I See You

by Caroh99

Summary

Sansa Stark and Sandor Clegane on Titanic, inspired by the James Cameron film / Sansa Stark is terrified. In a month she will be marrying Joffrey Baratheon (a man who makes every day a painful ordeal for her) after they arrive in America aboard the biggest ship in history. But what happens when someone from her past comes back? Why does Sandor Clegane’s re-appereance shake Sansa so much?

Notes

*Copyrights:
- I do not own anything related to G.R.R. Martin’s works, or to the 1997 film Titanic. And I mean no disrespect to the historical figures that appear in this work, as my interpretations of them were inspired by the film.
- Throughout the story I use lines from the both ASOIAF books, the Game of Thrones show, as well as from the script of the Titanic movie, along with it´s deleted scenes and some of the documentaries from it´s special features.
- I tried to be as historically accurate as possible, but if I didn´t I blame my fanfic writer´s creative license for that!

*Warnings: It´s going be angsty at parts since it explores themes such as PTSD, physiological and physical abuse (nothing too explicit of the latter), attempted sexual assault (nothing explicit), and some nonconsensual situations (nothing explicit). And more warnings may appear as the story moves forward

By the way, I wanted to share with you all the “poster” I made for the fic, as a sort of re-
introduction gift for the fandom after my long absence! :D

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1. Beautiful Sansa Stark

Out there in the horizon was the grand ship that the whole world was calling the pride of the White Star Line- the RMS Titanic. It could be seen from several blocks away, towering above roofs and the terminal buildings like the skyline of a city. Beautiful Sansa Stark was staring with a growing sense of dread at the imposing steamer from one of the bedroom windows in her suite at The South Western Hotel, while it waited for departure on the deep waters of the White Star Dock down at the harbour.

Since as long as Sansa could recall all everyone had been talking about for months with nothing but awe and the highest of praises was that colossal white and black machine. This morning from other windows dozens of people were also gazing out at the Titanic, but Sansa wondered if she was the only one who was not looking forward with anticipation to boarding the largest ship yet launched in history.

_I gather I probably am_, Sansa resignedly contemplated, trying very hard to wait patiently for the ill-fated hour that the imminent knock on her door would mean.
She had changed into two different outfits, and was now at last ready to go. Her nails were trimmed, and her auburn hair was arranged into a huge pompadour that could seat perfectly her enormous intricate hat- the biggest she owned. It made Sansa smile a little to recall a morning at the horse races when Cersei had been asked to remove a hat of similar size due to all the people behind her who could not see what was happening. Her future mother-in-law had not been one bit pleased by that, but to Sansa is was a fond memory.

The Olympic-class ocean liner was about to embark on its maiden voyage with New York in America as its destination, carrying more than a thousand people of all nationalities, social classes and ages across the seas. Sansa was one of those souls, but hers was to be a one-way passage voyage since she had no idea when would she be returning to England, her homeland. She had been aboard other luxury liners before, but even at this distance it was evident to her that this was the biggest ship she had ever laid eyes on.

She had declined to join Joffrey and Tommen the previous afternoon when they went to the docks to get a better look at the exterior of the large vessel, for Sansa had no desire to get close to that ship before she absolutely had to. From this distance she could already make out many of the details that made up the steamer, from its four tunnels to its Stars and Stripes and Union Jack flags at its bow and stern, and even its White Star banner at its center below the code flags. In any case, Titanic had gone against tradition and had not been open for public inspection prior to her launch, so Sansa’s request to stay behind at the hotel so she could rest had thankfully not been challenged.

It was not yet midday of April 10th 1912, but the city of Southampton had already come alive as it prepared for the special event that was to take place in less than two hours from now. Great assessments of people could be seen at the distance, and loud noises could be heard coming up through the open windows of the bedroom, composed of excited cries and the bustle of the masses below in the streets that added to the cacophony of sounds belonging to the loud motors and the hocking of automobiles.

But Sansa was only dimly aware of it all. She was attempting to force herself to remain calm, but since it was impossible to take a deep breath with her corset laced so tightly, she had to settle with twisting tightly in her hand part of the curtain of yellow silk beside her. Yet even in these brief blessed moments of precious privacy it was difficult to try and ignore the knowledge of what would happen to her once the Titanic set sail, however much she wished her mind would stray far away from reality if only for a moment.

Just as if he had known that she was relishing her solitude, Joffrey´s voice suddenly carried through the closed door from the room next to hers. The sounds of her fiancé talking made Sansa clench her jaw tightly. She had promised to herself to try and accept her fate and be a bit more considerate and attentive towards Joff, if only to just make her situation a little less difficult to bear, but it was so hard for Sansa to keep that promise.
Specially after her betrothed requested from her to do things she had no desire to do, just as he had done three quarters of an hour ago when he instructed her to change from her initial chosen outfit for today into one that was socially considered more suitable. Yet black had been the perfect colour to match her mood. There was nothing about today for her to celebrate. *Maybe they’ve forgotten Uncle Robert, but I won’t ever stop mourning Father.*

But the truth went even deeper than this. Joffrey’s past behaviour towards her was impossible to forget, not matter how much her fiancé tried to make it up to her by playing the gracious gentleman. Perhaps the fact that he at least tried to make amends should have made Sansa feel more kindly toward him, but it did not. Sansa knew Joff could be gallant when it suited him, but it seemed to suit him less and less with every passing day. She knew that all his courtesies could vanish in the blink of an eye with the slightest of provocations.

With a long loud sigh she shook her head and closed the window. Sansa turned sharply away from the morning view, crossing the bedroom to the corner farthest from the door and Joffrey’s voice. To a stranger chancing to walk through the doorway, (had the door not been closed and locked), Sansa Stark would have made the perfect picture of what a well brought up girl should be like, from her tailored matching clothes to the natural composed manner in which she carried herself at almost all times.

People never failed to remark how elegant young pretty Miss Stark always looked, and she was in truth an admirable product of years of practicing the rules of femininity under the watchful eye of Mademoiselle Mordane. An education which had certainly left its mark on Sansa’s already graceful character- to the point where even in moments such as these when she was all alone in her bedroom, with her doomed future looming before her like a deep dark void, Sansa nonetheless calmly sat down with a straight back upon the chair before the vanity table at a corner of the bedroom, and stared at her reflection in the mirror with empty eyes, waiting for the fateful knock on the door.

Yes, Sansa was the perfect portrait of a lady, though nobody knew what a high daily cost she had to pay in order to be able to be worthy of such a title. And if society suspected they preferred to ignore such a fact, for the truth of the matter was that it was ever so much more conventional for the world to pretend that Sansa was far from being a miserable barely seventeen year old girl, even if she did feel afraid for all the lonely hours of the day, with every smile costing her the greatest of increasing difficulties.

The Lannisters were certainly aware of her misery having been the ones to shatter Sansa’s dreams and hopes, but so long as Sansa behaved properly at all times and played along in the twisted game they lived in where she was expected to act as if there were no hard feelings between them, the lions -her captors- did not really care how empty she felt inside. So why should others mind?

Indeed, strangers to the circles she moved in might wonder why poised, graceful, innocent Sansa
Stark should have any cause to be unhappy, for she was well educated, well endowed, regal of bearing, and could sew, dance, sing and write poetry, besides knowing how to dress- all attributes many young girls might envy her for.

Sansa played the high harp and was very beautiful, with high cheekbones and the thick auburn hair of the Tully’s. Her beauty was so great that not even her losses and the recent disgraceful scandal surrounding her father’s death and that of her inheritance could diminish it in the world’s eyes.

Sansa’s small even breaths and the *click click* of the small golden watch that was resting on one of the corners of her vanity table were the only sounds interrupting the stillness of the bedroom now. Her piercing blue eyes, which she also had inherited from her mother’s side of the family, vacantly gazed at the sight Sansa made this morning in the mirror, even as she thought, *I hardly know myself anymore.*

Through the looking glass a creature of porcelain beauty who was not in control of her own life was staring at her, making her feel more than ever as if she had become a ghost somewhere along the road, dead before her time. Her life was over before it had begun.

*Life is not a fairy tale,* Sansa had learned to her sorrow some while ago. *Who am I these days? Who is this strange girl sitting before me with big empty eyes that reflect misery rather than innocence?*

The persistent *click click* of the watch finally managed to break through Sansa’s train of thoughts, and as her stare fell on the time (10:45), her pulse quickened, and her chest began to rise and fall at a faster pace, constricting her ribs inside her already binding corset. Sansa let her eyes wonder over the smooth wooden surface of the vanity momentarily, only to gulp as she raised her left hand to the side of her face so she could secure one of the jeweled hatpins beneath the big bow of her hat.

She stilled the moment she caught sight of the engagement ring decorating her finger. There were times when she could manage to forget she was carrying this dreadful rock, but sooner or later one of Joffrey’s most expensive reminders that he owned her would made itself be felt or noticed. Long ago when Sansa had been little, she had spent countless hours dreaming on how her wedding ring would look like, imagining from its size and colour, to the way it would feel once it was on her finger, and the look on everyone’s face when she showed it to them.

*Mrs. Joffrey Baratheon,* Sansa thought, contemplating the ring even after her hatpin was secured.

Once she would have envied the girl who got to possess a jewel such as the one she carried now, but now to Sansa it was only a ridiculously opulent shameful thing- a twelve carat yellow diamond set in Lannister gold that meant she was tied to a man to whom she felt nothing but contempt and
dislike for; a reminder that she apparently had everything a girl in her position could dream of, and yet she had nothing that really mattered.

They have made me a Lannister, Sansa thought bitterly, for everything she owned in the world was a gift from Joffrey. From the clothes on her back to the food on her plate, they were all a present from him. I’m dependant on him and always will be, as he is so fond of reminding me...

Yet again for the fourth time in the past hours, Sansa’s mind strayed back to the moment when she had woken up—possibly due to her musings on the man whom she was going to join herself to in marriage less than a month from now, under the eyes of God and men.

Dawn, she had thought as she woke up, stretching under the bedcovers like a lazy cat with a smile on her face, every nerve atingle. Another day. Another new day. Nightmares of the time after her father had died still troubled Sansa’s sleep sometimes; dark suffocating dreams that woke her in the black of night struggling for breath. But last night’s dream had not been like that. Home, she had realized quickly. It was a dream of home.

“Sweet one,” her father had been telling her gently, as tears ran down her eyes because her music tutor Mr. Dahlin, whom Sansa has fancied herself to be in love with when she was nine years old, had left their service to go back to Sweden. “Listen to me. You’re being silly. When you’re old enough, I will make you a match with a man who’s worthy of you, someone brave and gentle and strong...”

Sansa had been so little and naive that she had believed her father blindly, and had hugged Lady, her puppy, closer to her, reassured and quite content. It was for those old days Sansa hungered for. She prayed for them even if she knew it was useless, for they were never meant to be again.

Morning light had ended up stealing into Sansa’s sleepy thoughts like a thief soon enough, and then the dream had faded, and her father and Lady were dead again, and she was bound in marriage to Joff. Don’t, Sansa told herself, when she realized tears were about to fall down her cheeks.

She blinked them back as the reminiscences faded away. She had already silently wept her eyes dry last night, and couldn’t afford to cry at present. That beautiful dream of long ago had ended and her only road was forward.

“Sansa!”
Lost in thoughts and in memories of the past - in happier days of a better life than the one she was forced to live now - the loud voice and sudden knock did not fail to startle Sansa, even driving a small gasp from her.

She didn’t like to weep when or where they could see her, but sometimes the memories of her father came unbidden, and then it was really hard to hold back her grief. She tried not to think of her father or her life before the Lannisters too often, but in truth Sansa would have given anything to go back in time.

A heartbeat later the rap came again, more sharply this time. Be still, or else you’ll betray yourself.

“Do you hear me?” her fiancé wondered through the door. “Open up! What the deuce are you doing in there? We’re really running late now. Come out!”

He calls me as if he were calling a dog, she thought.

“I’ll be outside in a moment,” Sansa called back in answer, shaking her head in an attempt to gather herself as she reached out with trembling hands for her white and purple gloves and her matching tightly rolled umbrella, gulping.

She pushed herself out of her chair, and quickly pinched her cheeks with one hand and bit her lips to draw some colour to her pale face. I must look pretty, and I must be strong.

She knew she would get reproaches from the lions if they didn’t arrive at the docks at a convenient time, but she did not particularly care much for that. Rather than hurrying outside at once, Sansa walked over to the body length mirror beside the vanity table.

Sansa protested a few times in little ways like this- making them late for an appointment, or saying the inappropriate thing over dinner. Anything she could think of that was rebellious and would therefore make her feel alive once again.

Sansa got a good long look at herself from head to toe now. After Joffrey had told her to change, Sansa had taken out her expensive large hat and her white and purple strapped jacket and narrow skirt, which was made out of a rich fabric and had many layers to it. The whole setup consisted of a skirt, a white blouse with a velvet high collar, a double breasted long jacket which had a belt at the waist and white and purple buttons on the front and back of it which were covered in velvet.
In some lights the purple stripes looked a deep blue colour, and her small tie had a diamond shaped brooch with gold settings, and an amethyst in the middle with gold vines extending from the stone to the edges of the brooch as a tiepin. Sansa’s earrings and her high curved shoes with criss-cross straps at their front were her favourite accessories of this outfit though. She could not help but think that due also to her corset, her figure resembled that of an hourglass, just the way women looked like in the latest fashion magazines.

_The lions won’t be pleased though_, Sansa thought with a smirk, as she turned around to admire the backside of her outfit. It was beautiful, but white was not the appropriate color to wear when one traveled. Cersei would know and probably remark about it. _Let her._

She didn’t care anymore if other people were shocked by her decision to wear a light color today. The only things that bothered her about her garments were that they had been bought and paid for by Joffrey in his latest trip to Paris, and that due to her situation even the things Sansa had once loved -like fashion- were slowly becoming an increasing symbol of oppression.

_At least I won’t have to change three times today_, she reasoned, since it was not expected of anyone to change during their first evening aboard a ship’s journey. _If only I could dress up for people I love again._

Sansa held her breath as she finally walked across the bedroom some moments later with her head held high, and waited till her hand was on the doorknob to don the pretty smile on her face she used to hide her sorrows.

_And now it comes_, Sansa thought, opening the door and crossing the threshold. She walked into the adjacent room, bracing herself for the charade she was required to perform whenever she was with Joff and Cersei, only to stop at once a heartbeat later in utter surprise.

She drew a little intake of breath, and realized a moment too late that her mouth was hanging open in a big O. Across the room was the one person Sansa Stark would have least expected to find, and that was all it took for all her self-possession to fade away instantly, since the man before her brought back all the memories she had been trying so hard to suppress.

With only one look he could make Sansa feel like a fool because of the composed behaviour she tried so hard to appear she possessed. This tall impressive man with shoulder length black hair looked exactly like the last time Sansa had beheld him, but it wasn’t due to these things that Sansa would have recognized him anywhere. It was because it was not easy to forget once you saw them, the burn scars that covered half of Sandor Clegane’s face.
I found a picture of Sophie Turner (Sansa Stark) at a tattoo shop in Belfast (where Titanic was built), and when I saw the drawing of this very same ship in the background (at least I think that’s what it is), I couldn’t stop smiling, taking it as some sort of sign that this story was worth telling!
Hello everyone! Thank you SO much for you for reading/commenting <3 I made this fic for you, and after months of working on it- to finally hear what you think of it is GREAT! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seeing Sandor Clegane standing in the same room as her after all these months brought it all back to Sansa in the blink of an eye. Her attempts at trying to forget the past disappeared with a single look at him. From the time when I was little to my current mockery of a life, she thought in despair, rooted to the spot.

It didn’t even matter that she hadn’t met him until she was four and ten. Before she knew it, memories of Sansa’s whole life were rushing through her mind this morning in which she was due to set sail to America on the R.M.S. Titanic.

Those recollections overwhelmed her, for Sansa had not been born into this particular claustrophobic life were wealth and the expectations and limitations of what a young woman could do ruled over one’s every day thoughts and choices…

Sansa Stark had once been a happy girl with hope in her heart. She had been born in the winter of 1895 at the Stark’s vast estate in Yorkshire, and had lived all her childhood protected behind the great walls of Winterfell. I was so sheltered back then, Sansa sometimes thought nowadays with dull resentment.

But she could not find it in her to blame her parents for that. Eddard Stark and his wife Catelyn had never been too fond of the city, so Sansa’s earliest years had taken place in the wild moors, far from London. She had been loved and cared for by her parents and all the people at Winterfell, and had grown up to be a girl everyone described as sweet, delicate and kind. A girl who wanted only for things to be nice and pretty, the way they were in the fairy tales and songs her mother used to read to her every night before she fell asleep.

But when she was eight her mother had died as she tried to give birth to her second child, and the following years had been quite hard for Sansa and Eddard. She loved her father dearly, but it was never the same after Catelyn passed away. The subsequent years following the most tragic event she had known were rather uneventful.
She remained living with her father at Winterfell, spending her days being tutored on various lessons, and in between her teachings Sansa would play with her dog called Lady, and her other dearest friend, Podrick Payne, the orphaned nephew of her father’s butler, Ilyn Payne. Pod had been the only other child close to Sansa in age, and had dreamed only of one day becoming a houseboy at the “big house”, making his uncle proud.

Old Uncle Jon had been one of Eddard Stark’s oldest friends, and the husband of Lysa, Catelyn Stark’s sister, and it hadn’t been until the elderly gentleman had died, and Sansa and her father went to Scotland to pay their respects to the bereft family, that her tranquil idyllic life finally started to change.

That trip to the Highlands had been the first time Sansa had met her mother’s sister and her sickly little cousin, Robert. Even if she hadn’t grown particularly fond of either of them once she had met them, (though she did keep until recently a current correspondence with Sweetrobin, as little Robert liked to be called), Sansa had rushed to throw her arms around her aunt’s neck and had kissed her cheek once her father had told her what her aunt had done for her.

Some days after their arrival at The Eyrie, her aunt and her father had conversed about Sansa’s future, and she could only imagine that Aunt Lysa must have explicitly expressed of what a vital importance it was for Sansa to be tutored abroad if she wanted to be presented into the best circles of society in some years time, to the point where Eddard had finally relented to Lysa’s pleas and agreed to be separated from his daughter for a time.

Sansa had both beamed with happiness when she learned she was to go to a boarding school in the Continent and had felt a little scared at the prospect of leaving her father and the life she had known at Winterfell, but the promises of what this new chapter would bring had been too alluring and great to really cast a shadow over Sansa’s soaring spirits.

So when she was barely eleven Sansa had gone away to the prestigious Mademoiselle Mordane’s Académie in the outskirts of Paris. She had parted from her father with a heavy heart, but the following years at her French finishing school had been where some of the most wonderful memories Sansa had ever known had taken place.

She had been a brilliant pupil who excelled in almost all of her lessons, and had made many friends whom Sansa could only recall with fondness. The dearest girls had been Jeyne Poole, Mya Snow and Myranda Royce, and due to the years of living without any true female companions by her side, Sansa ended up treasuring those girls as much as if they had been her true sisters.

Her friends had all possessed quite different personalities, but all of them had been taught to be good girls who would never rise up against their parents, their future husbands, or the strict rules society had inflicted upon women of their station. Sansa had been content at that time with being
brought up to believe and behave in just the same way as the other girls, for all of them were children and did not know any better.

She could still laugh at the memories of countless afternoons eating on the tower steps that led to the bedroom she shared with her friends. They would all giggle and gossip and share secrets and Sansa would always go to bed on those nights thankful to have met such nice people.

Then one day when Sansa was four and ten her time at Miss Mordane’s Academy was done, so her father travelled back to France to fetch her. Despite Sansa’s fondness for the school itself, for her tutors and for her friends, she had been as excited to leave it as she had once been to join it, for now that her education was over her life was truly about to start, and Sansa had nothing if not great expectations for her future.

As soon as her studies were finished, Eddard introduced her to as much of Paris’ society as he could. The pageantry of the parties, its men and women in their velvets and silks and gemstones, the great city with its people- all of it had helped to make those days the most magical time of Sansa’s whole life, and yet there had been so much she had not seen or done!

I thought my song was beginning the day that father came to pick me up at the academy, but it was almost done, Sansa mused sullenly, for in Paris, not three days after she left school, her father had ran into his oldest friend Robert Baratheon, whom he had not seen for over a decade, and Sansa’s fate had thus been sealed forever.

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Eddard Stark and Robert Baratheon had met in Switzerland when they were nine years old, and ever since they had become the best of friends, and neither the passing of time nor the Atlantic Ocean had managed to change this for Ned or for the American he thought of as a brother.

Robert Baratheon, a steel magnate, had been a member of a well-established family, prosperous in the manufacturing industry, who owned the largest fortune in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It hadn’t been until a year after meeting him that Sansa learned that Mr. Baratheon had once in his youth wished to marry her father’s sister, Lyanna. Sansa’s aunt had died quite young though, putting an end to the good match that would have not only made Robert and Eddard brothers for true, but given the former the irrefutable social entrance into European society.

In the end Robert had married Cersei of the California Lannisters, a daughter to one of the most
prominent families in America, ever since Cersei’s grandfather had thrived in the mining world during the California Gold Rush. Cersei had also happened to be the only daughter of Tywin Lannister, a man who was as rich as Croesus, and who was known as The Great Lion.

Robert Baratheon had therefore married the heir to quite a vast fortune, for even if Cersei had two brothers, neither had ever married or sired children, which meant that his offspring would receive an overwhelming inheritance, particularly for their firstborn son.

Cersei and Robert had shared an estranged marriage since the start, but all Sansa could see when she first met them was how nice, big, loud Uncle Robert was to her and to her father. And even if Sansa had grown up hearing about her father’s childhood friend, it was really his family the ones to have dazzled her, particularly her fashionable aunt, who had the brightest smile she had ever seen, and of course their eldest son.

The Baratheons had three children. Joffrey was the eldest, and from the moment of their first introduction, Sansa had been swept off her feet. It didn’t even matter that she was just four and ten and he was already quite old at twenty three. Joff was simply the handsomest young man Sansa had ever set eyes upon, with the golden hair and green eyes of the Lannisters, and the impeccable manners of a gentleman that could not fail to impress her.

He had finished his education at Harvard earlier that year, and had been taking the Grand Tour with his parents and younger brother when Sansa first met him. And even though she didn’t really know him yet, Sansa had already fancied herself in love with him, for Joffrey was all she ever dreamt her husband should be, tall and handsome and strong, with hair like gold.

After Joffrey, his mother had given birth to Myrcella and then to Tommen, but Sansa had never met the former since Joffrey’s sister- who was about three years younger than Sansa- had been left behind in the United States at Sunspear, her finishing school, run by the fabled socialite Arianne Martell.

Tommen, who had been almost nine when Sansa had first seen him, was a sweet kind boy who unfortunately had a distant relationship with his father and brother, and was not that much loved by his mother, for the apple of Cersei’s eyes was her eldest son.

The Baratheons had accompanied Sansa and her father during the remaining days of their stay in France, and Sansa could not have been more pleased. It hurt her to recall what a foolish little girl she turned out to be- so glad when their new friends announced that they would be accompanying the Starks back to England for a short visit, before they resumed their European tour.
Once both families had crossed the Channel, they only stayed for a week in London before Robert Baratheon invited himself and his family to Winterfell, pointing out that it had been more than two decades since he had set foot upon the legendary residence where Ned like to hide himself from the rest of the world.

_Oh, to have them at Winterfell!_ Sansa had simply beamed, gazing at Joffrey worshipfully. She had never felt more proud of her ancestral home as she did on the day the Starks showed the Lannisters the grandeur of Winterfell, which could be seen in every corner of the estate.

It had been during that stay at Winterfell that Sansa had first learned of Joffrey’s fondness for sports. Polo, rowing, yachting, and cricket; tennis, golf, cycling, motoring and football, he excelled in them all. And of course each sport required its own set of clothing. Knits, flannel and tweeds in white to knickerbockers and plus-fours (a sort of loose knee-breeches fastened at the knee with a band), as well as knit sweaters in navy. Sansa had proclaimed him the living personification of a shining knight the first time she saw him in his polo outfit.

If Sansa had not found Joff attractive when they first met, she certainly would have by the time he had spent a week with her at her home, for he behaved like the most gallant of princes. It was unfortunate that about three and a half years ago, Sansa had been too captivated by the attractive picture Joff made in a Norfolk shooting jacket with front and back pleats, with knickerbockers in loud tweeds, to realize how much he liked killing- for it was shooting and hunting the sports Joff liked best, and he was a good shooter and rider.

Yet if she was honest with herself, it was not due to Joffrey or his family that Sansa could recall so vividly that visit by the Baratheons at Winterfell. It was actually due to Sandor Clegane that Sansa knew she could never forget those two weeks from long ago, for it had been during that fortnight that she had learned the truth about how exactly had Mr. Clegane acquired the burn scars on his face.

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Sansa had first seen Clegane three days after meeting the Baratheon party in France. She had gone with her father and their Americans friends to see “Faust” at the Garnier Palace, a place populated by men in ties and tails, and women in exquisite gowns.

She had been so captivated by the Love Duet that Sansa didn’t even realize afterwards in her distraction that as they all descended the Grand Staircase once the performance had ended, she had separated herself from her father and the Baratheons. At the bottom of the steps she’d begun searching for her father, but the Palace Garnier had been as crowded as any market at midday.
As Sansa searched for a familiar face with a slight sense of anxiety, at one point she had stumbled backwards and bumped into someone. Strong hands had grasped her by the shoulders, and for a moment Sansa had breathed in relief thinking she had found her father. But when she turned around it had been the burned face of a stranger looking down on her, with his mouth twisted in a terrible mockery of a smile.

“You are shaking, girl,” the stranger had said in a strong American accent, his voice rasping. “Do I frighten you so much?”

He did, and had for weeks afterwards. Sansa had learned moments later that night that the stranger who towered over everyone around them was actually Sandor Clegane, a bodyguard who worked for Tywin Lannister, and whom Mr. Baratheon had brought along to guard him and his family as they travelled overseas, among other things.

He had accompanied the Baratheons to Winterfell, but would usually work on some secret errand, (and was sometimes even sent to other countries on some mysterious task), that took him away for long periods of time, and Sansa therefore rarely ever saw him.

But near the conclusion of that early and only visit of the Baratheons at Winterfell, Sansa Stark had shared yet another memorable encounter with Mr. Clegane- the second time they had ever conversed since that awkward introduction at the Paris Opera House.

Towards the end of their stay, Sansa’s father had hosted a grand hunt in honour of Robert and his family’s departure, cordially inviting all of their neighbours over for the outgoing. Sansa had spent quite an agreeable morning with the ladies, and had enjoyed herself immensely during the afternoon talking to Joffrey once the men had returned from the hunt. He’d been the soul of courtesy, for he’d talked to Sansa all night, showering her with compliments, trying to make her laugh, sharing little bits of gossip and explaining japes.

At one point though, Sansa had looked around and noticing that Uncle Robert was nowhere nearby, she had asked Joff where she thought his fathers was out of simple curiosity.

Joffrey had only shrugged and replied, “Father is probably scolding our dog for disappearing for a few days.”

“I didn’t know you had a dog…”
“Clegane,” he explained, laughing. “Everyone calls him The Hound. We got word from Grandfather back in London that his elder and only brother died last month, and when Father told Clegane, the man disappeared without any notice. He appeared at Winterfell’s entrance about two hours ago, offering no excuse. The brothers didn’t really like each other, so it beats me why would Sandor be upset about it. He’s never done anything unpredictable before.”

Sansa had stared at Joffrey open mouthed.

“He is my Grandfather’s dog in truth,” Joffrey went on, oblivious to her shock. “I like him, and his devotion to our family is unquestioned, so hopefully that will make up for this disappearance. His brother, who was his only family, was known as The Mountain that Rides. From what I’ve heard of him, I think I would have liked to have met him...”

She had failed to hear the rest of Joffrey’s words, as surprised to learn that Sandor Clegane was called “dog”, as she had been to hear the way Joffrey could dismissive such a delicate matter as that of losing a brother.

Sansa had already began to feel very sorry for Mr. Clegane, and had even fallen silent after that conversation, thinking back upon the sibling she had been so close to having had her mother only survived a second delivery, before Joff started engaging her in a more cheerful conversation.

As the event hosted in the grounds of Winterfell evolved into an elegant dinner held outside in a fraction of the gardens, Sansa thought no more of Clegane, for Joffrey made sure she had a wonderful time. Dinner was a marvellous affair, and cups were filled all night, yet afterward Sansa could not recall ever tasting the wine. She needed no spirits. She was drunk on the magic of the night, giddy with excitement, swept away by beauties she had dreamt of all her life.

By the time dessert was being served in that charming night, just when Sansa had started to think that if only she had had Myranda and Jeyne and Mya with her to show them what a handsome boy she had by her side- a young man who was paying her every courtesy and attention- everything would be perfect- the evening took a surprising turn of events.

Uncle Robert and Aunt Cersei had started arguing loudly before everyone, and it was quite clear to Sansa that Mr. Baratheon was intoxicated. He had stormed away after Mrs. Lannister gave him the coldest look Sansa had ever since in all her life, and then Sansa’s own father had strode after his friend, to make sure he did no more harm to someone else or to his own dignity. Dinner had ended abruptly after that.

Sansa at fourteen knew that it was quite improper to remain alone in Joffrey’s company after dusk,
but all the ladies around her had already vanished in the night in the arms of their husbands, friends or relatives. If only she could discover a servant or a maid nearby, she would have asked them to lead her back home.

But there had been no other choice for Sansa than to ask Joff if he could escort her back to the house, secretly wondering if she should allow him to take the liberty of kissing her or not now that she found herself in such a situation.

Yet when she turned around to speak, Sansa had noticed Joffrey looking at his mother with a queer look on his face, and before she could even blink, he was saying, “It’s quite late and you must be tired.”

“Well,” Sansa had agreed, glad that Joff had spared her the need to ask him herself to escort her back. “The way is so dark. I should be glad for some protection.”

Moments later Sansa found out to her great surprise that it hadn’t been his own protection that Joffrey had been offering her, but that of Sandor Clegane. The tall man had seemed to take form out of the night, so quickly had he appear after Joff called for him. The light of the lamps that had been set up earlier had made his burned face shine a dull red.

Sansa had stared with eyes wide as pigeon eggs at Joffrey’s retreating back as he walked over to his mother, unable to say anything once her golden gallant suitor ordered Clegane to escort her back to the house.

Her disappointment must have been easy to notice, for the tall man had rasped, “Did you think Joff was going to take you himself?” He’d laughed and Sansa had thought that he had a laugh like the snarling of dogs in a pit. “Small chance of that.”

He had pulled her unresisting to her feet. “Come, you’re not the only one who needs sleep. I’m drunk as a dog, damn me.”

He’d laughed again, and though Sansa had been terrified she had followed nonetheless, close behind Mr. Clegane with her eyes lowered, watching where she placed her feet. She recalled that night so well. The ground was rocky and uneven; the flickering light of his lantern made it seem to shift and move beneath her.

But finally the silence weighted heavier with every step. Sansa had not been able to bear the sight
of him, for he frightened her so, yet she had finally recalled that she had been raised in all the ways and matters of courtesy and should therefore say something.

“Joffrey told me about your brother, Mr. Clegane. I am truly sorry to hear of his passing. I am sure he must have been a good man. Joffrey said his grandfather esteemed his services greatly. My condolences, sir.”

Sandor Clegane snarled at her. “Spare me your empty little condolences, girl... and your sirs. I am no gentleman. I’m the Lannister’s dog, and if I told you some of the good deeds my fucking brother committed in his time to young girls like you, you’d not get any sleep ever again without pissing your bed every night.”

Sansa never knew why she did not remain silent after those rough words. Maybe it was because she fancied that she could hear a measure of pain in Clegane’s voice as he spoke, or maybe it had been because she had wondered then and there if there hadn’t been anyone to console him after the news of his brother’s death.

Whatever the case, and without realizing what she was doing, Sansa heard herself say in a tremulous, confused voice, “I- I am sorry. I beg pardon if I upset you, Mr. Clegane. But- but your brother is at peace now. Surely that is of some comfort?”

She had meant to sound kind and had spoken truthfully, for when her own mother died, it was at least to some degree more bear here passing if Sansa recalled that she was in Heaven. But right there and then Sansa realized she was must be a poor judge of character if she was silly enough to even consider that what could bring her comfort, could also bring peace to Clegane’s troubled soul. He had stopped suddenly in the middle of the dark and empty grounds snorting loudly, and Sansa had had no choice but to stop beside him.

“Someone trained you well,” Clegane remarked in that drunken rasp of a voice. “You’re like one of those birds from Africa or South America, aren’t you? A pretty little talking bird, repeating all the pretty little words they taught you to recite.”

“That’s unkind.” Sansa had felt her heart fluttering in her chest. “You’re frightening me. I want to go now.”

“Esteemed his services greatly,” Clegane snarled, not even really hearing her. “That’s truth enough. If there was one man Tywin Lannister could count on always doing the dirty work for him, it was Gregor. And he sure enjoyed it. That boy back in Memphis the week before I left home for San Francisco, not yet fifteen, oh, that was a pretty bit of business. Fool boy, he had no business
Sansa had been staring at her feet, not understanding much of what she was hearing but for the momentary mention of Joffrey’s second uncle, Tyrion as she hoped that her father would suddenly appear and save her. But Eddard Stark had been busy elsewhere. Instead, Sandor Clegane had put a huge hand under her chin and forced Sansa’s face up. He squatted in front of her, and moved the lantern close.

“There’s a pretty for you. Take a good long stare. You know you want to. I’ve watched you turning away ever since Paris. Piss on that. Take your look.”

His fingers held her jaw as hard as an iron trap. His eyes watched hers. Drunken eyes, sullen with anger. She had to look. The right side of his face was gaunt, with sharp cheekbones and a grey eye beneath a heavy brow. His nose was large and hooked, his hair thin, dark. He wore it long and brushed it sideways, because no hair grew on the other side of that face.

The left side was the cruel result of skin that had once been sear away. Even his ear had been burned to the point were there was nothing left but a hole. His eye was still good, but all around it was a twisted mass of scar, slick dark flesh hard as leather, pocked with craters and fissured by deep cracks that gleamed red and wet when he moved. Sansa had begun to cry. Sandor Clegane had let go of her then, as he placed the lantern on the ground.

“No pretty words for that, girl? None of the little compliment they’ve taught you?” When there was no answer, he continued. “Most of them, they think it was a burning building, an accident on a train. One fool asked if it was due to an explosion.”

His laugh was softer this time, but just as bitter. “I’ll tell you what it was, girl,” he said, a voice from the night, a shadow leaning so close now that she could smell the sour stench of wine on his breath. “I was six, maybe seven. A woodcarver set up shop in the town near my father’s farm, and to buy favour he sent us gifts. The old man made marvellous toys. I don’t remember what I got, but it was Gregor’s gift I wanted.

“A wooden cowboy of the west, all painted up, every joint pegged separate and fixed with strings, so you could make him fight. Gregor is five years older than me; the toy was nothing to him. He was already near six foot tall and muscled like an ox, and was in talks of entering the Lannister’s services.

“So I took his toy, but there was no joy to it, I tell you. I was scared all the while, and true enough, he found me. There was a brazier in the room. Gregor never said a word, just picked me up under his arm and shoved the side of my face down in the burning coals and held me there while I
“He was stronger than me. Even then, it took three grown men to drag him off me. Pastors and priests preach about Hell. What do they know? Only a man who’s been burned knows what Hell is truly like. My father told everyone my bedding had caught fire, and the town’s doctor gave me ointments. Ointments! Gregor got fifty dollars for his first job a week later. A fortune just for doing The Great Lion a service.”

The rasping voice trailed off. He squatted silently before Sansa, a hulking black shape shrouded in the night, hidden from her eyes. She could hear his ragged breathing. She was sad for him, she realized. In all her life she had never dreamed or at least heard of something so horrible happening to someone she knew, and though Sansa had no previous experience to teach her how to behave in a moment like this, somehow, at some point, the fear had gone away.

The silence went on and on, so long that Sansa began to grow afraid once more, but she was afraid for Clegane now, not for herself. She found his massive shoulder with her hand.

“He was no true gentleman,” she whispered to him.

Mr. Clegane had thrown back his head and roared. Sansa stumbled back, away from him, but he’d caught her arm.

“No,” he growled at her, “no, little bird, he was no true gentleman.”

The rest of the way to the house, Sandor Clegane said not a word. He led her all the way to an open door at the back of the house, and stepped in after her. They walked in silence through her home, his burned face twitching and his eyes brooding, and he was one step behind her as she reached the stairs that would take her directly to her bedroom in the upper landing, and finally stopped. Sansa had no desire to talk to the guests by that point to bid them all good night, but neither was she about to go upstairs with a grown man beside her.

“Thank you,” Sansa said meekly, hoping he’d understand he was being dismissed.

Clegane had caught her by the arm and leaned close, once he had made sure no one was nearby.

“The things I told you tonight,” he’d said, his voice sounding even rougher than usual. “If you ever
tell Joffrey... your father, any of them...”

“I won’t,” Sansa had whispered. “I promise.”

It was not enough.

“If you ever tell anyone,” Clegane finished, “I’ll kill you.”

That night had happened about three years ago, and Sansa had never told anyone, just as she had promised. The matter had never been discussed between her and Sandor Clegane either. Sometimes Sansa even wondered if he even remembered in the first place that he had told her his deepest secret in a drunken spell.

Not even on the night when she had last exchanged words with him, after that fateful argument with Joffrey some months back that completely tore at last the blindfold from Sansa´s eyes regarding what kind of a man her betrothed had the potential of becoming.

After that momentous night at Winterfell, it had only been a matter of days before the Lannisters finally bid Sansa’s father and her goodbye, since there were still many countries schedule for them to visit in Joff’s Grand Tour. Eddard Stark had told Sansa afterwards that he was not happy to learn Joffrey took more after the Lannisters than the Baratheons, but had nonetheless given his consent for a correspondence to start between her and Joff.

In the months that followed Sansa spent many nights falling asleep with the memory of how Joffrey had smiled and kissed her hand when they parted at the silver fountain in the gardens of Winterfell, handsome and gallant, taking over her mind and her heart.

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Sansa didn’t see the Lannisters or her Uncle Robert again until she was fifteen years old, when they returned to England from their travels through the Continent. They had left Tommen in Denmark to be tutored at one of the best schools the Lannister gold and Baratheon steel could afford.

During the long months that had passed since she had last seen Joffrey and his family, certain things had already changed in Sansa’s life. For one, since the season in which she would host her
coming out ball was fast approaching, she found herself travelling to London more and more often, and that was quite exciting. Several suitors gathered around her quickly, and Sansa was even lucky enough to meet her friend Jeyne Poole again for a couple of days as she travelled with her parents back to Wales.

About a week before her debutante ball took place, Joff re-entered Sansa’s life, and it only took him a fortnight before he proposed to Sansa, saying that he had run the idea by her father (and his own), and they had both approved. Over the past months, Joffrey and Sansa had exchanged several letters, and when she first heard of his return, Sansa found herself already building castles in the air regarding her future with him.

It wouldn’t be until many weeks later, once she had reflected back upon this time, that Sansa could see clearly what a mistake she had committed in thinking she knew Joffrey well enough to call him her betrothed with just the short amount of knowledge of his past and character that she had possessed.

But even though Sansa had always considered marrying into the aristocratic upper class, to the heir to a baronetcy for example, so that the Starks could elevate from their “nouveau riche” style, Sansa couldn’t dismiss Joffrey as a suitable suitor.

Putting aside the fact that their fathers loved each other like brothers, American tycoons were practically considered royalty, and the fact that Sansa’s lack of title didn’t seem to bother Joffrey, all served as contributed factors to her acceptance of Joff’s proposal.

Later, it would be of some small comfort to recall that at least Joffrey hadn’t been the first man she’d kissed. That honour had been bestowed to the handsome French boy who used to bring the post at Miss Mordane’s Academy, but her fiancé never knew about that.

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Time seemed to quicken after the proposal. The very night in which the Starks and the Baratheons privately celebrated the future union of their two families, Sansa’s father had taken her aside from the others at one point in the evening so he could have a word with her.

He told her that he had discussed some issues with Joffrey and his father, and he had agreed that they would wait until Sansa was seventeen before their wedding could finally happen. It was not Sansa’s place to question her father’s decisions, so she had nodded in agreement and kissed him on the cheek, smiling and happy at the prospect that she would have about a year and a half to plan that very special celebration that would see her tie her fate to Joffrey’s forever.
Though there was still some time before Sansa began overseeing her wedding preparations, there were still matters of great importance that she and Joff had to discuss. Mainly, where would the wedding take place and where would they live. Sansa had seen many photographs of America before, and while she didn’t object at living there, the prospect of moving to another country was quite daunting. Still, it was unpractical to suppose that the heir to the Baratheon steel empire should live in England when his business was in America, so Sansa quickly made up her mind of considering Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania her new home.

During the first months of their engagement Sansa had no cause to complain about the man who was to be her lord and husband. They went out on excursions and tennis outgoings, and Sansa’s father even allowed her to let Joff drive her around the country in his open motorcar. Sansa had been excited not only due to the thought of an afternoon with her fiancé, but at the opportunity of finally wearing her automobile bonnet, with goggles to keep the dust from her eyes, as well as the lovely wide chiffon vale that was about three feet in length, and draped around her hat and tied around her chin.

Yet one day, when it all seemed to good to be true, Joffrey finally began to unfortunately behave in a way that made doubts and hesitations arise in Sansa’s heart, making her question her own feelings for him for the first time due to her inability to ignore Joff’s attitude in particular situations.

It had all started on a summer day in which the air had been warm and heavy with the scent of flowers, and the woods in Winterfell’s grounds had a gentle beauty that Sansa had seen in her home many times before. At first glance it was obvious it was a day for adventures, yet by dusk it turned into a disaster.

Joffrey and Sansa had spent an hour riding near the riverbank, and when they had returned to the main house by the stables they had encountered some of Sansa’s old childhood friends, among them Podrick Payne, as they wrestled in play, with the hounds barking all around them. Pod had been cheering on their friends when she caught sight of him, and realizing that she hadn’t yet properly introduced her betrothed to him, Sansa had called Pod and the others over to her to remedy that, only to regret it forever.

Joff had apologized that night to her after his dreadful behaviour, and though Sansa had finally assured her fiancé that she would let the matter go in the end, it was never the same after that summer day. The seed of doubt had taken root in her mind about just how perfect where she and Joffrey matched for each other, and the more Sansa asked herself that question, the more fear began to gnaw at her heart.

She couldn’t help it. Gone was the image of the charming and gallant young man whom Sansa had
once thought herself in love with, for every time she saw Joffrey afterwards, his manner and words came out as false to Sansa, to the point where she realized that she thought of him as nothing else than an arrogant, handsome spoiled boy who just happened to be rich beyond meaning.

After that first encounter with Joffrey’s true nature, Sansa started to consider the possibility of breaking off her engagement with him, and then it was only a matter of days before she began to look for a way out from her complicated situation. That had been the beginning of the end, though Sansa had not known it back then. At first the only sour memory of that time was that it had occurred during what would become the last days Sansa and Ned ever spent at Winterfell.

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Some short weeks later when she met Joff again after she´d settled in London due to her father’s growing involvement in business with Uncle Robert, Sansa decided to focus carefully on any detail that may give away Joffrey’s true self to her again, and it didn’t take her long to find many.

Among them were the fact Joff’s views in matters regarding their future together started to slowly change now that he was her fiancé. Now the very rebellious notions uttered by Sansa that had once seemed to impress Joff, where dismissed as silly thoughts or passing fancies.

But by then whenever Sansa thought of telling her father she wanted to break off her engagement, with a crestfallen heart she had realized that she did not have it in her to do that, due to reasons she knew nothing about other that things were not going as well as he would like with Uncle Robert at work. So, bearing that in mind, Sansa decided to wait just a little longer, silently praying that everything will be settled soon for Eddard and her to maybe go away to the Continent, escaping their troubles for good.

But then the end of life as she knew it arrived about a week later with the sudden death of Robert Baratheon in an automobile accident as he drove back from Brighton to London. Sansa had been quite shocked by the news, since despite his many flaws Joff’s father had still been relatively young, and full of life and spirit. Her betrothed hadn’t gotten along very well with his sire, but Uncle Robert had always been very kind to her.

Her father had been greatly affected by his best friend’s demise, yet Sansa had been witness to how little time was Ned able to properly mourn Robert, before solicitors started knocking on their door, demanding meetings with Eddard. Sansa was kept in the dark about all the work her father and Joff’s father did together, but she knew they were partners in more than one business, and the day after Mr. Baratheon had died many legal transactions arrived, pressuring an already tired Eddard.
Still, when Sansa’s mother-in-law-to-be sent an invitation for her future daughter in law to accompany her in her grief, Eddard could not object to Sansa’s going, despite the recent disagreements with Joffrey at work. Sansa herself had written back to Mrs. Baratheon with a heavy heart, due to not only Robert’s death, or her father’s grief, but because she had realized that she would have to postpone breaking off the engagement with Joff yet again, for who knew how long now this time.

_I can’t be so cruel as to desert Joffrey so soon after his father’s death_, Sansa had told herself, as she bid her father good-bye one morning, and vowed to herself that the next time she saw Eddard again she would finally come to him with the truth.

“Be careful Sansa, my sweet child,” had been the last words her father told Sansa, after he had made it clear that she could write to him if anything bad happened, and he would go to the Red Keep and fetch her himself.

“I will, Father,” she’d promised, not knowing how soon she would need to start truly doing just that.

“I love you, daughter.”

“I love you, too,” Sansa said, kissing him on the cheek after they had shared a hug.

Sansa had then turned around, straightened her shoulders, and walked towards the motorcar that would take her to the Red Keep, the name of the large country house the Lannisters had moved into temporarily in one of the nicest neighbourhood of London.

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It all went downhill from then on. Living alone in the same house as a mourning Aunt Cersei was not something Sansa enjoyed. With every day something would happen to make the charm Sansa had once felt for Robert Baratheon’s widow fade away, to the point where she felt that the day when she would finally be able to leave the Red Keep could not come soon enough.

Sansa was never meant to get her wish though, for barely three weeks after her uncle Robert was killed on the road, the most terrible blow Sansa could have envisioned came, and in the most shocking of ways. Sansa’s father, the honourable Eddard Stark, had killed himself.
Those times seemed like a memory from another age now, even if they had only happened about a year ago, since everything was and felt so different to Sansa. Those days were like a mix of dreams and nightmares that had happened to another person that was not her, for not only where Uncle Robert and her father dead now, but Joffrey and Cersei and Sansa had changed into quite different people from the once they had first been introduced to in France.

Why, even Sandor Clegane had changed! Even if she hadn’t seen him in almost a year, and even if the change had not been too drastic, Sansa was certain of it. It did not even matter that she had not known him for long prior to the death of his horrible brother. Over the last couple of years, Sansa had at times observed the way Clegane behaved and talked, and somehow it looked as if the change, at least in him, was for the better.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the backstory! Next chapter will see the plot moving forward from Sandor’s POV ;)
Hey there! So glad you all liked the backstory :D Now I’m keeping my fingers crossed you enjoyed Sandor’s POV *takesadeepbreath* Here we go ;)  

Btw, I will be posting next chapter either a little earlier or a litter later than usual cause I’ll be away next weekend. (Just so you know the change in the date is only for this time) :) 

As he stepped inside The Grapes pub a sudden ripple seemed to go through the crowd. Almost all the men present had been in the process of raising their drinks to toast a group of sailors, but when Sandor Clegane appeared on the threshold all noise died down immediately.

More than thirty pair of eyes settled on him, and while his height and his built were enough to cause an impression, Sandor knew it was because of his face that all smiles vanished, and an expression of fear took hold of everyone. This reaction happened any time he walked into a room, no matter if it was full of strangers or of people who knew him, or had at least heard of his half burned face.

Yet this behaviour didn’t bother him at all. Once it had, and there was a time when he’d even been proud of it. But for the last couple of years Sandor just didn’t really care. Not that he allowed the world to know it. As he strode over to the bar, the scowl that settled on his features was a usual gesture. His mere presence emanated anger and horror, while his victims considered his rasping voice the most terrible sound in the world.

Eyes followed him as he settled on a stool at the far end of the bar, the loneliest spot in the establishment, but most importantly one of the still discarded places that allowed Sandor to protect his back as he leaned against a wall. Conversation resumed and the abandoned toast was finished as he threw his cigarette butt on the floor once the customers decided he was not about to pull out a gun at them and shoot them all dead.

“What can I get you?” the barman asked him, looking up at his face. It was evident he didn’t like what he saw there.

“Single malt whisky,” Sandor growled, glaring at his surroundings once he’d spared the fat, bald man a glance.
“It will cost you,” the sodding bastard pointed out.

Sandor snorted. “Then I’ll pay,” he threw back.

Yet when he’d been told how much the glass would cost him, he had let out a bark of laughter and stated, “For that much money I should own the bloody pub.”

“Last year, might be you could. But with these strikes, I need coin to support the Missus. If you don’t want to pay then let someone who will sit in that place.”

Sandor knew what the man was talking about. The recent incursions were weakening sea trade for the White Star Line, delaying it’s shipping schedules. Bloody bad luck that not all crossings could be cancelled, he thought irritably, for the Oceanic and Adriatic had lend their coal to Titanic to make certain the ship’s first trip was not delayed. Still, Sandor was amused by the owner’s attempt at bravery, and therefore replied, “I like an honest brigand. Have it your way.”

When he got his whiskey he opened his mouth and smelt it before finishing it in a single drink. Sandor was feeling the familiar warmth the alcohol sent running through him when the pub keeper decided to continue the talk about how the coal strikes were affecting his business.

“Oh well, at least what with the Titanic setting sail tomorrow, men all over Southampton have found a decent way to earn a living. I can say the same for me, and hopefully you can as well, sir,” he remarked.

“I’m paying for a drink, not for your bloody wit,” Sandor rasped, his mouth twitching as he threw coins on the surface of the wooden bar stand. “Get me another one and then bugger the fuck off.”

There were about forty working class men tonight at The Grapes, strong drunk men who were probably on good terms with the owner, but apparently the barman wasn’t sure they would rush forward to help him if he decided to order Sandor to leave before things got ugly. Together they could overwhelm him, though he’d likely kill seven or eight of them before they took him down.

Sighing in resignation the pub keeper served him another drink and then left him alone. Good, Sandor thought, staring down at the yellowish brown liquid in his glass. He hated when people didn’t get the hint quick enough that he loathed company just as much as he detested small talk.
The air was thick with smoke and smelt of alcohol and sweat. The decorations on the walls of the bar were visible thanks to the few electrical lights hanging from the ceiling, and through the glass windows people could be seen striding by on the street. By the looks of them, almost all of the men at The Grapes were dockworkers and ship crew.

Some of them were breaking into a sailor’s bloody song, while others were playing a very serious hand of poker, but everyone was drinking. Everyone but me. Once, drowning himself in a sea of wine was and killing his brother were the only things Sandor dreamt of, but tonight he would only order two whiskeys, and he intended to take his time in drinking his second glass.

He knew could outdrink every man present and still be able to see them to bed; something Sandor hated but had nonetheless had to do more than once first with Robert Baratheon and then with his stupid eldest son. It’s a bloody wonder I didn’t ring that bastard’s neck this afternoon after laying eyes on him again... But for a long time Sandor had stopped fancying getting truly drunk. After what had happened to him in Germany, the very thought of it began to make him feel sick.

He still enjoyed alcohol, but it was the excess of it to which he now silently opposed. Taking out another cigarette, Sandor brooded for a moment on the reason behind this change in him, before shaking his head in warning. Don’t even go there, dog. There would be time enough for that after tomorrow morning.

That thought made his mouth start twitching again, and he unconsciously fisted his hands in impotent fury as they rested on the bar. For tomorrow Sandor would be back again on full time duty for the Lannisters as they all returned to America aboard the bloody Titanic.

It had been almost a year since he’d been forced to play guard dog to them, and the prospect than in a few hours time he would have to present his services to Joffrey Baratheon and his party was not one Sandor was looking forward to. Yet his mission in the Continent for Tywin Lannister was done, and home awaited him in the United States.

That idea brought the first smile of the night to his face, yet it was a cynical sour grim; a gesture that stretched the burns around his mouth tightly. Sandor knew it was’t a pretty sight, but thinking of his home highly amused him. For what fucking home are you thinking about? There’s no one waiting for you back in Pennsylvania or even California now that dear Gregor is dead before his sodding time.

Sandor had considered more than once getting a big black dog to keep him company in his one story apparent in San Francisco, but in the end he never went on and bought it. He was rarely home, since working for the Lannisters was mostly a twenty-four hour-long job, six out of seven
days a week, which meant there would be no one to look after the animal. Still, Sandor had decided that if he ever had a dog, it would be called Stranger.

The clock on the wall struck midnight, and that was Sandor´s signal to go get some sleep. In twelve hours time the Titanic would set sail and he had to be on it with a clean appearance and an alert face. He walked out of the pub without a backward glance, once again scowling as he thought about this damned trip, filling his lungs with cool night air.

But he wasn´t angry because he would rarely get any free time from now on. It was because he was sick and tired of the life he led, even though he was only thirty-four. But he felt more than a decade older, and looked it. Sandor Clegane´s life just wasn´t an easy one.

He´d seen and done many things that made grown men shit themselves with fear, and none but one had ever bothered him. Yet for months Sandor had grown to dislike sleeping, for his futility would haunt him even in his dreams. And sometimes he even spent the long slow hours of each day trying to ignore the gnawing memory of being practically useless the first time in his life he had cared about something.

Someone, Sandor corrected himself unconsciously as he finished his cigarette.

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He was making his way to the South Western Hotel by way of Oxford Street at half past ten in the morning of Wednesday April 10th 1912, dressed in his usual costumed size suit. It was a simple ensemble: dark grey trousers and a matching coat. The perfect outfit for a bodyguard, except that Sandor wore no hat and his dark limp hair was longer than most men´s, for it reached his shoulder blades. His automatic 1909 colt pistol and the FN model from 1910 were securely hidden in his waistband, yet easy to reach within a heartbeat´s notice. In one hand he was carrying his traveling bag.

To Sandor it seemed that today Southampton was even more crowded than London had been back in June when King George V was crowned, and it was all do to the sodding launching of the Titanic. Not that he had expected anything less. The sheer size of it was an engineering challenge. There had never been ships as large as Titanic or her sister, and it was no secret that the White Star Line was putting a real effort into making this vessel the last word of comfort and luxury. Which is why they erected a large dock for their giant´s send off.

Sister ship of the RMS Olympic, the Titanic was above average with it´s on-board gymnasium and swimming pool, squash court and Turkish bath, libraries and opulent first class cabins. Since these
were luxuries both the Lannisters and the Baratheons were used to, they were not new to their employees. So if Sandor was impressed with this attempt of mankind to conquer nature it was because it was a symbol of progress: an art of ship making.

Its mechanical aspects interested Sandor far more than it’s useless decorations. About eleven stories high with a hull that spanned four city blocks long, Titanic had nine decks and weighted more than 46,000 tons. At the base it had a double bottom and each of her steam engines was the size of a three-story house. It could carry more than three thousand passengers and it’s safety features were highly advanced.

Titanic was the second of three large Olympic class ocean liners by the White Star Line, and while they were not the fastest passenger ships out there (that honour was for the Lusitania and the Mauretania of the Cunard Line), the sister ships could even rival the Hamburg America Line and the Norddeustcher Lloyd. Titanic had been built in Belfast for three years and it’s port of registry had been Liverpool.

Due to his height it was easy for Sandor to make his way through the crowd assembled at the new White Star Dock. The racket everyone was making was threatening to bring on a headache though, and the nearby noises from the train station where passengers from London were still arriving were no cure for it either. But at least Sandor would be out of this mess in less than a minute, seeing as he’d reached his destination. The hotel building was directly before the dock where the Titanic awaited it’s departure.

As he reached the South Western Hotel’s entrance, Sandor was forced to wait and make way for John Jacob Astor and his young wife. It was clear by the amount of luggage all around them that the couple was also going back to the United States. As they got into one of their automobile, a 1912 35 HP Renault Town car, Sandor gathered that Astor would probably be the richest passenger on board the Titanic.

Snorting, he remembered the jokes about how Tywin Lannister hated the man for having more money than the Great Lion himself. But even though Astor and his wife were the only prominent people Sandor could recognize at the moment, he knew that the vessel’s first class would be full of familiar puffed up idiots and their empty headed women.

For after all, even though the Titanic was going to be a mass of all levels of society, if it was remembered in history it would be because of it’s luxurious accommodations. A bloody floating city of light! he thought with contempt. How he wished he could give up his place aboard the accursed ship!

Frowning he stepped into the lobby, ignoring the pair of valets at the entrance who’d looked him up and down with scared eyes as they tried to utter a coherent phrase. But when one of them
succeeded, all the man could manage was, “Sir- are- please, are you a guest here?” Sandor was aware most of the rich idiots in the big room were staring at him, some of them already talking to each other in disapproval, even those who recognized him as the Lannister´s worker. But he registered all these almost as an afterthought.

Spying his bloody workmates, Sandor made his way to where the bastards stood, ignoring the valet´s question. The two men were waiting by a column, and all the luggage of Joffrey´s party was lying all around them. *The lions never travel light.* Sandor walked up to Meryn Trant and Boros Blount and rasped, “Any word on what the sleeping arrangements will be? Are we in Second or Third Class?”

He put his traveling bag beside the nearest peace of luggage as Trant answered with a voice dripping with contempt, “Boros and I are in second, but you are going to share the boss´s suite with him.”

Sandor had been scanning the lobby for any possible danger out of custom, but at those words he turned to look at Joffrey´s valet in disbelief. *Bloody hell!* This had to be a joke! Some twisted perverse sodding joke. He had expected Joffrey to get him one of those basic cabins in first class intended for servants, but never this!

“Damn it Clegane,” Blount put in. “You might look happier about it. What I wouldn´t give to be traveling in such style! Though I guess second class on the Titanic is as good as first in other ships!”

Sandor didn´t even spare Boros the courtesy of looking at him. He was really too pissed off to do anything but abandon his place in search for the South Western Hotel´s elevators. While he was within earshot of them, he heard Trant remarking coldly to Blount, “Charming as ever, our dog.”

Cursing those two sons of whores under his breath, Sandor stepped inside the empty elevator, harshly instructing the operator what floor he wished to go to. This was turning out to be one sodding damnable trip, and it hadn´t even started! When he´d met Joffrey yesterday, the bastard had told him the sleeping arrangements for everyone but his three male employees. Cersei Lannister was going to sleep alone in a private suit, while in the adjacent double bed cabin young Tommen was going to share the room with the two maids. The boy would sleep on one bed, and Trudy Bolt and Senelle Headey would share the other one.

Meanwhile, Joff´s little betrothed was going to sleep at another private suit, with Joffrey resting in the room next door. One of the two beds in that room was going to come to waste, but if what Trant said was true, then Sandor had just found himself it´s owner for the following week.
It wasn’t that he objected to the lack of privacy, though if he had been allowed to choose, he would have bought a room all to himself in Second Class. No, it was the fact that he would have to live in close quarters with a man he didn’t respect, and actually thought of with nothing but avid contempt. And yet, it went deeper than that.

Sandor knew that the real reason behind his disgust was because this felt too much like London, when he’d played the guard dog to that little shit and witness him and his bitch of a mother tormenting the little bird. The mere memory of those times made Sandor clench and unclench his hands in fury. It all came down to the same thing. His anger at this sleeping arrangement was fuelled by the same motive that kept him from quitting the Lannisters once and for all.

Before he knew it, Sandor was walking down the corridor leading to the lion’s den, with an ugly smirk on his face as he thought how easy it was to slip back into the Hound’s shoes, even though he’d been away from them all in Europe, on his own for months. As Sandor reached the room he was looking for, Cersei Lannister stepped outside, closely followed by Tommen and the two maids.

She was a handsome woman in her early forties, but hers was a proud, stony beauty. The lioness had the same green eyes as all her children, and today due to her dark green gown and feathered hat to match, they sparkled like cold jewels. Eleven year old Tommen was trying to match his mother’s long strides with his plump legs. Trudy Bolt and Senelle Headey, who quickly looked away when their eyes met his, closed the procession.

Tommen acknowledged him with a brief smile, but his mother stopped beside Sandor and remarked in exasperation, “Clegane, Joff is still in the room. Try and make him hurry. We’ll be waiting downstairs.”

Returning the Lannister woman’s brief nod, Sandor waited until her party disappeared around the corner before resuming his walk to the suite. When he reached the door he took a deep steadying breath, determined to ignore the fact that his pulse had quicken.

_Calm down, you idiot. It may have been months, but you don’t have to get so bloody nervous!_ Still he hesitated. _How can I face her after so long and after such silence?_ Not that he owed her any explanation, or thought she expected him to offer one. Oh, how he’d dreaded and longed for this moment! _If only I could go have a smoke or get away from these accursed people!_

Knocking after unconsciously brushing his hair with both hands, Sandor Clegane opened the door to the suite and found it empty but for Joffrey Baratheon. He ignored his disappointment beneath his usual expressionless mask, and bid his employer’s grandson good morning as his eyes quickly darted to the other door on the room, since she was on the other side of it.
“Ah, Clegane! Has the luggage been taken care of?” the tall twenty six year old heir asked him, standing in the middle of the elegant drawing room with his right hand on the pommel of his new and shinny walking cane.

“Yes, sir. The twenty trucks are being arranged into the four cars as we speak.” Or at least he hoped they were if Trant and Blount were not running behind the schedule he´d set up for them yesterday at noon.

Joff nodded approvingly at that information and changed the subject as he enquired if Sandor had met his mother in the corridor outside.

“Yes, she told me she´ll be waiting for us down at the lobby,” he barked in reply, choosing not to comment on the woman´s obvious impatience to be off. Not that she would have taken care to hid it from her son.

“The ship sails in an hour,” Joffrey pointed out impatiently, looking at the grandmother clock at a corner of the drawing room. “God, I swear, if she doesn´t hurry up...”

You´re wrong, he wanted to bark. There´s going to be so many people from Third Class that those will be the first to board. Whereas First Class passengers were expected to do the same within an hour of departure. We still have time, you idiot.

Sandor´s jaw was clenching as the memories of past similar situations flashed across his mind. But neither of them should have worried, for a moment later the door to the bedroom opened and Sansa Stark appeared at last. She crossed the threshold with a smile on her beautiful face, which Sandor at once recognized as fake, holding her head high, and an umbrella in her gloved hands.

She might have fooled Joffrey into believing she had accepted her fate, but when she when her blue eyes fell on Sandor, Sansa´s pretty mouth opened wide in utter surprise, which meant no one had told her of his return. Her attempt at appearing composed had vanished in the blink of an eye.

Her little game was up, and so was Sandor´s. It was laughable to recall how hard he´d tried to stop himself from right out admitting she had a hold over him, seeing as they only had to be in the same room again for Sandor to feel as if an electric current had passed between them. But what else did I expect after she´s haunted me for so long? he thought.
She hasn’t changed, he knew, feeling both sad and glad at that, as he wondered what she was thinking and feeling, letting his eyes roam over her casually. They were standing at different corners of the room, right in front of the other, and his view of her was great.

Unsmiling, he locked his grey eyes on her, adjusting to the vision of the little bird as a woman: a young woman, but a woman nonetheless. Face, teats, and she is taller too. God, she´d turned out more damned attractive than any vision of her Sandor had conjured up during the long months of separation! And she´s looking me straight in the face. That was definitely a change from the little girl whom he´d long ago told the real story behind his burns.

She had altered in other ways as well. With an odd and eerily familiar pang he registered that grief now etched her features, giving her a haunted, vulnerable look. But if anything, the change had only made her more beautiful. Yes, she is a stunning woman and in a month Joffrey will be having her at last.

He was somehow aware that the grandmother clock was still announcing eleven o´clock, which meant that not a single minute had passed since Sansa had appeared on the threshold. But for Sandor time seemed to stop for that moment as they stared at each other without interruption.

“Sweetpea, Clegane´s coming back home with us to America,” Joffrey informed her carelessly, walking over to stand by her side.

Apparently, the shock of seeing him again had made the little bird speechless. She had to blink a couple of times before she could find her voice and say with politeness, “Hello, Mr. Clegane. It´s really good to see you again. I- I hope you are well.”

She gave him a little nod as Joffrey snorted at her words, but Sandor only curtly rasped a “Miss” for a reply, still looking at her, aware that his voice sounded as rough as the sound of a saw on wood, not even caring that she still addressed him with courtesy. Fuck. He´d imagined that seeing Sansa again was going to be hard, but now that he´d heard her sweet voice again, Sandor knew that not seeing her and rarely getting any news of her had been worse.

Analysing her from head to foot, Joffrey nodded in approval and remarked, “This is exactly how I wanted you to look when I ordered you to change! Well done, my pet. You look exquisite.”

The corners of the little bird´s mouth barely rose upwards as her betrothed leaned in to kiss her cheek and offer her his arm. She took it, and without a backward glance to Sandor, she followed Joff out of the room. Taking in the bloody stunning sight of Sansa´s rear, which her white outfit made quite prominent, a practical thought came to Sandor´s mind. At least it´s a good thing she is
wearing that enormous feathered hat. It would be hard to loose sight of that big purple ribbon bow and extravagant bonnet down at the crowded dock.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo... what did you think? 0_0
When they reached the lobby Sandor was pleased to see that the Lannister’s luggage had been taken care of. Meryn Trant and Boros Blount were standing near the South Western Hotel’s entrance, Trudy Bolt and Senelle Headey by their sides. Tommen Baratheon was by his mother as Cersei Lannister talked to Colonel Archibald Gracie IV. Sandor hated knowing all of these puffed rich idiots by name, but he couldn´t have worked for the lions for almost twenty years without getting to learn such things.

Joffrey headed over to join his mother dragging Sansa along, and when Gracie saw them he praised the little bird’s beauty and inquired after her health in the same breath, before explaining to Joff that after he’d seen Cersei standing all alone at the lobby, he’d rushed in to offer his services to the unprotected lady.

He heard Joffrey thank the writer for his trouble as Sandor snorted at the thought of the Lannister woman as an unprotected lady. Then he left them alone as Sansa spoke some polite comment in reply, and went over to ask Trant and Blount how long would it be till the automobiles would pick them up.

“In less than five minutes,” answered Blount.

Nodding, Sandor stepped away from them, for he wanted to wait for the cars by his own. It made his duty of guarding the little bird and the lions easier. He stationed himself against a column close enough to their party so he could hear Sansa talking; a column within her eye vision. Yet as he observed her Sandor was aware that she wasn’t chirping away her usual courtesies. That intrigued him, for she never wasted a chance to be polite.

But Sansa never spoke. She didn’t inquire the Colonel how the tour for his latest book had gone, leaving Joffrey to ask instead. Sansa would smile and nod, but her mind seemed to be elsewhere. Sandor longed to hear her voice again, but had to settle to wait for that till later. Frowning, he turned to his right, and when he caught Trant’s eye and the man nodded, he knew that was the signal that it was time to leave. He went over to Joffrey and informed him, “The cars are here, sir.”

“Oh Archibald,” Cersei exclaimed then. “You must promise to tell me everything about The Truth About Chickamauga one of these evenings. Please dine with us tonight so we can here all about this new book of yours! I’m sure it will be fascinating.”
“With pleasure! It’s a pity your father couldn’t be here though. Titanic- it’s a devishly exciting event!”

“Indeed,” Cersei replied, smiling. “Well, we’ll see you on board. Please excuse us.”

“Certainly,” the man exclaimed. “Time I should be going as well.”

As he moved away, Sandor saw Joffrey’s mother stare at Sansa intently. The little bird was taller than her, even though she was only seventeen. Cersei suddenly stated with resentment, “We may not be able to avoid the smelly crowd at the dockside by now, but at least your betrothed looks splendid, Joff darling.”

The young man glanced at Sansa with unconcealed pride. “She does, doesn’t she? By Jove, she’s ravishing.”

“Indeed…” the Lannister woman said coldly, begrudgingly. “Well, regardless of how she looks, one does not wear white when one is traveling, Joff. I’m surprised the little dove failed to recall that.”

They talk across her as if she wasn’t even there, Sandor thought, annoyed. No wonder Sansa didn’t bloody well speak if this is how things were like between her and the lions. It was just another sort of torment they were inflicting upon her. But that’s what they’ve been doing to her for more than a year now, isn’t it? Killing her softly: her soul, her spirit, her innocence... And you’re just as guilty as them.

For the human being standing before him was the outcome of his advice to her as the child within her was murdered: a girl hiding her true-self deeper and deeper inside behind a cool shell of courtesy. Just as I told her to do. He could not help but frown at the realization that this bothered him. Sandor had wondered how Sansa had changed during the past months, and now he had his answer. And I’m not sure I like it that much for her sake.

Cersei moved away, and Joff followed his mother as he escorted Sansa once again. As they passed him, Sandor saw the little bird mouthing words that seemed to say, “I felt like black.”

His blood seemed to chill, for he took her words to mean that she didn’t feel like sailing for New York any more than he did. And yet here we are. Seven hells, what a fucking mess! They all followed the Lannister bitch as she exited the building. Outside, four town cars awaited them all,
They had been rented for the short trip through the crowd from the South Western Hotel to the quayside beside Titanic ´s berth. Sandor had overseen the seating arrangements yesterday. Blount would be driving the white Renault, while Sandor sat on the passenger ´s seat at the front. The little bird and Joffrey would be on the back seats.

Tommen and his mother would be travelling in the silver-gray Daimler-Benz, with Trant and Senelle at the front. Trudy was to go on the third one as a hired chauffer drove it, keeping an eye on everyone ´s traveling bags. The final automobile had been hired to transport the rest of the luggage. With the Lannisters and their strand of wealth, comfort always came first, no matter the cost.

Even though Sandor hadn ´t been inside the hotel for more than twenty minutes, the mob on the streets seemed to have doubled. At least next door on the train station there didn ´t seem to be any more passengers arriving from London, which would make the way to the blasted ship a lot easier. Cersei and her son got into their car, followed by Senelle and Trant. Trudy headed for the third automobile, and Sandor was pleased to see that right at the rear of the procession most of the luggage was already packed up inside it.

But then something unexpected suddenly happened. Blount was waiting for Sansa, Joffrey and Sandor in the Renault when a hotel ´s footman hit Joffrey as he ran past him out into the street. The boy collided with Joff, wrenching a gasp of pain from him. Since it was evident to anyone witnessing the scene that it had been an accident, Sandor didn ´t step forward. Almost anyone.

“You bastard!” Joff shouted in pain, holding his arm as Sansa backed away from him, surprised. “You ´ll pay for this!”

Sandor knew that his employer was only refraining from shouting further curses because he was in a public place where not only his fiancé, but also other women were present. The stupid footman almost pissed himself as he recognized the heir to the Baratheon Empire, and wasted no time in hurriedly stammering an apology.

“I don ´t care who you were looking for,” Joff pointed out condescendingly. “I want to talk to your superior. You deserve to be fired!”

“You can ´t!” Sandor suddenly heard Sansa gasp.
Joffrey turned his head. “What did you say?”

Sandor could not believe the little bird had chosen this moment to finally speak. Is she mad? To tell him no in front of all of these people! It was clear she hadn’t meant to say anything, for there was a sudden fear in her eyes as she seemed to realize what she’d just done.

“Did you say I can’t?” Joffrey asked her, his tone as cold as ice. “Did you?”

“Please,” Sansa said lowering her voice as she looked around her. “I only meant it would be ill luck to turn this boy out into the streets on such a special day.”

Smiling acidly, Joff stepped closer to her. He seemed to have forgotten where they were, witnesses, women and footman all. “Should I ask why do you care what happens to him so much?”

“I don’t even know him, Joff.” The words tumbled out desperately from Sansa’s mouth, and though they were mere frantic whispers, Sandor heard them.

“Perhaps you don’t, but you like riffraff, don’t you?” Joffrey shot back. “I remember that boy from Winterfell, Podrick Payne. Didn’t you call him a swineherd, Dog?”

Bloody hells, Sandor thought, sighing. He glanced at Sansa and saw her face grow red as he caught her eye, looking nervous and afraid of what he might answer.

“Did I?” he replied. “I don’t recall.”

Joff gave a petulant shrug as Sansa opened her mouth to speak further. Sandor could not help but wonder if his words had somehow given her courage.

“Send word to have him fired tomorrow,” the little bird chirped. “Only- I don’t want us to miss the ship. I could not bear it. Please, let’s go. Your mother is getting impatient.”
Scowling, Joff studied her. Sandor could tell he knew she was lying and was desperate to avoid retribution. With a heavy heart he feared how the golden shit would make her pay for this. He had remained discretely in the background of this quarrel, but now found himself stepping forward.

“The girl speaks truly,” he put in, aware that Joffrey esteemed him enough to believe his words. “If you wrong others on the day you are to board a ship on it’s maiden voyage, you will reap bad luck throughout the whole journey.”

Sandor´s voice was flat, as if he didn´t care a whit whether Joff believed him or no. It was a stupid superstition to believe in, but when had he ever been able to protect the little bird to the best of his abilities as much as he would really like? Thankfully, the young lion believed Sandor. He looked unhappy, but nonetheless dismissed the footman with a wave of the hand. Forgetting his betrothed, he stepped into the Renault without a backward glance.

Sansa and Sandor alone remained of their party. She shot a quick look at him and chirped, “Thank you.”

Before he could even blink she had walked towards the automobile, and in a heartbeat a porter had opened the door and helped her inside. Shaking his head, Sandor took his place at the front of the car beside Blount.

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There was a stony silence inside the elegant car, but Sansa did not care to break it even though she found unbearable the way the air was growing warm and stuffy around them. She did not want to be sitting inside the automobile with Joffrey next to her any more than she wanted to get on board the Titanic, but none of that mattered. So instead, her efforts were focused on ignoring the imminent sea voyage as she tried to keep an indifferent façade to her current situation, but it was hard.

_ I don’t know why I pretend I am not afraid. I’m sure Joff knows I’m nervous._ The all too familiar fear of waiting to see how her betrothed would react to something she did that displeased him was something Sansa was used to, but the anticipation that preceded his first words after they had a row was always very nerve-racking.

Sansa took care not to move an inch as she sat staring at her hands while they left the South Western Hotel behind them, fearing any sudden movement would provoke a negative reaction from Joff regarding her slip with the footman. _I have been so careful lately, she thought in wonder. And with the blink of an eye I almost ruined it._ Still, what else could she have done?
The poor boy had looked really scared, and Sansa was certain Joffrey wasn´t hurt. *If that footman gets to keep his position, it won´t really matter that it costs me dearly.* She had borne too many ordeals at the Lannisters hand that surely one more could not matter very much. *Least of all if it was to spare somebody else.*

Of late her relationship with the man sitting beside her had been slightly better in the sense that they rarely fought. Sansa would just agree to whatever Joffrey wanted, no matter how much she hated it, and tried to face it all with good grace. Sometimes she failed, but now Sansa feared that her newest outburst would mean all her struggles to have a less conflictive bond with her fiancé had vanished. Still, there was nothing she could really do about it but wait for the outcome of her blunder.

“You´re prettier with your mouth closed, Sansa,” Joffrey suddenly remarked.

She had no choice but to look at him then. He was wearing a white waistcoat, accompanied by a light grey jacket and pants. His bowler hat hid his golden hair, which happened to match the ridiculous lion gold pin attached to his tie. His black shoes were spotless, his hands covered by tan kid brown gloves. All in all, Joff was still one of the handsomest men she had ever seen, but this was no longer to his credit. *That silly moustache of his only serves to add years to his age.*

When she realized that he had nothing else to say on the matter, Sansa lowered her gaze and smoothed down her skirt. He wanted an obedient girl after all, didn´t he? Joff reached out to hold her hand, and at his touch Sansa was only able to suppress a shudder because they were both wearing gloves.

Once this had sent her heart pounding, but now his touch filled her with revulsion. Sansa knew better than to show it though. She made herself sit very still again, glad that at least Joff´s behaviour meant that he really had forgiven her slip because of what Sandor Clegane had told him.

*But surely he knows I´m making it all up!* Sansa recalled thinking when she realized Joff´s bodyguard was backing her up. She could have sworn that there was no such superstition and had therefore thanked Mr. Clegane for stepping in and helping her out, though she had her doubts. *Maybe it really would have been bad luck had Joff gone ahead with his retribution.*

But this wasn´t the first time she found herself in Clegane´s debt. And even though the man was not a gentleman, Sansa had nonetheless hoped more than once that God would hear her prayers and gentle the rage inside him. She looked away from Joffrey and stared out at the sky as their white Renault, leading the silver-gray Daimler-Benz, pushed through the crowd, leaving a wake in the press of people.
A seagull soared above the harbour then, wings spread wide against the morning sky. A blush was creeping up her cheeks as Sansa remembered the long stare she had exchanged with Sandor Clegane back at the hotel’s suite. So personal. She knew it had been very rude to stare so, but she could not help it. But in the end, him being back changes nothing, she sighed regretfully.

Her musings were interrupted as Joff said possessively, “You’ll be the most beautiful woman on board the greatest ship that’s ever been made, my pet. Aren’t I a lucky man?”

So he’s decided to play gallant today, Sansa thought in relief, turning her attention back to her husband-to-be. Feeling no sort of emotion from his supposed compliment, she thanked him flatly, almost coldly. She did not know what else to say. Anything else and he’ll think me a fool or a liar. Her words had been hollow, but they made Joff nod and smile. His plump lips always made him look pouty. Sansa had liked that once, but now it made her sick.

Seeing the direction that her eyes had taken, Joff mistook her, though Sansa wasn’t sure if he did so deliberately. In the end he just didn’t care if she did things willingly or not so long as she did them without protesting. That was why when he leaned over, pulling her closer by the hold he had on her hand, Sansa closed her eyes in defeat and allowed Joffrey to kiss her.

It was hard to return his kiss, but in the end the gesture seemed to please him. As they drew apart, she unclenched her balled fists and decided to ignore the eerie relationship between them for a moment or two, and before she knew it Sansa’s mind had returned to thinking about Sandor Clegane.

The last time they had seen each other had been on the day when Joff showed her his true colours for the first time, and after that night he was gone. Over the following weeks she could only learn that Clegane had gone to Europe under Tywin Lannister’s orders, but that was it. No one ever mentioned him, though Sansa was certain he was not dead and was still employed by the lions. Otherwise they probably would have mentioned his nonappearance at some point.

She had wish for his presence and wondered what had become of him often enough. Sometimes Sansa had even laid awake at night imagining him on some dangerous secret mission, curious as to whether he knew that the wedding day had been set. Would he care? But even if he doesn’t I am glad he is back, Sansa thought.

Harsh as he was, she had proof that Sandor Clegane would not let any harm come to her if he could help it. She knew her fiancé was fond of Clegane, but Sansa was certain that his employee didn’t like Joffrey and maybe he didn’t even approve of her marriage to him, and somehow that made her feel a little safer than she had this morning.
Now that he was back the curiosity to know what he´d been up to increased, but Sansa knew she would never know. It would not do to ask Joffrey about it, and neither could she ask Clegane, fearing he would think she was prying into his secret businesses. It´s odd really, Sansa contemplated as she turned away from the window to look straight ahead of her to where the man she was thinking about was seated at the front of the car.

Once I could not even bear to look him straight in the face, and now that´s all I want to do! Even back at the hotel lobby when she had determinedly never once glanced at him despite the fact that she sensed his stare on her, she had exhorted every ounce of free will she possessed to look anywhere but at him.

Sansa had done so out of fear that Cersei´s eye, which was keener than that of her eldest son, would see that Clegane did not feel the contempt that Meryn Trant and Boros Blount did for her. But now she was free to look at the big man´s back from time to time without worries. So she did just that, marvelling at how could such a tall and brawny man as him could fit inside this car.

She noticed that his long dark hair was still shoulder length, and in truth outwardly he did not seem to have changed at tall: it was the same face, unshaven on one side and burned on the other. As she was lost in her contemplations though, Titanic suddenly came into full view through the car´s front window, bringing back all of Sansa´s trepidations about her future as Mrs. Joffrey Baratheon.

There was the stunning white giant that would take her to her new home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That vision of men´s glory and symbol of pride of the White Star Line was the means to transport her to her end. Sansa shifted in her seat, ill at ease. With every heartbeat the bow of the Titanic came closer, towering several stories above the wharf from it´s port side.

It was such an imposing sight that she ought to have been overwhelmed, but the view reminded her of the other ship voyages she´d been on with her father, and that was what hurt the most. Sansa stared out of the window again, aware of the evident excitement in the air as the crowds observed with admiration the vessel, yet the beauty of it all was lost on her. Don´t cry, she ordered herself as her lips trembled. Don´t you dare cry in front of Joff. Remember that you promised yourself you wouldn´t anymore.

She observed with unseen eyes the bright blue sky, and even hated the white clouds. Sansa longed for a weather to match her mood: cold, rain and grey skies. All around them the dock was crowded with people, luggage, motorcars, carriages, wagons and lorries, until finally she focused her attention on the sight of a little girl sitting on her father´s shoulders while they looked up at the Titanic. It made Sansa smile until Boros Blount hunk at them to move out of the way.
Irritated, she found herself turning towards Joffrey, questioning with impatience, “Must we bring so many men?”

Her betrothed looked for a moment surprised that she had spoken at all, but after considering a moment he explained, “Even if the dock wasn’t so crowded we would still need to have people guarding our backs. It’s expected of a man of my position, darling… I would have thought that even you would’ve realized that.”

Biting her lip in annoyance, Sansa longed to tell him that she doubted any one on board would believe that Meryn Trant and Boros Blount, former Pinkerton constables who had been sent to England to look after the lions as bodyguards by Tywin Lannister soon after Robert Baratheon had passed away, were really only Joff’s valet and chauffer. Society called them in jest, “The Lannister’s wet nurses.” They did not mock the Hound with that title though.

But Sansa preferred not to dwell too much on the fact that she was marrying into a family that felt a need to protect it’s members at all times for reasons she knew nothing about, specially when she was certain not many other of their acquaintances would be as well escorted as the lions as they crossed the Atlantic.

Curiosity took hold of Sansa though as she inquired with a casual tone, “Is that why Mr. Clegane returned?”

“You still don’t like him, do you?” Joff wondered, amused.

Sansa only shrugged. Her fiancé reflected for a moment before continuing, “He may work for me, but in reality he belongs to Grandfather, who sent word that his dog was to return to the United States with us. But I could not be happier. Having the Hound work for me has many advantages.”

Sansa was taking in every word Joffrey said, which she would analyse later, when her betrothed suddenly announced, “I’m going to instruct him to guard you all voyage long, you know.”

“What do you mean?” she asked quickly, completely startled.

He looked at her and seemed to consider whether to lie or answer her with the truth, and apparently deciding for the latter Joff elaborated further, pointing out, “You are not the only one who is scared of the Hound, sweet pea. Every one of our acquaintances is terrified of him, and so I came up with the idea of having him keeping an eye on you at all times.”
“But why?” Have I not been good?

“Because this will be the first time since the death of your father when you have the possibility of really socializing with others. And while I want to trust you love, I would much rather take precautions. So from morning till night, whenever you are alone, my faithful dog will be making sure my pretty fiancé remembers her place and doesn’t go on forgetting the consequences of what gossiping about the relationship between us could bring…”

Joffrey went on and on, but Sansa stop paying attention. She realized she was not as surprised with this decision as she had believed at first. The man she was going to marry not only did not trust her but also wanted to isolate her, and he’d found the perfect way to do so without raising too many eyebrows. And this is just the beginning, she knew. As soon as they were married he would lock her inside the house and throw away the key.

People will whisper among themselves how inappropriate it is of the Lannisters to let a man like Clegane guard an unmarried girl when there isn’t any sign of a threat, but none of them will right out address the issue with me. No one would talk to her willingly so long as The Hound shadowed her every step. And if no one outright says anything, the lions will apparently not mind the gossip.

Sansa would just have to pray that an opportunity would present itself that would enable her to unburden herself to some sympathetic ear. That was where her last hope resided, and the fact that Joffrey was aware of her desire to do so would not stop her. No, not even if Clegane is with me.

But at least while this decision bothered her because it was another step into robbing her completely of her independence, Sansa gathered that if someone was to guard her, then she was glad it was Sandor Clegane. Better him than the others. He had never made her feel uncomfortable the way Blount and Trant did, not even when she was younger and he had told her the story behind his burns.

Meryn Trant and Boros Blount were two other people whom Sansa saw daily, but whom she did not trust. She rarely spoke to them, and she knew that the dislike was mutual from both sides. Mr. Blount was an ugly short-tempered man with a broad chest and short, bandy legs, whose nose and voice were flat, his cheeks baggy with jowls, and his hair grey and brittle. He never failed to make her feel as though she had no clothes on, covering her arms with goose bumps.

Whereas Mr. Trant was as dour as an undertaker, had pouchy bags under his cold eyes, a wide sour mouth, rusty hair spotted with grey, and treated Sansa at times as if she were a lackwit child.

“And so I’ve even decided that Clegane and I will share the room next to your suite. I know that
Mother and you have a difficult time bonding, so I gather than rather than spending every moment with her, you can go off on your own provided the Hound is with you.”

Sansa’s face showed no emotion as she registered this new revelation. The length of trouble Joff would go to in order to ascertain his little plan worked to perfection both amazed and scared her. She dutifully mouthed her thanks to her fiancé for his consideration, but her mind was full of memories from the night so long ago when Joffrey had revealed his true self to her.

*It seems like so long ago.* During that fateful horrible hour Sansa’s blindfolded eyes had been unveiled, and she had seen how wrong she’d been to fear Mr. Clegane, when in reality it was Joff who was the monster. And now it appeared that Clegane was going to share Joff’s room, and rest next to hers.

That thought provoke different reactions from Sansa, but none of them were the ones her betrothed would have imagined or wanted, but for one. She was a little embarrassed by it, but not one bit uncomfortable or afraid. Having Sandor Clegane so near would mean that she would be safe from Joffrey during the nights, something that had been bothering her for weeks after learning that she was not going to be sharing a suite with Cersei as originally planned.

Sansa only wished that she could have the same sort of protection when her fateful wedding night arrived, but knew it would not be so. All of these thoughts were at present making it harder for her to be sitting near Joff, sharing with him the warm interior of the automobile, and for a moment she longed for the car trip from the South Western Hotel to the Titanic to end.

But when that happened less than a minute later, Sansa’s tummy instantly tightened into knots. What she dreaded was finally here! It was time to leave her homeland. For a desperate moment she regretted having declined yesterday afternoon to go sightseeing in the streets of Southampton with Joff and Tommen.

Now her last memories of England would be of being stuffed in her hotel suite, afraid and alone. *But Father once said there was no shame in being afraid, only in showing your fear,* Sansa recalled. *All men live in fear.* She was glad to at least have the memory of her father sustain her during these difficult moments.

