



JAIME

A white book sat on a white table in a white room.

The room was round, its walls of whitewashed stone hung with white woolen tapestries. It formed the first floor of White Sword Tower, a slender structure of four stories built into an angle of the castle wall overlooking the bay. The undercroft held arms and armor, the second and third floors the small spare sleeping cells of the six brothers of the Kingsguard.

One of those cells had been his for eighteen years, but this morning he had moved his things to the topmost floor, which was given over entirely to the Lord Commander's apartments. Those rooms were spare as well, though spacious; and they were above the outer walls, which meant he would have a view of the sea. *I will like that*, he thought. *The view, and all the rest.*

As pale as the room, Jaime sat by the book in his Kingsguard whites, waiting for his Sworn Brothers. A longsword hung from his hip. *From the wrong hip.* Before he had always worn his sword on his left, and drawn it across his body when he unsheathed. He had shifted it to his right hip this morning, so as to be able to draw it with his left hand in the same manner, but the weight of it felt strange there, and when he had tried to pull the blade from the scabbard the whole motion seemed clumsy and unnatural. His clothing fit badly as well. He had donned the winter raiment of the Kingsguard, a tunic and breeches of bleached white wool and a heavy white cloak, but it all seemed to hang loose on him.

Jaime had spent his days at his brother's trial, standing well to the back of the hall. Either Tyrion never saw him there or he did not know him, but that was no surprise. Half the court no longer seemed to know him. *I am a stranger in my own House*. His son was dead, his father had disowned him, and his sister . . . she had not allowed him to be alone with her once, after that first day in the royal sept where Joffrey lay amongst the candles. Even when they bore him across the city to his tomb in the Great Sept of Baelor, Cersei kept a careful distance.

He looked about the Round Room once more. White wool hangings covered the walls, and there was a white shield and two crossed longswords mounted above the hearth. The chair behind the table was old black oak, with cushions of blanchéd cowhide, the leather worn thin. *Worn by the bony arse of Barristan the Bold and Ser Gerold Hightower before him, by Prince Aemon the Dragonknight, Ser Ryam Redwyne, and the Demon of Darry, by Ser Duncan the Tall and the Pale Griffin Alyn Connington*. How could the Kingslayer belong in such exalted company?

Yet here he was.

The table itself was old weirwood, pale as bone, carved in the shape of a huge shield supported by three white stallions. By tradition the Lord Commander sat at the top of the shield, and the brothers three to a side, on the rare occasions when all seven were assembled. The book that rested by his elbow was massive; two feet tall and a foot and a half wide, a thousand pages thick, fine white vellum bound between covers of bleached white leather with gold hinges and fastenings. *The Book of the Brothers* was its formal name, but more often it was simply called the White Book.

Within the White Book was the history of the Kingsguard. Every knight who'd ever served had a page, to record his name and deeds for all time. On the top left-hand corner of each page was drawn the shield the man had carried at the time he was chosen, inked in rich colors. Down in the bottom right corner was the shield of the Kingsguard; snow-white, empty, pure. The upper shields were all different; the lower shields were all the same. In the space between were written the facts of each man's life and service. The heraldic drawings and illuminations were done by septons sent from the Great Sept of Baelor three times a year, but it was the duty of the Lord Commander to keep the entries up to date.

My duty, now. Once he learned to write with his left hand, that is. The White Book was well behind. The deaths of Ser Mandon Moore and Ser Preston Greenfield needed to be entered, and the brief bloody Kingsguard service of Sandor Clegane as well. New pages must be started for Ser Balon Swann, Ser Osmund Kettleblack, and the Knight of Flowers. *I will need to summon a septon to draw their shields.*

Ser Barristan Selmy had preceded Jaime as Lord Commander. The shield atop his page showed the arms of House Selmy: three stalks of wheat, yellow, on a brown field. Jaime was amused, though unsurprised, to find that Ser Barristan had taken the time to record his own dismissal before leaving the castle.

