tactic. Get the upper hand by catching Sansa off-guard.

“…but I want you to know how much we appreciate you for giving up so much for our daughter. Too many men who claim to love their partners but then drop out at the slightest sign of discomfort. Moving together…it’s a big step. If you’re willing to uproot your entire life for Sansa…then, we know it’s not just an act.” Catelyn stares at her husband. To Sansa’s complete surprise. He nods. “We know you love her.”
“I do.”

“She says you treat her well, and that you’ve always given her anything she’s asked for.”

“I try my best.” There’s an oddity to Sandor’s tone. He doesn’t believe Catelyn on that matter, and Sansa knows it’s because he never thought he was good enough for Sansa. Even to this day, there’s a part of him that is waiting for Sansa to do better.

“Therefore, her father and I have no complaints.” Catelyn smiles at him. It’s warm. “You have our complete support.”

Both Sansa and Sandor freeze.

“What the fuck?”

Ned and Catelyn stare at Sansa in horror. “Sansa! Language!” Catelyn leans in to meet her gaze. “We are in public.”

Sansa sputters out her response. “I’m sorry.” Sansa turns to the other table-goers who turned towards the outburst. “Sorry,” she repeats. Sansa turns back to her parents. “I was caught off-guard. What did you just say?”

Catelyn shakes her head as if Sansa is six again and caught sneaking desserts into her room. “You haven’t had the best luck with relationships. It might be hereditary. I had horrible luck with men. It’s a miracle I met your father.”

“I’m beginning to think it’s the other way around,” Sansa retorts.

“My point is,” Catelyn refutes, her grin curt and not at all displaying her annoyance. “Sandor may well be the best you ever get.”

Sansa stares at her mother. She then looks at Sandor who is as shocked as she is—perhaps even more so. Unlike Sansa, however, he knows exactly how to respond.

“With all due respect, that is the dumbest fucking thing I’ve ever heard.” Sandor doesn’t even hesitate to sing Sansa’s praises. “Your daughter is…I can’t even describe her in words. I’m not good enough for her. Not even close. She deserves—”

“See? That’s exactly what we mean.” The server comes by. He must be the most skilled of his peers because instead of speaking, the man sets all the drinks down and places all the plates without so much as a whisper of interruption. He does not look at them. He smiles and moves on as if he was never there. “Sansa, all my life I thought you were going to end up like me: a gorgeous housewife with an impossibly rich husband and five children who are the envy of her peers. Instead, you turned out to be a career woman. There’s nothing wrong with that.” Catelyn takes a sip of her cabaret. Sansa prays she doesn’t drink too much. Alcohol only loosens tongue, and if this conversation gets any worse, the redhead will set herself ablaze. “You will do wonderful things, but you’re not meant to run the ropes backstage. You want to be a star. And two suns will simply scorch the earth.”

Catelyn’s voice is calm—melodic in its condescension. “A man like Sandor would support you. Starks are speakers. Not podiums. You’re his world just as your father is mine.” Catelyn holds Ned’s hand. “We couldn’t be happier for you two.”

Sansa makes a strained noise through her gaping mouth.

“The only thing left is to get married. We should start planning now, before you leave for university.”
To Sansa’s credit, she does not swear.

“What?”

“Marriage. The two of you have made it clear you are committed to each other and it only seems proper that it’s made official.”

Ned peers down at them. “Unless you are not serious about my daughter?”

“That’s our business.” Sandor doesn’t hesitate to answer. Sansa wants to scream. How is he handling this so well? Why was he not protesting? Why was he just going along with it?

“Great. We can have it done next summer,” Catelyn proclaims, choosing to construe Sandor’s ambivalence with her own optimistic spin. “It’ll be the wedding of the century. Far beyond whatever Daenerys Targaryen could manage. I’m thinking of an ocean view, perhaps a destination wedding. Sansa loves Monaco.”

“I’m seventeen!” Sansa blurts out. “You two cannot be serious.” She glares at them. “Is this a trick. This has to be a trick.” Reverse psychology at its finest. Sansa almost wants to slam her fist down on the table in triumph. She was not going to fall for this crap. She was going to show her parents who was boss.

“Excuse me?” Her parents looked utterly confused.

“You are hoping that by approving of Sandor, I won’t want him anymore.” Sansa tries to come as confident, but her face is turning as red as her, and her breath is shakier than a flower in a snowstorm. Sandor places a hand on her back. “Well, I want him. I want him for the long haul. I want him for life,” Sansa declares loudly, causing more people to stare. She says this proudly and though she means every word, the atmosphere feels like it’s choking her. Something feels wrong. It’s like drinking cocoa on a cold day while swimming in ice water. Everything is off.

“Perfect,” Catelyn agrees. “An ocean wedding it is.”

All of Sansa’s bravado drained in that instance. “An ocean wedding?”

