Battle of the Targaryens
by Winterfelland

Summary

“They are really just an emotionally stunted group of fundamentally flawed people doing a very silly pseudo-job. That's what she's marrying into. So, I hope she likes it. It's going to be weird for her.”

A modern royalty au, inspired by today’s longest running soap opera, where Rhaegar is Charles, Jon the son he and Camilla never had, and the Starks are the long-disposed true heirs of Scotland.

Notes

Behold! One of the 100 reasons I still haven't finished Freia!
This is just something I've had so much fun with creating, combining my love for ASOIAF with my guilty-pleasure for modern royalty. Too many modern au's are USA-set, so I tried my best to make this as British as I possibly could. I also sort of kept the characters of
Aegon and Rhaenys the same as they are in Freia, mostly cause I couldn't really write them any other way. But their relationships are all extremely different.
Sort of based this on this https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9U-rhVp1C and this https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Huab6p5HW0E.
Anything else? Oh yeah, don't take it too seriously.
Chapter Summary

“They are really just an emotionally stunted group of fundamentally flawed people doing a very silly pseudo-job. That's what she's marrying into. So, I hope she likes it. It's going to be weird for her. I would (personally) not marry into the royal family. I'm a commoner, I would not be welcome. Especially after what I just said.”
- John Oliver, commenting on Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's engagement.

When Jon opens the door, he expects a woman in a white ball gown, too much fabric, too much sparkle, lace and bows everywhere, standing in the middle of the room, bright sunlight turning her into a priceless piece of art on spotlight.

Instead, Rhaenys is just sitting in front of her dressing table, a dressing gown over her wedding dress to protect it from any possible stains, and though her hair seems done, there are no diamonds the size of eggs glittering in her updo.

When Jon walks in and closes the door behind him, she looks up and spots him.

“Where’s dad?” He asks, but instead he gets a chuckle from his sister.

“Christ, Jon, you look more dolled up than I do.”

“Mum wanted me to wear the honorable Irish Guard uniform.” he says, looking down at his look of the day, trying to remain somewhat confident.

“Mum knows best.”

“Wait till you see Aegon.” Jon tells her.

“But my mum knows better.” Rhaenys adds with a grin and she allows him to peck her cheek, despite her layers of carefully applied make-up.

“Arianne.” He mutters in an attempt to greeting, nodding at the black-haired girl, sitting on the sofa to Rhaenys’ left, leaning back, skipping through a magazine, chewing gum. She’s also wearing a robe, though he can see most of her pale blue dress. The maid of honour seems nowhere near nervous.

“Hey.” She says, blinking her eyes up at him only for half a second.

Jon glances around the room and in the corner a small flatscreen shows him the happenings in and around the Abbey.

“Look,” he points, “The prince of orange with his orange hair.”

“They’re letting the foreignors in.” Rhaenys says, glancing sideways at the tv, “Mummy is still getting dressed and daddy is discussing the schedule with Connington again, you know how he always likes to go through everything at the last minute.”
“The cars are already outside. Aunt Dany and Drogo are about to depart.” Jon informs her, “Are you nervous?”

“No.” Rhaenys says instantly, “Why should I be? That would make this all so much worse.”

“You can’t control nervousness, it’s an emotion.” Jon says and Rhaenys waves that away.

“Watch me.” She says and then she leans her head down on her arms in front of her on the table, and sighs heavily, shakily.

Jon places a hand on her shoulder and squeezes it, “You look really pretty.” He tells her.

“Thanks.” She mumbles, her face hidden from his view, when she leans up she says, “Mummy said I had to wear the Cambridge’s Lover’s Knot, because they’re giving Willas the Duke of Cambridge title… I’m delaying the moment I’m putting it on cause my neck aches at the idea alone that I’ll have to carry it around for the entire ceremony and that godawful carriage ride.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Jon confesses and Rhaenys points at the tiara on display, lying on a pillow softer than any bed’s.

“I like it.” He tries but Rhaenys only shakes her head.

“I told the make-up artist that I didn’t want to look as if I tried too hard- obviously, she tried too hard. With all these cameras, I’ll end up—“

“You look really really good.” Jon quickly says and he wonders if it helps anyone that he’s putting in all this effort to repeat the words ‘pretty’, ‘nice’ and ‘I like it’, so much. Rhaenys doesn’t even seem to hear him.

“Can’t believe why I agreed to any of this.” She says.

“Cause disagreeing wasn’t an option.” Jon reminds her and the BBC newsman’s voice suddenly, enthusiastically announces the arrival of Rhaenys’ uncles.

He introduces them by their fancy Spanish titles, yet mispronounces Oberyn’s name, makes no mention of his girlfriend slash unofficial life partner as if the woman simply isn’t there, then goes off to explain what physical reason causes His Majesty the king of Spain to have to be wheeled inside.

The arrival of the Spanish gives the man reason to explain how, Rhaenys’ mother being a Spanish infanta, Rhaenys herself has a spot in the Spanish succession, right behind her three cousins and her brother Aegon, because, so the newsman explains, in Spain male come first.

“Terribly old-fashioned, is it not?” He wonders aloud, thankfully, he’s the only one giving commentary, so there’s no one there to debate with him.

Jon rolls his eyes, “What a bloody idiot.” He decides, “He’s commenting on a sodding royal wedding and he believes he gets to judge anything for being old-fashioned?”

“I’ll show him some old-fashioned.” Rhaenys says, and she sits up straight.

“Infanta Arianne will be in the bridal party, we’re told she is the maid of honour. The only adult bridesmaid!” Ted the newsman goes on, “We can also expect the bride’s mother to arrive with her son, Prince Aegon.”
As if she hears the mention, Elia bursts in and groans when she finds Rhaenys still wearing a robe, “Por Amor de Dios! Rhaenys! You’ll be late.” After nearly thirty years, she still has that strong Spanish accent which adds temperament to basically all she says.

“All brides are late at their wedding.” Rhaenys says while her mother pulls her up by her upper-arm, “I wouldn’t dream of being contradicting.”

Jon turns his back on his half-sister and her mother when he hears the BBC lay out the story of what nowadays is popularly referred to as Battle of the Targaryens.

“The princess consort and her son will arrive ahead of prince Aegon and his mother. Not because princess Elia outranks her, but because the prince outranks her... Very very complicated stuff... it’s protocol. In absence of the king her royal highness simply cannot walk ahead of a prince of royal birth. A bit painful and all... of course this is the first time the princess consort and the princess Elia will be together in one room since the divorce, it’s a very very anticipated moment, very.”

Arianne turns the tv off and jumps up from her comfortable seat to hold Rhaenys’ hand as they place the heavy tiara on her head.

Jon turns to watch and then realises she’s taken off her robe to reveal a lacy dress of simplicity and elegance. Or, so he presumes. He knows nothing of fashion. But she looks pretty. Rhaenys always looks pretty, she looks much like her mother. In her braided black bun the diamonds seem to twinkle most, and the whitest white of the dress makes her skin look even more tan than usual. Even though she’s rather short, in full uniform like this, she appears the tallest woman in Britain.

Rhaenys looks at herself as her big, bulging, dark eyes find her own in the reflection of the staring mirror. She doesn’t look happy. Not even close.

Elia takes a step back to admire her beautiful baby girl, she sighs and tears appear in the corner of her eyes...

That’s when Rhaenys sobs and Jon can only catch her just in time before she drops down to the floor, hyperventilating and gasping for air.

“Get me out of this monstrosity!”

“Rhaenys! Rhaenys, it’s okay…”

“No, no, no, I’m not going out there! I’m not doing it!”

“Rhaenys, calm down, breathe…”

“Oh Dios Mío.” Arianne mutters.

Elia starts to reassure Rhaenys is ridiculously rapid Spanish Jon doesn’t understand a word off, so it’s easy to ignore, while he helps his sister to the sofa.

“I can’t... I can’t... I can’t... Lo Siento! Mamá, NO! Por favor!”

“Rhaenys, you’re just nervous!” Elia tells her daughter in Spanish that there’s no going back now.

“I look like a cupcake!” Rhaenys bellows, “Y por que? Por NADA!”

“Careful, the tiara!” Arianne warns.
“Just… get her a plastic sack or something.” Jon tells Arianne, who doesn’t move.

“I had this when I married your father.” Elia says then, “Just nerves.”

Jon’s not sure if he’d describe a panic attack as ‘just nerves’, but he can imagine Elia experienced something close to this 30 years ago. Which… isn’t a good sign.

“I can’t do this.” Rhaenys whimpers.

“Too late.” Arianne says, “Bad luck. Your face is on the tea towels and they’ve sold the china… Everyone important is waiting for you in the church. Too late to chicken out now.”

“Shut up.” Jon tells her.

“Jon, it’s okay, we’ll take care of it.” Elia says and she gently strokes her daughter’s back, basically the only thing she can touch without ruining the hard work.

“I’m-“

“It’s just nerves.”

Rhaenys squeezes Jon’s hand and when he turns to look her in the eye she nods and pulls herself upright.

“I’m better.” She says, breathing out slowly, as if she’s about to meditate, and she accepts the glass of water her mother offers her, “I’m better, I’m fine, I’ll be okay.”

“Do you want me to go and get Aegon?”

“He’s already on his way.” Elia says, “You better go. Your mother is waiting for you downstairs.” Elia gives Jon a friendly though firm look that won’t be argued with, and he realises it’s time for him to leave.

“Good luck.” He says, “Just another thing you’ll just have to get over with.”

Rhaenys nods and actually manages to give him a smile, “I’m better.” She repeats, “Thank you.”

Jon kisses Rhaenys to her cheek, before he leaves the room, runs down the hallway, towards the grand staircase, through some doors until he finds his mother straightening his father’s medals in the courtyard, near the black Bentleys and Rolls-Royces all ready and set to take off to destination.

The king is wearing his red Grenadier Guards uniform, which looks quite a bit like Jon’s, though with a whole lot more décor. His wife is wearing some soft pink assemble with lace ends at the sleeves, neckline and skirt, completed with matching hat. Jon’s mother was never the girl for fascinators, she always says her head is too long for these, but usually Jon just presumes she hates the idea of having a giant fake flower stuck to her head.

“Don’t you two look dashing.”

“Why are you not wearing your RAF uniform?” Rhaegar asks as a way of greeting, “they’re all expecting it.”

“Mum wanted me in this.” Jon stupidly responds.

Rhaegar looks at Lyanna, who grins shamefully, “Well, I just think he looks best in red, that’s all.”
Jon disagrees silently, wishing he could just wear a sodding black suit, as his father goes on, “The RAF won’t like it, he’s been in their active service!”

“But his Irish Guard rank is higher, so I presumed it would make more sense.” Lyanna tries.

“Now none of us will be in RAF uniform, they won’t like it, not one bit.”

“But the Irish will be pleased!” Lyanna says, smile to her face that usually has Rhaegar calm down.

“Viserys is-“

“Oh darling, no military anything would ever want to be honored by that baboon.”

Rhaegar opens his mouth but Jon clears his throat and informs them, “It doesn’t matter, cause I’m really not getting changed now.”

Rhaegar frowns at his son, almost with suspicion, then remembers to ask, “How is your sister?”

“Pretending not to be nervous, afraid of losing her precious reputation, trembling like a leaf, complaining about her make-up, her tiara and her dress… She had a massive panic attack just before I left. She looks good in white though.”

“At least she’s comfortable enough to be herself.” Lyanna says, slight frown on her face but Rhaegar doesn’t think it’s funny.

“Well, I’ll better go wait for her inside.” He announces before pecking his wife’s cheek and hurrying back inside.

“I’d bet good money he’s more nervous than she is.” Jon’s mother proclaims and Jon wants to passionately disagree when his phone buzzes in the pocket of his trousers.

He opens it to see the face of a beaming red-headed girl and he’s just about to answer when his mother smacks his shoulder.

“Put that away! Don’t you dare tell me you were even considering bringing that monster with you to the Abbey, what if it’ll ring?”

“As if anyone is going to try and call me?” Jon moves his phone away from his mum’s grabbing hands, “I think you don’t need to worry bout that.”

“If no one is going to call you there’s no need to bring it along!”

Jon turns his back on his mother, who’s that much smaller the top of her head barely reaches his shoulder so there’s little chance of protesting she has left to do. “Hey.” He says, and he tries not to grin when he waits for her to respond. When she doesn’t, his almost-grin turns into a frown, “Hello?”

There’s silence at the other side of the line, though he hears her breathing, and she takes a moment to, ironically, say, “I didn’t think you’d pick up the phone.”

“We’re just about to leave, really.” He says and he hears his mother scuff behind him.

“Oh… yes.”

“Are you okay?”
“Jon, I didn’t go.” She confesses then, and he hears how hoarse her voice is when she raises it, “I can’t do it, I’m sorry.”

“That’s… that’s okay.” He says and his mother stops her silent protest the moment she hears his voice change, “You can… you can come to the party, I’ll see you there.”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s okay, everyone will be there, no cameras and-“

“I just don’t think I’m ready.”

Jon closes his eyes and sighs, “It’s just a party.” He says then, and he hates himself for his sudden frustration.

“It’s not just a party, Jon.” Ygritte says, and she sounds as annoyed as he feels, “You don’t understand. You have no clue what this is like for me.”

“Right.” He says, he doesn’t. He has no idea what it’s like to have the papers write about you, cameras follow you every move, have the whole world criticise you, carry the weight of the opinion of millions of people who’ve never met you heavy on your shoulders… no clue. He’s got no clue what it’s like to never have that, and then suddenly, one day, get overwhelmed by it. Jon is so used to it, that he sometimes hardly even notices. But for Ygritte… he knows these past few months have been hell. He thought things got better when his father offered to pay her security from his own personal funds, but it only got worse, her father had to contact a drone lawyer though the poor man couldn’t afford it, which was all broadly discussed in the media.

He never thought a girl like Ygritte would give a crap about what anyone thought of her, it’s what mostly attracted him to her in the first place; how extremely indifferent she was about the opinion of those around her. It’s a very attractive trait to find when you’re trying to surround yourself with friends who are not willing to sell intimate details of your life to the tabloids, it’s an even more attractive trait to find when you want to have a girlfriend who’s there because she likes you, which is hard when the people you meet usually know more about you than you’ll ever know about them.

At the end of the day it seems even girls like Ygritte care when you give them the nicknames Pug Nose-Grit and wide-eyed Why-Grit, write articles about the financial issues of their dad being the reason they never got to wear braces to fix their crooked teeth and debate openly whether or not they’ve ever held a hairbrush in their life.

The “Poor girl, she must have so many extreme headaches, with all these nasty things being said about her… especially when your eyes are that far apart, it must be hard to cope!” Comment of an Australian radio woman was badly received even by the English and she was forced to apologize through some pathetically weak twitter post, including sad and guilty smiley emoticons.

And that was just a week ago.

“Baby, listen, it’s Rhaenys’ wedding, you’ll be there as her friend, not my-“

“No, I won’t be there. I’m at home. I’m… I’m wearing my pajamas, I’m not leaving my flat.”

“I mean the party. It’s okay, Rhaenys’ll understand.”

“I don’t care about Rhaenys.”

“Okay well… you can come because… for me?”
I don’t want to, I can’t, Jon I’m sorry.”

Jon feels his mother’s piercing eyes through his back and he straightens it to give her a false façade of comfort, “Look, Ygritte, I know it’s-“

“No.” She cuts him off instantly, “You know nothing Jon Snow.”

She hangs up and Jon drop his phone hand like it holds a thousand stones, not an iPhone, right before he swirls the thing through the courtyard. It drops some fifty feet away, on the sandy gravel, where it, no doubt, rests to die a slow death of uncountable cracks in the glass. Fuck Apple.

He closes his eyes, breathes in deeply, then turns to give his mother a very bright and happy beaming smile.

“Well, let’s go!”

His mother has commented before on Jon’s ‘sudden bursts of aggressiveness’, and he supposes this is what she means.

Lyanna’s wise enough not to ask questions, though, when they get into the car, silently, and let the driver drive them out through the gates, into The Mall, she frowns deeply, and by the time they’ve passed Clarence House, she can no longer hold in a, ‘I never liked her anyway.”

Jon says nothing and raises his hand to awkwardly wave at the crowds. He wants to tell his mother to smile and wave too, because they’ll write about her sour face and say it’s because she hates Rhaenys and the idea of Rhaenys continuing the Targaryen bloodline into the future, Elia’s daughter all that… but even though Rhaegar will have headaches because of it… Lyanna’s always been too much of a rebel to be that good at stage play.

“She was terribly impolite.”

Jon scuffs, “Because you are never?”

That makes her laugh finally and she shakes her head, “It’s not quite the same.”

“How?”

“I never waltzed over your father like a doormat, for starters.”

Jon purses his lips and realises he turns his face forward so they won’t be able to make pictures of his frown, “It wasn’t-“

“You deserve better.” She says and squeezes his knee, after which she finally puts that smile she trains daily on her face, and lifts her hand to wave like the fleshed-out royal she is.

By Horse Guards Road Jon feels his jaw start aching and he rubs his sweaty hands to his upper legs and hides a yawn behind his hand when they drive through Horse Guards Arch. Around Whitehall and the south side of Parliament Square up till Broad Sanctuary it’s absolutely packed with people, of all ages, waving Union Jack and English cross flags and screaming their names. Enthusiastically, they wave and cheer and Jon grins as if he feels terribly flattered at their adoration.

Purposely, he tries not to read the boards, usually there’s one or two saying ‘Jon? Call me!’ With an added number, or ‘You may not be a prince, but I can still be your princess’- and he won’t be able to deal with the cringe right now.
Jon can vaguely remember how much his mother was hated once, when he was only a little boy, and his parents not yet married. It was only after his grandmother died that Rhaegar had been able to divorce his first wife. Meanwhile, the two of them had separated long before, no longer living together, both having affairs. It just so happened that Rhaegar’s affair was public knowledge, long before Jon was born, and eventually, when he was acknowledged, with an official statement informing that the baby boy would not be in line for the throne, openly confirmed.

Elia has always been extremely popular, all the way back in the early nineties she’d held hands with HIV patients and walked through mine fields, making her look like an all-round badass. She also happened to be very beautiful and charming, better still, a master at playing the press. The cameras and the people loved her. Rhaegar not so much though, and his long-term mistress and ten-years-younger mistress was considered a home wrecker. Absolutely unsuitable to come anywhere near Buckingham Palace.

Lyanna Snow wasn’t Spanish, certainly no Spanish royalty, she wasn’t even aristo. She was rather pretty, but nothing special, and she never really cared for fashion or the other glamorous things, the sparkle needed to make the monarchy shine. Jon’s mother likes it best to be up north in Scotland, where she grew up, to ride a horse, make a beach ride, feel the wind in her hair, smell the salt of the sea and be as far away from London and the attention as she possibly can be.

She can be quite awkward with people, isn’t the best at small talk and chitchatting, has a tendency for being a tat bit too honest, forgets, even after all these years, small etiquette details every now and then, re-wears dresses from ten years ago that are rather out of fashion, and fails to have that particular smile everyone wants to see plastered to her face at all times. With a resting face that doesn’t appear all that friendly and welcoming, it results in too many bored and angry looking face shots.

Elia Martell was what everyone wanted, and when she closed the palace gates behind her and they got Lyanna Snow in return, ‘Lady Horseface’ wasn’t particularly wanted.

Infamous pictures of a Lyanna being helped down the steps of St Mary’s hospital by her brother Rickard, a teeny tiny baby boy in the crook of her arm, helped her image somewhat, for even the darkest devil couldn’t deny to feel some sympathy for her- though little did the world know the car she got in was driven away by none other than the prince of Wales.

He drove his future wife and son straight to Clarence House, which is where Jon spent his first years until his grandmother passed away. Half a year later Rhaegar and Elia official divorced, three months after that he was crowned in a grand coronation in Westminster Abbey, and two months after that Jon was ring bearer boy at his parent’s long overdue wedding ceremony in Windsor chapel. And so Jon spent the majority of his childhood having the garden, stables and endless rooms of Buckingham Palace as his playground, with Sandringham House for Christmas, Balmoral for the summer break, and Windsor Castle during the weekends.

There are definitely worse places to grow up, and as a child it doesn’t feel so much as a golden cage. His best memories are learning to ride a pony alongside Rhaenys. Aegon never liked horses, but he did like pranks and Jon liked that too. The three of them were a one of a kind, impressive team of mischief. Of course it was extraordinary that it was the ambassador of Germany who slipped over a bananasplit, and that they ended up being scolded by their father’s private secretary, their nanny and their father, but they didn’t have the awareness yet to realise just how extraordinary. It helped that his parents always tried their best to give him the illusion of freedom, though that only made it sting more when he realised freedom really wasn’t going to be in the cards for him after all.
Rhaegar and Lyanna’s wedding was the smallest royal wedding in the history of royal weddings and the most bespoke one ever since the last incest couple tied the knot, some three-hundred years ago.

It really helped that Elia had happily married Anders, her dentist boyfriend in Castile, merely three days after the divorce, which lessened her image of ‘bereaved and left woman robbed of her husband, life and title’, a swift of change positive for all parties involved. It also helped that Aegon half leaned into his new stepmother’s lap in the wedding pictures, positively beaming, and it helped that Lyanna, in all her discomfort, tried so hard it was as obvious as the blue sky, and people found that endearing.

When that year’s Christmas card, the first one Jon ever was a part of, featured Rhaenys, Aegon and Jon, aged six, four and three, in the snow, wearing Union Jack colours matching outfits, the press was eager to portray the King’s family as ‘perfectly imperfect’, going on and on about what a model example the Targaryens presented of how peculiar situations could always work, so long as there was enough love and respect, ‘no family is perfect, but aren’t these kids just adorable?! Who needs perfection when you are happy???’

Some people, usually the older grannies who still long for the days of queen Rhaella and her masked balls, still feel little but hostility, but who cares about the old-fashioned tarts anyway.

The attention Jon has received all his life seemed always half confused. As if the press didn’t really know what to do with him. He wasn’t a prince, still had his mother’s surname, though he got the Fitzroy title and would certainly receive a dukedom or something useless like that upon marriage-if he ever chooses to do that. He won’t be king even if both Aegon and Rhaenys die of a severe flu, on the spot, yet he is a full fleshed out member of the royal family, working for the firm, with his own page on the official royal house website, including a yearly changing portrait picture that looks just like the one made last year. Plus he receives a moderately pleasant salary from the state for his service to king and country. Ever since he got back from his second Iraq mission and got himself some office façade job at the RAF all he’s been doing is cutting ribbons, opening hospitals and shaking hands.

Hence the confusion. Back in the days, everyone seemed a bit wary of him, because he wasn’t a prince, he wasn’t an HRH, but he was the king’s son. They cleverly found a way around naming Lyanna queen by giving her the princess consort title, as she was lawfully queen, and Elia was not, where Elia was kind of still queen according to the church where Lyanna would never be that. But as Jon was born, by that time, out of wedlock, the rules were quite strict. No special title for him. And he liked it that way.

Yet, he did it all according to the books, the way his father wanted him to. He finished his Bachelor’s degree in International law at Cambridge, went to Sandhurst, did his military academy duties one by one, and ended up serving two full years abroad-until a plan to have him kidnapped (and possibly brutally tortured and murdered) by the Taliban leaked out and his mother threw a fit. Jon half expected Rhaegar to fly over to Baghdad and personally drag him back home to London, but instead it was Jon Connington, his father’s private secretary, who waited for him near the helicopter.

“I kind of expected my dad.” Jon confessed and Connington shrugged.

“he didn’t think the government would give permission for such an impulsive trip.”

Aegon got himself out of military service by taking his time for college in eight full spanning years- he was the handsome Prince Charming once. The one on the posters all the girls hang up on their wall, the one they used to write these boards for. He is more handsome than Jon will ever be,
truthfully. Jon looks like his mother, whether Aegon is much like their handsome, blonde, blue-eyed and imposing father.

Aegon got all the attention, all the screams, all the paparazzi, all the girls swirling around him, giggling at every word—until he was pictured embracing his boyfriend. Obviously, the whole country went bonkers, which seemed funny at first, but quickly got extremely dark, even scary.

It was horrible to not be able to avoid the most disgusting and spiteful things being said about his own brother. Aegon certainly has his flaws but his heart is one heavy chunk of gold, he’d never harm a fly and he didn’t deserve any hate from no soul.

Jon can’t remember ever feeling as proud as he did when he sat in a corner of the tea room of Clarence House, when Aegon did his life changing interview with the BBC. He sat there, dressed in an, for him, extremely simple black suit, pale as a cloth, hands fist, back straight.

“I shall ask you once if you wish to confirm or deny the rumors regarding your sexuality?” The BBC woman asked.

Aegon’s face did nothing when he said, “I am gay.”

“How long has your family known?” The woman asked.

“Probably before I myself knew.” He said.

“And do they care?”

“I don’t think so? Well, I’ve never asked because they’ve never given me the slightest idea that they might… that it mattered anything to them at all.”

“They have not commented on it?”

“I know my family will support me no matter what, I’ve always known, it has never been discussed because it wasn’t necessary.”

“So they don’t care?”

“I guess they care whether I’m happy or not, they’re quite indifferent about how.”

It was life changing for both Aegon and Jon. For Aegon it meant that he first swirled around at the bottom of the popularity polls, to shoot right up to the roof after the interview, proclaimed ‘interview of the century’ and ‘very very brave indeed’. He was named modernizer of the monarchy by the Post, Telegraph and Daily Mail and even praised for setting examples and, all on his own, changing the national cultural standard. When asked how he felt about all this praise he said ‘I don’t know? I’ve always been gay, so for me nothing’s really changed and I hope that to the rest of the world, it won’t feel like I’ve changed either.” Which was really, the best possible answer he possibly could’ve given- according to a teary-eyed Oprah.

Unfortunately, this burst of popularity and love didn’t last very long when he was photographed at a private Halloween party wearing a Nazi SS uniform. After that he’d done it for good with the old-fashioned tarts, who, granted, really suffered during the blitz.

For Jon, it meant that he was now the one chosen for spot number one in Cosmo Girl’s list of ‘still single hot princes’, which was only a little embarrassing, until he noticed the girls around his university suddenly had become all too interested in the classes he was taking. His courses were suddenly stuffed with girls, they constantly asked him to come with them to parties, accidentally
bumped into him in corridors and eventually hugged him goodbye with tears in their eyes, even though he didn’t know their names, when he finally graduated.

Jon more or less joined the army to run away from the attention, but now he’s back in London, it seems worse than ever. He can’t go out for drinks without his father disappointingly shoving drunk pictures of his departing in his face the next morning. He became suspicious of friends when private photos of him leaked out, most were of him lying in the grass field of his uni sports fields, dressed in football outfit and beer in hand, some of him holding up cards during a drinking game and it wasn’t all that bad apart from the embarrassing one of him holding up a pan of burned curry… But that was a warning he didn’t take lightly.

*Jon can’t cook without his nanny’s help*, the tabloids said. Sadly, that is one of the only truths they’ve ever spoken.

His phone got tabbed too and Buckingham palace successfully sued the guilty French newspaper and managed to keep short conversations of Jon calling his father, complaining about the internet access at Balmoral, from getting published. After the second hack, he had to give up on his private mobile phone and since has had to change number every two months.

Rhaenys has it worst though, of the three of them. She was, still is, the girl, the one everyone wants to see just to know what she is wearing. She is criticised more, most talked about, most photographed, most followed, and, luckily, considering her long-term commitment to the firm as current heir presumptive, best liked. Rhaenys is funny, charming, beautiful and professional. Most of all she’s dutiful and serious, though witty and smart, sharp most of all. She’s much like her father, with her mother’s elegance and temper. The only bad press she ever receives is either about her extremely high clothing expenses or when she goes on two skiing trips within the time span of a month- and usually she gets away with that by throwing out an official statement explaining how the second trip was part of a wedding invite.

Rhaenys has got loads of friends, though Jon doubts she likes or trusts any of them. She used to drink a bit too much, but that ended when she joined the army. She never got to serve in Iraq or Mali like Jon, she’s the heir, obviously, the first princess of Wales ever in her own right, far more important than some third born bastard, but she worked for all the medals she’s got, and Jon bets she’d prefer to walk down that aisle dressed in a bright red honorary Irish Guard uniform. Jon would trade, but he doubts anyone would want to see him in a dress.

When they walk through the abbey doors they’re greeted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pycelle is all dressed up and all exhaustingly gross per usual, with his faked crooked back and his slow and tiring speech.

“Y-your royal highness… s-so pleased to s-see you!”

He holds Lyanna’s hand in his shaking grasp and Jon can’t help but shiver when the man’s eyes find his.

“Your excellence.” Jon smiles briefly before he moves on to the other men in dress robes, until he manages to escape and run off to his seat, all at the front.

He greets his aunt and uncle, which makes him afraid for a moment that he’ll be forced to converse with them, which wouldn’t please anyone. Aunt Dany brought her extremely broad husband, who’s accent is so strong Jon usually only nods and smiles when he’s speaking, because really, he understands nothing of it. Drogo is wearing some decorative bells in his too long braid, Jon spots, which he tries to see as a festive gesture. His uncle Viserys pretends not to see him, as he glares around the abbey, displeased look on his face. Jon’s glad he has no idea what his uncle is angry
about now. He politely nods at them as a sign of recognition, and it’s not much later when his mother mutters, “I’m going to say hi to Elia, get that over with.”

Her spot is thankfully instantly filled when Aegon joins Jon and he can’t help but roll his eyes when his brother gives him a pleased nod, “Where’s the bear skin hat?”

“Not on my head.”

They laugh nervously, “Good to see you here so soon.” Jon says, making an invisible head gesture to his aunt and uncle. He really feels no need to find out what his uncle Viserys wants to complain about and his aunt smells too much of cigarettes and he can’t bear that right now with the heat of the damn church.

“I had them sew pockets in the trousers.” Aegon confesses, when they both sit down, Lyanna’s returned and takes her seat at Aegon’s right, straightening her skirt, “When they remade the damn thing. So I’ve got my cigarettes.”

“I haven’t said hi to Willas. Couldn’t bring myself, not after what happened with Loras.”

”Tell me again, what happened with Loras?”

“I never told you and I’m not telling you now.”

“You do realise we’re stuck with that family now, don’t you?” Jon asks as they watch Willas and Loras take their place at the alter.

“I hope you realise.” Aegon says, ”Margaery was drunk last night, said she wants to do you. She likes your arse.”

“That’s gross.”

”I told her that.”

Jon laughs.

“She didn’t think it was funny, though.”

”Isn’t she still dating that Baratheon twat?” He wonders.

”Right, I always forget that. I think she does too, sometimes. He’s such a tosser.”

”Idiot has serious mental issues.” Jon agrees.

”It’s cause he’s the product of incest.” Aegon smirks.

“So are we.”

They both chuckle and swallow their laughter in when Lyanna gives them a warning glare.

“Did you know they made the Frey’s enter through the side door? Along with the Beckhams and all?” Aegon can’t tell without sniggering, “Imagine grandpa Walder’s humiliation. Silly old Duffer. He’s at his sixth wife now, did you know? Sixth. She’s, what? Twenty-three or something.”

“The PM entered through the side door, too.” Jon reminds him.
“That’s just because all his illegitimate children and these crazy rumours about his wife and her affair with her twin brother are not Christian enough to enter through the grand doors.” Aegon clarifies.

“That’s all bollocks.” Jon says, “Obviously."

“Mate, have you seen—"

“Stop it.” Lyanna hisses the moment she’s returned and Jon can’t help but laugh. For a moment he wishes he could tell Aegon about damn Ygritte, but then he remembers how his mother wasn’t exactly the only one who wasn’t particularly fond of his girlfriend, and he doubts it’s a good idea to have Aegon do a happy dance in the middle of the abbey where everyone will wonder why, so he shuts it up.

Aegon lifts his ceremony booklet up to hide his mouth from peeking cameras when he says, “Saw your mate Robb when I entered… he’s with his mummy. She erm… seems like your type, to be honest. You’re into gingers, right?”

Jon shoves Aegon and his mother hisses them again. They choke away their laughs when the choir begins their Psalm 122:1 KJV – I was glad when they said unto me. The music fills the whole building and everyone jumps up to wait for another three minutes as they can’t actually see the bride appear because the view’s hidden by both the random choir in the middle as well as high trees Elia thought would look lovely and fill the space with greenery, but only ended up blocking the sight even more, if possible.

Elia doesn’t mind herself though, as she wipes a tear away at the sight of her only daughter. Beside her stands her dentist husband, and behind that Rhaenys’ Spanish family, of which some are wearing that special head piece of which he’s forgotten the name. They look very regal and perfect, though not as regal and perfect as Rhaenys.

She bats her eyes their way and Aegon gives her an overly enthusiastic wink which she answers with a grin that hides her nervousness well.

Rhaegar unveils his daughter and then hands her over to her future husband after which the ceremony begins, which, Jon spots in the ceremony booklet, is only supposed to last for four whole hours. Great.
The Revolution Theory

Chapter Summary

“Historically, we’ve always been obsessed with the royal family – they are the longest running real-life soap opera.”
- Royal biographer Andrew Morton

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sansa’s never seen the inside of Buckingham Palace, she’s never even seen the palace gardens or went on a tour during summer, to see the throne room and grand staircase, when the royal family is away to Balmoral or some other place nice.

She’s not sure if it’s because it’s so festive now, with all the lights, and the people dressed so beautifully in black tie, but unlike usually with such landmarks, her expectations are met and more.

The historian in her can’t help but intensely stare at all these famous portraits she’s only ever before seen on high resolution pictures. The Winterhalters cover nearly every wall and she leans as close as she can to see the details in the pearl chokers, diamond crowns, velvet doublets, lace sleeves and brocade skirts.

A romantic representation of Aegon’s conquest of the British Isles takes her breath away, as she studies the waves that smash against his ship, his silvery hair waving in the wind, his two queens by his side… the sky is a dark mess of many blues, aggressive and frightening to behold. He’s about to step on land, kneel, and kiss the sand.

Sansa nearly forgets to sip her champagne as she moves from one painting to the other, actually failing at socialising the way her mother advised her to, as she treats the palace like the museum it is, ignoring the party scenery.

“Good to network a little.” Cat said, but Catelyn Stark doesn’t understand much about the world of historians and archaeology. Surely, Sansa won’t run into a professor at a wedding such as this, stuffed with the highs and lows of British aristocracy. What Catelyn meant, when she said ‘networking’, was ‘try and make friends with old friends so you won’t be so lonely, and then also find yourself a better suited boyfriend in the meantime’.

Eventually, Harry has to drag her away from the art and push her towards the ballroom, demanding she finishes her glass so he can hand her a new one. They watch the bride and groom’s first dance and Sansa can’t help but wipe a tear away.

To have such a wedding… it seems like everything the little girl she was once may have dreamed of.

The princess of Wales looks absolutely beautiful in her second dress of the day. Though still white, it’s lace-free, sleeveless and has some sparkly stones near her neckline for decoration. The skirt is full and easy to move in, or so Sansa thinks, and as her dark locks dance around her face, she seems to feel happily freed of her tiara. She certainly looks a whole lot less paranoid, and actually
manages to smile.

The king has only just left his seat to go and mingle with the guests, and his wife seems to be having a good time with Sansa’s own mother, they’re laughing and shaking their heads at the silliness of the subject of their conversation.

Sansa has only ever met the king once, when she was invited to Rhaenys’ 21st birthday party, now seven, nearly eight years ago. Lyanna has been a family friend since before Sansa was born, so she does know the princess consort well enough, but it’s been years. Sansa never got along well with Aegon, who was too interested in all things forbidden, and Jon… well, Jon just didn’t really seem to like Sansa much.

Sansa then left her Lo don private school for boarding school in France age 17, to return for her A levels, after which she went off all the way up north to Scotland, St Andrews University. After her university undergraduate in general history, she did her 3 years masters in Archaeology and Pre-history at Brown University in the US, and then went on to study under Professor Luwin, curator emeritus of human evolution in the Department of Anthropology at New York’s Columbia University, for a PHD. It’s there, that she first concerned herself with answering the question ‘how come such weak and hairless creatures managed to conquer the world?’

It had her dance between the Louvre Museum Paris, the New York museum of Natural History as well as the Hebrew University of Tel Aviv for a year- until she received an invitation from The Natural History Museum in London, to get her first ever real job for working on a new exposition dedicated to the Homo Neanderthalis, suddenly a totally different story ever since research pointed out the DNA shares of Western Europeans and those humans who got there first.

Living permanently in London again after so long agrees to her, Sansa loves being near her family more than anything, but she also realises how much she’d missed the stiff and polite British, as well as the food, the cold weather that has you curl up on the sofa with a blanket, the tea of course, but most of all the humour.

The world is a magnificent place with too much to see and too much to discover, but nothing’s quite like home.

She spent the entirety of early April decorating her and Harry’s moderately sized but comfortable flat, and often found herself just strolling around the city, as if she felt a need to rediscover it, to say hi and introduce herself again.

To the outside world, it seems as if she’d always been so focused on work, as if her career was all that mattered, but the outside world didn’t know how haunted she’d felt, how much of her travels had felt like running away, how her studying and research had felt like hiding.

The invite for this royal wedding surprised her, and it took some convincing from Robb to give in and attend. It’s not every year one gets the chance to watch a future queen say her ‘I do’, or, in this case, her ‘I will’, and Sansa has to admit that she enjoyed every moment of it.

Looking back now, it’s not at all so strange she got an invite. Before she ran off she and Rhaenys had been close, they’d always gotten along well. Rhaenys is an educated, clever woman with a quick wit Sansa finds both challenging and stimulating. Never a dull moment with the princess of Wales.

Rhaenys and Robb used to date, once upon a time, when they were in their late teens, but Robb never dealt well with all the attention and the pressures that Rhaenys’ unavoidable future brought, so they constantly broke up and then got back together. During one of these break-ups Robb met
Jeyne at a polo match, hooked up with her, accidentally knocked her up, and any possible happily-ever-after with the heir to the throne had flown past when, even though Jeyne lost the baby, he decided to date someone… easier, and stayed with her. Robb was in no way interested in joining the royal firm, and that was it. Not everything can be mended, and some things simply really shouldn’t be.

Nevertheless, Robb and Rhaenys remain friends even today, at least, that’s what they like others to think, probably strengthened by their shared love for Jon Snow, and Rhaenys must’ve known Sansa would have just returned to London. Rhaenys always knows these things. Plus, the Starks are family friends, and it might’ve been odd to invite the whole family and ask Rickon for page boy and yet fail at inviting the eldest daughter.

It is odd to be back in the midst of what once may have been her home, her playground, her field, like a lion’s savanna. She recognises nearly everyone, yet knows nobody. Nobody except her family, Harry and Jeyne Poole, who still happens to know everybody.

Sansa watches the Tyrells from a distance, succeeds at not making eye contact with Margaery, who’s surrounded by all her Tyrell cousins (with their fake hair and inappropriately short skirts). Then she spots the Greyjoys, including that horrid friend of Robb’s, Theon. All of them are dressed in black, and the women are wearing trouser suits, unsurprisingly. Asha Greyjoy braided her hair in a style that reminds Sansa of Vikings’ Lagartha. The Hightowers managed to wrap nearly all their diamonds around their throats and wrists, their urge to display their wealth was always laughable. Lord Bolton brought what appears to be his third wife; an extremely fat Frey- as if Frey’s are not too much of a presence anyway. Such a ghastly man, Roose. Lord Manderly has seemingly only gotten fatter than he used to be and he and his equally fat son Wylis won’t get up from their chairs. The Kettleblacks are living up to their reputation of unscrupulous behaviour, as, meanwhile, the dwarf of Lannister makes sure no wine goes untasted. Disgusting man, Sansa thinks, famed for boasting about frequently visiting prostitutes.

The Spanish are making their mark on the evening, for sure, as Rhaenys’ youngest uncle makes sure the music is never dull and the dancing never stops. He has quite the hips, that man. The king of Spain is as wheelchair bound as Sansa’s brother Bran, and he seems calm and more reserved than his younger brother, politely smiling and seemingly enjoying himself with good conversation and being surrounded by his family. His uniform is nearly invisible below all these honorary medals he pinned down on his chest. His eldest daughter, the infanta Arianne, hardly leaves his side. The Dayne family have Spanish descent as well, and Sansa knows their eldest son is one of the king’s only friends, Ser Arthur, knighted after thirty years of service to the crown. It only makes sense that his family is well represented, including his sisters Ashara, and Allyria as well as his nephew, his late brother’s son, Edric, or Eddie, another friend of Robb’s.

Sansa is just politely nodding at Edric, when she spots the Prime Minister from the corner of her eye. He too, has grown fat, though Sansa already knew that, she had internet in Scotland and Rhode Island. Cersei is still beautiful, yet nowhere near the most beautiful woman in the room, and her frown tells Sansa she knows and loads it. Myrcella, an old childhood friend of Sansa’s, looks so much like her mother now that it’s terrifying.

Sansa knows everyone yet feels little need to talk to any of them. Hence why she slightly panics when Harry leaves her all alone in some corner for the toilet, champagne glass in her hand, leaning against a wall, trying to blend in with it.

She gulps her champagne away and decides to get rid of some of the time by getting herself a new glass. She hunts down a waiter dressed in full white tie peacock penguin style, and once she holds her fresh new glass of bubbles she’s left to stand there, one hand holding a glass, the other her
Well fuck, she thinks before she breathes a sigh of relieve by the sight of the back of her brother’s red-haired head.

“Robb, for Christ’s sake, Harry left me and now I’m-“

“Sans!” Robb’s undeniably quite drunk, with his tie loosened and his pupils glossy. He doesn’t let her finish and presses a gross kiss to her cheek, “My sister… I haven’t see you all evening!”

“I was admiring the paintings.”

Robb just laughs at that and points with his glass at his collocutor, “Maybe my friend can give you a tour, some of these folks on there are related to him.”

“Not all of them.” Jon Snow says, and the moment Sansa’s wide eyes of shock find his face he grins uncomfortably, “Maegor the Cruel is ehm… actually not an ancestor, against popular believe, I always like to… to make that clear.”

“I don’t think it’s believe mate, it must’ve been assumption.” Robb laughs and slams Jon’s back, “Where is Harry? I was going to talk to that bastard, actually, he and I have some things to discuss.”

“Such as what?”

“I have prepared my speech.” Robb says and he shakes his head at Sansa’s face of disgust, “It’s duty Sans, nothing to be done.”

On the dance floor the king and his wife are taking their spot and plenty of people gather around it to witness, “Shouldn’t you be dancing with Jeyne?” Sansa asks, eyebrow raised, “Speaking of duty?”

“Jeyne’s too busy gossiping, she’s forgotten all about me, promise.” Robb looks at Jon again, “speaking of forgetting… Jon! You must remember my sister, The Lady Sansa Stark. Sans, this is my friend Jon.”

“Hey.” Jon says, without a grin or a hint of a smile or anything of the sort. Guess it’s true what they say, Sansa decides, the guy really is the embodiment of gloominess.

“Pleasure to meet you, your royal highness.” Sansa presses a polite smile to her lips in the hope of getting one in return, but alas.

“Jon’s not an HRH,” Robb says, then adds in whispers, “He was born out of wedlock, but don’t tell anybody! It’s a secret.”

Jon smacks his friend to the back of his head and the ends of his mouth curl up only slightly, “Piss off.” He mutters and if the room had been less dark Sansa might’ve believed he was blushing.

“Sansa’s just got back from somewhere, she got her PhD last year and after twelve months of digging in the dirt, she’s now working for the Natural History Museum, something with Neanderthals and fossils.”

Jon clearly puts on his ‘interested face’, which he seems to master perfectly, and it only makes Sansa less enthusiastic to further explain, “I’m specialised in Pre-Historical Sapiens.”
“I read somewhere that we share their DNA.”

“I assume that is because Homo sapiens are humans.” Sansa says stupidly.

“I mean the Neanderthals.”

“Oh! Yes! I mean, that is true.” Sansa coughs and goes off to do what she does always and every time she’s nervous, rambling. “You must see Sapiens as every other species who ever lived on planet earth. Most species are like a family, with parents, brothers, sisters and cousins. So… our parents would be the apes, our cousins are our closest relating apes, such as the chimps and the bonobos, and then there are our lost brothers and sisters, the Neanderthals and Denisovans.”

Jon doesn’t seem to be much afraid of her burst of information, and politely asks, “Some historians think we merged with them, right?”

Sansa nods and feels her face redden and she notices Robb’s stupid grin. “I must say I disagree, if we had merged, the level of DNA would have been higher, it’s more likely it was only just possible for Neanderthals and Homo sapiens to produce living fertile offspring only at a short borderline point, after which only the Homo sapiens survived, along with some lucky Neanderthal and Denisovan genes.”

“Bye.” Robb suddenly says and he leaves them there, near a high table.

“Robb says it’s a waste of money to find out.” Sansa explains as Jon watches his friend walk away with not a specific sign of surprise, “I’m not going to cure diseases or end starvation.”

“Nor will art.” Jon says, “I’m pretty sure Robb listens to his music. I’m pretty sure I don’t cure diseases on a daily basis, either.”

“Well… art pleases people, I suppose. And sometimes we sell it for charity.” Which is what Jon concerns himself with on a daily basis, she assumes.

Jon doesn’t deny or agree and then points out, after a second of silence, “You never used to be interested in all that.”

Sansa gulps as he brings back a Sansa she now hates and envies both, “I always wanted to study history.”

“Yeah but you always liked the knights and princesses, the… the heroes. Not the hunter-gatherers.”

“I suppose I… I suppose I found out heroes don’t exist.” Sansa says and she expects some sort of response to that comment in Jon’s facial expression, but there’s nothing, he’s so remarkably well at hiding whatever thought he may have that it nearly scares her. He never quite used to be like that, such a robot, ready to converse with anyone on any topic. He was always the most human of the king’s children.

He must do this all the time, Sansa realises; listen to people ramble on about what they do, ask the right questions that can’t possibly be offensive or taken the wrong way, with a face that gives you nothing. It makes Sansa feel uncomfortable. It makes her feel like this conversation is routine to him.

“So now you’re looking for the hidden stories of the Stone Age, hoping the people who lived the way we still should might not have been as evil as we are now?”
Sansa takes a moment to respond before she says, “No, I guess I found it interesting to find out how we became what we are.”

“What we are?”

“The rulers of planet Earth.”

Sansa realises that because his face gives her so little, she instantly notices the tiniest thing, and the nearly invisible raise of his left eyebrow seems to tell her that her answer wasn’t what he expected, “And?”

“And what?”

“How did we become the rulers of the earth?”

“Everyone disagrees.” Sansa confesses.

“What do you think?”

“I ehm… I think it’s a mixture of various things.”

“Wouldn’t you assume it’s because we’re extremely intelligent?”

“No,” Sansa says instantly, “Because it’s extremely debatable whether or not we’re all that intelligent. Our so-called intelligence is currently destroying the planet. We’re arrogant, greedy and power-hungry, we’re often driven by simple emotions and needs… We’re quite stupid.”

Jon smirks then, because apparently insulting humanity amuses him, “Maybe animals are just not clever enough to be arrogant and greedy?”

“They’re clever enough to be as greedy as they can be. A lion is extremely arrogant, but he’s allowed to be, because he’s at the top of the food chain, his arrogance fits his role, he’s self-confident, more so than we are, even though we basically control and own all the lions. Homo sapiens are not meant to be at the top of the food chain, hence why we’re so untrustworthy and anxious.”

“We’re afraid of lions?”

“Our animal brain is telling us to be afraid of lions.”

“You know, my great-great grandfather wanted to have Charles Darwin beheaded for suggesting humans are animals.” Jon remarks, and he smiles. Sansa can’t actually remember seeing him do that before. He’s looked gloomy and broody all night, which, in his case, isn’t much of a rarity. Tabloids have often enough diagnosed him with chronic depression- Sansa always simply assumed he carries around the bitchy resting face usually only women are shamed for.

“Should I be worried?”

“Not really, no, though I suggest you avoid Pycelle, but I’d advice that to anyone, revolution theory fanatic or not.” He seems to realise that what he’s saying doesn’t really fit the avoid-the-slightest-possibility-of-offensiveness strategy he has carefully maintained up till now, and he quickly asks, “I guess you don’t like it when I call it a theory?”

“Michelangelo thought the world was as flat as a pancake… so who am I to claim there’s no possibility of us being entirely wrong?”
“Are you comparing yourself to Michelangelo now?” With that comment, Jon seems to willingly dodge his avoid-the-slightest-possibility-of-offensiveness strategy, and Sansa’s glad for it, because he combines this loss with a matching smirk. It’s small, but kind, not plastered on his face but genuine, as his eyes twinkle along.

“You know, there’s a theory that says Michelangelo never existed and was actually a group of multiple men.” Sansa avoids the question.

“So, you’re comparing yourself to a group of multiple men?”

“I’m comparing scientists of today with the Michelangelos of the past. There’s always the possibility of being wrong, that’s the danger of scientific research, you can never label it 100% correct.”

“Then why bother?”

“People have always wanted answers, we can’t stand not knowing, once we know, we move on to the next unknown, we like to be unfulfilled in our knowledge, which is why the idea of eternal satisfaction shouldn’t please you.”

“Is this you pointing out that there’s a justification in wasting money on researching million-year-old bones? Even though it won’t cure cancer?”

“I suppose so, yeah.” Sansa says and in that moment the two of them just grin at each other as if this is the most pleasant conversation they’ve had in weeks.

It most certainly is the most pleasant conversation of the day, that Sansa won’t deny. Including every word she exchanged with Harry, who very much wanted to be anywhere else but at this wedding, her dead-anxious mother terrified Rickon would step on the bride’s train, and her work-centred father, who has been so focused on some crisis going on somewhere in the world that she told him to ‘live in London for a minute’, after which he painfully told her, ‘Not all of us hide away in the past the whole day, some of us care about right now.’ Sansa wanted to help Arya get dressed but obviously the girl threw a fit about the colour scheme and they ended up fighting about it as they’d done a thousand times a day when they were teenagers. That left only Bran, but unfortunately, he isn’t here because he is on some wheelchair camp with other wheelchair bound children, where he gets to play wheelchair sports all day and ride ponies in a special saddle.

“So, that’s what you’ve been doing when you were gone all these years?” Jon suddenly asks, and she can’t help but notice how he noticed her absence.

“I… yes. I worked at the Louvre and the Natural History museum in New York. I mean, it was an internship, really, but-“

“That’s amazing.” Jon says, and he seems sincerely impressed.

“Yeah, it really was.” Sansa breathes a smile, “After St Andrews I did my Archeology masters at Brown University, then I did a Human Revolution PhD in New York, and After that I went to Tel Aviv to do an exchange programme at the Hebrew university of Tel Aviv, that was four months, before I moved back to London, I’ve been back in the UK for some weeks now.”

“Robb never said.” Jon says, and then he smiles again, and Sansa can’t remember his smile being quite so handsome, she also never noticed him being as broad as he is, or as tall, and she’s quite convinced he had exactly no facial hair the last time she saw him.

“I’m sure you and Robb have better things to talk about than me.” Sansa can’t help but feel her
face redden and she curses herself for it.

If truth be told, Sansa always crushed majorly on Aegon. He was gloriously handsome with the most beautiful pale blue eyes, always extremely well-dressed, musical, enjoyed the arts and theatre, ridiculously charming and a real life actual prince. Jon… not so much. He was Robb’s best friend, Rhaenys’ younger brother… the skinny boy with the long face and the messy hair. He just wasn’t all that interesting, certainly not eye-catching or worth obsessing about. Sixteen-year-old Sansa had never been good at paying attention to the less obviously nice things in life, things less conveniently pretty.

As it turns out, she notes, Aegon had been as gay as gay can be all that time, obvious to anyone who looked beyond his pretty face, and Jon grew up to be the most handsome of the King’s two sons, not to mention extremely good at charming small talk. Life always has to be so damn ironic… never mention unfair.

In that moment, she tries to remember whether or not he has a girlfriend, and some magazine covers of an unimpressively pretty redhead pop up in her mind. Yvette? Y-something? Sansa has no idea and she wonders if the girl is somewhere in this palace.

“What do you think I and Robb talk about?” He throws back.

“Well, it won’t be the origins of human kind, that I know.” Sansa says and Jon laughs. She can’t actually remember hearing him laugh, ever. He probably still had a high baby voice the last time she heard him speak not through a YouTube clip, or on TV. It’s a husky laugh, and it comes so suddenly it makes her happy.

“Did you vote for him?” He asks then, and he makes a head gesture towards the prime minister.

Sansa looks without thinking twice and spots Joffrey. Her throat tightens and she gulps to do something about it, “I ehm… voted labour, actually.”

“Really?” Jon grins and seems pleasantly surprised, “Did you tell your dad?”

“He didn’t ask.” Sansa grins, “You?”

“I didn’t vote at all.”

“Why not?” Sansa asks before thinking and when she catches him grinning she quickly goes on, “Could you? Incognito?”

“Technically yes, I can, but I won’t. If I had, my vote had not been for him, that’s for sure.”

Sansa pulls her eyes off Robert and his kin, “I wish it wasn’t my father’s party, too.”

“Don’t worry, it’s not the party, it’s personal.” Jon says, and Sansa can’t help but chuckle. He looks back at the MP before he adds, “What an absolute loon, that eldest.”

Sansa nearly chokes on her sip of champagne, “You think?”

Jon nods, “His face reminds me of a raccoon.”

Sansa actually giggles now, mostly at the disgust in his voice, even after all these years, it still positively pleases her to hear someone bash on Joff, “He was quite handsome, once upon a time.”

“Right.”
“I thought so, at least.”

Jon gives her a look of disbelieve from the corner of his eye, before he asks, “Was it his self-sacrificing and loving personality?”

Sansa smirks and shakes her head, “My father… daddy and Robert have been best friends since Eton, so I’ve known him all my life. We started dating when I was fifteen. I actually applied for St Andrews because that’s where he was already enrolled.”

Jon’s look of disbelieve is wiped off his face and he looks positively sorry now, “Poor you.”

Sansa nods, “It seemed right back then, you know better than anyone what the English upper class can be like. It’s a very secluded world.”

“The sloans, you mean? Jersey and loafers included? I’m actually quite happy I miraculously managed to dodge that bullet.”

Sansa grins and can’t help bit tell him, “I’m sorry to say it, but to the outside world it didn’t seem much like a miracle, seemed to me as if you were aggressively fighting it on purpose.”

Jon smiles, “I meant for it to look effortless.”

“Well, on the pro side, it’s brave to distance yourself from the spoiled and high-headed and defend and befriend the people you’re not necessarily supposed to be seen with.” Sansa will never forget how shamelessly Joffrey bullied that one fat boy, Lord Tarleys eldest. Naturally, he had been one of Jon’s group of outcast friends. Sansa wonders if Jon ever considered himself to be an outcast, and therefore actively sought for others.

“You do know your own brother and I have been friends since Eton too, right? I mean, I’m an Etonian as well, I’m not brave.”

Sansa laughs, “Fine, you’re not brave, but I am jealous. I wish I had been spared the experience.”

“Thought you and Margaery are still close?”

Sansa shrugs, “No, not anymore. You get along with her? She’s family now.”

“Willas is, I think I have seen Margaery twice in the last twelve months, including yesterday during the rehearsal for this sodding wedding- don’t really know why she was there, I know she was pissed about not being bridesmaid.”

Sansa can imagine, the spotlight was always her favourite place, “Why were you there? You didn’t seem to have much of a role?”

Jon shrugs, “Making sure Rhaenys didn’t freak out and run off halfway through.”

Sansa frowns, “That bad?”

“She’s not really the marrying kind… but you can imagine what our family is like.”

Sansa bites her lower lip and can’t help but glance over at the princess, who’s standing next to her mother, “But Willas-“

“I’m just hoping he’ll support her in all the wars to come.”

Sansa is not quite sure what he means with ‘wars’, though she knows she doesn’t wish to find out,
“Mummy calls the Tyrells professional social climbers.” She spills out without thinking, and for a horrifying moment she looks up at his face, terrified of his possible anger, but he bursts out laughing instead.

“Can you imagine how wonderful our world would be, if they’d put all their efforts, energy and hard work in securing international peace?”

Sansa laughs along with him in relief and then realises that, “You know, I think oddly, as of right now, you’re far better integrated in this world than I am.”

“You really don’t see anyone anymore?” He asks, and he seems to think that’s sad, despite his overall opinion.

“Well… I and Jeyne still have a lot of contact, remember her?”

“Poole?”

Sansa nods.

“Course I do, the brunette?”

The suspiciousness inside of her that comes naturally would usually cause Sansa to think that, to Jon, assuming Jeyne’s a brunette would’ve simply been a good bet, but somehow, it doesn’t pop up now, “Jep!”

“Nice.” He nods, “Friends you make during college are for life but those made before that are family.”

“Exactly!” Sansa grins.

“So, what was he like?”

“Who?”

“Joffrey?”

“Oh! Well, erm… as you would expect, I suppose.”

“I’m not sure what to expect, I mean, if he really is the way he comes across to me, I doubt you ever would’ve dated him in the first place, hence my curiosity.”

Sansa smirks, “Are you asking what attracted me to him?”

“Aside from his money, yes.”

Sansa raises her eyebrows, “You really think that of me? He was perfectly charming and gallant in the beginning. He had the same friends, our parents got along. He was handsome- to me, back then. He lived the same life and seemed to want the same things. I was very very much in love- the way only young girls can be.”

“Until you took off your puberty shaped spectacles and you saw him for the sod he is?”

“No… he erm, I didn’t take off my spectacles, he sort of, kind of slammed them off my face.”

Jon’s face doesn’t give anything away, the way he must’ve trained it to over the years, yet she sees something shift in his eyes, “I’m sorry,” he says, “You don’t have to tell me.”
“I know.” Sansa quickly says, and she suddenly feels uncomfortable again, at his proper response. She really shouldn’t tell him such things, that was probably his way of informing her that he doesn’t care about the drama of her life… why would he? Her teenage stupidities must look totally ridiculous to him, “I ehm… we broke up before I left for boarding school, it’s been some time ago, now.”

“Must’ve sucked to have to see him every day. Andrews is such a village, isn’t it?”

“Oh no, he dropped out not long after, he failed half of his courses, I think.”

Jon blinks at her, then laughs again, and Sansa realises how his laugh makes her grin like an idiot. It feels good to make other people laugh, but it feels better to make people who barely ever seem to laugh laugh.

“We ehm… I and Egg, we sort of wanted to ask someone to go and get us burgers and fries. You want to join?”

“You’re too lazy to get it yourselves?” Sansa again realises her stupid mouth moves faster than her brain when he shakes his head.

“I’d love to, but I don’t think I’d make it back alive, not today, I’ll have mobs swirling around me no matter how many hats, sunglasses and wigs I use for coverage.”

Sansa tries to imagine him standing in the middle of MacDonalds, wearing the red army uniform he wore this afternoon, with the golden badges and medals. She knows he suffers enough harassment as it is, “Of course! I’m sorry!” She wants to hit herself for, again, forgetting something so obvious. It’s just that, standing there and chatting away with him makes her forget entirely that he’s not just a regular bloke she just ran into at a house party.

He doesn’t seem at all that much insulted again, when he repeats his invite, “Robb’s coming, too. And Jeyne. Not Poole, the other one.” He jokes.

“I know that one.” Sansa smiles, and she’s about to enthusiastically accept an invite to eat burgers somewhere in the private rooms of Buckingham Palace, when she realises there’s no way she’ll ever get Harry to come with her, and she’s not seen him for too long as it is, “Thank you but ehm, I think Harry will want to go home soon.”

He doesn’t ask her who Harry is, which could either be because he knows or because he doesn’t care, “Okay well, if you change your mind, just ehm… text Robb. Aegon always orders too much anyway. Harry can join.”

“Thanks.” Sansa smiles, and she feels slightly bereaved when he turns around to leave her there, “I’ll see you at the next wedding, I suppose.”

“Huh?”

“Robb hasn’t invited you?”

“Oh… course he has! You’re looking at the best man.”

“Really? Well, I’m not sure why I didn’t figure.”

He gives her one last lopsided grin of mind-blowing charm before he finally trots off and Sansa’s still trying to figure out what the hell just happened when Harry pecks her cheek from behind and has her jump up in shock.
“Was that Jon Snow?”

Sansa nods as she still watches the man’s back.

“Should I be worried?” Harry still stands behind her, his face near her neck as he talks in her ear.

“What?”

“That whole family is bonkers.” Harry says, “I’ve heard from good sources that he sees a shrink every day and that all of them have tried to kill themselves at one point in time.”

Sansa can’t help but laugh that away, “That is bonkers. The newspapers know that the royal family sell well no matter what rubbish they write.”

“Yes well, Bran actually said he had a thing for you, once upon a time.”

“I’m quite sure he has a girlfriend.” Sansa chuckles.

“Ygritte.”

“Yes.” Sansa breathes, and suddenly she remembers, “She’s a… a friend of Sam Tarley’s girlfriend, Gilly.” She can still remember Sam quite well. He was ridiculously clever, that she’ll never forget, perhaps he’s here somewhere, too.

“He knocked a photographer into the hospital not so very long ago, did you hear?”

Sansa looks sideways at her boyfriend and shakes her head.

“The man wanted to turn it into a case, but eventually they paid him good money to shut it. It was quite bad, actually. It wasn’t the first time he lost his self-control in front of journalists.”

Sansa huffs, “You cannot possibly call these vile idiots with cameras journalists, harassing people doesn’t cover news.”

“Still.”

“Well,” Sansa says, “As a matter of fact, I had an out most pleasant and perfectly decent conversation with him- he’s my brother’s dearest friend, so if I were you, I wouldn’t call him bonkers in Robb’s presence.”

“Robb…” Harry huffs, “He’s drunk and bonkers as of right now. He said something about wolves and that he’d send them after me if need be.”

“Really?” Sansa can’t help but grin, “Well, better not make that necessary.”

Harry sighs, “Can we please go home now? If I have to speak to one more conservative I’m going to blow up and burst.”

Sansa giggles, grabs his hand, and pull him towards what she hopes might be the entrance.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading! Do let me know what you think xx
Toxic

Chapter Summary

'There's been a lot of speculation about every single girl I'm with and it actually does quite irritate me after a while, more so because it's a complete pain for the girls.'
- Prince William

The one thing about being royal that’s worse than the paparazzi, worse than the never-ending attention, the lifelong duty, the lack of absolute freedom whatsoever concerning one’s career choices, the gossip, the exhausting demand for absolute political correctness and a total restriction for one’s own personal views at all times… is the fact that Jon has little choice but to live with his parents.

That is, he could move to Nottingham cottage on the Sandringham estate, but the ceiling is so low he won’t be able to stand upright in his own bathroom. That, and the kitchen is tiny, there’s no gym, no room for his books or his tv, and he’ll feel like he’s living in the countryside. Plus, Jon kind of wants a dog, and he can’t have a dog in that cottage, and he knows they’ll sooner give in and put him in a place they usually only reserve for married couples, when he just sticks around Buckingham Palace a little while longer.

Aegon lives with his mother and her husband in the York private apartments of St James’ palace and ever since Rhaenys got married and returned from her Seychelles month-long honeymoon she and Willas have made it comfortable for themselves in apartment 6B in Kensington Palace, that six bedroom, eight bathroom, five floor wing they fully redecorated ever since it’d been empty after uncle Aemon moved out, to the the smaller and better adapted next-door apartment 5A. Viserys has been eagerly eyeing the palace for years, but alas. Jon suspects Rhaegar tries to keep his brother out of London by refusing to give him proper living accommodations. At least Dany is not an issue there, she usually just hides away in Los Angeles with her bulky, raspy voiced, braided husband anyway.

Jon has looked into the possibility of simply getting his own place, not part of some official royal residence, but the security costs would just not be worth it. So, until his father finds him a spot in a corner of Kensington Palace they will be able to renovate, Jon has to learn how to live with his mother bursting into his room on a Saturday morning, yanking the curtains open, and bellowing in his ear.

"Jon! For Christ’s sake boy, it’s past noon!"

“I got in at four.” Jon pulls a pillow over his head to shield his eyes from the piercing light of day.

“You must eat something.” Lyanna decides and she picks some clothes up off the floor, “And you need a shower. It’s not you to waste away your life like this, especially not over a girl.”

“It’s not over a-“ Jon loudly tells her through the cotton of his pillow, and he uses the fabric for an excuse not to say her name.

“If she doesn’t want you, baggage and all, you shouldn’t want her.”
Jon ignores that comment. He’s heard it all multiple times. First from Aegon, when he eventually burst out and confessed at their 3 o’clock MacDonalds after party, not long after that he received the same from Robb. The next day he had a look-through his schedule with Sam, his trusty friend-turned-overpayed private-secretary who could do so much better, and suffered through it for the third time, and then there was Rhaenys, who, first on the phone, later in person, passionately informed him that Ygritte could drop dead for all Jon should care, “The bitch never deserved you anyway, soon she’ll come back crawling when she’s all alone and sexless and miserable, and you can tell her to sod off back to the shabby rotting hell she never should have emerged from to begin with.”

Jon tries not to tell everyone that their lectures on how she’s not worth Jon’s misery feel only a little insincere because all of them disliked his ex-girlfriend. It’s easy for them to tell him to just move on, when this is basically what they all have been hoping for, these past three years. Not that they’d ever admit that.

“You don’t even like going out!” Lyanna adds then and he hears the frustration in her voice which suddenly takes a turn as she changes her tune from ‘get dressed’ to ‘get yourself together’, “You always say you hate the music and the dancing.”

“Music was fine, and I didn’t do much dancing.”

It was actually Rhaenys’ suggestion that he went out and ‘mingled’. She said he needed to show Ygritte, as well as the world, but mostly Ygritte, that he’s having the time of his life, fully enjoying the freedom of being rid of her. Jon highly doubts Ygritte buys it, considering how much he embarrassed himself when he had her on the phone, the day after Rhaenys’ wedding, when she flatly told him, “I don’t think this is working.”

Still, Jon goes out and Jon mingles- Aegon pulls him along towards the deeper darkest places of the London upper class night scene, which usually means the same two or three secluded ‘members-only’ nightclubs. Where the Soho club folks hang around. Boys in tailored suits with rich daddies who’ll leave them a fortune and girls in overpriced crazy expensive dresses looking for a boy with a rich daddy to marry. Old and new money come together, and every now and then, they don’t part ways again. At least it means the drinks are good and there’s never a ‘surprise’ performance from some wannabe ear-murdering unpaid DJ.

Jon can’t deny it’s fun to spend so much time with his brother after all these years in the army, it’s also kind of sort of fun to just be able to drink up whatever Aegon pushes in his hands without worrying it will get him off duty with the RAF for a month. It’s also quite great to get introduced to all of Egg’s friends. Some of them extremely gay, others only homosexual, most of them bisexuals, and every now and then it’s a very pretty woman.

“Alicia is like… I think she’s aristo, not sure, but she likes you.”

“She said so?”

“No mate, she didn’t say so!” Aegon usually laughs at Jon’s total inability to be that type of charming the James Bonds of this world are. Jon may not drink it shaken and stirred, and he does need Aegon to point out women look his way, but he’s happy sleeping around lately. He’s never tried it before, and for now, the sex numbs his brain enough to get it off Ygritte and her fucking everything for a while.

“Your father wants to speak with you, you better be grateful it’s me you’re seeing first.” Lyanna sighs, “He’s not happy.”
Jon just groans, knowing perfectly well that his hangover won’t be enough torture to punish him for the sin of alcohol. Fucking paps, he thinks and he wants to scream as he tries to remember what it is that happened now. He’s perfectly confident he didn’t attack one again, that’s only happened twice and Rhaegar made it perfectly clear that it wasn’t going to happen trice. Probably just drunk pictures, he decides, and who cares about these? He just came back from over four years of service, it was a Friday night and only a couple of days ago he’d been snapped at one successful engagement of him playing football with chronically ill children.

Jon hates it when they make him do that. What’s so special about him that just meeting him might brighten up a dying kid’s day? He’s just a guy, and yet they expect of him to do something so important and impossible. It’s too fucking depressing and no matter how much he makes them laugh and how often he lets them win when he’s keeper in front of a tiny net… he never leaves feeling like he actually had a day spent well. It just feels like he’s an actor who left the stage, an entertainer who isn’t actually all that good at his job. So many could do it a thousand times better and him having to be the one who does it anyway just makes him feel useless.

“So, get up, get dressed, we want you in the blue drawing room for tea.”

Jon doesn’t respond and only gets up when she’s already left the room. He figures that he might be able to delay having to go and see his father and receive the usual scolding if he goes to the gym first, but then his head protests heavily at the mere idea alone, and he decides to leave it at a shower only.

He feels as if he only slept for mere minutes when he finally drags himself towards the drawing room his parents use for Sunday’s tea, only to find it empty and get an escort by Connington, of all people, towards his father’s office.

Rhaegar doesn’t particularly see Sundays as a non-working day, Jon knows, yet he can’t remember his father ever missing his teatime moment with his wife over business on any day.

When Jon walks into the room, he realises that’s because his mother will be part of the interrogation process.

“Son, sit down.” Rhaegar is seated behind his desk, with his wife in front of it in one of the two chairs. Jon takes his spot in the other and wraps his arms around himself.

“I’m too old for scolding.” That’s what Jon usually says when he missed a mark. He’s never caused as much drama in all his life as Aegon has in some single days only, so usually, the argument helps a lot.

Rhaegar clears his throat, looks down at the tablet he’s holding, then makes some quick eye contact with Lyanna, who’s surprisingly quiet, and sighs, “You’re not here for a scolding.”

“Then why the serious setting?” Jon asks, and when Rhaegar takes his time to find the proper answer Jon decides to jump on the excuse train, better sooner rather than later, there’s no strong argument for a well-rounded apology, “I’m sorry, I know I’ve been going out a lot, lately. It’s caused as much drama in all his life as Aegon has in some single days only, so usually, the argument helps a lot.

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Rhaegar blinks, “It’s not just the partying.”

“I know it’s… I try to keep my self control around the photographers but they’re just… I try. Nothing happened last night, Egg got me home.”
“We’re worried about you, darling.” Lyanna says then, her voice surprisingly soft, “Sometimes you don’t come home.”

“I stay at James’s.” Jon says, quickly, “Or at Robb and Jeyne’s place.”

Rhaegar looks as if that’s the greatest bag of bullshit he’s ever heard, though he doesn’t say it, “How are you feeling?” He asks.

Total crap, obviously, but you can’t tell your father when he’s looking at you the way Rhaegar is looking at Jon, his wide eyes seriously worried, “I’m fine, honestly.”

He just turned 27 for crying out loud, he shouldn’t have his parents look at him all worried as if he came home smelling of pod, these days are behind him. He’s an adult who takes care of himself.

“I just want to move out.”

“Are you telling me this is because you’re frustrated with living here?”

“You have your own rooms, darling, you barely even see us.” Lyanna adds to her husband’s disbelieve, “We… we know it’s hard when someone you love leaves you, but-“

“You don’t know.” Jon says and he raises his voice without meaning to, “You don’t.”

His parents have each other. The amount of shit Rhaegar put Jon’s mother through should’ve shied away any sane woman, but it never scared off Lyanna. She stayed. No matter how much she was photographed, no matter what they wrote about her, said about her, said to her. Lyanna never left, she never bailed, she didn’t give up, not on Rhaegar.

“Jon, I know your situation is a peculiar one, one you didn’t choose, I understand that better than anyone, whether you believe me or not.” Rhaegar says, “It’s hard and sometimes it’s lonely but that doesn’t mean you have to choose to live it miserably.”

“I choose nothing.” Jon huffs.

Jon can’t see it but he knows his parents are exchanging some very heavy looks of concern, they’re discussing how the hell they’re going to have to deal with this without uttering one single word. All they do it stare at each other’s face.

Perhaps Jon would be able to handle the betrayal of people he thought he could trust better, if it wasn’t for his parents who seemingly have all the loyalty in the world. All the loyalty they need, that is.

“You can choose to behave according to your age.”

“It’s Rhaenys’ fault.” Jon then drops, he knows he sounds only as childish as his father claims when he says it, but it’s the truth, “She said I had to go out there and live a little, to… to show everyone I’m doing very well on my own.”

“Show everyone?” Lyanna asks.

“Yes.”

“I think it’s working.” Rhaegar says and Jon looks up in surprise. When Rhaegar doesn’t continue Jon groans in frustration.

“Just say it. Why am I here?”
Rhaegar glances at his wife for one last time when he lays his tablet down, turns it on and turns it around so Jon can see a Daily Mail article.

“Fuck.” He says, without thinking, and his mother doesn’t even scold him.

*Why I couldn’t do it anymore*, the headline says, *My life as a royal girlfriend.*

Ygritte’s face stares back at him with unapologetic eyes, she looks fierce even, as if she feels confident and convinced.

Jon can feel his father frown and his mother’s eyes scan his face, both in fear of his response. He can imagine they had a hard time knowing what to expect. Will he burst out into tears? Will he scream? Curse? Get up and yank his chair across the room, smashing some 14th century Chinese vases to pieces?

The truth is, Jon doesn’t even know how to respond. Whatever to feel furious or just laugh. All he seems to experience is an extreme form of disbelief. He feels flabbergasted.

“Do you know this woman?” Rhaegar asks and there’s no way Jon will respond to that question. Rhaegar paid for the guards around Ygritte’s house, he knows Jon knows Ygritte.

Jon only hides his face behind his hands, inwardly swearing with all the harshest words he knows.

“Jon?”

When Jon refuses to answer Lyanna lays her hand on her son’s shoulder, “It’s not your fault, I and your father want you to know that we know this is everything but what you wanted, what you anticipated. We are not angry with you.”

Jon can’t help but humorlessly laugh at that. Somehow, he can’t believe he didn’t anticipate it. Of all her flaws, Jon never thought it would be Ygritte’s lack of class that would end up haunting him.

“She’s not a lady.” Rhaenys said once, and it had angered him back then, but now he knows what she meant.

“It’s because of her dad.” Jon decides, “Her dad is… they must’ve paid her for this.” It never was the spotlight Ygritte craved, of that Jon’s sure, so it must’ve been that.

“Well, if it’s money that she wanted all she had to do was ask.” Lyanna declares, she sounds a bit flabbergasted, too.

“*Money!*” Rhaegar has a tendency to suddenly raise his voice, a habit Jon inherited, “We will not bow down to blackmail!”

“She’d never blackmail us!” Jon defends, and he has no idea why.

“She would only sell our dirty laundry to the press!” Rhaegar seems angry now, and though Jon knows it’s not him the man’s angry with, it still slightly scares him. Rhaegar is simply a very impressive and imposing man. Extremely intimidating.

“Her father’s ill, and they’re not… comfortable. He needs special treatment in-“

“Special treatment my bloody arse!” Rhaegar pulls the tablet back towards him, “She claims we left her to suffer the scrutiny of the press, says she couldn’t even leave her house.”
“Well, she couldn’t—“

“I paid for her security from my own pockets! Do I look like a halfwit? She had no reason to complain! You asked and I sympathised with this bloody woman I’d never met, so I—“

“She was very grateful—“

“Not grateful enough to not lie about it! The state cannot offer security protection to non members of the royal family, the rules are quite clear about that, there is nothing else I could have done. She was never in any danger and you told me she was satisfied!”

“She never… doesn’t she say you paid for it?” Jon has never felt so incredibly made fun of, and in that moment he battles wanting to read the article till the last dot, or never find out at all, ever.

“No.” Rhaegar says, “Miss claims that, even after a year of dating, she never even met either me or your mother because we are high-headed snobs who felt too good for her company.”

“Ygritte never really particularly wanted to meet you.” Jon remembers.

“Worse, is that she calls your sister an hypocritical actress, who laughs at common people behind their backs, mocking their clothes and their accents and…” Rhaegar lifts up the tablet to find the specific point where Ygritte actively tried to bash Rhaenys, “A brilliant actress who seemingly thinks her job is to amuse the less privileged, less sophisticated and less educated of our country. She’s an arrogant snob.”

“It’s all very unnecessary.” Lyanna decides.

“She says our family is one great feud, an institution that represents the small group of wealthiest privileged, who keep up the impression of unity for the sake of it.” Rhaegar says, “Do you have any idea how much damage control this will cost us? It might take us years to have this moved into the back of the people’s minds!”

Jon rather aggressively pulls the tablet back from his father’s hands, and spots some big black letters, highlighting what Ygritte had got to say about him, in particular, ‘He isn’t mentally stable. The army did him serious harm and he has anger issues, it’s why he can be so violent to photographers. He also struggles a lot with his position role within the institution, he complained all the time. At one point it just became too much and I realised how fake it all was. How fake he was, the family, everything. It’s all fake. Everything about being with him was toxic, and I couldn’t breathe.’

Jon wishes he could throw the tablet away and smash it to pieces against the wall. To shatter her words, maybe forget them and with him forgetting, so will everyone else. But wouldn’t that just prove her right? Jon suddenly notices how violently his hands shake.

“We’re going to have to come up with a PR plan to emphasise how everything she wrote is—“

“Bullocks!” Rhaegar finishes his wife’s sentence.

“We’re not fake, are we? And your sister is not a… she’s not arrogant at all.”

Jon remembers Rhaenys laughing at people standing in line, waiting for her to show up and shake their hands. She wasn’t mocking, not really. In Rhaenys’ nature there’s no room for her to understand why people would wait for hours in the rain to shake a hand of someone they don’t even know.
Jon also remembers how he told Ygritte all about staged photo calls, staged smiles, staged handshakes, the interviews that are redone time and time again, the questions delivered beforehand, answers practiced. The speeches written by three professional speech writers that all of them only practice, then give like a parrot mimicking the sound of a door slammed shut.

“She’s not lying.” Jon says, “I am a whiny, stupid, foolish idiot who complains about how horribly privileged he is.”

Lyanna gives the sympathetic and worried mum sigh, “Darling, that’s not true.” She says, placing a hand on his shoulder, “That girl needs money, you said so yourself.”

“But she’s not lying.” Jon says, and before Lyanna can contradict him Rhaegar loudly proclaims,

“It doesn’t bloody matter whether or not she is lying, I don’t care how she sees us or thinks of us! No one gets to call my children arrogant, fake and toxic.”

“She calls you arrogant, fake and toxic too.” Lyanna says and when Rhaegar gives her a look of fury she gobbles up a chuckle, “She calls all of us fake and toxic and crazy and what not. But we know better, and that’s what counts most. There’s no point in fighting each other,” she leans back in her seat, “I suggest we stay calm.”

Rhaegar’s anger fades fully after these wise words and he nods in agreement, “I have spoken to Connington about this, he and I agree that we shall not release a statement and first wait and see what happens. We’ll hope it blows over. You’re lucky it’s a Saturday, so I’ll be able to ignore the Prime Minister for a little while longer.”

“The comment section is very much on your side.” Lyanna says, thinking that’s any sort of condolence for him, ignoring the fact that the Daily Mail has been giving the royal family hell ever since they figured they could, “Everyone says it was a trashy move on her part, they say she’s doing it for the attention.”

“She’s not doing it for the attention.” Jon says, he’s quite certain of that.

“It doesn’t matter.” Rhaegar says again, “Your sister will be here in a moment, if I were you I’d mentally prep myself for her rage.”

Jon doesn’t need that advice, he’s already started, though he doubts he’ll ever be prepared for whatever Rhaenys is about to do after getting called a fake snob.

Lyanna shoves her chair back and gets up, “Well, I think we need some time to think, hmm?” She suggests, and all know that she means ‘Jon’ when she says ‘we’.

Jon just nods, follows her example and leaves the room as soon as he can.

The adrenaline has faded his hangover headache away, replaced it with even worse stomach cramps of shame. He drops down in his bed again, hides his face under the blankets and wishes he didn’t feel too miserable to cry. He should’ve let Aegon buy him that boxing thing for his birthday, so he could fist it into pieces now, screaming the lungs out of his body. Instead, all he can do is close his eyes and drown away in self-pity.

He is only allowed about an hour of peace, self pity and quiet before Aegon bursts in and drops down on the bed, leaning over him, telling the cotton that hides his face, “Rhaenys is here too, she’s saying very mean things about your ex-girlfriend.”

Jon doesn’t respond, only closes his eyes more fiercely, until he realises there’s one thing he needs
to know, “She’s very angry with me?”

“Naah.” Aegon says, “it wasn’t you who gave an interview, calling her fake and entitled.”

Jon moves the blanket off his face and sits upright, “Entitled?”

“You haven’t read it?” Aegon stares at Jon with disbelief as he puts some crips in his mouth, with his mouthful, he grins, “I would if I were you.”

“Rather chew on glass.” Jon says and he drops back down, so he can stare at the ceiling, as empty as his heart.

“She called me a pretentious, scornful, smug and spoiled twat with a drinking problem.” Aegon says, mouth full.

“Aegon, I’m so sorry.”

Aegon grins, “For what? She’s right. Can’t say Rhaenys shares my ability to self reflect, I’m debating whether she’s more hurt by ‘bossy’ or the thing about her being ‘presumptuous’. ‘The high and mighty princess Rhaenys is a know-it-all.’ I mean, the girl met our sister maybe twice and her description is so accurate I wish I could congratulate her, was it not that it really was a dick move on her part.”

“It’s not funny.” Jon says.

