

# TYRION

The *Selaesori Qhoran* was seven days from Volantis when Penny finally emerged from her cabin, creeping up on deck like some timid woodland creature emerging from a long winter's sleep.

It was dusk and the red priest had lit his nightfire in the great iron brazier amidships as the crew gathered round to pray. Moqorro's voice was a bass drum that seemed to boom from somewhere deep within his massive torso. "*We thank you for your sun that keeps us warm,*" he prayed. "*We thank you for your stars that watch over us as we sail this cold black sea.*" A huge man, taller than Ser Jorah and wide enough to make two of him, the priest wore scarlet robes embroidered at sleeve and hem and collar with orange satin flames. His skin was black as pitch, his hair as white as snow; the flames tattooed across his cheeks and brow yellow and orange. His iron staff was as tall as he was and crowned with a dragon's head; when he stamped its butt upon the deck, the dragon's maw spat crackling green flame.

His guardsmen, five slave warriors of the Fiery Hand, led the responses. They chanted in the tongue of Old Volantis, but Tyrion had heard the prayers enough to grasp the essence. *Light our fire and protect us from the dark, blah blah, light our way and keep us toasty warm, the night is dark and full of terrors, save us from the scary things, and blah blah blah some more.*

He knew better than to voice such thoughts aloud. Tyrion Lannister had no use for any god, but on this ship it was wise to show a certain respect for red R'hllor. Jorah Mormont had removed Tyrion's chains and fetters once they were safely under way, and the dwarf did not wish to give him cause to clap them on again.

The *Selaesori Qhoran* was a wallowing tub of five hundred tons, with a deep hold, high castles fore and aft, and a single mast between. At her forecastle stood a grotesque figurehead, some worm-eaten wooden eminence with a constipated look and a scroll tucked up under one arm.

Tyrion had never seen an uglier ship. Her crew was no prettier. Her captain, a mean-mouthed, flinty, kettle-bellied man with close-set, greedy eyes, was a bad *cyvasse* player and a worse loser. Under him served four mates, freedmen all, and fifty slaves bound to the ship, each with a crude version of the cog's figurehead tattooed upon one cheek. *No-Nose*, the sailors liked to call Tyrion, no matter how many times he told them his name was Hugor Hill.

Three of the mates and more than three-quarters of the crew were fervent worshipers of the Lord of Light. Tyrion was less certain about the captain, who always emerged for the evening prayers but took no other part in them. But Moqorro was the true master of the *Selaesori Qhoran*, at least for this voyage.

*"Lord of Light, bless your slave Moqorro, and light his way in the dark places of the world,"* the red priest boomed. *"And defend your righteous slave Benerro. Grant him courage. Grant him wisdom. Fill his heart with fire."*

That was when Tyrion noticed Penny, watching the mummery from the steep wooden stair that led down beneath the sterncastle. She stood on one of the lower steps, so only the top of her head was visible. Beneath her hood her eyes shone big and white in the light of the nightfire. She had her dog with her, the big grey hound she rode in the mock jousts.

"My lady," Tyrion called softly. In truth, she was no lady, but he could not bring himself to mouth that silly name of hers, and he was not about to call her *girl* or *dwarf*.

She cringed back. "I ... I did not see you."

"Well, I am small."

"I ... I was unwell ..." Her dog barked.

*Sick with grief, you mean.* "If I can be of help ..."

“No.” And quick as that she was gone again, retreating back below to the cabin she shared with her dog and sow. Tyrion could not fault her. The crew of the *Selaesori Qhoran* had been pleased enough when he first came on board; a dwarf was good luck, after all. His head had been rubbed so often and so vigorously that it was a wonder he wasn’t bald. But Penny had met with a more mixed reaction. She might be a dwarf, but she was also a woman, and women were bad luck aboard ship. For every man who tried to rub her head, there were three who muttered maledictions under their breath when she went by.

