

The gaoler yanked his leather strap free of Tyrion's grasp. "Message," he said, as if he had never heard the word before. His frown made deep creases in his brow.

"You heard me, my lord. Only carry my word to your lady. Tell her..." "at? "at would possibly make Lysa Anyn relent? The inspiration came to Tyrion Lannister suddenly. tell her that I wish to confess my crimes."

Mord raised his arm and Tyrion braced himself for another blow, but the turnkey hesitated. Suspicion and greed warred in his eyes. He wanted that gold, yet he feared a trick; he had the look of a man who had often been tricked. "Is lie," he muttered darkly. "Dwarf man cheat me..."

"I will put my promise in writing," Tyrion vowed.

Some illiterates held writing in disdain; others seemed to have a superstitious reverence for the written word, as if it were some sort of magic. Fortunately, Mord was one of the latter. The turnkey lowered the strap. "Writing down gold. Much gold."

"Oh, much gold," Tyrion assured him. "The purse is just a taste, my friend. My brother wears armor of solid gold plate." In truth, Jaime's armor was gilded steel, but this oaf would never know the difference.

Mord fingered his strap thoughtfully, but in the end, he relented and went to fetch paper and ink. When the letter was written, the gaoler frowned at it suspiciously. "Now deliver my message," Tyrion urged.

He was shivering in his sleep when they came for him, late that night. Mord opened the door but kept his silence. Ser Vardis Egen woke Tyrion with the point of his boot. "On your feet, Imp. My lady wants to see you."

Tyrion rubbed the sleep from his eyes and put on a grimace he scarcely felt. "No doubt she does, but what makes you think I wish to see her?"

Ser Vardis frowned. Tyrion remembered him well from the years he had spent at King's Landing as the captain of the Hand's household guard. A square, plain face, silver hair, a heavy build, and no humor whatsoever. "Your wishes are not my concern. On your feet, or I'll have you carried."

Tyrion clambered awkwardly to his feet. "A cold night," he said casually, "and the High Hall is so drafty. I don't wish to catch a chill. Mord, if you would be so good, fetch my cloak."

The gaoler squinted at him, face dull with suspicion.

"My cloak," Tyrion repeated. "The shadowskin you took from me for safekeeping. You recall."

"Get him the damnable cloak," Ser Vardis said.

Mord did not dare grumble. He gave Tyrion a glare that promised future retribution, yet he went for the cloak. When he draped it around his prisoner's neck, Tyrion smiled. "My thanks. I shall think of you whenever I wear it." He flung the trailing end of the long fur over his right shoulder, and felt warm for the first time in days. "Lead on, Ser Vardis."

The High Hall of the Arryns was aglow with the light of fifty torches, burning in the sconces along the walls. The Lady Lysa wore black silk, with the moon-and-falcon sewn on her breast in pearls. Since she did not look the sort to join the Night's Watch, Tyrion could only imagine that she had decided mourning clothes were appropriate garb for a confession. Her long auburn hair,