Within a Gilded Cage

by GreedIsGreen

Summary

“I dare say, my Lady, you will be the most beautiful bride the seven kingdoms has seen since her Grace married King Robert,” the handmaid exclaimed, adding, “Gods rest his soul.”

“Six,” Sansa corrected her.

The maid’s hands paused, still tangled in the hair she was braiding. “I’m sorry, ma’am?”

The reluctant bride shook her head. ”It matters not.”
“I dare say, my Lady, you will be the most beautiful bride the Seven Kingdoms has seen since Her Grace married King Robert,” the handmaid exclaimed, adding quickly, “Gods rest his soul.”

“Six,” Sansa corrected her.

The maid’s hands paused, still tangled in the hair she was braiding. “I’m sorry, ma’am?”

The reluctant bride shook her head. “It matters not. Please continue,” she directed, and deft fingers carried on in their task unabated.

*The smallfolk don’t even know what my marriage has bought.*

Somehow the realization that her future happiness had been traded away like farmer might a horse had not quite set in before now. It lie in the back of her mind, like a nightmare that’s tentacles lingered. She was aware, but not wary. Yet now, as each lock of hair was pinned into place, dread and anxiety overflowed, filling her bones in place of marrow. The maid bade her stand, and Sansa’s stomach roiled as she viewed herself in the looking glass. Auburn tresses plaited in a crown atop her head, seeded with delicate pearls. Her dress, a cascade of gold silk and red brocade draping her head to toe. In the reflection, she spied her maiden cloak on the bed behind her. The grey and white direwolf looked fierce and savage amid the finery that the Lannisters doted upon her.

*I am a Stark. I will always be a Stark.*

Stiff backed, Sansa motioned to retrieve the last vestige of her heritage — soon to be replaced by a regal lion(*though it should be a stag*) — and draped it over her shoulders. She tried not to think too closely on what she had agreed to give up in this arrangement. All the dreams she’d had as a girl of marrying a gallant prince tasted of ashes now — desolate and acrid on her tongue. She swallowed them down.

*Father died for his honor, but my marriage will ensure peace.*

That was the comforting lie she told herself as she wrote to beg her brother, Robb, to bring no war to King’s Landing’s gates. It was her idea, made in equal parts humor and desperation. She had thought no one was listening to the traitor’s daughter as she murmured it into her wine. But someone *had* heard. Heard, and thought it a sufficient enough plan to propose. It was under the great lion’s own scrutiny that Sansa was coerced to the deed. And in so doing, in so carefully managed words, the Starks and Lannisters came to an accord: Myrcella was sent to marry Robb, and in return, Sansa’s betrothal to Prince — nay — King Joffrey would go ahead as planned. Their marriages bought the North’s independence, and superceded a potentially devastating war.

If Lord Tywin thought the idea anything more than a flighty child’s ramblings, he never gave indication. That was for the best. It was safer if they thought her a simpleton.

*Robb is kind, and Myrcella will be happy. I will not be granted such a gift.*

King Joffrey sneered at her, even as he took her to wife, placed the crown upon her head, and pledged his love with a kiss that made even her porcelain skin ghastly pale. She hardly registered that she held her breath and scrunched her eyes tight, desperate to block the sensation of his wormy lips
out, until the applause at their union filled the Great Sept of Baelor.

It was only as Joffrey led her away, down the aisle, and out into the open air that Sansa realized a lone tear had fallen. She hastily wiped it away.

*I cannot cry. I cannot let them see my tears. I must be as strong as my lady mother.*

The false smiles Sansa gave as she greeted each Lord and Lady at the reception began to hurt her cheeks. The feast hadn’t even begun for true, and already she was exhausted with the spectacle. Joffrey had stumbled away before even half the guests had made their way into the hall, and now she and Cersei and Lord Tywin made their apologies and excuses for the absent king. She envied him the luxury of being able to walk away as he pleased, but chided him for it as well.

*At least, I know my duty. Unlike him.*

There were seventy-two dishes served. Sansa did her best to take at least one bite from each, but by half way through, she couldn’t help but feel it was a waste. As much as these Southron lords liked to pretend the summer would never end, winter is coming. The words of her house truer now than they were only six months ago. She had personally seen the white raven from the Citadel fly into the rookery. The pretense of plenty irked her far more now than it would have prior to her father’s execution.

*Fools. They’re all fools.*

As the celebration continued — the flagrant display of wealth and privilege — so too did her own disdain grow. She pushed out of her seat, itching to move, to do anything except sit and placate the spoiled king she called husband. Before Sansa could take a single step, Joffrey’s hand coiled tightly around her wrist.

“Where do you think you’re going, wife?” His shrill voice demanded.

Softly, deferentially, “I merely thought to converse amongst our guests, my love.” Bile rose in her throat at the term of endearment. “I hoped especially to treat with Lady Margaery. I have not had the opportunity since her betrothal to Tommen was announced.” The lady in question having come to King’s Landing to wed a king, to find only a prince available. A situation the Tyrells accepted with undue grace.

The harsh set of his face gentled at the mention of the Tyrell rose, and he ascended to his feet. “I shall join you, lest you shame our house with your insipid company.”

The old Sansa would have bristled at his words, but now she only curtsied meekly, taking his arm, conducting herself as she had seen the Queen Regent do on King Robert’s arm countless times. Face placid even as rage boiled underneath.

The conversation with Margaery and her flock of hens was surprisingly pleasant. Sansa was pleased at the young rose’s ability to engage Joffrey, and her efforts kept the worst of his temper off any perceived slight he might attribute to his newly anointed bride. Around them, the lords and ladies of the court revelled in merriment: laughing at the jesters that cut paths through the room, dancing to the minstrels. Even her own foot tapped beneath her gilded skirts to the beat. It had been so long since she’d danced.

That was when the sly lord approached. Sansa had met him before. Interactions both unsettling and brief. His features were sharp — accentuated by his little beard and the grey wings at his temples — much like the silver mockingbird he wore at his collar.
“My King,” he greeted. “Your Grace.” He bowed most respectfully before her.

A cocky sideways grin spread over Joffrey, as it always did when he was addressed thusly. “Lord Baelish.”

The Master of Coin’s tone was ingratiating. “I must congratulate you, my King. Both on your beautiful bride and the day’s festivities. I am sure the grandeur of this day will be talked of for months to come.”

“Yes, it is quite feast, isn’t it?” he admitted, leaning smugly back on one leg, and purposefully neglecting the compliment to his lady wife.