Their car stopped and Sansa quailed. *God help me,* she told herself glancing at the colossally big ship, waiting for Mr. Blount to scurry over to open the door for her. *God, give me courage.* Sansa took a deep breath. *I am a Stark. I can be brave.* She was distracted from her current anxiety by the sight of Sandor Clegane stepping out of the car so he could open her door himself.
She raised her Tully blue eyes to meet his grey ones, only to find that he was already looking down at her. Sansa offered him her hand and he took it lightly. As they touched she fleetingly marvelled at how little her hand was compared to his, before registering that for some strange reason they just could not seem to look away from each other´s faces.

Maybe it is because we have not seen each other for so long, she pondered. Or because he´s realizing that now I can look at him, scars and all, and not be frightened by what I see. It was hard to guess the real reason, since his face showed no emotions now, and in any case she had always had trouble reading his face.

Once both of her feet had touched the ground, Sansa thanked Clegane for his kindness. She received no answer but a grunt, but that did not bother her. After all, she had missed his rough manners almost as much as the sound of his rasping voice.

When he let go of her hand Sansa finally glanced towards the ocean liner, taking in her first real sight of the ship about to set sail on it´s first maiden voyage, recalling that the china had never been used, or how the sheets had never been slept in. Titanic was called the ship of dreams.

If only it could be that for me too, Sansa thought with wistful longing.
Sorry for posting this a day late, but now that it’s here I hope you enjoyed it! :D We’re finally going to start getting scenes from the actual movie now ;)}
It was almost noon. Sansa looked up at the Titanic, intimidated by the gleaming white structure that rose mountainously beyond the rail. Above that the buff-coloured funnels stood against the sky like the pillars of some great temple, even as crewmen moved across the deck, dwarfed by the scale of the steamer as a gorgeous burgundy car, hanging from a loading crane, was lowered toward a hatch.

Sansa was in the middle of a crowd of hundreds, yet she felt completely alone. It was almost as if she were in a dream; a spectator but nothing more. The atmosphere was one of excitement, but she could not share in with the general giddiness. People were embracing all about her, waving and shouting up to their friends and relatives on the decks above them, or hugging each other in tearful farewells.

_Let them, Sansa thought with envy. They do not know how awful it is to pretend you never cry when that’s all you feel like doing from the morning you wake up, to the moment when you’re about to fall sleep._

Passengers were streaming to board the Titanic, jostling with hustling seamen and stokers, porters, and barking White Star Line officials. It was ironic how much they wanted to go when all Sansa felt like doing was stay in her homeland. Just then, Boros Blount opened the door on the other side of the car for Joff, who quickly walked over to stand beside her.

“I don’t see what all the fuss is about,” Sansa heard herself remarking with cool disdain. “It doesn’t look any bigger than the Mauretania.”

As the words left her mouth Sansa blinked, startled. Surely it was the thought of leaving England what was making her feel defiant? But if she carried on so, it could only end badly for her. She turned quickly to look at Joff, but he only laughed at her in amusement.

“You can be blasé about some things, but not about Titanic!” he exclaimed, gazing up worshipfully at the ocean liner. He turned around to offer his hand to his mother as Cersei and Tommen joined them. “It’s over a hundred feet longer than Mauretania and far more luxurious.”

“The little dove is much too hard to impress, Joff,” Sansa’s mother-in-law observed coldly.
Sansa pretended not to have heard that, aware that she fooled no one. But Joff was still in a good humour, for he only replied, “Mind your step, Mother. There’s a puddle.”

“So this is the ship they say is unsinkable,” Cersei commented, drawing everyone’s eyes up to the colossal vessel once again.

“It is unsinkable,” Sansa’s betrothed assured them with pride, as if he himself had built it. “God himself couldn’t sink this ship!”

A White Star Line porter scurried toward them, obviously harried by all their last minute loading, for he appeared stricken at the sight of their enormous pile of steamer trunks, suitcases, wooden crates and steel safes.

“Sir,” he said, addressing Joff. “You’ll have to check your baggage through the main terminal, round that way-”

But Sansa saw Joff nonchalantly hand the man money enough to make his eyes open as big as saucers.

“See my man,” Joffrey commanded the porter, indicating Trant. “I’m sure the two of you can work out a deal that’s to both of our benefits.”

The White Star Line employee beamed, exclaiming that it would be his pleasure to do so. Sansa observed the face of the man she was soon to be tied to in holy wedlock. He never tires of the effect his gold has on others. She heard then Mr. Trant instructing, “These trunks here, and twenty more in the Daimler. We’ll have all this lot up in the rooms.”

The porter whistled frantically for some cargo-handlers nearby for them to come over and help him. Once Joff was satisfied that his chauffer and valet would see to it that everything was taken care of, he checked his pocket gold watch.

“We’d better hurry,” he said. “This way, ladies. Clegane, come with us.”

Indicating the way toward the first class gangway, he moved into the crowd, leading the way for Sansa, Cersei, Tommen, Sandor Clegane, Trudy and Senelle, the last two laden with bags of the Lannister’s most recent purchases. With every step she took she was gettint nearer to her doom,
making it impossible for Sansa to do more than just force herself to breathe deeply, as they all
weaved between vehicles and handcarts, hurrying passengers who seemed to belong in second class
and steerage, and well-wishers of several different nationalities.

When they reached the elevated boarding bridge twenty feet above destined for the use of First
Class passengers, Sansa heard Cersei sniff. The Lannister woman had wanted to arrive earlier in
order to be able to avoid the crowded dock, but Sansa had taken so long in changing from her black
outfit into the one she was wearing now that they were too late to take the raised platform.

As they passed by a line of men with coarse wool and tweeds, queued up inside movable barriers
for the Health Officer to examine them one by one, Sansa´s mouth threatened to crack into a little
smile as Cersei gasped at the sight. But even then it was a hollow gesture, for the pain she was
feeling could not be forgotten by this little victory over Mrs. Baratheon.

The only moment when Sansa came out of her dazed state was when the sight of a well-dressed
young man cranking the handle of a wooden cinematograph camera caught her attention. He was
filming a lady standing in front of the Titanic, who looked very self-conscious.

“Look at the ship, darling, that´s it!” he was saying. “You´re amazed! You can´t believe how big it is! That´s great, Mary!”

Sansa was not aware that she had been so interested in the couple that she had fallen behind. *Why
can´t that be me?* she wanted to know. *Why can´t I have what they have? What did I ever do to
deserve Joff?*

The way that man was looking at Mary made her smile softly, and then she was chuckling at the
sight of Mary doing a poor impression of the actress Clara Bow. Out of nowhere a pair of strong
hands landed on her shoulders, making Sansa jump. Before she even had time to gasp in surprise,
she heard Sandor Clegane growl in an angry voice, “Keep moving, little bird.”

*I’d forgotten that´s was his nickname for me,* Sansa thought. It had started out as a way of his to
mock her, but with time it had become pleasant to hear him call her that. She knew she should
thank him for coming back for her, but Sansa could not bring herself to do so. He was only doing
his job, but after all, being escorted back to the lions was the last thing she wanted.

Clegane directed her towards their party with a firm hand placed discreetly on her back. As they
approached their party, Sansa saw two yelling boys shoving past Joffrey, closely followed by a
man who looked to be their father and who accidentally hit her fiancé out of his way in order to not
loose track of the children.
Please God, don’t let him start another scene right here! Sansa thought in despair, but thankfully by the time she had joined him, her fiancé could do nothing more than exclaim coldly, “Steerage swine! Apparently they’ve missed their annual bath.”

“We could have gone through the terminal instead of running along the dock like some squalid immigrant family,” Cersei reminded everyone, sounding very annoyed as she shot a look of venom in Sansa’s direction.

“Yes, Mother,” her son replied in irritation, before guiding them out of the path of a horse-drawn wagon.

Joffrey turned to Sansa and offered her his arm so he could motion her forward. She forced herself to take it, glad he was at least walking at a slow pace so she would not trip over her narrow skirt.

She was expecting her betrothed to comment to her at any moment that his mother was right, but instead Joffrey observed, “Don’t think I didn’t notice that I almost lost you back there but for Clegane. See how useful our Dog is turning out to be? And we are not even on board yet.”

Sansa looked up at his handsome, arrogant face. I must not let him see how nervous I am, she thought. But with every step that resolution got harder and harder.

She must have indeed been unable to hide some of her emotions, for Joff suddenly commented, “Your going to your new home on the grandest ship in history and you act as if you’re going to your execution. Don’t you remember how eager you once were to go live with me in the United States, dear? Just think about those happy times and give me a big smile.”

Sansa did as she was told and looked away while the hull of the Titanic loomed over them as a great iron wall, black and severe. To her it was a slave ship taking her to America in Lannister gold chains. While her heart beat furiously, Joff escorted her up the gangway, her arm in his, his hand closing protectively over hers while they both used their umbrellas for support.

That walk was something out of a nightmare for Sansa, for now every step was a real struggle, as if she were pulling her feet out of ankle-deep mud. And the gangway was longer than she would have believed, a thousand meters, and horror waiting at the end. Sansa wondered how could she keep herself from shaking when fear was devouring her. Will I ever see Winterfell again?
When Sansa finally entered the gangway to the D-Deck doors, a sense of dread was overwhelming her, as if the ship was swallowing her whole. Outwardly she was everything a well-brought up girl should be, but inside Sansa was screaming.

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It was a quarter past noon. A screaming blast pierced the air, bellowing the Titanic’s departure as it moved into the waters of the English Channel without any vibrations. Sandor stood beside the Grand Staircase on D-Deck, where the reception area for First Class was located.

The ornate oak staircase was similar to the one back at The South Western Hotel, but Sandor could smell the fresh paint on this one, though the richly carved woodwork that had gone into it brought back memories of Gregor and the wooden cowboy, making his mouth twitch.

In an attempt to distract himself Sandor looked up at the glass dome far above him, but that sight only served to make him think it was obscene to put so much care and effort into this mammoth liner. There were stained glass windows, deeply piled carpets, and the fucking staircase even had bronze cherubs decorating it. *It may well be a luxury ship, but it’s just too bloody much!* The White Star Line logo was everywhere, reminding everyone that they had built the largest wonder of their time.

Titanic brimmed with wealth and costs beyond comprehension, and to someone else it may have inspired reverence and respect, but not to Sandor. He could admire it, but was not overwhelmed by it. In fact, the only thing that could awe him was the sight of Sansa in her white clothes standing some distance away. The reception room was a sea of jewels, furs and bright fabrics since everyone had striven to outdo each other on sailing day, but to Sandor the little bird stood out above everyone.

After the Lannister party had entered the ship and had their names entered in the passenger’s list, Captain Smith himself, the great patriarch of the sea, had personally greeted Sansa, Joff, his mother and Tommen. Then had followed a procession of officers and crew of the RMS Titanic to pass by, all of whom were smiling. Joffrey had then ordered the maids, Boros and Trant to go on ahead with their luggage to their suites so they could start unpacking, but Sandor had been told to stay nearby.

So, ever faithful, he had strode away through the press and was now waiting for the lions to finish greeting everyone they knew so that they could go rest before lunch. And though standing guard for the Lannisters and the Barathones was a dull job, Sandor was used to it. And today it had its compensations since it allowed him to be near Sansa after months of being deprived of her company.
Yet keeping an eye on the little bird wasn’t always so sodding pleasant. Less than half an hour ago Sandor’s insides had turned to lead as he realized that he had lost her amidst the hundreds of people at the dock waiting for the launching. Thankfully he had located her a short distance away in a matter of seconds, staring at a man with a camera as he filmed some woman.

Cursing himself for his careless slip, Sandor had led her back to her captors, too angry to do more than just bid her to stay close by. Since he’d helped Sansa out of the car up until these moments at the Titanic’s reception room, Sandor had watched her, certain of the struggle she was going through as she left her homeland for a strange country with people who terrified her.

Ever since meeting her again Sandor had noticed that the little bird seemed detached from reality, and now she still moved as if in a dream through all these opulence. He hated seeing the lions suck the life from the little bird. There was still steel underneath her, but he was starting to suspect that some of her resolution was fading. She should be resting, he thought in annoyance, wishing the wealthy shallow passengers would spare her their hollow courtesies and let her be.

But the stupid lions wanted to greet the entire entourage of rich Americans and Europeans who’d impeccably turned out, a fucking perfect example of the world’s most prominent upper class. Yesterday Sandor had heard Blount saying that there would be people from all sorts of high places: European royalty, British aristocracy, American tycoons and even theatre stars. And all of these puffed up idiots were boundlessly confident folk, sure of everything.

The thought that these were the sorts of people who ruled the world made Sandor feel disgusted. He smirked nastily at a passing stewardess sheepherding a bunch of servants struggling with piles of luggage before settling his gaze on Sansa once again. It was evident even from this distance that she not only outshone every other woman in the room in looks, but also in nature.

For while these women had probably memorized the list of names of all the first class passengers, the little bird had a talent for recalling a person’s name and their face no matter their station. Had he not known this previously, it would have still been evident that people felt it as soon as they talked to her. Even when she is trying to pretend she isn’t miserable.

At long last though the lions finally decided it was time to end their little charade, and so Sandor followed them to their suites. It’s my room too, he remembered with a frown.

A steward led them to the electric lifts that would eventually take them to the hallway that led to their cabins. As soon as he stepped outside the elevator Sandor saw a big brass letter B, indicating the deck they were on. First Class accommodations were located amidships, were the rocking of the ship was less keenly felt, so that passengers wouldn’t be seasick.
Moments later, the steward took his leave so he could show the Lannister woman and Tommen over to their staterooms, leaving Sansa, Joffrey and Sandor at the door of suites B-52, B-54 and B-56. The Millionaire Suite consisted of three rooms, joined by interconnecting doors. There was the living room with a crystal chandelier and a chimney decorated by a gold mirror, a blue room for him and Joff with brass beds, and a red chamber for Sansa with a wooden bed.

But there was also a fully equipped bathroom with a telephone, table fans, private bath and lavatory, electric light and electric heaters, and a wardrobe room. In addition there was also a private 50-foot promenade deck outside with gimbal lamps designed not to tip over in rough waters, and even bells to summon a steward. Sandor knew what that these accommodations had cost Joff: $4,350 dollars. *A small fortune to some, but not to him.*

Sandor warily inspected the three luxurious rooms out of habit as Sansa’s maid started unpacking her mistress’ belongings, barely glancing at the bed in the second of the three suites where he would be expected to berth. A room service waiter had appeared and was pouring champagne into a glass of orange juice as Trant and Blount carried Sansa’s harp out onto the promenade.

The waiter handed a Bucks Frizz to the little bird as she finished removing her enormous hat. Her rich deep auburn hair caught Sandor’s attention immediately, even as Joffrey talked to his younger brother, who had come to see if their rooms were as big as his, and to propose a trip to the outer deck so they could try and catch a last sight of England.

“Who wants to come with me?” the boy asked, eagerly looking around him.

“No one,” Joff answered, as he took a glass of champagne from the waiter.

“But I want to!” Tommen protested.

“I don’t care what you want,” his brother explained.

Watching Joff torment his younger brother always reminded Sandor of Gregor.

“Joff, I could go with him,” the little bird suddenly chirped in.

That caught Sandor’s attention. He would gladly accompany Sansa and the boy far away from these rooms if they so wished it, but his bloody employer did not seem to share his opinion. He
didn’t glance at his fiancé, only raised a hand in her direction, but that was all it was needed. The
gesture was clear: he was ordering the little bird to shut up and not interfere. Fucking bastard!

But Tommen was not giving up yet. “Mother said I could!”

“Mother said I could,” Joffrey mocked. “Don’t be childish.”

“I’m a child,” the lad declared haughtily. “I’m supposed to be childish.”

Sandor threw his head back and laughed, before barking, “He has you there.”

Joffrey was fond of Sandor, but that did not mean he was beaten. He told Tommen to get the hell
out and walked out on to the covered deck. His threatening tone had succeeded in sending his
younger brother running, the boy’s chubby little legs pumping hard. Sandor returned his gaze to the
little bird, who was helping her maid unpack some paintings.

“God, not those mud paintings again,” Joffrey called out, talking to Sansa through the doorway.
“They certainly were a waste of money.”

“The difference between Joff’s taste in art and mine is that I have some,” Sandor was amazed but
pleased to hear the little bird mutter under her breath, before calling back to her betrothed, “You’re
wrong. They’re fascinating… Like being inside a dream or something. There’s truth but no logic.
And we need a little colour in this room.”

Sandor detected longing and sadness in her voice. So that’s why you like them, he realized. Because
they represent a better reality than the one you are living. At first he’d barely glanced at the
pictures, but now he stared at them again, trying to see what exactly was it that had caught Sansa’s
imagination.

“What’s the artist’s name?” Trudy wondered.

“Something Picasso,” Sansa replied, once she had read the name off the canvas.

“Something Picasso,” Joffrey mimicked, snorting as he leaned against the doorframe looking at
her. “He won’t amount to a thing. He won’t me, trust me! But at least they were cheap."

The little bird pretended not to have heard him.

“Let’s put the Degas in the bedroom,” she answered, taking the painting with the dancers in her hands as she walked in the direction of her private stateroom, closely followed by her maid. As they disappeared, a porter wheeled in Joff’s private safe into the sitting room on a hand truck.

“Put that in the wardrobe,” Sandor snarled at the man, the memory of what was inside that steel box adding to his wish to be able to punch the golden bastard right on the face. In his mind, the only things that could begin to compensate Joffrey’s behaviour towards Sansa were the sight of bones breaking and his blood being spilled.

Shaking his head, Sandor watched the man he hated take out his wallet so he could tip the porter and the room service waiter, which reminded him that he ought to pay a visit to the purser’s safe on C-Deck. He had to make sure it was a safe place for the lions to leave their $11,000 dollars in jewellery.

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Sansa entered her bedroom carrying the large Degas of the dancers. Looking about her, she decided that once upon a time she would have liked the gilded mahogany furniture in the Empire style. There were wall sconces with ribbon designs made of bronze, and the bed four posted bed had curtains were so fine Sansa could see right through them. *I can even smell the fresh paint!*

Her spacious stateroom had every comfort imaginable. *Very elegant,* she thought, sighing. *If only I could still enjoy such splendours.* She had to admit though that the ornate panelling and the woodwork were indeed beautiful, and the furniture was covered with satin upholstery. There was also a gold mirror on her vanity table, where Trudy had already placed her personal items.

At least Sansa could do something to feel a little better about it. Turning her attention back to the painting, she wondered where she ought to put it. “Let’s see,” she pondered, looking about her. When her eyes fell on the dresser near the canopy bed, her mind was made up. Sansa walked towards it and set the Degas on there.

She gazed about her and walked over to the big bed, running her palm over the lace bedspread. Sansa liked the fact that there were flowers all around so they could brighten up her mood at least a
little, and that her suite smelt of nutmeg and other costly spices. Trudy, who had begun to hang up some of her clothes, could not help but remark excitedly, “It smells so brand new!”

Sansa looked at the woman. Trudy was only twenty, only a few years older than her, but beside Sandor Clegane she was the only one of the Lannister’s workers to whom she spoke to beyond a command. Though she liked the Irish girl and there were times when it felt like she was the closet thing she had to a friend these days, Sansa could not bring herself to truly trust her. Still, she could not help but smile at the woman’s enthusiasm as she extended her arm so that Trudy could begin unbuttoning her sleeves.

“It’s like they built it all just for us,” the maid continued. “I mean, just to think that tonight when I crawl between the sheets, I’ll be the first!”

“Oh Trudy,” Sansa sighed, chuckling. It was nice to think that at least there was someone in this stateroom who was happy to be aboard the RMS Titanic.

Sansa’s smile was a short one though, for a moment later she became alert to the fact that Joffrey was leaning against the doorway, his glass of champagne refilled, looking at her with evident lust. She gulped.

“And in a month when I crawl between the sheets, I’ll still be the first,” he pointed out with a nasty smile, not caring whether he made them uncomfortable by his insinuation, or by the fact that he had eavesdrop on their conversation.

He nodded at Trudy, who excused herself and left the room quickly, blushing as she edged around Joffrey. No, don’t go, Sansa wanted to tell her, but instead she held her tongue, her throat suddenly dry.

Joff locked the door as Sansa attempted to muster some semblance of composure. Now this room was definitely tainted for her. He had poisoned it with his mere presence, just as he did everything in her life. She turned away from him, staring at her reflection in the mirror with a stoic expression. It suffocated her to think she could not be alone for a moment.

Sansa waited, hearing Joffrey put his drink on the surface of the table. Knowing what was coming did not make things easier for her, and nor did it give her time enough to prepare. Soon enough Joff was behind her, wrapping his arms around her body. It was an act of intimacy, but such gestures always seemed to Sansa to be mixed with possessiveness.
“The first and only,” he continued in a whisper, bending down so he could place a wet kiss on her neck. “Forever.”

Sansa repeated that word over and over in her head as squeezed her tightly. Yes, she was going to be tied to him till one of them died. He would be her master in the eyes of God and the world, expected to comfort him, share his bed, and give him heirs. But Sansa knew all these already. It was just that to think about it as his mouth was upon her was simply too much.

She was glad Joff was not looking up, for otherwise he would have at once seen her blank expression reflected on the mirror. This was the moment Sansa dreaded most each day: being alone with her fiancé. It was when she had to be bravest and strong as she suffered through his caresses, as was her duty, while she wept no more than she had to afterwards. She could attempt to be defiant as long as there were other people around, but being alone with Joffrey in a room paralysed her.

Sansa knew she ought to say something, but the words caught in her throat. She just couldn’t move as her golden monster turned her around so that he could take her in his arms and claim her mouth, long and hard. She bore it without any outward struggle after countless similar occurrences, but in her mind she was still looking for some sort of explanation to all this.

Please stop, Sansa thought fervently as his hands roamed down her back in what she supposed Joff thought was either a soothing or a thrilling gesture, but which only served to make her skin crawl. Leave me! Let me be! Please. But it was no good. I am not yet married. Why won’t he allow me to enjoy my freedom before the doom date is upon us?

Sansa should not complain though. The morning after the fateful night in which she had fully realized to whom she was engaged to, Joffrey, ashamed by some of his actions, had promised Sansa that he would wait until they were married for him to claim his marital rights.

Not believing him, she had lived in fear day after day, but when months passed by and he didn’t do anything more than just kiss and touch her, Sansa could only be content that he was not demanding anything more at the moment. Her wedding night had seemed wonderfully wicked and exciting to her as a schoolgirl, but now that it was finally upon her, she could only be terrified of it. But surely it wouldn’t be so bad if only I was with a man I loved.

Myranda Royce, Sansa’s friend, had instructed her in some of the womanly arts, but even though her experience was very limited, what little she could imagine was now too horrible to bear. For Joffrey would be the only man she would ever know intimately- and who would know her in turn.

So however much Sansa longed for this trip aboard the Titanic to be finished, she dreaded its end,
for after the sea voyage would come her wedding. All of a sudden Joff’s hands were on her chest, brushing against her breasts as he began unbuttoning her jacket. Sansa drew back, and said in alarm, “Joff, no! Please, stop!”

But her protestations were ignored, as they had been a hundred times before. He smiled down at her. “I sent the maid away. Don’t you need help undressing?”

Sansa tried to step back, but he pulled her into his arms and suddenly he was kissing her again. Feebly, she tried to squirm, but only succeeded in pressing herself more tightly against him. His mouth was on hers, swallowing her words, drowning her whimpers and protests as his fingers worked deftly down the jacket, and when he was done, he took it off. Her heart racing, Sansa stood still as a lance with her eyes wide open as she heard the jacket hit the ground, and Joff squeezed her breast, his other hand lingering on her waist.

Even though she was wearing a white blouse that covered her up to the neck, having a layer removed of her clothing made Sansa feel exposed. Dimly the thought that she would be expected to wear the jacket all day long rush through her mind, but Joff would not allowed her to pick it up at the present to keep it from getting wrinkled.

No, instead Joffrey met her gaze and, smiling again, he gripped her shoulders to steer her towards the bed. He forced her to sit down even as Sansa opened her mouth, her lips trembling. But no words came out. The man she was to marry settled next to her so he could lean over and smell her neck, one hand on her thigh, the other on the small of her back.

In moments such as these one thought kept running through Sansa’s mind in a rush: *He promised. He said he would wait. He promised*. A heartbeat later she heard movement next door, and instantly the thought that Sandor Clegane flashed across her numb mind. The next thing she knew Sansa was standing up, for it was now more unbearable than usual to be kissing Joff somehow. She met his green gaze as he cursed low under his breath, considering something.

Finally, with a small snort he said, “It seems my plan to keep me off temptation worked. I’ll go tell the Hound that he is going to guard only you on this journey. We’re having lunch with Captain Smith later today, so get some rest.”

Meekly Sansa lowered her eyes, not feeling one bit inclined to reply to his words. Joffrey winked at her before walking out of the room, closing the door softly behind him after he’d taken one last long look at her. For a moment Sansa could not breathe, but when she heard voices next door she finally let out a deep breath, her chest heaving with gratitude and a numb sense of disbelief.
Her eyes descended on Joff’s glass of champagne and she took it in her hands and drank it quickly, desperate to wash his taste away. It was cloyingly sweet, but very strong. It almost gagged her, but Sansa emptied the cup until her head was swimming. *Maybe the drink will give me courage*, she thought, staring at the dancers inside Degas’ painting, her eyes filling with tears. *Or maybe it will just help me drown my sorrows.*

Chapter End Notes

There are original scenes in this chapter as well as some taken from the script of the film. Can you guess know which one was a deleted scene? :D
Sandor walked away from the Palm Court restaurant after escorting the little bird, Cersei Lannister and Tommen to its entrance. The lions were meeting Joff there to talk with Bruce J. Ismay, Chairman and Managing Director of the White Star Line, Thomas Andrews, Titanic’s shipbuilder, and with that big woman who’d joined the first class passengers yesterday at sunset after the cruise liner had called at Cherbourg, France.

The Titanic had just departed Queensland, Ireland; its final stop to pick up passengers to take across the Atlantic. Now it was streaming west from the coast of Ireland, with nothing ahead but ocean. Sandor had only been on board the ship for little more than a day, but thankfully something had already happened to him make this damnable trip a whole lot more enjoyable.

Striding away from the First Class reception room, he made his way towards the back of the vessel. It took him some minutes to reach the Second Class stairwell that led to the poop deck, and even though it was a Third Class area, he accessed it without any trouble. At this hour of the day the place was crowded, which was not surprising seeing as steerage was where most of the passengers could be found.

Sandor reached a bench and sat on it, Titanic’s wake spreading out behind him to the horizon. There was a couple with two young children nearby, but when the mother caught sight of him, the party quickly moved away. Rolling his eyes, Sandor turned his attention to the seagulls flying nearby, waiting. It was a partly cloudy day, but relatively warm due to a brisk wind.

He must have sat there for about ten minutes when a crewmember appeared walking three small dogs around the deck. One of them was a black French bulldog, and despite the fact that Sandor thought the poor animal was one of the ugliest looking creatures he’d ever seen, when the dog got close enough to him and sniffed him, he leaned over to scratch his ear. The crewmember in the white coat strode away dragging the animals along as quickly as he could by pulling at their leashes.

As Sandor watched them disappear through the crowd with contempt, a man nearby snorted, pointing out, “First class dogs coming down here to take a shit. I thought they were nobler than that.”

Recognizing the voice instantly, Sandor looked up and his eyes fell on Dr. Elbert Broder standing before him, a big smile plastered across his face. Grinning back, Sandor rasped, “How else are you to remember that’s where you rank in the scheme of things?”
“Like I could forget!” the man laughed, still staring down at him without fear. “I´m glad to see you again, Sandor Clegane. I almost tripped with my luggage yesterday evening as I saw you staring down at me from A-Deck while I got on board. I´ve been looking out for you ever since.”

“I knew you would find me eventually if I hang about Third Class,” he answered.

Sandor stood up and laid a hand on Broder´s shoulder in greeting, thinking that it was indeed good to see the face of the bastard who´d saved his life six months ago. Still, at the back of his mind it bothered him how, for short of the secret of what Gregor did to his face, this person knew everything about him.

As he took in that fact the German doctor had hardly changed, Sandor thought the same thing he´d done back when they´d first met: that Broder ought to have been a professional boxer. He looks more like a man made to break bones than to heal them.

“What the bloody hell are you travelling to America for?” he demanded, as he sat down back on the bench.

Broder joined him, rubbing his jaw as he answered in a thick German accent, “What is there for me in Europe but graves and bitter memories? My sister is dead and her son has invited me over to live with him in some place called Atlanta. The change will be hard, but Daniel´s the only family I´ve got left. He even paid for my ticket. He´s doing very well with his business.”

Sandor´s expression turned serious, and he growled quietly, “You know as well as I do that war is brewing. It won´t be long now before the German Empire will need good doctors for it´s army, and when the United States sides with England, you and your nephew will be in danger if you stay in Georgia.”

The man´s shoulders sagged, and for a moment he seemed to consider Sandor´s words before asking, “Can I bum a cigarette?”

Nodding, he passed Broder a cigarette, knowing the German would take a while to answer as he mulled over Sandor´s words. The comfortable silence that fell between them made him think back upon the circumstances that had led them to meet back in the northern city of Delmenhorst.

Business for Tywin Lannister had sent Sandor to Imperial Germany. Officially he was supposed to
take a close look of their high steel production, which surpassed England and was second only to the United States, but in reality Sandor was meant to try to secretly contact General Josias von Heeringen, the old lion’s acquaintance and the Prussian Minister of War.

Tywin had befriended the man decades ago, and wanted to know if the Kaiser was indeed planning on hosting an informal war council later this year. Sandor had succeeded in making contact, and was brining back to the old lion a coded response from the German general. He knew why Lannister, a prominent American politician, wanted to keep his friendship with von Heeringen quiet, but what caught Sandor’s attention was the reason behind Tywin’s sudden interest on German’s political and military activities.

After he had met with the General’s men, Sandor had travelled north. It had been in Delmenhorst when word had reached him that the date for Sansa and Joffrey’s wedding had been set. Deciding that drowning himself in wine for the night was the only way to deal with that shit, Sandor had ended up in a tavern brawl where a sodding idiot taller than him had knifed him across the abdomen.

_It was my fucking fault. I hadn’t drunk heavily for a long time, and I’d eaten nothing that day after traveling for hours. What the hell was I thinking?_ In the end he’d been ambushed and left for dead in a black alley, and that was how Elbert Broder had found him coming back from visiting a sick patient, unconscious as his lifeblood drained out of him to scorch the street red.

The last thing Sandor remembered was being hit in the back of the head with something heavy as he fought to keep three men off him at the tavern, and then the next thing he knew he was resting on a bed too small for him, being nursed back to health by an ugly stranger who claimed to be a doctor. Arguing that he had believed Sandor would not be able to pay for hospital treatment, the doctor had taken him to his personal clinic, which also happened to be his home. In the end, it had only taken the man a matter of days to gain Sandor’s trust, and somehow a friendship of sorts had started between them.

“Why did you become a doctor?” he remembered asking Elbert the night before Sandor, now fully recovered, left Delmenhorst and Broder’s care.

“I never chose it. My father was one, and his before him. I was trained for it since the day they deemed me old enough.”

When Elbert finished the cigarette he concluded, “I doubt Daniel would wish to return, no matter how hostile the situation becomes for the likes of us. But I’ll go back when I’m needed by my fellow countrymen, or when yours kick me out. For now though I want to go to this Atlanta and enjoy some peace and quiet among my people.”
Frowning, Sandor knew his mouth had begun to twitch. He sighed deeply and snarled, “If you need any sort of help, just send word to me. But I’ll still visit you from time to time to check on you.”

Broder nodded in appreciation, and smiled again.

“Thank you, my friend, and thank God you saw me yesterday. Would you have imagined half a year ago that we’d be travelling together aboard the most glorious ship of all times?”

Sandor’s indifference to Titanic’s title must have been obvious, for Elbert frowned, and remarked, “It’s your turn to tell me why are you going back.”

Shit, he thought, looking away. Lost in memories of how they’d met, Sandor had momentarily forgotten that Broder knew just what he felt more the Lannisters, which meant that a lot of things Sandor would rather leave well alone would have to be discussed. Yet he owed the German doctor the truth, and if the bloody man wanted to talk about them, he would just have to stand it with as much good grace as he could collect.

“My work in Europe is done,” he answered roughly, meeting Broder’s stare. “I’ve been called back.”

“I see,” Elbert said, his smile flickering and fading. “So you no longer intend to leave them?”

“I don’t know,” Sandor admitted, running a hand through his hair, not caring anymore to keep the frustration from his voice.

“And why don’t you know any more? When we parted ways I was hoping you would finally decide to leave your employers and head down to Istanbul. Run away to the desert or India, or wherever it was that you told me you’d always wanted to go to.”

“The Himalayas,” Sandor mumbled, shoving his fists deep into the inside of his trouser pockets. “Or Australia.”

“Come now, tell me what happened,” Dr. Broder insisted, goading him on.
But it was Sandor’s turn to take out a cigarette and smoke it in silence.

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So far it really felt as if Titanic was a floating hotel rather than a ship. The Palm Court was a lovely veranda café were only refreshments were served. Sansa entered it admiring the beautiful sunny spot enclosed by high arched windows, decorated by growing ivy.

People bid her and the Lannisters a good afternoon as they passed by their tables, and Sansa made herself smile at them all pleasantly. She had met some of them back in London, and had made the recent acquaintance of many others as they travelled on the train from Waterloo Station to Southampton. Sansa saw Benjamin Guggenheim sharing a table with Léontine Aubert, a French singer and his mistress, and there was also Jacques Heath Futrelle and his wife at another table.

The list went on and on, and still there were people, like her soon to be mother-in-law, who were disappointed some of their acquaintances could not manage to travel to America aboard the Titanic as it had been promised. Cersei was specially disappointed at missing “The Napoleon of Wall Street”, Mr. J. Pierpoint Morgan, who owned the White Star Line, and Milton Snively Hershey too, founder of the Hershey’s Food Corporation. Joff on the other hand had been disappointed to learn that Guglielmo Marconi was not a passenger either.

Walking amongst some of the wealthiest people in the world, Sansa was aware of how her beauty drew everyone’s attention. But she had realized a while back that rather than enjoy this, it was a curse, for all she’d gained for her looks was Joffrey Baratheon.

She gazed at him as he walked before her, escorting his mother to their table. He was wearing, along with all the male passengers in the room, a morning suit with a cut-away coat, a plain shirt, a light colour waistcoat and ascot tie with a stick pin. His trousers were dark, his cufflinks Lannister gold, and his shoes were black.

As for her, Sansa had chosen to wear a lovely pale green gown, which brought out the auburn in her hair. She had asked Trudy to arrange it into a pompadour with a braid and a rose. It was a simple style, just swept up with a bun, unlike Cersei’s, which was full of coils and curled fringes.

Not that either of their hairstyles was really visible, since they had to cover them up with hats. *At least pompadours aren’t as big as they used to be some years ago, or I’d still be having my hair arranged at this hour.*
As they arrived at their table, Sansa saw they were late, for Molly Brown, Bruce J. Ismay and Thomas Andrews were already waiting for them. She had met Mrs. Brown last night at dinner, and Cersei had quickly informed her party that she was “new money”, after her husband had struck gold somewhere out west. Sansa stared at the older woman, saddened by the fact that no matter how genteel she dressed, they would never consider her one of them.

Yet, Sansa had liked her. Conversation at the dinner table had been a novelty after Mrs. Brown began speaking of things no one ever said about in her presence, like the rights of women and education for children, among other social issues. No one ever discussed such things, and she enjoyed not being kept in the darkness for once.

Bruce J. Imsay was another matter. She had never really liked the Chairman and Managing Director of the White Star Line ever since the night she had met him at a performance of Franz Lahar’s The Merry Widow, when he had complimented Joffrey for winning her hand, addressing his praise to her chest. I’ve never liked the way he smiles.

But if there was one person at the table whom Sansa was almost fond of, it was Mr. Thomas Andrews, Titanic’s Master Shipbuilder. She had liked him ever since she was a little girl, mainly because he was a good friend of her father. Looking at him now, Sansa thought that he was quite a handsome gentleman.

Still, even though she was very happy to meet him again, Sansa feared Mr. Andrews would bring out her father’s name often during the conversation, just as Captain Smith had done yesterday when they had had lunch with him. That meal had been a very emotional and tiring experience for Sansa. To listen to the naval reserve officer’s praise of Eddard Stark even as the lions appeared to agree with him when in reality they had destroyed him, was more than she had been able to bear.

The thought of having another repetition of that ordeal troubled her greatly, but thankfully Mr. Andrews only gently told her how sorry he was for her loss, and that he always thought of her father with fondness. She thanked him kindly before Joff interrupted them by asking, “Thomas, did you receive our wedding invitation?”

Sansa pressed her lips together, a gesture Mr. Andrews noticed. Turning his attention to Joffrey, he tried to smile, inquiring when was the happy event.

“In a month,” Sansa told him meekly, dropping her gaze.
She was embarrassed that her father’s friend had seen the grief in her eyes and heard the sorrow in her voice, but perhaps it was for the better. After all, these three people were going to be her audience. Except for Ismay, Mrs. Brown and Mr. Andrews were Sansa’s only hope.

Ever since yesterday Sansa had been shocked to confirm that society didn’t care that she was marrying a man who was rude and aggressive towards her in public. They either thought she was content with her lot, for after all, didn’t it speak well of Joffrey that he’d asked her to marry him right after Eddard Stark’s fall from grace? But it was too much for Sansa to see that her acquaintances would accept that as an unquestionable fact rather than one that demanded investigation.

She had gone to bed depressed and homesick, even resenting her father for giving her such a sheltered childhood that had left her unprepared to face the charade that was high society. Sansa had lived her early years happily at Winterfell before moving to Mademoiselle Mordane’s Academy.

After that she’d met Joffrey and had returned home once she got a glimpse of Parisian’s high places. When the recently widowed Mrs. Robert Baratheon had asked her to stay with her in London, their period of mourning prevented them from going about town, and when Ned Stark died, Sansa had fallen ill. Once she came out of her grief she had become the lion’s prisoner, mostly confide to their house unless society forced them to take her along with them.

And that’s how Sansa had spent the last year, but now that she was free of those accursed walls that made up the Lannister’s London’s house, were there were only servants to witness Joff’s daily slips of his real character, she had yearned to have some kindly soul take pity on her and free her of their clutches, only to have her hopes crushed.

Yet when she had woken up this morning, a plan of sorts had formed in Sansa’s mind. She would disobey Joffrey and Cersei during tea before Mrs. Brown and Mr. Andrews, and once her situation was thrust before their very eyes, surely at least one of them would step in.

So with hope once again high in her heart, Sansa sat down very straight on her chair, prepared to listen for a while to her companions gossiping about the other passenger’s private lives, ready for the first opportunity she had to act. But for the next twenty minutes nothing happened. Almost from the moment of sitting down, conversation had turned to the Titanic, and all everyone did, but for Cersei and Sansa, was talk about the ship. If it hadn’t been for Molly Brown, it would have been a gathering utterly dominated by men.

“She is the largest moving object ever made by the hand of man in all history, and Mr. Andrews here designed her from the keel plates up.”
All eyes fell on the Irishmen, who clearly disliked the attention. He coughed and humbly said, “Well, I may have knocked her together, but the idea was Mr. Ismay’s. He envisioned a steamer so grand in scale, and so luxurious in its appointments, that its supremacy would never be challenged. And here she is, willed into solid reality!”

He slapped the table, emotion in his voice and in his face.

“Why’re ships always being called she?” Molly Brown wanted to know. “Is it because men think half the women around have big sterns and should be weighed in tonnage?”

All laughed, or pretended to at least. Sansa was about to answer that it simply was just another example of the men setting the rules their way, when the waiter arrived to take orders. Joff had been in the process of taking out a cigarette, and seeing her chance, Sansa light it up for him. But rather than handing it back, she began to smoke it herself.

She closed her eyes, relishing the taste of freedom for a brief moment. She was fond of this, and not only because it felt good to stop treading carefully around the lions. Her enjoyment was short lived though.

“You know I don’t like that, little dove,” came Cersei’s voice to her right.

Opening her eyes, Sansa turned to look at her soon to be mother-in-law. You hypocrite, she thought. You smoke in the privacy of your bedroom every night. She found herself possessed of a queer giddy courage, for rather than obeying, she opened her mouth and exhaled the smoke upon Cersei Lannister’s shocked face.

“She knows,” Joff commented drily, taking the cigarette from her and stubbing it out.

Sansa was pleased to see that Mrs. Brown hadn’t missed anything, before Joffrey turned to the waiter and instructed, “We’ll both have coffee. Dark, with a little sugar and no milk.”

As the waiter turned to Mr. Ismay, Joff looked at her with a sardonic smile and inquired, “That’s how you like your coffee, isn’t it, sweet pea?”
“So, you gonna cut her lemon cake for her too there, Joff?” Molly Brown suddenly wondered, before Sansa had time to do anything more than just stare with disdain at her fiancé.

To her great disappointment, Sansa discovered that her little act of rebellion had not worked properly, seeing as no further comments on the matter were made. Refusing to let her hopes be shattered, she smoothed down her skirts, grateful at least that she didn’t have any back pains due to her corset today, and took a small delicate bite of her lemon cake. It was the taste of childhood evenings in Winterfell. The taste of innocence. The taste of dreams. The memory of her home gave her strength.

As they ate and drank their refreshments, Sansa learned that the cruise liner´s electrical plant was as powerful as that of a city, and that the building of the ship dated back to 1909. Apparently, Titanic wasn´t the fastest ship on the ocean, but she could beat her sister ship nonetheless as she sailed smoothly towards the western horizon. Mr. Andrews admitted what an engineering challenge it had proved due to it´s size, but spoke with respect of the thousands of men who had helped built it, emphasising on all the steps to ensure the worker´s safety.

When Joff remarked that he was very pleased with the final product, he went on to point out that there was Baratheon steel in some parts of the steamer. “And the whole world knows what that means,” he finished, swelling with pride.

“Which parts?” Sansa had wondered airily, hoping that her opportunity had come at last.

“The best ones of course!” her betrothed answered, looking pouty. Good, she was upsetting him. “They are not calling the Titanic a technological marvel for nothing, you know.”

Molly Brown had stepped in by joking that now she knew who to hold accountable for if something went wrong. Something that was impossible, Mr. Ismay was quick to assure her. He promised that the 2, 228 persons on board were safe, since Titanic was actually considered a lifeboat in itself and their welfare had been it´s main concern since it´s conception.

After that he went on to enumerate the differences between Titanic and it´s sister ship, the Olympic. He even admitted to being responsible for the installation along the forward half of the A-Deck promenade of steel screens with sliding windows to provide additional shelter for First Class passengers.

So far, Sansa had dutifully listened and dutifully drunk her cup of coffee at decent intervals, but her nerves were beginning to get strained. Nothing is happening, she thought in despair. And as the growing fear of her plan not working grew, she began to grow angry.
“Hey, who came up with the name Titanic?” Molly Brown suddenly demanded, looking around. “Was it you, Bruce?”

“Yes, it was!” the man quickly answered, beaming. “I wanted to convey sheer size. And size means stability, luxury and safety…”

Mr. Ismay went on and on, addressing the never ending majesty of the ship of his dreams with so much optimism, that something inside Sansa broke. She was tired of hearing the man’s voice and his awe and adoration for the Titanic as her final hope vanished.

This ghastly lie is your life, Sansa told herself miserably. Accept it once and for all. You have no place but here. You are all alone and you will never be free of them. She would spend the rest of her life a prisoner, and no one cared. She was angry and devastated, but somehow she still managed to retain a semblance of tranquillity as she turned her head to look at Bruce J. Ismay.

“Do you know of Dr. Freud, Mr. Ismay?” she interrupted in a bored tone. “His ideas about the male preoccupation with size might be of particular interest to you.”

A silence fell upon the table as everyone looked at her; a silence that was finally broken by the sounds of Mr. Andrews choking on his breadstick as he tried to supress laughter.

“My God, Sansa,” Cersei stuttered after a moment. “What has gotten into you?”

Sansa looked at her folded hands on her lap, waiting.

“I do apologize,” Cersei continued, clearly mortified.

But Molly Brown was amused. “You´re a pistol, darling. Are you sure you can handle her, Joff?”

Sansa knew her betrothed was angry, but to her disappointment he didn´t lash out at her before the others. No, instead he feigned unconcern and replied, “Well, I may have to start minding what she reads from now on, won´t I, Mrs. Brown? But other than that, I´m sure I´m covered.”
You’re wrong, she thought. I didn’t read it anywhere. But Myranda Royce did and she was the one to tell me about it. Sansa would have told him so, except that now she saw no use for it. Turning to Bruce Ismay, Joffrey apologized on her behalf, claiming that grief for the memory of her father’s death still upset her at times.

“But she is very sorry,” he assured everyone. “Aren’t you, love?”

But Sansa did not dignify that question with an answer. At the mention of her father by none other than Joffrey, the man responsible for Eddard Stark’s downfall, she snapped. This is not right. This is not fair. Her fiancé was mocking her, and if she didn’t get out of here she would start crying before everyone.

I need fresh air, she thought desperately before rising from the table.

Without asking to be excused, and yet strangely calm, Sansa walked away in silence. Thankfully, no one moved to interfere. She passed through the revolving doors without a backward glance, leaving the place.

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He was almost done with the cigarette, and Sandor was considering stalling by taking out another one. He wasn’t sure yet how could he explain his motives to Broder when he couldn’t even sort them out in the first place, for it was all just too fucking mixed up in Sandor’s head. And as if to prove him right, chance intervened in that moment, for as he glanced carelessly across the well deck, the little bird suddenly appeared at the aft railing of the B-deck promenade.

Sitting up straight, his senses suddenly alert and tense all at once, Sandor stared at her as she stood in her long dress and hat, always the picture of the perfect lady. Has she come looking for me? he dared wondered, unable to take his eyes off her, ignoring the fact that that he wasn’t alone. They were across from each other, about seventy feet apart, with the well deck like a valley between them; she on her promontory, he on his much lower one.

Sandor watched Sansa stare down at the water before unpinning her hat and taking it off. She looked at it and abruptly tossed it over the rail. Startled, he watched the hat sail far down to the water, carried away astern, before riveting his attention back to her. Even from this distance it was obvious that the little was upset.
What the fuck have they done to her now? Sandor thought across the space of the well deck; across the gulf between worlds, and not for the first time. She was embodying the melancholy isolated princess locked away in a tower.

Sansa suddenly turned and looked right at him. Despite being caught staring, he didn’t turn away. Sandor saw her eyes widen in surprise before they took in the fact that he was not alone. She turned away embarrassed, but in a matter of moments she was observing him again. Just as it had happened yesterday back at the hotel, they seemed unable and unwilling to do anything else.

And just as yesterday morning, Joffrey broke the spell. Oblivious to Sandor’s eyes on them, or apparently anybody else’s, the little golden shit came up behind Sansa and took her arm roughly. She jerked away, which then began an argument. Sandor was about to stand up and ran over to interrupt them with some excuse, when the little bird stormed away. Joff went after her, disappearing along the B-Deck promenade, leaving him staring at the place where they’d stood for a long moment after they’d vanished.

“That girl,” Dr. Broder pointed out, with a frown.

“What girl?” Sandor asked automatically as he returned his attention to his friend. *Do I give myself away so easily?*

The German man snorted, and stated, “That highborn maid with the fair face and auburn hair is Sansa Stark.” He said her name softly. “And the man who came for her was Joffrey Baratheon… I should have known.”

There was no reproach or judgment in Elbert’s voice. Only a little incredulity directed at himself that he had not realized sooner that matters still stood the same for Sandor as they had half a year ago. He appreciated the fact that the man beside him felt concern for him, even if not that long ago Sandor would have been loathe to even consider the possibility of trying to explain to anyone just what Sansa Stark meant to him.

But after everything he’d seen Sansa live through, Sandor didn’t care he had confided to another soul that the little bird unknowingly had some hold over him. Realizing that he wanted to know what Broder was thinking, he raised his good eyebrow at the man and inquired, “Well?”

“In all my days I’ve never seen a man quite like you,” Elbert replied.
“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“People are afraid of you,” he answered, gesturing at the deck, for everyone had moved as far away from them as they could get.

“I know that,” Sandor rasped, suddenly irritated.

“I can still remember the night I found you,” Dr. Elbert went on, not the least intimidated. “I thought you´d been dead for hours. You were bleeding like a pig, so I´d set you down for dead and then you coughed. I nearly shit myself! I reckoned you were going to die by the time I took you to my clinic, but you didn´t. And I was certain you were going to die a dozens times over the next few days, but you didn´t. Do you remember what you told me when I asked you what had kept you going?”

“Hate,” he nodded. *And it was true up to a point.*

“There´s another reason you´re still here.”

*Here he goes again,* Sandor realized, shaking his head in defeat. He´d forgot this annoying habit of Elbert´s. He longed to point out to the doctor that the only reason was because he was a big fucker and tough to kill, but knowing how useless that would be, Sandor waited.

“God isn´t done with you yet,” was Broder´s conclusion. “He´s got plans for you, Sandor Clegane.”

Sandor had foreseen all of these, so he just remarked to Elbert that he was in the wrong line of work, feeling impatient. *He ought to have been a priest. Though if he had, I´d have died that night back in Germany.*

He wanted to go now as much as he´d wanted to stay not five minutes ago. Not knowing what the bird and the lion had ben fighting about alarmed him, and he felt guilty for being away in such moments, though Sandor knew that was of no use seeing as such occurrences were frequent.

*At least she has steel beneath her skin, to stand so much.* Up to a point he resented her for following the advice he had given her on that fateful night before he went away, despite the fact that it had kept her alive. His free hour was almost done though, and he had to report back to the
duty of looking after the little bird. Sandor stood up, ready to go to Sansa´s side.

Before he went though, he turned to gaze down at Elbert, and barked a question.

“If God is real, why hasn´t he punished me yet?” he waned to know.

“He has,” Dr. Broder answered, once again softly. “But it´s never too late to start helping people out. It´s never too late to come back.”

Uncomfortable with the German doctor´s reply, Sandor snarled angrily that he didn´t want to talk about it anymore. Does he think I haven´t fucking tried to help her out? But what else can I do? For fuck´s sake, I want her to be free of them more than anyone or anything!

His friend just looked at him with pity. Pity for her or for him or for both of them, Sandor did not know. He told the man that he would meet him here tomorrow around the same time and without a backward glance, he strode away, hoping he would be in time unless his assistance was needed to stop some disaster.

There was a loud humming inside his head as Sandor tried to remember all the consequences of what giving Joff a black eye would bring on him… and for the little bird. Sighing deeply in resignation, he abandoned the poop deck and went back to First Class.
Hello everyone! I hope you enjoyed reading about the Elder Brother in an AU outside the Quiet Isle hehe! Oh and guess what: next chapter will give us some SanSan alone time ;D
You Are All The Colors Of Confusion

Chapter Notes

- Hello everyone!! Guess what?! thefeatherofhope has become my beta, so I want to give a shout out to this lovely lady who makes the SanSan fandom an amazing place!!

- Also, a BIG THANKS to everyone who´s read and reviewed, bookmarked and gave kudos to this pic :D <3

- The title for this chapter is taken from a line of the song “My Invitation” by Sarah Slean

She walked down the promenade, not really knowing where she was heading to, but aware that Joffrey was following her. There was only one thought rushing through Sansa´s mind. *I´m so silly!* A weak little girl with stupid plans that never learns!

What had she been thinking? How naïve was she to believe after everything she´d been through that there were still people out there in the world who were good, honorable and would be willing to do an unselfish deed. Joffrey caught up with her soon enough, but she didn´t care. She deserved whatever punishment he had in store for her after her behavior at the Palm Court restaurant.

He grabbed her roughly by the elbow to stop her, and yanking her closer, Joffrey commanded her to walk with him. Sansa, red-faced, had no choice but to go with him, even though the touch of his hand made her flesh crawl. She felt like a doll as she let Joff steer her to wherever he wanted, too strong to fight in any case.

Sansa had lived in fear of him for a long time, because even when he was in his best behavior, she knew that at the slightest provocation Joffrey could hurt her, and now he was not even trying to hide his fury. In a matter of moments they had reached a deserted area of B-deck promenade. Making sure no one was around, Joff pushed her hard against the wall.

Pain blinded her as her head hit the wall behind her, and at the impact all of her resolve to be strong withered. It took all of Sansa´s strength not to weep. She had been weeping too much of late. It was unseemly, she knew, but she could not seem to help herself; the tears would come, sometimes over a trifle, and nothing she did could hold them back.

Joffrey´s golden hair was shining in the sun like a crown, but a spasm of rage was distorting his handsome features. Stepping closer to her, he whispered furiously, “I hope you´re pleased with yourself! What the hell was all that about?”
“I want to go home,” she whimpered, without thinking. “Please, please, let me go! Do you really don’t care that I don’t want you?’”

Sandor Clegane maybe would have laughed at that, Sansa knew. Other men might have cursed her, warned her to keep silent, or even begged for her forgiveness. Joff did none of these. He stared down at her grief stricken face with narrowed eyes for a long moment, saying nothing.

But the thought that he was reconsidering their engagement and actually taking her own feelings into account never crossed Sansa’s mortified mind. She knew him too well to believe that, but even if he hit her right here she just could not keep silent anymore.

She opened her mouth to plead with him to release her, both physically and mentally, but closed it just as soon. He would do whatever he wanted, and until she knew what that was it was better to remain silent as she attempted to control her trembling.

At long last Joffrey sighed. His features had softened as he gazed at her, and leaning his forehead against hers, he said, “You know what would happen if I let you go, darling. And you know as well as I do what you would provoke if you dare tell anyone about us. So let’s not go over it again.”

A little whimper escaped her as she realized that her fear had somehow managed to calm down his anger. He isn’t going to hurt me, she realized. He is just going to pretend as if none of this had happened. At this point Sansa didn’t even know which one of those two options was worse. She was only aware that the waiting was too stressful for her agitated state. In the blink of an eye, the fight was gone from her. Her rebellious spirit disappeared, leaving only emptiness and a heavy acceptance of the mess she was in.

Sensing her defeat and straightening up, Joff looked down at her slyly and commented with a smile, “I think you need to take a deep breath and calm down.”

The half past hour had really shaken her, but she did as he told her, and so he continued. “Weren’t you wearing a hat? Oh well, no matter… Sansa, I hate to leave this for later, but Astor and Gracie are waiting for me. I’ll tell you what though. Why don’t you go join Tommen at the library? Mother asked me to do it because she also has an appointment, but I think the brat would prefer you anyways. And as soon as I see Clegane I’ll tell him to go to you. Now, do you promise to behave from now on?”
Feeling light headed, Sansa could only nod. She wished he would go away and leave her be, but wishing had never got her anywhere. Instead, Joffrey gave her a moment to compose herself before offering her his arm so he could escort her to the reading and writing room once he was satisfied she was not about to start another scene. When they reached the elegant room, Sansa saw Tommen sitting by the large fireplace, Meryn Trant and Boros Blount standing beside his sofa.

Joff gave her a peck on the cheek as he signaled for his men to follow him. Once they were gone Sansa looked about the beautifully furnished room, noticing that there were mostly only women here. They were scattered on the opulent lounges and armchairs, some even occupying some of the writing tables. The writing bureaus were along the walls, as well as shelves in mahogany with white columns. There was also a chart with the ship’s position for each day, if any one cared to see the Titanic´s progress across the Atlantic.

The atmosphere was very formal and stiff, and yet Sansa already felt a little better. Her father had used to read to her every night before she fell asleep, making her love libraries and bookstores. Those memories finally slowed down the beating of her frantic heart. Trying to look calm and composed, she approached plump little Tommen, who bid her a shy greeting after inviting her to sit down with him.

“Look Sansa, I´m reading Treasure Island,” the twelve year old told her. “Have you read it? Would you like me to read it for you?”

She could not help but smile down at the boy despite everything. If there was one Lannister whom Sansa liked, it was Tommen. She could sympathize with him not only because Joffrey bullied them both, and Cersei scarcely recalled that they were alive, but because he was a sweet, kind, gentle, good and honest child.

“My father read it to me long ago, so I have quite forgotten it,” Sansa lied. “I would love it if you read it to me.”

She settled comfortably on her seat, hoping that she would be able to loose herself in Robert Louis Stevenson´s words as he described the adventures of Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver. Her head was throbbing, but this was the perfect escape. At least for a little while. She didn´t feel like talking, or thinking. And if she couldn´t go to her room to lie down, this was at least a good alternative.

As Tommen read on Sansa could not help but remember how scared she´d been as a little girl of the pirates in the novel, when in truth it was just a silly story, made sweet by the memory of her father´s voice as he read it to her. In life, the monsters win, but at least it is not so in the stories of my childhood.
Her soon to be brother-in-law was reading the part where Jim hides in a barrel of apples and overhears the pirates talking, when a soft voice before Sansa suddenly enquired, “You seemed close to tears, Miss Stark. What book is that?”

She raised her head and found Thomas Andrews looking down at her. He was twisting a notepad and a pencil in his hands. Quickly realizing he was right, and understanding the true meaning behind his words, Sansa lowered her eyes and replied, “It is Treasure Island, Mr. Andrews.”

All thoughts of confessing her situation to her father’s friend had left her, yet Sansa’s past behaviour at the restaurant must have worked a little, for the Scottish shipbuilder stared at her for a long moment before quietly remarking that her eyes gave the lie to her tongue. As he said so he smiled wanly, and turning to Tommen, he asked, “Would you let me have a word with Miss Stark, fine man?”

Suddenly shy, Tommen nodded and got off the sofa. Sansa was gazing after him as he walked away haunting for more books, when her attention was caught by a group of four girls seating nearby. The adult supervising them was nowhere to be found, and the girls were gossiping away about boys and school loud enough for their words to carry across the room.

_I wonder how I didn’t hear them before_, Sansa thought, observing them. _They must be some years younger than me._

Their dreams appeared to be full of songs and stories, the way hers had been before Joffrey showed her his true nature. Sansa pitied them. Sansa envied them. Once when she had been at boarding school in France, she had spent long afternoons herself talking in just that manner with her own friends. They would do needlework or talk over lemon cakes and tea, sometimes playing at tiles of an evening, or singing together in the castle church.

And often one or two of them would share a bed, where they would whisper half the night away. _We were children_, Sansa thought. _Just silly little girls, who knew nothing. My dreams were full of songs and stories._ It made no matter. That day was done, and so was that girl. She glanced away, remembering that Mr. Andrews was standing before her. She tried to think of some polite conversation, but he spared her the effort.

Following the direction of her eyes to the nearby group, he shrugged and remarked, “I had come with the intention of answering my wife’s letter, but I see it will be pointless of me to do concentrate with so much noise close by.”
She tried to return his smile, but she still seemed unable to say anything. *He knows now that I am a porcelain puppet with no voice.* Why had she ever spoken? Now this man suspected what a sham her life was, but her plight was still the same. She was aware that he was studying her face, but Sansa feared to lift her head and find pity in his kind eyes.

Mr. Andrews stepped closer to her and asked, “Miss Stark, is it really grief for your father that makes you so sad?”

Now that her wish had come true, that someone was actually asking her if there was something wrong, Sansa felt detached. Her mind had gone blank. She could not think of a word to say to him. What was it that she had endlessly rehearsed she would say if someone asked her this? She could feel and remember nothing except Joff’s reminder of what was at stake if she broke their deal.

Completely at a loss, Sansa decided to be reasonable. *It is no more than a simple kindness.* After all, the man had been her father’s friend and had seen her storm away from the table a short while ago. *It is just an act of courtesy…* but in truth, right now, as she finally looked up to meet his eyes, she realized that it meant the world to her.

Sansa was about to speak when a shadow fell across her face. She turned to find Sandor Clegane standing beside her lounging chair, looming over her like a cliff. *So, he’s found me.* She knew he had come to take her to her room to change for supper, but it wasn’t very clear to her whether she should be mad at him or not for appearing just as she was about to answer Thomas Andrews question.

He was wearing one of his usual dark suits, Sansa noticed, recalling how she had found him looking at her from the steerage deck, seating beside a man she had never seen. The look on his scarred face as he stared at her and then at Mr. Andrews was so intense that she felt as if an electrical current had run through her body, reawakening her senses.

Quickly growing wary and alert, Sansa stood up, blushing even as she tried to ignore the continually throbbing pain in her head. Averting Clegane’s penetrating gaze, she excused herself to Mr. Andrews.

***

Sandor had been looking for over an hour all over the bloody Titanic for the little bird with no results. Finally, he found Joffrey in the smoking room, where the golden little shit informed him of Sansa’s whereabouts. She was in the reading and writing room with young Tommen. Barely waiting for Joff to instruct him to escort her from the library to her room, Sandor quickly strode
away, a menacing scowl upon his face.

He was impatient to see her and know what had caused the public argument she’d had earlier today with her bastard of a betrothed. Sandor was planning on taking a small detour that would allow them to drop Tommen off in his stateroom first, so that they could finally get a chance to talk privately. Ever since yesterday morning, that had been the main thought in his head.

So he walked in the direction of the ship’s library, fully aware that this would be the first time the little bird and he would talk after that fateful night before he went away over a year ago. Sandor knew by the way they kept on staring at each other that their dynamic would be different, and he was eager to find out exactly how.

He only regretted that it was because of a fight that they would start talking again. But given their situations, what other sodding reason could there be between them for that? But when he entered the library, Sandor saw more than he had bargained for. Sansa was talking alone to Titanic’s main shipbuilder, and because he didn’t like that, he clenched his jaw in anger.

Their conversation had apparently been so entertaining that neither the little bird nor Andrews saw him approach them until he was standing right beside them. Sandor threw the man a menacing look before shooting a resentful glare at Sansa, only to stop midway as he took in one good look at her face.

She’s white as a corpse, he noticed, his insides twisting painfully.

Thomas Andrews was forgotten. Sandor only wanted to know now more than ever what had happened, and so he barked at Sansa that it was time to go. He then impatiently escorted her and Tommen to the boy’s suite, and once they left him in the care of his mother’s maid, Sandor breathed a little easier.

But minutes later he was still in the dark. He found himself hoping that the little bird would say something, anything, the merest word, but she never spoke. Sansa only looked at the floor as she walked beside him, the good side of his face to her.

She’s withdrawing into herself, Sandor thought in despair. The thought shook him, for even though he knew she wasn’t scared of him anymore, he couldn’t afford for her not to trust him. His peace of mind could not stand it. He narrowed his eyes, throwing a glimpse at her in an attempt to catch her attention, but Sansa never looked up.
When they reached their stateroom, Sandor unlocked the door. As he opened it, the little bird finally looked at him, and knowing she was going to thank him for pointlessly escorting her around the ship, Sandor stalled her. He shook his head, and gently pushed Sansa inside. She entered without a protest, and Sandor followed her into the living room, closing the door behind him. Aware that she was watching him, he made sure that there was no one in any of the three rooms that made up their suite, before coming to step before her.

“What has he done now?” he rasped at last, staring at her without blinking.

He saw Sansa’s eyes widen as she took in the meaning of his question. She raised an eyebrow, bit her lip, and lowered her gaze, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands all the while.

“He’s done nothing,” she finally answered.

Sandor snorted. “They trained you well, little bird. Now, out with it.”

Expecting her to pour out with the truth, Sandor was shocked to realize that she wanted to keep the story to herself. A deep rage flared up inside him as she remained silent. What the fuck is she playing at? Surely she knew it was safe to trust him!

But as he stared at the top of Sansa’s auburn bent head, the possibility that he’d been wrong was born. Still unwilling to accept it though, he once again asked her what had happened. And yet again, the little bird refused to tell him.

Sniffing, she politely remarked, “Thank you for your concern, but everything is all right.”

Sandor heard her, but still refused to believe she had spoken that lie. And yet, contempt for himself for daring to believe that things would now be different between them was growing. He had been so certain that the change in their interaction meant something- that it meant everything... But after all, what have you really ever done for her, dog? All your advice and attempts at being kind and sparing her from getting punished change nothing.

Still, he was unable to leave things like this. So Sandor reached out and grabbed Sansa’s wrist, growling as he shook her, “Stop that! Do you really think I’ll believe such bullshit? Don’t lie to me. I hate liars.”
“Let go of me!” she cried. “Let me go. Please, you’re scaring me!”

“Everything scares you,” he pointed out. “Look at me. Look at me!”

But she wouldn’t listen to him. Sansa twisted in his grasp, her head bent down. Sandor snorted, realizing what a stupid fool he had been. He laughed bitterly, the sound as cold and hollow as if it had come from the bottom of a deep well.

“The little bird still can’t bear to look at me, can she?” he stated harshly, finally releasing her. “You were glad enough to see my face back at the hotel, though. Remember?”

Sansa remembered all too well, and both the memory and the fact that he was pointing it out made her blush fiercely. Ever since he had gone for her to the library, Sansa had felt Clegane’s eyes on her, silently mocking her for her behaviour towards the lions, which he was certain to have already heard about.

Embarrassed, she had been sure as he walked her to her room that he was going to call her out on her naivety, but when they reached the living room door and still he’s said nothing, Sansa had sighed in relief. Her assurance had been short lived though, for the moment she saw Clegane follow her into the room, she knew he was going to demand an explanation from her for being a stupid fool.

And so when he asked her what had Joffrey done, she had answered him truthfully. He did nothing. It was I who gambled out of my own will and lost. She was just too tired to say any more. In the past trying to justify her actions or beliefs to Sandor Clegane had proved fruitless, so why bother now?

But with ease he could smell out her falsehood. The Hound asked her again about the public fight he’d witnessed her having with Joff, and because she still didn’t feel like recalling the recent events, let alone explaining them to someone else, Sansa had courteously thanked Mr. Clegane for his concern, hoping he would notice that she wanted to be alone. But it had been the wrong thing to say and do.

The next thing Sansa knew, the Hound had grabbed her by the wrist, calling her a liar. Too startled by his behaviour, Sansa had tried to free herself from his grasp, stunned that he would behave like
this with her. No, no, she’d desperately thought. Why does he have to turn on me today of all times? That hurt her more than anything else that had happened in the past hours.

Her headache had intensified, and unable to think clearly, Sansa was embarrassed by the way he was shedding light to the fact that she had evidently been pleased to see him again. Suddenly mad, Sansa made herself look at his face now, really look.

The scars were not the worst part, not even the way his mouth was twitching. It’s his eyes. She had never seen eyes so full of anger. He is a dog, just as everyone says, including him. A half-wild, mean tempered dog that bites any hand that tries to pet him. And I was also a fool for not seeing he was just as coarse as ever. Sansa hugged herself, feeling miserable and alone.

“I think you are hateful,” she whispered, not troubling to keep the anger from her voice.

He had gazed down at her then with a look she had never seen before. There were so many emotions darkening his eyes, confusing her. Finally he rasped, “You’ll be glad of the hateful things I do someday when you’re his wife, and I’m all that stands between you and your beloved husband.”

He was always rough-tongued, but something in the way he was looking at her as he said that filled her with dread. And Sansa was too stunned with the implication behind those words, trying to grasp the magnitude of the situation she was in and what his words regarding who Joffrey was meant, she could do no more than stammer, “I- I wasn’t lying to you. I was only thanking you.”

“Just as if I was one of those gentlemen you love so well, yes,” he pointed out, his laugh half a snarl.

Sansa had forgotten in the year of his absence that she hated the way he talked, always so harsh and angry. Taking a deep breath to try and calm herself, hoping that whatever this was, it would end soon so Clegane would leave her alone, Sansa began explaining that he has misunderstood her. “It’s just that you startled me with the force of your insistence.”

Once again, the man corrected her. “No, what you mean is that I scared you. You told me so a moment ago.”

Sansa glanced away, giving up. No matter what she said or did, the Hound would purposely misread her intentions. She faced him again and remarked, “I would have thought that scaring
people gave you joy.”

“No, it gives me joy to kill people,” he amended, his mouth still twitching. “Killing is the sweetest thing there is…. I killed my first man at twelve. I’ve lost count of how many I’ve killed since then. Nobles with old names, fat rich tycoons, politicians puffed up like bladders, yes, and women and children too.” He went on before Sansa could think of a reply. “Wrinkle up your face all you like, but they’re all just meat, and I’m the butcher. So long as I have mind to, there’s no man on earth I need fear.”

At least not now that your brother is dead, Sansa thought, but she had better sense than to say that out loud. Instead she asked him coolly, “Aren’t you afraid? God might send you down to hell for all the evil you’ve done.”


“The God who made us all.”

“All?” he mocked. “Tell me, little bird, what kind of god makes a monster like the Imp, or a halfwit like Mrs. Stokeworth’s daughter? If there is a god, he made sheep so wolves could eat mutton, and he made the weak for the strong to play with.”

“Good men protect the weak.”

He snorted. “There are no good men, no more than there is a god. If you can’t protect yourself, die and get out of the way of those who can. Violence and strong arms rule this world, don’t ever believe any different.”

Sansa backed away from him. “You’re awful.”

“I’m honest. It’s the world that’s awful.”

“Please leave me alone, Mr. Clegane.”

“Mr. Clegane?” He spat at her feet to show her what he thought of that. “I’m a dog, remember? Joff’s dog, and you’re his bird… Will you sing a song for me, little bird? A song about princes and fair maidens? Go on sing, why don’t you?”
Sansa stared open mouthed up at Sandor Clegane, wondering if she was hearing correctly. She couldn’t sing for him now, here, after everything she’d been through; after this argument. And I don’t know any songs. Not anymore.

“I can’t,” she told him, incredulous. “Not now.”

“But that’s what little birds are supposed to do, isn’t it?”

_Oh God, maybe if I sing to him he’ll go away soon?_ she thought in despair, feeling tears starting to fall down her cheeks.

“I- I know a- a song about Florian and Jonquil,” she stammered haltingly, saying the name of the first song that had a knight and his princess that came to mind.

The Hound looked at her tears and snapped harshly, “Florian and Jonquil? A fool and his cunt. Spare me.” He walked in the direction of the door, but once he was before it he turned around and continued. “One day I’ll have a song from you, whether you will it or no.”

“I will sing it to you gladly,” Sansa assured him, fearing she would faint if her nerves were tested a moment longer.

Sandor Clegane snorted. “Pretty thing, and such a bad liar. A dog can smell a lie, you know. Look around you, and take a good whiff. They’re all liars here… and every one better than you.”

And then, in the blink of an eye he was gone, slamming the door behind him so strongly that the sound made Sansa wince.
Le Coeur de la Mer

Chapter Notes

- I would like to dedicate this chapter to the lovely @carobaldoni because today is her nameday! She is a great friend and the first person in the fandom I told about how I was writing this new SanSan fic :D

- A big THANK YOU to @thefeatherofhope for being my beta!! <3

- I’m sort of nervous about this chapter, hehe. All of the tension and ptsd so far has been leading up to this one o_o

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hours later Sansa was sitting before her vanity table, staring at Degas’ painting, her chin resting on her hand. She was wearing her white empire waist nightgown with the pink roses embroidered down the front, and her long hair fell down her back in soft ringlets. If someone were to ask her how long she had been sitting like that, Sansa would not have known the answer.

Night had fallen a long time ago; of that alone she was aware. The lions had mercifully left her alone, and except for Trudy, Sansa had not seen a single soul after Sandor Clegane left her, though she had heard Joffrey and Meryn Trant next door earlier tonight as the latter helped Joff get ready for dinner.

When the Hound had gone Sansa had locked herself in her bedroom, and throwing herself upon the bed, she had cried herself to sleep. Her dreams had kept her from getting a peaceful rest, to the point that when Trudy woke her up, Sansa felt mentally and physically tired. But at least her headache had almost disappeared.

Instructing her maid to beg Joffrey to allow her to dine alone tonight, Sansa had then taken a warm bath, once everyone had gone away to dinner. As the warm water relaxed her, she tried to keep herself from dwelling too much on her situation, but in the end it was of no use. For how could she escape her reality when her heart was breaking?

After her bath she’d had a cold supper by lamplight, listening over and over again to the melody that her music box played. It had been a present from her father on her fifth birthday. Sansa treasured it as much as she did her harp, for those were the only things Joff had allowed her to keep that belonged to her past.

When she was finished eating, her wet hair was dry and ready for its customary one hundred
strokes. Tonight Sansa had preferred to do them herself, so she had dismissed Trudy and picked up her brush, deciding that once that was done she would go try to get some sleep again.

But that had been a long time ago, and still she didn’t feel like going to bed. Whenever Sansa got tired of having the people in the painting staring at her, she would either play once more the melody of her musical box, or lower her eyes to stare at the items scattered across the vanity table. There were perfumes and flowers, as well as her tortoise shell hand mirror, inlaid with mother of pearl, and even an ashtray decorated with the White Star Logo.

Sansa gazed at the latter remembering the cigarette she’d dared smoke earlier today before the lions, Mrs. Brown, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Ismay. The memory sent a chill through her, yet nonetheless Sansa longed to smoke one at present.

With a sigh, she turned her attention to the ornate art noveau hair comb beside it. It was one of her favourite pieces, for it had a beautiful jade butterfly taking flight upon it’s ebony handle. Sansa reached out to caress it wonderingly, running her fingers across the jewelled insect’s wings. \textit{Would that I had wings as well.}

It must have been later than she thought, for suddenly Sansa saw Joffrey standing in her doorway reflected in the cracked mirror of her vanity wearing a topcoat over his night clothes. She hadn’t even heard him changing next door this time, so lost in her musings had she been. \textit{I hate how he can just come into my room without knocking, shutting us out from the world with only a locked door.}

Swiftly, the thought of Sandor Clegane preparing for bed next door crossed Sansa’s mind, but she sullenly dismissed it with a toss of her head. Joffrey looked at her for a long moment before coming towards her. She gulped, wondering why he would not leave her be.

“I know you are melancholy, Sansa,” he announced, an unexpected tenderness in his voice. “But I hope this changes things.”

Sansa stared at him, unable to think of a single thing to say to him. She could feel a fierce blush creeping up her cheeks. \textit{Why is he looking at me that way? What does he want me to say? He wanted something from her, but Sansa did not know what it was. He looks like a starving child, but I have no food to give him.}

How he could expect her to give him anything willingly when he was robbing her of her soul and sanity was beyond her. From behind her back, her fiancé handed her a large black velvet jewel case. Numbly, Sansa took it.
“I intended to save this till the engagement gala next week”, he confessed, leaning against the vanity table. “But I thought that tonight was better. It’s a sort of reminder of my feelings for you.”

The mention of her engagement gala before Pittsburgh society made Sansa stiffen. With shaking fingers, she slowly opened the box. Inside it was a necklace. A huge, malevolent blue stone glittering with an infinity of cold scalpels, glinting in its dark depths. It was a mesmerizing piece of jewelry.

“Good gracious,” she whispered, staring in awe at the diamond, as wary as she was astonished.

“56 carats,” Joff announced with pride as he took it from the box so he could place it around her throat. “I bought it because it reminds me of the color of your eyes. You have beautiful eyes. Honest, innocent, and blue as a sunlit sea. I drown in them every time you look at me.”

Returning her attention to the mirror so she could see herself wearing it, Joffrey stood behind her, his hands on her arms.

“It was once worn by Louis XVI,” he informed her, ignoring the sight of her tired and puffy eyes; remnants of the tears she had spilled for hours. “But when Louis lost everything from the neck up, it disappeared. Someone had the crown diamond chopped too before being recut into a heart-like shape. It’s called Le Coeur de la Mer.”

*The Heart of the Ocean.* It was an overwhelming, fabulous, dreadfully heavy stone. *Bright, shining, and empty.* Looking away from the picture of the blue cold jewel upon her chest, Sansa met Joff’s eyes as he gazed intently at the image of the two of them in the mirror.

“It’s for royalty,” her fiancé added. “We are royalty, darling. It’s only fitting we should look the part.”

Never had the power and the money of his family felt so heavy on Sansa’s shoulders. It was almost as if she was being crushed by it. Slowly, the man she was going to marry brought his fingers forward to caress her neck. He seemed to be disarmed by the picture of elegance and beauty she presented. Yet it was in moments such as this, when Joffrey’s emotions were unguarded, that Sansa feared him most.

She could tell that he was disappointed with her cool reception at his attempts to win her heart, but she didn’t care if he was upset that she preferred to hide behind an unyielding wall. *Why should I*
spare his feelings when no one cares about mine? Him least of all.

Abruptly Joff shut her music box and dropped on one knee beside her, and leaning close, he told her, “You know, there’s nothing I couldn’t give you… there’s nothing I’d deny you if you did not deny me. You’re precious to me, Sansa. Open your heart to me again. Wouldn’t you like for things to be as they were when we first met?”

He wants me to be the child he knew, whom he needs only to spoil with gifts for everything to be forgiven. But it was no good; she did not feel as if she was precious to him. Sansa may have liked to play that part once, but it was too late to make amends now.

Can this monster really expect me to believe in his words? If there was one thing that she had learned with him, it was mistrust. The meaning behind Joffrey’s words felt acutely against Sansa’s senses with every passing moment, driving her to retreat more and more into herself, seeking some sort of refuge. It was just too much for her right now to be expected to happily look forward to the fact that in a month she would be his wife.

Once she had loved Joffrey with all her heart, and admired and trusted his mother. But they had repaid that love and trust with betrayal, lies and pain. Sansa would never make that mistake again. No, not even if he buys me Buckingham Palace! Nothing would ever make him good in her eyes again. In truth, she could not presently even enjoy the fact that she was disappointing him by not reacting positively to this attempt of his at reaching out and expressing his emotions for her.

The feeling of the necklace closing around her throat like a dog collar was too strong for her to ignore. Sansa turned to look at her reflection once more, and her left hand went to her throat. Her eye was caught by the sight of her engagement ring beside the blue heart of ice.

And just as on the occasion when Joff had presented her with the ring, Sansa now thought that this massive glittering diamond was nothing but a reflected light back unto her fiancé, to illuminate the greatness that was Joffrey Baratheon. They were extensions of his personal power. The present seemed innocent enough, but the burden of it made Sansa’s tummy tightened into a knot, for the memory of a fateful night long ago and of another sort of gift he’d given her was still fresh.

He’s claiming me as his property with it for the entire world to see; I’m the ultimate trophy; the prize he is triumphantly bringing back to America after defeating my father. With every passing day her doom loomed nearer… Sansa would have torn the thing away if she had dared.

She knew Joffrey was still looking at her, waiting for her to answer him, but all her words had withered. Sansa could only sit there, staring at herself wearing Joffrey’s ring and Joffrey’s
necklace, feeling the world drawing closer and closer, intensifying her feeling of entrapment.

“It´s worth a kiss at least, don´t you think?” he prompted in disappointment, reaching out to draw her hair away from her face. Her heart hammered against her ribs, and for as long as it lasted, Sansa held her breath.

A moment later he was gone, bidding her good night and taking the necklace with him and claiming that it was better to keep it in the safe for as long as the sea voyage lasted. The moment Joff was gone, Sansa rose on unsteady feet and rushed to lock the door. She waited for the sounds next door to disappear, digging her nails into her hands all the while. She tried to stifle the little frightened gasps that had began to take over her.

Once she was certain that both Joffrey and Sandor Clegane were asleep, Sansa sat back down on the chair before the table. \textit{Maybe in the only way he knows how, Joff does truly love me. But his love was killing her. I´m the woman he wants, and he´ll have me, even though he knows that I hate him,} she thought miserably. \textit{I´m his property to do with as he likes.}

Sansa´s eyes welled up, and she leaned her head on the vanity table, sobbing quietly, her shoulders shaking with the force of an emotion she had to keep at bay, fearing it would be overheard.

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The following day was a blur. Sansa had woken up on Friday morning feeling a hole inside her; a hollow place, an emptiness where her heart had been that she suspected would remain forever and ever.

She had huddled beneath her blankets and squeezed her eyes shut in an attempt to try to will herself back to sleep, but it had been of no use. The lions would never allow her with so many people around to spend the whole day in bed unless she was physically ill.

She had let her maid choose her outfit, and if the young woman noticed her puffy eyes, she pretended she did not see it. When Trudy was done with her, Sansa stood before the mirror, looking with vacant eyes at the sight she presented: A young woman wearing a pretty day dress of pristine ivory cotton with scalloped borders and a pink ashes of roses silk taffeta sash. The fabric was tight across her chest, forcing her to take vey small breaths.

Her auburn hair was smartly arranged atop her head and her waist looked so small it defied belief.
In short, she looked beautiful in that gown that brought out the auburn of her hair, but the thought that people would be looking at her and smiling even as her heart broke was too much to bear.

When she left the room the Hound had escorted her in silence to Cersei´s stateroom. Sansa had been forced to bite her lip to keep from sobbing at she considered that maybe now she had lost her only ally. All her fear and irritation at Sandor Clegane from the day before had vanished at that thought.

Afterwards, Sansa knew she´d had lunch that day at Café Parisien, but her mind could only remember the charming sun-lit veranda decorated with ivy, with a beautiful view of the sea as she drank her tea. But of the people she´d been with, Sansa could not recall their names, or even their faces. She had always prided herself at remembering such things, but today it was not only impossible but also unimportant. She knew though that Cersei had been seating next to her, and that at one point the conversation had turned to her wedding.

“Oh Sansa,” one of the women had remarked, clapping her hands in enthusiasm. “I´ve been to your future house in Pittsburgh. It´s a marvel. An Italian house with an indoor swimming pool and tennis court. It has a casino and a bowling alley, as well as a shooting range and a yacht. The Baratheons have prized horses in their stables, and very admirable art collections. It simply is the best place for a wedding!”

Sansa had wearily turned to the woman, wondering what was all the foolish chatter she was going on about. It had been a long time since she found herself enjoying the company of other women, to the point where it was hard to recall she had once found it pleasant. But now, even though her attention had been caught at the mention of her name, what the woman was saying meant nothing to Sansa. Yet she knew they expected her to say something.

“Mr. Baratheon will be pleased to hear you say so,” she had answered, eerily aloof. “And anything that pleases him, pleases me.”

She was aware that Cersei´s eyes were upon her, sensing something was wrong with her, but that didn´t scared Sansa as it once had. No, instead she had fallen back silent and serenely broken a piece of comb, letting honey drip down onto her bread, which she ate in small delicate bites.

“Have you heard that Mr. Ismay is pressing Captain Smith to sail faster so that we can arrive on Tuesday night instead?” Cersei had suddenly remarked in a voice as soft as silk. “I hope it´s true. Don´t you, Sansa? Just imagine what a welcome to your new life that would be! The press would be all over such an event.”
“Yes indeed,” she replied, calmly. She knew such words by rote. She’d sat with her hands in her lap, watching the way Cersei moved and laughed and tossed her blonde curls.

_She charms them all_, she remembering thinking dully. _How I hate her_. She looked away when the group began discussing what song should she dance with Joff once they were married, wishing this ordeal that was her life to be over. Sansa had often daydreamed of the way she would dance at her wedding, with every eye upon her and her handsome husband. In her dreams she had always been smiling.

Sansa spent the rest of that gathering wondering how much longer till lunch was finished, for every word she had spoken, every breath she had taken, had been a lie, a facade. As they made their way back to their respective suites, Cersei informed Sansa that she was getting tired of her poor performance, and that if she planned to go on behaving like a simpleton before their acquaintances, she would much rather not be burdened with her presence.

As they arrived at the Lannister woman’s stateroom, Sansa saw that Sandor Clegane was already await her so that he could escort her to her own room. She lowered her eyes at the sight of the Hound, too tired to do anything else. Yet Cersei sensed a change in her as they stopped beside Clegane, and rather than entering her suite, she shrewdly contemplated Sansa for a long moment.

“I think you deserve a punishment, little dove,” the woman told her with smug superiority while taking care that there were no passengers or stewards walking down the hall. “I’m going to tell Joff that tomorrow you are to spend the whole day on your own. Let us hope that you will use that time wisely to reconsider your attitude, but I don’t have high hopes for you, specially what with Clegane dogging your every step. But that can’t be helped.”

_She thinks I’m afraid of him_, Sansa realized dully, as she peeked a look at the Hound. His expression was bland, but his grey eyes were cold. He gave Cersei a short nod to let them know he would do as she instructed.

Sansa’s upcoming punishment meant nothing to her, though. What bothered her was the fact that had she been told this a day ago, the prospect of spending a day on her own with the Hound for company would have been something she would have looked forward to; now with the way things stood between them, she feared those hours alone with him.

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Once she was back in her room, Trudy began preparing her a bath. Sansa was tempted to beg Joff to let her miss dinner, for she wanted to crawl back into bed, pull the drapes, hide beneath the
blankets and sleep and sleep. I could tell him that my tummy is upset. She desired nothing more than that, but she’d already missed dinner last night, and a second night in a row was unthinkable.

So instead Sansa fell into contemplation as she waited for her bath to be ready, recalling the days after Joffrey had shown her his true nature, and Sandor Clegane had vanished from her life. Soon after that fateful night, Joffrey had gone away to the Continent on some business, leaving Sansa alone with Cersei for months with the instructions to start the wedding preparations.

One night I’ll escape, she had told herself more than once during that time, but she never did. For no matter how bad things deteriorated between her and Cersei, even to the point where they would go on for days without speaking to each other, there was nowhere for Sansa to go now that Winterfell was gone. She had her Aunt Lysa in Scotland, but she feared what Joffrey would do to her and her cousin Robert if they took her in. Presuming I manage to get there unscathed in the first place, of course.

So Sansa had stayed trapped inside her prison, for Cersei usually left orders with the servants to not let get wander outside whenever she left the house without her. She’d been locked up behind those walls, confined within her golden cage, with no other friend for a time but an old blind dog.

The animal had been too old and toothless, and mostly all he did was sleep, but when she found him in the garden and patted him, the mutt had whined and licked her hand, and after that they were fast friends until Cersei had him poisoned, just like she’d previously done with her Lady.

Yet going out was also a horrible charade; everyone Sansa met would look at her with sympathetic, pitying glances as they refused to forget the disgraceful circumstances that led to her father taking his own life even as they praised Joff for being a true gentleman who refused to abandon her in her hour of need.

When he finally returned from bringing Tommen back from his boarding school in Switzerland, Joffrey had announced that a wedding date had been set, and told them they would be sailing to America on the Titanic’s maiden voyage when it left England in the spring.

“Now that all this mourning period for our fathers has passed nothing is stopping us from getting married, love,” he had explained, putting his arm around her shoulder. “But the wedding must be in Pennsylvania, Sansa. The scandal surrounding your father’s suicide won’t be so bad there.”

I will never be ready for it, Sansa recalled thinking as Joffrey presented her with the new bridal wardrobe he’d bought for her in Paris. That had been more than six months ago, and now she felt even worse. Impotent fury at her betrothed and his mother took hold of her now, making her pace
from end of her bedroom to the other.

Her eyes fell on the big chest where most of the evening gowns Joffrey had gotten for her in France. As she stared at it, a mad idea took hold of Sansa. She rushed to it, opened it, and rummaged it’s contents until she found what she was looking for: a red silk gown with a black lace underdress… a dress an unmarried girl could never wear out in public.

Why am I doing this? Sansa asked herself, as she spread the dress delicately over her bed. Walking to her jewellery box, she began looking for the appropriate pieces to wear. What she hoped to accomplish besides making them angry for wearing such an unsuitable outfit, she did not know.

