



Adrian Lannister

The gates of Casterly Rock stood open like a lion's mouth.

Adrian sat in the carriage beside Tyrion, watching through the window as servants loaded the last of the trunks onto the baggage wagons. There were seven carriages in total, all painted crimson with golden lions on the doors, and one enormous house wheel at the back for the servants and supplies. The whole procession stretched down the courtyard like a very fancy, very slow snake.

Father stood near the lead carriage, hands clasped behind his back, watching everything with the same expression he used when reviewing household accounts. Nothing was allowed to be out of place. Not one trunk. Not one horse. Not one servant running late.

Adrian's stomach felt tight with excitement. They were really leaving. Really going to King's Landing. Really going to see Jaime again.

"Try not to jump out of your skin," Tyrion said without looking up from his book. "We have a week of travel ahead. Pace yourself."

"I'm not jumping."

"You're bouncing your knee so hard the whole carriage is shaking."

Adrian looked down. His knee was bouncing. He made it stop.

Outside, Joy appeared at the window, pressing her nose against the glass. Her breath fogged it up. "Adrian! When are we leaving? It's been forever!"

"It's been ten minutes," Tyrion said.

"That's forever!"

A sharp whistle cut through the courtyard. Uncle Gerion's voice rang out: "Positions! Mount up! Let's get this golden parade moving before we're all grey and dead!"

The carriages began to roll.

Adrian pressed his face back to the window as they passed through the gates. Hundreds of people lined the courtyard, the walls, even the ramparts. Servants, guards, merchants, common folk from Lannisport who'd climbed all the way up just to see them off. They waved. They cheered.

And they called his name.

"Lord Adrian!"

"The Young Lion!"

"Safe travels, my lord!"

Adrian felt his face go hot. He raised his good hand and waved back, trying to smile the way Father would want him to. The way a lord's son should smile. Confident. Grateful. Not like his chest was tight and his throat felt weird.

"They like you," Tyrion observed.

"They're just being nice."

"They're calling you the Young Lion. You don't hear them shouting Dwarf Lion."

Adrian didn't know what to say to that. He kept waving until the gates fell behind them and the road stretched ahead, golden and wide and going somewhere he'd never been.

The first rest stop came four hours later, in a wide meadow dotted with wildflowers.

Adrian climbed out of the carriage the moment it stopped, his legs stiff from sitting. Joy tumbled out after him, landing in the grass with a laugh.

"Finally!" She spun in a circle, arms out. "I thought we'd be in there forever!"

"We'll be back in there in twenty minutes," Tyrion called from the carriage door. "Don't get too comfortable."

But Joy was already running. She'd spotted something, a flash of orange and black near the edge of the meadow.

"Adrian! Look! A butterfly!"

Adrian followed her. The butterfly was huge, its wings as wide as Adrian's hand, the colors so bright they looked painted. It landed on a purple flower, wings opening and closing slowly.

Joy crept closer, her whole body tense with concentration. "I'm going to catch it."

"You can't catch a butterfly."

"I can if I'm fast."

She lunged. The butterfly lifted into the air. Joy lunged again, stumbled, and went down on her knees in the dirt.

"Ow!"

Adrian ran over. "Are you okay?"

Joy sat up, scowling. There was dirt all down the front of her dress and a smudge on her left cheek. "Stupid butterfly."

"You're not supposed to catch them anyway. Tyrion says their wings are fragile."

"Well, it's rude to be that pretty and then just fly away when someone wants to look at you."

Adrian bit back a laugh. He held out his good hand and helped her up. The butterfly was already gone, lost somewhere in the trees.

Joy brushed at her dress, making the dirt worse. "Aunt Genna's going to be mad."

"Probably."

"Do I have dirt on my face?"

Adrian looked at her. There was a clear smudge on her cheek, brown against her pale skin. "A little."

"Can you get it off?"

He tried to wipe it with his sleeve. It smeared. Joy sighed.

"I'll just tell her I fell. She'll believe that."

"Because you fall a lot."

"I do not!"

"You fell yesterday. And the day before that."

"Those don't count. I was running."