*And the sight of me can only be salt in her wound. They hacked off her brother’s head in the hope that it was mine, yet here I sit like some bloody gargoyle, offering empty consolations. If I were her, I’d want nothing more than to shove me into the sea.*

He felt nothing but pity for the girl. She did not deserve the horror visited on her in Volantis, any more than her brother had. The last time he had seen her, just before they left port, her eyes had been raw from crying, two ghastly red holes in a wan, pale face. By the time they raised sail she had locked herself in her cabin with her dog and her pig, but at night they could hear her weeping. Only yesterday he had heard one of the mates say that they ought to throw her overboard before her tears could swamp the ship. Tyrion was not entirely sure he had been japing.

When the evening prayers had ended and the ship’s crew had once again dispersed, some to their watch and others to food and rum and hammocks, Moqorro remained beside his nightfire, as he did every night. The red priest rested by day but kept vigil through the dark hours, to tend his sacred flames so that the sun might return to them at dawn.

Tyrion squatted across from him and warmed his hands against the night’s chill. Moqorro took no notice of him for several moments. He was staring into the flickering flames, lost in some vision. *Does he see days yet to come, as he claims?* If so, that was a fearsome gift. After a time the priest raised his eyes to meet the dwarf’s. “Hugor Hill,” he said, inclining his head in a solemn nod. “Have you come to pray with me?”

“Someone told me that the night is dark and full of terrors. What do you see in those flames?”

“Dragons,” Moqorro said in the Common Tongue of Westeros. He spoke it very well, with hardly a trace of accent. No doubt that was one reason the high priest Benerro had chosen him to bring the faith of R’hllor to Daenerys Targaryen. “Dragons old and young, true and false, bright and dark. And you. A small man with a big shadow, snarling in the midst of all.”

“Snarling? An amiable fellow like me?” Tyrion was almost flattered. *And no doubt that is just what he intends. Every fool loves to hear that he’s important.* “Perhaps it was Penny you saw. We’re almost of a size.”

“No, my friend.”

*My friend? When did that happen, I wonder?* “Did you see how long it will take us to reach Meereen?”

“You are eager to behold the world’s deliverer?”

*Yes and no. The world’s deliverer may snick off my head or give me to her dragons as a savory.* “Not me,” said Tyrion. “For me, it is all about the olives. Though I fear I may grow old and die before I taste one. I could dog-paddle faster than we’re sailing. Tell me, was *Selaesori Qhoran* a tri-arch or a turtle?”

The red priest chuckled. “Neither. *Qhoran* is ... not a ruler, but one who serves and counsels such, and helps conduct his business. You of Westeros might say *steward* or *magister*.”

*King’s Hand?* That amused him. “And *selaesori*?”

Moqorro touched his nose. “Imbued with a pleasant aroma. Fragrant, would you say? Flowery?”

“So *Selaesori Qhoran* means *Stinky Steward*, more or less?”

“*Fragrant Steward*, rather.”

Tyrion gave a crooked grin. “I believe I will stay with *Stinky*. But I do thank you for the lesson.”

“I am pleased to have enlightened you. Perhaps someday you will let me teach you the truth of R’hllor as well.”

“Someday.” *When I am a head on a spike.*

The quarters he shared with Ser Jorah were a cabin only by courtesy; the dank, dark, foul-smelling closet had barely enough space to hang a pair of sleeping hammocks, one above the other. He found Mormont stretched out in the lower one, swaying slowly with the motion of the ship. “The girl finally poked her nose abovedecks,” Tyrion told him. “One look at me and she scurried right back down below.”

“You’re not a pretty sight.”

“Not all of us can be as comely as you. The girl is lost. It would not surprise me if the poor creature wasn’t sneaking up to jump over the side and drown herself.”

“The poor creature’s name is Penny.”

“I know her name.” He hated her name. Her brother had gone by the name of Groat, though his true name had been Oppo. *Groat and Penny. The smallest coins, worth the least, and what’s worse, they chose the names themselves.* It left a bad taste in Tyrion’s mouth. “By any name, she needs a friend.”

Ser Jorah sat up in his hammock. “Befriend her, then. Marry her, for all I care.”

That left a bad taste in his mouth as well. “Like with like, is that your notion? Do you mean to find a she-bear for yourself, ser?”

“You were the one who insisted that we bring her.”

“I said we could not abandon her in Volantis. That does not mean I want to fuck her. She wants me dead, have you forgotten? I’m the last person she’s

like to want as a friend.”