“Indeed, sire.” The little man smirked. “Though, I do wonder that you have not danced yet? It is bad luck not to dance on one’s wedding day, is it not?”

A cruelness came over Joffrey’s eyes as he looked at his Stark bride. “You are right, as always, Littlefinger.” He turned, hand extended to the Tyrell girl. “Would you honor me with this dance, my Lady?”

Lady Margaery paled at the King’s obvious slight to his new queen, and acquiesced only at Sansa’s blink and nod in her direction. Tacit approval to allow the King his crude behavior. “Of course, my King. I am honored.”

“Splendid!” remarked Lord Baelish, then sat his eyes upon the former Stark. “Perhaps, our new queen would like a dance as well? I’m sure Prince Tommen would be happy-”

“No,” commanded Joffrey, staring distastefully at the pair. “You dance with her, Littlefinger.” He laughed a pernicious cackle. “The little lord and the traitor’s get. It will give our guests quite an entertaining sight.” Lady Margaery blanched next to him, but was quick to paint a smile on her face when he led her away.

If Joffrey’s offensive directive disturbed Lord Baelish, Sansa saw no evidence. The clever man smiled amiably, his grey-green eyes glinting from the lit braziers as he took her hand and kissed a lingering apology to her knuckles. “I should be so lucky,” he whispered, though she was not certain she was meant to hear. Her skin tingled where lips met flesh. “Shall we, your Grace?”

At her nod, they sifted through the revellers to the dance floor. Hushed whispers and giggles followed in their wake. Sansa was certain her face was beet red from mortification at being so ill-treated at her own wedding by her own husband.

As they took their position, Lord Baelish’s voice rumbled lowly, “Ignore them.”

“Pardon, my Lord?” The dance began, and in her distraction, she was slow to start.

Lord Baelish adeptly countered her error as he rounded her. “They are jealous old cunts, the lot of them.”

Sansa covered her mouth to stifle a giggle. “You should not say such things, Lord Baelish.”

“Apologies, your Grace.” Amusement found his lips. “I only speak the truth.”

Sansa met his hands with her own as they circled clockwise around each other. “What in the world do they have to be jealous of?”

“Do you truly not see?” he asked as they worked their way through the steps. “You are the Queen.”
Sansa’s brows drew together in thought.

The motions of the dance brought them closer, and he whispered, “You have power.” The direction shifted counter clockwise. “More than any of them are like to see in their lifetimes.” They parted.

_I am the Queen._

How had she allowed herself to wallow in her own self-pitying misery, and not realize what her new position offered? Yes, she was not likely to be granted the same freedom that Queen Cersei received from King Robert, but she still held a respectable level of authority.

They danced in silence, and Sansa was relieved to find that Lord Baelish made for a more than adequate partner. More so than she could say for poor Lady Margaery and her toes as Joffrey stumbled through the exercise. The song became softer as it entered into its last refrain. Their hands came together for the final measures, and Sansa felt a coldness being pressed into her palm. She fought to keep confusion from her face as her eyes asked a question her lips would not.

“A gift,” he said. “Essence of Nightshade.”

Her eyes widened. “I don’t understand.”

The timbre of his voice lowered, “One drop will ease your burdens this night. Three will give you dreamless sleep.”

Her mind whirled as they spun again. “More than three?” Sansa asked, a tremor in her tone.

“Is not to be used under any circumstances.” He did not need to expound why. His meaning was clear.

_Death._

The musicians stopped, the final notes faded. His pensive gaze studied, held her in place even as other couples swept from the floor. He stepped closer than propriety deemed acceptable, but she did not back away. “I could not save you from this marriage, but I promise you will not suffer needlessly.” He took her arm leading her back to the dais where the high table resided. “One drop,” Lord Baelish reminded her before abandoning her with her brutish husband and departing.

The vial warmed in her hand as she sat above the din. She thought on his words. What desire would Lord Baelish have to ease her burdens? A vague detail crawled to the fore, of him having grown up with her mother in the Tully household, but is it as simple as that? This was King’s Landing, and as she had learned the hard way, nothing is given without expectation. Sansa resolved herself to dispose of the concoction.

Yet, as the hours dwindled — day gave way to evening, the last rays of sunlight set beyond the horizon — her agitation increased. Joffrey would not be kind. He was displeased with the cost of this alliance. Displeased at losing control of the North, and being forced to marry the disgraced daughter of a traitor. Nevermind that it was his own impulsivity that caused its necessity.

The skin of her palm burned where the potion nestled, and she discreetly opened it beneath the table’s edge to examine. When her head lifted from the object of her many hours reflection, she found grey-green eyes seeking her out from across the hall. Therein, lurked a question: _Do you trust me?_

It could be a trick. A mummer’s farce designed to kill her. Or it could be as he claimed. It could bring relief from the vile bodily invasion she was sure to endure at Joffrey’s behest. Truthfully, Sansa
knew she would never trust anyone ever again, but the threat of death caused little fear in her these days. If that was the outcome, then sobeit.

Resigned to an indeterminate fate, the drop reached Sansa’s goblet, and her throat burned as she downed its contents. Lord Baelish gave her a scant nod above the rim of his own cup — both pride and sadness mingled in his features.

Chapter End Notes

So I heard mention that GRRM’s original outline called for the marriage of Sansa and Joffrey to actually happen. Curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to explore it a little. I'm not sure how often I'll be updating this, but I think it'll be interesting.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The bed was an ornamented thing, an oppressive monstrosity that weighed down the room. Draped in heavy red brocade and cloth of gold, Sansa had the momentary contemplation that she should like to change them before reality settled heavy around her — around what was to happen next. The hand she had reached out to finger the fine materials yanked back as though it had been burned.

Even with the essence of nightshade weighing down her mind, and calming her body, Sansa was all too alert to the presence of the king as the court’s ladies deposited him in the chamber with her. She turned and found that while her own garments had been ripped asunder, his were immaculate — his doublet open, but whole, and his tunic lacing loosened. Was that because the ladies were as frightened of his temper as she, or was it a respect paid due to his position? Perhaps a mixture of the two.

When the ladies clucked and skittered away from the room and the door shut, all joviality on her new husband’s face melted away. He took in her ragdoll appearance — the way she held the tattered remains of her bodice over her bosom — with abject interest.

“Take it off,” Joffrey commanded her, his hand waving indifferently to the ruined dress. “Lay on the bed.”

