

JAIME

The trumpets made a brazen blare, and cut the still blue air of dusk. Josmyn Peckledon was on his feet at once, scrambling for his master's swordbelt.

The boy has good instincts. "Outlaws don't blow trumpets to herald their arrival," Jaime told him. "I shan't need my sword. That will be my cousin, the Warden of the West."

The riders were dismounting when he emerged from his tent; half a dozen knights, and twoscore mounted archers and men-at-arms. "*Jaime!*" roared a shaggy man clad in gilded ringmail and a fox-fur cloak. "So gaunt, and all in white! And bearded too!"

"This? Mere stubble, against that mane of yours, coz." Ser Daven's bristling beard and bushy mustache grew into sidewhiskers as thick as a hedgerow, and those into the tangled yellow thicket atop his head, matted down by the helm he was removing. Somewhere in the midst of all that hair lurked a pug nose and a pair of lively hazel eyes. "Did some outlaw steal your razor?"

"I vowed I would not let my hair be cut until my father was avenged." For a man who looked so leonine, Daven Lannister sounded oddly sheepish. "The Young Wolf got to Karstark first, though. Robbed me of my vengeance." He handed his helm to a squire and pushed his fingers through his hair where the weight of the steel had crushed it down. "I like a bit of hair. The nights grow colder, and a little foliage helps to keep your face warm. Aye, and Aunt Genna always said I had a brick for a chin." He clasped Jaime by the arms. "We feared for you after the Whispering Wood. Heard Stark's direwolf tore out your throat."

"Did you weep bitter tears for me, coz?"

"Half of Lannisport was mourning. The female half." Ser Daven's gaze went to Jaime's stump. "So it's true. The bastards took your sword hand."

"I have a new one, made of gold. There's much to be said for being one-handed. I drink less wine for fear of spilling and am seldom inclined to

scratch my arse at court.”

“Aye, there’s that. Maybe I should have mine off as well.” His cousin laughed. “Was it Catelyn Stark who took it?”

“Vargo Hoat.” Where do these tales come from?

“The Qohorik?” Ser Daven spat. “That’s for him and all his Brave Companions. I told your father I would forage for him, but he refused me. Some tasks are fit for lions, he said, but foraging is best left for goats and dogs.”

Lord Tywin’s very words, Jaime knew; he could almost hear his father’s voice. “Come inside, coz. We need to talk.”

Garrett had lit the braziers, and their glowing coals filled Jaime’s tent with a ruddy heat. Ser Daven shrugged out of his cloak and tossed it at Little Lew. “You a Piper, boy?” he growled. “You have a runty look to you.”

“I’m Lewys Piper, if it please my lord.”

“I beat your brother bloody in a mêlée once. The runty little fool took offense when I asked him if that was his sister dancing naked on his shield.”

“She’s the sigil of our House. We don’t have a sister.”

“More’s the pity. Your sigil has nice teats. What sort of man hides behind a naked woman, though? Every time I thumped your brother’s shield, I felt unchivalrous.”

“Enough,” said Jaime, laughing. “Leave him be.” Pia was mulling wine for them, stirring the kettle with a spoon. “I need to know what I can expect to find at Riverrun.”

His cousin shrugged. “The siege drags on. The Blackfish sits inside the castle, we sit outside in our camps. Bloody boring, if you want the truth.” Ser Daven seated himself upon a camp stool. “Tully ought to make a sortie, to remind us all we’re still at war. Be nice if he culled some Freys too. Ryman, for a start. The man’s drunk more oft than not. Oh, and Edwyn. Not as thick as his father, but as full of hate as a boil’s full of pus. And our own Ser Emmon... no, *Lord* Emmon, Seven save us, must not forget his new title... our Lord of Riverrun does nought but try to tell me how to run the

siege. He wants me to take the castle without *damaging* it, since it is now his lordly seat.”

“Is that wine hot yet?” Jaime asked Pia.

“Yes, m’lord.” The girl covered her mouth when she spoke. Peck served the wine on a golden platter. Ser Daven pulled off his gloves and took a cup. “Thank you, boy. Who might you be?”

“Josmyn Peckledon, if it please my lord.”

“Peck was a hero on the Blackwater,” Jaime said. “He slew two knights and captured two more.”

“You must be more dangerous than you look, lad. Is that a beard, or did you forget to wash the dirt off your face? Stannis Baratheon’s wife has a thicker mustache. How old are you?”

“Fifteen, ser.”

Ser Daven snorted. “You know the best thing about heroes, Jaime? They all die young and leave more women for the rest of us.” He tossed the cup back to the squire. “Fill that full again, and I’ll call you hero too. I have a thirst.”

