



JAIME

The king sat at the head of the table, a stack of cushions under his arse, signing each document as it was presented to him.

“Only a few more, Your Grace,” Ser Kevan Lannister assured him. “This is a bill of attainder against Lord Edmure Tully, stripping him of Riverrun and all its lands and incomes, for rebelling against his lawful king. This is a similar attainder, against his uncle Ser Brynden Tully, the Blackfish.” Tommen signed them one after the other, dipping the quill carefully and writing his name in a broad childish hand.

Jaime watched from the foot of the table, thinking of all those lords who aspired to a seat on the king’s small council. *They can bloody well have mine.* If this was power, why did it taste like tedium? He did not feel especially powerful, watching Tommen dip his quill in the inkpot again. He felt bored.

And sore. Every muscle in his body ached, and his ribs and shoulders were bruised from the battering they’d gotten, courtesy of Ser Addam Marbrand. Just thinking of it made him wince. He could only hope the man would keep his mouth shut. Jaime had known Marbrand since he was a boy, serving as a page at Casterly Rock; he trusted him as much as he trusted anyone. Enough to ask him to take up shields and tourney swords. He had wanted to know if he could fight with his left hand.

And now I do. The knowledge was more painful than the beating that Ser Addam had given him, and the beating was so bad he could hardly dress himself this morning. If they had been fighting in earnest, Jaime would have died two dozen deaths. It seemed so simple, changing hands. It wasn't. Every instinct he had was wrong. He had to *think* about everything, where once he'd just moved. And while he was thinking, Marbrand was thumping him. His left hand couldn't even seem to *hold* a longsword properly; Ser Addam had disarmed him thrice, sending his blade spinning.

"This grants said lands, incomes, and castle to Ser Emmon Frey and his lady wife, Lady Genna." Ser Kevan presented another sheaf of parchments to the king. Tommen dipped and signed. "This is a decree of legitimacy for a natural son of Lord Roose Bolton of the Dreadfort. And this names Lord Bolton your Warden of the North." Tommen dipped, signed, dipped, signed. "This grants Ser Rolph Spicer title to the castle Castamere and raises him to the rank of lord." Tommen scrawled his name.

I should have gone to Ser Ilyn Payne, Jaime reflected. The King's Justice was not a friend as Marbrand was, and might well have beat him bloody . . . but without a tongue, he was not like to boast of it afterward. All it would take would be one chance remark by Ser Addam in his cups, and the whole world would soon know how useless he'd become. *Lord Commander of the Kingsguard.* It was a cruel jape, that . . . though not quite so cruel as the gift his father had sent him.

"This is your royal pardon for Lord Gawen Westerling, his lady wife, and his daughter Jeyne, welcoming them back into the king's peace," Ser Kevan said. "This is a pardon for Lord Jonos Bracken of Stone Hedge. This is a pardon for Lord Vance. This for Lord Goodbrook. This for Lord Mooton of Maidenpool."

Jaime pushed himself to his feet. "You seem to have these matters well in hand, Uncle. I shall leave His Grace to you."

"As you wish." Ser Kevan rose as well. "Jaime, you should go to your father. This breach between you—"

"—is his doing. Nor will he mend it by sending me mocking gifts. Tell him that, if you can pry him away from the Tyrells long enough."

His uncle looked distressed. “The gift was heartfelt. We thought that it might encourage you—”

“—to grow a new hand?” Jaime turned to Tommen. Though he had Joffrey’s golden curls and green eyes, the new king shared little else with his late brother. He inclined to plumpness, his face was pink and round, and he even liked to read. *He is still shy of nine, this son of mine. The boy is not the man.* It would be seven years before Tommen was ruling in his own right. Until then the realm would remain firmly in the hands of his lord grandfather. “Sire,” he asked, “do I have your leave to go?”

“As you like, Ser Uncle.” Tommen looked back to Ser Kevan. “Can I seal them now, Great-Uncle?” Pressing his royal seal into the hot wax was his favorite part of being king, so far.

Jaime strode from the council chamber. Outside the door he found Ser Meryn Trant standing stiff at guard in white scale armor and snowy cloak. *If this one should learn how feeble I am, or Kettleblack or Blount should hear of it . . .* “Remain here until His Grace is done,” he said, “then escort him back to Maegor’s.”

Trant inclined his head. “As you say, my lord.”

The outer ward was crowded and noisy that morning. Jaime made for the stables, where a large group of men were saddling their horses. “Steelshanks!” he called. “Are you off, then?”

