



SANSA

T*hat was such a sweet dream*, Sansa thought drowsily. She had been back in Winterfell, running through the godswood with her Lady. Her father had been there, and her brothers, all of them warm and safe. *If only dreaming could make it so . . .*

She threw back the coverlets. *I must be brave*. Her torments would soon be ended, one way or the other. *If Lady was here, I would not be afraid*. Lady was dead, though; Robb, Bran, Rickon, Arya, her father, her mother, even Septa Mordane. *All of them are dead but me*. She was alone in the world now.

Her lord husband was not beside her, but she was used to that. Tyrion was a bad sleeper and often rose before the dawn. Usually she found him in the solar, hunched beside a candle, lost in some old scroll or leatherbound book. Sometimes the smell of the morning bread from the ovens took him to the kitchens, and sometimes he would climb up to the roof garden or wander all alone down Traitor's Walk.

She threw back the shutters and shivered as gooseprickles rose along her arms. There were clouds massing in the eastern sky, pierced by shafts of sunlight. *They look like two huge castles afloat in the morning sky*. Sansa could see their walls of tumbled stone, their mighty keeps and barbicans. Wispy banners swirled from atop their towers and reached for the fast-fading stars. The sun was coming up behind them, and she watched them go

from black to grey to a thousand shades of rose and gold and crimson. Soon the wind mushed them together, and there was only one castle where there had been two.

She heard the door open as her maids brought the hot water for her bath. They were both new to her service; Tyrion said the women who'd tended to her previously had all been Cersei's spies, just as Sansa had always suspected. "Come see," she told them. "There's a castle in the sky."

They came to have a look. "It's made of gold." Shae had short dark hair and bold eyes. She did all that was asked of her, but sometimes she gave Sansa the most insolent looks. "A castle all of gold, there's a sight I'd like to see."

"A castle, is it?" Brella had to squint. "That tower's tumbling over, looks like. It's all ruins, that is."

Sansa did not want to hear about falling towers and ruined castles. She closed the shutters and said, "We are expected at the queen's breakfast. Is my lord husband in the solar?"

"No, m'lady," said Brella. "I have not seen him."

"Might be he went to see his father," Shae declared. "Might be the King's Hand had need of his counsel."

Brella gave a sniff. "Lady Sansa, you'll be wanting to get into the tub before the water gets too cool."

Sansa let Shae pull her shift up over her head and climbed into the big wooden tub. She was tempted to ask for a cup of wine, to calm her nerves. The wedding was to be at midday in the Great Sept of Baelor across the city. And come evenfall the feast would be held in the throne room; a thousand guests and seventy-seven courses, with singers and jugglers and mummers. But first came breakfast in the Queen's Ballroom, for the Lannisters and the Tyrell men—the Tyrell women would be breaking their fast with Margaery—and a hundred odd knights and lordlings. *They have made me a Lannister*, Sansa thought bitterly.

Brella sent Shae to fetch more hot water while she washed Sansa's back. "You are trembling, m'lady."

"The water is not hot enough," Sansa lied.

Her maids were dressing her when Tyrion appeared, Podrick Payne in tow. “You look lovely, Sansa.” He turned to his squire. “Pod, be so good as to pour me a cup of wine.”

“There will be wine at the breakfast, my lord,” Sansa said.

“There’s wine here. You don’t expect me to face my sister sober, surely? It’s a new century, my lady. The three hundredth year since Aegon’s Conquest.” The dwarf took a cup of red from Podrick and raised it high. “To Aegon. What a fortunate fellow. Two sisters, two wives, and three big dragons, what more could a man ask for?” He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

The Imp’s clothing was soiled and unkempt, Sansa noticed; it looked as though he’d slept in it. “Will you be changing into fresh garb, my lord? Your new doublet is very handsome.”

“The *doublet* is handsome, yes.” Tyrion put the cup aside. “Come, Pod, let us see if we can find some garments to make me look less dwarfish. I would not want to shame my lady wife.”

When the Imp returned a short time later, he was presentable enough, and even a little taller. Podrick Payne had changed as well, and looked almost a proper squire for once, although a rather large red pimple in the fold beside his nose spoiled the effect of his splendid purple, white, and gold raiment. *He is such a timid boy.* Sansa had been wary of Tyrion’s squire at first; he was a Payne, cousin to Ser Ilyn Payne who had taken her father’s head off. However, she’d soon come to realize that Pod was as frightened of her as she was of his cousin. Whenever she spoke to him, he turned the most alarming shade of red.

