

Vulpes Vulpes and Canis Lupus

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/22797370) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/22797370>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	A Song of Ice and Fire - George R. R. Martin , A Song of Ice and Fire & Related Fandoms , Game of Thrones (TV)
Relationships:	Jon Snow/Sansa Stark , Arya Stark/Gendry Waters , Catelyn Stark/Ned Stark , Arya Stark & Sansa Stark , Jon Snow & Arya Stark
Characters:	Sansa Stark , Jon Snow , Jon Snow Aegon Targaryen , Arya Stark , Ned Stark , Nymeria (ASoIaF) , Ghost (ASoIaF) , Benjen Stark , Grenn (ASoIaF) , Pypar (ASoIaF) , Samwell Tarly , Catelyn Tully Stark , Bran Stark , Robb Stark , Rickon Stark , Jeor Mormont , Alliser Thorne , Tyrion Lannister , Robert Baratheon , Sandor Clegane , Cersei Lannister , Joffrey Baratheon , Jaime Lannister
Additional Tags:	Eventual Romance , Action & Romance , Drama & Romance , Romance , True Love's Kiss , One True Pairing , True Love , True Mates , Magic , Warging , Siren Sansa Stark , direwolves , The North (ASOIAF) , Children of the Forest , Alternate Universe - Westeros , The Night's Watch (ASoIaF) , Banshee Powers , powers , greensight , Other Additional Tags to Be Added , jonsa , Alternate Universe - Magic
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-02-19 Updated: 2022-05-23 Words: 21,972 Chapters: 6/?

Vulpes Vulpes and Canis Lupus

by [GreenseerofGondor](#)

Summary

Set in the book universe Sansa's direwolf, Lady is still killed at the Trident, but everything changes from there. An irate and heart broken Sansa has a change of heart and reconciles with her sister, but she can not forgive Ned. Sansa and Arya run away to find Nymeria and be where nowhere will find them: The Wall. Both girls will learn about their magical heritage, forge an unbreakable bond, prove the paradigm of their era false, and reunite with Jon Snow.

Notes

So this my first Jonsa fic and attempt to explore A Song of Ice and Fire. It may be rocky and I am not promising perfection, but I will my damned hardest to create a story worth reading and enjoying. I am still reading the books (I am at A Storm of Swords currently) but I do my best to remain faithful to their tone and characterization. Nevertheless, prepared to be confronted by some Out of Character behavior.

I also apologize in advance if the POV's are hard to follow or the story seems rushed or choppy. I haven't written fanfiction in several months so I am a little rusty.

Please enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Unleashed

POV Eddard Stark

Ned waved Jory Cassel away and proceeded to his bloody business. But he hovered for several moments to lend support to the Warden of the North.

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POV Eddard Stark

The Valyrian Steel Blade plunged downward immediately leaving behind a quickly blooming ruby rose. Each petal was once Lady's blood, the fluid that gave her life. Now this ichor was staining her grey fur; drowning it in a dark scarlet syrup. Never again would the dire wolf's fur glisten from Sansa's adoring grooming; its future was one of ruin. A sharp yipe coincided with the thrust of the sword and Ned's heart fragmented.

A spray of warm fluid came up to greet him once the sword cut through flesh like scissors through fabric. Some of the jettisoned blood found its way into Ned's mouth and he was flooded with the acrid taste of iron. He involuntarily gagged and Ice slipped from his hands as he fell to his knees; the dirt of the stable floor did little to break the impact.

Ned then turned to the side and vomited harshly, the stomach in his muscles went taut and twisted in pain. In his sickened haze Ned looked up and saw the prone silhouette of Lady. Her soft and pink tongue lay askew from her slackened jaw and her grey ears drooped dismally. Worst of all, even harder to bear than the immense laceration sewn into her chest, were her vacant eyes.

Lady's lids hadn't closed all the way when she died so there were slivers of faded flaxen peeking out, a macabre contrast to the gleaming gold of her eyes mere moments before. Ned pitifully crawled over to Lady and gingerly closed her eyes. She deserves to rest in peace without having to see the face of her murderer. Ned was disgusted with himself, shame pulsed through his body and he grew sick once more.

He thought to himself. I've done the unforgivable; I've slain my house's sigil, but even worse my Sansa's beloved companion. How much of a craven was I to have yielded to Robert so easily? Who have I become, and who will I become the further south we travel?

Ned swallowed the rancid flavor of nausea and moved to stand while still pondering the self-imposed question. However, Ned could not answer before a shrill scream emanated from the inn across the yard.

The shriek far outclassed Lady's in misery and magnitude, and only one person could sense Lady's passing: Sansa. The world shook.

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POV Arya Stark

Sansa's entire being quaked with lament. She had fought and struggled to flee from the common room and reach Lady. If only she could be with her direwolf, Lady would be safe from any threats. In calmer times Arya would have been impressed with her sister's ferocity, her strikes and cries were akin to a mother watching their child taken to the chopping block. And in a way Sansa was that mother, a wolverine who was pinned down and ravaged by the knowledge that her young was to be silenced. Though no matter how sharp Sansa's claws,

savage her teeth or fearsome her howls the Northern guardsmen would not be swayed, she was cordoned off in a cage of mail clad human limbs. But Sansa was nonetheless undeterred.

Indignation swelled up in Arya's chest and flared outward like wildfire. Sansa should not have to oppose such injustice alone! I just lost Nymeria and I feel mutilated. Nymeria's presence still lingered like a phantom, on the periphery of touch. Sansa did not deserve to suffer the same fate! And thus, she too joined in on the rampage.

Arya shouted and flung herself savagely at Ned's men who were beginning to struggle in containing Sansa. Arya ducked beneath their knees and took grasp of whatever she could. She clasped the dried leather of sword belts and the rough cotton of trousers. Arya's efforts were futile however and she quickly realized this. With her slight form and negligible mass she could not successfully dislodge any of the Guardsmen from where they surrounded Sansa.

In desperation, Arya stomped on any booted feet and kicked any knees within her range of reach. She doubled and tripled her striking speed to maximize the damage, yet she doubted she was doing little more than leaving minute bruises and slightly agitating Sansa's captors. Nevertheless, Arya persisted and managed to fell the Northman closest to her; he tumbled down as she kicked his knee out from under him and he lost all semblance of balance. Good, one down, 4 more to go!

Arya leaped forward to focus on her new prey and she made slight progress when he stumbled backwards, she took advantage of his vulnerability and kned him in the stomach stealing the breath from his lungs. She then slipped through the gap made by her victim as he toppled over to the floor and jumped to meet Sansa in the epicenter of the chaos. Sansa did not even notice Arya's arrival and thrashed and flailed with reckless abandon. Arya tried to reach Sansa's ears over her screeching but to no avail, it seemed a coordinated plan was not an option for the time being.

She covered Sansa's back flank and squared up, thankful for the pause created by her own intervention. At present the guards weren't dragging Sansa out the door but trying to deduce the identity of their miniature assailant. She caught the eye of Varly Stroud, Jory's lieutenant, and his posture slackened. Realization dawned upon the guard's face; Varly's raging beard of auburn and hazel eyes recounted that he'd recognized Arya.

Thus his men had inadvertently been attacking their liege lord's youngest daughter while fruitlessly contending to contain the other. He motioned for the rest of his men to stand down. It wouldn't do to terrorize Lord Stark's children. Besides, their lord has a significant enough head start to the stables that Sansa would be unable to interfere. Hence keeping Sansa barricaded held no more use. All five of the Northmen stepped back and hung their heads in a shallow bow of respect.

Immediately Arya recognized Varly's command to cease struggling and responded in kind by doing the same. Even Sansa grew coherent enough to realize that they were no longer trying to herd her toward her bed chamber, and for the span of a breath all was calm. Then Sansa's countenance crumbled into something feral and she screamed.

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POV Sansa Stark

Lady had died, and Sansa knew it.

Her soul snapped in half like centuries old yarn. The twin strands recoiled to make the image of fangs dripping with blood for several long seconds but then they fell listlessly downward. The fracture reverberated throughout Sansa. Initially it was only an insidious hiss but as it diffused inside Sansa's body it grew in decibel and agony, a story of a broken girl. Sansa punctuated her sorrowful narrative of her devastated spirit with a visceral wail.

She shook with the exertion. But she remained standing on two feet while the world around her continued to vibrate violently and her screams reverberated throughout every hollow space of the common room. Windows of splotted and stained glass shattered, the door flung from its hinges, tables and chair alike splintered and crimson leaked from the ears of everyone present besides Arya.

Within seconds Queen Cersei, Prince Joffrey and Tommen, Princess Myrcella, Vayon Poole and his daughter Jeyne, Varly and his guardsmen, all of the accompanying servants, and even Jory Cassel who had returned from the stables collapsed to the floor leaving a hollow thud in their wake.

Sansa was horrified. All Seven Hell's must have broken out and the Stranger came to deliver her to a fiery death. And without Lady by her side, and her father's cowardice weighing on her mind, both seething sores to her spirit, death would be a worthy sanctuary.

But the Stranger never appeared with its milky white skull shrouded in shadow and skeletal fingers proffered to end Sansa's life. Instead, Arya was tugging her hand and bellowing, "We need to go now! Whatever you've done is paramount to treason! Let's go!" Arya pleaded with such fervency and fear, her face knotted in consternation. But, Sansa remained immobile as she took in the sight of Arya. Why was her little sister so worried? Why must they go? Had she done something wrong?

Then a frigid stone fell to the bottom of her belly and landed in a frozen lake that cracked on impact. And Sansa shivered.

Her teeth chattered and her mind was unable to devise any articulate thought, but under all of the cold, Sansa knew: she had been responsible for all of this! She had never seen such destruction before or even that great a quantity of blood. The inn appeared to have been ransacked and have weathered a tremendous storm, with thunder strong enough to shake and tear apart the world. And maybe even kill... Oh Gods no! Were all of these people dead? Innocent and pure Tommen and Myrcella? Twisted and beautiful Joffrey? Sweet Jeyne Poole? And even her father's steward and personal guard lay unmoving, them unparalleled in loyalty and honor. Had she done this? Was she a murderer? If that was so, she was no better than Joffrey or Ilyn Payne! Why wasn't her sister running in terror? Arya was always one to exercise her chivalry and fortitude but Sansa's handiwork out-rivaled any danger or challenge her sister had faced yet. Arya had to leave before she got hurt too!

Sansa emphatically pointed towards the door and encouraged Arya to run. She tried to make her desires as clear as possible without the usage of her voice as her throat was rubbed raw, it was beyond her to speak at the moment. Sansa even bestowed a few shoves and kicks to motivate Arya's retreat but her younger sister stood firm. It didn't take Sansa long to tire herself out and she noticed that Arya was still there standing without a speck of sense.

Arya had grown impatient with Sansa's reluctance to listen and finally struck her sister in the face. Hard.

Sansa backed away cradling her swollen cheek in her hand. The paralysis that Sansa's mind was under suddenly wore off and she could make sense of Arya's words, "Sansa stop! You are acting stupid and we are low on time! You don't have the skill or speed to smack me, so do not try that again. Right now you're reducing your chance of escaping with your head on your shoulders! I know you didn't intend for this to happen! I know that you are a good person at heart and that our father wronged you! Lady and Nymeria should both be here, but they're not! We are those who are left and we need to go! Either the royal family will wake up or someone will come across this mess and take us prisoner. We must go now!"

Arya then quick as a whip snatched Sansa's right hand and used all of the momentum she could muster to propel them towards the ruined door. Thankfully, Arya's words seemed to have sunk in as Sansa remained mute and only nodded dumbly but allowed Arya to direct her outside. They stumbled over the threshold and very nearly missed crashing into one another while maneuvering through the doorway.

The night air was chilly and hinted at an even colder midnight. Only the occasional torch and brazier illuminated the yard before them as the moon had waned to its most extreme. Even the stars were less willing to shine.

Arya cursed inwardly. Slipping through the woods and surrounding area around the Trident undetected would be much more trying. Arya might have been able to navigate herself with little to no sound in the Wolfswood but Sansa was not nearly as sure-footed. They would have to move cautiously and slowly to prevent the alert of anyone else. Most likely if they were to be caught it would be by the Hound or Ilyn Payne flanking the perimeter.

At the very least the pair were fortunate enough to have been clad in cloaks. Nevertheless, they were bereft of supplies and rations. But they would have to make do with what they had, improvisation would become a skill they must acquaint themselves with quickly.

Arya surveyed the area and noted that there was no one of suspicion nearby to witness their escape, but was unsatisfied with the insecurity of their position out in the open.

Sansa also had her eyes peeled and saw Arya's uneasiness.

She whispered, "We are sitting ducks out here. Where do you suppose we must go?"

Sansa sounded so frightened and small. Arya hated the fact that she had so much responsibility imposed upon her, but she was the only one who could help Sansa. They needed to stay together. With that in mind, Arya searched for the best route to take.

While Arya conducted her examination, Sansa began to see movement from the building in front of them. The stables! Father was still there!

Sansa was overwhelmed with relief that her father was up and moving, but it quickly became dampened by fear and resentment that her father would find them. The only reason he was in the stables was to slaughter Lady. He was responsible for all of this, and Sansa could not stand to face him.

A cutting yowl came from beyond the barrier of trees, cold as granite and sharp as Valyrian Steel.

Arya gasped, and recognized the baying creature, "Nymeria! It's her! She never left! She was born to survive in the wild, she is our best chance. She could have fled with her tail between

her legs, but she stayed to watch over us! Follow me, we are going to find her!" Sansa nodded in earnest and followed Arya instinctively as they ran in the direction of Nymeria's calls.