“Why you gotta be so toxic?” Aegon asks and he bursts out laughing, after which Jon angrily jumps up, “Don’t be like that, you and I both know my way of handling this is the only way. The damn article is out, nothing to be done. By tonight every Britton who cares has read it front to back. Every person in the world, now I think of it. For some reason we attract a lot of global interest, even you.”

“Dad’s going to kill me.”

Aegon chews on a fresh handful of crips, “Naaah, he’s too worried about you to consider killing you.”

Jon sits down in his sofa and contemplates turning on the tv, but changes his mind when Aegon gulps his snack down and informs him,

“They’re looking into her past now.”

“What the fuck does her past gotta do with it?”

“You know what they’re like- better safe than sorry. Just in case your girlfriend has some skeletons in her closet, we’d rather know before The Telegraph does.”

“Ygritte has no skeletons, she’s extremely normal- which is why I liked her.”

“Don’t remind me.” Aegon rolls his eyes and looks down in the sack of his food as if studying it adds to the experience, “I’ll help you find someone extremely un-Ygritte.”

“Thanks, but no.” Jon says and he looks down at his phone, sees he’s got over ten missed calls, all from Robb and Sam, he presumes. Grenn and Pyp probably texted him a ‘hey man, hope ur okay’- and Theon likely tried to do the same in the corner of some long-dead, overcrowded groupchat. Jon really doesn’t feel ready yet to face their support.
“How bout one of Margaery’s cousins? They’re all very aristo and high-headed. I’m sure they’d love to deal with some of your toxic-ness.”

“Piss off, Aegon.”

“Or how bout my cuz Ari? I mean, she’s Spanish, not sure if you could handle that, but it would strengthen the family ties. Maybe that way they’d stop gossiping about how much my family wants your mum dead.”

“I have told you a billion times; I And Arianne is not gonna happen.”

“Is it cause she’s ten years your senior? Cause that’s very ageist of you. I couldn’t imagine what else might turn you off, she’s very-“

“She can’t stand me.”

“True,” Aegon acknowledges, “But at the same time she also wants to do you, and I speak from experience when I say these two make for epic nights.”

“That’s disgusting.” Jon says. If there’s anything he hates in the world, it’s Aegon trying to set him up with a Martell. They’re not his kind of people. And it would be weird. With Arianne, it’s always weird. It gives him al the cringe when she looks at him from across the room and does that thing with her eyes and reminds him of memories he thought he burned from his brain.

Aegon drops down next to him, offers him the sack of crips and then throws it on the coffee table when Jon shakes his head.

“Myrcella Baratheon’s pretty hot.”Aegon goes on, “But then, I suppose we better find you someone trustworthy after this fiasco.”

“This fiasco isn’t over yet.” Jon reminds him, it has not even started.

“You won’t survive a Greyjoy and I think the Hightowers won’t survive you… I don’t know much about the Fossoway girl, so maybe one of these two curvy ones from Umber? Elayne Karstark? But you don’t like brunettes…”

“Who said I don’t?”

“I know!” Aegon suddenly proclaims and he opens his phone, “She’s Scottish which means catholic which isn’t good, but do meet my friend Val.” Aegon presses a picture of a blonde girl with blue eyes and a sharp jawline in his face, “She’s nice, fun but decent, attractive, and she told me she thinks you’re hot.”

Jon blinks at the photo, “Why do people tell you that? It’s weird.” Jon says, before he remembers why he’s so upset, “I don’t want you to set me up.” He pushes the phone out of his face and groans, “I want to be alone.”

“Sansa Stark?” Aegon asks.

“NO!”

“Okay sorry, no need to yell, didn’t know you had issues with Sansa Stark.”

Before Jon can respond Rhaenys barks in the room, her face red, her eyes so wide the blue seems almost purple, that’s how red they are, and the moment Jon sees her he knows it’s no longer just
“Have you ever heard of the Free Folk?” She demands to know, without greeting.

“N-no, I don’t think so?”

Rhaenys takes a step further into the room, “Free Folk; that organisation stuffed with gingers, who set houses on fire and organise rallies? From Scotland?”

“No.” Jon says, convinced now, “I haven’t-“

“Well that’s weird, because Connington seems convinced your crazy famewhore ex-girlfriend was a member.”

“Ygritte?”

“If you have other problematic exes I suggest you inform us now!”

Jon jumps up from the sofa, “that’s not-“

“She’s in pictures you know, when she was seventeen she was there when they set Karstark House on fire, she got away with it because she was underage.”

“Ygritte never-“

“Told you? Guess that’s because the fucking organisation claims to be Jacobite, They’re linked to the Tartan Terrorists! They’ve placed bombs near oils industry offices and they sent letter bombs to our grandmother in the eighties!”

“I know them!” Aegon proclaims, “They were threatening to kill English people by poisoning the water supply.”

“Ygritte wouldn’t-“

“Shut up, Jon!” Rhaenys only tells him, “You fucked up, congratulations. Obviously, she’d give an interview about why the English royal family is totally insane and pure evil! She hates everything to do with England and what’s more English than us?”

“Well, debatably, loads of things,” Aegon says, “In general, we’re more German and French than anything, thanks to the conqueror and all, furthermore, you and I are 50 percent Spanish and Jon here is half a Scot himself. Jon, are you a tartan terrorist too, or-“

“No!” Jon wants to pull his hair out of frustration, “Rhaenys, I had no idea, I swear, if she was part of any such thing I would have known, if she ever was she wasn’t anymore when I-“

“I don’t care about your excuses! I wish you good luck cleaning up this shit.”

Rhaenys throws a picture at him that doesn’t even nearly reach him, only falls down on the floor, before she storms off again.

“Wow.” Aegon said, “I mean… not even in my wildest dreams I could’ve imagined I’d be able to hate that ginger witch more than I did when I walked into this room… but my abilities keep surprising me.”

Jon picks up the picture, unfolds it and instantly recognises Ygritte, albeit a whole lot years younger, standing among other terrorists, watching as Karstark House burns down, set aflame by
terrorists. Lord Karstark lost his two boys in that fire. The man never found a way to live with it.

As Jon looks down at the pictures, Aegon clears his throat, “I guess Alys Karstark really is off the list now.”

Rhaenys doesn’t stay for dinner, she claims she promised Willas to be back home in time, but Jon doubts it. His brother-in-law was notably absent as the family sat together to decide what PR tactic will be both realistic and wise.

Jon hates the silence during dinner, when not even Aegon tries to fill the room up with his tales. He leaves around eight after which Jon hits the gym, finally, before he takes some laps in the pool, after which he showers and puts on comfortable sweats and an old jumper, ready to watch some series and drink some beer, all on his own.

Before he turns on a new episode of House of Cards, he decides to end his silence and opens his phone to scan through his messages.

As he expected, his friends all left him condolences and he politely responds in a slightly too cheerful manner, restraining from giving away any other kind of information.

He’s just about to respond to Gilly when Rhaenys calls.

“Hey.” He says.

“You sounds like Ross Gellar.” Rhaenys says, “Hey.”

Jon ignores that and remains fully silent as he patiently waits for her to say what the hell it is she got to say.

“Are you okay?”

“Please don’t delay it, if you’re calling to yell at me again, do it now, I’ll lay the phone next to me on the sofa so I won’t be able to hear but you can pretend I didn’t and unleash all your frustrations.”

“Jon, don’t be like that...” She says, her voice all soft and full of regret, “I’m calling to say sorry. I know you couldn’t have known and it’s none of your fault- I shouldn’t have yelled.”

Rhaenys doesn’t often apologise, and that’s how, when she does, it always instantly makes Jon go full, “It’s okay.” He says, “I know how upset you must’ve been, you never liked her, none of you did.”

“Because she wasn’t one of us, not because I thought she’d ever do something like this!”

“I liked her because she wasn’t one of us.” Jon confesses.

“I know.” Rhaenys sighs, “But there are different sorts of non-aristo spoiled brats who aren’t member of a Scottish terrorist group.”

“What if she’s still a member? I’ll look like a total idiot.”

“Naah.” Rhaenys says, “For now, no one knows her darkest past, they may never know. No point in breaking your brain over it.”

Jon figures she’s right and he nods, then realises she can’t see that, and says, “Thanks.”
“I’m sorry for yelling.” Rhaenys says again, “It’s worst for you.”

“She met you twice,” Jon says, “her opinion of you says nothing, it’s not the same with me.”

“Everyone seems to think she just wants attention.” Rhaenys says, “I mean, there’s nothing wrong with coming across as if you’re the victim of some evil witch.”

“I look like a total loser.” Jon says.

“No you don’t! She’s lying, they all think she’s lying and they hate how she’s talking like that about her king, it’s like, treason.”

“They’re saying that?”

“Some, Yeah. And Daily Mail readers aren’t necessarily very monarchist, so.”

“Maybe they’re just very anti-Ygritte.”

“Who cares, to be honest. Everyone’s exaggerating now, you better have some faith in the British, they are a sensible kind.”

“If you say so.”

“Jon?” Rhaenys whispers then, as if she’s about to say something no one else may hear, “I know it’s… I know it’s easy to give up on the trustworthiness of people now, but she’s just one shitty person in an ocean of human beings. Some apples are rotting, but that doesn’t say crap about the other fruits.”

Jon grins, “What, like Willas?”

“Yeah, suppose so, yes. I mean… well, you know what I mean.”

Jon’s not used to hear his sister struggle with words, and as amusing as it is, it’s also heartwarming, “Thanks.” He says, “I’ll talk to you in the morning, Okay?”

“Yes, Yeah, is good, good-night.”

“Good-night.”

When Jon goes to bed he’s afraid he’ll dream about apples, but instead he’s in the yellow drawing room, when his father has an audience with prime minister Baratheon, and his hair is suddenly as red as Ygritte’s, and next to him stands that ugly pouty son of his, Joffrey, a boy who represents the deepest most bitter feelings of hatred, jealousy and disgust Jon has ever experienced, and together they’re ripping newspapers apart as Jon’s father sits down, in a sofa, shaking his head, “The press, the press…” he says, “Good for nothing. The fucking press. Lying bastards.”

When Jon wants to run out, there’s a red-head in the door opening that makes his heart stop beating, but it’s not Ygritte.

“I voted labour.” Sansa Stark confesses, staring at the conservative prime minister, she rolls her eyes and smiles.

“You’re brave.” Jon says, his throat feels tight as he studies her ghostly face. Her golden eyelashes are still as long as he remembers, but the freckles he used to love to love so much are gone. Probably because of some make-up. Her full cheeks have made way for her mother’s high cheekbones, her hair is shorter, just over her shoulders now, she’s far skinnier than he remembers, yet curvier, and
her smile looks different. A carelessness that used to be with her every move has left her as if it never knew her. He doesn’t recognise a thing from her eyes other than that blue colour, and the way she watches him has a certain nervousness and discomfort he hates. It’s the attitude of someone he just met, someone who’s all nervous meeting royalty…. Not the attitude of someone he’s known all his life. Someone he remembers, once upon a time, a billion years ago, watching from the other side of the sandbox as she built the castle of her dreams, carefully making sure not to smudge her floral-print dress.

“You know better than anyone what the English upper class can be like. It's a very secluded world.”

It was her world. She was the true born daughter and granddaughter of dukes, member of a great family, proud, beautiful and perfect. She was all London wanted her to be, more promising than the most perfect version of Jon that he could ever be. Sweet, kind, confident and so super clever. Yet innocent and naïve in a way Jon envied.

He loved that most, about her. There was something so magical about her ability to be extremely intelligent, witty, smart, bookish, a little geeky… while also being completely and totally blind to the pains of reality. As if she was willingly ignorant, and she made that look like a good and lovely thing. She believed in castles on clouds, rainbows, unicorns, princes on white horses and happily ever after. She came home with straight A’s from school, watched history channel and read articles on human evolution… while she also painted her nails pink, as she swooned over a certain lad in a boyband, Taylor Swift country music in the background.

Sansa represented something he always wanted but could never have. He was never brave. Especially not when it came to her.

Sansa Stark was the only thing he liked about being part of a world he never felt at home in. So when she disappeared, off to France first, then Scotland, then even across the big ocean, to grow into a woman so different yet one he would recognise with just one glance… he felt even more out of place, because somehow, suddenly, a piece was missing.

A year after she left, Jon graduated law school, went to Sandhurst, eventually joined the army, and before he knew it, he was dragging himself through a desert in Iraq.

“I miraculously managed to dodge that bullet.” Jon tells her, and Sansa closes her eyes.

He never aggressively fought anything, nothing except his stupid blushing when she appeared in some door-opening, or gave him one of these polite smiles that lasted less than half a second. None of that was effortless.

In his dream, Jon’s father stands up, and suddenly he’s wearing his coronation crown. The one he was only supposed to wear that one time, “The crown comes first.” Rhaegar declares, and Robert Baratheon rolls up the only newspaper he didn’t tear apart, hits Joffrey’s head with it, who screams and then runs off.

“Are you going to show me the paintings?” Sansa asks, and Jon has no idea what she’s talking about, “You said you would, remember? Your ancestors are on there.”

“Oh.” Jon can’t help looking away from her face when he blushes.

Looking at her makes him feel like that sensitive, shy, timid and meek coward again. She makes him feel like the dangly loser teenager he felt he left behind decades ago. The kid who never would have survived a single day in a warzone.
“Yeah, sure.”
After spending the entire summer decorating the new flat, Sansa jumps shoulder deep into her work. After so long abroad it’s quite amazing to work in places she knows so well. Still surrounded by people from all over the world, she’s suddenly no longer the foreigner, and it’s wonderful to have the benefit of specialists from all over the world and home both in one place.

She goes to dinner at her parents’ house every Sunday and it’s amazing seeing them so often, almost like before. She loves having lunch with Jeyne, coffee with Mya, and having Robb and Arya over for movie night.

It’s surprisingly easy to rebuild her life in London. She knows where to shop, where the curry is best and what coffeehouses serve the best lattes. She randomly bumps into familiar faces and all of them are happy to see her, tell her she looks good and invite her over to some event.

At first, Sansa mostly refuses, but then Jeyne convinces her and before she knows it, she finds herself at charity auctions and Hightower dinners with chocolate fountains. At one of the latter she runs into Margaery, who hugs her and kisses both her cheeks, ‘I love that dress! McQueen, right?’

“No, just Zara.”

“Oh, I love Zara!”

Sansa nearly comes face to face with Joffrey twice, but even that doesn’t seem so bad as she thought it might be.

By the time autumn’s arrived, Sansa’s comfortable in her job, feeling confident and satisfied, and she’s fallen in love with London all over again. Like when you realise, you never quite fall out of love with your first love.

It’s at one beneficial auction, at the Jaehaerys and Alysanne museum, hosted by princess Daenerys, who’s desperately trying to be eager to make an end to slavery somewhere in the world, that Sansa finds herself finally in a McQueen dress again.

It all looks good, the right people are invited, the food’s nice, experts walk around, a great amount of money was spent… but Sansa can’t help but get the sense that this is a wonderful example of giving people fish, instead of fishnets. Worst of all, she can’t help but notice how lily white the whole room is. Of course, she knows this is about raising money, but it would be nice to have some sort of representation here. People who actually saw it all with their own eyes. Not the typical just graduated rich boy who took a coarse in African history and thinks he now gets to
lecture African people on African culture. Because in all honesty, if you didn’t know, it would be hard to figure this isn’t one standard London’s high society dinner party.

Charities like this are always in some way somewhat corrupt and that’s not something princess Daenerys should want to be associated with. It wouldn’t surprise Sansa if the director of whatever charity it is that she’s organising this for has a prestigious SW3 postcode.

Charity is a wonderful thing, but Sansa has learned by now that international charity is sketchy… at best. But then, Sansa’s not an uneducated rich as fuck over-privileged talentless do-gooder of the royal blood with a posh Valyrian name, so who’s she to think she knows better? She certainly has no right to complain about it, as she herself attends the event.

Yet, she finds herself doing just that to her mother, who nods and pretends to listen until her eyes widen at the sight of a woman Sansa can’t instantly place.

“Sansa dear, this is Miss Rhoyce, she’s in charge of fashion here. Myranda, Have I not told you of my daughter?”

Sansa shakes the woman’s hand, “My, the Sansa Stark? Your mother has told me all about you.”

“I’ve been abroad.”

“It’s very good to have you back, Cat missed you.”

Catelyn looks as proud as any mother and she beams back, “Sansa’s finished her history degree in America and she worked for the Louvre Museum.”

“It was only a residency.” Sansa says, “I erm… I graduated general history. I just got back from a couple of months Tel Aviv, but before that it was mostly New York.”

“Oh, really?” The woman looks surprised then, “Most female history students prefer the late modern age.”

“And the males prefer the Second World War.” Sansa nods, “But I’m not a student anymore.”

Myranda smiles and Sansa’s happy to spot amused interest, “So I can’t tempt you to a tour of our collection?”

“I’d love to.” Sansa says, hoping not to sound too eager.

Myranda nods and takes Sansa with her on a crash coarse of fashion history as Sansa stares at some really nice eighteenth century wineglass-shaped frock.

“They’re in the english style.” Sansa says.

“Yet, they’re from France.”

“Very popular among Marie Antoinette’s problematic group of best friends.”

Myranda nods, “The embroidery is all handmade with golden threat. You must’ve heard of Marie Antoinette’s favourite designer-”

“Rose Bertin?”

“It’s all hand-made, of course.”
“Madame Bertin was exceptionally expensive.”

“As most of Marie Antoinette’s favourites.”

“Imagine the hours spent on this… it must’ve been days.”

“Bet the Homo sapiens aren’t that pretty.” Myranda says when Sansa leans back up.

Sansa smiles, “They occupied themselves with the simpler things in life.”

“I can imagine.” Myranda says, “I’m sorry to say we have no pieces dating back to before the seventeenth century.”

“That’s okay.” Sansa smiles, “I loved it.”

“So, you’re working where now?”

“Well Cambridge is opening an exhibition of Homo Sapien and Neanderthal relics in the natural history museum. Since I studied most of these relics in Tel Aviv, they asked. It’s opening mid to late January. So, I’m in London till then. I’ll see where fate takes me after that. I might go back to New York.”

“You like to move from place to place?”

Sansa wants to instantly say yes, but something stops her, “I’d love to teach someday.”

“In Homo Sapiens?”

“There’s not much work in research.” Sansa admits.

“And you’re not interested in the museum world?”

“Not much work in that either.” Sansa smiles.

“Catelyn says you’re magnificent with needle and thread.” Myranda looks down at the floor, then back up, “If you’re still looking for something after January, do contact me, maybe there’s something I can do for you.”

“In fashion?” Sansa breathes a surprised chuckle.

“We don’t go that far back in time, but you might enjoy it.”

“But I’m not an art historian. Even in Paris I… I’m specialised in general world history. I have… I have mostly focussed on macro-historical questions on a… on a large scale. I’ve looked at concepts such as consciousness, the origin of leadership, where… where sexism comes from since there’s no biological explanation and what definitions we have of intelligence… Did people get happier as history evolved? What’s the essential difference between humans and animals? Why do we gossip? Is there a link between the rise of polytheism and the agricultural revolution… I… I would be extremely unsuitable for the job.”

“It’s not often I face a historian who’s heard of Rose Bertin, can recognise an English style Louis XVI’s style frock and has a feel for fashion, I wouldn’t say you’re extremely unsuitable. But I don’t deny your recent work wouldn’t be the best match.”

“I don’t come close to how qualified so many others must be.”
“Sansa,” Myranda sighs, and she turns her back on the glass that separates them from the French frock, “It’ll only be part time, but part time could grow into more, if you work hard. And part-time means you have plenty of time for… macro-historical processes.”

“But I’m not… I don’t know all that much about…” Sansa stops herself right there when she realises she does know all that much about fashion history. She turns around, looks at a white regency dress, reminding her of that scene in Pride and Prejudice, Keira Knightly version, where Lizzie wears these pearls in her hair, and then she knows that the ten-year-old Sansa who wanted nothing more but to wear her ball gown costume all day would murder for a job offer such as this one.

That Sansa is gone, though. And this Sansa has separated herself so much from the upper-class London clique that the idea of getting a job through friends of friends of your mum horrifies her.

“I’ll… I’ll let you know?” Sansa asks, and now she knows why her Catelyn dragged her with her to this event.

“Great.” Myranda smiles her bright and kind smile, then disappears.

When Sansa gets home she finds Harry asleep on the sofa. She tries to soundlessly take her shoes off but fails and when he wakes up in shock he smiles and sits upright.

“I thought you’d be home early… I wanted to surprise you with dinner.”

“Oh…” Sansa walks in, kisses him and sits down, “I’m sorry. I would’ve loved that.”

“Where were you? You look pretty, all dressed up.” Harry pulls on the skirt of her bedazzled dress, his eyes smiling.

“Some auction, hosted by the king’s sister.” Sansa shrugs.

“Oh.” Harry doesn’t at all sound excited at that and it doesn’t surprise Sansa much. He’s never into such things, good cause or not, “I wish you’d called.”

“I texted you.”

“You know I never check these.” Harry grins, and Sansa can’t help but chuckle.

“I’ll call you next time.” She promises, “I’m sorry I kept you waiting.”

“You would have loved the food…”

“It was spontaneous. Mum’s idea.”

Harry shakes his head and pretends to shudder, “I can’t stand things like that.” He says, sighing and leaning back in his seat, “All these people there are nuts.”

“It was beneficiary.”

“Sure.” Harry chuckles in his disbelief.

“Modern slavery is a multibillion-dollar industry. The United Nations estimates that roughly 27 to 30 million individuals are currently caught in the slave trade. Princess Daenerys is very passionate about it.”

“How lovely of her.” He says, “I bet she wouldn’t be able to tell me what you just told me.”
“She’s not a working member of the royal family, everything she does is not taxpayer funded, she doesn’t have to do this. She lives in the USA with her Native American husband, she could just—”

“That explains his ridiculous hair.”

“Don’t say that.” Sansa says, “It’s traditional, it’s his culture.”

Harry raises his eyebrows and then laughs, “I saw him at the royal wedding after party, he could sit on it.”

Sansa shrugs and leans back, “If that’s the way he likes it.”

Harry kisses her hand then and still holds it when he goes to lay back down, his head in her lap, “That whole family is crazy.” He mutters.

“Don’t—”

“Say that when Robb’s in the room, yeah, got it.”

“I mean it.”

“We should’ve gotten a bigger apartment.” Harry randomly says, “It’s far too small.”

“Yes well, I wasn’t sure if I’d stay after January and if I do stay, I don’t need a big townhouse, after you’ve gone back to New York.”

Harry turns to look at her, “What do you mean? Are you thinking of staying?”

“My mum introduced me to a woman who works for the fashion department at Jaehaerys and Alysanne… she said I could call her if I—”

“But you’re a macro-history specialist. Fashion isn’t exactly—“

“No, but if I won’t find a job in time, at least I’ll have a back-up.”

“You’ll find a job.” Harry says and he leans up to kiss her, “You’re brilliant.”

Sansa smiles and then leans her head back in the pillow behind her, “I like London though, don’t you?”

“It’s gloomy and rainy as always.”

Harry’s raised in Florida, he doesn’t care for Northern European weather. He always complained about the weather in New York, too. Sansa met him during a piping hot summer day and as her pale ginger skin burned away he complained about the humidity and they bonded over their shared discomfort at the party of a mutual friend.

“I like seeing my family all the time.”

“You like going to charity events.” Sansa can’t help but spot the mockery in his voice.

“I like going to events and meeting interesting people. There’s nothing wrong with that, surely?”

Harry pulls himself up and moves over to the open kitchen to open the fridge, “We should’ve gotten a bigger place, then.”
Sansa bites her lip and turns her head away.

“For the long run, I don’t see us staying here. This place literally got three rooms, including bathroom.”

“It’s got a bathtub, though.” Sansa tries, and she grins when Harry laughs. She can’t stand it when he’s angry.

“If you have to take advantage of being a posh girl with rich parents, next time, accept your daddy’s offer when he wants to buy you a place.”

“He already bought me a place, for me and Robb, but Jeyne moved in, and I don’t-“

“Robb and his wife are living in a house bought for him by his daddy?” The horror on Harry’s face would make her laugh if she didn’t know how genuine it is.

Harry takes pride in being self-made. His parents divorced when he was little, his mother took him to America and there the American dream inspired him to despise anything old-fashioned or what he might consider ‘outdated’. The king being head of state blows his mind, for starters. He’s that American who thinks it’s super weird that church and state aren’t constitutionally separated and freedom of speech is restricted. The irony.

The whole reason Sansa’s parents are rich is because their family is among the oldest in the country, and although Sansa’s father got himself to the political top, it’s hard to deny his many connections gave a push in the right direction.

Sansa has taught herself to despise all things privileged too, she hates the class system, and she hates how she once dreamed of being that socialite soho club Stepford wife. Yet now she’s back… every time Harry mocks it, it feels like he’s mocking her, too.

“They pay rent.”

“From that job Ned got him?”

“Stop it, Harry, Robb’s my brother, he works very hard.”

“Not as hard as most should have to, if they wanted his position.”

“Robb can’t help being born who he is, nor could I. You know me, I’m not like that… so please, don’t be so hostile.”

Harry gulps down some beer as he studies her face, then sighs, and tells her, “Arryn doesn’t necessarily need me back in New York in the new year. I wanted to discuss it with you first, but I guess you’ve made up your mind about London?”

“I’ve only met with this woman once, nothing’s set yet, I just spoke to her and now I’m telling you, I haven’t decided where I’m going.”

“But you like London?”

“Of course I like London, it’s my home.”

“You weren’t so eager to come here, though.”

Sansa gets up from the sofa and wraps her arms around herself, “We don’t have to talk about this now.”
“If you don’t wanna leave London I can’t go back to New York.”

“Do you need me to follow you?”

“I have followed you, haven’t I? After your surprise trip to Gaza when we were apart for four months.”

“Israel wasn’t…” Sansa sighs, “Let’s just go to bed? I’m tired.”

“It’s not you to settle.” Harry reminds her, “You’re too ambitious to settle for a part-time job that’s nowhere near your specialty and was fixed for you by your mother, don’t you want to achieve things because you worked hard?”

“Yes well… what if there’s no wind, hmm? What if I’m just trying to find some… some air to breathe? If I can’t find a job I’d rather stay near my family.”

“So your daddy can pay your bills and-“

“Don’t.” Sansa spits, “Leave my parents out of it. It’s not their fault that I don’t want to go to New York and sit around and wait for you to come home.”

“But we agreed New York-“

“We agreed we’d stay in London till January and then see what would come next.” Sansa says, “Anyway, we have to stay till January, Robb and Jeyne have set the date at 31st of December.”

“They have what?”

“My brother’s getting married the last day of the year. They thought it’d be fun and different. They’re getting married at Winterfell.”

“Well, How exciting. Do I have to be there?”

“Of course you do, he’s my brother.”

“All these smug people will be there.”

“Do you mean his friends?”

“All these spoiled and bored rich kids with their ridiculous accents.” Harry physically cringes.

“That’s not…” Sansa sighs again and then decides to give up, “Well, I’m sorry you don’t like my brother’s friends. Although their accent also happens to be my accent-“

“Sansa-“

“ They come with his package though, and he comes with mine. Robb’s my brother and I’d appreciate it if you could put some effort-“

“You’re right.” Harry says then and he puts the beer down on the counter to grab her hand, “He is your family, I will try to be nice.”

“Thank you.” Sansa says, “You can start tomorrow.”

“What?”
“It’s his birthday.”

“You… said it was Sunday?”

“He’s celebrating tomorrow, a Saturday.”

“I’m sorry honey, I have a diner, I can’t just-“

“You can come after.”

“With Chinese bankers.”

“So? Parties last till late at night.”

“Yes but…” Harry sighs, then nods, “I’ll be there.”

“Really?” Sansa sighs in relieve and kisses his cheek, “Thank you, I know how badly you don’t want to.”

Harry nods, gives her a frown and then pulls her towards him to kiss her and push her to the bedroom door, to which Sansa is happy to oblige, so long as they’re no longer fighting, she’s glad.

Robb still lives in his London flat on Old Church Street in Chelsea, the one where Sansa used to stay before she got her own flat.

Sansa arrives at around five, everyone else already there, including grandpa Tully, who’s so deep into his Dementia that he keeps asking her why she’s not at school and offers biscuits from the jar every 30 minutes.

Twelve years ago, Sansa’s aunt Lysa would’ve been here too, but no one mentions her absence. Uncle Edmure isn’t here either, he and aunt Roselin are on some five-year anniversary trip to Honolulu, their two boys are staying with Roslin’s parents, in Cumbria.

Arya’s 24, and still at uni, Cambridge, like Robb, and she seems to actually finally pass things. Bran looks healthy and strong, he’s eager to start his masters. Rickon’s nearly sixteen, with his ADHD wilder than ever.

“I want a new dog.” He proclaims during the appetizer.

Nymeria only passed away in June, so now Summer is the only remaining dog of what once was a whole pack of Huskies.

Greywind was the first, he died when Sansa was fifteen, a year later her favourite Lady passed away, just before she left for boarding school. Nymeria passed away two years after that.

“I’ve never named one.”

“You’ve never walked one either.” Ned laughs. Sansa’s father is always happiest around family, and lately it has been such madness at Westminster, that he frowns more than he smiles.

With a politician for a father, the Stark kids have seen more of London than their traditional home
of Scotland. When Ned was elected major of London he was one of the first aristocratic names to win a political seat independent from the House of Lords in over half a century.

Sansa’s proud of her father, but he doesn’t handle hectic and dramatic things well, especially tragedies he takes as a personal loss. Thus, a shooting near Westminster depresses him for at least six months, and when a building collapses because of negligence he’s sleepless for weeks. It exhausts him and he looks many years older. It doesn’t help that foreign idiots are throwing around their unasked-for insulting, humiliating and factually incorrect opinions, nor does the whole mess that is Brexit.

Sansa doesn’t believe her father was born to be in a position of power, but Ned sees it not as an entitlement, but a duty, to represent the people - which means that so long as he has votes, he continues to work very, very hard.

Unlike Robb and Catelyn, Sansa stays out of politics, she doesn’t join her father during campaigning, gives no interviews, avoids the media and prefers it that way.

Sansa was perhaps well-known before she disappeared, but she’s managed to fade into oblivion quite well, and she likes it that way. In the beginning, it felt like she’d spent part of her life living a lie, being a bit of a fraud.

“I’ll walk the dog.” Rickon promises, “I want a black one.”

“Huskies aren’t black!” Arya bites.

“They can be!” Rickon says and Catelyn gives them warning glances before the debate can unleash into something of more violence.

“We’ll think about it, dear.”

“When Bran leaves I’ll be the only one left, it’ll be quiet at the house.” Rickon tries, and everyone laughs. So long as Rickon lives somewhere it’ll never be quiet.

“Your mother said we’ll think about it.” Ned moves his hand to ruffle Rickon’s auburn curls, who quickly tries to tame the new mess.

“What would you call him, Rickon?” Jeyne asks. Even though she and Robb have been dating for nearly eight years now, she’s still a little left out. Arya and Catelyn aren’t particularly fond of her, and though Ned never shows it, nor is he.

Jeyne is… sweet. She’s kind and gentle. Sansa cannot help but think Robb could use someone with a little more spine, some backbone, someone who disagrees with him from time to time. Jeyne’s whole life seems to revolve around pleasing and keeping Robb happy. He’d appreciate it more if he’d actually see it, but Robb’s life… doesn’t revolve around Jeyne.

As far as Sansa knows, both Jon and Theon don’t know her well, and he works a lot. Sansa knows Jeyne’s close to her family; minor aristos who could be considered social climbers, was is not that Sansa’s convinced Jeyne genuinely loves Robb more than anything.

Robb loves her back, Sansa knows, and they’ve been through a lot. They only started dating after he knocked her up, age 21, when he and Rhaenys just split for the one-hundredth time. She lost the baby three months in and stayed together. Jeyne seemed ready for commitment ever since, but Robb less so. He spend most of these last years in service, went to Mali, then Iraq, with Jon. He finally proposed to the girl last Christmas. Two months after princess Rhaenys publicly announced her engagement.
“Shaggydog.” Rickon answers, without doubt.

“I like-“ Jeyne starts but both Arya and Bran are too loud.

“What a stupid name!”

“How old are you?”

“Oi!” Robb bellows, “Rickers can name the beast whatever he likes.”

“Don’t call me Rickers.” Rickon grimaces.

It’s this sort of family banter that Sansa missed the most.

“Too many dogs!” Grandpa Tully loudly proclaims, “Poor Greywind and… and…. What’s the name of yours?”

“Lady.”

“Too many dogs! You cannot have five!”

“We’ll have two.” Rickon says, he doesn’t handle grandpa Tully’s dementia well.

“A toast to Greywind, Lady and Nymeria.” Ned raises his glass, and everyone follows.

“What time’s Harry coming, dear?” Catelyn asks.

“Around eight, he’s working late.”

“On a Saturday? Oh, how sad.”

“How’s his job?” Ned asks, “He’s enjoying it?”

“I believe so.” Sansa nods.

“Jon seems happy with the lad… spoke to him on the phone yesterday. Cousin Robin passed his driver’s test.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful!” As much as Catelyn can’t stand her sister, she still attempts to care for her nephew.

Aunt’s Lysa’s first husband is co-president of the Vale Bank, where Harry’s been working since graduation. Sansa’s never been into economics, and she can’t stand the corruption of the industry. No one can deny that uncle Jon need not turn his pennies around.

“Such a shame they couldn’t make it.” Catelyn sighs, “They could have met Harry!”

“Jon said the boy has a good head for figures, said he’s very sharp.”

“They’re related? Right?” Arya asks, “Thought he was like… a third cousin ten times removed. That’s why he got the job.”

“That’s hardly worth mentioning, darling.” Catelyn says.

“It’s not why he got the job!” Sansa snaps.

“Still.” Arya says.
“Don’t worry.” Bran grins, “He’s related to uncle Jon, which means it’s not *legal* incest.”

Arya pretends to have a hard time keeping her food in as Robb takes his responsibility as eldest, “Our father’s a Duke, we do not get to laugh at inbreeding with a family tree like ours.”

“My parents were full cousins.” Ned says with little shame, “There’s a Jonnel Stark who wedded his niece, Sansa Stark, somewhere in the 1600’s.”

“That sounds like uncle Jon.” Arya laughs.

“I and Harry are in absolutely no way related.” Sansa lifts her spoon, “So I don’t know what all this is about.”

“It’s about Lord Harold Arryn Hardying getting his fancy job just cause he knows uncle Jon.” Arya explains, “Even though he’s always bitching about how we get everything handed to us on a silver platter, as if he has any idea about what our lives are like.”

“He doesn’t-“

“He’s a judgemental dick.”

“*Language!*” Catelyn gasps.

“If I get the puppy, I’ll wake up myself in the middle of the night to let him out.” Rickon’s ADHD remembers.

“If you get a puppy,” Ned says, pointing his fork at Rickon, “I want you to walk him trice a day.”

“I will!”

“And if I see Osha taking care-”

“You won’t!”

“And you’ll train him yourself. I want him to sit and lie down and shut up by comman-”

“Yes, yes! He will, he will!”

“If he wakes me up in the middle of the night, once, I’ll-“

“He won’t!”

“As for his cleanliness-“

“He won’t pee in the house ever!”

“You better not-“

“I won’t! With Summer I’ve al-“

“And you’ll take care of Summer too.”

“I will!”

“Walk Summer *and* the new dog, before you go to school, every day.”

“Yes! I promise, I swear, I will!”
“Ned…” Catelyn tries, but it’s too late.

“Very well, then.” Ned accepts and Rickon jumps up in euphoria.

“YES! Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!” Rickon wraps his arms around his father, who chuckles as Catelyn shakes her head.

It’s nearly eight when the birthday cake is served, which they finish in front of the telly, watching the Great British Bake Off.

“I like that heart shaped thing.” Jeyne comments, and no one really responds because no one knows what she’s talking about and no one cares.

It’s half past when the doorbell rings and Jeyne runs off to open it.

When she comes back it’s none other but the Prince Aegon who bursts in, dressed in jeans and a leather jacket, “I know we’re early, but you know how toxic Jon can be, so- oh, hello!”

Ned jumps up to greet the prince, as well as Catelyn, who straightens her skirt and tries to casually wipe the crumbs off her blouse.

Sansa exchanges some meaningful look with Arya before she spots Jon Snow, first time since his sister’s wedding. Up close, at least. He was there when his mother opened a new exhibition about Holstein the younger paintings at the Portrait Gallery. Sansa watched him from a distance, feverishly holding tight on her champagne glass.

She realised then what she realised at Rhaenys’ wedding, which is that Jon Snow dried up really well. She’s not sure what it is that makes her want to keep looking at him, perhaps curiosity to know what is hidden behind the harness he wears, or maybe it’s just the shape of his jawline, biceps and trimmed beard that she likes. Truth is, that when she was in the gym with Maya, and Maya casually mentioned how Jon Snow has clearly tried to overcome the trauma of his ex-girlfriend’s little stunt by releasing his frustrations in the gym, Sansa tried hard to not agree a little too wholeheartedly.

Up close, as far as him standing in the doorway and her sitting in the sofa, squeezed in between her little brother and her little sister, can be considered up close, he doesn’t look quite as confident and as comfortable as he did at the gallery. He looks awkward mostly, but Sansa suspects that’s mainly because Aegon is trying his best to make him that. He seems quite skilled at it.

“Hey mate.” Robb says, bro-hugging his two friends with one arm, “Good to see you, welcome… wanna beer?”

Robb’s already off to the balcony, to grab some cold beers, when Catelyn squeezes Jon’s shoulder.

“Jon, hello! How’s your mother?”

“Good… just tired.”

“I heard Australia was a success?”

“They got good press, so that’s good, but two weeks was a lot. My father’s better at handling jetlag.”

Ned is having the same sort-like conversation with Aegon, and Sansa decides it’s time for her to go
and hide in the kitchen, so she can ring Harry, to ask him why the hell he’s taking so long.

She stands there, in the kitchen, cursing in her unanswered iPhone, when her mother, coat on, walks in.

“We’re leaving.” She says, “Before the real party starts.”

“Okay.” Sansa’s hand lowers to remove the phone from her ear.

“Have fun.” Catelyn kisses Sansa’s cheek, until she spots the phone and gives an apologetic smile, “I’m sure he’s only busy.”

“It’s a Saturday.” Sansa says, without thinking, “He said he’d be here, that’s all.”

“I’m sure he will.” Catelyn smiles.

Sansa nods and Cat moves to leave before she changes her mind and turns back around.

“Sansa?”

“Hmm?”

“You are good, aren’t you? I know being back in the city has been hard-“

“It hasn’t.” Sansa says, “truly, it’s been good to me.”

Catelyn nods, “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely sure.”

“If there’s anything I can do-“

“No, but thank you.”

Catelyn nods again, then gives Sansa a worried smile, “You can tell me, but I’m sure you know.”

“I do.” Sansa breathes a smile, “Just… don’t worry so much. It’s been so long, and I’m a big girl.”

“I know.” Catelyn lays her hand to Sansa’s cheek, “I know. All my girls are big, and my boys too.”

With one last peck to Sansa’s cheek, her mother’s gone, and Sansa drops down against the counter, taking a minute before she raises her phone again.

She swears at her screen just when Theon appears, grinning.

“Sansiepans, look at you, more beautiful than ever.”

“I’m having a conversation.” Sansa says, listening to the ringing.

“Oh, I will not disturb.” Theon laughs when he opens the balcony door to smoke and as soon as he’s turned his back on her, Sansa leaves for the living room.

Ned, grandpa and Rickon have left too, but Arya sits on one of the two sofas, crammed in between Loras and Eddie, who’re both watching Aegon.

Robb himself has already ditched Jeyne with her cousin who’s name Sansa always forgets, but she clearly arrived with Willas, who didn’t bring Rhaenys, but did bring Margaery, and her cousins.
She’s surrounded by some more girls Sansa went to school with; Alysanne Bulwer, Lady Alice Graceford and Meredith Crane.

Robb and Jon are spreading out the drinks on the dining table, bottles of alcohol varying in their percentage of poison are put on display. They’re laughing and are engaged in what’s clearly a conversation between just the two of them.

Behind Sansa the bell rings and a host of Hightowers bursts in, followed by Myrcella Baratheon and some guy Sansa doesn’t recognise.

Sansa spends a good half hour talking about New York fashion week with Meredith, then discusses the weather and politics with Alice, and she even talks about dog breeds with Dickon Tarley. Too soon, she ends up with Jeyne. Sansa sees and acknowledges how desperately her brother’s fiancée wants this conversation to go well, but it’s just not gonna happen.

Sansa asks about the wedding in hope of some info she’s interested in. After the mention of red roses, she doesn’t dare ask about music.

“And the dress?”

“They haven’t started yet, but-“

“They haven’t?” Sansa jumps up, “You’re getting married in three months!”

“We just finished the design. I wasn’t sure if I wanted a custom one, it seemed such a waste. Your mother convinced me.”

“Who’s the designer?” Sansa always imagined to come with her sister-in-law, to Kleinfeld, to witness the fitting, keep her opinions in as she sipped champagne.

“Erdem.”

“Oh… I mean, nice. I love Erdem.”

Jeyne proves to not be daft, “Not everyone is a fan, but I am.”

“Well, how nice.” Sansa says, “I’m ehm… going to call Harry.”

She disappears into the kitchen again, where it’s stuffed with Greyjoys suddenly and Sansa seeks refuge to the balcony.

She doesn’t get to breathe a breath of relieve for long when she jumps up in surprise and fear when, from a corner she didn’t think was occupied, Jon says, “Hey.”

“Christ…” Sansa says, placing a hand to her racing heart.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you.”

It’s okay.” Sansa grabs the railing of the tiny balcony, stuffed with beer and wine, and, after re-finding her breath, she glances his way, “Smoking kills.”

Jon looks at his cigarette and raises his eyebrows, “I never knew, I’ll quit now.”

Sansa looks away and finds her face heat up, “I’m sorry I… that was rude.”

Jon doesn’t deny it, instead he looks at her in a way that makes her feel far too uncomfortable.
“What are you doing here?” He asks instead, and for a moment she finds that question as rude as her own remark, until she realises she’s standing outside, on a balcony, in mid-September, wearing nothing but an off-shoulder little black dress. At least Jon is wearing a coat, one extremely expensive and very warm one, she’s sure. Black wool and the cut are too fashionable for him to have picked it out himself, she decides.

He’s wearing that cap she’s seen him wear in magazines before, when he’s not on duty but just casually out and about, pretending not to see the photographers. It suits him well, she thinks, makes it look less like he desperately needs a haircut.

“I was going to call Ha- someone.”

“Outside?”

“In the kitchen.”

Jon chuckles.

Already, Sansa thinks, usually it would take a whole lot more to make Jon Snow smile. Especially nowadays. Sansa hasn’t failed to miss how miserable he has been since that article thing written by his ex-girlfriend, whose name she keeps forgetting.

“Didn’t want to disturb Asha.”

“So now you’re stuck with me instead.”

“That’s not-“

“I’ll be off in a sec, you can call your boyfriend in peace.”

“I wasn’t going to- I mean, well, don’t rush.”

Jon gives her his friendly and polite plastered-on smile again, but he coughs, either because he’s a smoker and his lungs are ink black, or because he tries to break the awkwardness, “How are the Neanderthals doing?”

“Great! I mean, they’re still extinct, but the exhibition is going well.” Sansa can’t help but cringe at her own joke.

“My dad’s going to open it.”

“I know, we’re so grateful.” Sansa can say that wholeheartedly, before she throws out, “I erm… I’m applying for a job at the Jaehaerys and Alysanne museum, I think.”

There’s no I think. Sansa hasn’t mentioned it to anyone, but somehow, she’s known that this job… it’s hers. It’s what’ll make her happiest, and she’s decided that happiest, is what she wants to go for, whether it’s a smart move career wise or not, and for some unexplainable reason, she casually admits it to herself by informing Jon Snow, of all people, who seems logically surprised.

“Thought you are specialised in the Stone Age?” Jon throws his cigarette away, into the darkness of night.

“Macrohistory.”

"I don't know what that is." Jon admits.
"It's... well, me neither, sometimes, to be honest."

"Sometimes?"

"Maybe I'll explain it to you, someday."

Jon seems to catch the hint, and instead, asks, "Wouldn't art history-"

"I know it's a change."

Jon raises his eyebrows at the coolness in her voice, but doesn’t mention it, when he kindly tells her, "I'm patron of Jaehaerys and Alysanne, so if you need me to, you know, lemme know."

"Really?" Sansa has a hard time believing that. He doesn't seem very artsy.

"Yeah. My dad is president, but he doesn't do recommendation e-mails, I think."

"Well, that's very kind of you and very... tempting. But better not. It's... it's worse enough that my mum probably got me the interview."?

"Did she?" Jon raises his eyebrows in amusement.

"It'll only be part time." For some reason his frown annoys her. He's Jon freaking Snow. Practically royal. He shouldn't judge her for taking jobs she's not exceptionally qualified for, "I hope that maybe I'll get to teach or something... to pay the bills, you know? I can juggle more than one job."

Jon grins again, looking ahead of himself as he leans his arms on the railing, "I'm sure you can."

Sansa leans down beside him, at safe distance, staring at the red bricks of the flat opposite of Robb's, across the street, "I do... I did always love fashion history."

"I remember."

"You do?"

"Rhaenys' eighteenth birthday party."

Sansa gasps, "That was eighteenth century themed!"

"I can never forget, still suffer nightmares."

Sansa laughs light-heartedly at the memory, and he still grins before he looks down at his cigarette, and decides to give her some lessons on life.

"You have to do what makes you happiest. It doesn’t matter if you had a little help getting one interview, everyone has help, one way or another, just... so long as you work hard, give it your all and always show up on time."

Sansa blinks at that.

"If it ends up not being the thing for you, you can always quit."

"It’s... not exactly what I’ve been aiming." Sansa says, and she's not sure why she admits that. She hasn’t been able to talk all this over with anyone, and she shouldn’t do it with him. Although his view seems so un-biased that it’s tempting to tell him everything, "I'll change my course, that’s a
“Terrifying?” Jon asks, “Better than dull.”

Sansa cannot help but smile at that.

“Are you bored, Sansa?”

“W-what?”

The way Jon smirks then does funny things to her cheeks and she has to look away in hope of hiding her blushing.

“N-no, I just… life choices are hard.”

“They don’t have to be.”

“No?”

Jon shakes his head.

“Well, I-“

“What do you want?”

“Hmm?”

Jon shrugs, “What do you want? Do you wanna change course and do something terrifying?”

“I… I don’t know?”

“You’re lucky. You get to think about what you want. We don’t all have that luxury.”

Jon turns his head away from her, and Sansa is glad he’s no longer looking at her like that.

“I want to stay in London.” Sansa says, her voice far too timid.

“Then you totally should.” Jon says, looking at the pack of Camel Light he holds, and as she watches his hands, she feels herself shudder, and he noticed too, then takes his coat off, to place it around her shoulder.

Without being able to do anything to stop it, Sansa feels his body heat and smells his scent all around her, which numbs her brain, then has her covered in goosebumps, “T-thank you.”

Jon gives her a lopsided grin and Sansa watches the smoke from his cigarette rise up to the sky in an attempt to not feel distracted by the muscles flexing in his, now bare, upper arms. He’s only wearing a white cotton t-shirt, but he doesn’t seem cold.

“I better go back inside, face everyone’s pity.” He says, throwing away his cigarette, and Sansa can’t help but be a bit stunned at how unapologetically honest it is.

“I don’t think Robb feels sorry for you.” Sansa blurts out, realising that pretending she had no idea what he was talking about, would have perhaps been the politer thing to do.

“He better not.” Jon says.

“Nor do I.”
“Guess that’s why I’m still on this balcony.” Jon says.

Sansa grins and he grins back, “It’s good you’re here, it’s some distraction.”

“I have plenty distraction.” Jon says, “Representatives of the state actually work hard, despite what you might think.”

“You don’t know what I think.”

Jon looks up and she sees a tiny sparkle in his eyes that tells her he enjoys her kind of wit.

“I’m going to Toronto next week, to open the Commonwealth games.”

“That’s great.” Sansa says.

“And after that it’s Geneva, where I’m going to try and be as unpolitical as I possibly can while I help human rights lawyers bring awareness to Yazidi sex slaves in IS occupied areas.”

“Can you be unpolitical about… about things like that?” Sansa asks, her throat hoarse.

“No.” He says, instantly, “But people find it hard to fight you on matters like sex slave trafficking. And it works that I’m the one who brings awareness, while the lawyers do most of the talking. It’s all tricky, but it’s worth it, and I’m not the one writing the speeches.”

“Your aunt-“

“Dany only focusses on raising money, which is great, but she’s never met one of them, she doesn’t know what they want. The lives of these women are destroyed, and we do nothing, they feel abandoned. What they want most, is a voice, to not be another number. Numbers mean nothing to people, never have. I can… I am in a position where I can give that to them. Or try to.”

Sansa blinks as she listens. She’s never quite felt so at loss of words, “Are there charities, about anything, that can be totally unpolitical?”

“No.” Jon says instantly, again, “Not if they know what they’re doing.”

“How many… know what they’re doing?”

“I don’t count, but I easily could.” Jon shakes his head, “It’s the frustration of my impossible job. They want you to be this person who’s desperate to change the world for the better, but once you find out what way would be the most effective way to make a difference, you aren’t actually allowed to do that.”

“So?”

“So, I’m frustrated.”

Sansa chuckles, shuts up in fear of angering him, then smiles when she sees his eyes smile, “No one can tell.” She jokes, and that has him raise his eyebrows.

“I get away with a lot, so that makes it easier. No one really cares too much about me. Rhaenys is dancing on tightropes all day every day.”

“It doesn’t appear so.”

“She’s that good at it.”
“That’s nice. I guess?”

Jon shrugs, then says, “No, that’s pretty frustrating, too, actually.”

“Why?”

Jon shrugs again, “Because… I dunno… her mental health thing, for example. All she goes on about is breaking the stigma and bringing awareness… encouraging people to ask for help. Meanwhile, she can’t do anything about the fact that, for most people, it doesn’t necessarily get better when they ask for help.”

Sansa suddenly realises she’s grabbing his coat with her hand, squeezing it hard, digging her nails in the, definitely very expensive, wool, “It… Why would… that’s-“

“She can’t actually bring awareness to the fact that asking for help doesn’t mean you get the right help, or help covered by insurance, or help you don’t have to be on a twelve-months waiting list for, because these problems are all caused by budgets and legislation.”

“And that’s frustrating.”

Jon suddenly seems to snap out of his frustrations, turns his head, and smiles as if he slightly regrets all he just told her, “It’s still a nice change from opening expositions.” Jon says, “Not saying that isn’t very fulfilling and rewarding.”

“Not as rewarding as sitting in the golden state coach and opening state parliament.”

When Jon turns around to lean with his back against the railing, she fears, again, that he’s a bit offended. He’s awfully terrible to read, and it makes this whole conversation as exhausting as it’s satisfying.

“Only the monarch opens state parliament, and I’m not a knight of the garter, but I am colonel, so I’m on horseback. I haven’t sat down in a carriage since I was 22.”

“You must miss it.”

“You bet.” Jon smirks.

Sansa knows he earned the uniform he wears, but what he really contributed to the army always seemed doubtful to her.

“How about Ascot?”

Jon chuckles, “Don’t be silly, that’s animal abuse.”

“That’s only a bit hypocritical, coming from someone who plays polo.”

Jon grins, “I play for charity.”

“Oh, right.” Sansa says, and then they slide into this place, where they smile at each other, for some time, not saying anything.

They snap out of it when the door opens and the loud music of the party inside destroys the peace Sansa did not fully appreciate until it’s gone.

“There she is!” Aegon points at Sansa and over his shoulder she spots the uncomfortable face of her boyfriend.
“Harry!” Sansa says and he quickly walks over to her to hug her and claim her as his own.

“I was looking for you.”

“Well, I’m here! At my brother’s party.” Sansa breathes in his coat.

“Good you came so soon mate,” Aegon says, “Jon’s always had this huge crush on Sansa.” He laughs loudly, until he spots Jon's furious glare.

Aegon clears his throat, “Joke.” He says, grinning at Harry’s frown, “Just one of my very funny jokes.”

Aegon pulls Jon with him inside and closes the door, to shut Sansa and Harry off from the noise again.

“He’s crazy.” Harry says, “Absolutely out of his mind nuts. I swear, he was hitting on me.”

“He’s just a free spirit… shouldn’t pay attention to what he says.”

Harry nods once, “Traffic was horrible, I’m sorry I’m so late. I called, but you didn’t pick up your phone.”

“I wanted to I was… talking.”

Harry pecks her cheek, “you must be glad I showed up to save you from that bloke… he always looks so goddamn miserable.”

“Jon?”

“You call him Jon?”

“That’s his name. And he’s not miserable, he’s just not very… smiley.”

“I’m not staying long.” Harry says, ignoring her defense, “I’ve got work to do tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't really call the V&A museum the Victoria and Albert museum, cause that wouldn't make any sense (as far as this story makes sense), so I settled for Jaehaerys and Alysanne, even though it sounds weird, lol!

Thanks for reading, and please lemme know what you think!Xxx
Wouldn't it be terrible if you'd spent all your life doing everything you were supposed to do, didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't eat things, took lots of exercise, all the things you didn't want to do, and suddenly one day you were run over by a big red bus, and as the wheels were crunching into you you'd say 'Oh my god, I could have got so drunk last night!' That's the way you should live your life, as if tomorrow you'll be run over by a big red bus.'
- Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

“You need to tell me something.” Robb says, the moment Jon jumps into the backseat of the private chauffeured car.

“Hey, good to see you too.”

Robb nods, “Yeah, how was France?”

“Cold, good food, great wine, horrible parties, terrible people, ugly women... mostly.” Jon summarises the annual family skiing trip, “Aegon didn’t injure himself, which is a first.”

“I wish I could’ve been there.”

“No, you don’t.” Jon promises, “But maybe next year-“

“Forget next year, check this out now.” Robb pushes his phone in Jon’s face and at first Jon feels like he’s looking at a dark mush of modern art.

“That’s... that’s your balcony.” Jon grabs the phone from Robb’s hand and looks at it a little less up close.

“Jon Moves On’ the Daily Mail article says, with below it some paparazzi pics of Jon hanging his coat over Sansa’s shoulders.

“That’s… that was at your birthday party.” Jon says, he’s not exactly sure what else to say.

“They don’t know it’s Sansa.” Robb says, “Which is weird cause she’s the daughter of the major of London, and doesn’t shy away from glittery social events, lately.”

“You can’t really tell.” Jon says, narrowing his eyes. Most of Sansa is hidden away behind a tree and its shadow, though they managed to capture the moment of Jon wrapping his coat around her just so that it looks like they’re caught up in a romantic embrace.

“I can tell just fine.” Robb says, “Look mate, I know you’ve had a hard time lately, but Sansa’s my sister, there’s a code about this! She’s off limits, she’s-“

“Dating someone else.” Jon says.

He could certainly namedrop Rhaenys, probably should namedrop Rhaenys, to point out some
hideous case of hypocrisy here, but that’s unnecessary, cause Jon is not dating Sansa. Also, namedropping Rhaenys has a nasty tendency of ruinng Robb’s mood, and now’s really not the time for that.

“I was just lending her my coat cause it was freezing outside, we weren’t… we were just talking.”

“Bout what?” Robb narrows his eyes as he looks up at Jon from the article he’s still got opened on his screen.

“Stuff. I don’t remember. It wasn’t important.” In all honesty, Jon remembers everything. From what they talked about, to the way she twirled her auburn curls around her forefinger, but Robb’s upset enough as it is, and it’s better to play this as aloof as aloof exists.

“Why are they only publishing this now?”

“I don’t know.” Jon shrugs, “Probably because they wanted to drag out the aftermath of Ygritte’s attempt at journalism. After people got bored of that they went on to the next hole, which is me getting on with my life, being totally over her, and finding someone else for them to torture.”

“They’re not going to torture Sansa!”

“No! Of course not. They don’t mention her name, right?”

“She’s the mysterious brunette and Jon’s mystery girl.” Robb says, and the way he says it makes Jon wanna laugh, but he’s wiser than that.

“Well, I mean, if they didn’t even get her hair colour right…”

“They’re going to try and find out who she is, though.” Robb says.

Jon’s well aware of that, more so than Robb could possibly ever imagine, and a terrible and nauseating case of anxiety is threatening to creep up, but sharing his mini-heart attack would do no one any favours, so instead, he shrugs, “Look, I trust about everyone at that party apart from one or two Tyrell’s and Theon’s sister, they don’t even know she’s a really obvious redhead, and I never actually hang out with Sansa, so it’s going to be okay.”

Robb nods then, sighs and leans back into his seat, “Well, I hope Harry agrees.”

“Who?”

“Hardyng. Her boyfriend.”

Jon can spot the obvious displeasure at that situation in Robb’s voice and tries his best to casually turn his head to look out at the window, in hope of spotting something in the streets of London that’ll distract him from being far too interested.

“He’s a right real prick. Always demanding and jealous. He’s not gonna be happy about this. I bet he’s giving her a hard time right now.”

“About the article?” Jon snaps his neck when he turns his head back and looks down at Robb’s, now turned off, phone, “I was just lending her my coat, she was cold.”

Robb nods once, “I’m sure it was the right thing to do, mate.” He says, then pats Jon’s shoulder as if that’s all the reassurance he’s got to offer.

“It was freezing outside.” Jon says, leaning back again.
“Not freezing as hard as Harry’s heart. He’s ehm… I don’t know, he’s very high-headed, thinks he’s really better than the rest of us cause he’s so self-made. Which is bullshit anyway cause the only reason he got his fancy banking job is cause he’s Jon’s fourth cousin so much removed.”

“He’s my what?”

“I mean uncle Jon, Jon Arryn.”

“He’s related?”

“Don’t be so shocked, you’re a bloody Targaryen.”

Jon raises his eyebrows but accepts his undeniable defeat.

“Anyway, he’s related to Jon, not to us. Jon is aunt Lysa’s ex husband-“

“You aunt Lysa?”

“My mother’s sister.”

“I remember-“

“They don’t talk anymore, we kinda disowned her. You know what family can be like.”

“Oh. I mean, what I wanted to say is, ‘I remember her’.”

“You do?”

“Wasn’t she… I mean, she showed up at parties? I remember she was at your parents anniver-“

Robb suddenly pulls the phone back from Jon’s hand and loudly says, not looking him in the eye, “It has something to do with money, I think.”

“So you’re not inviting her to the wedding either?”

Robb laughs and it’s the ugliest laugh Jon has ever heard, “I’d rather invite Stalin and Hitler both.”

Jon feels extremely uncomfortable suddenly and gulps to give himself time to come up with something to say, “Your granddad must-“

“Grandpa doesn’t wanna see her anymore either.”

“Doesn’t your grandpa think she’s still in secondary school?” Jon aims to make a lighthearted joke, but it doesn’t work.

“No.” Robb says, “Anyway, every family has black sheep.”

“Don’t tell me. I’m sure my dad would love to pretend Viserys is still in secondary school.”

“Lysa and Jon divorced years ago.”

“She must love it that her ex husband still speaks to the family who disowned her.”

“I don’t give a shit what she thinks.” Robb spits, and he pushes his phone into his pocket, “And Jon is one of my dad’s best friends, for years, since before Lysa married him.”
“Doesn’t hurt to know the right people in banking.” Jon mutters, and Robb ignores it.

“I’ve been suspicious ever since Sansa seemed super reluctant to live with him.”

“Of what?”

“Of Harry!”

“Oh. Aren’t they?” Jon slides back into his poised attitude of disinterest.

“They are. Sansa’s here only for the span of her forestmen exhibition and he followed her… Because he claims her, I suppose. He didn’t follow her to Tel Aviv. I guess that’s why they’re still together. He’s working for the Vale Bank, he used to work in New York, that’s where he met her, when she was doing some archeology thing at Columbia, I’m not sure if it was right before or right after her three months in Paris… anyway, it seems to me he hates London and he hates Sansa’s London life so he’s eager to go back to the Big Apple. Well, I say arriverderci, he and his judgmental condemning are unbearable. He tries to make me feel guilty for having rich parents.”

“Well, that’s not your fault.” Jon mumbles.

“No, it’s not! I don’t care really, but I hate it most when he does it to Sansa.”

“He does?”

“Well, I know he complains to her that she’s changed since they came here. Sansa was desperate to leave London, you know, she’s tried hard to get away from all these socialite activities she was buried in before she left for St Andrews.”

“Why was she desperate to leave London?”

Robb’s eyes widen for the tiniest second only, then he bites his lower lip and it’s his turn to hide his face by staring out at the window, “Just wanted to get away from it all.” Robb says.

“Was it because of Joffrey?”

“No!” Robb laughs, “God no, he’s a total Oxbridge reject, so that was over when they left Secondary School. I personally made sure he is no issue anymore, trust me.”

“I can’t remember.” Jon confesses. He’s quite sure Robb would’ve confided in him, back in the days, if he’d shown Joffrey Baratheon some good left and rights.

“Oh! I may be a privileged spoiled rich kid,” Robb says, “But at least I’m not that guy.” His laughing stops and then he frowns, “How do you know about Joffrey?”

“Hmm?”

“You asked if she left because of Joffrey. How do you… do you know he… how do you know?”

Jon waits a second, then shrugs, “She may have mentioned it, sometime, I don’t… I don’t remember.”

Robb doesn’t seem to believe that, and he shouldn’t, really, so Jon laughs and shakes his head.

“Seems to me like your sister got terrible taste.”

“Yeah, Joffrey, Harry, now you…” Robb shoves Jon and they both laugh, albeit one sounding a
Jon can’t deny he’s been thinking about Sansa a lot. He didn’t send an email to Myranda of the Jaehaerys, as she specifically asked him not to, and he admired her for it, but he’s terrified he’ll come to regret that. The idea of Sansa leaving and going back to New York in the new year makes him feel weirdly panicky. Thinking about her at all makes him feel restless. And strangely happy, too.

He ran into her not long after he came back from Toronto, at one of Rhaenys’ charity events for Nurses2020. Jon’s sure there was no Harry, but he did see a Jeyne Pool. In any case, she asked him about Montreal, he told her it was Toronto and she blushed at that before confessing to having watched some of it on tv. Then he asked her about the Neanderthals and she showed him pics on her iPhone of the progressing exhibition. Jon’s never felt so interested in the Stone Age as he does now. He was in a grocery shop, in France, and grabbed a magazine when he spotted some dug up bones on the cover. They turned out to be of Dinosaurs and his interest faded along with his suddenly reappeared French.

She was at one of Rhaenys’ other parties at Kensington too. Apparently they’re hanging out again, which pleases him far too much. Sansa was always a good friend, a right friend, trustworthy, kind, sweet, clever, independent but caring and… well, really really hot.

Jon secretly mourns all the guys who died of frustration over feeling sexually attracted to a best friend’s sister. When he had a crush on her, over ten years ago, he admired her from afar, didn’t really talk to her. He’d just blush and stumble off when she came too near.

He was in his puberty prime back then, so obviously there was loads of jerking off going on, and when Sansa would walk around in her summer dresses or bikinis, sunbathing in the back garden, he’d run off in fear of making a fool of himself.

He never had that with other girls, cause he just rolled their eyes at their silliness. He also always felt like they only cared about his attention because he was the king’s son, and that made him feel so much less bad about taking advantage.

Jon hasn’t been blessed with feeling this restless about someone in years. He doesn’t deserve suffering like this, especially because she’s not only Robb’s younger sister, she’s also in a relationship, and probably leaving in two months time. It’s not fair that she came back to torture him, remind him of dark ages, only to hurry off again.

Unfortunately, none of the facts change the undeniable truth that she may be the most beautiful woman walking around in London, currently, ever. Jon wouldn’t know, cause he hasn’t actually checked out other ladies when she happens to be in the room. She shines, like a diamond she demands his eyes to stare at her. Which is unbearable because he can’t stare at her. She’s Sansa. He’s done enough of Sansa staring to last a lifetime. He should have outgrown it by now.

Once upon a time, he didn’t think she was hot, or attractive, or mind-blowing beautiful. She was just… Robb’s sister. The geeky one, the good girl, a bit boring. Pretty, yes, undeniably so, but more like a little sister to him than anything else. A bit… irrelevant. Annoying even, sometimes, when she tattletaled. Not worth spending time thinking about.

The moment Jon started noticing the existence of the female kind, she grew up and got breasts and her hips and arse started doing these things, and she didn’t tattletale so much anymore, and she started doing things to his lower abdomen that were weird. Jon couldn’t tell anyone, he certainly couldn’t tell her, so all he did was run away.
A decade of no Sansa Stark in his life has changed his point of view drastically, and perhaps these years changed her as much as they’ve changed him. He can’t run away anymore. She’s like a magnet now.

Jon’s not sure what, but there’s something that had her run off for so long, and it’s probably not very pretty. It would likely be easy to find out if he’d just knock on Dayne’s door and ask him to do his research magic, but then, Jon would have to explain that to his dad. Above that, it’s none of his business, and he knows. Whatever she has hidden in her closet, no matter how ugly, it’s hers to hide away, and he has absolutely no right to even want to know. All he knows for sure, is that, whatever it is, it can’t possibly be a mess of her own making. The way Robb’s eyes change when asked tell Jon that much.

Sansa was away for years, and now, suddenly, she’s everywhere. At Rhaenys’ place, at Robb’s place, at Robb’s parents’ place, at parties, at auctions, at charity events and her dad’s 50th birthday dinner. Jon runs into her all the time, and each and every one of these times she gives him that gorgeous smile, as if she’s as happy to see him as he’s happy to see her.

She squeezes his lower arm and says, “Hey you.” And all he can do is grin like a total idiot. They always end up talking, and he makes her smile and giggle, and when she blushes her cheeks adorably clash with her hair.

The first time he ran into her at Kensington Palace it was Rhaenys’ birthday, and Robb obviously wasn’t there because he obviously found something better to do, and he stupidly offered to give her a tour. She stood there, looking a slightly bit lost, seemingly a little overwhelmed with her past surrounding her from every corner, and he felt a desperate urge to just… save her. Help her keep her head above the water. Her discomfort gave him such a huge urge to help her out that it, subconsciously, also brought him the bravery he needed to walk up to her. And when she looked up, recognised him, she smiled, and her smile brought streams of bubbly happiness to every end of his body.

“Oh, but Rhaenys already did.” She said.

“I mean… I mean of Kensington.”

“You mean the state rooms?” She gasped and when he nodded she nearly tripled over her feet to follow him to the door. He showed her the grand staircase, the old kitchens, the hallway where Rhaenryra and Laenar Velaryon met, the ballroom and Aegon II’s nursery, still as intact as his mother’s bathroom, now nearly 200 years old.

“She was the longest reigning monarch and the first female monarch to rule, over a decade after queen Rhaenyra.” Jon could hear himself lecture as they walked down the gothic staircase, decorated left and right with medieval paintings of dragons, the iron throne, people being set aflame and other battles, just the causal Targaryen residency basics.

“She’s always been a favourite of mine.” Sansa said as she looked around, “I mean, well, historians have their favourite historical figures.”

Jon just smiled to let her know he understood, even though he didn’t really. He’s not a historian. You can be, really, when the acts of these people still reflect on you today, considering they’re related. He doesn’t have favourites, he has some that don’t embarrass him as much as other, and that’s as far as his liking and disliking goes.

“So, who are your favourites?”
“Oh gosh…” she said and he could help but think it was cute, the way she said that. He never thought he’d find such a posh thing cute, “Cleopatra.”

“Really?”

“Of course! I like ehm… some fierceness. Hera is my favourite Greek goddess.”

Jon was debating whether or not to tell her he knew absolutely nothing about Greek Gods when she was already on her way continuing her list of people, mostly women, that inspire her.

“Marie Antoinette, though I can’t really say why. She’s simply fascinating, perhaps because there’s quite simply no one like her. I find her endearing for her innocence and the tragedy of her golden cage. Catherine the great, of course. Rhaenys I’s mother, Barba Bracken-“

“The one who convinced him to break with Rome so he could marry her, then later beheaded?”

“I remember wanting to go to the Tower, when I was a young girl, just to see the place where they took her head.”

“That’s a bit of a morbid thing for a young girl to wanna see.”

Sansa giggled and the sound did weird things to his abdomen, “Yes well… I love queen Nearys too. And ehm… well empress Cixi, Aegon V, Good Queen Alysanne, of course… I’ve read a book about Lucretia Borgia quite recently… I’m not so fond of queen Rhaenyr, to be quite honest. She called breastfeeding disgusting and, well, overall, she was just a terrible person. And of course Nymeria, I read a dozen books about her in college… I went through this phase where I was obsessed with Versailles, all three Louis’, and I loved Madame de Montespan. I still love her. I finished reading a book about her last week, actually. But I’ve read about Maintenon, too, and Pompadour and Du Barry… not many good books about them, unfortunately.”

“Sounds to me like you read a lot.”

Sansa giggled again, “Yes, well… I like stories! That’s why I like history.”

Jon remembers her liking stories. In fact, most of his memories of her include her holding a book.

“But Rhaenys has a warm place in my heart. She never married to keep her crown. I love how she… how she waited, how she survived with nothing but her wits. She’s such a prime example of grand female leadership. She’s absurdly fascinating. One day your sister will be Rhaenys II.”

“Let’s hope so!”

“What do you mean?”

Jon stopped when Sansa stopped in front of a painting as large as life of queen Rhaenys age twenty-five, Golden crown in her golden curls.

“Well… if she won’t be it’ll mean she’ll have died before my father. In which case we’ll hope she has a child, else we’re stuck with Aegon, and Aegon won’t have babies which means we’re stuck with Viserys, which will be the end of everything.”

Sansa blinked at all that and then smiled, “Rhaenys seems perfectly healthy to me.”

As they walked through Rhaella’s garden he pointed at the fountains, telling her the different names and the backstory of each one of these, he suddenly felt guilty. Jon never used to be, never
wanted to be that type of guy who tried to charm girls with who he is and who his family is, but after Ygritte he’s done little but that, shamelessly, too. As if he’s decided that all the torture and attention his job bestows on him doesn’t deserve to demand him to have enough self-respect to push away the women who throw themselves at his feet.

The only women who never threw themselves at him were either lesbian, related to him, or a Stark.

And so there Jon was, taking advantage of his name, his family, his place. Doing it to Sansa just made it all feel a hundred times worse.

Yet, he took her on a house tour to show her how impressive the castle his mental and fucked up ancestors built hundreds of years ago is, showing her the garden in moonlight, telling her emotional, yet fascinating stories about his wonderfully kind late grandma, longest reigning monarch of Britain ever.

“She once asked me… she always told me; Wouldn’t it be terrible if you’d spent all your life doing everything you were supposed to do, didn’t drink, didn’t smoke, didn’t eat pizza, took lots of exercise, all the things you didn’t want to do, and suddenly one day you were run over by a big red bus, and as the wheels were crunching into you you’d say ‘Oh my god, I could have got so drunk last night!’ she said, that’s the way you should live your life, as if tomorrow you’ll be run over by a big red bus.”

“So that’s why you smoke?”

“I don’t remember why I smoke, it’s been so long.”

Sansa giggled for the one-hundredth time and it made him grin like a fool.

Sansa didn’t seem to suspect him of unleashing his cheap wooing methods on her, she only listened tentatively, sipping from the glass of champagne she brought along, following him every move with her eyes as her ears seemed glued to his lips.

They ended up sitting on a bench, staring out over Rhaella’s garden, the clattering fountain in front of them, as they talked and talked and talked. Jon can’t remember ever feeling so comfortable talking to someone. She never misunderstands or takes something the wrong way, and she even gets all his jokes, even the ones he doesn’t make to amuse others, but merely to satisfy his own scorn, the dry ones.

In the weeks after that she told him about the last time she visited Disneyland, about her grandfather with Dementia, about her favourite book and the book she read last week, she tells him about her degrees, about her job worries, her colleagues, her family, her lack of driving license, her favourite thee, her plumber problems, her loud neighbours, her visit to the ballet… everything and nothing and none of it ever grows boring.

It didn’t take long for Jon to stop feeling like he’s taking advantage of the situation and her interests. Not at all. He wouldn’t ever, he decided, and they don’t actually hang out except for these times they randomly bump into each other, and they don’t text message each other, or have long phone conversations, and, most importantly, half the time she comes up to him.

It’s worse, because, when he toured her through Kensington, he just truly enjoyed amusing her with all the little facts they desperately tried to burn into his skull since he was a little boy. As he watched her listen breathlessly and gaze at the rose bushes and clattering fountains, he wondered how easy his life may have been had he been a bit more like her, a bit more at ease with attention,
more comfortable with people watching him, genuinely interested in history, both the ugly and the seemingly pretty parts.

Jon always used to dislike people like that. People like Sansa. But Sansa’s not like Sansa, she’s different, even though she’s not. She’s no gossiper, she doesn’t go to charity dinners to hatch a rich husband but because she cares about charity, she doesn’t care about history because it makes her feel important but for the simple reason she’s fascinated, she doesn’t hang out with Jon’s sister because she’ll be queen one day, but because she likes the company, and she’s not interested in paintings of Aegon III because she’s an descendant of one of his many illegitimate children, but because she likes the use of shadows around his nose, the details of the rings decorating his fingers, and the technique used to paint the silk of his doublet.

When she laughs at his jokes he gets the impression that she actually thinks they’re funny, and when her eyes light up when she sees him, his anxiety fades, his depression leaves him, his skin is cleared and all his debts are paid.

“Anyway, they’re going to both be at this dinner, so please just… I don’t know, don’t mention it at all? What do you think?” Robb opens his phone again to look at the screen.

“They’ll both be there?” Jon feels his throat tighten and then a need to hit himself pops up. Of course they’ll be at this engagement party. She’s Robb’s sister and Harry’s her boyfriend. He’s looked forward to seeing her tonight, especially cause she told him a week ago that, “We’ll miss you when you’re in France”… Jon’s not sure who ‘we’ was referring to, but he knows ‘we’ included ‘I’ and that had Jon feel so goddamn good. He cared too much about what suit to wear, what to do with his fucking hair, what he’d say when she walked up to him, thought of cheap opening lines, wondered if he could hug her hello, because they’ve arrived at this certain station in their relationship currently where shaking hands would just feel weird.

But yeah, Harry. Jon’s forgotten about Harry the same way he’s forgotten about Ygritte. Ygritte who? Ygritte hasn’t crossed his mind since Sansa grabbed his wrist at an auction because she wanted to show him a real Van Gogh.

“I know you don’t really like art, but look at the colours!”

She didn’t let go of his arm until Catelyn appeared and he felt a shockwave go through his whole upper body, that’s how hurriedly she dropped her hold.

“Yeah, I was hoping he’d stay behind, too, but no, somehow she managed to convince him. Now I think of it, it might be because you will be there.”

“D-do you think so?”

Robb sighs, “I don’t want to ruin this for Jeyne, she’s been preparing it for months… she had help from my mum, as in, she managed to suffer through my mum. They don’t get along all that well.”

“That’s shitty.” Jon says, as if he didn’t already know. He doubts he’d ever be able to suffer through a relationship with a girl his mother can’t stand. Ygritte was too many mistakes for a lifetime. She’s plenty of I-told-you-so’s to consider going on a date with one of those daughters of Lyanna’s horse races friends.

“Yeah well, don’t pretend like you like her.”

Jon refuses to deny that nor take the full blame for it, “I don’t really feel like you’ve ever given me the chance to like or dislike her.”
Robb stubbornly ignores that and Jon wants to ask if Sansa and Jeyne get along but he thinks that might be wrongly timed. Also, he kind of knows they don’t. Cause Sansa told him, together with all the billion other random things he now knows about her. Things random enough for him to go through life and be constantly reminded of her. Like, when Rhaenys tells him she’s planning on doing yoga again, and he can only just stop himself from telling her Sansa has a yoga class every week. Or when his mum goes on about sun energy panels and he remembers the lovely memory of that one time he told Sansa about him attending the Commonwealth climate change reception hosted by the Foreign Secretary and she bombarded him with a million question and then joked about how easily she catches sunburns, “I never tan! Just get covered in freckles!”

Jon loves her freckles. Especially these on her shoulders. He doesn’t know why, he just does.

“It’s just a dinner, you’ll be fine, you and Jeyne have been together for a decade.”

“Not a decade,” Robb says, “It feels like a decade. I still can’t believe I’m 29 to be honest… means that, soon, I’ll be 30 and nearly 40.”

Jon bites his lip and stops himself from asking whether that’s truly the main reason for this whole marriage thing in the first place, but he contains himself.

“I’m glad when all this is over, to be honest. And doing it the 31st was a mistake.”

“Dad’s pissed because we won’t be there for the annual New Year’s shoot at Balmoral. Now he doesn’t get to scare Aegon by ‘accidentally’ shooting a soft bullet through the gap between his legs, and Aegon won’t be able to pretend he’s scared.”

“They can come?” Robb suggests.

“Dad prefers not to, the security will ruin your wedding.”

“Well, I mean, it’s all the way up in Scotland, you and I have been friends forever and I’ve known your parents for twenty years.”

“Twenty years? We’re only 29.”

“We went to Marlborough college when we were four.”

“Right.”

Robb groans then, “I just really really hope mum won’t bring out the baby pictures. She was crying last week, you know. Crying. Because her ‘baby boy’ is getting married.”

Jon laughs, “That’s adorable.”

“Yeah, and exhausting.” Robb shakes his head, then makes a nod when the car drives around the corner, towards the garage underneath his parents’ city villa, “I know Jeyne wanted it at her parents’ house, but mum insisted. It sucks most because it’s not like I’m her only child, she can bully Sansa and Arya and Bran and Rickon into doing it her way in the next one hundred years, but she’s acting as if she has not that much faith in them.”

“I don’t think it’s a punishment to have Winterfell castle for wedding location, if she has to give in and have one dinner at your parents’ place, I think they’ll live.”

“I just want everyone to get along.” Robb whines on. Robb doesn’t ever whine, or complain, and he’s not the person to be nervous about family quarrels, but all he’s been doing ever since he
picked Jon up from Clarence House, is sum up all the things that are making his blood sugar rise.

“It’s just a dinner.” Jon says again, “Make sure Jeyne drinks her wine, don’t let Arya be in charge of the music, ask your dad to amuse Mrs Westerling and place Sansa near Jeyne’s dad, she’ll be able to have pleasant small talk with him.”

“Are you suggesting I use my little sister to make sure an old grumpy man has an entertaining evening?”

“You can place him next to Rickon too, but that’s a guarantee for disaster. Just place Harry at Sansa’s other side and Catelyn to the man’s left. Arya and Rickon apart, Bran somewhere between Rickon and Sansa, Rickon near your dad and Catelyn away from Arya…”

“Mate, I can’t bark in and take over the table setting.”

“Course you can.” Jon shrugs, “just remember, it’s your party, too.”

“We are getting drunk afterwards aren’t we? Jeyne’s flying to Bermuda tonight for her hen party.”

“Sure.” Jon says, jaw clenched. He only has a meeting with the WWF tomorrow morning, but the survival of wild dolphins in the Mediterranean probably won’t depend on him being fresh, hungover-free and well-slept.

“Thanks.” Robb says and he sounds sincerely grateful.

It’s a gratitude he bestows on Jon more than once during the evening, which makes Jon feel only worse about the way he can’t stop looking at the rather low v-neck of Sansa’s navy blue ribbed-knit clingy-fit midi dress with long sleeves that emphasize her pretty shoulders. She keeps plucking on the ruffled ends, playing with the emerald stitching as if she’s terribly nervous and Jon’s just desperately trying to convince himself it’s got absolutely nothing to do with him- and he would have succeeded perfectly, was it not for Harry Hardyng’s narrowed eyes glancing at him every other second.

If this would be the fifteenth century, and Jon and Harry would both be declared knights by the grace of god and the king, Jon would’ve been challenged to some duel the moment he stumbled over the doorstep, and he would’ve been killed in cool blood after mere moments of intense sword-fighting. Luckily, Jon’s not that kind of King’s bastard, and this is Robb’s engagement party, and it was just a stupid article, nothing happened, nothing will ever happen, Harry’s the immature one here because really, Jon’s not even in love with Sansa anyway.

*It’s just a stupid article,* Jon thinks. He wishes he could tell Harry, but unfortunately, he’s quite aware that it’s not. If maybe he hadn’t seen her since Robb’s birthday party, then it could be just an article, but he has. And every time he randomly, casually and incidentally found himself at the same event as her, he also spend a tiny ridiculously inappropriate amount of time talking to her.

The food is pretty amazing, Catelyn outdid herself, with the help of some sous chef, Jon supposes, and he politely congratulates her as she sits between Mr Westerling and Rickon, who sits beside Harry, who sits next to Sansa, who’s battling herself through a conversation with Mr Westerling.

Jon can vaguely hear Jeyne, at his left, discuss church flowers with Ned, a safe and boring subject, and Jon gulps down some wine to distract himself before he, quite suddenly, gets up and announces he needs some air.