“Are purple, gold, and white the colors of House Payne, Podrick?” she asked him politely.

“No. I mean, yes.” He blushed. “The colors. Our arms are purple and white chequy, my lady. With gold coins. In the checks. Purple and white. Both.” He studied her feet.

“There’s a tale behind those coins,” said Tyrion. “No doubt Pod will confide it to your toes one day. Just now we are expected at the Queen’s Ballroom, however. Shall we?”

Sansa was tempted to beg off. *I could tell him that my tummy was upset, or that my moon's blood had come.* She wanted nothing more than to crawl back in bed and pull the drapes. *I must be brave, like Robb,* she told herself, as she took her lord husband stiffly by the arm.

In the Queen's Ballroom they broke their fast on honeycakes baked with blackberries and nuts, gammon steaks, bacon, fingerfish crisped in breadcrumbs, autumn pears, and a Dornish dish of onions, cheese, and chopped eggs cooked up with fiery peppers. "Nothing like a hearty breakfast to whet one's appetite for the seventy-seven-course feast to follow," Tyrion commented as their plates were filled. There were flagons of milk and flagons of mead and flagons of a light sweet golden wine to wash it down. Musicians strolled among the tables, piping and fluting and fiddling, while Ser Dontos galloped about on his broomstick horse and Moon Boy made farting sounds with his cheeks and sang rude songs about the guests.

Tyrion scarce touched his food, Sansa noticed, though he drank several cups of the wine. For herself, she tried a little of the Dornish eggs, but the peppers burned her mouth. Otherwise she only nibbled at the fruit and fish and honeycakes. Every time Joffrey looked at her, her tummy got so fluttery that she felt as though she'd swallowed a bat.

When the food had been cleared away, the queen solemnly presented Joff with the wife's cloak that he would drape over Margaery's shoulders. "It is the cloak I donned when Robert took me for his queen, the same cloak my mother Lady Joanna wore when wed to my lord father." Sansa thought it looked threadbare, if truth be told, but perhaps because it was so used.

Then it was time for gifts. It was traditional in the Reach to give presents to bride and groom on the morning of their wedding; on the morrow they would receive more presents as a couple, but today's tokens were for their separate persons.

From Jalabhar Xho, Joffrey received a great bow of golden wood and quiver of long arrows fletched with green and scarlet feathers; from Lady Tanda a pair of supple riding boots; from Ser Kevan a magnificent red leather jousting saddle; a red gold brooch wrought in the shape of a scorpion from the Dornishman, Prince Oberyn; silver spurs from Ser

Addam Marbrand; a red silk tourney pavilion from Lord Mathis Rowan. Lord Paxter Redwyne brought forth a beautiful wooden model of the war galley of two hundred oars being built even now on the Arbor. "If it please Your Grace, she will be called *King Joffrey's Valor*," he said, and Joff allowed that he was very pleased indeed. "I will make it my flagship when I sail to Dragonstone to kill my traitor uncle Stannis," he said.

He plays the gracious king today. Joffrey could be gallant when it suited him, Sansa knew, but it seemed to suit him less and less. Indeed, all his courtesy vanished at once when Tyrion presented him with their own gift: a huge old book called *Lives of Four Kings*, bound in leather and gorgeously illuminated. The king leafed through it with no interest. "And what is this, Uncle?"

A book. Sansa wondered if Joffrey moved those fat wormy lips of his when he read.

"Grand Maester Kaeth's history of the reigns of Daeron the Young Dragon, Baelor the Blessed, Aegon the Unworthy, and Daeron the Good," her small husband answered.

"A book every king should read, Your Grace," said Ser Kevan.

"My father had no time for books." Joffrey shoved the tome across the table. "If you read less, Uncle Imp, perhaps Lady Sansa would have a baby in her belly by now." He laughed . . . and when the king laughs, the court laughs with him. "Don't be sad, Sansa, once I've gotten Queen Margaery with child I'll visit your bedchamber and show my little uncle how it's done."

Sansa reddened. She glanced nervously at Tyrion, afraid of what he might say. This could turn as nasty as the bedding had at their own feast. But for once the dwarf filled his mouth with wine instead of words.

Lord Mace Tyrell came forward to present his gift: a golden chalice three feet tall, with two ornate curved handles and seven faces glittering with gemstones. "Seven faces for Your Grace's seven kingdoms," the bride's father explained. He showed them how each face bore the sigil of one of the great houses: ruby lion, emerald rose, onyx stag, silver trout, blue jade falcon, opal sun, and pearl direwolf.

