TYRION

The sow had a sweeter temper than some horses he had ridden. Patient and sure-footed, she accepted Tyrion with hardly a squeal when he clambered onto her back, and remained motionless as he reached for shield and lance. Yet when he gathered up her reins and pressed his feet into her side, she moved at once. Her name was Pretty, short for Pretty Pig, and she had been trained to saddle and bridle since she was a piglet.

The painted wooden armor clattered as Pretty trotted across the deck. Tyrion's armpits were prickly with perspiration, and a bead of sweat was trickling down his scar beneath the oversized, ill-fitting helm, yet for one absurd moment he felt almost like Jaime, riding out onto a tourney field with lance in hand, his golden armor flashing in the sun.

When the laughter began, the dream dissolved. He was no champion, just a dwarf on a pig clutching a stick, capering for the amusement of some restless rum-soaked sailors in hopes of sweetening their mood. Somewhere down in hell his father was seething and Joffrey was chuckling. Tyrion could feel their cold dead eyes watching this mummer's face, as avid as the crew of the *Selaesori Qhoran*.

And now here came his foe. Penny rode her big grey dog, her striped lance waving drunkenly as the beast bounded across the deck. Her shield and armor had been painted red, though the paint was chipped and fading; his own armor was blue. *Not mine. Groat's. Never mine, I pray.*

Tyrion kicked at Pretty's haunches to speed her to a charge as the sailors urged him on with hoots and shouts. Whether they were shouting encouragement or mocking him he could not have said for certain, though he had a fair notion. Why did I ever allow myself to be talked into this farce?

He knew the answer, though. For twelve days now the ship had floated becalmed in the Gulf of Grief. The mood of the crew was ugly, and like to turn uglier when their daily rum ration went dry. There were only so many

hours a man could devote to mending sails, caulking leaks, and fishing. Jorah Mormont had heard the muttering about how dwarf luck had failed them. Whilst the ship's cook still gave Tyrion's head a rub from time to time, in hopes that it might stir a wind, the rest had taken to giving him venomous looks whenever he crossed their paths. Penny's lot was even worse, since the cook had put about the notion that squeezing a dwarf girl's breast might be just the thing to win their luck back. He had also started referring to Pretty Pig as *Bacon*, a jape that had seemed much funnier when Tyrion had made it.

"We have to make them laugh," Penny had said, pleading. "We have to make them like us. If we give them a show, it will help them forget. *Please*, m'lord." And somehow, somewise, someway he had consented. *It must have been the rum*. The captain's wine had been the first thing to run out. You could get drunk much quicker on rum than on wine, Tyrion Lannister had discovered.

So he found himself clad in Groat's painted wooden armor, astride Groat's sow, whilst Groat's sister instructed him in the finer points of the mummer's joust that had been their bread and salt. It had a certain delicious irony to it, considering that Tyrion had almost lost his head once by refusing to mount the dog for his nephew's twisted amusement. Yet somehow he found it difficult to appreciate the humor of it all from sowback.

Penny's lance descended just in time for its blunted point to brush his shoulder; his own lance wobbled as he brought it down and banged it noisily off a corner of her shield. She kept her seat. He lost his. But then, he was supposed to.

Easy as falling off a pig ... though falling off this particular pig was harder than it looked. Tyrion curled into a ball as he dropped, remembering his lesson, but even so, he hit the deck with a solid *thump* and bit his tongue so hard he tasted blood. He felt as if he were twelve again, cartwheeling across the supper table in Casterly Rock's great hall. Back then his uncle Gerion had been on hand to praise his efforts, in place of surly sailors. Their laughter seemed sparse and strained compared to the great gales that had greeted Groat's and Penny's antics at Joffrey's wedding feast, and some hissed at him in anger. "No-Nose, you ride same way you look, ugly," one

man shouted from the sterncastle. "Must have no balls, let girl beat you." *He wagered coin on me*, Tyrion decided. He let the insult wash right over him. He had heard worse in his time.

The wooden armor made rising awkward. He found himself flailing like a turtle on its back. That, at least, set a few of the sailors to laughing. A shame I did not break my leg, that would have left them howling. And if they had been in that privy when I shot my father through the bowels, they might have laughed hard enough to shit their breeches right along with him. But anything to keep the bloody bastards sweet.

