

Randyll Tarly was in his element, staring down from the high ground as armies clashed in an epic battle. He was offered the distinct honour of leading the army after the royal army suffered too many casualties while taking Crakehall. The after-war reports changed King Robert's mind about leading the army by himself, and he left the overall command of the army to Randyll. For that reason, Randyll respected the king. King Robert was a drunkard and a whoremonger, but the man was fair and knew his limits. There was no doubt King Robert remained a puissant warrior of great skill. There was hardly any warrior in Westeros capable of defeating the Demon of the Trident in a straight fight sans Lord Eddard Stark, who defeated Ser Arthur Dayne in single combat.

A great warrior need not necessarily become a great commander of the armies. In the case of King Robert, this was truer than anything else. King Robert's martial prowess was exemplary, but the King was better suited to be a warrior than a battlefield commander. This was why Randyll was given the overall command of the army, and he promptly chose Lord Patrice Oakheart to be his second in command. There were a lot of unsatisfied grumblings over his position and his choice for second in command. Mostly, it was from Mace Tyrell, who, to this day, continued to boast of his 'victory' at Ashford in the rebellion. Randyll didn't bother to point out that Mace Tyrell arrived at Ashford long after Robert Baratheon's forces retreated after suffering defeat. But King Robert took great pleasure in reminding the Lord of Highgarden of this fact whenever the Fat Flower often thought to boast of his 'victory' at Ashford.

Randyll was rather amused at the fact that the big mouth and false boasting of Mace Tyrell and the lickspittles of Highgarden's court likely played a role in his elevated post. But Randyll was not one to waste such an opportunity. He made the most of it by using the information the Westerlings gave him about the plans of Tywin Lannister. He had swept away all the pockets of the Lannister Army while marching straight for Lannisport. Not only did he provide King Robert with the chance to smash a few heads, but he also ensured it was done in a way that kept the King safe from harm's way. The hired catspaws, bandits and Lannister knights, beguiled by the offer of gold and lordship from Lord Tywin, were captured or killed. Most of the killing was done by King Robert, similar to the killing he was watching unfold outside the walls of Lannisport.

"Lord Patrice. You're in charge of the vanguard. I believe his grace has had enough fun for today." said Randyll before looking at his second in command.

"Good hunting." Randyll nodded firmly at Lord Oakheart.

He stared ahead into the battlefield as Lord Patrice Oakeheart marched the van into the fray, smashing through the meagre Lannister force gathered outside the city walls.

'Lord Tywin must be getting desperate if he is sending the useless and decrepit men of the Rock to fight his wars.' Randyll thought, watching the ease with which Lord Oakheart cut a bloody swathe through the right flank of the Lannister army.

The city of Lannisport remained closed off, with the many banners of Dorne decorating its many towers and walls. It was no secret what the Dornish were doing inside the city. They were hunting down anyone with any relation to House Lannister and made a sport of sorts to hunt them down. Some of the ravens from Lord Paxtor Redwyne spoke of Prince Oberyn killing off anyone with blonde hair. While he felt Lord Redwyne was exaggerating a little bit, he wouldn't put it past the Dornish idiots to do something so barbaric. House Martell had a genuine grievance against House Lannister, and they had waited more than a decade to bring those responsible to justice. Unfortunately, Doran Martell was not at the helm of the Dornish army. Even the Dornish fleet was comprised of sellsails from the Summer Isles and Lys despite what the despicable Dornishmen say about their grand fleet.

“Looks like the battle is almost over.” Randyll muttered to himself before giving orders for the rest of the men to follow him.

Randyll had the men take a tally of the men they lost and treat the wounded in their camp. He also sent emissaries to Lannisport to treat with the Dornish and see whether they were in a position to support their campaign against the Lannisters of Casterly Rock. He also sent forward scouts as quickly as possible to ensure there were no more obstacles on their way to the Rock. Despite moving closer to victory, Randyll wouldn't underestimate the tenacity of Lord Tywin. The lord of Casterly Rock was not someone to be underestimated. The Old Lion had been waging war against everyone without a Lannister name from the ripe age of one and ten.