The girls never saw the face of their father as he saw his two girls plunge headfirst into the agestral and foreboding recesses of the Riverlands forests. And little did he know that they were heading due North for the Wall guided by a direwolf intent on reuniting herself with her sibling, and the girls with theirs.

Fled Part 1

Chapter Summary

The girls make a run for it and digest what just happened. Jon comes into the fold.

Chapter Notes

So here is Chapter 2! I hope it meets your expectations and you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it. Just a note: Everyone has been aged up five years, so that makes the plot actually work.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jon Snow

Ghost had never been so overwrought before. From the day Jon and his brothers had found the direwolf pups clinging to the corpse of their mother Ghost had been an anomaly. In addition to his striking garnet eyes and chalky coat, he never made a sound. Unlike his siblings who were keen on starting up a howling racket and letting their thoughts be known, Ghost was as hushed as a skulking wraith. The direwolf's inaudibility only compounded his seeming dearth of emotion, rendering him constantly brooding.

Of all his siblings, Shaggydog was essentially the worst of the pack as he was perpetually impulsive and noisy, akin to Rickon. And in a roundabout way this made sense because Shaggydog was also pure pitch, the opposite of his unperturbed brother.

Nymeria and Grey Wind were apt to engage with Shaggydog, and Bran's unnamed wolf wasn't opposed to joining in. There was only one sibling that compared to Ghost in composure: Lady, his half sister Sansa's companion. Lady was lithe and all smoothed edges; she was so well manicured it was difficult to imagine she was not a domesticated pet by birth. She refrained from almost all versions of play with her litter mates and found business and filth almost as distasteful as Sansa herself. She was always composed and courteous.

In that aspect she was the most like Ghost; a similarity that Jon found nigh absurd as he and Sansa couldn't be further removed from each other. But that was the joy in being a wild animal, there was no social standard for uphold or propriety to maintain. The only absolutes were survival and the strength of the pack. Jon was very envious. He had always thought of the Starks as his pack but he had no choice but to vacate the only home he'd ever known when Lord Stark departed with the girls.

It's not that I didn't desire to forge an identity of my own making and cast away the shroud of Ned Stark's bastard, and the Night's Watch would be the perfect opportunity. I hoped to find as much prosperity and renown as Uncle Benjen at the Wall, but nonetheless with father gone, I didn't feel welcome at Winterfell any longer.

Jon didn't want to poison his memories of Winterfell with the cold venom that Catelyn Stark directed at him so he swallowed any reservations and swore the oath. The adjustment to his new home had been rough and he was still figuring out where he fit into the hierarchy of the Night's Watch. He was derisively called *Lord Snow* more often than his actual name and all hope of his uncle guiding his transition from bastard to Sworn brother evaporated once Benjen left on another ranging mission. He would be left to experience the baptism of fire that was grappling with Alliser Thorne's vitriol and the belligerence of his Sworn Brothers.

Jon couldn't be too bitter as Benjen was First Ranger and had his own responsibilities, responsibilities Jon wished to inherit in time through hard work. But it still stung that his uncle had embarked on an assignment so soon after they arrived. And worse of all nobody had acknowledged Jon's name day of 15 years.

I wasn't used to pageantry or excessive celebration of my name day but I had appreciated the subdued and subtle well wishes that my brothers, Arya and our father bestowed upon me. It would be less of a dream than I initially thought and a hardship I would have to accustom to for life.

And Ghost was also having a difficult time acclimating to the new environment. The direwolf had remained relatively calm as he bid farewell to his siblings with only a tinge of moroseness to mar his demeanor. But Ghost had become increasingly agitated as time went on and Jon assumed it had to do with the loss of his family and adapting to a home where he had less liberty to move around. However, Ghost's current behavior was beyond any restlessness he displayed prior and Jon was concerned.

Jon did everything he could think of to relieve Ghost's distress but it was all for naught. Ghost remained indifferent to Jon's attempted belly rubs, a visit to the top of the Wall and even a bit of pork offered under the table. By nightfall Jon hadn't the slightest notion of what to do. He prayed against all reason that Ghost would settle down during the night while they slept in Jon's sleeping cell in Hardin's Tower. But Ghost only paced incessantly and bared his teeth in frustration. Jon had decided to open the door to the yard clad in the velvet of evening and let Ghost work through his irritation by himself. Nevertheless, as Jon moved to undo the latch of his doorway Ghost went for his heel.

The grip of Ghost's fangs was a far cry from smarting his foot, but Jon was alarmed at the strength of Ghost's mandible.

I am at wits end with Ghost .

He then exhaled deeply through the small gap left between his grinding teeth.

"Let go of me Ghost. I've tried to understand whatever is irking you, but you refuse to meet me halfway. I'm bone tired from training today and want to get as close to enough hours of sleep as possible. You're free to go for the night, so let go of me."

Ghost just looked at Jon stubbornly with a glare that held all the intelligence of a man.

Jon labored to end the clamp Ghost had made on his foot but Ghost stood firm.

"I said let go of me! Unless you've got something to tell me leave me in peace Godsdamnit!"

Ghost then released Jon's foot and caught him by surprise. He jumped up and placed his paws on Jon's shoulder holding him still. Jon had no choice but to exchange looks with the direwolf and he was taken captive by the misery seething in Ghost's scarlet optics.

In the depths of the red irises did I finally comprehend: Ghost had felt something happen, and it wasn't good.

Jon gazed intently at Ghost and for a split second he was no longer in his own body; he was removed from all tangibility. The sensation should have jarred Jon but it was inexplicably familiar and Jon noticed his thoughts were much sharper and abbreviated. Instinct and emotion seemed the common denominators in how he processed the world; almost animal-like. And for a fleeting moment Jon saw and felt a greatsword plunge into the heart of a dainty and too trusting direwolf.

The names Lady and Sansa reverberated and drowned his senses.

Sansa

Their initial passage through the woods was almost unbearable. Sansa was fraught with worry and shot nerves, while her sister had only one thought at present: finding Nymeria. She even seemed immune to Sansa's periodic whispers and shrieks when she thought she heard an animal or tripped over a root. But it seemed that some Gods took pity on them and Nymeria revealed herself.

Arya was elated when they finally found her. She sat self-assured with perfect posture, but there was still a wild gleam in her eye: just like Arya. It took her no time at all to launch herself at the direwolf. In a way they merged back into one being, two halves returned to one whole. Sansa hated to admit it, but she was jealous. She would never have that with Lady again, and now she had a frightening ability to grapple with.

Her reality had been tilted on its axis, all laws of nature mired in chaos. She felt empty. Within her was an unrelenting vacuum that devoured all remnants of how Lady soothed and delighted her. Sansa never fathomed she would have to return to an existence where Lady was absent. Even the time before her brothers brought home the direwolf pups as a younger child felt dull and hollow. For a few short months she had actually felt like a true Stark. It didn't matter that she took after her lady mother or detested the untraditional pursuits, she was still worthy of a direwolf.

Just for a little while Sansa knew her place in the family was right and that she was not a mistake, unlike her sister who so embodied the Northern spirit. But now Lady was dead and she was on the run. Save her surname, Sansa couldn't feel less of a Stark than she did at that moment.

Starks were above indiscriminate shows of malversation, they were the First Men and lived according to an unyielding code of honor. But apparently she wasn't beyond such villainy. Sansa truly wished that she did not kill all of those people at the inn. It didn't matter that some of them were vile, it was never intention to murder anyone. A true lady wouldn't be capable of such malice. And maybe this showed that she was no true lady, but something else entirely.

Most likely this was retribution. She deserved to be punished for her misguided affection for Joffrey and her disloyalty to her house. Sansa carried herself as if being a Northerner was undesirable; she far superior to a life of faith, simplicity and family. For her crimes, the truest symbol of her Stark heritage had been slaughtered, and she would always carry this with her.

Sansa brought her thoughts back to her sister. Her elation was palpable and infectious. The eldest sister found herself unable to remain aloof to Arya's happiness. Her little sister no matter how much of a terror had helped her when no one else could, and she deserved this boon. Undoubtedly their journey would be difficult, and that was only due to her lack of survival know-how. They also had no concrete destination in mind, but this could be a lesson. A lesson to trust in her sister and overcome what seemed like a gaping void between the two. Nymeria and Arya were both sharp and capable. Sansa vowed that she would do her best to not be a burden but follow the lead of her sister when it was necessary.

She moved closer to the large mass that was Arya and Nymeria wrestling each other. Her little sister was laughing and seemed oblivious to the outside world.

I loath to spoil the reunion but I also want to thank Nymeria for her loyalty.

Sansa spoke, "Thank you Nymeria. You had no obligation to stay as my actions are what forced you to leave. But you remained right here, waiting for when we would need you. You are as brave as the princess you were named for."

Arya nodded in agreement. "You're such a good and smart girl. I'm so sorry for throwing rocks at you, and I promise to never force you to leave again. We are a pack, and together we will survive." Arya even glanced at Sansa for a moment, and her older sister's heart soared.

Sansa then gingerly lowered to her knees and joined Arya in petting the direwolf. She even received a few licks of a bristly tongue for her troubles.

Eventually Nymeria grew restless and claustrophobic from all of the attention. She gently nudged her way out and made eye contact with both girls. Once sure she had their attention she swiveled her head to what lay before

Arya laughed once more. “It seems it’s time to go.”

“Indeed it does. Nymeria, lead the way.”

The group fell into relative silence and only the occasional fluttering branch or Nymeria’s snorts broke it.

The pervasive darkness seemed to swallow up most sound and Sansa feared what might emerge from it whenever she fell noisily. And she fell quite often. She was sure Arya was shooting her scathing looks but thankfully she couldn’t see.

Nymeria and Arya’s nimble movements reminded Sansa of the tale of Jenny of Oldstones and how she danced with such grace. It was not only tragically romantic but quite morose.

She found herself humming the accompanying song as she accrued a bruise upon each new verse.

The enthrall of the tune transported Sansa to a time far removed from the present. The lyrics came forth on their own accord.

High in the halls of the kings who are gone

Jenny would dance with her ghosts

The ones she had lost and the ones she had found

And the ones who had loved her the most

*The ones who'd been gone for so very long
She couldn't remember their names
They spun her around on the damp old stones
Spun away all her sorrow and pain
And she never wanted to leave, never wanted to leave
Never wanted to leave, never wanted to leave
They danced through the day
And into the night through the snow that swept through the hall
From winter to summer then winter again
'Til the walls did crumble and fall
And she never wanted to leave, never wanted to leave
Never wanted to leave,...*

Sansa made sure to keep a modest volume to her words, but her voice carried throughout the spruces and pines that studded the forest shores of the ruby ford. The melody ensconced the Stark sisters and Nymeria in a shield of sorts that protect from the precarious situation Sansa had unwittingly forced them into.

Sansa even thought she heard her sister murmuring along to the song and was glad that she could at least provide her sister with temporary solace.

But like all songs must end, Jenny's lament was closed and stowed away to be visited another time.

And hopefully a cheerier time than this.

The girls resumed their wordless march for several more minutes until Arya halted abruptly and caught Sansa who was about to fall forward from stopping without forewarning.

Once Sansa had regained her balance, Arya turned her head and scrutinized Sansa.

“How did you do that? Then in the inn? Were you planning on doing that, and how long have you known you could do that?” Arya rattled off.

Sansa wasn't sure how to respond as she had nothing rational to say. Words could not convey just how overcome with contrition and fright she was. But her grief was the greatest weight upon her as she had lost two things she loved and prided herself on: her sweet direwolf and her voice. Her skill in courtesies and singing had been some of her greatest accomplishments, but these were only made possible due to the power of her voice. And now that power was perverted into something wicked.

“I am not quite sure what “that” was. I didn't intend to hurt all of those people or leave the crossroads inn in shambles. Frankly, it was frightening and I never want to do it again. I could have killed everyone, save father! And with my own voice too!” Sansa cried out and hugged herself tight trying to contain her sniffing.

Arya stood before her torn between sympathy and fascination.

“If you were to have killed the Lannisters and their household I would say good riddance.”

Sansa's face shot up in horror, “Arya, how could you say that? We had friends there as well, Jeyne, Varly, Vayon, Jory and not to mention that Myrcella and Tommen are perfectly innocent,” she shrieked out.

Arya grew exasperated. “Well of course I didn't mean *all* of the Lannisters, Myrcella and Tommen are harmless enough, but you would have done a great service to the realm in eliminating that hateful woman and her eldest vile spawn. And of course none of the Northmen warranted death. Also, have no right to judge me! If you hadn't bold faced lied to the King, Lady would still be alive. You brought this upon us with your dishonesty and incindinary fit! I am the one who got us out of there, you stood there as still as the statues in the Crypts!”

Anger and sorrow bloomed in Sansa's chest and threatened to sprout beyond her control. *Oh how I want to strike Arya at this moment. How could my sister be so cruel as to accuse me of orchestrating our predicament?* In truth, at that moment in the inn, she had prayed for death.

“Do you really think me so heartless as to plan something like this? I had no other choice but to placate Joffrey as he is my betrothed, defying the Crown Prince before the King and almost the entirety of his household, would be suicide. And do not for one second think I wanted Lady to die to cause such pain. I was ready for the Stranger to spirit me away from all of that calamity I made.”

Arya took the rebuke passively.

Sansa continued, “Do not presume to know my head or my heart. I made a mistake and I will not deny that. But do not forget your own culpability in antagonizing the prince. There were other ways for you to have dispelled the situation, or even better you could have refrained from putting Mycah in danger, by...simply...doing...what...you...were...told.” Sansa spat out.

Arya underwent a rapid succession of fleeting emotions. Sansa had never seen her sister so out outraged and prepared herself for her wrath, but the attack never came and Arya's expression melted from irate to chagrined and finally to wounded. All fire had gone out with the water that was Sansa's rebuttals, and left behind was a scared little girl who had come far too close to death mere hours earlier.

