

Strong hands grasped her by the shoulders, and for a moment Sansa thought it was her father, but when she turned, it was the burned face of Sandor Clegane looking down at her, his mouth twisted in a terrible mockery of a smile. "You are shaking, girl," he said, his voice rasping. "Do I frighten you so much?"

He did, and had since she had first laid eyes on the ruin that fire had made of his face, though it seemed to her now that he was not half so terrifying as the other. Still, Sansa wrenched away from him, and the Hound laughed, and Lady moved between them, rumbling a warning. Sansa dropped to her knees to wrap her arms around the wolf. They were all gathered around gaping, she could feel their eyes on her, and here and there she heard muttered comments and titters of laughter.

"A wolf," a man said, and someone else said, "Seven hells, that's a direwolf," and the first man said, "What's it doing in camp?" and the Hound's rasping voice replied, "The Starks use them for wet nurses," and Sansa realized that the two stranger knights were looking down on her and Lady, swords in their hands, and then she was frightened again, and ashamed. Tears filled her eyes.

She heard the queen say, "Joffrey, go to her."

And her prince was there.

"Leave her alone," Joffrey said. He stood over her, beautiful in blue wool and black leather, his golden curls shining in the sun like a crown. He gave her his hand, drew her to her feet. "What is it, sweet lady? Why are you afraid? No one will hurt you. Put away your swords, all of you. The wolf is her little pet, that's all." He looked at Sandor Clegane. "And you, dog, away with you, you're scaring my betrothed."

The Hound, ever faithful, bowed and slid away quietly through the press. Sansa struggled to steady herself. She felt like such a fool. She was a Stark of Winterfell, a noble lady, and someday she would be a queen. "It was not him, my sweet prince," she tried to explain. "It was the other one."

The two stranger knights exchanged a look. "Payne?" chuckled the young man in the green armor.

The older man in white spoke to Sansa gently. "Ofttimes Ser Ilyn frightens me as well, sweet lady. He has a fearsome aspect."

"As well he should." The queen had descended from the wheelhouse. The spectators parted to make way for her. "If the wicked do not fear the Mng's Justice, you have put the wrong man in the office."

Sansa finally found her words. "Then surely you have chosen the right one, Your Grace," she said, and a gale of laughter erupted all around her.

"Well spoken, child," said the old man in white. "As befits the daughter of Eddard Stark. I am honored to know you, however irregular the manner of our meeting. I am Ser Barristan Selmy, of the Kingsguard." He bowed.

Sansa knew the name, and now the courtesies that Septa Mordane had taught her over the years came back to her. "The Lord Commander of the Kingsguard," she said, "and councillor to Robert