Trudy came into her bedroom, and when her eyes fell on the red gown, her mouth dropped open. She turned to regard Sansa strangely, and quickly began to tell her it wasn’t proper for her to wear it just yet. None of it was of any good though. Sansa wanted to wear that dress to dinner tonight and her maid wasn’t going to stop her.

When the tub was full with scalding hot water, Trudy bathed and washed Sansa’s hair. By then Sansa was feeling a queer sort of detachment from her surroundings, but her resolution to defy them was still strong. If only to avenge Lady and that sad old hound, I have to do this.

When she was dressed, Sansa once again gazed at herself in the mirror. She knew she looked ravishing, but looking pretty had long lost it’s appeal for her. Yet the more beautiful I look tonight, the more people will notice me, and then some may suspect that there is something wrong with me. Her plan to let the world see how Joff treated her had not worked out, but maybe this would get their attention!

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Her red dress certainly caused quite a stir among all the First Class passengers of the Titanic, Sansa noticed while shooting a sly glance at Cersei; Joffrey’s mother pretended she did not exist. Yet it was a hollow victory; for Joffrey, though startled to see her wearing that colour, had actually remarked that he thought she’d never looked better.

Giving her a kiss on the cheek as he met her in the hallway outside, he had leaned over and whispered, “Nothing you do changes anything, sweet pea. You could have come out wearing nothing and I would still not break our engagement. Nothing you can ever think of doing will ever be so shocking as to compel me to do that.”

Feeling suddenly light-headed, almost feverish, Sansa had followed Joff in stunned silence down to
the First Class dinning saloon, the Á la Carte restaurant. She walked amidst rows of electric light, aboard the most stately and magnificent ship in history, and all Sansa could do was feel trapped. Her soul was weeping and the emptiness that filled her threatened to crush her down.

Dinner that night seemed to go on forever. Sweet waltzes were played in the background as fourteen courses were presented to her to eat. The sight of the food made Sansa feel ill. The smell of the lobster, quail’s eggs, caviar, salmon and jelly made her tummy tie into a knot, and she hardly tasted each dish. Of all those seating at her table, Sansa was the only one not eating or talking, smiling or laughing.

At one point though, Sansa’s attention was recalled back to reality as Mrs. Ida Straus asked her a question. Despite everything, she tried to smile and answer the elderly lady politely, for ever since meeting her and her husband back in London, they had always treated Sansa very kindly.

When Mrs. Straus turned away to ask her husband something else, Sansa found herself staring at the old couple. It was evident that they still loved each other very much. The way Isidor Straus held his wife’s hand beneath the table assured her of that. Glancing to her left, Sansa contemplated Joffrey: the very idea of having to spend her life with him like this till they were as old as the Straus marriage made her blood ran cold.

*It will be easier to bear it if I were drunk,* she thought, seating at the edge of her seat and draining her cup in three long swallows, the liquid making her head swim. It almost gagged her. She knew it was very fine champagne, but Sansa was too nervous to taste it.

She looked about her, registering that no one had noticed her action. All around her were familiar faces, yet no one really knew her. Sansa was flanked between her captors, but Cersei and Joff attentions´ were focused on their other neighbours, while right before her James Crawley, the heir to the Earl of Grantham and the Viscount Downton, and his son Patrick were holding fort animatedly. Lowering her head, Sansa stared at her plate, no longer listening to the inconsequential babble around her. It was in that moment that she saw her whole life as if she´d already lived it.

It would be an endless parade of parties and cotillions, yachts and polo matches. Always the same narrow people, the same mindless chatter; and Joff, always Joffrey in the background, making her sick to her stomach. Sansa felt as if she was standing on the edge great precipice with no one to pull her back. *No one who cares, or even notices…* The inertia of her life was threatening to suffocate her, along with the thought that she was powerless to change it.

Reaching out for one of the White Star logo stamped silver forks before her, Sansa brought it beneath the beautifully laid table so she could begin poking it into the skin of her arm, harder and harder, until she drew blood. The drops fell both on the napkin on her knee and on the fabric of her red gown, blending perfectly on the latter.
As she walked along the corridor back to her stateroom escorted by Joffrey, she saw a stewardess coming the other way. The woman greeted them, and Sansa nodded with a slight smile, perfectly composed. At the door to the bedroom her fiancé gave her a good night kiss after looking her up and down one last time with amusement.

Sansa entered the sanctuary of her camber, noticing the warm fire crackling Merrily in the hearth. She shivered all the same, shutting the door firmly behind her. The very walls of the room made her feel as though there was no air to breathe, but at least here she was on the other side of the door from her betrothed.

The moment dinner had ended Sansa had asked her betrothed to escort her back to her cabin, claiming a terrible headache. Joff had done so, and now he was off to have some coffee in the Palm Court room with the other men, before they all migrated to the smoking room.

She wanted to go to sleep, but before she could do that, Sansa had to remove this awful red dress. She knew it was going to be hard without a maid to help her, but before long she had hope that she would manage it. *I don’t care if I have to tear it to take it off.*

Sansa raised her arms to remove the gold and moonstone brooch from her elegant chignon, but it was too high for her to reach. All she succeeded in doing was scattering the floor with amber hairpins. Frowning, Sansa removed her black gloves before moving on to the back of the gown. She could not reach it’s bottoms either. Her fingertips fumbled with no result on the ones she did manage to brush lightly.

Knowing that it would be wiser to either wait for Trudy to appear or to go to sleep with the dress on, Sansa stamped her foot impatiently, her hands trembling as she began fumbling at the laces of the gown. *Why did I ever wear this? What was I thinking? Why do my plans never work out? But it was of no use. She had ten thick and clumsy thumbs instead of fingers, all of them broken.*

Yet the more evident it became that she would not be able to undress herself, the less Sansa could stand wearing the gown. She knocked her foot against the chair by the vanity table, and crying out in pain Sansa whirled about, only to come to an abrupt stop the moment she caught sight of her reflection in the large mirror.

*No wonder I can no longer find myself when I look into a mirror.* She stood there for a moment
breathing deeply, hating what she saw on it with all her strength, before madness suddenly took hold of her.

With a primal, anguished cry Sansa clawed at her throat, ripping off her necklace. In a wild frenzy, she tore at herself, at her clothes, at her hair, screaming, no longer caring if anyone outside heard her sobbing. When had she stopped having control over her own life? Trying to remember was like trying to catch running water with her hands.

Removing her wedding ring, Sansa flung it to the floor before attacking the room. She flung everything off the dresser, barely hearing the sound it made as it all clattered against the wall. Dozens of emotions possessed her all at once. From rage to frustration, to fear and helplessness to self-loathing. It was overwhelming, a hysterical cataclysm that made it hard for her to breathe.

*It’s not me, it’s this room,* she thought in a daze, staring at the red walls, feeling them closing in about her. *They’re Lannister crimson. Is that why Joff wanted me to have this room? They even match the colour of this dress, stained with my blood.* A sudden panic of being trapped in here forever, of never being able to leave this nightmare of a life, took hold of Sansa. *I have to get out of here!* Surely there was somewhere she could go in this accursed ship. She was choking, so she turned and fled, sobbing.

Sansa ran along the B-Deck promenade, dishevelled, her hair flying. She cried with every breath she took, her cheeks streamed with tears. She was shaking desperately; unaware of where she was going. Passengers and crew members stared at her, shocked at her emotional public display.

Carelessly, Sansa dashed headlong across the deserted fantail, her skirt flapping, her breath hitching with occasional sobs, which she no longer took care to suppress. Before she knew it she found herself slammed against the base of the Titanic’s stern flagpole. She clung to it red-faced, listening to the sound of the waters below, feeling breathless and dizzy. For the longest time there was no sound but the wind and the waves that came as the ship broke through them.

Suddenly, Sansa began to clumsily climb over the railing, hitching her long dress out of the way. Was this the reason her steps had led her here? Why no one had stopped her? Moving methodically she turned her body around and placed her heels on the white-painted gunwale, her back to the railing.

Taking a deep breath and feeling as though her heart would burst inside the constraint of her tightly laced corset, she looked down sixty feet. Below her the massive propellers were churning the Atlantic Ocean into white foam, leaving a ghostly trail toward the horizon. Panting, Sansa stared intently at the black waters below, and very slowly, her heart thumping wildly, she leaned forward, her arms straightening, her hands tight around the railing. Blood ran down her bitten lip, mingling with the salt of her tears.
It was madness, but if she turned away she wasn´t likely to get another chance to escape her golden prison. *There is no sense to life, so why go back? It isn´t going to get any better.* Words that someone had spoken to her came back in those moments, though Sansa could not remember who had said them, or when: *If you can´t protect yourself, die and get out of the way of those who can.*

Sansa was certain she didn´t have the courage or the means to break free in any other way, but none of that mattered anymore. Here was the answer to her prayers, she realized with a very slight disappointment. *My deliverance. I deserve this end.*

Her head seemed terribly light, as if she were floating. This was not the first time that she tried to kill herself: that had happened right after her father had committed suicide. The flood of memories and emotions from those days shook Sansa to the core. It was hard to believe this was the end, but at least the Lannisters had not taken everything from her. *I´m still free to choose my end.*

The vortex beneath her seemed to hypnotize her. A strong breeze ran salty fingers through Sansa´s hair and a cold gust of wind up her legs, making her shiver as her dress flew all about her in the wind created by Titanic´s movement. For some unknown reason, the sight took her back to cold nights long ago in Winterfell with her father during the long summer of her childhood.

The only sounds in the world were the rush of the water below, the flutter and snap of the big Union Jack flag right above her, and Sansa´s breath as she tried to fight back more tears. She closed her eyes, ready to put an end to her suffering. No one would ever know what had become of her. She would just disappear, and surely once she let go of the rail it wouldn´t be so bad. *There’ll only be blackness and silence.* Total oblivion.

“I´ll be seeing you soon, Father” Sansa whispered, so tremulously she could scarcely hear her own voice.

In her mind she could see every detail of Eddard Stark´s face, from his kind eyes to his warm smile. In her mind, she was no longer alone. And in a way it was oddly reassuring to know it would all end here and now. But so lost in her thoughts was Sansa, that she didn´t hear the sound of heavy footsteps behind her.
I think that even if you haven´t seen the film, it´s not that hard to guess whose footsteps are those!! ;D
Sandor was sitting on one of the benches of Titanic´s poop deck, smoking a cigarette while gazing up at the night skies. So far this trip was turning out to be worse than he had expected, but at least every night he´d been able to come out here and relax.

This was his favourite part of the day, for at no other hour was the ship so quiet that it gave the appearance of being deserted, which allowed him to think. Being back with the Lannisters and meeting up with Elbert Broder had forced Sandor into facing many uncomfortable truths that he´d tried to ignore for far too long.

What a fucking mess I´m in, he snorted, running a hand tiredly down his face. He wasn´t sure how he had allowed himself to get into it, but now he was in so deep he could not see a way out of it. Working for the lions and saving enough money to be able to live comfortably off when he got tired of serving them had been his plan for years, but now that seemed impossible.

When he´d accompanied them to Europe, everything had changed. He was different now, and going back to the United States made him feel that it was bloody high time that he made a decision about what he was going to do with the rest of his life.

I feel ancient, he thought for the hundredth time, the weight of the fight he´d had yesterday afternoon with Sansa heavy on his conscience. But Sandor wasn´t old. He was only in his early thirties, and if he somehow managed to keep his ugly head on his shoulders, he still had decades more of living before he was an old man.

Yet all the things he´d been forced to witness of late were getting on his nerves more than ever, and now that even Gregor was gone Sandor felt as if he was drifting aimlessly. He knew very well the reason that kept him from quitting the lions for good and disappearing forever from the only life he knew, but being aware of the reason didn´t help his situation much.

He recognized that the only way to stay sane was for him to move to another country and start a new life there, away from all the shit he´d been stuck in all his life; but with a sinking heart he
recognized that at least for now he would stay where he was. *I promised her as much yesterday, when I surprised both of us by claiming I would stand between her and Joffrey.*

What a fucking business it was to be willing to throw everything away for a woman, especially when that woman didn’t even look twice in his direction! Not only had she made him admit to himself that he’d always despised the only life he’d ever known, but simply by existing, Sansa made Sandor feel more tied to this reality than ever before. *And she doesn’t even know that she’s provoked this!*

*And even if she did know, why should she give a damn?* She had never wanted or asked for it, and she had troubles of her own. But it irked Sandor to think that not only did he allow his life to be ruled by a woman in a way, but even as he acknowledged the fact, he had no intention of changing the situation.

For years, Sandor had dreamed of one day living a nomadic existence, traveling from place to place, sleeping under the open sky, and eventually settling somewhere quiet where he would spend the rest of his days. But with every passing day that fantasy kept fading, until all Sandor was left with was the hopelessness of his current situation, and the fear that it would never come to an end.

But his hands were tied. Sandor knew that much, and there was nothing he could do to change things his way. It was painful to see Sansa so changed, but it was just as bad to remember that she had once been so naïve that she was unaware of what was in store with her. The words that the sodding German doctor had told him yesterday came back to Sandor then, and while he had no faith in his friend’s religious beliefs, he could relate to his talk about helping people, though he wasn’t very good at it himself.

Understanding that he was only alive to help the little bird (and that he was fucking it up) made rage coil inside Sandor. Taking a deep breath, he decided to try and forget about everything for a while before he had to return to the room he shared with the little golden shit. After all, it was tiring how after seeing her again she could manage to dominate his thoughts every moment of the day.

He didn’t know how long he sat there smoking with his eyes closed, but all of a sudden, Sandor heard a noise. As the sound of running footsteps drew nearer, he opened his eyes and turned wearily, annoyed at being disturbed.

He saw a woman climbing up the stairs from the well deck and then running across the poop deck. It was too dark for him to see her clearly as she crossed the stern deck, but her loud breathing made it clear that she was agitated. Sandor settled back in his chair, thinking that as soon as he was done with this cigarette he would stand up and go. No doubt the woman was going to meet someone in a matter of moments, and he had no desire to be around when that happened.
As the minutes went by and all seemed still, Sandor became aware of a sense of dread growing inside him. Frowning, he stood up and as he raised his arms and stretched, he glanced carelessly in the direction the woman had disappeared, only to see that she was poised to throw herself off the stern of the ship.

Supposing that she hadn´t seen him in the shadows as she ran across the stern of the Titanic, Sandor hurriedly strode towards her. The light of a nearby lamp fell on the woman´s back, so that as Sandor got closer he caught sight of her hair and body. She seemed unaware that she had an audience.

No! Sandor thought, his heart lodging somewhere near his throat as he stopped abruptly, the air driven from his lungs at the sight. It can´t be.

But there was no way in seven hells that Sandor could ever mistake the little bird´s hair colour, height and general build with that of another. He stood rooted to the spot, unable to believe what he was seeing: Sansa Stark posed like a figurehead on the stern of the ship, with nothing but her grip on the railing to stop her from falling to her death.

“Don´t do it!” he rasped, wincing even as the words left him.

What in seven hells do you think you´re doing? Sandor asked himself, his mouth wide open in surprise. If he scared her and she fell, he´d not only kill her but himself as well.

Sansa caught her breath in her throat and whipped her head around at the sound of his voice, but thankfully she didn´t let go of the rail. It took a moment for her eyes to focus on him, partly due to the darkness that surrounded them, but also because she appeared to be emerging from a dream.

Sandor could tell that the little bird was so startled by his sudden appearance that she was speechless. His eyes took in the sight she presented with shock. Her red hair was a mess, and she was breathing heavily, her whole body violently trembling. Only once had he ever seen her looking like this, and Sandor felt the same clenching sensation at the pit of his stomach twisting his insides into knots.

In his line of work Sandor saw bad shit every day, and most of the times he was the one doing it, but the only times he´d ever cared that he felt like a worthless son of a bitch was whenever Sansa was involved. It didn´t even matter that she wasn´t suffering by his hand, for he was guilty of allowing the lions to drive her to the edge.
Of standing by and doing nothing as they took the innocent sweet girl he’d met at the Paris Opera House and turning her into a young woman who felt that throwing herself off the back of a ship was her only choice. Was it any wonder she was trying to set free of her golden cage?

Finally Sansa found her voice. “Stay back!” she told him, raggedly. “Don’t come any closer!”

He hadn’t been aware that he had stepped closer to her, and now in the faint glow from the stern running lights Sandor could see the tear tracks on the little bird’s cheeks. *I wanted her to be free, but not like this!*

“Take my hand,” he told her, trying to appear calm. “I’ll pull you back in.”

But she shook her head, yelling, “No!”

Deciding to take another track, Sandor tried to smirk and ask as carelessly as possible, “The little bird thinks she has wings, does she?”

It was the wrong thing to say. For once Sansa didn’t seem to care about being polite, for she said, completely exasperated, “Oh God, just go away! Leave me be! Let me die in peace!”

Her words hurt him. To hear Sansa saying such things was something Sandor knew would be scorched in his mind forever. The world seemed to grow colder. They stood there looking at each other for a long moment, Sansa breathing heavily, Sandor reproaching himself for not suspecting this could happen. During the entire voyage, Sansa had never looked so lovely, yet her eyes were always full of misery, excepting the occasions he’d caught her staring intently at a wall, for then her mind appeared to be far away, out of touch with reality.

“Oh God, just go away! Leave me be! Let me die in peace!”

“Stay where you are,” she snapped again, her voice full of fear. “I mean it. I’ll let go!”

Once more Sandor was not aware that he had moved. But the desperation in her voice brought into full perspective the mess they were in, and he knew that he could help her if he acted smart and quick. *Careful now.* He couldn’t afford to say the wrong word or do a wrong move.

Remembering that he was still holding his cigarette, Sandor showed it to her, silently asking her if
he could throw it overboard. When she only looked at him with a puzzled frown, Sandor took it for acquiescence and stepping closer, he flung the butt of the cigarette to the North Atlantic’s depths.

For half a breath he waited, and when the little bird did nothing even though he was now practically within arm reach of her, he felt free to point out, “No, you won´t.”

“What do you mean by that?” Sansa demanded angrily, even as she continued to cry. “Don´t presume to tell me what I will and will not do!”

_She´s drunk_, he realized, his throat dry. Taking a deep breath, willing himself to be patient, Sandor shrugged and said, “You would have done it already… Now come on, take my hand.”

He offered it to her, hoping she would take it instantly. _Anyone could come at any moment_. But his words appeared to confuse Sansa, to the point were her anger seemed to ebb away. She couldn´t see him very well through the tears, so she raised a hand and wiped some away, the movement driving the thought of her loosing her balance flashing through Sandor´s mind.

“You´re distracting me,” the little bird finally answered. “Please go away.”

“I can´t,” he answered truthfully. “I´m involved.”

Sansa locked her eyes with his, her mouth open a little. She seemed to find his words amusing, for she let out a deep breath and smiled sadly. With a shake of her head she asked softly, “Give me one good reason why I shouldn´t do it.”

For a moment Sandor´s mind went blank. Some may have thought that it was kinder to let her end her sufferings right here and now, but it was impossible for him to even consider the possibility of letting her go. She was too young and perfect to have reached her end.

_How can I convince her that life is worth living when I´m not that fond of it myself? If it wasn´t for her, life would have no meaning for me. She means everything. The only one who has ever and will ever matter, I reckon._

“You can´t leave me alone with them,” Sandor told her finally, his voice sounding like two wood saws grinding together.
He saw her eyes widen in surprise, but only for a moment. Mistaking the meaning behind his words, Sansa replied, “You were with them before me, and there is nothing stopping you from leaving them. But it’s different for me, Sandor. I can’t go back. I can’t walk away.”

The sorrow in her voice was the saddest sound he’d ever heard. Devastation etched every feature of Sansa’s face, every line of her body, to the extent that Sandor wished he could look away. But he couldn’t do that. All of a sudden, he wondered if Sansa had realized she’s slipped and called him by his given name, and then a new idea crossed Sandor’s mind: blackmail.

“If you let go,” he informed her. “I will jump in after you to try and save you.”

“Don’t be absurd,” she gasped. “You’ll be killed.”

There, Sandor thought, breathing a little easier. Now I’ve made her responsible for me. She can’t kill herself while having my death on her conscience. Still, one word and his plan could back fire. After all, Sandor had never dealt with the little bird in such a situation. He wanted to believe he knew her better than most, but it was possible that Sansa had been so altered during the months he’d been away that the idea of killing them both would not truly terrify her.

Snorting, Sandor began taking off his jacket, as he snarled, “I’m a good swimmer.”

“The fall alone would kill you,” the little bird pointed out desperately.

“It would hurt,” he agreed. “I’m not saying it wouldn’t. But to be honest, I’m a lot more worried about the water being so cold.”

Finally he broke their stare, the man deciding that his intentions would seem a lot more natural if he took off his shoes. And if I do end up following her into the Atlantic, at least someone would eventually deduce that something happened here. As he began unlacing his shoe, Sandor realized that he was close enough to reach out to the little bird, but he knew that would only startle her.

Sansa remained silent for several moments, looking down at the sea, but then she hesitantly asked how cold he thought the water was, the reality of what she was about to do finally sinking in.
“Freezing,” he rasped, taking off his other shoe. “Maybe a couple degrees over…. Once when I was in Canada, I went ice-fishing out on this lake… ice fishing’s when you chop a hole in the-”

“I know what ice fishing is,” she interrupted softly.

As he spoke, Sandor was aware that he was engaging Sansa in the story, so confirming that the best course of action was to make it seem like this was not even about her, he went on.

“Well, I went through some thin ice and I’m telling you, water that cold, like that right down there, it hits you like a thousand knives all over your body. You can´t breathe, you can’t think about anything but the pain…. Only once before had I experienced such pain, and I bet you can imagine when… Which is why I’m not looking forward to jumping in after you. But like I said, I don’t see a choice… I guess I’m kind of hoping you’ll come back over the rail and get me off the hook here.”

As he regarded her with a blank expression Sandor tried to conceal the hope from his voice. When Sansa perplexedly pointed out that he was mad, Sandor replied, “I’m not the one hanging off the back of a ship of my own free will, little bird.”

Looking abashed, Sansa bit her lip. Sandor took the opportunity of sliding closer, the way he usually moved up on a spooked horse.

“Come on, you don’t want to do this. Give me your hand,” he rasped, holding his breath.

Sansa stared at him for a long time, looking into his eyes in a way that made Sandor feel as if she was filling up the whole universe. His heart was beating madly inside him as he held his breath, waiting...

“All right,” Sansa replied after a long pause, her voice quavering.

Sandor sighed in relief, but until Sansa was safely back in this side of the rail, he wasn’t going to rest easy. Unblinking, he watched her unfasten one hand from the rail and gingerly reached it around toward him. He took her hand firmly in his and Sansa began to turn, gingerly, poking with her toes until they found a place to rest.

He could tell that now that she had decided to live, the height terrified her. Overcome by vertigo, she shifted her other foot and turned to face him. They had never been so close. Their faces were mere inches away from each other, with only their misty breaths between them, and all around them there was nothing but air and sky, and below the sea.
“I’ve got you and I won’t let go,” he rasped reassuringly, promising.

Attempting a smile that would give her some sort of comfort, Sandor quickly ran his eyes down the length of Sansa’s dress, and when he noticed the long train of her gown, he grabbed her by the arm with his free hand. And sure enough, as soon as she began to climb over, her dress got in the way, and her foot would have slipped off the edge of the deck, had he not been prepared.

Before she lost her balance and fell, his iron fingers had caught her, supporting her. They kept their eyes on each other as he gently tried to get her over the railing, holding her with all his strength, the man afraid she would slip between his arms.

The moment her feet touched the deck, she stumbled, but Sandor was ready to catch her in his arms, his heart pounding wildly at the thought that it was over. He crushed her against him. There was no gentleness in the way he held her. He kept his arms around her shaking frame with a possessive force he was unable to control, unwilling to let her go, unable to fully believe the danger had passed. He was having a hard time believing what Sansa had almost done, and that he had actually saved her from such fate.

“Please, I- I can’t breathe,” Sansa gasped, trying to wriggle free.

Coming back to his senses, Sandor let go of his grip on her. But the moment she was free, the little bird seemed unable to support herself, and she swayed slightly where she stood at once, the stripes of light and darkness falling across her face. He placed a hand on her arm to keep her from falling, looking down at her intently. She seemed too stunned to do more than just stand there, trembling.

Now that he could look at her properly, Sandor began taking in every detail about her tousled appearance. From her torn red dress to her messy hair, half loose about her, half up on some fancy hairdo, to her tear stained cheeks, the thought of what exactly had possessed her to do such a thing returned to him, but he could wait a moment longer before hopefully getting the answer. What matters most right now is making sure she is all right.

Sandor, remembering that if someone were to come upon them and see her looking dishevelled and see him without his jacket and shoes, they would draw their own conclusions, leaned down to pick up his jacket before sweeping it over her shoulders.

He wanted to ask her what the fuck had she been thinking, but he controlled his impulses and, still shaken, only snarled “Here, you’re shivering.”
The sound of Sandor’s voice seemed to break the spell under which Sansa had fallen. Turning her wide, scared eyes up to him, the little bird lips trembled for a moment before she started crying. Frowning, Sandor reminded himself that she was still there because he’d asked it of her. *It would do no good to try to bite her head off now for trying to take her own life.*

Instead, Sandor brought his right hand to cup Sansa’s wet cheek. Brushing away a little roughly some of her tears with his thumb, Sandor studied her reaction carefully. For a moment, as he drowned in the depths of her blue eyes, he forgot everything but the two of them, and the desire to drive away some of her pain took hold of him.

“You’re all right now, little bird,” he growled, his mouth twitching. “You’re all right.”

Sandor was assuring her as much as himself. Shaking her head, she lowered her eyes to the floor, the young woman too embarrassed to look at him. *Oh no you won’t,* he thought, refusing to let her retreat into herself again. Sansa would never do that again with Sandor if he could help it. *Not after what just happened.*

“Come,” he told her, picking up his shoes and walking over to the bench where he’d previously been seated. He couldn’t take her back to her cabin yet. She had to calm down first.

Once seated, Sandor began putting on his shoes as Sansa stood beside him, wearing a jacket that was too many sizes too big for her, still crying silently. He met her eyes and growled, “Want a smoke?”

The irony of the situation struck him. It was like deja vú. He looked at her more intently, for now they had another secret together. When Sansa bit her lip, hesitating, Sandor barked, “I thought you’d like it when I taught you how to smoke.”

He could tell that the memory clearly came back to the little bird vividly, but rather than blushing, she just pointed out in a quiet voice, “I did, but he doesn’t like it when I smoke.”

“Bugger Joffrey,” Sandor told her, shrugging even as he wondered at the way Sansa’s mind worked. One minute she was sick of her golden fiancé to the point of committing suicide, and the next one she seemed unwilling to do something as simple as smoking because it would displeased him. “Seat down, Sansa.”
Trying to smile but failing miserably, Sansa accepted the cigarette he offered her and once he´d lit it up for her, she sat down heavily on the bench beside him.

For the longest of moments neither of them spoke, but although the desire to learn what exactly had happened to her to trigger such behaviour was burning inside him, Sandor waited, sensing that the right thing to do was to wait until Sansa was ready to speak.

They sat for a long while in silence, and despite everything, Sandor was glad to discern that it was a comfortable silence. If it had been up to him he wouldn´t have minded staying here till dawn just sitting beside her, without talking. When the little bird finally found her words, she spoke in a voice so low he had to lean closer to be able to hear her.

“I thought you were angry with me.”

Shocked, Sandor straightened up and lowered the hand he had just raised to smoke his cigarette. *What the fuck?*

“No,” she assured him quickly, shaking her head. “It wasn´t that at all. But I did think you didn´t want anything else to do with me if you could help it.”

Sighing with relief, Sandor considered the meaning behind her words, and then answered, “I´ve always been angry, but it has nothing to do with you. And yesterday, although I was mad at you for not telling me what was going on, whom I really hated was that fucking idiot.” *And now myself, for not having really realized how what was going inside your head.*

In the back of his mind he wondered for the hundredth time at how easy it was to open up to her at times, and hoping she would feel the same way and answer him this time round, Sandor said, “What did he do now to make you feel as though you had no way out?”

“I don´t have a way out,” she stated softly, hiding her face in her hands. “I came back because I didn´t want you to die, but I did so knowing that things were just going to be the same way, if not worse.”

Sandor opened his mouth and closed it again, realizing he really didn´t know what to say. It made
him feel uncomfortable to imagine that now it was his fault that her misery would be prolonged, but a selfish instinct took over him. She was alive and she was here, and right now nothing else mattered.

He stared at her bent head, wishing there was something he could say, when he noticed she wasn’t wearing her engagement ring. If only Sansa didn’t have to marry that little shit… If only it was that simple. Sandor knew about her miseries better than anyone else, and had even felt them as though done to him. We’re both stuck on a sodding train we can’t get off, he thought, crushing the butt of his cigarette with his foot.

“It wasn’t just one thing,” Sansa continued, still keeping her head in her hands so that her voice came to him muffled. “It was everything. It´s them! It is their whole world. I am trapped in it like an insect in amber. Like a little bird in a gilded cage!”

With every word she seemed to gain more confidence, for soon enough she was telling Sandor the rest in a rush, all the while looking up at him. “But tonight I finally had had enough. I had to get away, and so I just ran and ran and ran. And then I was at the back rail and there was no more ship, and before I knew what I was doing I was over the rail. It seemed like a good idea. I would be free of them and at least Joffrey would be sorry.”

There was a harsh edge to Sandor´s voice as he finally rasped, “Yes, Joffrey would have been sorry, but you would have been dead.”

She winced at the anger in his voice, but after considering a moment, she smoked the cigarette and went on.

“Sometimes it´s as if I have vanished. As if I ceased being important in my own life and now serve as the objective of others. They´ve constricted my soul with their rules, their mind games, and their lies. My very existence suddenly revolves around them, and I can’t do anything to change that. Sometimes I even dream that I’m dying, and as awful as that sounds, it’s better than my reality. If you could just see inside my head, you would understand. You’d go mad. I hate the Lannisters, and no one cares. No one seems to be able to see me as a real person with real feelings and desires, ambitions or dreams. Nobody knows a thing going on inside of me, nor do they care to.”

“I care, and I do understand, Sansa,” Sandor told her, his piercing gaze never leaving her. “I see you.”

His eyes watched hers as she registered his words and her features soften, his blood running cold at the thought that had he hadn’t been here to stop her, she would be dead now. Only once before had
Sansa looked at him with such gratitude, and just as in that instance, Sandor felt like retching. Her gentle, sweet and honest expression was too much for him to bear.

“Don´t look at me like that,” he told her, gazing away. “I don´t bloody deserve it. I told you how to survive that night before I left, and it was the best advice I could´ve given you back then, but now I don´t have any such words to offer you…” His voiced trailed off, a voice full of self-hatred that made the little bird stare at him curiously.

“Do you remember that night?” she wondered, frowning slightly, a little embarrassed. “That fateful night?”

“Of course I bloody do,” Sandor snarled, scratching at the beard that ran on the good side of his face. Sometimes he had even wondered if he would hear her screams till the day he died. “Do you think I could ever forget it?”
When Eddard Stark died, his daughter had given herself to darkness. She didn’t come out of her room at the Lannister’s manor in London, and the whole household knew that she spent her days sleeping. Servants took her meals, but the dishes returned to the kitchen, untouched and spoiling.

Sandor had witnessed it all with a stony expression, longing to at least see the little bird once, but he kept his distance. Not out of fear from the lions, but ignorant as to how the fuck he could bring Sansa Stark comfort.

“Sometimes my sleep was leaden and dreamless, and I would wake up from it more tired than when I had closed my eyes…” Sansa was telling him now as they sat on a bench on the poop deck of Titanic, remembering and smoking. For the first time, she was pouring it all out.

They had been sitting there for some time, but thankfully no one had come and interrupted them. Sandor knew that the little bird by now was calm enough to allow him to escort her back to their staterooms, but he wouldn’t have moved from this spot even if the ship’s sodding Master-at-arms had come personally to arrest him.

He had saved Sansa from throwing herself off the vessel, and Sandor knew that what she needed now to feel better was to unburden herself. And sitting there and just listening to her, no matter how angry it made him at moments, was something he not only could do, but also wanted to do.

“…Yet those were the best times,” the little bird continued, occasionally hiccupping, a far away look on her beautiful face as she stared off into the horizon. “For when I dreamed, I dreamt of my father. Waking or sleeping, I could not stop wondering what he must have been feeling and enduring to make him pull the trigger. Of course now I understand, but losing him, and in such a
way, had been the worst thing I’d ever experienced, up until that point.”

Sandor shifted uncomfortably on his seat, debating for the hundredth time whether or not he should keep silent on that matter. He hated to keep quiet, yet he feared now more than ever what Sansa would do if she knew the whole truth about the way Ned Stark had met his end. He was considering whether or not it was a good idea to speak out, when the bird’s next words stopped him.

“When Trudy tried to talk to me, I never answered her,” Sansa went on. “And when Doctor Pycelle saw me and prescribed me medicine, I swallowed it all in one drink, thankful it made me sleepy… Joffrey went to see me every day for a fortnight, but I was always either asleep or pretending to be. I had already decided not to marry him since that horrible misunderstanding with my friend Podrick back in Winterfell, before Uncle Robert died. I told myself that as soon as I felt better I would break off our engagement. But I couldn’t face going back to Winterfell on my own, so I decided to go to Scotland and stay with my aunt and cousin.”

She stopped to take a deep breath as Sandor threw the butt of his cigarette to the floor, crushing it with his foot. Sansa watched his movements before continuing.

“As you probably know by now, I was corresponding with my aunt to arrange my passage up North; because after her son got sick, she was unable to attend father’s funeral… But Cersei decided to read my mail and we both know what happened afterwards.”

Sandor nodded, the memories still fresh in his mind. He remembered that night as if it had been yesterday. After the Lannister bitch told Joffrey that his betrothed was planning on getting as far away from him as possible, he had ordered Sandor to go fetch Sansa in her bedroom and bring her to him.

“And I don’t care if she is sleeping! Wake her up and drag her from the bed if you must,” he’d ordered him. It had been near midnight, but when Sandor had knocked on the door, announcing his presence outside in the hallway, the little bird had mercifully opened the door quickly.

She’d had been wearing a robe over her nightgown, and he’d been shocked speechless by the sight of her after almost three weeks of keeping to her bedroom. She was thin and pale, and there were shadows under her eyes. Her gaunt face had still been beautiful, but in a ghostly sort of way.

“He wants to see you,” he’d informed her roughly, hoping she wouldn’t protest.
She must have seen the warning look in his face, for she´d stepped outside quick enough. After a moment of walking down the hallway though, Sansa chirped, “What is this about?”

“Planning any trips to the Highlands soon?” he´d barked, preparing her.

Noticing the shock and sudden defeat that his words had caused her, Sandor had conducted the little bird down the flight of stairs in silence. When they reached the living room, Sansa had cringed away from the closed door, backing into Sandor.

“Do it, girl,” he´d told her, pushing her before him. “The longer we keep him waiting, the worse it will go for you, and he´ll have you inside no matter what, so give him what he wants.”

Once she was inside, Joffrey had closed the door to the room, but thankfully he had forgotten to dismiss Sandor for the night. So he´d stuck around, knowing things would probably turn ugly for the little bird. And unfortunately he´d had been right. Soon enough the yelling and name-calling inside the living room had began, and when Sandor could bear no more the sound of Sansa´s screaming, he had intervened.

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“Despite suspecting that Joffrey was not at all the charming man I had thought him to be at first, for a moment I felt safe as I entered the living room,” Sansa confessed, shifting around on the bench so she could truly face him, “Closing the door, he smiled at me, and for a heartbeat he´d been my knight in shining armour again. But then the first words he spoke revealed how foolish I was. He asked me when had been the last time I had taken a bath, coldly observing that I stank…”

Sandor didn´t feel like listening to the details of what had gone on inside the living room before he intervened. Having heard it all as it happened had sometimes compelled him to wake up abruptly in the dead of night, shaken. But Sansa needed to unburden herself, so he didn´t stop her.

“I don´t know to this day if it was a good thing or a bad one that he wasn´t even drunk that night…” Sansa admitted, looking down at her hands. “Not even waiting for me to reply, Joffrey went on to ask what was I thinking planning to go stay with Aunt Lysa when my place was with him. I tried to calmly explain to him that I felt it would be easier to mourn my father away from the city, but when he outright forbid me to go, I realized that the only way for him to let me go was to break off our engagement right then and there. I did so, explaining to him that it hadn´t been until he came along that I had ever been unhappy.”

A cold wind made Sansa shiver, but she only wrapped Sandor´s jacket closer around her and kept
I told him that I had stopped loving him for a long time now, and had only remained with him because Uncle Robert had died, and I didn’t want to hurt him in such a moment… His anger grew with every word I said, and when I was done he just informed me that I was never to mock him like that again, for a true wife had to obey her husband at all times.”

Sansa’s voiced was hardening as the memories overtook her. Her tears had long ago dried up, though the streaks they’d left on her cheeks were still visible.

“Something in the way Joffrey just stood there looking at me took the breath out of me. I backed away from him in horror, seeing him fully for the first time. I assured him that I was leaving him no matter how he felt, but he only replied that I was to obey him… And then the argument really began. I can’t recall much of what we yelled at each other, but I imagine you probably overheard us in any case. At one point I turned towards the door sensing I had to get away before things got worse, and then the next thing I knew, he was on me…”

Sansa’s gaze was now fixed on the floor as she told Sandor everything, her voice almost impersonal. As if it had all happened to someone other than herself.

“…He yanked back the hand I had raised to try and shield my face, and a moment later he had backhanded me across the ear with his fist. I don’t remember falling, but the next thing I knew, I was sprawled on one knee, my head ringing. Joff was standing before me, with blood on his knuckles. My ear felt numb, and when I touched it, my fingertips came away wet and red.”

Reminding himself to be calm, Sandor clenched and unclenched his fists. He had known what had happened; he had overheard it and seen the aftermath of it, but it was something else entirely to hear it being told by no other than the little bird.

“I had never been more stunned in all my life. Not even when they told me about Father. I felt as if I were in a nightmare. Before I could realize what I was doing, I whispered to Joffrey that he was a monster and I hated him. His response was to pull me back on my feet roughly, and this time he grasped me beneath the jaw and held my head still as he struck me. He hit me twice this time, left to right, and harder, right to left. And then he had grabbed me by the hair before shoving a meaty hand down the front of my nightgown. He gave a hard yank and the silk came tearing away, baring my corset to the waist. As he let me go, I stumbled to my knees, my arms crossed over my chest, tears welling in my eyes. Then he was on me again, forcing me down onto the floor. I screamed and screamed, hoping someone would hear, but when no one came, I tried to tell myself that it was all going to be over soon… But then you saved me.”
His mouth twitching, Sandor returned the little bird’s gaze. It had been one of the hardest things he’d ever done, listening outside in the empty hallway to the sounds of Sansa screaming. But when she finally started yelling at Joffrey to stop, begging him to leave her alone, Sandor had snapped. Wrenching open the door, he had rasped, “Enough!”

His voice had crackled the air like a whip, and a moment later Sansa was free as Joff got off of her. Not a moment too soon, Sandor reflected, remembering he’d been about to throw himself on the golden little shit in order to stop him. But Joffrey had stood up quickly, looking dazed, breathing heavily. He had thrown Sandor a venomous look before turning around to look down at Sansa.

Sandor had followed suit. Even now, he remembered all too well the sight of Sansa’s split lip, and the way the blood ran down her chin, mingling with the salt of her tears, the little bird had been breathing heavily as she lay on the ground with her knees spread out, shocked, scared and embarrassed.

Without a second thought, Sandor had taken off his jacket and tossed it to her. Clutching it against her chest gratefully, Sansa’s fists had bunched hard in the dark wool.

“Stop crying,” Joffrey had snapped at her, annoyed. “You’re prettier when you smile and laugh.”

Sansa had made herself smile then, clearly afraid that he would hit her again if she did not; but it was no good, for Joff still shook his head. “Wipe off the blood, you’re all messy.”

Sandor had stared at Joff, wide-eyed with disgust, the thought of killing the sick fucker right there and now flashing through his mind. But as Joffrey turned away from Sansa to leave the room, the sight of the little bird´s face had distracted Sandor. He recognized that hard stare in her eyes, for that was the way many men looked when they were about to shoot someone.

Bloody hells! Sandor had thought, snapping into action as Sansa reached out for the fire poker beside her. A moment later he was kneeling before her, placing himself between her and Joffrey. With a delicacy that surprised even himself, Sandor had rasped, “Here, girl,” before dabbing at the blood welling from Sansa´s broken lip with his handkerchief.

With utter relief, he saw that the moment was gone. The little bird, lowering her eyes and remembering her courtesies, thanked him. But hearing those two words had felt just as if two knives had been thrust into him. He´d stared at her swollen face, his hands shaking in impotent fury.
“Clegane,” Joffrey had said, before he left the room. “Take care of her. I’m going to bed.”

Without a backward glance, the fucking son of a bitch had left the living room. The moment the sound of his retreating footsteps had begun to fade, Sandor had scooped Sansa around the waist, lifting her as gently as he could off the ground. When his eyes were then drawn to the sight of the top of Sansa´s breasts and her corset, Sandor had quickly averted his gaze, the scowl on his face deepening.

“Don´t worry, little bird. I won´t hurt you,” he´d snarled, heading in the direction of the kitchen; as Sansa, sensing the direction of his stare, quickly covered herself with his jacket. “But you´re bleeding. Let´s go see to that cut.”

Without another word, Sandor had searched for some ice to reduce the swelling and the bruising on her face and lip, while Sansa waited for him out into the garden, now wearing his coat. Some moments later, longing to have some further advice to give her, Sandor had followed the little bird outside.

“Save yourself some pain, girl, and give him what he wants,” he had rasped at her the moment he reached her.

She had been looking up at the night skies, crying hard, but at his words she turned to him and asked, “What… what does he want? Please, tell me.”

“He wants you to smile and smell sweet and be his lady love. He wants to hear you recite all your pretty little words the way you’ve been taught at finishing school. He wants you to love him… and fear him.”

After that, they had fallen silent, each staring out into the dark grounds of the Lannister´s London house. Sansa occasionally winced as she rested the ice against her bruised face. At one point, Sandor had felt the need for a smoke, and taking one out, he had looked at it for a brief moment before offering it to the little bird. She had seemed startled that he would even think of sharing one with her.

“I- I don´t know how,” she´d finally chirped.

“It´s not that hard. Here, let me show you. Try it, and if you don´t like it, you can give it back.”

So the bird had tried it, and had choked the first time she´d inhaled the smoke. But after a moment
or two, she seemed to find it soothing, for she finished it without complaint, and even asked him for another. When he had escorted her back to her chamber a short while later, she made no motion to return his jacket. But she did try to give him back his handkerchief.

Looking at it, Sandor had snorted, growling bitterly, “Keep it. You’ll be needing it again.”

He had taken a long look at her face as she opened her mouth to thank him again, but before she could do so, Sandor had turned around and strode away. By dawn Joff had sent him word that he was to leave for Italy on a very important errand as soon as possible, which meant that Sandor had not been able to see Sansa one last time; then almost a year had passed before they met again at the South Western Hotel back in Southampton, almost three days ago.

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“And then you were gone,” Sansa said softly, and for a moment Sandor wondered if he was imagining the reproach in her eyes. “But I lived with your advice for a year,” Sansa informed him, crossing her arms before her as they sat on the bench at the poop deck of the Titanic. “Each day, whenever things got too hard, I heard the cold rasp of your voice, metal on stone, saying: Save yourself some pain, girl, and give him what he wants… But of late it has been harder to remember exactly why I should go to such trouble.”

Sandor ground his teeth in fury as a new thought occurred to him. “Has he hit you again?” he rasped with narrowed eyes, and the sound of his voice sounded raw.

“No, he has not. As long as I don’t upset his perfect plans, he can be play gentleman.” She stopped, hesitating as to whether or not she should elaborate, and when Sandor fixed her with a piercing stare, she gazed at her hands and continued. “But of late it has become harder to be in my best behaviour around him. Did you hear what I said yesterday to Mr. Ismay?”

*You mean, what you didn’t tell me when I asked you what was wrong?* Sandor wanted to growl at her; but instead he only nodded, a feeling of dread plummeting in the pit of his stomach and wishing for the first time in many months that he could drain an entire bottle of wine in one long drink.

“Well, yesterday we had an argument and he threw me against a wall and I hit my head.”

“May he burn in seven hells!” he cursed, wishing he could dip him in horseshit and cook him. Or
tickle him till the moon turned black. “I swear that one of these days I’m going to kill him!”

“So it is all right for you to kill him, but when I tried to on that night you stopped me, remember?” Sansa noted, tilting her head to one side in confusion.

Despite everything, Sandor was surprised to see she was addressing the fact that he knew that once she’d wanted to kill her fiancé. Unsure as to how to respond, his head became full of memories of that fateful night that had unfettered the events that had led Sansa to attempt suicide tonight. But seeing as he had been away for about a year, there were many blank holes that needed filling.

After a moment of hesitation, Sandor asked Sansa what had happened with Joffrey the morning when he’d left for Europe. The little bird stiffened at the memory, but gone were the days when she would hesitate to tell him something. A new level of trust had been born between them during the past hour, and at once she answered him.

“He came to my bedroom around midday, casually asking me if I was better, as if he had not beaten me bloody only some hours past. He did not so much as glance at the bruise he had left, and after he realized that I wasn’t going to answer, he went on to propose a deal.

“He said that my father had made Cersei my legal ward before he died, and that I was going to sign the deeds to Winterfell and my inheritance over to him, because seeing as he was to become my husband, he wanted to have complete access and control of my money. Joffrey told me that if I refused to do so and carry on with our engagement as if nothing had happened, he would sell Winterfell, financially ruin Aunt Lysa, and send me off to an asylum, claiming that grief over my father had unhinged me.”

That was too much for Sandor. Cursing loudly, shaking, he stood up and hit his forehead in rage. He strode back and forth across the ship’s stern deck, all the while aware that Sansa was staring at him. But disregarding his reaction, she just went on in in a voice with no emotion.

“I wanted to rage and hurt him as he had hurt me, but I didn’t. I wanted to scare him by threatening to tell him off to the authorities, but I didn’t. You know how powerful the Lannisters are, and in the eyes of the law I belonged with them. When I met the trustees of the Stark Estate to include Joffrey in my will, they showed me proof that I was Cersei’s legal ward.

“I was left me with no options or means to do anything without their help, and in the eyes of society Joff was my gallant shinning knight, saving me and the Stark name, despite the disgrace my father’s bankruptcy and suicide. Who would believe me? After all, hadn’t he and Father had a public falling out just days before the suicide, and yet here Joff was, loving me despite everything.
I had no one to turn to, and nowhere to go.”

The sound of his footsteps upon the floor was loud and heavy, but Sandor didn´t stop moving. Occasionally he would throw an angry glance in Sansa´s direction, but for the most part he was cursing Joffrey to burn in seven hells under his breath.

“In the end I remembered your words and told Joffrey that I would do whatever he asked. When he saw that he had won, in the blink of an eye he was before me, but this time he began asking me to forgive me. Not for hitting me, but for trying to take advantage of me before you stopped him. He promised he would not touch me until our wedding night. I think that´s why he wanted you to share a room with him during this trip. Too much of a temptation to have me sleeping next door…”

“From that day on we´ve been as you´ve witnessed us. Soon after that morning he went away to Europe, leaving me with Cersei... It was during that time that I first began considering that dying was not such a terrible thing after all. Once I even tried to fling myself from the balcony in order to put an end to my suffering, but in the end my courage left me.”

The way she spoke those last words chilled Sandor´s blood. He had suspected it was quite bad, and everything he had just heard had confirmed it, but to think that the little bird had been considering committing suicide for a while now left him feeling numb. Suddenly, she surprised Sandor by laughing bitterly.

“I´m sorry,” she told him, passing a tired hand over her face. “You must think I´m such a coward. Here I am trying to end my life, when there are people who suffer worse than I do and yet go on living… You, for example. When you were only a child you had already suffered more than I have, and by the hand of your brother.”

Had a man approached Sandor and told him that, he would have knocked him down or put a bullet through their head. But although he was surprised that she had dared to bring that up, he wasn´t as annoyed as he once would have believed. After all, even though I was drunk, wasn´t I the one who told her about my scars in the first place? And he didn´t regret it. With a smirk he wondered if some part of Sansa wasn´t telling him everything because she had been a bit drunk earlier tonight. If that was true, he could only hope she wouldn´t regret it either.

With a deep sigh, Sandor shook his head and sat back down next to her. “That´s not what I was thinking, Sansa.”

They stared at each other for a long moment, until the shadow of a smile appeared on the little bird´s face. Hesitating for a moment, she finally said, “Thank you for listening to me, and for being
honest. It really means a lot to me.”

Sandor was aware that she hadn´t thanked him for stopping her from killing herself. So with a poor attempt at returning her smile, Sandor stretched tight the burns on his face and rasped, “Just promise me you won’t try taking your life again, little bird.”

Her eyes widened, and Sandor saw that she was blushing. She bit her lip and lowered her head in shame. The sight was too much for Sandor. He needed to hear her promise him, or else he didn’t know what he would do.

“Sansa?” he prompted, lifting her chin with his knuckle.

“I don’t see why it would be so bad,” she confessed, finally meeting his eyes. “My father did it when his world shattered beneath him. I can’t judge him. Not now that I know what life is really like.”

Sandor’s hand dropped onto the bench between them, as comprehension dawned on him. Bloody hells! Sandor had hated himself for keeping it from her all this time, and now once again the debate as to whether or not he should tell her about Ned Stark’s death ran through his mind. If he told her what he knew, he ran the risk of strengthening her desire to be free of the lions by any means… but after what she had just said, perhaps Sansa would think differently about suicide if she knew the truth.

He knew in the back of his mind that the little bird was staring intently, waiting for his reaction, and his frown must have given him away, for suddenly she chirped, “What is it?”

His mouth twitching, Sandor looked at her again, taking in every feature of her lovely face. Sighing deeply, reasoning that she had been kept in the dark for far too long, and yet still not completely sure that this was the right moment for it, Sandor snarled, “Little bird, there’s something I should have told you a long time ago, but I´m scared of what you will do once you know.”

She stilled beside him, and it took her a moment to compose herself. She gripped the edge of the bench, and whispered, “Is it about Father?”

Nodding, he growled, “Your father didn’t kill himself. I wasn’t there the night when he died, but Joffrey was, along with some of his men. They paid your father a visit and in less than an hour made it appear as if he’d put a bullet through his head. I know because I overheard some of them
Sansa’s mouth dropped open and her eyes widened in surprise. She gazed at up him in astonishment, not even taking the trouble to breathe, seating perfectly still. Sandor hadn’t known what reaction to expect, only that he feared it would finally drive her over the edge. He sat wary and alert, waiting.

After a long moment of looking stunned, her voice broke as she asked him, “Did Joffrey kill him?”

“I don’t know if he pulled the trigger,” he answered carefully, truthfully. “But I’m suspecting your father signed you over to the lion’s clutches under some kind of threat before he was killed. That’s why your Cersei’s ward.”

Once again, time stood still between them, and then, in the blink of an eye, Sansa dashed across the deck to the rail before them. Sandor had followed her, cursing himself for being unable to stop her from getting off the bench in the first place, but with relief he saw that rather than throwing herself overboard again, Sansa was retching into the Atlantic.

Still not completely sure she wouldn’t attempt anything else, Sandor stopped and patiently waited for her to finish, wishing he could will himself to go over and rub her back in comfort. After some minutes, the little bird finally straightened up and said, “I must have known all along somewhere deep inside me.”

She turned around as though sleepwalking, and went back to sit on the bench. Gripping his jacket closer, she huddled inside it, shivering. Sansa wasn’t crying though, and Sandor didn’t know if that was a bag or a good thing. Then, she actually apologized for getting sick and even thanked him for looking out for her.

“For fuck’s sake, there’s nothing to be sorry for or to thank me for,” he told her, striding over to her, not in the right humour to stand her courtesies.

“I’m glad you told me,” she answered, resting her back on the bench. “Somehow it makes me feel better to know neither of us killed ourselves.”

Looking down at her, Sandor stood before her and realized that this was the only reaction he was going to get out of her tonight regarding her father’s murder. She had been too emotionally strained and tested in a single night to do more than just sit there, taking it all in, trying to make sense of her
“Promise me that you won’t try to hurt yourself,” he insisted again. *She has to hear herself say the words, more than I do,* he knew. “If you need someone to talk to, you just come to me.”

And finally Sansa looked him straight in the face and said, “I promise.”

“Good,” he rasped, breathing easier. Sandor took out his metal pocket watch. If they didn’t return soon, then the lions would find out that both of them were missing.

“Feeling better?” he asked Sansa. “It’s time we went back. You have to try and get some rest.”

The little bird closed her eyes, but nodded eventually. Sandor was somehow certain that at least for tonight she would not try to harm herself again. As she stood up, Sandor remarked that he had been a fool for keeping her out here in the cold for so long.

“If you get a cold we won’t be able to do as the Lannister bitch told us and spend tomorrow together,” he rasped lightly, hoping that the prospect would cheer her up some. *And I will keep a closer eye on you tomorrow.*

A moment later his lip curled at that, for he was angry at the world for putting a girl like Sansa Stark in a situation where spending a whole day with the Hound would seem like a safe haven. A part of him was happy to see Sansa smiling as she took in the meaning behind his words, but another part was raging at having her gladly accept such compensation. *She has to go back to the man who killed her father because I made her, and still she looks comforted by the thought of having me for company.*

“Ready?” he questioned as they stood before each other, the little bird looking up at him with so much trust and thankfulness that he shifted uncomfortable on the spot.

Sansa nodded nervously, hugging herself to keep from shaking, and followed him, unresisting. By the time they reached the well deck, they had fallen into a deep silence. They walked across the Titanic and took the lift down to B-Deck, and when they got out, they saw Meryn Trant striding towards them.

*Fuck!* Sandor thought, sparing a quick glance in the little bird’s direction. She looked so
dishevelled that Trant was bound to stop them for no other reason than that. He ought to have thought of an alibi in case they met someone. Sansa was probably thinking the same as she flinched away, scared.

Laying a heavy hand on her shoulder, Sandor rasped, “That one is nothing to fear, bird. Paint stripes on a toad, he does not become a tiger.”

He knew she had heard him, but she still looked about uncertainly. As the man reached them he stopped, taking in the sight of Sansa wearing Sandor’s jacket, her hair wild and loose, her eyes red from crying.

“They left the door to your stateroom open, Miss Stark. Mr. Baratheon asked me to go and look for you since his dog was nowhere to be found. How is it that you are not in your room at this hour?”

By that statement Sandor knew that Joffrey was still in the smoke room, clearly not as troubled as Meryn claimed, or else the bastard would have been looking for the little bird himself.

“Miss Stark wanted some fresh air, so Mr. Baratheon’s dog did his duty and looked out for her.”

“You didn’t do a very good job by the looks of her,” Trant remarked, turning to Sansa with contempt. “It is not seemly for you to be out of your room at this hour.”

“I did not meant to, but I’m afraid I had an accident,” the little bird chirped in. “I wanted to see the propellers, but I slipped. And I would have gone overboard, but Mr. Clegane saved me just in time. He almost went over himself in the process.”

“That’s good,” Sandor thought. The lie sounded true enough. Meryn regarded Clegane briefly before settling his unblinking stare on Sansa. “What a pity that he didn’t...”
Barking at the idiot that Miss Stark needed to go to sleep, he then ordered Trant to go inform his master that he had found Sansa. The moment Meryn Trant disappeared inside the lift, the little bird asked him, “Why do you let people call you a dog?”

Sandor considered the question before answering, “I like dogs better than people. My grandfather was kennel master at Casterly Rock. One autumn year, Tytos Lannister came between a bobcat and her prey. The bitch tore into Tyto’s horse and would have done for him too, but my grandfather came up with the hounds. Three of his dogs died running her off. My grandfather lost a leg, so Lannister compensated him for it with lands and a small ranch, and took his son into the family business.”

They had reached the door to Sansa’s bedroom as they talked, and making sure no one was around, Sandor cupped her under the jaw, raising her chin. “A hound will die for you, but never lie to you. And he’ll look you straight in the face. And that’s more than little birds can do, isn’t it?”

Regarding him with those piercing blue eyes of her, shining bright in the hallway lightning, Sansa answered, “Once, maybe. But not now, Sandor.”

He released her, all the while pretending not to be moved by the emotion in her voice and the use of his given name. “Do you want me to go fetch that maid of yours to help you clean up?”

“Oh no, I can manage,” Sansa assured him quickly with a hesitant smile. “But thank you for the offer, and for lending me your jacket.”

She took it off and gave it back to him. Sandor nodded, telling her that he would be in the living room until she had used the bathroom they had to share along with Joffrey, though she could call for him if she needed to. With a grateful smile the little bird thanked him and slipped into her darkened bedchamber.

Before she closed the door though, Sandor stopped Sansa to ask her one more time if she was really feeling all right. With a nod she assured him that she was, and then he saw the little bird switch on the electric lights before disappearing behind the closed door.
Chapter End Notes

Reviews are love <3 :D
That was such a sweet dream, Sansa thought drowsily under the covers, curled up tight. She had been back in Winterfell, running in its vast grounds with Lady, her dog. Her father had been there, and both of them had been happy and safe. *If only dreaming could make it so.* Sometimes she dreamed of her home and woke with her heart thumping, but this dream had not been like that.

It had been so lovely that Sansa groaned as she reluctantly opened her eyes, wondering what time it was. Trudy hadn’t come yet to wake her up, so she supposed it was still quite early. Hoping she would slip back into the lands of dreams easily, Sansa closed her eyes, but a moment later she was sitting up quickly as memories of last night came rushing through her mind.

*Dear God!* she thought, her mouth wide open. *Dear God!* How she even managed to fall asleep after everything she had lived through in the past twelve hours was beyond her. Flashbacks of last night came to her awakening consciousness; Sansa had gone from feeling so lost and defeated that she was about to throw herself into the freezing Atlantic Ocean, to having Sandor Clegane brushing her tears away as he cupped her face after she had decided to live.

But that was not all. Sansa recalled vividly the moment he told her that her father hadn’t killed himself, and how she had become sick in front of him. But rather than being embarrassed about it, the weight of the truth was what was foremost in her mind right now, followed by an overwhelming feeling of having finally unburdened herself to someone.

She didn’t know how she should feel about it all since it had happened so recently, and yet a voice inside Sansa’s head whispered to her that it was all very simple. Nothing had changed really. Her situation was still the same but for two things: now she knew the truth about her father, and somehow Sandor Clegane had become the most important person in her life overnight. *I am not going back to sleep,* Sansa realized. *My head is all a tumult.* She pushed her pillow away reluctantly and threw back the blankets, but she didn’t get up from the bed. Instead she sat up and put her arms around her legs, her chin resting on her knees, thinking.
Father didn’t killed himself. Knowing that made all the difference in the world, though Sansa was surprised that she still didn’t feel like crying. The truth had shocked her at first, but even last night she had been unable to break down about it. Had she truly not suspected it deep down, surely she would reacted differently and have a harder time accepting it. Or maybe I’ve already shed all the bitter tears in the world, and now there are no more.

I ought to be more frightened of Joffrey, now more than ever, she thought too, but somehow she wasn’t. She knew the worst that he could do to her now, and he had already done it. If only her father had confided in her about his troubles, Sansa felt certain they would have been able to face anything together!

But now I’ll have to marry my father’s murderer, she realized, wondering how she would ever go through with it, knowing she could not confront Joffrey with the truth without confessing who had told her about it. But how will I bear seeing him again? How can I let him touch me? How can he even look me in the eye after what he did?

Smiling cynically, Sansa shook her head in defeat. She had asked herself the same questions the morning after Joff showed her his true colours, and somehow she had been able to see him again and let him touch her, and he didn’t appear to have any trouble looking at her. He was a liar, but would still definitely carry on his promise of hurting her relatives and locking her away somewhere if she didn’t go through with their marriage.

“Oh God,” she whispered, ashamed of her folly. “What was I thinking last night? Had I gone through with it, he might have hurt them just the same…”

And not only that, but she would have taken her own life half believing that it couldn’t be so bad since her own father had done it, when in reality that was not the truth of the matter.

However much she suffered, Sansa could not let the lions beat her. With a growing determination, she promised herself she would go through with her engagement to Joffrey Baratheon, loathing to even think about giving birth to the children of the man who had killed her father, and yet unwilling to consider the possibility of killing herself again.

She would never know what had happened inside the room where Ned Stark had lost his life, but even if he hadn’t sacrificed himself for her sake, Sansa owed it to her father not to give in without a fight… And I also promised Sandor that I would not harm myself again.

Overnight he had become such an important and prominent figure in her life that Sansa feared what she would do when he was again called away on some secret mission for the Lannisters, after she
had become Mrs. Baratheon. It felt strange to think back upon how easily she had confided her secrets to another human being… to a man… to Sandor Clegane of all people- but he was unlike any man she had ever know, and Sansa had longed so strongly for someone to talk to that the improprieties of it all seemed of no consequence.

And by just listening to her, he had done her a great service. Now there was finally someone who knew what was really in her soul, and Sandor didn´t pity her, despite having seeing her at the lowest points of her life. He had been genuinely concerned and desperate to help her to the best of his abilities.

But was it truly surprising? After all, ever since he had told Sansa about his scars, their interactions had always been free of pretences up to a point. Clegane may have been drunk at the time, but the seeds of the trust between them had been planted back then in the darkness of the gardens of Winterfell. How can I wonder at him sympathizing with me when he knows just as well as I do how it feels to be tyrannized and preyed upon?

A genuine smile emerged on Sansa´s face as she thought that even though the daily horrors of her life would continue, she no longer had to face them alone. Yesterday I had nothing, but now I have a friend, she knew, recalling the way Sandor had stayed listening and talking to her in the darkness of the poop deck, and how that had been more effective than any meaningless comforts others would have offered to stop her from crying and shaking.

How can he be so mean one day and yet so kind the next? she wondered, half puzzled and in awe of the mystery that he presented, even as she considered how odd it felt to be truly smiling once again after so long.

How silly she had been not to realize before that there had indeed been one person in her world who did notice her grief! Since his return on Wednesday whenever she caught Sandor staring at her, she understood it had meant that he did notice her, and was giving her the recognition she longed for.

Also, she could not ignore the way he´d reacted to the thought of loosing her. Sansa could recall perfectly how his eyes had glowed frantically in the sudden glare of the deck´s electric light as he persuaded her not to let go of life.

She had been seating in bed so lost in her cataclysm of emotions and musings, unconsciously playing with the black velvet bow at the end of her single loose plait, that when her bed hangings were yanked back, Sansa could only throw a hand against the sudden light, staring in surprise at her maid standing over her beside the bed. I didn´t even heard her come in!
“Oh!” Trudy squealed, surprised to see her awake. “Top of the mornin’, to’ya, Miss!”

The moment her eyes fell on the Irish girl, Sansa smiled composedly, inwardly relived that before she went to bed last night, she had picked up all the things she’d thrown to the floor when she had been unable to undress herself, until no trace of her outburst remained. *Hopefully Meryn Trant didn’t walk in on them after seeing that I’d left my door open last night.* If he were to tell Joffrey about that, then Sansa would have to admit – at least up to a point - to her fiancé why she had tried to destroy her stateroom.

Getting out of bed, Sansa slipped a pink robe over her nightgown, belting it about her waist. She noticed the widened eyes of her maid on the discarded red gown she had worn last night, all hacked to pieces.

“I’m afraid I couldn’t get out of it last night on my own,” Sansa explained apologetically. “So I took some scissors and cut myself out of it.”

Obvisouly embarrassed, Trudy lowered her eyes and said, “You ought to have called for me, Miss. I would have been glad to help you get ready for bed.”

“It was quite late,” Sansa explained, walking over to the tea tray, all the while amazed at how easy it was to pretend that nothing out of the ordinary had happened, specially considering that Cersei forced Trudy to spy on her. “I couldn’t imagine disturbing you.”

Trudy smiled at her, touched by her consideration, but she continued insisting that it was better to wake her up rather than having such a beautiful dress destroyed. Sansa stared at the remains of the discarded red gown full with contempt.

“I heard you had quite a fright last night!” Trudy went on, oblivious to the eagerness in her own voice, no doubt at the prospect of hearing the servant’s gossip confirmed. “Thankfully the Hound was there to save you, though I’m sure I would have been just as frightened of falling into the sea as of having such a man being the one to save me.”

Resisting the urge to throw a venomous look at Trudy for her unjust judgment, Sansa instead took a bite of toast, wondering if the food tasted sweeter today because she was to spend the whole day in the company of none other but the frightful Sandor Clegane. She could not help but smile a little at the thought.
Thank you for such a sweet punishment, Cersei, she thought, recalling the way she had feared Sandor not two days ago as they argued, when he took her wrist and shook her, demanding an answer. He only wanted to know what had happened out of concern for me, Sansa realized now. Not because he wished to mock me for trying to expose Joff’s behaviour to others.

Was it accident or fate that last night had turned out the way it had? Had it been Meryn Trant or Boros Blount the ones who found her about to throw herself overboard, Sansa would have jumped off the Titanic without a second thought. But surely Sandor was the one who saved me for a reason.

Why, even when escorting her back to the cabin last night his ferocious presence had somehow managed to give her the strength to carry on and tell Meryn Trant the lie of wishing to see the propellers. A lie everyone had apparently believed judging by what the Irish girl had just articulated.

“Would you like me to prepare a bath for you?” Trudy´s voice shook her out of her reverie.

Shaking her head, Sansa replied, “No, I had one last night before going to bed. Let´s see: what I´m going to wear today?”

Trudy stared at her with an open mouth, seemingly amazed that Sansa had taken a bath all by herself. As she broke her fast, she still felt possessed by dozens of emotions, ranging from sadness and confusion, to shame and even joy. But for the first time in years she actually enjoyed the process of getting ready.

From the time when she was little, one of her favourite moments of the day had been deciding which from among dozens of dresses in her closet that she should wear, sorting out the specific shoes and jewellery and accessories for it, while she imagined the way her hair would look when she was all done. And when at last she was ready and Sansa was standing before the mirror, the joy of knowing she looked pretty made her frivolously kiss her reflection over and over again.

All of that had been a thing of the past to her for the past two years. Yet today Sansa had once again felt like that little girl as she searched for the perfect dress to wear. She choose a hobble skirt of butter coloured satin with a wheat pattern and a seamless over bodice that that joined the skirt at the bust line in a pleated pattern. The neckline was edged in scalloped lace, and underneath she wore a white blouse, even though she knew only it´s embroidered pattern sleeves were visible. A pretty small purse completed her outfit.

Feeling once again proud of her beauty, Sansa daringly instructed Trudy to arrange her hair in the
popular Gibson Girl style. She was certain her maid had noticed her enthusiasm, but Trudy was thankfully tactful enough not to point it out. The only thing about her appearance that Sansa disliked was the engagement ring on her finger, which she had been forced to look for before going to bed last night.

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Joffrey had been staring down at the elegant fireplace when Sansa entered the living room a few moments later. A day ago she would not have believed it possible that she could hate him more than she already did, but as he raised his head and smiled at her, taking in the lovely spectacle she presented, she knew how wrong she’d been.

“Silly goose,” he exclaimed, walking towards her and embracing her even as a shiver went through her. Then, he demanded suddenly, “What were you thinking wanting to see the ship’s propellers last night?”

Refusing to even breathe as he held her close, Sansa shrugged, her insides tight into a knot. Knowing she should say something though, she gave him the precise, succinct explanation she had told Meryn Trant.

Thankfully, rather than kissing her on the lips this morning, Joff preferred to kiss her nose, afterward remarking that women and machinery didn’t mix. As he pulled away, Sansa started at him, the young woman wondering if the face of this murderer was the last thing Eddard Stark had seen before dying. She noticed then that he was wearing a wool suit with a light coloured waistcoat, an ascot tie and a black top hat.

“I imagine it was quite a shock, but I hope you’ve learned your lesson. Did you have any trouble sleeping because of it?” he enquired.

“As a matter of fact, I did,” Sansa lied. “I had a dream about my father.”

She held her breath, waiting to register any change in her fiancé’s features, but he only whistled and said, “It must have been a nightmare then.”

“We were back in Winterfell,” Sansa carried on, ignoring Joff’s remark. “I was a child again, and happy.”
Joff narrowed his eyes at her last words. He appeared reflective for a moment before warning her in a quiet, calm voice, “I cannot stop you from having nightmares, but you know you are not to mention Winterfell to me… or your father, for that matter.”

Sansa didn’t even hear his threat, for she was concentrating on the thin and strained sound of his voice. *A liar’s voice*, she thought. *A guilty voice.* Quite composed, she pressed her lips together and held her tongue.

“Nonetheless, wasn’t it clever of me to come up with the idea of having Clegane guarding you? You shouldn’t have been out and about at that hour, Sansa, but at least you had the sense to obey and take your escort.”

“Yes, Joff,” she answered, knowing that was what he wanted to hear.

Nodding at her in approval, her betrothed put a protective arm around her, and said, “I wish I could be the one spending the day with you, sweetpea, but I already have my hours planned out for the day. Right now I’m off to the barber, and then I’m aiming to go down to the squash courts and play a game or two. Afterwards I’m trying out the Turkish bath, and then it’s lunch with that politician, Washington Dodge. I’m planning to take a few laps in the pool and try the gymnasium as well before it’s time to get ready for dinner. By Jove, this ship has everything one could think of! Oh, but dear, don’t look so sad! Mr. Andrews is going to give us all a tour of the ship tomorrow after church!”

Sansa stared at Joff with incredulity, all the while wishing she could tell him to get rid off that ridiculous thin moustache while he visited the barber. Sliding his hands up and down her arms in a poor attempt at being soothing, Joffrey continued, “It’s a pity you can’t join Mother at her game of shuffleboard, but she told me what happened with her friends yesterday and I hope that this day with our dog teaches you a lesson. You’re expected to have lunch with her though, so don’t be late. But for now just wait for the Hound until he reports for duty. He’s running late, but I’m sure he’ll be here in a moment or two… I love you.”

He had told her those three words many times over the past year, and they had never stirred any feeling in her breast, but now an emotion so powerful that it almost left her shaking took hold of her, and Sansa longed to slap the smile off Joffrey’s face. But Sandor’s advice was too strongly rooted in her mind by now for her to forget herself.

*He wants me to smile and smell sweet and be his lady love. He wants to hear me recite all the pretty little words I was taught at school. He wants me to love him… and fear him.*
If she slapped him right here and now she would be breaking the promise she had made to Sandor last night. *If I say what is really on my mind, Joff will hurt me.* Knowing this, Sansa instead forced the corners of her mouth to rise in a smile as she lied softly, “Me too.”

When he was gone a moment later, Sansa released her breath, marvelling at his lack of understanding. *Am I really that good an actress that he can’t even sense the rage that was threatening to consume me?* Feeling her legs weakening under her, Sansa walked over to one of the divan chairs, sat down, and waited for Sandor to appear.

She was shaken by the strain of being close to Joffrey, knowing what he had done to her father, but at the thought that now she had someone to talk it all over with, Sansa felt vigour and strength coming back to her. Yet as the seconds went by and the prospect of meeting up with Sandor Clegane after everything that they’d been through last night drew nearer, she smoothed down the cloth of her skirt nervously. But Sansa had to confess it was a pleasant sort of nervousness; a sense of expectation that sent her heart beating wildly.

When he finally knocked and opened the door a few minutes later, Sansa stood up quickly, gulping as she did so. At the very sight of him she felt better, for when Sandor’s grey eyes met her blue ones, his mouth twisted into a grin. Sighing in relief brought by the hope that had finally settled in her heart, Sansa smiled back and took the arm he extended to her.
Spoiler alert: I promise that next chapter will be full of SanSan ;D
Sansa and Sandor were walking side by side on boat deck of the gleaming new Titanic in silence. People were reading and talking in steamer chairs, some of whom would glance curiously at them from time to time. Sansa was feeling nervous to the point that, whenever she opened her mouth to speak out the words that kept running through her mind, she would falter, embarrassed.

And worse still, she feared Sandor already knew what was happening to her, but had decided to wait for her to make up her mind. *Just tell him,* Sansa reprimanded herself a dozen times, to no avail. She had been marshaling her courage since meeting him in their stateroom’s living room twenty minutes ago.

As she sighed and cast her gaze out to the sea, a warm ray of sunlight fell on her face, making her look up at the sky. It had been years since she had relished this sensation. Sansa knew she ran the risk of getting freckles, but at the moment that seemed of little consequence. She was more engrossed in the fact that somehow she had finally found her courage.

“Sandor, I- I realized this morning that I hadn´t actually thanked you for pulling me back,” she admitted, blushing even as she stared down at her feet. “I thanked you for listening to me and for lending me your coat and such, but never about trying so hard to keep me from letting go.”

After a short pause he replied in his rasping voice, “I get why it may seem that way to you, but I didn´t save you, Sansa. The decision was up to you, and you made the choice. I don´t think you get just how strong you really are.”

Hearing him calling her by her name, even as he said such nice things about her, sent a pleasant thrill running through her. Glancing up, Sansa found him already staring down at her in deep contemplation. For some reason, the sight of the burns that covered half his face in the morning light soothed her, and before she could stop herself, Sansa enquired curiously, “Would you really have jumped after me?”
Once again, Sandor took a moment to consider her words before answering. But when he did, he growled, “I would’ve gone into a burning building for you, so why not into the North Atlantic?”

Sansa gasped, her eyes widening. The only thing she believed Sandor feared was fire, and thus her first reaction after recovering from her shock, was to feel amazed and pleased and honoured, but then she registered the raw honesty with which he’d spoken, and confusion held sway.

“Thank you,” she repeated, thinking that for the first time in her life those two words had failed to convey the depth of her gratitude.

Sandor’s mouth began to twitch. As always, he was wearing a simple outfit, and he was probably the only man on the deck who didn’t have a hat or a pair of gloves on. Nodding his appreciation, he seemed to relax as he enquired if she had gotten any rest.

Sansa assured him that she had, and even confessed her beautiful dream of being back at Winterfell with her father. Sandor remarked that it was no surprise that she had dreamt of Eddard Stark, however he was relieved to hear she had been able to get some sleep. After a pause he rasped, “If you want to talk about anything else that’s on your mind, just do so, bird.”

Considering for a moment, Sansa decided against elaborating any further about her problems any further at the moment. Last night had been enough for the present. Passing her pretty little purse from her right hand to her left, she wondered aloud, “Did you manage to get some rest too?”

“Not much,” he replied shortly, almost carelessly, as he stared at the people who were walking all about them, the man taking in every detail and face and movement.

Sansa stared at him with a frown. Sandor Clegane had always been able to read her easily, as if her face were an open book, but right now she was finding out that he wasn’t as difficult to figure out as she had once thought. The contempt in his voice left her in no doubt that having to share a room with Joffrey, especially after last night, was a nightly ordeal for him.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she told him sincerely.

Sandor took one look at her face and snorted. Sighing deeply, he elaborated on his answer, “I don’t know how I managed to keep myself from getting drunk last night, or from murdering that piece of shit in his sleep. But at first light I was out of the room. Couldn’t get far away enough from him.”
“I know,” Sansa assured him, stepping closer to him. “I don´t know myself how I managed to remain calm and composed when I saw him this morning… That´s why you were late to meet me, wasn´t it? You didn´t want to encounter him in the living room?”

Shrugging, Sandor nodded, admitting that he had been stalling nearby until he deemed it safe enough. As a new consideration crossed her mind, Sansa bit her lip again, suddenly worried.

“Sandor, I don´t want you to lose your job over my outburst,” she told him, growing serious, for the prospect of what she would do if her friend got fired was terrifying. “Joff is your boss, and if you feel so strongly against him-”

“Don´t worry about me, little bird,” Sandor interrupted, his voice sounding like two wood saws grinding together. “I´ll be all right. It has its perks. This way I can keep an eye on the both of you, and you don´t have to see Trant as much. Let´s just stop talking about that piece of shit for a while. He´s not worth us ruining our morning.”

Sansa winced at his vocabulary, but could see the sense in that. But then a new thought flashed across her mind. He hates the Lannisters just as much as I do, and yet he serves them. But he isn´t their prisoner, like I am. I´m sure the pay is good, but surely he could walk away from them if he really wanted to…

“Sandor,” she told him, oblivious to the nod in recognition that John Jacob Astor and his wife Melanie directed at her as they passed by her. “I don´t want to talk about the Lannisters any more than you do, but I do want to know why do you stay with them when you don´t have to? Why put yourself through the trouble of working for people you despise who are mean, cruel and evil?”

Sandor stopped walking and looked at her strangely, as if weighing how much he should tell her. Then, grimacing, he snarled, “You´re forgetting who I am, little bird. I´m a killer, and I´ve done my share of mean, cruel and evil deeds, I promise you. The world is built by killers, but to all I´m the monster.”

Sansa opened her mouth in a little “o”. Of course she hadn´t forgotten that to the world Sandor Clegane was the fearsome Hound, but despite everything he had ever done, the fact remained that with her he was different. “Maybe it does,” she told him. “But you saved me too. You won´t hurt me.”

The harsh lines of the unburned side of his face softened as he saw the trust she had for him in her eyes, and he vowed in reply, “No, little bird. I won´t ever hurt you.”
The look that passed between them shook Sansa to the core. She was seeing Sandor Clegane as more than her protector and her friend now, but as a person with a past, with hopes and ambitions, imperfections and good traits. And somehow, as the possibility that he stayed with the lions to keep an eye on her occurred to her, Sansa felt selfish for wanting him to stay even if it meant him sacrificing his future for her.

*If he really is my friend, I must want what is best for him.* But how could she even begin to know what was best for him when she practically didn’t know anything about him except for the secret of his burns? She ignored the full extent and nature of most of his work for the Lannisters and the Baratheons.

“Can I ask you something?” she wondered, finally looking away from the sight of his dark grey eyes, walking forward to a pair of empty deck chairs.

As she sat down, Sandor shrugged, pointing out that she already had. Ignoring him, Sansa smoothed her skirt and said, “If you weren’t working for them, what would you like to be doing?”

Sandor seemed startled that she would care to know such a thing. “Why do you want to know that?” he barked, sitting down on the chair beside hers.

“Because I want to get to know you,” Sansa confessed after taking a deep breath. She could feel herself blushing. “It feels as though you know everything about me, whereas you are a complete mystery to me.”

Expecting further opposition, she was pleasantly surprised to hear him wondering what it was that she wanted to know. Growing animated, marvelling at how wonderful it was to be able to feel like this again, Sansa repeated her question.

For some reason he looked uncomfortable, and she realized that maybe there had never been many people in his life that showed an interest in him. *Hopefully he won’t mind me being interested.* He even began shifting about, and the sight of such a big man sitting down on a low deck chair brought a smile to her face. Staring at her, Sandor finally let out a loud breath, as if he was surrendering to her.

“For a long time all I wanted to do was hang around with the lions till I got the chance to kill my brother,” he growled, running a hand through the hair that covered some of his burns. “But now I don’t know… I guess I want to travel. The Middle East and India. Australia and Russia too.”
“Oh my,” Sansa answered, realizing that she wasn’t as surprised as she would have thought by what he had just said. She understood what he had meant about his brother because she knew the secret of his burned face. Surely it must have hurt him even more to know his own brother was the one who burned him, even more than the pain he must have felt as the fire touched his skin. She chose not to concentrate on that at that moment, even though her heart went out to him.

“Sandor, that sounds wonderful! Is there any reason you want to go to those places in particular?”

He shrugged again. “They’re big, so there’s bound to still be some remote places which civilization hasn’t ruined.”

Sansa sat up straighter, her excitement growing with every passing moment. Of course Sandor would like to go off and be a hermit somewhere; live on the road and answer to no man. And it’s not as if he has a wife to forsake after all.

“I’ve wanted to see India ever since reading The Jungle Book and Kim as a little girl,” Sansa shared with Sandor enthusiastically. “And I have longed to visit Russia ever since the occasion some years ago when the Tsar and his family visited the King some years back. Father took me to see them and as I watched them pass by in their beautiful carriages I couldn’t believe it possible that there could be a more handsome royal family than that of Imperial Russia. Of course that led me to read Tolstoy, and I thought there- oh, I’m sorry! I’m running on and on and you were the one who was supposed to be talking! Do - do you like Tolstoy?”

She could have hit herself at her folly. After having managed to have Sandor Clegane open up to her about his wishes and desires, she had to go on about royalty and authors and Tolstoy! But her uneasiness disappeared the moment she caught his eye, for he was smiling down at her with something like fondness.

“I prefer Dostoyevsky, little bird,” he informed her.

“I haven’t read any of his works yet… But you like to read, then?”

Sandor nodded. “I guess I do.”

“What is your favourite book?” she demanded, happy to find that they had two things in common now that didn’t involve being bullied: travelling and reading.
“I don’t have one, but I like Nietzsche and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon,” Sandor told her, his eye boring into her.

Thinking that she liked the way he had spoken those foreign names in his rough voice, a voice as hard as an iron grasp, she wondered if he spoke other languages, Sansa decided to tell him what authors she liked, even though he hadn’t asked her. She mentioned Dickens and Thackeray, Austen and Radcliffe, the Brontë sisters, Mary Shelley and Lord Byron.

Sandor chuckled, a sour sound, part rumble, part a snarl. “You’re supposed to have one favourite author, not a whole damn repertoire of them.”

“What else do you do when you’re not reading?” Sansa wanted to know, giggling herself. Somehow she was finding it enthralling how the simplest questions could reveal to her such a wide range of traits in another person.

“I like boxing, horses, cars and guns,” he rasped down at her. “Cleaning and fixing them, that is.”

Of course, and he most likely has a gun with him right now, Sansa thought, determined not to let that little piece of information ruin the moment. Right now they were not Miss Stark and her guard, the Hound, but Sansa and Sandor, with no worries or cares or need for carrying guns. “That’s nice. Do you manage to clean and fix them during your free time?”

Snorting, Sandor grunted that he hadn’t been able to clean or fix any cars in the past months.

“Oh yes, you were travelling,” Sansa recalled, thinking back upon the year they had spent apart. “Well, at least you were doing something that you liked, in a way. I imagine you must have visited dozens of places.”

“Some, though I spent most of the time in Germany,” he answered, grounding his teeth a moment in frustration.

“Didn’t you liked it?” she wondered, guessing that most of his mysterious errands for the lions were linked to that land.
“It was all right at times,” he said shortly, and then, as if wishing to change the subject, Sandor asked her, “What would you like to be doing, Sansa? Marriage and motherhood, just with a different groom?”

“I know why you would say that,” Sansa confessed. “And in a way it is true. All I ever wanted growing up was to find a husband and have children, and while I want to still believe even to this day that there is a certain magic to all that, I also think that if I had the choice, that is not what I would be doing at the moment.”

Sandor raised his good eyebrow at her, waiting for her to elaborate further. Sansa shot him a furtive glance, weighing on the matter of whether or not she should confess her long-cherished dream to someone other than herself. She had not thought about that in ages…

“Well?”

“I fear to tell you,” she admitted, glancing about nervously, but there was no one close enough to hear. “You’ll only mock me.”

“T’s no hair off my arse what you want to do,” Sandor said, leaning closer. “After all, who am I to judge you? But if you really want to tell me, then I won’t laugh.”

“Well good, because I’m tired of people dismissing my dreams with a chuckle and a pat on the head,” Sansa declared, her heart starting to beat fast at the prospect of confessing her ambition. “You see, when I was a little girl, a famous singer stayed at Winterfell for a fortnight. He even gave me my first singing lesson. When he left, I cried bitter tears. He was the first person to tell me what a good singing voice I had. I’ve had a string of music teachers, even though I always knew I would never do anything about my talent because I was to grow up and be a proper lady with no need for any professional singing… But in the back of my mind I would always play with the idea of singing before a large crowd on a stage… Do you remember when we met at the Opera House? That’s what I would love to be doing right now- singing in Paris.”

As she finished, Sansa let out a sigh of satisfaction at the thought that now there was someone else who knew her secret. This was definitely turning out to be a brilliant, sunny morning. There’s not even a single chill in the air! But as she realized that Sandor wasn’t saying anything, she came back to reality with a twinge.

“You think it’s silly, don’t you?” She asked him, even as she feared his reply, staring at his brooding grey eyes.
“I don’t,” Sandor rasped in answer, looking serious.

Sansa blinked. “Whenever I even began hinting at it to Father or Joff, they would look at me as if my hair was on fire.”

She gasped, realizing what she had just said even as the broad daylight fell on Sandor’s burns. She covered her mouth with her hand, flinching. But Sandor chuckled in amusement, and ignoring her reference to fire, he elaborated further.

“Well, I’d back you up with my life savings in a moment because I know you would succeed in anything you set your mind on… But I don’t think singing in Paris would be a good idea. Or anywhere in Europe, for that matter.”

“Why not?” she contemplated, the girl both confused and pleased at the faith she had heard in his words. No one ever spoke that way about her. At least not to her directly, and she doubted the Lannisters spent their time gushing about her many accomplishments behind her back.

“Because war is coming,” he replied. “I’m not sure how soon, but it is. Things are happening all over the place, and it’s only a matter of time before the ticking bomb goes off. When it does, not many places will be safe from it.”

“Oh.” She was speechless. Of course she had heard there was trouble coming, but in reality she had not paid it much attention, since she going to go live far away in America, but also because Joffrey never liked talking about politics with her.

But Sansa had read the headlines of the papers. She knew there was a war going on between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ottoman Empire. She had cheered along with the rest of Great Britain when Winston Churchill was named the First Lord of the Admiralty. On one of her rare outings she had even overheard some women at a suffragette gathering on the street discussing England pledging it’s alliance to France, an act that had angered the Kaiser.

“I knew things were getting serious when the British War Staff was established at the start of the year,” she acknowledged, with a frown.

Sandor snorted. “That’s old news, Sansa. Last month Germany announced it’s new naval program, which means that the Anglo-German talks on naval forces are damned to fail before long.”
“How awful it is to think that King George and the Kaiser could get into a war when they are first cousins,” she pointed out. She had always been captivated by the fact that Queen Victoria’s descendants ruled the houses of Europe. For some reason she found it fascinating to learn how the monarch were connected to one another.

“You´re forgetting that tsar you´re so fond of, bird,” Sandor snarled. “He is a fool of a ruler. Not only war is coming to Imperial Russia, but a revolution is as sure as hell going to break loose too, and he won´t know how to handle it, mark my words. Last September one of Nicholas’ ministers was murdered right before him at an opera house, and every day there are more strikes… the one thing keeping me from moving to Siberia is the fact that the Bolsheviks are daily growing in number. They’ll take over one day, and then mother Russia will be covered with blood.”

Oh no! Sansa thought, crestfallen. She hated the thought of so much imminent bloodshed. Wasn’t there a safe haven somewhere in the world? Even though she didn´t know anyone who had even met them, as Sandor went on, she felt afraid for the Tsar and his family.

“Please, I don´t want to hear any more about it,” she interrupted. And after considering the matter for a mere moment, she decided to ask, “How do you- is that what you were doing for over a year in Europe? Gathering information for Joff´s grandfather? You could have read it or heard it somewhere I suppose, but something tells me that that was what you were doing.”

