Summary

After a string of messy relationships Sansa makes a New Year's resolution to herself: no dating for the entire year. It seemed like such an easy thing to stick to, until the flowers started coming.
Winter

WINTER

January

A hush had fallen over King's Landing that seemed as thick as the layer of confetti and fallen streamers littering the streets. There was a banner loudly proclaiming 'HAPPY NEW YEAR' hanging haphazardly out of the window of the apartment across the street from hers and Sansa found that her eyes kept drifting over to it as she tapped her pen against the blank page of the notebook in her lap.

The sun was just beginning its assent over the silent city that was still locked in slumber before it faced a day of recovering from its night of revelry. Sansa had been awake for hours, she always woke up extremely early on the first day of the year, ready to begin her life anew.

She had always loved the first day of the year, it was a fresh start freely given to everyone, free of strings and complications. There were no bad memories with the year, it was a new clean slate. The perfect time for a new her. She liked to spend the first day of the year creating her New Year's resolutions, trying to find the best thing that would help to shape her year to come.

Sansa was a big believer in resolutions, unfortunately she had never been able to see one through. She always found herself putting things off and creating excuses. This year was going to be different though, she could feel it. She just had to find the prefect thing that would give her just the right amount of change in her life that she could easily stick to.

It was easier said than done.

The sound of groaning from behind her drew her attention away from the banner floating in the breeze and Sansa looked over her shoulder to see her little sister rise her head up from the couch to glare at her from behind her wildly mussed brown hair.

"How are you awake already?" Arya groaned as she rubbed at her face, smearing the remains of her thick eyeliner around her eyes so that she looked like she had tried to do her makeup to resemble a raccoon.

"It's a new year." Sansa said airily as she adjusted her back against the windowsill, "I don't want to waste a minute of it."

"Sleeping isn't wasting." Arya mumbled into the couch as she flopped her face back down. Sansa spared a moment of worry that she would not be able to get the makeup stains out of the pillows before shaking her head at her sister. Arya's words were still slightly slurred but it was far better than how she'd sounded at four o'clock that morning when she'd shown up at Sansa's front door and demanded a horizontal surface to sleep on.

Sansa made a dismal noise of disagreement as she continued tapping her pen against her notebook. None of the resolutions she'd thought of seemed very worthy of her time. She had to admit that none of them were ones she was likely to see through to the end of the year either.

"What're you doing?" Arya mumbled, drawing Sansa's attention back to her.

"Trying to think of my New Year's resolution." Sansa admitted, waiting for her little sister to poke fun at her. Sure enough Arya let out a sound that was half a groan and half a laugh.
"Those stupid things? People still do that?" Arya sighed and opened her eyes to peer over at Sansa. "Why put yourself through the pressure of disappointing yourself in a few weeks?"

Sansa shrugged as she stared down at the blank page that seemed to be glaring up at her mockingly. "I want to find something I'll stick to this time. Something I can do."

Arya groaned as she flopped over onto her other side gracelessly so that she could look at Sansa without twisting her neck around. "Resolve to get straight A's or something, or to go to class every day." She said before letting out a large yawn that she did not bother to try to hide at all.

Frowning Sansa stopped her pen tapping to peer at her sister. "I already go to class every day and I have a 4.0." Sansa's brow wrinkled in concern as she looked at Arya. "Are you not going to class every day?"

Arya waved her hand dismissively "Hey this isn't about me, it's about you!" Sansa scoffed and made a mental note to talk to her sister about her attendance and how college wasn't a game once she'd sobered up a little. "What about no going out on school nights?" Arya said as she threw an arm over her eyes to block out the light of the sun raising behind them.

"I only go out on school nights when it's an important function I can't reschedule." Sansa admitted as she pushed a stray lock of hair behind her ear. She couldn't help but think that these would be better resolutions for Arya than for herself. Her little sister's first semester at King's Landing University seemed to have been more about partying than learning. "I make sure to only go out on dates on the weekend."

"Well then, I don't know, maybe you should just give up dating." Arya said from behind her arms as she shifted to get comfortable on Sansa's couch.

Sansa rolled her eyes at Arya's tone but as she did so Arya's words crept into her brain. "No dating." Sansa mulled the thought over aloud, she saw Arya move her arms apart a bit to peer out at her curiously from behind them her attention caught by Sansa's tone.

It wasn't actually as bad of an idea as Sansa had first thought, everyone knew her track record was far from pristine. She had dated more than her fair share of toads looking for her prince charming. So far all she had found was pain and humiliation. She had spent so much of her life defining who she was based off of her relationships that the idea of going through a year without one terrified her. Perhaps it was the fear that got her to nod along to Arya as she whispered, "No dating. For a whole year."

Maybe it was time to figure out who she was when she was alone, to stop recreating herself for other people and to do so for herself. Sansa found her resolve strengthening as she clutched her pen and began to write on the blank page that had been mocking her all morning.

"Are you serious?" Arya asked, sounding more coherent than she had during the whole conversation. Sansa nodded thoughtfully as she began to wonder if she should add another resolution or just focus on this one.

"Yes." Sansa admitted as she finally put her notebook down and looked over at her little sister who was watching her with narrowed eyes. "I think it's a great idea."

"Why?" Arya asked, clearly not sure if Sansa was trying to mock her or not.

Shrugging off her embarrassment Sansa found herself admitting in a whisper something that she had never wanted to say aloud before. "Because...I can't keep expecting other people to love me if I'm
not even sure if I love myself."

Her words hung heavy in the air between them and Sansa cleared her throat as she tried to swallow the lump of mortification in her throat. Arya and her had never been close, never been one for heart to hearts so Sansa was unsure of why she was even talking to her about this. Arya had never been supportive of any of Sansa's relationships, or really even anything that she did so she did not know why this would be any different. She was sure that she had just opened a door for a lifelong topic of mocking but when she finally got the courage to look back over at her sister she found that Arya was propped up on her elbows and just watching her thoughtfully.

"I've never known you to keep a New Year's resolution." Arya said slowly, causing Sansa's brows to wrinkle. She had been sure Arya was going to launch into a tirade about her past relationships or laugh in her face.

"Well I'll keep this one." Sansa said, her spine straightening as the idea of no dates for a year began to roll around in her mind.

"Yeah you will." Arya mulled as she collapsed back onto the couch and tugged at her short hair in thought. She was silent for a moment before she looked back over at Sansa and said definitively. "Because my New Year's resolution is making sure that you keep yours."

Sansa felt her eyebrow quirk upwards in surprise. "You've never made a resolution in your life."

"Yup." Arya said through a yawn as she turned her back on Sansa and the sun behind her, pulling the pillow over head to block out the light. Her voice was muffled as she spoke again. "That's how you know I'll keep this one. I've been saving up all my resolve."

Shaking her head with a smile Sansa stood and pulled the curtains closed, her smile widening as she heard Arya let out a groan of relief as the light diminished. Picking up her notebook Sansa retreated to her room where she planned to come up with things to keep her occupied for the next fifty-two weekends since she suddenly found her social calendar wide open.

XxX

Sansa had thought that this would be the easiest resolution that she ever had to keep. All she had to do was say no whenever someone asked for her phone number or for a date. She would just say that she had plans or that she was focusing on herself, anything to avoid breaking the resolution that Arya had taken to texting her a reminder of three times a day.

Two weeks into the new year and Sansa found herself still holding strong, she didn't even have a desire to break her resolution. She had spent the last two weekends getting an early start to the upcoming semester's workload, she'd already read most of her textbooks and started outlining topics for her term papers. She found herself thinking that this was going to be the easiest year of her life, no drama, no hassle. No other person demanding all of her spare time and attention. She would get the best grades and have the most relaxed time of her life. She might even catch up with old TV shows that she used to watch as a kid.

At least that was what Sansa thought until the third weekend came. By now all of her friends and classmates had returned to campus as school had started earlier that week. Friday night steadily approached on Sansa amid a plethora of chimes from her cell phone as friends texted her to come out and join them at the bars. It was the first weekend back at campus and Sansa knew that most, if not all, of her friends were celebrating their return to the freedom of college away from their parents.

She herself had spent the holiday in King's Landing as Arya had a project for her class that lasted
over the weeks of break and their family did not want their youngest daughter to face the holiday alone. So, Sansa had volunteered to pass up three weeks of knee deep snow and conversations with her mother by the fire and making endless Christmas cookies with her younger brothers so that Arya would not spend the holiday by herself. But Arya did not seem to understand what Sansa had sacrificed for her and other than seeing her for a few hours Christmas day the only time Sansa had seen her during the entire three-week period was when she’d stumbled onto her doorstep drunk.

Now with the combined weeks of solitude of break and her own self-imposed isolation of her resolution Sansa was going on nearly a month of hanging out by herself. Her mind was already beginning to implode with boredom and she did not think she could spend another weekend reading about post-modern femininity in political campaigns if she did not get out of this apartment for a bit first.

The problem with that was that Sansa had never gone anywhere alone. The thought of seeing a movie by herself made her cringe and whenever Sansa saw people dining alone in restaurants she never knew whether she wanted to cringe at them being alone or applaud them for their bravery of eating out when they knew people had to be judging them or assuming that they had been stood up. Or at least that's what she did.

This no dating resolution did not mean that she was not allowed to go out and do things with her friends of course. But Sansa knew her friends, she knew that they would spend the night asking her about who she had spent the holidays seeing and pointing out cute people at the bars and telling her to go and get their numbers. While Arya and her had only made the resolution for Sansa not to date she felt that flirting or sleeping with people was breaking her resolution as well. She had resolved to spend this year single and she was going to do that, no matter how bored she became.

Sansa was halfway through her third movie of the night when there was a sharp knock on her door. Raising from the couch Sansa couldn't help worrying on her bottom lip as she approached the door, she had already told all of her friends that she couldn't come out that night, making up some excuse about homework. But she knew her friends and sometimes they wouldn't take no for an answer. Sansa was still trying to come up with excuses to not join them bar hopping when she opened the door.

Arya’s gray eyes met hers and Sansa breathed a sigh of relief that made her little sister's eyebrows raise. "Expecting someone else?" She asked breezily as she stepped into the apartment and kicked the door shut with her faded combat boots. Sansa frowned at the dirt left on her door by the kick as she shook her head.

"I was worried you were one of my friends." She admitted as she followed Arya back to the couch where she'd flopped down like it was her apartment as well. "What are you doing here?" Sansa asked curiously.

"Just checking on you." Arya said through a mouthful of popcorn that she had grabbed from the bowl on the coffee table. Sansa silently marveled at her sister's ability to make herself feel at home wherever she was. "First weekend school was back in session, I was worried you'd break the resolution already."

"Already?" Sansa asked, her spine straightening at the insult. "What makes you think I'll break it at all?"

Rolling her eyes Arya shoved another fistful of popcorn in her mouth causing Sansa to wrinkle her nose in disgust. "Your track record isn't exactly the best with this kind of thing."

Sansa chose to ignore that (as it was true after all) and decided to focus on a different part of Arya's
statement. "I'm fine. Just watching a movie."

Arya looked over at the paused image of the romantic comedy Sansa had only been half watching and snorted. "These things shouldn't even count as movies."

Rolling her eyes Sansa shoved Arya's hand away from the bowl long enough to grab some popcorn herself. Unlike Arya she didn't shove the whole thing in her face but rather ate only a few pieces at a time.

"I can't even remember the last time I saw you watch a movie." Arya mused thoughtfully, peering at Sansa through her hair that had grown out from what Sansa thought was a disastrous haircut to be just long enough to fall into her eyes all the time. Sansa had offered her clips to pull it back from her face and Arya had stared at her like she had offered to dye it blonde and paint her nails pink.

"You're bored out of your mind, aren't you?" Arya asked, the barely concealed amusement in her voice drawing Sansa's attention back to her.

"No." Sansa snapped automatically, crossing her arms over her chest in a huff. "I'm finding all of this spare time to be nice actually."

"Liar." Arya said with a grin as she tipped her head back and tossed a popcorn kernel high into the air before catching it in her open mouth. Sansa didn't know whether to be impressed or disgusted.

"It's a little disconcerting to have this much free time, yes." Sansa admitted through gritted teeth. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to give up on this resolution!" She said stubbornly. If anything, Arya's certainty that Sansa would fail at this was only making her resolve stronger.

Her sister peered at her thoughtfully as she looked up from the now empty bowl of popcorn. "Why don't you get a job?" Arya asked, tapping her greasy finger against her lip as she looked around Sansa's apartment. "It'll keep you from being cooped up in here all the time. Even you can't study twenty-four hours a day."

Sansa leaned back against the couch as she mulled over her sister's words. A job would certainly keep her mind from becoming a blank slate from boredom and it would get her out of the apartment a few times a week. She wasn't even a month into the year and already she had organized everything in her apartment, she'd even alphabetized her cereal boxes for Seven's sake!

"That's not a bad idea." Sansa mused thoughtfully as her brain already began to think over what places she could apply to that wouldn't cut into her class schedule or her studying. School would always come first after all.

"When will you realize that I am full of great ideas?" Arya asked as she licked the popcorn butter off her fingertips. Sansa chose to ignore this as she pulled her notebook off the table in front of them and began to write a list of places to drop her resume off in the morning. She'd already decided to do the resolution her sister had suggested, she didn't have to give her the satisfaction of telling her she was right about something else in her life as well.

February

"And this is the cappuccino machine, careful you don't burn yourself. These things get hot." Alayaya explained as she ran Sansa through a quick tour of the equipment behind the counter.

It was her first day at King's Cup, the locally owed coffee shop that marked the halfway point between Sansa's apartment and campus. It had been the place that she had applied to that she had been hoping the most would hire her, solely for the convenience of its location. When they'd called
her for an interview Sansa had nearly jumped for joy in the middle of the student union.

Standing behind the counter-top Sansa couldn't help but shiver as she listened attentively to Alayaya's instructions. Winter in King's Landing was much milder than the winters of Sansa's youth but that morning had dawned gray and bleak with a sharp wind that cut through all of Sansa's clothing as she had walked to her very first day of work. The chill had yet to leave her bones as she listened to her new manager explain the intricacies of making shapes out of foam to her.

"Sorry I'm late!" A sweet-sounding voice suddenly interrupted Alayaya's lecture and Sansa turned to peer over her shoulder curiously at the new comer. A pretty girl with shiny brown hair looked at Sansa with curious brown eyes as she tied an apron around her waist. "This must be the new girl." She said with a smile, stepping forward with her hand outstretched as she finished tying off her apron. "I'm Margaery. It's nice to meet you."

"Sansa. It's nice to meet you too." Sansa replied and she shook Margaery's hand and tried to ignore the softness of the other girl's touch. Shaking her head at herself Sansa turned back to Alayaya who was speaking again.

"It's just the two of you today. I've got to run to the bank later to take care of some paperwork so Margaery will be showing you the ropes."

Sansa and Margaery both nodded as Alayaya took what must have been yesterday's deposit from the cash register and headed out the back door. Sansa looked at Margaery and waited for her to tell her what to do; this was her very first job and she found herself wondering if it was apparent on her face.

"All the equipment is on already right?" Margaery asked, as she began to check each piece before Sansa could even nod in response.

"Yes." Sansa said, clearing her throat. "And we already have coffee brewing."

"Perfect." Margaery said grinning over her shoulder at her. "Then all we need to do is turn on the stereo and unlock the front door. Have you ever worked in a coffeehouse before?" She asked curiously as she walked out from behind the counter towards the front.

"No," Sansa admitted, certain that her newness at all of this was obvious with just a look. Margaery didn't seem too concerned with this as she fiddled with a few locks on the door.

"That's okay, it's pretty easy to catch on too. You seem like you handle early mornings well and that can be the hardest challenge some days." She said with a laugh as she flicked on the 'Open' sign and came back to the counter. Margaery leaned back against the counter towards the front.

"The morning rush is my favorite part of the day. I have nothing to focus on but coffee orders and everything else just sort of floats away." Margaery admitted just as the bell above the door rang out.

For the next few hours Sansa made more cups of coffee than she thought that she had ever made in her entire life combined. She hadn't considered when she had applied for this job that since it was on the way for her walk to campus it would be on the way for other students as well. Not only did they get the student crowd but also faculty and tourists on their way to see the remains of the ruins of the Red Keep. There was an endless stream of customers and by the end of the first hour Sansa had already developed a deep hatred for the bell over the front door. It's constant ringing was like a drill pressed against her temple, try as she might she could not get it to fade into background noise like the rest of the sounds in the shop. She supposed that might have been the point of it but that did not stop her from glaring at it every now and again.
She messed up a few orders at the beginning but Margaery was a patient teacher and she did not let the grumpy moods of the customer frazzle her so Sansa tried very hard to copy her cool and calm demeanor. A few of them snapped at her to make their drinks faster and Sansa fought down the urge to snap back that if they were in that big of a hurry perhaps they shouldn't have stopped for coffee. Instead she would nod along as Margaery apologized and explained to them that it was Sansa's first day. She didn't know if it was understanding of the harrows of the first day on a job or the way Margaery would lower her voice to tell them like she was sharing a secret that would get the customer to stop glaring at her while she made their coffees. Whatever it was Sansa made a mental note to keep a close eye on the way Margaery dealt with irked customers, she had the feeling she would need the pointers in the future.

By the time Alyaya returned back to the coffeehouse Sansa felt like she had learned how to make every drink in the place. Her head was swimming with ingredients and the sound of that damned bell. She graciously accepted the free latte Margaery made her as a welcome to the store before she waved her goodbyes and headed off to class. It wasn't until she was halfway across campus that Sansa realized that she hadn't had a second all morning to even think about dating or flirting or anything other than coffee really. Biting down a smile Sansa shook her head, surprised to find that Arya had been right about another thing in her life. For a sister she wasn't that close too Arya sure seemed to know what Sansa needed.

XxX

Falling into her new routine was a lot easier than Sansa had anticipated. Her life quickly blended into a schedule of work and school. In the time when she wasn't studying or brewing coffee for strangers whose faces she was beginning to recognize Sansa had taken up knitting. It was something her mother had taught her back in middle school and Sansa had taken up again with the intent that she would be making everyone scarves for Christmas this year. Arya would drop by unannounced every few days and whenever she saw the pile of yarn in the basket by Sansa's couch she always got a pleased look on her face. It was apparent to both of them that Sansa was holding strong to her resolution because she was. But what neither of them had counted on was Sansa's own thoughts betraying her.

It had started as an accident, Sansa had been working the register while Margaery brewed the coffee behind her. She had fallen into an almost autopilot of taking orders, telling totals and counting out change. It was before sunrise and the people in line were yet to be caffeinated so she wasn't seeing very many smiling faces, which she had already gotten used to. Most people couldn't smile an uncaffeinated smile during the light of dawn.

But then a girl with long blonde hair came up to the counter and ordered a green tea. Sansa had to force herself not to stare at the unusual color of her eyes, she couldn't quite tell if they were blue or purple. The girl had caught her staring and smiled at her, the corners of her mouth stretching up like the rising sun. Sansa was strong enough in her resolution to only smile back, she did not flirt nor draw a smiley face on her coffee cup like she had taken to doing for particularly grumpy customers. No Sansa had contented herself to a smile and watching the girl's backside as she had walked away (to which Margaery had caught with a knowingly raised eyebrow that made Sansa blush as bright as her hair).

The smile shouldn't have been a big deal, all it should have done was make Sansa smile in return because for once someone was showing her a bit of cheer in the mornings. But Sansa hadn't been on a date in months and she had just spent Valentine's day curled up on the couch with her little sister and her recently dumped best friend Jeyne eating enough chocolate to fill a bathtub in their pajamas. Sansa had never spent Valentine's Day without a date since she had hit puberty, it was beginning to sink into her just what not dating for a year meant. It meant no kisses, no flowers, no one to laugh
with about stupid little things only they understood. That one little smile should have been just a nice moment of the day but instead it festered into something dangerous.

Sansa could stop herself from flirting, from going out on dates but she could not stop her mind from imagining. And that's what it was doing. It was imagining that pretty blonde girl holding her hand, laughing at her jokes, waking up next to her. She would walk to class and imagine the girl was there beside her. Sansa would come home and pretend that the girl was there and talk about her day to an empty apartment. She worried a moment for her sanity as she told her couch about her classes but Sansa excused it by reminding herself she was still keeping her resolution this way. It was better to talk to an empty room than admit defeat to Arya.

After all, pretending she was in a relationship was not breaking her resolution. She had resolved to not go on dates but she had never resolved to not imagine dating.

The blonde girl never came back into the shop that week although Sansa kept a sharp eye out for her. She caught Margaery looking at her with a strange look on her face a few times but Sansa chose to ignore it. She knew that it had to be apparent to others some of what she was thinking because Margaery was not the only one to be giving her that curious look. Add in to that the fact that Arya had started texting her nearly ten times a day reminding Sansa about her resolution, reminding her in all capital letters that she was NOT ALLOWED TO DATE or that Arya would never let her live it down.

The text messages worked a little and Sansa tried to get her mind to stop imaging that she was dating the blonde girl and after not seeing her again for a few weeks Sansa was finally able to shake her image from her mind. But all that did was make her start imagining she was dating other people. She made a silent promise to herself that she would not imagine that she was dating anyone that she actually knew, even if all she knew about them was their name. But when she saw a cute stranger on the street or in the shop she let her mind wander and imagine all the things that they could have together in a relationship.

Sansa was in the middle of imaging she was dating a man with dark skin and muscles like coiled rope who’d ordered two shots of espresso despite the fact that it was ten o’clock at night when the cursed bell went off again and Sansa jerked her head up from the table she was wiping down to look up and glare at the door.

Margaery grinned at her as she flipped the open sign off next to the door she had just locked. "Relax jumpy. It's just me."

Forcing aside the thoughts that Margaery's crooked grin gave her Sansa smiled back as she reminded herself of her promise not to imagine relationships with people she actually knew. She had made that rule entirely because of Margaery who she spent three shifts a week with trying not to wonder if her hair was actually as soft as it looked and how it would feel to wrap her hands in it. Shaking her head at her hatred for the bell, Sansa went back to cleaning the front of the shop as Margaery shut down the machines and began to count out their tips for the night.

"Someone left this for you." Margaery's sweet voice sounded amused as Sansa looked up from where she was sweeping to see Margaery waving a yellow tulip at her. There was a thin scrap of paper tied around the stem and as Sansa approached the counter she was surprised to see her name written on it in an unfamiliar script.

"Who left it?" Sansa asked in surprise leaning on the counter to peer at the flower, her mind wheeling over who had been in the shop recently. She never actually looked at the tip jar because she did not want the amount of its contents to affect her mood. She felt like she would have noticed if someone slipped a flower in there but truthfully she was so lost in her own head lately that she didn't
know if that was true.

"No idea." Margaery said with a shrug, fingerling the piece of paper tied to the flower. "Yours is the only name on this." She leaned her elbows on the counter so that she was only a few inches from Sansa as she whispered conspiratorially. "Looks like you have a secret admirer."

Sansa swallowed hard at Margaery's closeness. Her ponytail had fallen over one shoulder and its tip was dangling just inches above Sansa's hand. If she turned her palm upwards her fingers might just be able to brush the ends of her hair and find out if it was as soft as she thought it was. She was so focused on Margaery's hair that it took her a moment for her words to sink in.

"A secret admirer?" Of all the years for that to happen to her for the first time in her life it had to be during the year she wasn't dating? Sansa was just cursing her luck when a thought occurred to her. She had been imagining relationships for the past few weeks and she had vowed not to date all year. This was way too coincidental of timing to be anything but one person. "My sister didn't come in here today did she?"

Sansa looked up in time to see Margaery's face fall but then she blinked and Margaery was grinning at her curiously. Supposing she must have imagined it Sansa shook the thought from her head and focused on Margaery who was speaking again, "Your sister? I don't think so, why?"

"She likes to prank me sometimes." Sansa lied quickly, she was not about to get into her resolution and all of her history that had led to it. It was bad enough that Arya knew about it, she didn't want to pull anyone else into this.

Margaery made a noise of understanding before she smiled and waved the tulip under Sansa's nose. The sweet smell of it blended with the rose scent of Margaery's perfume and Sansa swallowed hard as she realized that Margaery hadn't moved away, they were both leaning over the counter and their faces were less than half a foot apart as Margaery whispered conspiratorially, "I didn't see her today, I don't think this flower was left as a prank."

"Did you see who left it?" Sansa asked curiously in spite of herself, her voice lowering to match Margaery's tone. Her heart was beating a bruise against her rib-cage and she wasn't sure if it was due to the flower or Margaery's closeness.

"No idea." Margaery breathed, tilting her head to peer at Sansa curiously. As she moved her ponytail dipped down and the very ends of her hair brushed against the top of Sansa's hand. The touch of it made Sansa jerk back like she had been burned. Her sudden movement made the broom she had propped against the counter fall to the floor with a crash that sounded deafening after the softness of the last few moments.

Swallowing hard Sansa bent to retrieve the broom, fighting off a blush as she tried not to look too long at Margaery. She didn't know if it was her sudden overactive imagination about dating or the fact that she had watched far too many romcoms lately but Sansa had felt like a moment had just passed between them. She wasn't letting herself date this year so that probably meant she shouldn't be having moments either.

"Well that's certainly interesting." Sansa said quickly, sparing a glance at the tulip held softly in Margaery's hand. The flower was pretty but she did not want to touch it, certain that it had been left as a trick by her little sister. This was Arya's not so subtle way of telling her to get her head out of the clouds and Sansa suddenly felt the burning urge to get out of the coffeehouse. That flower was a symbol of the fact that she was nearly cheating on her resolution and Sansa did not like the reminder staring her in the face. She felt like she could taste the scent of the flower with every breath she took and she found that she was suddenly lightheaded from it all.
"Are you alright?" Margaery asked curiously as Sansa sped past the counter towards the backroom.

"Never better. Let's get out of here, yeah?" Sansa asked as she untied her apron, her fingers suddenly clumsy on the knot.

"What's the sudden rush? Got a hot date or something?" Margaery asked, Sansa was so lost in her thoughts she barely noticed the look of sadness cross Margaery's face.

Sansa laughed at the absurdity of the question and then she laughed harder as she realized that no one but her and Arya knew it was absurd. Of course, Margaery would assume she was dating right now. Just like she would assume the flower would cause Sansa happiness and curiosity that someone would leave it for her. Instead it was causing her waves of guilt for her thoughts of the past few weeks.