“As soon as m’lady is mounted,” said Steelshanks Walton. “My lord of Bolton expects us. Here she is now.”

A groom led a fine grey mare out the stable door. On her back was mounted a skinny hollow-eyed girl wrapped in a heavy cloak. Grey, it was, like the dress beneath it, and trimmed with white satin. The clasp that pinned it to her breast was wrought in the shape of a wolf’s head with slitted opal eyes. The girl’s long brown hair blew wild in the wind. She had a pretty face, he thought, but her eyes were sad and wary.

When she saw him, she inclined her head. “Ser Jaime,” she said in a thin anxious voice. “You are kind to see me off.”

Jaime studied her closely. “You know me, then?”

She bit her lip. “You may not recall, my lord, as I was littler then . . . but I had the honor to meet you at Winterfell when King Robert came to visit my father Lord Eddard.” She lowered her big brown eyes and mumbled, “I’m Arya Stark.”

Jaime had never paid much attention to Arya Stark, but it seemed to him that this girl was older. “I understand you’re to be married.”

“I am to wed Lord Bolton’s son, Ramsay. He used to be a Snow, but His Grace has made him a Bolton. They say he’s very brave. I am so happy.”

Then why do you sound so frightened? “I wish you joy, my lady.” Jaime turned back to Steelshanks. “You have the coin you were promised?”

“Aye, and we’ve shared it out. You have my thanks.” The northman grinned. “A Lannister always pays his debts.”

“Always,” said Jaime, with a last glance at the girl. He wondered if there was much resemblance. Not that it mattered. The real Arya Stark was buried in some unmarked grave in Flea Bottom in all likelihood. With her brothers dead, and both parents, who would dare name this one a fraud? “Good speed,” he told Steelshanks. Nage raised his peace banner, and the northmen formed a column as ragged as their fur cloaks and trotted out the castle gate. The thin girl on the grey mare looked small and forlorn in their midst.

A few of the horses still shied away from the dark splotch on the hard-packed ground where the earth had drunk the life’s blood of the stableboy Gregor Clegane had killed so clumsily. The sight of it made Jaime angry all over again. He had told his Kingsguard to keep the crowd out of the way, but that oaf Ser Boros had let himself be distracted by the duel. The fool boy himself shared some of the blame, to be sure; the dead Dornishman as well. And Clegane most of all. The blow that took the boy’s arm off had been mischance, but that second cut . . .

Well, Gregor is paying for it now. Grand Maester Pycelle was tending to the man’s wounds, but the howls heard ringing from the maester’s chambers suggested that the healing was not going as well as it might. “The flesh mortifies and the wounds ooze pus,” Pycelle told the council. “Even maggots will not touch such foulness. His convulsions are so violent that I have had to gag him to prevent him from biting off his tongue. I have cut

away as much tissue as I dare, and treated the rot with boiling wine and bread mold, to no avail. The veins in his arm are turning black. When I leeches him, all the leeches died. My lords, I must know what malignant substance Prince Oberyn used on his spear. Let us detain these other Dornishmen until they are more forthcoming.”

Lord Tywin had refused him. “There will be trouble enough with Sunspear over Prince Oberyn’s death. I do not mean to make matters worse by holding his companions captive.”

“Then I fear Ser Gregor may die.”

“Undoubtedly. I swore as much in the letter I sent to Prince Doran with his brother’s body. But it must be seen to be the sword of the King’s Justice that slays him, not a poisoned spear. Heal him.”

Grand Maester Pycelle blinked in dismay. “My lord—”

“*Heal him,*” Lord Tywin said again, vexed. “You are aware that Lord Varys has sent fishermen into the waters around Dragonstone. They report that only a token force remains to defend the island. The Lyseni are gone from the bay, and the great part of Lord Stannis’s strength with them.”

“Well and good,” announced Pycelle. “Let Stannis rot in Lys, I say. We are well rid of the man and his ambitions.”

“Did you turn into an utter fool when Tyrion shaved your beard? This is *Stannis Baratheon*. The man will fight to the bitter end and then some. If he is gone, it can only mean he intends to resume the war. Most likely he will land at Storm’s End and try and rouse the storm lords. If so, he’s finished. But a bolder man might roll the dice for Dorne. If he should win Sunspear to his cause, he might prolong this war for years. So we will *not* offend the Martells any further, for *any* reason. The Dornishmen are free to go, and you *will* heal Ser Gregor.”

