

TYRION

For a long while he did not stir, but lay unmoving upon the heap of old sacks that served him for a bed, listening to the wind in the lines, to the lapping of the river at the hull.

A full moon floated above the mast. *It is following me downriver, watching me like some great eye.* Despite the warmth of the musty skins that covered him, a shiver went through the little man. *I need a cup of wine. A dozen cups of wine.* But the moon would blink before that whoreson Griff let him quench his thirst. Instead he drank water, and was condemned to sleepless nights and days of sweats and shakes.

The dwarf sat up, cradling his head in his hands. *Did I dream?* All memory of it had fled. The nights had never been kind to Tyrion Lannister. He slept badly even on soft feather beds. On the *Shy Maid*, he made his bed atop the roof of the cabin, with a coil of hempen rope for a pillow. He liked it better up here than in the boat's cramped hold. The air was fresher, and the river sounds were sweeter than Duck's snoring. There was a price to be paid for such joys, though; the deck was hard, and he woke stiff and sore, his legs cramped and aching.

They were throbbing now, his calves gone hard as wood. He kneaded them with his fingers, trying to rub the ache away, but when he stood the pain was still enough to make him grimace. *I need to bathe.* His boy's clothes stank, and so did he. The others bathed in the river, but thus far he had not joined them. Some of the turtles he'd seen in the shallows looked big enough to bite him in half. *Bonesnappers*, Duck called them. Besides, he did not want Lomore to see him naked.

A wooden ladder led down from the cabin roof. Tyrion pulled on his boots and descended to the afterdeck, where Griff sat wrapped in a wolf-skin cloak beside an iron brazier. The sellsword kept the night watch by himself, rising as the rest of his band sought their beds and retiring when the sun came up.

Tyrion squatted across from him and warmed his hands over the coals. Across the water nightingales were singing. “Day soon,” he said to Griff.

“Not soon enough. We need to be under way.” If it had been up to Griff, the *Shy Maid* would continue downstream by night as well as day, but Yandry and Ysilla refused to risk their poleboat in the dark. The Upper Rhoyme was full of snags and sawyers, any one of which could rip out the *Shy Maid*’s hull. Griff did not want to hear it. What he wanted was Volantis.

The sellsword’s eyes were always moving, searching the night for ... what? *Pirates? Stone men? Slave-catchers?* The river had perils, the dwarf knew, but Griff himself struck Tyrion as more dangerous than any of them. He reminded Tyrion of Bronn, though Bronn had a sellsword’s black humor and Griff had no humor at all.

“I would kill for a cup of wine,” muttered Tyrion.

Griff made no reply. *You will die before you drink*, his pale eyes seemed to say. Tyrion had drunk himself blind his first night on the *Shy Maid*. The next day he awoke with dragons fighting in his skull. Griff took one look at him retching over the side of the poleboat, and said, “You are done with drink.”

“Wine helps me sleep,” Tyrion had protested. *Wine drowns my dreams*, he might have said.

“Then stay awake,” Griff had replied, implacable.

To the east, the first pale light of day suffused the sky above the river. The waters of the Rhoyme slowly went from black to blue, to match the sellsword’s hair and beard. Griff got to his feet. “The others should wake soon. The deck is yours.” As the nightingales fell silent, the river larks took up their song. Egrets splashed amongst the reeds and left their tracks across the sandbars. The clouds in the sky were aglow: pink and purple, maroon and gold, pearl and saffron. One looked like a dragon. *Once a man has seen a dragon in flight, let him stay at home and tend his garden in content*, someone had written once, *for this wide world has no greater wonder*.

Tyrion scratched at his scar and tried to recall the author's name. Dragons had been much in his thoughts of late.

"Good morrow, Hugor." Septa Lefore had emerged in her white robes, cinched at the waist with a woven belt of seven colors. Her hair flowed loose about her shoulders. "How did you sleep?"

"Fitfully, good lady. I dreamed of you again." *A waking dream.* He could not sleep, so he had eased a hand between his legs and imagined the septa atop him, breasts bouncing.

