

TYRION

They have my son,” Tywin Lannister said.

“They do, my lord.” The messenger’s voice was dulled by exhaustion. On the breast of his torn surcoat, the brindled boar of Crakehall was half-obscured by dried blood.

One of your sons, Tyrion thought. He took a sip of wine and said not a word, thinking of Jaime. When he lifted his arm, pain shot through his elbow, reminding him of his own brief taste of battle. He loved his brother, but he would not have wanted to be with him in the Whispering Wood for all the gold in Casterly Rock.

His lord father’s assembled captains and bannermen had fallen very quiet as the courier told his tale. The only sound was the crackle and hiss of the log burning in the hearth at the end of the long, drafty common room.

After the hardships of the long relentless drive south, the prospect of even a single night in an inn had cheered Tyrion mightily... though he rather wished it had not been this inn again, with all its memories. His father had set a grueling pace, and it had taken its toll. Men wounded in the battle kept up as best they could or were abandoned to fend for themselves. Every morning they left a few more by the roadside, men who went to sleep never to wake. Every afternoon a few more collapsed along the way. And every evening a few more deserted, stealing off into the dusk. Tyrion had been half-tempted to go with them.

He had been upstairs, enjoying the comfort of a featherbed and the warmth of Shae’s body beside him, when his squire had woken him to say that a rider had arrived with dire news of Riverrun. So it had all been for nothing. The rush south, the endless forced marches, the bodies left beside the road... all for naught. Robb Stark had reached Riverrun days and days ago.

“How could this happen?” Ser Harys Swyft moaned. “How? Even after the Whispering Wood, you had Riverrun ringed in iron, surrounded by a great host... what madness made Ser Jaime decide to split his men into three separate camps? Surely he knew how vulnerable that would leave them?”

Better than you, you chinless craven, Tyrion thought. Jaime might have lost Riverrun, but it angered him to hear his brother slandered by the likes of Swyft, a shameless lickspittle whose greatest accomplishment was marrying his equally chinless daughter to Ser Kevan, and thereby attaching himself to the Lannisters.

“I would have done the same,” his uncle responded, a good deal more calmly than Tyrion might have. “You have never seen Riverrun, Ser Harys, or you would know that Jaime had little choice in the matter. The castle is situated at the end of the point of land where the Tumblestone flows into the Red Fork of the Trident. The rivers form two sides of a triangle, and when danger threatens, the Tullys open their sluice gates upstream to create a wide moat on the third side, turning Riverrun into an island. The walls rise sheer from the water, and from their towers the defenders have a commanding view of the opposite shores for many leagues around. To cut off all the approaches, a besieger must needs place one camp north of the Tumblestone, one south of the Red Fork, and a third between the rivers, west of the moat. There is no other way, none.”