“A splendid cup,” said Joffrey, “but we’ll need to chip the wolf off and put a squid in its place, I think.”

Sansa pretended that she had not heard.

“Margaery and I shall drink deep at the feast, good father.” Joffrey lifted the chalice above his head, for everyone to admire.

“The damned thing’s as tall as I am,” Tyrion muttered in a low voice. “Half a chalice and Joff will be falling down drunk.”

Good, she thought. Perhaps he’ll break his neck.

Lord Tywin waited until last to present the king with his own gift: a longsword. Its scabbard was made of cherrywood, gold, and oiled red leather, studded with golden lions’ heads. The lions had ruby eyes, she saw. The ballroom fell silent as Joffrey unsheathed the blade and thrust the sword above his head. Red and black ripples in the steel shimmered in the morning light.

“Magnificent,” declared Mathis Rowan.

“A sword to sing of, sire,” said Lord Redwyne.

“A *king’s* sword,” said Ser Kevan Lannister.

King Joffrey looked as if he wanted to kill someone right then and there, he was so excited. He slashed at the air and laughed. “A great sword must have a great name, my lords! What shall I call it?”

Sansa remembered Lion’s Tooth, the sword Arya had flung into the Trident, and Hearteater, the one he’d made her kiss before the battle. She wondered if he’d want Margaery to kiss this one.

The guests were shouting out names for the new blade. Joff dismissed a dozen before he heard one he liked. “*Widow’s Wail!*” he cried. “Yes! It shall make many a widow, too!” He slashed again. “And when I face my uncle Stannis it will break his magic sword clean in two.” Joff tried a downcut, forcing Ser Balon Swann to take a hasty step backward. Laughter rang through the hall at the look on Ser Balon’s face.

“Have a care, Your Grace,” Ser Addam Marbrand warned the king. “Valyrian steel is perilously sharp.”

“I remember.” Joffrey brought Widow’s Wail down in a savage two-handed slice, onto the book that Tyrion had given him. The heavy leather cover parted at a stroke. “Sharp! I told you, I am no stranger to Valyrian steel.” It took him half a dozen further cuts to hack the thick tome apart, and the boy was breathless by the time he was done. Sansa could feel her husband struggling with his fury as Ser Osmund Kettleblack shouted, “I pray you never turn that wicked edge on me, sire.”

“See that you never give me cause, ser.” Joffrey flicked a chunk of *Lives of Four Kings* off the table at swordpoint, then slid Widow’s Wail back into its scabbard.

“Your Grace,” Ser Garlan Tyrell said. “Perhaps you did not know. In all of Westeros there were but four copies of that book illuminated in Kaeth’s own hand.”

“Now there are three.” Joffrey undid his old swordbelt to don his new one. “You and Lady Sansa owe me a better present, Uncle Imp. This one is all chopped to pieces.”

Tyrion was staring at his nephew with his mismatched eyes. “Perhaps a knife, sire. To match your sword. A dagger of the same fine Valyrian steel . . . with a dragonbone hilt, say?”

Joff gave him a sharp look. “You . . . yes, a dagger to match my sword, good.” He nodded. “A . . . a gold hilt with rubies in it. Dragonbone is too plain.”

“As you wish, Your Grace.” Tyrion drank another cup of wine. He might have been all alone in his solar for all the attention he paid Sansa. But when the time came to leave for the wedding, he took her by the hand.

As they were crossing the yard, Prince Oberyn of Dorne fell in beside them, his black-haired paramour on his arm. Sansa glanced at the woman curiously. She was baseborn and unwed, and had borne two bastard daughters for the prince, but she did not fear to look even the queen in the eye. Shae had told her that this Ellaria worshiped some Lysene love goddess. “She was almost a whore when he found her, m’lady,” her maid confided, “and now she’s near a princess.” Sansa had never been this close to the Dornishwoman before. *She is not truly beautiful*, she thought, *but something about her draws the eye*.

“I once had the great good fortune to see the Citadel’s copy of *Lives of Four Kings*,” Prince Oberyne was telling her lord husband. “The illuminations were wondrous to behold, but Kaeth was too kind by half to King Viserys.”

Tyrion gave him a sharp look. “Too kind? He scants Viserys shamefully, in my view. It should have been *Lives of Five Kings*.”

