



CATELYN

Ser Desmond Grell had served House Tully all his life. He had been a squire when Catelyn was born, a knight when she learned to walk and ride and swim, master-at-arms by the day that she was wed. He had seen Lord Hoster's little Cat become a young woman, a great lord's lady, mother to a king. *And now he has seen me become a traitor as well.*

Her brother Edmure had named Ser Desmond castellan of Riverrun when he rode off to battle, so it fell to him to deal with her crime. To ease his discomfort he brought her father's steward with him, dour Utherydes Wayn. The two men stood and looked at her; Ser Desmond stout, red-faced, embarrassed, Utherydes grave, gaunt, melancholy. Each waited for the other to speak. *They have given their lives to my father's service, and I have repaid them with disgrace,* Catelyn thought wearily.

"Your sons," Ser Desmond said at last. "Maester Vyman told us. The poor lads. Terrible. Terrible. But . . ."

"We share your grief, my lady," said Utherydes Wayn. "All Riverrun mourns with you, but . . ."

"The news must have driven you mad," Ser Desmond broke in, "a madness of grief, a *mother's* madness, men will understand. You did not know . . ."

"I did," Catelyn said firmly. "I understood what I was doing and knew it was treasonous. If you fail to punish me, men will believe that we connived

together to free Jaime Lannister. It was mine own act and mine alone, and I alone must answer for it. Put me in the Kingslayer's empty irons, and I will wear them proudly, if that is how it must be."

"Fetters?" The very word seemed to shock poor Ser Desmond. "For the king's mother, my lord's own daughter? Impossible."

"Mayhaps," said the steward Utherydes Wayn, "my lady would consent to be confined to her chambers until Ser Edmure returns. A time alone, to pray for her murdered sons?"

"Confined, aye," Ser Desmond said. "Confined to a tower cell, that would serve."

"If I am to be confined, let it be in my father's chambers, so I might comfort him in his last days."

Ser Desmond considered a moment. "Very well. You shall lack no comfort nor courtesy, but freedom of the castle is denied you. Visit the sept as you need, but otherwise remain in Lord Hoster's chambers until Lord Edmure returns."

"As you wish." Her brother was no lord while their father lived, but Catelyn did not correct him. "Set a guard on me if you must, but I give you my pledge that I shall attempt no escape."

Ser Desmond nodded, plainly glad to be done with his distasteful task, but sad-eyed Utherydes Wayn lingered a moment after the castellan took his leave. "It was a grave thing you did, my lady, but for naught. Ser Desmond has sent Ser Robin Ryger after them, to bring back the Kingslayer . . . or failing that, his head."

Catelyn had expected no less. *May the Warrior give strength to your sword arm, Brienne*, she prayed. She had done all she could; nothing remained but to hope.

Her things were moved into her father's bedchamber, dominated by the great canopied bed she had been born in, its pillars carved in the shapes of leaping trout. Her father himself had been moved half a turn down the stair, his sickbed placed to face the triangular balcony that opened off his solar, from whence he could see the rivers that he had always loved so well.

Lord Hoster was sleeping when Catelyn entered. She went out to the balcony and stood with one hand on the rough stone balustrade. Beyond the point of the castle the swift Tumblestone joined the placid Red Fork, and she could see a long way downriver. *If a striped sail comes from the east, it will be Ser Robin returning.* For the moment the surface of the waters was empty. She thanked the gods for that, and went back inside to sit with her father.

Catelyn could not say if Lord Hoster knew that she was there, or if her presence brought him any comfort, but it gave her solace to be with him. *What would you say if you knew my crime, Father?* she wondered. *Would you have done as I did, if it were Lysa and me in the hands of our enemies? Or would you condemn me too, and call it mother's madness?*

There was a smell of death about that room; a heavy smell, sweet and foul, clinging. It reminded her of the sons that she had lost, her sweet Bran and her little Rickon, slain at the hand of Theon Greyjoy, who had been Ned's ward. She still grieved for Ned, she would always grieve for Ned, but to have her babies taken as well . . . "It is a monstrous cruel thing to lose a child," she whispered softly, more to herself than to her father.

Lord Hoster's eyes opened. "Tansy," he husked in a voice thick with pain.

He does not know me. Catelyn had grown accustomed to him taking her for her mother or her sister Lysa, but Tansy was a name strange to her. "It's Catelyn," she said. "It's Cat, Father."

"Forgive me . . . the blood . . . oh, please . . . Tansy . . ."

