

# TYRION

The *Shy Maid* moved through the fog like a blind man groping his way down an unfamiliar hall.

Septa Lefore was praying. The mists muffled the sound of her voice, making it seem small and hushed. Griff paced the deck, mail clinking softly beneath his wolfskin cloak. From time to time he touched his sword, as if to make certain that it still hung at his side. Rolly Duckfield was pushing at the starboard pole, Yandry at the larboard. Ysilla had the tiller.

“I do not like this place,” Haldon Halfmaester muttered. “Frightened of a little fog?” mocked Tyrion, though in truth there was quite a lot of fog. At the prow of the *Shy Maid*, Young Griff stood with the third pole, to push them away from hazards as they loomed up through the mists. The lanterns had been lit fore and aft, but the fog was so thick that all the dwarf could see from amidships was a light floating out ahead of him and another following behind. His own task was to tend the brazier and make certain that the fire did not go out.

“This is no common fog, Hugor Hill,” Ysilla insisted. “It stinks of sorcery, as you would know if you had a nose to smell it. Many a voyager has been lost here, poleboats and pirates and great river galleys too. They wander forlorn through the mists, searching for a sun they cannot find until madness or hunger claim their lives. There are restless spirits in the air here and tormented souls below the water.”

“There’s one now,” said Tyrion. Off to starboard a hand large enough to crush the boat was reaching up from the murky depths. Only the tops of two fingers broke the river’s surface, but as the *Shy Maid* eased on past he could see the rest of the hand rippling below the water and a pale face looking up. Though his tone was light, he was uneasy. This was a bad place, rank with despair and death. *Ysilla is not wrong. This fog is not natural.* Something foul grew in the waters here, and festered in the air. *Small wonder the stone men go mad.*

“You should not make mock,” warned Ysilla. “The whispering dead hate the warm and quick and ever seek for more damned souls to join them.”

“I doubt they have a shroud my size.” The dwarf stirred the coals with a poker.

“Hatred does not stir the stone men half so much as hunger.” Haldon Halfmaester had wrapped a yellow scarf around his mouth and nose, muffling his voice. “Nothing any sane man would want to eat grows in these fogs. Thrice each year the triarchs of Volantis send a galley upriver with provisions, but the mercy ships are oft late and sometimes bring more mouths than food.”

Young Griff said, “There must be fish in the river.”

“I would not eat any fish taken from these waters,” said Ysilla. “I would not.”

“We’d do well not to breathe the fog either,” said Haldon. “Garin’s Curse is all about us.”

*The only way not to breathe the fog is not to breathe.* “Garin’s Curse is only greyscale,” said Tyrion. The curse was oft seen in children, especially in damp, cold climes. The afflicted flesh stiffened, calcified, and cracked, though the dwarf had read that greyscale’s progress could be stayed by limes, mustard poultices, and scalding-hot baths (the maesters said) or by prayer, sacrifice, and fasting (the septons insisted). Then the disease passed, leaving its young victims disfigured but alive. Maesters and septons alike agreed that children marked by greyscale could never be touched by the rarer mortal form of the affliction, nor by its terrible swift cousin, the grey plague. “Damp is said to be the culprit,” he said. “Foul humors in the air. Not curses.”

“The conquerors did not believe either, Hugor Hill,” said Ysilla. “The men of Volantis and Valyria hung Garin in a golden cage and made mock as he called upon his Mother to destroy them. But in the night the waters rose and drowned them, and from that day to this they have not rested. They are down there still beneath the water, they who were once the lords of fire.

Their cold breath rises from the murk to make these fogs, and their flesh has turned as stony as their hearts.”

The stump of Tyrion’s nose was itching fiercely. He gave it a scratch. *The old woman may be right. This place is no good. I feel as if I am back in the privy again, watching my father die.* He would go mad as well if he had to spend his days in this grey soup whilst his flesh and bones turned to stone.

Young Griff did not seem to share his misgivings. “Let them try and trouble us, we’ll show them what we’re made of.”

