**Chapter 42**

**The Second Butcher’s Ball**

*The Battle of the First Butcher’s Ball was fought south of the God’s Eye during the Dance of Dragons and saw the complete destruction of the Green army led by Ser Criston Cole.*

*At the time, it was acknowledged by Lords and smallfolk alike as the most vicious and merciless slaughter created by the Blacks and the Greens. The Dance being the Dance, both the number of deaths and the ferocity of the fighting would rapidly be surpassed by other battles and bloody events.*

*But the name renamed, and eight years later, the memory would lead to the Second Battle of Castamere being proclaimed the Second Butcher’s Ball, in addition to other names like the Bloody Gullet and the Leonine Slaughter.*

*This name was given despite the reality this great battle – without doubt the greatest of the War of Lions – had not much in common with the first carnage the Westerners took inspiration from.*

*The belligerents weren’t the same, obviously. If the Lannister army could be considered ‘Greens’, the Reynes certainly weren’t ‘Blacks’. The terrain and the circumstances which had led to it were also vastly different: in the Riverlands no army was really limited to manoeuvre; it was flat ground from Harrenhal to King’s Landing. The same couldn’t be said about the uneven, hilly hinterlands of the Westerlands.*

*More importantly, it was a battle the armies on both sides of the battlefield could have theoretically avoided. Ser Tyland Lannister could have taken his forces north or eastwards and prevented a decisive confrontation with House Reyne’s sizeable army. The self-proclaimed King Walder Reyne could have refrained from assaulting Castamere straight-on to instead attempt a more indirect encirclement by Ashemark.*

*In the end, all commanders, Green or Red, decided the battle had to be fought in view of the southern walls of Castamere. If there were plenty of reasons to avoid a true battle, there were excellent motives to destroy the enemy army too. House Reyne and the allies it had convinced to rise in rebellion were living on borrowed time. With Castamere fallen, the north of the Westerlands could throw thousands of men into the ‘breach’ created by the fall of the Reyne fortress. The twelve thousand men of Lord Walder Reyne and his sworn bannersmen had to stay in position to ensure this gap was closed, all the while thousands of reinforcements arrived at Lannisport. The forces of Casterly Rock and all of those loyal to King Daeron I, in the meanwhile, were under enormous pressure to end this rebellion as fast as possible, since the longer it continued, the more destruction and fleeing smallfolk they would have to deal with once the swords were finally sheathed. The prestige of ending the treachery of the Reynes before their very ancestral home was not to be neglected either.*

*Thus began a battle which would haunt the survivors for long years. It would not be fought with dragons, and nearly all troops fought on foot, the slopes and the rocks making cavalry charges impossible given how pikemen and halberd-armed infantry could cover efficiently the narrow valley.*

*It was the Second Butcher’s Ball. And this would be the bloodiest day of the War of Lions.*

Extract from The War of Lions by Second Historian-Librarian Jonos Underhill, original written at Fairmarket, 160AC.

**Ser Tyland Lannister**

This was battle was very unlike the fighting of Lannisport or any battle he had fought until now.

Not that there were many of them.

Tyland had rarely thought about it, but the more he returned to the moves which had led him today, the more his inexperience was thrown in his face. Warrior and Father Above, what he wouldn’t have given for more of his elders to be here today to guide him!

The Lannister knight didn’t turn his head. He was not Lord Grimm Banefort, but he knew hoping for some long and valiant knights of the West to come to his help at this hour...it wasn’t going to happen.

Like the Faith septons often said, the Seven Heavens helped those who said themselves. Yes, it may be a good attempt to castigate those who doubted the religious power of the Most Devout, but they were right...somewhat.

The enemy soldiers arrived in position and these notions of Heaven and Hell ceased to be for today. Time to send the enemies of House Lannister into large graves.

“Send them a volley.”

He didn’t need to repeat himself.

“SCORPIONS!” the Captain in charge of the siege engines screamed. “KILL THE TRAITORS!”

“ARCHERS! FIRE AT WILL!”

His army and the northern Westerners holdfast troops had the higher ground. And as the Gods were his witness, they were going to exploit it for all its worth.

Clearly, the southern walls were the most important position of the entire battle. Should the battle be lost, it was an extremely strong position now that it was correctly manned. That and the fact the oath-breakers had brought no ladders that he could see from his post of observation should be enough to save the army in case the worst happened.

