

TYRION

Through the door came the soft sound of the high harp, mingled with a trilling of pipes. The singer's voice was muffled by the thick walls, yet Tyrion knew the verse. *I loved a maid as fair as summer*, he remembered, *with sunlight in her hair...*

Ser Meryn Trant guarded the queen's door this night. His muttered "My lord" struck Tyrion as a tad grudging, but he opened the door nonetheless. The song broke off abruptly as he strode into his sister's bedchamber.

Cersei was reclining on a pile of cushions. Her feet were bare, her golden hair artfully tousled, her robe a green-and-gold samite that caught the light of the candles and shimmered as she looked up. "Sweet sister," Tyrion said, "how beautiful you look tonight." He turned to the singer. "And you as well, cousin. I had no notion you had such a lovely voice."

The compliment made Ser Lancel sulky; perhaps he thought he was being mocked. It seemed to Tyrion that the lad had grown three inches since being knighted. Lancel had thick sandy hair, green Lannister eyes, and a line of soft blond fuzz on his upper lip. At sixteen, he was cursed with all the certainty of youth, unleavened by any trace of humor or self-doubt, and wed to the arrogance that came so naturally to those born blond and strong and handsome. His recent elevation had only made him worse. "Did Her Grace send for you?" the boy demanded.

"Not that I recall," Tyrion admitted. "It grieves me to disturb your revels, Lancel, but as it happens, I have matters of import to discuss with my sister."

Cersei regarded him suspiciously. "If you are here about those begging brothers, Tyrion, spare me your reproaches. I won't have them spreading their filthy treasons in the streets. They can preach to each other in the dungeons."

"And count themselves lucky that they have such a gentle queen," added Lancel. "I would have had their tongues out."

“One even dared to say that the gods were punishing us because Jaime murdered the rightful king,” Cersei declared. “It will not be borne, Tyrion. I gave you ample opportunity to deal with these lice, but you and your Ser Jacelyn did nothing, so I commanded Vylarr to attend to the matter.”

“And so he did.” Tyrion *had* been annoyed when the red cloaks had dragged a half dozen of the scabrous prophets down to the dungeons without consulting him, but they were not important enough to battle over. “No doubt we will all be better off for a little quiet in the streets. That is not why I came. I have tidings I know you will be anxious to hear, sweet sister, but they are best spoken of privily.”

“Very well.” The harpist and the piper bowed and hurried out, while Cersei kissed her cousin chastely on the cheek. “Leave us, Lancel. My brother’s harmless when he’s alone. If he’d brought his pets, we’d smell them.”

The young knight gave his cousin a baleful glance and pulled the door shut forcefully behind him. “I’ll have you know I make Shagga bathe once a fortnight,” Tyrion said when he was gone.

“You’re very pleased with yourself, aren’t you? Why?”

“Why not?” Tyrion said. Every day, every night, hammers rang along the Street of Steel, and the great chain grew longer. He hopped up onto the great canopied bed. “Is this the bed where Robert died? I’m surprised you kept it.”

“It gives me sweet dreams,” she said. “Now spit out your business and waddle away, Imp.”

Tyrion smiled. “Lord Stannis has sailed from Dragonstone.”

Cersei bolted to her feet. “And yet you sit there grinning like a harvest-day pumpkin? Has Bywater called out the City Watch? We must send a bird to Harrenhal at once.” He was laughing by then. She seized him by the shoulders and shook him. “Stop it. Are you mad, or drunk? *Stop it!*”

It was all he could do to get out the words. “I can’t,” he gasped. “It’s too... gods, too funny... Stannis...”

“*What?*”

“He hasn’t sailed against us,” Tyrion managed. “He’s laid siege to Storm’s End. Renly is riding to meet him.”

His sister’s nails dug painfully into his arms. For a moment she stared incredulous, as if he had begun to gibber in an unknown tongue. “Stannis and Renly are fighting *each other*?” When he nodded, Cersei began to chuckle. “Gods be good,” she gasped, “I’m starting to believe that Robert was the *clever* one.”

Tyrion threw back his head and roared. They laughed together. Cersei pulled him off the bed and whirled him around and even hugged him, for a moment as giddy as a girl. By the time she let go of him, Tyrion was breathless and dizzy. He staggered to her sideboard and put out a hand to steady himself.

“Do you think it will truly come to battle between them? If they should come to some accord—”

“They won’t,” Tyrion said. “They are too different and yet too much alike, and neither could ever stomach the other.”

