My lady, you ought to cover your head. You will take a chill.

It is only water, Ser Rodrik.

Catelyn had almost forgotten the softness and warmth of the southern rain. In the north, it fell cold and hard and sent grown men running for shelter.

I am soaked through. Even my bones are wet.

There is an inn at the crossroads up ahead.

Lord Jowan Mallister and his men, with his son Patrek by his side. The last time she had seen him, he had been jesting at her uncle's wedding feast. Mallisters stood bannerman to the Tullys.

An inn. If only, but we dare not risk it. If we wish to remain unknown, we must...

Riders! My lady, best pull up your hood.

The nod he gave her was a high lord's courtesy, but there was no recognition in those fierce eyes.

Lord Mallister did not know you.

He saw a pair of mud-spattered travelers. It would never occur to him that one might be daughter of his liege lord.

I think we shall be safe enough at the inn.
YOU'VE HEARD ME PLAY SOMEWHERE? I WAS MADE TO SING FOR KINGS AND HIGH LORDS.

YOU'VE HEARD ME PLAY SOMEWHERE? I WAS MADE TO SING FOR KINGS AND HIGH LORDS.

WE HAD BEST MAKE HASTE IF WE HOPE TO EAT TONIGHT, MY LADY. THOSE WHO COME LATE TO THE TABLE DON'T EAT.

IT MIGHT BE BETTER IF WE WERE NOT KNIGHT AND LADY, BUT COMMON TRAVELERS. FATHER AND DAUGHTER ON SOME FAMILY BUSINESS?

SEVEN BLESSINGS TO YOU, GOODFOLK. ARE YOU BOUND TO THE TOWNEY AT KINGS LANDING?

MY NAME IS MARUILL. DOUBTFUL YOU'VE HEARD ME PLAY SOMEWHERE? I WAS MADE TO SING FOR KINGS AND HIGH LORDS.

TWO ROOMS. THAT'S ALL THERE IS. THEY'RE UNDER THE BELL TOWER, BUT WE'RE FULL UP. IT'S THOSE ON THE ROAD.

LEAVE YOUR BOOTS DOWNSTAIRS. THE BOY WILL CLEAN THEM.
Catelyn wondered what Edmure would think of that, a singer had once bedded a girl her brother had fancied, and he had hated the breed ever since.

And Winterfell? Have you traveled north?

Why would it? It’s all blizzards and bear skins and the Starks know no music but the howling of wolves.

I’m sorry, but we’re full up every room. What with the journey approaching...

You’re welcome to my room, my lord. Now there’s a clever man.

My men can sleep in the stable and I don’t require a large room.

Innkeeper! We have horses that need stabling, and my lord of Lannister requires a room.

A hundred times, they keep a chamber for me and the young lord is like a brother.

I can see that. Lord Tully is fond of song. I hear no doubt you’ve been to Riverrun?
MY MEN WILL HAVE WHATEVER YOU'RE SERVING I'LL TAKE ROAST FOWL AND A FLAGON OF YOUR BEST WINE.

I WAS SORRY TO MISS YOU AT WINTERFELL.

I WAS STILL CATELYN TULLY THE LAST TIME I BEDDED HERE.

YOU IN THE CORNER, IS THAT THE BLACK BIRD OF HARRENHAL I SEE ON YOUR SURCOAT, SER?

IT IS, MY LADY.

THE RED STALLION WAS EVER A WELCOME SIGHT AT RIVERRUN. MY FATHER COUNTS JONOS BRACKEN AMONG HIS MOST LOYAL BANNERMEN.

OUR LORD IS HONORED BY HIS TRUST.
TL;DR I envious your father's men, but I do not see the purpose of this.

I know your sigil as well. The twin towers of Frey. How fares your good lord, Ser?

Lord Walder, is well. My lady, he plans to take a new wife on his ninth-name day.

This man came a guest, into my house, and there conspired to murder my son.

In the name of King Robert and the good lords you serve, I call upon you to seize him and help me to return him to Winterfell to await the king's justice.