Not that it would. Tyland had not taken command of his men today because he believed they were inferior to the betrayers and murderous conspirators of Castamere, Deep Den, and numerous other castles damned for all eternity by their criminal deeds.

And so he smiled as bolts and arrows began to thin the first lines of the traitor infantry.

Unfortunately, this success didn’t last long before the true archers on the other sides, accompanied by hundreds of crossbowmen, began to shoot their own volleys. Many sons of Lannisport and the Banefort were too slow to react for the arrows which came to end their lives.

For several minutes, the meagre light they were fighting under was darkened by thousands of arrows. It was a grey morning, quite unlike the normal days of summer so far. Add the crows which were starting to arrive, and the battlefield looked quite...sinister.

How many died in the prelude of the battle? Tyland didn’t know, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to.

Still, for now the battle was fought as he predicted, and things were turning in his favour. The two armies had begun to close the distance, but he had more archers, and more arrows. That he had recovered the supplies and the equipment stored inside Castamere was a great boon in that regard.

It wasn’t pretty, but it looked like for every loyal man who fell, the red bastards were losing two or three. Obviously they wouldn’t be able to maintain this rate of projectiles for every long, but it had given him an additional dagger to stab his enemy with.

The question was if it was going to be enough. The valley was now a sea of red as crimson banners and bloody armours drowned it in violence, and while it could be the same for his troops, the Reyne army appeared to be endless.

“DEATH TO THE REYNES! ADVANCE!”

Command flags painted in gold with a death’s head were hoisted upon the agreed pennants.

Drums rolled and rolled in a thunderous noise, and the Lannister army marched forwards.

“DEATH TO THE LANNISTERS!”

“HEAR US ROAR!”

“KILL THEM ALL!”

“FOR THE ROCK!

“FOR CASTAMERE!”

The last feet separating the army were closed in the blink of an eye.

The noise of thousands of armours and shields clashing with weapons engulfed everything in the next instant.

In five heartbeats, the parade discipline of the lines didn’t hold. The battlefield degenerated into complete chaos, a combat of infantry where nothing orderly could be saved.

“The archers can stop firing.” Most of them had already done so, their arms in need of rest or their quivers emptied of arrows when it wasn’t both. “Tell the scorpion crews to redirect their bolts upon the left wing of the bastards.”

“Yes, my Lord. What of our knights?”

“Send them into the fray. Ten gold dragons for every lordly oath-breaker’s head they bring back!”

**Lord Grimm Banefort**

His grandfather had told him that during a battle, everything could go wrong, like colic when you have finally donned your armour and the enemy is charging down the slopes, or the sun in your face when you are about to kill your sworn enemy.

The last one wasn’t going to happen to him: there was little sun today, and if he had a sworn enemy, he had no idea who it was. Grimm could die, of course. But dying from someone’s weapon was the common destiny of all soldiers.

The Lord of the Banefort swore loudly when three green boys of Lannisport threw down their weapons and tried to run away when their group began to fall upon the blades of the Lydden and Marbrand killers.

“DO NOT RETREAT! THE WARRIOR IS WITH US!” Most likely the oath-breakers were shouting the same thing, but Grimm knew if some souls were true, they might return to their positions...no such luck, of course.

“MEN OF THE BANEFORT! SHOW THE COWARDS AND THE TRAITORS WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW ME! GRIMM IS HERE!”

“GRIM WE ARE!”

“SEND THEM TO THE SEVEN HELLS!” The dark-clad Lord bellowed, and his forces plunged into the melee.

Grimm didn’t run. HI plate armour was heavy, and he tired too easily when he did that. So instead he breathed out, kept his grimness, and struck before returning to a guarding stance.

And as he wielded the great warhammer of his House, when the *Hammer of Grimness* hit a traitor, the Reyne boot-licker didn’t return for another bout. Either because Grimm had pulverised him, or falling upon a battlefield gave him men the opportunity to finish the defeated enemy.

It was ugly, especially as dozens of men fell the same way.

But it worked.

In fact, it worked so well Grimm began to smite the legs first every time he saw the summer idiots protect insufficiently this part of their body. Who knew having a broken leg was that much of a death sentence?

“KILL HIM! ONE THOUSAND DRAGONS FOR HIS HEAD!”

