

The Golden Dragon Chapter 4 (The Imp's Little Lion)

Fifteen months had passed since Adrian's arrival, and the whispers about Lord Tywin's bastard had settled into acceptance, if not quite approval. The child himself, now eighteen months old, seemed oblivious to the circumstances of his birth as he toddled across the nursery floor with increasing confidence.

"Look at you go!" Serra clapped her hands encouragingly as Adrian navigated the space between a wooden chair and a chest of toys. His steps were still unsteady but remarkably coordinated for his age. "Such a clever little lord."

Adrian beamed at the praise, his unusual silver-gold hair catching the afternoon light streaming through the tall windows. He wore a crimson tunic emblazoned with a golden lion, custom-made by Casterly Rock's finest seamstresses.

"Li-on," he said clearly, pointing to the sigil on his chest. "Li-on!"

Serra's eyes widened. It had been his first word a month ago, and already his vocabulary was growing daily. "That's right, my sweet. Lion. The proud lion of Lannister."

The nursery door opened, and Tyrion entered, carrying a wooden horse he'd commissioned from a toymaker in Lannisport. At twelve years old, he was still small for his age, but his face had lost some of its childish roundness.

"How's my brother today?" Tyrion asked, setting the toy down.

"Li-on!" Adrian exclaimed, pointing first to his tunic and then to Tyrion. "Tee-on!"

Tyrion laughed. "Close enough. It's Tyrion, but you'll get it eventually."

"He's adding new words every day," Serra reported. "Master Creylen says he's never seen a child so young speak so clearly."

"Lannisters are exceptional in all things," Tyrion replied with a wink. He lowered himself to the floor, sitting cross-legged. "Come here, Adrian. I've brought you something."

Adrian toddled over, more steady with each step, and plopped down beside his brother. He immediately reached for the wooden horse, examining it with unusual focus.

"Horse," Tyrion said clearly. "Can you say 'horse'?"

"Ho," Adrian attempted, frowning in concentration. "Ho-ss."

"Close enough! That's excellent," Tyrion praised, ruffling Adrian's hair. "You'll be reciting poetry before you're three at this rate."

The door opened again, this time admitting Lord Tywin himself. Serra immediately rose and curtsied deeply. Tyrion remained seated beside Adrian but straightened his posture slightly.

"Father," Tyrion greeted him.

Tywin's cold gaze swept over the scene, lingering momentarily on the wooden horse before settling on Adrian. "How is he progressing?"

Before Serra could answer, Adrian looked up and broke into a delighted smile. "Fa!" he exclaimed, arms reaching upward. "Fa!"

A flicker of something—perhaps pride, perhaps satisfaction—crossed Tywin's face so quickly it might have been imagined. "He attempts to say 'Father'?"

"Yes, my lord," Serra confirmed. "And many other words. 'Lion' was his first, naturally. He also says 'book' and 'red' and 'gold.'"

"Appropriate," Tywin noted dryly. "And his walking?"

"Improves daily, my lord. Maester Creylen says he's advancing faster than—"

"Good." Tywin cut her off, approaching Adrian. The boy was still reaching upward, his little hands opening and closing expectantly.

To Serra and Tyrion's surprise, Tywin actually bent down and lifted the child, holding him. Adrian immediately grabbed at the golden chain of office around Tywin's neck, fascinated by its shine.

"Go-Id," Adrian said clearly.

"Yes," Tywin replied. "Gold. The color of our house. And what is our house, Adrian?"

"Li-on!" Adrian proclaimed triumphantly.

For the briefest moment, the corner of Tywin's mouth twitched upward. "Lannister," he corrected. "House Lannister."

"Lan-ster," Adrian attempted, earning another almost-smile from his supposed father.

"He will be ready," Tywin announced, "to join us for dinner tonight. The family gathers to discuss several matters. It is time they all saw his progress."

Serra looked alarmed. "My lord, he's still so young for a formal dinner..."

"Just for a brief appearance," Tywin clarified. "After the main course. See that he is properly dressed." He set Adrian back down beside Tyrion. "Continue with his words," he instructed his younger son before turning to leave.

"Bye Fa!" Adrian called after him, waving enthusiastically, but Tywin did not wave back at him, he just closed the door.

"Well," Tyrion said after a moment, "it seems you've accomplished what I never could—you've made Father almost smile."

