



## TYRION

**H**e woke to the creak of old iron hinges.

“Who?” he croaked. At least he had his voice back, raw and hoarse though it was. The fever was still on him, and Tyrion had no notion of the hour. How long had he slept this time? He was so weak, so damnably weak. “Who?” he called again, more loudly. Torchlight spilled through the open door, but within the chamber the only light came from the stub of a candle beside his bed.

When he saw a shape moving toward him, Tyrion shivered. Here in Maegor’s Holdfast, every servant was in the queen’s pay, so any visitor might be another of Cersei’s catspaws, sent to finish the work Ser Mandon had begun.

Then the man stepped into the candlelight, got a good look at the dwarf’s pale face, and chortled. “Cut yourself shaving, did you?”

Tyrion’s fingers went to the great gash that ran from above one eye down to his jaw, across what remained of his nose. The proud flesh was still raw and warm to the touch. “With a fearful big razor, yes.”

Bronn’s coal-black hair was freshly washed and brushed straight back from the hard lines of his face, and he was dressed in high boots of soft, tooled leather, a wide belt studded with nuggets of silver, and a cloak of pale green silk. Across the dark grey wool of his doublet, a burning chain was embroidered diagonally in bright green thread.

“Where have you been?” Tyrion demanded of him. “I sent for you . . . it must have been a fortnight ago.”

“Four days ago, more like,” the sellsword said, “and I’ve been here twice, and found you dead to the world.”

“Not dead. Though my sweet sister did try.” Perhaps he should not have said that aloud, but Tyrion was past caring. Cersei was behind Ser Mandon’s attempt to kill him, he knew that in his gut. “What’s that ugly thing on your chest?”

Bronn grinned. “My knightly sigil. A flaming chain, green, on a smoke-grey field. By your lord father’s command, I’m Ser Bronn of the Blackwater now, Imp. See you don’t forget it.”

Tyrion put his hands on the featherbed and squirmed back a few inches, against the pillows. “I was the one who promised you knighthood, remember?” He had liked that “*by your lord father’s command*” not at all. Lord Tywin had wasted little time. Moving his son from the Tower of the Hand to claim it for himself was a message anyone could read, and this was another. “I lose half my nose and you gain a knighthood. The gods have a deal to answer for.” His voice was sour. “Did my father dub you himself?”

“No. Them of us as survived the fight at the winch towers got ourselves dabbed by the High Septon and dubbed by the Kingsguard. Took half the bloody day, with only three of the White Swords left to do the honors.”

“I knew Ser Mandon died in the battle.” *Shoved into the river by Pod, half a heartbeat before the treacherous bastard could drive his sword through my heart.* “Who else was lost?”

“The Hound,” said Bronn. “Not dead, only gone. The gold cloaks say he turned craven and you led a sortie in his place.”

*Not one of my better notions.* Tyrion could feel the scar tissue pull tight when he frowned. He waved Bronn toward a chair. “My sister has mistaken me for a mushroom. She keeps me in the dark and feeds me shit. Pod’s a good lad, but the knot in his tongue is the size of Casterly Rock, and I don’t trust half of what he tells me. I sent him to bring Ser Jacelyn and he came back and told me he’s dead.”

“Him, and thousands more.” Bronn sat.

“How?” Tyrion demanded, feeling that much sicker.

“During the battle. Your sister sent the Kettleblacks to fetch the king back to the Red Keep, the way I hear it. When the gold cloaks saw him leaving, half of them decided they’d leave with him. Ironhand put himself in their path and tried to order them back to the walls. They say Bywater was blistering them good and almost had ’em ready to turn when someone put an arrow through his neck. He didn’t seem so fearsome then, so they dragged him off his horse and killed him.”

*Another debt to lay at Cersei’s door.* “My nephew,” he said, “Joffrey. Was he in any danger?”

“No more’n some, and less than most.”

“Had he suffered any harm? Taken a wound? Mussed his hair, stubbed his toe, cracked a nail?”

“Not as I heard.”

“I warned Cersei what would happen. Who commands the gold cloaks now?”

“Your lord father’s given them to one of his westermen, some knight named Addam Marbrand.”