“And Stannis has always felt he was cheated of Storm’s End,” Cersei said thoughtfully. “The ancestral seat of House Baratheon, his by rights... if you knew how many times he came to Robert singing that same dull song in that gloomy aggrieved tone he has. When Robert gave the place to Renly, Stannis clenched his jaw so tight I thought his teeth would shatter.”

“He took it as a slight.”

“It was meant as a slight,” Cersei said.

“Shall we raise a cup to brotherly love?”

“Yes,” she answered, breathless. “Oh, gods, yes.”

His back was to her as he filled two cups with sweet Arbor red. It was the easiest thing in the world to sprinkle a pinch of fine powder into hers. “To Stannis!” he said as he handed her the wine. *Harmless when I’m alone, am I?*

“To Renly!” she replied, laughing. “May they battle long and hard, and the Others take them both!”

Is this the Cersei that Jaime sees? When she smiled, you saw how beautiful she was, truly. *I loved a maid as fair as summer, with sunlight in her hair.* He almost felt sorry for poisoning her.

It was the next morning as he broke his fast that her messenger arrived. The queen was indisposed and would not be able to leave her chambers. *Not able to leave her privy, more like.* Tyrion made the proper sympathetic noises and sent word to Cersei to rest easy, he would treat with Ser Cleos as they'd planned.

The Iron Throne of Aegon the Conqueror was a tangle of nasty barbs and jagged metal teeth waiting for any fool who tried to sit too comfortably, and the steps made his stunted legs cramp as he climbed up to it, all too aware of what an absurd spectacle he must be. Yet there was one thing to be said for it. It was high.

Lannister guardsmen stood silent in their crimson cloaks and lioncrested halfhelms. Ser Jacelyn's gold cloaks faced them across the hall. The steps to the throne were flanked by Bronn and Ser Preston of the Kingsguard. Courtiers filled the gallery while supplicants clustered near the towering oak-and-bronze doors. Sansa Stark looked especially lovely this morning, though her face was as pale as milk. Lord Gyles stood coughing, while poor cousin Tyrek wore his bridegroom's mantle of miniver and velvet. Since his marriage to little Lady Ermesande three days past, the other squires had taken to calling him "Wet Nurse" and asking him what sort of swaddling clothes his bride wore on their wedding night.

Tyrion looked down on them all, and found he liked it. "Call forth Ser Cleos Frey." His voice rang off the stone walls and down the length of the hall. He liked that too. *A pity Shae could not be here to see this,* he reflected. She'd asked to come, but it was impossible.

Ser Cleos made the long walk between the gold cloaks and the crimson, looking neither right nor left. As he knelt, Tyrion observed that his cousin was losing his hair.

"Ser Cleos," Littlefinger said from the council table, "you have our thanks for bringing us this peace offer from Lord Stark."

Grand Maester Pycelle cleared his throat. “The Queen Regent, the King’s Hand, and the small council have considered the terms offered by this self-styled King in the North. Sad to say, they will not do, and you must tell these northmen so, ser.”

“Here are *our* terms,” said Tyrion. “Robb Stark must lay down his sword, swear fealty, and return to Winterfell. He must free my brother unharmed, and place his host under Jaime’s command, to march against the rebels Renly and Stannis Baratheon. Each of Stark’s bannermen must send us a son as hostage. A daughter will suffice where there is no son. They shall be treated gently and given high places here at court, so long as their fathers commit no new treasons.”

Cleos Frey looked ill. “My lord Hand,” he said, “Lord Stark will never consent to these terms.”

We never expected he would, Cleos. “Tell him that we have raised another great host at Casterly Rock, that soon it will march on him from the west while my lord father advances from the east. Tell him that he stands alone, without hope of allies. Stannis and Renly Baratheon war against each other, and the Prince of Dorne has consented to wed his son Trystane to the Princess Myrcella.” Murmurs of delight and consternation alike arose from the gallery and the back of the hall.

“As to this of my cousins,” Tyrion went on, “we offer Harrion Karstark and Ser Wylis Manderly for Willem Lannister, and Lord Cerwyn and Ser Donnel Locke for your brother Tion. Tell Stark that two Lannisters are worth four northmen in any season.” He waited for the laughter to die. “His father’s bones he shall have, as a gesture of Joffrey’s good faith.”

“Lord Stark asked for his sisters and his father’s sword as well,” Ser Cleos reminded him.

