

“Don’t play the fool. Stannis and Renly are one thing, and Eddard Stark is quite another. Robert will listen to Stark. Damn them both. I should have insisted that he name you, but I was certain Stark would refuse him.”

“We ought to count ourselves fortunate,” the man said. “The king might as easily have named one of his brothers, or even Littlefinger, gods help us. Give me honorable enemies rather than ambitious ones, and I’ll sleep more easily by night.”

They were talking about Father, Bran realized. He wanted to hear more. A few more feet... but they would see him if he swung out in front of the window.

“We will have to watch him carefully,” the woman said.

“I would sooner watch you,” the man said. He sounded bored. “Come back here.”

“Lord Eddard has never taken any interest in anything that happened south of the Neck,” the woman said. “Never. I tell you, he means to move against us. Why else would he leave the seat of his power?”

“A hundred reasons. Duty. Honor. He yearns to write his name large across the book of history, to get away from his wife, or both. Perhaps he just wants to be warm for once in his life.”

“His wife is Lady Arryn’s sister. It’s a wonder Lysa was not here to greet us with her accusations.”

Bran looked down. There was a narrow ledge beneath the window, only a few inches wide. He tried to lower himself toward it. Too far. He would never reach.

“You fret too much. Lysa Arryn is a frightened cow.”

“That frightened cow shared Jon Arryn’s bed.”

“If she knew anything, she would have gone to Robert before she fled King’s Landing.”

“When he had already agreed to foster that weakling son of hers at Casterly Rock? I think not. She knew the boy’s life would be hostage to her silence. She may grow bolder now that he’s safe atop the Eyrie.”

“Mothers.” The man made the word sound like a curse. “I think birthing does something to your minds. You are all mad.” He laughed. It was a bitter sound. “Let Lady Arryn grow as bold as she likes. Whatever she knows, whatever she thinks she knows, she has no proof.” He paused a moment. “Or does she?”

“Do you think the king will require proof?” the woman said. “I tell you, he loves me not.”

“And whose fault is that, sweet sister?”

Bran studied the ledge. He could drop down. It was too narrow to land on, but if he could catch hold as he fell past, pull himself up... except that might make a noise, draw them to the window. He was not sure what he was hearing, but he knew it was not meant for his ears.

“You are as blind as Robert,” the woman was saying.

“If you mean I see the same thing, yes,” the man said. “I see a man who would sooner die than betray his king.”

“He betrayed one already, or have you forgotten?” the woman said. “Oh, I don’t deny he’s loyal to Robert, that’s obvious. What happens when Robert dies and Joff takes the throne? And the sooner that comes to pass, the safer we’ll all be. My husband grows more restless every day.”