

“And why was that?” Luwin peered through his tube.

“It was something to do about Jon, I think.” The dream had been deeply disturbing, more so than any of the other crow dreams. “Hodor won’t go down into the crypts.”

The maester had only been half listening, Bran could tell. He lifted his eye from the tube, blinking. “Hodor won’t...”

“Go down into the crypts. When I woke, I told him to take me down, to see if Father was truly there. At first he didn’t know what I was saying, but I got him to the steps by telling him to go here and go there, only then he wouldn’t go down. He just stood on the top step and said ‘Hodor,’ like he was scared of the dark, but I had a torch. It made me so mad I almost gave him a swat in the head, like Old Nan is always doing.” He saw the way the maester was frowning and hurriedly added, “I didn’t, though.”

“Good. Hodor is a man, not a mule to be beaten.”

“In the dream I flew down with the crow, but I can’t do that when I’m awake,” Bran explained.

“Why would you want to go down to the crypts?”

“I told you. To look for Father.”

The maester tugged at the chain around his neck, as he often did when he was uncomfortable. “Bran, sweet child, one day Lord Eddard will sit below in stone, beside his father and his father’s father and all the Starks back to the old Kings in the North... but that will not be for many years, gods be good. Your father is a prisoner of the queen in King’s Landing. You will not find him in the crypts.”

“He was there last night. I talked to him.”

“Stubborn boy,” the maester sighed, setting his book aside. “Would you like to go see?”

“I can’t. Hodor won’t go, and the steps are too narrow and twisty for Dancer.”

“I believe I can solve that difficulty.”

In place of Hodor, the wildling woman Osha was summoned. She was tall and tough and uncomplaining, willing to go wherever she was commanded. “I lived my life beyond the Wall, a hole in the ground won’t fret me none, m’lords,” she said.

“Summer, come,” Bran called as she lifted him in wiry-strong arms. The direwolf left his bone and followed as Osha carried Bran across the yard and down the spiral steps to the cold vault under the earth. Maester Luwin went ahead with a torch. Bran did not even mind-too badly-that she carried him in her arms and not on her back. Ser Rodrik had ordered Osha’s chain struck off, since she had served faithfully and well since she had been at Winterfell. She still wore the heavy iron shackles around her ankles-a sign that she was not yet wholly trusted-but they did not hinder her sure strides down the steps.

Bran could not recall the last time he had been in the crypts. It had been before, for certain. When he was little, he used to play down here with Robb and Jon and his sisters.

He wished they were here now; the vault might not have seemed so dark and scary. Summer stalked out in the echoing gloom, then stopped, lifted his head, and sniffed the chill dead air. He bared his teeth and crept backward, eyes glowing golden in the light of the maester’s torch. Even