Ser Ilyn Payne stood mute, the hilt of Eddard Stark’s greatsword rising over one shoulder. “Ice,” said Tyrion. “He’ll have that when he makes his peace with us, not before.”

“As you say. And his sisters?”

Tyrion glanced toward Sansa, and felt a stab of pity as he said, “Until such time as he frees my brother Jaime, unharmed, they shall remain here as hostages. How well they are treated depends on him.” *And if the gods are good, Bywater will find Arya alive, before Robb learns she’s gone missing.*

“I shall bring him your message, my lord.”

Tyrion plucked at one of the twisted blades that sprang from the arm of the throne. *And now the thrust.* “Vylarr,” he called.

“My lord.”

“The men Stark sent are sufficient to protect Lord Eddard’s bones, but a Lannister should have a Lannister escort,” Tyrion declared. “Ser Cleos is the queen’s cousin, and mine. We shall sleep more easily if you would see him safely back to Riverrun.”

“As you command. How many men should I take?”

“Why, all of them.”

Vylarr stood like a man made of stone. It was Grand Maester Pycelle who rose, gasping, “My lord Hand, that cannot... your father, Lord Tywin himself, he sent these good men to our city to protect Queen Cersei and her children...”

“The Kingsguard and the City Watch protect them well enough. The gods speed you on your way, Vylarr.”

At the council table Varys smiled knowingly, Littlefinger sat feigning boredom, and Pycelle gaped like a fish, pale and confused. A herald stepped forward. “If any man has other matters to set before the King’s Hand, let him speak now or go forth and hold his silence.”

“*I will be heard.*” A slender man all in black pushed his way between the Redwyne twins.

“*Ser Alliser!*” Tyrion exclaimed. “Why, I had no notion that you’d come to court. You should have sent me word.”

“I have, as well you know.” Thorne was as prickly as his name, a spare, sharp-featured man of fifty, hard-eyed and hard-handed, his black hair streaked with grey. “I have been shunned, ignored, and left to wait like some baseborn servant.”

“Truly? Bronn, this was not well done. Ser Alliser and I are old friends. We walked the Wall together.”

“Sweet Ser Alliser,” murmured Varys, “you must not think too harshly of us. So many seek our Joffrey’s grace, in these troubled and tumultuous times.”

“More troubled than you know, eunuch.”

“To his face we call him *Lord* Eunuch,” quipped Littlefinger.

“How may we be of help to you, good brother?” Grand Maester Pycelle asked in soothing tones.

“The Lord Commander sent me to His Grace the king,” Thorne answered. “The matter is too grave to be left to servants.”

“The king is playing with his new crossbow,” Tyrion said. Ridding himself of Joffrey had required only an ungainly Myrish crossbow that threw three quarrels at a time, and nothing would do but that he try it at once. “You can speak to servants or hold your silence.”

“As you will,” Ser Alliser said, displeasure in every word. “I am sent to tell you that we found two rangers, long missing. They were dead, yet when we brought the corpses back to the Wall they rose again in the night. One slew Ser Jaremy Rykker, while the second tried to murder the Lord Commander.”

Distantly, Tyrion heard someone snigger. *Does he mean to mock me with this folly?* He shifted uneasily and glanced down at Varys, Littlefinger, and Pycelle, wondering if one of them had a role in this. A dwarf enjoyed at best a tenuous hold on dignity. Once the court and kingdom started to laugh at him, he was doomed. And yet... and yet...

Tyrion remembered a cold night under the stars when he’d stood beside the boy Jon Snow and a great white wolf atop the Wall at the end of the world, gazing out at the trackless dark beyond. He had felt—what?—*something*, to be sure, a dread that had cut like that frigid northern wind. A wolf had howled off in the night, and the sound had sent a shiver through him.

Don't be a fool, he told himself. *A wolf, a wind, a dark forest, it meant nothing. And yet...* He had come to have a liking for old Jeor Mormont during his time at Castle Black. "I trust that the Old Bear survived this attack?"

"He did."

"And that your brothers killed these, ah, dead men?"

"We did."

"You're certain that they are dead this time?" Tyrion asked mildly. When Bronn choked on a snort of laughter, he knew how he must proceed. "Truly truly dead?"

"They were dead the first time," Ser Alliser snapped. "Pale and cold, with black hands and feet. I brought Jared's hand, torn from his corpse by the bastard's wolf."

Littlefinger stirred. "And where is this charming token?"

Ser Alliser frowned uncomfortably. "It... rotted to pieces while I waited, unheard. There's naught left to show but bones."