Adrian grinned. They walked back toward the carriages together, Joy still trying to brush the dirt off her dress, and Adrian felt the tightness in his chest ease just a little. This was good. This was normal. Just him and Joy and a butterfly that got away.

The Golden Road appeared at midday on the second day.

Adrian had been dozing against the carriage window, lulled by the rhythm of the wheels, when Joy's shriek jerked him awake.

"Adrian! Adrian, look! The road is gold! It's real gold!"

He blinked and looked out the window. The road ahead glittered in the sunlight, every stone shining like a coin fresh from the mint. It stretched ahead of them in a wide, perfect ribbon, almost too bright to look at.

Joy pressed her face to the glass. "Tyrion! Is it real gold? Did they really pave a road with gold?"

Tyrion looked up from his book, glanced out the window, and smiled. "No, Joy. It's not gold. It's just stone."

"But it's shiny!"

"The sun makes it shiny. The stones are a light color, almost white, and when the sun hits them at the right angle, they reflect the light. It looks like gold, but it's not."

Joy's face fell. "Oh."

"Still pretty, though," Adrian offered.

"I guess." She slumped back against the seat, disappointed. "I thought maybe someone was really rich and just decided to make a golden road because they could."

"We are rich," Tyrion said. "So were the old Lannister kings. They built this road three hundred years ago. They called it the Golden Road because of the way it looks in the sun. And because Lannisters like to put the word 'golden' on everything."

"Like the Golden Tooth," Adrian said.

"Exactly like the Golden Tooth. Which, incidentally, is not actually gold either. Just a lot of rocks shaped like a tooth."

Joy perked up. "Can we stop there?"

"No. We're going the other way."

She slumped again.

Adrian smiled and turned back to the window, watching the golden stones pass beneath them. Even if it wasn't real gold, it was still beautiful. And it was still theirs. The Lannister road, built by Lannister kings, leading to a Lannister future.

Three Days Later

The world had gotten bigger.

He'd never been this far from Casterly Rock before. Well, except when the Ironborn took him, but that didn't count. That was different. This was *choosing* to go somewhere. This was adventure, the good kind, the kind from stories where nobody got hurt and nothing went wrong and you came home with tales to tell.

The carriage rocked gently as they climbed toward the passage between the white hills. Adrian shifted on the bench, careful not to jostle his bandaged left hand. It still throbbed sometimes, especially after a long day of travel, but he'd gotten good at ignoring it.

Joy sat beside him, bouncing on the cushions like she'd forgotten what sitting still meant. Her golden hair was already escaping from the braid Aunt Genna had woven this morning, and there was a smudge of dirt on her cheek from when she'd climbed out at the last rest stop to chase a butterfly.

"Look!" She pointed out the window. "It looks like a giant's tooth! Like someone pulled it out and stuck it in the ground!"

Adrian looked. She was right. The two white hills rose on either side of the road, and the passage between them looked exactly like the gap where a tooth should be. He grinned. "Maybe a giant lost a fight. And the tooth fell here."

"What giant?" Joy asked immediately. "Was it a big giant or a small giant?"

"There's no such thing as a small giant," Tyrion said from across the carriage. He was reading a book, but he'd looked up at the word *giant* with one eyebrow raised. "That's just a tall man."

"Well, maybe it was a tall man's tooth then," Joy said.

"Tall men's teeth don't make hills, they are usually the same size as any other teeth," Tyrion replied. "I lost one in a fall when I was eight and didn't turn into a hill."

Joy's eyes went wide. "You did?"

"Indeed. Straight out of my mouth. I kept it for years in a little box."

"That's disgusting," Joy said, delighted.

The carriage tilted as they entered the passage. The white stone walls rose on either side, high and smooth, blocking out the sun. Adrian leaned closer to the window. "Tyrion, have you been to King's Landing before?"

"Once," Tyrion said. He closed his book and set it on the bench beside him. "When I was seven years old. So, over ten years ago. I don't remember much."

"Why did you go?"

"Father had business with the King. The Mad King, that is. I was allowed to come along." Tyrion's mouth twitched. "I believe his exact words were, 'The boy should see the capital at least once before something terrible happens to him.'"

"Did something terrible happen?" Joy asked.

