

Abashed, Robb sheathed his sword, suddenly a child again. Catelyn said to Ser Rodrik, "I see my son is wearing steel now."

The old master-at-arms said, "I thought it was time."

Robb was looking at her anxiously. "Past time," she said. "Winterfell may have need of all its swords soon, and they had best not be made of wood."

Theon Greyjoy put a hand on the hilt of his blade and said, "My lady, if it comes to that, my House owes yours a great debt."

Maester Luwin pulled at his chain collar where it chafed against his neck. "All we have is conjecture. This is the queen's beloved brother we mean to accuse. She will not take it kindly. We must have proof, or forever keep silent."

"Your proof is in the dagger," Ser Rodrik said. "A fine blade like that will not have gone unnoticed."

There was only one place to find the truth of it, Catelyn realized. "Someone must go to King's Landing."

"I'll go," Robb said.

"No," she told him. "Your place is here. There must always be a Stark in Winterfell." She looked at Ser Rodrik with his great white whiskers, at Maester Luwin in his grey robes, at young Greyjoy, lean and dark and impetuous. Who to send? Who would be believed? Then she knew. Catelyn struggled to push back the blankets, her bandaged fingers as stiff and unyielding as stone. She climbed out of bed. "I must go myself."

"My lady," said Maester Luwin, "is that wise? Surely the Lannisters would greet your arrival with suspicion."

"What about Bran?" Robb asked. The poor boy looked utterly confused now. "You can't mean to leave him."

"I have done everything I can for Bran," she said, laying a wounded hand on his arm. "His life is in the hands of the gods and Maester Luwin. As you reminded me yourself, Robb, I have other children to think of now."

"You will need a strong escort, my lady," Theon said.

"I'll send Hal with a squad of guardsmen," Robb said.

"No," Catelyn said. "A large party attracts unwelcome attention. I would not have the Lannisters know I am coming."

Ser Rodrik protested. "My lady, let me accompany you at least. The kingsroad can be perilous for a woman alone."

"I will not be taking the kingsroad," Catelyn replied. She thought for a moment, then nodded her consent. "Two riders can move as fast as one, and a good deal faster than a long column burdened by wagons and wheelhouses. I will welcome your company, Ser Rodrik. We will follow the White Knife down to the sea, and hire a ship at White Harbor. Strong horses and brisk winds should bring us to King's Landing well ahead of Ned and the Lannisters." And then, she thought, we shall see what we shall see.