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The Lannister dining hall gleamed with gold and crimson in the light of a hundred candles. Tywin sat at the head of the table, with Kevan to his right and Genna to his left. Emmon Frey, Genna's husband, sat beside her, looking as uncomfortable as always in Lannister company. Dorna Swyft, Kevan's wife, sat beside her husband, and Tyrion was positioned near the foot of the table.

The remains of a lavish meal littered the table—suckling pig, honeyed duck, and lemoncakes—as servants cleared away plates and brought fresh wine.

"The Tyrells grow more ambitious by the day," Kevan was saying. "Their latest proposal for reduced tariffs on Arbor wine is nothing short of—"

He was interrupted as the doors opened, and Serra entered, holding Adrian's hand as he walked beside her, dressed in a miniature version of Lannister formal attire—crimson velvet with gold threading.

Conversation halted as all eyes turned to the child. Adrian, far from being intimidated by the attention, looked around the room with bright interest.

"Come, Adrian," Tywin commanded from the head of the table.

Adrian needed no further encouragement. He let go of Serra's hand and walked almost steadily across the hall. When he reached Tywin, he raised his arms expectantly.

Tywin lifted the boy onto his lap. "This is Adrian," he announced unnecessarily. "He joins us briefly tonight."

"Well, look at you," Genna said warmly. "Walking all by yourself and dressed like a proper little lord."

Adrian beamed at her. "Ge-na," he said, pointing directly at her.

Genna's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "He knows my name?"

"He knows all of you," Tywin replied. "Tyrion has been teaching him."

From his place at the table, Tyrion gave a small, proud nod. "He's a quick study."

"Remarkable," Kevan murmured, studying the child closely. "And how old is he now?"

"Eighteen months," Tywin replied.

"My Lancel didn't speak half so clearly at twice that age," Kevan admitted, leaning forward to address Adrian directly. "Hello, Adrian. I'm your Uncle Kevan."

Adrian studied him for a moment, his green eyes unnervingly focused. "Ke-van," he repeated, then smiled charmingly. "Un-ca."

A ripple of impressed murmurs went around the table. Even Emmon Frey looked begrudgingly impressed.

"The Lannister blood shows strongly in him," Kevan remarked, his eyes lingering on Adrian's unusual hair.

"Indeed," Tywin replied evenly. "As does his intelligence."

"Tee-on!" Adrian suddenly called out, spotting his brother at the far end of the table. "Tee-on book!"

Tyrion grinned. "Yes, we'll read a book later."

"He loves the stories Tyrion reads him," Serra explained to the others. "Especially the ones about dragons and knights."

As the conversation continued around him, Adrian remained remarkably composed, occasionally offering a word or two but mostly watching the adults with that same intense focus.

One Year Later - Adrian (3), Tyrion (13)

Tyrion Lannister's short legs dangled from the oversized chair in Casterly Rock's library, not quite reaching the ornate footstool positioned beneath. He'd long ago stopped caring about such indignities. The library was his sanctuary, one of the few places where his stature mattered less than his mind.

"Again!" demanded the small voice beside him.

Tyrion glanced down at Adrian, his three-year-old half-brother. The boy's eyes—Lannister eyes, green flecked with gold—stared up at him with fascination.

"Again?" Tyrion chuckled, closing the leather-bound volume. "We've read about Aegon the Conqueror three times already. Don't you want to hear a different story?"

Adrian shook his head emphatically. "I want dragons."

Always dragons, Tyrion thought with amusement. *Most children his age prefer stories about knights or magic, but Adrian wants dragons.*

"Very well," Tyrion sighed dramatically, though secretly pleased. He reopened the book to a colorful illustration of Balerion the Black Dread. "But this time, I'm telling you about Visenya and Rhaenys too. A proper Targaryen tale needs all three dragons."

Adrian climbed onto the window seat beside Tyrion's chair, his small face solemn with anticipation. "Were they big as mountains?"

"Bigger," Tyrion replied, deliberately exaggerating. "Balerion's wings could cover entire towns in shadow. When he roared, brave knights wet their armor in fear."

Adrian giggled at this detail, eyes wide. "Did they breathe fire like the book shows?"