She then began to sob, her true age shining through her obstinate veneer. Even more shocking was that she threw herself into Sansa's embrace and clutched her tight. Arya's uncharacteristic demonstration of grief struck Sansa dumb and she failed to reciprocate the hug until her own fury burned away and the strain of the situation weighed her down as well.

She clutched Arya in earnest and the girls struggled with forcing out apologies. None of them were articulate but the sisters knew what they meant all of the same.

Arya is a wonderful sister and I just never paid enough attention until now. And she feels the same. We're all we have left and it won't do at all for us to continue our petty hostilities. We are sisters and that is what matters.

Nymeria curled around the girls to ward off all threats and give them comfort. She alternated between snuggling into the laps of the girls and whined when the tears reached their zenith. But like a raging fever breaks, the girls' ailment of melancholy slowly dissipated.

Sansa was the first one to speak, "What I said was cruel and untrue. You saved me, and exercised honor in defending Mycah. It was I who acted the coward, but I think you've given me a chance at redemption. It would have been much simpler to abandon me, but you instead took me with you and braved running away with me, useless, in tow."

Sansa smiled slightly and stroked Arya's wayward hair.

Arya snorted and wiped her snot on the sleeve of her robe. Her eyes began to dry.

"No Sansa. I was also wrong. I didn't consider the impossible situation you were put in and I am the reason Lady was murdered. I sent Nymeria away when she and I were the party at fault for assaulting the prince. Although, I will never apologize for saving Nymeria or standing up to Joffrey, but I did let my impulses get the better of me. It was as clear as daylight on your face that you were as stunned as I was, and even more rattled than I when you screamed. You are incapable of any true evil and I understand that now."

Sansa's surprise and relief showed on her face but she didn't withdraw from the moment.

"I guess we can both concur that we've said things in desperation that were indeed false. We've both made mistakes, and it would be a lie to absolve either of us of any wrongdoing. However, this is where our paths have led, and I am wholeheartedly grateful that Nymeria is still alive and with us."

Sansa paused and peered assuredly at Arya. She then took her hand and squeezed it.

"The future is uncertain and it is only the three of us, but I don't see cooperation and mutual reliance between our little pack as impossible. We all know what is at stake if we get caught, and we'll do whatever it takes to prevent that reality. I do love you Arya, and realize the peril you have put yourself in to help me. And I will do my best to return the favor."

Sansa smiled kindly and released Arya's hand.

“Now do you think this might be a suitable site to rest for the night? My feet are mottled with blisters and I am dreadfully tired.”

Arya

Arya simply rolled her eyes and nodded in agreement. She scanned the area and declared it sufficiently hidden to guarantee their safety. But before she allowed herself to relax she looked at the stars trying forlornly to learn the direction they were heading. Nevertheless Arya had never studied the constellations with such fervor as her elder brothers and her fatigue was making her vision cloudy.

I'll have to wait until morning; tree moss is a superior method of navigation anyway, she thought.

Arya then returned to her companions. The three remained in the same spot and permitted exhaustion to creep in, but not before Arya got one more word in.

“We are not done discussing your scream, you're like a living weapon! I almost wish I had it.”

Sansa responded with a voice thick with sleep and a little remorse. “No you don't. Arya you saw what it can do. It's terrible enough one of us has it. Now sleep. We don't know what awaits us at daybreak.”

Arya's slumber was peaceful and uninterrupted for many hours. She only roused because light had seeped through the cover of the trees and penetrated the flesh of her eyelids. The world wasn't blissfully dark any longer. She blinked furiously as she heard a faint shuffling in the dirt, unsure what was causing it. The tread was too deft for Sansa in a wooded area, and there was a slight swish of fir. Arya was still groggy and sat up rubbing her eyes when she looked.

The origin of the sound was Nymeria walking towards them with two rabbits slinging lifelessly from her blood stained maw. Arya only chuckled and looked at Nymeria knowingly.

“We’re going to have to cook these up for Sansa to even consider eating them. I appreciate your refined tastes, but Sansa isn’t so advanced. We might as well begin a small fire to warm your findings so they’re a little more palatable for us picky humans. Come here girl.”

Nymeria suddenly dropped her prey from her jaw and crouched down, hackles up, tail broadening and teeth bared. She let out a chilling growl and stared angrily at something over Arya’s shoulder.

Arya imagined it was just her sister waking up that startled the direwolf, but when she turned to scold Sansa she found her still fast asleep. The object of Nymeria’s rage was the Hound.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your thoughts, and I will see you next time. If you have questions feel free to contact me!

Fled Part II

Chapter Summary

This is really Ned's chapter in a way because we get to see him grapple with the fallout of his actions. Hope you enjoy!

Chapter Notes

Without Sonderlust45 this fic would remain a half baked idea; she is my creative sparring partner and amazing beta, so big round of applause for her!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Eddard Stark

Ned was paralyzed as he watched his two daughters bolt past him, completely oblivious to his presence across the yard. Before they had entirely vanished into the arbor, Sansa looked his way for an instant. Gone was the face of a doting daughter, eager to please. And in its place was a glare that spit poison. Her mouth was contorted into a grimace and her eyes were so bright with ire that they scorched all before them.

Her face left as soon as it appeared and she was gone along with her intrepid sister. His belly turned with the knowledge that he was the catalyst of Sansa's woe, and even more despicable he had endangered his girls.

Ned struggled to overcome the urge to be sick once again. Regret and concern seethed through his veins; and leadened his body with rue. Ice lay unsheathed in his hands, and for all he could tell the sword bore the weight of the entire Wall within. Yet this wall wasn't composed of eternal, magically reinforced ice, but instead fashioned from all that was left of him. His hollow bones drained of affection and pride, acted as the skeleton for his wall.

What have I done? How have I come to this point, with my child looking at me like the enemy? Why did I hurt my daughters so?

But in his heart, Ned already knew the answer: his fealty to Robert defeated the love he felt for his family. The pledge he made to his liege lord called for absolute servitude and the utmost loyalty: the promise to be Hand of the King. And like his vow to govern the North justly and rule Winterfell according to the law of the First Men, Ned would uphold his oath until his body was in the Crypts. And he joined his forefathers in death's stony embrace. Ned

imagined his father and eldest brother would be disappointed in him greatly, because they were always fiercer than he was. True wolves were Brandon, Lyanna and Rickard Stark; Ned never felt he lived up to his House's sigil. And his actions only supported this conclusion. He couldn't rationalize why he was so compelled to be at Robert's beck and call, it had just been that way since they were boys.

They scaled the peaks of the Eyrie and learned the best way to charm girls both low and highborn. Together they had overthrown a centuries old dynasty and installed a new king. For decades the pair had been brothers in arms and the dearest of friends. However, Ned's devotion went deeper than mere loyalty.

It's my pride that blinds me. A Northman must conduct himself with honor, live and breathe the vows he swears. I am no knight of the south but House Stark has never broken faith with flowery declarations of fealty. Yet I am loath to disregard the tradition, even if it is to the detriment of my family. However, what is honor if it cannot protect those you love; who are pure and good? Isn't it more noble to honor the promise I was charged with to my wife, children and subjects, than waste away until I am nothing more than a shade of duty and subservience? Of course it is; there is no other answer for a halfway decent man to accept! I need to find my daughters, all other tribulations can wait.

"Family, Duty, Honor" the House Tully words swam and swished in his head like the trouts they identify with, their fins tickling and stroking his worry. Ned shook his head violently as if to force the thoughts from his skull, the tendons in his neck crackled hideously and snapped for good measure. He then tilted his head skyward and glimpsed upon the onyx sheet. There were few stars in the sky, only the occasional silver spangle to be seen. It was as if the sky were a yawning, cavern leaning downwards to swallow him up for his follies. But it would not be him who was at the mercy of the night, his daughters were alone without protection or supplies. He couldn't remain still a second longer.

He strode to the dilapidated inn and took note of the fragmented wooden planks and smashed glass panes that made up the hostel. His boots carried him over the dusty space and to the remnants of a door with the faint engraving of crossing roads impressed upon the oak door. From the entryway to the great furnace bodies were strewn here and there, some were fortunate enough to have settled in chairs sturdy enough to withstand whatever caused this wreckage.

The unconscious figures were a conglomeration of stations, houses and backgrounds. No matter the fine detail on a silk dress of nobility or the rusted gauntlets and helms of hedge knights, none were spared. Every one of them had crimson slithering from their ears into sticky pools of blood. They ranged from Jaime Lannister to the innkeep Masha.

For a terrifying moment Ned thought all of his traveling companions perished, lying in morbid wait for discovery. But a scan of the room disconfirmed the Lord of Winterfell's fear as he noticed that all of their chests were moving up and down. They all sustained a curiously potent blow, but at least they were breathing consistently. Ned walked up to his Northmen and grimaced. They too were inert and therefore unforthcoming with any information. Before he continued his exploration Ned seized Jory's upper body and drug him to the base of the ruined wall.

He propped him upright as gently as he could and used his own tunic to wipe the blood from Jory's whiskers and ears. Ned did the same for the Northmen he could find and crept gingerly to the center of the common room. King Robert, Queen Cersei and their royal remained seated in a handful of chairs orbiting the ornate main table.

What happened here? Surely, it was not bandits or thieves as there are no wounds marking anyone as having been attacked. All of the finery of crowns and jewels were still draped about the royal family, undisturbed and garish as ever. No riches had been taken, and there were no signs of a struggle.

Ned scratched his beard and took a moment to ponder how queer the situation was.

Why had his girls been safe? Had they run before this cataclysm; yet how would they have forewarning? Could this be some plot to kidnap his children, and strike a blow against the crown?

Ned thought not, as nobody had been killed and his daughters were running freely. The only clue Ned had was the scream he heard from the thatch roofed stables. Even the enclosure where he slayed Lady had shaken a bit.

The wail was most definitely feminine and higher of pitch. No words accompanied the barrage of sound, it was just pure catharsis, almost inhuman.

Initially Ned thought it had been Sansa who screamed but she could not be capable of something like this? But Arya was never keen to shriek, and both girls were gone. Perhaps Sansa was responsible, but how?

He had only been gone for a mere handful of minutes. Ned didn't get an opportunity for further consideration. Someone else entered through the broken doorway. In a gruff tone with his motley of scars accommodating hit curse, the Hound inquired, "What in the seven bloody hells happened here?"

He was looking at Edward with unbridled suspicion and accusing eyes. His voice dropped an octave and was as sharp as the teeth of his Hound Helm, "Would you happen to know, **Lord Stark?**"

He sneered in his gravely brogue. Ned swallowed deep and thought carefully. He had every reason to be wary of Prince Joffrey's sworn shield. The Hound had a reputation for brutality and savagery, almost on par with his ghastly elder brother. Perhaps playing the fool would buy Ned some much needed time and control. "I was in the stables dispensing Queen Cersei and King Robert's will. The deed is done, the direwolf has been killed in the stead of her sister."

The Hound didn't entertain Ned's deflection. He grunted. "Yes, I know you Starks are all about honor and justice, but that doesn't explain why when I return from taking a piss, I find you standing before a mess of corpses. Alone." Clegane bit out the last word and there was no doubt he thought Ned responsible. "I was absent when this mess happened, as I told you. I was doing my duty, while you were relieving your bladder. We both missed the origin of this

madness; I am in the dark as much as you are. But from what I've seen they're all alive, just unconscious."

Clegane barely acknowledged Ned's explanation. He did a quick scan of the tattered space. "I don't see either of your whelps among the wreckage. And I have an inkling that they weren't eager to see you slaughter one of their pets. Where are the girls?" Ned ground his teeth in frustration. He had prayed his daughters would be an afterthought. The Hound caught the scent. "I imagine they went to bed. Today hasn't been kind to them."

Clegane was growing impatient as he gnawed on his chapped lips. "There is no one else to blame for their blubbering, but themselves. The small one was stupid enough to anger the prince, and the other stupid enough to love the brat. Neither of them would give up without a fight and fall asleep. I don't know much about you Northmen, and I never claimed to, but this here is not of the South. Considering that the rest of you Northerners are passed out as well, your children are missing, and you're the only one awake, there is only one possible solution. I'd arrest you, but my sword hasn't seen live combat in too long, wouldn't want her to atrophy.

"There's no one here to do your fighting for you. Stark, show me what you can do with that pretty sword, I have always wanted to see a Valyrian Steel blade in action. It's unfortunate that so many men have lost their balls and softened up. Valyrian Steel is a weapon, not a mantel piece. Prove that you've still got balls that haven't frozen off from disuse in the North, sitting all fancy in your carved chair. Prove it!"

Ned took a deep breath and knew there was no other alternative; he would have to defeat the Hound in defense of his girls, or die trying. But he couldn't allow Clegane to goad him. He collected Ice fully and used the sweet, stinging serenade of steel against the night air to brace himself and awaken the Wolf he always struggled to unleash. He gripped the pommel of the sword with both hands and raised it up.

Clegane waited not a moment longer to charge Eddard and he caught him unprepared. It was a blunt strike with little finesse but Ned labored to parry it. He slid away a few paces to gain some breathing room. The Hound roared a guttural cry and took his blade low to slash at Ned's ankles. However, Ned was able to jump high enough to avoid the debilitating blow. He knew if Clegane forced him to his back, he would be dead.

Clegane was noticeably irritated but didn't surrender to the impulse of bludgeoning and hacking away. He released one gauntlet from its grip on the pommel and swung it back to swipe at Ned's jaw. The blow was hard and true. Ned tasted the iron of blood and spit out a chipped tooth. His mouth stung, and his head was spinning from the blow. Understanding that he couldn't concede the advantage he swung Ice in a compact arch as to not lose his center of gravity, but to also put more weight behind the cut.

