

TYRION

“Lot ninety-seven.” The auctioneer snapped his whip. “A pair of dwarfs, well trained for your amusement.”

The auction block had been thrown up where the broad brown Skahazadhan flowed into Slaver’s Bay. Tyrion Lannister could smell the salt in the air, mingled with the stink from the latrine ditches behind the slave pens. He did not mind the heat so much as he did the damp. The very air seemed to weigh him down, like a warm wet blanket across his head and shoulders.

“Dog and pig included in lot,” the auctioneer announced. “The dwarfs ride them. Delight the guests at your next feast or use them for a folly.”

The bidders sat on wooden benches sipping fruit drinks. A few were being fanned by slaves. Many wore *tokars*, that peculiar garment beloved by the old blood of Slaver’s Bay, as elegant as it was impractical. Others dressed more plainly—men in tunics and hooded cloaks, women in colored silks. Whores or priestesses, most like; this far east it was hard to tell the two apart.

Back behind the benches, trading japes and making mock of the proceedings, stood a clot of westerners. *Sellswords*, Tyrion knew. He spied longswords, dirks and daggers, a brace of throwing axes, mail beneath their cloaks. Their hair and beards and faces marked most for men of the Free Cities, but here and there were a few who might have been Westerosi. *Are they buying? Or did they just turn up for the show?*

“Who will open for this pair?”

“Three hundred,” bid a matron on an antique palanquin. “Four,” called a monstrously fat Yunkishman from the litter where he sprawled like a leviathan. Covered all in yellow silk fringed with gold, he looked as large as four Illyrios. Tyrion pitied the slaves who had to carry him. *At least we will be spared that duty. What joy to be a dwarf.*

“And one,” said a crone in a violet *tokar*. The auctioneer gave her a sour look but did not disallow the bid.

The slave sailors off the *Selaesori Qhoran*, sold singly, had gone for prices ranging from five hundred to nine hundred pieces of silver. Seasoned seamen were a valuable commodity. None had put up any sort of fight when the slaves boarded their crippled cog. For them this was just a change of owner. The ship’s mates had been free men, but the widow of the waterfront had written them a binder, promising to stand their ransom in such a case as this. The three surviving fiery fingers had not been sold yet, but they were chattels of the Lord of Light and could count on being bought back by some red temple. The flames tattooed upon their faces were their binders.

Tyrion and Penny had no such reassurance. “Four-fifty,” came the bid. “Four-eighty.”

“Five hundred.”

Some bids were called out in High Valyrian, some in the mongrel tongue of Ghis. A few buyers signaled with a finger, the twist of a wrist, or the wave of a painted fan.

“I’m glad they are keeping us together,” Penny whispered.

The slave trader shot them a look. “No talk.”

Tyrion gave Penny’s shoulder a squeeze. Strands of hair, pale blond and black, clung to his brow, the rags of his tunic to his back. Some of that was sweat, some dried blood. He had not been so foolish as to fight the slavers, as Jorah Mormont had, but that did not mean he had escaped punishment. In his case it was his mouth that earned him lashes.

“Eight hundred.”

“And fifty.”

“And one.”

We're worth as much as a sailor, Tyrion mused. Though perhaps it was Pretty Pig the buyers wanted. *A well-trained pig is hard to find*. They certainly were not bidding by the pound.

At nine hundred pieces of silver, the bidding began to slow. At nine hundred fifty-one (from the crone), it stopped. The auctioneer had the scent, though, and nothing would do but that the dwarfs give the crowd a taste of their show. Crunch and Pretty Pig were led up onto the platform. Without saddles or bridles, mounting them proved tricky. The moment the sow began to move Tyrion slid off her rump and landed on his own, provoking gales of laughter from the bidders.

“One thousand,” bid the grotesque fat man.

“And one.” The crone again.

Penny’s mouth was frozen in a rictus of a smile. *Well trained for your amusement*. Her father had a deal to answer for, in whatever small hell was reserved for dwarfs.

“Twelve hundred.” The leviathan in yellow. A slave beside him handed him a drink. *Lemon, no doubt*. The way those yellow eyes were fixed upon the block made Tyrion uncomfortable.

“Thirteen hundred.”

“And one.” The crone.

My father always said a Lannister was worth ten times as much as any common man.

At sixteen hundred the pace began to flag again, so the slave trader invited some of the buyers to come up for a closer look at the dwarfs. “The female’s young,” he promised. “You could breed the two of them, get good coin for the whelps.”