“You’re both dwarfs.”

“Yes, and so was her brother, who was killed because some drunken fools took him for me.”

“Feeling guilty, are you?”

“No.” Tyrion bristled. “I have sins enough to answer for; I’ll have no part of this one. I might have nurtured some ill will toward her and her brother for the part they played the night of Joffrey’s wedding, but I never wished them harm.”

“You are a harmless creature, to be sure. Innocent as a lamb.” Ser Jorah got to his feet. “The dwarf girl is your burden. Kiss her, kill her, or avoid her, as you like. It’s naught to me.” He shouldered past Tyrion and out of the cabin.

*Twice exiled, and small wonder, Tyrion thought. I’d exile him too if I could. The man is cold, brooding, sullen, deaf to humor. And those are his good points. Ser Jorah spent most of his waking hours pacing the forecastle or leaning on the rail, gazing out to sea. Looking for his silver queen. Looking for Daenerys, willing the ship to sail faster. Well, I might do the same if Tysha waited in Meereen.*

Could Slaver’s Bay be where whores went? It seemed unlikely. From what he’d read, the slaver cities were the place where whores were made.

*Mormont should have bought one for himself.* A pretty slave girl might have done wonders to improve his temper ... particularly one with silvery hair, like the whore who had been sitting on his cock back in Selhorys.

On the river Tyrion had to endure Griff, but there had at least been the mystery of the captain’s true identity to divert him and the more congenial companionship of the rest of the poleboat’s little company. On the cog, alas, everyone was just who they appeared to be, no one was particularly congenial, and only the red priest was interesting. *Him, and maybe Penny. But the girl hates me, and she should.*

Life aboard the *Selaesori Qhoran* was nothing if not tedious, Tyrion had found. The most exciting part of his day was pricking his toes and fingers with a knife. On the river there had been wonders to behold: giant turtles, ruined cities, stone men, naked septas. One never knew what might be lurking around the next bend. The days and nights at sea were all the same. Leaving Volantis, the cog had sailed within sight of land at first, so Tyrion could gaze at passing headlands, watch clouds of seabirds rise from stony cliffs and crumbling watchtowers, count bare brown islands as they slipped past. He saw many other ships as well: fishing boats, lumbering merchantmen, proud galleys with their oars lashing the waves into white foam. But once they struck out into deeper waters, there was only sea and sky, air and water. The water looked like water. The sky looked like sky. Sometimes there was a cloud. *Too much blue.*

And the nights were worse. Tyrion slept badly at the best of times, and this was far from that. Sleep meant dreams as like as not, and in his dreams the Sorrows waited, and a stony king with his father's face. That left him with the beggar's choice of climbing up into his hammock and listening to Jorah Mormont snore beneath him, or remaining abovedecks to contemplate the sea. On moonless nights the water was as black as maester's ink, from horizon to horizon. Dark and deep and forbidding, beautiful in a chilly sort of way, but when he looked at it too long Tyrion found himself musing on how easy it would be to slip over the gunwale and drop down into that darkness. One very small splash, and the pathetic little tale that was his life would soon be done. *But what if there is a hell and my father's waiting for me?*

The best part of each evening was supper. The food was not especially good, but it was plentiful, so that was where the dwarf went next. The galley where he took his meals was a cramped and uncomfortable space, with a ceiling so low that the taller passengers were always in danger of cracking their heads, a hazard the strapping slave soldiers of the Fiery Hand seemed particularly prone to. As much as Tyrion enjoyed sniggering at that, he had come to prefer taking his meals alone. Sitting at a crowded table with men who did not share a common language with you, listening to them talk and jape whilst understanding none of it, had quickly grown

wearisome. Particularly since he always found himself wondering if the japes and laughter were directed at him.

The galley was also where the ship's books were kept. Her captain being an especially bookish man, she carried three—a collection of nautical poetry that went from bad to worse, a well-thumbed tome about the erotic adventures of a young slave girl in a Lysene pillow house, and the fourth and final volume of *The Life of the Triarch Belicho*, a famous Volantene patriot whose unbroken succession of conquests and triumphs ended rather abruptly when he was eaten by giants. Tyrion had finished them all by their third day at sea. Then, for lack of any other books, he started reading them again. The slave girl's story was the worst written but the most engrossing, and that was the one he took down this evening to see him through a supper of buttered beets, cold fish stew, and biscuits that could have been used to drive nails.

