



CATELYN

The drums were pounding, pounding, pounding, and her head with them. Pipes wailed and flutes trilled from the musicians' gallery at the foot of the hall; fiddles screeched, horns blew, the skins skirled a lively tune, but the drumming drove them all. The sounds echoed off the rafters, whilst the guests ate, drank, and shouted at one another below. *Walder Frey must be deaf as a stone to call this music.* Catelyn sipped a cup of wine and watched Jinglebell prance to the sounds of "Alysanne." At least she thought it was meant to be "Alysanne." With these players, it might as easily have been "The Bear and the Maiden Fair."

Outside the rain still fell, but within the Twins the air was thick and hot. A fire roared in the hearth and rows of torches burned smokily from iron sconces on the walls. Yet most of the heat came off the bodies of the wedding guests, jammed in so thick along the benches that every man who tried to lift his cup poked his neighbor in the ribs.

Even on the dais they were closer than Catelyn would have liked. She had been placed between Ser Ryman Frey and Roose Bolton, and had gotten a good noseful of both. Ser Ryman drank as if Westeros was about to run short of wine, and sweated it all out under his arms. He had bathed in lemonwater, she judged, but no lemon could mask so much sour sweat. Roose Bolton had a sweeter smell to him, yet no more pleasant. He sipped hippocras in preference to wine or mead, and ate but little.

Catelyn could not fault him for his lack of appetite. The wedding feast began with a thin leek soup, followed by a salad of green beans, onions, and beets, river pike poached in almond milk, mounds of mashed turnips that were cold before they reached the table, jellied calves' brains, and a leche of stringy beef. It was poor fare to set before a king, and the calves' brains turned Catelyn's stomach. Yet Robb ate it uncomplaining, and her brother was too caught up with his bride to pay much attention.

You would never guess Edmure complained of Roslin all the way from Riverrun to the Twins. Husband and wife ate from a single plate, drank from a single cup, and exchanged chaste kisses between sips. Most of the dishes Edmure waved away. She could not blame him for that. She remembered little of the food served at her own wedding feast. *Did I even taste it? Or spend the whole time gazing at Ned's face, wondering who he was?*

Poor Roslin's smile had a fixed quality to it, as if someone had sewn it onto her face. *Well, she is a maid wedded, but the bedding's yet to come. No doubt she's as terrified as I was.* Robb was seated between Alyx Frey and Fair Walda, two of the more nubile Frey maidens. "At the wedding feast I hope you will not refuse to dance with my daughters," Walder Frey had said. "It would please an old man's heart." His heart should be well pleased, then; Robb had done his duty like a king. He had danced with each of the girls, with Edmure's bride and the eighth Lady Frey, with the widow Ami and Roose Bolton's wife Fat Walda, with the pimply twins Serra and Sarra, even with Shirei, Lord Walder's youngest, who must have been all of six. Catelyn wondered whether the Lord of the Crossing would be satisfied, or if he would find cause for complaint in all the other daughters and granddaughters who had not had a turn with the king. "Your sisters dance very well," she said to Ser Ryman Frey, trying to be pleasant.

"They're aunts and cousins." Ser Ryman drank a swallow of wine, the sweat trickling down his cheek into his beard.

A sour man, and in his cups, Catelyn thought. The Late Lord Frey might be niggardly when it came to feeding his guests, but he did not stint on the drink. The ale, wine, and mead were flowing as fast as the river outside. The Greatjon was already roaring drunk. Lord Walder's son Merrett was matching him cup for cup, but Ser Whalen Frey had passed out trying to keep up with the two of them. Catelyn would sooner Lord Umber had seen

fit to stay sober, but telling the Greatjon not to drink was like telling him not to breathe for a few hours.