Jaime lifted his own cup left-handed and took a swallow. The warmth spread through his chest. “You were speaking of the Freys you wanted dead. Ryman, Edwyn, Emmon...”

“And Walder Rivers,” Daven said, “that whoreson. Hates that he’s a bastard, and hates everyone who’s not. Ser Perwyn seems a decent fellow, though, might as well spare him. The women too. I’m to marry one, I hear. Your father might have seen fit to consult with me about this marriage, by the bye. My own father was treating with Paxter Redwyne before Oxcross, did you know? Redwyne has a nicely dowered daughter...”

“Desmera?” Jaime laughed. “How well do you like freckles?”

“If my choice is Freys or freckles, well... half of Lord Walder’s brood look like stoats.”

“Only half? Be thankful. I saw Lancel’s bride at Darry.”

“Gatehouse Ami, gods be good. I couldn’t believe that Lancel picked that one. What’s wrong with that boy?”

“He’s grown pious,” said Jaime, “but it wasn’t him who did the picking. Lady Amerei’s mother is a Darry. Our uncle thought she’d help Lancel win the Darry smallfolk.”

“How, by fucking them? You know why they call her Gatehouse Ami? She raises her portcullis for every knight who happens by. Lancel had best find an armorer to make him a horned helm.”

“That won’t be necessary. Our coz is off to King’s Landing to take vows as one of the High Septon’s swords.”

Ser Daven could not have looked more astonished if Jaime had told him that Lancel had decided to become a mummer’s monkey. “Not truly? You are japing with me. Gatehouse Ami must be more stoatish than I’d heard if she could drive the boy to *that*.”

When Jaime had taken his leave of Lady Amerei, she had been weeping softly at the dissolution of her marriage whilst letting Lyle Crakehall console her. Her tears had not troubled him half so much as the hard looks on the faces of her kin as they stood about the yard. “I hope you do not intend to take vows as well, coz,” he said to Daven. “The Freys are prickly where marriage contracts are concerned. I would hate to disappoint them again.”

Ser Daven snorted. “I’ll wed and bed my stoat, never fear. I know what happened to Robb Stark. From what Edwyn tells me, though, I’d best pick one who hasn’t flowered yet, or I’m like to find that Black Walder has been there first. I’ll wager he’s had Gatehouse Ami, and more than thrice. Maybe that explains Lancel’s godliness, and his father’s mood.”

“You have seen Ser Kevan?”

“Aye. He passed here on his way west. I asked him to help us take the castle, but Kevan would have none of it. He brooded the whole time he was here. Courteous enough, but chilly. I swore to him that I never asked to be made Warden of the West, that the honor should have gone to him, and he declared that he held no grudge against me, but you would never have

known it from his tone. He stayed three days and hardly said three words to me. Would that he'd remained, I could have used his counsel. Our friends of Frey would not have dared vex Ser Kevan the way that they've been vexing me."

"Tell me," said Jaime.

"I would, but where to begin? Whilst I've been building rams and siege towers, Ryman Frey has raised a gibbet. Every day at dawn he brings forth Edmure Tully, drapes a noose around his neck, and threatens to hang him unless the castle yields. The Blackfish pays his mummer's show no mind, so come evenfall Lord Edmure is taken down again. His wife's with child, did you know?"

He hadn't. "Edmure bedded her, after the Red Wedding?"

"He was bedding her *during* the Red Wedding. Roslin's a pretty little thing, hardly stoatish at all. And fond of Edmure, queerly. Perwyn tells me she's praying for a girl."

Jaime considered that a moment. "Once Edmure's son is born, Lord Walder will have no more need of Edmure."

"That's how I see it too. Our good-uncle Emm... ah, *Lord Emmon*, that is... he wants Edmure hanged at once. The presence of a Tully Lord of Riverrun distresses him almost as much as the prospective birth of yet another. Daily he beseeches me to *make* Ser Ryman dangle Tully, never mind how. Meanwhile, I have Lord Gawen Westerling tugging at my other sleeve. The Blackfish has his lady wife inside the castle, along with three of his snot-nosed whelps. His lordship fears Tully will kill them if the Freys hang Edmure. One of them is the Young Wolf's little queen."

Jaime had met Jeyne Westerling, he thought, though he could not recall what she looked like. *She must be fair indeed, to have been worth a kingdom.* "Ser Brynden won't kill children," he assured his cousin. "He's not as black a fish as that." He was beginning to grasp why Riverrun had not yet fallen. "Tell me of your dispositions, coz."

