

JAIME

The new Lord of Riverrun was so angry that he was shaking. “We have been deceived,” he said. “This man had played us false!” Pink spittle flew from his lips as he jabbed a finger at Edmure Tully. “I will have his head off! I rule in Riverrun, by the king’s own decree, I—”

“Emmon,” said his wife, “the Lord Commander knows about the king’s decree. Ser Edmure knows about the king’s decree. The stableboys know about the king’s decree.”

“I am the lord, and I will have his head!”

“For what crime?” Thin as he was, Edmure still looked more lordly than Emmon Frey. He wore a quilted doublet of red wool with a leaping trout embroidered on its chest. His boots were black, his breeches blue. His auburn hair had been washed and barbered, his red beard neatly trimmed. “I did all that was asked of me.”

“Oh?” Jaime Lannister had not slept since Riverrun had opened its gates, and his head was pounding. “I do not recall asking you to let Ser Brynden escape.”

“You required me to surrender my castle, not my uncle. Am I to blame if your men let him slip through their siege lines?”

Jaime was not amused. “*Where is he?*” he said, letting his irritation show. His men had searched Riverrun thrice over, and Brynden Tully was nowhere to be found.

“He never told me where he meant to go.”

“And you never asked. How did he get out?”

“Fish swim. Even black ones.” Edmure smiled.

Jaime was sorely tempted to crack him across the mouth with his golden hand. A few missing teeth would put an end to his smiles. For a man who was going to spend the rest of his life a prisoner, Edmure was entirely too pleased with himself. “We have oubliettes beneath the Casterly Rock

that fit a man as tight as a suit of armor. You can't turn in them, or sit, or reach down to your feet when the rats start gnawing at your toes. Would you care to reconsider that answer?"

Lord Edmure's smile went away. "You gave me your word that I would be treated honorably, as befits my rank."

"So you shall," said Jaime. "Nobler knights than you have died whimpering in those oubliettes, and many a high lord too. Even a king or two, if I recall my history. Your wife can have the one beside you, if you like. I would not want to part you."

"He did swim," said Edmure, sullenly. He had the same blue eyes as his sister Catelyn, and Jaime saw the same loathing there that he'd once seen in hers. "We raised the portcullis on the Water Gate. Not all the way, just three feet or so. Enough to leave a gap under the water, though the gate still appeared to be closed. My uncle is a strong swimmer. After dark, he pulled himself beneath the spikes."

And he slipped under our boom the same way, no doubt. A moonless night, bored guards, a black fish in a black river floating quietly downstream. If Ruttiger or Yew or any of their men heard a splash, they would put it down to a turtle or a trout. Edmure had waited most of the day before hauling down the direwolf of Stark in token of surrender. In the confusion of the castle changing hands, it had been the next morning before Jaime had been informed that the Blackfish was not amongst the prisoners.

He went to the window and gazed out over the river. It was a bright autumn day, and the sun was shining on the waters. *By now the Blackfish could be ten leagues downstream.*

"You have to find him," insisted Emmon Frey.

"He'll be found." Jaime spoke with a certainty he did not feel. "I have hounds and hunters sniffing after him even now." Ser Addam Marbrand was leading the search on the south side of the river, Ser Dermot of the Rainwood on the north. He had considered enlisting the riverlords as well, but Vance and Piper and their ilk were more like to help the Blackfish escape than clap him into fetters. All in all, he was not hopeful. "He may elude us for a time," he said, "but eventually he must surface."

“What if he should try and take my castle back?”

“You have a garrison of two hundred.” Too large a garrison, in truth, but Lord Emmon had an anxious disposition. At least he would have no trouble feeding them; the Blackfish had left Riverrun amply provisioned, just as he had claimed. “After the trouble Ser Brynden took to leave us, I doubt that he’ll come skulking back.” *Unless it is at the head of a band of outlaws.* He did not doubt that the Blackfish meant to continue the fight.

“This is your seat,” Lady Genna told her husband. “It is for you to hold it. If you cannot do that, put it to the torch and run back to the Rock.”

Lord Emmon rubbed his mouth. His hand came away red and slimy from the sourleaf. “To be sure. Riverrun is mine, and no man shall ever take it from me.” He gave Edmure Tully one last suspicious look, as Lady Genna drew him from the solar.