Catelyn did not know what was more satisfying: the sound of a dozen swords being drawn as one or the look on Tyron Lannister's face.
Sansa had attended the Hand’s Tourney with Septa Mordane and Jeyne Poole, and it had been better than the songs.

They watched the heroes of a hundred songs ride forth, each more fabulous than the last.
THE KINGSLAYER RODE BRILLIANTLY. HE OVERTHREW SER ANDAR ROYCE AND MARCHER LORD BRYCE CARON AS EASILY AS IF HE WERE RIDING AT RINGS, THEN TOOK A HARD-FOUGHT MATCH FROM BARRISTAN SELMY.

SER RENLY FELL TO THE HOUND WITH SUCH VIOLENCE HE SEEMED TO FLY OFF HIS HORSE. HIS HEAD HIT THE GROUND WITH AN AUDIBLE CRACK THAT MADE THE CROWD GASP, BUT IT WAS ONLY ONE GOLD ANTLER ON HIS HELM SNAPING OFF.

LATER, A HEDGE KNIGHT IN A CHEQUERED GOWN DISGRACED HIMSELF BY KILLING BERIC DONNARON'S HORSE AND WAS DECLARED FORFEIT. LORD BERIC PUT HIS SADDLE TO A NEW MOUNT AND WAS PROMPTLY KNOCKED OFF IT BY THE WARRIOR PRIEST THORDS OF MVYR.

SER ARON SANTAGAR AND LOTHOR BRUNE TILTED THRICE WITHOUT RESULT. SER ARON FELL AFTERWARD TO LORD TAJON MAULSTER, AND BRUNE TO JOHN ROYCE'S YOUNGER SON ROBAR.
The most terrifying moment of the day came during Ser Gregor Clegane’s second joust. When the point of his lance rode up and struck a young knight from the Vale under the gorget.

Sanza had never seen a man die. She ought to have been crying, but the tears would not come.

It would have been different, if it had been Jory or Ser Rodrik or father, she told herself. This young stranger from the Vale of Arryn was nothing to her.

The world would forget his name now. There would be no songs sung for him.

In the end it came to four, the hound and his monstrous brother Gregor, the Kingslayer...

...and Loras Tyrell, the knight of flowers.
WHEN HIS WHITE MARE STOPPED IN FRONT OF HER, SHE THOUGHT HER HEART WOULD BURST.

SWEET LADY, NO VICTORY IS HALF SO BEAUTIFUL AS YOU.

His last match of the day was against the younger Ser Royce, but Sansa’s eyes were only for Ser Loras.

When each victory, Ser Loras would remove his helm, ride slowly around the fence, and finally pluck a white rose and throw it to some fair maiden in the crowd.

His last match of the day was against the younger Ser Royce, but Sansa’s eyes were only for Ser Loras.

To the other maidsens he had given white roses.

She inhaled its sweet fragrance and sat clutching it long after Ser Loras had ridden off.

You must be one of her daughters, you have the Tully look.
BY THEN THE MOON WAS WELL UP, SO THE KING DECREED THAT THE LAST THREE MATCHES WOULD BE Fought ON THE NEXT MORNING BEFORE THE MELEE. THE COMMONS BEGAN THEIR LONG WALK HOME, AND THE COURT MOVED TO THE RIVERSIDE TO BEGIN THE FEAST.

SWEET CHILD! THIS IS LORD PETRY BAELISH, OF THE KING’S SMALL COUNCIL.

YOU HAVE HER HAIR.

YOUR MOTHER WAS MY QUEEN OF BEAUTY ONCE.
At first, she’d thought she hated him for what they’d done to Lady... but after she’d wept her eyes dry, she’d told herself that it had not been Joffrey’s doing. Not truly.

The Queen had done it. She was the one to hate. Her and Arya.

Nothing bad would have happened except for Arya.

Ser Loras had a keen eye for beauty, sweet lady.

He was too kind. Ser Loras is a true knight.

Do you think he will win tomorrow, my lord?

No.

My dog will do for him, or perhaps my uncle Jaime.

