Ice of the Heart

by Northern_Lady

Summary

Ser Jorah arrives at Winterfell to accept punishment for his crimes.

Notes

I know, I know, I have way too many unfinished stories and have no business starting another one. Sometimes the ideas just come to me and I have to write them. I am not sure where this one is headed but it demanded to be written.
Chapter 1

“Open the gates!” The call was sounded as Sansa and Jon sat down to dinner in the great hall of Winterfell.

“I suppose we should go see who it is.” Jon said as he looked longingly at his plate. It had been a busy day in court. The King in North never seemed to have time enough to eat.

“Whoever it is can be brought in.” Sansa said. “It’s probably just another messenger from our new Queen in the South. You should eat Jon.”

Jon sighed, pushed out his chair from the table and got to his feet. “I am going to go see who it is.”

“Jon!” Sansa protested. “At least take some bread with you.”

Jon grabbed a roll from the table and headed out of the great hall towards the yard.

“Fine, I’ll come too.” He heard Sansa say as she got up and followed after him.

When they reached the yard they found the gates open and a man sat on horseback wearing the familiar Mormont armor. Neither of them had ever seen this man before. He was older than most of the men Lyanna had sent to aid in the battle for Winterfell. Jon stopped a few feet from the man as he dismounted his horse. Sansa held back, standing several feet behind Jon.

“Your grace,” The man said with was either a nod or a low bow, “I am Ser Jorah of House Mormont. I came here to accept punishment for my former crimes against House Stark.”

Jon wasn’t sure what crimes the man was talking about. He did know however that this was Lord Commander Mormont’s son. Longclaw rightfully belonged to him. Lord Jeor had told him that his son fled Westeros. “What exactly were your crimes?”

Ser Jorah could hardly meet Jon’s eyes as he replied to Jon. “Years ago there were poachers on Bear Island. I sold them into slavery so that I might give my wife the life of wealth and luxury she was accustomed to. Your Lord Father sentenced me to death for my crimes but I fled to Essos to escape him.”

“So why return to Westeros now?” Jon asked him, confused.

“I have been in the service of Daenerys Targaryen for several years. I wished to see her win the Iron Throne before I die. I have seen that. There is nothing left for me to do now but accept the sentence that was handed to me years ago.” Ser Jorah said.

Jon took a step back. “You came here so I could kill you?”

“Surely you have executed men before?” Jorah asked.

“I have, but not one of them ever offered themselves up so courteously.” Jon said. “Your crimes were against my father and his laws. I have no cause to kill you. If you wish to right your crimes then you should seek out those you sold into slavery and buy their freedom, or compensate their families. Your death accomplishes nothing.”

“I do not even remember the names of those I sold into slavery. There is no hope of helping them now. My death is coming within the next few years either way. I was ordered by my queen to find a
cure. It doesn’t exist.” Jorah said, and he pulled up his sleeve and showed Jon the grey scales on his arm. “Since I must die, I’d rather die restoring what is left of my honor than go insane like the stone men.”

Jon stared at the arm with concern. “You sold men into slavery and took away the rest of their lives and freedom. Greyscale is already taking your own life and freedom. I don’t think any execution is necessary.”

Ser Jorah sighed, both saddened and relieved by this news. “What will I do while I wait to die?”

“Serve House Stark the rest of your days.” Jon said.

“And when I am gone mad from disease and of no use to House Stark?”

“Only then will you be ready to die, not before.” Jon said.

Ser Jorah considered these words and then nodded. “I will do as you say.”

“Then come inside and join our feast. Tomorrow we will find some suitable work for you.” Jon said and he led the way back into the castle.

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After the meal was ended, Sansa joined Jon in his solar.

“What do you plan to do with him, with Ser Jorah?” She asked, looking up from her sewing.

“I don’t know. I only know that Lord Commander Mormont was a great man. I can not kill his son.” Jon said.

“Slavery is still against the law.” Sansa pointed out.

“As it should be.” Jon agreed. “That doesn’t mean the man should die for a crime committed twenty years ago. There are other ways to punish crimes. There are dungeons and work houses and fines to be paid. Besides, I think Ser Jorah has been haunted by his crimes for many years or else he would not be here.”

“And you think that is enough, the guilt he carries?” Sansa asked him.

“You don’t?”

“Honestly I don’t know or really even care. I just don’t understand what he can possibly do here.” Sansa said. “We already have a Master at Arms, a Kennel Master, a Steward, do you intend to have him join the household guard? The kingsguard?”

“Maybe, if he is any good with a sword.” Jon said.

“He’s not exactly young. What if he is no good with a blade?” She asked.

“I don’t know.” Jon said frustrated. “What do you want me to do with him? Would you prefer I send him back to Bear Island?”

Sansa sighed, putting her sewing down. “What if he is only a spy for Daenerys Targaryen? What if she sent him knowing you wouldn’t kill him?”

“I don’t see how she could have known that I wouldn’t.”
“Maybe she didn’t know. Maybe he was perfectly willing to die anyhow. I just don’t think you can trust him. He served her for years…” Sansa said.

“She is not our enemy.” Jon protested. “She gave us leave to rule the North without her interference. Why would she send a spy?”

“Because that’s what Queens do. That’s how politics work, with spies and whispers and money and promises and death.” Sansa explained, frustrated.

Jon regarded her with awe. “I don’t think he’s a spy but if you’re worried about it, I’ll leave him to you. He can be your shield and you can let me know if anything about him seems amiss, since you know so much about Southern politics.”

Sansa paled. “I already have a shield.”

“Brienne won’t be back for ages. Tarth is a long way away and her father could be ill a long time. Besides he needn’t be your sworn shield, just a temporary household guard.” Jon said.

“You would entrust your sister to a spy?” She asked warily.

“Sansa, he can’t hurt you within the walls of Winterfell. You are the King’s sister and everyone here is loyal to the both of us. He wouldn’t dare.” Jon said.

“I suppose you’re right.” She said, giving in.

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“I hear I am to be your shield, my lady.” Ser Jorah caught up to Sansa in the corridor after breakfast the following morning.