“It’ll have to be big. This is my only chance to plan a wedding for my daughter. I mean, Arya is never going to get married and if the miracle is to occur, we all know she will elope with some heathen and get divorced on the same day.” Catelyn turns to Sandor. “Sansa has always wanted a big wedding. She used to make little drawings of her future dress, put on my heels and walk around the table holding a bouquet.”

“I was eight!”

“We’re not interested in marriage right now.” Sandor’s statement is made with the stony assurance of a brick wall. Sandor is looking at her parents, staring them dead in the eye as he tells them they are taking their time. “Sansa should focus on her school. Marriage will just add stress. We’ll discuss it after she’s graduated.”

Oh, why couldn’t she say that? The words act as a speed bump and suddenly, Catelyn and Ned are conversing in what may be a telepathic communication on how to response. Sansa wants to think of a response before they do. She turns to Sandor. Despite the calamity, Sandor is her rock. His poker face is screwed on so tight, Sansa wonders if a power drill can undo it.

The older man leans into Sansa’s ear. “You’re wet,” Sandor tells Sansa.
Sansa raises an eyebrow. “I’m not wet,” Sansa replies out loud. How can Sandor even suggest she was turned on by this? She feels Sandor pat her on the back, bringing to her attention of the dampness of her sweat. She is sweating. She is wet a sheet because the terror of her parents’ words had her sweating.

Sansa looks up in embarrassment. Her parents look uncomfortable. Sansa doesn’t know what embarrassment tastes like, she’s sure it has a coppery tang. Her tongue is bleeding from how hard she bit it. “I have to use the lady’s room.”

Sansa rushes out without another word. She turns her back on her parents, leaves Sandor for the slaughter. She gets angry. Angry at herself for doing it. Angry at her parents for forcing her hand. She’s even mad at Sandor. Because he’s okay with what’s happening. He should be the one who’s a mess and instead, he’s supporting her and making sure she’s okay. It makes Sansa feel weak. Stupid. Sansa walks and walks until she reaches the bathroom door. She doesn’t have to go. Not really. Her legs take her in a different direction and before she knows it, Sansa is outside the restaurant. She stretches her legs. It’s been a while since she’s been on the run. She should condition herself after all. She might go back to track at uni. Sansa does not look back. She makes a run for it.

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Sandor sees the brilliant flash of red dashing out the door before anyone else. Like a professional, he does not react immediately. He continues to talk to Ned and Catelyn, making occasional gestures and comments to satisfy their incessant question. It’s irritating, but he puts up with it because fuck, the alternative is worse.

“When Sansa comes back, we can discuss seasons. A summer wedding is too predictable, but as Starks, a winter wedding may be too on the nose…”

Sandor figures he’s had enough. “I’m going to check on Sansa.”

Catelyn is perplexed. “She just left.”

Sandor wants to tell them that Sansa doesn’t use public restrooms for anything but looking at herself in the mirror. He also contemplates telling them that Sansa left the restaurant five minutes ago and as a runner, was without a doubt making good time. Instead, he keeps her secret. “I get worried.” Sandor proceeds to walk in the opposite direction of the bathroom. He figures she’d go on instinct so instead of worrying about twists and turns she may have taken, he bulldozes forward.

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Sansa is fast, and she has approximately five minutes on him. Even if the glass of wine slowed her down—his only hope of catching her is that she stopped to take a rest. If not, she’ll retreat to his apartment, a little cooler-headed and more inclined to talk. Fortunately, luck is on Sandor’s side because from a distance, he sees the spot of red and picks up his speed. Sansa is taking a break, having purchase water from a nearby vendor. Like a fox, Sansa hears him coming. Her eyes widen as he draws near and as expected, she drops the water bottle on the street and breaks into another run.

They run for several minutes, and he’s grateful the streets are relatively empty because this is not a good scene. He is a grown man with scars all over his body chasing after a teenage girl in the middle of the night. They end up running into a park—deserted except for a few vagabonds and transients. There’s a lovely fountain which Sansa and Sandor have visited on more than one occasion. Finding little choice in his situation, Sandor reaches out to grab her when they are near the centerpiece, and he pulls her into the fountain. As Sandor planned, they land in the water.
Sansa splashes about like a hooked fish. Sandor wisely lets her go. Several moments past and Sansa finally realizes that again—she is wet. And again, not in a fun way.

“You done?”

Sansa pushes her hair out of her face. She looks at Sandor and nods. “Yeah, I’m good.”

“Good.”

They get out of the fountain. Sandor takes off his jacket, and even though it’s as soaked as they are, the extra layer provides some semblance of warmth. “I’ll get us a ride.” He takes out his phone, and they walk out to where they are expected to wait.

“So…” Sansa starts. “They like you.”

“I wouldn’t go that far.” Sandor shrugs. “They tolerate me, I guess.”

“According to them, you’re the best I’ll ever get.”

Sandor chuckles at that. “I don’t think that’s what they meant. You know you could have a prince if you wanted.”

Sansa shakes her head. She tries to smile, but it just comes off sad. “That’s Arya’s territory. No princes for me.” She turns to Sandor. “I did get a knight, though. In my experience, that’s better.”