Orders issued — curtly as though he were speaking to a lowly whore — he walked to a sideboard where a wine carafe and two goblets laid in wait. She longed for the barest sip to swallow the lump in her throat. It was for naught. Joffrey filled only one, downing it as he waited for her compliance. Watched. His gaze unnerved her. It was icy, malicious, predatory in a way she hadn’t seen since the day the day her father's head was struck from his shoulders.

Please, she prayed. Mother, please let him be quickly done with me.

Dainty fingers fumbled, trying to figure out the best way to remove the garment and keep some modesty. It was a pointless endeavor. Before she’d fully abandoned the goal as futile, Joffrey stepped forward.

“Could you be a more useless prig?” he said with petulance as his hands flew to the dress. The fabric ripped, exposing her breasts and stomach. Her arms hung useless at her side under his gaze. Joffrey’s eyes glowed in triumph until he registered Sansa’s lack of reaction. He seemed almost disappointed. Perhaps, he had expected her to scream or struggle, but Lord Baelish’s gift coursed heavily in her veins, quelling any resistance. Was that why the strange man had given it to her? King Joffrey’s predilection towards cruelty in the court was well known, but did it extend to the bedroom as well? If anyone were to know, a brothel keeper likely would.

The king huffed as the disheveled doublet slid off his arms. “Let’s get this over with. Grandfather says I’m to put a babe in your belly, and I’d just as soon get it done.”

Sansa let the remains of her frippery drop to the floor when he turned his back, tugging at his boots and other adornments. She climbed beneath the silken covers of the soft mattress. Her eyes flickered to the side, watching Joffrey — her husband, her king, and soon to be lover. Golden hair smattered over his limbs, his chest, glittering in the light from the few sconces that lit the room. She could not deny that he was handsome, even if his mind was spiteful and vicious. The young girl that she used
to be would have been happy at being bound to such a beautiful man.

_Innocence makes fools of us all._

The potion had the curious effect of making her feel relaxed and warm. Sansa might have felt concern as he mounted the bed were her frame of mind less altered, but as he nudged his way between her thighs, she could not bring herself to trouble over it. The anxiety she felt during the feast a mere trace in her consciousness.

Sansa gazed down her body. She could see him fully, but his manhood was still soft. Perched on his heels, he attempted to coax it to stiffness with his hand. Her eyes were listless as she observed him.

Joffrey noticed her regard, and his jaw clenched in annoyance; perhaps embarrassment. “Stop looking at me,” he chastised, giving a light slap to her cheek.

“No. Don’t touch it.” His green eyes flared like wildfire, gleeful at seeing his mark upon her skin.

Sansa hazarded another glance down, and saw his manhood standing firmly erect.

_Lord Baelish did know._

It was not a comforting thought, the knowledge that her husband needed to abuse her so to do his duty. Another slap filled the chamber. A pained gasp. She could already feel the welt forming on her opposite cheek. Her head was ringing, the taste of copper flooding her mouth where she'd bit her tongue. Joffrey must have seen the red bloom. She only just caught sight of the excitement in his face before he pushed into her.

Her mind screamed — _No! I don’t want this!_ — but her body was ambivalent; drunk on wine and drugged into complacency, limbs weighted, grounded to the surface beneath her. Tears pricked, but she refused to let him hear her cry.

It _hurt._ Joffrey had done nothing to ready her. When he met resistance, he only pulled back a fraction and thrust harder. He tore through her maidenhead most painfully, filling her to the hilt without regard for her comfort. A whimper was held captive in her throat as her as her body sought to burrow further into the downy mattress, arms stiff at her side, as her fingers clinched at the sheets — holding on as if her life depended on it, as if gripping the material could somehow lessen the injury. The place between her legs burned as he rutted.

Tears streamed in rivers down her cheeks, but almost as soon as it began, it ended. Lost in her own agony, Sansa failed to notice that Joffrey had stilled. His breath a damp pant against her shoulder where his head slumped. Both their breathing was ragged: Sansa’s smarting from his forceful intrusion, and Joffrey’s from mild exertion. She felt as, incrementally, the length inside her softened until it slid from her on its own, a wake of his seed following, a slow dribble down the crevice of her bottom.

The loss of connection seemed to rouse Joffrey from his post-coital stupor. He clamored off the freshly defiled girl, and shrugged his clothes back on. Sansa shivered from the loss of his heat, her skin tacky from the sweat that formed between them. She felt dirty and ill-used. She wiped away the tears that streaked her face, knowing that if he saw them, they would serve to bring only more grief.

_Joffrey walked to the exit, and she decided it was safe to rise, intent on washing away the stain between her legs._
“Don’t,” he ordered.

Sansa froze, confused, until he opened the door to their chamber, and his mother sauntered in, a mockery of pity plastered on her face.

“It’s done. Do what you will with her. I have better things to do than listen to the clucking of hens.” And he was gone, leaving an unimpressed Cersei to survey the new queen.

“Little dove,” she greeted, taking a seat at the edge of the bed.

The sheet was pulled higher, flimsy protection against Cersei’s prying eyes. “Your Grace.” Sansa’s voice cracked. “I- I was not-”

“Expecting me to intrude on your wedding night?” She gave a rueful chuckle, blonde tresses dancing. “I’ve been ordered to confirm your consummation, and to instruct the bride how best to conceive. Be thankful that it is me and not the Grand Maester.”

Sansa gulped at the thought of Pycelle prodding at her with his clawing hands and lecherous eyes.

Cersei sighed. “Now let us see,” she said, gesturing to remove the sheet.

Sansa blanched, gripping it tighter.

“Come now. This is not the time for modesty.” The sheet was ripped away, and Sansa struggled to cover herself. “Spread your legs. Or would you prefer the Grand Maester to inspect you?”

The threat resonated more than Sansa wanted to admit, and reason won out. Sansa — with only a touch of reticence — did as instructed. Cersei surveilled the evidence, and scoffed softly, “Of course. You smile prettily, simper prettily… It only makes sense that you’d bleed prettily, too.”

Blue eyes cast down to see the proof of consummation: a light spot of blood, more pink than red soaked into the sheets, and dappling her nether lips. It seemed out of sorts to the pain she experienced.

“Now to our other purpose: conception. The sooner you have an heir in your belly, the sooner the crown and our alliance with the North will be secured.” Cersei inspected Sansa closer, lifting her chin to see Joffrey’s handiwork. “Hmm. Lay on your back, knees to chest.”

But I don’t want Joffrey’s babies.