He was reading the girl's account of the day she and her sister were taken by slavers when Penny entered the galley. "Oh," she said, "I thought ... I did not mean to disturb m'lord, I ..."

"You are not disturbing me. You're not going to try to kill me again, I hope."

"No." She looked away, her face reddening. "In that case, I would welcome some company. There's little enough aboard this ship." Tyrion closed the book. "Come. Sit. Eat." The girl had left most of her meals untouched outside her cabin door. By now she must be starving. "The stew is almost edible. The fish is fresh, at least."

"No, I ... I choked on a fish bone once, I can't eat fish."

"Have some wine, then." He filled a cup and slid it toward her.

"Compliments of our captain. Closer to piss than Arbor gold, if truth be told, but even piss tastes better than the black tar rum the sailors drink. It might help you sleep."

The girl made no move to touch the cup. "Thank you, m'lord, but no." She backed away. "I should not be bothering you."



“Do you mean to spend your whole life running away?” Tyrion asked before she could slip back out the door.

That stopped her. Her cheeks turned a bright pink, and he was afraid she was about to start weeping again. Instead she thrust out her lip defiantly and said, “You’re running too.”

“I am,” he confessed, “but I am running *to* and you are running *from*, and there’s a world of difference there.”

“We would never have had to run at all but for you.”

*It took some courage to say that to my face.* “Are you speaking of King’s Landing or Volantis?”

“Both.” Tears glistened in her eyes. “Everything. Why couldn’t you just come joust with us, the way the king wanted? You wouldn’t have gotten hurt. What would that have cost m’lord, to climb up on our dog and ride a tilt to please the boy? It was just a bit of fun. They would have laughed at you, that’s all.”

“They would have laughed at me,” said Tyrion. *I made them laugh at Joff instead. And wasn’t that a clever ploy?*

“My brother says that is a good thing, making people laugh. A *noble* thing, and honorable. My brother says ... he ...” The tears fell then, rolling down her face.

“I am sorry about your brother.” Tyrion had said the same words to her before, back in Volantis, but she was so far gone in grief back there that he doubted she had heard them.

She heard them now. “Sorry. You are sorry.” Her lip was trembling, her cheeks were wet, her eyes were red-rimmed holes. “We left King’s Landing that very night. My brother said it was for the best, before someone wondered if we’d had some part in the king’s death and decided to torture us to find out. We went to Tyrosh first. My brother thought that would be far enough, but it wasn’t. We knew a juggler there. For years and years he

would juggle every day by the Fountain of the Drunken God. He was old, so his hands were not as deft as they had been, and sometimes he would drop his balls and chase them across the square, but the Tyroshi would laugh and throw him coins all the same. Then one morning we heard that his body had been found at the Temple of Trios. Trios has three heads, and there's a big statue of him beside the temple doors. The old man had been cut into three parts and pushed inside the threefold mouths of Trios. Only when the parts were sewn back together, his head was gone."

"A gift for my sweet sister. He was another dwarf."

"A little man, aye. Like you, and Oppo. Groat. Are you sorry about the juggler too?"

"I never knew your juggler existed until this very moment ... but yes, I am sorry he is dead."

"He died for you. His blood is on your hands."

The accusation stung, coming so hard on the heels of Jorah Mormont's words. "His blood is on my sister's hands, and the hands of the brutes who killed him. My hands ..." Tyrion turned them over, inspected them, coiled them into fists. "... my hands are crusted with old blood, aye. Call me kinslayer, and you won't be wrong. Kingslayer, I'll answer to that one as well. I have killed mothers, fathers, nephews, lovers, men and women, kings and whores. A singer once annoyed me, so I had the bastard stewed. But I have never killed a juggler, nor a dwarf, and I am not to blame for what happened to your bloody brother."