It took Randyll a few days to resupply the army and ensure the men were ready to march. In between this time, he learned the Dornish army had split in two as a portion of their fleet, and men had sailed to the Iron Islands to support the North's invasion of the Iron Islands. Prince Oberyn hardly divulged any details of what was happening, and Randyll didn't care much so long as the Martells fielded their army to support the siege of the Rock. He was quite content to leave the Ironborn to their fate in their dreary islands. In fact, he was hoping the Northerners and Dornishmen would wipe out those filthy pirates masquerading as lords of the Seven Kingdoms.

‘Clearly, the way of mercy has not worked well for Balon Greyjoy. Perhaps the Stark boy could teach old Greyjoy a lesson he'll never forget.’ Randyll mused idly.

By all accounts, Harrion Stark was doing an excellent job crushing the Ironborn rebellion singlehandedly. The tales coming from the city harbour spoke of great battles, wild tales of magic and sound defeat of the Ironborn. Randyll cared not for the fanciful stories spread by the Smallfolk and contented himself with the word that the Ironborn were being smacked around by a child of admittedly great skill.

When King Robert called for a council to discuss what was to be done with the Westerlands and the Iron Islands, most were in favour of wiping out the Ironborn and taking away land from the rebelling lords of both kingdoms. Randyll didn't have a particular opinion on the matter, and therefore, he kept his mouth shut. He cared not one whit what befalls the Ironborn and their islands after the war. He cared if the Dornishmen were making attempts to take a few castles from the Ironborn. Still, strangely, Prince Oberyn and his fellow Dornishmen never uttered any outrageous demands of that sort. He was not the only one surprised by the Dornishmen not demanding any spoils from their expedition into the Iron Islands. It made his hair stand out as he realised that Prince Oberyn had come to some sort of understanding with the Northerners. He made it a point to bring it up with Jon Arryn when he had the chance to meet the Hand of the King. King Robert was largely dismissive of any form of court politics unless it involved a battle.

“So, what is our next move, Lord Tarly? I think we've dallied enough at Lannisport. It's time we take the fight to the Old Lion, who is hiding under a rock.” said King Robert.

The courtiers laughed at the King's jape at the expense of Lord Tywin. Randyll merely let out a slight grin as a courtesy to the King's jest.

“The scouts we had sent returned with good news, your grace. Our way ahead is safe. The remainder of the Lannister army has withdrawn, but I believe they will try to defend their position one more time before they fully withdraw into the safety of Casterly Rock.” Randyll dutifully informed the King and the council.

“Perhaps we should offer terms to this Lannister army for their surrender. Surely, they know they are facing defeat.” Paxtor Redwyne suggested.

Randyll merely eyed the Lord of Arbor silently, knowing Lord Redwyne lost all credibility in his grace’s eyes.

“There’ll be no terms offered to those blonde cunts. I want all of their heads on a spike!” King Robert thundered, making everyone flinch in the room except the Dornish lords.

“A sentiment that I share. A good Lannister is a dead Lannister.” Prince Oberyn declared, a cruel glint shining in his eyes.

Randyll exchanged a concerned look with Patrice Oakheart as they both understood Prince Oberyn would only become a burden in the council by goading King Robert to act irrationally. It didn’t help that Jon Arryn was far away, and the king remained in a perpetual state of inebriation. Prince Oberyn had easily won over King Robert’s affection by gifting a dozen Dornish Red barrels as a gift.

“Perhaps we could wait for Lord Stark and Lord Arryn to make a final decision regarding the fate of House Lannister. Their voices should also be heard, and it’d be a slight against two of his grace’s oldest allies to dismiss their thoughts on a matter like this.” Randyll said diplomatically.