She had so very long ago, in what seemed another life. One filled with happiness and ease, and none of the vipers that surrounded her now. But Cersei’s gentle nudge to her shoulder had her comply all the same. As Sansa wrapped her arms around her knees and stared up at the canopy, red-faced, as the former queen abandoned her seat, crossing the room to Sansa’s vanity.

“You know, we aren’t that different, Sansa,” Cersei told her as she rifled through different powders and unguents, bottles clinking. “Though, I wonder if you don’t have better sense than I did.”

Those were words she’d never thought to leave the former queen’s lips. “I’m sorry?”

The necessary balm acquired, the golden lioness came back to sit at her side, looking serenely down at her. “You know what Joffrey is. You understand that this is a political arrangement, and aren’t blinded by such concerns as love.”

The jar opened. Cersei gathered a bit of the ointment on her finger, dabbing gently at the bruises
forming on Sansa’s cheeks. The girl flinched. “I know. It stings.” She wore an almost apologetic
grimace. “Robert was not kind to me, and I expect no better of Joffrey.”

“They are like father, like son?” Sansa muttered the words before her brain could instruct her tongue to cease,
and Cersei’s hand faltered, pressing a bit more harshly at Sansa’s tender cheek.

Her cool green eyes hardened momentarily, studying Sansa before she looked back to her work. “I
suppose.” Fingers smoothed the tingling balm into purpling skin. “The point I am trying to get at,
however, is that you no longer have any delusions the way I did. I thought myself half in love with
Robert when we married — so handsome and tall. Strong as a bull, and built like one, too.” She
sounded almost wistful. “But all those illusions shattered on our wedding night.”

The container was set aside, and Cersei glared at her charge. “King Robert was a drunk and a brute.
When he took me there were no gentle words, no soft touches. Even as I was his wife by law, he
treated me no better than a whore. Worse probably, because he did not want me — not in his bed
and not as his wife. His manhood nearly ripped me in two when he forced his way between my legs.
There was so much blood.”

Cersei sighed, flipping her dangling golden locks over one shoulder as she turned away to stare out
at the Blackwater. “When he was finished I feared that I would bleed to death. But I did not. And
every night he came to my bed, a drunken sot, determined to fuck an heir into me. And every night
he uttered another woman’s name.” Malice dripped from her lips as she locked her eyes on Sansa
once more. “I was real and alive and his, but all he wanted was your aunt — a girl long dead. So,
yes. You have the better of it, I think.”

Cersei’s gaze raked over Sansa, harsh and cold, before surreptitiously leaving her side. Quick steps
towards the exit.

“Your Grace?” Sansa called out to her, voice unsure.

The lioness paused halfway between the door and the bed, barely pivoting to acknowledge her.
“Yes, little dove?”

“How long? How long must I remain like this?”

In answer, Cersei glanced about the room, spying an hourglass only feet away. It was flipped. “Until
the sand stops falling.”

As soon as the door shut, Sansa released the hold on her knees, determined to rinse away every trace
of Joffrey.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry you guys.

*ducks for cover*
Sansa rose from her bed shortly before midday. No ladies maids or servants disturbed her due to the previous night's celebration. Custom dictated that she would call them when she was ready to be assisted (no doubt they were already anxiously waiting even now, beyond the door to her chambers), then take up the normal routine of dressing the new queen. It was a small reprieve, and one of which she would gladly take advantage.

Sitting before her vanity, Sansa studied the deep set bruises that marred her porcelain cheeks. It was not the first that she’d been abused so, but it had never been done by Joffrey himself. Beatings were a messiness normally reserved for the Kingsguard that served him. Only Ser Arys Oakheart and the Hound seemed to take pity on the hostage she had been then. Now that she was queen, and they bound to serve her as well, she wondered if perhaps that particular abuse would cease. And if it did, was that to the better or worse? With Joffrey’s erratic temper, she could not help the shuddering thought that the pain would be tenfold under his hands.

There was a knock at her door, and Sansa was pulled from her musings, cursing that she had not taken the few free moments she had to powder over the ugliness that purpled her skin.

The dressing robe was retrieved from its resting place, and pulled tight around her as she went to answer the door. Outside, she met the bowed head of Lord Varys.

“My Lord, I fear you’ve caught me at a disadvantage. I have only just risen.”

“Apologies, Your Grace. I ought not have presumed on such an auspicious morn, save that a raven has only just arrived for you.” His hand extended with the missive, his eyes still averted to the ground. “I thought it best to deliver with expediency.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to thank the man, but that is not how a queen should address her retainer. Though the honorific of Lord had been bequeathed to Varys as Master of Whispers, he was still a landless servant. “Very good, my Lord.” The scroll placed in her hand was emblazoned with the sigil of House Stark — a direwolf set in gray wax. “You were right to bring this straight away. Your service is appreciated.”

The man bowed deeply as he backed away. “Thank you, Your Grace.”

As soon as Lord Varys turned to leave, Sansa cast a glance toward the two servants that had been patiently waiting for their mistress to rise. She gave them a wordless nod; permission to enter and aid her in readying for the day — however reluctant she may have been.

The new queen would be exempt from attending court for the day, but there was an expectation that she should make an appearance in the gardens. Usually, it would be with the new bridegroom, but given the fact that Joffrey was a king not apt to follow decorum, she anticipated that the trek was hers alone to make. As the ladies fiddled with her hair, and painstakingly covered the visible blemishes to her person, Sansa began practicing the lies in her head.

*I’m afraid the King is much busy with matters of the realm.*

*I am certain that were King Joffrey here, he would most graciously accept your well wishes, as do I.*

*Yes. I am most anxious to give his Grace many healthy heirs.*

The last made her skin crawl. The hair on her arms and neck raised in contempt at the idea.
“Are you cold, Your Grace? Shall I fetch a shawl?”

It should not surprise Sansa that her maid took notice. She was well aware that all her actions and moods were to be catalogued and served up to the Lannisters. She wondered which one these two served? Joffrey? No. He wouldn’t sully his ears with the words of so low a creature as a ladies maid. He barely listened to his own small council. Tywin, perhaps, except that she couldn’t envision the proud countenance of the Lord Hand feigning interest in the comings and goings of a lady — queen though she may be. Cersei, then. Only second in cruelty to her son, Sansa would have to take extra care with her tongue.

Rather than draw further attention to her distress, the queen rubbed her arms, giving the faintest smile. “It is rather chilly today.”