“Not a knight.” Sandor pulls her closer. “You okay?”

Sansa nods. “I made bad decisions all my life. I dated Joffery. I was friends with the wrong girls. Had the wrong dreams. Looked up to the wrong people. I dated Joffery,” Sansa repeats. “And now my parents think unless settle down with someone who loves me, I’m just going to keep making mistakes.”

“It’s not like that. They just want you to be happy.”

“Isn’t it though?” Sansa holds Sandor’s hand. “They like you because they know no matter what you will take care of me. If I screw up again, I have you. That’s why they’re rushing this. To make sure I have a safety net when I fall because they are sure I am going to fall.”

Sandor is silent for a moment. Finally, he asks Sansa if she’s projecting. “That’s not true.”

Sansa frowns as she looks at Sandor. He sighs. “I think they’re worried about you. Because you’ve had shit luck and they want to make sure you’re okay. Not because they think you’re going to fail, or they don’t trust you. They love you. That’s it.”

Sansa absorbs his words. After a while, she admits that he’s right. “I can’t make another mistake again.”

“You won’t.” The car arrives and Sandor opens the door for her before getting in.

“You sound so sure.”

“I’m always sure about you.”

Sandor has more confidence in her than anyone she’s ever met. Sansa is not stupid or naïve, and neither is her lover. They’re both aware that if this relationship is forever, it’s because the foundation is based on necessity. Sandor needs a purpose, and Sansa needs the devotion. The bricks are made of
love and passion, but that foundation is what keeps the house from going under. It’s not a sweet love story like her parents or passionate affair like Robb and Jon, but it works for them. Sansa calls her parents to apologize. She is going home with Sandor but will be back tomorrow morning so that they can talk about tonight. “I need to talk this over with Sandor first,” she tells them with fingers entwined with Sandor.

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After retrieving their snacks and hyped up on three cans of bottled caffeine, Jon spots a familiar name. “Robb, look at this.”

Robb walks over to inspect the paper. “That’s…”

“Rickon’s doctor,” Jon notes. He grabs his cell phone and looks him up. “It says here he specializes in criminal psychiatry and owns a private practice… worked with the FBI…” Jon pauses. He turns to Robb. “How did you find him?”

“He was a recommendation from one of mum’s friends. Said he was a miracle worker.” Robb tries to read over his shoulder. “What’s the matter?”

“Call Rickon.”

“Jon?”

“Call Rickon. Now.”

Robb grabs his phone and calls his little brother. “What’s the matter? Do you think he’s good for this?”

Jon’s mouth pursed into a tight line. “I don’t know.” Google dives can only go so far, but the second he sees that the man moved to England after his adopted daughter died from “mysterious circumstances,” all Jon can think about is making sure the mystery isn't solved with Shireen.

Chapter End Notes

I won't bother to mention how many months it has been since an update but the answer is too fucking long. Frankly, my goal is to finish this story before I post anything else. I know from experience that working on other things will put this story on the backburner and I can't do that again. I am seven chapters away. I finished all the outlines. I just hope I can give everyone the end it deserves.

I hope you enjoy this story. I will try and finish the next one as soon as I can. Have a great day everyone!
No one wants to have the fifth shot in Russian Roulette. In the first round, there is a 1 in 6 chance of the bullet being lined up with the barrel; in the second round, the probability goes down to 1 in 5, all the way through to the final sixth shot where the chance is 1 in 1 or certain death. Everyone complains about being the middle child but being the youngest was worse in a big family. By the time Rickon was born, the bullet is in the chamber, and he’s got a 50-50 shot of blowing his brains out. Everything Rickon could have done to set him apart from his siblings has been done. Every spot taken, every role filled.

Robb set the standard as the oldest. Rickon is positive when his father filled up his mother’s barrel; he knew it was a surefire safety shot. Robb is the heir, the top student, the rugby captain—which confirmed Rickon’s theory that Robb would have to try to fail because being a starting player was good enough, but he has to be the captain. Rickon won’t lie and say he doesn’t admire his brother, but that should have been enough for the eldest Stark. Instead, Robb decides he’s going to add honor student to the mix and become an engineering and business student. That is the stuff of fiction. Sansa has it easy as the first daughter. She's already insured to be a princess her entire life, but never one to lose a competition, she ends up being the beautiful one. Sansa is smart, maybe not top of her class, scholarship smart—but her grades are solid, she's athletic and most importantly, she's popular. Rickon is talking American television cheerleader-level popular. Arya should have been the one who fell through the cracks, but she staked her claim as the rebel. The one who drove her parents mad with her passion and promise for success. She is the one who would make the Stark name her own. Both the prodigal daughter and the prodigy, Rickon spent his childhood watching her find herself, even at the cost of everyone’s sanity. Rickon supposed he should have likened her to a kindred spirit, but he never fully understood Arya. He loves her—as expected from a family so close—but she is difficult, and sometimes, it seems like the only people she likes are father and Jon. She fights with Robb constantly, as if to usurp his position as the future head of the family, and despite her progress with Sansa, Rickon can still remember their yelling matches when he was a toddler. She coddles Bran, but the paraplegic made her uncomfortable. Rickon understands.

