

would not let them see her grief. “Lord Baelish tells me that I have you to thank for bringing me here.”

Varys giggled like a little girl. “Oh, yes. I suppose I am guilty. I hope you forgive me, kind lady.” He eased himself down into a seat and put his hands together. “I wonder if we might trouble you to show us the dagger?”

Catelyn Stark stared at the eunuch in stunned disbelief. He was a spider, she thought wildly, an enchanter or worse. He knew things no one could possibly know, unless “What have you done to Ser Rodrik?” she demanded.

Littlefinger was lost. “I feel rather like the knight who arrives at the battle without his lance. What dagger are we talking about? Who is Ser Rodrik?”

“Ser Rodrik Cassel is master-at-arms at Winterfell,” Varys informed him. “I assure you, Lady Stark, nothing at all has been done to the good knight. He did call here early this afternoon. He visited with Ser Aron Santagar in the armory, and they talked of a certain dagger. About sunset, they left the castle together and walked to that dreadful hovel where you were staying. They are still there, drinking in the common room, waiting for your return. Ser Rodrik was very distressed to find you gone.”

“How could you know all that?”

“The whisperings of little birds,” Varys said, smiling. “I know things, sweet lady. That is the nature of my service.” He shrugged. “You do have the dagger with you, yes?”

Catelyn pulled it out from beneath her cloak and threw it down on the table in front of him. “Here. Perhaps your little birds will whisper the name of the man it belongs to.”

Varys lifted the knife with exaggerated delicacy and ran a thumb along its edge. Blood welled, and he let out a squeal and dropped the dagger back on the table.

“Careful,” Catelyn told him, “it’s sharp.”

“Nothing holds an edge like Valyrian steel,” Littlefinger said as Varys sucked at his bleeding thumb and looked at Catelyn with sullen admonition. Littlefinger hefted the knife lightly in his hand, testing the grip. He flipped it in the air, caught it again with his other hand. “Such sweet balance. You want to find the owner, is that the reason for this visit? You have no need of Ser Aron for that, my lady. You should have come to me.”

“And if I had,” she said, “what would you have told me?”

“I would have told you that there was only one knife like this at King’s Landing.” He grasped the blade between thumb and forefinger, drew it back over his shoulder, and threw it across the room with a practiced flick of his wrist. It struck the door and buried itself deep in the oak, quivering. “It’s mine.”

“Yours?” It made no sense. Petyr had not been at Winterfell.

“Until the tourney on Prince Joffrey’s name day,” he said, crossing the room to wrench the dagger from the wood. “I backed Ser Jaime in the jousting, along with half the court.” Petyr’s sheepish grin made him look half a boy again. “When Loras Tyrell unhorsed him, many of us became a trifle poorer. Ser Jaime lost a hundred golden dragons, the queen lost an emerald pendant, and I lost my knife. Her Grace got the emerald back, but the winner kept the rest.”