Titters echoed through the hall. "Lord Baelish," Tyrion called down to Littlefinger, "buy our brave Ser Alliser a hundred spades to take back to the Wall with him."

"Spades?" Ser Alliser narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"If you *bury* your dead, they won't come walking," Tyrion told him, and the court laughed openly. "Spades will end your troubles, with some strong backs to wield them. Ser Jacelyn, see that the good brother has his pick of the city dungeons."

Ser Jacelyn Bywater said, "As you will, my lord, but the cells are near empty. Yoren took all the likely men."

"Arrest some more, then," Tyrion told him. "Or spread the word that there's bread and turnips on the Wall, and they'll go of their own accord." The city had too many mouths to feed, and the Night's Watch a perpetual need of men. At Tyrion's signal, the herald cried an end, and the hall began to empty.

Ser Alliser Thorne was not so easily dismissed. He was waiting at the foot of the iron Throne when Tyrion descended. “Do you think I sailed all the way from Eastwatch-by-the-Sea to be mocked by the likes of you?” he fumed, blocking the way. “This is no jape. I saw it with my own eyes. I tell you, the dead walk.”

“You should try to kill them more thoroughly.” Tyrion pushed past. Ser Alliser made to grab his sleeve, but Preston Greenfield thrust him back. “No closer, ser.”

Thorne knew better than to challenge a knight of the Kingsguard. “You are a fool, Imp,” he shouted at Tyrion’s back.

The dwarf turned to face him. “Me? Truly? Then why were they laughing at you, I wonder?” He smiled wanly. “You came for men, did you not?”

“The cold winds are rising. The Wall must be held.”

“And to hold it you need men, which I’ve given you... as you might have noted, if your ears heard anything but insults. Take them, thank me, and begone before I’m forced to take a crab fork to you again. Give my warm regards to Lord Mormont... and to Jon Snow as well.” Bronn seized Ser Alliser by the elbow and marched him forcefully from the hall.

Grand Maester Pycelle had already scuttled off, but Varys and Littlefinger had watched it all, start to finish. “I grow ever more admiring of you, my lord,” confessed the eunuch. “You appease the Stark boy with his father’s bones and strip your sister of her protectors in one swift stroke. You give that black brother the men he seeks, rid the city of some hungry mouths, yet make it all seem mockery so none may say that the dwarf fears snarks and grumkins. Oh, deftly done.”

Littlefinger stroked his beard. “Do you truly mean to send away all your guards, Lannister?”

“No, I mean to send away all my *sister’s* guards.”

“The queen will never allow that.”

“Oh, I think she may. I *am* her brother, and when you’ve known me longer, you’ll learn that I mean everything I say.”

“Even the lies?”

“*Especially* the lies. Lord Petyr, I sense that you are unhappy with me.”

“I love you as much as I ever have, my lord. Though I do not relish being played for a fool. If Myrcella weds Trystane Martell, she can scarcely wed Robert Arryn, can she?”

“Not without causing a great scandal,” he admitted. “I regret my little ruse, Lord Petyr, but when we spoke, I could not know the Dornishmen would accept my offer.”

Littlefinger was not appeased. “I do not like being lied to, my lord. Leave me out of your next deception.”

Only if you’ll do the same for me, Tyrion thought, glancing at the dagger sheathed at Littlefinger’s hip. “If I have given offense, I am deeply sorry. All men know how much we love you, my lord. And how much we need you.”

“Try and remember that.” With that Littlefinger left them.

“Walk with me, Varys,” said Tyrion. They left through the king’s door behind the throne, the eunuch’s slippers whisking lightly over the stone.

“Lord Baelish has the truth of it, you know. The queen will never permit you to send away her guard.”

“She will. You’ll see to that.”

A smile flickered across Varys’s plump lips. “Will I?”

“Oh, for a certainty. You’ll tell her it is part of my scheme to free Jaime.”

Varys stroked a powdered cheek. “This would doubtless involve the four men your man Bronn searched for so diligently in all the low places of King’s Landing. A thief, a poisoner, a mummer, and a murderer.”

“Put them in crimson cloaks and lion helms, they’ll look no different from any other guardsmen. I searched for some time for a ruse that might get them into Riverrun before I thought to hide them in plain sight. They’ll ride in by the main gate, flying Lannister banners and escorting Lord Eddard’s bones.” He smiled crookedly. “Four men alone would be watched

vigilantly. Four among a hundred can lose themselves. So I must send the true guardsmen as well as the false... as you'll tell my sister."

