



TYRION

When dawn broke, he found he could not face the thought of food. *By evenfall I may stand condemned.* His belly was acid with bile, and his nose itched. Tyrion scratched at it with the point of his knife. *One last witness to endure, then my turn.* But what to do? Deny everything? Accuse Sansa and Ser Dontos? Confess, in the hope of spending the rest of his days on the Wall? Let the dice fly and pray the Red Viper could defeat Ser Gregor Clegane?

Tyrion stabbed listlessly at a greasy grey sausage, wishing it were his sister. *It is bloody cold on the Wall, but at least I would be shut of Cersei.* He did not think he would make much of a ranger, but the Night's Watch needed clever men as well as strong ones. Lord Commander Mormont had said as much, when Tyrion had visited Castle Black. *There are those inconvenient vows, though.* It would mean the end of his marriage and whatever claim he might ever have made for Casterly Rock, but he did not seem destined to enjoy either in any case. And he seemed to recall that there was a brothel in a nearby village.

It was not a life he'd ever dreamed of, but it was life. And all he had to do to earn it was trust in his father, stand up on his little stunted legs, and say, "Yes, I did it, I confess." That was the part that tied his bowels in knots. He almost wished he *had* done it, since it seemed he must suffer for it anyway.

“My lord?” said Podrick Payne. “They’re here, my lord. Ser Addam. And the gold cloaks. They wait without.”

“Pod, tell me true . . . do you think I did it?”

The boy hesitated. When he tried to speak, all he managed to produce was a weak sputter.

I am doomed. Tyrion sighed. “No need to answer. You’ve been a good squire to me. Better than I deserved. Whatever happens, I thank you for your leal service.”

Ser Addam Marbrand waited at the door with six gold cloaks. He had nothing to say this morning, it seemed. *Another good man who thinks me a kinslayer.* Tyrion summoned all the dignity he could find and waddled down the steps. He could feel them all watching him as he crossed the yard; the guards on the walls, the grooms by the stables, the scullions and washerwomen and serving girls. Inside the throne room, knights and lordlings moved aside to let them through, and whispered to their ladies.

No sooner had Tyrion taken his place before the judges than another group of gold cloaks led in Shae.

A cold hand tightened round his heart. *Varys betrayed her*, he thought. Then he remembered. *No. I betrayed her myself. I should have left her with Lollys. Of course they’d question Sansa’s maids, I’d do the same.* Tyrion rubbed at the slick scar where his nose had been, wondering why Cersei had bothered. *Shae knows nothing that can hurt me.*

“They plotted it together,” she said, this girl he’d loved. “The Imp and Lady Sansa plotted it after the Young Wolf died. Sansa wanted revenge for her brother and Tyrion meant to have the throne. He was going to kill his sister next, and then his own lord father, so he could be Hand for Prince Tommen. But after a year or so, before Tommen got too old, he would have killed him too, so as to take the crown for his own head.”

“How could you know all this?” demanded Prince Oberyn. “Why would the Imp divulge such plans to his wife’s maid?”

“I overheard some, m’lord,” said Shae, “and m’lady let things slip too. But most I had from his own lips. I wasn’t only Lady Sansa’s maid. I was his whore, all the time he was here in King’s Landing. On the morning of

the wedding, he dragged me down where they keep the dragon skulls and fucked me there with the monsters all around. And when I cried, he said I ought to be more grateful, that it wasn't every girl who got to be the king's whore. That was when he told me how he meant to be king. He said that poor boy Joffrey would never know his bride the way he was knowing me." She started sobbing then. "I never meant to be a whore, m'lords. I was to be married. A squire, he was, and a good brave boy, gentle born. But the Imp saw me at the Green Fork and put the boy I meant to marry in the front rank of the van, and after he was killed he sent his wildlings to bring me to his tent. Shagga, the big one, and Timett with the burned eye. He said if I didn't pleasure him, he'd give me to them, so I did. Then he brought me to the city, so I'd be close when he wanted me. He made me do such shameful things . . ."

Prince Oberyn looked curious. "What sorts of things?"