“We are made of blood and bone, in the image of the Father and the Mother,” said Septa Lefore. “Make no vainglorious boasts, I beg you. Pride is a grievous sin. The stone men were proud as well, and the Shrouded Lord was proudest of them all.”

The heat from the glowing coals brought a flush to Tyrion’s face. “Is there a Shrouded Lord? Or is he just some tale?”

“The Shrouded Lord has ruled these mists since Garin’s day,” said Yandry. “Some say that he himself is Garin, risen from his watery grave.”

“The dead do not rise,” insisted Haldon Halfmaester, “and no man lives a thousand years. Yes, there is a Shrouded Lord. There have been a score of them. When one dies another takes his place. This one is a corsair from the Basilisk Islands who believed the Rhoynish would offer richer pickings than the Summer Sea.”

“Aye, I’ve heard that too,” said Duck, “but there’s another tale I like better. The one that says he’s not like t’other stone men, that he started as a statue till a grey woman came out of the fog and kissed him with lips as cold as ice.”

“*Enough,*” said Griff. “Be quiet, all of you.”

Septa Lefore sucked in her breath. “*What was that?*”

“Where?” Tyrion saw nothing but the fog. “Something moved. I saw the water rippling.”

“A turtle,” the prince announced cheerfully. “A big ’snapper, that’s all it was.” He thrust his pole out ahead of them and pushed them away from a towering green obelisk.

The fog clung to them, damp and chilly. A sunken temple loomed up out of the greyness as Yandry and Duck leaned upon their poles and paced slowly from prow to stern, pushing. They passed a marble stair that spiraled up from the mud and ended jaggedly in air. Beyond, half-seen, were other shapes: shattered spires, headless statues, trees with roots bigger than their boat.

“This was the most beautiful city on the river, and the richest,” said Yandry. “Chroyane, the festival city.”

*Too rich, thought Tyrion, too beautiful. It is never wise to tempt the dragons.* The drowned city was all around them. A half-seen shape flapped by overhead, pale leathery wings beating at the fog. The dwarf craned his head around to get a better look, but the thing was gone as suddenly as it had appeared.

Not long after, another light floated into view. “Boat,” a voice called across the water, faintly. “Who are you?”

“*Shy Maid*,” Yandry shouted back. “*Kingfisher*. Up or down?”

“Down. Hides and honey, ale and tallow.”

“Up. Knives and needles, lace and linen, spice wine.”

“What word from old Volantis?” Yandry called. “War,” the word came back. “Where?” Griff shouted. “When?”

“When the year turns,” came the answer, “Nyessos and Malaquo go hand in hand, and the elephants show stripes.” The voice faded as the other boat moved away from them. They watched its light dwindle and disappear.

“Is it wise to shout through the fog at boats we cannot see?” asked Tyrion. “What if they were pirates?” They had been fortunate where the pirates were concerned, slipping down Dagger Lake by night, unseen and unmolested. Once Duck had caught a glimpse of a hull that he insisted belonged to Urho the Unwashed. The *Shy Maid* had been upwind, however, and Urho—if Urho it had been—had shown no interest in them.

“The pirates will not sail into the Sorrows,” said Yandry. “Elephants with stripes?” Griff muttered. “What is that about? Nyessos and Malaquo? Illyrio has paid Triarch Nyessos enough to own him eight times over.”

“In gold or cheese?” quipped Tyrion.

Griff rounded on him. “Unless you can cut this fog with your next witticism, keep it to yourself.”

*Yes, Father, the dwarf almost said. I'll be quiet. Thank you. He did not know these Volantenes, yet it seemed to him that elephants and tigers might have good reason to make common cause when faced with dragons. Might be the cheesemonger has misjudged the situation. You can buy a man with gold, but only blood and steel will keep him true.*

The little man stirred the coals again and blew on them to make them burn brighter. *I hate this. I hate this fog, I hate this place, and I am less than fond of Griff.* Tyrion still had the poison mushrooms he had plucked from the grounds of Illyrio's manse, and there were days when he was sore tempted to slip them into Griff's supper. The trouble was, Griff scarce seemed to eat.

