



SANSA

She awoke all at once, every nerve atingle. For a moment she did not remember where she was. She had dreamt that she was little, still sharing a bedchamber with her sister Arya. But it was her maid she heard tossing in sleep, not her sister, and this was not Winterfell, but the Eyrie. *And I am Alayne Stone, a bastard girl.* The room was cold and black, though she was warm beneath the blankets. Dawn had not yet come. Sometimes she dreamed of Ser Ilyn Payne and woke with her heart thumping, but this dream had not been like that. *Home. It was a dream of home.*

The Eyrie was no home. It was no bigger than Maegor's Holdfast, and outside its sheer white walls was only the mountain and the long treacherous descent past Sky and Snow and Stone to the Gates of the Moon on the valley floor. There was no place to go and little to do. The older servants said these halls rang with laughter when her father and Robert Baratheon had been Jon Arryn's wards, but those days were many years gone. Her aunt kept a small household, and seldom permitted any guests to ascend past the Gates of the Moon. Aside from her aged maid, Sansa's only companion was the Lord Robert, eight going on three.

And Marillion. There is always Marillion. When he played for them at supper, the young singer often seemed to be singing directly at her. Her aunt was far from pleased. Lady Lysa doted on Marillion, and had banished two serving girls and even a page for telling lies about him.

Lysa was as lonely as she was. Her new husband seemed to spend more time at the foot of the mountain than he did atop it. He was gone now, had been gone the past four days, meeting with the Corbrays. From bits and pieces of overheard conversations Sansa knew that Jon Arryn's bannermen resented Lysa's marriage and begrudged Petyr his authority as Lord Protector of the Vale. The senior branch of House Royce was close to open revolt over her aunt's failure to aid Robb in his war, and the Waynwoods, Redforts, Belmores, and Templetons were giving them every support. The mountain clans were being troublesome as well, and old Lord Hunter had died so suddenly that his two younger sons were accusing their elder brother of having murdered him. The Vale of Arryn might have been spared the worst of the war, but it was hardly the idyllic place that Lady Lysa had made it out to be.

I am not going back to sleep, Sansa realized. *My head is all a tumult*. She pushed her pillow away reluctantly, threw back the blankets, went to her window, and opened the shutters.

Snow was falling on the Eyrie.

Outside the flakes drifted down as soft and silent as memory. *Was this what woke me?* Already the snowfall lay thick upon the garden below, blanketing the grass, dusting the shrubs and statues with white and weighing down the branches of the trees. The sight took Sansa back to cold nights long ago, in the long summer of her childhood.

She had last seen snow the day she'd left Winterfell. *That was a lighter fall than this*, she remembered. *Robb had melting flakes in his hair when he hugged me, and the snowball Arya tried to make kept coming apart in her hands*. It hurt to remember how happy she had been that morning. Hullen had helped her mount, and she'd ridden out with the snowflakes swirling around her, off to see the great wide world. *I thought my song was beginning that day, but it was almost done*.

Sansa left the shutters open as she dressed. It would be cold, she knew, though the Eyrie's towers encircled the garden and protected it from the worst of the mountain winds. She donned silken smallclothes and a linen shift, and over that a warm dress of blue lambswool. Two pairs of hose for

her legs, boots that laced up to her knees, heavy leather gloves, and finally a hooded cloak of soft white fox fur.

Her maid rolled herself more tightly in her blanket as the snow began to drift in the window. Sansa eased open the door, and made her way down the winding stair. When she opened the door to the garden, it was so lovely that she held her breath, unwilling to disturb such perfect beauty. The snow drifted down and down, all in ghostly silence, and lay thick and unbroken on the ground. All color had fled the world outside. It was a place of whites and blacks and greys. White towers and white snow and white statues, black shadows and black trees, the dark grey sky above. *A pure world*, Sansa thought. *I do not belong here*.

Yet she stepped out all the same. Her boots tore ankle-deep holes into the smooth white surface of the snow, yet made no sound. Sansa drifted past frosted shrubs and thin dark trees, and wondered if she were still dreaming. Drifting snowflakes brushed her face as light as lover's kisses, and melted on her cheeks. At the center of the garden, beside the statue of the weeping woman that lay broken and half-buried on the ground, she turned her face up to the sky and closed her eyes. She could feel the snow on her lashes, taste it on her lips. It was the taste of Winterfell. The taste of innocence. The taste of dreams.