Jorah Mormont finally took pity on Tyrion's struggles and pulled him to his feet. "You looked a fool."

That was the intent. "It is hard to look a hero when mounted on a pig."

"That must be why I stay off pigs."

Tyrion unbuckled his helm, twisted it off, and spat a gobbet of bloody pink phlegm over the side. "It feels as though I bit through half my tongue."

"Next time bite harder." Ser Jorah shrugged. "Truth be told, I've seen worse jousters."

Was that praise? "I fell off the bloody pig and bit my tongue. What could possibly be worse than that?"

"Getting a splinter through your eye and dying."

Penny had vaulted off her dog, a big grey brute called Crunch. "The thing is not to joust well, Hugor." She was always careful to call him Hugor where anyone might hear. "The thing is to make them laugh and throw coins."

Poor payment for the blood and bruises, Tyrion thought, but he kept that to himself as well. "We failed at that as well. No one threw coins." Not a penny, not a groat.

"They will when we get better." Penny pulled off her helm. Mouse-brown hair spilled down to her ears. Her eyes were brown too, beneath a heavy

shelf of brow, her cheeks smooth and flushed. She pulled some acorns from a leather bag for Pretty Pig. The sow ate them from her hand, squealing happily. "When we perform for Queen Daenerys the silver will rain down, you'll see."

Some of the sailors were shouting at them and slamming their heels against the deck, demanding another tilt. The ship's cook was the loudest, as always. Tyrion had learned to despise that man, even if he was the only half-decent *cyvasse* player on the cog. "You see, they liked us," Penny said, with a hopeful little smile. "Shall we go again, Hugor?"

He was on the point of refusing when a shout from one of the mates spared him the necessity. It was midmorning, and the captain wanted the boats out again. The cog's huge striped sail hung limply from her mast, as it had for days, but he was hopeful that they could find a wind somewhere to the north. That meant rowing. The boats were small, however, and the cog was large; towing it was hot, sweaty, exhausting work that left the hands blistered and the back aching, and accomplished nothing. The crew hated it. Tyrion could not blame them. "The widow should have put us on a galley," he muttered sourly. "If someone could help me out of these bloody planks, I would be grateful. I think I may have a splinter through my crotch."

Mormont did the duty, albeit with poor grace. Penny collected her dog and pig and led them both below. "You might want to tell your lady to keep her door closed and barred when she's inside," Ser Jorah said as he was undoing the buckles on the straps that joined the wooden breastplate to the backplate. "I'm hearing too much talk about ribs and hams and bacon."

"That pig is half her livelihood."

"A Ghiscari crew would eat the dog as well." Mormont pulled the breastplate and backplate apart. "Just tell her."

"As you wish." His tunic was soaked with sweat and clinging to his chest. Tyrion plucked at it, wishing for a bit of breeze. The wooden armor was as hot and heavy as it was uncomfortable. Half of it looked to be old paint, layer on layer on layer of it, from a hundred past repaintings. At Joffrey's wedding feast, he recalled, one rider had displayed the direwolf of Robb

Stark, the other the arms and colors of Stannis Baratheon. "We will need both animals if we're to tilt for Queen Daenerys," he said. If the sailors took it in their heads to butcher Pretty Pig, neither he nor Penny could hope to stop them ... but Ser Jorah's longsword might give them pause, at least.

"Is that how you hope to keep your head, Imp?"

"Ser Imp, if you please. And yes. Once Her Grace knows my true worth, she'll cherish me. I am a lovable little fellow, after all, and I know many useful things about my kin. But until such time I had best keep her amused."

"Caper as you like, it won't wash out your crimes. Daenerys Targaryen is no silly child to be diverted by japes and tumbles. She will deal with you justly."