She knew she was right before Sandor even answered her. A sudden tautness appeared on his features, and he sat back straight, resting his hands on his legs. Sansa stared at them, admiring how big they were.

“I’d rather not talk about it,” he finally rasped. “Not because I don´t trust you, because I do. But it´s best for you not to know much about all that.”

Sansa nodded in understanding. She didn´t need to hear him say so for her to have her suspicions confirmed anyway. But she still felt uncomfortable at the thought that maybe he had been endangering his life just to gain information. And all because of Tywin Lannister.

She had never met the man, and had no desire to do so. To think that I had to endure his vile daughter and his awful grandson for a year without Sandor to help me makes me want to slap him the next time I see him… Well, she wouldn´t have to wait long for that. Joff had informed her last night at dinner that the Great Lion had sent a telegram to inform them that he would be arriving at New York ahead of them.
And afterwards he would accompany them to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for the wedding before returning to Casterly Rock, his home in California. Sansa had longed for the day that would happen because it would mean that Cersei would be going away for a time; but now, come to think about it, maybe Sandor would have to go back with them as well.

*After all, he works for both Joff and Mr. Lannister.* She longed to ask Sandor if he thought this was possible, but at the moment she feared to hear the answer too much to dare. It will only dampen her spirit, and Sansa didn’t want anything to ruin the first day she had felt really happy in over a year. Deciding to brood upon that matter later, she searched for another topic of conversation, and almost instantly she found one.

“How old are you, Sandor?” she enquired, curiously.

“How old do you want to know my age for, little bird?” he barked, narrowing his eyes at her in suspicion.

“Oh come on, Sandor,” she pleaded eagerly, shifting closer to him. The movement made her knee bump against his long legs. Forcing herself not to blush at such close proximity, Sansa went on. “I’ll tell you how old I am if you do!”

“I already know that, bird,” he pointed out.

Reading her frustration clearly in her features, Sandor threw back his head and laughed. The sound so startled Sansa that for a brief moment she could only gape at him, thinking that his laughter sounded like iron scraping over stone. *It’s so nice to know he is still able to laugh,* she could not help but think, growing excited again. *It makes him seem less jaded about life.* Now more than ever, she was unwilling let him get away without answering her.

“Oh come on, Sandor, please tell me. I have a good reason for wanting to know, I promise,” she chirped, tittering along with him.

“I’m thirty four,” he rasped. “Happy?”

Sansa shook her head, thinking that he looked a little older than that. “Not quite. Now I want you to tell me what you have been up to these past three decades. And don’t hold back anything! Except for lunch, which I must have with Cersei, we have all day to talk, and once you are done, I plan to tell you anything about me that you care to know.”
Hours later, (Sansa could not be certain how long it had been), after covering miles of the ship’s decks and enclosed promenades, she was walking on the aft side of the Titanic, still conversing intently with Sandor. They passed people lounging on deck chairs as the clear and fair morning turned into midday light, while stewards scurried over to serve them tea or hot cocoa.

But neither of them perceived much of it. They were aboard the most luxurious ship in history, but the world had ceased to exist for them. Learning as much as they cared to share with each other about their past lives had been a thrilling new experience. For the first time in her life Sansa felt keenly connected to another human being.

Not even with her girlfriends back at school, or with Joffrey in the early days of their acquaintances could she recall being so at ease in the company of another person. With him, there was no need to live up to the expectations her friends anticipated of her, and nor was there any room for Sansa to constantly be trying to be in her best behaviour to impress Sandor, the way she had once felt compelled to do with Joff. They were repaying each other’s honesty with truth.

She had simply been enjoying herself, marvelling at how easy and pleasant it was to talk to Sandor, and then somewhere along the way she had suddenly known with almost utter certainty what he was thinking and feeling. It had begun wanting to reciprocate the same blessed feeling of being understood that he had made her feel as she poured out her troubles and shifted some of their heavy weight onto his strong broad shoulders, but now she found that conversing with him was a very thrilling affair in its own right.

Sandor not only encouraged her to speak her mind, but also challenged her arguments and made her question her beliefs and ascertain their worth. Sansa’s mind had hungered for such stimulation, and she hadn’t even been aware of it.

Sandor had spoken about how his mother had died giving birth to him, and his father had neglected him, not seeming to care much that his oldest son was growing up to be a horrible boy who took pleasure in terrorizing others and inflicting pain on animals. Sandor had grown up in an entirely male dominated world, for even his eldest and only sister, whom he barely remembered, had died when he was four.

He told Sansa about the way Gregor Clegane had staged his father’s death to look like an accident, and how he had run away from the family’s farm to San Francisco where he offered his services to Tywin Lannister. He had been twelve years old, which meant that he had spent the last twenty years serving the lions. Sandor didn’t elaborate much on what sort of work he had to do, but Sansa
had a pretty good idea of what it entailed.

But he did inform her that he had been all over the United Sates due to his work, and whenever he got a rare holiday or a weekend free, he would go to Mexico or Canada, as far away from them as he could get, but not too far to make him lose track of his eldest brother’s doings.

When Uncle Robert had decided to take his family Europe for an extended period of time, Mr. Lannister had sent Sandor to work for them. A job he hated, not only because of Joffrey and his daily interactions with people like Cersei, Meryn Trant and Boros Blount, but also because it placed him half a world away from his brother. Sandor had dreamt of the day he would be able to avenge himself and kill Gregor, but life had cheated him of his wish...

In return, Sansa told Sandor all about growing up in Winterfell and the pain of losing her mother. She confided in him everything she could recall about her childhood, from the idyllic manner she had found it while growing up, to how frustrated it had made her at one point to be buried in the country away from the excitement of society. She spoke of her time spent in boarding school in France and of how much fun she’d had there, even though she found herself missing her father more and more as time went on.

Sansa told him about the friends she had made at Mademoiselle Mordane’s Academy, as well as confessed which classes she had preferred and in which lessons she had had the hardest time learning. She informed him of how beautiful she had found Paris around the time she had met him and the lions, and of what she and her father had done once the Baratheons left them at Winterfell, after their first and only visit to her family home.

She admitted how and when her perception of Joff had begun to change, and how she had spent her days after her betrothed had left her alone in the care of his mother, shut away in their London manor, after her father died and Sandor had been sent to Europe on Tywin Lannister’s business.

But Sansa knew that no matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t get to know each other to perfection in the matter of hours… not even if it felt like they indeed had done so. But they had to try; Titanic would be in New York on Wednesday morning, which meant that they had less than four days to get fully acquainted with the other before their situations changed, and Sansa was once again shut inside her captor’s cage, and Sandor’s duty of escorting her about the cruise liner ended. And if the gossip going about the ship is true and we actually manage to speed up the journey so we can arrive on Tuesday night, we will have even less time to be together like this.

As she walked on Sandor’s right, with his burns facing her, Sansa caught sight of some stewardesses casting frightened, furtive glances at him. Since meeting him at the Opera Garnier at the age of 14, Sansa had rarely been in Sandor’s presence without someone who was not either a Lannister or someone working for them.
Ever since she boarded the vessel, Sansa had found herself his company with others once more. While she had not really noticed it before (because at first she had been too immersed in her own personal sorrows to care what was going on about her, and today she had been too engrossed in her conversation with Sandor), Sansa detected the way people seemed truly frightened of him, and seemed to resent his presence in first class. At one time, he had scared her once too, but that did not prevent Sansa from feeling as if she highly disliked everyone around them.

She discerned Sandor was conscious of the reason behind her anger, but he seemed more amused by her reaction than by the stewardesses’ conduct. It bewildered her.

“There you mind it?” she could not help herself from asking after a pause.

He considered the question before rasping, “Not really… I did once, but not anymore… But you look at my face now, little bird. How do you like it?”

They had stopped walking. As Sansa turned to gaze up at Sandor about to respond, she found him grinning down wickedly at her. She could not help but smile back, but as her own grin widened, a steward interrupted them, inquiring if Sansa would like for some tea or other refreshment. As she shook her head, she noticed that Sandor was staring at something behind her.

“Look,” he nodded, once the man was gone. “Your friends from the dock back in England.”

Sansa swirled around, and as her eyes caught sight of who had attracted Sandor’s attention, her face lit up. Right before her was the couple she had seen in Southampton. The man with the big wooden movie camera was cranking it and once again, the woman was posing stiffly, standing at the rail.

Daringly, Sansa reached out for Sandor’s hand, and pulling him along the deck, they joined the couple just as the man exclaimed, “You’re sad, Mary! You’ve just left your lover on the shore. You may never see him again. Try to be sadder, darling.”

Unable to control herself, Sansa let go of Sandor’s hand and entered the shot, striking a theatrical pose at the rail next to Mary, who burst out laughing at her sudden appearance. The man grinned at Sansa and began yelling instructions, gesturing eagerly. She knew it was most unladylike of her, but she couldn’t stop laughing. For just a little while she wanted to be gay and childish and forget who she was.

As Sansa posed tragically, raising the back of her hand to her forehead, she met Sandor’s eyes as he
cast a long shadow on the sunny promenade. The light she saw in them encouraged her to whirl about, doing any reckless dance move that came to her mind. After a couple of minutes the man asked her if she would like to try cranking the camera, and nodding excitedly, Sansa did, instructing them to romantically gaze off into the horizon.

When she was done Sandor stepped forward and laid his hand on her arm, walking away from the couple as soon as she had thanked them for their kindness. She was going to reprimand him for not letting her introduce herself to them, but was distracted by the fact that he was touching her in the same manner as Joff, and yet this was an entirely different situation.

Apart from her fiancé, no man had ever touched her, and the further they walked down the dock, the more Sansa’s heart began racing wildly. Last night he held me in his arms too, and cupped my face more than once. But last night she had not been herself, not like she was now.

When they reached the end of the A-Deck promenade, Sandor stopped, staring down at the forecastle deck. Sansa blushed as she looked at him, wondering if he had sensed her increasing pulse rate. But thankfully it didn’t appear that he had. She quietly joined him on his contemplation of the steerage-designated areas, sanding beside him, her shoulder touching his arm.

Sansa wanted to ask Sandor what he was thinking, but the silence that had fallen between them was very comfortable, and just as with so much else during this day, it was the first time in a long time that she enjoyed the peaceful action of being at ease beside another person with no need for words to be spoken.

“You looked like a moving picture actress back there, little bird,” Sandor rasped long minutes afterward.

“Thank you,” she answered, smiling.

“I saw a man once in the pier of Santa Monica in Los Angeles painting a woman who was posing like you just did.”

As he spoke of that place, Sansa felt her usual contempt for the country where she was to make her new home fading away. She closed her eyes and whispered, “Describe it to me.”

Sandor took a moment before obliging her. And when he did, he snarled, “It’s not much. Everyone just drinks cheap beer and rides the rollercoaster until they throw up. Some people ride horses on
the beach, right in the surf.”

All of it sounded absolutely marvelous to Sansa. By keeping her eyes closed, she could almost picture it, although her imagination had replaced the beach in Santa Monica with the one in Brighton she had one visited with her father.

“I know you hate lying, Sandor,” Sansa told him, opening her eyes so she could look at his features. “But say we’ll go to that pier some day, even if we only ever just talk about it.”

“Only if you promise to ride like a real cowboy, little bird,” he barked, his mouth twitching. “None of that side-saddle stuff.”

“You mean with one leg on each side?” Sansa wondered, scandalized. And then, as an afterthought, she asked, “Can you show me?”

“If you like.”

“I think I would,” she assured him, smiling up at him.

She turned her gaze to the horizon, looking ahead across the Atlantic, staring into the glistening sunlight. Just as she began struggling very hard to keep her tears at bay at the thought that such a trip could never happen because life was not that simple, she suddenly saw Sandor spit into the ocean beside her. With her mouth hanging agape in surprise, Sansa blinked.

Sandor laughed aloud. “What? Didn’t they teach you that in finishing school?”

“You know they didn’t,” she said confidently, wondering if she should be amused or appalled. The former was winning, and yet she blushed as she caught the eye of passerby appalled at her companion’s behavior.

“Here, it’s easy. Watch closely,” he instructed, spitting again, not caring one bit that they were being observed.

Sansa screwed up her mouth in distaste, shaking her head, and stated, her voice soft and precise,
“No, thank you.”

But Sandor only laughed harder, and the sound of his voice warmed Sansa more than the sunlight on her face earlier this morning. She watched him smoothly drawing his metal cigarette case from his jacket and snapping it open, taking three out. One he placed behind his ear for later, but the other two she could see were meant for them to smoke right now.

Sansa paused, considering carefully for a moment if she should accept it. If word reached the lions that she had been smoking with the Hound on the deck, they would be furious. But then again, it might be that they may never hear of it…

A moment later, Sandor was lighting up her cigarette.
Chapter Notes

- Thank you to my great awesome friend and supportive clever beta thefeatherofhope for all her help with this fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She was hurrying away from the reception room on D-Deck, for once unguarded. How ironic that not a day ago she would have welcomed such freedom, and now that she had achieved it, all she wanted was to go in search of her guard. Sansa had eaten her lunch as quick as she could manage while still looking like a well-brought up lady, eager to leave the side of Cersei and the Countess of Rothes.

All through lunch a plan had been forming in her mind, which left her little attention to spare to her companions´ table conversation. In any case, she was glad that her growing excitement had kept her from paying the women much attention, for they had been discussing a matter that was an uncomfortable subject for Sansa.

“But the purpose of university is to find a suitable husband. Sansa has already done that, and I doubt it will be any different for my Myrcella,” Cersei had been telling the Countess, as Sansa silently marvelled at how different this day was turning out to be in comparison with the previous three days she´d spent aboard the Titanic.

“I´m sure she will be a great success when she comes out into society,” the wife of the 19th Earl of Rothes assured Mrs. Baratheon, turning to Sansa. “How lucky you are to have saved yourself such troubles, child!”

Sansa didn´t say anything in reply, for the meaning behind the words irked her. In truth, as she was growing up she had never really cared much about the possibility of going to college, but now that the option was no longer possible, it bothered her to know she would never be able to study even if she wanted to. So settling for an absent minded smile, Sansa continued eating, not caring at all that her distraction was probably earning her Cersei´s everlasting disdain.

It was strange, but she felt as if she had found a new meaning to life, and Sansa felt stronger for it, maybe even to the point of recklessness. It´s not wise to not think things through, she knew, but if there were any future consequences to her current actions, she felt prepared to face them. Befriending Sandor Clegane was making her forget her fate, which was strange since her situation remained practically the same.
But today Sansa felt more concerned about the present than the future. After Sandor had given her a cigarette, she had become aware that a man down in poop deck had been waving at Sandor. It’s him, Sansa had known at once, recognizing the man she had spied her friend talking to the day before yesterday moments before Joff confronted her for being rude to Mr. Bruce Ismay at the Palm Court restaurant.

She had turned quickly to look at Sandor, who nodded at the man, and before she could even begin to consider that it would be impertinent, she was enquiring, “Who is that man from steerage, Sandor? I saw him with you on Thursday.”

Frowning, Sandor had taken a few moments to reply, as if considering how much he should tell her. Finally he had rasped, “He’s a friend. I’ve been meeting him down in Third Class every day as I wait for you to have lunch.”

“I would like to meet him if he is a friend of yours,” Sansa had stated quickly, but he had only barked that he didn’t think it would be wise.

She had been disappointed at first, but while she had lunch the idea of finishing early so she could go in search for Sandor so she could possibly meet his friend had taken hold of her, and that’s where she was heading to right now. Sansa suspected Sandor wouldn’t like it one bit, but her curiosity drove that certainty to the back of her mind, along with the fact that this was better than just waiting with Cersei for him to appear so he could escort her somewhere far away from her mother-in-law.

_I’m drunk with joie de vivre!_ Sansa thought eagerly, walking with a purpose down B-Deck. Fleetingly hoping that she was both in the right direction, and that she would not be missing Sandor in case he decided to go looking for her earlier, she unlatched the gate to go down into third class, glancing over her shoulder to make sure no one was noticing her.

As she went down the stairs she saw the steerage men on the deck stop what they were doing so they could stare at her. Hoping they would keep their distance, Sansa reached the third class general room sooner than she would have thought. Gazing around her, she knew that this was the social centre of steerage life. It was stark by comparison to the opulence of First Class, though here a cacophony of sounds made it a loud, boisterous place.

There were mothers with babies, children running between the benches yelling in several languages and being scolded in several more. There were old women yelling, men playing chess, girls doing needlepoint and reading dime novels. There was even a man noodling around the upright piano and another noodling around it. Three boys, shrieking and shouting, were scrambling around chasing a
rat under the benches, trying to kill it with a shoe and causing general havoc.

It took all of Sansa´s will not to shriek when she caught sight of the animal scurrying away near her feet. A hush fell as she clutched her little purse closer to her, and almost all activity in the room stopped. She couldn´t recall ever feeling as self-conscious as she saw the steerage passengers openly stare at her, some with resentment, and others with awe.

Gulping, her eyes fell on the group closest to her. There was a good-looking young man who reminded her of Joffrey playing with a little girl on his knee. Both of them were drawing something in a sketchbook. But there was also an Irish man beside them who stopped talking when he caught Sansa´s eye, and a dark haired man struggling to have a conversation with a pretty fair girl dressed in a high collared blouse and a long skirt. The good-looking boy raised his head at that moment, and when he saw Sansa, his mouth fell open.

Where is Sandor? She thought anxiously, staring about her with uncertainty. Unwilling to belief that he was not here, Sansa decided to slip in among the crowd, murmuring greetings as she worked her way to the back of the room, trying to appear all grown up and unconcerned even as she realized that where he here, he would have definitely spotted her by now.

Her distress was quickly forgotten when she saw that Sandor´s friend was making his way towards her, and now that he was approaching her, Sansa could see that though he was old, he looked strong. He stood straight and tall, and moved with the vigor of a man in the prime of his years. As he stopped before her and took of his hat for her, Sansa quickly noticed his shabby shirt and britches before finally taking in the details of his features.

His was not a gentle, kind face. His head was large and square, his eyes shrewd, his nose veined and red, and his scalp was as stubbly as his heavy jaw. The effect ought to have intimidated her, but something in his eyes made her feel at ease. Taking a deep breath and standing a little straighter, she said, “Hello, I- I am looking for Mr. Sandor Clegane. I´m-”

“You´re Miss Sansa Stark,” the stranger interrupted with a fierce foreign voice and a smile.

Sansa was as pleased as she was surprised. Did Sandor spent the past hour talking about me to his friend? Trying to ignore the thrill that thought gave her, she exclaimed, “Why yes, I am! I’m sorry, but well, I’ve seen you with Mr. Clegane before and he told me that he would be with you around this time, so I thought- well, he is sort of my protector, you see. And I- well, I finished lunch early and decided to- I thought that I should come looking…”

Her voice trailed away in embarrassment. Somehow the reasoning behind her actions sounded silly
once she had to explain them to someone else. There was no need for her to further explain herself, for Sandor’s friend seemed to understand. Nodding, he remarked, “I’m very pleased to meet you, Miss Stark. I’m Dr. Elbert Broder, Mr. Clegane’s friend. He’s talked a lot about you.”

She could not help herself and smiled, wishing she could reply that Sandor had also mentioned Dr. Broder to her as well, Sansa confessed that she was glad to hear Mr. Clegane had a friend.

“But you’re his friend too, aren’t you?” the foreigner inquired, raising a puzzled eyebrow.

“Yes, I am,” she assured him, her smile widening.

“Well, I am privileged to be considered one of his friends, and to share such honour with you.”

Registering the affection for Sandor that his friend’s voice betrayed, Sansa felt content with her decision to have come to third class, even as she asked the doctor about the whereabouts of their mutual friend.

“He went to the lavatory, but he’s coming back. Would you like to wait for him here?”

“Yes, I think that would be best.”

Elbert Broder beckoned her to take a seat beside his old suitcase. Accepting, Sansa looked around, glad to see that the tension that had formed about the general room with her sudden appearance was gone. Regretting that she had learned no German in school, Sansa asked him in English if he had known Sandor long.

“Not really. I met him six months ago in my hometown in Germany.”

“And do you have family in America?”

“Yes, I’m going to live with my sister’s son in Savannah.”

“I’m sure the people of Savannah are very lucky to be receiving your services. I think that being a
doctor is one of the noblest callings,” Sansa commented.

Looking embarrassed, Dr. Broder answered, “My lady is too kind, but I have not found it so all the time. When a woman dies or a little child, those are the cruellest memories. I shall spare you the details of such horrors, but… Miss Stark, can I be frank with you?”

A little taken aback by the seriousness in the man’s tone, Sansa nodded.

“I’m very glad that we were able to meet because I want to talk with you about Mr. Clegane.”

Taken aback by the concern in Broder’s voice, Sansa nodded, encouraging him to go on.

“I saved his life on the night we met.”

Oh God! She thought, growing pale as she imagined the horrors Sandor had to endure by working for the Lannisters. Anxiously, she asked him what had happened, her concern evident on her face and in her voice.

“He had been in a fight, but thankfully things turned out all right for him in the end. When I first met him he was a bitter, tormented soul, a broken man who drank to drown his pain in a sea of wine. He did not love, nor was he loved himself. It was hate against some secret sorrow that drove him. He reminded me of that verse from the Bible: He who loves not abide in death.”

Sansa shuddered, conscious of what that secret sorrow had been, and afraid of how close Sandor had been to dying. Where other men dreamed of love, wealth or glory, Sandor had dreamed for decades only of killing his brother. That had been the bread that nourished him, the fuel that kept his fires burning.

The hope of spilling Gregor Clegane’s blood was all he had lived for, but that had been taken from him when the Spaniard Oberyn Martell poisoned his brother. Poor Sandor! It must be horrible to believe that your mission in life will never come to pass… If only she could find a way to help him as much as he was helping her.

“But I am glad to see that he has changed of late,” Dr. Elbert Broder assured her. “Not much, for he is still a sinner who mocks both God and me, does not seek forgiveness for his sins, and finds no pride in his work, but at least he does not drink the way he used to now. I keep telling him that it is
not too late for him, but he does not believe me. But I am certain that God made me save his life for a reason.”

“I agree with you,” Sansa said passionately. There is a God, and there are true men as well. “And I believe in Sandor. Why, I-”

She would have continued had a polite nervous cough behind her not interrupted her. Turning around she saw that the handsome boy she’d seen earlier and his Irish friend were standing before her. It was quite evident by the stares they were exchanging with Dr. Broder that they wanted to be introduced to her. Momentarily distracted from the conversation about Sandor, Sansa and the German physician had no choice but to turn their attention to the newcomers clad in working class attire.

“Miss Stark, allow me to introduce to you some of my friends. These are Mr. Tommy Ryan and Mr. Jack Dawson,” the doctor informed her, clearly uncomfortable. “Boys, this is Miss Sansa Stark.”

The scowl on the former’s face disappeared as he nodded at her, a smile taking its place. Sansa glanced at the Irishman curiously. He is not truly handsome, she thought, but something about him draws the eye. Still, it was Jack Dawson whom she could not stop herself from looking at. His physical resemblance to Joff was uncanny. She extended her hand in greeting, and Jack took it, kissing the back of her fingers.

“I saw that in a nickelodeon once, and I always wanted to do it,” he admitted in an American accent. “Tony and I are sorry for barging in on you like this Miss Sansa, but you see, I was watching you talk with good old Broder here, and well, I made this for you.”

He gave her one of the papers from his sketchbook, and Sansa was surprised to see a beautifully rendition of her in black crayon. The artist had captured her perfectly in a mere matter of minutes; her face was luminous and alive, a celebration of the human condition.

“Thank you, Mr. Dawson,” Sansa told him politely. It was only courteous to show some interest in his work after he had drawn a portrait of her, and a lady must never forget her courtesies “You have a gift. This is quite good. It really is!”

“They didn’t think too much of them in Paris, but I’m glad you liked it,” the Bohemian artist informed her with modesty.
Thinking that he had talent enough to enter the Royal College of the Arts, and wondering if Sandor was ever going to come back from the lavatory, even as she knew in the back of her mind that it was better to show him this drawing later, Sansa folded it up and put it inside her little pretty purse, commenting, “And are you and Mr. Ryan looking forward to arriving in America?”

“Well, it’s a big world, and I want to see it all before I go,” Tommy Ryan told them, watching Sansa. “My father was always talking about going to see the ocean. He died in the town he was born in, and never did see it. You can’t wait around because you never know what hand you’re going to get dealt next… See Miss Stark, my folks died when I was fifteen, and I’ve been on the road since. Something like that teaches you to take life as it comes at you. To make each day count. For example, Jack here and I won our tickets in a lucky hand of poker—”

“A very lucky hand,” Jack agreed, glancing at Sansa as well. Despite herself she was curious about this American. “And now we’re going home to the land of the free and the home of the real hot-dogs on no other ship but the Titanic! We’re riding in high style, and for all I know my destiny is to become a millionaire! A week ago I was sleeping under a bridge and today I am inviting a real lady over to a part aboard the greatest ship in the world.”

Knowing whom they were refereeing to, Sansa was startled. “You’re asking me to a party?”

“Yes, tonight in this room. They’re going to be lots of dancing.”

“Boys,” Elbert Broder said in warning, even as he looked around nervously. “I don’t think it would be appropriate.”

Sansa thought she knew why the German doctor seemed preoccupied, but she was feeling flattered and very excited.

“Can I bring a friend?” she enquired.

As Jack and Tommy nodded, Sandor’s sudden rasping snarl made everyone in their little party jump.

“What in seven hells do you think you are doing here?” he demanded as he reached them.

Sansa looked up nervously, unconsciously smoothing down the cloth of her skirt. Never before had
she been more aware of the way he filled a room, even a crowded one such as this. Knowing there was no need for her to lie, she informed Sandor that she had been waiting for him to come back. “I finished lunch early today, and rather than waiting, I decided to come in search for you.”

Throwing murderous looks at Jack and Tommy, Sandor turned his attention to his friend and snarled with a sharpness that took her aback, “Are you a fool or mad?”

“Once she was here I saw no point in sending her back the way she came from, Sandor,” Dr. Broder replied calmly.

“And it was a good thing that I stayed, for Jack and Tommy have just invited us to a party tonight,” Sansa informed Sandor, giving him a small smile.

Stunned, he blinked a couple of times before his mouth started twitching. For a brief moment Sansa was scared he would hit the young men as he took in the meaning of what she had told him, but Dr. Broder stood up quickly, laying a hand on Sandor’s arm and muttering something in his good ear. They’re almost of the same height, Sansa could not help but notice

“Is that the tale, now?” Sandor barked, incredulous. “Well, if these two know what’s good for them, they’ll tuck their tails between their legs and run!”

Sandor was so tall and powerfully made in comparison to them, that the boys didn’t waist a moment in obeying. Embarrassed, Sansa bit her lip, feeling the weight of Sandor’s eyes on her.

“It’s time to go,” he told her.

“Oh but Sandor, I don’t want to,” she pleaded. “Mr. Broder and I-”

“You do not belong in steerage,” he reminded her.

“But-”

“Complain to the White Star Line men who set the rules, Sansa, not me,” he pointed out, motioned her to stand up so they could leave.
Defeated, Sansa bid farewell to Dr. Elder Broder, Tommy and Jack, the latter sketching a bow, hoping she would be able to see him tonight at the party. As Sandor jerked his head towards the staircase that would take them away from the third class general room, Sansa realized that she could not be angry with him for his reaction to her presence in steerage. Not because of his concern for her welfare, but because the suspicion that he had been jealous of Jack and Tommy was growing inside of her.

Leaving a stunned silence behind them, they made their way to the more respectable parts of the Titanic. As soon as they were alone Sansa hurried on to explain that he really couldn’t be mad at her.

“For I only wanted to spend more time with you. Surely- it’s not wrong is it? I- I’m sorry, Sandor,” she ended up mumbling, a little daunted by his stony silence.

“No, you’re not,” Sandor finally rasped, his expression softening slightly.

“No, I’m not,” Sansa admitted, trying miserably to keep herself from smiling.

Sandor snorted and asked her, “What the fuck did you told the Lannister bitch?”

“I told her that I knew you were waiting outside the restaurant and then I asked her to let me go find you so you could escort me to my room for a nap.”

“Don’t provoke her, little bird,” Sandor growled. “And don’t go wandering on your own in Third Class, for fuck’s sake! Some of them could be sick, and others are bound to be traveling under aliases for dangerous reasons, and there you go amongst their midst.”

“Not all of them can be bad,” Sansa retorted. “Your friend was really nice to me, and he really cares for you, Sandor… and so do I.”

Sandor snorted to show her what he thought of her comment. “You two mean to take me under your wing?”

“He told me that he saved your life,” she prompted, ignoring his mocking tone. “What happened?”
Sandor was taken aback for a moment, but he recovered quickly and sighed deeply. He looked irritated, but Sansa wanted answers. He must have seen the determination in her face, for he replied, “I got into a fight in a tavern. I was drunk as a dog, so I couldn’t fight back well enough. That’s all you need to know.”

“So it wasn’t because of some job you were doing for the Lannisters?”

“No. I got drunk because I heard some bad news, but I haven’t felt like getting drunk since then, Sansa. So let’s stop talking about it.”

Trying to tell herself that she was relieved that at least Sandor hadn’t gotten injured because of some job he had been doing for the Lannisters, and knowing he was not going to tell her how badly he had been hurt or what bad news he had learned, Sansa asked him if they could go to the party tonight.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea, little bird,” was her answer. “You’re forgetting the lions.”

“Oh please, please, Sandor! I so want to go! Please let us go!” she exclaimed in a rush. “It’s been so long since I’ve enjoyed going to a dance, and I really want to go to this one with you. You don’t have to dance or anything, but just let us go for a little while. Surely we can come up with a plan to outsmart Joffrey and the others so that they don’t find out about it! If we can’t they I won’t mention the matter ever again.”

“You really want to bloody go?” Sandor asked her with annoyance.

Eagerly hoping that he would not refuse again, the words came tumbling out of Sansa. "Yes, I do! I would like that more than anything.”

Reluctantly, he finally agreed. Smiling broadly so her dimples would appear on her cheeks, Sansa put her hand on Sandor’s arm and thanked him. Thinking it was silly how she was suddenly finding it hard to walk and talk and think all at the same time, Sansa asked him sweetly, “Shouldn’t we go back though and ask at what time we should arrive?”

“No,” he replied, even as she felt the warmth of his body next to hers. “Don’t fret, Sansa. One is never too early or too late for the kind of party you’re making me go to. And anyways, it wouldn’t matter at what time it started because we are only going when we manage to throw the lions off
our backs, and we are only staying for an hour to keep your pretty head from trouble.”

“Do you speak other languages?” she suddenly felt like asking, wishing to distract him from the sight of her scarlet face. And anyways, I’m curious. I’ve been wondering about this since this morning.

They had by now reached the Boat Deck, and were walking by the ship’s first chimney, which little Tommen, who had a passion for ship building, had informed Sansa was actually a storage room, when Sandor rasped, “I know Spanish, and some German, French, and Russian. I tried to learn Italian when I was in Europe.”

Frowning, Sansa whispered, “Sandor, why did you come back? You could have abandoned your work and live off in some country, and I’m sure the lions would never have found you.”

“It wasn’t for the pleasure of looking at their faces, I’ll tell you that,” he snarled. “But I’m glad I did.”

For a reason his words confused her. Sansa wasn’t sure if he was glad that he had come back because he had saved her, or because of something else. She gave him a little smile and said, “You should be happy, Sandor.”

A moment later she was jumping as a bugler suddenly sounded across the deck, announcing the meal call behind them.

“Bloody hells!” Sandor growled. “Why do they insist on always announcing dinner like a damn cavalry charge?”

Blushing, and aware that she had to return to her cabin and get dressed for dinner, Sansa chirped, “Let’s go watch the sunset!”

Sandor sneered at her enthusiasm, but allowed himself to be steered towards the rail, his features softening after her words. Teasing him with yet another smile, she sighed contentedly as he casually leaned against the railing, his arms crossed over his chest. So far today was turning out to be a glorious day that Sansa would treasure forever.
It was just like Tommy Ryan had said earlier when he talked about the importance of making each
day count, Sansa thought as she waited for Trudy to be done with her hair. *Now that Sandor is here
to support me, I can see the beauty behind the Irishman’s words, rather than just wishing for each
day to be over as soon as it has begun.* It didn’t even matter that this new found freedom would
only last for a few days more, for at the moment something else had taken hold of Sansa’s mind.

For the past hours as she got ready for dinner, her thoughts kept turning into a treacherous path:
that of how in less than a day Sansa had come to care for Sandor Clegane more than anyone else in
the world. *I wouldn’t have thought it possible that such deep feelings could develop in so short a
space of time, but they have!* He was a grown man and she was only seventeen, and yet their
relationship felt right. It didn’t even matter what Sandor had done in the past. She knew that in him
she had found the strongest of allies.

It was all very confusing, for the fact remained that her situation had not really changed and still
she felt exuberant. *I want to be the most beautiful young woman aboard Titanic tonight,* she had
decided when she entered her cabin and Trudy asked her what she wanted to wear for dinner.

*I want to dress up for him.* God, what was she doing? This was madness. And yet, if she was
certain of something tonight, then that was the fact that although everyone would think she had
dressed with Joffrey in mind, Sandor would know the truth.

It had taken her two hours to make herself beautiful. Sansa had fretted over what she would wear
for almost half an hour and had finally decided upon the elegant black silk gown with extensive
beading that had a coral satin underdress. The back of the gown was pinned up in different angles
and layers, and it also had quite a drastic train.

She was wearing as well elbow long white gloves, and a modest diamond brooch that would not
distract the attention from the dress’ exquisite detail. The neckline was low but not revealing, and
her hair had been arranged with the help of a hot waving iron into an elaborate bun on the back of
her head secured by a jeweled pin.

Deciding upon her favorite perfume, a sharp sweet fragrance with a hint of lemon under the smell
of flowers, Sansa felt very satisfied with the sight she presented, although she was uncomfortable at
the thought of how sharply she would stand out at the third class party, but there was nothing she
could do to help that, for the very thought of how Sandor would look when he saw her once dinner
was over made her feel as if butterflies were fluttering nervously in her tummy.

She wasn’t even really sure how he felt about her, but the certainty that he had been jealous of
Jack and Tommy had set her mind down its current path, and now she could not help but wonder if
maybe she could be the new meaning in Sandor’s life the way he had suddenly become the center of her existence. At least I think he likes me…

Sandor was not a handsome man, but had it not been for the burns that covered half his face surely he would not have been thought of as ugly. After all he was powerfully built with muscles like a bull, and his voice transmitted danger and excitement… So different from the pretty picture of the perfect knight she had once thought she wanted for herself, a role she had believed Joff fitted to perfection.

But when it came down to it, Sandor was brave, gentle and strong, and those were assets she now valued more than looks or wealth. I like everything about him, she realized. Even all his faults.

How right her father had been when he described to her years ago the man he wanted for her. Not that Sansa believed Sandor Clegane was the man Eddard Stark would’ve had in mind. I don’t even know it myself. I just know he is those things with me and yet I am to marry a monster in a few weeks. Sansa shuddered, forcing herself to stop thinking about her father, or else she would go mad and would be unable to be civil to him.

No, it was much better to think of the party tonight, and of whom she would be going with. Sandor and she had agreed to meet on the A-Deck foyer by the ornate clock after Joff had gone off with the men to the smoking room, and Cersei either retired for the night or chose to stay conversing with the women. In case of the latter Sansa would claim a headache and go meet with Sandor so he could supposedly escort her back to her stateroom.

Sansa was fairly certain that they would avoid detection, but she nonetheless felt quite wicked sneaking away under the Lannister’s noses, defying them with Sandor’s help. I’m supposed to be a good and obedient girl after all. And even if Joffrey were to find out she was not in her room, she very much doubted he would ever dream she was at a steerage dance.

She was full of daring ideas, unwilling to allow her life to be given away to the lions without this sort of rebellious acts. It didn’t even matter that if all went according to plan they would never find out about it, for just to know that Sansa was doing so with Sandor was more than enough for her.

Remembering that Joff was waiting for her in the living room, Sansa reminded herself to keep a calm, stoic behavior if she really wanted this night to be perfect and for the man she loathed not to ruin it. So lifting her head high, she opened the door of her bedroom and crossed Sandor and Joff’s room, where Meryn Trant was cleaning up, before stepping into the living room.

The moment he caught sight of her, her betrothed swelled with pride. She took his appearance
briefly, noticing that he had not removed his silly moustache. But his hair was combed backwards and he was wearing a dress coat and an arrogant, devilish smile that filled her arms with goose bumps.

“Good God, you look ravishing, sweet pea!” he exclaimed, undressing her as he spoke, making her feel as if something dead were slithering over her skin.

Sansa wrinkled her brow aware, hating the possibility that Joff thought she had dressed up for him. “It is good of you to say so,” she managed to answer after a pause.

“Here.”

He calls me as if he were calling a dog, she thought, obeying even as the way he contentedly watched her made her squirm. She pressed her lips together, lowered her gaze, and pretended not to notice. When she reached him he slid an arm around behind her and kissed her on the neck, smelling her briefly. Longing to be able to order him never to touch her again, Sansa instead held her tongue, recalling Sandor’s face as he grinned down at her once she had thanked him for agreeing to take her to the party.

After a couple of moments Sansa tried to step back, but Joff only pulled her into his arms. Feebly she tried to squirm as memories of the past years between them threatened to overcome her newfound happiness, and in the end she only succeeded in pressing herself more tightly against her fiancé. Joffrey caught her face between his hands, and then his mouth was on her, swallowing her words, kissing her on the lips for a long time.

When she manage to turn her face away and wrench free, he pointed out, his green gaze glittering with amusement, “You look bright-eyed tonight, sweet pea.”

“Yes, Joffrey,” she whispered hoarsely.

She could feel herself blushing as he put his arms around her, and said, “Mother told me you were once again rude at lunch.”

Sansa had nothing to say to that, but an idea came to her suddenly, and it seemed so right that she blurted it out at once, aware that Joff would be pleased to hear it.
“Yes, I´m sorry, but you know I haven´t been myself lately. But I hope you had a good day, Joff. You look very handsome after your trip to the barber. Tell me about it.”

She wondered at how calmly she had spoken such lies. Maybe the fact that Sandor´s grin was passing through her mind as she said them had helped her. Sansa´s fiancé reflected a moment, as if considering whether or not she was up to something, before smiling down at her and saying, “I did, love. I would ask you about your day, but I´m sure there can be nothing to tell. Help me with my tie and cufflinks while I tell you all about it… There´s a good sport!”

Staring at his chest, drawing his voice out as she occasionally nodded to feign attention even as she felt an utter fool for pleasing him like this, Sansa raised her hands to Joff´s bow tie, feeling as if something dead were slithering over her skin. If only the man before her could be Sandor…

Chapter End Notes

Soo... I couldn´t waste the chance to include Jack in the story hehe! Hope you all like his appearance :D
The wind blew cold and lonely. Sandor had been smoking as he walked along the deck, staring at the purple sky shot with orange in the west, when strains of classic music reached him. With a frown, he tossed the butt of the cigarette out unto the sea and reached the entrance to First Class, where a young steward nervously bowed and opened the door for him.

“G-good evening, s-sir,” the boy stammered.

“Don´t call me sir,” he rasped with bored disdain, not even caring to glance in the lad´s direction.

This idiot was just the first one of the night. Everyone aboard this ship were bloody cowards, from First Class right down to steerage. None but two people aboard would look straight at his face, at least not for long. Not that Sandor was bothered by it, since no sooner had he taken two steps away from the steward that he had forgotten the matter, even though all the rich puffed up persons around him were behaving in a similar way, strongly aware of his presence yet pretending to ignore it.

The only thing that they respected was money, and since he didn´t have much by their standards, and was scarred to boot, it was in moments such as these that the contrast between him and the upper class was sharpest. But tonight Sandor Clegane had more important matters on his mind than the fact that he was being the subject of furtive glances by the owners of a wealth that combined would be more than one hundred million dollars.

He glanced around, the splendour of the place spreading out before him. Overhead was the enormous glass dome of wrought iron to admit natural light, with a crystal chandelier at its centre, glinting, it´s light playing across the interior upper landing and the First Class Grand Staircase. If he had to choose, then this was the epitome of the opulent naval architecture of the time, sweeping down six stories of the ship, all the way to E-Deck. Even though they didn´t look that much alike, Sandor found himself remembering the night he had met the little bird back at the Opera House in Paris, right by the Grand Staircase.
His lip twitching slightly, he walked towards the back of the foyer and leaned against a wall next to a gold-plated light fixture, his arms crossed over his chest, waiting. And soon enough a large crowd was descending down to dinner before him, all of them dressed up in their best.

The women were wearing floor length dresses, feathers in their hair, all covered in jewels. As to the men, they were all in evening dress but for him. *I wouldn’t be caught dead in a penguin suit. I’d look like a bloody pallbearer.* Some five minutes later, as Sandor stared at the large carved wooden panel that contained a clock whose face was flanked by the figures of Honour and Glory Crowning Time located at the uppermost landing of the Great Stairway, the Lannister party finally arrived.

He saw Joff come down the stairs first, with his mother on his arm. Neither of them saw him. And just behind them was Sansa, the sole reason why he was standing in the outskirts of the foyer in the first place. She was a vision in pink and black in a low cut dress that showed off her white neck and shoulders, her arms covered in white gloves that came well above her elbows. Sandor actually stopped breathing for a moment, hypnotized by her beauty.

In all its majesty, the Titanic could not impress him the way she did. She just shone amidst the swirling throng, and it was almost as if she was floating across the floor. Looking as delicate as a queen, Sandor could not help but compare her to some vision as she went down the stairs with a smile, biding everyone she passed by a good evening. She was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen, and it ought to have seemed impossible that he had spent this day getting to know who she really was as a person, but somehow it didn’t.

It felt right to know that of all the passengers aboard the ship- out of all the people in the world- Sansa was the only one who truly knew him in return. *She was the first person to acknowledge that what Gregor did to me was wrong. She was the first person who didn’t see me as a dog...* They had agreed to meet right here later once dinner was over, and yet, the fact that the little bird seemed to feel the weight of his eyes on her even though she had no idea he was in the room seemed like the most natural thing in the world.

There was something between them now, and had it not been for the fact that he was still caught off guard by the sight she presented tonight, Sandor would have found it frustrating to have to keep his distance and pretend as if she meant nothing to him. When their eyes met, he nodded a perfunctory discrete greeting, which she returned with a blazing grin; a smile just for him. And it was in that moment that Sandor Clegane knew he was really fucked up.

He had been heavily suspecting it all day- or if truth be told, maybe he had fought this certainty for the last couple of years, but in either case, it had taken time and the circumstances surrounding them to reach this point, and Sansa’s smile just now decided his fate. *This is it, nothing else matters. There’s nothing to wait for anymore.* As soon as they left the steerage party he had to act.
Sandor hadn’t returned her smile, but he never broke eye contact while the little bird followed Joffrey and Cersei as they made their way down to the dinning room below. For as long as she could she kept glancing back, apparently unable to stop herself from looking at him, until finally she disappeared from his sight. Letting out a long, heavy breath, he tried to remain calm, even as hundreds of thoughts flashed through his mind.

Today had been the best day of his life, and now everything he had ever believed in had changed. He remembered the sound of Sansa’s laughter, and he smirked at the thought that even though he had spent months without hearing it in the past, today the little bird had laughed so much that surely even if he didn’t hear that sweet music again, the memory of today would stay with him till the day he died.

It was as if her laughter had brought him back to life. *Fuck, there’s no more point in denying it.* Without her nothing made sense. He had always been good at knowing what people were, and yet Sansa Stark had always managed to surprise him. He had tried so hard to keep her at a distance when they’d first met, and over the years he’d tried to keep her from becoming important to him. *And yet here we are now.*

Sandor breathed deeply, recalling that he had to keep calm and a clear head, because no matter how sure he was that his new-formed plan would work out somehow, he would still be putting the little bird’s life at risk. He knew better than anyone the power behind the Baratheon steel and Lannister gold, but there was a chance for success, and he had to take it. But now that he had someone to look after, he could not afford any mistakes.

*Getting away from the lions won’t be hard. It’s getting out of New York without getting recognized that’s going to present a problem.* But Sandor was going to do everything in his power to keep her away from them. And yet, there was the matter of them not having that much money. Sandor didn’t mind that he was going to have to work to earn their living soon enough, but he did resent the fact that he would be unable to withdraw from a bank the money he had been saving for decades.

*If only there was a way I could do it without giving our location away to the bloody Lannisters I would do it for the little bird’s sake.* But there wasn’t. Still, Sandor knew that the more money they had, the more comfortable a life he could give her. Not that he thought he could ever offer her anything like the life she was accustomed to, but at least he wasn’t going to force her to do anything against her will, or suffocate her. *She will be ruined in the eyes of society the moment she runs away with me, but if she stays in this world of overwhelming opulence she will die.*

Seven hells, he would rather hurt himself if it came to choosing between dying and being a new cause of misery for her. *I couldn’t bear to be the one to bring back pain into her eyes.* The burnt corner of his mouth twitched and twitched again as he thought of it all.
I reckon I’m different because of her too though. But it wasn’t out of a sense of paying a debt that Sandor wanted to help her out, but rather because he was deeply thankful to her for the same reasons she was to him: the little bird had listened and talked to him. Sansa’s compassion had overwhelmed him, Sandor was forced to admit.

He wasn’t sure that even by saving her from the lions he would be able to really express how much he appreciated that. But I’ll do my best to prove it to her if she only gives me the chance to try and make her happy every day, for as long as she wants me to. Bloody hells, now that Sandor came to think about it, maybe the little bird’s feelings weren’t the only ones that had sprung from a sense of thankfulness.

I’m one lucky fucked up bastard! He knew that when the moment came to tell Sansa about his plan it would be different, but for now Sandor was calm, confident in his certainty that the little bird would be pleased with his proposal. They were too comfortable in each other’s presence for him to consider things wouldn’t work out like he hoped tonight after they left the steerage dance; after Sansa has enjoyed herself.

It had been so long since that had happened that Sandor was eager to the point of recklessness to grant her this wish- if only for an hour. Under any other circumstances, Sandor would have done everything he could to stop the little bird from risking Joffrey’s wrath, but after her suicide attempt he was desperate to try and find ways to make her see her decision to keep on living had been worth it. Which was bloody tough, seeing as he hadn’t been too fond of life either up until recently.

Still, he reflected, it would have been too cruel for him to help saving her yesterday only to expect her to go on living inside her golden prison. Or too cruel even to refuse her this wish when she had so few rights and so little say in her own life.

And in any case, he was going to try his damn best to keep his feelings for her at bay, because he wanted to make it clear to Sansa from the start that he wasn’t expecting any sort of payment in return, no matter how hard he knew that would be for him remember. No matter how much Sandor wanted her, that was not what mattered at present. How this would work out, he didn’t know though.

Sandor would’ve wanted nothing more than to have her return his feelings, but he was not about to fool himself. Seventeen was still a young age, and even if the little bird had already lived through enough shit to make her wise beyond her years, he knew that in other aspects she was still a child.

Even if she does feel something for me now, it’s been born out of a sense of gratitude, he gathered. It was strange to recall that not a day ago he had found her about to kill herself. Remembering how
the golden idiot had thanked him for saving Sansa last night still made him ball his hands into fists in anger.

_But somehow I helped bring about this change._ Sandor felt a pang in his chest at the thought that just by listening and talking with her had brought such an alteration in Sansa. _I tested her too. I wanted to know how she would react to certain things… Seven hells, she even challenged me, not one bit afraid of me anymore_, he remembered with pride. _There’s no fear of judging or condemnation between us now. There’s only truth now._

An awakening was going on inside Sansa, and he would be there to protect her if she wanted to, making sure no more harm came to her as she went through the world she was so eager to discover. And somehow it will all work out, even though they were so different. She was gentle and he was rough. Sansa was soft spoken and he was rude. She was compassionate and he was ruthless. And yet…

The little bird was only seventeen and despite the threat of a future as Mrs. Joffrey Baratheon, she was still full of dreams. And while Sandor was thirty-four, now he only cared about making sure all her wishes came true. He knew that was his only chance at happiness.

A long time later, once Sandor had seen Joffrey disappearing into the smoking room for cigars, coffee and brandy as he talked with the other men about politics, the upcoming rumours of war, finances, businesses and even congratulated each other on being masters of the universe, Sandor crossed the A-Deck foyer and walked up the stairs towards the ornate clock. For a couple of moments he studied it before it softly struck the hour, and when he finally tired around, the first grin of the night appeared in Sandor´s burned face.

Sansa was coming up the sweeping staircase toward him, smiling nervously. Despite everything Sandor looked her up and down appraisingly, which only made the little bird blush prettily. He held his hand out toward her, grinning wider, only to have the smirk wipe off his face the moment she placed her small hand on his.

He gulped, looking down at her with awe, respect, lust, desire and admiration. The dress really set off her curves to perfection and it was not easy to raise his eyes, but when he did, it was the light in her blue eyes as they regarded him what made it hard for Sandor to move. He wanted had a strong desire to tell her how great she looked, but in the back of his mind he knew there was no need for it.

The way he was staring at her left her in no doubt about it. For a moment it seemed as though neither of them knew what to say, but Sansa finally managed to chirp a hello. The moment was gone. She lowered her eyes
“Well,” he rasped, a bit hoarsely. “Here we are.”

“Here we are,” the little bird agreed.

“And now I´m taking you back to your room,” he informed her.

Sansa´s eyes widened at that, and her mouth dropped open into a little O of horror. Smirking again, Sandor put a hand on her back and steered her towards the entrance to First Class, even as he barked, “A jest, girl. A bloody jest.”

The little bird took his arm as they stepped outside into the night´s cold air, no longer looking mortified. “Oh Sandor, don´t tease me so!” she exclaimed with relief. “The thought of us at the party was the only thing that kept me going as I sat through dinner.”

He could not help but snort, and with a raised eyebrow he asked, “It was that bad, was it?”

Leaning closer, the little bird nodded vigorously as they walked across the empty deck. “Well, some parts of it were. For example, the moment we reached the dining saloon, I actually heard Sir Cosmo congratulate Joffrey on how splendid I was, admiring me just as if I were one of his prized show mares!”

Sandor had caught men, both old and young, gaping at Sansa open mouthed more often than he could remember, but since that only made him angry all he could manage in response was to snarl, “That can´t be helped, bird. Who sat with you at the table?”

“Everyone did. The countess of Rothes, Mr. Astor and his wife, Sir Cosmo and Lady Duff- Colonel Gracie, Molly Brown, Benjamin Guggenheim and Madame Aubert, Mr. Andrews, and Mr. Ismay… It really felt for a moment as if dinner was going to go on forever.”

He could picture her perfectly sitting between all of those rich idiots, and he pointed out that he was sorry she had to go through with it. But if things work out well, by this time next week we will be far away from this mad circus forever.

“At least I was sitting by Mr. Andrews and Molly Brown, and I like them both,” the little bird
continued. “You know how he is always writing in his little book?”

Sandor nodded, frowning. He knew very well that Titanic´s naval architect was under Sansa´s spell. *That man knows every rivet in this ship. His blood and soul are in it.* To the eye´s of the world it belonged to Bruce Ismay, but the biggest liner in the world was possible because of Andrews.

“Well, tonight when I was sick of hearing Cersei´s lies as she told everyone how much she cared for Tommen, I asked Mr. Andrews if I could read what he was writing in his notebook. And do you know what I saw, Sandor? He was scribbling away something about increasing the number of screws in hat hoots from two to three, or some such nonsense. Of course I nonetheless remarked that his ship was truly a wonder, and after he had thanked me for that with a sheepish smile, he actually remarked that I was looking better.”

She smiled up at him at that, and Sandor could not help but agree with Andrews, specially after he remembered the state in which he had found her two days ago when he fetched her from the ship´s library, as she talked with the Irishman. After a moment, Sansa continued.

“The dining room is beautiful though,” she said. “I hadn´t really paid it much attention before, but tonight I thought it looked like the ballroom of some palace, alive and lit by a constellation of chandeliers, full of elegantly dressed people I don´t really know, and exquisite music from coming from the small orchestra. And yet, no matter how lovely it all was, it took all my strength not to stand up and leave for the real party you´re taking me to. Have I thanked you for it?”

“Only about a dozen times,” Sandor rasped, uncomfortable by the awareness that Sansa was growing more and more excited the closer they got to steerage. *If she thinks we will be accepted in Third Class, she´s wrong. Nobody wants us in this ship. If there´s a place for us, we´ll have to search long and far for to find it.* And as I´ve told you before, there´s no bloody need to thank me. We´re not even going to be there long. An hour at most, I reckon.”

“One hour after we arrive?” she teased hopefully.

But Sandor shook his head. “No, one hour starting the moment we met by the clock.”

For a moment it looked as if she was about to protest, but gave it up as a lost cause. Nodding briefly in approval, he glanced around to make sure no one was nearby as they reached the gate to go down into third class. As he unlatched it, Sansa asked him if he´d had any supper.
“Yes, before you did,” he replied, offering her his hand to help her step down the stairs.

“You ought to have waited until I was having dinner, Sandor. You finished early and had to wait for me for more than an hour.”

“I didn´t mind,” he assured her with a shrug. “What did you have?”

“I couldn´t eat more than just a mouthful of each course. But I thought the soup of barley and venison was very tasty. As well as the salmon baked in clay and the roast duckling. Of course my favourite dish was the lemon cakes frosted in sugar at the end, but by then I was so stuffed that I could not manage more than two little ones, as much as I love them.”

Right in that moment loud music reach them. Sansa had been in the process of removing her white gloves, but at the sound she lowered her head, trying to hide her smirk. “They´re not very good, are they?” she observed.

Sandor made a sound that might have been a laugh. “They´re old deaf women back in London complaining of the din, I´ll warrant. God, my bloody ears, and we haven´t even arrived yet! Here, give me your engagement ring to hide or else whose to say it may not be stolen down there.”

Smiling confidently, Sansa handed it to him, before he jerked his head to the right, gesturing that it was time for them to resume their descent, his hand casually on his waistline where his Webley revolver was hidden.

***

A bear there was, a bear, a bear!

All black and brown, and covered with hair.

The bear! The bear!

Sandor wanted to laugh as that particular song began to play. He knew that it´s true meaning would be lost on the little bird had she been paying any attention to it, but that did not stop him from finding some similarities between it´s words and his current situation with Sansa. At least the bloody band isn´t as bad as we first thought.
The third class general room was crowded and alive with loud music. Such bloody noise would have driven him mad any other night, but tonight was different. Sandor heard laughter and shouts all around him even as the band went on playing The Bear and the Maiden Fair. People of all ages were dancing, drinking beer and wine, smoking, fighting and gambling.

*Oh, sweet she was, and pure and fair!*

*The maid with honey in her hair!*

*Her hair! Her hair!*

*The maid with honey in her hair!*

*What the hell was I thinking bringing her here?* Sandor wondered, looking over at the little bird as she talked with Jack Dawson and Tommy Ryan a short distance away from their table. *Even in steerage, she bewitches every man she meets.* Elbert Broder was sitting to Sandor’s left, and the moment the two young men had approached Sansa, he had asked the German doctor to tell him everything he knew about them.

After Broder was done Sandor could only brood in sullen silence as he kept looking either at Sansa and the men she was with, and the door to the well deck. He didn’t want to miss a single person that went through it, in case he needed to be prepared to hide the little bird if Trant or Blount appeared.

With a frown Sandor remembered hearing those two sons of whores insulting Sansa’s many times, even as they consented she was good looking. Not two days ago he had overheard them comparing Sansa to Cersei Lannister in her youth, trying to decide which was one better.

“In the end, all I wish was for a tailor to take in my skin so that I might look young again, and pretty maids would willingly shower me with kisses.”

“Well the blind ones,” Sandor has rasped as he passed by them, shoving Boros strongly out of his way.

Trant had hooted at that, exclaiming, “Just so, dog! You’re a good one to talk!”

He laughed coldly. “Think I’m drunk to fall for that one?”
Sandor had walked away unperturbed. Trant was always looking for a way to rouse him, and the fact that Sandor didn’t give him that satisfaction angered the valet even more. Tonight though he was aware of the fact that after what the lions had done to her, it wasn’t that strange that Sansa seemed to enjoy celebrating life by being in the company of company such as himself and everyone else in this room. *Anything that is different from them will appeal to her.*

Not for the first time he found himself thinking absentmindedly about the segregation between first and third class on the Titanic. A bunk in a shared room in steerage was about thirty-three dollars, while the most expensive staterooms cost more than four thousand. Eight times more than the American average income of five hundred a year. This colossal steel beast really had all the walks from life on board for the experience.

But whether or not this was lost on the little bird as she conversed with her new acquaintances, when they had arrived at the party, she, regal of bearing, had preformed the necessary courtesies among these people as good as if she had been meeting King George and Queen Mary.

She told Elbert his cough was sounding better, complimented the blonde woman who was with Fabrizio Di Rossi on her gown, and questioned Ryan on how his day had been, before praising Dawson for his talent as an artist. *She would have made Joffrey a great wife if he’d had the sense to love her,* he thought for the hundredth time.

Or maybe in a better world she would have someone like Jack Dawson to protect her. *A young man, not some scarred man who was more than a decade older than her.* The thought made him uncomfortable, but in the end Sandor knew that it was useless to imagine how things could’ve turned out differently.

Too many what if’s were of no use to anyone. This was the way things were like, but the possibility of changing their future for the better was at least within reach. In any case, someone like Dawson would never be able to live long to tell the tale if he tried to save Sansa himself. The kid didn’t know the Lannisters like he did.

*Oh, I’m a maid, and I’m pure and fair!*

*I’ll never dance with a hairy bear!*

*A bear! A bear!*

*I’ll never dance with a hairy bear!*

In reality even if he had the bloody right, he shouldn’t be feeling so annoyed at the American and the Irishman talking with the little bird, for even as he kept most of his attention on her, Sansa was
returning the gesture. Ever couple of minutes she would lock her gaze with his, and give him a blazing smile that went right through him. Whenever she did this rather than grinning back he would raise his glass to his lips. Not that she seemed to mind his lack of response.

“Miss Stark is a pretty girl,” Broder remarked beside him at one point. “As wise as she is lovely.”

“And courteous,” he agreed. “A proper little lady.”

Sandor had imagined Broder would be grinning at him, and when he turned to face him, he wasn´t disappointed.

“I´ve always thought that all men are fools and all men are knights, where women are concerned,” his friend remarked, stroking his beard.

Sandor snorted, annoyed. “I need your advice, not your bloody wit.”

“But I don´t think you need my help, Sandor. I trust you know what you are doing, and I´m certain that anything I could come up with to try and change your mind wouldn´t work. Am I wrong?”

Nodding, Sandor barked briefly, “No… But do you agree with it?”

He hadn´t told Broder anything about his plan yet, but it hadn´t surprised him that the German doctor seemed to suspect it. Elbert nodded, a faint smile appearing on his face.

After a moment of hesitating, Sandor settled his intent gaze on Sansa once again, and asked, “And do you think she´ll agree too?”

His heart stopped beating for a moment or two, as long as it took Broder to answer. Finally the man replied, “I don´t know her as you do, but I think she will. And if she does you´ll be the luckiest man on Earth, and I pity anyone who tries to stop the two of you from saving each other. Whether it is the man she is engaged to, or Jack Dawson.”

“I can´t help it,” Sandor admitted, realizing that for all his troubles the sight he presented was that of a jealous dog. This is mad. “I don´t like them… I don´t really like anyone.”
“But you like her and me. And your conduct is understandable. We´ve always known that you´ve felt protective of her from the start… I want you to know that I am very happy for you, my friend. I´m glad things are looking up for you at last.”

*Then she sighed and squealed and kicked the air!*

*My bear! She sang. My bear so fair!*

*And off they went, from here to there,*

*The bear, the bear, and the maiden fair.*

They were seating on a table close the dance floor. Sandor shot Jack bloody Dawson a murderous look as he leaned down to whisper something in Sansa´s ear, the stupid Tommy Ryan still prattling on to the both of them. His mouth twitching, Sandor raised his first mug of the night and drained it straightaway, his eyes never leaving her. He grabbed another one, but only placed it between his hands.

Some five minutes later she came rushing to his side, almost jumping in excitement, feeling the exhilaration of the moment, of the atmosphere. “Oh Sandor, would you like to dance?”

His eyes widened at that. *What the fuck?* Trying to ignore the fact that she´d asked him loudly before Elbert and Dawson, Sandor shook his head and lowered his gaze to his drink, unwilling to see the disappointment in her eyes.

“I´ll dance with you!” Jack volunteered at once.

Sandor looked up at the boy at that, and studied him in silence. He could not say a word against that. He had no right.

Intimidated but standing his ground, the painter stared him straight in the face, earning some of Sandor´s grudging resect. Jack went on, “But you´ll have to wait till the next one, cause I have to go to the restroom. Come Tommy, I´m sure you want to go just as much as I do!”

He returned his gaze to Sansa as she agreed to Dawson´s proposition. The moment the boys had moved away after bloody winking at her, Sandor was unable to keep his curiosity at bay any longer.
“What the fuck were you all talking about back there?” he asked, annoyed.

Sansa laughed. “Silly stuff, really. Tommy was telling me that the accommodations in steerage were quite good on this ship, and then Jack pointed out that it was the best he´d ever seen since there were hardly any rats! And then I asked him how he had means to travel and he replied that he worked from place to place, on tramp steamers and such. But all of that is of no matter… Sandor, won´t you please dance with me?”

There was no need for him to answer her. She saw his refusal plain in his eyes. The little bird didn´t hold it against him though. Instead she grabbed one of the beer tankards on the table and said, “I don´t like the taste, but I want us to have a toast! You too Dr. Broder. Come, join me!”

_I would rather this was wine_, Sandor thought. _A flagon of sour red, dark as blood, was all a man needed. Or a woman._ He laughed as he shook his head, and, amused by her enthusiasm, pointed out, “You can´t hold your beer, little bird.”

“Oh, don´t tease me, Sandor,” she replied fervently. “I know I´m not being very ladylike tonight, but at least I´m glad you find it amusing. Everyone else I know would be horrified… Anyways, let´s toast to making it count!”

Never taking her eyes off him, Sansa tried to drink in little gulps as much of her beer as she could manage. Broder drank his tankard straight away, but Sandor barely touched his.

She noticed this. “You don´t drink as much as you used to, do you?”

Sandor raised an eyebrow at her. Except for the one time when he has told her the secret of his scars, the little bird had never seen him drunk. She had no way of knowing he had been a drunkard, or that he was now far into the process of recovering. _Or that she was the cause._ Thinking of the irony of it all, Sandor made a sound that was almost a laugh.

“What´s so funny?” Elbert wanted to know.

“If I wanted the pair of you to know, I´d have told you already,” he barked in reply.
“Sandor, don´t be mean,” the little bird chirped in.

A moment later she was gone as Jack came back for her. He watched the boy help her up unto the raised platform, and then the music started playing. Sandor saw them facing each other and knew that at once that the little bird was hesitating because she didn´t know the steps. Not that it mattered to the bloody young fool, for after drawing her closer they were off, a bit awkward at first, but a couple of moments later Sansa had the hang of it. Sandor´s mouth began to twitch.

The party was rowdy and rollicking, Sandor noticed as a table got knocked over after a drunkard crashed into it. And in the middle of it all his eyes were focused on Sansa as she danced with Jack, her dress´s long tail tied into a knot to her side to keep people from stepping on it. The steps got faster, but he could see the little bird was enjoying herself as never before.

A space opened around them on the raised platform, and people began watching them, clapping as the band went on and on. At long last though, it all ended in a mad rush. The sodding painter stepped away from Sansa with a flourish, allowing her to take a bow. He watched Sansa do a graceful ballet move, making everyone present laugh and applaud. Sandor didn´t need to be a good judge of wine to know she was drunk, unlike himself.

I never thought I would live to see the day when Sansa Stark not only enjoyed entertaining the poor, but was also a hit with them. She was walking towards their table again across the pine panelling room, avoiding the sturdy teak furniture scattered in her way, flushed and sweaty, and escorted by Jack.

When she reached him, the little bird grabbed Sandor´s cigarette from his mouth without asking, an impish little grin on her pretty face, and brought it to her pretty mouth, puffing on it. The sight of her being cocky made Sandor grin widely. That is until the Irishman suddenly appeared beside them, offering big pints to both Sansa and Jack.

She accepted hers and hoisted it with both hands to her mouth and tried to drain it´s contents in one long drink, showing off. Sandor could see the muscles in her neck working as she gulped. When she placed it back down on the table, half the drink was gone.

“What, you think a first class girl can´t drink?” she asked them with a raised eyebrow when she was done and realized the four of them were staring at her.

Sandor snorted, barely registering that the dancing had started again as her words and actions caused general laughter. A moment later he was standing up in anger as a drunk stranger crashed into Tommy, who ended up sloshing been over Sansa´s dress.
“You stupid bastard!” he roared.

He was about to lunge at the man when Broder stopped him, putting a restraining hand on his arm. “I know you have a fierce bark and a sharper bite, my friend. But let’s not draw unwanted attention.”

Sandor took a long moment to calm down, inwardly cursing himself for not thinking about what Elbert had just pointed out. When the little bird felt certain he wasn’t about to get into a fight, she chuckled, assuring him that she didn’t mind it at all. The stranger, noticing Sandor wasn’t about to attack him anymore, lowered his fists.

Looking about him with contempt, Sandor knew that this lot of gnats wasn’t worth the bother of starting a fight. Elbert clapped his back, even as Sansa remarked to the five men, “You think you’re big tough men? Let’s see you do this!”

And then, to Sandor’s amazement, she took off her high heel shoes and standing in her stocking feet, she assumed some ballet position, arms raised. As delicate as a queen she went up, her entire weight on the tips of her toes. Sandor, Broder, Jack, Tommy and the stranger gaped at her incredible muscle control for a long time, before she finally came down, her face screwed up in pain.

“I haven’t done that in years,” she exclaimed, grabbing her foot, jumping around.

A moment later she had lost her balance, but Sandor was faster this time. He caught her before she stumbled, and Sansa leaned in on him. He didn’t feel like letting her go, specially after she seemed unwilling to move either, but aware that they were being watched by the others and that for once her courtesies had failed her since she hadn’t thanked him yet, Sandor spared her the need to speak. Some things were better left unsaid.

He steadied her and pointed out, “We must get back.”

He finished his second drink of the night in two gulps and settled it down hard on the table as the little bird bid everyone a good night, a new gale of laughter erupting around them from the gambling table to their right.
Chapter End Notes

Can´t wait to hear your thoughts on this one! :D
The ocean was calm, as smooth as glass, but there was a chilly breeze. Moments after they had left steerage, they were on the boat deck, and besides a man mopping the floors some distance away, they were the only people there. For all the attention they paid the man cleaning the ship, they might have been all alone in the world.

Sansa and Sandor were walking along the rows of lifeboats, and the little bird, still a bit drunk from the party, was chatting away happily about how much she’d liked it, thanking him in between every breath for taking her there. Sometimes she would even giggle and spin, her skirts swirling around her.

“That was a real party!” she told him yet again, still giddy from the magic of the night. “I could have danced till dawn!”

“You like keeping queer company then. I was sick of them all peeping at us,” he snarled, unable to say that which had really bothered him.

“Oh Sandor, thank you!” she said gaily, smiling up at him. “I know you didn’t like it much, but I had such a pleasant- so fun- I enjoyed myself- this is the best day I have ever had. Thank you!”

Sandor looked down at her with a softened expression, taking in the sight of her clutching his jacket tight against her to keep the cold at bay, the remains of her arranged hairdo falling apart about her cheeks. How was it that every single time that he laid eyes on her, everything happened to him anew? Once again he was certain that he had never seen such a beautiful person in the entire world. Bloody hells, he wanted more of this. More of them enjoying life together.

A half smile flickered across his burned face as he barked, “You ought to really thank me, little bird.”
She blinked. “What do you mean?”

“You promised me a pretty little song, have you forgotten? I never got it.”

Sandor saw Sansa covering her mouth to hide a nervous smile. Hhe thought of how far along they’d come from their argument on Thursday.

“What would you like me to sing?” she chirped.

“Anything but that song you mentioned of Florian and Jonquil,” he said laughing, and the sound was half a snarl.

After a moment of hesitation she said, “I’m going to sing you the most popular song of last year…”

_Come Josephine in my flying machine_

_And it’s up she goes! Up she goes!

_In the air she goes. Where? There she goes!

_Come Josephine in my flying machine_

_Balance yourself like a bird on a beam_

_In the air she goes_

_There she goes_

_Up, up, a little bit higher!

_Oh, my, the moon is on fire!

_Come Josephine in my flying machine_

_Going up_

_All on_

_Good-bye.

_Oh, say, let us fly girl!_

Still a bit tipsy from the party, Sansa fumbled the last words and broke down laughing. Sandor took
one good look at her and snorted. This wasn´t what he had been imagining when he had first pictured the little bird singing him a song, and yet the next moment they were laughing together.

“Come on,” she exclaimed. “Don´t tell me you didn´t like it!”

“I enjoyed hearing you sing it,” he truthfully replied after a pause.

They had reached the First Class Entrance, and although none of them said a word about it, they made no attempts to move. *Neither of us wants the evening to end.* Through the closed doors the sound of the ship´s orchestra wafted gently toward them, and despite the fact that the night air was sodding cold, Sandor wasn´t really bothered by it.

The little bird grabbed a davit and leaned back, staring up at the heavens. “Isn´t it magnificent? So grand and endless, and we´re so small…”

Sandor looked up too. The stars were blazing overhead, so bright and clear that the spiral nebulae known as the Via Lactea was easily visible to them. Somehow the sight soothed something inside him. He nodded in agreement. Sansa then went to the rail and leaned on it.

“The Lannisters and their friends are such small people, Sandor. They think they´re giants on this earth, but they´re not even dust in God´s eye. They live inside this little tiny champagne bubble, and someday the bubble´s is going to burst.”

He could almost hear the words she left unsaid. Her frustration at being forced to be inside that blasted bubble with them all. He gave a snort of contempt at the thought of the fucking lions, and leaning at the rail next to her, the burned side of his face to her, his big hand barely touching her white one; Sandor´s attention was suddenly seized by that slightest imaginable contact. It was all he could feel, and yet their hands weren´t touching. Somehow, the cold night air didn´t bother him anymore.

“You´re not one of them,” he rasped. “There´s been a mistake.”

“A mistake?” she wondered, raising an eyebrow.

“You got mailed to the wrong address,” he joked, instantly regretting it. *What a fucking stupid thing to say!*
Sansa laughed nonetheless though. “I did, didn’t I? Oh Sandor, look, a shooting star!”

Pointing upwards, Sandor caught sight of it. They stared at it in silence for as long as it lasted.

“That was a long one,” he remarked, relishing the sense of ease and comfort of the moment.

“My father used to say that whenever you saw one, it was a soul going to Heaven. I always liked that idea… We’re also supposed to wish on it.”

Sandor returned his gaze to her, and discovered that they were suddenly very close together. There was moonlight in Sansa’s eyes. *It would be so easy to move another couple of inches to kiss her*, he could not help but think, unable to look away from her lips. And he had no doubts that the little bird was thinking the same thing.

“What would you wish for?” he heard himself rasp, his voice growing serious.

After a beat, Sansa inhaled softly and pulled back, smiling in a way that made Sandor think that he had never seen a sweeter and sadder smile before. When she finally answered him, she said, “Something I can’t have.”

Before Sandor could even blink, she had squeezed his hand and started walking towards the First Class Entrance. The thought of them going back to that world right now was too much for him though. He knew it was not the best idea to linger here, but still he heard himself bark after her, “Sansa, wait. There’s something I want to talk with you about.”

He hadn’t had any intentions of telling her tonight, but somehow the moment had arrived. And in the end, it didn’t really matter. All he cared about was her answer to his proposition. *This is the moment of truth. My life may be about to change.*

She stopped and turned around, staring at him in surprise. Intrigued she came back to him and remarked, “Sandor, you’ll catch a cold if we stay here any longer. What is it?”

Wishing to avoid being detected, Sandor closed his hand around her arm and gently steered her away from the lights of the First Class section. Casting a long shadow across her, and making sure no one was nearby, he said, “I’m going.”
Sansa’s honest, innocent eyes widened at his words. “Going?”

Sandor grinned at the look on her face. “The little bird repeats whatever she hears. Going, yes.”

“Where will you go?” She demanded, and he knew that she still wasn’t really certain what he meant.

“Away from the Lannisters. Took me long enough, but I’m done with them. What’s a dog to do with lions, I ask you? Even a dog gets tired of being kicked.”

“When?” The little bird chirped, sounding disappointed and scared.

“I’ll disappear when we reach New York Harbour, I suppose. West somewhere, anywhere.”

“They won’t let you,” she warned him, staring at him with bid sad eyes. *She has never looked at me like this before. Does she think I’m planning on abandoning her to her lot?*

“I won’t ask them leave to go, little bird. And any man who tries to stop me is a dead man.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Sansa wanted to know, her voice soft and precise.

“I could keep you safe,” he vowed in a rasping voice, yanking her closer now that the moment had come. “They’re all afraid of me. No one would hurt you again, or I’d kill them.”

“What? I- I don’t understand,” she stammered, raising a hand to her head in confusion.

“Sansa, listen to me,” he stated sharply, hoping that the change in his voice would bring her out of her momentary bewilderment. “You want to fly away, don’t you? Well, bloody good for you! Let’s shit on the damned Lannisters’ heads for once and take off.”

She stared at him open-mouthed, completely astonished.
“You could knock me down with a feather,” she replied, fervently. “Why would you put yourself at such risk for me? If you bring me along the chances of them letting you be will definitely disappear.”

He hadn’t expected for her to need an explanation for the reasoning behind this decision. “How the hell could I do anything else after yesterday, little bird? After today? Do you really think I can stand by and let you marry him? Fuck, do you think I’m going to be able to treat you with indifference the moment we leave this ship and I am no longer required to guard you?”

Tears were streaming down her face now, and her lips were trembling, but Sansa didn’t cry out or even speak. Growing nervous that for some reason it was hard for him to read her face in these moments, Sandor pulled her even nearer, not ungently, and went on hurriedly, needing for her to understand him.

“I’ve been thinking about this for hours,” he barked passionately, bending down towards her. “In fact, I think I’ve been considering it for years. I wouldn’t be telling you this if I wasn’t sure that it can be done, Sansa, but there’s nothing stopping us from taking the chance! I thought I was done with life, but now- come away with me. I’ve looked after myself since I was a kid. I know how to get around and how to survive. I’m certain we can do this and live to tell the tale. And I want to make it clear that I expect nothing from you in return. I ask of you nothing but that you let me protect you, little bird.”

When his voice trailed off, Sansa still did not seem to know what to say. Sandor stared at her intently, wishing he could look into her soul so he could be sure he hadn’t made a mistake by believing she would gladly jump at this opportunity. What have I done?

“Why are you crying?” He asked her, unable to bear any longer this silence or the spectacle of her piercing blue eyes filling up with tears.

Smiling at long last, the little bird answered, breathing faintly, “They’re tears of joy, Sandor. I- I just can’t believe this. My wishes never come true.”

Feeling as if something was soaring inside him, Sandor’s face broke into a genuine wide grin. They stared at each other for a long moment, each occupied with their own thoughts, and yet both delighted at the possibilities that now lay before them.

“But where would we go?” Sansa wondered, her cheeks growing red at what he supposed was her
realization that he really meant everything he was telling her.

“I can take you anywhere you want,” Sandor assured her, trying to be hopeful that she was at last relenting.

“Let’s go to India or Australia! British East Africa too!” she replied at once, eagerly reaching out to hold his hand. “Those far away places you told me about this morning sound perfect! I- I wish we could send word to my aunt and cousin in Scotland though that I’m all right. But that wouldn’t be wise, would it? Oh God, what will happen to them? What if Joffrey wants to revenge himself upon me through them?”

“We’ll figure it all out before we arrive in America, little bird,” he assured her, his words a low growl, his mouth pulled up in half a smile. “Tonight nothing but you and me matters.”

***

When they reached the door of her bedroom, thankfully the only people in the corridor. His hand on the small of her back, Sandor had escorted Sansa in silence, while both of them were still taking in the magnitude of the decision they were soon to put to motion.

The little bird handed him back his jacket, while Sandor, standing by her shoulder, gave her back her engagement ring and her gloves. He gazed down at in amusement at how her hand trembled as she put the key that opened the door to her stateroom. And his smile widened when, once Sansa had stepped inside the suite, she began to nervously fiddle with a loose strand of her auburn hair, which shone brightly in the corridor’s wall light. He was glad to see he could read her easily once again.

“Good night, Sandor,” she said, her voice soft as a kiss. “And thank you for everything.”

He nodded and rasped, “We’ll talk more tomorrow, little bird.”

She smiled then, a shy secret smile, one just for him. Nodding, Sansa made a move to close her door, before suddenly deciding to step up before him. He was rooted to the spot as he watched her lifting her hand up to cup his scarred cheek with her fingers. Sandor burned where the little bird touched him. It only lasted for a couple of seconds before he was left standing alone before her closed door in the empty hall.
Sansa Clegane’s rasping voice drifted to Sansa Stark in her dreams, so that when she woke up on the morning of Sunday, April 14th 1912 with a smile on her face, utterly re-freshed, she drowsily whispered his name against her feather pillow. The first thing she registered when she opened her eyes was the pale light of morning slanting through the bed canopy drapes. A moment later Sansa was wondering at her ability to fall deeply asleep after the events of last night.

She had gone to bed marvelling, restless and excited, questioning if she would lay awake all night eager for dawn's arrival. But now everything came back to her in a wild rush, and she hugged the pillow to her face to muffle her squeal of joy. Her heart was full of happiness and hope, making her whisper Sandor’s name again into her pillow just to hear the sound of it.

Sansa laughed at her foolishness and stretched nosily on the bed, a big smile on her face at the thought of starting a new life with Sandor Clegane away from the lions. *Has there ever been a truer man?* she wondered, still overwhelmed by the magnitude of what he was willing to risk in order to keep her safe.

Sansa had been so flabbergasted when Sandor proposed to her to run away because not even after they had grown so close yesterday had she expected such an offer from him. And now a whole new life awaited her, with an infinite expanse of time, each day just as marvellous as the one before.

So much could go wrong though. Despite her boundless happiness, she was nervous since she could not help but dwell in what manner their plan could go wrong. *Nothing good ever happens to me. But- but I have prayed so hard and for so long. Surely this is my answer!*

Reclining on the bed into a more comfortable position, Sansa thought back upon everything that had happened between her and Sandor after he had saved her, when she wanted to throw herself into the Atlantic. And doing so, analysing Sandor’s words as he offered to take her away and the urgency with which he has spoken made perfect sense to her, so that almost all doubts and hesitations were erased.

She could think of nothing better than traveling with him to far away places! Sansa would have liked to go back to Paris, but the rumours of war made it impossible at the moment. *Still, wherever we go, everything will be so different from now on! I’m going to be able to do anything I like, far away from this golden cage.* And she would be safe, because if there was anyone who could protect her from the Lannisters, then Sandor was that person. *And only him.* Sansa wanted nobody else. She needed nobody else.
For even if the life he offered her was a vagabond one, where they would have to be on the run constantly, that was the only way she would be happy and keep her sanity. But if Joff ever finds us, it is for Sandor’s sake that I fear and not mine. I will rather he killed me just as he did Father than take me back. What of Aunt Lysa and her boy though? Could I really be so selfish as to endanger them? But most of all, what would happen to Sandor if we are caught?

To imagine him being killed or imprisoned for trying to save her was too much to bear. Sansa found it hard to breathe as she deliberated the latter. She knew he would protest, dismissing it when she voiced her fear for him. But Sansa could not help herself. She cared more for his well-being than she did for hers. But I know that despite everything, the moment he looks into my eyes and says it is time to go, I shall follow him.

Blushing, Sansa could not help recall then that moment last night after the steerage dance when she thought briefly that Sandor was going to kiss her. I wanted him to, she knew. And I am sorry that he did not. And although she was certain that he had wanted to as well, Sansa believed she understood why he hadn’t. His expression had given away the hunger he had for her, and the intensity of that longing had matched her own.

The man, who everyone feared, excited her. He touched something within her very soul, and when she found herself cupping the burned side of his face, Sansa knew the same had happened with him. Something I did not dare imagine I could feel. But rather than scaring her, she blossomed whenever his eyes roamed over her, or when they were in close proximity.

Sandor’s strength and confidence captivated her in a way she had not encountered with any other man before. The men she associated with were not like him, and nor were Jack Dawson or Tommy Ryan. And then, it overwhelmed Sansa to think how noble Sandor was in regards to her. How much he wants to protect me, she thought, her heart beating a little faster. It went deeper than the recent but intense friendship that had been formed between them. This had been years in the making, though she had not expected it.

But I am glad it did. For even though she was aware that by running away with Sandor Clegane her reputation would be forever ruined, Sansa could not care less. Better poor and nameless but happy, than being respected by all of Philadelphia’s high society as Mrs. Joffrey Baratheon.

But now that she thought of it, there were still many things they would have to discuss over the next few days if they were to succeed in their plan. For one, she had no money. Sansa did not know if Sandor did, but they could not count upon her Father’s estate or her inheritance from her mother’s side. It all now belonged to Joffrey, and she could not even bring the matter to a court for fear of her future whereabouts being discovered.

Well, he can keep it all and be welcomed to it so long as he never finds us. I suppose I will have to
find some sort of work to help pay for our food and shelter, and for the passage to Asia, Africa or Australia. That thought scared Sansa a little since there weren’t many things she could think of that she knew how to do well enough to the point where she would get paid.

I could give singing or drawing lessons, and do some embroidery and sewing too, but if we have to be on the run I doubt I shall find an establishment that would hire me for just a couple of days. She hoped Sandor knew what to do about it, and once she found work she would do her best to always keep her companion from viewing her as a burden.

I can’t let him be the only one who works to keep food in our bellies. He’s done enough for me as it is. I can and will be hardworking! And who knows, maybe I’ll surprise myself and discover some new talent I did not know I had! Sighing contentedly, Sansa hugged herself tightly, wondering where Sandor was at this precise moment, and what he was doing.

She could scarcely wait to see him again. Making up her mind, she decided that as soon as she could, she would ask him what exactly he felt for her. If there is really something there on his part, I don’t see the point of waiting. Her relationship with Sandor was not like the fairy tales she had grown up longing for, but now all she wanted to do was to be with him. It made her shudder to even remember that, only half a day ago, her only future was to be with Joffrey.

Yet now that she was going to spend the future with Sandor, she desired for him to be more than just her friend and protector. She had so many questions, and she would not get the answers until she could talk to Sandor alone. Sansa had always known that, if there was someone in the Lannister party whom she could trust above the others it was Sandor Clegane; but she had not supposed the stake he had invested into looking out for her.

He was like her guardian angel, and even though she was curious when it began, to know that she had not been alone all this time made the memory of her sufferings a little easier to bear. To think about it made her warm feelings for him grow.

Somehow she felt better to comprehend that the roots of their connection had been there for years, and had not been born out of Sandor rescuing her from her suicide attempt. The memory of that night made Sansa take a deep calming breath. She could not be ashamed of her actions of that night, but she regretted thinking that there had been no way out of her prison. It’s unbearable to think that I would be gone now, never knowing how close happiness was within my grasp.

Sansa had never been and felt this close to another human being, and above all, she wanted to belong to him, and he to her. It was strange to imagine that this could be possible even as she knew that being with Sandor would be the first time in her life when she was completely and utterly free. Sansa wasn’t quite sure what it was that she felt, but even if he didn’t want to be with her in the way she was imagining, as long as they were together, she would be content.
But it would be hard if he did not give in to the sweet madness that was taking over her senses as Sansa envisioned what it would be like to pull up Sandor’s shirt and caress the warm skin underneath; to stand on her toes and kiss him as he leaned down; to run her fingers through his dark hair and drown in his deep grey eyes… As a flush crept up her neck, someone knocked at the door.

“Yes?” she called out quickly, nervously tugging a lock of her hair behind her ear.

Trudy announced herself, and Sansa donned her smile, ready to face this new world. When her maid drew back the four-poster bed curtains, Sansa threw back the coverlets. She knew she ought to behave demurely and calmly, but it was hard to do so when her heart was singing. She greeted Trudy warmly as she handed her maid her bed robe; the room had grown chilly during the night, despite the electric heater in the corner.

When Sansa was glowing pink after her bath and drying her wet hair with a towel, Trudy finally spied the scissors on the vanity table. With a worried expression she exclaimed, “Oh miss, you didn’t cut off your gown again, did you?”

“I did, Trudy,” she replied, trying not to sound too amused.

“I was afraid you would have torn your gown again since you did not asked me to help you out of it last night! Where is it?”

“I threw it overboard,” Sansa lied.

In truth it was hidden under her bed, reeking of sweat and beer. She was planning on throwing it overboard from the promenade of their staterooms as soon as she could find a moment to do so without anyone noticing it. It would never do to have someone finding it, both because it was cut into pieces since she could not take it off on her own without destroying it, and also because it could lead to awkward questions.

“Oh, I’m sorry Trudy,” Sansa said, walking over to the Irish girl and squeezing her hand. “But don’t worry. I wasn’t going to wear it ever again, and in any case, Mr. Baratheon gives me so many gowns that I am sure it’s absence won’t be noticed.”

“But why won’t you just call for me rather than destroying them? Please do so tonight, miss!”
“No, it’s all right Trudy,” Sansa said firmly. “I can manage on my own. Now come, I must get ready to have breakfast with Mr. Joffrey, little Tommen and their mother.”

And I hope Sandor stands guard by us too. It may be silly to expect the lions having their bodyguard with them as they had their breakfast in Cersei Lannister’s rooms, but such occasions were always a battlefield for Sansa. And even though today I go prepared and armed, rather than as their hostage, if I can glance at Sandor from time to time it would be far better.

Unable to keep her joy completely hidden, Sansa smiled more than once as she got ready. The ivory dress she decided to wear for breakfast had a beautifully complex pattern of flowers all over it. The bodice was slashed in the front almost to her belly, but a deep vee of dove-grey lace covered the gap.

The skirt was long and had a soft and airy look. The slightest breeze would make it ripple. The blouse was short sleeved, three crystals dangling from each one, and three buttons closed the back. The underdress was made of satin, with a lace overdress. Her slippers were of soft grey doeskin that hugged her feet like lovers embrace, and her nails had been trimmed.

She decided to wear her long auburn hair down, held at the nape of the neck in a simple braid. Taking a small pink rose from the vase that also had violets and forget-me-nots, Sansa tucked the fresh bloom behind her ear, thinking not only that she looked beautiful and that it was a pity she would have to change again before the church service, but also hoping against hope that Sandor was waiting outside so he could see what a pretty sight she presented.
When Sansa entered the living room she was immediately disappointed to see that there were only Joffrey and a couple of service room waiters there. Hoping that Sandor was waiting either outside in the hallway or in Cersei Lannister’s stateroom, Sansa forced herself to bid her fiancé a good morning. In response Joffrey made a sweeping bow to her, so deep she was not quite sure if she was being mocked.