"*Unspeakable* things." As the tears rolled slowly down that pretty face, no doubt every man in the hall wanted to take Shae in his arms and comfort her. "With my mouth and . . . other parts, m'lord. All my parts. He used me every way there was, and . . . he used to make me tell him how big he was. *My giant*, I had to call him, *my giant of Lannister*."

Oswald Kettleblack was the first to laugh. Boros and Meryn joined in, then Cersei, Ser Loras, and more lords and ladies than he could count. The sudden gale of mirth made the rafters ring and shook the Iron Throne. "It's true," Shae protested. "My giant of Lannister." The laughter swelled twice as loud. Their mouths were twisted in merriment, their bellies shook. Some laughed so hard that snot flew from their nostrils.

I saved you all, Tyrion thought. *I saved this vile city and all your worthless lives*. There were hundreds in the throne room, every one of them laughing but his father. Or so it seemed. Even the Red Viper chortled, and Mace Tyrell looked like to bust a gut, but Lord Tywin Lannister sat between them as if made of stone, his fingers steepled beneath his chin.

Tyrion pushed forward. "*MY LORDS!*" he shouted. He had to shout, to have any hope of being heard.

His father raised a hand. Bit by bit, the hall grew silent.

“Get this lying whore out of my sight,” said Tyrion, “and I will give you your confession.”

Lord Tywin nodded, gestured. Shae looked half in terror as the gold cloaks formed up around her. Her eyes met Tyrion’s as they marched her from the wall. Was it shame he saw there, or fear? He wondered what Cersei had promised her. *You will get the gold or jewels, whatever it was you asked for*, he thought as he watched her back recede, *but before the moon has turned she’ll have you entertaining the gold cloaks in their barracks.*

Tyrion stared up at his father’s hard green eyes with their flecks of cold bright gold. “Guilty,” he said, “so guilty. Is that what you wanted to hear?”

Lord Tywin said nothing. Mace Tyrell nodded. Prince Oberyn looked mildly disappointed. “You admit you poisoned the king?”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Tyrion. “Of Joffrey’s death I am innocent. I am guilty of a more monstrous crime.” He took a step toward his father. “I was born. I lived. I am guilty of being a dwarf, I confess it. And no matter how many times my good father forgave me, I have persisted in my infamy.”

“This is folly, Tyrion,” declared Lord Tywin. “Speak to the matter at hand. You are not on trial for being a dwarf.”

“That is where you err, my lord. I have been on trial for being a dwarf my entire life.”

“Have you nothing to say in your defense?”

“Nothing but this: I did not do it. Yet now I wish I had.” He turned to face the hall, that sea of pale faces. “I wish I had enough poison for you all. You make me sorry that I am not the monster you would have me be, yet there it is. I am innocent, but I will get no justice here. You leave me no choice but to appeal to the gods. I demand trial by battle.”

“Have you taken leave of your wits?” his father said.

“No, I’ve found them. *I demand trial by battle!*”

His sweet sister could not have been more pleased. “He has that right, my lords,” she reminded the judges. “Let the gods judge. Ser Gregor Clegane

will stand for Joffrey. He returned to the city the night before last, to put his sword at my service.”

Lord Tywin’s face was so dark that for half a heartbeat Tyrion wondered if he’d drunk some poisoned wine as well. He slammed his fist down on the table, too angry to speak. It was Mace Tyrell who turned to Tyrion and asked the question. “Do you have a champion to defend your innocence?”

“He does, my lord.” Prince Oberyn of Dorne rose to his feet. “The dwarf has quite convinced me.”

The uproar was deafening. Tyrion took especial pleasure in the sudden doubt he glimpsed in Cersei’s eyes. It took a hundred gold cloaks pounding the butts of their spears against the floor to quiet the throne room again. By then Lord Tywin Lannister had recovered himself. “Let the issue be decided on the morrow,” he declared in iron tones. “I wash my hands of it.” He gave his dwarf son a cold angry look, then strode from the hall, out the king’s door behind the Iron Throne, his brother Kevan at his side.