“YOU DON’T HAVE THAT MANY COINS LEFT IN YOUR CHESTS, TRAITORS!” The Lord of the Banefort shouted back, as his warhammer smashed into the head of a Lydden knight with a very satisfying sound before several of his sword-wielding guards carved him apart. “GRIMM! GRIMM AND HOUSE BANEFORT FOR THE ROCK! HOLD THE LINE! HOLD THE LINE AND KILL THE BASTARDS!”

The Ashemark and Sarsfield men charged them. He was ready to receive the assault.

This time the Lord of the Banefort had to strike like an excited madman. There were too many of them, and his halberdiers were a bit too busy to help him.

“COME ON! WESTERNERS! WITH ME! THE TRAITORS ARE REELING!”

This was a lie, really. In fact they were more and more coming this way...maybe because his counter-charge had led him to advance too far. The left and the right wings – if they deserved such a prestigious name as they were so close to him – had lost too much ground.

“STAND YOUR GROUND!”

Already, Tyland rallied the former Lannisport fishermen – they had that sort of courage. But he had to stand here.

“IT’S THE LORD OF THE BANEFORT! KILL HIM AND WE WILL BE ALL VERY RICH!”

Grimm wondered at which moment of the last years killing fellow nobles had become the normal thing to do. Wars of his grandfather and before had been terrible, no doubt, but even the Ironborn pirates often ransomed prisoners – as long as they were men, but still. Had the Dance changed so many things?

“YOU DON’T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO KILL ME!”

One by one, he was forced to kill four enemies to prove it. Then two more received broken legs, and he punched one more imbecile who had come without his helmet...and received a dagger through his throat, courtesy of one of his men-at-arms.

This was the moment he had to parry from the right a severed arm thrown in his face, before hammering the metal of an enormous and lavishly decorated two-handed sword.

“Garth Hill,” Grimm rumbled as he recognised a modified sigil of House Marbrand on the traitor’s plastron. “The Bastard Cur of the Westerlands.”

The boy had already deserved his name before the Reynes rose in rebellion...and he had done plenty of evil things since, if the raven messages and the rumours said the truth.

“It is Lord Garth Marbrand now, old fool!”

More Marbrand traitor armsmen threw themselves between him and his forces, and Grimm bit back a curse as he was forced into a duel with one of the dogs of the Red Lion.

**Lord Garth Marbrand**

Garth grinned as the Lord of the Banefort found himself alone, his men repelled by the fury of his new friends. Penniless knights they might be, but their skilled with swords and axes had been shamefully ignored by the Noble Houses, and today they proved how wrong these haughty blue-blooded fools were.

Teeth bared under his lion-shaped helmet offered by the King, the new Lord of Ashemark began one of his favourite secret weapons in the noble of swordsmanship, the Gale’s Feint, or as he loved to explain it to the corpses in the mud: feint, feint and a powerful thrust in the joints of the armour wielding the weapon, disarming in every way his opponent.

It had never failed him.

He feinted.

The massive black-armoured Lord threw himself forward and used his own armoured head to smash in his.

The shock was more violent than everything he ever felt, and as Garth made several steps back, he felt blood running down his nose.

“That...” the strike – a head strike – had made him out of breath.

The warhammer swung faster than an ugly mass of black metal should have been possible...it took all his strength to parry the blow. His arms hurt and his armour of steel rang like a clarion, and suddenly, the two-handed sword he was using didn’t seem like such a wise choice against a blunt weapon like the one of his enemy.

“You could have been a great man if you had bowed to King Walder!”

The warhammer came back, and the new parry forced him to grit his teeth least he grunted in pain.

“The King of assassins, bastards, sellswords, and oath-breakers,” Grimm Banefort darkly laughed, “I will bend the knee first to the Black Queen before your Master.”

The warhammer struck more slowly this time, and Garth used the opportunity to launch a new series of fast attacks to make the warhammer-wielding Lord retreat.

But Grimm didn’t move. He didn’t parry either, and the feint forced the Lord of Ashemark to overextend.

Some septons pretended that when the Gods smiled upon their Champions, time seemed to slow on the battlefield.

Garth definitely saw the truth of that as he tried to regain his balance and the warhammer began to descend over him, over his exposed left, over-

It was like a giant had decided to strike his left arm...it sent him on the ground, face-first.

The taste of blood, once a trickle, was now ten times worse.

The pain of his left arm was so intense he couldn’t fight the tears which formed immediately. It hurt! Warrior Above, it hurt! And Garth didn’t need to be a maester to know that his shield arm – not that he used one today – was going to be denied to him for the rest of the battle.