Sure she'd technically kept her resolution so far but her mind certainty hadn't been. She might as well have been going on a date a night for how her thoughts had been lately. Shaking her head at both herself and Margaery's question Sansa hung her apron up and grabbed her bag from the cubby that had her name printed under it like she was back in kindergarten. She pulled her coat on hastily as she tried to swallow her guilt.

Margaery shook her head at her antics and approached her to grab her own things from her cubby. Sansa took a small step backwards, suddenly afraid of what she might do if they got too close.

"You're a bit strange sometimes Sansa, you know that?" Margaery asked as she handed Sansa the tulip and her part of the tips so that she could pull her own coat on.

Pocketing the money Sansa stared at the tulip, it's petals yellow like the sun as she wondered if someone other than Arya did leave it for her. She couldn't quite shake the feeling that it was a test from her sister trying to make sure her resolve was still in check. Or perhaps it was from someone who really did admire her and couldn't think of any other way to say it.

Or maybe it was a sign from the old gods and the new that she had made a promise to herself and she needed to keep it, and not just in body but mind and spirit too. She couldn't very well go on dating people in her head for the next year and then pretend like she'd actually kept this resolution. No, Sansa had agreed to this resolution not just to stop dating people who were bad for her but to better herself for herself. Having imaginary relationships with people she passed on the street was not the way to do that.

Sansa ran her fingers over the waxy petals of the tulip as Margaery looked over her shoulder at her, her fingers hovering above the pad for the alarm code.

"You ready?"

Sansa nodded quickly, her fingers closing tightly over the tulip, it's petal crushing beneath her fingers. She was ready, ready to fully commit to her no dating promise. For it wasn't a resolution anymore, this wasn't something she wanted to do. This was something she needed to do. She needed to see this through and not just so that Arya couldn't lord it over her for the rest of her life. She needed to do this for herself.

She followed Margaery out the back door quickly, the beeping of the alarm pad reminding them to hurry so that they could lock the door before the alarm went off. Sansa stood by as Margaery locked the door behind them giving Sansa one last smile as she began to head for her car.

"Well I'm glad one of us has something interesting going on in their lives. We'll have to keep an eye out for your secret admirer." She said with a wave that Sansa returned halfheartedly as she turned in
the opposite direction of Margaery to head towards her apartment.

Casting a quick look over her shoulder to make sure Margaery was safely in her car Sansa opened her palm and stared down at the crushed petals of the tulip resting in her hand. "You promised yourself." Sansa whispered, forcing down the curiosity and butterflies blooming in her stomach. She had promised herself a year of no dating to better herself and pretend relationships and worrying about strange flowers was not the way to do that. It was time for her to get serious about this and stop hiding out in her apartment because she was too afraid to do things alone. Walking past a bus stop bench Sansa placed the crushed tulip on the faded metal seat before continuing home, not sparing the flower a second glance or thought as she walked on.
A few days had passed since the mysterious flower had been left for her at work and Sansa found that it was an easier thing to push from her mind than she had first expected. She was pretty sure she knew who had left it for her, the more time she had to think about it the more she realized the only person who could have left it for her was Arya. Sansa must have been more obvious than she thought last month imagining relationships with strangers. The flower was simply her sister's not so subtle way of telling her to get her head out of the clouds and come back down to Earth.

Sansa had to admit it worked fairly well. The tulip soon fled from her mind and Sansa was able to fall back into her routine. As midterms approached she found herself suddenly grateful that she worked in a coffeehouse as the free drink she got every shift was starting to be what carried her through her long nights of studying. Her advisors had warned her that trying to complete a double major in five years would be tough but Sansa was only just beginning to realize how tough it would be. But she hadn't been able to choose between political science and women's studies when it came time to pick a major so she had decided to go for both, despite the worried comments from her mother about over-extending.

She was not the only one feeling the breath of midterm grades on the back of her neck. Frazzled looking students had begun to camp out at the coffeehouse, books and papers piled high around them as they slung back copious amounts of black coffee and espresso and fought over the tables closest to the power outlets. The clacking sound of keyboard keys soon faded into background music as Sansa wondered how crammed the shop would be come finals week.

Some of her coworkers were feeling the pressure as well. Podrick, a first-year history student would stand in the backroom reading flashcards during his breaks. Sansa often overheard him muttering dates and names under his breath as he drew leaves in the foam of lattes. Now in her first year of grad school Margaery was no stranger to midterms but Sansa still caught her reading her textbook under the counter more than once as the exams approached. Another first-year student, Bella, was often dancing around them behind the counter as she practiced the steps for her dance final as best as she could in an apron holding a hot pot of coffee.

Even Alayaya seemed to have picked up on the anxiety of her employees and customers. She offered free espresso shots the night before exams started to anyone who showed her an exam schedule. Sansa caught sight of her throwing back shots of the espresso herself like it was whiskey. The only person who seemed to be calm about the approaching exams was Shae, who was not a student and who seemed to be quite amused by everyone's stress. She did put out a blanket offer to everyone that she could change shifts with them during exam week to help people get more time to rest or study so Sansa didn't mind too much when she caught Shae giggling at their frantic studying more and more often as the exams dates arrived.

Sansa didn't see very much of Arya during midterm week thankfully. Even her incessant NO DATING text messages whittled down to once a day. She knew that her little sister was busy with her own exams and Sansa was just grateful that Arya was focusing on them instead of her. She didn't know if she could have handled her constant reminders any more that week. It was nice to finally have a break from the endless reminder that she wasn't allowed to date, especially since she kept finding herself in close quarters with Margaery.
They didn't work every shift together but they were still on the schedule on the same shift three days a week. Margaery was easily Sansa's favorite person to work with, and not just because she was nice to look at. She had a seemingly unflappable demeanor and Sansa had yet to see her even so much as glare at an unruly customer. Sansa often found herself wishing that she had even half as much of Margaery's coolness, she herself often got harried and rushed when customers were rude to her and she had burned herself with foam more than once under someone's glaring eyes. Sansa could learn a lot from Margaery, that's why she was always so excited to work with her. Or at least that was the lie she told herself to make her feel less guilty about the resolution.

The last day of midterm week ended up being a very slow night for the coffeehouse, it seemed even slower after the last couple of weeks of studying madness. Sansa herself felt like a weight had been lifted off of her as she had finished her last test that morning and she'd had a really good feeling about it. As she locked up the shop for the night she was already imagining the long bath she would take that night and the nearly full bottle of wine she might just finish off. She was trying to decide if she wanted to swing by the pizza place a few blocks away from her apartment on the way home or content herself to eating cereal for the third night in a row when Margaery's voice tore her from her thoughts.

"Thank the gods this week is finally over." She said as she flipped the main lights off as Sansa used the light drifting from the backroom to pick her way around the tables. The chairs sitting on top of them looked like the limbs of weird bare trees in the dim light. "The tips this past week were nice but I thought exams would never end."

Sansa nodded in agreement as she reached the counter and came to a stop a few feet away from Margaery. It was what she had deemed as a safe distance since the incident with the tulip. "Well it's just eight more weeks until finals. The tips are probably even better that week."

Margaery let out a low groan that made Sansa swallow hard at the sound. "Don't you even mention finals to me right now Sansa Stark." She leaned back heavily against the wall and stared at Sansa through the hair that had fallen loose from her ponytail to frame her face. Sansa curled her fingers into fists behind her back to resist the urge to tuck it back behind her ears. "Midterms ended hours ago and already you have the audacity to bring up finals?"

Sansa found herself grinning despite herself. Margaery often had that effect on her. "I'm sorry." She said through her smile, biting her lip to stop herself from asking how she could make it up to her. Those words sounded far too much like flirting and Sansa had already decided that flirting was coming too close to breaking her no dating resolution. The more shifts she worked with Margaery the harder Sansa found it not to flirt.

"Don't worry about it. You haven't done any damage that a drink won't fix." Margaery said with a smile, pushing herself away from the wall to lead the way into the backroom. Sansa was in the middle of pulling on her coat when Margaery spoke again. "I know this place down in Flea Bottom that makes killer cocktails. Plus, the bartender knows me and gives me half off drinks whenever I bring a pretty girl with me. What do you say?"

Fumbling with her coat Sansa took a moment before she responded. She didn't know which part of that statement to focus on first, the fact that Margaery had called her pretty or the fact that it seemed coming too close to breaking her no dating resolution. The more shifts she worked with Margaery the harder Sansa found it not to flirt.

"Sure." Margaery pulled her ponytail out of the back of her coat and shrugged. "After this week I could use a good drink. Or four."

Sansa could feel her heart beating a bruise against the inside of her ribs as she fought to find an answer. On the one hand drinks were not necessarily a date and even though Margaery called her
pretty and seemed to flirt with her sometimes Sansa had no idea if she even liked girls. She very well
could be asking her because they were coworkers who seemed to be on the way to being friends and
this had been a very stressful week. A drink didn't sound like such a bad idea, Sansa hadn't gone out
to a bar in months as she had been trying to avoid any scene that might put her in a position where
flirting or being asked out might happen. The thought of going out for drinks with Margaery made
Sansa's heart flutter in anticipation and it was that feeling that got her to shake her head no.

"I can't tonight, sorry." Sansa admitted breathlessly as she slung her backpack over her shoulder.
"Maybe I could take a raincheck?" A raincheck would still be valid in nine months right? Sansa
couldn't help but wonder as she fiddled with the strap of her bag.

"Sure." Margaery said with a grin as she pulled her keys out of her pocket. She didn't look too
disappointed Sansa noted with a sigh of relief. She must not have been asking her out on a date after
all. "My little brother and his boyfriend want me to meet up with them anyway. Maybe we'll go
down to Flea Bottom and they can get the half-priced drinks for bringing me."

Sansa laughed as she followed Margaery out the door and tried to ignore the swoop of
disappointment in her chest.

XxX

Things with Margaery were as normal as ever the next few days much to Sansa's relief. She realized
now that Margaery must not have been asking her out after all and had just wanted to relax after a
long week. She felt a little annoyed with herself for not taking the chance to go out and do something
besides work and school and her knitting project but at the same time Sansa knew that not going had
been a good idea. Even if it hadn't been a date she had too many complicated feelings about
Margaery for it to have been fair to go out with her. Fair for herself because of her resolution but also
not fair to Margaery. She clearly didn't have the same feelings that Sansa did and even if she did
Sansa couldn't act on hers for another eight and a half months so what was the point of bringing them
up?

With midterms over the coffeehouse patronage had resumed its normal volume for which Sansa
found herself both grateful for and annoyed. She missed the constant stream of people (although she
did not miss the endless chime of that damned bell) because it had allowed her less time to think
about things. Now she had far too many emotions and confusions clouding her head and they were
no longer busy enough to keep all the thoughts from entering her mind.

Sansa was getting ready to leave her shift and head to class when Bella popped her head into the
back, nearly hitting Sansa with the swinging door with the exuberance she swung the door open
with.

"Here's your portion of the tips from the morning." Bella said as she thrust a handful of small bills
and change at Sansa who juggled her bag and cup of coffee to catch the money before Bella dropped
it on the floor like she usually did. She never checked to make sure someone was ready to take
whatever she was offering them, she just thrust out her arm and let go.

"Thanks." Sansa said as she shoved the change into the front pocket of her bag. It clinked musically
against the other fistfuls of coins she'd put in there over the last week. She made a mental note to
clean her bag out when she got home.

"This was left for you too." Bella added as she shoved something pink at Sansa and let it drop as the
bell went off in the other room. Sansa caught the object in surprise, nearly spilling her coffee in the
process, as Bella left her alone in the backroom.
A pink flower, a peony Sansa recognized after a few moments, lay in her hand. It's petals where slightly crushed on one side from Bella's grip and there on the stem was a small piece of paper with her name scrawled on it in an elegant hand. Sansa stared down at it for a moment before darting back through the door into the shop. She ignored Bella's look of curiosity as she scanned the room, Arya was nowhere in sight but that didn't mean she hadn't had someone leave this for her.

"Did you see who left this?" Sansa asked Bella curiously, waving the flower in her hand at her.

"Nope." Bella shrugged as she went back to texting under the counter clearly oblivious to the turbulent emotions this little flower was putting Sansa through. Strange that such a small thing could hold such power.

The next week Shae found a yellow daisy left on a table with Sansa's name on it. She grinned as she tucked it behind Sansa's ear and told her she hadn't see who had left it. Sansa had pulled the flower from her ear and went into the back to check her text messages from Arya but all she had was an endless stream of messages reminding her NO DATING in a variety of different ways. Her little sister had never mentioned anything about flowers and Sansa hadn't even seen her for weeks they'd both been so busy but somehow she couldn't quite shake the feeling that she was the mastermind behind these little flowers.

With a sigh Sansa dropped the daisy into the trashcan before throwing a few paper towels over it to hide it from sight, unfortunately she couldn't hide it from her thoughts as easily.

April

The arrival of April was brought on by a seemingly endless rain shower and even more flowers. Nearly every shift Sansa worked now a new flower was left for her, in a variety of species and colors. Sansa kept a close eye out for Arya but she never came into the coffeehouse. Sansa assumed that she was having other people drop the flowers off for her in order to avoid Sansa's suspicions but Sansa was not fooled that easily. She knew that Arya was the mastermind behind the flowers, it was her twisted way to keep her on track with the resolution.

When the second week of April drew to a close and Sansa was still being presented with a flower every shift from a grinning coworker who swore they had no idea who left it she realized that she had finally had enough. She texted Arya to meet her at her apartment that evening and when Arya texted her back that she had plans Sansa was still so worked up that all she texted back was NOW, she didn't even put any kind of punctuation so that Arya knew she was serious.

It was another hour before Arya finally showed up at the apartment, her hair was shorter now and Sansa realized that she had chopped it all off again. It actually looked good on her this time and Sansa wondered if she'd actually let someone else cut it rather than taking the scissors to her own hair because one of their father's friends had made some drunken comment about ladies having long hair. Her sister's snappy tone drew her from her thoughts.

"What's so important that couldn't wait until tomorrow?" Arya asked as she pushed past Sansa into the apartment, throwing her wet coat over the back of one the bar stools by the counter Sansa had in lieu of a table and chairs.

"You have to stop leaving me flowers." Sansa said as she shut the door. She knew it was best to not beat around the bush when it came to Arya. Straight and to the point were the way to go with her little sister as she had learned the hard way.

Arya looked up from the gray and white scarf Sansa was knitting for Jon, their cousin who had been raised like a brother with them. He was a member of the army and was stationed at the northern most
point of Westeros at the Wall so Sansa was making his scarf nearly twice as thick as the others.

"What flowers?" Arya asked curiously as she let the unfinished scarf slide through her hands and drop back onto the counter.

Sansa huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. "You don't have to play coy. I've already told you I intend to keep this resolution so you don't have to keep trying so hard."

Leaning back against the counter Arya's eyes scanned the room, clearly looking for any of the flowers she'd been leaving. Sansa hadn't brought any of them back to the apartment however. She didn't want any kind of reminder of the things she couldn't have for the next eight months. Well that and she didn't want to give Arya the satisfaction of her keeping them.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Arya finally admitted with a shrug, her gray eyes locking onto Sansa's blue ones with a spark of curiosity. "Who's been leaving you flowers?"

Faltering Sansa uncrossed her arms to run a hand through her hair. This was not the direction she had been expecting this conversation to go in. She had excepted Arya to deny it but she hadn't expected her to play dumb, she wasn't very good at it. If Arya was going this direction then that meant... "It hasn't been you?"

Arya shook her head as she picked up an apple from the bowl on the counter and bit into it. "Nope. Have they been left here?" She asked around a mouthful of half chewed fruit as she looked around the room again as if she suddenly expected flowers to jump out at her from behind the cupboard doors.

Suddenly feeling the need to sit down Sansa headed for her couch where she all but fell onto the cushions. Shaking her head she answered Arya's question, "At the coffeehouse. I thought it was you this whole time."

"When did it start?" Arya asked curiously as she came to sit in front of Sansa on the coffee table. Sansa's mind was in such a whirl she didn't even berate her for sitting on the furniture. She'd spent the last six weeks convinced that the flowers had been left by her sister. She knew that Arya had lied to her about things before but she was certain she was telling her the truth now. This was something she would confess too, if only to take credit it for it.

"The end of February." Sansa said with a sigh, leaning her head back against the couch cushions. "I thought it was you reminding me to get my head out of the clouds and not date."

"Why would you need another reminder?" Arya asked, biting the apple again, the fruit crunching sounding extremely loud to Sansa's frazzled mind. "You're not quitting on me are you?"

"Of course not." Sansa snapped. She shrugged as she tried to remember why she had initially thought Arya was behind the flowers to begin with. "It just seemed like something you would do. The timing of it seemed like too much of a coincidence to actually be someone who was interested in me." She admitted, trying very hard to control the blush wanting to bloom over her features.

"Have you told anyone else about the resolution?" Arya asked curiously, juice from the apple dripping off her hand onto the carpet.

Sansa frowned at it as she shook her head. "Only you and I know." Arya shifted at the comment and Sansa's brows rose at the motion. "Don't we?" She asked, unable to keep the edge from her voice. This resolution was private to her, she didn't exactly want people asking her about it or making fun of her for her choices. As far as she was concerned the less people that knew the better.
"Well..." Arya shrugged as she turned the apple between her fingers. "You and I know. And so do some of my friends."

Sansa groaned and rose her hands to cover her face. She didn't know whether she was more embarrassed or angry that Arya was using her troubled love life to gossip with her friends about. Sansa never gossiped about Arya with any of her friends, largely in truth to the fact that Sansa knew very little about Arya's life. She was a very private person unlike the rest of their family.

"Who all knows?" Sansa asked between her fingers. Part of her wished that her couch would just swallow her and she could live in between it's cushions for the rest of her short life before she died of embarrassment.

"Hot-Pie and Gendry. But they won't say anything to anyone! They don't even know you!" Arya protested quickly not even giving Sansa time to wonder why on earth one of her sister's friends was called 'Hot-Pie' or why she wasn't even the littlest bit surprised by it.

"Then why would you tell them?" Sansa snapped, the anger beginning to take over the embarrassment she was feeling.

"They wondered why I kept texting you so much." Arya shrugged sheepishly as she bit into her apple again before she continued to speak around her mouthful of half chewed fruit. "I don't see why it's such a big deal."

"Because it's my private business!" Sansa said, raising to her feet in agitation. She paced around the room as she talked, suddenly needing to move. "I don't want people knowing about the fact that I need a whole year of not dating anyone to try and better myself. I don't want people to know about how bad of taste I've had in the past to have to make this kind of resolution."

"I didn't tell them any of that!" Arya protested. "No one cares about any of that!"

"I do!" Sansa cried, whirling back on her sister. Arya jerked back a little in surprise at the fervor tone of Sansa's voice. Sansa sighed and said, slightly calmer. "I care about that. It's why I wanted to do this in the first place."

Arya looked down at her feet and for a moment Sansa thought she actually looked like she felt guilty before she suddenly jerked her head up. "What if one of your exes is sending the flowers?"

The sudden wild change in subject made Sansa's head whirl a bit and she sat back on the couch heavily as the thought began to work through her mind. Briefly she wondered if that had been Arya's intention, to distract her from her ire that she had told others about this. Whatever Arya's plan it worked and her anger flitted from her thoughts as she thought about the possibility that she already knew who was leaving her the flowers. True, a few of her exes did live in the city but that didn't mean they would suddenly take an interest in her and try to rekindle anything. Especially not in such a subtle way.

"I don't think so." Sansa said thoughtfully. "It doesn't seem like something any of them would do."

She was just getting ready to berate Arya again for sharing her secrets when her sister spoke again. It seemed that she could sense Sansa's irritation and was doing her best to avoid the worst of it.

"What about Baelish?" Arya asked, making Sansa cringe at the sound of his name. She'd dated Petyr Baelish for nearly seven months much to the chagrin of her entire family as he was twice her age and had once been close with her mother. It was that reason that Sansa was drawn to him to begin with, it was one of the very few 'rebellious' things she had done in her entire life. But he'd ended up being extremely manipulative and had nearly managed to turn her against her entire family and isolate her
before she finally came to her senses and left him. She knew that he still resided somewhere in the city but she had been lucky enough thus far to not run into him.

"There's not enough layers to it." Sansa admitted as she thought about it. If Baelish was going to start seeking her out again and leaving her flowers he'd pick flowers that meant something to her, that would somehow remind her of him. "It's not manipulative enough to be Petyr."

Arya nodded thoughtfully before throwing another name out, she was clearly desperate to diminish Sansa's anger as much as she could before it hit her. "Joffrey?"

Sansa snorted at the thought of her first boyfriend having enough kindness in him to so much as look at a flower without it shriveling to dust. She'd been young when she met him and desperate enough for love that she'd stayed through his abuse and the terrible things he had said and done to her. No, if anyone from her past was going to be approaching her again it would never be him.

"No." Sansa said assuredly, "This would be too much work for him. Besides, I've been here for three years at the same school as him and I've yet to see him once."

"Thank the gods for that." Arya muttered to which Sansa nodded along. It was no secret Arya detested Joffrey only second to how much Sansa did. In fact, after the horrible incident with Lady Arya had been the one to attack Joffrey, not Sansa, as she had been too blinded by grief to do much of anything. Sansa had seen a picture of Joffrey in the school paper once after his family made some donation and she was pleased to see that he still bore the scars of her sister's fingernails down his cheek. "What about Myranda?"

"Royce?" Sansa asked in surprise. She hadn't even known that Arya knew about her, although she supposed it wasn't that surprising. Arya always seemed to know much more about her siblings' lives than they knew about hers. Two summers ago the girl had come into Sansa's life like a whirlwind and she had left in much the same fashion. They'd spend the summer doing shots and making love and just generally having fun. They had never been very serious but even if they had been if Myranda had wanted to rekindle something with her she would have made a much louder gesture than a flower. "She lives in Storm's End, she's not behind this."

"Clegane?" Arya asked with a shrug. The name gave Sansa pause as she thought it over. Her relationship with Sandor had been short and relatively sweet until his drinking habits and the way the alcohol turned him into something bitter and gruff tore them apart. He wouldn't give up drinking for her back when they dated so Sansa highly doubted he would have given it up and be seeking her out now.

"I don't think so." Sansa admitted.

"That guy you were dating last semester." Arya said waving her hand as she tried to remember his name. "The pompous jackass one."

"What Harold?" Sansa said with a laugh. Her sister was right, he was a bit of a jackass. He carried his arrogance like a badge of honor and in the end Sansa just couldn't bring herself to be with someone who wouldn't even walk down unpaved streets because the mud might ruin his expensive shoes. "He would never lower himself to coming to this side of King's Landing. Someone might recognize him."

"Well who else have you dated?" Arya asked as she leaned back on her hands. She seemed very keen to avoid talking about how she had told her friends about Sansa's New Year's resolution so with a sigh Sansa decided to put that on the back-burner for the night.
"No one serious enough that they would try to start something back up again with flowers." Sansa admitted thoughtfully. She found herself suddenly craving a large bowl of ice cream as rehashing her exes had only made her realize how many toads she'd dated in the past.

"It must be someone new then." Arya muttered thoughtfully causing Sansa's eyes to drift over to hers. Arya's thick brow furrowed at a sudden thought. "You're not backing out on me, are you? You're still keeping this resolution?"

"Of course I am." Sansa said defiantly. She wasn't about to let a couple of flowers ruin this for her. Part of her was offended that Arya would think her so weak but a larger part of her wasn't surprised. She didn't think Arya had a very high opinion of her overall.

"Don't keep it for me, because you think I'll be mad or disappointed." Arya said loftily, staring at Sansa with a gaze so akin to their father it made a shiver go up Sansa's spine. "I mean I would be mad but don't keep it just cause of that."

"I'm not." Sansa said in surprise. One day people would have more faith in her, she promised herself silently. "I'm keeping it for me."

XxX

Another week passed and a flower was left for Sansa during every shift. Now that she knew they weren't being left by Arya Sansa started to spend her shifts watching the tip jar like a hawk but more and more often the flowers were being left on the counter or on tables. She tried to keep an eye on repeat customers but she never managed to catch anyone in the act of leaving the flowers behind. It was probably for the best as she did not know what she would actually do if she did catch someone. She wasn't very good at confrontation and what would she even say? 'I'm flattered but you need to come back in January?'

She was beginning to spend a ridiculous amount of time in the library trying to both finish up the last few pieces of work she hadn't already completed for the semester and to distract herself from the flower question. She had gotten her midterm grades back earlier that week and had been pleased to find she had gotten over 95% on all of them. It was a record, even for her and she had pulled a 4.0 every semester so far. At least this resolution was providing her with an even stronger work ethic and higher than ever grades.

But even Sansa had a limit on how much studying she could do before going crazy.

She was spending yet another Friday night at home alone, her homework for the next week long since completed and her knitting materials spread out around her when a commercial came on the TV for a movie she had been hearing great things about lately. Sansa had to admit, the trailer was pretty funny and she was a fan of some of the main actor's other films. Besides, she had the night off and didn't have anything for school that wasn't already done. She was tempted to go to a late night showing but it was Friday and already after eight, the majority of her friends would already have plans or be at the bars. Sansa was even considering calling Arya and begging her to go with her before the absurdity of it all struck her.

One of the reasons she wasn't dating anyone this year was to get better at being alone but all she was doing was being alone in her apartment or work or campus. She still had no idea what it was like to be alone out in the world. She couldn't live the rest of her life being too afraid to go out and do things on her own.

It was this moment of self-indignant annoyance that got her to jump from the couch, yarn falling off her lap to puddle on the floor, and head out the door into the night.
Unfortunately the moment of near fury at herself for spending all her time alone didn't last the eight blocks it took her to get to the closest movie theater. By the time it was within her line of sight Sansa was all but dragging her feet to get herself to keep moving forward. She could see people entering and exiting the theater and all of them were in large groups or couples. She couldn't see anyone coming or going that was alone. Sansa swallowed hard against the sudden lump in her throat. She felt like she could already feel the judgmental gazes of the other moviegoers and the employees. They were all going to wonder what was so wrong with her that she had to go to movies alone. She considered turning around and going home but Sansa knew that she wouldn't be able to live with herself if she did. That would feel far too much like giving up and she wasn't about to let that happen.