"And for the sake of her beloved brother, she will consent, despite her misgivings." They made their way down a deserted colonnade. "Still, the loss of her red cloaks will surely make her uneasy."

"I like her uneasy," said Tyrion.

Ser Cleos Frey left that very afternoon, escorted by Vylarr and a hundred red-cloaked Lannister guardsmen. The men Robb Stark had sent joined them at the King's Gate for the long ride west.

Tyrion found Timett dicing with his Burned Men in the barracks. "Come to my solar at midnight." Timett gave him a hard one-eyed stare, a curt nod. He was not one for long speeches.

That night he feasted with the Stone Crows and Moon Brothers in the Small Hall, though he shunned the wine for once. He wanted all his wits about him. "Shagga, what moon is this?"

Shagga's frown was a fierce thing. "Black, I think."

"In the west, they call that a traitor's moon. Try not to get too drunk tonight, and see that your axe is sharp."

"A Stone Crow's axe is always sharp, and Shagga's axes are sharpest of all. Once I cut off a man's head, but he did not know it until he tried to brush his hair. Then it fell off."

"Is that why you never brush yours?" The Stone Crows roared and stamped their feet, Shagga hooting loudest of all.

By midnight, the castle was silent and dark. Doubtless a few gold cloaks on the walls spied them leaving the Tower of the Hand, but no one raised a voice. He was the Hand of the King, and where he went was his own affair.

The thin wooden door split with a thunderous crack beneath the heel of Shagga's boot. Pieces went flying inward, and Tyrion heard a woman's gasp of fear. Shagga hacked the door apart with three great blows of his axe and kicked his way through the ruins. Timett followed, and then Tyrion, stepping gingerly over the splinters. The fire had burned down a few

glowing embers, and shadows lay thick across the bedchamber. When Timett ripped the heavy curtains off the bed, the naked serving girl stared up with wide white eyes. “Please, my lords,” she pleaded, “don’t hurt me.” She cringed away from Shagga, flushed and fearful, trying to cover her charms with her hands and coming up a hand short.

“Go,” Tyrion told her. “It’s not you we want.”

“Shagga wants this woman.”

“Shagga wants every whore in this city of whores,” complained Timett son of Timett.

“Yes,” Shagga said, unabashed. “Shagga would give her a strong child.”

“If she wants a strong child, she’ll know whom to seek,” Tyrion said. “Timett, see her out... gently, if you would.”

The Burned Man pulled the girl from the bed and half marched, half dragged her across the chamber. Shagga watched them go, mournful as a puppy. The girl stumbled over the shattered door and out into the hall, helped along by a firm shove from Timett. Above their heads, the ravens were screeching.

Tyrion dragged the soft blanket off the bed, uncovering Grand Maester Pycelle beneath. “Tell me, does the Citadel approve of you bedding the serving wenches, Maester?”

The old man was as naked as the girl, though he made a markedly less attractive sight. For once, his heavy-lidded eyes were open wide. “W-what is the meaning of this? I am an old man, your loyal servant...”

Tyrion hoisted himself onto the bed. “So loyal that you sent only one of my letters to Doran Martell. The other you gave to my sister.”

“N-no,” squealed Pycelle. “No, a falsehood, I swear it, it was not me. Varys, it was Varys, the Spider, I warned you—”

“Do all maesters lie so poorly? I told Varys that I was giving Prince Doran my nephew Tommen to foster. I told Littlefinger that I planned to wed Myrcella to Lord Robert of the Eyrie. I told no one that I had offered

Myrcella to the Dornish... that truth was only in the letter I entrusted to *you*.”

Pycelle clutched for a corner of the blanket. “Birds are lost, messages stolen or sold... it was Varys, there are things I might tell you of that eunuch that would chill your blood...”

“My lady prefers my blood hot.”

“Make no mistake, for every secret the eunuch whispers in your ear, he holds seven back. And Littlefinger, that one...”

“I know all about Lord Petyr. He’s almost as untrustworthy as you. Shagga, cut off his manhood and feed it to the goats.”

Shagga hefted the huge double-bladed axe. “There are no goats, Halfman.”

“Make do.”

Roaring, Shagga leapt forward. Pycelle shrieked and wet the bed, urine spraying in all directions as he tried to scramble back out of reach. The wildling caught him by the end of his billowy white beard and hacked off three-quarters of it with a single slash of the axe.