Smalljon Umber and Robin Flint sat near Robb, to the other side of Fair Walda and Alyx, respectively. Neither of them was drinking; along with Patrek Mallister and Dacey Mormont, they were her son's guards this evening. A wedding feast was not a battle, but there were always dangers when men were in their cups, and a king should never be unguarded. Catelyn was glad of that, and even more glad of the swordbelts hanging on pegs along the walls. *No man needs a longsword to deal with jellied calves' brains.*

"Everyone thought my lord would choose Fair Walda," Lady Walda Bolton told Ser Wendel, shouting to be heard above the music. Fat Walda was a round pink butterball of a girl with watery blue eyes, limp yellow hair, and a huge bosom, yet her voice was a fluttering squeak. It was hard to picture her in the Dreadfort in her pink lace and cape of vair. "My lord grandfather offered Roose his bride's weight in silver as a dowry, though, so my lord of Bolton picked *me*." The girl's chins jiggled when she laughed. "I weigh six stone more than Fair Walda, but that was the first time I was glad of it. I'm Lady Bolton now and my cousin's still a maid, and she'll be *nineteen* soon, poor thing."

The Lord of the Dreadfort paid the chatter no mind, Catelyn saw. Sometimes he tasted a bite of this, a spoon of that, tearing bread from the loaf with short strong fingers, but the meal could not distract him. Bolton had made a toast to Lord Walder's grandsons when the wedding feast began, pointedly mentioning that Walder and Walder were in the care of his bastard son. From the way the old man had squinted at him, his mouth sucking at the air, Catelyn knew he had heard the unspoken threat.

Was there ever a wedding less joyful? she wondered, until she remembered her poor Sansa and her marriage to the Imp. *Mother take mercy on her. She has a gentle soul.* The heat and smoke and noise were making her sick. The musicians in the gallery might be numerous and loud, but they were not especially gifted. Catelyn took another swallow of wine and allowed a page to refill her cup. *A few more hours, and the worst will be over.* By this hour tomorrow Robb would be off to another battle, this time with the ironmen at Moat Cailin. Strange, how that prospect seemed

almost a relief. *He will win his battle. He wins all his battles, and the ironborn are without a king. Besides, Ned taught him well.* The drums were pounding. Jinglebell hopped past her once again, but the music was so loud she could scarcely hear his bells.

Above the din came a sudden snarling as two dogs fell upon each other over a scrap of meat. They rolled across the floor, snapping and biting, as a howl of mirth went up. Someone doused them with a flagon of ale and they broke apart. One limped toward the dais. Lord Walder's toothless mouth opened in a bark of laughter as the dripping wet dog shook ale and hair all over three of his grandsons.

The sight of the dogs made Catelyn wish once more for Grey Wind, but Robb's direwolf was nowhere to be seen. Lord Walder had refused to allow him in the hall. "Your wild beast has a taste for human flesh, I hear, *heh*," the old man had said. "Rips out throats, yes. I'll have no such creature at my Roslin's feast, amongst women and little ones, all my sweet innocents."

"Grey Wind is no danger to them, my lord," Robb protested. "Not so long as I am there."

"You were there at my gates, were you not? When the wolf attacked the grandsons I sent to greet you? I heard all about that, don't think I didn't, *heh*."

"No harm was done—"

"No harm, the king says? No harm? Petyr fell from his horse, *fell*. I lost a wife the same way, falling." His mouth worked in and out. "Or was she just some strumpet? Bastard Walder's mother, yes, now I recall. She fell off her horse and cracked her head. What would Your Grace do if Petyr had broken his neck, *heh*? Give me another apology in place of a grandson? No, no, no. Might be you're king, I won't say you're not, the King in the North, *heh*, but under my roof, my rule. Have your wolf or have your wedding, sire. You'll not have both."

Catelyn could tell that her son was furious, but he yielded with as much courtesy as he could summon. *If it pleases Lord Walder to serve me stewed crow smothered in maggots*, he'd told her, *I'll eat it and ask for a second bowl*. And so he had.

The Greatjon had drunk another of Lord Walder's brood under the table, Petyr Pimple this time. *The lad has a third his capacity, what did he expect?* Lord Umber wiped his mouth, stood, and began to sing. "*A bear there was, a bear, a BEAR! All black and brown and covered with hair!*" His voice was not at all bad, though somewhat thick from drink. Unfortunately the fiddlers and drummers and flutists up above were playing "Flowers of Spring," which suited the words of "The Bear and the Maiden Fair" as well as snails might suit a bowl of porridge. Even poor Jinglebell covered his ears at the cacophony.

