

“Telling Shagga and Timett how to pillage is like telling a rooster how to crow,” Tyrion commented, “but I should prefer to keep them with me.” Uncouth and unruly they might be, yet the wildlings were his, and he trusted them more than any of his father’s men. He was not about to hand them over.

“Then you had best learn to control them. I will not have the city plundered.”

“The city?” Tyrion was lost. “What city would that be?”

“King’s Landing. I am sending you to court.”

It was the last thing Tyrion Lannister would ever have anticipated.

He reached for his wine, and considered for a moment as he sipped. “And what am I to do there?”

“Rule,” his father said curtly

Tyrion hooted with laughter. “My sweet sister might have a word or two to say about that!”

“Let her say what she likes. Her son needs to be taken in hand before he ruins us all. I blame those jackanapes on the council—our friend Petyr, the venerable Grand Maester, and that cockless wonder Lord Varys. What sort of counsel are they giving Joffrey when he lurches from one folly to the next? Whose notion was it to make this Janos Slynt a lord? The man’s father was a butcher, and they grant him Harrenhal. Harrenhal, that was the seat of kings! Not that he will ever set foot inside it, if I have a say. I am told he took a bloody spear for his sigil. A bloody cleaver would have been my choice.” His father had not raised his voice, yet Tyrion could see the anger in the gold of his eyes. “And dismissing Selmy, where was the sense in that? Yes, the man was old, but the name of Barristan the Bold still has meaning in the realm. He lent honor to any man he served. Can anyone say the same of the Hound? You feed your dog bones under the table, you do not seat him beside you on the high bench.” He pointed a finger at Tyrion’s face. “If Cersei cannot curb the boy, you must. And if these councillors are playing us false...”

Tyrion knew. “Spikes,” he sighed. “Heads. Walls.”

“I see you have taken a few lessons from me.”

“More than you know, Father,” Tyrion answered quietly. He finished his wine and set the cup aside, thoughtful. A part of him was more pleased than he cared to admit. Another part was remembering the battle upriver, and wondering if he was being sent to hold the left again. “Why me?” he asked, cocking his head to one side. “Why not my uncle? Why not Ser Addam or Ser Flement or Lord Serrett? Why not a... bigger man?”

Lord Tywin rose abruptly. “You are my son.”

That was when he knew. You have given him up for lost, he thought. You bloody bastard, you think Jaime’s good as dead, so I’m all you have left. Tyrion wanted to slap him, to spit in his face, to draw his dagger and cut the heart out of him and see if it was made of old hard gold, the way the smallfolk said. Yet he sat there, silent and still.

The shards of the broken cup crunched beneath his father’s heels as Lord Tywin crossed the room. “One last thing,” he said at the door. “You will not take the whore to court.”