“Timett, do you suppose our friend will be more forthcoming without those whiskers to hide behind?” Tyrion used a bit of the sheet to wipe the piss off his boots.

“He will tell the truth soon.” Darkness pooled in the empty pit of Timett’s burned eye. “I can smell the stink of his fear.”

Shagga tossed a handful of hair down to the rushes, and seized what beard was left. “Hold still, Maester,” urged Tyrion. “When Shagga gets angry, his hands shake.”

“Shagga’s hands never shake,” the huge man said indignantly, pressing the great crescent blade under Pycelle’s quivering chin and sawing through another tangle of beard.

“How long have you been spying for my sister?” Tyrion asked.

Pycelle’s breathing was rapid and shallow. “All I did, I did for House Lannister.” A sheen of sweat covered the broad dome of the old man’s

brow, and wisps of white hair clung to his wrinkled skin. “Always... for years... your lord father, ask him, I was ever his true servant... ’twas I who bid Aerys open his gates...”

That took Tyrion by surprise. He had been no more than an ugly boy at Casterly Rock when the city fell. “So the Sack of King’s Landing was your work as well?”

“For the realm! Once Rhaegar died, the war was done. Aerys was mad, Viserys too young, Prince Aegon a babe at the breast, but the realm needed a king... I prayed it should be your good father, but Robert was too strong, and Lord Stark moved too swiftly...”

“How many have you betrayed, I wonder? Aerys, Eddard Stark, me... King Robert as well? Lord Arryn, Prince Rhaegar? Where does it begin, Pycelle?” He *knew* where it ended.

The axe scratched at the apple of Pycelle’s throat and stroked the soft wobbly skin under his jaw, scraping away the last hairs. “You... were not here,” he gasped when the blade moved upward to his cheeks. “Robert... his wounds... if you had seen them, smelled them, you would have no doubt...”

“Oh, I know the boar did your work for you... but if he’d left the job half done, doubtless you would have finished it.”

“He was a wretched king... vain, drunken, lecherous... he would have set your sister aside, his own queen... please... Renly was plotting to bring the Highgarden maid to court, to entice his brother... it is the gods’ own truth...”

“And what was Lord Arryn plotting?”

“He *knew*,” Pycelle said. “About... about...”

“I know what he knew about,” snapped Tyrion, who was not anxious for Shagga and Timett to know as well.

“He was sending his wife back to the Eyrie, and his son to be fostered on Dragonstone... he meant to act...”

“So you poisoned him first.”

“No.” Pycelle struggled feebly. Shagga growled and grabbed his head. The clansman’s hand was so big he could have crushed the maester’s skull like an eggshell had he squeezed.

Tyrion *tsked* at him. “I saw the tears of Lys among your potions. And you sent away Lord Arryn’s own maester and tended him yourself, so you could make certain that he died.”

“A falsehood!”

“Shave him closer,” Tyrion suggested. “The throat again.”

The axe swept back down, rasping over the skin. A thin film of spit bubbled on Pycelle’s lips as his mouth trembled. “I tried to save Lord Arryn. I vow—”

“Careful now, Shagga, you’ve cut him.”

Shagga growled. “Dolf fathered warriors, not barbers.”

When he felt the blood trickling down his neck and onto his chest, the old man shuddered, and the last strength went out of him. He looked shrunk, both smaller and frailer than he had been when they burst in on him. “Yes,” he whimpered, “yes, Colemon was purging, so I sent him away. The queen needed Lord Arryn dead, she did not say so, could not, Varys was listening, always listening, but when I looked at her I knew. It was not me who gave him the poison, though, I swear it.” The old man wept. “Varys will tell you, it was the boy, his squire, Hugh he was called, he must surely have done it, ask your sister, ask her.”

Tyrion was disgusted. “Bind him and take him away,” he commanded. “Throw him down in one of the black cells.”

They dragged him out the splintered door. “Lannister,” he moaned, “all I’ve done has been for Lannister...”

When he was gone, Tyrion made a leisurely search of the quarters and collected a few more small jars from his shelves. The ravens muttered above his head as he worked, a strangely peaceful noise. He would need to find someone to tend the birds until the Citadel sent a man to replace Pycelle.

He was the one I'd hoped to trust. Varys and Littlefinger were no more loyal, he suspected... only more subtle, and thus more dangerous. Perhaps his father's way would have been best: summon Ilyn Payne, mount three heads above the gates, and have done. *And wouldn't that be a pretty sight,* he thought.