

Catelyn shifted uneasily in her seat. "The dwarf is here, and not by choice. Chains or no, he is my prisoner. Lysa will want him to answer for his crimes no less than I. It was her own lord husband the Lannisters murdered, and her own letter that first warned us against them."

Brynden Blackfish gave her a weary smile. "I hope you are right, child," he sighed, in tones that said she was wrong.

The sun was well to the west by the time the slope began to flatten beneath the hooves of their horses. The road widened and grew straight, and for the first time Catelyn noticed wildflowers and grasses growing. Once they reached the valley floor, the going was faster and they made good time, cantering through verdant greenwoods and sleepy little hamlets, past orchards and golden wheat fields, splashing across a dozen sunlit streams. Her uncle sent a standard-bearer ahead of them, a double banner flying from his staff; the moon-and-falcon of House Arryn on high, and below it his own black fish. Farm wagons and merchants' carts and riders from lesser houses moved aside to let them pass.

Even so, it was full dark before they reached the stout castle that stood at the foot of the Giant's Lance. Torches flickered atop its ramparts, and the horned moon danced upon the dark waters of its moat. The drawbridge was up and the portcullis down, but Catelyn saw lights burning in the gatehouse and spilling from the windows of the square towers beyond.

"The Gates of the Moon," her uncle said as the party drew rein. His standard-bearer rode to the edge of the moat to hail the men in the gatehouse. "Lord Nestor's seat. He should be expecting us. Look up."

Catelyn raised her eyes, up and up and up. At first all she saw was stone and trees, the looming mass of the great mountain shrouded in night, as black as a starless sky. Then she noticed the glow of distant fires well above them; a tower keep, built upon the steep side of the mountain, its lights like orange eyes staring down from above. Above that was another, higher and more distant, and still higher a third, no more than a flickering spark in the sky. And finally, up where the falcons soared, a flash of white in the moonlight. Vertigo washed over her as she stared upward at the pale towers, so far above.

"The Eyrie," she heard Marillion murmur, awed.

The sharp voice of Tyrion Lannister broke in. "The Arryns must not be overfond of company. If you're planning to make us climb that mountain in the dark, I'd rather you kill me here."

"We'll spend the night here and make the ascent on the morrow," Brynden told him.

"I can scarcely wait," the dwarf replied. "How do we get up there? I've no experience at riding goats."

"Mules," Brynden said, smiling.

"There are steps carved into the mountain," Catelyn said. Ned had told her about them when he talked of his youth here with Robert Baratheon and Jon Arryn.

Her uncle nodded. "It is too dark to see them, but the steps are there. Too steep and narrow for horses, but mules can manage them most of the way. The path is guarded by three waycastles, Stone and Snow and Sky. The mules will take us as far up as Sky."

Tyrion Lannister glanced up doubtfully. "And beyond that?"