Oh, I hope not. Tyrion studied Mormont with his mismatched eyes. "And how will she welcome you, this just queen? A warm embrace, a girlish titter, a headsman's axe?" He grinned at the knight's obvious discomfit. "Did you truly expect me to believe you were about the queen's business in that whorehouse? Defending her from half a world away? Or could it be that you were running, that your dragon queen sent you from her side? But why would she ... oh, wait, you were spying on her." Tyrion made a clucking sound. "You hope to buy your way back into her favor by presenting her with me. An ill-considered scheme, I'd say. One might even say an act of drunken desperation. Perhaps if I were Jaime ... but Jaime killed her father, I only killed my own. You think Daenerys will execute me and pardon you, but the reverse is just as likely. Maybe you should hop up on that pig, Ser Jorah. Put on a suit of iron motley, like Florian the—"

The blow the big knight gave him cracked his head around and knocked him sideways, so hard that his head bounced off the deck. Blood filled his mouth as he staggered back onto one knee. He spat out a broken tooth. *Growing prettier every day, but I do believe I poked a wound.* "Did the dwarf say something to offend you, ser?" Tyrion asked innocently, wiping bubbles of blood off his broken lip with the back of his hand.

"I am sick of your mouth, dwarf," said Mormont. "You still have a few teeth left. If you want to keep them, stay away from me for the rest of this voyage."

"That could be difficult. We share a cabin."

"You can find somewhere else to sleep. Down in the hold, up on deck, it makes no matter. Just keep out of my sight."

Tyrion pulled himself back to his feet. "As you wish," he answered, through a mouthful of blood, but the big knight was already gone, his boots pounding on the deckboards.

Below, in the galley, Tyrion was rinsing out his mouth with rum and water and wincing at the sting when Penny found him. "I heard what happened. Oh, are you hurt?"

He shrugged. "A bit of blood and a broken tooth." *But I believe I hurt him more*. "And him a knight. Sad to say, I would not count on Ser Jorah should we need protection."

"What did you do? Oh, your lip is bleeding." She slipped a square from her sleeve and dabbed at it. "What did you say?"

"A few truths Ser Bezoar did not care to hear."

"You mustn't mock him. Don't you know *anything*? You can't talk that way to a big person. They can *hurt* you. Ser Jorah could have tossed you in the sea. The sailors would have laughed to see you drown. You have to be careful around big people. Be jolly and playful with them, keep them smiling, make them laugh, that's what my father always said. Didn't your father ever tell you how to act with big people?"

"My father called them smallfolk," said Tyrion, "and he was not what you'd call a jolly man." He took another sip of watered rum, sloshed it around his mouth, spat it out. "Still, I take your point. I have a deal to learn about being a dwarf. Perhaps you will be good enough to teach me, in between the jousting and the pig-riding."

"I will, m'lord. Gladly. But ... what were these truths? Why did Ser Jorah hit you so hard?"

"Why, for love. The same reason that I stewed that singer." He thought of Shae and the look in her eyes as he tightened the chain about her throat, twisting it in his fist. A chain of golden hands. For hands of gold are always gold, but a woman's hands are warm. "Are you a maid, Penny?"

She blushed. "Yes. Of course. Who would have—"

"Stay that way. Love is madness, and lust is poison. Keep your maidenhead. You'll be happier for it, and you're less like to find yourself in some dingy brothel on the Rhoyne with a whore who looks a bit like your lost love." *Or chasing across half the world, hoping to find wherever whores go.* "Ser Jorah dreams of rescuing his dragon queen and basking in her gratitude, but I know a thing or two about the gratitude of kings, and I'd sooner have a palace in Valyria." He broke off suddenly. "Did you feel that? The ship moved."

"It did." Penny's face lit up with joy. "We're moving again. The wind ..." She rushed to the door. "I want to see. Come, I'll race you up." Off she went.

She is young, Tyrion had to remind himself, as Penny scrambled from the galley and up the steep wooden steps as fast as her short legs would allow. *Almost a child.* Still, it tickled him to see her excitement. He followed her topside.

The sail had come to life again, billowing, emptying, then billowing again, the red stripes on the canvas wriggling like snakes. Sailors dashed across the decks and hauled on lines as the mates bellowed orders in the tongue of Old Volantis. The rowers in the ship's boats had loosed their tow ropes and turned back toward the cog, stroking hard. The wind was blowing from the west, swirling and gusting, clutching at ropes and cloaks like a mischievous child. The *Selaesori Qhoran* was under way.

Might be we'll make Meereen after all, Tyrion thought.

But when he clambered up the ladder to the sterncastle and looked off from the stern, his smile faltered. *Blue sky and blue sea here, but off west ... I have never seen a sky that color.* A thick band of clouds ran along the horizon. "A bar sinister," he said to Penny, pointing.