Penny picked the cup of wine he'd poured for her and threw it in his face. *Just like my sweet sister.* He heard the galley door slam but never saw her leave. His eyes were stinging, and the world was a blur. *So much for befriending her.*

Tyrion Lannister had scant experience with other dwarfs. His lord father had not welcomed any reminders of his son's deformities, and such mummers as featured little folk in their troupes soon learned to stay away from Lannisport and Casterly Rock, at the risk of his displeasure. Growing

up, Tyrion heard reports of a dwarf jester at the seat of the Dornish Lord Fowler, a dwarf maester in service on the Fingers, and a female dwarf amongst the silent sisters, but he never felt the least need to seek them out. Less reliable tales also reached his ears, of a dwarf witch who haunted a hill in the riverlands, and a dwarf whore in King's Landing renowned for coupling with dogs. His own sweet sister had told him of the last, even offering to find him a bitch in heat if he cared to try it out. When he asked politely if she were referring to herself, Cersei had thrown a cup of wine in his face. *That was red, as I recall, and this is gold.* Tyrion mopped at his face with a sleeve. His eyes still stung.

He did not see Penny again until the day of the storm.

The salt air lay still and heavy that morning, but the western sky was a fiery red, streaked with lowering clouds that glowed as bright as Lannister crimson. Sailors were dashing about battening hatches, running lines, clearing the decks, lashing down everything that was not already lashed down. "Bad wind coming," one warned him. "No-Nose should get below."

Tyrion remembered the storm he'd suffered crossing the narrow sea, the way the deck had jumped beneath his feet, the hideous creaking sounds the ship had made, the taste of wine and vomit. "No-Nose will stay up here." If the gods wanted him, he would sooner die by drowning than choking on his own vomit. And overhead the cog's canvas sail rippled slowly, like the fur of some great beast stirring from a long sleep, then filled with a sudden *crack* that turned every head on the ship.

The winds drove the cog before them, far off her chosen course. Behind them black clouds piled one atop another against a blood-red sky. By midmorning they could see lightning flickering to the west, followed by the distant crash of thunder. The sea grew rougher, and dark waves rose up to smash against the hull of the *Stinky Steward*. It was about then that the crew started hauling down the canvas. Tyrion was underfoot amid-ships, so he climbed the forecastle and hunkered down, savoring the lash of cold rain on his cheeks. The cog went up and down, bucking more wildly than any horse he'd ever ridden, lifting with each wave before sliding down into the troughs between, jarring him to the bones. Even so, it was better here where he could see than down below locked in some airless cabin.

By the time the storm broke, evening was upon them and Tyrion Lannister was soaked through to the smallclothes, yet somehow he felt elated ... and even more so later, when he found a drunken Jorah Mor-mont in a pool of vomit in their cabin.

The dwarf lingered in the galley after supper, celebrating his survival by sharing a few tots of black tar rum with the ship's cook, a great greasy loutish Volantene who spoke only one word of the Common Tongue (*fuck*), but played a ferocious game of *cyvasse*, particularly when drunk. They played three games that night. Tyrion won the first, then lost the other two. After that he decided that he'd had enough and stumbled back up on deck to clear his head of rum and elephants alike.

He found Penny on the forecastle, where he had so often found Ser Jorah, standing by the rail beside the cog's hideous half-rotted figurehead and gazing out across the inky sea. From behind, she looked as small and vulnerable as a child.

Tyrion thought it best to leave her undisturbed, but it was too late. She had heard him. "Hugor Hill."

"If you like." *We both know better.* "I am sorry to intrude on you. I will retire."

"No." Her face was pale and sad, but she did not look to have been crying. "I'm sorry too. About the wine. It wasn't you who killed my brother or that poor old man in Tyrosh."

"I played a part, though not by choice."

"I miss him so much. My brother. I ..."

"I understand." He found himself thinking of Jaime. *Count yourself lucky. Your brother died before he could betray you.*

"I thought I wanted to die," she said, "but today when the storm came and I thought the ship would sink, I ... I ..."

“You realized that you wanted to live after all.” *I have been there too. Something else we have in common.*

Her teeth were crooked, which made her shy with her smiles, but she smiled now. “Did you truly cook a singer in a stew?”