In most cases the gold cloaks would have resented having an outsider placed over them, but Ser Addam Marbrand was a shrewd choice. Like Jaime, he was the sort of man other men liked to follow. *I have lost the City Watch.* “I sent Pod looking for Shagga, but he’s had no luck.”

“The Stone Crows are still in the kingswood. Shagga seems to have taken a fancy to the place. Timett led the Burned Men home, with all the plunder they took from Stannis’s camp after the fighting. Chella turned up with a dozen Black Ears at the River Gate one morning, but your father’s red cloaks chased them off while the Kingslanders threw dung and cheered.”

*Ingrates. The Black Ears died for them.* Whilst Tyrion lay drugged and dreaming, his own blood had pulled his claws out, one by one. “I want you to go to my sister. Her precious son made it through the battle unscathed, so Cersei has no more need of a hostage. She swore to free Alayaya once—”

“She did. Eight, nine days ago, after the whipping.”

Tyrion shoved himself up higher, ignoring the sudden stab of pain through his shoulder. *"Whipping?"*

"They tied her to a post in the yard and scourged her, then shoved her out the gate naked and bloody."

*She was learning to read*, Tyrion thought, absurdly. Across his face the scar stretched tight, and for a moment it felt as though his head would burst with rage. Alayaya was a whore, true enough, but a sweeter, braver, more innocent girl he had seldom met. Tyrion had never touched her; she had been no more than a veil, to hide Shae. In his carelessness, he had never thought what the role might cost her. "I promised my sister I would treat Tommen as she treated Alayaya," he remembered aloud. He felt as though he might retch. "How can I scourge an eight-year-old boy?" *But if I don't, Cersei wins.*

"You don't have Tommen," Bronn said bluntly. "Once she learned that Ironhand was dead, the queen sent the Kettleblacks after him, and no one at Rosby had the balls to say them nay."

Another blow; yet a relief as well, he must admit it. He was fond of Tommen. "The Kettleblacks were supposed to be ours," he reminded Bronn with more than a touch of irritation.

"They were, so long as I could give them two of your pennies for every one they had from the queen, but now she's raised the stakes. Osney and Osfryd were made knights after the battle, same as me. Gods know what for, no one saw them do any fighting."

*My hirelings betray me, my friends are scourged and shamed, and I lie here rotting*, Tyrion thought. *I thought I won the bloody battle. Is this what triumph tastes like?* "Is it true that Stannis was put to rout by Renly's ghost?"

Bronn smiled thinly. "From the winch towers, all we saw was banners in the mud and men throwing down their spears to run, but there's hundreds in the pot shops and brothels who'll tell you how they saw Lord Renly kill this one or that one. Most of Stannis's host had been Renly's to start, and they went right back over at the sight of him in that shiny green armor."

After all his planning, after the sortie and the bridge of ships, after getting his face slashed in two, Tyrion had been eclipsed by a dead man. *If indeed*

*Renly is dead.* Something else he would need to look into. “How did Stannis escape?”

“His Lyseni kept their galleys out in the bay, beyond your chain. When the battle turned bad, they put in along the bay shore and took off as many as they could. Men were killing each other to get aboard, toward the end.”

“What of Robb Stark, what has he been doing?”

“There’s some of his wolves burning their way down toward Duskendale. Your father’s sending this Lord Tarly to sort them out. I’d half a mind to join him. It’s said he’s a good soldier, and openhanded with the plunder.”

The thought of losing Bronn was the final straw. “No. Your place is here. You’re the captain of the Hand’s guard.”

“You’re not the Hand,” Bronn reminded him sharply. “Your father is, and he’s got his own bloody guard.”

“What happened to all the men you hired for me?”

“Some died at the winch towers. That uncle of yours, Ser Kevan, he paid the rest of us and tossed us out.”

“How good of him,” Tyrion said acidly. “Does that mean you’ve lost your taste for gold?”

“Not bloody likely.”

“Good,” said Tyrion, “because as it happens, I still have need of you. What do you know of Ser Mandon Moore?”

Bronn laughed. “I know he’s bloody well drowned.”

“I owe him a great debt, but how to pay it?” He touched his face, feeling the scar. “I know precious little of the man, if truth be told.”

“He had eyes like a fish and he wore a white cloak. What else do you need to know?”