When Sansa opened her eyes again, she was on her knees. She did not remember falling. It seemed to her that the sky was a lighter shade of grey. *Dawn*, she thought. *Another day. Another new day*. It was the old days she hungered for. Prayed for. But who could she pray to? The garden had been meant for a godswood once, she knew, but the soil was too thin and stony for a weirwood to take root. *A godswood without gods, as empty as me*.

She scooped up a handful of snow and squeezed it between her fingers. Heavy and wet, the snow packed easily. Sansa began to make snowballs, shaping and smoothing them until they were round and white and perfect. She remembered a summer's snow in Winterfell when Arya and Bran had ambushed her as she emerged from the keep one morning. They'd each had a dozen snowballs to hand, and she'd had none. Bran had been perched on the roof of the covered bridge, out of reach, but Sansa had chased Arya through the stables and around the kitchen until both of them were breathless. She might even have caught her, but she'd slipped on some ice.

Her sister came back to see if she was hurt. When she said she wasn't, Arya hit her in the face with another snowball, but Sansa grabbed her leg and pulled her down and was rubbing snow in her hair when Jory came along and pulled them apart, laughing.

What do I want with snowballs? She looked at her sad little arsenal. *There's no one to throw them at.* She let the one she was making drop from her hand. *I could build a snow knight instead,* she thought. *Or even . . .*

She pushed two of her snowballs together, added a third, packed more snow in around them, and patted the whole thing into the shape of a cylinder. When it was done, she stood it on end and used the tip of her little finger to poke holes in it for windows. The crenellations around the top took a little more care, but when they were done she had a tower. *I need some walls now,* Sansa thought, *and then a keep.* She set to work.

The snow fell and the castle rose. Two walls ankle-high, the inner taller than the outer. Towers and turrets, keeps and stairs, a round kitchen, a square armory, the stables along the inside of the west wall. It was only a castle when she began, but before very long Sansa knew it was Winterfell. She found twigs and fallen branches beneath the snow and broke off the ends to make the trees for the godswood. For the gravestones in the lychyard she used bits of bark. Soon her gloves and her boots were crusty white, her hands were tingling, and her feet were soaked and cold, but she did not care. The castle was all that mattered. Some things were hard to remember, but most came back to her easily, as if she had been there only yesterday. The Library Tower, with the steep stonework stair twisting about its exterior. The gatehouse, two huge bulwarks, the arched gate between them, crenellations all along the top . . .

And all the while the snow kept falling, piling up in drifts around her buildings as fast as she raised them. She was patting down the pitched roof of the Great Hall when she heard a voice, and looked up to see her maid calling from her window. Was my lady well? Did she wish to break her fast? Sansa shook her head, and went back to shaping snow, adding a chimney to one end of the Great Hall, where the hearth would stand inside.

Dawn stole into her garden like a thief. The grey of the sky grew lighter still, and the trees and shrubs turned a dark green beneath their stoles of

snow. A few servants came out and watched her for a time, but she paid them no mind and they soon went back inside where it was warmer. Sansa saw Lady Lysa gazing down from her balcony, wrapped up in a blue velvet robe trimmed with fox fur, but when she looked again her aunt was gone. Maester Coleman popped out of the rookery and peered down for a while, skinny and shivering but curious.

Her bridges kept falling down. There was a covered bridge between the armory and the main keep, and another that went from the fourth floor of the bell tower to the second floor of the rookery, but no matter how carefully she shaped them, they would not hold together. The third time one collapsed on her, she cursed aloud and sat back in helpless frustration.

“Pack the snow around a stick, Sansa.”

She did not know how long he had been watching her, or when he had returned from the Vale. “A stick?” she asked.

“That will give it strength enough to stand, I’d think,” Petyr said. “May I come into your castle, my lady?”

Sansa was wary. “Don’t break it. Be . . .”

“. . . gentle?” He smiled. “Winterfell has withstood fiercer enemies than me. It *is* Winterfell, is it not?”

“Yes,” Sansa admitted.

He walked along outside the walls. “I used to dream of it, in those years after Cat went north with Eddard Stark. In my dreams it was ever a dark place, and cold.”