“Jon, dear, you’re not still smoking are you?” Catelyn asks, and he’s grateful she does, because he honestly didn’t even think of that, and just going outside to clear his head isn’t usually something
he does a lot when he’s over at the Stark residence.

“I’ll be right back.” Jon smiles, before he runs off to the hall, grabs his coat off the hanger and makes his way through the kitchen into the back garden.

It’s no Buckingham Palace garden, but it’s pretty and rather big all the same, with a small pond in the back near a tree with a romantic classic wooden swing.

Jon can remember camping in this garden during the middle of summer, drinking lemonade, eating strawberries and playing football and tennis.

In the pockets of his coat he finds a pack of Marlboro light, and he curses when he can’t find a lighter. He stands there, searching through his empty pockets, cigarette between his lips, when the glass door opens and Sansa walks through.

She hands him a lighter without saying a word and then hugs her arms around herself and watches her shoes as he lightens the cigarette.

“I won’t offer you my coat.” Jon says and he curses himself and his stupid attempt at joking when she looks up and he sees how upset she is.

“It’s not funny.” She says, “Harry wasn’t happy.”

Jon wants to tell her he really doesn’t give a shit about Harry, but then, she cares about Harry, and he cares about her, so perhaps he somehow does care about Harry, even though he really doesn’t.

“I’m sorry.” He mutters.

“Robb’s party was over three months ago, why are they only-“

“Because they wanted to drag out the whole heartbroken Jon thing.”

“What?”

“The media. It wasn’t the right time, so they waited until people got bored of hearing about a pathetic sad me and now they’re feeding readers a happy and reborn me.”

“That’s…” Sansa closes her eyes when she can’t find a proper word and she sighs. It’s so cold outside the air she breathes out is as white as the smoke coming out of Jon’s cigarette and without a second thought he pulls his coat off and wraps it around her shoulders anyway.

Sansa lets him and her wide eyes follow his moves when he goes to stand back, leaning against the porch, smoking his cigarette.

Jon wouldn’t be able to read her face even if he looked, so he doesn’t, he feels her eyes burn as he stands there, pretending not to notice the cold, his face turned towards the deep garden.

“I hate how you talk about this.” Sansa says then, “As if you’re… as if it’s normal to you.”

Jon chuckles humourlessly, “It is.”

“Rhaenys does that too.” Sansa goes on, “Acting like it’s part of this life that she has submitted herself to.”

“I suppose she has.” Jon says simply.
“But it’s not… it’s not normal to me.”

Jon feels some power tuck him around as he looks up and feels his face soften at her voice, “I know, I’m so sorry.”

She seems as surprised as he does at his sudden wave of sincere apology and she blinks a couple of times before she shakes her head once, “It’s not at all your fault.”

“So then what do you want from me?” He wishes he couldn’t be so cold, but he sees no other way. Telling her how this whole thing really makes him feel is out of the question, so the only option that remains to him is playing the aloof card, which usually comes much easier to him.

Sansa seems a bit taken aback by the question, but she refinds herself quickly enough to simply ask, “Do you think they’re going to harass me now?”

“Of course not.” Jon says, “They don’t know who you are, they don’t know it was you, they think you have brown hair. You’re fine.”

“But what if they’ll-”

“They won’t.” Jon says and he tries to keep it short when he adds, “We don’t hang out, we sometimes meet at parties of common friends, but they have no idea you and I even know each other, you’re just a sister of a friend of mine, we’re aquintences, nothing more, you’re just Robb’s little sister.”

Sansa’s face does nothing at his words, and her indifference at what, hearing it come out of his mouth with his own ears, sounds like casual cruelty to Jon, hurts him more than it should, more than he deserves.

“Very well then, in that case, it’ll be okay.” She says, and she turns around to walk away and before Jon can help himself he throws his cigarette away and grabs her lower arm to stop her. She’s warmer than he expected, and it sends thrills of electricity through his veins. Immediately, he pulls his hand back.

“I’m sorry.” He says, again, and he’s not sure what he’s apologising for.

“It’s just a Daily Mail article.” Sansa gives him a tiny smile and then pulls his coat off her shoulders, almost as if she’s afraid someone might see her wear it. A camera, or human eyes.

“It is.” Jon says, “But it’s my responsibility and… my baggage. It shouldn’t ever bother you.”

“If you don’t want that part of you to ever bother anyone, you can’t have friends at all, Jon.” She says, and the truth of that stings.

“Well I… that doesn’t mean I… generally that doesn’t mean they… I don’t want my friends to be bothered.”

Sansa’s eyes soften at his stammering and she squeezes his lower arm, “Can’t always protect everyone.” She says.

*Yes I can,* Jon wants to say. He’ll protect her like a knight with a sword if he must. Whether that’s from the paparazzi, the Daily Mail or something else, *someone else.* Where all he could do had seemed to have so many boundaries, with Ygritte, he doesn’t feel that way at all, right now, with Sansa, it feels limitless. Boundaries to hell. Rules? Agreements? ‘We need the press as much as they need us’? Who gives a flying fuck. Sansa’s a private citizen, and he’ll never forgive himself
for her discomfort, in any way, over something in any way related to his absurd life.

“If you say this won’t get worse, I’ll believe you, and it’s fine.” She goes on.

“It won’t ever happen again, promise.”

Sansa still smiles, “Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

“I’ll keep it.” Jon swears.

“I just…” Sansa sighs, and then she puts on the tiniest of smiles, just a hint, but it’s lovely, “I just can’t believe they write these things about you all the time. You’re just a normal guy.”

Jon’s not sure whether he should take that as a compliment, “Apparently some people do think I’m interesting.” He says, eyebrows raised.

Sansa giggles only for a short moment, but it’s long enough for Jon to smirk, “That’s not what I mean it’s just… aren’t they ruining your life?”

“Naah. I’m used to it, I’ve had so much worse.”

Sansa nods then, but can’t help but add, “It’s seems unhealthy, that’s all.”

“It is.” Jon agrees, “But I can help myself, I’m a big boy.”

Sansa smiles again, “Well, I’m a big girl, so the brunette in me will be fine too.”

They grin at each other until Jon realises her boyfriend is inside, probably aware they’re both out here, talking about these damn pictures, and he clears his throat, “And If… If Harry’s upset, just tell him… tell him you were out there because you were trying to call him.”

“I told him.” Sansa says, “It didn’t help because it got us fighting about the fact that he was extremely late at my brother’s birthday party and I didn’t take up the phone when he called, something I thought we’d moved passed weeks ago.”

Jon can imagine how that conversation might’ve gone and he decides he’s in no way guilty of that escalation, “D-did you tell him-“

“It doesn’t matter, Harry’s never happy when I’m linked to royals, he thinks your family is bonkers.”

“Well that’s not… very nice of him.”

“So long as I don’t think you’re bonkers, right?”

Jon smirks at her playful grin and agrees wholeheartedly, “Yeah, that’s true.”

“I’m ehm… I’m going back inside.” She says then, hugging herself again and Jon nods, because there’s really nothing he can do to make her stay that won’t be either awkward or weird.

“Say… say sorry to Harry for me? Tell him it wasn’t-“

“You don’t want to apologise to him, trust me.” She says with a wave, and that’s one sentence that’ll have Jon fantasise about what it is she might mean.

“In that case don’t tell him I’m sorry.”
“Can I tell him you and I laughed about it? Because it’s silly and we don’t care?”

“Sure.”

“Kay.” She grabs the handle of the door, opens it, then seems to remember, “I got in. At Jaehaerys and Alysanne, I mean. I’ll start in February.”

“That’s amazing.”

Sansa beams, suddenly, “It’s crazy but… in a good way, I guess.”

“Yes, of course it is.”

She smiles, and opens the door.

“Sans?” He asks, right before she closes the door, and she turns around to give him a questioning look.

“Yeah?”

“Robb ehm… Robb wants to go out after everyone’s left, and I think he’ll probably be drinking and he’ll be… well, you know. So I thought maybe you’d want to come? We could celebrate your new job and… you could help me drag him back home by four in the morning? He’d like it if you’d come, too. We can ask Arya and maybe Rhaenys will come, too, if Aegon convinces her.”

Sansa bites her lower lip, seems to have some extreme inner struggle, before she smiles and nods, “Sure, I could be your wingman.”

“I don’t need a wingman.” Jon laughs uncomfortably.

“Of course you don’t.” She smirks and then disappears to leave Jon all alone on the bloody terrace, cursing and hating himself. Once again, without a coat. He’s lost count of the times she borrowed his coat and literally forgot to give it back.
Mahiki

Chapter Summary

'When the first Mahiki opened, nightclubs took themselves very seriously. These were the days of spraying Cristal over your Bentley. Mahiki, by contrast, was silly, gaudy and perfect for a bunch of Hoorays fresh out of St Andrews university. And where Wills and Kate led, the other young Royals followed.'

Harry wasn’t happy about that article. Not at all. He was unhappier about it than he was willing to let Sansa know, but Sansa could tell, and it bothered her. It annoyed her. She couldn’t stand how childishly difficult he was being about something so silly.

She woke up late, the morning of the bloody article, and she started her Saturday by scrolling through her news apps, reading about Jennifer Aniston and Justin something’s break-up, watching a clip of Kourney Kardashian’s how-to-eat-a-kit-kat tutorial, looking at the polls, struggling her way through some Brexit related painfuless and then nearly clicked on some link to net-a-porter before she spotted Jon’s name plus mystery brunette and her attention was hooked.

Not in a million years did she think that mystery girl was, well… her. It wasn’t but it also was. Sansa turned her phone around, held it at further distance, then looked at it up close, and she came to the conclusion that of about everyone who knows her well, basically no one would be able to tell.

Her face was mostly hidden by the tree, you could only see Jon even though you also couldn’t, because that’s how bad the quality was. The only time Sansa was fully in the picture was when Jon wrapped his arms so around her, that he could place his coat around her shoulders. It had been only a fraction of a second, she’s sure, yet… well, undeniably so the picture makes it seem like they were amorously embracing, as if he was holding her tight and she leaned into him, standing on her tip toes, breathing in his scent, having to lean up only slightly to…

But they weren’t hugging. He was doing the gentlemanly thing because that’s how he is. Noble and friendly and gentlemanly. She was cold and he helped her out.

Sansa stared at the vague picture of his face, which didn’t look as much like his face as it looked like an ink stain, for far too long after which she scrolled down, read every word of the article, which described her as ‘Rebound or possibly more?’, and then found herself gazing far too long at a high-quality picture of Jon in military uniform at Rhaenys’s wedding. He looked really good then, Sansa can remember.

Harry didn’t text or ring at all that day and she vaguely hoped he wouldn’t mention it at all, ever, but as she was putting on her Altuzarra dress, her hair and make-up done, she heard him open the front door, and she couldn’t help but feel annoyed at knowing why he’d come home early.

He didn’t smile when he walked in, didn’t tell her she looked pretty, only had that big frown on his face and Sansa remembers how, what she hated most, was the fact that he even let this get to him. He could have been smart enough to know it was just a dumb article, he could have trusted her enough to never care for a single second, he should have been the one who told her he didn’t care, who told her not to worry, who reassured her. She was the one on the front cover of the flipping
Daily Mail!

He chose none of that, he skipped the high road and took full advantage of every chance he saw to make her feel absolutely horrible about this thing she could in no way have helped.

“Harry, it’s just an article.”

“Why was he hugging you?”

“He wasn’t.” And though it was not a lie, somehow, it still felt like one and he seemed to smell it.

“Why were you on that balcony in the first place?”

“I was at Robb’s birthday party!”

“Here I was, thinking parties in September are usually inside!”

“I was outside, calling you, asking you where you were, because you’d promised to be there at eight and you didn’t show up till eleven!”

That fight could’ve gone on forever, but luckily Sansa had some place to go. She even told him not to come if he didn’t want to, but he insisted. Sansa knew he did because he knew who was going to be there, and that annoyed her even more. Everything he did that night annoyed her.

The way he drove them to her parents house, not uttering a word, the way he greeted her mother and Jeyne’s parents and her maid of honour, shook hands with her father and her uncle Edmure, failed to smile at Robb, ignored Arya as well… the way he glanced at Jon she hated most.

She felt so sorry for him then, for Jon, for the way the press is always so set on ruining his life. After his ex-girlfriend’s trashy move he doesn’t deserve Harry’s scorn as well. It wasn’t his fault, not in any way at all. All Jon did was loan her his coat because she’d been shivering, too stupid to put on one herself. It had been the right thing, it had been sweet, and she didn’t want him punished for that. She didn’t want him to punish himself.

He stared at her with these apologetic eyes all evening, so much that when he left to go and smoke outside, she couldn’t help but tell everyone she needed a bathroom break.

Sansa doubts anyone but Jeyne’s mother believed that, but no one could object or tell her “Oh no darling, sit down, I’ll do it!” When it came to using the toilet.

He apologised so often to her then that it was hard not to tell him how sorry she was, and as he smiled and placed his coat around her shoulders again, because she was again too stupid to put one on, she realised that she couldn’t give a damn about Harry. He wasn’t in these pictures, it wasn’t about him, if he didn’t believe her when she said nothing had happened that was entirely up to him, she knew, and Jon knew, and she wasn’t going to blame him for something he could absolutely do nothing about. It was clear as day that he struggled enough with all of it as it is, he doesn’t deserve for Sansa to make it worse, she didn’t deserve an apology from him.

So, when he asked her if she wanted to come with him and Robb, to some private members-only club no doubt, she couldn’t help but agree. Both because Robb would need it, and because she just wanted to, to go dancing, clear her head and show Harry that he has no right to be angry with her for living her life.

“Shall we go home?” Harry asks, somewhere around ten.
“It’s only ten.” Sansa says.

“I’m tired.” He says and she smiles, gives him a peck to his cheek and sighs.

“You work so hard.” She says, “You go home, I’ll take a cab.”

“That’s a waste of money.”

“We’re not going home together anyway, I’m going out.” She informs him and his eyes widen, well aware that there’s little he can do but blink like an idiot as Sansa’s daddy and her big brother watch and hear every word they speak.

“Going out? Where?”

“You’re coming?” Robb grins, “That’s great! We’re going to Mahiki. Right?” He turns to look for Jon’s confirmation, and when Jon apparently gives it, without saying a word or nodding, Robb’s grin broadens.

As Sansa helps her mother clean up the kitchen she feels her mother’s eyes peek. It’s not Catelyn’s style to keep in her questions and after merely a few minutes she blurts out, “How are you and Harry doing?”

“Good.” Sansa says, her back towards her mother as she tupperwares some carrots.

“Are you sure? You seem tense.”

“I do, or we do?”

“Both, really.”

Sansa waits a moment before she admits, “Paparazzi made pics of me and Jon and it looks like we were embracing, but we weren’t, and now Harry’s upset.”

“What pictures?”

Sansa turns around to face her mother who then probably remembers the balcony pics she also scrolled past this morning and she seems to understand.

“Oh… That was you?”

“We weren’t… he was lending me his coat.”

“And this you told Harry?”

“Yes, Of course I did.” Sansa groans, “But he’s being difficult about everything.”

“Everything?”

“I want to stay in London.” Sansa confesses and this visibly pleases her mother.

“That’s wonderful! I knew Myranda would hire you.”

Sansa clenches her jaw, “She made a job offer, yes, but even if don’t accept that, I still want to stay. I’ll have to find a job as a teacher. I’m done running.”

Catelyn nods once, “There’s nothing here that you should want to run away from.” She says, then
she drops the spoon she holds and she walks over to Sansa to wrap her arms around her daughter, “He can’t reach you.”

“I know.” Sansa says, “I wasn’t running from him, I was running from the life I thought had made a fool of me.”

“Don’t say that.” Catelyn warns, her eyes big. “You are and never were a fool.”

“I was.” Sansa says, “But I’m not anymore, and I love being in London, being near all of you.”

Cat cradles Sansa’s cheek and gives her that warm maternal smile, “We love having you here too, darling.”

“Harry wants to go back to New York and I haven’t actually told him I’m not coming with him, and I know he won’t like it.”

“I’m sure he’ll understand, you just have to talk to him.” Catelyn says and she lets go of Sansa to put the Tupperware in the freezer.

“He’s been working so much, lately, that’s all.” Sansa says, “We just need a bit of a break.”

“Well, Christmas is just around the corner, so this will just be a bit of a rough patch you’ll get through.”

Catelyn smiles again and squeezes Sansa’s shoulder before she fills the sink with water.

“You still have some dresses here, in your old room, you can’t go out to these places Robb and Jon drag themselves to dressed in wool.” Catelyn says, and so it is that two hours later Sansa finds herself, dressed in some black vintage Calvin Klein satin dress that shows just enough skin to leave enough to the imagination, sitting on some barstool in Mahiki. Cocktail in hand, facing the dance floor, shoulder to shoulder with Jon, as they watch Robb have the best time with Theon and Arya.

“You don’t wanna dance?” He asks after a long time of silence.

“I texted Jeyne.” Sansa says, in a way of answer.

You need Jeyne to dance?” Jon asks.

“No.” She says instantly, “I just… it’s been probably over a year since I’ve been in a club like this.”

“Really?” Jon doesn’t sound surprised in an offensive way, just genuinely surprised, “But you always loved dancing.”

There are these moments where he says something like that, mentions the Sansa of nearly a decade ago, and she’s reminded of how long she’s known him. How long he has known her. They used to be teenagers who hung out at shake shack and the public pool in Chelsea together, with a dozen other people Sansa didn’t bother saying good-bye to, before she ran off. He used to come to all her birthday parties, and she’d go to his, and she was there when he graduated Eton, with Robb, and they made this group picture together, that still decorates the wall of Robb’s drawing room, one that would make anyone believe that they would be friends forever.

Sansa hates it when he does that. Reminds her of how long he’s known her. She doesn’t want him to remind her of that person. The person who never gave him a second glance because she was too blind to notice how kind, smart, funny and good he was. The person who failed to see what was
right in front of her, but fell madly in love with someone she should not have given a second glance.

Sansa feels like she’s gotten to know him all over again, and the rather dangly, skinny, high pitched voiced, shy boy with his hairless baby-face of her memories has become so vague thanks to this new one who’s tall, broad, trimmed bearded, sharp-jawed, deep-voiced and a bit more confident, that she often finds herself wishing he could forget what she used to be, too.

There’s such and ease in the way he mentions the past, that Sansa’s confident he has no idea of what these small memories do to her, what they mean to her now, how they make her feel. He doesn’t seem to think it makes her feel anything at all, just as it doesn’t seem to make him feel anything, either.

Sansa wants him to forget the Sansa who didn’t see him, who was in love with Joffrey, who was so superficial and naïve, who wanted stupid and silly things, who was high-headed, selfish, blind and foolish… the one Arya couldn’t stand. The one who loved dancing. She wants him to only know the Sansa Arya loves. Who doesn’t feel like dancing because he hates dancing and she’d rather stay with him near this bar. The Sansa who sees everything. Who cannot help but see him even when he’s not there. When her thoughts drift away and she starts thinking of things she shouldn’t be thinking about. When she closes her eyes at night and tries to sleep but can’t because she has some tingly feelings in her lower-abdomen.

“You would know.” She says, “You always hated going out, lately not so much.” Sansa hates how obvious the jealousy in her voice is. It really is none of her damn business who he sleeps with. If he wants to shag around with gorgeous tall blond supermodels with perfect white teeth, she really doesn’t get to have an opinion about that.

Jon frowns and then, rather cooly, says, “I still hate going out, promise.” He doesn’t turn away from her but moves in his seat as if he wishes he could and from that moment on, there’s a huge gaping hole of awkwardness between them that has them both silently sipping their drinks.

“How bout her?” Sansa makes a head gesture to some blonde girl in a glittery burgundy dress in a desperate attempt to break the silence, “She’s pretty.”

Jon looks for half a second then shakes his head, “Huh?”

“I was going to be your wing man, remember?”

“Right.” Jon sips from his drink, “I’ve already texted Aegon.”

“Aegon’s going to be your wingman?”

“He always is.” Jon jokes, “What else does one have a gay brother for?”

Sansa forces a smile to her lips, “I bet he loves it.”

“Yeah, he hated Ygritte partly because it meant he couldn’t set me up with his girlfriends anymore.”

Sansa has never heard him mention that name before and it takes her aback for a moment, after which she presses a smile to her face, “I doubt that was it. Family knows.”

“Do they? Okay, well… tell me, honestly, what do you think of Jeyne?”

Sansa waits a moment before she hears herself blurt out, “Mistake.”
Jon grins at the directness, and probably at the predictability of her response, and gulps down some beer. “Okay.”

“You disagree?”

Jon looks at Robb for a moment, watches his friend laugh as Arya does some impressive robot move followed up by a failed full upper body wave, and admits, “I think he could be happier, that’s all. Doesn’t mean she makes him miserable.”

“That’s good enough? To not be miserable?”

“For Robb? Apparently, yeah. I guess he… I sometimes think he likes the security. Jeyne is very safe for him. She wouldn’t ever hurt him. She’ll never make him miserable, and that’s good enough.”

“For you?” Sansa wants to hit herself for asking the cringeworthy question, and she feels her face redden as she leans her head forward to hide her blushes behind some curtains of auburn hair.

“Have you heard of my parents?” Jon laughs and seems to think the mention of the king and his wife is all the answer he needs to give.

“My parents are happy.” Sansa says then, with all certainty, and she knows that they’ve been beautiful role models as well as perhaps a standard she will impossibly be able to live up to herself. She highly doubts they were madly in love when they found each other. Or at any point after that. But there’s a sincere and deep love between them that’s maybe stronger than the foolish puppy love. It’s built over the years, stone by stone. Stronger than lust and desire. It lasts longer than what Sansa feels when she watches the muscles in Jon’s back move when she catches herself staring as he hangs his coat on the hanger, or makes himself some coffee, or picks up something from a shelf. That sort of thing… it’s not supposed to last, and that’s probably why she keeps telling herself to stop thinking about him, because there’s no future. And Sansa has been miserable enough as it is.

Mine too.” Jon says, “But they’ve hurt a lot of other people to be able to. Guess Robb doesn’t want to hurt anyone, he’d rather hurt himself.”

And Rhaenys, Sansa thinks. But she has never looked at it that way before and she finds herself at a loss of words, suddenly. Thinking of Harry, how piping hot he must be with anger right now, she wonders how happy she makes him. Sansa genuinely feels like all she does is frustrate him lately, and the more choices she makes that make her happy, the less happy he is, nearly as if her happiness makes him the opposite of that. Perhaps that is what Robb would not be able to handle. To love someone who’s happiness would be his unhappiness. Jeyne could never be that.

Sansa sighs and takes a sip, “Difficult.” She mutters.

“You’re not here because you wanted to piss Harry off, are you?” Jon asks then, and Sansa might’ve spit out her drink had she been a little tipsier.

“No.” She says, before she decides that honesty will probably contain a higher level of wit, and somehow, being that feels important, “I mean, of course I am.”

Jon laughs and doesn’t look at her when he shakes his head at her silliness, which annoys her. Which is stupid because the only reason she said it was because she knew it would amuse him.

“Does that amuse you?”

Jon shrugs, waits a moment before he says, “I’m just thinking… just thinking how much you’re
like Robb sometimes.”

“I’m not.” Sansa doesn’t mean to sound like his words insult her.

“No, you’re not, most of the time you’re nothing like him.”

Sansa decides to feel content with that and he laughs again when her anger fades away, “Stop laughing at me.”

Still grinning, he shakes his head, and even with the loud music and the terrible lightning, Sansa can’t help but watch him, smile to her lips as she feels her face soften.

Sansa opens her mouth to tell him something she shouldn’t, something she has to say, or else she’ll burst, when she’s hugged from behind and saved from making a fool of herself.

“Sansa! What are you doing here!”

“Mya!” Sansa enthusiastically hugs her friend back, “I didn’t know you’d be here!”

“I didn’t know you ever came here.” Mya Stone, still a short-haired girl with the brightest blue eyes, was Sansa’s roommate for two years at St Andrews, and Sansa still sometimes misses their movie nights with popcorn and tea.

“No I… I usually don’t.”

“You better tell me next time.” Mya says, before her eyes move to Jon and they only widen for a fraction of a second.

“Mya… this is ehm… my brother’s best man.” Sansa breathes a wide smile and makes a hand gesture to Robb who’s spinning his little sister around the dance floor, “It was Robb’s engagement party.”

“Oh god really? But I thought that was next week! Oh my god I-“

“No no! It was only a family dinner, nothing like that. Big thing is next week, yeah.”

“Oh, Good!” Mya goes on to introduce her friends and before Sansa knows it she turns around to find Jon’s spot empty. She’s not sure where he went but she finds herself unable to pay attention to the stories that are being told to her and it’s only shortly after Aegon places his hands in front of her eyes to make her guess who he is, and she stands face to face with both him and Rhaenys, positively distracted and surprised, that she spots Jon somewhere talking to someone with honey blond hair. Someone pretty. Someone not Robb’s sister. Someone not dating Harry. Someone not Sansa.

Sansa swallows some feeling she can’t name away, and then forces herself to realise she doesn’t need Jon to piss off Harry anyway, and that’s how she finds herself dancing the night away until the hour of need pops up and Robb really should be brought home.

Sansa is wobbly on her feet when Jon pulls her away from the front door, “We’re taking the back.” He says. Ten minutes later, she follows him through a back alley, dragging with her a surprisingly sober Robb, escaping paparazzi photographers via the back door of a prestige members only club in soho. Sixteen-year-old Sansa’s dream come true, especially because she ends up sitting in the back seat of an actual state car, including special number plate and a Targaryen sigil decorating the front of the car, on a flag, and in the black leather of the seats. Better still, it’s with Aegon, who sits beside her in the backseat, as Robb sleeps at her left, his head leaning on her shoulder.
Enthusiastically, he tells a story about a man named Meryn Trant.

“So, according to himself, he broke in *twice.*”

“Where?”

“Buckingham Palace.” Rhaenys says, she seems bored by the story, seemingly having heard it a million times before as she doesn’t turn around, sitting in the seat in front of Sansa.


“Well, it’s a formidable building.” Aegon grins, “Anyway… he admitted to shinnying up the drainpipe, rolling through a window near the servant quarters where a housemaid—“

“Old Nan.” Jon throws in, “That was Old Nan.”

“Bless that woman.” Rhaenys nods.

“Nan called security, then, when the guards came to her room, the guy had disappeared, which led them to assume dear Nan had seen a ghost.” Aegon finishes.

“Nan really was old.” Rhaenys nods some more.

“She still is.” Jon decides.

“Trant later claimed he spend 30 minutes eating cheddar cheese and crackers and just strolling around, said he checked out some portraits and landscape paintings and even sat down on the throne.” Jon says, and unlike Rhaenys, he turned around in his seat to face them.

“That’s… that’s madness.” Sansa decides and she shifts her shoulder as Robb’s head leans too heavily on a painful spot.

“He went into the post room too, where Lyanna had stacked loads of gifts for Jon.” Aegon says and he ruffles his brother’s dark curls, “The bastard had just been born, you see?”

“He drank half a bottle of granny’s red whine before he left.” Rhaenys makes sure to add.

Aegon, Rhaenys and Jon grin at how startled Sansa is and they exchange looks as to who will be the one to continue this story that seems to be a favourite of theirs.

“That was his *first* visit.” Rhaenys says, “No one ever dares claim old Nan sees ghosts ever since.”

“His next visit was fifteen years later, after his divorce and dad’s accession to the throne, and he wandered into his majesty’s bedroom.” Aegon says.

Sansa gasps again and as she leans up to not miss a word she realises what amazing storytellers all three of them are. They don’t look alike one bit, Aegon with his blonde hair, straight nose and dimples, Rhaenys with her shiny ash black locks, high cheekbones and perfect white teeth, and Jon with his long face, sharp jawline and brown curly mess. It’s not only the colouring and faces that are different; Aegon always seems careless and confident, as confident as Rhaenys who in her turn is the opposite of careless, she’s more reserved, carries herself well, very calculated and clever yet entertaining. Jon, is not confident nor carefree, but his head isn’t so much in the clouds, he’s approachable, most likable, and least comfortable with attention and the spotlight, it’s no shock to Sansa he’s the most popular among the public, despite his media shyness, he’s the boy next door in an impressive military uniform, never mind handsome, and with perfect hair. All three of them,
Sansa thinks, are friendly, strong-witted and dutiful. Loyal, most of all. Sansa supposes they have no choice but to be.

Somehow, she realises, it must’ve been hard for them, growing up the way they had to, to still end up not only being part of the royal family firm, but also be an actual family, who just happen to be royal.

They tell this story together, like a team. “An alarm sensor detected his movements but police thought it was faulty and silenced it.” Rhaenys tells.

“He wandered through the corridors for a couple of minutes before reaching the royal apartments.” Jon explains, “In an anteroom he cut his hand when he broke a glass duck. He was still carrying some pieces of glass when he entered my parents’ bedroom.”

“Dad woke up, terrified obviously, when Trant pulled the curtains off the bed away, and the guy sat down on the edge.” Aegon tells.

“At my mum’s side of the bed.” Jon adds.

“Pa still insists he remained calm and spoke to the man until security showed up and led him away, handed him over to the police… but the guy did an interview seven years ago, saying Rhaegar threw the night lamp at his head and Lyanna screamed and ran out.” Aegon laughs.

It takes Sansa half a second to establish for herself that ‘pa’ means the king of England.

“The prick described her nightgown.” Rhaenys remembers.

“Pa said Trant asked for a cigarette, which pa didn’t have, he phoned the switchboard twice but no one arrived cause the police at duty was walking the dogs.”

“Bloody Connington.” Rhaenys mutters, “Such a useless twat.”

“Where was Dayne?” Aegon wonders aloud.


Aegon and Rhaenys both laugh too and Sansa suddenly really feels like she lost the story and it’s key.

“So why… how is this now a-“

“Well, the guy was arrested last week because he’s involved in some drug case.” Jon explains, “It’s why we remembered.”

“It’s a good story.” Rhaenys nods as she pops a sweet into her mouth, “This is me.” She makes a hand gesture when the car makes its way through Kensington Palace’s gates and the statue of queen Rhaenyra appears in front of them. The car pulls up to the front door, and just before she’s about to climb out of the car, Aegon pulls her hair.

“Can I stay?”

“No.” She says, pushing his hand away, “You know Willas.”

“Nearly as well as you do.” He says and she hits his shoulder which makes him laugh, then he follows her out of the car anyway.
“Thanks for the drive San, always a pleasure sitting in your backseat.”

Sansa can’t hear the driver’s response, but Aegon bursts out laughing.

“Not so loud!” Rhaenys warns and the two of them make their way to the front door, but they don’t disappear inside without Aegon turning around, and yelling,

“Jon! Take good care of your wives.” He points two fingers at his brother who then quickly pushes him out and pulls the door shut.

Sansa can hear the distant laughing of Aegon fade away as Jon tells the driver to take them to Robb’s flat.

“Or do you want to-“

“No, we’ll bring Robb home first.” Sansa agrees and Jon nods, leans back and sighs as the window goes down and they can no longer see the driver, nor would he be able to hear, if they choose to tell a story.

Sansa drops her cheek to the top of Robb’s auburn head and is suddenly all too aware that, basically, the two of them are alone again. How she constantly ends up alone with him she’s not so sure. Although she won’t deny she does extremely little to avoid it, as if she’s suicidal and doesn’t bother avoiding lethal situations.

The first time Sansa was at Kensington Palace he caught her gazing at the paintings, neglecting the party, and offered to show her the tourist route and a little bit more. He even went outside with her, despite the burning cold, and told her the stories of his grandmother’s garden, which didn’t necessarily seem to brighten his mood. She thought it sweet, and she couldn’t help but hate herself for keeping him away from the party with her weird interests in his family’s history. As she gazed and gasped and oohed, he must’ve thought she was either drunk or pretending or crazy.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I just… I just love the stories. I know it may seem really silly to others.”

“Is okay.” Jon said, “Don’t they always says the passion of others can never be annoying? I suppose it still counts when one’s interested in your fucked up family history.”

The time after that she sat next to him during dinner, trying to keep her eyes off his hand, wrapped around his fork, and his jaw, attractively chewing his food, meanwhile desperately trying not to focus on the smell of his body scent. She ended up telling him about New York, Paris and Tel Aviv, and they talked some more about how useless international charities are, and he told her how he tries to focus most on British humanitarian work, in an attempt to avoid getting caught up in scandals.

She knows she’ll never forget what he told her then, when he randomly mentioned that one time he visited a Red Cross refugee camp, “I came out of that tent… it was only 9:30 in the morning, cause you know… we did it all early in then morrow or late at night cause of the cursed heat, and that tent… it was an orphanage. Most of these kids had no parents. None of them. And they had no food either. They were all starving. I held a two-year-old malnourished boy and I thought… I thought he couldn’t possibly be that old. He looked not even one. And I came out of that tent… we only bring a select group of press, only a selective group of photographers. And the first question one of them asked me was what I’d had for breakfast. That’s why I hate the press. Not cause they ruin my private life, stalk me and the people I care about… it’s cause they’re all one bunch of pieces of shit. I travel to a desert in the desperate hope of bringing some extremely necessary awareness to the fact that children of two are dying of starvation, and all these arseholes care about
is what overpriced shoes that Rhaenys ordered for me online it is that I’m wearing.”

The time after that, she asked him about Toronto, he didn’t seem offended when she, in her eagerness to ask the right question, mistakenly called it Montreal.

“You look nice.” He told her, and a compliment hasn’t made her feel so beautiful in years. Or perhaps it was something in his eyes more so then in the words, considering how shy he looked when he said it.

Ten days ago, she avoided him a little, because she frustratingly couldn’t stop herself from imagining what it would look like, if he took off the white t-shirt he was wearing. In that way she’s sure he takes off his t-shirts. Grabbing the collar at his back and yanking it off in one go, probably only using just one hand. Nothing quite as sexual as that.

She hates how sexy smoking looks when he does it. Something about sucking a cigarette shouldn’t make her groin tug. He seems to use smoking as a way to escape a room full of people, to have a moment just for himself, and every time she catches him do that, through the glass of a door or a window, that’s the only time she recognises the sweet boy of a decade ago, and she feels it’s endearing.

Despite the unhealthy habit he adapted to have a moment to himself, he always smiles when she walks outside to join him, and he often turns so that the smoke doesn’t blow in her face, and there’s this thing on his face that almost seems relieved, as if he’s ever so grateful that she disturbed his moment of hiding, or more so, joins him there.

Jon helps her get Robb inside the apartment, who finally sores up when they’re already up the stairs to his bedroom.

“Thanks mate, you’re the best.” He mutters to Jon, who took his shoes off and now makes sure he’s fully covered by the duvet.

“Poor kid,” Jon mutters as they walk down the stairs, “His hangover will murder him. He’s getting old. We all are. I remember at Eton… I could drink a full bottle of Scotch all on my own and be bright and shiny on the football field the next morning.”

“You’re not getting old.” Sansa smirks, “You’re not even 29 years old!”

Jon stops putting his coat on and he turns around grinning, “Yes I am.”

“But you and Robb-“

“-are three months apart. My birthday was two weeks ago.”

“Oh.” Has it been over three months since they stood on that balcony? Doesn’t feel like that.

“You didn’t watch ITV’s ‘Jon at 29’ documentary?” Jon grins.

“No.” Sansa confesses.

“Me neither, I would probably have died in cringe and shame.”

“I might see if it’s on YouTube, a Jon documentary sounds very interesting to me.” Sansa blurts our, and Jon avoids looking at her as he pretends to have not heard her.

“We released some shots of my face that look identical to the ones we released last year, to honour
the occasion.” Jon says as he pulls his other arm through the sleeve. “I ehm… half expected you to invite me to your party, I guess.”

Jon looks up, his eyes wide until he finds her cheeky grin, “I don’t do birthday parties.”

“What’s the point?”

“You’ll celebrate with friends and family, you can eat cake, people will give you presents… it’s fun.” Sansa smirks, “But you don’t do fun do you? You’d rather sulk around, feel sorry for yourself and be all melodramatic about the fact that you’re aging up.”

Jon doesn’t smirk nor grin, but his eyes sparkle when he says, “I don’t mind aging up.”

“Right.”

“I don’t. I’m not like Robb, I’m not afraid of living a peaceful life where I go to bed by ten and wake up at seven, to have breakfast, exercise and-“

“You do know Robb’s the one getting married, don’t you?”

“We all know why that it.”

Sansa finds herself speechless then, before she goes back to the original subject, “I’ll be 27 next month and-“

“27? You’re such a baby. You can drink all the alcohol you want.”

“I can’t!” Sansa giggles, she shoves him and thus ends up so close to him she can smell his aftershave, which is always dangerous territory, “Trust me I’m… I’m also getting old.”

“Naah.” He says. Because she moves towards him, he now has to look down to look into her eyes, which he doesn’t shy away from, for once.

“I am. We all are. So you ehm… you better prepare for my birthday party. Just so you know.”

“Harry won’t like that.”

“You don’t care about Harry.”

“Does anyone care about Harry?”

Sansa can’t help but laugh so loud Jon has to hush her. Waking up Robb would be terrible.

“I’m sorry.” He says, pushing her hair over her shoulder. The gentle way he does the simple gesture covers her body in goosebumps.

“Don’t be. He doesn’t like you.”

“Does anyone like him?”

Sansa laughs again but shoves him too, “I do. I’d like it for the two of you to get along. Which is why… which is why you’re invited to my birthday party.”
“6th of December?”

Sansa nods. He knows her birthday by head. She’s not sure why, but she knows she’ll crack her brain over it in the next weeks to come. Like she does over nearly all he says and does.

“I ehm… I and Aegon are on a three-day visit to Wales, then.”

“Oh.” Sansa forces a smile to her face, “That’s a good excuse.”

Jon finally smiles, though only shortly, “I don’t mind other people’s birthdays, I just don’t like my own. I’m not the person who enjoys being the centre of attention.”

“You picked the wrong career, darling.”

“I picked the army. So I guess you’re right.”

“You’re better now, aren’t you?” Sansa may not have responded in the way she felt an urge to, to him telling her he wakes up early to exercise and eat healthy breakfast… but she’s had her fair share of shrinks telling her how important stupid stuff like showering, eating veggies, brushing your teeth and wearing clean clothes are for the fitness of your brain.

“Yeah, of course.”

“Good.”

His simple answer indicates that he really doesn’t feel like talking about that, and the goofy, flirty moment has disappeared as if someone threw an ice bucket over both their heads.

Sansa plays with her fingers before she walks into Robb’s living room, to grab her jacket, but instead she pulls a blanket off the sofa and wraps it around her shoulders, “You don’t have to bring me home, I can crash here.”

“Don’t be silly.” Jon says, “It’s no problem.”

“I know but… you must be tired. I don’t mind, really.”

“I’m sure you don’t, but I… it’s really no effort. Don’t you live around the corner?”

“It’s fine.” Sansa insists and she can feel her face heat up again.

He doesn’t say anything for a moment and when Sansa finally looks up she feels his eyes burn, and for a slight second she fears he’s angry, “Look, I apologised for the article thing, I get that-“

“It’s got nothing to do with that.”

“You’re being weird.” Jon insists.

Sansa wants to tell him he’s got no right of accusing her of such. Weird? The way he stared at her during dinner was weird. The way he looks at her now is. The way she feels whenever she’s with him… she wishes that could be weird, but somehow, it may be unexpected and unexplainable, but it feels the opposite of weird. It feels like it makes total sense. Worst of all… she feels this excruciating fear that perhaps, somehow, she’ll never ever feel that way again, the way she feels when she’s with him. The possibility scares her more than anything before. And perhaps that’s why she keeps playing with fire.

“And I don’t want things to be awkward between us, cause Robb’s getting married and you’re
going to be a bit stuck with me for the next couple of weeks, and I really hope you won’t… you can be… not weird. For Robb’s sake.”

“I’m not being weird.” Sansa insists.

“Whatever.” Jon waves with his hand and turns around to walk away but kinda like he did on the terrace earlier in the evening, she grabs his lower arm to stop him.

“It’s not you. I just don’t… I don’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“I don’t… I don’t know.”

Jon’s frown grows with every word she speaks and she can see his inner struggle as he battles with his consciousness as he watches his headache grow, “Sansa, don’t-”

“You know what I mean.” Sansa says then, and she lets go of his arm instantly. She’s bluffing, and not just that, she’s entering dangerous waters by doing so, and when his eyes blink up to find hers, two big, very grey, very dark eyes that narrow suspiciously, Sansa has to gulp down something warm creeping down her back.

Jon takes a step away from her and says nothing, which she takes for a yes. His eyes move over her face, and then he lets them drop down, as he makes a full body scan of the way she stands there, “Put the coat on.” He orders, “I’ll bring you home.”

The car ride towards her flat is one of silence, and they’re no longer separated by a row of chairs. Every time the car reaches a bump in the road their shoulders touch and Sansa plays with the hem of her skirt as she wishes she could close her eyes and give in to the deep and dark urge to lay her head on his shoulder and curl around him like a cat.

The car stops outside, in front of her flat’s front door and Sansa can’t help but turn around before she leaves, with the alcohol still in her veins she grabs the cardoor before he gets to pull it shut.

“You’re a really good friend.” She says, “Robb’s lucky to have you.”

“I’m not so sure.” Jon says, looking away as if the compliment is too much to handle.

“I am.” Sansa insists, and she feels herself grin at him, “And I don’t feel like I’m stuck with you. Not at all.”

Jon still doesn’t look at her when he says, “I don’t feel like I’m stuck with you either.”

“Good,” Sansa says, and she feels suddenly incredibly brave when she bites her lip and suggests, “I might not be the brunette mystery girl, but we could still be friends.”

Jon doesn’t seem to feel awkward then, when he pushes the door further open and climbs out so that he is looking down into her eyes again, as if to emphasis that she has no power over him, although they both know better than that, “You and I can’t be friends.” He says.

“Why not?”

“You know why.” He says, and he grins his perfect grin, one Sansa won’t be able to ignore as she answers it with that geeky smile with the pursed lips she can’t remember using since her St. Andrews days.
“Aegon said you used to have a crush on me.” She says, and she enjoys the blush that undeniably appears on his cheeks, “I thought he was joking.”

“That’s a long time ago.” Jon simply says, as if that makes it terribly irrelevant.

“I never noticed.” Sansa confesses, she’s not sure what she might’ve done if she had.

“I don’t believe that at all.”

“You think I’m far smarter than I am.” Sansa says, licking her lips, and she knows she’s flirting, again, and she knows and does nothing to stop herself, “It’s very flattering.”

“I wasn’t flattering.” Jon says and Sansa feels like she’s swimming in the grey ocean of his eyes as they reflect the street lightening like a shattered mirror, “I just remember how embarrassingly obvious I was.”

“So no one ever told you to ask me out?”

“Everyone told me to ask you out.”

“Then why didn’t you?”

“Because-“ Jon stops himself to carefully consider his answer, as his hand holds the car door in its place, “Because you would’ve said no.”

Their smiles have faded when they both remember the old days, where Sansa was the Sansa she wants him to forget.

Perhaps she doesn’t mind his memories after all. Perhaps he does see how much she’s changed. Perhaps he wouldn’t look at her the way he does now, if he believed she was still that person. Perhaps the beauty of him being in love with that Sansa… is that he, even then, managed the love her for her. Perhaps she hasn’t changed as much as she wants to think, and perhaps there’s no one who understands that as well as he does.

“But be so sure about that.” Sansa hears her voice whisper, although she isn’t fully sure she says anything at all.

“You are no brunette, but you’re a mystery girl all the same.” Jon says, and at that her smile disappears, at that her courage sinks away in her shoes and the butterflies she did not notice until they are gone leave her with nothing but dread, and she wishes them back so desperately that the urge to fall into his arms is the greatest she’s ever had to contain.

“I’m staying.” Sansa whispers, “Harry doesn’t want me to, but I… I belong here. I wanted nothing more but to leave but… I was a foolish girl. Now, I feel safe behind the grey walls of London.”

Jon only nods.

“I’m done running.” She adds.

“Then stay.”

“I will, that’s why… that’s why I think you’ll be more stuck with me than the other way around.”

“I’ll manage.” Jon says and that brings the smile back to her face.

“Thank you, Jon.” Sansa says and she leans forward to wrap her arms around his shoulders. It’s a
friendly hug, a good-bye-see-you-later-hug, one that should mean nothing, should make her feel nothing, and yet turns her frozen skin to heat. If a paparazzi would picture this now, Sansa thinks, as she feels him hug her back, she would not be able to tell Harry how Jon was just handing over his coat, that it meant nothing. This hug is no stupid article, and it lasts too long, yet not long enough. With the greatest inner-resistance Sansa let’s go, before she turns around to go inside.

“You’ll be okay Sans,” He says, “You’re strong.”

No one’s ever called her that. Everyone always thinks she’s beautiful, vulnerable, precious and in need of protection. They’re all always so terribly afraid that weak and silly Sansa will do something foolish, her naivety taking the upper hand again. Like a weightless feather. Close the door quickly before Sansa blows outside.

Sansa shakes her head and smirks at him, trying to hide how much his words mean to her, she says, “If I were strong, I’d be lying in my bed right now.”

Jon grins back and gets in the car. Sansa doesn’t mean to, but even though she closes the door, she stands in the hallway listening to the car fading away until it’s gone, before she climbs the stairs to her bedroom, where she finds Harry fast asleep, still fully dressed lying above the sheets, in his attempt to stay awake and be there when she got home, to give her a hard time no doubt. His exhaustion ruined that for him, and saved Sansa’s night, to keep it the way she wants it to be, free of stains, quite perfect.

That is, until she climbs in her bed, and he turns to his side, and wraps an arm around her, “I’m sorry.” He mummers in her neck, pulling her close, “I’ve been such an asshole.”

Sansa cannot bring herself to deny it, but as she allows him to wriggle her in his embrace she closes her eyes, to make him suffer through his apology, as her shame grows.

“I’ll make it up to you, I promise.”

“It’s okay.” Sansa mutters.

“You had fun?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Good.” Harry says, and somehow, Sansa knows he means it, and that only makes her feel worse.
Jon met Val the night of Robb’s engagement dinner, when Aegon finally found a way to introduce him to the woman.

Her hair is honey blond, her eyes a pretty blue, her teeth pearly white and her face perfectly symmetrical. She’s tall, conventionally beautiful, easygoing, funny, charming and all of these things.

Which is why Jon, reluctant for no reason other than what he refuses to acknowledge, takes her with him to Robb’s engagement party. Where he believes he quickly loses sight of her, that’s how mortally drunk he gets, avoiding Sansa like some plague that’ll kill him. Not because of her, but because of the tall douche by her side, that and her seemingly happy face, as she sweetly smiles at Harry. He got over the article quite well, or so it seems.

When Jon wakes up the next morning in his own bed, a naked Val curled up in the crook of his arm, he can’t help but curse. He can very easily get over the fact that he, assumably, had sex with this gorgeous blonde, but he doubts his father will appreciate the gesture of him bringing girls home, to Buckingham Palace of all places, which is why he gets up as quickly as he can, jumps in the shower, and, with the excuse of “I have so many meetings!” Manages to help her out without getting seen, when he’s sure his parents are to church. Alas, this all could not end without her whispering “Last night was amazing.” In his ear, which gets him feeling both guilty and uncomfortable.

When Aegon asks if he’s in love with her already Jon shakes his head and receives the advice to “You definitely gotta ask her to come with you to the wedding. It’ll be a nice fuck you to Ygritte, Miss-Difficult-About-Attending-Weddings. You dump me after not showing up right before my blood sister is about to make her vows? Watch me bring this girl a hundred times your level to a wedding three weeks later.”

“I can’t use her like that.” Jon clenches his jaws, “And it’s been a little over three weeks.”

“Listen mate, you shagged her already, it’s too late to make an attempt at not using her… and you like her, don’t you?”

Jon can’t really remember, all he remembers is an overdose on tequila and a murderous headache when he woke up, which ended up lasting two days, “I think so?”

“Just ask her!”

And so Jon asks the blonde woman to be his date for Robb’s wedding, to which he’s extremely reluctant, because by the time it’s Christmas and he watches his father do the Christmas speech two days before the actual 25th, BBC cameras all around him, he knows full well what illness he
suffers, and he doesn’t like to say it out loud, in fear of only spreading the infection with his acknowledgment.

“My family and I wish you all the happiest of Christmases and a blessed new year.” The king tells the lens. At his left, on the high coffee table, is a collection of photographs; a group photo at Rhaeny’s wedding with the whole family minus the Spanish, a teenage Jon posing in front of a waterfall in Scotland, a black-and-white portrait of a young Lyanna, a three-year-old Rhaenys holding a black kitten, and the three royal children in fancy dress sitting for an official photograph, Rhaenys wearing her wedding tiara, Aegon in his white tie with the royal standard around his neck and Jon in military uniform. A collection of whom the king loves most. From their decorated frames, the faces of these people smile or seriously stare back to create a convincing surrounding to present the king as a head of state and family man both.

Traditionally, the royal family gather at Sandringham, and annually Aegon and Rhaenys spend Christmas Eve and Christmas morning with their father at Sandringham, to leave in the evening to spend the rest of the day as well as Boxing Day with Elia. But Elia’s in Spain this year, which means that Rhaenys arrives with three trunks and a sour looking Willas with the intention of moving from Sandringham straight to Winterfell Castle, in Scotland.

Aegon quickly gets bored and spends too much of his time texting his current boyfriend, then gets drunk with Arthur Dayne, the night before the Sandringham church walk, just because, and arrives late the next morning, which angers his father so much that Buzzfeed, the Daily Mail and the Telegraph are confident Jon’s parents’ marriage is in trouble, considering Rhaegar’s less-festive-than-usual facial expression.

Dany brought her braided husband, who not only looks but also seems to feel terribly out of place. He spectacularly defeats Lyanna at chess, which has her clap for him, and Rhaegar finally manages to tolerate him somewhat. They brought the kids too, which is always nice, and Jon especially likes the two youngest girls, who seem really interested in horses, and he’s always happy to teach anyone how to ride a pony.

When Drogo wears some traditional headwear from his Native American culture Aegon can’t help but ask him what sort of hat it is, to which the man, in an accent as thick as trees, responds, “It is a crown.”

Aegon laughs aloud and points at his dad, “Careful pa, he’s coming for your job! Soon we’ll all be out on the streets.”

If Aegon were still that twelve-year-old with an uncontrollable case of ADHD Rhaegar would’ve smacked the back of his head and grounded him for a year, but for now, there’s little Rhaegar can do but glare in the hope his look might kill.

Viserys is calm for his doing, he whines of course, per usual, but it’s only about the food and the weather, which both has got nothing to do with the family, and it seems like friction will actually take a pass this year. He’s decent to Dany too, who has always been the only one capable of handling him and his unbearable arrogance.

“Ghastly man, odious figure.” Lyanna mutters to Jon, as Rhaegar confronts Viserys on his miserably low working hours in the Court Circular.

Viserys doesn’t like Rhaegar’s decision to use the exact words; ‘if you don’t work, you don’t get paid’ one bit, and thus, friction proves to be unavoidable as it always is. Christmas wouldn’t be the same without Viserys throwing a fit because Rhaegar threatens to cut his allowance.
Uncle Aemon looks older than ever, but grandma Rhaella’s uncle still seems as fit as a young boy on the football field, despite his blindness he still tells the stories of a young soul, and he does little but that, as he’s always done, so long as Jon can remember. Jon’s never used to be sure whether he loved the man or couldn’t stand him, it depended on his mood, both his and Aemon’s, but the last couple of years he’s finally found it within himself to appreciate the blessings of having an ancient uncle who complains about what a total arsehole Winston Churchill was.

This Christmas he doesn’t try to hold his vague advises in, and Rhaenys listens breathlessly, because she’s the only one who enjoys poetry as much as Rhaegar does.

Lyanna loves Christmas and she decorates three of the twenty Christmas trees scattered through the palace all by herself, either listens to or hums the classic Christmas carols all day, outdoes herself with the gift wrapping and then starts asking Rhaenys where the babies are at because “Christmas is the best when you have little ones around who still believe in the magic!” Which Rhaenys casually waves off, claiming they’re waiting for a few more years.

It’s not Lyanna but Rhaegar who eventually notices Jon isn’t really in the mood for all of the festiveness and worst is, that he doesn’t even ask what’s wrong, but assumes.

During the Boxing Day shooting, he wraps an arm around Jon’s shoulders, as they’re both walking in the back, gun hanging over their arm, hoping to catch some unfortunate rabbit.

Aegon, Rhaenys And Willas are out there in the distance, screaming too loudly to have any chance of catching the tiniest ant as they’re scaring off any possible dinner, no doubt joking about unleashing a bullet a couple inches left of Viserys’s head, just to scare him, and Rhaegar asks, “What’s her name?”

“Hmm?” Jon casually asks.

“Is she aware she’s ruining your holidays or is your broken heart invisible to her?”

Jon humourless laughs, “My heart’s not broken!”

Rhaegar only raises his eyebrows.

“I’m not… it’s nothing like that. I’m fine.”

Rhaegar gives Jon an amused look and pats his son’s back, “So long as she’s not a member of the Tartan Terrorists, hmm?”

“She’s not.” Jon says before he can stop himself, and Rhaegar laughs.

“Well, she’s mad if she lets you go, I raised you well, I know.”

“She’s mad if she takes me on.” Jon bites back, “Me and all my baggage.”

Rhaegar blinks before he clears his throat and looks at his gun, before he says, “If girls can only see your baggage, they’re not worth the effort. Humans are not defined by what wears them down, they’re defined by what keeps them moving, what keeps them from falling apart.”

Jon rolls his eyes at his father’s attempt at wisdom, “Did uncle Aemon tell you this?”

“No,” Rhaegar laughs, “He told your aunt Dany.”

Jon then decides to admit, “There are plenty of women who’d love to be a part of all this, it’s just
that... these are not the women I want, and women I do like... they're terrified and they aren't in no way willing to give up their freedom and their future."

Rhaegar’s smile is gone and Jon spots something that looks like shame, guilt, even, and then he asks, “So she’s afraid she’ll lose her freedom?”

“No.” Jon says, “No, she’s... I don’t know, she doesn’t know I like her.”

“Oh. Well, that changes things. Maybe tell her?”

Jon chuckles uncomfortably, some deeply embarrassed part of him knows she probably already knows, “I think that’ll ruin things.” He says. His friendship with Robb, for one.

“She’s afraid of the press.”

“I’m afraid of the press. With Ygritte... the way they handled Ygritte...”

“You might tell your next girlfriend some fake stories, if they’ll end up in the newspapers you know she can’t be trusted.” Rhaegar laughs, “I know Aegon does that.” His laugh disappears when he realises what he’s saying, “Of course I disapprove.”

“I won’t have to, she wouldn’t do that.” That Jon knows.

“Well, that’s good. I’m glad you can still... it’s good to trust people. Trusting no one is in many ways worse than trusting everyone.”

“It’s not about trust. I don’t know if she’s afraid of... I know she deserves to be free and to have a future, and I know I don’t want to be the person who takes that from her.”

Rhaegar nods, then ruffles Jon’s hair the way he’s done since so long as Jon can remember, and Jon regrets not putting a cap on, “Just remember that a person’s freedom should be of their own choosing, you don’t make that decision for her.”

“But what if I don’t want to ask?”

“Then you’re a better man than I am.”

Jon smiles at that comment, “I think mum’s fine.”

Rhaegar smiles too, “She’s okay.” He agrees and then his smile disappears and he says, “You’re a good kid, we’re very proud of you. What you did in Geneva... I’m very proud of you.”

Jon gulps away the emotions at this unexpected compliment, “Thanks, Dad.”

“Someday you don’t have to ask,” Rhaegar says, “I never had to ask your mother, she was the one telling me, and I knew. Someday, I hope, you’ll know.”

Jon nods, pretending to believe.

“Unless you already do?”

Jon wonders if he ever asked Ygritte, and then knows he hasn’t, he knows there’s never been anyone with whom he wanted to live out his life behind golden bars, not until now. He spent nearly three years losing his head over Ygritte, panicking and worrying whether or not she was going to run away. He always knew she would eventually, and perhaps that’s really why he picked her, because if he ever, for one moment, thought she’d stay, he would’ve known there would never
have been a way back. Like there’s no way back with Rhaenys and Willas.

Jon shakes his head. Ygritte has fully left Jon’s mind when he confesses, “She’s got a boyfriend.”

“Oh.” Rhaegar seems a bit taken aback, “Then that’s… the problem?”

“I guess.” Jon says and Rhaegar laughs, the way he sometimes does when one of his children says something that only he could find amusing. Jon guesses it’s because he likes being a dad, he likes being their dad.

They both look up in shock when Rhaenys fires a shot and she does a little dance when she finds out she, apparently, killed something.

“Can we go inside now?” Aegon bellows, “I’m cold, I need a drink!”

Jon spends the rest of his Christmas weekend at Sandringham playing cards with uncle Aemon, horse-riding as he laughs at Egg’s attempts at doing the same, arguing with Rhaenys, watching movies with Rhaenys, watching tv shows with his mum, struggling his way through a football match that’s extremely dominated by everyone avoiding any contact with Drogo, and then ends it with allowing Egg and Rhaenys together to spend a horrifying amount of money on redoing his closet.

“You need this jacket.” Rhaenys says, “You’d pull off the woolen collar really well.”

“Just remember not to wear it with blue jeans in the same washing!” Aegon adds, “You’re not a hippie nor a hipster, you’re laid back and cool, but at the same time, you know what you’re doing and you know what you want.”

Jon can’t help but grimace, “Okay?”

“And he needs some new Clarks.” Rhaenys says as she nudges Aegon, who’s behind the laptop, scanning through the online world of overpriced clothes, “Just do a black pair and the suede brown ones. He won’t wear the lighter colors anyway.”

Jon could confirm, but it’s of no use.

“You like the longer coats, don’t you? I assume we won’t get you in a tartan one?” Aegon laughs but no one laughs with him and he’s not bothered whatsoever, when he’s done, he scrolls down the page, “How about some trainers, hmm? Like… like some good Balanciagas.”

“Stop.” Jon hides his face behind his hands.

“No! Jon’s too cool for school.” Rhaenys says when Aegon opens a link to black Oldskools.

“We gotta spice it up a bit! How bout some Chelsea boots?”

Jon has to lean in to actually know what the fuck these are, and when he sees he shrugs, “Yeah, I could wear these and still contain my self-respect. And I actually don’t mind the vans. Just not the blocked ones.”

“Great!”

Rhaenys groans.

“What? He likes them!” Egg yells at her.
“He’s 29, dress him to his age!”

“Carita, we don’t all have to look like we’re going to church every day.”

“I never go.” Rhaenys says.

“Nor does Jon, and at least he looks the part. There’s a reason for him to be number 8, if you don’t mind, I very much plan on keeping him there.”

“I’m what?” Jon asks.

“He refers to Vogue’s best dressed men of Britain list.” Rhaenys rolls her eyes.

“I’m on it?”

“And so am I.” Aegon says, moving Tommy Hilfiger jumpers into the basket, “You better not kick me off number one, I’m warning you.”

“You’ve all got that in your own hands.” Jon says, staring at the screen as Aegon contemplates whether green or brown will look best, before buying both the t-shirts.

“Don’t worry, Juan, I’ve got this.” Aegon promises.

And so Jon finds himself in some bizarrely expensive outfit sitting in a car, squeezed in between his siblings, wearing his new Chelsea boots, dark washed jeans, a cotton blouse with a rib-woolen jumper over it, warmed up by his trusty recycled non-tartan black coat, accessorized by his equally trusty cap, this one actually in some brown tartan pattern Rhaenys has more than once called ‘hideous’.

Rhaenys is wearing a coat dress, which is her job uniform. She matches the dark blue buttoned ensemble with her black boots and a furry hat she insisted is a fake, though Jon has his doubts.

Aegon is already in a pitch-black suit, though he’s stopped wearing the Targaryen red ties ever since a particular moron across the pond made that his trademark.

“I’d actually be excited if the bloke wasn’t getting married to a grey mouse. The Starks are fun, Winterfell is a good castle, had some of the best parties there… Lord Eddard is a politician I actually like… Lady Stark still looks fabulous for her age, Sansa’s a gem, Arya is the best laugh, Bran is the cleverest lad I’ve ever met, it’s just Jeyne… why Jeyne Westerling? Of all people. Any home stylist in the world could find a wall paper more interesting than that girl.” Aegon complains.

“Don’t be so rude.” Rhaenys tells him, “Jeyne’s lovely.”

Aegon snarks at that, “You hate her more than all of us combined.”

“I do not.” Rhaenys insists.

“I don’t hate Jeyne.’ Jon tries.

“Liar.” Aegon says before he leans forward to look past Jon at Rhaenys, “If I’ve wondered what the hell Robb wants with her, then you-“

“Egg stop.” Jon says.

Egg raises his eyebrows in amusement and then leans back in his seat, grinning, “When’s Val
“coming?”

“After the ceremony.” Jon says, looking through the window.

“Who’s Val?” Rhaenys asks.

“Jon’s new girlfriend.”

“She’s not my girlfriend.”

“She is. I set them up, finally I managed.”

“She’s not…” Jon sighs, “I went on one date with her, and-“

“He had sex with her too, at Buckingham Palace-“

“Really?” Rhaenys gasps.

“How do you know that?” Jon asks, his eyes widened.

“I have sources.”

“Does pa know?”

Aegon ignores that and goes on, “Anyway, so, I introduced them at Mahiki, I knew it was a match made in heaven when she told me all she really wants to wear is black… I said, girl, you gotta meet my brother, and so-“

“Jon’s not in love with her.” Rhaenys cuts him off with a dismissive chuckle.

“Thanks.” Jon says, but his gratitude doesn’t last long.

“He obviously likes Sansa.”

“I do not-“


Rhaenys rolls her eyes, “Obviously!”

“No way! That’s like… that would be…” Aegon looks at Jon, narrows his eyes and asks, “Really?”

“No!”

“He’s still in the denial stage.” Rhaenys mutters.

“I am not!”

“In that case he’s in that stage where he refuses to admit it to himself, but already knows he’s fucked.” Rhaenys decides.

“Fucked Val at Buckingham Palace.” Aegon laughs and Rhaenys gobbles down her chuckle.

Jon decides this is the moment where he’ll start to ignore them both and he curses himself for not bringing his earplugs as he stares down at his phone, scrolling through the BBC app, as they go on to discuss his feelings.
“Look, if Jon liked Sansa, I would know, and I don’t.”

“Are you saying he tells you everything?”

“No, I think I know everything. Like I said, I have sources.”

“Oh puhlease.” Rhaenys chuckles, “Forget your sources. How about if you ever stopped talking all the time and put in some effort to listen to what other people have to say, you would have noticed the one source you need.” Rhaenys points at Jon, sitting between them, with her thumb, to make sure no one wonders what one source she’s referring to.

“Vete a la mierda!” Is all Aegon says.

“Seriously! Like last week, I said I want to try out yoga…” Rhaenys puts up a voice Jon assumes is modeled after his, “Sansa goes to yoga once a week… and I reminded him this morning of my gluten-free diet, and he said Sansa told me research pointed out gluten-free is actually pretty unhealthy… Sansa’s favourite movie is Dirty Dancing, Sansa really likes the ballet, Sansa’s favourite paintings are the Garden of Eden and the Girl with the Pearl Earring. Sansa’s favourite flowers are white peonies, Sansa knows everything about bones and corsets, so I’m super interested in bones and corsets too now, Sansa, Sansa, Sansa… Sansa is staying in London, have you heard? I’m so happy Sansa’s staying in London… do you think Sansa will be at this random event? Did you invite Sansa? Do you think Sansa hates me because she’s on the cover of the Daily Mail because I couldn’t help myself and be a gentleman? Nice dress Rhaenys! Thank you, Jon! Sansa also wears dresses, did you know? I know cause all I do is stare at her over the rim of my glass and-“

“Rhaenys fuck off!” Jon elbows her, but she only bursts out laughing.

Aegon shakes his head, in all seriousness, he pretends to disagree, “Sansa? Robb’s little sister? Jon wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Not when he was seventeen, no.” Rhaenys laughs.

“I mean, she’s not even his type.” Aegon decides, and he suspiciously glances at Jon, who’s gone back to staring ahead of himself, “She’s ginger. When has Jon ever shagged gingers? Also, she’s far too clever, far too funny, if I may say so, she’s also way too sexy, and well… she’s dating that gorgeous blonde guy from-“

“Aegon shut up.” Jon hisses and he gives his older brother a shove that’s meant to hurt.

He and Rhaenys have made friends again in their shared amusement over Jon’s discomfort, and when Jon crosses his arms, his face piping red, they finally manage to gulp down their laughter.

“Sorry.” Rhaenys mutters, but it’s not genuine.

Jon doesn’t stop staring ahead of himself, pissed beyond limits and he feels his siblings watch him intently, until Aegon can’t hold it in no longer.

“Oh gosh…” he mutters, “Poor Val…” and he and Rhaenys both burst out laughing again.

By the time they finally reach the goddamn castle Jon’s the first to jump out, no matter his uncomfortable middle seat.

It’s been snowing in Scotland, a thick layer rests comfortably on the grassy fields that surround the massive building that is the ancient home to the ancient Stark family. Wolves are engraved in
about everything, the windows are still small, because when it was built, glass was expensive. The
towers are round and high, the walls thick and grey. Over a thousand years old, Winterfell is the
oldest still standing castle in Scotland, and it’s still occupied and owned by the family of its
original builder, some man named Brandon, no doubt, who built it to keep the violent Vikings out
and protect his people from their raving. The same guy who built the Handrian’s wall, which is not
far away from here. A wall of 80 miles, coast to coast, built for the same reason.

Jon used to come here all the time when he was a boy, Balmoral is just around the corner and it’s
because Ned and Lyanna have been such long-lasting friends that Jon got to meet Robb in the first
place, during summer, when they’d visited, he’d been only five, and it was in this castle.

Christmas at Winterfell is a treat. Everything is decorated but nothing’s overdone. It reminds Jon a
bit of these Downton Abbey Christmas specials Rhaenys forced him to watch.

A great tree decorated with golden stars and twinkling lights in the shape of actual candles greets
them in the hall, and the railing of the staircases that lead Jon to his bedroom are so full with these
green Christmas plants which name he keeps forgetting, that it’s actually impossible to hold them
and make use of their purpose.

There’s even a mini Christmas tree in Jon’s room, a fake though, unsurprisingly, but he would’ve
liked the smell.

It’s not long until Robb bursts in, already dressed for dinner, happy but mostly nervous and only a
little panicky, informing Jon that Jeyne has just left because “bloody Eleanor insists the groom
cannot see the bride before the wedding.”

“No going back now.” Jon grins, which is a joke not received well.

“Stop it, everyone’s been saying that all day.”

Jon can still recall Theon during Robb’s bachelor party, “Imagine, soon, in only a couple of days,
you’ll only ever be able to be inside of Jeyne, no other woman, ever, never again, just her, for the
rest of your life, till the end of your days, just Jeyne, only Jeyne, until you die.”

It was Theon’s intention to have Robb loosen his boundaries somewhat in that trashy strip club he
insisted they visit, but his actions had the opposite effect, and he failed miserably. All Robb did
was sit straight, hands right beside his body, the honour his father installed in him keeping him
firmly in his seat.

For Jon, it was much the same, and he wanted to throw up and run out screaming when one of the
strippers attempted to press her breasts in his face, creepily calling him by his accurate official
royal title, the most honourable Lord Jon Fitzroy Snow.

That bachelor party was everything a bachelor party is expected to be and thus everything it
shouldn’t have been. Not even Theon had a good time, when he ran into his uncle, some really
creepy guy with pitch black hair and one eye that wasn’t… exactly the way it should’ve been had it
been healthy.

Robb’s last dinner as an official bachelor is more to his taste, surrounded by only his own family
and his closest friends. Jon’s already sitting down, friendly chatting away with Catelyn when
Sansa barks in, apologising for being late, and Jon wishes he could loudly tell her it’s absolutely no
problem whatsoever when he’s sure she looks at him and finds him staring like a dimwit at how
perfectly beautiful she looks.
Never in a million years did Jon expect her to look so good in burgundy red, but she really really does. She wears some close-fitted dress with an barely-there slit at the thigh. Some asymmetric one-shoulder neckline accentuates her neck as well as her shoulders which she highlights with, what Jon knows, are some impressively large Stark family ruby earrings from the vault.

She hugs Rhaenys, who played it safe in a satin white belted jumpsuit.

Jon’s never before paid attention to what women wear, suddenly now he’s looking around to spot if the other ladies are wearing earrings like Sansa’s, and he feels like a total fool. They’re just earrings, it doesn’t bloody matter.

Catelyn speeches, though Ned helps her cut it short when she seems about to cry, and when Theon takes the stage, Jon can’t help but allow his eyes to wander off to Sansa, who’s pushing Harry’s hair in place, all sweetly, and at that, Jon gulps down his full glass of wine.

After dinner it’s poker time, which Jon hates but Aegon loves, which is good because he steals a full 3000 from Theon without any obvious amount of great effort.

Jon’s casually smoking outside, in the cold, on his own, the way he likes it best, alone with the ruthless Scottish wind and some gargoyles, when the glass door opens and none other but Harry Hardyng barks in.

“I’m not interrupting, am I?” He grins as if he means to joke, casually mocking the fact that Jon has no company, and all Jon can respond is,

“Only my moment of peace.”

When Harry laughs he sounds posh, which is surprising considering he grew up in Florida and tries his very best to pretend to hate, not envy, the upper class, “Listen, I came here because… well, because I thought it might be a good idea for you to hear from my lips that it’s okay. I’m okay about the pictures. I know these were just silly gossip.”

“What?” Jon knows exactly what pictures, how could he ever forget these pictures? “Oh! You mean those vague ones? Yeah, right, I never thought you’d care, I mean, who cares about a Daily Mail article?”

It’s Jon’s turn to mockingly laugh now, and he hasn’t stopped yet when Harry clears his throat and says, “Sansa told me, she said you were just lending her your coat.”

“Hmm? Yeah… I mean, she was cold. She was trying to call you, actually.”

“I know, I was working late.”

“You didn’t pick up the phone.”

“I was already on my way.”

“Sansa didn’t know.”

“I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“That you were about to show up late to her brother’s birthday party?” When Harry has trouble finding a response Jon seizes his chance to add, “It’s good you’re not working late now, Robb’s very important to Sansa. This wedding is important to her, important to the family.”
“You’re quite close to them, aren’t you?”

“To the Starks? Yeah, I mean, I came here for the first time when I was still in pre-school. They’re wonderful, wonderful people.”

“They are.”

“Like a second family to me.”

“Sansa loves her family very much.”

“I know she does, it’s why she loves London so much.”

Jon’s not sure whether he started narrowing his eyes or if Harry did, either way, they’re having some glaring contest as they throw passive aggressive lines at each other, and it’s both challenging and releasing.

“If Sansa wants to be in London, we’ll stay in London, I told her. I can work from whatever place and I just want her to be happy.”

“Good,” Jon hears himself say, “She deserves that.”

“I guess she’s like a little sister to you, right? With how close you and Robb are?”

Jon throws his cigarette away, and doesn’t nod, shake his head or blink, “All the Starks are like family.” He says.

“Yes…” Harry laughs again, in that way that makes shivers run down Jon’s spine, “I’m sure they are. You’re like their foster son. Part of the furniture, like a chair, or a plant.”

“At least I’m not a rug.” Jon says.

“A rug?”

“I won’t let people waltz over me.”

Harry laughs some more, “No, you’re as steady as a coffee table. Aren’t all of you Targaryens? It’s been some while since you did your bit of incest. I suppose y’all sane now? But then, you’re not actually a Targaryen, are you? You’re a bastard.”

“I was born out of wedlock.” Jon says, “But thankfully we live in a society now where people are appreciated for their hard work, and not looked down upon or judged for their birth.”

“No!” Harry grins, “Though one easily forgets, when hiding away in this castle in the middle of nowhere, talking to a king’s son.”

“Not the middle of nowhere. The Scottish Highlands.” Jon says.

Harry says nothing and Jon doesn’t feel like continuing this conversation would do either of them a favour, for he doesn’t see Harry making an impressive comeback, and if this goes on for three seconds more, he’s afraid of shoving the bloke down the terrace, and Robb won’t be very forgiving about him ruining his wedding by murdering the groom’s sister’s boyfriend, so he coughs, and makes his way around Harry in an unnecessarily large circle, towards the door, and goes back inside, feeling like he just engaged in a battle still left undecided.

Nevertheless, it was extremely exhausting and not so long after Jon finds his sister sitting
somewhere near the bar, all alone with her cosmopolitan, which can only be by choice.

Jon drops down beside her, orders a Martini, and asks, “Is it the music or something else?”

“Everything.” Rhaenys mutters, not looking up at him, instead, continuing to stare ahead, “Everything.”

Jon wraps an arm around her shoulders and pecks her temple, “Dr Phill claims we’ll always be a little in love with our first love. It’s okay if all this is a bit hard.”

“That’s not it…” Rhaenys sighs, “I mean, it is, but it’s also something else.”

“What?” Jon asks, “You are okay, aren’t you?”

Rhaenys nods and takes a sip from her cosmo, “I just… my period came this evening, right before the bloody dinner. I was late and I thought I might…” She doesn’t finish and takes another sip instead.

“Well that’s… I didn’t know you guys were trying? You told my mother-“

“I already have the entire country watching my extremely flat stomach, I can’t have your mother be on baby watch, too.”

Jon can accept that for an explanation, “I’m sorry.” He mutters, “I understand, she shouldn’t have asked.”

Rhaenys shrugs, “She was only honest. I should be producing babies. I want babies. Why else do you think I got married? Because I enjoyed parading around the Abbey in a ridiculous dress?”

“Well Rhaenys, you’re only 32, you’ll be fine, you’re young, just enjoy being married for now, and-“

“I can’t burden you and Aegon with this. I’m papa’s heir, it’s duty.”

Jon laughs uncomfortably, “Think you had a bit too much to drink.”

“No.” Rhaenys drunkenly tell him, “I’m fine. I’m just… ugh.”

She turns her head to glance at Robb, who’s chatting with his Tully uncle, all happy and bright.

“I’m glad he’s happy.” She whispers, and Jon knows she’s sincere.

“Course you are.” Jon smiles and it makes his cheeks ache, “Cause you’re a good person.”

“I’m not.” Rhaenys says.

“You are.”

“I’m really, really not. I had this daydream where Jeyne tripled over her ugly dress and dropped dead in the middle of the church aisle and Robb didn’t even mind. In my head, his bride dropped dead and he didn’t even blink an eye. I’m a horrible, horrible person.”

“You’re a… you’d be a horrible person if you stuck out your foot and made her triple.”

Rhaenys groans, “No…” she sighs, “It wasn’t my fault, I pretended to be shocked but I laughed behind my hand.”
“That’s not so bad.”

“It’s terrible. *I’m* terrible.”

“Maybe a little bit terrible.” Jon finally gives in.

Rhaenys looks sideways at her brother and narrows her eyes, “Don’t tell me you don’t daydream about accidentally shooting Harry Hardyng in the neck during the new year’s hunt?”

“I haven’t yet, but thanks for the inspiration, I will *now.*”

Rhaenys sympathetically rubs Jon’s shoulder and then shakes her head in disbelieve, “Who would’ve thought, you crushing on Sansa… *still*?”

“Again.”

“Wow.” Rhaenys sips from her drink and then clears her throat, “If it helps, she and that Harry douche are not going to last long, and every time she looks at you she gets that glossy look in her eyes which makes me think she wants to fuck you silly.”

“She doesn’t.”

“She does though.”

“No.”

“Yes. I’m no blind idiot, I know you rather well, and I know her, and I’m sorry to inform you I’m not the only one who sees. Hardyng is probably going to pop from frustration somewhere either right before or right after the ceremony.”

“He’s just a jealous dickhead.” Jon says, “I just talked to him… he was trying to mark his territory. He called me a plant.”

“Damn.” Rhaenys chuckles, “Hope you got him back on that.”

“I called him a rug.”

Rhaenys nearly chokes on her drink, “You still have so much to learn.”

“He was peeing all over her.”

“What?”

“Marking his territory.”

Rhaenys laughs, though it’s hoarse and drunk and unhappy, “As if we Targaryens care. We breathe out and set little territorial dogs like him to flames. We’re dragons.”

“I’m not that guy.”

“I hate to say it, but you’re already that guy.”

“Nothing’s happened.”

“Yet.”

Jon feels his face light up, “Don’t be ridiculous.”
Rhaenys chuckles some more, then shakes her head, “You know you want to.”

“She’s in a relationship.”

“That’s got nothing to do with it.”

“It’s got everything to do with it, I want to respect the fact that she’s with someone else.” Jon says.

Rhaenys looks up and her eyes mock him, “So if she’ll throw herself at you, pulling the clothes off her body, naked sweaty and ready for you, with those hungry eyes, begging you to just have her right here, right now, on the floor if you must… you’ll say, ‘no Sansa, I’m sorry, we can’t, I’m not that guy.’“

Jon can only frown and Rhaenys chuckles some more, “Sansa would never do that.” He tells her when she’s done, and Rhaenys shakes her head, takes a sip, then decides,

“In her fantasies, she would.” Rhaenys says and she plays with her earring as she turns her cocktail glass in her hand.

“She would never-“

“Not without feeling guilty, no, but a girl wants what a girl wants and one moment that’s cocktails and the next it’s making all 16-year-old Jon Snow’s dreams come true.”

“Well, I don’t wanna put her in a situation like that.”

“Jon…” Rhaenys sighs loudly, “For the love of god and Jesus and all things nice and spice, drop the good guy act and perhaps you’ll actually get yourself your girl.”

“You’re drunk.”

“Whether I’m wrong or right or drunk is neither here nor there, Lord Fitzroy… just remember, when you’re going to sleep al alone and lonely tonight feeling sorry for yourself classic you style… at least she’s not getting married.”

“You’re married yourself.”

“The upper-class way.” Rhaenys says, and her voice is suddenly very high, “You know what the aristocratic approach is to marriage.”

“Bring forth an heir and a spare and then try and be civil to each other?”

“Exactly.”

“Rhaenys…” Jon sighs, “This isn’t the nineteenth century.”

“Maybe not in your world, but it is in mine.”

“I’m a member of our family too, you know.”

“I wasn’t going to be like my mother.” Rhaenys says then, and Jon realises she’s back to talking to herself, “I wasn’t going to buy the fairytale, only created to sell to the public, I wasn’t going to hate the other women, I wasn’t going to be lonely and bitter and-“

“Your mum’s not lonely and bitter. She’s got Anders.”
Rhaenys loudly huffs, “I’m glad he makes my mum happy, but he’s a twat. He doesn’t believe in female succession when there’s a son. He used to whisper in my brother’s ear that he should rule after our father, and his grandfather once said that it’s not right for men to kneel to women. He’s one of the people who are against a change of law in Spain, he says Arianne especially is unfit to rule, being the willful wanton that she is.”

Jon can’t help but laugh at that. Rhaenys is the only princess of Wales Britain could want, but Arianne? Jon’s not a fan for very… specific reasons he wouldn’t share with everyone.

“It’s not funny.” Rhaenys says, jaw clenched.

“I doubt Anders Yrenwood has any possible influence on Spanish succession rules, never mind British. Anyway, your mother is fine, she’s getting pampered by her rich boyfriend, jet-setting most of Southern Europe… meanwhile doing fantastic humanitarian work. Everyone loves Elia.”

“I’m not worried about my mother. I’m worried about me never having babies and burdening Aegon with the ugly truth of him being gay.”

“Oh.” Jon realises he got lost, and also a little stuck in this conversation, and just when he’s found a response to give, Rhaenys starts crying.

“Bloody Willas…” She mutters angrily, and she gulps down her glass.

“Let’s go to bed, Rhaenys,” Jon says, and he gets up, and helps her get to her feet, while she aggressively wipes away tears.

“Now I’m ruining your evening.” Rhaenys complains.

“Don’t worry bout that,” Jon ensures his sister, “It was beyond rescue many hours ago.”

“Okay… okay good.” Rhaenys breathes in and out, then straightens her back to walk out with the self-confidence and reserve that her grandmother taught her.

“Let me-“

“I can do it!” Rhaenys says and she pulls her glittery clutch bag from his hands, “Christ Jon, I’m drunk, not dying.”

Jon says nothing as he walks with her to the door, up the stairs, to her room.

“You’ve ever wondered whether you want to be king?” Rhaenys asks when she opens the door.

“It’s all yours.” Jon says, and he’s stunned at the question. He’s not sure why she asks. No ones ever asked, he’s never seriously considered.

“You don’t want to be legitimised? With my blessing? With Elia’s blessing? To be a true Targaryen? To be… to be father’s real son.”

“I am father’s real son.”

Rhaenys has nothing in her eyes when she says, “No. You’re a Snow, like your mother. Your mother will always be a Snow. But you don’t have to be. You can be a Targaryen.”

“I’m fine wherever I am now.” Jon gulps.

“It’s not about you being fine.” Rhaenys says, “I’m not asking you for permission. You were born
in a dragon’s crib, no matter what, you have a duty too.”

“Rhaenys, go to bed.” Jon says, and there’s no part of him anywhere that thinks this is funny.