“I have heard the same.” Sansa said, barely stopping to acknowledge him.

“I trust you are in agreement to this?” Ser Jorah asked her, keeping up with her pace.

She stopped and turned to face him. “My brother is the King, my agreement with his wishes has very little to do with it.”

“I see.” Jorah said looking down at his feet for a moment. “I understand you are accustomed to Lady Brienne of Tarth as a shield. I will do my best for you in her absence.”

“I thank you for it Ser.” Sansa said, turning away from him and heading towards the Library. Sam Tarly would most likely be found there. She needed to ask him a question.

Ser Jorah followed her all the way to the library and posted himself just inside the door while Sansa went to find Sam. She found him asleep at a table full of open books.

“You ought to have blown the candles out when you started getting sleepy,” Sansa told him and he woke with a start.

“Oh! Oh you’re right. Sorry.” Sam said, looking at the melted candle wax all over the table and dripped onto the floor.

“Did you find it yet?” She asked him.

“Not yet. It would help a great deal if someone else could read Valyrian. Two sets of eyes are much better than one.” Sam said.
“Septa Mordane tried to teach me Valyrian. It was years ago. I’m afraid I remember very little of it” Sansa said sadly.

“It’s alright. I don’t need to find it right away anyhow.” Sam said, catching sight of Ser Jorah near the door. “Another Mormont?”

Sansa nodded. “That’s Ser Jorah. He arrived last night. Jon assigned him to be my shield until Brienne returns.”

“Wait… he’s commander Mormont’s son?” Sam said, both awed and frightened as he got to his feet.

“Yes, he’s also very ill, with greyscale, so keep your distance.” Sansa quietly.

Sam grew solemn at this news. “The lord commander saved my life. He forbid me to die... I have to help him. There’s a book…” Sam turned to the left and rushed down a row of shelves. “I know of a book that could help.”

Sansa groaned. “Did you forget about breakfast?”

Sam stopped and gave her a look. “Do I look like I ever forget about breakfast?”

“Well it’s already been served and you weren’t there and now you’re off searching for another book.: Sansa pointed out.

“I didn’t forget. I just slept too long. That’s alright, I’ll just eat twice as much at lunch.” Sam said happily. “I do it all the time. Sometimes I do it even when I did have breakfast.”

Of course he did. “Well… I’ll leave you to it then.” Sansa took a step back and took her leave of the young maester.

“Where to now, my lady?” Ser Jorah asked as she met him at the door.

“The godswood.” She said and he followed after her as she left the castle.
Chapter 2

The godswood at Winterfell was not unlike the godswood Ser Jorah had grown up with at Bear Island. He had not set foot in such a place in more than twenty years. The gods, if they did indeed exist, would want nothing to do with him now he was sure.

He kept his distance and watched Sansa Stark as she prayed. She was a beautiful young woman. He had never expected that the king in the north would let him live let alone give him the duty of guarding his pretty sister. Ser Jorah had guarded a woman for many years of his life thus far. From what little he knew her, Sansa seemed to be very different than Dany. She was softer somehow and perhaps more kindhearted as well. Sansa concerned herself with worrying that Jon and Sam were well fed and that the smallfolk within her gates were warm. Dany was above such things and would have assigned those sorts of duties to someone else. As sister to the king, Sansa might have done the same but she didn’t, probably because she cared about these things on a personal level. And for all her kind courteousness, there was something cold within Sansa as well. Ser Jorah had always been able to read people and after the space of a few hours spent with Sansa he was convinced that she kept something cold close to heart, something painful that she tried to keep hidden. Perhaps it was the deaths of her family in recent years. Rumor had it that Sansa had seen her father beheaded. That alone would be enough to chill any person.

Sansa got to her feet once her prayers had ended and turned to Ser Jorah. “Brienne always asked me what I pray for. I am sure you are wondering the same.”

“Indeed.” He replied though it hadn’t occurred to him to be curious about her prayers.

“They’re not real prayers...well I don’t expect any gods are going answer anyway. I just come here because I like this place.” Sansa admitted.

“That is understandable. A godswood does have a certain otherworldly beauty.” he said truthfully.

“So does the Wall. Have you been there Ser?” She asked him as she began to make her way out of the godswood.

“I’m afraid that is one of the few places on the world I have not visited.” He replied following her out of the woods.

“You were in Essos a long time. You have seen all the free cities?” She asked him.

For the greater part of the morning Jorah told Sansa about the his many travels all while Sansa worked on a tapestry in the small hall. She was a pleasant companion and even seemed to take an interest in his stories.

The first day at Winterfell went quite well. Everyone he met was kind and did not treat him like the criminal he was. They didn’t even treat him like he was diseased. Maybe Jon hadn’t told them. Maybe Jon was unaware of how greyscale spread. Jorah was careful to keep his arm well wrapped
and to keep his distance from everyone all the same. That ought to be enough. He had lived at
Dany’s court for more than a year that way and no one else took ill in all that time.

At evening he escorted Sansa back to her room and went on to the room two doors across from hers
that had been given to him as his own room. He found it difficult to sleep that night. His fears of
going mad from disease kept him awake a great deal as of late. He finally did fall asleep at a late hour
only to awaken to screaming down the hall.

Jon was already in the hallway when Jorah got there. Jon unlocked Sansa’s door and went inside.
Jorah listened from the doorway of his room as Jon woke his sister and tried to comfort her. Two
maids went into the room carrying mulled wine and fresh linens then went back out again. A short
while passed and all grew quiet. Jon exited the room and found Ser Jorah standing in his own
doorsway watching with concerned eyes.

“She has nightmares.” Jon said as explanation. “Nightmares of terrible things that happened to her
not so long ago.”

“What happened to her?” Jorah asked.

“It’s not my place to share the details but anyone here could tell you that Sansa was married to
Ramsay Bolton for a time and Bolton was a cruel man.” Jon said.

Jorah nodded as if he understood when in truth he didn’t really understand much of anything about
the situation.