“Is there any more that you would care to tell me?” Jaime asked Edmure when the two of them were alone.

“This was my father’s solar,” said Tully. “He ruled the riverlands from here, wisely and well. He liked to sit beside that window. The light was good there, and whenever he looked up from his work he could see the river. When his eyes were tired he would have Cat read to him. Littlefinger and I built a castle out of wooden blocks once, there beside the door. You will never know how sick it makes me to see you in this room, Kingslayer. You will never know how much I despise you.”

He was wrong about that. “I have been despised by better men than you, Edmure.” Jaime called for a guard. “Take his lordship back to his tower and see that he’s fed.”

The Lord of Riverrun went silently. On the morrow, he would start west. Ser Forley Prester would command his escort; a hundred men, including twenty knights. *Best double that. Lord Beric may try to free Edmure before they reach the Golden Tooth.* Jaime did not want to have to capture Tully for a third time.

He returned to Hoster Tully’s chair, pulled over the map of the Trident, and flattened it beneath his golden hand. *Where would I go, if I were the*

Blackfish?

“Lord Commander?” A guardsman stood in the open door. “Lady Westerling and her daughter are without, as you commanded.”

Jaime shoved the map aside. “Show them in.” *At least the girl did not vanish too.* Jeyne Westerling had been Robb Stark’s queen, the girl who cost him everything. With a wolf in her belly, she could have proved more dangerous than the Blackfish.

She did not look dangerous. Jeyne was a willowy girl, no more than fifteen or sixteen, more awkward than graceful. She had narrow hips, breasts the size of apples, a mop of chestnut curls, and the soft brown eyes of a doe. *Pretty enough for a child,* Jaime decided, *but not a girl to lose a kingdom for.* Her face was puffy, and there was a scab on her forehead, half-hidden by a lock of brown hair. “What happened there?” he asked her.

The girl turned her head away. “It is nothing,” insisted her mother, a stern-faced woman in a gown of green velvet. A necklace of golden seashells looped about her long, thin neck. “She would not give up the little crown the rebel gave her, and when I tried to take it from her head the willful child fought me.”

“It was mine.” Jeyne sobbed. “You had no right. Robb had it made for me. I *loved* him.”

Her mother made to slap her, but Jaime stepped between them. “None of that,” he warned Lady Sybell. “Sit down, both of you.” The girl curled up in her chair like a frightened animal, but her mother sat stiffly, her head high. “Will you have wine?” he asked them. The girl did not answer. “No, thank you,” said her mother.

“As you will.” Jaime turned to the daughter. “I am sorry for your loss. The boy had courage, I’ll give him that. There is a question I must ask you. Are you carrying his child, my lady?”

Jeyne burst from her chair and would have fled the room if the guard at the door had not seized her by the arm. “She is not,” said Lady Sybell, as her daughter struggled to escape. “I made certain of that, as your lord father bid me.”

Jaime nodded. Tywin Lannister was not a man to overlook such details. “Unhand the girl,” he said, “I’m done with her for now.” As Jeyne fled sobbing down the stairs, he considered her mother. “House Westerling has its pardon, and your brother Rolph has been made Lord of Castamere. What else would you have of us?”

“Your lord father promised me worthy marriages for Jeyne and her younger sister. Lords or heirs, he swore to me, not younger sons nor household knights.”

Lords or heirs. To be sure. The Westerlings were an old House, and proud, but Lady Sybell herself had been born a Spicer, from a line of upjumped merchants. Her grandmother had been some sort of half-mad witch woman from the east, he seemed to recall. And the Westerlings were impoverished. Younger sons would have been the best that Sybell Spicer’s daughters could have hoped for in the ordinary course of events, but a nice fat pot of Lannister gold would make even a dead rebel’s widow look attractive to some lord. “You’ll have your marriages,” said Jaime, “but Jeyne must wait two full years before she weds again.” If the girl took another husband too soon and had a child by him, inevitably there would come whispers that the Young Wolf was the father.