Rhaenys smirks then, her ugliest smile yet, when she admits, “I secretly hated you when we were kids. You’re just what everyone wants me to be.”

“Rhaenys…” Jon takes her upper arms between his, “You’re drunk.”

“Am I? Yes I am. Also, I’m still jealous. Perhaps more so. But I’m… I’m also your sister.”

Rhaenys sighs then and cradles his cheek. She looks sad, suddenly, and when she blinks tears appear in the corner of her eye, “That’s why I could never hate you.”

“You don’t have to hate me.” Jon mutters and Rhaenys smiles.

“Even if I tried…” she whispers, before she wraps her arms around him, and kisses his cheek, “I’m sorry, Jon.” She whispers, “I am.”

“You don’t have to be.” Jon cackles, “You did nothing wrong. You… you work too hard.”

“Yeah.” She says, “yeah, maybe.” And with one last sad smile, she disappears into her room, and leaves him standing there, in that hallway, all alone, all confused and a little miserable.
Chapter Summary

“I never see any home cooking, all I get is fancy stuff.”
-Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Chapter Notes

Hi Y’all! Thank you for all your lovely messages, they really do make my day and I want you to know I’m beyond grateful X

Now, I'm not particularly fond of this chapter, partly because I never intended for it to be a chapter, I had to cut one in half because it was just far too long. That's why chapter nine will, again, be a Sansa pov chapter. Anyway, this is just a sort of chapter that had to happen to keep the story rolling and to get the characters where they need to be for the chapter after this. If that makes any sense.

Anyway, don't mind my rambling, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s huge.” Harry notes as the car stops in front of Wintertown Cathedral.

“It’s called a cathedral for a reason.” Sansa smiles, “I was baptized here.”

Harry opens the door and gets out, still looking up at the building, holding it open for Sansa as she follows.

“The lower half of the tower is pre-\textit{Romanesque} from the 11th century,” she tells him, pointing up, as if he’ll miss the tower if she won’t, “Originally it was free-standing, you know, a bit like the closely similar \textit{Muthill} Church.”

“I don’t know.” Harry says, frowning.

“The upper part was added in the 15th century; the change in masonry is very obvious, \textit{look}, that’s why its much taller. Most of the rest of the building is \textit{Gothic},” Sansa concludes.

“I didn’t know you were interested in architecture.”

“I’m not really, it’s just… well, this is \textit{Stark}.”

“Right.” Harry blinks some more, then spots some photographers failing at hiding behind some trees, close to the opening of the fence around the typical English courtyard, with the ancient bowing tombstones.

“Let’s not look at them.” Sansa says, grabbing Harry’s arm.

“Why are they \textit{here}?"
“Because,” Sansa says, “The king and princess consort are coming, and usually they don’t attend weddings outside their own family, because of the security risks, so this is thing.”

“And all these other people?” Harry nods at the people with smartphones.

“Just locals. For most folks it’s not every day the king pops by just around the corner.”

Harry huffs but says nothing, thankfully.

“Don’t you think Jeyne minds? All the attention should be on her, maybe? Not on her fiancé’s best man’s family.”

“I think Jeyne doesn’t enjoy attention all that much, anyway.” Sansa says, which is exactly what she told Jon, this very morning.

She peeked into Robb’s room, to see if he was ready, and Jon opened the door, wearing a half-buttoned up shirt.

He smiled at her as if he was happy to see her so unexpectedly, even told her she looked pretty, which sounded genuine, so quickly and promptly did he say it.

“I… I like the hat.” He added, pointing at her fascinator.

Sansa tried her best not to blush like a fool, thanked him, and then made her way in to see if Robb was drowning away in his anxiety. He wasn’t, Jon made well sure of that.

Sansa straightened her brother’s tie, told him not to forget smiling, advised him to just keep his eyes on Jeyne and pretend the rest of the world wasn’t there, before Jon pulled her upper arm and asked, away from Robb’s earshot, “Is the paparazzi very very bad?”

“It is as was expected.” Sansa said, placing her hand over his, rubbing the back in hope of calming his nerves. His cause wasn’t as lost as much as Robb’s was.

“They’re ruining it, aren’t they?”

“No…” Sansa rubbed his shoulder and took a step closer to him, to make sure he heard as she whispered, “It’s just a couple of photographers, nothing more. They don’t invade the church, and they won’t be able to get into the party. It’s fine.”

Jon breathed out and nodded, “Jeyne must hate it.” He said then, and Sansa shook her head.

“She’ll have super high quality pictures of her arrival at the church! For free! What bride doesn’t want that?”

Before she left she felt like pulling a hand through his hair, to make sure it stayed in place, and also because she wanted to touch it so badly. Perhaps it would relax him, perhaps she could kiss his temple too, then, or give him a hug. Or pull the clothes off his body and satisfy her overwhelming, occasionally slightly unhealthy fantasies of the last two or so months.

Sansa didn’t, because she knew it would be a terrible idea, as well as terribly out of character, so instead, she ran off, downstairs, to the car ready to bring her and Harry to church.

Harry has been much better lately. He told her that it’s up to her what she wants for her career, that he respects her wish to live near her family, and that he won’t complain about it again. And he hasn’t, not really. He rolls his eyes and sighs a lot, but he’s been amazing throughout this entire
wedding, not complaining, nor whining, and it doesn’t bother Sansa that he doesn’t enjoy it, because she doesn’t expect him to.

In January, Sansa will start a part-time job at the Jehaerys and Alysanne museum. She can’t wait. Even though it’s only part time, and it won’t make enough money to cut off her financial dependence on her parents, nor will she have enough time left to start that PhD she always planned on getting… she knows this is something she can work her way up in, that she will find long-lasting fulfillment in. And she’ll have some time for other things, like tennis, friends, family, charity. Margaery asked her to join in on organising a benefit gala at Highgarden Palace, to collect money for a children’s cancer hospital, and she’s seriously considering helping.

Meanwhile she could always follow some programs at Cambridge, or perhaps even Oxford. The article she wrote that came along with her work for the National History museum hasn’t been published yet and she hopes that perhaps it’ll get received well enough for her to be able to hang around in academics. The lectures she gave at the museum to history college students as well as secondary schoolers were amazing, and Sansa knows teaching is something she wishes to explore.

Harry still works at the bank, and though he still works more than he should, he makes sure to have one night off every weekend, during which he usually takes Sansa out for dinner, or they go to the theatre.

Harry struggled himself a way through the party last night, and she figures he’ll struggle himself a way through this too, but if she manages to keep him away from certain people, like Aegon, Robb, Arya, Jon… she’ll manage.

It was quite wonderful to introduce him to Scotland. She’s told him so much about it that occasionally, when she pointed at something, he ended up telling her he already recognised.

Sansa woke up this morning by the sound of him on the phone, as he sat behind his laptop, and she didn’t even feel annoyed with him working during the weekend as early as nine o’clock. She’s too happy to be at Winterfell.

The church is absolutely packed and Sansa finds her family at the front. She takes up the task of distracting an iPhone-less Rickon, to get him to sit still, which she’s still struggling with when the king and his wife enter the church.

The church is that filled up with aristos that they all follow the proper protocol of getting up for their monarch, as the choir clears its throat and enthusiastically starts the first tunes of ‘I Vow to Thee My Country’.

Harry snort. “He’s the bride now? You’d think being king should be enough to feed a man’s ego.”

“It’s not about his ego.” Sansa snaps back, “It’s about respecting the crown.”

“He’s not wearing a crown?”

“He’s always wearing a crown, he is the crown.”

Harry snorts again, “Whatever.”

“It’s not whatever.” Sansa glares at him, “It’s the constitution of my country. It’s been law since before your country existed.”

“Sweetheart, there’s no need to remind me the English live in the past.”
Sansa can feel her eyes widen then, “It’s not… it’s got nothing… You may think it’s silly, but it happens to be the way we do things, have been doing things since forever.”

“The British and their silly unwritten rules. He’s just an averagely special guy, and y’all want to get up for him just because he was lucky enough to be born first in a family of mad idiots? It’s bullshit.”

It’s funny, Sansa knows, how quick she’s to defend the monarchy, despite all its flaws. She’s not even that much of a monarchist to begin with. It’s indeed a quite old-fashioned, expensive as hell, technically useless, undemocratic leftover from days of the past, representing a problematic class system and a colonial past. Sure, that’s all not very great, but she won’t let a person from a country that elected Donald bloody Trump mock her King. And perhaps the words of the choir inspire the patriot deep within her, to suddenly feel a burning need to defend her perfectly flawed Island.

“I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above, Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love.” The choir sings.

“Oh do shut up Harry.” Sansa barks and Harry looks up in surprise, “Have you seen the news lately? Americans do not get to make fun of our very dutiful, respectable, and perfectly sane head of state! He’s our king, and if we wish to rise to respect our sovereign, we will and I won’t let you laugh at it!”

“The love that never falters, the love that pays the price, The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.”

Harry opens his mouth, then closes it again. There’s something in his eyes she’s never before seen, but Sansa doesn’t care to dwell.

Her papa always says that British use their manners to keep people at bay, where Americans use them to make contact. He also always says that Americans like, but do not respect the English, while English respect but greatly dislike Americans. Sansa never really thought about any of these wisdoms until she lived together with an American in the heart of London.

“I’m sick of hearing you mock and complain.” Sansa says, before she turns to wave at Rhaenys, who’s hanging on the arm of Willas, who only arrived this morning. She looks much better than she did last night.

Sansa moves away from her seat, and Harry, as her father greets his king, who really is as musical as Jon claims, for he reaches his seat just when the choir finishes the first couplet. Speaking of perfect timing. As if he did it on purpose.

“Been so long!” Lyanna says, kissing Sansa’s father, “Doesn’t this all look marvelous.”

“Your royal highness.” Sansa curtsies.

“Hello dear,” Lyanna says, kissing Sansa’s cheeks, “You look so lovely in this colour.”

“Thank you.” Sansa breathes, as she straightens the skirt of her blue double breasted Tartan McQueen coat, one with sharp shoulders in hope of making her look less frumpy, with the fascinator in the shape of a large white rose on top of her head. Rickon laughed far too loudly when Arya joked that from one side, it looks like a giant potato chip.

When Robb arrives, he doesn’t seem at all so anxious anymore, and only a little nervous, which slightly surprises her, considering the state she left him in.
“How’d you manage?” She asks Jon, grabbing his arm to get his attention.

“I told him to stop being such a nervous wreck or else he better call the whole thing off.”

“How could-“

“He never would have.” Jon says and he rubs her upper arms in an attempt to get her to relax a bit, “He’s here, they’re going to get married, if we’re lucky we’ll be back at the castle before my fingers freeze off.”

Sansa grabs his hand and finds that, indeed, his fingers are freezing, “You didn’t bring gloves?”

Jon shakes his head and his stone-cold hands squeeze hers as Sansa holds them between her own in an attempt to warm them a little, “I was too occupied to worry about myself.”

Sansa smirks, “Poor Jon, neglects himself to help a friend.”

“I did do that.” He grins.

“Too bad morning suits don’t have pockets.” She notes with a grin.

“Robb doesn’t suffer the same pain,” Jon nods at Robb, who has a healthy colour to his cheeks, “I gave him a whisky.”

“You fed him alcohol?” Sansa shouldn’t be as surprised as she is.

“No!” Jon laughs, “I mean yes, but it was only one shot.”

“It’s noon.” Sansa says.

“It wasn’t noon yet when he drank it.” Jon laughs at her frown, “Made him wash it down with a coffee and two glasses of water.”

Sansa shakes her head in disbelieve but she can’t help but grin, which is a grin he answers.

“We’re in Scotland, Sansa, it was Scottish whiskey.”

“Right.”

“And it helped, look, he seems fine. Much better than he did when I woke him up, I assure you.”

“I do not doubt it.”

“You don’t have to thank me, I’ll take-“

“Honey, I think your mother needs some ehm, some reassuring.” Harry’s head suddenly pops up from the corner of Sansa’s left eye, and it annoys her as much as it startles her.

“Oh, well I… I’ll go.” Sansa is desperate not to leave Harry and Jon behind with just the two of them, and she’s grateful when Jon nods and announces he’ll go back to supporting Robb.

Sansa gives him her last reassuring smile before he trots off. As she turns around to rip her eyes off her brother’s best man’s back, she feels Harry’s hand clasp around her upper arm.

“Can you try be less obvious?” He asks, his mouth close to her ear so only she can hear the threat in his voice, and Sansa gulps, “It’s embarrassing.”
“What do you—“

“If you do that one more time, I’m going home and perfect Sansa can explain to everyone why.”

He let’s go of her arm, adding in a bit of a push when he lets go, one that has her stumble, and walks back to his seat. When Sansa looks up she finds her father’s watching eyes and his frown is deeper than she’s seen it in a while.

Sansa stands there, watching her father’s worried eyes on her, when the music changes and the whole church either gets up or moves over to their seat.

The predictable and overdone choice of Pachelbel’s Canon D fills the Cathedral and Sansa tries to firmly keep her eyes on Jeyne, as she nervously enters the church, hanging on her father’s arm.

Vaguely, Sansa sees the white of her sister-in-law’s dress, but there’s little else she can make out but that it has the predictable and overdone lace sleeves. The presence of Harry at her left, silent yet ever so loudly, gives her an itchy feeling, as his words are like loud banging drums inside her head.

The music stops and Jeyne reaches Robb, who gives her his lopsided grin of pride.

“Dearly beloved, we have gathered here today, in the sight of god, and in the face of this congregation,” the archbishop starts, “To join together this man, and this woman, in holy matrimony.”

“Harry…” Sansa starts, but she can’t find words to describe what it is she wishes to tell him, and he ignores her fully.

“This honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man’s innocence…”

“Sit still.” Arya says as Sansa hops from her aching left feet to the other, “You’re making me anxious.”

Arya doesn’t know full well how anxious Sansa feels, as she looks sideways at Harry, who blankly refuses to answer her gaze.

“First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord…”

“Don’t talk to me like that again.” She whispers, her jaws clenched, “You do not get to threaten me.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Harry says as he plays with the corner of his programme booklet.

“If you have something to say, say it.”

“I don’t have to. You know exactly.”

Sansa wishes Harry could look up, for her to see his face, to show him her anger, her sincerity, and her frustration.

“Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other…”

“I honestly don’t know what your problem is.”
Harry laughs then, a little too loudly, and Catelyn glares at them.

As with every wedding, the silence that follows when the man asks ‘if any man can shew any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together’ or else ‘hereafter for ever hold his peace’, is awkward, and a slight bit too long.

“You’re being silly.”

“I’m being silly now?” Harry asks, “You sure make me feel like a fool. You and him.”

“Him?”

“Ssssh!” Catelyn hisses.

Mr Westerling reveals his daughter to the world when he unveils her, and her pretty face is beautifully framed by her soft brown curls. In it, she wears the smallest Stark family tiara. They have three, and this tiny one was made in the twenties, originally intended to be worn like a band around the head, according to the styles of that day. Jeyne placed it correctly somewhere at the crown of her head, so it’s perfectly visible, but not entirely at the front, not like a child would wear the plastic version. Sansa suspects that’s either a YouTube video or her mother’s doing.

“Who brings this woman to be married to this man?” The archbishop asks, and Jeyne’s father answers, then he places Jeyne’s trembling hand in Robb’s, who visibly squeezes hers. Jeyne gives him a shaky smile and as Sansa watches she can’t help but have her eyes drift off to Robb’s right.

Jon smirks when he notices her looking, but it doesn’t last so long, when he spots the look on her face. Sansa’s not sure what it is, there are no mirrors and he’s too far away to see the reflection in his eyes, but, knowing she should look away, she holds tight on him, the worried look he gives her, as she wishes she could tell him, tell him everything, so that perhaps he’ll hug her, and she wouldn’t feel so lost anymore. Sansa can only find the strength to break from it when the first song starts, and she’s forced to look down, at the lyrics in the booklet.

There is no nervousness in Robb when he makes his vows, when he promises to love and hold dear, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, until death will tear him and Jeyne apart. He’s confident, and Sansa can’t help but know he’s being that for her- for Jeyne. He’s her rock, always has been. She’s not weak, only the prime example of extreme introversion.

“Why are you here?” Sansa asks then.

“For you.”

“Let us pray.” The archbishop suggests, and Jeyne and Robb both sink down on their knees in front of him.

“Because it’s important to me, or because you’re jealous?”

“...so, these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, ...”

“Of what should I be jealous?” Harry finally turns his face to look at her, and he doesn’t seem angry, only hurt and most of all disappointed, “You are mine.”

“If this is about that article again-“

“I don’t care about the fucking article.”

“Look where we are right now, all this bullshit.”

“This, is my brother’s wedding.” Sansa hisses, and at that Catelyn grabs her upper arm and pinches it really hard, so hard it hurts, and Sansa has instant flashbacks to all these times she was forced to sit through Sunday service, giggling at Arya’s singing.

The archbishop intertwines Robb and Jeyne’s hands, “…what god has joined together let no man put asunder…”

“If you don’t want to be here, I don’t want you here either.”

The archbishop pronounces Robb and Jeyne married, in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Ghost, “Amen.” Every person in the cathedral utters, apart from Sansa and Harry, and mere seconds later, he’s gone.

“…that you may so live together in this life and the world to come, and you may have life everlasting. Amen.”

“Amen.” The cathedral follows again, though some people have turned their heads to see the man, whom most don’t recognise, walk away.

Sansa takes a few steps away from her seat, in her absolute shock and shame and when she notices people staring, she looks down at her feet and goes back to stand next to her mother, who’s positively aflame.

Sansa only knows Catelyn asks her “Have you lost your mind?” Because she can read her mother’s eyes, that’s how soundlessly she mutters, and she knows better than to answer, as she ignores her father’s questioning gaze, and looks down at the booklet in her hands as another song starts.

Sansa clears her throat and sings, as she watches Jon, from the corner of her eye, walk over to his seat.

“Joy of heaven, to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.”

When the song is over, Sansa’s face is bright red, and she feels Catelyn wrap her hand around her upper arm once more, this time, it’s not to pinch, but it’s a supportive squeeze.

Mr Westerling gets up and moves to the front to give his speech,

“I appeal to you, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,” he starts, and all Sansa can think is how the only thing she wishes to do with her body is hide it somewhere, in some corner, where no one can see her.

By the time the man has finished and another song has started, Sansa feels a tear run down her cheek, and she’s not sure whether it’s anger or disappointment that she feels, though there’s a great overwhelming presence of embarrassment.

When the service is finally over, Jeyne has shaken off her nerves, and gives the crowd in the church a bright smile when Robb helps her out to the entrance.

Sansa stands outside, hugging herself, as she watches the flower girls throw flower petals down the path as Robb and Jeyne wave at the crowd and the photographers, descending the church.
To avoid having to speak with anyone who’ll expect her to give responses of substance, Sansa climbs in a car with Rickon and grandpa Tully.

“Sansa darling,” he asks, “Why are you here, shouldn’t you be in France?”

Sansa knows better than to tell her grandad that she graduated from French boarding school nearly nine years ago, so instead, she says, “It’s the holidays grandpapa, it’s New Year’s Eve.”

“Is it really?” The man gasps, and in his excitement, his old and soft hand grabs Sansa’s, “What year?”

“1945.” Rickon mocks, “have you heard? We won the war.”

Grandpa Tully looks extremely confused then and Sansa glares at her little brother, “We’re going back to Winterfell.”

“Oh no.” The man sighs, “I can’t stand that bloody castle, always cold in these halls.” He grins then and recalls, “Though I remember one excellent ghillies ball, in the early fifties it was, we’d dance the Eightsome Reel, and all the girls were wearing these silly skirts—”

“Petticoats.” Sansa says.

“And the jewelry they’d wear… all the diamonds, sometimes they’d turn you blind! The women were beautiful back in these days… not all half as beautiful as your own grandmother.”

“I’m sure.” Sansa smiles, and her grandfather squeezes her hand.

“You have her hair.” He says and he playfully pulls on a strand, “Same as your mother’s…”

Sansa’s smile widens. She never knew her grandmother, but often people say she looked just like Sansa now, “Was grandmama at the ghillies ball too?”

“Of course she was! Your grandmother loved balls, and she loved dancing, so I danced with her until my feet were sore—”

Sansa beams at the romance in his words and Rickon rolls his eyes.

“Were you a good dancer?” Sansa asks.

“Everything but!” Granddad Tully laughs then, rather loudly, “Let me tell you something, dear…“ he moves his head closer to Sansa’s so he can softly tell her his secret, “Men who dance with all the ladies can never be trusted… but a man who triples over his own feet, struggles with the rhythm of the tunes and threatens his dignity with every move he makes… well, if a man like that still asks you to dance and twirls you around in his arms all through the night until the sun comes up… you’ll know he’s a keeper.”

“So, that’s how you made grandmama fall in love with you?”

“That, as well as my charm, good looks and brilliant sense of humour.”

Even Rickon laughs then and Sansa realises she feels much better, suddenly, as she tries to imagine how her grandfather was once a blushing man of twenty-something, asking her red-headed grandmother in a petticoat to dance a reel in Winterfell’s ballroom.

“Where are we going?” Grandpa asks then, and he frowns, “And why do you have such a silly hat on top of your head?”
“It’s Robb’s wedding day, grandpa.” Sansa says patiently, “We’re going back to Winterfell.”

“Winterfell?” The old man huffs, “Ghastly place, horrendous heating… so drafty and gloomy.”

“There’ll be a party.” Sansa says.

“Why?”

“Because Robb got married.” Sansa repeats.

“Robb? Really? Ridiculous! Who agreed to this? Certainly not your mother! That father of yours has always been too soft…” Grandpa shakes his head, “The boy can only just vote!”

“He’s 29, grandpapa.” Sansa says.

“I know that!” The man says, and he sinks back in his seat, before he calmly and casually asks, “Who is he marrying again?”

“Jeyne.” Sansa says.

“So long as it’s not a bloody Lannister.”

“She’s a Westerling.”

“A what?”

“Westerling. They’re from Devonshire. Her father is viscount Westerling.”

“A viscount.” Grandpa shakes his head, “Never heard of them.”

“They’re a minor house.” Sansa says, hoping her grandfather won’t go down the class system route. He’s old enough to remember the days where a simple note by his ducal hand could change the course of a court hearing.

Grandpa Tully mutters a bit in his displease, words Sansa could probably understand if she put in effort, but she doesn’t, until he asks, “Why are you here? Shouldn’t you two be at school?”

“It’s the holidays grandpapa, it’s New Year’s Eve.”

“Oh cracky! I haven’t had a good shoot in a while! The New Years shoot is always the best.”

“Pa said you couldn’t come.” Rickon says, his frown deep, “You can’t hold a walking stick and a gun at the same time.”

Grandfather Tully uses said walking stick to press it into Rickon’s face, warningly, threateningly, furiously, “That father of yours doesn’t get to tell me where I will or won’t go, certainly not since he very obviously failed to teach you some manners!”

“It’ll be fun.” Sansa says, pushing the stick down, away from Rickon’s nose, “His majesty will join too.”

“Blimey… really? I haven’t seen Rhaella in such long time! Such a lovely, lovely lady. Wonderful asset to Britain, very dutiful.”

Sansa gulps away some guilt when she nods, “Yes, she really is!”
Upstairs, when she gets changed, there’s no Harry anywhere, and she’s glad. She’ll fight that storm when she gets to it. Breathing heavily, she sits down behind her make up table, where she then struggles to take the fascinator from her hair with her trembling fingers.

Downstairs, the lunch has just started and when Sansa walks in, she pretends not to see the glaring eyes of her father and brothers.

The speeches are just about to start.

Sansa purposely sits down as far away from her mother as she possibly can, and, after suffering through the lunch, she finally finds a moment where she can congratulate Robb.

“Sans…” he sighs as he hugs her, “I’m married, it’s crazy.”

Sansa grins and takes his face between her hands, “I think it suits you.”

Robb grins, “I feel sorry for you, cause mum now thinks you’re next and she’ll torture you with it all the way to the alter.”

“I don’t really see myself getting married anytime soon. Or ever.”

“Of course you do!” Robb says and he pulls her hands off his face so he can hold them tight, “All you’ve ever wanted was to have that princess wedding.”

“I just don’t think that’s what I want anymore.” Sansa admits, “It’s never the fairytale… just look at Rhaenys.”

“Rhaenys? Is Rhaenys unhappy?” Robb seems both genuinely surprised and worried.

“No! I mean, well… she’s not living the fairytale life, that’s all I’m saying. And she did have that fairytale wedding.”

“A televised one at Westminster Abbey?” Robb asks, chuckling, “You certainly won’t have to suffer that.”

“What are the odds?” Sansa smirks, and then some aunt of Jeyne’s interrupts them and pulls Robb along towards the giant four-stories wedding cake, where Jeyne is already standing, knife in her hand, ready to cut it.

Sansa spends the entire reception sitting down, near her grandfather, constantly repeating to him why he is where he is, why everyone else is there too, hearing his complains as she repeats over and over again that it’s New Years.

“If I still had my own teeth I’d try out some of the sugary substance,” he says, pointing at the cake on Sansa’s plait, “But alas, my own white teeth have left me years ago and my body is no longer as young as I am.”

“But you’re old?” Arya frowns.

“Not in here!” Grandpa Tully says, pointing at his forehead, “And that, my dear child, is the only me who matters!”

At one point, Robb introduces grandpa Tully to his best man.

“I’m honoured to meet you, your grace.” Jon says, “Robb has told me all about you.”
Grandpa Tully frowns, “What’s you name again son?”

“I’m Jon.”

“Jon doesn’t tell me much, boy, all the lads are named Jon these days.”

“Jon Snow.” Jon verifies, which, sansa suspects, he’s never done before in his whole life. It’s pretty mad, to think that everyone Jon meets, already knows his name and more, no matter where he goes in this country.

“Where are the Snow’s from? Yorkshire?”

Jon blinks his eyes and looks up at Sansa who can’t help but grin at the awkwardness of this conversation. Grandpa Tully might be the only man in England not to know who Jon is, and she never expected the situation to be so entertaining, “Ehm, no, your grace. I use my mother’s name, and she’s not… her family isn’t… well, she’s Scottish.”

“Your mother’s name? Blimey.”

“My mother’s name as well as Fitzroy. From… from my father.” Sansa can nearly hear Jon wonder whether or not it’s necessary to explain that Fitzroy is a name given to royal bastards because they’re not legally allowed to take on their father’s actual surname. But it’s unnecessary.

The duke of Cumbria widens his eyes. His French is quite fluent, and everyone remotely posh knows what fitz and roy stand for.

“Are you from the Wellington Fitzroys?”

“Err, no.”

“The… Beauforts?”

Jon shakes his head as grandpa Tully keeps mentioning families descending from bastard offspring.

“Are you French?” Grandpa Tully tries some more.

“No, your grace.”

“Then how is a Fitzroy not aristocratic?”

“I am… I mean I’m not aristo I am…”

“He’s the first Fitzroy of his line, grandpapa.” Sansa explains and Jon gives her a thankful smile, although her grandfather still doesn’t really get it.

“I’m Rhaegar’s son. Rhaegar and Lyanna’s.” Jon eventually simply throws out.

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“You’re not the first to be confused.” He jokes.

Grandpa Tully departs the feast at around seven, having his dinner on a plate in his own room, while everyone else gets changed for dinner, as well as the feast.

Sansa sits down on her bed to put on her high-heeled Gianvito Rossi sandals, dressed in a navy-
blue Alice + Olivia's silk-chiffon gown, trimmed with cascading ruffles that flutter gracefully with each step she makes. As she struggles with the straps she notices how nervous she feels to go down, and with that, she realises how Harry has already ruined it.

The memory of him walking away, halfway through Jeyne’s vows, comes back to her like a cloud on a hot summer day at the beach.

With that in the back of her mind, she’s unable to ignore Jon, as if he doesn’t exist, the way she has unknowingly promised herself. She’s only aware of that oath the moment she breaks it, which is when he happens to stand at the bottom of the staircase, talking to Rhaenys, just when she makes her way down, and it’s when he looks up, that Sansa no longer fears slipping over her skirt and rolling down, because his smile makes her feel like she’s floating.

“Darling, you look marvelous.” Rhaenys says when Sansa reaches the bottom, and she kisses both her cheeks, “You always look best in blue, makes your eyes pop.”

“Thank you.” She breathes, and when they make their way to the hall, Rhaenys talks about how much she just loved the ceremony, and Sansa barely hears a word, as all her brain can do is focus on his piercing eyes on her.

“Where’s Harry?” Rhaenys asks, as Jon leaves them to take his seat near Robb.

“I don’t know, he should be here.”

“He’s being difficult, isn’t he?” Rhaenys asks, and she shakes her head at the disgrace.

“Harry is… kind of a rough diamond.” Sansa tries.

“No he’s most certainly not!” Rhaenys laughs, “Because I am fond of diamonds.”

Sansa gives her a pleading look and she stops laughing.

“I’m sorry.” Rhaenys clears her throat, “That was inappropriate.”

“Not usually your preferred choice of behaviour.” Sansa notes.

“Perhaps it should be, at least that way I’ll be a little less predictable.”

“You’re not predictable.” Sansa tries.

“Oh please, I’m as predictable as you are a terrible liar.” With that, Rhaenys sits down, waving at her husband who sits opposite her, ten feet away, at the other end of the table.

Sansa finds herself seated next to an uncle of Jeyne’s, who not at all tries to hide how eagerly he stares at her chest area. Just when Jon’s about to speech, her eyes find Harry, who doesn’t even attempt to smile at her.

Sansa doesn’t try to look apologetic or in any way kind, when she gives Harry a furious glare, and then turns her head to watch Jon give his speech as if he usually does the same for a living. Robb always jokes Jon’s unemployed and does some charity work here and there, but Sansa knows better. Being royal is a job not all of them are good at it, but Jon is, and he’s got the speaking skills to show for it.

The food is good, the wine is amazing, and Sansa slowly sips from it as she realises that, really, the only way she’ll be able to crawl into bed with Harry tonight, will be for her to do it drunkenly.
To shock the older people, Robb and Jeyne decided to hire an actual DJ for their big night, who isn’t even all that terrible.

Sansa has just taken a new glass of champagne from a waiter’s plate when she bumps into Jon and spills it all over his perfectly fancy and expensive suit, “I’m so sorry!” Sansa starts and she makes some embarrassing attempt to ‘wipe’ it off him.

“It’s okay, it’s fine, don’t worry about it!” He says, and just when Sansa locks her eyes with his and feels ready to confess things that should be left unsaid, she spots some ridiculously attractive blonde woman, who is, Sansa realises, his date.

“At least it’s not red!” She jokes and when Sansa tries to crack a smile, it hurts her cheeks.

“Yeah, thank god!”

Jon has magically found himself a handkerchief and tries to pat his jacket dry, “Did you think the speech went well?”

“Of course!” Sansa says, and the stinging in her jaw worsens.

“I actually practiced.”

“He was very nervous.” The blonde woman tells Sansa, and Sansa can only give her the friendly smile as she grabs another full glass off a passing plate.

Jon clears his throat, “Sans… Sansa this is Val, Val, Sansa, she’s-”

“Robb’s sister.” Sansa shakes the woman’s hand, wondering how you spell that name, mentally planning to instagram stalk her. Sansa’s a pathetic woman.

“I’ve heard all about you.” Val says.

“These are words no one likes to hear!” Sansa tries and Val and Jon both pretend to think it’s funny.

“Only good things, promise.” Val says and Sansa can’t help but move her eyes to the woman’s hand on Jon’s arm.

As Sansa wonders why the hell this has to be so awkward, the music starts and Robb and Jeyne take their place on the dance floor, ready for their first dance as husband and wife.

“If you’ll excuse me…” Sansa turns but Jon stops her by doing nothing but pull on the back of her dress. The heat of his hand sends goosebumps to every corner of her body.

“You’re okay?”

“Of course.”

Jon frowns and Sansa pulls his hand off her dress.

“Just tired, that’s all.” Sansa grins.

“Sure?”

Sansa nods, “Enjoy the party!’ She tells the blonde bimbo before she tries to naturally fade away into the shadows of the crowd, but she’s sure she looks more like she’s running away from ugly
truths.

She decides to watch the first dance, sitting in Bran’s lap. And that’s when she realises she still hasn’t taken a proper look at Jeyne’s dress. It’s quite a spectacular dress, if one takes the effort to look at it. Pretty in its simplicity. A dress not made for someone who likes to have all eyes on her, a dress made for a woman you have to pay attention to, to see her value.

You don’t want to be too drunk around midnight.” Bran says and Sansa smiles.

“You’re such a good kid.” She sighs, pulling her fingers through her little brother’s auburn locks.

Bran frowns when he reorders his hair but they grin at each other again when he nods at their older brother, “Look at that idiot… he’s married.”

“I know, it’s distressing.” Sansa agrees, and when she looks up she spots Arya, who laughs.

“Why’s everyone pretending like Robb died?” She asks, “He’s married, not deceased.”

“Oh, shut up, Arya!”

Arya only laughs, “Everyone has to chill…” She says, “Here, have some champagne.” She presses a glass in Sansa’s hand, “By the time the clock strikes twelve, the magic is about to start.”

“The magic ends at midnight, Arya.” Sansa says.

“Not tonight, big sis, tonight, we make our own fairytale.”

It’s eleven o’clock when Sansa notices Harry’s definitely gone. She can’t find him anywhere. Not in the hall, not in the dining room, nor the drawing room or library.

Sansa delays going upstairs until she sees no other way and when she makes her way up the stairs she feels her feet sting.

Sansa doesn’t have to open the door to her bedroom to find him, she runs into Harry somewhere half on her way, and he’s holding his luggage.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?” Sansa asks when he makes his way past her, wearing a coat and carrying his suitcase with him.

“Home.” He says.

“No.” Sansa breathes, “You’re staying.”

He looks up and gives her a look of hatred, “You don’t get to tell me what I can or cannot do.”

“That’s odd, since that’s all you’ve ever done to me.”

Harry’s eyes widen in his fury and he walks up to her.

For a moment, Sansa thinks he’ll beat her. She turns her face away and closes her eyes in fear of the nearing pain.

If he hits me I’ll kill him, Sansa promises herself. She’s always walked on her toes trying to keep him happy … she’s suffered the shame and embarrassment of Joffrey hitting her, and all that came after. She won’t go through that again.
The trauma hits her when she forcefully keeps her eyes shut, even though nothing happens. It’s not
darkness she sees. It’s a young girl, sixteen, walking home in the middle of the night, her left eye

Sansa will be damned if she’ll ever be that girl again.

Never, she thinks, and knowing he can scare her like this, even without doing anything, making her
think that he might… that’s when she knows they’re over. Because she refuses to let any man ever
make her feel like she’s nothing. Never again will she feel that small.

Harry lowers his raised hand and then grabs her upper arm, “We have to talk.”

Sansa breathes out, her eyes still avoiding him as the skin he touches burns, “Yes.” She says,
though there’s no relieve, and she feels strong when she adds “If you leave now, we’re over.”

Harry blinks, “You don’t want that.”

“You do not get to tell me what it is I want.”

Harry instantly lets her go, as if her words are poison to his ears, “What you want is to stay in
London, take a part-time job, enjoy the useless and meaningless braindead socialite life and live off
bulks of your parents’ money.”

Sansa shakes her head, “I want to be with my family.”

“Your family? Are you sure you want to be with your family?”

“Yes.”

Harry laughs and Sansa feels a little sick suddenly.

“You cannot mock me for wanting to settle down.”

“Settle down?”

“I’ve spent the past decade running and moving from place to place, all over the world, and I…I’m done. I want to… I want to be home.”

“You travelled for your job.” Harry says, “And so did I. It’s about our career. Your career used to
be everything to you, and now… now you want to settle down?”

“My career has-“

“Has taken a back seat. You give up all you’ve worked for, give up on that PhD, just so you can be
near your family?”

“You make that sound like it’s outrageous to choose family.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“I just want to be happy. I’ve learned to value it.”

“This makes you happy?” Harry makes a hand gesture to the staircase leading down to hallway, to
the party, “These people?”

“They’re my fam-“
“I don’t just mean your family.”

“These people are my friends.” Sansa says, straightening her back.

“Friends…” Harry chuckles.

“Yes, my-“

“So you wanna settle down?” Harry asks, loudly, suddenly, and when Sansa nods, uncomfortably and full of uncertainty, he randomly proposes in the least romantic way imaginable, “You wanna get married?”

“What? No!”

“No? That’s what settling down means. That’s what your brother is doing.”

“Harry I…”

“You don’t want to settle down with me.” Harry decides.

Sansa says nothing, and her silence clearly infuriates him.

“You were never in love with me. You never will be.”

“Harry don’t be silly.” Sansa mutters, but she knows he’s not.

“And now you are in love with someone else, so now you wanna settle down.”

“What? N-no! How can you-“

“Don’t lie to me.”

“I don’t lie!”

Harry shakes his head, a spiteful tiny smile around his lips, as If he was just proven right.

“I’m sorry.” He only says and Sansa has to run to keep up with him as he drags his suitcase off the stairs.

There are too many people in the hallway for Sansa to yell anything at all, so she waits for them to actually be outside, in the freezing cold, where snowflakes are cascading down upon Scotland, before she/yells, “If you leave now, I don’t ever want to see you again. I mean that!”

Harry turns around, furious, “I can’t stay! I can’t stand it, not for one more second.”

“Fine! Go! No one will miss you and your sour face!”

Harry drops his suitcase down in the snow, and his bulging eyes are furious, “You used to laugh at the people that are inside right now, you mocked them and called them fools. Now you’re one of them.”

“I’ve always been one of them.”

“So this is you?”

Sansa shrugs. She honestly doesn’t know. Who can tell? She hasn’t been actively seeking to find out, hoping that it might blow her way. Sansa still doesn’t know who she is, but she knows where
she wants to be.

“I never wanted to stay in London.” Harry confesses then, “I thought you’d grow tired of it eventually, so I just said I was fine with it.”

“You lied.”

Harry nods, “But only because I was afraid of losing you.”

Sansa bets he’s been afraid of losing her for months.

“But it’s not up to me when you’re the one who’s changing.”

“I’m not changing, Harry, don’t be ridiculous! I’m from London! I’m from this world, these people are my people, you always knew that… they may be horrible but they’re my people, and you can’t ask me to give that up.”

“I can’t stand the way he looks at you.” Harry admits then, randomly.

“Who?”

“He looks at you as if he’s seen you naked.”

Sansa laughs, then hides her face behind her hands, in an attempt to shield herself from what’s undeniably coming.

“And you look at him... In a way that just...”

Sansa wants to tell him she wants only him, but it doesn’t quite manage to find a way from her heart to her throat.

“He wants you.”

Sansa looks up and shakes her head. The alcohol in her veins makes her heart beat loudly in her ears. The cold around her doesn’t reach her, it only makes her less vulnerable for the truth, which she’s nowhere near ready to admit, “I don’t know who you’re talking about.” She hears herself say.

“And you want him.”

Sansa wishes she brought her little clutch, she would have been able to yank it to his head, “I don’t know who you think you are, to say that-“

“I’m not fucking blind, Sansa, Jesus Christ!” Harry kicks against his suitcase, “I’m not a fool! Stop lying!”

“I’m not lying!” Sansa feels tears well up and when she sobs Harry calms down somewhat, watching her, thinking so hard she can hear the radars in his frontal lobe make extra hours.

“Has he?” Harry asks then, and Sansa looks up, afraid as well as nervous and anxious.

“Has he what?”

“Seen you naked.”

Sansa mouth drops open and if she had any air in her lungs she might’ve screamed. Instead, her insulted hand slaps against his cheek.
“How dare you!” She wonders with a scream and just then a taxi pulls up.

Harry ignores her as his lifts up his suitcase.

“Get in that car, you coward.” Sansa suddenly sobs and she turns her back to him.

He doesn’t come to follow her when she runs back inside, instead, she’s sure, he helps the driver put his luggage in the back, before he gets into the car, to make his way back to that city he hates so much. He’ll be all lonely in a train when the clock strikes twelve. And Sansa… she’ll be free. Because she told him. She said they’d be over if he left. No doubt he believes she was bluffing. But she wasn’t. Sansa’s done bluffing.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and please let me know what you think! :) X
Chapter Summary

“Whatever ‘in love’ means.”
-Prince Charles

Chapter Notes

Okay so... Thanks for all the love!

For anyone who's interested in the unnecessary amount of thought I put into writing this... I figured I'd explain why I made certain characters from certain areas, considering someone got mad at me for forgetting that Dornish people aren't Spanish (:S)...

Anyway so, Targaryens aren originally French. The actual royal family now is mostly German/Danish, but William the Conqueror was very French, and I felt it fitted to replace him with Aegon the Conqueror. I kept the Targaryens titles a copy of the Windsors. Lyanna has the title Camilla will have if/when Charles becomes king, princess consort. Aegon has no title other than prince because he’s not married. Jon’s a Fitzroy, a name traditionally given to royal bastards. Willas got the duchy Cambridge when he married Rhaenys. Same as William when he married Kate. Rhaenys is Princess of Wales in her own right, however. Fun fact: has never never happened in real life. Aemon’s duke of Edinburgh because he’s old. Like the duke of Edinburgh. Daenerys and Viserys are only still princes, because Drogo didn’t get nothing and Viserys isn’t married.

The Starks are Scottish because deh. They're duke of Rothesay. That’s the traditional dukedom belonging to the crown prince of Scotland (prior to 1602), I thought that was fitting, because the Starks are the ‘true’ heirs to the Scottish throne, a bit like the Stuarts. But without Bonnie Prince Charlie and the battle of Culloden. Because Starks wouldn't do that.

It felt wrong to make the Martell's British like the rest. I really liked the idea of making them monarch in their own right, and to make Elia a princess in her own right. It also gave me fun things to play with. As for whitewashing... I guess all I can say is that not all Spanish people are white? Just because I made them Spanish doesn't mean I changed whatever skincolour they have. It means I gave them the opportunity to be a royal house completely separate from England, from the Targaryens, and to maintain that crucial part of them being separate from (and better than) (the rest of Westeros/) Britain.

The Tully’s are dukes of Cumbria, because that’s the duchy most northern in England and it’s to the border with Scotland. The Lannisters are dukes of Westminster, because the current one is the richest aristocrat in England with like 10 billion pounds. Baratheons aren't aristo because Robert was going to be PM, same for the Arryns. I made them bankers. Furthermore, the Tyrell’s are earls of Cardogan. Second richest to Westminster, and their asset thing is actually called Cardoganrose. Fits! Greyjoys are viscounts Pelly. Because Guy Pelly is a real guy who’s best friends with Prince Harry (and godfather of prince Louis) and is the one who once took ‘personal blame’ for
Harry’s drug abuse (?) and was also there when Harry had his infamous (and reason why I started hating him) Nazi uniform dress up. I thought it worked for Theon :)

Without further ado

Sansa’s no longer crying when she walks back inside, though her hands still tremble when she stumbles into the party.

“Sansie!” Theon calls, “There you are!”

It’s not midnight yet. The old people are all still awake and the music is still decent and relatively pleasant to most ears.

“I was… I was getting some fresh air.”

“Come dance with us!” Theon says and he pulls her arm to drag her with him towards the dance floor, where Robb, Jeyne, Arya, Aegon, Maya and Jon’s bloody girlfriend Pal or Gal or whatever are dancing their arses off.

“Naah, I need another drink.”

Sansa wriggles herself free from any possible grasp before she finds Jon leaning against the bar.

“Cosmo?” He asks and she nods after which he delivers.

“Shouldn’t you be dancing?” He asks, he always does, it’s cause he knows how much she likes it, she supposes. If only he knew how much more she likes standing here, in some corner, with him, just sipping her drink, because the two of them can be perfectly content in the most comfortable of silences.

“Naah.” Sansa simply says, “You?”

“I hate dancing.” He smirks, because he knows full well she knows that.

“So… you never dance?”

Jon shakes his head. Obviously he doesn’t, why else would his date be out there, twirling around Theon, of all people?

“Not even… not even with me?”

Jon’s smirk disappears and he seems both surprised and a little taken aback, before he says, “Sure.”

“You’ll dance with me?”

Jon only grins.

“I wouldn’t want to rob you off your dignity.” Sansa jokes and Jon laughs.
“I think you’ve already failed there.”

Sansa looks up to give him a dazzling smile and then Jeyne’s father announces that it’s only a few minutes before the clock strikes twelve, and everyone excitedly turns towards a huge tv screen, put there just to show a ticking clock.

Sansa moves closer to Jon as the year passes by, and when everyone jumps up in joy and ecstasy, she only moves her head up to find him watching her. She’s not quite sure what she sees, but it’s the softest sweetest look anyone’s ever given her.

Sansa wishes she could kiss his smile, but instead she leans up and places a peck to his cheek.

“Happy new year.” He grins, and then he takes her hand to pull her with him, outside, to watch the fireworks.

His hand is sweaty and warm, and she swears his thumb rubs hers, although she might be imagining that.

As if this is a parallel in their relationship, as if their life, their characters and their exhaustingly slowly progressing love is written down in a dusty romance novel, he takes his black jacket off. The one she spilled a full glass of white wine over. He wraps the jacket around her shoulders, pushes her hair back, and then looks at her, waiting for her to blink up and answer his gaze. When she does, and they can look each other in the eye, they both know.

His eyes are prettier than all the fireworks, she thinks, yet she can’t bring it up to keep looking. She was never good at staring straight into the sun, and this feels a bit the same.

She turns to stand beside him, and leans her head on his shoulder, her hands in the pockets of his woolen black tie jacket.

“Last year, I celebrated New Years in Iraq.” He mutters in her hair.

“Were there any fireworks?”

“If we wanted to let Daesh know where we were at, we might’ve tried that.”

Sansa smirks, rubbing her cheek to his shoulder. Her nose so close to his neck, she can smell his aftershave.

“No fireworks and no champagne. Just a sky full of stars and your comrades.”

“Sounds quite nice. Simplicity and all.”

“Yeah, it was. I wouldn’t go back for the world, though.”

“Please don’t.” Sansa says, and she means the plead, and when he looks down to smile at her, she knows he heard that, too.

15 minutes later, Sansa loses Jon somewhere in the crowd of excited and drunk people, when her fingers fail to keep hold of his hand, and when she turns to catch him, she spots him in a tight embrace with both his siblings, which makes her smile.

And so she finds herself wandering around the terrace, occasionally wishing someone a happy new year and receiving a hug or a kiss to the cheek. She watches the fireworks go off, wearing Jon’s jacket to protect her from the stinging winter freeze, hugging herself, leaning against the stone
wall, when her mother appears.

“Your father and I are going to bed.” She says, kissing Sansa’s cheeks, “Where’s Harry?"

“I don’t know.” Sansa says, “Somewhere in Cumberland, probably.”

Catelyn frowns, “What-“

“He wanted to work.” Sansa explains and Catelyn only gives a small nod before she decides she can’t let it rest.

“What happened during the church service?”

Sansa shrugs.

“How are the two of you doing?” Catelyn asks.

“We broke up.”

“Oh darling… I’m sorry.” Sansa’s mother rubs her upper arm.

“It’s okay. We’ll be…. It’s for the better.”

“And you look so beautiful… and now you’re standing here all alone.”

“I’m okay, mum, promise.” Sansa presses a smile to her lips in an attempt to convince.

“Don’t you want to go to bed?”

“Naah,” Sansa shakes her head, “I’ll stay at the party for a little while longer.”

Catelyn nods, then straightens the collar of the jacket.

“Whose jacket is this?”

“Jon’s.”

“Oh.” Catelyn’s hand rests on the collar, “You do know what you’re doing, don’t you?”

Sansa doesn’t look her mother in the eye when she nods.

“Sansa-“

“I’ll be fine, just go to bed.” Sansa smiles and she softly pushes her mother towards the door.

“Well… very well.” Catelyn kisses Sansa’s forehead before she finally walks over to Ned, who’s waiting for her in front of the opened door.

Sansa finds Jeyne somewhere near the frozen fountain, where she’s dropped down to sit on the rim, rubbing her feet.

“Happy new year, Sansa.” She says, and Sansa receives a tight kiss accompanied by some sloppy kisses, “You look like a mess.” She decides then, before she puts her heels back on.

“That’s cause it’s freezing ten below zero here and I’m wearing nothing but sandals and a silk dress.”
“And Jon’s coat.” Jeyne notes and she giggles then as if that’s very funny, “Look, there he is.”

Sansa is a weak idiot when she follows Jeyne’s rude pointing finger and then spots Jon, not that far away, as he allows his mother to hug him. Sansa can’t help but think it looks adorable.

“He must be cold.” Jeyne notes as Lyanna takes Jon’s face between her hands.

With his jacket handed away, Jon’s left with his white cotton shirt. His bow tie is loose around his neck and his sleeves are rolled up.

“Don’t you think he wants his coat back?” Before Sansa can stop her, Jeyne raises her hand to wave at him, and when his eyes spot the movement, he looks a little surprised at first, then smiles his polite smile.

“Guess he likes talking to his mum.” Sansa suggests when Jon turns back to Lyanna.

“Or maybe he’s not an impossible twat.” Jeyne says, “Speaking of twats, where’s Harry?”

“Does anyone like him?” Sansa sighs, and it still stings to know the chances are slim.

“Not even Theon.” Jeyne shakes her head, “I mean, Bran is easy with people, so I never hear him complain.”

“He left.” Sansa says, “Because he couldn’t stay here for another moment longer, that’s how much he hates my home.”

“Well ow.” Jeyne says, “Did he even try the food?”

Sansa laughs, “Doubt it.” She says, and she can’t help but raise her legs up to rub her own feet, too. The fireworks are still going off when Jon finally manages to loosen himself from his mother’s grasp, and makes his way over to his jacket.

“Bye.” Jeyne says, jumping up and disappearing inside.

“Does she hate me?” Jon asks.

“No, I think she’s cold.” Sansa gets up, grabbing her glittery clutch, not looking at him.

When she takes his jacket off to give it back he accepts it, but only because she makes her way back inside.

“I’m gonna go, check on Rhaenys, okay?” He asks, laying his hand on her shoulder, as if he promises her he’ll come back and find her once he has.

Sansa nods and without consciously deciding to, she walks over to Robb and Theon, where Robb takes her hand and announces how horrifying it is that he has not danced with his sister yet, at his very own wedding.

The cold outside sobered Sansa up well enough to realise where she is, what happened, what she’s doing, what’s going to happen, where she’s going to be, where she wants to be, and it clears her head of all her thinking. She allows Theon to offer her another glass of champagne, and then decides she’s going to have fun.

It’s not too late, she knows. Harry left before midnight. The fairytales of old times taught her the feast ends at twelve, that her prince is holding her slipper, and the magic spell breaks- but it
doesn’t. It is no spell, Sansa knows, but whatever it is, it needs no Harry to be magical.

As soon as Aegon excitedly proclaims “All the old people are gone!” The music switches from standard safe Ed Sheeran, The Beatles and The Police to a dangerous low of the Spice Girls and Nicki Minaj, with an occasional Happy New Year, by ABBA.

They make this group picture, where Sansa stands in front of Jon, hands on his shoulders, with Robb’s arm wrapped around her, Jeyne 1 standing to his right. Theon is lying in the front, with Aegon kneeling as he leans on Jon’s knee to keep himself upright, Arya places herself in the middle spot, holding up her hand in a peace sign, sticking out her tongue, sitting in Bran’s lap. Rhaenys is standing next to Willas and the middle is filled up with Margaery, Loras, the three Tyrell cousins, Eddie, Jeyne 1’s cousins, Mya, Mya’s half-brother Gendry, Theon’s sister Asha, Jeyne 2 and Rickon, who’s hair is so messy, he’s barely recognisable. Once the camera flashes for the last time she finds herself sink down against Jon, cheek resting on his shoulder.

Jon turns his head and whispers, “You’re tired?”

“No.” She smiles, before she drunkenly adds, “I wanna dance.”

And this she does. Jon not so much, though he does swirl her over the dance floor at Natasha Beddingfield’s Unwritten, during which he doesn’t step on her toes. It also turns out Aegon has his ways of getting some dance moves out of his little brother, “from back in the days, when we were going through a short but passionate Michael Jackson phase.”

Jon laughs a lot, even with Theon, and that’s good, Sansa thinks, that’s perfect. His laugh makes her laugh. She laughs so much her rib case starts aching.

Margaery seems like the sincerest person in the world, Aegon is the best dancer Sansa’s ever seen, Theon is simply hilarious, Rhaenys a marvelous singer, Arya her favourite sister, Jeyne 1 suddenly tells the most interesting stories while Jeyne 2 is cozied up with another brother of Willas and Margaery- not the gay one.

It’s nearly four when Robb lifts Jeyne 1 up in his arms and carries her out of the room, to spend their first night as husband and wife… in his childhood bedchamber. Arya purposely throws a handful of leftover flower petals in Robb’s face, and Jeyne loses a shoe, but it doesn’t ruin the moment.

Sansa hugs Jeyne 2 good night as Jon wakes Theon up, who’s fallen asleep in a corner, lying on a temporary lounge. Arya helps Bran to the lift, with Rickon stumbling after them, and it’s only half an hour later, when Jon suggests they go down to the kitchen, to eat what remains of the appetizers.

Sansa glances sideways, at Margaery and Rhaenys, who are giggling at something Aegon’s saying, before she nods, and he grabs her hand, and pulls her with him.

Winterfell has two kitchens. One the family uses when it’s just them, and another one in the cellar, where the servant quarters used to be, back during the golden days of the aristocracy, roughly a hundred years ago. That second one is used when the family entertains, and today, it was used to prepare lunch, dinner and a mind-blowing amount of appetizers for the over 350 guests.

“Rhaenys And Willas froze in the remainders of their wedding cake.” Jon fun facts as he opens a box of French Macarons. He offers and Sansa greedily nods.

“That’s nice.” Sansa says, “I think Robb and Jeyne will too, probably.”

“Yeah.” Jon nods, opening one of the three huge fridges, taking out a beer bottle.
Sansa chews on a blackberry macaron as he opens his own beer and fills her a glass of red wine, watching his biceps in his rolled-up sleeves move in a way that begs to be touched.

“My parents did it too. I once told an American friend and she was disgusted.” Sansa says, “I told her English fruitcakes just can’t get old but she didn’t believe it.”

“English fruitcakes have magical powers.” Jon smirks, “As disgusting as they are.”

“You had like, three slices.”

“Only cause I knew what dinner was awaiting us.”

Sansa giggles.

“Royal wedding cakes tend to be a bit bigger than average though, so it’s kinda pricey to freeze them. Which usually isn’t my father’s style at all. He’s very… economical.”

Sansa giggles, “Just call it parsimonious.” She suggests.

“He’s a penny-pincher.” Jon grins and they both drunkenly chuckle.

“Like a Scrooge?”

“No! Scrooge was a greedy arsehole- my father just knows he has no choice but to spend taxpayer money wisely.”

Sansa nods, “I can understand that.”

“Can you really?” Jon raises his eyebrows in amusement.

“I don’t need my parents.” Sansa says and she can’t help but pinch his nose, “I’m an independent woman. At least, I could be.”

“I know.” Jon ensures, happily grinning, almost proudly, “I’m jealous.”

“Because you don’t get to spend money like it grows on trees?” Sansa asks, “Your dad is wise to teach you responsibility.”

“Yeah, if only he didn’t have the burden of my mother’s total lack of it.” Jon laughs.

“Must feel like your dad has four children sometimes.” Sansa says, before she can stop herself. Once she realises what she just said she nearly chokes on the French biscuit, “I mean-“

“It’s okay. Don’t worry bout it.” Jon grins at Sansa’s widened eyes, “Age is just a number. Even when you’re over ten years apart. I guess.” He then moves his face closer to hers, “Society forces women to mature far sooner than men, anyway… One wise woman once wrote in an article. You should know.”

Sansa gulps, “You’ve read my articles?”

“Course!” He doesn’t really seem to be one bit aware of what that means to her, when he takes another gulp from his beer, “Well, not all of them. You’re a good writer, but I really don’t care about the find of mixed breed cavemen bones.”

“You mean that skeleton they found? Of a girl exactly fifty percent Neanderthal and fifty perfect Sapien? That was… that was a really, really important find.”
Jon shrugs and smirks, “Yeah, it was boring.”

Sansa shoves him and he laughs.

“My dad read it though, before he visited the museum. They have a royal seal of approval.”

“Oh, that’s so kind of him.” Sansa realises she doesn’t really want to talk about his dad, but she also knows this might be her only chance of asking one particular question, “So… I’ve always wondered… I’m wondering if he even enjoys it?” ‘My dad?’

“Hhmm-mmh. Yes, you see…” Sansa leans closer to him and she’s sure he can probably smell the taste of alcohol off her breath, if only because it’s where his eyes turn to, “It never looks like much fun?”

“I never asked.” Jon confesses.

Sansa giggles and can’t help watch his mouth when she says, “Maybe you should.”

“Yeah.” He mutters hoarsely, he gulps and Sansa tries not to faint when he moves closer, “Maybe.”

“Such a unique job.”

Sansa smiles and at that he turns away from her, rather quickly, as if someone snapped him out of his state of trance. He blinks, looks at his beer, gulps some of it down, and then starts rambling.

“Yeah, I mean, well, he’s not the only one. There’s Elia’s brother, and The Netherlands has a king, as well as Belgium, Sweden-“

“They’re not your dad.”

“No.”

“So, you can’t ask them what it’s like.”

“It’s silly.” Jon says suddenly, as if the word just occurred to him, “Most of the time it feels like you’re doing a very silly, very useless pseudo job.”

Sansa nods as if that’s the satisfying answer she was looking for, which it really isn’t, “It’s a fantasy.”

“What?”

“I studied fantasies for my masters.”

“Really?” Jon laughs as if she’s joking, but she’s not.

“It’s what connects us, makes us trust each other. If you and I were chimps, we could be friends.”

“I’d love to be your chimp friend.”

Sansa giggles like a silly girl and he nudges her shoulder, “I could trust you.”

“You can trust me.”

Sansa grins down into her glass, “You can trust me too.”
“I know.”

“Because you know me.”

Jon doesn’t deny or confirm, he only watches her intently, which makes her wonder whether he doubts he may know her at all. Does she know him? She knows so much and yet so little. She knows all she needs to know to be confident that if she and him were indeed chimpanzees, they wouldn’t be wasting so much time. Dancing around each other like magnets.

For the first time ever in her life, Sansa wishes she could be a chimpanzee.

“There are loads of people you don’t know at all, yet you trust them too.”

Jon raises his eyebrow and she’s pleasantly surprised when he doesn’t deny it. Most people would.

“It’s fantasies,” Sansa says, and when he doesn’t respond she verifies, “Fantasies unite. Like religions.”

Jon widens his eyes, both amused and shocked, “You ever plan on writing that in an article? You wanna be set on fire?”

Sansa feels her face redden and she grabs her glass tighter, “I try to be careful. But I’m right.”

“Verify.”

“Sometimes we take something seriously while we know it isn’t real. Like football. But sometimes we’ve forgotten we made it up. There’s no one who doesn’t believe in the existence of Great Britain.”

“Britain’s a fantasy?”

“The state, yes. It exists only inside our heads. We’re prepared to die for fantasies, for king and country, or God.”

“My dad is very real.” Jon says, he still seems amused.

“But his crown isn’t.”

“You’re saying that cause the power of the crown comes from God?”

“I’m saying the crown is something we imagine.”

“I feel much better about my life now, thank you.”

“You said yourself it feels silly.”

“I feel like a locked-up chimp, everyone staring and watching and I don’t even know why because I’m not special. I never thought I wasn’t even real.”

“You can get out. You’re not the heir.”

“I’m worse.” Jon says, his grin has disappeared, “My father will die rolling off his throne. He dedicated his life to duty. The only time he ever wavered was when I was born. When he married mum. I’m the walking representation of him failing once and that’s why I can’t fail him, to prove that I was worth the sacrifice.”
Sansa raises her glass to her lips and takes a small sip, “So you’re doing it for him.”

Jon shrugs.

“You do it because you love him.” Sansa feels the corners of her lips curl up, “Love’s no fantasy. Marriage is… but not love.”

“Doesn’t this all get you fucking depressed? To think marriage only exists in our imagination?”

“It’s why I’m going back to fashion.” Sansa says and Jon laughs.

“It’s not for you, Sans.” Jon says, “You deserve to believe.”

“I believe. Just because it’s a fantasy doesn’t mean it’s not real.”

“But—"

“Human Rights are a fantasy, but we all have to believe in them, and that’s why they’re real. Just because it’s a fantasy doesn’t mean it means nothing.”

Jon sits up straight, smirks and points at her as if he caught something, “Dumbledore.”

“What?”

“Dumbledore. Harry asks is this happening inside my head? And Dumbledore says Just because it’s happening in your head doesn’t mean it’s not real.”

Sansa giggles. She wonders how drunk he must be to come up with Dumbledore quotes, and feel confident enough to bring them up, but she loves it.

“I loved these books…” Jon sighs as if someone burned all the copies.

“We should do a marathon.” Sansa suggests.

“Yeah! With Robb, Arya, Egg and… Jeyne, I suppose… can you believe he’s married?”

Sansa laughs, “No. last time I checked he was still my annoying older brother stealing my earplugs.”

“Last time I checked we were getting lost in the desert, bored out of our skull under the Iraq sun.”

“Bored?”

“That’s what war is. Ninety percent boredom, ten percent fear.”

Sansa nods and realises that when it’s war they’re moving to, she really needs some ice cream to cool off, so she slides off her stool, triples over towards the freezer, and grabs some low-fat carb-free yoghurt ice cream.

She feels his burning eyes on her every move she makes as she grabs a spoon, sits back down, opens the pot, and takes a first mouthful, “So,” she starts, “Did you or did you not kill?”

“What?”

“Robb never answered.”

Jon stares back at her for a moment before he says, “Well, in that case, nor will I.”
“Do you miss the army, Jon?”

“Yes. I mean, no. I’m just… I suppose I struggled with adjusting to life cutting ribbons and unveiling plagues.”

“But you’re doing more than that. The commonwealth games… Bran plays wheelchair basketball for the team you support. And, that documentary you, Aegon and Rhaenys made about climate change was really good, and not just because Obama, the pope and Leonardo DiCaprio were in it.”

“They just wanted to tag our names to the thing, for press.”

“So? You chose to add more than your name. And that’s just one thing. There’s that autism charity you told me about… and all the amazing things you do for the Red Cross. You visited Syrian refugee camps in Greece and interviewed Yazidi rape victims. That video has more than 30 million views on YouTube, you know? The Times called you one of today’s most influential humanitarians.”

Jon shakes his head, “I’m not a humanitarian. Real humanitarians don’t get paid.”

“Real humanitarians don’t call themselves humanitarians.” Sansa disagrees with a smile.

“They called me that after my crappy speech in Geneva.” Jon recalls.

“That was an amazing speech.”

“No.” Jon says, and he shakes his head again, not looking at her, he recalls, “I stood there and I wanted to tell them… There’s so much I wanted to say. I wanted to ask them why, why had nothing been done? Wanted to call them by their names, accuse the countries by their names but-“

“You did.”

“I didn’t.” He still doesn’t look at her and stares at his beer when he confesses, “It took me months to convince my dad to let me go there. He thinks the United Nations are too political for us. He’d rather have me spoon soup in the mouth of some unfortunate within the borders of the UK. He always tells me not to be so political.”

“What’s political about-“

“I should not have told them not to let it become a second Rwanda.” Jon shrugs, “Pa probably regrets sending me to international law school.”

“You called it by its name.” Sansa says, “You called it a genocide and they didn’t like hearing that.”

Jon finally stares back at her.

“You bring awareness to stuff. Important big deal stuff. That’s pretty badass.”

Jon blinks, then shakes his head, “Is the ice cream good?”

Sansa nods, getting the message, “You want some?”

“I had too much wedding cake.”

Sansa nods, narrows her eyes, then asks, “So you didn’t kill anyone?”
Jon smirks uncomfortably, “You really want to know that?”

“Doesn’t everyone want to know that?”

“They ask if I killed someone but they never wanna know what it feels like. What they should be asking. The real shit.”

“Okay so, what does it feel like?”

Jon sips from his beer and gives her a challenging look. The ‘real shit’ sounds depressing and promising at the same time.

“Pretty good.” He admits, and it’s no joke. His eyes are wide and he doesn’t smile, “You don’t want it to, because when you go there you are told you’re fighting for freedom or… or to work on the infrastructure. Then… you just get blown away by the madness of it all. You’re away from what you think is the real world, only to realise that a war zone where little children are walking around with bomb belts and young women are sold into sex slavery is as real as Buckingham freaking Palace. And you’ll feel miserable about yourself and all your privilege, and all the whining and complaining you used to do about stupid bullshit non-existing problems, and it all goes down from there. Until you realise that taking someone’s life feels satisfying. People are no longer people, just a hit or miss. You lose track of what it is you’re doing. You lose yourself.”

Sansa wants to say she understands, but truth is she doesn’t, and as he keeps talking, somehow, she knows he doesn’t want her to understand, he doesn’t seem to have any desire for understanding nor pity. That would only frustrate him more.

“Worst part is that I was good at it. I finally felt like I was good at something that was absolutely not related to my father in any way whatsoever.”

Sansa feels like that explains why it’s hard for him to say whether or not he misses it.

“I’ve never felt as useless as I did when I came back from Iraq. Going from that to cutting ribbons… that was… unbearable. I couldn’t sleep because of the nightmares, and all I could think about was that these other men were still there, while I was safe at home, like a coward. And then my mum… she was angry because one tree at Sandringham was taken down without permission, and Rhaenys was worrying about wedding flower decorations, and my father had meetings with people from his golf patronage, and really all Aegon did was… was buy shoes … and I got to a… to some event, and all these people there, they only cared about superficial things, me being there was the most superficial thing ever, and all of that made me so angry. I hated being so fucking superficial. I became one frustrated mess because everyone either doesn’t know how superficial it all is, or they don’t care and happily go around pretending to be ignorant.”

Sansa can’t pull her eyes off his face as he angrily stares down into his bottle, jaw clenched, and she wonders why she made him go through all that, why she made him miserable. She loves his smile so much, and only moments before he couldn’t stop smiling. All night it’s been easy to make him smile.

“I’m sorry.” She says, “If you don’t want to talk-“

“Don’t worry bout it.” he smiles reassuringly, “I’ve had the best therapy money can buy. I’m fine.”

Sansa smiles and grabs his hand then. He looks down at their fingers as they entangle, and then he bursts.

“You think I’m a badass? I talk about Yazidi sex violence victims because I was there when they
liberated a house stuffed with them. I saw their faces, I saw fear of death in their eyes and how black and blue their arms were and they… one had cigarette burns on her cheek. Her cheek. And she thirteen years old. Thirteen. I don’t do charity work because it’s right or because I’m a good person. I talk about the Yazidi genocide and play football with orphans because I feel guilty.”

The media thinks Jon’s lonely, thinks he desperately needs to find them a new princess to dehumanize to some expensive clothes wearing doll, to give them new royal babies to stalk and make illegal pictures of with drones.

“Jon’s lost, that’s all.” Rhaenys said, a while ago, when she caught Sansa staring at him through the window, as he stood outside, smoking. “He has a hard time accepting he’s human. He can’t stand it that he’s no better than the rest of us mere mortals.”

Sansa didn’t get it then, but now she understands.

“I still think you’re badass.” She whispers.

“I think you’re badass.”

He looks up and for a tiny moment Sansa thinks he’ll kiss her, but then he pulls his hand from hers and it leaves her feeling bereaved and empty.

“So, did Harry have to work during the night?”

“He wanted to go back home so he could wake up early.”

“Such a workhorse.”

Jon’s being sarcastic then and she easily spots the mocking humour in his eyes, which she pretends to ignore, “Yes well, he just…” Sansa sighs, then remembers, and decides to not give a damn, “He doesn’t like all of this.”

“All of what?”

“He doesn’t like this world. Privileged rich upper class kids partying all through the night in a cultural heritage castle.”

“Well, that explains why he hates me.” Jon laughs, “That’s all I ever do.”

Sansa hates how he knows, hates Harry for clearly letting him know, and then decides to tell Jon to not give a damn, “He’s just a judgmental, jealous, irrelevant prick.”

Jon still smirks, and his eyes suddenly do a glossy thing she’s seen before, “Could’ve just denied it.” He says, his eyes flirting.

He’s drunk. Sansa tells herself, and so am I. “It doesn’t matter.” She says.

Sansa hears Harry’s voice faintly in the back of her head.

_Did he?

What?

See you naked?

She wouldn’t. She couldn’t. But she wishes it all the same.
“I never said it mattered.” Jon says, and he says it with such indifference that she almost believes him.

“Good.”

“Leaving you behind in Scotland so he can go home and work? Hating me won’t help him.”

Sansa’s throat is suddenly so tight she can’t gulp nor speak, “H-he hates me more, currently. Promise.”

“Why?”

“H-he says I’ve changed. He says I’m no longer… ever since we came to London, he says… He said he thought I was different.”

Jon looks at her for a moment with a face she can’t explain nor describe, almost as if he feels sorry for her, as if he’s angry, but somewhere, far away, he seems pleased too, “Different how?”

“Not so shallow.”

“You’re not shallow.”

“I used to be.”

“You’re the sweetest person I know.” Jon says, and it’s supposed to be a compliment, but somehow, sweet is just not what she wants him to think of her.

“I like shallow things.”

Jon shakes his head, “Almost all of us like shallow things. You can’t love people when you expect them to be perfect.”

“I love being back.” She admits then, “I love being with my family, in London, with you guys... I like the accents, the stiff upper lip, the constant apologising, the swearing-“

“the humour and irony.” Jon helps.

Sansa nods, “And the correct spelling, and the… the sink with two taps… and no one leans against the pole in the tube…”

“I don’t know about that.”

“And just… Kensington, and Chelsea and… Hyde Park, and bloody Oxford Street. I like the food and the tea, and I do really like the charity parties with chocolate fountains and aristocrats with my accent who insist on getting changed for dinner… I even missed the weather, y’know?”

Jon only grins.

“I suppose this is my home, and I don’t want to give it up again.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I-“

“He’ll get over it.” Jon decides.
“He will.” Sansa hears herself say.

“If he loves you, he will.”

Sansa nods.

“That’s most important.” Jon looks at her, sideways, from the corner of his eye, and he grins a grin Sansa’s never seen before, “Unless you’re bored.”

“I’m not.” Sansa breathes.

If she’d lean in she’d be able to feel his warm breath on her lips. His eyelashes lay upon his cheeks like shadows, as if he attempts to hide his shame beneath their darkness.

And just like that, Harry’s disappeared from her mind.

Sansa cradles his face and unconsciously rubs her thumb over his lower lip. When he blinks his eyes back up and locks them with hers, she can’t help but think that perhaps, somehow, this is more erotic than any other moment of her life, before, and all she can think of is how badly she wants him.

Suddenly, as if he can read her thoughts, he gets up, “Let me bring you to your room.”

Sansa nods, pushing her empty ice-cream bucket and wineglass away.

They chat a bit about the weather as they walk up towards the right hallway. Laughing at stupid things they wouldn’t laugh at if they weren’t drunk. Sansa likes the sound of it, and the only reason she hushes him is because she’d hate to wake someone who might burst this bubble she wishes she could live in. The castle is dimly lit, and Sansa stares at her own shadow as she lifts her heavy feet to walk her towards a door she’s never dreaded so much in her life.

“This is it.”

The bedroom of the Sansa she’s wanted him to forget. It is as if this childhood home, Winterfell, has explained to her that there’s no harm in him remembering the person the Sansa of today hates most. If anything, it makes her feel all the more blessed that he liked her when she was like that, before she changed. Even though she didn’t know it, Jon loved her. That certainly counts for something. Someone never wanted her to change to begin with. And knowing that even the worst parts of her are lovable in the eyes of someone like him, has helped her accept the past some more, in a way she never believed she’d be able to do.

Jon nods. He has his hands deep inside his pockets and looks down, as if her face is too dangerous a territory, and with the Sansa of the past so threateningly nearby, she suddenly recognises in him the Jon from before Iraq, the one who, so she thought, didn’t like her at all. She recognises the blush on his face as if they’re teenagers, and they’re back at Winterfell, during the summer holiday, in the zeros, and he’s seventeen and she’s fifteen, and he just ran into her in the middle of the night, and all she’s wearing is a t-shirt and knickers. The way he looks down, stares at his feet, avoiding her questioning gaze.

They’re young again, with no trauma, no bruises to make for better conversation. They’re free to not make the same mistakes again. And Sansa won’t. She knows she never will, and that’s perhaps why she doesn’t share his fear, it’s because it all makes sense, for the first time ever.

She can’t stop looking at him, at his white shirt with the top buttons open, his dark hair messy. He looks nervous, she sees, and that makes him all the more attractive.
Jon slowly and gently, for the last time, pulls his jacket off her shoulders, and it’s not the cold breeze of the hallway that has her arms prickled with goosebumps.

He puts the jacket back on, and looks up when he mutters, “G-night.”

He doesn’t turn around to leave, his eyes glued to hers as much as his feet are with the carpet beneath his shoes.

Sansa grabs the handle of the door, and opens it slightly, never breaking their eye contact, “Happy new year, Jon.” She says, and this is when she should walk in, leave him there, alone, to go in her room, take off her clothes and make-up, and fall asleep wearing pajamas.

There are multiple shoulds fighting in her brain then, the should of the Sansa who loves Harry and would never want to hurt him, and the should of Sansa who just desperately needs to have really good sex tonight.

Sansa has to stand on her tiptoes when she leans in for his cheek, but even when she leans in she knows she’s weak. Weak and wrong and Harry was right.

Gently she presses her lips to his, and it’s as soft as much as a thunder of fireworks. He doesn’t kiss her back, perhaps because she gives him no time, as it’s only a peck, so quick and fast and meaningless that perhaps she’ll get away with it.

She could’ve gotten away with it, if she didn’t see a hunger in his eyes that matched the hunger in her groin. Some hunger that has been growing for months and no longer accepts to be ignored. She takes his face in her hands when he kisses her back, and she suddenly feels so weightless she knows she’s about to succumb to the floor. Sansa’s starving, and all conscious thought leaves her when he lifts her up with one arm and opens the door with the other.

She doesn’t linger to think on how wrong it is, all she feels is right, as if she had no choice, as if she’s not to blame. It’s fate, it’s chemistry, it’s meant to happen, it’s no fantasy, it’s real. The realest thing she’s ever felt, as if finally, she’s herself.

Sansa swears to only stop kissing him when she has to, for a frantic moment where all her intense feelings are colliding, all her animalistic desires are being satisfied, and it consumes her, drags her into a frenzy of relieve.

She’s imagined for so long how it might be to kiss him, whether he’d be a good kisser, and now that she knows, she knows she should’ve found out sooner.

Her trembling nervous fingers unbutton his shirt and together they push the thing off him, after which she places her hands to his chest, digging her nails in his shoulders. The muscles flex beneath her fingertips and Sansa gasps in his mouth and her hands shoot up to the nape of his neck when she feels his tongue in her mouth.

He sits down on the end of the bed, tries to pull her with him but she resists so she can finally kick these murderous shoes off. As she fights with the straps, he watches her, and when she looks up, she stands there, barefooted, in her blue Stella McCartney dress, the pins in her hair giving up as escaped curls fall in front of her eyes.

Sansa knows that this is a moment for her where she can come to her senses. Realise what it is they’re doing. He’s not touching her, he’s somewhat removed from her and it’s so dark in the room she could pretend not to recognise him. She could shake her head and decide that this is not she, not her, not Sansa. She’s not that woman.
Jon’s not smiling anymore, only staring at her, almost as if he’s anxious, his bare chest gives away his heavy breathing but he makes no sound and it seems to Sansa, like it’s mostly as if he’s waiting for her to decide what it is she wants. Because he already knows what he wants.

If she’d tell him to leave, he won’t ever hold it against her. He’ll have a hard time looking her in the eye, and she’ll lose him from her life, if only because they’d have to stay away from each other in some attempt at self-protection… but he wouldn’t ever blame her for giving him the ‘wrong ideas’ or ‘leading him on’.

His waiting and his silence are life changing in a way they shouldn’t be, and that makes her feel like crying, but she’s too high on adrenaline. They’re in this together. Knowing that makes her almost grateful. No matter what it is, she wants nothing more but to be in this together.

She’s made up her mind when she moves her hand to the light switch on the wall and only switches on the lights by her bed-stands, and in the warm haze his eyes sparkle and she can see what he looks like without a shirt on. He smirks then, a shy and nervous smile that steals her breath away.

She’s definitely going on top, she decides, and once she has, her patience leaves her.

She pushes him down into the bed and the long skirt of her dress moves up when she climbs on top of him. He smirks when she pushes his hands away when he tries to help her open his belt and he takes the opportunity to run his hands over places he was probably as desperate to touch as she was to open his belt, before his fingers end up under her skirt and tug on her knickers.

His adam’s apple bops when she finally manages to get his freaking trousers down, and she’s grateful he doesn’t joke about how long it took her. It shouldn’t surprise her he’s not that kind of guy.

In fact, he’s the kind of guy to push her away a little, and answer her wide eyes of fear at the sudden rejection with a chuckly, “Sans, I kinda need my trousers back, I got a condom in there.”

Apparently, he’s also the kind of guy who puts condoms in the pockets of his trousers when he goes to a wedding. It shouldn’t make her feel as jealous as it does. It should make her feel grateful, because it’s convenient, and jealousy is something she has learned to deal with in a whole different way, lately.

Sansa’s sitting upright on top of him, trying to reach for the zipper at the back of her dress when Jon takes his wallet out, finds the rubber protection and opens the package with his fingers… because he’s probably the kind of guy who knows that opening it with your teeth is dangerous. He also knows how to put it on quickly, too quickly for Sansa to get her dress off in time, which means she gives up on that mission and crawls a little closer to him.

Jon’s half leaning up, half lying on his back, tilting his head to watch it all happen, when Sansa, in her lack of patience and desperate eagerness, finds out that, no matter how ready for anything she may think she is, sinking down in one go, is never a good idea. At least… not when you’re dealing with this particular size. Which is about the only negative aspect of having to deal with this particular size.

Jon pushes himself up, his eyes worried and scared, apologising as if it wasn’t Sansa’s own stupid fault when she winces and gasps at the burning ache somewhere deep within her.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I-“ he loses his breath and then shuts up because she kisses him, and her hips start rolling.
Having sex has never before made her feel so powerful. Perhaps because she’s never had sex just for her, ever before. She’s not doing it for anyone else, it doesn’t feel like she’s giving him anything, or like he’s taking something from her. She never thought sex could ever make her feel like she has full control over her anatomy, but this… this really does.

*Sharing* is the word that fits best. It’s sacred and special not because sex is, because it doesn’t have to be, but because they are, what she feels for him. It’s amazing because she wants it so badly, so ridiculously badly that she almost feels like fainting when she realises this really is what she’s doing.

She made the decision to do this with her body, she gives herself to him, all of her, because she chose to, because she wanted it so desperately, and that feels empowering.

He doesn’t say anything for a while, and nor does she, and the only moment she doesn’t find him watching her, is when he pushes himself up to open that one last clasp of her dress at her back, after which she helps him pull the whole thing over her head. Sansa can’t feel bothered when some seems protest (it only cost 3999 pounds she promised her mum she’d pay back), because she’s far too aware that the nude-coloured corset underneath her gala gown is as ugly as all shaping underwear is.

Jon really doesn’t seem to mind she’s not wearing some red lacy ensemble, as he grins like a little boy in a sweet shop when he pulls the zipper down and finally has her all naked in his arms.

First time sex should be awkward and uncomfortable, with lots of bumping teeth, lots of accidental hair pulling and arms in the way. There’s none of that when Sansa decides he senses her getting tired when he rolls her down into her back, and he needs not wait for her to spread her legs for him, closing her eyes in anticipation, but he goes down to trail his fingers down her rib case and kiss her breasts instead.

She really doesn’t feel like lazy foreplay midway through, he can do that after and Jon adorably chuckles when she smacks his shoulder and digs her nails in his upper arm.

“I’m not gonna last much longer, just so you know.” He warns, before he takes her face in his hand so he can make her look him in the eye, in the way he supposedly likes, before he’s glad to follow command.

“Thanks.” Sansa whispers to his grin, when he continues where she left it, “I appreciate you sharing things with me.”

“I’ll share things with you… any… any day.” He promises, and with that, the silence is over, “Just give me a call.”

“A call?”

Jon nods, “You have my number?”

“Which one?” She smirks to his mouth.

“The one people call when they wanna s-share things.”

“I might call.”

He only grins.

“Sharing things sounds r-really good.”
“You have no idea.” He groans, Sansa chuckles and he then gasps for the first time, indicating he didn’t lie as his breathing gets less controlled. His hand trembles when he palms her left breast and just realising how it’s she who’s doing that to him, makes her legs shake.

“S-Sansa…” he pants to her pleased smile, “I can do b-better that this… o-okay? It’s cause I… cause I had a drink.”

Better than this sounds outright impossible, and when she tells him that he shakily smiles, only a little pleased with himself.

He holds her neck in his hand, places his thumb to her chin to open her mouth a little so he can press his tongue inside, and as she sighs in his mouth she moves her hand to his hair, to gently tuck it, digging her heels in his back in an attempt to let him know it’s fine. She wouldn’t want him to torture himself just to impress her, he need not worry about that.