“No. It was always warm, even when it snowed. Water from the hot springs is piped through the walls to warm them, and inside the glass gardens it was always like the hottest day of summer.” She stood, towering over the great white castle. “I can’t think how to do the glass roof over the gardens.”

Littlefinger stroked his chin, where his beard had been before Lysa had asked him to shave it off. “The glass was locked in frames, no? Twigs are your answer. Peel them and cross them and use bark to tie them together into frames. I’ll show you.” He moved through the garden, gathering up twigs and sticks and shaking the snow from them. When he had enough, he

stepped over both walls with a single long stride and squatted on his heels in the middle of the yard. Sansa came closer to watch what he was doing. His hands were deft and sure, and before long he had a crisscrossing latticework of twigs, very like the one that roofed the glass gardens of Winterfell. “We will need to imagine the glass, to be sure,” he said when he gave it to her.

“This is just right,” she said.

He touched her face. “And so is that.”

Sansa did not understand. “And so is what?”

“Your smile, my lady. Shall I make another for you?”

“If you would.”

“Nothing could please me more.”

She raised the walls of the glass gardens while Littlefinger roofed them over, and when they were done with that he helped her extend the walls and build the guardshall. When she used sticks for the covered bridges, they stood, just as he had said they would. The First Keep was simple enough, an old round drum tower, but Sansa was stymied again when it came to putting the gargoyles around the top. Again he had the answer. “It’s been snowing on your castle, my lady,” he pointed out. “What do the gargoyles look like when they’re covered with snow?”

Sansa closed her eyes to see them in memory. “They’re just white lumps.”

“Well, then. Gargoyles are hard, but white lumps should be easy.” And they were.

The Broken Tower was easier still. They made a tall tower together, kneeling side by side to roll it smooth, and when they’d raised it Sansa stuck her fingers through the top, grabbed a handful of snow, and flung it full in his face. Petyr yelped, as the snow slid down under his collar. “That was unchivalrously done, my lady.”

“As was bringing me here, when you swore to take me home.”

She wondered where this courage had come from, to speak to him so frankly. *From Winterfell*, she thought. *I am stronger within the walls of Winterfell.*

His face grew serious. "Yes, I played you false in that . . . and in one other thing as well."

Sansa's stomach was aflutter. "What other thing?"

"I told you that nothing could please me more than to help you with your castle. I fear that was a lie as well. Something else would please me more." He stepped closer. "This."

Sansa tried to step back, but he pulled her into his arms and suddenly he was kissing her. Feebly, she tried to squirm, but only succeeded in pressing herself more tightly against him. His mouth was on hers, swallowing her words. He tasted of mint. For half a heartbeat she yielded to his kiss . . . before she turned her face away and wrenched free. "What are you *doing*?"

Petyr straightened his cloak. "Kissing a snow maid."

"You're supposed to kiss *her*." Sansa glanced up at Lysa's balcony, but it was empty now. "Your lady wife."

"I do. Lysa has no cause for complaint." He smiled. "I wish you could see yourself, my lady. You are so beautiful. You're crusted over with snow like some little bear cub, but your face is flushed and you can scarcely breathe. How long have you been out here? You must be very cold. Let me warm you, Sansa. Take off those gloves, give me your hands."

"I won't." He sounded almost like Marillion, the night he'd gotten so drunk at the wedding. Only this time Lothor Brune would not appear to save her; Ser Lothor was Petyr's man. "You shouldn't kiss me. I might have been your own daughter . . ."

"Might have been," he admitted, with a rueful smile. "But you're not, are you? You are Eddard Stark's daughter, and Cat's. But I think you might be even more beautiful than your mother was, when she was your age."

"Petyr, please." Her voice sounded so weak. "Please . . ."

"A *castle*!"

The voice was loud, shrill, and childish. Littlefinger turned away from her. "Lord Robert." He sketched a bow. "Should you be out in the snow without your gloves?"

"Did you make the snow castle, Lord Littlefinger?"

“Alayne did most of it, my lord.”

Sansa said, “It’s meant to be Winterfell.”

“Winterfell?” Robert was small for eight, a stick of a boy with splotchy skin and eyes that were always runny. Under one arm he clutched the threadbare cloth doll he carried everywhere.

“Winterfell is the seat of House Stark,” Sansa told her husband-to-be. “The great castle of the north.”