And so the Mountain screamed, day and night. Lord Tywin Lannister could cow even the Stranger, it would seem.

As Jaime climbed the winding steps of White Sword Tower, he could hear Ser Boros snoring in his cell. Ser Balon’s door was shut as well; he had the king tonight, and would sleep all day. Aside from Blount’s snores, the

tower was very quiet. That suited Jaime well enough. *I ought to rest myself.* Last night, after his dance with Ser Addam, he'd been too sore to sleep.

But when he stepped into his bedchamber, he found his sister waiting for him.

She stood beside the open window, looking over the curtain walls and out to sea. The bay wind swirled around her, flattening her gown against her body in a way that quickened Jaime's pulse. It was white, that gown, like the hangings on the wall and the draperies on his bed. Swirls of tiny emeralds brightened the ends of her wide sleeves and spiraled down her bodice. Larger emeralds were set in the golden spiderweb that bound her golden hair. The gown was cut low, to bare her shoulders and the tops of her breasts. *She is so beautiful.* He wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms.

"Cersei." He closed the door softly. "Why are you here?"

"Where else could I go?" When she turned to him there were tears in her eyes. "Father's made it clear that I am no longer wanted on the council. Jaime, won't you talk to him?"

Jaime took off his cloak and hung it from a peg on the wall. "I talk to Lord Tywin every day."

"*Must* you be so stubborn? All he wants . . ."

". . . is to force me from the Kingsguard and send me back to Casterly Rock."

"That need not be so terrible. He is sending me back to Casterly Rock as well. He wants me far away, so he'll have a free hand with Tommen. Tommen is *my* son, not his!"

"Tommen is the king."

"He is a boy! A frightened little boy who saw his brother *murdered* at his own wedding. And now they are telling him that *he* must marry. The girl is twice his age and twice a widow!"

He eased himself into a chair, trying to ignore the ache of bruised muscles. "The Tyrells are insisting. I see no harm in it. Tommen's been lonely since Myrcella went to Dorne. He likes having Margaery and her ladies about. Let them wed."

“He is your son . . .”

“He is my seed. He’s never called me Father. No more than Joffrey ever did. You warned me a thousand times never to show any undue interest in them.”

“To keep them safe! You as well. How would it have looked if my brother had played the father to the king’s children? Even Robert might have grown suspicious.”

“Well, he’s beyond suspicion now.” Robert’s death still left a bitter taste in Jaime’s mouth. *It should have been me who killed him, not Cersei.* “I only wished he’d died at my hands.” *When I still had two of them.* “If I’d let kingslaying become a habit, as he liked to say, I could have taken you as my wife for all the world to see. I’m not ashamed of loving you, only of the things I’ve done to hide it. That boy at Winterfell . . .”

“Did I tell you to throw him out the window? If you’d gone hunting as I begged you, nothing would have happened. But no, you had to have me, you could not wait until we returned to the city.”

“I’d waited long enough. I hated watching Robert stumble to your bed every night, always wondering if maybe this night he’d decide to claim his rights as husband.” Jaime suddenly remembered something else that troubled him about Winterfell. “At Riverrun, Catelyn Stark seemed convinced I’d sent some footpad to slit her son’s throat. That I’d given him a dagger.”

“That,” she said scornfully. “Tyrion asked me about that.”

“There *was* a dagger. The scars on Lady Catelyn’s hands were real enough, she showed them to me. Did you . . . ?”

“Oh, don’t be absurd.” Cersei closed the window. “Yes, I hoped the boy would die. So did you. Even *Robert* thought that would have been for the best. ‘We kill our horses when they break a leg, and our dogs when they go blind, but we are too weak to give the same mercy to crippled children,’ he told me. He was blind himself at the time, from drink.”

Robert? Jaime had guarded the king long enough to know that Robert Baratheon said things in his cups that he would have denied angrily the next day. “Were you alone when Robert said this?”

“You don’t think he said it to Ned Stark, I hope? Of course we were alone. Us and the children.” Cersei removed her hairnet and draped it over a bedpost, then shook out her golden curls. “Perhaps Myrcella sent this man with the dagger, do you think so?”

It was meant as mockery, but she’d cut right to the heart of it, Jaime saw at once. “Not Myrcella. Joffrey.”

Cersei frowned. “Joffrey had no love for Robb Stark, but the younger boy was nothing to him. He was only a child himself.”

“A child hungry for a pat on the head from that sot you let him believe was his father.” He had an uncomfortable thought. “Tyrion almost died because of this bloody dagger. If he knew the whole thing was Joffrey’s work, that might be why . . .”