“Half his nose is gone,” complained the crone once she’d had a good close look. Her wrinkled face puckered with displeasure. Her flesh was maggot

white; wrapped in the violet *tokar*, she looked like a prune gone to mold. “His eyes don’t match neither. An ill-favored thing.”

“My lady hasn’t seen my best part yet.” Tyrion grabbed his crotch, in case she missed his meaning.

The hag hissed in outrage, and Tyrion got a lick of the whip across his back, a stinging cut that drove him to his knees. The taste of blood filled his mouth. He grinned and spat.

“Two thousand,” called a new voice, back of the benches.

And what would a sellsword want with a dwarf? Tyrion pushed himself back to his feet to get a better look. The new bidder was an older man, white-haired yet tall and fit, with leathery brown skin and a close-cropped salt-and-pepper beard. Half-hidden under a faded purple cloak were a longsword and a brace of daggers.

“Twenty-five hundred.” A female voice this time; a girl, short, with a thick waist and heavy bosom, clad in ornate armor. Her sculpted black steel breastplate was inlaid in gold and showed a harpy rising with chains dangling from her claws. A pair of slave soldiers lifted her to shoulder height on a shield.

“Three thousand.” The brown-skinned man pushed through the crowd, his fellow sellswords shoving buyers aside to clear a path. *Yes. Come closer.* Tyrion knew how to deal with sellswords. He did not think for a moment that this man wanted him to frolic at feasts. *He knows me. He means to take me back to Westeros and sell me to my sister.* The dwarf rubbed his mouth to hide his smile. Cersei and the Seven Kingdoms were half a world away. Much and more could happen before he got there. *I turned Bronn. Give me half a chance, might be I could turn this one too.*

The crone and the girl on the shield gave up the chase at three thousand, but not the fat man in yellow. He weighed the sellswords with his yellow eyes, flicked his tongue across his yellow teeth, and said, “Five thousand silvers for the lot.”

The sellsword frowned, shrugged, turned away.

Seven hells. Tyrion was quite certain that he did not want to become the property of the immense Lord Yellowbelly. Just the sight of him sagging across his litter, a mountain of sallow flesh with piggy yellow eyes and breasts big as Pretty Pig pushing at the silk of his *tokar* was enough to make the dwarf's skin crawl. And the smell wafting off him was palpable even on the block.

"If there are no further bids—"

"Seven thousand," shouted Tyrion.

Laughter rippled across the benches. "The dwarf wants to buy himself," the girl on the shield observed.

Tyrion gave her a lascivious grin. "A clever slave deserves a clever master, and you lot all look like fools."

That provoked more laughter from the bidders, and a scowl from the auctioneer, who was fingering his whip indecisively as he tried to puzzle out whether this would work to his benefit.

"Five thousand is an insult!" Tyrion called out. "I joust, I sing, I say amusing things. I'll fuck your wife and make her scream. Or your enemy's wife if you prefer, what better way to shame him? I'm murder with a cross-bow, and men three times my size quail and tremble when we meet across a *cyvasse* table. I have even been known to cook from time to time. I bid *ten* thousand silvers for myself! I'm good for it, I am, I am. My father told me I must always pay my debts."

The sellsword in the purple cloak turned back. His eyes met Tyrion's across the rows of other bidders, and he smiled. *A warm smile, that,* the dwarf reflected. *Friendly. But my, those eyes are cold. Might be I don't want him to buy us after all.*

The yellow enormity was squirming in his litter, a look of annoyance on his huge pie face. He muttered something sour in Ghiscari that Tyrion did not

understand, but the tone of it was plain enough. “Was that another bid?” The dwarf cocked his head. “I offer all the gold of Casterly Rock.”

He heard the whip before he felt it, a whistle in the air, thin and sharp. Tyrion grunted under the blow, but this time he managed to stay on his feet. His thoughts flashed back to the beginnings of his journey, when his most pressing problem had been deciding which wine to drink with his midmorning snails. *See what comes of chasing dragons.* A laugh burst from his lips, spattering the first row of buyers with blood and spit.

“You are sold,” the auctioneer announced. Then he hit him again, just because he could. This time Tyrion went down.

