

CATELYN

Two days ride from Riverrun, a scout spied them watering their horses beside a muddy stream. Catelyn had never been so glad to see the twin tower badge of House Frey.

When she asked him to lead them to her uncle, he said, “The Blackfish is gone west with the king, my lady. Martyn Rivers commands the outriders in his stead.”

“I see.” She had met Rivers at the Twins; a baseborn son of Lord Walder Frey, half brother to Ser Perwyn. It did not surprise her to learn that Robb had struck at the heart of Lannister power; clearly he had been contemplating just that when he sent her away to treat with Renly. “Where is Rivers now?”

“His camp is two hours ride, my lady.”

“Take us to him,” she commanded. Brienne helped her back into her saddle, and they set out at once.

“Have you come from Bitterbridge, my lady?” the scout asked.

“No.” She had not dared. With Renly dead, Catelyn had been uncertain of the reception she might receive from his young widow and her protectors. Instead she had ridden through the heart of the war, through fertile riverlands turned to blackened desert by the fury of the Lannisters, and each night her scouts brought back tales that made her ill. “Lord Renly is slain,” she added.

“We’d hoped that tale was some Lannister lie, or—”

“Would that it were. My brother commands in Riverrun?”

“Yes, my lady. His Grace left Ser Edmure to hold Riverrun and guard his rear.”

Gods grant him the strength to do so, Catelyn thought. And the wisdom as well. “Is there word from Robb in the west?”

“You have not heard?” The man seemed surprised. “His Grace won a great victory at Oxcross. Ser Stafford Lannister is dead, his host scattered.”

Ser Wendel Manderly gave a *whoop* of pleasure, but Catelyn only nodded. Tomorrow’s trials concerned her more than yesterday’s triumphs.

Martyn Rivers had made his camp in the shell of a shattered holdfast, beside a roofless stable and a hundred fresh graves. He went to one knee when Catelyn dismounted. “Well met, my lady. Your brother charged us to keep an eye out for your party, and escort you back to Riverrun in all haste should we come upon you.”

Catelyn scarce liked the sound of that. “Is it my father?”

“No, my lady. Lord Hoster is unchanged.” Rivers was a ruddy man with scant resemblance to his half brothers. “It is only that we feared you might chance upon Lannister scouts. Lord Tywin has left Harrenhal and marches west with all his power.”

“Rise,” she told Rivers, frowning. Stannis Baratheon would soon be on the march as well, gods help them all. “How long until Lord Tywin is upon us?”

“Three days, perhaps four, it is hard to know. We have eyes out along all the roads, but it would be best not to linger.”

Nor did they. Rivers broke his camp quickly and saddled up beside her, and they set off again, near fifty strong now, flying beneath the direwolf, the leaping trout, the twin towers.

Her men wanted to hear more of Robb’s victory at Oxcross, and Rivers obliged. “There’s a singer come to Riverrun, calls himself Rymund the Rhymer, he’s made a song of the fight. Doubtless you’ll hear it sung tonight, my lady. ‘Wolf in the Night’ this Rymund calls it.” He went on to tell how the remnants of Ser Stafford’s host had fallen back on Lannisport. Without siege engines there was no way to storm Casterly Rock, so the Young Wolf was paying the Lannisters back in kind for the devastation they’d inflicted on the riverlands. Lords Karstark and Glover were raiding along the coast, Lady Mormont had captured thousands of cattle and was driving them back toward Riverrun, while the Greatjon had seized the gold

mines at Castamere, Nunn's Deep, and the Pendric Hills. Ser Wendel laughed. "Nothing's more like to bring a Lannister running than a threat to his gold."

"How did the king ever take the Tooth?" Ser Perwyn Frey asked his bastard brother. "That's a hard strong keep, and it commands the hill road."

"He never took it. He slipped around it in the night. It's said the direwolf showed him the way, that Grey Wind of his. The beast sniffed out a goat track that wound down a defile and up along beneath a ridge, a crooked and stony way, yet wide enough for men riding single file. The Lannisters in their watchtowers got not so much a glimpse of them." Rivers lowered his voice. "There's some say that after the battle, the king cut out Stafford Lannister's heart and fed it to the wolf."