"A wicked dream, no doubt. You are a wicked man. Will you pray with me and ask forgiveness for your sins?"

Only if we pray in the fashion of the Summer Isles. "No, but do give the Maiden a long, sweet kiss for me."

Laughing, the septa walked to the prow of the boat. It was her custom to bathe in the river every morning. "Plainly, this boat was not named for you," Tyrion called as she disrobed.

"The Mother and the Father made us in their image, Hugor. We should glory in our bodies, for they are the work of gods."

The gods must have been drunk when they got to me. The dwarf watched Lefore slip into the water. The sight always made him hard. There was something wonderfully wicked about the thought of peeling the septa out of those chaste white robes and spreading her legs. *Innocence despoiled,* he thought ... though Lefore was not near as innocent as she appeared. She had stretch marks on her belly that could only have come from childbirth.

Yandry and Ysilla had risen with the sun and were going about their business. Yandry stole a glance at Septa Lefore from time to time as he was checking the lines. His small dark wife, Ysilla, took no notice. She fed some wood chips to the brazier on the afterdeck, stirred the coals with a blackened blade, and began to knead the dough for the morning biscuits.

When Lefore climbed back onto the deck, Tyrion savored the sight of water trickling between her breasts, her smooth skin glowing golden in the morning light. She was past forty, more handsome than pretty, but still easy on the eye. *Being randy is the next best thing to being drunk*, he decided. It made him feel as if he was still alive. “Did you see the turtle, Hugar?” the septa asked him, wringing water from her hair. “The big ridgeback?”

The early morning was the best time for seeing turtles. During the day they would swim down deep, or hide in cuts along the banks, but when the sun was newly risen they came to the surface. Some liked to swim beside the boat. Tyrion had glimpsed a dozen different sorts: large turtles and small ones, flatbacks and red-ears, softshells and bonesnappers, brown turtles, green turtles, black turtles, clawed turtles and horned turtles, turtles whose ridged and patterned shells were covered with whorls of gold and jade and cream. Some were so large they could have borne a man upon their backs. Yandry swore the Rhoynar princes used to ride them across the river. He and his wife were Greenblood born, a pair of Dornish orphans come home to Mother Rhoyme.

“I missed the ridgeback.” *I was watching the naked woman*. “I am sad for you.” Lefore slipped her robe over her head. “I know you only rise so early in hopes of seeing turtles.”

“I like to watch the sun come up as well.” It was like watching a maiden rising naked from her bath. Some might be prettier than others, but every one was full of promise. “The turtles have their charms, I will allow. Nothing delights me so much as the sight of a nice pair of shapely ... shells.”

Septa Lefore laughed. Like everyone else aboard the *Shy Maid*, she had her secrets. She was welcome to them. *I do not want to know her, I only want to fuck her*. She knew it too. As she hung her septa’s crystal about her neck, to nestle in the cleft between her breasts, she teased him with a smile.

Yandry pulled up the anchor, slid one of the long poles off the cabin roof, and pushed them off. Two of the herons raised their heads to watch as the *Shy Maid* drifted away from the bank, out into the current. Slowly the boat began to move downstream. Yandry went to the tiller. Ysilla was turning the

biscuits. She laid an iron pan atop the brazier and put the bacon in. Some days she cooked biscuits and bacon; some days bacon and biscuits. Once every fortnight there might be a fish, but not today.

When Ysilla turned her back, Tyrion snatched a biscuit off the brazier, darting away just in time to avoid a smack from her fearsome wooden spoon. They were best when eaten hot, dripping with honey and butter. The smell of the bacon cooking soon fetched Duck up from the hold. He sniffed over the brazier, received a swack from Ysilla's spoon, and went back to have his morning piss off the stern.

Tyrion waddled over to join him. "Now here's a sight to see," he quipped as they were emptying their bladders, "a dwarf and a duck, making the mighty Rhoyne that much mightier."

Yandry snorted in derision. "Mother Rhoyne has no need of your water, Yollo. She is the greatest river in the world."