"Fire hot enough to melt stone and turn castles into puddles," Tyrion confirmed, enjoying the boy's rapt expression. It was refreshing to have someone at Casterly Rock who actually wanted his company. "The Field of Fire was—"

"What's a field of fire?" Adrian interrupted, scooting closer.

Tyrion paused, considering how to describe one of history's bloodiest battles to a child. "It's where Aegon and his sisters used all three dragons at once. The grass caught fire, and—"

"And everyone burned up!" Adrian finished with alarming enthusiasm.

There's that Lannister bloodthirst, Tyrion thought wryly. Though something about Adrian's fascination with fire seemed different.

"Not everyone," Tyrion corrected. "King Loren of the Rock—our ancestor—was clever enough to survive."

Adrian's brow furrowed. "But he lost, didn't he?"

"He did," Tyrion admitted. "But sometimes, little brother, knowing when to kneel is wiser than standing your ground." He tapped his temple. "Survival requires this more than this." He made a fist, which made Adrian smile.

"Father says a Lannister never kneels," Adrian countered.

Tyrion barely suppressed a snort. *Of course, Tywin would teach him that already.* "Your father—our father—has many sayings. You'll learn them all soon enough."

Something flickered across Adrian's face—a shadow of thoughtfulness unusual in one so young. "But you're smart. Smarter than anyone. That's what Maester Creylen told Serra."

Warmth spread through Tyrion's chest at this innocent report. *At least someone on this cursed rock appreciates my mind.* "Did he now? Well, don't tell Father, or poor Creylen might find himself sent to the Wall."

Adrian giggled again, not fully understanding the joke but enjoying being part of it. The sound echoed in the cavernous library, bright and incongruous among the solemn tomes.

Tyrion found himself smiling genuinely. These afternoon reading sessions had become the highlight of his otherwise lonely days. His father barely acknowledged him, Jaime was away in King's Landing, and Cersei—well, the less thought about his sweet sister, the better, especially based on what he was hearing.

"Tell me about Valyria now," Adrian requested, interrupting Tyrion's thoughts.

"Ah, ancient Valyria," Tyrion sighed with genuine enthusiasm, setting aside the first book and reaching for another volume, this one bound in faded red leather. "The greatest civilization the world has ever known."

He opened to an illustration of the Valyrian peninsula before the Doom, with its fourteen flames and gleaming cities.

"They had magic," Tyrion explained, "and dragon-binding horns, and swords forged with spells."

Adrian ran a small finger over the illustration. "Why did it disappear?"

"The Doom," Tyrion answered dramatically, lowering his voice. "Mountains exploded, seas boiled, and dragons burned—even in their lairs."

Adrian's eyes widened. "Everyone died?"

"Almost everyone. Except—"

"The Targ-ryen!" Adrian finished triumphantly.

Tyrion nodded, impressed by the boy's recall. "Very good. They fled to Dragonstone before the Doom."

"Because they knew it was coming," Adrian added. "Daenys Targ-ryen saw it in a dream."

Tyrion tilted his head, surprised. "That's right. Dragon dreams, they called them. Where did you learn that? It's not in this book."

Adrian shrugged, suddenly looking uncertain. "I don't remember."

Curious, Tyrion thought. *Perhaps Creylen has been teaching him more than Father mentioned.*

Before Tyrion could inquire further, the library door opened with a creak. A servant woman entered, her eyes carefully avoiding direct contact with Tyrion.

"Lord Adrian," she called. "It's time for your evening meal."

Adrian's face fell. "But we haven't finished about Valyria!"

"Tomorrow," Tyrion promised, closing the book. "We'll continue tomorrow."

The servant approached, her expression softening as she observed them. "It's good of you to teach your brother about history, Lord Tyrion," she said, surprising him with direct address. Then, unable to help herself, she added, "Despite your... circumstances."

Tyrion's momentary pleasure curdled. *Ah, yes, the imp playing nursemaid. How touching.*

"My circumstances are quite comfortable, thank you," he replied with deliberate cheerfulness. "Though I'd welcome more wine if you're offering."

The woman flushed and extended her hand to Adrian. "Come, my lord. Cook has made honey cakes for dessert."

Adrian slid from the window seat but didn't take her hand. Instead, he turned to Tyrion and, without warning, threw his arms around his brother's neck.

"Thank you for the dragons," he whispered.