"What does that mean?" she asked. "It means some big bastard is creeping up behind us."

He was surprised to find that Moqorro and two of his fiery fingers had joined them on the sterncastle. It was only midday, and the red priest and his men did not normally emerge till dusk. The priest gave him a solemn nod. "There you see it, Hugor Hill. God's wroth. The Lord of Light will not be mocked."

Tyrion had a bad feeling about this. "The widow said this ship would never reach her destination. I took that to mean that once we were out to sea beyond the reach of triarchs, the captain would change course for Meereen. Or perhaps that you would seize the ship with your Fiery Hand and take us to Daenerys. But that isn't what your high priest saw at all, is it?"

"No." Moqorro's deep voice tolled as solemnly as a funeral bell. "This is what he saw." The red priest lifted his staff, and inclined its head toward the west.

Penny was lost. "I don't understand. What does it mean?"

"It means we had best get below. Ser Jorah has exiled me from our cabin. Might I hide in yours when the time comes?"

"Yes," she said. "You would be ... oh ..."

For the better part of three hours they ran before the wind, as the storm grew closer. The western sky went green, then grey, then black. A wall of dark clouds loomed up behind them, churning like a kettle of milk left on the fire too long. Tyrion and Penny watched from the forecastle, huddled by the figurehead and holding hands, careful to stay out of the way of captain and crew.

The last storm had been thrilling, intoxicating, a sudden squall that had left him feeling cleansed and refreshed. This one felt different right from the first. The captain sensed it too. He changed their course to north by northeast to try and get out of the storm's path.

It was a futile effort. This storm was too big. The seas around them grew rougher. The wind began to howl. The *Stinky Steward* rose and fell as waves smashed against her hull. Behind them lightning stabbed down from the sky, blinding purple bolts that danced across the sea in webs of light. Thunder followed. "The time has come to hide." Tyrion took Penny by the arm and led her belowdecks.

Pretty and Crunch were were both half-mad with fear. The dog was barking, barking, barking. He knocked Tyrion right off his feet as they entered. The sow had been shitting everywhere. Tyrion cleaned that up as best he could whilst Penny tried to calm the animals. Then they tied down or put away anything that was still loose. "I'm frightened," Penny confessed. The cabin had begun to tilt and jump, going this way and that as the waves hammered at the hull of the ship.

There are worse ways to die than drowning. Your brother learned that, and so did my lord father. And Shae, that lying cunt. Hands of gold are always cold, but a woman's hands are warm. "We should play a game," Tyrion suggested. "That might help take our thoughts off the storm."

"Not *cyvasse*," she said at once. "Not *cyvasse*," Tyrion agreed, as the deck rose under him. That would only lead to pieces flying violently across the cabin and raining down on sow and dog. "When you were a little girl, did you ever play come-into-my-castle?"

"No. Can you teach me?"

Could he? Tyrion hesitated. Fool of a dwarf. Of course she's never played come-into-my-castle. She never had a castle. Come-into-my-castle was a game for highborn children, one meant to teach them courtesy, heraldry, and a thing or two about their lord father's friends and foes. "That won't ..." he started. The deck gave another violent heave, slamming the two of them

together. Penny gave a squeak of fright. "That game won't do," Tyrion told her, gritting his teeth. "Sorry. I don't know what game—"

"I do." Penny kissed him.

It was an awkward kiss, rushed, clumsy. But it took him utterly by surprise. His hands jerked up and grabbed hold of her shoulders to shove her away. Instead he hesitated, then pulled her closer, gave her a squeeze. Her lips were dry, hard, closed up tighter than a miser's purse. *A small mercy,* thought Tyrion. This was nothing he had wanted. He liked Penny, he pitied Penny, he even admired Penny in a way, but he did not desire her. He had no wish to hurt her, though; the gods and his sweet sister had given her enough pain. So he let the kiss go on, holding her gently by the shoulders. His own lips stayed firmly shut. The *Selaesori Qhoran* rolled and shuddered around them.

Finally she pulled back an inch or two. Tyrion could see his own reflection shining in her eyes. *Pretty eyes*, he thought, but he saw other things as well. *A lot of fear, a little hope ... but not a bit of lust. She does not want me, no more than I want her.*

When she lowered her head, he took her under the chin and raised it up again. "We cannot play that game, my lady." Above the thunder boomed, close at hand now.