Roose Bolton murmured some words too soft to hear and went off in search of a privy. The cramped hall was in a constant uproar of guests and servants coming and going. A second feast, for knights and lords of somewhat lesser rank, was roaring along in the other castle, she knew. Lord Walder had exiled his baseborn children and their offspring to that side of the river, so that Robb's northmen had taken to referring to it as "the bastard feast." Some guests were no doubt stealing off to see if the bastards were having a better time than they were. Some might even be venturing as far as the camps. The Freys had provided wagons of wine, ale, and mead, so the common soldiers could drink to the wedding of Riverrun and the Twins.

Robb sat down in Bolton's vacant place. "A few more hours and this farce is done, Mother," he said in a low voice, as the Greatjon sang of the maid with honey in her hair. "Black Walder's been mild as a lamb for once. And Uncle Edmure seems well content in his bride." He leaned across her. "Ser Ryman?"

Ser Ryman Frey blinked and said, "Sire. Yes?"

"I'd hoped to ask Olyvar to squire for me when we march north," said Robb, "but I do not see him here. Would he be at the other feast?"

"Olyvar?" Ser Ryman shook his head. "No. Not Olyvar. Gone . . . gone from the castles. Duty."

"I see." Robb's tone suggested otherwise. When Ser Ryman offered nothing more, the king got to his feet again. "Would you care for a dance, Mother?"

"Thank you, but no." A dance was the last thing she needed, the way her head was throbbing. "No doubt one of Lord Walder's daughters would be

pleased to partner you.”

“Oh, no doubt.” His smile was resigned.

The musicians were playing “Iron Lances” by then, while the Greatjon sang “The Lusty Lad.” *Someone should acquaint them with each other, it might improve the harmony.* Catelyn turned back to Ser Ryman. “I had heard that one of your cousins was a singer.”

“Alesander. Symond’s son. Alyx is his sister.” He raised a cup toward where she danced with Robin Flint.

“Will Alesander be playing for us tonight?”

Ser Ryman squinted at her. “Not him. He’s away.” He wiped sweat from his brow and lurched to his feet. “Pardons, my lady. Pardons.” Catelyn watched him stagger toward the door.

Edmure was kissing Roslin and squeezing her hand. Elsewhere in the hall, Ser Marq Piper and Ser Danwell Frey played a drinking game, Lame Lothar said something amusing to Ser Hosteen, one of the younger Freys juggled three daggers for a group of giggly girls, and Jinglebell sat on the floor sucking wine off his fingers. The servers were bringing out huge silver platters piled high with cuts of juicy pink lamb, the most appetizing dish they’d seen all evening. And Robb was leading Dacey Mormont in a dance.

When she wore a dress in place of a hauberk, Lady Maege’s eldest daughter was quite pretty; tall and willowy, with a shy smile that made her long face light up. It was pleasant to see that she could be as graceful on the dance floor as in the training yard. Catelyn wondered if Lady Maege had reached the Neck as yet. She had taken her other daughters with her, but as one of Robb’s battle companions Dacey had chosen to remain by his side. *He has Ned’s gift for inspiring loyalty.* Olyvar Frey had been devoted to her son as well. Hadn’t Robb said that Olyvar wanted to remain with him even *after* he’d married Jeyne?

Seated betwixt his black oak towers, the Lord of the Crossing clapped his spotted hands together. The noise they made was so faint that even those on the dais scarce heard it, but Ser Aenys and Ser Hosteen saw and began to pound their cups on the table. Lame Lothar joined them, then Marq Piper and Ser Danwell and Ser Raymund. Half the guests were soon pounding.

Finally even the mob of musicians in the gallery took note. The piping, drumming, and fiddling trailed off into quiet.

“Your Grace,” Lord Walder called out to Robb, “the septon has prayed his prayers, some words have been said, and Lord Edmure’s wrapped my sweetling in a fish cloak, but they are not yet man and wife. A sword needs a sheath, *heh*, and a wedding needs a bedding. What does my sire say? Is it meet that we should bed them?”