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Ser Jorah was wakened again early the next morning by the pounding knocking noise on Sansa’s
doors.

“I found it Sansa! I found it!” Samwell Tarly was shouting.

Sansa wrenched open her door. “You found the cure?”

“Not that.” He said, his enthusiasm dampened. “I found the prophecy!”

“Oh! And what does it say, exactly?” She asked him.

“Well I didn’t find the exact prophecy. I found the name of the book where it’s written...also his
name is Azor Ahai just like Melisandre said.. All I have to do is send for the book in Old Town.”
Sam said.

“And what if they don’t have the book in the citadel? Or what if they won’t send it all the way to
Winterfell?” Sansa asked.

“Then I suppose I’ll have to go there and get it.” Sam said, excited about the prospect.

“Are you sure it’s worth going so far?” She asked him.

“You and I know the truth. Jon needs to be convinced. If this is what it takes to save the realm…”
Sam began.

“How is Jon going to save the realm?” Jorah asked from his place in the hall outside his room. “The
realm is at peace.”

“North of the wall it isn’t.” Sam said. “The army of the dead is coming.”
“Tell me more.” Jorah said, wanting to know about this cause his father had been so invested in.”
Chapter 3

Two weeks passed. Sansa grew accustomed to Ser Jorah’s company and was almost convinced that he was not a spy after all but had been sincere in wanting to pay for his crimes. She knew a great deal of his history now and also knew that he was a true Northerner. He had the northern accent as well as the dour northern sense of humor, plainness of dress, as well as the beliefs about honor and justice. She had met many knights in her years at Kinglanding and most of them were quite proud of their titles and fancy armor. Ser Jorah seemed to carry none of the arrogance she had come to expect from a knight. This discovery both surprised and confused Sansa.

Jon on the other hand was having second thoughts about letting Ser Jorah stay.

“Maybe I should send him back to Bear Island.” He told Sansa one evening as they sat alone in his solar.

“Why?” She asked, suddenly not liking this turn of conversation.

“Lyanna Mormont is young. Maybe she would like the assistance and advice of her family.” Jon suggested.

“She has been ruling Bear Island just fine on her own. I doubt she wants a man to come and take over.” Sansa said thoughtlessly.

Jon regarded her with surprise. “You’d rather I left you to rule winterfell alone?” he asked.

“That’s not what I said.” Sansa protested.

“No but it’s something you have hinted at for years, that I don’t give you enough input or ever ask your opinion.” Jon went on.

“That’s not what this is about.” Sansa said, wanting to avoid another argument with Jon. “If Ser Jorah had wanted to go home, he would have gone there instead of coming here.”

“Perhaps he would have but I’m starting to think it might be dangerous to let him stay.” Jon said sadly.

“You’re the one who insisted he wasn’t a spy.” She countered.

“And I stand by that. He’s not a spy but he does have a disease.”

“He keeps his arm covered. Greyscale only spreads by touch.” Sansa said a little anxiously.

“And what if someone were to touch him accidentally? What if we don’t really understand greyscale at all?” Jon asked her with concern.

“Sam is trying to learn about it. Give him a little more time. Don’t send Ser Jorah away just yet.” Sansa said, her tone almost pleading.

“You don’t want him to go?” Jon asked her with realization.

“I...I suppose not.” Sansa said, barely able to admit it to herself she felt herself blushing and couldn’t for the life of her figure out why.

Jon noticed her flush cheeks. “Sansa, are you alright?”
“I’m fine!” She said, her tone a little more angry than she had intended. She set her sewing aside and got to her feet. “Perhaps I had best got to bed.”

“Goodnight Sansa.” Jon said and he watched her go, still unsure of what could possibly be going on her head.

The entire household, servants and all, had gathered at the gates to greet the returning Master of Ships. Sansa had never known Ser Davos Seaworth very well but when Jon had chosen the man as master of ships it was clear he had made the right choice. Davos had been away for months at sea and at Bear Island. Lady Lyanna Mormont had welcomed him to her home and somehow advising her had helped him through the loss of princess Shireen. Now it was time for Davos to return to his King with news of trade on the sea.

Davos greeted each person in line at the gates, stopping to say a few kind words to each one, lords and lowborn alike. That was one of things Jon had liked about the man, that he didn’t care for blood or titles, only about honor. Davos stopped in front of Sansa when he came to her place in the line.

“It is good to see you again my lady.” Davos said.

“You as well Ser.” She replied.

His eyes fell on Ser Jorah behind her.

“This is Ser Jorah of House Mormont.” Sansa made the introduction. “He is serving as my shield while Brienne cares for her father.”

“Yes, Lady Lyanna spoke of him.” Ser Davos said. “In fact, she had heard that he was quite ill. Is that true?” Davos asked the both of them.

“Aye, it’s true.” Jorah answered.

“I may be able to be of some help with that. We will speak of it after the feast.” Davos said, and moved on down the line of people.

Sansa paced the small hall endlessly while they waited for Ser Davos. Ser Jorah watched her from his place along the wall.

“You look as anxious as I should be feeling.” He finally spoke up.

“You’re not worried?” She stopped pacing to ask him.

“I am far past worry.” Jorah said.

“And yet you stand there so calmly.” Sansa said.

“Those are my house words are they not? Here we stand.” He said.

“I suppose you were accustomed to standing calmly though all sorts of things being a queensguard.” Sansa said.

“I suppose you were accustomed to a different shield. You needn’t concern yourself with the likes of me.” he said.
She stared at him. “What is that supposed to mean? I should be happy that you’re dying?”

“Not happy...but you knew of my condition from the moment I came to Winterfell. You knew I would die and Brienne will return to be shield. There’s no cause to care…”

“There’s every cause to care!” She replied rather forcefully. She took a breath to calm herself. “I only meant…” But Sansa didn’t have the words to explain herself. She didn’t quite understand herself at all.

A knock sounded at the door. “Enter. Come in.” They both said at once.”