“I don’t care *why*,” Cersei said. “He can take his reasons down to hell with him. If you had seen how Joff died . . . he *fought*, Jaime, he fought for every breath, but it was as if some malign spirit had its hands about his throat. He had such terror in his eyes . . . When he was little, he’d run to me when he was scared or hurt and I would protect him. But that night there was nothing I could do. Tyrion murdered him in front of me, and *there was nothing I could do*.” Cersei sank to her knees before his chair and took Jaime’s good hand between both of hers. “Joff is dead and Myrcella’s in Dorne. Tommen’s all I have left. You mustn’t let Father take him from me. Jaime, please.”

“Lord Tywin has not asked for my approval. I can talk to him, but he will not listen . . .”

“He will if you agree to leave the Kingsguard.”

“I’m not leaving the Kingsguard.”

His sister fought back tears. “Jaime, you’re my shining knight. You cannot abandon me when I need you most! He is stealing my son, sending me away . . . and unless you stop him, Father is going to force me to wed again!”

Jaime should not have been surprised, but he was. The words were a blow to his gut harder than any that Ser Addam Marbrand had dealt him. “Who?”

“Does it matter? Some lord or other. Someone Father thinks he needs. I don’t care. I will not have another husband. You are the only man I want in my bed, ever again.”

“Then *tell* him that!”

She pulled her hands away. “You are talking madness again. Would you have us ripped apart, as Mother did that time she caught us playing? Tommen would lose the throne, Myrcella her marriage . . . I *want* to be your wife, we belong to each other, but it can never be, Jaime. We are brother and sister.”

“The Targaryens . . .”

“*We are not Targaryens!*”

“Quiet,” he said, scornfully. “So loud, you’ll wake my Sworn Brothers. We can’t have that, now, can we? People might learn that you had come to see me.”

“Jaime,” she sobbed, “don’t you think *I* want it as much as you do? It makes no matter who they wed me to, I want you at my side, I want you in my bed, I want you inside me. Nothing has changed between us. Let me prove it to you.” She pushed up his tunic and began to fumble with the laces of his breeches.

Jaime felt himself responding. “No,” he said, “not here.” They had never done it in White Sword Tower, much less in the Lord Commander’s chambers. “Cersei, this is not the place.”

“You took me in the sept. This is no different.” She drew out his cock and bent her head over it.

Jaime pushed her away with the stump of his right hand. “*No*. Not here, I said.” He forced himself to stand.

For an instant he could see confusion in her bright green eyes, and fear as well. Then rage replaced it. Cersei gathered herself together, got to her feet, straightened her skirts. “Was it your hand they hacked off in Harrenhal, or your manhood?” As she shook her head, her hair tumbled around her bare white shoulders. “I was a fool to come. You lacked the courage to avenge Joffrey, why would I think that you’d protect Tommen? Tell me, if the Imp had killed all three of your children, would *that* have made you wroth?”

“Tyrion is not going to harm Tommen or Myrcella. I am still not certain he killed Joffrey.”

Her mouth twisted in anger. “How can you *say* that? After all his threats —”

“Threats mean nothing. He swears he did not do it.”

“Oh, he *swears*, is that it? And dwarfs don’t lie, is that what you think?”

“Not to me. No more than you would.”

“You great golden fool. He’s lied to you a thousand times, and so have I.” She bound up her hair again, and scooped up the hairnet from the bedpost where she’d hung it. “Think what you will. The little monster is in a black cell, and soon Ser Ilyn will have his head off. Perhaps you’d like it for a keepsake.” She glanced at the pillow. “He can watch over you as you sleep alone in that cold white bed. Until his eyes rot out, that is.”

“You had best go, Cersei. You’re making me angry.”

“Oh, an angry cripple. How terrifying.” She laughed. “A pity Lord Tywin Lannister never had a son. I could have been the heir he wanted, but I lacked the cock. And speaking of such, best tuck yours away, brother. It looks rather sad and small, hanging from your breeches like that.”

When she was gone Jaime took her advice, fumbling one-handed at his laces. He felt a bone-deep ache in his phantom fingers. *I’ve lost a hand, a father, a son, a sister, and a lover, and soon enough I will lose a brother. And yet they keep telling me House Lannister won this war.*

Jaime donned his cloak and went downstairs, where he found Ser Boros Blount having a cup of wine in the common room. “When you’re done with your drink, tell Ser Loras I’m ready to see her.”