Tyrion froze, momentarily stunned by the unexpected embrace. No one at Casterly Rock touched him willingly except Jaime. Certainly not with affection. Awkwardly, he patted Adrian's back, throat suddenly tight.

"You're welcome, little brother," he managed.

As Adrian pulled away, Tyrion caught sight of a figure standing in the shadows of the library entrance—tall, imposing, unmistakable. Tywin Lannister observed the scene with an unreadable expression.

How long has he been there? Tyrion wondered, his chest tightening with familiar anxiety. *Does he think I'm trying to turn the boy against him somehow?*

Adrian, oblivious to the tension, waved cheerfully. "Father! Tyrion told me about dragons and Valyria and the Field of Fire!"

Tywin stepped into the light, his gaze moving between his sons. "Did he?" His voice betrayed nothing.

"He knows everything," Adrian declared with childish certainty.

Tyrion braced himself for his father's dismissal or cutting remark. *Here it comes. 'A mind wasted in a mockery of a body' or something equally charming.*

Instead, Tywin merely nodded once. "Ensure that knowledge is put to proper use," he said to Adrian. Then, to Tyrion's astonishment, he added, "Continue these sessions if they interest you both."

With that, he turned and left as silently as he had appeared.

Tyrion stared after him, baffled by what seemed almost like... approval? No, surely not. More likely, Tywin simply saw benefit in having Tyrion occupy Adrian while he attended to more important matters.

The servant cleared her throat. "Come along, Lord Adrian."

As they departed, Adrian turned to wave goodbye once more, his small face bright with affection. "Tomorrow we'll read about the swords with the magic!"

"Valyrian steel," Tyrion corrected automatically, raising his hand in farewell.

When they had gone, Tyrion remained in the library's growing shadows, surrounded by books and unexpected emotions. He reached for the dragon book again, running his fingers over its worn cover.

He hugged me, Tyrion thought, still feeling the ghost of those small arms around his neck. *He actually hugged me.*

For the first time since Jaime had left for King's Landing, Tyrion Lannister felt a little less alone in Casterly Rock.

A dangerous feeling to indulge, the cynical part of his mind warned. *He's Tywin's golden child, not truly yours to love.*

Yet as Tyrion carefully reshelfed the books, he couldn't help but look forward to tomorrow's reading about Valyrian steel. Perhaps he would tell Adrian about Ice and Brightroar, and watch those remarkable eyes light up again with wonder.

Perhaps, just perhaps, he had found a friend.

Two Months Later

The normally austere courtyard of Casterly Rock erupted with unusual activity as a colorful procession wound its way through the Lion's Mouth. Servants rushed about, gawking at the exotic caravan making its entrance—merchants in foreign garb, sailors with sun-darkened skin, and at their center, a golden-haired man whose booming laugh echoed off the ancient stone walls.

Gerion Lannister had returned.

Adrian pressed his face against a window overlooking the courtyard, his small hands splayed on the glass. At three years old, he had never seen such a spectacle at his somber home.

"Is that my uncle?" he asked, turning to Tyrion, who stood beside him. His brother had told him that their uncle Gerion would visit soon.

"Indeed it is," Tyrion confirmed, a rare smile lighting his face. "The prodigal lion returns at last."

Below them, Gerion dismounted as if he was dancing, his hair longer than Lannister custom, his clothing a flamboyant blend of Westerosi and foreign styles. He clapped a nearby guard on the shoulder like an old friend rather than a servant.

"Why is he dressed funny?" Adrian asked.

"Because Uncle Gerion thinks life is a grand joke," Tyrion replied, "and he's determined to have the last laugh."

As if on cue, Gerion threw back his head and roared with laughter at something a servant said—a sound so genuine it made several nearby guards crack smiles.

"Come," Tyrion said, taking Adrian's small hand. "Father will expect us in the great hall to welcome him properly."

By the time they reached the hall, Tywin Lannister already stood at its center, his expression a careful mask of lordly welcome that did nothing to soften his imposing presence.

"Brother!" Gerion called, striding forward to embrace Tywin, who accepted the gesture with rigid formality. "Still as warm as a winter in the North, I see."

"Your journey was successful?" Tywin asked, ignoring the jab.

"Beyond all expectations," Gerion grinned, his eyes scanning the hall until they found Tyrion. "Ah! My favorite nephew!"