There was little sun today, but the Lord of Ashemark felt the long shadow of the Grim Lord behind him.

“Mercy...” the words were poison in his mouth. “Mercy, I can give you a ransom of Lord...”

“The words of a Reyne dog,” the warrior of the dark lands of the Banefort growled derisively. “Who would be foolish enough to trust them?”

“No! Please...”

Something heavy struck him, and Garth Marbrand, formerly Garth Hill, perished.

**King Walder Reyne**

The disorganisation of the first lines was so complete Walder didn’t see Garth Marbrand fall. The aftershocks of his death, however, were impossible to miss.

In less time than it took to say, scores of men, including the swords from the lands of Ashemark and many disreputable ‘free-riding’ companies brutally lost their will to fight...and began to cede ground everywhere.

The left and the right, which until now had progressed so far they were on their way to encircle the Banefort spearhead, ceded ground like snakes had been thrown under their boots.

“We were so close...” The Red King muttered angrily.

“My King, we must-“

“I have seen the problem.” As if anyone could miss it, several sellswords and fleeing armsmen were so broken they were trying to make themselves a way through the Reyne troops...with all the deathly consequences it created. “We have not the choice, it seems. My banners must win where those of Ashemark failed.”

This loss was going to cost them heavily, Walder wished he could convince himself otherwise, but it was nothing but the truth. The Marbrand troops, by their collapse, forbid him from pushing the Lannister host against the walls and destroying them in the process. Someone, most likely Tyland Lannister, was rallying them before they could flee past the walls of Castamere, and without his troops in hot pursuit behind, the enemy was bleeding but not broken.

Which meant that without sufficient siege engines, the Red army of the Westerlands would likely be unable to retake Castamere after the necessary killing was done.

The great enemy of House Lannister banished the thought after a moment.

For now, Walder had to concentrate on winning the battle, period, because right now, it was the Lannisters who were winning. They had inflicted heavy losses on his vanguard. Really, he would be surprised if fewer than a thousand of his men were dead or crippled by this large turn of hourglass of fighting. They had brought more halberdiers and spearmen to reform an imposing wall, with Grimm Banefort pushing them to new heights of ferocity.

“MEN OF THE WEST! THE LIONS PRETENDERS THINK THEY HAVE SEEN OUR WRATH! THEY HAVE SEEN NOTHING! KILL THEM! FOR CASTAMERE! FOR THE MIGHT AND THE RIGHT OF THE RED LION!”

The clamour and the war cries were screamed with a fervour which was a balm for his soul.

“CHARGE!”

A reserve of two thousand men was left behind, but this time, Walder didn’t bluff or sent a small portion of it to encourage his opponent to make a mistake.

The mailed fist of the southern Westerlands and a good part of the North went on a raging advance nothing but a counter-cavalry charge would stop...and they weren’t any on this battlefield save those assigned for the rear-guard patrols and the messengers.

“With me,” he ordered his men.

“Your Grace...”

“I have ordered everything I can from here, now is the time to kill as many Lannisters as we can.”

**Ser Tyland Lannister**

His battle-plan wasn’t working.

This was the bad news.

The good news, as far as he was able to ascertain, was that the enemy’s plans had failed like his had since his troops charged upon the battlefield.

This was all the good news he could find, however. The battle had long ceased to be a thing of discipline and proper formations, and had disintegrated into a chaotic melee where butchery reigned supreme.

“My Lord, the archers have returned and are ready to shoot their arrows again.”

The knight of Casterly Rock chuckled darkly.

“And what are they going to do?”

“My Lord?”

“What are they going to do?” Tyland repeated. “Most of our forces are so close to the enemy I don’t see any way even our best archers can shoot accurately the Reyne traitors without hurting our own men.”

It was not a pretty thing, this melee. The ruckus of the weapons and the screams of men was a gigantic clamour which never ended. Thousands of swords, hammering and striking, killing soldiers they should have called brothers, cousins, or allies. The crows were flying in large clouds which sometimes rushed to devour corpses in a hurry before the attacks and counter-attacks forced them to fly away.

The sky was grey over their heads, but it was a shade promising them any rain. It was a hot, light sky of grey, and Tyland had already emptied three jugs of water.

It was the only reason the battle was slowing down at times, men retreating to drink and catch a breath before the warmth of the weather and this suffocating weather emptied them of all their strength and killed as surely as the blades of Lannisport.