"We have the castle well encircled. Ser Ryman and the Freys are north of the Tumblestone. South of Red Fork sits Lord Emmon, with Ser Forley

Prester and with what remains of your old host, plus the river lords who came over to us after the Red Wedding. A sullen lot, I don't mind saying. Good for sulking in their tents, but not much more. Mine own camp is between the rivers, facing the moat and Riverrun's main gates. We've thrown a boom across the Red Fork, downstream of the castle. Manfryd Yew and Raynard Ruttiger have charge of its defense, so no one can escape by boat. I gave them nets as well, to fish. It helps keep us fed."

"Can we starve the castle out?"

Ser Daven shook his head. "The Blackfish expelled all the useless mouths from Riverrun and picked this country clean. He has enough stores to keep man and horse alive for two full years."

"And how well are we provisioned?"

"So long as there are fish in the rivers, we won't starve, though I don't know how we're going to feed the horses. The Freys are hauling food and fodder down from the Twins, but Ser Ryman claims he does not have enough to share, so we must forage for ourselves. Half the men I send off to look for food do not return. Some are deserting. Others we find ripening under trees, with ropes about their necks."

"We came on some, the day before last," said Jaime. Addam Marbrand's scouts had found them, hanging black-faced beneath a crabapple tree. The corpses had been stripped naked, and each man had a crabapple shoved between his teeth. None bore any wounds; plainly, they had yielded. Strongboar had grown furious at that, vowing bloody vengeance on the heads of any men who would truss up warriors to die like suckling pigs.

"It might have been outlaws," Ser Daven said, when Jaime told the tale, "or not. There are still bands of northmen about. And these Lords of the Trident may have bent their knees, but methinks their hearts are still... wolfish."

Jaime glanced at his two younger squires, who were hovering near the braziers pretending not to listen. Lewys Piper and Garrett Paege were both the sons of river lords. He had grown fond of both of them and would hate to have to give them to Ser Ilyn. "The ropes suggest Dondarrion to me."

“Your lightning lord’s not the only man who knows how to tie a noose. Don’t get me started on Lord Beric. He’s here, he’s there, he’s everywhere, but when you send men after him, he melts away like dew. The river lords are helping him, never doubt it. A bloody marcher lord, if you can believe it. One day you hear the man is dead, the next they’re saying how he can’t be killed.” Ser Daven put his wine cup down. “My scouts report fires in the high places at night. Signal fires, they think... as if there were a ring of watchers all around us. And there are fires in the villages as well. Some new god...”

No, an old one. “Thoros is with Dondarrion, the fat Myrish priest who used to drink with Robert.” His golden hand was on the table. Jaime touched it and watched the gold glimmer in the sullen light of the braziers. “We’ll deal with Dondarrion if we have to, but the Blackfish must come first. He has to know his cause is hopeless. Have you tried to treat with him?”

“Ser Ryman did. Rode up to the castle gates half-drunk and blustering, making threats. The Blackfish appeared on the ramparts long enough to say that he would not waste fair words on foul men. Then he put an arrow in the rump of Ryman’s palfrey. The horse reared, Frey fell into the mud, and I laughed so hard I almost pissed myself. If it had been me inside the castle, I would have put that arrow through Ryman’s lying throat.”

“I’ll wear a gorget when I treat with them,” said Jaime, with a half smile. “I mean to offer him generous terms.” If he could end this siege without bloodshed, then it could not be said that he had taken up arms against House Tully.

“You are welcome to try, my lord, but I doubt that words will win the day. We need to storm the castle.”

There had been a time, not so long ago, when Jaime would doubtless have urged the same course. He knew he could not sit here for two years to starve the Blackfish out. “Whatever we do needs to be done quickly,” he told Ser Daven. “My place is back at King’s Landing, with the king.”

“Aye,” his cousin said. “I don’t doubt your sister needs you. Why did she send off Kevan? I thought she’d make him Hand.”

“He would not take it.” He was not as blind as I was.

“Kevan should be the Warden of the West. Or you. It’s not that I’m not grateful for the honor, mind you, but our uncle’s twice my age and has more experience of command. I hope he knows I never asked for this.”

“He knows.”

“How is Cersei? As beautiful as ever?”

“Radiant.” *Fickle*. “Golden.” *False as fool’s gold*. Last night he dreamed he’d found her fucking Moon Boy. He’d killed the fool and smashed his sister’s teeth to splinters with his golden hand, just as Gregor Clegane had done to poor Pia. In his dreams Jaime always had two hands; one was made of gold, but it worked just like the other. “The sooner we are done with Riverrun, the sooner I’ll be back at Cersei’s side.” What Jaime would do then he did not know.

