

him here, without a word of permission, without so much as a warning, to drag us into your quarrels with the Lannisters..."

"My quarrels?" Catelyn could scarce believe what she was hearing. A great fire burned in the hearth, but there was no trace of warmth in Lysa's voice. "They were your quarrels first, sister. It was you who sent me that cursed letter, you who wrote that the Lannisters had murdered your husband."

"To warn you, so you could stay away from them! I never meant to fight them! Gods, Cat, do you know what you've done?"

"Mother?" a small voice said. Lysa whirled, her heavy robe swirling around her. Robert Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, stood in the doorway, clutching a ragged cloth doll and looking at them with large eyes. He was a painfully thin child, small for his age and sickly all his days, and from time to time he trembled. The shaking sickness, the maesters called it. "I heard voices."

Small wonder, Catelyn thought; Lysa had almost been shouting. Still, her sister looked daggers at her. "This is your aunt Catelyn, baby. My sister, Lady Stark. Do you remember?"

The boy glanced at her blankly. "I think so," he said, blinking, though he had been less than a year old the last time Catelyn had seen him.

Lysa seated herself near the fire and said, "Come to Mother, my sweet one." She straightened his bedclothes and fussed with his fine brown hair. "Isn't he beautiful? And strong too, don't you believe the things you hear. Jon knew. The seed is strong, he told me. His last words. He kept saying Robert's name, and he grabbed my arm so hard he left marks. Tell them, the seed is strong. His seed. He wanted everyone to know what a good strong boy my baby was going to be."

"Lysa," Catelyn said, "if you're right about the Lannisters, all the more reason we must act quickly. We-"

"Not in front of the baby," Lysa said. "He has a delicate temper, don't you, sweet one?"

"The boy is Lord of the Eyrie and Defender of the Vale," Catelyn reminded her, "and these are no times for delicacy. Ned thinks it may come to war."

"Quiet!" Lysa snapped at her. "You're scaring the boy." Little Robert took a quick peek over his shoulder at Catelyn and began to tremble. His doll fell to the rushes, and he pressed himself against his mother. "Don't be afraid, my sweet baby," Lysa whispered. "Mother's here, nothing will hurt you." She opened her robe and drew out a pale, heavy breast, tipped with red. The boy grabbed for it eagerly, buried his face against her chest, and began to suck. Lysa stroked his hair. Catelyn was at a loss for words. Jon Arryn's son, she thought incredulously. She remembered her own baby, three-year-old Rickon, half the age of this boy and five times as fierce. Small wonder the lords of the Vale were restive. For the first time she understood why the king had tried to take the child away from his mother to foster with the Lannisters...

"We're safe here," Lysa was saying. Whether to her or to the boy, Catelyn was not sure.

"Don't be a fool," Catelyn said, the anger rising in her. "No one is safe. If you think hiding here will make the Lannisters forget you, you are sadly mistaken."