“Ah, yes. Ned and Jon should be here by my side.” King Robert’s words slurred towards the end, but his blue eyes regained some sense of clarity when they turned towards Randyll. “Where are they Randyll? Why have they not come to my side?”

“Lord Stark and Edmure Tully are marching their armies towards Casterly Rock through the River Road. Prince Stannis and the Vale lords won’t be far away, joining them as they traverse the Gold Road. Once we march at the earliest, we’ll reach the Rock before the others, your grace.”

“Then why aren’t we marching?” Robert asked angrily, looking at no one in particular, but Randyll could see Mace Tyrell gulp in fear.

Randyll had the urge to point out that the Tyrells were dragging their feet in following his commands, but he resisted the temptation. There was no point in antagonising the Tyrells when there was nothing substantial to be gained.

“Should you give the orders, the men will begin marching in the morning itself, your grace.” Randyll informed the drunk king.

“What about the remaining Lannister army? We should make a plan to deal with them.” Paxter Redwyne reminded the council.

“I have a plan. We march in with our combined army and kill every man fighting for the lions.” Prince Oberyn declared, grinning from ear to ear.

“I like that plan. I’ll have those blonde cunts crushed with my hammer.” King Robert thumped the table, and that was the end of the discussion.

Randyll could only sigh at the turn of events. He had hoped to carefully broach the subject with King Robert after the man regained a semblance of normalcy, but Lord Redwyne destroyed that possibility. He supposed he’d have to improvise on the field on his personal risk. The last thing he wanted was for something to happen to King Robert on his watch. Already, the King was actively engaged in the war effort against the advice of several maesters.

'I'll need to have a word with Ser Barristan and Ser Arys. Very few people know of the nature of the King's injury, and they might succeed in talking some sense into the elder Baratheon.' Randyll mused.

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Robert knew he was not supposed to engage in battles until his wound healed, but he cared not one whit about his life. He cared not for the throne or the wars, in all honesty. He had pretty much died so long ago when he lost everything he fought for with Lyanna's death. Only his will to keep the Targaryens out of the Red Keep kept him going all these years. Otherwise, he'd have run off to Essos long ago on a ship and become a mercenary. He was a terrible king, and he knew he was not suited for the throne or even a castle.

And now, he knew for certain the family he had was an illusion far greater than he had even imagined. He had known Cersei hated him, and he deserved it as he could never see another woman in the place of Lyanna, no matter their beauty. But the Lannister woman had turned him into the laughingstock of the Seven Kingdoms by passing off her bastards as his children. A better man might have forgiven such an act, but Robert was no better man.

He knew that for certain. After all that he had done, he knew he was not welcomed into the hallowed heavens of the gods.

'If there were any gods, that is.' Robert thought with a scoff.

If there were gods, as the septons and the Northerners say, he'd certainly feel more relieved. At least he could take comfort in that he was not the only one doing nothing meaningful with all the power in his hands.

Pain flared up from his belly as he adjusted himself on the saddle. It took some effort not to give anything away as he was surrounded by his Kingsguard knights and an assortment of the finest knights from the Reach, the Crownlands and the Stormlands. He had stopped taking the Milk of the Poppy after he realised the pain was not going away. He sort of learned to live with the pain, and Robert could feel it was only getting worse as days went by.

Lord Tarly had done exemplary work in gathering some of the best warriors and having them flank him the whole time. Robert could not help but chuckle ruefully. The Lord of Horn Hill was under the impression all threats to his person could be dealt with by using some of the finest knights of the realm.

'Unfortunately, the greatest threat to Robert Baratheon comes from Robert Baratheon.' Robert thought amusedly, gritting his teeth as another sharp jab of pain flared up from his abdomen.

He gripped Godsgrief's handle for support, after which the pain became bearable. The hammer's weight in his hand was a comfort because he knew he was holding a weapon fit for the gods in his hands. He had tested the limits of its power in this war. The giant oak doors of Crakehall were broken by Godsgrief, and no shield or armour had withstood a blow from his hammer in the many battles he had fought in this war. He felt as if he was a god in mortal flesh whenever he wielded the hammer. The weapon was fit for a king, and it was one of the joys he had as a king other than fucking whores bowlegged and wining and dining to his heart's content.