He talked with his cousin for another hour before the Warden of the West finally took his leave. When he was gone, Jaime donned his gold hand and brown cloak to walk amongst the tents.

If truth be told, he liked this life. He felt more comfortable amongst soldiers in the field than he ever had at court. And his men seemed comfortable with him as well. At one cookfire three crossbowmen offered him a share of a hare they’d caught. At another a young knight asked his counsel on the best way to defend against a warhammer. Down beside the river, he watched two washerwomen jousting in the shallows, mounted on the shoulders of a pair of men-at-arms. The girls were half-drunk and half-naked, laughing and snapping rolled-up cloaks at one another as a dozen other men urged them on. Jaime bet a copper star on the blond girl riding Raff the Sweetling, and lost it when the two of them went down splashing amongst the reeds.

Across the river wolves were howling, and the wind was gusting through a stand of willows, making their branches writhe and whisper. Jaime found Ser Ilyn Payne alone outside his tent, honing his greatsword with a whetstone. “Come,” he said, and the silent knight rose, smiling thinly. *He enjoys this*, he realized. *It pleases him to humiliate me nightly. It might please him even more to kill me*. He liked to believe that he was

getting better, but the improvement was slow and not without cost. Underneath his steel and wool and boiled leather Jaime Lannister was a tapestry of cuts and scabs and bruises.

A sentry challenged them as they led their horses from the camp. Jaime clapped the man's shoulder with his golden hand. "Stay vigilant. There are wolves about." They rode back along the Red Fork to the ruins of a burned village they had passed that afternoon. It was there they danced their midnight dance, amongst blackened stones and old cold cinders. For a little while Jaime had the better of it. Perhaps his old skill *was* coming back, he allowed himself to think. Perhaps tonight it would be Payne who went to sleep bruised and bloody.

It was as if Ser Ilyn heard his thoughts. He parried Jaime's last cut lazily and launched a counterattack that drove Jaime back into the river, where his boot slipped out from under him in the mud. He ended on his knees, with the silent knight's sword at his throat and his own lost in the reeds. In the moonlight the pockmarks on Payne's face were large as craters. He made that clacking sound that might have been a laugh and drew his sword up Jaime's throat till the point came to rest between his lips. Only then did he step back and sheathe his steel.

I would have done better to challenge Raff the Sweetling, with a whore upon my back, Jaime thought as he shook mud off his gilded hand. Part of him wanted to tear the thing off and fling it in the river. It was good for nothing, and the left was not much better. Ser Ilyn had gone back to the horses, leaving him to find his own feet. *At least I still have two of those.*

The last day of their journey was cold and gusty. The wind rattled amongst the branches in the bare brown woods and made the river reeds bow low along the Red Fork. Even mantled in the winter wool of the Kingsguard, Jaime could feel the iron teeth of that wind as he rode beside his cousin Daven. It was late afternoon when they sighted Riverrun, rising from the narrow point where the Tumblestone joined the Red Fork. The Tully castle looked like a great stone ship with its prow pointed downriver. Its sandstone walls were drenched in red-gold light, and seemed higher and thicker than Jaime had remembered. *This nut will not crack easily,* he

thought gloomily. If the Blackfish would not listen, he would have no choice but to break the vow he'd made to Catelyn Stark. The vow he'd sworn his king came first.

The boom across the river and the three great camps of the besieging army were just as his cousin had described. Ser Ryman Frey's encampment north of the Tumblestone was the largest, and the most disorderly. A great grey gallows loomed above the tents, as tall as any trebuchet. On it stood a solitary figure with a rope about his neck. *Edmure Tully*. Jaime felt a stab of pity. *To keep him standing there day after day, with that noose around his neck... better to have his head off and be done with it.*

Behind the gallows, tents and cookfires spread out in ragged disarray. The Frey lordlings and their knights had raised their pavilions comfortably upstream of the latrine trenches; downstream were muddy hovels, wayns, and ox carts. "Ser Ryman don't want his boys getting bored, so he gives them whores and cockfights and boar baiting," Ser Daven said. "He's even got himself a bloody *singer*. Our aunt brought Whitesmile Wat from Lannisport, if you can believe it, so Ryman had to have a singer too. Couldn't we just dam the river and drown the whole lot of them, coz?"