Ser Davos Seaworth entered the room, followed by Samwell Tarly.
“I am a simple man.” Davos began. “And unfortunately this isn’t going to be simple. The truth is, I wasn’t there when Shireen Baratheon was struck with greyscale but I heard the tale many times. Maester Cressen didn’t know what to do for her. Stannis sent for healers from all over. No one knew what to do for her, except one. His name was Kren. I don’t know where he hailed from and I don’t know where he went when he left but I do know how he banished the disease she carried.” Davos halted speaking, seemingly hesitant to go on.

“Well, maesters have tried all sorts of things to cure greyscale.” Sam spoke up. “Some of the things they have tried through the ages have been pretty strange.”

Davos sighed. “Well I suppose I’ve got no choice but to tell you. As you may already be aware, many times children don’t always die of the disease. Shireen wasn’t like that. She was going to die. She was on the brink of death until Kren came. Kren brought with him a child who had survived greyscale some years earlier. He took blood from that child, a small amount, not enough to truly harm him, and he put that blood in the veins of Shireen and within hours she had taken a turn for the better.”

“The blood of a child?” Jorah asked, disturbed,

“Not just any child.” Davos clarified. “Only a child that has survived the disease can be of any use. Kren insisted that those who survive have properties in their blood that will help others survive. Clearly Kren was right but Lord Stannis didn’t want the story of his daughter’s cure widely known. The people already thought harshly of him without tales that he took the blood of a child.”

“It actually makes sense.” Sam said, lost in thought. “I read something once about the properties of blood and-”

“Where would even find a child who had survived?” Sansa interrupted Sam’s ramblings.

“There are plenty of children who have survived greyscale in Essos.” Ser Jorah said. “And probably would be willing to help if offered enough money, but how exactly does the blood get into my veins?”

“Kren had a device of some sort.” Davos said. “He made it himself. I don’t know how it worked.”

“I can come up something.” Sam offered. “I’m sure of it.”

“Good.” Davos said. “In a fortnight I am making a trip to Essos. I will find a child who has a family willing to allow him make the trip to Westeros and I will return him home the next trip. The question is, how much are you willing to pay?”

“As much as I have to.” Jorah said.
Once the details of the plan were fully ironed out, Sam and Davos left Sansa and Jorah to themselves.

“Do you think it will work?” Sansa asked him.

“I don’t know, but it can’t hurt to try.”

She nodded. “I think I’d like a walk in the godswood.”

She headed towards the yard followed by her shield.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Again, not a terribly long chapter but longer than the last one. Slightly.

It had been difficult enough for Sansa to sleep because of the many nightmares she was plagued with. Now, with this news from Ser Davos, Sansa could hardly sleep at all. She didn’t know why Ser Jorah’s illness should worry her so. It didn’t make any sense. She supposed she had gotten to know him fairly well over the last couple of weeks but he had been right, there was no cause to care about his welfare as much as she did. And yet she couldn’t stop worrying.

Sansa got out of bed and headed into the corridor with thoughts of going to the kitchen for some warm milk. Ser Jorah’s door was open as she passed by his room.

“My lady are you alright?” He said as she went passed his door.

Sansa stopped. “I’m alright, I just can’t sleep.”

“To be truthful, neither can I.” He said.

“Walk with me to the kitchens?” She asked, since he was awake anyhow.

“Aye.” Jorah moved from where he sat on the edge of his bed and accompanied her to the kitchen.

In the kitchen Sansa warmed some milk for herself and Ser Jorah took mulled wine. They found a small table that the servants used for meals and sat there to have their drinks. They didn’t talk about Ser Davos or any hopes for a cure. They didn’t talk about much of anything really. Some time later Sansa awoke and found herself being carried by Jon.

“What’s going on?” She asked him. They were in the corridor nearing her room.

“You fell asleep in the kitchen.” Jon told her.

“Let me down. I can walk.” She said and he let her down. “Where is Ser Jorah? Why did no one wake me?”

“He spoke to you and tried to wake you. When that didn’t work he came for me. You were sleeping so soundly that I couldn’t wake you either.” Jon explained. “So I thought it best to carry you back to bed. Did you take a sleeping dram?”

“No I. I just fell asleep.” Sansa said. In that moment she realized something. She had felt safe with Ser Jorah. It had been so peaceful sitting there in the kitchen with him. That was why she had been able to sleep so soundly. That was why she was so worried for his life. After everything she had suffered, there were very few men who she felt truly comfortable with. She trusted Jon of course and Samwell seemed harmless enough. Other men had her feeling a certain anxiety in the back of her mind. It wasn’t terror or fear, really. It was an ongoing sense of mistrust. She didn’t feel that with Ser Jorah. She supposed it helped that Queen Daenerys had already trusted him for many years. If he were the sort of man to harm a woman, he would not have been serving her. The new queen had already enacted harsh punishments in the South for crimes against women and had executed some of
her own Dothraki for rape during the sack of Kingslanding. No, Ser Jorah wasn’t one of those sorts of men. He was probably the closest thing to a true knight she was ever going to meet.

As Sansa climbed back into her bed she decided that it might have been nice if Ser Jorah hadn’t been ill and he might have carried her back to her room himself. It would have been a little like something out of the songs. She might have liked that.

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Ser Jorah dropped the rags that had covered his arm into the fireplace in his chambers. Samwell had instructed him that the rags could not be washed. They had to be burned and that he must wash his hands in vinegar and wine each time he changed the rags. Jorah had followed the instructions carefully everyday since his arrival in Winterfell. The young maester had high hopes for the plan Ser Davos had set in motion. Jorah himself didn’t want to allow himself the luxury of hope. He had already accepted that he would die, had even tried to decide the manner of his death by presenting himself to Jon. None of that had been to any avail.

“Are you ready?” Sansa asked from his doorway. They were already late for breakfast.

“I am.” He said, following her out.

“Jon is leaving today.” Sansa said sadly as they walked.

“I am aware, but he won’t be gone for long.” He said.

“I don’t see why he needs to go to the Deepwood Mott. The Glovers ought to know that he’s needed in Winterfell.” Sansa said.