And in a few years, when I am old enough to enter the lists, I shall do for them all.

The servants kept the cups filled all night but she needed no wine. She was drunk on the magic of the night, giddy with glamour.

Course came and went—a soup of barley and venison, salads of sweetgrass and plums—snails in honeys and garlic—and Joffrey was the soul of courtesy.
DO NOT TELL ME WHAT TO DO, WOMAN! I AM KING HERE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
I RULE HERE, AND IF I SAY THAT I WILL FIGHT TOMORROW, I WILL FIGHT!

I CAN STILL KNOCK YOU IN THE DIRT. REMEMBER THAT, KINGSAYER!

AS YOU SAY, MY LORD.

HA! THE GREAT KNIGHT.

IT GROWS LATE. DO YOU NEED AN ESCORT BACK TO THE CASTLE?

NO.

I MEAN TO SAY, YES, THANK YOU. I SHOULD BE GLAD OF SOME PROTECTION.
DOG!

YES, YOUR GRACE?

TAKE MY BETROTHED BACK TO THE CASTLE AND SEE THAT NO HARM BEFALLS HER.

DID YOU THINK Joff WAS GOING TO TAKE YOU HIMSELF?

SMALL CHANCE OF THAT.

COME, YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO NEEDS SLEEP. I'VE DRUNK TOO MUCH, AND I MAY NEED TO KILL MY BROTHER TOMORROW.
YOU RODE GALLANTLY TODAY, SER SANDOR. SPARE ME YOUR SER'S I AM NO KNIGHT. I SPIT ON THEM AND THEIR VOWS.

MY BROTHER IS A KNIGHT. DID YOU SEE HIM RIDE TODAY?

YES, HE WAS...

GALLANT?

NO ONE COULD WITHSTAND HIM. THAT'S TRUE ENOUGH. THAT BOY TODAY, HIS SECOND Joust. SAW THAT, DID YOU?

BOY'S GORGET WASN'T FASTENED PROPER. YOU THINK SER GREGOR'S LANCE RODE UP BY CHANCE?

SOME SEPTA TRAINED YOU WELL. YOU'RE LIKE ONE OF THOSE PRETTY LITTLE BIRDS FROM THE SUMMER ISLES. REPEATING ALL THE PRETTY LITTLE WORDS THEY TAUGHT YOU.

THAT'S UNKIND.

NO ONE COULD WITHSTAND HIM.
There's a pretty for you. Take a good long stare, you know you want to. I've watched you turning away all the way down the Kingsroad.

Most of them, they think it was some battle a siege, a burning tower, an enemy with a torch, one fool asked if it was dragon's breath.

I was younger than you. Six, maybe seven. A woodcarver set up shop in the village under my father's keep and to buy favor, he sent us gifts. Toys.

I don't remember what I got, but it was Gregor's gift I wanted. He was five years older than me and already a squire. Toys meant nothing to him, so I took it.

Gregor's lance goes where Gregor wants it to go. Look at me. Look at me!
There was no joy in it, I tell you. I was scared all the while, and true enough, he found me.

"Only a man who's been burned knows what hell is really like."

"It took three men to drag him off me."

My father told everyone my bedclothes had caught fire. Our maester gave me ointments.

"Four years later, they anointed him with the seven oils. He recited his knightly vows, and Rhaegar Targaryen tapped him on the shoulder and said arise, ser Gregor."
He was no true knight.

No little bird. He was no true knight.

The things I told you tonight. If you ever tell Joffrey...

I won’t.

Your sister. Your father. Any of them...

If you ever tell anyone. I will kill you.
Hugh was Jon Arryn’s squire for four years. The king knighted him in Jon’s memory. I fear the lad was not ready.

Eddard wondered whether it was for his sake the boy had died. Slain by a Lannister bannerman before Ned could speak with him. Could that be mere happenstance?

None of us is.

For knighthood?

For death.

This was needless. War should not be a game.

And yet the King means to fight in the melee today.

Tory had woken him in the night with that news. Small wonder he had slept so badly.