Ser Barristan of House Selmy. Firstborn son of Ser Lyonel Selmy of Harvest Hall. Served as squire to Ser Manfred Swann. Named "the Bold" in his 10th year, when he donned borrowed armor to appear as a mystery knight in the tourney at Blackhaven, where he was defeated and unmasked by Duncan, Prince of Dragonflies. Knighted in his 16th year by King Aegon V Targaryen, after performing great feats of prowess as a mystery knight in the winter tourney at King's Landing, defeating Prince Duncan the Small and Ser Duncan the Tall, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Slew Maelys the Monstrous, last of the Blackfyre Pretenders, in single combat during the War of the Ninepenny Kings. Defeated Lormelle Long Lance and Cedrik Storm, the Bastard of Bronzegate. Named to the Kingsguard in his 23rd year, by Lord Commander Ser Gerold Hightower. Defended the passage against all challengers in the tourney of the Silver Bridge. Victor in the mêlée at Maidenpool. Brought King Aerys II to safety during the Defiance of Duskendale, despite an arrow wound in the chest. Avenged the murder of his Sworn Brother, Ser Gwayne Gaunt. Rescued Lady Jeyne Swann and her septa from the Kingswood Brotherhood, defeating Simon Toyne and the Smiling Knight, and slaying the former. In the Oldtown tourney, defeated and unmasked the mystery knight Blackshield, revealing him as the Bastard of Uplands. Sole champion of Lord Steffon's tourney at Storm's End, whereat he unhorsed Lord Robert Baratheon, Prince Oberyn Martell, Lord Leyton Hightower, Lord Jon Connington, Lord Jason Mallister, and Prince Rhaegar Targaryen. Wounded by arrow, spear, and sword at the Battle of the Trident whilst fighting beside his Sworn Brothers and Rhaegar Prince of

Dragonstone. Pardoned, and named Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, by King Robert I Baratheon. Served in the honor guard that brought Lady Cersei of House Lannister to King's Landing to wed King Robert. Led the attack on Old Wyk during Balon Greyjoy's Rebellion. Champion of the tourney at King's Landing, in his 57th year. Dismissed from service by King Joffrey I Baratheon in his 61st year, for reasons of advanced age.

The earlier part of Ser Barristan's storied career had been entered by Ser Gerold Hightower in a big forceful hand. Selmy's own smaller and more elegant writing took over with the account of his wounding on the Trident.

Jaime's own page was scant by comparison.

Ser Jaime of House Lannister. Firstborn son of Lord Tywin and Lady Joanna of Casterly Rock. Served against the Kingswood Brotherhood as squire to Lord Summer Crakehall. Knighted in his 15th year by Ser Arthur Dayne of the Kingsguard, for valor in the field. Chosen for the Kingsguard in his 15th year by King Aerys II Targaryen. During the Sack of King's Landing, slew King Aerys II at the foot of the Iron Throne. Thereafter known as the "Kingslayer." Pardoned for his crime by King Robert I Baratheon. Served in the honor guard that brought his sister the Lady Cersei Lannister to King's Landing to wed King Robert. Champion in the tourney held at King's Landing on the occasion of their wedding.

Summed up like that, his life seemed a rather scant and mingy thing. Ser Barristan could have recorded a few of his other tourney victories, at least. And Ser Gerold might have written a few more words about the deeds he'd performed when Ser Arthur Dayne broke the Kingswood Brotherhood. He *had* saved Lord Sumner's life as Big Belly Ben was about to smash his head in, though the outlaw had escaped him. And he'd held his own against the Smiling Knight, though it was Ser Arthur who slew him. *What a fight that was, and what a foe.* The Smiling Knight was a madman, cruelty and chivalry all jumbled up together, but he did not know the meaning of fear. *And Dayne, with Dawn in hand . . .* The outlaw's longsword had so many notches by the end that Ser Arthur had stopped to let him fetch a new one. "It's that white sword of yours I want," the robber knight told him as they resumed, though he was bleeding from a dozen wounds by then. "Then you shall have it, ser," the Sword of the Morning replied, and made an end of it.

The world was simpler in those days, Jaime thought, and men as well as swords were made of finer steel. Or was it only that he had been fifteen? They were all in their graves now, the Sword of the Morning and the Smiling Knight, the White Bull and Prince Lewyn, Ser Oswell Whent with his black humor, earnest Jon Darry, Simon Toyne and his Kingswood Brotherhood, bluff old Sumner Crakehall. *And me, that boy I was . . . when did he die, I wonder? When I donned the white cloak? When I opened Aerys's throat?* That boy had wanted to be Ser Arthur Dayne, but someplace along the way he had become the Smiling Knight instead.

When he heard the door open, he closed the White Book and stood to receive his Sworn Brothers. Ser Osmund Kettleblack was the first to arrive. He gave Jaime a grin, as if they were old brothers-in-arms. "Ser Jaime," he said, "had you looked like this t'other night, I'd have known you at once."

