

Tyrion rolled his eyes. "If the Starks feel the need for gold, they can melt down Jaime's armor." "if we ask for a truce, they will think us weak," Ser Addam argued. "We should march on them at once."

"Surely our friends at court could be prevailed upon to join us with fresh troops," said Ser Harys. "And someone might return to Casterly Rock to raise a new host."

Lord Tywin Lannister rose to his feet. "They have my son," he said once more, in a voice that cut through the babble like a sword through suet. "Leave me. All of you."

Ever the soul of obedience, Tyrion rose to depart with the rest, but his father gave him a look. "Not you, Tyrion. Remain. And you as well, Kevan. The rest of you, out."

Tyrion eased himself back onto the bench, startled into speechlessness. Ser Kevan crossed the room to the wine casks. "Uncle," Tyrion called, "if you would be so kind—"

"Here." His father offered him his cup, the wine untouched.

Now Tyrion truly was nonplussed. He drank.

Lord Tywin seated himself. "You have the right of it about Stark. Alive, we might have used Lord Eddard to forge a peace with Winterfell and Riverrun, a peace that would have given us the time we need to deal with Robert's brothers. Dead His hand curled into a fist. "Madness. Rank madness."

"Joff's only a boy," Tyrion pointed out. "At his age, I committed a few follies of my own."

His father gave him a sharp look. "I suppose we ought to be grateful that he has not yet married a whore."

Tyrion sipped at his wine, wondering how Lord Tywin would look if he flung the cup in his face.

"Our position is worse than you know," his father went on. "It would seem we have a new king."

Ser Kevan looked poleaxed. "A new-who? What have they done to Joffrey?"

The faintest flicker of distaste played across Lord Tywin's thin lips. "Nothing... yet. My grandson still sits the Iron Throne, but the eunuch has heard whispers from the south. Renly Baratheon wed Margaery Tyrell at Highgarden this fortnight past, and now he has claimed the crown. The bride's father and brothers have bent the knee and sworn him their swords."

"Those are grave tidings." When Ser Kevan frowned, the furrows in his brow grew deep as canyons.

"My daughter commands us to ride for King's Landing at once, to defend the Red Keep against King Renly and the Knight of Flowers." His mouth tightened. "Commands us, mind you. In the name of the king and council."

"How is King Joffrey taking the news?" Tyrion asked with a certain black amusement.

"Cersei has not seen fit to tell him yet," Lord Tywin said. "She fears he might insist on marching against Renly himself."

"With what army?" Tyrion asked. "You don't plan to give him this one, I hope?"

"He talks of leading the City Watch," Lord Tywin said.