"I would not believe such tales," Catelyn said sharply. "My son is no savage."

"As you say, my lady. Still, it's no more than the beast deserved. That is no common wolf, that one. The Greatjon's been heard to say that the old gods of the north sent those direwolves to your children."

Catelyn remembered the day when her boys had found the pups in the late summer snows. There had been five, three male and two female for the five trueborn children of House Stark... and a sixth, white of fur and red of eye, for Ned's bastard son Jon Snow. *No common wolves*, she thought. *No indeed.*

That night as they made their camp, Brienne sought out her tent. "My lady, you are safely back among your own now, a day's ride from your brother's castle. Give me leave to go."

Catelyn should not have been surprised. The homely young woman had kept to herself all through their journey, spending most of her time with the horses, brushing out their coats and pulling stones from their shoes. She had helped Shadd cook and clean game as well, and soon proved that she could hunt as well as any. Any task Catelyn asked her to turn her hand to, Brienne had performed deftly and without complaint, and when she was spoken to she answered politely, but she never chattered, nor wept, nor laughed. She

had ridden with them every day and slept among them every night without ever truly becoming one of them.

It was the same when she was with Renly, Catelyn thought. At the feast, in the melee, even in Renly's pavilion with her brothers of the Rainbow Guard. There are walls around this one higher than Winterfell's.

"If you left us, where would you go?" Catelyn asked her.

"Back," Brienne said. "To Storm's End."

"Alone." It was not a question.

The broad face was a pool of still water, giving no hint of what might live in the depths below. "Yes."

"You mean to kill Stannis."

Brienne closed her thick callused fingers around the hilt of her sword.

The sword that had been his. "I swore a vow. Three times I swore. You heard me."

"I did," Catelyn admitted. The girl had kept the rainbow cloak when she discarded the rest of her bloodstained clothing, she knew. Brienne's own things had been left behind during their flight, and she had been forced to clothe herself in odd bits of Ser Wendel's spare garb, since no one else in their party had garments large enough to fit her. "Vows should be kept, I agree, but Stannis has a great host around him, and his own guards sworn to keep him safe."

"I am not afraid of his guards. I am as good as any of them. I should never have fled."

"Is that what troubles you, that some fool might call you craven?" She sighed. "Renly's death was no fault of yours. You served him valiantly, but when you seek to follow him into the earth, you serve no one." She stretched out a hand, to give what comfort a touch could give. "I know how hard it is—"

Brienne shook off her hand. "No one knows."

"You're wrong," Catelyn said sharply. "Every morning, when I wake, I remember that Ned is gone. I have no skill with swords, but that does not

mean that I do not dream of riding to King's Landing and wrapping my hands around Cersei Lannister's white throat and squeezing until her face turns black."

The Beauty raised her eyes, the only part of her that was truly beautiful. "If you dream that, why would you seek to hold me back? Is it because of what Stannis said at the parley?"

Was it? Catelyn glanced across the camp. Two men were walking sentry, spears in hand. "I was taught that good men must fight evil in this world, and Renly's death was evil beyond all doubt. Yet I was also taught that the gods make kings, not the swords of men. If Stannis is our rightful king—"

"He's not. Robert was never the rightful king either, even Renly said as much. Jaime Lannister *murdered* the rightful king, after Robert killed his lawful heir on the Trident. Where were the gods then? The gods don't care about men, no more than kings care about peasants."

"A good king does care."

"Lord Renly... His Grace, he... he would have been the *best* king, my lady, he was so good, he..."

"He is gone, Brienne," she said, as gently as she could. "Stannis and Joffrey remain... and so does my son."

"He wouldn't... you'd never make a *peace* with Stannis, would you? Bend the knee? You wouldn't..."

"I will tell you true, Brienne. I do not know. My son may be a king, but I am no queen... only a mother who would keep her children safe, however she could."

"I am not made to be a mother. I need to fight."