"I'm still here, aren't I?"

Adrian studied Tyrion's face. He was smiling, but it was the smile he used when he didn't want to talk about something. Adrian had seen it before. He decided not to push.

Instead, he asked, "What's the Red Keep like? Is it really red?"

Tyrion blinked. "Is it... what?"

"Red," Adrian repeated. "The Red Keep. Is it red? Or is that just the name?"

"It's red," Tyrion said slowly, like he was trying to decide if Adrian was joking. "Made of red stone. That's why it's called the Red Keep."

"Oh." Adrian frowned. "I thought maybe it was a trick. Like how the Inn of the Kneeling Man doesn't actually have a kneeling man inside."

"How do you know?" Joy asked. "Have you been?"

"No, but Sandor told me. He said the only thing kneeling at that inn is the barkeep when he's scrubbing the floor."

Joy giggled. Tyrion looked like he was trying very hard not to laugh.

Adrian leaned forward. "Can you see Dragonstone from the top of the Red Keep?"

"Dragonstone?" Tyrion tilted his head. "Why would you want to see Dragonstone?"

"Because that's where the dragons lived. Before. And if you can see it from the Red Keep, then maybe you can see where they flew."

Tyrion's expression softened. "I don't know if you can see Dragonstone from the Red Keep, Adrian. It's quite far. But there are other things to see. The Great Sept of Baelor, for one. The largest sept in the Seven Kingdoms."

"Is it bigger than the Rock?" Joy asked.

"No. Nothing's bigger than the Rock."

Joy looked satisfied.

The carriage began to tilt downward. They were descending now, out of the passage. Adrian pressed his face back to the window and watched the white walls fall away, replaced by rolling green hills dotted with trees.

Then the carriage jolted to a stop.

Adrian grabbed the edge of the bench to steady himself. Joy yelped and nearly slid off onto the floor. Tyrion caught her by the arm.

"Driver! What's the delay?" Tyrion shouted.

A voice called back, muffled. Adrian couldn't make out the words, but a moment later the carriage door swung open.

Uncle Tygett stood outside, grinning. His hair was windblown and his cloak was dusty, but he looked like he'd just won a joust. "Out you lot come! We're taking a break. Stretch your legs before your arses go numb."

"My arse is already numb," Tyrion muttered, but he climbed out.

Adrian followed, careful with his left hand, and helped Joy down after him. The ground felt strange under his feet. Too still. He'd been sitting for so long that walking felt like balancing on a ship's deck.

They were in a wide clearing off the side of the road. Trees surrounded them on three sides, and ahead, in the distance, Adrian could see the outline of a castle. It sat on a hill, grey stone against a grey sky, with banners flying from its towers.

"Is that King's Landing?" Joy asked.

"No," Adrian said. "That's Deep Den. Seat of House Lydden. We're still a long way from the capital."

Tygett clapped Adrian on the shoulder. "Good eye, though, little lion. You'll see plenty of castles before this journey's done." He looked down at Joy. "And you, little she-lion. You look like you're ready to explode."

Joy nodded vigorously. "I want to run."

"Then run! Go on, before you burst." Tygett waved toward the trees. "Just don't go too far. And watch out for wolves."

Joy's eyes went huge. "Wolves?"

"Big ones. With teeth like swords."

"Tygett," Tyrion said sharply.

Tygett laughed. "I'm joking! There are no wolves. Well, probably no wolves. Maybe a rabbit or two. Go on."

Joy took off like an arrow from a bow, shrieking with joy, followed by her father. Adrian watched her go, something tight in his chest loosening just a little.

"You shouldn't scare her," Tyrion said.

"She's fine. Fear makes things more exciting." Tygett gestured at Joy, who was now spinning in circles with her arms out, laughing at nothing.

Tyrion's mouth thinned, but he didn't argue.

Adrian looked up at Tygett. "Have you been to King's Landing before?"

"Oh, many times." Tygett's grin widened. "Last time was four years ago. Wonderful city. Loud, dirty, smells like a privy that hasn't been cleaned in a decade, but wonderful all the same."

"What's wonderful about it?"