“Who, me? No. I do not cook.”

When Penny giggled, she sounded like the sweet young girl she was ... seventeen, eighteen, no more than nineteen. “What did he do, this singer?”

“He wrote a song about me.” *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.* It was queer how quick the words came back to him. Perhaps they had never left him. *Hands of gold are always cold, but a woman’s hands are warm.*

“It must have been a very bad song.”

“Not really. It was no ‘Rains of Castamere,’ mind you, but some parts were ... well ...”

“How did it go?”

He laughed. “No. You do *not* want to hear me sing.”

“My mother used to sing to us when we were children. My brother and me. She always said that it didn’t matter what your voice was like so long as you loved the song.”

“Was she ... ?”

“... a little person? No, but our father was. His own father sold him to a slaver when he was three, but he grew up to be such a famous mummer that he bought his freedom. He traveled to all the Free Cities, and Westeros as well. In Oldtown they used to call him Hop-Bean.”

*Of course they did.* Tyrion tried not to wince. “He’s dead now,” Penny went on. “My mother too. Oppo ... he was my last family, and now he’s gone

too.” She turned her head away and gazed out across the sea. “What will I do? Where will I go? I have no trade, just the jousting show, and that needs two.”

*No*, thought Tyrion. *That is not a place you want to go, girl. Do not ask that of me. Do not even think it.* “Find yourself some likely orphan boy,” he suggested.

Penny did not seem to hear that. “It was Father’s idea to do the tilts. He even trained the first pig, but by then he was too sick to ride her, so Oppo took his place. I always rode the dog. We performed for the Sealord of Braavos once, and he laughed so hard that afterward he gave each of us a ... a grand gift.”

“Is that where my sister found you? In Braavos?”

“Your sister?” The girl looked lost. “Queen Cersei.”

Penny shook her head. “She never ... it was a man who came to us, in Pentos. Osmund. No, Oswald. Something like that. Oppo met with him, not me. Oppo made all of our arrangements. My brother always knew what to do, where we should go next.”

“Meereen is where we’re going next.”

She gave him a puzzled look. “Qarth, you mean. We’re bound for Qarth, by way of New Ghis.”

“Meereen. You’ll ride your dog for the dragon queen and come away with your weight in gold. Best start eating more, so you’ll be nice and plump when you joust before Her Grace.”

Penny did not return the smile. “By myself, all I can do is ride around in circles. And even if the queen should laugh, where will I go afterward? We never stay in one place long. The first time they see us they laugh and laugh, but by the fourth or fifth time, they know what we’re going to do before we do it. Then they stop laughing, so we have to go somewhere new. We make the most coin in the big cities, but I always liked the little towns

the best. Places like that, the people have no silver, but they feed us at their own tables, and the children follow us everywhere.”

*That’s because they have never seen a dwarf before, in their wretched pisspot towns,* Tyrion thought. *The bloody brats would follow around a two-headed goat if one turned up. Until they got bored with its bleating and slaughtered it for supper.* But he had no wish to make her weep again, so instead he said, “Daenerys has a kind heart and a generous nature.” It was what she needed to hear. “She will find a place for you at her court, I don’t doubt. A safe place, beyond my sister’s reach.”

Penny turned back to him. “And you will be there too.”

*Unless Daenerys decides she needs some Lannister blood, to pay for the Targaryen blood my brother shed.* “I will.”

After that, the dwarf girl was seen more frequently above deck. The next day Tyrion encountered her and her spotted sow amidships in midafternoon, when the air was warm and the sea calm. “Her name is Pretty,” the girl told him, shyly.

*Pretty the pig and Penny the girl,* he thought. *Someone has a deal to answer for.* Penny gave Tyrion some acorns, and he let Pretty eat them from his hand. *Do not think I don’t see what you are doing, girl,* he thought, as the big sow snuffled and squealed.

Soon they began to take their meals together. Some nights it was just the two of them; at other meals they crowded in with Moqorro’s guards. *The fingers,* Tyrion called them; they were men of the Fiery Hand, after all, and there were five of them. Penny laughed at that, a sweet sound, though not one that he heard often. Her wound was too fresh, her grief too deep.