A score or more of Walder Frey’s sons and grandsons began to bang their cups again, shouting, “To bed! To bed! *To bed with them!*” Roslin had gone white. Catelyn wondered whether it was the prospect of losing her maidenhead that frightened the girl, or the bedding itself. With so many siblings, she was not like to be a stranger to the custom, but it was different when you were the one being bedded. On Catelyn’s own wedding night, Jory Cassell had torn her gown in his haste to get her out of it, and drunken Desmond Grell kept apologizing for every bawdy joke, only to make another. When Lord Dustin had beheld her naked, he’d told Ned that her breasts were enough to make him wish he’d never been weaned. *Poor man*, she thought. He had ridden south with Ned, never to return. Catelyn wondered how many of the men here tonight would be dead before the year was done. *Too many, I fear.*

Robb raised a hand. “If you think the time is meet, Lord Walder, by all means let us bed them.”

A roar of approval greeted his pronouncement. Up in the gallery the musicians took up their pipes and horns and fiddles again, and began to play “The Queen Took Off Her Sandal, the King Took Off His Crown.” Jinglebell hopped from foot to foot, his own crown ringing. “I hear Tully men have trout between their legs instead of cocks,” Alyx Frey called out boldly. “Does it take a worm to make them rise?” To which Ser Marq Piper threw back, “I hear that Frey women have two gates in place of one!” and Alyx said, “Aye, but both are closed and barred to little things like you!” A gust of laughter followed, until Patrek Mallister climbed up onto a table to propose a toast to Edmure’s one-eyed fish. “And a mighty pike it is!” he proclaimed. “Nay, I’ll wager it’s a minnow,” Fat Walda Bolton shouted out from Catelyn’s side. Then the general cry of “*Bed them! Bed them!*” went up again.

The guests swarmed the dais, the drunkest in the forefront as ever. The men and boys surrounded Roslin and lifted her into the air whilst the maids and mothers in the hall pulled Edmure to his feet and began tugging at his clothing. He was laughing and shouting bawdy jokes back at them, though the music was too loud for Catelyn to hear. She heard the Greatjon, though. “Give this little bride to me,” he bellowed as he shoved through the other men and threw Roslin over one shoulder. “Look at this little thing! No meat on her at all!”

Catelyn felt sorry for the girl. Most brides tried to return the banter, or at least pretended to enjoy it, but Roslin was stiff with terror, clutching the Greatjon as if she feared he might drop her. *She’s crying too*, Catelyn realized as she watched Ser Marq Piper pull off one of the bride’s shoes. *I hope Edmure is gentle with the poor child*. Jolly, bawdy music still poured down from the gallery; the queen was taking off her kirtle now, and the king his tunic.

She knew she should join the throng of women round her brother, but she would only ruin their fun. The last thing she felt just now was bawdy. Edmure would forgive her absence, she did not doubt; much jollier to be stripped and bedded by a score of lusty, laughing Freys than by a sour, stricken sister.

As man and maid were carried from the hall, a trail of clothing behind them, Catelyn saw that Robb had also remained. Walder Frey was prickly enough to see some insult to his daughter in that. *He should join in Roslin’s bedding, but is it my place to tell him so?* She tensed, until she saw that others had stayed as well. Petyr Pimple and Ser Whalen Frey slept on, their heads on the table. Merrett Frey poured himself another cup of wine, while Jinglebell wandered about stealing bites off the plates of those who’d left. Ser Wendel Manderly was lustily attacking a leg of lamb. And of course Lord Walder was far too feeble to leave his seat without help. *He will expect Robb to go, though*. She could almost hear the old man asking why His Grace did not want to see his daughter naked. The drums were pounding again, pounding and pounding and pounding.

Dacey Mormont, who seemed to be the only woman left in the hall besides Catelyn, stepped up behind Edwyn Frey, and touched him lightly on the arm as she said something in his ear. Edwyn wrenched himself away

from her with unseemly violence. “No,” he said, too loudly. “I’m done with dancing for the nonce.” Dacey paled and turned away. Catelyn got slowly to her feet. *What just happened there?* Doubt gripped her heart, where an instant before had been only weariness. *It is nothing*, she tried to tell herself, *you are seeing grumkins in the woodpile, you are become an old silly woman sick with grief and fear*. But something must have shown on her face. Even Ser Wendel Manderly took note. “Is something amiss?” he asked, the leg of lamb in his hands.