Walking up to the ticket counter was absurdly one of the hardest things she had ever done and Sansa had been through some rough times in her life. She managed to order her ticket without her voice shaking although she did have to keep her hands in her pockets so that no one would see the tremble in them. The teenage boy manning the ticket booth didn't even look up at her when she ordered only one ticket and he slid back her change with a monotone request for 'Next.' as Sansa blinked in surprise. Scooping her ticket and her change off the counter she folded her umbrella and shook some of the water off of it before heading inside.

The lobby was fairly crowded as people hunted for their theater or waited in line for overpriced concessions. Sansa checked her phone screen and frowned as she realized she still had half an hour before her movie started. She supposed she should have looked up the show times before she stomped off in a huff. Now she had to mill around out here and draw even more attention to the fact that she had come alone.

Drawing a deep breath Sansa went to stand at the back of the long line for concessions. At least waiting here would give her an excuse to be standing alone and perhaps it wouldn't even draw that much attention to herself. For all these people knew she had a date or a group of friends waiting in a theater for her and she had drawn the short straw to pick up snacks. She used these thoughts to console herself as she waited anxiously in a line that moved surprisingly quickly for how long it was. Not even five minutes had passed before she found herself facing a frazzled looking girl she vaguely recognized as one of the coffeehouses frequent customers.

"What can I get you?" the girl, Roslin, according to her nametag asked. She still managed to smile at Sansa despite the frazzled attitudes of her coworkers behind the counter with her so Sansa made sure to smile back even though her stomach was still a ball of nerves and she could feel people's eyes on her.

"A small popcorn and a lemonade." Sansa responded quickly, shuffling nervously. It was her usual request when she went to movies although she rarely ended up eating any of the popcorn as her date would eat it all even though they always swore they didn't want any before they ordered.

Roslin collected her items for her and as Sansa passed her the money she kept waiting for the girl to make some comment about her being alone. But all she did was give Sansa another smile as she handed her her change and then look past her to the next customer.

Juggling her items Sansa began to head in the direction of her theater, pleased to see that it's previous showing had already emptied out and she could find her seat already. There were a few groups of people already seated and she walked past them as quickly as she could up the stairs without causing her popcorn to spill. She headed straight to the very back row where she went into the corner, hoping that the lack of light would prevent anyone from catching sight of her and recognizing her. The view of the screen wasn't very good from back there but Sansa didn't care.
The theater began to fill up as the movie got closer to starting and Sansa only half watched the ads they played as they waited to start the previews. She mostly watched the people entering the theater, she kept waiting for someone to look up and see that she was alone and for the whole theater to start laughing and mocking her until she ran out in tears back to the safety of her apartment.

After what seemed like hours the previews of upcoming films finally began to play to the half full theater and Sansa let out a sigh of relief as she adjusted the popcorn bucket on her lap. Before too long the opening credits of the movie were playing and the theater was dark around them. Sansa finally relaxed back against her seat as she realized that no one had said anything to her about being alone. No one had laughed at her or even looked at her funny. Literally the only person who cared that she had come to a movie alone was her.

Sansa had to bite back a bubble of laughter as she realized what a big deal she had been making out of virtually nothing. A tiny giggle escaped her and someone a few rows down looked over their shoulder at her in surprise. She supposed a scene where someone was dying was not the best time to get a fit of the giggles. Sansa shoved her fist into her mouth and began to concentrate on the movie her nerves soon long forgotten as she let the fictional world take her away.

XxX

Going to that one film alone opened a door to a world Sansa hadn't even realized she had been hiding herself from. She had been so dependent on having other people with her when she went to things that she hadn't even realized how much she was cutting herself off from. How many things she was missing out on because she was too afraid of being judged about being alone. Going to that movie and learning that no one cared that she was by herself felt like an awakening to Sansa. Gone were the days where she sat at home bored out of her mind but feeling like she had no place to go too because she couldn't find someone to go with her. Gone were the feelings of inadequacy, needing someone to hold her hand to go out to eat. But most importantly to her, gone were the days where she spent all of her time alone wishing she was out doing something else.

Now Sansa felt comfortable going out and doing things alone. Sure, each time she went somewhere new she was always nervous someone would look at her funny or say something rude to her but the more things she went to the less that fear affected her. She went to a few more movies just to test out her newfound bravery and then she went to a new art gallery that had recently opened. She was even brave enough to approach the artist, Daario, who she had a lovely conversation with about art and dragons. Sansa had felt like he was flirting with her at the beginning so she quickly mentioned that she had a girlfriend and immediately the flirting stopped for which Sansa was grateful. All she wanted was to go places alone not be faced with anything that might feel like breaking her resolution.

There was so much culture in King's Landing and Sansa felt that even though she had lived there for three years she had missed out on so much of it. Not many of her past relationships were very interested in going to art galleries or museums with her and the ones that were, Harold and Petyr, often ruined the experience by talking down to the guides or contradicting the plaques describing the artwork. All in all it made for a very unpleasant experience and Sansa soon stopped asking them to go to those places with her. None of her friends ever wanted to go, claiming that it felt too much like school. They only wanted to go shopping or to bars or movies or just stay home and relax. Sansa always ended up just going along with what they wanted and skipping the things she wanted to do, but not anymore.

Now the world was her oyster, or at the very least King's Landing was. Sansa had made a list of places she wanted to go to and she was slowly working her way down that list, going somewhere new nearly every day. She felt like she had never had this much fun in her life or been this brave.
She'd even ridden the city bus home alone one night rather than taking a taxi. While Sansa knew that most people would laugh at the idea that she was being brave by doing these things Sansa found herself caring less and less about what they thought. For the first time ever Sansa felt like she was truly living a life she actually liked.

She was coming home from a tour of the Red Keep ruins, a historical sight she had lived next to for years and never visited, when the light sprinkle of rain suddenly turned into a downpour. Cursing Sansa pulled the hood of her jacket tighter to her. She had forgotten her umbrella in her haste leaving the apartment and she was soaked through in minutes.

Sansa was so focused on trying (and failing) to keep the rain off her that she didn't even notice the other person on the sidewalk until she ran straight into them. A familiar voice let out a soft grunt at the impact and Sansa reached up to catch their arm automatically.

"I am so sorry!" Sansa cried, blinking rain out of her eyes as she looked up at who she had just run headlong into. She started in surprise as she recognized Margaery's soft brown eyes and crooked smile. Sansa realized with a gulp that she was still holding onto her elbow and she let go with a soft gasp that she hoped very much Margaery hadn't heard.

"It's okay." Margaery said with a smile as Sansa looked around and realized they were across the street from the coffeehouse. She had been so focused on the rain she hadn't even noticed where she was. "Where are you off to in such a hurry?" Margaery asked curiously. She didn't seem to mind the fact that they were both getting drenched but Sansa supposed they were both already soaked a little conversation wasn't going to hurt any.

"My apartment. It's just a few blocks that way." Sansa pushed her hood back a little from her face as she looked up and down the street for Margaery's blue Volkswagen beetle. "Where's your car?"

"Loras has it for the weekend. He wanted to take his boyfriend out of town for their three-year anniversary." Margaery smiled wider at the thought. Sansa knew from prior conversations that she was a big fan of Renly, her little brother's long-term boyfriend. "So while they're off having a romantic getaway I am stuck waiting for the bus home in the rain."

Sansa nodded sympathetically, silently hoping that Margaery would not ask her where she had been. While Sansa had gotten very good at going places alone she had yet to admit to anyone that she was actually doing that. It was one thing to be okay doing it around strangers it was another thing entirely to have people who knew her know about it.

As if Margaery could hear her fears she asked, "What are you doing out so late? You didn't just get done with class did you?"

For a moment Sansa waffled with the idea of taking the out and lying to her but she knew that Margaery might notice the fact that she didn't have her backpack with her. Besides what was the point of lying? Sansa hadn't done anything wrong. If people got weird about the fact that Sansa was going to stuff alone than that was their problem, not hers. She held tight to that thought as she took a deep breath.

"No." Sansa had to clear her throat against the sudden lump of nerves catching her breath. "I was actually at a tour of the Red Keep. They're open late on the weekends."

"I love the Red Keep, well I love the historical aspects of it. Some of the rooms are pretty creepy." Margaery said with a grin. Suddenly, her cheery look faltered almost imperceptibility as the rain started to fall even harder. She nearly had to yell her next question for Sansa to hear, "Were you on a date?"
Again Sansa toyed with the idea of taking the out before she silently chastised herself. She had done nothing wrong and she had nothing to hide from, she kept reminding herself as she slowly shook her head no, feeling like she was just opening an invitation to be teased at work once she admitted this. "No actually I went alone."

Margaery's shoulders relaxed as Sansa felt her own tense up. Of all the people that she first talked to about going places alone why did it have to be Margaery? Try as she might to keep her feelings for the older girl strictly platonic she still greatly admired Margaery. She was intelligent and sophisticated and beautiful and for lack of a better phrase, cool. What she thought about Sansa mattered to her, try as Sansa might to not care about what people thought. It seemed that while she was getting the hang of not caring what strangers thought about her she still had some progress to make on caring about what her friends did.

"That's so cool."

Sansa blinked as Margaery's words pulled her from her thoughts. Of all the responses she had been bracing herself for that was not one of them. She looked at Margaery the best she could through the rain and she could see the sincerity on Margaery's face as she continued speaking.

"I'm so bad at going to places alone. I get so nervous like people are staring at me, it's been like that since my last girlfriend and I broke up. Which sucks because there are so many things here I want to see." Margaery said with a small, almost self-conscious, shrug.

Sansa nodded in agreement even though she didn't quite know which part of that statement to focus on first. Part of her was relieved to learn that she was not the only person out there to get nervous going places solo but the larger part of her brain was more concerned by the fact that Margaery had an ex-girlfriend. That meant she liked girls. That meant Sansa might have a chance-

Cutting that thought off at the roots Sansa smiled at Margaery, shivering as a bead of rain got under her coat and slid down her chest. "Going places is hard at first but it gets easier. I just started going places alone myself." She admitted before silently cursing herself. That opened the door to questions she did not feel like answering.

"Yeah? What brought about the change?" Margaery asked curiously as Sansa noticed she too was shivering. She had an infallible way of asking the questions Sansa was always hoping to avoid.

Sansa considered brushing off the question, especially when she noticed Margaery's bus headed down the street, but there was something about Margaery that made her so easy to talk too. Perhaps that was why she always asked the questions Sansa didn't want her too, because she knew Sansa would answer her anyway.

"I just realized that I can't be afraid forever you know?" She admitted, shrugging sheepishly. The words sounded much cornier aloud than they had in her head. "I can't let life keep passing me by because I'm too scared to do anything about it."

Margaery smiled her crooked smile at her as the bus pulled up to the curb beside them. Sansa pointedly ignored the swoop in her stomach that smile caused as the bus doors opened with a mechanical swoosh and the driver looked down at them expectantly. "You're quite the enigma Sansa Stark, do you know that?"

Margaery boarded the bus with a little wave before Sansa could answer her. She shook her head no at the driver when he gestured at her to ask if she was going to board the bus as well. The door shut with another hiss as Sansa looked at the windows to see if she could find Margaery. For some reason she wasn't even surprised to find Margaery staring back at her when she found her face in a window
halfway down the bus.

The rain poured endlessly on as Sansa rose her hand in a small wave that Margaery returned with a grin as the bus pulled away from the curb.

No one had ever called Sansa an enigma before, she found that she kind of liked it.
Fête

May

The old adage proved true that year, the last month's rain had brought an endless amount of flowers to King's Landing. Sansa couldn't walk anywhere without seeing flowers blooming. They were outside of shops, they were all over campus, she even spotted them in the window box of the apartment across from hers. Everywhere she looked another flower caught her eye and the coffeehouse was no different.

Whoever was leaving her flowers seemed to be growing relentless. Sansa was being left anywhere from one flower to what was close to a whole bouquet. She wasn't sure if it was because the person who was leaving them was growing restless that the object of their affection had yet to approach them or because there were suddenly much more flowers available to them that had brought on this change. Whatever it was Sansa still felt helpless to do anything about it, she still didn't even know who was leaving the flowers for her!

She had done everything she could think of to catch her admirer in the act but so far nothing had worked. She'd even asked Jeyne Poole to hang out in the coffeehouse one day and see if she could spot who had left them, hoping that since she had never come into the shop her admirer wouldn't know that she was Sansa's friend. It didn't work. In fact, this time the flower left for Sansa was found next to Jeyne's bag when she returned from getting a refill on coffee. Whoever was leaving the flowers was far quicker than anything Sansa could think of.

She had to admit to herself that the flowers weren't all that bad to look at, she had always been a fan of flowers since she was a little girl. Growing up she only had access to flowers for a short period of the year before the cold came and they all perished. Of course, they had winter flowers in Winterfell that bloomed only in the ice and snow but Sansa had always dreamed of walking surrounded by roses and daisies and carnations. Now she was finally getting the chance.

Sansa was staring out the windows to the coffeehouse trying to see if the flowers hanging from the pot on the lamppost across the street were hyacinths or hydrangeas when a sudden noise beside her jolted her out of her thoughts.

"Sorry." Margaery said as Sansa started and looked at the tray of coffee mugs she had just placed on the counter beside her. Judging from the grin on her face Sansa did not think Margaery was very sorry at all. Nevertheless, her grin was as infectious as ever and Sansa found herself smiling back. "What are you looking at so intently?" Margaery asked curiously, peering out the window as well.

"The flowers." Sansa admitted with a shrug as she took two mugs off the tray and began to stack them in the rows under the counter. "I've always loved spring here, there's so many flowers in bloom."

"You should see the flowers in Highgarden." Margaery said with a dreamy smile, mentioning her hometown. "The flowers there bloom nearly year round and my grandmother has a garden with almost every type of rose planted in it."

Sansa sighed wistfully at the thought. "That sounds beautiful. I've never been to Highgarden." She admitted looking up in time to see Margaery adopt a horrified look on her face.
"Never?" She asked aghast. "Not even for the Rose Festival?"

Sansa shrugged sheepishly. She had always begged for her parents to take her to the Rose Festival every spring, it was the largest display of flowers in Westeros yearly. People brought their blooms from all over, including rare hybrid roses, for the chance to show them off to fellow flower lovers. Receiving an award from the Rose Festival was the most prestigious award a gardener could have. Not only that but there were carnival rides and vendors selling rose flavored toffee. Sansa had begged and pleaded with her parents to go but they had never bent, claiming that it was much too far to travel for just a festival.

"The Rose Festival is thought to be one of the most romantic festivals in the world. People bring their loved ones from all over to buy them roses that show them how much they love them." Margaery added, clearly aghast that Sansa had never attended. Sansa could tell that she had been reciting this information for most of her life. It was common knowledge that the Tyrell family was a huge sponsor of the Rose Festival. "You haven't been to it before?"

"No." Sansa admitted looking down at her shoes. For some reason hearing Margaery talk about loved ones was making her blush. One of the downsides of being a redhead was that her blushes were always noticeable.

"Well that just won't do." Margaery exclaimed with a shake of her head. She looked truly shocked that Sansa had never gone before, Sansa almost felt like she had insulted her. "You have to come with me this year, I won't take no for an answer!"

"I would never say no to that." Sansa blurted without thinking. Going to the Rose Festival had been her dream since she was small, she would never turn down the offer to make one of her dreams come true.

"Great! It's in two weeks. I'll let Alayaya know we both need it off." Margaery said as Sansa began to realize exactly what she'd just agreed to.

XxX

"I don't get why I have to come." Arya whined as she pushed her sunglasses higher up on the bridge of her nose as she flopped against the stairs leading up to Sansa's building.

"I told you it'll be fun." Sansa said, worrying on her lip as she scanned the street for Margaery's car.

"It's too early." Arya complained as she leaned her head against the railing. Sansa had a feeling if Margaery didn't get here soon her sister would be asleep on the steps.

"It's a long drive. Don't worry, you can sleep in the car." Sansa reminded her for the fifth time that morning. Arya had never been known for being a morning person.

Arya let out a long sigh which Sansa chose to ignore. She had all but had to beg for her sister to come along on this trip with her. Margaery had agreed to let her come easily enough, she'd said 'the more the merrier' and Sansa only thought for a moment that her grin had looked forced. Convincing Arya however, had taken her nearly a whole afternoon and the bribe of an entire bucket full of licorice. Of course, once Arya realized that Sansa wanted her to come along because she had feelings for Margaery she'd agreed instantly and then proceeded to lecture Sansa for half an hour about her resolution. No matter how many times Sansa swore nothing had happened between them Arya still continued her lecture about keeping promises, wagging a piece of licorice at her like her finger as she reprimanded her.
Her sister was right about one thing, it was extremely early out. The drive to Highgarden would take them close to four hours, if traffic was good to them. Margaery had told Sansa the drive had taken her nearly eight hours before because of the number of cars leaving the city. People traveled to the Rose Festival from all over the country, there was bound to be some traffic for them to face. The thought of being in a car with Margaery for that long was making Sansa's heart speed up in anticipation. She would have nowhere to go if the conversation steered in a direction she didn't want it to. She still could not quite believe she had actually agreed to go to this, no matter what she had originally said.

Sansa had considered taking back her word about going with Margaery, more and more as the date of their departure approached. But try as she might she just could not get herself to back out on her word. It was not just because she did not want to disappoint Margaery, despite what Arya seemed to think, Sansa did not want to disappoint herself. She had wanted to go and see the golden roses of Highgarden since she was a child. She used to study maps of the briar maze circling the ancient castle determined that when she visited she would never waste any time being lost. This was all even before she'd known about the Rose Festival, once she'd heard about that she had begged every year to get to go. Now that she was being offered the chance to visit it with someone who knew the area and could show her things Sansa hadn't even dreamed of she could not bring herself to say no.

She knew by now that her feelings for Margaery were not based strictly in friendship but Sansa had found that she had more self-control than she tended to give herself credit for. Sansa would be able to make it through this weekend without affecting her friendship with Margaery and without breaking her resolution, she would see to that. And if for whatever reason her resolve wavered and her emotions got the best of her Arya was there to keep her in check. Although judging by the fact that she was currently asleep on the stairs Sansa had a feeling she wasn't going to be able to rely on her sister as much as she had originally thought.

Margaery's familiar car pulled up to the curb just as Sansa was beginning to doubt her decision. Sansa nudged Arya awake as she bent down to retrieve her bags. Despite the fact that Sansa only wanted to explore a place she'd dreamed of visiting most of her life this weekend, the reality was that finals were fast approaching and she was going to have to make some time this weekend to hit the books. She'd even managed to get Arya to bring along her school things but getting her to actually use them was going to be a whole other battle entirely.

"Sorry I'm late!" Margaery called as she got out of the car to come and grab one of the bags from Sansa's hands. Sansa tried to grab it back from her but Margaery was already fitting it into the trunk. "I was getting subsistence for the road."

"Oh, you didn't have to do that." Sansa said in surprise as she put her free hand against Arya's back and pushed her forward. Arya looked ready to fall asleep on her feet at any moment. "You're already driving us you didn't have to bring us anything."

"It's not just for you, I need the caffeine fix to face the road." Margaery said with a grin as she placed Arya's bags next to the others in the trunk and forced it shut. Her Beetle's trunk wasn't very big. All their things made it a tight squeeze.

"Is it a bad drive?" Sansa asked curiously as she opened the passenger side door and moved the seat up so Arya could fall into the backseat. She fastened her seatbelt with fumbling hands and Sansa was pretty sure she'd fallen asleep before the belt had even locked into place.

"It's not terrible." Margaery admitted as they both got into the car. "Traffic can be a bitch though."

Sansa nodded in agreement despite the fact that she'd never driven in the south. She'd driven around Winterfell before and once she had even driven her little brother Bran down to Greywater Watch to
visit his friends from camp. She had never had the need to drive down south but she could still tell that the amount of cars on the roads were far more than anything she'd ever driven with.

"I brought coffee and doughnuts for everyone." Margaery said passing Sansa a cup that she took gratefully. Looking in the backseat Margaery noticed Arya slumped against the window and laughed. "But I guess we all won't be needing them."

"She's not much of a morning person." Sansa said apologetically as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She'd never been in Margaery's car before, it was extremely clean and Sansa wondered if it was always like that or if she'd cleaned it out for their trip. The only thing in the car besides the food Margaery had brought was a strand of beads on a thick piece of blue yarn hanging from the rearview mirror.

Margaery caught her looking at it as she pulled out onto the street. "My nephew made me that for Christmas last year." Margaery explained, smiling the soft smile she always did when she talked about her family. It made Sansa smile at her in return automatically.

"Are you excited to see your family?" Sansa asked though she already knew the answer. Margaery had been talking of nothing but the Rose Festival and going home for the last few weeks. But she did not want the car to lapse into silence before they were truly under way and she felt if she could steer the conversation to family then perhaps they could avoid some awkwardness for at least a little while.

"So excited!" Margaery exclaimed causing Arya to squirm in the backseat. Margaery grinned at Sansa sheepishly as she continued at a lower volume. "Loras and Renly will be there later tonight, Ren had a class this morning he couldn't miss. So we're going to have a late dinner tonight with the whole family. You'll be able to meet all three of my brothers."

"I always forget you have as many brothers as me." Sansa said before shaking her head, "Well blood brothers at least." She reprimanded.

"What do you mean?" Margaery asked curiously, peering at Sansa from the corner of her eye so she didn't have to take her eyes fully off the road.

"I have three brothers by blood; Robb, Bran and Rickon. But I also consider my cousin Jon and Robb's best friend Theon my brothers since they lived with us growing up." Sansa explained. For once she didn't feel awkward or defensive as she explained this. People tended to ask a lot of nosy questions when she mentioned Jon or Theon. They always wanted to know why they lived with her family or how long they'd been there. Sansa had found that people generally tended to be very nosy when presented with family circumstances that they considered abnormal. But Sansa wasn't afraid that Margaery would do that, she never acted the way other people did to Sansa.

"Wow you grew up in a full house." Margaery said with a whistle as she merged onto the freeway. She let out a small sign of relief that traffic was moving and not yet stuck in a gridlock.

"At one point we also had six dogs." Sansa admitted causing Margaery to gasp.

"Shut up!" She cried looking at Sansa with wide eyes making a laugh bubble out of Sansa. She ignored the kick against the back of her seat. Arya was clearly not as asleep as she was wanting them to believe but Sansa was not doing anything wrong. A friendly conversation was not the same as dating, surely even Arya knew that.

XxX

The drive ended up lasting nearly six hours but they passed some of the most beautiful scenery Sansa
had ever seen. With the exception of King’s Landing the furthest south Sansa had ever been was their yearly trip to visit her mother's family in Riverrun. Margaery ended up pulling them off onto the legendary Roseroad due to the congestion on the main road and even with the slower speed limit Sansa had to admit it was totally worth it. There were roses lining the sides of the road and once those had passed they’d driven past idyllic farms that looked as serene as if they'd come alive from a painting. Even Arya didn't have anything negative to say once she had finally stopped pretending to sleep. Although given the fact that her phone went off every few minutes Sansa had a feeling she might have just been too busy texting to offer any negative comments.

Despite Sansa's fears there had been no awkward conversations or tense silences. Being with Margaery was a breeze, it was a far easier car ride then even ones with her brothers had been in the past. For some reason her and Margaery just seemed to work, they never ran out of things to talk about and Margaery was full of history on the Roseroad to which Sansa was ecstatic. It was like having her own private tour guide.

By the time they pulled up to Margaery's childhood home the majority of Sansa's nerves had disappeared. She was scared to meet her family yes, but Margaery had told her so much about them on the drive that she felt like she already knew them. They came up a long driveway to a three-story white house and Margaery had hopped out of the car almost before they'd come to a complete stop. Sansa watched in amusement as she ran up the steps to throw her arms around a man she assumed was her father. She hadn't even realized she was smiling until she heard Arya let out a long sigh from behind her.

"You are so fucked."

The next few hours were a blur of names as Margaery introduced them to a host of cousins, brothers, nieces and nephew and her brothers' partners. Sansa had never met a family that rivaled hers in size and she found herself impressed that Margaery's came so close to hers. Stark family reunions tended to be a bit more somber than the Tyrells true, but the amount of people was close to the same. In truth, the names of most her cousins slipped Sansa's mind almost as soon as she heard them. The only names she truly bothered to remember were that of Margaery's brothers and parents. And of course, her grandmother.

Sansa had never been as impressed by a woman so immediately as she was by Olenna Tyrell. The woman had a presence to her that seemed to draw all attention to her, despite her wrinkled skin and small frame. Sansa found her eyes kept drifting over to her as the day went on, more often than not the woman's eyes were already on her, watching her scrutinizingly. Sansa couldn't help but feel like she was being sized up for something, she just couldn't figure out what it was.

Thankfully Arya was on her best behavior and insulted no one, at least not in earshot of Sansa. She still could not quite believe Arya had agreed to come with her. Sansa shivered in fear whenever she thought of the favor that she would have to do in return for this, part of her wondered if Arya already had something devious in mind. She could see as the day wore on that Arya was growing weary of playing nice with Margaery's family. Fortunately, Margaery seemed to sense it too because before Sansa could even come up with an excuse to leave the room for a little while Margaery was pulling at her and Arya's arms and calling over her shoulder that she was going to show them the gardens.

The moment they were out on the front porch and the door had shut behind them Margaery let out a sigh of relief that almost rivaled the one Arya let out. "Sorry. My family is a little intense at times." Margaery said with a laugh.

Arya snorted before Sansa could respond. Unfortunately, Margaery was between them so Sansa couldn't even elbow her to remind her to be nice. "You should see our family when the Sunbursts
Sansa blinked in surprise, she hadn't expected Arya to play nice with Margaery at all this weekend. Let alone offer family trivia. She had fully expected Arya to antagonize Margaery, hoping to drive a wedge between her and Sansa so that she would stick to her resolution. Sansa side-eyed Arya as Margaery laughed and began to lead them to the gardens but Arya only shrugged at her questioning eyes.

"Glad to know it's not just my family." Margaery said as she led them around the side of the house. Sansa had just opened her mouth to assure her that it was most definitely not when the rose garden came into view and the words suddenly fled from her mind. She stumbled to a stop as the sight of roses in every feasible color filled her eyes. And there wasn't just roses, despite what they called the garden. Sansa could see peonies and daisies poking out in between the blooms. She thought she could even see stalks of lavender hiding behind a bunch of blush roses.