“It’s not so great.” The boy knelt before the gatehouse. “Look, here comes a giant to knock it down.” He stood his doll in the snow and moved it jerkily. “*Tromp tromp I’m a giant, I’m a giant,*” he chanted. “*Ho ho ho, open your gates or I’ll mash them and smash them.*” Swinging the doll by the legs, he knocked the top off one gatehouse tower and then the other.

It was more than Sansa could stand. “Robert, *stop that.*” Instead he swung the doll again, and a foot of wall exploded. She grabbed for his hand but she caught the doll instead. There was a loud ripping sound as the thin cloth tore. Suddenly she had the doll’s head, Robert had the legs and body, and the rag-and-sawdust stuffing was spilling in the snow.

Lord Robert’s mouth trembled. “You *killllllllled* him,” he wailed. Then he began to shake. It started with no more than a little shivering, but within a few short heartbeats he had collapsed across the castle, his limbs flailing about violently. White towers and snowy bridges shattered and fell on all sides. Sansa stood horrified, but Petyr Baelish seized her cousin’s wrists and shouted for the maester.

Guards and serving girls arrived within instants to help restrain the boy, Maester Colemon a short time later. Robert Arryn’s shaking sickness was nothing new to the people of the Eyrie, and Lady Lysa had trained them all to come rushing at the boy’s first cry. The maester held the little lord’s head and gave him half a cup of dreamwine, murmuring soothing words. Slowly the violence of the fit seemed to ebb away, till nothing remained but a small shaking of the hands. “Help him to my chambers,” Colemon told the guards. “A leeching will help calm him.”

“It was my fault.” Sansa showed them the doll’s head. “I ripped his doll in two. I never meant to, but . . .”

“His lordship was destroying the castle,” said Petyr.

“A giant,” the boy whispered, weeping. “It wasn’t me, it was a giant hurt the castle. She *killed* him! I hate her! She’s a bastard and I *hate* her! I don’t *want* to be leeches!”

“My lord, your blood needs thinning,” said Maester Colemon. “It is the bad blood that makes you angry, and the rage that brings on the shaking. Come now.”

They led the boy away. *My lord husband*, Sansa thought, as she contemplated the ruins of Winterfell. The snow had stopped, and it was colder than before. She wondered if Lord Robert would shake all through their wedding. *At least Joffrey was sound of body*. A mad rage seized hold of her. She picked up a broken branch and smashed the torn doll’s head down on top of it, then pushed it down atop the shattered gatehouse of her snow castle. The servants looked aghast, but when Littlefinger saw what she’d done he laughed. “If the tales be true, that’s not the first giant to end up with his head on Winterfell’s walls.”

“Those are only stories,” she said, and left him there.

Back in her bedchamber, Sansa took off her cloak and her wet boots and sat beside the fire. She had no doubt that she would be made to answer for Lord Robert’s fit. *Perhaps Lady Lysa will send me away*. Her aunt was quick to banish anyone who displeased her, and nothing displeased her quite so much as people she suspected of mistreating her son.

Sansa would have welcomed banishment. The Gates of the Moon was much larger than the Eyrie, and livelier as well. Lord Nestor Royce seemed gruff and stern, but his daughter Myranda kept his castle for him, and everyone said how frolicsome she was. Even Sansa’s supposed bastardy might not count too much against her below. One of King Robert’s baseborn daughters was in service to Lord Nestor, and she and the Lady Myranda were said to be fast friends, as close as sisters.

I will tell my aunt that I don’t want to marry Robert. Not even the High Septon himself could declare a woman married if she refused to say the vows. She wasn’t a beggar, no matter what her aunt said. She was thirteen, a woman flowered and wed, the heir to Winterfell. Sansa felt sorry for her little cousin sometimes, but she could not imagine ever wanting to be his

wife. *I would sooner be married to Tyrion again.* If Lady Lysa knew that, surely she'd send her away . . . away from Robert's pouts and shakes and runny eyes, away from Marillion's lingering looks, away from Petyr's kisses. *I will tell her. I will!*

It was late that afternoon when Lady Lysa summoned her. Sansa had been marshaling her courage all day, but no sooner did Marillion appear at her door than all her doubts returned. "Lady Lysa requires your presence in the High Hall." The singer's eyes undressed her as he spoke, but she was used to that.

