The northern lords sat opposite, with Catelyn and Robb facing her brother across the tables. They were fewer. The Greatjon sat at Robb's left hand, and then Theon Greyjoy; Galbart Glover and Lady Mormont were to the right of Catelyn. Lord Rickard Karstark, gaunt and hollow-eyed in his grief, took his seat like a man in a nightmare, his long beard uncombed and unwashed. He had left two sons dead in the Whispering Wood, and there was no word of the third, his eldest, who had led the Karstark spears against Tywin Lannister on the Green Fork.

The arguing raged on late into the night. Each lord had a right to speak, and speak they did... and shout, and curse, and reason, and cajole, and jest, and bargain, and slam tankards on the table, and threaten, and walk out, and return sullen or smiling. Catelyn sat and listened to it all.

Roose Bolton had re-formed the battered remnants of their other host at the mouth of the causeway. Ser Helman Tallhart and Walder Frey still held the Twins. Lord Tywin's army had crossed the Trident, and was making for Harrenhal. And there were two kings in the realm. Two kings, and no agreement.

Many of the lords bannermen wanted to march on Harrenhal at once, to meet Lord Tywin and end Lannister power for all time. Young, hot-tempered Marq Piper urged a strike west at Casterly Rock instead. Still others counseled patience. Riverrun sat athwart the Lannister supply lines, Jason Mallister pointed out; let them bide their time, denying Lord Tywin fresh levies and provisions while they strengthened their defenses and rested their weary troops. Lord Blackwood would have none of it. They should finish the work they began in the Whispering Wood. March to Harrenhal and bring Roose Bolton's army down as well. What Blackwood urged, Bracken opposed, as ever; Lord Jonos Bracken rose to insist they ought pledge their fealty to King Renly, and move south to join their might to his.

"Renly is not the king," Robb said. It was the first time her son had spoken. Like his father, he knew how to listen.

"You cannot mean to hold to Joffrey, my lord," Galbart Glover said. "He put your father to death."

"That makes him evil," Robb replied. "I do not know that it makes Renly king. Joffrey is still Robert's eldest trueborn son, so the throne is rightfully his by all the laws of the realm. Were he to die, and I mean to see that he does, he has a younger brother. Tommen is next in line after Joffrey."

"Tommen is no less a Lannister," Ser Marq Piper snapped.

"As you say," said Robb, troubled. "Yet if neither one is king, still, how could it be Lord Renly? He's Robert's younger brother. Bran can't be Lord of Winterfell before me, and Renly can't be king before Lord Stannis."

Lady Mormont agreed. "Lord Stannis has the better claim."

"Renly is crowned," said Marq Piper. "Highgarden and Storm's End support his claim, and the Dornishmen will not be laggardly. If Winterfell and Riverrun add their strength to his, he will have five of the seven great houses behind him. Six, if the Arryns bestir themselves! Six against the Rock! My lords, within the year, we will have all their heads on pikes, the queen and the boy king, Lord Tywin, the Imp, the Kingslayer, Ser Kevan, all of them! That is what we shall win if