He dug into Sandor's belly deep enough, but only grazed the chest. Sandor stumbled back, evidently surprised that Ned got the best of him, but remained calm.

He jabbed his sword low and caught Ned in the thigh, bone and marrow splintered and the complementary muscles split. Ned fell to his knees and bit back an anguished yell, but he wasn't able to contain the entire expletive that raged from his wounds.

I have to rise again, or my children will be hunted down and killed. I must stand.

Ned willed himself to find his feet and shifted his weight to the uninjured leg. But he was thrown back down again by a shove from behind, and he was rendered inert from the pain. He turned to see who pushed him and was met with the sour yet beautiful face of Cersei. The last thing he heard before he lost all sense was Cersei commanding The Hound to bring her Arya and Sansa.

Arya Stark

Sandor Clegane prowled forward at his full height, and he blocked the newly risen sun. He was an invasion to the senses, with the ringing screech of a gorget striking against shoulder pads and mail tunic, and the blinding shafts of sun that curved around his silhouette. His right hand rested menacingly on the pommel of his sword and the blade shone dull with a carmine sheen - blood most likely.

Nymeria bridged the gap between Arya and the Hound and adjusted her stance with every move Clegane made. Nymeria's eyes had shrunk to golden coals that smoked rabidly, her hackles raised into fearsome points and her ears pasted flat to her skull. Clegane seemed unmoved by Nymeria's display and Arya cursed at the man's wicked smile and ill advised audacity in the face of a direwolf trembling with fury.

Oh you stupid man! Why couldn't you just let us be? We were so close to getting away!

Arya boldly stepped one foot forward but Sansa gripped her shoulder firmly to hold her in place. Sansa shook her head with resignation clear in her eyes. Instead she was the Stark to venture ahead. She released two sharp whistles and Nymeria responded immediately with a slackened posture and cocked head. Nymeria chanced a glance back at Sansa with confusion. Arya shared in her direwolf's perplexity but she only made eye contact with the beast and nodded imperceptibly for her to stand down. Sansa worked her way to a position even with Nymeria, her tread not betraying any knowledge of blisters or bruises.

She clucked her tongue, and rested her hand on the sloped plane between Nymeria's ears, "Shhh. Nymeria it's alright. Sandor isn't here to hurt us, is he? Oh no, he doesn't attack defenseless little girls does he? No, he helps keep them safe. Isn't that right Ser?

Had Sansa taken leave of her wits overnight, Clegane was no Florian the Fool! Why was she trying to reason with the monster of a man? She would get all of them killed!

The Hound inhaled sharply and gathered his saliva. In a gush of saliva he spit the bitterness from his mouth and responded, "I ain't no knight and you know that Little Bird. The Queen wants your head; both of your heads. She won't rest until she has you wolf bitches returned to her custody, dead or alive. She claims the two of you worked some devilish magic and assaulted the royal party. Now what do you have to say to that Little Bird?"

Arya wanted to stick her tongue out for being mostly disregarded by Clegane's attention, but she held it anyway. Sansa made a show of bringing her forefinger and thumb to her chin to mime someone lost in thought, the labyrinth of their psyche proving too much to navigate.

The Hound just waited, fixated on his sister. Ultimately, Sansa decided she had played the farce of naivety for too long and she spoke with condescension bleeding from her tone, as if she were explaining why the Moon was most certainly not made of cheese to a youth in swaddling clothes, “Now that doesn’t sound much like sweet Queen Cersei, does it? She’s much too kind and reasonable to believe in such absurdities. You must be mistaken, my lord.”

The Hound let out an angry grunt and narrowed his eyes but did nothing else in reaction. Sansa continued, “Now I think that this was all a wild dream of yours; a fanciful few hours of the night. You simply envisioned her Majesty’s wishes in your sleepy mind. Perhaps now, it is time for you to return to bed, and see how this dream really ends. Now lay down, Sandor and go to sleep.”

Sandor stood there mesmerized as if Sansa were the only thing that mattered, as though she was the sole speck of sanity and virtue in the world. Part way through Sansa’s delivery Clegane’s lids began to droop and he became bleary eyed. His hand fell to his side, and abandoned the sword pommel. Sansa transitioned into a lullaby that was a favorite of their lady mother, ‘The Song of the Seven’.

Her words were as sweet as sugared nuts glazed with honey, but also had an edge to it like the bite of a lemon cake. Arya had never heard something so enrapturing, and she paid particular attention to the verse about the Maiden. It seemed an especially appropriate passage for Sansa to sing.

[...The Maiden dances through the sky, she lives in every lover's sigh. Her smiles teach the birds to fly, and gives dreams to little children...]

Akin to a newborn babe, Sandor hushed all sound and curled on the forest floor into a ball. As he lost all clarity his armor crunched against the hard earth, twigs snapped and dry leaves cracked. Then he was fast asleep. In the end Arya had also become somewhat entranced by Sansa’s words, and remained fixed in that spot. Her own eyes were fighting to stay open and her mind was as muddled as the Red Fork swollen with rain. She had envisioned Sansa in a frock of snow bear fur with a coronet of weirwood leaves and wolves perched over her brown.

It was like time had slowed as she watched a stranger walk towards her with love in her eyes. But once Sansa halted her melody Arya gained full control of her faculties once more, even Nymeria appeared to just be emerging from a stupor. The vision vanished. Sansa said nothing else. She returned to Arya, grabbed her hand and began to run back into the wall of trees. Nymeria followed closely behind, leaving Arya the only one without a lick of a clue of what was coming next.

Now how did she do THAT??? I'm so jealous!

Bran Stark

The furs and wool were suffocating him, leaching all coolness from the air and boiling his insides. Sweat took residence in every crevice of his body and the space between his garb and

his blankets. He couldn't breathe, it was too much. Too warm! Too hot! He was burning alive! Bran started in his bed.

His sudden movement and unexpected awakening frightened his mother from sewing a wellness wreath. She dropped the half completed craft and pricked her forefinger with the edge of the needle when she jumped in surprise. He saw a small drop of blood fall to the blankets, staining the wool an ominous red.

He shifted his gaze from his mother to the pile of fur that dominated the remaining space of his bed. The direwolf lifted his head in appraisal and locked eyes with Bran. He had seen so much.

Chapter End Notes

So sorry about the wait y'all. I boomeranged from midterms to a monstrous cold to a lack of inspiration. But I'm back! Expect another installment within 2 weeks at the most, and maybe check out my DaarioxSansa fic coming soon!

You are all amazingly wonderful and I love every, each, one of you. I did a dreadful job of responding to comments, but trust me, they are very near and dear to my heart! I will be working on my responses throughout the weekend.

Thank you again to Sonderlust45!

Grey Cloth to Black Fur

Chapter Summary

Jon recovers from his vision and gets better settled into life at the Wall. Sleeping in, new friends and conflict of interest.

Chapter Notes

Sonderlust45 is my SUPERHERO and the BEST PERSON TO HAVE EVER LIVED! She has the patience of a saint and a will of iron. You're missing out if you haven't read her content yet!

I'm so glad to announce that I'm still alive, and writing. It's been several months of radio silence and I cannot make up for that. I ran out of inspiration especially during April-May without this hideous virus and fear of basically the world ending.

But I hope this chapter is somewhat of a peace offering and brings you all back to the narrative.

I cannot promise super consistent updates but I've realized that I don't want to rush this story and it needs time to breathe. Each chapter will only have 1 POV from now on and will be much more fleshed out.

So longer story yay! And let me know how you've all been!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Jon Snow

Jon came to with a start. His sharp intake of breath mixed with the draft emanating from the ajar door. His throat was chilled and he coughed many times to chase the nip away. With great difficulty he drew himself to his elbows and winced at how he chafed against his tunic stiff from the cold. Ghost had retreated to the corner and lay with his great snowy head perched between massive paws. His eyes fixed on Jon.

“Well you seem to be in fine form.” Jon groaned, “unlike myself at the moment.”.

He made a pitiful sight indeed, collapsed in a tangle of limbs like a young lad who had been drunken underneath the table. He had regained control over his arms, but his legs were still autonomous; beings beyond his control even if they were attached to his body. The most

logical plan was to wait out the numbness drowning his legs, and he was more than willing to comply.

Feeling resurfaced slowly in fits and starts. Tingles danced along his calves and thighs like thousands of Sansa's beloved sewing pins plucking holes in prized silk. However, Jon would not stand to be anyone's needlework. Wincing through the blitz of sensations in his legs he stood up, albeit shakily and after a few strides closed the door. He sighed in contentment, utterly glad no more no more glacial drafts would penetrate his sleeping cell.

Turning to face Ghost, a flurry of questions bubbled upward. Jon hadn't the faintest idea how he ended up splayed out cold in the middle of his meager quarters with the door open to permit all kinds of wintry horrors in. He tilted his head and regarded Ghost pointedly, almost expecting an explanation.

"You gotta meet me halfway here Ghost, what happened? Did someone do this? Was it one of the initiates who stole into my cell and clobbered me upside the head? My head is smarting fiercely now that I think about it."

Jon massaged the portion of his skull that took the impact from his fall. It was extremely tender and when he regained more alertness it would throb like thunder. But something seemed off about his supposition.

It wouldn't make sense for me to be attacked by another initiate, there are too many unknowns.

"Not even someone as daft as Grenn or mean as Rast would fail to close the door after their ambush. Perhaps they would want to bash some fear of the Seven into me, but they wouldn't outright sentence me to death. And that's what an open door was in the dead of night at the Wall: a death sentence. Everyone already struggled to keep warm enough with all the furs, wools and cottons at hand without unfettered subjection to the snow and ice. If I were found dead, sans weapon and lethally frostbitten in his cell, foul play would be the only reasonable reason. Everyone knows me to be hot headed or arrogant at times, but I am a Northmen through and through, I have always known to always secure my lodgings against the weather.'

Jon began to pace and grow steadier on his feet.

'Also, it is veritable lunacy to make a move on me while Ghost is near. I never doubt that he and I are a team, a perpetual promise to watch each other's backs is one of the cords that fastens us together for all time. If someone attempted to harm me, and Ghost was able to do anything, he would at the very least maim his master's assailant. And for as strong of a grudge that the others have against me, they aren't masochists looking to lose digits or even entire extremities. Everyone knows to steer clear of a direwolf at all times. So, I was not incapacitated by anyone. No one tried to kill me. I am at a loss. Ghost, have any ideas?"

Air chuffed from Ghost's snout; that was all the response he would get. So Jon returned to examining the possibilities with vigor. Jon's mind reeled back to his last waking moments but he was only met with dense fog. He couldn't seem to recollect any of what transpired before

he fell unconscious. There was a block as obstinate as Arya, massive as Hodor and unmovable as the ramparts of Winterfell impeding his memory.

“Oh for the love! I am acting like a twit! I am wasting what precious time I have left to sleep. Rest will benefit me far better than interrogating you all night. What was I thinking asking a direwolf to bely my confusion.” Jon’s voice receded into a low grumble and he pulled at his curls in frustration as he stomped to bed and disrobed.

It was a lengthy and clumsy process interjected by the vilest of swears but Jon was finally able to shirk off his trousers, jerkin, undershirt and boots off without anymore bodily injury. He slipped into the cot and burrowed under the meager coverings, patting the space next to him for Ghost to nestle in.

Ghost wasted no time in complying and cozied into covering Jon’s frame. But before Jon snuffed out the candles held aloft his cot, the direwolf bucked back and playfully headbutted Jon’s shoulder.

Jon knew immediately what had irked Ghost.

“Alright, alright. You aren’t that poor of a conversationalist, I concede, and all offense is retracted. You’re a much more stimulating speaking partner than anyone of the human variety in this frozen hellhole. But don’t let that get to your head, that isn’t saying much. Intelligence and tact are few and far between within the ranks of the Night’s Watch, so it isn’t saying a lot that you can outwit the likes of Alliser Thorne or Albett. Good night, boy.”

Jon spat into his forefinger and thumb and watched as the light flickered away from the extinguished candles.

Ghost playfully bit Jon before sleep claimed them both, and Jon smiled a little knowing his companion was keen enough to catch the hidden jape undermining Ghost’s exceeding intellect. He loved the direwolf, but even his affection for Ghost could not drive off Jon’s jumbled memories.

The reasons for his fainting stuck to his skull like the gummy sap of a Weirwood. His wonderings were tantalizingly tempting in their rich red hue, but just far enough out of reach on the pearl white bark for Jon to retrieve. Giving up, Jon accepted that he would not remember how he passed out before the night was over. He slipped into a fitful sleep of lullabies, wolves and red tresses.

The morning dawned defiantly. Waking and getting dressed was a trying affair due to the immense clamor of Ser Alliser Thorne reprimanding Jon for his tardiness. Alliser’s jeers to hurry Jon up were as pestering as the whistle of a tea kettle about ready to burst into a mass of iron and steam. Jon’s own frustration seethed to a boil inside of him and he muttered several profanities as he fell over while pulling up his woolen stockings.

“Enough beauty sleep, Lord Snow.” Jon shoved his breeches on over his stockings. “Your brothers are up already, having shivered their sleep off ages ago.”

Jon fastened his jerkin to his undershirt.

“Hurry up you fancy pants bastard, I won’t wait all day.”

Jon jammed his feet into his leather boots.

“Our other recruits don’t reckon it’s too fair they stand out in the blistering cold doing combat drills, while you lounge around with your mutt!”

Jon fastened his belt and a finger got stuck in the clasp, he winced.

“By now you’ll be prettier than the Queen herself with all that rest.”

Jon shrugged on his coal woolen cloak.

“If you don’t come out now, I’ll drag you out myself.”

Jon fitted his fur lined gloves onto his hands and he was finished dressing.