He crossed to Tyrion in a few long strides and swept him into a bear hug, lifting him off his feet. "Still burying yourself in books, I hope?"

"Whenever I can escape other duties," Tyrion replied, his usual cynicism momentarily absent.

Gerion set him down and then noticed the small figure half-hidden behind his brother. "And who might this be?"

Tywin cleared his throat. "My son, Adrian Lannister."

A flicker of surprise crossed Gerion's face, quickly replaced by curiosity as he crouched down to Adrian's level. "Well met, young nephew. I don't believe we've had the pleasure."

Adrian studied the newcomer. "You're my uncle?"

"So it would seem," Gerion replied with a wink. "Though I'm far more handsome than your other uncles, wouldn't you agree?"

Adrian giggled. "You have the same eyes as Father and me."

"Lannister eyes," Gerion agreed, studying the boy more carefully. "Though your hair is an interesting shade. Not quite the golden mane of most lions."

"His mother was Lysene," Tywin stated flatly. "Bring your gifts to the hall, brother. The journey must have tired you."

Gerion's gaze lingered on Adrian for a moment longer, his expression thoughtful, before he rose and clapped his hands. "Gifts! Yes, I've brought treasures from across the Narrow Sea."

At his command, servants began bringing in exotic items from the caravan—spice jars from Qarth, silks from Yi Ti, strange fruits preserved in honey from the Summer Isles, and wooden chests of curiosities.

"For you, brother," Gerion announced, presenting Tywin with an intricately carved box. "A set of golden inkwells from Volantis, worthy of the Lord of Casterly Rock."

Tywin accepted with a curt nod.

"For my scholarly nephew," Gerion continued, handing Tyrion a leather-bound book. "An incomplete history of the Valyrian Freehold, with illustrations I'm told are unmatched in the Seven Kingdoms."

Tyrion's eyes widened as he reverently opened the volume. "This is... extraordinary. Thank you, uncle."

"And for my newest nephew," Gerion said, kneeling again before Adrian. He produced a small wooden drum, its sides painted with colorful patterns and exotic birds. "From the Summer Isles, where they believe music speaks when words fail."

Adrian accepted the drum with wide eyes, running his fingers over the taut skin stretched across its top.

"Like this," Gerion demonstrated, tapping out a simple rhythm. Adrian immediately mimicked it, his face lighting up at the sound.

"What do you say?" Tywin prompted.

"Thank you, Uncle Gerion," Adrian replied dutifully, but his genuine delight was evident as he continued tapping the drum.

"Perhaps save the musical education for after the feast," Tywin suggested, though his tone made it more command than request.

The great hall was soon transformed for a welcoming feast. Gerion sat at Tywin's right hand along with Kevan and Gemma, Adrian sat nearby, and Tyrion across the table. As wine flowed, Gerion's stories grew more animated, drawing laughter from even the most stoic servants.

"...and then the Summer Islander said, 'That's not a mermaid, that's the harbormaster's wife!'" Gerion finished one tale, causing uproarious laughter to echo through the hall.

Adrian giggled helplessly, though he clearly didn't understand the joke. Tywin's expression darkened with each burst of inappropriate mirth.

"And the pirate captain in Tyrosh," Gerion continued, gesturing with his wine cup. "Frightful man with a forked purple beard. Swore he'd fought the last dragon himself!"

"Dragons are all dead," Adrian stated with the certainty of recently acquired knowledge. "Tyrion told me. The last one was small as a cat."

"So the maesters claim," Gerion agreed, leaning conspiratorially toward Adrian. "But I've seen dragon eggs in the Markets—black as night and hard as stone."

Adrian's eyes widened to saucers. "Real dragon eggs? Can they hatch?"

"Enough fantasy," Tywin interrupted. "Adrian doesn't need his head filled with such tales."

"All boys need a little fantasy, brother," Gerion countered easily. "I certainly did growing up in this mausoleum." He turned back to Adrian. "Though your father is right—most believe the dragons are gone forever."

"I want to see a dragon," Adrian declared firmly.

"Kevan mentioned you might continue your travels to Volantis," Tywin said, pointedly changing the subject. "What business draws you there?"

Gerion held his brother's gaze for a long moment, clearly registering the evasion. He took a slow sip of wine before responding.