Duck and Yandry pushed against the poles. Ysilla turned the tiller. Young Griff pushed the *Shy Maid* away from a broken tower whose windows stared down like blind black eyes. Overhead her sail hung limp and heavy. The water deepened under her hull, until their poles could not touch bottom, but still the current pushed them downstream, until ...

All Tyrion could see was something massive rising from the river, humped and ominous. He took it for a hill looming above a wooded island, or some colossal rock overgrown with moss and ferns and hidden by the fog. As the *Shy Maid* drew nearer, though, the shape of it came clearer. A wooden keep

could be seen beside the water, rotted and overgrown. Slender spires took form above it, some of them snapped off like broken spears. Roofless towers appeared and disappeared, thrusting blindly upward. Halls and galleries drifted past: graceful buttresses, delicate arches, fluted columns, terraces and bowers.

All ruined, all desolate, all fallen.

The grey moss grew thickly here, covering the fallen stones in great mounds and bearding all the towers. Black vines crept in and out of windows, through doors and over archways, up the sides of high stone walls. The fog concealed three-quarters of the palace, but what they glimpsed was more than enough for Tyrion to know that this island fastness had been ten times the size of the Red Keep once and a hundred times more beautiful. He knew where he was. “The Palace of Love,” he said softly.

“That was the Rhoynar name,” said Haldon Halfmaester, “but for a thousand years this has been the Palace of Sorrow.”

The ruin was sad enough, but knowing what it had been made it even sadder. *There was laughter here once*, Tyrion thought. *There were gardens bright with flowers and fountains sparkling golden in the sun. These steps once rang to the sound of lovers’ footsteps, and beneath that broken dome marriages beyond count were sealed with a kiss.* His thoughts turned to Tysha, who had so briefly been his lady wife. *It was Jaime*, he thought, despairing. *He was my own blood, my big strong brother. When I was small he brought me toys, barrel hoops and blocks and a carved wooden lion. He gave me my first pony and taught me how to ride him. When he said that he had bought you for me, I never doubted him. Why would I? He was Jaime, and you were just some girl who’d played a part. I had feared it from the start, from the moment you first smiled at me and let me touch your hand. My own father could not love me. Why would you if not for gold?*

Through the long grey fingers of the fog, he heard again the deep shuddering *thrum* of a bowstring snapping taut, the grunt Lord Tywin made as the quarrel took him beneath the belly, the slap of cheeks on stone as he sat back down to die. “Wherever whores go,” he said. *And where is that?*

Tyrion wanted to ask him. *Where did Tysha go, Father?* “How much more of this fog must we endure?”

“Another hour should see us clear of the Sorrows,” said Haldon Halfmaester. “From there on, this should be a pleasure cruise. There’s a village around every bend along the lower Rhoyme. Orchards and vineyards and fields of grain ripening in the sun, fisherfolk on the water, hot baths and sweet wines. Selhorys, Valysar, and Volon Therys are walled towns so large they would be cities in the Seven Kingdoms. I believe I’ll—”

“Light ahead,” warned Young Griff.

Tyrion saw it too. Kingfisher, *or another poleboat*, he told himself, but somehow he knew that was not right. His nose itched. He scratched at it savagely. The light grew brighter as the *Shy Maid* approached it. A soft star in the distance, it glimmered faintly through the fog, beckoning them on. Shortly it became two lights, then three: a ragged row of beacons rising from the water.

“The Bridge of Dream,” Griff named it. “There will be stone men on the span. Some may start to wail at our approach, but they are not like to molest us. Most stone men are feeble creatures, clumsy, lumbering, witless. Near the end they all go mad, but that is when they are most dangerous. If need be, fend them off with the torches. On no account let them touch you.”

“They may not even see us,” said Haldon Halfmaester. “The fog will hide us from them until we are almost at the bridge, and then we will be past before they know that we are here.”