One of the guards yanked him back to his feet. Another prodded Penny down off the platform with the butt of his spear. The next piece of chattel was already being led up to take their place. A girl, fifteen or sixteen, not off the *Selaesori Qhoran* this time. Tyrion did not know her. *The same age as Daenerys Targaryen, or near enough.* The slaver soon had her naked. *At least we were spared that humiliation.*

Tyrion gazed across the Yunkish camp to the walls of Meereen. Those gates looked so close ... and if the talk in the slave pens could be believed, Meereen remained a free city for the nonce. Within those crumbling walls, slavery and the slave trade were still forbidden. All he had to do was reach those gates and pass beyond, and he would be a free man again.

But that was hardly possible unless he abandoned Penny. *She’d want to take the dog and the pig along.*

“It won’t be so terrible, will it?” Penny whispered. “He paid so much for us. He’ll be kind, won’t he?”

So long as we amuse him. “We’re too valuable to mistreat,” he reassured her, with blood still trickling down his back from those last two lashes. *When our show grows stale, however ... and it does, it does grow stale ...*

Their master’s overseer was waiting to take charge of them, with a mule cart and two soldiers. He had a long narrow face and a chin beard bound

about with golden wire, and his stiff red-black hair swept out from his temples to form a pair of taloned hands. “What darling little creatures you are,” he said. “You remind me of my own children ... or would, if my little ones were not dead. I shall take good care of you. Tell me your names.”

“Penny.” Her voice was a whisper, small and scared.

Tyrion, of House Lannister, rightful lord of Casterly Rock, you sniveling worm. “Yollo.”

“Bold Yollo. Bright Penny. You are the property of the noble and valorous Yezzan zo Qaggaz, scholar and warrior, revered amongst the Wise Masters of Yunkai. Count yourselves fortunate, for Yezzan is a kindly and benevolent master. Think of him as you would your father.”

Gladly, thought Tyrion, but this time he held his tongue. They would have to perform for their new master soon enough, he did not doubt, and he could not take another lash.

“Your father loves his special treasures best of all, and he will cherish you,” the overseer was saying. “And me, think of me as you would the nurse who cared for you when you were small. Nurse is what all my children call me.”

“Lot ninety-nine,” the auctioneer called. “A warrior.”

The girl had sold quickly and was being bundled off to her new owner, clutching her clothing to small, pink-tipped breasts. Two slavers dragged Jorah Mormont onto the block to take her place. The knight was naked but for a breechclout, his back raw from the whip, his face so swollen as to be almost unrecognizable. Chains bound his wrists and ankles. *A little taste of the meal he cooked for me*, Tyrion thought, yet he found that he could take no pleasure from the big knight’s miseries.

Even in chains, Mormont looked dangerous, a hulking brute with big, thick arms and sloped shoulders. All that coarse dark hair on his chest made him look more beast than man. Both his eyes were blackened, two dark pits in that grotesquely swollen face. Upon one cheek he bore a brand: a demon’s mask.

When the slavers had swarmed aboard the *Selaesori Qhoran*, Ser Jorah had met them with longsword in hand, slaying three before they overwhelmed him. Their shipmates would gladly have killed him, but the captain forbade it; a fighter was always worth good silver. So Mormont had been chained to an oar, beaten within an inch of his life, starved, and branded.

“Big and strong, this one,” the auctioneer declared. “Plenty of piss in him. He’ll give a good show in the fighting pits. Who will start me out at three hundred?”

No one would.

Mormont paid no mind to the mongrel crowd; his eyes were fixed beyond the siege lines, on the distant city with its ancient walls of many-colored brick. Tyrion could read that look as easy as a book: *so near and yet so distant*. The poor wretch had returned too late. Daenerys Targaryen was wed, the guards on the pens had told them, laughing. She had taken a Meereenese slaver as her king, as wealthy as he was noble, and when the peace was signed and sealed the fighting pits of Meereen would open once again. Other slaves insisted that the guards were lying, that Daenerys Targaryen would never make peace with slavers. *Mhysa*, they called her. Someone told him that meant *Mother*. Soon the silver queen would come forth from her city, smash the Yunkai’i, and break their chains, they whispered to one another.

And then she’ll bake us all a lemon pie and kiss our widdle wounds and make them better, the dwarf thought. He had no faith in royal rescues. If need be, he would see to their deliverance himself. The mushrooms jammed into the toe of his boot should be sufficient for both him and Penny. Crunch and Pretty Pig would need to fend for themselves.