They say the children are often disowned in the morning light.

They say so, but not of Robert.
SEVEN HILLS, LANCEL! DO I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING MYSELF?

YOUR GRACE, IT'S MADE TOO SMALL, IT WON'T GO.

LOOK AT THESE OAFS, NED! MY WIFE INSISTED I TAKE THESE TWO TO SQUIRE FOR ME.

SQUIRES! I SAY THEY'RE SWINEHERDS DRESSED UP IN SILK.

THE BOYS ARE NOT AT FAULT, YOU'RE TOO FAT FOR YOUR ARMOR, ROBERT.

FAT? FAT? IS THAT HOW YOU SPEAK TO YOUR KINGS?

DAMN YOU, NED, WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS RIGHT?

YOU HEARD THE HAND, I NEED A BREASTPLATE STRETCHER, NOW! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

YOU NEVER KNEW LYANNA AS I DID, ROBERT. YOU SAW HER BEAUTY, BUT NOT THE IRON UNDERNEATH IT.

LYANNA WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU THAT YOU HAVE NO BUSINESS IN THE MELEE.

THE WOMAN TRIED TO FORBID ME TO FIGHT IN THE MELEE.

YOUR SISTER WOULD NEVER HAVE SHAMED ME LIKE THAT.

TALK IS YOU AND THE QUEEN HAD ANGRY WORDS LAST NIGHT.
YOU TOO?
YOU ARE A SOUR MAN, STARK.

YOUR GRACE, IT IS NOT SEEMLY THAT THE KING SHOULD RIDE INTO THE MELEE. IT WOULD NOT BE A FAIR CONTEST, WHO WOULD DARE STRIKE YOU?

NED SAW AT ONCE THAT SELMY HAD HIT THE MARK. THE DANGERS OF THE MELEE WERE ONLY A SAVIOR TO ROBERT, BUT THIS TOUCHED HIS PRIDE.

WHY, ALL OF THEM, DAMN IT. IF THEY CAN... AND THE LAST MAN LEFT STANDING...

...WILL BE YOU.

THERE'S NOT A MAN IN THE SEVEN KINGDOMS WHO WOULD DARE RISK HURTING YOU.

ARE YOU TELLING ME THOSE PRANCING GRAVEN'S WILL LET ME WIN?

FOR A CERTAINTY.

SET OUT! GET OUT BEFORE I KILL YOU.

NOT YOU, NED.
I swear to you, I was never so alive as when I was winning the throne and never so dead as now that I've won it.

Look at what kingsing has done to me gods. Too fat for my armor. How did it come to that?

I swear to you. I was never so alive as when I was winning the throne and never so dead as now that I've won it.

And Cersei. She's lovely. To look at, but she's cold.

I'm sorry for your girl. Ned. About the wolf. My son was lying. I'd stake my soul on it.

More than once, I've dreamed of giving up the crown. Take ship for the Free Cities with my horse and my hammer. You know what stops me? The thought of Joffrey on the throne with Cersei standing behind him.

How could I have made a son like that?

Ah, Ned. Say I'm a better king than Aerys and be done with it. You never could lie for love nor honor.

So who do you think our champion will be today? Have you seen Mace Tyrell's boy? The knight of flowers. They call him.

Now. There's a son any man would be proud to own to.
Edward would have liked nothing better than to see both of them lose, but Sansa was watching all mist-eyed and eager. "A hundred dragons on the Kingslayer!"

"Done! The Hound has a hungry look about him this morning."

He had promised to watch the final lists with her, as Septa Nordane was ill.

"If you know who's going to win the second match, speak up now before Lord Renly plucks me clean."

"The Hound would win!"

Afterward it was time for the tournament to resume.
Ser Gregor Clegane was called the Mountain that rides. Some said it had been Ser Gregor who’d dashed the skull of the Infant Aegon Tarstark. It was whispered that he had raped the mother before putting her to the sword.

These things were not said in his hearing.

Now, however, Ser Gregor was having trouble controlling his stallion.

