

No one was smiling. “By what right do you savages intrude on our councils?” demanded Ser Kevan.

“Savages, lowlander?” Conn might have been handsome if you washed him. “We are free men, and free men by rights sit on all war councils.”

“Which one is the lion lord?” Chella asked.

“They are both old men,” announced Timett son of Timett, who had yet to see his twentieth year.

Ser Kevan’s hand went to his sword hilt, but his brother placed two fingers on his wrist and held him fast. Lord Tywin seemed unperturbed. “Tyrion, have you forgotten your courtesies? Kindly acquaint us with our... honored guests.”

Tyrion licked his fingers. “With pleasure,” he said. “The fair maid is Chella daughter of Cheyk of the Black Ears.”

“I’m no maid,” Chella protested. “My sons have taken fifty ears among them.”

“May they take fifty more.” Tyrion waddled away from her. “This is Conn son of Coratt. Shagga son of Dolf is the one who looks like Casterly Rock with hair. They are Stone Crows. Here is Ulf son of Umar of the Moon Brothers, and here Timett son of Timett, a red hand of the Burned Men. And this is Bronn, a sellsword of no particular allegiance. He has already changed sides twice in the short time I’ve known him, you and he ought to get on famously, Father.” To Bronn and the clansmen he said, “May I present my lord father, Tywin son of Tytos of House Lannister, Lord of Casterly Rock, Warden of the West, Shield of Lannisport, and once and future Hand of the King.”

Lord Tywin rose, dignified and correct. “Even in the west, we know the prowess of the warrior clans of the Mountains of the Moon. What brings you down from your strongholds, my lords?”

“Horses,” said Shagga.

“A promise of silk and steel,” said Timett son of Timett.

Tyrion was about to tell his lord father how he proposed to reduce the Vale of Arryn to a smoking wasteland, but he was never given the chance. The door banged open again. The messenger gave Tyrion’s clansmen a quick, queer look as he dropped to one knee before Lord Tywin. “My lord,” he said, “Ser Addam bid me tell you that the Stark host is moving down the causeway.”

Lord Tywin Lannister did not smile. Lord Tywin never smiled, but Tyrion had learned to read his father’s pleasure all the same, and it was there on his face. “So the wolfling is leaving his den to play among the lions,” he said in a voice of quiet satisfaction. “Splendid. Return to Ser Addam and tell him to fall back. He is not to engage the northerners until we arrive, but I want him to harass their flanks and draw them farther south.”

“It will be as you command.” The rider took his leave.

“We are well situated here,” Ser Kevan pointed out. “Close to the ford and ringed by pits and spikes. If they are coming south, I say let them come, and break themselves against us.”