“Everything,” said Tyrion, “for a start.” What he wanted was proof that Ser Mandon had been Cersei’s, but he dare not say so aloud. In the Red Keep a man did best to hold his tongue. There were rats in the walls, and little birds who talked too much, and spiders. “Help me up,” he said, struggling with the bedclothes. “It’s time I paid a call on my father, and past time I let myself be seen again.”

“Such a pretty sight,” mocked Bronn.

“What’s half a nose, on a face like mine? But speaking of pretty, is Margaery Tyrell in King’s Landing yet?”

“No. She’s coming, though, and the city’s mad with love for her. The Tyrells have been carting food up from Highgarden and giving it away in her name. Hundreds of wayns each day. There’s thousands of Tyrell men swaggering about with little golden roses sewn on their doublets, and not a one is buying his own wine. Wife, widow, or whore, the women are all giving up their virtue to every peach-fuzz boy with a gold rose on his teat.”

*They spit on me, and buy drinks for the Tyrells.* Tyrion slid from the bed to the floor. His legs turned wobbly beneath him, the room spun, and he had to grasp Bronn’s arm to keep from pitching headlong into the rushes. “*Pod!*” he shouted. “Podrick Payne! Where in the seven hells are you?” Pain gnawed at him like a toothless dog. Tyrion hated weakness, especially his own. It shamed him, and shame made him angry. “Pod, *get in here!*”

The boy came running. When he saw Tyrion standing and clutching Bronn’s arm, he gaped at them. “My lord. You stood. Is that . . . do you . . . do you need wine? Dreamwine? Should I get the maester? He said you must stay. Abed, I mean.”

“I have stayed abed too long. Bring me some clean garb.”

“Garb?”

How the boy could be so clearheaded and resourceful in battle and so confused at all other times Tyrion could never comprehend. “Clothing,” he repeated. “Tunic, doublet, breeches, hose. For me. To dress in. So I can leave this bloody cell.”

It took all three of them to clothe him. Hideous though his face might be, the worst of his wounds was the one at the juncture of shoulder and arm, where his own mail had been driven back into his armpit by an arrow. Pus and blood still seeped from the discolored flesh whenever Maester Frenken changed his dressing, and any movement sent a stab of agony through him.

In the end, Tyrion settled for a pair of breeches and an oversized bed robe that hung loosely about his shoulders. Bronn yanked his boots onto his feet while Pod went in search of a stick for him to lean on. He drank a cup of

dreamwine to fortify himself. The wine was sweetened with honey, with just enough of the poppy to make his wounds bearable for a time.

Even so, he was dizzy by the time he turned the latch, and the descent down the twisting stone steps made his legs tremble. He walked with the stick in one hand and the other on Pod's shoulder. A serving girl was coming up as they were going down. She stared at them with wide white eyes, as if she were looking at a ghost. *The dwarf has risen from the dead*, Tyrion thought. *And look, he's uglier than ever, run tell your friends.*

Maegor's Holdfast was the strongest place in the Red Keep, a castle within the castle, surrounded by a deep dry moat lined with spikes. The drawbridge was up for the night when they reached the door. Ser Meryn Trant stood before it in his pale armor and white cloak. "Lower the bridge," Tyrion commanded him.

"The queen's orders are to raise the bridge at night." Ser Meryn had always been Cersei's creature.

"The queen's asleep, and I have business with my father."

There was magic in the name of Lord Tywin Lannister. Grumbling, Ser Meryn Trant gave the command, and the drawbridge was lowered. A second Kingsguard knight stood sentry across the moat. Ser Osmund Kettleblack managed a smile when he saw Tyrion waddling toward him. "Feeling stronger, m'lord?"

"Much. When's the next battle? I can scarcely wait."

When Pod and he reached the serpentine steps, however, Tyrion could only gape at them in dismay. *I will never climb those by myself*, he confessed to himself. Swallowing his dignity, he asked Bronn to carry him, hoping against hope that at this hour there would be no one to see and smile, no one to tell the tale of the dwarf being carried up the steps like a babe in arms.

The outer ward was crowded with tents and pavilions, dozens of them. "Tyrell men," Podrick Payne explained as they threaded their way through a maze of silk and canvas. "Lord Rowan's too, and Lord Redwyne's. There wasn't room enough for all. In the castle, I mean. Some took rooms. Rooms in the city. In inns and all. They're here for the wedding. The king's wedding, King Joffrey's. Will you be strong enough to attend, my lord?"