Tyrion shook off the last few drops. "Big enough to drown a dwarf, I grant you. The Mander is as broad, though. So is the Trident, near its mouth. The Blackwater runs deeper."

"You do not know the river. Wait, and you will see."

The bacon turned crisp, the biscuits golden brown. Young Griff stumbled up onto deck yawning. "Good morrow, all." The lad was shorter than Duck, but his lanky build suggested that he had not yet come into his full growth. *This beardless boy could have any maiden in the Seven Kingdoms, blue hair or no. Those eyes of his would melt them.* Like his sire, Young Griff had blue eyes, but where the father's eyes were pale, the son's were dark. By lamplight they turned black, and in the light of dusk they seemed purple. His eyelashes were as long as any woman's.

"I smell bacon," the lad said, pulling on his boots. "Good bacon," said Ysilla. "Sit."

She fed them on the afterdeck, pressing honeyed biscuits on Young Griff and hitting Duck's hand with her spoon whenever he made a grab for more

bacon. Tyrion pulled apart two biscuits, filled them with bacon, and carried one to Yandry at the tiller. Afterward he helped Duck to raise the *Shy Maid*'s big lateen sail. Yandry took them out into the center of the river, where the current was strongest. The *Shy Maid* was a sweet boat. Her draft was so shallow she could work her way up even the smallest of the river's vassal streams, negotiating sandbars that would have stranded larger vessels, yet with her sail raised and a current under her, she could make good speed. That could mean life and death on the upper reaches of the Rhoyne, Yandry claimed. "There is no law above the Sorrows, not for a thousand years."

"And no *people*, so far as I can see." He'd glimpsed some ruins along the banks, piles of masonry overgrown by vines and moss and flowers, but no other signs of human habitation.

"You do not know the river, Yollo. A pirate boat may lurk up any stream, and escaped slaves oft hide amongst the ruins. The slave-catchers seldom come so far north."

"Slave-catchers would be a welcome change from turtles." Not being an escaped slave, Tyrion need not fear being caught. And no pirate was like to bother a poleboat moving downstream. The valuable goods came up the river from Volantis.

When the bacon was gone, Duck punched Young Griff in the shoulder. "Time to raise some bruises. Swords today, I think."

"Swords?" Young Griff grinned. "Swords will be sweet."

Tyrion helped him dress for the bout, in heavy breeches, padded doublet, and a dented suit of old steel plate. Ser Rolly shrugged into his mail and boiled leather. Both set helms upon their heads and chose blunted longswords from the bundle in the weapons chest. They set to on the afterdeck, having at each other lustily whilst the rest of the morning company looked on.

When they fought with mace or blunted longaxe, Ser Rolly's greater size and strength would quickly overwhelm his charge; with swords the contests

were more even. Neither man had taken up a shield this morning, so it was a game of slash and parry, back and forth across the deck. The river rang to the sounds of their combat. Young Griff landed more blows, though Duck's were harder. After a while, the bigger man began to tire. His cuts came a little slower, a little lower. Young Griff turned them all and launched a furious attack that forced Ser Rolly back. When they reached the stern, the lad tied up their blades and slammed a shoulder into Duck, and the big man went into the river.

He came up sputtering and cursing, bellowing for someone to fish him out before a 'snapper ate his privates. Tyrion tossed a line to him. "Ducks should swim better than that," he said as he and Yandry were hauling the knight back aboard the *Shy Maid*.

Ser Rolly grabbed Tyrion by the collar. "Let us see how dwarfs swim," he said, chucking him headlong into the Rhoyme.

The dwarf laughed last; he could paddle passably well, and did ... until his legs began to cramp. Young Griff extended him a pole. "You are not the first to try and drown me," he told Duck, as he was pouring river water from his boot. "My father threw me down a well the day I was born, but I was so ugly that the water witch who lived down there spat me back." He pulled off the other boot, then did a cartwheel along the deck, spraying all of them.

Young Griff laughed. "Where did you learn that?"