Could there have been another woman in her father's life? Some village maiden he had wronged when he was young, perhaps? *Could he have found comfort in some serving wench's arms after Mother died?* It was a queer thought, unsettling. Suddenly she felt as though she had not known her father at all. "Who is Tansy, my lord? Do you want me to send for her, Father? Where would I find the woman? Does she still live?"

Lord Hoster groaned. "Dead." His hand groped for hers. "You'll have others . . . sweet babes, and trueborn."

Others? Catelyn thought. *Has he forgotten that Ned is gone? Is he still talking to Tansy, or is it me now, or Lysa, or Mother?*

When he coughed, the sputum came up bloody. He clutched her fingers. “. . . be a good wife and the gods will bless you . . . sons . . . trueborn sons . . . *aaahhh*.” The sudden spasm of pain made Lord Hoster’s hand tighten. His nails dug into her hand, and he gave a muffled scream.

Maester Vyman came quickly, to mix another dose of milk of the poppy and help his lord swallow it down. Soon enough, Lord Hoster Tully had fallen back into a heavy sleep.

“He was asking after a woman,” said Cat. “Tansy.”

“Tansy?” The maester looked at her blankly.

“You know no one by that name? A serving girl, a woman from some nearby village? Perhaps someone from years past?” Catelyn had been gone from Riverrun for a very long time.

“No, my lady. I can make inquiries, if you like. Utherydes Wayn would surely know if any such person ever served at Riverrun. Tansy, did you say? The smallfolk often name their daughters after flowers and herbs.” The maester looked thoughtful. “There was a widow, I recall, she used to come to the castle looking for old shoes in need of new soles. Her name was Tansy, now that I think on it. Or was it Pansy? Some such. But she has not come for many years . . .”

“Her name was Violet,” said Catelyn, who remembered the old woman very well.

“Was it?” The maester looked apologetic. “My pardons, Lady Catelyn, but I may not stay. Ser Desmond has decreed that we are to speak to you only so far as our duties require.”

“Then you must do as he commands.” Catelyn could not blame Ser Desmond; she had given him small reason to trust her, and no doubt he feared that she might use the loyalty that many of the folk of Riverrun would still feel toward their lord’s daughter to work some further mischief. *I am free of the war, at least*, she told herself, *if only for a little while*.

After the maester had gone, she donned a woolen cloak and stepped out onto the balcony once more. Sunlight shimmered on the rivers, gilding the surface of the waters as they rolled past the castle. Catelyn shaded her eyes

against the glare, searching for a distant sail, dreading the sight of one. But there was nothing, and nothing meant that her hopes were still alive.

All that day she watched, and well into the night, until her legs ached from the standing. A raven came to the castle in late afternoon, flapping down on great black wings to the rookery. *Dark wings, dark words*, she thought, remembering the last bird that had come and the horror it had brought.

Maester Vyman returned at evenfall to minister to Lord Tully and bring Catelyn a modest supper of bread, cheese, and boiled beef with horseradish. "I spoke to Utherydes Wayn, my lady. He is quite certain that no woman by the name of Tansy has ever been at Riverrun during his service."

"There was a raven today, I saw. Has Jaime been taken again?" *Or slain, gods forbid?*

"No, my lady, we've had no word of the Kingslayer."

"Is it another battle, then? Is Edmure in difficulty? Or Robb? Please, be kind, put my fears at rest."

"My lady, I should not . . ." Vyman glanced about, as if to make certain no one else was in the room. "Lord Tywin has left the riverlands. All's quiet on the fords."

"Whence came the raven, then?"

"From the west," he answered, busying himself with Lord Hoster's bedclothes and avoiding her eyes.

"Was it news of Robb?"

He hesitated. "Yes, my lady."

"Something is wrong." She knew it from his manner. He was hiding something from her. "Tell me. Is it Robb? Is he hurt?" *Not dead, gods be good, please do not tell me that he is dead.*

"His Grace took a wound storming the Crag," Maester Vyman said, still evasive, "but writes that it is no cause for concern, and that he hopes to return soon."

"A wound? What sort of wound? How serious?"

"No cause for concern, he writes."

“All wounds concern me. Is he being cared for?”

“I am certain of it. The maester at the Crag will tend to him, I have no doubt.”

“Where was he wounded?”

“My lady, I am commanded not to speak with you. I am sorry.” Gathering up his potions, Vyman made a hurried exit, and once again Catelyn was left alone with her father. The milk of the poppy had done its work, and Lord Hoster was sunk in heavy sleep. A thin line of spittle ran down from one corner of his open mouth to dampen his pillow. Catelyn took a square of linen and wiped it away gently. When she touched him, Lord Hoster moaned. “Forgive me,” he said, so softly she could scarcely hear the words. “Tansy . . . blood . . . the blood . . . gods be kind . . .”