"Would you indeed?" Jaime doubted that. The servants had bathed him, shaved him, and washed and brushed his hair. When he looked in a glass, he no longer saw the man who had crossed the riverlands with Brienne . . . but he did not see himself either. His face was thin and hollow, and he had lines under his eyes. *I look like some old man.* "Stand by your seat, ser."

Kettleblack complied. The other Sworn Brothers filed in one by one. "Sers," Jaime said in a formal tone when all five had assembled, "who guards the king?"

"My brothers Ser Osney and Ser Osfryd," Ser Osmund replied.

"And my brother Ser Garlan," said the Knight of Flowers.

"Will they keep him safe?"

"They will, my lord."

"Be seated, then." The words were ritual. Before the seven could meet in session, the king's safety must be assured.

Ser Boros and Ser Meryn sat to his right, leaving an empty chair between them for Ser Arys Oakheart, off in Dorne. Ser Osmund, Ser Balon, and Ser Loras took the seats to his left. *The old and the new.* Jaime wondered if that meant anything. There had been times during its history where the Kingsguard had been divided against itself, most notably and bitterly during the Dance of the Dragons. Was that something he needed to fear as well?

It seemed queer to him to sit in the Lord Commander's seat where Barristan the Bold had sat for so many years. *And even queerer to sit here crippled.* Nonetheless, it was his seat, and this was his Kingsguard now. *Tommen's seven.*

Jaime had served with Meryn Trant and Boros Blount for years; adequate fighters, but Trant was sly and cruel, and Blount a bag of growly air. Ser Balon Swann was better suited to his cloak, and of course the Knight of Flowers was supposedly all a knight should be. The fifth man was a stranger to him, this Osmund Kettleblack.

He wondered what Ser Arthur Dayne would have to say of this lot. "*How is it that the Kingsguard has fallen so low,*" most like. "*It was my doing,*" *I would have to answer. "I opened the door, and did nothing when the vermin began to crawl inside."*

"The king is dead," Jaime began. "My sister's son, a boy of thirteen, murdered at his own wedding feast in his own hall. All five of you were present. All five of you were *protecting* him. And yet he's dead." He waited to see what they would say to that, but none of them so much as cleared a throat. *The Tyrell boy is angry, and Balon Swann's ashamed,* he judged. From the other three Jaime sensed only indifference. "Did my brother do this thing?" he asked them bluntly. "Did Tyrion poison my nephew?"

Ser Balon shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Ser Boros made a fist. Ser Osmund gave a lazy shrug. It was Meryn Trant who finally answered. "He filled Joffrey's cup with wine. That must have been when he slipped the poison in."

"You are certain it was the *wine* that was poisoned?"

"What else?" said Ser Boros Blount. "The Imp emptied the dregs on the floor. Why, but to spill the wine that might have proved him guilty?"

"He knew the wine was poisoned," said Ser Meryn.

Ser Balon Swann frowned. "The Imp was not alone on the dais. Far from it. That late in the feast, we had people standing and moving about, changing places, slipping off to the privy, servants were coming and going . . . the king and queen had just opened the wedding pie, every eye was on them or those thrice-damned doves. No one was watching the wine cup."

“Who else was on the dais?” asked Jaime.

Ser Meryn answered. “The king’s family, the bride’s family, Grand Maester Pycelle, the High Septon . . .”

“There’s your poisoner,” suggested Ser Oswald Kettleblack with a sly grin. “Too holy by half, that old man. Never liked the look o’ him, myself.” He laughed.

“No,” the Knight of Flowers said, unamused. “Sansa Stark was the poisoner. You all forget, my sister was drinking from that chalice as well. Sansa Stark was the only person in the hall who had reason to want Margaery dead, as well as the king. By poisoning the wedding cup, she could hope to kill both of them. And why did she run afterward, unless she was guilty?”

The boy makes sense. Tyrion might yet be innocent. No one was any closer to finding the girl, however. Perhaps Jaime should look into that himself. For a start, it would be good to know how she had gotten out of the castle. *Varys may have a notion or two about that.* No one knew the Red Keep better than the eunuch.

That could wait, however. Just now Jaime had more immediate concerns. *You say you are the Lord Commander of the Kingsguard*, his father had said. *Go do your duty.* These five were not the brothers he would have chosen, but they were the brothers he had; the time had come to take them in hand.