"The people! The markets! The—" Tygett paused, his eyes flicking to Tyrion, then back to Adrian. "—the sights. Lots of sights. Very educational."

"What kind of sights?" Adrian asked.

"Well, there's the harbor, for one. Ships from all over the world. And the Street of Steel, where they make the finest weapons you've ever seen. And the brothels, of course, finest in the Seven Kingdoms-

"Tygett." Aunt Genna's voice made him stop.

Tygett froze. Aunt Genna was climbing out of her own carriage, her crimson gown somehow still immaculate despite two days of travel. She fixed Tygett with a look.

Adrian blinked. Brothels. He'd heard that word before. Tyrion and Sandor had mentioned them once, and they'd both gotten very quiet when Adrian asked what they were. Something about ladies and... he wasn't quite sure. But from the way the adults talked about them, they seemed like places where people went to do things children weren't supposed to know about.

"Were you really about to describe the brothels to a seven-year-old?" Genna asked, her voice dangerously sweet.

"I was merely listing the attractions of the capital," Tygett said, his grin not quite reaching his eyes anymore. "Comprehensively."

"Comprehensively." Genna walked over and stood beside Adrian, her hand resting on his shoulder. "How thoughtful."

Behind Adrian, Sandor made a sound that might have been a snort. Adrian glanced back. The Hound stood a few paces away, one hand resting on his sword hilt, watching the exchange with what looked like amusement in his scarred face.

"What's a brothel?" Joy asked, appearing at Adrian's other side.

Tyrion closed his eyes. "Aunt Genna, please."

"Don't *please* me. He started it." Genna's grip on Adrian's shoulder tightened slightly. "A brothel is a place where adults go to do adult things. You don't need to know about it yet."

Adrian frowned. That was the same thing Tyrion had said before. And Sandor. Which meant it was probably something interesting that they didn't want him to know.

"What kind of adult things?" he asked, because if he was going to be treated like he didn't understand, he might as well try to understand.

"The kind you'll learn about when you're older," Genna said firmly.

Adrian's frown deepened. "That's what everyone always says."

"Because it's true." Genna turned her gaze back to Tygett. "And *you*. You will keep your mouth shut about the capital's more colorful establishments. Or I will tell Tywin exactly what you were doing in Lannisport three months ago."

Tygett's grin vanished entirely. "You wouldn't."

"Try me."

There was a long silence. Sandor shifted his weight, and Adrian heard the leather of his armor creak. When Adrian glanced back again, the Hound was watching Tygett with an expression that said he'd very much like to hear what Tygett had been doing in Lannisport.

Then Tygett sighed. "Fine. I'll behave."

"You'd better."

Sandor made that sound again, definitely a snort this time. "Shame. I was looking forward to the educational tour."

Genna shot him a look. "Don't you start."

"Wouldn't dream of it, my lady." Sandor's mouth twitched. "Boy's got enough nightmares without adding your brother's exploits to them."

Adrian looked up at Sandor. The Hound looked back down at him, and something in his expression softened, just slightly. It was the same look he'd had on the ship, when he'd told Adrian to keep his weapons hidden and use them without hesitation.

"Come on, boy," Sandor said, jerking his head toward the trees where Joy had run off. "Your little cousin looks like she's about to climb something. Better get there before she breaks her neck and your father has mine."

Joy came running back, breathing hard, her face flushed. "Adrian! Come on! There's a stream over there! I saw fish!"

Adrian's heart jumped. "Really?"

"Yes! Big ones! Come look!"

He glanced at Tyrion. Tyrion waved him off. "Go. Just don't fall in. Your father will have my head if you come back soaked."

Adrian didn't need to be told twice. He took off after Joy, ignoring the way his ribs twinged with each step. Sandor fell into step behind them without a word, his long strides eating up the ground.

They ran through the grass, past the line of guards standing watch, and into the trees.

The stream was small, barely wider than Adrian was tall, but the water was clear and fast-moving. Joy crouched at the edge, pointing.

"See? Right there!"

Adrian knelt beside her, careful not to put weight on his bad hand. He looked where she was pointing and saw them: three silver fish, darting through the water like little arrows.

"They're fast," he said.

"Do you think we could catch one?"

"With what? Our hands?"