Jaime could see archers moving behind the merlons on the castle ramparts. Above them streamed the banners of House Tully, the silver trout defiant on its striped field of red and blue. But the highest tower flew a different flag; a long white standard emblazoned with the direwolf of Stark. "The first time I saw Riverrun, I was a squire green as summer grass," Jaime told his cousin. "Old Sumner Crakehall sent me to deliver a message, one he swore could not be entrusted to a raven. Lord Hoster kept me for a fortnight whilst mulling his reply, and sat me beside his daughter Lysa at every meal."

"Small wonder you took the white. I'd have done the same."

"Oh, Lysa was not so fearsome as all that." She had been a pretty girl, in truth; dimpled and delicate, with long auburn hair. *Timid, though. Prone to tongue-tied silences and fits of giggles, with none of Cersei's fire.* Her older sister had seemed more interesting, though Catelyn was promised to some northern boy, the heir of Winterfell... but at that age, no girl interested

Jaime half so much as Hoster's famous brother, who had won renown fighting the Ninepenny Kings upon the Stepstones. At table he had ignored poor Lysa, whilst pressing Brynden Tully for tales of Maelys the Monstrous and the Ebon Prince. *Ser Brynden was younger then than I am now*, Jaime reflected, *and I was younger than Peck*.

The nearest ford across the Red Fork was upstream of the castle. To reach Ser Daven's camp they had to ride through Emmon Frey's, past the pavilions of the river lords who had bent their knees and been accepted back into the king's peace. Jaime noted the banners of Lychester and Vance, of Roote and Goodbrook, the acorns of House Smallford and Lord Piper's dancing maiden, but the banners he did *not* see gave him pause. The silver eagle of Mallister was nowhere in evidence; nor the red horse of Bracken, the willow of the Rygers, the twining snakes of Paege. Though all had renewed their fealty to the Iron Throne, none had come to join the siege. The Brackens were fighting the Blackwoods, Jaime knew, which accounted for their absence, but as for the rest...

Our new friends are no friends at all. Their loyalty goes no deeper than their skins. Riverrun had to be taken, and soon. The longer the siege dragged on, the more it would hearten other recalcitrants, like Tytos Blackwood.

At the ford, Ser Kennos of Kayce blew the Horn of Herrock. *That should bring the Blackfish to the battlements.* Ser Hugo and Ser Dermot led Jaime's way across the river, splashing through the muddy red-brown waters with the white standard of the Kingsguard and Tommen's stag and lion streaming in the wind. The rest of the column followed hard behind them.

The Lannister camp rang to the sound of wooden hammers where a new siege tower was rising. Two other towers stood completed, half-covered with raw horsehide. Between them sat a rolling ram; a tree trunk with a fire-hardened point suspended on chains beneath a wooden roof. *My coz has not been idle, it would seem.*

"My lord," Peck asked, "where do you want your tent?"

“There, upon that rise.” He pointed with his golden hand, though it was not well suited to that task. “Baggage there, horse lines there. We’ll use the latrines my cousin has so kindly dug for us. Ser Addam, inspect our perimeter with an eye for any weaknesses.” Jaime did not anticipate an attack, but he had not anticipated the Whispering Wood either.

“Shall I summon the stoats for a war council?” Daven asked.

“Not until I’ve spoken to the Blackfish.” Jaime beckoned to Beardless Jon Bettley. “Shake out a peace banner and bear a message to the castle. Inform Ser Brynden Tully that I would have words with him, at first light on the morrow. I will come to the edge of the moat and meet him on his drawbridge.”

Peck looked alarmed. “My lord, the bowmen could...”

“They won’t.” Jaime dismounted. “Raise my tent and plant my standards.” *And we’ll see who comes running, and how quickly.*

It did not require long. Pia was fussing at a brazier, trying to light the coals. Peck went to help her. Of late, Jaime oft went to sleep to the sound of them fucking in a corner of the tent. As Garrett was undoing the clasps on Jaime’s greaves, the tent flapped open. “Here at last, are you?” boomed his aunt. She filled the door, with her Frey husband peering out from behind her. “Past time. Have you no hug for your old fat aunt?” She held out her arms and left him no choice but to embrace her.

Genna Lannister had been a shapely woman in her youth, always threatening to overflow her bodice. Now the only shape she had was square. Her face was broad and smooth, her neck a thick pink pillar, her bosom enormous. She carried enough flesh to make two of her husband. Jaime hugged her dutifully and waited for her to pinch his ear. She had been pinching his ear for as long as he could remember, but today she forbore. Instead, she planted soft and sloppy kisses on his cheeks. “I am sorry for your loss.”

“I had a new hand made, of gold.” He showed her.

“Very nice. Will they make you a gold father too?” Lady Genna’s voice was sharp. “Tywin was the loss I meant.”