His words disturbed her more than she could say, though she could make no sense of them. *Blood*, she thought. *Must it all come back to blood? Father, who was this woman, and what did you do to her that needs so much forgiveness?*

That night Catelyn slept fitfully, haunted by formless dreams of her children, the lost and the dead. Well before the break of day, she woke with her father’s words echoing in her ears. *Sweet babes, and trueborn . . . why would he say that, unless . . . could he have fathered a bastard on this woman Tansy?* She could not believe it. Her brother Edmure, yes; it would not have surprised her to learn that Edmure had a dozen natural children. But not her father, not Lord Hoster Tully, never.

Could Tansy be some pet name he called Lysa, the way he called me Cat? Lord Hoster had mistaken her for her sister before. *You’ll have others, he said. Sweet babes, and trueborn.* Lysa had miscarried five times, twice in the Eyrie, thrice at King’s Landing . . . but never at Riverrun, where Lord Hoster would have been at hand to comfort her. *Never, unless . . . unless she was with child, that first time . . .*

She and her sister had been married on the same day, and left in their father’s care when their new husbands had ridden off to rejoin Robert’s rebellion. Afterward, when their moon blood did not come at the accustomed time, Lysa had gushed happily of the sons she was certain they carried. “Your son will be heir to Winterfell and mine to the Eyrie. Oh,

they'll be the best of friends, like your Ned and Lord Robert. They'll be more brothers than cousins, truly, I just know it." *She was so happy.*

But Lysa's blood had come not long after, and all the joy had gone out of her. Catelyn had always thought that Lysa had simply been a little late, but if she *had* been with child . . .

She remembered the first time she gave her sister Robb to hold; small, red-faced, and squalling, but strong even then, full of life. No sooner had Catelyn placed the babe in her sister's arms than Lysa's face dissolved into tears. Hurriedly she had thrust the baby back at Catelyn and fled.

If she had lost a child before, that might explain Father's words, and much else besides . . . Lysa's match with Lord Arryn had been hastily arranged, and Jon was an old man even then, older than their father. *An old man without an heir.* His first two wives had left him childless, his brother's son had been murdered with Brandon Stark in King's Landing, his gallant cousin had died in the Battle of the Bells. He needed a young wife if House Arryn was to continue . . . *a young wife known to be fertile.*

Catelyn rose, threw on a robe, and descended the steps to the darkened solar to stand over her father. A sense of helpless dread filled her. "Father," she said, "Father, I know what you did." She was no longer an innocent bride with a head full of dreams. She was a widow, a traitor, a grieving mother, and wise, wise in the ways of the world. "You made him take her," she whispered. "Lysa was the price Jon Arryn had to pay for the swords and spears of House Tully."

Small wonder her sister's marriage had been so loveless. The Arryns were proud, and prickly of their honor. Lord Jon might wed Lysa to bind the Tullys to the cause of the rebellion, and in hopes of a son, but it would have been hard for him to love a woman who came to his bed soiled and unwilling. He would have been kind, no doubt; dutiful, yes; but Lysa needed warmth.

The next day, as she broke her fast, Catelyn asked for quill and paper and began a letter to her sister in the Vale of Arryn. She told Lysa of Bran and Rickon, struggling with the words, but mostly she wrote of their father. *His thoughts are all of the wrong he did you, now that his time grows short. Maester Vyman says he dare not make the milk of the poppy any stronger. It*

is time for Father to lay down his sword and shield. It is time for him to rest. Yet he fights on grimly, will not yield. It is for your sake, I think. He needs your forgiveness. The war has made the road from the Eyrie to Riverrun dangerous to travel, I know, but surely a strong force of knights could see you safely through the Mountains of the Moon? A hundred men, or a thousand? And if you cannot come, will you not write him at least? A few words of love, so he might die in peace? Write what you will, and I shall read it to him, and ease his way.

Even as she set the quill aside and asked for sealing wax, Catelyn sensed that the letter was like to be too little and too late. Maester Vyman did not believe Lord Hoster would linger long enough for a raven to reach the Eyrie and return. *Though he has said much the same before . . .* Tully men did not surrender easily, no matter the odds. After she entrusted the parchment to the maester's care, Catelyn went to the sept and lit a candle to the Father Above for her own father's sake, a second to the Crone, who had let the first raven into the world when she peered through the door of death, and a third to the Mother, for Lysa and all the children they had both lost.