He burst forward with Ghost at his side, the two moving together like a flowing mirage of beast and man, and finally responded to the Master at Arms’ taunts.

“Alright, Ser. Your point has been made plenty clear, I have obviously let my brothers down. I am no more deserving of more sleep than the rest of them. I am ready to begin my drills,” Jon forced out as diplomatically as possible, but he wasn’t convinced that his words were delivered without a nasty bite. He then bowed his head in deference, and smiled hollowly.

Alliser seemed less than satisfied, contempt etched his dismal face into a menacing scowl. He nodded and turned on his heel, but felt the need to throw one more heckle over his shoulder.

“And the Holy Seven let out their long awaited breath during your absence. Come and hope to show that your skills with the sword improved as much as your morning disposition. I tire of waiting on you.”

Jon wished to roll his eyes, but instead addressed Ghost.

“Cluck Cluck.” Jon clicked his tongue at Ghost and his direwolf nodded with the uncanny dignity and obedience of a man. Ghost was by no means obsequious but knew when he needed to follow orders.

The trio stalked down the wooden staircase cascading down the tilted tower. With each step, the staircase creaked and croaked threateningly . The precariousness of the steps caused Jon and Ghost to hurry their descent and beat Alliser to the crust of snow awaiting them at the bottom.

In their pursuit of stable ground Ghost and Jon unintentionally brush past the Master of Arms and bump sides with him. Ser Alliser was not amused.

“Although your vigor is commendable, never venture to rush past your superior officers again. It is unbecoming of the Night’s Watch for recruits to jolt against their betters and walk

before them. Show some respect or you will be mucking out the stables with the other lowly stewards and rejects. Instead of a sword you will have a shovel and pitchfork.”

Thorne ignored the rude gesture Jon tried so valiantly to hide and continued towards the training yard with his austere head held high and his sword's pommel gleaming slightly in the light projected off the wall. Ghost ran off to relieve himself and the scamper off towards the king's road to hunt. Jon felt exceedingly glum without Ghost and listened as their footfalls grew out of synch, the direwolf peeled away from the men.

The snow was slightly slushy but not melted enough to hinder any movement, and the pair reached the training area within a few minutes. A heavy silence had settled between Thorne and Jon, so uncomfortable that Jon was cheered to join the black rank and file of his compatriots.

Recruits had been divided up into groups of four and were further split into teams of two, each duo would work together to ward off the attacks of those opposite them. Surprisingly, the men were able to maintain the semblance of a clean column, and the two parallel lines heaved to and fro when blows were exchanged.

The clash of steel on steel reinvigorated Jon's spirits and he rushed off to the armory before Alliser could find some other reason to scold Jon. A rush of heat greeted him upon entering the armory. Donal Noye was deeper in the building hunched over an anvil hammering away at a sword.

Jon waved to the armorer but he was met by no reply. Foregoing further hailings, Jon searched for a suitable blade ensconced in the weapon's stand. He found a blade that looked sturdy and sharp enough to withstand hours of training and took a moment to appreciate the crevices and serrations beaten into the sword from years of use. The weapon was no creation of Mikken, the Winterfell blacksmith, but Donal Noye was skilled at his craft nonetheless. Jon then donned a protective vest and he was all set to train.

Jon sheathed the sword and called out a genuine thanks to the armorer still enraptured with his work.

Jon returned to the training yard and looked for a group to join, while trying to steer clear of Ser Jaremy Rykker who was barking orders and criticisms to the recruits busy at swordplay. The last thing Jon wanted to do was aggravate another senior officer with not only his lateness but also standing around idle.

He spotted Grenn and Pypar crowding around Samwell Tarly who huddled to the side of the steel volleys taking place around him. From the looks of it, Grenn and Pypar were antagonizing Sam with a steady supply of mockeries, deriding the boy's obesity and outright refusal to fight back. Grenn poked Sam with the blunt point of his sword and chuckled as the fat rolls of Sam's belly undulated. Jon could not stand their ill treatment of a man who had done nothing to deserve it.

He called out, “Perhaps the two of you would prefer to fight someone who is actually armed and willing to spar. Samwell has discarded his blade in the snow, therefore he is defenseless.

It is tasteless to harass a man without a weapon. Face me if you would, I think I can handle two on one.”

Jon’s bravado was very uncharacteristic of him but he had an excess of energy to burn off and he had to teach the delinquents that abusing their advantage was shameful. He shook off any remnants of weariness and warmed up his cold muscles. Grenn and Pypar watched as Jon shuffled in place and left Sam to his own shivering devices. The boy’s face had drained of all color and his eyes bulged with disbelief that someone stood up for him.

Grenn was the first to press the advantage while Pypar stayed back for a few moments to assess Jon’s technique. Grenn’s offensive was like a bristling aurochs stampeding towards Jon, but he was able to easily hop out of the way and catch Grenn’s sword, redirecting the blow into the ice trampled underfoot. With Grenn momentarily off-balanced, Jon swiped his own sword at Grenn’s bowed back with the flat of his sword and forced him to the ground.

Pypar joined the fray to take the pressure off his partner with a mighty two handed slash aimed at Jon’s head, rather impressive for a man of such slight stature. Jon parried the strike for the most part, and the edge of the sword grazed Jon’s vambrace and a flurry of sparks erupted away like a family of lightning bugs. Jon kicked Pypar square in the abdomen and he crumpled to his hands and knees.

Grenn’s hulking form had since then risen from the wan muck and swiped away the flakes pressed on his burgeoning beard. He lumbered forward and his face burned indignantly, obviously he was grappling embarrassment. Jon was amply willing to compound Grenn’s shame.

“Is that the best you got Grenn? You went down faster and harder than a fallen snowbear.”

Jon twirled the sword in his grip to readjust his hold and smiled haughtily at Jon, goading the man to clumsily attack once more.

Grenn growled roughly but refrained from responding.

Good, I’ve made him angry. And sloppier to boot I will bet.

Grenn measured his advance this time around and kept his senses about him. His eyes narrowed and this warned Jon to be ready.

“You are gonna pay for that, bastard,” Grenn roared.

Jon narrowly avoided a thwack of the sword targeting his neck and he retreated a few paces back. The two circled each other until Grenn made to punch Jon with his gauntlet and then turned his blade around on Jon’s vulnerable side.

Jon evaded the punch but the sword was true in its design and jabbed Jon’s ribcage. The air was knocked from Jon’s lungs and all he wanted to do was gasp greedily, but by that time Grenn was winding up for another go, and it sounded like Pypar had recovered himself.

“You’re playing dirty Snow, but there isn’t anyone dirtier than myself,” Pyp bit out.

Jon laughed. "That isn't much of a compliment to yourself."

Pypar then swung at Jon in a wide arc at chest height to stab him, but he clouted only the fog of Jon's breath, as Jon had dropped to his knees. Like a whip Jon snapped up again and undercut Pypar right in the chin and pockets of sanguine jumped from Pypar's battered jaw.

Grenn then made another slash at Jon, but his sword fell out of his hand when Jon's own sword crested the metal of Grenn's half helm. The oaf returned to his knees and cradled his head sporting a ansty gash.

Both opponents lay in heaps at Jon's feet.

"Had enough yet? I can do this all day, but I reckon that the lot of you cannot. Now, why don't we cease the pointless hostilities and I teach you to fight fairly? Eh?"

Jon dropped his own sword and extended both hands to pull Grenn and Pypar to their feet.

Jon continued, "I've already made enough enemies here for having only been here a few weeks. I would much rather prefer to make some friends, and if we are to swear lifelong loyalty to each other, we might as well learn to fight competently."

Pypar and Grenn hesitated as they contemplated Jon's offer. It was apparent that they agreed as they accepted Jon's proffered hands and unsteadily regained their footing.

Grenn started, "You've got the right of it Snow. Even if we wanted to, we couldn't overcome you. Instead maybe we can figure out how to become passable swordsmen instead of spending decades having our arses handed to us. Thoughts Pyp?"

Pyp gurgled out an affirmative response as he held his maltreated jaw in his gloved grip. Some blood bubbled at the corner of his lips but the message was clear enough: he wanted to accept Jon's offer of peace and tutelage.

Grenn then turned to Samwell, and pointed at him. "What about him?" he inquired.

Jon considered that.

Grenn and Pypar have potential if they can be improved if tempered and unstructured properly. Samwell is another matter. But I have no choice other than to help him as well. Gods know he needs it.

"Samwell will become one of us. We will make a Brother of him yet. But first, I think an apology is in order."

Jon looked at Grenn and Pypar expectantly, entirely open to guilting them if need be.

The pair dropped their heads abashedly and mustered up their bruised egos.

In unison they mumbled, "I'm sorry. We need to stick together with men like Ser Alliser Thorne breathing down our necks. It was not proper for us to be so cruel. We need to watch each other's backs instead of making more enemies like Jon said. Could you forgive us?"

Sam was so speechless he only nodded wildly and the flubber under his chin whacking back and forth mixed with his cherry red countenance was ridiculous enough to make all three of the other men stifle their laughter.

Jon wagered that if Sam weren't as shy as he presented himself, he'd launch forward and crush them all in an embrace.

"I was so scared to come here, I thought I would die for sure. But now, for the first time in my entire life I can actually have true friends and brothers. All is forgiven!" Sam cheered.

Jon's stoicism split into a delighted grin.

"Alright then, we have lots of work to do if we want to be in fighting form by the time they deem us ready to take our vows" Jon stayed.

Apparently Ser Rykker had caught wind that Jon's group had stopped training and were instead exchanging words in place of blows. Thus he ceased the tongue lashing he was giving Todder, Daeron, Jeren and Halder to descend upon Jon and his friends like a starving vulture.

The ranger arrived in time to overhear the tail end of the conversation and leered deliberately at what he made out.

He knows something. But what?

Ser Rykker stood there and let the recruits squirm for a few minutes with his eerie snicker echoing in their ears. Then he let them in on the secret:

"You won't have much of a wait until officially taking the Black. I heard the Old Bear himself scheming to have the Vows take place tonight. Ready yourselves."

He walked away laughing once more, seemingly unmoved at the consternation he caused in the initiates.

"Tonight?" Grenn, Pypar and Sam cried simultaneously, gulping next.

Jon chuckled.

And as if a manifestation of the lot's dismay, Jeor Mormont stalked to the balcony jutting out from the second floor of the Lord Commander's tower. He waited there, unwavering with his massive corn craving crow on one shoulder and his snowy beard clashing violently with his inky apparel. Until no voices resounded throughout the yard only then did he address his mern.

"The time has come for you to swear yourself to the Brotherhood. This batch of initiates has been here for nigh a fortnight, and where boys once were, I now see men if my old eyes don't fail me."

Among the masses Jon heard a voice, and he fancied it none other than Alliser Thorne, and the voice was blatantly deriding Mormont, "More likely than not. This lot couldn't tell you the difference between a spade and a sword. Lord Mormont's eyes atrophied long ago."

He smirked and looked to his cronies for validation. However uncannily, Mormont shot a virulent look to Thorne and that shut him up immediately.

Jon could not figure how Mormont detected the jape but now that he looked closer, Mormont's old crow had perched atop Thorne's shoulder and glared at him as hostility as his master.

Mormont then continued, "If I could, I would give you more time to acclimate to the cold and perceive Castle Black as a home, no matter how negligible. But that would take days, or even years. And time is what we no longer have. We've been undermanned for far too long by many men of honor or worth, and our numbers have diminished unsustainability. We cannot wait anymore, just now we have lost one of our very best, Bejen Stark on a scouting mission. The words of his house could not be more fitting today, "Winter is Coming".'

'Thus we must all be ready to face it as brothers of the black. Decide upon where you will take your vows, the sept or the Weirwood. The location couldn't matter less to me. All that I care about is that your words are true and resolute. Senior officers will be assigned to escort those of you who keep with the Old Gods to the Weirwoods at midnight. That is all.'

The Old Bear retreated but his crow continued to circle and wheel above everyone's heads. Periodically he squawked "corn" and once he landed on the crown of Jon's head. That got a immense laugh from Grenn and Pypar, but was more preoccupied with the bird's talons ripping his curls out at the root.

The hours dwindled away like the melted wax of a candle. As a flame eventually burns out, the sun receded into the eastern horizon leaving behind ribbons of faint orange and heavy indigo. The remainder of the day was spent training, eating and getting to know each other until it was time to depart to the Weirwood grove beyond the Wall. A sickle lay suspended in the sky and from its filed edges, brittle but bright moonlight kissed the icy lebe that stretched out beyond the Wall and Castle Black.

It was that moon which signaled it was time to saddle up and take the oath. And that is how Jon flanked by three new allies found himself kneeling before the gaunt and grim face carved upon a Weirwood.

Cold sleet bit through all of Jon's layers from his knees and the sting permeated Jon's entire body. He quaked and trembled in the open night protected by only the circle of heart trees and his unwavering faith in the Old Gods. Ghost sat panting beside him.

All four men shared a look and began their vows knowing they could only forsake them upon pain of death:

"Night gathers, and now my watch begins. It shall not end until my death. I shall take no wife, hold no lands, father no children. I shall wear no crowns and win no glory. I shall live and die at my post. I am the sword in the darkness. I am the watcher on the walls. I am the fire that burns against the cold, the light that brings the dawn, the horn that wakes the

sleepers, the shield that guards the realms of men. I pledge my life and honor to the Night's Watch, for this night and all the nights to come.”

Once the words were finished Jon knew that everything had changed, like the ground had lurched beneath his feet and began spinning counter to its innate course. But alas, none of the like occurred.

Jon peered into the cavities carved away to bear the sad eyes of the Weirwood face. And oddly pupils shown within the depths and flitted downward, catching Jon's attention and encouraging him to look also. From the chapped and swollen lips of the heart tree ruby juice slid down, staining the pearly bark. With no rational thought in his head, Jon lowered his hand and stole a few drops from a nearby deposit. Then he brought the sap to his own mouth and swallowed the viscous material.