"What do you think?" Margaery asked curiously, peering over at Sansa with a smile.

Sansa tried to find words to describe the beauty of the garden, the amount of flowers she didn't think she had ever seen in one place before that wasn't a nursery or a park. She found that she was suddenly speechless. The early afternoon sunlight almost made some of the roses seem like they were glowing. She couldn't quite believe that Margaery had gotten to grow up with something this beautiful in her backyard. At that moment she didn't know who she was more envious of, Margaery for getting to see the garden or the garden for getting to see Margaery.

For the sunlight was making her glow too, her hair seemed to fall around her shoulders like a glittering wave and her eyes were bright with joy as she smiled at Sansa. She didn't think she had ever seen her look so carefree. For a moment she forgot about everything but Margaery and the garden. There was no resolution, no Arya standing beside them. There was nothing in the world but her, Margaery and the flowers. For a moment the whole world seemed to stand still. Margaery's smile slipped slowly and for a moment Sansa wondered if she could feel it too.

Arya's voice suddenly ripped Sansa from her thoughts, reminding her that despite what she wanted her and Margaery were not the only two people in the world. "If this has let you speechless you're going to be a wreck at the festival tomorrow."

XxX

The smell of syrup drew Sansa from sleep the next morning and for a moment she couldn't quite place where she was. By the time she remembered that she was in one of the guest's room of Margaery's house there was groaning beside her and Sansa looked at the twin bed next to her to see Arya pulling her pillow over her head with a groan.

They had stayed out late the night before. Loras and Margaery had wanted to show Sansa and Arya the sights of Highgarden so they had been given a tour of as much as they could see before things closed. The Tyrells had a cousin who worked security at the castle and they had been able to get them access to the briar maze after dark, although truth be told Sansa didn't know if the access had been quite legal. Whether it was or not it had been some of the most fun she had had in a long time. There were no lights in the maze as it was only open until dark so they'd had to use the light of the night sky (and in a few tricky areas their cellphones) to guide them. They had all left with a few scratches from straying too close to the walls but Sansa could still remember the laughter as they raced each other through the maze. Her palm still tingled from when Margaery had grabbed her hand so they wouldn't lose each other in the dark.

As she lay in bed Sansa ran her fingers against her palm and for a moment she could swear she still
felt Margaery's skin against hers. Shaking her head Sansa forced herself out of bed. She had a resolution to keep and a festival to see, not to mention finals to study for still. She had no time to fantasize about things she couldn't have yet.

Sansa repeated that thought over and over to herself like a mantra as she got ready for the day. By the time she headed downstairs, the smell of coffee now joining that of the syrup, she felt like she was totally in control again. It didn't matter the feelings that she was blossoming for Margaery, she would not act on them no matter what happened. Or at least, she wouldn't act on them until January first.

Even with these thoughts in her mind the sight of Margaery leaning against the kitchen counter with a mug of coffee in her hand, her hair still ruffled from sleep, brought a smile to Sansa's face. Her breath caught in her throat as Margaery caught sight of her and smiled back. Realizing that she was approaching dangerous territory Sansa quickly cast her eyes to the floor before entering the room. She was almost halfway through keeping this resolution, she had never stuck to something this long before in her whole life. She wasn't about to let a crush take that away from her.

If Margaery picked up on any of Sansa's hesitation around her she did not mention it. By the time they had managed to rouse Arya and everyone was ready to leave for the festival Sansa was able to look at Margaery again without losing her breath.

They chose to walk the mile and a half to the festival because Margaery and Loras swore they would likely end up walking that far if they tried to take the car and park on a lot. At least this way they didn't have to pay for parking or fight the crowd of cars trying to jostle for closer parking spots. They hadn't even gone two blocks before they started to see cars parked along the side of the road and after another block they joined the first few stragglers of a crowd. Loras and Margaery led the way through the growing throng of people, looking over their shoulders every few minutes to make sure everyone was still following them.

The crowd grew thicker as they approached the entrance to the festival and Loras and Margaery fell back to walk next to them, scared to lose anyone in the crowd. The amount of people forced Sansa closer to Margaery and their arms brushed against each other as they grew closer to the gate. Sansa curled her fingers into her palm, letting the bite of her nails against her skin remind her to not reach down and catch Margaery's hand in her own. The phantom touch of Margaery's hand in hers last night filled her mind as they waited in line.

Arya grumbled about the wait but her complainants were lost in the mutter of the crowd. Sansa stood up on her tiptoes, trying to peer above the heads of the crowd to see the flowers past the gate. Bright colored petals caught her eye before a hand gripped her arm and tugged her lightly back down to flat feet.

Sansa peered curiously at Margaery who let go of her arm slowly as she spoke. "No peeking. It's better to see it all at once."

The line moved them forward before Sansa could reply. Arya shot her a meaningful look as she stepped around her so that she was standing in between her and Margaery as they waited for the last few groups of people to finish purchasing their tickets. Sansa heart began to speed up in anticipation as they approached the gates. This was something she'd been dreaming of for most of her life. She still couldn't quite believe that she was finally going to see it. By the time they bought their tickets and Sansa's hand was stamped with a black rose for reentry she was all but bouncing on her feet to get inside.

Margaery was right, it was better to see it all at once. There were booths overflowing with blooms, and it was far more than just roses. Every booth had at least one breed of rose but they also had other
flowers as well. There were colors that Sansa had never even dreamed that flowers could be in and vendors selling things to help flowers grow and goods made in the shape of flowers. The scent of sugar hung in the air, mixing with the heavy perfume of the flowers.

Sansa spun in a slow circle unsure of which alley of booths to take first. Loras and Renly called out a good-bye as they headed off towards the rides, they’d already made plans to meet up with them later for lunch. Margaery and Arya watched Sansa silently, Margaery looking amused while Arya looked impatient, both of them waiting for Sansa to choose where to go. Finally she just started off down the row that had the least amount of people down it.

The flowers were so beautiful Sansa couldn't quite wrap her mind around them. She had never seen colors so bright expect in pictures. She had never seen so many flowers at once, her mind was spinning trying to remember all of the names to the ones tucked among the roses. There were small signs naming the flowers, some listing prices as the blooms were for sale.

"They are all just so beautiful." Sansa said with a wistful sigh as they passed a booth overflowing with orange roses. She had never seen roses of that color before.

"I love orange roses." Margaery agreed as they continued on. "They're a hybrid rose so they had to create a whole new meaning for them when they were created."

"What do you mean a meaning?" Sansa asked curiously, casting a brief look at Margaery before her attention was caught by another group of flowers.

"Flowers have meanings." Margaery said in surprise, like she thought that was common knowledge Sansa would have known. As a flower lover she probably should have, but Sansa hadn't been able to garden for much of her life due to the coldness of the North. Her love of flowers was based purely off of looks alone. "Like orange roses mean love emerging from friendship. It's a blend of the meaning of yellow roses and red roses, just like the flower itself."

Sansa nodded along thoughtfully as she suddenly wondered why she had never pressed Margaery for details on the flowers she was getting. She was studying for a master's degree in botany, she should have been the first person she approached.

"Do all flowers have meanings?" Arya asked, staring at Margaery with a steely look and cutting off Sansa's train of thought.

"Yeah, and the meaning can be different depending on the color." Margaery explained as they came to a stop at the end of the row of booths.

"What about the flowers people have been leaving Sansa at the coffeehouse? What do those mean?" Arya asked intently. She was staring at Margaery with a look Sansa didn't quite understand but Sansa couldn’t help but stare curiously at Margaery as well. She was beginning to wonder the same thing about the flowers herself. Sansa had always thought that the flowers were just meant as a nice gesture, she'd never assumed that there might be more of a deeper meaning to each individual flower.

"From the ones I've seen they all seem to be about friendship or admiration." Margaery explained, causing Sansa to nod along. That made sense, the flowers were being left in a way that seemed like that.

"Do you know who is leaving them?" Arya asked, her voice suddenly unreadable.

"No one's seen who is doing it. Whoever it is they are really sly. But we're all keeping an eye out for whoever is doing it." Margaery explained as she looked away from Arya, clearly trying to see which
direction to lead them in next.

Arya made a noise of agreement and Margaery shifted uneasily underneath her stare. Sansa felt like there was something deeper happening here but before she could lay her finger on it one of Margaery’s many cousins was calling her name and pushing her way towards them through the crowd.

The Rose Festival was everything that Sansa had ever dreamed it would be and more. The perfume of the flowers hung so heavy in the air that for days after the event was over Sansa felt like she could still smell the scent of it lingering in her hair. The blooms were in every color under the rainbow and some seemed even more than that. The rose flavored toffee that Sansa had put off trying her whole life because she’d wanted to try it there was just as sweet and delicious as she had always been promised.

After they’d walked around all of the booths and seen every possible thing there they made their way to the rides, causing Arya to let out a "Finally!". They rode spinning rides for hours until Sansa was sure one of them was going to be sick. She couldn’t remember the last time she had laughed this hard or smiled this often. Everyone seemed to be in grand spirits, even Arya who had grumbled the whole way there seemed to be enjoying herself. It wasn’t until they were leaving the fairground late that night that Sansa realized she hadn’t even thought about her resolution at all, which had to be the first time since the New Year that she had gone that long without thinking about it.

They were almost out of the park when they passed a young boy selling light pink roses by the exit gate. Everyone made their way past him except for Margaery who stopped and fumbled through her purse for change. Sansa was at the end of their little group and she waited for Margaery to catch back up with her.

"This is for you." Margaery said breathlessly as she reached Sansa, passing her the single bloom in her hand.

Sansa stared at it in surprise, "For me? Why?"

Margaery’s smile grew as she grabbed Sansa’s empty hand from where it hung by her side. "No one should ever leave their first Rose Festival without a flower. It’s atrocious."

Sansa’s fingers curled around the stem of the flower carefully, mindful of the thorns still sticking off of it. For one wild moment she wondered if Margaery was the one leaving her the flowers at the coffeehouse but she shook that thought away almost as soon as it entered her mind. There was no way she could have kept that up for so long without Sansa catching her. This was just a token of friendship, a nice gesture from a friend who had gone out of her way to give her something nice this weekend.

"Thank you." Sansa said in surprise, looking up from the flower to Margaery. She realized with a thrill that they were standing awfully close together, not so close that she felt uneasy or pressed but closer than most people normally stood. If it was another year Sansa would have kissed her right then, if it wasn’t for that damned resolution holding her back. But, Sansa reminded herself thoughtfully, that resolution was how she even met Margaery. It was how she stopped being afraid to go to places alone. As much as she hated it at moments like this it had already led to so many good things in her life. She couldn’t quit on it now.

"It's beautiful." Sansa said softly, looking back down at the rose and tracing the petals with her fingers. "Thank you." Sansa said again before taking a small step backwards.

Margaery’s face gave nothing away as Sansa moved away from her. She still couldn’t figure
Margaery out, was she interested in her or did she just want to be Sansa's friend? Did it even matter? No one was going to wait seven more months to date her so there was no point pondering about it. By the time Sansa was dating again Margaery's interest would have moved on, if it was even there at all.

"Anytime." Margaery said as she started to lead the way towards their group who had already reached the next block. Sansa followed after her quietly, her fingers tracing the softness of the petals as they made their way through the lingering crowd.

XxX

They stopped at the festival again the next morning to do one last loop around the booths. Arya complained the whole time as she had not wanted to go with them but Sansa had begged her too, reminding her that this was way she had come in the first place not to sleep all day like she did at home. Sansa bought a few souvenirs this time as she had not wanted to carry them around all day yesterday. Robb's wife's birthday was coming up in the next month and Sansa found a pair of earrings shaped like roses to give her. She also bought an illustration of this year's advert for the festival, it was a drawn yellow rose with the festival title and the year proclaimed above it. This way she would always remember it.

Margaery didn't buy anything but Sansa supposed that she must have several items such as the ones being sold seeing as how she had attended nearly every year of her life. Arya surprised her by buying a metal rose that had been welded together by scrap metal. Sansa had never seen her sister buy anything with a flower on it in her life. When she remarked on it Arya glared at her and told her that it wasn't for her but she refused to give any more information despite how hard Sansa pressed.

By the time they were ready to head back to the house and say their goodbyes to Margaery's family it was early afternoon. After thanking the Tyrells for letting them stay Sansa and Arya waited by the car to give Margaery some privacy with her family. Sansa knew how hard it was to live away from your family and she wanted to give Margaery her own time to say goodbye to them.

They took the main freeway for the drive home and the conversation never lulled into silence for which Sansa was grateful for. The rose Margaery had given her was sitting in front of her on the dashboard and Sansa found she kept staring at it throughout the drive. The conversation was able to distract her for the most part. Arya was actually awake for the drive this time so the conversation never had a chance to falter as she seemed to be extremely hyper from all the sugar she'd eaten at the festival. She kept asking Margaery questions about her life and Sansa felt like she learned more about the girl in those few hours in the car than she had in the months they'd been working together. Arya wasn't worried about breaking a resolution so she could ask Margaery all the questions she liked. Sansa found she was both grateful and annoyed. The more she found out about Margaery the more she liked her and the more she liked her the more troubled she was by the fact that she couldn't do anything about it.

Arya finally crashed around the time they started to see exit signs for King's Landing. For a moment the car filled with silence but it wasn't awkward like Sansa feared it might be. Silence with Margaery felt easy, she never felt pressured to fill the empty spaces between them with empty words.

"I'm glad I could be there for your first Rose Festival." Margaery broke the silence as she took the exit leading towards Sansa's apartment.

"Me too." Sansa said without thinking before her eyes landed on the rose. If Margaery was developing feelings for her she didn't want to get her hopes up or hurt her. This resolution meant too much to Sansa to drop it now but that didn't mean Margaery had to get hurt by it too. "Thank you so much for taking me. You're a good friend."
Margaery smiled at that and maybe it was just a trick of the streetlights flickering past them but for a moment Sansa thought she saw her tense at the word friend.

"So are you." Margaery said as she pulled to the curb next to Sansa's building.

"Maybe one day you could come with me to Winterfell." Sansa said before she cursed herself silently. She felt like she was just taking back the friend part of her last statement by saying that. But Margaery had looked sad for a moment and Sansa had just wanted to see her smile a real smile like she was doing now.

"I'd like that." Margaery said before Arya cut her off with a groan from the backseat.

After they'd gathered their bags and bid Margaery goodbye Sansa and Arya stood on the curb for a moment to watch her drive away. As her car turned the corner and fled from sight Arya finally spoke.

"I like her." Arya sighed deeply like admitting this was hurting her. "She would be good for you."

Sansa turned to stare at her in surprise. She had expected Arya to launch into a full-blown tirade about how Sansa should stop seeing Margaery until the year was over because it was so obvious how close she was to breaking her resolution. She had not expected her to say that Margaery and her would be good together.

"Your taste is improving. Are you going to ask her out?" Arya asked curiously, staring at Sansa with an unreadable look.

Sansa mulled the thought over in her head but it only took her a moment to come up with the answer she already had come to the night before. "Not this year."

Arya's eyebrows rose at that. She looked genuinely surprised by that response.Sansa didn't know if she should feel offended that Arya thought she would break so easily on her word. "You're still going to see this resolution through then?"

Sansa nodded even as her fingers toyed with the rose in her hand. Her thumb brushed by a thorn and she winced as it punctured her skin.

"You can't just do it because of me." Arya said causing Sansa to blink in surprise. "Don't miss out on something good because you're afraid of me being upset or whatever."

"That's not why I'm doing it." Sansa said startled. They had already been over this before but it seemed Arya still needed reassurance that Sansa was keeping the resolution for more reasons than her. In truth, Arya being disappointed in her was no longer even one of the top ten reasons she planned to see this resolution through to the end.

"Why are you doing it then?" Arya asked curiously.

"Because-" Sansa paused as she struggled to find the right way to phrase it to make someone else understand what she herself was just beginning to grasp. "Because I never finish anything. I never see anything through because I think that the results I've gotten to when I'm halfway are good enough. I don't want to be like this forever. I want to finish something for once in my life."

Sansa let out a small laugh as she looked up at the sky. There was so much light pollution in King's Landing that only the brightest stars were stubborn enough to shine brilliant enough to be seen. She could feel Arya's eyes tight on her as she continued. "This resolution is good for me. I didn't think it would be, not like this at least, but it is. I feel like I'm getting stronger, more independent. I want to
see who I'll become at the end of the year. I won't lie, I like Margaery. A lot. But if I quit now and start dating her I'm always going to wonder what would have happened if I'd kept the resolution until the end of the year."

It felt easier admitting all of these things to the night sky but Sansa looked down to look her little sister in the eye as she admitted the truth she'd realized the night before.

"If I quit now I'm always going to wonder who I could have become. And I'm afraid I might blame Margaery for me quitting." Sansa looked down at the rose in her hand and sighed. "Me asking her out now isn't fair to either of us."

June

The weeks after the Rose Festival passed in a stressful blur of cramming for finals. Sansa felt like she spent more time in the library than her own apartment as finals approached. The coffeehouse became an absolute madhouse that made midterm week seem like a slow day. Sansa passed more than one person on campus who was broken down in tears with books scattered around them.

Sansa didn't see many people as finals came on. For once it seemed that Arya was actually studying for something as she did not text Sansa nearly as often. Jeyne, the only friend Sansa really saw anymore now that she wasn't going out partying, came over once to pick up Sansa's notes from last semester for her class and that was the only person Sansa saw for a whole week other than people at work and class. She barely even saw Margaery as she had asked Shae to cover most of her shifts that week so she could work on presenting the first draft of her thesis.

By the time Sansa was done with her last test she felt thoroughly wiped. All she wanted to do was go home and pass out on her couch because it was closer to the door than her bed was. However, when she approached her building she suddenly became wide awake again because sitting on the stoop next to Arya was Jon Snow. He stood up as Sansa approached them at almost a run.

"What are you doing here?" Sansa asked in surprise as she threw her arms around him for hug.

"I'm here for a week for a new systems training." Jon said, his voice muffled by her hair as he hugged her back. "Thought I'd stop by and see you two while I was in town."

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" Sansa asked as she pulled away. It had been a few years since she had seen him last and she found that his face had only grown more solemn in that time.

"I know you don't like to be disturbed during finals week. I texted Arya to tell you, didn't she?" Jon asked, his brow furrowed. Sansa turned to frown at Arya at the same time Jon did. She held her hands up in mock defense before jumping to her feet.

"Hey I had my own finals to worry about. I can't play raven for everyone." Jon laughed as Sansa merely shook her head. She wasn't upset at Arya for not telling her, in fact this was the perfect surprise to end finals week on. "I'm starving can we eat yet?" Arya asked which drew Sansa's attention to the rumble in her own stomach. She'd been living off of cereal and cold pizza for most of the week and it seemed that her stomach was finally telling her that was no longer enough.

"Yes!" Sansa cried in agreement.

Jon laughed at their exuberance and gestured for them to lead the way. Arya took the front leading them off down a series of alleys and side streets Sansa had never been too. Nearly twenty minutes later when Sansa felt like she was going to pass out she was so hungry Arya finally came to a stop in front of a door that blended in so well with the wall of the decrypt factory it led into that Sansa
almost didn't see it.

"What is this place?" Sansa asked nervously causing Arya to roll her eyes at her.

"Relax, it's safe."

Sansa opened her mouth to remind her that wasn't really an answer but Arya was already halfway inside before she could get the words out. She cast a look at Jon who shrugged in amusement before following after Arya. Sansa took a deep breath before she followed after them nervously. She didn't know what she had been expecting from the rundown warehouse district the place was set in but she was pleasantly surprised to find that Arya had taken them to a restaurant.

The building it was housed in was clearly an old factory and there were still large pieces of machinery against the back well. The floor was concrete and it looked like part of the bar was made out of pieces of an old assembly line. It looked exactly like the kind of place her little sister would favor. The more Sansa looked around the more she wondered if this was a place Arya frequented regularly. The ease with which she led them to a table made her think that it was.

"How'd you find this place?" Jon asked as they settled into a table. A boy around Arya's age with shockingly blue hair came up to their table before Arya had the chance to answer him.

"Hey Arry. I didn't think you had any other friends."

Sansa blinked at the rudeness of the statement but Arya only laughed.

"This is my brother Jon and my sister Sansa." Arya said with an eyeroll. It seemed Sansa had been right, this was a place Arya frequented. "This is Aegon. I thought this table wasn't in your section?"

"I knew you couldn't have friends this pretty." Aegon winked at both Sansa and Jon in turn and Sansa had the distinct feeling that he was trying to flirt with both of them at once. She couldn't help but grin at his boldness. "And I traded Jeynie for this table when I saw you sit at it."

Arya cursed under her breath as Aegon set down three paper menus on the table. Sansa didn't see what the big deal was. The boy seemed pleasant enough, if not a little bold and abrupt. He seemed right up her little sister's alley for friends so Sansa didn't understand why she wouldn't have wanted to sit in his section.

"Do you need another menu?" Aegon asked curiously, scanning the bar as if he was expecting someone else to join them. "Where is your boy at anyway?"

"Aegon go get us a pitcher!" Arya snapped as Jon and Sansa both swiveled their heads to stare at Arya openmouthed. Aegon flipped Arya off but did as she asked, walking away as he muttered something about hormones under his breath as he passed.

Sansa kept staring at Arya who was shifting awkwardly under the weight of her and Jon's eyes. Sansa couldn't help but feel a little bit offended. Arya had had her hands deep into Sansa's love life this year and she hadn't even bothered to tell her that she was dating anybody? She knew that Arya was never one to gossip or share but still! Sansa had thought that they were becoming so much closer but it looked like that was only one sided.

"So," Jon said with a grin that looked ready to split his face in two. Arya had never dated anyone before, or at least not that anyone in the family knew of. It seemed like she was pretty good at keeping her private life secret though. "Who exactly is your boy?"

"Aegon doesn't know what he's talking about." Arya snapped defensively, crossing her arms over
her chest. "I don't have a boy."

Jon held up his hands in mock defense but he looked ready to drop the subject for now. He must have picked up on what Sansa did in Arya's voice. She might not have a boy but she certainly had feelings for a boy. Considering what Sansa was currently going through she couldn't help but feel for her sister. There was nothing worse than feelings that you were unable to act on, regardless of the reason.

"Okay no more talk about Arya's love life." Jon said with a laugh, trying to lighten the mood. "Why don't we talk about yours Sansa?"

Sansa started in surprise before her mind started to whir to think of an excuse as to why she wasn't dating anyone. The second those thoughts started though she scoffed, she had nothing to apologize for or hide from just because she was single. So she wanted to take a year to get to know herself and better herself so what? She didn't need to hide that.

Before she could turn her thoughts into words Jon leaned his elbows on the table to stare at her with that intent smoldering look that only Jon could do. "I hope you don't mind but Arya told me about your resolution."

"Arya!" Sansa cried, turning to glare at Arya who quickly stood up at her tone.

"Where the hell is Aegon with that beer?" She cried before speeding away towards the bar.

Sansa had half a mind to follow her but she ended up huffing and falling back against her seat. She could have words with her sister later. She bent her head down slightly so that her long hair would hide the blush beginning to spread across her face.

"Please don't be too mad at her." Jon pleaded. He had always favored Arya above the rest of them. "It's my fault. I asked her if you were seeing anyone and she told me."

"You never ask me about my love life." Sansa pouted, the few times Jon made time to call her this year the only topics they seemed to broach were work and school and Jon's long-term girlfriend Ygritte who Sansa secretly adored. She was wilder than even Arya but she was so good for Jon who was far too serious for his own good at times.

"I've never had to before." Jon admitted causing Sansa to look back up at him as he explained. "Until this year you've always brought up who you were dating when I called you. We'd spend half the time talking about them rather than you. That's why I asked Arya why you were being so quiet about your current partner."

"You make it sound like I've never not been in a relationship before." Sansa said even though she knew as she said it that it was true. She'd never been single for very long since she'd hit puberty. She'd gone from one terrible relationship to a string of bad ones. Being single for an extended length of time was totally new for her, she just hadn't expected for other people to pick up on it.

"I hope you're not hurt that we were talking about you. Arya only told me that you resolved to not date anyone this year and that she was helping you out. She didn't say anything else about it, I swear." Jon told her imploringly.

Sansa uncrossed her arms as she sighed in defeat. There was no point in being mad at Arya now for something that was already done and over with. "Did she tell everyone else too?" The last thing she wanted to be was the butt of some big family joke. Poor Sansa and her need for constant validation from romantic partners.
"I don't think so. Nobody's mentioned it to me."

"Well at least we know Robb doesn't know then." Sansa sighed causing Jon to snort. Robb was absolutely terrible at keeping secrets, something that they had all learned the hard way as children. He had gotten all of them into trouble more than once.

"I really don't think she told anyone else. And she didn't even really want to tell me. In truth I pushed her." Jon let out a sigh as Sansa watched him curiously. It had been a few years since she had seen him last and he wore the years in his demeanor. His years in the army were beginning to weigh heavy on him and while his face still looked young Sansa could see the weight of his service in his eyes.

"Why?" Sansa asked softly.

"I worry about you." Jon responded immediately, looking back up at her. "I worry about all of you."

Sansa nodded slowly, expecting Jon to drop it at that. She was surprised when he kept speaking, his voice low and intent. "I won't press you for details about why you're doing what you're doing but I want you to know that I think it's a really great idea."

"You do?" Sansa asked startled. That was the first time someone had said that to her about her dating choices in, well maybe ever. "Why?"

Jon shrugged and it looked like he was mulling over his answer a bit before he spoke next, "Because...you have to live with yourself forever, it's the only person that you have to do that with. Forever is a really long time to spend with someone so you might as well like who you are."

Sansa smiled at the answer, she had never thought of it like that. There was something more behind his words and Sansa found herself asking, "Do you like who you are?"

"Somedays." Jon replied slowly.

Sansa reached across the table and squeezed his hand gently. Jon had always borne so much of the world on his shoulders. She wished that she knew of a way to ease that pain but sadly nothing had occurred to her yet.

Arya appeared then, a pitcher of beer clutched in one hand, foam spilling off the sides down her hand and onto the floor. Three glasses clinked together in her other hand which she put down on the table with a clunk breaking the moment of seriousness between Sansa and Jon. They shared a sad smile of understanding before a patron at a nearby table called out to Arya causing her to turn and glare at them.

