

“You’re not supposed to leave the column,” Sansa reminded her. “Father said so.”

Arya shrugged. “I didn’t go far. Anyway, Nymeria was with me the whole time. I don’t always go off, either. Sometimes it’s fun just to ride along with the wagons and talk to people.”

Sansa knew all about the sorts of people Arya liked to talk to: squires and grooms and serving girls, old men and naked children, rough-spoken freeriders of uncertain birth. Arya would make friends with anybody. This Mycah was the worst; a butcher’s boy, thirteen and wild, he slept in the meat wagon and smelled of the slaughtering block. Just the sight of him was enough to make Sansa feel sick, but Arya seemed to prefer his company to hers.

Sansa was running out of patience now. “You have to come with me,” she told her sister firmly. “You can’t refuse the queen. Septa Mordane will expect you.”

Arya ignored her. She gave a hard yank with the brush. Nymeria growled and spun away, affronted. “Come back here!”

“There’s going to be lemon cakes and tea,” Sansa went on, all adult and reasonable. Lady brushed against her leg. Sansa scratched her ears the way she liked, and Lady sat beside her on her haunches, watching Arya chase Nymeria. “Why would you want to ride a smelly old horse and get all sore and sweaty when you could recline on feather pillows and eat cakes with the queen?”

“I don’t like the queen,” Arya said casually. Sansa sucked in her breath, shocked that even Arya would say such a thing, but her sister prattled on, heedless. “She won’t even let me bring Nymeria.” She thrust the brush under her belt and stalked her wolf. Nymeria watched her approach warily.

“A royal wheelhouse is no place for a wolf,” Sansa said. “And Princess Myrcella is afraid of them, you know that.”

“Myrcella is a little baby.” Arya grabbed Nymeria around her neck, but the moment she pulled out the brush again the direwolf wriggled free and bounded off. Frustrated, Arya threw down the brush. “Bad wolf!” she shouted.

Sansa couldn’t help but smile a little. The kennelmaster once told her that an animal takes after its master. She gave Lady a quick little hug. Lady licked her cheek. Sansa giggled. Arya heard and whirled around, glaring. “I don’t care what you say, I’m going out riding.” Her long horsey face got the stubborn look that meant she was going to do something willful.

“Gods be true, Arya, sometimes you act like such a child,” Sansa said. “I’ll go by myself then. It will be ever so much nicer that way. Lady and I will eat all the lemon cakes and just have the best time without you.”

She turned to walk off, but Arya shouted after her, “They won’t let you bring Lady either.” She was gone before Sansa could think of a reply, chasing Nymeria along the river.

Alone and humiliated, Sansa took the long way back to the inn, where she knew Septa Mordane would be waiting. Lady padded quietly by her side. She was almost in tears. All she wanted was for things to be nice and pretty, the way they were in the songs. Why couldn’t Arya be sweet and delicate and kind, like Princess Myrcella? She would have liked a sister like that.