

ahead to the Eyrie and the Gates of the Moon with the word of their coming. Fresh mounts were brought forth from the stables, surefooted mountain stock with shaggy coats, and within the hour they set forth once again. Catelyn rode beside her uncle as they began the descent to the valley floor. Behind came Bronn, Tyrion Lannister, Marillion, and six of Brynden's men.

Not until they were a third of the way down the mountain path, well out of earshot of the others, did Brynden Tully turn to her and say, "So, child. Tell me about this storm of yours."

"I have not been a child in many years, Uncle," Catelyn said, but she told him nonetheless. It took longer than she would have believed to tell it all, Lysa's letter and Bran's fall, the assassin's dagger and Littlefinger and her chance meeting with Tyrion Lannister in the crossroads inn.

Her uncle listened silently, heavy brows shadowing his eyes as his frown grew deeper. Brynden Tully had always known how to listen... to anyone but her father. He was Lord Hoster's brother, younger by five years, but the two of them had been at war as far back as Catelyn could remember. During one of their louder quarrels, when Catelyn was eight, Lord Hoster had called Brynden "the black goat of the Tully flock." Laughing, Brynden had pointed out that the sigil of their house was a leaping trout, so he ought to be a black fish rather than a black goat, and from that day forward he had taken it as his personal emblem.

The war had not ended until the day she and Lysa had been wed. It was at their wedding feast that Brynden told his brother he was leaving Riverrun to serve Lysa and her new husband, the Lord of the Eyrie. Lord Hoster had not spoken his brother's name since, from what Edmure told her in his infrequent letters.

Nonetheless, during all those years of Catelyn's girlhood, it had been Brynden the Blackfish to whom Lord Hoster's children had run with their tears and their tales, when Father was too busy and Mother too ill. Catelyn, Lysa, Edmure... and yes, even Petyr Baelish, their father's ward... he had listened to them all patiently, as he listened now, laughing at their triumphs and sympathizing with their childish misfortunes.

When she was done, her uncle remained silent for a long time, as his horse negotiated the steep, rocky trail. "Your father must be told," he said at last. "If the Lannisters should march, Winterfell is remote and the Vale walled up behind its mountains, but Riverrun lies right in their path."

"I'd had the same fear," Catelyn admitted. "I shall ask Maester Colemon to send a bird when we reach the Eyrie." She had other messages to send as well; the commands that Ned had given her for his bannermen, to ready the defenses of the north. "What is the mood in the Vale?" she asked.

"Angry," Brynden Tully admitted. "Lord Jon was much loved, and the insult was keenly felt when the king named Jaime Lannister to an office the Arryns had held for near three hundred years. Lysa has commanded us to call her son the True Warden of the East, but no one is fooled. Nor is your sister alone in wondering at the manner of the Hand's death. None dare say Jon was murdered, not openly, but suspicion casts a long shadow." He gave Catelyn a look, his mouth tight. "And there is the boy."