“They most likely do know it. That’s why the visit is only to be for a few weeks.” Jorah pointed out.

“Samwell is leaving too, in three days.” Sansa said. “Everyone is leaving.”

Jorah knew that Samwell was making a trip to the citadel to find a particular book and to seek help with the greyscale problem. “Sam and Jon are hardly everyone.”

Sansa stopped walking and turned to him. “I forbid you to die.”

“What?” Jorah asked, a little stunned.

“Sam told me that your father forbid him to die and it was those words that kept him alive.” Sansa said. “Everyone I care about either leaves me or dies..so..I forbid you to die.” With tears in her eyes Sansa turned away from him and kept walking towards the great hall.

Ser Jorah went after her, unable to trust himself to speak.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Too soon for these sorts of feels? Maybe, but I couldn't wait any longer.

The first night of Jon’s absence Sansa couldn’t fall asleep at all. More than a year ago he had promised to protect her, to never let anyone like Ramsay hurt her again. She had told him then that he couldn’t protect her, that no one could protect anyone. It was something that she still believed. No one was as safe as they believed themselves to be. She didn’t need protection, she needed only to face the fact that life is not a song. The world was not a kind place and people were perfectly willing to hurt one another whenever it suited them. So it shouldn’t matter that Jon was away. His being gone should not disturb her sleep in the least. And yet it did. Eventually she managed to sleep in short increments of twenty or thirty minutes only to be awake again for an hour or more.

The next day Sansa was so exhausted that she fell asleep at breakfast.

“Did you sleep poorly, my lady?” Ser Jorah’s voice woke her up.

“Oh..” Sansa lifted her head to find that most the great hall had been cleared of people. Only she and Ser Jorah and few servants clearing tables remained. “Yes, I’m afraid I did.” Sansa admitted. “I’m not sure that I slept much at all.”

“Perhaps it is not my place to ask, but do the nightmares keep you awake every night?” He asked kindly.

“Not every night. Sometimes I go a week or two and have none at all.” Sansa told him. “Last night I was simply worried because Jon isn’t here.”

“I am sure his journey to Deepwood will be perfectly safe, just as you are perfectly safe here in Winterfell.” Ser Jorah said. “Though I understand that you would miss your family after being separated for so many years.”

“It isn’t as simple as that.” Sansa said. “Jon and I argue all the time. Of course I will miss him. He is the only family I have. I would be lost without him.. But..” She wasn’t sure if she should continue.

“It’s alright.” Jorah said, seeing her hesitation. “You needn’t tell me if it makes you uncomfortable.”

Sansa was tempted to take the escape he offered her and not say anything else. It would be easier. In spite of her usual reticence, she found herself wanting to tell him anyway. “I don’t feel safe if Jon isn’t here. That probably sounds quite mad because Winterfell is my home and everyone here is loyal to House Stark. Except that Winterfell was my home when Ramsay Bolton lived in it too. It was Jon who risked his life... who nearly died to get our home back and capture Ramsay..it was Jon who promised he would protect me and never let anyone hurt me again....” Sansa brushed away a few unwanted tears.

“What did Bolton do to you?” Jorah asked.

“Every night he hurt me. Every night.” She said, not wanting to explain further details than that. He would understand what she meant. “Every day he kept me locked in my room. Sometimes I would...
seem to befriend a servant and he would have them flayed. He brought me out into the yard to show me the people he flayed on my account. He’d had mistresses before he married me and when he grew bored of them he would hunt them on the grounds of Winterfell with a pack of his dogs. Sometimes he flayed those women. Or let his dogs have them...I was terrified every moment of what he might do next…”

“I am sorry.” Jorah said sadly, disturbed by her story. “You should never have treated in such a manner. No one should. I suppose that is why you prefer a woman as your shield.”

“Brienne has helped me a great deal. I will be glad for her return. She saved my life but I wouldn’t say I prefer her company.” Sansa said quite honestly and then felt herself blush at having said something so bold.

Ser Jorah didn’t seem to know what to say to that and to save herself from the awkwardness of the situation, Sansa got to her feet. “I really should finish that tapestry today.”

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Ser Jorah kept to his place along the wall in the small hall that day while Sansa and a few other ladies worked on a tapestry. Being her shield wasn’t as formal an occupation as Queensguard had been because with Sansa he was sitting in a chair for much of the time and was even reading a book for the greater part of the day. Some of the time he only pretended to be reading. Instead of reading he was watching Sansa. It both angered and disturbed him that she had suffered such abuse. And for some strange reason that he could not fathom, she seemed to enjoy his company and greatly wanted him to survive his illness. Dany had wanted him to survive too he supposed but she had been willing to see him go. She had other guards and other advisors and even lovers. He wasn’t needed at her court. Maybe he was needed at Winterfell. Maybe this beautiful young woman with her sad eyes and ice in her soul could give him a reason to try to live.

After the evening meal Jorah escorted Sansa back to her rooms wondering what she planned to do with herself for the rest of the evening. This time of night she ordinarily spent alone with Jon in his solar. Without Jon, she truly would be alone for the rest of the evening.

Sansa paused outside the door of Jon’s rooms as they reached them. She sighed and then moved on to her own rooms. She stopped there and looked up at him as if to say something, then changed her mind. “Well, good night Ser.” She said finally.

He knew that she had probably been considering asking him to stay and talk with her or something of that nature. She most likely didn’t want to spend the evening alone but she was either too timid or too polite to ask him to stay.

“The hour is yet early. If you have no plans to occupy yourself perhaps you might consider a game of cyvasse? I’ll wear gloves and not touch any of the pieces.” He offered.

Sansa’s sad demeanor brightened just a little and she graced him with a small smile. “I would like that.” She said.

For several hours they played the game and chatted about various things. They talked about happenings in the South, the White Walkers, and more stories from his time in Essos and her time in Kingslanding. Eventually, Ser Jorah spoke of his wife Lynesse.

“At that point I left Lynesse behind.” He said, explaining the full story of how he fled westeros.