*Stone eyes are blind eyes*, thought Tyrion. The mortal form of greyscale began in the extremities, he knew: a tingling in a fingertip, a toenail turning black, a loss of feeling. As the numbness crept into the hand, or stole past the foot and up the leg, the flesh stiffened and grew cold and the victim’s skin took on a greyish hue, resembling stone. He had heard it said that there were three good cures for greyscale: axe and sword and cleaver. Hacking off afflicted parts did sometimes stop the spread of the disease, Tyrion knew, but not always. Many a man had sacrificed one arm or foot, only to find the other going grey. Once that happened, hope was gone. Blindness

was common when the stone reached the face. In the final stages the curse turned inward, to muscles, bones, and inner organs.

Ahead of them, the bridge grew larger. *The Bridge of Dream*, Griff called it, but this dream was smashed and broken. Pale stone arches marched off into the fog, reaching from the Palace of Sorrow to the river's western bank. Half of them had collapsed, pulled down by the weight of the grey moss that draped them and the thick black vines that snaked upward from the water. The broad wooden span of the bridge had rotted through, but some of the lamps that lined the way were still aglow. As the *Shy Maid* drew closer, Tyrion could see the shapes of stone men moving in the light, shuffling aimlessly around the lamps like slow grey moths. Some were naked, others clad in shrouds.

Griff drew his longsword. "Yollo, light the torches. Lad, take Lemoire back to her cabin and stay with her."

Young Griff gave his father a stubborn look. "Lemoire knows where her cabin is. I want to stay."

"We are sworn to protect you," Lemoire said softly. "I don't need to be protected. I can use a sword as well as Duck. I'm half a knight."

"And half a boy," said Griff. "Do as you are told. Now."

The youth cursed under his breath and flung his pole down onto the deck. The sound echoed queerly in the fog, and for a moment it was as if poles were falling around them. "Why should I run and hide? Haldon is staying, and Ysilla. Even Hugor."

"Aye," said Tyrion, "but I'm small enough to hide behind a duck." He thrust half a dozen torches into the brazier's glowing coals and watched the oiled rags flare up. *Don't stare at the fire*, he told himself. The flames would leave him night blind.

"You're a *dwarf*," Young Griff said scornfully. "My secret is revealed," Tyrion agreed. "Aye, I'm less than half of Haldon, and no one gives a



mummer's fart whether I live or die." *Least of all me.* "You, though ... you are everything."

"Dwarf," said Griff, "I warned you—"

A wail came shivering through the fog, faint and high.

Lemore whirled, trembling. "Seven save us all."

The broken bridge was a bare five yards ahead. Around its piers, the water rippled white as the foam from a madman's mouth. Forty feet above, the stone men moaned and muttered beneath a flickering lamp. Most took no more notice of the *Shy Maid* than of a drifting log. Tyrion clutched his torch tighter and found that he was holding his breath. And then they were beneath the bridge, white walls heavy with curtains of grey fungus looming to either side, water foaming angrily around them. For a moment it looked as though they might crash into the right-hand pier, but Duck raised his pole and shoved off, back into the center of the channel, and a few heartbeats later they were clear.

Tyrion had no sooner exhaled than Young Griff grabbed hold of his arm. "What do you mean? I am *everything*? What did you mean by that? Why am I everything?"

"Why," said Tyrion, "if the stone men had taken Yandry or Griff or our lovely Lemore, we would have grieved for them and gone on. Lose *you*, and this whole enterprise is undone, and all those years of feverish plotting by the cheesemonger and the eunuch will have been for naught ... isn't that so?"

The boy looked to Griff. "He knows who I am."

*If I did not know before, I would now.* By then the *Shy Maid* was well downstream of the Bridge of Dream. All that remained was a dwindling light astern, and soon enough that would be gone as well. "You're Young Griff, son of Griff the sellsword," said Tyrion. "Or perhaps you are the Warrior in mortal guise. Let me take a closer look." He held up his torch, so that the light washed over Young Griff's face.