"Curiosities, brother. Always curiosities." His eyes flickered to Adrian once more, then back to Tywin. "I find family histories... fascinating."

Tywin's expression hardened. "We shall discuss your future plans later. In private."

"As you wish," Gerion agreed with an easy smile. He turned to Adrian and spoke in a stage whisper. "Your father always did prefer private conversations. Especially about matters of importance."

Adrian nodded solemnly, as though receiving profound wisdom, and returned to tapping his new drum quietly under the table.

As the feast continued, Gerion regaled the hall with more tales of his travels, each more outlandish than the last. Adrian hung on every word, his eyes bright with excitement at descriptions of distant lands and strange customs.

From his seat at the high table, Tywin observed the scene with growing displeasure. When Adrian began asking Gerion about "dragon dreams" he'd heard about from Tyrion, Tywin abruptly stood.

"It grows late," he announced. "Adrian, it's time for your bed."

"But Father—" Adrian began to protest.

"No arguments," Tywin said firmly.

Gerion winked at Adrian. "Don't worry, nephew. I'll be here for some time. We'll have plenty of opportunities for more stories."

Adrian reluctantly slid from his chair but brightened at this promise. "Will you tell me about Asshai tomorrow?"

"If your father permits," Gerion replied, his eyes challenging Tywin over the rim of his wine cup.

As a nursemaid led Adrian away, Tywin remained standing. "Enjoy the hospitality of Casterly Rock, brother. We have much to discuss on the morrow."

Gerion raised his cup in salute. "Family discussions are always entertaining."

After Tywin departed, Gerion turned to Tyrion, who had observed the entire exchange with shrewd eyes.

"So, nephew," Gerion said quietly. "Tell me about this new brother of yours."

Tyrion glanced toward the doorway where Tywin had exited. "Carefully, uncle. Very carefully."

Gerion's customary smile faded, replaced by a look of genuine curiosity. "His hair... reminds me of someone."

"Does it?" Tyrion replied, feigning disinterest.

"Indeed." Gerion took another long drink of wine, his expression contemplative. "Most curious. Most curious indeed."

Tomorrow - Adrian Lannister (Daeron Targaryen)

Adrian's fingers hurt from tapping his new drum all morning. The drum was the best present ever. Better than the wooden lion Father gave him. Better than the picture books. The drum made noise and noise was exciting.

Uncle Gerion was coming to teach him how to play it properly. Adrian sat on his bed, legs swinging back and forth, not touching the floor. His chamber was big with stone walls that made sounds echo. The servants had lit the fire because Casterly Rock was always cold, even when it was sunny outside.

The drum sat on his lap. It had funny birds painted on it that Adrian had never seen before. They had long curly feathers and beaks as red as blood. Adrian liked blood-red things.

The door opened with a creak. Uncle Gerion came in with a big smile that showed all his teeth. Father never smiled like that.

"There's my little drummer!" Uncle Gerion said. His voice was loud and bouncy. "Have you been practicing?"

Adrian nodded fast. "I can do this." He hit the drum three times. Bam-bam-bam.

"Not bad!" Uncle Gerion sat on the bed next to him. The bed went down on his side because he was big. "But drums tell stories in the Summer Isles. Let me show you."

Uncle Gerion's hands moved fast on the drum. Bam-ba-ba-bam-bam. The sounds made Adrian's heart feel jumpy and happy.

"That's how they call people to feasts," Uncle Gerion explained. "And this—" he tapped a slower beat, "—is for sad times, like when someone dies."

Adrian frowned. "I don't like that one."

"Most don't," Uncle Gerion laughed. "Try the happy one."

Adrian tried to copy the beat. His small hands couldn't move as fast as Uncle Gerion's big ones. It sounded wrong. Bam-ba-bam-bam.

"Almost!" Uncle Gerion didn't sound disappointed like Father would. "Try again."

Adrian tried harder. His tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth. Bam-ba-ba-bam-bam.

"There you have it!" Uncle Gerion clapped his hands. "A natural musician!"

Pride made Adrian's chest feel big. He was good at something new!

"Can we go outside?" Adrian asked. "My room makes the drum too loud."

Uncle Gerion thought for a moment. "The western courtyard should be empty this time of day. Let's see if your father's lions will appreciate Summer Islands music."