"I don't work here!"

XxX

Sansa was able to see Jon twice more before he headed back to the coldness of the Wall. She worried about his somberness but as Arya pointed out he had always been that way. Still Sansa hoped that Ygritte would be able to help him find more sunshine in the days ahead. Sansa made a promise to call and text him more often, if only for her own peace of mind.

Summer vacation had finally begun and Sansa had two whole weeks of freedom before her summer classes started. She had to do summer classes if she wanted to finish her degrees in five years but it still put a damper on her break. This summer she was doing all of her courses online which was a huge relief. Now she was free to soak up as much summer sun as she wanted to.
Of course, she was also still working at the coffeehouse. In fact, to her surprise no one there left for the entire summer. The only one who left at first was Shae who left immediately after finals ended for two weeks. She told Sansa before she left that since she always ended up picking up so many shifts during finals week she always planned her vacations for when they ended.

Shae returned the weekend after Jon left, her skin a few shades darker from the sun in the Summer Isles and a more relaxed look about her than Sansa had seen for weeks. Sansa was in the middle of looking over Podrick's shoulder as he swiped through the photos Shae was showing them of her trip when she suddenly leaned on the counter to speak to them in a conspiratorly low voice.

"Now that we are all back in town I was thinking we should all go out." Shae said with a shrug, causing her long black hair to fall over her shoulder. "It's been ages since we all went out for a drink."

Podrick agreed and he and Shae began to make plans for going out that weekend. Podrick passed Shae her phone so that she could text Margaery and Bella the details before she looked up at Sansa.

"You're coming too right?"

Sansa hadn't been out to a bar in the last six months. Figuring she would be able to handle it if she was with a group of people since most of the students had left for the summer she nodded, although she could already feel a ball of apprehension forming in the pit of her stomach.

For the next few days all anyone talked about at work was where to go. In the end Bella's choice won out, a new club that had just opened up by the harbor, called the 'Street of Silk'. She'd pleaded so much that in the end everyone accosted their choices to go there.

Sansa had never been so nervous to go to a club before. She spent three hours trying to figure out what to wear as she did not want to wear something too revealing because she didn't want to be warding off unwelcome advances all night but she did not want to wear anything too plain because then the club might not let her in. In the end, she settled on a short black dress and a pair of sequin gold flats Rickon had bought her for her birthday last year.

The walk to the coffeehouse where they were all meeting up brought goosebumps to Sansa's arms. She hadn't brought a jacket since she didn't want to carry it all night and the heat of day had melted when the sun went down. By the time she got to the coffeehouse she was shivering but she was happy to see when she got there that she was not the only one.

"Sansa! You joined us after all." Margaery cried with joy as Sansa reached them. Sansa could only nod in response, the sight of so much of Margaery's bare legs had left her speechless. Her short green dress was beautiful enough but paired with her tall black heels Sansa thought her legs looked like they went on for miles. Her brain seemed to forget how to form words for a moment.

Sansa was the last one to join them so they started off down the street, the click-clack of the other girls' heels a comforting sound in the night. It took them nearly thirty minutes to reach the club, a fact that everyone wearing heels grumbled about.

"We are taking taxis home!" Shae cried as they joined the line of patrons waiting to get in. Podrick and Sansa exchanged a smile as everyone else nodded in agreement.

The wait in line was far shorter than Sansa thought it would be given the length of it. The club inside looked much the same as every other club Sansa had been to in her life. The only difference that she could see was that this one had long silk drapes covering the ceiling to the floor against the walls.
At the bar Alayaya ordered shots for everyone as a thank you for all their hard work. The alcohol burned the back of Sansa's throat going down and she only just managed not to cough at the sensation. She could not remember the last time she had drank anything other than beer or wine.

After another round of shots, this time provided by Shae, they each ordered their own drink before fighting their way through the crowd to find a table close to the edge of the dance floor. The dance floor was packed with people and at the sight of it Bella proclaimed loudly of her need to dance. Margaery offered to go with her and they both placed their drinks on the table before shoving their way into the crowd.

Sansa took a seat at the table next to Shae who let out a sigh of relief as the pressure was lifted off her feet.

"These things are like torture devices." Shae moaned as she rubbed her feet under the table.

"Why do you wear them?" Sansa asked curiously. She had always been a fan of high heels but she rarely got to wear them. She loved the way they looked but she was already tall and whenever she wore them whoever she was dating always complained that she was taller than them, with the exception of Sandor who still had several inches on her even when she wore her tallest heels. Even now that she was single she found she had a hard time wearing heels because people always commented on how tall she was or they made rude comments that Sansa just did not feel like dealing with.

"They make my butt look good." Shae admitted with a laugh.

Alayaya lifted her glass in a toast that made Sansa laugh. She could feel the effects of the shots warming her veins.

"Podrick where is your girlfriend?" Shae called across the table to their quiet co-worker who leaned across the table to hear better over the thump of the music. Sansa took this moment of distraction to scan the dance floor for Margaery, finding her bright dress easily among the crowd.

"She went home to Dorne for the summer." Podrick called, his soft voice barely audible over the bass. Sansa only half-listened to their conversation, she was far too entranced by the sight of Margaery’s legs.

"Aw a shame. You must be so lonely. We must spend more time together this summer." Shae said before turning abruptly to Sansa. "Speaking of lonely, are you seeing anyone yet?"

Sansa tore her eyes off of Margaery to look at her in surprise. Her love life had never come up at work before, she had always managed to successfully avoid the topic. Even with the flowers that she was still receiving nearly every day no one pressed her for too much information. They all knew she had no idea where they were coming from.

"No." Sansa admitted, the alcohol made her tongue looser than it usually was for she found herself continuing. "I'm not really dating at the moment."

Shae's eyebrows rose and her and Alayaya exchanged a surprised glance before she asked, "Why not?"

Sansa’s mouth opened and her tolerance was so low from never drinking hard alcohol anymore that she might have spilled out her resolution right then and there except at that moment Margaery appeared back at their table, breathless from all the dancing. She grabbed her drink from the table and took a deep pull from it. The part of Sansa that always mothered her friends when she went out
wanted to remind Margaery that her sugary cocktail wasn't going to rehydrate her. Before Sansa could get the words out Margaery was reaching down and grabbing Sansa's hand, tugging her to her feet.

"Come dance with me!" She cried, pulling Sansa after her. She was clearly determined not to take no for an answer. Sansa cast a look over her shoulder at the table to see if anyone would help get her out of this but everyone was suddenly playing on their phones or in deep conversation.

The bass pulsed in Sansa's ears like a second heartbeat as she let Margaery lead her out onto the dance floor. The vodka she'd had seemed to be lining her bloodstream and she found herself moving to the beat even before Margaery brought them to a stop in the middle of the crowd. The smell of sweat and alcohol was heavy in Sansa's nose but then Margaery moved closer and all she could smell was her shampoo.

The tempo of the song increased and Sansa let herself get lost to the music. It was an easy thing to do with alcohol lowering her shame, she didn't really care what any of the people around her thought of her dancing. The only thing that she cared about in that moment was the music and Margaery, who danced like she didn't know how gorgeous she was. Every move of her hips made Sansa want to puddle on the floor; she couldn't quite believe that Margaery was dancing next to her, with her. Margaery moved her hips in a small circle and pushed her hair out of her face in a move that made Sansa's heart tighten.

"Gods you are so beautiful." Sansa whispered, the thump of the music was so loud she didn't think that Margaery would hear her over it. The words had been burning a hole into her tongue for months and Sansa just needed to get them out.

Margaery's eyes flickered to her but she didn't say anything to show that she had heard her. She placed her palm lightly on Sansa's arms and moved closer to her. Their bodies moved in the same rhythm as the song played on. Sansa felt like the bass pumping through the speakers and making the floor shake like it was a separate heartbeat. It was the heartbeat of the music, the club and the people dancing. It was the heartbeat of her and Margaery as they both moved to be closer together.

They were close enough now that Sansa realized the heels Margaery had on closed the little bit of height she had on her. They were eye to eye as they danced and Sansa moved her hand to Margaery's waist like it was drawn there by a magnetic charge. With the music this loud Sansa could barely hear her own frantic thoughts about her resolution, about her promise to herself. She couldn't hear anything but the music, see anything but Margaery.

The song came to an erupt end before transitioning into a new one, this one with an even faster tempo. That space between the beats was almost enough to bring Sansa back to her senses.

"I'd kiss you right now if I could." Sansa admitted breathlessly, her thoughts still not entirely under control. She had enough to know that kissing Margaery in that moment would ruin her last six months of progress but it was still taking everything in her not to close those last few inches and put her lips on Margaery's.

"Why can't you?" Margaery asked, her eyes half lidded as she looked down at Sansa's mouth.

"Because it's June." Sansa whispered in all but a whine. Her thoughts were a complete haywired mess and she couldn't remember what she should or shouldn't share with Margaery anymore.

Margaery let out a startled breathless laugh at that. "Can people not kiss in June?"

"Not this year." Sansa admitted, but oh Gods how she wanted too.
Margaery looked puzzled at that but she made no move to close the distance between them, nor did she pull away. Sansa knew that the smart thing to do would be to walk away, to get off the dance floor and put some distance between herself and Margaery but she could not get her feet to move. Instead she stayed where she was, dancing with Margaery late into the night letting the music do the talking for them.
Summer

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SUMMER

July

Sansa kept waiting for Margaery to bring up the events at the bar but she never said anything. They went back to work at the coffeehouse with things seeming to be as normal as ever despite the fact that Sansa's face burned for what felt like hours the next morning when she saw her. Perhaps Margaery didn't remember the things Sansa said or maybe she just didn't find it to be as big of a deal as Sansa. Whatever the reason was, Sansa wasn't sure if she was grateful or upset that they had yet to talk about what had happened, or rather, hadn't happened.

As the days passed Sansa stopped waiting for Margaery to say something to her as they worked beside each other and her breath came a little easier. She was now on the back half of her resolution and from this side six more months seemed like nothing to get through. She had already made it through six months after all, so she already knew that it was possible and that she could make it through another six. Sansa knew that she should bring up the dancing with Margaery but since the other girl seemed content not to say anything Sansa supposed that she might as well just follow her lead.

The heat of summer arrived in full force as July wore on. Sansa couldn't even go outside without feeling like she was choking on the humidity. She found that she was even more grateful than she thought she would be that all her classes were online. Now she could do her coursework from the comfortable air-conditioning of her apartment or the library. She'd even taken to bringing her course materials with her to work when she worked days and doing work at the coffeehouse after her shift. She told herself that this way she didn't have to walk home in the highest heat of the day. That it had everything to do with her health and nothing to do with the fact that Margaery was working on the later shift schedule this summer and that was the only time Sansa really got to see her.

To Sansa's surprise she was still receiving flowers in the tip jar. She had assumed that her admirer would have stopped their efforts by now or at least left for the summer. But her assumptions were proved to be false and still the flowers came. Now that she knew they had meaning Sansa found herself googling the meaning of the flowers she was receiving every time she was left a new one. Margaery had been right, they all meant some form of admiration or friendship. She was also left a pink aster flower which, according to google, meant patience and love. The love part threw Sansa for a moment but she figured whoever had left the flower had only focused on the patience meaning. And that part was certainly accurate. Whoever was leaving the flowers for her had been doing it for months now and had never even approached her. Sansa couldn't help but feel silly that she still didn't know who was leaving them for her but at the same time she wondered why no one had come forward yet to claim them. Surely, they had waited long enough.

With her courses, work, the flowers, and waiting for Margaery to bring up the events at the bar Sansa felt like she was having a very full summer. She had also made a promise to herself to go to something new every week. She had a bit more free time during the summer than she did in the school year so she figured that she might as well utilize some of it. Places were a bit more crowded because it was tourist season but Sansa still managed to spend a whole day in the museum of Westeros history. The hall on the history of religion had kept her captivated for hours.
Sansa found as time passed that the best way to stop herself from wondering why Margaery had yet to say anything and to prevent herself from going down the wormhole of the fact that Sansa wasn't even dating so why did it matter was to keep herself busy. Her knitting project was getting out of control. She had already made scarves for all of her family members for gifts and now she was making them for friends as well. She knew that she could learn to make something other than scarves but she felt like she struggled enough with that as it was. There were baskets full of yarn littered around most her apartment and scarves draped over several surfaces. Sansa found she was pretty grateful that she rarely had visitors these days.

As summer wore on Sansa stopped wondering when Margaery was going to bring up the dancing. She assumed that she must have been reading things wrong this whole time, Margaery had never been interested in her as more than a friend. All this worrying she had been doing about asking her out or what she would do if Margaery asked her out had been pointless. The girl had never even been interested in her as more than a friend in the first place. Sansa felt a little embarrassed by the fact that she had told Margaery she wanted to kiss her and she found she was suddenly grateful for Margaery's good grace to not bring it up.

The good thing about Margaery not being interested in her meant that Sansa could make it through these last six months of not dating with a breeze. Once Sansa had gotten past her initial burst of freaking out over being single Margaery had been the only person she had even been remotely interested in. Knowing that she didn't have a chance even if she was dating Sansa knew that she could make it through these last six months without a problem. Hell, she might not even start dating after her resolution was over anyway. She felt like she was coming a long way with this no dating thing, she might just keep it up for a while. The next time she dated someone Sansa was going to be much pickier. She felt like she had a better sense of what she wanted in a partner now and what she wanted from herself in a relationship. She was done with jumping from one bad relationship to another. The next time she dated someone Sansa wanted it to be because she got butterflies around the other person and because they made her laugh and could hold a real conversation. She was done being in relationships with people she only sort of liked just because she didn't want to be single.

Sansa found she even kind of liked being single, it was a relief to not have to have her free time spent wasting away doing whatever someone else wanted to do. Maybe Margaery not liking her was a blessing in disguise, maybe Sansa wouldn't even date again until she was done with school. With her GPA she was well on track to graduating valedictorian, there was no reason to jeopardize that with a relationship.

Sansa was well on her way to convincing herself not to bother with dating ever again. No one had ever said that she handled rejection well. She was working on a pro/con list of not dating one night when a loud knock on her door drew her from her thoughts. Sansa sighed and headed towards the door with a pang of irritation, the knock had made her lose her train of thought and she had just come up with a really good pro. She hadn't been expecting company but she found she wasn't all that surprised when she opened the door and Arya barreled past her with a huff.

"I am way too involved in your love life!" Arya cried out before she fell with a sigh onto the window seat.

Sansa cocked her head to the side as Arya glared at her. "What are you talking about?" She asked curiously. As far as Sansa knew Arya hadn't been involved with any part of her nonexistent love life since she had accompanied Margaery and her to the Rose Festival. She found that she was suddenly grateful she had shut her notebook before she had opened the door. She really did not want to have a conversation about that right now.

"Margaery called me today." Arya huffed, crossing her arms and glaring at Sansa like she had put
Margaery up to it. Honestly, Sansa was more surprised that Margaery had saved Arya's number after the festival than she was that she had called her.

"Why?" Sansa asked when it became clear Arya was not going to continue speaking without provocation. It still surprised Sansa how someone who claimed to hate drama could be so dramatic at times.

"To ask me if you were dating anyone, or at all, right now." Arya said with a raised eyebrow. Clearly she thought Sansa was somehow at fault for this intrusion into her busy summer of, well actually Sansa didn't really know what Arya was up to at the moment.

Sansa sat down on the couch heavily, she felt like her legs had all but given out on her. Why would Margaery call Arya to ask those things if she wasn't even interested in her? They'd had a moment on the dance floor and Sansa had thought that was the end of it, that Margaery wasn't interested in her as anything but a friend but was she wrong? There was no reason for Margaery to ask Arya what she did if she only wanted to be Sansa's friend. And Sansa had never said anything to Margaery about not dating at the moment, the only people she had told beside Arya was her other coworkers. If Margaery knew that that meant that they had been talking about her. What else had Sansa said that could have made it back to Margaery?

She was so focused on this that it took Arya angrily clearing her throat for Sansa to come back to the present. "What did you tell her?" She asked curiously, her heart beating in her throat. Arya had a record of telling people about her resolution after all. Sansa crossed her fingers under her thighs in the hopes that this time Arya had known to keep her mouth shut.

"I told her to ask you that herself." Arya said like it was a no brainer.

Sansa let out a sigh of relief at that. She really had thought Arya might have told Margaery everything. Judging by the look Arya gave her Sansa had a feeling she knew what she had been thinking. "Thank you." Sansa said leaning her head back against the couch as her mind whirled. Was she wrong again? Did Margaery have feelings for her after all? This whole thing with Margaery was leaving her dizzy and with a strange unpleasant feeling like she was back in high school.

"Remind me again how I got involved with all of this?" Arya asked as she kicked off her sneakers. Apparently, she was planning on staying for a while.

"Because you're the best sister ever." Sansa said without thinking. There was a brief pause as the words sunk into both of them. It seemed it was not lost on either of them that that was the first time in their lives either of them had said anything remotely of that nature.

"Yeah, well, that's true." Arya finally said as she shoved her hair back out of her face, resolutely not looking in Sansa's direction. She had never been very good at handling her family complimenting her.

The unexpected moment of closeness made Sansa feel like she could finally ask the question that had been burning in her mind for a month. Besides, Arya was distracted which was usually the best time to ask her personal questions. "Speaking of love lives, when are you going to tell me about this boy of yours?"

Arya glared at her and grabbed one of the pillows on the sill beside her, clearly stoking up on ammo to throw at Sansa if the conversation went on much further. Sansa held up her hands in mock defense. Like Arya had said, she was incredibly involved with Sansa's love life. Sansa just wanted to know a little bit about hers. They had grown so much closer over the last six months and Sansa just wanted that closeness to be felt on both sides.
"You know you can come to me about anything right?" Sansa said, her voice suddenly softer like Arya was a stray animal she was trying to coax out of a corner. When it came to Arya Sansa often felt like she was lacking on her big sister duties. Bran and Rickon would come to her with relationship questions (usually after Jon or Robb or Gods forbid Theon had steered them wrong and Sansa was mainly on damage control) but as far as Sansa knew Arya never came to anyone for advice. Sansa had been in that position before and she knew all too well how overwhelming it could feel. She didn't want that for anybody.

Arya shifted uncomfortably, pulling the pillow into her lap. For once she didn't even roll her eyes at Sansa's attempts to get her to confide in her. They were making all kinds of progress these days. "Yeah, I know."

There was a brief pause as Sansa waited with baited breath for Arya to continue. Her sister took to examining her fingernails with great scrutiny and Sansa let out a long-suffering sigh. She supposed she would just have to wait for Arya to come to her when she was ready but Sansa really wanted to be the one giving advice for once instead of getting it. "You're still not going to tell me anything are you?"

"Nope."

XxX

Knowing that Margaery had gone to her sister to get inside information on her love life Sansa found that she was suddenly unsure of how to act around her. Somehow this was even worse than thinking she only wanted to be her friend. Knowing she might have a chance and still being unable to take it was leaving Sansa very confused on how to talk or act around Margaery. She kept reminding herself to just be herself but that was easier said than done when right now her self was a very confused mess.

Not only was she a very confused mess but as July came to a close she was a very hot mess. Literally hot. A heatwave had crested over Westeros sending several cities into record breaking temperatures. The walk home from work made Sansa feel like she was going to melt into a puddle of goo on the pavement. The heat didn't even break at night, the darkness stopped bringing cooler temperatures it just meant that it was harder for people to see your sweat.

To make matters worse the heat caused the overworked air-conditioner at the coffeehouse to give up one day. It coughed out its last burst of cold air before letting out a large metallic groan that even Sansa's untrained mechanical ears knew was not a good sign. Alayaya let out a string of colorful curse words that made Sansa glad the only customers in the shop at the time were longtime regulars who had heard her say far worse things before. It was the one shift a week Margaery and Sansa still had together and they both watched in silent hope as Alayaya fiddled with the thermostat. The air had been off for only a few minutes and already the heat from outside was creeping inside. Sansa could feel beads of sweat forming at the nape of her neck.

After a few minutes of fidgeting and cussing Alayaya let out a long sigh. "The old girl is finally gone."

Sansa let out a groan of disappointment as Margaery made a cross over her heart and sighed. The customers were already fidgeting at the raise in temperature and several of them were packing up their belongings. Alayaya pulled her phone out of her pocket and pressed the speed dial for the technician who made bi-weekly trips to check on the air conditioner during the summer. Margaery beckoned for Sansa to start closing down the machines.

"There's no way were staying open in this heat without air." Margaery told her as she began to shut
of the equipment.

Sure enough she was right. Alayaya got off the phone a few minutes later and apologized to the few remaining customers, shooing them out the door so that she could lock the door and flip the closed signs. She sighed in relief as she noticed them closing everything down and wiping the counters.

"Finish up as quick as you can girls. It's only going to get hotter." Alayaya sighed, pushing her hair back off her face.

"Do you think they can fix it?" Sansa asked hopefully. Her shirt was already beginning to stick between her shoulder blades.

"Doubtful. This thing is older than I am." Alayaya patted the thermostat fondly even as sweat dripped down the bridge of her nose. "You can leave once you're done closing up. I'll let you know whether we'll be open tomorrow or not."

They finished their closing duties in what Sansa felt was record breaking time. The unrelenting heat of the shop was even worse than that of outside for there was not even the slightest hint of a breeze to cool them down. By the time they were bidding goodbyes and good lucks to Alayaya Sansa felt like she was sweating in places she didn't even know she could sweat.

"I'm parked over here." Margaery said as she gestured down the road to her car. "I'll give you a ride home."

"Thank you." Sansa sighed in relief, she didn't think she could walk home without passing out. Even the short walk to Margaery's car felt like torture. Opening the car door a blast of even hotter air hit both of them and Margaery sighed as she pulled a towel from her backseat and tossed it onto the passenger seat.

"Loras convinced me to get leather seats when I bought my car. Every summer I feel like murdering him." Margaery complained as she adjusted the towel on her own seat before getting into the car with a groan.

"Have you tried seat covers?" Sansa asked as she climbed carefully into the car. The back of her calf brushed the leather of the seat and she winced at the heat. She was suddenly immensely grateful for the towel she was sitting on because if she had to sit on the seat itself she was pretty sure she would have third degree burns by the time she got up again.

"Yeah." Margaery said as she started her car and turned the air-conditioner dial as high as it would go. The initial burst of air was hot and Sansa wrinkled her nose at its touch. "I swear I could still feel the heat from the leather through them so I gave up on it. The towel works better."

"Damn Loras." Sansa agreed with her as the air finally started to turn cold. Margaery laughed and nodded in agreement. As Sansa finally started to cool down she realized that this was the first time she had truly been alone with Margaery with no other ears close enough to listen since the night at the bar. Her fingers curled into her palms as she waited to see if Margaery would say something. She debated mentioning it herself before realizing that night still undiscussed between them the silence in the car still did not feel awkward. As they neared Sansa's building her shoulders relaxed and she let the blessed air-conditioning cool her down.

"I bet you miss Winterfell on days like this huh?" Margaery asked curiously as she pulled up to the curb in front of Sansa's building.

"I always miss Winterfell." Sansa admitted, looking over at Margaery. Even covered in a light sheen
of sweat she was still the most beautiful girl Sansa had ever seen. She couldn't help but think of how she wanted to make her sweat for vastly different reasons. The thought brought the telltale signs of heat to her cheeks and Sansa quickly fumbled with the latch of her seatbelt so that Margaery would not see her blush and comment on it.

"I get it. Home is always home." Margaery said as she reached over and clicked the latch on the seatbelt Sansa was struggling to get undone.

She mumbled a 'thanks' before reaching for the door handle, looking up in time to see Margaery smile at her. "I guess I'll see you later."

Sansa made a noise of agreement before stepping out of the car, the heat hitting her like a physical weight as she dashed up the stairs to her building. She didn't stop running until she was inside her apartment and the pro/con list of dating she had made a few days before was in her hand. Thinking of the soft smile on Margaery's face as she had gotten out of the car Sansa ripped the paper in half. Six more months of not dating was more than enough.

August

The heat wave didn't break for nearly two weeks. Two awful weeks where Sansa barely left the safe coolness of her apartment as the coffeehouse was closed for a week while a new air-conditioner was ordered and installed. Sansa hadn't expected to hear from her coworkers during this time but to her surprise they had all started a group chat that went on until the shop reopened. This time when they invited her out drinking with them Sansa declined. She had embarrassed herself enough in front of them. Besides, she no longer trusted herself around Margaery when alcohol was involved.

She wasn't planning on spending the whole summer inside of course. King's Landing was often the home to several festivals and concerts during the summer and Sansa was able to score a ticket to The First Men's concert before it sold out. The heat wave had broken a few days before the show but Sansa was still sweating by the time she reached the fairgrounds the concert was being held at after walking from her apartment. She found herself very grateful that she had remembered to pack sunscreen in her bag because there was still another few hours left before the sun went down and she felt like she could already see a burn forming on her skin. Yet another fun perk of being a redhead.

The fairgrounds were already packed with people. Sansa had arrived a little later than she had planned but there was still another thirty minutes before the opening act, the Greenseers, started playing. Sansa started picking her way through the crowd in the attempts to make it a little closer to the stage. This far out there were people settled on blankets on the grass, clearly content to just listen to the concert and not join the massive throng of people all vying for a closer look at the stage. Sansa loved watching the people in the crowd. There were people of all ages in all styles of dress. She passed a group of teens debating over which side of the crowd would be faster to get through and she silently agreed with the one that said either one would be faster if they just started and stopped standing around discussing it. Sansa slowly made her way closer to the stage, sidestepping around groups and singles. No one paid much attention to her. She discovered quickly that if she looked like she had a purpose people let her move right past them without jostling her. She'd made it about fifteen feet in before she realized that the group of teens she'd passed was following the path she was cutting through the crowd. Sansa let out a little laugh that was lost in the rumble of the crowd.

She came to a stop about ten people back from the stage. The rows in front of her were packed so tightly with people Sansa didn't think she could get through them if she tried too. She hadn't been trying to get to the stage anyway, just close enough to see the band perform. The heat of the bodies around her made the temperature rise what felt like another ten degrees and Sansa pulled a water
bottle out of her backpack and drank from it while she still had the chance. As she was putting the bottle back into her bag a shout from across the crowd caught her attention and she looked up curiously.