“Leave off,” Griff commanded, “or you will wish you had.”

The dwarf ignored him. “The blue hair makes your eyes seem blue, that’s good. And the tale of how you color it in honor of your dead Tyroshi mother was so touching it almost made me cry. Still, a curious man might wonder why some sellsword’s whelp would need a soiled septa to instruct him in the Faith, or a chainless maester to tutor him in history and tongues. And a clever man might question why your father would engage a hedge knight to train you in arms instead of simply sending you off to apprentice with one of the free companies. It is almost as if someone wanted to keep you hidden whilst still preparing you for ... what? Now, there’s a puzzlement, but I’m sure that in time it will come to me. I must admit, you have noble features for a dead boy.”

The boy flushed. “*I am not dead.*”

“How not? My lord father wrapped your corpse in a crimson cloak and laid you down beside your sister at the foot of the Iron Throne, his gift to the new king. Those who had the stomach to lift the cloak said that half your head was gone.”

The lad backed off a step, confused. “Your—?”

“—*father*, aye. Tywin of House Lannister. Perhaps you may have heard of him.”

Young Griff hesitated. “*Lannister?* Your father—”

“—is dead. At my hand. If it please Your Grace to call me Yollo or Hugor, so be it, but know that I was born Tyrion of House Lannister, true-born son of Tywin and Joanna, both of whom I slew. Men will tell you that I am a kingslayer, a kinslayer, and a liar, and all of that is true ... but then, we are a company of liars, are we not? Take your feigned father. *Griff*, is it?” The dwarf sniggered. “You should thank the gods that Varys the Spider is a part of this plot of yours. *Griff* would not have fooled the cockless wonder for an instant, no more than it did me. *No lord*, my lordship says, *no knight*. And I’m no dwarf. Just saying a thing does not make it true. Who better to raise

Prince Rhaegar's infant son than Prince Rhaegar's dear friend Jon Connington, once Lord of Griffin's Roost and Hand of the King?"

"Be quiet." Griff's voice was uneasy.

On the larboard side of the boat, a huge stone hand was visible just below the water. Two fingers broke the surface. *How many of those are there?* Tyrion wondered. A trickle of moisture ran down his spine and made him shudder. The Sorrows drifted by them. Peering through the mists, he glimpsed a broken spire, a headless hero, an ancient tree torn from the ground and upended, its huge roots twisting through the roof and windows of a broken dome. *Why does all of this seem so familiar?*

Straight on, a tilted stairway of pale marble rose up out of the dark water in a graceful spiral, ending abruptly ten feet above their heads. *No*, thought Tyrion, *that is not possible*.

"Ahead." Lemoire's voice was shivery. "A light."

All of them looked. All of them saw it. "*Kingfisher*," said Griff. "Her, or some other like her." But he drew his sword again.

No one said a word. The *Shy Maid* moved with the current. Her sail had not been raised since she first entered the Sorrows. She had no way to move but with the river. Duck stood squinting, clutching his pole with both hands. After a time even Yandry stopped pushing. Every eye was on the distant light. As they grew closer, it turned into two lights. Then three.

"The Bridge of Dream," said Tyrion. "Inconceivable," said Haldon Halfmaester. "We've left the bridge behind. Rivers only run one way."

"Mother Rhoyne runs how she will," murmured Yandry. "Seven save us," said Lemoire.

Up ahead, the stone men on the span began to wail. A few were pointing down at them. "Haldon, get the prince below," commanded Griff.

It was too late. The current had them in its teeth. They drifted inexorably toward the bridge. Yandry stabbed out with his pole to keep them from smashing into a pier. The thrust shoved them sideways, through a curtain of pale grey moss. Tyrion felt tendrils brush against his face, soft as a whore's fingers. Then there was a crash behind him, and the deck tilted so suddenly that he almost lost his feet and went pitching over the side.

A stone man crashed down into the boat.