Once he had straightened up, Joffrey examined her critically from top to bottom and said, “That dress sets off your attributes splendidly, sweet pea. I must remember to buy you more gowns like that.”

Sansa thought it curious that if Sandor had been the man standing before her, she would have been pleased to be stared at so intently. But since it was Joff, she only blushed, thinking it a very rude remark and ashamed at having Trudy hearing it. Apparently the Irish maid thought so too, for she excused herself and went off to join the service room waiters outside on the private promenade deck.

Joffrey waved a curt dismissal in Trudy’s direction, still studying Sansa from head to heels. Feeling that she ought to say something and concluding that she could try to be civil with him until Wednesday, she remembered Mademoiselle Mordane’s advice that courtesy is a lady’s armour. So Sansa donned her armour and replied, “Thank you. That would be most kind of you. I hope your mother excuses me for taking a little longer to get ready this morning.”

“I´m sure she would not, were we to have breakfast with her,” her betrothed informed her, walking towards her. “But since you´re only having breakfast with me, I am the one whom you should hope will excuse you.”

Sansa stiffened as his hand reached out for hers. She was still surprised to register she had tried to pull her hand away. It was only when Joff’s hold on it tightened into a hold as he drew her closer that she realized her blunder.
Thinking quickly, Sansa tried to cover it up by adopting the submissive behavior she knew Joffrey liked so well. “Oh, so it’s only going to be the two of us?”

Joffrey frowned and answered in mocking tones, “That’s what I said, isn’t it? Sometimes I agree with Mother when she says you are a stupid girl. No wonder she worries whether our children will be stupid like you.”

Any insults from the lions had lost their power to hurt her long before Sandor Clegane reappeared in her life. Donning an injured expression, Sansa whispered an apology, thinking that Joffrey wanted her to be more than just a little bird who recited all the words they’d taught her. *It’s like I told Sandor last night. My beloved betrothed sees me as a horse to mistreat whenever he wants.*

Something in either her face or the tone of her voice made Joffrey frown, though. Swiftly discerning precisely what was going through his mind, Sansa reddened. *Oh God, not now!*

“I would sooner breaker my fast with a kiss, you know,” he pointed out.

She could hardly refuse without angering him, so Sansa made herself place a quick cold peck on his cheek, and hastily stepped away. But it was of no use.

“How… dutiful,” he observed, sounding disappointed. He was smiling with his mouth, but not his eyes.

Before she could blink, Joffrey had placed his arms around her and was kissing her. Sansa closed her eyes, instinctively pretending it was Sandor, wondering if his mouth would press down on her own just as cruelly as Joff’s was doing.

“Come,” he commanded, once he was satisfied.

Offering her his arm, Joffrey led her to the promenade deck even as Sansa reminded herself not to let him see how nervous he made her. *It will all be over soon,* she told herself over and over again as they walked into the spacious Tudor facing enclosed promenade. Sunlight splashed across the potted trees and trellised vines to the floor, the light bringing out the deep red in her auburn hair.

Her eyes fell on her harp, standing by in a corner of the deck. It was her most prized possession since it was the only item from her childhood that Joffrey had allowed her to keep. But she hadn’t
played it in months. *That should change before I part with it forever. Maybe Sandor would like me to sing to him as I play it.*

Still, not even the prospect of how that would please Sandor could erase the pain that shot through her heart as Sansa remembered it had been the last present she had received from her mother before she passed away; her father would ask her to play it after dinner for entertainment before she went away to boarding school in France.

Sansa could hardly bear to enter the promenade after such recollections, but she knew that if she refused, her fiancé would only forcefully grab her by the elbow and steer her to the table. Instead, suddenly desperate for the feeling of fresh air against her face, Sansa said the first thing that came into her mind: “Oh, look!”

Letting go of Joff’s arm, she walked towards one of the windows of the verandah and took a deep breath, admiring the way the clouds were amassing in the sky, pierced by shafts of sunlight. *They look like two huge castles afloat in the morning sky.* Sansa could see their walls of tumbled stone, their mighty keeps and barbicans. Wispy banners swirlled from atop their towers and reached for the fast-fading stars. Soon the wind crushed them together, and there was only one castle remained where there had been two.

“What are you looking at?” Joffrey inquired with suspicion beside her, breaking the spell.

“There’s a castle in the sky,” she told him, pointing in the direction she was contemplating.

She was expecting him to comment on her foolishness again, but he surprised her by saying, “It looks more like a ruined castle, with falling towers at its side.”

His words made her shiver. *I do not want to hear about falling towers and ruined castles,* she thought, as goose prickles rose on her arms. She turned her back on the beautiful horizon of the northern sea without any further comment, and without waiting for Joffrey to escort her to her chair. Sansa smoothed down her skirt and took a seat.

The table was laid out beautifully, with a very pretty china set. She observed that they were to break their fast with honey cakes baked with blackberries and nuts, gammon steaks, bacon, crispy breaded fish, autumn pears, and a Spanish dish of onions, cheese and chopped eggs cooked up with fiery peppers. The sight of it all made her tummy feel a little queasy.
Sansa informed Trudy that she wanted some hot tea and a glass of cold buttermilk to drink as the two service room waiters left the enclosed deck. Joffrey chose that moment to enquire if she was not planning on not having coffee.

“Not today,” she said, hesitantly.

There was something in the way he had asked the question that made her aware that he was ready to pick a fight at the first opportunity she gave him. Thus, when he instructed Trudy to go ahead and serve her a cup of coffee, Sansa bit her lip and stared down at her hands, remaining silent. *He treats me as if I were a child.* When Trudy was done serving the coffee, she left them alone.

They ate their breakfast in silence, the tension palpable. Sansa dutifully lifted her drinks and took occasional sips, nibbling at the pastries in an attempt to settle her stomach. With every minute that went by, Sansa longed with more intensity for the moment when she would finally be free of the man before her, brooding in silence as he studied her over his glass of orange juice.

Sansa daintily sipped her hot tea as she tried to think up some polite conversation, but she had forgotten all the dinner talk from last night. She had more significant matters to remember. And the way Joffrey’s eyes regarded her with cold amusement was unsettling her.

Usually eating with him was always a silent affair on her part, but her fiancé never seemed to mind her strained silences. But now she was not glad for the silence; it made her already uneasy tummy flutter as she wondered what could be behind his distant facade.

*If it’s something that has to do with me, he’ll let me know eventually, but surely he does not know of anything that I’ve done to displease him. He can’t know about Sandor. How could he? she wondered. Maybe I’m being silly. It’s probably just my conscience, and he is upset over something to do with his business.* Unable to bear the wait any longer, Sansa decided that she had to either satisfy her curiosity or leave the promenade.

As if he’d been reading her thoughts, Joffrey spared her the decision by stating, “I can see you are not very hungry this morning, Sansa darling. And despite the lovely picture you present, you also look as if you had not slept well.”

He smiled as he spoke, a mocking smile that only served to make her heart beat faster. Sansa took one last small delicate bite of her honey cake and demurred cautiously, while trying to remain calm, “I am afraid that I did not. It might be best that I retire and get some rest before having to get ready for church service.”
Joffrey gave her a sharp look, and his sudden expression was one Sansa recalled only too well; it was the same look he´d had on the night when she had first told him she wanted to break off their engagement, just before he showed her his true nature. The sight rooted her to her chair, and in a stiff voice that held no trace of warmth he remarked, “No wonder you are tired. Your exertions below decks were no doubt exhausting.”

Sansa blinked, unsure she had heard him right. A moment later her mouth had opened and closed, even as her fingers tightened round her teacup and her eyes grew wide. How does he know? she wondered in panic, as the realization of what this new revelation could mean for her new friend and for her. How could he have found out? Does Sandor know Joffrey found out? Good heavens, what does Joffrey suspect about Sandor and me?

Sansa’s throat had gone dry and her heart was racing, her mind fervently searching for a subtle way out of this mess. She had to be careful, lest her current situation and the chance of escaping became complicated. She tried to think of something she might say to make amends, but all the words that came to her were lame and weak. All the while Joffrey went on staring at her, seemingly amused by her reaction, but Sansa knew he was seething inside.

“I- how?” she stammered. It was the best she could manage at such short notice. Oh, why did I ever agree to go to that party? Sandor knew it was risky! I hope I haven’t ruined it all!

For a moment she thought Joff would not answer her, as displeased as he looked with her. But after considering for a moment he said, “I was just out for a walk and met Colonel Gracie. He retired early last night, but before he went to bed he told me that he had seen you and Clegane disappearing into the Third Class section of the ship. I imagine you went to that dance that was hosted there… I have not yet seen Sandor, but I am more eager to hear your explanation for this. Why had you not retired to your bedroom? What the hell were you thinking, Sansa? No, don’t answer that, since you clearly weren’t. So just tell me what happened. Now.”

With every word he spoke, Joffrey became angrier and angrier. But for once, if Sansa was scared, it was not for what he could do to her, but for what this could mean for Sandor. And despite everything, the question of what exactly could that implicated flashed through her mind.

Thinking it was best she found the answer for that later, and hoping that the lie that came to her in that moment was believable, Sansa answered in a rush, “I- I was invited to the party by an elderly doctor I met yesterday morning. We- we became acquainted after we both saw how a little boy fell down by the poop deck, and ran over to him to help. We just started talking and he invited me. I- I ’m sorry I didn’t tell you, but I knew you would not want me to go, Joffrey. And I lied to Mr. Clegane. He wouldn’t accompany me until I told him that you knew and had approved…”
Her voice trailed off as she thought of how ridiculous her story sounded. Sansa doubted Sandor would come up with a story of his own when he did not yet know hers, but if he refused to give any details when Joff confronted him, it could lead to trouble. He’ll be asked why did he not report their visit to the dance, but at least if there is anything good to come out of this it was that she doubted Joffrey suspected there was something between her and his employee.

_I must remember to tell him that I had to incriminate Doctor Broder though. Please God, don’t let Joffrey change his mind and instruct Sandor to stop guarding me. If he does, we won’t have any moments alone in which to plan our escape!_

“And who was this doctor?” Joffrey demanded, raising his voice, the features she had once thought of as handsome distorted by jealousy. “It makes my head spin to think that had it not been by the Colonel’s remark, you would have kept me in the dark about this!”

_Thank goodness Colonel Gracie didn’t actually follow us, or else he would have seen me dancing with Jack!_

“I- I don’t know his name, Joff! We just talked a little and he invited me out of politeness. I only stayed at the dance for a couple of moments, and I never saw him again.”

“So you’ve said. But I want to know: what is his name?”

“I- I can’t remember. It sounded so foreign and I was never very good at my language lessons,” she lied, trying to think of something else to say that might make amends. But all the words that came to her were even more lame and weak than her current explanations.

Joffrey pressed his lips together as he realized that even if she did know more about the foreigner medical man, she was not going to confess to anything. “The Hound is disappointing me. He is not as good of a guard dog as he used to be. I didn’t leave you in his care so you could go wherever you please! He better keep you in First Class for the remainder of the voyage, or I shall be forced to escort you myself and confine you to your bedroom in your spare hours.

“Not that I think that would teach you a lesson, seeing as the voyage will end in a matter of days… But I expected better from Clegane. I haven’t seen him yet. He was once again not in our room when I went to bed, and when I woke up today he was off. But as soon as he reports to me for duty he will hear me out… What the deuce is the world coming to when you have to command your servants to remember the full extent of their duty? It’s beyond me that he needed any reminder that I would certainly not have let you go… Maybe he just doesn’t care about this particular job, and that’s why he didn’t try to stop you...”
As Joffrey went on and on, unaware that Trudy and Boros Blount had appeared at the entrance to the enclosed promenade, Sansa stiffened. His contemptuous words about Sandor’s worth sent a chill through her, and she stated, “I don’t see what all the fuss is about. Mr. Clegane is supposed to guard me and that is exactly what he did. And even if you cared more for my safety than for having people approach me on my own in fear of what I may tell them, I was never in any danger.”

*Be quiet, or you will only make it worse,* she told herself, even as Joffrey gave her a look that made her cringe. Bristling under the implication and reproach behind her words, he lifted a finger and pointed it at her face, as he replied in warning, “You will never behave like that again, Sansa. Do you understand me? I forbid it.”

She returned his stare coolly, reminding herself to be cautious even though the very sound of his voice was made her sick. Sensing the defiance in her, Joff leaned back in his seat with a casual air, and pleasantly went on by pointing out, “After all, I can’t permit my most prized possession to mingle with the gutter rats and riffraff found in steerage. It’s only natural that I want to protect my most treasured investment, wouldn’t you agree?”

A kind of madness took over Sansa then, for Joffrey’s words reminded her that he had stolen all her money after he had ruined her father. *He thinks of me as the ultimate trophy.* The thought of him possessing her had never seemed more odious to her as it did in that moment, when it felt as if such a deed would be his final victory over Eddard Stark.

There is danger in fighting back, Sansa knew, but she was beyond caring. She could imagine Sandor rasping that she ought to guard her tongue, but it didn’t matter much right now. She flared, momentarily forgetting everything except how much she hated the man before her. Her revulsion for Joffrey was plain on her face and in her voice, and reckless words tumbled out of her.

“I’m sick of you, Joffrey. I would much rather be a foreman in one of your mills for you to command, than your fiancé. You suffocate me!”

As soon as her outburst ended, Sansa’s courage left her. She only had time to glance nervously towards the door at Trudy and Blount before Joffrey exploded. In a heartbeat he stood up and swept the table aside with a long crash. A moment later he was glowering before Sansa, gripping her so tightly by the arms that it hurt.

Trapped and visibly trembling, she was forced to listen to him as he cried out, “You’re not my fiancé! You are my wife! You are my wife in practice if not yet by law, so you will honour me as a wife is required to honour her husband! And you will never mock me like that again! I am tired of your rebellious acts. This is the last one! I will not be made out a fool. If I say you will behave from
now one, you will, or I swear to God that I won’t answer for myself if you ever again do or say something that displeases me. Is any of these in any way unclear?”

Sansa could feel the blood rushing to her face. No tears, she prayed. Please, please, I must not cry. Please, go away. Shrinking into the chair, her neck tightening so that she could scarcely nod, Sansa whimpered, a meek and contrite, “No.”

His face hardened as he stared down at her intently, but there was a triumphant look in his eyes as he calmed down and replied, “It’s always been like this from the very beginning, love. You either obey me, or I reprimand you. It’s so simple that I don’t know how you’ve managed to keep on forgetting… If you’ll pardon me, I believe I have lost my appetite. I’ll see you in a short while though, so be ready and dress as befits Mrs. Joffrey Baratheon this time. No shocking red dress for church today, all right? And remember that afterwards we have scheduled a personal tour of the ship with Captain Smith and Mr. Andrews. Now, excuse me.”

“Yes,” she whispered, too frightened to defy him any further.

All of Sansa’s resolve to fight him had withered in the face of his outburst. It was a clear, sharp reminder that she was still a captive in a way, even though the door to her prison would be opened in a matter of days. Snorting, Joffrey leaned down and pressed his lips to hers briefly, before finally releasing her arms. As he walked away, Sansa released her breath, thinking that his grip will certainly leave some bruises; she hated feeling this helpless.

At least Sandor wasn’t here to see this, she thought with relief. Had he witnessed it, who knows what would have happened? Boros Blount followed Joffrey as the latter left the promenade deck, and out of the corner of her eye Sansa saw Trudy, frozen, partway through the door. After the men had stalked past her, the Irish maid rushed towards her.

“I- I’m sorry, Trudy,” Sansa stammered, musing that it was no wonder servants always seemed to know everything about their employers. “I- we had a little accident.”

Trudy knelt down and began cleaning up some of the mess Joffrey had made. Still a little shaken, but surprised that see she was not as affected by this conflict as she would have been before she befriended Sandor, Sansa joined Trudy on the floor, endeavoring to help her. Her hands were trembling a little though, and a thousand thoughts were rushed through her mind, making it difficult for her to be of much help.

“It’s all right, miss,” Trudy told her, reaching out to place a comforting hand on her knee. “Go back to your room. I’ll clean this up and then I will go help you get ready for church service as soon as I
am done. You still have to take a bath.’

Sansa saw the sense in that, but she needed a couple of moments to compose herself from such an encounter. She still felt dizzy from the moment she had believed Joffrey was going to hit her. I have every right to cry, she knew, but the tears thankfully had not come. Had Sandor not offered to take her away, this encounter would have affected her deeply, since Joffrey in a furor had always scared her… Until now. He doesn’t control me anymore.

The realization felt so liberating that Sansa giggled, and for a moment she almost started crying from pure bliss. Her eyes fell on a rose lying nearby in the sunny veranda, which had fallen from the shattered vase Joffrey had broken when he flipped over the breakfast table. Sansa picked it up and inhaled its fragrance; loving how sweet it’s perfume smelled.

Aware that Trudy was mouthing empty encouragements to her, probably under the belief that she was losing her wits, Sansa recalled her courtesies and said, “Yes Trudy, I’ll do as you say. Thank you.”

Before her maid helped her to her feet, Sansa brushed the back of her hand against her lips in an attempt to remove Joffrey’s taste from her mouth.

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While Trudy helped her get ready for the second time this morning, Sansa was silent. Many thoughts went round and round in her head, from what the outcome of Joffrey’s confrontation with Sandor would be like, to how she would gather the courage to ask Sandor for confirm what she suspected, to several castles in the air of her and Sandor seeing the world together, as far away from the lions as they could manage.

As Trudy pulled on her corset strings, with Sansa sucking in her waist, Cersei Lannister opened the door to her bedroom. She was wearing a white dress, as beautiful as the rope of emeralds and diamonds around her slender neck. Sansa thought she looked strangely innocent, but there were points of colour in her cheeks. Coldly commanding Trudy to leave the room, Cersei walked over to Sansa and took over the Irish girl’s work.

“Good morning,” Sansa chirped, gathering that if she was to face mother and son in the space of an hour, she should at least try to avoid getting into a fight with one of them.
Her mother in law snorted and remarked graciously, “Always so polite, little dove.”

Sansa hated that nickname, now more than ever because it reminded her of the way Sandor liked to call her.

“Courtesy is a lady´s armour,” Sansa replied in a modest tone.

“You can take off your armour now,” was Cersei´s response. “There is no need to hide behind that wall at present.”

Pressing her lips together and gnashing her teeth, Sansa held her tongue and waited, for there was little doubt in her mind what Joffrey´s mother was doing here. She wants to scold me for my conduct of last night. The woman never missed an opportunity to do so.

Sansa could only suppose that it was both because Joffrey´s determination to marry her had caused a big rift between mother and son, and also due to the fact that it was because of her that Cersei had been forced to remain in Europe for years, when the society empress wanted nothing more than to be back in America with her family.

There are probably other reasons, but becoming her legal ward rendered me into an unwanted burden, even if I did enrich her son. Well, Cersei was not fit to be deemed by any as a respectable matron. She had done a poor job of protecting a young orphaned unmarried girl.

“I heard what happened last night and this morning, and I approve of my son´s behavior,” Cersei informed Sansa, binding her inside the restrictive corset. “It is quite obvious that the approaching prospect of becoming his wife is driving you to behave as vulgarly as that Brown woman does. Wearing red dresses for dinner, forgetting yourself and being rude to our friends, and now going to a dance held in Third Class! You should have learned by now that none of us get what we want, so what exactly do you hope to accomplish? Against my advice, Joffrey will not release you from your engagement, so all that is left for me to do is to warn you that we will not under any circumstances tolerate such a conduct back home. This is not a game, girl.”

The only thing Sansa could think as the Lannister woman went on was that she was grateful to Trudy for not telling anyone how she had destroyed two of her gowns, or else Cersei would have chastised her for that as well. Still, with every word her mother in law pulled her corset strings tighter, forcing Sansa to swallow hard while wondering if the woman behind her was not imagining how sweet it would be to wrap the strings around her neck instead.
Since she made no attempts at replying, Cersei became angry and turned her around harshly. Sansa only had time to notice how she was taller at seven and ten as Cersei was in her forties, before she realized that the woman’s eyes had fallen on the bruises that her son had made on her arms a short while ago.

For a moment, Sansa was startled to see that all the sternness melted off Cersei’s face, and when the American woman resumed talking, it took her a moment to accept the fact that Joff’s mother sounded almost sympathetic.

“It is not your fault. Joffrey has always been difficult. Even his birth, I labored a day and a half to bring him forth. You cannot imagine the pain, Sansa. I screamed so loudly that I fancied Robert might hear me at the other end of town.”

“Uncle Robert was not with you?” she wondered, raising an eyebrow in surprise, both at the news and at this confidentiality.

“Robert?” Cersei gave a wry smile. She seemed to find Sansa’s question wonderfully amusing.

“Robert was off with his friends, drinking and whoring,” Cersei explained in disgust. “That was his custom. Whenever my pains began, my beloved husband would flee from the sickbed. And when he returned he would give me some exquisite piece of jewelry, and I would present him with a baby… Not that I wanted him to stay, mind you. I had the doctor and an army of midwives, and I had my brother. When they told Jaime he was not allowed in the bedroom, he smiled and asked which one of them proposed to keep him out… Joffrey will show you no such devotion, I fear.”

Sansa lowered her head. Perhaps she should be feeling more kindly toward this woman, but after everything that had happened between them, she could not. She was not even curious what was compelling Cersei to such honesty.

“It’s so unfair,” she whispered, thinking that it was only Sandor what kept her from having the fate Cersei described.

Frowning, her voice sharp, her mother in law replied, “Try not to sound so sad, Sansa, even though you’re right. Of course it’s unfair. We’re women. Nothing in our lives is ever easy… You may never love Joffrey, but you’ll love his children. Although wait until you birth a child. A woman’s life is nine parts mess to one part magic. And the bits that look like magic often turn out the messiest of all… But you’re stronger than you look. I expect you’ll survive a bit of humiliation. I did. You could thank your father and that Payne boy for that, if they weren’t dead. Joffrey has never been able to forget the way they both shamed him, so he shames you in turn.”
Her words gave Sansa a chill. She hated to think back upon the time the lions had visited her and her father at Winterfell. A half smile flickered across Cersei’s face, and she suddenly asked, “Do you still dream of being loved, Sansa?”

“Everyone wants to be loved,” she answered, turning away in case her thoughts of Sandor betrayed her.

“I see age and experience have not made you any brighter,” said Cersei, speaking to her as if she was the biggest fool in the world. “Permit me to share a bit of womanly wisdom with you on this very special day when we find ourselves bonding over feminine affairs. Love is poison. A sweet poison, yes, but it will kill you all the same. And the more people you love, the weaker you are. You’ll do things for them that you know you shouldn’t do. You’ll act the fool to keep them happy, to keep them safe. Love no one but your children. On that front, a mother has no choice.”
The Sun From Both Sides

Chapter Notes

- Thank you to my friend and beta @thefeatherofhope for everything!! :D
- (*Title is taken from a quote by David Viscott*)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm does bind the restless wave,
Who bids the mighty ocean deep
It’s own appointed limits keep;
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

O Saviour, whose almighty words
The winds and waves submissive heard,
Who walked upon the foaming deep,
And calm amid the rage did sleep;
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Oh Holy Spirit, who did not brood
Upon the waters dark and rude,
And bid their angry tumult cease,
And give for wild confusion peace;
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Oh Trinity of love and power,
Your children shield in danger’s hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them where-so-ever they go;
Thus, evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

This was one of Sansa Stark’s favourite hymns. Her Father had taught it to her weeks before they sailed from England to France, and even though she had been looking forward to going to boarding school, the prospect of her first sea voyage had scared her. Eddard Stark, remembering how much she had enjoyed learning hymns with her mother before she passed away, had remedied the matter with “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”.

Sansa bowed her head to hide the smile that came to her face as she recalled how much she used to laugh whenever her father sang out loud in his strong, deep voice, for he had a bad ear. She was standing between Joffrey and Tommen at the Sunday service that was being held in the immense Jacobean style First Class dining saloon, as Captain Smith lead dozens of passengers in several hymns.

Looking up as a new song began, Sansa was relieved the lions had not noticed her slip. Particularly because after such an eventful morning with both mother and son, she had no desire to provoke them further until she could speak to her friend about it. Before she finished tightly tying up her corset, Cersei had even warned her that no matter what she felt inside, the face she showed to the world must look composed.

Especially when she felt like shivering every time her arm brushed that of her fiancé beside her; or when, every time Joff looked at her, Sansa’s tummy got so fluttery that she felt as though she’d swallowed a mouse. *He makes me feel as though something dead were slithering over my skin.*

Still, she had registered that he looked out of sorts, and aware that it was because of their altercation during breakfast, Sansa simply took a deep breath, telling herself to be as brave as her father. But it was hard to remember that when she longed with a burning urgency to learn what had transpired between Joffrey and Sandor when the former confronted the latter about last night.

With all of these in mind, and knowing that the Lannisters would require her to look pretty so they could parade their reserved protégé among their acquaintances, Sansa had taken special care with her hair and clothes. She wore a gown of rich, dark blue velvet, which awakened the colour in her eyes. It had purple satin accents and a white bodice inset with lace. A gold and moonstone comb with a large ornamental tortoiseshell decorated with coloured stones and pearls rested at the back of her head.
Both the dress and the comb had been gifts from her betrothed. The gown’s sleeves hid his other gifts: the bruises on her arms he’d given her earlier. Still, despite the pretty picture she presented, the waist so tight that Sansa could scarcely breathe. It was no wonder to her now that she sometimes caught men looking at her chest.

Finally, her hair had been brushed until it shone, and had then been arranged into half ponytail, which allowed her auburn curls to fall down her back. She had dismissed wearing a hat today, and had instead picked up a shawl, for there was a chill in the air this morning. With a little pang Sansa realized that these were the final days in which Sandor would be able to see her wearing such nice clothes in a long time.

*I do wonder though if he has ever seen me wearing my hair down like this,* Sansa thought while longing to be able to stare at him. She knew he was standing well in the back of the crowd, and she was certain that he was keeping an eye on her, since he had made it clear to her that he unfortunately followed no religion. Still, Sansa thought it best to ignore him altogether. She was certain her expression would illuminate the moment their eyes met, and no one could see that for their sakes.

Somehow knew that Sandor would understand her behaviour and would follow suit, but it was nonetheless hard to wait patiently for the moment when they would finally be able to be on their own to talk. *At least after the tour of the ship we’ll be free to do so,* Sansa recalled, thankful that tea on Sunday afternoon was not allowed.

It made her uncomfortable to think that the ceremony was passing as if in a dream for her. She did all that was required and expected, but her heart was not in it. When she was little she had enjoyed going to church, but after she had become the lion’s ward that had changed. But at some point Sansa found herself thanking God for delivering Sandor Clegane to her. *Please look out for us now,* she prayed.

When the service was finished a moment later, her spirits took flight. She followed her group as they walked away from the assembled congregation, her eyes instinctively fell on Sandor in a dark plain suit as he stood guard beside the entrance of the First Class Dining Saloon, his hands resting behind his back.

At the mere sight of him Sansa’s breath quickened and her heart began to beat a little faster. It didn’t even matter if he did not look back at her to avoid suspicion, but when she was passing by his side his grey eyes flickered to her, and Sansa saw his expression softening. He pressed his lips together ever so slightly, and that was almost enough to give her the courage she needed to endure whatever trials laid ahead until Wednesday, when Titanic reached America.
The ship’s gymnasium was a room full of machines, many of which Sansa did not recognize. And the ones she did were occupied. A woman with a distinguished air whose name she could not recall was pedalling a stationary bicycle, and Joffrey was working the oars of a stationary rowing machine with a well-trained stroke.

“It reminds me of my Harvard days,” he remarked to their group.

Little Tommen was standing impatiently beside Sansa, waiting for Joff to finish so he could get a closer look at the machine. She would have liked Sandor to join them so they could talk about the gymnasium, but he had remained outside, waiting for them as the rest enjoyed this part of the tour.

Still, Sansa understood she should be honoured. Mr. Andrews had offered to be their private guide, and from what she had overheard Cersei telling her eldest son earlier, theirs was the only party the Titanic’s shipbuilder had led exclusively, without having other passengers join in. They had spent a pleasant lunch with him, and had already been to the swimming pool, the tennis and squash racquet courts, the Turkish baths, and had even attended a golf course.

Suddenly, a bouncy little man in white flannels stepped before Sansa, and addressing the Lannister woman, Thomas McCauley, the gym instructor, informed in eager tones: “The electric horse is very popular, but we also have an electric camel. Ah, now that your fine young son is done, would you care to try your hand at the rowing, m’am?”

“Don’t be absurd,” Cersei stated. “I can’t think of a skill I should likely need less.”

Mr. Andrews, who had just hit a switch on a machine with a saddle to make it start to undulate, watched Sansa as she curiously put her hand on the apparatus, before saying, “The next stop on our tour will be the bridge. This way, please.”

As they left the wooden wheelhouse behind them and stepped inside the simple looking enclosed bridge, which was situated at the forward end of the boat deck, the commanding view took Sansa’s breath away and reminded her of the story Jack Dawson had told her yesterday at the party. He’d said that his favourite spot on Titanic was the bow, because by holding on to the rail and leaning forward so that he could look down, Jack had the view of the Atlantic unrolling towards him.
“It’s incredible, Sansa!” He had exclaimed with a grin. “There is only the wind, and the murmur of the sun sparkled water fifty feet below. Maybe a dolphin or two, and a small sight of the distant Statue of Liberty! If you close your eyes it’s almost as if there was no ship underneath you at all. It’s as if you were soaring! That’s the only way to appreciate this ship’s glory, if you ask me…”

Last night the pretty picture he painted with his words had reminded Sansa of her suicide attempt on Friday night, but now, staring off into the horizon, she gathered there must be some truth and beauty in the artist’s words.

Sansa had scarcely heard a word that their guide had spoken, but her thoughts were finally interrupted when a young man hustled into the bridge; and skirting around the small group, he handed a telegram to Captain Smith, saying, “Another ice warning, sir. This one is from the Baltic.”

“She’s too polite, Captain Smith,” the young officer said. “I don’t know if the other warnings were real, but this one is real.”

“Thank you, Sparks”, the elderly naval reserve officer replied, glancing at the message before nonchalantly putting it in his pocket.

The strong and graceful Englishman caught her eye, and nodding reassuringly to her, commented warmly, “Not to worry, it is quite normal for this time of year. In fact, we are speeding up. I’ve just ordered the last boilers lit.”

Thomas Andrews, with a slight scowl on his face, motioned the group toward the door before Sansa could think of a reply. The bridge was the last stop of their tour, and as their guide led them away from the bridge along the boat deck on the starboard side of the ship, (named thus because most lifeboats had been stowed securely in this place), Sansa recalled something that Sandor had told her yesterday about outdated maritime safety regulations.

Since she found herself walking beside the Irish shipbuilder, she impulsively turned to her companion and pointed out, “Mr. Andrews, I did the sum in my head, and with the number of lifeboats times the capacity you mentioned- forgive me, but it seems that there are not enough for everyone aboard.”

Mr. Andrews looked quite pleased with her question, and remarked in agreement, “About half, actually. Sansa, you miss nothing, do you? In fact, I put in these new type davits, which can take an extra row of boats here.”

He gestured along the deck, and continued sadly, “But it was thought, by some, that the deck
would look too cluttered. So I was overruled.”

The sound of Joff slapping the side of one of the lifeboats interrupted them. Seeing that her fiancé shot an angry look in her direction, Sansa realized that her questions had upset him. As the rays of the bright crisp sun danced on her hair and the floor, she lowered her eyes and resolved to speak no more while praying Sandor followed her example. She could feel the weight of her friend’s eyes on her as Joffrey exclaimed, “It’s a waste of deck space as it is, on an unsinkable ship!”

Thankfully, as soon as he said that, her betrothed decided that the time had come to break their little group up. Joffrey had arranged to meet with John Jacob Astor, and Cersei and Tommen had been invited by the Countess of Rothes to play board games and gossip. Sansa had also been included in the invitation, but after her pitiful social performance of the past few days, and despite their conversation of some hours ago, her mother in law had no desire to have her spend any time with her friends.

Once they were gone only Mr. Andrews and Sandor remained. *The only two people of the group who care about my opinions*, she noted. For a moment Sansa considered starting a conversation between the three of them, but since she had important matters to discuss with Sandor, she thanked the Irish businessman for his kindness and for the tour.

Mr. Andrews, looking a little uncertain about the prospect of leaving her alone with her ferocious escort, took a moment before replying, “It was my pleasure. And sleep soundly tonight, young Sansa. I have built you a good ship, strong and true. So don’t worry, she’s all the lifeboat you need in these smooth seas.”

“Thank you, Mr. Andrews,” she replied courteously. “It is kind of you to say so, and rest assured, now I have no fears.”

The moment she was left alone with Sandor, he put a heavy hand on her shoulder and steered her along the deck without a word. Sansa could sense his barely contained urgency, which he tried to keep at bay in order not to attract attention, but she was certain he was finding it as hard as she was. The first open door they reached was that of the now empty gymnasium, and it was there that they chose to finally talk privately.

Sandor followed her inside and closed the door behind them, glancing out through the ripple-glass window to the deserted starboard rail to make sure no one had seen them. A moment later he had strode over to stand by her side, his hand reaching out to grab her wrist as he barked, “I heard what happened this morning, little bird. Are you all right? Did that bastard hurt you? I don’t know how I manage to keep myself from shooting him after Blount told me what had happened!”
It was as clear as daylight that Sandor was angry. Sansa could feel the fury in him; she could see it on his face, the way his mouth was stretched tight in a tight line, the sharp rasp in his voice. She wondered dimly if the lions had not sense it because he had not wanted them to, or because there existed no special connection between the Lannisters and Sandor.

_They must be blind_, she thought as she realized that, despite everything, the hold Sandor had on her wrist was gentle. _Oh thank goodness they are blind!_ It was so odd how his mere proximity made Sansa feel excited, nervous, and most of all overwhelmingly relieved. _In only a day and a half he has become so important to me that I cannot imagine a worse fate than being without him._

“I was dying to be alone with you,” she informed him, shaking her head in an attempt to gain back her concentration. “Sandor, what did Joffrey speak with you? What did you tell him? I never revealed Dr. Broder´s name, but the only lie I could come up with when he confronted me was that a German doctor—”

“I know, little bird,” he snarled quickly, to ease her fears and spare her the need to go on. “I know. That piece of shit wanted confirmation for everything you said, and rather than waiting to see if my story would match yours, he just went straight ahead and told me what you´d come up with. So I just agreed and assured the idiot I would guard you better from now on.”

“Sandor, I´m so sorry. You warned me it was foolish to go to that party, but I really didn´t think anything would come of it. I just wanted to have fun. I never intended to put your friend´s life in danger.”

Sandor´s eyes bore into her own, restless and bright as a grey thunderstorm. Snorting, he replied, “Don´t worry, Elbert´s safe. I told Joffrey it was pointless to investigate him, and he confessed he guessed that going to the party and breaking the rules was what had attracted you to go to steerage, not Broder himself. In the end he just reported him and an officer had a talk with Elbert. I´ve already seen him and he told me that you shouldn´t fret your pretty little head about him.”

“Good,” Sansa said with relief. Now that all of this was settled they could move on and she could ask him the question that had been burning inside her for hours, consuming her very soul and peace of mind. “Oh Sandor, I- I still can´t believe it. We´re actually going to run away together!”

She took no care to hide her enthusiasm even though it saddened her that he had finally let go of her wrist. “I do feel awful about risking Aunt Lysa and my cousin´s lives in this way though. I can´t help but think that I am being selfish, but you know what being with lions drove me to do. If I could only think of a way to warn them—”
Sansa stopped talking because Sandor took her by the shoulders and stepped closer to her. His jet
black hair was covering half is his burns as he leaned down, and for a moment she thought he
meant to kiss her. Instead he growled, “Don´t make it harder for you, Sansa. I know you feel bad
about them, but the longer you stay with the Lannisters, the worse it will go for you. I don´t give a
fuck about anyone but you, and if you stay with them for your family´s sake- you just have to put
yourself first-”

“Sandor, please stop.” Sansa interrupted, so grateful for the emotion and urgency he was
displaying that she wanted to hug him. “I am not reconsidering my decision, so please do not
worry. I can barely recognize myself for this, but despite what I just said, when the ship docks, I
am getting off with you.”

She wondered if such words spoken aloud sounded mad. But because none of this would make
sense to the world, I trust it. Sansa stared up at Sandor Clegane´s burned face, wearing her heart on
her face, and he grinned at her in relief, his strong big hands sliding down her arms in a comforting
caress. But even though his touch upon her was slight, when he pressed down on the places where
her arms had bruises, Sansa cried out in pain.

Startled, her friend released her at once, and looking confused and even afraid, he gasped, “I- I´m
sorry, little bird! I don´t-”

Sansa bit her lip as Sandor abruptly stopped. She tried to avert her gaze, but she knew it was
useless. Even as she blinked, the reason behind her behaviour was quickly becoming apparent to
him.

“Seven fucking buggering hells!” he roared, forgetting to keep his voice down as he threw back his
head in anger. “He did hurt you, Sansa! Why the bloody hells didn´t you tell me?”

“It was my own fault!” she explained, the words tumbling out desperately. “I- you know that with
time I have learned to hide my feelings better when I am around Joff, so as not to anger him. This
morning it was just too much, but it won´t happen again! I can´t risk for another slip of mine
endangering our plan.”

“That little gutless sodding coward! If only I had been there!” he barked, pacing back and forth
before her, the man appearing tall, impassive and menacing as he ran a hand through his hair.
Sansa wasn´t sure he had even heard her. “I can´t believe- if only there was a way to kill him
before we left that would not send the police chasing after me…”

And then, before Sansa could do anything more than just gasp, Sandor had hit the nearby electrical
horse with his fist. The sound of his bones smashing into it sent a shiver down her spine, but after the impact only a curse escaped him.

“Sandor!” she cried out, both in surprise, worry and annoyance. “Stop this!”

She rushed to his side and took his hand in both her own, examining it. Sandor looked away in exasperation, still breathing heavily. Sansa tried to be careful as she inspected his hand from various angles. Thank God he doesn’t appear to have broken any bones, she thought with relief. Beyond having bruised knuckles, and a very small amount of blood showing through a cut where the skin had broken, he appeared to have suffered nothing serious.

“This is exactly why I didn’t want you to know about it,” Sansa informed him firmly. “I see I was right in suspecting you would have reacted in this manner. And breakfast was bad enough without you doing something rash.”

Although she could only see his profile, she registered him closing his eyes in an attempt to calm himself. Even as it struck Sansa how unreal yet natural it was to share this familiarity with him to the point where she was not afraid to tell off the fearsome Hound, Sansa began to caress Sandor’s injured hand very gently in both her own, her thumbs tracing little patterns over his skin.

He probably hasn’t realized it yet, she thought after a moment or two, holding her breath. And then, just as if she had lost control of the movements of her body, Sansa found herself raising Sandor’s hand to her lips. Closing her eyes, she tenderly kissed him. Instantly she felt him stiffen, and after only a sweet moment in which to enjoy the sensation that act had given her, Sandor pulled away.

“What the bloody hells do you think you’re doing, Sansa?” She heard him rasp hoarsely.

Her eyes opened at the sound of his voice, and even though it made her flush and avert her eyes, Sansa did not regret her behaviour. After all, she had intended to bring forth this issue as soon as she could, despite the fact that the possibility existed that she could be wrong about what he felt for her. But even if this endangered the current state of their relationship, Sansa had to know.

I never would have thought though I would be the one who would say such daring things, she thought nervously. And so openly! But it was of no use now to dwell on how if circumstances been different, she might never have formed such a strong bond with Sandor Clegane.
After all, perhaps this was my fate all along. There was no question in her heart as to whether or not they belonged together. Even as a little girl she had never dreamed that she could feel such depth of emotions for a man. Her attachment to Joffrey of a few years ago was a feeble fancy that was not even worthy of being compared with this feeling. What Sandor made her feel burst from her heart and ran all through her, shaking her to the core. It didn’t matter that her feelings were very young. They had already overtook her, and the promise of what they could become one day took her breath away.

Sansa returned her attention to Sandor, and found him looking at her, waiting for her to say something, the burned side of his mouth twitching. Her tummy began to flutter because she knew that it was going to be hard to get the words out. Speaking quietly in a voice she struggled to keep steady, she finally answered Sandor by saying, “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about something that you mentioned when you offered to keep me safe… I- Sandor, do you- do you care for me? Do you have feelings for me?”

Sandor’s mouth jerked as if she had slapped him, and his eyes widened in surprise. Finally he managed to snarl, “What?”

Frowning in dismay, Sansa hurried to explain herself. “Well, you said that you had been considering it for years, and I believe that what you meant with that was more than just to help me escape. Why would you take the trouble to clearly clarify that you would ask for nothing in return if I agreed? It was as if you thought I knew you wanted more, and I-”

“Sansa, this isn’t-”

“No, please let me finish. I- I suspect you are going to protest for several reasons. We are so different and each of us have had hard lives, and you may even think I am too young to know my own heart, but I swear to you that the moment I realized you had been taking care of me for years in any way you could because of what you felt for me - everything was truly all right with the world, Sandor. And to know that long before yesterday- the happiest day of my life so far because of how we got to know one another- you were looking out for me because you cared- I had never been so happy. You may say that you don’t expect anything in return, but I do. I want you, Sandor. And believe it or not, long before Titanic, I missed your presence in my life. I- I can’t say that I had thought of you in this fashion before, but what matters is that I do now, and everything else is unimportant in comparison to that. I want you today. Now. And it’s the only thing that makes sense to me in this mad world.”

There, Sansa thought when she was done. I know my heart, and now so does he. How she ever found confessing such truths so naturally in the end startled her. Nervously wringing her hands together, Sansa waited with bated breath for his response. The happiness they could find together was no longer held in the balance of fate, but on his decision.
The first thing she noticed once she was done speaking was that Sandor´s already clenched jaw
seemed to compress even tighter. Then he swore, clearly at a loss as to what to do next. Finally, he
fixed his attention on the floor and rasped in a voice that sounded like two wood saws grinding
together, “I- I have cared about what happens to you for a long time, and now I want to look after
you, Sansa… Take you away from your cage.”

Sansa released her breath when she realized he wasn´t going to say anything else, but she refused to
give up without one last try. Thinking quickly for something to make Sandor confess the words
that she could sense were stuck in his chest and which appeared to be unable to come out without
help, she replied, “You told me a few days ago that you would never lie to me. Is that really all you
want? If you don´t think of me in that way, I promise that I will never again bring this up no matter
how much I may want to do so.”

Her words amazed her. The thoughts that she was cornering him into giving in, as well as the fact
that she was pressuring the issue when maybe she ought to have waited to see what developed
between them, flashed across Sansa´s mind, but now wasn´t the time to regret her actions. That
may come in a moment or two.

For his part, she knew that Sandor was also surprised. He had looked up sharply as she spoke, and
was now gazing down at her in awe both at her determination, and that she had understood what he
´d meant when he told her that a dog would lie and die for her, but never lie to her. And in truth
Sansa had not understood their true meaning until this morning. But much of Sandor´s behaviour
and actions now made sense.

Still gazing at her, he was now studying her face, searching for something there. All of a sudden,
Sandor silently strode closer to her, his grey eyes stripping her bare, leaving Sansa´s soul naked
before him. And then, as if he finally could not help himself, he touched her cheek, his thumb
slightly tracing the line of her cheekbone.

“Little bird,” he said, his voice raw and harsh as steel on stone. “Don´t tempt me, or I bloody swear
that I won´t be able to control myself.”

Feeling her heart soaring with a triumph and a joy unlike anything she could ever have imagined
one could know, Sansa sighed in relief and said, “Stop fighting us.”

Since one of his huge hands was still cupping her face, Sansa took the other one in both her own
and brought it gently between them. Noticing it was the same hairy bruised hand she had held
moments ago, it seemed like a lifetime away that so much had developed between them, and Sansa
once again brought it to her lips.
Turning it over, she kissed his wrist and the inside of his palm tenderly, her eyes closed in order to
treasure this moment forever, relishing contentedly in the warmth of his skin against her mouth,
grateful that unlike most men she knew, Sandor never wore gloves.

“You see,” Sansa chirped gently after a long moment, looking up at Sandor´s face with a beaming
smile full of peace. “I had every right to do this.”

Chapter End Notes

- Sooooo, a bit different from the movie but I hope you don´t mind the changes x)
Sandor was standing in the room he shared with Joffrey, staring at the idiot´s private safe as he stroked his beard. He knew as well as it´s owner both the combination and the wealth that was hidden inside the steel box, and if he were to steal even only of it´s contents, that would be more than enough to keep the little bird in relative comfort for years on end.

The possibilities that such a thought provoked were endless, and for a moment Sandor wanted nothing more than to be able to take a small fortune from the safe before he ran away with Sansa. He even grinned as he imagined laughing in the lions´ faces as he did that. But his smirk only lasted a moment, for he knew that robbing the Lannisters would only increase their desire for vengeance once they discovered he had escaped with the little bird in tow.

Turning his back on the steel safe, Sandor´s eyes fell on the brass bed where the son of a bitch slept. He could barely stand the sight of it, not only because it was Joffrey´s, but because it brought back all the hatred he had for the man. His hands tightened into fists at the memory of the bruises the bastard had left on Sansa in the morning. Sandor had felt immensely pleased by the news that the little bird had stood up to her sick betrothed, even as he was annoyed at her for putting herself in such a situation in the first place. Though that piece of shit couldn´t crush her spirits anymore at least.

*It will all be over soon,* Sandor reminded himself after a few heartbeats in which he tried to regain some measure of calm. In truth, he knew that now he had the upper hand on Joffrey Baratheon in more sense than one despite the coward´s wealth, but Sandor would always be bothered by the fact that he´d been unable to break the man´s jaw in an attempt to get some measure of vengeance for what he´d done to Sansa.

Right in that moment he heard her moving inside her bedroom, where she had disappeared to change dresses some moments ago. The thought that she was naked just a few steps away sent his hands trembling, and reminding himself that there now was a possibility to act on his desires one day, Sandor walked away from the view of Sansa´s closed door to the suite´s living room. At present he had too much on his mind to even begin letting his imagination run wild in that direction.
Sandor entered the room, immune to all of it’s luxurious decorations and spun around backwards a chair near the fireplace. Straddling it, he sat down and leaned the unburned side of his face on his hand, his elbow resting over the top of the chair. Sandor hadn’t had a moment to himself ever since the little bird confronted him with his feelings about her back at the Titanic´s gymnasium and he felt it was time to reflect on it.

To begin with, Sansa had definitely surprised him from the moment he understood she finally knew his secret, to the way she had conducted herself. And now Sandor felt impatient, for he was desperate to see her again even though they had only parted a few moments back. But he wanted to breathe the same air as Sansa, and even touch her to reassure himself that now she was really his.

And yet, because he was aware of what they both did to each other, Sandor knew that there was no need for such guarantees between them. It was just that it was strange to get around the fact that now she was his and he was hers completely. He had wanted for this for years, even as he called himself a bloody fool for daring to even think of her as more than just the unlucky fiancé of his employer´s grandson.

Because even after Sandor offered to take her away from her prison, his resolution to keep at bay had been strong. Or so I sodding thought. For at the first opportunity he had forgotten his initial intentions. Not that the little bird left me much choice. Though I’m far from complaining. And in the end, maybe fighting what the little bird provoked in him would only have been postponing the inevitable. Maybe all of this had always been meant to happen.

*Might be I was looking at it the wrong way,* he thought. *I believed I would be taking advantage of her if I gave in, depriving her of the chance to find a man more worthy of her. But such a choice was never mine to make.* It had hit Sandor like a lightning bolt that it was up to the little bird whom she wanted to be with, and he was bloody stupid if he’d ever believed himself to be strong enough to resist her forever.

*That’s why when the moment came, all that was left for me to do was to accept her decision.* And hadn’t Sandor told himself last night that all he wanted was to make Sansa happy? Well, she seemed to think that only with him could she be so, and she had addressed and beaten every point he’d meant to bring up as the little bird confronted Sandor about his feelings for her, almost as if she had been pledging herself to him.

Sandor feared he may have been selfish, but he just hadn’t had the heart not to give in. Even now he didn’t even consider trying to rectify things, for in truth, he liked to know that the little bird was now thinking about him in the way he had done about her for years. He was not blind to the fact that they had grown close due to their difficult circumstances, but nothing in Sandor Clegane´s life had even been simple or normal.
But nothing had ever been so right either. And now Sandor felt relieved that such a heavy load had been taken off his shoulders, even as he felt immensely happy about the way things had turned out. Which was why he now vowed to himself that nothing on earth would come between them if he could help it.

*Unless she decides otherwise.* Sandor didn’t feel like thinking too much on that, but he knew that if the day ever came when she wanted to leave his side even after they’d been together, then he would let her. That was one of his initial decisions that had not changed. *It would break me, but I would accept it.*

And yet, if things did turn out all right between them, and the little bird wanted them to marry one day, Sandor would only be too glad to please her. But the idea of such a union was too strange for him to worry about at the moment. A bit incredulous that such a thought had even crossed his mind, Sandor snorted and stood up. Better not to dwell that far along down the road, or else he would soon be imagining how many kids the little bird would want, and how his family’s house would look like.

At present, the magnitude of knowing that Sansa wanted to be with him filled him with more than enough happiness; a feeling beyond anything he had ever known, which in turn left him once again feeling impatient to see her. *But I bet it’s going to take a lot more time for her to be ready,* Sandor gathered, resigned. The little bird was close to perfect, but she was a fool when it came to dresses and such.

Still, he shouldn’t mind that. *It may be a long time since she has another chance to change three times a day soon enough.* But in the end whatever she wore, to Sandor’s eyes Sansa always looked too bloody good to be true. Craving some fresh air, he strode towards the promenade and for a couple of moments, he spent his time studying the two ways in which one could latch the windows. There was the day latch and one for storms, but Sandor didn’t spare them much of his attention in the end.

Too distracted to do much, and hoping that the next few days before they arrived in New York would pass by swiftly, Sandor took out a cigarette and turned his attention to the view outside the ship. It was dusk and the sky was painted with orange light. He turned his eyes toward the distant horizon where the sun had fallen, noticing that the ocean was as smooth as glass, and the weather was clear, calm, and very cold. Sandor closed his eyes in an attempt to let the chill winds clear his head.

When he was done with his second cigarette, he was still staring at the calm sea as Titanic glided through it, so lost in his thoughts that he never heard Sansa’s footsteps falling softly behind him. But then Sandor heard her voice saying, “Hello, Sandor.”
He turned only to feel warm at the sight of her. *Far too damn beautiful as usual.* Sandor’s eyes drank in the way her eyes sparkled with energy, how radiant was her smile, and how the cold breeze made her cheeks grow red. The little bird had let her pool of curls completely loose, a sight Sandor had never beheld. He was entranced both by the way the electric lights made it glow to the point it resembled burning embers, and by how it was blowing behind her.

Sansa was standing with an air of casual modesty before him, he noticed as he stood half in daylight, half in shadow. There was something different about her, and Sandor could only gather that the change had been brought about mostly because of what had happened between them earlier, rather than by the strange dress she was wearing. He had never seen her in anything so simple before, and yet Sandor was fascinated by how the gown clung to the curves of the little bird´s body, almost like a second skin.

“You look nice,” he could not help but rasp hoarsely.

Sandor was aware he had never paid anyone this sort of compliment before, and he hoped he´d done it right, even as he felt relief that the little bird was too innocent to realize the effect she had on his body. *Don´t even think about it*, Sandor warned himself, as he considered that Sansa would look even better without that dress on.

He gathered he had done well done enough with those three words though, for the little bird gave him a beaming smile and giggled. Then she spun, the bottom of her gown swirling around her. Raising an eyebrow at her behaviour, Sandor watched Sansa curiously as she stepped back into the living room. He saw her pick up a pile of clothes from a nearby chair and carrying them in her arms, she came back to the enclosed promenade.

“What in seven hells are you doing, little bird?” he growled in surprise, after Sansa had thrown the pile of clothing into the sea.

Biting her lip in that way that drove him crazy, Sansa looked guilty as she answered, “Well, I can´t really take my dresses off on my own, but on Friday night I discovered a way to do so. I cut them off with some scissors!”

Sandor was at a loss for words. Giggling again, the little bird continued, “Don´t look at me like that, Sandor! I couldn’t very well wake Trudy up to help me undress after that night when you found me at the stern of the ship, so cutting it away seemed like a good idea, and it did work! And last night after the party- had Colonel Gracie not seen us, the Lannisters would have suspected anyways about what we´d been up to if they caught the sight of my gown! It was covered in beer and smelled quite awful! I also had to cut off the blue one I was just wearing, since Cersei had
tightened it so hard I could scarcely breathe in it, let alone remove it in any other way.”

“But won`t anyone notice they`re gone?” Sandor asked suspiciously, not wholly convinced this had been a good idea.

“Not really”, Sansa chirped. “Joffrey won´t, and I at least must be thankful that his mother doesn´t supervise my wardrobe, which keeps her in the dark about this. Trudy knows, but she thinks it´s only because I don´t want to disturb her after she´s retired to bed that I´ve been doing it on my own… And I suspect she sympathizes because she understands how these gowns bind me even tighter to my prison.”

“Well,” Sandor said after a moment. “There`s nothing happening tonight. So there`s nothing stopping you from asking your maid to help you after dinner.”

“Oh, this gown is different. It´s the only one I can put on and take off on my own,” the little bird announced, resting her hands on the rail so she could peer over the edge. “And in any case, I´m not going to dinner.”

“What?” he snarled, registering the fact that Sansa was not wearing her engagement ring, a sight that pleased him.

“I don’t feel like going to dinner with the lions after what has happened between us, Sandor,” she explained calmly, shaking her head slightly, the movement of her hair catching Sandor´s attention for a moment. “I want to be with you.”

“Fuck, Sansa,” he growled, stepping closer to her. “You know I want that too, but we can´t. We´ve already pissed off Joffrey today. It´s too risky.”

“But I have it all figured out,” she clarified quickly, not taking the trouble to hide her eagerness. “When Trudy comes to help me get ready for dinner, I am going to claim to have a fierce headache, and would much rather dine alone. Joff’s still angry with me, so I doubt he’ll object, or even take the trouble to come asking for me. And so when my dinner arrives, we can share it here! You’re not expected to be with anyone else, so you’d just be following your duty. And we need not fear being interrupted by Joffrey, since I heard him tell his mother that he’s going to meet with Mr. Guggenheim. They have some business meeting with John D. Rockefeller and Henry Selfridge on Friday morning, and I am willing to bet they will prepare for it till well after midnight.”
Sandor frowned, trying to look for a loophole in the plan. He liked it, but that did not make it perfect. As he considered whether or not he should give his consent, the little bird look up at him with big wide expectant eyes, and when he met her gaze, the way Sansa´s eyelashes flickered quickly was his undoing.

When he nodded in agreement, the little bird was so pleased that for a moment Sandor was certain she was going to fling her arms around him, but unfortunately she did not. She’s shy, he thought in understanding, knowing full well that the mixture of her current innocence and the straightforwardness which Sansa had conveyed back in the gymnasium were going to drive him too distraction.

Now that they had taken such a big step forward and he had made up his mind about letting things run their course without protest, Sandor was desperate to kiss the little bird. He had wanted to ever since before she kissed his hand that second time, but had held back, aware anyone could walk in on them at the gymnasium.

*There’s no one stopping us now,* he thought, not really believing he was actually planning on kissing Sansa Stark within moments. But then, just as when the little bird had further surprised him by claiming the right to kiss his hand, Sansa did something that stopped him from kissing her pretty mouth.

“Oh look, Sandor!” she gasped, turning away from him to contemplate the horizon. “It´s so very lovely!”

Sandor stared at her for a heartbeat, taken aback not by this outburst, but by how Sansa´s little hand reached out to squeeze his own as she sighed contentedly. Snorting resignedly, the sound coming out as half as snarl to his ears, he turned to watch the sun disappear beside the little bird as they stood invulnerable, towering over the sea. It only lasted for a couple of moments, but Sandor could appreciate what had driven the Sansa to turn her attention from him to the view before them.

“It’s really something,” he agreed, thinking that even though this was not the first sundown he had ever seen, it was the first one had had not witness on his own.

Sansa turned her beautiful face up towards him, and with soft smile she told him in a gentle voice, “I have a surprise for you.”

Curious, Sandor grinned down at her. “You do, do you?”
“Come,” the little bird said, leading him by the hand towards the other end of the enclosed promenade.

They walked over to the corner where Sansa´s harp stood, and when they reached it, she brushed it´s strings with her fingertips and chirped, “This is the only thing from my past Joff allowed me to keep. I- I have not touched it in years, even though I used to love playing and singing it to my Father once. Since I´m not going to see it ever again once we dock, I thought I should play it one last time. And unless I´m much mistaken, I told you not so long ago that I would gladly sing you Florian and Jonquil.”

Taken aback, Sandor blinked as his stared first at her face, and then at the harp. Surprised but very pleased, he smiled and growled, “That you did. Go on then with your singing, pretty bird.”

Sansa beamed at him due to the compliment and because he knew she was excited about this. She let go of his hand and sat down on the chair next to the big instrument, while Sandor leaned back on the wall and took out another cigarette, ready to enjoy his private concert. Not only was he looking forward to hearing her singing again, but knowing he had in a small way helped the little bird reconnect with her past, made Sandor feel content. It was a good way to end this day.

Relaxing, he lit up his cigarette and waited, his eyes fixed on Sansa before him. He registered that now that she was sitting down, the instrument seemed taller than her. The little bird cleared her throat and ran her fingers up and down the strings, and after taking a deep breath she began the song. It didn´t take Sandor many minutes after that to forget the cigarette he was holding, or even how now that night was falling, the air was growing colder. All of his attention was focused on the young woman with the magnificent voice, who mastered the musical instrument with a talent unknown to him.

One moment, Sandor´s eyes were following Sansa´s hands as they moved across the harp, and the next he was taking in how peaceful she looked as she sang him the song. The sound of her sweet, rich, strong voice amazed him just as much as it had done last night after the steerage party.

She would ´ve been a star if she ´d ever had the chance to audition, Sandor thought as he gazed down at her with a rueful smile, not even aware that he had unconsciously thrown the untouched cigarette to the floor and stamped it out with his shoe. But she still can if she wants to. Sandor would ´ve liked it if he was the only one to ever hear Sansa´s voice like this, but he wasn´t about to stop her from sharing it with the audiences of the world if that made her happy.

He wasn´t aware how long they stayed like that, the little bird singing away while he stared at her, a bit incredulous that this was all really happening, but when Sansa was done, Sandor guessed that it couldn´t have lasted as long as it had seemed to him at the moment. Meeting his eyes, she leaned the side of her head against the instrument and asked, “Well, how did I do? Did you like it?”
Words failed him. Sandor found he couldn’t move or say a word, and he was aware that his face didn’t look good, since he wasn’t even smiling anymore. He was just rooted to the spot as a familiar and yet strange warmth began to take hold of him. Sansa must have understood some sign of what was going on with him, because the way she looked at him changed.

It was no longer the same almost childish expression she’d worn as she gazed out at the sun setting minutes ago, but rather a face full of excitement and longing. Blushing, Sansa continued to stare at him, and at last unable to resist it any longer, and knowing he would be welcome, Sandor strode forward to reach the little bird. And when he did, he came up behind her and places his hands on her shoulders, bending forward.

Sansa sighed softly as she leaned back against him, and he saw her close her eyes as he went down on one knee. As gently as he could manage, Sandor brushed away her soft hair so he could kiss the back of her white neck. The sound of her breathing growing stronger, Sandor smiled as he moved his hands from her shoulders to her waist. It was so small he only needed one to cover it.

Pressing her gently against him, Sandor left a trail of kisses on the little bird, starting at her shoulder blade and ending on her arm, right where the bruises the sick bastard had left on her. In that moment, Sansa placed her one of her hands over his, and then their fingers were intertwining. Moving slowly, she leaned back further, even as he pushed forward slightly as well. With her other hand, the little bird reached out to caress the good side of his face.

Sandor groaned and buried his head in her hair, letting the scent of her wash over him for a couple of moments. Then he found that his good cheek was against hers and he was living in a world out of time. He had imagined this moment for longer than he could remember, and now Sandor was brushing Sansa’s forehead and cheeks with his burned lips as she turned her head around towards him.

He raised his hands, which had been moving in soothing circles over her hips, and cupped her face, and as their eyes met, bright, alive and clouded with desire, Sandor realized that they had both been holding their breaths. Not waiting another heartbeat, Sandor closed his eyes as his mouth finally found hers. He had intended it to be a gentle kiss, but the moment his lips touched hers, Sandor gave in to the inevitable force that claimed mastery over him.

And the little bird was kissing him back in this moment of glory with a building passion, even though at first she had done so slowly, almost tremulously. But as his heart quickened and his body responded to Sansa’s eagerness after she opened her mouth to him, Sandor wrapped his arms around her as daylight faded away at long last. It was hard to tell who was the one who was demanding the other to comply.
When they finally broke apart, they were both breathing heavily, their breaths mingling. They stared at each other for a moment before breaking into smiles, and then Sandor buried his hands in her hair, his forehead against hers.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, little bird,” he managed to rasp in a hoarse voice as he hugged her closer, her arms going around his neck.

Sandor had more experience with fucking than with kissing, but after today he hoped he would have a chance to try the latter more often, for kissing Sansa Stark had been better than anything he could have ever imagined. He couldn’t even begin to grasp how it was that he of all people could have found such joy and wonder with someone as her.

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As much as Sandor was loath to break apart and leave the promenade, it soon grew colder, and the last thing he wanted was for the little bird to catch a cold. So they went back to the living room, and as he followed her Sandor registered with amusement that Sansa had become shy.

These contradictions in her character would indeed never stop amazing him, even though he understood why they happened. One moment she was like the girl he had first met all those years ago, and the next one she was surprising him with the depths of maturity that hid under her skin of steel. Not two minutes ago she had been kissing Sandor as he secretly hoped she had never done with Joffrey or someone else, and now she was finding it a hard job to keep her cheeks from growing red.

Fully aware that her modesty was not something he should fear, Sandor decided he wouldn’t press this further, but would rather wait until she felt comfortable enough to acknowledge it. Wondering then what he could say to begin a casual conversation, Sandor’s eyes fell on one of her paintings. Remembering how the little bird had defended them against Joffrey the day they had boarded the Titanic, he stopped walking and snarled, “You have good taste. I like that painting.”

Sansa turned around and faced him with a whimsical smile. “You like my Monet?”

He knew she was aware he had just remarked upon it to please her, but as the little bird’s grin widened, Sandor heard himself answer, “I like it because you do.”

She broke into a laugh and said, “Oh Sandor, you are too kind.” And then, an impish little smile
appearing on her face that aroused all of Sandor’s suspicions, Sansa added, “Wait here. I’m going to go get something from my bedroom.”

Snorting and shaking his head, Sandor did as he was told. But he only had to wait for a couple of moments, and before he knew it, the little bird was back, a piece of paper in her hands.

“What do you think of this one?” she wondered, handing it to him.

Sandor looked down at the piece of paper only to discover it was a drawing of Sansa. He inhaled sharply as he closely took in what a great piece of work this was. It was almost life like, for the eyes on the little bird had been drawn in a way that captured her soul.

“I like this one better,” Sandor informed her, smiling at the real Sansa and not even thinking anymore about how such a movement would stretch his scars tight.

“Jack Dawson did it,” the little bird told him then, trying not to chuckle at the way his eyes widened in shock at the news. “But I hope you don’t mind that, since I want to give it to you.”

Sandor’s mouth began to twitch, and he returned his attention to the drawing. Sure enough at the bottom on the right corner were the painter’s damn initials: JD. He does have talent, Sandor grudgingly accepted, knowing full well that he would treasure this gift forever even though he disliked it’s author.

So he thanked the little bird and folded the paper in two, hiding it in his coat’s inside pocket. Realizing that he was jealous, Sansa stood on her toes and places her hands on his chest.

“So you think he captured me well?” she wanted to know, blinking up at him with a coquettish air.

Sandor was both amused and aroused by that, and he found himself barking a “Yes,” even as he placed a hand in between Sansa’s shoulder blades, before letting it slid down slowly to the small of her back. The way the little bird’s body shivered with pleasure in his arms made it all the more exhilarating.

He was just leaning down to kiss her again when they heard a faint knock on the door of Sansa’s bedroom, and in the blink of an eye they had separated. Sandor made straight for the promenade
after Sansa whispered, “It’s Trudy!” to him, and left his arms with a startled expression. Trying to remain calm, telling himself that they could have been interrupted in worse ways, Sandor took out a cigarettes and strained his ears so he could listen to whatever Trudy and Sansa talked about.

_I hope her plan works_, Sandor found himself thinking as he registered how the ship stood silhouetted against a purple sky, her thousand portholes reflected in the calm water.

From inside the living room he heard the little bird exclaiming in a tired voice, “I´m in the living room Trudy.”

Some moments later the Irish maid replied, “Good evening, miss! Oh, so you´ve put on another dress?”

“Yes, and I choose one that was easy to take off this time.”

“Have you decided which one would you like to wear for dinner?”

“My head hurts terribly, Trudy. So you´ll have to excuse myself to Mr. Baratheon and his mother, for I am going to retire early tonight. But before you do so, would you mind having a steward send me some dinner?”

“Of course, miss.”

“Thank you,” the little bird chirped kindly, making Sandor stifle a laugh. _Always so courteous. A proper little lady._

“But shouldn´t you be resting then, miss?” the servant girl inquired, making him tense.

“I will as soon as I decide replace the Picasso painting in my room for this one of Monet. I´ve been trying to decide between this one with the water lilies or this one by Degas with the ballet dancers, but I think I like the with the flowers better.”

Smirking, Sandor relaxed. Everything seemed to be going according to plan, and Trudy had been fooled.
“I’ll carry it for you, miss,” the young woman offered.

“No, thank you. I can manage. I hope you had a good day, Trudy?”

“Oh yes, miss, I did! This ship is a wonder! I will be very sorry to leave it.”

“Indeed…”

“Did you have a good day, miss?”

“It was all right,” Sansa responded, her voice fading away as she left the living room.

By this time Sandor had already prepared a plausible lie in case Trudy found him outside smoking. He would claim to have nothing better to do, and since he had been charged to keep an eye on Joffrey’s betrothed, he was just doing as instructed, even as he kept his distance from Sansa, since it was better if no one suspected how close to each other they had grown.

*And this is my bloody room too after all,* he reminded himself. But it was all useless, since Trudy never came out into the enclosed promenade, and was never aware of his presence here. He could still hear the distant chatter of their voices as the two women talked in the little bird’s bedroom, and deciding it would be best to hide here until dinner arrived, Sandor smoke another cigarette and waited, all the while staring at Sansa’s harp.

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The steward brought the little bird almost all of the dishes that were being served over at the First Class dining saloon. There were oysters and a fancy chicken soup followed by poached salmon with Mousseline sauce, filet mignons Lili, roast duckling, creamed carrots, boiled rice, pate de foie gras, pudding, chocolate and vanilla éclairs, French ice cream, fresh fruits, cheeses and coffee. There were also different wines for each course, as well as coffee and port and distilled spirits.

As they sat on the floor of Sansa’s locked bedroom next to each other, their walls against the wall, Sandor found himself feeding the little bird off his plate and drinking from the same cup as her. They had already discovered that finding a good conversation to discuss was not hard for them,
but unlike yesterday when they first began to know each other, now they would also kiss unpredictably.

It didn´t even seem to matter that this was probably going to be the only time they shared such fine food together, for they spent some minutes wondering where would they be in a week´s time, and what they would be having for dinner. Sandor even felt a mixture of pride and regret as Sansa joked and made light of the struggles they would soon face on the road.

Still, despite all these, Sandor found it hard to fully enjoy himself for several reasons. He was always alert in case a servant or Joffrey came into some of the other rooms, and not only did he fear for Sansa´s reputation if it were to be discovered that she had dined alone with him in her bedroom, but also for her sake in case her spineless fiancé found out about this.

They had already talked over what they would do if Joffrey came back hours earlier than he was expected, but Sandor was still not comfortable with the way they were disregarding the risk of behaving so carelessly. But when he had voiced them to Sansa, she had only replied, “I told you- I could not have dinner with the lions after what happened between us. I wanted to celebrate this new life with you. But I promise that after tonight I will try my best to be proper. I´ll go have dinner with the Lannisters tomorrow night and on Tuesday without a word of complaint, because the fact that it will be the last days I ever have to spend with them will sustain me. But tomorrow is still hours away, Sandor! Let´s make the most of tonight. Oh, which reminds me- Mr. Andrews told me there is to be a dog show tomorrow. Let´s go and take Tommen. I´ll ask his mother for permission. He is the only one of them that I like, and since I won´t be seeing him ever again, I want to spend some time with him. He´s always been kind to me. He is so unlike his brother…”

It took them about an hour to finish dinner, and as they ate their last dish, the little bird looked at him and giggled, exclaiming, “Oh Sandor, I hadn´t seen how tiny the glass looks in your hand! I can barely see it! I don´t think I´ve told you, but I really like how big and strong your hands are.”

Snorting even as he was glad so much food would keep her from getting drunk, Sandor shook his head and barked, “I think the wine is going to your head once again, bird.”

“You´re probably right,” Sansa agreed, settling her own empty cup on the floor beside them. “But that last one was a very fine French vintage. It tasted of oak and fruit and hot summer nights.”

Sandor snorted again and stood up, offering her his hand to help the little bird get up. He began to clean up the empty plates, glasses, and bottles scattered about the ground. After a moment of hesitation, Sansa started helping him. They stayed silent for a couple of moments, but once everything had been placed on the empty trays the steward had brought, she coughed. That sound was so familiar to Sandor by now, that he could recognize it for what it really was.
“What’s on your mind, Sansa?” he wondered, knowing she was gathering courage to ask him something.

Completely unperturbed that he could read her so easily, Sansa bit her lip and unconsciously played with one of her red curls before replying, “You don’t drink like you used to, do you?”

Sandor blinked in surprise. “Why do you say so?”

“Well, I remember that you were quite drunk the night you told me about your scars. And yesterday when I met Dr. Broder- he said he had saved your life after a fight, and included in the same sentence that you used to drink to drown your pain.”

_Bloody great_, Sandor thought, telling himself that he would ask Elbert as soon as he could to warn him beforehand about anything he wanted to share with Sansa, in order to give him a chance to prepare himself. He finally nodded as an answer to her question, but remained silent. The little bird wanted to know more though. Stepping closer to him, she asked him if he would like to talk about it.

“There’s not much to tell,” Sandor told her at last. “Before this trip, life was shit for me. I just did my job for the lions and saved whatever money I didn’t spend on drinking. And after Gregor died, I felt almost like a ghost, drifting through life no longer with a purpose. When I met Broder I had been in a fight that had almost cost me my life, since I was so drunk when it started I was hardly able to protect myself. But it will never happen again, I promise you. I learned my lesson.”

He said those last words because a look of fear had shadowed her beautiful face, and Sandor wanted to reassure her that she would be safe with him always. Sansa took a deep breath and said with a sigh, “I’m glad you did, but what made you drink so much to the point that your life was at risk?”

Touched by the concern in her voice, Sandor realized that the time had come to tell her another truth. Running a hand through his hair to keep it away from his face, he answered with a shrug, “I had just learned that the date for your wedding had been fixed. And in truth, I didn’t expect it to hit me that hard. You’d been engaged to Joffrey for a long time by then, but now that I think back upon those months when I was travelling through Europe, I can confirm what I always suspected.”

The little bird nodded, understanding. “Because you had already cared for me for a long time by then. And that’s why you came back to their service even though you hate them and could have
disappeared and abandon your this life back then. I- I used to think you´d returned because the pay was good and life with them was all you had ever know, but it was for me, and I thank you, Sandor. I- it overwhelms me.”

Her voice trailed off, but Sandor could guess what she was thinking. If truth be told, not that many hours ago he would have been uncomfortable at the thought that Sansa would discover just how much she meant to him, but now Sandor was more than happy to accept their current situation without taking the trouble to understand how or why it was working out so well. *If only I believed in fate or some other bullshit like destiny, I could claim that to be the answer for this. But in truth, this went beyond anything like that.*

“Yes, it was for you,” Sandor heard himself rasp as he caressed his knuckles against her cheekbone. “I wanted to see you again and look out for you as much as I could once you got married to that son of a bitch. Who knows- maybe I would have ended up ripping that bastard´s heart out on your wedding night.”

As tears appeared on her face, the little bird smiled at him and reached out to once again cup his burned cheek with her fingers. Only this time she bid him to bend over in a whisper, and when he did Sansa kissed his scars in several places, before claiming his mouth with her own.

“Oh God,” she said after a long moment, resting her head against his chest as she hugged him tightly. “I don´t know what I would do if I were to lose you.”

Sandor held her in his arms as strongly as he could without hurting her, resting his chin on the top of her head. *The same goes for me too*, he thought, but not wishing to have the little bird worry without cause, he snarled instead, “You won´t. Just close your eyes and imagine we´re already far away from here.”

“No,” Sansa said, shaking her head and turning her face up to stare at him with big wide eyes. “I don´t want to imagine anything. I´ll do that tomorrow and on Tuesday. But tonight is our night, and I don´t want it to end just yet. Take me somewhere far away from this place.”

He didn´t need to remember they were on a ship to understand her meaning. His heart actually stopped beating for a moment as Sandor took in the meaning behind Sansa´s words. Their bodies were still pressed close together, their faces touching. His eyes grew wide and alert as he rasped, “You- you´re sure?”

“Yes,” she sighed softly. “I know that we are rushing in into what´s happening to us, but I want this, don´t you?”
“Fuck yes,” he growled, and a moment later his lips had closed over hers and his hands were over her, pulling at her dress.

The warmth of the little bird´s body was clouding Sandor´s senses, to the point where he could not even breathe as she melted under his touch, his hands on her breasts, hers gripping his arms and back. It didn´t take him more than a minute to begin to lose himself in the moment, but it was different for Sansa, for at one point she broke away and gasp, “No Sandor, wait, not here!”

At first he heard her voice, but the words had no meaning to him. But when he registered that the little bird was trying to push him away, Sandor came back to his senses. Groaning and breathing heavily, ashamed at how easily he had lost his control, he rested his forehead on her shoulder and snarled, “Sorry. I- I thought- I don´t want you to feel pressured. You´re right Sansa, this is dangerous, and you shouldn´t-t you shouldn´t do anything you don´t want to.”

Sandor tried hard to keep the disappointment from his voice, but it didn´t matter, since Sansa quickly intervened by saying, “You misunderstand me. I- I want to do this, but I- I want to be in a place where we don´t have to fear Joffrey or Trudy barging in on us. So let´s go far away right now. Somewhere no one will find us. Let´s go in search of some place where we can be alone for a couple of hours, Sandor! What do you say?”
Sansa had arranged the pillows on her bed to look similar to her, and in the dark with the bed hangings closed, she was certain they needed not worry if someone walked into her bedroom, that they would discover she was not sleeping in her bed. If they happened to meet someone they knew, Sansa would claim she had needed some fresh air, and since Sandor was expected to guard her, he had been left with no other choice than to follow her.

He had placed the empty dinner tray on the floor of the corridor outside the living room, and had waited for her there, because he could not be seen going out of her bedroom. Thankfully, as soon as she opened the door and stepped outside, Sansa noticed there was no one around. Her heart raced with excitement as her eyes met his; she locked the door and began to walk along the corridor towards the B-deck foyer.

Her heart pounded with excitement as she thought of what they were about to do, for, despite the secrecy that it entailed, and it was far-removed from the teachings she had received as a child, Sansa Stark had never felt more certain of anything in her life than she did now, giving herself to Sandor Clegane.

She had not forgotten how precarious their situation was, or how risky it was for them not to wait until they were far away from the Lannisters’ grasp, but she could not bear the thought of not immediately exploring this new depth of their relationship. *It makes no sense,* she knew. And yet, she could not ignore such a powerful emotion. And Sansa knew Sandor felt the same, overwhelmed by the intensity of feeling that had taken hold of them, to the point where rational thoughts had disappeared for both of them.

Sandor was striding beside her, leading her past the stairs of the foyer to the bank of elevators. She blindly followed him, even though she recognized he had no idea where they could go and hide from the rest of the world.

*“Take us down,”* he barked at the elevator operator, whose eyes grew wide as he caught sight of Sandor’s scars.
"Are you deaf, fool?" Sansa´s companion snarled. “Get moving!"

The young man quickly scrambled to comply, whimpering, “I´m sorry, sir! Good evening, miss.”

“Don´t call me sir if you know what's good for you,” Sandor warned him, making it hard for Sansa to keep herself from rolling her eyes. Really, he is just showing off!

The operator closed the steel gate and the lift started to descend. With the nervous operator beside them, Sansa and Sandor could do nothing but stare anywhere but at each other, not speaking, not standing too close together. As they went down, Sansa´s mind replayed the events that had led up to this moment, and it was hard for her to keep a radiant smile from appearing on her face.

From the boundless joy she had felt when Sandor had confirmed he had feelings for her, to the tender moment after so many years when she had played her harp and sang him a song; to that precious first kiss as Titanic glowed with the warm creamy light of late afternoon; a kiss that had left her trembling, ecstatic, and blushing from head to foot, which had then been followed by the wonderful dinner they had shared together.

Those were blissful moments, even if they had taken place under the shadow of being discovered, and they had made Sansa realize that she should stop thinking she could never be any closer to Sandor than she already was, for the connection between them was clearly going to intensify as the days went by. Her heart went out to him as she realized that the news of her engagement had almost cost him his life, and it was then that the possibility of losing him had shaken her to the core.

She had been unable to breathe even though he had been safe and in her arms. The thought had occurred to her that Cersei had been right when she talked to Sansa in the morning about love. But she saw it from the wrong perspective, she felt certain. The love she had experienced this day was from poisonous. And yet, she still hesitated. If they were to be caught, Sandor would be in great danger.

The thought that their feelings for each other could harm them in any way had been too much for Sansa to bear, and she had felt that familiar sensation of being suffocated inside the four walls of her bedroom. It had no longer seemed like the safe haven where she´d shared dinner with Sandor, but the golden cage in which her captor had trapped her.

That was why she´d asked Sandor to take her away from that place, even though there were more dangers outside of the room waiting for the opportunity to trap them. I could not stand the thought of being with Sandor so close to those people, and yet I seem unable leave his side, specially now
of all times.

In the back of her mind Sansa was aware that, despite all her attempts at dealing with this situation in an adult and reasonable way, she had no idea how to deal with being in love under such conditions, and that she was behaving rashly. This morning she had been determined to be in her best behaviour, and now she was once again risking Joffrey’s wrath to be alone with Sandor.

*But I can’t do otherwise,* she knew, wishing she could hold Sandor’s hand as they went down the Titanic’s elevator. *I’m different than the person who went to church service this morning.* As long as no one suspected what they felt for one other, it didn't really matter if her betrothed got angry at her for disobeying him again. *Not when we are days away from escaping him forever.*

Just then, as if sensing the storm of emotions that was taking place inside her, Sandor brushed his hand discreetly against hers. The contact only lasted for the blink of an eye, but that was all it took to make Sansa desperate to be in his arms again, and to be kissing him with the same powerful urgency his scarred lips had conquered hers after she told him she wanted to be his.

And Sansa knew that Sandor was every bit as surprised by the intense current they were being swept under as she was, for rather than pointing out all that could go wrong with this mad plan, he too had given in. But to discover that she was Sandor’s vulnerability just as much as he was hers, and that he was not some cold unreachable pillar of wisdom that she could trust but not understand made her feelings for him grow in intensity. It also made her see him as her equal now more than ever.

*And now I’m going to be his in every sense of the word,* Sansa thought, taking small deep breaths. The realization of what they were about to do made her feel a strange fluttering inside her tummy. Despite her previous terrifying encounters with Joff of this sort, Sansa was looking forward to the moment when they were finally alone even more than for this trip to end on Wednesday.

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After they had left the elevator on the previous floor, Sandor had searched for a way down to the maze of white painted corridors of F-Deck. They had hunted for an empty space, and the first one they found was the fan room.

It was a functional space, with access to the fan room and the boiler uptakes, and others too. Sansa leaned against the wall and watched Sandor decide where should they go from here.
“You know,” she remarked suddenly with a smile. “I find that I don´t mind your cursing and swearing at all.”

Sandor threw back his head and laughed. He had a laugh like the snarling of dogs in a pit, and Sansa liked the sound very much.

“So you approve of me frightening that fool of an operator, little bird?” he rasped, grinning down at her.

Sansa chuckled and shook her head and said, ”Not really, but at least I think you scared him so much with your warning that I doubt he´ll tell a soul he ever saw us.”

Sandor´s mouth twitched as he winked down at her and took her hand to lead her away. They soon reached a corner into a blind alley, with a door marked for only members of the crew.

“Do you know where we are going?” she wondered curiously, longing for them to finally reach a safe destination.

“I think I know where that door leads to,” he answered, growing serious. “But Sansa listen, it may be dangerous, and I need you to keep close to me. If we are heading in the right direction, then we´re going to pass through the boiler room. It´s a very dark place, and I don´t want you to lose the hold of my hand when we are there.”

“But won´t there be people in there?”

“Yes, but since the place will be so dark, I don´t think anyone will be able to see my face if I´m careful.”

She nodded in understanding. “But where will we go afterwards?”

“You´ll see,” Sandor growled in reply, grinning wolfishly down at her in anticipation of what they were about to do.

He flung open the door and they entered a small room with a machine that was making very loud
noises. There was no way forward, but there was a manhole in the ground and a ladder attached to it leading downward. Sandor pointed to it and said, “After you, Sansa.”

He offered her a hand to help her down, and a minute later they had come down the escape ladder into the boiler room of the Titanic. Sansa looked around in amazement. It was like a vision of hell, with all the roaring big furnaces and the black figures moving in the smoky glow.

Sansa looked down at her gown though, and she bit her lip. It was not the most beautiful dress in her wardrobe, but its lavender, lilac, rose and pale pink silks were modest, elegant and very and becoming to her colouring, and she feared for it's sake in this place. Which was odd, seeing as she had not cared to cut apart several more expensive gowns and even throw them into the ocean.

_I gather it’s because I’ve lived through so much in it_, Sansa thought admiring it. It was a silk chiffon that had been dyed to make it appear as if it changed colours with the slightest movement. And unlike her other gowns, this one required no corset due to having tight sashes that she had bounded around herself to support her breasts.

She was quite thankful for the lack of corset, seeing as it would have been hard for her to run down the Titanic with that sort of a compressing restrictor. _And maybe Sandor would have a hard time unlacing it_, Sansa gathered, blushing fiercely and shaking her head so she could concentrate in the present moment.

“I hate this place,” Sandor suddenly rasped beside her.

Sansa turned to look at him with a frown, but the moment she saw the way he was staring at the fires in the furnaces, she understood. She moved closer to him and whispered, “We can go back if you like. I wouldn’t blame you. I´d feel the same way.”

She privately whished that if they did return the way they´d come, it would be to go to another secret place rather than back to their staterooms. But Sandor only grunted in reply and took her hand again and strode quickly down the length of the room, dodging startled sweaty stokers and trimmers with wheelbarrows of coal.

“Carry on!” Sansa cried out to a couple of them with a laugh. “Don´t mind us!”

Soon enough they were running through the open watertight door into another boiler room, but just as they had crossed it, Sandor pulled Sansa through a fiercely hot alley between two massive
boilers. They were now more in the dark than ever, and finally out of sight of the working crew. Watching them from the shadows, Sansa saw the glistening strokers working in the hellish atmosphere, shovelling coal into the insatiable maws of the enormous furnaces, covered in dust and ashes as they toiled away.

The whole place was thundering with the roar of the fires, but when Sandor assuredly took her in his arms so he could kiss her, Sansa´s ears closed down to the noise. *His body is as strong and dangerous as those of the men nearby,* she thought dazedly, clinging to him. She felt the atmosphere resonated with some inner demon inside Sandor, and the thought that she surrendering to it was so exciting it nearly took her breath away.

In the steamy, pounding darkness that kept her from seeing him, they kissed passionately for some moments, and Sandor even lifted her from the floor as if she weighed nothing at all. But then, just as suddenly as he had taken her into his arms, he broke apart and barked, “Come, we´re close now, little bird.”

Sandor led her in the dark by the hand, and soon enough they had reached a closed door hidden away in a corner of the boiler room.

“I didn´t know you were so familiar with the ship´s designs,” Sansa whispered. “But I am really thankful that you are.”

*They lions will never think we are here,* Sansa knew. *And the workers didn´t see our faces. If they send someone after us, that person won´t know who we are.* Her expensive gown would give her away as a First Class passenger, and Sandor´s burns could not be hidden. *But maybe by the time someone follows, we will have left this place.* Sansa wasn´t sure how long it would take, but she hoped it would until nearly midnight, even it the risk of discovery grew.

She could tell that Sandor was enjoying himself as much as she was, and when they finally entered the room beyond the door, Sansa noticed they had just arrived at Titanic´s hold. which meant they were right at the bottom of the ship. It was hard to believe that a whole floating city was just above their heads. Thankfully, the large room was lighted, so that Sansa´s eyes grew wide as they adjusted to the change.

“It´s like an enormous warehouse,” she said in a low voice, hugging herself against the cold; another sharp contrast from the dripping heat of the boiler room next door. “But won´t any of the men back there come in search for us?”

“I don´t think so,” Sandor answered, closing the door behind them. “I overheard Captain Smith
telling you and the lions earlier that he´d ordered the last boiler lit. They can´t spare anyone to come looking for us. They´ve probably sent for someone to do that, but by the time those men arrive, we´ll be long gone.”

Sansa took in the rows of stacked cargo as they walked between them, noticing boxes and crates of different sizes, the endless baggage of suitcases and luggage. She guessed there were all manner of objects inside the boxes, from furniture and food, to paintings and expensive machines.

_I wonder if the rumours are true and there are also gold bullions, diamonds and exotic skins hidden somewhere in between the electric winches_, Sansa thought curiously, before she realized that she hadn´t quite grasp the importance that this place would have in her life from now on.

As she grew a little nervous, they came upon a brand new Renault who's brass trim and headlamps set off it´s deep burgundy color. Sandor whistled appraisingly, and under some foolish impulse, before she knew what she was doing, Sansa had climbed into the upholstered back seat. She sat down with a perfect straight posture, admiring the cut crystal bud vases on the walls, each containing a rose.

Meanwhile, Sandor was running his hands down the leather and wood of the driver’s seat, examining every inch of the car. Growing a little impatient, and fearing that he had forgotten why they were here, Sansa coughed politely. Turning his head in her direction, Sandor chuckled. He leaned an elbow on the automobile's door and growled, “Where to, little bird?”

_To the stars_, she almost answered, before realizing that something stuck in her throat, rendering her speechless. Sansa sat rooted to the spot now that his attentions was focused on her again, her eyes fixed on Sandor in return as a thousand emotions and thoughts ran through her heart and her mind.

His grey eyes were looked at her in a way that went straight to her soul, and as comprehension grasped him, Sandor’s expression gentled. He reached out to stroke her hair softly, and Sansa closed her eyes as a sigh escaped her. Once again, she found that his mere touch was soothing.

