

Just beyond, through the mists, she glimpsed the walls and towers of Moat Cailin... or what remained of them. Immense blocks of black basalt, each as large as a crofter's cottage, lay scattered and tumbled like a child's wooden blocks, half-sunk in the soft boggy soil. Nothing else remained of a curtain wall that had once stood as high as Winterfell's. The wooden keep was gone entirely, rotted away a thousand years past, with not so much as a timber to mark where it had stood. All that was left of the great stronghold of the First Men were three towers... three where there had once been twenty, if the taletellers could be believed.

The Gatehouse Tower looked sound enough, and even boasted a few feet of standing wall to either side of it. The Drunkard's Tower, off in the bog where the south and west walls had once met, leaned like a man about to spew a bellyful of wine into the gutter. And the tall, slender Children's Tower, where legend said the children of the forest had once called upon their nameless gods to send the hammer of the waters, had lost half its crown. It looked as if some great beast had taken a bite out of the crenellations along the tower top, and spit the rubble across the bog. All three towers were green with moss. A tree was growing out between the stones on the north side of the Gatehouse Tower, its gnarled limbs festooned with rosy white blankets of ghostskin.

"Gods have mercy," Ser Brynden exclaimed when he saw what lay before them. "This is Moat Cailin? It's no more than a-

"-death trap," Catelyn finished. "I know how it looks, Uncle. I thought the same the first time I saw it, but Ned assured me that this ruin is more formidable than it seems. The three surviving towers command the causeway from all sides, and any enemy must pass between them. The bogs here are impenetrable, full of quicksands and suckholes and teeming with snakes. To assault any of the towers, an army would need to wade through waist-deep black muck, cross a moat full of lizard-lions, and scale walls slimy with moss, all the while exposing themselves to fire from archers in the other towers." She gave her uncle a grim smile. "And when night falls, there are said to be ghosts, cold vengeful spirits of the north who hunger for southron blood."

Ser Brynden chuckled. "Remind me not to linger here. Last I looked, I was southron myself."

Standards had been raised atop all three towers. The Karstark sunburst hung from the Drunkard's Tower, beneath the direwolf; on the Children's Tower it was the Greatjon's giant in shattered chains. But on the Gatehouse Tower, the Stark banner flew alone. That was where Robb had made his seat. Catelyn made for it, with Ser Brynden and Ser Wendel behind her, their horses stepping slowly down the log-and-plank road that had been laid across the green-and-black fields of mud.

She found her son surrounded by his father's lords bannermen, in a drafty hall with a peat fire smoking in a black hearth. He was seated at a massive stone table, a pile of maps and papers in front of him, talking intently with Roose Bolton and the Greatjon. At first he did not notice her... but his wolf did. The great grey beast was lying near the fire, but when Catelyn entered he lifted his head, and his golden eyes met hers. The lords fell silent one by one, and Robb looked up at the sudden quiet and saw her. "Mother?" he said, his voice thick with emotion.