"The mummers taught me," he lied. "My mother loved me best of all her children because I was so small. She nursed me at her breast till I was seven. That made my brothers jealous, so they stuffed me in a sack and sold me to a mummer's troupe. When I tried to run off the master mummer cut off half my nose, so I had no choice but to go with them and learn to be amusing."

The truth was rather different. His uncle had taught him a bit of tumbling when he was six or seven. Tyrion had taken to it eagerly. For half a year he cartwheeled his merry way about Casterly Rock, bringing smiles to the

faces of septons, squires, and servants alike. Even Cersei laughed to see him once or twice.

All that ended abruptly the day his father returned from a sojourn in King's Landing. That night at supper Tyrion surprised his sire by walking the length of the high table on his hands. Lord Tywin was not pleased. "The gods made you a dwarf. Must you be a fool as well? You were born a lion, not a monkey."

And you're a corpse, Father, so I'll caper as I please. "You have a gift for making men smile," Septa Lefore told Tyrion as he was drying off his toes. "You should thank the Father Above. He gives gifts to all his children."

"He does," he agreed pleasantly. *And when I die, please let them bury with me a crossbow, so I can thank the Father Above for his gifts the same way I thanked the father below.*

His clothing was still soaked from his involuntary swim, clinging to his arms and legs uncomfortably. Whilst Young Griff went off with Septa Lefore to be instructed in the mysteries of the Faith, Tyrion stripped off the wet clothes and donned dry ones. Duck had a good guffaw when he emerged on deck again. He could not blame him. Dressed as he was, he made a comic sight. His doublet was divided down the middle; the left side was purple velvet with bronze studs; the right, yellow wool embroidered in green floral patterns. His breeches were similarly split; the right leg was solid green, the left leg striped in red and white. One of Illyrio's chests had been packed with a child's clothing, musty but well made. Septa Lefore had slit each garment apart, then sewn them back together, joining half of this to half of that to fashion a crude motley. Griff had even insisted that Tyrion help with the cutting and sewing. No doubt he meant for it to be humbling, but Tyrion enjoyed the needlework. Lefore was always pleasant company, despite her penchant for scolding him whenever he said something rude about the gods. *If Griff wants to cast me as the fool, I'll play the game.* Somewhere, he knew, Lord Tywin Lannister was horrified, and that took the sting from it.

His other duty was anything but foolish. *Duck has his sword, I my quill and parchment.* Griff had commanded him to set down all he knew of

dragonlore. The task was a formidable one, but the dwarf labored at it every day, scratching away as best he could as he sat cross-legged on the cabin roof.

Tyrion had read much and more of dragons through the years. The greater part of those accounts were idle tales and could not be relied on, and the books that Illyrio had provided them were not the ones he might have wished for. What he really wanted was the complete text of *The Fires of the Freehold*, Galendro's history of Valyria. No complete copy was known to Westeros, however; even the Citadel's lacked twenty-seven scrolls. *They must have a library in Old Volantis, surely. I may find a better copy there, if I can find a way inside the Black Walls to the city's heart.*

He was less hopeful concerning Septon Barth's *Dragons, Wyrms, and Wyverns: Their Unnatural History*. Barth had been a blacksmith's son who rose to be King's Hand during the reign of Jaehaerys the Conciliator. His enemies always claimed he was more sorcerer than septon. Baelor the Blessed had ordered all Barth's writings destroyed when he came to the Iron Throne. Ten years ago, Tyrion had read a fragment of *Unnatural History* that had eluded the Blessed Baelor, but he doubted that any of Barth's work had found its way across the narrow sea. And of course there was even less chance of his coming on the fragmentary, anonymous, blood-soaked tome sometimes called *Blood and Fire* and sometimes *The Death of Dragons*, the only surviving copy of which was supposedly hidden away in a locked vault beneath the Citadel.

When the Halfmaester appeared on deck, yawning, the dwarf was writing down what he recalled concerning the mating habits of dragons, on which subject Barth, Munkun, and Thomax held markedly divergent views. Haldon stalked to the stern to piss down at the sun where it shimmered on the water, breaking apart with every puff of wind. "We should reach the junction with the Noyne by evening, Yollo," the Halfmaester called out.

