

“What of him?”

“He reports to Varys. The Spider has taken a great interest in you and all your doings.” He shifted in the window seat. “Now glance at the wall. Farther west, above the stables. The guardsman leaning on the ramparts?”

Ned saw the man. “Another of the eunuch’s whisperers?”

“No, this one belongs to the queen. Notice that he enjoys a fine view of the door to this tower, the better to note who calls on you.

There are others, many unknown even to me. The Red Keep is full of eyes. Why do you think I hid Cat in a brothel?”

Eddard Stark had no taste for these intrigues. “Seven hells,” he swore. It did seem as though the man on the walls was watching him. Suddenly uncomfortable, Ned moved away from the window. “Is everyone someone’s informer in this cursed city?”

“Scarcely,” said Littlefinger. He counted on the fingers on his hand. “Why, there’s me, you, the king... although, come to think on it, the king tells the queen much too much, and I’m less than certain about you.” He stood up. “Is there a man in your service that you trust utterly and completely?”

“Yes,” said Ned.

“In that case, I have a delightful palace in Valyria that I would dearly love to sell you,” Littlefinger said with a mocking smile. “The wiser answer was no, my lord, but be that as it may. Send this paragon of yours to Ser Hugh and the others. Your own comings and goings will be noted, but even Varys the Spider cannot watch every man in your service every hour of the day.” He started for the door.

“Lord Petyr,” Ned called after him. “I... am grateful for your help. Perhaps I was wrong to distrust you.”

Littlefinger fingered his small pointed beard. “You are slow to learn, Lord Eddard. Distrusting me was the wisest thing you’ve done since you climbed down off your horse.”