“I have two sons as well,” Lady Westerling reminded him. “Rollam is with me, but Raynald was a knight and went with the rebels to the Twins. If I had known what was to happen there, I would never have allowed that.” There was a hint of reproach in her voice. “Raynald knew nought of any... of the understanding with your lord father. He may be a captive at the Twins.”

Or he may be dead. Walder Frey would not have known of *the understanding* either. “I will make inquiries. If Ser Raynald is still a captive, we’ll pay his ransom for you.”

“Mention was made of a match for him as well. A bride from Casterly Rock. Your lord father said that Raynald should have joy of him, if all went as we hoped.”

Even from the grave, Lord Tywin’s dead hand moves us all. “Joy is my late uncle Gerion’s natural daughter. A betrothal can be arranged, if that is

your wish, but any marriage will need to wait. Joy was nine or ten when last I saw her.”

“His *natural* daughter?” Lady Sybell looked as if she had swallowed a lemon. “You want a Westerling to wed a *bastard*?”

“No more than I want Joy to marry the son of some scheming turncloak bitch. She deserves better.” Jaime would happily have strangled the woman with her seashell necklace. Joy was a sweet child, albeit a lonely one; her father had been Jaime’s favorite uncle. “Your daughter is worth ten of you, my lady. You’ll leave with Edmure and Ser Forley on the morrow. Until then, you would do well to stay out of my sight.” He shouted for a guardsman, and Lady Sybell went off with her lips pressed primly together. Jaime had to wonder how much Lord Gawen knew about his wife’s scheming. *How much do we men ever know?*

When Edmure and the Westerlings departed, four hundred men rode with them; Jaime had doubled the escort again at the last moment. He rode with them a few miles, to talk with Ser Forley Prester. Though he bore a bull’s head upon his surcoat and horns upon his helm, Ser Forley could not have been less bovine. He was a short, spare, hard-bitten man. With his pinched nose, bald pate, and grizzled brown beard, he looked more like an innkeep than a knight. “We don’t know where the Blackfish is,” Jaime reminded him, “but if he can cut Edmure free, he will.”

“That will not happen, my lord.” Like most innkeeps, Ser Forley was no man’s fool. “Scouts and outriders will screen our march, and we’ll fortify our camps by night. I have picked ten men to stay with Tully day and night, my best longbowmen. If he should ride so much as a foot off the road, they will loose so many shafts at him that his own mother would take him for a goose.”

“Good.” Jaime would as lief have Tully reach Casterly Rock safely, but better dead than fled. “Best keep some archers near Lord Westerling’s daughter as well.”

Ser Forley seemed taken aback. “Gawen’s girl? She’s—”

“—the Young Wolf’s widow,” Jaime finished, “and twice as dangerous as Edmure if she were ever to escape us.”

“As you say, my lord. She will be watched.”

Jaime had to canter past the Westerlings as he rode down the column on his way back to Riverrun. Lord Gawen nodded gravely as he passed, but Lady Sybell looked through him with eyes like chips of ice. Jeyne never saw him at all. The widow rode with downcast eyes, huddled beneath a hooded cloak. Underneath its heavy folds, her clothes were finely made, but torn. *She ripped them herself, as a mark of mourning*, Jaime realized. *That could not have pleased her mother*. He found himself wondering if Cersei would tear her gown if she should ever hear that he was dead.

He did not go straight back to the castle but crossed the Tumblestone once more to call on Edwyn Frey and discuss the transfer of his great-grandfather’s prisoners. The Frey host had begun to break up within hours of Riverrun’s surrender, as Lord Walder’s bannermen and freeriders pulled up stakes to make for home. The Freys who still remained were striking camp, but he found Edwyn with his bastard uncle in the latter’s pavilion.

The two of them were huddled over a map, arguing heatedly, but they broke off when Jaime entered. “Lord Commander,” Rivers said with cold courtesy, but Edwyn blurted out, “My father’s blood is on your hands, ser.”

That took Jaime a bit aback. “How so?”

“You were the one who sent him home, were you not?”

Someone had to. “Has some ill befallen Ser Ryman?”

“Hanged with all his party,” said Walder Rivers. “The outlaws caught them two leagues south of Fairmarket.”

“Dondarrion?”

“Him, or Thoros, or this woman Stoneheart.”