She really really likes the sound that comes from the back of his throat right before he collapses and drops down into her arms. Sansa skates her hands over his trembling sweaty body, when she catches herself grinning at the ceiling. She wipes it off and closes her eyes, trying to take every bit of the moment in.

As grateful as she is for all of it, about instantly after it’s over, she can hardly suppress an overwhelming fear of it being the only time. Of this being it. She’ll never experience this again. Lovemaking like this. Lovemaking like she never believed it existed.

_This is how it always should be. This is how we should always want it_, Sansa thinks. _If there’s a god, he or she intended it to be like this. This is how babies should be made._

She moves her hands through his hair and dreamily tugs on it and her thoughts drift away when he moves down, to press open mouthed kisses to her wet thighs.

She doesn’t believe she’s ever been this sopping wet before. Literally dripping. It probably started sometime when she was sitting on that stool, trying not to look at his biceps.

If she hadn’t dragged him with her into her room she would’ve needed 40 minutes of masturbation at least if she wanted any chance of sleeping at all.

Jon needs no forty minutes, embarrassingly he and his mouth get her there where she needs to be to experience ecstatic feelings of fulfillment, with a little help from some fingers, in what feels like only a minute.

It’s that sort of orgasm that no porn star could ever imitate. It needs no screaming or moaning. It consists of only uncontrollable trembling limbs, an arched back and eyes rolling back into the skull. She doesn’t thank God, she thanks no one at all, only breathes his name. She wants to beg for mercy, but there’s none of that she manages to squeeze out of her lungs, it’s far too late. There’s no mercy anywhere that’s reserved for her, which is fine.

When he enters her again, he does so while locking her up in a hold that feels like he’ll never let go, yet Sansa doubts she’s ever felt this free before. She may have picked another rhythm if she had any say, but she doesn’t mind it slow, this way it’ll last longer, she knows, and she’s grateful for that, because the longer it lasts, the more it’ll feel like this is a forever, not a hasty moment of mistakes that they’ll both regret when it’s done. This way she can savour it, she’ll have time to memorise all of his touches, all of his kisses, the feeling of his skin, of his tongue in her mouth, the sweat of his body beneath her fingertips, his stubble reddening her neck, his breath warming her, his arms holding her.
He lays his head down on her chest and she lazily pulls her fingers through his hair. When Sansa thinks he’s fallen asleep, he asks, “You want me to go?”

Sansa shakes her head, “No.” She doesn’t understand why he asks.

When Sansa falls asleep, wrapped up against him, her ear to his soothing heart, she can’t fight the feeling of never having felt so satisfied before, so loved, like putting on a glove that fits perfectly after years of wearing suffocatingly small ones.

Most of all, she realises, that she doesn’t feel so restless anymore, she doesn’t believe she’s ever felt so at peace as she does when she lies against him, in the crook of his arm, her head on his shoulder, and he lazily kisses her smile. His lips move to her cheek, then her nose, before he wishes her good-night.

“You too.” She whispers to the dark.

She wishes she could tell him what this means to her. But she wouldn’t be able to find the words. And even if she could, she’s not sure if she’d have the strength to say it aloud. She hopes she lets him know some of it as she drags herself against him, but that’s all, as she silently hopes he doesn’t notice the two or three tears dropping down her cheeks.
Hangover

Chapter Summary

"Young people are the same as they always were. They are just as ignorant."
— Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Thanks for the love!
I'm trying to make Saturday my update day (cause I like schedules), but I can't promise anything. Saturdays tend to be different every week, which is why I couldn't update until today. But yeah. I guess I can promise weekly updates from now. Definitely want bot this as well as 'Freia' finished before season eight starts.

Three hours later, Jon wakes up because his phone buzzes.

His eyes won’t open, even though he tells them to. It’s the headache, he knows, and when he shifts his head in the pillow, it gets worse. That is, until the smell of her shampoo reaches his nose. Messy locks tickle his face and when Jon lifts his free arm to rub in his eyes with his hand, Sansa moans in her sleep, after which he instantly freezes.

She’s all soft and warm against him, lying in the crook of his arm, her face buried in his neck, where her slow, rhythmic inhaling and exhaling warms his skin. She’s deep in her sleep, doesn’t seem to plan on waking up anytime soon, and if she already struggles with a possible hangover, it’s in no way visible. She couldn’t be lying closer against him if her body morphed with his, and, looking at her peaceful face, that seems to be the way she likes it.

Jon gently pushes some strands from her pretty face and then runs his fingertips down her spine, gently and slowly, after which she relaxes, which doesn’t last long when Jon’s phone goes off again. Jon quickly stretches that one arm that’s not sleeping under the weight of Sansa and with his grasping fingers he manages to find his phone without actually leaning up.

Through his narrowed eyes he sees his father’s name on the screen and Jon, initially, feels an extreme amount of annoyance. According to Apple, it’s exactly ten o’clock- Rhaegar must’ve lost his mind.

It’s only when Jon sees that Robb has been trying to call him too, that he realises. He swears inwardly and throws his phone away.

He could just close his eyes and go back to sleep. Perhaps Sansa won’t throw him out the moment she wakes up, maybe she’ll smile, maybe she won’t be a mess of regrets, maybe she won’t even put on clothes. Maybe she’ll let him kiss her between her legs again.

A great wave of guilt takes over him then, and Jon has to close his eyes again to keep himself from screaming triumphantly.
Flashbacks of the night before make him feel like the winner of the only prize that mattered as much as he knows he’s that guy now. Taking advantage of the drunk girl who just had a fight with her boyfriend. He might as well have comforted her as she complained to him about how difficult Harry is, her sipping wine, and him being understanding and giving the wrong advice on purpose. He didn’t even have to do anything like that.

Some tiny voice in his brain tells him she kissed him, not the other way around, but then, Jon really didn’t have to ask her if she wanted to go eat the leftovers, and there definitely was no need to bring her to her room. This is her house, and her room. She didn’t need him to find the fucking way. Obviously it was super gentlemanly of him, but he constantly catches himself taking advantage of being gentlemanly as an excuse to spend more time with her, move closer to her or touch her. She doesn’t need him to help her get up from a chair, and Jon doesn’t offer his hand because he’s gentlemanly. What he did last night was everything but gentlemanly.

Speaking of her hand, he probably shouldn’t have taken it as she gazed up at the sky, in awe of the fireworks- and he certainly should’ve toned down on the flirting.

He couldn’t help it, though. He’d lie if he claimed he had not been able to stop it, but still, no matter how hard he tried, he didn’t think about putting in effort to make her laugh, to look at her and keep looking at her the moment she noticed him staring. It just happened. She looked so beautiful last night, in her blue dress. All Jon had been able to think of, when he saw her coming down the stairs in it, was that he’d never seen such a pretty dress, nor has he ever wanted to tear a dress off so badly.

She was happy, and bubbly and all smiles and she kept touching him, too. She hugged him and lay her hands on his shoulders, pushed his hair from his face… and when she talked to him, she moved closer towards him, so close he could count her mascara’d eyelashes, batting attractively at him. She grinned seductively and played with her hair. She wanted it too.

Aegon said so, “She wants you too.” He said, “Just do it.”

“No.” Jon said, “No, she’s upset cause Harry left.”

“Who cares.” Aegon laughed, “Even if it’s just for one night.”

If last night is the only night Jon will ever have, he’ll be forever grateful, he’ll cherish it, and be fully content, even though it would also probably break his heart.

“Shag her good, little brother.” Aegon said, and Jon tried. He’s not sure if he managed, everything was too much of a haze, and he was too drunk for him to perform at the top of his abilities. Though not drunk enough to remember everything. He memorised every touch, every sound she made, every look she gave him, all the things she whispered to him.

When Robb calls again Jon considers picking up, but then realizes how that would force him to lie about his whereabouts to his best friend, the older brother of the naked girl in his bed, and that simply isn’t optional.

So he presses the caller away, leans his head back, closes his eyes for a moment which causes the world to spin around like a pirouetting ballerina, and as soon as Jon feels the nausea come up, he pulls himself up. Carefully and gently he unleashes himself from Sansa’s embrace, and surprisingly manages to not wake her up while doing so.

The air in her bedroom is icy cold and when Jon breathes out, his warm breath drifts up like a cloud. As quickly as he can he puts his clothes back on, clothes that smell of alcohol, cigarettes and
sweat. They’re sticky and smelly and remind him of shame.

Sansa’s bedroom is surprisingly small. He didn’t see last night. It’s not dark, with wood, paintings, harnesses, plaid and bookcases, like most of Winterfell. Her iron bed has a classic headboard, with decorative curtains around it. The floor is a white fluffy carpet, there’s a desk below the window and a matching drawer in the corner. Apart from some pictures on the wall, most of a Sansa of years past, this room could probably pass for just another guest bedroom. She hasn’t spend much time at Winterfell since she was about sixteen, of course, so that explains.

Jon plans on rushing out soundlessly, closing the door behind him and never looking back, leaving last night behind forever, on being strong and somewhat wise, but he’s still half drunk and therefore clumsy, causing her to stir when he nearly tumbles over his own shoe, and when his phone buzzes again, lying on a spot somewhere on the duvet, it wakes her up finally.

Her piercing blue eyes shoot up and find him, standing there, in the middle of the room, trousers on and his shirt half buttoned up.

She rubs her swollen eyes as she moves to sit upright and then, Jon cannot thank God enough, gives him a cheeky smile, “Y’know, if you plan on disappearing before the girl wakes up, at least try a little harder not to wake her up.”

“I’m… I’ve got to… the hunt. New Years hunt. It already started.”

Sansa glances sideways at the alarm clock and she hides her face behind her hand, “that’s today?” She groans.

“Yeah…” Jon can’t help but smirk, and her looking away gives him the opportunity to let his eyes wander over her bare legs, seeing them in bright daylight is quite a new experience, “it’s January 1st.”

Sansa pulls her hand away and smiles too, “I should probably go too. I said I would.”

“Did you promise?” Jon asks and when she shakes her head he feels ridiculously envious, “I wish I hadn’t.”

Sansa laughs, though only shortly, then, she stretches her hand out towards him, which he gratefully grabs like a starving fat child who’s handed his first meal of the day. Sansa only uses his hand to pull him back to the bed and she grabs his collar, then raises from the bed a little, and once the sheets drop around her, Jon can’t help but look down.

“You have a headache?” Jon asks when her fingers entangle with the hair at the nape of his neck.

When Sansa shakes her head her nose bumps with his, “Think I’m still drunk, actually. You?”

“I think the staircase will end up killing me.”

Sansa giggles and pushes his hair from his face, “Then don’t go down.”

“I really have to.”

Sansa shrugs and closes her eyes to press the softest of kisses to his lips, “Did you promise Robb?”

“Promised my dad.”

Sansa bites her lower lip and then whispers, “He’s a cruel man.”
“He is.” Jon agrees and he kisses her back, moving his hands down to skate them over the exposed skin of her torso. Rhaegar really, really is cruel, Jon spitefully thinks, when Sansa shivers at the touch of his fingers tickling her back.

She grins seductively and Jon realises she wasn’t joking, she really is still drunk. Jon’s jealous. Drunk he might be able to survive that hunt.

“I really gotta go.” He mutters, when she pushes herself closer to him, pressing her breasts against his thin cotton shirt, her hands still in his hair.

She still grins, as if she finds his exhausting habit of loyalty and obedience amusing, “You can come back?” She suggests, and there’s some wavering in her voice, almost as if she’s uncertain, as if she’s too insecure, but she battled it anyway.

“I can.” Jon hoarsely responds. His throat tightens then, because her smile is so sweet, and she smells so nice, and she’s all warm and soft against him, naked, and it fits really well in his arms.

She’s snuggling her face in his neck when Jon’s phone goes off again and Jon is in danger of possibly losing his mind when he grabs it, as it lays somewhere near her knee, and slightly moves away from her, to turn it off again.

“I’m leaving.” He says, and Sansa grins before she hides her face behind her hands and drops back down into the bed.

“Oh, bye.” She says, and Jon can’t help but lean over her and press some kisses to her face. She giggles and he can’t help but give her rediculously sexy naked body in the bed one last glance before he hurries out and runs back to his own room.

He opens it, ready to burst in and throw on the clothes suitable for hunting rabbit in full speed mode, when he stands face to face with his date. Who’s packing her stuff.

Val doesn’t seem at all that angry, which both surprises and seems logical to him. She didn’t much give him the impression that she ever expected this to be more than casually using each other, but then, she did sent him heart emojis and texts to tell him how much she looked forward to the night he eventually ended up spending with Sansa.

“Hi.” She says, and she looks up with a tiny smile.

“V-Val I… I’m sorry I was-“

“I thought you were at the hunt?” She asks.

“I was.” Jon says, “I mean, I’m going there.”

“Hasn’t it already started?”

As if to answer for him, Jon’s phone loudly buzzes, “Yeah, it… it has.”

“I figured you’d already left to join.” She says, pushing some more clothes in her bag.

“I… yeah.” Jon’s not sure if she’s mocking him or genuinely, honestly, believes he spend the night sleeping in his own bed, and she simply missed it because he arrived after she’d fallen asleep and then left again before she woke up.

“I want to catch my train.” She tells him.
“Okay.” Jon says, hopefully managing to sound as if he’s not entirely relieved.

“So, thank you, for inviting me to the party.” She says as she pulls the bag off the bed, and grabs her coat from the armchair in the corner, “I had fun.” She says, and she kisses his cheek, before she leaves him all alone in the room.

At that Jon knows this is probably her way of simply refusing to address the fact that he is a ridiculous asshole who dumped her somewhere between the church service and midnight to go off and do… other things. In all fairness, Jon can’t actually remember introducing her to anyone other than Sansa. Which is horrible, considering the only good thing she might’ve gotten out of this disaster would be the opportunity to network a bit. Jon has never been good at dating, but this really hits rock bottom. His phone goes off again, and in his self-hatred he forgets he wasn’t going to pick it up.

“Where are you?” His father asks, his voice perfectly calm with no hint of anger. That is the most terrifying voice of all voices.

“In my room.” Jon croaks.

“I want you here within ten minutes.” Rhaegar announces, before hanging up the phone again.

Jon wants to scan through all of Robb’s ‘where tf r u?’ messages, but realizes he’s got no time for that, as he runs into his own little private bathroom and throws his head under the ice cold water tap.

He throws his clothes in some corner, puts on a dangerous amount of deodorant and after getting dressed in the proper clothes, he leans down to lace his shoes, to which his guts heavily protests.

He really has got no time to throw up, but the body wants what it wants, and there’s nothing as horrible as not being able to stop throwing up. Honestly. That feeling you get when you know there’s nothing left in your stomach, yet the muscles around it ignore your common sense and stubbornly keep squeezing like a huge fist is hammering against your insides… no fun.

While he’s doing that, he wonders, again, how on earth he ever managed to get it up last night. He shouldn’t have been able to do that, it fully goes against everything nature and science that he managed to make love to Sansa, not once, but twice, with that much alcohol in his blood. But then, most of last night ignored science. And it was worth it, so bloody worth it. If Jon has to hang above a toilet for the rest of the day, feeling as miserable as the person who invented the word, to just be able to relive it again, he’d do it gladly.

Flashbacks keep coming back to him, of how he pulled down her ruined knickers, how she moaned his name in his ear, how she tasted, how she felt, how she trembled, how she smiled and kissed him, with so much eager hunger Jon couldn’t get himself to close his eyes, just because he had to keep reminding himself of how real it was. He remembers how she told him she couldn’t imagine ‘better’ when he promised her.

He remembers how she felt, better than any woman has ever felt before, how she pulled on his hair and gasped when he moved in too deep, only to spread her legs wider, give him better acces to do it again.

These memories only make his head turn more, and they cloud his brain in such a way that Jon, for a moment, fails to remember why the hell he’s even here. That’s until he throws up some more.
Jon’s ready to start wishing for his mum to be here to stroke his hair and tell him everything will be alright, dwelling away in self-pity, feeling so disgusted with himself that he’s capable of crying, when it’s finally over.

Like all these times before he promises himself that never will he ever drink so much again, not even to help his nerves and grow in confidence- realizing full well that he’s dangerously nearing that 30 years mark and, really, he’s too old for this now, anyway.

Yet, after drinking three glasses of piercing cold Scottish water right from the tap, Jon can’t deny he feels a little better now, at least the poison has mostly departed his guts, whatever’s left in his blood will be for his kidneys to deal with.

He puts his army print jacket on while running down the stairs, where he finds Arthur freaking Dayne.

“You look terrible, son.” He laughs, slamming Jon on the back, “Your father isn’t happy.”

“He isn’t?” Jon laughs uncomfortably, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

In all his fear of keeping everyone waiting, Jon can’t help but feel some fury when he finds the party still stationed near the terrace, enjoying sandwiches and orange juice. The dogs are enthusiastically barking, and waiters, these poor poor waiters, are walking around with sandwich trays.

“Jon!”

Jon hurries his way towards Aegon, vaguely and stupidly hoping he’ll be able to dodge the bullet of his father’s fury when he’s surrounded by other people.

“You look terrible.” Aegon decides, which is unfair because Aegon looks great. He looks awake, well dressed, showered, fresh and shiny. Like a brand new penny.

“I feel worse.” Jon admits, and then he catches Aegon’s narrowed eyes, who then bursts out laughing.

“I’m so happy for you!”

Jon wants to rudely push Aegon to the ground when he excitedly goes in for a tight hug, “Please don’t.”

“I didn’t believe you’d be able to do it. I’m proud, honestly, I really am!”

Jon’s did nothing to be proud of. He’s a horrible person. At least, that’s what he told himself when he woke up. The feeling quite faded once she woke up too, and grinned at him like that. She kissed him again, this very morning, and even though she said it, she didn’t seem nearly as drunk as she was last night. She didn’t seem angry either, or upset, or sad. She didn’t seem to feel bad- nearly as if Harry didn’t exist at all.

But he knows they haven’t broken up. She talked about him, last night, she did, when she sat down near the counter, eating her French biscuits, she’d called him jealous, and she told Jon not to care about his opinions… but she also agreed when Jon said that if Harry loves her, that’s the only thing that matters.

“My loader is as gay as Donald Trump is fucking stupid.” Aegon mutters, “Happy new year to me.”
Jon frowns and stalks off, unknowingly right into his father’s waiting presence.

Rhaegar keeps his voice down when he informs him that grown up men are perfectly capable of showing up on time at events they promised to attend. Then he narrows his eyes, in that same way as Aegon did, and asks him, “Where the hell did you sleep last night?”

“W-what?” Jon only slept a ridiculously small part of the morning and none of the night, but he doubts Rhaegar would enjoy such a smart answer.

“Dayne said you never returned to your bloody room, you better not have-“

“Don’t spy on me.”

“I don’t spy on you, I asked Dayne where the hell you were and he informed me you never-“

“Tell Arthur not to spy on me.”

“I pay him to spy on you in some attempt to keep you safe.”

“I’m safe.” Jon reassures, “Got all my limbs and I brought my head along, too. No need to worry, pa.”

Rhaegar blinks a couple of times, then narrows his eyes and stubbornly declares, “It’s my job to worry about you.”

“I slept in Sansa’s room.” Jon blurts out, “We ate wedding cake and watched a movie and I fell asleep on the sofa. It was super late, my phone died, I woke up ten minutes ago. Next time I’ll let my babysitters know. Sorry.”

Rhaegar looks at him, eyes still narrowed, clearly not believing a word, but then he nods and Jon struts off, to find himself a loader, and get on with this misery.

In the background, he hears Aegon talk to his loader, “You know a loader… that’s basically a squire, am I right? So if I were a knight… and we’re here at a real castle so you can easily imagine… I’d love it to have you as my squire.”

Aegon’s loader really does seem as gay as a daffodil, “I’d love to be your squire, your royal highness.” he chuckles.

“My squire gets to call me Aegon. Or Egg.”

Jon can’t help but feel grateful for his brother, if anything he’s always good for making him smile in such moments of utter despair.

Nearly four hours later Jon has successfully managed to avoid Robb, as well as Aegon, Rhaenys, his father and Ned, because looking at Ned makes him feel guilty, for some reason having to do with having sex with his daughter. Which makes him hate himself because that’s such a pathetic and somewhat sexist emotion to feel, one that would probably anger Rhaenys if she ever found out—which she won’t.

He denies the offered lunch which is set up in the dining room, and instead suddenly finds a ridiculous amount of energy somewhere in some part of his body, when he runs up the stairs, while throwing some sandwiches down.
Sansa pulls him into her room like she’s been waiting for him to come back ever since he left, and, as she pulls the clothes off his body, manages to ask if there’s anything he caught.

“No.” He says as he allows her to push him towards her bathroom, “That would only have delayed me from getting back in here.”

She won’t stop kissing him as the warm streams of water fall down from the shower head and protests with giggles when he turns her around, to push her up against the cold wall and have her from behind. Her fingers entangle with his as he moves inside her, his face buried in the crook of her neck. She sighs in her satisfaction and moans when he sucks on the wet and warm skin of her neck. He knows that’s not a very clever idea, it’ll probably leave some sort of mark, but she doesn’t seem to mind, only leans her head back when he pulls her leg up, in an attempt to make this a little more comfortable, as far as shower sex can be that. But again, she doesn’t seem to mind.

He’s been fantasising about what having sex with her would be like for months, and he always told himself that she’s probably not as wild and naughty as his horny mind likes to think she is, but he was wrong.

Jon can’t do it roughly, somehow, for some reason unknown, he has issues with that, even though she keeps giving him every opportunity to be that. All he wants is to just lazily kiss her, caress parts of her he never thought he’d ever get to see, to pull his hand through her hair and explore the taste of her skin as if he has a lifetime left to do all of this.

Perhaps it’s because Sansa seems more aware of how much they’re running out of time, perhaps it’s because she hasn’t forgotten about Harry, it’s probably because Sansa doesn’t need to keep pinching herself to prove to herself she isn’t dreaming, and that’s why she can’t bear him wasting so much time on being slow.

She doesn’t even allow him to make an attempt at drying his hair, before she officially takes over, pushes him back down in the bed, and from that point on, Jon realises there’s only one way to deal with this, and that’s by doing not that. Just not deal. Not even try. He happily hands over all control to her, whatever she wants, in whatever way she likes it, he’ll just let her take the lead. It’s an approach that quickly proves to be best when she moves down.

Instantly, he forgets all names including his mother’s and when he closes his eyes, all he sees is stars. For a moment he fears he’ll throw up again, but then he realizes it’s a loss of weight he’s experiencing, not nausea, and he regains enough of his sense to weakly tell her to put an end to it if she doesn’t want it to end here.

Sansa moves back up and Jon feels like a grateful fool when she seems to get this wordless hint and takes the spot of going on top with great please and confidence, like yesterday, albeit a little more carefully.

Jon tries to lay on his back and watch her doing that for as long as he can, but she’s too far away, and her body is still a little moist, and her breasts do things to him, so he pushes himself back up, and takes her face in his hands, to dip his tongue in her mouth.

“Jon…” she sighs after a while, panting to his mouth, her nails digging in his scalp as she doesn’t seem able to rid her eyes off his, “Jon…”

“W-what?”

“Don’t stop.”
“I won’t.” Jon instantly promises, it’s the easiest promise he’s ever made.

“Please don’t stop.”

“I won’t stop.”

Sansa kisses him again, then leans her forehead to his, and whispers, “I want you.”

He wants her too. He’s never wanted anyone so badly. If he ever truly believed he loved Ygritte it was life playing a joke on him. He’s been fantasizing of doing this for months, and it doesn’t disappoint. It’s like drinking a glass of water after days roaming around a desert, it’s like taking off sunglasses and finally seeing the world in the colours intended.

“You want me too?” She asks.

It’s the stupidest question anyone has ever asked him, “Yeah.” Jon gulps, kisses her, then admits, “Wanted you for months.”

“M-me too.” She says.

An hour or so later, Jon falls asleep, on his stomach, with an arm wrapped around her, pulling her close against him. She can feel her fingers pull through his hair as he fades into a dreamless high sleep, and he feels half awake throughout it, vaguely noticing her fingers drawing circles on his arms, shoulders, then back. It is probably why it feels like he only closed his eyes for a minute or so when he wakes up thanks to her dried-up hair tickling his back as her lips place soft kisses to the aching muscles in his shoulders. Jon tries to mutter something, but he can’t even hear it himself, after which she giggles.

He always used to hate giggling girls. Ygritte never giggled. Nor Rhaenys. Sansa’s giggle sounds carefree and happy. He loves a carefree and happy Sansa, and thus, he loves no sound more than her giggling.

She lies down, her front to his back, and he can feel her soft perky breasts pressed against him, “I didn’t wanna wake you, but staring at your sleepy face got a little boring.”

“So you did want to wake me up?”

Sansa giggles some more, softly, and puffs of breath warm the skin behind his ear. Jon grins into the cotton pillow, “Only because I don’t want you to be jetlagged.”

“I appreciate your concern.”

“You’re tired?” She asks, and he can feel her smirk.

“Define tired.” He catches her at surprise when he turns to his back and he can only pull her back in time when she rolls off him, nearly off the bed.

Sansa quickly refinds herself and moves over him, her long auburn hair falling down the sides of her face, creating a curtain around them, locking even the room they’re in out. Locking it all out but them, is what they’ve been doing. Ignoring everything outside that door, every person, every thought, every possible word spoken.

Jon’s not ready for it to end.

“Tired of me?”
“That’s not a thing.”
“A thing?”
“That won’t ever happen.”
“Ever?”
“Ever.”
“I’ll never grow tired of you either.” She promises back, and they smirk at each other like two excited kids in DisneyLand Paris.

She proves surprisingly and uncharacteristically submissive when he pushes her down in the bed, next to him. Her curtain of auburn hair is gone, but he likes the way she curves against him, the way she leans her head so that his arm behind her rests in the crook of her neck, so it won’t go numb. He likes the way she runs her footpad over the back of his leg, all lazily, as she sighs in content when he presses in. Even though she lies with her back towards him, she turns her head so that she can look at him, if she wants to, in those rare moments where she opens her eyes and scans his face.

It’s all slow, almost torturously so, as he feels the muscles in her legs tighten and her back curls away from him, when she climaxes and trembles like a leaf, only for her to push herself closer to him. Jon doesn’t believe he’s ever experienced sex so intimately, and he constantly feels some odd desire to crawl inside of her, or wrap himself entirely around her, either or, to just be as near her as he can possibly be, with as much of his skin touching hers as is optional.

When he comes, he doesn’t move out, and they just lay there, panting, calming down, their breathing slowing together, rhythmically, almost.

“You’re falling asleep again?” She whispers after some time, her thumb rubs circles on his handpalm.

“Again? Is only the second time.” Jon mutters in her neck, his eyes heavily closed.

“You men are all the same.” She breathes.

“Has not one bloke ever done you the honours of staying awake?”

Sansa shakes her head.

“I don’t believe that. I’d stay awake if I could.”

“It’s called post-coitus sleep.” Sansa explains, “Two explanations came out of PET scans… one, is that you have to let go of all your anxiety and fears in order to be able to orgasm. Which, apparently, makes you sleepy, and the second, only male thing, is that you guys make some hormone- which is by the way linked to your recovery time, too- it is a hormone that’s very strong during sleep. They injected it in animals and they almost instantly fell asleep.”

“You’re so fucking smart.” Jon whispers right below her ear, snuggling his face in the sweaty crook, where she smells really nice, “Just saying… if you’re trying to keep me awake by chatting, rambling about science won’t do the trick.”

Sansa giggles again, and Jon feels his mouth smirk at the mere sound of it. He presses his nose in her hair, breathing in the scent of shampoo when she swivs.
“I’m not smart.” She says then, “Just book things. I read too much.”

Jon opens one eye, the only one he can, to glance up at her and he smirks when he sees her face, “You can’t read too much. I don’t read at all.”

“You’re smarter than me, though.”

Jon chuckles, “What? You have a master.” For a moment he thinks she’s joking, but she’s really not.

“Really.” She says, “I’m not smart. Promise.”

“I think you’re smart.”

“That’s sweet.” She smiles to herself, avoiding his gaze, “Are you still sick?” She asks then.

“Naah.” He says.

“Was it very bad? Going on that hunt?”

“I survived.” And that’s all he’ll have to say about that.

“Shouldn’t drink so much next time, Jon Snow.” Sansa whispers and she moves hair out of his face to press a kiss to his temple, “You obviously can’t handle it.”

“I’m getting old.” He says.

Sansa giggles, “You’re only one year my senior.”

“How were you not sick?” Jon genuinely wonders.

Sansa shrugs, then smirks a little wider, “Adrenaline.” She assumes.

“No, that’s definitely not it.” Jon says, “Science won’t be the answer. Maybe you’re just more used to alcohol than you like to admit.”

“Maybe.” She grins and Jon’s leans up and plans on kissing her until she falls asleep when someone bangs on the door.

“SANSA!” Rickon bellows through it, “MUM WANTS TO SEE YOU!” It seems for a moment as if he’s gone, but then he adds, “DINNER AT SEVEN!”

Jon has been trotting through the woods around Winterfell on an empty stomach, and having sex with only three sandwiches in your system isn’t exactly a preferred circumstance either, so he can’t help but feel excited at the mention of dinner.

“Mum and dad are probably leaving after that.” Jon whispers in Sansa’s ear, after which she sighs and drops her head to his chest.

“You’re leaving with them?” She asks, without looking up, which makes it exceedingly harder to figure if the idea hurts her or not.

“I ehm... Robb and Jeyne are going on their honeymoon tonight, aren’t they?”

Sansa nods, then climbs off him. She grabs her nightrobe off the floor, puts it on and walks over towards her dresser, “Should probably get dressed.” She says, “Make myself somewhat
Jon sits upright in the bed and watches her scan through the small amount of dresses she hung up. She doesn’t seem to plan on staying much longer than she already has, either.

“I have ehm… I have to go to the New Year’s reception at Buckhingham Palace.”

“Yeah.” Sansa vaguely says as she touches the fabric of a green dress, “Daddy mentioned it.”

“He’s invited.” Jon says, which is a stupid thing to say because it sounds a bit like ‘you’re not invited’- which is probably why she ignores it as she pulls out two dresses. One she holds up in front of herself as she turns towards the mirror, then shakes her head and hangs it back, after which she takes the other one off the hanger.

“I can’t wear green.” She mutters, “Christmas is over.”

“What does that got to do with it?” Jon chuckles.

“My hair is red,” she says, as if that makes it obvious.

“So?”

“So… red and green together are horrendously festive.”

Jon laughs again and finally she smiles and stops for a moment, as she scans through the wardrobe, pulling out underwear and tights.

“You should get dressed too.” She says, and she walks behind the screen, to put on her clothes.

Jon moves out of the bed, puts as much as his trousers back on, and then shovels behind the screen, where’s she’s just rolling one of the stockings up a leg. They’re black with small polka dots scattered over her legs. They’re nice, he thinks, but they’d look better when scattered on the floor.

“I’ll see you downstairs.” He says, and when he tries to wonder what it is that upset her, he realizes that perhaps she’s not so much upset, as that she’s already distancing herself. If he leaves with his parents tonight, as he should, as he planned to do, he’ll go back to London, and eventually she will too, and this Scottish bubble will burst, spat apart and all he’ll have left is memories to haunt him.

She’ll go back to Harry, who’s probably waiting for her at home. She’ll start her job at the new museum and he’ll be cutting ribbons again. It’ll be a new year where nothing will have changed, except that Robb’s married and he won’t see her all the time now that all the engagement parties, dress fittings, food tastings and rehearsal dinners are over. Maybe he’ll see her at Arya’s birthday party, if he can manage to go there, else it’ll be probably Jeyne’s, which is months away. Perhaps he’ll run into her when he has some meeting at the Jehaerys and Alysanne, he’s patron after all, and she works there now. If he’s a real desperate fool he’ll ask Sam to check in with the museum, see if he might be able to pop in to open some new wing, or something. They’ll be happy to add his name to a plaque and he’ll have the hope of catching a glimpse of her, standing in some corner, wearing a long-sleeved black dress like the one she’s wearing right now, of velvet with a wrap-effect that cinches in at the waist and turns to reveal a skin-baring low back. He’ll stare at the back, realizing he knows what it feels like to kiss down that neck, knowing he knows he’s seen what she looks like with no dress on at all.

Or he could just call her. If he doesn’t have the guts for that he might even sent her a text message. He hates texting. It’ll be easy to talk himself out of doing that, unless… unless she’ll text him first.
Sansa nods, then moves over to him, pulls him close, takes his face between her hands and kisses him. Just a peck. No tongue, no extra whatever. She just takes his lower lip between her own and presses her mouth to his. It’s not a friendly kiss, nor a goodbye kiss, it’s no promise nor a demand. Jon’s not sure what it is, only that it’s not their last.

Jeyne and Robb leave his childhood home in some old timer, apparently bought by the fourteenth duke of Rothesay somewhere in the sixties. Before Robb jumps in the car, he manages to pull Jon aside, for some conversation no one else is clearly allowed to hear, which takes all Jon’s breath away, and he can’t help but stare up at Robb in fear, when his best friend clears his throat.

“Listen man… I know we-“

“I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“What?”

“I was going to… to ask you if you could just… I mean I get that it was a crappy thing to do-“

“It was.” Jon gulps, although he has a feeling he has no idea what the fuck Robb is talking about.

“But Theon is really sorry.”

“Theon?”

“And ehm… I mean, I don’t wanna be… but I didn’t really get the impression that you liked her all that much anyway. But that’s obviously none of my business. I get it, if you’re-“

“What did Theon do?”

Robb frowns, glances over at Jeyne, who’s hugging her mother farewell, then asks, his voice even softer, “You don’t know?”

“Know what?”

Robb looks super uncomfortable suddenly, “Well… you were avoiding us all day, I haven’t seen you at all and you… so Theon figured you were pissed.”

“About what?”

“Val.”

“Val?”

“Your date.”

“I know who Val is.” Jon chuckles then suddenly realises and his awkward encounter with said date suddenly makes much more sense, “Theon slept with her.” He says and it’s not a question but Robb nods anyway.

“Theon’s really sorry.”

“Doubt that.” Jon laughs. He might feel sorry about being in a certain kind of position where people are angry with him, but Jon can’t imagine him feeling guilty. Anyway, who’s Jon to judge? He didn’t sleep with someone’s date, he slept with someone’s girlfriend who also happens to be his
best friend’s little sister.

“Don’t worry bout it, mate. It’s fine. You’re right, I really wasn’t interested anyway. Glad she had a
good time despite me not paying her much attention. I’m just knackered, that’s all.”

Robb gives him a broad smile of utter relieve, and with the reassurance he manages to make his
way over to the car.

Robb really can’t drive it, which makes it pretty hilarious to see him take off, meeting the horizon,
on his way to the train station, where Rodrik will be waiting to drive it back home, as the
newlyweds jump in a taxi, ready to bring them to the airport, where they’ll jump on some plane,
ready to take them off to Bora Bora where they no doubt will do a lot of sunbathing, sunburning,
cocktail drinking and sexing.

The royal family happily accepts the offer of dinner, and Jon can’t help but feel like Sansa
purposely sits all the way at the total opposite end of the extremely long table. He tries to focus on
his food as his mother fails to keep his father from going on about diplomatic-related stuff, without
mentioning his own personal opinions once. Rhaegar really has turned politically correct
conversations into an art form. One Rhaenys hasn’t quite mastered yet, and Aegon never will.

Rhaegar goes on about the pros and cons of a hard Brexit, almost as if it’s not a highly emotional
and extremely controversial topic, while Jon can’t get himself to stop staring at Sansa. As she
continues to ignore him he can’t dodge the feeling that he must’ve done something very wrong. It’s
not indifference she’s giving him, but rather a cold shoulder. While his eyes plead to her, he
catches Arya frowning at him from the corner of his eye.

Jon gives Arya his friendliest smile, one she doesn’t answer as her eyebrows disappear behind her
bangs. She watches him with suspicion, as if she just caught him doing something she couldn’t ever
approve of, even if she wanted to. Jon guesses that is about right. If only she actually knew.
Perhaps she already knows. She watches as if it wasn’t hard to guess.

It’s past nine when Jon puts on his coat as his luggage is carried out, to be put in the car.

“So good of you to have us!” Lyanna says, thanking Ned with a tight hug.

“Of course, of course, we were so happy you could make it.”

“We really must go back now.” Rhaegar says, as he kisses Cat’s cheek, “But Scotland’s always a
pleasure.”

Jon wraps his scarf around his neck when he spots Sansa through the opened front door. As
reserved as she was during dinner, so obviously are her eyes begging now. Jon looks around, partly
to make sure no one sees and partly to give himself some time to built up nerves and think of things
to say, before he casually walks back inside.

She grabs his sleeve and pulls him with her, behind some Stark armor, where she instantly drops
her grip and demands to know, “You’ll call me?” She doesn’t look at him when she asks, instead
she moves her eyes from her shoes to the door, where they can hear the distant laughter of their
parents.

Jon waits with responding until she finally bats her eyes up to look at him, which seems to cost her
all the efforts she can find, which is oddly endearing, “If you want.”

Sansa seems a little stunned at the response, then clearly decides to feel offended by it, and Jon
can’t help but feel himself grin when he grabs her arm to stop her when she moves to walk away.
“D-don’t,” He says and he takes her face between his hands, her high-cheekboned, perfectly small and pretty face, “Don’t walk away.”

Sansa stares at him with her wide puppy eyes, the color of a frozen lake somewhere in the north, then she bites her lower lip and Jon really can’t help but kiss her. This time, it is a goodbye kiss, but still, it’s not their last.

“You didn’t want things to be awkward, remember?” She asks, her eyes still closed, as he nudges his nose to hers.

“It won’t be.” He promises himself as much as her.

“Okay.” She breathes to his mouth, “I’ll miss you.” She confesses, and at that Jon suddenly feels both wonderful and miserable.

He’s kissing her again, in some desperate moment where he pretends his departure can be delayed, until his mother calls for him.

“Okay, I’ll call you.” Jon says again, and when he tries to let go off her, she grabs his collar and pulls him back, to really give him a last kiss now, which Jon decides is the best one of them all, because she smiles when she does it, she happily beams at him only because of the prospect of him calling again, and that makes him happier than any kiss ever has.

“Here comes the dirty mistress.” Aegon laughs when Jon drops down in his car seat, “Did she put her knickers in the pocket of your coat?”

Rhaegar climbs behind the steers himself, with Lyanna getting in at his left. Clearly, Rhaenys hasn’t left with her husband, cause she’s already in the backseat, with Aegon.

“Shut up.” Jon mutters.

“You must be the only one not wanting to be the dirty mistress of a-”

“Aegon, piss off!”

Lyanna turns around and frowns, “What’s that about?”

“Jon’s a dirty mistress, didn’t you hear?”

Jon shoves him and Aegon laughs.

“He doesn’t like talking about it, it’s a sensitive subject for him.”

“Aegon stop it.” Rhaegar uses his warning voice as he starts the car.

“A dirty what?” Lyanna asks, turning around to face her husband’s brood.

“Mistress.”

At the clear pronunciation of the word, Rhaenys gasps, “No!”

Aegon grins broadly at the excitement for his new scoop, “Yes! He really did that.”

“Did what?” Lyanna asks, and she seems worried.

“I cannot believe it.” Rhaenys says.
“I’m never ever telling you anything ever again.” Jon says, turning his face away from Aegon, to shame him with a refusal to look him in the eye.

“You didn’t tell me, I guessed.” Aegon reminds him.

“Why didn’t I guess?” Rhaenys wonders, “It all makes sense now. If you look closely, you can see how badly he’s marked.”

“I’m not-“

“What happened?” Lyanna asks, her voice loud and threatening now.

“Nothing.” Jon says, and he leans forward to squeeze his mother’s shoulder, “Aegon’s joking about my hangover.”

Lyanna sinks back down in her seat, “You kids call that a ‘mistress’ nowadays?” Her laughs is meant to inform Jon of how little she believes of his bullshit. He’s glad, he wouldn’t want a dumb mother.

Lyanna obviously decides to respect the fact that she won’t get an explanation that is in any way truthful, so she grabs a magazine, opens it, and laughs, “My father always used to say… a man at night is a man in the morrow.”

“Or a woman.” Rhaenys says and Aegon rolls his eyes at the predictability of the comment.

“Or a gay guy.”

“That’s not how it works.” Rhaenys says.

“Why not? That’s homophobic.”

“No, it’s not, because-“

“We all have hangovers!” Rhaegar loudly proclaims, seemingly already exhausted, “Alcohol does not discriminate.”

“Amen.” Jon says, before he gulps down some water from a bottle.
La Perla

Chapter Summary

"A boy is holding a girl so very tight in his arms tonight."
- King Edward VIII

Sansa gets home, the third of January sometime after midnight, to a flat that simply smells a bit wrong. It’s too cold in there, and she doesn’t take her coat off after pushing her suitcase in.

She switches the light in the narrow hallway on, then spots a person she desperately hoped had already left.

Harry’s fallen asleep on the sofa, and if these were better days, she might walk over to him, push his hair from his face and kiss his temple, to wake him up and tell him to go to bed.

But Sansa doesn’t want him to go to bed, all she wants is for him not get anywhere near her. The thought alone makes her cringe, and she doubts he’d be pleased by whatever her real life response may be.

She pulls the suitcases through the living room into her bedroom as soundlessly as she possibly can, and thankfully Harry doesn’t wake up. He doesn’t even move.

Sansa thanks God as she pulls the door shut and takes a deep breath of relieve when she drops herself down onto the bed. She quickly gets up again to take her clothes off, and the relieve when she’s liberated of her bra has never before been so great.

Sansa brushes her teeth, brushes her hair, takes her make up off, applies all sorts of creams to her face and then goes to lie in bed.

For a moment she manages to stick to the promise she made herself not to check her phone. But it won’t last when she grabs her charging phone off her night table, ready to set her alarm, and then finds herself feeling disappointed at the lack of missed calls.

Obviously there are none, because if someone had called her, she would know. She would’ve ran over towards it, ready to pick it up like the desperate fool she has now become.

Sansa hates herself. She loathes her own behavior. She can’t stand how eager she is for him to call her, simply because she needs to know that what happened… that it’s not over. That it won’t be over. That he didn’t lie when he said he’d call her.

Perhaps she should’ve told him she’d call him, but it’s definitely too late for that now. She won’t deny that when he agreed to call her, she expected him to call when he got home, or even when he was in the train, or at the least when he went to sleep that night. When he didn’t, Sansa just assumed he must’ve been tired. But then the next day passed by without him attempting to let her know he was still alive, and the day after that, and now the aching possibility of him never ever calling ever has started creeping in, and that does some seriously horrible things to her abdomen.

Jon’s not like that, she keeps telling herself. He’s probably just been busy. He’s no Joffrey 2.0, perhaps he doesn’t want to bother her, maybe he doesn’t think she wants to be bothered by him.
Maybe he doesn’t think she cares. Maybe… maybe it didn’t mean anything to him.

Because his communication was dead, Sansa found other ways to convince herself of his existence, which, as it turns out, is ridiculously simple with someone like him.

He may not have called her when he arrived at King’s Cross, but he did get photographed when getting in the car, hiding his face behind sunglasses and his trademark cap- and even though he didn’t call her to tell her he arrived home safely, the article reassured Sansa with the sentence *Royal family returns to London to get back to work after holidays.*

Then, the next day, when he still had not called, Sansa found herself scanning through articles that contained pics of him arriving at Kensington Palace, to visit Rhaenys, and then pictures of him driving his car back to Buckingham Palace.

And the day after that there were pictures of him playing football with friends somewhere in Hyde Park. He looked really cute in these pictures, happy and careless and not about to pick up his phone anytime soon.

The day after that Sansa left Winterfell herself, traveling with her parents, back to London, and as she had dinner with them at their London residence, minus her dad, she read all the boring articles about the New Years reception at Buckingham Palace, and studied all the pics of him in a white tie suit, holding a champagne glass, talking to loads of people Sansa didn’t recognise, and a few she did, including her own dad. Sansa’s never before been so envious of her own father.

Lying on her side, she scrolls through some more pictures of the event, and she realises she has about memorised them all. She’s pathetic now. Absolutely pathetic and sad and she hates herself.

With that feeling, she falls asleep, only to wake up before her alarm, and to find the sheets beside her used and slept it. Harry clearly didn’t think he had no right to sleep in her bed, though he’s gone now, and as Sansa walks out of the bedroom, into the living room-kitchen combo, she finds he’s already left. Where to she’s not sure, probably work. Hopefully he’ll stay away for long.

Sansa knows she’s got to properly and officially end it as soon as possible, but that doesn’t necessarily mean she’s looking forward to it.

She opens the refrigerator to take out some juice, only to find it empty. Sansa swears and drops down on one of the stools at the bar. The flat’s not big enough for a real dining area, which is fine, because Harry hates entertaining anyway. He hates entertainment in general, Sansa thinks, bitterly.

As she sits by the bar, she spots a note, a handwritten one, and before she grabs it, she remembers. Note in hand Sansa rushes over towards the calendar, and reads the big giant letters Harry wrote down months ago ‘*Hong Kong*’ it says.

The bastard is in bloody China.

And he won’t be back for another two weeks. Well, that’s just great. Sansa unfolds the note, and then ends up feeling guilty, suddenly. An emotion she hasn’t yet experienced.

*Hey baby, didn’t want to wake you up cause you looked so beautiful sleeping. I’ve got to go catch my plane, I’ll be back in two weeks, I’ll miss you. Please don’t be angry, we’ll be fine, we just need to talk. Love you, H.*

Sansa folds the note up in her hand and then realises she feels guilty for not feeling any guilt.

Should she call him? She knows he’s probably somewhere hanging in-between clouds and the sun,
on his way east. Will he call her when he arrives? Maybe. Probably. Should she pick up?

Throwing her phone out of the window has never before seemed like such a good idea.

She can’t tell him she expected him and his stuff to be gone by now over the phone, and she can’t remind him that her father bought her this flat and that’s why he’s the one who should leave over FaceTime either. Neither of these are things he deserves, no matter what. Which means she really should not have had dinner at her parents house last night, because she can’t have conversations with him in the next couple of days and pretend all’s going to be fine. They won’t be fine, and talking is not going to fix anything. He’s a bloody idiot for writing that fucking note. Does he know her at all? He knows her perhaps as someone who doesn’t always means what she says. Because he always manages to manipulate her into changing her mind. But not this time. Him seemingly ignoring the fact that she quite clearly dumped him, only makes her hate him more.

Sansa curses herself and is hiding her face behind her hand when the phone rings. In her fear of having to speak to Harry, pretending to be happy to hear his voice, she’s forgotten that she’s been waiting for it to ring for over two days now, which is why, when she spots Jon’s name, she fails to wait the appropriate amount of time to not give him the impression she’s the desperate fool she is, and picks it up instantly.

“How?” She asks, almost as if she doesn’t believe it’s him calling.

“Hey.” He says, and she nearly drops off the stool at the sound of his voice.

“Hi.” She says, and she wants to hit her own face at the lousiness of her responses, “I mean, how are you?”

“I’m fine.”

Fine? What’s that supposed to mean? He’s fine. Is that good or bad? Fine could be anything, it’s the kind of thing you say when you don’t actually wanna say anything at all. Fine could mean he’s fine, but it could also mean he’s tired or exhausted or extremely angry or regretful or wonderfully happy.

“Me too.” At that Sansa really does slam her own face.

“Great.” She can hear him grin through the phone, which gives her the confidence she needs to suggest,

“I ehm… I gotta go have lunch with Maya, but ehm… we have to talk.”

“We do.” He agrees. She didn’t expect him to disagree. Whether this is going to end before it’s started or not, they have to talk about it anyway.

“So maybe… maybe tonight?” She’d rather invite him over right now, but again, she really doesn’t want him to know how paranoid and desperate she really is, and Maya usually doesn’t take cancellations very well.

“Yeah, Okay?”

“If you can’t make it, that’s fine.” Sansa quickly says.

“No, I can, I mean, I’m having dinner with Mum’s family, but I have time after that.”

His mum’s family? Who’s that? Sansa wants to ask, but decides she can just as much do that
tonight, “Yeah, that’d be... that’d be good.”

“So you want to... you want to meet somewhere?”

Sansa hasn’t actually considered meeting him somewhere, usually, when he went out, she knew chances were high of it not exactly going unseen, these past two days of next level stalking have reminded her of that fact more than anything ever has, “Can you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Meet somewhere? I mean... isn’t that... isn’t that sort of... dangerous?”

“No.” Jon says dryly, “I have bodyguards.” She understands why he says it so coolly. She knows his bodyguard’s name. The big one with the microphone is Arthur, the one Rhaenys calls her father’s only real friend, and then there’s Glen, who’s never talking, and Barristan and Joe. And the driver’s called Sandor and Jon’s PA’s name is Sam, who’s also one of his best friends...

Sansa knows everything about Jon’s bodyguards. They’d follow him to an amusement park, when the Starks took Robb and his friends there for his birthday. Or when they were fourteen and fifteen and they’d go out to Shake Shack in Covent Garden, on a weekly basis, with Robb, Arya, Theon... everyone, and from their seat they’d laugh at the opera singer down below, because fourteen year olds think opera singer’s faces are funny. Meanwhile, Arthur or Barristan would stand in a corner, avoiding the shopping people and lost tourists as he melted into the walls, never keeping his eyes off the back of the king’s son’s head. Jon’s bodyguard followed him all the way to the door of his dorm room at Eton, Sansa remembers. She remembers him crying about the bodyguards once, when he was about eight, or seven. She can’t remember the context, but she knows his disdain for what he calls his ‘babysitters’ hasn’t exactly softened.

“Right.” Sansa chuckles uncomfortably, “But maybe it’s better when we don’t... I mean, there might be photographers. You can just come over to my place, maybe that’s... better.”

Jon doesn’t respond for a moment during which Sansa realises he’s perfectly unaware of Harry’s trip to China.

“If you want.”

“Sure.” He says, though he’s never before sounded so terribly unenthusiastic.

“Harry’s in China.” Sansa blurts out then, which is meant to reassure him, though she realises it doesn’t quite work. It just makes her sound like a cheater.

In all honesty, a cheater is not what Sansa feels like. Her and Harry have been over for a long while. She loved him, still loves him, would probably have carried on dragging the relationship forward like a limping old man was it not for Jon, but they really are over. He was wonderful, and she spend some amazing years with him, he was part of an important chapter of her life, but he won’t be a returning character in the rest of her book, not if Sansa gets to write it the way she should.

“I’ll be there around eight, okay?”

“Sure.” Sansa says, and she tries to not sound too bright, too fake.

“Okay bye.” He hangs up just like that and Sansa’s left wondering why she’s been so desperate to have this conversation. It was about as uncomfortable as any telephone conversation she’s ever been forced to have.
She drops her phone down into the table and then drags herself into her bedroom, to shower and get dressed.

Lunch with Mia is horrible because she claims to see some ‘glow’ on Sansa and demands to know where it comes from.

“It’s probably just Scotland.”

“Girl no, that’s sex.”

“What is?”

“You.”

“I am sex?”

“Having some good one, too!” Maya laughs, “I mean… you don’t deny it, right? Did you and Harry make up? You must miss him already.”

“Not really.” Sansa says, and she tries not to sound too cold.

Maya frowns at that, “You two are still fighting?”

“Well, _no_,” Sansa says, “Cause he’s in China. On his way over there, that is. We’re over, basically. He made that pretty clear.”

Maya’s frown grows and the look of suspicion in her eyes is one Sansa tries to avoid at all cost.

“So, how are things with the horses?”

Maya’s Link to royalty is not having sex with one, she’s actually managed to make her way into the circles of blue blood by being as ridiculously obsessed with horses as much as Lyanna is.

“Good! I think Boreas is really going to be something, he’s still young and has a temper but when we manage to control him… he’ll be as fast as the wind.”

“I’ll bet on him, then.” Sansa says.

“No, don’t think we’ll put him to use during this year’s Ascot, you should bet on Legolas, instead.”

Sansa listens to Maya ramble on about horses and animal abusive horse races for another hour before she manages to liberate herself. She runs off to buy some new black lacy La Perla underwear, then makes an emergency appointment to get her legs waxed, visits the hairdresser and eventually ends up back home, still with an empty fridge.

Sansa curses at that, runs back out again, to the nearest grocery shop, where she buys bread, cruelly, milk, orange juice, cheese, canned tomato soup, a couple of apples, some bananas, crackers, potatoe chips, bell peppers, pasta, rice, mushrooms, spinach, handsoap, toilet paper and a couple of magazines. She runs back in to buy two bottles of wine, and then, when she’s finally back home, can’t help but order a pizza.

She’s eating that pizza in front of the Telly, her hair in a messy bun, when she realizes it’s 7:30 pm, and she knows she’s really gotta reapply her make up and put on her new underwear.

She’s about to jump up and prepare herself in a rush when the bell rings.
Pizza piece in hand she presses the button to open the door downstairs, and as she freaks out over the mess of the house and her own appearance, she realises she really can’t have looked much better put together when she was sitting in Winterfell’s kitchen, drunk and hornier than she can ever remember being. He still seemed to find her attractive then, and there’s little to be done, now.

She’s chewing on her pizza when he appears from the stairs, and as he spots her, standing there in her sweats, he grins.

“I’m sorry I’m early.” He says, “But my dad and my uncle don’t really get along so I was in a hurry to escape.”

Sansa gulps down her mouthful of pizza and admits, “I did not know you had an uncle. Other than your father’s brother.”

“He and my grandfather like to stay out of the public eye.” Jon nods and Sansa moves out of the doorway to let him in, “They live in Scotland, actually.”

“Your mother’s family?”

“Uncle Brandon and grandpa Snow.” Jon confirms.

“I think I might’ve heard of them, actually.” Sansa recalls, and she’s glad, because she doesn’t like not knowing such important things about him.

“Yeah, my uncle’s the guy from the infamous pics of my mum carrying baby me out of the hospital.”

Sansa’s not quite sure what to say then. She wishes she could claim she’d never seen these pics, cause they seem like such an invasion of privacy, but of course she has. The whole world has, and as Jon mentions it so causally, she assumes he’s perfectly aware of that.

Sansa instantly feels she can guess why uncle Brandon and Jon’s dad don’t get along all that well.

“Do you want something to drink? I have… I have orange juice and… and wine.”

Jon grins again, and he doesn’t seem half as uncomfortable as he sounded on the phone. Her shabby look doesn’t seem a turn off for him, actually, in some way, it seems to amuse him in the exact right way.

If Sansa had known he’d find her cute in pyjama trousers and an oversized jumper, eating a delivery pizza, she would not have spend £279,95 on overpriced lingerie.

“I’m good.” He says, then he takes off his jacket and looks at the remainders of the pizza, “Can I please have some?”

“Sure.”

“Only if you-“

“Take it.”

Sansa drops down in the armchair as she watches him eat the gone-cold pizza while she wonders how anyone can be so attractive while eating. He’s got one fine jawline, and it does something magnificent when he’s using it for chewing- like art.

“Have you heard from Robb?” He asks.
“He send me some pics of palm trees, white sandy beaches and expensive cocktails.” Sansa says and Jon chuckles.

“Yeah, me too.”

“Was the dinner that bad you left without finishing your meal?” Sansa asks then.

“No, it was fine. I just like pizza.”

Sansa smiles, “It’s your lucky day then, I nearly ordered sushi.”

“I don’t mind sushi either.” He says.

“I don’t share sushi, though.” Sansa says, and the two of them find themselves smirking at the other the way they’ve done countless times before in the last couple of months. It makes the butterflies in Sansa’s belly go wild.

“We can’t order food at the palace.” Jon says, “We gotta ask someone to pick it up for us, but ehm… they don’t really like doing that, so we try to do it as little as possible.”

“Yeah, I remember.” Sansa says, “You asked me if I wanted to come eat burgers with you and Robb and Aegon, at Rhaenys’ wedding. You said someone was on his way to pick it up.”

“Right!” Jon grins when he remembers, “I’d forgotten.”

Sansa hasn’t. It’d been the first event she’d went to ever since coming back to London and it ended up being that. It had been a crazy day. She barely recognised him, that’s how long it’d been, and he’s changed so much. Nothing remains of the shy long-faced short boy of her childhood memories.

“So… Harry’s in China?”

Sansa hadn’t expected him to start that conversation this soon, so she’s a little taken aback when she nods, “Yeah he’s in Hong Kong.”

“Why?”

“I… I don’t know. Work. He’s there for the bank.”

Jon watches her for a moment, opens his mouth to speak, then closes it again and continues his staring, “Hong Kong officially isn’t part of China.” He then says, “It’s an independent state with an independent flag. Thanks to… thanks to the British empire.”

“You’ve ever been?” Sansa asks, and Jon shakes his head.

“Only to Beijing. For the summer olympics of 2008. Long time ago.”

“That’s… that must’ve been amazing.”

Jon only shrugs, it doesn’t exactly seem like his fondest memory, “Uncle Vis is a member of the Olympic committee, it’s a miracle Britain can still participate.”

“I’m sure he doesn’t actually have all that much power.”

“No, but they give him too much opportunity to say racist, sexist or other offensive things. He wanted Wimbledon too, but my father didn’t let that happen. Serena Williams really hates him, I
know, cause she’s a friend of Rhaenys’. He hates her more though. He’s a racist arsehole. I know he used to have two sheep called Serena and Venus.”

If Sansa was chewing she’d probably nearly choke on her pizza at that piece of information.

“There’s a reason why they keep him away from the paralympics. Too high a risk for him to make unapologetic ableist comments.”

Sansa’s not sure what to say then. Jon can often speak of matters such as this as if they are perfectly normal to him. They are, of course, but he doesn’t quite seem to grasp that they’re not to Sansa, or perhaps he prefers to ignore that, because he doesn’t like to acknowledge how absurd his life is, or his family.

“You sure you don’t want wine?”

Jon shakes his head, “I’m still getting over the last time I consumed alcohol.”

Sansa can’t help but smile at the memory of the last time Jon consumed alcohol. It feels like ages ago, not merely a few days.

“When did you get back home?” He asks then.

“Last night.” Sansa says and suddenly that same frustration she’s felt for the past couple days, waiting for him to call her, comes bubbling up again.

She doesn’t want to talk about this. About when she got home, and about Robb’s pictures, or where or why Harry is in China. She wants to talk about them.

“Jon?” She whispers and when she looks up she finds him watching her intently, almost as if he’s scared, “Jon I… we have to talk.”

Jon nods and leans back in his seat, clearly leaving it up to her to lead this conversation. Which doesn’t please her at all.

He allows her to struggle a bit with her inner self, fumbling with the sleeve of her jumper, moving her eyes to every corner of her flat without actually facing him, before he says,

“I’m sorry I didn’t call sooner. I wasn’t sure if you’d want me to. I’m ehm… not so good at sensing that sort of stuff. I don’t really know the rules. Also, I hate phone calls so it’s easy for me to postpone them.”

Sansa breathes out and she feels her whole body relax. At that the paranoia of waiting for the phone to ring leaves her soul and the few grey hairs she gained turn red once again.

“That’s okay.” She mumbles.

“Anyway, I… yeah, I wanted to call you sooner. But I supposed that maybe… maybe you kind of needed some… time? Thought you’d call me if you felt a need to. So I waited because… well I assumed… I don’t know.”

It seems like Sansa isn’t the only one who did a lot of overthinking these last couple of days. Jon has one talent for talking a lot without actually saying anything and it leaves Sansa blinking at his face for a while. That is, until she realises she doesn’t possess the same illness. It’s not for nothing that she gobbled up so much of Tolstoy and Austen when she was a sickeningly romantic teenager.
“I missed you.” She says, because these are magic words and they’re the truth, “I thought that… for a moment I thought that you weren’t going to call and it was going to end in Scotland. And I… I don’t want that. I don’t want it to end.”

Jon’s eyes have grown in size, about doubled, and from the corner of her own she can see him play with the zipper of his jacket.

“Me neither.” He mutters then.

Sansa knows there’s probably a whole lot of other things she should say to him. Loads of other things they’d better discuss, but she decides that can wait when she gets up and walks over to him, and drops down in his lap.

She takes his face between her hands and kisses him, kisses him until her lips are numb, until she’s so weightless that she doesn’t even notice how he gently presses her down into to sofa, until she’s lying on her back, locked up underneath him in some hold she hopes will last forever.

Sansa’s glad she didn’t put on her fancy lingerie, it would take him time to pull it off, now, all she has to do is push her jumper up, pull it over her head and throw it away, somewhere in some corner.

The sofa is uncomfortable and only just large enough, but it would be too much of a waste of time to drag him with her into the bedroom, and perhaps, she feels, Jon doesn’t want to.

It’s not only she who feels guilt, she knows. He’s not the guy to not care. She’s seen the way he looked around this flat, checked out the pictures, all the little bits and bops and clutter that remind anyone who’s in here that this is as much Harry’s place as it’s Sansa’s. The tv that’s still on is his, and the Xbox beside it is too. Loads of books stacked on the shelves are his, and his trainers are lying around on the floor.

Sansa’s bedroom is Harry’s bedroom too, and that bed is his as well. He slept in it last night- they slept in it together, as all these nights before. She didn’t change the sheets and they still smell of him.

If Harry knew… if he could in any way know about this, about Jon, about what’s happening in his very own home… Sansa can’t begin to imagine what it is he might do, what it is he might feel.

It’s easy for Sansa to push all these ideas to the back of her head when she spreads her legs and feels Jon move inside of her, and when she sits up to cradle him and rolls her hips, taking control over the rhythm because she doesn’t always want him to go slow, sometimes she wants it to hurt a little, if only because it’s never enough. That feeling is so all consuming there’s little room she’s got left to still remember her own name. All she can do is close her eyes, moan when she has to, gasp when her breath is stolen from her, and move with him.

It wasn’t the alcohol that made it so good, she now knows. She already greatly suspected it. It’s like losing a different kind of virginity - because it’s more than sex. It’s maddening and blissful at the same time.

But, when she lays her head to his chest, rubbing her cheek to his t-shirt, turns her face to peek at the tv, where she spots no one but him on the screen, standing next to his mother, who stands beside his father, who addresses the nation in his New Years speech… reality hits her, and Sansa suddenly feels a little sick.

Instead of pushing herself off him, she only drags herself closer against him, as he wraps the
blanket, with up till now only decorative purposes, around her, to keep her warm. Beneath her ear she can hear his heartbeat, it’s steady and comforting, it reassures her in every way, reminds her of why and of how, but it doesn’t take away the her nervousness.

They can’t keep doing this. There has to come a certain point where things are cleared up.

Her focus is solely on his fingers drawing circles on her back when he switches the tv and puts on some episode of ITV’s Dancing on Ice, probably just to get this own bored face off the screen.

“How was it?” Sansa mutters.

“Boring as fuck.” He says and Sansa can feel his voice roll through his lungs underneath her ear.

“That bad?” She smiles.

“It just… went on for hours, and I forgot the name of the husband of the high commissioner of New Zealand… I thought it was Christian, but it really wasn’t. So that’s going to be awkward for some time.”

Sansa can’t help but giggle, “What was his name?”

“I still don’t know.” Jon confesses.

“You should’ve looked it up!” Sansa says, and when he moves his arm to grab his phone as it lays on the teatable in front of him, Sansa has to lift her head up.

“Siri, who’s the husband of the High Commissionair of New Zealand?”

“I’m sorry 2-8-3-9-5-4-8-3, I don’t know what that is.” Siri responds.

“You’re a number now?”

“I can’t tell Siri who I really am.” Jon grins, “that’s dangerous.” He clears his throat, “Who’s the New Zealand High Commissionair’s husband? Siri?”

“I could be a little off, but here it is:” Siri says.

“My phone just opened maps.” Jon says, and he tries again.

“I found this on the web for who’s the husband of the High Commissionair’s husband of New Zealand.” Siri says.

Sansa leans up and laughs, “That’s the American one.”

Jon groans, “I don’t care anymore.”

Sansa giggles when she pulls his phone from his hands, and she can’t help but love how he has absolutely no issue with allowing her to do that. Harry never lets her look in his phone, he claims that’s a breach of privacy. She takes the time to type it in, then finds it on the woman’s wiki page, “Christopher.” She says, eventually.

“Well… at least I was somewhat close.” He says, pulls the phone from her hand and drops it back down on the table.

“Yeah, that does not make it less bad.” Sansa says, grinning down on him as he pushes her hair from her face so he can properly kiss her without accidentally suffocating on a strand of hair.
“You got a balcony, don’t you?” He asks after a while, as Sansa dreamily sucks on his lower lip.

Sansa only nods, and her nose bumps with his when she does, before she places some multiple kisses to his mouth.

“I really- need… to smoke.” Jon manages to tell her through her refusal to stop kissing him.

“Smoking kills you.” Sansa says, kissing his chin, before she snuggles her face in the crook of his neck.

“Loads of things kill you. He says and he pulls her face back up by a handful of hair at the back of her head, “If I’m not careful, you’ll end up killing me.”

“How?” Sansa giggles, “Never on purpose, I wouldn’t ever.”

“Because,” he says as he pushes her off him, gently but surely, “You’re going to drive me mad.”

His voice sounds like he’s joking, and he’s gotta be, of course, but he doesn’t look at her when he says it, as he sits up and pulls his jeans back on.

“That won’t be on purpose either.” Sansa says, and she’s not giggling anymore.

“I know.” He says, before pulling his jumper back over his head.

Sansa slowly, almost lazily, puts her clothes back on once he’s gone. Then, in her pjs once again, she shovels over towards the kitchen, from where she can see him lean over the railing of the balcony, staring down at the empty garden full of trashcans below. Sansa’s flat doesn’t necessarily have the best city view.

She fills herself a glass of red, then opens the door and steps out into the cold freezing London air, on nothing but a pair of fluffy socks.

He looks up when she closes the door behind her, but he doesn’t answer her smile.

Sansa’s about to feel her anxiety come up when he turns his head away from her, every inch of his body language making her uncomfortable, when he asks, “Have you… are you and Harry still together?”

Sansa gulps a tight feeling in her throat away and tries not to feel offended, “Of Course not.”

Jon looks up, finally, his brows knitted together, giving her a look of disbelief.

“You’d think… you’d think you’d be here, right now, if I and Harry were still together?”

Jon’s got nothing to say for himself.

“Do you think I would have slept with you? If-“

“You didn’t say, that’s all.”

“What?”

Jon shrugs, “You didn’t say.”

“Say what?”
“You didn’t actually tell me that you and-“

“Yes I did? At Robb’s wedding-“

“You didn’t.” Jon shakes his head.

“I didn’t?”

Jon shakes his head again.

“Oh.”

“I would have remembered.” He says, his frowns disappears when he adds, in a whirlwind of words, “I ehm… I figured it best to just ask you. Cause, ehm… you know, I’m getting older and I decided that the mature and grown up thing to do would be to just ask you, so I wouldn’t have to think about it a lot, drive myself mad, y’know.”

Sansa nods stupidly.

“But I didn’t really want to ask. In case you-“

“His stuff is still here cause he’s in China and because he doesn’t actually believe me when I say I’m done. But I am done.”

“Okay.” Jon says.

“Okay.” Sansa nods, smiles and feels as happy as a child when he grins back.

For a moment they stare and smirk at each other like all their problems have randomly faded, and Sansa can’t recall feeling this bubbly happy since graduating uni. After a long peaceful silence where the two of them lean on the railing, shoulder to shoulder, wind breezing through their hair as the darkness of night is invisible in the thousands of lights of city nightlife, nothing like Scotland, he breaks the spell by glancing at his watch.

“You have to leave, don’t you?” Sansa asks.

Jon nods.

“I’ll see you soon?” She wanted to ask tomorrow, but he might have something to do, he probably does, and she doesn’t believe she’d deal with rejection all that well. Not now.

Jon finally looks up and smiles, not happily, not amused, she’s not sure how, only that it comforts her, “Yeah.”

“Okay.” Sansa says, “Maybe I’ll… maybe I’ll call you.”

Jon smiles to himself now, more than to her, and she can’t help but shamelessly scan his face with her eyes. Every corner of it.

“When’s Harry coming back?” He asks.

“Two weeks.” Sansa says.

“He left yesterday?”

“Yeah.” When another blow of wind dances through the knit of her jumper Sansa moves closer
him, in hope of finding some warmth.

She’s not left disappointed when he wraps an arm around her shoulders, and then pecks her temple. Sansa leans against him, wishing she could kiss him, but she’s afraid that might ruin the moment.

They’re good at silence, Sansa knows. It’s not wrong for them, when neither says a thing. They can be comfortable and at ease when no one’s saying a word. In silence, you’ll often find what noise could never tell you. And this particular silence tells her all she needs to know.

It’s disturbed when her phone goes off, and Sansa hears the tune through the half-opened door. She waits the small amount of seconds she is allowed to take, purely for simple and useless delay, before she goes inside, to answer the phone.

Thinking there can only be one person who’d call her this late at night, only one person who’s at the other end of the world, jetlagged and only just landed, only one person she can’t speak to now- Sansa’s left surprised and confused when it’s Arya’s name who pops up on the screen. Her face dances in front of Sansa’s eyes, her little sister’s happy and bubbly smile.

If Arya’s calling past midnight on a day not even Aegon would consider part of the weekend, she might actually be in real trouble this time, and knowing that makes Sansa’s throat tighten when she takes up the phone, “Arya?”

“Sans? Are you still awake?”

“No, this is me sleeptalking.” Sansa instantly regrets that terrible joke when Arya sobs, “What’s wrong?”

Arya sobs again, “Sansa… Sansa I don’t know what to do.”

“What do you mean? What happened?”

There must be something of horror and terrorizing fear in Sansa’s voice which causes Jon to pop his head through the door opening. His eyes find Sansa’s and he instantly steps in, closes the door, and moves over to her.

“Arya?”

“Grandpa’s not breathing.”

Sansa grabs the fabric of Jon’s sleeve, “What?”

“He’s not breathing, Sansa.”

“What do you… where is he?”

“Home. He’s just home we… I came over to… he wanted to have a drink, and I-I did, I mean… I- I… he said… and then he fell asleep, and now I can’t w-wake him up.”

“Call… call 999.”

“I already have.”

“Good. Now just… just stay calm, and… have you tried to check his pulse?”

Arya sobs again, “I have Sansa, I have it’s… it’s not there.”
“Just… just try again.”

“S-Sansa no… Sansa, I think he’s d-dead.”

Tears drop down Sansa’s cheek, and it’s no longer she who’s grabbing Jon, but the other way around, as he helps her stand upright.

“Wait for the ambulance.”

“I am.” Arya’s voice gives Sansa the impression that she’s crying as hard as Sansa is herself, which lingers to sobbing like a scared child.

“W-where’s mama?”

“Asleep.” Arya sobs, “She’s asleep, e-everyone’s asleep.”

“Y-you have to wake them.”

“N-no.” Arya says, “Sansa, I can’t you… you have to come over here.”

Sansa nods at that and pushes Jon away. She walks over towards her white Converse All Stars, thrown in the corner near the door, and starts failing at putting them on with one hand.

“I’m putting on my shoes right now.”

“I don’t want to wake them.” Arya says, “I don’t… I don’t w-want to tell them.”

“You just… you wake up Bran.” Sansa suggests. Bran was always the calmest one of them all, he’ll know what to do, he’ll even know what to say. That’s Bran.

“O-okay.” Arya hiccups.

“Wake up Bran.”

“I will.”

“And wake up Rickon. Just wake them up before the ambulance is there.”

“They’re already here.” Arya says then, “I can hear them.”

“Good.” Sansa says, though she’s not sure what’s so good about an ambulance. Good would be no ambulance needed, “I’ll be there in a m-minute, okay?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s gonna be okay.” Sansa tries, but Arya ignores that comment, as she should, cause it’s as empty as a politician’s lie.

“You’ll be here?”

“Just a minute.” Sansa promises and then Arya hangs up, just when the ambulance’s sirens reach the phone’s microphone.

Sansa’s aggressively trying to put her shoes on when Jon kneels down and grabs her trembling hands.

“Let’s just put on a pair of boots, hmm?”
Sansa looks up and finds his eyes warm, his face in control, she doesn’t believe she’s ever seen him so calm, which says a lot.

She shakily nods, allows him to help her up, and then runs into her bedroom, to put on the first pair of suede Chelsea boots she can find.

After that she grabs her trusty brown Cloé Nile bag, her keys and cardholder already in there, and puts on her Rag & Bone quilted shell down jacket, which is as warm as it’s going to get with her currently available range of outerwear that she’s installed on the rack near the door.

She’s already dialing a taxi company when Jon pulls her phone from her hand, somewhere halfway down with the lift.

“Don’t be silly,” he says, “My car’s outside.”

“Where did you park?” She asks, and the answer is right in front of her eyes once they’re standing outside, “You’re not allowed to park there.”

Jon ignores her as he opens the door for her and helps her get from the slippery footpath in the car.

“I’ve got my magic card.” He says, as soon as he’s behind the wheel, and he picks it from behind the window, and throws it in her lap, right before he starts the engine and takes the car off.

“You’re a… you’re a government official?”

“No, I’m a member of the royal family.”

Sansa turns the blue badge around in her hands, “That’s… that’s unfair.”

Jon keep his eyes on the road when he adds, “I’ve never paid a fine for parking in my life.”

“Thank god.” Sansa mutters, “You would have such a hard time paying it.”

Jon fails to suppress a smile and, eyes still on the road, he asks, “You’d want to swap with me?”

“Currently? Yeah.”

Jon realises what she means and for a fraction of a second he looks at her, then he removes his left hand off the clutch and grabs hers, as they both lay in her lap, still holding the blue badge.

“Thanks for bringing me.”

Jon only nods, as if he refuses to accept gratitude for that, “Put your seatbelt on.” He says instead and Sansa obliges.

When they’re nearing the right neighbourhood he pulls his hand back and grabs his phone, dials a number, then waits a second and says, “Hey Arthur. No. Yeah. I know. Listen I’m… I’m not going to be late tonight. Yeah, that’s what I mean. I’m not going to be late, I’m going to be very late. Aren’t they already asleep? I don’t know, I’ll call you again. No, it’s fine. Yeah, I will. Yeah, promise.”

He hangs up again and puts the phone away.

“Was that your nanny?”

“No, it was Arthur Dayne. My father’s head of security. If I get kidnapped and they’ll cut my ear
off to force the government to pay a billion pounds in smart money it’ll basically be his fault, so he likes to know where I’m at.”

“You didn’t tell him, though.” Sansa reminds him.

“He trusts me.” Jon simply says, “And he’s used to Aegon.”

“You can’t park there.” Sansa says, but then she remembers she really shouldn’t give a damn and as soon as the car comes to an halt she opens the door.

She runs over towards the front door, around the ambulance that’s parked nearly as anti-socially as Jon’s Range Rover. She’s already rung the bell when she realises he hasn’t followed her, and she jumps down the stone stairs leading up to the entrance to check where the hells he’s keeping up.

“What are you doing?” She asks, when she spots him leaning against the car.

Jon looks up and seems extremely unsure whether he should move only an inch closer towards the house.

“Just… just back over here. I’m not letting you drive away from me now.” Sansa really means that.

Jon bites his lower lip, then pushes himself off the car and walks over to her, to grab her hand and pull her with him, back to the door. Just when Sansa raises her hand to ring the bell again, the door’s opened, and as if in reflex Sansa drops Jon’s hand, when she stands face to face with her father.

Ned’s face of concern changes to confusion, and Sansa hates herself when she asks him, “How’s grandpa?” Mostly because she knows it’s the only way to dodge the bullet of questions he’s about to fire.

There’s no need for Sansa to ask, she already knows, though it doesn’t stop her from collapsing in her father’s arms when he says it aloud.
Chapter Summary

Dialogue is character and character is plot.
-George V

“Son, I don’t mean to be rude,” Ned says, “But why are you here?”

Jon gulps and looks up from his seat on the sofa, “Hmm?”

“It’s three AM and my father-in-law just passed away. Truly, I am only asking.”

Jon’s eyes shoot to Arya, who’s eyebrows are raised in what seems to be a mixture of interest and amusement, so far as anyone in her state can feel those emotions. Aside from her and Ned, there’s no one in the drawing room, no one other than the loudly ticking clock that makes the silence only more apparent.

“I ehm… I and Sansa we were just… we were just hanging out.”

“Aha.” Ned says.

“She’s… she’s going to work for the museum and I’m… I’ve been a patron for years, so we just… talked about that.”

Ned says nothing, only gives Jon a look that seems to cut right through him. Ned’s silence has Jon rambling, which is never a good thing.

“I mean, it wasn’t that late, it’s just that I had dinner with… dinner with the family. My mum’s family, I mean. You know my uncle… Brandon? You know what he’s like… what he’s like around my dad. I’d rather not leave them alone in a room together. So we couldn’t meet before that. Me and Sansa, I mean. And then Arya called, and I had my car so… so I just thought I’d bring her, so she didn’t have to take a taxi, cause that would’ve been… So now I’m here.”

Ned still seems to find it unnecessary to speak his mind, and he only nods.

When another silence follows Arya chuckles.

Jon’s glad to bring her some distraction and amusement during such horrible times, but honestly, he would have preferred it to be about anything other than this.

Sansa, probably capable of smelling his shame, walks in then. She’s taken off her shoes and is wearing fluffy slippers, but she’s still in that same outfit he found her in when she opened the door to her flat. Very baggy, very casual, very comfortable.

Her crying ruined her mascara and she took all of it off, so that her eyelashes now have the colour of gold. The blue in her pupils is only brighter now that it’s rimmed with bloodstained eyes, and her cheeks are as white as cloth.
“I called Robb.” Sansa announces, “It was only afternoon in Bora Bora. He’s ehm… he’s taking a plane home. He’ll probably be here somewhere tomorrow by night… it ehm, it’s cause they have to take three different planes, and it’s all very last minute, of course, but he hopes to be here by tomorrow night.”

“Good.” Ned nods, “how’s your mother?”

“She and uncle Edmure are talking now, ehm… I think she’ll want to lie down soon.”

“I’ll go to her.” Ned says and he quickly gets up and leaves.

Sansa looks from Arya to Jon and back to Arya until Arya gets the memo and leaves the room without actually informing anyone where or why she’s going.

Jon rubs his sweaty hands and has a hard time looking up at Sansa’s face. There’s something about the pain on there that just makes it nearly unbearable.

“I’m going to spend the night here.” She says.

Jon nods as if he agrees, which isn’t at all what he intends, which makes him hate himself for his lack of tact.

“I’m so sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Please don’t… don’t apologise.” Jon says and he finally manages to look up, where he finds her eyes wide, teary and begging.

“Thank you for bringing me.” She says then, so softly he barely hears.

“Of course.” Jon gets up, walks over to her and takes her in his arms, where she shivers and shudders and closes her eyes.

After some while she pulls away slightly, breathes out a sob, and rubs her eyes dry with the back off her hand. Then she looks at him and attempts to smile, he presumes, and he presses a kiss to one of her moist cheeks.

“You should go home.” She says and she lifts her hand to push hair from his face, “It’s so late.”

Jon nods, “Yeah, I just didn’t want to go without saying goodbye, making sure you were fine.”

Sansa smiles though some tears appear in the corner of her eyes again, and she presses a kiss to his lips, “Don’t you have loads of stuff to do tomorrow?” She asks.

“Well it’s ehm… it’s World Mental Health Day tomorrow, and Rhaenys is really focusing on that so she’s hosting a reception at Kensington Palace, and I and Aegon were supposed to come but-“

“Yeah she mentioned it.” Sansa rubs her eyes again, “She’s very excited.”

Jon nods, watches her face for a moment as her eyes scan the room as if she’s looking for something she doesn’t actually wants to find, “Just… just call me when you get home tomorrow, okay? And if you want me to come over, I’ll be there.”

Sansa nods.

“I’ll tell them I’m ill or something.”
“But people will-“

“You shouldn’t worry about people.” Jon says and he pushes her hair back over her shoulders, “You shouldn’t worry about all that.”

Sansa nods, then sobs again, and drops down against him once more, “Thank you.” She breathes in his neck, and he feels her tears moisten the fabric of his shirt.

Jon presses kisses to her hair, then leans his cheek to the top of her head and mutters, “I’m so sorry about your grandfather.”

Sansa says nothing as another sob escapes from her throat and she rubs her cheek to the black wool of his coat.

He wishes he could take her home, not leave her behind here. He doesn’t want her to sleep alone tonight, he wants to hold her and comfort her and stay awake until he’s sure she’s asleep.

Sansa let’s him out, and before she’s about to close the door, she pulls his hand to get him to turn so she can kiss him again.

Jon can’t remember ever kissing anyone at the front door of a house that looks out at the road. A quite busy road, at that. A house where a duke just passed away, a duke who also happens to have been the London major’s father-in-law. It might be three at night, but cameras don’t sleep. He’s been trained to not be so reckless.

Jon really can’t bother to make himself care, however, and as he drives back home, he feels his fingers tremble.

The next morning she calls him at 10:30, which is only just after his father has a total fit about the time he got home. Which happens to have both been a ‘breach of agreements’ as well as just ‘plain dangerous’.

“Where are you?”