Later that day, as she sat at Lord Hoster's bedside with a book, reading the same passage over and over, she heard the sound of loud voices and a trumpet's blare. *Ser Robin*, she thought at once, flinching. She went to the balcony, but there was nothing to be seen out on the rivers, but she could hear the voices more clearly from outside, the sound of many horses, the clink of armor, and here and there a cheer. Catelyn made her way up the winding stairs to the roof of the keep. *Ser Desmond did not forbid me the roof*, she told herself as she climbed.

The sounds were coming from the far side of the castle, by the main gate. A knot of men stood before the portcullis as it rose in jerks and starts, and in the fields beyond, outside the castle, were several hundred riders. When the wind blew, it lifted their banners, and she trembled in relief at the sight of the leaping trout of Riverrun. *Edmure*.

It was two hours before he saw fit to come to her. By then the castle rang to the sound of noisy reunions as men embraced the women and children they had left behind. Three ravens had risen from the rookery, black wings beating at the air as they took flight. Catelyn watched them from her father's balcony. She had washed her hair, changed her clothing, and

prepared herself for her brother's reproaches . . . but even so, the waiting was hard.

When at last she heard sounds outside her door, she sat and folded her hands in her lap. Dried red mud spattered Edmure's boots, greaves, and surcoat. To look at him, you would never know he had won his battle. He was thin and drawn, with pale cheeks, unkempt beard, and too-bright eyes.

"Edmure," Catelyn said, worried, "you look unwell. Has something happened? Have the Lannisters crossed the river?"

"I threw them back. Lord Tywin, Gregor Clegane, Addam Marbrand, I turned them away. Stannis, though . . ." He grimaced.

"Stannis? What of Stannis?"

"He lost the battle at King's Landing," Edmure said unhappily. "His fleet was burned, his army routed."

A Lannister victory was ill tidings, but Catelyn could not share her brother's obvious dismay. She still had nightmares about the shadow she had seen slide across Renly's tent and the way the blood had come flowing out through the steel of his gorget. "Stannis was no more a friend than Lord Tywin."

"You do not understand. Highgarden has declared for Joffrey. Dorne as well. All the south." His mouth tightened. "And *you* see fit to loose the Kingslayer. You had no right."

"I had a mother's right." Her voice was calm, though the news about Highgarden was a savage blow to Robb's hopes. She could not think about that now, though.

"No right," Edmure repeated. "He was Robb's captive, your *king's* captive, and Robb charged me to keep him safe."

"Brienne will keep him safe. She swore it on her sword."

"That *woman*?"

"She will deliver Jaime to King's Landing, and bring Arya and Sansa back to us safely."

"Cersei will never give them up."

“Not Cersei. Tyrion. He swore it, in open court. And the Kingslayer swore it as well.”

“Jaime’s word is worthless. As for the Imp, it’s said he took an axe in the head during the battle. He’ll be dead before your Brienne reaches King’s Landing, if she ever does.”

“Dead?” *Could the gods truly be so merciless?* She had made Jaime swear a hundred oaths, but it was his brother’s promise she had pinned her hopes on.

Edmure was blind to her distress. “Jaime was *my* charge, and I mean to have him back. I’ve sent ravens—”

“Ravens to whom? How many?”

“Three,” he said, “so the message will be certain to reach Lord Bolton. By river or road, the way from Riverrun to King’s Landing must needs take them close by Harrenhal.”

“Harrenhal.” The very word seemed to darken the room. Horror thickened her voice as she said, “Edmure, do you know what you have done?”

“Have no fear, I left your part out. I wrote that Jaime had escaped, and offered a thousand dragons for his recapture.”

Worse and worse, Catelyn thought in despair. *My brother is a fool.* Unbidden, unwanted, tears filled her eyes. “If this was an escape,” she said softly, “and not an exchange of hostages, why should the Lannisters give my daughters to Brienne?”

“It will never come to that. The Kingslayer will be returned to us, I have made certain of it.”

“All you have made certain is that I shall never see my daughters again. Brienne might have gotten him to King’s Landing safely . . . *so long as no one was hunting for them.* But now . . .” Catelyn could not go on. “Leave me, Edmure.” She had no right to command him, here in the castle that would soon be his, yet her tone would brook no argument. “Leave me to Father and my grief, I have no more to say to you. Go. *Go.*” All she wanted was to lie down, to close her eyes and sleep, and pray no dreams would come.