

to join them, fumbling with his helmet, a metal pot with a thin slit for his eyes and a long black silk plume.

“Logs don’t bleed,” Tyrion said to no one in particular. He felt naked without armor. He looked around for a rock and ran over to where Marillion was hiding. “Move over.”

“Go away!” the boy screamed back at him. “I’m a singer, I want no part of this fight!”

“What, lost your taste for adventure?” Tyrion kicked at the youth until he slid over, and not a moment too soon. A heartbeat later, the riders were on them.

There were no heralds, no banners, no horns nor drums, only the twang of bowstrings as Morrec and Lharys let fly, and suddenly the clansmen came thundering out of the dawn, lean dark men in boiled leather and mismatched armor, faces hidden behind barred halfhelmets. In gloved hands were clutched all manner of weapons: longswords and lances and sharpened scythes, spiked clubs and daggers and heavy iron mauls. At their head rode a big man in a striped shadowskin cloak, armed with a two-handed greatsword.

Ser Rodrik shouted “Winterfell!” and rode to meet him, with Bronn and Chiggen beside him, screaming some wordless battle cry. Ser Willis Wode followed, swinging a spiked morningstar around his head. “Harrenhal! Harrenhal!” he sang. Tyrion felt a sudden urge to leap up, brandish his axe, and boom out, “Casterly Rock!” but the insanity passed quickly and he crouched down lower.

He heard the screams of frightened horses and the crash of metal on metal. Chiggen’s sword raked across the naked face of a mailed rider, and Bronn plunged through the clansmen like a whirlwind, cutting down foes right and left. Ser Rodrik hammered at the big man in the shadowskin cloak, their horses dancing round each other as they traded blow for blow. Jyck vaulted onto a horse and galloped bareback into the fray. Tyrion saw an arrow sprout from the throat of the man in the shadowskin cloak. When he opened his mouth to scream, only blood came out. By the time he fell, Ser Rodrik was fighting someone else.

Suddenly Marillion shrieked, covering his head with his woodharp as a horse leapt over their rock. Tyrion scrambled to his feet as the rider turned to come back at them, hefting a spiked maul. Tyrion swung his axe with both hands. The blade caught the charging horse in the throat with a meaty thunk, angling upward, and Tyrion almost lost his grip as the animal screamed and collapsed. He managed to wrench the axe free and lurch clumsily out of the way. Marillion was less fortunate. Horse and rider crashed to the ground in a tangle on top of the singer. Tyrion danced back in while the brigand’s leg was still pinned beneath his fallen mount, and buried the axe in the man’s neck, just above the shoulder blades.

As he struggled to yank the blade loose, he heard Marillion moaning under the bodies.

“Someone help me,” the singer gasped. “Gods have mercy, I’m bleeding.”

“I believe that’s horse blood,” Tyrion said. The singer’s hand came crawling out from beneath the dead animal, scrabbling in the dirt like a spider with five legs. Tyrion put his heel on the grasping fingers and felt a satisfying crunch. “Close your eyes and pretend you’re dead,” he advised the singer before he hefted the axe and turned away.