

Sandor Clegane seemed to take form out of the night, so quickly did he appear. He had exchanged his armor for a red woolen tunic with a leather dog's head sewn on the front. The light of the torches made his burned face shine a dull red. "Yes, Your Grace?" he said.

"Take my betrothed back to the castle, and see that no harm befalls her," the prince told him brusquely. And without even a word of farewell, Joffrey strode off, leaving her there.

Sansa could feel the Hound watching her. "Did you think Joff was going to take you himself?" He laughed. He had a laugh like the snarling of dogs in a pit. "Small chance of that." He pulled her unresisting to her feet. "Come, you're not the only one needs sleep. I've drunk too much, and I may need to kill my brother tomorrow." He laughed again.

Suddenly terrified, Sansa pushed at Septa Mordane's shoulder, hoping to wake her, but she only snored the louder. King Robert had stumbled off and half the benches were suddenly empty. The feast was over, and the beautiful dream had ended with it.

The Hound snatched up a torch to light their way. Sansa followed close beside him. The ground was rocky and uneven; the flickering light made it seem to shift and move beneath her. She kept her eyes lowered, watching where she placed her feet. They walked among the pavilions, each with its banner and its armor hung outside, the silence weighing heavier with every step. Sansa could not bear the sight of him, he frightened her so, yet she had been raised in all the ways of courtesy. A true lady would not notice his face, she told herself. "You rode gallantly today, Ser Sandor," she made herself say.

Sandor Clegane snarled at her. "Spare me your empty little compliments, girl... and your ser's. I am no knight. I spit on them and their vows. My brother is a knight. Did you see him ride today?"

"Yes," Sansa whispered, trembling. "He was..."

"Gallant?" the Hound finished.

He was mocking her, she realized. "No one could withstand him," she managed at last, proud of herself. It was no lie.

Sandor Clegane stopped suddenly in the middle of a dark and empty field. She had no choice but to stop beside him. "Some septa trained you well. You're like one of those birds from the Summer Isles, aren't you? A pretty little talking -bird, repeating all the pretty little words they taught you to recite."

"That's unkind." Sansa could feel her heart fluttering in her chest. "You're frightening me. I want to go now."

"No one could withstand him," the Hound rasped. "That's truth enough. No one could ever withstand Gregor. That boy today, his second joust, oh, that was a pretty bit of business. You saw that, did you? Fool boy, he had no business riding in this company. No money, no squire, no one to help him with that armor. That gorget wasn't fastened proper. You think Gregor didn't notice that? You think Ser Gregor's lance rode up by chance, do you? Pretty little talking girl, you believe that, you're empty-headed as a bird for true. Gregor's lance goes where Gregor wants it to go. Look at me. Look at me!" Sandor Clegane put a huge hand under her chin and forced her face up. He squatted in front of her, and moved the torch close. "There's a pretty for