Later, back in his tower cell, Tyrion poured himself a cup of wine and sent Podrick Payne off for cheese, bread, and olives. He doubted whether he could keep down anything heavier just now. *Did you think I would go meekly, Father?* he asked the shadow his candles etched upon the wall. *I have too much of you in me for that.* He felt strangely at peace, now that he had snatched the power of life and death from his father’s hands and placed it in the hands of the gods. *Assuming there are gods, and they give a mummer’s fart. If not, then I’m in Dornish hands.* No matter what happened, Tyrion had the satisfaction of knowing that he’d kicked Lord Tywin’s plans to splinters. If Prince Oberyn won, it would further inflame Highgarden against the Dornish; Mace Tyrell would see the man who crippled his son helping the dwarf who almost poisoned his daughter to escape his rightful punishment. And if the Mountain triumphed, Doran Martell might well demand to know why his brother had been served with death instead of the justice Tyrion had promised him. Dorne might crown Myrcella after all.

It was almost worth dying to know all the trouble he’d made. *Will you come to see the end, Shae? Will you stand there with the rest, watching as*

Ser Ilyn lops my ugly head off? Will you miss your giant of Lannister when he's dead? He drained his wine, flung the cup aside, and sang lustily.

*He rode through the streets of the city,
down from his hill on high,
O'er the wynds and the steps and the cobbles,
he rode to a woman's sigh.
For she was his secret treasure,
she was his shame and his bliss.
And a chain and a keep are nothing,
compared to a woman's kiss.*

Ser Kevan did not visit him that night. He was probably with Lord Tywin, trying to placate the Tyrells. *I have seen the last of that uncle, I fear.* He poured another cup of wine. A pity he'd had Symon Silver Tongue killed before learning all the words of that song. It wasn't a bad song, if truth be told. Especially compared to the ones that would be written about him henceforth. "*For hands of gold are always cold, but a woman's hands are warm,*" he sang. Perhaps he should write the other verses himself. If he lived so long.

That night, surprisingly, Tyrion Lannister slept long and deep. He rose at first light, well rested and with a hearty appetite, and broke his fast on fried bread, blood sausage, applecakes, and a double helping of eggs cooked with onions and fiery Dornish peppers. Then he begged leave of his guards to attend his champion. Ser Addam gave his consent.

Tyrion found Prince Oberyn drinking a cup of red wine as he donned his armor. He was attended by four of his younger Dornish lordlings. "Good morrow to you, my lord," the prince said. "Will you take a cup of wine?"

"Should you be drinking before battle?"

"I always drink before battle."

"That could get you killed. Worse, it could get *me* killed."

Prince Oberyn laughed. "The gods defend the innocent. You *are* innocent, I trust?"

"Only of killing Joffrey," Tyrion admitted. "I do hope you know what you are about to face. Gregor Clegane is—"

"—large? So I have heard."

“He is almost eight feet tall and must weigh thirty stone, all of it muscle. He fights with a two-handed greatsword, but needs only one hand to wield it. He has been known to cut men in half with a single blow. His armor is so heavy that no lesser man could bear the weight, let alone move in it.”

Prince Oberyn was unimpressed. “I have killed large men before. The trick is to get them off their feet. Once they go down, they’re dead.” The Dornishman sounded so blithely confident that Tyrion felt almost reassured, until he turned and said, “Daemon, my spear!” Ser Daemon tossed it to him, and the Red Viper snatched it from the air.

“You mean to face the Mountain with a *spear*?” That made Tyrion uneasy all over again. In battle, ranks of massed spears made for a formidable front, but single combat against a skilled swordsman was a very different matter.

“We are fond of spears in Dorne. Besides, it is the only way to counter his reach. Have a look, Lord Imp, but see you do not touch.” The spear was turned ash eight feet long, the shaft smooth, thick, and heavy. The last two feet of that was steel: a slender leaf-shaped spearhead narrowing to a wicked spike. The edges looked sharp enough to shave with. When Oberyn spun the haft between the palms of his hand, they glistened black. *Oil? Or poison?* Tyrion decided that he would sooner not know. “I hope you are good with that,” he said doubtfully.

