

she had known at Riverrun had grown into a woman who was by turns proud, fearful, cruel, dreamy, reckless, timid, stubborn, vain, and, above all, inconstant.

When that vile turnkey of hers had come crawling to tell them that Tyrion Lannister wished to confess, Catelyn had urged Lysa to have the dwarf brought to them privately, but no, nothing would do but that her sister must make a show of him before half the Vale. And now this...

"Lannister is my prisoner," she told Ser Rodrik as they descended the tower stairs and made their way through the Eyrie's cold white halls. Catelyn wore plain grey wool with a silvered belt. "My sister must be reminded of that."

At the doors to Lysa's apartments, they met her uncle storming out. "Going to join the fool's festival?" Ser Brynden snapped. "I'd tell you to slap some sense into your sister, if I thought it would do any good, but you'd only bruise your hand."

"There was a bird from Riverrun," Catelyn began, "a letter from Edmure..."

"I know, child." The black fish that fastened his cloak was Brynden's only concession to ornament. "I had to hear it from Maester Colemon. I asked your sister for leave to take a thousand seasoned men and ride for Riverrun with all haste. Do you know what she told me? The Vale cannot spare a thousand swords, nor even one, Uncle, she said. You are the Knight of the Gate. Your place is here." A gust of childish laughter drifted through the open doors behind him, and her uncle glanced darkly over his shoulder. "Well, I told her she could bloody well find herself a new Knight of the Gate. Black fish or no, I am still a Tully. I shall leave for Riverrun by evenfall."

Catelyn could not pretend to surprise. "Alone? You know as well as I that you will never survive the high road. Ser Rodrik and I are returning to Winterfell. Come with us, Uncle. I will give you your thousand men. Riverrun will not fight alone."

Brynden thought a moment, then nodded a brusque agreement. "As you say. It's the long way home, but I'm more like to get there. I'll wait for you below." He went striding off, his cloak swirling behind him.

Catelyn exchanged a look with Ser Rodrik. They went through the doors to the high, nervous sound of a child's giggles.

Lysa's apartments opened over a small garden, a circle of dirt and grass planted with blue flowers and ringed on all sides by tall white towers. The builders had intended it as a godswood, but the Eyrie rested on the hard stone of the mountain, and no matter how much soil was hauled up from the Vale, they could not get a weirwood to take root here. So the Lords of the Eyrie planted grass and scattered statuary amidst low, flowering shrubs. It was there the two champions would meet to place their lives, and that of Tyrion Lannister, into the hands of the gods.

Lysa, freshly scrubbed and garbed in cream velvet with a rope of sapphires and moonstones around her milk-white neck, was holding court on the terrace overlooking the scene of the combat, surrounded by her knights, retainers, and lords high and low. Most of them still hoped to wed her, bed her, and rule the Vale of Arryn by her side.

From what Catelyn had seen during her stay at the Eyrie, it was a vain hope.