The blonde maid curtsied before making her way to the wardrobe to sift through the myriad shawls until she found one that would suit the gown Queen Sansa was to wear. The other, a short pretty-ish brunette continued to place the last pins in her hair.

When the day dress was donned and the shawl placed, Sansa looked over her image. There was nary a hair out of place; a portion of her auburn hair braided and pinned at the back. The rest was brushed until it gleamed, cascading down to the center of her back. The marks of violence on her skin were well hidden beneath pale powder, though if one examined closely, they might notice the slight plumpness where they lingered beneath. The gown chosen for her was of sapphire silk, overlaid with silver brocade — a surprising choice given she was a newmade Lannister. The shawl that was placed on her shoulder, an intricate pattern of lace in seafoam that complimented both the gown, her hair, and illuminated her pale complexion. For all that these women were spies, they at least knew what they were doing in regards to her dress.

Still, Sansa prayed she would be given leave to replace them with ladies of her own choosing eventually. It was customary for the queen to be dressed and attended by ladies of the peerage. Neither of these two fit that description — no better than chamber maids. It was an issue that would have to be resolved in time, but with the North now an independent kingdom, no Northern lords would be petitioning to send their daughters to assist her. Another solution would have to be worked out if she is to take control during her reign as queen.

As expected, the King sent his regrets (a term she used generously) that he would not join her. So, Sansa set off alone. The sea of courtiers parted as she swept into the gardens. Sycophants and scoundrels bowing and scraping at her skirts, angling to gain favor with the new queen. They hadn’t been so kind to her only six months previously. She could still remember their silent whispers. Traitor’s daughter, Northern whore. How quickly the tables have turned. She, of course, graced them with empty platitudes and promises to share a meal that she had no intention of keeping. Anything to make them feel their vile words and actions were forgiven, so that she might win their support. A picture of affability covering the wary girl beneath.

As she rounded the edge of the hedge maze, Sansa spotted Lady Margaery with her gaggle of hens. They were playing a game of Blind Man’s Buff, all too entranced with teasing and avoiding their blindfolded pursuer to notice the queen coming upon them. She had just come to stand behind the rose of the Reach, reaching to tap her shoulder when the girl deftly dodged out of the way of grabbing hands. Grabbing hands that landed directly on Sansa.

“Got you!” cried the girl triumphantly before stripping off her blindfold. Her face crumpled when she recognized her catch, quickly dipping into an apologetic curtsy. “Oh! Your Grace! Please, beg pardon.” Which turned into a rippled effect of bowed heads and obfuscated eyes.

Sansa graced them with her most winning smile. “It’s quite alright. No harm done.”
“Perhaps, her Grace would care to join us?” It was Lady Margaery that spoke, her voice simpering sweet, her demeanor demure.

The scroll from earlier burned a hole in her pocket, as yet unread. “Oh, that would be lovely, but I’ve yet to cover the grounds. Perhaps another time.”

“Of course, Your Grace.” Lady Margaery said as she stepped closer. She curtsied, but let slip a sly smile and a tart reply. “Even bothersome customs must be adhered to.”

Sansa choked down a mirthful laugh. The first true turn of humor she’d had in months.

“We’re here every day. Your Grace is always welcome to join us for our daily tea and games.” Lady Margaery’s eyes spoke volumes — warm and open. Yet, there was a hidden depth to them that Sansa could not quite place. She found herself determined to figure out what it was.

Taking up the girl’s hand, a tentative offering of acceptance, “I may take you up on that offer.” She smiled, giving a short press to Lady Margaery's palm. “Pray excuse me.”

A solemnness crept back into her face as Sansa left the kindly women. It was not the first offer of friendship she’d received that day, but it was the first she felt held some manner of earnestness to it.

Even as heat of the day started to wane, Sansa’s discomfort grew. Her underthings felt heavy with perspiration from her efforts, and if she had to make excuses and feign courtesy to another well-wisher, she thought her face might break in half. When the gaze of the ever watchful court seemed satisfied with her display, she ducked into the entrance of the maze. The thought of getting lost among the many blooms away from prying eyes too tempting to refute. Further and further, she followed its winding trail, to the one part, she knew few would be. A dead end that had afforded her peace and privacy — the Godswood.

Seeing the carved face of the oak tree — for there was no true weirwood tree here — endeared her with a deep sense of serenity. It was as close to home, as close to safe, as she would ever be allowed. Once, she would have come here to meet her Florian, poor old Dontos. She’d heard rumor that he was dead now — an arrow notched in his heart. She would weep, but could not. His death protected her, though she was certain his attacker had no such objective in mind.

It was at the base of the heart tree that Sansa finally allowed herself to collapse; her skirts billowing about her as she finally broke the seal of her missive.

Sansa, my sweet, I write today on behalf of your brother and myself

to express our congratulations on the most auspicious day of your wedding.

It heartens us both to see the war ended and you in a such a prominent position.

You will make a fine and noble queen.

Sansa read the words, but they sounded nothing like her mother. It was cold, proper. There was not even a line to indicate any sign of affection.

A crunch of boots on the detrius surrounding the Godswood broke Sansa from her reflection. “Not what you had hoped, I gather.”

It was him again — Lord Baelish. She could not help but notice how the slate blue of his doublet brought out the green of his hooded eyes. The green of the silk tunic beneath a near match for the shawl she wore. It was an odd thing to notice as her heart twisted in her chest.

“It is… merely a message of felicitations.” She finished, unable to truly suppress her disappointment.
“Soft words to keep the lions happy.” He extended his hand to her. Within was another scroll. This one’s seal was blue. The crest of the Tullys — a fish distended midair — embedded in the wax. Fingers grabbed, scurried as they wrested the parchment open.

Sansa, my sweet child, how I have wept for you.
I prayed for a way to be there before you wed,
for a way to save you from such a deleterious fate.
But the Seven did not hear my pleas, so I do as I needs must.
The man that delivers this scroll is not a good man,
but in a sea of liars, we must use those liars closest to us
He failed me once, and but for the sake of my hand, I trust he will not do so again.
Let him guide you, my dear. I love you so.

“I don’t understand. Her hand?”

Lord Baelish tried to hide the self-satisfied smile upon his face, but failed miserably. “Your mother has agreed to marry me as soon as her mourning periods ends.”

A new dawning — anger, confusion, contrition. Her mother, the noble Catelyn Tully Stark, has agreed to tie herself to this man for her daughter’s sake. Sansa’s own guilt over her father’s death, over the willingness of her mother to sacrifice herself on a pyre in order to protect her estranged child, was born afresh. “So you— The vial? It wasn’t just a gift from you.”