Nurse was still lecturing his master’s new prizes. “Do all you are told and nothing more, and you shall live like little lords, pampered and adored,” he promised. “Disobey ... but you would never do that, would you? Not my sweetlings.” He reached down and pinched Penny on her cheek.

“Two hundred, then,” the auctioneer said. “A big brute like this, he’s worth three times as much. What a bodyguard he will make! No enemy will dare

molest you!”

“Come, my little friends,” Nurse said, “I will show you to your new home. In Yunkai you will dwell in the golden pyramid of Qaggaz and dine off silver plates, but here we live simply, in the humble tents of soldiers.”

“Who will give me one hundred?” cried the auctioneer.

That drew a bid at last, though it was only fifty silvers. The bidder was a thin man in a leather apron.

“And one,” said the crone in the violet *tokar*.

One of the soldiers lifted Penny onto the back of the mule cart. “Who is the old woman?” the dwarf asked him.

“Zahrina,” the man said. “Cheap fighters, hers. Meat for heroes. Your friend dead soon.”

He was no friend to me. Yet Tyrion Lannister found himself turning to Nurse and saying, “You cannot let her have him.”

Nurse squinted at him. “What is this noise you make?”

Tyrion pointed. “That one is part of our show. The bear and the maiden fair. Jorah is the bear, Penny is the maiden, I am the brave knight who rescues her. I dance about and hit him in the balls. Very funny.”

The overseer squinted at the auction block. “Him?” The bidding for Jorah Mormont had reached two hundred silvers.

“And one,” said the crone in the violet *tokar*. “Your bear. I see.” Nurse went scuttling off through the crowd, bent over the huge yellow Yunkishman in his litter, whispered in his ear. His master nodded, chins wobbling, then raised his fan. “Three hundred,” he called out in a wheezy voice.

The crone sniffed and turned away. “Why did you do that?” Penny asked, in the Common Tongue.

A fair question, thought Tyrion. *Why did I?* “Your show was growing dull. Every mummer needs a dancing bear.”

She gave him a reproachful look, then retreated to the back of the cart and sat with her arms around Crunch, as if the dog was her last true friend in the world. *Perhaps he is.*

Nurse returned with Jorah Mormont. Two of their master’s slave soldiers flung him into the back of the mule cart between the dwarfs. The knight did not struggle. *All the fight went out of him when he heard that his queen had wed*, Tyrion realized. One whispered word had done what fists and whips and clubs could not; it had broken him. *I should have let the crone have him. He’s going to be as useful as nipples on a breastplate.*

Nurse climbed onto the front of the mule cart and took up the reins, and they set off through the siege camp to the compound of their new master, the noble Yezzan zo Qaggaz. Four slave soldiers marched beside them, two on either side of the cart.

Penny did not weep, but her eyes were red and miserable, and she never lifted them from Crunch. *Does she think all this might fade away if she does not look at it?* Ser Jorah Mormont looked at no one and nothing. He sat huddled, brooding in his chains.

Tyrion looked at everything and everyone.

The Yunkish encampment was not one camp but a hundred camps raised up cheek by jowl in a crescent around the walls of Meereen, a city of silk and canvas with its own avenues and alleys, taverns and trollops, good districts and bad. Between the siege lines and the bay, tents had sprouted up like yellow mushrooms. Some were small and mean, no more than a flap of old stained canvas to keep off the rain and sun, but beside them stood barracks tents large enough to sleep a hundred men and silken pavilions as big as palaces with harpies gleaming atop their roof poles. Some camps were orderly, with the tents arrayed around a fire pit in concentric circles, weapons and armor stacked around the inner ring, horse lines outside. Elsewhere, pure chaos seemed to reign.

The dry, scorched plains around Meereen were flat and bare and treeless for long leagues, but the Yunkish ships had brought lumber and hides up from the south, enough to raise six huge trebuchets. They were arrayed on three sides of the city, all but the river side, surrounded by piles of broken stone and casks of pitch and resin just waiting for a torch. One of the soldiers walking along beside the cart saw where Tyrion was looking and proudly told him that each of the trebuchets had been given a name: Dragonbreaker, Harridan, Harpy's Daughter, Wicked Sister, Ghost of Astapor, Mazdhan's Fist. Towering above the tents to a height of forty feet, the trebuchets were the siege camp's chief landmarks. "Just the sight of them drove the dragon queen to her knees," he boasted. "And there she will stay, sucking Hizdahr's noble cock, else we smash her walls to rubble."