“Ravening weasels could not keep me away.” There was this to be said for weddings over battles, at least; it was less likely that someone would cut off your nose.

Lights still burned dimly behind shuttered windows in the Tower of the Hand. The men on the door wore the crimson cloaks and lion-crested helms of his father’s household guard. Tyrion knew them both, and they admitted him on sight . . . though neither could bear to look long at his face, he noted.

Within, they came upon Ser Addam Marbrand, descending the turnpike stair in the ornate black breastplate and cloth-of-gold cloak of an officer in the City Watch. “My lord,” he said, “how good to see you on your feet. I’d heard—”

“—rumors of a small grave being dug? Me too. Under the circumstances it seemed best to get up. I hear you’re commander of the City Watch. Shall I offer congratulations or condolences?”

“Both, I fear.” Ser Addam smiled. “Death and desertion have left me with some forty-four hundred. Only the gods and Littlefinger know how we are to go on paying wages for so many, but your sister forbids me to dismiss any.”

*Still anxious, Cersei? The battle’s done, the gold cloaks won’t help you now.* “Do you come from my father?” he asked.

“Aye. I fear I did not leave him in the best of moods. Lord Tywin feels forty-four hundred guardsmen more than sufficient to find one lost squire, but your cousin Tyrek remains missing.”

Tyrek was the son of his late Uncle Tygett, a boy of thirteen. He had vanished in the riot, not long after wedding the Lady Ermesande, a suckling babe who happened to be the last surviving heir of House Hayford. *And likely the first bride in the history of the Seven Kingdoms to be widowed before she was weaned.* “I couldn’t find him either,” confessed Tyrion.

“He’s feeding worms,” said Bronn with his usual tact. “Ironhand looked for him, and the eunuch rattled a nice fat purse. They had no more luck than we did. Give it up, ser.”



Ser Addam gazed at the sellsword with distaste. "Lord Tywin is stubborn where his blood is concerned. He will have the lad, alive or dead, and I mean to oblige him." He looked back to Tyrion. "You will find your father in his solar."

*My solar*, thought Tyrion. "I believe I know the way."

The way was up more steps, but this time he climbed under his own power, with one hand on Pod's shoulder. Bronn opened the door for him. Lord Tywin Lannister was seated beneath the window, writing by the glow of an oil lamp. He raised his eyes at the sound of the latch. "Tyrion." Calmly, he laid his quill aside.

"I'm pleased you remember me, my lord." Tyrion released his grip on Pod, leaned his weight on the stick, and waddled closer. *Something is wrong*, he knew at once.

"Ser Bronn," Lord Tywin said, "Podrick. Perhaps you had best wait without until we are done."

The look Bronn gave the Hand was little less than insolent; nonetheless, he bowed and withdrew, with Pod on his heels. The heavy door swung shut behind them, and Tyrion Lannister was alone with his father. Even with the windows of the solar shuttered against the night, the chill in the room was palpable. *What sort of lies has Cersei been telling him?*

The Lord of Casterly Rock was as lean as a man twenty years younger, even handsome in his austere way. Stiff blond whiskers covered his cheeks, framing a stern face, a bald head, a hard mouth. About his throat he wore a chain of golden hands, the fingers of each clasping the wrist of the next. "That's a handsome chain," Tyrion said. *Though it looked better on me.*

Lord Tywin ignored the sally. "You had best be seated. Is it wise for you to be out of your sickbed?"

"I am sick of my sickbed." Tyrion knew how much his father despised weakness. He claimed the nearest chair. "Such pleasant chambers you have. Would you believe it, while I was dying, someone moved me to a dark little cell in Maegor's?"

"The Red Keep is overcrowded with wedding guests. Once they depart, we will find you more suitable accommodations."

“I rather liked *these* accommodations. Have you set a date for this great wedding?”

“Joffrey and Margaery shall marry on the first day of the new year, which as it happens is also the first day of the new century. The ceremony will herald the dawn of a new era.”

*A new Lannister era*, thought Tyrion. “Oh, bother, I fear I’ve made other plans for that day.”

“Did you come here just to complain of your bedchamber and make your lame japes? I have important letters to finish.”