"Why not?"

Adrian considered this. His left hand was useless, but his right hand was fine. And the fish didn't look that fast. "We could try."

Joy grinned and plunged her hand into the water. The fish scattered immediately. She yelped. "It's cold!"

"Of course it's cold. It's a stream."

"I know that! I just didn't think it would be *that* cold!"

Behind them, Sandor snorted. "Fish aren't stupid, girl. They see a hand coming and they're gone. That's how they stay fish instead of dinner."

Joy pulled her hand out and shook the water off, glaring at the fish. "They're too fast anyway."

"Could use a spear," Sandor said. He'd stopped a few paces back, leaning against a tree with his arms crossed. "Or a net. But hands? Waste of time."

"Have you caught fish before?" Adrian asked, looking back at him.

"Once or twice. When I was a boy and stupid enough to think it was worth the effort." Sandor's mouth twitched. "Spent three hours in a stream like this one. Caught nothing. Went home with my feet frozen and my brother laughing his arse off."

"Your brother laughed at you?" Joy asked.

"He laughed at everything. Especially things that weren't funny."

Something in Sandor's voice made Adrian not want to ask more questions about his brother. He turned back to the stream instead.

They sat there for a moment, just watching the water. Adrian liked this. The sound of it, the way the sunlight caught on the surface and made it sparkle.

Then Joy said, "Adrian?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you scared?"

He looked at her. "Of what?"

"King's Landing. All those people. All those strangers."

Adrian's stomach tightened. He thought about the cell. The guards. The hands grabbing him in the dark. The screaming.

He pushed it down.

"No," he said. "I'm not scared. Father will be there. And Tyrion. And you. And Uncle Tygett and Aunt Genna. We'll be fine."

Behind them, Sandor made a sound that might have been agreement. "You'll be surrounded by Lannister guards the whole time. And me. Anyone tries to touch you, they'll lose the hand."

Joy's eyes went wide. "Really?"

"Really."

"Even if it's the King?"

Sandor paused. Then he said, very carefully, "The King won't try to touch you. He's got better things to do. Like drinking and eating and falling asleep in council meetings."

Adrian blinked. "He falls asleep in council meetings?"

"Like a log. Snores too. Loud enough to wake the dead. At least from what I hear."

Joy giggled.

She stood and brushed off her dress. "Come on. Let's go back. I want to see if Aunt Genna brought any honeycakes."

Adrian stood too. They walked back through the trees together, side by side.

When they returned to the clearing, Aunt Genna had assembled what looked like a small court. Joy's cousins stood in a line: Cleos looking uncomfortable in his travel cloak, Lyonel fidgeting with his belt, and little Tion trying very hard to stand still and failing. Joy ran to join them, still breathless from the stream.

Adrian slowed his steps. This looked official. This looked like a lesson.

"Good, you're back." Genna's eyes swept over Adrian and Joy, checking for injuries or dirt. She frowned at the water stains on Joy's sleeve but said nothing. "Come here, both of you. Stand with your cousins."

Adrian moved to stand beside Cleos. Sandor took up position near the carriages.

Genna clasped her hands in front of her. "Now. Before we reach King's Landing, there are things you need to understand about how to conduct yourselves. Particularly around the royal family."

"The King?" Tion asked.

"The King, the Queen, and the Prince. All of them." Genna's gaze moved across each child in turn. "You will address them properly at all times. King Robert is 'Your Grace.' Queen Cersei is 'Your Grace.' Prince Joffrey is 'Your Highness.' Not by their names. Never by their names in public."

Joy's hand went up like she was in a lesson with Maester Creylen.

Genna sighed. "Yes, Joy?"

"But Queen Cersei is my aunt," Joy said, her small face scrunched in confusion. "And Adrian's sister. And Prince Joffrey is my cousin and Adrian's nephew. Why can't we call them by their names if they're family?"

Cleos made a strangled sound. Lyonel elbowed him.

Adrian spoke before Genna could answer. "It doesn't matter if they're family. I read about it in the books. There are rules for how you talk to royalty in public. In private, if they say it's all right, you can use their names. But in public, you use their titles. Always."