His heart pounded in his ears, and then all went silent. He thought he heard a wolf's final whimper, a lady's otherworldly cry and the angry tears of a young girl, all congealing to yank back Jon's memories of the night before to his mind. Jon recalled all of it.

Ghost knocked me over, and I had a vision. A dream mayhaps, of danger and heartbreak. In my vision Lady, Ghost's littermate was slain, a lady was inconsolable, so much pain echoed in her cries. But then, the pain abated, muted for the moment, and two girls were running.

Flickers of inn walls shattering like frail kindling and Sansa's titanic cry flash in his eyes. Then a forest spins around Jon and he sees a massive man with a face half burnt off come across three sleeping figures. He draws his blood flecked sword and the direwolf coils back with fangs bared.

One girl is standing hip to hip with the grey beast eyes shining brighter than castle forged steel and brown feral hair. The other wasn't as much a girl, but a woman grown, all elegant and feminine with her copper spirals. Her eyes reflected the cerulean sky above. They couldn't be anymore different, but inexplicably they were the same: two girls of noble birth thrust into a world much more deadly than their castle. But who are they?

Do I know them? Am I related to them? San...Ary.... Sansa and Arya! My half sisters! Something is incredibly wrong because they aren't with the royal procession anymore. They're losing loved ones and hunted by the Hound! The Hound is only called upon to exact revenge or shed blood on the Crown's behalf. And where is Father?

Had Father gone with the girls? No, I didn't see that. He must have stayed behind, but why? Oh it didn't truly matter. Lady is dead, and I've tethered myself to the Order for the rest of my days. In taking the black I've abandoned Sansa and Arya. But they need my help, and I can do nothing but freeze my balls off at Castle Black!

Wait, I've made friends. Friends I think in time I can come to love and trust like Robb. That's the way, when the time is right I will depart the Wall and take my friends with me to rescue Lord Stark and the girls.

Jon snapped his hooded head to read Ghost's own thoughts and he knew they were of the same mind. It wasn't possible to leave so abruptly, as his life would be forfeit due to

desertion. Not to mention that his honor would be tarnished beyond repair if he broke his vows.

The son of Eddard Stark was as beholden to duty, as his father before him, they just had different responsibilities. For so long duty meant staying out of the way for Jon, and ruling for Ned. There was nothing else the bastard was compelled to do.

But moments ago that all changed and I've tied myself to another, noble and meaningful cause. I am a man of the Night's Watch, and that means I have forsaken all other loyalties. However, rational this distinction, it doesn't make divorcing myself from the past any easier. What kind of man would I be to abandon the Starks? A man of his word?

Bugger that if I give up on those who still need me Being a Brother that doesn't negate the fact that I am still a child of House Stark and have another family. For my sake, both as a man of principle and worthy judgement, I must not stray from my chosen path, as a kinsman and brother alike!

I cannot let Sansa and Arya get hurt because of my own inaction. There is no path I can take that will not contradict a part of who I am, and erode my integrity. Each option brings self destruction.

If only I could combine the two...but reconcile the Night's Watch with what... fantasies and dreams? No, that makes no sense. And yet, somehow I know it is all too real. Sometimes we have to have faith when rationality isn't enough. And my love for the Starks conquers all reason. I have to trust that what I see and feel is true, no matter how fanciful or disturbing. I must unite my tangible obligation to the Black Brotherhood with the ingrained fidelity I owe my kin.

Yes that might work. I must ensure that my personal wishes align with those of my new Order. I'll have to think of a legitimate reason to venture South. Whatever it is must be sanctioned by the Order, mayhaps getting closer to the likes of Bowen Marsh or Jeor Mormont would yield favorable results. But what could that be?

Chapter End Notes

If you're still with me, you're . I hope this can help a little during this scary and crazy time!

If you have any questions, critiques or suggestions please feel free to share them! In addition, all of the kudos and follows make me tear up a bit.

Please go and check out Sonderlust45's MANY JONSA FICS. She is a master and deserves all the READS, KUDOS and COMMENTS!

A Den of Deathly Dreams

Chapter Summary

House Stark reels in more ways than one from the disruption of their household, and threat to their way of life.

Chapter Notes

So, I am not dead. I REPEAT I AM NOT DEAD! Jonsa fam, Happy New Year and I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. As we go back to work and school I hope that this chapter can help make that process a little less painful, and more bearable. If any of you ever need someone to talk, I would be honored to chat with y'all or discuss all things ASOIAF.

I sincerely hope the writing isn't too choppy or OC for the kids, as it's been awhile since I was so young, so trying to reconcile young age with the high level education they receive is difficult.

This wouldn't be possible without my two betas: [dreams_for_spring](#) and [formerAnnie](#). They are some of the best people out there and I love them to death!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bran Stark

Bran's gaze sank to the modest helping of gruel lodged in his wooden bowl. His elbows were harbored heavily at his sides and he sat slumped over the feast table. The beige puffs and plumes of soggy barley interspersed with chunks of dried apricots were all that Bran could see at the moment. And his breakfast wasn't much company compared to the attention he craved.

Since waking up from a coma Bran had justifiably felt rather withdrawn and removed, but the feeling had magnified to loneliness in the latter days of the week.

That morning in particular Bran thought himself neglected by the other members of his household. He didn't know why, or what he had done wrong, but he certainly felt like he was being punished for awakening.

It was disheartening to say the least, and at the most it broke his heart. It seemed he was destined to be both a cripple and a pariah due to an infirmity or flaw seemingly beyond his control. His recollection of coming too was mired in drowsiness, only fleeting images splashed before his eyes and the sensations of alarm and unbearable warmth flush through his body.

The bed was drowned in sweat, but it felt scalding to Bran all the same. In his feverish daze, he had the clarity to utter a string of words that he knew must be recounted immediately. The meaning of the words darted around the periphery of conscious understanding, but the root meaning was clear: what he had seen while unconscious could not be known to him alone.

In what was slurred and aimless speech, Bran managed to articulate a few key phrases...
“Lady dead...Father captured...Sansa screaming...Fly...He said I will fly if I choose to...but I made the wrong choice...will not run or fly...but crawl instead.”

Upon hearing the rambling Mother and Maester Luwin had placated him soothingly, and listened to his dwindling whispers until he fell asleep again. Bran was not sober or alert enough to catch the whispers exchanged between Mother and the maester, but he had seen the way his mother's eyes blew wide like the ripples of a stone thrown in a pond. She was obviously disturbed by his ill tidings, but she smothered it with motherly crooning, toweling him off and stroking his auburn hair.

With the image of Summer's aureate eyes beckoning him to slumber, Bran surmised that he had failed in gaining their conviction and slept.

To make matters worse, mother and Luwin seemed to have sworn a united front to change the subject from everything Bran babbled in his somnolent state. Any time Bran tried to revisit the fragments he remembered he was met with rushed nods and cursory excuses citing responsibilities as more pressing.

He hated the constant dismissal, because in the pit of his stomach he *felt*, no, he *knew* that what he said in his sleep was *true*. His mother and his maester were supposed to give him

guidance and comfort, nurturance welded into the marrow of their bones. And yet, all they could do was hush him up to quiet the ill tidings that his words aroused in their own mind.

It was all so unfair, what have I done to deserve this? I am the blood of the direwolf, and the entrapments of men shouldn't concern me! Bran ached to shout into the empty Great Hall, but he tempered the impulse because he remembered the presence of the sniffing russet-headed child with watery eyes and a snotty nose. Sniffles and abundant dry hiccups ruined the typically lively and easy ambience of breakfast time, he mentally shook off the dregs of sullenness he had made friends with.

Rickon. Ahh, how could I have forgotten my little brother? This was as difficult a time as any for the family, but poor Rickon wasn't old enough or sufficiently mature such as myself to comprehend all of the changes occurring within the household.

Bran was almost a man grown and had the wherewithal to articulate the rampant comings and goings of personnel within the castle. Pride bloomed in Bran's collapsed chest and he sat up straight with renewed vigor.

Robb had hardly a moment to spare with his new delegating and facilitations as acting lord of the keep, and mother along with Maester Luwin were attached to both his hips like his prized dagger and longsword. Robb was agitated to no end that the authority figures in his life regarded him as unable to properly lead Winterfell's people, but he was too good-natured to air his grievances.

And therefore, Robb could no longer be the default eldest brother to whom all the nightmares and bruised egos were laid bare to; that was now Bran's place. He would have to be the comfort and guidance that Rickon was sorely lacking. Because the littlest Stark hadn't adjusted well to the departure of half of their family. At least until father returned home, and things could be normal again. *Or at least as normal as possible, being a cripple and all.*

But Bran then noticed the renewal of aplomb within posture, recognizing that he had already set aside his own tribulations. He remembered the distressed child to his left, his own moaning could wait until he instilled the same composure in Rickon.

He couldn't utilize the muscles in his legs to latch on to the bench and slide closer to Rickon, so instead Bran used all of his strength to propel himself by gripping the table fiercely and

swinging leftward.

It wasn't a dignified maneuver, but it did the trick. Rickon looked up immediately as he sensed the new presence to his side. Alarm, shock, and then happiness proceeded to mold his features, and Bran was startled at Rickon's reaction time.

Out of all the siblings, except perhaps Arya, Rickon was the most primal and wolfish, his emotions and ambitions driving his every rash decision and formidable outburst.

And Rickon's personality transferred over to Shaggydog, who had become so insolent and ornery that he wasn't permitted within the castle walls anymore. The two both suffered for it, but mother was insistent.

Rickon's reflexes were almost lupine in celerity so it was no wonder at all that he launched himself into Bran's arms with no preamble.

Bran almost lost the tenuous grip he had on his balance but Summer was under the table instantly to grab the fabric of Bran's trousers with jaws. With Summer's assistance, Bran remained upright but he didn't fail to notice the slobber that now seeped into his pants near his ankle when he glanced downward.

What a good boy! He is always there, whenever I need him. We might as well be one and the same. He is the ultimate protector. My protector.

The Direwolves have only been part of the household for a short while but Summer had already saved Bran more times than he could count.

Afterall, my direwolf was the one to notify my family of my fall from the Broken Tower and Summer even killed the catspaw that tried to assassinate me during my coma. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be here. Someday, I will do the same for him.

Bran mentally thanked Summer for his interference and he almost swore that the smoky beast nodded in a conciliating gesture.

Perish the thought Bran. Summer cannot understand you so well as to respond in kind. Quit these childish thoughts and see to Rickon.

Bran chastised himself and refocused onto Rickon who had begun crying once again and clutched his elder brother's vestments. So Bran did his fraternal duty and wrapped his arms around Rickon's trembling torso. He crooned and shushed Rickon until his tears ceased and the young boy was coherent enough to explain his sadness. Bran continued to pat Rickon on his maroon cap of curls that were as unruly as ever.

When he decided Rickon wouldn't break out into tears again, Bran lowered his hand to his side and looked intently at Rickon.

"Why are you crying, Rickon? What happened? Did someone hurt you?"

Bran registered that his voice rose in volume and intensity as he finished his questions. Anxiety tinged his throat and tongue with the possibility that another catspaw was lurking in the castle.

Could there be another assassin in Winterfell, and are they after Rickon? Is this my fault? The last catspaw didn't finish the job and Rickon is even more vulnerable without Shaggydog near him. Rickon could be the next target! Whoever would strike such a bargain to murder a child in exchange for some meager gold dragons is beyond despicable! I will not let that happen again in Winterfell, the North should house only the noblest and most honorable of individuals. So, I will be noble as well and protect my house.

Bran turned and called for the slumbering Hodor in the corner to awaken. His snores were surprisingly faint for a man of his formidable size but he made a ruckus whenever startled. It took several moments for him to take stock of his surroundings and his long and shaggy brown hair and beard of the same color moved in tandem as he shook off the residual sleepiness.

The stool he slept on creaked and groaned once it was released from the burden of his great weight and Hodor's tendons popped and cracked to life as he stretched.

The spectacle made Rickon giggle and all signs of distress faded away. Hodor bent down to retrieve the basket he strapped to his back to carry Bran around in and the stretch of leather and the shuffling of buckles announced that Hodor was ready to bear Bran's weight.

Bran smiled earnestly at the sight of his younger brother reacting brightly to the giant stable boy's noisy and clumsy antics and in his own merriment forgot to give Rickon the opportunity to answer what had upset him so.

Hodor lumbered over to the High Table and bent down to pick up Bran and deposit him inside the basket. However, Rickon was still holding fast to Bran so he hitched a ride as well.

"Hodor?" The stableboy inquired.

Bran ordered, "To the stables Hodor. We're missing a key member of our party."

Bran gave the directive in a confident voice that he preferred to imagine was sonorous and knightly, pointing his finger in the general path to the stables.

Rickon giggled and his head lolled side to side with every stomp of Hodor on the uneven flagstones.

Hodor knew the route better than perhaps anyone else in the household because his primary station had been to care for the stables and horse pens before Bran's accident. Now Hodor was Bran's primary mode of transport.

Hodor and his passengers along with Summer slinking soundlessly beside them walked the length of the great hall and appreciated the gallery of tapestries that adorned the sooty stone walls as they gently flapped with the subtle autumn breeze that absconded into the large corridor through the ajar doors.

Despite the oaken great door's massive size and tremendous weight, Hodor only needed to softly push each door wider apart to accommodate his hulking profile. None of the Stark children, including Robb, Jon and even their ward Theon could close or open the doors by themselves. Normally, it demanded at least two to three men grown to control the egress when they needed to be unlatched or shut, but in his own peculiar but extraordinary fashion Hodor could move the doors almost effortlessly.

