

My son loved that young wife of his. Vain woman. If not for her, he would never have thought to sell those poachers.”

Jon could scarcely follow what he was saying. “My lord, I don’t understand. What’s happened to my father?”

“I told you to sit,” Mormont grumbled. “Sit, “ the raven screamed. “And have a drink, damn you. That’s a command, Snow.”

Jon sat, and took a sip of wine.

“Lord Eddard has been imprisoned. He is charged with treason. It is said he plotted with Robert’s brothers to deny the throne to Prince Joffrey.”

“No,” Jon said at once. “That couldn’t be. My father would never betray the king!”

“Be that as it may,” said Mormont. “It is not for me to say. Nor for you...”

“But it’s a lie,” Jon insisted. How could they think his father was a traitor, had they all gone mad? Lord Eddard Stark would never dishonor himself... would he?

He fathered a bastard, a small voice whispered inside him. Where was the honor in that? And your mother, what of her? He will not even speak her name.

“My lord, what will happen to him? Will they kill him?”

“As to that, I cannot say, lad. I mean to send a letter. I knew some of the king’s councillors in my youth. Old Pycelle, Lord Stannis, Ser Barristan... Whatever your father has done, or hasn’t done, he is a great lord. He must be allowed to take the black and join us here. Gods knows, we need men of Lord Eddard’s ability.”

Jon knew that other men accused of treason had been allowed to redeem their honor on the Wall in days past. Why not Lord Eddard? His father here. That was a strange thought, and strangely uncomfortable. It would be a monstrous injustice to strip him of Winterfell and force him to take the black, and yet if it meant his life...

And would Joffrey allow it? He remembered the prince at Winterfell, the way he’d mocked Robb and Ser Rodrik in the yard. Jon himself he had scarcely even noticed; bastards were beneath even his contempt. “My lord, will the king listen to you?”

The Old Bear shrugged. “A boy king... I imagine he’ll listen to his mother. A pity the dwarf isn’t with them. He’s the lad’s uncle, and he saw our need when he visited us. It was a bad thing, your lady mother taking him captive-”

“Lady Stark is not my mother,” Jon reminded him sharply. Tyrion Lannister had been a friend to him. If Lord Eddard was killed, she would be as much to blame as the queen. “My lord, what of my sisters? Arya and Sansa, they were with my father, do you know-”

“Pycelle makes no mention of them, but doubtless they’ll be treated gently. I will ask about them when I write.” Mormont shook his head. “This could not have happened at a worse time. If ever the realm needed a strong king... there are dark days and cold nights ahead, I feel it in my bones...” He gave Jon a long shrewd look. “I hope you are not thinking of doing anything stupid, boy.”

He’s my father, Jon wanted to say, but he knew that Mormont would not want to hear it. His throat was dry. He made himself take another sip of wine.