“You will have no cause for complaint. Though Ser Gregor may. However thick his plate, there will be gaps at the joints. Inside the elbow and knee, beneath the arms . . . I will find a place to tickle him, I promise you.” He set the spear aside. “It is said that a Lannister always pays his debts. Perhaps you will return to Sunspear with me when the day’s bloodletting is done. My brother Doran would be most pleased to meet the rightful heir to Casterly Rock . . . especially if he brought his lovely wife, the Lady of Winterfell.”

Does the snake think I have Sansa squirreled away somewhere, like a nut I’m hoarding for winter? If so, Tyrion was not about to disabuse him. “A trip to Dorne might be very pleasant, now that I reflect on it.”

“Plan on a lengthy visit.” Prince Oberyn sipped his wine. “You and Doran have many matters of mutual interest to discuss. Music, trade,

history, wine, the dwarf's penny . . . the laws of inheritance and succession. No doubt an uncle's counsel would be of benefit to Queen Myrcella in the trying times ahead."

If Varys had his little birds listening, Oberyn was giving them a ripe earful. "I believe I will have that cup of wine," said Tyrion. *Queen Myrcella?* It would have been more tempting if only he did have Sansa tucked beneath his cloak. *If she declared for Myrcella over Tommen, would the north follow?* What the Red Viper was hinting at was treason. Could Tyrion truly take up arms against Tommen, against his own father? *Cersei would spit blood.* It might be worth it for that alone.

"Do you recall the tale I told you of our first meeting, Imp?" Prince Oberyn asked, as the Bastard of Godsgrace knelt before him to fasten his greaves. "It was not for your tail alone that my sister and I came to Casterly Rock. We were on a quest of sorts. A quest that took us to Starfall, the Arbor, Oldtown, the Shield Islands, Crakehall, and finally Casterly Rock . . . but our true destination was marriage. Doran was betrothed to Lady Mellario of Norvos, so he had been left behind as castellan of Sunspear. My sister and I were yet unpromised.

"Elia found it all exciting. She was of that age, and her delicate health had never permitted her much travel. I preferred to amuse myself by mocking my sister's suitors. There was Little Lord Lazyeye, Squire Squishlips, one I named the Whale That Walks, that sort of thing. The only one who was even halfway presentable was young Baelor Hightower. A pretty lad, and my sister was half in love with him until he had the misfortune to fart once in our presence. I promptly named him Baelor Breakwind, and after that Elia couldn't look at him without laughing. I was a monstrous young fellow, someone should have sliced out my vile tongue."

Yes, Tyrion agreed silently. Baelor Hightower was no longer young, but he remained Lord Leyton's heir; wealthy, handsome, and a knight of splendid repute. *Baelor Brightsmile*, they called him now. Had Elia wed him in place of Rhaegar Targaryen, she might be in Oldtown with her children growing tall around her. He wondered how many lives had been snuffed out by that fart.

“Lannisport was the end of our voyage,” Prince Oberyn went on, as Ser Arron Qorgyle helped him into a padded leather tunic and began lacing it up the back. “Were you aware that our mothers knew each other of old?”

“They had been at court together as girls, I seem to recall. Companions to Princess Rhaella?”

“Just so. It was my belief that the mothers had cooked up this plot between them. Squire Squishlips and his ilk and the various pimply young maidens who’d been paraded before me were the almonds before the feast, meant only to whet our appetites. The main course was to be served at Casterly Rock.”

“Cersei and Jaime.”

“Such a clever dwarf. Elia and I were older, to be sure. Your brother and sister could not have been more than eight or nine. Still, a difference of five or six years is little enough. And there was an empty cabin on our ship, a very nice cabin, such as might be kept for a person of high birth. As if it were intended that we take someone back to Sunspear. A young page, perhaps. Or a companion for Elia. Your lady mother meant to betroth Jaime to my sister, or Cersei to me. Perhaps both.”