Arya has long defined herself by her skill, and seeing Bran was like staring down her greatest fear. Rickon wants to tell Arya that she doesn’t have to worry—that she shouldn’t feel sorry for Bran because Rickon sure as hell didn’t, and Bran was his favorite sibling! You’re supposed to feel sorry for handicapped people, but it’s kind of hard to feel pity when there are guys like Stephen Hawking, Willas Tyrell, every participant in the paraplegic Olympics making you feel like crap for being able-bodied and useless. Bran is artistic and studious and soulful. He sings to birds, and they flutter around him like a freaking Disney princess. Worse of all, Bran has a hot boyfriend. Rickon is straight as charcoal spaghetti, and even he thinks Bran scored—once he ignores the crazy that Jojen naturally exudes.

As the youngest, Rickon is still a blank page. The problem is that everyone has written everything, and it’s clear he’ll become a cliché. He’ll grow up handsome, but not as attractive as Sansa. He’s rebellious but has none of the genius of Arya that makes such defiance attractive. No one ever overlooks Bran, not with his condition. Rickon likes to think he’s a leader, but whereas Robb is an inspiration and "has a mind for strategy", Rickon, for all his positives, is more akin to a tyrant. So, one day, when one of the older kids comes after him for mouthing out, and Rickon shows him exactly what his mouth can do—which is bite into his arm so hard, he bleeds over the classroom’s carpet, Rickon decides he’s going to be the weird one.
And just like that, Rickon has a place in the house.

Rickon learns when and where to say outlandish things, when to utter his outrageous stories and when to bear his teeth to those who deserve it. He’s always been a biter, and he likes the shocked looks on people’s faces and the fear his enemies display when he comes too close. He’s not stupid. He has to grow up eventually—but until he finds the next best thing, he’ll have to make do with this role. Because being a freak is better than being invisible.

Maybe that’s why he became so obsessed with Shireen Baratheon.

Shireen has never been invisible in her entire life.

Thanks to the scar on her face, Shireen has always stood out. She is a normal girl otherwise. She’s sweet and smart, and a tad solemn—which is expected as the daughter of Stannis Baratheon, and Rickon falls for her at first sight. He likes how brave she is, how she shies away from attention, but still dares to pull her hair back. She never complains—not in all the time Rickon has stalked her. Her mother and stepmother are in a cult, her father is one of the richest men in England, and her stepfather is an ex-con. One day, she might inherit Baratheon Industries.

She’s still so normal, and Rickon wonders if he’s with her, then maybe, he can drop some of the pretenses for once. He didn’t have to be the “weird Stark” any longer.

Rickon thinks about this, and when Lyanna finds him staring off to a distance, she asks for his thoughts. Instead of telling her the whole truth, he relays the probability of Russian Roulette.

Lyanna stares at him. And then she frowns.

“You’re wrong.”

Rickon jumps. “What?”

“You’re math is wrong.” Lyanna grabs her phone and touches the calculator app. “Okay, say you’re playing with someone else. You haven’t considered the chance that you won’t have to play because someone has already shot themselves in the face. If you multiply the chance of a bullet being in the chamber with the chance of having to play you can calculate the risk of dying in each round. After someone takes the first shot, you have a 1/5 chance of dying and now must multiply against a 5/6 chance of having to play. That’s still a 1 in 6 chance of getting shot. You continue this equation for six rounds, and the probability remains the same.”

Rickon stares at her. “…what?”

Lyanna rolls her eyes. “1/6 multiplied by 6/6 is still 1/6. 1/5 multiplied by 5/6 is 1/6. 1/4 multiplied by 4/6 is…”

“Okay, I’m not stupid,” Rickon mutters. “I get it.”

“And furthermore, the classic gun for Russian Roulette requires that you spin the cylinder before you pull the trigger. Technically, you start over each time, so regardless, the probability is still the same. 1 in 6.”

The car to their destination stops, but Lyanna keeps talking. “No matter your chances, playing Russian Roulette is a stupid idea. If you get shot, you deserve it so don’t expect me to cry at your funeral.” Lyanna puts away her phone. The four of them walk into the house, sans Bran who is wheeled by an attentive Jojen. He’s saying something into Bran’s ear. Lyanna frowns, wondering what they are talking about. She never trusts whisperers. She is about to say something to Rickon,
only to be met by his pout. By the gods, he’s such a *kid.*

“Rickon?”

Rickon doesn’t meet his eyes. “Yeah?”

“I’m the youngest of five girls,” Lyanna tells him. “I know how it feels to have the last shot.”

The admission placates the youngest Stark, and for a brief second, he sends Lyanna a blinding smile. If it weren’t for Rickon’s immaturity, Lyanna swears her body would have been petrified. Her sister, Darcey, warned her about this. That Lyanna shouldn’t underestimate Rickon out because of his age.