“Father Above, what I wouldn’t pay for a bountiful rain...”

It would likely create plenty of mud too, but it was preferable to this pressure on your chest, shoulders, and their poor bones...at least it was his opinion. Alas, controlling the weather was the province of the Gods, and so far they didn’t appear to have listened to his prayers.

“We have to push them back and reform our lines before the situation becomes worse and we can’t even shoot the traitors in the range of the walls.” If it happened, he wouldn’t even be able to retreat behind them at the end of the day without the rebels pursuing and slaughtering them. Tyland shook his head. It was far, far worse than what he had lived at Lannisport.

The commander of the loyal army unsheathed his sword.

“We commit the reserves. Now. Tell my company to prepare itself, we are going to try to cut the head of the snake while the oath-breakers are still disorganised.”

“Yes, my Lord!”

Tyland looked at the unprecedented slaughter occurring in the valley for three heartbeats before running down the stone stairs.

“Hear us roar,” he whispered.

**Lord Grimm Banefort**

Tyland Lannister had done what needed to be done. Unfortunately, he certainly had done it too late.

It wasn’t the fault of the victor of Lannisport. Grimm himself had seen it too late. In the middle of the carnage, it had been difficult to find out when the most dangerous knights and plate-armoured swordsmen had taken the field. Without their horses, the only thing which made the difference between them and their lowborn infantry was how fancy their amours were...which unfortunately wasn’t of a great utility when everyone surviving the first duels looked like he had been bathed in blood.

“STAND!” Grimm shouted as at least ten and maybe a full score of Jast footmen threw down their spears. “STAND! THE WEST WILL STAND! THE TRAITORS WILL PAY! DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED AS COWARDS?”

His words managed to find something in a couple of hundred swordsmen and spearmen, whose line found some stability...but to his left, the rest of the army collapsed.

“STAND! HOLD THE LINE!”

But there was no salvation, no miracle...Grimm had expected none, and none were granted.

Some part of him wanted to pity these boys. Too young, too inexperienced, full of piss and boasts, they were the knights and levies of summer that had known only a few easy battles like Lannisport and nothing of the hard grit a true bloodbath required to stay alive. They had not been given the best plate or the best weapons, for those had been lost in the Riverlands.

The other part of him, a part which went to dominate his thoughts, wanted to damn them. They had sworn oaths and boasted of their future victories for countless dawns and evenings, but when the time came to prove them, cowardice was the repayment of all the gold and food one had invested in them. For many of them, it wasn’t even the first time they broke today after the first charge.

But this time there was little to stop the enemy. The reserves were committed to stop the enemy short of the wall. Cavalry on this uneven ground, if they had hundreds of horses to lose, would be something awful to watch.

Tyland had yet to see it, but here, in the middle of it, Grimm knew the battle was lost. And half of his personal guard had advanced too deep into the Reyne host to retreat fast enough.

Grimm turned his head...and for what was likely the last time of his life, he smiled.

“MEN OF THE BANEFORT! WITH ME!”

“GRIMM FOR THE BANEFORT! GRIMM AND HOUSE LANNISTER!”

They charged southwards, deeper into the red ranks of the traitors. More than one oath-breaker had an astonished expression on his face as he or one of his men killed him.

Between fifty and sixty crossbowmen were caught defenceless as several spearmen panicked and didn’t think of forming a wall.

Grimm killed five of the bastards, in deeds if not in birth, himself.

His good warhammer was soaked in their blood and he had to stop twice and use the banners of House Reyne to clean it lest it begin to be too slippery.

And then he continued to advance. He had less than sixty men with him now, but the rebels’ foot was fleeing before them, like a flooding river devastate everything on its path.

Their target saw him at last as his men fled for their lives, but it was too late for him.

“LYDDEN! STOP HIDING LIKE A MOLE IN ITS BURROW! FIGHT LIKE A MAN!”

The tumult of the battle did not allow the Lord of the Banefort to hear if the man screamed in rage, but in the middle of the chaos, hundreds of swords were raised and the disloyal chivalry of the southern Westerlands charged them.

Grimm didn’t wait for them to be ready and threw several of the nearby red levies between them and his vanguard.

The fighting was ferocious, more ferocious than anything he had ever done. And he was thirsty. He was thirsty and exhausted. But the sight of the green feathers of this treacherous scum of Joffrey Lydden were mocking him, and the more he advanced, the more he knew he could kill him.