“No, it was. I’ve been privy to our King’s… appetites,” he finished with an uncertain waver of his head. “I felt it was best to preempt his penchant for violence with docility.” He knelt before her, his thumb and index lifting her chin, grey-green probing. “Though it appears it did not curb it entirely.”

Sansa paled, jerked her face from his grasp.

“My apologies, Your Grace. My intent was not to offend.”

“There is no offense taken, my Lord.” Only shame at my predicament. But that she dare not say. She felt small as the little dove Cersei claimed in that moment.

His face was contrite — his sharp features, the fine lines that edged his eyes — gentled at the broken creature before him. The spritely lord then took both hands in his own, lifting her from the humus of the earth. Butterflies took flight in her tummy at the gentleness behind his touch. “Please, Your Grace, when we are alone you may call me Petyr.”
Chapter 4

Hooking Sansa’s arm in his, Petyr guided the lost looking queen out of the Godswood, into the maze proper. “My Lor—” She bit her tongue, quickly correcting herself. “Lord Petyr. I must ask. This letter— It says—” But before the written words could be repeated, she found her mouth covered — the palm of his hand soft and warm against her lips. The cold, calculating eyes of Lord Petyr flashed their warning, imploring her silence.

“The maze,” he whispered quietly against her ear, the soft brush of mint on his breath sending a shiver down her spine. “The Godswood is a safe space for such talk, but the maze has ears, Your Grace. If delicate subjects must be discussed, they must be done with care. Do you understand?”

When Lord Petyr backed away, the heat from his nearness receding, Sansa forced herself to meet his eyes, even as a flush at her own incompetence filled her cheeks. She nodded, and his hand fell away, replaced with the coolness of the breeze. He resumed his position by her side, his air of nonchalance falling back into place. She did not rejoin their arms, however, too mortified to initiate such; nor did he, perhaps reading her need for space.

Soft as a mouse, she let the words drip into his ear. “The betrothal. How is that possible? Do you not need my husband’s consent?”

Lord Petyr’s steps were lackadaisical as he hummed to himself in the sheltered corridor, his eyes bounding around the corners before he answered. “The Crown, the small council — neither are privy to the arrangement. Nor will they be, if it can be avoided. I have promised your mother one year from the time her husband’s bones are sealed in Winterfell’s crypts to mourn. It is my hope that within that time, the political landscape with be more favorable to the union.”

Her hand found his forearm, their progress pausing. “Why? Would it not be more fortuitous to your standing at court to have it known that you were to marry a Tully of Riverrun — the former Lady of Winterfell — now?”

“Under different circumstances, yes,” he admitted. “But King Joffrey is wary of any Northern influence at present; even a hint of pity towards his detractors earns dire reward. If I am to protect your interests — your position as queen — it is better that no one knows. Especially—” A pause, a stiffening of his back as he retreated from the hand that still rested upon his arm, putting adequate distance between them. “Yes, Your Grace,” a smile plastered on his lips, his eyes now wide but expressionless, “I do believe that winter roses would thrive here.”

Confusion, then understanding as she heard the delicate crunch of footsteps along the path at her back. The hand that hovered where he once stood, used to gesture in nonchalance to their surroundings as she quickly followed his redirection. The inflection of her voice warm and light, “I have never heard of them growing south of Harrenhal. That is your new seat, is it not? Do you perchance know if they grow in the gardens there?”

“I could not say with certainty, my Queen.” The faint titters of the unwelcome interlopers could scarce be overheard as they passed by, silencing to mere puffs of breath as they listened intently to the Queen and the Master of Coin in conversation. “If it please you, I can send to my castellan, inquire if a bush might be procured for you. Blue winter roses for our Winter Queen.”

Sansa watched as the backs of the courtiers retreated around the corner, but couldn’t stop the question from forming on her lips. “Is that what they really call me, my Lord?”
“It is. The white raven arrived on your wedding day, and the maesters say that the snows may reach
King’s Landing within a year. Perhaps two, if we are lucky.” The distance between them closed
once more. “The smallfolk say that you brought the winter when you came down the Neck. That the
iciness of your gaze could freeze a man dead.”

“They fear me.” The blue of her eyes dimmed, falling to the earth as her fingers twisted in the tassels
of her shawl.

A warm drag of his knuckle across her cheek caused the tumultuous sea to lift in shock, but he did
not cease his caress and now stood far too close for decorum; his eyes lost, as though he were
leagues away and not in a compromising position with the queen of the realm. To touch a queen the
way he touched her now, were anyone to see, could cause scandal. Could lose him his head; hers as
well, yet she did not pull away. He tucked an escaped strand of her auburn hair behind her ear, his
hand resting there, cupping beneath her jaw, and like a kitten, she pressed into him, seeking the
compassion for which she was so starved. It was inappropriate — dangerous — yet neither seemed
apt to break the connection, even as their eyes locked.

Lord Petyr’s voice was husky, almost tender. “They do not know you. You have been locked away
behind these high walls since the moment of your arrival. If you want to win the love of the people,
you must go out among them. Show them that you are not the ice queen they dread. They had little
enough attention from Robert before his demise, and Cersei would just as soon spit on them as look
at them. Joffrey is no different.” There were no honorifics, no respect in his tone for the rulers of the
realm which he had been so careful to bestow prior, she noticed.

“Is that my adviser speaking or my future father?” she whispered, eyes searching his own.

The subtle reminder of who they were — what they were — to each other seemed to leave him
unaffected. A disconcerting stir built below her ribs. “It is as your friend, Sansa. Your true friend.”

The warmth of his hand continued its slide from her neck down the length of her arm, her palm
aflame where his silky digits dared touch. He cradled it back into the nook of his elbow, and she
harmonized her steps with his as they slowly slipped through the bends and curves, heading towards
the center of the winding labyrinth; her heartbeat a vibrant carole in her chest.

It took some time before Sansa could find her voice again. The lingering tingles from his boldness
still etched upon her skin. “Is there ought else my friend might advise?” She prayed the levity in her
voice did not seem forced.

In her periphery, the telltale smirk lifted the corner of his lips. “I might.” Another breath. “After my
meeting with Lady Olenna this morning, I stumbled upon you in conversation with the Lady
Margaery.”

Wetting her lips, a hint of breathlessness in her reply. “Yes, I spoke briefly with her.” Her eyes
surveilled the premises — it was bereft of any courtiers. Likely, they were all driven inside by the
lure of refreshment now the sun was in its descent. “She invited me to tea.”