“Whoever did it,” he told them, “Joffrey is dead, and the Iron Throne belongs to Tommen now. I mean for him to sit on it until his hair turns white and his teeth fall out. And not from poison.” Jaime turned to Ser Boros Blount. The man had grown stout in recent years, though he was big-boned enough to carry it. “Ser Boros, you look like a man who enjoys his food. Henceforth you’ll taste everything Tommen eats or drinks.”

Ser Osmund Kettleblack laughed aloud and the Knight of Flowers smiled, but Ser Boros turned a deep beet red. “I am no food taster! I am a knight of the Kingsguard!”

“Sad to say, you are.” Cersei should never have stripped the man of his white cloak. But their father had only compounded the shame by restoring it. “My sister has told me how readily you yielded my nephew to Tyrion’s

sellswords. You will find carrots and pease less threatening, I hope. When your Sworn Brothers are training in the yard with sword and shield, you may train with spoon and trencher. Tommen loves applecakes. Try not to let any sellswords make off with them.”

“You speak to me thus? *You?*”

“You should have died before you let Tommen be taken.”

“As you died protecting Aerys, ser?” Ser Boros lurched to his feet, and clasped the hilt of his sword. “*I won’t . . .* I won’t suffer this. You should be the food taster, it seems to me. What else is a cripple good for?”

Jaime smiled. “I agree. I am as unfit to guard the king as you are. So draw that sword you’re fondling, and we shall see how your two hands fare against my one. At the end one of us will be dead, and the Kingsguard will be improved.” He rose. “Or, if you prefer, you may return to your duties.”

“*Bah!*” Ser Boros hawked up a glob of green phlegm, spat it at Jaime’s feet, and walked out, his sword still in its sheath.

The man is craven, and a good thing. Though fat, aging, and never more than ordinary, Ser Boros could still have hacked him into bloody pieces. *But Boros does not know that, and neither must the rest. They feared the man I was; the man I am they’d pity.*

Jaime seated himself again and turned to Kettleblack. “Ser Osmund. I do not know you. I find that curious. I’ve fought in tourneys, mêlées, and battles throughout the Seven Kingdoms. I know of every hedge knight, freerider, and upjumped squire of any skill who has ever presumed to break a lance in the lists. So how is it that I have never heard of you, Ser Osmund?”

“That I couldn’t say, my lord.” He had a great wide smile on his face, did Ser Osmund, as if he and Jaime were old comrades in arms playing some jolly little game. “I’m a soldier, though, not no tourney knight.”

“Where had you served, before my sister found you?”

“Here and there, my lord.”

“I have been to Oldtown in the south and Winterfell in the north. I have been to Lannisport in the west, and King’s Landing in the east. But I have never been to Here. Nor There.” For want of a finger, Jaime pointed his

stump at Ser Osmund's beak of a nose. "I will ask once more. *Where have you served?*"

"In the Stepstones. Some in the Disputed Lands. There's always fighting there. I rode with the Gallant Men. We fought for Lys, and some for Tyrosh."

You fought for anyone who would pay you. "How did you come by your knighthood?"

"On a battlefield."

"Who knighted you?"

"Ser Robert . . . Stone. He's dead now, my lord."

"To be sure." Ser Robert Stone might have been some bastard from the Vale, he supposed, selling his sword in the Disputed Lands. On the other hand, he might be no more than a name Ser Osmund cobbled together from a dead king and a castle wall. *What was Cersei thinking when she gave this one a white cloak?*

At least Kettleblack would likely know how to use a sword and shield. Sellswords were seldom the most honorable of men, but they had to have a certain skill at arms to stay alive. "Very well, ser," Jaime said. "You may go."

The man's grin returned. He left swaggering.

"Ser Meryn." Jaime smiled at the sour knight with the rust-red hair and the pouches under his eyes. "I have heard it said that Joffrey made use of you to chastise Sansa Stark." He turned the White Book around one-handed. "Here, show me where it is in our vows that we swear to beat women and children."

"I did as His Grace commanded me. We are sworn to obey."

"Henceforth you will temper that obedience. My sister is Queen Regent. My father is the King's Hand. I am Lord Commander of the Kingsguard. Obey us. None other."

Ser Meryn got a stubborn look on his face. "Are you telling us not to obey the king?"

“The king is eight. Our first duty is to *protect* him, which includes protecting him from himself. Use that ugly thing you keep inside your helm. If Tommen wants you to saddle his horse, obey him. If he tells you to kill his horse, come to me.”

“Aye. As you command, my lord.”

