

“Sorry to disappoint you, Father,” Tyrion said. “No need to leap up and embrace me, I wouldn’t want you to strain yourself.” He crossed the room to their table, acutely conscious of the way his stunted legs made him waddle with every step. Whenever his father’s eyes were on him, he became uncomfortably aware of all his deformities and shortcomings. “Kind of you to go to war for me,” he said as he climbed into a chair and helped himself to a cup of his father’s ale.

“By my lights, it was you who started this,” Lord Tywin replied. “Your brother Jaime would never have meekly submitted to capture at the hands of a woman.”

“That’s one way we differ, Jaime and I. He’s taller as well, you may have noticed.”

His father ignored the sally. “The honor of our House was at stake. I had no choice but to ride. No man sheds Lannister blood with impunity...”

“Hear Me Roar,” Tyrion said, grinning. The Lannister words. “Truth be told, none of my blood was actually shed, although it was a close thing once or twice. Morrec and Jyck were killed.”

“I suppose you will be wanting some new men.”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Father, I’ve acquired a few of my own.” He tried a swallow of the ale. It was brown and yeasty, so thick you could almost chew it. Very fine, in truth. A pity his father had hanged the innkeep. “How is your war going?”

His uncle answered. “Well enough, for the nonce. Ser Edmure had scattered small troops of men along his borders to stop our raiding, and your lord father and I were able to destroy most of them piecemeal before they could regroup.”

“Your brother has been covering himself with glory,” his father said. “He smashed the Lords Vance and Piper at the Golden Tooth, and met the massed power of the Tullys under the walls of Riverrun. The lords of the Trident have been put to rout. Ser Edmure Tully was taken captive, with many of his knights and bannermen. Lord Blackwood led a few survivors back to Riverrun, where Jaime has them under siege. The rest fled to their own strongholds.”

“Your father and I have been marching on each in turn,” Ser Kevan said. “With Lord Blackwood gone, Raventree fell at once, and Lady Whent yielded Harrenhal for want of men to defend it. Ser Gregor burnt out the Pipers and the Brackens...”

“Leaving you unopposed?” Tyrion said.

“Not wholly,” Ser Kevan said. “The Mallisters still hold Seagard and Walder Frey is marshaling his levies at the Twins.”

“No matter,” Lord Tywin said. “Frey only takes the field when the scent of victory is in the air, and all he smells now is ruin. And Jason Mallister lacks the strength to fight alone. Once Jaime takes Riverrun, they will both be quick enough to bend the knee. Unless the Starks and the Arryns come forth to oppose us, this war is good as won.”

“I would not fret overmuch about the Arryns if I were you,” Tyrion said. “The Starks are another matter. Lord Eddard-”

“-is our hostage,” his father said. “He will lead no armies while he rots in a dungeon under the Red Keep.”

“No,” Ser Kevan agreed, “but his son has called the banners and sits at Moat Cailin with a strong host around him.”