“Still in bed.” She says with a sad chuckle. “Again, actually. I got up around six, faced everyone, then had to go and hide in my room to lie down. You?”

“I’m home, at the palace, just had breakfast with my mum… kind of wishing I didn’t get up this morning.”

“I didn’t sleep a wink.” She confesses, “I… I wish I went home with you.”

“I know.” Jon says. He wishes that too, “But it’s good you’re with your family.”

“What time’s the reception?” She asks.

“Starts at one and it’s over around five.”

“Okay.” She breathes.

“But I can leave early.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I can just not go at all, too.”
“It’s fine. You should go. I’ll stay with my family.”

“Okay. Yeah- you should.”

“I don’t really want to, though.” She confesses then and she breathes out a sad chuckle, “My mum really only wants to be comforted by my dad or uncle Bryden, Arya completely shuts off all her emotions, Rickon is one hot mess of ADHD and uncle Edmure is going on about how it’s wrong that aunt Lysa isn’t here… meanwhile I’m just hoping Robb will be home soon.”

“He will be.” Jon says, “He’ll try and get home as soon as possible.”

Robb texted Jon, to let him know his grandfather passed away, and that he and Jeyne are already on their way back home. Jon wasn’t exactly sure how to confess to his friend that he was already fully aware, so he simply responded with a ‘I heard, I’m so sorry man. If there’s anything I can do, lemme know.’

There isn’t much Jon can do for Robb, but he knows he probably can help Sansa, which is all he really wants to do anyway, so he rushes his way through the reception and leaves early, which infuriates Rhaenys, but he can’t bring himself to care.

“I’ll explain later.” He says when he makes his way out of the reception, but Rhaenys won’t accept that.

“You can explain it to me now.” She says, when she stops him somewhere near the grand staircase.

Jon pulls her grabbing fingers off his sleeve and pushes her away from him, “Sansa’s grandfather died last night.” He tells her.

“Oh. I… I did not know.”

“Never thought I’d hear you admit to such a thing.” Jon says, before he turns to walk away.

Rhaenys grabs his sleeve again, “Jon please… I’m sorry, but I couldn’t have known.”

“Exactly.”

“Give Sansa my condolences. And Robb too.”

He rushes out of his suit, puts on the clothes he prefers to put on when he hopes no one will spot him, gets in a car different from the one he drove in last night, and drives over towards the Stark residence.

He texts her when he’s there, as they’d agreed, and three minutes later she sits down at his left, and shuts the door.

“Hey.” She says. Her eyes look that way when people have been crying for hours, and Jon can’t help but be amazed at how blue her eyes are in contrast.

“Hi.”

She gives him a warm but sad smile and then leans forward, to press her lips to his, “Thank you for picking me up.”

“Sure.” He says, “The trip might take a little longer now, I’m not gonna rush again.”

“That’s fine.” Sansa smiles, and she leans back in her seat, to make herself comfortable.
“How are you?” He asks once they’re well on the road.

She only shrugs and Jon places his left hand in her lap, to grab hers, and her sweaty fingers eagerly entangle with his.

“You’ve had dinner?”

Sansa shakes her head.

“I’ll make you something.” He says, and his voice, to him, sounds incredibly brave. He’s not a chef, he hates cooking, he never cooks, has never actually had to do much cooking ever in his life, and it is a reoccurring joke among people close to him how it’s a simple and plain fact that Jon can’t boil an egg to save his life.

But if Sansa hasn’t had dinner yet, and she’s hungry, and she wants to eat, he’ll cook. He’ll cook for Sansa. He’ll even look up some online recipe with a difficulty rate of two out of five and an overall four star appreciation.

“That’d be great, but I’m not sure how much food I’ve got at home.”

“I have money, I can buy food.”

Sansa smiles slightly, “You can go to the grocery shop?”

“Yeah I, you know, have legs, and I pick the things from the shelves, and I’ll use my hand to grab my wallet, and use my ability to count to give the right amount of cash—“

“Stop.” Sansa says, she smiles but shakes her head, “Don’t be like that. I know what it’s like when you’re out in public. And I see no bodyguard. Isn’t it dangerous for you to just go to a shop?”

Jon needs some time to find a proper response that won’t actually confuse her more, “I think it might be more dangerous for me to go to a shop than it would be for you, or someone not so… someone a little more ordinary, I don’t deny that. But I think I’ll be fine.”

“You don’t have to.” Sansa decides.

“I really don’t mind.” Jon says.

“Can you cook?”

“Anyone can cook.”

Sansa laughs at that, then shakes her head in disbelieve, and leans with the side of her face against the window, to stare out of it.

When they get home he suggests she takes a bath, which she does only after she looks through her cabins and her freezer.

“This is a meal.” She says, pointing at some vegetables, “Just… go get some chicken or… shrimps of something, and some noodles or rice, and I’ll have a bath, and I’ll be back in time to stop you from thinking you might actually be capable of putting it in the pan.”

“What did Robb tell you?”

“What do you mean?”
“About my cooking.”

“Nothing.”

“Yes he did.”

Sansa smirks, “What would he have told me?”

“That’s what I’m asking you.”

“Just that you burned down curry at Eton from time to time.”

“Right.” Jon shakes his head and can’t help but feel a bit betrayed, “You can just take a bath, I’ll be fine.”

Sansa frowns though smiles in her disbelieve.

“I mean it. You go take a bath.”

“Okay.” She says after some hesitation, then departs to the bathroom.

45 minutes later Jon has realised that just going to the groceries isn’t something as simple as it sounds, because how was he supposed to know the fish would be that close to the frozen fruit, and the noodles are in the Asian food section, nowhere near the pasta.

He didn’t want to ask someone in the shop, because he already noticed them staring, and if he’d go up to them, they’d know for sure it was him, and he’d have to tell them no when they’d ask for selfies, after which they’d start making zoomed-in pics of his back, thinking he doesn’t notice that at all.

When he gets back, using the key she gave him, the flat smells of unions and garlic in a pan.

“You don’t take long baths.” Jon says.

“I got out after three minutes because it made me think.”

“Oh.” Jon can only say, “I hope you don’t mind, but I brought some coke, cause you only have orange juice.”

“You paid for it yourself, didn’t you?” Sansa smiles, and then throws mushrooms into the mix in the pan.

She doesn’t have a dining table, so they just eat in front of the tv, watching some BBC documentary about sharks, which doesn’t interest him at all, and he’s quite sure it doesn’t interest her either. She doesn’t speak, only asks him how the reception was, and if he’s tired. But when he tries to ask how she’s feeling, she quickly shuts herself away.

It’s only after they’ve had the most slow, careful, attentive and gentle sex that Jon has ever had in his entire life, and she’s lying in the crook of his arm, with her head on his shoulder, fumbling with his hand between her fingers, that she starts talking.

At first only practical things. Like when and where the funeral will be, and what they’ll do with her grandfather’s clothes, when her mother has an appointment with the lawyer to take a look at the will... these sort of things.

After that she goes on to tell him how Arya’s doing, how Bran and Rickon are coping, how her
father is supporting her mother, how uncle Edmure is trying to be strong for them all, and how Robb will arrive at Heathrow in the morning.

“I can go pick him up?” Jon suggest.

“Could you?” She turns her head to look up, “That would be amazing, that way mummy won’t have to do it. Papa couldn’t get off work, you see, he’s so busy, and I don’t have a car… I don’t have a driver’s license either. He could take a taxi, but I would rather have someone waiting for him when he arrives.”

“No, sure. I mean, of course I’ll do that.”

“You don’t have somewhere to be?”

“I’m sure I do, but I can cancel. If I say it’s for Robb, because his grandfather passed away, they’ll understand.”

Sansa nods and kisses his chin, “You’re amazing, thank you.” She says, after which he finally manages to feel he can ask her how she is doing without her either lying or refusing to answer in general.

She does twirl around it for a bit. She goes on to say that it’s better, her grandfather was old, and his Alzheimer’s was getting worse. He couldn’t live on his own anymore, and his care demanded a lot of Catelyn’s attention, of which much should’ve gone to Rickon. He could only ever talk about the past, Sansa says, and then she breaks when she remembers how often her grandfather spoke of his late wife.

Jon holds her as she cries. He doesn’t hush her, because if she doesn’t want to cry, she’ll stop herself. He doesn’t tell her everything will be alright, cause it won’t. Her grandfather is gone, and that hurts, and it’ll hurt for a while. Saying it’s fine won’t help her, Jon knows that.

“You’ll be fine.” He says instead, “You’re strong.”

She falls asleep then, around eleven, and when he gets up from the bed, somewhere near midnight, he thinks she’s fast away, until she grabs his arm and pulls him back down, clutches him tight in some locking embrace.

“Where are you going?” She asks, snuggling her face in the crook of his neck.

“Gotta go to the loo.” He mutters, which is partly true. He really better should leave. It was one thing to lay in the bed, but it’ll be another to fall asleep here and spend the night. It’s not his bed. Lying in it only reminds him that in many ways, this isn’t as right as it feels.

“You’ll come back?” She asks, because she knows.

“Uhuh.”

“Okay.” She says, and she lets him go as if she gives her consent.

When he comes back she pulls him towards her for more than just cuddling, and she makes sure to look at his face when she moves on top of him. Her moans are soft, nearly whispers, and he smothers them with kisses.

“Do you have to leave?” She asks, when he spoons her, rubbing the back of his leg with her footpad as she holds his hand tight in hers.
“Yeah.”

“Okay.”

“I can stay.” He says, which isn’t true, but he doesn’t care. If she wants him to stay he wants to know, and if he’ll know, he’ll stay. He wants to stay.

Sansa nods, “We can pick Robb up, together.” She says, though they both know that him staying has got nothing to do with Robb.

Jon, waking up the next morning because she showers his face with soft kisses, has nothing to do with Robb. Them showering together, and him being able to make her giggle, when they have breakfast, because he makes a stupid joke, has nothing to do with Robb either. Nor does Jon watching her apply her make-up in front of her dressing table as she rambles on about something with Marie Antoinette’s embroiderer… None of that is because he has to pick Robb up.

Jon doesn’t suffer through some angry calls from Connington and Sam just cause he’s doing the Starks a favour. When Jon waits with Sansa at the right gate, watching her as she nibbles on a sandwich that’s apparently her favourite, one with cream cheese and lettuce, he knows he’s not here for Robb.

He’s here not even so much for Sansa, but more so because he feels he has to be. There’s no one else who should be doing this, no one but him who’d be the right person.

Doing this for her feels right, even though it’s maybe not. It’s the sort of thing Harry probably would want to do. A boyfriend thing. When Jon drinks his coffee, spots Robb, waves, and then watches as Sansa breaks down in silent tears when her brother holds her, he knows that he doesn’t care whether or not he’s her boyfriend, all that matters is that this is just the way it should be.

“Good to see you, man.” Robb says, bro-hugging him with one arm.

“Jon offered to pick you up.” Sansa says, smiling, “He ehm… we were in a meeting for the museum when Arya called, actually.”

“Really?” That info causes Robb to hug Jon again. Little does he know, “Thanks so much.”

Jon’s supposed to visit a premiering theatre performance in Covent Garden that afternoon, which is why he drops Sansa, Robb and Jeyne off at the Belgravia Stark residence, despite the look of pure dread in Sansa’s eyes when he informs her they’ll have to separate for a few hours.

When he gets home Jon quickly changes, showers, and rushes back to Belgravia, to pick her up before they go back to her Chelsea flat, where they go through the same sort of pattern as they did the night before, except now Sansa makes him stop the car near the grocery shop, so they can buy whatever it is she needs together, and she doesn’t complain about his parking.

She makes a lasagna, and they eat it in front of the telly, watching a History channel documentary about the Russian Revolution. Again, Jon’s pretty sure neither of them are all that interested, though this time, Sansa can guess the dates of events before Attenborough’s voice informs them, and she even shakes her head once when she disagrees with a conclusion, though the error doesn’t seem to frustrate her much.

He helps her put the dishes in the dishwasher when she suddenly blurts out, “I called Harry.”

Jon looks up and says nothing though he imagines she easily spots the fear in his eyes.
“Well, really, he called me for the one hundredth time and I finally took up the phone.”

“Oh.” Jon stupidly says.

“I know I should’ve answered before, I just… you know, wasn’t ready.”

Jon nods as if he gets what she means.

“Anyway, it was as I expected. I hung up on him as soon as he raised his voice.”

“He raised his voice?”

Sansa shrugs as if that part didn’t surprise her one bit and she casually informs him, “I told him that once he’s back from China I want him out of the flat within two days. Daddy bought it so it’s only fair that he’ll be the one to go. Anyway, I picked it out, decorated it all, made it home… he just moved in. So now he can just… move out.”

“He’ll be back in two weeks?”

“Something like that.” Sansa shrugs again, “I hope by then he’ll have come to terms with all this.”

“All this?”

“The break up.” She verified, she shakes her head at Harry’s silliness as she closes the dishwasher, “He ehm… I dunno, I feel like he doesn’t take me seriously when I tell him it’s over.”

“He doesn’t?”

Sansa shakes her head some more, “He’s never taken me seriously.” She mutters to herself, as she presses some buttons.

“Well that’s… I mean… I guess he-“

“He thinks we have to talk, he thinks he’ll be able to change my mind.” The dishwasher starts with the loud banging sound of splashing water, “To talk me out of it, so to speak. He’s always had a lot of faith in his manipulative ways. For good reason, I guess. He is a banker.”

“Well-“

“I didn’t tell him about you.” She looks up, almost apologetic, “I guess I’m saving that as a last resort. I’m sorry, I probably should have.”

Jon shrugs, “Don’t apologise. I leave you to handle Harry whatever way you see fit.”

“I just don’t wanna deal with him right now.” She says and her puppy eyes widen as if she’s begging him for understanding, “I don’t wanna talk to him or see him or listen to his demeaning voice. I just wanna… I just wanna be left in peace.”

Jon finally feels like he understands something and he attempts to give her a sweet smile she returns.

“Don’t apologise.” Jon says again and she seems somewhat reassured. Jon’s just glad she told him, if only to calm his nerves. Ten minutes later they’re lying naked in her bed and around midnight she caresses his face with her fingers as if she’s drawing paintings on it, and smiles through her exhausted teary eyes, “Thank you. For being here. Y’know, I… I don’t wanna be alone.”
Jon wants to tell her there’s no place he’d rather be, but instead, he stupidly jokes, “Had nothing better to do.”

Sansa smirks, “You lazy royal dimwits, sitting on your arses all day, living the good life over the backs of hardworking taxpayers—“

“If you’ve got a problem with that, it’s your father you should talk to. He might be able to do something about it.”

Sansa gives him a breathtakingly beautiful sassy smile as she climbs on top of him, “He’s a monarchist.”

“He’s a conservative.” Jon says, before he jokes, “That’s what he told me, once, when I found out he’s a member of that party.”

“You talk to him about politics? That’s brave. I never do.” Sansa smirks.

Jon pushes himself up too, to press a kiss to her nose, “I don’t wanna talk about your dad.”

Sansa giggles and pushes his hair behind his ears, “Is it my dad or the waste of money that is monarchy that bothers you here?”

Jon grabs both her legs in his hands, softly digging his thumbs in her upper thighs, “Did your mother never teach you the three things you shouldn’t talk about, when you’re at a party?”

“Party? You consider this a party?” Sansa laughs.

“It’s politics, money and religion. You just combined the three.”

“Religion, too?”

“My father’s head of the Anglican Church. I’d say that’s religion.”

Sansa shakes her head, faking disbelieve, “I’m glad my mother never advised me that, I might’ve ended up as uneducated as you.”

Jon pushes her down in the bed and she shrieks and giggles when he tickles her. It makes him exceptionally pleased to make her laugh, she looks almost happy, and that’s great. There are a lot of these fleeting moments where she appears happy, almost careless, especially the next day, when Sansa decides she can get away with staying home all day, not leaving the house.

“Daddy and Arya will take care of mummy. I just wanna stay inside.” She tells him and he nods, “Do you have-“

“I’ll cancel.”

“No, don’t be silly, I’ll-“

“I wanna cancel.”

“Jon-“

“I’ve already cancelled everything in my head, you can’t make me uncancel.”

She grins at him, hugs him, and then proceeds to make love to him all day. She doesn’t cry when they’re doing it, or when they’re ordering food, which they do twice, or when they’re watching a
collection of her favourite movies, or when they’re just lazily kissing… but there are plenty of moments in between when she’s crying her eyes out. Especially when she pulls out some baby album books and scans through them, to try and find some nice pictures to frame.

“He taught me how to cycle.” She sobs, showing him a picture of her ten year old self on a baby blue bicycle, “And how to swim… there are all these rivers near Riverrun… he taught all of us how to swim. It was like a… like a tradition.”

Hi squeezes her hand and lets her wet his t-shirt with all her salty tears. He doesn’t want to enjoy it, he really knows he shouldn’t, but he can’t help but feel somewhat, somewhere, somehow a tiny bit pleased with how he gets to be there, now.

This may be Harry’s flat, and Jon might be sitting in Harry’s sofa, drinking from Harry’s glass, feeling the warmth of Harry’s heating, but Harry’s not here. Sansa only mentioned him to remind Jon that she dumped him, adding how desperately she doesn’t want to see him. The dirty mistress isn’t supposed to comfort his lover when she just suffered a loss. But Jon does that. Because he’s not her dirty mistress. He knows he can make her feel better, give her comfort and offer her the shoulder she wants to cry on, the ear she wants to talk to. Being that person for her… it’s pleasing in a way he knows it shouldn’t be. It’s just that it makes him feel like he’s important to her, and he can’t help but feel joy at the faint idea.

“This is him?” Jon looks at a black and white photo, “He’s handsome.”

Sansa takes the picture from him and chuckles, “No… that’s uncle Bryden. He’s like… nearly twenty years grandpa’s junior, but still his brother… he used to be in the army. Never got married… Robb, Arya, Bran and I are pretty convinced he’s gay.”

“The airforce…” Jon mutters, “He was an air cadet. I’m honorary member of the air cadets.”

“Didn’t know you can fly?”

“I can’t.” Jon grins, “It’s honorary.”

“Does it mean you get an uniform?”

“Probably.” Jon shrugs, “But I always wear the Irish guards Mounted Officer’s.”

“The red one?” She asks, and Jon nods, “I like that one.”

“I prefer the Blues and Royals frockcoat.” Jon says, “It’s black.”

Sansa only grins.

“Is this your grandpa?”

Sansa takes the picture from his hand, then nods, “Jep, pretty sure that’s him.” She smiles down at the picture, “He looks so much like Bran, don’t you think?”

Jon nods, even though he can’t really see it. The picture is old and vague, and the man in the picture wears glasses.

“I imagine he had red hair… but I know he didn’t. We got that from grandmama.”

“What was she like?”

“We never knew her. She died of eclampsia, when she gave birth to a stillborn baby boy.”
“That’s horrible.”

Sansa nods, “Yeah it was… I mean, I wasn’t there. Grandpa always said I look just like her… he loved her so much. Lately all he did was talk about her. He had all these pics of her in his room. Of this beautiful woman with pearls in the fifties… she was Jewish, you know? That’s why she came to England.”

“You’re Jewish?”

“No, my grandmother was.”

“If she was Jewish then your mother is and that means so are you. That’s Hebrew law.”

Sansa looks up from the picture, “Is it?”

Jon nods.

Sansa chuckles, “Guess it’s true that we learn something new everyday. I know my grandmama believed we’d all die if we were Jewish, so, you know, it was never really a thing in our family. But I know that some second cousins ten times removed always called her ‘the jew’.”

“That’s awful.”

“Yeah, it really is…” Sansa grabs another picture, “Look at that… their wedding.”

She presses a picture in his face of a fifties wedding, with the woman wearing a flower crown and the man in fancy morning suit with top hat.

“She looks like Audrey Hepburn…” Sansa mutters, “Givenchy runs in the family.”

Jon smirks.

“Look at the way he looks at her…” Sansa sighs, “This picture was… sixty, seventy years ago? And he was still in love with her till his very last day, even after she was gone… can you imagine? All he did was talk about her, about the parties she loved and her beautiful red hair… maybe it’s because they’re from a different time, but love like that… Can you imagine loving someone for seventy years?”

Jon looks at a different picture of what seems to be a family portrait of four, two parents and two girls with bows in their hair, “Yeah, I… maybe.”

When Jon looks up she’s crying again, but he’s not so sure why. She’s holding another wedding portrait in her hands, presses it to her heart, and hides her mouth behind her hand as tears roll down.

Jon shoves the box aside and moves closer to her, wrapping an arm around her.

“I’m s-sorry…” she starts.

“Don’t be. Don’t be.” Jon whispers to her hair.

“I’m sick of crying.” She decides after that, and she turns on the tv again, “Let’s watch Mamma Mia.”

Jon suffers through Meryl Streep and Colin Firth’s awful singing as Sansa hums on her cheese crackers.
"I wanted to go vegan." She says, then chuckles at her own silliness, "Turns out I’m a weak human being who’s willing to be ignorant and betray her values. A day without cheese is like a day missing out on life."

Jon smirks, "You’re far too smart not to know that climate change is to blame by the great corporations and governments."

"Not smart." Sansa says, "I just watched your documentary."

"It really was Leo’s documentary, and climate change is really more Aegon’s thing, which is why he did most of the talking."

Sansa chuckles, "So humble, you are."

"Anyway, it comes down to the fact that climate change won’t be stopped by some vegan tree hugging hipster hippies who refuse to wear leather shoes."

"I could never be a hippie." Sansa sighs as if that saddens her.

"Because you can’t be vegan or because you wouldn’t ever hug a tree?"

Sansa laughs and pops some more cheese in her mouth, "Because… well I wanna say because I never would have managed to get you to sleep with me if I was a hippie, but that would be such a terrible betraying-feminism-thing to say…"

“What on earth makes you think I wouldn’t sleep with you if you were a hippie?"

Sansa looks up, still chewing her cheese, shrugs and smirks.

“That’s false.”

“Really?”

Jon nods.

“You’d still sleep with me if I’d hug trees?”

“I give speeches about the environment. I care.”

Sansa laughs, eats some more cheese, takes a sip from her wine, then tells him, getting up from her spot on the floor, her back leaning against the sofa, “I would definitely still do you, if you’d be a tree-hugger.”

Jon frowns in disbelieve, “Liar.” He says as he, badly hiding his eagerness, allows her to climb down in his lap.

“I’d never lie to you.”

Jon shakes his head.

“I’d even date you if you’d be vegan.”

“It’s dating what we’re doing?”

“What do you think? I just made you dinner, we watched a Meryl Streep musical and we’re about to have sex.”
“Sounds like a third date to me.” Jon says, lifting her up so he can press her down on her back, into the cushions of the sofa.

“Third dates are the best dates.” She decides, smirking as he pulls down her sweatpants.

The next morning they shower together, again, and Jon decides showering with Sansa is his favourite new thing in the world. She makes scrambled egg, then informs him that she’s going to her mum’s house to look through her grandpa’s paperwork.

“I’m getting some of grandmama’s Jewelry, apparently. Arya doesn’t want it, but I know she’ll regret it… I just hope Edmure won’t be difficult. He’ll obviously want to keep most of the family Jewelry within the family. Meaning the Tully’s… but he and Rosamund only have boys, and the private collection comes separately from the trust… also, well, we’ll probably have to sell chunks of it, to pay off inheritance taxes-“

“You want me to help you with that?”

“Why?”

“Well I’m a… I’m technically a lawyer, you know.”

Sansa remembers Jon’s law degree and warmly smiles, “Thank you but… I dunno I don’t want to ask that of you.”

“It’s no problem.”

“I’m asking enough of you as it is.”

“I really don’t mind.”

“I know but… I dunno, I’d feel guilty. And we have a perfectly good lawyer.”

Jon nods at that. He knows when pressing on will have no use, “Just let me know if I can help. I can always-“

“Thank you.” She says and for the hundredth time she drops herself into him arms, expressing her gratitude for all he does for her.

Jon doesn’t really see it that way. He never really knew Sansa’s grandfather, so there’s little mourning for him to do, which means that the only crappy feeling he’s dealing with, is the fact that Sansa’s upset. He never expected their first days together to be like this, and it’s a big letdown, but not big enough for him to complain about it. Somehow, he just continues to feel grateful that she seems to want to spend every waking and sleeping second of her day with him.

He drops her off at her parents’ house, she kisses him good bye in a way that makes his heart skip a beat, because it’s so casual, like it means nothing yet everything, then accepts the unavoidable truth that he’s not in any way capable of avoiding the weekly family get-together at Buckingham Palace. His favourite weekly meeting of never.

He sits through it, avoiding the gaze of everyone, especially his parents’, then, before he’s about to run off, his father calls him back and asks, “You haven’t forgotten about Luxembourg, have you?”

“Luxembourg?”

“You’ve forgotten?”
“No.” Jon lies, “I haven’t.”

“Good, because Connington tells me you have been extremely absent lately and Dayne informed me that the amount of time he’s unaware of your whereabouts worries him.”

“Oh.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes.” Jon says, “Robb’s grandfather died.”

“I heard. Your mother rang lady Stark this morning. It’s very sad. His Grace will be missed.”

“I just… I have to be there for him, for Robb, that’s all.”

Rhaegar blinks a couple of times, then nods, “That’s very good of you.”

“I’m going there, now.” Jon says.

Rhaegar says nothing, only frowns in a way that makes Jon uncomfortable, “You’re not getting out of Luxembourg.”

“Of course I’m not.” Jon says, “I don’t want to get out of it I… I’m looking forward to it. It’s just that… I want to support Robb.”

Rhaegar’s frown only grows and Jon can’t help but be glad for it. In his father’s case, with the peculiar job he does, it’s of the outmost importance that he spots bullshit when it’s dancing around naked in front of his eyes.

“I hope she appreciates your devotion.” Rhaegar wittily mutters.

“Hmm?”

“Just don’t forget about Luxembourg.”

“I won’t.”

“Very well.” Rhaegar nods, and Jon runs off.

He drives over towards Sansa’s place after a quick shower and a change of clothes, and when she opens the door for him, she’s wearing jeans and a white t-shirt.

“You like quiche?”

“Sure.”

“With spinach?”

Jon nods, and she kisses him in the quick meaningful and meaningless way again, before she runs back to the kitchen, to check up on her quiche, “I put some goat cheese and salmon in there… I figured I wanted a right real proper meal and the cooking always distracts me.”

Jon nods, sitting down at the bar.

“How was the meeting?”

“Okay.”
Sansa turns around, oven gloves on, “Are they… do they mind you’ve been away so much?”

Jon shakes his head, “It’s okay, they understand.”

“What did you tell them?”

“Said Robb’s grandfather died and I want to be there for him.”

Sansa snorts, “They must wonder why Robb, newly married and all, needs his best friend for support-“

“Doesn’t matter what they think.” Jon says, “And you really shouldn’t worry about it.”

Sansa nods, “The ehm… the funeral is Tuesday. I… I hope you can be there? It’s in Cumbria, he’ll be laid to rest in the Tully family vault, and I know it’s the other end of England, but-“

“Of course, I’ll be there.” Jon says, instantly.

Sansa smiles, “Okay.” She says.

Then Jon figures the right moment won’t ever exist and therefore he promptly informs her, “I gotta go to Luxembourg tomorrow.”

She looks up, eyes wide only for a fraction of a second, before she quickly hides that and whatever emotion it is that put it there, “Oh.”

“I really can’t get out of it. I… I should’ve said but I kinda forgot about it myself.”

“Why do you have to go?” Sansa asks before she leans down to put the oven dish away.

“Its ehm… its because of Brexit, they’re using us to sell the idea of a pro-Europe Britain post Brexit Britain.”

“And you get to go to… Luxembourg?” She asks, teasing smile to her lips.

“Yeah.” Jon grins, “All on my own. But I’m going to Denmark and Sweden in the spring, with Egg. And Rhaenys and Willas will go to France and Spain.”

“That’s… that’s quite something. It’s a responsibility.”

“They’re talking of sending Rhaenys to Israel, actually, but ehm… once that’s set I think she’ll probably be pregnant and then, you know, they’ll have to delay it again.”

“What’s Israel got to do with brexit?”

“Nothing, I guess, but you mentioned responsibility so that had me thinking. She’ll be the first member of the British royal family to officially visit Israel and occupied Palestine. Ever. It’s a big deal.”

“I’d be a nervous wreck with all these expectations.” Sansa thinks to herself, and Jon knows she doesn’t mean to say it, but he takes it as a sort of ‘I could never live the way you do’ comment, and that rather stings.

“We get to see the world.” Jon tries.

“You don’t need to be royal to see the world.” Sansa chuckles and she closes the dishwasher.
“No, I… no you definitely don’t.”

“You don’t even get to choose where you’ll go. And it’s work, basically, that comes with a lot of cons.”

Jon says nothing and when she looks up she spots the sour look on his face and she seems to realise what it is she’s been saying.

“I’m sure Luxembourg will be wonderful, though.”

“Are you? Cause I’m not.” Jon says. He had not been excited, and he certainly isn’t now, despite the compliment his father granted him by trusting him to handle a foreign engagement all on his own.

“You’ll be away for two days?” Sansa asks, and Jon nods.

“Yeah, I’ll blink twice and I’ll be on my way back home.” Jon says and that brings a different sort of smile to her lips.

“Okay.”

“I couldn’t get out of it, it’s been planned for nearly a year and—“

“No don’t be silly!” Sansa says, “I totally understand, you should go and… and have fun.”

Jon really doesn’t want to go and have fun, especially not in Luxembourg, but he supposes he’s lucky, cause Luxembourg is an hour away by air, and it’s only for two days. He would not have known what he’d have done had he been preparing to go off on some commonwealth tour to Canada or Australia, away for 10 days at the least, 25 at the most.

As tired as he was during the day, so awake is he when they make love. She’s less gentle now and seems more eager for pleasure which Jon is perfectly willing to give her. After months of daydreaming about all the things he’d love to do to and with a naked Sansa Stark, it’s enthralling and liberating to finally get the opportunity to try out some of it, albeit none of the wildest stuff. She doesn’t shy away when he turns her around, on her knees, and pushes her into the bed, holding her hips in his hands, and she only moans in gratitude as she grabs the iron rails of her headboard when he pushes in.

“I have to go home.” Jon whispers to the naked skin of her shoulder as she’s the little spoon in his arms, her eyelids flutter to her cheeks and she groans. When she shifts her sweaty warm skin rubs his and it makes his loins do things, which shouldn’t really be possible anymore, not after the last couple of hours.

“I want you to stay.” She whispers, turning her head to press her hot mouth to his.

“I wanna stay too.” He says, “But I… I gotta go to Luxembourg.”

“Take me with you.” She orders.

“Next time.” He promises, and he knows what he means when he promises and he thinks she can’t possibly, because it makes her smile.

He leaves her flat at six in the earliest of mornings, kissing her sleeping face before he drags himself away from her. He’s still too much in a rush, too high on sex, to feel cold when some flakes of snow fall down from the sky.
Jon is struggling to actually realise what it is he feels, when he opens the door of his car, ready to sink down in it, and he spots, in the corner of his eye, a flash of light. It’s barely there, and if he did not know already, if he did not recognise the man in the distance, he might’ve been able to think it was only a car, or a bus. But Jon knows, and when he sits down behind the wheel and grabs it with his sweaty hands, he closes his eyes and swears.
Sansa wakes up around ten, in a bed smelling of him, turns to her back, sighs, closes her eyes at all the memories and all the realisations that come back to her, before she sees four missed calls from Jon, beams like a teenager in love, happily calls him back, and then is disappointed when she hears something close to panic in his voice.

“I think they photographed me this morning.”

“Where?”

“When I got in my car, when I left your house.”

“Okay… and you’re freaking out over that because..?”

“Because, now, they’ll probably instal a photographer near your front door, just in case I show up, and if I show up a lot, they’ll maybe even follow you around, and if they follow you around, they-“

“Why would they follow me around? I do the most boring things.”

“Because… because.”

“Jon,” Sansa sighs, “it’s just a picture. If it is. Anyway I’m a… I’m a family friend. Maybe you were just checking up on me, or something.”

“At six in the morning?”

“Yeah? I guess. It’s not like you can tell that from a picture.”

“If you see any sort of photographer, please just… don’t do anything, don’t look at them, don’t talk to them, just-“

“Jon stop it, seriously. If they really photographed you, we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.”
“I’m not being paranoid.” Jon says then, and he sounds only a bit frustrated with her indifference.

“I’m sure you’re not, but-“

“I know what they’re like.” He says, “I’ve been here before, and I’m not… I’m not going to let them hurt you. So I’m telling you now; they photographed me, they’re going to follow you around, please pretend you don’t notice, and if they write about you or harass you in any way, I promise I’ll fix it.”

Sansa has some trouble gulping then, as her throat is dry and it makes it hard for her to find words, “I’ve been photographed before.” She reminds him, “don’t worry, I can handle it.”

“I’m not saying you can’t-“

“Where are you now?”

“In the car. I’m on my way to the airport.”

“Relax, focus on the trip, try to enjoy it, have a wonderful flight, don’t forget to call me, and we’ll talk about this when you get home.”

“Sansa-“

“I’ll be fine.”

“I know you will but-“

“Focus on Luxembourg, Jon.”

“I will, I just need-“

“Take some oxipan or mazepan, or whatever pan.”

“No! I don’t take relaxation drugs.”

“Why not? You’ll be in the air, this is your excuse.”

“Call me if you see a photographer.”

“So I can hand over my iPhone and you can give them a talk down about privacy violations?” Sansa giggles.

“It’s not funny. If you see paparazzi, I need you to tell me.”

“Okay, sir, I will do that.” Sansa says and she rolls over, to her back, “I think I want a cat.” She randomly confesses, “He can keep me company when you’re on a trip.”

“Sansa-“

“Or hiding from paparazzi, afraid to-“

“I’m not afraid for myself! They get to picture me nearly every day. I don’t want them to-“

“I’m staring out of my window, and there’s no one in front of my door.” Sansa says as she pulls herself up from her bed, and makes her way towards the bathroom. She can’t help but feel a smile to her lips, because his annoying worry doesn’t annoy her. It’s rather endearing.
“Well, good. Just tell me when you think you’re being photographed.”
“I will.”
“Thank you.”
“Can I go have a shower now?”
“Just, remember not to-“
“Talk to them, yeah, I got that.”
“And don’t listen to what they say.”
“I’ll wear a headset.”
“Sansa, I’m bloody serious.”
“I know, it’s very sexy, now, I gotta go.”
“I’m not joking.”
“Nor am I.”
“Sansa, I just-“
“Bye!”

Sansa throws her phone in the empty and dry sink, takes her clothes off, and forgets for a single second that her grandfather has died, during which she happily hums while taking out her hair elastic- that is, until her phone rings again.

For some reason she makes the assumption that it’s Jon again, which has her answer the phone with, “I really need a shower and you know why.”

“What?” Harry asks.
“What?” Sansa stutters.
“Where the fuck are you?” He asks.
“What? I mean… I’m home.”
“Really? Because I’ve been calling you non stop for the past two days.”

“Yes I… yes.” Sansa noticed, she saw nearly all of his incoming calls and she felt no shame ignoring them. There was little choice she had. There was barely a second where she wasn’t actually with Jon, and taking up a phone call from Harry with Jon around was simply no option. More so, that one time she did take up the phone Harry had done little but ignore everything she said, making demands and promises he would never be able to keep.

Harry aggressively texted her too, angrily telling her how much it pissed him off that he had to hear about her grandfather’s passing from no one other but uncle Jon Arryn.

Sansa had been very unwilling to answer his fury. Both because she had no time and because she did not want to. She did not have the emotional capacity to deal with his frustrations. Despite his
age, her grandfather’s passing had come as a surprise, as a shock, a blow that left her in constant stinging pain. If Harry chooses to answer such a tragedy with anger, she has no energy to waste on him.

The only thing she should be expecting from him is comfort and words of pity, but then, she doesn’t actually want kindness from him, or any other sort of gentle warmth. She doesn’t want him near, she doesn’t want his support, and she certainly doesn’t want to speak to him.

“I’m at the airport.”

“You’re where?”

“At the airport!”

“Oh... Why?”

“Because I’m about to board a plane.”

“Right.” The hand around her phone starts trembling, and, standing there, naked and vulnerable, she feels tears well up.

“I texted you I was on my way, but I suppose you haven’t seen that?”

Sansa places her hand in front of her mouth, to keep the sobs down her throat, and she can’t find anything decent enough to say.

“Damnit Sansa,” Harry says, “I’m so sorry about what happened at Robb’s wedding, but you can’t ignore me like that. Your grandfather is dead!”

Sansa shivers at these words for she’s not yet ready to have people say it aloud, “I didn’t ask you to come home.”

“I have to be at the funeral.” He says.

“I don’t want you there.” Sansa says.

“We’ll talk when I get home, Okay?” Harry asks.

“I’m not going to be home.” Sansa throws out.

“You just said-“

“I’m going to my parents, I won’t be there when you get here. I don’t want to talk to you. You can pick your stuff up and move out while I’m at my parents.”

“I can come too, we can-“

“No.” Sansa says and she hears her voice tremble, “Don’t even think of showing up at my parents’ house, not now, not after the way you insulted them, insulted Robb and Jeyne, insulted me.”

“I never-“

“I’ve never felt so humiliated in my life, I don’t want to see you.” Sansa says, “I’ve said all I got to say, I’m not interested in what you think you wanna tell me. When you’re here, you can pick up your stuff and get the fuck out of my life.” At that, she hangs up.
In a rush she jumps under the shower, washes her hair twice, then dries herself and puts on some jeans, a striped jumper and Converse All Stars.

Quickly and messily she changes the sheets, cleans up the dishes from the night before, picks up clothes from the floor, that lie in specific spots that can only tell a story of sex, empties the bin, and then goes to her bedroom to fill a suitcase with clothes.

She has to deal with Harry, and she will, but not right now, not like this. She has places to be, a mother to help arrange a funeral, and a family to support.

When Sansa’s in the cab, she scrolls through some articles of Jon arriving in Luxembourg. He looks professional, well-prepared and genuinely excited to be there. Paparazzi photos don’t seem to be at the front of his mind, as he shakes the hands of some grand-ducal couple.

At home Sansa receives commentary on her outfit from her mother, after which Catelyn insists Sansa borrows some black coat of hers that makes her look less ‘frumpy’. It’s a black woolen trench coat, one not by far as warm as her puffed green desk, which Sansa ends up resenting as she sits in front of the funeral director, who is the most icy cold man she’s ever come across.

Ned has duties at Westminster, Roslin couldn’t find a babysitter for the boys, aunt Lysa has not been invited and Catelyn can’t actually bring herself to discuss the colour of a coffin, so it’s mostly Sansa and uncle Edmure who decide on a dark wooden one, as Arya comforts her mother.

“We want to have it engraved with… with Tully Sprout. It is the sigil of our house.” Sansa says, “Is that possible?”

“It’ll cost you.” Mr. Queburn says.

Sansa blinks at the cool and cold answer, “Money’s no issue.”

“In that case everything is possible.” The man grins.

“Wonderful.” Sansa's smile hurts her jaw.

She’s standing outside as her mother and uncle sign the papers, when Jon calls again. She’s not quite sure whether to tell him about Harry’s arrival, and so she lets him go on about all he’s seen and everyone he’s met, which he manages to make more exciting than she’s sure it really was.

“That’s nice.” She says, “I miss you.” She adds playing with the simple necklace around her throat. She really does. It’s been half a day for crying out loud, yet she’s desperate for him to come home, which has only partly to do with the sour taste she’s got in her mouth, after picking out floral arrangements for the funeral reception.

“I miss you too.” He says, simply, with little effort, “Where are you?”

She tells him all about the horrible man who’s casually dragging money from their pockets over the back of dead Duke Tully, after which he confirms he’ll be home real soon.

She’s just about to clear her throat and inform him of Harry’s nearing presence when her mother loudly and frustratedly calls for her.

“I gotta go. Mum’s one mess of emotions.”

“Yeah sure.”
“I’ll call you tonight.”

“Okay.”

When Sansa gets home she’s greeted by the smell of take-out Curry, which her father wisely ordered. Catelyn is in no state to either cook or eat Ned’s food.

“Can I spend the night?” She asks her father after dinner and he hugs her for response.

“Are you alright? You look so tired and stressed. You’re not sleeping well?”

“Naah.” Sansa says, which is true, she just hates how her father thinks it’s because she’s too miserable, which isn’t necessarily true.

Sansa spends that evening watching some action film of Rickon’s choice in Bran’s room, where the three of them eat popcorn and they inform her of all they know of Arya’s new boyfriend.

Before she goes to bed she goes back downstairs, where her parents are sitting in front of the Telly, watching the news, and Sansa can’t help but stop herself when the BBC newsman reports on Jon shaking hands with the Luxembourgish crown prince. The man insists it speaks volumes that Jon, even though he’s an illegitimate, gets to do such big and responsible visits. What volumes exactly, however, he doesn’t specifically say.

“Sansa?”

“Hmm? Oh. Hey… I ehm, I came to say good night.” She kisses the both of them to their cheeks, and then goes up to her childhood bedroom, periwinkle colored and still full of old pictures of her younger years.

When she lies in bed she calls Jon again, chats with him about the upcoming funeral, her day, his day, the dinner she had, the dinner he had, their tomorrows and some other random things, before she falls asleep with a smile on her face, sometime past midnight.

The next morning she wakes up late, takes a long shower, purposely ignores her phone because she knows Harry must be on there, and is totally taken by surprise and shock when Robb marches into her room.

“They know.” He says, “And now so do our parents.”

“What?” Sansa clutches her bathrobe tighter around her as Robb pushes his phone in her face.

_Could this be Jon’s mystery girl?_

Sansa gulps when she sees a pic of herself at Robb’s wedding, dressed in blue, walking towards the cathedral, placed side by side with Jon placing a coat around her shoulders at Robb’s birthday party. Sansa instantly knows she really doesn’t want to read that article.

“That’s not… I’m sure its just another stupid Daily Mail article. Why are you reading that trash?”

“Are you going to lie to me?” Robb asks, eyebrows raised.

“No.” Sansa says, defensively.

“Are you sleeping around with Jon?”

“No.”
“You said you wouldn’t lie.” Robb says and there’s something close to betrayal in his eyes.

“I’m not lying. We’re not sleeping around.”

“Have you dumped Harry?”

“Not officially.” Sansa says carefully.

Robb nods, then humourlessly laughs, then shakes his head and ends up hiding his face behind his hands in disbelief.

“Robb…” Sansa begs, “Don’t be like that. I told him we’re over. We are over, I don’t want to be with him anymore.”

“Whatever,” Robb says, and he looks down at the article and scrolls down through it, “Just make sure this doesn’t put extra strain on Mum.”

“Why would it?”

“The flipping paparazzi of course! They’ll obviously want to have a striking picture of Jon with his new girlfriend, and they don’t give a fig if that means a mourning family’s privacy is gruesomely violated.”

“What do you mean, are there-“

“No, they’re not attacking this house.” Robb says before he turns around, ready to storm out, “Not yet.”

Sansa grabs his arm to stop him, “You’re going to be angry with me for this?”

Robb shrugs, “You tell me yourself, you haven’t broken up with Harry yet-“

“You never even liked him!” Sansa throws back.

“Because I thought you were too good for him, but you’re not exactly proving my point.”

“Robb-“

“Look, I don’t even care at this point. Jon’s my friend, he’s my best friend, and you’re my sister, I suppose I don’t even want to know, I just hope it’ll be worth it, because, again, you better hope this won’t turn the whole funeral in a total fiasco.”

Robb marches out and leaves Sansa in tears, which causes her to need nearly an hour to get dressed. She takes her time blow drying her hair, until her father knocks on her door and politely waits for her to answer.

“Will Harry come to the funeral?” Ned asks as a matter of greeting when she opens the door.

“No.” Sansa says, “I mean, he wants to but I told him not to.”

Ned frowns, “You did not tell us the two of you have separated.”

“It’s not official.” Sansa says, looking at the floor, “But we have separated. He just doesn’t know it yet.”

“Aha.” Ned says.
“I was going to when… he’s in China so I couldn’t- he was in China.“

“He’s in China still?”

“He’s on his way home.” Sansa says. He might actually already be in London, she thinks, and that idea makes her belly sting with guilt.

“You better bring him to the remembrance service.” Ned suggests.

“Papa-“

“It’s in London, everyone will be there.”

“So?”

“It’ll be a nice way to… to put an end to nasty rumours. I’m sure the royal family would like that.”

“But these aren’t rumours, daddy.” Sansa says, and she still can’t look her father in the eye when she adds, “I’m in love with him.”

Ned nods, “I see.” He sighs and through the hanging mirror at her side Sansa can see her father watching her with worry, “Well, in that case, I hope you’re not doing things you’ll end up regretting.”

After her father leaves Sansa can’t help but have an attack of tears, she curls up in her bed like a ball, cries it out for as long as she can, then drags herself up and when she’s halfway through getting dressed, Jon calls.

“Hello?” Her voice is terribly hoarse and she’s sure he can hear.

She half expects him to go full ‘I told you so’ on her, but instead he starts with, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, it’s not your fault, you warned me.”

“I should’ve gone home far sooner, or I should’ve… I should probably not have come at all. And this whole Luxembourg thing was stupid too, I should’ve stayed in London.”

“No! You should have went, don’t say silly things like that.”

“I was talking to Sam and he… maybe it’s better if I don’t go to your grandfather’s funeral.”

“What? No. No, don’t be…”

“Sansa, if I’m there, the paparazzi will go mad, I don’t want to ruin things like your grandfather’s funeral.”

“You won’t ruin anything. I want you there. We all want you there.”

“Has Robb-“

“He’ll get over it.” Sansa sounds more convinced than she is, “And papa he… he seems only worried, not upset. It’s a… it’s a difficult time.”

“I didn’t think… I thought we’d have more time before the media-“

“We’ll have time, it’s madness now, but once you come back-“
“You don’t deserve this right now.”

“I can handle it, promise. You told me yourself I’m… I’m strong.”

Jon waits a moment during which she imagines him nodding in that way he does, before he sighs through the speaker and reminds her of that other problem she still has not dealt with, “And… has ehm… have you heard from Harry?”

“Yes.” Sansa confesses, “He’s on his way home.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t know what to say to him, I have no idea how to make this better.” She says and then fresh tears appear in her eyes. Jon says nothing, probably because there’s nothing he can say, and Sansa hiccups a sob away, “Maybe he’s already in London.”

“We really fucked up.”

“He says he wants to come to the funeral.” Sansa confesses, and right after that, her mother bursts in.

“You’re not dressed yet?”

Sansa coughs her sobs away and gets up, “I ehm… I gotta go.”

“You have to hurry, Sansa for God’s sake, we’re leaving in 15 minutes you’re barely wearing mascara.”

“I’ll call you.” Jon tries.

“Yes, you-” Catelyn pulls Sansa’s phone from her hand.

“That better not be who I think it is.” She says, and without looking she throws the phone on the bed.

“Mum!” Sansa can’t help but be absolutely astounded at the movement, “You can’t just-“

“We’ll put you in some clothes of mine, you probably won’t fit whatever we’ve still got here of your old clothes and I need you to look decent.”

Sansa knows her mother is upset, that she’s sad, mourning, all that. Yet she can’t help but angrily glare while Catelyn searches through her own closet, to find something both suitable and black.

“You’re angry with me too?”

“Should I be?” Catelyn asks, not turning around to face her daughter.

“I don’t know.”

Catelyn turns around and throws some wide legged trousers in Sansa’s way, “You’re on the front page of a newspaper and they’re saying someone not your boyfriend left your flat in the earliest of mornings, if they’re not lying, that means I must’ve done something wrong in my upbringing because I did not raise someone who willingly hurts people like that.”

“Mummy…” Sansa begs, “I haven’t… that’s not…” she groans, “Harry and I are over.”
“Then end it.” Catelyn says.

“I wanted to, I… I did-“

“But you didn’t?”

“I did! I told you, I did. At Robb’s wedding, we broke up, I ended it, but he doesn’t want to hear it.”

“He doesn’t want to hear it?”

Sansa shakes her head, “But I told him it’s over, I told him to move out. But he’s in Hong Kong. He’ll leave once I- once I-“

“Once you what?”

“I was… I was delaying it.” Sansa says and she does not feel like crying, but like weeping, “I don’t want to hurt him.”

“Then why?”

“Because I… because I’m in love with Jon.”

Catelyn nods and suddenly every hint of anger has faded, it has made place for a cold harshness that’s even worse. It’s as if Sansa’s words are her biggest nightmare come true and she refuses to acknowledge it, “It’ll wear off.” Catelyn says, and she says it so coldly, Sansa can’t help but break out in tears.

“How can you say t-that?”

“Because I’ve witnessed this first hand with Lyanna.”

“L-Lyanna?”

“And your brother Robb.”

“But Robb-“

“This front page article? That’s only the beginning. If you’re going through with this they’ll skin you, as they do with all these women. You won’t be able to cross the street, they’ll hack your phone, harass not just you but all your family and friends… they’ll write the most horrible things about you, and thousands will comment the most horrible things. They’ll photograph you when you’re taking out the trash, when you’re on your way to work and when you’re sunbathing at the beach.”

“Mummy-“

“You’ll lose your job, you’ll lose your privacy, you won’t even be able to walk the street, to go grab a bite of lunch, visit the hairdresser…”

“Please stop?” Sansa asks, but Catelyn’s not done yet.

“That’s what you want? You think that’ll be worth it? Harry is a perfectly decent lad, and-”

“You don’t understand I… we never see each other. He’s always working and he wants to move back to New York… he only cares about his job and he never wants to come with me to… he hates
my friends, he hates Robb. All we do is fight, he doesn’t… he doesn’t understand me. We don’t understand each other.”

“You’ve been with this man for over two years. You’re ending it now because he doesn’t understand you?”

“He doesn’t make me happy.”

“That’s life, Sansa, sometimes things don’t make you happy. Sometimes they don’t come naturally, sometimes you have to work for it, it’s never a Disney movie in the real world. Do you think your father and I have always understood each other in the past thirty years?”

“That’s not-“

“Every time your father was working a lot and I barely saw him, every time he didn’t make me happy, it didn’t once occur to me to just run off to some other man.”

“Jon is not just some other man.”

“Your father and I-“

“Does it ever occur to you that you and papa don’t necessarily have the kind of relationship that everyone else in the world also aspires to? I don’t care about you and papa, it’s not the same.” Sansa says, but her mother ignores her.

“You have a wonderful life, with a wonderful job, a great place to live, a privileged amount of freedom and money to spend, no one to bother you and a promising career.”

“I know, but-“

“You’re willing to give that up and ruin your life because you think you’re in love with Jon?”

Sansa doesn’t quite know what to say as she suddenly realises that Catelyn couldn’t give a damn about Harry or Harry’s feelings. This is about the prospect of Sansa going through what Robb refused to go through and it seems like Catelyn is determined to prevent any of that from happening.

Sansa shakes her head. Not because she’s answering ‘no’, but because she needs her mother to stop. Nonetheless, Catelyn takes it as a no.

“Robb thought he was in love with Rhaenys too, but that-“

“He still loves her!” Sansa argues, her voice louder suddenly.

Catelyn’s eyes widen, “Don’t say such ridiculous things!”

“It’s true.” Sansa wipes the tears off her cheeks, “If it wasn’t for him knocking Jeyne up, if it wasn’t for Rhaenys’ family, everything would have been different.”

“But nothing is different! Not for Rhaenys, not for Robb, not for you.”

“Everything is different for me.” Sansa decides, she never looked at it like that, but she sure as hell does now. She’s not going to bow out like Robb. She won’t be as moderately pleased with life as he is.

“Being that closely linked to the royal family will take everything you’ve worked for away from
you. I am not going to let you do that to yourself.” Catelyn warns.

It’s not up to you.” Sansa mutters, but she’s ignored.

“Going on with this will be a mistake.”

“Jon makes me feel good.” Sansa confesses, “He makes me… he makes me laugh, and he makes me feel powerful and beautiful and intelligent, he makes me feel worthy. He makes me… he makes me believe again. Mama you have to understand… understand what that is like for me? After everything that happened? I didn’t think I’d… I didn’t think anyone would ever make me feel this way. I feel myself again. Finally I feel I don’t have to run away anymore.”

Catelyn’s eyes water then and she shakes her head, “That only means he can hurt you so much you’ll-“

“It’s worth it.” Sansa breathes, “I’ll take the risk.”

“Sansa…” Catelyn mutters and then she takes her daughter in her arms, “If you get hurt again… I don’t know what I’ll do.”

“I’ll be fine, I’m strong.” Sansa says, “J-Jon knows I’m strong. He makes me feel strong.”

“You… you shouldn’t need a man to make you feel strong.” Catelyn says and she takes Sansa face between her hands, “You can’t start gambling it all away just because Jon makes you laugh.”

“I… that’s not… it’s because I choose him. It’s because I feel like… I feel like I can be myself, only myself, and it’s enough. He’s the first… the first guy who doesn’t make me feel like I’ll never be enough, no matter what I do. He makes me feel strong because I don’t have to change. He reminds me that I’m perfectly fine, flaws and all.”

Cat bites her lower lip, lays her hands to Sansa’s shoulders, and reminds her of what she seems to think never crossed Sansa’s mind, and perhaps she’s right, “They’ll dig into your past.” She tries, “Do you want them to dig into your past? Do you want all that to be wide in the open, for all the world to see? It took you years to move past it, and you’re in a good place now.”

“He makes me happy.” Sansa repeats.

“For a moment, perhaps, but you won’t be happy when your life is snatched away.”

“That won’t-“

“Don’t forget in what place you were when you left London, because I won’t.”

“Mummy, that’s not-“

“That’s what that family does. They ruin lives, especially of the people they love. They don’t mean to, but they do.”

“What an awful thing to say.” Sansa says, “They’re your friends.”

“So I must know.” Catelyn nods, “Lyanna is a dear friend of ours, has been for years, I’ve known her all my life, and I’ve seen how they ruined her.”

“Well, She seems perfectly happy to me.”

“Now, yes, but twenty years ago she was a mess. Her whole life was a mess, the whole world called
her a homewrecker! Elia played the press and that whole fiasco—"

“That’s all got nothing to do with me.”

“It does because it’s still the same family. They’re all still mad. Rhaegar is still mad and Rhaenys behaves a hell of a lot like her mother, she manipulates the media like Elia has always done, and don’t even get me started on Aegon. They have to be mad, they have to live like that, they choose to live like that, else they wouldn’t be able to do it. But it’s not healthy, and everyone who comes too close will fall down the pit. Being near them, being with them, loving them, it ruins you. Lyanna was willing to let Rhaegar ruin her life, but—"

“I don’t really get the impression that she feels he ruined her life. And that was years ago, Jon isn’t married with two children, nor is he double my age. Jon is not mad, he’s perfectly sane, that’s one of the things I like about him. He keeps me sane.”

“But he’s not just Jon.” Catelyn says.

“Of course he is.” Sansa chuckles and she shakes her head, lifting her hand to rub in her eye.

“No.” Catelyn says, “He hasn’t been ‘just Jon’ since the day Rhaegar put that ring on Lyanna’s finger. He’s an employee of the Firm. He works for the crown. Everything he does, everything he says, every move he makes is reflective upon the royal family, upon the crown. He is owned by the state.”

“He’s just a guy.” Sansa breathes, “Like the rest of us. He’s just human.”

“That’s what he wants to be, what he likes to think he is, but he knows better. He’s a servant of the British people, that’s why he’s criticised and followed every step he makes and that’s alright because he has accepted his fate, he has no choice. But you do. You have a choice.”

“But that’s his life, I… I cannot let that influence my feelings for him. I… I’m in love with him as a person and that has nothing—"

“It will. You’ll be going out with all of Great Britain.”

“He’s not even in line to the throne.” Sansa tries.

“Only idiots think he’s not.” Catelyn snorts, “Apparently Buckingham Palace asked their lawyers to look into the possibility of legitimacy. Do you really think Rhaenys and her exceptionally unhappy marriage are the future? That brother of his is as gay as a doornail which leaves fly free Viserys who’s as shameful to the royal family as his mad and pathetically racist father before him… last but not least that sad excuse of a woman who’s hiding away in the States, not working for the taxpayers who pay every bill of hers while she’s married to a man who’s now being accused of sexual assault.”

“D-Drogo is being accused of sexual assault?”

“The news hasn’t broken yet but Lyanna told me a while ago that he has more than one lawsuit coming his way. We all knew he was a cheater, now we also know he’s sick.”

Sansa wants to say it surprises her, but it doesn’t. She doesn’t want to think people look like they might sexually assault people, because that’s an awful thought, yet she knows that if anyone’s gut feeling in the matter of sexual violence should be taken seriously, it’s her own.

“That’s… that’s…”
“That boy who makes you laugh is the future of a centuries old monarchy and all he’s got to offer you and your future children is a life slaving away in the public eye, criticised and judged for the way you turn your head. No freedom, no future, and with this new modern social media we have today, I guess that includes a suicide of your own mental health. They’ll drag you through the dirt and do everything they can to destroy you.”

Sansa breathes out shakily and hears how weak her voice is when she says, “But I love him.”

“Like I said, it’ll wear off.”

“I don’t want it to.” Sansa says, but she’s ignored.

“Put on some big sunglasses.” Catelyn says, “We’re going to this memorial, and after that we’ll depart for Cumbria, and you’re telling Harry you very much want him to be there.”

“Mummy…”

“I’ll see you downstairs.” Catelyn says, and she turns around and is gone. Just like that.

Sansa puts on some big, dark shades, goes downstairs and manages to hide half her face behind some fedora hat from the three photographers outside, before she hides away in the chauffeured car.

Arya squeezes her knee, but Robb and Jeyne say both nothing during the long ride to the Goring hotel.

Before they arrive, Sansa opens her phone. She’s got a text from Jeyne that says ‘Daily mail is saying you and Jon are a thing. 1. Please tell me it’s true, 2. Why didn’t you TELL me?!’, and another one from Mya, ‘Girl, I’m reading an article and I need u to explain cause I am confused af’. Sansa wishes she could respond, but ends up reading the article front to back herself.

It uses pics of her arriving at Westminster abbey for Rhaenys’ wedding and the now familiar pics of her and Jon outside on Robb’s balcony, as well as some new ones. One is of Jon, holding his car door open as he stares straight into the lens of the photographer who must’ve used some long-distance camera, because the pic is blurry, as well because it’s clearly pitch-dark. Then there’s a pic of Sansa leaving her own flat yesterday, wearing her casual outfits, her hair a messy bun on top of her head, her face exhausted. Not exactly the most flattering image she’s ever seen of herself. And, worst of all, some pictures that they clearly dragged out off private, closed-off social media accounts, including, probably, Sansa’s own Facebook and Instagram page.

A pic of a young Sansa at Rhaenys’ eighteenth birthday party. A pic of her with Robb, Jon, Jeyne, Rhaenys and Theon in some random bar. The group pic they made at Robb’s wedding, where she’s standing behind him, arms around his shoulders. A picture of her and Jon that she doesn’t actually remember nor recognises, but it seems made at Robb’s seventeenth birthday. Another picture is of Sansa with Robb, Jon, Theon, Aegon, Rhaenys, Arya, Bran and Rickon at Robb, Theon and Jon’s graduation from Eton, over a decade ago. A selfie of Sansa with Rhaenys and Willas at the Chelsea Flower Show this summer, and a selfie of Sansa and Arya at one of the king’s Buckingham Palace garden parties in June. A selfie of Sansa and Aegon at Rhaenys’ birthday last November with Jon in the background. There are even pictures of her and Jon at Robb’s wedding party, one of them dancing, where he holds her hand and she lays the other on his shoulder, they’re grinning at each other, and it’s obviously made by the hired professional photographer. The last picture is somewhat blurry, clearly made by some guest Sansa can probably sue, but it’s extremely telling, just by how close they’re standing together, Sansa in front of him, wearing his coat, his front to her back, as he looks over her shoulder, both of them staring up at the fireworks. She remembers how he told her
about news years eve in Iraq.

Looking at these pictures… Sansa’s quite sure the press has been picking up bread crumbs of their romance even before it started, and waited to bring it out like this with the convincing confirmation of Jon leaving her flat past reasonable hours... How embarrassing.

The article mentions how she’s supposed to be in a relationship, but then goes on to assume that’s probably over now, without making it seem like she ever was involved with both at the same time. At least that’s a relieve.

It describes her life, basically. Daughter of a politician and a socialite, university graduate, abroad for some years, a degree in general history, works for the Natural History Museum, studying for a second master at Cambridge, from a big family, upper class, aristo, old money, titled, friends with princess Rhaenys, sister of one of Jon’s best friends, ex girlfriend of the PM’s son, lectures about cavemen to secondary schoolers, granddaughter to two dukes, daughter to one, direct descendent through the male line of the last king of Scotland, no history of drunk driving and/or drug use and no criminal record of any sort …

When Sansa opens the comment section, the first comment, with nearly three-thousand likes, says; *didn’t think that lad would ever find himself someone suitable and sane, hope they’re happy.* The second is a little less enthusiastic, *Well this is trouble, she’s obviously too attractive for him.* And the third, 2594 likes, says, *“Poor girl, she looks horrible. Her grandfather died and her boyfriend is off partying in Luxembourg.*

As Sansa keeps scrolling, more and more negative comments pop up, *She dated someone else yesterday? She was quick to dump him when she realised she could hatch a prince, I reckon. Also, She’s too pale, she needs some sun. And those shoes? I’m sure her daddy can buy her something fancier. She looks like a drab. Guess that’s his taste, tho.*

Sansa’s wobbly feet get her out of the car with the comment *When is he gonna stop shagging gingers? At least this one doesn’t look like a horse.* In the back of her mind. There are more photographers outside the hotel, though they might as well be here because the duke of an ancient dukedom has passed away and his son in law happens to be the capital’s major.

Sansa’s glad for the shades her mother recommended. This way she hopes her teary eyes are less obvious, her face less puffy and red, less swollen.

The memorial really is attended by everyone, and the whole event passes by like she’s not there, like someone else’s body is there, in that chair, staring at her grandfather’s coffin.

“I can now say good-bye to you, dear papa, knowing that you are where you most wanted to be, where you may not be needed most, but surely loved best… with our sweet mama you rest, and I feel such warmth knowing you both look down upon us, watching over us, forever together in heaven, enjoying the rest and peace you so much deserve.” Uncle Edmure says, and Sansa keeps her eyes on the picture of her smiling grandfather, resting on his opened coffin.

Later that afternoon, Sansa finds a moment to sit by her grandfather’s body, with no one else near, as everyone else is sipping from a cup of tea.

“Hey grandad.” She says, but she can’t figure what it is she wants to say. It’s harder than she thought it would me, “I already miss you. I already need you advice.” Sansa smiles through the tears that roll down her cheeks like little rivers downstream. They drop to her lips and when she licks them away with her tongue the salty taste fills her mouth.
Grandad Tully says nothing. He indeed looks peaceful. Only his body rests here, but his heart and soul are with grandmama, they’re already at Riverrun, not waiting for this corpse to join them, for it doesn’t matter… they do not need limbs to move and lungs to breath, wherever they are. Wherever they are they’re at Riverrun, and it’s the 1950’s again, and grandmama is wearing a petticoat, and they’re waltzing until the sun comes up.

“I did a lot of stupid things, but I’ll make it right.” Sansa promises, “I want to, I… I don’t know what I want. I think I’m scared.”

If granddad Tully were here right now, he’d probably ask her what the hell she’s talking about, because he’d already forgotten the sentence she’d spoken before the latest one… that’s how extreme his dementia was. But if grandpa Tully were here and he’d still remember all she said, and all the conversations they had before… then he’d probably tell her to stop crying and to start smiling. But if truth must be told Sansa’s not quite sure what’s there to smile about. She can’t remember feeling this miserable in years, and, most of all, she feels guilty, because her darling grandfather has died, and all Sansa has been crying about all day is boy trouble.

Sansa’s still wearing the black clothes she wore for the memorial when she sits in the car, squeezed in between Bran and Rickon in the back seat. With both her parents in the front seat, she can’t actually pick up the phone, when Harry and Jon both attempt to call her.

She ignored Harry’s texts and she’s not quite sure what to say to Jon. He keeps telling her he’s sorry, and she keeps saying he shouldn’t feel that way. She doesn’t talk to him about Harry, or about what her parents said, he doesn’t ask and she’s glad for it. He doesn’t say all that much to begin with, and Sansa’s not quite sure what to do about that.

‘If you don’t want me to be there, just say.’

‘No, I want you to come. I want to see you.’

‘I want to see you too.’

All Sansa knows she dreams off, is for him to drag her away from Riverun, carry her away from all things horrible, hold her close, and together they’ll disappear.

There’s no disappearing, and Sansa feels that realisation has never been more evident than it is when she arrives at Riverrun, and it’s as empty as it’s never been. The duke has died, and without him, these halls seem hollow, the rooms dark, the gardens grim and every corner silent.

Sansa shares a room with Arya that night, and she listens to her little sister’s soft breathing as she fails to make any attempt at falling asleep. She considers leaving the room and finally finding some alone place where she can call Jon, but It’s too late, she knows he’s probably fast asleep, and she’ll see him tomorrow, in only a few hours he’ll be here, and then she can talk and see him both, and perhaps she won’t feel so confused then, perhaps everything will make sense again and she’ll instantly know what it is she needs to do, what it is she wants, and doing it will come easily then.

Sansa falls asleep reading daily mail comments, all as divided and as confusing as her own feelings. She guesses she won’t have to count on I-Shouldn’t-Even-Be-Here123 from Exeter UK and Ellen from BestPlaceOnEarth to figure out what the hell has happened and what the hell she should do. She’s really going to have to figure that out all by herself.

Chapter End Notes
I could add this whole essay on why Catelyn is behaving the way she is; her father just died, she understands what dating royalty means, she’s that person who doesn’t do grief well, she’s worried cause she knows Sansa’s past... but meh. Have you opinions :)
“Can you open the car now?” Aegon glares at Jon, with that same look he’s been giving him ever since they got in the car. It’s the look he always puts on when he’s somewhere he never wanted to go to but was forced to either through blackmail or warning.

“We shouldn’t have come.” Jon decides.

“Really? Ya think?” Aegon groans and hides his face behind his hand, “But we’re here now, so get out of the fucking car.”

“You really think it’s a mistake?”

“I’ve been saying so ever since you asked me to come, don’t ask again because I will kill you.”

“But she said she-“

“Jon, shut up.”

“What if-“

“Get out of the bloody car!”

Jon may be convinced that him being at this funeral is a mistake, but he’s just as convinced he needs Aegon by his side to lessen the pain. At least with Aegon, it’ll give more of an illusion that he’s attending this funeral as a family friend, nothing specifically more than that.

He tried to convince Rhaenys as well, but Rhaenys is not as easy to blackmail as Aegon, also, Rhaenys cares about her daily duties she refused to abandon for the sake of Jon’s honour. Plus, well, Robb is her ex boyfriend.

Jon’s father wasn’t at all happy both his sons were making the trip all the way to Cumbria, but he didn’t say, probably for the same reason he hasn’t actually commented on the huge amount of ‘Jon gets himself a girl!’ Articles that appear left and right in British and foreign newspapers and websites. Because it’s all very embarrassing. And Rhaegar doesn’t do embarrassing, he ignores embarrassing.

This funeral will be embarrassing too.

Last time he spoke to Sansa was through text messages last night, and she didn’t seem all that excited to talk to him, barely said a thing, didn’t give away much about her feelings or her current situation, and for all Jon knows she’s completely and utterly changed her mind.

“I’m already telling you, I’m not going to the reception.” Aegon says after Jon finally opens the car door.
“Yes you are, you promised!”

Aegon pushes Jon out and instantly, once he stands outside, the flashes of cameras blind him.

“Just pretend they’re here for me, I’ll steal the show.” Aegon says, his head turned away from the press so they won’t be able to lip read his words. Media training taught him well after years of effort.

It’s really impossible to pretend they’re here for any other reason but Jon and his no longer private private life, as they’re all calling his name and asking him questions that no respectable being would ever dare ask anyone.

‘We have become actors!’” Jon’s not so mentally fit grandfather often bellowed. He wasn’t very happy about it, and though Jon fails to believe his life would have been better had he actually been forced into a position of actual meaning, he knows he was never born to live life on the stage.

The flashing cameras are his spotlights and inside awaits what the audience suspect might be his new co-star. Who the hell cares that her grandfather has passed, that her family is mourning, that this is a private tragedy that deserves sympathy and respect- to them, this is a show, and Jon is sure that to most watching, the stage seems faked, and therefore not deserving of reasonable and human dignity.

The family is still waiting in front of the church door. Which is the worst idea ever. He’s not sure who came up with that, but if they were trying to ruin Jon’s life and do exactly that what the British press feeds off, they succeeded.

There’s an electric shock inside of him that makes him unable to move his feet, when he spots Harry. **Harry.**

Sansa said he still wanted to come. She said she told him to stay away. She said he didn’t really listen. And now that he’s obviously here, Jon can do little but assume that’s because she does want him here, even though his conscious brain tells him not to make assumptions, to remember being that adult who patiently awaits explanations.

“Jon?” Aegon mutters, “Don’t stand still.”

Is this why the press is so excited? Because they want to see his response? Of all the private photos they managed to dig up from the deepest corners of the internet there was none that confirmed shit. The only factual truth they have is that he left her flat at six in the morning and that they danced together at Robb’s wedding, through some pic made by some anonymous dickhead who probably earned some tens when selling it.

Jon can pretend this is the way it is. He is just a family friend. He’s always been that. He’s Robb’s best mate. He’s not nervous to be here, because he has no idea what the fucking fuss is all about. Nothing ever happened between him and Sansa, she’s just Robb’s little sister. She’s dating someone else for crying out loud! The press was making up things. He called Sansa up and they laughed about the silliness of it all.

Jon can pretend. He’s played pretend far more often than he’s not. Playing pretend is his job.

And if his job means that he pretends nothing is going on, nothing happened, that it wasn’t real, that it was all… whatever it was. A *fantasy*… that’s not too bad. The press won’t harass her, they won’t ruin her life, objectify her, abuse all her rights to privacy, they won’t tear her down and make her hate him. There’s nothing so very wrong with the prospect of Sansa never growing to hate him.
If Jon has to shake Harry’s hand and smile supportively at the guy to play the stage performance no one actually came to see… he’ll do that.

“Hey buddy.” He tells Rickon, who shakes his hand without looking at him, as if that would be embarrassing, though the boy squeezes hard.

Bran actually manages to smile. Arya hugs him, but says nothing.

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Jon tells Harry.

He would be lying, if he claimed there was no part of him that hopes Harry understands the true meaning of his words. At his left, he feels Arya, Bran and Rickon watch with widened, interested eyes. Even now, even they enjoy the world’s longest running soap opera.

His hopes do not go unanswered, when Harry does not respond, not with words that is, and his face gives nothing away either, but when he shakes Jon’s hand he makes carefully sure to break some bones. The pain only gives Jon the strength he needs to kiss Sansa’s cheek.

She doesn’t look at him, stares at her feet when he moves in front of her, and when his lips touch her skin, he can taste the salt of her tears. She doesn’t touch him, though she raises her hands as if she wants to. When he moves back, she glances up. It’s only a blink of her eyes, but she pairs it with a sad smile, one that he’s sure could tell him many things, if it lasted only a little longer.

Robb hugs him too, “I’m really angry.” he mutters in Jon’s ear, which doesn’t necessarily make Jon feel better.

Ned nods politely, same as Sansa’s uncle Edmure and his wife Roslin, who brought their four boys with names Jon never bothered to remember, but Catelyn… Jon can’t remember anyone ever looking at him with so much distrust and aversion ever since he hit a photographer in the face outside of Mahiki, at around 4AM, and his dad woke him up three hours later, bursting with fury.

The whole church service is worse than any Jon has ever been to.

“I hate funerals.” Aegon groans every other minute, occasionally spicing it up with comments like, “Is that the countess of Canarvon? Blonde does not suit her.”, “The Freys, check the Freys… Oh. My. God. fuck, I’d forgotten Roslin is a Frey… so embarrassing.”, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen this huge amount of gingers packed together in one space.” And “I bet half of these people didn’t actually know the man.”

“Did you know him?” Jon asks.

“No. Did you?”

“I’m here for Robb.”

Aegon can only just contain a burst of laughter, which is really very inappropriate at a funeral and Jon gives the people around them looking up some of his finest apologetic smiles.

“Robb? I bet you forgot Robb’s name the moment you saw Sansa’s ex-boyfriend.”

“I think it’s save to say he’s not her ex-boyfriend.”

“Does that piss you off?”
“No.” Jon says through clenched jaw.

“*Clearly.* Look, Jon…” Aegon turns around to somewhat face his brother, and so long as he keeps speaking in hushed tones and whispers, Jon thinks it’s safe to assume no one can hear them from the seat they picked out all the way in the back, “You were a dirty mistress and you are *still* a dirty mistress. Nothing really has changed.”

“Are you trying to cheer me up?”

“This is a funeral. I don’t do cheer ups at funerals.”

“But I-“

“This is what dirty mistresses do. They sit at the back of the church while the life partner gets the seat at the right. Gobble it up, swallow it down, you knew what you would find on your plate once your ordered.”

“Sansa’s not like that.”

“Then *why*… is that angry American bloke here? Every loon in every corner of Britain knows you shagged his girlfriend. *Clearly*… clearly that doesn’t bother him enough to dump her, else he wouldn’t be here, and if she wanted to dump him… well, she had all the opportunity, didn’t she? But she hasn’t.”

“Aegon-“

“And if she hasn’t, then I suspect she’s not actually planning on doing it anytime soon.”

Jon gulps and shakes his head. He can only shake his head.

“Look, that twat seems like he’s a bore. She obviously needed some excitement. You gave her that, the two of you had fun, now the fun is over and you gotta go back to sucky reality.”

Jon doesn’t even have the energy to shake his head anymore. All his limbs feel like frozen ice.

“If I were a girl I’d give you a ‘now you know what it feels like’ speech, but I’m not. If I were straight I’d give you the ‘she’s just not that into you’ talk, but thankfully I’m not that either. Also, I’m your brother and I really hate funerals.”

“She told me she dumped him. Why would she lie? Sansa would never lie.”

Aegon shrugs.

“Yesterday, she said she wanted me to be here. She said she told Harry not to come.” Jon tries, “Why would she do that?”

“Because…” Aegon sighs, seems to take a moment to find the right answer, before he gives it, “She doesn’t actually think this means anything more to you, either. Women always think men don’t have feelings.”

Jon has re-found the ability to shake his head, “That’s not Sansa.” He says again, though with less strength this time.

“I’m sure that, once upon a time, you would’ve said the same about her being a cheater. She was in the States and other exotic places for how many years? She’s not the cute giggly innocent girl you crushed on when you were a teen, anymore. Why do you think her aunt isn’t here?”
“Roslin is-”

“Not Roslin, the other one. Cat’s sister. That mental woman. I wasn’t there at the time and I’m not besties with the family, unlike you, and clearly you don’t even know, but Sansa’s grandfather made it clear he didn’t want his own daughter at his funeral, and I’ve heard stories that it had something to do with the woman’s second husband.”

“Lysa Arryn?”

“Lysa Baelish, nowadays.”

“What does that got to do with Sansa?”

“I don’t know mate, as I said, I’m not besties with the family, but I did manage to get Myrcella Baratheon drunk once, and that girl has some sources.”

“Sources?”

“Ned Stark and Robert Baratheon have been palls since pre-school, basically, and they’re friends with Jon Arryn, Lysa’s first husband.”

“I still really don’t get what this has got to do with-“

“Apparently, he’s behind bars.”

“Who?”

“Baelish. Jesus Jon, this is why you don’t gossip? Anyway, Myrcella said it’s London’s best kept secret.”

“What is?”

“She did not say.”

Jon groans and rolls his eyes, “This is why I don’t gossip. It’s bullshit 99 percent of the time.”

“I’m not talking bullshit, I swear. Look… she didn’t say why he’s in jail, because she didn’t know, but she did say no one’s as glad for it as Sansa is.”

Jon’s neck aches when he turns it back to Aegon, “You think something happened? Do you think he hurt her?”

“I don’t know. As I said, Myrcella didn’t tell me. Which says a lot cause she’s a hell of a lot better at gossip than you are. She didn’t call it London’s best kept secret for no reason.”

“Do you think Rhaenys-“

“No. She would’ve told me.” Aegon clears his throat and shifts in his seat, “All I’m saying is… the Sansa who played with dolls and liked dress up and dated Joffrey Baratheon is gone. She was already gone when she left for New York, and was a totally new human being beyond recognition when she came back. That girl’s skin went from porcelain to ivory to steel.”

Jon shakes his head again, “That doesn’t mean she would-“

“Cheat on her boyfriend and then ask her dirty mistress to come to her grandad’s funeral to prove a point to the nasty press who are all over her? With you and Harry both being here she can ensure
that they’re gonna leave her alone after this. Obviously nothing is going on between you two, because Harry’s still by her side and you even shook his hand.”

“But-“

“You’ve been a member of the royal family for 25 years, you know how some people play the press. I know Lyanna doesn’t master it, but my mother works it better than anyone else. This is it.”

Jon closes his eyes as, at the front, Bran is reading a bible verse.

He may not hate funerals as much as Aegon does, but he surely hates this funeral more than anyone else.

“We should’ve stayed home.” Jon decides.

“Yeah, I know.” Aegon groans again and people turn around to glare once more.

Hoster Tully is buried within the cathedral, in the family vault. Laid to rest beside his wife. Jon can only hug his coat tighter around him as he stares at his feet.

There’s a whole lot less press suddenly, or so it seems. They must think the show’s over. The curtains have fallen. If Jon didn’t know better he may even take his costume off. But that’s not going to happen, ever. You’re always an actor, even when it appears as if you’re in private, and actors don’t go out of character.

The reception is as could be expected. Aegon seems to have found some sympathy somewhere deep inside of him and decided to stay, so he can now try and convince Jon to consume some alcohol.

“It’ll warm you up, make you feel less… less miserable, I suppose.”

“I’m fine feeling miserable.” Jon says, “I like feeling miserable.”

“Ugh, why do you always have to be so melancholic?” Aegon sighs, “You’re just like pa.”

“Thanks.”

“That really wasn’t a compliment.”

“I know.”

“You and dad are always one moody bunch, so fucking gruff. You can never let loose, have some fun.”

“I don’t want to have fun, I’m at a funeral.”

“You gotta take your heart out of your cock.”

“My heart’s not in my-“

“Oh yes it is.” Aegon chuckles as memories of the good old days come back to him, “You couldn’t even fuck Val without making it uncomfortable. Remember that girl, Madeleine? Or Cecilia? And the Spencer girl, Leonore? Heck, you fell in love with Ygritte.”

“That’s not the same.” Jon says.
“The only reason you managed to shag your way through my black book last year was because Ygritte broke your heart and you were desperately trying to prove her wrong.”

“I wasn’t trying to prove anything I-“

“She always mocked you for being so feeling. That’s why that whole article of hers hit you so hard, because she spoke some painful truths. Most people can’t handle that.”

“Aegon, that’s-“

“It’s why it hit Rhaenys hard, too. And pa, and your mother. But not me. I know exactly what my flaws are and whether or not I intend to work on them. I’m not perfect, nowhere near that, and I’ve stopped caring about everyone being disappointed.”

“Aegon-“

“You care too much, that’s all I’m saying.”

“How can people care too much?” Jon asks.

“You can? You’re caring too much, right now.”

“No I’m not.”

“Course you are, why else would you be upset? This has happened before. You care too much and your heart is broken and then you’re depressed for weeks.”

“This isn’t like that.”

“How is it any different?”

“Because I love her.” Jon says, his jaw clenched together as if he already knows he shouldn’t be saying it, “And it’s not like it was with Ygritte or Cecillia. It’s different. I don’t want it to mean something, I know it does.”

Aegon groans, “But why does it always have to mean something?”

“Because… because! My whole life is a façade, everything is fake, everything is an act, everything is set up and… and all I do, every day, it’s supposed to be calculated and thought through and be part of some long-term plan… I hate that. I want some things to not be for the public or the firm. I want some thing to just be for me. I want some things to be real. I know Sansa is real.”

Aegon raises his eyebrows and suddenly glares, “Don’t you fucking dare mention that. You know I love your mother with all my heart, she’s a wonderful human being and I consider her family, but
whatever you’re talking about… that’s not goals. That wrecked my parents apart, ruined my childhood, and I won’t let you romanticise it, don’t you dare do that in my face, because I am Elia Martell’s son and I will die defending her honour.”

“I’m not romanticising it.” Jon says, “But you can’t deny that what my parents share is real.”

Aegon sighs loudly, “Oh, I see, so it’s really all about you wanting to be like your mummy and daddy?”

“It’s about me wanting to be nothing like my parents.” Jon says and Aegon rolls his eyes. The darkness on his face has already disappeared, as quickly as it came. He doesn’t like talking with Jon about what happened between their parents. Probably because he hates fighting. He’s always been more loyal to his mother than Rhaenys. He’s not as practical as his sister.

“I still don’t get why things have to mean something to be real.” Aegon shrugs, “It could have been a real one night stand, but nooo, your heart has to live in your cock.”