Jaime frowned. Ryman Frey had been a fool, a craven, and a sot, and no one was like to miss him much, least of all his fellow Freys. If Edwyn’s dry eyes were any clue, even his own sons would not mourn him long. *Still... these outlaws are growing bold, if they dare hang Lord Walder’s heir not a day’s ride from the Twins*. “How many men did Ser Ryman have with him?” he asked.

“Three knights and a dozen men-at-arms,” said Rivers. “It is almost as if they knew that he would be returning to the Twins, and with a small escort.”

Edwyn’s mouth twisted. “My brother had a hand in this, I’ll wager. He allowed the outlaws to escape after they murdered Merrett and Petyr, and this is why. With our father dead, there’s only me left between Black Walder and the Twins.”

“You have no proof of this,” said Walder Rivers.

“I do not need proof. I know my brother.”

“Your brother is at Seagard,” Rivers insisted. “How could he have known that Ser Ryman was returning to the Twins?”

“Someone told him,” said Edwyn in a bitter tone. “He has his spies in our camp, you can be sure.”

And you have yours at Seagard. Jaime knew that the enmity between Edwyn and Black Walder ran deep, but cared not a fig which of them succeeded their great-grandfather as Lord of the Crossing.

“If you will pardon me for intruding on your grief,” he said, in a dry tone, “we have other matters to consider. When you return to the Twins, please inform Lord Walder that King Tommen requires all the captives you took at the Red Wedding.”

Ser Walder frowned. “These prisoners are valuable, ser.”

“His Grace would not ask for them if they were worthless.”

Frey and Rivers exchanged a look. Edwyn said, “My lord grandfather will expect recompense for these prisoners.”

And he’ll have it, as soon as I grow a new hand, thought Jaime. “We all have expectations,” he said mildly. “Tell me, is Ser Raynald Westerling amongst these captives?”

“The knight of seashells?” Edwyn sneered. “You’ll find that one feeding the fish at the bottom of the Green Fork.”

“He was in the yard when our men came to put the direwolf down,” said Walder Rivers. “Whalen demanded his sword and he gave it over meek

enough, but when the crossbowmen began feathering the wolf he seized Whalen's axe and cut the monster loose of the net they'd thrown over him. Whalen says he took a quarrel in his shoulder and another in the gut, but still managed to reach the wallwalk and throw himself into the river."

"He left a trail of blood on the steps," said Edwyn.

"Did you find his corpse afterward?" asked Jaime.

"We found a thousand corpses afterward. Once they've spent a few days in the river they all look much the same."

"I've heard the same is true of hanged men," said Jaime, before he took his leave.

By the next morning little remained of the Frey encampment but flies, horse dung, and Ser Ryman's gallows, standing forlorn beside the Tumblestone. His coz wanted to know what should be done with it, and with the siege equipment he had built, his rams and sows and towers and trebuchets. Daven proposed that they drag it all to Raventree and use it there. Jaime told him to put everything to the torch, starting with the gallows. "I mean to deal with Lord Tytos myself. It won't require a siege tower."

Daven grinned through his bushy beard. "Single combat, coz? Scarce seems fair. Tytos is an old grey man."

An old grey man with two hands.

That night he and Ser Ilyn fought for three hours. It was one of his better nights. If they had been in earnest, Payne only would have killed him twice. Half a dozen deaths were more the rule, and some nights were worse than that. "If I keep at this for another year, I may be as good as Peck," Jaime declared, and Ser Ilyn made that clacking sound that meant he was amused. "Come, let's drink some more of Hoster Tully's good red wine."

Wine had become a part of their nightly ritual. Ser Ilyn made the perfect drinking companion. He never interrupted, never disagreed, never complained or asked for favors or told long pointless stories. All he did was drink and listen.

“I should have the tongues removed from all my friends,” said Jaime as he filled their cups, “and from my kin as well. A silent Cersei would be sweet. Though I’d miss her tongue when we kissed.” He drank. The wine was a deep red, sweet and heavy. It warmed him going down. “I can’t remember when we first began to kiss. It was innocent at first. Until it wasn’t.” He finished the wine and set his cup aside. “Tyrion once told me that most whores will not kiss you. They’ll fuck you blind, he said, but you’ll never feel their lips on yours. Do you think my sister kisses Kettleblack?”