Bran heard whispers that Hodor had giant's blood and he found that incredibly exciting, but nobody else would even entertain the prospect that Old Nan had wedded a man related to the mythical creatures of the True North. So Bran internally and secretly indulged in his belief and divulged it to Rickon when no one else could hear.

Rickon was the perfect confidant for any morsel of fun or bit of naughtiness as he was beyond reproach because of his young age and strong attachment to their mother. Anything Rickon said would be waved off as juvenile nonsense or make believe.

Rickon began to get giddy and bounce energetically as he realized their destination and to who they were visiting.

With his mighty strides, Hodor covered the expanse of the castle yard in a few dozen paces and walked unobstructed through the recently cleared dirt and dust. Once the stables were within sight, Summer quickly glanced at Bran and then reared forward to run towards his brother, who was contained within one of the stables.

Summer yipped enthusiastically and scratched at the wooden barrier between him and Shaggydog.

Shaggydog innately sensed the presence of his littermate and his howls thundered through the yard. In return, Rickon was growing agitated and was squirming fiercely to dismount from Hodor's back. He impatiently pounded his chubby fists onto Hodor and started to yank on the chestnut strands of hair Hodor left lying down his back.

Hodor humphed and repeated his name several times over with growing agitation.

“Hodor, Hodor, Hodor. Hodor!” Nonetheless, he expertly ignored Rickon’s assault and knelt his knees into the mud so the distance was safe enough for Rickon to jump. Bran winced at the squish and smack of the muck as Rickon landed, hard.

He hated to think of the begrimed sight Rickon made but he remained silent and watched Rickon launch towards the pen. He was too short to use, let alone reach the iron latch so he had to make do with answering Shaggydog’s howls with his own.

The cacophony was grating on Bran’s nerves and most likely everyone else on the premises; he wished to hush them both up, but he didn’t want to make Rickon cry again, so he held his tongue and simply enjoyed the pure relief and joy that the toddler and his direwolf exuded when they were reunited.

Rickon scuttled over to Shaggydog, stumbling a few times when he reached a particularly slippery island of muck but made it to the direwolf with little enough trouble. Once the two clashed, Rickon flung all of his mud onto Shaggy’s already matted and bristly obsidian mane, and the young boy and direwolf collided into a mess of fur and giggles. Bran couldn’t tell where Rickon ended and his wolf began.

Once the novelty of their reconciliation wore off, Shaggydog ambled past Rickon and yipped juvenily as he regarded Summer’s presence. The brothers sniffed each other, tousled a bit, and dared playful nips at each other’s ears. If the direwolves understood one thing at all, it was brotherhood, more so than any man.

And with that conclusion, Bran had to truly appreciate how fortunate he was to have so many brothers and sisters, no matter if they were far or near.

However, Rickon was his only sibling within his immediate vicinity, and Bran would make the most of every moment he had with his little brother.

The corners of his lips pointed upward to accommodate his growing grin, and he saw a mirror image on Rickon’s cherubic and jovial face.

Rickon grabbed fistfuls of Shaggydog's unruly fur and tugged until the direwolf got the hint that Rickon wanted to ride him. Shaggydog retaliated with some hollow snarls and mere shades of his bared teeth, but everyone knew that he would never hurt Rickon, no matter the nuisance the youngest Stark son could become. They were two sides of the same coin and could be agitated by the other, but must in the end accept and love their counterpart.

Rickon was always a little clumsy, so it took a few attempts for him to aptly mount Shaggydog from where he knelt down and he threw a sour glare at Bran when he made fun of his failings. Rickon intended to look menacing and scare Bran into no longer teasing his ungainliness. Instead, Bran only persisted in finding amusement at Rickon's expense with a heckling chortle.

The little Starkling's lips were puckered so tightly, his skin beet red and his eyes narrowed thinner than the fletching of a longbow. He looked like he had an especially acrid lemon cake bereft of the light dusting of powdered sugar that Sansa adored.

But then Rickon had finally situated himself between Shaggydog's broad shoulders and grasped handfuls of inky coat, and moved the tufts of head similar to the reigns of a horse.

Rickon looked back at Bran to announce his attention to begin a new expedition. His younger brother was fortunate that Shaggy didn't snap up and take a chunk from his chubby hands for so rudely pulling his fur.

He wanted to explore the Wolfswood with Hodor, Bran and Summer joining the excursion, but he realized that he never answered Bran's question.

"Bran! Bran!" Rickon called out his elder brother's name mightily until Bran stopped sniggering.

Bran supposed that he had given Rickon enough grief for the day; after all he had started crying. He silenced himself to hear what Rickon had to say.

"Braaaaaaaan!" Rickon whined.

Bran wiped residual wetness brought on due to laughter from his eyes and cleared his throat, and responded,

“What is it Rickon? Tell me?”

Without a moment’s hesitation Rickon burst out, “I had a bad dream. I saw the king dead, and papa was next.”

A rock, ice cold, plunged to the depths of Bran’s heart and shed its layers of numbing rime as it fell. Flakes of frost coated his innards and stole the breath from Bran’s throat. He went entirely still and remained unresponsive until Hodor’s incoherent mumbling and Summer’s whining broke through the hoary veneer.

Hodor’s breathing has accelerated so fast, with every huff and puff Bran wagered the behemoth man would pass out and take Bran down with him, tumbling into the mud. From what he could figure Hodor was panicking. The poor fellow was prone to fits of anxiety and he couldn’t verbalize what agitated him so much. Hodor seemed particularly intent on Bran’s currently stock still form.

I must be deathly pale. Hodor doesn’t understand why I’ve stopped cold in my tracks, so to speak. I’m sitting up here as severe and unyielding as the statues that dwell within the crypts. I feel as if all of the blood has drained from my face and been replaced by ice water, and this only occurred after Rickon divulged why he was upset.

King Robert dead and father dying? Preposterous! Rickon’s words are nothing but a fanciful farcical It must be...but he spoke so surely, like his dream had imparted some irrefutable impression, or wisdom from a mysterious source...My dreams also have left me similarly rattled. No...no. I am letting Rickon’s imagination get to me.

It has been a trying time for all so it makes sense that Rickon would also be having night terrors and stupendous visions of three-eyed crows. No! Not visions! Mere dreams and nothing more!

Perhaps Rickon and I had a severe reaction to dream wine that maester plies us with when we cannot sleep. That must be it.

Bran shook his head and recentered on the group below him. He whistled lowly, a soothing tune that assured Summer and Shaggy. They went silent. Then Bran looked towards Hodor and Rickon to temper their own worries. The goal was to restore Hodor to his normal pattern of breathing and end Rickon's sobs before they both fell unconscious for want of air.

"Shhhh. Shhh. Quiet down both of you! I am quite alright, I just got lost on my thoughts. No reason to fear," Bran tried to deliver gently.

Rickon hiccuped sporadically and continued to tear up, but his sobs had rescinded and Hodor became stiller.

"What an odd dream you had! It must have been very frightening," Bran said in an exaggerated tone to empathize with Rickon.

"But you were so brave to sleep through it and to tell me about it. When I was your age I would wet the bed and wail until mother or Maester Luwin came to check on me. I couldn't get out two words, let alone recall my nightmare. Good on you Rickon. You're more courageous than you know."

Rickon nodded along meaningfully to Bran's words and near the end began to beam brightly. His earnest smile and air of pride were all Bran needed to know. His brother had moved on to enjoy the praise and was preening like a pup taught the command to roll over. He would think no more of death, but of how he was the bravest Stark of all and would be a true force to be reckoned with when he came of age.

The group began their adventure to the Weirwood, but Bran's own grin was as frail and timid as how he felt on the inside.

"I am fine, really. Quit your fretting, I just got lost in my thoughts while trying to remember my own dreams from the night before. Nonetheless in the end they aren't that important and

shouldn't weigh heavily on us the day after. Dreams are for sleeping, not for when you are awake. It is a waste of time to dwell on them now. My best advice is to forget about what you dreamt. Are you ready for us to begin our voyage? Lord Rickon...the Adventurer. Do you like that title?"

Rickon belly laughed merrily and shook his head.

"I would like that very much!"

Ned Stark

His arms were fastened tightly, flush against his sides and held together by the corroded and glacial irons that gauntleted his mangled hands, ripe with a motley of contusions. His wrists were chapped and blistering from the embrace of the chains. Every part of his body hurt and all he wanted was to collapse into a heap like the body before him.

But he had something to fight for. *Someone* to fight for. No collection of broken bones, weeping sores or numbing fatigue would deter Eddard Stark from returning his daughters safely home to Winterfell or restoring the rightful ruler on the Iron Throne.

The corpse of Robert Baratheon, or to be more exact, what remained of Robert's body, simmered in the shallow puddle of piss and rainwater gathering in the gulley of the dungeon. Rot had already set in and a miasma of postmortem flatulence and festered flesh wafted through the cramped and dank oubliette.

The pungent odor was only one of many reminders that the King of the Seven Kingdoms was dead. Robert was brutalized and eaten alive by starved hounds, his ultimate fate to be unceremoniously dumped next to the incarcerated Warden of the North. Although, the worst reminder were the unseeing cobalt optics that stared pointedly at Ned Stark through a shroud of milkiness.

Ned wondered when his friend had truly become so detached from his past self. And how he fell followed right along Robert in kind.

When did the dissociation begin and how could I not see to such a great extent? How would Robert have fallen so far, and I been none the wiser. I could have prevented this, if only I had reached out earlier. Visited the South and given Robert solid counsel, Westeros would not be on the brink of civil war or my daughters hunted down like dogs.

Oh my daughters...gods may they still be alive. They must be alive! But the way the Hound spoke of them when he came back from his search was monstrous. Cersei had denounced them as Northern witches. Girls versed in the ancient discipline of blood magic. Slight demonesses who cavorted with gremlins and other horrors. She even shrieked that they were actually products of fornication between my and the godless wildlings instead of Catelyn.

She had paced back and forth ferociously while gesticulating in time with her accusations that all of the Stark children were indeed bastards and Catelyn had sold the soul of House Tully to join with the culture of the First Men.

Cersei's words were damning enough, but the reactions she generated from her ramblings were even more worrisome. Other than Robert, Tyrion, Ned's own entourage and some kinder hearted retainers were calling for an inquisition, starting with the girls.

Ned had no doubt it was Tyrion who Cersei had learned the Northern lore and folktales from, her bitter and haughty demeanor only compounding her distaste for the First Men and House Stark. Tyrion had certainly not meant to put the girls in harm's way, he just wanted to share his findings of the Winterfell library with his negligent family. No matter what, Cersei had made folklore and slander appear as indisputable fact to condemn Arya and Sansa to death.

But Ned had resolved that they would not bleed for his follies.

I have made one king in my lifetime, and he faltered. But the next will not, for he has the blood of the North within him. Ned was sure of it

Chapter End Notes

I will do my best to have the next installment up quicker than 7 months but thank you for sticking with me! I won't set a date for the next chapter but it won't be as long I

promise!

Has anyone read Fire and Blood Volume I? I just finished it and the Targs are kinda gross. Some are interesting and I agree that Aegon's conquest had some positive effects, but the rest of his family was kinda crap after Jahaerys.

So let's return back to the Starks and the First Men for a little while. If you have any questions, critiques, theories, predictions etc. let me know!

Weaving the Way Forward

Chapter Summary

Arya and Sansa have to work together to remain far ahead of the Hound's clutches, while acquainting themselves with their mother's ancestral homeland.

Chapter Notes

So I need to thank Thoros of Myr for resurrecting me after my long ass hiatus from writing. I have no excuse other than school, junior year: organic chemistry and anatomy kicked my ass. However, I am getting closer to graduation so that makes me happy, but also the Big Bad World awaits so it's a trade off. But no matter what I'll always have ASOIAF and GOT to escape to. I sincerely apologize for the ridiculous break, and I'm on summer break for three more months. I hope to do lots of writing.

This isn't very action heavy at all, mostly a character development chapter, so not much action. Also, I hope it isn't too illogical that Sansa basically forgets the good idea she had when she gets scared, as I am trying to show that even though she is making progress, like anyone else, when thrown into overwhelming situations we can regress, and kinda lose our sense of self and rationality. They're still young women and prone to changing emotions and doubt.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Arya Stark

They ran for what felt like hours, only stopping when the slush of cascading water beating against stone overpowered the song of chirping birds and swaying tree branches. By that time the river was too hard to ignore, and that made all the difference.

There was no level of clear navigation or geographical knowledge dictating their decisions. Nymeria was the one to actually plot the course, and Arya was glad for it. The most she could hope for was that they were running AWAY from Sandor Clegane, but the absence of the kingsroad informed the group that they were not running due north.

Arya imagined they were running more northwest along the second prong of the Trident, and even Sansa was inclined to agree.

The girls bent their knees and slumped over with ragged wheezes and pants. Whereas Nymeria looked no worse for the wear, standing as Sansa especially suffered from

deprivation of air, so loud she sputtered, that Arya would have thought she was pretending if she knew no better. But their mad dash had been all too real.

Both girls crawled along the forest floor dodging rocky crags, mud puddles and rotted moss when possible but disregarded any new scrapes or messes made on their robes. As the river fork came into sight Arya finally realized how parched she was.

The moist squish of the sodden grass and shrubs only whetted her thirst more. Without much thought she clamored to the river, half on her hands and knees, and stuck her neck out as far as she could go. Sansa did the same.

Arya had never seen anything so winsome as the troughs and peaks that punctuated each indigo ripple. The rocks were all sleek and flat from thousands of years of consistent flow.