“Wait a few years. Those Stark genes sneak up on you.”

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The hostess is Mariya Darry, a Frey by marriage and the mother of a mean and boastful child that went to the same summer camp as Bran. She did not age well, but no one held it against her given her marriage. For that same reason, no one has ever spoken out against her habit of frequenting establishments that employed barely legal young men or hiring catering companies that subscribe to the same hiring standards. She is elated to see Jojen at her doorstep, but less so when she sees Bran and his brother.

“I see you brought company.”

Jojen smiles, and Bran frowns when he sees it. It isn’t one of Jojen’s normal smiles, his soft, mischievous grins and it doesn’t hold the same watchful wonder in his eyes. This smile is charming and cheery. He looks like he’s happy to see her, and as soon as Bran catches the expression, he wonders who this man is. “It’s lovely to see you again, Mariya. This is Bran Stark; I’m sure you’ve met his parents.”

Her lips twitch. “Of course!” Not one to deny such sophisticated company, she allows them all in, casting a suspicious glance at the younger children. Her house is neat and has an obscure air of wealth beyond her means. She has one of her daughters fetch them a snack and refreshment.

“You said over the phone that you wanted to talk to me about a party?”

“Yes, the one I was working at last week. I was hoping you could give me a copy of your guest list. It’s…rather urgent.”

The woman gives him an odd look befitting such an unusual request. “I’m not sure I can do that, Jojen. People in my circle are rather private. I can’t give their name out to anyone.”

Under normal circumstances, Bran could not care less about the implication. Today, he’s ruffling up his tail feathers, and an abnormal air of indignation comes upon him. He is a Stark—not some minor Frey. *His* circle dines with lords. He’s technically a noble if one were to trace his lineage and god knows it exceeds any bloodline Ms. Darry could muster up.

“I know it’s a lot to ask,” Jojen tells her. He gets up from his seat. Everyone, especially Bran who is glaring, watches as he sits down next to her and takes her hand. “But it’s very important. I think quite fondly of you, Mariya.” The name grinds against Bran’s ear like nails on a chalkboard. “Surely someone as beautiful and true as yourself can find it within your heart to trust me. Just this once. You know I’m good at keeping secrets.”
What does that mean? This isn’t his Jojen, Bran thinks. His Jojen is solemn; enamored with Bran to the point of obsession. His Jojen doesn’t go after women with fidelity issues and lackluster husbands. But here is his Jojen, playing this woman like an actor on stage.

Bran’s watches Mariya’s when Jojen goes in for the kill. The older boy leans into her ear and whispers a discretion he doesn’t want Bran to hear. Mariya enjoys the gesture, but the words don’t make her toes curl as his whispers do to Bran. It doesn’t make her pupils blow or her lips part like the seas. Bran is not stupid, and he is not naïve either. When they’re alone, Jojen will apologize to Bran for flirting in front of him, but he will tell Bran that he needed to do it to get that list.

And Bran will know he is lying—because that isn’t the expression one makes when Joen Reed seduces them.

Bran knows better than anyone.

“You’re such a sweet boy, Jojen. How can I refuse?” Mariya gets up from her couch and heads to her room to print out the list. When she leaves, Bran tells his brother and Lyanna to leave them alone for a moment.

“Where?” Rickon asks, sass dripping from his tongue.

“Offer to help her kids in the kitchen.”

“But Bran—”

“I need to talk to Jojen. Alone.”

Lyanna catches the hint. “We got it.” She drags her ‘friend’ into the kitchen as commanded, leaving Jojen to Bran.

Jojen sighs. “Bran, I am sorry. But I needed to get that list.”

Bran can hear Sansa’s warning in his head.

“You’re lying.”

“What?” Jojen is confused, but Bran can see his eyes narrow. He is cautious, and his survivor roots are taking over.

“You weren’t flirting with her—not when you were whispering in her ears. You didn’t want me to hear it, because you promised her something. Threatened her—”

“Did you see her expression? The last thing I was doing was—”

“—How do you know her?” Bran cuts him off.

“I told you. I work at a restaurant she frequents, and when she has a dinner party, she’ll ask me to help the catering.” Jojen looks defensive. “She knows I need the money. A lot of my customers do, and they sometimes invite over for a job.”

“She’s one of the clients that give you hundreds of dollars per night? Sometimes thousands? Just for catering?”

“I try to keep my regulars happy. It’s just business.” Jojen shakes his head. “If you’re asking if I did anything with her, the answer is…”
“I know the answer.” Jojen would have never let him come if he did. “I’m just trying to wrap my head around the fact that she gives you hundreds of dollars each night for what? Flirting? Serving appetizers. I’m not stupid, Jo.”