“Dismissed.” As he left, Jaime turned to Ser Balon Swann. “Ser Balon, I have watched you tilt many a time, and fought with and against you in mêlées. I’m told you proved your valor a hundred times over during the Battle of the Blackwater. The Kingsguard is honored by your presence.”

“The honor’s mine, my lord.” Ser Balon sounded wary.

“There is only one question I would put to you. You served us loyally, it’s true . . . but Varys tells me that your brother rode with Renly and then Stannis, whilst your lord father chose not to call his banners at all and remained behind the walls of Stonehelm all through the fighting.”

“My father is an old man, my lord. Well past forty. His fighting days are done.”

“And your brother?”

“Donnel was wounded in the battle and yielded to Ser Elwood Harte. He was ransomed afterward and pledged his fealty to King Joffrey, as did many other captives.”

“So he did,” said Jaime. “Even so . . . Renly, Stannis, Joffrey, Tommen . . . how did he come to omit Balon Greyjoy and Robb Stark? He might have been the first knight in the realm to swear fealty to all six kings.”

Ser Balon’s unease was plain. “Donnel erred, but he is Tommen’s man now. You have my word.”

“It’s not Ser Donnel the Constant who concerns me. It’s you.” Jaime leaned forward. “What will you do if brave Ser Donnel gives his sword to yet another usurper, and one day comes storming into the throne room? And there you stand all in white, between your king and your blood. What will you do?”

“I . . . my lord, that will never happen.”

“It happened to me,” Jaime said.

Swann wiped his brow with the sleeve of his white tunic.

“You have no answer?”

“My lord.” Ser Balon drew himself up. “On my sword, on my honor, on my father’s name, I swear . . . I shall not do as you did.”

Jaime laughed. “Good. Return to your duties . . . and tell Ser Donnel to add a weathervane to his shield.”

And then he was alone with the Knight of Flowers.

Slim as a sword, lithe and fit, Ser Loras Tyrell wore a snowy linen tunic and white wool breeches, with a gold belt around his waist and a gold rose clasping his fine silk cloak. His hair was a soft brown tumble, and his eyes were brown as well, and bright with insolence. *He thinks this is a tourney, and his tilt has just been called.* “Seventeen and a knight of the Kingsguard,” said Jaime. “You must be proud. Prince Aemon the Dragonknight was seventeen when he was named. Did you know that?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And did you know that I was *fifteen*?”

“That as well, my lord.” He smiled.

Jaime hated that smile. “I was better than you, Ser Loras. I was bigger, I was stronger, and I was quicker.”

“And now you’re older,” the boy said. “My lord.”

He had to laugh. *This is too absurd. Tyrion would mock me unmercifully if he could hear me now, comparing cocks with this green boy.* “Older and wiser, ser. You should learn from me.”

“As you learned from Ser Boros and Ser Meryn?”

That arrow hit too close to the mark. “I learned from the White Bull and Barristan the Bold,” Jaime snapped. “I learned from Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning, who could have slain all five of you with his left hand while he was taking with a piss with the right. I learned from Prince Lewyn of Dorne and Ser Oswell Whent and Ser Jonothor Darry, good men every one.”

“Dead men, every one.”

He's me, Jaime realized suddenly. *I am speaking to myself, as I was, all cocksure arrogance and empty chivalry. This is what it does to you, to be too good too young.*

As in a swordfight, sometimes it is best to try a different stroke. "It's said you fought magnificently in the battle . . . almost as well as Lord Renly's ghost beside you. A Sworn Brother has no secrets from his Lord Commander. Tell me, ser. Who was wearing Renly's armor?"

For a moment Loras Tyrell looked as though he might refuse, but in the end he remembered his vows. "My brother," he said sullenly. "Renly was taller than me, and broader in the chest. His armor was too loose on me, but it suited Garlan well."

"Was the masquerade your notion, or his?"

"Lord Littlefinger suggested it. He said it would frighten Stannis's ignorant men-at-arms."

"And so it did." *And some knights and lordlings too.* "Well, you gave the singers something to make rhymes about, I suppose that's not to be despised. What did you do with Renly?"

"I buried him with mine own hands, in a place he showed me once when I was a squire at Storm's End. No one shall ever find him there to disturb his rest." He looked at Jaime defiantly. "I will defend King Tommen with all my strength, I swear it. I will give my life for his if need be. But I will never betray Renly, by word or deed. He was the king that should have been. He was the best of them."

