

## SANSA

Eddard Stark had left before dawn, Septa Mordane informed Sansa as they broke their fast. “The king sent for him. Another hunt, I do believe. There are still wild aurochs in these lands, I am told.”

“I’ve never seen an aurochs,” Sansa said, feeding a piece of bacon to Lady under the table. The direwolf took it from her hand, as delicate as a queen.

Septa Mordane sniffed in disapproval. “A noble lady does not feed dogs at her table,” she said, breaking off another piece of comb and letting the honey drip down onto her bread.

“She’s not a dog, she’s a direwolf,” Sansa pointed out as Lady licked her fingers with a rough tongue. “Anyway, Father said we could keep them with us if we want.”

The septa was not appeased. “You’re a good girl, Sansa, but I do vow, when it comes to that creature you’re as willful as your sister Arya.” She scowled. “And where is Arya this morning?”

“She wasn’t hungry,” Sansa said, knowing full well that her sister had probably stolen down to the kitchen hours ago and wheedled a breakfast out of some cook’s boy.

“Do remind her to dress nicely today. The grey velvet, perhaps. We are all invited to ride with the queen and Princess Myrcella in the royal wheelhouse, and we must look our best.”

Sansa already looked her best. She had brushed out her long auburn hair until it shone, and picked her nicest blue silks. She had been looking forward to today for more than a week. It was a great honor to ride with the queen, and besides, Prince Joffrey might be there. Her betrothed. Just thinking it made her feel a strange fluttering inside, even though they were not to marry for years and years. Sansa did not really know Joffrey yet, but she was already in love with him. He was all she ever dreamt her prince should be, tall and handsome and strong, with hair like gold. She treasured every chance to spend time with him, few as they were. The only thing that scared her about today was Arya. Arya had a way of ruining everything. You never knew what she would do. “I’ll tell her,” Sansa said uncertainly, “but she’ll dress the way she always does.” She hoped it wouldn’t be too embarrassing. “May I be excused?”

“You may.” Septa Mordane helped herself to more bread and honey, and Sansa slid from the bench. Lady followed at her heels as she ran from the inn’s common room.

Outside, she stood for a moment amidst the shouts and curses and the creak of wooden wheels as the men broke down the tents and pavilions and loaded the wagons for another day’s march. The inn was a sprawling three-story structure of pale stone, the biggest that Sansa had ever seen, but even so, it had accommodations for less than a third of the king’s party, which had swollen to more than four hundred with the addition of her father’s household and the freeriders who had joined them on the road.

She found Arya on the banks of the Trident, trying to hold Nymeria still while she brushed dried mud from her fur. The direwolf was not enjoying the process. Arya was wearing the same riding leathers she had worn yesterday and the day before.

“You better put on something pretty,” Sansa told her. “Septa Mordane said so. We’re traveling in the queen’s wheelhouse with Princess Myrcella today.”