A group of men around her age were jumping on each other and laughing. Sansa would have thought that they were teenagers except that several of them had facial hair too thick for most teens to grow. It wasn't their actions or debating over their ages that kept her eyes on them though. There, standing in the middle of the group with the sun glinting off his blonde curls, was Joffrey Baratheon.

Every nerve in Sansa's body froze at the sight of him. There was a rough crinkle of plastic as she squeezed her water bottle tight enough to dent it. He was far enough across the crowd that he did not look in her direction but Sansa still felt like her throat had gone to sandpaper and she felt suddenly lightheaded and not just from the heat. This was the first time that she had been in his presence in years and she found her mind was running in frantic circles trying to figure out what she wanted to do.

A large part of her wanted to march over to him and tell his friends what a cruel bastard he was. To shout at the top of her lungs about the things he said and did to her so that no one would ever be foolish enough to be his lover again. Another part of her wanted to slap him across his stupid face, to make him feel even a moment of the pain he'd put her through for years. Sansa wanted to tell him that despite his best efforts to ruin her, to make her weak and destroy her life, he had failed miserably. She had survived him and she was doing just fine.

Sansa started to make her way through the crowd, people's elbows hitting her in the ribs as they tried to jostle her back behind them. Sansa ignored them and pushed on, intending to let Joffrey know that, in fact, she was doing even better than fine. She was the top of her class, she had a job she enjoyed, she had friends who cared about her and she was closer than ever with her siblings. She went places alone and actually had a good time. She'd realized that she was stronger than she had ever thought she was, stronger than anyone had ever given her credit for. She was no longer defined by a relationship or what another person thought of her.

That thought made her stop cold. Joffrey and his friends were still several people away but he was close enough that if she shouted he would hear her. It was not like he was a stranger to the sound of her cries after all. But Sansa had realized that going over there and confronting him now would mean that he still had some kind of power over her and he didn't. She didn't have to go over there and tell him how much better her life was without him in it because she no longer cared what he thought about her.

Sansa turned back to the stage as the crowd began to cheer, the members of Greenseers were beginning to take the stage. Joffrey Baratheon had stopped having power over her and her choices a long time ago. Sansa was not going to let him ruin this night for her like he had ruined so many of her nights in the past. She was done letting him have any kind of effect on her.

As the music began to wash over the crowd Sansa laughed as the movement of the crowd pushed her forward. One of the teens who had followed her through the crowd earlier somehow heard her over the music and reached back for her hand, helping her shove the last few feet forward until she was against the fence surrounding the stage. The crowd around them tried to jostle them back, to get that sought over spot of 'front row' but Sansa planted her feet and held tight to the fence. It may have taken her a bit longer than others but Sansa had learned to stand her ground and she wasn't going to give that up for anyone.

XxX

The new air conditioner at the coffeehouse was amazing. Sansa thought it might even be better than
the one in her apartment. Every time she walked into the shop she let out a sigh of relief at the
blissful coolness inside. She didn't think she would ever get used to the hot summers of the south.
She had never thought that she would miss summer snows until she had come down here.

Sansa had assumed that the person leaving her the flowers would have given up after the week
without being able to leave them but when the shop reopened she was left a bouquet of eight
flowers, one for that day and one for every day the shop was closed. The thought of the flowers and
who was leaving them would consume her if she let herself focus on them for too long so Sansa had
taken to giving the flowers to strangers she passed as she walked home from work. The flowers
brightened her day so she hoped that she might be able to brighten others with them as well.

Part of her was content to never know who was leaving the flowers for her. If she was honest with
herself she still wasn't entirely convinced that it wasn't Arya testing her. When she focused on it too
much Sansa got confused and a little annoyed that she still hadn't caught who was doing it, despite
her best efforts. Not that knowing who was leaving them would change anything for her. She had a
little more than four months to go and she wasn't going to let anything or anyone jeopardize that for
her.

Her summer courses had ended earlier that week and students were set to return to campus starting in
the next couple of weeks. Sansa was both excited and dreading the school year starting up again. She
still had two more years to go before she graduated but this was Margaery's last year of school and
Sansa didn't think she would be sticking around in King's Landing after she was done. The selfish
part of Sansa wanted her too but more than that she wanted Margaery to go where ever she was
happiest. She kept expecting Margaery to tell her about how she was dating someone but she never
did. Sansa couldn't understand how a girl so wonderful was still single.

Sansa wasn't the only one who thought that either. She'd overheard a conversation between
Margaery and Bella earlier that week where Margaery had mentioned that it was just so hard to meet
people with her schedule. She didn't have to time to casually date and she was looking for something
more than that at the moment anyway. Sansa had pretended to keep wiping down that counter as she
listened and whispered a silent 'thank you' to the universe that Margaery's course-work and
internships kept her from meeting too many people. It was entirely selfish of her but it gave Sansa
hope that she might just have a chance once the year was over.

Summer was drawing to a close and the days were already slightly shorter than they had been when
classes had first ended. Now when they locked the doors at night dusk had already settled in. Near
the end of August Alayaya left early one night and Sansa and Margaery were left to close up the
shop together. It had been a slow night and both of them had spent more time playing on their
phones than they should have but during the summer Alayaya didn't mind as long as everything still
got done. They were able to do so much of their closing duties before they even locked the door that
they were set to leave only ten minutes after they'd locked up instead of the usual thirty or more.

"I'll go get the deposit bag." Sansa called over her shoulder to Margaery as she pushed through the
swinging door to the back. The door had just shut behind her when she realized that she had
forgotten her phone underneath the register. She had forgotten it there earlier that week and her and
Podrick had nearly set off the alarm letting her back in to get it. Not wanting to go through that again
Sansa quickly spun on her heels and pushed through the door again.

Margaery started in surprise at the movement and a slightly crumbled pink peony slipped out of her
hands and landed on the tiled floor.

Both Sansa and her stared at the flower in silence for a moment before Margaery let out a choked
sounding laugh. She stooped down to pick the flower up off the floor before reaching it out towards
Sansa. Her voice sounded slightly higher than usual as she spoke quickly, "I was just bringing this to you! Looks like you got left another flower."

Sansa looked from the flower to the tip jar where the flowers were usually left. She knew for a fact that there had been no flower in there when she'd gone to the back and the door was already locked. No one had even been in the coffeehouse for the last few hours and her and Margaery had deep cleaned the entire shop today. If that flower had been left Sansa would have found it by now which could only mean one thing...

"It's you." Sansa said breathlessly as she looked up from the flower to Margaery's face. Margaery swallowed nervously and shook her head in refusal as Sansa took a step closer to her, taking the peony out of her hand. She was careful not to brush Margaery's skin as she did it because she did not think she could handle the contact at the moment.

"Of course not." Margaery choked out on a laugh, her empty hand falling back to her side.

"Have they all been from you?" Sansa asked even though she felt like she already knew the answer. Her thoughts were going too fast for her to keep up and Sansa found herself wishing that they hadn't flipped all of the chairs up onto the tables so that she could sit down. She rubbed her fingers over the peony petals as she tried to wrap her mind around this turn of events.

Of course they were from Margaery. She had been the first one to find the flowers after all and she was the one who had told Sansa that flowers have meanings. She had even given Sansa a flower at the Rose Festival! How could Sansa have not figured it out by now?

Margaery shifted awkwardly as she nodded and Sansa slumped against the counter in surprise. She had been denying her feelings for Margaery so much and so often that she hadn't really let herself consider that Margaery had feelings for her too. She'd hoped off course and she'd thought that she might a few months ago but she had been trying to distance herself a little bit hoping that she would not hurt Margaery as she finished out her resolution. It seemed that had not worked and Sansa felt a lump form in her stomach as she realized that she had to let Margaery down now despite the fact that she very much did not want too.

"Does everyone know?" Sansa asked as she tried to buy herself some time. Was there even a graceful way to say 'I like you but I can't date you this year'? Why had there never been a rom-com about this so Sansa could at least have some point of reference to work off of?!

Looking down at the floor sheepishly Margaery nodded. "I could never get a read on you so I left the flowers as a way to kind of feel you out." Margaery admitted as she looked back up at Sansa. Sansa couldn't help but marvel at the fact that she wasn't even blushing. If Sansa had been in her shoes her face would have resembled a fire truck at this point. "But my secrets out now so I'll just say what you've already figured out. I like you Sansa. A lot. I'd like to ask you out on a date."

"I like you too." Sansa admitted before chastising herself. She did not want to get Margaery's hopes up but judging by the smile forming on her face she had already done that. She really needed to get better at what she said when she was caught off guard. "But I can't say yes."

A look of confusion crossed Margaery's face as her smile faltered. "Why not? It's not June anymore."

Sansa blushed as she remembered what she said during the dancing. She looked down at her shoes as she tried to decide what to do. She suddenly found herself embarrassed of her resolution, of the fact that she needed a year to be by herself to learn who she was. But Margaery had been honest with her so the least Sansa could do was return the favor.
"I'm not dating this month either." Sansa admitted as she looked back up at Margaery. "Or this whole year actually."

"Can I ask why not?" Margaery asked as disappointment and confusion wore on her face. Her hopeful look was gone and Sansa felt guilt threading through her blood. She never should have told Margaery she liked her too. She should have just let her down easy so that she could get on with her life.

Sansa bit her lip before she spoke. It was hard to say it all out loud but she owed Margaery the truth. "My New Year's resolution was to not date anyone this year. I've had some pretty bad relationships in the past and I just needed some distance from that. I need to figure out who I am by myself." She wanted to continue, to laugh it off as silly or to call it dumb but she held her tongue. That was something she would have done at the start of the year but not now. She was done apologizing for things that were important to her. Either Margaery would get it or she wouldn't but Sansa wasn't going to play herself down to get her too.

"I understand." Margaery sighed causing Sansa to look at her in surprise "I've had some bad relationships myself. I'm a little embarrassed I didn't realize what was happening. I shouldn't have left you all those flowers, I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Sansa said in shock. She hadn't really expected Margaery to understand let alone feel like she had something to apologize for. The flowers had been a bright part to her days these past few months, they were like a reminder that even as she changed people would still like this new her. "I like the flowers."

They looked at each other in silence for a moment, Sansa's fingers rubbing the soft petals of the flower in her hand. She found herself at a loss for what to say. She hadn't expected to have any kind of conversation with Margaery about feelings until January and she hadn't worked out what she was going to say yet. It seemed the conversation had gone a different direction than Margaery had expected as well, her brow was furrowed and she looked to be in deep thought.

"Are you going to start dating again next year?" Margaery finally broke the silence, her question slow as if she was still thinking it through even as she asked it.

Sansa nodded slowly, her heart suddenly feeling like it was beating in her throat. She had a feeling like she knew what direction this conversation was about to go in but she didn't want to get her hopes up. "I think so."

"So if I asked you on a date, say in January, that would be okay?" Margaery asked softly, her voice steady but the nervous twisting of her apron strings giving her away.

"Yeah." Sansa choked out in surprise before shaking her head. A year was a long time to wait for someone, she could never ask Margaery to do that for her. "But I can't ask you to put your life on hold for me."

"You didn't." Margaery smiled as she tilted her head to the side, watching Sansa thoughtfully. "And I'm not. I'm just going to remember that you're out there and maybe you can remember that too. Don't let me effect what you're doing this year Sansa."

"There's still another four months." Sansa reminded her, her heart was beating double time in her chest. Margaery could not be serious right now. As if Sansa could ever forget that Margaery was out there. But she could not expect for someone to put their life on pause just because she needed time to grow. This was asking far too much of Margaery. No matter what Sansa felt she knew that waiting these last few months might make Margaery resent her and she would never want that. "I can't ask..."
"I volunteered. Besides I've already invested quite a bit of time into this. It'd be foolish of me not to see it through now." Margaery reminded her softly before shrugging. A small smile was back on her face and it seemed like she had no idea the roller-coaster she'd sent Sansa on.

"You're serious?" Sansa asked, unwilling to let her hopes get up until Margaery confirmed it.

"I'm serious. You're not the only one who has dated their fair share of toads Sansa." Margaery said as her mouth went up into that half smile that made Sansa's knees go weak. "You're the first person I've met in a long time that I've actually been interested in for more than just a few weeks. That's why I left you all the flowers, I was scared of moving too fast and screwing it up."

"You're the first person I've been truly interested in for a long time too" Sansa admitted, shaking her head in wonder. She still couldn't quite believe this was happening, that her and Margaery were really on the same page about this.

"Then I think we owe it to ourselves to see where this takes us." Margaery said softly as she leaned against the counter next to Sansa. Their arms were just a hairs breath apart and Sansa swallowed hard at the sudden closeness. She didn't think she would be able to control her actions if Margaery came much closer but thankfully the older girl seemed to pick up on that. "I'll admit I'm not crazy about waiting until next year to go on a date with you but my grandmother always told me that good things were worth waiting for."

"Your grandmother does seem very wise." Sansa said, her heart beating loudly in her chest. Was Margaery serious? Would she really wait another four months just to go on a date with Sansa? People hadn't even been willing to wait a few days for her before. By the time her and Margaery even made it to a date Margaery would have been waiting for nearly a whole year. She had to give her an out, she had to let her know that she wasn't going to hold her to this. No matter how strong Sansa's feelings for Margaery were what she wanted more than anything was for Margaery to be happy. She wouldn't be happy just waiting around for her. "But you really don't have to wait for me. Four months can be an awfully long time."

"It can." Margaery agreed as she looked over at Sansa and reached up to tuck a stray lock of hair back behind Sansa's ear. Her fingers hovered next to Sansa's cheek as she whispered, "But something tells me that you're worth the wait Sansa."

---

**Chapter End Notes**

Sorry I haven't updated in ages! I'll try not to take so long with the last few chapters. I just moved and I still don't have internet at the new place so it might take me a bit to post/respond to reviews.
I swear to you all I am not trying to post this story in real time but it just keeps happening.
Thank you all for the reviews, you are all so sweet and wonderful!
I clearly can't keep promises with updating quickly but I swear this story will be finished by the end of the year (and hopefully I will be posting it before New Year's Eve).
One more chapter left!

AUTUMN

September

Sansa had assumed that her learning about the truth behind the flowers would cause their delivery to stop but she still found a flower resting on top of her bag after every shift she worked with Margaery. Now that classes were back in session they were working together three mornings a week. Sansa’s new favorite part of the day was the early morning when it was just her and Margaery getting the shop ready for opening.

Much to her surprise things between them didn’t feel awkward. In fact, Sansa felt like they were on much more even footing now that their feelings were both out in the open. True to her word, Margaery wasn’t trying to push Sansa into going on a date with her now and seemed content to wait. Sansa couldn’t help but admire her patience. She didn’t think that there were many things in the world she’d be willing to wait a year on. Although in a way she was waiting a year to date Margaery, albeit it was by her own choice.

Her classes were much harder than they’d been last year and Sansa could definitely tell that this school year was going to be much more difficult than her years of the past. Two weeks into the semester and she already felt like she was buried up to her elbows in homework. It seemed that she was not alone in that feeling as the students that crowded the coffeeshop were nearly all hidden behind piles of textbooks. Even her coworkers seemed more stressed than they had last semester. Sansa thought that part of it was readjusting to school after the summer mostly off but that didn’t stop her from taking late night trips to the library. The more work she did now the less catchup she had to do later in the semester.

Late one evening Sansa was juggling an armful of books and trying to balance a cup of coffee on top of them when the sound of familiar laughter caught her attention. She stopped halfway up the library’s front steps to look back over her shoulder, not at all surprised to see Margaery heading in her direction.

“Would you like some help with all that?” Margaery asked, her eyebrows arched in amusement as she closed the last few steps between them.

“Yes please.” Sansa sighed gratefully as Margaery took the cup of coffee out of her hands leaving Sansa finally free to balance the books in her arm in a way that didn’t make her feel like she was going to topple over backwards.
“What are you working on tonight?” Margaery asked curiously as they headed up the stairs together, trying to eye the titles of the many books in Sansa’s arm.

“A paper for my women in literature course.” Sansa said as she pushed the door open with her foot for Margaery to head through. She tried, and failed, not to look at Margaery’s backside as she walked in front of her.

“That sounds interesting.” Margaery said, perking up as she spotted the copy of Frankenstein at the top of Sansa’s pile. “At least more interesting than what I’m working on.”

“What are you working on?” Sansa asked as she led the way to the stairs, Margaery following after her in soundless agreement. Sansa’s favorite study room was on the third floor. It was much quieter up there as most of the students working on group projects tended to stay on the bottom floors.

“The different types of algae found in the bay.” Margaery said with a sigh. “I’ve been looking under a microscope all day, my eyes feel like they are going to explode.”

“Are there many different types of algae here?” Sansa asked curiously, she’d never been much for science. It was fascinating but it had never held her interest as much as literature or languages. But when Margaery talked about it Sansa suddenly found that nothing could hold her attention more.

“Oh tons.” Margaery said as she pulled open the door to the third floor for Sansa. “That’s the problem.”

“That’s not the topic of your thesis project is it?” Sansa asked in a whisper, mindful of the other students trying to study at the desks crowding the space before the rows of books started.

Margaery shook her head as she pointed to a dark study room in the corner. They headed that way as Margaery whispered, “No, I’m doing a study on rose crossbreeds for that. The algae project is for my marine botany class.”

Sansa made a noise of curiosity as she flipped on the light for the study room. The rooms on this floor consisted of a small table and two chairs to accommodate single students and small group projects. Sansa set her books down on the table with a relieved sigh as Margaery shut the door behind her. The room suddenly felt much smaller with the door shut and Sansa swallowed hard as she realized how completely alone they suddenly were. Sure, they spent time alone together every morning they opened the coffeeshop but that was different. They were working and there was always something that needed to get done. Not to mention there was a lot more space at the coffeeshop than there was in the study room. This was the first time since Sansa had found out about the truth of the flowers that they were completely and utterly alone.

Not even the fact that there was a room full of students on the other side of the door could make Sansa’s racing heart calm down. She opened her mouth to say something but she couldn’t seem to get any words to come out. Margaery seemed to notice the change in her because she looked back at the door before glancing back at Sansa with a worried knit between her eyebrows.

“I can open the door again if you’d like.” she offered softly, placing Sansa’s coffee on the table next to her books.

Sansa shook her head as she took a deep breath and settled into a chair. They’d both been controlling themselves for months now, a closed door wasn’t going to suddenly change that. She pulled a book close to her and breathed through her mouth so that the scent of Margaery’s perfume wouldn’t cut through the remaining dregs of her self control.
Though neither of them had spoken of it Margaery and Sansa began to meet up every other night at the library in the same study room as the first night. They studied together in a companionable silence and as the days went by Sansa no longer felt like her heart was going to beat out of her chest when the door shut.

With their study sessions and work they were seeing each other nearly every day and Margaery had taken to bringing her a flower to their study sessions as well. One night Sansa got to the room early and when Margaery showed up she placed a red rose on top of Sansa’s open book without a word.

“You know you don’t have to keep bringing me flowers, right?” Sansa asked, unable to shake the guilty feeling from her stomach as she ran her fingers along the soft petals.

“Oh, I like bringing them to you.” Margaery confessed as she settled down across the table.

“But they must be costing you a bit of money.” Sansa protested doing a bit of quick math in her head. At this point Margaery had left her hundreds of flowers. That couldn’t have been cheap.

“They don’t cost me anything.” Margaery admitted with a grin as she leaned forward to whisper conspiratorially. “I get them all from the campus greenhouses and they are close to overflowing with flowers. No one even notices they’re gone.”

“Really?” Sansa asked curiously, picking up the rose and pressing it to her nose so she could breathe in the heady scent of it. “I’ve never seen the campus greenhouses.”

Margaery seized onto that as hard as she’d seized onto the fact that Sansa hadn’t gone to the Rose Festival before. When it came to flowers Margaery was even more obsessed with them than Sansa was. That wasn’t all too surprising seeing what her major was. “Well we can’t have that. Are you free Sunday? I’ll give you a tour.” She realized quickly how that sounded for she quickly amended, “Not like a date or anything.”

“Of course, not like a date.” Sansa agreed, trying severely to ignore the thought in her mind that she was cheating her resolution by spending even more time with Margaery. If she was going to start counting hanging out with her as cheating the resolution than these study sessions would have to stop and she’d have to switch her work schedule around.

“You could bring Arya if you’d like.” Margaery offered hastily, clearly still seeing the look of worry on Sansa’s face no matter how hard she was trying to talk herself out of it.

“I think Arya’s pretty much done with being my chaperone this year.” Sansa admitted with a cringe.

“Well we will find someone else to go with us then. I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable.” Margaery suggested, reaching forward to put her hand on Sansa’s comfortingly.

“You don’t make me uncomfortable!” Sansa assured her quickly, resisting the urge to turn her hand over so that she could thread her fingers through Margaery’s.

Margaery smiled at the look on Sansa’s face. “I know I don’t. But I don’t want you to feel like a trip to the greenhouses stopped everything you’re doing this year.”

Warmth pooled in Sansa’s heart at even more proof of how seriously Margaery was taking her resolution. She’d said she was okay with waiting but every time she proved it Sansa still couldn’t help falling for her a little bit more. “It won’t. We’ve been controlling ourselves for months now, I don’t think one afternoon will break us.”
XxX

The university had three greenhouses, all of them located on the far west side of campus behind the building where the majority of the plant science classes were housed. As Sansa had only taken the minimum number of science classes to fill her prerequisites she had never been inside the building let alone the greenhouses. She'd passed them a few times on walks or runs around campus but she'd never tried to go inside before. She'd barely made it three feet inside the first one before she realized that had been a mistake.

They'd come early in the morning to avoid the heat of the day; the all glass walls had a way of making the whole place feel like you were baking in the sun according to Margaery. The greenhouse they were in was the one that housed flowers, the other two consisted of rare breeds of plants not native to the area and vegetation. The perfume of so many different types of flowers left a thick scent in the air and Sansa spun in a slow circle to take in the sight of so many flowers in such a small place.

She felt like she was back at the Rose Festival for a moment and she couldn't help but try to place names to as many flowers as she saw. She wasn't surprised to recognize most of them, Margaery had given her a bloom from nearly every plant Sansa could see. She began to pick her way forward around the tables housing potted plants, careful not to bump into any of the hanging baskets or ivy seemingly growing wild. Even though it was early on a weekend there was still a small handful of students milling about the room clearly getting a head start on projects. Judging by the way most of them said 'hello' or waved at Margaery Sansa wagered that they were all graduate students like her.

"Well what do you think?" Margaery asked curiously as they reached the end of the greenhouse which was covered with different colors of carnations.

"I can't believe you get to come here every day." Sansa admitted, running her fingers softly over one of the petals closest to her.

"It's not closed off to other students you know. You can come here whenever you want too." Margaery reminded her with a laugh.

Sansa smiled sheepishly at that. "It would feel like I'm intruding."

"Don't be silly. Beauty like this is meant to be shared." Margaery sighed as she picked a loose petal off of the table beside them. "Honestly I can't imagine not getting to see this whenever I want too. I've become spoiled by it."

"Where do you think you'll go when you graduate?" Sansa asked her curiously, trying to ignore the reminder that Margaery was finished with school at the end of the year.

"I haven't decided honestly." Margaery confessed, leaning back against the table with a wistful sigh. "Part of it depends on where I get a job of course, but I think I'd like to live in a smaller city. I don't think I'll go back to Highgarden but I'll probably end up somewhere in the Reach."

Sansa made a noise of agreement as she fought down the pain of their numbered days. Even if they did begin dating in January and even if things went well with them they'd only have a few months together before Margaery graduated and moved off. But, Sansa reminded herself, they'd already been waiting so long to be together if things worked out between them they could totally handle long distance.

"Do you think you'll go back to Winterfell?" Margaery asked, the wistful look on her face suddenly replaced by curiosity. "What brought you all the way down to King's Landing anyway?"
A bitter laugh escaped Sansa of its own accord. That wasn't a question that she really liked answering. "Well the reason I tell people is that I got offered a scholarship that was too good to turn down."

Margaery's eyebrows quirked up at her phrasing. "What's the real reason?"

"I followed a boy." Sansa admitted with a cringe. She still couldn't believe that she had actually been foolish enough to follow Joffrey across the country.

"Don't look so upset about that fact." Margaery said with a laugh at the pinched expression on Sansa's face.

"Why not?" Sansa asked with a self-deprecating grin, "He's terrible."

"Oh, I don't doubt it but if you hadn't done that we probably never would have met." Margaery countered as she bumped her arm against Sansa's causing a real smile to cross her face.

It was hard to argue with logic like that.

October

Between her study sessions with Margaery, school and her job Sansa had let the shredded remains of her social life fall through the cracks. One of the few people she still saw on the regular was Arya and that was only because she'd fallen into the habit of showing up unannounced on Sansa's doorstep a few days a week. Even though she knew she would never say it Sansa was beginning to suspect Arya was homesick. Sansa was honestly surprised that Arya hadn't transferred to a school closer to home once the last year had ended.

The thought of Arya leaving and the fact that she herself would be done with school in two years had left her with several thoughts of what her future held. She couldn’t seem to get Margaery's question out of her mind, where did Sansa plan on going after graduation? The thought of returning to Winterfell filled her heart with happiness but the thought of going and picking a new city and discovering a new place made her feel the same way. She still had two more years to figure it out of course, nothing had to be decided on today. Even with knowing that Sansa couldn’t seem to shake the question from her mind.

She wanted to talk about the idea of her moving back to Winterfell after graduation with someone but she didn’t want to broach the subject with any of her family members and get their hopes up. She’d only been back home a handful of times since she’d started college and everyone was always getting on her to come home more. Sansa liked to believe that she didn’t go home as often as she should because she was too busy with school but the reality was that until this year it had mostly been because she’d wanted to stay in King's Landing over break to hang out with whoever she was dating at the time.

Sansa knew that if she were to even bring up the idea of her moving back home, or really anywhere in the North, her family would decide that meant she was definitely moving back after graduation and proceed to tell everyone that. They would be so excited by the prospect that they wouldn’t be able to help themselves. And then if Sansa changed her plans that really weren’t even plans yet they would all be so disappointed in her. Probably as disappointed as they were when she decided not to attend her mother’s alma mater in the Eyrie.