Joffrey saw him come and try to say something before raising his sword.

The first strike of the Banefort warhammer shattered his leg.

The second was for his skull, and the Lord of Deep Den, accursed traitor, joined thousands of corpses on this terrible battlefield.

“I AM GRIMM!”

The Lydden knights who had survived the charge looked at each other...and began to take a step back. Then two. And after the third and the fourth, their fighting retreat transformed into a rout.

“NO! HE’S ALONE! HE IS ONLY A MAN! REFORM YOUR LINES! REFORM YOUR LINES! THE BATTLE IS WON!”

Grimm looked around him, and realised the words were true. Most of his men were dead, and those who were not had been delayed and delayed again until he stood alone in the middle of a circle of dead Lydden knights.

His men were too far away.

Grimm was alone.

And in the distance, the horns of Lannisport sounded once, twice, thrice. The agreed signal to retreat to the walls. The battle was lost...and yet, at the end of his life, the Grim Lord saw a ray of hope. His charge had not changed the outcome, but hundreds of traitors were fleeing, as they were now leaderless and the oaths they had sworn didn’t apply anymore with their liege dead.

Tyland would have enough time and men to defend the walls of Castamere. The battle was lost, but the lands north of the Reyne underground castle would be safe from the oath-breakers.

There was one last thing he could do...for his House and for the West.

“RED LION!” Grimm screamed. “WHERE IS THE RED LION? I KILLED ALL YOUR CAPTAINS AND LORDS! I MADE A MOUNTAIN OF SKULLS OF YOUR LEVIES! I AM GRIMM! HERE I STAND! WHERE IS THE RED LION? WHERE IS YOUR GREAT KING WHEN THE FIGHTING IS FIERCE?”

**King Walder Reyne**

Walder cursed as the black-armoured half-giant challenged him.

He had been about to order his men to pierce him with a hundred crossbows and good riddance, but for the first time, a relative silence fell upon this part of the battlefield.

Even far from it, the fighting was dying down.

Walder remembered how he had laughed sometimes in presence of his brother and a few servants when legendary duels in the middle of a battlefield were mentioned.

It was possible for such a duel to happen, but no man alone could stare down an army when he was left alone and encircled. There was no reason to give him such an honour, it was best to kill him swiftly and decisively.

And yet. And yet at this hour, his men had seen the hooded man symbol devastate everything in its path, and their Lord survive and kill hundreds of men, including Lord Joffrey Lydden, Lord Garth Marbrand, and at least three scores of knights.

Grimm was likely near dead of exhaustion.

“RED LION! WHERE IS THE RED LION?”

And none of it mattered, as the half-giant screamed like a demon-possessed creature.

The very words he had chosen to rally so many men to him were a stone around his neck.

He couldn’t refuse the duel in front of all his surviving captains.

“HERE!”

Walder ran to meet the man who had destroyed most of his plans today and in the days and nights before.

“DEATH TO THE FALSE LIONS!”

“HOUSE BANEFORT FOR THE WEST!”

The warhammer was far slower, and Walder had no problems avoiding it and thrusting his sword in one of the weaknesses of the plate created by the hacking and slashing of uncountable weapons during the battle.

Grimm screamed in agony...and his warhammer rose impossibly quick for a last horizontal strike directed at his right flank.

Walder tried to remove his sword, but Grimm grabbed it with his free hand.

Pain exploded on his right side when the warhammer found his mark.

**Ser Tyland Lannister**

The commander of the Lannister didn’t know if he was supposed to cry or laugh.

Grimm Banefort had fallen, and if anything, it had prompted every man who wasn’t already running towards the gates to imitate the less-than-courageous soldiers.

But there was also the matter of *who* had fallen fighting Grimm.

“My Lord, we saw it! He’s dead! The great traitor is dead!”

“I don’t think so,” the Reyne halberdiers and pikemen were pressing themselves against each other to make sure the loyalist spyglasses could see as close to nothing as it was possible of course, “they are bringing a stretcher. I think he’s unconscious and wounded, not dead.”

“Lord Banefort must have killed him, my Lord! Nobody can survive such a powerful blow of his warhammer!”

“Nobody who hasn’t plate armour, but this grasping usurper has one and besides-” his words changed into a full-blown laughter as advancing like a cohort of demons, the last men of the Banefort seized the body of their deceased Lord and began to walk away with it, daring with their eyes, their warhammer, and their frightening expressions the rebels to impede their return to Castamere.