Tyrion glanced up from his writing. "My name is Hugor. Yollo is hiding in my breeches. Shall I let him out to play?"

"Best not. You might frighten the turtles." Haldon's smile was as sharp as the blade of a dagger. "What did you tell me was the name of that street in

Lannisport where you were born, Yollo?”

“It was an alley. It had no name.” Tyrion took a mordant pleasure in inventing the details of the colorful life of Hugor Hill, also known as Yollo, a bastard out of Lannisport. *The best lies are seasoned with a bit of truth.* The dwarf knew he sounded like a westerman, and a highborn westerman at that, so Hugor must needs be some lordling’s by-blow. Born in Lannisport because he knew that city better than Oldtown or King’s Landing, and cities were where most dwarfs ended up, even those whelped by Goodwife Bumpkin in the turnip patch. The countryside had no grotes-queries or mummer shows ... though it did have wells aplenty, to swallow up unwanted kittens, three-headed calves, and babes like him.

“I see you have been defacing more good parchment, Yollo.” Haldon laced up his breeches.

“Not all of us can be half a maester.” Tyrion’s hand was cramping. He put his quill aside and flexed his stubby fingers. “Fancy another game of *cyvasse*?” The Halfmaester always defeated him, but it was a way to pass the time.

“This evening. Will you join us for Young Griff’s lesson?”

“Why not? Someone needs to correct your errors.”

There were four cabins on the *Shy Maid*. Yandry and Ysilla shared one,

Griff and Young Griff another. Septa Lemoire had a cabin to herself, as did Haldon. The Halfmaester’s cabin was the largest of the four. One wall was lined with bookshelves and bins stacked with old scrolls and parchments; another held racks of ointments, herbs, and potions. Golden light slanted through the wavy yellow glass of the round window. The furnishings included a bunk, a writing desk, a chair, a stool, and the Halfmaester’s *cyvasse* table, strewn with carved wooden pieces.

The lesson began with languages. Young Griff spoke the Common Tongue as if he had been born to it, and was fluent in High Valyrian, the low dialects of Pentos, Tyrosh, Myr, and Lys, and the trade talk of sailors. The

Volantene dialect was as new to him as it was to Tyrion, so every day they learned a few more words whilst Haldon corrected their mistakes.

Meereenese was harder; its roots were Valyrian as well, but the tree had been grafted onto the harsh, ugly tongue of Old Ghis. “You need a bee up your nose to speak Ghiscari properly,” Tyrion complained. Young Griff laughed, but the Halfmaester only said, “Again.” The boy obeyed, though he rolled his eyes along with his *zzzs* this time. *He has a better ear than me*, Tyrion was forced to admit, *though I’ll wager my tongue is still more nimble*.

Geometry followed languages. There the boy was less adroit, but Haldon was a patient teacher, and Tyrion was able to make himself of use as well. He had learned the mysteries of squares and circles and triangles from his father’s maesters at Casterly Rock, and they came back more quickly than he would have thought.

By the time they turned to history, Young Griff was growing restive. “We were discussing the history of Volantis,” Haldon said to him. “Can you tell Yollo the difference between a tiger and an elephant?”

“Volantis is the oldest of the Nine Free Cities, first daughter of Valyria,” the lad replied, in a bored tone. “After the Doom it pleased the Volantenes to consider themselves the heirs of the Freehold and rightful rulers of the world, but they were divided as to how dominion might best be achieved. The Old Blood favored the sword, while the merchants and moneylenders advocated trade. As they contended for rule of the city, the factions became known as the tigers and elephants, respectively.