"Then fight... but for the living, not the dead. Renly's enemies are Robb's enemies as well."

Brienne stared at the ground and shuffled her feet. "I do not know your son, my lady." She looked up. "I could serve you. If you would have me."

Catelyn was startled. "Why me?"

The question seemed to trouble Brienne. “You helped me. In the pavilion... when they thought that I had... that I had...”

“You were innocent.”

“Even so, you did not have to do that. You could have let them kill me. I was nothing to you.”

Perhaps I did not want to be the only one who knew the dark truth of what had happened there, Catelyn thought. “Brienne, I have taken many wellborn ladies into my service over the years, but never one like you. I am no battle commander.”

“No, but you have courage. Not battle courage perhaps but... I don’t know... a kind of *woman’s* courage. And I think, when the time comes, you will not try and hold me back. Promise me that. That you will not hold me back from Stannis.”

Catelyn could still hear Stannis saying that Robb’s turn too would come in time. It was like a cold breath on the back of her neck. “When the time comes, I will not hold you back.”

The tall girl knelt awkwardly, unsheathed Renly’s longsword, and laid it at her feet. “Then I am yours, my lady. Your liege man, or... whatever you would have me be. I will shield your back and keep your counsel and give my life for yours, if need be. I swear it by the old gods and the new.”

“And I vow that you shall always have a place by my hearth and meat and mead at my table, and pledge to ask no service of you that might bring you into dishonor. I swear it by the old gods and the new. Arise.” As she clasped the other woman’s hands between her own, Catelyn could not help but smile. *How many times did I watch Ned accept a man’s oath of service?* She wondered what he would think if he could see her now.

They forded the Red Fork late the next day, upstream of Riverrun where the river made a wide loop and the waters grew muddy and shallow. The crossing was guarded by a mixed force of archers and pikemen wearing the eagle badge of the Mallisters. When they saw Catelyn’s banners, they emerged from behind their sharpened stakes and sent a man over from the far bank to lead her party across. “Slow and careful like, milady,” he

warned as he took the bridle of her horse. “We’ve planted iron spikes under the water, y’see, and there’s caltrops scattered among them rocks there. It’s the same on all the fords, by your brother’s command.”

Edmure thinks to fight here. The realization gave her a queasy feeling in the bowels, but she held her tongue.

Between the Red Fork and the Tumblestone, they joined a stream of smallfolk making for the safety of Riverrun. Some were driving animals before them, others pulling wayns, but they made way as Catelyn rode past, and cheered her with cries of “Tully!” or “Stark!” Half a mile from the castle, she passed through a large encampment where the scarlet banner of the Blackwoods waved above the lord’s tent. Lucas took his leave of her there, to seek out his father, Lord Tytos. The rest rode on.

Catelyn spied a second camp strung out along the bank north of the Tumblestone, familiar standards flapping in the wind—Marq Piper’s dancing maiden, Darry’s plowman, the twining red-and-white snakes of the Paeges. They were all her father’s bannermen, lords of the Trident. Most had left Riverrun before she had, to defend their own lands. If they were here again, it could only mean that Edmure had called them back. *Gods save us, it’s true, he means to offer battle to Lord Tywin.*

Something dark was dangling against the walls of Riverrun, Catelyn saw from a distance. When she rode close, she saw dead men hanging from the battlements, slumped at the ends of long ropes with hempen nooses tight around their necks, their faces swollen and black. The crows had been at them, but their crimson cloaks still showed bright against the sandstone walls.

“They have hanged some Lannisters,” Hal Mollen observed.

“A pretty sight,” Ser Wendel Manderly said cheerfully.

“Our friends have begun without us,” Perwyn Frey jested. The others laughed, all but Brienne, who gazed up at the row of bodies unblinking, and neither spoke nor smiled.

If they have slain the Kingslayer, then my daughters are dead as well. Catelyn spurred her horse to a canter. Hal Mollen and Robin Flint raced

past at a gallop, hallooing to the gatehouse. The guards on the walls had doubtless spied her banners some time ago, for the portcullis was up as they approached.

