

“We must have the Twins, Mother,” Robb said heatedly. “There is no other way across the river. You know that.”

“Yes. And so does Walder Frey, you can be sure of that.”

That night they made camp on the southern edge of the bogs, halfway between the kingsroad and the river. It was there Theon Greyjoy brought them further word from her uncle. “Ser Brynden says to tell you he’s crossed swords with the Lannisters. There are a dozen scouts who won’t be reporting back to Lord Tywin anytime soon. Or ever.” He grinned. “Ser Addam Marbrand commands their outriders, and he’s pulling back south, burning as he goes. He knows where we are, more or less, but the Blackfish vows he will not know when we split.”

“Unless Lord Frey tells him,” Catelyn said sharply. “Theon, when you return to my uncle, tell him he is to place his best bowmen around the Twins, day and night, with orders to bring down any raven they see leaving the battlements. I want no birds bringing word of my son’s movements to Lord Tywin.”

“Ser Brynden has seen to it already, my lady,” Theon replied with a cocky smile. “A few more blackbirds, and we should have enough to bake a pie. I’ll save you their feathers for a hat.”

She ought to have known that Brynden Blackfish would be well ahead of her. “What have the Freys been doing while the Lannisters; burn their fields and plunder their holdfasts?”

“There’s been some fighting between Ser Addam’s men and Lord Walder’s,” Theon answered. “Not a day’s ride from here, we found two Lannister scouts feeding the crows where the Freys had strung them up. Most of Lord Walder’s strength remains massed at the Twins, though.”

That bore Walder Frey’s seal beyond a doubt, Catelyn thought bitterly; hold back, wait, watch, take no risk unless forced to it.

“If he’s been fighting the Lannisters, perhaps he does mean to hold to his vows,” Robb said.

Catelyn was less encouraged. “Defending his own lands is one thing, open battle against Lord Tywin quite another.”

Robb turned back to Theon Greyjoy. “Has the Blackfish found any other way across the Green Fork?”

Theon shook his head. “The river’s running high and fast. Ser Brynden says it can’t be forded, not this far north.”

“I must have that crossing!” Robb declared, fuming. “Oh, our horses might be able to swim the river, I suppose, but not with armored men on their backs. We’d need to build rafts to pole our steel across, helms and mail and lances, and we don’t have the trees for that. Or the time. Lord Tywin is marching north.” He balled his hand into a fist.

“Lord Frey would be a fool to try and bar our way,” Theon Greyjoy said with his customary easy confidence. “We have five times his numbers. You can take the Twins if you need to, Robb.”

“Not easily,” Catelyn warned them, “and not in time. While you were mounting your siege, Tywin Lannister would bring up his host and assault you from the rear.”