"I never meant ... I never kissed a boy before, but ... I only thought, what if we drown, and I ... I ..."

"It was sweet," lied Tyrion, "but I am married. She was with me at the feast, you may remember her. Lady Sansa."

"Was she your wife? She ... she was very beautiful ..."

And false. Sansa, Shae, all my women ... Tysha was the only one who ever loved me. Where do whores go? "A lovely girl," said Tyrion, "and we were joined beneath the eyes of gods and men. It may be that she is lost to me, but until I know that for a certainty I must be true to her."

"I understand." Penny turned her face away from his.

My perfect woman, Tyrion thought bitterly. One still young enough to believe such blatant lies.

The hull was creaking, the deck moving, and Pretty was squealing in distress. Penny crawled across the cabin floor on her hands and knees, wrapped her arms around the sow's head, and murmured reassurance to her. Looking at the two of them, it was hard to know who was comforting whom. The sight was so grotesque it should have been hilarious, but Tyrion could not even find a smile. *The girl deserves better than a pig*, he thought. *An honest kiss, a little kindness, everyone deserves that much, however big or small*. He looked about for his wine cup, but when he found it all the rum had spilled. *Drowning is bad enough*, he reflected sourly, *but drowning sad and sober, that's too cruel*.

In the end, they did not drown ... though there were times when the prospect of a nice, peaceful drowning had a certain appeal. The storm raged for the rest of that day and well into the night. Wet winds howled around them and waves rose like the fists of drowned giants to smash down on their decks. Above, they learned later, a mate and two sailors were swept overboard, the ship's cook was blinded when a kettle of hot grease flew up into his face, and the captain was thrown from the stern-castle to the main deck so violently he broke both legs. Below, Crunch howled and barked and snapped at Penny, and Pretty Pig began to shit again, turning the cramped, damp cabin into a sty. Tyrion managed to avoid retching his way through all of this, chiefly thanks to the lack of wine. Penny was not so fortunate, but he held her anyway as the ship's hull creaked and groaned alarmingly around them, like a cask about to burst.

Nearby midnight the winds finally died away, and the sea grew calm enough for Tyrion to make his way back up onto deck. What he saw there did not reassure him. The cog was drifting on a sea of dragonglass beneath a bowl of stars, but all around the storm raged on. East, west, north, south, everywhere he looked, the clouds rose up like black mountains, their tumbled slopes and collossal cliffs alive with blue and purple lightning. No rain was falling, but the decks were slick and wet underfoot.

Tyrion could hear someone screaming from below, a thin, high voice hysterical with fear. He could hear Moqorro too. The red priest stood on the forecastle facing the storm, his staff raised above his head as he boomed a prayer. Amidships, a dozen sailors and two of the fiery fingers were struggling with tangled lines and sodden canvas, but whether they were trying to raise the sail again or pull it down he never knew. Whatever they were doing, it seemed to him a very bad idea. And so it was.

The wind returned as a whispered threat, cold and damp, brushing over his cheek, flapping the wet sail, swirling and tugging at Moqorro's scarlet robes. Some instinct made Tyrion grab hold of the nearest rail, just in time. In the space of three heartbeats the little breeze became a howling gale. Moqorro shouted something, and green flames leapt from the dragon's maw atop his staff to vanish in the night. Then the rains came, black and blinding, and forecastle and sterncastle both vanished behind a wall of water. Something huge flapped overhead, and Tyrion glanced up in time to see the sail taking wing, with two men still dangling from the lines. Then he heard a *crack. Oh, bloody hell*, he had time to think, *that had to be the mast*.

He found a line and pulled on it, fighting toward the hatch to get himself below out of the storm, but a gust of wind knocked his feet from under him and a second slammed him into the rail and there he clung. Rain lashed at his face, blinding him. His mouth was full of blood again. The ship groaned and growled beneath him like a constipated fat man straining to shit.

Then the mast burst.

Tyrion never saw it, but he heard it. That *crack*ing sound again and then a scream of tortured wood, and suddenly the air was full of shards and splinters. One missed his eye by half an inch, a second found his neck, a third went through his calf, boots and breeches and all. He screamed. But he held on to the line, held on with a desperate strength he did not know he had. *The widow said this ship would never reach her destination*, he remembered. Then he laughed and laughed, wild and hysterical, as thunder boomed and timbers moaned and waves crashed all around him.