Genna's eyebrows rose. "Exactly right, Adrian. Where did you read that?"

"*The Lives of Four Kings*. Tyrion gave it to me." Adrian looked at Joy. "It's about respect. Even if Queen Cersei is Father's daughter, she's still the Queen. The title matters more than the family connection when other people are watching."

Joy still looked confused, but she nodded slowly. "So... in public, she's Your Grace. In private, she's Aunt Cersei?"

"If she lets you call her that," Adrian said. "Some people are very strict about titles. Even in private."

"Your father, for instance," Genna muttered. Then, louder, "But yes, Joy. That's the idea. In public, you are representing House Lannister. You will be polite, respectful, and proper. No running, no shouting, no climbing on furniture."

Tion's face fell. Lyonel looked relieved that he wasn't the only one being warned.

"You will curtsy to the Queen," Genna continued, demonstrating a small, precise movement. "Like this. Not too deep, you're not servants. But enough to show respect. Boys, you will bow. Cleos, show them."

Cleos bowed, his movements stiff but correct. Adrian copied him, feeling the pull in his ribs. His bow was shallower, but Genna nodded approval.

"Good. Joy, your turn."

Joy attempted a curtsy. She wobbled slightly and had to put her arms out for balance. Genna winced but didn't correct her.

"We'll work on that," she said. "Now. When you speak to the King or Queen, you wait to be addressed first. You do not interrupt. You do not argue. You do not ask inappropriate questions."

"What's an inappropriate question?" Lyonel asked.

"Anything about their marriage, their children's behavior, how much wine the King drinks." Genna's tone was crisp. "If you're not sure whether a question is appropriate, don't ask it."

"And Prince Joffrey?" Cleos asked carefully. "How should we... I mean, he's close to our age. Do we play with him? Or...?"

Genna's expression went carefully neutral. "If the Prince invites you to play, you accept politely. You let him lead. You do not correct him, even if he's wrong. You do not beat him at games, even if you could. You make him feel important."

"Why?" Tion asked. "If he's being stupid?"

"Because he will be King one day," Genna said flatly. "And kings remember slights. Even small ones. Even from when they were children."

The clearing went quiet.

Adrian thought about Joffrey. Five years old. Younger than him. But still the heir to the Iron Throne. Still someone who could, one day, give orders that everyone would have to follow.

Give orders to me, Adrian thought bitterly.

He wondered what Joffrey was like. If he was anything like the kings in the stories. Brave and strong and wise.

Probably not, if he was only five.

"One more thing," Genna said. "You do not mention the Greyjoy Rebellion in front of the Queen. You do not talk about what happened to Adrian. You do not ask questions about the war. That is a topic for adults, not children. Understood?"

Adrian's chest tightened. He didn't want to talk about the Greyjoys anyway. He was glad that was a rule.

"Understood," he said.

The others echoed him.

Genna nodded, satisfied. "Good. Now go wash your hands. We'll be back on the road soon, and I want you all presentable when we stop for the night."

The children scattered. Joy ran toward the stream again, Tion chasing after her. Cleos and Lyonel walked more slowly, talking in low voices.

Adrian stayed where he was for a moment, thinking.

Queen Cersei. His sister. He'd never met her, not that he could remember. Father never talked about her except in the most formal terms. *The Queen. Robert's wife. Never my daughter or your sister.*

He wondered what she was like. If she looked like Father. If she had green eyes like him.

If she was kind.

But mostly, he thought about Jaime.

Jaime would be there. At King's Landing. Jaime had promised to compete in the tourney, promised to win, promised Adrian he would see him soon.

That thought made him smile. Jaime was easy to be around. Jaime was like Tyrion. So, now he had two Tyrions.

Adrian couldn't wait to see him again.

"Boy," Sandor called from near the carriages. "Stop daydreaming. Your aunt said wash your hands."

Adrian blinked and looked down at his hands. His right hand was dirty from kneeling by the stream. His left hand was still bandaged.

He walked toward the water barrel near the carriages, and as he went, he let himself imagine it.

King's Landing. The Red Keep. Jaime in his white cloak, smiling when he saw Adrian.

Maybe it would be all right.

Maybe it would even be good.