“A man such as Tywin Lannister comes but once in a thousand years,” declared her husband. Emmon Frey was a fretful man with nervous hands. He might have weighed ten stone... but only wet, and clad in mail. He was a weed in wool, with no chin to speak of, a flaw that the prominence of the apple in his throat made even more absurd. Half his hair had been gone before he turned thirty. Now he was sixty and only a few white wisps remained.

“Some queer tales have been reaching us of late,” Lady Genna said, after Jaime dismissed Pia and his squires. “A woman hardly knows what to believe. Can it be true that Tyrion slew Tywin? Or is that some calumny your sister put about?”

“It’s true enough.” The weight of his golden hand had grown irksome. He fumbled at the straps that secured it to his wrist.

“For a son to raise his hand against a father,” Ser Emmon said. “Monstrous. These are dark days in Westeros. I fear for us all with Lord Tywin gone.”

“You feared for us all when he was here.” Genna settled her ample rump upon a camp stool, which creaked alarmingly beneath her weight. “Nephew, speak to us of our son Cleos and the manner of his death.”

Jaime undid the last fastening and set his hand aside. “We were set upon by outlaws. Ser Cleos scattered them, but it cost his life.” The lie came easy; he could see that it pleased them.

“The boy had courage, I always said so. It was in his blood.” A pinkish froth glistened on Ser Emmon’s lips when he spoke, courtesy of the sourleaf he liked to chew.

“His bones should be interred beneath the Rock, in the Hall of Heroes,” Lady Genna declared. “Where was he laid to rest?”

Nowhere. The Bloody Mummings stripped his corpse and left his flesh to feast the carrion crows. “Beside a stream,” he lied. “When this war is done, I will find the place and send him home.” Bones were bones; these days, nothing was easier to come by.

“This war...” Lord Emmon cleared his throat, the apple in his throat moving up and down. “You will have seen the siege machines. Rams, trebuchets, towers. It will not serve, Jaime. Daven means to break my walls, smash in my gates. He talks of burning pitch, of setting the castle afire. *My castle.*” He reached up one sleeve, brought out a parchment, and thrust it at Jaime’s face. “I have the decree. Signed by the king, by Tommen, see, the royal seal, the stag and lion. I am the lawful lord of Riverrun, and I will not have it reduced to a smoking ruin.”

“Oh, put that fool thing away,” his wife snapped. “So long as the Blackfish sits inside Riverrun you can wipe your arse with that paper for all the good it does us.” Though she had been a Frey for fifty years, Lady Genna remained very much a Lannister. *Quite a lot of Lannister.* “Jaime will deliver you the castle.”

“To be sure,” Lord Emmon said. “Ser Jaime, your lord father’s faith in me was well placed, you shall see. I mean to be firm but fair with my new vassals. Blackwood and Bracken, Jason Mallister, Vance and Piper, they shall learn that they have a just overlord in Emmon Frey. My father as well, yes. He is the Lord of the Crossing, but *I* am the Lord of Riverrun. A son has a duty to obey his father, true, but a bannerman must obey his overlord.”

Oh, gods be good. “You are not his overlord, ser. Read your parchment. You were granted Riverrun with its lands and incomes, no more. Petyr Baelish is the Lord Paramount of the Trident. Riverrun will be subject to the rule of Harrenhal.”

That did not please Lord Emmon. “Harrenhal is a ruin, haunted and accursed,” he objected, “and Baelish... the man is a coin counter, no proper lord, his birth...”

“If you are unhappy with the arrangements, go to King’s Landing and take it up with my sweet sister.” Cersei would devour Emmon Frey and pick her teeth with his bones, he did not doubt. *That is, if she’s not too busy fucking Osmund Kettleblack.*

Lady Genna gave a snort. “There is no need to trouble Her Grace with such nonsense. Emm, why don’t you step outside and have a breath of air?”

“A breath of air?”

“Or a good long piss, if you prefer. My nephew and I have *family* matters to discuss.”

Lord Emmon flushed. “Yes, it is warm in here. I will wait outside, my lady. Ser.” His lordship rolled up his parchment, sketched a bow toward Jaime, and tottered from the tent.

It was hard not to feel contemptuous of Emmon Frey. He had arrived at Casterly Rock in his fourteenth year to wed a lioness half his age. Tyrion used to say that Lord Tywin had given him a nervous belly for a wedding gift. *Genna has played her part as well.* Jaime remembered many a feast where Emmon sat poking at his food sullenly whilst his wife made ribald jests with whatever household knight had been seated to her left, their conversations punctuated by loud bursts of laughter. *She gave Frey four sons, to be sure. At least she says they are his.* No one in Casterly Rock had the courage to suggest otherwise, least of all Ser Emmon.