The best dressed perhaps, Jaime thought, but for once he did not say it. The arrogance had gone out of Ser Loras the moment he began to speak of Renly. *He answered truly. He is proud and reckless and full of piss, but he is not false. Not yet.* "As you say. One more thing, and you may return to your duties."

"Yes, my lord?"

"I still have Brienne of Tarth in a tower cell."

The boy's mouth hardened. "A black cell would be better."

"You are certain that's what she deserves?"

“She deserves death. I told Renly that a woman had no place in the Rainbow Guard. She won the mêlée with a trick.”

“I seem to recall another knight who was fond of tricks. He once rode a mare in heat against a foe mounted on a bad-tempered stallion. What sort of trickery did Brienne use?”

Ser Loras flushed. “She leapt . . . it makes no matter. She won, I grant her that. His Grace put a rainbow cloak around her shoulders. And she killed him. Or let him die.”

“A large difference there.” *The difference between my crime and the shame of Boros Blount.*

“She had sworn to protect him. Ser Emmon Cuy, Ser Robar Royce, Ser Parmen Crane, they’d sworn as well. How could anyone have hurt him, with her inside his tent and the others just outside? Unless they were part of it.”

“There were five of you at the wedding feast,” Jaime pointed out. “How could Joffrey die? Unless you were part of it?”

Ser Loras drew himself up stiffly. “There was nothing we could have done.”

“The wench says the same. She grieves for Renly as you do. I promise you, I never grieve for Aerys. Brienne’s ugly, and pighead stubborn. But she lacks the wits to be a liar, and she is loyal past the point of sense. She swore an oath to bring me to King’s Landing, and here I sit. This hand I lost . . . well, that was my doing as much as hers. Considering all she did to protect me, I have no doubt that she would have fought for Renly, had there been a foe to fight. But a shadow?” Jaime shook his head. “Draw your sword, Ser Loras. Show me how *you’d* fight a shadow. I should like to see that.”

Ser Loras made no move to rise. “She fled,” he said. “She and Catelyn Stark, they left him in his blood and ran. Why would they, if it was not their work?” He stared at the table. “Renly gave me the van. Otherwise it would have been me helping him don his armor. He often entrusted that task to me. We had . . . we had prayed together that night. I left him with her. Ser Parmen and Ser Emmon were guarding the tent, and Ser Robar Royce was there as well. Ser Emmon swore Brienne had . . . although . . .”

“Yes?” Jaime prompted, sensing a doubt.

“The gorget was cut through. One clean stroke, through a steel gorget. Renly’s armor was the best, the finest steel. How could she do that? I tried myself, and it was not possible. She’s freakish strong for a woman, but even the Mountain would have needed a heavy axe. And why armor him and *then* cut his throat?” He gave Jaime a confused look. “If not her, though . . . how could it be a *shadow*?”

“Ask her.” Jaime came to a decision. “Go to her cell. Ask your questions and hear her answers. If you are still convinced that she murdered Lord Renly, I will see that she answers for it. The choice will be yours. Accuse her, or release her. All I ask is that you judge her fairly, on your honor as a knight.”

Ser Loras stood. “I shall. On my honor.”

“We are done, then.”

The younger man started for the door. But there he turned back. “Renly thought she was absurd. A woman dressed in man’s mail, pretending to be a knight.”

“If he’d ever seen her in pink satin and Myrish lace, he would not have complained.”

“I asked him why he kept her close, if he thought her so grotesque. He said that all his other knights wanted things of him, castles or honors or riches, but all that Brienne wanted was to die for him. When I saw him all bloody, with her fled and the three of them unharmed . . . if she’s innocent, then Robar and Emmon . . .” He could not seem to say the words.

Jaime had not stopped to consider that aspect of it. “I would have done the same, ser.” The lie came easy, but Ser Loras seemed grateful for it.

When he was gone, the Lord Commander sat alone in the white room, wondering. The Knight of Flowers had been so mad with grief for Renly that he had cut down two of his own Sworn Brothers, but it had never occurred to Jaime to do the same with the five who had failed Joffrey. *He was my son, my secret son . . . What am I, if I do not lift the hand I have left to avenge mine own blood and seed?* He ought to kill Ser Boros at least, just to be rid of him.

He looked at his stump and grimaced. *I must do something about that.* If the late Ser Jacelyn Bywater could wear an iron hand, he should have a gold one. *Cersei might like that. A golden hand to stroke her golden hair, and hold her hard against me.*

His hand could wait, though. There were other things to tend to first. There were other debts to pay.