“Perhaps,” said Tyrion, “but my father—”

“—ruled the Seven Kingdoms, but was ruled at home by his lady wife, or so *my* mother always said.” Prince Oberyn raised his arms, so Lord Dagos Manwoody and the Bastard of Godsgrace could slip a chainmail byrnie down over his head. “At Oldtown we learned of your mother’s death, and the monstrous child she had borne. We might have turned back there, but my mother chose to sail on. I told you of the welcome we found at Casterly Rock.

“What I did not tell you was that my mother waited as long as was decent, and then broached your father about our purpose. Years later, on her deathbed, she told me that Lord Tywin had refused us brusquely. His daughter was meant for Prince Rhaegar, he informed her. And when she asked for Jaime, to espouse Elia, he offered her you instead.”

“Which offer she took for an outrage.”

“It *was*. Even you can see that, surely?”

“Oh, surely.” *It all goes back and back*, Tyrion thought, *to our mothers and fathers and theirs before them. We are puppets dancing on the strings of those who came before us, and one day our own children will take up our strings and dance on in our steads.* “Well, Prince Rhaegar married Elia of Dorne, not Cersei Lannister of Casterly Rock. So it would seem your mother won that tilt.”

“She thought so,” Prince Oberyn agreed, “but your father is not a man to forget such slights. He taught that lesson to Lord and Lady Tarbeck once, and to the Reynes of Castamere. And at King’s Landing, he taught it to my sister. My helm, Dagos.” Manwoody handed it to him; a high golden helm with a copper disk mounted on the brow, the sun of Dorne. The visor had been removed, Tyrion saw. “Elia and her children have waited long for justice.” Prince Oberyn pulled on soft red leather gloves, and took up his spear again. “But this day they shall have it.”

The outer ward had been chosen for the combat. Tyrion had to skip and run to keep up with Prince Oberyn’s long strides. *The snake is eager*, he thought. *Let us hope he is venomous as well.* The day was grey and windy. The sun was struggling to break through the clouds, but Tyrion could no more have said who was going to win that fight than the one on which his life depended.

It looked as though a thousand people had come to see if he would live or die. They lined the castle wallwalks and elbowed one another on the steps of keeps and towers. They watched from the stable doors, from windows and bridges, from balconies and roofs. And the yard was packed with them, so many that the gold cloaks and the knights of the Kingsguard had to shove them back to make enough room for the fight. Some had dragged out chairs to watch more comfortably, while others perched on barrels. *We should have done this in the Dragonpit*, Tyrion thought sourly. *We could have charged a penny a head and paid for Joffrey’s wedding and funeral both.* Some of the onlookers even had small children sitting on their shoulders, to get a better view. They shouted and pointed at the sight of Tyrion.

Cersei seemed half a child herself beside Ser Gregor. In his armor, the Mountain looked bigger than any man had any right to be. Beneath a long yellow surcoat bearing the three black dogs of Clegane, he wore heavy plate

over chainmail, dull grey steel dented and scarred in battle. Beneath that would be boiled leather and a layer of quilting. A flat-topped greathelm was bolted to his gorget, with breaths around the mouth and nose and a narrow slit for vision. The crest atop it was a stone fist.

If Ser Gregor was suffering from wounds, Tyrion could see no sign of it from across the yard. *He looks as though he was chiseled out of rock, standing there.* His greatsword was planted in the ground before him, six feet of scarred metal. Ser Gregor's huge hands, clad in gauntlets of lobstered steel, clasped the crosshilt to either side of the grip. Even Prince Oberyn's paramour paled at the sight of him. "You are going to fight *that*?" Ellaria Sand said in a hushed voice.

"I am going to kill that," her lover replied carelessly.

Tyrion had his own doubts, now that they stood on the brink. When he looked at Prince Oberyn, he found himself wishing he had Bronn defending him . . . or even better, Jaime. The Red Viper was lightly armored; greaves, vambraces, gorget, spaulder, steel codpiece. Elsewise Oberyn was clad in supple leather and flowing silks. Over his byrnie he wore his scales of gleaming copper, but mail and scale together would not give him a quarter the protection of Gregor's heavy plate. With its visor removed, the prince's helm was effectively no better than a half-helm, lacking even a nasal. His round steel shield was brightly polished, and showed the sun-and-spear in red gold, yellow gold, white gold, and copper.

