

“The boy? What of him?” She ducked her head as they passed under a low overhang of rock, and around a sharp turn.

Her uncle’s voice was troubled. “Lord Robert,” he sighed. “Six years old, sickly, and prone to weep if you take his dolls away. Jon Arryn’s trueborn heir, by all the gods, yet there are some who say he is too weak to sit his father’s seat, Nestor Royce has been high steward these past fourteen years, while Lord Jon served in King’s Landing, and many whisper that he should rule until the boy comes of age. Others believe that Lysa must marry again, and soon. Already the suitors gather like crows on a battlefield. The Eyrie is full of them.”

“I might have expected that,” Catelyn said. Small wonder there; Lysa was still young, and the kingdom of Mountain and Vale made a handsome wedding gift. “Will Lysa take another husband?”

“She says yes, provided she finds a man who suits her,” Brynden Tully said, “but she has already rejected Lord Nestor and a dozen other suitable men. She swears that this time she will choose her lord husband.”

“You of all people can scarce fault her for that.”

Ser Brynden snorted. “Nor do I, but... it seems to me Lysa is only playing at courtship. She enjoys the sport, but I believe your sister intends to rule herself until her boy is old enough to be Lord of the Eyrie in truth as well as name.”

“A woman can rule as wisely as a man,” Catelyn said.

“The tight woman can,” her uncle said with a sideways glance. “Make no mistake, Cat. Lysa is not you.” He hesitated a moment. “If truth be told, I fear you may not find your sister as helpful as you would like.”

She was puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“The Lysa who came back from King’s Landing is not the same girl who went south when her husband was named Hand. Those years were hard for her. You must know. Lord Arryn was a dutiful husband, but their marriage was made from politics, not passion.”

“As was my own.”

“They began the same, but your ending has been happier than your sister’s. Two babes stillborn, twice as many miscarriages, Lord Arryn’s death... Catelyn, the gods gave Lysa only the one child, and he is all your sister lives for now, poor boy. Small wonder she fled rather than see him handed over to the Lannisters. Your sister is afraid, child, and the Lannisters are what she fears most. She ran to the Vale, stealing away from the Red Keep like a thief in the night, and all to snatch her son out of the lion’s mouth... and now you have brought the lion to her door.”

“In chains,” Catelyn said. A crevasse yawned on her right, falling away into darkness. She reined up her horse and picked her way along step by careful step.

“Oh?” Her uncle glanced back, to where Tyrion Lannister was making his slow descent behind them. “I see an axe on his saddle, a dirk at his belt, and a sellsword that trails after him like a hungry shadow. Where are the chains, sweet one?”