After a few days of rolling the idea over and over in her mind Sansa started to feel that if she didn’t discuss it with someone she was going to explode. That was how she found herself after class one afternoon scrolling through her contacts list for someone to bounce the idea of moving home off of.
Most of the contacts she scrolled right past easily, although she did pause to delete a few numbers from her phone in the process. She hadn’t realized she’d still had Harold’s number but she made sure to change that quickly. She debated calling a family friend Brienne but ultimately decided against it. No matter how tight-lipped Brienne was Sansa didn’t want to risk the possibility of it getting back to her mother.

Near the end of her contact list Sansa was beginning to feel a little bit desperate. Her finger was hovering over Theon’s name even though she knew it was a disastrously bad idea. Not only was he sure to spill to Robb (who couldn’t keep a secret from their father to save his life) but Theon gave notoriously bad advice. Sansa was about to bite the bullet and call him anyway when a name at the bottom of her screen caught her eye.

Chewing on her bottom lip Sansa let desperation lead her to push the call button, holding the phone up to her ear and not letting herself pause to think this decision through. Honestly, she was more surprised that she still had his phone number (when was the last time she’d cleared her contact list?) than the fact that she had actually pressed the call button.

Despite the fact that she had called him Sansa still found herself silently praying that she’d be sent to voicemail but he answered on the third ring.

“Sansa Stark. To what do I owe this honor?” even though she hadn’t heard his voice in over three years Sansa found that she could still recognize the amusement in his voice.

“Hi Tyrion, is this a bad time?” she fought to keep the hopefulness out of her voice but she didn’t quite think she succeeded.

“Not at all.” she could practically hear him getting cozy and she could imagine him sipping a glass of wine as he pondered over the possible reasons of her phone call.

Tyrion Lannister was a lot of things, Sansa knew that. She’d never heard a Lannister say anything good about him, with the exception of his brother Jamie, but he had always been kind to Sansa. He’d leaked family business secrets to the press last year effectively shutting down his father’s company but everything Sansa had ever said to him had stayed between them. He was the first person who pointed out Joffrey’s cruelty to her that she had actually believed and the last terrible night that she had ever been inside of the Lannister mansion he’d caused a diversion so she could slip out unnoticed.

It suddenly dawned on Sansa that they hadn’t spoken since that night which made her doubt calling him even more.

“How have you been?” Sansa stalled, chewing on her nails in a habit she had mostly broken except for when she was extremely nervous.

“I’ve been well.” she could hear the chuckle in his voice as he continued, “But I think we both know that you didn’t call me up to catch up.”

“Uh no, you’re right I didn’t.” Sansa admitted, running her hand through her hair. She’d called him for a reason after all, she might as well get to it. “Actually, I was wondering if I could bounce an idea off of you?”

She’d originally called Tyrion because she didn’t have anyone else in her contacts list to talk to but in the end, Sansa found that she was grateful for that fact. He was able to bring up points about moving closer to home that she hadn’t thought of as well as disarming the majority of her fears and misgivings. She didn’t come to any kind of a decision but she felt a lot better just from having talked
about her options with someone who took the conversation seriously.

What she had expected to be a five-minute phone call at best somehow turned into nearly two hours. After they discussed her potential futures after college Tyrion filled her in with all the nitty-gritty details of the lawsuit his father had tried to file against him. He also told her about the new woman he was dating which of course led to a discussion about Sansa’s love life. She found herself admitting to him that she wasn’t dating and then after he asked why she spilled everything, from the resolution to the flowers to Margaery. The more they talked Sansa found herself wondering if all those years ago that Tyrion hadn’t just been her ally but her friend. She made a silent promise to herself that she would start calling him every month so that another three years didn’t go by before they spoke again.

In the end no grand decisions were made but Sansa felt ten pounds lighter just getting some of the things she’d said off of her chest to someone who would just listen without judging her. She could hear a lightness in Tyrion’s voice that hadn’t been there at the start of their conversation as he bid her farewell so he could get ready to meet up with his date. He left her with one last bit of advice before they parted ways, “Just remember Sansa, you have to follow your heart in all of this. You’ve always been good at that.”

XxX

Sansa’s original plan for Halloween was to hang out at her apartment and hand out candy to the few kids who lived in the building and stopped by her door on their way out to trick or treating. Afterwards she was going to curl up on the couch with a bowl of popcorn and B-list horror movies that she would watch with the lights on. However, she wasn’t even fifteen minutes into the first film of the night when rapid knocking on her door drew her attention.

Sighing, Sansa stood up to go and let Arya in but when she opened the door she was surprised to have Jeyne be the one pushing past her into the apartment. Sansa couldn’t help but wonder what it was about her house that made no one wait to be invited in.

"You are not wearing that tonight." Jeyne said before she was even all the way in the door as she eyed Sansa's pink pajamas with cats printed on them with distaste.

Sansa crossed her arms and fought down a smart remark since Jeyne was wearing a tight black jumpsuit with cat ears perched on her head. She’d thought she’d seen a tail as she’d walked past as well.

"What's wrong with my pajamas?" Sansa chose to ask instead as she shut the door behind her.

"You can't wear that to a party!" Jeyne cried in outrage.

"I'm not going to a party." Sansa reminded her calmly. They’d had this discussion three times this past week alone. Sansa just wasn’t in the mood for parties anymore. They no longer felt like her scene.

"Yes, you are." Jeyne said forcefully, placing her hands on her hips and glaring at Sansa with her eyes narrowed. "You didn't go out with me at all last semester. I know you've got this whole all study and no play thing going on right now but enough is enough girl! You need a night out."

"I really don't." Sansa said with a sigh even though a small part of her was heavily agreeing with Jeyne. They were already on the second month of the semester and she hadn’t gone to a single party or even a bar. She’d gotten used to going to other places by herself but for some reason she just couldn't get herself to go to those. She’d didn't think that she would be tempted to do anything with anyone, her heart was set on Margaery no matter how much she had tried for it not to be.
"Yes, you do." Jeyne said in a no-nonsense voice that was usually reserved for her little brother. "You have to have something that can pass as a costume." Jeyne called over her shoulder as she headed in the direction of Sansa's bedroom.

Still mumbling protests Sansa hurried after her, mainly to prevent Jeyne from turning her room inside out than to get out of going with her.

XxX

Despite Sansa's many protests and complaints, she still found herself following Jeyne up the steps to a house so overflowing with people that there were people hanging out on the front steps that they had to push themselves around just to enter the building. The inside of the house was no better, Sansa felt like she was being squeezed in on all sides as she wriggled her way through the crowd cheering on a game of beer pong in the front room. She had to fight down a flare of nausea as so many strangers’ sweat brushed against her. Sansa pulled down on her dress nervously as she followed the path Jeyne cut through the crowd to get to the makeshift bar in the kitchen. She pressed a plastic cup filled to rim with beer into Sansa's hand and Sansa accepted it gratefully. The mass of people around her had once been something she'd grown accustomed to but after so long apart from it she felt like her heart was jumping out of her skin in time with the beat of the music.

Sansa followed after Jeyne the best she could to the dance floor and after she finished her first cup of beer she was beginning to feel more relaxed. By the time she'd nearly reached the end of her second she didn't even mind when Jeyne wandered off to flirt with a boy from her statistics class. She'd had a feeling that despite all of Jeyne’s assuredness that she was dragging Sansa out for her behalf it was mainly because she’d needed a wingwoman for the night.

"Nice costume." A voice shout whispered into her ear and Sansa turned in surprise to find Margaery grinning at her from under the brim of a black witch hat.

Sansa pulled self-consciously at the short white skirt of her nurse's costume that Jeyne had unearthed from the back of Sansa's closet. She did not remember it feeling this short when she'd worn it freshman year.

"Thanks." Sansa shouted back in order to be heard over the electronic music pumping through the speakers. Dimly Sansa wondered how much longer the neighbors would wait before they called in a noise complaint. "I like yours too."

Margaery grinned and tipped her hat at Sansa as she stepped closer to be heard better. "I'm surprised to see you here."

Sansa pulled self-consciously at the short white skirt of her nurse's costume that Jeyne had unearthed from the back of Sansa's closet. She did not remember it feeling this short when she'd worn it freshman year.

"Thanks." Sansa shouted back in order to be heard over the electronic music pumping through the speakers. Dimly Sansa wondered how much longer the neighbors would wait before they called in a noise complaint. "I like yours too."

Margaery grinned and tipped her hat at Sansa as she stepped closer to be heard better. "I'm surprised to see you here."

"My friend dragged me out." Sansa admitted looking around with a shrug. Jeyne was nowhere in sight. "I don't even know whose house this is."

Margaery tipped her head back and laughed at that. "It's Loras's and Renly's. Well them and four other people."

"Well that explains why you're here." Sansa said with a grin. She suddenly felt much more at ease knowing she at least knew some of the hosts of the party. Margaery’s presence didn’t hurt either. "Where are they? I should say hi since I'm crashing their party."

"They're probably off making out upstairs." Margaery dismissed airily with a wave of her hand, nearly stumbling into Sansa as the dancing crowd behind them surged wildly as the tempo increased. "This place is packed. Want to go somewhere a little bit quieter?"
Sansa nodded gratefully, casting another look around for Jeyne to let her know where she was going. Not seeing her she followed after Margaery upstairs. A sudden surge of panic made her wonder if Margaery was going to lead her into a bedroom. Sansa highly doubted she could handle being in the same room as Margaery and a bed and not do something to break her resolution. However, Margaery walked past all of the doors on the second floor and instead lead the way up a ladder to what Sansa suspected was the attic. Climbing the ladder was extremely difficult in their dresses as Sansa had to use all of her self control not to look up as Margaery headed up before her. Grateful that no one was underneath her Sansa let Margaery reach down and give her a hand up into the room.

Judging by the slanted walls and short ceiling the room they were in had in fact once been an attic. It had been converted into a kind of game room it seemed, there were two couches shoved against one wall and a large television with several different game consoles against the other. Sansa was surprised that only a few people were in the room, she'd expected it to be overflowing like the rest of the house. A guy dressed up as an astronaut called out a welcome to Margaery as they came further into the room.

"The guys don't like people they don't know coming upstairs." Margaery explained to Sansa as she carefully stepped past the people playing videogames to the far side of the room. Sansa followed after her curiously, she'd thought that this room was their destination but Margaery made no move to sit on any of the vacant seats. She didn't come to a stop until she reached a small window that she unlatched and pushed open before shooting a smile over her shoulder at Sansa.

"Do you trust me?" Margaery asked, barely giving Sansa time to wonder over the question before she slipped out of the window.

Sansa felt her stomach bottom out and she suddenly felt very sober as she darted to the window and looked down, half expecting to see Margaery's broken body on the pavement far below them. Instead she found Margaery perched carefully on the slated roof, one hand bracing herself against the roof and the other reaching back for Sansa.

"You could have warned me." Sansa berated her before sitting on the edge of the window ledge and swinging her legs out into the cold night air. She tried not to flash Margaery as she did so but she had a feeling she wasn't quite successful. She let Margaery take her hand as she crept out onto the ledge, squeezing Margaery's hand and holding her breath as she dared a look over the edge.

"That's a pretty nasty fall." Sansa whispered breathlessly. She wasn’t afraid of heights but the sight of the ground so far below them still left her feeling a little light headed.

"Good thing we're not planning on falling." Margaery whispered back as Sansa settled next to her. She waited a moment longer before letting go of her hand and Sansa felt her fingers brush against her palm as she let go. The noise of the party was much quieter up here and the voices of the people in the room behind them were only a distant hum.

"It's beautiful out here." Margaery whispered, looking out at the lights of the city.

"Do you ever miss stars?" Sansa asked curiously, craning her neck back to peer up at the dark sky. With so much light pollution around them Sansa could only see three, maybe four stars above them. Half of which she supposed were actually airplanes or satellites.

"All the time." Margaery laughed as she pulled her knees to her chest. "But the city is beautiful too. The lights are like their own kind of stars."

"I never thought of it that way." Sansa admitted as she cast another look out at the lights sprawling endlessly before them. She could see what Margaery meant, if she squinted the vast ocean of lights...
before them could almost pass for the night sky in Winterfell, just brighter and much closer.

“It’s good to change our perspective of things sometimes.” Margaery said, not taking her eyes off the city. “That’s what my grandmother says at least.”

“Well, like I’ve said she is very wise.” Sansa smiled as she felt Margaery’s gaze turn to her. She stared at the lights for a moment more before turning to face her. She’d tipped her witch’s hat up so that it just perched on her hair and even with all of the dark makeup on her face Sansa still thought she was the most breathtaking woman she’d ever seen.

Tyrion’s words from earlier that month about following her heart echoed in her head and Sansa knew in that moment that she would follow Margaery anywhere. Every time that she thought she had reached the cusp of her feelings for Margaery, that they couldn’t possibly go any deeper than they already did, she would do something that made Sansa fall for her a little bit more. The noise of the party fell away as Sansa studied the planes of Margaery’s face.

“You’re staring at me.” Margaery whispered, a smile toying at the corner of her mouth.

“You were staring at me first.” Sansa whispered back shifting slightly closer to Margaery as a gust of wind stirred her hair up around her face. The fact that the ground was so very far below them had not left her mind and she wasn’t sure if it was fear or Margaery’s closeness making her pulse race like it was.

“I can’t help it.” Margaery admitted, her voice soft, shifting an inch closer to Sansa. There hadn’t been much space between them to begin with, the awning they were on wasn’t exactly broad. Sansa’s arm rested against Margaery’s, the chiffon of her sleeves scratching Sansa’s bare skin.

“Why not?” Sansa asked, tilting her head closer to hear Margaery’s answer as a loud cheer drifted out the window towards them. It seemed someone had just defeated the boss on the videogame being played inside. Sansa felt like she was about to go fight her own boss level battle. Her wavering self-control versus the overwhelming urge to kiss Margaery on the lips she’d just licked.

“I was taught to always appreciate beauty.” Margaery whispered, turning her head to face Sansa a little more as if she could hear the last few remaining shards of Sansa’s restraint shattering into pieces.

Looking back on it Sansa would never be sure which one of them had leaned in first, just as she would never be sure who stopped first. She just knew that one second they were facing each other with a good half a foot between them and the next their faces were barely centimeters apart.

Sansa could feel Margaery's breath against her lips. Some of the hairs that had fall loose of her ponytail caught in Margaery's exhales and tickled the sides of her face. Sansa knew that if she leaned forward just a fraction of an inch her lips would finally be pressed against Margaery's.

Yet neither of them moved. Sansa felt like she could hear both of their hearts beating in the small space there was between them. This was nothing like when they had almost kissed back in June. That had been fueled by alcohol and lust, the closeness of the dance floor pushing them desperately together. But out here, it was like the rest of the world had fallen away and the beers Sansa had drank early seemed to have left her system. She had never felt more clear headed in her life.

This close to each other it was hard to get her eyes to focus on Margaery's but the sound of her voice tore Sansa’s eyes from her lips up to her eyes which was looking at her softly.

"Kissing isn't dating is it?” Margaery breathed, her lips barely moving because if she moved too
much their lips would be touching.

Sansa wanted so desperately to say yes to that. She wanted to bury her hands in Margaery's soft brown hair and kiss her until they were both breathless. But she knew that if she did that there would be no going back. Her resolution would be done and broken and she was so close to the finish line she could actually taste it. She'd never finished anything important like this before. Everything had always fallen to the wayside or been given up on. Sansa had never been this close to being able to keep her word to herself. She wanted to kiss Margaery so desperately she felt it like an ache inside of her but Sansa knew that she couldn't. Even if they did manage to just keep it to this one kiss Sansa would still know it had happened. She would still have let herself down.

"It would still feel like cheating." Sansa admitted, careful to not brush her lips against Margaery's as she spoke.

"On who?" Margaery whispered, her eyes searching Sansa's.

"Myself." Sansa shrugged, her fingers digging into her knees to keep herself from leaning forward even as she told Margaery the truth.

Margaery smiled at her softly before leaning back slowly like it was physically paining her to do so. "Well we can't have that."

Sansa didn't know how she managed to look so calm and possessed about the whole thing when Sansa felt like her own heart was beating a bruise against her chest. She swallowed down a sick feeling that she was disappointing Margaery as she ran her hands down her legs. They were covered in goosebumps and she didn't know if it was from the cold or the shivers being so close to Margaery was giving her.

"I'm sorry." Sansa whispered before turning and grabbing hold of the window ledge. It took her a lot more struggle to get back inside than it had coming out and only part of it was because she was doing it by herself this time. Sansa heard Margaery say her name behind her several times but she found that she couldn't get herself to look back at her. She ignored the curious looks the people in the attic gave her as she darted past them towards the ladder.

She wasn't being fair to Margaery. She deserved to kiss as many girls on rooftops as she wanted and now because of Sansa she wasn't getting too. Maybe Margaery didn't regret agreeing to wait for her yet but the feeling would be coming soon. That would have been the perfect spot for a first kiss and Sansa had just ruined it for them.

Swallowing her anger at herself Sansa made her way through the crowd scattered throughout the house and pushed her way outside. Taking a deep breath of the cool night air Sansa couldn't resist turning and casting a look over her shoulder as she approached the sidewalk. Margaery was still sitting on the roof where Sansa had left her. Even from this distance Sansa could feel her eyes on her and she knew the confusion she must be feeling. A deep pool of shame began to form in Sansa's stomach as she wrapped her arms around herself and headed off in the direction of home.
So when I said the story would be finished by the end of the year I was clearly lying. I didn't mean to, I promise!
I really did intend to post this ages ago but I was never completely satisfied with the ending until now.
Thank you all so much for your kind words and encouragement! I hope you enjoy the final chapter.

SOLSTICE

November

The autumnal chill in the air did nothing to match the chill that had taken up residence in Sansa’s chest. Sansa had not thought it was possible to feel shame like it was a living breathing thing. A ball had formed in her stomach, composed out of guilt, shame and regret. It seemed to grow larger with every breath that she took, it drew strength in the looks that passed between her and Margaery at the coffeeshop.

Work was the one place that she could not avoid Margaery although she tried her very hardest to do so. She volunteered to do all of the dishes, preferring to stay alone in the backroom where the loudness of the dishwasher provided an easy excuse not to have conversations. The minutes before the door was unlocked when it was just her and Margaery opening up were the hardest. Sansa couldn’t seem to find the words to make a sincere enough apology. She felt like she was just stringing Margaery along at this point and yet she did not want to tell her to stop waiting for her. She had never felt so strongly for one person before. She knew that the right thing to do was to tell Margaery to stop waiting for her and go and live her life but Sansa could not seem to find the words anymore.

Sansa had skived off their weekly study sessions out of desperation. She could barely handle being at work with Margaery, she knew that being cramped in a small room with her would only end in disaster. She was trying to spare them both anymore unnecessary heartache.

However, it didn’t seem like Margaery had gotten the memo.

Sansa was fleeing work one morning and when she pulled her bag out of the cubby it was in a red rose floated down to the floor. It had been tucked into the cubby with her bag. Sansa stared down at it in surprise. She didn’t deserve any more flowers just as she didn’t deserve Margaery’s patience. She bent down to pick it up, running her fingers over the slightly crushed petals.

“Are you ever going to stop avoiding me?” Margaery asked softly from the doorway.

Sansa jumped and pricked her hand on a thorn on the rose as she did so. She hadn’t even heard Margaery come in. She felt like denying that she was avoiding her at all but they would both know what a lie that was and Sansa had already put Margaery through enough, she didn’t need to be lying to her too.
“I just feel so ashamed.” Sansa finally admitted, preferring to say the words to the rose than to Margaery herself. A bright spot of blood had formed on her palm and Sansa stared at it with fascination. She could see Bella peering at them curiously over Margaery’s shoulder and Sansa wanted the floor to open up right then and there.

“What on earth for?” Margaery asked, taking a step inside the backroom so that the door swung shut behind her leaving them alone. “I was the one that was out of line that night.”

Sansa’s head shot up so fast she felt her neck pop. “What?”

“I should never have brought you somewhere we would be alone together. I should have known what would happen—”

“You’re joking right?” Sansa asked wearily, certain that Margaery was teasing her. When she shook her head ‘no’ Sansa was surprised by a sudden flare of anger coursing through her. How dare Margaery blame herself in all of this? It wasn’t her fault that Sansa had this resolution and it wasn’t her fault that they had almost kissed. Sansa was a grown woman who was perfectly capable of accepting the responsibility of her actions.

“This is so not your fault.” Sansa said hotly. “I knew we would be alone the moment I followed you out onto the roof and I did it anyway. I feel terrible for rejecting you. I almost kissed you because I—” Sansa cut herself off at the amused look forming on Margaery’s face. “What?” she asked in exasperation.

“Sorry.” Margaery said with a grin that made Sansa think that she wasn’t really very sorry at all. “I’ve just never seen you mad before. It’s really cute.”

Sansa rolled her eyes and tossed the rose at her. Margaery caught it easily and began to pull the thorns off the stem with careful movements.

“Please don’t be blaming yourself for something I had a part in.” Sansa finally whispered, causing Margaery to look up from the flower and back at her.

“I won’t, if you agree that you won’t either.” Margaery said softly as she worked the thrones out of the stem slowly.

“I can’t keep asking you to wait for me.” Sansa whispered. She wanted to say the words louder but it was hard enough for her to get them to leave her lips at all.

“You keep saying that but Sansa, you never asked.” Margaery sighed in exasperation, looking back up at Sansa. Her eyes were soft as she reminded her, “I volunteered.”

“I still feel guilty.” Sansa admitted with a shrug before looking down at her feet.

“Would you like me to stop sending the flowers? Would that help?” Margaery asked, her voice full of patience. Sansa had no idea what she had done to deserve this amazing woman being so kind to her.

“No.” Sansa said after a moment of thought. “I like the flowers.”

“I’ll keep sending them, then.” Margaery smiled as she looked down at the now thorneless rose in her hands. “For however long it takes.”

“It’s just not fair to you.” Sansa protested with a shake of her head. How could Margaery not see that? “I tell you one moment that I’m not dating this year and the next moment I’m trying to kiss you
on a rooftop. How is your head not spinning in circles by this point?”

Margaery stepped forward with a smile, reaching up to tuck the rose behind Sansa’s ear. She made certain to keep a bit of space between their bodies for which Sansa was very grateful.

“My head has always been spinning in circles when I’m with you Sansa.” Margaery confided, her fingers trailing through Sansa’s hair as she lowered her hand. “You have that affect on me.”

XxX

After their heart to heart at the coffeehouse things between her and Margaery thankfully fell back into their routine. Sansa couldn’t remember the last time she had felt so at ease with a person. Nor could she remember the last person that she had fought with that didn’t bring the fight up days later to make her feel guilty. Although she supposed it hadn’t really been a fight at all, simply a misunderstanding. It was nice to not have it thrown back in her face though, not that she had really expected Margaery to do so. It was just nice to have it proved to her once again how wonderful Margaery truly was.

Their study sessions were back on with a vigor. Margaery was clearly feeling the pressure of finals as strongly as Sansa was. They were still over a month away but Sansa was of the mindset that finals were something that one could never be overprepared for. She had already started a rigorous study plan. Margaery was working on her thesis as well as her coursework so she had taken to joining Sansa nearly every night at the library. They didn’t talk much during their study sessions but it was still nice to have some company.

In the quiet moments of the library Sansa would sometimes put her books down for a moment to rest her eyes or to simply absorb what she had just read. She would often use that time to study Margaery who would be working diligently, her brown hair cascading down over one shoulder. Sansa couldn’t wait until January where she could finally act on her desire to reach forward and touch it.

She couldn’t help but wonder if Margaery was counting down the days like she was. Sansa had taken to crossing off each day on her calendar before she went to bed so that she could have further proof that she was one step closer to the new year. One step closer to Margaery.

The study sessions still sometimes felt like she was cheating on her resolution but since they spent the majority of the night in silence and both of them would be studying even if the other person wasn’t there Sansa decided she would let it slide. It wasn’t like her and Margaery were touching or anything so Sansa didn’t think that she needed to worry about it too much. She made sure that they both kept their distance and that the conversation didn’t stray to anything too serious. She wanted to make it clear that this was just study sessions between friends and nothing more. Not that she thought Margaery needed the reminder, that was purely for Sansa herself.

She had never thought that she would be content to have a first date with someone be in the library but that was before she had met Margaery. If Margaery wanted to pick up trash in the park for their first date Sansa would happily agree to it.

Margaery had mentioned the affect Sansa had on her but sometimes Sansa didn’t think that she realized the affect she had on Sansa as well.

XxX

“Wow that is a lot of yarn.” Robb commented dryly as he surveyed the overflowing basket sitting beside Sansa’s couch.
“She’s turned into a knitting mad woman.” Arya said as she flopped onto the couch and rolled her eyes when Sansa stuck her tongue out at her. For whatever reason whenever more than two of the Stark children were around each other they all seemed to revert back to childhood.

“Don’t make fun of my knitting or neither of you are getting Christmas gifts this year.” Sansa huffed as she sat down on the windowsill. Robb laughed and shoved Arya’s feet to the floor so he could sit beside her on the couch.

“Let me guess, you knitted us something?” Robb asked with a grin, laughing as he held up his hands to ward off the pillow Sansa threw at him.

Robb was in town for the weekend for a conference their father had sent him down to attend. He had been working for their father since he graduated college from the University of Winterfell. Robb had never shown any desire to leave Winterfell which Sansa personally thought was very sweet of him. Their father liked to send him to conferences in his stead though so that Robb could at least see a little bit of the world. Personally, Sansa thought that it was also because their father hated to travel and he really hated to be without his wife for too long.

A musical tinkling noise suddenly cut through their laughter as Arya pulled her phone out of her pocket. Ignoring the fact that their brother only had a short amount of time to spend with them before he had to get back to work Arya darted out into the hallway to answer the phone call.

Robb watched her run off curiously before turning back to Sansa. “Dad wanted me to mention to you that we’re planning on adding a new department at the company pretty soon. It should be up and running within the year.”

“Oh, that’s exciting!” Sansa replied although she wasn’t sure why Robb was bringing it up. She’d talked to their father just the other day and he hadn’t mentioned anything.

“Yeah, and there will be lots of jobs to fill in case you were interested in moving back home.” Robb said with a shrug that he was trying far too hard to make casual.

