

late. I have a son. You have a daughter. My Joff and your Sansa shall join our houses, as Lyanna and I might once have done.”

This offer did surprise him. “Sansa is only eleven.”

Robert waved an impatient hand. “Old enough for betrothal. The marriage can wait a few years.” The king smiled. “Now stand up and say yes, curse you.”

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Your Grace,” Ned answered. He hesitated. “These honors are all so unexpected. May I have some time to consider? I need to tell my wife...”

“Yes, yes, of course, tell Catelyn, sleep on it if you must.” The king reached down, clasped Ned by the hand, and pulled him roughly to his feet. “Just don’t keep me waiting too long. I am not the most patient of men.”

For a moment Eddard Stark was filled with a terrible sense of foreboding. This was his place, here in the north. He looked at the stone figures all around them, breathed deep in the chill silence of the crypt. He could feel the eyes of the dead. They were all listening, he knew. And winter was coming.