Bran feels stupid regardless. He knows he doesn’t understand money. His parents buy him everything without question, but he’s still a Stark. His family could sniff about criminality in a church. There’s something odd about Jojen’s cash flow. How his boyfriend works odd hours of the night, how he keeps a secret phone that he hides from Bran’s all-seeing eyes. Bran, intoxicated by the love Jojen has given him, has often chosen willful ignorance in this matter. He’ll tell me when he’s ready, Bran told himself, because a lie of omission isn’t a real lie.

Now, he realizes how stupid he was—face to face with one of Jojen’s ‘lies.’

Jojen frowns. “This is why I didn’t want us to come.”

“Really? Because the only reason she hasn’t thrown herself at you is that I am here.”

“Bran…”

“I don’t like it when you keep things from me,” Bran tells him. When Jojen opens his mouth to speak, Bran interrupts. “And I hate it, even more when you make me love you until I’m so far gone, I’ll forgive anything you’ve done. It’s a strategic move. You wait. You watch. And then you tell me when the thought of leaving you hurts me. So, I’m going to ask you again: have you told me everything about you?”

Jojen hesitates. It was second too long, but it was enough for Mariya to come back with her list and halt Jojen’s answer. She touches his arm and asks him to visit again anytime. “My husband is gone all week.” The invitation does not make matters worse but does nothing to alleviate the damage. Jojen watches as Bran grips the handles of his wheelchair and turns away from him. Jojen does all he can to not glare at the Frey wife.

“Thank you,” he says instead. “I look forward to seeing you again.” Jojen would sooner swim in sewage. They call Rickon and Lyanna from the kitchen, but that was the last Jojen heard Bran say before he entered the car. As soon as Jojen finishes maneuvering Bran’s wheelchair in the vehicle, Jojen assures Bran of the truth.

“You know I love you. I would never do anything to jeopardize our relationship.” Unlike Jojen, Bran doesn’t hold back his response.

“That’s the problem, Jojen.”

Their conversation is put on pause when Rickon receives a phone call.

“It’s Robb,” Rickon tells them, nervous of clouting tension building up in this car. There’s nowhere to run either.

Bran turns away, and for once, Jojen is relieved to lose the heat of his lover’s gaze. “Pick it up.”

“Are you—?”

“It’s fine,” Bran tells his little brother. “He should know what’s going on.”

“Why?” They were making such progress!

Bran looks at Jojen.
“Because it isn’t right to keep secrets from the people you love.”

***

Ramsay tells Theon everything. The trust his boyfriend has given him is worth more than any present, any silk shirt, or Michelin meal. Ramsay spends hours confiding in Theon, stories of past and future ghosts that forever haunt him, and these moments are sacred. No one has ever love Theon the way Ramsay will, and no one will ever love Ramsay the way Theon has. For this reason, Theon has to trust Ramsay with just as much vigor—because what is love without trust?

“Red is a lovely color on you.” The compliment sounds forced, as if Ramsay is trying to get praise from a strangled throat. “That’s why I dressed you in blue.”

The lingerie Theon is wearing is moss blue—an awful shade against Theon’s complexion. Theon hates it, but he’s glad to be wearing it. He doesn’t want to wear something he approves of—not for their guest. Never for that man.

Ramsay places a blindfold over his eyes. “You keep your mouth shut. You let me handle things. Go against the plan, and I leave you for dead.”

Perhaps Theon is getting ahead of himself, but he doesn’t believe Ramsay. It sounds like a game when he makes the threat, like when he says he’s going to kill Theon and fucks him instead.

Someone knocks on the door and Theon tenses.

“It’s time,” Ramsay mutters. He’s irritated, and Theon’s breath hitches. Ramsay has the same tone whenever he’s about to do something vile, and Theon hopes for a bloodbath today.

Theon waits and listens. He hears the door open, the incoming footsteps, the ingenuine greetings that cover their grudges, and finally, he hears them into the bedroom of the suite, and his mouth is dry because all the water in his body is released into a cold sweat when he hears the visitor's voice.

“Oh, you even blindfolded him for me.”

Theon has to remind himself of how angry Ramsay would be if he threw up.

“Just like you asked,” Theon hears Ramsay proclaim. He knows that is a lie. Hopes it is, at the very least. He recalls Ramsay telling his men to pack it because he doesn’t want Theon to see Euron’s face. He hopes the memory is real, but then again, he hopes this reality isn’t.

Theon can feel Euron drawing near. The air grows cold, and Theon can feel Euron’s touch before it lands. He knows his uncle is reaching forward. He retches at the thought. Before a single finger is laid on his golden hair, Ramsay’s hand all but slaps him away.

His hero, Theon swoons.

“Let’s not get hasty. We have to talk business.”

“And skip the pleasantries?” Euron chuckles. “I never strike a deal without some goodwill.”

“The feast upon your eyes should be enough for now,” Ramsay suggests, his voice deep enough to escape a hiss. “I’ll let you touch him after we put some numbers on paper.”

“You don’t trust me.”

“Don’t take it personally,” Ramsay answers. He moves away to play with some glasses. Theon can
hear the liquor pour into the cup. “I don’t trust anyone.”