Edmure rode out from the castle to meet her, surrounded by three of her father's sworn men—great-bellied Ser Desmond Grell the master-at-arms, Utherydes Wayn the steward, and Ser Robin Ryger, Riverrun's big bald captain of guards. They were all three of an age with Lord Hoster, men who had spent their lives in her father's service. *Old men*, Catelyn realized.

Edmure wore a blue-and-red cloak over a tunic embroidered with silver fish. From the look of him, he had not shaved since she rode south; his beard was a fiery bush. "Cat, it is good to have you safely back. When we heard of Renly's death, we feared for your life. And Lord Tywin is on the march as well."

"So I am told. How fares our father?"

"One day he seems stronger, the next..." He shook his head. "He's asked for you. I did not know what to tell him."

"I will go to him soon," she vowed. "Has there been word from Storm's End since Renly died? Or from Bitterbridge?" No ravens came to men on the road, and Catelyn was anxious to know what had happened behind her.

"Nothing from Bitterbridge. From Storm's End, three birds from the castellan, Ser Cortnay Penrose, all carrying the same plea. Stannis has him surrounded by land and sea. He offers his allegiance to whatsoever king will break the siege. He fears for the boy, he says. What boy would that be, do you know?"

"Edric Storm," Brienne told them. "Robert's bastard son."

Edmure looked at her curiously. "Stannis has sworn that the garrison might go free, unharmed, provided they yield the castle within the fortnight and deliver the boy into his hands, but Ser Cortnay will not consent."

He risks all for a baseborn boy whose blood is not even his own, Catelyn thought. "Did you send him an answer?"

Edmure shook his head. "Why, when we have neither help nor hope to offer? And Stannis is no enemy of ours."

Ser Robin Ryger spoke. "My lady, can you tell us the manner of Lord Renly's death? The tales we've heard have been queer."

"Cat," her brother said, "some say *you* killed Renly. Others claim it was some southron woman." His glance lingered on Brienne.

"My king was murdered," the girl said quietly, "and not by Lady Catelyn. I swear it on my sword, by the gods old and new."

"This is Brienne of Tarth, the daughter of Lord Selwyn the Evenstar, who served in Renly's Rainbow Guard," Catelyn told them. "Brienne, I am honored to acquaint you with my brother Ser Edmure Tully, heir to Riverrun. His steward Utherydes Wayn. Ser Robin Ryger and Ser Desmond Grell."

"Honored," said Ser Desmond. The others echoed him. The girl flushed, embarrassed even at this commonplace courtesy. If Edmure thought her a curious sort of lady, at least he had the grace not to say so.

"Brienne was with Renly when he was killed, as was I," said Catelyn, "but we had no part in his death." She did not care to speak of the shadow, here in the open with men all around, so she waved a hand at the bodies. "Who are these men you've hanged?"

Edmure glanced up uncomfortably. "They came with Ser Cleos when he brought the queen's answer to our peace offer."

Catelyn was shocked. "You've killed *envoys*?"

"False envoys," Edmure declared. "They pledged me their peace and surrendered their weapons, so I allowed them freedom of the castle, and for three nights they ate my meat and drank my mead whilst I talked with Ser Cleos. On the fourth night, they tried to free the Kingslayer." He pointed up. "That big brute killed two guards with naught but those ham hands of his, caught them by the throats and smashed their skulls together while that skinny lad beside him was opening Lannister's cell with a bit of wire, gods curse him. The one on the end was some sort of damned mummer. He used my own voice to command that the River Gate be opened. The guardsmen swear to it, Enger and Delp and Long Lew, all three. If you ask me, the man

sounded nothing like me, and yet the oafs were raising the portcullis all the same.”

This was the Imp’s work, Catelyn suspected; it stank of the same sort of cunning he had displayed at the Eyrie. Once, she would have named Tyrion the least dangerous of the Lannisters. Now she was not so certain. “How is it you caught them?”

“Ah, as it happened, I was not in the castle. I’d crossed the Tumblestone to, ah...”