Tyrion saw a slave being whipped, blow after blow, until his back was nothing but blood and raw meat. A file of men marched past in irons, clanking with every step; they carried spears and wore short swords, but chains linked them wrist to wrist and ankle to ankle. The air smelled of roasting meat, and he saw one man skinning a dog for his stewpot.

He saw the dead as well, and heard the dying. Under the drifting smoke, the smell of horses, and the sharp salt tang of the bay was a stink of blood and shit. *Some flux*, he realized, as he watched two sellswords carry the corpse of a third from one of the tents. That made his fingers twitch. Disease could wipe out an army quicker than any battle, he had heard his father say once.

All the more reason to escape, and soon.

A quarter mile on, he found good reason to reconsider. A crowd had formed around three slaves taken whilst trying to escape. "I know my little treasures will be sweet and obedient," Nurse said. "See what befalls ones who try to run."

The captives had been tied to a row of crossbeams, and a pair of sling-ers were using them to test their skills. "Tolosi," one of the guards told them. "The best slingers in the world. They throw soft lead balls in place of stones."

Tyrion had never seen the point of slings, when bows had so much better range ... but he had never seen Tolosi at work before. Their lead balls did vastly more damage than the smooth stones other slingers used, and more than any bow as well. One struck the knee of one of the captives, and it burst apart in a gout of blood and bone that left the man's lower leg dangling by a rope of dark red tendon. *Well, he won't run again*, Tyrion allowed, as the man began to scream. His shrieks mingled in the morning air with the laughter of camp followers and the curses of those who'd wagered good coin that the slinger would miss. Penny looked away, but Nurse grasped her under the chin and twisted her head back around. "Watch," he commanded. "You too, bear."

Jorah Mormont raised his head and stared at Nurse. Tyrion could see the tightness in his arms. *He's going to throttle him, and that will be the end for all of us*. But the knight only grimaced, then turned to watch the bloody show.

To the east the massive brick walls of Meereen shimmered through the morning heat. That was the refuge these poor fools had hoped to reach. *How long will it remain a refuge, though?*

All three of the would-be escapees were dead before Nurse gathered up the reins again. The mule cart rumbled on.

Their master's camp was south and east of the Harridan, almost in its shadow, and spread over several acres. The humble tent of Yezzan zo Qaggaz proved to be a palace of lemon-colored silk. Gilded harpies stood atop the center poles of each of its nine peaked roofs, shining in the sun. Lesser tents ringed it on all sides. "Those are the dwellings of our noble master's cooks, concubines, and warriors, and a few less-favored kinsmen," Nurse told them, "but you little darlings shall have the rare privilege of sleeping within Yezzan's own pavilion. It pleases him to keep his treasures close." He frowned at Mormont. "Not you, bear. You are big and ugly, you will be chained outside." The knight did not respond. "First, all of you must be fitted for collars."

The collars were made of iron, lightly gilded to make them glitter in the light. Yezzan's name was incised into the metal in Valyrian glyphs, and a

pair of tiny bells were affixed below the ears, so the wearer's every step produced a merry little tinkling sound. Jorah Mormont accepted his collar in a sullen silence, but Penny began to cry as the armorer was fastening her own into place. "It's so heavy," she complained.

Tyrion squeezed her hand. "It's solid gold," he lied. "In Westeros, high-born ladies dream of such a necklace." *Better a collar than a brand. A collar can be removed.* He remembered Shae, and the way the golden chain had glimmered as he twisted it tighter and tighter about her throat.

Afterward, Nurse had Ser Jorah's chains fastened to a stake near the cookfire whilst he escorted the two dwarfs inside the master's pavilion and showed them where they would sleep, in a carpeted alcove separated from the main tent by walls of yellow silk. They would share this space with Yezzan's other treasures: a boy with twisted, hairy "goat legs," a two-headed girl out of Mantarys, a bearded woman, and a willowy creature called Sweets who dressed in moonstones and Myrish lace. "You are trying to decide if I'm a man or woman," Sweets said, when she was brought before the dwarfs. Then she lifted her skirts and showed them what was underneath. "I'm both, and master loves me best."

A grotesquerie, Tyrion realized. Somewhere some god is laughing. "Lovely," he said to Sweets, who had purple hair and violet eyes, "but we were hoping to be the pretty ones for once."