Marillion was comely, there was no denying it; boyish and slender, with smooth skin, sandy hair, a charming smile. But he had made himself well hated in the Vale, by everyone but her aunt and little Lord Robert. To hear the servants talk, Sansa was not the first maid to suffer his advances, and the others had not had Lothor Brune to defend them. But Lady Lysa would hear no complaints against him. Since coming to the Eyrie, the singer had become her favorite. He sang Lord Robert to sleep every night, and tweaked the noses of Lady Lysa's suitors with verses that made mock of their foibles. Her aunt had showered him with gold and gifts; costly clothes, a gold arm ring, a belt studded with moonstones, a fine horse. She had even given him her late husband's favorite falcon. It all served to make Marillion unfailingly courteous in Lady Lysa's presence, and unfailingly arrogant outside it.

"Thank you," Sansa told him stiffly. "I know the way."

He would not leave. "My lady said to bring you."

Bring me? She did not like the sound of that. "Are you a guardsman now?" Littlefinger had dismissed the Eyrie's captain of guards and put Ser Lothor Brune in his place.

"Do you require guarding?" Marillion said lightly. "I am composing a new song, you should know. A song so sweet and sad it will melt even your frozen heart. 'The Roadside Rose,' I mean to call it. About a baseborn girl so beautiful she bewitched every man who laid eyes upon her."

I am a Stark of Winterfell, she longed to tell him. Instead she nodded, and let him escort her down the tower steps and along a bridge. The High Hall had been closed as long as she'd been at the Eyrie. Sansa wondered why her

aunt had opened it. Normally she preferred the comfort of her solar, or the cozy warmth of Lord Arryn's audience chamber with its view of the waterfall.

Two guards in sky-blue cloaks flanked the carved wooden doors of the High Hall, spears in hand. "No one is to enter so long as Alayne is with Lady Lysa," Marillion told them.

"Aye." The men let them pass, then crossed their spears. Marillion swung the doors shut and barred them with a third spear, longer and thicker than those the guards had borne.

Sansa felt a prickle of unease. "Why did you do that?"

"My lady awaits you."

She looked about uncertainly. Lady Lysa sat on the dais in a high-backed chair of carved weirwood, alone. To her right was a second chair, taller than her own, with a stack of blue cushions piled on the seat, but Lord Robert was not in it. Sansa hoped he'd recovered. Marillion was not like to tell her, though.

Sansa walked down the blue silk carpet between rows of fluted pillars slim as lances. The floors and walls of the High Hall were made of milk-white marble veined with blue. Shafts of pale daylight slanted down through narrow arched windows along the eastern wall. Between the windows were torches, mounted in high iron sconces, but none of them was lit. Her footsteps fell softly on the carpet. Outside the wind blew cold and lonely.

Amidst so much white marble even the sunlight looked chilly, somehow . . . though not half so chilly as her aunt. Lady Lysa had dressed in a gown of cream-colored velvet and a necklace of sapphires and moon-stones. Her auburn hair had been done up in a thick braid, and fell across one shoulder. She sat in the high seat watching her niece approach, her face red and puffy beneath the paint and powder. On the wall behind her hung a huge banner, the moon-and-falcon of House Arryn in cream and blue.

Sansa stopped before the dais, and curtsied. "My lady. You sent for me." She could still hear the sound of the wind, and the soft chords Marillion was playing at the foot of the hall.

“I saw what you did,” the Lady Lysa said.

Sansa smoothed down the folds of her skirt. “I trust Lord Robert is better? I never meant to rip his doll. He was smashing my snow castle, I only . . .”

“Will you play the coy deceiver with me?” her aunt said. “I was not speaking of Robert’s doll. I *saw* you kissing him.”

The High Hall seemed to grow a little colder. The walls and floor and columns might have turned to ice. “He kissed me.”

Lysa’s nostrils flared. “And why would he do that? He has a wife who loves him. A woman grown, not a little girl. He has no need for the likes of you. Confess, child. You threw yourself at him. That was the way of it.”

Sansa took a step backward. “That’s not true.”

“Where are you going? Are you afraid? Such wanton behavior must be punished, but I will not be hard on you. We keep a whipping boy for Robert, as is the custom in the Free Cities. His health is too delicate for him to bear the rod himself. I shall find some common girl to take your whipping, but first you must own up to what you’ve done. I cannot abide a liar, Alayne.”