Dance around him until he's so tired he can hardly lift his arm, then put him on his back. The Red Viper seemed to have the same notion as Bronn. But the sellsword had been blunt about the risks of such tactics. *I hope to seven hells that you know what you are doing, snake.*

A platform had been erected beside the Tower of the Hand, halfway between the two champions. That was where Lord Tywin sat with his brother Ser Kevan. King Tommen was not in evidence; for that, at least, Tyrion was grateful.

Lord Tywin glanced briefly at his dwarf son, then lifted his hand. A dozen trumpeters blew a fanfare to quiet the crowd. The High Septon shuffled forward in his tall crystal crown, and prayed that the Father Above would help them in this judgment, and that the Warrior would lend his

strength to the arm of the man whose cause was just. *That would be me*, Tyrion almost shouted, but they would only laugh, and he was sick unto death of laughter.

Ser Osmund Kettleblack brought Clegane his shield, a massive thing of heavy oak rimmed in black iron. As the Mountain slid his left arm through the straps, Tyrion saw that the hounds of Clegane had been painted over. This morning Ser Gregor bore the seven-pointed star the Andals had brought to Westeros when they crossed the narrow sea to overwhelm the First Men and their gods. *Very pious of you, Cersei, but I doubt the gods will be impressed.*

There were fifty yards between them. Prince Oberyn advanced quickly, Ser Gregor more ominously. *The ground does not shake when he walks*, Tyrion told himself. *That is only my heart fluttering.* When the two men were ten yards apart, the Red Viper stopped and called out, “Have they told you who I am?”

Ser Gregor grunted through his breaths. “Some dead man.” He came on, inexorable.

The Dornishman slid sideways. “I am Oberyn Martell, a prince of Dorne,” he said, as the Mountain turned to keep him in sight. “Princess Elia was my sister.”

“Who?” asked Gregor Clegane.

Oberyn’s long spear jabbed, but Ser Gregor took the point on his shield, shoved it aside, and bulled back at the prince, his great sword flashing. The Dornishman spun away untouched. The spear darted forward. Clegane slashed at it, Martell snapped it back, then thrust again. Metal screamed on metal as the spearhead slid off the Mountain’s chest, slicing through the surcoat and leaving a long bright scratch on the steel beneath. “Elia Martell, Princess of Dorne,” the Red Viper hissed. “You raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children.”

Ser Gregor grunted. He made a ponderous charge to hack at the Dornishman’s head. Prince Oberyn avoided him easily. “You raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children.”

“Did you come to talk or to fight?”

“I came to hear you confess.” The Red Viper landed a quick thrust on the Mountain’s belly, to no effect. Gregor cut at him, and missed. The long spear lanced in above his sword. Like a serpent’s tongue it flickered in and out, feinting low and landing high, jabbing at groin, shield, eyes. *The Mountain makes for a big target, at the least*, Tyrion thought. Prince Oberyn could scarcely miss, though none of his blows was penetrating Ser Gregor’s heavy plate. The Dornishman kept circling, jabbing, then darting back again, forcing the bigger man to turn and turn again. *Clegane is losing sight of him*. The Mountain’s helm had a narrow eyeslit, severely limiting his vision. Oberyn was making good use of that, and the length of his spear, and his quickness.

It went on that way for what seemed a long time. Back and forth they moved across the yard, and round and round in spirals, Ser Gregor slashing at the air while Oberyn’s spear struck at arm, and leg, twice at his temple. Gregor’s big wooden shield took its share of hits as well, until a dog’s head peeped out from under the star, and elsewhere the raw oak showed through. Clegane would grunt from time to time, and once Tyrion heard him mutter a curse, but otherwise he fought in a sullen silence.