Ser Boros was too much of a coward to do much more than glower. “You are ready to see who?”

“Just tell Loras.”

“Aye.” Ser Boros drained his cup. “Aye, Lord Commander.”

He took his own good time about it, though, or else the Knight of Flowers proved hard to find. Several hours had passed by the time they arrived, the slim handsome youth and the big ugly maid. Jaime was sitting

alone in the round room, leafing idly through the White Book. “Lord Commander,” Ser Loras said, “you wished to see the Maid of Tarth?”

“I did.” Jaime waved them closer with his left hand. “You have talked with her, I take it?”

“As you commanded, my lord.”

“And?”

The lad tensed. “I . . . it may be it happened as she says, ser. That it was Stannis. I cannot be certain.”

“Varys tells me that the castellan of Storm’s End perished strangely as well,” said Jaime.

“Ser Cortnay Penrose,” said Brienne sadly. “A good man.”

“A stubborn man. One day he stood square in the way of the King of Dragonstone. The next he leapt from a tower.” Jaime stood. “Ser Loras, we will talk more of this later. You may leave Brienne with me.”

The wench looked as ugly and awkward as ever, he decided when Tyrell left them. Someone had dressed her in woman’s clothes again, but this dress fit much better than that hideous pink rag the goat had made her wear. “Blue is a good color on you, my lady,” Jaime observed. “It goes well with your eyes.” *She does have astonishing eyes.*

Brienne glanced down at herself, flustered. “Septa Donyse padded out the bodice, to give it that shape. She said you sent her to me.” She lingered by the door, as if she meant to flee at any second. “You look . . .”

“Different?” He managed a half-smile. “More meat on the ribs and fewer lice in my hair, that’s all. The stump’s the same. Close the door and come here.”

She did as he bid her. “The white cloak . . .”

“. . . is new, but I’m sure I’ll soil it soon enough.”

“That wasn’t . . . I was about to say that it becomes you.”

She came closer, hesitant. “Jaime, did you mean what you told Ser Loras? About . . . about King Renly, and the shadow?”

Jaime shrugged. “I would have killed Renly myself if we’d met in battle, what do I care who cut his throat?”

“You said I had honor . . .”

“I’m the bloody Kingslayer, remember? When I say you have honor, that’s like a whore vouchsafing your maidenhood.” He leaned back and looked up at her. “Steelshanks is on his way back north, to deliver Arya Stark to Roose Bolton.”

“You gave her to *him*?” she cried, dismayed. “You swore an oath to Lady Catelyn . . .”

“With a sword at my throat, but never mind. Lady Catelyn’s dead. I could not give her back her daughters even if I had them. And the girl my father sent with Steelshanks was not Arya Stark.”

“*Not* Arya Stark?”

“You heard me. My lord father found some skinny northern girl more or less the same age with more or less the same coloring. He dressed her up in white and grey, gave her a silver wolf to pin her cloak, and sent her off to wed Bolton’s bastard.” He lifted his stump to point at her. “I wanted to tell you that before you went galloping off to rescue her and got yourself killed for no good purpose. You’re not half bad with a sword, but you’re not good enough to take on two hundred men by yourself.”

Brienne shook her head. “When Lord Bolton learns that your father paid him with false coin . . .”

“Oh, he knows. *Lannisters lie*, remember? It makes no matter, this girl serves his purpose just as well. Who is going to say that she *isn’t* Arya Stark? Everyone the girl was close to is dead except for her sister, who has disappeared.”

“Why would you tell me all this, if it’s true? You are betraying your father’s secrets.”

The Hand’s secrets, he thought. *I no longer have a father*. “I pay my debts like every good little lion. I did promise Lady Stark her daughters . . . and one of them is still alive. My brother may know where she is, but if so he isn’t saying. Cersei is convinced that Sansa helped him murder Joffrey.”

The wench’s mouth got stubborn. “I will not believe that gentle girl a poisoner. Lady Catelyn said that she had a loving heart. It was your brother. There was a trial, Ser Loras said.”

“Two trials, actually. Words and swords both failed him. A bloody mess. Did you watch from your window?”

“My cell faces the sea. I heard the shouting, though.”

“Prince Oberyn of Dorne is dead, Ser Gregor Clegane lies dying, and Tyrion stands condemned before the eyes of gods and men. They’re keeping him in a black cell till they kill him.”

Brienne looked at him. “You do not believe he did it.”

