

Robb glanced from her to Greyjoy, searching for an answer and finding none. For a moment he looked even younger than his fifteen years, despite his mail and sword and the stubble on his cheeks. "What would my lord father do?" he asked her.

"Find a way across," she told him. "Whatever it took."

The next morning it was Ser Brynden Tully himself who rode back to them. He had put aside the heavy plate and helm he'd worn as the Knight of the Gate for the lighter leather-and-mail of an outrider, but his obsidian fish still fastened his cloak.

Her uncle's face was grave as he swung down off his horse. "There has been a battle under the walls of Riverrun," he said, his mouth grim. "We had it from a Lannister outrider we took captive. The Kingslayer has destroyed Edmure's host and sent the lords of the Trident reeling in flight."

A cold hand clutched at Catelyn's heart. "And my brother?"

"Wounded and taken prisoner," Ser Brynden said. "Lord Blackwood and the other survivors are under siege inside Riverrun, surrounded by Jaime's host."

Robb looked fretful. "We must get across this accursed river if we're to have any hope of relieving them in time."

"That will not be easily done," her uncle cautioned. "Lord Frey has pulled his whole strength back inside his castles, and his gates are closed and barred."

"Damn the man," Robb swore. "If the old fool does not relent and let me cross, he'll leave me no choice but to storm his walls. I'll pull the Twins down around his ears if I have to, we'll see how well he likes that!"

"You sound like a sulky boy, Robb," Catelyn said sharply. "A child sees an obstacle, and his first thought is to run around it or knock it down. A lord must learn that sometimes words can accomplish what swords cannot."

Robb's neck reddened at the rebuke. "Tell me what you mean, Mother," he said meekly.

"The Freys have held the crossing for six hundred years, and for six hundred years they have never failed to exact their toll."

"What toll? What does he want?"

She smiled. "That is what we must discover."

"And what if I do not choose to pay this toll?"

"Then you had best retreat back to Moat Cailin, deploy to meet Lord Tywin in battle... or grow wings. I see no other choices." Catelyn put her heels to her horse and rode off, leaving her son to ponder her words. It would not do to make him feel as if his mother were usurping his place. Did you teach him wisdom as well as valor, Ned? she wondered. Did you teach him how to kneel? The graveyards of the Seven Kingdoms were full of brave men who had never learned that lesson.

It was near midday when their vanguard came in sight of the Twins, where the Lords of the Crossing had their seat.

The Green Fork ran swift and deep here, but the Freys had spanned it many centuries past and grown rich off the coin men paid them to cross. Their bridge was a massive arch of smooth grey