No one among the Red rebels did. They had seen Grimm and his bannersmen carve them new holes and break all their bones at one against one hundred. The men of the Banefort didn’t care if they died anymore. The traitors were afraid of death. And so the oath-breakers let the survivors of the Grim banners go with the warhammer and the body of the man who had killed so many of them.

Tyland decided to cry and laugh as the battlefield was abandoned to the traitors and his beaten army took refuge behind the walls erected by House Reyne.

“Farewell, Grimm. I know you didn’t believe in the Seven Heavens, but I think there’s a seat waiting for you Above...if only because the Stranger will be too scared of what will happen with your men if you end up in the Seven Hells...”

**King Walder Reyne**

It was the pain which woke him up.

The pain which burned most of the right of his body from the leg to the shoulders was atrocious. And after the pain came the thirst.

“Water.” He whispered, and soon he received it in his throat. The thirst vanished.

The pain got worse.

It took a lot of time to feel strong enough to demand a seat. All the while healers and other men fussed around him, placing balms before adding more bandages of cloth over it. Walder grimaced when he saw how...ugly it was, even half-hidden under many healing artifices.

This blow had nearly killed him, and his sword arm felt...powerless. Useless.

The Red King tried to focus. They were in his great tent, which meant they had returned to the army camp at the entrance of the Castamere pass.

“How many?” the leader of the forces standing against House Lannister asked.

A man approached. Walder recognised him as Lord Merlon Sarsfield.

“My King, of your great host, we think seven hundred and two thousand men are dead.”

“You...” his throat was so parched the Lord of Castamere had no choice but to cough. “You think?”

“Sunset is approaching, my King,” the Lord who had seen all his sons die under the Red banners explained. “We’re still trying to assess the magnitude of our losses and those of the Lannister dogs...”

“And theirs?”

“Over five thousand, fewer than seven, and all of the survivors have fled behind your walls, my King.”

And he hadn’t the siege engines to break them, they were too far behind him...and he wouldn’t have the men to storm the ramparts, when it came down to it.

But someone kept coming back in his mind.

“Why are you unable to have a more accurate count of our fallen? We are masters of the battlefield!”

Lord Merlon bit his lower lip, before he sadly shook his head.

“Yes, my Lord, we are...but hundreds of warriors and camp followers of House Lydden began to desert when you fell. There are many...many doubters who began to spread word of your death. We were able to prove them wrong, of course! But a lot of cowardly souls took the opportunity to run while we brought you to the healers.”

Yes, they would have, wouldn’t they? Walder had thought his authority and his voice would be enough to keep them in the ranks despite the death of their Lord and Master, but Grimm had wounded him, and while he was unconscious, there were few captains and Lords left to ensure the army didn’t fall apart.

“Tell me the truth, Lord Sarsfield. How bad it is?”

“We still have...close to five thousand men.”

Five thousand. Five thousand when in the morning, they had begun with *twelve thousand* redoubtable warriors and knights!

“This is the bloodiest of all victories...butchery on the scale of a battlefield.” Walder wouldn’t have uttered it aloud if he wasn’t tired and sweaty, but somehow, he didn’t care anymore.

His army had won the day...and it wasn’t enough. In fact, while Walder knew he ignored most of the details, he was more and more convinced his war situation was worse than it had been at dawn. At least the army had reasonably intact and most of his bannersmen alive...now they weren’t. Damn Grimm Banefort, may he roast in Hell for eternity.

The Red Lion wouldn’t cry. The Red Lion wouldn’t sob.

But he had led the Red Lion’s banners into rebellion, and he had monumentally failed.

“My King, we can’t stay here for long.”

“I know.” He couldn’t ride any longer, and the moment the Lannisters received fresh reinforcements from the Banefort, the Crag, and a dozen other castles, his warriors would be overwhelmed. “Make the preparations. We must begin to march south after the next dawn.”

**Author’s note**: So end the Second Butcher’s Ball, greatest battle of the War of Lions.

As you have no doubt guessed, it didn’t end like House Reyne and its vassals wanted...and now the consequences of their betrayal are going to be felt in all their severity. What do you do once you have burned all your bridges and the Lannisters and the Greens are roaring at the gates?

More links on the Dance is not Over:

P a treon: www. p a treon Antony444

Alternate History: www .alternatehistory forum /threads /asoiaf-the-dance-is-not-over.391415