“You were whoring or wenching. Get on with the tale.”

Edmure’s cheeks flamed as red as his beard. “It was the hour before dawn, and I was only then returning. When Long Lew saw my boat and recognized me, he finally thought to wonder who was standing below barking commands, and raised a cry.”

“Tell me the Kingslayer was retaken.”

“Yes, though not easily. Jaime got hold of a sword, slew Poul Pernford and Ser Desmond’s squire Myles, and wounded Delp so badly that Maester Vyman fears he’ll soon die as well. It was a bloody mess. At the sound of steel, some of the other red cloaks rushed to join him, barehand or no. I hanged those beside the four who freed him, and threw the rest in the dungeons. Jaime too. We’ll have no more escapes from that one. He’s down in the dark this time, chained hand and foot and bolted to the wall.”

“And Cleos Frey?”

“He swears he knew naught of the plot. Who can say? The man is half Lannister, half Frey, and all liar. I put him in Jaime’s old tower cell.”

“You say he brought terms?”

“If you can call them that. You’ll like them no more than I did, I promise.”

“Can we hope for no help from the south, Lady Stark?” asked Utherydes Wayn, her father’s steward. “This charge of incest... Lord Tywin does not suffer such slights lightly. He will seek to wash the stain from his daughter’s name with the blood of her accuser, Lord Stannis must see that. He has no choice but to make common cause with us.”

Stannis has made common cause with a power greater and darker. “Let us speak of these matters later.” Catelyn trotted over the drawbridge, putting the grisly row of dead Lannisters behind her. Her brother kept pace. As they rode out into the bustle of Riverrun’s upper bailey, a naked toddler ran in front of the horses. Catelyn jerked her reins hard to avoid him, glancing about in dismay. Hundreds of smallfolk had been admitted to the castle, and allowed to erect crude shelters against the walls. Their children were everywhere underfoot, and the yard teemed with their cows, sheep, and chickens. “Who are all these folk?”

“My people,” Edmure answered. “They were afraid.”

Only my sweet brother would crowd all these useless mouths into a castle that might soon be under siege. Catelyn knew that Edmure had a soft heart; sometimes she thought his head was even softer. She loved him for it, yet still...

“Can Robb be reached by raven?”

“He’s in the field, my lady,” Ser Desmond replied. “The bird would have no way to find him.”

Utherydes Wayn coughed. “Before he left us, the young king instructed us to send you on to the Twins upon your return, Lady Stark. He asks that you learn more of Lord Walder’s daughters, to help him select his bride when the time comes.”

“We’ll provide you with fresh mounts and provisions,” her brother promised. “You’ll want to refresh yourself before—”

“I’ll want to stay,” Catelyn said, dismounting. She had no intention of leaving Riverrun and her dying father to pick Robb’s wife for him. *Robb wants me safe, I cannot fault him for that, but his pretext is growing threadbare.* “Boy,” she called, and an urchin from the stables ran out to take the reins of her horse.

Edmure swung down from his saddle. He was a head taller than she was, but he would always be her little brother. “Cat,” he said unhappily, “Lord Tywin is coming—”

“He is making for the west, to defend his own lands. If we close our gates and shelter behind the walls, we can watch him pass with safety.”

“This is Tully land,” Edmure declared. “If Tywin Lannister thinks to cross it unbloodied, I mean to teach him a hard lesson.”

The same lesson you taught his son? Her brother could be stubborn as river rock when his pride was touched, but neither of them was likely to forget how Ser Jaime had cut Edmure’s host to bloody pieces the last time he had offered battle. “We have nothing to gain and everything to lose by meeting Lord Tywin in the field,” Catelyn said tactfully.

“The yard is not the place to discuss my battle plans.”

“As you will. Where shall we go?”

Her brother’s face darkened. For a moment she thought he was about to lose his temper with her, but finally he snapped, “The godswood. If you will insist.”

She followed him along a gallery to the godswood gate. Edmure’s anger had always been a sulky, sullen thing. Catelyn was sorry she had wounded him, but the matter was too important for her to concern herself with his pride. When they were alone beneath the trees, Edmure turned to face her.