Sansa couldn’t help but smile at him. She had been so stressed not that long ago about where she would go when she graduated and she still wasn’t sure. She found herself very grateful she hadn’t mentioned her thoughts on moving back to Winterfell to anyone in her family.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Sansa said softly. She didn’t know where she wanted to end up yet but there was no point in hurting her family’s feelings or getting hopes up until she did.

Robb nodded quickly, it was clearly not the answer he had been hoping for but he still looked a bit more relaxed now that he had done what their father had likely asked him to do. Eddard Stark was always having other people try to convince Sansa to come home. He had never wanted her to go to King’s Landing in the first place and after Joffrey and her broke up he didn’t understand why she wouldn’t come home. Sansa hadn’t had the heart to tell him that she was too ashamed to face everyone. They had told her what a bad idea moving here was and she hadn’t listened to them. She had stayed at King’s Landing to prove a point, but she still didn’t know if that point was to her family or herself.

“So, how’s the love life these days?” Robb asked, glancing around her apartment as if someone was suddenly going to spring out of the cupboards. “Are you seeing anyone? Do you have anyone special in your life?”

Sansa bit down a laugh at that. Robb was clearly desperate to change the subject, he hated talking about love lives with his siblings. Poor thing didn’t realize what a can of worms he had just opened.
“No, and yes.”

December

“Do you think Rickon would wear this?” Arya asked holding a bright orange wool hat with pompoms on the tassels up and eyeing it curiously.

Sansa looked at her warily, not entirely sure if she was joking or not. Their little brother was known for wearing bright and outrageous outfits but that was a bit much even for him.

“Probably not.” Sansa said gently holding back a sigh of relief when Arya only grumbled a little before placing it back on the shelf.

The Stark sisters were taking a much-needed break from studying to pick up the last few Christmas gifts they needed. Well, the last few gifts Arya still needed to buy. Sansa had made all of her gifts for everyone on her list this year. It was the last weekend before finals week so the crowd inside of the stores was mostly devoid of students and Arya and Sansa were shouldering their way past screaming children and frazzled looking parents inside of over caffeinated young adults.

“Have you seriously got all of your shopping done already?” Arya asked for the third time as she sniffed curiously at a bottle of cologne. Sansa didn’t know who she’d had in mind for the bottle but judging by the look of disgust on her face no one would be getting that as a gift from her this year.

“I’ve told you I didn’t have to do any shopping, I made all my gifts.” Sansa reminded her, she was trying to keep her patience with her sister but it was beginning to run thin. The crowd was only getting thicker and Arya seemed in no hurry to get her shopping list done that evening. Sansa had a feeling that she was doing this more as an excuse to not study than anything else. Sansa was all in favor of a break but she still wanted to revise her literature notes one more time before she went to sleep that evening.

“You’re crazy. That’s way too much work.” Arya grumbled as she threw a pair of socks patterned with dragons into the shopping cart that she had been riding on more than pushing. She had nearly bowled over an old woman two aisles back and Sansa had had to grab onto the back of her coat and pull her to a stop to prevent an accident.

“It’s certainly cheaper though.” Sansa said as she eyed the many items in the cart. She had no idea her sister had so many people to buy gifts for.

“Since when do you care about things being cheaper?” Arya asked curiously.

“Since I started working.” Sansa retorted defiantly.

“Please we both know you haven’t kept that job for the money. That’s just a bonus.” Arya said with a laugh that Sansa chose to ignore. Arya studied a pack of pens very intensely and she tried to keep her voice nonchalant as she asked, “Speaking of your job have you had any more clues as to who might be leaving you the flowers?”

Sansa found herself suddenly enthralled with a selection of neckties as she tried and failed to fight down a blush. She hadn’t been able to bring herself to tell Arya who had been leaving the flowers for her. It opened up too many doors she didn’t feel like dealing with yet. Realizing that she couldn’t avoid telling her the truth any longer Sansa whispered in defeat. “Actually, I found out it’s been Margaery.”

To her surprise Arya didn’t launch into a tirade or tell her to quit her job. Instead she did something Sansa did not expect, rolling her eyes and muttering under her breath, “Finally.”
“You knew?” Sansa asked in shock trying to ignore the slight sting of betrayal she felt. How could Arya know something like that and not tell her?

“I assumed.” Arya admitted with a shrug. She looked up in time to see the hurt look Sansa was giving her and rolled her eyes again. “I’ve kind of figured it was her since the Rose Festival.”

“And you didn’t say anything to me?” Sansa asked in shock.

“It wasn’t my place.” Arya muttered, looking uncomfortable. “Besides, I’m kind of surprised it took you this long.”

Sansa felt her blush deepen as Arya rolled her eyes at her again. How was she supposed to have known it was Margaery?

It seemed her sister wasn’t letting her off the hook yet as she continued, “For someone so smart Sansa you sure can be pretty clueless.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Sansa asked defensively.

“It means that Margaery is literally studying flowers and you never guessed it was her.” Arya shook her head with a sigh. “Add in the fact that she is obviously crazy about you, I can’t believe it took you this long. How did you finally find out? Did you catch her in the act?”

Sansa silently cursed her red headed genes for her blush as she cursed her sister out loud for laughing at her and simply knowing her too well.

XxX

Finals were finally over and Sansa could feel the relief of them being done like a physical weight off of her shoulders. She hadn’t realized how stressed out she had been until it was over. She spent the week after they were done at work but she didn’t mind at all. Without the stress of knowing that she should be studying for tests her shifts seemed to go by much quicker.

“Sansa wait up a minute!” Margaery called as Sansa put on her coat to head home. Her shift was over and she needed to go home to pack. Her and Arya were set out to leave the next morning for Winterfell where they would spend a week of the holiday break with their family.

Margaery followed her into the back room and dug in her bag as Sansa waited patiently, half expecting her to pull out a flower. Instead she found herself surprised when Margaery pulled out a red wrapped package. The store had a long-standing tradition of doing Secret Santa for Christmas gifts and Sansa knew for a fact that Margaery didn’t have her because she had heard Podrick asking Bella yesterday whether or not Sansa liked chocolate. Besides, even if Margaery did have her, they weren’t doing the gift exchange until everyone got back from their vacations. Shae had this weekend off and Sansa was leaving in the morning and Margaery was leaving the day after her. Bella was leaving the day after that. There wasn’t much point to do their party when half the staff wouldn’t be there.

“I know we weren’t supposed to be giving anyone else but our secret Santa gifts but I couldn’t resist.” Margaery said with a smile as she pressed the gift into Sansa’s hands. Judging by the shape and feel of it in her hands she would wager that it was a book. Sansa didn’t care what it was, the fact that Margaery had thought of her at all made her heart swell with joy.

“I actually have something for you as well.” Sansa admitted sheepishly, looking down at her feet. “I already snuck it into your bag.”
Margaery looked at her in surprise before peeking into the front pocket of her bag. The small green wrapped package Sansa had snuck in there sat innocently atop her things. Margaery laughed and looked up at her in surprise.

“I took a page out of your book with the flowers.” Sansa admitted with a shrug causing Margaery’s smile to widen.

“We shouldn’t open them until Christmas.” Margaery sighed which Sansa agreed with. She wanted to rip the paper off the package in her hands almost as much as she wanted to run her hands through Margaery’s hair. She was growing so very tired of waiting where Margaery was concerned. The fact that there was only a little more than a week left to go until her resolution was over was not lost on her.

As if Margaery could feel the thought running through Sansa’s mind, she cleared her throat. “When do you get back again?”

“New Year’s Eve.” Sansa said slowly. It had been Arya’s idea to wait to leave until right before Christmas and then stay later. She’d said it worked better for her schedule but Sansa had a feeling it was mainly so Sansa wouldn’t be around Margaery in the last week before her resolution was over. There was no point to test her already stretched thin self-control any more than she already had.

“You know I don’t expect you to start dating me or anything at the start of the year right Sansa?” Margaery asked shyly, suddenly pulling Sansa from her thoughts. “If you wanted to keep this not dating thing going a little longer, or if you need more time, I totally understand.”

“Thank you.” Sansa said in surprise. She had not been expecting Margaery to offer such a thing. Margaery’s concern was appreciated but not needed. Sansa didn’t want to wait any longer, she barely had it in her to make it to the end of the week. “I’ll keep that in mind. But it’s totally not necessary.”

Margaery tucked a strand of hair behind her ear as she shifted her feet nervously. “Do you have any plans for New Year’s Eve when you get back? What time do you guys fly in?”

“We get in late afternoon. I don’t have any official plans yet.” She didn’t mention that she had been leaving the night open in the hopes that she could meet up with Margaery that evening. If Margaery hadn’t offered anything, she likely would have ended up at home alone or with Arya ringing in the new year.

“Loras and Renly are having a party. You should stop by. It won’t be nearly as big as their Halloween party.” Margaery added, clearly seeing the look of unease on Sansa’s face. She wanted to spend time with Margaery and she liked Loras and Renly a lot but their Halloween party had been a bit too packed for her taste. But if Margaery was at the party Sansa did not care if the entire population of King’s Landing was in attendance.

“If you’re going to be there, I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

XxX

“Ouch, Theon that’s my foot!” Sansa cried in pain as her adopted brother crunched on her toes in his haste to pull her and Arya into a hug at the same time.

“My face does not need to be in your armpit!” Arya cried out, her voice muffled by the fabric of his shirt.

“I haven’t seen you two in over a year and a half and that’s the kind of welcome I get?” Theon
grumbled light-heartedly as he stepped out of the way for the others to come and hug them. The next few minutes were a mess of hugs and dogs parking and tails hitting Sansa painfully in the thighs as the dogs got wound up from all of the excitement. She couldn’t remember the last time all of the Stark children had been under one roof, judging by the looks on her parents’ faces she wasn’t the only one thinking that.

“How was your flight? Not too bumpy I hope?” Catelyn asked, brushing some of Sansa’s hair back out of her face.

“It was fine.” Arya said from where she sat on the floor with Nymeria in her lap. The dog was nearly as big as Arya, it was a wonder it could sit on her without knocking her over. Sansa felt her usual stab of longing for Lady that she always felt when she saw her siblings’ dogs.

Catelyn looked down at her with a smile before reaching forward and pulling Sansa into another hug. “I am just so glad you two are finally home.”

The next morning Sansa was startled awake by a weight suddenly flinging itself onto her bed. “It’s Christmas morning! You have to get up!” Rickon cried as he bounced on his knees a few times before another weight joined them on the bed. Before Sansa could but her hands up to protect her face Shaggydog had already licked a trail of drool from her chin to her eyebrow.

“I’m up, I’m up!” she cried in protest, trying to shove the dog off of her and sit up. Instead she was joined by yet another dog as Summer sped into her room and leaped onto the bed to join in the merriment.

“Bran, call off your dog!” Sansa cried as she pulled her pillow over her head as the dogs continued to try to bathe her with their tongues. Her nose wrinkled at the smell of their breath even with the pillow between them.

“They want you to get up so they can open presents!” Bran called from the foot of the bed. Sansa lifted the pillow enough to glare at him from underneath the edge of it.

“I can’t get up if they’re on top of me!”

“Spoilsport.” Bran laughed before whistling for Summer to join him. He hopped down and went to Bran’s side immediately while Rickon tried to wrestle Shaggydog back off the bed. Sansa stood up the moment the dogs were off of her, trying to rub her face dry on her shirt as she did so.

“What a warm Stark welcome to Christmas morning.” Bran said with a grin, ignoring the glare Sansa gave her younger brothers when she noticed the time on the clock beside her bed. She knew that her brothers were still young and should retain some of the magic of waking up early on Christmas morning for a few more years but really? Waking her up before five was just cruel.

“Am I the last one up?” Sansa asked with a sigh as she pulled on her bathrobe.

“Are you kidding? You’re the easiest one to wake up. That’s why we got you first.” Rickon said as he let go of Shaggydog’s collar. He ran straight towards Sansa, headbutting her legs until she reached down to scratch behind his ears.

“You get to help us wake the others.” Bran added with a mischievous smirk.

Sansa didn’t mind so much how early it was anymore.

XxX
Christmas passed in a blur of strewn wrapping paper and cookie decorating and a particularly terrifying few minutes when it appeared that Grey Wind had eaten part of a Lego set when really, he had just nudged it with his nose under the couch. Robb had been in the midst of dialing the vet when Ygritte had found the pieces.

Everyone loved the scarves Sansa had knitted for them and their father commented more than once on how much better her knitting skills had gotten. Amid all of the chaos Sansa didn’t have a moment to herself to think about the present Margaery had given her until after dinner. Once everyone began to turn in for the night and Sansa made her way back to her room, she dug the package out of her suitcase and cradled it in her hands as she sat down on her bed.

She could hear Arya and Jon laughing in the next room but she let it fade into background noise as she settled against her pillows, running her fingers over the carefully folded corners of the gift Margaery had picked out just for her. She almost didn’t want to open it because opening it would mean that the anticipation was over. What if the thing that she was waiting for wasn’t as amazing as she thought it would be?

But it was from Margaery so Sansa knew that whatever it was she would love it. Slowly, Sansa ran her fingernail underneath the edge of the tape, peeling back all of the corners on the package back so painfully slow that if any of her siblings had been in the room with her, they would have thrown things at her by now. Holding her breath Sansa pulled the paper from the package revealing a book, just like she had known all along.

It was a light purple book with an image of a sun flower on it and the title above read, The Language of Flowers. Sansa ran her fingers down the cover with a light laugh. She should have known.

Nestling deeper into her pillows Sansa flipped the book open intent on reading up about all of the flowers Margaery had been leaving her, curious to know if the information she found online had been correct. She stopped at the sight of Margaery’s familiar scrawl on the inside cover.

Sansa,

You deserve all of the flowers in the world.

I hope I’ll have the chance to give them to you.

Margaery

Xxx

After finding the inscription in the book the rest of the break seemed to both drag on and pass too quickly. Sansa was very happy to be back spending time with her family and she had a great time with them but whenever there was a lull in conversation, she always found her thoughts drifting back to Margaery. She knew that Margaery had told her that she would keep waiting for her but Sansa was more than done with waiting. She didn’t know how she was going to be around Margaery on New Year’s Eve and manage to wait until midnight. Every time those thoughts came into her head, she would whisper a silent thank you to Arya for making them stay at Winterfell as long as they were.

By the time the day came for them to head home Sansa found that as much as she wanted to go back to King’s Landing she still wanted to stay in Winterfell as well. It wasn’t the places themselves that she found herself longing for, just the people. If only she could get every person she cared about to stay in the same city. That would be her ideal home.
She managed not to cry during the goodbyes at the airport but only just barely. She let Arya lead the way through security as she waved goodbye over her shoulder.

Their flight had originally been scheduled to land in King’s Landing at four in the afternoon but the flight before theirs had been delayed with some bad weather at Storm’s End. Sansa found herself torn between cursing the delay and being thankful for it. She could count the hours she had left until her resolution was over on her hands now. That knowledge kept her pacing at their gate for hours. By the time their plane finally arrived and they were able to board their new arrival time was nine o’clock.

Sansa still wasn’t sure how she managed to make it through the flight without going crazy or driving her seat mates mad enough to attempt to throw her off the plane. She felt so jittery she wouldn’t have really blamed them if they tried. Landing and baggage claim all became a blur to her and before she knew it, they were in a taxi headed towards her apartment where Arya was staying with her over break as her dorm was closed for the holiday.

“What are you doing tonight?” Sansa asked, partly out of curiosity but mainly to distract herself from how little time she had left. She only had a little over two hours to go. At the beginning of the year that would have felt like nothing but now it felt like a lifetime.

“Oh, I figured I would just tag along with you.” Arya said nonchalantly causing Sansa to look at her in shock. She didn’t care if Arya wanted to hang out with her but it was going to put a bit of a damper on her plans tonight. “I’m kidding.” Arya grinned as she caught the look on Sansa’s face. “I’m going to the bars with Gendry.”

“Is Gendry your boyfriend?” Sansa couldn’t stop herself from asking as they pulled up the curb in front of her building.

“Shut up.” Arya blushed as she got out of the car. Sansa bit back her smile at the sight of red on her sister’s cheeks and the fact that her answer hadn’t been a no.

Her heart began to speed up as they carried their bags up to the apartment and it had nothing to do with physical exertion. Less than two hours to go now. She needed to change and head out to the party. Her original plan was to shower off the feeling of traveling but there was no time for that now. She felt like Cinderella, only in her version she stopped being a pumpkin at midnight instead of turning into one. Sansa changed faster than she had ever changed for anything in her life, whispering a silent thank you to her past self for planning and laying out her outfit before she left.

She was headed towards the door, trying to pull on her coat and put on her shoes at the same time when the sound of Arya clearing her throat stopped her.

“Before you go, I just wanted to say-” Arya frowned as she hesitated, her nose scrunched up like it always did when she talked about personal things. Sansa paused in her struggling to look at her sister in surprise. Arya had never gotten the scrunched-up face when talking to her before. “I just want to say that I’m proud of you for sticking to your resolution.” she blurted in a rush, as if she didn’t get it all out in one breath it wasn’t coming out at all.

“Thank you.” Sansa said in surprise. That had to be the nicest thing her sister had ever said to her. “And thank you for helping me keep it.”

Arya shrugged like it was no big deal, before shoving her hands in her coat pockets and grinning at Sansa. “No problem. Now get out of here and go and get your girl.”

XxX
Sansa chose to walk to the party instead of taking a cab. She knew that New Year’s Eve was a dangerous night for a girl to be out walking alone but she was so hyped up with adrenaline she couldn’t stand the idea of sitting still in a car. Besides, she felt like she could take on the whole world at the moment. She could defeat anything that tried to keep her from getting to Margaery.

She came up to the house both quicker than she thought she would and after what felt like ages. She wondered if that was how the rest of the night was going to feel, like no time was passing at all and yet going by at top speed. There was less than thirty minutes until midnight, less than thirty minutes until Sansa’s resolution was over. She had never felt such a sense of anticipation in her entire life.

The steps leading up to the house were thankfully clear this time and Sansa hesitated only a moment before knocking on the door. Normally for house parties she knew the protocol was to just go inside but Margaery had said this was a smaller affair.

The door opened almost immediately and Sansa realized that while ‘smaller’ might have meant smaller than Halloween the party was still not a tiny get together. Sansa maneuvered her way through the crowd, scanning it in the search of a familiar face. Sweaty, blurry-eyed faces looked back at her curiously and she got several pieces of confetti tangled in her hair as she got caught in the crossfire of a confetti fight on her way into the kitchen. She let out a grateful sigh of relief as she caught sight of someone she knew.

“Loras!” Sansa called out to be heard over the music she was surprised she hadn’t been able to hear outside. She supposed she probably couldn’t have heard it over the pounding of her own heart.

“Sansa! You made it! Marg will be thrilled!” Loras exclaimed happily, leaning across the counter to try to pull Sansa into a hug.

“Is she still here?” Sansa asked, the thought causing her throat to go dry immediately. She hadn’t thought that by the time she got here Margaery might not still be. Sansa felt a sudden surge of horror as she realized that she hadn’t texted Margaery to let her know that her flight had been delayed. She had a rule of not texting Margaery as she didn’t want to get into the habit of doing so unless it was important and then when it was something important, she completely forgot!

“She’s upstairs!” Loras cried before letting go of her to call out to one of his friends who had just arrived. Sansa called a thanks over her shoulder as she shouldered her way past the crowd again towards the stairs, only barely managing to dodge more flying confetti.

She took the stairs two at a time not even bothering to pause to look in any of the rooms on the second floor as she headed towards the ladder. She already knew where Margaery was going to be. She felt even more grateful about her decision to wear pants as she climbed the ladder as quickly as she dared as her hands started shaking in anticipation. There was no one upstairs when Sansa finally entered the room and for a moment, she felt her stomach drop in disappointment before she realized how cold the room was. Noticing the open window Sansa’s heart began to speed up as she made her way towards it, hardly daring to breath as she neared it. Seeing a familiar mane of brown hair out the window caused her breath to rush out of her in relief.

Margaery turned at the sound, the corners of her mouth twisting up in delight as she saw Sansa sit down on the windowsill to climb out and join her.

“I was beginning to think you weren’t going to make it.” Margaery admitted as she reached her hand out to help Sansa steady herself on the cold roof tiles. She didn’t remember it feeling as cold up here on Halloween and she’d had on far less clothes than.

“My flight got delayed. I’m such a shit, I should have texted you.” Sansa said with a cringe, waiting
for Margaery to admonish her.

“It’s okay, you’re here now.” Margaery replied, nudging Sansa softly with her shoulder. Sansa shook her head at herself, when would she realize that Margaery never acted in the way Sansa was used to people doing?

Sansa turned towards her to apologize but stopped short when she realized that Margaery was wearing her Christmas gift. She had made Margaery a scarf as well, which was maybe not as thoughtful of a gift as hers had been since she had made one for everyone as a gift this year but she had taken extra care with Margaery’s. She had made it twice as long as the others since she’d noticed Margaery was a fan of longer scarves and she had picked a rich green yarn that accented Margaery’s eyes nicely. She had hoped that she would like it but she hadn’t really expected her to wear it, at least not so soon.

“You’re wearing it.” Sansa whispered in wonder, reaching her hand out to run a piece of yarn between her fingers.

“Of course, I am. It’s beautiful.” Margaery said. “Did you like your gift?”

“Yes. It’s perfect.” Sansa breathed looking up at Margaery. She swallowed hard when she noticed how close they were and pulled back a little. Less than ten minutes to go. She could make it.

“How was Highgarden?” she asked, not only to kill the time left until midnight but also because she was genuinely curious. She was curious about everything about Margaery.

“Wonderful. Although it is always a little bit sad to see my grandmother’s garden in the winter, so many of the flowers are dead.” Margaery sighed wistfully.

“They’ll grow back, won’t they?” Sansa asked, wanting to ease the furrow between Margaery’s brows.

“The strong ones will.” Margaery assured her, smiling at her as she nudged her shoulder lightly. “The strong ones always grow back.”

Sansa smiled at her as Margaery asked, “How was Winterfell?”

“Cold and noisy and wonderful.” Sansa said with a grin as she thought of her family. She quietly hoped that next year Margaery would accompany her to Winterfell so that she could experience the knee-deep snow and her brothers Christmas morning wake-up call.

They fell into silence and Sansa couldn’t help but wonder if Margaery was counting down the minutes like she was. They were so close to the new year. Her resolution was so close to being over.

Sansa stared out at the lights of the city before her with wonder. She had never seen a city from such a way before, and she found that she could pick out places after a moment. She recognized the lights and the neon signs; some she even recognized the shapes. She had seen more of the city this past year than she had seen in the two and a half years she been there before. She hadn’t expected such a simple thing as not dating to affect her life so much but it had.

“The lights really do look like stars.” Sansa whispered, recalling the last conversation they had had on the roof together.

Before Margaery could respond the loud cries of the people below them counting down the last minute of the year filled their ears. Margaery smiled at her before joining in on the count, Sansa couldn’t help but beam at her as she did the same. Their whispered voices filled the air as the people
below them cried out “Happy New year!”

Margaery’s fingers brushed Sansa’s against the cold tiles of the rooftop as they listened to the cheers below them drift out into the night.

“Happy new year.” Sansa whispered, her throat suddenly incredibly dry. She resisted the urge to cough as her skin seemed to burn where Margaery touched her.

“Happy new year.” Margaery whispered back, her fingers still just barely brushing Sansa’s.

The fact that it was a new year suddenly hit Sansa as did the fact that her resolution was now over. No, not over. Complete.

She had never finished a resolution in her life before. She had always abandoned them when things got too hard, deciding that since the only person who would be disappointed by her failure was herself it didn’t really matter if she saw them through. Not this time though, this time she had finished it and she had grown more than she had ever expected to by doing so.

“I actually did it.” Sansa mused in shock as she looked out at the city lights. “I actually finished a resolution.”

“I’m really proud of you for sticking with it.” Margaery admitted, causing Sansa to look over at her with a blush already forming on her face even before she saw the proud smile on Margaery’s. “I don’t think that I’ve ever finished a resolution.”

“It’s never too late to start.” Sansa said as she smiled back at her. She kept her eyes on Margaery’s despite the fact that she wanted to look away and downplay her words as she admitted, “I’m glad I did it, you know? It was really hard but it helped me grow a lot. I think that this was something I needed to do.”

“That makes a lot of sense.” Margaery mused, one of her fingers curling around Sansa’s. “Are you glad the year is over?”

“So glad.” Sansa exhaled with relief causing Margaery to giggle at her exuberance.

“And that means your resolution is over too?” Margaery confirmed, her voice suddenly gone husky and Sansa could swear that her pupils dilated as she looked at her.

Sansa nodded slowly, her heartbeat speeding up as she leaned closer to Margaery as if she was drawn to her by some invisible force.

“Thank the Gods.” Margaery whispered before leaning forward to press her lips against Sansa’s.

As their lips met Sansa wound her hands into Margaery’s hair at the nape of her neck, unsure of what was softer, her hair or her lips. The sounds of the people still cheering the start of a new year drifted out the window towards them as they kissed and the only coherent thought that Sansa could form was that the only thing that would make this more romantic was if it started to snow.

Sansa pulled away just far enough to rest her forehead against Margaery’s, happy to find that she was just as out of breath as she was. They smiled at each other as Sansa carefully shifted closer so that there was barely any space left between them.

“I know what my resolution for this year will be.” Sansa whispered gently as she curled her fingers into Margaery’s tresses.
“What is it?” Margaery asked curiously, reaching one of her hands up to hold Sansa’s where it rested against her cheek.

“I’m going to resolve to kiss you every single day.” Sansa promised, running her thumb softly over Margaery’s face as she smiled.

“That sounds like an excellent resolution to me.” Margaery whispered as Sansa leaned in to kiss her again.

Their lips moved against each other like they were made to go together and Sansa found that it was better than any of the kisses she had imagined her and Margaery sharing. She had spent the last year trying to avoid thinking such thoughts but a few always slipped through. Those daydreams were nothing compared to the real thing.

Still kissing her Margaery pressed her back gently, guiding Sansa backwards until she was laying flat against the tiles. In the back of her mind she knew that they were cold but the heat of the woman above her warded off any chill. Sansa kept her arms wound tight around Margaery, not even afraid of the fact that they were laying down on a roof two stories up. She trusted that Margaery would never let them fall.

The only thing Sansa had any intention of falling for was Margaery, but in her heart she knew that she had done that long ago.

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