

them still. If I must trade our four Lannisters for their two Starks, I will call that a bargain and thank the gods. I want you safe, Robb, ruling at Winterfell from your father's seat. I want you to live your life, to kiss a girl and wed a woman and father a son. I want to write an end to this. I want to go home, my lords, and weep for my husband."

The hall was very quiet when Catelyn finished speaking.

"Peace," said her uncle Brynden. "Peace is sweet, my lady... but on what terms? It is no good hammering your sword into a plowshare if you must forge it again on the morrow."

"What did Torrhen and my Eddard die for, if I am to return to Karhold with nothing but their bones?" asked Rickard Karstark.

"Aye," said Lord Bracken. "Gregor Clegane laid waste to my fields, slaughtered my smallfolk, and left Stone Hedge a smoking ruin. Am I now to bend the knee to the ones who sent him? What have we fought for, if we are to put all back as it was before?"

Lord Blackwood agreed, to Catelyn's surprise and dismay. "And if we do make peace with King Joffrey, are we not then traitors to King Renly? What if the stag should prevail against the lion, where would that leave us?"

"Whatever you may decide for yourselves, I shall never call a Lannister my king," declared Marq Piper.

"Nor I" yelled the little Darry boy. "I never will!"

Again the shouting began. Catelyn sat despairing. She had come so close, she thought. They had almost listened, almost... but the moment was gone. There would be no peace, no chance to heal, no safety. She looked at her son, watched him as he listened to the lords debate, frowning, troubled, yet wedded to his war. He had pledged himself to marry a daughter of Walder Frey, but she saw his true bride plain before her now: the sword he had laid on the table.

Catelyn was thinking of her girls, wondering if she would ever see them again, when the Greatjon lurched to his feet.

"MY LORDS!" he shouted, his voice booming off the rafters. "Here is what I say to these two kings!" He spat. "Renly Baratheon is nothing to me, nor Stannis neither. Why should they rule over me and mine, from some flowery seat in Highgarden or Dorne? What do they know of the Wall or the wolfwood or the barrows of the First Men? Even their gods are wrong. The Others take the Lannisters too, I've had a bellyful of them." He reached back over his shoulder and drew his immense two-handed greatsword. "Why shouldn't we rule ourselves again? It was the dragons we married, and the dragons are all dead!" He pointed at Robb with the blade. "There sits the only king I mean to bow my knee to, m'lords," he thundered. "The King in the North!"

And he knelt, and laid his sword at her son's feet.

"I'll have peace on those terms," Lord Karstark said. "They can keep their red castle and their iron chair as well." He eased his longsword from its scabbard. "The King in the North!" he said, kneeling beside the Greatjon.

Maege Mormont stood. "The King of Winter!" she declared, and laid her spiked mace beside the swords. And the river lords were rising too, Blackwood and Bracken and Mallister, houses who had never been ruled from Winterfell, yet Catelyn watched them rise and draw their blades,