“You do not have the strength to meet the Lannisters in the field,” she said bluntly.

“When all my strength is marshaled, I should have eight thousand foot and three thousand horse,” Edmure said.

“Which means Lord Tywin will have near twice your numbers.”

“Robb’s won his battles against worse odds,” Edmure replied, “and I have a plan. You’ve forgotten Roose Bolton. Lord Tywin defeated him on the Green Fork, but failed to pursue. When Lord Tywin went to Harrenhal, Bolton took the ruby ford and the crossroads. He has ten thousand men. I’ve sent word to Helman Tallhart to join him with the garrison Robb left at the Twins—”

“Edmure, Robb left those men to *hold* the Twins and make certain Lord Walder keeps faith with us.”

“He has,” Edmure said stubbornly. “The Freys fought bravely in the Whispering Wood, and old Ser Stevron died at Oxcross, we hear. Ser Ryman and Black Walder and the rest are with Robb in the west, Martyn has been of great service scouting, and Ser Perwyn helped see you safe to Renly. Gods be good, how much more can we ask of them? Robb’s betrothed to one of Lord Walder’s daughters, and Roose Bolton wed another, I hear. And haven’t you taken two of his grandsons to be fostered at Winterfell?”

“A ward can easily become a hostage, if need be.” She had not known that Ser Stevron was dead, nor of Bolton’s marriage.

“If we’re two hostages to the good, all the more reason Lord Walder dare not play us false. Bolton needs Frey’s men, and Ser Helman’s as well. I’ve commanded him to retake Harrenhal.”

“That’s like to be a bloody business.”

“Yes, but once the castle falls, Lord Tywin will have no safe retreat. My own levies will defend the fords of Red Fork against his crossing. If he attacks across the river, he’ll end as Rhaegar did when he tried to cross the Trident. If he holds back, he’ll be caught between Riverrun and Harrenhal, and when Robb returns from the west we can finish him for good and all.”

Her brother’s voice was full of brusque confidence, but Catelyn found herself wishing that Robb had not taken her uncle Brynden west with him. The Blackfish was the veteran of half a hundred battles; Edmure was the veteran of one, and that one lost.

“The plan’s a good one,” he concluded. “Lord Tytos says so, and Lord Jonos as well. When did Blackwood and Bracken agree about *anything* that was not certain, I ask you?”

“Be that as it may.” She was suddenly weary. Perhaps she was wrong to oppose him. Perhaps it was a splendid plan, and her misgivings only a woman’s fears. She wished Ned were here, or her uncle Brynden, or... “Have you asked Father about this?”

“Father is in no state to weigh strategies. Two days ago he was making plans for your marriage to Brandon Stark! Go see him yourself if you do

not believe me. This plan will work, Cat, you'll see."

"I hope so, Edmure. I truly do." She kissed him on the cheek, to let him know she meant it, and went to find her father.

Lord Hoster Tully was much as she had left him—abed, haggard, flesh pale and clammy. The room smelled of sickness, a cloying odor made up in equal parts of stale sweat and medicine. When she pulled back the drapes, her father gave a low moan, and his eyes fluttered open. He stared at her as if he could not comprehend who she was or what she wanted.

"Father." She kissed him. "I am returned."

He seemed to know her then. "You've come," he whispered faintly, lips barely moving.

"Yes," she said. "Robb sent me south, but I hurried back."

"South... where... is the Eyrie south, sweetling? I don't recall... oh, dear heart, I was afraid... have you forgiven me, child?" Tears ran down his cheeks.

"You've done nothing that needs forgiveness, Father." She stroked his limp white hair and felt his brow. The fever still burned him from within, despite all the maester's potions.

"It was best," her father whispered. "Jon's a good man, good... strong, kind... take care of you... he will... and well born, listen to me, you must, I'm your father... your father... you'll wed when Cat does, yes you *will*..."

He thinks I'm Lysa, Catelyn realized. Gods be good, he talks as if we were not married yet.