He landed on the cabin roof, so heavily that the *Shy Maid* seemed to rock, and roared a word down at them in a tongue that Tyrion did not know. A second stone man followed, landing back beside the tiller. The weathered planks splintered beneath the impact, and Ysilla let out a shriek.

Duck was closest to her. The big man did not waste time reaching for his sword. Instead he swung his pole, slamming it into the stone man's chest and knocking him off the boat into the river, where he sank at once without a sound.

Griff was on the second man the instant he shambled down off the cabin roof. With a sword in his right hand and a torch in his left, he drove the creature backwards. As the current swept the *Shy Maid* beneath the bridge, their shifting shadows danced upon the mossy walls. When the stone man moved aft, Duck blocked his way, pole in hand. When he went forward, Haldon Halfmaester waved a second torch at him and drove him back. He had no choice but to come straight at Griff. The captain slid aside, his blade flashing. A spark flew where the steel bit into the stone man's calcified grey flesh, but his arm tumbled to the deck all the same. Griff kicked the limb aside. Yandry and Duck had come up with their poles. Together they forced the creature over the side and into the black waters of the Rhoyme.

By then the *Shy Maid* had drifted out from under the broken bridge. "Did we get them all?" asked Duck. "How many jumped?"

"Two," said Tyrion, shivering. "Three," said Haldon. "Behind you."

The dwarf turned, and there he stood.

The leap had shattered one of his legs, and a jagged piece of pale bone jutted out through the rotted cloth of his breeches and the grey meat beneath. The broken bone was speckled with brown blood, but still he lurched forward, reaching for Young Griff. His hand was grey and stiff, but blood oozed between his knuckles as he tried to close his fingers to grasp. The boy stood staring, as still as if he too were made of stone. His hand was on his sword hilt, but he seemed to have forgotten why.

Tyrion kicked the lad's leg out from under him and leapt over him when he fell, thrusting his torch into the stone man's face to send him stumbling backwards on his shattered leg, flailing at the flames with stiff grey hands. The dwarf waddled after him, slashing with the torch, jabbing it at the stone man's eyes. *A little farther. Back, one more step, another.* They were at the edge of the deck when the creature rushed him, grabbed the torch, and ripped it from his hands. *Bugger me*, thought Tyrion.

The stone man flung the torch away. There was a soft *hiss* as the black waters quenched the flames. The stone man howled. He had been a Summer Islander, before; his jaw and half his cheek had turned to stone, but his skin was black as midnight where it was not grey. Where he had grasped the torch, his skin had cracked and split. Blood was seeping from his knuckles though he did not seem to feel it. That was some small mercy, Tyrion supposed. Though mortal, greyscale was supposedly not painful.

*"Stand aside!"* someone shouted, far away, and another voice said, *"The prince! Protect the boy!"* The stone man staggered forward, his hands outstretched and grasping.

Tyrion drove a shoulder into him.

It felt like slamming into a castle wall, but this castle stood upon a shattered leg. The stone man went over backwards, grabbing hold of Tyrion as he fell. They hit the river with a towering splash, and Mother Rhoyne swallowed up the two of them.

The sudden cold hit Tyrion like a hammer. As he sank he felt a stone hand fumbling at his face. Another closed around his arm, dragging him down into darkness. Blind, his nose full of river, choking, sinking, he kicked and

twisted and fought to pry the clutching fingers off his arm, but the stone fingers were unyielding. Air bubbled from his lips. The world was black and growing blacker. He could not breathe.

*There are worse ways to die than drowning.* And if truth be told, he had perished long ago, back in King's Landing. It was only his revenant who remained, the small vengeful ghost who throttled Shae and put a cross-bow bolt through the great Lord Tywin's bowels. No man would mourn the thing that he'd become. *I'll haunt the Seven Kingdoms*, he thought, sinking deeper. *They would not love me living, so let them dread me dead.*

When he opened his mouth to curse them all, black water filled his lungs, and the dark closed in around him.