No sooner was he gone than his lady wife rolled her eyes. “My lord and master. What *was* your father thinking, to name him Lord of Riverrun?”

“I imagine he was thinking of your sons.”

“I think of them as well. Emm will make a wretched lord. Ty may do better, if he has the sense to learn from me and not his father.” She looked about the tent. “Do you have wine?”

Jaime found a flagon and poured for her, one-handed. “Why are you here, my lady? You should have remained at Casterly Rock until the fighting’s done.”

“Once Emm heard he was a lord, he had to come at once to claim his seat.” Lady Genna took a drink and wiped her mouth on her sleeve. “Your father should have granted us Darry. Cleos married one of the plowman’s daughters, you will recall. His grieving widow is furious that her sons were not granted her lord father’s lands. Gatehouse Ami is Darry only on her mother’s side. My good-daughter Jeyne is her aunt, a full sister to Lady Mariya.”

“A younger sister,” Jaime reminded her, “and Ty will have Riverrun, a greater prize than Darry.”

“A poisoned prize. House Darry is extinguished in the male line, House Tully is not. That muttonhead Ser Ryman puts a noose round Edmure’s neck, but will not hang him. And Roslin Frey has a trout growing in her belly. My grandsons will never be secure in Riverrun so long as any Tully heir remains alive.”

She was not wrong, Jaime knew. “If Roslin has a girl—”

“—she can wed Ty, provided old Lord Walder will consent. Yes, I’ve thought of that. A boy is just as likely, though, and his little cock would cloud the issue. And if Ser Brynden should survive this siege, he might be inclined to claim Riverrun in his own name... or in the name of young Robert Arryn.”

Jaime remembered little Robert from King’s Landing, still sucking on his mother’s teats at four. “Arryn won’t live long enough to breed. And why should the Lord of the Eyrie need Riverrun?”

“Why does a man with one pot of gold need another? Men are greedy. Tywin should have granted Riverrun to Kevan and Darry to Emm. I would have told him so if he had troubled to ask me, but when did your father ever consult with anyone but Kevan?” She sighed deeply. “I do not blame Kevan for wanting the safer seat for his own boy, mind you. I know him too well.”

“What Kevan wants and what Lancel wants appear to be two different things.” He told her of Lancel’s decision to renounce wife and lands and lordship to fight for the Holy Faith. “If you still want Darry, write to Cersei and make your case.”

Lady Genna waved her cup in dismissal. “No, that horse has left the yard. Emm has it in his pointed head that he will rule the riverlands. And Lancel... I suppose we should have seen this coming from afar. A life protecting the High Septon is not so different from a life protecting the king, after all. Kevan will be wroth, I fear. As wroth as Tywin was when you got it in your head to take the white. At least Kevan still has Martyn for an heir. He can marry him to Gatehouse Ami in Lancel’s place. Seven save

us all.” His aunt gave a sigh. “And speaking of the Seven, why would Cersei permit the Faith to arm again?”

Jaime shrugged. “I am certain she had reasons.”

“Reasons?” Lady Genna made a rude noise. “They had best be *good* reasons. The Swords and Stars troubled even the Targaryens. The Conqueror himself tread carefully with the Faith, so they would not oppose him. And when Aegon died and the lords rose up against his sons, both orders were in the thick of that rebellion. The more pious lords supported them, and many of the smallfolk. King Maegor finally had to put a bounty on them. He paid a dragon for the head of any unrepentant Warrior’s Son, and a silver stag for the scalp of a Poor Fellow, if I recall my history. Thousands were slain, but nigh as many still roamed the realm, defiant, until the Iron Throne slew Maegor and King Jaehaerys agreed to pardon all those who would set aside their swords.”

“I’d forgotten most of that,” Jaime confessed.

“You and your sister both.” She took another swallow of her wine. “Is it true that Tywin was smiling on his bier?”

“He was rotting on his bier. It made his mouth twist.”

“Was that all it was?” That seemed to sadden her. “Men say that Tywin never smiled, but he smiled when he wed your mother, and when Aerys made him Hand. When Tarbeck Hall came crashing down on Lady Ellyn, that scheming bitch, Tyg claimed he smiled then. And he smiled at your birth, Jaime, I saw that with mine own eyes. You and Cersei, pink and perfect, as alike as two peas in a pod... well, except between the legs. What *lungs* you had!”

“Hear us roar.” Jaime grinned. “Next you’ll be telling me how much he liked to laugh.”