Her father's hands clutched at hers, fluttering like two frightened white birds. "That stripling... wretched boy... not speak that name to me, your duty... your mother, she would..." Lord Hoster cried as a spasm of pain washed over him. "Oh, gods forgive me, forgive me, *forgive* me. My medicine..."

And then Maester Vyman was there, holding a cup to his lips. Lord Hoster sucked at the thick white potion as eager as a babe at the breast, and Catelyn could see peace settle over him once more. "He'll sleep now, my lady," the maester said when the cup was empty. The milk of the poppy had

left a thick white film around her father's mouth. Maester Vyman wiped it away with a sleeve.

Catelyn could watch no more. Hoster Tully had been a strong man, and proud. It hurt her to see him reduced to this. She went out to the terrace. The yard below was crowded with refugees and chaotic with their noises, but beyond the walls the rivers flowed clean and pure and endless. *Those are his rivers, and soon he will return to them for his last voyage.*

Maester Vyman had followed her out. "My lady," he said softly, "I cannot keep the end at bay much longer. We ought send a rider after his brother. Ser Brynden would wish to be here."

"Yes," Catelyn said, her voice thick with her grief.

"And the Lady Lysa as well, perhaps?"

"Lysa will not come."

"If you wrote her yourself, perhaps..."

"I will put some words to paper, if that please you." She wondered who Lysa's "wretched stripling" had been. Some young squire or hedge knight, like as not... though by the vehemence with which Lord Hoster had opposed him, he might have been a tradesman's son or baseborn apprentice, even a singer. Lysa had always been too fond of singers. *I must not blame her. Jon Arryn was twenty years older than our father, however noble.*

The tower her brother had set aside for her use was the very same that she and Lysa had shared as maids. It would feel good to sleep on a featherbed again, with a warm fire in the hearth; when she was rested the world would seem less bleak.

But outside her chambers she found Utherydes Wayn waiting with two women clad in grey, their faces cowed save for their eyes. Catelyn knew at once why they were here. "*Ned?*"

The sisters lowered their gaze. Utherydes said, "Ser Cleos brought him from King's Landing, my lady."

"Take me to him," she commanded.

They had laid him out on a trestle table and covered him with a banner, the white banner of House Stark with its grey direwolf sigil. "I would look

on him,” Catelyn said.

“Only the bones remain, my lady.”

“I would look on him,” she repeated.

One of the silent sisters turned down the banner.

Bones, Catelyn thought. *This is not Ned, this is not the man I loved, the father of my children.* His hands were clasped together over his chest, skeletal fingers curled about the hilt of some longsword, but they were not Ned’s hands, so strong and full of life. They had dressed the bones in Ned’s surcoat, the fine white velvet with the direwolf badge over the heart, but nothing remained of the warm flesh that had pillowed her head so many nights, the arms that had held her. The head had been rejoined to the body with fine silver wire, but one skull looks much like another, and in those empty hollows she found no trace of her lord’s dark grey eyes, eyes that could be soft as a fog or hard as stone. *They gave his eyes to crows*, she remembered.

Catelyn turned away. “That is not his sword.”

“Ice was not returned to us, my lady,” Utherydes said. “Only Lord Eddard’s bones.”

“I suppose I must thank the queen for even that much.”

“Thank the Imp, my lady. It was his doing.”

One day I will thank them all. “I am grateful for your service, sisters,” Catelyn said, “but I must lay another task upon you. Lord Eddard was a Stark, and his bones must be laid to rest beneath Winterfell.” *They will make a statue of him, a stone likeness that will sit in the dark with a direwolf at his feet and a sword across his knees.* “Make certain the sisters have fresh horses, and aught else they need for the journey,” she told Utherydes Wayn. “Hal Mollen will escort them back to Winterfell, it is his place as captain of guards.” She gazed down at the bones that were all that remained of her lord and love. “Now leave me, all of you. I would be alone with Ned tonight.”

The women in grey bowed their heads. *The silent sisters do not speak to the living*, Catelyn remembered dully, *but some say they can talk to the*

dead. And how she envied that...