She did not answer him. Instead she went after Edwyn Frey. The players in the gallery had finally gotten both king and queen down to their name-day suits. With scarcely a moment’s respite, they began to play a very different sort of song. No one sang the words, but Catelyn knew “The Rains of Castamere” when she heard it. Edwyn was hurrying toward a door. She hurried faster, driven by the music. Six quick strides and she caught him. *And who are you, the proud lord said, that I must bow so low?* She grabbed Edwyn by the arm to turn him and went cold all over when she felt the iron rings beneath his silken sleeve.

Catelyn slapped him so hard she broke his lip. *Olyvar*, she thought, *and Perwyn, Alesander, all absent. And Roslin wept . . .*

Edwyn Frey shoved her aside. The music drowned all other sound, echoing off the walls as if the stones themselves were playing. Robb gave Edwyn an angry look and moved to block his way . . . and staggered suddenly as a quarrel sprouted from his side, just beneath the shoulder. If he screamed then, the sound was swallowed by the pipes and horns and fiddles. Catelyn saw a second bolt pierce his leg, saw him fall. Up in the gallery, half the musicians had crossbows in their hands instead of drums or lutes. She ran toward her son, until something punched in the small of the back and the hard stone floor came up to slap her. “*Robb!*” she screamed. She saw Smalljon Umber wrestle a table off its trestles. Crossbow bolts thudded into the wood, one two three, as he flung it down on top of his king. Robin Flint was ringed by Freys, their daggers rising and falling. Ser Wendel Manderly rose ponderously to his feet, holding his leg of lamb. A quarrel went in his open mouth and came out the back of his neck. Ser Wendel crashed forward, knocking the table off its trestles and sending

cups, flagons, trenchers, platters, turnips, beets, and wine bouncing, spilling, and sliding across the floor.

Catelyn's back was on fire. *I have to reach him.* The Smalljon bludgeoned Ser Raymund Frey across the face with a leg of mutton. But when he reached for his swordbelt a crossbow bolt drove him to his knees. *In a coat of gold or a coat of red, a lion still has claws.* She saw Lucas Blackwood cut down by Ser Hosteen Frey. One of the Vances was hamstringed by Black Walder as he was wrestling with Ser Harys Haigh. *And mine are long and sharp, my lord, as long and sharp as yours.* The crossbows took Donnel Locke, Owen Norrey, and half a dozen more. Young Ser Benfrey had seized Dacey Mormont by the arm, but Catelyn saw her grab up a flagon of wine with her other hand, smash it full in his face, and run for the door. It flew open before she reached it. Ser Ryman Frey pushed into the hall, clad in steel from helm to heel. A dozen Frey men-at-arms packed the door behind him. They were armed with heavy longaxes.

"*Mercy!*" Catelyn cried, but horns and drums and the clash of steel smothered her plea. Ser Ryman buried the head of his axe in Dacey's stomach. By then men were pouring in the other doors as well, mailed men in shaggy fur cloaks with steel in their hands. *Northmen!* She took them for rescue for half a heartbeat, till one of them struck the Smalljon's head off with two huge blows of his axe. Hope blew out like a candle in a storm.

In the midst of slaughter, the Lord of the Crossing sat on his carved oaken throne, watching greedily.

There was a dagger on the floor a few feet away. Perhaps it had skittered there when the Smalljon knocked the table off its trestles, or perhaps it had fallen from the hand of some dying man. Catelyn crawled toward it. Her limbs were leaden, and the taste of blood was in her mouth. *I will kill Walder Frey,* she told herself. Jinglebell was closer to the knife, hiding under a table, but he only cringed away as she snatched up the blade. *I will kill the old man, I can do that much at least.*

Then the tabletop that the Smalljon had flung over Robb shifted, and her son struggled to his knees. He had an arrow in his side, a second in his leg, a third through his chest. Lord Walder raised a hand, and the music stopped, all but one drum. Catelyn heard the crash of distant battle, and closer the

wild howling of a wolf. *Grey Wind*, she remembered too late. “*Heh*,” Lord Walder cackled at Robb, “the King in the North arises. Seems we killed some of your men, Your Grace. Oh, but I’ll make you an *apology*, that will mend them all again, *heh*.”