Adrian jumped off the bed, hugging his drum tight. He liked the western courtyard. It had a fountain with stone lions that spit water and flowers that smelled nice.

As they walked through the long hallways, servants bowed to them. Some looked surprised to see Uncle Gerion holding Adrian's hand. Father never held his hand.

"Uncle Gerion," Adrian asked as they walked, "why is your hair long? Father's hair is short."

Uncle Gerion laughed. "Because your father follows rules, and I like to break them."

"Breaking rules is bad," Adrian recited what he'd been taught.

"Sometimes," Uncle Gerion agreed. "But sometimes rules are just... boring."

Adrian thought about this. It was confusing. Father said rules were important.

The courtyard was warm with sunshine when they arrived. Adrian ran to the fountain and sat on its edge. The stone was sun-hot under his legs.

"Now we can be loud!" Uncle Gerion declared. He took a bigger drum from under his cloak that Adrian hadn't noticed before.

"You have one too!" Adrian pointed excitedly.

"Every drummer needs a partner," Uncle Gerion winked. He began tapping a new rhythm, faster than before.

Adrian tried to follow. His hands were clumsy at first, but then something funny happened. He could feel the beat in his chest, like his heart was telling his hands what to do. Bam-ba-ba-bam. His small fingers found the rhythm.

Uncle Gerion's eyebrows went up. "Well now! You've got the gift, nephew!"

"What gift?" Adrian asked, still drumming.

"Music," Uncle Gerion said. "It's in your blood."

Adrian liked that idea. Music in his blood. Like the Lannister gold in his hair, Father always said.

They played together, making louder and louder sounds. Adrian laughed every time Uncle Gerion added a funny noise or changed the beat suddenly. The courtyard filled with sounds that bounced off the stone walls.

A servant walked by and stopped to stare. Then another. Soon there were three servants standing by the archway, watching with wide eyes.

"We have an audience!" Uncle Gerion announced, playing faster.

Adrian didn't know what "audience" meant, but he liked how the servants were smiling. Nobody smiled much at Casterly Rock except for Tyrion, Serra, and Genna sometimes.

"What's all this commotion?" a familiar voice called.

Tyrion appeared in the courtyard, walking with his funny waddling steps that Adrian was never supposed to mention.

"Nephew!" Uncle Gerion greeted him. "Come join our Summer Islands band!"

Tyrion shook his head. "I fear I have no musical talent."

"Nonsense!" Uncle Gerion pulled a tiny drum from his pocket. "Even the tone-deaf can manage a simple beat."

Adrian ran to Tyrion, still holding his drum. "Please play, Tyrion! It's fun!"

Tyrion looked at Adrian's excited face and sighed. "How can I refuse such an enthusiastic invitation?" He took the small drum reluctantly.

Uncle Gerion showed Tyrion an easy beat. Bam-bam. Bam-bam.

Tyrion tried it, looking embarrassed. His short fingers tapped uncertainly.

"See? You're a natural too!" Uncle Gerion lied, but in a nice way that made Tyrion almost smile.

The three of them sat by the fountain, playing their drums. Adrian in the middle, Tyrion and Uncle Gerion on either side. Uncle Gerion started singing words in a strange language that sounded like water flowing.

More servants gathered to watch. One started clapping along. Then another. Adrian had never seen servants act this way before. Father would be angry.

But Father wasn't here, and the sun was warm, and the drums were talking to each other like friends.

Adrian laughed so hard his sides hurt when Uncle Gerion stood up and started dancing with his drum, his feet making funny patterns on the stones. Even Tyrion chuckled, his mismatched eyes crinkling at the corners.

"Your turn, Adrian!" Uncle Gerion called.

Adrian stood up and tried to copy the dance, his little legs stomping and jumping. He probably looked silly, but he didn't care. This was the most fun he'd ever had.

"Is this how they dance in the Summer Isles?" Adrian asked, twirling in a wobbly circle.

"Close enough!" Uncle Gerion laughed. "Though they wear fewer clothes and more feathers!"

Tyrion snorted. "Perhaps we should avoid teaching him that particular tradition."

Adrian didn't understand what was funny, but laughed anyway because the grown-ups were laughing.

For a long wonderful time, they played and danced and made noise that echoed all through the courtyard. Adrian felt something new and strange—like his chest might burst with happiness.