

“Jon? Arya, what are you talking about? Who said this?”

“They did,” she told him. “There was a fat one with rings and a forked yellow beard, and another in mail and a steel cap, and the fat one said they had to delay but the other one told him he couldn’t keep juggling and the wolf and the lion were going to eat each other and it was a mummer’s farce.” She tried to remember the rest. She hadn’t quite understood everything she’d heard, and now it was all mixed up in her head. “The fat one said the princess was with child. The one in the steel cap, he had the torch, he said that they had to hurry. I think he was a wizard.”

“A wizard,” said Ned, unsmiling. “Did he have a long white beard and tall pointed hat speckled with stars?”

“No! It wasn’t like Old Nan’s stories. He didn’t look like a wizard, but the fat one said he was.”

“I warn you, Arya, if you’re spinning this thread of air-”

“No, I told you, it was in the dungeons, by the place with the secret wall. I was chasing cats, and well...” She screwed up her face. If she admitted knocking over Prince Tommen, he would be really angry with her. “... well, I went in this window. That’s where I found the monsters.”

“Monsters and wizards,” her father said. “It would seem you’ve had quite an adventure. These men you heard, you say they spoke of juggling and mummery?”

“Yes,” Arya admitted, “only-”

“Arya, they were mummers,” her father told her. “There must be a dozen troupes in King’s Landing right now, come to make some coin off the tourney crowds. I’m not certain what these two were doing in the castle, but perhaps the king has asked for a show.”

“No.” She shook her head stubbornly. “They weren’t-”

“You shouldn’t be following people about and spying on them in any case. Nor do I cherish the notion of my daughter climbing in strange windows after stray cats. Look at you, sweetling. Your arms are covered with scratches. This has gone on long enough. Tell Syrio Forel that I want a word with him-”

He was interrupted by a short, sudden knock. “Lord Eddard, pardons,” Desmond called out, opening the door a crack, “but there’s a black brother here begging audience. He says the matter is urgent. I thought you would want to know.”

“My door is always open to the Night’s Watch,” Father said.

Desmond ushered the man inside. He was stooped and ugly, with an unkempt beard and unwashed clothes, yet Father greeted him pleasantly and asked his name.

“Yoren, as it please m’lord. My pardons for the hour.” He bowed to Arya. “And this must be your son. He has your look.”

“I’m a girl,” Arya said, exasperated. If the old man was down from the Wall, he must have come by way of Winterfell. “Do you know my brothers?” she asked excitedly. “Robb and Bran are at Winterfell, and Jon’s on the Wall. Jon Snow, he’s in the Night’s Watch too, you must know him, he has a direwolf, a white one with red eyes. Is Jon a ranger yet? I’m Arya Stark.” The old man in his smelly black clothes was looking at her oddly, but Arya could not seem to stop talking. “When you ride back to the Wall, would you bring Jon a letter if I wrote one?” She