“It does not. Like I said, it’s different now.”

“You wanna know what I think?”

“No?”

“You love the idea of her. As you loved the idea of Ygritte. I’m sure your idea of Ygritte would never have written that article. Your idea of Ygritte probably wasn’t aware of your PTSD either, Hmm?”

Jon shakes his head, “I know Sansa, better than I know myself.”

“Really?” Aegon asks, “Then tell me… why did she leave London, ten years ago?”

Jon opens his mouth, closes it again, then says, “You just think that happened for a reason because you heard stupid rumours.”

“Where there’s smoke there’s fire.”

“Shut up, Aegon.” Jon mutters, “You don’t know Sansa.”

“Nor do you. Yet you’re saying you love her. Love sucks, that I know. Especially for us folks.”

“Us folks?”

“You know what I mean. You struggle with that more than all the rest of us combined.” Aegon scoffs, “You’re the only one who hasn’t accepted his fate, yet. But you know exactly what dating you includes, and you know she knows. If she forgot she got her reminder. Being your boyfriend sucks big time, that’s the truth of it. Maybe you should consider not wanting to do that to her. Especially if you love her as much as you think you do.”

Jon can only widen his eyes and stare at Aegon in disbelieve, until Aegon chuckles, humourlessly.

“Why d’you think I’m a single man? I’ve seen what ‘love’ did to Rhaenys. Maybe you’d be wise to realise it’s just not in it for us. Rhaenys realised, I’ve always known, now it’s your turn.”

“You’re being pathetic.” Jon says, “And it’s stupid to compare.”

“I’m just saying, Sansa’s not a teenage girl who dreams of dating Britain’s most eligible bachelor.
She’s aristo, she knows how fucked up we are. She may like you, but she’s not mad enough to take you on. Anyway, it’s probably best that way. I get that it’s painful, but she’s really just a girl—“

“Shut up.” Jon growls before he marches outside towards the terrace, where some preppy lads widen their eyes at the sight of him. At the look of that Jon decides the grassy field in front of the terrace is probably a better place to scream all his frustrations out and smoke, so he makes his way down the stairs and lights a cigarette leaning against some really ancient oak tree.

Aegon takes too long to catch up with him, probably because he doesn’t work out that often, and he grabs Jon’s shoulder.

“Let’s just go home.” He suggests.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry, I ehm… I just wanna say that I do feel bad for you.”

“Thanks.”

“As you know, I happen to know a lot of women, and I also happen to be a wonderful wingman, as you also know, so I’ll be happy to help you send the girl a message again. As we did with Ygritte, remember?”

“I really don’t want to send a message.” Jon says. Frankly, the idea of having to sleep himself through a heap of Aegon’s girlfriends makes him feel kind of sick. After Ygritte, he felt immensely lonely. Now, he feels much worse, more like he had the hope his life wasn’t going to totally suck and now that’s just been stripped away from him, and all there’s left is memories of certain feelings he’s sure he’ll never feel again. Maybe his heart really does live inside his cock.

Aegon takes the pack of cigarettes from Jon’s hand and lights one, “That bad, huh?” He sighs, “Now I feel guilty for making fun of you behind your back.”

“Don’t worry bout it.” Jon says, and he means it. Aegon’s his older brother, he’s supposed to be an arsehole. When it’s necessary, he’ll always stick up for him, and, so Jon has always told himself, that’s probably all that matters.

He’s reminded of that when they walk around the oak tree, back towards the terrace when suddenly, from some corner Jon’s eyes managed to miss, Harry jumps at him and hammers his fist to his face.

“Oi! That’s my brother you dickhead!” Aegon bellows and, like a true honorable knight, he attacks the attacker while Jon stumbles backwards, nearly falls over in his attempt to rescue some of his dignity, and grabs for his bleeding nose.

Within a matter of very tiny seconds Robb pulls Aegon off Harry, who easily admits defeat, for the desired target has long been hit, and makes ready to walk away.

“You come back here you coward!” Aegon screams while Robb pushes him away.

Sansa screams and comes running their way, flapping black skirt and all.

“I’m gonna seriously do him harm!” Aegon screams at Harry’s back.

“Stop, no, STOP!” Jon grabs Aegon by the back of his coat, “I really deserved that.”
“I don’t care.” Aegon says, but he allows Jon to pull him away.

“We’re going home.” Jon tells Robb, who nods and gives him a worried look, as they’re walking around the castle, hopefully to enter through some door where not an entire host of funeral guests will be able to look upon Jon’s bleeding face of shame.

In the back Jon hears Sansa argue with what he assumes is Harry, but the only other voice he hears is Catelyn’s, followed by the clear slap of a hand to a cheek.

“Sansa, come back here!” Catelyn screams, but she’s obviously ignored when Sansa catches up with Jon and his host of unpaid defenders.

“Jon! Jon, stop…” she pulls his hand and then shies back once she sees the look in his eyes, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t touch me.” He says and he pushes her away.

“Are you hurt?”

“No.”

“You’re bleeding.” Sansa says and her hand moves to his ruined black blouse.

“I said, don’t touch me.” Jon can’t help but raise his voice then.

“Are you leaving?” She asks.

“Yeah.” Jon says and from the corner of his eye he spots Aegon aggressively calling the driver, while Robb gives Sansa some narrowed-eyed look that could mean a million things.

“Maybe I could-“

“Just leave it.” Jon says and he turns around to continue his march to wherever Robb plans on taking him.

“Jon…” she grabs his hand again and doesn’t shy away this time when he rudely pulls it back, “I’m sorry!” She calls loudly, “You can’t leave like that, you have to clean your face.”

“Watch me.”

“Jon, please-“

“Just leave me alone!” Jon barks at her, and he instantly feels guilt when tears appear in her eyes, but he’s too angry and there’s too much adrenaline in his body and he’s already made his choice, so he can’t give into it now just because she’s crying.

“Jon…” she tries one more time, but she doesn’t follow him anymore, and Jon doesn’t look back.

Jon’s in Riverrun’s library for only three minutes before Clegane informs them he’s just around the corner, ready for them to pop in.

“I’m sorry mate.” Jon tries but Robb shakes his head.

“She’s my little sister.” He says, “And this is my grandfather’s funeral.”

“I didn’t-“
“Yeah, I’m sure it wasn’t your fault.” Robb says, but the look in his eyes is full of something horrifyingly close to disgust, “But it happened anyway.”

“Robb-“

“I gotta go, make sure Sansa’s okay.” Robb says, and he then turns around, to walk away as fast as his long legs can carry him.

“Can’t blame him.” Aegon says after some silence, “You broke numerous bro codes there.”

Jon can only glare and Aegon, who then suddenly bursts out laughing.

Laughing.

“I’m sorry!” He says, hiding his mouth behind his hand in an attempt to stop what sounds too much like an attack of giggles, “I am, I’m… I’m sorry, but really, I’ve sort of always wanted to do that. I mean, I hit him. I wasn’t in the army you know, and I don’t attack paparazzi, this is new to me. Also, your face looks kinda funny.”

“Bugger off, Aegon.” Jon says, but Aegon can only laugh some more as his shoulder shake uncontrollably.

He manages to control his laughter once they get into the car, but then starts again when Clegane frowns his eyebrows in that way he always does when he’s judging.

“What the fuck did you two get up to?”

“Have you perhaps read the Daily Mail lately, Sandor?” Aegon asks.

“Of course not, what do you think, I’m an idiot?”

“Don’t know why I asked.” Aegon nods, leaning back in his seat.

“You seriously should get some ice on that.” Aegon says once they’re well on their way, hitting the high road.

“Yeah, good idea, let’s stop and find a frozen lake or something.”

Aegon laughs again, then tells Sandor, “Sandor, I hit Jon’s rival in the face today.”

“And he hit Jon, I reckon?”

“Yeah, but his was a surprise attack.”

“Right.” Sandor growls, before he says, “There might actually be some disinfecting spray underneath the seats.”

Aegon amuses himself by torturing Jon with some disinfect mess, before he turns back to his phone, “We should’ve taken the heli.” He mutters when Sandor informs them it’s another three hours of driving, scrolling through some Facebook page, before he opens his village of Smurfs, ready to gather coins and build them some new mushroom homes.

Jon turns to his side. His nose doesn’t hurt so much, it’s more his cheekbone that suffers heavily and when he leans the aching skin to the cold glass of the window it feels good. He sits in that position, shifting his face every now and then to find the coolest spot, for about an hour, until Aegon shoves him.
“Juan… Jon, brother, she’s calling.”

“What?” Jon isn’t eager to remove his face off the glass, but then Aegon throws his iPhone against his shoulder, which seriously hurts, and he sits up, “OW!”

“She’s calling, you idiot.” Aegon says, before he turns back to his phone, pretending to be uninterested.

Jon stares at her name for too long and misses the call. For a moment, he feels relieve until the phone stubbornly goes off again.

“Turn that fucking noise off!” Sandor loudly orders, and in fear of the driver’s anger, Jon, stupidly, picks up the phone.

“Hello?”

She’s crying, he can hear that instantly, he imagines her face is full of tears by just the way her voice sounds, “Jon? I’m s-sorry.” She sounds more surprised than he feels by the fact that he actually picked up the phone.

“What’s wrong?”

Aegon lifts his arm up to let Jon know he thinks that’s the dumbest question imaginable. He’s probably right.

“I-I’m sorry.” She sobs again.

“Sansa I…” He says and his throat tightens as he tries to gulp, “I’m sorry too, I’m sorry I… stop crying.”

“How’s your face? Did he hurt you?”

“My face’s fine.”

“R-really?”

“Yeah.” Jon lies.

“Robb’s very a-angry.” She says then, and he really doesn’t understand why. Not with her, that is. Robb being angry with her angers him.

“He shouldn’t be.”

“I’m sorry, it’s all my fault.”

Jon chooses not to deny that, and he knows that probably makes her feel bad, and some part of him doesn’t care, even though it’s not true. It really, really isn’t just her fault. They really, really fucked up together.

“Can we talk?”

“I’m in the car.”

“Is Aegon-“

“Yeah, he’s here.”
Aegon seems to smell he’s the ‘he’ and he sits up straight as if to honour it.

“A-are you still angry with me?” She asks then, and though her voice and her tears and sobs shatter every thought Aegon managed to push in his brain, he can’t help but still feel angry, and in his anger, he feels no need to help her feel better, so he ignores that question again.

He hears her sob through the phone and he wonders where she is, if she’s still at Riverrun, if maybe he can convince Sandor to turn around and drive back. Maybe he will, if Jon’ll give him a tip the size of his monthly wage.

“My mum, she… Mum said it would be better if Harry-“

“I really don’t care about your mother.” Remembering the way Catelyn looked at him all day, Jon feels confident saying that.

“No! I mean, I know, I understand, but… that’s not… what I’m trying to say is that, with all the media attention… I just didn’t want to… I don’t know what I wanted. They kept talking to me and I… I know I probably should’ve told you it was better for you not to come.”

Jon agrees.

“But I really wanted to see you, and I had… I’d missed you, and I thought… I don’t know what I was thinking. I just didn’t want to wait another two days to see you.”

Jon shared that feeling, “I… I wanted to see you too.”

“Really?” She sounds oddly surprised, but perhaps that’s just relieve, and he can hear her smile through the phone, “Okay g-good.”

“I told you, I did.”

“Yeah.”

“I just don’t get why he was there.” Jon feels no desire to say Harry’s name aloud.

“I didn’t even want him there, I told him not to come, I told you I told him not to come. My parents called him, I think. They decided that the media would… I mean, with the funeral… mummy was so upset, you have no idea.”

“I get it.” Jon says, and there’s really no way ever he’ll ever be able to explain how much it pisses him off that Aegon was right. The only thing Jon hates more than Aegon being right, is press games. Never did he think these two would ever be combined in something Sansa did. That’s the most infuriating realisation Jon has ever had to experience.

“I don’t think you do.” She says and her sobbing has slowly decreased, “I’m… I want to explain.”

“Sure.” Jon’s aware of how cold his voice is.

“Daddy rang the palace, they advised-“

At that Jon breaks. He’s in no mood to hear how the fucking palace feels about any of this. How the fuck dare they? He can perfectly imagine his father sitting behind a desk, looking over that godawful article, deciding to ring up Sansa’s parents to talk business.

“I don’t fucking care.”
“W-what?”

“About what the palace said. I don’t want to hear it. I can imagine.”

“Well they advised-“

“For Harry to be there?” Jon guesses and it takes her too long to respond so Jon knows all he needs to know, “I don’t bloody care.” Jon says, “I hope Harry had a good time crashing the party.”

“It was my grandfather’s funeral.” Sansa says, and her voice is suddenly less apologetic.

“Don’t I know it.” Jon mutters.

“I’m sorry?”

“Whatever, I gotta hang.”

“No, Jon, listen, I want to explain-“

“I never asked for an explanation. I never asked for any of this.”

“Well, if that’s really how you feel-“

“I don’t think you give a shit about how I feel!”

“Jon!” She yells again, and her sadness has turned to frustrated anger, “Of course I do! How can you-“

“I’m not here for press games, okay? I don’t do shit like that. I don’t appreciate people playing with me like I’m some sort of doll on a media chess board. You can tell your daddy to ring the palace and inform them that-“

“That’s not what happened!”

“You just told me that’s what happened! Harry was there because the press had to photograph him being there.”

“Yes, well-“

“And that’s why I had to show up, too. That’s why I had to be there. My presence was necessary for-“

“No! I wanted you to be there!”

“Yeah, you tell yourself that. This is my life, okay? I get that’s hard for you to imagine, but I have to live like that, every single day I deal with this. I know how the game works, and I don’t want to fucking play it and I especially don’t let other people play it with me!”

“You think that’s what happened? You really think I would use you like that?”

“You just told me.”

“No, I’ve told you a billion times that I wanted you there because I missed you and wanted to see you.”

“You didn’t see me, though, did you? I sat at the back of the sodding church while he sat right
beside you.”
“I didn’t want that.”
“Well, then you should’ve told him to piss off. But you didn’t.”
“It was my grandfather’s funeral.” Sansa simply says.
“I get it, thank you.”
“No, you don’t. Can’t we just… can’t we… can we see each other?”
“I’m in the car.”
“I mean tomorrow!”
“I’m having loads of shit to do.”
“Well, I’m sure you can find a moment where we’ll-“
“I’m sorry, but I really don’t think Harry would like that.”
“Harry’s not-“
“Happy, no, he’s very unhappy. And if you don’t mind, I don’t think we should anger him some more.”
“I don’t give a fig about Harry!”
“I don’t want to talk about Harry.” Jon decides.
“Nor do I!”
“I don’t want to talk at all.”
“Jon-“
“I’ve gotta go.”
“No! Listen, can I just… can I call you when you’re home? Can I… can I call you tomorrow? Can we please talk? I can explain, I-“
“Yeah, fine.”
“Stop cutting me off.”
“I said it’s fine.”
“Well, great.” She says and he’s sure her crying has stopped. That’s one thing anger is good for.
“I really gotta go now.”
“Okay.”
“Bye.”
“Jon, I-“
Jon hangs up and throws his phone away.

No one says a thing and the silence only widens the burning feeling in Jon’s abdomen, and he’s more aware than ever of his painful cheek. Jon drops down back against the window and he realises he feels like crying, but he’s too angry and bitter to allow himself such a release of emotions. Right now, he prefers to stubbornly bottle it all up.

After a minute or three, Aegon clears his throat, “So erm, Sandor… how’s your brother doing? Gregor’s his name? I haven’t seen him around in a while, he’s still working for the Duke of Westminster?”

Sandor doesn’t respond and keeps his eyes firmly on the road.

“What’d she say?” Aegon asks, but when he, again, gets no response he leans back.

About an hour out of London Jon is nearly falling asleep against the cold window, when Aegon shoves him once more.

“Your pal Sam is asking us to join him in some pub.”

“I don’t want to go out.” Jon says, he hopes that saying it slowly will save him from having to repeat it.

“But I do.”

“You don’t need me, I know you don’t.”

“You need a drink.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t-“

“Jon!” Aegon pulls his brother off the window by grabbing the fabric around his upper arm, “I’ve been in a car for nearly eight hours today, I was at the funeral of a man I don’t remember ever meeting, I went all the way to Cumbria for you, I listened to all your whining and self-pity, suffered myself a way through your hoops of melancholy, dealed with your gruffy negative arse, I… I fought for you today! The least fucking thing you can do for me is have a fucking beer!”

Jon says nothing and leans his face back against the glass.

“Thanks.”

“That was not a yes.” Jon mutters, and then suddenly, oddly, scarily, Sandor laughs.

Sandor Clegane is laughing at him. When Jon never actually thought the man had such an ability.

And so Jon finds himself getting dragged into what seems to be not at all Aegon’s kind of place. Wearing his cap pulled over his face in hope of no one seeing him and leaking pictures of his harmed face to the press. At first sight it seems like a pub Aegon wouldn’t want to be found in when dying. But then, Aegon really isn’t as bad as he seems, as Jon always keeps telling people, including Sam, who also doesn’t understand what the hell Aegon is doing here.

“He texted me to ask if I was willing to cheer you up tonight, I said sure, but I already agreed to
meet here with Pyp and Grenn, and I couldn’t really cancel, and then he invited you, which was totally fine, I just didn’t expect him to invite himself.”

“It’s fine.” Jon says, as he shifts in his seat, “Aegon is socially strong enough to save himself.”

Aegon seems to have found the one other gay guy in the bar, who’s now teaching him how to play darts, which might be hilarious, wasn’t it that Jon’s life sucks.

“So ehm… I wanted to ask, but I didn’t think you’d like to answer.” Sam starts.

“Sansa Stark?”

Sam nods once after some hesitation.

“Was true, not anymore.”

“So why do you need cheering up?”

Jon’s not sure why he partly lies, when he says, “I broke the bro code.”

“Oh… Yeah, so… Robb is angry?”

Jon nods.

“I’m sorry, that must be bad.”

Jon opens his mouth to respond when a red-headed woman walks in.

Jon’s eyes widen for a moment, then he feels like hiding behind Sam’s respectable torso, but already knows he failed the moment he sees her, because she was already looking right at him when he spotted her.

Jon coughs, “Ygritte.”

“What?”

“Ygritte.”

“Jon, I can’t-“

“It’s Ygritte!”

“Oh… Oh! Ehm… yeah, I suppose she’s here with Gilly.”

“They still hang out?” Jon can’t help but feel betrayed.

“Errr yeah… sometimes? I didn’t think you’d like to know so I never mentioned.”

Jon pulls himself up from his seat, “Gotta go home.”

Sam gets up too, in an attempt to stop him, or maybe politely ask him not to leave, but Jon has already rushed over to Aegon, who just missed the dartboard and hit the painting hanging at it’s left.

“We’re leaving.”

“Have you had some beer?”
“No.”

“In that case, we’re not leaving.”

“Aegon I wanna go.”

“Oh, Thank you!” Aegon accepts the darts his new friend pulled out of the wall for him, “I’m just going to- Hey!”

Jon pulls Aegon with him back to their coats, but it’s too late.

“Jon?” Ygritte fakes surprise.

“Oh…” Aegon says, “Oh, no.”

Jon can’t bring himself to greet her, or even acknowledge her, so all he does is glare.

“Didn’t know you’d be here.”

“Likewise.” Aegon says, and though he doesn’t glare, Jon imagines his stare is worse.

“I was-“

“I haven’t had one beer.” Aegon says, “I mean, since you think I have a drinking problem I ehm… thought you’d like to know.”

Ygritte blushes for the first time ever, Jon thinks, and her eyes are two wide glossy blue balls that stare back at Jon, “Jon, I’m-“

Jon doesn’t think he can bear it if another redhead gives him a serenade of apologies, so he marches over to grab his coat, gives Gilly the look of betrayal, and then stumbles out of the pub, Aegon following him closely.

Jon can’t actually pull the cigarettes out of his pocket or she’s already caught up with him.

“Jon…” she starts, her accent as strong as ever, “I’ve wanted to speak to ye for so long.”

Jon lights his cigarette while mockingly grinning.

“I just didn’t think ye’d want to talk to me.”

“You know me so well.” Jon says.

“I just wanted to say I regret that interview. I never should’ve don’ it. I’m sorry.”

Jon just blinks at her. He hopes he looks extremely unimpressed.

“We just needed the money, Jon.”

“You really only had to ask.”

“That’s not… I never could not accept yer money.”

“Guess your father wouldn’t want English pounds, hmm?”

Ygritte’s eyes widen, “What are ye-“
“Shut up.” Jon really is over it now. Sansa crying on the phone was enough for today, he has no energy left in him to battle this. Frankly, he doesn’t care enough to put in effort, “You used to be a member of the Tartan Terrorists.”

“How do ye know?”

“Well, not cause you told me!”

“That’s years ago!”

“I don’t care! Your uncle Tormund send my grandmother a letter bomb!”

“That’s not-“

“And you gave an interview to the press where you called my family fake, sick and toxic! You called me toxic!”

“No! No I didn’t I… I called… the world was toxic. Ye know it is. I couldn’t bear all the attention. I hated it, you know I hated it. I put up with it for-“

“You know shit about the attention. I’ve had it all my life.”

“I…. Ye know nothin’!” She says, and her lower lip trembles, “All they wrote about me, all they said… they followed me everywhere, I couldn’t bear that!”

“You called my sister a snob.”

“You called her a snob.” She reminds him.

“I’m sure I did at one point, we all say mean things about our family because family can be fucking annoying but they’re my family. You told the press my brother has a drinking problem!”

“He does!”

“So what if he does!” Jon grabs another cigarette and lights it, “It wasn’t for you to earn money by telling the world! I thought I could trust you.”

“Jon…. I … I knew ye’d be angry but-“

“But what?” Jon shakes his head and sucks on his cigarette, “I hope the money you earned was well spent.”

“It was.” She says, “I needed it for my father. Ye know he needed the medical care. It wasn’t for the attention.”

“Yeah, I’m glad my toxic family and I could be of use to you.”

“Jon-“

“Don’t touch me!” When Jon told Sansa he said it because he knew he’d lose his self control if she held on to him for too long. With Ygritte, it’s just that the idea of her touching him makes him feel sick.

“I really am sorry.” Ygritte says again. She’s nowhere near as upset as Sansa was on the phone. She means her apology, but that is it. She doesn’t have sleepless nights where she can’t stop thinking about her mistake. She’ll sleep just fine tonight as well.
“Apology not accepted.” Jon informs her. Pycelle will probably be very disappointed in him for failing at the blessed forgiveness, but some things are simply unforgivable, and all there’s left to do is forgive oneself for being unforgiving. Jon feels extremely unforgiving when he sees the unaffected look in Ygritte’s eyes.

“I understand.” She says.

“Bye.” Jon walks back to Aegon, who was wise enough to keep his distance.

“You didn’t make her cry, did you?”

Jon shakes his head, “No. She apologised, and I didn’t accept it.”

“Good for you, brother.” Aegon slaps Jon’s back, “You feel better?”

“No.”

“Okay, So are we going to have some beer now?”

Jon sighs, “Sure.”
 Sansa and Harry get home around eleven, after the longest, most painful drive back to London. He said nothing from beginning to end, and Sansa was glad for it, because if he thought to open his mouth, she probably would have yelled things she’d grow to regret.

Barely has she taken off her shoes and he marches into the bedroom, and slams the door shut.

Sansa can only stand there, nailed to the floor, as she hears him move around.

Ten minutes later, he walks out with a suitcase.

“We can talk about the practical stuff later.”

“Where are you going?”

Harry shrugs, “Some hotel? I can go check if Richard is still awake, but I don’t want to bother him.”

“You don’t have to.” Sansa says, “It’s past midnight. You can… you can take the bed, I’ll sleep on the sofa.”

“I can have the bed?” Harry laughs the most humourless, most horrifying laugh she’s ever heard him laugh, “The idea of having to sleep in that bed makes me want to kill myself.”

Sansa blinks a couple of times and then decides she really gets that, “Okay well… you can take the sofa, then.” Harry doesn’t need to know that the sofa is about as tainted as the bed.

“No.” He says, “I don’t want to be here.”

Sansa nods as if she understands, she probably would if she tried, but then, her body is so full of emotions and shock that all she wants to do is take a shower and sit down on the floor, crying.

“I’ll come pick up the rest of my stuff sometime next week.”

“You agree that I should keep the flat?”
“I don’t ever want to be here again.”

“Harry, I’m sorry.” Sansa can’t help but try when he makes way towards the door.

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes. Yes, I am.” Sansa’s sure of that, “I would’ve… if I had the chance to do it all over again I would never have-“

“You would sleep with him again.” Harry says and he sounds extremely convinced of that, “Don’t you fucking dare deny that.”

Sansa gulps, “I’m not denying that, because that’s not…” she closes her eyes and realises that debating with Harry whether or not sleeping with Jon was wrong is really the last thing she ever wants to do in her life, “I would have handled it all very differently.”

Harry gives her a look of disgust, opens the layers of the cupboard, grabs out some of the papers he seems to deem important, that is, contracts and his passport, pushes these in his suitcase, and then moves towards the door.

“I never cheated.” Sansa says, “Nothing happened before you ran out on me at Robb’s wedding.”

“I ran out on you?” Harry looks furious then, but Sansa won’t back down on this one.

“I ran after you, but you already made up your mind. I told you that if you’d leave we’d be over. I told you that if you left, I wanted you out of my home before I got back. You’re the one who gave up on us.”

“There hasn’t been an us for some while. Not since you stood on that balcony and he handed you his motherfucking coat.”

Sansa can’t deny that, “I’m sorry.” She says.

“I hope you’ll be happy in your golden prison.” He mocks.

“I really hope you’ll be happy working all day and every day for a bank.” Sansa can’t help but throw back.

“You and that guy deserve each other. He didn’t deserve my fist to his face.”

Sansa agrees, though her reasoning may be a bit different, “I really don’t… I really wish it could be not like this.”

“Should’ve thought of that sooner.” Harry says, and with that, he’s gone.

Sansa’s sob sounds more like a gasp. He really is gone now. She had planned to do this, but he didn’t let her take the high road, instead, she’s the villain now. She can’t even deny it herself, it’s more than a feeling, it’s knowing things for a fact.

So, Sansa takes a shower, sits down on the bathroom floor, crying as the streams of water fall down upon her face and body, the heavy weight of her wet hair only increasing the headache.

After that she puts on the warmest pajamas she can find and goes to lie in bed, feeling miserable and alone.

The dumped adulteress shouldn’t be alone. She should have her lover here with her, at least. That
is how they always make it seem in the movies. Where the one who’s cheated on is crying and miserable, while the asshole cheater doesn’t feel bad whatsoever and goes off to some luxurious palm beach vacation, with lover and all, feeling no shame whatsoever.

Sansa hates her life. She hates Harry, she hates her parents, she hates Robb, she hates Jon… she hates him most of all. None of this would have happened had he not been so Jon. She was living the perfectly picture perfect life before she bumped into him at Buckingham Palace. Before he smiled at her the way she’s sure he only smiles at her, before he looked at her in that way she’s always wanted someone to look at her.

It’s his face that dances in front of her eyes when she goes to lie in bed, and surprisingly, she falls asleep right away.

When she wakes up, she can only think of how she told him she’d call him. She told him, and though he didn’t sound all too excited, he agreed.

Sansa can’t remember ever feeling this insecure. About his feelings and her own.

In her mind, she tries to turn it so that it’s somewhat a good sign that it upset him so much to see Harry. Clearly he didn’t like that at all. Obviously he was also angered by the fist to his eye, but that occurred long after he gave Sansa one extremely displeased and pissed off glare from the other end of the church.

She can’t blame him. If she’d stumbled into a church for the funeral of a man she couldn’t actually remember ever having a real conversation with other than simple pleasantries, for which she’d had to travel half through the country, and battle a host of eager and insane photographers, to then only find Jon standing there, accompanied by no other but someone else, she would have probably turned around at the spot to run away and hide and cry in some dark corner.

Obviously that sort of thing isn’t Jon’s style. It’s in his blood to hide his feelings. His face never gives anything away. Only when he means to- so obviously he meant to let her know how absolutely crazy angry he was.

But she can explain. Sansa knows she can. She’ll tell him. She’ll tell him all about her mother’s speech, her father’s insistence, uncle Edmure who was desperate to give his father a respectable funeral without it being a total media circus, Robb who was red with fury…

“I just got a call from the palace’s press secretary.”

“Has Jon been-“

“They say the best thing is to say nothing and ignore them. I suggested Harry being there, asked if they think that might give the hint for press to lose some of their interest and they said it’s very possible and they urged we try.” Ned informed her.

At the moment Sansa couldn’t actually imagine it was her private love life they were talking about. As if it was business.

“I just don’t want you to look bad, darling.” Ned said.

Because that’s what this all was about. It isn’t about the upcoming elections. It isn’t even about grandpa Tully’s funeral being a total fiasco, waltzed over by photographers and some videocameras… it is about Sansa’s perfect reputation.

“After everything you went through, I don’t want the newspapers to drag you for this.”
“For what?”

“They’re calling you an adulteress.”

Sansa remembered very well how TrudyDaisy from Worcester had called her a ‘Very lovely girl, our prince is lucky to have such a classy lady!’ Yet she couldn’t remember where exactly any newspaper had called her an adulteress, but sure, she was the first to admit that would leak.

If it hadn’t already. Plenty of people in Sansa and Harry’s environment would be happy to leak any sort of information regarding their relationship status, which had, despite the red lights, been firmly on in the eyes of the outside world, until last night, that is.

So yes, sure, she would be the adulteress. And people would shame her for it. They’d write articles and say mean things about her. Call her names, make fun of her, probably go as far as to mock the amount of times she touches her hair, the way she sits, the way she puts one foot in front of the other when she walks…

And that would be the end of the world? Sansa should think that after not just going through but also surviving everything that happened, her parents would have a little more faith in her strength. But alas, clearly not.

“You just don’t want me to be with Jon, because you think it’ll make me unhappy in the long run.” She accused her father, who seemed taken back by that, watched her for a moment and then shook his head.

“Sansa I-“

“And it won’t look good, for the party, because he’s a member of the royal family, and he’s not allowed to be political. My relationships will reflect on you, and you don’t want this to reflect on you.”

“Let’s not talk about that now.”

“Why not? It’s why you want me to use Harry to play the press.”

“Not use him-“

“If I tell him I want him to come, only because I want to misinform the press, he won’t come. Because he’ll feel like I’m using him. Which I am.” Sansa insisted, “Which I won’t.”

But Sansa did, because Harry was already on his way over, and some part of her couldn’t bare to get angry with him, in some extreme fear of making things worse. When he arrived at Riverrun he hugged her, and she couldn’t deny the warmth of his embrace made her feel somewhat better.

“It’s not true, is it?” He asked, “You wouldn’t do that.”

Half a year ago Sansa would have agreed wholeheartedly. She really wouldn’t ever do that. Not to Harry, not to anyone.

But half a year ago, Sansa didn’t know Ed Sheeran was right all along. Half a year ago, she didn’t make herself feel like throwing up because she’s so in love… it’s basically a little sickening how much she likes him. She’s the first to admit that.

There are many things she’s learned, things she’s gained. Things she could have happily lived without was she not utterly addicted now.
Even if she could, Sansa doesn’t want to. She chooses not to live without that. Who the hell cares about what her parents think?

Ned and Catelyn think Sansa is that tainted, scarred girl, who needs protection, whose shields are all scattered, walls are broken, and legs too weak to run away from threat.

But that’s not who she wants to be anymore. She is in London because she chose to stop running, and it felt good. It felt right. Jon feels good and right too.

And yes, it’s terrifying. Because not running means she’ll choose something she decided long ago, to much heartbreak, doesn’t exist. A fairytale. A fantasy. The dream of having that love story she always used to read about. When she still believed the real Sisi and Franz Joseph from the Romy Schneider trilogy were happily married, before she read the biography and found out they really definitely weren’t.

The only ones who don’t love a good love story are those who are all too aware that all stories end. But what’s a books without stories? Sansa refuses to miss the opportunity of writing perhaps the best chapter of her life.

She caught Harry staring at Jon and Aegon having a smoke in the garden, walked up to him and asked, “Why are you here? Did my parents-“

“Your mother called.” He admitted, before he turned his head, “Since when?”

“What?”

“Since when?”

Sansa gulped down some of her tea, and then turned somewhat away, to stare down at her feet.

“You’re not going to lie to me, are you?”

“How do you know?”

“Just… the way he kissed your cheek.”

Sansa felt like the air was sucked out of her lungs and she only nodded. She supposed everyone could feel the tension there. Jon kissed her cheek and it was the gentlest touch she’d felt in too long, weakening her knees, all she wanted to do was beg him to hold her.

“Since when?” Harry asked again.

“Robb’s wedding.”

When Sansa looked up he nodded, then swore, and shook his head in disbelieve. After that he gave her that first look of disgust that would be followed by many more after.

“Harry I’m-“

“Shut up.”

“I never-“

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“I’m sorry.”
“Was it only once?”

At that tears appeared in her eyes and she didn’t need to say anything to answer him.

Before she knew it, he dropped his own cup down to the nearest table, marched outside and pressed his fist to Jon’s cheekbone.

Sansa screamed and her scream caught Catelyn’s attention, who ordered Ned, without muttering a sound, to entertain the guests with a Chopin piano piece played by Rickon, who suddenly was eager to do so, for the first time in his life.

Aegon went full defense mode, the way only siblings can, and it actually took Robb some effort to pull the prince off Sansa’s boyfriend.

“What the hell was that?” Sansa asked when Jon marched off.

“Half of what he deserves.”

“It’s my grandfather’s funeral!”

Harry shrugged, “You were happy to spread your legs for him only a day after your grandfather—”

He never finished that sentence because Sansa smacked him across the face with more force than she ever imagined she possessed. She instantly regretted doing that, but it didn’t stop her from running after Jon, who wasn’t at all eager to talk to her. His face was bleeding and that gave her a burst of anger, worry and shame all at once.

Robb found her standing at the same spot in the middle of the field, 15 minutes later, tears having ruined all her small attempts at make up, and he made no effort to comfort her.

“Let’s go inside.” He suggested.

“Is he… are they—“

“They left.” Robb said, “And if I were you I wouldn’t call him.”

She wanted to ask what he meant by that, but she didn’t have to. His eyes said it all.

“Stop judging me.” She said.

“Judging you?”

“Yes. Stop it.”

“I’m not—“

“You are, and you don’t get to. You’re my brother, you should—“

“Warm you from making a really big fucking mistake.”

“That’s really what you think?”

Robb said nothing.

“You wanna know what I think?”

Robb really didn’t seem to be one bit interested, and that infuriated her.
“I think you think you made a mistake.”

Robb’s eyes widened and she hadn’t seen him that angry since that one time topless pictures of Rhaenys sunbathing when they were holidaying in the South of France leaked out.

“Shut up.” He hissed, “You don’t know what you’re talking about, you have no idea, you’re a naïve fool about to get ravished by wild dogs with cameras.”

Sansa nodded, “If that’s really how you see me, you don’t know me at all.”

Robb laughed scornfully, “Fine, okay the pity card. Just don’t come running with tears down your cheeks when things go to hell, because I will tell you I told you so.”

“Don’t you worry about that.” Sansa spat back.

Robb said nothing again, just gave her that one hateful look and turned to walk away, but Sansa felt like she wasn’t done telling him to back off just yet.

“It’s very disappointing that you think your opinion in this is of value.”

“It’s good to know you don’t give a shit.”

“It is! Would you give a shit? Do you think you need my permission to go off and do someone?”

“That’s not the point! You’re being reckless and careless and self-centered. I don’t know what it is you’re thinking, but I don’t want to talk to you right now.”

And that’s all Robb had to say to her, up till the point came where they departed Cumbria to go back to London.

Sansa wanted to ask her father to promise her, swear to her, that it all had nothing to do with the upcoming elections, but she didn’t have the guts. She wouldn’t be able to deal with him either lying or admitting to the truth but making it seem less bad.

Power is not a right, it’s a duty, and if Ned’s family will cause uproar that’ll have a lasting damaging effect to the campaign, which might negatively influence the eventual outcome of the votes… well. It would be Ned’s duty to do all that’s in his might to prevent that.

Sansa’s quite sure that her mother, Robert Baratheon, Jon Arryn, Howland Reed, Vayon Poole, Jory Kassel and a dozen other party members, as well as the palace staff he had on the phone, convinced him that, at all cost, this was really not a scandal they could risk. Thanks to Robert and his own bunch of family scandals as of late, the polls are really quite miserable, currently.

Sansa’s not as stupid as they all think she is. She supposes that, at this point, she’d better not fight it, but instead take advantage of the situation.

“You’re right, daddy. I’ve been a stupid woman.”

“Don’t say that, darling.” He said, instantly.

“I’ve been so foolish… I’ve hurt everyone.”

“We all make mistakes.”

“I’m so, so sorry.”
Ned stroked her hair and hugged her tight. That sort of hug that might’ve given her comfort had she not felt so miserably betrayed.

They don’t have to know. Ned doesn’t, Cat doesn’t, and Robb can go to hell, too. They’ll come around. They’re her family.

It’s as if their resistance only makes her more determined. And with that fierce and strong determination, she opens her phone, ready to call him, to order him to listen to her. She’ll do all the talking this time, she’ll tell him all, and he’ll hear it. she’ll make this right.

Sansa has prepared her speech and is ready to find his name, when a text message from Jeyne pops up.

‘Are you Okay?’ She asks.

‘Yeah. Thansx’

‘U want me to come over with ice cream?’

‘Lol, no, I’m good. It’s not that breakup.’

‘Naaah I get it. But I thought you really liked him?’

At that Sansa blinks and sits down, ‘Who’re you talking about?’

‘You saw the pictures?’

Sansa’s certainly not ready to admit to not having seen any sort of picture, and with one click she opens the Daily Mail’s app.

Sansa would have preferred for it to be Val. Or some other blonde nobody. Or a brunette nobody. She even would have preferred it if it had been someone from her own circle. Some lightheaded artisto friend of Aegon’s.

She would’ve hated all that, but at least it would not have broken her heart- because at least with them, she’d know that she is the more special one.

Ygritte’s hair has a more fiery, more orange shade of red. Brighter than Sansa’s. If she’d been the one on that balcony, she would not have been dubbed ‘mystery brunette’, no one would have had to look twice to know it was her. No one has to look twice now either.

They’re not touching, but they’re certainly in some conversation that could be about anything at all.

Sansa can’t ever remember asking Jon if he still was in contact with the woman who sold his family’s dirty laundry to the press. She has not thought it weird to assume he didn’t.

‘All’s forgiven?’ The title of the article wonders. Sansa can only read the first two sentences, where the writer wonders if perhaps true love conquers all, before she has to throw her phone away and sink down on the stool before she nearly falls over.

‘Sans?’ Jeyne worriedly asks, and Sansa takes a deep breath before she sends a smiley and a thumbs up emoticon.

And with these words, Sansa bows down to grab a pot of Ben and Jerries cookie dough from the freezer, before she curls up on the sofa, ready to eat it all while crying her eyes out.
Is this karma? After all these years of seeing the monsters win, Sansa had certainly given up on any type of faith in karma— but it seems that it’s real when it is she who has sinned.

When she turns on the telly, the Colin Firth version of Jane Austen’s Pride & Prejudice pops on.

One of the most romantic moments of cinematic history; Colin helps Lizzie into the carriage, holding her hand, the camera zooms in on the rare touch. He stares deeply into her eyes, and then tells hers, warmly and with true conviction, “I hope we shall meet again very soon.”

He says his goodbyes to Gardener, a true gentlemen, with the manners Englishmen are known for and proud of.

Then, he turns back to Elizabeth, looks directly at her when he pauses to communicate his continued interest.

“Good day, miss Bennet.”

And Miss Bennet melts. Only at the look in his eyes, the way he blinks his eyelashes, everything he tells her with just a glance.

For the man who, only a couple of scenes before, awkwardly asked her twice in the same conversation whether her parents were in good health, while indecently wearing only a white shirt after taking a dip in the lake… he really managed to get his shit together.

As the carriage is pulled away, mr Darcy does not shy away from staring after it, while Lizzie turns around to give him one last look.

A rich man with all his estate and money and no one to share it with, longingly he looks after this woman, who now sees him for the human being she didn’t believe he was.

And so, majoring in romantic lead, Colin Firth graduates the Jane Austen college cum laude.

Meanwhile, Sansa cries her eyes out. She wants it too. She knows now. She’s always known, but she refused to acknowledge it. After Joffrey the fairytale had shattered for her, and she knew then that there was not going to be a Prince Charming. Prince Charming doesn’t exist, he is as fictional as Fitzwilliam Darcy. Only fools want it.

Every touch from Jon, as simple as a holding hand, had pushed that decision to the back of her head, and now… now she’s more hurt than all the photographers harassing her could ever harm her.

On Monday, Sansa has her first workday at the museum. She’d forgotten all about it, about how excited she was, and now she can barely battle herself a way through it.

Myranda shows her all the props they have stored; 200-year-old underwear once owned by Aegon V, Nymeria’s harness and Aegon the conqueror’s sword...

“Look at this silk…” she says, and, “Can you see how transparent it is? It cost them months to make.”

Sansa’s mother asks her over for dinner, but she manages to politely refuse. Instead, she watches some more episodes of Pride & Prejudice, eats chocolate while re-watching Outlander season 1 and falls asleep on her sofa.

The next day she goes to the gym with Mya, who doesn’t ask, because that’s Mya, she knows when
to ask and when not to, before she goes to work again. She finishes late that day, so she picks up some curry on her way home, where she falls asleep, reading reports on some Homo Australitipier bone marrow, found in Ghana.

On Wednesday she wakes up early, then scrolls through some pages, trying to figure out what cat it is she wants, needs and should get now that she’s so miserable. She goes to work, gets home, makes herself some pesto pasta with spinach and mini-tomatoes, and is then unpleasantly surprised by the unannounced visit of her mother.

“Hello darling! You look wonderful.” Catelyn lies as she pretends not to see the mess of the flat and the bags underneath Sansa’s eyes.

Catelyn claims she’s only here to check up on her, but it only takes her a couple of minutes before she asks how Harry’s doing.

“I don’t know where he is, but he said he’d come and pick up the rest of his stuff somewhere this week.”

“Oh.” Catelyn says, she looks around the nods, “Well, hopeful soon.”

“Yeah.” Sansa nods.

“I’m very sorry darling, is there anything I can do for you?”

“No.” Sansa says, then she sighs and allows her mother to hug her.

“You’ll find someone else. There are so many wonderful men in this world. You’re so young and far too smart and beautiful to let men make you miserable!”

Sansa hasn’t actually confessed to feeling miserable, but she guesses it’s obvious. Catelyn simply preferred not to mention it until now.

Sansa can’t stand how her mother pretends he doesn’t exist. As if she doesn’t know. She can’t stand how Catelyn is chatting away as if Sansa will find someone ‘suitable’, someone not Harry nor Jon, someone Sansa doesn’t want.

“I don’t want to find someone.” Sansa mutters.

“Well, you don’t have to, of course.”

“I just want to be alone.”

“No one wants to be alone!”

“I do.” Sansa says, and at that she walks around the kitchen counter, and drops down on the sofa, turns on the tv, and watches a full episode of the Bachelor, during which Catelyn says nothing, either stunned or at loss of words.

“You’ll be alright.” Catelyn says, rather softly, when she leaves, and she hugs Sansa tight. Sansa can’t help but know her mother leaves feeling a whole lot more worried than she did when she arrived, and she knows it’s wrong to worry your mother, but she can’t actually bring up the energy to pretend the idea of ‘finding someone else’ excites her. She doesn’t want to find someone else. She already found her someone, and he prefers to hang around with a girl who got paid for calling him toxic.
Friday is another lecture day. She goes through meetings, then cancels a lunch with Jeyne because she doesn’t feel like she’s got the strength to battle the rain, and works at the museum until closing time.

When she arrives at her place, she’s photographed by paparazzi. No doubt they’ve noticed Harry has left. She really is the lonely dumped pathetic fool now.

When she’s eating pasta leftovers, she thinks for a moment that he’s calling, but instead, it’s uncle Jon, who wants to discuss Ned’s birthday and asks her if she’s coming to February’s Saturday rally.

“‘I really don’t feel like it.” She confesses.

“You’re not feeling so well?” He asks, no faked concern.

“The weather’s not agreeing with me.”

“Well, consider coming! It would mean the world to your father! Get well soon, darling.”

Sansa nearly falls asleep in the cab during her ride home from her Saturday yoga class, but then wakes up when she gets an e-mail from an old cat lady, that wakes her up instantly.

Sunday morning Sansa goes to pick up a cat named Billy. He’s 12-years-old, and ginger, like Sansa, though more orange, not so auburn. He’s rather big, only a little fat, doesn’t leave the house, is not very fond of strangers and loves tuna and staring out through the window, at flying birds.

The woman is leaving her flat in Chelsea for a nursing home and gives Billy, including Billy’s possessions, such as his crab pole and his food bowl, away for free.

When back at her flat, carrying Billy with her in a basket, she gets a call from Harry.

Two hours later, Billy is curled up in Sansa’s lap, purring in content, when the door opens and Harry arrives to cleanse the flat of all his possessions.

Sometimes he asks if she wants to keep something, and most of the time she responds by saying she’d rather have him take it. She’ll order a new mixer on e-bay, who cares, it’s not like she can’t afford it.

She’d offer to help him bring the boxes he fills downstairs to his car, but then, he’d refuse, and she doesn’t actually want to help him, so why bother.

The next morning Billy wakes her up by licking her face, and when she gets back home from work after buying overpriced toys for the cat at the Pet-store, he comes right at her to greet her.

Cat curled at her side, fresh meal in her lap, an Harry free flat around her, Sansa’s almost forgotten Jon exists. That is, until she turns on the news.

Apparently he and Aegon did a HIV test to try and help break the stigma surrounding both test and disease. And Rihanna is there too. The bad news is she’s reminded of how handsome he is and how much she loves his slightly nervous and shy smile… Good news is, Jon’s clean. Well, Sansa supposes that’s a relieve. At least he didn’t give her chlamydia for a good-bye gift.

She laughs that thought away by remembering how they used a condom anyway. Did they? Most of the time. Not the last couple of times, after she told him she’s on the pill anyway. Not that time in the shower, at Winterfell. She really liked the idea of getting rid of these rubber wrappers being
a physical barrier between them, and she’s never missed a pill in her entire life. Or has she? The last couple of weeks have been crazy hectic.

Billy looks up when Sansa stiffens. She gulps down her last bite of sweet potato and then jumps up, to run towards the calendar in the bathroom.

Two days late. Only two days late! That could be because of the stress. It has to be the stress. Sansa is sometimes late when she doesn’t have stress, so this has got to be it.

Four days later, Sansa asks Mya to go get her a pregnancy test, because god forbid she’s photographed buying one.

When two are convincingly negative, Sansa feels absolutely and totally relieved, until Mya leaves and goes home.

Obviously the last thing she could use right now is a pregnancy, never mind a baby. But the thought and the possibility alone had given her so many pictures of the future, a distant future she hasn’t daydreamed about since she was about sixteen years old, that she can’t help but feel absolutely miserable. Again.

When she thinks she couldn’t possibly feel worse, it turns out the throwing up she was doing wasn’t morning sickness but just the same old fucking flu, and Sansa doesn’t even care, because it makes her feel less guilty when she calls in sick for work, knowing she’s not exactly necessarily lying when she claims to not be able to work because she’s unwell.

She stays home with her unpregnant womb, a very sore throat, loads of coughing and Billy the cat, watching American life time movies and Grey’s Anatomy. She’s never before noticed how many pregnant patients there are at the Grey-Sloan Memorial hospital, until now.

Arya calls Friday night, two weeks after grandpa Tully’s funeral, and the last week of January. Sansa doesn’t take up the phone, just sends a text telling her she caught the flu and so her little sister is at her front door little over an hour later.

“I got you some breakfast for tomorrow, here’s more ice cream, I thought maybe wine? I dunno… painkillers, these things you gotta suck on and they take the soar feeling in your throat away but you won’t be able to taste you food… And some of mum’s lasagna. I know you’re angry with her but I figured you wouldn’t want to make her food suffer for it.”

Arya suffers through some more Pride and Prejudice, which Sansa initially only puts on in the hope of scaring Arya away. But then she loses herself in Jane’s beautiful dialogues, and while Sansa continues to cry at random moments, Arya befriends Billy. At around eight they decide to order some sushi.

“So… have you called him?”

Sansa chews on some tasteless sushimi and shrugs.

“You should.”

“Why?”

“Cause you wanna.” Arya says with an eye roll, cause apparently it’s a stupid question.

“I thought I was pregnant.” Sansa promptly admits, cause she figures the shrinks might be correct when they say talking helps, and talking to Arya seems a save bet, for some reason.
“Oh shit. Have you-“

“I’m not. I did like six tests, all extremely negative. One even had this… one of these sad smileys.”

“Well good.” Arya says, and Sansa can feel her sister’s eyes burn, “Right?”

“Yeah.”

“You didn’t-“

“I don’t want a baby. It’s just that I’m a stupid fool and a horrible woman. That’s all that bothers me.”

“Huh?”

“When I thought I might be pregnant, I just… I imagined how I would tell him, how he’d respond, all happy, and I thought, stupidly, that he’d hopelessly fall in love with me at the news, and I wondered if we’d have a boy or a girl, and if he’d have his hair and his… his eyes and his… everything, and I just… I thought, well, if I have to have a baby right now, then I won’t mind so much if it’s with him, if it’s his, even if he hates me.”

“He doesn’t hate you.”

“He’d hate me if he ever found out that I was happy about being pregnant because I thought I could maybe get him back, that way. That’s sick and wrong and I don’t wanna be that woman.”

“You’re not that woman.”

“I was! For a moment I was.”

“If that’s true then I’m totally a murderer, considering how often I wish I could kill someone.”

“Don’t be so violent, Arya!” Sansa cries, and she hides her face behind her hands, suddenly unable to control herself and her sobbing.

Seriously, you just have to call him.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because… because he doesn’t want me to.”

Arya laughs, “Oh puhtlease…”

“Literally everyone in my life has been trying to convince me to never ever see him again. Mum and dad were horrible, Robb was a total dick and-“

“Yeah, whatever. Who cares? If you wanna call him, you call him. Don’t go sit here and cry.”

“But Ygritte-“

“Called his sister an arrogant snob in an interview she gave to the press. She called his brother a drunk, his mother lazy, his dad controlling and self-centered and he himself a chronically depressed loser.”
“But-“

“Remember that time he lent you a coat and they made it look like the two of you were in some sort of romantic embrace? It’s just a picture.”

“He’s s-so angry with me.” Sansa admits before she sips on her wine.

“So?”

“So? Well-“

“Just call him, talk to him, and figure it out. Colin Firth isn’t gonna help you, nor are Ben and Jerry.”

“I don’t want to… I can’t call him now.”

“Then call him tomorrow, or in two days, whatever, so long as you call him once you want to.”

“Why don’t you care?” Sansa then asks, “Everyone’s angry with me because I screwed up, but you-“

“You didn’t screw up.” Arya says, “Everyone’s unhappy because what you did screwed them up. It’s not good for dad’s campaign, mum’s afraid you won’t be able to handle the press, that you’ll go back to being depressed you again, she thinks it’ll ruin the privacy and peace of what she thinks is her perfect family and Robb just doesn’t want his best friend and his sister to date because if it won’t work out he thinks he’ll have to choose, and he thinks it’s weird and awkward… or something. Also, it reminds him of Rhaenys, and we all know that’s the only thing he can’t handle.”

“But that’s all… that’s all fair.” Sansa whispers.

“Maybe? I guess, but it’s not your problem. Anyway, I like Jon. From what I’ve seen he really cares about you, and you care about him. You’re my sister, I want you with someone decent who cares about you. You really fucking deserve someone like Jon after all that mad shit. Everyone should want that for you. So what if this isn’t convenient for everyone? Sometimes things aren’t convenient, doesn’t mean they’re wrong.”

“But-“

“You’re such a pleaser, Sansa. All you ever wanna do is please everyone. Whenever someone gets angry with you, or treats you like shit, you just go in full freeze mode and automatically assume you’re the guilty party and everything is on you to blame. You dump Harry and then end up feeling guilty because you can’t deal with his anger, even if it’s totally unjustified, just cause you always have to assume you’re the one in the wrong when shit happens. You run away from negative things cause you’re scared. Stop being scared. Stop caring so much. Stop trying to be perfect, stop trying to keep everyone happy, stop trying to do the right thing.”

“I haven’t been-“

“Doing the right thing, no. Having sex with Jon in this flat before Harry moved out was not nice. But that doesn’t mean you should punish yourself for it. Grandpa just died and that’s fucking awful, you deserved some self-care. Clearly, that’s the self care you… longer for. Just because things are ugly or don’t look the way you think they should, doesn’t mean it’s wrong. Like I… when I go to the gym I look horrible, and I feel exhausted, and I hate it but… but it’s right, you know? You put too much faith in pretty.”
Sansa really doesn’t know.

“You’ve been miserable for too long. Harry was a toxic dickhead who made you feel guilty for being you. Jon cares about you for who you are. He knows you, he respects you, supports you and he’s 100% on your side. What the hell could I possibly dislike about that? He’s good for you, he makes you smile, he helped you become you again for the first time in years and if anything I’ll be forever grateful cause I’ve missed you being you. You deserve him. Fuck everyone else and go and do what makes you happy.”

“I was going to.” Sansa says, when tears appear in the corners of her eyes again, ready to drop down, “But then… he was so angry with me.”

“People do that sometimes. You talk about it, explain yourself, say sorry, fix it. It’s not that complicated.”

“I never should’ve… I should’ve broken up with Harry long before I and Jon… but I was scared, and I was.”

“It’s okay to be scared, so long as it doesn’t keep you from doing what you want.”

“And mama-“

“Don’t listen to her. She’s feeling hella guilty, told me she thinks she may have been a bit harsh.”

“A bit.” Sansa snorts.

“She still feels guilty, you know. About what happened.”

“She shouldn’t.” Sansa says, wiping her nose.

“Well, I guess that’s not a choice. You know what she’s like.”

“You look much more like her.” Sansa says, “She can be so… so fierce.”

Arya shrugs, “Just protecting her babies.”

“I don’t need her to protect me. I need her support. She thinks I’m weak.”

“Doesn’t matter what she thinks if she’s wrong. You go prove her wrong.”

Sansa sobs a little and finally Arya gives in and wraps an arm around her. Arya pecks the top of Sansa’s head when she lays her head on her shoulder.

“I’m sorry.” Arya says.

“For what?”

“We’re all just… I think everyone hates it that they couldn’t protect you then, so now they’re… trying to make up for that, or something. I’m sorry that shit still haunts you. But you can choose to no let it get to you, y’know.”

“I don’t think he wants to talk to me.” Sana’a admits.

Arya sighs in disbelieve, “Of course he does, Sansa.”

“But-“
“For all you know he and that… that girl just casually bumped into each other.”

“He hardly ever gets photographed around… at places like that. What if he was… maybe he was like… sending me a message?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Is all Arya says, and Sansa guesses that’s all she can say. Jon would never do that.

“Anyway, I’m going.” Arya pulls herself up, patting Billy’s head before she grabs her coat, “Someone’s waiting for me, and you’re well looked after.”

“Do you want me to-“

“No, I’ll find my way out, you should go to bed. And stop watching Jane Austen crap.”

Sansa nods.

“And call Jon.”

Sansa nods again.

“Okay, well, Bye sis, take care.” Arya kisses Sansa’s temple and is gone. But her words hang in the room like a blanket covering a lamp. Sansa wants to pull it off, but she’s afraid of the blinding light. She’s been sitting in a dimly lit room for so long.

She leans her head in her hands, sighs, and quickly concludes that she’s sick of being afraid. Arya’s right. Scary doesn’t mean wrong. And wrong doesn’t mean it’s not right. As weird as that sounds.

Harry was safe and comfortable. She was with him for two years and managed to stay there because it was easy. She liked easy, perhaps mostly because she was afraid of things not easy. Nothing with Jon is easy. It’s terrifying. And not just because he is who he is, with all strings attacked. The press and media attention shook Sansa to the core, but it isn’t that she fears the most.

Losing Harry stings. She knew it would. Many parts of her know that’s why she kept delaying it. Because she was afraid and weak. It reminds Sansa almost of her last day of secondary school. The life you lived is gone, whether you like it or not, there’s no going backwards, it’s over, and with it the people, the habits, the things you’re used to.

Sansa will never have lunch with Harry again, she’ll never fall asleep with her head on his shoulder as he watches sports. Never again will they celebrate his birthday, and coming Christmas he won’t buy her another bottle of Chanel Chance au tendre. They’ll never go to the ballet again, she won’t hear him sing as he’s making a curry. No boring morning sex where she’s sure he’d rather go to sleep again. No shopping together. No fights anymore about his work addiction. She won’t ever have to nag forever for him to come with her to family dinner. They’ll never play 30 seconds again, and she’ll never lay in bed right beside him, listening to his breathing, his hand resting on her hip.

She never envisioned a future with him, however. There was never a house with a porch, a dog and two babies… all she loses in in the present. Perhaps she always knew it wouldn’t be forever, or maybe she didn’t love him enough to dream of that. Maybe she was too scarred to dare dream of such things… or maybe she was right to believe that after everything that has happened, she simply no longer wants stuff like that. Maybe she was wrong to assume that, maybe she simply didn’t want such things with Harry.
Her future isn’t so clear anymore, suddenly. She has so many choices. It’s like a multiple choice question that has no right answer, but only a life changing effect. It reminds her of Slumdog Millionaire.

Sansa knew she loved Harry. She may not have been very much in love with him anymore, if she ever was… but she most definitely loved him. Not fiercely, but still wholeheartedly.

She knows full well she’s desperately, maddeningly, all-consumingly in love with Jon, however. In love in that way she can’t stop thinking about him. There’s nowhere else she wants to be but near him. She likes everything about him, even the things she would hate in someone else.

But it’s not save. Her mother was right. He can hurt her in a way no one else can, no one else ever could. She knows that now.

It’s all unexpected. She’s unprepared. Unguarded. She has no backup plan. If this goes horribly wrong, there’s no safety net to rescue her and soften the blow.

Has Sansa not been running for too long? Isn’t the whole reason for her to want to stay in London because she decided she no longer wants to be scared?

Is there really a choice when the thought of never getting to touch him again, never kissing him again, never feeling his breath to her lips, never being with him, never feeling him inside her… is without doubt the most terrifying thought?

Sansa can be brave too. If brave is all she needs to be to make the leap, to not look back, leave high school behind and move on- to a new life, one scarier, more challenging and more difficult, more satisfying and more risky than any life she’s ever lived before- Sansa will be brave.

Sansa raises a trembling hand, finds Jon’s name in her phone, turns her phone off again and throws it away.

Billy’s big yellow eyes give her a judging look as he lifts his head at the thud of the phone dropping in the cushions.

With the cat’s piercing eyes on her, Sansa picks the phone up again, opens it, looks at it again, shaking her head and runs into her kitchen, to refill her glass of wine.

It’s a quarter past midnight, and her neighbour is listening to Bobbie Tyler’s Total Eclipse of the Heart. It didn’t cost Colin Firth much to make Sansa cry, so Bobbie certainly has it easy.

I really need you tonight
Forever's gonna start tonight

Sansa, one glass of wine in her hand, phone in the other, sits down on the sofa, and calls Jon.

“Hey, it’s me, I’m not here, try again, or not. Talk to you later!”

Once upon a time I was falling in love
But now I’m only falling apart
And there’s nothing I can say
A total eclipse of the heart

Sansa can’t bring herself to try again, and thus she falls asleep on the sofa again, in the company of her cat, exhausted, sick and miserable.
try not to call Sansa whiny and a drama queen please... I wrote this chapter when I was heartbroken myself, so the behaviour may or may not be a bit personal, lol!
Jon has spent the last two weeks focusing on work. Just work. One appearance after another. Uncle Aemon has officially retired, age 97, and that means everyone else has to step up their game. Rhaenys returns from a successful trip to the Middle East and attends the yearly opening of state parliament for the first time ever, wearing queen Rhaenys’ huge Kokoshnik tiara. Meanwhile she prepares to go on her second grand tour of the commonwealth, accompanied by her husband. She also gives a passionate and dangerously political speech about immigration that receives global attention and a couple million views on YouTube. Rhaegar nervously reads every news article about it, when the public responds to it with both cheers and a shitload of hateful criticism.

Jon thought it was awesome, Elia beams with pride, and Aegon shakes his head in disbelieve.

Standing on that stage, straight back, Rhaenys proves why she’s the future queen. She always was the best at speeching, and she knows it.

“My fellow countrymen come from England, Scotland, northern-Ireland and Wales. But they are also immigrants from Pakistan, India, Poland, Somalia and Syria. My own grandparents came here from Denmark and France 110 years ago. There is not one definition. British are girls who love girls, boys who love boys, and boys and girls who love each other. We believe in God, Allah, everything and nothing. In other words: the UK is you. The UK is us. My greatest hope for my country is that we will be able to take care of one another. That we will continue to build this country – on a foundation of trust, solidarity and generosity of spirit. That we will feel that we are, despite all our differences, one people. That the UK is my UK, the UK I know, love, represent and have declared to devotedly serve for the rest of my life. The only UK I recognise. That UK, is strong and free, it is one.”

With Elia off to Spain again, Aegon starts doing his first investitures, while he goes on to take the pace he’s most used to, which means he turns up somewhere to wave, shake hands and grin, about once a week. He visits Evelina Children’s Hospital, receives an Honorary Fellowship at the Royal Society of Medicine and goes on an official visit to Coventry and Cambridge University.

They even manage to drag Lyanna out of her stables, and off she goes to open railway stations and visit hospitals and schools. After years of being patron of the National Literacy Trust she’s even awarded a honorary doctorate for literary work, though even she herself doesn’t actually seem to quite understand why and for what. But Rhaegar’s incredibly proud.

Now that Jon has finally managed to get his own mental health in order, he easily rolls back into his previous routine, of focussing on refugees and, perhaps less emotionally draining although equally exhausting, climate change.

Jon also really likes to work with kids. Jon likes playing football with kids, listening to their stories and their tales. They don’t treat him differently, and if they do it’s cause their parents told them to.
Usually they only half understand who he is and why he’s supposedly special, which makes him feel much more at ease.

“Why are they picturing you?” one kid asks.

“They’re not picturing me, they’re picturing you.” Jon says, “You’re special.”

There’s only a handful of people who manage to make him feel like he’s not special, only few who he feels know him, the actual Jon, and still decided to like him. Excluding his family, that always used to be Sam and Robb. No one else. Not even Ygritte. Because Ygritte never quite managed to understand a single thing about his life. She only ever complained about it, and took no pity on him in her mockery of what she thought was outdated and useless.

At some point, suddenly, Sansa was that sort of person, too; someone who understood the world, didn’t take it too seriously, but seriously enough to see the value and the importance, the purpose, the point of it all, if there is any. It didn’t scare her, but she didn’t enjoy it either. She wasn’t in it for the attention, but neither did it make her want to run away and hide. She knew his family, knew how fucked up they are, yet still genuinely liked Rhaenys, occasionally Aegon, and managed to have pleasant conversations with Jon’s parents without seemingly too much effort. Her parents are Lyanna’s oldest friends.

She knows him for as long as he can remember. She saw him go through the ugly and awkward stages of puberty. And when they became friends, everything was so easy. He didn’t have to think twice about what to say, words came naturally, as far as they ever will for him, and she wouldn’t take it the wrong way. She understood his humour, and her own matched it. When he was talking, she’d listen, and even though she sometimes couldn’t possibly ever understand, she never ever gave him the feeling that whatever it was he was saying was totally ridiculous. She was safe. But not in a boring way. Save in a way that keeps Jon grounded.

Going through two weeks of no Sansa in his life whatsoever has him floating through the air, like a lost ghost. Lonely, even though he’s constantly in company, extremely moody, even though he can’t afford that, tired even though he sleeps plenty… it’s all just so empty. The good things are crap cause he can’t tell her about it, and the crappy things are unbearable because he doesn’t have the energy to deal with bullshit.

Jon’s quite sure his parents are worrying about him again, and he also suspects them of thinking it’s because he’s fighting with Robb, though they haven’t asked what it is they’re fighting about. Rhaegar always prefers to let his children come to him by their own choice, and Lyanna simply seems at a loss of words.

“Do you still want to move out?” Rhaegar asks, during dinner with just the three of them.

“I’m 28.” Is the only thing Jon can think of saying. He knows that in plenty of cultures it’s perfectly acceptable and even expected to live out your days with your parents, but Jon doesn’t come from such a culture, and even if he did, he’d probably still go mad. His parents are no ordinary parents, their lives are, in fact, extremely extraordinary, and Buckingham palace is a stiff place of protocol, a fishbowl, with constant watchful eyes and a great lack of potential freedom.

“Elia is thinking of moving to Spain permanently.”

“I think what you mean to say is that she did that ten years ago, and has finally decided to let you know.”

Rhaegar ignores that and goes on, “I thought you might enjoy it to live with your brother.”
Jon did not see that one coming, as he always kept his eyes on Kensington, but St James… he could definitely live in St James’ palace.

“If Aegon agrees.” Lyanna adds.

“That would be… I mean, yeah, I’d like that.” Jon says. A too enthusiastic response to getting rid of your parents might not be the nicest thing to do.

“But only if you promise to behave.”

“I always behave.” Jon insists.

“You maybe, but you combined with your brother not so much. I don’t want property owned by the crown estate, a national heritage, turned into a… one giant house party.”

“I’m 28.” Jon says again.

“I mean it.”

“So do I.”

“We’ll make a list of agreements, and if you fail to stick to them I’ll give you a one way ticket to Nottingham Cottage.”

“You won’t have to.”

“Great, so that’s settled then.”

Aegon is about as eager to get rid of his mother, so the two of them waste no time deciding on the floor plan and all what comes after that.

Likely Jon will be able to move in around June, and summer can’t come soon enough to Jon, though he’ll miss his morning swimming laps in Buckingham Palace’s pool.

It’s a Saturday evening when Jon is planning on falling asleep in front of his tv after drinking two, maybe three beers, watching some crappy Netflix movie, when Rhaenys rings him up.

“You wanna get drunk?”

“I’m already drinking.”

“You wanna get drunk with me?”

“What happened?”

“If you come over, I’ll tell you.”

“You okay?”

“I’ll see you within an hour.”

With great displease and a huge urge not to, Jon puts on his shoes and a random coat, yells at Arthur, through the skinny window in front of his office, that he’s going to Kensington, only to find the office empty because it’s a Saturday night and Arthur Dayne has a life outside of being head of the royal family’s security, as incredulous as that seems. Jon always forgets.
Jon gets into the car that’s parked closest to the door, and finds himself riding through Kensington Palace’s gates less than 30 min later.

Rhaenys is in her kitchen, her huge, wide, living kitchen, with an ‘open space’ and ‘lots of natural lightening’, except now that the sun’s gone down, it’s naturally dark, and the lightening of the garden in the back doesn’t do much to spice it up a bit. When it’s just you living in an ‘apartment’ of 80+ rooms, Jon figures it can feel quite lonely.

She doesn’t greet Jon when he walks in, doesn’t scold him when he throws his coat over a chair no one ever sits in, and then hands him a glass filled to the rim with expensive red wine.

“Cheers.” She says, and Jon doesn’t dare refuse.

“Rhaenys-“

“He’s cheating on me.”

Jon nearly drops his glass in anger, then manages to control himself and slowly asks, “Are you sure?”

“100 percent. I just paid 5 grand to keep photographical evidence out of the press. Used my mother’s lawyer. Pa can never know. You understand?”

Jon nods, “What sort of… photographic evidence?”

“His boyfriend made them himself.”

“His… Oh.” Aegon always said that he knew for sure that Willas was gay. As gay as Loras. And Aegon knows better than anyone how gay Loras is exactly.

“Anyway, we’ve destroyed it all. If they somehow leak out anyway, well… either my shame will double my fortune or it’ll be by the hands of some terrorist organisation. Either way it’ll boost my position in the popularity polls. I might even surpass you.”

“Does Aegon know?”

“Egg’s on his way.”

“Does he know?”

“Aegon lives in the gay scene, of course he knows. Without him they would’ve leaked by now.”

“But-“

“Pa can’t know.” Rhaenys repeats, slowly but loudly.

“Yeah, he won’t hear it from me.”

Rhaenys laughs humourlessly, shakes her head and says, “He’s in Jamaica right now, you know. He’s on some luxurious vacation with his gay boyfriends, avoiding historically significant Middle East trips, while I get to clean up this embarrassing mess.”

“Don’t you prefer it not to have to see the real-life version of him right now?”
“I saw some version of him today that will haunt me even when I’m long dead and buried.”

Jon can imagine, “I’m sorry.” Is all he can say.

“I’m sorry too.” She sighs, “Usually I try to only complain of him to my mother and, you know, female friends, but this is… this requires ears I can trust.”

Jon wraps an arm around his sister and pecks her cheek, as if to confirm what needs no confirmation.

When Aegon finally shows up Jon expects him to be absolutely furious, but it’s not so bad. Perhaps because he already had the chance to release his fury, or perhaps because he just really saw it coming. Luckily, he keeps his I-told-you-so’s in.

“We agreed not to cheat until we at least had kids.” Rhaenys says once the three of them are seated on a pearl white sofa that looks out over her English garden. Jon can’t help but feel miserable about that comment.

They agreed? He’s always known that Rhaenys married Willas because her clock was ticking. That is, reaching thirty was a certain point for her where she accepted that duty overrides love. Rhaenys married Willas because he was suitable and because she had to marry someone. Whatever was in it for Willas Jon never quite understood, but then, his mother is Lyanna, not Elia.

Rhaegar and Elia had a sort-like arrangement, where Elia popped out heir Rhaenys and spare Aegon, before they separated their lives so that the public didn’t need to know, and they were no bother to each other either. And so they lived, relatively happy, together, but mostly apart… until Rhaegar accidentally fathered Jon.

Not acknowledging the parentage might have been a possibility, even an advised cause of action, and Jon believes that borderline point in Rhaegar and Lyanna’s relationship may or may not have been the reason for his grandfather and uncle to absolutely and totally despise Jon’s father. Anyway, that didn’t happen, and Elia became the poor victim, and Lyanna the other woman. Then Rhaella died and Rhaegar became the first divorced monarch in the history of Britain.

Jon didn’t grow up thinking these arranged pre-nupped marriages are the norm. His parents had to move mountains and fight a full country of angry misinformed haters to get the chance to be together. Jon would rather move the Mount Everest than be married to a Willas.

Rhaenys also just really wants to be a mother. Jon knows that too. And he figures that the failure of making an attempt to fulfil that goal is perhaps the major reason for Willas to cheat before allowed.

“I told him that if I’m not pregnant by April I want IVF, but I’m taking that back. I want IVF now.” Jon can understand. How on earth Rhaenys manages to have sex with a gay husband she doesn’t love and certainly doesn’t seem to feel only a little bit sexually attracted to is a complete and utter mystery to him.

Aegon has been urging him to go back to his previous behaviour, from the days right after Ygritte, when Rhaenys herself had advised Jon to ‘sent a message’, but he can’t. He also just doesn’t want to. He’s 28. Also, he just wants Sansa. Maybe he’ll be able to have sex with someone else when he no longer ‘just’ wants Sansa, and he’s sure that day will come, someday, once upon a time, in the distant future, but not now.

As Rhaenys goes on to talk about all Willas has been up to lately, with all the men and women he’s
been, Jon can’t help but notice how coolly she tells it all.

He has tried with all his might not to think of it, as only the memory of Harry standing by Sansa’s side in a flippin church is enough for him to feel sick, but the thought of her with someone else, no matter who… well. No.

Knowing that the bed he slept in four nights straight, that bed in her slightly messy, cosy, candled and throw-pillowed flat, where she lay in his arms all night, sighing in her sleep, rubbing her cheek to his bare shoulder… knowing that bed is Harry’s, knowing Harry and Sansa are probably lying in that bed together, right now, well…

Jon gets up and goes to the loo just in a vague hope Rhaenys might have changed the subject in conversation in the time he was gone, but alas, it’s only worse.

“I swear, he hates it more than I do. I knew he might be bisexual when we married, but now I know he could never love me. I lie on my back, just wishing for it to be over and…”

Rhaenys starts crying about as soon as Jon has dropped back down on the sofa, and because she holds her wine in her left hand, she has no choice but to pick Jon’s shoulder to drop down against. Jon wraps his arm around her and exchanges some looks of concern with Aegon, who leans his head in his hands.

“You shouldn’t have married him.” Aegon says then, everyone agrees to that, but Jon’s pretty sure no one has told Rhaenys to her face, “I really don’t want to say the painful truth aloud, but you’re stuck with him.”

“You can divorce.” Jon suggests.

“No.” Rhaenys loudly sobs, “Never!”

“You have no children.” Aegon tries, “It won’t have to be like it was for us. You could just-“

“We haven’t been married for barely a year! What do I look like? An American reality star? We are royal, we give the right examples. And I don’t just drop out of my own choices when they turn out regrettable.”

“Maybe you should in this case.” Aegon goes on, but Rhaenys only shakes her head and cries some more.

Jon’s realising how the wine is doing it’s job in his blood, as he drops his cheek to the top of Rhaenys’ dark head of hair, when the phone buzzes in his pocket.

“Of all the men, all the men, I could’ve picked anyone! But it had to be the gay one.”

“Well, I did warn you.” Aegon couldn’t keep it in after all, and Rhaenys only cries some more.

“I feel like a brood mare. My only duty is to conceive. My doctor has been trying to put me on a d-diet, and he wants Willas to stop smoking. I have to inject my own arse with… with hormones! I feel so emotional all the time, like I’m constantly on my period, I have zero self-control… and look at my face! I’m bloated. I can’t… I just can’t… ”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want.” Jon says, and he gulps down his wine until his glass is empty and immediately refills.

“I want IVF!”
“Well, do that.” Aegon says, “Tell them to add some extra embryos, that way you’ll end up with twins or even some cute triplets and you’ll never have to see Willas ever again.”

“Try to think of Willas as the true brood mare here.” Jon suggests.

“No.” Aegon shakes his head, “He’s the sperm donor.”

“Are you k-kidding me? I’ll have to look at his a-arrogant smug potato twat face for the rest of my goddamn life!”

“Unless you just divorce the arsehole. Look, I’m as gay as ten Willas’es, but if I were married to someone as stunning and gorgeous and hot as you, I wouldn’t dream of looking somewhere else.”

“Mate?” Jon grimaces at Aegon, even though he can sense where this is going. Jon agrees Rhaenys is exceptionally beautiful, but he’d never, not in his right mind, describe his own goddamn sister as ‘hot’.

“You deserve so much better.”

“I didn’t marry him for better!” Rhaenys says, and she suddenly pushes herself off Jon’s shoulder, “I married him for a respectable, decent, proper marriage of mutual respect!”

“That sounds like total crap.” Aegon says and Jon can’t help but agree by chuckling.

“Yeah, I mean, I don’t want to… but I think it’s too late for that, now.”

“I can’t d-divorce…” Rhaenys drops her head back down, softly sobbing, and Jon can feel her tears through the collar of the t-shirt he wears underneath his ribbed jumper.

“Our own parents divorced.” Aegon says.

“Rhaenys…” Jon sighs, “Look, this is not your fault, okay? You couldn’t have known. He’s the cheating arsehole here. You’ve only been married for a year and you already had to pay half a million to get his scandalous shit out of the media. If you’re going to be married to him for the next… what? Fifty years, how expensive do you think he’ll end up being?”

“I have m-money.” Rhaenys mutters.

“Yeah, but you don’t wanna spend that on Willas.”

As soon as Rhaenys raises herself off his lap, he can stick his hand in his pocket, but he waits to do so by rubbing some tears off her high cheekbones.

“You don’t deserve to be miserable, Rhae Rhae.” Aegon says, “And honestly, he doesn’t deserve to make you miserable.” Then he loudly sighs, shakes his head, and proclaims, “The two of you make the worst mistakes when it comes to partners. One does a Tartan terrorist and his best friend’s sister who’s already in a relationship, and the other gets married to a cheating gay dude who can’t keep his affairs un-photographed.”

“I could not have known!” Rhaenys defends herself, but Jon feels no urge to do the same. Maybe he didn’t know Ygritte used to set ancient castles on fire, but that doesn’t mean that he should not have been able to know better from the start. She was never going to adapt, she was never going to make an attempt to try and that relationship had no future from the beginning on. Perhaps that’s why he jumped into it in the first place.
As for doing his best friend’s sister… he has no defence. He doesn’t feel like defending himself. If he could do it over, he’d maybe try and avoid the funeral, but he regrets nothing. He wouldn’t want to have missed it for all the money Rhaenys has spent on Willas’ sex-life. He wouldn’t even have wanted to miss it to not have to go through this ridiculously shitty time of his life.

“I was trying to do the sensible thing. I’d rather have a partner I can rely on than a partner who’s good in bed.”

“Yet you now have neither of these things?”

“Well, nor do I, so I suppose both approaches suck.” Jon mutters. Aegon chuckles but Rhaenys turns her neck to glare at him.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Hmm?”

“Sansa is as reliable as the sun coming up every morning.”

“Sure.”

“Yes! You know she is!”

“Yeah, whatever, maybe, but I don’t think I’ll ever find out.”

Rhaenys sighs loudly and groans, “You’re such an idiot.”

“What?”

“Jeyne says Sansa’s adopted a cat and has only been working.”

“So?”

“So? Are you stupid?”

“Probably.” Jon glances at Aegon, who can’t help but laugh.

“I asked her if she wanted to go out for coffee or lunch, but she says she’s too busy and Mya didn’t want to tell me how she’s doing, said I had to ask her myself if I wanted to find out. Which means that I don’t get to know, cause they know I’ll tell you.”

Jon has trouble gulping as his throat tightens and his world begins to turn, “Okay…”

“You have called her, haven’t you?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I… because I don’t want to be her mistress. I’m not like you. I do care. I don’t want to… I’d rather not have her, than share her.”

“Who says you have to?”

“He was at her grandfather’s funeral. I walked around with a swollen and blue cheek for two weeks, they had to put make up on it so the press wouldn’t see, and my eye still doesn’t look the
way it should. She called me up to tell me she wanted to explain, but she has never given me any indication that she plans on dumping him. The only reason she wanted me to be at that funeral was because it was a clever way to mislead the press.”

“Who told you that?” Rhaenys asks.

Jon looks at Aegon, who defensively crosses his arms and raises his chin as if he actively stands by his words.

Rhaenys glares at Jon, “You’ve been listening to him?”

“Well-"

“Oi!”

“Aegon doesn’t know Sansa at all. I thought you knew her.”

“Yeah, I thought so too, but-“

“Clearly not! Gosh, you’re an idiot.”

“Whatever, Rhaenys, it’s not like she made an attempt to call me, lately.”

Rhaenys only shakes her head in disbelief.

“And Robb has been furious with me.”

“So? Robb can lump it.”

Jon can’t help but notice the tone in her voice when she says that.

“You find someone who’s not gay, not a terrorist, understands our world, isn’t catholic, isn’t American, not been married before, has her own money, isn’t in it for the attention, who’s smart, educated, respectful, beautiful and kind with a decent family and you just... you don’t call her?”

“I-“

“I hate you.”

Aegon leans back in his seat, opens his phone and asks, before Jon can respond, “So, are we going out tonight, or what?”

Rhaenys and Jon both give him a look of total disbelief and he shrugs.

“It’s a Saturday, you guys.”

“She said she’d call me, and she hasn’t.”

“Well...” Aegon chuckles uncomfortably, “Look, I don’t mean to sound like I know better or whatever but... I was there and ehm... I mean, she seemed really upset and she looked very, well... guilty, I suppose. You weren’t exactly all that kind to her, so if she hasn’t called you I wouldn’t say that might necessarily mean it’s because she doesn’t wanna.”

“I said she could!”

“Yeah, But you sounded like you meant ‘please don’t’.”
“That’s not true.”

“Okay, let me put it like this… you certainly gave her the idea that you didn’t want her to call you.”

“Well that’s-“

“Shut up.” Rhaenys spits, “No offence, but I have no energy to listen to how you stupidly fucked up. You’re one lucky bastard that you bumped into someone like Sansa, and I can’t handle you being too dumb to realise.”

Jon can’t help but feel angry then, “I do realise. I know exactly how lucky I am, or was, or whatever. I know I blew it and that’s not just my fault.”

“I agree.” Aegon says, as he studies his fingernails, “It’s not cool to invite Juan to a funeral all the way over in fucking Cumbria, where he also ends up beaten in the face by your boyfriend. Not cool, at all.”

“That wasn’t-“

“And obviously she was playing the press by having them both there, which was obviously done just cause the polls aren’t necessarily in her father’s favour and the Conservatives can’t use bad publicity like this. The PM has enough scandal of his own. They want to make Ned FA, I’m not sure if you’ve heard… it basically means he really can’t have a daughter affair-ing around with unpopular Lyanna’s son.”

“Sansa wouldn’t do that.” Rhaenys says, though she sounds less convinced suddenly.