Robert heaved Godsgrief and placed it against his shoulder while grinning at the battle raging ahead from a safe vantage point. The Dornish spears led by Prince Oberyn had bravely smashed into the Lannister lines, assisted by brave Reachmen. He could see several lion banners disengaged from the fighting and killing happening on the field of battle.

‘That cannot be tolerated. Running away from battle like cowards.’ Robert thought.

“To me, men. Let’s give the blonde cunts a good thumping they’ll never forget!” Robert shouted, raising Godsgrief above his head.

“Your grace, wait...!” Ser Barristan called after him, but Robert didn’t mind the Lord Commander of his Kingsguard.

Robert spurred his horse forward with the men of the Stormlands flanking him as he rode straight towards the enemy. Much of what happened afterwards passed in a blur for Robert as he was singularly focused, drowning out the pain he was feeling and skilling as many men from the Lannister army. He swung Godsgrief in all directions, expertly smashing in the heads and chests of enemy soldiers and knights that dared to tread closer to his reach. He could feel his heart drumming and nothing else as he killed man after man. Each swing of Godsgrief spilt blood, drowning out his own pain in the blood of his enemies. Knights, lords, and spearmen alike fell victim to Godsgrief, and in that moment, Robert felt invincible.

When the fight finally ended, Robert felt a weight settle on his throat. An excruciating pain developed in his belly, and in the next moment, he coughed out blood. His vision swam as he felt like his head was spinning.

“Robert.”

He gasped as he recognised the sound of Lyanna in his ears.

“Lyanna!” Robert muttered, his eyes seeing his long-dead betrothed standing close to his horse.

Godsgrief slipped from his hand, falling to the ground. He reached out with his free right hand to touch the beautiful face of his betrothed, and in the next moment, he was seeing the sky instead of the sparkling grey eyes of his dead betrothed.

“Lyanna!” Robert gasped as a searing pain lanced through his abdomen before darkness claimed him.

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Randyll Tarly stared at the prone form of King Robert after the Silent Sisters had cleaned the body with oils and rosewater. The body would be under the care of the maesters while in transit to the Stormlands. The arrangements were made in a hurry after Prince Stannis arrived in haste after ravens were sent to all loyal allies of House Baratheon regarding King Robert’s passing. The maesters proclaimed the king dead because of a burst belly, but he was unsure whether that was true. King Robert had been healthy after he rested properly after the siege of Crakehall. The injury suffered by the king was treated immediately, and the king had taken sufficient rest.

He suspected the maesters fumbled with King Robert's treatment somehow. He had said as much when Prince Stannis enquired. As a result, the Prince of Dragonstone had ordered the imprisonment of all maesters involved in treating King Robert after the siege of Crakehall. More could only be known after the maesters from the Citadel could properly decipher whether there was any foul play. The use of poison was also not ruled out at this point.

However, the most crucial problem lay in the succession as they were in the midst of a war, and King Robert had no direct heirs of his body. The natural succession would see Stannis Baratheon crowned king, but there was palpable tension among the lords as this would be the first time the Baratheon dynasty faced a succession crisis.

All eyes were now pointed at Stannis Baratheon to see what he'd decide.

"My coronation will happen at the Red Keep after I put Tywin Lannister's head on a spike as Robert desired." Stannis Baratheon declared boldly before the assembled lords.

"My prince, perhaps it'd be wise to have you crowned in Lannisport. The longer you wait, the succession will become perilous." Lord Swan cautioned.

"I have made my decision. I'll have the pledge of allegiance from the lords of the Stormlands, the Crownlands, the Reach and the Vale on the morrow. I'll have the fealty sworn from the Northerners and the Riverlands at Casterly Rock."