Catelyn grabbed a handful of Jinglebell Frey’s long grey hair and dragged him out of his hiding place. “Lord Walder!” she shouted. “*LORD WALDER!*” The drum beat slow and sonorous, *boom boom boom*. “Enough,” said Catelyn. “*Enough*, I say. You have repaid betrayal with betrayal, let it end.” When she pressed her dagger to Jinglebell’s throat, the memory of Bran’s sickroom came back to her, with the feel of steel at her own throat. The drum went *boom boom boom boom boom boom*. “Please,” she said. “He is my son. My first son, and my last. Let him go. Let him go and I swear we will forget this . . . forget all you’ve done here. I swear it by the old gods and new, we . . . we will take no vengeance . . .”

Lord Walder peered at her in mistrust. “Only a fool would believe such blather. D’you take me for a fool, my lady?”

“I take you for a father. Keep me for a hostage, Edmure as well if you haven’t killed him. But let Robb go.”

“No.” Robb’s voice was whisper faint. “Mother, no . . .”

“Yes. Robb, get up. Get up and walk out, please, *please*. Save yourself . . . if not for me, for Jeyne.”

“Jeyne?” Robb grabbed the edge of the table and forced himself to stand. “Mother,” he said, “*Grey Wind* . . .”

“Go to him. Now. Robb, *walk out of here*.”

Lord Walder snorted. “And why would I let him do that?”

She pressed the blade deeper into Jinglebell’s throat. The lackwit rolled his eyes at her in mute appeal. A foul stench assailed her nose, but she paid it no more mind than she did the sullen ceaseless pounding of that drum, *boom boom boom boom boom boom*. Ser Ryman and Black Walder were circling round her back, but Catelyn did not care. They could do as they wished with her; imprison her, rape her, kill her, it made no matter. She had lived too long, and Ned was waiting. It was Robb she feared for. “On my honor as a Tully,” she told Lord Walder, “on my honor as a Stark, I will

trade your boy's life for Robb's. A son for a son." Her hand shook so badly she was ringing Jinglebell's head.

Boom, the drum sounded, *boom doom boom doom*. The old man's lips went in and out. The knife trembled in Catelyn's hand, slippery with sweat. "A son for a son, *heh*," he repeated. "But that's a grandson . . . and he never was much use."

A man in dark armor and a pale pink cloak spotted with blood stepped up to Robb. "Jaime Lannister sends his regards." He thrust his longsword through her son's heart, and twisted.

Robb had broken his word, but Catelyn kept hers. She tugged hard on Aegon's hair and sawed at his neck until the blade grated on bone. Blood ran hot over her fingers. His little bells were ringing, ringing, ringing, and the drum went *boom doom boom*.

Finally someone took the knife away from her. The tears burned like vinegar as they ran down her cheeks. Ten fierce ravens were raking her face with sharp talons and tearing off strips of flesh, leaving deep furrows that ran red with blood. She could taste it on her lips.

It hurts so much, she thought. *Our children, Ned, all our sweet babes. Rickon, Bran, Arya, Sansa, Robb . . . Robb . . . please, Ned, please, make it stop, make it stop hurting . . .* The white tears and the red ones ran together until her face was torn and tattered, the face that Ned had loved. Catelyn Stark raised her hands and watched the blood run down her long fingers, over her wrists, beneath the sleeves of her gown. Slow red worms crawled along her arms and under her clothes. *It tickles*. That made her laugh until she screamed. "Mad," someone said, "she's lost her wits," and someone else said, "Make an end," and a hand grabbed her scalp just as she'd done with Jinglebell, and she thought, *No, don't, don't cut my hair, Ned loves my hair*. Then the steel was at her throat, and its bite was red and cold.