The Mountain’s stallion broke into a hard gallop, plunging forward wildly. Loras Tyrell’s mare charged forward as smooth as silk.

Oh, he’s so beautiful. Don’t let Ser Gregor hurt him, father.

These things were not said in his hearing.

Now, however, Ser Gregor was having trouble controlling his stallion.

The Mountain’s stallion broke into a hard gallop, plunging forward wildly. Loras Tyrell’s mare charged forward as smooth as silk.

And it began.

Rah!

Crash.
NED SHOUTED, "STOP HIM!" BUT HIS WORDS WERE LOST IN THE ROAR. EVERYONE ELSE WAS SHOUTING AS WELL.

LEAVE HIM BE.
IN THE NAME OF THE KING, STOP THIS MADNESS!

IS THE HOUND THE CHAMPION NOW?

I OWE YOU MY LIFE, THE DAY IS YOURS, SER.

I AM NO SER.

Tyrell had to know that mare was in heat. I swear the boy planned the whole thing. Ser Jorah always favored huge, ill-tempered stallions with more spirit than sense.

There’s small honor in tricks.

Small honor and twenty thousand gold.

That afternoon a boy named Ansuy, an unheralded commoner from the Dornish marches, won the archery competition.

The melee went on for three hours. Nearly forty men took part. They fought with blunted weapons in a chaos of mud and blood until only the Red Priest, Throgs of Myr, was left standing.

The king did not fight.
Much later, after he’d taken the girls back to the city and seen them both safe in bed, he ascended to his rooms in the Tower of the Hand.

The hour was well past midnight down by the river. The revelers were only beginning to dwindle.

Tyrion Lannister’s daster Bray Brax’s fall. The death of Jon Arryn. All of it was linked, but the truth was as clouded now as when he’d started.

Send him in.

A man to see you, my lord. He won’t give his name.

Who are you?

A friend. We must speak alone.

Leave us, Jory.

Lord Varys?

I will not keep you long, my lord, but there are things you must know.
TODAY WAS A NEAR THING THEY HAD HOPED TO KILL THE KING IN THE MELEE.

WHO HAD?

IF I NEED TO TELL YOU THAT, YOU ARE A BIGGER FOOL THAN ROBERT AND I AM ON THE WRONG SIDE.

THE LANNISTERS, BUT CERSI... SHE ASKED HIM NOT TO FIGHT.

SHE FORBIDE HIM IN FRONT OF HIS BROTHER, HIS KNIGHTS, AND HALF THE COURT. DO YOU KNOW A SURE WAY TO FORCE THE KING INTO THE MELEE?

AMIDST THE CHAOS, WHO COULD NAME IT MURDER IF SOME CHANCE BLOW FELL THE GRACE?

YOU KNEW OF THIS PLOT, YET YOU DID NOTHING YOU MIGHT HAVE COME TO ME EARLIER.

YOU DID NOT TRUST ME?

I WAS CURIOUS TO SEE WHAT YOU WOULD DO. I DID NOT TRUST YOU, MY LORD.

THE RED KEEP HAS MEN WHO ARE LOYAL TO THE REALM AND THOSE WHO ARE LOYAL TO THEMSELVES. UNTIL THIS MORNING, I COULD NOT SAY WHICH YOU MIGHT BE.

NOW THAT I KNOW, I BEGIN TO COMPREHEND WHY THE QUEEN FEARS YOU SO MUCH.
Robert must be told.

And what proof shall we lay before him? pray send for Ser Illyn directly to take our heads, and be done with it.

You are making them most anxious, Lord Eddard. But together we may be able to forestall them.

Thank you for the wine when you see me next at council. Be sure to treat me with your accustomed contempt.

Why now?

Varys! How did Jon Arryn die?

Jon Arryn had been hand for fourteen years. What was he doing that they had to kill him?

The tears of Lys, they call it. Clear and sweet as water, and it leaves no trace. Given him by some sweet friend who often shared head and meat with him, no doubt. His squire, perhaps.

A pity Ser Hugh died before you could speak with him.

Asking questions.

To be continued.