“I was building a snow castle,” Sansa said. “Lord Petyr was helping me, and then he kissed me. That’s what you saw.”

“Have you no honor?” her aunt said sharply. “Or do you take me for a fool? You do, don’t you? You take me for a fool. Yes, I see that now. I am not a fool. You think you can have any man you want because you’re young and beautiful. Don’t think I haven’t seen the looks you give Marillion. I know everything that happens in the Eyrie, little lady. And I have known your like before, too. But you are mistaken if you think big eyes and strumpet’s smiles will win you Petyr. He is mine.” She rose to her feet. “They all tried to take him from me. My lord father, my husband, your mother . . . Catelyn most of all. She liked to kiss my Petyr too, oh yes she did.”

Sansa retreated another step. “My mother?”

“Yes, your mother, your precious mother, my own sweet sister Catelyn. Don’t you think to play the innocent with me, you vile little liar. All those

years in Riverrun, she played with Petyr as if he were her little toy. She teased him with smiles and soft words and wanton looks, and made his nights a torment.”

“No.” *My mother is dead*, she wanted to shriek. *She was your own sister, and she’s dead*. “She didn’t. She wouldn’t.”

“How would you know? Were you there?” Lysa descended from the high seat, her skirts swirling. “Did you come with Lord Bracken and Lord Blackwood, the time they visited to lay their feud before my father? Lord Bracken’s singer played for us, and Catelyn danced six dances with Petyr that night, *six*, I counted. When the lords began to argue my father took them up to his audience chamber, so there was no one to stop us drinking. Edmure got drunk, young as he was . . . and Petyr tried to kiss your mother, only she pushed him away. She *laughed* at him. He looked so wounded I thought my heart would burst, and afterward he drank until he passed out at the table. Uncle Brynden carried him up to bed before my father could find him like that. But you remember none of it, do you?” She looked down angrily. “*Do you?*”

Is she drunk, or mad? “I was not born, my lady.”

“You were not born. But I was, so do not presume to tell what is true. I *know* what is true. You kissed him!”

“He kissed me,” Sansa insisted again. “I never wanted—”

“Be quiet, I haven’t given you leave to speak. You enticed him, just as your mother did that night in Riverrun, with her smiles and her dancing. You think I could forget? That was the night I stole up to his bed to give him comfort. I bled, but it was the sweetest hurt. He told me he loved me then, but he called me *Cat*, just before he fell back to sleep. Even so, I stayed with him until the sky began to lighten. Your mother did not deserve him. She would not even give him her favor to wear when he fought Brandon Stark. *I* would have given him my favor. I gave him everything. He is mine now. Not Catelyn’s and not yours.”

All of Sansa’s resolve had withered in the face of her aunt’s onslaught. Lysa Arryn was frightening her as much as Queen Cersei ever had. “He’s yours, my lady,” she said, trying to sound meek and contrite. “May I have your leave to go?”

“You may not.” Her aunt’s breath smelled of wine. “If you were anyone else, I would banish you. Send you down to Lord Nestor at the Gates of the Moon, or back to the Fingers. How would you like to spend your life on that bleak shore, surrounded by slatterns and sheep pellets? That was what my father meant for Petyr. Everyone thought it was because of that stupid duel with Brandon Stark, but that wasn’t so. Father said I ought to thank the gods that so great a lord as Jon Arryn was willing to take me soiled, but I knew it was only for the swords. I had to marry Jon, or my father would have turned me out as he did his brother, but it was Petyr I was meant for. I am telling you all this so you will understand how much we love each other, how long we have suffered and dreamed of one another. We made a baby together, a precious little baby.” Lysa put her hands flat against her belly, as if the child was still there. “When they stole him from me, I made a promise to myself that I would never let it happen again. Jon wished to send my sweet Robert to Dragonstone, and that sort of a king would have given him to Cersei Lannister, but I never let them . . . no more than I’ll let you steal my Petyr Littlefinger. Do you hear me, Alayne or Sansa or whatever you call yourself? Do you hear what I am telling you?”

“Yes. I swear, I won’t ever kiss him again, or . . . or entice him.” Sansa thought that was what her aunt wanted to hear.