Ser Ilyn did not answer.

“I don’t think it would be proper for me to slay mine own Sworn Brother. What I need to do is geld him and send him to the Wall. That’s what they did with Lucamore the Lusty. Ser Osmund may not take kindly to the gelding, to be sure. And there are his brothers to consider. Brothers can be dangerous. After Aegon the Unworthy put Ser Terrence Toyne to death for sleeping with his mistress, Toyne’s brothers did their best to kill him. Their best was not quite good enough, thanks to the Dragonknight, but it was not for want of trying. It’s written down in the White Book. All of it, save what to do with Cersei.”

Ser Ilyn drew a finger across his throat.

“No,” said Jaime. “Tommen has lost a brother, and the man he thought of as his father. If I were to kill his mother, he would hate me for it... and that sweet little wife of his would find a way to turn that hatred to the benefit of Highgarden.”

Ser Ilyn smiled in a way Jaime did not like. *An ugly smile. An ugly soul.* “You talk too much,” he told the man.

The next day Ser Dermot of the Rainwood returned to the castle, empty-handed. When asked what he’d found, he answered, “Wolves. Hundreds of the bloody beggars.” He’d lost two sentries to them. The wolves had come out of the dark to savage them. “Armed men in mail and boiled leather, and yet the beasts had no fear of them. Before he died, Jate said the pack was led by a she-wolf of monstrous size. A direwolf, to hear

him tell it. The wolves got in amongst our horse lines too. The bloody bastards killed my favorite bay.”

“A ring of fires round your camp might keep them off,” said Jaime, though he wondered. Could Ser Dermot’s direwolf be the same beast that had mauled Joffrey near the crossroads?

Wolves or no, Ser Dermot took fresh horses and more men and went out again the next morning, to resume the search for Brynden Tully. That same afternoon, the lords of the Trident came to Jaime asking his leave to return to their own lands. He granted it. Lord Piper also wanted to know about his son Marq. “All the captives will be ransomed,” Jaime promised. As the riverlords took their leave, Lord Karyl Vance lingered to say, “Lord Jaime, you must go to Raventree. So long as it is Jonos at his gates Tytos will never yield, but I know he will bend his knee for you.” Jaime thanked him for his counsel.

Strongboar was the next to depart. He wanted to return to Darry as he’d promised and fight the outlaws. “We rode across half the bloody realm and for what? So you could make Edmure Tully piss his breeches? There’s no song in that. I need a *fight*. I want the Hound, Jaime. Him, or the marcher lord.”

“The Hound’s head is yours if you can take it,” Jaime said, “but Beric Dondarrion is to be captured alive, so he can be brought back to King’s Landing. A thousand people need to see him die, or else he won’t stay dead.” Strongboar grumbled at that, but finally agreed. The next day he departed with his squire and men-at-arms, plus Beardless Jon Bettley, who had decided that hunting outlaws was preferable to returning to his famously homely wife. Supposedly she had the beard that Bettley lacked.

Jaime still had the garrison to deal with. To a man, they swore that they knew nothing of Ser Brynden’s plans or where he might have gone. “They are lying,” Emmon Frey insisted, but Jaime thought not. “If you share your plans with no one, no one can betray you,” he pointed out. Lady Genna suggested that a few of the men might be put to the question. He refused. “I gave Edmure my word that if he yielded, the garrison could leave unharmed.”

“That was chivalrous of you,” his aunt said, “but it’s strength that’s needed here, not chivalry.”

Ask Edmure how chivalrous I am, thought Jaime. *Ask him about the trebuchet.* Somehow he did not think the maesters were like to confuse him with Prince Aemon the Dragonknight when they wrote their histories. Still, he felt curiously content. The war was all but won. Dragonstone had fallen and Storm’s End would soon enough, he could not doubt, and Stannis was welcome to the Wall. The northmen would love him no more than the storm lords had. If Roose Bolton did not destroy him, winter would.