He soon had her calling the ship the *Stinky Steward*, though she got somewhat wroth with him whenever he called Pretty *Bacon*. To atone for that Tyrion made an attempt to teach her *cyvasse*, though he soon realized that was a lost cause. “No,” he said, a dozen times, “the dragon flies, not the elephants.”

That same night, she came right out and asked him if he would like to tilt with her. “No,” he answered. Only later did it occur to him that perhaps *tilt* did not mean tilt. His answer would still have been no, but he might not have been so brusque.

Back in the cabin he shared with Jorah Mormont, Tyrion twisted in his hammock for hours, slipping in and out of sleep. His dreams were full of grey, stony hands reaching for him from out of the fog, and a stair that led up to his father.

Finally he gave it up and made his way up top for a breath of night air. The *Selaesori Qhoran* had furled her big striped sail for the night, and her decks were all but deserted. One of the mates was on the sterncastle, and amidships Moqorro sat by his brazier, where a few small flames still danced amongst the embers.

Only the brightest stars were visible, all to the west. A dull red glow lit the sky to the northeast, the color of a blood bruise. Tyrion had never seen a bigger moon. Monstrous, swollen, it looked as if it had swallowed the sun and woken with a fever. Its twin, floating on the sea beyond the ship, shimmered red with every wave. “What hour is this?” he asked Moqorro. “That cannot be sunrise unless the east has moved. Why is the sky red?”

“The sky is always red above Valyria, Hugor Hill.”

A cold chill went down his back. “Are we close?”

“Closer than the crew would like,” Moqorro said in his deep voice. “Do you know the stories, in your Sunset Kingdoms?”

“I know some sailors say that any man who lays eyes upon that coast is doomed.” He did not believe such tales himself, no more than his uncle had. Gerion Lannister had set sail for Valyria when Tyrion was eighteen, intent on recovering the lost ancestral blade of House Lannister and any other treasures that might have survived the Doom. Tyrion had wanted desperately to go with them, but his lord father had dubbed the voyage a “fool’s quest,” and forbidden him to take part.



*And perhaps he was not so wrong.* Almost a decade had passed since the *Laughing Lion* headed out from Lannisport, and Gerion had never returned. The men Lord Tywin sent to seek after him had traced his course as far as Volantis, where half his crew had deserted him and he had bought slaves to replace them. No free man would willingly sign aboard a ship whose captain spoke openly of his intent to sail into the Smoking Sea. “So those are fires of the Fourteen Flames we’re seeing, reflected on the clouds?”

“Fourteen or fourteen thousand. What man dares count them? It is not wise for mortals to look too deeply at those fires, my friend. Those are the fires of god’s own wrath, and no human flame can match them. We are small creatures, men.”

“Some smaller than others.” *Valyria*. It was written that on the day of Doom every hill for five hundred miles had split asunder to fill the air with ash and smoke and fire, blazes so hot and hungry that even the dragons in the sky were engulfed and consumed. Great rents had opened in the earth, swallowing palaces, temples, entire towns. Lakes boiled or turned to acid, mountains burst, fiery fountains spewed molten rock a thousand feet into the air, red clouds rained down dragonglass and the black blood of demons, and to the north the ground splintered and collapsed and fell in on itself and an angry sea came rushing in. The proudest city in all the world was gone in an instant, its fabled empire vanished in a day, the Lands of the Long Summer scorched and drowned and blighted.

*An empire built on blood and fire. The Valyrians reaped the seed they had sown.* “Does our captain mean to test the curse?”

“Our captain would prefer to be fifty leagues farther out to sea, well away from that accursed shore, but I have commanded him to steer the shortest course. Others seek Daenerys too.”

*Griff, with his young prince.* Could all that talk of the Golden Company sailing west have been a feint? Tyrion considered saying something, then thought better. It seemed to him that the prophecy that drove the red priests had room for just one hero. A second Targaryen would only serve to confuse them. “Have you seen these others in your fires?” he asked, warily.

“Only their shadows,” Moqorro said. “One most of all. A tall and twisted thing with one black eye and ten long arms, sailing on a sea of blood.”