“Look at me, Sansa,” she heard him rasp, and the sound startled her, for it seemed as if he had spoken louder than he really had in this quiet place.

She opened her eyes and found him smiling down at her. Sansa studied every detail of his face, from it´s gaunt left side with sharp cheekbones and heavy brow, to his large and hooked nose. Then she took in the side that had been ruined by the fire. The flames had burned away his ear and left a twisted mass of scars, and down by Sandor´s jaw she could even see a hint of bone. His skin was hard as leather, pocked with craters and fissured by deep cracks. _Why am I thinking about the
night when he told me about his scars? she wondered, confused. For as long as she could remember, he had always worn his thin dark hair brushed sideways and had always had a beard. Sansa liked it, but she thought it wasn´t right that it hid the good part of his face from her eyes.

“Are you sure about this, little bird?” he growled, not unkindly.

In answer, several memories flashed through Sansa´s eyes. She recalled how she´d felt when she saw him again back at the South Western Hotel before they boarded the Titanic, when he came back into her life. Then she remembered how he had comforted her the night she had tried to kill herself by throwing herself off the ship into the freezing waters of the North Atlantic, and the way they had grown closer together since then as they learned more about each other.

Finally, Sansa heard his voice in her head as he vowed to keep her safe and take her away from her prison, even as the memory of his scarred lips seemed to brush against her mouth. It was the moment of truth, and Sansa Stark decided her fate.

“More than anything,” she replied, returning Sandor´s grin with a loving smile of her own.

A moment later he had grabbed her hand and led her out of the car in silence. Her heart beating wildly, Sandor led her a short distance away and then he stopped in the middle of a circle formed by walls of crammed luggage, and after looking around for a moment, he removed his coat and placed it on the floor like a blanket.

“Yours too, Sansa,” he snarled, approaching her and helping her out of her own beautiful coat.

She watched him placed it on top of his own discarded one, biting her lip as she tried to decide what to do. Should I help him or just... wait? Sansa was about to do the former, and had even opened her mouth to ask Sandor what she should be doing, when the words caught in her throat and her eyes grew wide at the sight in front of her.

Sandor was taking off his waistcoat and shirt, arranging them as bundles to act as pillows as he pointed out that it was not going to be very comfortable, and that he´d heard that there was always pain for a woman the first time. But Sansa could barely hear the words, or even pay much attention to the leather paddle holster he had placed nearby, which held two of his guns.

She didn´t even remember that this wasn´t the first time in her life she had seen a man wearing nothing but his trousers, that when she was a little girl Podrick Payne used to similarly appear
before her whenever they escaped to the lake on Winterfell´s grounds for a swim. But there was no link in her mind with the body of a child from long ago to that of the man before her.

Sandor was not only tall and powerfully made, but also muscled like a bull. His chest and arms were covered with dark hair, and there was a big scar running down one of his broad and heavy shoulders. Sansa found herself imagining what it would be like to caress his skin, and as other thoughts followed that one, a flush crept up her neck. And then she caught sight of Sandor smiling slightly at her as he realized she was staring at him.

She glanced furtively about her, straining her ears to confirm they were still alone, before settling her gaze on the floor while shyly waiting for Sandor, afraid that if she continued to gaze at him with a startled expression, he might think her foolish or unprepared.

“You´re nervous,” Sandor suddenly said, making Sansa raise her head.

He was grinning down at her, and in that moment, as she looked into her lover´s eyes, Sansa felt entranced by them, as if Sandor´s smile emboldened her, suddenly making her feel beautiful and strong. Lifting her head higher, she took a deep breath and walked toward him, not too slow and not too fast, until she was standing right before him.

“Don´t worry,” she told him in a soft, tremulous voice. “I´ll be all right… Put your hands on me, Sandor.”

There was a nervousness and an energy and a hesitance in both of them as Sandor placed his left hand on her waist, even as his right hand smoothed away from her face some of her auburn ringlets so he could kiss her forehead. Then his eyes roamed over her body while his left hand began to caress her curves. Sansa could feel the warmth of his hand through the silk of her gown, which made her acutely aware of the heat coming from his body.

_He has such rough, strong calloused hands_, she thought, certain that she would remember the way they were touching her for the rest of her life. _He holds the power of life and death in them_. As Sandor lowered his head to nuzzle at her neck, kissing her there and whispering things to her ear, Sansa was glad that she had dabbed some of her favourite perfume there earlier. It was a sharp sweet fragrance with a hint of lemon in it under the smell of flowers, and by the way Sandor was inhaling deeply at the moment, Sansa was certain he liked it as well.

When he raised his head to look at her again, Sansa noticed a peculiar look on his face. She had dreamt of her wedding night a thousand times, and she knew that the way Sandor´s grey eyes had darkened was just how she would have wanted her loving husband to look at her.
Unable to wait any longer, Sansa threw herself into his arms, kissing Sandor avidly, abandoning all hold on reality. In a matter of moments, her head was spinning as he pulled her down with him onto the floor. A curse escaped Sandor’s lips as his mouth went lower and Sansa shivered with desire.

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Sansa had lost count of time, to the point where she was not certain if she was awake or asleep. Her heart had never been so full as in this moment in which she was pressed tight against Sandor, his coat acting as a blanket over their naked intertwined bodies. There was nothing in the whole wide world for Sansa but him and the connexion between them.

She felt tired and giddy at the same time, swept away by a love she had not dared to hope for only two days ago, and made Sansa fear her heart would burst out of her chest. Surely this is a dream, she thought for a moment, dazed. It is too good to be true. And yet she knew this had all been real. The proof of it was asleep beside her, snoring.

Sandor had been right. Their clothes had done little to cushion the floor, and yet Sansa was utterly content to spend eternity like this: lying on her side, not daring to move, the sight of Sandor sleeping next to her making her unwilling to disturb such perfect peace. This man whom she knew better than anyone else had managed to captivate her suddenly falling asleep in a heartbeat after lying spent and breathless when it was over. Smiling, Sansa sighed against his skin and whispered Sandor’s name to herself, contemplating how peaceful he looked.

“All that I am is yours,” she whispered, reaching out to smooth a lank of hair away from the face of this quiet, strong and brave companion.

She then traced light fingers over his scars, wishing she could kiss them without disturbing him. She wondered how he could fall asleep now of all times, but then she recalled how he hadn’t really slept in the past two nights, unwilling to share a room with Joffrey. Still, even though the aftermath of what they had just done had also left Sansa panting and flushed and now she was also a little sleepy, she felt too happy to be able to close her eyes.

And her mind was too active as well. She could do nothing else but remember everything that had just occurred between them. It had been both physical, skin against skin, intimate noises and senses heightened, and also spiritual, one in which their souls craved and found comfort in each other; it was a feeling that defied belief.
Sansa’s heart had pounded the whole time, her nose full of strange scents, and her vision misty at times. At first she had realized that even though Sandor had been desperate to touch her, he had been holding himself back for fear he would hurt her. That was why he had taken his time to explore her in a manner that was tender, soothing, illustrious and passionate all at once.

But she had shared his desperation, not understanding how it was possible since this was all so new and strange to her, and it had led her to grow bolder. And then Sandor’s warm, firm hands had grown rough, and Sansa had welcomed his weight upon her. She had known a piercing pain at one point, followed by a pleasure beyond understanding, and the rest had been lost in sighs, incoherent sounds and words, and sharp movements.

She had surrendered herself to him, letting him take and give, afraid that if he stopped she would die. There had come a moment though when Sansa knew it was all over, and they had simply stared at each other wonderingly, their faces flushed, their bodies covered in sweat.

“You’re trembling, little bird,” Sandor had remarked in rough and deep rasping voice.

Too moved to reply, Sansa had just hugged his head to her chest, holding on for dear life. And Sandor, resting his cheek against her bare breasts, his hold on her simultaneously gentle, tender and protective all at once, had said, “I can feel your heart beating. It’s going so fast.”

But that had not been all. It had all happened again and again, and when it was over at last, once he had made certain she felt a bliss unlike anything she had ever thought possible, Sandor had held her tight afterwards, his voice in her ear whispering her name more than once. And then before she knew it, he had fallen asleep.

As if reading her thoughts, the big man beside her suddenly stirred, waking up at last. Sansa stared at him and waited as his mouth twitched and his eyes opened. He groaned and blinked a couple of times as if trying to remember where he was or what had happened. And when he did a moment later, Sandor met her eyes with an intense gaze.

He smiled tiredly down at her and turned his head so he could brush her face and her mouth with kisses full of longing and desire. He wrapped his arms around her when they broke apart, and they clung to each other for some minutes in silence, Sansa’s long curls surrounding them. There was no need for her to voice what was going on inside her heart, for she knew that Sandor was also experiencing this perfect union between them, and that it had the power to transport them into something bigger than themselves.

“Sandor,” she said at last. “If we could be this way anywhere in the world right now, where would
you like us to be?”

He grinned, the burned side of his face pulled tight, twisting his mouth in an unusual manner. Sandor’s voice was thick with lust and his eyes had darkened again as he answered, “I spent a week some months ago in a place called Taorima in Sicily. If there wasn’t going to be a war, I would’ve liked to take you there some day.”

No war lasts forever, Sansa thought with a smile, closing her eyes. “Describe it to me,” she whispered. “I want to imagine we are there right now.”

“Well, it would be blazing hot to begin with,” Sandor pointed out. “None of this bloody cold. We would spend the whole day fucking, swimming and eating. We would rest on the beach and even do some sight seeing…”

All at once, and despite the fact that she was enjoying the castle in the air Sandor was building in her mind with his words, Sansa found that sleep was finally claiming her too. And before she knew it, she had drifted off into the land of dreams.
Chapter End Notes

Soooooo!!!! It happened x)
Nothing can be better than this. Sandor had found peace in those unbelievable moments. Sansa´s head was resting on his chest, their legs tangled together beneath his shirt and her gown. The fingers of his left hand were either tracing over the little bird´s naked skin reverently, or tangling in her soft red hair as he smoked a cigarette. After she had awakened from her short slumber, Sandor had found out that he only had two cigarettes left, and giving one to Sansa, he had taken the other. He knew that it would soon be time for to leave, but at present he felt completely relaxed.

I could stay here forever though, he thought, mindful that he was so deep in this that it actually bloody hurt. His need for her was overwhelming. All his life Sandor had mocked those who depended on others for survival, and now his heart constricted at the thought of having to leave this room.

For some time now he had been staring at the way Sansa was languidly playing with her beautiful delicate hands. She would open one like a flower, stretching her long elegant fingers, as the other one held her cigarette. Long before tonight, Sandor knew that Joffrey had never slept with her, and so he had tried his best to make Sansa enjoy herself. But at first it had been challenging, because he was scared of hurting her even as his lust to finally posses her after years of longing clouded his senses and made it difficult for Sandor to believe that the little bird was actually his now.

She was so pure and he was tainted. Her skin was so intoxicatingly sweet. Her sweet and eager body had clashed with her innocence and inexperience in a way that had amazed Sandor, and all that he´d been able to do was tighten his hold on her as they plunged themselves further into the night.

At one point he had tasted Sansa´s tears, but then she had looked at him with a smile as warm as the sunrise, and he had registered an inner fire blazing in her eyes for the first that left him in awe of her. His life had been a fucking mess as long as he could remember, but for the first time he finally felt happy. I´m one lucky son of a bitch, he told himself, swelling with pride as he finished his cigarette. He could still feel the little bird´s tears on his good cheek; taste them on his lips. It was the taste of innocence… the taste of dreams. And it made him admire how wild and free she was despite everything. Sandor doubted he had been like that when he was her age.
Just then, Sansa surprised him by chirping, “Sandor, do you remember when we left the hotel on Wednesday how Joffrey wanted to have that footman who bumped into him fired?”

“Yes,” he growled, wondering what she was getting at, frowning as the memory broke the spell of his reveries. *I remember it all too well.*

“It wasn’t true what you said, was it? That bit about how it was bad luck to wrong others on the day of a ship’s maiden voyage?”

Knowing there was no point in trying to change the subject, Sandor rasped a confirmation. The little bird dwelt on the meaning behind that for some moments before saying, “Thank you for lying to spare me. I know you hate liars.”

*I would lie for your sake any day, any time.* Sandor shifted around so he could face Sansa, and snarled, “No need to thank me. But you shouldn’t even be thinking about that now of all times, Sansa.”

He frowned down at her, wondering what had made her remember that. Reading his thoughts on his expression, Sansa raised a hand to run a finger down his burned cheek and said, “I kept your handkerchief after you went away to Europe.”

Sandor blinked, not understating what she meant. Sansa chuckled softly and elaborated, “The night when Joff showed me his true colours, you told me to keep your handkerchief. Well I did. I kept it hidden in a cedar chest beneath my summer clothes. I- I didn’t know why I did, except that whenever things got too hard, I would take it out and somehow holding it in my hands would make me remember the advice you gave me on how to survive with the Lannisters, and it would all seem a little more bearable then.”

“Fuck,” Sandor replied, stunned. He had forgotten that handkerchief if truth be told, but he was pleased to know that it had helped Sansa in some small way nonetheless.

“What happened to it?” he asked her, curious.

“Cersei’s maid found it one day when she was helping Trudy pack up my clothes for this trip. I suppose she thought it was worthless since it was dirty and had bloodstains on it, and threw it away. I don’t really know why am I thinking about this now. But it makes me happy to look back
upon that time we spent separated and know that somehow, my keeping your handkerchief means that I missed you in some way that I was not even aware of. But I like to think that I always knew deep down that you were different from anyone else I’d ever met. Of course that was evident since the night you told me about your scars, but our relationship already went deeper than that back then. You are just so very special, Sandor.”

His hands slipped from her legs to her face and he kissed her, finding it hard to believe her words. *If there is anything special in me, it’s because you’ve changed me,* he wanted to tell her. Sandor’s past no longer seemed like an endless count of wasted years.

He encircled her in his arms and nuzzled his head on her neck, kissing her throat and grabbing one of her breasts in his hand. Then he heard himself bark, “I’m glad to hear you thought of me from time to time, little bird. I’ve thought of you every day for the past three years.”

Sansa blinked, and he knew she was trying hard to hold back tears. Sandor raised his head only to have her brush her nose against his, and remarked, “No wonder you were as eager as I was to do this! You’ve waited long enough for me.”

Sandor started to laugh, then groaned instead as he remembered all the arguments against them giving in to their desires before they had even left this bloody ship. But at the end of the day he was just a man, and he had never wanted any woman like he’d wanted Sansa Stark. *And bugger, she’s really mine now. How am I to keep my hands off her now?* And that led him to wonder.

“Are you all right?” he asked her, uncertain now if she had really enjoyed it as much as he thought she had.

Sansa nodded eagerly and sighed with a smile, “I’m more than all right. I feel perfect.”

*Aye, that you bloody are.*

“But thank you for asking.”

She kissed his shoulder, making Sandor grin contentedly. And to think that this was just the start of it all. A hundred different paths lay before them. But suddenly, the thought that Sansa could end up with a child occurred to him. *And it no doubt will if we carry on like this.*
Next time he had to make sure he had some French letters at hand as protection. The little bird was so new to all of this, that he would only have himself to blame for this if a baby was on the way. Being a father was a strange prospect, and one Sandor did not welcome in the near future since they had to look out for themselves right now. But it had been impossible to keep himself from coming inside her those first three times.

“I´ve never done anything like this,” Sandor suddenly felt like telling her.

“What do you mean?” she asked curiously, a blush creeping up her cheeks.

“I´ve never cared for any woman I´ve ever been with,” he explained. Though I fucked plenty trying to either forget you or pretend they were you. But I´ve never needed or wanted anyone but you. “What we just did- it´s never been that way for me before. I never believed fucking could be like that.”

“Sandor!” she gasped startled, blushing from head to foot, shocked that he would say such a thing. She hit his arm lightly, which only made him laugh, the sound a hollow rumble.

Grinning and feeling like a sodding green boy in this affair, unsure as to what was the best way to conduct himself. Hoping he wasn´t about to do something stupid and fuck it all up, he went on.

“I wanted you to know that this is it for me. I´m not the sort of man who- well, what I mean is that I´m all in, but that doesn´t mean that I expect it to be the same for you.”

There was a tender new light in her eyes as she regarded him silently and then nodded. There was no need for her to speak. Sandor could read it all in her gaze. Feeling better with himself for speaking out, and deciding it was time to lighten the mood, he decided to tease her further, and rasped, “Come now, Sansa. Don´t tell me you´d never fooled around with anyone before. And I mean before Joffrey.”

Her eyes wide, she quickly shook her head and said, “Of course not! If this was new for you, imagine what it was like for me!”

“So there´s been no one else in your life apart from that sick bastard and now me?” Sandor wondered, remembering that boy from Winterfell who´d caused so much trouble between her and Joffrey.
“Well, just before I left school there was this French boy who wanted to marry me,” Sansa confessed. “He was sixteen and I was fourteen, and he was really handsome. He was poor though, and back then I really cared about marrying someone wealthy. So even if we hadn’t been so young and Father had somehow consented to it, I would not have accepted him… That was less than four years ago, and yet it seems like a lifetime away. It’s as if I was another person from that girl who was dazzled by a hollow golden lion.”

Not wanting her to dwell on those days now, Sandor was trying to figure out what he would tell Sansa if she asked about the women in his life. Honestly, there aren’t any. His mother and older sister had died when he was a kid, and he could not even remember them. And the women he had fucked in the last twenty years meant nothing to him. Their faces had disappeared with time, even those who had been pretty, and he had never cared to ask the whores he knew what their names were.

Sandor had never felt comfortable around them anyways. Some of them had been scared shitless by his face, and though a few of them had found him exciting, in the end he had never been interested in keeping any of the women for himself. Bloody hells, I know what the little bird means, he thought, running a hand through his hair. He could barely recognize himself now when he thought of the man he had once been before the little bird flew into his life at the Opera House in Paris. Sansa brings out the best in me, and she is the only one who has ever really needed me.

“You probably know about Podrick Payne already,” Sansa said suddenly, interrupting his thoughts.

Sandor’s mouth twitch as he realized that she was still thinking about the boys she’d known before Joffrey. He nodded, for she was right. He knew about that kid all right.

“I wonder how I did not see Joff’s true nature after that incident,” she confessed with a sigh. “Cersei told me this morning that one of the reasons why Joffrey hurts me is because I didn’t take his side on that stupid quarrel between him and Pod. That fight in which I saw Podrick beat him.”

Sandor looked away from her beautiful face, remembering events that had taken place three years ago in Winterfell. He had not been present when it happened, but Blount and Trant had told him about it later on. And when he learned what had occurred between the Payne boy and Joffrey, Sandor had been certain it would not bode well for the little bird. And I was fucking right, he thought, wishing that sometimes he wasn’t.

He frowned as he recalled all the details from that day. From what he’d heard, Joffrey had been angry at the familiarity between Sansa and this Podrick. Not only because he was a servant and she was the girl he was considering to one day make his wife, but because he was jealous. He had even reprimanded the little bird about her conduct, but she had dismissed him, unaware of how Joffrey would see that as a sign of disloyalty.
“I thought it was so silly that Joffrey could be jealous of Pod, and so I laughed in his face,” Sansa recollected sadly. “The next thing I knew though Joffrey was angry and calling me names before Podrick. Of course poor Pod hit Joff to defend my honour, and that cost him his life in the end.”

Sandor nodded and sighed, thinking back on it all. *Joffrey lost the fight, and held a grudge against the boy ever since. And at the first chance he could, he had him killed in revenge.*

“Sandor?” the little bird suddenly asked him, making him stiffen beside her.

He didn’t like the way the conversation was turning out, but he was aware that Sansa felt like there wasn’t anything they couldn’t talk about, and Sandor didn’t feel like betraying that trust.

“Yes?” he growled, running a hand down the little bird’s body in an attempt to distract her- and himself.

“Do you know what businesses my father and Joffrey had together? Neither of them ever told me much about it.”

Sandor closed his eyes as he lay back down on the floor. *It’s growing cold,* he thought, placing an arm beneath his head. Sansa cuddled close to him, her head on his arm, one arm and one leg thrown across him. He took his time in answering her though, unsure where to start.

He’d never liked the all too honourable Eddard Stark, thinking him a bloody fool for not realizing until it was too late that he was entrusting his precious daughter and her estate to the care of a dangerous family. But Sandor had no wish to speak ill of the man to the daughter who cherished his memory, whatever his opinions about him were.

“Your father and Robert Baratheon made many deals together during the last years of their lives,” Sandor finally rasped, trying to concentrate since the little bird’s delicate caress of his chest was distracting. “At one point Joff managed to convince his father to speculate in the wrong affairs, and after Robert died your father, as his partner, found himself caught in the middle of it all, mixing with the wrong people as he tried to clear his friend’s name. He asked for some legal advice that—”

“No, don’t go on”, Sansa interrupted, placing a finger on his mouth. “I- I thought I was ready, but I’m not. I can’t think about Father yet. I’m sorry, but- but I only just learned that Joff killed him less than two nights ago.”
“I understand,” Sandor assured her, kissing her forehead. “Don’t worry, bird. It’s all in the past.” He feared his words sounded stupid, but he wasn’t sure what else to say. “I don’t think it matters anymore what we were like before this trip.”

And silently he added with an amount of pride, *I’ll never be the knight from one of her songs, but I am what she wants.*

“I just wish I had something to offer you,” Sansa admitted, hugging him closer. “But Joff stole all of my inheritance.”

“I know,” he growled, rubbing her arms to keep her warm. “But don’t think about that. I don’t. Now I’m going to look after you.”

“But you’re going to be giving away the money that you’ve been saving all your life because of me,” Sansa told him, titling her neck so she could look at him.

Sandor knew what she meant. When they were on the run, he wouldn’t be able to access his savings to keep the Lannisters from finding out where they were hiding. But because he now had the little bird with him, he did not care as much as he would have thought about the fact that Joffrey and his grandfather would keep it, along with Gregor’s lands and property.

There was no point in thinking about all that. For one, he had to decide where they would strike to the moment they left New York behind them. The image of them laying on a beach in Sicily flashed across Sandor’s mind then, but he shook it away.

“If course I am,” Sandor told Sansa in a serious tone. “And I have no problems with starting off from scratch, but I wish I could offer you more, little bird, because it won’t be easy. You’re used to more, and deserve more. But at least we’ll be together, and I’ll be keeping an eye on you, making sure you are safe.”

She smiled at him before replying, “I’ll repay you by finding some work, Sandor. I imagine that I could do some work as-”

“Don’t even think about it, Sansa!” he rasped firmly in surprised, taken aback by her offer, even as he was moved. “I don’t have a problem with you doing whatever you like, but not because you feel forced to do it out of necessity. I’m not expecting you to work in exchange for some food in our
belleys and a roof under our heads.”

“But why not?” she wanted to know. “It’s silly of you to speak like that when we could have more money if I only find-”

“It’s growing late,” Sandor pointed out, interrupting her. “We’ll talk about it tomorrow, Sansa. We should get going.”

“All right,” she agreed, laying a soft kiss on his mouth. “But we will talk about it.”

He could not help but snort at the thought that they would find plenty to fight about in the future. As they got dressed, Sandor was unable to keep his eyes away from Sansa. He took in the sight of her naked body in all its glory as she stood up and put her dress back on.

Unexpectedly, his contemplation of her was interrupted as the little bird looked at the floor and gasped. Sandor followed her gaze and saw what was the matter at once. There was a small smear of blood on the ground. Frowning, he remembered the moment when he became aware of it after he had first taken her. He had decided to worry about it later, and since that time had now arrived, Sandor began inspecting their clothes looking for bloodstains. He finally found one on his coat.

Thankful that it wasn’t on Sansa’s dress or coat. Sandor snorted and said, “I’ll take a page out of your book and throw this overboard as soon as I can.”

The little bird blushed, and quickly apologized for ruining his coat. Sandor snorted, and assured her that she shouldn’t think twice about it. Just as they were about to leave Titanic’s hold though, the little bird put her hand in his and said, “Sandor, I have absolute faith in us, but I don’t think I could bear it if Joff finds out about us before we can escape him. If that were to happen, or if he was to caught us after we’ve run away, I- I hope he doesn’t want me anymore, because if he does, I would rather die before going back to him.”

Sandor looked down at Sansa in surprise and blinked, understanding what she meant at once. His heart grew cold as the image of the little bird about to throw herself off the Titanic on Friday night flashed across his mind. He could not even breathe at the thought of loosing her. In an attempt to keep himself from shaking at the thought of a world without Sansa, Sandor hugged her fiercely, kissing the top of her head.

“Don’t say that,” he vowed, forcing himself to take a deep breath. “If I have a say in the matter,
then there won’t ever again be any cause for you to feel like that, little bird”.

He wasn’t sure how he would manage that if the worst came to pass, but after Wednesday, even if it cost him his life, he would make it impossible for Sansa ever to be within Joffrey’s grasp after Wednesday.

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By the time they reached the forward well deck of the Titanic, they had left any feelings of misfortune far behind. Seeing as it was past eleven thirty, they concluded that they were just in time to make it back to their stateroom before midnight. Because even though they expected Joffrey to be with John Astor for another hour at least, they felt they had tempted fate far too much already in a single day.

They had thought it best to leave the lower levels of the ship from a different route from the one they had taken hours ago, which was why they were now on the forward well deck rather than in an elevator. Coming through a crew door onto the deck, Sansa and Sandor could barely stand straight since they were laughing so hard at having actually managed to get away with their play. Sansa was breathless and dizzy, clutching at his arm for support.

Sansa and Sandor had run all the way from the hold, and now they stood beside the crow’s nest. He knew there were more likely a pair of lookouts at the top, and if they didn’t keep quiet they were meant to drawn their attention. He was about to lead the little bird away, throwing his stained coat overboard along the way, when she suddenly turned her face up to the dark sky and closed her eyes.

“The wish I made to that shooting star last night,” she whispered. “It came true.”

Unable to resist her, Sandor ended up pulling her into the shadows of the deck so he could hold her in his arms and kiss her fiercely. As if from far away he heard a bell ringing somewhere nearby, but he was too far-gone to pay it any notice. They stood like that for a minute or two, the little bird standing on her toes so she could reach him better, running her fingers through his hair.

Caught up in mutual absorption, Sandor, bending over, felt like he could drown in her blue eyes as they separated. Their breath clouded around them in the freezing air, but Sandor didn’t even feel the cold.
“You’re so beautiful,” he heard himself rasp, grinning from ear to ear as Sansa giggled between his arms.

In that moment as he held her close to him, disaster and doom seemed so far away, and yet Sandor knew that unless they got a hold of themselves and retired for the night, that could quickly change.

Sandor was about to release his hold on the little bird when out of the corner of his eye something caught his attention. He glanced to his left, only to grow still a heartbeat later. He stared at the massive iceberg towering over the Titanic for a second in complete disbelief, not even aware that his hold on Sansa was tightening, before reacting.

The ship was about to hit the fucking berg on it’s starboard bow! Without a second thought, Sandor instinctively pushed the little bird behind him and took her hand, his eyes never leaving the ice mass ahead. He knew she had no idea what was going on, but he didn’t care.

“Get back!” he told Sansa, the colour draining out of his face.

The next couple of moments went by in agonizing slowness. Sandor held his breath as the iceberg smashed against the steel hull plates of the Titanic. With his jaw clenched, he fleetingly remembered that the berg was bumping and scraping along the side of the ship where Sansa and he had just been.

Sandor felt the shudder running through Titanic, even as the little bird, unbalanced by the vibrations caused by the impact, staggered beside him. Then, the ship passed the wall of ice, blocking out the sky like a mountain. Fragments of the berg broke off it during the collision and came crashing down onto the deck. Sandor pushed Sansa back again to keep the flying chunks of ice from hitting them.

There was only one thought on his mind throughout those minutes: the biggest ship in history had just run into an iceberg on its maiden voyage!
Chapter End Notes

*In case any one is wondering, a French letter is an old form of condom
The air smelled clean on this moonless night as Titanic glided across an unnatural sea, black and flat as a pool of oil, it´s lights mirrored almost perfectly in the water. The collision had lasted less than a minute and some moments later, Sansa and Sandor were leaning over the starboard rail of Titanic´s forward well deck, watching the iceberg moving aft down the side of the vessel. Sandor calculated that the bloody thing was about fifty to one hundred feet high and two hundred to four hundred feet long.

He stared down at what he could see of the sea liner´s hull, but from this angle no damage was visible. Yet Sandor knew better. Despite it´s highly advanced naval engineer system and safety features, the crash could still have created irreparable harm below the waterline. He could only hope that Titanic´s watertight compartments would be able to stop the blow from the iceberg from becoming a problem.

Behind them a couple of steerage men were kicking the scattered pieces of ice that had fallen from the berg around the deck, laughing. Sandor turned around and saw another man joining them, and even heard him ask, “What happened? I was in the cabin and- ”

“Shut up and join us, James! You´re missing all the fun!”

“Could it have damaged the ship?” the little bird suddenly chirped beside him, curiously following his gaze.

Sandor straightened up, and the burn scars on his face and throat made one side of his mouth twitch as he rasped, “Maybe.”

As he voiced such a possibility, the enormity of what he had just said hit him like a sledgehammer blow. And just in that moment, Sandor felt Titanic coming to a halt. He gulped at the fact that those in charge had deemed it wise to stop the ship from moving. The little bird regarded him with wide innocent eyes, taking in the full meaning of his words.
“But this ship can’t sink!” she gasped, incredulous.

“It’s made of iron, Sansa. It can,” he explained in what he hoped was a steady voice, running a hand through his hair in case his hand started shaking. “Fuck, it can’t even corner worth a shit. The rudder is too small for so big a ship, so it’s wonder we hit the berg. With all of it’s boilers lit, it just wasn’t able to move quick enough to avoid the collision. I suspect the idiots up at the crow’s nest didn’t see the iceberg until it was too late and.”

“I can’t believe it!” Sansa admitted with a frown, as she tried to take in what he was telling her. “How do you know all these?”

Sandor looked down at her with a raised eyebrow. “I pay attention, little bird. I overheard Captain Smith telling you and the others about it when you were all visiting the bridge on your sodding tour this morning.”

She shivered as he finished talking and wondered, “What are we going to do?”

“Don’t worry,” he snarled, wishing there was no one around so he could comfort her with more than words. “Even if the ship’s doomed, nothing changes. We’ll arrive in New York aboard a rescue ship. There may be some delay that’ll keep us from reaching it on Wednesday as we had planned, but as soon as we dock we’ll make our escape.”

Somewhat reassured, but still bewildered by what had just happened, Sansa pointed out, “I know it’s awfully cold, Sandor, but weren’t you going to throw your coat overboard?”

“Right,” Sandor agreed, glad she had remembered.

He quickly took off his stained coat and threw it overboard, telling himself that he should not be worried when they weren’t certain that things were as bad as he feared. And even if the worst comes to pass, we’ll be safe, Sandor gathered as the cold night air chilled him to the bone.

First class women would most likely be put into the lifeboats before the sinking was well on its way, and knowing Joffrey, he would make certain that he and his party were aboard one of those boats too, even if he had to bribe an officer so that even Sandor, Joffrey, Trant and Blount were saved. That made Sandor uncomfortable for many reasons. He did not like the idea of taking the place of a woman on a boat, but if he didn’t do that, then anything could bloody well happen, and
then what would the little bird do?

The face of Elbert Broder flashed across Sandor’s mind and he shifted uncomfortably where he stood. Before he could even think further though, the little bird remarked, “This is certainly turning out to be a night to remember in more ways than one, isn’t it?”

Snorting, Sandor nodded in agreement. “It bloody well is.”

And it wasn´t going to end any time soon. He was tired from sleeping so little these past days, but even if the bloody ship hadn’t hit the iceberg, Sandor doubted he would have been able to rest tonight. After what had happened between him and the little bird there was too much on his mind. And he felt more alive now than he had done in the past thirty-five years of his life.

Suddenly, Sansa clutched his arm and asked, “Should we stay here or go back to our cabins?”

“Let´s go back,” Sandor told her. “It’ll be better if we just wait for a steward to tell us what to do.”

He already knew what would the steward would tell them if the waters the Titanic was meant to conquer ended up defeating it, but it would not do for Joffrey to find out Sansa was not in her bedroom.

“I was hoping you wouldn´t say that,” Sansa admitted, smiling up at him.

What she meant to him intensified in that moment as Sandor remembered this day spent by her side. Whatever happened, at least they wouldn´t have to face it on their own now.

“It’ll be all right,” he assured her with a smile. “Remember, if you jump, I jump. Right?”

“Right,” the little bird agreed in a steady voice, nodding as she remembered how he had been ready to jump into the freezing waters of the North Atlantic two nights ago when she was about to take her own life.

Making their way across the well deck, Sandor saw that more people had come out to see what had happened. He searched for Broder’s face among the small crowd, but the German doctor wasn’t
here. As they passed the same group of men who had been playing around with parts of the berg a few moments back, Sandor overheard them once again, remarking stupid things, like, “The ship can hit a hundred icebergs and it won’t sink!”

And those in First Class were no better. As Sansa and Sandor went up the steps that led to B-Deck, two men were also talking about the collision, and one of them said, “I want some of that ice to be put in my drink.”

Sandor snorted and shook his head. The idiots suddenly became aware of the little bird and him, and they stared at them while he opened the locked gate to First Class. He threw them a dirty look as the captain of the ship rounded the corner, followed by Thomas Andrews and a man Sandor did not know.

The faces of the three newcomers were grim as they passed right by Sansa and Sandor. Andrews barely glanced at the little bird as Sandor overheard Captain Smith ask, “Can you shore up?”

“Not unless the pumps get ahead,” the stranger replied.

Those six words made Sandor’s whole body stiffen. As the inspection party went down the stairs to the well deck, he bent down and told Sansa in a low, hoarse voice, “I think it is bad, little bird.”

Biting her lip, she shook her pretty head and said, “Lead the way.”

As they stepped through the door towards the inside of the ship, their hands brushed accidentally. Sandor was about to pull away when he felt the little bird’s finger running down the length of the back of his hand. A shiver ran down his spine at that, and even though her touch was fleeting, that contact was enough to make him determine to keep a cool head for Sansa’s sake. After all, Sandor had meant it when he promised to keep her safe.

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As Sansa crossed the B-Deck foyer of the Titanic with Sandor by her side, several thoughts were rushing through her mind, yet she felt oddly at peace. It was still hard to accept that the ship might be underwater by this time tomorrow, specially since it had been created to be unsinkable. Everyone had said so, and since Sansa knew so little of shipbuilding, she had believed it.
But now that it was likely that the impossible had happened, Sansa didn´t feel in danger because of it. It´s just as Sandor said, she thought. *Our plan will be delayed, but it does not affect us in any other way.* That made her smile as they entered the corridor of their staterooms, for it allowed her to concentrate on the other event that made this night memorable.

She looked up at Sandor and blushed, her smile deepening until her dimples appeared. Sansa would´ve liked to lay awake all night and dwell on everything that had happened after they had admitted having feelings for each other, but if they had to evacuate the vessel, that would have to wait. Yet she felt like dancing at the mere thought of how loved she felt now, and at how the love she had in her to feel and give was no longer buried, but actually reciprocated.

*I´m so selfish for it though,* she reprimanded herself. *If the ship is really going to sink, it is a serious matter.* But she just couldn´t concentrate of the magnitude of it in her present dream like state. And that made her recall how almost six days ago she had believed that Titanic was the ship of dreams to everyone but her. *Oh how wrong I was!* she was glad to admit, relishing in the thought that her relationship with Sandor would live on long after this sea voyage had ended.

When they reached the door to her bedroom Sansa sighed and put her hand on the doorknob. She glanced up at Sandor and said, “I have to leave you now.”

Sandor raised an eyebrow at her, as if unwilling to believe such a prospect could really upset someone like her. *That is another thing I like about him,* Sansa mused then. *He makes me feel so very strong.*

“Only for a moment or two,” he rasped in reply. “Mark my words, this night is far from over. So don´t change, and just be ready for any developments.”

“Where will you be?” she wanted to know.

“Don´t worry, little bird,” he answered, bending down as he spoke, driving into sharp contrast just how tall and big he was. But that did not intimidate Sansa; she actually longed to be in his arms once again. He continued speaking, “I´ll stay in the living room as soon as I find out some more about what´s really going on here.”

Sansa nodded, wishing she could kiss him in farewell. But they were not the only ones in the corridor. A steward was hurrying along, reassuring the people clad in their robes and slippers who had come out to investigate what the commotion was all about. Sandor then grinned down at her and nodded towards the door, which she understood it to be a sign that she should step inside.
Smiling back at him, Sansa did just that, hearing Sandor already walking ahead behind her. With another sigh she closed the door and rested her back against it as she stood inside the dark room. After a moment she straightened up and moved towards the electric lights, and when they were on, she giggled at the sight of her closed bed hangings, enclosing the pillows she had arranged earlier to look like her in case Trudy came calling.

Hugging her coat closer about her, Sansa was about to part the bed hangings so she could rest on her bed as she waited and thought, when a cold voice whose owner she recognized at once asked, “Where the hell have you been?”

Believing she had been alone, the sound frightened her so much that Sansa whirled around with a loud gasp. And then she saw Joffrey seated in one of the chairs by the table with the flower vase. The sight gave Sansa a chill, and she stared at him in horror, wondering in alarm how long had he been there.

Joff was still in his dark dinner suit, but he was eyeing her with so much anger that he looked far from handsome. Gulping, Sansa became conscious of her appearance. Her hair was loose and tangled, and the hem of her gown was dirty from the boiler room. If he noticed the latter, she wasn’t sure how she could explain getting soot on her dress. And she was so startled by his sudden appearance that for a moment she was speechless.

But as Sansa realized that this was the first time she had seen Joffrey after everything that had happened between her and Sandor, she grew more composed. Aware that it was lucky Sandor was not here in case she could not contain her fiancé’s anger, Sansa grew determined to control the current situation as best she could.

“I asked you a question, Sansa!” Joffrey snapped, his fingers closing into fists. “Where the fuck have you been?”

Anxious to divert his attention to another subject, Sansa stepped closer to him and finally finding her voice, remarked, “Oh Joff, something serious has happened!”

She was not quite able to look him in the eye as she spoke, afraid he would somehow know if he stared at her too intently that she was now no longer a girl but a happy woman in love. Sansa went on hurriedly, “I think we are all in trouble. The ship apparently struck an iceberg, and I fear it may...”
“For the last time,” Joffrey interrupted, trying hard to keep himself from yelling. “Where were you?”

Sansa blinked, and replied, “Joff, you can’t be serious! I’m telling you that we’re in the middle of an emergency and all you seem to care about is-”

He stood up abruptly before she could finish, and her heart sank. There is danger in him, Sansa thought. I can sense it. Thinking quickly, she decided that a half truth would be better than an outright lie, so she said quickly, “All right, I’ll tell you were I was. I was sleeping, but a hard shudder woke me up. And when the ship stopped moving Mr. Clegane knocked on my door to tell me that he would like to go investigate. But since he had to guard me, he asked if I wouldn’t mind going along with him. So I did, and we saw pieces of the iceberg scattered all over the deck. I wanted to come back though, so I told Mr. Clegane to escort me here, yet I instructed him to go back and see what he could learn. I felt certain you wouldn’t mind it that I was left alone while he did this. But I was only outside for about ten to fifteen minutes. I didn’t tell you before because I feared you would be upset… Which reminds me, what are you doing in my bedroom? Did you not have a meeting with Mr. Astor and that man who’s last name I can never remember?”

Sansa kept her tone cool and polite, yet even so Joffrey’s eyes narrowed as he tried to decide what to make of her words.

“I did,” he finally answered. “But our meeting got interrupted because Mrs. Astor wasn’t feeling well and sent for J.J. As to what am I doing in your bedroom. I thought I had made it clear to you this morning. I’m here because I can if I want to, wife.”

That word made her blush, both because it reminded her of what had just happened with her and Sandor back on the hull of Titanic, but also because of her betrothed’s promise to wait until their wedding night before consuming their mockery of a relationship.

She didn’t dare answer him now, but it did not matter, since Joffrey went on, even as he stepped closer to her. “A very admirable woman, Mrs. Astor. She’s done her duty and is now carrying J.J.’s heir.”

The conversation was making her anxious and wary, but Sansa told herself that she was being silly. It was on the tip of her tongue to remark that there was nothing unexpected about Mrs. Astor expecting a child, but decided to hold her tongue. At least I’m sure that Sandor would not think the less of me if I could not have a baby.

“Joff, please,” she responded, attempting to smile. “It’s not long now for our wedding. But right
now we should be worrying about the ship. What if-

She stopped abruptly as he smirked and rubbed his shaven cheek, as if he was bored. His behaviour puzzled greatly, which made her decide to remain silent until Joffrey decided whether he was angry with her or not. Although why he should be when he believes I went away only to check on the state of the sea liner, I do not know.

“You´ve changed so much in the last couple of days,” he pointed out at last. “A few days ago you would have already started whimpering as you guessed what my presence here could mean, and now I´ve never felt you more unreachable.” Joff paused, as if considering carefully what to say next.

Sansa waited, holding her breath, her heart beating faster. And then he continued, “My meeting broke up two hours ago, and in truth I was glad it did. Seeing how happy J.J. looked to go back to his wife made me feel almost sorry for my display over breakfast. So I thought I should come here and ask you once again to make amends, even as I enquired about your alleged headache. But you were not here, and whatever it was that you were doing, you had been foolish enough to arrange your pillows in your shape, as if that would help you conceal your secret, when in fact it had quite the opposite effect.”

Sansa felt as though her heart had lodged in her throat as Joffrey went on in a tight voice. She dreaded for him to go on as she realized that it had been a mistake to expect no one to find out of their long absence. But even now I cannot regret what happened. What Sandor and I chose to do. To experience together.

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“She did not just wait for you here patiently for two hours. I had Trant and Blount go look for you, but they could not find you or that dog anywhere-”

“Ask Mr. Andrews or the Captain if we were not on deck just now,” Sansa snapped recklessly, unable to keep quiet any longer. “We just saw them.”

“Be that as it may, that does not account for your whereabouts for several hours, Sansa!” Joffrey retorted, his voice raising. “Do you really think I´m such a fool? You´ve just lied to me. You claim to be too sick to have dinner with us, and yet I come here to find you gone-”

“I needed some fresh air, Joff,” Sansa countered, hoping she did not betray her and Sandor´s secret. “I was feeling sick, and it is not my fault if your bodyguards were unable to find me, when all the time I was-“
“Stop lying to me, and don’t talk to me about bodyguards! The stupid Hound was supposed to fill you with fear, and yet I find that he’s turned into an idiotic puppy that follows you around wherever you like to go despite of what I’ve ordered him to do! It’s almost like- but no that would be too ridiculous. If it wasn’t for the fact he keeps others away from you because of his disgusting face, I would replace him with Trant at once.”

That made Sansa pause. It didn’t seem like Joffrey could even conceive the idea of her and Sandor together conspiring against him to be possible. Hoping to get a clearer view of how matters stood so she would know how to behave and react, Sansa asked, “And where pray do you think I have been?”

“Where I forbid you to go this morning,” Joffrey shot back, no longer taking care to keep his voice down. “You were in steerage with your new friends. After lunch I sent Boros and Meryn to ask around in Third Class about you, and they’ve reported back that you were quite a success among the riffraff, dancing for them, drinking and smoking like a painted whore. And they tell me that you seemed quite close to an American called Jack Dawson, who apparently looks like me…”

Sansa wasn’t sure if she should laugh or not when Joff was finished. She felt utterly relieved that she and Sandor had not been discovered, because it meant that their plan was still safe. Stifling a laugh, wishing she could thank God in his mercy for the way things were turning out, Sansa decided not to lie this time.

“Jack Dawson means nothing to me,” she confidently assured the fool. “I was at a party, Joff. I had to dance with someone. I am sorry for drinking and smoking, but I- I just wanted to do something wild before I become your wife. It will be such a big responsibility, and this was my last and only chance to do something like it.”

Joffrey’s face darkened and he seemed to consider her explanation for a moment before remarking, “Let’s say I believe you were not with that damned Dawson then. Tell me where have you been instead for the past hours?”

“I wished for some fresh air to clear my head,” Sansa repeated stiffly, wondering when this conversation would end as she ran a hand through her hair. “I- I walked around and around the boat deck, and.”

“Why are you not wearing your wedding ring?” Joffrey interrupted in a commanding tone.
Sansa regarded him in disbelief for a couple of moments as his words sank in. And when she opened her mouth to reply, the only thing that occurred to her to say was, “I took it off. I- I was so angry at you over what happened this morning at breakfast. But I- I’ll put it back on right now.”

She could have cursed herself then, for she feared her voice sounded thin and strained. A liar’s voice, Sansa thought. A guilty voice. She was about to go in search of the engagement ring she loathed when Joff suddenly stepped before her and seized her by the wrist. Surprised, she shrunk away and tried to wrench free, but his fingers dug like claws into her skin.

“No, Sansa,” Joffrey informed her. “I seem to remember saying that if you ever again did anything that displeased me, I would not answer for myself. And you’ve displeased me greatly, Sansa.”

He squeezed her wrist as he spoke, but even though it hurt, all Sansa could do was wonder if due to his close proximity, Joffrey was about to smell Sandor on her. I don’t even know if it would be better if he were drunk or not. She had started to breathe heavily, her chest rising and falling in a manner that drove Joff’s eyes to her breasts. Pulling her hard against him, Sansa stiffened and turned her face away from him, afraid he would attempt to kiss her. That was something she could not bear after today.

“You shouldn’t look so disgusted, sweet pea,” Joff told her, amused, even as from the other rooms of their suite, Sansa overheard a rasping voice.

It’s Sandor, she thought, feeling both relieved and afraid. She was glad to know he was close by, for it was a reminder that he loved her and that nothing else mattered. But Sansa was terrified of him hearing Joffrey mistreat her, knowing full well what sort of a reaction that would provoke. One that could cost us our plan of escape… But if he only sees the aftermath of the attack, I may be able to convince him not to retaliate.

Aware that Joff would realize she had lost some internal struggle with her next words, Sansa sighed and said weakly, “I’m sorry. I- please, Joff. I promise to be better. Just let go of me. You’re hurting me.”

Joff regarded her without any warmth, and pointed out quietly, “You should’ve thought of that before deciding to disobey the orders I gave you this morning, my love.”

Mindful that she would have to answer for her behaviour, and thinking fleetingly that it was a small price to pay so long as Joffrey didn’t find out about her and Sandor, Sansa braced herself for what was to come. If we are to stand a chance, I must not cry out, or else Sandor will know something’s
wrong. And she had to keep Joffrey from speaking loudly to her.

She nodded in acceptance, and Sansa saw then in her fiancé’s eyes a recognition that she was no longer the scared little girl he could frighten to tears with just a few words, but rather someone made of sterner stuff, who had resigned herself to being punished, but would not be beaten by it. Someone he did not know.

And that scares him, Sansa noticed, seeing how Joffrey’s cold expression suddenly went blank. He does not know what has happened to bring about this change, and he will try to fight it the only way he knows how to deal with me. The next moment, Joffrey had slapped Sansa hard across the face.

Memories of the first time he had done that flashed through her mind as she lost her footing at the impact. The blow sent her crashing against the wall behind her, and she hit her face against it. Sliding down to the floor as her knees grew weak, Sansa sat on the ground, dishevelled and dazed.

Her head was ringing and her face felt numb, and she knew her lip had split and blood was trickling down her chin. No sound had voluntarily escaped her, but she feared that the noise of her hitting the wall had been loud enough to be overheard beyond the walls of her bedroom. Blinking, Sansa gazed up at Joffrey, who was closing in on her already, ready to chastise her again.
Vengeance or Justice?

Chapter Notes

- Many thanks to my beta @thefeatherofhope for all her help with this fic!!
- And I want to thank everyone else who reads, reviews, leaves kudos <3 It means a lot! :D

Sandor was walking down the corridor, away from the door to the little bird´s bedroom, thinking that if the Titanic – as the pinnacle of mankind´s power- sunk, it would bring into sharp awareness some unpleasant truths about men´s bloody ego and mortality. And in the end, even if the whole world was shocked by it, stranger things did happen. The way things have turned out between Sansa and me for one.

But then reconsidering, he could not help but half smile half grimace as he thought, Or perhaps that´s not so strange given our circumstances. A moment later he walked by a couple of people, and overheard a woman asking a steward why had the ship´s engines stopped after she felt a shudder.

“I shouldn´t worry, m´am,” the idiot replied. “We´ve likely thrown a propeller blade, that´s the shudder you felt. May I bring you anything?”

Sandor snorted, not caring if the woman or the bloody steward overheard him in turn. The man´s explanation made him mad, but Sandor knew it would be foolish of him to point that out and be responsible for creating panic among the First Class passengers, when what he really needed to do was find someone he was certain would know what was going on.

Since he was convinced Titanic was going to sink tonight, Sandor felt restless with how calm and slow events were unfolding. But at least now that the little bird was at present safe inside her bedroom, Sandor had no need to hide how restive he felt with all this shit of waiting who knew how long before people began getting into the lifeboats. For Sandor, even though he was not an expert on shipbuilding, knew that in an occasion such as this one, every lost minute would cost more passengers their lives.

He remembered some of the things he´d learned amongst the sailors back on Southampton. Apparently, Titanic´s crew had only three days to familiarize themselves with the ship. There had been no boat drills though, because they were thought to be unnecessary. That could be a fucking problem later on. And the longer they take on getting First Class Passengers onto the boats, the longer it´ll be for those in steerage, Sandor thought, wondering what was going to happen to Elbert
If only there was a way I could fucking help him! And maybe there was. If he managed to put the little bird inside a lifeboat soon, then he might get a chance to go in search of the German doctor and somehow get him onto one of the boats as well before Joffrey managed to bribe an officer to let him, Sandor, Trant and Blount board another one.

As he thought of this, Sandor reached the end of the corridor and decided to stand on the foyer of B-Deck so he could brood about what to do next while he searched for someone who had the answers he was seeking. His eyes settled on Bruce Ismay, the Chairman and Managing Director of the White Star Line, but Sandor dismissed him at once. I’ll get no help from him, he knew.

And he was right. The man had no idea what was going on either. Sandor saw him hurrying about the foyer, dressed in his pyjamas under a topcoat. The man approached the steward named Barnes, who had been getting other concerned passengers back into their rooms.

“There’s no cause for alarm,” Barnes was telling them. “Please, go back inside.”

But Ismay, the complacent puffed up rich man that he was, would not tolerate that. He stopped the steward in his tracks, his voice full of anger and frustration, as he demanded why had they stopped.

“Please, sir,” Barnes replied calmly. “There’s no emergency.”

More annoyed than ever, driven mad by the way everyone was behaving when in danger, not even caring that they were not to be blames since they were oblivious to that fact, Sandor rasped, “I believe you may get your headlines, Mr. Ismay. Titanic’s most likely going to founder.”

Startled, Ismay and Barnes turned to look at him. The former seemed displeased by his words, while the latter just looked scared. Clearly not believing a word he’d said, Ismay glanced back at the steward and informed, “I’ll go to the bridge and seek my answers there.”

“You do that,” Sandor snarled, already walking back into the corridor, dismissing the English businessman from his mind.

Fuck, if not even someone as important as J. Bruce Ismay had been told about genuine state of the sodding ship, it was just another confirmation that the evacuation was going to be a bloody slow
affair, just as he’d feared. Growing frustrated by the fact that he could not go and warn Broder about it, or could even go to the bridge himself and demand for things to be set in motion because he feared Joffrey would return soon, Sandor strode back towards the stateroom, accepting the hard truth that he would have to go and wait until the crew got more organized.

Sighing in resignation, Sandor opened the door to the living room, thinking he would go smoke on the enclosed verandah. But even though he remembered a moment later that he had given Sansa his last cigarette, Sandor could not help but grin as he recalled too that it had been in that promenade where he had first kissed the little bird.

And he was still grinning as he stepped into the living room and found Meryn Trant and Boros Blount standing in opposite corners, with ugly smirks on their faces. There was a deep silence as he entered, but it only lasted a couple of moments.

“Ah the faithful watchdog returns,” Trant said, after Sandor closed the door behind him. “I think he is getting too old for the job, Boros. I think he is shit at it.”

Raising an eyebrow at them, not caring to waste his time and pick up a fight with them, Sandor realized that there was a chance that Joffrey had also returned before Sansa and he did.

“We´ve been looking for Miss Stark and you,” Blount explained with a cynical smile. “For nearly two hours. We even went down to steerage and asked around, but no one´s seen the pair of you. It´s almost as if you had disappeared.”

Suddenly alert, his body growing taut, Sandor growled, “Is that the tale, now? We´ve hit a berg and that´s all you idiots can do?”

“That´s what Mr. Baratheon instructed us to do,” Trant corrected. “Almost two hours ago, and whatever it was that just happened to this ship, which I´m sure is nothing serious, only took place less than half an hour ago.”

Sandor laughed to show the man his words did not worry him, but in reality his mind was active, realizing he would have to be very careful and not admit to anything if Sansa and he were to stand a chance to have their actions this night from being detected.

Glaring at Meryn and Boros, Sandor said, “Spare me and lay your day´s activities at the door of someone who gives a shit.”
The only man Sandor had to answer to was Joffrey, and until he saw that little piece of shit, he still had time to come up with an alibi for Sansa and him. But where was Joffrey? The door to their bedroom was opened, and he did not appeared to be in it. _Is he still with Astor, or... bloody hells!_ It took all of Sandor´s resolve not to look in the direction of the little birds bedroom.

“We know the boss´ girlfriend has been seeing a gutter rat called Jack Dawson,” Blount pointed out quickly, as if attempting to make it clear that they had the upper hand. “Meryn and I are wondering how the two of them have managed to pay you in order to keep a blind eye to it. They can´t be giving you money, since I´m sure they have none- but maybe one of them has something that not even Tywin himself offer you.”

_What? Dawson?_ Sandor thought for a moment, before wondering if he should laugh or be bloody thankful that this pair had no idea about the little bird and him- or at least, not without that sodding painter being in the middle.

His face betraying nothing, knowing full well he could not afford to show fear before these two, Sandor rasped, “You don´t know half as much as you think you do, idiots. What the hell are you doing here, anyways? Shouldn´t you be with Joffrey at his meeting with Astor?”

“It ended almost two hours ago,” Blount informed him. “Mr. Joffrey has been waiting for Miss Stark ever since in her bedroom. He sent us looking for you two, but as we´ve just told you, we could not find you.”

His burned face remained expressionless as his worst fear was confirmed, Sandor could look at the men he hated and snort, unsure what to do or say next. _I have to interrupt Joffrey and the little bird for her sake_, he knew. _I’ll say that I thought it´s best since the Titanic´s most likely going to start sinking soon._

But Meryn Trant, sensing he was cornered, stared back at Sandor with a gloating grin on his face as he remarked, “You seem to have lost your coat, Hound.”

Growing even more wary, conscious of the fact that Trant had always hated him and was desperate for the opportunity to see him fall from the lion´s good graces, Sandor replied in a voice thick with contempt, “As it happens, that´s just what I was about to do. Go put a coat.”

Without waiting for them to answer back, Sandor strode over to his room, the place where he and Joffrey slept, his ears straining to hear any sound that came from Sansa´s bedroom. It only took him a moment before he heard their voices, but hard as he tried he could not hear what they were saying.
Refusing to give in and grow desperate, thinking that because there was no shouting, there was a chance that the little bird was managing to fool Joffrey and keep things nice and calm between them, Sandor kept himself from barging in on them until he knew how matters stood. *Maybe I shouldn’t walk in and ruin it all if there’s even the smallest possibility that Sansa has everything under control.*

But standing in his bedroom and waiting was too fucking difficult for Sandor, and going back to the living room with those suspicious idiots would be no good either. So he put on his coat and leaned against the wall, running a hand down his face as he tried to organize his thoughts. But that was not meant to be, for less than a minute afterwards, he heard a loud noise coming from the little bird’s room. It was almost as if some furniture had been moved.

Familiarized with Joffrey’s behaviour better than anyone, that sound was enough to drive Sandor striding across his bedroom to Sansa’s, almost dislodging the door from it’s hinges as he opened it without bothering to knock or announce himself.

“Sir, the ship’s sinking,” was all he had time to growl, before his hoarse voice trailed off into silence.

Everything happened very quickly after that. One moment he was staring at Joffrey as the man stood in the middle of what appeared to be Sansa’s empty bedroom, and the next Sandor was turning his head around as he caught a slight movement from the corner of his eye. And there on the ground next to the door was his little bird, blood spilling from her lower lip.

Sandor’s eye caught Sansa’s, and he remained still as stone for a heartbeat. And that was all it took for him to forget about everything but his present reality. Sansa must have recognized something in his expression, for suddenly she gasped in a frightened voice, “Sandor, don’t!”

But he was too far-gone to understand or even hear her words. Joffrey had no time to cry out or do anything except look shocked as Sandor screamed, “You bloody bastard!”

Swinging a heavy fist with brute force into Joffrey fucking Baratheon’s face, Sandor both felt and heard bones breaking. The only rational thought in his mind in that moment was that he could not take out one of his guns and shoot the coward dead before him, since that would lead him straight to prison. But the mere sight of blood sprouting beneath his hand as Joffrey fell to the floor felt so good that for a moment Sandor felt exhilarated, and he snarled, “You had it coming to you for years, you son of a bitch!”
Breathing heavily, taking in the sight of his bloodied employer lying unconscious on his back as he relished how good it felt to finally avenge in some small way all the torments the little bird had endured at Joffrey’s command, Sandor turned his attention back to Sansa. And then the daze he was in suddenly broke, even as all the implications of what he had just done began to rush through his mind.

The little bird looked just as stunned as he felt. She was looking at her betrothed in utter shock, but sensing his stare, she raised her beautiful bruised face and then their eyes met. Unsure what to do, Sandor was about to walk over to her so he could take her away from this place, before he sensed that someone had stepped up behind him.

A moment later, Sandor heard Meryn Trant’s voice saying, “Don’t move, dog! I’m pointing my gun at you. Boros, go fetch the master at arms quickly, and the doctor too! Tell them we have a rabid dog on the loose. A dog who has just turned on his master, but will now slowly hand over his guns to me, or else I’ll shoot the Stark girl instead.”

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Less than half an hour later, Thomas King, Titanic’s Master at Arms was handcuffing Sandor to a water pipe at his office on E-Deck as Boros Blount stood by gloating. Sandor cast his gaze around the room, noticing the bed where King slept in, alongside that of the ship’s other Master at Arms, Henry Bailey. Beside him there was a porthole from which he could see clearly how the sea liner’s angle in the water was becoming steeper. *It will go down by the head with the water spilling over the tops of the bulkheads.*

“Any man who says this ship isn’t sinking is a bloody idiot,” he rasped, ignoring how the handcuffs were too small for him, to the point where they were so tight around his wrists that Sandor was certain they will have soon bare his skin bare.

“I thought I told you to drop it,” King reminded him, placing Sandor’s guns inside one of the drawers of his desk.

Staring at him with bitterness, Sandor closed his hands into fists, trying to remain calm. But it was too sodding difficult. Every fucking minute that passed by was a minute wasted and there seemed that there was nothing he could do to change that. Ever since the Master at Arms appeared in Sansa’s bedroom to take him away, Sandor had been trying to convince the old fool that his arrest could wait till later, seeing as there was a bigger problem at hand, but everything he told the Englishman seemed to fall on deaf ears.
And it was the same with Blount. Sandor had always known he was a stupid fool, but to actually have this gnat choosing to ignore that Titanic was bloody sinking only to spite him was too fucking much.

“You did tell him that, Mr. King,” Boros told the Master at arms. “But this dog doesn’t seem to want to follow orders anymore. I don’t know what’s wrong with him. He usually isn’t so talkative, you know. But now that he decides to bark, he has to do it about such a ridiculous notion!”

Sandor didn’t even bother to look at Blount as he snarled at King, “Why do you believe him and not me? Couldn’t be my face, could it?”

He didn’t expect the old man to answer him, since he already knew that his burns and his reputation were factors that at times worked against him. Sandor had tried to be reasonable and explained why he was certain the ship was going to be at the bottom of the sea in a matter of hours, but the bloody Englishman just wouldn’t listen to him. And that only made Sandor even angrier than he already was. For, not counting the little bird, he was mad at the whole fucking world, himself included.

Though he didn’t really know how else he could’ve reacted from the moment he saw blood slipping down Sansa’s jaw from her bruised lip. But everything had happened so fast after Trant pointed his gun at him. After seeing Joffrey’s chest raising and falling as confirmation that he was not dead from the blow Sandor had given him, he had been unable to do or say anything until Blount arrived with the Master at Arms and the doctor.

When the latter told them that Joff only had a broken nose, Sandor would’ve liked to do more than just assure Sansa that everything would be all right. But that had been impossible when he feared that Trant was going to hurt her at the slightest provocation.

And after the doctor and Thomas King had arrived, Meryn had bid Sansa to go wait in the living room for any developments if she knew what was best for her and Sandor, making it impossible for the two of them to try and figure out what they were going to do now.

But I promised her everything would be all right, and I have to keep that promise. Even if I am placed under arrest, King has to make sure I don’t go down with this ship. But his luck for tonight seemed to have run out though, for just then, a crewman rushed into the room, and anxiously blurted out, “Mr. Bailey wants you at the purser, sir. Urgently.”

Thomas King looked surprised and uncertain, but then Blount nodded in Sandor’s direction as he said to the Master at Arms, “Go on. I’ll keep an eye on him.”
If King still had any doubts, they disappeared when Blount pulled his pearl handled Colt .45 automatic from under his coat. Nodding, the Englishman tossed the handcuff key to Boros, and then he left the room alongside the crewman. Blount flipped the key in the air and caught it with a grin, showing off. *Now what the fuck am I to do?* Sandor thought. With King gone, there was no one to stop Blount from abandoning him to his luck in this cursed room.

“I really thought you had killed Joffrey for a moment, you know,” the man told Sandor. “Or at least dislocate his jaw. But even though I´m glad the boss isn´t dead, I don´t think any of the Lannisters would object to me shooting you, right here, right now. No one would even care if you died… Well, maybe one person would.”

“Bugger off,” he snarled, unimpressed. “And bugger all the lions too.”

Blount´s words had no effect on him beyond annoying him for being a confirmation that now the lions’ party knew about Sansa and him. And yet, despite everything, Sandor had to admit it did feel good to be able to say whatever the hell he liked about his former employers.

*Maybe it was sooner than planned, and this is not how I would´ve wanted it to happen, but it feels bloody good to have parted ways from that family of golden shitheads. If I could´ve only seen Joffrey burn until the moon turned black though!*  

Sandor knew how lucky he was that the spineless coward was not dead, but even now he could not regret having attacked him. *Even though I´ve still end up being arrested.* He could only suppose that some rational part of him had kept him from doing worse damage to that piece of shit.

Hitting a man was not worth this, but hitting Joffrey Baratheon, one of the most influential man on this vessel, was. Even if the little bird had not been in the picture, Sandor had only a few options to keep himself out of jail. *I could pay my fee with my savings, but the Lannisters would try to have me killed the moment I was free. Fuck, even if I was in jail they would still try to do that.*

“Be careful how you bark, dog!” Boros snapped back, annoyed at Sandor´s lack of willingness to start a fight. “I hold your life in my hands now.”

“Best wipe the shit off your fingers, then,” Sandor replied, growing annoyed.

He needed Blount to shut the fuck up so he could think of a way to get out of this sodding mess.
before it was too late, even as he needed to come up with another plan that would allow Sansa and
him to escape the lions the moment they reached New York. And then there’s Broder too, he
thought. I can’t forget about him either.

But it was hard to think of all of this with Boros sodding Blount trying to bait him into doing
something impulsive for the second time this night. So before the man could answer him back,
Sandor rasped, “And if you think you can scare me, then you really don’t have any brains. Tywin
Lannister will want to hear what I have to tell him regarding the jobs he set for me back in Europe,
so neither his grandson nor you can kill me off. At least not until I am of no further use to the old
lion. So why don’t you do us both a favour and stop talking? I need silence and you need to stop
acting like a fool if you expect to survive this night.”

When he was finished, Sandor waited for a couple of moments for Blount to say something, but
surprisingly he did not. Seating down on a chair beside the only desk in the room, Boros shot him a
sullen look of defeat. Relieved that at least one thing was working out for him, Sandor took a deep
breath and started doing some serious thinking.

He was more worried than he was letting on, but he had to keep a clear almost detached mind-set if
he was to think of a new well-laid plan for the little bird and him. But I have to do it fast. Among
many other things, the thought that Sansa was at present on her own among the lions made Sandor
ready to despair, but if he wasn’t careful he may end up fucking it all up again, and that could end
up making Sansa feel as if there was now no other way to escape the Lannisters other than suicide.

Sandor didn’t want to doubt the little bird’s strength and courage, for he knew her to be able to
bear more than any other young woman he knew, but had she not told him just about an hour ago
that she would take her own life if she was ever again at Joffrey’s mercy? And the moment that
fucking bastard woke up, there would be hell to pay.

Once Joffrey is safe aboard the rescue ship, he will try to send a wireless telegraph to Tywin in
New York, which will mean that almost as soon as we reach America, the old lion will interrogate
me. And whether I give in or not, he will end up ordering my death, if for no other reason than to
sustain his bloody family’s honour. Sandor knew that the famous Lannister patriarch was
disappointed in his eldest grandson, whereas he held Sandor in some esteem.

But that was worthless when compared with protecting his family. Even if he were to understand
why I hit his sadistic piece of shit of a grandson, he would still not care for Sansa’s welfare above
his family’s reputation. He’ll use or discard her to his own convenience. And in the slightest
chance that Tywin wanted to keep Sandor alive, he would make sure to send him as far away from
the little bird as he could to avoid any more trouble. That is if he doesn’t decide that the only way
to deal with her is to have her killed.
That idea was too much for Sandor and he shuddered to try and make it go away. But then, if the little bird was allowed to live... well, he couldn’t even begin to think about that. Whether Joffrey still decided to carry on with his engagement to Sansa or not, she would still suffer a worse fate than the one the golden little shit had had in store for her before. But there was no point in even brooding on that. Or else, Sandor feared it could be a confirmation of having admitted defeat to a certain degree. *I know things are not looking up for either the little bird or me, but what I have to figure out now is how are we to reunite so we can successfully escape?*

He wasn’t even going to consider if this situation would’ve been easier if the Titanic was not about to flounder. *We were caught because we were foolish enough to tempt our luck.* And yet, Sandor could not really regret that, for it had meant that Sansa had given herself to him. *No use in thinking about what we could’ve done to avoid this mess. What’s done is done.*

Sandor took a long moment to consider what they were going to do assuming he didn’t end up being left to drown in this room. *I’ll still be under arrest if I manage to board the rescue ship. How then can I get in touch with the little bird?* The bloody Lannisters would most likely make that impossible, and everyone would back them up seeing as she was not only Joff’s betrothed, but Cersei’s legal ward. *It’ll be impossible. Even if I were to meet up with her before New York, it would be too hard to avoid detection.*

The possibility of somehow making the lions think Sansa and he had died along with the people from Third Class who were bound to perish with the ship crossed Sandor’s mind, but he dismissed it at once. *We could pretend to be from steerage, but my face will give us away at once.* And any whisper of us having survived will arouse Joff’s suspicions enough to have the matter investigated.

No, the best thing for them to do- the only thing however much he hated to admit it, was to let matters run their present course. *I will have to escape the moment we arrive in New York and somehow kidnap her.* It could be done, since Sandor knew better than anyone where the lions would be staying and what were they going to do for as long as they stayed in that city, which was an advantage.

But if he was unable to escape, then it would have to be the little bird the one who flew away from her prison on her own, and then she would have to try and find him. *And then I’ll try to escape somehow.*

But that only raised more questions. Her best chance at escaping would be the moment she was in the crowded dock, but from there, how was Sansa to know where he had been taken while under arrest? *And how am I going to bloody tell her about this in the first place when I don’t even know how am I going to get off this bloody ship in time before it sinks?*

*Bloody hells!* Sandor thought, his head pounding. This was all too sodding much! He hated feeling
like this vulnerable, exposed and impotent. *What are we going to do?* he wondered again, for the hundredth time. *If I don’t act now, none of this is going to matter!* Before Sandor could even blink though, another unpleasant surprise happened. Meryn Trant appeared at the door of the Master at Arms´ room. *That’s fucking great!* Sandor thought, almost amused. *That’s just what I needed, for matters to get worse.*
Sansa had not said a word since the moment she had screamed at Sandor not to attack Joffrey. She had wanted to, but it had been hard to think of anything to say when she was afraid Meryn Trant would shoot Sandor or her. She would’ve liked to discuss with him some new plan, but that had been impossible.

Instead, all Sansa could do from the time Joffrey was knocked unconscious to the moment when Titanic’s doctor and Master at Arms arrived at her bedroom, was to remain on the floor shaken, her eyes traveling between her betrothed’s body as it lay nearby, to Sandor who was standing by the door looking just as bad as Sansa felt, and then to Trant as he pointed his gun at Sandor.

And then, when the newcomers arrived followed by Boros Blount, Dr. O’Loughlin had seen her bloodied lip and asked his assistant Dr. Simpson to take care of her. But Meryn Trant had intervened, telling everyone that he would look after her himself.

“Better that you both help Mr. Baratheon,” he explained, gesturing to Sansa to step into the living room.

Sansa and Sandor had exchanged a last look of longing and despair then, but still she could not speak. There were no words she could say, nor anything she could do, for fear their situation would only worsen if she defied the man who was currently in charge. That was why she had left her bedroom in silence even though Sandor had barked at her that everything would be all right.

She had entered the living room and sat down on the divan, her eyes fixed on the wall, not even paying Meryn Trant any attention any more. In truth, Sansa believed she was in shock, utterly paralyzed with sick dismay. One moment her head had been full of dreams of escape, and the next, her future with Sandor was uncertain. For a moment Sansa even forgot that the ship was sinking, since her attention was all caught up in her current situation.

It was almost as if she had stepped into a surreal dream, one which she did not know how to
confront in order to wake up. All she could do was stare at the wall as she sat with a straight back, her hands folded on her knees. Sansa felt so strange, as if at the slightest provocation she would suddenly start screaming. Her mind was full of unanswered questions, her heart beating wildly inside her chest as a headache began.

*What are we going to do now that they know about us? How are we going to escape? What will Joffrey do to us if he wakes up? Good Lord, please let him be all right. If Sandor killed him, all is lost for us. Where will the Master at Arms take Sandor? If the ship is sinking, shouldn’t he be put on a lifeboat too? But how will we find each other again? The Lannisters won’t just let us walk away, and perhaps neither will the law. What if they lie to put him in jail, or worse- kill him? How would I even know what happens to him if the lions decide to keep me in the dark? What will become of me now too? Despite what I said, I don’t want to die now that I’ve finally found a reason for living!*  

The more she thought about it all, the more she wondered, since these and more questions were robbing Sansa of her peace of mind, to the point where after fifteen minutes of wondering about them, she felt as if she had lost all sense of time and space. She longed to act in order to find the answers to some of them, but knowing that was impossible with Meryn Trant in the same room, all she could do was wait and go mad with escalating anxiety.

It was almost as if she had become a leaf upon a stream. All she felt able to do was let the current sweep her away, hoping that at one point it would bring her to a safe shore in some far away horizon. Sansa sighed then, wishing for a cup of tea to calm her nerves and warm her up. *How could this beautiful day end like this?*

Suddenly, Sansa’s attention was called back to the present as Meryn Trant left his place by the fireplace so he could stand before her as she sat on the divan. She raised her face to meet his stare with a blank expression, for despite the power he currently held over her and Sandor’s fates, he no longer intimidated her.

Sansa could not help but wonder then why this coward had decided to stay with her during these difficult moments rather than follow Sandor to wherever they had taken him, or stay with the doctors as they saw to Joffrey. *Maybe he wants to coerce Sandor into not doing any more rash deeds tonight. If he stays with me, then it could be seen as a threat, because if either of us misbehave, he’ll kill me. And if Joff did not wake up soon, now that Sandor had fallen from grace with the Lannisters their party would probably be lead by Trant.*

“If only I had known you were so desperate,” Meryn finally said, his eyes never leaving hers, “I would have spared you the need to look for comfort from Clegane.”

As she tried to decide what he could possibly mean by that, Sansa grew angry for she could not
ignore the scorn with which he’s spoken of Sandor. She shot him a disgusted look, and even though she thought of a dozen things to say to this awful man, she decided he was not worth the trouble of even opening her mouth. *If I did not speak to Sandor before, I most certainly won’t waste my words on him.*

Amused by the scowl she did not take the trouble to hide, Trant smirked down at her in return. For a moment he regarded her with an expression Sansa could not discern, but finally he stepped away from her and returned to his place by the fireside. A moment later, the door that led to Joffrey and Sandor’s room was opened and old Dr. O’Loughlin appeared.

“Mr. Baratheon has woken up.” he informed them. “His nose is broken, but other than that, he is all right. We’ve done what we can for him, and there is some swelling, but he is able to speak without suffering too much pain.”

Relieved only because it meant that Sandor could not be accused of murdering his employer, Sansa stood up and nodded at the doctor. At long last some of her questions would be answered, although she doubted she would find any comfort in them.

“And now if you’ll excuse Dr. Simpson and I, for we must go. There seems to be something wrong with the ship, and we may be needed elsewhere before this night is out,” Dr. William Francis Norman O’Loughlin explained. “Things are quite bad, I fear… You should clean that cut soon, miss.”

She knew what he meant, for Titanic had begun to list slightly, which only added more pressure to the cataclysm of emotions Sansa was living through. And because she was lost in her thoughts, she failed to acknowledge the Irish medic’s words.

To excuse her silence, Meryn Trant thanked both doctors for their help and advice, accompanying them to hallway. The moment they were gone and he had closed the door to the living room behind him, Sansa felt that Trant was staring at her again. But this time she could not throw him any irritated looks, for another man had fully caught her attention, to the point where she stopped breathing for a moment.

Joffrey was standing by the doorway before her, his nose swollen and crooked. His mouth was open so he could breathe better, and he was regarding her as if she were an insect to be crushed down slowly. Despite what it had probably cost her and Sandor, Sansa felt glad to see the betrothed she loathed thus injured.

“Sir, I- I’m glad to see you are all right,” Trant told his employer.
Joff did not appear to have heard him, so intent was he on staring at his fiancé. So Trant coughed politely and asked, “Is there anything you would like me to do?”

His eyes never leaving her, Joffrey asked Meryn Trant in a thick nasal voice, “Where is he?”

“That problem has been dealt with for the present, sir,” the valet replied. “The Master at Arms took him away. Boros is with them, to keep an eye on the Hound. I’m only sorry I could not stop him from attacking you. But as soon as he did I had my gun on him... If I may ask, what do you intend to do with that rabid dog now, sir?”

Sansa hated to hear Sandor being spoken of like this, but she was rooted to the spot, afraid of the form Joffrey’s retribution would take. She gulped, dreading to hear what would be Sandor’s fate even as much as she longed to have one of her questions answered.

“You’re here against your will, aren’t you?” Joffrey replied, stepping closer to Sansa.

*It isn’t for the pleasure of your company you can be sure of that,* she thought before he continued. “You wouldn’t have cared at all if he’d killed me, if things had somehow turned out your way and you two had been able to escape after he attacked me.”

Unsure what to reply, Sansa began to breathe heavily. His words made her nervous. It did surprise her though to see that Joff actually looked hurt by her silence. *What else can he expect from me after everything he did to my father and me?*

“I’ve been so blind,” he continued, not caring at all that Meryn Trant was still in the room. “This is more than just another one of your rebellious acts.”

It was not a question, but a statement, and in any case Sansa found it impossible to deny it, whatever the consequences of her behaviour were. After all, there wasn’t a single thing she could think to say to him at this point. Grabbing her roughly by the shoulders, he spat, “Have you slept with him?”

Her lip trembling, Sansa stared back at Joffrey, not caring anymore to hide just how much she hated him. The thought even crossed her mind of spitting at him, the way Sandor had done on Saturday as they walked about the Titanic, both to her horror and amusement. The recollection must have softened her expression, for suddenly Joffrey had pulled her closer, exclaiming, “You
She wasn’t sure what would happen next, but being interrupted by a loud knock on the door and an urgent voice were definitely not what Sansa had been expecting. But no sooner had the words left Joffrey that the door to the living room was opening and Steward Barnes had appeared.

“Sir,” he said, addressing Joff. “I’ve been told to ask you to please put on your lifejacket, and come up to the boat deck.”

“Get out!” Joffrey exclaimed, not releasing Sansa as she twisted in his grasp. “We’re busy.”

But the steward was adamant, for he actually disregarded the order. He walked over to the bedroom Sandor and Joff had shared, and after a minute reappeared with several lifejackets in his hands.

“I’m sorry about the inconvenience, Mr. Baratheon, but it’s Captain’s orders. Please dress warmly, it’s quite cold tonight.”

Barnes handed the lifejackets to Meryn Trant as Joffrey remarked how ridiculous this new turn of events was. *Surely he can’t still believe that the ship won’t sink*, Sansa thought, amazed that she had ever fallen for such a fool.

Before the steward departed, he turned to look at Sansa as she stood between Joffrey’s arms, and remarked, “Not to worry, miss. I’m sure it’s just a precaution.”

The moment Barnes was gone Joffrey released her and said, “Go fetch Blount as soon as we meet with my mother and brother, Meryn. There’s no knowing what other mad things they’ll have us doing tonight, so it’s better that we keep close together.”

She could not help herself then. Speaking out at long last, Sansa asked, “What about Sandor?”

Joffrey almost snapped his neck as he quickly turned his head in her direction, as if unable to believe his ears. He looked shocked that she had dared use Sandor’s first name before him, and that the first thing she was saying to him was a question about the fate of the man who had betrayed his trust and attacked him.
“Come along,” he ordered her. “But don’t think I won’t deal with you as soon as this stupid disturbance has passed. You have much to explain, but in the meantime don’t you dare talk to me. In fact, I don’t want you to open that fucking mouth of yours for anything until I tell you otherwise.”

***

Still chained to the water pipe next to the porthole at the Master at Arms office, Sandor was glaring at Meryn Trant and Boros Blount. The former had pulled out his gun at him as the latter stood up from the chair he’d been sitting in.

Sandor snarled at Meryn in a mocked in a full of contempt, “Here’s a brave man, baring a gun on a bound captive. Untie me, why don’t you? We’ll see how fearless you are when I’ve shoved your gun up your arse. How about you, Boros? Wait, I forgot that you’ve never had any courage in you. I shit better men than you both.”

“You know, I do believe this ship may sink,” Trant told Blount, crossing over to Sandor. “And this dog along with it.”

Sandor snorted to show Meryn what he thought of that as Boros said to Trant, “But Tywin Lannister needs him.”

“The Great Lion will have to learn what disappointment is,” Meryn replied with an ugly smirk. “There is nothing after all that we could’ve done to save this sad old hound after the forces of nature conspired to take away his life. It was simply out of our hands. And Joffrey agrees. By the way, you only broke his nose, Clegane.”

“All right,” Boros agreed, flipping the handcuff key in the air, catching it and putting it in his pocket. “You do what you like. But I hope you remember that I’m standing by you on this. You owe me, Trant.”

Meryn nodded dismissively, and Boros stepped outside to wait. Once Blount had exited the room, Trant smacked his lips and smiled. With a gloating expression he told Sandor, “I bet it was the sweetest moment of your life, fucking that tight little warm cunt. It’s cost you both everything though. I doubt the boss will want to keep her after he is done with her, so I’m going to ask him if I can fuck her too. I have hope that he’ll refuse me, or that she’ll have any spirit left to object after what Joffrey is going to do to her to make her pay.”
His head pounding, Sandor moved faster than Trant would have believed possible. He had already tried earlier to break the handcuffs with no results, but Meryn fucking Trant didn´t know that. So Sandor lurched forward as much as he could, and though it wasn´t much, it was enough to scare the idiot before him into silence.

Trant gasped and stepped away, looking scared. Sandor laughed in his face then, a laugh as cold and hollow as if it had come from the bottom of a deep well. When he was done, he rasped with narrowed eyes, “I´ll give you that one, but if you´re foolish enough to talk about her again, I´ll kill you before this night is done, you piece of shit.”

He hated lying, most of all when the words weren´t even convincing, but in his current position, Sandor just couldn´t do much else. His mouth started to twitch as he once again pulled on the pipe with all his strength, but the damned thing was not budging.

Recovering from his shock, Meryn Trant spat, “You´ve always had a fierce bark, but I doubt your wish will be granted. I would shoot you right here and now like the dog you are, but I think it will be best if I leave you to drown, your last thoughts being on how stupid you were to ever dare defy the lions.”

“Bugger that, bugger the Lannisters, and bugger you,” Sandor growled, making the each word a sneer. But Trant only laughed in his face and left the room without a backward glance.

“Don´t you dare lay a hand on her!” Sandor bellowed hoarsely after him, trying to pull on one hand out of the cuffs, working until the skin underneath it was raw. But it was no bloody good. “Do you hear me?”

His mind racing and his heart beating fast, Sandor started shouting, “Help! Somebody!”

But he received no answer except the distant laugh of Trant and Blount. But for those sodding gnats, the corridor outside was most likely deserted. Still, Sandor kept calling out for help, refusing to believe this was how it was all going to end. Because even though death didn´t scare him, he was as terrified of leaving Sansa in the hands of the lions as he had ever been of fire.

_I have to get free for the little bird_, he kept on thinking desperately, wondering how the hell was he supposed to get out of this mess. But it wasn´t long afterwards that Sandor stopped screaming as he heard a gurgling sound. A moment later, water was pouring under the door, spreading rapidly across the floor even as more came in.
Shit! he thought, his mouth giving another twitch. In a matter of minutes the office would be flooded inches deep in bitter icy water. Sandor stared out of the porthole apprehensively at the water rising up the glass and gulped. He pulled hopelessly on the pipe again until his skin turned red, but it was of no fucking use. Finally Sandor collapsed against the wall, certain he was doomed.

***

Sansa was standing at a corner of Titanic´s A-Deck foyer, looking from one of the windows at the scene outside. Thomas Andrews, wearing a lifebelt to set a good example, was striding along the boat deck as seamen and officers scurried to uncover the boats. He is afraid, she thought. And with good reason. Steam was venting from overhead, and she could tell that the din was horrendous.

It was clear that the crew´s level of disorganization was accumulating to make communication between everyone nearly impossible. They´ve never had a boat drill, she knew. And now they must act if they intend to save as many lives as possible, unprepared as they are.

As some men fumbled with the mechanism of one of the lifeboats, Sansa saw Mr. Andrews approaching, yelling to them over the roar of the fog with a look of disgust. A few passengers were outside on the deck as well, standing hesitant in the noise and bitter cold. Poor Mr. Andrews, Sansa thought as the shipbuilder gazed at his pocket watch before heading for the foyer entrance. He looks as if he is in a bad dream too.

Inside the A-Deck foyer, it was another story. Stewards were being very polite and obsequious, trying to convey no sense of danger whatsoever to the large number of indignant or curious First Class passengers that had gathered near the staircase due to all the confusion. Sansa turned away from the window only to see Molly Brown asked a passing young steward, “What´s doing, sonny? You´ve got us all trussed up and now we´re cooling in our heels.”

The young man backed away, actually stumbling as he tried to climb up the staircase. He mumbled, “Let me go and find out,” before hurrying away.

“I don´t think anyone knows what´s going on,” Mrs. Brown told the group she was with.

Sansa could not help but agree. All seemed to be unaware that death was hanging over Titanic. She took in the sight before her, unbelieving. Wallace Hartley had assembled his band in the First Class lounge, and they were playing to the rhythm of Alexander´s Ragtime Band, the popular song by Irving Berlin.
She gulped, for this magnificent room was doomed to a watery end. Titanic would no longer be the perfect example of style, luxury and safety. Turning around to stare at the Lannisters beside her, Sansa saw Joffrey pacing impatiently from left to right, carrying the lifejackets in his arms.

“These God damned English doing everything by the book,” he cried in his new nasal accent, looking furiously at everyone around him.

“There’s no need for language, darling,” Cersei admonished kindly, gazing with concern at her eldest son’s broken nose, wearing a hooded cloak of soft white fox fur over her nightdress.

Joffrey obeyed and fell back into a moody silence. When she had first seen that he had suffered an accident, Cersei had been highly alarmed, but when she demanded to know what had happened, Joff had surprised Sansa by refusing to answer. He is probably still deciding what to do about Sandor and I, Sansa suspected with a heavy heart. And of course Cersei doesn’t suspect anything, since Sandor’s allegiance to the lions has always been unquestioned.

Regarding Sansa, her mother-in-law never wondered what had happened to her in order to have a bruised lip. Cersei knew her son had hit her, and didn’t seem to care beyond commenting, “There is blood on your face, Sansa! Clean it up before anyone sees you! Trudy, help her!”

That had been some ten minutes ago. Now with a sigh Cersei Lannister turned to Trudy and Senelle and ordered the maids to go back and turn the heater on in their room so it wouldn’t be too cold when they all returned. The girls obeyed at once.

Sansa shook her head, frustrated at her mother-in-law’s inability to grasp the seriousness of their current situation. Cersei had even remarked at one point, “You watch, they’ll put us off in these silly little boats to freeze, and we’ll all be back on board by breakfast. What a ridiculous precaution it is to have drills!”

“Mother, I forgot Ser Pounce in the bedroom!” little Tommen suddenly exclaimed, turning to go back.

But Sansa took him gently by the arm, refusing to let him go fetch his favourite toy.

“Stay here, Tommen,” she said firmly, which surprised him.
As she smiled at him to take off the edge from her words, Sansa caught Cersei´s eye. The expression on her face must have surprised the older woman, who turned to look at her son for guidance. But Joffrey only nodded at his mother, which made Cersei frown with scepticism. Taking hold of Tommen´s arm, she walked away to join the Countess of Roathes and Lady Duff-Gordon.

Sansa was left alone with Joffrey, but only for a moment. Seeing that Mr. Andrews had just entered the A-Deck foyer with a heartbroken expression, Sansa walked over to him, not even caring at present that Joffrey was at once going after her.

She grabbed the Irishman by the arm to draw his attention. He turned surprised, but when he saw her, he actually looked relieved. A frown fell on his face though as his eyes focused on her bruised lip.

“What happened?” he asked her, in a worried voice.

Touched by his concern, but dismissing his question over a more important matter, Sansa said in a firm voice that never faltered, “I saw the iceberg, Mr. Andrews. And now I see it in your eyes. Please tell me the truth.”

His expression was painful, and his mouth jerked as if she had slapped him, but he hesitated only for a moment before replying, “The ship will sink.”

She felt her heart constricting at those four words, but she found she needed further confirmation. “Are you sure?”

“I´m positive,” was the Irishman´s answer. “In an hour or so, it will all be at the bottom of the Atlantic.”

“My God!” Joffrey gasped behind Sansa, in stunned tones as he tried to understand what he had just heard. “The Titanic sinking? But that´s inconceivable!”