And he had done his own part here at Riverrun without actually ever taking up arms against the Starks or Tullys. Once he found the Blackfish, he would be free to return to King’s Landing, where he belonged. *My place is with my king. With my son.* Would Tommen want to know that? The truth could cost the boy his throne. *Would you sooner have a father or a chair, lad?* Jaime wished he knew the answer. *He does like stamping papers with his seal.* The boy might not even believe him, to be sure. Cersei would say it was a lie. *My sweet sister, the deceiver.* He would need to find some way to winkle Tommen from her clutches before the boy became another Joffrey. And whilst at that, he should find the lad a new small council too. *If Cersei can be put aside, Ser Kevan may agree to serve as Tommen’s Hand.* And if not, well, the Seven Kingdoms did not lack for able men. Forley Prester would make a good choice, or Roland Crakehall. If someone other than a westerman was needed to appease the Tyrells, there was always Mathis Rowan... or even Petyr Baelish. Littlefinger was as amiable as he was clever, but too lowborn to threaten any of the great lords, with no swords of his own. *The perfect Hand.*

The Tully garrison departed the next morning, stripped of all their arms and armor. Each man was allowed three days’ food and the clothing on his back, after he swore a solemn oath never to take up arms against Lord Emmon or House Lannister. “If you’re fortunate, one man in ten may keep that vow,” Lady Genna said.

“Good. I’d sooner face nine men than ten. The tenth might have been the one who would have killed me.”

“The other nine will kill you just as quick.”

“Better that than die in bed.” *Or on the privy.*

Two men did not choose to depart with the others. Ser Desmond Grell, Lord Hoster’s old master-at-arms, preferred to take the black. So did Ser Robin Ryger, Riverrun’s captain of guards. “This castle’s been my home for forty years,” said Grell. “You say I’m free to go, but where? I’m too old and too stout to make a hedge knight. But men are always welcome at the Wall.”

“As you wish,” said Jaime, though it was a bloody nuisance. He allowed them to keep their arms and armor, and assigned a dozen of Gregor Clegane’s men to escort the two of them to Maidenpool. The command he gave to Rafford, the one they called the Sweetling. “See to it that the prisoners reach Maidenpool unspoiled,” he told the man, “or what Ser Gregor did to the Goat will seem a jolly lark compared to what I’ll do to you.”

More days passed. Lord Emmon assembled all of Riverrun in the yard, Lord Edmure’s people and his own, and spoke to them for close on three hours about what would be expected of them now that he was their lord and master. From time to time he waved his parchment, as stableboys and serving girls and smiths listened in a sullen silence and a light rain fell down upon them all.

The singer was listening too, the one that Jaime had taken from Ser Ryman Frey. Jaime came upon him standing inside an open door, where it was dry. “His lordship should have been a singer,” the man said. “This speech is longer than a marcher ballad, and I don’t think he’s stopped for breath.”

Jaime had to laugh. “Lord Emmon does not need to breathe, so long as he can chew. Are you going to make a song of it?”

“A funny one. I’ll call it ‘Talking to the Fish.’”

“Just don’t play it where my aunt can hear.” Jaime had never paid the man much mind before. He was a small fellow, garbed in ragged green breeches and a frayed tunic of a lighter shade of green, with brown leather

patches covering the holes. His nose was long and sharp, his smile big and loose. Thin brown hair fell to his collar, snagged and unwashed. *Fifty if he's a day*, thought Jaime, *a hedge harp, and hard used by life*. "Weren't you Ser Ryman's man when I found you?" he asked.

"Only for a fortnight."

"I would have expected you to depart with the Freys."

"That one up there's a Frey," the singer said, nodding at Lord Emmon, "and this castle seems a nice snug place to pass the winter. Whitesmire Wat went home with Ser Forley, so I thought I'd see if I could win his place. Wat's got that high sweet voice that the likes o' me can't hope to match. But I know twice as many bawdy songs as he does. Begging my lord's pardon."

"You should get on famously with my aunt," said Jaime. "If you hope to winter here, see that your playing pleases Lady Genna. She's the one that matters."

"Not you?"

"My place is with the king. I shall not stay here long."

"I'm sorry to hear that, my lord. I know better songs than 'The Rains of Castamere.' I could have played you... oh, all sorts o' things."

"Some other time," said Jaime. "Do you have a name?"

"Tom of Sevenstreams, if it please my lord." The singer doffed his hat. "Most call me Tom o' Sevens, though."

