

EDDARD

He dreamt an old dream, of three knights in white cloaks, and a tower long fallen, and Lyanna in her bed of blood.

In the dream his friends rode with him, as they had in life. Proud Martyn Cassel, Jory's father; faithful Theo Wull; Ethan Glover, who had been Brandon's squire; Ser Mark Ryswell, soft of speech and gentle of heart; the crannogman, Howland Reed; Lord Dustin on his great red stallion. Ned had known their faces as well as he knew his own once, but the years leech at a man's memories, even those he has vowed never to forget. In the dream they were only shadows, grey wraiths on horses made of mist.

They were seven, facing three. In the dream as it had been in life. Yet these were no ordinary three. They waited before the round tower, the red mountains of Dorne at their backs, their white cloaks blowing in the wind. And these were no shadows; their faces burned clear, even now. Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning, had a sad smile on his lips. The hilt of the greatsword Dawn poked up over his right shoulder. Ser Oswell Whent was on one knee, sharpening his blade with a whetstone. Across his white-enameled helm, the black bat of his House spread its wings. Between them stood fierce old Ser Gerold Hightower, the White Bull, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard.

"I looked for you on the Trident," Ned said to them.

"We were not there," Ser Gerold answered.

"Woe to the Usurper if we had been," said Ser Oswell.

"When King's Landing fell, Ser Jaime slew your king with a golden sword, and I wondered where you were."

"Far away," Ser Gerold said, "or Aerys would yet sit the Iron Throne, and our false brother would burn in seven hells."

"I came down on Storm's End to lift the siege," Ned told them... and the Lords Tyrell and Redwyne dipped their banners, and all their knights bent the knee to pledge us fealty. I was certain you would be among them."

"Our knees do not bend easily," said Ser Arthur Dayne.

"Ser Willem Darry is fled to Dragonstone, with your queen and Prince Viserys. I thought you might have sailed with him."

"Ser Willem is a good man and true," said Ser Oswell.

"But not of the Kingsguard," Ser Gerold pointed out. "The Kingsguard does not flee."

"Then or now," said Ser Arthur. He donned his helm.

"We swore a vow," explained old Ser Gerold.

Ned's wraiths moved up beside him, with shadow swords in hand. They were seven against three.

"And now it begins," said Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning. He unsheathed Dawn and held it with both hands. The blade was pale as milkglass, alive with light.