“The tigers held sway for almost a century after the Doom of Valyria. For a time they were successful. A Volantene fleet took Lys and a Volantene army captured Myr, and for two generations all three cities were ruled from within the Black Walls. That ended when the tigers tried to swallow Tyrosh. Pentos came into the war on the Tyroshi side, along with the Westerosi Storm King. Braavos provided a Lyseni exile with a hundred warships, Aegon Targaryen flew forth from Dragonstone on the Black Dread, and Myr and Lys rose up in rebellion. The war left the Disputed Lands a waste, and freed Lys and Myr from the yoke. The tigers suffered other defeats as well. The fleet they sent to reclaim Valyria vanished in the Smoking Sea.

Qohor and Norvos broke their power on the Rhoyme when the fire galleys fought on Dagger Lake. Out of the east came the Dothraki, driving smallfolk from their hovels and nobles from their estates, until only grass and ruins remained from the forest of Qohor to the headwaters of the Selhoru. After a century of war, Volantis found herself broken, bankrupt, and depopulated. It was then that the elephants rose up. They have held sway ever since. Some years the tigers elect a triarch, and some years they do not, but never more than one, so the elephants have ruled the city for three hundred years.”

“Just so,” said Haldon. “And the present triarchs?”

“Malaquo is a tiger, Nyessos and Doniphos are elephants.”

“And what lesson can we draw from Volantene history?”

“If you want to conquer the world, you best have dragons.”

Tyrion could not help but laugh.

Later, when Young Griff went up on deck to help Yandry with the sails and poles, Haldon set up his *cyvasse* table for their game. Tyrion watched with mismatched eyes, and said, “The boy is bright. You have done well by him. Half the lords in Westeros are not so learned, sad to say. Languages, history, songs, sums ... a heady stew for some sellsword’s son.”

“A book can be as dangerous as a sword in the right hands,” said Haldon.

“Try to give me a better battle this time, Yollo. You play *cyvasse* as badly as you tumble.”

“I am trying to lull you into a false sense of confidence,” said Tyrion, as they arranged their tiles on either side of a carved wooden screen. “You *think* you taught me how to play, but things are not always as they seem. Perhaps I learned the game from the cheesemonger, have you considered that?”

“Illyrio does not play *cyvasse*.”

No, thought the dwarf, he plays the game of thrones, and you and Griff and Duck are only pieces, to be moved where he will and sacrificed at need, just as he sacrificed Viserys. “The blame must fall on you, then. If I play badly, it is your doing.”

The Halfmaester chuckled. “Yollo, I shall miss you when the pirates cut your throat.”

“Where are these famous pirates? I am beginning to think that you and Illyrio made them all up.”

“They are thickest on the stretch of river between Ar Noy and the Sorrows. Above the ruins of Ar Noy, the Qohorik rule the river, and below the Sorrows the galleys of Volantis hold sway, but neither city claims the waters in between, so the pirates have made it their own. Dagger Lake is full of islands where they lurk in hidden caves and secret strongholds. Are you ready?”

“For you? Beyond a doubt. For the pirates? Less so.”

Haldon removed the screen. Each of them contemplated the other’s opening array. “You are learning,” the Halfmaester said.

Tyrion almost grabbed his dragon but thought better of it. Last game he had brought her out too soon and lost her to a trebuchet. “If we do meet these fabled pirates, I may join up with them. I’ll tell them that my name is Hugor Halfmaester.” He moved his light horse toward Haldon’s mountains.

Haldon answered with an elephant. “Hugor Halfwit would suit you better.”

“I only need half my wits to be a match for you.” Tyrion moved up his heavy horse to support the light. “Perhaps you would care to wager on the outcome?”

The Halfmaester arched an eyebrow. “How much?”

“I have no coin. We’ll play for secrets.”

“Griff would cut my tongue out.”

“Afraid, are you? I would be if I were you.”

“The day you defeat me at *cyvasse* will be the day turtles crawl out my arse.” The Halfmaester moved his spears. “You have your wager, little man.”

Tyrion stretched a hand out for his dragon.

It was three hours later when the little man finally crept back up on deck to empty his bladder. Duck was helping Yandry wrestle down the sail, while Ysilla took the tiller. The sun hung low above the reed-beds along the western bank, as the wind began to gust and rip. *I need that skin of wine*, the dwarf thought. His legs were cramped from squatting on that stool, and he felt so light-headed that he was lucky not to fall into the river.