And how quenching the water was! The life blood of the Riverlands, and our mother's birthplace. It's the sweetest substance I have ever drunk! It must be a blessing sent to us, mayhaps even by Mother, little as she might like me. And it was her overwhelming disappointment in me that helped captive any interest I might have had in her formative years or the culture of her people. But now even when mother's constant admonishments and mouth curled taut in disdain were finally without, I miss her dreadfully. For all of her harsh moments and critiques, mother was also warm smiles and fierce embraces, mother was also home. And I yearn for it. If I ever see her again, I'd like for her to tell me more of her childhood, and the riverlands their grandfather presided over.

Her Tully heritage pulsed and thrummed with every drink she took, reinvigorated by the swathes of water around her. She ducked down and threw some on her face, and it was quite bracing, waking her momentarily before the reverie continued. Arya's mind wandered gently like the clouds floating in the sky and she enjoyed the coolness coating her cheeks even as the water dried.

She watched each drop fall and cut grooves into the river mud, red clay softening and growing glassy.

The river gives us life, and it is what will keep us alive.

Sansa turned to Arya and smiled. "It might be best that we cross. The king and queen wouldn't expect us to be that bold, or inventive to brave the currents and wash our scent away. We'll have to scout when the river is at its lowest and the tides are weak. But for now we should take a minute to rest."

Arya returned the tender grin and never felt more connected to her sister before, Sansa even sounded like her!

She spoke, "Family, Duty, Honor. Those are the words of House Tully. I'd never much cared for the frivolities and constraints south of the Neck, but at least the riverlands have gotten that right."

A beat of silence passed, and they shared another look of understanding.

“Family, Duty, Honor.” They both said together and the words took on new meaning for Arya.

Nymeria absorbed the encounter with clear eyes that cut to the truth of it: Sansa and Arya were fortunate enough for this chance at reconciliation, but Lady was lost to Nymeria forever. And for that Arya’s heart ached. She moved to comfort her direwolf, but as if sensing Arya’s sorrow and wishing for it to dissipate, Nymeria promptly rested on her haunches and her satin tongue lolled out to the side. A state that spoke volumes without making any sound: *It’s alright Arya, be with your sister now. Don’t let my own grief tarnish your joy.*

Arya gave her direwolf a meaningful nod, accepting the unspoken guidance, and turned to see what trouble Sansa had gotten into. However, to Arya’s surprise, there was no trouble to be had because Sansa had busied herself with constructive work after she decided she had caught her breath.

Sansa sought to collect some kindling and Arya joined her with no preamble. Instinctively, Arya considered what she knew of the regional flora, and her knowledge of the seasons and climate informed Arya that it might prove a challenge to procure any acceptable items to feed a fire. The focus of their hunt in particular were fallen branches or even dry pine needles that were unfortunately sparse this time of year because it was the rainy season. Any refuse cast aside by the throngs of conifers and evergreens were sure to be rotted before they hit the ground. Typically, humid air choked with moisture and constant exposure to water from the sky and river alike, rendered all wood and shrubbery ripe with dampness and unsuitable for a fire.

Although, thankfully, that day was unlike any other: the sky bereft of any storm clouds since morning and the sun had shone steadfastly. Arya’s earlier pessimism had indeed been wrong, and miraculously the thick curtains of rain were yet to trouble them. The area was clear and dry enough so there shouldn’t be any trouble alighting the kindling with flint or an edged rock perched above the river bank.

The girls worked in companionable silence for half of an hour until Arya took inventory of their bounty. Arya had retrieved most of the kindling that was acceptable to take to flame, but Sansa in her own way had contributed a modest helping of twigs and shoots.

Sansa saw where Arya started her pile and contributed her findings to the collective.

“This should be sufficient for at least one fire. If we could transport any remaining bark, twigs or branches it would go a long way to warding away the chills. However, I can’t think of a way to carry them that wouldn’t require filling our arms with the rest. And if our arms are working to support our loads then not only will it inhibit our walking speed, but we won’t be able to scavenge any other useful things to carry. But we should just appreciate the time we have to replenish our energy.” Arya stated.

Sansa listened but seemed otherwise preoccupied mentally. Arya just pressed on.

“We also can’t make a fire until night time, because any smoke stream we burn will lead the Hound and the royal retinue our way. So we should devise a plan for when we leave our rest spot.” Arya scratched her chestnut hair in deep thought and took note of the knots and tangles

that had formed. She half expected Sansa to chide her for her wayward appearance, and seeming distaste for proper grooming.

Arya cringed slightly, hunched over to render herself a more minute target and almost braced herself for a tongue lashing, but none came.

Sansa instead was undoing her own hair, the copper tresses fluidly slid down Sansa's back and Arya felt a pang of envy flutter in her chest.

But before Arya had the chance to jab at Sansa's own vanity, she saw that Sansa had already moved onto another.

As soon as Sansa's strands fell inert she bent down and grabbed a handful of kindling to twist into her hair. Sansa carefully examined the lengths of the pieces she selected with cerulean eyes narrowed, nose scrunched and her lips buried in a thoughtful bite.

Accordingly she wove and knotted the bark and twigs into a corresponding lock of hair and secured it as tight as possible. Soon enough, a decent portion of the kindling had been tangled into the auburn curls and removed from the pile.

Arya was dumbstruck for several moments and her speech faltered.

What was Sansa doing to her beautiful hair?!? It would be a gnarled mess for days, how could she do this? There weren't any pearl combs in the wilderness!

Once finished with her task, Sansa turned around and looked at Arya as if nothing was amiss. She hummed quietly and grinned at Arya.

Arya found her voice again.

"Sansa has one night in the forest driven you mad? Why are you plaiting a twig into your hair?"

Sansa just smiled again, and waited a few seconds until she answered.

"I'm improvising. I wanted to be able to pull my own weight by solving the problem with the leftover kindling. The smaller pieces are comparable to the pendants and clips that I braid into my hair, but also much lighter. So I figured I could use my long hair to our advantage and tie as many pieces as possible to my hair. In a way you were my inspiration, but in a good way. I deemed my vanity the least of our concerns right now, and that frivolities could wait behind practicalities. Like staying warm. What do you think?"

Sansa was then very shy and looked down at her feet, unsure of her handiwork.

Arya stalked up to Sansa and threw her arms around her. "I think it is wonderful. I have never been more proud to call you my sister. Now show me how to do it!"

Within minutes, Arya's eagerness to learn combined with Sansa's practiced hands yielded two Northern girls fastening bits of wood to their hair instead of just one.

“Imagine the fright we’d give mother and Septa Mordane if they could see our hair now!” Arya japed enthusiastically.

Sansa laughed amiably in response but her attention must have been miles away.

Arya inquired, “Sansa what’s wrong? I didn’t mean to make you sad, it was just a jest.”

Sansa responded with unshed tears, “I know that Arya, and I do appreciate your humor in the face of our...unique circumstances, I am doing my best to not think of mother or Winterfell. It simply hurts too much, and we cannot afford my silly fits of emotion to slow us down.”

Arya stepped forward and patted her sister on the shoulder, wincing at the slashes and dirt stains that brindled the once creamy woolen sleeping gown. Arya was truly amazed that her sister hadn’t taken much notice of the damage to her dress, which was beyond the repair abilities of even Sansa herself. She squeezed lightly and attempted to convey her shared sentiments with her sister.

“I understand how you feel. I miss Mother too, as unexpected as it is. And something about this gushes of cyan water and the soft red mud that nestles its sides harkens me back to Mother and House Tully. The river is her watchful eye, and the mud her long hair.”

Sansa let out a watery laugh and scrubbed the tears from her eyes that matched their mothers’ so well.

“Did you just compare our mother’s hair to mud? I imagine she would feel so flattered.”

Arya withdrew into herself a bit and looked down sheepishly and dug her booted foot into the grass drawing illogical patterns. She jerkily nodded as if hesitant to confirm Sansa’s suspicions. Sansa only continued to laugh and Arya looked up again. Embarrassment blossomed in her chest and she felt a surge of indignation lash out.

“Alright, alright! It isn’t that funny, Sansa! We aren’t all keen at poetry or so familiar with the songs and stories that we have such a grasp of words. I meant it as a compliment!”

Sansa chuckled a few moments more as the shine in her eyes dwindled away to nothing because no more tears were shed.

Then Sansa replied, “Arya, I too understand what you meant. I couldn’t think of a more worthy acclamation for her. She is as graceful, yet as untamed as the Trident herself, and she’s told me in the past how she loved constructing mud pies in her youth. Mother wouldn’t be offended, but instead honored. I am sorry for my reaction. I didn’t mean anything by it.”

Sansa then squeezed her sister’s shoulder in return and gave her a meaningful smile, small but more genuine than any Sansa had given her before.

Arya appreciated the gesture for a moment, but Nymeria seemed to grow restless. She gently butted her head against the sisters and whined softly.

Arya half anticipated Sansa would burst into tears following Nymeria’s demonstration if she were reminded of Lady, but she only knelt down slightly and patted Nymeria on the head.

Sansa was just sincere and appreciative of Nymeria and Arya's company.

Nymeria then left Sansa and returned to Arya's side, while Sansa stood back up and remained stationary in repose. Arya waited patiently, and Sansa turned around, the twigs and sticks in her hair clinking hollowly, but her eyes were full of determination.

Sansa began, "What shall we do until nightfall? We have sufficient kindling for a fire, and we cannot light it now for the reasons you gave earlier. There are many hours remaining until the sky darkens enough."

Arya contemplated their options.

"Well if we stay here too long, the Hound will awaken and gain significant ground on us or find us outright. Linger in one place too long could mean death for us, or so Jon told me after he returned from one of his hunts with Robb and Father. Although I suppose he was referring to the animals in that case..." Arya trailed off thoughtfully.

"In our case we are the animals, and the Hound our predator. As little credit as I usually like to give our half brother, the logic is sound and Jon was right. He better than anyone would know based on his years of quiet observation and keeping away from mother's wrath."

Arya's mouth hung open of its own accord. She had never heard Sansa speak of Jon in a positive manner, let alone praise him. Sansa always followed suit in their mother's example of ignoring Jon or treating him with thinly veiled contempt. Arya believed Sansa to hate their brother.

Sansa seemed taken aback by Arya's reaction.

"I know what you're thinking, and no I don't hold hostility for Jon in my heart. I hate what his presence does to mother and the stain on Father's honor he represents, but not Jon himself. Now enough of this, we can continue to reconcile our familial differences later once we find ourselves in a safer locale. How do you suggest we get there?"

Sansa was growing impatient and uncomfortable at the shock on Arya's face, and Arya didn't want to antagonize her sister further.

"We need to ford the river at its shallowest point as you suggested, and from there we can perhaps gather some berries to sustain ourselves until Nymeria has the chance to hunt for a rabbit or something."

Sansa's pale skin took on a sickly olive hue, and she gulped noticeably.

In her fear, Sansa had forgot crossing the river was her idea at first, panic overwhelmed her and she lost her sense.

"You want us to cross here? Are you certain there is not another spot further down that is less deep. I am a terrible swimmer."

Arya did her best to reassure her sister and not to entertain her self doubt, "I am certain Sansa. Nymeria wouldn't have led us here if she thought there was any danger, she wants to

survive as well, and she is intelligent to know that to get to the other side, and further away from Sandor Clegane, we have to cross. Do not fret, Nymeria will show us the safest place to cross. She will lead us, then me, and you. I will take hold of her tail, and you my hand. That way we will stay together no matter the strength of any current.”

Sansa appeared to grasp the concept and within a few moments the green faded. She took a deep breath to steel herself for what was to come, standing up straight and throwing her shoulders back.

“Like a human chain of sorts, well almost...with Nymeria.”

Arya nodded, “Exactly, we will be just fine. Nymeria wouldn’t let anything happen to us, would you Nymeria?” Arya looked to the direwolf to substantiate her claim.

Nymeria lifted her head and chuffed in the affirmative, her tail swaying. Arya’s words and Nymeria must have reassured Sansa enough because she was already starting for the water.

“Wait a moment, Sansa, Nymeria has to go first to scout.”

And Nymeria did just that, taking charge and sniffing every which way, padding the ground beneath the river with a paw, and fixing her sharp honey eyes before her. Once Nymeria located a corridor of the river she deemed safe, she wheeled around and beckoned with her head for the girls to follow.

Nymeria then waded gingerly into the depths and stuck her tail out for Arya to clutch. Arya grabbed Sansa’s hand with her right, almost yanking her forward in her earnestness, but Sansa righted herself quickly, and she followed after her younger sister. Arya grasped Nymeria’s soft tail with her left and clicked her tongue, signaling Nymeria to advance.

The water was frigid and almost came up to Sansa’s waist, but the undertow was minimal. Arya and Sansa shivered in time with each other, trying to keep pace with Nymeria as she trudged forward. The river rocks were slippery, and Sansa almost lost her footing once, to Arya’s horror, stopping in a panic.

“We are almost there” Arya coached Sansa, “We will make it, I promise. Just search for places without rock and only mud to step on. You are less liable to slip.”

“I’ll try” Sansa answered apprehensively, but she did as she was told, and Arya’s promise rang true.

Nymeria deftly vaulted onto the slippery bank, seemingly unaware of the soaked mud and steep slant. Arya and Sansa took a much longer time to half-crawl up the slope and they were slathered in the auburn sludge, but they didn’t care at all, for they had made it safely.

Arya looked to their small pack of three and thought to herself, *With such an uncertain future, we should take safe harbor in moments like these. Sansa is my sister, and I must never forget that despite our differences we need each other for whatever lies ahead.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, and love you all! Expect an update before June is over!

End Notes

Thank you to all of the Jonsa fanfics I have read that gave me the courage to write my own. If you have any questions please feel free to message me!

From here on out, I plan on the chapters to be 3,000 words minimum and the story length is TBD, but at least 60,000 words probably.

You're all the best! :)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!