“Do you know what happened to her?” Sansa asked him.
“I assume she is still with Tregar Ormollen.” He said. “Wherever she is, I am sure she is happier there than she was with me.”

“But why? Is Bear Island truly so terrible?” She asked.

“Bear Island is not Old Town and House Mormont does not have the wealth that House Hightower does. I loved her, but it wasn’t enough.” He said truthfully.

Sansa didn’t reply. She sighed, moved her cyvasse piece, and Jorah took note of the tears in her eyes.

“I suppose it is a sad story.” Jorah said in response to her reaction.

“I’m not sad.” She said softly. “I’m angry.”

“Why?” He asked her, confused.

“Because if I had been married to a man who was kind to me and who loved me enough to do everything he could to make me happy, nothing could induce me to leave him.” Sansa said, her voice breaking as actual tears started to fall. She brushed them away angrily. “I’m sorry I...it’s getting late. Perhaps I had best go to bed.”

Jorah didn’t move. For Lynesse love had not been enough and Dany had not cared for him in return either. Was Sansa simply caught up in the story he told or was she saying something deeper? “Will you be able to sleep?”

“No.” She admitted. “But I have to try.”

“Is there anything I can do to make it easier?” He asked her gently.

“Perhaps, but it would be presumptuous to even ask it of you.” She said worriedly.

He shook his head. “Nothing you could ask of me would be presumptuous.” he said, the words coming to him quickly, a simple way to let her know he cared without saying so outright. “I will do whatever you ask if it makes you happy.”

If her wide eyes and small gasp was any indication, she had understood his meaning.

“My lady? How can I help?” He asked, bringing her back to reality.

“Would you be opposed to sleeping outside my door?” She finally asked. “I think I would prefer it if my shield were closer.”

“Of course. I’ll send in your maids and be back momentarily.”

“Ser Jorah?” She called after him. “Thank you.”
Sansa felt more at ease to sleep with her shield outside her door. However she also felt something else that she had not anticipated. Ser Jorah’s words that evening had stirred up feelings that she had been unaware she was capable of. For the first time in many years, she had to admit to herself that she cared for someone romantically. Not since she had been given tourney favor by Loras Tyrell had she experienced these sorts of feelings. She had known of course that she cared about Ser Jorah’s well being. She had known that she felt safe with him and enjoyed his company. She had not realized until he offered to see to her happiness that her feelings were of the romantic nature, or perhaps she had simply not wanted to accept that she was could care for a man after everything she had suffered at the hands of men.

The feeling was bittersweet. A kind and honorable man had indicated that he cared for her. She cared for him in return. But he was dying and she could never touch him or she would die as well. At least she could spend time with him, perhaps she could even have a few years of his company. More than that if Ser Davos and Sam could help him.

Sleep did eventually come to her in spite of her troubled thoughts. When she awoke in the morning and opened her chamber door, Jorah was in the midst of moving his cot out of the corridor.

“How did you sleep, my lady?” he asked her.

“Better. Much better.” she told him. “Was it very uncomfortable out here?”

“Not terribly, and it was no trouble.” he said. He pulled the cot back into his chambers just a few doors away and did not return to her right away.

She knew his routine well enough by now to know that he was occupied with changing the bandage on his arm. She moved to his open doorway as he tossed the rags into the embers of the fire.

“Does it hurt?” she asked.

He glanced over at her as he worked to tie on new rags. “Yes. Some days more than others.”

“And there is nothing that can be done for the pain?” she asked, concerned.

“Perhaps milk of the poppy but I don’t wish to have my senses dulled with that just yet. Later when the disease is spread, I might take it.” He explained as he washed his hands in wine and vinegar.

“My father had milk of the poppy for a time.” she said sadly. “He was not the same at all while he had it.”

“Aye. No one is. I had it once long ago, after the Greyjoy rebellion. I was wounded in the battle that king Robert knighted me for. I am not in any hurry to have it again.”
He had finished tending his arm and he turned to escort Sansa to breakfast. Some part of Sansa wanted to tell him how she felt about his words the previous night. She had lost too many people she cared about to dare not tell him. It would be better to tell him now before too much time passed and it became more awkward to broach the subject. But she didn't know what to say. Should she ask him what he meant by his words, just to clarify? Should she simply tell him she cared for him? No, a lady wouldn't simply declare her love for a man. Besides, it wasn't exactly love although she did care for him. And what if she had misunderstood and he hadn't meant what she thought at all? Whatever she needed to say, she couldn't find the words.

“Is something wrong?” Jorah asked her as he moved to walk with her to breakfast.

“No I… there is nothing wrong. I was just thinking...about what you said last night…” Sansa said, unsure how she was going to explain herself having broached the subject. Jorah sighed. “If my words were too forward, please forgive me. I had not intended to make you uncomfortable.”

“That's the thing.” Sansa replied a little anxiously. “You didn't. You didn't make me uncomfortable. In fact, I appreciated it a great deal that you would say something like that.”

Jorah stopped walking and turned to face her. “What are you saying?”

“I don't know exactly.” she struggled to form her reply. “I suppose that depends on what exactly you were saying, or what you meant to convey by your words last night.”

Jorah swallowed. “I had no place saying anything to indicate I cared for you.” He said sadly. “You are a young and beautiful woman and are the sister of the king. I am only an old man and as your shield, I spoke out of place.”

“No, you didn't.” she said, meeting his eyes. “You said exactly the words I needed to hear.”

“But Sansa, I may not live much longer and even if I do, I can never...you deserve better. As such, my words were misplaced.”

“No they weren't.” Sanda insisted. “Unless you didn't mean to say you cared?”

“I did. I still do, but it isn't enough to care.” he said.

“It is for me.” She told him. “If that is all I can ever have, it will be enough.”

Ser Jorah was at a loss for words. He just stood there a moment looking stunned. “You can't mean that.” he said finally finding his voice.

“I can and I do.” she said, tears in her eyes.

“Then the gods are cruel to wait until I am ill with disease to send you to me.” he said.

“Yes, the gods are cruel indeed.” she agreed.