“You should attend. As often as possible. Make sweet friends with the dainty rose,”

There was something about the way he said it — equal parts disdain and plot. “Not that I mind a
having a friend, but why? Why
her specifically?”

They halted before the central fountain. The gurgling trickle of water echoed in the open air. Lord
Petyr dropped her arm, gesturing to take a seat. His eyes skittered to and fro until he was satisfied
they were truly alone. His voice a deadly sort of calm that set her hair on end. “The Tyrells are an
ambitious lot; Lady Margaery especially so. They came to the Crown’s aid expecting a king for prize. In my estimation, their goals remain unchanged.”

“But Joffrey has already married me,” she stated decisively. “There is no prize left.”

Head tilted. “Is there not?”

“But Joffrey has already married me,” she stated decisively. “There is no prize left.”

Ambitious lot; Lady Margaery especially so. They came to the Crown’s aid expecting a king for prize. In my estimation, their goals remain unchanged.”

“But Joffrey has already married me,” she stated decisively. “There is no prize left.”

Head tilted. “Is there not?”

“Not unless...” The gears in her head spun and caught a horrid, wonderful thought. “Unless tragedy befalls the king.” And a darker thought. “Or unless it befalls me.” Suddenly, Lord Petyr’s desire that she befriend Lady Margaery became no simple suggestion, but necessity.

Lord Petyr’s lips pressed together, but a twisted pride resided in his green depths as he witnessed her come to terms with her predicament. “We should speak no more of this. Not here.”

“One question. Please,” Sansa pleaded. She had to know.

His eyes danced indulgently. “One question,” he agreed.

“Say that Margaery counts me friend. Say that she decides she cannot part with me. What if I become with child before...?” Before Joffrey’s death. It hung in the air about them like a morbid fog. Thick. Oppressive.

The query must have caught him by surprise, almost as though it was not worth imagining, which made no sense to Sansa as it seemed the most important question out of all potential scenarios. His gaze dropped, falling to where even now, a babe might grow. His hand twitched as if to reach for her, but never lifted from its resting place on his thigh, as though he remembered how exposed they were in the vacuous central garden of the maze. “Should that come to pass, we will deal with it. Until then, it is not a worry that you should carry.”

There was something more he wanted to say. Something he debated. Sansa could see it shining like beacon in the morass of green and gray. “What aren’t you telling me, my Lord?”

“Nothing of import,” he was quick to rebut. “Nothing that needs concern you at present, in any case.”

“So my friend holds secrets from me then?” Sansa accused.

“Your adviser holds his tongue lest he is proven wrong.” Lord Petyr rose from his stone perch, hand extended. “Come. I will escort you back to your chambers.”

“Is it wise for us to be seen so?” she challenged, even as he helped her to stand.

“You forget, my Queen.” A smug gleam illuminated his face. “We have already been seen. It would be far more suspicious if we did not exit the maze together. And it would be further damning if I did not do my duty, and see my sovereign to the safety of her rooms.” An addendum, “Which brings me to another topic that should be addressed. It is unwise for the Queen not to have her own ladies. Have you given thought to whom you might offer the positions?”

Was that not a thought that Sansa had only this morning? “Not as yet. It would be a boon if I could have a Northern lady or two around me, but I am not so clueless as to believe any Northmen would willingly send them. They are their own kingdom now. There is no need to placate a Southron queen.”

“A pertinent observation,” praised Lord Petyr. “If you will permit me, I know of a few influential lords who would like to see their kin well placed. I could make inquiries on your behalf.” He
squeezed her hand in the crook of his arm. “It is not safe for a lone wolf in the Red Keep. You need allies. Extra eyes and ears. I can deliver them to you.”

“And how do I know that those eyes and ears won’t serve you, Lord Petyr?” A cheeky, but relevant response.

He released her arm as she poised herself to enter her apartments, a wicked grin dimpling his cheeks.

“You don’t.”
Chapter 5

The swift tap of her slippers down the corridor resounded in her ears. The throne room would soon be opened to the public for petitioners, and Sansa was leery of arriving late and incurring the ire of the Hand, Lord Tywin. For the past two days, she had ably avoided her duties, lying in as a result of her womanly pains.

It was only three weeks into Sansa’s newly made marriage and according to the disgruntled stares from the Queen Mother, the Lord Hand, and the King, she had already failed in her duty — the moonblood drenching her sheets having proved such. However, with the coming of her tide, there was a cessation to the activities in her bedchamber. For that modicum of relief, Sansa was pleased. She made ample use of her condition to avoid the lions in the keep, and was happy to do so until she awoke in the wee hours of the morning to the rasp of paper slipped beneath her chamber door.

Not since the first day of her marriage had Sansa missed a day at Court as Lord Tywin dispensed with the business of the realm, hearing suits and settling petty disputes. Lord Baelish had encouraged her in such endeavors upon their second meeting among the Seven, huddle behind the Mother’s skirts where prying eyes were less likely to see. Caution, he emphasized, would be necessary as they moved ahead, and he would send word to arrange future meetings. None had come, until the message that morning, imploring her to keep to her duties that day.

So it was with some haste that Sansa washed and dressed (taking extra care to place adequate padding between her legs), and presented herself to the Court, to the surprise of Lord Tywin. He said nothing as she took her place on the dais, but nodded in reluctant appreciation that she appeared to take her position far more seriously than that of his absentee grandson. The rest of the small council soon took up residence in their own positions, and Sansa fought the desire to let her eyes wander to the man who claimed to be her adviser.

A rapping echo of a wooden stave at the stone floor signaled the beginning of the session, and petitioners were led inside to plead their case, and released with the King’s justice, or as near to it as they would ever see. For the first hour, it was as commonplace as any other day — a land dispute, a marriage arranged, a trading charter granted — until a group of dirty men, clearly hardened and well traveled, entered the room. The lords and ladies in attendance backed deftly out of their path, clearing the floor for the motley band.

The Lord Hand’s eyes narrowed as the eldest of them stepped forward, hat removed in deference to speak his plight.

The Old Lion’s voice boomed, “To what purpose have you come before the Court today?”

“I have come here to seek the King’s aid, m’lord. There be a troupe of bandits raiding our lands, killing and stealing our livestock. And our womenfolk.” The man sniffed, eyes turned to the floor. “They stole me daughter. She t’weren’t but eleven, m’lord.”