Mr. Andrews barely spared a look in Joff´s direction before taking Sansa´s hand firmly in both his own and stating, “I don´t want to be responsible for a panic, so please tell only who you must. And get to a boat quickly. Don´t wait! You remember what I told you earlier about the boats?”
As if from another lifetime the memory of how Titanic’s shipbuilder had confessed that there were not enough boats for everyone on board flashed across Sansa’s mind. She felt almost ashamed because she hadn’t really thought of all the people who would perish along with the ship. But she remembered them now. *All those wonderful people I met last night at the steerage dance. Helga and Fabrizzio, Tommy and Jack and Dr. Broder...*


He tried to smile, but it came out more as a grimace. A moment later he was moving among the passengers, urging them to put on their lifebelts and go to the boats. Sansa stood rooted to the spot for a moment, unsure what to do next. The only thoughts in her mind were of Sandor. But just as she realized that the time had come for her to act, Joffrey grabbed Sansa by the elbow in a vice like grip and steered her towards his mother and brother.

“Excuse me, Countess, Lady Duff-Gordon. I’m sorry to intrude, but I must speak to my mother,” he told them, breaking off their conversation.

The women took in the sight of his broken nose with raised eyebrows, and then their eyes fell on Sansa’s bruised lip. Cersei followed her friends’ gaze, and growing alarmed at what they were doubtlessly assuming, she remarked, “I’ll be back in a moment. What is it, Joff?”

Her son nodded to the corner where they had all been standing a few minutes ago, so Cersei and Tommen followed Joffrey and Sansa. There, Joff told his family what Mr. Andrews had just informed them, and at long last Sansa saw fear cloud the green eyes of her mother-in-law. Cersei was a strong woman who would do her best to keep the world from learning her true feelings though, so after taking in the meaning behind the news, she asked in a proud tone, “Do you know if the lifeboats will be seated according to class? I hope they are not too crowded.”

“Oh Cersei, shut up!” Sansa suddenly shouted in disgust.

Cersei froze, her mouth open in shock. But Sansa did not care. The words had escaped her before she was aware of it, but she did not regret them. In fact, she felt the urge to say more. She felt free of her dream like state at long last. And vaguely she wondered for a moment where this courage had come from, to speak to Cersei so frankly. But this was one question that Sansa already knew the answer to. *From Sandor.*

So stepping closer to her mother-in-law, even as shoved off Joffrey’s hold on her elbow, Sansa
lowered her voice and explained in a hoarse voice, “Don’t you understand? The water is freezing and there are not enough boats. Not enough by half! So half the people on this ship are going to die!”

As she finished, Sansa had the relief of seeing Cersei actually look ashamed, if only for a moment. But this small victory was cut short by her betrothed, who pointed out mockingly, “Not the better half. I overheard Bejamin Guggenheim telling Henry Blank that both Masters at Arms were busy at the purser. So I doubt they’ll remember to set the Hound loose in time to save him. So you see, you were a fool to ever think you two ever stood a chance. I always win, Sansa. One way or another.”

Sansa turned quickly to face him, as his meaning hit her like a thunderbolt. The words were a knife in her belly. No, she thought. No, that would be too cruel. Staring at him with terror as overwhelming as anything she had ever felt, Sansa stated, “You unimaginable bastard. You’re a coward who won’t even confront him for the wrongs you think he did to you.”

An angry scowl appeared on his face at her words, but he could not strike her in retaliation before some many witnesses. She stepped away from him in revulsion as he turned a dark shade of red, and staring down at little Tommen in turn, who was looking on the scene with confusion, Sansa said, “Goodbye, Tommen.”

Before any of them could even blink, Joff tried to stop her by letting the lifejackets he was carrying drop to the floor so he could grab her arm, but Sansa actually managed to pull free from him this time. Whirling around, she walked away with a determined step through the crowd. But it was only a matter of moments before her former fiancé had caught up with her, which did not surprise her in the least. Grabbing her roughly by both arms this time, Joffrey shook her, raising startled gasps from those around them.

“Where are you going?” he demanded. “To him? Is that it? Stop moving! I won’t allow it! I said stop! I won’t let you become the bitch to that dog! You belong with me!”

“I’d rather be his mistress than your wife,” Sansa retaliated with complete honesty, taking a perverted joy at the sight of Joffrey’s reaction.

Clenching his jaw and squeezing her arms viciously, he pulled her back toward his family, but Sansa managed to slap his broken nose with her hand nonetheless. Joffrey let go off her with a loud curse, and a heartbeat later Sansa had started running away from him through the clusters of people. Somehow sensing she was still in danger though, she looked back and saw a furious Joff coming after her, even as he covered his swollen nose with his hand, his eyes full of tears of pain.
Breathlessly, Sansa reached two First Class men she had never seen before, and told them urgently as she pointed to her bruised lip, “That man struck me after I refused to allow him to take advantage of me! Please help me!”

Appalled, they turned to see Joffrey coming towards them. Sansa ran off as the two strangers moved up to meet him, and at long last she managed to disappear by reaching the First Class entrance, which had a knot of people coming through it. She pushed rudely through them, and went across the landing. The thought that she had finally broken free from her prison didn’t even occur too her at present, seeing as she was desperate to find a way to save Sandor before time ran out.
Sansa was running, not really realizing where she was going. Now that she had put a little distance between her and Joffrey, she was realizing the full extent of her actions. *I’m free!* She thought in wonder. *I’m free!* And those two words made her feel so happy that she could not help but laugh aloud as she made her way through the crowd.

Far away in the back of Sansa’s mind though, she still knew that the matter was not so simple. It was no secret where she was heading to, and if she met Joffrey or anyone of his party either here on the Titanic, or even on the rescue ship, it would definitely mean trouble. But right now Sansa felt as if she were a bird flying away from her gilded cage forever.

All those years of confinement were behind her, as well as her mockery of an engagement to a man she despised. And even though she would have preferred the truth to come out until they were in America, it was so sweet to be rid of her prison a couple of days earlier. *I am free of Joffrey! I will not have to kiss him, nor marry him, nor bear him any children. Let another have all that. Poor girl.*

In these moments, everything seemed possible, even the fact that she and Sandor would manage to somehow come through this whole ordeal safe and sound, so that the moment they reached New York, they would be able to start a new life together. *And maybe one day we’ll have a home and a family too.*

But for that Sansa first needed to find Sandor. And that made her stop breathless in the middle of a first class corridor. *I’m so silly!* She thought, trying to calm down. *I’ve been running about like a chicken with its head cut off.* Now that she felt certain Joffrey was no longer chasing after her, Sansa had to concentrate. *I’ll think about how I finally stood up to the lions for the first and last time later. Oh, but won’t Sandor laugh when he learns I hit Joff right on his broken nose!*

She evoked then in her mind the sight of Sandor´s face, to the point where she could even hear the sound of his laugh. For some reason, that made her face fall. *Oh God, please help me!* She prayed suddenly, her lip trembling. *Where can I find him? What can I do?* She had escaped her captors with no idea on how to rescue Sandor. So much depended on her next move. Sansa wondered if she shouldn´t go to the Purser´s Office and look for the Master at Arms there, demanding that he
Joffrey had mentioned that both Masters at Arms were at the Purser, but for all she knew, they might be at the Second Class purser, not the one in First Class. The thought made her fearful. *Suppose I go to the wrong one?* Sandor could be somewhere in the lower decks of Titanic, and it could mean his death by drowning if she delayed even for a minute.

The thoughts went round and round in her head. Stamping her foot in frustration, almost feeling tears coming to her eyes at having to decide what was her best course of action when Sandor’s life was hanging in the balance, Sansa felt a shock running through her as she heard Mr. Andrews´ Irish voice behind her. She swirled around and saw him coming up the corridor in her direction.

“Anyone in here?” he was calling out, opening stateroom doors, making sure that there were no more passengers lingering in their rooms at this. “Steward, check the starboard corridors! Madam, please put on a lifebelt and get to a boat immediately.”

Sansa ran up to him at once, relieved that out of all the people on Titanic, she had met the only friend she had in First Class, who would surely be able to help her in some way.

“Mr. Andrews, thank God!” she exclaimed, flushed and panting. “Where would the Master at Arms take someone under arrest?”

He stared at her for a moment, uncomprehending. Then he blinked and gasped, “What? Sansa, you have to get to a boat right away!”

“I can’t, sir!” she explained, urgently. “I have to go find Sandor! I- I can’t lose him!”

Thomas Andrews raised an eyebrow at her. “Sandor?”

“Sandor Clegane, the man who was been guarding me during the voyage,” she elaborated. “He’s been arrested, and I am certain he has been abandoned somewhere to go down along with the ship.”

She spoke without thinking, and only recalled how painful it must be to the businessman how his beautiful sea liner was doomed when she saw him wince at her words. But recovering quickly, he shook his head, regarding her with disbelief, before replying, “But men are not allowed to get
inside the boats until all the women have done so. Please Sansa, you have to save yourself. Otherwise-”

“Thomas, no!” Sansa interrupted, barely hearing what he was telling her, hoping that the fact that she was calling him by his first name would make an impression on him. “I can’t leave him! I won’t!”

“Ah, I see,” Thomas Andrews expressed, smiling a little. “I was wondering what had happened to you to bring such a change from the girl who first boarded the ship, to the young woman who stands here before me.”

For a moment Sansa returned his smile, glad that the transformation Sandor had inspired in her had been evident to those who paid attention. Glad that she no longer had to keep their love in the shadows, as one would hide something immoral.

“I’ll do this with or without your help,” she finally assured the man before her in a strong, determined voice, holding her head up high. “But without it will take longer.”

Sighing in resignation, Mr. Andrews took her by the arm and started walking as he instructed, “Take the elevator to the very bottom and go left, down the crewman’s passage. Then make a right.”

“Bottom, left, right,” Sansa nodded, striving to remember. “I have it.”

“Hurry, Sansa,” he bid her, with an encouraging smile.

“Thank you, sir,” she said, shaking his hand, relieved those were all the instructions she needed.

A moment later she was running again. It took her only a minute to reach the elevators, and gasping, she gave a silent prayer as she saw that not all of them had yet been deserted. Walking towards the only remaining elevator operator, Sansa tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. The man seemed only a few years older than her, but the fear in his eyes made him look younger.

“Sorry, miss,” he stumbled. “Lifts are closed.”
“Mr. Andrews bid me to tell you that you are to take me down at once,” she lied, saying the first thing that came into her head. And when she saw him hesitating, she added in a convincing stern voice, “But if you feel disinclined to follow orders, be certain I shall report you. Now please do your job and take me down.”

Before the man could even open his mouth, Sansa had stepped into the elevator. Resigned, looking at her as if he would like to call her by a few rude names, the operator followed her inside before fumbling to close the gate and start the lift. Soon, as they descended, it started to grow colder, and Sansa hugged herself, relieved that she had not taken off her coat, even though goose pricksles had covered her arms and legs by now.

There was complete silence between her and the young man as they descended deeper into the sinking ship, and even though Sansa bit her lip in shame at the thought of how she had scared the operator with her lie, it had been for Sandor’s sake, and she was willing to do much more for him.

And just as if knowing what she had been contemplating, fate seemed to decide that it was time to test her resolution. Through the wrought iron door of the elevator car, Sansa saw the decks of Titanic going past, and then the lift was slowing down. And then, a heartbeat later and without any notice, ice water was swirling around her legs.

It had all been so sudden that Sansa could not help but scream in surprise as the force of the water pushed her against the wall behind her. I have to go on, she reminded herself. I have to go on for Sandor. Be brave, like a lady in a song.

The young operator beside her was as alarmed as she was apparently, for he shrieked louder than her, and yelled, “I´m going back up!”

“No!” she managed to exclaim, preventing him from doing just as he´d announced.

Shaken and scared, Sansa forced the door open herself with as much strength she could muster and splashed out of the elevator, hiking up her floor-length skirt to ease her movements. Sandor is counting on me, she reminded herself, over and over again to keep fear at bay.

“You´re mad!” she heard the young operator shout after her.

Turning around to see him disappear as he went up the ship, Sansa gulped. She remembered that
less than a day ago Cersei Lannister had told her love would make her act the fool to keep those she cared for safe. But even though it made her feel uncomfortable to recall her former mother-in-law’s advice in a moment when horror was threatening to coil about her throat, Sansa still managed to take a deep breath before looking around and muttering, “Left, crew passage.”

Spotting it, feeling absurdly proud to have reached this far, she slogged down the flooded deserted corridor, trying hard to ignore just how cold the water was, or how much she was shaking, her teeth chattering. But it was of no use. It’s just as Sandor told me the night before last, she thought.

A thousand knives were cutting at her legs, but despite the pain Sansa could still move. I had no idea I would suffer this before I died when I almost killed myself. But why am I thinking about that now? Concentrate, Sansa Stark! Turn right now, she forced herself to remember, focusing her attention on putting one foot down in front of the other. One more step. One more step. She had to keep moving. If she stopped, she would never start again.

Turning into a cross-corridor, she splashed down an empty hall, full of rows of white doors on each side and objects floating on the water. Oh God, which one is it? Sansa wondered in despair, staring at the eerie glow the lights were casting on the surface of the water. Somehow, the sight was enough to tie her insides into knots.

The water level was rising with every passing moment, and she feared she would never manage to reach the end of the corridor before it was all flooded up. These moments were something out of a nightmare, where every single step was a struggle, as if she were pulling her feet out of ankle-deep cold mud.

For a brief moment she felt overwhelmed, the reality that she was all on her own in the depths of the Titanic overwhelming her. But still, Sansa somehow she found the strength to scream at the top of her lungs, and calling out amidst the sound of the water all about her, she yelled, “Sandor! Sandor, are you here? Sandor!”

For one hideous instant there was silence, and she was about to move forward, realizing there was nothing else to do but go from door to door in case Sandor was in trouble and could not call back to her, or worse, he was not here at all, when she suddenly heard his rasping voice calling back, shouting, “Sansa! In here! Little bird!”

During the initial shock of actually hearing him answering her, Sansa nearly jumped out of her skin. But it only lasted the blink of an eye. The next moment, her spirit was taking flight as she realized that he really was here, and with it, Sansa ran towards the door from which his rough, rasping later was coming from. Pushing it wide open, creating a small wave, Sansa’s eyes fell on Sandor Clegane. I’ve found him! She thought, exulting, hardly daring to believe it even though he was standing before her, at the other end of the room.
Sansa’s heart constricted as an overwhelming sense of relief took hold of her, despite the fact that her breath caught in her throat when she saw him handcuffed to a water pipe. Oh God, thank you! Thank you! At least he seems unharmed! They stood staring at each other for a moment in complete silence, as if memorizing each other’s faces, before Sandor rasped as he beamed at her, “You’re a fucking wonder, little bird! You’re bloody brilliant!”

A small whimper escaping her, Sansa splashed over to him and put her arms around Sandor. He was unable to return the gesture, but it didn’t matter. She felt how thankful he was in the kiss he gave her as he bent down to reach her, her hands cupping both sides of his face. Their bodies shook from the overwhelming joy of being in each other’s presence once again.

And for a moment, as they broke apart and looked into each other’s eyes, her forehead resting against his, Sansa forgot where they were, for she loved this man to the point where she was certain her heart would burst with happiness. Before she knew it, a tear was rolling down her cheek.

He was staring down at her as if she had never seen her, and yet, there was pride in his voice as he snarled, “My brave, strong, little bird! Thank you!”

“You would have done the same,” she replied, smiling up at him, her heart plain in her face, her tummy fluttering pleasantly. It was nice to have someone believe she was courageous.

“I’m fucking glad to see you, little bird,” he barked, taking in the sight of her bruised lip so intently that his mouth began to twitch. “Believe me, I am. Though I have half a mind to ask you why you are not on safe aboard a lifeboat, Sansa?”

“Oh Sandor, how can you even imagine I would leave this ship without you,” she exclaimed, unbelieving. I would rather die than live without you. “And if I was in a lifeboat, then I would be with Cersei, and that would be even more dangerous than this.”

“Where’s that bastard?” he suddenly demanded roughly. “How did you escape him? Did he hurt you again?”

“I was worried they had hurt you in return,” she admitted with a sigh, hoping Sandor could control his anger better in future. But right now it was not the time to tell him that. “But I can see they didn’t. And I’ve left Joffrey, but we can talk about that later.”
Sandor’s registered the news with a nod, and at once he barked, “Right. Well, we’ll think of a new plan soon. Right now I need you to find a key for my handcuffs, Sansa. Blount took the ones that belonged to the Master at Arms. Try those drawers. It’s a small brass key.”

Sansa nodded, ready to do as she was told. It felt nice trusting herself to the care of such a strong person as Sandor again. We’re together. There’s nothing to fear now. She kissed his and hugged him again briefly, and after they had shared a look, Sansa headed over in the direction of the drawer. She could not help but notice thought that somehow, now that she was no longer beside him, Sansa was once again growing quite aware of the freezing water around her.

When she reached the drawer, Sansa was expecting to see a set of keys inside it. Thus, when she failed to find one, her heart started beating a little faster. Refusing to look in Sandor’s direction in case he would see a hint of fear in her eyes, Sansa began to ransack the office, searching drawers and cupboards. With every minute her actions became more desperate though, until finally she stopped.

Breathing hard as she stood in the middle of the room, surrounded by water colder than anything she had ever felt in her life, Sansa finally looked at Sandor and said, “There’s no brass key. I only found a silver one.”

As if they were reading each other’s thought, Sandor and her looked around at the water, now almost two feet deep. Sandor seemed about to say something, but before he could even open his mouth, Sansa announced, “I’ll be right back. I am going to get help.”

It wasn’t a prospect she was looking forward to, least of all when Sandor’s life was still at stake, but there was no other way. It had been a blow to Sansa to realize that even though she had found him, she could not save Sandor without the key to the handcuffs.

I can’t allow that to crush me down though. I would’ve liked it if Sandor was the one taking the decisions from now on, but his life still depends on me. If I could find him, surely I can bring helps as well, and soon. She only had to be brave for a little while longer.

All of these thoughts rushed through Sansa’s head in the blink of an eye, because just as Sandor nodded in reluctant acceptance, Sansa was already running out of the room. She looked back at him from the doorway though, just as he rasped, “I’ll wait here then, little bird. Be careful.”

She smiled at him and was gone, splashing away through the swirling water of the North Atlantic.
As she attempted to make her way down the hall, Sansa recalled that she had seen a stairwell by the elevators. Since it really seemed as if there was no one nearby, she decided to go up to the next deck. I doubt it will be flooded yet. When she was climbing the stairs though, her coat was leaving a heavy trail behind her, and Sansa realized that unless she discarded it, the mere weight of it would slow her down.

Without a second thought, she shrugged it off quickly and practically bounded up the remaining steps in a hurry. When she reached the top, Sansa found herself once again on her own in a deserted long corridor. And she could not help but think that had she not been a First Class passenger, she might have gotten used to moving about the steerage hallways. It’s as if this ship is a long labyrinth, she thought, dazed. And I can’t afford to get lost in it.

Just then a long groan of stressing metal echoed along the hall as Titanic continued to sink. The sound startled Sansa so much that she gave a little scream, but she was at once running down the passage again, quite unimpeded now that she had taken her coat off. But her heart lurched at how cold she felt without it.

“Hello?” she screamed after she reached the end of the passage. “Somebody?”

There was no response. Dazed, Sansa turned around a corner into another corridor, only to stop abruptly as she saw that that the hallway was slopping down into water that was shimmering with the reflection of the lights all above her. It would be so easy for her to lose her way in such a big ship… Shaking her head, Sansa was about to turn back the way she had come from, away from the creeping water that was quickly making its way towards her, when she gasped in relief as she saw a young man appearing out of a room to her right.

The stranger ran through the water, sending up geysers of spray. As Sansa got a closer look at him, she saw that his eyes seemed crazed, and he just pelt past her without slowing down.

“Please help me!” she called after him. “We need help!”

But the man either didn’t understand her, didn’t hear her in his agitated state, or simply didn’t care. Without looking back, he disappeared among the maze of white hallways and endless rows of doorways, deep in the depths of the doomed sea vessel. Far away, the hull gonged with terrifying, inhuman sounds. It’s like a bad surreal dream, Sansa thought, forcing herself to keep from shaking. But sure I didn’t found Sandor only so that we could both perish in the Master at Arms’ office! She could not allow their story to end like this.

Just as she was wondering where should she head for next, all the lights along the corridor
flickered and went out, leaving Sansa in utter darkness. She stood rooted to the spot, too terrified to even think of a prayer. She didn’t want this happening to her. Not here, not now! But it only lasted for an instant. In the blink of an eye, they had come back on. And with the light, so had her heartbeat and pulse. Sansa found herself breathing at an alarmingly rapid rate, for that one moment of blackness had been one of the most terrifying of her life.

But there was no time for her to recover calmly. She had to get going. Turning back the way she came from, Sansa almost fell to the ground as she stumbled against a man. Holding on to him, she managed to register by his outfit that he was a ship’s steward. Despite the fact that his arms were full of lifebelts though, the stranger grabbed her forcefully by the arm before she could even register what he was about, pulling her along with him like some wayward child.

“Come on then,” he told her, clearly upset to see someone was still lingering about in his section. “Let’s get you topside, miss. That’s right.”

“Wait!” she exclaimed, trying to force him to stop moving. “Wait! I need your help! There’s a man down here who needs-”

“No need for panic, miss,” the steward interrupted her. “Come along now.”

“No, let me go!” she shouted, struggling against him. “You’re going the wrong way!”

But it was more than evident that the steward was not listening to her. Accepting with a sense of dread that he would be of no help to her either, Sansa shouted in his ear as loudly as she could. And when the man turned around to face her, she slapped him hard across the face. Her hand hurt as she let it fall to her side, shocked.

She had never done anything like this before, and for a moment Sansa could not help but wonder how unladylike she had just behaved. The blow she had delivered to Joffrey’s broken nose somehow didn’t count as the same as this. The steward staggered, letting her go. Holding his reddened cheek, he stammered, “To hell with you,” and then he was running off.

“This can’t be happening,” Sansa found herself whispering, as she stumbled back against the wall, struck by how still the corridor had become as she stood somewhere in the bowels of the ship.

She took a deep breath in an attempt to once again calm herself as she realized that even if she found someone else, it wasn’t going to be likely that they were going to help her free Sandor. In a
disaster such as the one tonight was turning out to be, many would only be looking after themselves. For a moment Sansa closed her eyes, weighing her options. As she opened them again, her stare fell on a glass case on the wall with a fire-axe in it.

Her first impulse was to break the glass with a battered suitcase that was lying discarded nearby. But she knew her own limitation. *I may be able to seize the axe and carry it back to the office, though it will be awfully heavy. But I could never use it to free him.* Rather than cutting his handcuffs in two, Sansa feared she would end up cutting Sandor´s hands off.

Just as panic threatened to take hold of her, an idea struck her. It was clear that she would have to free Sandor herself, which meant that she required an object to do so. *But what object and where to find it?* Her eyes fell on the only item near her, the discarded suitcase, and Sansa almost laughed in relief as a new thought occurred to her.

*I think this is where people from Third Class slept. Surely I can find something in one of the rooms that I can use!* Without further delay, Sansa dashed quickly inside the nearest one. Had Sandor and her lives not been in danger, and if Titanic were not sinking, Sansa would have felt ashamed at what she found inside the room though. The luxury of her stateroom in First Class seemed ostentatious when compared to the simplicity of a Third Class cabin.

There were bunk beds for six people, a small amount of wardrobe space, a sink, heat and electrical lighting. Along with the forgotten possessions the passengers from steerage had left behind during the evacuation, that was all Sansa could see in here. And yet, she knew that Titanic´s accommodations were probably the best to be found in the whole world for Third Class passengers. *At least up until tonight.*

Moving about quickly, Sansa searched about the cabin for something she could use to help her free Sandor. But after a minute of two she started growing desperate as she realized there weren´t many things that would be able to help her.

“Please God, help me,” she started muttering, desperately looking under the bunk beds, and beneath the pillows. “Please.”

Standing up, Sansa ran a hand through her hair, biting her lip impatiently as a prickle of unease took hold of her. Some moments ago she had found a little box of hairpins by the sink, and a memory from long ago had flashed across her mind. She had dismissed it as ridiculous, but she was starting to realize there was nothing else she could think of to try and do to free her lover.

*But what if it doesn’t work?* She wondered, reaching out for the small box with a trembling hand,
her head bowed, fighting to hold back her tears. It was hard not to be terrified when Sandor could be about to drown if she hesitated any longer. *Or drown if I don’t succeed. And me with him, since I would not leave his side.*

A particularly loud noise echoed through the depths of the sea in that moment, and fearing that she was risking precious moments, she turned around and fled back the way she came from. A few heartbeats later she had reached the stairwell, but this time as she peered down at it, Sansa gasped. The water had flooded the bottom five steps. Shaking, highly aware of how the freezing water was, Sansa went down, the box of hairpins tightly held in her hand.

She almost said of one of Sandor’s favourite curse words as she plunged into the water, which was up to her waist, but refrained from speaking it. For a moment, she couldn’t breathe, but soon enough she was thinking that it was enough that she had already slapped a man tonight. *If I begin cursing I won’t recognize myself before this night is over.*

It was all very well for Sandor to curse as much as he liked. Sansa had already gotten used to it, but that did not mean she had to follow his example in this particular regard. All of these musings were turning out to be a poor attempt to distract her from the pain the freezing water was inflicting on her limbs though. Grimacing, Sansa powered forward down the corridor, holding the box of hairpins over her head. It would not do for her to drop it, or for the pins to get wet. When she finally reached the Master at Arms’ office, Sansa lost no time to make her way towards Sandor, who looked up as she walked into the room.

“Nobody would come,” she informed him, her teeth chattering. “And I could find nothing else that I could use to try and free you but this.”

She showed him the box of hairpins. Sandor took one good look at it and rasped, “What the hell is that?”

“A box of hairpins,” Sansa answered, trying very hard to remain calm. “When I was at boarding school, me and my friends were sometimes locked inside our rooms at night to keep us from running to the kitchens, so we could not steal desserts that would make us sick the morning after. My friend Myranda was excellent at picking on locks with hairpins, and she taught me well.”

Sandor looked just as scared as she felt for a brief moment, realizing what was at stake, and how they were pinning their lives on hairpins. But he was not a man given to panic even in the worst of situations. Still, the thought flashed across Sansa’s mind of how frustrating it must be for him to be unable to do anything in his current position, leaving his fate up to a child’s trick she had learned years ago.
“Oh Sandor, I´m so sorry that I could not find something better,” she heard herself exclaiming, the words stumbling out desperately. “There was an axe, but I wasn´t sure I could use it to cut the handcuffs in two. But if you like, I can try! I´ll go back and fetch it.”

“Wait, Sansa,” he snarled, stopping her before she ran off again. “Don´t ruffle your feathers. I understand. Let´s- let´s find out if these hairpins work first before we restoring to sodding axes.”

He positioned the chain connecting the two cuffs across the steel pipe, stretching it out until it was taut as a bowstring. Sansa gulped as she stared at his reddened wrists. But she could not give in to panic now of all times. So rather than wincing as she moved across the water to Sandor´s side, Sansa remained calmed as she took out a hairpin and handed the box to him for safekeeping.

Concentrate closely, she told herself then, bending close to the handcuffs and taking a deep breath to calm herself. Locating the lock, Sansa took a deep breath and muttered a silent prayer to the heavens.

“You can do it, little bird,” Sandor rasped, not unkindly. “I trust you.”

Nodding and managing a small smile, Sansa bit the tip of her tongue and set to work, hoping her hands wouldn´t be stiff, awkward or clumsy. Thankfully, even though she had not done this in a long time, the process came back to her effortlessly. Steadily pulling apart it´s two ends so she would have a long metal wire, Sansa inserted one end of the hairpin inside the handcuff´s lock.

And using the lock as support, she composedly bended the tip of the pin and began to move it about, pushing it further into the lock whenever she thought it right. It only took her less than two minutes, but Sansa could not remember ever living through two such long and stressful seconds at present.

But finally, she heard a satisfactory click, which meant that her plan had worked. With wide eyes Sansa saw the cuffs separate, releasing Sandor´s hands from their hold. The sight shook her so much that she released the pin, feeling as if all the strength had gone out of her.

“You fucking did it!” Sandor said, laughing roughly as he quickly removed the handcuffs and rubbed his wrists, dropping the box of hairpins as well. “Great work there, Harry Houdini!”

I did it, Sansa repeated in her mind, relief taking over her soul. I did it!
Raising startled eyes, she found Sandor´s grinning burned face gazing at her with disbelief, admiration and love. A small sob escaping her as a flood of realizations flashed through her mind at what it meant to finally have Sandor back with her, and before she knew what she was doing, Sansa had thrown herself into Sandor´s welcoming arms.

He crushed her to against him in desperation, kissing the top of her head and running his hands through her hair, as if afraid she would suddenly vanish. Meanwhile, Sansa clung to Sandor´s big frame, relishing in how being held by him made her feel as if there was nothing in this earth that could ever harm her. *Nothing, not even the sinking of the greatest ship in history.*

“Sansa,” Sandor snarled, pressing her even closer to him, forgetting to be gentle in such desperate moments. “You´re bloody brilliant. I would´ve never thought of that! Not in a hundred years.”

“Of course not,” Sansa agreed, giggling as a couple of tears streamed down her cheeks. “I wouldn´t be surprised if you´d never seen a hairpin in your life before tonight.”

Throwing his head back and roaring with laughter, the sound sending a pleasant tingling all through Sansa´s body. When he had recovered, Sandor barked, “Let me get my guns.”

She watched him made his way through the water over to the desk. Opening it´s drawer he took out a pair of guns. Sansa´s eyes grew bid at she realized there was a possibility he could use them before this night was over.

“Come on, let´s go,” he told her, interrupting her musings as he put each gun on a different side of his waistband. “We have to get away from here, now.”

They waded out of the office and into the hall, holding hands. Sansa started towards the stairs, intending to go back up to the hall full of steerage cabins so they could find a way out of the lower levels of Titanic from there. But Sandor stopped her before she could even attempt to take two steps in the cold water.

“It´s too deep down that way,” he explained.

Sansa stared at the stairwell, and reluctantly agreed. Already, there was only about a foot of it´s opening visible. They would have to find another way out and soon, for time was running out quickly. *But at least Sandor is beside me now.*
It wasn´t long before they found a stairwell that would take them up to the next deck. The difficult part was making their way from the Master at Arms´ office to the staircase while the ice cold waters of the North Atlantic kept on pouring into Titanic, making it too damned hard for even a man as tall and big as Sandor Clegane to keep his balance.

And it didn´t help that the fucking water was freezing beyond anything he could´ve imagined. The time he had fallen through some thin ice as Sandor went ice-fishing in Canada was nothing compared to this. It was so damned cold it actually burned him, and there had been no way to escape it until they reached the stairwell. Still, despite it all, Sandor was ready to hold on to Sansa´s hand for dear life whenever he felt her fingers slipping away as the God damned icy water swirled around them.

The moment they reached the stairwell, he bid Sansa to climb up the ladder first. And as he followed her, Sandor´s eyes took in the alluring sight of how her wet dress clung to her behind and to her long legs. *Stop it*, he thought, shaking his head. *This isn´t the sodding time or place for that*.

For a moment as they stood on D-Deck, trying to catch their breaths, Sandor considered where should they head for next. But just as he was deciding on whether or not it would be wise to go looking for Elbert seeing as they were already at steerage, Sandor caught sight of Sansa trembling like a leaf beside him.

“Here,” he rasped, taking off his coat. The bottom was soaked through and dripping, but most of it was dry enough, seeing as his height had kept it from getting wet.

“Oh,” the little bird chirped, as Sandor helped her into it. “Thank you.”

“Don´t mention it,” he told her, rubbing her arms in an attempt to bring back some warmth into her body, thinking she looked beautiful wearing his coat, even though it was too big for her.
Sansa smiled up at him when Sandor unconsciously reached out to brush away a strand of wet hair from her face. Then he took her hands in his own and kissed them, before he began to rub them as gently as he could.

“What happened to your coat?” he asked, raising an eyebrow at her.

“I had to take it off so I could move better in the water,” she replied in a voice that shook from the cold.

Without waiting a moment longer, Sandor tugged Sansa closer to him so he could both hug her and keep her warm. She leaned against his chest gratefully, seeking comfort as he wrapped his arms around her, the motions as familiar to him as if they’d had spent the last decade doing this, rather than only a day.

They both needed a moment to rest anyways, and this way he would be able to spend a few more moments with the little bird before making sure she got on a lifeboat along with the other women. Sandor could only hope he would be able to follow her, if not on the same boat, at least soon enough in another. But even if the worst happens, she came back for me. No one could take that away from him. And so he hugged her tightly against him, his head full of thoughts of how strong and courageous his little bird was. Sandor was so fucking proud of her, amazed by the transformation in her that had taken place before his eyes since Friday night. She had already given him more than he had any right to expect, and yet now she had also saved his life, risking her own in the process.

Sandor’s heart was threatening to burst inside his chest as he remembered what he’d felt when he saw her appearing at the door of the Master at Arms’ office, determined to free him, even if the only way she could do that was with a fucking hairpin. And maybe the rest of the world would’ve thought he was mad, but Sandor had found hope in this mad night to trust Sansa the way he’d never been able to do about anyone else.

He knew there had been a big chance that she’d failed, but now that they were once again together, Sandor didn’t want to dwell on what might have happened had the little bird’s plan failed to work. I would’ve told her to leave me and save herself, and she would’ve been stubborn about it, refusing to leave my side.

A smile appeared at the corner of his mouth as he imagined that despite the fact that Sansa must
have been scared shitless first as she tried to find him, and then as she tried to find a way to save him, she had never faltered. Hers was a heart not only good and pure, but brave. What did I do to deserve her? he thought, hugging her even closer.

“I already knew you were made of sterner stuff than you let on, little bird,” he snarled, pulling away so he could stare down at her, his hands enclosing her small waist. “But I hope you can see that now too, Sansa.”

Blushing, she bit her lip, but then she nodded and said with a teasing smile, “Yes, but only because you inspire me to believe in myself. It’s like- for you I can do the inconceivable.”

Amazed, Sandor couldn’t find the words to reply to that. So instead he bent down and kissed her properly, hoping she would know just how much she meant to him. It was hard to believe even now after everything that had happened between them that whatever she provoked in him, she felt it as well in regards to him. In the past he would’ve scoffed at such a notion, but that would’ve been because he didn’t know what he was missing.

“I’m sorry about this,” he suddenly rasped, gently brushing his thumb by the small bruise on her lip, even as he struggled to keep his fury against Joffrey in check. “I should’ve known better. I’m sorry too that he hurt you again, Sansa. But even if I wish I’d killed that bastard, it’s best for the both of us that I didn’t.”

Sandor was going to go on, but the little bird raised a hand to cup his cheek and said in a soft voice, “It’s all right. We both should’ve known better. I’m to blame too. It was always my idea to disobey him, even if it risked us getting caught. But neither of could help ourselves, and that is why you relented to the steerage dance and to escaping into the hull of the ship hours ago. I don’t think we should worry about that anymore though. There’s no time for it. We are together now and that’s all that matters.”

“That, and getting through this night alive,” Sandor added in agreement. They had lingered here long enough.

“We’ll worry about what we could’ve done differently another day,” the little bird proposed. “After all, despite everything, neither of us regret what we did before we were caught.”

Sandor could not help but grin at the certainty with which she spoke those words. They were true of course, but he liked hearing Sansa saying them. He looked at her a long moment, and finally nodded. No more would be said of this.
“The little bird is no longer afraid to speak her mind,” Sandor pointed out, chuckling, both proud and amused. “Is she?” It wasn’t like her to refer to them fucking so naturally.

“No, I’m not,” Sansa consented. “But oh Sandor, what are we going to do after we leave the ship?”

“Let’s get away from here and find a way to the boat deck first,” he proposed, taking her hand in his and starting to walk away from the stairwell, which was almost underwater by now. “We’ll come up with something as we make our way there. For example, I would like to know just did you manage to escape them, little bird. You said he didn’t hurt you.”

“He didn’t,” she replied. “I hurt him. When he regained consciousness he seemed to be having trouble taking in the fact that we were together. He looked sort of lost, unsure about what to do. Soon enough he would have probably returned to his usual self, but at least he was disoriented enough when I was with him. So in a way, I was safe.”

She went on to tell him how stewards had at long last instructed First Class passengers all to go to the boat decks, how Thomas Andrews had confirmed that Titanic would sink in about an hour, and how she had finally had enough of the lions.

“Joffrey followed me after I left their side of course,” Sansa finished off. “And he tried to stop me. But he had to let me go after I hit him on his broken nose. Then I- oh, I knew you would laugh, Sandor!”

Of course he would fucking laugh! Sandor roared with laughter, a sour sound, part rumble and part snarl echoing down the deserted corridor eerily. He could only imagine it, but that was sweet enough. And soon enough Sansa had joined in, even though she kept protesting it had been very unladylike of her.

“We may quite a team, little bird,” he remarked, as his laughter finally died down. “And you loved hitting that bastard as much as I did, admit it.”

The little bird rolled her eyes at him, but she was smiling as she did so. As they rounded a corner into another sodding empty hallway, and Sandor wondered how long it would be before they managed to get up to the next deck, Sansa asked him what had happened to him after he’d been arrested. Sandor gave her a short account, leaving out the part Meryn Trant’s gloating of what that piece of shit would like to do to her if he ever had the chance.
If Sandor saw Trant or Joffrey again, he knew it would be hard to restrain himself from killing them both. But I’ve got to try. Hitting Joff had already cost them their plan of keeping their relationship secret until they escaped once they reached New York. Now they had to come up with a new one, but many things made that bloody difficult.

If only those two would drown tonight! But then, thinking it over, Sandor realized he didn’t want that. Bugger that. I don’t want them dead. I want them burned till the moon turns black! And yet, in a way the best revenge they could ever have over the Lannisters would be to keep arrive New York safe and sound, before escaping.

Which is why he suddenly rasped, “Sansa, you do realize though that when we are on the rescue ship, if any of the lions were to see us, I’d be arrested again, don’t you?”

Sansa shuddered and nodded. Then she chirped, “I had thought about it. And I will denounce the Lannisters for all they have done to me if that happens. But in the eyes of the law I am their ward until I turn eighteen, so even if some believe me, to the world they still have power of me.”

“That you won’t, little bird,” Sandor warned her at once, his dark eyes narrowing. “If the worse comes to happen, I’ll be the one telling anyone who will listen about those hypocrites. But you have already angered them enough to keep on adding things to the bloody list. If I’m arrested the law will back them up if they try to keep you with them.”

“Do you think they would tell the police that you- that we- that I’m no longer a maid?” she wondered reddening, glancing nervously at him. “Since I am not of age they could accuse you of-”

“Don’t worry about that, bird,” Sandor reassured her. “They wouldn’t dare tell anyone that Joffrey’s fiancé preferred to fuck his dog rather than him.”

His words came out harsher than he’d intended, he realized as he saw Sansa wince. He lay a heavy hand on her shoulder, cursing himself for upsetting her, but just then she said, “Yes, you’re right. For all anyone knows, it was Joffrey. There is no real evidence that you did it.”

They won’t need proof, he thought. They have money enough to make up for that. Whereas they had nothing. The Lannisters would rob him of his life’s savings the first moment they could, which meant that Sandor was not even going to be able to pay a fee to get out of jail. Then they will either let me rot in there, or send someone to finish me off.
And Sansa in the meantime would be punished with either death or a different kind of imprisonment. _I may have spared her marrying to that son of a bitch, but that doesn’t mean she wouldn’t suffer._ Sandor was reminded once again of Meryn Trant’s lust for the little bird. And there would be nothing neither of them could do about it, out of fear the other one would get hurt in retaliation.

“If only I wasn’t so fucking recognizable,” Sandor snarled angrily. “Then we may have stood a chance by keeping a low profile on the rescue ship.”

“And there is no one who can help us,” Sansa agreed with a miserable sigh. “I felt so happy when I left Joffrey—so free… I shudder to think that I could be made to return to that cage. To be torn from your side. It— it almost makes the prospect of going down with Titanic welcoming, doesn’t it? We would’ve still won, but most importantly, we would be together to the very end.”

“Enough, Sansa,” he rasped, his voice as rough and hard as an iron rasp and his face tight with anger. “We wouldn’t have won. Not like you think. We’ll worry about all of this later, little bird. We’ve come so far. But tonight—tonight we must live.”

Sandor was afraid Sansa was starting to panic. He could read her so easily, and hated to see his courageous little bird of moments ago believe that death was the only bloody answer. He’d only started having hope himself, and because she made it possible, Sandor hated to think that she felt none in return sometimes. That’s why he needed to be strong for her now.

The little bird’s eyes widened at his optimism, and she nodded nervously, ashamed of how for a moment she’d wanted to take the easy way out. Sandor closed his hand around her arm, reminding himself to talk to her about this, before pulling her to the end of the corridor, with a closed door at it’s end. Sansa followed unresisting.

When they reached the door, Sandor sighed in relief. He could hear people moving on the other side, which meant they were all heading for the nearest exit up to C-Deck. The sodding door was locked though, which meant there was only one thing he could do to take care of that.

A moment later Sandor was telling Sansa to step away as he threw all his weight against the door, hitting it with his shoulder. It burst open at once under the force with a loud crashing sound, the wooden doorframe splintering apart.

“Quick,” he growled, offering the little bird his hand.
When she took it, they stumbled through the shattered doorframe into the corridor, and at once Sandor realized where exactly were they on E-deck. *This is Scotland Road*, he thought, gazing about. It was the widest passageway in the Titanic, running almost the length of the ship and used by crew and steerage alike. Right now many Third Class passengers were moving along it, heading aft.

Sansa and Sandor started to follow them, but they hadn´t yet taken five steps when a steward, who had been herding people along, marched over to them.

“Here you,” the idiot exclaims. “You´ll have to pay for that, you know! That´s White Star Line property-”

Sandor only bothered to turn around so the man could get a good look of his angry face. The man paled as he caught sight of his burns and shut the fuck up, as Sandor knew he would. Leading Sansa by the hand past the dumbfounded steward, they joined the steerage stragglers. It some places the corridor was almost completely blocked by large families carrying every bit of luggage they owned.

He shook his head as he spared a glance in their direction. Sandor knew why they were doing that, but it also made him feel irritated that they couldn´t grasp how the situation was beyond salvaging their earthly goods, few as they were.

“Here, lass,” a woman suddenly told Sansa in an Irish voice. She handed her a blanket, and nodded at Sandor before explaining, “It´s not much for such a big man, but he should cover himself up. His lips have turned blue.”

Sandor stared in surprise, unable to say a word, taken aback by the stranger´s generosity and by the fact that she wasn´t afraid to look at his face. A man that looked a lot like her caught up with them as they hurried down Scotland Road, and offered Sansa and him a flask of whiskey.

“Cheers,” Sandor growled, accepting it.

He handed it over to the little bird first, telling her that it would serve to take the chill off. She took a big drink, and Sandor grinned before following suit. When he gave the man his flask back, he and the Irishwoman moved away from them, nodding at them after Sansa and Sandor had thanked them simultaneously, she with all her pretty courtesies, and he with a brief thank you that came out as a grunt. He was not used to the kindness of strangers, but he covered himself up with the small
blanket as best he could.

Trying a number of doors and iron gates along the way, and finding them all locked, Sandor was beginning to despair that they had reached a dead end when he heard a familiar voice calling out his name.

“Sandor! Sandor!”

He turned and saw Elbert Broder pushing his way through the crowd towards him. Making sure the little bird was right beside him, Sandor close the space between him and the German doctor, and before he knew it, both of them were hugging like long lost brothers.

“I´m fucking glad to see you, old man,” Sandor told his friend, grinning as he released him.

“Likewise!” Elbert replied, before realizing Sansa was also here, his eyes widening in shock. “But- but Miss Stark, you should be on a lifeboat!”

“It´s a long story,” the little bird answered, smiling at the doctor. “But I am glad to see you again, even though it´s under these circumstances.”

“Yes, about that,” Broder said nervously, looking at both of them in turn. “Two men came down to Third Class hours ago, asking around about you two. From what I heard, you are now believed to be Jack Dawson´s girl, Miss Stark.”

“Yes, we know about that, but we´ll explain later. As Sansa said, it´s a long story… We´re at the aft of the ship, aren´t we?” Sandor wondered, trying to figure out where the next exit from this deck could be.

Elbert nodded just as Jack Dawson, Tommy Ryan, Fabrizio de Rossi, his Norwegian girlfriend and her family appeared.

“Doctor, why did you just take off like that? We- Oh, Sansa!” Dawson stopped talking as he reached them and caught the little bird´s eyes.

“Hello Jack!” Sansa exclaimed, looking pleased to see her friends.

As she began greeting them all and the three young men started talking to her as if he wasn´t even there, Sandor decided it was not the time to gets jealous about Dawson. Why I should, I don´t bloody know. The little bird had given him no cause, but he just couldn´t help it.
Guessing correctly what was going on through his head, Elbert said, “The boats are all going. I guess you’re both just as lost and desperate as the rest of us. We’re trying to search for a way out since the main stairwell is overcrowded. There’s a gate right ahead up to the upper decks though. We were all heading there when I caught sight of you. Thank God we both stand out in a crowd.”

Sandor nodded absentmindedly, gazing around over the heads of the solidly packed crowd clogging the corridor. This place was a fucking mess, so it was no wonder why everyone looked confused. Nearby there was a mother changing a baby’s diaper on top of an upturned steamer trunk, and a few steps before them another woman was arguing heatedly with a man in Serbo-Croatian, a wailing scrawny looking child next to them.

Then, there was also a man kneeling down so he could console a woman who was simply sitting on the floor, sobbing. And a whole family was blocking the corridor as they waited patiently for the father to find the meaning to a sign in his English-Arabic dictionary. Other passengers had their suitcases and duffel bags with them, despite the fact that most of them looked soaked through. And none of them is wearing their lifebelts, he thought in disbelief, before reminding himself to find two for Sansa and himself as soon as he could.

Refusing to let the little bird eventually drown in this place, Sandor bid Broder to join them as he took Sansa’s hand again and pushed through the crowed in the direction of the stairwell Elbert had mentioned. They reached it soon enough, but Sandor almost groaned aloud as he realized that Dawson, Ryan, di Rossi and the Norwegian family had followed them. They’ll just slow us down.

Deciding to deal with them later, Sandor led the way up two decks before getting stopped by the sight before him. Up against a steel gate at the head of the stairwell, he saw that Titanic’s crew was letting a few women squeeze through the gate, opening it a foot or so. But some terrified men tried to rush through the gap, almost forcing the gate fully open.

The crewmen and stewards had to push them back, shoving and punching them before closing the gate. One of them was even brandishing a small revolver while another was holding a fire axe threateningly. When they managed to lock the gate, a cry of outrage went up among the crowd, who surged forward again, pounding against the steel and shouting in several languages. Fucking chaos!

The crew was so scared now that even if all the women and children that remained in Third Class were to appear before them, they would still most likely refuse to give them a chance. Bloody idiots, letting the situation get out of control to the point where now they had a mob. The situation seemed hopeless, but whatever Sansa and Sandor were going to do, they had better do it fast, for this deck would soon be underwater.

“Get back, you lot! Go to the main stairwell, with everyone else,” a scared steward was ordering loudly. “It’ll all get sorted out there!”

Somehow, with those words Sandor finally lost patience. Time was running out faster than he would like, and this son of a bitch was not going to stand in the way of Sansa getting into a lifeboat.
He stood for a moment amidst the shouts and curses, before taking one look at the scene. *I can make our way through that sorry lot,* he thought, staring at the screw. Releasing the little bird’s hand, Sandor handed her his blanket and barked, “Wait here!”

Acting quickly, he shoved people out of the way and strode over to a bench bolted to the floor on the landing. He began pulling at it, but it was fucking hard. Thankfully, a moment later Broder, Jack, Tommy and Fabrizio were helping him out, pitching it until the bolts sheared and the bench broke free. From somewhere nearby, Sandor realized that Sansa must have figured out what he had in mind, for he heard her shouting at the nearby passengers, “Move aside please! Quickly, move aside!”

They did as she asked and cleared a path up the stairs between Sandor and the other men and the gate. Running up the steps with the bench, they ram it into the gate with all their strength. It ripped loose at once from it’s track and fell outward, narrowly missing the scattering crew. Led by Sandor, the crowd surged through, Sansa among them.

He helped her step over the fallen gate, before taking her by the hand and snarling at the cowering steward, “If you want to keep your job with the White Star Line, you better take us to the boat deck now.”

The man stared at Sandor for a moment. He knew that the light was painting his burned face with yellow shadows, which would make it look even more terrible than it did in daylight. And some seconds of staring at it was enough for the steward to nod dumbly and motion for them all to follow him.

“Here’s your blanket,” the little bird chirped beside him, handing it over to him. “It’s going to be really cold outside.”

Sandor thanked her and kissed the top of her head as they all made their way up to C-deck. As they rounded a corner he caught Elbert Broder’s approving eye. *He was right,* Sandor thought. *He knew there was still for me worth living for, and I found it. And I’ll try my damn best to keep it.* He put a hand on Sansa’s back, beneath her long auburn hair, to steer her before him, afraid to loose her in the gathering crowd that was following them.

At long last, they reached the boat deck from the crews’ stair just aft of the ship’s third funnel. Sandor, having shoved the steward out of the way, burst through the door, quickly followed by the little bird, Broder, Dawson, Ryan, di Rossi, the Norwegian family, the shaken steward, and a couple more others who had joined in along the way. His relief at reaching the boat deck was short lived though. The moment they were outside, Sandor noticed two things first: the night air was fucking freezing, and all the boats were gone, their empty davits alone remaining.

A couple of dogs ran by, which meant that things up here were bad enough if they had decided to release the First Class pets from the kennels. Before he could even fear that they were too late, Sansa ran away towards an old man Sandor recognized as Colonel Gracie. He was chugging forward along the deck, escorting two First Class ladies.
The sight of them made Sandor sigh in relief, for their presence could mean that there was still space on some lifeboat somewhere along Titanic for Sansa to get in and be safe. Following her, Sandor heard her asking even as she tried to catch her breath, “Colonel, are there any boats left?”

It took the old fool a moment to recognize Sansa. He looked at the little bird’s bedraggled, flushed state, and answered, “Yes, miss. There are still a couple of boats all the way forward. This way, I’ll lead you!”

That was all Sandor needed. He grabbed Sansa´s hand before racing past Gracie, Elbert, Dawson and Tommy following close behind. They ran by the First Class orchestra as they struck up a lively waltz, and Sandor snorted at the sight of them still playing even though no one as paying them any mind.

“Music to drown by,” Broder exclaimed behind him. “Now I know I´m in First Class!”

But this was nothing like First Class, Sandor thought. All around them the world seemed to be falling apart. Some distance away he saw Captain Smith by the rail shouting through a large metal megaphone to one of the boats pulling away from the ship to come back, while an officer beside him blew a whistle and waved his arms.

The fools´ hopes were dashed soon enough, Sandor noticed, as the captain wearily lowered his megaphone slowly. Poor wretch, he thought. His brilliant career is going to end with one of history´s biggest maritime disasters. For Sandor knew that a captain was meant to go down with his ship if there were people still on board.

Ahead, they passed a man tossing deck chairs over the rail and Sandor wondered despairingly why there seemed to be no rescue ship nearby. Surely they sent fucking calls for assistance, didn’t they? That had been one of his hopes of getting off Titanic soon enough.

It would´ve been a God damned perfect solution to keep Sansa from being left alone, but now the lifeboats would be unable to ferry passengers from the sinking ship to the rescue ship. No, instead they would just float by aimlessly, waiting to be rescued sooner rather than later.

He imagined what it must be like for those First Class women in the boats as they saw Titanic angled down into the water, with the bow rail about less than ten feet above the surface. The great liner, its rows of lights blazing, slanting down into the sullen black mirror of the Atlantic...

And from what he could see at this distance, the lifeboats were being launched barely half-full. The level of disorganization by the crew made Sandor mad, and he only grew angrier as he heard the roar of the water cascading into the ship below them. He pushed his way to the rail, the little bird behind him, and saw that twenty feet below them the sea was pouring into the staterooms of B-deck.

Suddenly, a distress rocket exploded overhead like a thunderclap, sending out white starbursts that
lit up the entire deck as they fell. Startled faces turned upward, Sansa and Sandor’s included. He noticed that beside them, that man with the camera they’d met yesterday was cranking away at his machine again, hoping to get an exposure of the rocket’s light. His woman was posing in front of the camera as the man directed her, saying bullshit like, “You’re afraid, darling. Scared to death—yes, that’s it!”

Sandor thought that either she had suddenly learned to act, or else she was petrified. The couple recognized Sansa, and greeted her almost cheerfully. Shaking his head, Sandor returned his attention to the German doctor and the other men.

“You better go check the other side,” Sandor told them, willing to risk getting separated from his friend if that made it easier for each man to find a way to get into a lifeboat.

No one would let four men take the place of the women, especially if they had no money to buy their seats. And Broder and Sandor were big enough to take two spaces on a boat. *Besides, I don’t want to keep them from finding a way off the ship just because I want to make sure I see the little bird safe inside a boat.*

Broder must have known that there was a chance this could very well be the last time they saw each other, for he put a hand on Sandor’s shoulder and said, “Good luck, Sandor Clegane. Look out for Miss Stark, and may God have mercy on us all.”

*There he goes again, talking about God.* Sansa on the other hand was staring at Elbert wide eyed as he turned and ran off, followed by Dawson and Ryan, after the former had actually kissed the little bird’s cheek in farewell. Sandor’s eyes were set on Elbert Broder’s eyes as his friend searched for a way around the deckhouse, and then he was lost amongst the crowd.

“Oh Sandor, look,” Sansa whispered, tugging at his elbow as she leaned her head on his arm. “The Straus!”

Sandor followed the direction of her gaze to the finely dressed old couple. The businessman and co-owner of Macy’s, the department store, was standing with his wife nearby, apparently pleading with her.

“Please, Ida,” Isidor Straus was saying. “Get into the boat.”

“No,” the old lady replied. “We’ve been together for forty years, and where you go, I go. Don’t argue with me, Isidor. You know it does no good.”

Turning to a woman dressed as a maid, Sandor saw Mrs. Straus handing off her fur coat to her and saying, “I won’t need this anymore. You take it, child.”

The maid and a couple of officers began to plead with the old lady to escape while she still could,
but she refused them too. The old man, recognizing he was defeated, looked at his wife with great sadness and love before pulling her gently close to him. Sandor looked away then, not even surprised that he was able to recognize those feelings in others when he himself was experiencing them. But it made him uncomfortable to think that there was a chance Sansa and he would not be able to reach that age together.

The little bird was very quiet as she stood beside him, staring at the old couple with big round eyes. Sandor glanced around the deck, scowling, for the pace of the crew’s work had now become more frantic. Both crew and officers alike were running all over the deck, their previous complacency gone. And all around them chaos and confusion was growing as well. A woman was calling for a child, a man was shouting over people’s heads, and a woman was taking hold of an officer’s arm as he was about to launch a boat.

“Will you hold a moment?” she asked him. “I just have to run back to my room for something—”

Before she could say another word, the officer grabbed her and shoved her bodily into the boat. Then he shouted, “She’s the last one. Lower away!”

Determined that Sansa would be aboard the next boat, Sandor was about to go ask the officer if he could go along with her, when the man exclaimed to a gathering of people before him, “Women and children, please! Women and children only! Step back, sir. No, sorry sir. No men are allowed yet. That’s protocol.”

Fuck! Sandor thought, despairing. A part of him wanted to go find another boat, one that would allow men in, but he was not about to risk the little bird’s life for that. No, not even if Sandor knew she would loathe their separation just as much she would. Panic would soon be setting in for good, and he didn’t want Sansa anywhere near this ship when everything started to fall apart.

But this is for the best, he reminded himself. We were lucky enough to find that boats were still being launched. I’ll see her safe inside one and then I’ll do my sodding best to somehow survive this and meet her on the rescue ship.

What they would do then, Sandor had no idea. But hopefully he would have time to figure that out the moment he was off Titanic. Seeing that Sansa was shivering with cold, and thinking about how this could very well be the last moments they spent together, Sandor wrapped his arms around her. He wanted to tell her so many things, but they all seemed to choke on his throat. The little bird buried her face on his chest, not speaking either. Maybe there’s no need for us to say anything. All we could say to each other, we already know.
Sansa had accepted without any effort the fact that Titanic would sink when Sandor had first hinted at it. She had accepted the reality that Joffrey had learned about Sandor and her sooner than they would have wished. And when the time came to break free of her prison and go rescue Sandor on her own, she had accepted that too without hesitation. But this was too much.

If she had ever heard that there was a protocol that stated women and children were to be saved before men on lifeboats in case of a maritime disaster, Sansa had completely forgotten it until she was staring at the Straus couple, realizing that she was expected to leave Sandor to his fate aboard the sinking ship. She raised her head from his chest and shuddered on this moonless night that had turned into a mad dream.

They were standing amidst a crowd of uncertain passengers in all states of dress and undress. A Third Class lady was barefooted, while a couple more next to her were in stockings. Some men were in top hat and overcoat, whereas others still had on their evening dress. There were people from First Class in bathrobes and kimonos as well, and some women were wearing lifebelts over velvet gowns as they carried books and small dogs, their arms covered in jewels.

But if there was one thing all the women present had in common regardless of their station, it was that they were experiencing the same heart wrenching pain Sansa was feeling, even though they all showed it in different ways. Some of the women were stoic, while others were overwhelmed by emotion and had to be helped into the boats by force.

Sansa watched the farewells taking place all around her as Sandor stepped closer to the boat. Her eyes fell on a nearby group, where a woman was holding the hands of two little girls, even as she looked into the eyes of her husband, terrified that she may not see him again.

“It´s goodbye for a little while,” the man assured his wife, lying kindly. “Only for a little while.” Then he turned to his two little girls and said, “Please go with mummy. You have to go now.”
The woman stumbled to the boat with her children, hiding her tears from them as best she could while the man encouraged them with a false cheer, choking with emotion, “Hold mummy´s hand and be a good girl, Sophie. That´s right, look after her.”

Too overcome by witnessing the parting of the family, Sansa shifted nervously where she stood and looked away, a little embarrassed to have beheld such an intimate moment. Other First Class women Sansa knew only by name were beseeching their husbands to join them on the boats, but the gentleman, dressed in full evening dress, only shook their heads at them with taut lips.

The very image of chivalry would have once appealed to Sansa´s imagination, but now such nobility made her feel mortified. She was haunted by so many thoughts, doubting Sandor would be able to catch another boat in time, and wondering how she could ever be expected to leave his side in the first place after everything they meant to each other. Without him she could see no future for her.

_I was so certain that rescuing him from the Master at Arms´ office meant everything_, Sansa thought dazedly, burying her face once again in Sandor´s chest. _I knew that once we were on the rescue ship, we would once again be in danger._ But to think that there was a chance Sandor wouldn´t even be allowed to make it to the other vessel had left her momentarily speechless.

She wanted so desperately so say and do something, but all she could do was cling to the man whose arms were supporting her, for Sansa´s legs fell so weak she was afraid she would faint at any moment now. She could feel the cold wind on her lashes, taste it on her lips. And even though Sandor´s arms were wrapped around her comfortingly, Sansa was shivering wildly, though not due to the sharp, merciless cold. Had she ever felt more wretched? When she had been the Lannisters´ prisoner there had never been any hope to brighten up her days. But now that her hope was cruelly being taken away, all she could think of was that she couldn´t leave Sandor.

_This cannot be my last moment with him. Please God, don´t separate us_, she wanted to scream. _Please don´t._ And for some reason, the hope that they would see each other again in some hours time was so faint that Sansa felt tears in her eyes. She sniffed loudly, and for a moment Sandor let her sob against his chest.

“There, there, little bird,” he rasped, bending down to whisper in her ear. “You´ll soon be safe.”

The fact that he wasn´t even protesting with the officer to get on-board a boat with her broke Sansa´s heart. _If he did, it would endanger my chance of quickly getting into a lifeboat._ To have yet another proof of Sandor´s love for her, made Sansa raise her eyes to gaze up at his burned face.
He had dark circles under his eyes, and the lines at the corners of his mouth were deeper than usual, making him look older than his thirty-four years. Sansa knew he was awake from pure adrenaline. *Surely we didn’t go through so much together only to say farewell?* Sandor smiled down at her with a wolfish grin, an attempt to lighten up the moment even though Sansa was certain he was feeling just as bad as her. His gesture had meant to be reassuring, but Sansa’s throat tightened.

“I can’t,” she managed to express, trembling.

Sandor’s smile softened, knowing full well what was going through her mind. “You must.”

“There has to be another way,” she said desperately, her fingers digging into his arms.

Sandor must have seen something in her face, for he leaned closer and replied firmly, “This is the way. The only way”

As she opened her mouth to protest, someone suddenly tapped Sansa on the shoulder. Turning her head around, she caught sight of a grown man standing beside them. And since his attention was all focused on her, Sansa wasn’t certain that he had even noticed the ferocious man next to her.

Handing her a note, the stranger said in a pleading tone, “Miss, if you’re saved could you please get this to my wife in De Moines, Iowa?”

Sansa took the letter unconsciously, blinking as she tried to wrap her head around what the man was saying.

“She just celebrated her fiftieth birthday,” the man continued with a smile. “And I- you’re not going to believe that, of course. You’re going to think she’s thirty-five. People often ask me if she is my daughter, but I say no, I’m just lucky.”

Sansa hardly heard the words spilling out of the stranger’s mouth, for she’d had enough. Mumbling an excuse so as not to appear rude, and putting the piece of paper inside a pocket of Sandor’s coat, Sansa returned her attention to her big man, unable to take this anymore.

“I’m not going without you,” she assured him in a determined strong voice, certain she could never be able to do it, even if the whole world were to expect it from her.
Sandor raised an eyebrow at her, but he seemed to have expected further opposition from her part, for he only kissed her forehead and snarled, his eyes suddenly infinitely wise and deep, “Yes, you are. Get in the boat, Sansa.”

She felt curiously light-headed as she demanded in a broken voice, stamping her feet hard on the ground, “How can you expect me to do that?”

“I’m not doomed yet,” Sandor rasped defensively.

But Sansa shook her head, reminding him that he had once told her he would never lie to her.

“I’m not lying,” he explained, running soothing circles on her back with his big, strong, warm hands. “I’m not done living yet, little bird. Not now that I have you. Bloody hells! Believe me girl, I’ll do my best to get aboard another lifeboat. But you have to go now!”

“If they don’t let any men in until it’s too late, your will to live won’t matter,” Sansa pointed out, even though she knew that Sandor was aware of it as well. “But if I stay here with you, then we can take the very last boat. The officers will surely take compassion then! Or let me go talk to this lifeboat’s officer. Surely I can make him see how-”

“Stop trying to find a way out of this,” Sandor told her firmly, putting a finger on her lips. “None of it will do you any good. You’re getting into this boat, Sansa. Right now. We can’t afford to lose any more time, and anyways, you knew this was going to happen. So don’t-”

“No, I didn’t!” Sansa assured him, feeling her heart pounding as she tried to think of what else she might say to make him see sense. “I didn’t realized this until just some moments ago!”


“No!” she whimpered, her voice a frightened gasp, her lips trembling as she shook her head. “Please Sandor, don’t make me do this. I won’t leave you! I just can’t.”

“It’s for the best,” Sandor said, after a moment. He sounded as if every word was costing him a great deal to speak. Sansa had never seen him so stricken with emotion. Brushing his knuckles
against her wet cheek, Sandor rasped at her in his deep voice, “I promised I would keep you safe, and I’m keeping that promise no matter what, Sansa. So don’t make this harder for us, little bird.”

“Little bird?” a nasal mocking voice repeated, just as Sansa wondered how Sandor expected her to be safe in the first place if she didn’t have him.

Sandor and Sansa turned around at the same time, and then she gasped as her eyes met Joffrey Baratheon’s. They had been so absorbed in each other that for a moment it had seemed that they were all alone on Titanic, but Joff walking in on them broke that spell at once. For a moment Sansa looked right through her former fiancé, her head full of Sandor, before cringing away from her former gaoler, frightened.

As she stepped instinctively backward she bumped into Sandor, his strong hands grasping her by the shoulders. Joffrey pressed his lips together at their familiarity, and then said in a voice thick with venom, “Ah, I’ve found my stray dog at last!”

“My own dog now,” Sandor snarled in correction in his deep rasping voice.

Sansa didn’t even care that Joff’s nose looked more swollen than when she had last been near him, so shocked she was to see him again. In her head, she could almost hear the door to her golden cage being locked with her inside it at the very sight of him. Frowning at Sandor’s words, Joffrey returned his attention to her. He looked her up and down, staring at her as she shivered in her wet gown and Sandor’s coat, presenting a shocking display for a woman who had been engaged to him not two hours ago.

“My God,” he exclaimed, amazed, taking off his overcoat. “Look at you! You’re shivering! Here, put this one on.”

Before he could even extend it to her though, Sandor grabbed him by the front of his shirt. Yanking him within an inch of his burned face, he growled with pure loathing, “The next time you talk to her, I’ll beat you so bad you’ll wish I killed you.”

Fear clutching at her already trembling heart at the thought that Sandor would once again loose control and end up being arrested for hitting Joffrey, Sansa exclaimed urgently, “No, Sandor please don’t!

Begging him with her eyes not to do anything rash, Sandor looked at her for a moment before
nodding. He released Joffrey, barking gruffly, “Get the fuck out of here, you little shit.”

“No wait,” Sansa said quickly, realizing that Sandor was no longer wearing the blanket the Irish women had given him back in steerage. “I’ll take his overcoat so you can have your coat back. This way we’ll both be warm.”

For a moment it seemed as if he was going to object, but in the end he just shrugged, his mouth twitching. Sansa accepted her former betrothed’s overcoat numbly, afraid that he was laughing in Sandor’s face in an attempt to goad his rival further. But even though she was furious at Joffrey for intruding upon Sandor and her now of all times, Sansa’s hatred for him didn’t blind her to common reason.

As Sandor put his big coat back on, and Sansa did the same with Joffrey’s warm overcoat, the lifeboat’s officer shouted, “Quickly, ladies. Please step into the boat. Hurry please.”

Not caring anymore that Joffrey was with them witnessing everything, Sandor and Sansa returned their attention to each other at the same moment.

“Go on now,” he bid her gently, staring at her face so intently that Sansa wondered if he wasn’t trying to commit her features to memory.

But nothing had changed for her. “No,” she said in a voice thick with emotion. “Not without you!”

“Damn it, little bird!” Sandor roared. “Get inside. I have to get going. I’ve got my own boat to catch.”

She wished she could feel as certain as he looked that they would see each other again. With a clenched jaw, Joffrey put in in his nasal voice, “Yes hurry! This boat is almost full!”

Sansa was going to dismiss Joffrey’s intruding words, but Sandor apparently had other plans. Turning to the officer in charge, he asked loudly, “Can I not get in too to protect her?”

The officer opened his mouth to reply, but ended up blinking in surprise as he caught sight of Sandor’s face. Recovering quickly though, he answered, “No, sir! No man is allowed on this boat or any of the boats until the ladies are off.”
Sandor’s hold on Sansa tightened momentarily at that, but he still managed to bark, “Well then, tell me what the number of this boat is so I may find her afterwards.”

As the officer notified Sandor with what he wanted to know, Sansa noticed that a certain look passed between the two men, and then the officer had reached out and grabbed her, pulling her toward the boat. She struggled in protest, calling out for Sandor out of instinct even though she knew he wanted this to happen. Her behavior went unnoticed amidst the chaos of a sinking ship, for she was far from being the only woman in this position.

Her hand had reached out to Sandor as he stepped away from her, her fingers barely rushing his scarred cheek for a moment. And then the rest felt like a rush and a blur. The next thing she knew, despite all her struggles she was still being forced to step down into the boat, taking in the sight of the rest of little lifeboats floating in the distance.

But after calling out to Sandor and receiving no answer, Sansa became quiet, unsure as to what to do. There would be no use to make a scene here, when nobody would care, and maybe it was even selfish of her to cause delay when it wasn't only her life hanging in the balance. She knew that there were women who were far worse off than her; women who would have whole families depending on them after tonight when their men died.

It was just that right now Sansa couldn't think of them for more than a brief moment. Instead, she fell into a trace, too horrified by the realization that there had been no proper good bye between Sandor and her to feel bad about the way he had decided her fate himself.

Sitting down numbly into an empty seat, she heard the officer yelling, “Lower away”, before watching two men at the rail as the boat began to descend. Time seemed to slow down, even though dozens of thoughts were flashing through Sansa’s mind. She was aware that the ropes were going through the pulleys as the seamen began to lower the boat, but no sound of it reached her ears.

Sansa also knew the chief officer was giving orders by the way in which his lips were moving, but all she could hear was the blood pounding in her ears. Her fellow passengers were terrified as the boat descended, swaying and jerking toward the water many feet below. But Sansa had other matters on her mind to worry about that.

She quickly searched for Sandor amongst the people on the boat deck, and finally found him standing commandingly by the rail already looking down at her with a small smile, Joffrey beside him, his green eyes on her as well. Helplessly she thought in despair that this couldn’t be happening. This can’t be my last view of Sandor. It can’t. It can’t!
Suddenly, another distress rocket burst high above in the dark sky bathing her face in light, the wind ran salty fingers through Sansa’s hair. While others groaned in protest as it blinded them, she was able to see Sandor outlined by it, to the point where she noticed that his hands were shaking as they rested on the rail.

Sansa gazed up at him in fascination in this moment when stars were scattered about the distant sky, as the ship’s hundreds of dancing lights were transformed into a thousand by the tears in her eyes. A shooting star traced a bright line across the heavens, just like it had the previous night when she had wished that she could be free from the lions so she could be with her new friend. Tears were pouring down Sansa’s cheeks as she recalled that, consumed with unbearable pain that made breathing very difficult for her.

A panic as overwhelming as anything Sansa Stark had ever felt filled her suddenly. *This is all wrong.* She couldn’t let others choose for her, no matter how angry they got. *No, not even Sandor.* And so, not even pausing to take a breath, Sansa began to pushing women out of her way so she could hurl herself out of the boat to the rail of the A-Deck promenade. She managed to catch it barely, and scrambled over the rail with the help of some startled passengers, even as the lifeboat continued to make its way down to the surface of the North Atlantic.

It all happened in less than half a minute. And as she realized that she was back in Titanic, Sansa felt like laughing. She couldn’t even feel scared about how she had possibly just turned away from her only chance of survival. She was just relieved that now she could run back to Sandor’s side, where she belonged. *And hopefully this will be enough to assure him that my place is by his side, no matter what.*

***

*No. No! Fuck no!* Sandor thought as he saw Sansa making her way across the lifeboat, the sight making him feel as sick as when he’d realized Gregor was going to burn his face off. Realizing at once what she was about to do, he roared at her to stop. But even he yelled at the top of his lungs, Sandor knew it was of no use. After his momentary shock some sort of current ran through him as he saw the little bird lunging herself off the lifeboat, back into Titanic.

He leaned rapidly over across the rail, afraid that she might have accidentally fallen into the ocean and hurt herself, prepared to jump in and save her. When Sandor saw though that Sansa was safely back on the ship after some strangers’ help kept her from slipping, he swirled around and ran down the boat deck for the nearest way down to A-deck, desperate to get to her. Sandor had even forgotten Joffrey in these moments. He was full of relief, anger, awe, and more as he banged through the doors to the First Class foyer, practically jumping four stairs at a time.
A moment later he saw Sansa coming into the room as well, searching for him amongst the crowd. Being a hard person to miss, she spied Sandor at once and ran towards him, Joff’s long overcoat flying out behind her. They met at the bottom of the stairs and collided in an embrace. She gasped with emotion as he crushed her to him, lifting her from the floor. The little bird hugged him back as hard as she could, as overwhelmed as he was. No longer giving a fuck that anyone saw them, Sandor kissed every inch of her face that he could reach, his hands tangled on her long hair.

“You’re a fool, Sansa! Why did you do it?” he demanded, even as he kissed her. “Why? Why did you do that? Why?”

Tears were still running freely down her pale cheeks as she smoothed his sweaty hair away from his face, whimpering simply, honestly, “You jump, I jump. Right?”

Those words knocked the air out of Sandor. Ever since Friday night when she’d tried to kill herself, right after telling her that if she threw herself into the North Atlantic, he would follow, there was special meaning behind those words. And so Sandor could only blink down as his little bird, no longer wanting to scream and forcibly carry her towards another lifeboat, but rather just grateful that he’d been given this second chance in life. How can I be angry with her when she is willing to die for me? I may be stubborn as hell, but I believe I’ve bloody well met my match.

“Right,” he rasped in agreement, leaning his forehead on hers, realizing that if she was to survive this night, they would have to find a way out of Titanic together. “Fuck, little bird, you’re mad!” he could not help but snarl half in exasperation, half in amusement. “You want to jump off the ship when it’s not sinking, and you jump right back into it when it is!”

Sansa let out a sound between a laugh and a sob, but before she could say anything else Sandor hugged her again, their arms locking their bodies in a tight embrace. It was as if the world had stood still, and despite everything, in this place in between mad reality and sweet dreams, Sandor was just relieved that they were together once again. Together until the very end.
Survival

Chapter Notes

*Many thanks to the amazing lady who is also an awesome beta: the great @thefeatherofhope xD

*And thank you very much for reading, giving kudos, bookmarking and commenting <3

Unfortunately, Sandor’s relief only lasted a moment. As he hugged Sansa close to him, he looked about the First Class foyer, wondering what the hell they were going to do now. But before he could even begin to come up with a new plan to make sure the little bird didn’t died tonight, Sandor caught sight of Joffrey standing on the landing above.

_Bloody hells_, he thought, staring at the look on the idiot’s face as he gazed down at them, sensing that something bad was about to happen. Sansa’s back was to Joff, so she was unaware of there being anything wrong beyond feeling him stiffening in her arms. And then, to make matters worse, Sandor saw Meryn Trant and Boros Blount suddenly appear out of nowhere, coming up behind their boss. Both men took one good look at the little bird and Sandor as they hugged, and looking disgusted, they simultaneously put restraining hands on Joffrey.

_If it wasn’t because this damned ship is sinking, we wouldn’t be so lucky_, Sandor knew as he saw Joff’s face twist with revolt. _Fuck_, he thought, his hand closing around Sansa’s. The stupid son of a bitch hated losing, so of course he wasn’t to give in that easily. Sandor saw Joffrey whirling around so he could grab Blount’s pistol from his waistband. To his credit, the bastard moved quicker than he had expected, but in the end Sandor was faster.

By the time Joff had started running along the rail as he tried to aim the gun at them, Sandor was already leading the little bird down the stairs, running as fast as he could manage without making Sansa lose her footing. He’d been in this sort of situation dozens of times, but never before had been as frightened as when he imagined Joffrey shooting Sansa dead.

At first the little bird had been surprised, unaware of this new danger, but then she saw Joffrey too and screamed, running even faster than she already had been. They heard Joffrey yelling in rage as he fired, hitting the wall near their legs as they went down to the next deck. Following them the little shit fired again, but this time the bullet blew a divet out of the oak panelling behind Sansa’s head; Sandor pulling her away just in time. They ran down the stairs two at a time until they reached the First Class reception room on D-Deck, right at the bottom of the Grand Staircase.
“Bloody hells!” Sandor roared, realizing that in his urgency to get as far away from Joff as possible, he had ended up getting them into more trouble, for this fucking place was flooded several feet deep.

Still, there was nowhere else to turn to at the moment, so Sandor led Sansa straight into the freezing water, wading across the large room to where the floor sloped upwards, stopping only until they reached dry footing at the entrance to the dining saloon. Turning his head around, Sandor saw Joffrey catch up with them then, reeling down the stairs just in time to see them splashing through the water. The next moment, Sandor had hidden behind a column, the little bird beside him, her eyes wide with fear and her cheeks flushed as she tried to hold her breath, least a sound escaped her.

Joffrey fired twice more, but thankfully the idiot had never been that great of a shot, despite the countless times Tywin Lannister and Robert Baratheon had ordered Sandor to correct that. So all Joffrey got for his troubles were two big gouts of spray near him. Fearing Sansa would scream at the sound of the shots though, Sandor quickly clamped down his hand over her open mouth, smothering her.

For half a minute they waited to see what Joffrey would do next, scared he would keep on looking for them or not, but thankfully he chose to retreat. He’s probably realizing it will be his death too if he follows us any longer down here.

“I hope you enjoy your time together!” he screamed at them. “Short as it will be!”

A couple of moments later, they heard his retreating footsteps as he went back up the stairs. When he deemed it safe enough, Sandor removed his hand from Sansa’s mouth. Her breath was coming ragged as she said in a shaking voice, “Oh God, I thought he was going to kill us!”

Sandor hugged her again, kissing her on the top of her head. He wasn’t about to admit that he was shaken too because he didn’t want to scare the little bird even more than she already was. Sansa was shaking in his arms, and after a long moment in which ice water started boiling up around them, the ship’s wood groaning and creaking all the while, she asked, “Shouldn’t we go back? It must be safe by now.”

“Not yet,” Sandor snarled a bit relief, but still very much shaken at the thought that there were many ways in which he could have lost Sansa. “If we do so now we may meet him again. The more distance we put between him and us, the better off we’ll be.”

But no sooner had he said those words that he heard footsteps nearby. Straining his ears, Sandor
held his breath, waiting and wondering. *Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!* he thought, realizing what was going on as he recognized Trant and Blount’s voices. Joffrey hadn’t been brave enough to come after Sansa and him, but that didn’t meant he was ready to give up on his revenge. *So he’s sent his men to do the dirty work for him.*

The little bird looked at him with eyes full of terror. Quickly, Sandor strode towards the nearby closed doors of the dining room, leading Sansa along by the hand. But they were locked shut. Afraid to break through them since that would give away their position, Sandor realized that there was only one thing he could do if he meant to keep the little bird safe.

*I’ll have to kill them.* He almost smiled at the prospect. It would be bloody sweet to keep the promise he’d made to Trant earlier tonight, after the bastard bragged about how he was going to fuck Sansa as soon as Joffrey was done with her. Hearing that Boros and Meryn were splashing their way among the tables and ornate columns in the next room, Sandor turned to Sansa and said in quickly in a whisper, “Sansa, listen to me closely. I want you to go hide behind a table as I go finish them off.”

Sansa’s mouth fell open as she realized what he was going to do. Shaking her head, she placed her hands on his chest, twisting his coat in them as if that would keep him from leaving her side.

“No, Sandor,” she pleaded, frightened. “Stay here. Let’s find somewhere else to hide! Then when they’re gone-”

“They won’t leave us alone until they’ve killed at least one of us,” Sandor snarled urgently, interrupting her. He saw that she was surprised by his warning, but it was bloody important for her to understand how matters stood. “Joffrey must have promised them a big, fat reward if they do. Otherwise they wouldn’t be here after us as Titanic falls apart. But I’m deadly with a gun, bird. And I know I can stop them.”

“But if you kill them, then you’ll go to jail! We have a chance to accuse Joffrey of attacking us with a gun if necessary, but only if you don’t fight too!”

“Nobody will care about Joffrey attacking us while Titanic is sinking, Sansa. And how could anyone find out that I killed them, or confirmed it, when there is no one hanging around and their dead bodies are going to go down with the sodding ship?” he demanded hoarsely, trying hard to keep his voice down. “If the lions want me in jail, whether I do this or not won’t make that much of a difference. The thing is not getting caught.”

She seemed about to argue, but Sandor looked at her in a hard way, hoping she would understand
without saying anything else. Trant and Blount were coming closer, and there was no time to loose, specially when this room would be flooded in a matter of minutes.

Tears started falling down Sansa’s eyes again, but she took a deep breath before nodding in resignation. Grateful, Sandor bid her again to go hide in a far away corner, and when he saw that she did that without causing too much noise as she moved in the water, he breathed in relief. Don’t worry, little bird, he thought. I told you I’m was not done living yet.

And now it was time to play this game. Grabbing one of his guns from his waistband, Sandor peered around the column where he was hiding, listening, his eyes quickly taking in the room next door to see where the men were. The dining saloon had turned into a bloody lake, and the tables were like white islands, the china clinking eerily as the floor began to tilt forward. Shaking his head, Sandor returned his attention to the gun in his hand to make sure it was loaded.

Despite the fact that it had been days since Sandor had last slept through a whole night; that he was cold and that his wrists hurt from the way he’d tried to free himself from the handcuffs earlier today, he was alert. Sandor knew that Sansa and his own life depended on him keeping a clear head through whatever the upcoming fight.

“We know you’re here, Clegane,” Trant called out suddenly. “And there’s no use prolonging this. It’s only a matter of time before we find you both.”

Sandor could not help but laugh then, and the sound was a long rasping sound that echoed off the walls, dripping with contempt.

“What’s so fucking funny?” Boros called out.

“You two,” Sandor rasped in answer. “You think that just because you’ve kicked dogs before, you’ll be able to finish me off. Well, I dare you then. Come and try me. You’ll both be dead in a moment anyways. I was hoping you’d do something stupid, Trant. Remember that I warned you I would kill you before tonight was over?”

Meryn was about to shout back, but a serving trolley ran downhill in that moment, bumping into a pillar. The crash scared Trant into silence, and Sandor laughed again, the sound iron scraping over stone this time, his face for a moment transformed. Making the best of their momentary distraction, Sandor glanced behind him as more water came into the dining room, advancing in a hundred foot wide tide. Oil paintings were floating about the splendidly decorated room, and the Grand Staircase was now submerged past the first landing.
He wanted to act now, but in the end he decided it was better to hide until he could get a better aim at them both. So Sandor crouched behind the nearest table as Trant and Blount approached the column where he was hiding, even as more water advanced towards them all, swirling over the floor. Cursing his height and big built, Sandor took a deep breath and crawled ahead to the next row of tables, hoping they wouldn’t see him. They moved in the cold water after him, searching and finding nothing.

Just as Sandor was deciding that the time had come to make the first move, he froze as he saw with waited breath a sodding metal cart, five feet tall and full of stacks of china dishes, roll down a nearby aisle between tables, right towards Sansa. And sure enough, it hit a table and the stacks of dishes toppled out, exploding across the floor and showering her. Scrambling out of the way with noisy movements, Trant and Blount spin around, spying the little bird at last.

Before they could move an inch though, Sandor had rapidly aimed his gun at Blount and shot him right through the head. Boros had been closer to Sansa than to him, but thankfully his aim hadn’t failed. Sandor heard Sansa scream somewhere, and just as Meryn was recovering from the shock, Sandor lunged forward, tackling him from the side, desperate to keep this man as far away from the little bird as possible. They slammed together into a table, crashing over it and falling to the floor, landing in the water that was flowing rapidly between the tables.

For some moments they fought in the icy water, and then Sandor managed to jam his knee down on Trant’s hand, breaking his grip on the pistol. He kicked it away just in time, and before Meryn could so much as blink, Sandor hit him hard on the stomach with his pistol, making the bastard double over in pain. Not giving him a chance to recover, Sandor grabbed Trant and slammed his head into a glass door, which made the man drop to the floor with a splash, dazed.

Sandor’s face twisted as he thought frigidly for a moment how good it felt to know that he was going to finish him off in cold blood. *He isn’t Joffrey, but I can’t complain.* He had disliked Meryn fucking Trant since long before Sansa Stark came into his life. Finally putting an end to this, Sandor shot him five times on the back, and when he was done and the body was floating in the water that had now raised up to Sandor’s chest, the overwhelming rage that had consumed him, eclipsing all other thoughts, started to disappear.

*So much for Joffrey Baratheon’s brave bodyguards,* Sandor thought with contempt, his eyes hard as stone, his mouth twitching as his lips set in a disgusted scowl. As his heart slowed down, Sandor lingered long enough to make sure Trant was really dead. Then he turned around and made his way across the submerging dining room in the direction where he knew Sansa was hiding, returning his gun to his waistband. Had there been any time, he may have searched for Meryn’s and Blount’s, but at least he still had his two guns with him, and one of them was still fully loaded. *Just in case.* After all, they may still meet up with Joff again.
“It’s all right, little bird,” he called out to her. “It’s over.”

She let out a sob loud enough for him to hear, and stood up, shaking. Sandor was expecting Sansa to be angry with him for refusing to keep on running away from Joff’s men, and as he caught sight of her still white face while she stared at Meryn’s corpse, he feared the worst, wondering for a brief moment if she would judge him for taking their lives.

Thankfully though, as she stood there hugging herself, Sansa suddenly smiled at him, a look of admiration appearing in her eyes. For more than once reason that surprised him. He had just killed two men, and yet there was no sign of fear in the little bird’s eyes as they met his own dark ones. *How could I fucking doubt her even for a moment?*

And even though his lank dark hair was plastered to his brow in a sheen of sweat while water was ran off him, the burns that marked his face glistening slickly, Sansa still ran into his arms with a beaming smile. He laughed again, amazed that yet again they had managed to still be together. After they’d kiss, Sandor leaned back and rubbed her arms, even though he knew it was a poor attempt at keeping her warm.

“Are you hurt?” she wondered, letting her stare trace all over him.

“No,” Sandor answered, realizing that his instinct to survive and protect her had been stronger had managed to make him fight hard and fast, to the point where Trant hadn't never even stood the chance to harm him. His hands hurt and he was fucking freezing, but other than that he was all right.

“Sandor, I was so scared,” she confessed, drying away her tears. “Why did you do it?”

Sandor looked at her in surprise, for he’d have thought it was obvious. A moment later though, he realized that the little bird wasn’t really expecting him to answer, for she knew why he’d done it to protect her; to protect their relationship as much as their lives. This was sort of like what had happened with her moments earlier as she decided to jump back into Titanic. She couldn't stay away from him, and Sandor couldn't miss the opportunity of finishing those gnats off. Logical or not, there had been no way to avoid it, and it was useless to do anything else but accept it.

“I- I thought- I was so afraid of losing you!” Sansa continued. “But then you- you were so brave!”

Sandor snorted, and confessed in a bitter voice that sounded as rough as the sound of a saw on
wood, “A dog doesn’t need courage to kill off rats.”

She smiled at him and nodded in agreement, and when he’d returned it with a grin, Sandor growled in a deep voice, “Let’s go.”

Leading her by the hand, they ran aft, uphill, away from the far end of the dining room, where it was flooded up to the ceiling. Entering the galley, Sandor saw a stairwell, and breathing in relief, he made their way towards it. He was just about to start up when the little bird stopped him abruptly.

“Wait!” she chirped, frowning. “Listen!”

Raising an eyebrow, Sandor did as she bid him. And then he heard it. A short distance away, a child could be heard crying. *Fuck!* he thought, feeling exasperated, for knowing Sansa, he knew what she was about to ask.
“Little bird, no,” Sandor rasped, as they heard the child’s cry once again, coming from somewhere below them.

But nothing he said would be of any use, even if it put another strain on his already stretched nerves. Sansa gave him a pleading look, hoping he would understand, before dashing down the steps of the stairwell. She heard Sandor cursing behind her before he followed, and when they reached the next deck they found that the corridor was in deep water. And sure enough, there was a little boy standing deep in the middle of the endless corridor, wailing.