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The rest of the day was both happy and sad. Jorah could hardly believe that it was real. Sansa went about her regular activities as if their conversation had never even happened. It was her occasional glance in his direction and the small smiles she shared with him when no one else was watching that let him know that it had not been a dream or delusion. By some miracle, Sansa Stark cared for him. He decided before the day had ended that he was not going to let that affection go to waste. Perhaps
he could never be her lover but he would be the best shield he could be and would do everything he could to see to her happiness in the time he had left.

Late that afternoon Samwell found them in the small hall. He carried a book and a box full of vials and herbs and his excitement over whatever he wished to tell them was apparent before he ever spoke a word.

“I have good news.” Sam began. “I was reading a text by Maester Crydon. He studied greyscale a great deal. He has written about a way that he says will help to manage the pain. Its an ointment for the skin. Do you wish to give it a try Ser?”

“I suppose it can't hurt to try.” Jorah said.

“Well, actually it can.” Sam said. “If it we use this it might feel worse for a time before feeling better.”

“How much worse?” Jorah asked.

“The text used the word, agony.” Sam admitted.

“Then perhaps it isn't safe.” Sansa spoke up anxiously.

“Oh it is perfectly safe and all of the author's patients had relief from their pain but I am afraid it did get worse before it got better.”

“You are sure it will be improved in the end?” Jorah asked.

“I have used four other treatments from this book and every one has turned out well.” Sam said.

“Alright. Do as you will.” Jorah consented.

Both Sansa and Jorah watched as Sam laid his ingredients out on the table and began to make what looked like a potion of sorts. He mixed and measured powders, crushed leaves from plants, added a few things neither of them recognized.

“I like making tinctures and salves.” Sam said as he worked. “It’s a little like cooking and I always did like cooking. Mostly though, it’s a little like magic, like making a potion.” He said cheerfully.

“I never did like cooking.” Jorah said dourly.

“Yes, well, you probably spent all your time learning sword fighting and doing knightly things.” Sam said, peeling a dried root with a knife as he spoke.

“Not all my time. I like books as well.” Jorah said.

“Really?” Sam asked a little surprised. “That’s strange because usually I find that those who are good with swords are not so interested in books.”

“Then maybe I’m no good with a sword.” Jorah pointed out.

“Oh I doubt that. I read about the siege of Pyke when king Robert knighted you. And I heard that you and Jaime Lannister came to a draw in a tourney once.” Sam said.

“Aye, that is the truth.” Jorah admitted.

“It’s ready.” Sam said, holding up the wooden bowl where he had mixed his remedy. “Are you
ready?"

Jorah moved to sit in a chair in the corner and removed the rags from his arm. Sam passed the bowl to Jorah.

“It’s quite sticky. Just put it on rather thick. You can burn the bowl when you are finished.” Sam said.

Jorah stared at the substance for a moment.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Sansa asked him.

“I am.” He said and began to follow Sam’s instructions.

Chapter End Notes

Please tell me that this isn't the chapter that ruins the story. Almost half of my stories have one and at that point I give up and stop writing because I don't know how to continue and I don't know how to go back and fix it. I do have plans for the further plot of this story...I just feel like it is moving too fast...
Agony was a word that didn’t do nearly enough to describe the pain caused by Samwell’s ointment. At first it was merely cold to touch. Within minutes it grew warm and was burning his skin. Jorah did not move from where he sat nor did he cry out in pain but his discomfort was clear in his features.

“How long?” He finally managed to ask.

“I don’t exactly know.” Sam said, a little uncomfortable with his lack of knowledge on the matter.

“You don’t know?” Sansa asked him, clearly upset.

“Well the book didn’t say and it’s not as if I’ve ever done this before.” Sam protested.

Several minutes passed of Sansa pacing the room and Sam watching him with concern before Jorah could not take the combination of pain he was feeling combined with being observed in this manner. He got to his feet and headed for the door.

“Where are you going?” Sansa asked him.

Jorah couldn’t answer her. He was in too much pain to speak. Sam caught Sansa’s arm before she could go after Jorah.

“Just...you should probably let him go.” Sam said with a shrug and a nod, “Knights don’t want their lady to see them in pain.”

“But I…I’m not.” Sansa wanted to go after him but Sam’s words made her hesitate. “I’m not his lady.”

“I have eyes. I see the way you look at him, the way you worry about him,” Sam said, “I’ll go. I’ll make sure he’s alright. I know you care about him but it’s best if I go.”

“Does everyone know?” Sansa asked, worried that perhaps she had somehow breached propriety.

“No, I don’t think so.” He said reassuringly. “I only noticed because Jon asked me to look out for you while he was gone... at least until it’s time for me to leave for Old Town. Anyhow, I’ve been watching, that’s how I noticed.”

“Oh…” Sansa breathed a sigh of relief.

“Anyhow, where do you suppose Ser Jorah has gone to?” Sam asked.

“Maybe the godswood.” Sansa suggested.

“Right. The godswood.” He moved for the door. “I’ll bring him back once he is free of pain.”

Sansa waited for hours. By the time Sam and Jorah did return she was frazzled with worry. It was nearly time for the evening meal in the great hall but she had not left the small hall in all that time.

“Well?” She asked the two men as they came into the door.
“Samwell was right. The pain is dulled for now.” Jorah said.

“Yes, and if you add more ointment before this wears off it won’t burn the next time.” Sam said and then taking one glance at the way Jorah and Sansa were looking at one another, decided he had better leave. “Anyhow, I will be in the great hall… eating… If you need me.”

“Are you alright?” Sansa asked him once Sam was gone.

“I am alright.” Jorah said.

Sansa burst into tears. “If I could, I would hug you now.”

“As would I.” Jorah said. “It’s best not to dwell on it. We should join the others for dinner.”

Sansa nodded, wiped away her tears, and made the walk to the great hall with her shield.