*“Important letters. To be sure.”*

“Some battles are won with swords and spears, others with quills and ravens. Spare me these coy reproaches, Tyrion. I visited your sickbed as often as Maester Ballabar would allow it, when you seemed like to die.” He steeped his fingers under his chin. “Why did you dismiss Ballabar?”

Tyrion shrugged. “Maester Frenken is not so determined to keep me insensate.”

“Ballabar came to the city in Lord Redwyne’s retinue. A gifted healer, it’s said. It was kind of Cersei to ask him to look after you. She feared for your life.”

*Feared that I might keep it, you mean.* “Doubtless that’s why she’s never once left my bedside.”

“Don’t be impertinent. Cersei has a royal wedding to plan, I am waging a war, and you have been out of danger for at least a fortnight.” Lord Tywin studied his son’s disfigured face, his pale green eyes unflinching. “Though the wound is ghastly enough, I’ll grant you. What madness possessed you?”

“The foe was at the gates with a battering ram. If Jaime had led the sortie, you’d call it valor.”

“Jaime would never be so foolish as to remove his helm in battle. I trust you killed the man who cut you?”

“Oh, the wretch is dead enough.” Though it had been Podrick Payne who’d killed Ser Mandon, shoving him into the river to drown beneath the weight of his armor. “A dead enemy is a joy forever,” Tyrion said blithely, though Ser Mandon was not his true enemy. The man had no reason to want

him dead. *He was only a catspaw, and I believe I know the cat. She told him to make certain I did not survive the battle.* But without proof Lord Tywin would never listen to such a charge. “Why are you here in the city, Father?” he asked. “Shouldn’t you be off fighting Lord Stannis or Robb Stark or someone?” *And the sooner the better.*

“Until Lord Redwyne brings his fleet up, we lack the ships to assail Dragonstone. It makes no matter. Stannis Baratheon’s sun set on the Blackwater. As for Stark, the boy is still in the west, but a large force of northmen under Helman Tallhart and Robett Glover are descending toward Duskendale. I’ve sent Lord Tarly to meet them, while Ser Gregor drives up the kingsroad to cut off their retreat. Tallhart and Glover will be caught between them, with a third of Stark’s strength.”

“Duskendale?” There was nothing at Duskendale worth such a risk. Had the Young Wolf finally blundered?

“It’s nothing you need trouble yourself with. Your face is pale as death, and there’s blood seeping through your dressings. Say what you want and take yourself back to bed.”

“What I want . . .” His throat felt raw and tight. What *did* he want? *More than you can ever give me, Father.* “Pod tells me that Littlefinger’s been made Lord of Harrenhal.”

“An empty title, so long as Roose Bolton holds the castle for Robb Stark, yet Lord Baelish was desirous of the honor. He did us good service in the matter of the Tyrell marriage. A Lannister pays his debts.”

The Tyrell marriage had been Tyrion’s notion, in point of fact, but it would seem churlish to try to claim that now. “That title may not be as empty as you think,” he warned. “Littlefinger does nothing without good reason. But be that as it may. You said something about paying debts, I believe?”

“And you want your own reward, is that it? Very well. What is it you would have of me? Lands, castle, some office?”

“A little bloody gratitude would make a nice start.”

Lord Tywin stared at him, unblinking. “Mummers and monkeys require applause. So did Aerys, for that matter. You did as you were commanded,

and I am sure it was to the best of your ability. No one denies the part you played.”

“That *part* I played?” What nostrils Tyrion had left must surely have flared. “I saved your bloody city, it seems to me.”

“Most people seem to feel that it was my attack on Lord Stannis’s flank that turned the tide of battle. Lords Tyrell, Rowan, Redwyne, and Tarly fought nobly as well, and I’m told it was your sister Cersei who set the pyromancers to making the wildfire that destroyed the Baratheon fleet.”

“While all I did was get my nosehairs trimmed, is that it?” Tyrion could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“Your chain was a clever stroke, and crucial to our victory. Is that what you wanted to hear? I am told we have you to thank for our Dornish alliance as well. You may be pleased to learn that Myrcella has arrived safely at Sunspear. Ser Arys Oakheart writes that she has taken a great liking to Princess Arianne, and that Prince Trystane is enchanted with her. I dislike giving House Martell a hostage, but I suppose that could not be helped.”