Sweets sniggered, but Nurse was not amused. "Save your japes for this evening, when you perform for our noble master. If you please him, you will be well rewarded. If not ..." He slapped Tyrion across the face.

"You will want to be careful with Nurse," said Sweets when the overseer had departed. "He is the only true monster here." The bearded woman spoke an incomprehensible variety of Ghiscari, the goat boy some guttural sailor's pidgin called the trade talk. The two-headed girl was feeble-minded; one head was no bigger than an orange and did not speak at all, the other had filed teeth and was like to growl at anyone who came too close to her cage. But Sweets was fluent in four tongues, one of them High Valyrian.

“What is the master like?” Penny asked, anxiously. “His eyes are yellow, and he stinks,” said Sweets. “Ten years ago he went to Sothoros, and he has been rotting from the inside out ever since. Make him forget that he is dying, even for a little while, and he can be most generous. Deny him nothing.”

They had only the afternoon to learn the ways of chattel. Yezzan’s body slaves filled a tub with hot water, and the dwarfs were allowed to bathe—Penny first, then Tyrion. Afterward another slave spread a stinging ointment across the cuts on his back to keep them from mortifying, then covered them with a cool poultice. Penny’s hair was cut, and Tyrion’s beard got a trim. They were given soft slippers and fresh clothing, plain but clean.

As evening fell, Nurse returned to tell them that it was time to don their mummer’s plate. Yezzan would be hosting the Yunkish supreme commander, the noble Yurkhaz zo Yunzak, and they would be expected to perform. “Shall we unchain your bear?”

“Not this night,” Tyrion said. “Let us joust for our master first and save the bear for some other time.”

“Just so. After your capers are concluded, you will help serve and pour. See that you do not spill on the guests, or it will go ill for you.”

A juggler began the evening’s frolics. Then came a trio of energetic tumblers. After them the goat-legged boy came out and did a grotesque jig whilst one of Yurkhaz’s slaves played on a bone flute. Tyrion had half a mind to ask him if he knew “The Rains of Castamere.” As they waited their own turn to perform, he watched Yezzan and his guests. The human prune in the place of honor was evidently the Yunkish supreme commander, who looked about as formidable as a loose stool. A dozen other Yunkish lords attended him. Two sellsword captains were on hand as well, each accompanied by a dozen men of his company. One was an elegant Pentoshi, grey-haired and clad in silk but for his cloak, a ragged thing sewn from dozens of strips of torn, bloodstained cloth. The other captain was the man who’d tried to buy them that morning, the brown-skinned bidder with the salt-and-pepper beard. “Brown Ben Plumm,” Sweets named him. “Captain of the Second Sons.”

A Westerosi, and a Plumm. Better and better. “You are next,” Nurse informed them. “Be amusing, my little darlings, or you will wish you had.”

Tyrion had not mastered half of Groat’s old tricks, but he could ride the sow, fall off when he was meant to, roll, and pop back onto his feet. All of that proved well received. The sight of little people running about drunkenly and whacking at one another with wooden weapons appeared to be just as hilarious in a siege camp by Slaver’s Bay as at Joffrey’s wedding feast in King’s Landing. *Contempt*, thought Tyrion, *the universal tongue*.

Their master Yezzan laughed loudest and longest whenever one of his dwarfs suffered a fall or took a blow, his whole vast body shaking like suet in an earthquake; his guests waited to see how Yurkhaz no Yunzak responded before joining in. The supreme commander appeared so frail that Tyrion was afraid laughing might kill him. When Penny’s helm was struck off and flew into the lap of a sour-faced Yunkishman in a striped green-and-gold *tokar*, Yurkhaz cackled like a chicken. When said lord reached inside the helm and drew out a large purple melon dribbling pulp, he wheezed until his face turned the same color as the fruit. He turned to his host and whispered something that made their master chortle and lick his lips ... though there was a hint of anger in those slitted yellow eyes, it seemed to Tyrion.

Afterward the dwarfs stripped off their wooden armor and the sweat-soaked clothing beneath and changed into the fresh yellow tunics that had been provided them for serving. Tyrion was given a flagon of purple wine, Penny a flagon of water. They moved about the tent filling cups, their slippered feet whispering over thick carpets. It was harder work than it appeared. Before long his legs were cramping badly, and one of the cuts on his back had begun to bleed again, the red seeping through the yellow linen of his tunic. Tyrion bit his tongue and kept on pouring.