Not Oberyn Martell. “You raped her,” he called, feinting. “You murdered her,” he said, dodging a looping cut from Gregor’s greatsword. “You killed her children,” he shouted, slamming the spearpoint into the giant’s throat, only to have it glance off the thick steel gorget with a screech.

“Oberyn is toying with him,” said Ellaria Sand.

That is fool’s play, thought Tyrion. “The Mountain is too bloody big to be any man’s toy.”

All around the yard, the throng of spectators was creeping in toward the two combatants, edging forward inch by inch to get a better view. The Kingsguard tried to keep them back, shoving at the gawkers forcefully with their big white shields, but there were hundreds of gawkers and only six of the men in white armor.

“You raped her.” Prince Oberyn parried a savage cut with his spearhead. “You murdered her.” He sent the spearpoint at Clegane’s eyes, so fast the huge man flinched back. “You killed her children.” The spear flickered sideways and down, scraping against the Mountain’s breastplate. “You

raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children.” The spear was two feet longer than Ser Gregor’s sword, more than enough to keep him at an awkward distance. He hacked at the shaft whenever Oberyn lunged at him, trying to lop off the spearhead, but he might as well have been trying to hack the wings off a fly. “You raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children.” Gregor tried to bull rush, but Oberyn skipped aside and circled round his back. “You raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children.”

“Be quiet.” Ser Gregor seemed to be moving a little slower, and his greatsword no longer rose quite so high as it had when the contest began. “Shut your bloody mouth.”

“You raped her,” the prince said, moving to the right.

“*Enough!*” Ser Gregor took two long strides and brought his sword down at Oberyn’s head, but the Dornishman backstepped once more. “You murdered her,” he said.

“*SHUT UP!*” Gregor charged headlong, right at the point of the spear, which slammed into his right breast then slid aside with a hideous steel shriek. Suddenly the Mountain was close enough to strike, his huge sword flashing in a steel blur. The crowd was screaming as well. Oberyn slipped the first blow and let go of the spear, useless now that Ser Gregor was inside it. The second cut the Dornishman caught on his shield. Metal met metal with an ear-splitting clang, sending the Red Viper reeling. Ser Gregor followed, bellowing. *He doesn’t use words, he just roars like an animal*, Tyrion thought. Oberyn’s retreat became a headlong backward flight mere inches ahead of the greatsword as it slashed at his chest, his arms, his head.

The stable was behind him. Spectators screamed and shoved at each other to get out of the way. One stumbled into Oberyn’s back. Ser Gregor hacked down with all his savage strength. The Red Viper threw himself sideways, rolling. The luckless stableboy behind him was not so quick. As his arm rose to protect his face, Gregor’s sword took it off between elbow and shoulder. “*Shut UP!*” the Mountain howled at the stableboy’s scream, and this time he swung the blade sideways, sending the top half of the lad’s head across the yard in a spray of blood and brains. Hundreds of spectators suddenly seemed to lose all interest in the guilt or innocence of Tyrion

Lannister, judging by the way they pushed and shoved at each other to escape the yard.

But the Red Viper of Dorne was back on his feet, his long spear in hand. “Elia,” he called at Ser Gregor. “You raped her. You murdered her. You killed her children. Now say her name.”

The Mountain whirled. Helm, shield, sword, surcoat; he was spattered with gore from head to heels. “You talk too much,” he grumbled. “You make my head hurt.”

“I will hear you say it. She was Elia of Dorne.”

The Mountain snorted contemptuously, and came on . . . and in that moment, the sun broke through the low clouds that had hidden the sky since dawn.

The sun of Dorne, Tyrion told himself, but it was Gregor Clegane who moved first to put the sun at his back. *This is a dim and brutal man, but he has a warrior’s instincts.*

The Red Viper crouched, squinting, and sent his spear darting forward again. Ser Gregor hacked at it, but the thrust had only been a feint. Off balance, he stumbled forward a step.

