

“Your Grace,” Ser Boros said when they were ushered inside by another of the Kingsguard, Ser Mandon of the curiously dead face, “I’ve brought the girl.”

Sansa had hoped Joffrey might be with her. Her prince was not there, but three of the king’s councillors were. Lord Petyr Baelish sat on the queen’s left hand, Grand Maester Pycelle at the end of the table, while Lord Varys hovered over them, smelling flowery. All of them were clad in black, she realized with a feeling of dread. Mourning clothes...

The queen wore a high-collared black silk gown, with a hundred dark red rubies sewn into her bodice, covering her from neck to bosom. They were cut in the shape of teardrops, as if the queen were weeping blood. Cersei smiled to see her, and Sansa thought it was the sweetest and saddest smile she had ever seen. “Sansa, my sweet child,” she said, “I know you’ve been asking for me. I’m sorry that I could not send for you sooner. Matters have been very unsettled, and I have not had a moment. I trust my people have been taking good care of you?”

“Everyone has been very sweet and pleasant, Your Grace, thank you ever so much for asking,” Sansa said politely. “Only, well, no one will talk to us or tell us what’s happened

“Us?” Cersei seemed puzzled.

“We put the steward’s girl in with her,” Ser Boros said. “We did not know what else to do with her.”

The queen frowned. “Next time, you will ask,” she said, her voice sharp. “The gods only know what sort of tales she’s been filling Sansa’s head with.”

“Jeyne’s scared,” Sansa said. “She won’t stop crying. I promised her I’d ask if she could see her father.”

Old Grand Maester Pycelle lowered his eyes.

“Her father is well, isn’t he?” Sansa said anxiously. She knew there had been fighting, but surely no one would harm a steward. Vayon Poole did not even wear a sword.

Queen Cersei looked at each of the councillors in turn. “I won’t have Sansa fretting needlessly. What shall we do with this little friend of hers, my lords?”

Lord Petyr leaned forward. “I’ll find a place for her.”

“Not in the city,” said the queen.

“Do you take me for a fool?”

The queen ignored that. “Ser Boros, escort this girl to Lord Petyr’s apartments and instruct his people to keep her there until he comes for her. Tell her that Littlefinger will be taking her to see her father, that ought to calm her down. I want her gone before Sansa returns to her chamber.”

“As you command, Your Grace,” Ser Boros said. He bowed deeply, spun on his heel, and took his leave, his long white cloak stirring the air behind him.

Sansa was confused. “I don’t understand,” she said. “Where is Jeyne’s father? Why can’t Ser Boros take her to him instead of Lord Petyr having to do it?” She had promised herself she would be a lady, gentle as the queen and as strong as her mother, the Lady Catelyn, but all of a sudden she was scared again. For a second she thought she might cry. “Where are you sending her? She hasn’t done anything wrong, she’s a good girl.”