“So you admit it now? It was you, just as I thought. You are as wanton as your mother.” Lysa grabbed her by the wrist. “Come with me now. There is something I want to show you.”

“You’re hurting me.” Sansa squirmed. “Please, Aunt Lysa, I haven’t done anything. I swear it.”

Her aunt ignored her protests. “*Marillion!*” she shouted. “I need you, Marillion! I *need* you!”

The singer had remained discreetly in the rear of the hall, but at Lady Arryn’s shout he came at once. “My lady?”

“Play us a song. Play ‘The False and the Fair.’”

Marillion’s fingers brushed the strings. “*The lord he came a-riding upon a rainy day, hey-nonny, hey-nonny, hey-nonny-hey . . .*”

Lady Lysa pulled at Sansa’s arm. It was either walk or be dragged, so she chose to walk, halfway down the hall and between a pair of pillars, to a

white weirwood door set in the marble wall. The door was firmly closed, with three heavy bronze bars to hold it in place, but Sansa could hear the wind outside worrying at its edges. When she saw the crescent moon carved in the wood, she planted her feet. “The Moon Door.” She tried to yank free. “Why are you showing me the Moon Door?”

“You squeak like a mouse now, but you were bold enough in the garden, weren’t you? You were bold enough in the snow.”

“*The lady sat a-sewing upon a rainy day,*” Marillion sang. “*Hey-nonny, hey-nonny, hey-nonny-hey.*”

“Open the door,” Lysa commanded. “*Open* it, I say. You will do it, or I’ll send for my guards.” She shoved Sansa forward. “Your mother was brave, at least. Lift off the bars.”

If I do as she says, she will let me go. Sansa grabbed one of the bronze bars, yanked it loose, and tossed it down. The second bar clattered to the marble, then the third. She had barely touched the latch when the heavy wooden door *flew* inward and slammed back against the wall with a bang. Snow had piled up around the frame, and it all came blowing in at them, borne on a blast of cold air that left Sansa shivering. She tried to step backward, but her aunt was behind her. Lysa seized her by the wrist and put her other hand between her shoulder blades, propelling her forcefully toward the open door.

Beyond was white sky, falling snow, and nothing else.

“Look down,” said Lady Lysa. “Look *down*.”

She tried to wrench free, but her aunt’s fingers were digging into her arm like claws. Lysa gave her another shove, and Sansa shrieked. Her left foot broke through a crust of snow and knocked it loose. There was nothing in front of her but empty air, and a waycastle six hundred feet below clinging to the side of the mountain. “Don’t!” Sansa screamed. “You’re scaring me!” Behind her, Marillion was still playing his woodharp and singing, “*Hey-nonny, hey-nonny, hey-nonny-hey.*”

“Do you still want my leave to go? Do you?”

“No.” Sansa planted her feet and tried to squirm backward, but her aunt did not budge. “Not this way. Please . . .” She put a hand up, her fingers

scrabbling at the doorframe, but she could not get a grip, and her feet were sliding on the wet marble floor. Lady Lysa pressed her forward inexorably. Her aunt outweighed her by three stone. “*The lady lay a-kissing, upon a mound of hay,*” Marillion was singing. Sansa twisted sideways, hysterical with fear, and one foot slipped out over the void. She screamed. “*Hey-nonny, hey-nonny, hey-nonny-hey.*” The wind flapped her skirts up and bit at her bare legs with cold teeth. She could feel snowflakes melting on her cheeks. Sansa flailed, found Lysa’s thick auburn braid, and clutched it tight. “My hair!” her aunt shrieked. “*Let go of my hair!*” She was shaking, sobbing. They teetered on the edge. Far off, she heard the guards pounding on the door with their spears, demanding to be let in. Marillion broke off his song.

“*Lysa!* What’s the meaning of this?” The shout cut through the sobs and heavy breathing. Footsteps echoed down the High Hall. “Get *back* from there! Lysa, what are you doing?” The guards were still beating at the door; Littlefinger had come in the back way, through the lords’ entrance behind the dais.

As Lysa turned, her grip loosened enough for Sansa to rip free. She stumbled to her knees, where Petyr Baelish saw her. He stopped suddenly. “Alayne. What is the trouble here?”

“*Her.*” Lady Lysa grabbed a handful of Sansa’s hair. “*She’s* the trouble. She *kissed* you.”