“She did it, though. And you know what dear Juan is like. His heart lives in his cock.”

“My heart does not live in my-“

“Even if that’s true I still think you should hear her out.” Rhaenys decides.

“I’d love to, but she hasn’t called me.”

“Then call her.” She groans and shakes her head, “Don’t be so difficult. If you don’t call her you’ll regret it for the rest of your life.”

“Sansa’s not Robb.” Jon spits out then, and he wouldn’t have if Rhaenys wasn’t trying so hard to make this look like it’s all on him.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You will regret Robb for the rest of your life.”

“Shut up or I’ll throw you out of my house.”

“Now, now… don’t be like that.” Aegon loudly clears his throat, grabs the wine bottle and fills all their glasses to the rim, “No need for hostility. Love is difficult, we all know that. Let’s not make it harder, by-“

“I’m not making it harder, Rhaenys is blaming me for a situation she knows nothing about and I’m not having it.”

“Whatever, I’m just trying to warn you.” Rhaenys looks at her wine glass as if she contemplates swallowing it all down in one go, then grabs both his shoulders to force him to look her in the eye,
“You do realise that if I won’t ever have babies, you’ll need a Sansa in your life more than anything else, don’t you?”

Jon pushes Rhaenys away and attempts to get up but she pulls him back, “Piss off.”

“I’m not joking.”

“Rhaenys, pipe down.” Aegon warns, and his voice is so deep Jon barely recognises it. He has officially dodged his attempts at keeping the atmosphere and mood calm by means of humour.

“It’s not like Aegon here is ever going to continue the family line.”

“I’m born out of wedlock.” Jon tells her through gritted teeth.

“You only flaw.”

Aegon pulls Rhaenys off Jon with one pull off his arm, “You’re drunk.”

“You know what they say about drunk people; honest like children.”

“Don’t say things you’ll regret.” Aegon says, his eyes two molten balls of wide blue.

“Cheers to that.” Rhaenys says, pushing Aegon’s aiming hand away when he tries to pull the wine from her hand.

Jon pushes himself off the sofa, “It’s not my fault Willas was a mistake.”

Rhaenys shakes her head, then hides her face behind her hand.

“If you don’t want to divorce him, there’s nothing I or Jon can do for you, because you know this is not going to chance. It’s only going to get worse.” Aegon decides, as Jon moves over to the window, to stare out at Kensington Palace’s courtyard.

The bulbs in the lanterns have a yellowish colour. Their light flickers and when you stare at them long enough, they start looking like stars. The only flickering stars in all of London.

In the back he can hear Aegon making attempts at talking some sense into Rhaenys, but she’s too drunk and he’s only making it worse.

When Jon closes his eyes, he feels the world turning. Lately he’s getting drunk so quickly, as if he’s that teenager at Eton again, smuggling scotch into his dorms.

“If Pa’s ever going to find out… he’ll be furious.”

“He won’t find out.” Aegon says.

“I just need to get pregnant.”

“If you want it too badly it won’t happen.” Aegon reminds her, “The doctor said-“

“I know what the doctor said! I was there.”

“And maybe the problem is Willas, not you.”

“Aegon, I’m losing my mind.” Rhaenys says, and as Jon’s sister starts crying again, he pulls his phone from his jeans and checks the screen to see a missed call from what he expects to be some
sort of Arthur Dayne replacement.

Instead, there’s a pic of Sansa in the dark blue dress she wore to Robb’s wedding, accessorised with some stud earrings and the most beautiful smile planet earth has ever seen.

He can’t actually remember making that picture, which is perhaps why he loves it so much, because the setting still tells him exactly when and where he made it. Only a couple of corners away from her bedroom, a couple of corners away from their first kiss.

_Missed call: Sansa Stark x1_ His phone tells him. Once. She called him once. She actually, really, factually picked up her phone to call him, to talk to him, and Jon actually factually managed to not pick it up.

Jon can’t pull his eyes off Sansa’s drunk and happy face while Rhaenys goes on about the biggest mistake of her life and IVF and other fertility treatments.

“It can’t be uncle Viserys. Can you imagine Viserys near the throne? And I don’t… I _can’t_… I don’t want to… I could never bother the two of you with my mess…”

“You don’t, Rhaenys don’t be silly.”

She’s stopped crying and resumed her drinking and thus doesn’t actually notice how Jon’s attention has shifted, until Aegon looks up.

“Jon? What the hell are you staring at? Is there another terrorist attack or something?” Aegon asks.

“No.” Jon’s voice is husky and when he puts his phone back into his pocket, he leans his forehead against the glass and continues to stare outside.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m not doing it.” Jon says, and he moves away from the glass, turns around and looks at his siblings, sitting on the sofa, “You asked me if I want to be legitimised, if I want my spot in the line of succession. I’m just telling you now, I’m not doing it.”

Rhaenys seems surprised at first, but then she frowns, “You’re a coward.”

“I’m not a fool.” Jon corrects, “And I’m not going to suffer because you married a guy who unsurprisingly turned out to be a mistake.”

“I already told you.” Rhaenys says, “It’s not up to you.”

“Yes, it is, and my answer is no.”

“Jon-“

“This is what you meant, right? When you asked me if I want to be a real Targaryen? You want me to create some back-up heirs for you in case you can’t have children of your own.”

“Stop it.” Aegon says, “Stop it, _stop it_. This is total bullocks. We’re talking about this as if we’re living in the fourteenth century!”

“You shouldn’t have married Willas,” Jon ignores Aegon, “That’s all you, not me, so you’re going to leave me out of it.”

“You work for The Firm. We’re all a part of this family.” Rhaenys gets up and her eyes could kill
him if he cared about her anger.

“Am I? Because the last time we discussed this you said I’m no real Targaryen, that my mother can never be, but that I could. But only in exchange for taking a place in your line of heirs, right?”

Aegon looks at Rhaenys as if he needs her to confirm she really said that, because he has a hard time buying it. That surprises Jon. Rhaenys has always been obsessed with duty. Of course she’d say such a thing.

Rhaenys says nothing, only stares back when Jon repeats, “I’m not doing it. You’re not going to force me to help you clean up this mess. You leave me out of it. You’ll leave Sansa out of it.”

“Sansa’s already in it.” Rhaenys shrugs.

“No.”

“Yes.” Rhaenys says, “Because she loves you.” She smiles then, “You were right when you said she’s nothing like Robb. Sansa’s going to stay. You may not really believe it yet, but you hatched yourself a Lyanna.”

“Shut up.” Jon warns but Rhaenys shakes her head, tears of loneliness and pain drip down her cheeks, and from the corner of his eye Jon can see Aegon grimace.

“You two have lost your minds.” He says, “You’re both bag shit crazy.”

Jon marches towards the door, and that’s when Rhaenys regrets.

“Jon…” she whispers but he pushes her reaching hand away.

As he puts his coat back on, quickly and aggressively, he can hear himself tell her, “I hope you’ll be miserable for the rest of your life, it’ll be all your own fault.”

The pebbles beneath his feet make too much noise as Jon walks over towards his car and suddenly, he hates Robb.

Sansa is nothing like Robb.

Robb left. Not because of Jeyne, not because of Jeyne’s baby. Robb left because he didn’t want all of this. He knew exactly what his life by Rhaenys’ side would be like, standing in her shadow, no real job of his own, always walking behind her, the whole world forever watching him, living his days being a servant of an outdated institution with no clear place or role in a modern democratic society, a slave to public opinion, no freedom, no opinions, no real life… and he didn’t do it.

Did Robb not love Rhaenys enough? Or was he not strong enough? Jon never asked. They never talked about it.

Robb married Jeyne because there was no going back. He loved her, sure, but she wasn’t it. If Rhaenys was it, how could he leave her? You’re never supposed to leave the people you love. History doesn’t repeat itself, Jon knows. And whatever happened to his parents, that’s not Rhaenys. Rhaenys isn’t like Rhaegar, she’s too much like her mother.

Lyanna wasn’t married to a Jeyne, and Elia was not off to Jamaica, being gay and causing expensive barely coverable scandals.

Jon’s no longer sure who he is in this story. He always believed he’d be like aunt Dany. Off doing
her own thing most of the time, uninterested in all the drama, using her position for good… or attempting to. Aunt Dany is often largely criticised for working exactly never yet living off her wits at the cost of the taxpayer, investing money in so-called good charities that eventually often turn out to be a great collusion of fraud. Also, Drogo has lately been accused of sexual assault by more than one victim, and though he denies it all, one can’t help but feel some truth must be in it. “Where there’s smoke there’s fire.” Lyanna muttered. Jon won’t deny not being surprised when he found out.

So maybe he shouldn’t aspire being a Daenerys. But he’s certainly not uncle Viserys, either. He doesn’t plan to hang around with convicted rape and drug trade criminals anytime soon, and he certainly won’t go around lobbying for third world country dictatorial, human rights violating ‘politicians’. Also, he does take the public cost for his travels seriously. Uncle Viserys isn’t nicknamed Fly Free Viserys for no reason, his total disregard for public funding and frequent use of the royal helicopter are infamous.

So, who is Jon going to be? He’s stuck working for the royal firm until he’s as old as uncle Aemon, that he knows. But he can choose what role he’ll play.

*You may not believe it yet, but you hatched yourself a Lyanna.*

Jon grabs the steers of his car, squeezes it so hard the muscles in his palms hurt, and then he screams. After that he drops his forehead to the steers, breathes out as if he’s been running a marathon, and somehow manages to feel better for it.

*Sansa will stay.*

What the hell has he been doing? Moping around, being angry with how unfair it all is, being angry with her… Rhaenys is right about something. He knows Sansa. He’s been so haunted by Ygritte and the undeniable and unavoidable hell his status will bring to whomever it might be that’s in his life, that he projected his fears on her behaviour. He even listened to Aegon. Aegon doesn’t know shit. Aegon’s never been in any somewhat stable relationship.

Jon opens the door of his car. He’s had too much to drink, and he can’t drive, but the alcohol seems to open something that has been closed for too long, and his mind is clear. He could take a cab and take the security risk, or wait for the palace to send a driver, probably Sandor, or he could just walk, give his parents a heart-attack. Let the cold winter air wake him up, help him see, help him to stay awake, to not lose whatever it is he’s feeling. He can’t afford that loss, he knows.

There’s no one at the gatehouse, thankfully, and when he gets out, he walks around Rhaenys’ backyard garden, around Aegon III’s statue, towards queen Rhaenys’ statue. During the day it’s filled with tourists, but right now it’s surprisingly calm and peaceful.

It’s freezing cold and, in the distance, when he stares at Kensington Gardens, he can see the frozen round pound, his fingers are icicles, and putting them deep in his pockets helps very little. When he’s walked all the way down the Dial Walk, purposely avoiding the Palace Avenue, it starts snowing, and from the corner of his eye he can see a bodyguard in the shadows, following him at perfect distance. Soft flakes fall down, into his hair, on his shoulders, and to his cheeks they melt. The cold keeps him awake and alert, but also extremely uncomfortable, and that’s probably why he makes some manoeuvre the army taught him, getting rid of the bodyguard before he pops into a cab when he’s just passed the Whole Foods Market.

The taxi driver doesn’t seem to recognise him at first, and when he does he puts on the popular widened eyes and look of disbelief.
“Where to, sir?”

“Finborough Road, of Finborough theatre, near Brompton Cemetery.”

“Okay sir, thank you sir.”

When he arrives, not in front of Sansa’s flat, but around the corner, the man refuses to let Jon pay, but Jon presses some extra paper with his father’s face on it in his hand.

“It’s past twelve, have a tip, mate.” He says.

“Thank you, your highness!”

Jon smiles, inwardly uncomfortable, and leans against a lightening pole to watch the man disappear.

February and it is snowing… the flakes drop into his eyelashes, and as the cold of the piercing air around him fights its way through the layers of clothing he wears, Jon regrets whatever the hell he planned on doing.

What will he tell her? What is he going to say? Harry will kill him when he sets one foot into the flat, if he gets to set a foot in, in the first place.

When he presses the bell, it’s half an hour later, near half past one, and he’s spent too long brooding about what to say, preparing a speech, weighting over every word as if she’ll care about that.

*I don’t want you to be my Lyanna. He’ll say, I want you to be my Sansa. Let’s not make Rhaenys’ mistake, Robb’s mistake, or my dad’s mistake, let’s do it right. I’ll do it right. From the beginning, from the start.*

The bell rings, nothing happens, and he waits a count to thirty before he rings again. Forty seconds pass, and Jon leans his forehead against the dark, massive door. Behind him a car struggles its way through the snow.

If a paparazzi is hidden away in the dark right now, he’ll take a picture of Jon at his most vulnerable, and that one bad-selling biography they’ll write about him in a hundred years will be grateful for it.

Jon feels like crying in self-pity and self-loathing when he pushes himself off the door. His legs are heavy when he walks down the steps, back to the footpath. Should he walk all the way to Buckingham Palace? That’ll be an interesting experience. He’s never made that walk, he’d like the to see London from that point of views. Maybe that way he’ll perhaps be able to sleep.

The wind rushes in his ears, making him numb for all sounds, and he nearly misses her voice when, slightly apprehensively, she whispers through the speaker, “Hello?”
Infected

Chapter Summary

"The biggest disease this day and age is that of people feeling unloved."
- Diana, Princess of Wales

Chapter Notes

Hey y'all! Sorry for the total lack of updating, I have no life left, that’s my only excuse. ALso, I wrote these chapters when I was heartbroken. I certain piece in this chapter was written from my own pov at the time, when I felt super miserable and believed the world would end you know, and it was hard for me to go back and reread it, so I kept postponing it.
Anyway, I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sansa stands in the middle of the room, leaning against the back of her sofa, when he walks through the door she opened for him.

She took the time to put on her trusty hot pink bathrobe, yet she can’t help but feel very naked, in her oversized t-shirt and knickers. He doesn’t help much by moving his eyes over her as if he’s roaming the field, lingering on her bare legs.

When she sees his face she let’s go of all her intentions to keep some distance and instantly moves over to tuck on his coat, “What have… you’re freezing cold, is it snowing outside?”

“I’m fine, I’m good.” Jon says and after he allows her to place his coat over a chair, he moves a whole lot of steps away from her, almost as if he’s terrified she’ll be infectious.

Sansa knows she’s sick, therefore looks tired and… well, sick, but there’s very little light in the room and he’s seen her in worse states, so it must be something other than appearance.

“Has something happened?” Sansa asks.

Jon shakes his head. For some reason he seems at a total loss of words as his wide eyes stare back at her with something close to distrust in them.

“Did you walk?”

“ Took a taxi.”

“Are you… are you drunk?”

Jon shakes his head in a way that tells her he certainly thinks he’s sober, “A bit sozzled.” He says and he smirks at his own choice of words, “Wine… went a tiny bit to my head. You know what Aegon’s like… he prefers my personality when I’m pissed.”
“Do you want-“

“Is Harry here?”

“No. Of course not.”

He seems to somewhat relax then, nods and unwraps the scarf around his neck.

“Jon-“

“You said you’d call me.”

Sansa feels extremely taken aback then. By the look in his eyes and the last couple of weeks of not seeing him, combined with him showing up now, unannounced, the last thing she expected was for him to throw that in her face, “Yes I… I said… that.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I… I called you today.” Sansa can hear how useless these words sound herself and his frown only makes it worse.

“Yeah.”

“I…” Sansa closes her eyes, breathes out, and straightens her back, “last time I saw you, you looked at me as if I had just slaughtered your entire family. I didn’t think you’d want to talk to me.”

Jon doesn’t actually deny that when he rolls up the sleeves of his jumper, looking down, avoiding her gaze.

“You were angry and-“

“You think that’s weird?”

“What?”

“You don’t get why I was angry?” He looks up and his grey eyes are nearly as cold as they were that day.

“I… I wanted to explain.” Sansa breathes out, “I called you that same evening. You didn’t let me.”

“You made it seem like you believed it wasn’t entirely your fault. I figure you’re planning on doing to same now?”

Sansa can feel her lungs let go of the air within them as if someone punched her guts, “What?”

“You shouldn’t have asked me to come.”

“No I…” Sansa closes her eyes, to help her choose her words carefully, but he doesn’t give her time.

“You know what it’s like. I wish you had no idea, but I know you do. You also knew I’d be there if you asked, I wouldn’t say no. I wish I said no. I wish I didn’t expect people to be better than that. Of course they wouldn’t be. But I can’t say… I can’t say no to you.”

“Jon-“
“It’s my life.” He says and suddenly she wishes he’d go back to avoiding her eyes, because the intense stare he gives her now might possibly be worse, “I don’t play with the press. Once you start there’s no end to it. It’s no game, it’s serious and dangerous.”

“I know.”

“Do you?”

“Yes.”

“I know you do, that’s why I don’t get it. You shut your mouth and stay away from the press, that’s all I ask. Don’t use me. My or my family. I always make that clear. I didn’t think I’d have to make it clear to you.”

“I would never use you.” Sansa says, her voice shaking terribly, “What would I use you for? You’re… you’re Jon. That’s all. That’s everything.”

Some part of her fears Jon simply doesn’t believe her when he says nothing and she bites her lip to stop tears from streaming down.

“I didn’t think Harry would actually be there.” Sansa tries, but she realises how pathetic she must sound, “I didn’t think he wanted to. So I just… I agreed because I didn’t think it would happen. I didn’t think it… didn’t think it would matter.”

“Of course it mattered.”

“Yes.” Sansa breathes, “Yes I know that now. I get it, I do. I was… I was stupid.”

Jon shakes his head, “Not stupid. Not that.”

“Daddy said… My father said it would be better. They said they’d leave us alone. They’d leave you alone. I didn’t want… He talked and talked, and then my mother and Robb they just… and daddy’s private secretary he… this Lannister guy was on the phone with my father all day and Robert was furious so I… I figured you hated all the coverage.”

“I’m used to coverage.” Jon says, “When did I ever give you the impression that I care about the coverage?”

Sansa shrugs, then decides to repeat, “I didn’t actually expect him to show up. My mother wanted him there.”

“Your mother? Weren’t you talking about you father’s campaign team?”

“Does it matter?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t want to fight with you.” Sansa says, “It’s the middle of the night and you just-“

“I’ll go, if you want.” He says, turning his back to her, grabbing his coat.

“No.” That’s certainly not anywhere near what she wants, she grabs his lower arm to stop him, which he aggressively pulls back.

“Then you’d better deal with me being angry.”

“Fine!” Sansa says, “It’s not like you called me.”

“I was angry.” He says, quite simply, “Because you betrayed my trust.”
“I would never-“

“I know you were away for a couple of years but it’s important. It’s the most important thing to me.” Jon goes on, “I have to be able to trust my social circle. I’m… I am who I am. We don’t complain and we don’t explain. Most of all we never talk to the press.”

“I would never talk to the press!”

“You might as well have!”

“No.” Sansa says, “That’s not true. You know that’s not true. I have nothing to do with my father’s campaign team. That’s not me. You know that’s not me. I told you, I don’t even vote conservative!”

Jon laughs again, more genuine this time, “Of all the people in my life, you would be the last person I ever thought I’d have to have this talk with.”

“You don’t have to.” Sansa says, “I do know, I always knew. What happened is… It was my fault. I can’t… can’t take that back but I promise, I swear it’ll never happen again. Ever.”

Jon raises one eyebrow and then his face decides to go back to nothing. Giving away nothing. Like a blank canvas of meaninglessness.

Then, suddenly, Sansa feels extremely angry, “I really don’t believe you have the right to blame this all on me.”

Jon only shrugs, and that’s when Sansa bursts.

“There was a lot of stuff going on, okay? My granddad died and my face was all over the news! Usually there are no comment sections dedicated to me. That was pretty goddamn scary! Meanwhile, you were off, on some stupid tour to some stupid tiny country-“

“Luxembourg.” Jon says.

“-which was apparently more important than you and me and the fact that-“

“Of course that was not more important!”

“-that all that stuff was going on! I know this is your life, but it’s not my life! Had you told me and explained it would have been better for you not to come to the sodding wedding I would have agreed wholeheartedly and taken all your advice, but you were gone. I had no idea what you believed was best because you didn’t tell me. You left me, and that’s fine, because I get that your job is important and whatever, but I don’t appreciate you judging the fact that I had no idea what the fuck I had to do! And for the record, my grandfather died, I was grieving, it was easy to manipulate me. It’s not my fault that the party did that. I would never call press in my right mind but perhaps, maybe, possibly I was not in my right mind!”

When she finally manages to run out of words, she finds Jon at a loss of them and after a silence that lasts too long he nods, “I’m sorry. You’re right.” He mutters, and his eyes suddenly bulge a bit.

“I should have called.” Sansa says, “So we could have… so we could have this fight a bit sooner. But I don’t believe it’s very mature to blame one another for not calling. We should blame that on ourselves.”

Jon shrugs again and his arrogance makes an appearance, “I figured it’s my role to wait for you to call me up and let me know you’ve got some free time for me.”
“Don’t be ridiculous!” Sansa spits back, “The last thing you’d ever do is sit by the phone and wait for me.”

“It’s not what I always promise myself to do, no.” His voice suddenly sounds quite drunk again.

“I saw the pictures.”

“What pictures?”

“Of you.”

“Okay?”

“With her.”


“Ygritte.”

“Ygri… Sansa don’t be silly.”

“Don’t call me that!”

Jon just laughs.

“Don’t take the mickey out of me.”

“Ygritte told the whole world of my mental health issues just so she could earn some extra pocket money. She called Aegon a drunk and my mum a lazy tree-hugging dimwit. I’m not sure what you-“

“Then why were you photographed with her?”

Jon stares at her for a moment, as if he tries to decide whether or not she’s being serious, which indeed makes Sansa feel stupid, “I don’t know… cause I was at a bar, drinking the stinging pain in my fucking cheek away because your boyfriend beat me in the face, and she was there too.”

“She was just… there?”

“She followed me outside cause she wanted to apologise. I told her to sod off and die. What do you think happened?”

“I don’t know, I’ve only seen the pictures.” Sansa breathes out, and she suddenly wants to hit herself.

“I’m glad you recognise the unreliable source that is paparazzi pictures published online.” Jon mocks, and then he laughs.

“It’s not funny.”

“Were you jealous… of Ygritte?”

“No.”

“You have to admit it’s quite funny that we were arguing about making deals with the press right before you get upset over some blurry privacy violating paparazzi pictures of me standing outside smoking.” Jon laughs some more and suddenly he doesn’t seem a bit tipsy, but truly drunk, and that annoys her. So, he had to drink himself a way through some bottle of substance before he
found the guts to come here? And now he’s laughing?

Sansa feels tears prickle behind her eyes suddenly. A combination of drunk Jon and angry Jon makes for a very cruel one.

“Fine.” Sansa says, and she shoves him to the chest, “Just get out.”

Jon doesn’t move an inch, and his face is still stone cold emotionless.

“I mean it!” She raises her voice, “I never asked for this.”

“Nor did I!” He bellows back in her face, so loud it nearly scares her. Which she absolutely hates. Joffrey scared her, Petyr scared her, Harry could scare her too… but Jon isn’t supposed to. He’s supposed to be different. He’s that person who would never scare, or hurt, or harm her.

“Then why are you here?” Sansa asks, her hands shake suddenly, and a tear drops down her cheek as her voice begins to tremble, “Go to Val, or to someone else, whatever. I’m sure you don’t need me to keep you company, so don’t waste my time.”

“I don’t actually.” Jon finally grabs his coat, and struggles to put it on in his state, “I don’t need you.”

As Sansa watches him she can’t help but feel a mixture of fury and total wrecking heartbreak. No. He can’t go now. He’s here, isn’t he? What does that mean? He’s only here to rub it in her face that he doesn’t need her, to remind her of what a horrible person she is? He could’ve just sent a card for her to burn if that’s all he needed her to know.

“Well, good night.” She tells him, “It’s a Saturday night, I’m sure you’ll amuse yourself.”

“I won’t, actually.” Jon mutters, grabbing his scarf.

“I certainly don’t want to.”

“You know nothing.” Jon says and he drops his hands, “Ygritte always told me that, but she hadn’t met you.”

“I don’t care about Ygritte! I don’t care about anyone! I don’t care about all the lightheaded blonde bimbos you screw!”

Jon just laughs. Awkwardly, it seems his first genuine laugh, “Don’t insult yourself.”

Sansa crosses her arms, “Don’t laugh at me!”

Jon’s still smirking, partly probably because he realises how pathetically childish and useless this fight is. They sound like teenagers.

“I care who you sleep with.” Jon confesses, and she’s not sure why, not sure how, but the cruelty has gone, his voice is softer, and his eyes kinder, “As hard as it is for me to admit. Why else do you think I’m here?”

Sansa blinks at that and opens her mouth to give a response she doesn’t yet know but he doesn’t let her, as he gets up from her sofa and moves a step towards her.

“I get that you… I understand that you’re dealing with this Harry situation, and I’m sorry if I’ve nearly ruined something you care about, I really really don’t want to hurt you. I hate it if I did, if I… you know. So if you want to be with him… I mean, I never… I never wanted to be that guy,
and I’m not expecting anything from you, but I just…”

Jon shuts up for a second during which Sansa knows she could find a hole to fill with her own words, but she’s at a loss of them. More importantly, there’s nothing she wants more but for him to keep talking the way he does, despite the struggle it obviously is, which seems endearing somehow, though she hates herself for thinking so.

“What the hell are you talking about?” she breathes softly.

He’s clearly struggling so much she shouldn’t force him to go on and suffer some more, but then he pulls a hand through his hair, and she can see the muscles in his upper arms stretch and flex and Sansa can do little but feel her feet nailed to the floor. All she can do is stand there like a total loon.

Jon groans then and looks at her as if he’ll die if he won’t say it, as if he’ll never get to say it again if he doesn’t now.

“What I mean is… I don’t know what I mean, I’m terrible with words. I just feel like you think I have no feelings, I feel that you have lately used me as if I don’t get hurt, and perhaps I shouldn’t have any feelings, maybe I don’t have a right to feelings, but I do have them, I tried not to have them, but it’s… that’s not working for me. That’s my problem, obviously. So I guess I’m… I’m here to ask you if you care about my fucking feelings or not, because if you don’t, then please just… please just don’t… just don’t.”

“Of course I care.” Sansa says, “Of course I… how can you think I might not care?”

Jon shrugs, his wide grey eyes twinkle back at her.

“Look Jon I…” Sansa feels like crying some more and then she coughs and her flu comes crashing back, “I’m sick, okay?”

“Of what? The-“

“Of nothing! I’m sick. Literally. Got the flu and I can’t breathe, my muscles ache and I’ve got a headache. You wanna scream at me, that’s fine, I deserve that, and I’m so happy you’re here, but please let’s… let’s wait a couple of days and don’t do it in the middle of the night.”

“You’re sick?”

“Yeah.”

Jon blinks at her, frowns, looks up and down as if he’s trying to find physical truth, and then seems to take her word for it, “Why didn’t you say?”

“I couldn’t get a word in.”

“That’s bullshit.” He snorts, and he’s right, “You should’ve called me.”

His tone has changed from ‘you should’ve called me because we have to talk’ to ‘because I would’ve made you fresh orange juice and stroked your hair to ease your suffers’.

“I did.”

Jon ignores that and walks over to her after pushing his wet coat off again. He places his one hand to her forehead as he cups her face with the other.

Sansa closes her eyes at the touch and although the screaming brought her headache back, his
touch manages to ease the pain in a pleasant way.

“I’m so sorry.” He mutters.

Sansa’s still got her eyes closed when she tries to smile for an answer.

Sansa can’t help but take a deep breath then and without consciously deciding to, she surrenders by grabbing his jumper in both her hands, “I broke up with Harry.”

“Yeah, you said.” Jon says. Clearly, she drained his vocabulary, and now he’s empty.

“Before the funeral.” She adds.

“I know.”

“I told you.”

“I remember.”

“I didn’t want him at the funeral. He was just… there. I missed you, I wanted to see you, that’s why you were there. Not because of the press. That wasn’t me. I would never. I know I screwed up, but I… Harry left at Robb’s wedding because he knew I was in love with you and I… I knew he was right but… I was scared. I’ve been scared about everything. But then… you kissed me and I wasn’t afraid anymore. So I made up my mind. I made up my mind before you even kissed me. I was a coward, that’s all. I’ve been a coward for months, but I didn’t wanna be anymore.”

“You’re not a-“

“Of course I am! If I wouldn’t be coward I would’ve told Harry to piss off the moment he showed up in Cumbria.”

Jon smirks a miserable smirk then, and shakes his head, “Sansa…” he sighs, “That’s a mess.”

“I know. I… I made a mess, I know I did. I’m just… Arya says I’m a pleaser, and I guess she’s right.”

Jon only raises his eyebrows, and he’s still smirking when he shrugs, “Maybe, yeah.”

I’m sorry I didn’t call you, but you didn’t seem to want me to, and I couldn’t bring myself to force the conversation. Also I just… I really really needed some time to think, especially because my grandfather just died- and somehow I can’t do that when you’re around. I didn’t want to hurt anyone, and I suppose that by trying to hurt no one, I hurt… I hurt everyone.”

Jon watches her as if her words are paining him physically, and other than the grimace on his face, there’s nothing.

“So… so I… of course I care. I didn’t… I didn’t want to… I didn’t mean to let any of this happen.”

Her words are silenced when he wraps his arms around her and he pulls her in a warm hug.

“You’re burning.” He says after what feels like many minutes of silence where she allows his embrace to give her all the comfort she’s been dreaming of these past couple of days.

“I didn’t want Harry at the funeral.”

Jon moves his hand to stroke her hair, “Lemme bring you to bed.”
Sansa looks up and places her hand to his cheek, rubs his beard with her thumb and gives him a tiny smile, “I wanted you to be there.”

Jon nods, smiles, leans his forehead to hers and says, “I’m going to make it up to you, okay?”

Sansa wants to tell him that’s perfectly unnecessary, he’s got nothing to make up for, but she’s really not feeling so well, and perhaps him making it up to her, means he’s not going to leave. So, she only smiles.

He holds her face in his hands and forces her to look into his eyes, his sweet and gentle eyes, and she’s reminded of what a curse he is. As if she could ever forget.

She wants to help him take off his jumper. To taste his lips on hers, on her naked skin. She wants silly and simple things perhaps most of all. Rub his cheek with her thumb, pull her fingers through his hair, press her nose to his, wrap her arms around him. To ask him with an embrace to never go away. She needs no protection from nothing but being alone. She wants him to look at her like that and smile.

Even when she’s as sick as this, she can still want it, still feel it in her abdomen. A sort of lusty burning need she hates and loves equally. It makes her happy like she’s drugged, and it drives her insane. It deprives her off her control, reminds her that, she too, can be all instinct. That she’s no better than anyone else when it comes to love. She’s learned that now. The pain did that. It’s so dangerous perhaps because it’s irresistibile. It makes fools of us all.

She could promise herself that she doesn’t need it, remind herself of everything else in her life, of her loved ones and luck and all. The good weather. It’s just that the heartache would always end up being unbearable and on the inside, she was so bitter. Pain, really, only heals with time, and all she could do and think about was missing him, as she was enduring, waiting for that moment to come, where she didn’t miss him anymore. The scariest thing of all may be, that she didn’t wish to stop missing him. Sansa could miss him for the rest of her life if she had to. Because, even though she felt like dying, she was alive.

Being alone is suddenly very terrifying to her, when there’s someone she can lose, and that someone feels right, for the first time in her life. So, when the idea of that someone being gone, or not wanting her back, pops up, that’s when she has to admit she’s not that strong after all. That’s when it became unmistakable, because she could no longer disregard it. The vulnerability. She was forced to stop imagining, to create pictures in her mind of what it could be like. Silly pictures. It feels like she is done looking, yet she still had not what she really needs. It’s was horrifying in-between, of wanting, longing, pain and nothing. It’s the pictures, she fears, that’ll make her forgive him anything.

Sansa can think about touching him at the most random times of day. She’s had that for months now. Mostly when he’s there, on the tv screen or the other side of the room or something. But it happens when she’s in the car too, or shopping for groceries. Even when she’s at work and her colleagues think she’s listening to what they’re saying. And she’ll feel embarrassed for the people around her, even though she knows they don’t know. Her thoughts just wander. Nothing she can do. It’s amazing, he’s amazing. It’s chemistry and passion. Often, it’s quite boring, and that’s perfect because it is perfect. It could never be boring, even if it’s just staring. So much intimacy. It’s real, even though it’s a fantasy. It feels real. Though never as good as the real thing. Yet a million times better than the real thing with someone else. Only the thought of him, she’ll prefer over others. Doesn’t that say it all? She’d rather reminisce on his kisses forever than settle for kisses of others. Someone else. She’ll grab her head and try to get rid of it, but it’s impossible because she’s possessed. That’s why she believed she’d never get over it. He’s in her head, not
because she thinks of him, but because she’s infected.

She wants him to gently make love to her first, after that fuck her silly, to end it with slow and sleepy sex until she falls asleep wrapped up in his arms, his heartbeat beneath her ear, the moving of his breathing is rhythmic and soothing.

But she can’t even kiss him. Cause he’ll be sick too. What a mess.

He lowers his hands to grab hers, and pulls her with him to the dark bedroom, where her cold bed is waiting for her, big enough to feel lonely when you lie in it all alone, though more comfortable than the sofa she preferred when she fell asleep for the first time, a mere couple of hours ago.

He doesn’t turn the lights on as she sinks down on her bedside. He sits down beside her, helps her climb in and carefully makes sure to tuck her in as she can’t seem to shut up.

“I should have broken up with Harry weeks ago-months ago, I wanted to but we were together for so long, for two years and I didn’t want to hurt him.”

“I understand.” finally she feels like he means it.

“I needed some time to figure out what I want and where I am and where I want to be… I suppose.”

“Of course.” He croaks.

“I was going to call you. I called you. I called you today, I….”

“Yeah, I saw, I… I was with Rhaenys, I couldn’t pick up my phone.”

“I see.”

He doesn’t respond to that, only stares back at her as he still sits by her bedside. That’s when a horrible thought appears in her head.

“You’re leaving?”

He only smiles.

“Please stay?” Sansa can’t find words to describe how desperate she is for him to be sweet and nice and caring to her.

“If you want.” She’s pretty sure he smirks because he likes the desperate tone in her voice. We’re all mere mortals at the end of the day, we all want to be loved and needed. Even those with blue blood.

“Sure.” Sansa says, and she leans back up as Jon moves down to take his shoes off.

“It was the right thing to do, to break up with Harry, I know that, and I’d do it again but still he… he was part of my life for a long time, and I needed some time to get used to that, to be able to close that chapter off without feeling any more guilt than I already did.”

Jon kicks his shoes off, pulls his jumper over his head, then turns around to stare back at her. If only he were good with words, she thinks then, because if he were, he could tell her what he needs from her, wants from her, and she’d give it to him, and they could hold on and fall asleep.

“But the chapter is over now, and I’m in a new one, I just need some time to figure out what kind of chapter I need and want it to be.”
Jon moves over towards the other side of the bed, and climbs in beside her, pulling her down again, to lay down wrapped up in his arms.

“And I knew these pictures of you and Ygritte didn’t mean anything, I’m stupid to-“

“Sansa?”

“Yeah?”

“Shut up. You’re sick, you need to sleep.”

Sansa turns around to curl around him, to find his steady heartbeat with her ear, and when she catches it, it doesn’t disappoint. He never disappoints. His body especially.

“I’m so glad you’re here.” She mutters eventually and she looks up only a little to press a kiss to his jaw, snuggle her nose to the sharp edge of it, as her skin rubs against the stubble of his trimmed beard.

“I’m drunk, though.” He says, and surprisingly, his mouth somewhat curls into what might become a lopsided grin.

Sansa let’s her lips linger somewhere left to his mouth, as if she wants to kiss the potential of a smile, but she doesn’t, cause that would be stupid, “I missed you.” She says and her hands move up to his hair, as her thumbs remain to his temples, from where she can gently rub his cheek, his ear, and the spot below it, where the sharp start of his jaw clenches.

“Missed you too.” He finally says, and he pushes her hair from her face.

“I don’t ever want to miss you again.” Sansa says, and she feels like her heart might burst from her chest at the words, at their intense truth, at how she’s never meant anything as much as this, she whispers his name to his lips again, and then he kisses her. She figures that, because he’s the one to do it, she shouldn’t feel guilty for spreading the disease. Maybe he’s as sick as she is. Maybe he doesn’t mind, either.

It’s just a soft kiss, which can’t last too long cause she can’t breathe through her nose, and that’s okay, because he’s here, and he’s not going anywhere, and if some part of his brain needs convincing, she’ll do it in the morrow. When he’s making her fresh orange juice.

Sansa wonders how she ever managed to keep away from him for nearly three weeks, now that she’s sleeping in a bed that’s only hers, now that she can give herself to him and be his not only for a fleeting moment… how could she have waited? How and why? Such a waste of time. Some tiny voice in the back of her head tells her she’s the biggest idiot in the whole world. He’s here, in her flat, it’s night and they’re alone and they’re kissing, and she’s allowed to because she’s his now, he may not yet know it and she may not have told him, but she is. He can have her, all of her.

He stops kissing her to take her face in his hands and with his thumbs he wipes the tears off her cheeks, “I just- I just don’t wanna share you.”

“You don’t have to.” She says instantly.

He nods, kisses her some more, in the lazily, loving way she loves most, before he pulls back again and says, “I’m so sorry I yelled.”

“It’s okay.”
When Jon shakes his head, his nose bumps hers, “It’s not.”

Sansa kisses him again, and tells him, “I yelled too.” Through the kisses.

“I missed you too.” He says.

“You do trust me, don’t you, Jon?”

Jon nods.

“I mean it. I could never… I could never allow you not to trust me. It’s me.”

“I know it’s you.”

“And it’s you.”

Jon only smirks as he looks down at her lips.

“It’s us.” She hopes he knows what she means.

He’s just kissing the corners of her smiling mouth when his phone rings.

Jon doesn’t answer, just let’s the jingle sound go on and on until it fades, and that’s also when Sansa gets another attack of coughs.

“I can’t breathe.” She tells him halfway through the coughs.

“You’ve been like this for how long?”

“Today was day three.” She says.

“You should feel better tomorrow.” Jon decides.

“Can’t wait.” Sansa says and she coughs again.

“It doesn’t sound good.”

“I don’t feel good.”

Jon presses a kiss to her aching throat and then smirks to her skin, “You’re like a heater. Don’t take it the wrong way but it’s really good for warming up.”

“Glad to be useful.”

“Also, your voice is kinda sexy?”

“What?”

“It’s husky.”

“Only cause my throat hurts. Also, I can’t breathe through my nose.”

Jon laughs and Sansa laughs, her laughing turns into coughing and then they both freeze at the shock of his phone ringing again.

“Who’s trying to call you?” The lack of shakiness in her voice surprises her and Jon grins at the questions, hides his face behind a hand as if he suddenly feels embarrassed and then answers.

“Either my secretary or worse.”
“Worse?”

“Could be my sister, likelier my brother, worst case scenario one of my parents. I don’t want to take up the phone, I’m sick of my stalkers.”

“They don’t know you’re here?” Sansa giggles.

“I took a cab here.” Jon says, “Was quite fun to see the man’s face, he was frowning and wondering is that really him? But he said nothing until the end, when he refused my money.”

Sansa breathes a laugh to Jon’s shoulder and then rubs her cheek to the cotton of his t-shirt, surrendering to his embrace, “I hope you forced him to accept.”

“I did.” He promises.

“They think you must be kidnapped.” Sansa leans up and presses her nose to his, “They’re worried about you.”

Jon sighs and digs his nose into her hair, “I’ll take up the phone when I know it’s Aegon calling.” He says, before he stretches his arm to grab for the phone, which instantly starts ringing as soon as he picks it up, as if the caller knows.

Jon sits up, presses accept and says, “Hey.”

Sansa sits up, too, and can’t help but earwig.

“At a friend’s.” “No, don’t be ridiculous, I’m fine.” “So, what if I am? I don’t have to-“ “Because-“ “It was an impulsive decision.” “I didn’t want your opinion.” “Well, tell them I’m sorry.” “I am!” “just say I’m at Robb’s.” “Well, tell them I’m with Sam.” “You can think of someone!” “I didn’t tell her.” “That’s none of your bloody business.” “A car?”

Jon turns around to give Sansa a questioning look, as she sits there, hugging her knees, trying to suppress her coughing as she watches him. She shakes her head.

“No, I’ll spend the night.” “Is there something I can do to stop them?” “Well then.” “I’m not going outside to say hello.” “They know where she lives, Dayne knows everything.” “I’ll call him in the morning.” “I don’t know! In the morning!” “No! Piss off! AEGON!” “Hey mum. Yeah, I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.” “Yeah, I wasn’t thinking, I should’ve called.” “I’m perfectly fine, promise.” “I’ll see you tomorrow, okay? Say sorry to dad.” “Okay, bye.”

Jon groans and throws his phone down on the nightstand, so loudly Sansa’s sure Apple’s sensitive screen didn’t handle it well.

“I won’t deny I enjoyed witnessing that conversation.” She says, and then she laughs, and naturally her laughing makes her cough.

“It’s not funny.” Jon says, smirking and he rubs her back with his warm hand in an attempt to ease the pain of her ribcase’s suffering.

“I’m feeling so sorry for your mother.”

“She called your brother.”

Sansa gasps, “He must’ve loved that.” She can’t help but amuse herself with the fantasy of Robb getting a call from princess Lyanna, asking him where her son in, right in the middle of the night.
“You be glad she doesn’t have your number.”

“Why? You disappear a lot?”

“No.” Jon chuckles and sinks down in the bed again, pulling her with him, “They’re sending a security guy over.”

“Really? Why?”

“Protocol.” Jon shrugs, “We’ll leave him outside in his car.”

“All night?”

Jon shrugs again, “We pay well, I promise.”

“That seems pretty… dramatic. How’s he going to keep an eye on you?”

Jon shrugs again, “Dunno, never paid much attention to the logic. Up till now I’ve never been kidnapped, so I have total faith in their abilities.”

How often are you people kidnapped, actually?” Sansa asks, resting her chin on his shoulder as she wraps her arms around his torso, pressing her front to his back.

“Never.” Jon says, “Dad has been paranoid ever since Elia took Rhaenys and baby Aegon with her to Spain without informing him, twice.” Jon recalls as if he was there at the time, “I mean… well, that must’ve been terrifying for him, considering it was in the same year when there was an assassination attempt on he himself… there are videos of him looking up at the sound of the shots, playing with his cuff links, looking as if he’s very unimpressed.”

“That’s it?”

“Yeah, I mean, for gun incidents, yeah. Scottish terrorists used to send bomb letters, and my mum got a lot of hate mail telling her to kill herself when the whole world thought she was a home wrecker. Oh, and some guy wanted to throw acid in my uncle Vis’s face. Rhaenys had a stalker for a while, but he’s behind bars now, and Aegon usually ends up in a mess of his own making. Some people claimed they wanted to kill him after he came out, someone sent him a letter containing white powder… but after that dad doubled his bodyguards and he’s not allowed to open his own mail. Not that he ever opened it himself, but whatever. And one time they tried to kidnap aunt Dany, but when they asked her to get out of the car, she kicked this guy in his groin, and told them not bloody likely.”

Sansa feels extremely dreadful suddenly, the ease, even amusement, with which he tells these stories makes it, if possible, almost worse, “But never you?”

Jon yawns, “Not really? I mean, when I went to school for the first time, I was four or something, they broke into the building and watched me in class, after that just left.”

“They broke into your school?”

“Yeah, but they never hurt me or reached me, they just stared at me through the window of -“

“That’s sick.”

“Yeah. I mean, obviously. And the photographers of course… those pics of Rhaenys sunbathing topless in France, zoomed in to private property three kilometers away. She successfully sued them.
Anyway, paparazzi has always been extreme. My dad sued only once, when they made pics of Aegon and me in the back garden, when we were kids, they climbed in trees and-

“Jon, that’s horrible. I never knew- I mean, I saw these pictures of Rhaenys, but-

“Everyone saw these. It sucked cause loads of people blamed her, said she shouldn’t have been so stupid as to sunbath in the first place. Donald Trump even tweeted about it-

“Well, if Trump tweeted about it…”

Jon laughs and Sansa hears it roll through his lungs, “Bet he regrets saying it now. He would’ve liked riding around London in a carriage, Rhaenys by his side. Naturally, there’s no fucking way that’s going to happen.”

“He’s been though, hasn’t he?”

Jon shrugs, “Yeah, but only our dad had to shake his hand, at Windsor Castle. The rest of us bailed out, found some excuse somehow. Thank god. Even my mother was working that day, I’m sure she missed a spa trip, actually, and she never does. Not sure what Aegon would say to his face, but it would be equally wonderful and terrible.”

Sansa tries to remind herself how absurd this conversation is as she drops her ear to his chest.

“He hates Rhaenys because Elia refused to go out with him.”

Sansa moves up and chuckles, “What?” But Jon’s dead serious.

“He used to send her flowers.” Jon coughs a smoker’s cough before he continues a story that shouldn’t surprise her, but it does anyway, “He called her the ultimate trophy wife and once said his only regret in life is that he never got to sleep with her… As the roses and orchids piled up at her apartment, she became increasingly concerned about what to do. It came really close to seeming like Trump was stalking her, and I can remember my father being worried. She asked him what to do… imagine that. This is back in the days, when they weren’t exactly best mates. Anyway, pa suggested she’d just chuck all of them away, not say anything in case he’d mistake her refusal for a game of hard to get… cause that’s probably how he would have taken it. Eventually it stopped. That’s when he started making comments about her mental instability.”

“Wow.” Is all Sansa can say.

“Then later on, he was on some talk show and called her being crazy a minor detail. He also said she had times where she didn’t look great, and we all kind of assume he’s talking about the time when she was bulimic.”

“Wow.” Sansa says again.

“He called my mother a horse twice, said he didn’t understand why a man would choose someone who looks like my mother over someone with Elia’s legs. I mean… yeah.”

“That’s madness.”

“He is madness. Robert wanted him to come to London for a state visit, because after Tywin’s Brexit fiasco he’s trying to kiss America’s arse. But for my family, this is awkward on whole new levels. And my family has experience in a lot of levels.”

“I… I can imagine. He never said anything about you?”
“I’m sure that if he has, it would have leaked out in the weeks before his little visit. I’m kinda disappointed nothing showed up.”

“Maybe.” Sansa smirks.

“Anyway, none of that is dangerous, just embarrassing.”

“So, no one wants you dead?”

“Nope. Never got a bomb letter. I’m not that important.” Jon grins until he sees her face and he instantly wipes the smile away, “It’s okay.” He says, kissing her cheek multiple times, “Our protection is on point.”

“But you have no protection now.”

“Not yet, give it two seconds. Anyway, no one knows where I am!”

“Your taxi driver knows!”

“That was… you don’t have to worry, it’s fine, I promise, it’ll be okay. I’ve been out and about without protection often enough.”

“You have?”

“Yeah. They won’t sent you a bomb letter, promise.” He snuggles his face to hers and wraps his arms more tightly around her, “No one is ever going to hurt you, I swear.”

Sansa has not even thought of herself, and she gulps away the thought, “Just promise you won’t ever tell that story of your dad and his cufflinks to my mum.” She mutters, her face hidden in his shoulder.

“I won’t.” Jon laughs, “I won’t, I won’t.”

“Okay… I’m probably going to fall asleep now.” She tells him and he grins, but not for long, because she can’t.

He’s here, but even Jon can’t make the flu disappear. Sansa wonders how people like Louis XIV got away with making people believe he had magic royal powers of healing. Sansa still feels like crap and her coughing won’t stop, and her breathing doesn’t get any easier.

He doesn’t complain though, and he doesn’t fall asleep either, which, she’s sure, is as much because he’s a good guy as because he actually can’t because her coughing keeps him awake.

“I’m sorry.” She says, but he doesn’t accept her apologising. He just hugs her, makes her a shitload of tea, feeds her aspirin, rubs her back, strokes her hair and holds her hand until, finally, at around four in the morning, her exhaustion wins the fight. Her eyelids sink down as she lays draped around him, still hearing the sounds of his heartbeat, as his breathing comforts her and his fingers massaging her scalp make her sleepy. The birds start twittering to announce the new arrival of day just when she’s sinking away.

It’s nothing like their first night together, like a total foil, Sansa thinks, but, ignoring her terrible physical state, she’ll cherish it all the same. They don’t say so much, only the necessities, and she feels extremely unattractive, but he doesn’t seem to mind.

Drained, weakened and exhausted, Sansa falls asleep, her limbs and muscles aching, her hair a
mess, and if she had energy left to think, she’d wonder about what tomorrow might bring, but she has none, and perhaps that’s better.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and I’m just gonna ask you all again to be a bit soft, because, again, this chapter really is the result of my own personal emotional rollercoaster. 

Xxx!
Sansa notices none of his failed attempts at baking eggs when she walks out of the bedroom, just when he successfully finishes the first unburnt version, at around one in the afternoon, wearing knickers, a jumper and slippers, enthusiastically greeting the cat before giving him a second glance. When she does, her smile only lasts so long, before she spots Chris, the protection officer.

Her widened eyes look at Jon in a mixture of shock and shame, as she begs him to do something.

“Ehm, that’s Chris. He’s my official stalker.”

“Miss.” Chris says, no emotion on his face giving away his thoughts. He wouldn’t dare.

“Sir.” Sansa mutters as she tries to pull her T-shirt down with her hands.

Jon clears his throat, “We were talking about some security stuff, but he was just leaving.”

Chris gets the message, gets up from the stool, and leaves. To go back to standing outside Sansa’s front door. His job must be exhaustingly boring, Jon thinks. Just standing there, trying not to get distracted by your thoughts and the odd places fantasy takes you, as you probably hope someone messages you through your earplug. Just to have something to do.

He always wondered who they prefer to follow around most. The king would be politically most interesting. You get to hear snippets of top state secrets. Also, Rhaegar would hands down be the most professional one, and he rewards loyalty. But then, Aegon’s life must be more exciting. Also, more exhausting. Rhaenys works hardest, so you don’t get a moment of rest and you have to wake up early every goddamn day to follow her around. But she’s extremely nice to staff. She knows you have to be, to keep stories out of the press. So not so professional there, but she always gets them some extra Christmas gifts and sends birthday cards. Jon is the sort of person who forgets about that, weren’t it for Sam’s reminders. Jon doubts people like to work for him. He figures they all see him as the overprivileged whiney guy who’s as lazy as his mother, considering how little he worked after he came back from Iraq. Jon’s parents insisted on keeping his ptsd out of the press, and that meant none of the staff could know.

Speaking of lazy, Jon’s mum must be the best. She doesn’t work so hard, but nor does she complain. She’s always laid back, doesn’t take it all too seriously, would never, unlike Rhaenys, insist on people using her correct titles, and is an all round bubbly and cheeky person. Jon imagines some members of staff are a little, or very, terrified of Rhaegar. He knows they all adore his mum. Although, that inability to take things seriously, might be annoying too, when you’re part of the PR team, desperately trying to make her understand that it’s just not a good idea to be photographed going out for lunch with Catelyn Stark, a day before the Brexit referendum.
“What idiots care about who I go to lunch with?” She asked, and they must’ve been screaming internally, before making a last attempt to make her understand what politically impartial means.

“It’s just lunch.” She rolled her eyes. Rhaegar knew he was supposed to be angry, but he never gets angry at Jon’s mum. Rhaenys however, was extremely annoyed. Perhaps especially because Rhaegar wasn’t angry. Aegon thought it was funny. Jon was too depressed to care. Both because being depressed was his nature back then, and because, well, *brexit*.

“How are you feeling?” Jon asks, as soon as Chris’ out the door.

“Better, actually.” Sansa says and her voice sounds as if she herself is surprised by it.

“Flus usually don’t last longer than three to five days.” Jon says and Sansa sneezes, as if she wants to remind him that she’s only at day four.

“Sorry bout Chris.” Jon says.

Sansa shrugs, “Rhaenys told me you guys can’t tell them to go. Something with insurance.”

“Well, there’s this deal with the government, that they only pay for our security if we stick to the guidelines they set up. So I ehm… I can’t tell Chris to go.”

Sansa smirks as she looks at the cat, “It’s fine, he can stay.”

Jon watches her scratch the cat behind his ears for a while, “Rhaenys said you got a cat.”

“How did she know?” Sansa asks, lifting the lazy beast up in her arms, snuggling her face in the ginger fur.

“Rhaenys knows everything.” Jon shrugs.

“She used secret services to find out I got a cat?”

“Maybe.” Jon grins and he offers her a plate of toast and eggs, “You don’t have any bacon.”

“No, I’m thinking of going vegetarian. For the environment, you know.”

“Doesn’t explain why you’ve got no beans.”

“Also, I don’t really like bacon.”

“So, where are the beans?”

“I usually just have some yoghurt with fruit for breakfast.”

“At least you’re not vegan, then.”

“At least? Don’t you know how extremely problematic the dairy industry is?”

“I don’t.” Jon says, “Because ignorance is bliss.”

“Hypocrite.” Sansa smirks.

“My mum and dad are super environmental. Buckingham palace is 85 percent wind and sun energy and my dad’s favourite person in the world is David Attenborough.”

“Are they vegan?”
“Sometimes.” Jon laughs.

He watches her nibble on her toast as she pats the cat, who lies on the counter, purring contently. Jon can’t help but sympathise, Sansa’s got nice fingers.

“He likes you.” Sansa decides when the cat suspiciously glares up at Jon, “His name is Billy.”

“He’s a bit fat.” Jon notes.

“No he’s not.” Sansa puts up a high pitched voice Jon’s mother reserves for newborn foals, “He’s a very handsome, very pretty little big buddy… yes, you are so handsome, aren’t you? The most handsome-est cat.”

“Where did you get him?” Jon asks, failing at hiding his amusement.

“Lady Porchester was moving into a smaller home and Billy couldn’t come along.”

“That’s not so weird.”

Sansa glances up, worried frown on her face, “You don’t like him?”

Jon can’t help but put fuel to the flame of her badly hidden disappointment, “I’m a dog person.”

Sansa gasps and places her hands over the cats ears, “Don’t hurt his feelings!”

Jon laughs, “Thought you were too?”

“I’m a Billy person.” Sansa says, and she goes on to scratch the cat behind his ears.

“He’s a lucky bastard.”

“So are you.” Sansa mutters. She takes her time before she looks up and gives him perhaps her most beautiful smile up to date. Billy the cat is neglected then when she gets off her stool, walks around the counter and drops herself in his lap.

“You’ve got a hangover again?”

“Maybe.”

She happily grins and, one leg at each side of him, pushes some curls behind his ears, “Have we ever had sex with you not being drunk or hangover?”

“Yeah.” Jon mutters and he nudges her nose with his, “I remember vividly.” He makes a head gesture, “It was on that sofa.”

Sansa beams at him, then kisses him, but doesn’t allow him to deepen it when she moves her face somewhat away, “Weren’t you a little hangover?”

“No, just getting over a trauma caused by the previous hangover.”

Sansa giggles, and starts kissing him again, “You have… to… go home?” She asks, without stopping, and Jon nods.

“You have no idea how eager I am to postpone that.” He says before she pulls his face back to hers.
She sighs in his mouth and scratches the stubble at his cheek with her nails before she grabs the hair at the nape of his neck. She tastes of mint toothpaste and it’s hard to dip his tongue in her mouth because she keeps smiling. He doesn’t want to tell her to stop smiling because that would feel so wrong, and it would also mean he’d have to stop kissing her for a moment, which he just really doesn’t want to do.

“How many eggs did you ruin?” She asks after a while.

“Only two.”

Sansa giggles, “Only two?”

“Two and a half.”

“You did well, I’m proud.”

Her face is so close he can count her eyelashes and the freckles on her face, every time she breathes out it warms his lips and when he snuggles his face in the crook of her neck, placing some open mouthed kisses to it, she moans and leans up, in an attempt to move closer, which is fairly impossible. As usual her breasts are driving him crazy- he never used to be a boob man, but he figures he is totally a boob man when it comes to the right set- and Jon’s eager enough to place his hands to her back, in an attempt to hold her steady in his lap.

From the corner of his eye Jon spots Billy’s yellow gaze, staring right back at him, like Edward staring at a sleeping Bella; creepy and extremely unnerving. It gives Jon the strength to get up, and drag Sansa into her bedroom.

Three hours later she presses a finger to a scar on his shoulder, “This one’s from the army?”

“No, that’s from that one time Aegon threw a vase at my head.”

Sansa smiles and nods in understanding, “Yeah, I also have the scars to prove I and Arya weren’t particularly close when growing up.”

“Where?” Jon asks in disbelief, raising the duvet to check but she giggles and pulls the sheets back.

“Don’t! It’s cold…”

It’s still snowing outside. Big flakes drop from the sky, and Jon can see them through the window at his right, but it seems almost like they’re living in some other world. As if what happens outside this flat is none of their concern. Like a bubble, or a snow globe. Someone’s shaking it and all Jon can do is just drag her closer against him, and kiss her until he can feel his lips no more.

“Here…. Wait.” She pulls her leg up, moves away from him so she can press her foot in his face.

Jon grabs it, and indeed spots something that looks like a previous minor wound, “She forced you to walk on glass?”

Sansa giggles and then squirms when he rubs his thumb over the sensitive skin of her footpad, only teasing the possibility of tickling, “No! She broke my mirror when I wasn’t there, then, when I got out of the shower, I stood in glass.”

“Why did she break your mirror?”
“Cause I broke her PlayStation.”

“Why did you break her PlayStation?”

“I don’t know.” Sansa giggles and squirms again when he places a kiss to her footpad, “Don’t ask that many questions... Why did Aegon throw a vase at your face?”

“He was trying to hit Rhaenys.”

Sansa laughs and pulls her foot back so she can wrap herself around him again, “You never used to fight with him?”

“When we were kids maybe, sometimes, about the best car seat or the last chicken leg, I don’t know… I always got along with the both of them really well, from early on. They were too busy fighting each other to pay attention to me.”

Sansa grins and he pushes some strands of really pretty red hair from her face, “You were too easy.” She jokes, half handing out a compliment, half mocking him.

“Maybe.” He grins, “And I wasn’t there from the start. I kind of walked on eggshells the first couple of years. Also... well, I think I look a lot like my dad, when it comes to problem resolution, and they’re both like their mother, very Spanish temperamental, you know... so they clash a lot, and when they do it’s like... like fireworks and sparks and loads of screaming. Mostly in Spanish.”

“Really?”

Jon nods, “very fast... I can’t understand a word except the swear words. Rhaenys calls Egg a Hijo de Puta and says he’s talking Los Cojones again, then he calls her a coño, and tells her to go fuck a fish.”

“I didn’t know you speak Spanish!” Sansa proclaims, “Rhaenys always mocks you a bit.”

“She does?”

“Well, not really, I mean-“

Jon laughs, “My Spanish is as good as it’s ever going to get, let’s leave it at that, same for French and German. The nannies really tried, though.”

“The three of you always seem so close.”

“I guess we are, surpassingly. We grew up together, mostly cause Elia kind of has lived in Spain ever since Rhaenys was like, eight or nine.”

“Why? Didn’t she want to be with her children?”

“She saw them nearly every weekend. I suppose she was very lonely in London, and then Anders is obviously kinda Spanish, and he really hates London, so...”

“Anders is her husband, right? What’s he like?”

“He’s only good for making Elia happy and keeping her content, basically.”

“That bad?”

“He and my uncle Viserys get along.” Jon says, as if that says it all- which it does.
“I don’t know anything about Viserys.” Sansa confesses.

“Good. Stay away from him.”

Sansa leans her head back in hope of getting an indication at how much he means that, “What’d he do?”

“He’s total trash, that’s all.”

“That’s all?”

Jon sighs, then confesses, “I know my dad thinks he may or may not have sexually assaulted aunt Dany in the past, but she really doesn’t want to do anything about that so he gets away with it… dad likes to keep him out of the spotlights as much as possible, but that’s hard, cause he lives off attention. He was my dad’s spare before he had kids, and still lingers to these days.”

“Oh wow.” Sansa mutters, “That’s… that’s crazy. And pretty sad.”

“Yeah well, I promise that’s the worst part of my family.”

Sansa softly smiles and then pecks his lips, “At least your generation is normal. That’s what they always say, right… they say; the royal family is mental but at least the younger ones seem sane.”

“Who says that?” Jon grins and Sansa giggles at the expression on his face.

“Is it not true?”

“Beyond the point.” He says and she laughs. Jon laughs too until he remembers last night. Everything that happened before Sansa said ‘I broke up with Harry.’ Seems like a heap of horribleness he really rather forgets.

“You can’t help being a bit weird when you live such a relatively weird life.” Sansa decides.

“Didn’t your mum teach you to call things special, rather than weird?”

“You want me to call you special, now?”

“I’ll call you special too, if you like?” Jon grins and Sansa answers that comment with a random attack of kisses. Jon figures she really likes the kissing, because she often won’t even let him finish his sentence without interrupting it with a kiss. She seems rather worn out after more than two hours of active sex, and doesn’t give him the indication that she’s set for round 3- or 4, depending- but that doesn’t mean she’s not going to kiss him.

Jon never used to be too fond of kissing. It took him a while to learn to appreciate it. For a long time it just seemed not so very special to press your mouth to someone else’s and do things, things he taught himself to be good at just cause girls seemed to always think it such a big deal, even though it seemed boring and uninteresting to Jon. Ygritte didn’t like kissing either, so there they matched. As for currently, he’s fully healed from the disease. Turned out the cure was Sansa. He’s spend the good part of last year wanting to kiss her just by watching her talk, and the real thing doesn’t disappoint.

Sansa moans in his mouth, sighs when he takes her lower lip between his, and then opens her eyes to find him watching her, which has her smiling again, which is both slightly infuriating as well as ridiculously adorable.
“Why did you come last night?” She asks, “Was it just the alcohol?”

“You called me.”

“That’s it? I didn’t even have to say a thing?” She giggles and seems pleased with the answer, despite clearly not taking it seriously.

“And Rhaenys told me you got a cat.”

Sansa rubs her thumb over his lower lip and follows that movement with her eyes when she says, “That had you worried?”

Jon only gives her a small smile, which she pecks, before he confesses, “I was at Rhaenys because… well, she was upset.” He figures he better not start this whole new thing by lying, plus, he sort of wants to tell her, and he knows he can, which is relatively new, so he figures why not, “Willas is cheating on her.”

By the look on Sansa’s face, Jon can tell two things: 1. He’ll never ever cheat on her, and 2. She had no idea that Rhaenys and Willas are married in a contract of convenience, not love or anything even near it.

“Oh no!” As if she’ll comfort Rhaenys by it, she rubs the side of his torso, “Is she alright? She must feel horrible! What is she going to do? Where’s Willas? Did he-“

“Currently in Jamaica with his secret boyfriend.”

Sansa looks a little confused, then puzzled, and shakes her head, “I did not know he’s a bisexual?”

“We’re hoping that he is.”

“What?”

“Rhaenys and Willas aren’t a love match.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re married the old-fashioned way.”

“Oh… Oh! Really? I cannot believe it.” Sansa turns to her back and stares at the ceiling, at a loss of words.

Jon lies on his side, watching the frown on her face as her brain is working hard to process all this new information. Sansa’s such a sweetheart; she honestly believed Rhaenys would do something out of pure desire in her pursuit for happiness. The royal family really is fucked up. Old and young generation both.

“So, then she… she’s not upset?” Sansa asks, turning her face to look at him.

“She’s upset because she had to pay a small fortune to keep certain pictures out of the press.”

“Damn.” Sansa breathes.

“Also, well… she’s been trying to get pregnant and it’s not working, so she’s frustrated about that.”

“R-Rhaenys can’t have a baby?”
“She’s trying, and the doctor’s giving her heaps of these hormones so she’s not feeling so very well and she was taking that out on me.”

Sansa suddenly jerks up and gives him a look he didn’t see coming, “Are you telling me you have been anything other than understanding and supportive to your cheated on, hormone-stuffed sister?”

Jon quickly sits up too, “No! I mean, yes- look, I know you think you know Rhaenys, but you honestly can’t begin to imagine what she can be like when it’s about doing her duty and whatever.”

“Doing her duty?”

“She told me that if she won’t have babies I’ll have to get legitimised.”

“Le-what?”

Jon shakes his head and drops back down on his back, “I don’t want to talk about this with you.”

“Why not?”

“Because-“

“Because you don’t want our first fight to be about your sister’s love life?” She moves over him when she says it, grinning down at him as her hair falls down, like a curtain, to the side of her face. It tickles his cheek and Jon smirks when he pushes it away and pulls her down in the bed again.

“Because I don’t want to talk about all that.”

“You came here because you’re trying to forget about the drama and intrigue of royal court?” Sansa teases.

“No… Jon rubs his eyes to give himself some time before he says, “Came here because I really missed you, and then Rhaenys was a total mess because she assumed she didn’t need love in her life, going on and on about how horrible it is to have to be married to someone who’s gay and doesn’t give a sod about you, and obviously I felt sorry for her, but it also sort of made me miss you even more, and then Rhaenys just kept feeding me wine, and she started talking about the future of the monarchy, and I really just didn’t like the way she put it all, and so I got nervous, and I freaked out, and I thought, what am I doing? And before I knew it I stood in front of your door.”

“That’s a good story.”

“I didn’t make it up.”

“These are the best stories.” Sansa grins, “So you ehm… you just thought… wow! Really sucks to be loveless, I should go to Sansa, see if she wants me?”

“No, that’s not…” Jon sighs when he sees her beaming smirk, shakes his head and kisses her, kisses her for as long as he can just to avoid going on with this conversation which is exhausting as well as cute, which probably sums up Sansa lying naked in a bed, very cute, also very exhausting.

“It’s okay.” She breathes to his mouth, eyes closed, “I want you.”

“Good to know.” He mutters back.

“You want me too?”
“Yeah.”

“I mean, not in a Rhaenys and Willas kinda way.”

“What?”

“Not in a convenient way.”

Jon pulls his head back, and doesn’t whisper to her lips anymore when he repeats, “What?”

Sansa giggles and he can feel her very cold feet rub up his calf, giving him goosebumps, nearly succeeding in distracting him from this suddenly confusing conversation, “You know what I mean.”

“I don’t, honestly.”

“I mean… you’ll promise we’ll never be like Rhaenys and Willas?”

Jon can’t help but laugh, “Of course not!”

“Because you like me, don’t you?”

Jon nods, and frowns, “Also, I’m not gay.”

“I didn’t think you might.” Sansa giggles, and she presses her nose to his, “I suppose I just mean to ask that if ehm… if we… if you and I- I mean- I’m just wondering, what we are… are? I mean… we haven’t even been on a proper date yet.”

Jon feels his frown turn into raises eyebrows, then pushes hair from her face in the hope of finding some expression in a corner of her face he couldn’t see, and then he decides to blatantly ask, “You wanna know if we’re serious?”

“Only if that’s what you want.”

“Are you sure that’s what you want? You and Harry-“

“Have been over for months, I’ve been in love with you since October.”

Jon clears his throat in an attempt to keep his head cool, before he suggests, “Whatever you want.”

“What does that mean?” She chuckles.

“Literally what it says.”

“Right.”

“Let’s just take it slow.” He says then, and when he sees the look in the eyes she quickly turns down, he instantly adds, “To just stay away from all the drama. I don’t want the media to go in some sort of frenzy. And I don’t want everyone to have and give their unasked opinions and to interfere and you know, so… so let’s just…let’s spend some time together so we can figure it out and get to… I guess get to know each other, and have a good time. Let’s go on dates, but let’s keep it to ourselves so it can be ehm… ours for a while.”

Usually Jon’s rambling doesn’t end up containing the right thing to say, but surprisingly, it does now, “Okay.” She mutters happily, and with her nails she scratches his stubble. He should probably really shave or something- though she doesn’t seem to mind.
“Anything else you need to know?”

“Yeah… are you staying for dinner?”

“Sure.”

Sansa seems far too excited by the prospect of having to feed him and enthusiastically goes in for another kiss, but he can’t let her deepen it too much, because he remembers.

“A-actually I should probably go home? My mum was pretty worried last night.”

Sansa’s face shows disappointed understanding when she reluctantly nods, “So I’ll… I’ll see you soon?”

“Course.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I’ve got the whole day off.”

“So you can stay over? I mean, tonight? You can go home and then… come back?”

Sansa seems well aware she might be asking for a bit too much, considering how she bats her eyelids and gives him some sort of inviting grin he can’t possibly refuse.

“I guess?”

“Nice.” She says, then, she gets up, moves away too quickly for him to grasp her hand and pull her back, and chuckles when he groans in protest, “You better get up then, sooner you’re off sooner you’re back… also, I’m hungry.”

It takes him another one and a half hour to actually get out of the bed after he successfully manages to pull her back in- but when he does, he gets home at around six.

He manages to avoid his father, who’s hosting investitures, which is good, because it means he’ll be avoidable for the rest of the evening, but he can’t ignore his mother, who slaps the back of his head with a newspaper.

“Ow!”

“Half of what you deserve!” She yells, and she hits him again, “if you’ll ever do that again, just disappearing off the radar, I’ll have you injected with some stalking chip!”

“That would be unnecessary.” Jon assures her.

“It better be.” Lyanna crosses her arms, then sighs, shakes her head and the glare goes off her face, “What’s been going on with you lately, boy? I know I’m old and you think I won’t understand, but if there’s anything I can do, just-“

“I’m fine.” Jon quickly says, and oddly, he totally feels like he means that.

Lyanna seems to spot the sincerity too, and unfortunately Jon is at that stage in life where his mum actually gets suspicious when he’s not miserable, “Where were you?”

“With a friend.”
“A friend?”

“Yeah, I don’t have too many, but still-“

“I called Robb, he said you weren’t there. Aegon said the two of you are fighting because of this business with the Stark girl.”

“Shouldn’t listen to what Aegon says.”

“I think people should listen to him a little more.” Lyanna shakes her head, “90 percent of the time the boy says what comes up in his mind, but the other ten percent he says what no one else likes to hear aloud- which is always important to listen to.”

“He and Rhaenys got that in common.” Jon mutters and he drops down on the sofa, where an excited Susan jumps in his lap.

Jon’s always happy to cuddle with a spaniel, and he’s playing with Susan’s long ears when his mother sits down opposite him, in an armchair, watching him with narrowed eyes.

“Did you and Rhaenys argue?”

“No.” Jon says, not looking up when spaniels Whiskey and Sherry join him on the sofa.

“About what?”

“Usual stuff.”

“Can you try and be a little more specific?”

Jon rolls his eyes and looks up, “Things. She’s having problems with Willas and she’s taking it out on me.”

“Problems? What problems?”

Jon shrugs.

“She told you not to tell me?”

“She told me not to tell anyone.” Jon confesses, scratching whiskey behind his ear.

“Does your father know?”

Jon shrugs again.

“Jon!”

“What?”

“You’re not a teenager anymore, you don’t have to be so damn difficult.”

“You don’t have to ask so many questions.” Jon throws back and Sherry barks as if she means to say she agrees.

“Careful, young man.” Lyanna gets up and points her warning finger as if he very much still is a teenager, “You disappear in the middle of the night, Aegon totally flips and Rhaenys is a mess saying it’s ‘all her fault’, you don’t take up your phone and don’t respond until well past
midnight… don’t you dare use that tone with me. I can ask all the questions.”

Jon watches his mother’s face and wonders, as he’s done so often, why people always think he looks exactly like her. He knows he’s got her eyes, but other then that? She’s far prettier, “I’m sorry bout that.” He mutters.

“So where were you last night and why was your sister saying it was her fault?”

“Because we did fight.” Jon admits, “She’s been weird about the succession lately and she’s made some comments about me needing Sansa in case of her not being able to produce an heir and a spare and I told her that she shouldn’t make her problems mine, and that I won’t let her drag me into all that mess.”

“Mess?”

“She made a mistake marrying Willas.” Jon confesses, “But I’m sure you already knew that.”

“What’s wrong with Willas?” Lyanna still asks.

“Everything?” Jon shrugs, “I don’t know, she wants a baby so she’s on hormone injections and they’re making her paranoid, depressed and unbearable.”

“Oh poor child.” Lyanna sighs and she sinks down, back in the chair, holding her heart as if it’s that desperate to go out for Rhaenys, “I had no idea?”

“You still don’t cause she doesn’t want you to.”

Lyanna nods as if she understands, which Jon doubts.

“Anyway, So it comes down to her being afraid Viserys’ line will end up on the throne, and that’s-”

“Viserys? That’s what she’s afraid of? There’s always Aegon, surely.”

“But Egg’s gay, he might adopt some Ethiopian or Chinese baby with his gay boyfriend somewhere within the next twenty years, but that’s not useful to the succession.” Jon quickly reminds her, and it’s as if she finally actually truly understands then when her eyes widen and she nods.

Lyanna gets back up from the chair, walks over to him, pushes some of his hair from his face, and gives him a small smile, “Well, you don’t worry about that, darling. There’s no way that will ever be your mess to clean.”

“Rhaenys mentioned a legitimisation.” Jon remembers.

“Would you like that?” Lyanna asks carefully.

“I don’t want to be anywhere near the throne.”

“You won’t be.” Lyanna quickly says, “Don’t you worry about that, I’ll take care of it.” She promises, before she pats his cheek, and then walks off.

Jon’s not sure whether to feel reassured or afraid after that, though he guesses that if anyone can save him from being dragged into this shoulders deep, it’s his dad, and if anyone can convince Jon’s dad to do, or don’t do anything, it’s Jon’s mum. She’s a good ally to have, and Jon’s glad to say he can count on her friendship always.
When Jon, showered and dressed in clean clothes, arrives back at Sansa’s house, being driven there by a more than usual cranky Sandor, it takes her too long to open the door.

“I fell asleep on the sofa.” She confesses after he stops kissing her, “I still have to eat.”

“I can help?” He suggests, and she giggles that away, “Seriously! You can teach me.”

“Would you ever need to learn?”

“Maybe? I’d like to.”

“Silly you.” She teases, shaking her head when she walks into the kitchen. She’s still wearing that same jumper he left her in, but it’s now combined with light blue pyjama bottoms with a white cloud print.

She preheats the oven, puts on the candles she’s got scattered through the flat, which all look as if she turns them on on a daily basis, and takes her time to scan through her fridge before she settles on what to eat.

“Lasagna is daddy’s favourite.” Sansa says when she takes an empty lasagna browl out of the oven and puts in a pre-made mini pie, stuffed with what Jon’s thinks might be salmon and spinach.

Jon watches her as she opens a bag of pre-cut potatoes and covers them in pepper, salt and other herbs, “You really haven’t seen them in three weeks?”

“I saw mummy last week.” Sansa confesses, opening a plastic bag of Greek salad, “She came to check on me.”

“And your dad?” Jon asks when handed a pan full of potato.

Sansa shakes her head.

“Sansa that’s-“

“I don’t feel like seeing them right now, I will when we’ve all cooled down a bit.” Sansa leans down to turn on the gas, probably taking advantage of not having to look at him.

“I’m sorry.”

Sansa sighs when she gets up, “For what?”

“Without the media-“

“There is no ‘without the media’.” Sansa takes the pan from his hands again and puts it on the stove.

“I know, but still, without my-”

“It’s got nothing to do with you.”

“It does a little.”

Sansa shakes her head, “I’m fighting with my parents not because of the media or because of you but because they’re treating me like a child who can’t make her own decisions.”

“Media wouldn’t have been any issue if they didn’t care so sickeningly much about the people in
my life.” Jon reminds her, “It’s no fun to be my boyfriend.”

“I’d like to find that out on my own.”

“I know- I mean, I understand, but I just… your parents are right that it’s madness. And I want you to be prepared.”

Sansa sighs as she cuts cherry tomatoes, “They’re trying to protect me, but they don’t understand that they’re only doing more harm.”

“Can’t you tell them?”

Sansa shrugs, “They love me.” She says, “They want me to be happy. They’ll get over it.”

Jon figures he lost the argument there, and can’t help but wonder to himself why he’s defending two people who’re clearly and apparently trying to convince their daughter to stay away from him. It doesn’t even hurt. If they didn’t do so, he’d probably consider them bad parents. If they really want her to be happy, the last thing they should do is be overjoyed about their daughter dating him.

Sansa adds the cherry tomatoes to the salad, sprinkles it with cheese, and then opens a tube of humus sauce, before she sighs and stops, “They always really used to like you. No one liked Harry and I figured they’d finally all be glad that I found someone suitable, and still it’s not suitable enough.”

Jon’s not sure what to say, so he watches her, his mouth opened, ready to speak words he can’t find, and she grabs the pan to shake the potatoes around.

“They’ll get over it, once they see.” She reminds herself again.

“I’m-“

“Don’t say you’re sorry.”

“Okay I’m- Okay.”

“Robb’s still angry with you?” She asks then, after some short silence in which she studies his guilt ridden face.

Jon nods.

“Me too.” Sansa places her hand to rub his cheek, before she moves closer to him, “It’s not your fault.” She whispers to him, “It just needs some time.”

Jon’s willing to give it all the time. He would like everyone to be supportive, especially because they have some tough times ahead that could use support, especially Sansa, but if they insist on being difficult he’ll accept that for a painful fact he can do little about. They can protect and nag as much as they like, he’s not going to give up on Sansa, it’s not in the range of possibilities and it’s not consideration, so if she’s up for it, and if she’s willing to place her bet on him… he can only be grateful and feel undeserving.

“I’ll protect you from the press.” He swears then, “I will. That’s my responsibility and I’ll take it. I promise.”

Sansa gives him a small and sweet smile but says nothing before she turns back towards her potatoes.
“I can take care of myself.” She says then, softly, without looking at him, “I don’t need to be constantly protected from the dark dangerous world.”

“I know.”

“I’ll handle it, I’m not gonna run.” Sansa looks up and her eyes are wide, “You don’t worry about that.”

“I don’t.”

“You do.” She smiles then, “I understand you do.”

“It’s not that I would… it’s more that I would understand. If you’d run, I mean. I won’t hold a grudge, promise.”

Sansa looks back at the potatoes, waits a moment before she let’s go off the pan and walks over to him to hug him tight. She says nothing, but that’s okay because her embrace tells him enough.

Sansa’s no Ygritte. Even if she’ll run away screaming in half a year from now, at least she won’t do it half an hour before she promised to come to his sister’s wedding, and she won’t give an interview to the world, confessing about how fucked up his family is and how mentally unstable he is.

He can trust Sansa, he can tell her everything he needs to tell her and more. She won’t blame his family for the press attention, she won’t even blame him. She’s in this knowing what that means, what it contains, she’s all in this, and she seems more determined than he is.

“I can't burn my potatoes!” She says, and she swiftly goes back to her cheerful self.

Perhaps, after dating a Joffrey and a Harry, Jon may be royalty, at least he’s easy in all other regards. Robb said Sansa always had to walk on eggshells around Harry, and he can only guess what her relationship with Joff might’ve been like.

Sansa doesn’t deserve to have to walk on eggshells, yet even with him he notices how she apologises a lot, she always checks for his approval, no matter what it is about and when she speaks, he can almost hear her choose the right words in her head. Her self esteem seems ridiculously low and no matter how small the compliment is that he makes, it hardly ever actually pleases her, because she just doesn’t believe it.

The Sansa he remembers from many days past didn’t mind the attention much. She chattered away at parties and dressed up in glittery eye-catching looks. She always tried to be picture perfect, that he knows- she was her mummy’s favourite, only brought home good grades, never put a foot wrong and had that sort of self-confidence that made you believe she could rule the world. You had to keep looking, and she didn’t mind if you did.

A teenage Jon was madly in love with a confident and shiny, bubbly Sansa. Now, at twenty-eight, he loves a Sansa who’s still as brilliant and beautiful as she was back then, but she has less faith in herself. She has less faith in the beauty of life, of the world, of people. She is, by lack of a better word, less naïve.

But she seems to have faith in him. When she smiles at him she looks bubbly. As she sits beside him on the sofa, feet in his lap, she hums as she nibbles on her salad. She may not believe his stupid compliments, but they make her blush, and even though she apologises a lot, it seems more typically English habit than her being truly afraid of his anger.
He wishes he could ask her, though, because right now it feels as if she has two strong gates guarding something that he can feel and sense, but he can’t see it or know what it is. He thinks she knows he known, but prefers to pretend she has no idea, just to dance around it- and that’s fine. For now it is.

Jon meant it when he said he’d like some time for them to adjust, get to know each other, find a way to be together that’s comfortable. He’s not sure how long that’ll last, but he is sure he’s going to do everything it takes to give the two of them that time, all the time she needs. He fucked it up before, and he won’t allow himself to do it again. When it comes to Sansa, he knows there won’t come a second one along. This is it.

End Notes

For anyone who might be interested:

Battle of the Walese = Battle of the Targaryens  
Queen Rhaella = Elizabeth II 
Rhaegar = mixture of Charles and Philip  
Lyanna = Duchess of Cornwall 
Elia = Lady Diana Spencer 
Rhaenys = Prince William (sorta though not really) 
Aegon = (gay) Prince Harry 
Viserys = Duke of York 
Daenerys = Princess Margaret  
JonxSansa ≠ Harry and Meghan

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