By the time the storm abated and the surviving passengers and crew came crawling back on deck, like pale pink worms wriggling to the surface after a

rain, the *Selaesori Qhoran* was a broken thing, floating low in the water and listing ten degrees to port, her hull sprung in half a hundred places, her hold awash in seawater, her mast a splintered ruin no taller than a dwarf. Even her figurehead had not escaped; one of his arms had broken off, the one with all his scrolls. Nine men had been lost, including a mate, two of the fiery fingers, and Moqorro himself.

Did Benerro see this in his fires? Tyrion wondered, when he realized the huge red priest was gone. Did Moqorro?

"Prophecy is like a half-trained mule," he complained to Jorah Mormont. "It looks as though it might be useful, but the moment you trust in it, it kicks you in the head. That bloody widow knew the ship would never reach her destination, she warned us of that, said Benerro saw it in his fires, only I took that to mean ... well, what does it matter?" His mouth twisted. "What it really meant was that some bloody big storm would turn our mast to kindling so we could drift aimlessly across the Gulf of Grief until our food ran out and we started eating one another. Who do you suppose they'll carve up first ... the pig, the dog, or me?"

"The noisiest, I'd say."

The captain died the following day, the ship's cook three nights later. It was all that the remaining crew could do to keep the wreck afloat. The mate who had assumed command reckoned that they were somewhere off the southern end of the Isle of Cedars. When he lowered the ship's boats to tow them toward the nearest land, one sank and the men in the other cut the line and rowed off north, abandoning the cog and all their shipmates.

"Slaves," said Jorah Mormont, contemptuous.

The big knight had slept through the storm, to hear him tell it. Tyrion had his doubts, but he kept them to himself. One day he might want to bite someone in the leg, and for that you needed teeth. Mormont seemed content to ignore their disagreement, so Tyrion decided to pretend it had not happened.

For nineteen days they drifted, as food and water dwindled. The sun beat down on them, relentless. Penny huddled in her cabin with her dog and her pig, and Tyrion brought her food, limping on his bandaged calf and sniffing at the wound by night. When he had nothing else to do, he pricked his toes and fingers too. Ser Jorah made a point of sharpening his sword each day, honing the point until it gleamed. The three remaining fiery fingers lit the nightfire as the sun went down, but they wore their ornate armor as they led the crew in prayer, and their spears were close at hand. And not a single sailor tried to rub the head of either dwarf.

"Should we joust for them again?" Penny asked one night. "Best not," said Tyrion. "That would only serve to remind them we have a nice plump pig." Though Pretty was growing less plump with every passing day, and Crunch was fur and bones.

That night he dreamed that he was back in King's Landing again, a crossbow in his hand. "Wherever whores go," Lord Tywin said, but when Tyrion's finger clenched and the bowstring *thrummed*, it was Penny with the quarrel buried in her belly.

He woke to the sound of shouting.

The deck was moving under him, and for half a heartbeat he was so confused he thought he was back on the *Shy Maid*. A whiff of pigshit brought him to his senses. The Sorrows were behind him, half a world away, and the joys of that time as well. He remembered how sweet Le-more had looked after her morning swims, with beads of water glistening on her naked skin, but the only maiden here was his poor Penny, the stunted little dwarf girl.

Something was afoot, though. Tyrion slipped from the hammock, yawning, and looked about for his boots. And mad though it was, he looked for the crossbow as well, but of course there was none such to be found. *A pity,* he mused, *it might have been some use when the big folk come to eat me.* He pulled his boots on and climbed on deck to see what the shouting was about. Penny was there before him, her eyes wide with wonder. "A sail," she shouted, "there, there, do you see? A sail, and they've seen us, they have. A sail."

This time he kissed her ... once on each cheek, once on the brow, and one last one on the mouth. She was flushed and laughing by the last kiss, suddenly shy again, but it made no matter. The other ship was closing. A big galley, he saw. Her oars left a long white wake behind her. "What ship is that?" he asked Ser Jorah Mormont. "Can you read her name?"

"I don't need to read her name. We're downwind. I can smell her." Mormont drew his sword. "That's a slaver."