Most of the guests paid them no more mind than they did the other slaves ... but one Yunkishman declared drunkenly that Yezzan should make the two dwarfs fuck, and another demanded to know how Tyrion had lost his nose. *I shoved it up your wife’s cunt and she bit it off*, he almost replied ... but the storm had persuaded him that he did not want to die as yet, so instead he said, “It was cut off to punish me for insolence, lord.”

Then a lord in a blue *tokar* fringed with tiger's eyes recalled that Tyrion had boasted of his skill at *cyvasse* on the auction block. "Let us put him to the test," he said. A table and set of pieces was duly produced. A scant few moments later, the red-faced lord shoved the table over in fury, scattering the pieces across the carpets to the sound of Yunkish laughter.

"You should have let him win," Penny whispered.

Brown Ben Plumm lifted the fallen table, smiling. "Try me next, dwarf. When I was younger, the Second Sons took contract with Volantis. I learned the game there."

"I am only a slave. My noble master decides when and who I play." Tyrion turned to Yezzan. "Master?"

The yellow lord seemed amused by the notion. "What stakes do you propose, Captain?"

"If I win, give this slave to me," said Plumm. "No," Yezzan zo Qaggaz said. "But if you can defeat my dwarf, you may have the price I paid for him, in gold."

"Done," the sellsword said. The scattered pieces were picked up off the carpet, and they sat down to play.

Tyrion won the first game. Plumm took the second, for double the stakes. As they set up for their third contest, the dwarf studied his opponent. Brown-skinned, his cheeks and jaw covered by a close-cropped bristly beard of grey and white, his face creased by a thousand wrinkles and a few old scars, Plumm had an amiable look to him, especially when he smiled. *The faithful retainer*, Tyrion decided. *Every man's favorite nuncle, full of chuckles and old sayings and roughspun wisdom*. It was all sham. Those smiles never touched Plumm's eyes, where greed hid behind a veil of caution. *Hungry, but wary, this one*.

The sellsword was nearly as bad a player as the Yunkish lord had been, but his play was stolid and tenacious rather than bold. His opening arrays were different every time, yet all the same—conservative, defensive, passive. *He*

does not play to win, Tyrion realized. *He plays so as not to lose*. It worked in their second game, when the little man overreached himself with an unsound assault. It did not work in the third game, nor the fourth, nor the fifth, which proved to be their last.

Near the end of that final contest, with his fortress in ruins, his dragon dead, elephants before him and heavy horse circling round his rear, Plumm looked up smiling and said, “Yollo wins again. Death in four.”

“Three.” Tyrion tapped his dragon. “I was lucky. Perhaps you should give my head a good rub before our next game, Captain. Some of that luck might rub off on your fingers.” *You will still lose, but you might give me a better game*. Grinning, he pushed back from the *cyvasse* table, picked up his wine flagon, and returned to pouring with Yezzan zo Qaggaz considerably richer and Brown Ben Plumm considerably impoverished. His gargantuan master had fallen off into drunken sleep during the third game, his goblet slipping from his yellowed fingers to spill its contents on the carpet, but perhaps he would be pleased when he awakened.

When the supreme commander Yurkhaz zo Yunzak departed, supported by a pair of burly slaves, that seemed to be a general signal for the other guests to take their leaves as well. After the tent had emptied out, Nurse reappeared to tell the servers that they might make their own feast from the leavings. “Eat quickly. All this must be clean again before you sleep.”

Tyrion was on his knees, his legs aching and his bloody back screaming with pain, trying to scrub out the stain that the noble Yezzan’s spilled wine had left upon the noble Yezzan’s carpet, when the overseer tapped his cheek gently with the end of his whip. “Yollo. You have done well. You and your wife.”

“She is not my wife.”

“Your whore, then. On your feet, both of you.”

Tyrion rose unsteadily, one leg trembling beneath him. His thighs were knots, so cramped that Penny had to lend him a hand to pull him to his feet. “What have we done?”

“Much and more,” said the overseer. “Nurse said you would be rewarded if you pleased your father, did he not? Though the noble Yezzan is loath to lose his little treasures, as you have seen, Yurkhaz zo Yunzak persuaded him that it would be selfish to keep such droll antics to himself. Rejoice! To celebrate the signing of the peace, you shall have the honor of jousting in the Great Pit of Daznak. Thousands will come see you! Tens of thousands! And, oh, how we shall laugh!”