_Same age as I when I came to King’s Landing._ Sansa blinked her watery eyes at the thought of the terror the young girl must be in — a hostage as she had been, but unprotected by her station.

“These men,” Tywin inquired, “Where are these attacks occurring?”

The bedraggled man wrung his ratty hat between his hands. “We come from the Riverlands, m’lord. Just a ways from Lord Holloway’s Town.”
Tywin sat up straighter on the perilous throne. “Lord Baelish,” he addressed and the slender man stepped smoothly forward, taking the place at the Hand’s side. “That is within your holdings is it not?”

“It is, my Lord Hand,” said Littlefinger. “I received word from my castellan just yesterday informing me of the situation."

“And?” Tywin asked impatiently.

The sly Littlefinger lowered his voice, his eyes darting to Sansa before continuing, “It seems a band of mercenaries were hired by one of the Northern lords prior to the wars end and left to their own devices afterward. They call themselves the Bloody Mummers.” Sansa swallowed down her rising bile at the revelation and Tywin’s face betrayed nothing, but he straightened his doublet as he looked dispassionately beyond the crowd in front of him. “I am told, they count Dothraki among their numbers, which may account for their particular barbarism.”

“Dothraki in Westeros,” Tywin tutted. “Impossible.” Yet, there was something about his unreadable expression that gave Sansa pause.

Meeting the encouraging face of Lord Petyr again, Sansa decided perhaps this would be a moment for her to spread her wings into this new position. “My Lord, I cannot help but feel that some of the responsibility for this lies on me. It was mine own people that hired these men. As the Queen, I think the Crown has a duty to subdue them.”

The soft lilting of her Northern accent seemed to shake Lord Tywin out of whatever thoughts that were plaguing him. Speculatively, he raked his gaze over this little lamb that would be queen. “You would have me divert the Crown’s resources to dispatch with mere bandits?”

Swallowing, Sansa fought the urge to wither. The resonance of the Lord Hand’s voice sending icy shivers down her spine. “Yes, my Lord. I think it would do well for the Crown to help its people, given that the Riverlands were so ravaged during the war.” She indicated with her hand to the dirty souls that still sat quiet and forlorn in the hall, and noted the tears that slipped down the petitioners cheeks. “And perhaps place a modest bounty for the return of their womenfolk.”

Tywin very nearly gaped. “You are young, and unskilled in the realm of justice, so let me educate you. If I place a bounty, we will be knee deep in peasants claiming their daughters were stolen, only for blaggards to show up a week later begging for the money they think owed after those daughters are returned with bastards in their bellies.”

The Queen’s innocent face flamed with shame as she averted her eyes to the twisted swords of the throne Tywin sat.

“If I may,” Littlefinger interjected softly, “What our Queen proposes, while somewhat naive, may help to ease the tensions between the smallfolk and the Crown. I’ve received reports, rumblings of unrest among the peasantry since the war. If we were to aid these men, I think it might go a ways towards mending the frayed relationship between the people and their masters.”

Stern-faced Tywin sucked at his teeth. “And just where would the Crown find the money necessary to afford such? As Master of Coin, you are aware of the kingdom’s strained finances just as well as I am.”

There was the tiniest of glimmers in Littlefinger’s eye. “As a loyal subject of the Crown, I would be happy to fund the efforts, and provide the men. It would cost the Crown nothing.”
Lord Tywin grunted and leaned back further into his seat as he processed the situation, nails giving a swift rap to the rusted metal of the throne where his arm perched. “Fine,” he proclaimed. Bellowing out to the group awaiting his judgment, “Your request for aid is granted. The Lord of Harrenhal will supply men to root out the raiders, as well as a bounty for the return of your women. He will discuss the particulars with you at his leisure once these proceedings are done for the day. You are dismissed.”

The ragged men in the hall bowed reverently, their heads bounding up and down like bells being rung out of sync as they quietly voiced their thanks and backed away and out of the throne room. With their departure, the murmurs of the lords and ladies of the court picked back up, and the tension that held the audience receded.

Sansa found herself thankful to Lord Petyr for stepping into deflect Lord Tywin’s annoyance with her proposal as well as his defense of its merits. A gracious nod of her head as he retreated to his original position behind the throne was met with a bow and a delicious quirk to his brow. Perhaps, this was why his note insisted that she come — to step up as a queen and resolve the conflict as a monarch should. It would also serve as a convenient excuse for them to meet openly and without a need for subterfuge.

The herald’s voice announcing the presentation of a lord from the Eyrie cut through her ruminations. “Lord Nestor Royce and his daughter, the Lady Myranda.”

Sansa tore her eyes from where they had been studying the pattern in her dress, to watch the entry of their newest guests at Court. Her eyes widened as the two, arm in arm, made their way through the crowd.

No.

A thick lump of fear hung heavily in her throat, and try as she might, no amount of swallowing could dislodge it.

It can’t be.

She dared a glance to Lord Petyr where he stood casually. Those around him — their eyes all trained on the entry of the new Lord and Lady — did not notice the paling features of the Queen, but her adviser met her gaze boldly with a devilish sparkle in his eye, and she knew without a doubt why he’d wanted her here. He had done this treacherous, treasonous thing. He had done it for her — to what purpose, she was unsure — but if the Court were to discover the ruse, they could all suffer the consequences. It was positively reckless, and a shock of disquiet swam hotly through her veins.

Sansa had barely the clarity to compose herself, to absorb the conversation being had before Lord Tywin pressed her with a question. “Queen Sansa, the decision is yours. Will you accept Lady Myranda as one of your ladies?”

Her features as placid as she could make them, Sansa rose, gait miraculously steady as she descended the dais towards the sweet faced, dark haired beauty where she curtsied meekly. “Rise.”

Gaze upturned, Sansa saw into the depths of the soft brown eyes, saw the trepidation that lingered there, and mutual recognition.

“You honor me with your request, Lady Myranda.” She was proud that she did not stumble over the false name, and reached for the girl’s hand, giving it a squeeze of acknowledgment. “I will gladly take you into my service.”
“Thank you for the privilege, my Queen. I will deign to serve you and House Baratheon with utmost loyalty,” was the murmured response.

Oh, Lord Littlefinger was up to his games, and a silent rage fueled Sansa as she sent daggers to him as she re-took her seat. He merely smiled his amusement.

_How dare he bring sweet Jeyne Poole into this viper’s den?!_

The impudent man will soon learn how sharp a wolf’s teeth are.

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