“Yollo,” Duck called. “Where’s Haldon?”

“He’s taken to his bed, in some discomfort. There are turtles crawling out his arse.” He left the knight to sort that out and crawled up the ladder to the cabin roof. Off to the east, there was darkness gathering behind a rocky island.

Septa Lemoire found him there. “Can you feel the storms in the air, Hugor Hill? Dagger Lake is ahead of us, where pirates prowl. And beyond that lie the Sorrows.”

Not mine. I carry mine own sorrows with me, everywhere I go. He thought of Tysha and wondered where whores go. *Why not Volantis? Perhaps I’ll find her there. A man should cling to hope.* He wondered what he would say to her. *I am sorry that I let them rape you, love. I thought you were a whore. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me? I want to go back to our cottage, to the way it was when we were man and wife.*

The island fell away behind them. Tyrion saw ruins rising along the eastern bank: crooked walls and fallen towers, broken domes and rows of rotted wooden pillars, streets choked by mud and overgrown with purple moss. *Another dead city, ten times as large as Ghoyan Drohe.* Turtles lived there now, big bonesnappers. The dwarf could see them basking in the sun,

brown and black hummocks with jagged ridges down the center of their shells. A few saw the *Shy Maid* and slid down into the water, leaving ripples in their wake. This would not be a good place for a swim.

Then, through the twisted half-drowned trees and wide wet streets, he glimpsed the silvery sheen of sunlight upon water. *Another river*, he knew at once, *rushing toward the Rhoyme*. The ruins grew taller as the land grew narrower, until the city ended on a point of land where stood the remains of a colossal palace of pink and green marble, its collapsed domes and broken spires looming large above a row of covered archways. Tyrion saw more 'snappers sleeping in the slips where half a hundred ships might once have docked. He knew where he was then. *That was Nymeria's palace, and this is all that remains of Ny Sar, her city.*

"Yollo," shouted Yandry as the *Shy Maid* passed the point, "tell me again of those Westerosi rivers as big as Mother Rhoyme."

"I did not know," he called back. "No river in the Seven Kingdoms is half so wide as this." The new river that had joined them was a close twin to the one they had been sailing down, and that one alone had almost matched the Mander or the Trident.

"This is Ny Sar, where the Mother gathers in her Wild Daughter, Noyne," said Yandry, "but she will not reach her widest point until she meets her other daughters. At Dagger Lake the Qhoyme comes rushing in, the Darkling Daughter, full of gold and amber from the Axe and pine-cones from the Forest of Qohor. South of there the Mother meets Lhorulu, the Smiling Daughter from the Golden Fields. Where they join once stood Chroyane, the festival city, where the streets were made of water and the houses made of gold. Then south and east again for long leagues, until at last comes creeping in Selhoru, the Shy Daughter who hides her course in reeds and writhes. There Mother Rhoyme waxes so wide that a man upon a boat in the center of the stream cannot see a shore to either side. You shall see, my little friend."

I shall, the dwarf was thinking, when he spied a rippling ahead not six yards from the boat. He was about to point it out to Lemore when it came to the surface with a wash of water that rocked the *Shy Maid* sideways.

It was another turtle, a horned turtle of enormous size, its dark green shell mottled with brown and overgrown with water moss and crusty black river molluscs. It raised its head and bellowed, a deep-throated thrumming roar louder than any warhorn that Tyrion had ever heard. “We are blessed,” Ysilla was crying loudly, as tears streamed down her face. “We are blessed, we are blessed.”

Duck was hooting, and Young Griff too. Haldon came out on deck to learn the cause of the commotion ... but too late. The giant turtle had vanished below the water once again. “What was the cause of all that noise?” the Halfmaester asked.

“A turtle,” said Tyrion. “A turtle bigger than this boat.”

“It was *him*,” cried Yandry. “The Old Man of the River.”

And why not? Tyrion grinned. *Gods and wonders always appear, to attend the birth of kings.*