The prince laughed. “Viserys hardly reigned a fortnight.”

“He reigned more than a year,” said Tyrion.

Oberyne gave a shrug. “A year or a fortnight, what does it matter? He poisoned his own nephew to gain the throne and then did nothing once he had it.”

“Baelor starved himself to death, fasting,” said Tyrion. “His uncle served him loyally as Hand, as he had served the Young Dragon before him. Viserys might only have reigned a year, but he ruled for fifteen, while Daeron warred and Baelor prayed.” He made a sour face. “And if he did remove his nephew, can you blame him? Someone had to save the realm from Baelor’s follies.”

Sansa was shocked. “But Baelor the Blessed was a great king. He walked the Boneway barefoot to make peace with Dorne, and rescued the Dragonknight from a snakepit. The vipers refused to strike him because he was so pure and holy.”

Prince Oberyne smiled. “If you were a viper, my lady, would you want to bite a bloodless stick like Baelor the Blessed? I’d sooner save my fangs for someone juicier . . .”

“My prince is playing with you, Lady Sansa,” said the woman Ellaria Sand. “The septons and singers like to say that the snakes did not bite Baelor, but the truth is very different. He was bitten half a hundred times, and should have died from it.”

“If he had, Viserys would have reigned a dozen years,” said Tyrion, “and the Seven Kingdoms might have been better served. Some believe Baelor was deranged by all that venom.”

“Yes,” said Prince Oberyne, “but I’ve seen no snakes in this Red Keep of yours. So how do you account for Joffrey?”

“I prefer not to.” Tyrion inclined his head stiffly. “If you will excuse us. Our litter awaits.” The dwarf helped Sansa up inside and clambered awkwardly after her. “Close the curtains, my lady, if you’d be so good.”

“Must we, my lord?” Sansa did not want to be shut behind the curtains. “The day is so lovely.”

“The good people of King’s Landing are like to throw dung at the litter if they see me inside it. Do us both a kindness, my lady. Close the curtains.”

She did as he bid her. They sat for a time, as the air grew warm and stuffy around them. “I was sorry about your book, my lord,” she made herself say.

“It was Joffrey’s book. He might have learned a thing or two if he’d read it.” He sounded distracted. “I should have known better. I should have seen . . . a good many things.”

“Perhaps the dagger will please him more.”

When the dwarf grimaced, his scar tightened and twisted. “The boy’s earned himself a dagger, wouldn’t you say?” Thankfully Tyrion did not wait for her reply. “Joff quarreled with your brother Robb at Winterfell. Tell me, was there ill feeling between Bran and His Grace as well?”

“Bran?” The question confused her. “Before he fell, you mean?” She had to try and think back. It was all so long ago. “Bran was a sweet boy. Everyone loved him. He and Tommen fought with wooden swords, I remember, but just for play.”

Tyrion lapsed back into moody silence. Sansa heard the distant clank of chains from outside; the portcullis was being drawn up. A moment later there was a shout, and their litter swayed into motion. Deprived of the passing scenery, she chose to stare at her folded hands, uncomfortably aware of her husband’s mismatched eyes. *Why is he looking at me that way?*

“You loved your brothers, much as I love Jaime.”

Is this some Lannister trap to make me speak treason? “My brothers were traitors, and they’ve gone to traitors’ graves. It is treason to love a traitor.”

Her little husband snorted. “Robb rose in arms against his rightful king. By law, that made him a traitor. The others died too young to know what

treason was.” He rubbed his nose. “Sansa, do you know what happened to Bran at Winterfell?”

“Bran fell. He was always climbing things, and finally he fell. We always feared he would. And Theon Greyjoy killed him, but that was later.”

“Theon Greyjoy.” Tyrion sighed. “Your lady mother once accused me . . . well, I will not burden you with the ugly details. She accused me falsely. I never harmed your brother Bran. And I mean no harm to you.”

What does he want me to say? “That is good to know, my lord.” He wanted something from her, but Sansa did not know what it was. *He looks like a starving child, but I have no food to give him. Why won't he leave me be?*

Tyrion rubbed at his scarred, scabby nose yet again, an ugly habit that drew the eye to his ugly face. “You have never asked me how Robb died, or your lady mother.”

“I . . . would sooner not know. It would give me bad dreams.”

“Then I will say no more.”

“That . . . that's kind of you.”

“Oh, yes,” said Tyrion. “I am the very soul of kindness. And I know about bad dreams.”