“No?” Euron asks. “Not even Theon?”

“Why would I put any faith in a whore?”

Euron sits down on the bed next to his nephew. Theon shivers at the proximity, and he chooses to focus on the fact that they are not touching. Not yet. “You didn’t bind him. You’re not worried he’s going to run away?”

“I trained him well,” Ramsay tells him. “If this goes well, I’ll even throw in some free advice.”

“He’s so pretty.” Euron ignores the jab. “He didn’t get that from his father, but his mother was a decent bitch. I always figured she was doing her own business on the docks while my brother ran his ships.” Euron laughed at his crudeness. “God, I should have had her, too.”

“Well, it’s never too late.”

Euron shakes his head. “No, there’s no point. Why settle for old bones when I can have some fresh blood instead?”

For the first time, Theon feels the man on him, and it isn’t something small like a finger or a hand. No, Euron presses his lips against Theon’s hair and inhales. Theon must use all of his power not to move, or cry, or do anything to upset Ramsay.

This is for you, Theon reminds himself. Ramsay is doing this for him, and Theon must trust that Ramsay knows what’s good for him.

“Has he cried for you, yet?” Euron asks sweetly. “Has he begged you to stop as you rip him open and watch the blood run down his thighs? Has he cried for his father or pray for the Drowned One to take him under the abyss?” Euron’s tongue touches Theon’s cheek. “Have you made him moan as you put his mouth on his cock and watch him wish for death after he gives into you—”

Ramsay sets down the glass.

“—Because I have.”

Ramsay is fast.

Euron is faster.

Theon loses his blindfold when everything goes to shit. Euron grabs Theon by the neck as soon as Ramsay takes out his gun, well hidden by bottles of liquor and jars and cans. Ramsay’s men move to take out Euron’s cavalry, but they are late. One man manages to throw a knife in Euron’s direction, and soon, Theon has a blade pressed against his neck.

Euron laughs, and Theon knows his uncle has won. He knows, because Theon vowed never to doubt Ramsay, and yet Theon has never been more sure that Euron will walk out of this room alive. The Greyjoy wants to cry, but Ramsay doesn’t deserve another slight.

I’m sorry, Theon thinks.

“If you think that whore is enough to save you—”

“Are we still playing, Mr. Bolton? Because you already lost when you didn’t shoot me.”
“Slit his throat or not; I will kill you.”

“Maybe, but not today. You’re not going to shoot me. Not when I hold my nephew’s life in my hands.” He presses the knife against Theon’s throat. “It must be maddening when a monster becomes a man. He makes you weak, and you know it. But you can’t even bring yourself to get rid of him, can you? Why? He’s a good lay; I’ll give you that. Is it happiness?” Euron’s eyes look straight past Ramsay’s gun and into his eyes. “Is it love?”

Ramsay shoots, but he doesn’t aim at Euron’s head but instead his arm. A shootout plays out in the background as both Euron and Ramsay’s men take the blows. One of Euron’s men grabs Ramsay. Though gifted with a penchant for violence, Ramsay isn’t an experienced fighter. He holds his own, but it takes far too much time, and the other man stabs his torso before getting a bullet in the face. Though all of Euron’s men are dead, the Greyjoy is the true victor in the end. As Ramsay counts the remains, he refuses to even glance over to where Theon once laid.

Theon and Euron are already gone.

***

Ramsay, for all his criticism, is proud of the pack he built. Many men come and go, but the ones who stay are loyal. Some are even smart. They do not merely drive him to safety, but also to aid.

Dr. Lecter opens the door when Ramsay rings.

“It’s been a while doctor. Mind if I come in?”

Dr. Lecter steps to the side to let Ramsay’s men scuffle him through. “It’s very rude to turn up uninvited.” Dr. Lecter glances at the blood dripping on the marble. Thank goodness he replaced the carpet. It was dangerous enough commodity with the dogs, but blood stains were a bitch to clean on polyester. “But I will forgive you this once seeing as it is an emergency.”

“Thank you,” Ramsay tells him. Dr. Lecter is the only man he thanks without reserve. He knows the consequences of poor etiquette.

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After Ramsay’s first session with Dr. Lecter, the world made sense.

“Doctor-patient confidentiality is not an infallible concept. While I may play priest to your confessions, I am required by law to inform the proper authorities if I have reason to believe you intend to harm yourself or others. Is that clear?”

Ramsay rose an eyebrow at the declaration. “So, if I want to kill someone, it’s better that I do it and confess, rather than tell you I want to do it?”

Dr. Lecter smiled at him. “If you killed someone and I thought you planned to do it again, I would be in the right to call the police.”

“How, that is something they don’t talk about in movies.” Ramsay tilted his head. “You talk funny.”

“I am from—”

“I’m not talking about the accent.” Ramsay drank Dr. Lecter’s tea. “You never said you would report me, just that you are ‘required’ to, or that ‘you’d be in the right.’”
Dr. Lecter’s grin grew wider. “You are a very astute young man.”