The days passed slowly. Samwell left on his trip for Old Town and Sansa was left to manage Winterfell alone. She didn’t mind. She knew how to manage a castle. It helped to have Ser Jorah as company. He left her to make her own decisions and did not offer any input unless he was asked. Sometimes she did ask his advice but mostly she managed on her own. In the evenings they played cyvasse together or read books. They tried not to speak of their feelings. It simply hurt too much to do so. It was simpler to just try to be content with one another’s company. Most nights Ser Jorah slept outside Sansa’s chambers because it helped her to sleep. They passed the time this way for a few weeks until Jon returned.

Sansa waited in the yard with everyone else on Jon’s arrival. She ignored decorum and ran to hug him as soon as he was dismounted. Jon smiled and embraced her firmly in response.

“It is good to be home.” Jon said as she let him go.

“How was your trip?” She asked him as they made their way inside.

“It went well. A defense strategy is in place in case that the White Walkers should make it past the Wall. The Umbers were in talks with us as well of course.” Jon explained.

“Good. Any word from Ser Davos while you were there?” Sansa asked, she knew that much of Jon’s correspondence was being sent to Deepwood for the duration of his stay there.

“No. None yet.” Jon said, his eyes falling on Ser Jorah who followed them at a distance. “How is he?”

“Sam gave him something for pain so at least that is improved.” Sansa said.

“And the disease has not spread further on his skin?”

“Not to speak of, no.” Sansa told him.

The Master at arms, Hiram, was approaching them and looked as if he had something important to say. “Sansa, I will speak with you further in my solar tonight, as usual?” Jon said.

Sansa nodded and let her brother go. Ser Jorah caught up to her. “You must be relieved to have him back.” He said.

“I am... but expects me in his solar tonight. I am glad to see him. I want speak with him tonight… but
he expects everything to go back to the way it was before he left.” Sansa said worriedly.

“Of course.” Jorah said. “He is unaware of how you have spent your evenings these past weeks. You can either let things return to how they were or tell him how they are going to be.”

“I’ll have to tell him.” Sansa didn’t really need to think about her answer.

“He may not like it,” Jorah pointed out.

“I don’t think he will dislike it,” Sansa protested.

“Sansa, not only am I many years your elder, I am here to serve house Stark to pay for my crimes, and I have a deadly disease. He isn’t going to like it. I thought you knew that or I might have never…” Jorah trailed off.

“Might have never what? Chosen to spend time with me? Let me know that you cared?” Sansa asked.

Jorah hung his head. “There will be strife between you and your brother because of me. That was not something I wanted.”

“It’s alright. I’m sure he will accept it given time. I’ll tell him tonight.” Sansa said.

He nodded. “As you wish.”
Chapter 9

Sansa was nervous all day leading up to the evening meal. The more she thought on it, the more she was convinced that Ser Jorah was right. Jon was not going to like hearing about what had transpired while he was away. He wouldn't understand or like to be aware of it. Even so, she didn't want to keep secrets from him. She had decided long ago to never do that to him again. She had to tell him. So she struggled all day with planning the best words to let him know.

They were nearing the end of the evening meal and servants had already begun to clear the tables when a familiar cry sounded, “Open the gates!”

Sansa grabbed Jon’s hand across the table to keep him from leaving this time.

“Fine,” he said with half a smile, “I will let him come to me this time.”

Moments later there were footsteps entering the great hall, two guards followed by a young woman wearing leather armor and a sword. Both Jon and Sansa spoke at the same time.

“Arya!”

The room fell silent, all eyes on the younger Stark girl they had all believed to be dead.

Arya endured their stares for but a moment. “Seven hells, if I had known the feast was over I might have arrived a little earlier.”

Jon laughed and got to his feet, knocking down his chair as he did so. He reached Arya before Sansa did and hugged her tightly. Sansa hugged her little sister as well.

“Where have you been?” Jon asked when he finally let her go.

“Everywhere.” she said simply. “I went where I needed to go and deal with our enemies.”

“You still have the sword I gave you...after all this time…” Jon noticed.

“Of course I do. Needle was all I had left. And it has saved my life many times over.” Arya told him.

Chaos followed for the rest of the evening. Food was brought out for Arya, questions were asked, stories were shared. It was good to have their sister home again but Sansa knew it was not the time to speak to Jon about Ser Jorah. He had always been close to Arya, closer even than she had. As glad as she was to see Arya, Sansa felt a little like her return meant that she was losing Jon. The three of them stayed up late into the night. Sansa was the first to retire.

Ser Jorah was awake as she passed his room to enter her own. She stopped at his doorway.

“I didn't tell him.” she explained. “I was going to but it isn't the right time.”

“While I value your honesty, there will never be a right time,” Jorah said.

“I know. Good night ser,” Sansa said and she moved on to her room where she fell into a restless sleep.
The next day found Arya and Jon sparring in the yard. Sansa watched from the balcony with Ser Jorah at her side.

“She is good with that blade of hers.” he commented. “Someone trained her well in the braavosi style.”

“Apparently that was Syrio Forel. Father told me she was having dancing lessons with him. It never made any sense why she would want that.” Sansa had only learned this information the previous night.

“The braavosi call their fighting a water dance, so strictly speaking, your father spoke the truth.”

“I suppose he did… look at them. Jon looks happier than I have seen him in ages.”

“I don’t know about that. He looked happy enough when he returned to you yesterday.” Jorah tried to cheer her with his words.

“I suppose it will always be like this now.” Sansa said, “The two of them sparring in the yard every day while I watch.”

“Sansa, I know it may feel like it right now, but Jon isn’t lost to you and your sister does care for you. Just because the two of them have a shared interest in swordsmanship doesn’t mean they don’t care about you.” Jorah said reassuringly.

“I know…I am glad that Arya is alive and that she is here…truly I am….for years I have worried about her and wanted her to return home…it’s just…”

“You feel lonely on the outside looking in. I understand that sentiment, believe me.”

“At least someone does,” Sansa said with a sigh.

Chapter End Notes

I have two more chapters written and posted them once only to delete them again as they seemed rather unpopular. At the moment I am stuck on what is the best path to continue this story. The path I wanted to go isn’t going so smoothly.

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