

cloak was gone, and Tyrion saw that the blade was badly notched, its cheap steel spotted with rust. Small wonder the clansmen had left nine bodies on the ground.

They had only three dead; two of Lord Bracken's men-at-arms, Kurleket and Mohor, and his own man Jyck, who had made such a bold show with his bareback charge. A fool to the end, Tyrion thought.

"Lady Stark, I urge you to press on, with all haste," Ser Willis Wode said, his eyes scanning the ridgetops warily through the slit in his helm. "We drove them off for the moment, but they will not have gone far."

"We must bury our dead, Ser Willis," she said. "These were brave men. I will not leave them to the crows and shadowcats."

"This soil is too stony for digging," Ser Willis said.

"Then we shall gather stones for cairns."

"Gather all the stones you want," Bronn told her, "but do it without me or Chiggen. I've better things to do than pile rocks on dead men... breathing, for one." He looked over the rest of the survivors. "Any of you who hope to be alive come nightfall, ride with us."

"My lady, I fear he speaks the truth," Ser Rodrik said wearily. The old knight had been wounded in the fight, a deep gash in his left arm and a spear thrust that grazed his neck, and he sounded his age. "If we linger here, they will be on us again for a certainty, and we may not live through a second attack."

Tyrion could see the anger in Catelyn's face, but she had no choice. "May the gods forgive us, then. We will ride at once."

There was no shortage of horses now. Tyrion moved his saddle to Jyck's spotted gelding, who looked strong enough to last another three or four days at least. He was about to mount when Lharys stepped up and said, "I'll take that dirk now, dwarf."

"Let him keep it." Catelyn Stark looked down from her horse. "And see that he has his axe back as well. We may have need of it if we are attacked again."

"You have my thanks, lady," Tyrion said, mounting up.

"Save them," she said curtly. "I trust you no more than I did before." She was gone before he could frame a reply.

Tyrion adjusted his stolen helm and took the axe from Bronn. He remembered how he had begun the journey, with his wrists bound and a hood pulled down over his head, and decided that this was a definite improvement. Lady Stark could keep her trust; so long as he could keep the axe, he would count himself ahead in the game.

Ser Willis Wode led them out. Bronn took the rear, with Lady Stark safely in the middle, Ser Rodrik a shadow beside her. Marillion kept throwing sullen looks back at Tyrion as they rode. The singer had broken several ribs, his woodharp, and all four fingers on his playing hand, yet the day had not been an utter loss to him; somewhere he had acquired a magnificent shadowskin cloak, thick black fur slashed by stripes of white. He huddled beneath its folds silently, and for once had nothing to say.