

## SANSA

“He wouldn’t send Ser Loras,” Sansa told Jeyne Poole that night as they shared a cold supper by lamplight. “I think it was because of his leg.”

Lord Eddard had taken his supper in his bedchamber with Alyn, Harwin, and Vayon Poole, the better to rest his broken leg, and Septa Mordane had complained of sore feet after standing in the gallery all day. Arya was supposed to join them, but she was late coming back from her dancing lesson.

“His leg?” Jeyne said uncertainly. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl of Sansa’s own age. “Did Ser Loras hurt his leg?”

“Not his leg,” Sansa said, nibbling delicately at a chicken leg. “Father’s leg, silly. It hurts him ever so much, it makes him cross. Otherwise I’m certain he would have sent Ser Loras.”

Her father’s decision still bewildered her. When the Knight of Flowers had spoken up, she’d been sure she was about to see one of Old Nan’s stories come to life. Ser Gregor was the monster and Ser Loras the true hero who would slay him. He even looked a true hero, so slim and beautiful, with golden roses around his slender waist and his rich brown hair tumbling down into his eyes. And then Father had refused him! It had upset her more than she could tell. She had said as much to Septa Mordane as they descended the stairs from the gallery, but the septa had only told her it was not her place to question her lord father’s decisions.

That was when Lord Baelish had said, “Oh, I don’t know, Septa. Some of her lord father’s decisions could do with a bit of questioning. The young lady is as wise as she is lovely.” He made a sweeping bow to Sansa, so deep she was not quite sure if she was being complimented or mocked.

Septa Mordane had been very upset to realize that Lord Baelish had overheard them. “The girl was just talking, my lord,” she’d said. “Foolish chatter. She meant nothing by the comment.”

Lord Baelish stroked his little pointed beard and said, “Nothing? Tell me, child, why would you have sent Ser Loras?”

Sansa had no choice but to explain about heroes and monsters. The king’s councillor smiled. “Well, those are not the reasons I’d have given, but...” He had touched her cheek, his thumb lightly tracing the line of a cheekbone. “Life is not a song, sweetling. You may learn that one day to your sorrow.”

Sansa did not feel like telling all that to Jeyne, however; it made her uneasy just to think back on it.

“Ser Ilyn’s the King’s Justice, not Ser Loras,” Jeyne said. “Lord Eddard should have sent him.”

Sansa shuddered. Every time she looked at Ser Ilyn Payne, she shivered. He made her feel as though something dead were slithering over her naked skin. “Ser Ilyn’s almost like a second monster. I’m glad Father didn’t pick him.”

“Lord Beric is as much a hero as Ser Loras. He’s ever so brave and gallant.”

“I suppose,” Sansa said doubtfully. Beric Dondarrion was handsome enough, but he was awfully old, almost twenty-two; the Knight of Flowers would have been much better. Of course,