Ramsay was indeed a boy then, because praise from an adult—a man of authority, a man of prestige like his father, made him puff up with pride. “I’m not stupid. My father thinks I am, because I do things he doesn’t like. He thinks anyone who does something he doesn’t like is stupid. Following his command like a lamb to the slaughter—that’s stupid. Domeric was like that. The perfect son. The heir.”

“Domeric is your older brother?”

“Half-brother,” Ramsay corrected. There was a pause, and Dr. Lecter knew Ramsay was sizing him up. He was determining whether Dr. Lecter was a person he could trust, or at least confide in without consequence. Then, Ramsay spoke. Perhaps, Ramsay could sense he was a predator, but knew that their prey differed.

“I didn’t kill him,” Ramsay revealed. “My father thinks I did. Domeric’s aunt thinks so, too. But I wasn’t lying. It was an accident.”

“What happened?”

“Domeric wasn’t the model son that everyone made out to be. He liked to see people get hurt. He just hid it better than I did. ‘Impulse control,’ he called it.” Ramsay looked down at his tea. “I think that’s why he brought me into the family. He needed a scapegoat in case something went wrong. And I knew it.” Ramsay turned his gaze back on Dr. Lecter. “I knew he was using me, but I wanted so desperately to be a Bolton, to not be a fucking bastard that I agreed to it.”

“What happened on the night of his death? With the girl?”

Ramsay put the cup down. “We sometimes hired girls. Prostitutes. Whores. A bum or two who needed the money and could provide a good chase and whoever got there first got to have them. A true bonding experience between brothers.”

Dr. Lecter’s lips twitched.

“You don’t approve?” Ramsay sneered.

“This is not my story to judge,” Dr. Lecter said instead. “But no, while I agree violence may come in hand with sensuality, your proclivities are not my tastes. Continue.”

There was something in the manner of his request that made Ramsay comply. “That night, Domeric won. But he didn’t want to fuck her—he, he grabbed a knife, and he started to…try something new.” Ramsay paused as he remembered the incident. “I asked him what he was doing, and I guess that was a fucking stupid question, but Domeric loved answering my stupid questions. He loved being the smart one. Fucking idiot.” Ramsay paused. “He turned around and that girl…she took the knife from him and just…started stabbing him.” Ramsay shook his head. “It wasn’t even that sort of knife. It was a flaying knife. You don’t stab people with that.”

“That’s what you found abnormal?”

“Yeah.” Ramsay supposed it was. “She went after me next, but I was stronger than her. She only got Domeric by surprise. I got the knife from her and skinned her throat. She died before the cops came.”

“Why did you call the cops?”
“What kind of question is that?”

Dr. Lecter set aside his notebook. “There was a chance you could have gotten away with everything if you had just walked away. Domeric was dead. The girl was dead. Perhaps, she started stabbing him, and he managed to get the knife away from her in time to deliver a final blow, but not before succumbing to his wounds. Or he slit her throat—her death was not instant so managed vengeance in her dying breath.”

“My DNA was all over the crime scene. People knew I was with Domeric. It was self-defense…”

“You thought about it before you called.”

“I…” Ramsay fell silent. "Yes."

Dr. Lecter leaned in. “You are a smart boy, regardless of what your father believes. You choose the right story, and I commend you for that. That’s not why you’re here.”

“Why am I here, then?”

“You are here because, after your brother’s death, you started acting up more. You were already categorized as a troubled student. Minor crimes, little indiscretions. Your teachers think it’s because of trauma, but there’s more truth to that story.” Dr. Lecter fetches a cookie from the well-placed tin. “You want more than the occasional squabble in the schoolyard. You miss the hunt and wish to fill your palette with the colors of that night. It haunts you, and so you sketch on paper what you want to draw on canvas.

Ramsay choked up.

"Even if that's true, it doesn't matter." Ramsay opted for a different response. “What do I do? My father is putting me on heavy security detail since Domeric’s death.” Whether it is to keep an eye on his heir’s safety or wait for his downfall was the question.

“If he has not seek vengeance for his son’s death, then he is a pragmatist of the highest regard.” Dr. Lecter spoke the words Ramsay had been yearning to hear his entire life. “You are his heir. He will keep you safe, if nothing else but for his legacy to continue. And, you must keep yourself safe from those who hunt monsters.”

Looking back, Ramsay would say that Dr. Lecter was the first person Ramsay genuinely broke bread with. It was not true trust, for Ramsay would never be so stupid, but it closest thing he ever had.

“Teach me.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed reading!

If I ever get around to re-editing and titling this story, this chapter would be called hope. Let me be honest, I am pretty sure I got this chapter done because I am trying to avoid studying for my exams. Asha was supposed to be in this chapter, but it became clear it was more trouble than it was worth to write her in. She will appear in a later chapter (hopefully?).
Chapter 64 will include a final "resolution" to Jon and Robb's relationship while Ramsay makes decision that affects Jojen and Bran's life forever.

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