*Oh, poor thing!* Sansa thought, raising a hand to her mouth. If she had to guess, she would say the child was no older than three, but since she´d never played that much with little boys, it was hard to tell. Her knowledge of children was limited to her sickly cousin Robert and to Tommen Baratheon, both of whom were far older than this one.

“We can´t leave him,” she heard herself say, her voice drawing the boy´s attention to them, as Sansa hugged herself to keep from shaking.

“We bloody hells!” Sandor snarled roughly, sounding annoyed.

But even if he didn´t want to do it, he nodded in resignation, just as she knew he would. *I can´t blame him for his reluctance though. After all, we´ll be losing the promise of escape up the stairwell.* But Sansa couldn’t just abandon this little boy to a watery end. The next moment, he was running towards the child, and lifting him off the floor as if he weighted no more than a doll, Sandor came back in a few quick strides.

The moment he was beside her they turned to run up the stairs, but just then a torrent of water came pouring down it like rapids. It was so powerful that it only took them a moment to realize they could not go against it.
“Come on,” Sandor barked, charging the other way down the flooding corridor, holding the crying boy in his right arm as his left hand took Sansa’s to lead her along down the hall. At it’s end there were two closed heavy double doors, but that hadn’t stopped them before. And yet, this was different. As they approached them, Sansa saw water spraying through the gap between the doors right up to the ceiling. The doors were groaning and starting to crack up open under the heavy pressure of the freezing water.

For a moment Sansa held her breath, her eyes wide with shock as she realized that this was probably the end. The sight of was enough to tie her insides into knots, and she was rooted to the spot, and had it not been for the fact that Sandor yanked her away as he started to run back in the direction they had come from, yelling “Sansa, turn back! Back!” , she wondered if she would have ever found the will to move on her own.

Thankfully her state of trance had only lasted half a moment. Pivoting along with Sandor, they hurried as fast as they could, taking a turn into a cross-corridor again. But they had not covered ten feet when a man suddenly appeared before them, coming out of a room. Seeing them, he cried out in a strange language, and ran towards Sandor.

“What is he saying?” Sansa asked, frightened, her brow wrinkling. “I can’t understand him!”

“He´s speaking in Russian, little bird,” Sandor rasped in reply. “He´s saying that this is his son.”

“Oh,” she said, surprise. If he is his son they why did he leave him out here alone? Sansa thought as she watched the man taking the child from Sandor’s arms. She could tell that he hadn´t liked what he found in her lover’s face. Turning away without another word, he ran the way Sandor and her had just come from.

“No!” Sansa screamed in protest. “Don´t go that way! Come back!”

Sandor had barely begun repeating her words in Russian when Sansa saw the double doors blast open with a terrible sound. A wall of water thundered into the corridor, and in the blink of an eye the little boy and his father had disappeared in it. Sansa screamed as Sandor started to run, practically dragging her along. They hurried as a strong wave collided against a nearby wall, more water gaining on them in the matter of heartbeats.

But they managed to reach a new stairway, narrower than the one they had been at when they had first heard the poor Russian boy scream. Making their way up the steps, icy water rushing up behind them, threatening to sweep them off their feet, they discovered too late that right at the top a steel gate was blocking the way. Sandor slammed his fists against it and roared in fury as Sansa
gripped its bars, shivering with cold and fear.

Sandor tried to force the gates apart with pure strength for a couple of moments, but it was of no use. The gates wouldn’t open and the water was still thundering up the stairs. Terror filled her, her heart hammering against her ribs, and horror coiling cold hands around Sansa’s throat. For an instant she held her breath, but then Sandor was hugging her, almost crushing her against him.

“What are we going to do?” she screamed in desperation, her survival instincts fighting against this fate.

She could tell that Sandor didn’t have an answer to her question, so for a moment they stayed in a tight embrace, accepting that this might very well be the end, but reassuring each other that at least they weren’t facing it alone. Just as they started giving up hope though, and Sansa closed her eyes wanting it all to be over if this really was going to be how she would die, Sandor released her. Startled, she opened her eyes even as several things happened at once.

Just as Sandor roared something about his guns, taking one of them out with a curse, a terrified steward was running on the landing at the other side of the gates.

“Wait!” Sansa called out, cupping her hands around her mouth. “Wait! Help us! Unlock the gate!”

The steward stopped at the sound, realizing that he was not alone. He turned to face them, but it was clear that the sight of water welling up around Sandor and Sansa, pouring out through the gate and slamming them against it, was scaring him almost as much as it was them. After all, it had only taken a few minutes for it to reach up to their waist.

“Help us!” Sansa pleaded, tears in her eyes, her arms reaching out to him, feeling as if she were about to be sick at the thought that their pleas would be in vain. “Please!”

The man seemed about to run off, but finally decided to help them out. But the steward had tried Sandor’s patience. Instructing the man to get out of the way, Sandor aimed his gun at the lock and shot it twice. Sansa heard the man scream even as he ran away, scared even more by the shotguns.

As an endless amount of ice-cold water kept on pouring through the gate on the landing where they stood, the lights suddenly went out, plunging the landing into darkness.
Desperate and utterly scared, Sansa asked Sandor if his plan had worked. She felt him moving beside her, and a moment later the gate finally swung open and the two of them were at once pushing their way through the dark and flooded landing as best they could. When they reached the stairs onto the other side, they went up to the next deck, where they managed to reach the same scared steward of moments before. They decided to follow him without asking his leave.

And then they ran, and ran, and ran up seemingly endless stairs as the ship groaned all around them, the sound of objects falling across it making it rumble. Sansa couldn´t have been certain for how long they did that, having lost all sense of time and being too busy thinking many things, even though she couldn´t seem to manage to concentrate in one for more than a minute.

She needed a long moment to rest and analyse everything that had happened since she jumped back into Titanic, but that was impossible. At one point they got separated from the steward, but by that time it did not matter anymore, for Sandor and Sansa had at last reached familiar territory.

_I can’t believe we’re in A-Deck already_, she thought, overwhelmed by the fact that a few moments ago they were about to die, and now they had reached the First Class smoking room, the sounds of the crowds out on the decks faint as they echoed in the distance, filling her with dread. Sansa had never set for in this place since it was a space exclusively reserved for men, but now that she saw where Joffrey had spent many hours during the journey, she could not help but appreciate how beautiful it was.

It was decorated in a Georgian style as a place meant for relaxation. Similar to a gentlemen’s club, it had dark mahogany carvings and panelling, and many stained-glass windows and alcoves. The floor’s design was made of blue and red tiles, the furniture was made of leather, and right at the back a beautiful painting of a ship was displaced above the only fireplace on the sea vessel that had actual wood and a fire, since the rest ran on electricity.

_My beautiful paintings_, Sansa could not help but think then with regret as she recalled the last time she’d seen them back in their stateroom. They would all soon be at the bottom of the sea. As they approached the fireplace, running, soaked and out of breath, Sansa gasped and did a double take, for right before them a man she knew came into view. Thomas Andrews was standing by the fire as still as a statue, staring at the large paining above the mantle with an expression akin to fascination.

Sandor groaned as he recognized Mr. Andrews, looking at the revolving door that led the way out of the First Class smoking room with longing. Unable to stop herself after her eyes fell on her friend’s discarded lifebelt, which the Irishman had placed on a nearby table, Sansa approached him and asked, feeling ill at ease, “Won’t you even make a try for it, Mr. Andrews?”
turned around to look at her, a tear rolling down his cheek. She had never seen Thomas look his years, but now she did. *This can’t be happening*, Sansa thought, her heart breaking, not even caring that it was really warm now that they were beside a fire. This sea liner was supposed to be this man´s greatest achievement, and yet now he was going to pay with his life for building it. *It´s so unfair!* And not just for Sandor, Mr. Andrews and her, but for nearly everyone who had been a passenger on this sea vessel.

“I´m sorry that I didn´t build you a stronger ship, Sansa,” he told her as an ashtray fell of the mantle, the floor forever tilting sideways as Titanic sank deeper and deeper into the ocean. “I suppose it was just too good to last.”

“She turned around to see Sandor jerking his head at Thomas as a sign of grudging respect. Sansa nodded and bit her lip in an attempt to keep tears from falling down her cheeks. She was about to say farewell to Mr. Andrews when he called for them to stop. Walking over to his lifebelt, he handed it to Sansa without a moment of hesitation, saying, “I´m glad to see you were able to save your friend... Good luck, Sansa. I´m sure your father would be very proud of you.”

She took the lifebelt numbly, and stared at it for a moment before throwing her arms around the Irishman who had always been kind to her, ever since first meeting him when she was a child. *And he has a little girl of his own*, Sansa remembered as she whispered in Thomas´ ear, “Good luck to you too, Mr. Andrews. And thank you for everything.”

They shared a smile as they broke apart, and Sansa put on the lifebelt over Joff´s overcoat as quickly as she could manage. She knew she ought to be relieved for this, but her belly was too tight up in a knot as she thought that Thomas´ smile was the sweetest and saddest smile she had ever seen. *But how could it be otherwise? Too much of his soul is in this great ship for him not to feel its mortal wound.*

A moment later Sandor was pulling her away from the warmth of the fire into the biting cold, through the revolving door that led to the Palm Court restaurant. As if from another life Sansa recalled how she had lunch here on Thursday. She had managed to embarrass the Lannisters before Molly Brown, Thomas Andrews Bruce J. Ismay, but then Joffrey had frightened her in retaliation. *Then I got into a fight with Sandor.* It made Sansa shiver to recall the state of mind she´d been in just a few days ago.

She was brought back to the present as the sound of the mad chaos that was taking place outside reached them. Sansa tried hard not to look through the windows, aware that she was about to join them, a part of her wishing she could just stop running so she could tell Sandor everything that was in her heart. *Even if he already knows, I want him to hear it.*
A part of her also wanted to know what they would do if they managed to survive through the night, for while the uncertainty of a future with Sandor as they saw the world was what Sansa most desired, to not know how they would manage to escape New York without having the lions carry on Sandor´s arrest made her feel sick.

“Sandor, please stop,” she bid him, unwilling to go outside feeling this unprepared. “I- I need to rest for a moment.”

If he had any thought of protesting, Sandor decided to keep them to himself as Sansa knocked her knee against an upturned chair. Sandor caught her in his arms before she tripped over and she gave him a little hug in gratitude, happy for this moment in which she could regain some of her strength. If it wasn´t because it is a matter of life and death, I’m sure I would faint from exhaustion right here and now.

“It was really nice of you to agree to save that little boy,” Sansa told him, after a minute of silence, wondering why seeing him drown to death hadn´t managed to drive her to tears. “Thank you.”

“I didn´t do it for him,” Sandor explained. And after a pause he added, “You have a good heart, Sansa.”

“A good heart,” she said, wondering if it was true, raising her head from of Sandor´s chest, feeling better at the sight of the vague but pleasant smile he was giving her.

“The little bird repeats whatever she hears,” Sandor teased, a reference to the relationship between them before this fateful voyage. “A good heart, yes.”

He gave a bark of laughter, as rough as a saw on stone, the sound brining back some of Sansa´s strength. And with it, a small flicker of hope was born too. Hesitating, wondering how to say it, she managed to inquire, “Sandor, do you- do you think that if we go back to Mr. Andrews, we may be able to change his mind?”

She had already lost the Russian child, but and now she was about to lose Thomas Andrews. Sandor´s scarred face was hard to read when Sansa finished talking, and he took a long moment to consider before rasping, “You know better than that. It wouldn´t be worth it, little bird. You can´t change a man´s mind when it´s set on something.”
Sansa sighed, for there found much truth in those words, in more ways than one. And so she simply replied in a soft voice, “You have me there.”

She gave him a smile, despite the fact that she knew she must terrible as beautiful, melancholy music suddenly reached them from far away. It took her Sansa a moment to realize that it was Titanic’s band still playing. *It’s the hymn Nearer my God to Thee*, Sansa thought, recognizing the waltz. *Was it really less than a day ago that I was at church service?*

Sansa felt like remarking on the sweet, sorrowful melody, but she knew they had already lingered long enough already. She was as recovered as she was likely to get tonight. Sandor seemed to be thinking along the same lines, for not a heartbeat later he was offering her his hand.

“Ready?” he asked her.

“Ready,” Sansa agreed, taking his hand and nodding, bracing herself to face the world alongside Sandor as it fell apart about them just outside the four walls of this room.
They ran out of the restaurant and into a big crowd, a cold breeze on their faces and chaos everywhere as people shouted, cried, and hurried about in all directions, looking wild-eyed. Thinking quickly, Sandor pushed his way to the rail so he could take a look at the state of the ship, even as he held on to Sansa´s hand for dear life. When they reached the rail, he saw that it was worse than he´d expected. Sandor had never been in a war, but he was certain that the cold-burling haunting sound of panic that was running all through Titanic was similar to the terrors of a battlefield.

The mob was out of control, and even though Sandor didn´t like it, he couldn´t really blame them. They shoved and jostled, walking over people, yelling and shouting at officers as beyond them the bridge was finally under water, for the ship was going down by the head. Sandor thought with fury that this had been exactly what he´d wished to avoid- having the little bird on board Titanic as the North Atlantic dragged it down to it´s bottom.

Bloody hells, she has to live no matter what it takes! Sandor thought, refusing to give up hope. No, not even when we are in the water. For there would still be a chance, however small, that some lifeboat would come back and rescue them before they died of hypothermia. Sandor clung to that, for otherwise he had nothing.

“All right, we have to keep moving aft,” he rasped hoarsely but determinedly, even though his throat was dry and tight with a fear he would try as hard as he could to keep from Sansa. “Our best shot is to stay on the ship as long as possible.”

She nodded in agreement, trusting him completely. But it was one thing to say the words, and another one to actually carry them out. Fuck, here we go, he thought, as he started to push their way aft through the panicking mob, Sansa´s hand in his the only reality Sandor could recognize in this mad world. Suddenly, the ship shook as something exploded deep in it´s bowels.

“Probably a furnace,” Sandor shouted at the little bird as lost her balance, shaking her head wildly, trying to locate the source of the strong sudden movement.
They kept on clambering over the A-Deck aft rail for some moments, and then Sandor gestured to Sansa to get ready. Using all his strength, he lowered her toward the deck below. She dangled in the air for a moment, and then fell a small distance, the sight of it making his heart lurch. Sandor jumped down behind her quickly and pulled her to her feet, barking, “You’re hurt?”

But she shook her head, so he sighed in relief and snarled, “Good. Quick now!”

There was not time to lose. They joined a crush of people practically clawing and scrambling over each other to get down the narrow stairs to the well deck below, which was the only way aft. Cursing as he saw that the stairs were impossible, Sandor decided to climb over the B-Deck railing, helping Sansa over first.

She didn’t seem to want to do that again, but didn’t say a single word in protest. Lowering her again, he saw the little bird fall into a heap. After Sandor dropped down too, he needed only one hand to lift her from the floor once he’d made certain she still wasn’t hurt. Then they started forcing their way forward through the crowd across the well deck.

Near them by the rail people were jumping into the water even as Titanic groaned and shuddered beneath them. Only those who managed not to hit any debris, getting hurt or killed, would survive that fall. *But not for long.* The cold would soon see to them. A horrible loud sound was heard then by everyone as the stay cables along the top of the ship’s funnel snapped, lashing out like steel whips down into the water.

Sandor saw the funnel topple over from its mounts, falling like some pillar twenty-eight feet across until it hit the water hard, sending a huge wave. If there had been any people swimming underneath them, the poor bastards had now been crushed to death.

*I hope Elbert wasn’t anywhere near there,* Sandor thought, wishing that if his friend had to die tonight, it would be in a less painful way. He knew though that now hundreds of tons of water would be pouring down through the hole where the funnel had stood, thundering into the belly of the ship. And people would be sucked right into it, along with those that fell into the First Class foyer now that its glass dome had exploded, water washing over it in a rush.

The struggle to climb their way up the well deck stairs was hard, seeing as the fucking ship was tilting more and more. Growing desperate, Sandor put a hand squarely on Sansa’s backside, hurrying her up as she stood before him. He saw that hundreds of people were already on the poop deck, more appearing with every minute that went by. And they had to make their way all the way to the sodding back!
Clinging together, Sansa and Sandor kept on struggling across the tilting deck even as the bow went down, the stern rising. As they got closer and closer to the poop deck, the angle of Titanic on the sea increasing, they saw that many passengers were clinging to every fixed object available on the deck. But some were huddled on their knees around a priest who had raised his voice in prayer. Many were praying along, but others were sobbing or just staring at nothing, their minds blank with dread.

“Come on, Sansa,” Sandor roared at her, pulling himself from hand fold to hand fold along the rail even as he tugged her aft along the deck after she’d stopped moving when she caught sight of the priest and the gathering crowd.

They struggled on, pushing through the praying people, ignoring curses and shouts alike, except whenever he had to shout at slow moving people to move out of their way. At one point though, as a man lost his footing ahead and slid towards them, Sandor was forced to help him, thinking that by the angle of the ship, it’s propellers must probably be some twenty feet above the water. *And it’s rising faster than I would’ve thought.* Everything that was not bolted down inside Titanic would be shifting as the ship tilted further.

Suddenly, Sandor groaned loudly as a heavy piece of luggage fell down upon him out of nowhere, hitting his arm, tearing his coat and shirt open. His expression fell as blood appeared and Sansa turned around to face him, startled.

“What is it?” she asked him, wondering why he had screamed, looking up sharply at him.

“I got hit,” Sandor explained, showing her his arm, grateful the luggage hadn’t hit her, or hit him in the head.

The little bird almost fell at the sight of him bleeding, naked fear in her eyes, but Sandor moved suddenly, strong fingers grabbing her arm and steadying her.

“It’s all right,” he assured her. “Hold on to me and keep on moving, bird!”

Sansa opened her mouth to say something, but then closed it again, for she knew there was nothing they could do about it for now. She looked close to tears, but ended up doing as he’d told her. Glad at least that his arm wasn’t bothering him, guessing that the pain would come later once this fucking nightmare was over, Sandor started moving again.
Somehow they made it to the stern rail at last, right at the base of the flagpole, jammed in between other people, a single kerosene lantern flickering in the after mast. Sansa was gripping on to the rail as hard as she could, Sandor standing behind her with his arms around her, breathing noisily. This is the place where he stopped me from committing suicide, just two nights ago. They had lived through so much together since then that it felt like a lifetime. I am so afraid of dying now that it seems bound to happen. Now that I have someone to loose.

“Sandor, this is where it all really started for us,” Sansa reminded him loudly, her voice breaking with emotion above all the wailing and the sobbing, her head feeling dizzy.

Sandor stared down at her in surprise before bending over so he could kiss her fiercely. Tears welled up in Sansa´s eyes, and suddenly the lights all around them flickered, threatening to go out. Sandor held her closer as the stern rose into a night sky ablaze with stars.

From afar the voice of the priest carried to Sansa´s ears, as he said, “…He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people and He shall be their God who is always with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away…”

Those words confused Sansa´s mind as she struggled with her mixed emotions. She felt angry with God for allowing Titanic to sink, threatening her chance to form a new life with Sandor. And yet, she could not help but wonder if maybe this wasn´t for the best. Since Joffrey found out about us earlier than we wanted, perhaps the opportunity to leave him was never meant to be possible. But in either case, at least Sansa felt like her life had been well lived, if only because she had known deep and true love before the end.

A woman was crying so loudly next to her that the sound interrupted Sansa´s musings, and she came back to the present situation in the blink of an eye. She stared about her at the faces of the doomed, and her eyes fell on the sobbing woman, who didn´t look much older than her. They exchanged glances briefly, the stranger´s eyes infinitely sad. On her other side, Sansa saw a mother next to her, clutching a little girl to her, who was crying in terror.

“How high up are we?” Sansa fleetingly felt like asking Sandor, before realizing she didn´t really want to know the answer and holding her tongue, or else she was certain she would begin to feel
faint. People kept on screaming behind them as the sounds of the dying ship scared Sansa further, something she would not have believed could be possible. But as if to prove her wrong, fate decided to test her further.

Without any notice Titanic’s lights suddenly went out all, the sounds of dying people and machinery growing louder. And then, to make matters worse a horrible thunderous cracking clashing sound was heard, and a moment later Sandor was snarling in Sansa’s ear, “Seven bloody buggering hells! The ship’s breaking in two! Hold on to the rail!”

Her eyes growing wide with horror, Sansa did as Sandor bid, staring up at the night sky all the while. If she looked anywhere else she was certain that the fear in others would only unnerve her even more. The following moments were filled with the sounds of yelling, sobs, breaking steel and explosions as the poop deck fell back towards the water. The sensation of falling was so intense Sansa felt sick as Sandor and her struggled to hold onto the rail.

“It isn’t over,” Sandor barked at her grimly, as they heard some people exclaiming that the nightmare was finished. Sansa couldn’t think of anything in those moments. She was an unwilling participant in this terrifying game, and she did not know what the rules where, or how could she win.

No sooner had Sandor spoken that the stern once again began to tilt up rapidly as water entered her. Feeling the rush of the ascent as the fantail angled up once more, Sansa clung to the rail tighter at once, praying that neither Sandor nor her would slide off. As the stern went up and up people began to fall off, screaming. As the young woman beside Sansa disappeared, Sandor snarled, “We have to move!”

She hadn’t yet registered the meaning behind his words when he was already climbing over the stern rail. Amazed, Sansa watched him with her mouth hanging open, completely terrified to move. Sandor probably realized that for his lips started twitching. But he still reached out to grab her hand, rasping amidst the sound of hundreds of people dying about them in a voice that sounded like two wood saws grinding together, “Come on! I’ve got you! Hold on to me!”

Sansa couldn’t understand what he meant at first, and so she stared open-mouthed at him, feeling mortified, blanching. But then she reminded herself somehow that if there was one way to survive this, then Sandor would surely know about it. And so she tried hard to keep back her tears, afraid they would blind her as Sandor pulled her over the rail.

She almost laughed at the irony of how on Friday night he had done the same thing; only then it had been in the other direction. Sansa managed to get over just as the railing deck reached a vertical position, her tummy all a flutter. And then she screamed at the sight before her, completely petrified, and then Sandor gripped her protectively to him at once, so tightly that she could scarcely
breathe. Sansa wanted to look away, yet somehow she could not turn her head, and everyone was still shouting. Nothing could have prepared her for this. As she lay on the railing, she looked down fifteen stories to the boiling sea at the base of the stern section.

It was now straight up in the air, hanging up like that for a long painful moment in which people near her who couldn’t climb over were hanging from the railing, their legs dangling over the long drop. One by one though they started falling, plummeting down the vertical face of the poop deck, some of them bouncing horribly off deck benches and ventilators.

Sandor and Sansa were lying side by side on what was the vertical face of the hull, gripping the railing, which was horizontal, breathing heavily. *I would never have imagined my life would end like this*, she thought as if in a dream, staring down terrified at the black ocean waiting to claim their lives. Someone coughed beside them and Sansa turned quickly to see a man crouching on the hull next to them.

And then, a moment later the final relentless plunge into the North Atlantic began as the stern section flooded up. *And now it comes. There is no escape*, she thought trembling as she looked down a hundred feet to the water below while they all dropped like an elevator, her heart pounding wildly inside her and her heart blowing all about her.

“Sansa, listen!” Sandor exclaimed then, talking fast. “This is it! Take a deep breath and hold it right before we go into the water. The ship will suck us down, but you have to kick for the surface. Just keep kicking and do not let go off my hand. We’re going to make it, little bird. Trust me!”

*He would never lie to me*, Sansa remembered, telling herself it was all right to have hope. *Maybe this doesn’t have to be the end.* And even if she was scared, she had to be strong for him if he seemed to believe there was still some chance that they could make it. Though how could that be Sansa could not begin to wonder at present. So although she was staring at the water coming up at them, Sansa gripped Sandor’s hand harder and said, “I trust you.”

Below them the poop deck was disappearing, and the plunge was gathering speed as the boiling surface engulfed the docking bridge, rushing up the last thirty feet or so. *Oh God*, Sansa thought desperately, unbelievingly. *Oh God! Oh God!*

As the whole stern section of the RMS Titanic finally descended into the freezing sea with a rumbling roar, Sandor and Sansa sucked in their breaths and vanished under the water, leaving only black ocean in the place where the unsinkable ship had stood.
The lethally cold water made Sandor feel crushed, unable to think as a thousand knives pierced his body. Fucking hells! The freezing water forced the breath out of him, and it almost seemed as if his heart had stopped beating. But he was aware that although the vortex was sucking him down, he had to stay away from the ship’s propeller blades even as the salt water was stung his eyes, his senses growing numb.

Thankfully, there wasn’t as much suction as Sandor had expected, which made him frantically kick hard for the surface, holding Sansa tightly to him, pulling her up as well. At the surface they both gasped for air, spitting out water as they found a different kind of chaos to the one they’d seen while Titanic was sinking. Now hundreds of passengers all around them were floating where the ship had been, some stunned or crying, others screaming or praying, some moaning and others cursing.

They barely had time to gasp for air before people were clawing at them, grown insane by the freezing water; by a cold so intense it made Sandor feel as if Gregor was once again melting the flesh off his face, except that this time it was his whole body that was burning. For a moment he didn’t even know what to do, but then a man had appeared by the little bird’s side, and he was trying to climb on top of her, driven mad by his desire to get out of the frigid water by climbing onto anything.

Brought back to the present by Sansa’s scream, it only took Sandor a moment to realize what was going on before he was punching the stranger on the face repeatedly, until the man let go and she was free.

“Swim, Sansa!” Sandor roared at her as he shivered uncontrollably, the injury in his arm forgotten. “Swim!”

The little bird tried to do as he bid, but her strokes were not as effective as his because of her lifejacket. But by helping her out they finally managed to break out of the clot of people, away from the danger of having someone else try to drown them. Sandor looked around, desperate to find some floating object. Anything to get her out of the water before it is too late.
“Keep swimming!” Sandor told the little bird whenever he felt her slowing down. “Keep moving! Come on, you can do it!”

He knew that so long as they kept on stroking rhythmically, the effort would keep them from freezing. Or at least, postpone it. Behind them the chorus of tormented souls kept on wailing, screaming and moaning, and ahead of them there was nothing but black water stretching to the horizon. Sandor tried hard not to think on how isolated the sight made him feel, refusing to be overwhelmed by the hopelessness of the situation.

Sansa has to live! She is only seventeen, for fuck’s sake! She was the best thing that had ever happened to him, but it was hard to accept that it was the same for her. It tore at him even in these mad moments to consider that there would be no more happiness for the little bird beyond the two days they had shared together.

“Look for something floating nearby, little bird,” Sandor barked at her, breathing fast, sharply aware of what the frigid sea could do to them if they didn’t act fast. “Some debris. Anything.”

“It’s so cold,” Sansa said beside him, her teeth chattering.

By the tone of her voice, Sandor suspected she hadn’t even heard him. Which is why he said hoarsely, “I know, little bird. I fucking know. But help me! Look around.”

The urgency in his voice thankfully gave her focus, brining her mind back to the present. Sandor saw her scanning the frozen waters of the North Atlantic, panting, barely able to draw a breath. And then she gasped as a black French bulldog swam right before them, it’s coal coloured eyes shinning in the darkness. He stared with unbelieving eyes after the dog, and then Sandor cursed out loud as his attention was caught by something in the water.

“What’s that”? Sandor snarled, pointing ahead, glad he still had his sense of coordination even in this dark place.

Sansa turned her attention to where he was pointing at, and then they were making for it together. As they approached it Sandor sighed in relief, for it was a wooden door, smartly carved. At this point it was better than anything he could’ve hoped for. Sandor pushed the little bird up onto the door effortlessly and she slithered onto it face down.
Then he tried to follow and get up onto it too, but at once it began to tilt and submerge, almost dumping Sansa off it in the process. Realizing that it was clearly only big enough to support her alone, Sandor helped her back onto the door, accepting his fate. At least this way if the worst came to pass, the little bird now stood a chance to live until the lifeboats returned to rescue the survivors. 

*Even if this only buys her a couple of minutes, my life is worth that time.*

Clinging to the door, Sandor kept his upper body out of water as best he could. His face was inches away from Sansa’s, their cold breaths floating around them in a cloud as they panted from exertion.

“Sandor, but what about you?” she wondered, raising an eyebrow at him.

He didn’t know what to answer, afraid the little bird would get off the door when she realized why he hadn’t joined her, determined to share whatever fate awaited him. Their hair had started to freeze into icicles, their skins glazed over with sweat, making them both feel clammy. Without a word, they just stared at each other for a long moment, trying to wrap their minds around what had just happened, and what they were now living through, glad though that they were not alone.

Just as Sansa opened her mouth to say something, a man suddenly took form from out of the night, swimming toward their piece of debris, interrupting them. At once Sandor grew alert, and he rasped in warning, “Get the fuck out of here! This is just enough for her. You’ll push it under.”

“Let me try at least!” the stranger cried out desperately. “Or I’ll die soon!”

“You’ll die quicker if you come any closer,” Sandor promised him, prepared to fight this idiot off if need be.

Thankfully though, something changed the man’s mind. Sandor didn’t care if it was common sense, the sound of his rasping voice, or the sight of his burned face that did it, but he was relieved when the gnat said, “Yes, I see. Good luck to you then.”

As he swam off Sandor heard the little bird whispering beside him, “God bless you.”

Trying hard to keep himself from rolling his eyes at Sansa’s unshakable faith, he barked at her in a grunt of pain, “He’s can’t hear you, bird. He’s gone.”

“No,” she explained, shaking her head. “I meant- thank God for you, Sandor.”
Sandor stared at her with wide eyes, for once not wishing to say anything else against her beliefs, glad that she seemed to realize it would be worse if she got off the door than if she just stayed there docilely. Or maybe she just doesn’t have the strength to move. That was both a relief and something to be wary of. Nearby, people were still screaming, calling to the nearest lifeboats floating by. They were shouting things like, “Come back!”, “Please!”, “We know you can hear us!”, “For God´s sake, please help us!”, and “Save one life!”

As they floated amid the chorus of the damned, adrift, Sandor turned around as he heard a whistle blowing furiously. Knowing that the sound would carry over the water for miles, Sandor almost felt like shouting his thanks to the ship´s officer who was increasing their chance of getting rescued. What he will do once the first boat arrived though, Sandor couldn´t think of at the moment. For even if it started saving other people first, he would make sure to get Sansa inside it somehow. And me too if I can manage it.

Returning his attention to the little bird, Sandor rasped encouragingly, “The boats will come back for us, Sansa. So hold on just a little longer. They had to row away for the suction, but now they’ll be coming back.”

He was relieved to see his words could still help her, for even though she was shivering as much as he was, her lips blue and her teeth still chattering uncontrollably, she nodded and managed to give Sandor a small smile full of trust. His heart constricting inside him, he rested his forehead on the little bird’s, wondering if he couldn’t maybe distract his mind from the pain and the cold he was feeling by remembering everything that had happened between Sansa and him since Friday night.

They drifted under the night sky like that for a moment. The water was glassy, with only the faintest undulating swell. Sandor could actually see the starts reflected on the black mirror that was the sea as he squeezed the water out of Sansa´s long overcoat and the bottom of her dress, tucking them in tightly around her legs. Anything to keep her warm and stop him from wondering why the hell the lifeboats where not here yet.

At one point he had even taken out his wallet and tucked it securely inside Sansa´s coat, glad he had something to give her, but angry by the fact that his life´s savings could never be hers. Some time later he had remembered his guns, and deciding that it was better for her to be armed in some way, Sandor had been about to give them to her when Sansa told him she didn’t want them. A brief argument had taken place then, but in the end Sandor had given in, not wishing to upset her or make her waste her energy on the matter.

Deciding that he would place them inside her coat when she wasn’t paying attention, Sandor looked around them. Minutes later, as the moaning about them grew quieter, he began to rub the little bird’s arms, but she was unmoving, just staring into the horizon.
“Sansa?” he slurred with a bark when he was unable to bear her silence any longer, even as he grimaced with pain.

She took a long moment to answer him, but finally she observed, “It’s getting quiet.”

Sandor nodded, cursing silently. He knew why that was of course. People were already dying all around them of exposure. The nearest one was the officer who had whistled for the lifeboats. Sandor could see that he was slumped in his lifejacket, looking almost asleep as his corpse still held on to the debris that had helped keep him afloat.

Hoping he was right about what he was going to say, Sandor snarled at Sansa, “Just wait a few more minutes, bird. It’ll take the boats a while to get organized. Don’t be afraid.”

“I’m not afraid,” she replied, her body trembling endlessly.

And then, needing to hear her laugh if only to make these moments a less harder to bear, Sandor started talking, saying anything he could think of that would make her laugh, such as, “I feel hungry, but at the same time I want to throw up. I bet you do too, don’t you, bird? Bloody hells, you know- all of these could be worth it if only Joffrey is off drowning somewhere nearby.”

He got his wish, but not the way he’d been expecting. For Sandor did manage to make Sansa laugh, but the sound was so weak it sounded more like a gasp of fear. But suddenly finding his eyes in the dim light, the little bird whispered, “I love you, Sandor.”

His held his breath, shocked and moved beyond words. After a stunned moment, Sandor took her hand and kissed it, longing to say those words to her too. It would be easy, and he would mean it completely, but Sandor knew that if he did that, then the little bird would use it as confirmation, taking it as some sign that it was all right to die.

Die happy, but die nonetheless. Die when I want her to survive. She knows I love her too already, but I can’t speak the words if her life is at stake. So instead he rasped, “No, don’t say your good-byes, Sansa. Don’t give up! If you love me, then don’t let go! Don’t do it!”

But her only response to that was, “I’m so cold.”
“Listen to me, little bird,” Sandor said urgently. “You´re going to get out of this! You´re going to go on and you´re going to make babies and watch them grow. And you´re going to die an old lady, warm in your bed. Not here. Not this night. Do you understand me?”

Sandor wanted desperately to add too that he would be beside her as all of that happened to her, but right now the important thing was for Sansa to be saved. With every passing minute he was loosing hope that he would make it through to the next hour, but at least Sandor could die in peace if he knew she would live on.

“I can´t feel my body,” the little bird admitted tiredly, closing her eyes.

“Sansa, listen to me!” Sandor roared again, placing his hands on both sides of her beautiful white face, trying to ignore how hard it was to get the breath to speak. “Listen! Titanic was the best thing that ever happened to me. It brought me to you, and you saved me. And I´m thankful for that, little bird. Just- just think of what you have-e meant t-to me. It was all worth it, and I´m happy.”

He hadn´t been able to keep his voice from trembling with cold, for he was already starting to feel an annoyingly strong pain in his heart. Yet Sandor´s eyes were unwavering as he tried to cling to life and rasp, “You must do me this honour. Promise me- promise me you will survive... That you will never give up, no- no matter what happens. No matter how… hopeless things g-get. Promise me now, Sansa. I need to hear you say that you- you will enjoy life the way you were always meant to. And… never let go of that promise.”

Sandor didn´t care if it was the words or the way he was saying them that made Sansa realize what he was talking about. She had told him hours ago after they´d been together that if the Lannisters were to catch her again, she would take her own life. But that same girl had also managed to rescue him, defying the lions in the process.

If Sandor was no longer around to protect her, he wanted to make Sansa realize that rather than giving up, she should do all in her power to live on. She is made of sterner stuff than she realizes. And at least if she´s on her own, it may even mean she has a better chance at keeping a low profile.

“I promise,” his courageous little bird chirped at last, even as his pulse started to weaken. When she met his eyes, his mouth barely twitched.

Good, Sandor thought gratefully, breathing in utter relief but too tired to even be mad by the way things had ended up. At least I lasted longer than the others, seeing as I´m so big and I exercised. Had he still been drinking, that may not have helped though. But the reasons why no longer matter. Now Sandor wanted nothing more than to close his eyes and kiss her, but the former was easier to
do than the latter.

“Never let go, little bird,” Sandor rasped once again exhaustedly, just to make sure his last wish was clear. It was becoming an agony to speak, breath or even think. And his limbs were stiffening, which didn’t help either. *I was supposed to hide something in her coat, but fuck, for the life of me I can’t remember what it was…*

“I promise,” Sansa assured him bravely again, and Sandor heard warmth in her voice even as his breathing became slow and shallow. “I will never let go, Sandor. I will never let go.”

Sandor felt her grip his hand, and somehow she managed to lean close enough to kiss him. As they lay with their heads together with no need to say anything else, Sandor registered that it had finally grown quiet around them, except for the lapping of the water. *It doesn’t even feel cold anymore.* In that moment the little bird murmured something, but her voice was too faint for him to hear it. *Or maybe Sansa didn’t speak at all and I’m just imagining it,* Sandor Clegane thought before darkness claimed him.

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Sansa Stark was remembering a winter back in Winterfell when she had been a little girl. Podrick Payne had ambushed her as she emerged from the house one morning. He’d had a dozen snowballs at hand, and she’d had none. Sansa had chased him through the grounds and around the stables until both of them were breathless. She might even have caught Pod, but she’d slipped on some ice. When her friend came back to see if she was hurt, and after Sansa assured him that she wasn’t, he had hit her in the face with another snowball. She had to grab his leg and pull Podrick down in retaliation, and before long she was rubbing snow in his clothes. Then Sansa’s father had appeared with melting flakes in his hair, and as he laughed, he pulled them apart. Now that she thought about it, it made Sansa smile faintly how it no longer hurt to recall how happy she had been in that past life. *Sandor saw to that.*

Meanwhile, in this macabre wonderland of ice where everyone and everything seemed to have vanished, there were little ice particles everywhere, turning the whole world silver. Sandor and Sansa were still floating in the black water, Sandor beside her as she rested on the wooden door, imagining it was a featherbed, soft and warm and deep.

Holding hands, they had both been absolutely still for a while now, Sansa staring at the way the stars were reflected in the calm ocean’s surface. She could not recall ever feeling so at peace now that the screaming and wailing had ceased, while she waited for the long sleep to steal over her.
Dying isn’t so bad, she thought, her lips moving as she began to sing in a voice lower than a whisper, “Come Josephine in my flying machine…” thinking Sandor would appreciate it in such moments.

But she was never meant to get very far with the song. Sansa’s breathing was shallow as sudden movement from the corner of her eye caught her attention. Turning ever so slightly in that direction, she caught sight of the silhouette of a lifeboat with men in it that were lifting oars out of the water, leaving weightless pearls floating in the air. Sansa could hear them shouting, but their voices were too distorted for her to make any sense of what they were saying.

Am I dreaming? She wondered, guessing that she couldn’t be dead yet, for surely this couldn’t be the afterlife. Has Sandor seen it? If he has, then the boat is real. As if to answer her doubts, a torched was flashed in her direction, the light flaring across the water. It is real! The boats had come back, just as Sandor said they would! But after flickering past her motionless form, the light moved away.

It’s so far away, Sansa thought tiredly. But if she didn’t move now, the boat would pass her by and then it would really be too late. The men on the lifeboat were already moving away after all, the light from their torch fading. She lifted her head and turned to Sandor, fighting back the pain of having her hair frozen to the wood under her, which limited her movements.

In a barely audible whisper, Sansa called out Sandor’s name with a misty breath that resembled starlight, her voice sounding small and thin and tremulous in her ears. But at least I still have a voice, she thought with surprise and a little relief. Her eyesight had grown accustomed to the darkness, which allowed Sansa to see that Sandor’s eyes were closed and the scars of his face were rimed with frost, his hair dusted with crystals while his mouth had turned blue. He’s fallen asleep, Sansa thought, reaching out to touch his shoulder with her free hand to see if that would wake him.

She almost regretted having to disturb his dreams, for he looked so at peace. As gently as she could, Sansa turned Sandor’s face toward her, and she was about to open her mouth to call out to him again, only this time louder, when she suddenly realized what had happened.

Sandor was not asleep. Sansa could only stare at his still face as the truth went through her, shocking her and turning her mind blank. She shook the pale hands they had entwined to see if that would wake him, refusing to believe he had left her. In a way, this was even worse than when Sansa had learned her father had died, for back then she had not been present while it happened. No, I can’t have survived while he didn’t! I can’t! He is so much stronger than me! Surely being on this door can’t make that much of a difference. But apparently it had.

“Oh, Sandor,” Sansa whimpered at last in a soft voice, raising a hand to her mouth and looking at his still face beseechingly, wishing she could scream or that this was only an awful nightmare. My
brave, strong, gentle and kind love. Come back to me! Don´t leave me here!

Surely there couldn´t be a pain in the world that could match the one she was feeling right now, for Sansa hated the fact that even though tears had welled in her eyes, they would not fall. Why, she could not even breathe or think properly, for with those two words all hope, will and spirit left Sansa. Her eyes returned to the boat, which was further away now, the voices of the men inside it fainter.

Helplessly, she watched them row away in the desolate darkness, and she closed her eyes, too tired to do more, wanting it all to be over as her resolve withered and the last flicker of hope died. There was a ghostly silence all around her, and it was as if all colour had fled from the world. Sansa just didn´t know what to do.

I do not belong here. I´m so weak anyways, and now that he is gone there is no more reason to even try. It would be better if she just waited a little while longer, and then she would join him. I´ve lost both my parents, my home and now Sandor. Why would I want to keep on living?

But as Sansa willed herself to enter the land of dreams for what she knew would be the last time, it was almost as if she could suddenly hear Sandor´s rasping voice reminding her that she had made him a promise. Sansa´s eyes snapped open at once at the realization that she didn´t have the option to give up, no matter how much she wanted to. I promised. I can´t let myself die without a fight. Sandor would never forgive me. He may be gone, but I owe him this.

There was not even time to consider what would happen to her if she did manage to get into the boat, the important thing was to be rescued. Finding a last reserve of hidden energy, and raising her head suddenly, cracking the ice as she ripped her hair off the wood, Sansa began to call out to the men in the boat, but her voice was so weak she never stood a chance that they would hear her.

“Come back!” she screamed, her voice coming out as a weak whisper because it hurt so much to speak. “Come back!”

The boat was almost invisible now, it´s torch light as far away from her as any star in the heavens. They still can´t hear me! Sansa struggled to draw a breath, before calling out to them again. I have to move, she knew suddenly, struggling to wake up her sleeping limbs. Realizing that her hand was frozen to Sandor´s, Sansa breathed on it, hoping the ice would melt in time, even if just a little bit. And then, unclasping their hands at last, breathing a little faster now, Sansa looked at Sandor´s white face with a broken heart as she understood that this was going to be the last time she ever saw him.
“I will never let go,” she told him hoarsely, gently kissing his hand, the words costing her all of the courage that remained in her. “I promise.”

Feeling as if this was the hardest thing she would ever have to do in her life, Sansa released Sandor into the limitless blackness below by letting go of his hands. *Goodbye, my dearest love,* she thought, her eyes never leaving him. *Sleep well. And thank you.* Without a lifejacket, he disappeared beneath the dark water, fading away like a vision from a dream.

For a moment Sansa stared in shock at the place where Sandor Clegane had just been, wishing she could go after him, hating the thought of him going down to the depths of the sea on his own, and despising the way in which she would now have to think of him as someone from her past rather than her present and her future.

But instead, Sansa looked around her, wondering what she could do to get out of here. And a moment later she had rolled off the floating wooden door and plunged into the icy water. She would never reach the boat or recover her voice in time, but now that she could not give up, she had to at least try the only thing that she believed could save her. Before long her arms felt heavy, and Sansa feared that she was not going to make it.

*One more stroke,* she told herself. *Just a little further. One more stroke.* She had to keep moving, for if she paused even to catch her breath, Sansa feared dawn would find her here, floating after having frozen to death. *One more stroke. Just one more.* The officer’s white lifeboat was bobbing in the darkness like a sign post that kept her from losing her way.

At last, shivering uncontrollably Sansa managed to reach the dead officer with the help of her lifejacket, and taking the whistle from his blue lips with stiff fingers that would not bend, not even frightened by the sight of his frozen eyes, Sansa started to blow on the whistle with her last remaining energy.

As she did so, the sound slapped across the still water, somehow clearing her mind. A small part of her didn’t care if this worked or not, but the promise she had made to Sandor was at least stronger than any wish of dying. While the lifeboat came nearer, Sansa kept on blowing the whistle, relieved that it had worked.

Everything seemed to happen at once then, almost as if she had stepped into a dream. Sansa was aware that once she had been hauled into the boat, they had taken the whistle from her, but she kept on moving her mouth until, exhausted, she slipped into unconsciousness, the men all around her scrambling to cover her with blankets.
From time to time Sansa would wake up, but there was nothing she could do but wait. Wait to see if she would manage to live until they reached a rescue ship, or if she would die long before that. She was aware that she had been saved and that Sandor was dead even though she had fallen into a numb, un-responding trance as she longed to undo the past hours of this unforgiving night.

And despite the fact that Sansa did not regret keeping her promise, it was too hard to recall that now she was all alone, which was why she spent most of the next hours sleeping, the sight of the stars blazing overheard in the sky too difficult to bear. Reality was just too much for her, seeing as she was emotionally drained and unable to think about anything that was not how happy life would be if Sandor had only lived.

The eastern sky was vague with the first hint of dawn when a man excitedly jumping up and down next to her, pointing and yelling with glee, awoke Sansa. A moment later she observed that all the others had joined in, and she understood that they were safe now, and by the fact that there were now more people on board, she guessed that they had also rescued more passengers from freezing to death.

A young officer near her lighted up a green flare, waving it as everyone went on shouting and cheering. Their enthusiasm offended her, but she was beyond caring anything at this point, which was why she just stared at everyone without reacting. Some time later, a ship’s hull loomed over Sansa’s vision and she read the letters Carpathia on the bow. Her face was a blank white mask when some seamen helped her up a rode ladder to the rescue vessel’s gangway doors.

Tiredly, she did whatever she was instructed without a word, but when she saw women crying and hugging each other inside the Carpathia, Sansa looked away reeling, her heart bleeding for the one she had lost. She hadn’t died, but neither did she feel very much alive. It was as if she had entered a world outside of time, and her weak legs were barely able to hold her when her feet had touched the floor of the rescue ship.

“She’s cold!” she heard a Welsh voice say nearby, before a coat was draped over her shoulders. “There, is that better, Miss? Rest easy, we’re safe now. The worst is past and done.”

Sansa couldn’t help it. She chuckled at the hollow meaning behind those words, but it was a joyless laughter, the sort that could turn into sobbing in the blink of an eye. Her body was here, but her thoughts were elsewhere, and so was her heart.

*This cannot be real.* It felt as if she was living in two worlds, and one of them was that in which
ghosts abode. Sandor would now become a shadow that would follow her for the rest of her life. So in a twisted dark way, she had gotten her wish: she would spend the years to come with him.

Someone draped Sansa with warm blankets and gave her hot tea as crewmen guided her along rows of women, seated or standing as they waited with anxious faces to see if their loved ones had been saved. *They’re all widows now,* Sansa thought. *And so am I.*

Chapter End Notes

Whether you suspected this would happen or not, I want to say that I am really sorry to have killed off Sandor. Believe me, it was one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever come across in my writing experience. But to be honest, right from the start I knew/felt that this was the direction the story had to take.

Maybe that was one of the reasons why this wasn’t that hard of a chapter to write.... Anyways, I hope that you all keep on reading the story (2 more chapters left!), cause I
am really glad with the ending that I came up with. I’ll be keeping my fingers crossed that you enjoy it too even if Sandor is no longer in it.
Can’t wait to read your comments! :D
The Paradox of Living

Chapter Notes

- Thank you to my friend @thefeatherofhope for all her help and support with this story!! I’m so lucky that not only is she my beta, but also my dear friend!

- Title is taken from a quote by Jack London

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On the afternoon of the following day Sansa Stark was standing at the rail of Carpathia´s poop deck, staring down at the ocean without emotion. The skirt of the dress one of the rescue ship´s passengers had given her was blowing in the wind, Joffrey Baratheon´s long overcoat, now dry, keeping the chill air at bay.

Ever since Harold Lowe had rescued her in the early hours of yesterday morning, Titanic´s fifth officer had taken a special interest in looking after Sansa´s welfare. Which was why, when Sansa failed to acknowledge his remark from a moment ago, Mr. Lowe put a hand on her arm. She turned her head at the contact, forcing herself to focus her attention on him, even though she wasn´t really seeing him at all.

“We´ll be arriving in New York tomorrow,” he informed her, offering her a hot drink.

Sansa breathed in relief at the news. Carpathia´s captain had been debating on whether it wouldn´t be better to head for Halifax or The Azores, but by deciding to head back to America, it would make Sansa´s plans easier, since New York was a bigger place than the other two destinations. Nodding in recognition, Sansa tried to smile at Officer Lowe, but she knew she had failed miserably. They stood in silence there for an awkward moment, before he said, “Wouldn´t you be warmer back in the public room? I can escort you there if you like.”

“That´s very kind of you, Mr. Lowe, but I´ll be all right,” Sansa assured him, barely recognizing her voice, for it had changed since the early hours of yesterday.

“At least let me get you some food,” the Welshman persisted, hope in his eyes.

Sansa returned her gaze to the sea with a frown, leaning forward a little, her fingers wrapping over the rail hard enough to keep her from lashing out at him to leave her alone. Knowing what was better for her, she allowed herself to be escorted to a deck chair, and she sat there silently as Office
Lowe brought her soup, a big blanket, and the hot tea he’d offered to her moments before. When he was done Sansa thanked him cordially, but the Welshman seemed quite content, and with a nod he remarked, “Just hold on, miss.”

And then, promising to return as soon as he could manage, he walked away across the deck, and even though her eyes followed him, her mind was far away, thinking about her current situation. Agonizing on how much she loathed this. Sansa hated the fact that she had to act calm and composed, but at least her façade went unnoticed, for in the aftermath of Titanic’s sinking, after they had roamed the Carpathia in a failed attempt to find their loved ones, dozens of other widows had become stoic, wishing only to be left alone. At least I was spared such a quest, Sansa thought.

And after being briefly evaluated by one of the three doctors in charge, the widows got their wish and were left to themselves, unless they had family members with them. Or officers lurking around them, trying to make sure they want for nothing, Sansa added, thinking of her own situation. But as much as Sansa abhorred this, she knew it was better than allowing herself to break down in despair, even though she had every right to do so.

She had seen many women doing just that almost as soon as she was aboard the Carpathia, but unlike them, Sansa could not afford to be calmed under the influence of opiates, medicine or drugs. She needed to be vigilant during this voyage, out of fear that someone from her past would recognize her as she slept or was too weak to keep a low profile; for then she would be truly lost.

Since she had lost Sandor, Sansa had been unable to cry and she reviled herself for it too, despite the fact that, had she broken down in despair, she would’ve attracted unwanted attention. And yet, Sansa’s self-loathing went deeper than logical reasoning, for after her catatonic state had passed, it seemed that it was out of her reach to fittingly express her sorrow.

Why is it that I could cry every night and every day when I was the Lannister’s prisoner, and now that I’ve lost Sandor I can’t even shed a tear? It was almost as if all the tears Sansa had in her had frozen as she drifted on a door in the cold waters of the North Atlantic, the dead body of her best friend beside her.

And now it seemed that all that was left was an empty shell of a woman, whose heart felt so much it couldn’t even conceive a proper way in which to express its mourning. She even doubted she would ever be able to laugh again, or feel warmth in her heart. Sansa knew that now she had nothing in the world, but the only thing that grieved her was the loss of Sandor.

And so for every hour of the past day and a half, Sansa had felt like giving up, but then a moment later she would remember the promise Sandor had extracted from her with his last breaths. It was the memory and the significance of that promise what kept Sansa sane, compelling her to thank the passenger who had given up her bed for her to sleep on, and who had also given her a warm dry
dress to wear. And that vow was also what made her thank the doctor who had her under his care yesterday.

It was that promise that had kept Sansa from screaming in fury as Officer Lowe told her of the inconceivable casualties they suspected they’d suffered. More than fifteen hundred people had gone into the sea as Titanic sank from under us. Out of twenty boats floating nearby, only one went looking for survivors. Six were saved from the water, myself included. Six out of fifteen hundred, Sandor among them, abandoned to death.

Still, despite the overwhelming sense of loss Sansa felt whenever she thought of those men, Sandor’s promise had also served to compel her to come up with a plan. As she reached New York, she would disappear from good society, loosing herself in places the lions would never find her if they were to learn she had survived. Sansa only had vague ideas of what she would do once she arrived in America, but already she had come up with a new past for herself, in case someone began inquiring after her.

As they are bound to do with all of us who survived the wreck. And now that she thought about it, Sansa gathered that perhaps it would be best if she began to practice her new lies on Officer Lowe. The man had after all tried to question if there were any family members he could try and contact for her.

But as nice as the Welshman was, Sansa wished she could have someone familiar with her to console her in her heart-break. Someone who understood to a degree just how much Sandor had meant to her. Which was why Sansa had looked for Mr. Andrews and Elbert Broder among the survivors, with no results. I doubt many men from Third Class were saved, she thought grimly, gazing about her and remembering Jack Dawson.

When asked, Sansa had told those in charge when asked that she was from steerage, which was why she was now in the poop deck along with all the other widows from Third Class, among Titanic’s recovered lifeboats. She shuddered as her eyes passed an enormous pile of lifejackets on a hatch. The sight of them was enough to drive her back to the time she had spent in the freezing waters of the sea, and reminding herself that her food was getting colder, Sansa started eating and drinking.

She felt better at once, but she could not taste either the food or the tea. But she forced herself to finish them both to try and fill some of the emptiness inside her, despite the fact that she was not hungry. It will help keep my strong, she encouraged herself. Feeling unable to dwell on Sandor for more than a few moments, and deriding herself for that as well, Sansa cast her eyes on the RMS Carpathia instead, taking in it’s appearance for the first time since she had boarded it. This transatlantic passenger steamship of the Cunard line was nothing in comparison to Titanic.
Just as she was conceding that at least this ship was still keeping afloat, Sansa almost dropped the plate of soup and the cup of tea as her eyes fell on her former fiancé. Joffrey Baratheon was alive and well beyond his bandaged broken nose as he walked down the stairs that led to Carpathia´s poop deck, ignoring a passing steward who stopped to say something to him. As he went amongst the bereft survivors of steerage, Sansa placed the bowl of soup and the cup of tea on the ground at her feet, before bringing the blanket Mr. Lowe had brought her about her face, covering it up like a cowl.

It was just as Sandor and she had suspected after she had rescued him from the Master at Arm´s office. Of course the Lannisters would want to be sure if we had perished or not. A dozen painful thoughts and conflicting emotions passed through Sansa´s mind and heart. Part of her feared beyond anything that Joff would recognize her and reclaim her back under the pretext that his mother was her legal ward while having the witnesses to confirm her identity.

Another part of Sansa was hurting at the injustice of it all. Why did he have to live when Sandor could not? She bitterly demanded from God, forcing her hands to keep them from shaking with impotent fury. Why? It´s so unfair! And another part hated herself for considering now that Sandor was not with her, maybe she stood a better chance of not being detected.

Her heartbeat practically stopped during the minutes Joffrey Baratheon spent on the poop deck of the rescue ship, looking for the girl he had once been engaged to, whose family he had ruined and whose inheritance he had stolen. An English girl who had ended up falling in love with one of his most trusted employees, and for all he would ever know, had preferred to die with him on the Titanic rather than spend the rest of her life with him.

When he finally returned back to First Class, Sansa fixed him with a glare as icy and hard as the berg that had changed both their lives forever, hoping this would be the last time she ever saw him. Letting out a sigh she had not been aware she had been holding, Sansa finally lowered the blanket and stared down at the discarded tepid soup and cold tea by her feet.

She shifted in her seat on the deck chair and frowned as she felt something hard beneath her leg. Putting her hand in her pocket, she pulled out Sandor´s leather wallet and the beautiful necklace Joff had given her the night before she attempted to commit suicide. For a moment she looked at both objects in amazement, before quickly hiding them back inside the pocket. She was confused, but not enough to make her realize it would be better if no one but her saw them.

Unsettled by having the reality of what had happened being thrust upon her in this way, Sansa hugged herself, rocking gently. The fact that Sandor had made certain to leave her with the only worldly possessions he could was almost inconsequential compared to the blow her heart was receiving from the realization that she had this to remember him by. I don´t even have a photograph of him. But for his wallet, Sandor Clegane would exist now only in her memory.
Sansa sat with her head bowed, feeling desolate, suddenly immovable as she realized what was happening. Shaken by the flood of memories and raw emotions, her eyes welled up. She fought hard to hold back her tears, but it was no use. Almost blinded by them, Sansa was able to start weeping at long last, her tears washing some of the self-hatred away, even as she had to remember not to completely fall apart in case that attracted too much attention.

*Maybe one day soon I will be able to cry without restraint,* Sansa thought, weeping for the happy girl full of hope she’s been for two whole days. But most of all, she cried for the love she had known and lost.

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Carpathia had arrived in New York more than twelve hours ago, accompanied up river by tugboats hired by the press so that reporters could shout out questions through megaphone to those on the rescue ship. Pack ice, fog, thunderstorms and rough seas slowed its journey back to America. Docking at pier 54, the First and Second Class survivors had disembarked first, their arrival greeted by relatives and sympathisers.

But those in steerage had been forced to wait on for hours as the immigration inspectors processed their entry papers, some even being detained for questioning along with several of Titanic’s crew members. And even though it was now near midnight, thousands of people were still gathered at the dock, filling even the surrounding streets. The flashes of the photographers far away seemed to go off like bombs, lighting up whenever they felt like capturing a specific shot. Several hundred policemen were trying to keep the mob back, even as doctors and nurses waited beside ambulances.

When officers instructed Sansa and the other steerage widows to wait for their turn at the pier of the Cunard line, she really looked for the first time at the faces of the women with her. Maybe they were too distraught to have noticed, but if they hadn’t, Sansa was thankful to them for not giving away the fact that they had never before seen her amongst the other Third Class passengers on board the Titanic, apart from the steerage party.

It was raining hard as she waited for her new life to start. Sansa gazed up at the famous Statue of Liberty for a long moment, welcoming her to America with her glowing torch. But then she was distracted from her musings as reporters and photographers swarmed by the foot of the gangways, lining the tops of cars and trucks, offering dollars to anyone who was willing to talk. She thought it was like a mad circus, and Sansa tried to keep her head hidden from the cameras while they jostled to get close to the survivors, tugging on them as they passed by and shouting over each other to ask them questions.
Covered with a woollen shawl, courtesy of Officer Harold Lowe, Sansa took a deep breath and prepared herself as her group left the gangway and was instructed to walk towards the immigration officers nearby. *You can do this,* she told herself. *You can do it. You can still be brave.* If a caterpillar could turn into a butterfly, surely it couldn’t be that hard for her to exchange one life for another. *It cannot be any more unimaginable than the sinking of the Titanic.*

“Can I take your name please, love?” An officer with a strong American accent asked her.

“Jeyne Poole,” she lied, feeling sorry about how she could not yet tell who she really was. *But I it´s for the best. Sansa Stark is dead, after all.*

The man nodded and then another officer stepped forward to steer her towards a holding area for processing. Her heart was beating wildly as she looked around her, waiting for the first opportunity to escape. She joined a group of dazed immigrants who were flinching at the flashes of the photographers’ cameras, blinded by their glare. Suddenly a disturbance caught everyone’s attention as two men nearby burst through the cordon the policemen had set to mark the perimeter.

The intruders ran towards an old woman amongst the group of survivors, and then the three of them were all crying out with joy as they hugged. The reporters wasted no time to begin their coverage of the emotional reunion, their flashes exploding. *Now,* Sansa decided. Using the momentary distraction as a cover, and praying that she wouldn’t be caught, she walked away from the group of survivors, making her way through the jostling people.

Moving with purpose amidst the confusion, refusing to let a hint of fear or uncertainty betray her at such a crucial moment, Sansa was able to slip away without anyone challenging her. Her pace increased the further she walked away from the flashes and the roar of people behind her, and so did her determination. Fleetingly she registered that the rain had stopped.

Sansa had decided back on the Carpathia that she would go ask for help at a church, and if the Father in charge seemed inclined to turn her over to the authorities responsible for looking after those who had survived the Titanic, then Sansa would run away before that could ever happen. What she would do then, she did not know, but at least it would still be very difficult for the Lannisters to find out she had survived after all.

With a shake of her head Sansa hugged herself and slowed down, her relief at having managed her escape dimming as she recalled that she was in a strange city in the middle of the night in a foreign country, all on her own. Not for the first time she thought that if she only had Sandor’s guns with her, she might feel safer, even though she had never used one, or that she could end up in jail if she did use them.
There seemed to be no people around at this hour, and Sansa wasn´t sure if that was a good thing for her or a bad one, especially as she had a wallet full of money and a necklace worth millions with her. It didn´t even matter that rather than names, the streets had numbers. *Which is just the same, seeing as I have no idea where to find a church.* But there was no going back. *My only road is forward.*

Now more than ever she wished for her vision to be true. Ever since she had first come up with the idea of going to the religious sanctuary, Sansa had imagined being taken to a little room where she could rest to her heart´s content. At present she cared little for how when she woke up, she would be expected to explain herself, even as she came up with way to earn her living. For the moment the picture in her head of a warm bed, even if she didn´t manage to sleep at all tonight, was enough.

*Oh Sandor, if only you were with me,* Sansa thought with regret, sighing into the night. *You always knew what to do.* For a flicker of a moment she almost wanted him with her just so she could reproach him for putting her in a position where she had to try and do her best with a life she hadn´t really wanted in the first place. *Not without him anyway.*

But now because of his promise, she could not allow herself to break down and cry in the middle of the street because she was as lost in a way she had never before been in all her life. Sandor had wanted her to go on, but he had not told her how that could be accomplished.

*Maybe if we hadn´t fallen for each other and I had still somehow managed to escape my prison after Titanic collided with destiny, this wouldn´t be so bad for me to take,* Sansa guessed as she started to move down the lonely street again. *At least I wouldn´t mind being alone if I didn´t know what it was like to lose the chance of sharing my life with the man I love.* Sansa shook her head as she corrected herself. *The man I loved.* She felt awful. How could she be thinking this? What she had shared with Sandor, brief as it had been, was worth everything... *Even his life though?*

When she reached the end of the street, Sansa was about to round the corner when she collided with someone who had been hurrying her way, and she almost fell to the ground at the impact. Managing to grab on to the light post beside her, Sansa gasped as her eyes fell on a thin girl younger than herself with a long face, grey eyes and brown hair.

“Hey!” the girl cried out at her in a funny accent. “Watch where you are going!”

Despite herself, Sansa could only stare down at the stranger with wide eyes. But she quickly recovered herself from the shock; for she gathered that if she had to meet someone on this dark street, Sansa would much rather it was a young girl than some drunken man.
“I’m sorry,” she replied, running a hand through her tangled hair.

The girl rolled her eyes at Sansa’s courtesy in a manner that left her without a doubt that the strange child believed her to be stupid. Almost overwhelmed by the memory of Sandor calling her a little bird for the first time back in Winterfell after she tried to be courteous to him too, Sansa realized that the girl walking away.

“Wait!” she exclaimed, determined not to loose her chance. “Can you tell me where can I find a church?”

The girl stopped abruptly and turned around to face Sansa with an expression of disbelief.

“Do you think I look like someone who knows where to find a bloody church?” she spat.

Sansa bit her lip, her eyes taking in the little stranger’s appearance. Now that she thought of it, Sansa couldn’t believe she had ever seen a dirtier person anywhere. She looks like a beggar. But I am short of becoming one myself.

“Yes,” she finally answered the American girl. “I think you look like someone who knows her way around here.”

That made the stranger laugh. Sansa could tell that she had caught her curiosity in spite of herself, and she watched with relief as the girl headed back in her direction, even as she asked, “Why would you want to go to a church in the middle of the night anyways? You speak funny. Where are you from?”

Sansa paused, gulping, unsure as to what to respond. One wrong word and she could give herself away. Keeping silent was the wrong thing to do though. With sharp eyes, the girl’s mouth dropped open as she realized what was going on, and then she remarked with excitement, “You’re one of Titanic’s survivors!”

It wasn’t a question. Unable to speak or move, Sansa could only look down at the American child, wishing she could come up with a good lie quickly. Or maybe I should just excuse myself and get as far away from her as possible. She was about to do the latter when the strange girl said, “If you like, you can stay over with me tonight, and I’ll take you to whatever church in Chelsea you like tomorrow. I’m saying this for your own good. You wouldn’t last two more blocks down the road before the Greyjoy Gang found you, and then you’d be in deep trouble.”
Taken completely by surprise, Sansa drew an intake of breath. For a moment she even wondered if she had heard correctly, so taken aback by this offer from a person she had never met. The possibility existed that this girl had some darker motive for wanting to help Sansa out, but she could also not ignore that there was something about her she felt drawn to. *Maybe that is because she reminds me a little bit of Sandor,* she thought as she found herself accepting the proposal, thanking the strange child for her kindness.

“I´m not kind,” the girl told her, offering Sansa her hand. “I´m Arya Williams.”

Taking the smaller hand on her own, she replied with a small tremulous smile, the first since Titanic had sunk, “I´m Sansa Clegane.”

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After she had followed Arya to the little, cold and dirty room the girl called home, and she had seen the blanket on the floor that would serve as her bed, Sansa had felt certain that she would not be able to get much rest this night. But much to her surprise, the moment she closed her eyes she fell asleep. And that was the first time since the sinking of the Titanic that Sansa found some semblance of peace. For in the dream she had that night, a dream that would come to her from time to time for the rest of her life, Sansa found hope again.

It would always be the same dream, not a single detail altered by the passing of time. Sansa would find herself back on the Titanic wearing the most beautiful of white dresses as she stood on the boat deck, the echoing sound of distant waltz music breathing life back to people she had known but had died on the night the ship sank. Thomas Andrews would appear, dressed in tie and tail, along with Elbert Brother, Jack Dawson, Tommy Ryan, Fabrizio di Rosi, and even Trudy, Sansa´s Irish maid.

As they smiled at her, the music would increase in volume, changing from a soft tone to a vibrant melody. And somehow that would make Sansa realize that she had to be somewhere else. She would start walking towards the Grand Staircase in the First Class foyer, and when she stepped into it the place was so exquisitely beautiful that Sansa almost started crying.

When she stepped into the room the waltz music would stop, the silence of the abyss suddenly sweeping over the place. Yet the fact that she was at the bottom of the ocean wouldn’t matter to Sansa, for her attention by then would be captured by the sight before her.
At the bottom of the staircase stood a tall big man with his broad back to her. But as she walked down the stairs he would turn around, and then Sansa would be staring once again at the burned face of Sandor Clegane. Grinning, he would hold out his hand to her, and Sansa Stark would go into his waiting arms, too overwhelmed by all the love for her he saw in his dark grey eyes.

“Little bird,” he would rasp then, mending her heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has been reading, reviewing, leaving kudos, bookmarking... I know that it’s hard not to have our Sandor around anymore, but I am keeping my fingers crossed you are enjoying where the story is heading to!
And remember, NEXT CHAPTER will be the LAST ONE! :O ;D
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

*So we´ve come to it as last! The final chapter! :D I can´t believe I completed a fic! It feels amazing and fulfilling :D

*I owe my friend @thefeatherofhope a lot for being my beta!! Thank you for all your encouragement and help with this! <3

The first conscious thought Sansa had as she woke up in the morning of April 15th 1948, was that her old dream had visited her last night. She lay on her big bed under the silk sheets with her eyes closed and a smile on her lips as her mind trailed back in time to events that had taken place thirty six years ago. Sansa didn´t know how long she stayed like that, lost between memories and dreams, but eventually sounds from outside brought her back to the present.

With a sigh she stretched lazily on the bed, her fingers trailing over the empty space besides her as memories from the past were replaced by thoughts of today´s lunch. Nobody actually said it, but everyone knew that the family reunion was held in her honour, so they could all be with her on this date. But Sansa was more than glad for the opportunity to have all of her loved ones together back home. Ever since the start of World War II almost a decade ago, such occasions had unfortunately lessened.

They all still met for birthdays, holidays and national festivities, but it was nice to know that despite the busy lives her children led, everyone made certain that on the 12th of April of every year, their schedules were cleared for this family gathering.

Looking at the clock on her bureau, Sansa´s eyes shot wide open. She´d overslept! If she didn´t hurry, then there would be troubles in the kitchen. At least everyone but Adrien and Benoit were already home. As Sansa stood up and walked over to the large room were all her wardrobe was kept, she thought with amusement how frightened she´d been years ago at the thought of running the household of a château as large as Giroux, for the estate was bigger than Winterfell. But overseeing it had thankfully not proven as difficult as she had once thought.

Deciding to wear a sophisticated elegant grey belted dress for today, Sansa sat down before the mirror on her vanity table, arranging her hair into a simple bun. It didn´t surprise her that as she got ready, her mind kept on going back to the fateful week when her life had changed, for on this date it was more than natural.
Sansa quite liked the “new look” in fashion that had appeared last year, but she would always prefer the designs of her youth. Although that vanished age was long gone, at least Sansa’s figure was still slim after the birth of four children, her waistline having grown smaller after the stressful years of the war. And even though her auburn hair was now scattered with grey, Sansa felt as beautiful as any woman in her early fifties could when they were loved and at peace. The photographs scattered across the table were proof of that, seeing as they all showed her with a radiant expression through different periods of time.

Almost half an hour later Sansa went out of her bedroom, content with the picture she presented. She greeted the servants she met along the way on the halls of her home, and making a visit to the kitchens, she made sure that all the preparations for lunch were well under way, smiling as she spied the lemon cake they would all have for dessert. Suddenly recalling that Arya’s letter had arrived yesterday and she had yet to write a reply, Sansa walked over to the main living room of the château and headed straight for the beautiful mahogany desk she considered as her own “office”.

Stepping with a chuckle into the room as she recalled all the times she had re-decorated it to the distress of her family, Sansa sat down and re-read her oldest friend’s letter, wondering for the hundredth time why Arya wouldn’t just call her over the phone. She liked writing and receiving letters, but it had been so long since they had last seen each other that Sansa was starting to fear she would soon forget her friend’s voice.

As she wrote a long reply to Arya’s even longer letter, Edith Piaff’s voice singing La Vie en Rose in the radio, Sansa allowed herself to remember those early years of their friendship, which had been born on the night when she had first arrived in America. Arya Williams had taken Sansa to a church the following day, but less than a month later Sansa had already moved in into the New Yorker’s small one room flat.

Those first months after Titanic’s sinking had been some of the darkest of Sansa’s life, but Arya had been the one to help her find work that would allow her to get all the warm food and clothes she needed, which kept her from becoming a beggar. Her first job had been at a milliner’s shop, but then to earn more money she had begun to help with the costumes at a local theatre on Broadway.

And as luck would have it, for Sansa still had a little trouble believing it herself at times, one thing had led to another and at one point she had ended up acting and signing at the theatre’s plays, fulfilling her lifelong ambition of singing before large crowds. Her dream was initially perturbed by the advances of Petyr Baelish, her manager, but by then the Great War had broken out, and Sansa had volunteered to spent parts of her free time nursing convalescent soldiers, which meant she would be in the company of her employer for fewer hours as her singing lessons were in progress.

Although Baelish had died less than a year after World War I began under mysterious circumstances, Sansa’s singing career had flourished, to the point that by 1919 she had already
earned a moderate fame, being the lead actress and singer in many plays, even as different theatre companies fought for her.

It had been through her career on the stage that Sansa had met her husband, Adrien Jordan, a French socialite, heir to a wealthy family of bankers that were part Europe’s elite. Several men had shown interest in Sansa long before Adrien, Petyr Baelish included, but she had never paid them any mind, for her heart already belonged to another. Yet the longer she knew Adrien, the harder it had been for Sansa to keep on fooling herself that she wasn’t in love with him.

They had first met at a party thrown in a large house at Long Island, a year after the Great War was over. But afterwards Adrien confessed to Sansa that he had seen her before, on the night she first appeared in Faust. Adrien had fought for his homeland in the First World War, and would have lost his life were it not for an American soldier who rescued him from the trenches in time. When the war was over Adrien had looked for his rescuer, only to find that he had died shortly before the end. Wishing to pay the man’s family his respects, Adrien had travelled to New York, and it had been during that trip that he and Sansa had first met.

He was brave, gentle and kind; characteristics that had long before attracted Sansa, and the love Adrien had for her had only strengthen with the passing of time. She had fallen for his blue eyes and brown curly hair against her will, although it had been his good heart that had won her over from the start. For long months he courted Sansa, and when she finally agreed to marry him, she was forced to reveal her true origins, since his family had claimed to disown him if he married a simple English upstart singer.

Besides Arya, to whom Sansa had confided her true history some years after they’d met, Adrien was the only one who knew everything about her past. And when he found out about the Lannisters, it had taken all of Sansa’s pleas and tears to keep her fiancé from wishing to destroy them. With obvious reluctance he’d finally give in to her appeal, and one day years later, shortly after the Great Depression began, Sansa learned that Joffrey Baratheon had shot himself.

She had read way before his death that he had married a Southern heiress called Margaery Tyrell, and despite the fact that their children had inherited his millions, they failed to keep them due to the crash of 1929. But by that time Sansa had already been living in France for years, and such tidings stirred no emotion in her. She had travelled the world with Adrien during their life together, even visiting so far as India, the Middle East and Australia.

If there was one place she never felt like going back to though, it was England. Despite the fact that Adrien had bought Winterfell back for her, she had no desire to ever set foot in her homeland again, for the memories of the months she had been the lions’ prisoner unfortunately overweight the early years of her childhood.
Adrien claimed that one day she would change her mind, but if that ever happened, Sansa was certain it wouldn´t be soon. And it wasn´t like she had any family left back in that country, seeing as her Aunt Lysa and her cousin Robert had both died long ago, or so had Adrien´s inspectors informed them shortly after they married. They had been unable to determine if her family´s demise had any connection with the Lannisters, but since Sansa felt certain that they did, she felt responsible for their deaths. For years such knowledge had haunted her despite her husband´s attempts to convince her otherwise.

Aside from England, she would´ve preferred it she had the choice never to go back to the United States again either, but when the Nazi army invaded France, Adrien had taken her to New York as a precaution. The boys had stayed behind against their parents´ wishes, claiming that their duty was to stay and fight for their homeland. But that was years ago, and now Sansa was once again living in her adoptive home country- the land she had loved ever since she had been a student of Mademoiselle Mordane´s Academy in the outskirts of Paris.

Since the start of their marriage, Adrien and Sansa would spend half a year in their city home in the French capital, and the other half in their estate in the countryside, in the Dordogne region of southwest France, in the prefecture of Périgueux. Sansa highly enjoyed hosting elegant parties back in Paris, attending Coco Channel´s or Christian Dior´s runways, but she also found a sweet charm in country life, breeding horses for the races, watching the men play polo and swimming on a barge in the many lakes of Giroux´s grounds.

Suddenly, Sansa´s daughter made an appearance at the living room, her hair wet, and bathrobe over her bathing suit. She laughed as she took in the sight Caroline presented, feeling immensely proud, as she always did, when seeing her youngest child and only daughter.

Caroline was not yet twenty-five, a true beauty and a very modern woman. Many believed that she was not yet married because she was her father´s pet, and because her brothers were quite overprotective of her, but Sansa knew the truth to be otherwise. For the present Caroline was wedded to medicine, her dearest ambition to become a pediatrician.

Having inherited her mother´s hair, eyes and height, Caroline was the image of Sansa at her age, although she believed her child to be more even more beautiful than her. Sansa could only hope though that one day her daughter would believe her when she pointed out that there was no need for her to choose between love and work. Walking over to give Sansa a hug, Caroline looked at the five pages she had written to Arya and laughed.

“Oh Mother,” she exclaimed, rolling her eyes. “You and Auntie Arya are impossible! Why you two just won´t call each other up and spend the whole afternoon talking instead of all these writing and waiting I´ll never know.”
Sansa couldn’t help but chuckle, wondering if maybe such stubbornness wasn’t a sign of her getting old. She watched Caroline walk over to seat on her favourite sofa by the marble fireplace, and then Sansa groaned.

“Caroline, don’t please,” she cried out. “You’ll ruin the furniture.”

Sighing in annoyance, Caroline stood up and started walking all over the living room, twirling a strand of her wet auburn hair in her finger. *She’s thinking of Philippe*, Sansa knew. Phillipe had been one of Caroline’s best friends since they were both children, and the young man had recently proposed to her, only to be rejected.

Aware that she would only work against Phillipe’s case if she spoke before Caroline took the matter up with her herself, Sansa decided not to remark upon the young man’s absence from today’s lunch, an event he had previously attended for years.

“Where’s your brother?” Sansa instead enquired of Caroline. “I thought he was just taking Hadar for a short visit to the Château de Beynac.”

“I’m sure they won’t be long now,” Caroline replied, unperturbed.

They fell into a comfortable silence, but while her daughter’s mind was torn by her own persona dilemma, Sansa found herself remembering Caroline’s twin brother, Théo. Sansa’s third son had been a soldier during World War II, and he had died early in the conflict. *May there never be such a war again, God. At least not in my lifetime. I could not bear such a loss one more time.*

Losing one of her children had been the greatest pain Sansa Stark had ever known, and the wound was still too fresh for her to be able to recall her beautiful son’s face without feeling as if her heart had lodged in her throat. Of her three sons, young Théo had been the one who physically resembled Sansa the most, having inherited her auburn curls, just like Caroline. With a pang Sansa gathered that if Théo had been here today, his sister would’ve confided in him at once the troubles of her heart.

And then, as both women heard the sound of approaching cars, Caroline and Sansa smiled at the same time as they realized that Adrien and Bénoin had finally arrived. As her husband and second eldest son greeted her in turn, Sansa felt a little less empty. *Théo may have gone, but I still have his brothers and his father.*
Adrien kissed Sansa on the lips and Bénoit kissed her on both cheeks, both of them telling Caroline and her at once all about their train trip from Paris. Since Bénoit was a politician, he lived in the capital. He was a handsome intelligent man, not yet thirty, who was just as committed to his work as his sister. Sansa knew that he had a different girlfriend every month, but although his personal life was not ideal, at least he was doing very well in the government. Bénoit was the right hand man of France’s Prime Minister.

“And what did the two most beautiful woman in the world do after I left for Paris to fetch home this rascal?” Adrien inquired from his wife and his daughter, settling down in his personal seat in the living room, drawing Sansa closer so she could seat on his leg.

After answering him, Bénoit and Caroline began talking, seeing as they hadn’t been able to meet in the past couple of months. While they watched their children fondly, Adrien cupped Sansa’s face and asked her, “How are you, dear? I missed you, you know”

She knew at once what he meant, and she smiled at him gratefully before replying, “I do, but now that you are back, I´m well again.”

Adrien returned her smile and kissed her again, although much more discreetly than he would´ve done had they been alone. As they all started a conversation, Sansa could only feel grateful by how love came in many ways and forms.

Soon enough the four of them fell into the same discussion, but they couldn’t really get into too much detail with any topic seeing as their party was not yet complete. Half an hour later, when the footman announced that lunch was ready, Sansa started to get worried.

“What if something´s happened to your brother?” she asked Bénoit as they all stepped outside towards the picnic table, hoping he would give her a different answer from Caroline’s. “I don’t think it was a good idea for them to go out exploring in Hadar’s condition. She’ll be giving birth before the summer’s over, after all.”

“I wouldn't know much about that,” Bénoit told her with a small grin, putting his arm across her shoulders. He was the son that most resembled Adrien physically. “But I shouldn’t worry, Mother. After all, if-”

“It’s all right, Sansa,” Adrien suddenly exclaimed with a laugh. “They’ve just returned. Look!”
Sansa turned around quickly in the direction her husband was pointing, and with relief her eyes fell on her eldest son as he strode towards them across the grounds of the château, his small wife walking beside him.

“Oh Sandor!” she called out, a little exasperated. “Hadar should be resting, not walking around the French countryside as she expects her first baby!”

But Hadar only laughed as she answered, “I’m all right! I think the fresh air is good for the baby! It has been restless and kicking since we left Beynac.”

As everyone gathered around the soon to be parents, Sansa watched her firstborn, who was the living image of his father. They had the same height and body built, the same hair colour and the same nature. They even shared the same name, although the son’s face had not been burned away the way his father’s had been. But there were traits of Sansa too in him, for Sandor had inherited her blue eyes, and his features took after her too, being more delicate than those of his sire.

When Sansa had first learned that she was expecting Sandor’s child, it had been as if she had been born again. And even though it had been quite hard to be a widowed mother initially, she had never been happier in America than when she was with her little boy. She gave him all the love she could not give his father, protecting him against the world as best she could while they were both poor, Arya helping along. And in the end, Sandor’s son had grown up happy and safe.

By the time Sansa had met Adrien, her son had been six years old, and it was mainly because of him that she had delayed giving her hand away in marriage. First of all because she feared Sandor would see Adrien as an intruder who wished to take her affection away from him, but also because throughout all his short life, Sandor had grown up with an idealized version of his father, encouraged by Sansa. She had praised Sandor Clegane to their son as if he was faultless, and even though as her child grew older he learned more and more about the true story behind his parents’ relationship and his father’s history, it seemed that in many ways, the son was destined to imitate the father no matter what.

For not only were they similar in nature, but in interests too. Sandor was a very intelligent young man who knew several languages, had travelled extensively and preferred to keep to himself. Although he had accepted Adrien as his adoptive father from the start and the two had developed a strong relationship full of confidence, and even though Sandor treasured his siblings too, he was a solitary man, and Sansa never knew him to be in a serious relationship with a woman until the war ended and he came back married to Hadar.

Yet, even though he was reserved by nature, Sandor had told his mother, whom he loved as much as his father had done, the story about how he had fallen in love with Hadar. Despite the fact that he had never confirmed it, Sansa knew that her eldest son was a spy for the French government.
And because of that she sometimes wondered when had Sandor first known fear, seeing as she had tried so hard to protect him from the world as he was growing up.

But whatever else he did in his line of work, during World War II, Sandor had been sent on a mission to occupied Poland, where he had met Hadar and her family. Sansa didn’t know the details, but apparently Hadar’s family had all died in a concentration camp, and her daughter-in-law would’ve done so too had Sandor not saved her.

Coming back to the present as Bénoit took Sansa’s hand to lead her towards the table, they all sat down to eat and talk, celebrating the fact that they were together today, an empty chair reserved in Théo’s memory. Hours later though, in the late afternoon, Sansa and Sandor were sitting in a chair under her favourite tree, smoking as they looked out at the breathtaking view of the valley beside their estate. Back at the house Adrien, Bénoit, Caroline and Hadar were playing a game, all of them aware that on this day, the date in which Sansa’s first husband had died, mother and son liked to spend some time on their own.

Such moments reminded Sansa of her years living in New York as a single mother, working two jobs just so she could take a proper care of her precious child. Yet despite the hardships they had know, both of them had had been as happy in their little one room flat in Chelsea as they had been as they visited the Australian Outback in some family vacation, or spent together a rainy afternoon in Paris catching up.

“You’re going to be a wonderful father,” Sansa suddenly told her son, looking away from the view of the valley so she could stare at his handsome face, smiling as she realized that the length of his dark hair was as long as she remembered his sire had always had it. It was odd to think how his father had died around the same age as his son now was.

Sandor turned to look at her with a raised eyebrow, trying to figure out the true meaning behind her words. Then he grinned at her as he rasped, “I hope so. I wish to make you and Adrien proud… And father too.”

“Sandor would’ve been proud of you long before this,” Sansa assured her son, hearing echoes of his father in his voice. “You’re a good man, darling… Oh God, I can just imagine what your Father would’ve said had he been present when you first told us Hadar and you were expecting our grandchild!”

“Bloody hells?” Sandor guessed, snorting.

Sansa laughed and nodded. “Yes, something like that.”
“Well, he would´ve been proud of you too, Mum, if everything you´ve told me about him is true. As am I. Raising me up all on your own in a strange country when you were just a kid yourself. And look how far you´ve come. You´ve been brave for me all your life.”

It was Sansa´s turn to raise an eyebrow. Sandor had known she had in her the will to live a full life, which was why he had made her promise with his dying breath to do just that. And because of it, despite all the pain, loss, suffering and heartache, Sansa had become a better person. And yes, she had been brave in her own way too.

Suddenly, she felt her son´s large hand reach out for her own as a tear fell down her cheek. Around this time thirty six years ago, Sansa was falling in love with Sandor Clegane on board the Titanic, both of them completely unaware of what the future had in store for them, and yet utterly happy in their ignorance.

Perhaps we were meant to love each other so intensely because it was destined to be brief, she thought, recalling the bravest man she had ever known. But in those two days we were able to save each other in every possible way that a person can be saved.

“Yes,” Sansa said softly, agreeing with her son. “Sandor would´ve been proud… And I am proud of myself too.”

Her child squeezed her hand before sighing deeply, and then he growled, “Would you like to take the box out now?”

“Yes,” she answered with a smile, taking it out and placing it between them.

Every year on this day, except for wartime, Sansa and her son would look at the items on the little wooden box as a sort of ritual they held in Sandor´s memory. Inside there was an empty leather wallet and a massive, beautiful, cold diamond necklace, objects that served as links beyond time itself; proofs that she had once been Sansa Stark.

For a brief moment she stared at Le Couer de la Mer, thinking about how a woman´s heart was like an ocean full of secrets; recalling how the hardest part about being so poor all those years ago back in New York had been being so rich. But every time Sansa thought about selling the piece of jewelry, she would think of Joffrey, and how he could find out about her existence if she parted with it. At least I managed to do well without his help in the end. And to keep my son away from him.
Those thoughts led Sansa to discard the necklace without a second glance into the box so she could carefully hold Sandor’s old wallet in her hands. She had spent the money inside it during the first months in America, but at least she still had this record of her first love’s existence.

Sansa lifted the wallet for a closer look, her thumb rubbing it’s fading leather cover back and forth. Not a day went by when she didn’t think of Sandor Clegane, and yet it was only on the 12th of every April that she allowed herself to lay eyes on this object. Hugging the wallet close to her heart, Sansa closed her eyes and whispered Sandor’s name to herself ever so faintly, a soft smile on her lips as she recalled the way he’d looked when their eyes met as she was going down to dinner, just before they attended the steerage dance afterwards.

*I have no regrets*, she thought, remembering how there had been no unsaid things left between them, feeling overwhelmed once again by the love that had lived in her heart for decades, defying the test of time.

THE END

- “*Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it…*” (Song of Solomon 8.7)

- “*If there is any substitute for love, it is memory.*” (Joseph Brodsky)
Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked my take on how SanSan on Titanic would’ve been like! Thank you very much for reading, reviewing, leaving kudos and bookmarking! xD

Love you all my fellow SanSan fans!! <3

End Notes

So… I’m back with this fanfic! It’s all done, so you don’t have to worry it’ll be left unfinished (hehe). I’ve had this idea on my mind for three years now (the first two chapters were actually done back then), but I really began working on it over this summer.

And now five months later it’s all completed, along with a photostet for each chapter. It felt amazing to get back into the habit of writing, and now I can only hope you will all enjoy the final product as much as I liked coming up with it! But please bear in mind though that English is not my first language and I didn’t have a beta check it out beforehand.
(UPDATE: thefeatherofhope is now my beta! Can never thank her enough for her support and encouragement!)

Expect a new chapter every week!
Lots of love,
Caroh99 :)

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