Jaime gave her a hard smile. “See, wench? We know each other too well. Tyrion’s wanted to be me since he took his first step, but he’d never follow me in kingslaying. Sansa Stark killed Joffrey. My brother’s kept silent to protect her. He gets these fits of gallantry from time to time. The last one cost him a nose. This time it will mean his head.”

“No,” Brienne said. “It was not my lady’s daughter. It could not have been her.”

“There’s the stubborn stupid wench that I remember.”

She reddened. “My name is . . .”

“Brienne of Tarth.” Jaime sighed. “I have a gift for you.” He reached down under the Lord Commander’s chair and brought it out, wrapped in folds of crimson velvet.

Brienne approached as if the bundle was like to bite her, reached out a huge freckled hand, and flipped back a fold of cloth. Rubies glimmered in the light. She picked the treasure up gingerly, curled her fingers around the leather grip, and slowly slid the sword free of its scabbard. Blood and black the ripples shone. A finger of reflected light ran red along the edge. “Is this Valyrian steel? I have never seen such colors.”

“Nor I. There was a time that I would have given my right hand to wield a sword like that. Now it appears I have, so the blade is wasted on me. Take it.” Before she could think to refuse, he went on. “A sword so fine must bear a name. It would please me if you would call this one Oathkeeper. One more thing. The blade comes with a price.”

Her face darkened. “I told you, I will never serve . . .”

“. . . such foul creatures as us. Yes, I recall. Hear me out, Brienne. Both of us swore oaths concerning Sansa Stark. Cersei means to see that the girl

is found and killed, wherever she has gone to ground . . .”

Brienne’s homely face twisted in fury. “If you believe that I would harm my lady’s daughter for a *sword*, you—”

“*Just listen*,” he snapped, angered by her assumption. “I want you to find Sansa first, and get her somewhere safe. How else are the two of us going to make good our stupid vows to your precious dead Lady Catelyn?”

The wench blinked. “I . . . I thought . . .”

“I know what you *thought*.” Suddenly Jaime was sick of the sight of her. *She bleats like a bloody sheep*. “When Ned Stark died, his greatsword was given to the King’s Justice,” he told her. “But my father felt that such a fine blade was wasted on a mere headsman. He gave Ser Ilyn a new sword, and had Ice melted down and reforged. There was enough metal for two new blades. You’re holding one. So you’ll be defending Ned Stark’s daughter with Ned Stark’s own steel, if that makes any difference to you.”

“Ser, I . . . I owe you an apolo . . .”

He cut her off. “Take the bloody sword and go, before I change my mind. There’s a bay mare in the stables, as homely as you are but somewhat better trained. Chase after Steelshanks, search for Sansa, or ride home to your isle of sapphires, it’s naught to me. I don’t want to look at you anymore.”

“Jaime . . .”

“*Kingslayer*,” he reminded her. “Best use that sword to clean the wax out of your ears, wench. We’re done.”

Stubbornly, she persisted. “Joffrey was your . . .”

“My king. Leave it at that.”

“You say Sansa killed him. Why protect her?”

Because Joff was no more to me than a squirt of seed in Cersei’s cunt. And because he deserved to die. “I have made kings and unmade them. Sansa Stark is my last chance for honor.” Jaime smiled thinly. “Besides, kingslayers should band together. Are you ever going to go?”

Her big hand wrapped tight around Oathkeeper. “I will. And I will find the girl and keep her safe. For her lady mother’s sake. And for yours.” She bowed stiffly, whirled, and went.

Jaime sat alone at the table while the shadows crept across the room. As dusk began to settle, he lit a candle and opened the White Book to his own page. Quill and ink he found in a drawer. Beneath the last line Ser Barristan had entered, he wrote in an awkward hand that might have done credit to a six-year-old being taught his first letters by a maester:

Defeated in the Whispering Wood by the Young Wolf Robb Stark during the War of the Five Kings. Held captive at Riverrun and ransomed for a promise unfulfilled. Captured again by the Brave Companions, and maimed at the word of Vargo Hoat their captain, losing his sword hand to the blade of Zollo the Fat. Returned safely to King's Landing by Brienne, the Maid of Tarth.

When he was done, more than three-quarters of his page still remained to be filled between the gold lion on the crimson shield on top and the blank white shield at the bottom. Ser Gerold Hightower had begun his history, and Ser Barristan Selmy had continued it, but the rest Jaime Lannister would need to write for himself. He could write whatever he chose, henceforth.

Whatever he chose . . .