“No. Tywin mistrusted laughter. He heard too many people laughing at your grandsire.” She frowned. “I promise you, this mummer’s farce of a siege would not have amused him. How do you mean to end it, now that you’re here?”

“Treat with the Blackfish.”

“That won’t work.”

“I mean to offer him good terms.”

“Terms require trust. The Freys murdered guests beneath their roof, and you, well... I mean no offense, my love, but you *did* kill a certain king you had sworn to protect.”

“And I’ll kill the Blackfish if he does not yield.” His tone was harsher than he’d intended, but he was in no mood for having Aerys Targaryen thrown in his face.

“How, with your tongue?” Her voice was scornful. “I may be an old fat woman, but I do not have cheese between my ears, Jaime. Neither does the Blackfish. Empty threats won’t daunt him.”

“What would you counsel?”

She gave a ponderous shrug. “Emm wants Edmure’s head off. For once, he may be right. Ser Ryman has made us a laughingstock with that gibbet of his. You need to show Ser Brynden that your threats have teeth.”

“Killing Edmure might harden Ser Brynden’s resolve.”

“Resolve is one thing Brynden Blackfish never lacked for. Hoster Tully could have told you that.” Lady Genna finished her wine. “Well, I would never presume to tell you how to fight a war. I know my place... unlike your sister. Is it true that Cersei burned the Red Keep?”

“Only the Tower of the Hand.”

His aunt rolled her eyes. “She would have done better to leave the tower and burn her Hand. Harys *Swyft*? If ever a man deserved his arms, it is Ser Harys. And Gyles Rosby, Seven save us, I thought he died years ago. Merryweather... your father used to call his grandsire ‘the Chuckler,’ I’ll have you know. Tywin claimed the only thing Merryweather was good for was chuckling at the king’s witticisms. His lordship chuckled himself right into exile, as I recall. Cersei has put some bastard on the council too, and a kettle in the Kingsguard. She has the Faith arming and the Braavosi calling in loans all over Westeros. None of which would be happening if she’d had the simple sense to make your uncle the King’s Hand.”

“Ser Kevan refused the office.”

“So he said. He did not say why. There was much he did not say. *Would* not say.” Lady Genna made a face. “Kevan *always* did what was asked of him. It is not like him to turn away from any duty. Something is awry here, I can smell it.”

“He said that he was tired.” *He knows*, Cersei had said, as they stood above their father’s corpse. *He knows about us*.

“Tired?” His aunt pursed her lips. “I suppose he has a right to be. It has been hard for Kevan, living all his life in Tywin’s shadow. It was hard for all my brothers. That shadow Tywin cast was long and black, and each of them had to struggle to find a little sun. Tygett tried to be his own man, but he could never match your father, and that just made him angrier as the years went by. Gerion made japes. Better to mock the game than to play and lose. But Kevan saw how things stood early on, so he made himself a place by your father’s side.”

“And you?” Jaime asked her.

“It was not a game for girls. I was my father’s precious princess... and Tywin’s too, until I disappointed him. My brother never learned to like the taste of disappointment.” She pushed herself to her feet. “I’ve said what I came to say, I shan’t take any more of your time. Do what Tywin would have done.”

“Did you love him?” Jaime heard himself ask.

His aunt looked at him strangely. “I was seven when Walder Frey persuaded my lord father to give my hand to Emm. His *second* son, not even his heir. Father was himself a thirdborn son, and younger children crave the approval of their elders. Frey sensed that weakness in him, and Father agreed for no better reason than to please him. My betrothal was announced at a feast with half the west in attendance. Ellyn Tarbeck laughed and the Red Lion went angry from the hall. The rest sat on their tongues. Only Tywin dared speak against the match. A boy of ten. Father turned as white as mare’s milk, and Walder Frey was *quivering*.” She smiled. “How could I not love him, after that? That is not to say that I approved of all he did, or much enjoyed the company of the man that he

became... but every little girl needs a big brother to protect her. Tywin was big even when he was little.” She gave a sigh. “Who will protect us now?”

Jaime kissed her cheek. “He left a son.”

“Aye, he did. That is what I fear the most, in truth.”

That was a queer remark. “Why should you fear?”

“Jaime,” she said, tugging on his ear, “sweetling, I have known you since you were a babe at Joanna’s breast. You smile like Gerion and fight like Tyg, and there’s some of Kevan in you, else you would not wear that cloak... but *Tyrion* is Tywin’s son, not you. I said so once to your father’s face, and he would not speak to me for half a year. Men are such thundering great fools. Even the sort who come along once in a thousand years.”