“Tell her,” Sansa begged. “Tell her we were just building a castle . . .”

“*Be quiet!*” her aunt screamed. “I never gave you leave to speak. No one cares about your castle.”

“She’s a child, Lysa. Cat’s daughter. What did you think you were doing?”

“I was going to marry her to *Robert!* She has no gratitude. No . . . no *decency*. You are not hers to kiss. *Not hers!* I was teaching her a lesson, that was all.”

“I see.” He stroked his chin. “I think she understands now. Isn’t that so, Alayne?”

“Yes,” sobbed Sansa. “I understand.”

“I don’t want her here.” Her aunt’s eyes were shiny with tears. “Why did you bring her to the Vale, Petyr? This isn’t her place. She doesn’t belong here.”

“We’ll send her away, then. Back to King’s Landing, if you like.” He took a step toward them. “Let her up, now. Let her away from the door.”

“*NO!*” Lysa gave Sansa’s head another wrench. Snow eddied around them, making their skirts snap noisily. “You can’t want her. You *can’t*. She’s a stupid empty-headed little girl. She doesn’t love you the way I have. I’ve always loved you. I’ve proved it, haven’t I?” Tears ran down her aunt’s puffy red face. “I gave you my maiden’s gift. I would have given you a son too, but they murdered him with moon tea, with tansy and mint and wormwood, a spoon of honey and a drop of pennyroyal. It wasn’t me, I never *knew*, I only drank what Father gave me . . .”

“That’s past and done, Lysa. Lord Hoster’s dead, and his old maester as well.” Littlefinger moved closer. “Have you been at the wine again? You ought not to talk so much. We don’t want Alayne to know more than she should, do we? Or Marillion?”

Lady Lysa ignored that. “Cat never gave you anything. It was me who got you your first post, who made Jon bring you to court so we could be close to one another. You promised me you would never forget that.”

“Nor have I. We’re together, just as you always wanted, just as we always planned. Just let go of Sansa’s hair . . .”

“I won’t! I saw you kissing in the snow. She’s just like her mother. Catelyn kissed you in the godswood, but she never *meant* it, she never wanted you. Why did you love her best? It was me, it was always *meeee!*”

“I know, love.” He took another step. “And I am here. All you need to do is take my hand, come on.” He held it out to her. “There’s no cause for all these tears.”

“Tears, tears, *tears*,” she sobbed hysterically. “No need for tears . . . but that’s not what you said in King’s Landing. You told me to put the tears in Jon’s wine, and I did. For Robert, and for *us*! And I wrote Catelyn and told her the Lannisters had killed my lord husband, just as you said. That was so clever . . . you were always clever, I told Father that, I said Petyr’s so clever, he’ll rise high, he will, he *will*, and he’s sweet and gentle and I have

his little baby in my belly . . . Why did you kiss her? *Why?* We're together now, we're together after so long, so very long, why would you want to kiss *herrrrrrr?*"

"Lysa," Petyr sighed, "after all the storms we've suffered, you should trust me better. I swear, I shall never leave your side again, for as long as we both shall live."

"Truly?" she asked, weeping. "Oh, *truly?*"

"Truly. Now unhand the girl and come give me a kiss."

Lysa threw herself into Littlefinger's arms, sobbing. As they hugged, Sansa crawled from the Moon Door on hands and knees and wrapped her arms around the nearest pillar. She could feel her heart pounding. There was snow in her hair and her right shoe was missing. *It must have fallen.* She shuddered, and hugged the pillar tighter.

Littlefinger let Lysa sob against his chest for a moment, then put his hands on her arms and kissed her lightly. "My sweet silly jealous wife," he said, chuckling. "I've only loved one woman, I promise you."

Lysa Arryn smiled tremulously. "Only one? Oh, Petyr, do you swear it? Only one?"

"Only Cat." He gave her a short, sharp shove.

Lysa stumbled backward, her feet slipping on the wet marble. And then she was gone. She never screamed. For the longest time there was no sound but the wind.

Marillion gasped, "You . . . you . . ."

The guards were shouting outside the door, pounding with the butts of their heavy spears. Lord Petyr pulled Sansa to her feet. "You're not hurt?" When she shook her head, he said, "Run let my guards in, then. Quick now, there's no time to lose. This singer's killed my lady wife."