"Sing sweetly, Tom o' Sevens."

That night he dreamt that he was back in the Great Sept of Baelor, still standing vigil over his father's corpse. The sept was still and dark, until a woman emerged from the shadows and walked slowly to the bier. "Sister?" he said.

But it was not Cersei. She was all in grey, a silent sister. A hood and veil concealed her features, but he could see the candles burning in the green pools of her eyes. "Sister," he said, "what would you have of me?" His last word echoed up and down the sept, *mememememememememe*.

“I am not your sister, Jaime.” She raised a pale soft hand and pushed her hood back. “Have you forgotten me?”

Can I forget someone I never knew? The words caught in his throat. He *did* know her, but it had been so long...

“Will you forget your own lord father too? I wonder if you ever knew him, truly.” Her eyes were green, her hair spun gold. He could not tell how old she was. *Fifteen*, he thought, *or fifty*. She climbed the steps to stand above the bier. “He could never abide being laughed at. That was the thing he hated most.”

“Who are you?” He had to hear her say it.

“The question is, who are you?”

“This is a dream.”

“Is it?” She smiled sadly. “Count your hands, child.”

One. One hand, clasped tight around the sword hilt. Only one. “In my dreams I always have two hands.” He raised his right arm and stared uncomprehending at the ugliness of his stump.

“We all dream of things we cannot have. Tywin dreamed that his son would be a great knight, that his daughter would be a queen. He dreamed they would be so strong and brave and beautiful that no one would ever laugh at them.”

“I am a knight,” he told her, “and Cersei is a queen.”

A tear rolled down her cheek. The woman raised her hood again and turned her back on him. Jaime called after her, but already she was moving away, her skirt whispering lullabies as it brushed across the floor. *Don't leave me*, he wanted to call, but of course she'd left them long ago.

He woke in darkness, shivering. The room had grown cold as ice. Jaime flung aside the covers with the stump of his sword hand. The fire in the hearth had died, he saw, and the window had blown open. He crossed the pitch-dark chamber to fumble with the shutters, but when he reached the window his bare foot came down in something wet. Jaime recoiled, startled for a moment. His first thought was of blood, but blood would not have been so cold.

It was snow, drifting through the window.

Instead of closing the shutters he threw them wide. The yard below was covered by a thin white blanket, growing thicker even as he watched. The merlons on the battlements wore white cowls. The flakes fell silently, a few drifting in the window to melt upon his face. Jaime could see his own breath.

Snow in the riverlands. If it was snowing here, it could well be snowing on Lannisport as well, and on King's Landing. *Winter is marching south, and half our granaries are empty.* Any crops still in the fields were doomed. There would be no more plantings, no more hopes of one last harvest. He found himself wondering what his father would do to feed the realm, before he remembered that Tywin Lannister was dead.

When morning broke the snow was ankle deep, and deeper in the godswood, where drifts had piled up under the trees. Squires, stableboys, and highborn pages turned to children again under its cold white spell, and fought a snowball war up and down the wards and all along the battlements. Jaime heard them laughing. There was a time, not long ago, when he might have been out making snowballs with the best of them, to fling at Tyrion when he waddled by, or slip down the back of Cersei's gown. *You need two hands to make a decent snowball, though.*

There was a rap upon his door. "See who that is, Peck."

It was Riverrun's old maester, with a message clutched in his lined and wrinkled hand. Vyman's face was as pale as the new-fallen snow. "I know," Jaime said, "there has been a white raven from the Citadel. Winter has come."

"No, my lord. The bird was from King's Landing. I took the liberty... I did not know..." He held the letter out.

Jaime read it in the window seat, bathed in the light of that cold white morning. Qyburn's words were terse and to the point, Cersei's fevered and fervent. *Come at once, she said. Help me. Save me. I need you now as I have never needed you before. I love you. I love you. I love you. Come at once.*

Vyman was hovering by the door, waiting, and Jaime sensed that Peck was watching too. “Does my lord wish to answer?” the maester asked, after a long silence.

A snowflake landed on the letter. As it melted, the ink began to blur. Jaime rolled the parchment up again, as tight as one hand would allow, and handed it to Peck. “No,” he said. “Put this in the fire.”