“We’ll have our own hostage,” Tyrion said. “A council seat was also part of the bargain. Unless Prince Doran brings an army when he comes to claim it, he’ll be putting himself in our power.”

“Would that a council seat were all Martell came to claim,” Lord Tywin said. “You promised him vengeance as well.”

“I promised him justice.”

“Call it what you will. It still comes down to blood.”

“Not an item in short supply, surely? I splashed through lakes of it during the battle.” Tyrion saw no reason not to cut to the heart of the matter. “Or have you grown so fond of Gregor Clegane that you cannot bear to part with him?”

“Ser Gregor has his uses, as did his brother. Every lord has need of a beast from time to time . . . a lesson you seem to have learned, judging from Ser Bronn and those clansmen of yours.”

Tyrion thought of Timett’s burned eye, Shagga with his axe, Chella in her necklace of dried ears. And Bronn. Bronn most of all. “The woods are full

of beasts,” he reminded his father. “The alleyways as well.”

“True. Perhaps other dogs would hunt as well. I shall think on it. If there is nothing else . . .”

“You have important letters, yes.” Tyrion rose on unsteady legs, closed his eyes for an instant as a wave of dizziness washed over him, and took a shaky step toward the door. Later, he would reflect that he should have taken a second, and then a third. Instead he turned. “What do I want, you ask? I’ll tell you what I want. I want what is mine by rights. I want Casterly Rock.”

His father’s mouth grew hard. “Your brother’s birthright?”

“The knights of the Kingsguard are forbidden to marry, to father children, and to hold land, you know that as well as I. The day Jaime put on that white cloak, he gave up his claim to Casterly Rock, but never once have you acknowledged it. It’s past time. I want you to stand up before the realm and proclaim that I am your son and your lawful heir.”

Lord Tywin’s eyes were a pale green flecked with gold, as luminous as they were merciless. “Casterly Rock,” he declared in a flat cold dead tone. And then, “Never.”

The word hung between them, huge, sharp, poisoned.

*I knew the answer before I asked,* Tyrion said. *Eighteen years since Jaime joined the Kingsguard, and I never once raised the issue. I must have known. I must always have known.* “Why?” he made himself ask, though he knew he would rue the question.

“You ask that? You, who killed your mother to come into the world? You are an ill-made, devious, disobedient, spiteful little creature full of envy, lust, and low cunning. Men’s laws give you the right to bear my name and display my colors, since I cannot prove that you are not mine. To teach me humility, the gods have condemned me to watch you waddle about wearing that proud lion that was my father’s sigil and his father’s before him. But neither gods nor men shall ever compel me to let you turn Casterly Rock into your whorehouse.”

“My *whorehouse*?” The dawn broke; Tyrion understood all at once where this bile had come from. He ground his teeth together and said, “Cersei told

you about Alayaya.”

“Is that her name? I confess, I cannot remember the names of all your whores. Who was the one you married as a boy?”

“Tysha.” He spat out the answer, defiant.

“And that camp follower on the Green Fork?”

“Why do you care?” he asked, unwilling even to speak Shae’s name in his presence.

“I don’t. No more than I care if they live or die.”

“It was *you* who had Yaya whipped.” It was not a question.

“Your sister told me of your threats against my grandsons.” Lord Tywin’s voice was colder than ice. “Did she lie?”

Tyrion would not deny it. “I made threats, yes. To keep Alayaya safe. So the Kettleblacks would not misuse her.”

“To save a whore’s virtue, you threatened your own House, your own kin? Is that the way of it?”

“You were the one who taught me that a good threat is often more telling than a blow. Not that Joffrey hasn’t tempted me sore a few hundred times. If you’re so anxious to whip people, start with him. But Tommen . . . why would I harm Tommen? He’s a good lad, and mine own blood.”

“As was your mother.” Lord Tywin rose abruptly, to tower over his dwarf son. “Go back to your bed, Tyrion, and speak to me no more of *your rights* to Casterly Rock. You shall have your reward, but it shall be one I deem appropriate to your service and station. And make no mistake—this was the last time I will suffer you to bring shame onto House Lannister. You are *done* with whores. The next one I find in your bed, I’ll hang.”