

“You won it from him in a wager, during the tourney on Prince Joffrey’s name day.”

“When my brother Jaime was unhorsed by the Knight of Flowers, that was his story, no?”

“It was,” she admitted. A line creased her brow.

“Riders!”

The shriek came from the wind-carved ridge above them. Ser Rodrik had sent Lharys scrambling up the rock face to watch the road while they took their rest.

For a long second, no one moved. Catelyn Stark was the first to react. “Ser Rodrik, Ser Willis, to horse,” she shouted. “Get the other mounts behind us. Mohor, guard the prisoners-”

“Arm us!” Tyrion sprang to his feet and seized her by the arm. “You will need every sword.”

She knew he was right, Tyrion could see it. The mountain clans cared nothing for the enmities of the great houses; they would slaughter Stark and Lannister with equal fervor, as they slaughtered each other. They might spare Catelyn herself; she was still young enough to bear sons. Still, she hesitated.

“I hear them!” Ser Rodrik called out. Tyrion turned his head to listen, and there it was: hoofbeats, a dozen horses or more, coming nearer. Suddenly everyone was moving, reaching for weapons, running to their mounts.

Pebbles rained down around them as Lharys came springing and sliding down the ridge. He landed breathless in front of Catelyn Stark, an ungainly-looking man with wild tufts of rust-colored hair sticking out from under a conical steel cap. “Twenty men, maybe twenty-five,” he said, breathless. “Milk Snakes or Moon Brothers, by my guess. They must have eyes out, m’lady... hidden watchers... they know we’re here.”

Ser Rodrik Cassel was already ahorse, a longsword in hand. Mohor crouched behind a boulder, both hands on his iron-tipped spear, a dagger between his teeth. “You, singer,” Ser Willis Wode called out. “Help me with this breastplate.” Marillion sat frozen, clutching his woodharp, his face as pale as milk, but Tyrion’s man Morrec bounded quickly to his feet and moved to help the knight with his armor.

Tyrion kept his grip on Catelyn Stark. “You have no choice,” he told her. “Three of us, and a fourth man wasted guarding us... four men can be the difference between life and death up here.”

“Give me your word that you will put down your swords again after the fight is done.”

“My word?” The hoofbeats were louder now. Tyrion grinned crookedly. “Oh, that you have, my lady... on my honor as a Lannister.”

For a moment he thought she would spit at him, but instead she snapped, “Arm them,” and as quick as that she was pulling away. Ser Rodrik tossed Jyck his sword and scabbard, and wheeled to meet the foe. Morrec helped himself to a bow and quiver, and went to one knee beside the road. He was a better archer than swordsman. And Bronn rode up to offer Tyrion a double-bladed axe.

“I have never fought with an axe.” The weapon felt awkward and unfamiliar in his hands. It had a short haft, a heavy head, a nasty spike on top.

“Pretend you’re splitting logs,” Bronn said, drawing his longsword from the scabbard across his back. He spat, and trotted off to form up beside Chiggen and Ser Rodrik. Ser Willis mounted up