Prince Oberyn tilted his dented metal shield. A shaft of sunlight blazed blindingly off polished gold and copper, into the narrow slit of his foe’s helm. Clegane lifted his own shield against the glare. Prince Oberyn’s spear flashed like lightning and found the gap in the heavy plate, the joint under the arm. The point punched through mail and boiled leather. Gregor gave a choked grunt as the Dornishman twisted his spear and yanked it free. “Elia. Say it! Elia of Dorne!” He was circling, spear poised for another thrust. “*Say it!*”

Tyrion had his own prayer. *Fall down and die*, was how it went. *Damn you, fall down and die!* The blood trickling from the Mountain’s armpit was his own now, and he must be bleeding even more heavily inside the breastplate. When he tried to take a step, one knee buckled. Tyrion thought he was going down.

Prince Oberyn had circled behind him. “*ELIA OF DORNE!*” he shouted. Ser Gregor started to turn, but too slow and too late. The spearhead went

through the back of the knee this time, through the layers of chain and leather between the plates on thigh and calf. The Mountain reeled, swayed, then collapsed face first on the ground. His huge sword went flying from his hand. Slowly, ponderously, he rolled onto his back.

The Dornishman flung away his ruined shield, grasped the spear in both hands, and sauntered away. Behind him the Mountain let out a groan, and pushed himself onto an elbow. Oberyn whirled cat-quick, and *ran* at his fallen foe. “*EEEEELLLLLLIIIIIAAAAA!*” he screamed, as he drove the spear down with the whole weight of his body behind it. The *crack* of the ashwood shaft snapping was almost as sweet a sound as Cersei’s wail of fury, and for an instant Prince Oberyn had wings. *The snake has vaulted over the Mountain.* Four feet of broken spear jutted from Clegane’s belly as Prince Oberyn rolled, rose, and dusted himself off. He tossed aside the splintered spear and claimed his foe’s greatsword. “If you die before you say her name, ser, I will hunt you through all seven hells,” he promised.

Ser Gregor tried to rise. The broken spear had gone through him, and was pinning him to the ground. He wrapped both hands about the shaft, grunting, but could not pull it out. Beneath him was a spreading pool of red. “I am feeling more innocent by the instant,” Tyrion told Ellaria Sand beside him.

Prince Oberyn moved closer. “*Say the name!*” He put a foot on the Mountain’s chest and raised the greatsword with both hands. Whether he intended to hack off Gregor’s head or shove the point through his eyeslit was something Tyrion would never know.

Clegane’s hand shot up and grabbed the Dornishman behind the knee. The Red Viper brought down the greatsword in a wild slash, but he was off-balance, and the edge did no more than put another dent in the Mountain’s vambrace. Then the sword was forgotten as Gregor’s hand tightened and twisted, yanking the Dornishman down on top of him. They wrestled in the dust and blood, the broken spear wobbling back and forth. Tyrion saw with horror that the Mountain had wrapped one huge arm around the prince, drawing him tight against his chest, like a lover.

“Elia of Dorne,” they all heard Ser Gregor say, when they were close enough to kiss. His deep voice boomed within the helm. “I killed her

screaming whelp.” He thrust his free hand into Oberyn’s unprotected face, pushing steel fingers into his eyes. “*Then* I raped her.” Clegane slammed his fist into the Dornishman’s mouth, making splinters of his teeth. “Then I smashed her fucking head in. Like this.” As he drew back his huge fist, the blood on his gauntlet seemed to smoke in the cold dawn air. There was a sickening *crunch*. Ellaria Sand wailed in terror, and Tyrion’s breakfast came boiling back up. He found himself on his knees retching bacon and sausage and applecakes, and that double helping of fried eggs cooked up with onions and fiery Dornish peppers.

He never heard his father speak the words that condemned him. Perhaps no words were necessary. *I put my life in the Red Viper’s hands, and he dropped it*. When he remembered, too late, that snakes had no hands, Tyrion began to laugh hysterically.

He was halfway down the serpentine steps before he realized that the gold cloaks were not taking him back to his tower room. “I’ve been consigned to the black cells,” he said. They did not bother to answer. *Why waste your breath on the dead?*